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Entrepreneurial intentions among college students in Odisha: A behavioral analysis

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in driving innovation, economic diversification, and employment generation, particularly in emerging economies like India. Odisha, with its growing youth population and educational expansion, presents a fertile ground for fostering entrepreneurship. This study aims to analyze the entrepreneurial intentions among college students in Odisha through a behavioral lens, using Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the core framework. The research investigates how attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence students' intentions to pursue entrepreneurial careers. In addition, it evaluates the moderating effects of contextual variables such as gender, family business background, exposure to entrepreneurship education, and urban-rural differences.

A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 500 final-year undergraduate and postgraduate students from various colleges across Odisha. Quantitative analysis using multiple regression reveals that perceived behavioral control and attitude toward entrepreneurship are the strongest predictors of entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurship education significantly enhances students' self-efficacy, while subjective norms also have a positive but relatively moderate impact. The study finds gender-based differences in entrepreneurial orientation and underscores the challenges posed by lack of mentorship, access to finance, and social acceptance, especially among female and rural students.

The results have practical implications for policymakers, educators, and institutional stakeholders seeking to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Odisha. By integrating entrepreneurship education into mainstream curricula, expanding incubation and mentorship networks, and addressing socio-cultural barriers, the state can unlock the entrepreneurial potential of its youth. The findings contribute to the growing body of behavioral entrepreneurship literature in the Indian context and provide actionable insights aligned with the goals of Vikshit Bharat and the state's Vision 2036.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial intentions, college students, theory of planned behaviour, youth entrepreneurship, behavioral analysis

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is globally acknowledged as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment generation. In the context of emerging economies like India, entrepreneurship serves as a crucial instrument for inclusive development, particularly by addressing issues such as youth unemployment, regional disparities, and informal sector dependence (GEM India Report, 2022). With over 65% of its population under the age of 35, India has a unique demographic advantage that can be harnessed through entrepreneurship promotion (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2020).

Odisha, a resource-rich but economically lagging state in eastern India, presents a compelling context for entrepreneurial development. Despite notable progress in infrastructure, education, and industrial policy, the state's youth unemployment rate remains above the national average (CMIE, 2023). The need to shift the mindset of youth from job-seeking to job-creating has led to multiple state-led initiatives such as Startup Odisha, Mission Shakti for women entrepreneurs, and integration of entrepreneurship modules in higher education. However, the translation of these policy efforts into entrepreneurial action remains inconsistent and poorly understood.

One of the key determinants of entrepreneurial behavior is entrepreneurial intention, defined as an individual's conscious decision to start a new business venture in the future (Bird, 1988). According to Ajzen's (1991) ^[1] Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), intention is the most immediate antecedent of behavior, especially when the behavior involves planning and

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perceived risk, as is the case with entrepreneurship. The TPB framework posits that three core psychological factors attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control predict the strength of intention.

Numerous empirical studies have validated TPB's applicability in understanding entrepreneurial intentions across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts (Krueger *et al.*, 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009) [6, 7]. However, most of these studies are concentrated in Western contexts or major urban centers in India, such as Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai, with limited focus on Tier-II and Tier-III regions like Odisha. Regional disparities, institutional support mechanisms, family backgrounds, and gender roles can significantly shape entrepreneurial behavior, especially among students in rural and semi-urban colleges.

Further, exposure to entrepreneurship education and training has been shown to influence not only knowledge acquisition but also entrepreneurial attitudes and self-efficacy (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015) [4]. In Odisha, although entrepreneurship is gradually being integrated into higher education curricula, there is limited data on its actual impact on students' mindset and behavior.

Given this context, this study aims to bridge the research gap by exploring the behavioral determinants of entrepreneurial intentions among college students in Odisha. It uses TPB as a guiding theoretical lens to assess how psychological and contextual factors jointly shape the entrepreneurial aspirations of youth. By doing so, the paper contributes to the behavioral entrepreneurship literature while offering policy insights for state and institutional actors working toward youth empowerment and economic transformation.

2. Review of Literature

A growing body of interdisciplinary literature addresses the behavioral, educational, institutional, and socio-cultural factors that shape entrepreneurial intentions, particularly among young adults. This section provides a comprehensive review of existing theories, empirical findings, and contextual influences, with a focus on the relevance to Odisha.

Entrepreneurial intention research has evolved through multiple theoretical perspectives. Early models, such as Shapero's (1982) Entrepreneurial Event Model, emphasized perceived desirability and feasibility, while Ajzen's (1991) [1] Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) remains the most empirically validated model in recent studies (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014) [4, 13].

Several comparative studies (Karimi *et al.*, 2017) support TPB's predictive capacity across different national contexts. In India, studies by Malebana (2022) and Pandey & Tewari (2021) have used TPB to examine entrepreneurial aspirations among university students, reinforcing its robustness.

Attitude toward entrepreneurship is consistently found to be a strong predictor of intention. Students with positive views on autonomy, innovation, and opportunity recognition are more likely to form entrepreneurial goals.

Perceived behavioral control, akin to self-efficacy, reflects confidence in one's ability to start a business. It strongly correlates with entrepreneurial intention and mediates the effects of training and education.

Subjective norms, though weaker in some contexts, remain

crucial in collectivist societies like India where family and peer approval significantly affect career decisions.

There is a growing consensus that entrepreneurship education (EE) plays a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial intention. Fayolle & Gailly (2015) [4] argue that the design, delivery, and experiential orientation of EE programs directly influence student mindset. Studies by Nabi *et al.* (2017) and Ahmed *et al.* (2022) suggest that project-based learning, mentorship, and incubation support have long-term effects on entrepreneurial career choices.

In Odisha, while many public universities have introduced basic modules, quality and practical exposure remain uneven. Das and Behera (2021) observe that students often lack hands-on experience and industry linkages, limiting the effectiveness of EE.

Policy interventions such as Startup India, Skill India, and Startup Odisha have expanded institutional support for young entrepreneurs. However, the awareness and accessibility of such schemes among students remain limited (GEM India Report, 2022). The Odisha MSME Development Policy (2022) and Startup Policy aim to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, yet their outreach to college-level students in rural districts is understudied.

Empirical studies (e.g., Singh & Choudhary, 2023) highlight the disconnect between policy frameworks and on-ground implementation, particularly in smaller towns where mentorship and infrastructure are inadequate.

Digital platforms and emerging technologies are increasingly shaping the entrepreneurial landscape. Digital literacy and access to platforms like e-commerce, fintech, and social media are enabling new-age entrepreneurship, particularly among tech-savvy youth. However, in Odisha, especially in rural areas, digital inequality limits access to such opportunities.

Borah and Das (2023) find that while urban students in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack show high digital entrepreneurial intention, students from tribal districts face infrastructural and skill deficits.

Personality traits such as locus of control, need for achievement, and innovativeness significantly correlate with entrepreneurial intention. Students with proactive personality traits and internal locus of control are more inclined to take entrepreneurial risks.

In India, Bhat and Mehta (2020) found that students from economically weaker sections often exhibit higher risk aversion, deterring them from entrepreneurship despite strong business ideas. This is particularly relevant to Odisha, where financial insecurity and lack of safety nets increase risk sensitivity.

As noted earlier, gender disparities remain a persistent issue. In Odisha, girls face dual constraints lack of social encouragement and institutional bias. Studies by Priyadarshini & Mishra (2022) [10] show that many female students have entrepreneurial ideas but are hesitant to pursue them due to parental disapproval and fear of failure. Cultural norms that prioritize secure employment over entrepreneurship also hinder students' intentions, especially in rural and tribal regions.

Comparative studies highlight regional variations in entrepreneurial intention across Indian states. For instance, Banerjee and Mandal (2021) found higher intention scores in Karnataka and Maharashtra compared to Odisha and Bihar, attributing this to better startup ecosystems and cultural orientation toward risk-taking.

A localized study by Mohanty and Nayak (2022) in Odisha indicates that intention levels vary significantly based on the type of institution (government vs. private), urban vs. rural location, and academic stream (STEM vs. arts/humanities).

2.1 Research Gaps Identified

Based on the literature reviewed above, several research gaps are evident:

- Limited empirical studies focus specifically on Odisha's youth, especially in Tier-II and Tier-III educational institutions.
- Few studies integrate behavioral theories with contextual elements like digital literacy, gender, policy awareness, and socio-cultural norms.
- Most existing work is quantitative but lacks deeper qualitative insights into student motivations and barriers.
- There is inadequate assessment of the effectiveness of government-led entrepreneurship promotion policies at the college level.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the entrepreneurial intentions of college students in Odisha using the Theory of Planned Behavior.
- To examine the influence of family background, gender, and exposure to entrepreneurship education on these intentions.

4. Research Hypotheses

Based on the review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Attitude toward entrepreneurship significantly influences entrepreneurial intention.
- **H2:** Subjective norms positively influence entrepreneurial intention.
- **H3:** Perceived behavioral control has a strong positive impact on entrepreneurial intention.
- **H4:** Exposure to entrepreneurship education moderates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and entrepreneurial intention.
- **H5:** There is a significant gender difference in entrepreneurial intention among college students.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and explanatory research design. Descriptive analysis helps identify the level of entrepreneurial intention among college students, while explanatory analysis investigates the relationships between psychological constructs (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control) and entrepreneurial intention. The study is hypothesis-driven and seeks to test the predictive power of TPB variables and other contextual factors on entrepreneurial intention.

5.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population comprises final-year undergraduate and postgraduate students from higher educational institutions in Odisha.

- **Sampling Frame:** Students from public and private colleges in urban (e.g., Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Rourkela etc.), semi-urban (e.g., Balasore, Berhampur),

and rural areas (e.g., Kandhamal, Kalahandi).

- **Sampling Method:** A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure diversity based on geography, gender, and academic stream.
- **Sample Size:** A total of 400 students were surveyed. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (95% confidence level, $\pm 5\%$ margin of error).

5.3. Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire.

- The questionnaire was designed based on validated instruments from prior studies (Liñán & Chen, 2009) [7].
- Responses were collected both offline (paper-based) and online (Google Forms) to increase coverage across districts.
- Prior to the main survey, a pilot study with 30 students was conducted to ensure clarity and reliability of items.

5.4. Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire consisted of five parts:

1. Demographic Information: Age, gender, academic background, family income, and business background.
2. Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship: Measured using 5 Likert-scale items (e.g., "Being an entrepreneur is a desirable career choice").
3. Subjective Norms: Measured using 4 items (e.g., "My family encourages me to start my own business").
4. Perceived Behavioral Control: Measured using 6 items related to self-efficacy, resource access, and perceived skill.
5. Entrepreneurial Intention: Measured using 5 items adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009) [7], such as "I am determined to create a firm in the future."

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

5.5. Validity and Reliability

- Content validity was ensured through expert review from three faculty members specializing in entrepreneurship and behavioral research.
- Construct validity was tested using factor analysis (KMO > 0.70; Bartlett's test $p < 0.05$).
- Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with each construct showing acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$).

5.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26) and AMOS for structural modeling.

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution.
- **Correlation Analysis:** To examine relationships among TPB constructs.
- **Multiple Linear Regression:** To test the impact of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on entrepreneurial intention.
- **ANOVA / Independent t-tests:** To assess group differences based on gender, family background, and educational exposure.
- **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (optional):** Used for testing the TPB model's fit and mediating/moderating effects.

5.7. Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Participation was voluntary, and anonymity/confidentiality were assured.
- The research protocol was approved by the institutional review committee of the lead researcher's university.

5.8. Limitations of the Methodology

- The study is cross-sectional, limiting the ability to track changes in intention over time.
- The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias.
- Exclusion of qualitative insights limits the depth of understanding about motivational and emotional factors.

6. Analysis of Data

This section presents the key findings derived from the analysis of the survey data collected from 500 college students across Odisha, followed by an interpretative discussion aligned with the objectives of the study and the theoretical framework used.

6.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Gender:** 55% male, 45% female.
- **Academic Stream:** 40% from commerce/business, 35% from science/technical, 25% from arts/humanities.
- **Location:** 60% from urban and semi-urban colleges; 40% from rural institutions.
- **Family Business Background:** 38% reported having at least one family member in business.

6.2. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

- **Entrepreneurial Intention (Mean = 3.71):** Moderate-to-high levels of entrepreneurial intention were observed.
- **Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (Mean = 3.85):** Most students had a favorable perception of entrepreneurship as a career.
- **Subjective Norms (Mean = 3.40):** Mixed responses were noted; family support was higher among males and urban students.
- **Perceived Behavioral Control (Mean = 3.55):** Many students expressed confidence in their entrepreneurial skills, but concerns about funding and mentorship persisted.

6.3. Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis showed:

- Attitude and entrepreneurial intention: $r = 0.61, p < 0.01$
- Subjective norms and intention: $r = 0.48, p < 0.01$
- Perceived behavioral control and intention: $r = 0.65, p < 0.01$

This indicates strong and statistically significant associations between TPB constructs and entrepreneurial intention.

6.4. Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was run with entrepreneurial intention as the dependent variable and TPB components as predictors.

Predictor	β (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship	0.34	7.12	0.000
Subjective Norms	0.21	4.26	0.000
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.39	8.15	0.000

- $R^2 = 0.58$, indicating that 58% of the variance in entrepreneurial intention is explained by these variables.
- Perceived behavioral control emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting confidence and self-efficacy are vital determinants.

6.5. Group Differences (t-tests and ANOVA)

- **Gender:** Male students exhibited significantly higher entrepreneurial intention ($p < 0.05$), largely due to higher perceived behavioral control.
- **Academic Stream:** Students from commerce and science streams showed higher intention levels than those in arts/humanities.
- **Family Background:** Students with a family business background had significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions and stronger perceived control.
- **Urban vs. Rural:** Urban students displayed higher mean scores on all TPB components. Rural students cited lack of infrastructure, awareness, and digital exposure as major deterrents.

7. Key Findings

7.1 Validity of the Theory of Planned Behavior

The findings affirm the applicability of Ajzen's (1991) [1] Theory of Planned Behavior in the context of Odisha. All three constructs attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, significantly predict entrepreneurial intention, corroborating prior studies (Krueger *et al.*, 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009; Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014) [6, 7, 13].

7.2 Role of Attitude and Perceived Behavioral Control

The positive attitude of students toward entrepreneurship is consistent with the growing cultural shift in India toward self-employment, especially post-COVID-19 (Saxena, 2022) [12]. However, the higher predictive power of perceived behavioral control suggests that confidence in one's ability, access to resources, and skill perception are more influential than mere positive perception.

7.3 Gender Disparities

The gender-based differences reflect broader societal dynamics in Odisha. Female students' entrepreneurial intention is tempered by societal expectations, limited mobility, and lower self-confidence (Mishra & Kshetri, 2021) [8]. This implies the need for targeted mentorship and support programs for aspiring women entrepreneurs.

7.4 Education and Family Influence

The strong correlation between entrepreneurial family background and intention supports existing literature (Carr & Sequeira, 2007) [3]. Entrepreneurship education, though present in many colleges, needs to be restructured to offer experiential learning, startup simulation, and mentorship (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015) [4].

7.5 Urban-Rural Divide

The stark differences in intention and perceived feasibility between rural and urban students highlight structural

inequities. Students from rural areas face infrastructural, informational, and motivational constraints, despite equal or stronger interest. This gap must be addressed through decentralized policy implementation, regional incubation centers, and mobile entrepreneurship labs.

8. Conclusion

This study explored the entrepreneurial intentions of college students in Odisha using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a foundational framework. The empirical findings reveal that students exhibit a moderate to high level of entrepreneurial intention, shaped primarily by their attitude toward entrepreneurship and perceived behavioral control. The results underscore that students who perceive themselves as capable and confident in managing business challenges are significantly more inclined to pursue entrepreneurship as a career. Attitude toward entrepreneurship, influenced by personal motivation and perceived desirability, also emerged as a significant determinant.

However, subjective norms, representing social and familial support, played a comparatively weaker role. This suggests that while students may be personally inclined toward entrepreneurship, they often lack strong encouragement from their immediate social environment, particularly in rural settings and among female students. Notably, gender, academic background, and family business exposure significantly influenced intention levels, pointing to persistent structural and cultural barriers.

In the broader context of Odisha's development vision for 2036, nurturing entrepreneurial intentions among youth is not just desirable, it is essential. It promises to create a generation of job creators, reduce regional disparities, and contribute meaningfully to a self-reliant, innovative, and inclusive state economy.

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