

Digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention among urban Gen Z: Basis for digital youth entrepreneurship framework

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Abstract

This study examined the interrelationship among digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China as a basis for developing a Digital Youth Entrepreneurship Framework. Specifically, it assessed digital literacy in terms of tool proficiency, content evaluation ability, and security awareness; social media usage in terms of usage frequency and intensity, business-related usage purpose, and social media-based information acquisition; and online entrepreneurial intention in terms of behavioral intention, attitudinal orientation, and goal-oriented commitment. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design involving 400 Generation Z Xiaohongshu users aged 18–29 from selected urban areas in China, using purposive sampling. Data were gathered through a self-structured questionnaire, which demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency. Weighted mean, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis were employed at the 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that the dimensions of digital literacy were significantly and positively related to social media usage and online entrepreneurial intention. Likewise, all dimensions of social media usage were significantly and positively related to online entrepreneurial intention, with social media-based information acquisition showing the strongest association with goal-oriented commitment ($r = 0.929$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis showed that content evaluation ability, security awareness, usage frequency and intensity, and social media-based information acquisition significantly predicted online entrepreneurial intention, while tool proficiency was not a significant predictor. The regression model explained 95.6% of the variance in online entrepreneurial intention ($R^2 = 0.956$, $p < .001$). The findings highlight the importance of strengthening higher-order digital competencies and purposeful social media engagement in fostering youth online entrepreneurship. The study provides an empirical basis for developing a digital youth entrepreneurship framework tailored to the needs of Generation Z in urban China.

Keywords: digital literacy, social media usage, online entrepreneurial intention, Generation Z, Xiaohongshu, digital entrepreneurship, youth entrepreneurship framework

Digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention among urban Gen Z: Basis for digital youth entrepreneurship framework

1. Introduction

Urban Generation Z in China are individuals born between 1995 and 2009 who have primarily resided in municipalities under the central government, provincial capitals, or prefecture-level cities. Growing up amid China's rapid economic growth and urbanization, this generation has been significantly shaped by technological products such as the Internet, social media, and instant messaging platforms (Wang et al., 2024). Their upbringing in highly digitalized environments has given them distinct behavioral, cognitive, and entrepreneurial characteristics (Chen et al., 2023). Despite their technological immersion, three major challenges underscore the need for research on their entrepreneurial trajectories: a mismatch between policy encouragement and individual capabilities, a disconnection between platform potential and entrepreneurial practices, and a misalignment between existing theoretical frameworks and actual scenario demands.

At the practical level, many members of Gen Z are "willing but unable" to pursue digital entrepreneurship on Xiaohongshu. Over 40% express interest in entrepreneurship, yet 43% are discouraged due to lack of familiarity with platform policies and risks. This gap between entrepreneurial intention and digital competence has weakened the impact of youth entrepreneurship policies. There also exists a gap between the unique demands of Xiaohongshu's "content + e-commerce" model and the general entrepreneurial training available. Most training programs emphasize product selection rather than content-to-conversion strategies, leaving Gen Z entrepreneurs struggling with challenges such as traffic restrictions or note violations (Qian & Sun, 2022). Moreover, theoretical gaps remain unresolved. While digital literacy and social media usage have been widely studied (European Commission, 2022; Wang et al., 2024), little research focuses on the specific pathway linking digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention within its ecosystem. Previous studies often reduce social media usage to "time spent" rather than differentiating consumer use from entrepreneurial use (Huang et al., 2023). Moreover, existing studies on Xiaohongshu have focused primarily on consumer behavior and brand marketing (Zhou et al., 2024).

These gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive framework that examines the interplay between digital literacy, social media usage, and entrepreneurial intention. Given that 72% of the platform's active users are aged 18–29 and represent its primary consumer and entrepreneurial demographic (Xiaohongshu Business Insight Center, 2024), this research seeks to bridge theoretical and practical divides. Ultimately, the study aims to provide empirical evidence for developing a youth entrepreneurship support framework tailored to the realities of urban China's Generation Z.

Objectives of the Study - This study aims to examine the interrelationship among digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention of Gen Z in urban China as a basis for developing digital youth entrepreneurship support framework. Specifically, it aims to assess the level of digital literacy of Gen Z in urban China in terms of tool proficiency, content evaluation ability, and 'security awareness; determine the extent of social media usage in terms of: Usage frequency and intensity, Business-related usage purpose; and Social media-based information acquisition; measure the level of online entrepreneurial intention in terms of Behavioral intention, Attitudinal orientation, and Goal-oriented commitment; test the significant relationship among digital literacy, online entrepreneurial intention, and social media usage; determine which dimensions of digital literacy and social media engagement significantly predict online entrepreneurial intention among Urban Gen Z; develop a framework for digital youth entrepreneurship in urban China based on the findings of the study.

2. Methods

Research Design - This study employs descriptive correlational research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The rationale for this approach lies in the dual objectives of the research: (1) to present an accurate picture of the current levels of digital literacy, patterns of social media usage, and entrepreneurial intentions among Generation Z in urban China; and (2) to examine the relationships and moderating effects among these variables. First, the descriptive component is essential for mapping the current landscape of Xiaohongshu-based e-commerce entrepreneurship among Gen Z. It will allow the study to quantify indicators such as the mastery levels of specific digital literacy skills, the penetration rate of entrepreneurship-related social media behaviors, and the prevalence of entrepreneurial willingness. This addresses existing gaps in empirical data on how Gen Z navigates platform-specific entrepreneurial contexts. Second, the correlational component is necessary to test the hypothesized relationships between digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention. Relying solely on a descriptive design would limit the study to surface-level observations, while a purely correlational design might overlook the contextual depth of the entrepreneurial landscape. By combining both, this hybrid approach ensures a balanced methodology—one that provides the objectivity of descriptive research and the systematic rigor of correlational analysis. This alignment allows the research to achieve its full-chain goal: describing the current situation, verifying relationships, and generating evidence-based strategies for a youth entrepreneurship support framework.

Participants of the Study - The research participants are Gen Z users of Xiaohongshu in Chinese cities. The specific definition criteria are in terms of Age range: 18-29 years old (conforming to the core definition of Generation Z born between 1995 and 2010); as to Geographical scope, it covers 5 representative cities in the east (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hangzhou), central (Wuhan, Nanjing), and western (Chengdu, Xi'an, Chongqing) to ensure the diversity of the sample regions. In view of Platform usage: The usage period of the APP should be no less than 6 months, and there should be a history of browsing commercial content (such as product notes, store recommendations). Users who use it purely for entertainment are excluded. As to Entrepreneurial status: No experience in starting a business on Xiaohongshu e-commerce (such as not opening the store or activating a product showcase). Focus only on the “entrepreneurial intention” rather than the “already started” group to avoid the interference of entrepreneurial experience on the assessment of intention. The sample size is 400, represented by 80 participants per city using purposive sampling.

Instrument of the Study - The study will utilize a self-structured questionnaire composed of 45 items divided into four parts. The first part covered demographic and usage characteristics of respondents, while the second measured digital literacy across three dimensions: proficiency, content evaluation, and security awareness. The third part assessed social media engagement in terms of usage frequency and duration, business-related functions and acquisition of entrepreneurial information, and the fourth measured entrepreneurial intention, focusing on behavioral, attitudinal, and goal-oriented aspects.

Table 1
Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items	Interpretation
Digital Literacy			
Tool proficiency	0.793	5	Good
Content evaluation ability	0.837	5	Good
Security Awareness	0.834	5	Good
Social Media Usage			
Usage Frequency and Intensity	0.720	5	Acceptable
Business related usage purpose	0.878	5	Excellent
Social media – Based information acquisition	0.870	5	Excellent
Online entrepreneurial intention			
Behavioral Intention	0.828	5	Good
Attitudinal Orientation	0.895	5	Excellent
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.791	5	Good

Legend: $a \geq 0.9$ excellent; $0.9 > a \geq 0.8$ good; $0.8 > a \geq 0.7$ acceptable; $0.7 > a \geq 0.6$ questionable; $0.6 > a \geq 0.5$ poor; $0.5 > a$ unacceptable

The table presents the internal consistency reliability of the variables using Cronbach's alpha. The results show that all constructs demonstrate acceptable to excellent reliability, indicating that the items used in each scale consistently measure their respective variables. For digital literacy, the dimensions of tool proficiency ($\alpha=0.793$), content evaluation ability ($\alpha=0.837$), and security awareness ($\alpha=0.834$) all exhibit good reliability, suggesting that the instrument effectively captures respondents' digital competencies. In terms of social media usage, usage frequency and intensity ($\alpha=0.720$) is interpreted as acceptable, while business-related usage purpose ($\alpha=0.878$) and social media-based information acquisition ($\alpha=0.870$) both demonstrate excellent reliability, indicating strong consistency in measuring purpose-driven and information-oriented use of social media. Meanwhile, the dimensions of online entrepreneurial intention show good to excellent reliability, with behavioral intention ($\alpha=0.828$) and goal orientation commitment ($\alpha=0.791$) rated as good, and attitudinal orientation ($\alpha=0.895$) as excellent. Overall, since all Cronbach's alpha values exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70, the instrument is considered reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Data Gathering Procedure - This study begins with the clarification of the research problem. Drawing from an extensive review of related literature and existing research gaps the theoretical foundation of the study is established by integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior, the digital literacy framework, and social media empowerment theory. These frameworks support the development of a conceptual model wherein digital literacy serves as the independent variable, social media usage as the moderating variable, and entrepreneurial intention as the dependent variable. Based on this model, corresponding research hypotheses are formulated. Questionnaire is then designed using established and validated measurement scales from prior studies. To ensure content validity, the instrument undergoes expert review by three professors in the field of e-commerce and two practitioners engaged in Xiaohongshu-based entrepreneurship. Revisions are made to improve clarity and contextual relevance (e.g., refining general terms such as "data analysis function" to platform-specific expressions like "use of Xiaohongshu Business Advisor"). A pilot test involving 30 respondents is subsequently conducted to assess item clarity and logical consistency. Based on the feedback, necessary modifications are implemented, and the final version of the questionnaire is established. Reliability testing is then performed by computing the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each construct to ensure internal consistency.

Online surveys will be disseminated through Xiaohongshu entrepreneurship communities and popular Generation Z platforms such as Weibo and Bilibili, with incentives such as "Xiaohongshu Entrepreneurship Tips and Materials" provided to encourage participation. Offline data collection is conducted through purposive distribution in business districts and areas near universities across ten selected cities. In the data analysis stage, data cleaning is first performed using the SPSS 26.0 to identify and remove invalid responses, including those with patterned answers, incomplete data, or missing essential information. Subsequently, statistical analyses are conducted to test the research hypotheses, and the results are systematically interpreted and discussed.

Ethical Considerations - The research strictly adheres to academic ethics norms, and the core ethical safeguard measures are as follows: The principle of informed consent at the beginning of the questionnaire, a "Informed Consent Form" is set up, clearly informing respondents of the research purpose, the data usage (only for academic research, not for commercial or other purposes), and the filling time (about 10-15 minutes). Respondents can enter the questionnaire to fill it out only after clicking "Agree to Participate".

Anonymity and confidentiality assurance: The questionnaire does not require the filling of personal identification information such as name, mobile phone number, or Xiaohongshu account. It only collects non-identification demographic data such as gender, age, and city. After data collection, personal information is replaced by a "sample number". The original data is stored on an encrypted USB flash drive and can only be accessed by core members of the research team. After the research is completed, the data is retained for five years in accordance with academic norms and then uniformly destroyed to prevent the leakage of personal information.

Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time: The informed consent form clearly informs respondents that "they can withdraw at any time during the filling process, and the data will not be recorded after

withdrawal.” Online questionnaire supports the functions of “saving halfway” and “giving up submission.”

The principle of non-harm: The content of the questionnaire should avoid involving private, sensitive or potentially uncomfortable issues (such as personal income, negative entrepreneurial experiences). In in-depth interviews, respondents should not be induced to recall negative emotional events to ensure that the research process does not cause any harm to the respondents' psychology or life.

Data authenticity and ethical review: The research has passed the academic ethics review of the university and obtained the approval document for the ethics review before the research. During the data collection process, the quality of questionnaire filling was strictly monitored to avoid false data such as “flooding questionnaires” and “proxy filling”. In the analysis stage, the research results (including conclusions that do not conform to the hypotheses) were presented truthfully, without tampering with the data or selectively presenting it, to ensure the authenticity of the research and academic integrity.

Data Analysis - The weighted mean was used to determine the level of digital literacy, the extent of social media usage, and the level of online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China. The weighted mean scores were interpreted using a four-point Likert scale. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was employed to determine the significant relationships among digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was used to identify which dimensions of digital literacy and social media usage significantly predict online entrepreneurial intention. The regression model was evaluated using the regression coefficients (β), t -values, p -values, and coefficient of determination (R^2), with all statistical tests conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results and discussions

Table 2

Summary Table on Digital Literacy

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Tool proficiency	3.16	Agree	3
Content evaluation ability	3.26	Agree	1
Security Awareness	3.19	Agree	2
Composite Mean	3.20	Agree	

Legend; 4-Strongly Agree; 3-Agree; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree

Table 2 summarizes the three dimensions of digital literacy. The overall composite mean is 3.20, with a verbal interpretation of “Agree.” This implies that, taken collectively, urban Gen Z respondents demonstrate a solid baseline of digital literacy — sufficient for everyday online engagement, learning, and entrepreneurial exploration — but still possess room for growth before reaching consistently strong proficiency across all subdomains (Vugec, 2022). The Rank 1 dimension is Content Evaluation Ability (WM = 3.26). This suggests that respondents are strongest when it comes to analyzing, judging, and verifying digital information — a competence increasingly demanded by the proliferation of misinformation and algorithm-driven content streams (Xiong et al., 2025). Critical content evaluation is foundational to informed decision-making, especially among young entrepreneurs who must rely on digital data to size markets and assess competitors (Chang et al., 2023).

The Rank 2 dimension is Security Awareness (WM = 3.19), indicating that respondents demonstrate prudent but not exemplary practices in protecting themselves online (Ahamed et al., 2026). The Rank 3 (least-ranked) dimension — requiring emphasis — is Tool Proficiency (WM = 3.16). Although still rated “Agree,” this dimension scored the lowest among the three, signaling that respondents' hands-on ability to operate, integrate, and troubleshoot digital tools lags behind their cognitive and evaluative digital skills. Research indicates that Gen Z's confidence in using technology often outpaces their actual operational competence, creating a “perception–performance gap” that can undermine productivity and entrepreneurship alike (Ulfert et al., 2022). To address this, educational programs and entrepreneurial bootcamps should incorporate hands-on, project-based digital tool training rather than relying solely on assumed digital-native proficiency (Getenet et al., 2024).

Table 3
Summary Table on Social Media Usage

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Usage Frequency and Intensity	3.29	Agree	2
Business related usage purpose	3.36	Agree	1
Social Media – Based information acquisition	3.23	Agree	3
Composite Mean	3.29	Agree	

Legend; 4- To a Very Great Extent; 3- To a Great Extent; 2- To a Small Extent; 1- Not at All

Table 3 consolidates the three dimensions of social media usage. The overall composite mean is 3.29, verbally interpreted as “Agree.” This implies that, taken collectively, urban Gen Z respondents demonstrate socially embedded, frequent, and purposive social media engagement. The Rank 1 dimension is Business-Related Usage Purpose (WM = 3.36). This indicates that respondents' highest social media competency lies in their ability to align platform use with entrepreneurial goals — including competitor analysis, networking, and influencer followership. The Rank 2 dimension is Usage Frequency and Intensity (WM = 3.29), indicating that respondents' persistent, multi-times-daily exposure to social platforms provides the time-on-task substrate from which business-oriented and informational uses can grow. The Rank 3 (least-ranked) dimension — requiring emphasis — is Social Media-Based Information Acquisition (WM = 3.23). Although the lowest of the three, this is still firmly within the “Agree” range; however, the relative weakness implies that respondents' passive and incidental information consumption on social media has not yet matured into a deliberate, structured information-acquisition habit.

Table 4
Summary Table on Online Entrepreneurial Intention

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Behavioral Intention	3.27	Agree	1
Attitudinal Orientation	3.11	Agree	3
Goal Orientation Commitment	3.25	Agree	2
Composite Mean	3.27	Agree	

Legend; 4-Strongly Agree; 3-Agree; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree

Table 4 summarizes the respondents' online entrepreneurial intention. The overall composite mean of 3.27, interpreted as Agree, indicates that Generation Z respondents generally demonstrate a positive level of online entrepreneurial intention. Among the three dimensions, Behavioral Intention ranked first (3.27), followed by Goal-Oriented Commitment (3.25), while Attitudinal Orientation ranked lowest (3.11). The findings imply that respondents possess relatively strong intentions and commitment to pursue online entrepreneurship, although their entrepreneurial attitudes remain moderately developed. Overall, Generation Z appears willing to explore entrepreneurial opportunities but may still require greater exposure to entrepreneurship education, practical experiences, and institutional support to strengthen their entrepreneurial mindset. These findings are consistent with Lesinskis et al. (2023), who found that digital entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intention through improved digital competencies. Likewise, Awal et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of digital entrepreneurial knowledge and supportive environments in strengthening entrepreneurial intentions among university students. Furthermore, Hardiansyah (2026) emphasized that technology access and government support significantly encourage entrepreneurial interest among Generation Z.

Table 5 presents the Relationship between Digital Literacy and Social Media Usage. The findings reveal that all dimensions of digital literacy exhibit highly significant positive relationships with all dimensions of social media usage ($p < .001$). Among the relationships, tool proficiency demonstrated the strongest association with social media-based information acquisition ($r = .887$), indicating that respondents with higher levels of digital tool proficiency are more likely to utilize social media as an effective platform for acquiring information. Tool proficiency also showed strong relationships with usage frequency and business-related social media use, suggesting that digitally competent individuals engage more actively with social media for both personal and entrepreneurial purposes.

Table 5
Relationship Between Digital Literacy and Social Media Usage

Tool proficiency	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Usage Frequency and Intensity	0.728 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Business related usage purpose	0.780 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Media – Based information acquisition	0.887 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Content evaluation ability			
Usage Frequency and Intensity	0.271 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Business related usage purpose	0.471 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Media – Based information acquisition	0.627 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Security Awareness			
Usage Frequency and Intensity	0.329 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Business related usage purpose	0.460 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Media – Based information acquisition	0.521 ***	<.001	Highly Significant

Similarly, content evaluation ability and security awareness were significantly associated with all dimensions of social media usage, indicating that respondents who are capable of critically evaluating online information and practicing safe online behaviors tend to use social media more effectively and responsibly. These findings suggest that digital literacy serves as an important foundation for meaningful social media engagement among Generation Z. The results support the study of Lesinskis et al. (2023), who emphasized that digital competencies enable Generation Z to maximize digital platforms for entrepreneurial learning and engagement. Likewise, Hardiansyah (2026) reported that digital literacy and technology access significantly enhance entrepreneurial interest through increased utilization of digital platforms. Torres-Ortega (2026) further argued that digital literacy functions as a critical enabler of digital entrepreneurship by improving individuals' capacity to effectively use digital technologies and online platforms. Moreover, Awaluddin (2026) highlighted that digital literacy and strategic social media utilization form the foundation for sustainable digital entrepreneurship, enabling young entrepreneurs to identify opportunities, access market information, and develop competitive digital ventures.

Table 6
Relationship Between Digital Literacy and Online Entrepreneurial Intention

Tool proficiency	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Behavioral Intention	0.663 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Attitudinal Orientation	0.602 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.854 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Content evaluation ability			
Behavioral Intention	0.749 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Attitudinal Orientation	0.749 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.496 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Security Awareness			
Behavioral Intention	0.894 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Attitudinal Orientation	0.608 ***	<.001	Highly Significant
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.437 ***	<.001	Highly Significant

Table 6 presents the relationship between digital literacy and online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China. The results reveal that all dimensions of digital literacy exhibit highly significant positive relationships with all dimensions of online entrepreneurial intention ($p < .001$). This indicates that higher levels of digital literacy are consistently associated with stronger behavioral intention, more positive entrepreneurial attitudes, and greater commitment toward pursuing online entrepreneurial activities. Among the dimensions of digital literacy, security awareness demonstrated the strongest relationship with behavioral intention ($r = 0.894$, $p < .001$), followed by tool proficiency and goal-oriented commitment ($r = 0.854$, $p < .001$), and content evaluation ability with both behavioral intention and attitudinal orientation ($r = 0.749$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that respondents who possess stronger digital security practices, technical competencies, and the ability to

critically evaluate online information are more likely to demonstrate greater willingness to establish online businesses, maintain positive entrepreneurial attitudes, and remain committed to achieving entrepreneurial goals.

Tool proficiency showed significant positive relationships with behavioral intention ($r = 0.663$), attitudinal orientation ($r = 0.602$), and goal-oriented commitment ($r = 0.854$), indicating that respondents who are more competent in operating digital technologies tend to exhibit stronger entrepreneurial commitment. Similarly, content evaluation ability was significantly related to behavioral intention and attitudinal orientation ($r = 0.749$), suggesting that individuals who can critically evaluate online information are more confident and optimistic about pursuing digital entrepreneurial opportunities. Meanwhile, security awareness was significantly associated with all three dimensions of entrepreneurial intention, particularly behavioral intention, emphasizing the importance of cybersecurity knowledge and responsible digital practices in building entrepreneurial confidence.

The findings are consistent with Lesinskis et al. (2023), who reported that digital competencies developed through entrepreneurship education significantly enhance Generation Z's entrepreneurial intention by improving digital confidence and entrepreneurial readiness. Similarly, Awal et al. (2025) found that digital entrepreneurial knowledge and digital literacy positively influence students' entrepreneurial intention by strengthening their confidence, knowledge, and preparedness for digital business creation. Mtibaa et al. (2026) likewise emphasized that digital literacy and entrepreneurship education contribute significantly to favorable entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions by enhancing individuals' innovative capabilities.

Overall, the results demonstrate that digital literacy serves as a critical foundation for developing online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China. As respondents become more digitally competent, particularly in evaluating digital information and practicing safe online behaviors, they are more likely to develop stronger entrepreneurial aspirations, maintain positive entrepreneurial attitudes, and demonstrate greater commitment toward establishing online businesses. These findings reinforce the important role of digital literacy in preparing young people to participate successfully in the rapidly evolving digital economy.

Table 7

Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Online Entrepreneurial Intention

Usage Frequency and Intensity	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Behavioral Intention	0.459 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Attitudinal Orientation	0.445 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.850 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Business related usage purpose			
Behavioral Intention	0.539 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Attitudinal Orientation	0.478 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.778 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Social Media – Based information acquisition			
Behavioral Intention	0.675 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Attitudinal Orientation	0.733 ***	< .001	Highly Significant
Goal Orientation Commitment	0.929 ***	< .001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 7 presents the relationship between social media usage and online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China. The results indicate that all dimensions of social media usage exhibit highly significant positive relationships with all dimensions of online entrepreneurial intention ($p < .001$). This indicates that increased engagement with social media is associated with stronger behavioral intention, more favorable entrepreneurial attitudes, and greater commitment toward pursuing online entrepreneurial goals. Among the three dimensions of social media usage, social media-based information acquisition demonstrated the strongest relationship with goal-oriented commitment ($r = 0.929$, $p < .001$), followed by its relationship with attitudinal orientation ($r = 0.733$) and behavioral intention ($r = 0.675$). These findings suggest that Generation Z respondents who actively utilize social media to obtain business-related information, market trends, and entrepreneurial knowledge are more likely to establish concrete entrepreneurial goals and remain committed to pursuing online

business opportunities.

Similarly, business-related usage purpose was significantly associated with behavioral intention ($r = 0.539$), attitudinal orientation ($r = 0.478$), and goal-oriented commitment ($r = 0.778$). This implies that respondents who intentionally use social media for entrepreneurial learning, networking, and business promotion tend to exhibit stronger entrepreneurial intentions. Likewise, usage frequency and intensity showed significant positive relationships with all dimensions of entrepreneurial intention, with the strongest association observed in goal-oriented commitment ($r = 0.850$). This finding indicates that frequent interaction with digital platforms provides Generation Z with continuous exposure to entrepreneurial content, opportunities, and digital business practices, thereby strengthening their entrepreneurial commitment.

Findings support the study of Lesinskis et al. (2023), who emphasized that digital platforms and entrepreneurship education significantly enhance Generation Z's entrepreneurial intention by providing interactive learning environments and opportunities to develop entrepreneurial competencies. Awal et al. (2025) found that digital entrepreneurial knowledge acquired through online platforms, together with institutional support, significantly strengthens students' entrepreneurial intentions. Ahmad et al. (2026) further highlighted that active engagement with social media and digital influencers positively shapes e-entrepreneurial intentions by encouraging entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity recognition. Aryeh-Adjei et al. (2025) reported that effective utilization of digital technologies and social media enhances entrepreneurial activities by facilitating access to information, markets, and business networks. Findings are likewise consistent with Vasilescu et al. (2025), who found that educational exposure and digital engagement contribute significantly to entrepreneurial intention among young people by strengthening their confidence, motivation, and entrepreneurial preparedness.

Overall, the results demonstrate that social media serves not only as a communication platform but also as an important source of entrepreneurial knowledge, networking opportunities, and business inspiration that significantly contributes to the development of online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China.

Table 8

Predictors of Digital Literacy and Social Media Engagement on Online Entrepreneurial Intention

Variable	B	β	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
(Intercept)		0.2379	-2.61	0.009	Highly Significant
Tool proficiency	0.0355	0.0275	1.22	0.225	Not Significant
Content evaluation ability	0.2315	0.0222	10.81	<.001	Highly Significant
Security Awareness	0.3589	0.0147	22.00	<.001	Highly Significant
Usage Frequency and Intensity	0.1562	0.0209	6.79	<.001	Highly Significant
Business related usage purpose	-0.0971	0.0200	-4.24	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Media – Based information acquisition	0.4408	0.0279	13.66	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at $p\text{-value} < 0.05$; $p < .001$; $r^2 = 0.956$

Table 8 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the predictors of digital literacy and social media engagement on online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z in urban China. The model was statistically significant indicating that the identified dimensions of digital literacy and social media engagement collectively explain a substantial proportion of the variance in online entrepreneurial intention. Among the digital literacy dimensions, content evaluation ability and security awareness emerged as significant positive predictors of online entrepreneurial intention, whereas tool proficiency was not a significant predictor. These findings suggest that the ability to critically evaluate online information and practice secure digital behaviors contributes more substantially to entrepreneurial intention than basic operational digital skills. This finding is consistent with Lesinskis et al. (2023), who emphasized that higher-order digital competencies are more influential than basic technical skills in developing entrepreneurial readiness among Generation Z. Likewise, Awal et al. (2025) reported that digital entrepreneurial knowledge and digital competencies significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial intentions.

Regarding social media engagement, usage frequency and intensity and social media-based information

acquisition significantly and positively predicted online entrepreneurial intention, while business-related usage purpose showed a significant negative coefficient. The strong positive influence of social media-based information acquisition indicates that Generation Z respondents who actively obtain entrepreneurial information, market trends, and business knowledge through social media are more likely to develop stronger entrepreneurial intentions. These findings align with Aryeh-Adjei et al. (2025), who found that effective utilization of digital technologies and online platforms enhances entrepreneurial activities by facilitating access to business information and networks. Likewise, Ahmad et al. (2026) emphasized that social media interactions contribute to e-entrepreneurial intentions by increasing opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial motivation. Furthermore, Vasilescu et al. (2025) reported that digital engagement and educational exposure significantly strengthen entrepreneurial intention among young people.

The negative coefficient for business-related usage purpose suggests that, after controlling for other dimensions of social media engagement, merely using social media for business purposes does not necessarily strengthen entrepreneurial intention. This may indicate that the quality of information acquired and meaningful engagement with digital platforms are more influential than simply engaging in business-related online activities. Overall, the results indicate that content evaluation ability, security awareness, usage frequency and intensity, and social media-based information acquisition are significant determinants of online entrepreneurial intention among Urban Generation Z in China. These findings underscore the importance of developing advanced digital competencies and promoting meaningful engagement with social media to cultivate entrepreneurial readiness in the digital economy (Lesinskis et al., 2023; Awal et al., 2025).

Research Output

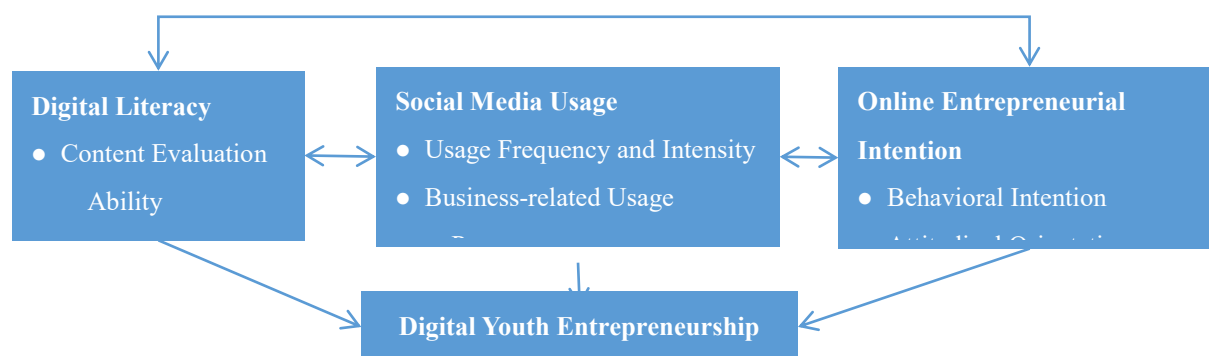


Figure 1. Digital Youth Entrepreneurship Framework

Figure 1 presents the proposed Digital Youth Entrepreneurship Framework, which was developed based on the empirical findings of the study. The framework demonstrates that digital literacy, social media usage, and online entrepreneurial intention are interconnected constructs that collectively contribute to the development of digital youth entrepreneurship among Urban Generation Z in China. This conceptualization is consistent with contemporary digital entrepreneurship literature, which emphasizes that digital competencies and online engagement jointly facilitate entrepreneurial development (Torres-Ortega, 2026).

The first component, Digital Literacy, consists of content evaluation ability and security awareness. These dimensions were retained because the regression analysis identified them as significant predictors of online entrepreneurial intention, whereas tool proficiency did not significantly predict entrepreneurial intention when other variables were considered simultaneously. This suggests that the ability to critically evaluate digital content and practice safe online behavior is more influential than basic technical skills in encouraging entrepreneurial aspirations. Similar findings were reported by Lesinskis et al. (2023) and Awal et al. (2025), who concluded that advanced digital competencies are essential in strengthening entrepreneurial intention.

The second component, Social Media Usage, comprises usage frequency and intensity, business-related usage purpose, and social media-based information acquisition. The framework recognizes social media as a platform that enables Generation Z to access entrepreneurial information, build professional networks, explore business opportunities, and engage in entrepreneurial learning. Among these dimensions, social media-based information acquisition demonstrated the strongest predictive influence on online entrepreneurial intention, emphasizing the importance of obtaining relevant business knowledge through digital platforms. These findings are supported by Aryeh-Adjei et al. (2025) and Ahmad et al. (2026), who emphasized that social media serves as an important mechanism for entrepreneurial learning, opportunity recognition, and business networking.

The third component, Online Entrepreneurial Intention, includes behavioral intention, attitudinal orientation, and goal-oriented commitment. These dimensions reflect an individual's willingness, positive attitude, and commitment to establishing an online business. The significant relationships observed between digital literacy, social media usage, and entrepreneurial intention indicate that digitally competent individuals who actively utilize social media are more likely to develop stronger entrepreneurial intentions. This finding is consistent with Vasilescu et al. (2025) and Awal et al. (2025), who reported that digital competencies, educational support, and online engagement significantly enhance entrepreneurial intention among young adults.

The bidirectional arrows between Digital Literacy and Social Media Usage, and between Social Media Usage and Online Entrepreneurial Intention, signify the significant positive relationships identified in the correlation analysis. These relationships suggest that improvements in digital literacy enhance meaningful social media engagement, while effective social media engagement further strengthens entrepreneurial intention. The direct relationship between Digital Literacy and Online Entrepreneurial Intention likewise indicates that digital competencies contribute directly to entrepreneurial readiness beyond the influence of social media, supporting the findings of Lesinskis et al. (2023).

The downward arrows from all three constructs toward Digital Youth Entrepreneurship illustrate that digital entrepreneurship is achieved through the combined influence of digital literacy, social media engagement, and entrepreneurial intention. Together, these components provide the competencies, digital experiences, and motivational factors necessary for Generation Z to participate successfully in the digital economy. This integrated perspective is supported by Torres-Ortega (2026), who argued that digital entrepreneurship emerges through the interaction of digital capabilities, online engagement, and entrepreneurial mindset.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Urban Generation Z in China exhibits a generally high level of digital literacy in using digital technologies, evaluating online information, and practicing digital security. Generation Z users in urban China demonstrate a high level of social media usage, particularly for business-related purposes, indicating that social media has become an important platform for entrepreneurial engagement and commercial exploration. Generation Z users in urban China possess a positive level of online entrepreneurial intention. There is significant relationships among digital literacy, social media usage and online entrepreneurial intention. Content evaluation ability, security awareness, usage frequency and intensity, and social media-based information acquisition significantly predict online entrepreneurial intention among Urban Generation Z in China. A framework for developing digital youth entrepreneurship support for Gen Z in urban China was developed.

Educational institutions and entrepreneurship development agencies may prioritize enhancing content evaluation skills, cybersecurity awareness, and the effective use of social media as a source of entrepreneurial information, as these were found to significantly predict online entrepreneurial intention. The proposed Digital Youth Entrepreneurship Framework may be adopted by educational , government agencies, entrepreneurship support organizations, and digital platform providers as a guide in designing policies, training programs, and initiatives that enhance digital literacy, promote meaningful social media engagement, and strengthen online entrepreneurial intention among Generation Z. Future researchers may include additional variables, such as

entrepreneurial self-efficacy, innovation capability, financial literacy, or institutional support, to provide a more comprehensive explanation of online entrepreneurial intention.

5. References

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