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**THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS OF URBAN
YOUTH IN CHINA: A CONCEPTUAL
ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION MEDIATION
FRAMEWORK**

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Abstract:

Urban entrepreneurship in China has been a key driver of economic transformation, social innovation, and job sustainability, particularly among youth people. However, despite the existence of various pro-entrepreneurship policies and a thriving innovation ecosystem, the actual rate of intention and engagement of urban youth in entrepreneurial activities is still modest. This paper conceptually reviews the factors of entrepreneurial intentions, focusing on the role of entrepreneurship education as a mediator within the framework Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Resource-Based View (RBV). This paper aimed to review literature on personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping entrepreneurial intentions, as well as how education influence these psychological dynamics. Literature review shows that personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control of behavior are the main drivers of entrepreneurial intentions, but their effectiveness depends on the role of entrepreneurship education. This paper proposed a conceptual of TPB and RBV to elucidate the relationship between the dimensions of psychology and education in fostering entrepreneurship intentions of urban youth in China. This review offers theoretical contributions to the field of entrepreneurial intent studies and practical recommendations for policy makers, educators, and youth incubators.

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Keyword:

China, Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Intentions, Planned Behavior, Theory of Resource-Based View, Urban Youth.



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Introduction

The China's economic development in the last four decades has marked a profound structural transformation from a central planning system to a dynamic market economy, driven by innovation and entrepreneurship (Guo et al., 2016; Zheng & Du, 2020). In the midst of these changes, urban youth entrepreneurship is emerging as a new driver for national competitiveness, technological innovation, and modern job creation. With an urbanization rate of over 70% and the total urban youth population reaching over 400 million (Song, 2022), the potential of China's young generation in the entrepreneurial sector is significant. However, even though China's entrepreneurial ecosystem is currently one of the most active in the world, data shows that the rate of youth entrepreneurial intention is still low compared to the available opportunities (Wang, You, et al., 2023; Lyu et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education reports that China has included entrepreneurship into the courses of more than 80% of its colleges, especially in cities. Notwithstanding this, Lv et al. (2022) statistics reveal that only 18% of urban university students with declared entrepreneurial interest actually establish a firm or go to startup events. This gap arises from the complexity of entrepreneurial purpose, which is influenced by human motivation, cultural norms, self-efficacy, and perceived control over necessary resources (Londono et al., 2021). Urban teenagers often conform to traditional familial expectations by opting for stable employment in government or state-owned enterprises (Shan et al., 2018; Lavelle, 2021). These cultural pressures may undermine subjective norms that may otherwise promote entrepreneurial engagement. Real or imagined obstacles such as lack of funds, inadequate knowledge of administrative procedures, or fear of failure which also diminish perceived behavioral control, hence lowering the actualization of entrepreneurial purpose. This phenomenon raises a profound question, such as why are urban youths who are tech-savvy, highly educated, and living in an innovative environment still hesitant to launch their own businesses?

In addition, since the implementation of economic reforms in the late 1970s, China has developed into one of the largest entrepreneurial ecosystems in the world (Guo et al., 2016; Zheng & Du, 2020). Urban youth are now a major focus on the national innovation agenda as they possess the characteristics of digital literacy, higher education levels, and a high spirit of pioneering. However, despite various policies such as "Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation

" being introduced, the actual rate of youth involvement in entrepreneurial activities remains modest (Wang, You, et al., 2023). Moreover, Chunmei and Bahari (2024) emphasizes, there is a gap between reported entrepreneurial intentions and the actual rate of new enterprise establishment by young people. This gap illustrates the complex interaction between individual psychological factors and education.

This paper reviews the issue through the framework of Planned Behavior Theory (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which is based on three main constructs such as personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control of behavior. In this context, entrepreneurial intentions are determined by the extent to which individuals see entrepreneurship as something positive, gain social support to do so, and are confident in their own ability to overcome obstacles. However, a variety of other factor also shape this relationship, including the level of exposure to entrepreneurship education within the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework. Theoretically, this paper expands the understanding of entrepreneurial intention by integrating the role of entrepreneurship education as a mediator (Troilo & Zhang, 2012; He & Ding, 2023). Practically, this review helps policymakers identify the most effective education and policy strategies to transform entrepreneurial intentions into real action, particularly in the context of cities such as Nanning and Shenzhen that are centres of youth innovation (Charles, 2025).

Literature Review

The entrepreneurial purpose is intricate, by using several underlying ideas from psychology, sociology, and economics. Prior to the fundamental of theoretical framework, it is important to evaluate various theories. Framing this paper is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Resource Based View (RBV) in the light of intention to venture.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

This paper uses Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991) to link each TPB construct: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control to entrepreneurial intention and behavior, and explores how psychological factors shape entrepreneurial intention. This theory is relevant in explaining the different factors that may affect the decision to venture into entrepreneurship, particular within the youths in the Chinese urban areas. Through deploying this theoretical model, this study seeks to confirm the net impact of these factors on the entrepreneurial intentions of the youth in urban areas and how different support factors can either strengthen or weaken the existing relationships. Jena (2020) observed that the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) also presupposes that entrepreneurial intention describes and predicts entrepreneurial behaviour and subsequent actions to execute plans.

In the Chinese context, positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship are increasing as a result of changes in work culture and technological development (Liu et al., 2019). However, social norms that still praise the stability of government employment and the perception of high risk reduce real intentions (Al-Qadasi et al., 2023). Perceived behavioral control, on the other hand, is heavily influenced by access to funding, training, and mentorship (Huang et al., 2022). Therefore, TPB serves as a conceptual basis for understanding the decisions of urban youth in actively engaging or otherwise in entrepreneurship.

Resource Based View (RBV)

Resource Based View (RBV) emphasizing the importance of internal resources of enterprises in creating and maintaining competitive advantages, and proposed the view that resources are heterogeneous and incompletely mobile among enterprises (Wernerfelt, 1984; 1995). Although the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) describes how attitudes, norms, and perceived control motivate intention, it ignores the fundamental resource basis enabling entrepreneurial activity. The Resource-Based View (RBV) complements TPB by stressing how material (e.g., start-up funding, technical assets) and intangible resources (e.g., specialized skills, networks) influence people's attitudes and regulate perceptions. Access to seed finance and incubator facilities, for instance, immediately improves perceived behavioral control; proprietary technology and mentoring networks increase confidence and favourably affect views on venture formation. Combining RBV and TPB thus offers a more complete model—connecting "can I do it?" (resources → PBC), "do others support me?" (networks → subjective norms), and "is it worth it?" (skills & knowledge → attitudes)—to forecast entrepreneurial intention among urban youth. Figure 1 illustrate the phenomenon.

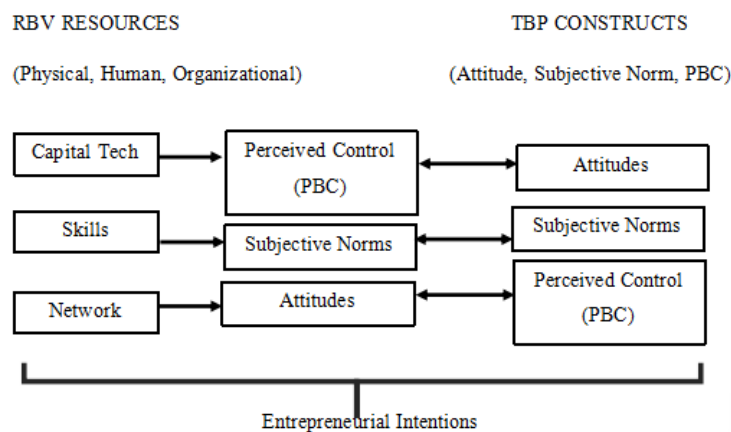


Figure 1: Model of Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Intention: Relationship Between RBV Resources and TBP Structure

According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), effective resource allocation yields quantifiable outcomes, hence establishing a sustainable competitive advantage (Dyduch et al., 2023; Barney et al. 1991). The core of the RBV lies in the scarce and irreplaceable resources controlled by the organization, which constitute the source of the company's lasting competitive advantage. However, how to effectively obtain and utilize these resources is the key to corporate strategy formulation. The research context of RBV providing rich research directions for many fields such as human resource management and economic finance. Whether in a single business or a diversified strategy, RBV is a theoretical tool that corporate decision makers cannot ignore, helping companies to discover and enhance their competitive advantages.

Entrepreneurial intention is the deliberate intention of a person to participate in entrepreneurial activities. For youth in urban China, entrepreneurial intention is formed by both internal drive and outside contextual elements. Research has shown that while young people in China exhibit great interest in entrepreneurship, this passion does not necessarily result in practical results (Ting et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2022). Entrepreneurship has been both appealing and required

given the fast-changing economic structure in Chinese cities combined with technology disruption and job saturation in conventional industries.

Entrepreneurship Education as a Mediator

Entrepreneurship education (EE) plays an important role in increasing self-efficacy, innovative skills, and entrepreneurial motivation (Troilo & Zhang, 2012; He & Ding, 2023). In China, over 75% of universities now offer entrepreneurship courses and 40% of graduates majoring in STEM (Lv et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial education is a vital mediating element affecting the link between TPB constructs: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control and entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurial education is becoming more structured in China as national policies call for its inclusion into universities. Its actual worth, however, beyond policy hyperbole is in how it converts psychological preparation into useful skill.

Entrepreneurial education equips young individuals with the cognitive and procedural skills necessary to start and manage firms by augmenting perceived behavioral control and fostering positive personal attitudes (Troilo & Zhang, 2012; Zhang et al., 2021). It fundamentally converts drive into capacity, so establishing a connection. Several empirical investigations on urban Chinese teenagers have shown a mediating influence of entrepreneurship education. Xie et al. (2018), for example, discovered that even after socio-demographic variables were included, individuals who engaged in organized entrepreneurship training indicated much greater degrees of entrepreneurial ambition than those who did not. Jiang (2022) qualitative interviews also reveal that students involved in hands-on initiatives, such as university incubators and pitch competitions are more likely to feel confidence in their capacity to act on entrepreneurial ideas. This implies that education not only gives information but also improves self-efficacy, especially in areas such financial literacy, business planning, and risk assessment. When one compares people with comparable personal beliefs but different access to entrepreneurial education, the mediation function becomes very clear. For example, two students might equally appreciate entrepreneurship and get family support (i.e., comparable attitudes and subjective norms), but the one who has completed entrepreneurship training will probably rate higher in perceived behavioural control and show more entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurial education thereby changes the intensity and character of internal TPB elements rather than just being an outside effect. It strengthens the conviction that entrepreneurship is both possible and wanted. It is believed to mediate the link between TPB components and entrepreneurial intention, hence partially channelling the effect of attitudes, norms, and control on intention via educational experiences. Designing interventions that not only raise interest but also empower young people with the tools and confidence to convert entrepreneurial ideas into action depends on an understanding of this mediating route. Consequently, the objective of this paper is to suggest a comprehensive, integrated model that is capable of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the behavioural intentions of urban youth in China with respect to entrepreneurship.

Conceptual Framework

Entrepreneurial education equips young individuals with the cognitive and procedural skills. Based on the literature, this section proposed conceptual framework based on previous study.

Comparison Framework from Previous Study

Significant studies have been conducted to ascertain the antecedents of entrepreneurial intention. In this area, one of the most commonly applied theoretical models is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). From TPB, entrepreneurial intention can be determined by personal attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Several scholars have used TPB to examine intention in different settings. For example, Xie et al. (2018), Jiang (2022), Mahfud et al. (2020), and Obschonka et al. (2019). Table 1 detailed the previous entrepreneurial intention research.

Table 1: Comparative Framework of Previous Entrepreneurial Intention Research

Research	Context	Theoretical Model	Key Variables	Mediation / Moderation	Gap Addressed
Xie et al. (2018)	Urban China (Guangzhou)	TPB	Attitude, PBC, Subjective Norms	None	No external factors tested
Jiang (2022)	Youth in 2 nd tier cities	TPB	TPB constructs + education exposure	Education considered contextual, not causal	Does not model education as mediator
Mahfud et al. (2020)	Indonesia (urban youth)	TPB + Experiential Learning	Attitude, education, past experience	Education as predictor	Mediation not statistically tested
Obschonka et al. (2019)	Global Youth Study	TPB + Culture	Entrepreneurial personality, intention	None	No China-specific contextual variables
Current Study	Urban Youth in Nanning, China	TPB + External Factors	TPB constructs + Entrepreneurial Education	Education = Mediator	Tests dual-path influence of education

Some gaps and inconsistencies are identified in the literature though the study is extensive. While the TPB framework offers a sound theoretical background for the analysis of entrepreneurial intentions, it fails to incorporate the effect of external support systems. Limited prior research has examined the mediating role entrepreneurship education to influence entrepreneurial intentions in China. Filling this gap is important for providing a better understanding of the factors that could influence entrepreneurship among the youths in urban areas of China. Meanwhile, a broad agreement exists in the majority of literature about the impact of personal attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control as posited in the TPB. However, the degree of importance of these factors differs from one study to another.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of this study is developed to explore the entrepreneurial intention of urban youth in China based on the extended TPB and RBV incorporating perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, personal attitudes, and education. The framework is formulated as follow:

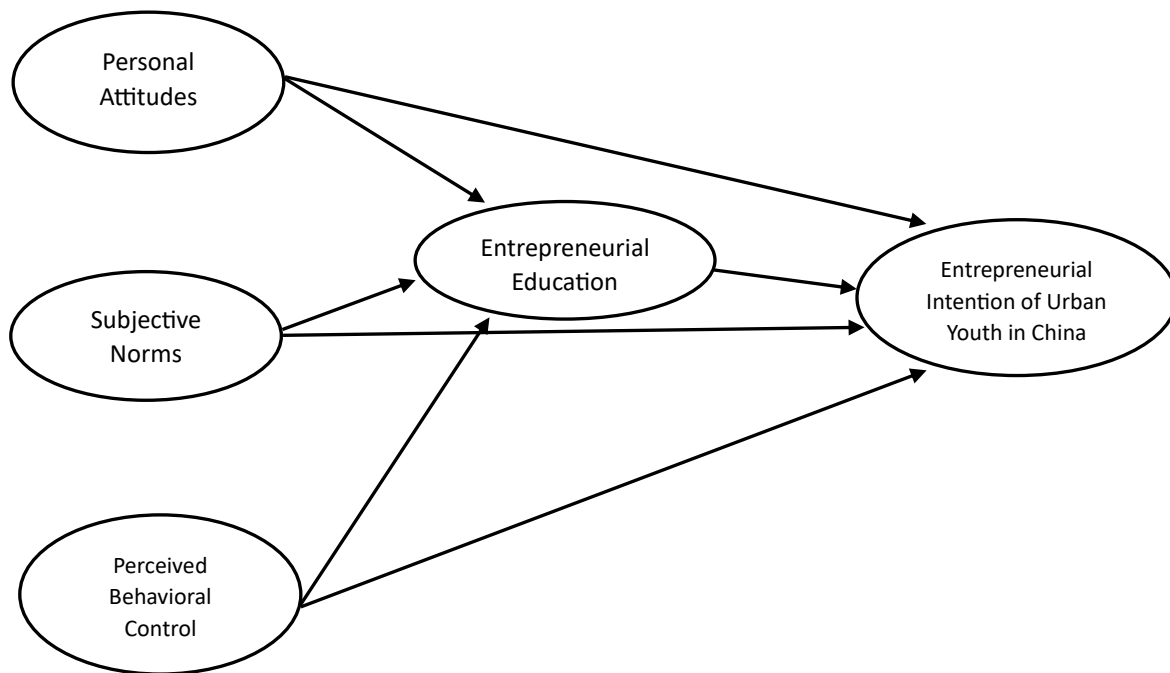


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

The model integrates the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with Resource-Based View (RBV) to provide a robust framework for evaluating the determinants of entrepreneurial intention. The TPB, introduced by Ajzen (1991), asserts that an individual's intention to engage in a behavior is determined by three primary factors: personal attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Fayolle, 2018; Yuan et al., 2022). These factors are directly used in the analysis of entrepreneurial intention in this framework. This framework suggests that the factors directly shape entrepreneurial intentions, but those effects are amplified through supportive entrepreneurship education.

Methodology

This paper review past literature to construct a conceptual model. Papers for study were found through searches in Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct, and library database. The scope of the analysis is limited to examining and making statements about research papers that use the terms entrepreneurship intention, entrepreneurship education, as well as urban youth in their titles. The paper also reviewed on TPB and RBV. The extant of the theory were be examined, analyzed and criticized.

Discussion

Literature findings show that there is a gap between entrepreneurial intentions and actions (Lyu et al., 2024). Although urban youth exhibit positive attitudes, institutional constraints, lack of role models, and difficulties in obtaining funding still hinder real entrepreneurial activities (Huang et al., 2022; He et al., 2019). Effective entrepreneurship education can reduce this gap through experiential learning, innovation competitions, and industry-university collaboration (Charles, 2025). This could expand TPB model to shows that the synergy between psychological interventions (attitudes, norms, PBCs) and structural support (EE) produces a multiplier effect on entrepreneurial intentions. However, without efficient education and guidance alone are not enough.

This paper explores urban youth entrepreneurship in China, with emphasis on history, current scenario, challenges, prospects and theoretical frameworks. Both the TPB and RBV are postulated as theoretical frameworks to establish how factors such as personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control affect the intentions of entrepreneurs. The paper also explains the role of entrepreneurial education focusing on the improvement of skills, confidence, and resources among urban youth. This highlights the gap that needs to be filled in the investigation of the antecedents to entrepreneurial intentionality among the youths in the urban areas of China. In sum, this paper offers a complex picture of youth entrepreneurship in urban China, based on the theoretical perspectives and the existing research findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the entrepreneurial intentions of urban youth in China are influenced by a combination of individual psychological factors and institutional structures. The integration of TPB and RBV offers a deeper understanding of how attitudes, social norms, and behavioral controls interact with education. This current research establishes a solid basis, comprehending that entrepreneurial endeavors in China are significantly shaped by both macro-environmental factors and individual-level characteristics. Nonetheless, the literature exhibits two significant deficiencies. First, research is often fragmented, concentrating either on institutional pressures or discrete psychological variables (Zheng & Du, 2020; Huang et al., 2021), hence neglecting to amalgamate both viewpoints into a unified predictive framework. Second, there exists a notable theoretical deficiency about the extensive application of the TPB to the particular demography of urban Chinese adolescents (Zhu et al., 2022).

The study directly tackles these deficiencies. This study will formulate an integrated model by concentrating only on the urban young population and use the comprehensive predictive capabilities of the TPB. This method will not only assess the cumulative impact of these psychological dimensions but also evaluate their predictive validity in the complex current setting of China's digital and employment sectors. This paper contributes by offering a cohesive framework for comprehending and promoting entrepreneurial ambition in one of the world's most dynamic and strategically significant marketplaces.

Recommendations For Future Studies

To strengthen the understanding of entrepreneurial intentions of urban youth in China, future studies are recommended to integrate the entrepreneurship education at all levels of higher education, including project-based learning and industry mentoring. It is also recommended to

develop a national mentor network, to increase the entrepreneurial intentions among urban youth and non-metropolitan youth. This model can be empirically tested in future studies to assess the effectiveness of educational on increasing true entrepreneurial intentions and behaviours. Quantitative studies can be conducted to confirm the relationship between the dimensions of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions.

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