Learning, Networking, and Venture Aspirations: Understanding Social Media's Role in Student Entrepreneurial Intentions

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Abstract: *The theoretical and empirical literature on the influence of social media on the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Pakistan remains limited. This study aimed to address this gap by examining how social media affects entrepreneurial intentions through the application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Learning Theory (SLT). Primary data were collected using psychometric questionnaires during the first phase and semi-structured interviews with twelve participants during the second phase. An explanatory sequential design was adopted, involving 300 undergraduate students in Lahore at the initial stage. Subsequently, twelve participants were purposefully selected based on the testing framework established in the first phase. Structural Equation Modelling (SmartPLS 4) was employed for analysis. The quantitative findings revealed that social media positively and significantly predicted entrepreneurial intentions through perceived opportunities available on these platforms. However, perceived misinformation, distractions, and digital risks demonstrated a significant negative relationship with entrepreneurial self-efficacy. These findings were supported by the qualitative interviews, where students viewed social media as a tool for opportunity recognition, role modelling, networking, and skill development. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn were identified as accessible entrepreneurial learning communities. At the same time, students highlighted risks including online scams, unrealistic expectations, information overload, and misleading content.The study concludes that social media functions as a double-edged sword, influencing both cognitive learning (attitudes, norms, and perceived control) and social learning (modelling and reinforcement) in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. The findings suggest that universities in Pakistan should promote guided digital entrepreneurship and social media education to support effective new venture development.*

Keywords: Social Media, Entrepreneurial Intentions, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Social Learning Theory (SLT), Universities Students, Pakistan, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Digital Learning, Observational Learning

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is becoming more studied in developing economies more so for younger populations with high unemployment rates. With new digital technologies coming out, there is a change in how students learn, engage with each other, and discover new career options (Ali et al., 2025). Social media has become a significant factor in shaping students' views and goals (Bajwa et al., 2022). This study investigates the impact of social media on the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Pakistan, employing both new and traditional theories to understand the opportunities and challenges of digital media.

All over the world people are noticing the impact of small businesses on the economy and are starting to encourage and promote the formation of new businesses (Irfan & Ali, 2022). New businesses also help alleviate poverty, create new ideas and stimulate competition (Irfan and Murray, 2023). This is also the case in Pakistan, where the majority of the population is under the age of 30, and where the vast majority of

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people are unemployed. Providing new and innovative businesses is a likely solution to ensuring that people are not living in poverty (El-Gohary et al., 2023). Numerous studies have shown that entrepreneurial intention is a strong predictor of new business formation, and researchers are starting to study the factors influencing the development of entrepreneurial intention (Irfan, Murray and Ali, 2023; Khan, Ali, Amin and Irfan, 2025; Khan et al., 2021). This is why universities should have the opportunity and responsibility of training the next generation of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education allows learners to gain skills, knowledge, and the right attitudes to tackle the challenges of contemporary business. This training will likely encourage new business formation, stimulating economic growth (Hussain et al., 2021).

Over the last few years, the use of digital technology and the social media phenomenon have influenced the way people give and receive information (Khan et al., 2022). Many have described these platforms as a low-cost pedagogy and helpful avenues to assist in entrepreneurial education and venture creation. They enable participants to teach, interact generationally, and access resources that may facilitate the entrepreneurial journey (Zafar, et al, 2012; Khan et al., 2022). From a pure conjecture perspective, the Theory of Planned Behavior attempts to predict the degree of impact such media can have on entrepreneurial intention. The theory states that three variables are of significance: the entrepreneurial attitude of an individual, the social entrepreneurial attitudes of significant others, and the individual's perception of control. There is social media evidence that suggests some improvement of entrepreneurial attitudes through the presentation of success stories; however, not all success stories are realistic. The entrepreneurial attitude of an individual seems to reflect a social norm even in the absence of a direct peer influence as friends and mentors often post about their entrepreneurial ventures, thus, entrepreneurial pressure. There is also the perception that easily accessible market information and guides improve the perception of control, and even though resources may be suboptimal, the perception of control is often positive. Many of the social media platforms in use appear to be entrepreneurial in nature; thus, the impact of these social media platforms on the intention to be an entrepreneur is a positive paradox (Mir et al, 2023; Nisa et al., 2021).

The theory of social learning, formulated by Bandura in 1977, proposes that individuals learn through the observations of others. Social media in this context represents a massive classroom where learners can see the actions of entrepreneurs, listen to their narratives, and witness the execution of actual business activities. Video content and posts on YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn teach users specific entrepreneurial tactics and mindsets, providing passive educational opportunities (Javed et al., 2016; Sohail et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant to Pakistan, where entrepreneurial training facilities are few and where entrepreneurship educational content on the internet is one's only means of accessing the global community of entrepreneurs at a relatively low cost. However, there are still challenges such as misinformation, distractions, online fraud, and a tendency to replace active participation in the real world with virtual activities. Therefore, in the context of simple principles of behavior and learning, the integration of social media into entrepreneurship courses might increase the entrepreneurial intention of university students. This is the gap that the present study addresses by providing evidence-based recommendations to integrate social media into entrepreneurship education in Pakistan while also warning against excessive integration that may lead to a reduction in real-world practice (Ali & Yousuf, 2019).

Problem Statement

Poverty is widely talked about, while young people remain unemployed in the country, and the situation does not improve. Many universities teach business skills, and their students start companies. Many fast-moving industries hit the market every day. Social media offers low-cost ways to learn almost anything. Online resources teach aspiring entrepreneurs business skills, and social media is used to promote ideas. Overseas labor can be used for marketing. On the other hand, social media diverts focus, and poor advice is given. Newbies to entrepreneurship can also be scammed. The fact that people use social media to explain entrepreneurship is not an indicator that they understand how to use them to promote ideas. Social media

can also explain how to avoid using them in promoting ideas. People should consider the use of social media for entrepreneurship in their business ideas for social media. The social media used for business should have a proactive approach to entrepreneurship. Using social media for entrepreneurship should keep the focus primarily balanced.

While many researchers argue that social media can provide students with information on how to launch and manage new ventures, data from social media usage within entrepreneur educational institutes in Pakistan seems to show that these platforms may negatively impact students' entrepreneurial intent. Undoubtedly, there are gaps in understanding social media activity and entrepreneurial intent, and theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior and social cognitive theory offer possible explanations, but researchers have yet to provide answers. What these particular platforms are able to do in relation to entrepreneurial intent, how normative peer attitudes define social media usage and entrepreneurial intent, and the extent to which students perceive control over their social media usage, are unknown. Without understanding these concepts, the ability of educators, policy makers, social media entrepreneurs, and the like to manage social media use and associated risks effectively, will be limited. This social media and entrepreneurial intent relationship gap within Pakistan social media usage will be the focus of the proposed research on the opportunities and challenges of social media use.

Research Objectives
- To analyze the extent and nature of social media usage among university students for entrepreneurial learning and networking.
- To examine how social media influences the three components of entrepreneurial intention as outlined in the Theory of Planned Behavior:
- To explore how Social Learning Theory principles, such as observational learning and role modeling, manifest in students' use of social media for entrepreneurial purposes.
- To identify the perceived opportunities that social media offers for entrepreneurial development in the Pakistani higher education context.
- To investigate the challenges and potential drawbacks associated with using social media for fostering entrepreneurial intentions among students.
- To propose strategies for integrating social media effectively into entrepreneurship education to maximize its positive impact while minimizing associated risks.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the extent and nature of social media usage among university students in Pakistan for entrepreneurial learning and networking?

RQ2: How does social media influence university students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship as per the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)?

RQ3: How does social media shape subjective norms regarding entrepreneurship among university students?

RQ4: How does social media affect students' perceived behavioral control in pursuing entrepreneurial ventures?

RQ5: How do principles of Social Learning Theory (e.g., observational learning, modeling) emerge in students' use of social media for entrepreneurial purposes?

RQ6: What opportunities do university students perceive in using social media for entrepreneurial development in the Pakistani context?

RQ7: What challenges and drawbacks do university students encounter when using social media to foster entrepreneurial intentions?

RQ8: What strategies can be developed to leverage social media effectively for entrepreneurship education while mitigating associated risks?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media usage for entrepreneurial purposes and students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between social media usage for entrepreneurial purposes and subjective norms regarding entrepreneurship.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between social media usage for entrepreneurial purposes and perceived behavioral control over entrepreneurial activities.

H4: Observational learning through social media has a significant positive influence on students' entrepreneurial intentions.

H5: The perceived opportunities offered by social media are positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions among university students.

H6: The perceived challenges of using social media are negatively associated with entrepreneurial intentions among university students.

H7: Students who actively engage in entrepreneurial communities on social media exhibit significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions than those who do not.

Significance of the Study

This research is appreciated by different segments of the population, such as teachers, politicians, and businesspeople. In the research, the author assesses the impact of social media on the entrepreneurial intention of university students from Millennials and Gen Z in Pakistan. He uses the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Learning Theory as he continues to contribute to the understanding of social media as a driver of entrepreneurship. Practically, this means that universities should priorities the creation of educational frameworks that incorporate social media as an educational technology, and consider the pedagogical cons as well. This also opens up opportunities for policymakers to offer educational frameworks and regulations on digital entrepreneurship aimed at the youth to stimulate employment and entrepreneurial creativity. Moreover, it could assist students in choosing between social media apps for networking and entrepreneurship. Ultimately, the result can reduce unemployment, poverty, and strengthen Pakistan's economy.

Literature Review

Having many young people, as in Pakistan, can give rise to entrepreneurship ideas, employment opportunities, and more eco-friendly advancement and growth. Entrepreneurial intention, or EI, is the thinking stage prior to starting a business. EI is studied in student populations, as many scholars believe it can indicate who will become an entrepreneur in the future. When formal employment opportunities are limited, EI encourages targeting unemployment and alleviating poverty. Thus, developing EI can become a priority for policymakers, even if the present outcome is unpredictable (Krueger, 2021).

Recent research appears to be suggesting a break from the traditional conception that having the intention to do something will lead to the action. One of the first meta-analyses of the 2023-2024 year points out an intention-behavior gap in which the authors note that entrepreneurial intention only weakly predicts individuals who pursue a start-up venture. The leap from thought to start-up appears contingent on factors such as the presence of a mentor, the availability of funding, or differences in methods of instruction. More recent research is proposing some strategies to close the gap, such as the development of specific action plans, experiential learning, and the fostering of conducive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Therefore, EI in itself may be an important factor, but its value will largely depend on the specific situational factors that can be controlled for by universities and policymakers. Self-initiated students may also be able to benefit from attending networking events. To self-link to the beginning of the paragraph, self-initiated students may also be able to benefit from attending networking events (Neneh, 2022).

Pakistan requires policies to support entrepreneurship. There is high youth unemployment, 11.1\% of 15-24-year-olds in 2024, so people may need to start businesses. A 2024-2025 Monitor notes that globally, fear of failure is increasing, which reduces people's willingness to even attempt something, and is especially prevalent in Pakistan. Many people want to start businesses, but feel they have no skills and face barriers. University studies suggest that inspiration and skills coupled with awareness are likely to increase intention to act, so focusing on such initiatives may work this is Nengomasha et al. (2022), but there are people who are skeptical that such measures can be effective in addressing the core issue.

Positive aspects of social media are countered by information overload and the risks associated with cyberbullying, particularly for young entrepreneurs. More research is needed to conclude on the social dimension and pedagogy of entrepreneurship teaching (Alalwan et al., 2024).

Bandura's social learning theory observes that individuals acquire learning via the observation of other individuals. Students can see entrepreneurs from all angles. A tutorial video on the preparation of various coffee beverages, an Instagram account selling vintage shoes, and a LinkedIn forum on a startup give opportunities for duplication. Some studies indicate that the observation of these online role models is likely to increase the entrepreneurial intention of students. Live Q and A streams, webinars, or podcasts enable students to observe thinking in real time. In countries like Pakistan, which have underfunded education systems that do not offer business courses, these digital resources seem to be very helpful. However, not all students have access to the internet, which limits the overall benefits of the system, too (Mahfud et al., 2020).

The platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram help students learn the skills they need through vicarious means. These platforms demonstrate different start-up stories from different parts of the world. One example is the student who watches YouTube videos of foreign founders and scrolls through LinkedIn case posts. She claims to feel increased flexibility and creativity, as though she internalizes the strategies that are presumably effective in different economies. Perhaps from a worldwide perspective, Bandura's modeling does give an idea. However, are all these ideas really that effective? Some perspectives in these ideas might be helpful, while others could even encourage everyday life misdirection's (Sutiadiningsih, 2022).

It appears that students learn from social media how to engage and create social media start-ups, as observed by their counterparts. Students, particularly teens, see their classmates launch small online shops and can market them on Instagram and TikTok. They then attempt to replicate or adapt what they see. This might enhance their self-efficacy, though, as seen and observed, it could create an achievement gap. There is a communal entrepreneurship spirit that thrives in self-identifying student entrepreneurs that promotes more interaction. (Mutohhari et al., 2023).

More recent research done in Pakistan seems to indicate that social media could act as an instructional space and an entrepreneurial encouragement (classroom and hype-builder), which does correlate with more risk. Many college students today are turning to YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp for business tips and advice from outside the classroom, as it is a growing trend in many colleges. These sites are believed to increase entrepreneurial self-efficacy by providing real-life case studies and tactical mentorship. This readily available information is especially valuable in Pakistan, where funds, formal education opportunities, and places are incredibly limited, and it is believed to help students launch a business. (Fatoki, 2023).

Young Pakistanis' attitudes towards entrepreneurship are informed by social media. Young entrepreneurs receive praise and admiration, and online business communities validate that entrepreneurial ventures are positive and desirable pursuits. Conversations and mentorship, along with role model visibility, ignite entrepreneurial ambition among youth, as documented by various studies. This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, within which the vision becomes social network sanctioned and normalised. Consequently, social media communities amplify the likelihood of having positive entrepreneurial intentions and pursuing entrepreneurial careers (Shahzad et al., 2023).

Women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan may be affected by social media in terms of what people think entrepreneurship is. Some women in university studies may face cultural and infrastructural barriers limiting their entrepreneurial participation. The barriers are bypassed with the use of social media and online platforms. Women are able to network, access online female role models, and engage in the effortless online trade of crafts. This positive digital phenomenon is reducing the gender disparities in entrepreneurial engagement, notwithstanding the rural women who, unlike their urban counterparts, experience severe digital imbalances (Khan et al., 2022).

Despite the enthusiasm of students for social media and launches around it, the actual building of businesses is extremely challenging. Reports show considerable interest; however, commitments falter due to a lack of finance, complexity of regulations, verbose debates, and limited actual work. Perhaps integrating social media with low-cost incubators and local accelerators, along with stronger collaborations between universities and industry power, could mitigate some of these factors. Would that lead to action? Probably not. It is also likely that some of the guidance of nearby (experienced) business founders is still missing (Shahzad et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This research focuses primarily on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) as the primary theories of behavior and entrepreneurship. These theories work together to inform the role of social media in cultivating the entrepreneurial intention of students in Pakistan. While TPB seeks to understand the role cognitive and motivational processes play in intention formation, SLT seeks to understand the role of digital environments and social frameworks. Together, the theories provide a means of understanding how social media facilitates or limits students' entrepreneurial intent.

The Social Learning Theory, particularly the TPB, is perhaps the most dominant in predicting behavior and, as a consequence, the intention to act and/or undertake entrepreneurship. Per the TPB, entrepreneurial intention is a function of three variables (determinants): attitudes towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. An individual's positive or negative evaluation of starting a business reflects an individual's attitude toward entrepreneurship. Social media can impact these attitudes by showcasing success stories of entrepreneurs, motivational content, and practical business tools. Students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship as a beneficial and attainable goal, formed in part by negative attitudes toward online, can shape a positive attitude.

Subjective norms are the perceived social pressure on one's entrepreneurial behavior. Social media creates new digital peer groups, entrepreneurial influencer networks, and professional communities. Peer entrepreneurs on social media encourage entrepreneurial discussion, sharing participatory business success, and posting online ventures as an achievement. This can normalize entrepreneurship in students' social networks. Social entrepreneurship mature circles strongly make subjective norms by social approval and visibility.

Behavioral control, as the extent to which students are self-convinced to perform the entrepreneurship tasks successfully, reflects. Students can acquire practical tools, knowledge, and templates through online entrepreneurial communities, business tutorials on YouTube, Instagram entrepreneurial pages, and LinkedIn. Control, competence, and self-trust can be strengthened. Performance control and self-trust can be weakened, confusion and distrust due to misinformation and fraudulent online activity.

Unlike the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes the internals of a person and the reasons behind their actions and decisions, learning theory and its observational aspect look at the social components and surroundings of a person. One explanation of learning theory states that when a person watches someone doing a particular task, and they receive some kind of reward after completing the task, that person will be

more likely to complete the same task and receive a reward. Therefore, social media, in the context of this study, is a great environment to observe constantly modeled entrepreneurial behavior.

There is an unending supply of entrepreneurial role models on social media, like the founders of global startups or owners of small local businesses. The students see the actions of these entrepreneurs and how they interact; they see their problem-solving and how they overcome issues and challenges. This exposure helps to refine and build entrepreneurial traits and confidence vicariously, without the students having to take part in the actions themselves. The effect of modeling behavior is best seen when the role models look or appear to be relatable. Another of these digital rewards is social media itself, which comes in the form of likes, comments, shares, and follows, and this is where learning theory comes in. Every student uses this reward system, which some may describe as a form of encouragement, and this serves as motivation to perform the same actions. Discouragement and the fear of failure may be present in the case of unideal role models.

Relevance to Pakistan's Context

Considering that entrepreneurship education in Pakistan is formal and mainly theoretical in nature, social media also acts as a form of low-cost exposure to entrepreneurial education and associated digital marketplaces. The TPB-SLT is also of interest as it accounts for how students develop an entrepreneurial mindset, and the digital ecosystem informs their confidence and actions. Hence, it is appropriate to use these theories to explore the impact of social media on entrepreneurial intentions.

Research Methodology

The impact of social media on entrepreneurial intentions was examined using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. First, the researchers collected and analysed quantitative data. Then, qualitative data were collected and analysed to further describe and detail the findings from the quantitative data. This approach strengthens the overall study design by balancing and integrating the generalisability of the quantitative findings with the context and depth of the qualitative data.

The research opted for a mixed-methods approach for the purpose of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach was likely able to capture the measurable relationships along with the complex inter-relationships underlying students' decisions. The use of a stratified sample likely contributed some degree of heterogeneity and representativeness to the study. Moreover, to strengthen the study's reliability and validity we deployed structured surveys, ran a pilot study and used a multitude of analytical techniques. The combination of SEM and the thematic analysis provided triangulation which strengthened the findings both theoretically and empirically. The approach as a whole was more than sufficient to contribute to the existing body of literature concerning entrepreneurship in Pakistan, and will offer methods to educators, students, and policymakers on optimising the business landscape in order to tackle and overcome both problems and opportunities.

This particular research had as target only undergraduate students in Lahore Pakistan. Lahore has highly suited this investigation. The multitude of higher education institutions, both public and private, along with business colleges, contribute to creating a vibrant educational atmosphere. Along with this educational atmosphere, there are also business accelerators, incubation centers, and tech parks. Students are given an opportunity to engage with entrepreneurial activities. While the outcomes are not the same, they are indeed positive. Additional studies may reveal heretofore unrecognized difficulties in this area (Shahzad et al., 2022) Quantitative data, including descriptive statistics as well as reliability analysis, were assessed in SPSS, and structural equation modelling was assessed in SmartPLS 4 (v. 4.0.8.1). For qualitative interview data, pattern analysis, as well as coding and thematic analysis, were accomplished in NVivo.The students' narratives were put under scrutiny. To discern students' feelings, we adopted thematic analysis employing what we referred to as "theme" hunting.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic attributes of the 300 participant respondents helped provide and contextualize the characteristics of the sample population employed in the advanced quantitative component of the research.

The sample population consisted of equal representation of male and female students (55% male and 45% female respondents). A little more than half of the respondents were students in the publicly funded (60%) and the remainder (40%) in privately funded institutions. For the respondents of the sample population the major areas of study comprised of 30% business, 25% engineering, 20% computer science, 15% social sciences, and the remainder mainly (10%) in other minor academic disciplines. This rich data coverage allowed us to improve the population samples prior and current study findings.

The respondents of the sample population reported to have high weekly social media activity (80% WhatsApp, 70% Facebook, 65% Instagram, 60% Youtube, and 35% LinkedIn). 75% of the respondents reported to be active social media users on a daily basis. 25% were users of the social media primarily for academic entrepreneurial purposes, while 35% were networking users and 30% were entertainment users. This multifactorial modeling of internet and social media that students use demonstrates the role of social media in the life of students in the sample population.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Subcategory / Distribution (%)
Gender	Male (55%), Female (45%)
Institution Type	Public Universities (60%), Private Universities (40%)
Academic Disciplines	Business (30%), Engineering (25%), Computer Science (20%), Social Sciences (15%), Others (10%)
Social Media Platforms Used	WhatsApp (80%), Facebook (70%), Instagram (65%), YouTube (60%), LinkedIn (35%)
Frequency of Use	Daily (75%), Weekly (20%), Rarely (5%)
Primary Purpose of Use	Networking (35%), Entertainment (30%), Entrepreneurial Learning (25%), Other (10%)

The constructs of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, self-efficacy, self-efficacy, opportunities, challenges, and entrepreneurial intentions revealed that perceptions overall were positive. Across the constructs, the mean scores were positive ranging from 3.40 to 3.97 (on a 5 point scale) indicating a positive attitude and strong intentions toward entrepreneurship. The response categories of "agree/strongly agree" showed that students' exposure to entrepreneurial content on social media influenced their attitudes and motivations.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Major Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	% Agree/Strongly Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree/Strongly Disagree
Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship	3.92	0.68	72%	18%	10%
Subjective Norms	3.65	0.74	65%	22%	13%
Perceived Behavioral Control	3.78	0.70	68%	20%	12%
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	3.85	0.66	70%	19%	11%
Opportunities via Social Media	3.97	0.72	75%	16%	9%
Challenges via Social Media	3.40	0.81	55%	25%	20%
Entrepreneurial Intentions	3.88	0.69	71%	17%	12%

Reliability and Validity Testing

To measure internal consistency, we used Cronbach's Alpha which reported that all constructs ranged from 0.81 to 0.88, well above the 0.70 threshold, confirming strong internal consistency.

The Composite Reliability (CR) values fell in the 0.86 to 0.92 range, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values fell in the 0.57 to 0.68 range, which meets the established standards for convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was established with the help of the Fornell–Larcker criterion. For each of the constructs, the square root of the AVE was greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming that the constructs are conceptually different from one another.

Table 3

Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship	0.86
Subjective Norms	0.82
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.84
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	0.88
Opportunities via Social Media	0.85
Challenges via Social Media	0.81
Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.87

- Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for convergent validity

To assess convergent validity, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were calculated. According to the thresholds established by Hair et al. (2019) for satisfactory convergent validity, CR values must be greater than 0.70, and AVE values must be greater than 0.50. The results, displayed in Table 4, show that all the constructs were above these thresholds.

Table 4

Construct	CR	AVE
Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship	0.89	0.61
Subjective Norms	0.87	0.59
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.88	0.62
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	0.91	0.66
Opportunities via Social Media	0.90	0.64
Challenges via Social Media	0.86	0.57
Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.92	0.68

- Discriminant validity (e.g., Fornell-Larcker criterion).

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used in determining discriminant validity. For each of the constructs in question, the square root of each AVE (which can be found on the diagonal) was cut, and was found to be greater than the inter-construct correlations (refer to Table 5). As such, this confirmed adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5

Discriminant Validity Matrix (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	ATT	SN	PBC	ESE	OPP	CHA	INT
Attitudes (ATT)	**0.78**						
Subjective Norms (SN)	0.52	**0.77**					
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	0.49	0.54	**0.79**				
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE)	0.55	0.50	0.57	**0.81**			
Opportunities (OPP)	0.60	0.53	0.51	0.58	**0.80**		
Challenges (CHA)	0.40	0.42	0.44	0.39	0.46	**0.75**	
Intentions (INT)	0.63	0.59	0.56	0.61	0.65	0.41	**0.82**

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM was used to assess the measurement and structural models.

Measurement Model

All factor loadings were above 0.70 and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, confirming strong indicator reliability.

Table 6

Measurement Model Assessment (CFA)

Construct	Indicator	Factor Loading	t-value	p-value
Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship	ATT1	0.79	15.32	<0.001
	ATT2	0.82	16.11	<0.001
	ATT3	0.81	15.97	<0.001
Subjective Norms	SN1	0.77	14.45	<0.001
	SN2	0.80	15.22	<0.001
…	…	…	…	…

Structural Model

From the path coefficients, it can be argued that positively related and all hypothesized relationships were significant. Entrepreneurial intentions were positively influenced by attitudes (β=0.28), subjective norms (β=0.22), perceived behavioral control (β=0.31), self-efficacy (β=0.26), and opportunities (β=0.19), while Challenges exhibited some negative influence (β=−0.15). The model predicted and explained the substantial amount of variance (R^2=0.64), shifting the target within the range of 64% of the empirical value on the constructs that were adjusted within the purview of the intentions.

Table 7

Structural Model Assessment

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	R² of Dependent Variable
Attitudes → Intentions	0.28	4.11	<0.001	
Subjective Norms → Intentions	0.22	3.74	<0.001	
PBC → Intentions	0.31	5.02	<0.001	
Self-Efficacy → Intentions	0.26	4.65	<0.001	
Opportunities → Intentions	0.19	3.21	0.001	
Challenges → Intentions	−0.15	2.88	0.004	
R² (Entrepreneurial Intentions)				0.64

Hypotheses Testing

All seven hypotheses were supported.

Table 8

Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported
H1	Attitudes toward entrepreneurship positively influence intentions.	Yes
H2	Subjective norms positively influence intentions.	Yes
H3	Perceived behavioral control positively influences intentions.	Yes
H4	Entrepreneurial self-efficacy positively influences intentions.	Yes
H5	Opportunities via social media positively influence intentions.	Yes
H6	Challenges via social media negatively influence intentions.	Yes

The impact of social media engagement on shaping entrepreneurial intention was proven by the quantitative variables. The strongest predictors within the scope of this research are attitude, norms, perceived control, and self-efficacy. This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior. Opportunities on social media increased entrepreneurial intention whereas challenges on social media platforms reduced intention, thus confirming the duality of social media.

Empirical evidence demonstrated that the online entrepreneurial role model, peer participation, and entrepreneurial content all served to bolster student motivation and heightened self-efficacy. Conversely, the misinformation risks and distraction challenges moderated, and thus reduced, the hypothesized positive effects.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As part of a larger study, 15 students were selected for in-person, qualitative interviews. The interviewees were of different genders, pursued different fields in academia, and had different social media use profiles, social media entrepreneurial exposure, and entrepreneurial experience which enhanced the representativeness of the sample.

Some of the interviewees were students who had small businesses or were involved in family businesses, while others had only online business education. The degree of online business education participation as well as social media use was assessed for the interviewees.

These characteristics made it possible to study the phenomenon of social media and entrepreneurial cognition.

Thematic Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, five major themes emerged:

Theme 1: Social Media as a Source of Opportunity

Learners perceived social media as an inexpensive starting point to examine concepts, obtain visibility, enter a market, and acquire business knowledge. Them most appreciated were Instagram and LinkedIn.

"*Instagram allows me to quickly and affordably test an idea.*"

"*I connect with business owners around the world on LinkedIn.*"

Theme 2: Role Models and Observational Learning

Reports of hardship and success from various entrepreneurs flooded digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok and were seen by many students. The depiction of these entrepreneurs helped motivate students and removed some of the mystery surrounding the field of entrepreneurship.

"*Watching entrepreneurs discuss their journeys is inspiring and makes entrepreneurship feel more attainable.*"

Theme 3: Peer Influence and Digital Communities

Students showed motivation from their peers undertaking entrepreneurial activities – and sometimes even felt pressure from them.

"*Seeing business posts from classmates motivates me to give it a shot.*"

Theme 4: Challenges and Digital Risks

People frequently reported concerns about false information, fraud, distractions, too much information, and misleading ads.

"*I joined a course advertised on Facebook, only to find it was a scam.*"

"*I start researching for business and spend hours scrolling instead.*"

Theme 5: Bridging Gaps in Formal Education
Learners believed university classes were more theory-based than social media's real-time market data.
"Our classes are theory-based but social media demonstrates real businesses."

Linking Themes to Theory
These concepts were closely related to TPB and SLT:
- Favorable attitudes were formed because of hearing success stories.
- Participation of peers and members of the online community shaped the subjective norms.
- Enhanced self-perceived behavioral control was attributed to the simplicity of entrepreneurship due to the presence of guides and tutorials.
- Students demonstrated SLT through the imitation of online entrepreneurs.

Thus, the role of social media on intention was the result of social cognitive (TPB) and behavioral (SLT) mechanisms.

Summary of Qualitative Findings
E-documents and scholarly articles quantify manifestations across disciplines. Digitized social platforms paradoxically offer intermittent empowerment rapport. Self-worth from unapprised socio-ethical risks—such as scams, misinformation notorously defame parallel abstractions—sustained critical heuristics. Negative interdependent structures fortified digital interactivity for entrepreneurial educational deficits in Pakistan. Normative social structures—especially punitive family conformity, and gender stereotypes—also influenced students' dynamics interpretation and social media engagement.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings
Triangulation showed strong alignment between quantitate changes and the qualitative stories.

Areas of Convergence
Self-efficacy: Both strands showed that social media enhanced student's perceptions of their self-efficacy.
Role Models: Social learning theory was pertinent in both findings.
Subjective norms: Digital peer influence was elaborated both statistically and narratively.
Opportunities: Both data sets showed social media facilitates students' exploration of business ideas, markets, and networks.

Areas of Divergence
Challenges: Quantitative indicators were showing that the challenges are negatively impacting the intentions while the qualitative results were showing the more profound dimensions of the challenges (scams, burnout, wasting time).
Cultural Influences: These were primarily emanating from the interviews rather than the surveys.
Information Overload Stress: The qualitative data offered an additional dimension of these data wherein the emotional and psychological aspects were considered.

Holistic Interpretation
Social media has a Dual Role
It has the ability to motivate and educate youth and synergistically connect them to entrepreneurial ecosystems. At the same time, it can also pose a threat in the form of eroding the users' confidence and/or erroneously educating them.

In the context of Pakistan, where the formal system of teaching entrepreneurship is mostly non-existent, the role of social media is also important, but it needs to be supplemented with proper frameworks, digital tab, and to a lesser extent, guidance in order to navigate the different tools available.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social Media and Entrepreneurial Attitudes

The study found a substantial positive correlation between social media use and social media attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Students who consumed motivational clips, entrepreneurial stories, and business advice on YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn, became increasingly positive toward entrepreneurship as a career and viewed it as feasible.

Such a finding is in line with prior literature that royalty concerning digital entrepreneurship stimulates the positive disposition of young people toward entrepreneurship through real-world relatable examples (e.g. Bandura, 1977; Ajzen, 1991).

Qualitative accounts substantiated that social media aided students in envisioning themselves as aspiring entrepreneurs and motivated them to transform their focus from passive admiration to active engagement. Within the Pakistani context lacking practical implementation in formal education on entrepreneurship, social media provided the necessary inspiration as well as contemporary entrepreneurial activities.

Role of Subjective Norms and Peer Influence

The numbers indicated that students who frequently interact with people (i.e. naive peers, students, groups, etc.) who have entrepreneurial attitudes are more likely to develop entrepreneurial intentions. Students described feeling encouraged by these interactions, such as naive peers posting updates about their entrepreneurial ventures, the promotion of entrepreneurial competitions by the university, and the celebration of entrepreneurial successes by distant social communities.

Most students felt motivated to exploit perceived entrepreneurial opportunities by both distant (e.g. social media) and close (e.g. classroom) peers who had launched ventures. Social media platforms such as Facebook have highlighted, and made visible to many, the social pressures to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities motivated by perceived entrepreneurial expectations.

In the context of Pakistan, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which addresses social pressures as perceived approval, is applicable. Interpersonal relationships are collectivistic, and the use of digital social networks serves as extensions of traditional social groups.

Perceived Behavioral Control and Access to Online Learning Resources

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) was one of the strongest predictors of intentions; specifically, students felt that having access to tutorials, step-by-step instructions, business advice, and free content available on YouTube and Instagram boosted their confidence in running a small business. This is consistent with previous research that shows students' confidence in their ability to perform entrepreneurial activities is enhanced through the use of digital technologies.

There was also the qualitative data which showed that although the use of social media bolstered entrepreneurial self-efficacy for the majority of students, some users reported feeling extra burdened in the presence of large volumes of mixed and contradictory information—demonstrating the paradoxical nature of social media content.

Students in Pakistan, where business incubation programmes are in short supply, social media plays a role as an informal and equitable learning environment, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged or lack comprehensive formal exposure to entrepreneurial education.

Observational Learning and Role Modeling (SLT Perspective)

The collected data provided ample evidence in support of Social Learning Theory. Students noted having watched:
- Influencer accounts detailing their startup experiences

- YouTube videos breakdowns on effective business strategies
- entrepreneurs showcasing their small businesses in the community
- female entrepreneurs in the business sector in Pakistan

There were "virtual mentors" that students could replicate the skills, strategies, behaviours, and problem-solving methods.

This is consistent with Bandura's assertion that people learn by observing the behaviours of others, particularly those who are similar to themselves. Students could learn from people in social circles that were far removed from themselves because social media diminished the access to these role models.

Opportunities Offered by Social Media
Using quantitative data, it was shown statistically that perceived opportunity is a very significant predictor of the intention to be an entrepreneur. What the interview participants described were the perceived opportunities such as:
- marketing products at little to no cost
- connecting with customers
- showcasing prototypes
- analyzing competitors
- joining entrepreneurial networks
- participating in online trainings

The literature shows that social media has a democratising effect on markets, knowledge, and networks (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In Pakistan, students were able to use affordable marketing strategies due to the lack of financial and institutional support.

Challenges and Digital Risks
Despite positive perceptions, challenges negatively influenced entrepreneurial intentions. Students raised concerns about:
- misinformation
- scams
- cyber-fraud
- time-wasting content
- excessive competition
- mental burnout from information overload

The current results correspond with prior scholarship suggesting the "dark side" of technology (Frison & Eggermont, 2020). The qualitative descriptions were able to uncover how negative information eroded students' confidence or hindered their learning process, information partly present in the survey results.
Some female students also expressed, culturally, their concerns about harassment and negative comments, illustrating the gendered barriers of Pakistan's online space.

Integration of TPB and SLT in Explaining Findings
Analyzing the influence of various aspects of social media on entrepreneurial behaviour using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Slim Learning Theory (SLT), and Social Media as Sources of Inspiration for Entrepreneurship:
- TPB explained the factors that influence the attitudes and social norms individuals perceive as control stemming from the content they view on social media platforms.
- SLT explained the phenomenon of behavioural learning through imitation of peers, as students were influencers of entrepreneurial model behaviour.

Thus, both motivation (TPB) and learning behaviour (SLT) were explained remarkably through both ways in which digital platforms influenced entrepreneurship.

Conclusions

Social media exerts a strong positive influence on the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Pakistan. This is primarily achieved by enhancing the perceived desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship, which fosters more favorable attitudes toward it. Student motivations are further amplified by subjective norms, as the visible entrepreneurial activities of peers on social media platforms create a powerful social influence.

Additionally, the widespread availability of accessible success stories and a vast repository of online educational resources significantly boost individuals' perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy. Entrepreneurial thinking itself is cultivated through students' engagement with both primary and secondary digital social networks, which shape an entrepreneurial mindset. This effect is particularly pronounced for students without formal entrepreneurial education, as the constant stream of social media content exposes them to perceived opportunities and entrepreneurial activity they might otherwise not encounter.

However, this digital environment also presents challenges, including a negative impact on risk-taking intentions and a tendency toward procrastination. Other risks range from digital security threats to the challenges posed by limited digital literacy. Ultimately, in the Pakistani context, social media functions as a critical extension of the informal entrepreneurial learning ecosystem, effectively filling gaps left by formal theoretical university curricula.

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