


# Exploring the Antecedents of Entrepreneurial Intention With the Theory of Planned Behaviour on Tunisian University Students

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## ABSTRACT

This study proposes to use the theory of planned behaviour to predict students' entrepreneurial intentions in Tunisian context. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted to collect responses from 257 students. Regressions analysis was used to test hypotheses. The result shows that attitude, perceived behavior control, and subjective norms significantly influence the entrepreneurial intention. The findings will be useful for government to support entrepreneurship and encourage graduates to start their own businesses to solve even part of the unemployment problem among the youths. The article is one of the initial attempts in Tunisian context to understand the entrepreneurial intention by using the theory of planned behaviour.

## KEYWORDS

Theory of Planned Behaviour, Entrepreneurial Intention, Students, Tunisia

## INTRODUCTION

Encouraging entrepreneurship is viewed as a potential solution to the unemployment of young people (Aloulou, 2016). It has been perceived as an engine of socioeconomic growth by providing job opportunities and diverse goods/services to the population (Reynolds et al., 2000). Guerrero, (2008) state that entrepreneurship is seen as an innovative and creative process, which play the potential role in creating added and new value to products/services, increasing productivity, creating new job opportunities, revitalizing and diversifying markets, improving social welfare, and developing the national economy.

According, to official statistics from National Institute of Statistics for the third quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate is estimated at more than 37% among youth ages (15 - 24 year) (about 38.5% among men and 36.2% among women). It should be noted that the unemployment rate for higher education graduates increased to 24.3% in the third quarter of 2022 against 22.8% in the second quarter of the same year. This rate is 15.2% among men and 32.0% among women in the third quarter of 2022, according to the same source. The increasing rate of unemployment of higher education graduates

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is a major challenge for government. Tunisian Government has been offering many agencies and programs to encourage young people to start their own businesses. Moreover, during their educational lives, many universities offer entrepreneurship courses to foster entrepreneurship spirit in the society. These initiatives and programs have not enough impact on the number of business start-ups in Tunisia.

Understanding entrepreneurial intention is fundamental since it is considered a key factor for individuals to become entrepreneurs (Gird & Bagraim, 2008; Krueger et al., 2000; Mensah et al., 2021). Thus, countries that want their young people to be highly entrepreneurial should seek to know and explore the predictor dimensions of entrepreneurial intention.

As the entrepreneurial intention, is a planned behavior shaped by an individual's attitude toward venturing, perceptions of abilities to operate their new venture and perceptions of social norms about venturing, we adopt the Theory of Planned Behaviour perspective to explain entrepreneurial intention.

The Theory of Planned Behavior has been one of the most widely used theories to explain entrepreneurial intention and this theory is composed of three dimensions (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Mensah et al., 2021; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2019): attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control toward entrepreneurship. However, the relative importance of each of these predictors varies across analyzed behaviors and situations (Ajzen, 1991). The Theory of Planned Behaviour model have not been widely tested to predict the formation of entrepreneurial intentions of university business students in developing countries such as Arab countries in general (Aloulou, 2016; Ahmed et al., 2019; Nasri & Morched, 2023) and Tunisia in particular. The study aimed to examine the determinants of entrepreneurial intention of university business students by using the Theory of Planned Behavior.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section describes the theoretical framework, the key concepts, and the hypothesized model of entrepreneurial intentions based on theory of planned behaviour. Then, the methodology section describes the sample and measures used as well as present reliability analyses and descriptive statistics. The third section presents the empirical results while the last section discusses the findings, their implications, limitations and recommendation for further researches.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS**

### **Entrepreneurial Intentions**

Entrepreneurial intentions play a central role in the entrepreneurship process because it is the starting stage and the incentive of entrepreneurship that encourages individuals to start their new businesses (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). Different definitions of entrepreneurial intention have been proposed in previous research. Do and Dadvari, (2017) define intention as "individual's state of mind that directs their attention and personal experience to planned entrepreneurial behaviour." Entrepreneurship is moreover a process (Gartner et al., 2005; Linan & Chen, 2009) in which entrepreneurial intention is the first step (Lee & Wong, 2004). To be more specific, entrepreneurial behavior is the process of searching, evaluation, and exploitation of business opportunities to make new business activities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) with entrepreneurial intentions being the very first and very important step of the whole process (Krueger et al., 2000). Strong intention encourages behaviors, especially planned behaviors (Ajzen, 1991), so it is considered as a determinant of behaviors (Fayolle & Lassas-Clerc, 2006). Studying entrepreneurial intention is thus a practical and useful approach to understanding actual entrepreneurial behavior in the context of business students.

A number of theories from social psychology have been used to predict intentions. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), has become one of the most influential theories of human behaviour applied in almost every discipline concerned with understanding some type of human behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 1998), especially entrepreneurial behaviour (Kautonen et al., 2015; Krueger & Carsrud, 1993; Krueger et al., 2000). Thus, the Theory of Planned Behavior offers a coherent, parsimonious, highly generalizable,

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