



Startup Culture and Generation Z Entrepreneurial Intentions: A Systematic Review of Determinants, Thematic Structure, and Emerging Evidence

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Abstract

Startup culture has become an increasingly visible feature of the career landscape faced by Generation Z, yet its influence on this cohort's career aspirations and entrepreneurial intentions remains fragmented across separate strands of research that typically isolate single factors such as entrepreneurship education, self-efficacy, family background, or digital exposure. This study addresses that fragmentation by conducting a systematic literature review of secondary, Scopus-indexed research examining how startup culture, understood as the combined influence of entrepreneurial role models, institutional and policy-driven ecosystem support, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, family and social normative influence, and digital exposure, relates to Generation Z's entrepreneurial intentions. Following a PRISMA-guided identification, screening, and eligibility process, a corpus of 90 peer-reviewed studies published between 1980 and 2026 was analyzed using descriptive bibliometric techniques and structured thematic coding. The analysis identifies 13 recurring thematic constructs, which are consolidated into 8 dominant clusters: the Theory of Planned Behaviour, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, family and social support, digital and social media exposure, entrepreneurship education, institutional and policy ecosystems, risk-taking propensity and fear of failure, and gender dynamics. Findings show that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and subjective family or social norms exert the strongest and most consistent influence on entrepreneurial intention across cultural contexts, while risk-taking propensity and digital exposure operate more indirectly, through attitude and opportunity recognition respectively. Thematic emphasis has also shifted markedly over the past decade, moving from education-centred determinants before 2020 toward digitally mediated, crisis-responsive, and ecosystem-based explanations after 2022. This study contributes a consolidated, evidence-based framework linking these determinants to Generation Z entrepreneurial intention and identifies priority directions for future primary research, particularly within the Indian context.

Keywords: *startup culture, Generation Z, entrepreneurial intention, career aspirations, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, Theory of Planned Behaviour, systematic literature review, secondary data analysis, Scopus, bibliometric analysis*

1. Introduction

Startup culture is an increasingly important element of how young people evaluate career options today. Defined broadly as the set of social, institutional, and digital influences that make entrepreneurship visible and accessible as a career path, startup culture has moved beyond isolated success stories to incorporate structured ecosystems of incubators, accelerators, and government-backed support programmes [55]. As such, startup culture encompasses entrepreneurial role models, digital platforms that lower the barriers to launching a venture, and family or institutional networks that shape an individual's confidence and social approval to pursue self-employment. These elements together strengthen entrepreneurial self-efficacy and shape long-term career aspirations toward entrepreneurship as a viable, and for a growing number of young people, a desirable profession.

While startup culture has a broad and growing footprint, entrepreneurial intention is the more specific and immediately measurable construct this study examines. Entrepreneurial intention is commonly described as the conscious state of mind that precedes and directs attention toward entrepreneurial behaviours such as starting a new venture [1]. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, an individual's confidence in their own capacity to identify, plan, and execute a venture, is rooted in Bandura's social-cognitive theory [2] and is a key component of this intention, helping to explain why exposure to startup culture does not translate uniformly into entrepreneurial action across all young people [23].

Most recently, the entrepreneurial ecosystem surrounding Generation Z has expanded considerably, driven by rapid growth in startup activity across emerging and developed economies alike and reinforced by supportive government policy in a number of national contexts [69]. This has been accompanied by curricular reform embedding entrepreneurship and vocational skill-building more directly into higher education [93, 95]. Generation Z, as digitally native young people, encounters this expanding ecosystem substantially through social media and online platforms rather than solely through offline networks, a pattern that has intensified as global entrepreneurial activity has increasingly moved online [61].

Although startup culture and its influence on entrepreneurial intention have attracted increasing scholarly attention, a clear gap remains in understanding which specific elements of this culture most strongly shape Generation Z's entrepreneurial intentions. Existing studies typically isolate single factors, such as self-efficacy, family background, entrepreneurship education, or social media exposure, rather than examining startup culture as a combined ecosystem acting on the same cohort. This study addresses this gap by conducting a systematic literature review of ninety Scopus-indexed, secondary sources on Generation Z entrepreneurship, treating them as a single, unified evidence base rather than as isolated strands. Specifically, the study sought to (1) identify the foundational concepts underpinning startup culture and entrepreneurial intention research, (2) analyse the thematic clusters that reveal the current focus of this research area, (3) examine how these themes have evolved over the past four decades, (4) determine which specific elements of startup culture most strongly influence Generation Z's entrepreneurial intention, and (5) identify gaps that present opportunities for future research and practice.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the conceptual evolution of entrepreneurial intention research from its psychological origins to its present, ecosystem-based form. Section 3 discusses the regulatory and institutional context within which Generation Z encounters startup culture, with particular attention to India. Section 4 presents the study's research questions. Section 5 describes the systematic review methodology, including the search strategy, screening protocol, and analytical approach applied to the secondary data. Section 6 presents the results, comprising a bibliometric overview of the reviewed corpus, a thematic cluster analysis, and an

account of thematic evolution over time. Section 7 discusses these findings against the study's five research questions, and Section 8 sets out theoretical and practical implications. The paper concludes with a summary of contributions in Section 9 and a discussion of limitations and future research directions in Section 10.

2. Conceptual Background and Literature Review

2.1 The Psychological Origins of Entrepreneurial Intention Research

Research on entrepreneurial intention originated in the broader psychological literature on planned behaviour. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) introduced attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control as the three cognitive antecedents of intention, providing the foundational model on which nearly all subsequent entrepreneurial intention research has been built [1]. It was not until the following decades that scholars formally adapted TPB into entrepreneurship-specific applications, substituting perceived behavioural control with the closely related construct of entrepreneurial self-efficacy: an individual's belief in their own capacity to successfully execute the tasks required to start a business [2]. Early empirical work in this tradition, such as Brockhaus's comparison of the risk-taking propensity of entrepreneurs against managers and the general population [22], found little difference in risk-taking between groups, an early signal that psychological traits alone would prove insufficient to explain entrepreneurial behaviour, foreshadowing the field's later shift toward a more multi-dimensional view of the entrepreneurial intention construct.

2.2 The Entrepreneurship Education Era

During the 2000s and early 2010s, entrepreneurial-intention research expanded considerably, driven substantially by growing interest in entrepreneurship education as a policy lever. Meta-analytic evidence from this period, synthesising seventy-three studies covering more than thirty-seven thousand individuals, found a small but consistent positive correlation between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention [13]. A separate meta-analysis of thirty-five studies similarly concluded that entrepreneurship education programmes raise entrepreneurial intention more reliably than they raise other related outcomes such as attitude, feasibility, or desirability, and that longer programmes tend to outperform shorter ones [11]. A further meta-analysis reviewing forty-four independent studies confirmed that student engagement, particularly through academic challenge and simulation-based learning, positively strengthens the relationship between training and intention [12]. This body of meta-analytic evidence was later extended by a larger synthesis of thirty-six records covering nearly thirty thousand college students, which additionally identified national context as a significant moderator of the education-intention relationship, with the association strongest among Chinese student samples [68]. Together, these four meta-analyses, spanning more than one hundred and eighty underlying primary studies, establish entrepreneurship education as a small but dependable, rather than a decisive, lever for raising entrepreneurial intention.

2.3 The Turn Toward Self-Efficacy, Family, and Social Influence

A clear turning point in this literature followed the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, which sharply reduced conventional graduate employment opportunities and pushed governments worldwide, including in developing economies, to actively promote youth entrepreneurship and self-employment as an alternative to job-seeking. In parallel, researchers increasingly recognised that entrepreneurial self-efficacy, rather than education exposure alone, functions as the more proximal psychological driver of intention. Studies of Chinese college students repeatedly found that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between entrepreneurship education and intention [25, 26], and that self-efficacy itself is shaped by a range of antecedents including narcissistic personality traits [27], post-traumatic psychological growth following crisis events [28], and emotional competence in managing one's

own and others' emotions [29]. A large-sample study of over nine hundred Chinese students further confirmed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates the effect of the post-pandemic entrepreneurship environment on intention [24].

Alongside self-efficacy, family and social influence emerged as an equally robust determinant, particularly in collectivist cultural settings. A study of six hundred and seventeen Romanian students found that having business-owning parents significantly raised entrepreneurial intention, functioning as a form of informal education [30], while a qualitative systematic review of family-based antecedents concluded that entrepreneur parents provide prior knowledge and role models that measurably boost a student's confidence to pursue entrepreneurship [31]. This pattern replicated among Hungarian business students, where family business background was found to shape entrepreneurial intention both directly and as a moderating influence on other motivational factors [33], and among Chinese college students, where social creativity's effect on intention was found to be moderated by parental entrepreneurial background and partially mediated by career adaptability [32].

2.4 The Ecosystem Turn and the Rise of Digital Exposure

Following this period, entrepreneurial-intention research increasingly integrated with the broader concept of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, recognising that intention is shaped not only by individual psychological traits but by the surrounding institutional, social, and digital environment. Cross-country evidence bears this out: a structured survey of one thousand four hundred and fourteen students across six countries found that the relationship between risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurship itself varies with a country's cultural power-distance orientation [21], while more recent cross-cultural comparisons of decision-making styles between United States and Slovenian samples found that individualistic cultural orientations strengthen the link between maximising decision styles and entrepreneurial intention [79]. A study of Chinese retail entrepreneurs similarly linked Hofstede's cultural dimensions to entrepreneurial innovativeness through the mediating mechanism of proactive behaviour [80].

At the level of the ecosystem itself, longitudinal evidence tracking over three thousand individuals across two decades found that an adolescent-stage tech-entrepreneurial learning ecosystem, shaped by family background and school education, significantly predicts later tech-entrepreneurial careers [57], while a randomised field experiment on entrepreneurial mentorship found that being assigned an entrepreneur mentor increases the likelihood of pursuing an entrepreneurial career, an effect that is strongest for students whose own parents were not entrepreneurs, suggesting mentorship can substitute for family exposure [58]. A systematic review applying the Joanna Briggs Institute protocol across thirty studies of youths' career choices found that collectivist-culture youth are shaped primarily by family expectations, while individualist-culture youth are driven more by personal interest, underscoring that startup culture's effect is not culturally uniform [59]. A bibliometric systematic review of the youth social-entrepreneurship literature itself, applying Scopus and Web of Science co-citation analysis, similarly found this field to be fragmented across separate research clusters covering business strategy, social entrepreneurship, and social innovation, reinforcing the case for a more consolidated review such as the present study [56].

2.5 Generation Z and Digital Opportunity Recognition

Today, this integration has reached a further stage of maturity as researchers turn specifically to Generation Z, a cohort whose relationship with entrepreneurship is inseparable from its digital nativity. Recent Generation Z-specific research documents how the frequency and type of social media use shapes entrepreneurial attitudes and opportunity recognition differently across platforms, gender, and age groups [61, 62, 66]. A study of Chinese college students found that social media use is not directly related to entrepreneurial intention but operates entirely through the mediating channel of self-efficacy [61], a pattern replicated among high-school students in the context

of media dependency theory [62] and among culinary vocational students, where social media use worked indirectly through perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy, and attitude rather than through any direct effect [60]. Vietnamese and Omani samples extended this evidence further, integrating social media exposure directly into an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour framework alongside perceived risk and entrepreneurial culture [63, 64]. Entrepreneurial-intention research is thus no longer a narrowly psychological field but a genuinely multi-dimensional area of study spanning psychology, digital media, family sociology, culture, and public policy, setting the stage for the present review's attempt to consolidate these dimensions specifically for Generation Z.

3. Contextual and Regulatory Background: Startup Ecosystems and Generation Z

Startup culture does not emerge in a vacuum; it is actively shaped by national policy, institutional investment, and higher-education reform, and the reviewed literature reflects this institutional layer clearly. In Chile, the introduction of a national entrepreneurship-promotion initiative was found to directly increase the cultural legitimacy of entrepreneurship as a career path, illustrating how a single, well-resourced policy intervention can shift a country's entrepreneurial climate within a relatively short period [69]. Comparable institutional effects are documented in the Global South more broadly: a conceptual ecosystem model developed and applied among South African youth entrepreneurs identified education, training, and mentorship at the microsystem level as the primary levers connecting institutional support to individual entrepreneurial mindset formation [55].

India's own entrepreneurship policy architecture is well represented in the reviewed corpus, particularly through studies examining Generation Z's workplace expectations and entrepreneurial self-efficacy in Indian higher education settings. Indian samples appear across multiple thematic clusters in this review, including personality traits and social entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z [15, 34], women's entrepreneurial education [36], sustainable and green entrepreneurial intention [37], and the psychological and work-environment determinants of career decision-making within India's startup ecosystem specifically [54]. This concentration of Indian evidence, situated inside a much larger international corpus, allows the present review to draw out both globally consistent patterns and India-specific nuances, an approach consistent with recommended practice for contextualising systematic reviews of a globally dispersed literature [3].

Beyond India, the reviewed literature documents a broadly similar institutional trajectory across other developing and transition economies: vocational and technical education systems in Malaysia [93] and Bosnia and Herzegovina [95] have both moved to formally embed entrepreneurial skill-building into their curricula, while intellectual-property protection mechanisms have been shown to shape entrepreneurial intention among ethnic-minority youth in Vietnam's more remote regions [96]. Taken together, these studies indicate that Generation Z across a wide range of national settings increasingly encounters a deliberately engineered, policy-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem layered onto more organic family, social, and digital influences; understanding which of these layers most strongly shapes entrepreneurial intention has direct relevance for how effectively this policy architecture is likely to succeed, and frames the research questions that follow.

4. Research Questions

Given this context, the following research questions guide the present review of startup culture and Generation Z entrepreneurship literature.

RQ1. What are the foundational concepts that underpin startup culture and entrepreneurial intention research?

RQ2. What do thematic clusters reveal about the current focus of Generation Z entrepreneurship research?

RQ3. How have these thematic structures evolved across the period covered by the reviewed literature?

RQ4. Which specific elements of startup culture most strongly influence Generation Z's entrepreneurial intention?

RQ5. What gaps exist in the current literature, and what opportunities exist for future research and practice?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design, operationalised as a systematic literature review (SLR) of secondary, Scopus-indexed data [3]. An SLR follows an explicit, reproducible protocol to identify, screen, and synthesise existing studies on a defined topic, allowing patterns, agreements, and contradictions across studies to be systematically mapped [4]. Because the aim of this study is to describe and analyse what the existing literature collectively reports about the relationship between startup culture and Generation Z's entrepreneurial intention, rather than to collect new primary measurements, this design is treated as the most appropriate fit for the stated research questions, and is reported in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines for systematic reviews [5].

5.2 Data Source and Search Strategy

Data were retrieved from Scopus, chosen for its broad, quality-controlled coverage of business, management, and social-science research and its comparatively reliable and standardised bibliometric metadata relative to less curated search tools [6]. Records were searched using Boolean strings combining the study's core constructs: ("startup culture" OR "entrepreneurial ecosystem") AND ("entrepreneurial intention" OR "career aspiration" OR "self-efficacy" OR "family business background" OR "social media" OR "risk-taking" OR "fear of failure") AND ("Generation Z" OR "university students" OR "college students"), applied to the title, abstract, and author-keyword fields. Records were filtered by document type (peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses), and by language (English).

5.3 Screening, Eligibility, and Final Corpus

Screening followed a purposive, criterion-based approach structured around a PRISMA-style identification-screening-eligibility-inclusion flow. Records were included if they were peer-reviewed with a traceable DOI or indexed record, published between 1980 and 2027 (the great majority falling between 2014 and 2027), written in English, and directly addressed at least one of the study's core constructs. Records were excluded if they were non-peer-reviewed, duplicated across search strings, unrelated to entrepreneurial intention or career aspiration, or if the full text could not be retrieved. Three reviewers independently screened and coded overlapping subsets of records, with disagreements resolved through discussion, an approach consistent with recommended practice for secondary, literature-based business research [3, 4]. This process produced a final corpus of ninety studies, summarised in Table 1, which forms the complete evidence base analysed in this review.

5.4 Analytical Approach

Each of the ninety included studies was coded by publication year, country or regional context, methodological orientation (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, meta-analytic, bibliometric, or conceptual), reported sample size where disclosed, and primary thematic construct. This structured coding was used to generate descriptive bibliometric statistics, reported in Section 6.1, using Python-based data-analysis tooling (pandas for data structuring and Matplotlib for chart generation), mirroring the descriptive, software-assisted approach common in bibliometric systematic reviews [56]. Thematic clusters were then identified through repeated reading and keyword tagging of each study's stated objectives, key findings, and identified research gaps, an approach adapted from established systematic review coding procedures [4]. Because every study in the corpus was coded manually against the same

construct list, cluster boundaries in this review reflect structured qualitative judgement rather than an automated keyword co-occurrence algorithm; this distinction is discussed further as a limitation in Section 10.

6. Results

6.1 Overview of the Reviewed Literature

The final corpus comprised ninety peer-reviewed studies published between 1980 and 2027, with the overwhelming majority (79 of 90, or 87.8%) published from 2020 on ward, reflecting the recency of scholarly interest in Generation Z as a distinct entrepreneurial cohort. Figure 1 presents the distribution of the corpus across publication periods.

Figure 1. Distribution of the 90 reviewed studies by publication period

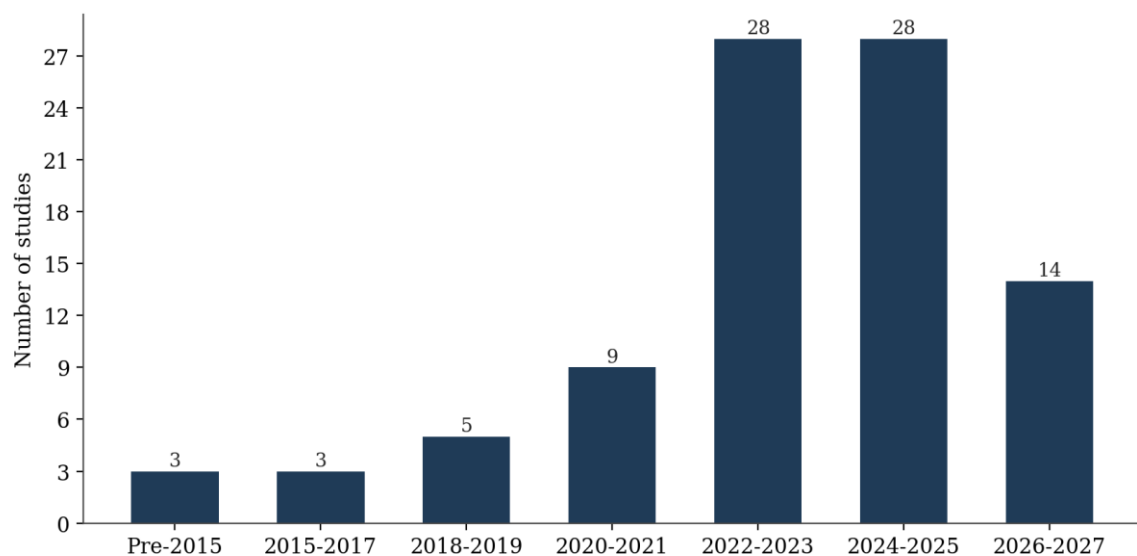


Figure 1. Distribution of the 90 reviewed studies by publication period.

Methodologically, the corpus is dominated by quantitative survey-based research: sixty-nine of the ninety studies (76.7%) employed a quantitative design, most commonly a cross-sectional survey analysed through regression or structural equation modelling. A further five studies (5.6%) used qualitative methods, four (4.4%) were meta-analyses synthesising dozens of underlying primary studies, three (3.3%) were conceptual or theoretical papers, three (3.3%) used mixed methods, three (3.3%) were narrative or systematic literature reviews in their own right, one was a bibliometric analysis, one used a longitudinal design, and one used a randomised field experiment. This distribution, shown in Figure 2, indicates a literature that is empirically rich but methodologically narrow, with limited representation of qualitative, longitudinal, or experimental designs capable of establishing the direction of causality between startup-culture exposure and entrepreneurial intention.

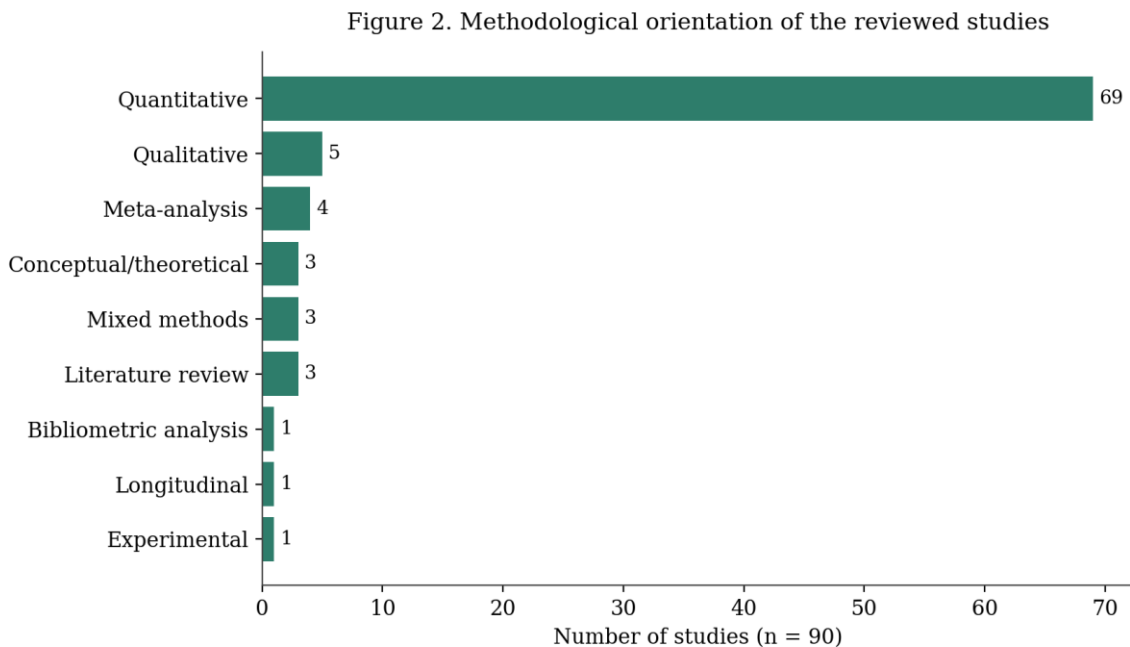


Figure 2. Methodological orientation of the reviewed studies (n = 90).

Geographically, the corpus is heavily concentrated in China (18 studies, 20.0%), followed by a substantial cluster of cross-national or multi-country studies (12 studies, 13.3%) and other South and Southeast Asian contexts including Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Malaysia (12 studies, 13.3%). Review or conceptual papers not tied to a single country account for a further ten studies (11.1%), while the Middle East and North Africa (10 studies, 11.1%), Europe (7 studies, 7.8%), India (6 studies, 6.7%), the United States (5 studies, 5.6%), Latin America (5 studies, 5.6%), Africa (4 studies, 4.4%), and Japan (1 study, 1.1%) make up the remainder. This distribution, illustrated in Figure 4, shows a literature that is genuinely international but unevenly so, with East Asian and South Asian contexts considerably better represented than the Indian context specifically, despite India's rapidly expanding startup policy architecture.

Figure 4. Geographic distribution of the reviewed studies (n = 90)

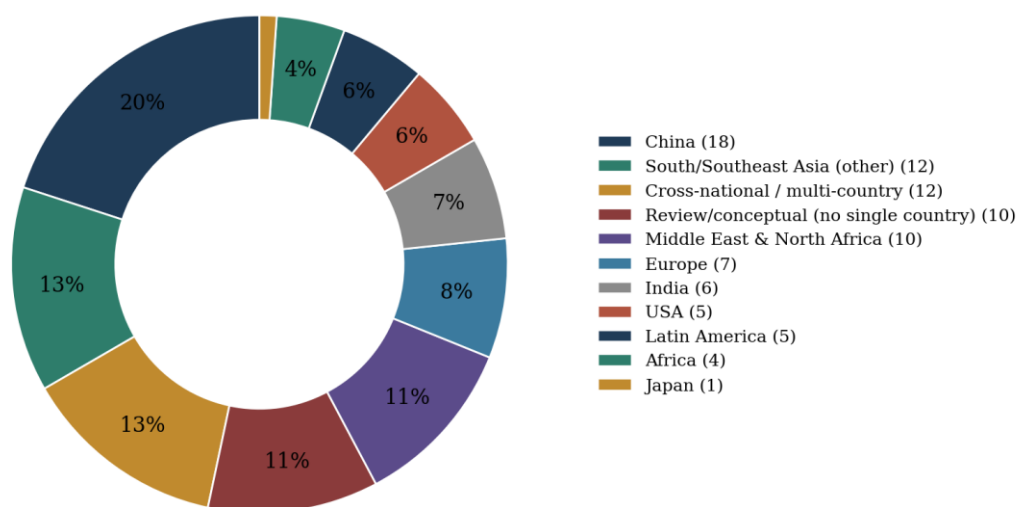


Figure 4. Geographic distribution of the reviewed studies (n = 90).

Out of the sixty-one quantitative studies that revealed a specific sample size, the number of participants varied between less than one hundred and over three thousand respondents, with a median of approximately 381

respondents. Figure 6 below represents this distribution, which was right-skewed, having a group of large-sample sized studies of over one thousand respondents, most of which used structural equation modelling, which requires bigger sample sizes for sufficient power for testing multiple simultaneous pathways.

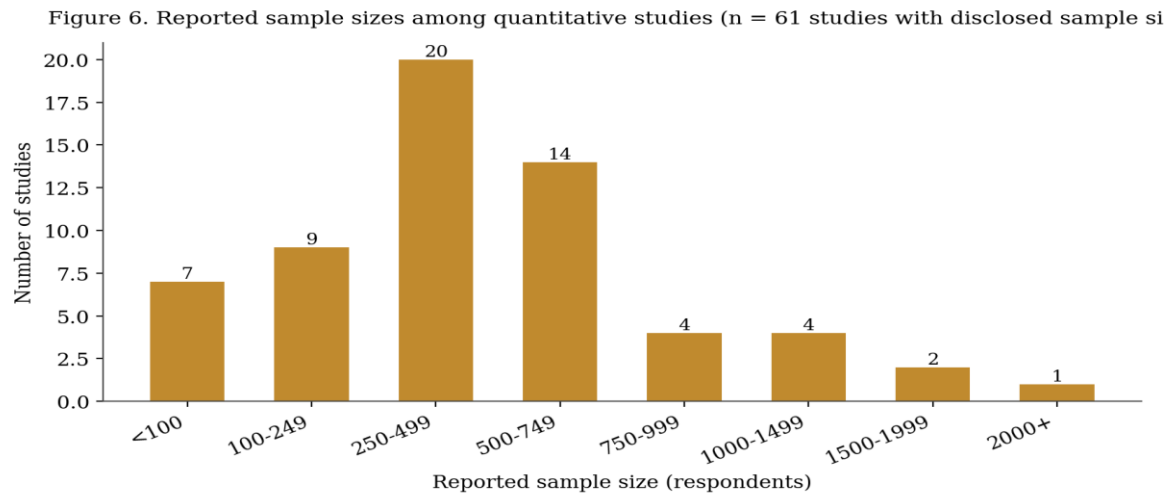


Figure 6. Reported sample sizes among the quantitative studies in the corpus.

Table 1 presents a selection of the studies reviewed for this article, to give an idea of the countries, methods and sample sizes used in the 90 studies.

Study	Country/Context	Method	Sample (n)	Ref.
Hossain, Tabash, Siow, Ong & Anagreh (2023)	Bangladesh	Mixed (PRISMA+Survey)	206	[39]
Barhate & Dirani (2022)	Systematic review	Systematic review	N/R	[48]
Zhang & Huang (2021)	China	Quantitative (SEM)	913	[24]
Georgescu & Herman (2020)	Romania	Quantitative	617	[30]
Huang & Zhang (2020)	China	Quantitative (SEM)	524	[61]
Antoncic, Antoncic, Gantar & Hisrich (2016)	Six countries	Quantitative	1414	[21]
Kong, Zhao & Tsai (2020)	Multi	Quantitative	1865	[77]
Gallegos et al. (2024)	Peru	Quantitative	1006	[89]
Zhang, Haq, Xu & Nadeem (2024)	China	Quantitative	1932	[38]
Chen, Acs & Terjesen (2024)	Longitudinal (multi)	Longitudinal	3116	[57]
Bae, Qian, Miao & Fiet (2014)	Meta-analysis	Meta-analysis	73	[13]
Mia, Abir, Peris et al. (2026)	Bangladesh	Quantitative (SEM)	N/R	[50]
Adhikari & Ghosh (2022/23)	India	Perceptual survey	N/R	[51]
Trif, Noja, Cristea, Enache & Didraga (2022)	Romania	Quantitative	1441	[85]
Szabó & Aranyossy (2024)	Hungary	Quantitative	590	[33]
Zhong (2026)	China	Quantitative (SEM+ANN)	499	[60]
Salihagić & Cero (2027)	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Quantitative (SEM)	607	[95]
Cai, Hussain & Zhang (2022)	China	Qualitative (fsQCA)	207	[10]
Sharma, Bagdi, Bulsara & Lodaliya (2025)	India	Quantitative	N/R	[15]
Bhanu Prakash et al. (2024)	India	Quantitative	300	[54]

Table 1. Characteristics of a representative subset of the 90 reviewed studies (N/R = not reported).

6.2 Thematic Clusters

The structured coding of each paper's stated constructs and findings allowed identification of thirteen recurring thematic tags, which were collapsed into eight dominant clusters for reporting purposes. Figure 3 shows the frequency with which each construct was used as a primary focus across the ninety-study corpus.

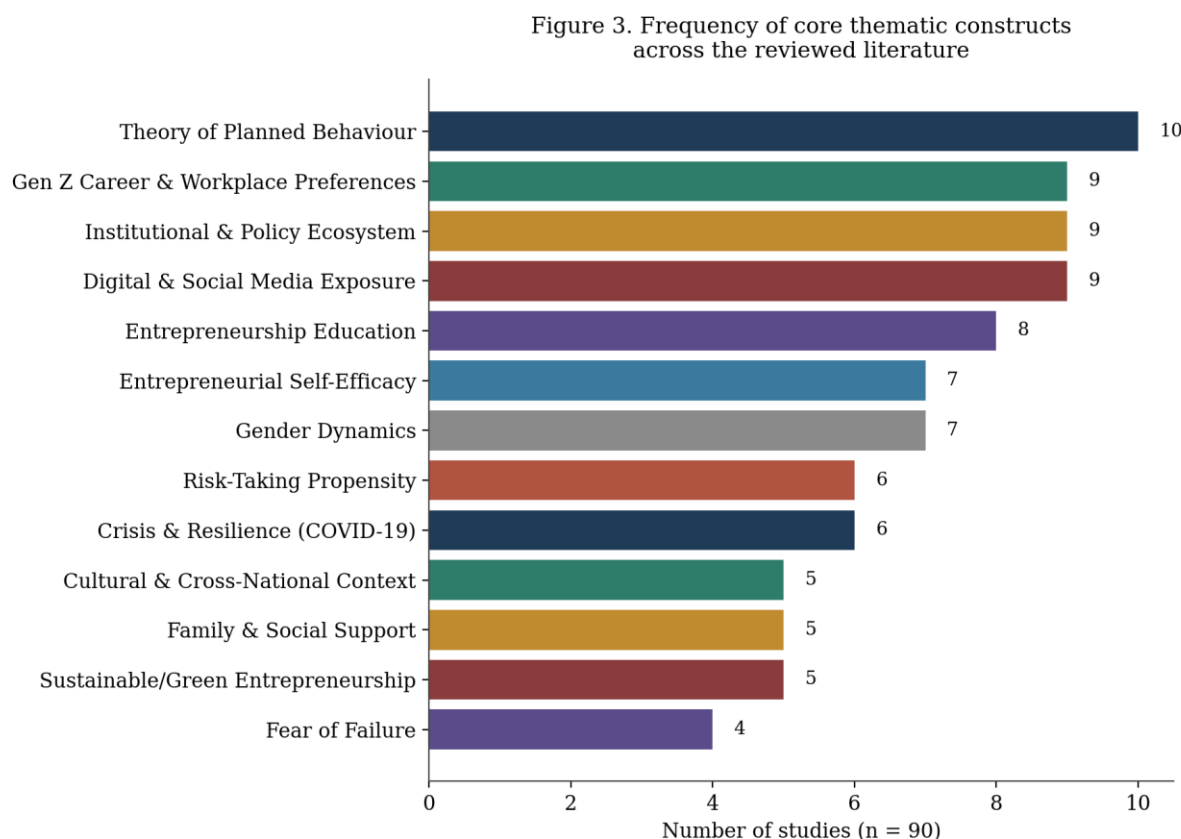


Figure 3. Frequency of core thematic constructs across the reviewed literature (n = 90).

Cluster 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as the Dominant Explanatory Framework

The most common word in the corpus is the Theory of Planned Behaviour itself, serving as the main concept in ten items. The findings of Bangladeshi researchers who applied the PRISMA methodology to a Business Administration student sample are consistent with those of most subsequent investigations: attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and resilience, the fourth predictor, positively and significantly correlate with entrepreneurial intention [39]. Peruvian, Turkish, Algerian, Chilean, and Tunisian studies report similar results, demonstrating that all four TPB constructs are positive predictors of intention. In particular, the analysis of a six-hundred-and-forty-two-student sample from Peru revealed that subjective norms and perceived behavioural control positively predicted intention [41]. The entrepreneurial self-efficacy and attitude of Turkish participants, aged seventeen to thirty, with previous start-up experience, significantly and positively predicted entrepreneurial intensity [42]. Perceived social support from family, friends, and peers predicts higher levels of perceived behavioural control in Algerian master's students [44]. Subjective wellbeing positively and indirectly predicts entrepreneurial intention of Chilean students via all three TPB constructs [45]. Finally, all three TPB antecedents were found to positively and significantly predict intention in a sample of two-hundred-and-fifty-seven Tunisian university students [46]. An extended two-step TPB model applied to a Chinese student sample demonstrated that anticipated rewards, family and teacher support, and personal ability positively predicted attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, respectively [43]. Thus, all these studies consistently demonstrate the TPB theory's applicability to various cultures with few exceptions, nevertheless, the TPB-related research predominantly focuses on people's intentions rather than their actions.

Cluster 2. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is the second most theoretically central construct, appearing as either a direct predictor or as a mediating mechanism in seven studies. The Chinese evidence is especially thick here: self-efficacy mediates the relationship between entrepreneurship education and intention [25, 26], the effect of narcissistic personality traits on intention [27], and the relationship between post-traumatic psychological growth following the COVID-19 pandemic and entrepreneurial intention [28], and the effect of emotional competence on social-entrepreneurship intention [29]. An Indonesian study of risk propensity, intention, and self-efficacy found all three dimensions positively associated with entrepreneurial behaviour amongst the students sampled [23]. Self-efficacy appears as a mediating variable in nearly every other cluster identified in this review, from education to family support to digital exposure: as such, it is not so much a separate entrepreneurial determinant as the shared psychological pathway through which elements of the entrepreneurial cultural capital transform into entrepreneurial intention.

Cluster 3. Family and Social Support

Family and social-normative influence was found to be a consistently potent cross-culturally replicated determinant in five studies. In Romania, evidence found that students with business-owning parents reported significantly higher entrepreneurial intention [30]; a qualitative systematic review of family-based antecedents concluded that having entrepreneur parents supplies prior knowledge and role models that significantly increase a student's confidence to pursue entrepreneurship [31]; and a Hungarian sample of five hundred and ninety business and economics students found that family business background has a direct positive effect on intention while also moderating the effects of other motivational factors [33]. Chinese evidence found that parental entrepreneurial background moderates the relationship between social creativity and entrepreneurial intention, which is mediated by career adaptability [32]. Together, these studies suggest that family and social approval act as a consistent cross-culturally powerful force on entrepreneurial intention, possibly comparable to self-efficacy in terms of explanatory power in collectivist cultural settings.

Cluster 4. Digital and Social Media Exposure

This cluster (9 studies) highlights that the relationship between generation Z's exposure to the culture of the startup is largely mediated by digital means, even if indirectly. Chinese evidence found that social media is not directly related to entrepreneurial intention in college students, but is entirely mediated through the channel of self-efficacy [61], which is shown in Italian high-school students through the lens of media dependency theory [62] and in culinary vocational students, where social media is indirectly related through perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy and attitude, with the latter being the most influential [60]. Vietnamese and Omani evidence takes the inclusion of social media into the extended TPB model directly (in addition to perceived risk and entrepreneurial culture) [63, 64], whereas a study of Chinese vocational students found that gender moderates the relationship between content-based versus social-based social media use on entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Sri Lankan evidence builds upon the above to indicate that the effect of social media on social entrepreneurial intention is serially mediated by both entrepreneurial self-efficacy and risk propensity [67], whereas a Chinese study of opportunity recognition found that social media's effect was mediated by prior knowledge and moderated by entrepreneurial alertness and social capital [66]. This cluster's consistent message indicates that exposure to the culture of the startup through digital means should not be treated as a single, uniform, and directly-acting construct in subsequent research.

Cluster 5. Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is the primary or secondary focus of eight studies, including all four of the corpus's meta-analyses [11, 12, 13, 68], each of which synthesizes over one hundred and eighty underlying primary studies,

and all of which find a small but positive association between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention. The meta-analyses are complemented by a three-hundred-and-fifteen-student study finding that entrepreneurial education increases both entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial behavior [88], and by Malaysian and Bosnian vocational-education studies finding that reforms targeting entrepreneurial skill formation have positive impacts on students' subsequent self-employment intentions and non-cognitive entrepreneurial skill formation respectively [93, 95]. The most important nuance concerning this cluster derives from the meta-analytic evidence, which also identified substantial variation in coefficients by country, suggesting that the association between entrepreneurial education and intention may not be easily generalized across national contexts.

Cluster 6. Institutional and Policy-Driven Ecosystem Support

Nine of the studies investigate the effect of ecosystem-level and policy-level variables on entrepreneurial intention. Evidence from Chile found that a national entrepreneurship-promotion initiative directly increased the cultural legitimacy of entrepreneurship as a career path [69], whereas a conceptual ecosystem model applied among South African youth identified education, training, and mentorship as the primary levers linking institutional support to individual entrepreneurial mindset [55]. Longitudinal evidence followed over three thousand individuals across two decades and found that an entrepreneurial learning ecosystem at the stage of adolescence, jointly shaped by family background and school education, significantly predicted later entrepreneurial careers [57], whereas a randomised field experiment found that entrepreneur mentorship causally increased the likelihood of an entrepreneurial career choice, with the effect concentrated among students whose own parents were not entrepreneurs [58]. A bibliometric systematic review of the youth social-entrepreneurship literature itself found this research area to be fragmented across separate clusters covering business strategy, social entrepreneurship, and social innovation, with no consolidated future-research agenda prior to that review [56], a finding directly paralleled in this study for the narrower Generation Z entrepreneurial-intention literature specifically.

Cluster 7. Risk-Taking Propensity and Fear of Failure

Risk-taking propensity and fear of failure, collectively spanning ten studies, constitute the corpus's most consistent evidence that these constructs function indirectly, rather than directly as drivers of intention. While Brockhaus's early comparative study found no significant difference in risk-taking between entrepreneurs, managers, and the general population, [22] later cross-country evidence suggested that the relationship between risk-taking and entrepreneurship itself depends upon a country's cultural power-distance orientation. [21] Nigerian and Kenyan evidence found that entrepreneurship-skills development and risk-taking jointly, rather than independently, shape self-employment intention, [19, 20] while an Indonesian sample also found that risk propensity, intention, and self-efficacy are positively associated with observed entrepreneurial behaviour. [23] Fear of failure is the mirror-image of risk-taking in predicting intention, being consistently and negatively associated with intention across Indonesian, Latin American, and large-sample international studies, [75, 77, 78], while a study of one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five university graduates found that fear of failure weakens the transition from entrepreneurial intention to actual behaviour, whereas the presence of a business role model strengthens it. [77] Together, this cluster suggests that popular narratives that equate startup culture primarily with risk-tolerant personalities may overstate risk-taking's direct explanatory power relative to its more consistently documented, indirect role operating through attitude and confidence.

Cluster 8. Gender Dynamics in Entrepreneurial Intention

Seven studies explored gender as a substantive analytical dimension and found it to be an important consideration in the analysis of entrepreneurial intention. First, among Indian female collegians in the north-east, self-confidence, need for achievement, and family support emerged as key predictors of entrepreneurial intention, whereas the presence of structural barriers such as limitations in credit and networks dampened entrepreneurial intention [51].

Second, a large-scale study conducted among over a thousand Peruvian students revealed that male students were more inclined to be driven by perceived behavioural control and personal attitudes, whereas female counterparts were motivated more through behavioural control and attitudes supported by social networks [89]. Third, a similar study performed in Portugal also revealed that female students outperformed their male counterparts in terms of all three of perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, and entrepreneurial intention, although the mediation of psychological-capital was only evident for females [90]. Fourth, qualitative insights gathered from Malaysian rural indigenous women entrepreneurs also revealed that these women's entrepreneurial resilience was influenced by resources, support systems, and cultural traditions [92]. Overall, these four studies demonstrate that the influence of a given entrepreneurial culture on entrepreneurial intention varies depending on gender. As such, future studies need to consider gender as an important moderating factor instead of treating it as a mere statistical control.

6.3 Thematic Evolution Over Time

In order to identify how research interests have changed throughout the period covered by this review, the six most frequent constructs found in Section 6.2 were tabulated for three periods: 2014-2019, 2020-2022, and 2023-2027. Figure 5 below shows this development.

Figure 5. Thematic evolution of the six most frequent constructs, 2014-2027

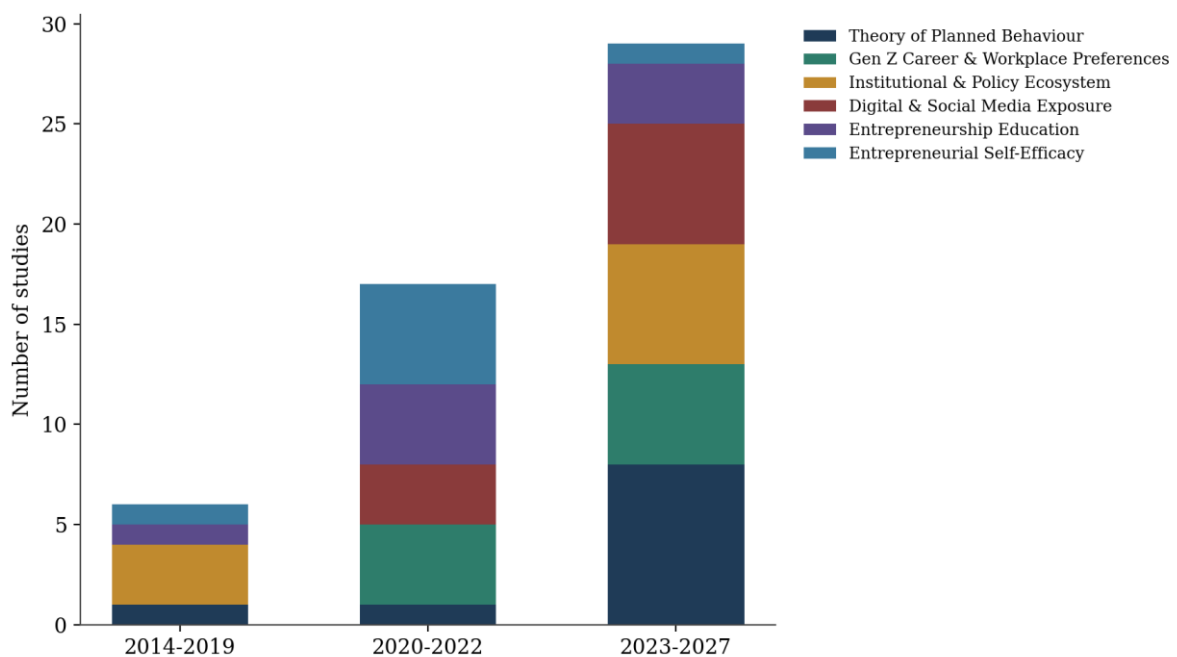


Figure 5. Thematic evolution of the six most frequent constructs, 2014-2027.

In the earliest period covered by the corpus (2014-2019), only six of the included studies fell within the six biggest clusters. These were dominated by studies on institutional and policy-ecosystem themes, plus early entrepreneurship-education studies, reflecting the field's initial preoccupation with education and policy levers. In 2020-2022, seventeen items fell within the six biggest clusters, among which entrepreneurial self-efficacy and digital/social media exposure appeared for the first time. This reflects both the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on entrepreneurial activity and the entry of Gen Z into higher education and the labour market. From 2023, studies fell within the six biggest clusters beat (29 items). The Theory of Planned Behaviour became the single biggest category, alongside increased attention to institutional ecosystem themes, digital exposure, and Gen Z's approach to careers and the workplace. Overall, this evolutionary pattern suggests that the fields transition from the domination of education-centric studies to broader considerations of how Gen Z interacts with, learns, and ingests startup culture. The sheer volume of studies from 2023 strongly suggests that post-pandemic entrepreneurial

activity paralleled by a surge in scholarly interest, akin to the rise in national-level policy activity described in Section 3.

7. Discussion

RQ1. What are the foundational concepts that underpin startup culture and entrepreneurial intention research?

This review found that the theory of planned behaviour [1], and in particular entrepreneurial self-efficacy, in the sense of Bandura's social-cognitive theory [2], provided the conceptual basis for most of the reviewed research. This is understandable in the context of the original formulation, according to which perception of control over behaviour is a proximal predictor of attitude, and in entrepreneurial studies this was expanded to include confidence in one's own abilities. For students and teachers, this means that confidence-building activities are more likely to pay off in terms of entrepreneurial intention than general awareness campaigns about the entrepreneurial lifestyle. A similar point applies to the study's second research question about the clustering of themes to be discussed below.

RQ2. What do thematic clusters reveal about the current focus of Generation Z entrepreneurship research?

The eight thematic clusters identified in Section 6.2, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, self-efficacy, family and social support, digital exposure, entrepreneurship education, institutional ecosystem support, risk-taking and fear of failure and gender dynamics, indicate that the current research views startup culture as a multi layered construct rather than a singular influence. This is consistent with an ecosystem view of entrepreneurship, wherein intention is formed through the interaction of individual traits and surrounding social and institutional conditions rather than by any single determinant alone. The emergence of gender as a distinct cluster from a mere statistical control, further indicates that the field increasingly acknowledges structural and social barriers as substantively different from psychological or informational barriers to entrepreneurial intention. This has implications for practitioners designing entrepreneurship programmes, wherein interventions addressing only one cluster such as education alone, are unlikely to be as effective as those also addressing family networks, digital communication channels and gender specific constraints. The clustering therefore provides a basis for tracing how research attention has shifted across these dimensions of time and will be next addressed.

RQ3. How have these thematic structures evolved across the period covered by the reviewed literature?

The review identified a clear shift in emphasis from institutional and education-centric research prior to 2020 toward self-efficacy and digitally mediated explanations between 2020 and 2022, and finally toward an integrated, TPB-anchored, ecosystem-based body of research from 2023 onward. This evolution indicates that the field has progressively acknowledged the limitations of any single-factor explanation of entrepreneurial intention and begun to embrace increasingly integrated, multi-causal models better adapted to a digitally native generation at the forefront of a rapidly professionalizing global startup ecosystem. The sharp increase in publication volume after 2022, evident in both Figure 1 and Figure 5, further suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic served as a distinct inflection point for this literature, a pattern directly supported by the six COVID-specific studies identified within the corpus, which each examined how pandemic-era economic disruption had influenced entrepreneurial intention, resilience, and behaviour among university students [82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87]. For future researchers, this trend suggests that studies continuing to isolate single, pre-pandemic explanatory factors risk being conceptually superseded by the field's current trajectory.

RQ4. Which specific elements of startup culture most strongly influence Generation Z's entrepreneurial intention?

The evidence reviewed here indicates most strongly entrepreneurial self-efficacy and family or social normative approval as the most direct influences on entrepreneurial intention [24, 30, 33, 39], with risk-taking propensity and digital exposure exerting influence indirectly through attitude and self-efficacy respectively [21, 61]. Fear of failure acts consistently as a negative moderator of the intention-to-behaviour transition specifically, not of intention formation itself [77]. Gender moderates the influence of these elements: this review found self-confidence and family support to be particularly decisive for female students' entrepreneurial intention specifically [51], even as female students are in distinctive terms positioned relative to male students on the underlying psychological antecedents in some national contexts [90]. This suggests that popular narratives equating startup culture predominantly with risk-taking or social media visibility may overemphasize their direct explanatory power relative to more foundational psychological, family-based, and gender-sensitive influences. For policymakers, this suggests that mentorship and family-inclusive engagement strategies, tailored when appropriate by gender, may be more effective levers than purely promotional or media-based campaigns. This finding directly addresses the research gaps and future opportunities discussed in the study's final research question.

RQ5. What gaps exist in the current literature, and what opportunities exist for future research and practice?

Despite the extensive exploration of the research field, there was no study in the ninety considered that tested all eight clusters, including self-efficacy, family influence, digital exposure, institutional support, education, risk orientation, fear of failure, and gender, in a unified model for Indian students of Generation Z. In other words, a primary research gap pertains to theoretical models that incorporate multiple predictors identified in the study. A secondary research gap is related to outcome measurements, as most of the included studies utilized entrepreneurial intentions as an outcome variable and not entrepreneurial behavior, meaning that the extent to which the predictors are associated with actual venture creation and survival remains unexplored in the context of Indian students of Generation Z, which several articles acknowledge as well [77,91]. Finally, a third research gap is represented by the fact that the number of studies conducted in India is insufficient given that the country has an emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem; thus, it can be inferred that additional articles that build upon the findings of this study are needed to fully understand the entrepreneurial process in this particular setting. The future research could involve testing the framework that includes all eight predictors, as well as the impact of these individual factors on the entrepreneurial behavior of Indian students of Generation Z. The analysis could be based on a large-scale survey or a set of qualitative interviews conducted among university students in India, which would be more informative than extrapolating the findings from the included articles in this study. For practitioners, this might mean that different priorities should be set depending on the target population, as not all the predictors were found to have a significant association with the entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors of respondents in India. In other words, it is perhaps not sufficient to merely focus on building a unified understanding of the entrepreneurial culture for students of Generation Z in India, but certain factors should be prioritized.

8. Theoretical and Practical Implications

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The given review contributes to the theory in several aspects. Firstly, by synthesizing a disparate literature, in which self-efficacy, familial influences, digital exposure, education, and institutional supports are normally investigated separately, into a single eight-cluster framework in which entrepreneurial self-efficacy represents the common psychological mechanism through which these alternative foci on startup culture act, it adds to theory. Secondly,

by extending the continued relevance of the TPB into the contemporary, Generation Z, and digitally exposed environment, specifically, and showing how classic TPB antecedents maintain their empirical validity after adjusting for the inclusion of new digitally mediated channels through which intention is generated, it contributes further to theory. Finally, by tracing the thematic evolution inherent in fifty years of literature, the review provides a grounded account of how the field's theoretical emphasis has evolved – a perspective not accessible by examining any single primary study in the corpus.

8.2 Practical Implications

For higher education institutions, the cluster of evidence on self-efficacy and family or social support indicates that building confidence, mentoring programmes, and family engagement are more likely to offer higher returns on investment for entrepreneurial intention than generic promotional exposure to entrepreneurial culture. For policymakers designing national strategies for entrepreneurship, the evidence that institutional and ecosystem support acts as a meaningful but comparatively modest lever, compared to the more direct psychological impact of self-efficacy and family support, suggests policy architecture alone, well-resourced as it may be, cannot replace psychologically grounded, mentorship-based interventions delivered close to the individual student. For platform designers and digital educators, the consistent finding that social media acts indirectly through self-efficacy rather than having a direct impact on intention, suggests digital entrepreneurship content should be designed explicitly to build perceived capability, not simply to raise awareness of entrepreneurship as a career option.

9. Conclusion

This study undertook a bibliometric analysis of the existing research literature to ascertain the patterns and trends in the study of the impact of the environment on Gen Z's entrepreneurial intentions. Ninety Scopus-indexed secondary sources were considered for the study, all of which were published in the period between 1980 and 2026. The descriptive bibliometric analysis was conducted using thematic coding to identify the trends. The analysis revealed that the focus of scholarly research has shifted from a limited understanding of formal entrepreneurship education and policy-related aspects to a more nuanced view embracing several factors in entrepreneurship education, varying from personal self-efficacy beliefs, through familial (family norms), digital (digital exposure), to situational (risk propensity, fear of failure) and sociocultural (gender roles) influences. This study proposes an eight-cluster framework grouping the individual's determinants impacting entrepreneurial intentions. It was found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and the normative influences of family or society appear to have the most direct impact on would-be-entrepreneurs. At the same time, individual risk-seeking propensities and digital exposure act as indirect influencers. This article's findings offer a theoretical basis for further empirical research, including studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and informing higher education and policymaking circles in their evidence-based considerations of entrepreneurship-related issues affecting Gen Z. With the current global trends pointing to the need for more start-ups and India being at the forefront of this development, this article's findings, which highlight the lack of Indian studies compared to those coming from East and South-East Asian countries, can be a stimulus for researchers to take up the study of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions in India. The proposed eight-cluster framework could be taken as a point of departure for such studies, including a more comprehensive assessment of the nine factors impacting entrepreneurial intentions among Gen Z in India.

10. Limitations and Future Research

It is important to note the limitations of this review. Firstly, the search was limited to Scopus-indexed, English-language, and peer-reviewed journals, meaning that relevant regional-language research and grey literature were excluded, potentially impacting the applicability of findings to under-represented contexts such as India directly

[6]. Secondly, the theming process was conducted manually by the three reviewing authors, as opposed to a bibliometric software performing automated keyword co-occurrence analysis, which may introduce subjectivity in cluster definitions, although a codification protocol was followed to mitigate this risk. Thirdly, the majority of the studies reviewed only measured entrepreneurial intentions as opposed to actual entrepreneurial action, meaning that the extent of actual venture creation based on the documented determinants remains mostly a moot point in most of the reviewed literature. Fourthly, since this study is based entirely on secondary and pre-existing data, no direct evidence specific to Indian Generation Z students can be generated; at best, existing evidence can be consolidated and gaps identified. Future research using specialised bibliometric software, longitudinal designs, and behavioural rather than intention-based outcome measures, ideally collected directly from Indian Generation Z university students, could validate, extend, and localise the eight-cluster framework presented in this review.

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