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Digital Entrepreneurial Intention In Busan: A Study Of International Students

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Abstract-International students can connect host-country digital resources with cross-border market knowledge, but their entrepreneurial intentions may be weakened by unclear regulation, unequal access to local networks, and sociocultural distance. This study develops and tests an integrated model linking institutional clarity, perceived regional entrepreneurial ecosystem support, and sociocultural adaptation to digital entrepreneurial intention among international students in Busan, Republic of Korea. Using 425 respondent profiles, the study evaluates institutional, ecosystem, and cultural drivers of intention. The measurement model demonstrates strong internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and satisfactory overall fit. All contextual drivers are positively associated with entrepreneurial intention, with ecosystem support emerging as the strongest predictor. Academic disciplines differ in average perceptions and intentions, particularly between technical or business-oriented students and humanities-oriented students, although structural relationships remain broadly comparable across groups. The findings support a place-sensitive view of digital entrepreneurship in which technological opportunity depends on intelligible institutions, inclusive ecosystem access, and confidence in navigating local social practices. Because the evidence is synthetic, the reported patterns require confirmation through ethically collected field data.

Keywords- *Acculturation; digital entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial ecosystems; institutional clarity; international students*

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital entrepreneurship has become central to innovation policy because digital artifacts, platforms, and networks reshape opportunity recognition, venture design, market access, and scaling (Nambisan, 2017; Autio et al., 2018; Nambisan et al., 2019). These features are especially relevant to international students, who may combine digital capabilities with knowledge of both host and home markets. Yet digital opportunity is not institution-free: entrepreneurs still require legal permission, banking access, mentors, investors, partners, and social legitimacy within particular places (Spigel, 2017; Elia et al., 2020).

International students are a strategically important but underexamined entrepreneurial population. They possess international experience and cross-border market bridges, while simultaneously facing visa restrictions, language barriers, weak local networks, and uncertainty about how institutions treat foreign founders. This condition reflects transnational mixed embeddedness, in which action is shaped by resources and constraints in both origin and destination contexts (Bagwell, 2018; Dheer, 2018; Ram et al., 2017).

Busan combines advanced digital infrastructure, a major logistics base, universities, cultural industries, and ambitions for technology-based development. However, Korea's startup activity remains concentrated around Seoul and Gyeonggi, and international students may experience a gap between technological opportunity and practical access. Recent Korean studies emphasize stronger regional startup systems and immigration-related assistance for international student entrepreneurship (Jeon & Son, 2024; Kim, 2025; Kim et al., 2025). This produces an infrastructure-friction paradox: the environment may be digitally advanced while legal, financial, network, and cultural pathways remain difficult to navigate.

This study integrates institutional clarity, perceived regional entrepreneurial ecosystem support, and sociocultural adaptation as contextual drivers of digital entrepreneurial intention. It also evaluates disciplinary heterogeneity. The contribution is threefold: integrating institutional, ecosystem, and acculturation perspectives; positioning international students as distinctive actors in a regional ecosystem; and distinguishing differences in ecosystem exposure from differences in the mechanisms that shape intention.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Digital entrepreneurship remains regionally embedded because digital firms depend on local talent, finance, regulation, communities, and complementary networks (Audretsch & Belitski, 2017; Malecki, 2018). Entrepreneurial ecosystems comprise interdependent cultural, social, institutional, and material attributes, but resources create value only when actors can access and combine them through networks (Acs et al., 2017; Brown & Mason, 2017; Wurth et al., 2022). International students therefore provide a demanding test of ecosystem inclusiveness.

Institutional clarity concerns whether visa transitions, permissible work, company registration, taxation, banking, payment systems, and university procedures are understandable and workable. The theory of planned behavior suggests that clearer pathways increase perceived control and feasibility (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000). H1: Institutional clarity is positively associated with digital entrepreneurial intention.

Perceived ecosystem support captures practical access to incubators, coworking spaces, digital infrastructure, mentors, finance, events, and founder networks. Formal availability is insufficient when selection criteria, communication, and informal referrals exclude international participants (Cavallo et al., 2019; Neumeier et al., 2019). H2: Perceived regional entrepreneurial ecosystem support is positively associated with digital entrepreneurial intention.

Sociocultural adaptation reflects confidence in host-country language, hierarchy, business etiquette, relationship protocols, and social acceptance. It is an operational capability rather than complete assimilation and can reduce social uncertainty during pitching, negotiation, and partnership formation (Berry, 1997; Zhong et al., 2025). H3: Sociocultural adaptation is positively associated with digital entrepreneurial intention.

Academic disciplines offer different forms of entrepreneurial capital. Business students may be more familiar with market analysis and finance, engineering or IT students with product development, and humanities or creative students with cultural and service opportunities that may be less visible to technology-oriented incubators (Maresch et al., 2016; Gilmartin et al., 2019). H4a predicts mean differences across disciplines; H4b predicts differences in structural relationships.

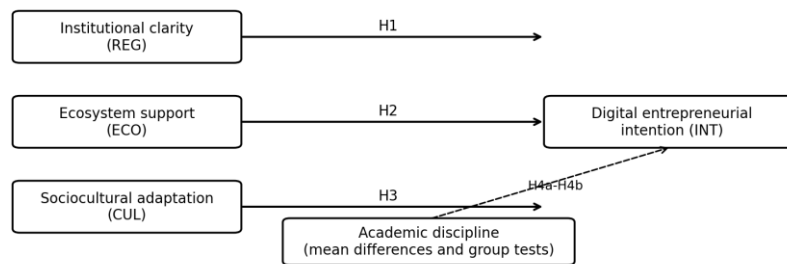


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

II. METHOD

The study uses a cross-sectional quantitative design to evaluate the proposed instrument and structural relationships. The dataset contains 425 profiles representing international undergraduates in Busan, distributed across business or logistics, engineering or information technology, and humanities or creative fields. Visa status and Korean proficiency were included as descriptive characteristics. The evidence is synthetic and is used to demonstrate the internal coherence and analytical implications of the proposed model rather than to claim direct observation of actual students.

TABLE I. RESPONDENT PROFILE

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Academic discipline	Business/logistics/trade	150	35.3
	Engineering/CS/IT	179	42.1
	Humanities/social sciences/creative/tourism	96	22.6
Visa status	D-2 student	383	90.1
	D-10 job-seeking	22	5.2
	Other	20	4.7
Korean proficiency	Beginner	174	40.9
	Intermediate	180	42.4
	Advanced	71	16.7

Four reflective constructs were measured with five items each on a five-point agreement scale. Institutional clarity covered visa transitions, registration, banking and payments, multilingual support, and work rules. Ecosystem support covered incubators, finance, multilingual mentorship, infrastructure, and perceived regional parity. Sociocultural adaptation covered hierarchy, informal protocols, Korean-language confidence, social distance, and acceptance. Digital entrepreneurial intention covered venture commitment, planning effort, career priority, measured risk, and preference for launching in Busan.

Analysis proceeded through descriptive statistics and reliability assessment, confirmatory factor analysis, discriminant validity using HTMT, ordinary least squares structural modeling with bootstrap resampling, and disciplinary comparisons using ANOVA, Tukey tests, and group-specific models. Reporting followed current SEM guidance (Hair et al., 2019; Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Hair & Alamer, 2022).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive and Measurement Results

Institutional clarity has the lowest construct mean, followed by sociocultural adaptation, whereas ecosystem support and entrepreneurial intention are modestly above the scale midpoint. This pattern illustrates the infrastructure-friction paradox: students can perceive digital and regional opportunity while remaining uncertain about formal and cultural access. The measurement model shows strong reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and satisfactory global fit.

TABLE II. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND MEASUREMENT-MODEL ASSESSMENT

Construct	Mean	SD	Loading range	Alpha	CR	AVE
REG	2.501	0.986	0.735-0.811	0.890	0.890	0.619
ECO	3.191	0.983	0.715-0.808	0.881	0.882	0.599
CUL	2.912	1.048	0.764-0.805	0.891	0.892	0.622
INT	3.123	0.998	0.769-0.805	0.891	0.891	0.621

CFA fit was chi-square(164) = 153.278, $p = .715$; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = .000; and SRMR = .028. All HTMT values were below .85. These results recover the intended four-factor structure and support the distinction between institutional intelligibility, ecosystem accessibility, sociocultural competence, and entrepreneurial intention.

Structural Model and Hypotheses

The structural model explains 43.3% of the variation in digital entrepreneurial intention and shows negligible multicollinearity. Institutional clarity is positively associated with intention, supporting H1. Clear multilingual guidance converts fragmented

administrative requirements into an intelligible founder pathway. Ecosystem support has the strongest coefficient, supporting H2 and reinforcing the distinction between the existence of regional resources and international students' practical ability to access them. Sociocultural adaptation is also positive, supporting H3 and indicating that formal permission and informal participation are complementary forms of entrepreneurial navigability.

TABLE III. STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS ASSESSMENT

Hypothesis	Path	Std. beta	Robust SE	p	Decision
H1	REG -> INT	0.263	0.037	< .001	Supported
H2	ECO -> INT	0.426	0.037	< .001	Supported
H3	CUL -> INT	0.269	0.037	< .001	Supported

Note. *R-squared* = .433; *adjusted R-squared* = .429; *F* = 135.10, *p* < .001. Bootstrap confidence intervals excluded zero for all paths.

Academic-Discipline Differences

Mean comparisons provide partial support for H4a. Engineering profiles report the strongest ecosystem support; business profiles report the strongest sociocultural adaptation; and both engineering and business profiles report higher intention than humanities profiles. Institutional clarity differs only weakly, suggesting that formal uncertainty is broadly shared. Lower scores among humanities and creative students should not be interpreted as weaker entrepreneurial ability; they may instead reflect lower ecosystem legibility for cultural, tourism, media, design, educational, and social-innovation ventures (Loots et al., 2021; Neumeier et al., 2019).

TABLE IV. DISCIPLINE MEANS AND GROUP-SPECIFIC RESULTS

Outcome	Business	Engineering	Humanities	F	p	Finding
REG	2.484	2.616	2.315	2.978	.052	Small difference
ECO	3.159	3.404	2.842	10.847	< .001	Bus., Eng. > Hum.
CUL	3.183	2.691	2.902	9.366	< .001	Bus. > Eng.
INT	3.199	3.325	2.629	17.051	< .001	Bus., Eng. > Hum.
R-squared	.397	.522	.266	-	-	Paths comparable

Group-specific paths were positive in most disciplines, but bootstrap comparisons did not establish significant differences in path strength; H4b is therefore not supported. The findings imply an exposure-mechanism distinction: disciplines differ more in ecosystem visibility and access than in the underlying contextual mechanisms of intention formation.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results strengthen a place-sensitive interpretation of digital entrepreneurial intention. Digital technologies broaden possible products and markets but do not eliminate dependence on host-city institutions, relationships, finance, and legitimacy. The model integrates three forms of navigability: institutional clarity, ecosystem accessibility, and sociocultural competence. The strongest ecosystem coefficient suggests that inclusion in incubators, mentoring, financing information, and founder networks is more immediately relevant than the mere existence of startup infrastructure.

For Busan and its universities, institutional information should be organized as a coordinated multilingual founder pathway covering immigration status, business eligibility, registration, taxation, banking, payment systems, intellectual property, and university rules. Incubator criteria and schedules should be transparent in multiple languages. Bilingual mentoring networks should connect students with founders, immigration specialists, accountants, legal advisers, investors, and industry partners. Cross-disciplinary teams should combine technical, commercial, cultural, tourism, design, communication, and creative capabilities. Finally, regional policy should recognize digital services and creative ventures alongside software and hardware.

Interpreting Institutional Clarity

The positive institutional-clarity relationship is consistent with the theory of planned behavior, because understandable rules strengthen perceived behavioral control. For international students, policy support is not useful merely because a program exists. Support becomes actionable when students can determine whether they are eligible, which office is responsible, what documents are required, how visa conditions interact with business registration, and how banking, taxation, and payment requirements should be sequenced. Fragmented guidance can therefore produce uncertainty even when individual agencies are formally supportive.

Institutional clarity also communicates legitimacy. Multilingual guidance and coordinated assistance signal that international students are viewed as potential contributors to regional development rather than only temporary educational consumers. This signaling function is important because uncertainty about acceptance may discourage students from investing time in opportunity development. The results therefore support a shift from isolated information pages toward a single founder journey that connects immigration, municipal, financial, university, and startup-support institutions.

Ecosystem Accessibility and Relational Inclusion

Ecosystem support is the strongest predictor because early-stage entrepreneurship depends on resources that are difficult to acquire individually. Incubators, mentors, finance, testbeds, events, and founder communities provide market information, credibility, partners, feedback, and referrals. Relational ecosystem theory emphasizes that these resources are productive only when actors can reach and combine them (Spigel, 2017). For international students, practical access may be constrained by local-language applications, informal referrals, narrow eligibility categories, and uncertainty about whether nontechnical or cross-border ventures are recognized.

The findings therefore distinguish ecosystem density from ecosystem inclusiveness. A city may have many startup organizations and still provide weak support to actors positioned outside dominant networks. Busan can address this gap by publishing transparent selection criteria, offering multilingual orientation, tracking international-student participation, and creating entry points for students who lack prior local contacts. Universities can function as bridging institutions by referring students to regional programs, validating their project readiness, and organizing supervised market-testing opportunities with local firms and communities.

Sociocultural Adaptation as Entrepreneurial Capability

The positive sociocultural-adaptation effect indicates that entrepreneurial feasibility is partly relational. Students may understand the formal rules but remain reluctant to approach customers, negotiate with partners, or present ideas when hierarchy, etiquette, and informal relationship-building are unfamiliar. Adaptation should not be equated with abandoning transnational identity. Instead, it represents sufficient confidence to interpret interactional expectations while retaining home-country knowledge, language resources, and market connections.

This interpretation suggests that entrepreneurship programs should combine technical training with cross-cultural practice. Bilingual pitching sessions, negotiation simulations, mentor shadowing, local founder panels, and mixed Korean-international project teams can reduce social uncertainty. Such interventions can also help domestic ecosystem actors recognize the value of international students as cultural intermediaries who connect Busan-based capabilities with overseas customers, suppliers, and digital communities.

Ecosystem Legibility and Disciplinary Inclusion

The disciplinary results introduce the concept of ecosystem legibility. Engineering and business projects may be easier for incubators and investors to classify because they resemble familiar technology or commercial venture models. Humanities, tourism, media, design, education, and social-innovation ideas may create value through different combinations of intellectual property, audience development, cultural knowledge, and service design. Lower ecosystem and intention scores may therefore reflect a mismatch between potential ventures and the categories used by support organizations rather than weaker entrepreneurial ability.

Because H4b is not supported, the general contextual architecture remains relevant across disciplines. Universal improvements in institutional clarity, ecosystem access, and sociocultural mentoring can therefore be combined with targeted outreach. Discipline-sensitive studios could help technical students validate customers, business students develop digital products, and humanities or creative students translate cultural and service capabilities into viable platform, content, tourism, educational, and cross-border venture models.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study develops an integrated framework explaining digital entrepreneurial intention among international students in Busan through institutional clarity, perceived regional ecosystem support, and sociocultural adaptation. All three dimensions are positively related to intention, with ecosystem support showing the strongest standardized association. The evidence indicates that advanced infrastructure is necessary but insufficient: students must also understand formal procedures, access relevant networks, and participate confidently in the local business environment.

The disciplinary analysis shows that business and engineering students report stronger ecosystem support and entrepreneurial intention than humanities and creative students, while the structural relationships remain broadly comparable. This suggests that targeted outreach can address unequal visibility and access without requiring entirely separate entrepreneurship systems for each discipline.

The principal limitation is that the respondent profiles are synthetic; the results demonstrate model coherence but cannot be treated as direct evidence of actual attitudes or behavior. The cross-sectional design also restricts causal interpretation and focuses on intention rather than venture creation. Future research should use ethically approved multi-university field data, translation and back-translation, probability-based or documented stratified sampling, measurement-invariance testing, and longitudinal follow-up from education and incubation to registration, financing, market entry, and venture survival.

In practical terms, universities and municipal agencies should create an integrated multilingual support desk rather than requiring students to navigate separate administrative domains. The pathway should explain immigration status, permissible activities, company registration, taxation, banking, payment services, intellectual property, and university rules in a clear sequence. Regular coordination among universities, immigration authorities, financial institutions, and startup agencies would reduce contradictory information and improve accountability.

Incubators and accelerators should evaluate effective inclusion, not only program availability. Application materials, selection dimensions, schedules, and funding conditions should be transparent in English and other commonly used languages. Programs should also monitor whether informal referrals, local-language requirements, or narrow technology criteria unintentionally exclude international students, humanities and creative disciplines, and service-oriented digital ventures.

Future studies should collect actual field data across several Busan universities and test measurement invariance by discipline, nationality, Korean proficiency, visa category, study level, and length of residence. Longitudinal designs should follow students from entrepreneurship education and incubation through business planning, visa transition, registration, financing, market entry, and survival. Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of multilingual portals, bilingual mentoring, cross-disciplinary venture studios, and inclusive incubator criteria would provide stronger evidence of which interventions improve feasibility, intention, and entrepreneurial action.

Comparative research across Korean cities and international entrepreneurial hubs could determine whether the infrastructure-friction paradox is specific to Busan or reflects a broader feature of international-student entrepreneurship. Such comparisons should examine whether similar digital infrastructure produces different outcomes because of regulatory clarity, ecosystem openness, immigration support, and sociocultural acceptance. The present framework provides a coherent basis for that research while emphasizing that technological opportunity must be connected to institutional intelligibility, relational accessibility, and sociocultural navigability.

Limitations and Research Agenda

The synthetic character of the respondent profiles is the most important limitation. The analysis demonstrates that the proposed constructs, relationships, and disciplinary patterns can be represented coherently, but synthetic evidence does not establish how actual international students perceive Busan's institutions or entrepreneurial ecosystem. The exceptionally strong measurement fit may partly reflect the data-generation process and may not reproduce the ambiguity, nonresponse, social-desirability bias, and measurement error found in field research. Accordingly, the numerical results should be treated as an analytical illustration rather than as a basis for immediate causal or budgetary decisions.

The cross-sectional design creates a second limitation. Institutional clarity, ecosystem participation, sociocultural adaptation, and entrepreneurial intention may influence each other over time. Highly motivated students may actively search for regulatory

guidance, attend startup events, and build local networks, creating reverse causality. Longitudinal evidence is needed to separate initial contextual exposure from subsequent learning and self-selection. Repeated measurement could identify whether participation in incubators or mentoring increases intention, whether intention encourages greater participation, and whether either process predicts concrete venture action.

The study also examines intention rather than behavior. Intention is a meaningful precursor, but it does not guarantee business registration, financing, market entry, or survival. The transition from intention to action may be interrupted by visa eligibility, academic workload, financial constraints, family expectations, employment opportunities, and changes in immigration or startup policy. Future studies should therefore record intermediate milestones, including idea validation, team formation, business-plan completion, program application, visa transition, company registration, first sales, and venture continuation.

Geographical and disciplinary scope should also be refined. Busan's combination of logistics, tourism, cultural industries, universities, and regional-development policy may produce conditions that differ from Seoul, other Korean cities, or international hubs. In addition, the broad humanities and creative category may conceal important differences among tourism, design, media, education, social science, and cultural production. Engineering and business categories may likewise include diverse venture orientations. Larger samples should permit more detailed subgroup analysis and formal measurement-invariance testing before comparing coefficients.

An ethically approved multi-university field study should use transparent recruitment, informed consent, nonresponse analysis, and clear documentation of data provenance. Survey items should undergo translation, back-translation, cognitive interviewing, and pilot testing across major language groups. Probability sampling may not always be feasible, but stratified purposive sampling can be documented by university, discipline, nationality, visa status, language proficiency, and study level. These procedures would strengthen construct validity and permit a more credible assessment of whether the proposed contextual mechanisms generalize beyond synthetic profiles.

Intervention research should pilot multilingual regulatory portals, integrated founder-support desks, bilingual mentoring, cross-disciplinary venture studios, and inclusive incubator criteria. Pre-post or phased evaluations could test whether these changes improve institutional clarity, ecosystem access, sociocultural confidence, entrepreneurial intention, and venture action.

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