

Research Article

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The Impact of Perceived University Support on Digital Entrepreneurial Intention with Perceived Desirability as a Mediation Variable

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Digital entrepreneurship has become an increasingly prominent field of interest, with universities playing a significant role in supporting students' ambitions to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. This research aims to examine how perceived university support influences students' desirability. Furthermore, it highlights the mediating role of perceived desirability in the relationship between the support offered by universities and students' digital entrepreneurial intentions.

Materials/methods. To evaluate the relationship and analyze the conceptual model, we used structural equation modeling combined with the bootstrapping method based on data from a sample of 309 university students in Vietnam.

Results. The findings indicate that perceived university support positively influences students' perceived desirability to engage in digital entrepreneurship. Furthermore, perceived desirability also emerges as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention within the Vietnamese context. Additionally, mediation analysis reveals that perceived desirability acts as a crucial link between university support and students' intention to establish digital start-ups.

Conclusion. These findings carry implications for both university educators and policymakers by highlighting how universities can provide comprehensive educational and developmental support. This support enhances students' positive perceptions and desirability toward entrepreneurship, ultimately strengthening their digital entrepreneurial intentions.

1. Introduction

Digital entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a key contributor to economic growth and job creation, particularly in developing economies (Savastano et al., 2022; Shkabatur et al., 2022; Do et al., 2024). Over the past decade, it has emerged as a rapidly growing field of research, driven by its critical role in reshaping economic landscapes and business models (Dutot & Van Horne, 2015; Satalkina & Steiner, 2020). Despite this recognition, the field remains in its early stages, with numerous aspects yet to be thoroughly explored (Mir et al., 2022; Paul et al., 2023). Previous studies have predominantly focused on traditional entrepreneurship, leaving a research gap in understanding the distinct pathways, opportunities, and challenges associated with digital entrepreneurship (Davidsson et al., 2020; Kajol et al., 2022).

In recent years, Vietnam has made significant strides in cultivating its startup ecosystem, driven by proactive government policies and strategic initiatives. The nation currently ranks 44th on the Global Innovation Index and ranks 59th in the global startup ecosystem, positioning itself as a key player in fostering creative dynamism within Southeast Asia (StartupBlink, 2023). A pivotal milestone is the Vietnamese Government's Decision 844/QD-TTg, which outlines a comprehensive strategy to foster and strengthen the national innovation startup ecosystem through 2025. This decision underscores the collaboration among businesses, the government, and educational organizations as critical drivers of innovation and entrepreneurship. Notably, educational institutions have increasingly integrated entrepreneurship and innovation into their curricula, raising awareness and fostering entrepreneurial behavior among students, with a particular emphasis on the role of universities.

In parallel, universities are widely recognized for their significant contribution to the development of students' entrepreneurial mindset through various forms of support, including knowledge transfer, idea incubation, and business development (Su et al., 2021). However, to evaluate the effectiveness of these institutions requires moving beyond examining curriculum content and focusing on students' perceptions of the overall support provided. Students' perceptions of university support are typically assessed across three key dimensions: perceived educational support, perceived business development support, and perceived concept development support (Wegner et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the specific mechanisms through which universities influence students' digital entrepreneurial intentions remain underexplored, particularly in emerging economies like Vietnam (Walter et al., 2006; Vu et al., 2024; Truong et al., 2022; Duc et al., 2024).

Findings from previous studies suggest that university support influences the development of entrepreneurial intentions among students indirectly (Saeed et al., 2018; Wegner et al., 2020). To better understand this effect on digital entrepreneurial intentions in the Vietnamese context, this research investigates this relationship with the mediating role of perceived desirability, defined as the extent to which an individual feels attracted to becoming an entrepreneur, reflecting personal preferences for this behavior. According to the Krueger and Brazeal model (1994), this construct integrates two key components of the Theory of Planned Behavior: attitude toward the act and social norms. These factors influence an individual's perception of entrepreneurship as a viable and attractive career path. This study explores how perceived university support fosters digital entrepreneurial intention in Vietnam, emphasizing the mediating role of perceived desirability and offering actionable insights into how universities can better inspire and nurture the next generation of digital entrepreneurs.

This study aims to explore the potential of university students as future digital entrepreneurs in an emerging economy, emphasizing the mediating role of perceived desirability. By applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this study offers both theoretical and

practical perspectives on the factors that influence students' digital entrepreneurial intentions. Accordingly, our study addresses the existing research gap by answering the following questions:

RQ1: What factors makeup perceived university support, and how can it be assessed in a comprehensive way?

RQ2: How does perceived university support influence the digital entrepreneurial intentions of university students?

RQ3: Does perceived desirability mediate the relationship between perceived university support and students' digital entrepreneurial intentions?

Through these inquiries, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital entrepreneurship and offers actionable recommendations for universities to enhance their support systems, ultimately fostering a robust digital entrepreneurship ecosystem in Vietnam. The following section of the study will include the literature review in Section 2, followed by the hypothesis development in Section 3. The methodology will be explained in Section 4, and then the data analysis techniques and results will be shown in Section 5. Section 6 provides the implications, conclusions, and study limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurial intention

Digital entrepreneurship is defined as the identification and exploitation of opportunities, "the establishment of a new company with creative business ideas in the network economy, using electronic platforms in data networks, and providing its products or services based on creating value entirely electronically. The key point is that this value can only be realized through the development of information technology" (Kollmann, 2006). Recent studies suggest that digital business involves strategically leveraging digital resources to identify and capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities (Modgil et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2025). Mohammed et al. (2023) define digital entrepreneurship as the utilization of digital media combined with information and communication technology to transform the competitive landscape. Similarly, Elia et al. (2020) describe it as the creation of new value through the application of digital technology in product manufacturing, service delivery, or business management. Additionally, Kraus et al. (2019) emphasize that digital entrepreneurship involves transferring assets, services, or business components into the digital realm, effectively transforming traditional business models through digital technologies.

Entrepreneurial intention refers to an individual's commitment engaging in entrepreneurial behavior, which is shaped by the recognition of opportunities, the utilization of available resources, and the support of the surrounding environment (Liñán & Chen, 2009; Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010). According to Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991), entrepreneurial intentions are a crucial predictor of subsequent entrepreneurial actions, offering valuable insights into the cognitive factors that motivate individuals to create ventures (Loan et al., 2021; Bui et al., 2022). The existing literature highlights numerous factors influencing the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. For example, Bird (1988) categorized these determinants into two main types: individual factors and contextual factors.

2.2. Perceived desirability and its influence on the digital entrepreneurial intention

Perceived desirability refers to the extent to which an individual wishes to establish their own business, encompassing both intrapersonal and extrapersonal influences. It is considered a critical factor in fostering positive entrepreneurial intentions, particularly among students (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). Defined as the allure one feels toward entrepreneurship (Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014), perceived desirability has been empirically validated as a significant determinant of entrepreneurial intention

(Shapero, 1984; Krueger, 1993; Gatewood et al., 1995). This motivation arises not only from personal aspirations but also from social perceptions and access to essential resources (Alferaih, 2022). Research has shown that positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship are strongly associated with increased entrepreneurial intention (Yan et al., 2023), thereby encouraging individuals to seize business opportunities (Lara-Bocanegra et al., 2022). Based on these insights, this study hypothesizes that students with greater confidence and determination to start a digital business will exhibit a stronger inclination to pursue their entrepreneurial goals.

H1: Perceived desirability positively influences digital entrepreneurial intention

2.3. Perceived university support

Research highlights that even if individual-level factors can influence entrepreneurial intention, it may be more effective to consider the role of contextual factors (Saaed et al., 2018). From a contextual perspective, the university serves as a key environmental factor in shaping individuals' willingness to become an entrepreneur (Franke & Lüthje, 2004). It also plays a pivotal role in contributing to the development of the new knowledge economy (Lestari et al., 2022). Consequently, universities play a pivotal role as repositories of knowledge and act as catalysts in shaping values and fostering attitudes that support entrepreneurship. (Guerrero & Urbano, 2012; Urbano & Guerrero, 2013). Previous research emphasizes that university support plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship through various mechanisms, including university incubators (Mas-Verdú et al., 2015), technology transfer initiatives, consultancy services (Mian, 1996), and financial funding (Munari et al., 2015). These forms of support equip students with essential resources for entrepreneurship. They also enhance students' entrepreneurial awareness and motivation while aiding the development of their ventures after graduation.

While universities can support entrepreneurship through various objectively measurable initiatives, understanding their effectiveness requires assessing the extent to which they influence students. This can be achieved by measuring students' perceptions of the university support, also known as "perceived university support" (PUS). Kraaijenbrink, Groen, and Bos (2010) suggested conceptualizing PUS using three separate but related constructs: perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS) and perceived business development support (PBDS). Educational support involves offering foundational knowledge and skills essential for starting a new business, encompassing a broader concept than the knowledge typically provided by universities. Concept development support emphasizes fostering motivation, awareness, and business idea generation in the initial stages of the entrepreneurial process. In contrast, business development support focuses on providing assistance to start-ups during the later stages of the entrepreneurial journey (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). These dimensions have been empirically validated in numerous studies and are widely acknowledged as a robust framework for assessing students' perceptions across diverse national contexts (Saaed et al., 2018; Wegner et al., 2020; Vu et al., 2024).

2.4. Perceived university support toward perceived desirability

In the past, empirical studies have demonstrated the positive impact of support from universities on perceived desirability. According to the career socialization theory (Gibb Dyer, 1994), students' career choices often align with their educational experiences. Therefore, it is anticipated that students' perception of university support, particularly socializing experiences, will enhance their cognition about starting new businesses as desirable actions. There has been research indicating that perceived desirability can be understood as a combination of personal attitude and perceived social norms (Liñán et al., 2011). Firstly, regarding attitude, university support in education and concept development equips students with techniques and methods, such as market analysis, to validate the value of a business idea. Subsequently, business development support enables students to further

evaluate and refine their foundational business ideas. This combined support allows students to assess the potential profitability and feasibility of business opportunities, which can motivate their decision to pursue entrepreneurship (Bhave, 1994). Despite the inherent risks of starting a business, a positive evaluation of the new venture fosters favorable attitudes toward entrepreneurship—an essential factor in cultivating students' entrepreneurial aspirations (Liu et al., 2022). In addition, regarding subjective norms, the university's provision of entrepreneurship support creates a community where students are exposed to entrepreneurship. According to Genshu Lu et al. (2021), university support reflects the expectations of government, society, and universities for students' entrepreneurship. These expectations and support create a subjective norm where students are more likely to launch new companies. From the above aspects, it is evident that perceived university support has a positive impact on perceived desirability. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2a: Educational support positively influences perceived desirability

H2b: Concept development support positively influences perceived desirability

H2c: Business development support positively influences perceived desirability

2.5. Perceived university support and its influence the digital entrepreneurial intention

Previous research suggests that students' perceptions of university support have a positive impact on the formation of entrepreneurial intentions (Mustafa et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2019). Educational and concept development support - such as training, lectures, courses, and competitions - provides them with valuable knowledge, techniques, and methods that help validate their business ideas (Liu et al., 2022). Subsequently, business development support offers the resources needed to further assess and refine these foundational business concepts. Consequently, students develop a positive interest in starting a new business, which promotes an intention to become an entrepreneur (Shi et al., 2019). Mustafa et al. (2016) conducted a study using Malaysian samples to examine the direct positive impact of the three types of support on entrepreneurial intentions. Similarly, Shi et al. (2019) explored how university support influences students' heterogeneous entrepreneurial intentions. In general, prior research indicates a positive relationship between students' perceived university support and entrepreneurial intention. We propose the following hypotheses regarding digital entrepreneurial intention:

H3a: Educational support positively influences digital entrepreneurial intention

H3b: Concept development support positively influences digital entrepreneurial intention

H3c: Business development support positively influences digital entrepreneurial intention

2.6. The mediating role of perceived desirability

Previous research has indicated that university support indirectly influences the formation of entrepreneurial intentions among students (Shi et al., 2019; Wegner et al., 2020). Several studies have also shown that perceived university support (PUS) does not exert a direct effect on students' entrepreneurial intentions (Saeed et al., 2018). To better understand the impact of this factor on digital entrepreneurial intention within the Vietnamese context, it is essential to clarify the mediating role of perceived desirability (PD). In the context of digital entrepreneurship—particularly among university students—PD may serve as a crucial mediating factor that links contextual influences, such as university support, to entrepreneurial intention. This study investigates how perceived university support fosters digital entrepreneurial intention in Vietnam by proposing the mediating role of perceived desirability, thereby offering insights into how universities can inspire students to become digital entrepreneurs.

H4a: Perceived desirability mediates the relationship between perceived educational support and digital entrepreneurial intention.

H4b: Perceived desirability mediates the relationship between perceived concept development support and digital entrepreneurial intention.

H4c: Perceived desirability mediates the relationship between perceived business development support and digital entrepreneurial intention.

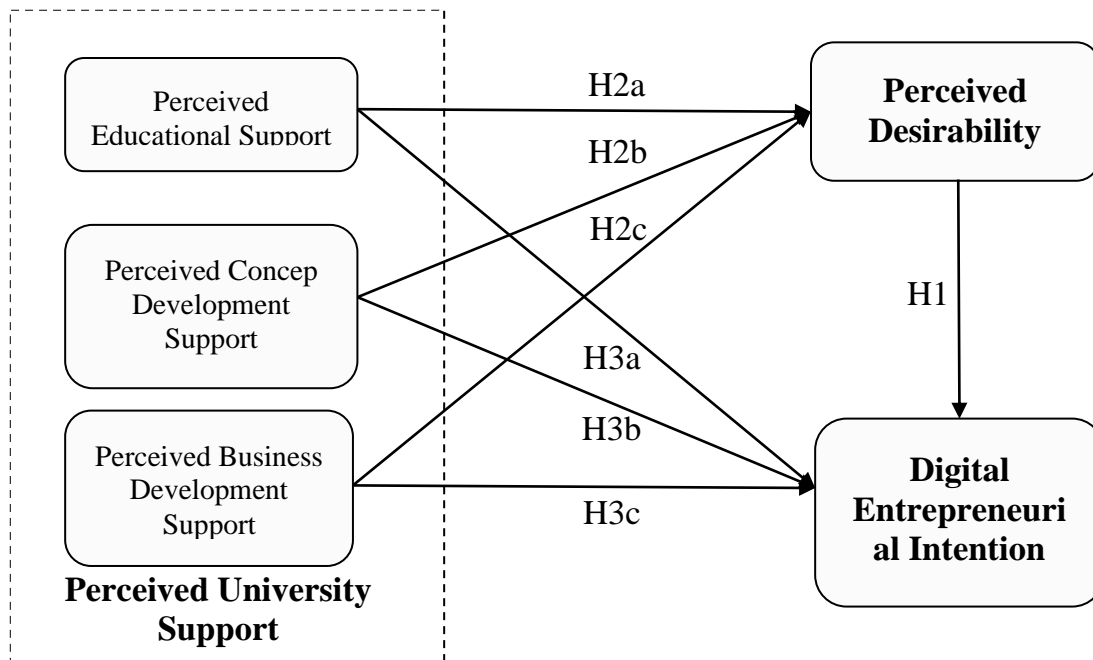


Figure 1. The proposed model. Source: Authors

The proposed research model integrates these hypotheses to provide a comprehensive assessment of both the direct and indirect effects of perceived university support on digital entrepreneurial intention, as depicted in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Data was collected using a simple random sampling method from August to October 2024 via Google Forms platform. This approach aligns with previous research on entrepreneurial intention, which frequently employs convenience sampling to overcome practical limitations when targeting university students (Nguyen et al., 2024). The questionnaire was distributed across universities in Vietnam, with student participation being entirely voluntary, based on their willingness to contribute to the research's objectives. Specifically, data were mainly collected from universities in Hanoi, Vietnam, including National Economics University, Foreign Trade University, and Hanoi University of Science and Technology.

3.2. Sample

A total of 373 responses were received. During the data cleaning process, 309 valid responses remained available for analysis, with 64 responses were omitted from the analysis due to insufficient completeness and concerns regarding response validity. These responses were characterized by a high proportion of unanswered items or patterns indicative of unreliable or inattentive answering behavior (e.g., random selection, selecting only one option for all questions). This exclusion was to ensure the quality and accuracy of the analysis results. Although the number 64 represents about

20% of the sample, the remaining sample still meets the requirements for size and representativeness for the target research group. In the final sample, 55.34% were women and 44.66% were men. The majority of respondents were aged 20 to 22 years, comprising for 70.55%. Additionally, 26.54% were aged 17 to 19, while 2.91% were over 22 years old. Many responses from students came from the Northern region, accounting for 78.96% of the sample. The majority of participants were economics students, representing approximately 73.14%, followed by engineering and other disciplines at 26.86%.

3.3. Measurement

The study utilized a researcher-designed and validated scale to measure the variables. To assess the constructs, all items were converted into a 5-point Likert scale. The survey collected demographic and occupational data alongside Likert scale questions on students' digital entrepreneurship perspectives. Its primary objective is to understand university students' digital entrepreneurial intentions in Vietnam and examine the factors influencing these intentions. Before widespread distribution, interviews with 20 students interested in entrepreneurship were conducted to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions. The survey comprises two main sections. The first section gathers participants' essential demographic information to ensure data accuracy and relevance to the study. The second section focuses on questions derived from key constructs in the research model. Each constructs is measured using multiple items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree"), quantifying participants' agreement levels and offering detailed insights into the factors shaping digital entrepreneurial intentions. The Likert scale is particularly valuable in this context as it enables researchers to assess the degree of consensus among participants regarding the factors influencing their entrepreneurial decision-making.

To ensure robustness, this study measured constructs using validated scales from prior research. The digital entrepreneurial intention (DEI) section was adapted from Aloulou et al. (2023) and Liñán (2009), both of which are widely recognized for their reliability and applicability to entrepreneurial intention research. For perceived desirability, we adopted the scale of Krueger (1993) because of its proven reliability in measuring digital entrepreneurship desirability. Additionally, some modifications were made based on Nguyen et al. (2024) to better align the model with Vietnam's unique cultural and entrepreneurial environment. Regarding perceived university support (PUS), the study synthesized 13 items from previous research (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Saeed et al., 2018), ensuring methodological rigor and relevance to Vietnam's higher education system. This adaptation ensures the constructs accurately capture the dynamics of university support in fostering digital entrepreneurial intentions in the local context.

The questionnaire underwent a rigorous development process to maximize its validity and reliability. Following a comprehensive literature review, open-ended interviews with 20 students were conducted to refine the questions, clarify ambiguous terms, and streamline the questionnaire's structure. Additionally, feedback from experts in entrepreneurship education further enhanced the instrument, ensuring it effectively measures the research constructs within the Vietnamese context. This systematic approach guarantees that the findings are both reliable and actionable, providing meaningful insights for academic and practical applications.

3.4. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM through SmartPLS 3.0 software. The PLS-SEM process involves three main steps: evaluation of the measurement model, assessment of the structural model, and examination of the impact of mediator variables. In the preliminary analysis, the measurement model was evaluated by examining reliability, convergence validity, and discriminant validity. Multicollinearity among con-structs was checked using the variance inflation factor (VIF) to ensure minimal construct interdependency. The R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 indices were calculated to evaluate the

model's fit. The bootstrapping method with 5000 samples was employed to test path coefficients and assess the mediating effect in the model. This systematic approach, incorporating advanced statistical tools and methodologies, ensured a thorough, detailed, and dependable examination and validation of the theoretical relationships proposed within the study's framework. Overall, PLS-SEM proved highly suitable for this study providing robust evaluation of the measurement model, analyzing the structural model, and examination of the mediating variable's influence.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement assessment

First, the outer loading of the observed variables was evaluated. According to Hair et al. (2013, 2020), if an observed variable has a low outer loading (<0.70), it may indicate that the variable does not significantly contribute to the corresponding factor and could be excluded from the model. As a result, four items (PD2, PBDS4, PBDS5, and PCDS5) were removed because their factor loading value was below the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

After removing these variables, Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha were used in evaluating the reliability of the scales. As reported in Table 1, Cronbach's Alpha and CR for all variables were above 0.7, demonstrating that the scale's reliability is adequate this analysis (Hair et al., 2016).

To assess convergent validity, Fornell and Lacker (1981) proposed calculating the AVE. The AVE value should exceed 0.50, indicating that at least 50% or more of the variance in the indicators is explained (Chin, 2009). As confirmed in Table 1, the AVE for each construct exceeded 0.5, supporting convergent validity. Additionally, Table 1 shows that all models meet the criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2020) for further analysis.

Table 1. Outer loading, reliability, and convergent validity. Source: Authors

| Variables | Items | Cronbach's Alpha | CR | AVE | Factor loading |
|---|-------|------------------|-------|-------|----------------|
| Digital Entrepreneurial Intention (DEI) | DEI1 | 0.926 | 0.942 | 0.730 | 0.867 |
| | DEI2 | | | | 0.855 |
| | DEI3 | | | | 0.825 |
| | DEI4 | | | | 0.887 |
| | DEI5 | | | | 0.826 |
| | DEI6 | | | | 0.866 |
| Perceived Desirability (PD) | PD1 | 0.872 | 0.913 | 0.723 | 0.857 |
| | PD3 | | | | 0.836 |
| | PD4 | | | | 0.860 |
| | PD5 | | | | 0.847 |
| Perceived Educational Support (PES) | PES1 | 0.869 | 0.902 | 0.605 | 0.805 |
| | PES2 | | | | 0.813 |
| | PES3 | | | | 0.799 |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | PES4 | | | | 0.730 |
| | PES5 | | | | 0.755 |
| | PES6 | | | | 0.759 |
| Perceived Concept Development Support (PCDS) | PCDS1 | | | | 0.789 |
| | PCDS2 | 0.766 | 0.851 | 0.588 | 0.772 |
| | PCDS3 | | | | 0.760 |
| | PCDS4 | | | | 0.745 |
| Perceived Business Development Support (PBDS) | PBDS1 | | | | 0.765 |
| | PBDS2 | 0.700 | 0.833 | 0.625 | 0.795 |
| | PBDS3 | | | | 0.811 |

N = 309; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability.

To evaluate discriminant validity, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed a hetero-trait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlation. According to this method, discriminant validity is established when the HTMT value is below 0.90. As shown in Table 2, the constructs PUS, DEI, and PD meet this threshold, confirming the presence of discriminant validity, as their HTMT values are below 0.90.

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlation. Source: Authors

| Variables | PBDS | PCDS | DEI | PES | PD |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| PBDS | | | | | |
| PCDS | 0.897 | | | | |
| DEI | 0.702 | 0.602 | | | |
| PES | 0.789 | 0.887 | 0.588 | | |
| PD | 0.709 | 0.691 | 0.825 | 0.662 | |

4.2. Structural proposed research model evaluation

In evaluating the structural model, the first step involved examining multicollinearity and identifying any data-related anomalies. According to Hair et al. (2013), a variance inflation factor (VIF) below 3.0 indicates no significant issues with multicollinearity or common method bias (CMB) (Hair et al., 2021). As shown in Table 3, all VIF values are below 3.0, confirming the absence of multicollinearity issues.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a statistical technique used to evaluate the quality of observed variables and explore hypothetical constructs. In CFA, the observed variables included in the analysis are assumed to have already been identified as belonging to specific factors. The primary function of CFA at this stage is to assess whether the observed variables within each factor adequately fit the data and meet the established standards. The CFA results of this research are presented in Figure 2.

The R-Square (R²) evaluation is used to assess the strength and robustness of the inner model's ability to predict endogenous latent components. According to Chin (2009), R² values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19, indicate a strong, moderate, and weak models, respectively. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, PD and PUS can moderately predict 58.9% of the DEI variance, with an R² value of 0.589. Additionally, PES, PCDS, and PBDS can moderately predict 41.2% of the PD variance, as indicated by the PD R² value of 0.412.

Additionally, this study assesses the effect size (f^2) following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2013) and Chin (2009). These guidelines indicated that f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 correspond to small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. As shown in Table 5, the three aspects of perceived university support (PES, PCDS, and PBDS) have a small effect on perceived desirability (PD), with f^2 values of 0.057, 0.059, and 0.027, respectively. In contrast, the impact of PD on DEI is significant, with an f^2 value of 0.514. Comparatively, the effects of PES and PBDS on DEI are relatively small, with f^2 values of 0.006 and 0.046, respectively. Additionally, PCDS shows no effect on DEI, as indicated by an f^2 value of 0.000.

In the next step, the result shows that Q² is greater than 0, indicating that the research model demonstrates predictive relevance. Based on structural analysis, the Q² value for PES, PCDS, PBDS, PD, and DEI are all greater than 0, confirming that the model meets the predictive relevance criterion.

Furthermore, a goodness-of-fit analysis was conducted based on the research findings. According to Henseler et al. (2014), a model is considered a good fit when NFI > 0.90 or close to 1, the SRMR value is less than 0.10. Table 6 reports that the NFI value is is greater 0.80, and the SRMR value is is less than 0.10, indicating that the research model is acceptable in terms of fit.

Table 3. Variance inflation factor (VIF). Source: Authors

| Variables | PBDS | PCDS | DEI | PES | PD |
|-----------|------|------|-------|-----|-------|
| PBDS | | | 2.011 | | 1.899 |
| PCDS | | | 2.538 | | 2.472 |
| PES | | | 2.398 | | 2.269 |
| PD | | | 1.701 | | |
| DEI | | | | | |

Table 4. R² estimation. Source: Authors

| | R ² | Category |
|-----|----------------|-------------|
| DEI | 0.589 | Substantial |
| PD | 0.412 | Moderate |

Table 5. f2 estimation. Source: Authors

| | f2 | Category |
|-------------|-------|---------------|
| PBDS -> DEI | 0.046 | Small effects |
| PBDS -> PD | 0.059 | Small effects |
| PCDS -> DEI | 0.000 | No effects |
| PCDS -> PD | 0.027 | Small effects |
| PES -> DEI | 0.006 | Small effects |
| PES -> PD | 0.057 | Small effects |
| PD -> DEI | 0.514 | Large effects |

Table 6. Evaluation result of fit model. Source: Authors

| | Saturated model | Estimated model |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SRMR | 0.054 | 0.054 |
| d_ULS | 0.811 | 0.811 |
| d_G | 0.355 | 0.355 |
| Chi-Square | 642.965 | 642.965 |
| NFI | 0.853 | 0.853 |

The structural model results were shown in Figure 2 and for more details about path coefficients, original sample value, t-statistics, p-values, and confidence intervals, are summarized in Table 7. The results indicated that DEI is positively influenced by PD (t-value = 11.788, p-value < 0.05), supporting hypothesis H1. This finding aligns with the EEM and consistent with previous studies (Saeed et al., 2014; Osorio et al., 2017; Vuorio et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2024). These results confirm that perceived desirability is a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention among college students.

Moreover, the results also suggested that PD was positively influenced by PES (t-value = 3.981, p-value < 0.05), PCDS (t-value = 2.485, p-value < 0.05) and PBDS (t-value = 3.914, p-value < 0.05) supporting Hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c. This observation aligns with Gibb Dyer's SCCT (1994), which proposes that students' school experiences influence their career inclinations, reflecting their learning experiences.

Similarly, the relationship between PBDS and DEI was significant (t-value = 3.413, p-value < 0.05), confirming Hypothesis H3c. In contrast to earlier theories, our investigation rejected Hypotheses H3a and H3b, given the t-values of 1.229 and 0.208 (<1.96) and a p-value of 0.220 and 0.835 (>0.05). These findings diverge from previous studies where perceived university support had a positive impact on DEI (Saeed et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2018; Premand et al., 2016). This discrepancy opens up new avenues for research on the three aspects of perceived university support regarding entrepreneurial intention, particularly digital entrepreneurial intention.

Table 7. Path coefficient. Source: Authors

| Path | B | SE | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|------------|--------|-------|---------|---------|----------|
| PES → PD | 0.275 | 0.069 | 3.981 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| PBDS → PD | 0.256 | 0.065 | 3.914 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| PCDS → PD | 0.197 | 0.079 | 2.485 | 0.013 | Accepted |
| PD → DEI | 0.600 | 0.051 | 11.788 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| PES → DEI | 0.074 | 0.060 | 1.229 | 0.220 | Rejected |
| PBDS → DEI | 0.195 | 0.057 | 3.414 | 0.001 | Accepted |
| PCDS → DEI | -0.013 | 0.061 | 0.208 | 0.835 | Rejected |

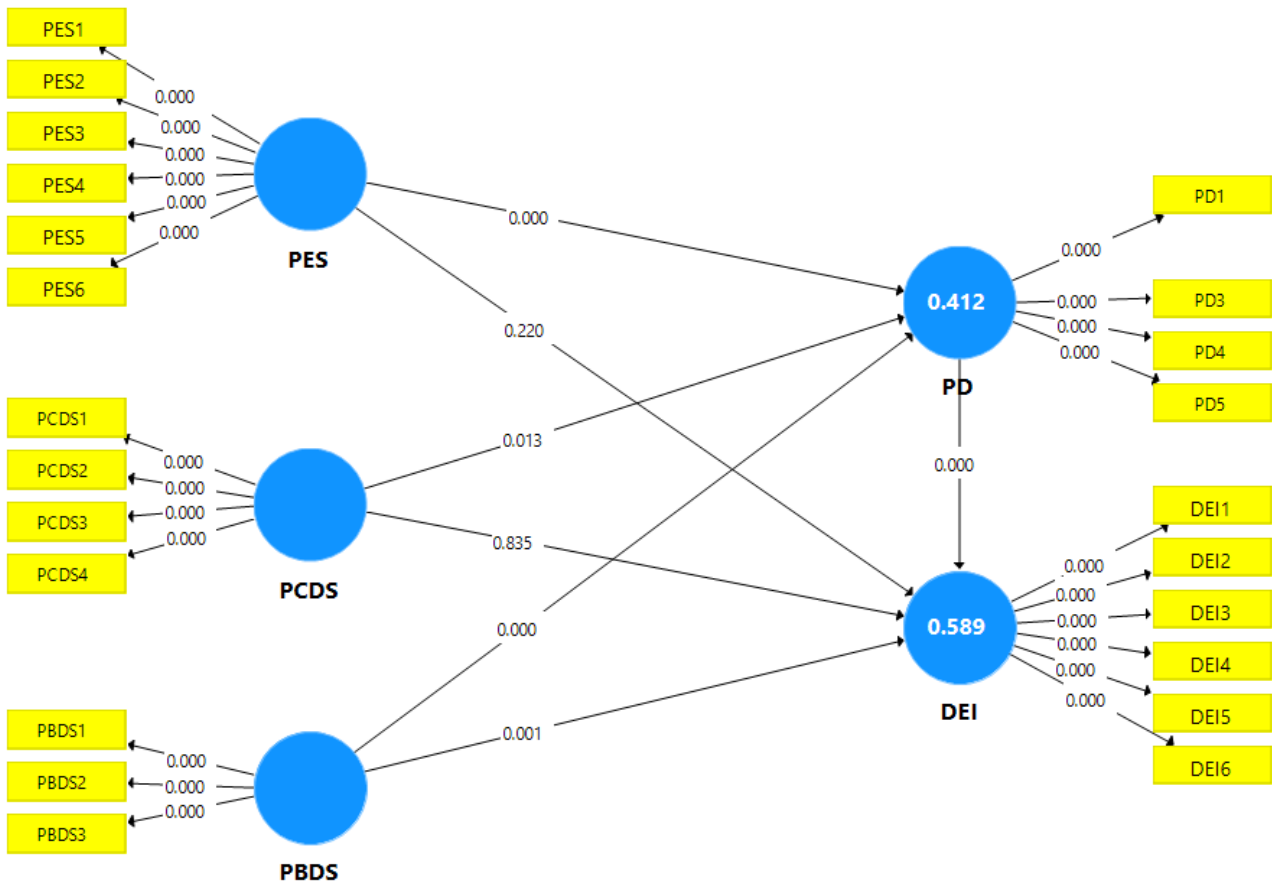


Figure 2. The structural model. Source: Authors

4.3. Mediation analysis

Our study employs a robust bootstrap test to analyze mediation effects, as bootstrapping the indirect effect offers greater statistical power than the Sobel (1982) test (Zhao et al., 2010). Furthermore, while the bootstrapping method has traditionally been applied in regression models, it is particularly effective in the PLS-SEM (Hair, 2022). The findings presented in Table 8 demonstrate that PUS (PES, PCDS, PBDS) display an indirect effect on DEI via PD, confirming that PD serves as a mediator in the relationships between PUS and DEI. Specifically, PES, PCDS, and PBDS positively

influence students' intention to become digital entrepreneurs through their PD ($\beta_{\text{PES-PD-DEI}} = 0.165$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{\text{PCDS-PD-DEI}} = 0.118$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta_{\text{PBDS-PD-DEI}} = 0.154$, $p < 0.001$). The non-significant direct effects of PCDS and PES to DEI suggest a full mediation effect, whereas the significant direct effect of PBDS indicates a partial mediation.

Table 8. Specific indirect effects. Source: Authors

| Path | B | SE | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|----------|
| PES → PD → DEI | 0.165 | 0.043 | 3.847 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| PCDS → PD → DEI | 0.118 | 0.049 | 2.422 | 0.016 | Accepted |
| PBDS → PD → DEI | 0.154 | 0.042 | 3.642 | 0.000 | Accepted |

5. Discussion

The empirical results of our study provide a clear insight into the relationship between students' perception of university support, their intention to pursue digital entrepreneurship and the mediating role of perceived desirability.

The study reveals that perceived desirability exerts a positive and significant influence on students' digital entrepreneurial intentions. This finding aligns with the Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM), which emphasizes that entrepreneurial intention is shaped by an individual's perceived desirability and feasibility. The result is also consistent with prior studies (Saeed et al., 2014; Osorio et al., 2017; Vuorio et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2024), which affirm that, among university students, perceived desirability serves as a key predictor of entrepreneurial intention. This can be explained by the fact that students who are drawn to the autonomy, creativity, and opportunities associated with entrepreneurship are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to pursue this path. Accordingly, the study concludes that perceived desirability plays a crucial role in fostering students' digital entrepreneurial intention.

The results also demonstrate that perceived educational support, concept development support, and business development support (PES, PCDS, and PBDS) significantly enhance students' perceived desirability toward digital entrepreneurship, with standardized coefficients of 0.275, 0.256, and 0.197, respectively. This supports Dyer's (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory, which posits that positive academic experiences can shape students' career interests by reinforcing their motivation and self-efficacy. The findings are further aligned with those of Shi et al. (2020), who found that perceived university support positively influences students' entrepreneurial attitudes and subjective norms. These results highlight the critical role of a supportive university environment—particularly one that promotes entrepreneurial thinking and digital competencies—in fostering students' motivation to pursue entrepreneurial careers.

However, unlike previous studies, we found that two aspects of perceived university support do not directly affect students' DEI, which contradicts earlier research (Saeed et al., 2015; Shi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, beyond direct effects, our study confirms the role of perceived desirability as a mediator between the relationship of perceived university support and digital entrepreneurial intentions of students in Vietnam. These findings suggest that students' perceptions of university support exert an indirect influence on their digital entrepreneurial intentions. Specifically, perceived educational support (PES) serves as a foundational element by equipping students with essential entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and mindset. Building on this, perceived concept development support (PCDS) fosters creativity and the generation of innovative ideas, while perceived business

development support (PBDS) provides the tools and resources needed to translate those ideas into viable ventures. When students recognize and internalize this support, their perceived desirability toward entrepreneurship increases, which in turn strengthens their entrepreneurial intentions. This highlights the interplay between environmental and personal factors, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how digital entrepreneurial intentions are formed. This underscores the critical role of perceived desirability in shaping students' intentions to pursue digital entrepreneurship. Our study added value to the inconsistencies in the literature regarding the role of universities in shaping entrepreneurial intention. While several studies have reported a positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions (Liñán, 2004; Souitaris et al., 2007), Oosterbeek et al. (2010) found a negative influence. Additionally, some empirical studies suggest no relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial interest (Lorz, 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2012). Our findings indicate that perceived university support indirectly influences college students' intentions toward digital entrepreneurship.

6. Conclusion

The study offers valuable insights for policymakers and educators by highlighting the direct and indirect influences of key factors on digital entrepreneurial intentions. Such a comprehensive understanding of these influences can support the development of effective strategies to foster and promote digital entrepreneurship across diverse contexts. The findings reveal that perceived desirability significantly and positively influences digital entrepreneurial intention (H1). Among the three components of perceived university support, perceived educational support had the strongest impact on perceived desirability (H2). Additionally, perceived university support, including perceived educational support, perceived concept development support, and perceived business development support positively influenced digital entrepreneurial intention (H3). Furthermore, perceived desirability emerged as a significant mediator, demonstrating digital entrepreneurial intention. This finding is particularly novel, as this study is the first to identify perceived desirability as a mediating factor between perceived university support and digital entrepreneurial intention. It underscores how university support fosters students' exploratory and entrepreneurial spirit. These results highlight the pivotal role of university support in shaping students' entrepreneurial desirability by demonstrating that universities can actively influence how appealing digital entrepreneurship appears to students. When students perceive strong university support—through educational, concept, and business support—they are more likely to view entrepreneurship as a desirable career path.

6.1. Theoretical implication

Firstly, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on the antecedents of digital entrepreneurial intentions. Existing research highlights the limited empirical studies and the inadequate understanding of the factors that motivate individuals to pursue digital entrepreneurship (Al-Mamary & Alraja, 2022; Paul et al., 2023; Vu et al., 2024). Thus, this study adds value to the ongoing scholarly discussion in this emerging field.

Secondly, the study clarifies the relationship between students' perception of university support and their intention to pursue digital entrepreneurship, while highlighting the mediating role of perceived desirability. The findings indicate that university support plays a key role in shaping students' entrepreneurial desires, leading them to view digital entrepreneurship as an attractive career option.

Finally, the research team proposed a new model that integrates organizational context factors, based on Wegner et al. (2020) with the perceived desirability variable from the Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM) by Shapero and Sokol (1982). By incorporating students' perception of university

support—an aspect rarely explored in previous studies—the model aims to address limitations in earlier frameworks.

6.2. Practical implication

The empirical findings of this study provide valuable practical insights for university educators and policymakers aiming to cultivate a supportive environment for digital entrepreneurship in Vietnam.

Firstly, the strong influence of perceived desirability on digital entrepreneurial intentions underscores the need for educational programs that promote optimism and enthusiasm about digital entrepreneurship. Universities and policymakers should develop initiatives that spark students' interest and motivation. For instance, incorporating experiential learning activities such as hackathons, startup simulations, and industry-led workshops into the curriculum can bridge the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, mentorship programs that connect students with successful digital entrepreneurs can significantly shape students' entrepreneurial aspirations and boost their confidence in navigating the digital economy.

Secondly, this study provides strong evidence of the crucial role of university support in shaping students' digital entrepreneurial intentions. Vietnam universities should prioritize building comprehensive entrepreneurship support systems that address students' educational, concept development, and business development needs. For example, developing interdisciplinary courses that integrate business and technology skills can equip students with a solid foundation for digital entrepreneurship. Furthermore, establish dedicated entrepreneurship centers or incubators that offer tailored guidance, funding resources, and networking opportunities, supporting students transition from ideation to implementation. By embracing this holistic approach, academic institutions can significantly boost students' perceived desirability toward digital entrepreneurship and empower them to navigate its challenges.

Finally, our findings emphasize that perceived university support not only cultivates entrepreneurial desirability but also significantly influences students' digital entrepreneurial intentions. To maintain the effectiveness of these support systems, universities should regularly assess students' perceptions of the support provided. This can be achieved through annual surveys, focus groups, or feedback mechanisms that enable institutions to identify gaps and refine their initiatives accordingly. By consistently aligning programs with students' needs and aspirations, universities can create lasting positive impact on the development of future digital entrepreneurs.

6.3. Limitations and further directions

While this study offers valuable insights into the impact of perceived university support on digital entrepreneurial intentions in Vietnam, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on online surveys may introduce random responses, potentially impacting data reliability. Incorporating more in-depth methods, such as interviews, could enhance data quality and mitigate random influences. Second, this study focuses solely on students, which presents limitations. The discrepancy between perception and reality may obscure whether individuals with digital entrepreneurial intentions will actually establish new businesses. Future research could utilize longitudinal data to provide a deeper understanding of the formation and evolution of digital entrepreneurial intentions. Finally, this study only examines the mediating effect of perceived desirability, leaving unexplored the two other factors in the EEM model. Future studies should investigate these additional factors to offer a more comprehensive perspective on the relationship between perceived university support and digital entrepreneurial intention. This section is not mandatory but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval. The respondents were informed and voluntarily participated in fulfilling the survey, their data collected from responses is only used for academic purposes. The authors further confirm that every work covered in the manuscript relevant to experimental animals or human patients has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies. Informed agreement to analyze data was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

Data Availability Statement. The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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