

Key Factors Affecting Entrepreneurial Intention: An Exploratory Study among Fashion Students

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Entrepreneurship is a fundamental driving force for a country's economic growth. In the global fashion industry, entrepreneurs accelerate design innovation and new business models, while creating employment opportunities (Zhao & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Therefore, both developed and developing countries are exploring best strategies to cultivate fashion entrepreneurship. To do so, it is critical to understand factors associated with entrepreneurial intention. Previous studies suggest that higher education influences individuals' level of entrepreneurial intention which is individual commitment to establish a new business (Zhang, Duysters, & Cloudt, 2014). However, there is limited knowledge about what nurtures early entrepreneurial intentions among fashion students. To address this gap, this study aims to explore the entrepreneurial intention of college fashion students in the United States.

The theoretical framework for this study is Entrepreneurial Event Theory. Shapero (1975) suggested perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, and propensity to act are direct antecedents to entrepreneurial intentions. An individual's perceptions of desirability of entrepreneurship is affected by one's personal attitudes, values and feelings, which are a result of unique social environments, such as family, peer groups, educational and professional influences (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). An individual's perception of feasibility of entrepreneurship is related to one's perception of available resources (eg. knowledge, financial support, and partners). Additionally, Shapero (1975) conceived "propensity to act" as a personal provision to act according to one's own decisions. In addition, previous studies pointed out that the Social Cognitive Theory can be used as a supplemental theory to explain entrepreneurial intention among students (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994). The Social Cognitive Theory identifies human behavior as an interaction of personal factors, behavior, and the environment (Bandura, 1989).

For the purpose of this study, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were employed. This qualitative method is effective for uncovering valuable insights, experiences and perspectives that are difficult to obtain from other research techniques (Creswell, 2012). Nineteen fashion students, recruited using the purposive sampling technique, participated in the study, including five males and fourteen females. Interviews were conducted from September 2016 to December 2016 at places convenient to participants, such as coffee house. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed for recurring themes. Among the participants, three participants currently own fashion businesses and fourteen of them showed high intention to become fashion entrepreneurs.

Three major themes emerged: (a) personality factors [14 out of 19]; (b) instrumental readiness accesses [14 out of 19]; and (c) prior exposure to entrepreneurial experience [11 out of 19]. The

findings revealed personality factors were critical for entrepreneurial tendency. Students with high entrepreneurial intention described their personality characteristics as “creative, outgoing, persistent, hardworking, and open-minded.” They can control their own destiny. Unlike students from other areas, fashion students often emphasized their artistic talents. In addition, access to capital, information and social networks are categorized as “instrumental readiness” to investigate entrepreneurial intention (Mat, Maat, & Mohd, 2015). “Having money saved up”, “fashion education”, “past internships”, and “staying in touch with old bosses” provide fashion students good resources to achieve business objectives or clarify business problems. Prior exposure to entrepreneurial experience was found as an important antecedent of fashion entrepreneurship as well. Students who were “raised up in a family business environment” and “inspired from my dad/aunt/friend’s businesses” are passionate about fashion entrepreneurship. Besides parents, their friends and employers often serve as role models, and positively diffuse their entrepreneurial knowledge.

This research offers important implications and contributions. First, in the context of fashion entrepreneurship, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the entrepreneurial intention of fashion students by combining Entrepreneurial Event Theory and Social Cognitive Theory. Personality factors, financial support, information access, social network, and prior exposure to entrepreneurial experience contribute most to entrepreneurship as a career choice. Second, this study is one of the few studies that focused on entrepreneurial intention among fashion students and fashion entrepreneurship education. The findings provide valuable insights for policy makers and fashion educators to promote entrepreneurship education and provide better support for fashion students to achieve entrepreneurial success. Future research opportunities could include empirical studies of key predictors of entrepreneurial intention among fashion students to validate and further generalize these findings.

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