Modeling Entrepreneurial Career Intentions of Textile and Apparel Undergraduates: An Examination of the Moderating Role of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Skills

Kittichai Watchravesringkan  
*University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Nancy N. Hodges  
*University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Jennifer Yurchisin  
*University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Jane Hegland  
*South Dakota State University*

Elena E. Karpova  
*Iowa State University, karpova@iastate.edu*

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Authors
Kittichai Watchravesringkan, Nancy N. Hodges, Jennifer Yurchisin, Jane Hegland, Elena E. Karpova, Sara B. Marcketti, and Ruoh-Nan Yan

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Kittichai Watchravesringkan, Nancy Hodges, and Jennifer Yurchisin, University of NC, USA
Jane Hegland, South Dakota State University, USA
Elena Karpova and Sara Marckett, Iowa State University, USA
Ruoh-Nan Yan, Colorado State University, USA

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Higher education programs designed to foster interest in entrepreneurship are growing throughout the United States and are particularly popular among female and minority students (Walstad & Kourilsky, 1998; Wilson, Kickul & Marlino, 2007). Likewise, studies suggest that this interest is great among students of textile and apparel programs, a predominantly female population (Hodges & Karpova, 2009). Therefore understanding the underlying motivations that drive students to pursue an entrepreneurial career is critical. Yet to date, no known studies explore the influence of cognitive processes (i.e., personal values and entrepreneurial career attitudes) on entrepreneurial career behavioral intentions. The purpose of this study was to empirically develop a comprehensive model of textile and apparel students’ entrepreneurial career intention that combines both cognitive and behavioral decision making processes.

According to the cognitive decision making perspective, college students make rational, goal-oriented career decisions and such decisions occur in a series of steps, ranging from an assessment of their own personal values to the likelihood of choosing a particular career (Brown, 2002). Researchers assert that a personal value is motivational and goal-oriented and regulates an individual’s intentional goals and commitments to achieve them (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Despite the well-recognized significance of the influence of personal values on consumption attitudes and behavior, little research exists that examines students’ entrepreneurial career intentions building on the concept of personal values. Thus, in the context of this study, it is expected that personal values may function as grounds for students’ favorable attitudes and behavioral decisions toward entrepreneurial careers. Based on the literature, four hypotheses were developed and tested:

H1: Students’ personal values (e.g., self-actualization, social affiliation) will directly influence their attitudes toward an entrepreneurial career.
H2: Students’ attitudes toward an entrepreneurial career will directly influence their entrepreneurial career intentions.
H3: Students’ assessment of the knowledge essential to an entrepreneurial career will moderate the relationships between their personal values and attitudes toward an entrepreneurial career.
H4: Students’ assessment of the skills essential to an entrepreneurial career will moderate the relationships between personal values and attitudes toward an entrepreneurial career.

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire with textile and apparel undergraduates at four U.S. universities. Of the 345 usable questionnaires, 94% (n=323) of
respondents were female and the mean age was 20.8. The questionnaire contained a combination of theoretically based scales (e.g., Wilson et al., 2004), and all measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale. Factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on all constructs. Results indicated that all constructs were unidimensional except personal values (two factors were extracted for personal values: self-actualization and social affiliation). All measures exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.70$). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the measurement model and revealed that the model was valid and reliable. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was subsequently performed to test the hypothesized relationships in the model. Results revealed a $\chi^2$ of 267.42, RMSEA of 0.081, $\chi^2$/df of 3.26, CFI of 0.96, TLI of 0.95, GFI of 0.91, and AGFI of 0.86, suggesting satisfactory fit.

Results revealed that attitude toward an entrepreneurial career was positively influenced by the self-actualization value ($r=.17$, $p < .01$), but not the social affiliation value. Thus, H1 was partially supported. As expected, entrepreneurial career intention was positively influenced by attitude toward an entrepreneurial career ($\beta=.96$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. To examine moderating effects, entrepreneurial knowledge and skills variables were each categorized into low and high groups using a median split. The difference in the regression slope estimates between low and high groups for entrepreneurial knowledge was .06 and for entrepreneurial skills was .42, and $\Delta\chi^2$ revealed significant differences between these two groups for both moderators on the relationship between self-actualization and attitudes toward an entrepreneurial career, but not on the relationship between social affiliation and attitudes, thereby partially supporting H3 and H4.

Study results establish a model of personal values – attitude – behavioral intention among the respondents. Results revealed that the self-actualization value significantly influenced attitudes, which, in turn, influenced entrepreneurial career intentions. In addition, both entrepreneurial knowledge and skills moderated the relationship between self-actualization and entrepreneurial career attitudes. Thus, the model offers a deeper understanding of the influencing role of personal values and entrepreneurial knowledge and skills on entrepreneurial career choice. Further testing of model applicability among this student population is needed.

References: