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EXPERIENCE, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

INTENCIÓN EMPRENDEDORA
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EL PAPEL DE LAS HABILIDADES
BLANDAS Y LOS MODERADORES DE
RECURSOS DIGITALES, EXPERIENCIA
Y REDES SOCIALES



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ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS AND MODERATORS OF DIGITAL RESOURCES, EXPERIENCE, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

INTENCIÓN EMPRENDEDORA EN LA ERA DIGITAL: EL PAPEL DE LAS HABILIDADES BLANDAS Y LOS MODERADORES DE RECURSOS DIGITALES, EXPERIENCIA Y REDES SOCIALES

ABSTRACT

This study examines how soft skills influence the entrepreneurial intention of university students in digital contexts, incorporating the moderating role of digital resources, prior entrepreneurial experience, and support networks. Based on a cross-sectional, non-experimental, and correlational design, the research surveyed 535 undergraduate students from business and economics programs at a Mexican public university. The survey instrument included validated scales for entrepreneurial intention, soft skills (creativity, proactivity, internal locus of control, and risk aversion), and contextual moderators. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests confirmed the internal consistency of all constructs. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that creativity and internal locus of control were significant and positive predictors of entrepreneurial intention, while risk aversion showed a significant negative effect. Proactivity, despite its theoretical relevance, did not reach statistical significance. A second regression model incorporating interaction terms indicated that none of the proposed moderators significantly altered the primary relationships between soft skills and entrepreneurial intention. These findings underscore the differential impact of specific soft skills and call for more nuanced educational interventions that strengthen creativity and internal locus of control, while also addressing students' ability to manage uncertainty. Although contextual factors did not show a moderating effect, their potential role in indirect or mediated pathways should be further investigated. Overall, the study contributes to a more integrative understanding of the psychological and contextual variables that shape entrepreneurial intention in digitally mediated educational environments.

Keywords: entrepreneurial intention, soft skills, digital resources, regression model

RESUMEN

El presente estudio analiza cómo las habilidades blandas influyen en la intención emprendedora de estudiantes universitarios en contextos digitalizados, incorporando el papel moderador de los recursos digitales, la experiencia emprendedora previa y las redes de apoyo. A través de un diseño cuantitativo, no experimental, transversal y correlacional, se encuestó a 535 estudiantes de licenciatura de programas económico-administrativos en México. El instrumento incluyó escalas validadas para medir la intención emprendedora, habilidades blandas (creatividad, proactividad, locus de control interno y aversión al riesgo) y factores contextuales. Los análisis factoriales exploratorios y de confiabilidad confirmaron la consistencia interna de los constructos. El modelo de regresión lineal múltiple reveló que la creatividad y el locus de control interno fueron predictores positivos y significativos de la intención emprendedora, mientras que la aversión al riesgo mostró un efecto negativo. La proactividad, pese a su relevancia teórica, no alcanzó significación estadística. En un segundo modelo, se incorporaron términos de interacción para analizar efectos moderadores, los cuales no resultaron significativos. Estos hallazgos destacan el impacto diferencial de ciertas habilidades blandas y sugieren la necesidad de intervenciones educativas más precisas, que fortalezcan la creatividad y el locus de control interno, y preparen a los estudiantes para enfrentar la incertidumbre. Si bien los factores contextuales no mostraron efectos moderadores directos, su papel potencial en trayectorias indirectas o mediadas requiere mayor investigación. En conjunto, el estudio contribuye a una comprensión más integral de los factores psicológicos y contextuales que configuran la intención emprendedora en entornos educativos mediados por tecnologías digitales.

Palabras clave: intención emprendedora, habilidades blandas, recursos digitales, modelos de regresión

1. INTRODUCTION

In a global context increasingly shaped by digital transformation, entrepreneurship has evolved beyond a purely economic strategy to become a comprehensive pathway for personal, professional, and social development. Entrepreneurial intention—understood as the conscious willingness to initiate a new venture or project—has been widely examined from psychological, educational, and sociocultural perspectives. However, the rise of digital environments has introduced new dynamics that reshape the factors underlying this intention.

Within this framework, so-called soft skills—such as creativity, proactivity, locus of control, and risk tolerance—have emerged as essential competencies for navigating contexts marked by volatility, uncertainty, and ongoing innovation. Simultaneously, access to digital resources, prior entrepreneurial experience, and the density or quality of support networks function as moderating elements that can either strengthen or hinder the formation of such intention.

This article empirically explores how these variables interact to shape entrepreneurial intention among upper secondary students in Mexico, within an increasingly digitalized environment. Based on the findings, the study aims to deepen the understanding of youth entrepreneurship in the digital age, offering valuable insights for both public policy design and contemporary entrepreneurship education.

1.1. Digital entrepreneurship and the social context

In the last decade, digital entrepreneurship has transformed the way businesses practices and how people interact socially (Kraus et al., 2019). Companies such as Google or Apple have not only reshaped the global economy but have also redefined communication channels, access to information, and consumption models (Richter et al., 2015). Muafi et al. (2021) argue that the convergence of artificial intelligence, digital twins, and the Internet of Things (IoT) enables the anticipation of product failures, the optimization of supply chains, and the delivery of real-time personalized experiences.

Conceptually, digital entrepreneurship is defined by the application of digital technologies in both the creation of new ventures and the transformation of existing organizations (Elia et al., 2020). This phenomenon encompasses both digitally native startups and the digital transformation of traditional firms through the utilization of big data, artificial intelligence, and cloud-based platforms (Hsieh & Wu 2019). Research shows that these technologies enhance flexibility and predictive capacity, helping entrepreneurs manage uncertainty (Benner & Tushman, 2015). Digital fosters innovation, job creation, and economic growth (Nambisan, 2017).

It also promotes the development of new business tools and methods (Geissingner et al., 2019; Ghezzi & Cavallo, 2020). By operating through multisided platforms—such as crowdfunding systems, peer-to-peer marketplaces, and app stores—digital entrepreneurs reinforce collaborative models that combine the resources and capabilities of multiple actors (Li et al., 2017;). Nevertheless, issues of governance, privacy, and inclusion

persist, as access and opportunities remain uneven, especially across gender and social status (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). Social initiatives during COVID-19 exemplify how digital entrepreneurship can mobilize resources to address societal needs (Yáñez-Valdés et al., 2023). Ultimately, institutional and educational support is key for building inclusive digital ecosystems (Li, 2023).

1.2. Entrepreneurial intention in the digital context

Digital Entrepreneurial Intention (DEI) refers to the predisposition to launch ventures supported by digital technologies in dynamic, hyperconnected environments. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), it depends on attitude toward digital entrepreneurship, subjective norms (perceived social pressure), and perceived behavioral control over the use of digital technologies (Öztorun & Efeoğlu, 2025). Training programs strengthen these determinants by increasing familiarity and confidence with digital tools.

Entrepreneurial digital self-efficacy—the confidence to use technology for business—has emerged as a strong predictor of DEI (Bachmann et al., 2024; Mir et al., 2023). Risk tolerance and specialized training also contribute as individuals more comfortable with uncertainty and exposed to targeted content tend to show higher entrepreneurial intention (Darmanto et al., 2022; Youssef et al., 2021). In parallel, social media skills, role models, and online communities enhance both self-efficacy and social norms, supporting the move from intention to action (Akhter et al., 2022).

Current research highlights the need for educational programs that integrate digital skills—such as data analytics and platform marketing—with pedagogical approaches that foster innovation and calculated risk-taking (Ismail & Hussain, 2024). Cultivating DEI thus requires the combined development of technical abilities, innovative thinking, and resilience within a supportive ecosystem.

1.3. Soft skills as antecedents of entrepreneurial intention

Soft skills, defined as social, communicative, and attitudinal competences, are decisive for the development of entrepreneurial intention because they complement technical knowledge and help manage the challenges of venture creation (Mardikaningsih, 2022; Garcez et al., 2025). Failures in teamwork or collaboration often arise not from technical gaps but from poor communication and emotional regulation (Darmawan et al., 2021). Negotiation, conflict resolution, customer orientation, and teamwork exemplify competences that translate theory into practice (Pratama et al., 2025).

From the perspective of the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), soft skills shape entrepreneurial intention directly—by supporting risk-taking, critical thinking, self-confidence, and perseverance—and indirectly, by fostering favorable attitudes, enhancing perceived control, and legitimizing entrepreneurship through subjective norms (Tem et al., 2020; Sriarianie et al., 2024). They encompass cognitive styles, such as planning and problem-solving, as well as personality traits like initiative, perseverance, and self-confidence (Rose et al., 2024). Empirical evidence confirms

that training in these competences, especially when combined with hard skills, increases predisposition to entrepreneurship and resilience in early stages (Putra & Darmawan, 2022; Hmieleski & Powell, 2018). In educational settings, active methodologies—simulations, mentoring, and internships—promote peer interaction and consolidate both interpersonal and cognitive skills (Liao et al., 2022). For the purposes of this study, softskills are defined as four competences: proactivity, creativity, locus of control and risk aversion, which represent key antecedents of entrepreneurial intention in the digital age.

Proactivity refers to the ability to anticipate change, take initiative, and shape the environment to achieve personal or professional goals (Hu et al., 2018). It has been consistently linked to job performance and entrepreneurial intention (Bilal et al., 2021; Huang & Kee, 2024). In digital environments, proactivity enables active learning of new tools and the transformation of technological uncertainty into strategic opportunity (Garcez et al., 2025).

Creativity defined as the ability to generate novel and useful ideas underpins innovation and differentiation (Karami et al., 2024). Digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the IoT expand creative processes by enabling co-creation and prototyping on online platforms (Hisrich & Soltanifar, 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2025). Educational uses of digital storytelling and multimedia tools further enhance entrepreneurial creativity (Tiernan & Donlon, 2025).

Locus of control refers to the belief in personal agency influences entrepreneurial intention, often mediated by competences and self-efficacy (Hamzah & Othman, 2023). In digital contexts, it guides decision-making in areas such as online reputation or self-directed learning. Internal locus of control, when paired with digital literacy, predicts entrepreneurial intention more strongly (Permana et al., 2024).

Risk aversion refers to the tendency to avoid uncertainty negatively affects entrepreneurial decisions (Baluku et al., 2020; Tran & Pham, 2024). While highly risk-averse individuals prefer stability, lower aversion fosters openness to experimentation and resilience. In digital ecosystems, it translates into willingness to invest in emerging technologies, cope with cybersecurity threats, and navigate platform volatility (Basiglio et al., 2025).

1.4. Moderators of the Relationship Between Soft Skills and Entrepreneurial Intention

The influence of soft skills—creativity, proactivity, risk aversion, and locus of control—on entrepreneurial intention is conditioned by contextual moderators: digital resources, prior entrepreneurial experience, and support networks (Pérez-Macías et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2023). Access to digital platforms enhances the impact of individual competences; for example, social media engagement has been shown to amplify the effect of creativity on entrepreneurial intention among university students (Miranti et al., 2024).

Previous entrepreneurial experience, even when unsuccessful, provides tacit learning that reduces risk aversion and strengthens the locus of control, both of which are crucial in digital ecosystems characterized by iteration and pivoting (Lopes et al., 2025). Likewise, interpersonal and institutional networks—comprising mentors, peers, or incubators—offer not only emotional and cognitive support but also enable knowledge exchange and idea validation (Al Saifi et al., 2016).

1.5. Study Model and Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework previously developed, this study proposes a conceptual model that examines the influence of four soft skills—creativity, proactivity, locus of control, and risk aversion—on entrepreneurial intention (Figure 1). These soft skills are considered behavioral predictors of entrepreneurial activity. However, it is acknowledged that this relationship may vary depending on contextual factors. Therefore, the model incorporates three moderating variables: access to digital resources, prior entrepreneurial experience, and support networks. These dimensions allow for the identification of conditions under which soft skills have a greater or lesser impact on entrepreneurial intention.

From this structure, the following hypotheses are defined:

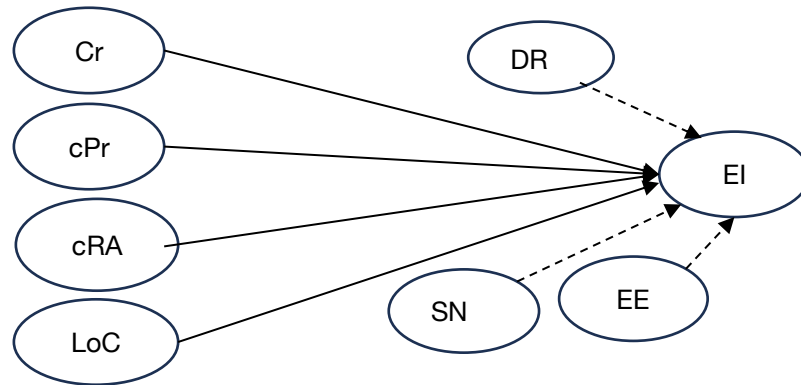
- H1. Creativity positively influences entrepreneurial intention.
- H2. Proactivity positively influences entrepreneurial intention.
- H3. Internal locus of control positively influences entrepreneurial intention.
- H4. Risk aversion negatively influences entrepreneurial intention.

Moderating effects:

- H5. Access to or perception of digital resources positively moderates the relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial intention.
- H6. Prior entrepreneurial experience positively moderates the relationship between proactivity and entrepreneurial intention.
- H7. Support networks positively moderate the relationship between internal locus of control and entrepreneurial intention.
- H8. Access to support networks and digital resources attenuates the negative effect of risk aversion on entrepreneurial intention.

Figure 1

Conceptual model



Note. DR = Digital Resources; EEx = Entrepreneurial Experience; SN = Support Networks; Cr = Creativity; Pr = Proactivity; RA = Risk Aversion; LoC = Locus of Control; EI = Entrepreneurial Intention. Solid lines represent direct relationships between soft skills and entrepreneurial intention. Dotted lines indicate moderating effects.

2. METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and correlational design, consistent with the aim of examining relationships between personal and contextual variables in the formation of entrepreneurial intention.

The sample consisted of 535 undergraduate students enrolled in business and economics programs at a public university in Mexico. Of these, 55.5% identified as women, 42.6% as men, and 1.9% as non-binary or preferred not to specify. The participants' average age was 20.8 years (SD = 2.15), with a range from 17 to 28 years. Regarding academic progression, 68.9% were in the first four semesters of their program, while the remaining 31.1% were in more advanced stages. Participants were selected through simple random sampling and responded voluntarily to an online questionnaire.

The instrument included eight sets of items. Entrepreneurial intention, the dependent variable, was measured with the six-item scale of Liñán and Chen (2009). Independent variables—creativity, proactivity, locus of control, and risk aversion—were assessed with adapted items from Rosique-Blasco et al. (2017). Moderating variables comprised perception of digital resources (four items), prior entrepreneurial experience (four items), and support networks (three items), designed based on prior literature and validated for clarity and internal consistency. All constructs were rated on 7-point Likert scales, and scores were calculated from item means. Reliability

coefficients for all scales exceeded the .70 threshold, and exploratory factor analyses supported their factorial validity.

Analyses were conducted in RStudio. The procedure included descriptive statistics, reliability and exploratory factor analyses, and bivariate correlations. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression models were estimated in two stages: first, with soft skills as predictors, and second, including moderating variables and interaction terms (mean-centered). Model validity was evaluated through adjusted R-squared values, statistical significance, and consistency with theoretical expectations.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability

To assess the structural validity of the scales used, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted by dimensions (Table 1), using maximum likelihood extraction without rotation. Sampling adequacy was confirmed through significant KMO and Bartlett tests.

Entrepreneurial intention presented high factor loadings (.68–.88), explaining 66% of variance with $\alpha = .92$. Creativity explained 53% of variance ($\alpha = .84$) with loadings of .65–.85 after removing one item. Proactivity showed consistent loadings (.70–.83), explaining 57% of variance, with α under review but preliminarily acceptable. Risk aversion retained four items (variance explained 44%, $\alpha = .76$) with more heterogeneous loadings (.55–.79). Locus of control kept five items (.64–.82), explaining 52% of variance with $\alpha = .84$. Support networks retained three items after item removal, explaining 44% with $\alpha = .69$.

Among moderators, entrepreneurial experience yielded loadings of .55–.81, explaining 52% with $\alpha = .81$, while perceived digital resources explained 54% with $\alpha = .81$ (loadings .63–.83). Together, results support convergent validity and internal consistency of all constructs.

Table 1

Results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability of the study variables

Items	Factor loadings	Explained Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha (a)
Entrepreneurial Intention		66 %	0.92
IE1	0.68		
IE2	0.82		
IE3	0.87		

Table 1
Results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability of the study variables

Items	Factor loadings	Explained Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha (a)
IE4	0.74		
IE5	0.86		
IE6	0.88		
Creativity		53 %	0.84
Cr1	0.68		
Cr2	0.80		
Cr3	0.85		
Cr4	0.65		
Cr5	0.66		
Proactivity		57 %	
Pr1	0.73		
Pr2	0.72		
Pr3	0.77		
Pr4	0.83		
Pr5	0.70		
Risk Aversion		44 %	0.76
RA1	0.69		
RA2	0.55		
RA3	0.79		
RA4	0.59		
Locus of Control		52 %	0.84
LoC1	0.66		
LoC2	0.78		
LoC3	0.82		
LoC4	0.68		
LoC5	0.64		
Support Networks		44 %	0.69
SN1	0.69		
SN2	0.73		
SN3	0.53		

Table 1

Results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability of the study variables

Items	Factor loadings	Explained Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha (a)
Entrepreneurial Experience		52 %	0.81
EE1	0.81		
EE2	0.79		
EE3	0.71		
EE4	0.55		
Digital Resources		54 %	0.81
DR1	0.65		
DR2	0.80		
DR3	0.83		
DR4	0.63		

3.2. Correlation Analysis

Means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations with 95% confidence intervals were computed (Table 2). Entrepreneurial intention correlated positively with creativity ($r = .47, p < .01$), proactivity ($r = .43, p < .01$), locus of control ($r = .41, p < .01$), and risk aversion ($r = .13, p < .01$), though the latter was weaker due to its inverse conceptual nature.

Moderators also correlated significantly with entrepreneurial intention: entrepreneurial experience ($r = .48, p < .01$) showed the strongest association, followed by digital resources ($r = .31, p < .01$) and support networks ($r = .15, p < .01$). Creativity and proactivity were highly intercorrelated ($r = .75, p < .01$), suggesting a tendency to co-occur, which should be considered in further analyses.

Table 2

Bivariate correlations among the study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Entrepreneurial Intention	-						
Creativity	.47**	-					
	[.40, .53]						

Table 2
Bivariate correlations among the study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Proactivity	.43** [.36, .50]	.75** [.71, .78]	-				
Risk Aversion	.13** [.04, .21]	.33** [.25, .40]	.38** [.31, .45]	-			
Locus of Control	.41** [.34, .48]	.48** [.42, .55]	.60** [.54, .65]	.42** [.35, .49]	-		
Digital Resources	.31** [.23, .38]	.41** [.34, .48]	.43** [.36, .50]	.14** [.06, .22]	.27** [.18, .34]	-	
Entrepreneurial Experience	.48** [.41, .54]	.48** [.42, .55]	.43** [.35, .49]	.10* [.02, .19]	.27** [.18, .34]	.55** [.49, .61]	-
SN	.15** [.07, .23]	.19** [.11, .27]	.23** [.15, .31]	.18** [.10, .26]	.36** [.29, .43]	.30** [.22, .37]	.17** [.09, .25]

Note. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval. * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

3.3. Base Model of Multiple Linear Regression

To test the study's hypotheses, a multiple linear regression model was estimated, incorporating four soft skills as predictors: creativity (CR), proactivity (PR), internal locus of control (LC), and risk aversion (RA), as predictors of entrepreneurial intention (EI), measured by six standardized items on a seven-point Likert scale

The model was significant ($F(4, 530) = 50.27, p < .001$), explaining 27.5% of the variance in entrepreneurial intention ($R^2 = .275$; adjusted $R^2 = .2696$). This finding supported the general hypothesis that soft skills exert a significant combined effect on entrepreneurial intention (Table 3).

At the individual level, three hypotheses were supported:

- Creativity was a strong positive predictor ($\beta = .404, SE = .072, t = 5.60, p < .001$), confirming H1.

- Locus of control was also positive and significant ($\beta = .345$, $SE = .067$, $t = 5.18$, $p < .001$), supporting H3.
- Risk aversion showed a negative and significant association ($\beta = -.152$, $SE = .054$, $t = -2.80$, $p = .005$), consistent with H4.

In contrast, proactivity did not reach significance ($\beta = .129$, $SE = .080$, $t = 1.61$, $p = .107$), leading to rejection of H2.

Model diagnostics indicated normally distributed residuals, absence of heteroscedasticity, and no influential outliers, supporting the robustness of the estimates. Overall, the base model highlights the differentiated roles of specific soft skills: creativity and locus of control as strong positive drivers, risk aversion as a negative factor, and proactivity as non-significant in this educational context.

Table 3
Multiple linear regression

Variable	B	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	1.22	0.342	3.56	< .001
Creativity	0.404	0.0721	5.6	< .001
Proactivity	0.129	0.0797	1.61	0.107
Locus of Control	0.345	0.0666	5.18	<.001
Risk Aversion	-0.152	0.0542	-2.8	0.005

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; p = significance level. The dependent variable is Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). Independent variables were previously standardized. Values of $p < .05$ were considered statistically significant.

3.4. Moderated Regression Model

After testing the direct effects, a moderated regression model was estimated to incorporate contextual variables (digital resources, prior entrepreneurial experience, and support networks) and their interactions with soft skills. All predictors were mean-centered before computing interaction terms.

The model was significant ($R^2 = .357$, $p < .001$), explaining 35.7% of the variance in entrepreneurial intention—an 8.2% improvement over the base model ($\Delta R^2 = .082$). Table 4 summarizes the estimated coefficients.

Regarding main effects, three variables remained robust predictors: creativity ($\beta = .249$, $SE = .07$, $t = 3.48$, $p < .001$), locus of control ($\beta = .367$, $SE = .07$, $t = 5.42$, $p < .001$), and prior entrepreneurial experience ($\beta = .270$, $SE = .04$, $t = 7.06$, $p < .001$). Risk aversion continued to exert a negative effect ($\beta = -.110$, $SE = .05$, $t = -2.10$, $p = .037$). Proactivity ($\beta = .050$, $p = .506$), digital resources ($\beta = -.010$, $p = .740$), and support networks ($\beta = -.010$, $p = .849$) were not significant as independent predictors.

Interaction effects showed only marginal significance. The interaction between creativity and digital resources was weak and negative ($\beta = -.063$, $SE = .03$, $t = -1.80$, $p = .073$), suggesting a potential but inconclusive moderation (H5 not supported). Proactivity \times experience ($\beta = .038$, $p = .225$) and locus of control \times support networks ($\beta = .060$, $p = .081$) were also non-significant, leading to the rejection of H6 and H7. Finally, the three-way interaction of risk aversion with digital resources and support networks did not reach significance ($\beta = -.022$, $p = .272$), rejecting H8.

Overall, the extended model confirms that soft skills remain central predictors of entrepreneurial intention, while the expected moderating roles of digital resources, experience, and networks were weak or absent. This suggests that contextual effects may be nonlinear or require different operationalization.

Table 4
Regression Model with Moderating Variables

Term	B (Estimate)	SE	t	p
Intercept	5.09	0.05	93.19	<.001
Creativity (Cr)	0.25	0.07	3.48	<.001
Proactivity (Pr)	0.05	0.08	0.67	.506
Locus of Control (LoC)	0.37	0.07	5.42	<.001
Risk Aversion (RA)	-0.11	0.05	-2.1	.037
Digital Resources (DR)	-0.01	0.04	-0.33	.740
Entrepreneurial Experience (EE)	0.27	0.04	7.06	<.001
Support Network (SN)	-0.01	0.04	-0.19	.849
Cr xDR	-0.06	0.03	-1.8	.073

Table 4
Regression Model with Moderating Variables

Term	B (Estimate)	SE	t	p
Pr x EE	0.04	0.03	1.21	.225
LoC x SN	0.06	0.03	1.75	.081
RA X DR X SN	-0.02	0.02	-1.1	.272

Note. SE = standard error. This model included second- and third-order interaction terms between personal variables (soft skills) and moderating variables (digital resources, entrepreneurial experience, and support networks). The dependent variable was Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). All variables were mean-centered prior to creating the interaction terms. A p-value < .05 was considered statistically significant.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm the relevance of soft skills as central drivers of entrepreneurial intention, especially in educational contexts transitioning toward digital and autonomous models. As anticipated, creativity and locus of control emerged as consistent and significant predictors. These results validate claims linking such competences to greater confidence, risk tolerance, and the ability to transform ideas into ventures. Creativity showed the strongest association, echoing prior evidence that places it at the core of generating innovative solutions and value propositions in uncertain environments (Garcez et al., 2025; Mardikaningsih, 2022).

Risk aversion maintained a negative relationship with entrepreneurial intention, supporting earlier research that identifies high sensitivity to risk as a barrier to entrepreneurial behavior (Putra & Darmawan, 2022). This underscores that entrepreneurial intention requires not only skills but also psychological readiness to face uncertainty. Although proactivity was not significant, its positive correlation suggests an indirect role through self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, or personal commitment (Hmieleski & Powell, 2018).

Moderators—digital resources, social support networks, and prior entrepreneurial experience—did not significantly alter the main relationships. While this contrasts with some studies (Öztorun & Efeoğlu, 2025; Elnadi & Gheith, 2023), several explanations are plausible. These resources may act as enabling conditions rather than direct moderators, the relative homogeneity of the sample may have reduced variability, and some non-significant effects could reflect measurement issues. Future research should adopt refined scales and longitudinal designs.

Overall, entrepreneurship appears as a multifactorial phenomenon where competences interact with social and institutional resources. The absence of strong moderating effects does not imply irrelevance; instead, contextual factors may operate indirectly or through mediation. This is especially relevant in digital environments where networks shape how students learn and collaborate (Bachmann et al., 2022).

Practically, the results suggest that entrepreneurship education should strengthen soft skills, particularly creativity and locus of control, through active learning methodologies. Programs must also foster ecosystems that encourage experimentation and allow failure as part of the learning process. Integrating individual competences with supportive contexts can promote a more resilient entrepreneurial culture aligned with 21st-century challenges.

Finally, this study aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), positioning entrepreneurship education as both a professional strategy and a driver of inclusive development.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that soft skills do not exert a uniform influence on the entrepreneurial intention of university students. Creativity and internal locus of control emerged as strong drivers, while risk aversion acted as a significant barrier. Proactivity, although theoretically relevant, did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that its effect may be mediated by other variables not captured in this model.

The analysis of contextual moderators—digital resources, prior entrepreneurial experience, and support networks—did not reveal significant effects, underscoring the complexity of entrepreneurial ecosystems. These findings indicate that such factors may operate indirectly or through more complex mechanisms, which future research should address with refined measures and longitudinal designs.

From a practical standpoint, the results highlight priorities for entrepreneurship education. Pedagogical interventions should emphasize creativity and locus of control while fostering greater risk tolerance and personal agency, both essential for navigating volatile, digitally mediated environments. Programs that combine skill development with supportive contexts can better prepare students to innovate, take calculated risks, and sustain entrepreneurial initiatives.

Overall, this research contributes to understanding the individual competences shaping entrepreneurial intention in the digital age. Future studies should expand the scope to include institutional and cultural factors and validate these results in broader populations. Advancing in this direction will strengthen the foundations of equitable and transformative entrepreneurship education aligned with contemporary societal challenges.

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