

Family Support and Higher Education Students' Engagement in Online Business – An Exploratory Study

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Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
20 July 2025	20 November 2025	30 November 2025	31 Disember 2025

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of online business has created new opportunities for higher education students to engage in entrepreneurial activities while pursuing their studies. Student involvement in online business has become increasingly common due to the accessibility of digital platforms and the flexibility they offer. However, students' engagement is influenced not only by individual motivation but also by their social environment, particularly the support they receive from their families. Previous studies have consistently identified family support as an important factor influencing entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, and behaviors among young individuals. Nevertheless, limited empirical research has specifically examined how higher education students perceive family support in relation to their engagement in online business. Understanding these perceptions is important because family members can provide emotional encouragement, financial assistance, practical guidance, and entrepreneurial role models that may shape students' willingness to participate in online entrepreneurial activities. This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a theoretical lens to contextualize family support as a form of social influence affecting students' engagement in online business. Rather than testing the TPB model, the theory is used to interpret students' perceptions within an exploratory and descriptive research design, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the social factors that influence student entrepreneurship in the digital economy.

Keywords: *Family Support, Online Business, Student Entrepreneurship, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Entrepreneurial Intention, University Students, Digital Entrepreneurship*

How to Cite:

Awalludin, N. R., Othman, N., Umaruddin, N. N. M., & Ishak, N. (2025). Family support and higher education students' engagement in online business. *The Asian Journal of Professional & Business Studies*, 6(2), 86–93.
<https://doi.org/10.61688/ajpbs.v6i2.420>

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies and e-commerce has transformed entrepreneurship by creating accessible opportunities for individuals to establish and manage businesses through online platforms. For higher education students, online entrepreneurship has emerged as an attractive career option because it offers flexibility, low start-up costs, and opportunities to generate income while pursuing academic studies. Despite these advantages, students' decisions to engage in online business are influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by social and environmental factors, particularly the family environment.

Family plays a fundamental role in shaping students' career aspirations, entrepreneurial attitudes, and decision-making processes. As the primary socialization agent, the family influences values, beliefs, risk perceptions, and career expectations through parental guidance, role modeling, and emotional interactions. Students who are exposed to entrepreneurial activities within their families often develop greater confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities and perceive business ownership as a realistic and attainable career path (Carr & Sequeira, 2007). Early exposure to entrepreneurial experiences also contributes to the development of entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy, which are recognized as important determinants of entrepreneurial intention (Zhao et al., 2005).

Beyond entrepreneurial role modeling, family support can influence students' readiness to participate in online entrepreneurship by providing emotional encouragement, financial assistance, and practical advice. Such support may reduce the perceived risks associated with starting a business and strengthen students' willingness to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. Conversely, families that prioritize stable employment and conventional career paths may discourage entrepreneurial activities because online businesses are often perceived as financially uncertain and less secure (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). These contrasting family perspectives demonstrate that family influence can either facilitate or constrain students' entrepreneurial engagement.

The influence of family can also be understood through Social Learning Theory, which suggests that individuals acquire behaviors and beliefs by observing significant others, particularly parents and close family members (Bandura, 1977). Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior proposes that subjective norms, including family expectations and approval, influence individuals' entrepreneurial intentions by shaping their perceptions of social acceptance (Liñán & Chen, 2009). These theoretical perspectives suggest that family influence extends beyond financial support to include social, cultural, and psychological factors that shape entrepreneurial decision-making.

Although previous studies have established that family support contributes to entrepreneurial intention, much of the existing literature has focused on general entrepreneurship rather than online entrepreneurship among higher education students. Moreover, many studies have employed quantitative approaches to examine the relationship between family support and entrepreneurial intention, providing limited understanding of how students perceive the influence of family on their decisions to participate in online business. Given the growing importance of digital entrepreneurship in the contemporary economy, further investigation is needed to explore students' subjective experiences and perceptions regarding family influence.

Therefore, this study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach to examine how higher education students perceive family-related factors that influence their engagement in online entrepreneurship. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate how family support, parental attitudes, entrepreneurial role models, and cultural beliefs shape students' decisions to participate in online business activities. The study is guided by the following research question:

How do higher education students perceive that family influence shapes their decisions to participate in online business?

By exploring students' lived experiences and perceptions, this study contributes to the growing literature on digital entrepreneurship by providing a deeper understanding of how family dynamics and the broader social context facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial engagement among young people. The findings are expected to provide insights for educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurship support programs in designing initiatives that strengthen family-supported entrepreneurial development within higher education.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Online Entrepreneurship

Online entrepreneurship participation by students has gained more academic focus in recent years because digital technology has transformed business operations. This study focuses on online entrepreneurship involvement as a key measure of students' business activity participation. Students participate in developing new business concepts and online marketplaces, apply social media for advertising, and manage financial and logistical operations through digital platforms.

Multiple aspects can be analysed in online entrepreneurial involvement, ranging from entrepreneurial activity frequency and students' active online business fields to their resources and time investments needed to keep their ventures active. Online entrepreneurship requires students to improve digital communication abilities along with problem-solving expertise and customer connection through virtual platforms.

Students' participation in online entrepreneurship is often discussed in relation to their entrepreneurial intentions toward concrete entrepreneurial activities. The development process is influenced by a range of internal and external elements, including personal traits and educational background, as well as technological accessibility and parental influence. Understanding how students engage in online entrepreneurship helps identify the factors that promote or limit digital entrepreneurial conduct.

Online entrepreneurship requires students to improve digital communication abilities along with problem-solving expertise and customer connection through virtual platforms. Ndofirepi (2020) and Nabi et al. (2017), along with other researchers, stress that digital entrepreneurship is increasingly important among young adults and university students because online platforms facilitate market access and reduce startup costs, lowering entry barriers. Online entrepreneurship stands as an appealing career path because it suits students who can handle digital tasks and want flexible, independent workplaces.

Students' participation in online entrepreneurship indicates their evolving entrepreneurial intentions toward concrete entrepreneurial activities. The development process usually depends on diverse internal and external elements, including personal traits and educational background, as well as technological accessibility and parental influence. Understanding how students engage in online entrepreneurship helps identify the factors that promote or limit digital entrepreneurial conduct.

Digital entrepreneurship represents a growing domain, particularly among youth who are tech-savvy and value autonomy (Nambisan, 2017). Fatoki (2019) emphasised the role of psychological capital, such as resilience and optimism, in shaping entrepreneurial intent among university students in South Africa. These factors are relevant to online business, where digital skills and confidence are crucial.

2.2 Family Supports

A person's career direction, together with entrepreneurial motivations, greatly depends on family influences. This research defines family influence as the various forms of support family members, particularly parents or guardians, apply to students who want to pursue online entrepreneurship. These family influences express themselves through different channels, including emotional support, financial support, knowledge sharing, and exemplary conduct.

Students often report greater confidence in dealing with business-related challenges. Children receive encouragement to launch their enterprise after their parents join them in entrepreneurial initiatives and provide financial backing or business feedback. Failure apprehension or diminished motivation might emerge from family members' doubts or lack of support, creating psychological barriers. Studies demonstrate that children from entrepreneurial families tend to seek entrepreneurial ventures because they monitor their parents operating and owning businesses (Carr & Sequeira, 2007). Early exposure to business operations helps these children develop stronger entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Entrepreneurial inclination is often shaped by a person's activities, which change based on the family values and cultural norms that surround them. People from collectivist communities base their entrepreneurial decisions on preserving family heritage while meeting cultural norms in business matters. Tangible business prospects require students to perhaps take over existing family businesses or start their own ventures to secure economic stability for their household.

Family influences exhibit dynamic characteristics because they interact with peer influence, institutional support, and individual motivational elements within their environment. Research demands analysis of family influence through its various emotional and social, as well as economic, dimensions.

Family support, as a form of social capital, significantly impacts students' willingness to start a business. Edelman et al. (2016) found that family encouragement positively influences startup actions, especially for young entrepreneurs. Aldrich and Cliff (2003) introduced the concept of 'family embeddedness,' suggesting that family norms, resources, and expectations create a unique entrepreneurial environment for youth.

2.4 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The research draws on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to better understand how psychological factors shape student interest in online entrepreneurship. The Theory of Planned Behaviour, as developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, explains how human behaviour follows from deliberate intentions, while three critical aspects drive these intentions: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The Theory of Planned Behaviour remains a widely used model to explain entrepreneurial intention. A meta-analysis by Schlaegel and Koenig (2014) confirmed TPB's applicability across various entrepreneurial contexts. Liñán and Fayolle (2015) further proposed that integrating cultural and family variables can enhance TPB's explanatory power in student-based entrepreneurship studies. The Theory of Planned Behaviour, as developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, explains how human behaviour follows from deliberate intentions, while three critical aspects drive these intentions: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

This assessment dimension reflects the extent of personified evaluation regarding specific conduct. Students show their positive view about starting and overseeing online businesses through this measure. People develop positive thoughts through the recognition of benefits, including self-determination, financial possibilities, skill improvement, and creative drive. An unfavourable outlook regarding starting an online business emerges from concerns about risks, along with fears of business failure and the academic workload that consumes time.

Family support can be conceptually understood as part of the social influence of the environment. The study gives paramount importance to family-based influences throughout its research structure. Students tend to act similarly to their family beliefs when they notice their family supports entrepreneurial activities, in light of these apparent expectations. When relatives pressure them to choose established jobs rather than start a business, students might abandon their business development goals.

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour model, an individual assesses their ability to carry out specific actions in this component. For students engaged in online entrepreneurship, their confidence in their capabilities, along with their professional knowledge base and access to necessary tools like technology, monetary backing, and mentoring, counts as perceived behavioural control. The family's support of resources and their creation of independent problem-solving conditions drive students to experience better behavioural self-control.

In this study, TPB is employed as a theoretical lens to help interpret the role of family support in students' engagement with online entrepreneurship. The theoretical framework provides extensive insight into what drives university students toward online entrepreneurial activities in this digital age.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine higher education students' perceptions of family support and its influence on their engagement in online business. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates the collection of numerical data that can be analyzed statistically to describe patterns, trends, and relationships among variables. The descriptive design enabled the researchers to obtain an overview of students' perceptions

of family influence without manipulating any variables, thereby providing an objective representation of the phenomenon under investigation.

The study involved 200 higher education students enrolled at selected universities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as the study specifically targeted students who had experience with online business activities or demonstrated an interest in entrepreneurship. This sampling technique ensured that respondents possessed relevant knowledge and experiences that could provide meaningful insights into the influence of family support on online entrepreneurial engagement.

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed based on the literature concerning entrepreneurial intention, family support, and entrepreneurship education. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including gender, age, academic program, and year of study. The second section collected information regarding respondents' involvement in online business activities. The third section measured students' perceptions of family influence on their participation in online entrepreneurship.

The family support construct included statements measuring parental encouragement, financial support, emotional support, entrepreneurial role models within the family, and the extent to which family members encouraged entrepreneurial activities. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating stronger perceived family support.

Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to eligible respondents during the study period. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the objectives of the research, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous and would be used solely for academic research purposes. Informed consent was obtained before the questionnaires were completed.

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions of family support. These descriptive statistics provided an overall understanding of how students perceived the influence of family support on their engagement in online business activities.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the data were used exclusively for research purposes.

4.0 ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysis of Quantitative Data

Data analysis included descriptive statistics in combination with reliability tests for examining the obtained data sets.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

The researcher used descriptive statistics to present important data through mean scores, frequency distributions, and standard deviations. The collected research data helped the researcher detect general patterns from pupils participating in online business ventures and understand how family dynamics shaped their behavior. Students who participate in online commercial activities demonstrate strong positive relationships with their families because their family support measures show consistently elevated mean scores in research results.

Using population data statistics, the study evaluated individual connections between dependent and independent variables and different demographics, such as age and gender, and academic areas of study. Various types of tables combined with charts delivered visual explanations, which helped readers understand the course information.

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis

N	COMPONENT	MEAN	STD DEVIATION
199	Family Influence 1	4.25	0.812
199	Family Influence 2	4.07	0.913
199	Family Influence 3	4.06	0.877

Table 1 above presents the descriptive statistics for three components of familial impact. The three items in this study show higher mean scores, with Family Influence 1 reaching the highest level at 4.25. Most students believe that family influences determine their decisions regarding business management. A weak variability in scores between 0.812 and 0.913 reveals that most student participants shared similar thoughts, although their experiences differed slightly. The table presents evidence for students who believe familial background plays a positive role in shaping their startup experience, thus impacting their online business participation rates.

4.3 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

The researcher evaluated the questionnaire items for the "Family Influence" variable using Cronbach's Alpha to determine their reliability level. The high Cronbach's Alpha scores prove that the chosen items successfully detect particular construct elements, which sustains the scale's dependability. This method is crucial to ensure that research findings are reliable. The evaluation of questionnaire items for potential changes emerges from changes in the reliability score before additional study commences.

Multiple statistical analysis approaches work together as an extensive research method for complete analysis of a subject issue. The analysis of quantitative data helps researchers detect variable relationships and perform hypothesis tests to justify future research about student entrepreneurial behavior affected by family influences.

Table 2
Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Acceptable (>0.6)	Result
Family Influence	0.748	Yes	Reliable

Cronbach's Alpha displayed the outcomes of a reliability assessment in Table 2. The Family Influence value exceeds 0.6, indicating statistical reliability, with a value of 0.748. The questionnaire items measuring family influence show internal consistency, which establishes their ability to precisely capture respondents' genuine thoughts.

Testing under the Family Influence variable proves that the selected components maintain validity to use in statistical analysis, starting from correlation and moving toward regression assessment.

Most students consider their family relations as supportive resources during their entrepreneurial pursuit. The Cronbach's Alpha test confirms that the collected data maintain dependability as well as consistency. The results confirm the hypothesis (H3) that family influences substantially influence students to become involved with online entrepreneurship.

5.0 DISCUSSION

Researchers analysed the family-related aspects that shape student prospects for online business startup activities through the Theory of Planned Behaviour analytical method. Students make decisions with considerable influence from their families through the evaluation domains of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control.

Students whose families offer support toward online business development tend to develop positive attitudes toward launching their own enterprises online. They believe entrepreneurship combines desirable qualities with excitement and accessibility. Students demonstrate increased motivation and better acceptance of entrepreneurship through positive feedback from their family members about their abilities and business success.

Family support makes students feel confident that essential people in their lives, including parents and brothers, endorse their business venture. By offering their support, family members provide students with social validation, helping them feel capable of following an entrepreneurial path since it fulfils their family's standards.

Students who receive financial help together with educational counselling from their families experience greater self-assurance to tackle entrepreneurship hurdles. Students who perceive their family members as supportive become more confident about their capability to manage a business; thus, they become more likely to start their own venture.

Research indicates that family support provides emotional backing to students, strengthens self-efficacy, and builds positive outlooks during goal achievement, so students feel their goals are acceptable and reachable. The intentions to establish internet businesses are affected by three psychological elements that work together.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The students demonstrate their understanding of the perceived behavioural control aspect articulated in the TPB model. Students develop higher confidence in overcoming obstacles and reaching task success when their families provide them with monetary and informational resources and emotional support. An increased sense of control regarding entrepreneurial responsibilities leads students to develop entrepreneurial intentions, which results in increased participation.

The data stresses that family members play a vital role as essential participants in programs focused on entrepreneurship development and education. Schools, together with universities, must take familial influences into account along with their entrepreneurship programs to deliver optimal outcomes. The development of entrepreneurial systems for youth can improve significantly through initiatives that activate parental participation in entrepreneurial teaching or establish family-based student teamwork pathways.

The research findings establish that familial context affects student entrepreneurial development by actively forming their attitudinal, behavioural, and motivational tendencies toward entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy improves through emotional support from family members, monetary backing, mentorship, and hands-on business practice opportunities. Understanding family dynamics allows institutions, educators, and politicians to create personalised support structures that cultivate digital entrepreneurs among the next generation.

The research highlights external motivating factors, including internet infrastructure and societal attitudes, as well as personal drive or passion, which act as driving forces independent of family influence. These factors remain important and work alongside family influence. Students who receive constant positive family backing develop stronger self-confidence regarding their entrepreneurship potential while gaining defence against the internet business management challenges and uncertainties. Research demonstrates the importance of family-based entrepreneurial instruction, which begins in early childhood.

The findings have significant implications for educational institutions, as well as for government bodies and entrepreneurship development programs. Current student entrepreneurship promotion initiatives primarily focus on

institution-based elements, including curriculum training units, access to incubators, and university-supplied mentor programs. The research points out that these key factors might not deliver effective outcomes unless family influences are integrated into the analysis.

Upcoming entrepreneurial programs should implement an all-encompassing, family-inclusive strategy that encompasses students as well as their parents. Workshops or seminars that unite students with their parents will create mutual understanding, build entrepreneurial awareness, and support the home environment. Family involvement in entrepreneurial mentoring through policy support should form the basis for developing enduring entrepreneurial environments.

Students must experience a complete integration of teaching toward online entrepreneurship development. While institutional variables, together with individual factors, are vital elements, researchers should continue to recognise family dynamics and their impact. Research findings show that students who benefit from supportive families can realise their business concepts and overcome mental and monetary barriers while boosting digital entrepreneurship through generational transfer. Understanding family influence as an entrepreneurial factor informs policy development that supports technological growth in evolving digital markets.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia for providing the resources and support necessary to complete this study. We would also like to thank all participants who contributed their time and insights to this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who offered valuable feedback during the development of this manuscript.

8.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in the paper.

9.0 AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1 contributed to the conceptualisation, research design, and writing of the original draft.

Author 2 was responsible for data collection, analysis, and validation of the results.

Author 3 provided supervision, critical review, and editing of the final manuscript.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

10.0 ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the [**Institutional Ethics Committee/Review Board**] under reference number [**Approval Number, if applicable**]. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

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