

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

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61688/ajpbs.v6i2.420>

Article History

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
20 July 2025	20 November 2025	30 November 2025	31 December 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 may be influenced not only by individual motivation but also by their social environment, particularly the support they receive from their families. Previous studies have identified family support as a factor associated with entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, and behaviours among young individuals. Nevertheless, limited research has specifically examined how higher education students perceive family support in relation to online business. This study uses a quantitative descriptive design to examine students' perceptions of family influence. The three family-influence items had mean scores of 4.25, 4.07, and 4.06, and the scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.748. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a theoretical lens; the study does not test TPB relationships or the effect of family support on engagement.

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., Mardhiah, N. N., & Ishak, N. (2025). Family support and higher education students' engagement in online business – An exploratory study. The Asian Journal of Professional & Business Studies, 6(2), 87–94. <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 examined family support and entrepreneurial intention, much of the existing literature has focused on general entrepreneurship rather than online entrepreneurship among higher education students. Further descriptive investigation of how students perceive family influence in this context is warranted.

Therefore, this study adopts an exploratory quantitative descriptive approach to examine how higher education students perceive family influence in relation to their engagement in online entrepreneurship. The study considers family support in this context and 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 describing students' survey responses, this study contributes to the literature on digital entrepreneurship and may offer insights for educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurship support programs concerned with family support in higher education.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Online Entrepreneurship

Student participation in online entrepreneurship has received greater academic focus in recent years as digital technology has transformed business operations. This study focuses on online entrepreneurship involvement as a key indicator of

students' participation in business activities. 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 skills, problem-solving skills, and customer connection skills 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 calls for digital communication, problem-solving, and customer engagement through virtual platforms. Digital technologies can create new entrepreneurial opportunities and facilitate market access (Nambisan, 2017). Online business may appeal to students seeking flexible work.

Digital entrepreneurship represents a growing domain in which digital technologies reshape entrepreneurial processes (Nambisan, 2017). Digital skills and confidence may be relevant to students' online business activities.

2.2 Family Support

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.

2.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The research draws on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to contextualise student interest in online entrepreneurship. Ajzen (1991) proposes that intention is informed by attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived

behavioural control. A meta-analysis by Schlaegel and Koenig (2014) examined entrepreneurial intention models. Liñán and Fayolle (2015) reviewed the literature on entrepreneurial intentions, including contextual influences.

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 possible role of family support in students' engagement with online entrepreneurship. The present descriptive analyses do not test the TPB model.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine higher education students' perceptions of family support in relation to online business. A quantitative approach facilitates the collection of numerical responses that can be summarised statistically. The descriptive design provided an overview of perceived family influence without manipulating variables or estimating its effect on engagement.

The study involved 200 higher education students enrolled at selected universities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting students with experience in online business activities or an interest in entrepreneurship. This approach sought respondents with relevant experience. Table 1 reports 199 valid responses for each family-influence item; the reason for the difference from the stated sample size is not reported.

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

The reported analysis comprised descriptive statistics and an internal consistency estimate for the family-influence items.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the family-influence items through means and standard deviations. The relatively high item means describe participants' reported perceptions of family influence; they do not establish a relationship with online-business engagement.

This section reports item-level descriptive statistics and internal consistency for the family-influence scale. No inferential comparison or association test is reported.

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 presents descriptive statistics for the three family-influence items, each with 199 valid responses. Family Influence 1 had the highest mean (4.25); the other means were 4.07 and 4.06. Standard deviations ranged from 0.812 to 0.913. These item scores describe perceived family influence but do not measure its effect on online-business participation.

4.3 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the Family Influence items. This statistic indicates how consistently the items function as a scale; it does not by itself establish construct validity.

The analyses reported here are descriptive and do not test associations between family influence and engagement or any hypothesis.

Table 2
Reliability Analysis

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

Table 2 reports a Cronbach's alpha of 0.748 for the Family Influence items, indicating acceptable internal consistency for these responses. This result alone does not establish that the scale captures all aspects of family influence.

Further evidence would be needed to assess construct validity and relationships with online-business engagement.

The item means indicate relatively favourable responses concerning family influence. No hypothesis test is reported, and these descriptive results do not establish a substantial effect on students' online-business engagement.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The Theory of Planned Behaviour offers a lens for discussing the possible role of family support in students' online entrepreneurship. Attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control were not separately tested in the reported analyses.

Family encouragement may be relevant to students' attitudes towards starting an online enterprise. The reported item ratings, however, do not show whether such encouragement changes attitudes or motivation.

In TPB terms, perceived family approval may be relevant to subjective norms. This interpretation is conceptual because subjective norms were not analysed separately in this study.

Financial help and advice from family members could be relevant to perceived behavioural control. The reported analysis does not establish whether these forms of support increase students' confidence or their likelihood of starting an online venture.

Prior work discusses the potential contribution of family support to entrepreneurial intentions. In this study, TPB provides context for interpreting students' ratings rather than evidence that its psychological pathways were observed.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study reports relatively favourable ratings on three family-influence items and acceptable internal consistency for the scale. It does not separately measure the TPB components or establish that family resources increase entrepreneurial intentions or participation.

The descriptive results suggest that perceived family influence merits attention in entrepreneurship education. Schools and universities may consider the role of family support when developing student programs, while recognising that the effectiveness of such initiatives was not evaluated here.

These results describe students' perceptions of family influence; they do not establish a causal effect on entrepreneurial attitudes, self-efficacy, or online-business engagement. The conceptual discussion may help educators and policymakers consider family dynamics in future support initiatives.

Digital access, societal attitudes, and personal motivation may also matter to online entrepreneurship, but these factors were not analysed in the reported results. Future research could examine their roles alongside family support.

The study may inform educational institutions and entrepreneurship development programs by drawing attention to perceived family influence. Whether family-inclusive activities improve entrepreneurial outcomes requires further evaluation.

Future entrepreneurship programs could consider opportunities for family participation, such as workshops involving students and parents. The effectiveness of these approaches should be assessed rather than assumed.

Family dynamics provide a relevant context for discussing students' online entrepreneurship. Future research should report the item wording, clarify the difference between the stated sample size and valid item responses, and test whether perceived family support is associated with online-business engagement.

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 observed the stated ethical standards of Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent before participation. Their privacy and confidentiality were maintained, and the data collected were used for academic purposes.

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