

The Pathways to Entrepreneurship: How Identity Style Influence Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration and Intention

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the mechanisms leading to entrepreneurship by examining how different identity styles influence entrepreneurial identity aspiration and intention. Specifically, the research seeks to understand the role of identity styles in shaping individuals' entrepreneurial aspirations and their intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities, thereby providing deeper insights into the processes underlying entrepreneurial decision-making. The results indicate that commitment ($r=0.387$, $p<0.01$) plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial identity aspiration, which strongly predicts entrepreneurial intentions ($r=0.811$, $p<0.01$). The informational identity style ($r=0.309$, $p<0.01$) and normative identity style ($r=0.314$, $p<0.01$) positively correlate with entrepreneurial identity aspiration, while a diffuse-avoidant identity style ($r=0.053$, $p>0.05$) shows no significant association. Understanding these relationships can help design targeted interventions that strengthen entrepreneurial self-concept and decision-making processes. Although some styles may hinder constructive decision-making tactics, decision-making skills can be improved over a lifetime.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial intention; entrepreneurial identity aspiration; identity style; commitment; business students.

1. Introduction

The methodologies used so far in studying the future entrepreneur have changed over the years, as the entrepreneur's profile undergoes metamorphoses over time (Liñán & Rodríguez, 2004). Identifying the determinants of entrepreneurial intentions is a key problem in economic and entrepreneurship research (Turulja et al., 2020). Entrepreneurial identity may be the "missing link" in explaining the widely cited Ajzen (1991) model of entrepreneurial intention and an "important channel for the influence of antecedents identified in other models on entrepreneurial

intention" (Celuch et al., 2017). Before starting a business, a young person must aspire to an entrepreneurial identity, thereby adopting its associated meanings and potential behaviors (Murnieks et al., 2014). To bridge the gap between their current self and their future self, individuals engage in activities that align their actions with long-term goals and strengthen their self-concept (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), as also recently explored by Pattnaik et al. (2024). The aspiration represents a crucial but underexplored motivational driver in the transition to actual entrepreneurship (Seibert et al., 2020).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Entrepreneurial Self-Perception: Identity Aspiration and Decision-Making

Entrepreneurial identity plays an important role in the connection between intention and behavior. A discrepancy between a person's current "self" and ideal "self" can create negative emotions, which in turn can lead to low self-efficacy and inaction (Tsou et al., 2023). Studies (e.g., Valencia, 2020) suggest that entrepreneurial identity is a key factor in starting a business, often even more important than entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. According to Monereo (2017), individuals who strengthen their self-perception as entrepreneurs continuously engage in internal dialogue and self-reflection on their self-concepts, such as "I-as-Leader," "I-as-Innovator," or "I-as-Owner" etc. Before making a decision, various options and roles are actively explored, while 'commitment' refers to the process of selecting and fully committing to a specific alternative. Several studies (e.g., Brännback et. al., 2021; Rosenfeld et.al., 2021; etc.) have confirmed the importance of "Self-concept" in entrepreneurship, indicating that a person's self-concept directly influences entrepreneurial behavior. This suggests that self-concept always incorporates the way individuals interpret their reality. Individuals with "identity chaos" are indifferent to important life decisions, tend to avoid making choices, and lack a sense of direction in their identity formation (Marcia, 1966). Some individuals actively explore options but avoid making decisions. Such individuals are characterized by frequently trying out different roles in search of who they are. Marcia (1966) calls this status an identity moratorium.

In contrast, individuals who have evaluated possible alternatives and made a choice regarding their identity can be described as having achieved identity. Berzonsky (1989) focuses on identity formation styles - informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant - which are characterized by differences in the strategies individuals use to deal with their life choices. According to Berzonsky (2008), identity processing styles characterize the cognitive processes of an individual and influence the formation of identity. The scientist's approach is process-oriented, paying attention to the dynamics of how identity is constructed and changed over time.

Wang et al. (2021) argue that the causal link between identity and entrepreneurial intention has not been thoroughly examined. Research on the factors that influence, and shape students'

entrepreneurial identity has been recognized as a problem (Mei & Symaco, 2022), as the transition from a student self-concept to an entrepreneurial role can lead to "identity confusion" (Nielsen & Gartner, 2017).

2.2. Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration and Entrepreneurial Intention

Individuals with strong entrepreneurial intentions are much more likely to choose entrepreneurship as their career choice (Biswas & Verma, 2021). Research indicates that entrepreneurial intention develops over time, making commitment and self-regulation highly significant (Donaldsons, 2019). According to the findings of Gabay-Mariani (2022), commitment is a key factor that drives individuals to do whatever is necessary to achieve their long-term goals, regardless of external challenges, and positively influences entrepreneurial startup activities. Research indicates that entrepreneurial intention develops over time, making commitment and self-regulation highly significant (Donaldsons, 2019). According to the findings of Gabay-Mariani (2022), commitment is a key factor that drives individuals to do whatever is necessary to achieve their long-term goals, regardless of external challenges, and positively influences entrepreneurial startup activities.

It is important to encourage individuals to take actions related to their potential future identity, as such activities are a means of validating their intended identity and supporting the process of becoming who they intend to become, according to scientists Farmer (2011).

In addition, studies in behavioral economics suggest that entrepreneurial decisions are influenced not only by identity, but also by cognitive biases and risk aversion (Saksonova & Jansone, 2021). Understanding how individuals manage uncertainty complements identity-based models.

3. Hypothesis Development

There is still a lack of sufficient theoretical understanding of the dynamics of entrepreneurial identity formation and development. It remains unclear whether entrepreneurial identity emerges primarily because of social construction or if it is influenced by other processes (Poudel, 2014). Theoretical insights (e.g., Marcia, 1980; Krueger, 2007a; Berzonsky, 2010, etc.) suggest that a strong identity forms the foundation for an individual's ability to make decisions and effectively solve problems, make choices, and draw conclusions.

Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: The Diffuse-Avoidant Identity Style (DAS) negatively affects Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA).
- H2: There is a relationship between the Informational Identity Style (IS) and Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA).

- H3: There is a relationship between the Normative Identity Style (NS) and Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA).
- H4: Commitment (C) positively affects business students' Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA).
- H5: Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA) positively influences students' Entrepreneurial Intention (EI).

4. Methods. Research design

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of Identity Style formation on Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA) to determine whether the style of identity formation influences the development of Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). The study investigates how different identity styles - such as informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant - contribute to the aspiration for an entrepreneurial identity and, in turn, influence the intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, it examines the mediating role of Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (EIA) in strengthening the relationship between identity styles and entrepreneurial intention.

To investigate the entrepreneurial intentions of business students, the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ) Version 3.1, developed by Liñán, Bradley, Basuki, and Redford (2006), was employed. Additionally, the Identity Style Inventory Version 5 (ISI-5), developed by Berzonsky, Soenens, Luyckx, and Smits (2013), was applied to measure identity styles. To evaluate Identity Aspiration, the scale developed by Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003) was utilized. All items across the questionnaires were measured using a 6-point Likert scale. To ensure scale validity and reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each part, all exceeding the 0.7 threshold. Potential biases due to convenience sampling and voluntary participation were acknowledged. A total of 147 business students aged 19 to 26 participated in the study, with 142 questionnaires considered valid for compiling the study results. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model of the study, which supports the proposed relationships between the key variables and illustrates the conceptual framework underlying the research hypotheses.

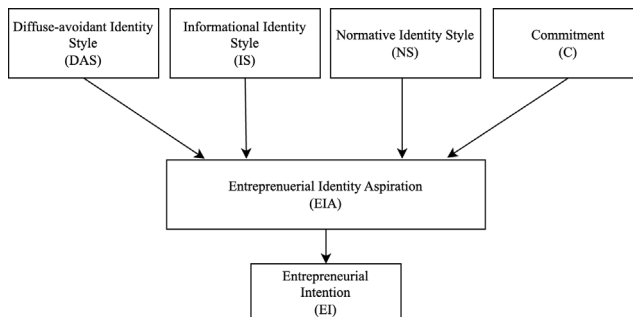


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the research. Source: Authors' research.

The Table 1 summarizes the number of valid and missing cases for six variables (DAS, IS, NS, C, EIA, and EI) in a dataset, generated using the statistical software SPSS for data corral.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics. Source: Authors' research

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
DAS	140	1,22	5,89	3,1365	0,07688	0,90966
IS	137	1,89	6	4,5296	0,06217	0,72764
NS	140	1,89	5,56	3,4865	0,06178	0,73103
C	139	2,33	5,89	3,8129	0,04334	0,56987
EIA	141	1	6	3,6613	0,11698	1,38909
EI	142	1	6	3,7324	0,12005	1,43062

Such statistics are used to assess the quality and completeness of the dataset before proceeding with analysis.

5. Data collection and discussion

Correlations between all main variables were calculated at the sum-score level (Table 2). The results provide insights into how identity styles relate to entrepreneurial identity aspiration, helping to understand the underlying mechanisms influencing entrepreneurial intention.

Table 2. Correlations between variables. Source: Authors' research

		EIA	EI	DAS	IS	NS	C
EIA	Pearson Correlation	1	,811**	,053	,257**	,309**	,387**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,533	,002	,000	,000
	N	141	139	140	137	140	138
EI	Pearson Correlation	,811**	1	,060	,297**	,241**	,368**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,480	,000	,004	,000
	N	139	142	139	136	139	138
DAS	Pearson Correlation	,053	,060	1	-,100	,539**	,417**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,533	,480		,246	,000	,000
	N	140	139	140	137	140	138
IS	Pearson Correlation	,257**	,297**	-,100	1	,297**	,542**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	,000	,246		,000	,000
	N	137	136	137	137	137	135
NS	Pearson Correlation	,309**	,241**	,539**	,297**	1	,611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,004	,000	,000		,000
	N	140	139	140	137	140	138
C	Pearson Correlation	,387**	,368**	,417**	,542**	,611**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	138	138	138	135	138	139

This study examines the relationships between different identity styles, entrepreneurial identity aspiration (EIA), and entrepreneurial intentions (EI). Commitment describes the extent to which an individual feels personally invested in the formation of their identity and is willing to make decisions that support the commitment to implement the identity.

The strong positive correlation observed in the analysis is between entrepreneurial identity aspiration and entrepreneurial intentions ($r=0.811$, $p<0.01$). This correlation indicates that individuals with high entrepreneurial identity aspiration are highly likely to develop entrepreneurial intentions.

The correlation analysis reveals no significant relationship between diffuse-avoidant identity style and entrepreneurial identity aspiration, ($r=0.053$, $p>0.05$). This indicates that a diffuse-avoidant identity style, characterized by a tendency to procrastinate or avoid making decisions about one's identity, does not significantly influence entrepreneurial identity aspiration. The normative identity style also shows a moderate positive correlation with entrepreneurial identity aspiration ($r=0.314$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals who adhere to societal expectations and conform to established norms are more likely to aspire toward an entrepreneurial identity. While a normative identity style may seem contrary to the innovative nature of entrepreneurship, these results imply that adherence to socially accepted values, such as responsibility and commitment, can contribute to entrepreneurial aspirations. Interestingly, social norms did not have a significant impact on entrepreneurial intention. This could be attributed to cultural or generational shifts, where youths prioritize self-directed goals over societal expectations.

Commitment demonstrates a positive correlation with entrepreneurial identity aspiration ($r=0.387$, $p<0.01$). This finding underscores the importance of identity stability and dedication to specific goals in fostering entrepreneurial aspirations. Strong commitment likely provides individuals with a clear sense of direction and purpose, supporting the development of entrepreneurial aspirations and subsequent behaviors. Commitment, or the ability to remain dedicated to a set of long-term goals, emerged as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial identity aspiration in this study. Commitment emerged as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial identity aspiration. It provides individuals with clarity, direction, and the perseverance needed to face entrepreneurial challenges.

6. Theoretical and practical implications

The findings provide compelling evidence for the critical role of identity processes in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations and intentions. Informational and normative identity styles, along with identity commitment, emerge as significant predictors of entrepreneurial identity aspiration. An informational identity style, characterized by active self-reflection and openness to new information, is a critical driver of entrepreneurial identity aspiration. Individuals with this style seek out and process information about themselves and their environment, enabling them to make informed decisions about their career paths. For aspiring entrepreneurs, this

reflective approach is particularly important, as it facilitates the recognition of opportunities, the evaluation of risks, and the development of innovative ideas, which could be achieved by using a multidisciplinary approach (Braslina et al., 2024). Diffuse-avoidant identity style is not conducive to entrepreneurial aspirations. This finding reinforces the notion that decision-avoidant tendencies and a lack of goal orientation hinder the development of an entrepreneurial identity. The results align with and extend identity-based intention models, suggesting that entrepreneurial education must evolve beyond skill-building to identity formation as a core objective. Also, these findings imply that entrepreneurship education should emphasize self-reflection, identity exploration, and long-term commitment. Curriculum could integrate identity-development exercises to foster entrepreneurial mindsets

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