

ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN GEN Z: THE ROLE OF FINANCIAL STRESS

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Abstract

Generation Z represents younger individuals born in the midst of growing technological innovations. They are considered digital natives and are known to be entrepreneurially inclined. However, there is growing concern about these groups' declining entrepreneurial intention. This study aimed to investigate financial stress (FS) as a previously unexplored variable that could determine the variance in EI in Gen Z. Two hundred and eleven undergraduates were randomly drawn from different institutions of higher learning in River State, Nigeria. Data for the study was gathered using the Financial Stress Scale- College Version (FSS-CV) and the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ). The result showed a significant regression equation $F(1,209) = 231.83, P < .05$, indicating that FS significantly predicted EI among the cohort with an R^2 of .231, demonstrating that the FS contributed 23.1% of the variation in the student's EI. Thus, the study's outcome confirms the study's hypothesis that FS would significantly predict EI among Gen Z. The practical implication and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: Gen Z, financial stress, entrepreneurial intention, undergraduates

BACKGROUND

The scope of entrepreneurship in contemporary society has expanded dramatically. The trend is a shared global phenomenon that is persistently expanding worldwide. Entrepreneurship is typically defined as the capacity to identify or create a business opportunity aimed at profit generation and societal advancement. Entrepreneurship remains vital to various societies because it contributes to progress in various ways (Gamede, 2020). Many researchers have emphasized the significance of entrepreneurial endeavors to the expansion of an economy. (Audretsch, 2018; Bosma et al., 2018; Doran et al., 2018; Galindo-Martín et al., 2020; Hamdan et al., 2020; Huang & Chen, 2021; Mohammadi, 2020; Peprah & Adekoya, 2020; Stoica et al., 2020; Urbano et al., 2019; Zouita, 2021), including wealth creation (Hitt et al., 2001; Islam, 2020; Ketchen et al., 2007; Oladokun, 2021; Uchehara, 2019), job creation (Ijiwole, 2019; Nkechi et al., 2012; Panda, 2021; Richard et al., 2021; Ugoani & Ibeonwo, 2015). Many countries focus on entrepreneurship's role in economic growth by creating jobs and wealth. Increased job opportunities and higher incomes may contribute to higher national income. As a result, entrepreneurship promotes individual financial well-being and a higher standard of living. However, engaging in entrepreneurial activity necessitates a sound mind.

In order to generate new business, the intention is a critical component of entrepreneurship. (Mahfud et al., 2020). Intentions have been recognized as a significant predictor of deliberate actions (Farrukh et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial intention (EI) reflects an individual's disposition to establish, gain, and sustain a business. Similarly, Thompson (2009) described entrepreneurial intention as an individual's self-acknowledged intention to set up a new business project consciously. The term relates to exploring and assessing information required for business formation (Choo & Wong, 2006). The fundamental principle of entrepreneurship is the conscious intent that precedes a specific enterprise establishment because it determines the starting point of a new venture. Accordingly, Choo and Wong (2009) noted that entrepreneurial activities are a function of entrepreneurial intentions. It is assumed to predict individuals' choice to institute their businesses (Singh & Onahring, 2019). Notably, entrepreneurship encompasses an opportunity identification process that is undoubtedly intentional (Krueger et al., 2000). Thus, intention assumes a principal role in entrepreneurship. EI has attracted huge research attention in recent decades (Agu et al., 2021; Bako et al., 2018; Dan-Jumbo & Ogbu Edeh, 2019; David & Lawal, 2018; Doan & Phan, 2020; Gujrati et al., 2019; Ibidunni et al., 2021; Igwe et al., 2020; Isiwu & Onwuka, 2017; Syed et al., 2020). Consequently, one of the principal components of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is financial well-being and financial capability that strengthens entrepreneurial activities.

Having grown up in a technologically advanced environment, members of Generation Z will play a significant role in Nigeria's economic growth in the coming years. The youth of today and tomorrow will play a significant role in Nigeria's economic growth. Generation Z and its contribution to the formal and informal sectors are starting to appear (Irawanto & Novianti, 2021). Indeed, these cohorts are the first to have never known life without the internet or social media, which has shaped their attitudes and abilities to operate online. Gen Z is not just comfortable with rapidly changing technology; they are set to become the authoritative figures on technology in the modern workplace. Notably, this generation in focus is geared toward shaping business and innovation in Nigeria in the future. In light of this, the younger generation exhibits a considerable passion and appetite for entrepreneurship. However, what is particularly encouraging is how many of them are driven by the desire to use innovation to address contemporary problems and enhance lives rather than by the desire for individual financial gain. However, Gen Z will also inherit some significant difficulties. For instance, this group is hit the hardest when it comes to unemployment and financial stress. Therefore, their plans to start a business are probably hindered by financial difficulties.

In recent years, Nigerian education has been focused on teaching students how to think like entrepreneurs. More and more, education and training in entrepreneurship are becoming part of the curriculum at all levels of education. Teaching students about entrepreneurship makes them more likely to start their businesses. (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Numerous disparate studies have applauded the existence of entrepreneurial education in the education system of Nigeria (Adegun, 2013; Akhuemonkhan et al., 2013; Aladejebi, 2018; Babatunde et al., 2021; Faloye & Olatunji, 2018; Jonathan, 2018; Kulo et al. 2018; Shaibu & Mmeremikwu, 2017; Ubong, 2017; Yatu et al., 2018). With the increasing recognition of entrepreneurship as a pathway to self-employment, the young are encouraged to embrace the entrepreneurial programs instituted to develop EI. Indeed, these programs are designed to prepare and build students to have entrepreneurial thinking and become enterprising individuals contributing to economic and sustainable development (Unachukwu, 2010). Nevertheless, intimation suggests a wide variation in an individual's EI. Accordingly, literature abounds that seems to indicate that personality traits, subjective norms, role models, perceived behavioral control, attitudes, entrepreneurial education and support, demographic variable, and social support are the commonly identified correlates of EI (see., Adeyonu et al., 2019; Agbim et al., 2010; Bin Jomah, 2018; Dong et al., 2019; Kim & Lim, 2019; Kološta et al., 2018; Shamsudin et al., 2017; Tran & Korfflesch, 2017; Usman & Kamau, 2017; Xu et al., 2016). However, financial stress is a probable variable that has not received much research attention in EI, thus, justifying the present study.

There is an increasing concern that the gen z group frequently experiences high financial stress, which could negatively affect their well-being, academic engagement, and performance if not addressed. These groups, especially in developing nations, face challenges occasioned by punitive financial situations. Financial stress (FS) entails the inability to meet one's financial obligations, which involves psychological and emotional effects (Northern et al., 2010). Nonetheless, FS arouses behavioral responses and propels an individual to behave in a certain way to address situations. Similarly, financial stress among the younger generation has been linked with financial-seeking behavior (Britt et al., 2011; Grable & Joo, 2001).

Thus, these cohorts could be motivated to embrace available entrepreneurial programs, increasing EI. Conversely, FS could decrease interest and demotivate EI. The present study aims to investigate FS as a scarcely explored variable that could significantly influence EI among Gen Z.

Hypothesis: *FS would significantly predict EI among Gen Z.*

Method

The present study adopted a quantitative research method to comprehensively understand how financial stress can affect entrepreneurial intention. Students enrolled in diverse institutions of higher learning in River State were recruited for the study. The respondents included male and female undergraduates aged between 18 and 30, with a mean age of 22.18. They were conveniently pooled from various departments and faculties within the institutions. In more detail, the respondent consisted of students in all-year studies from multiple studies, including social sciences, business management, sciences, and engineering. A convenience random sampling method was employed due to its commonality in entrepreneurship research. The students were approached between December 2022 and February 2023 and were asked to participate in the survey. In total, approximately 234 students consented to participate in the quantitative research. After completing the consent form, they were given the research questionnaire to fill on the spot. Indeed, research assistants were trained to assist when needed. After the validation process, it was observed that 16 copies of the research instrument were improperly filled, and seven were unreturned. However, the 211 correctly filled questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis.

Instruments

The respondents completed a self-measure of the Financial Stress Scale – College Version (FSS-CV developed by Northern, O'Brien, & Goetz, 2010). The FSS-CV was designed to measure students' financial stress and consists of 22 items covering various financial domains associated with a student's financial status and stress level. The scale is in Likert form, and each item requires students to rate their personal experience on a 4-point scale. The FSS-CV displayed high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .872). Also, the respondents completed the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ), initially developed by Linan and Chen (2009), which measures students' entrepreneurial intention. The Likert-type questionnaire measures readiness for entrepreneurship.

Result

A cross-sectional research design was employed for the study. The table below shows the result of a simple linear regression analysis conducted to test the interaction between FS and EI. The result showed a significant regression equation $F(1,209) = 231.83, P < .05$, with an R^2 of 231, indicating that the FS contributed 23.1% of the variation in the student's EI. Thus, the study's outcome confirms the study's hypothesis that FS would significantly predict EI among Gen Z.

Table: 1 Table showing regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of FS on EI

	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.82	.089		20.52	.000
Financial Stress	.87	.059	.877	14.89	.000
R^2	711				
F	231.83				

Discussion

The present study examined whether financial stress would predict entrepreneurial intention among Gen Z. The findings revealed a positive interaction between FS and EI at $F(1,209) = 231.83, P < .05$. As expected, the result indicated that FS accounts for 23.1% of EI variation among the Gen Z. This means that financial stress positively impacts entrepreneurial thinking. Therefore, the study suggests that FS presents a pathway to acquiring entrepreneurially conscious behaviors in Gen Z. Accordingly, the finding helps fill the literature gap by revealing the relationship between financial stress and entrepreneurial intention. The result corroborates the findings of Britt et al. (2011) and Grable and Joo (2001), who reported similar findings among undergraduates from different educational backgrounds. Thus, as young people strive to survive financial difficulties while also adhering to social demands, they become more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This finding suggests that self-efficacy is a probable explanatory association through understanding how financial stress triggers entrepreneurial behaviors among Gen Z. In other words, in predicting entrepreneurial intention in Gen Z based on the level of financial situation, one also needs to appraise the extent to which the individual believes in their ability to face and successfully learn a skill in a business.

Practical implication

The study's finding advocates that the effect of financial stress should be given attention to foster the development of entrepreneurial intention in the current generation. This is especially important given that Nigeria is one of the world's developing countries where financial difficulties seem to create some psychological and behavioral concerns. More so, the result provides valuable data to counselors, school management, skill acquisition centers, and the general public in categorizing financial stress as a motivating factor rather than a deterrence.

Conclusions

The present study explored the role of financial stress on entrepreneurial intention among Gen Z. The result of the regression analysis indicated a significant positive interactional effect between the variables. Based on the findings, it is concluded that FS positively influences EI. Consequently, the study is challenged with limitations. Firstly, the study was a survey, so causal inference was not allowed. An experimental approach might determine the causal relationships between the variables. Also, the sample size poses a limitation to the generalization of the result. Therefore, a comprehensive sampling technique is needed for future research. However, the study contributes to the entrepreneurship literature by revealing financial stress as an understudied psychological channel that could determine entrepreneurial intention in the younger generations.

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