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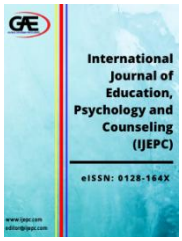

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MAPPING THE DRIVERS OF DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract:

This scoping review aims to map the landscape of research on digital entrepreneurial intention among undergraduate students in higher education institutions. The review specifically focuses on undergraduates in universities and colleges, reflecting the growing interest in fostering entrepreneurship through digital means. Following the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines, the review analysed studies published between 2020 and 2025. A total of 100 articles were selected using a structured search strategy with keywords related to entrepreneurial intention, higher education institutions, and undergraduate students. The findings reveal several dominant themes across the literature. Key influencing factors on digital entrepreneurial intention include entrepreneurship education, digital literacy, perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy, and institutional support. Many studies adopt theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to explain students' intentions to engage in digital entrepreneurship. There is also growing interest in the role of digital tools, online platforms, and experiential learning in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations. The review concludes that while significant progress has been made in understanding digital entrepreneurial intentions, research gaps remain. These include a lack of longitudinal studies, limited focus on socio-cultural contexts, and underrepresentation of data from developing countries.

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Keywords:

Entrepreneurial Intention, Undergraduate Students, Higher Education Institutions, Digital Entrepreneurship

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a vital area of interest within the field of entrepreneurship, particularly among university students. As digital technologies continue to evolve and reshape economic landscapes, more young individuals, especially undergraduates, are exploring entrepreneurial careers driven by innovation, flexibility, and access to global digital markets. Digital entrepreneurial intention (DEI) refers to an individual's conscious plan or desire to start a new venture by leveraging digital platforms, tools, or ecosystems. Among university students, DEI is gaining traction not only due to exposure to entrepreneurship education but also as a response to economic uncertainty, graduate unemployment, and the digital transformation of industries. Understanding the formation of digital entrepreneurial intentions among students is critical for higher education institutions (HEIs), educators, and policymakers aiming to build future-ready entrepreneurial talent.

The undergraduate phase represents a formative period where career intentions, including entrepreneurship, begin to crystallise. Therefore, exploring the factors influencing students' DEI is crucial for designing effective pedagogical strategies, institutional support, and national policies that promote digital entrepreneurship. While numerous empirical studies have examined entrepreneurial intentions in general, the specific domain of digital entrepreneurial intention among university undergraduates is still emerging. These studies vary significantly in terms of conceptual models, methodologies, contexts, and theoretical foundations. As such, a comprehensive synthesis is required to map out what is currently known, identify research gaps, and inform future inquiry. A scoping review serves as an ideal method to achieve this.

Despite growing scholarly interest, the literature on digital entrepreneurial intention remains fragmented, particularly in terms of constructs used, theoretical underpinnings, and regional focus. There is no consolidated understanding of how factors such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, institutional support, perceived behavioural control, or self-efficacy interact to influence DEI. In addition, there is a scarcity of literature reviews that comprehensively map this field, particularly reviews that focus exclusively on undergraduate students in higher education institutions between 2020 and 2025, a period marked by global digital acceleration due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Without such synthesis, it is challenging to track progress, compare findings, or identify overlooked dimensions, especially in developing country contexts.

To address this issue, this study undertakes a scoping review guided by the PRISMA-ScR framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews). Unlike systematic reviews that focus narrowly on effectiveness or outcome, a scoping review is better suited to explore the breadth and depth of research, clarify key concepts, and identify knowledge gaps. This methodology allows for the inclusion of diverse study designs, theoretical frameworks, and geographic contexts, thereby providing a broader understanding of the digital entrepreneurial intention landscape. By capturing

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variations in constructs, methods, and findings across 100 studies, the scoping review contributes to the theoretical and practical advancement of the field.

Accordingly, the objective of this scoping review is to synthesise current research on digital entrepreneurial intention among university undergraduates by mapping the extent, range, and nature of existing studies. This includes identifying the main constructs examined, theoretical frameworks employed, and methodological approaches used. Ultimately, the review aims to provide a solid foundation for future empirical studies and inform curriculum design, institutional strategies, and policy formulation to nurture digital entrepreneurship among youth.

Methodology

This scoping review was guided by the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews) framework developed by Tricco et al. (2018). As an extension of the original PRISMA protocol used in systematic literature reviews, PRISMA-ScR provides clear methodological guidance for conducting scoping reviews in a transparent and systematic manner. One of its major strengths lies in its systematic search strategy, which enables researchers to conduct a comprehensive review process across broad research domains. In line with this framework, the methodology of this study consists of three primary phases: (1) formulation of research questions, (2) systematic search strategy, and (3) data extraction and thematic analysis.

Formulation of Research Questions

To guide the review process, the research question was formulated using the PICo mnemonic (Population, Interest, Context) as proposed by Lockwood et al. (2015). In this review:

- P (Population): University undergraduate students
- I (Interest): Entrepreneurial intention
- Co (Context): Higher education institutions

Based on these elements, the main research question was:
"What are the key determinants, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps in digital entrepreneurial intention among university students in higher education institutions?"

Systematic Search Strategy

A three-step systematic search strategy was adopted, comprising identification, screening, and eligibility.
I. Identification
This step focused on identifying relevant keywords aligned with the research question. Three core concepts were identified: entrepreneurial intention, higher education institutions, and undergraduate students. Using AI tools such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek, these core terms were expanded into a broader search string using synonyms and related phrases.

The search was conducted across four platforms: Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, and AI-Elicit. Boolean operators (AND/OR), phrase searching, field codes (e.g., TITLE-ABS-KEY and TS=), truncation (*), and wildcard searches were applied. The final search string used was:

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STEP	Query	Scope of Search	Results
#1	"entrepreneurial intention*" OR "entrepreneurship intention*" OR "startup intention*" OR "intention to become an entrepreneur*" OR "entrepreneurial aspiration*" OR "entrepreneurial goal intention*"	Title	
#2	"higher education institution*" OR "university" OR "college" OR "higher education provider*" OR "tertiary education institution*" OR "post-secondary education institution*" OR "academic institution*" OR "HEI*"	Title	
#3	"undergraduate student*" OR "university undergraduate*" OR "college undergraduate*" OR "higher education undergraduate*"	Title/Abstract	
#4	AI OR "artificial intelligence" OR "digital literacy" OR "digital platform" OR "technology adoption" OR "digital entrepreneurship" OR "digital education"	Title/Abstract	
#5	#1 AND #2 AND #3	Result of search	Result of literature search
#6	#1 AND #2 AND #3 AND #4	Result of search	Result of literature search

II. Screening

Screening was carried out using four inclusion criteria:

1. Publication year: Only articles published between 2021, and July 2025 were considered.
2. Type of publication: Only journal articles, proceedings, and book chapters were included.
3. Language: Only publications in English and Malay were selected.

After applying these criteria, 45 articles were excluded, leaving 135 articles for the eligibility stage.

III. Eligibility

During eligibility checking, article titles and abstracts were reviewed for relevance to the study's objective and research question. An additional 35 articles were excluded due to misalignment with the core themes of entrepreneurial intention. This process resulted in a final selection of 100 articles for full-text review and data extraction.

Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis

A deductive thematic analysis was conducted based on the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The following four steps were followed:

1. Theme Identification: With the help of AI ChatGPT, an initial set of themes was proposed based on recurring patterns in the literature. These were:
    a. Personal and Psychological Drivers
    b. Educational and Institutional Influences
    c. Social Influences

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2. Theme Validation: These themes were reviewed and validated in consultation with academic experts. The panel confirmed all three themes as relevant and comprehensive in capturing the scope of the literature.
3. Data Extraction: Relevant data from the results and discussion sections of the included articles were extracted using tailored AI prompts in ChatGPT. Information aligned with the three final themes was recorded in a structured coding matrix.
4. Theme Reporting: Extracted data were synthesised and reported according to the identified themes. This synthesis forms the basis of the findings section in this review.

Results

Data Charting Process

From the initial pool of 180 articles, 100 articles met the inclusion criteria and were fully analysed. Data was charted based on bibliographic details, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, sample characteristics, and main findings relevant to entrepreneurial intention (DEI) in higher education institutions. A deductive thematic analysis identified three overarching themes: cognitive, social, and institutional drivers aligned with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

Distribution of Publications

The distribution of studies by publication year is shown in Figure 1. Research on entrepreneurial intention among university students has seen a steady rise between 2020 and 2024, peaking in 2024 with 31 studies.

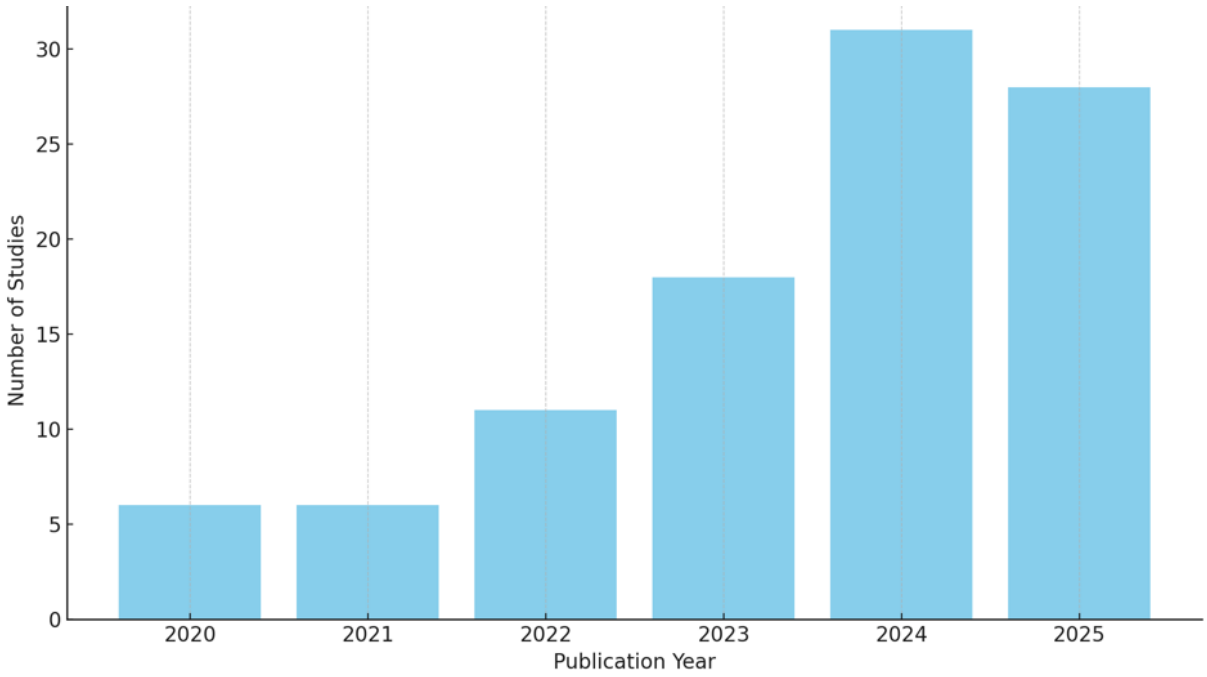

Figure 1: Distribution of Publications by Year (2020–2024)

Thematic Overview

Theme: Cognitive, Social, and Institutional Drivers of EI
Sub-Theme 1: Personal and Psychological Drivers

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- Digital Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (DES): Identified in 52 articles
- Perceived AI Competence (AIC): Found in 20 articles
- Entrepreneurial Opportunity Recognition (EOR): Reported in 31 articles
- Entrepreneurial Attitudes: A mediating factor in 43 articles

Sub-Theme 2: Educational and Institutional Influences

- Technology-Enhanced Learning (e.g., ChatGPT Adoption): Noted in recent studies
- Digital Entrepreneurship Education: Covered in 57 articles
- University Ecosystem Support: Evident in studies, Sub-Theme 3: Social Influences
- Subjective Norms: Cited in 36 articles
- Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC): Highlighted in 48 articles

Sub-Theme 3: Integrative Mechanism

- Serial Mediation: Observed in 15 articles showing how technology adoption influences intention through self-efficacy and attitudes.

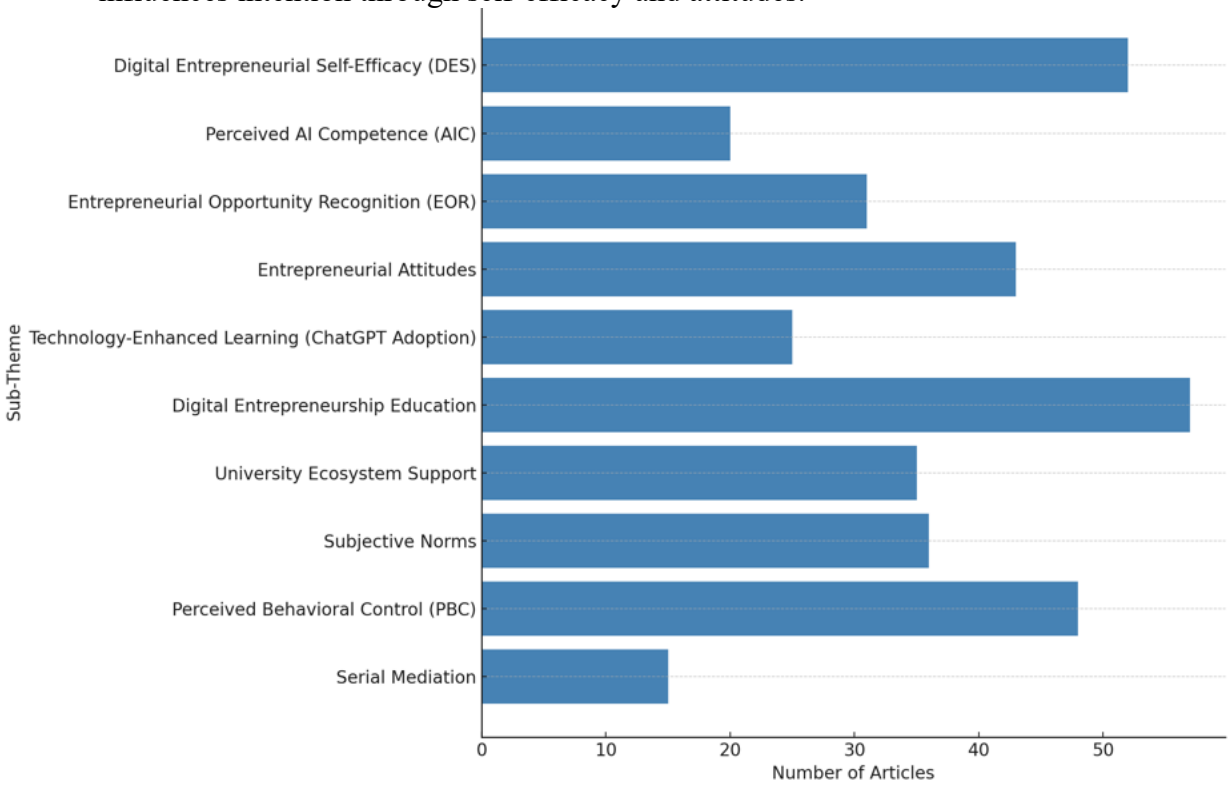

Figure 2: Distribution of articles across DEI sub-themes

Discussion

Using a critical reasoning approach, this review suggests that entrepreneurial intention is a multidimensional construct, shaped by personal cognition, social context, and institutional supports.

- Psychological factors, particularly self-efficacy and opportunity recognition, are strong predictors of EI, aligning with SCCT's focus on personal agency and capability.
- AI competence is emerging as a novel construct in DEI, indicating a shift from traditional to digitally driven entrepreneurship models.
- Educational structures, including digital entrepreneurship programs and university ecosystem support, play a central role in enhancing entrepreneurial intention, though gaps exist in resource availability across regions.

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- Social factors, such as subjective norms and perceived control, have a weaker yet still relevant influence, especially in collectivist societies.
- Serial mediation pathways confirm that the adoption of technology only enhances intention when mediated by self-efficacy and positive attitudes.

Conclusion

This scoping review synthesised 100 articles to explore the cognitive, social, and institutional factors shaping digital entrepreneurial intention (DEI) among university students, guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Findings reveal that personal drivers such as self-efficacy and AI competence consistently predict DEI, while institutional support and digital education initiatives serve as crucial enablers. Social influences, including peer and family expectations, show a moderate effect. Moreover, serial mediation mechanisms highlight the interdependence among these domains. However, the review is constrained by several limitations, including a dominance of cross-sectional designs that limit causal inferences, underutilization of longitudinal or mixed-method approaches, and insufficient attention to intersectional factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and digital access. Future research should adopt more robust methodological designs, investigate intersectional influences on DEI, and design intervention-based models utilising emerging tools like ChatGPT and digital simulation. Additionally, examining sustainability-oriented DEI models could provide valuable insights in addressing broader global challenges.

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