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Determinants of Entrepreneurial Intention among Young Graduates in Saudi Arabia: A Theory of Planned Behavior Approach

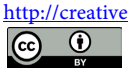
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Abstract

This study examines the determinants of entrepreneurial intention among 144 Master's students enrolled in Economics, Management, and Business Administration at the University of Hail, Saudi Arabia, using the Theory of Planned Behavior. Survey data were analyzed using correlations and multiple regression models. Personal attitude and perceived behavioral control were positively associated with entrepreneurial intention, whereas subjective norms were not a statistically significant predictor in the reported regression. Perceived behavioral control was also positively associated with personal attitude. Although these associations are consistent with a possible indirect pathway, a formal mediation test is required to establish an indirect effect. The study highlights the potential importance of entrepreneurial attitudes and perceived feasibility in graduate entrepreneurship education. Its single-university, nonprobability sample limits generalization to other universities or populations.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial Intention, Theory of Planned Behavior, University of Hail, Personal Attitude, Perceived Behavioral Control, Subjective Norms, Saudi Arabia, Gender Differences

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays an increasingly vital role in national economies, whether in developed or developing countries. It is widely acknowledged as a powerful driver of economic growth, innovation, and national competitiveness (GEM, 2023). In recent years, business creation has gained strong support from both pub-

lic and private sectors, becoming a strategic response to youth unemployment and economic transformation needs (OECD, 2022). Entrepreneurship is now seen as a key contributor to wealth generation and job creation, with clear economic and social implications.

In the context of rapid global changes—driven by technological advancements, shifting labor markets, and post-pandemic recovery efforts—many governments have adopted entrepreneurship as a strategic pillar. For instance, Saudi Arabia, through its Vision 2030, has significantly increased investment in research, innovation, and entrepreneurial education, aiming to empower young graduates and diversify its economy (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2023).

This growing interest in entrepreneurship has led to a need for a deeper understanding of the factors that shape entrepreneurial intention, particularly among youth. Based on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this study investigates the psychological and social dimensions that influence entrepreneurial intentions among young graduates in Saudi Arabia.

Very few studies have been conducted on the entrepreneurial intention of students in Saudi Arabia. From a theoretical perspective, most of the research on entrepreneurial intention is based on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Entrepreneurial Event Model by Shapero and Sokol (1982).

By applying Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the aim of this study is to identify the antecedents of entrepreneurial intention, namely: personal attitude, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control. To achieve this, a hypothetico-deductive approach based on correlation and multiple regression analyses was implemented. Data was collected from 144 Saudi students in Master's programs (I and II) studying economics and management.

After presenting the theoretical framework of the study, we will outline the methodology adopted. The following sections present the theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Entrepreneurial Intention

Intention is widely considered the best predictor of behavior, as it is viewed as a thoughtful and planned action. In the Theory of Planned Behavior, intention captures the motivational factors that influence behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Intention is an immediate antecedent of behavior in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Situated at the very beginning of the behavioral process, intention plays a central role in human behavior research and has sparked the interest of many scholars from various disciplines and specialties.

Intention is based on the idea that every act can be anticipated and predicted. Following this logic, it can be argued that entrepreneurial intention is a precursor to the act of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial intention models thus provide a true alternative for understanding entrepreneurial behavior and, consequently, explaining the act of under-

taking a business.

Supporters of the intentional approach (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993; Kolvereid, 1996; Tounés, 2006; Fayolle et al., 2006; Thompson, 2009; Boissin et al., 2009) have demonstrated the validity of intention models in the context of entrepreneurship. The approach based on intentions thus appears to be an appropriate theoretical framework for studying entrepreneurial behavior. Several intention models have been developed. Among the most significant are the basic intentional model by Krueger and Carsrud (1993), the entrepreneurial potential model by Krueger and Brazeal (1994), and finally, the conviction model by Davidsson (1995). The majority of researchers are inspired by Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the entrepreneurial event formation model of Shapero and Sokol (1982). We rely on Ajzen's model (Ajzen, 1991), which includes personal attitude, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control. These three constructs are considered direct antecedents of intention toward a behavior. The first two constructs—perceived behavioral attitude and perceived social norms—relate to Shapero and Sokol's (1982) concept of desirability and refer to the attraction an individual feels toward the behavior. The third construct—perceived behavioral control—is similar to both the concept of feasibility used by Shapero and Sokol (1982) and self-efficacy developed by Bandura (1977, 1982). This last dimension reflects the confidence a person believes they have in their ability to perform a behavior.

Research on entrepreneurial intention is abundant (Tounés, 2006; Kolvereid, 1996; Fayolle et al., 2006; Kennedy et al., 2003; Guerrero et al., 2008; Liñán & Chen, 2009; Liñán et al., 2011). Many studies focus on student populations and examine entrepreneurial intentions and attitudes (Shook & Bratianu, 2010; Veciana et al., 2005). Depending on the socio-cultural context, these models place varying emphasis on the different dimensions of Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior or the Shapero and Sokol model.

According to Krueger et al. (2000), perceived feasibility has a greater influence on the entrepreneurial intentions of American students than behavioral attitudes. In contrast, social norms are not significantly correlated with students' entrepreneurial intention. In a comparative study between French students, Boissin et al. (2009) compared French and American students and reported differences in entrepreneurial intentions and beliefs. Their analysis highlighted the role of control and behavioral beliefs. Liñán et al. (2011) likewise identified personal attitude and perceived behavioral control as particularly relevant factors in explaining entrepreneurial intentions. However, they may have an indirect effect on students' entrepreneurial intentions.

According to Hammami and Affes (2013), the political context, social norms, and feasibility notably influence civil servants' entrepreneurial intentions, whereas desirability and entrepreneurial identity show no significant effect. Boudabbous (2011), in a survey of 49 recent graduates from the Higher School of Commerce in Sfax, found that only behavioral attitudes significantly affect entrepreneurial

intention, while social norms and perceived behavioral control do not determine students' intentions to become self-employed.

2.2. Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is widely used to examine entrepreneurial intention (Entrialgo & Iglesias, 2016). Ajzen (1991) explains intention through attitudes toward a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. TPB was proposed to explain human behaviour and has been extended to 138 Bayona-Oré, 2023 numerous important fields including sociology, psychology, health (Ajzen, 1991), sports and university education. TPB allows the study of the factors that influence students' decisions (Davis et al., 1992) by emphasising personal beliefs and attitudes. Three factors determine intentions: 1) attitude (ATT) towards a behaviour, 2) subjective norms (SN) related to perceived social pressure, and 3) perceived behavioural control (PBC). An attitude towards behaviour consists of the evaluation that a person makes of the behaviour that can be favourable or unfavourable (Ajzen, 2002). The intention is the motivation of the individual for certain behaviours (Al-Qadasi et al., 2023) while entrepreneurial intention concerns the desire to establish a business as influenced by attitudes towards entrepreneurial behaviour (Al-Qadasi et al., 2023). TPB has been applied in different studies to determine the degree of entrepreneurial intention in university students. It has been combined with other theories such as self determination theory (Al-Jubari, 2019) and it has been integrated with other factors (Ahmed et al., 2017; Contreras-Barraza et al., 2021).

2.2.1. Attitude (ATT)

An attitude (ATT) towards a behaviour is the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). More favorable attitudes and subjective norms, together with greater perceived behavioral control, are expected to be associated with stronger behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Given that intention is the single most powerful predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), investigating the determinants of intentions is important for understanding the process of business creation. Research has identified personal attitude as a relevant correlate of entrepreneurial intention (Liñán et al., 2011; Al-Jubari, 2019). However, it is important to be aware that the research literature contains disagreement about the impacts of ATT on EI (Zhang et al., 2015).

The following hypothesis is proposed: Hypothesis 1 (H1): Attitude has a positive effect on entrepreneurial intention.

2.2.2. Subjective Norms (SN)

Subjective norms (SN) are related to, the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform a certain behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). In an entrepreneurial context, they correspond to an individual's perceptions of the values that others consider important regarding that individual's choice to create a venture (Gieure et

al., 2019, p. 3). Subjective norms are determinative for individuals who do not have experience in entrepreneurship (Zhang et al., 2015). Several studies with empirical data have demonstrated that SN has an influence on EI (Gieure et al., 2019; Ndofirepi & Rambe, 2017; Rueda et al., 2015). Subjective norms reflect perceived social pressure concerning whether to engage in a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, EI is influenced by extrinsic factors such as the opinions of friends, family, or colleagues (Contreras-Barraza et al., 2021). The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Subjective norms have a positive effect on entrepreneurial intention.

2.2.3. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)

The other important factor of TPB is perceived behavioural control (PBC), which, refers to people's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest (Ajzen, 1991). It corresponds to an individual's control (evaluation of skills, intellectual capacity, ability to overcome difficulties, coping with obstacles) over the actions to engage in specific behaviours (Gieure et al., 2019). PBC is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over the events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1991, p. 257). The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Perceived behavioural control has a positive effect on entrepreneurial intention.

2.2.4. Interrelations between TPB Constructs

Although Ajzen's (1991) theoretical model postulates positive correlations between explanatory factors of entrepreneurial intention, few studies have tested these hypothetical relationships. Nevertheless, recent research confirms these relations. The relationships among these factors are examined through the following two hypotheses:

H4: Social norms positively influence personal attitude toward business creation.

H5: Perceived behavioral control positively influences personal attitude.

Figure 1 presents the variables and the proposed research model. The variables analysed were the students' attitude (ATT), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC).

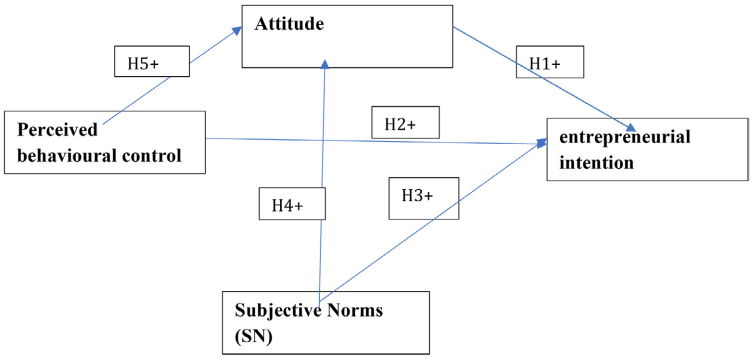


Figure 1. Model of entrepreneurial intention.

3. Methodology (Applied to the Case of the University of Hail)

To examine the entrepreneurial intention among students at the University of Hail, we adopted a quantitative research approach based on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior. The study focused on Master's students (Level I and II) enrolled in Economics, Management, and Business Administration programs. Data were collected through an online questionnaire designed to measure four constructs: entrepreneurial intention (dependent variable), personal attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (independent variables).

The scale used to assess entrepreneurial intention comprised six items adapted from Kolvereid (1996) and Thompson (2009), and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71.

Personal attitude toward business creation was measured using three items, consistent with the attitude construct in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), while subjective norms were operationalized following Krueger et al. (2000). This included both the perceived opinions of the student's close social environment and the relative importance given to these opinions. The reliability of this scale was satisfactory, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73. Perceived behavioral control was assessed using four items, showing strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91).

Internal consistency coefficients were reported for entrepreneurial intention ($\alpha = 0.71$), subjective norms ($\alpha = 0.73$), and perceived behavioral control ($\alpha = 0.91$). Construct validity and the reliability of the remaining measures are not fully documented, which limits interpretation of the findings.

A total of 144 valid questionnaires were obtained from Master's students at the University of Hail through academic mailing lists and university online platforms. Because participation followed an open invitation rather than documented random selection, the recruitment is best characterized as nonprobability, voluntary-response (convenience) sampling. This sample is appropriate for an exploratory, institution-specific examination of associations among the measured constructs, but does not support probability-based generalization to all Saudi graduates. The response rate and nonresponse bias cannot be assessed without the number of eligible students invited and responding. The cross-sectional design also precludes causal inference.

3.1. Sample Characteristics

The sample comprised approximately 63% female and 37% male respondents, as reported in the original study. These proportions describe the participants only; representativeness relative to program enrollment cannot be established without official enrollment figures. Gender comparisons should be interpreted cautiously because the coding scheme, group means, and significance test are not supplied.

3.2. Statistical Analyses and Key Findings

Composite scores were examined through bivariate correlations and multiple or-

dinary least squares (OLS) regressions. OLS was selected to evaluate associations between observed composite-scale scores and entrepreneurial intention in a modest-sized, exploratory sample; unlike structural equation modeling (SEM), this approach does not explicitly model latent-variable measurement error. The distinction between regression on observed scores and latent-variable modeling is discussed by Kline (2016). Accordingly, findings should be interpreted as associations among scale scores rather than definitive latent causal effects. Internal consistency was assessed using the reported Cronbach's alpha values. A full convergent-validity assessment requires standardized item loadings and/or average variance extracted (AVE), which cannot be reconstructed from alpha coefficients or the published regression tables alone. [insert loadings and AVE for each construct after verification.] Standardized regression coefficients are reproduced from the source tables; 95% confidence intervals require coefficient standard errors or bootstrap output and cannot be derived reliably from the supplied summary alone.

Entrepreneurial intention was positively correlated with personal attitude (r = 0.751), perceived behavioral control (r = 0.591), and subjective norms (r = 0.313). A correlation with gender (r = −0.218) was also reported, but its direction cannot be interpreted without the original gender coding. Correlation coefficients alone do not establish statistical significance without the corresponding tests.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were examined to detect multicollinearity; all values remained well below the critical threshold of 10.

3.2.1. Regression Results for Entrepreneurial Intention (University of Hail Sample)

In the reported entrepreneurial-intention regression (Table 1), personal attitude (β = 0.590) and perceived behavioral control (β = 0.271) were positive, statistically significant predictors, while subjective norms (β = 0.127) were not statistically significant. The model reported $R^2 = 0.656$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.630$; thus, the model accounted for approximately 65.6% of the sample variance (63.0% after adjustment). H1 and H3 were supported; H2 was not supported. The original table labels its coefficient column "Beta (t)" although only one coefficient per predictor is shown; these values are treated as reported β coefficients, pending confirmation that they are standardized. The reported model F-statistic should be checked against the original software output before submission.

Table 1. Regression predicting entrepreneurial intention.

Variables	Beta (t)	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	VIF
Personal Attitude	0.590***	0.656	0.630	25.88***	1.338
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.271**				1.378
Subjective Norms	0.127 (ns)				1.218
Gender	0.196				1.135
Student ID	0.002				1.084

Significance levels: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.05$; (ns) = not significant.

3.2.2. Regression Results for Personal Attitude (H4 and H5 Testing)

To explore the influence of perceived behavioral control and subjective norms on personal attitude, a separate regression analysis was conducted:

Table 2. Regression predicting personal attitude.

Variables	Beta (t)	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	VIF
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.401***	0.252	0.209	5.82***	1.164
Subjective Norms	0.122 (ns)				1.198
Gender	−0.092				1.124
Student ID	−0.123				1.064

Note: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.05$; ns = not statistically significant.

In the reported personal-attitude regression (Table 2), perceived behavioral control was positively associated with attitude (β = 0.401, reported $p < 0.001$), whereas subjective norms were not statistically significant (β = 0.122). These findings support H5 but not H4. Although the two regression models suggest a possible pathway from perceived behavioral control through attitude to intention, they do not establish statistically significant mediation. A bootstrap indirect-effect estimate and its 95% confidence interval must be obtained from the original respondent-level dataset before a mediation claim can be made. [report indirect effect (a × b), bootstrap resamples, 95% confidence interval, and whether the interval excludes zero.] The product of reported coefficients (0.401 × 0.590 ≈ 0.237) is only an illustrative path-product calculation, not a validated bootstrap mediation estimate.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the entrepreneurial behavior of graduate students at the University of Hail. Consistent with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, the results demonstrate that personal attitude and perceived behavioral control are the main predictors of students' entrepreneurial intention. This suggests that students who hold favorable views toward entrepreneurship and feel confident in their ability to start a business are more likely to express strong entrepreneurial intentions.

Subjective norms were not a statistically significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention in the multivariable regression. This finding is specific to the present sample and model and does not establish a broader trend in individualism or societal expectations.

The positive association of perceived behavioral control with both attitude and intention is compatible with a potential indirect pathway, but a statistically supported mediation conclusion requires bootstrapped confidence intervals. The available regression tables do not provide such evidence.

The reported gender-intention correlation suggests an association, but the direction and adjusted significance of gender differences cannot be verified without the gender coding and original test statistics. Therefore, claims that female respondents have significantly higher entrepreneurial intention should be treated as

provisional.

In summary, the study underscores the importance of fostering both positive attitudes and a strong sense of capability among students to enhance entrepreneurial intention. Programs aiming to promote entrepreneurship in Saudi universities—particularly in regions like Hail—should thus emphasize skill-building, confidence enhancement, and early exposure to entrepreneurial experiences.

4. Discussion

Subjective norms were not a statistically significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention in the reported multivariable model ($\beta = 0.127$). This result does not imply that social approval is irrelevant for every student or in all Saudi contexts. The pattern may depend on the study population, measurement, and inclusion of other predictors, and should be compared cautiously with earlier TPB research (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009).

For the supplementary relationships, perceived behavioral control positively predicted personal attitude ($\beta = 0.401$), whereas subjective norms did not show a statistically significant association with attitude. This finding is consistent with the idea that perceived capability and favorable evaluations of entrepreneurship may co-occur; causal ordering and mediation remain unverified in these cross-sectional data.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This institution-specific study finds that favorable personal attitudes and perceived behavioral control are positively associated with entrepreneurial intention among the surveyed graduate students, while subjective norms are not a significant predictor in the reported regression. Perceived behavioral control is also positively associated with attitude, although the hypothesized indirect effect has not been formally tested. The results support the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior for examining entrepreneurial intentions in this sample without establishing causality or national representativeness.

From a practical standpoint, the following recommendations can be proposed to foster entrepreneurial intention:

Promote Entrepreneurship as a Career Path: University programs should present entrepreneurship as a possible career option and provide practical opportunities for students to explore business creation.

Focus on Feasibility and Skill Development: Beyond raising awareness, training initiatives should enhance students' perceived behavioral control by equipping them with practical skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy necessary to launch a business.

Enhance Support Structures: Institutions should develop early-stage support systems including mentorship programs, startup incubators, and access to funding that help transform entrepreneurial intention into real ventures.

Integrate Entrepreneurship Education Across Curricula: Embedding entrepre-

neurship modules into business and management programs can stimulate interest and strengthen entrepreneurial competencies across disciplines.

Encourage Female Entrepreneurship: Tailored workshops and success stories highlighting female entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia may reinforce motivation and confidence among female students.

The study is limited by voluntary-response sampling at one university, cross-sectional self-reported measures, and incomplete reporting of construct validity, confidence intervals, and mediation tests. Future work should recruit probability-based or multi-institution samples, document the response rate, evaluate factor loadings and AVE, and test indirect effects with bootstrap confidence intervals. These additions are necessary before drawing broader or stronger inferential conclusions.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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