ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences
Volume 4, Issue 2, 2025 ISSN-L (Online): 3006-6638

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Social Media Influence, and Environmental Factors as Determinants of Entrepreneurial Intention: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

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Received: 09-03-2025 **Revised:** 10-04-2025 **Accepted:** 07-05-2025 **Published:** 30-06-2025

ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a critical solution to youth unemployment and economic stagnation, especially in developing countries. In today's digital era, the influence of social media platforms, psychological constructs such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and environmental conditions has become pivotal in shaping entrepreneurial dispositions. However, empirical research remains limited on how these factors interact to influence entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions among youth in emerging economies. Grounded in social cognitive theory, this study investigates the effects of social media influence, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and environmental support on entrepreneurial attitude, which shapes entrepreneurial intention. The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, collecting data through a structured questionnaire administered to students from private universities in Pakistan. A total of 371 valid responses were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. The results revealed that social media influence and entrepreneurial self-efficacy significantly and positively impact entrepreneurial attitude. Entrepreneurial attitude and strongly predicts entrepreneurial intention. However, environmental support did not exhibit a statistically significant direct effect on entrepreneurial attitude. These findings highlight the primacy of internal cognitive factors and digital engagement over structural conditions in shaping entrepreneurial mindsets.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Social Media Influence, Environmental Factors, Entrepreneurial Intention, Social Cognitive Theory*

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship serves as a cornerstone of socio-economic progress, offering innovative solutions to contemporary challenges and contributing significantly to national and global development. It is not merely a means of self-employment, but a transformative force that fosters societal advancement, technological progress, and economic resilience (Liguori & Winkler, 2022). In both developed and developing economies, entrepreneurial ventures are instrumental in addressing unemployment, promoting

inclusive growth, and accelerating digital transformation. Consequently, understanding the factors that influence entrepreneurial intention has garnered considerable attention among researchers, educators, and policymakers alike.

Entrepreneurial intention (EI), broadly defined as the cognitive state preceding the actual launch of a business, is a key predictor of entrepreneurial behavior (Liñán et al., 2023). It is influenced by multiple psychological, environmental, and social factors, which interact in complex ways. Theoretical frameworks of Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB) and bandura's social cognitive theory have been extensively employed to explain how attitudes, self-efficacy beliefs, and subjective norms shape one's intention to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors (Bari et al., 2023). These models emphasize that entrepreneurial attitudes and self-efficacy are essential mediators between external influences and entrepreneurial intention. However, with the advent of digital platforms and changing socio-technological paradigms, new antecedents such as social media influence have become increasingly relevant.

The influence of social media on entrepreneurship is a relatively recent yet rapidly growing domain of inquiry. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Facebook have transformed how aspiring entrepreneurs gather information, build networks, market ideas, and shape their self-identity (Wang & Huang, 2023). Unlike traditional media, social media offers interactive, real-time, and user-driven content that can significantly shape entrepreneurial perceptions and motivation. Empirical studies have started to recognize that exposure to entrepreneurial content on these platforms can enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) and foster favorable entrepreneurial attitudes (Ali et al., 2022). However, there remains limited understanding of how such influence translates into entrepreneurial intention, especially among younger generations in developing economies.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, the belief in one's capability to successfully initiate and manage entrepreneurial activities, has been widely acknowledged as a crucial antecedent of entrepreneurial intention (Cai et al., 2023). According to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy influences how individuals perceive challenges, take initiative, and persist in the face of adversity. In the entrepreneurial context, high levels of ESE are associated with stronger entrepreneurial intentions, better opportunity recognition, and greater resilience (Nguyen et al., 2022). Recent studies suggest that digital media consumption, especially through entrepreneurial influencers and startup success stories on social media, can play a pivotal role in enhancing self-efficacy among aspiring entrepreneurs (Yusof et al., 2023). However, unlocking the mediating mechanisms through which social media shapes ESE and ultimately impacts entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions. Another underexplored factor is the entrepreneurial environment, comprising cultural, institutional, educational, and economic conditions that support or hinder entrepreneurial activities. A supportive entrepreneurial environment can foster opportunity-driven rather than necessity-driven entrepreneurship, positively influencing entrepreneurial intention (Ratten & Usmanij, 2022). For instance, access to resources, entrepreneurial education, favorable government policies, and an innovation-oriented culture significantly impact individuals' attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Despite its recognized importance, few empirical models integrate environmental factors with digital influences such as social media to understand their combined impact on entrepreneurial intention.

The current research addresses these gaps by examining an integrated model that explores the roles of social media influence, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and environmental conditions in shaping entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions. The model posits that social media influence and environment positively affect entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which enhances entrepreneurial attitude, leading to stronger entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurial attitude is conceptualized as a key mediator, while

entrepreneurial self-efficacy acts both as a mediator and a proximal antecedent in the pathway from social media and environment to intention. This integrated model contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to adapt traditional entrepreneurial intention frameworks to the realities of the digital age.

This study is particularly relevant in the context of emerging economies, where youth unemployment remains a pressing issue, and entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a solution (Hassan et al., 2022). Pakistan where structural barriers such as limited access to finance, inadequate education systems, and socio-cultural constraints hinder formal employment opportunities, digital platforms are opening new vistas for self-employment and entrepreneurial exploration (Shabbir et al., 2023). Social media not only serves as a marketplace but also acts as a motivational platform where individuals can learn, share, and be inspired by entrepreneurial success stories. Academic investigation into the psychological mechanisms that link social media consumption to entrepreneurial outcomes remains scarce.

From a theoretical standpoint, integrating digital influence with psychological constructs such as self-efficacy and entrepreneurial attitude extends the applicability of theory of planned behavior (TPB) and social cognitive theory in digital contexts. It helps us understand how modern social cues and virtual environments interact with individual cognition to influence entrepreneurial outcomes. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study can inform entrepreneurship education programs, digital literacy campaigns, and policy initiatives aimed at nurturing entrepreneurial ecosystems, especially for youth and marginalized communities. This research offers timely insights into the evolving nature of entrepreneurial motivation in the post-pandemic world, where traditional employment structures have been disrupted, and digital entrepreneurship is gaining traction. By identifying how social media influence and environmental support shape cognitive dispositions like self-efficacy and attitude, this study can guide interventions aimed at boosting entrepreneurial activity. Governments and universities can leverage social media platforms to disseminate entrepreneurial content, conduct virtual mentoring, and promote success stories that foster positive attitudes and self-belief.

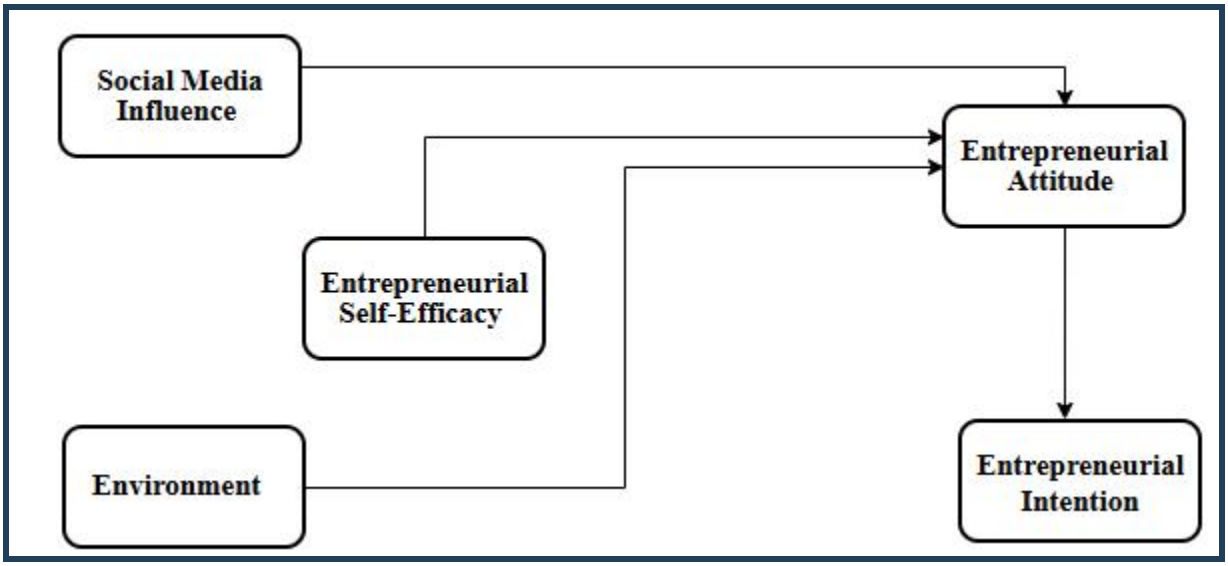
Theoretical Foundation

A theory that underpins the entire conceptual model, encompassing social media influence, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, entrepreneurial attitude, environment, and entrepreneurial intention, is Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) developed by Bandura. This theory provides an ecological vision of the study of mutual interdependence of cognitive, environmental, and behavioral processes that constitute the source of entrepreneurial intents, assimilating psychological mediators and contextual moderators.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) views these dimensions as all reinforcing each other, and all shaping themselves in a triadic model of reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986). In entrepreneurship studies, this reasoning implies that there is a coherent system of a perceived self-efficacy, an attitude orientation toward entrepreneurship, and in which the individual has to navigate, informal and formal institutions, media outlets, and social networks, where all components reinforce each other. This lack of single direction causality hierarchy is exactly what makes the SCT so much different than the more linear approaches and it actually allows the current model to assume causality as a two-way street and non-hierarchical. Bandura (1997) argues that people with high self-efficacy have a greater tendency to develop positive attitudes and follow through on goal-oriented behaviour, whereas people with low self-efficacy are highly likely to give up. This is enhanced by contemporary learning conditions like social media, where the lack of experience in successful entrepreneurs is instead given through experience to increase the self-confidence that the observer has over their ability (Wang & Huang, 2023). These affective

processes are mutually supporting and beneficial to self-efficacy that leads to subsequent positive affect, positive attitudinal responses and an increase in intention to be involved in entrepreneurial action.

SCT also argues that the effects of the environmental conditions are not accentuated in an atomistic vacuum but rather in synergetic relationship with the internal cognitive processes (Bandura, 2001). The environment is not only a source of knowledge but also a controller of individual agency. Institutional influence, resource availability, learning backgrounds, and learning environments are the foremost environmental factors, which favor learning and reinforce self-efficacy. People do not receive such contextual information passively, but instead they interpret and process it actively, building some future behavior intentions. Such a premise corresponds to a general claim of SCT that human functioning arises of individual acts of agency in and through ordered social systems. The other pillar of the SCT, the process of observational learning, the users of social media learn by simulation and in real time about the examples of entrepreneurial narratives, success stories, role models, modeling and internalizing behaviors that lead to more positive entrepreneur attitudes which constitute motivation precursors to the development of the entrepreneurial intentions (Yusof et al., 2023).



Hypotheses Development

Social media has transformed the way individuals learn, communicate, and form perceptions about various aspects of life, including entrepreneurship. In modern digital settings, the role played by social media in the development of entrepreneurial attitudes is becoming a crucial issue among scholars. Entrepreneurial attitude is a positive or negative evaluative position of an individual to engage in entrepreneurial activity (Li LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok are not only platforms that spread examples of entrepreneurship success, career advice, and business ideas, but platforms that serve as socio-psychological spaces where entrepreneurial identity and desire are cultivated (Wang & Huang, 2023). The social cognitive theory is the assumption that attitudes and beliefs are created of observational learning, particularly when people see that role models, with whom they identify, are successful (Bandura, 2001). The same conditions than mimicker in social media as users are allowed to observe real entrepreneurship stories that normalize and romanticize entrepreneurship actions. This vicarious connection is quite emotional, especially when the opinion formers share their pain and their moment of

epiphany. This process to a large extent aids in building positive entrepreneurial attitudes especially amongst the youths who access such materials avidly.

Social media are also designed in an interactive format, which encourages the involvement in the entrepreneurial community, interaction in the form of a dialog and securing of the validation of social ideas in business. Such online interactions strengthen the sense of desirability and social relevance, both of which are part and parcel of positive entrepreneurial attitudes development (Ali et al., 2022). With promotion of feedback, likes, and share of the entrepreneurial content one engages in or promotes, the user is well convinced of the importance of entrepreneurial careers. Social support means community-based endorsement, which enhances psychological benefits related to the entrepreneur experience and adds to positive attitudes.

The study by Hassan et al. (2022) indicates that reception of content related to entrepreneurship in social media has had a significant effect on influencing the attitude of university students towards entrepreneurship in Pakistan. The study by Wang and Huang (2023) demonstrates the positive association between using social media and entrepreneurial passion, the concept that is inherently connected with a person taking a stance on a particular evaluation of entrepreneurial activities. Those findings emphasize the idea that social media is not a passive source of information but rather a dynamic source of attitudinal change. The content that is distributed by these sources not only changes the view on entrepreneurship as a suitable occupation, but also transforms the vision of the traditional employment. Social media is a digital channel through which people learn entrepreneurialism and get motivated through social media in emerging economies where job opportunities in the formal sector are limited. Giving young people an example of alternative career paths expands the cognitive diagrams and changes the perceived structure of opportunities so that entrepreneurship seems effortless and attractive. This control is mostly noticeable among the digital natives, or millennials born in the digital age, who subconsciously accept the digital signs and adjust their attitudes to the stories voiced online. Those stories, commonly being offered with inspiration and motivations in mind, glorify the entrepreneurial process, and create more positive associations and emotional congruency with entrepreneurial ideals (Liguori & Winkler, 2022).

H1: Social media influence has a positive impact on entrepreneurial attitude.

Entrepreneurial attitude, defined as an individual's evaluative orientation toward engaging in entrepreneurial behavior, is significantly shaped by the surrounding environment. Entrepreneurial climate is a milestone stimulus in creating the impressions and views about entrepreneurship as a profession that is feasible and attractive. The elements that make it up are the institutional support, accesses to financial and technical resources, entrepreneurship education, socio-cultural norms, as well as the framework of the public policy, which together determine the individual attitude to the nation of entrepreneurship. Supportive environment would enhance confidence as well reducing perceived risks and generate opportunity making the positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. Using the perspective of the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), the environmental conditions do not enter the picture as being passive determinants, they act as effective tools of behavioral modeling and reinforcement. The enabling environment helps in observational learning, providing to the entrepreneur the access to entrepreneurial role models, and improving social persuasion, all the processes that affect cognitive assessments of entrepreneurship. In other words, areas with successful tales of entrepreneurship and those where the support institutional frameworks are evident are likely to evoke favorable beliefs and emotions towards entrepreneurship (Nguyen et al., 2022).

The significance of environmental support in influencing the attitude towards entrepreneurship is stressed empirically. As of late, the existence of incubators, financing schemes, entrepreneurship training, and governmental enticements has demonstrated a positive correlation with the propensity towards entrepreneurship question among students and young adults (Cai et al., 2023). These environmental characteristics act as external incentives that raise the feeling of conductibility and desirability, which are the fundamental elements of entrepreneurial attitude. As people feel that their environment is conducive enough and eliminates or minimizes uncertainty, they will have a positive perception of entrepreneurship and will consider it as an option as a career (Koe et al., 2022). In developing economies like Pakistan where structural unemployment and lack of access to secure jobs still challenges the residents, entrepreneurial ecosystem needs to exist in nurture entrepreneurial thinking in the young people. The support in the form of start-up funds, innovation centers and changes in policy towards targeted small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within the government establishes an enabling environment that fosters entrepreneurial intentions (Hassan et al., 2022). Educational institutions which incorporate an entrepreneurship curriculum in their grades, provide students with the skills, attitudes and exposure which enable them to form a positive mindset about business creation, these educational institutions also become an important bridge between the macro-environment and psychological development (Ali et al., 2022).

Sociocultural aspects of the surrounding are also crucial. Positive entrepreneurial values are more likely to be created in a society that cherishes risk-taking behaviour and values devoutness, innovation and self-reliance than one that views job security as the major element in an employment relationship (Yusof et al., 2023). The perception of entrepreneurship as communal is shaped in accordance with the cultural norms, which preferentially determine the emotional and cognitive reaction of individuals to the entrepreneurial behavior. The attitude formation can be triggered by environmental encouragement in collectivistic cultures which is done by community support and acceptance socially. The role of the environment is unifactorial and people internalize the extrinsic cues and construe it based on their personal experiences, previous acquaintance with the subject and cognition patterns. The identical environmental agent such as the access to seed funds would therefore provide diverse attitudinal differences depending on how they work out cognitively and as such, takes on the agentic view of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001).

H2: Environment has a positive impact on entrepreneurial attitude.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) is a central psychological factor influencing the formation of entrepreneurial attitudes. Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), self-efficacy beliefs are an important factor that will determine the motivational and affective states of individuals shaping their attitudes and behaviors that encompasses the area of entrepreneurship. Individuals who have high convictions towards their entrepreneurial capabilities will positively assess the entrepreneurial activities and hence create a positive entrepreneurial attitude. Entrepreneurial attitude refers to the positive or negative attitude of an individual to develop thoughts to become an entrepreneur with affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Liñan et al., 2023). Interpretation of challenges, risks and rewards in terms of entrepreneurship is achieved using self-efficacy which functions as a mental filter through which individuals outline the existence of challenges, risks and rewards in terms of entrepreneurship using internal self-assessment and external cues. Having a high ESE makes individuals feel that the entrepreneurial activities are not so intimidating and challenging to them, and this makes an entrepreneurial career desirable and appealing (Nguyen et al., 2022). According to social cognitive theory, how individuals feel, think, motivate themselves and act is based on self-efficacy. Individuals with a self-efficacy concerning entrepreneurial skills envisage the scenarios of success, aim higher, and endure hardships longer (Bandura, 2001). These psychological orientations closely associate with positive attitude development. As an illustration, a person who is sure of his/her capability of building a business plan, handling uncertainty, or selling a business to investors will be more inclined to recognize

entrepreneurship as a career and worthwhile choice (Cai et al., 2023). Therefore, self-efficacy is considered to be a motivational process which facilitates the development of the attitude. Empirical studies carried out in recent times also add weight to this relation. The meta-analysis conducted by Cai et al. (2023) revealed a steady and positive relationship in labelling ESE and entrepreneurial attitude irrespective of the context and population. In the same way, a study carried out by Bari et al. (2023) in developing economies explains further that self-efficacy contributes tremendously to cognitive and affective aspects of entrepreneurial attitude, strengthening entrepreneurial intention. The results highlight the significance of promoting ESE as the pillar of entrepreneurial learning and policy measures.

Personal mastery experiences, vicarious learning and verbal encouragement are the usual modes of nurturing ESE. Social media, business simulation, and entrepreneurship courses are the examples of platforms through which it is possible to learn and see the success of others and enhance self-belief (Yusof et al., 2023). When people develop a more confident attitude towards their own potential as a result of these experiences, they come to view entrepreneurship as something that implies independence, success and self-satisfaction which are the key components of positive attitude towards becoming an entrepreneur (Liguori & Winkler, 2022). The relationship is especially significant in emerging markets because the perceived obstacles to entering entrepreneurship, like financial insecurity, the absence of mentorship, or information gap, can kill enthusiasm. Increasing ESE under these conditions could reduce fear of failure and transform the view of entrepreneurship as risky to the one where it is considered a possibility (Hassan et al., 2022). In such a manner, ESE acts as a psychological facilitator that is characterized by optimism, less ambiguity, and a two-sided assessment of entrepreneurial opportunities.

H3: Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a positive impact on entrepreneurial attitude.

Entrepreneurial intention, defined as an individual's conscious state of mind directing attention and effort toward starting a new business, is one of the most robust predictors of future entrepreneurial behavior (Liñán et al., 2023). Entrepreneurial intention is a key outcome variable of the entrepreneurship study and a lot of literature is now showing that entrepreneurial attitude forms one of the key antecedents to the formation of this variable. Entrepreneurial attitude represents a product of an evaluative disposition with affective, cognitive and behavioral facets that propel people towards the opportunity of becoming an entrepreneur. An entrepreneurial disposition is an optimistic mediation that generally involves an optimistic set of perceptions of entrepreneurship value and feeling of compatibility with the entrepreneurial roles and preparedness to take risks and rewards of the restless business-making process (Nguyen et al., 2022). Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) depicts an attitude toward behavior is supposed to have an influential effect on an ensuing intention to participate in the behavior in like manner. The higher the personality types rate entrepreneurship as exciting, promising, and able to align with their own values and beliefs, the stronger their entrepreneurial intentions become (Bari et al., 2023). Since empirical studies support the argument, and this makes the state of entrepreneurial attitude a protagonist in anchoring models of entrepreneurship by intention.

Positive entrepreneurship disposition has a direct impact on increasing the appeal of the entrepreneurial activity thereby increasing the likelihood that a person will unwind the entrepreneurial intention that is to start a business. A positive entrepreneurial mindset reduces the perceived risk, increases intrinsic motivation and psychological willingness to act in the uncertain environment, which is an essential element in the process of entrepreneurial decision-making (Cai et al., 2023). As an example, the acknowledgment that entrepreneurship is empowering, influential, and financially beneficial makes one more probable to view the practice as both possible and desirable, elaborating purposeful decision to invest in entrepreneurial possibilities even with the psychological pressures of the external forces.

Positive entrepreneurial dispositions influence the way the social norms are perceived and individual control is viewed, which affects entrepreneurial intention indirectly as well. Based on the Social Cognitive Theory, those with positive affective reactions to entrepreneurship will more likely adopt so-called future-oriented thinking and goal-setting behavior, which are two non-substitutable prerequisites in development of entrepreneurial intentions. Along with such attitudes, persons also tend to engage in types of preparatory behavior, e.g., networking, opportunities recognition, resource acquisition all of which, as Yusof et al. (2023) aver, indicate the development of strong elements of entrepreneurial intentions.

Empirical studies in the recent past provide strong support to this connection. Nguyen et al. (2022) finding evidence that entrepreneurial attitude was a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention among Vietnamese university students. Similarly some scholars except that they adjusted for self-efficacy and subjective norms and allowed entrepreneurial attitude to become the most potent predictor of entrepreneurial intention in a sample of 12 countries. The studies highlight the need of interventions that aim at fostering entrepreneurial intention, focusing on the enhancement of favorable attitude about entrepreneurship, especially during education, mentorship and watching of media. The role of the entrepreneurial attitude is particularly significant whenever it comes down to the situation that is accompanied by the changing attitudes of society towards the concept of an entrepreneur. In many developing economies, where the classic channels of employment are shrinking and online entrepreneurship is growing, the development of a favorable entrepreneurial mindset becomes one of the preconditions in conjunction with a desire to engage in entrepreneurship (Hassan et al., 2022). Policies and programs of education that raise the social and economic esteem of entrepreneurship may be critical in the development of attitudes and intentions.

H4: Entrepreneurial attitude has a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationships among social media influence, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, environment, entrepreneurial attitude, and entrepreneurial intention. To measure perceptions, beliefs, and behavioral intentions a quantitative methodological frame was applied. The structured tools and statistic steps helped in getting accurate measurements. The cross-sectional design was appropriate in describing the cognitive and affective assessment associated with entrepreneurship by the students at one point in time helping in timely collection of information in a vast group of students. A snapshot on how digital and environmental factors co-created entrepreneurial dispositions was also produced through such a design.

The sample size comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students in the private universities in Pakistan. Among the factors taken into consideration to select the sample were higher levels of exposure to techniques of being an entrepreneur, technologies and social media platforms all of which have their role in the theoretical model. There was better access to startup incubators, mentorship programs and digital learning resources available in the private universities. The unit of analysis was the individual student since the constructs involved the personal perceptions, beliefs, and intentions. Purposive sampling used to disburse the questionnaires among respondents related to such as knowledge of social media and previous exposure to the material related to entrepreneurship providing data of contextually significant value. The number of participants 360 was expected based on the PLS-SEM 10-times rule (indicator: construct complexity ratio) (Flller et al., 2000), however, 500 questionnaires were sent out and 371 were returned.

The questionnaire was a self-administered questionnaire with a Likert-scale of five points. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, entrepreneurial intention, and entrepreneurial attitude scale items were the items of Chen et al. (1998), Ajzen (1991). The descriptive statistics and reliability values (Cronbachs alpha) were calculated on SPSS version 26 as well as multicollinearity checks (VIF). In SmartPLS 4.0, PLS-SEM analysis was conducted. PLS-SEM was selected due to the possibility to deal with complex models and consider non-normal data distribution (Hair et al., 2021).

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Regression Weights

Variables	Items	E	EA	EI	ESE	SMI
Environment (E)	**E1**	0.878				
	E2	0.889				
	E3	0.871				
	E4	0.879				
	E5	0.910				
	E6	0.935				
	E7	0.887				
	E8	0.919				
Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA),	**EA2**		0.750			
	EA3		0.760			
	EA4		0.785			
	EA5		0.846			
	EA6		0.756			
	EA7		0.812			
Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)	**EI1**			0.818		
	EI2			0.821		
	EI3			0.822		
	EI4			0.857		
	EI5			0.849		
	EI6			0.777		
Entrepreneurial Self Efficacy (ESE),	**ESE1**				0.852	
	ESE2				0.896	
	ESE3				0.865	
	ESE4				0.904	
	ESE5				0.839	
	ESE6				0.869	
Social Media Influence (SMI),	**SMI1**					0.895
	SMI2					0.872
	SMI3					0.853
	SMI4					0.838
	SMI5					0.872
	SMI6					0.899
	SMI7					0.832

SMI8	0.919

The table presents (see table 1) standardized factor loadings for observed items across five latent constructs: Environment (E), Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA), Entrepreneurial Intention (EI), Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE), and Social Media Influence (SMI). The loading levels of each of the seven latent constructs are above the proposed small cut-off of 0.70 and are, therefore, able to achieve an acceptable level of individual indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2021). Concerning the environmental aspect, the loading of indicators falls between 0.871 and 0.935 indicating convergent validity and internal consistency. Entrepreneurial attitude scale, the loadings range between 0.750 and 0.846 showing a measurement quality. The indicators of the entrepreneurial intention also reflect strong loadings (0.777-0.857) and, therefore, reflect a good representation of the latent construct. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy also yields uniform north values (0.839 to 0.904), which indicates that every question is related to the construct in question relatively high. The Social media influence construct has such loadings as 0.832-0.919 that also surpasses standard requirements. The high loadings on the constructs give empirical justification to include all items in further structural model analysis besides giving strong support on the appropriateness of using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationship among the study variables.

Reliability Statistics

Table 2: Reliability

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	(AVE)
Environment	0.965	0.981	0.970	0.803
Entrepreneurial Attitude	0.876	0.878	0.906	0.617
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.906	0.909	0.927	0.679
Entrepreneurial Self Efficacy	0.936	0.938	0.950	0.759
Social Media Influence	0.955	0.958	0.962	0.762

The statistics (see table 2) demonstrate that all constructs in the measurement model exhibit strong internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal reliability (Hair et al., 2021). The environment is relatively high at 0.965 and the social media influence and the entrepreneurial self-efficacy similarly high, 0.955 and 0.936. The entrepreneurial attitude and the entrepreneurial intention are within tolerable limits 0.876 and 0.906 respectively. The composite is 0.906 in the case of entrepreneurial attitude and 0.970 of environment values, which are acceptable of 0.70 confirming construct reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2022). The values of rho_A are large within every construct, strengthening the scale reliability robustness. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) between 0.617 and 0.803 between Entrepreneurial Attitude and Environment respectively exceeds the 0.50 level suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), and it proves that the variance is extracted by indicators is more than the measurement error. All in all, these results demonstrate that the instrument has enjoyable reliability.

Discriminant Validity

Table 3: HTMT Ratio

	E	EA	EI	ESE	SMI
Environment					
Entrepreneurial Attitude	0.163				
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.046	0.452			

Entrepreneurial Self Efficacy	0.085	0.453	0.615	[redacted]	
Social Media Influence	0.132	0.426	0.623	0.574	[redacted]

The values (see table 3) represent the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), a more stringent criterion for assessing discriminant validity in structural equation modeling using PLS-SEM. Somewhat reassuringly, namely, the values of HTMT of the proposed constructs do not exceed the conservative level of 0.85, which implies that each of the specified constructs is empirically independent of the other ones (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT between entrepreneurial intention and social media influence is 0.623 which falls well under the acceptable range, as well as the HTMT of 0.453 between entrepreneurial attitude and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. These findings encourage the assertion that the measures indicate conceptually variances and are not representative of the identical underlying latent variable.

Table 4: Measurement Model Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria	Threshold Value	Obtained Values (Range)	Interpretation
Factor Loadings	≥ 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021)	0.750 – 0.935	All item loadings exceed the threshold and reliable items
Cronbach's Alpha (α)	≥ 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021)	0.876 – 0.965	High internal consistency across constructs
rho_A	≥ 0.70 (Sarstedt et al., 2022)	0.878 – 0.981	Strong construct reliability
Composite Reliability (CR)	≥ 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021)	0.906 – 0.970	All constructs exceed CR threshold
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	≥ 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)	0.617 – 0.803	Good convergent validity
HTMT Ratio for Discriminant Validity	< 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015)	0.046 – 0.623	Discriminant validity established

The table (see table 4) confirms that the measurement model meets established criteria for reliability and validity. All standardized factor loadings fall between 0.750 and 0.935, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming that each observed indicator reliably represents its respective latent construct (Hair et al., 2021). Internal consistency is affirmed through Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.876 to 0.965, indicating high reliability across all constructs. Both rho_A and composite reliability (CR) values surpass the recommended threshold of 0.70, with CR values ranging from 0.906 to 0.970, further confirming the internal coherence of the scale (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Convergent validity is demonstrated through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, all above the 0.50 benchmark, showing that a significant portion of variance in the indicators is captured by their latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity is validated through the HTMT ratios, all falling well below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (range = 0.046–0.623), indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another (Henseler et al., 2015).

Hypotheses testing

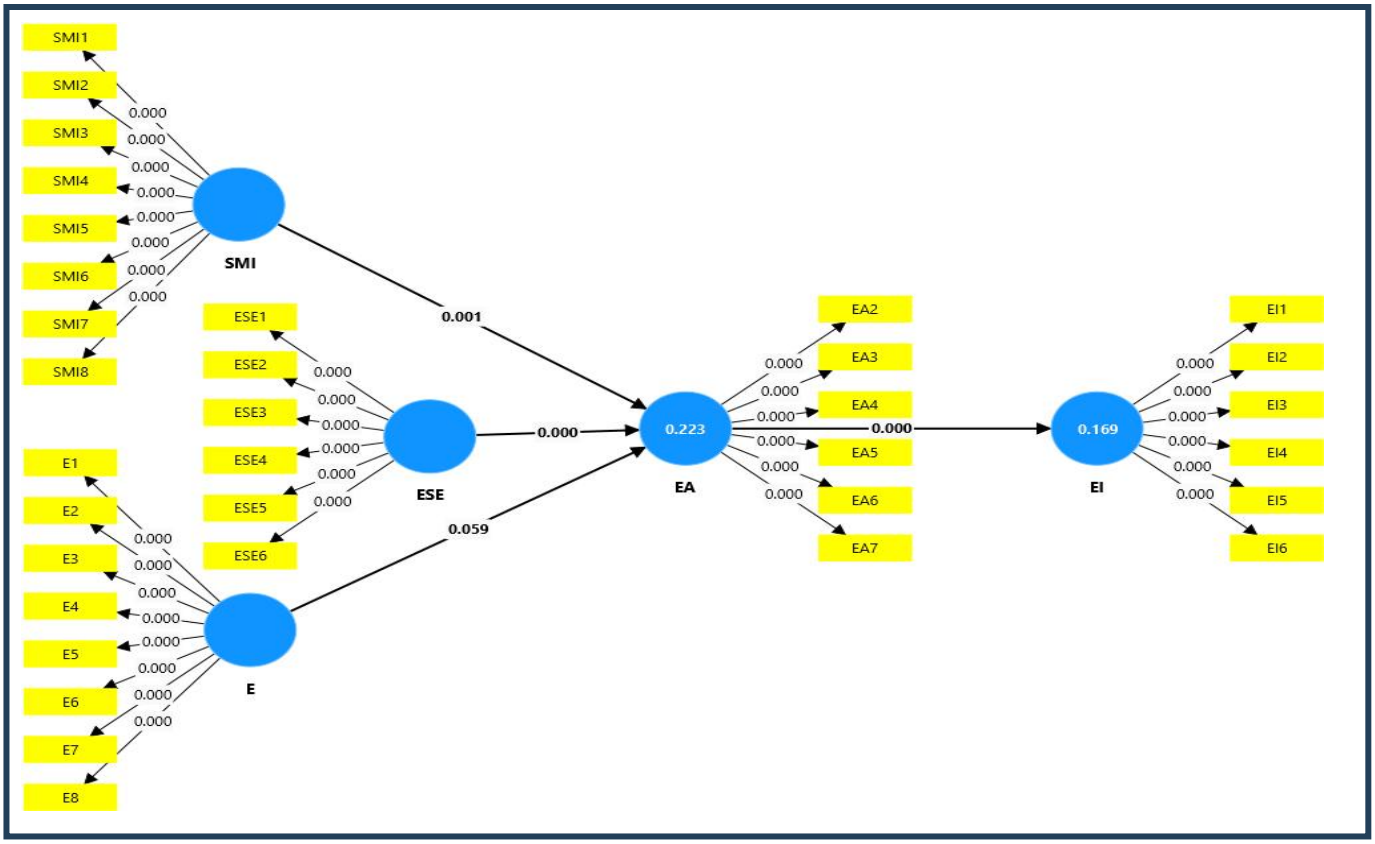


Table 5: Results

	Original sample (O)	(M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
SMI -> EA	0.220	0.222	0.063	3.479	0.001
ESE -> EA	0.293	0.293	0.059	4.935	0.000
E -> EA	0.092	0.099	0.048	1.891	0.059
EA -> EI	0.411	0.415	0.054	7.588	0.000

Social Media Influence (SMI), Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA), Entrepreneurial Self Efficacy (ESE), Environment (E), Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)

The structural model results indicate that several hypothesized relationships are statistically significant. SMI demonstrated a significant positive effect on EA with a path coefficient of 0.220 ($p = 0.001$), suggesting that greater exposure to entrepreneurial content on social platforms contributes to more favorable entrepreneurial evaluations. ESE also had a significant and stronger effect on EA ($\beta = 0.293$, $p < 0.001$). While the E showed a positive relationship with EA ($\beta = 0.092$), the effect was marginally insignificant ($p = 0.059$), indicating that environmental support may not directly influence attitude unless mediated by psychological factors like self-efficacy. The most substantial effect was observed between EA and EI, with a coefficient of 0.411 ($p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Hypotheses Findings

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Social Media Influence has a positive impact on Entrepreneurial Attitude	Supported
H2	Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy has a positive impact on Entrepreneurial	Supported

	Attitude	
H3	Environment has a positive impact on Entrepreneurial Attitude	Not Supported
H4	Entrepreneurial Attitude has a positive impact on Entrepreneurial Intention	Supported

DISCUSSION

The finding that social media influence has a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial attitude aligns with recent scholarly work recognizing the transformative role of digital platforms in shaping entrepreneurial perceptions (Wang & Huang, 2023). The social media can be described as both an information dissemination system and a comprehensive system allowing vicarious learning, affective processing, and identity construction (Ali et al., 2022). The Social Cognitive Theory asserts that such vicarious experiences largely influence the cognitive appraisals and attitudinal orientations especially those that have been strengthened by peer talks and increased emotional arousal (Bandura, 1997). The study conducted in the same vein confirms that exposure to entrepreneurial content and mentorship and peer successful stories on Instagram and TikTok can considerably influence the perceptions of the young users interested in the evaluation of entrepreneurial desirability and feasibility to provide a positive evaluative position (Yusof et al., 2023). Critically, this observation is consistent with past researchers on digital entrepreneurship in Pakistan and other emerging economies that have embraced the phenomenon due to a shortage of formal job options (Shabbir et al., 2023). Due to the interactive and community-based structure of social media, the users are more likely to have the socially validated but personalized and emotionally meaningful entrepreneurial attitudes, which should not be confused with the attitudes developed based on the traditional media or education (Liguori & Winkler, 2022).

Contrary to expectations, the relationship between environment and entrepreneurial attitude was not statistically significant at the conventional level, suggesting that environmental support may not directly shape attitudes unless mediated through psychological constructs like self-efficacy or moderated by personal experiences. It is proven that the institutional and cultural environments present a potent effect on entrepreneurship (Ratten & Usmanij, 2022). In the current work, however, the findings turn out to be more detailed. Even when there are supportive services, structures (incubators, policy interventions, capital sources) may be hidden or may be perceived as inaccessible, such that they do not have a direct influence on attitudes. The difference with the previous results (e.g., Koe et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022) can be due to contextual barriers in developing nations, such as bureaucratic attitudes, the lack of awareness of possible support systems, and soci-cultural disapproval of the unconventional profession. In the context of the Social Cognitive Theory, the power of environmental cues only takes effect when a person is mentally involved in the cues and considers the cues apt as pertinent in his or her own life (Bandura, 2001). As a result, unless potential entrepreneurs are able to internalize the fact that there is co-worker support or when they cannot view this as instrumentally important, the environment would be unlikely to change the formation of attitudes. Future research should focus on what role psychological empowerment plays in mediating this relationship or how previous exposure to entrepreneurship has a moderating impact to clarify this relationship further.

The positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial attitude emphasizes the psychological underpinnings of entrepreneurial orientation. The current study yields empirical evidence in sustaining the Social Cognitive Theory whereby, the underlying motivating concept as well as the determining factor of behavior is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In particular, entrepreneurial self-efficacy prepares a person to see the difficulties as malleable and the idea of entrepreneurship as feasible, hence cultivating positive attitudes (Cai et al., 2023). In line with the

previous study, self-efficacy is positively correlated with the level of confidence over tasks and emotional consistency with entrepreneurial activity (Nguyen et al., 2022). And the strength of this association implies that entrepreneurial attitudes are influenced by processes which are more proximal within an individual, rather than external environmental processes. The mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, and observational (especially digital) learning are effective processes of building entrepreneurial attitudes (Yusof et al., 2023). This means that even though the idea of entrepreneurship education programs and media-based programs that aim at promoting self-efficacy might not be as successful at improving entrepreneurial attitudes compared to structural reforms, they might be considered more effective than structural reforms alone.

The research proves statistically significant influence of entrepreneurial attitude and entrepreneurial intention and, therefore, supports major principles of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the results of various cross-national studies (LiLin et al, 2023). Being an affective-cognitive grounding, attitude serves as a behavioral intentional determinant by setting the desirability, goal compatibility, and inspirational congruence (Bari et al., 2023). Such findings support that developing positive entrepreneurial attitudes through positive role modeling, education and self-efficacy is one of the key channels to boosting entrepreneurial intention. The relationship is particularly relevant in situations like Pakistan, where social-economic changes and limited traditional career opportunities have caused greater dependency on entrepreneurship as an avenue to economic mobility (Hassan et al., 2022). Positive attitudes are able to significantly increase the risk of forming intentions because they allow young people to see entrepreneurship as a personally and socially valuable activity and, therefore, consider entrepreneurship to be rewarding and purposeful.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite offering valuable insights, this study is not without limitations. Cross-sectional method also limits the causal analysis as it measures the entrepreneurial cognition and behaviour only at the moment in time (Cai et al., 2023). A longitudinal study would provide a stronger picture of change in social media impact, self-efficacy and entrepreneur success over the time. The limitation of the study only to students in the private universities in Pakistan may compromise the generalization of the outcome to other institutions (including the public universities in Pakistan), and other socio-economic classes. Sampling frame used in future analyses should be more diverse consisting of rural population, non-study population of young people, and women entrepreneurs. Methodological precautions cannot trust self-reported data because they can be corrupted with social desirability and common method bias. Objective measurement could be improved by incorporating behavioral data or designs to form experiments (Hair et al., 2021). As the research applies the social cognitive theory, it would be worth complementing it with the entrepreneurial event model or the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) and generate more information. Moderating factors like gender or digital literacy or entrepreneurial education should also be investigated in future to define the boundary conditions of the identified relationships. This would develop the entrepreneurial intention literature in digital and emerging setups.

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