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ALTRUISTIC LIFE PURPOSE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Various studies have explored the determinants of entrepreneurial intention, drawing on frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior or motivational theories. Based on primary data from over 170 university students, a theoretical framework was designed to link an altruistic life purpose with entrepreneurial intention. Validated instruments and correlational analysis were employed. The integrated theoretical results indicate that a broad life purpose, one oriented beyond the self with a strong altruistic component, is positively associated with a favorable attitude toward entrepreneurship and higher intrinsic motivation to start a business. This finding suggests that a broader life purpose fosters entrepreneurial intention. The study concludes that an educational emphasis on altruism can enhance entrepreneurial vocations among youth (not only in social enterprises but also in for-profit ventures).

Keywords: life purpose; entrepreneurial intention; altruism.

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Introduction

Youth entrepreneurship has gained global significance as a pathway to innovation and employment (Silveyra et al., 2021). In Latin America and Mexico, fostering entrepreneurial vocations among college students is a key strategy for economic development. Traditionally, the literature has highlighted cognitive and socioeconomic factors (human capital, social networks, perceptions of feasibility) as predictors of entrepreneurial intention (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). However, recent interest has shifted toward personal and motivational dimensions. In particular, life purposes and personal values are emerging as key influences on entrepreneurial initiative (Ryff, 2019). It has been proposed that life purpose is fundamental to the entrepreneurial experience, as entrepreneurs need clear goals and objectives to guide their activities and overcome challenges (Ryff, 2019). This article aims to examine the relationship between an altruistic life purpose and the intention to start a business among young people.

The concept of life purpose refers to the sense of direction and existential goals that guide a person's life trajectory; it is a life goal represented as a long-term commitment (Kashdan et al., 2023). According to eudaimonic models of well-being, purpose is the existential core of a meaningful life, providing significance, direction, and clear goals (Ryff, 1989). Individuals with a defined purpose demonstrate greater perseverance, resilience in the face of adversity, and a focus on transcendent goals (Hill et al., 2016). When purpose involves the well-being of others—that is, when it is altruistic—it implies a sense of social contribution rather than a focus solely on personal achievements. Xi et al. (2022) define altruism as values, beliefs, and behaviors that involve helping others. This could also be present in for-profit entrepreneurs. Many government and philanthropic efforts have failed to solve social problems, making an entrepreneurial approach necessary (Dees, 1998). Studies on social entrepreneurship have shown that entrepreneurs oriented toward the public good exhibit characteristics such as social consciousness and a desire for sustainable change (Dees, 1998; Mair & Marti, 2006). In particular, Yasir et al. (2021) suggest that altruistic values have a positive effect on the intention to become an entrepreneur (particularly with a sustainable focus).

This type of evidence suggests that young people with Schwartz's (1992) values of benevolence and universality may view entrepreneurship as a means—both social and profitable—to realize their altruistic ideals. Recent studies have found that students in the

humanities place greater emphasis on values such as universalism and benevolence, while students in economics and technology placed greater value on power (Kuusisto et al., 2023).

To contextualize this relationship, multiple theories are drawn upon. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) proposes that behavioral intention (e.g., to start a business) is determined by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived control. An altruistic purpose can influence a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship if it is perceived that entrepreneurship will enable the achievement of altruistic goals (e.g., solving social problems). Furthermore, altruistic values can affect subjective norms, as individuals surround themselves with environments that value community service (Xi et al., 2022). Likewise, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains why an altruistic purpose reinforces the entrepreneurial drive. Young people guided by internal goals (serving the community) find in entrepreneurial activity a source of personal satisfaction and fulfillment, as opposed to extrinsic motivations driven by external rewards. The argument is that intrinsic motivation involves inherent pleasure in the task and persistence, while extrinsic motivation depends on external rewards and is associated with negative emotions. Thus, those who undertake entrepreneurial ventures driven by an altruistic ideal activate strong internal impulses, increasing their determination. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature regarding studies that confirm or refute whether altruistic values underpin commitment to social entrepreneurship initiatives—the central purpose of this research.

Consequently, the main objective of this article is to initiate a discussion around a theoretical framework that examines whether college students with broader or altruistic life purposes demonstrate a greater intention to become entrepreneurs. This motivation stems from preliminary data, in which the correlation between measures of altruistic purpose and entrepreneurial intention was positive and statistically significant. To explore this relationship in greater depth, the aforementioned theories are critically integrated, discussing how personal values and motivations interact in entrepreneurial decisions. This study expands the existing theoretical framework by incorporating life purpose—a construct that remains understudied in youth entrepreneurship—and proposes theory-based hypotheses for future mixed-methods studies.

A valuable contribution of this study is that previous research has focused on social entrepreneurship. The present study does not make that distinction, as the instrument allows for the identification of entrepreneurial intention in general, including for-profit entrepreneurship. To address the topic of life purpose, we draw on three theoretical components: breadth of purpose, presence of purpose, and school support for achieving one's purpose. The breadth of life purpose refers to the level of altruism associated with students' life goals. The presence of purpose is linked to students having life projects and goals, believing that these make them better people, and feeling that they reflect who they truly are. The third element evaluates the educational institution. It allows students to indicate whether their institution provides them with tools to achieve their life purpose, whether they find their schoolwork and activities valuable

and meaningful, and whether teachers support them in achieving their goals and dreams. It has been found that when employees feel their job brings them closer to their life purpose, their intention to leave the company decreases (Charles-Leija et al., 2023).

Altruism, defined as values, beliefs, and behaviors that involve helping others, contributes to a greater sense of life purpose (Xi et al., 2022). Previous studies have suggested that the search for meaning can, in itself, be a business opportunity (Van Gelderen, 2006). However, the approach of this study does not take that perspective. This article seeks to identify how students' personal purpose or meaning can serve as an indicator of entrepreneurial potential.

Most adults surveyed in a previous study perceive that their lives have meaning and purpose. For example, 59.2% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement "My life has a clear sense of purpose" (Kobau et al., 2010).

Adolescents who report a greater sense of meaning in life tend to have better psychological well-being, including greater happiness, optimism, and life satisfaction (Brassai et al., 2011). Similarly, a greater sense of meaning in life is associated with fewer psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, sleep problems, and chronic fatigue. Furthermore, meaning in life is linked to a better quality of life and greater overall well-being (Brassai et al., 2011).

Adolescents with a greater sense of meaning in life are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as illicit drug use, the use of over-the-counter sedatives, and unprotected sex. On the other hand, a greater sense of meaning in life is associated with healthy behaviors such as regular exercise and dietary control (Brassai et al., 2011). A longitudinal study in the United States showed that having a sense of purpose in life can positively influence people's economic outcomes, such as income and net worth (Hill et al., 2016).

Materials and methods

This study adopts a theoretical framework based on prior empirical evidence and our own data. The main instruments were: a) an altruistic life purpose scale designed and validated by the author, consisting of 13 Likert-type items (e.g., "My life purpose improves the lives of other people outside my city"). b) The Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire by Liñán and Chen (2009), consisting of 6 items on a 7-point scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree"). Examples of items: "I am determined to start a business in the future," "I will do everything possible to start and run my own business."

The sample included more than 170 students from various undergraduate programs at universities in the cities of Monclova and Saltillo, Coahuila (Mexico). Table 1 shows the gender and age distribution. In terms of gender, women predominate with 126 cases (73.3%), compared to 46 men (26.7%), for a total of 172 participants. Regarding age, the majority are between 18 and 20 years old, with 20-year-olds being the most common group (28.6%). Ages

outside this range are much less common, with only a few cases at the extremes, such as 16 or 29 years old. The difference in the totals (172 for gender and 161 for age; some data were lost due to recording errors) reflects a predominantly female and young population, with very little representation of those over 21 years of age.

Table1 . Sample description

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	126	73.3%
Male	46	26.7%
Total	172	100.0%
Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
16	1	0.6%
17	3	1.9%
18	25	15.5%
19	44	27.3%
20	46	28.6%
21	18	11.2%
22	7	4.3%
23	8	5.0%
24	1	0.6%
25	2	1.2%
26	3	1.9%
27	2	1.2%
29	1	0.6%
Total	161	100.0%

Table 2 contains two columns: “Item Descriptions” and “Variable.” The first column lists a series of statements related to life purposes, personal goals, education, and entrepreneurial aspirations. The second column assigns a specific variable to each statement, ranging from p1 to p13 for statements related to life purpose, and from e1 to e6 for statements related to entrepreneurship. It should be noted that the 13 life purpose items are divided into three constructs. Items p1 through p3 measure the breadth of life purpose; items p4 through p8 correspond to the presence of life purpose; and items p9 through p13 refer to the effort made by the educational institution to enable students to achieve their life purpose.

Table2 : Description of the items and variables included in the analysis

Description of the items	Variable
My life purpose impacts my loved ones	p1
My life plan impacts my community	p2
My purpose improves the lives of other people or living beings outside my city	p3
I believe that following my life's purpose makes me a better person	p4
I use my strengths to achieve my life's purpose	p5
I have goals that define my purpose in the world	p6
I have a goal in my life that gives meaning to my existence	p7
I have a project in my life that reflects who I am	p8
My teachers motivate me to pursue my dreams and aspirations	p9
I feel that school gives me a clear direction for my future	p10
My teachers support me in pursuing my personal goals	p11
Activities at school make me feel like I'm working toward something meaningful	p12
I feel that school gives me the tools I need to achieve my dreams	p13
I'm willing to do whatever it takes to become an entrepreneur.	e1
My career goal is to become an entrepreneur.	e2
I have done everything possible to start and run my own business.	e3
I am determined to start a business in the future.	e4
I have given serious thought to starting a business.	e5
I firmly intend to start a business someday.	e6

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for a set of key variables in the study. Each row corresponds to a specific variable and provides two statistical measures: the mean and the standard deviation (SD). It is worth noting that the 13 items related to the purpose construct are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, while those related to entrepreneurial intention are rated on a scale of 1 to 7. It can be observed that the items with the highest mean scores are 4, 5, and 7 for purpose—those corresponding to the construct of sense of purpose—which is consistent with previous studies highlighting a high sense of life purpose among most people (Kobau et al., 2010). These items show a mean score above 4 points. On the other hand, among the items focused on entrepreneurial intention, none exceeded an average of 6 units, indicating stability in this single construct.

Table3 : Mean and Standard Deviation of the Life Purpose and Entrepreneurial Intention Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
p1	3.69	1.11
p2	3.09	1.27
p3	3.20	1.25
p4	4.01	0.96
p5	4.18	0.88
p6	3.98	0.99
p7	4.09	1.04
p8	3.99	1.05
p9	3.72	1.08
p10	3.76	1.01
p11	3.53	1.20
p12	3.76	1.10
p13	3.73	0.97
e1	5.45	1.40
e2	5.24	1.63
e3	5.65	1.42
e4	5.51	1.62
e5	5.12	1.79
e6	5.37	1.67

Source: Author's own work

Table 3 shows a correlation matrix between the variables of interest. Notable are the correlations among the first three items related to life purpose, all three of which measure the breadth of that purpose. Most of these items showed statistically significant correlations with entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, the correlation increases when the purpose is "broader"—that is, when it aims to impact more people or groups further removed from the student's immediate circle (see Table 4).

Table4 : Correlations Among Life Purpose and Entrepreneurial Intention Variables

Corr	p1	p2	p3	p4	p5	p6	p7	p8	p9	p10	p11	p12	p13	e1	e2	e3	e4	e5	e6
p1	1*	0.58*	0.39*	0.23*	0.2*	0.26*	0.29*	0.37*	0.22*	0.18*	0.22*	0.24*	0.22*	0.16*	0.11	0.13*	0.09	0.16*	0.12
p2	0.58*	1*	0.61*	0.34*	0.22*	0.28*	0.3*	0.26*	0.25*	0.22*	0.23*	0.25*	0.21*	0.19*	0.24*	0.19*	0.13*	0.19*	0.21*
p3	0.39*	0.61*	1*	0.35*	0.27*	0.28*	0.23*	0.29*	0.29*	0.29*	0.31*	0.23*	0.2*	0.22*	0.26*	0.25*	0.26*	0.31*	0.33*
p4	0.23*	0.34*	0.35*	1*	0.71*	0.63*	0.62*	0.56*	0.31*	0.36*	0.29*	0.37*	0.33*	0.12	0.17*	0.23*	0.22*	0.19*	0.2*
p5	0.2*	0.22*	0.27*	0.71*	1*	0.69*	0.65*	0.53*	0.26*	0.34*	0.29*	0.35*	0.34*	0.18*	0.24*	0.3*	0.25*	0.28*	0.28*
p6	0.26*	0.28*	0.28*	0.63*	0.69*	1*	0.76*	0.59*	0.3*	0.43*	0.33*	0.42*	0.38*	0.32*	0.32*	0.37*	0.33*	0.36*	0.32*
p7	0.29*	0.3*	0.23*	0.62*	0.65*	0.76*	1*	0.65*	0.28*	0.4*	0.25*	0.36*	0.33*	0.28*	0.29*	0.37*	0.29*	0.31*	0.31*
p8	0.37*	0.26*	0.29*	0.56*	0.53*	0.59*	0.65*	1*	0.25*	0.36*	0.22*	0.35*	0.3*	0.23*	0.2*	0.28*	0.26*	0.25*	0.26*
p9	0.22*	0.25*	0.29*	0.31*	0.26*	0.3*	0.28*	0.25*	1*	0.73*	0.78*	0.62*	0.68*	0.15*	0.1	0.11	0.17*	0.19*	0.12
p10	0.18*	0.22*	0.29*	0.36*	0.34*	0.43*	0.4*	0.36*	0.73*	1*	0.67*	0.65*	0.64*	0.12	0.13*	0.13*	0.18*	0.16*	0.14*
p11	0.22*	0.23*	0.31*	0.29*	0.29*	0.33*	0.25*	0.22*	0.78*	0.67*	1*	0.65*	0.66*	0.14*	0.21*	0.2*	0.23*	0.25*	0.18*
p12	0.24*	0.25*	0.23*	0.37*	0.35*	0.42*	0.36*	0.35*	0.62*	0.65*	0.65*	1*	0.68*	0.21*	0.18*	0.26*	0.26*	0.19*	0.21*
p13	0.22*	0.21*	0.2*	0.33*	0.34*	0.38*	0.33*	0.3*	0.68*	0.64*	0.66*	0.68*	1*	0.17*	0.21*	0.2*	0.23*	0.19*	0.19*
e1	0.16*	0.19*	0.22*	0.12	0.18*	0.32*	0.28*	0.23*	0.15*	0.12	0.14*	0.21*	0.17*	1*	0.65*	0.61*	0.52*	0.55*	0.6*
e2	0.11	0.24*	0.26*	0.17*	0.24*	0.32*	0.29*	0.2*	0.1	0.13*	0.21*	0.18*	0.21*	0.65*	1*	0.69*	0.69*	0.66*	0.73*
e3	0.13*	0.19*	0.25*	0.23*	0.3*	0.37*	0.37*	0.28*	0.11	0.13*	0.2*	0.26*	0.2*	0.61*	0.69*	1*	0.81*	0.71*	0.78*
e4	0.09	0.13*	0.26*	0.22*	0.25*	0.33*	0.29*	0.26*	0.17*	0.18*	0.23*	0.26*	0.23*	0.52*	0.69*	0.81*	1*	0.79*	0.84*
e5	0.16*	0.19*	0.31*	0.19*	0.28*	0.36*	0.31*	0.25*	0.19*	0.16*	0.25*	0.19*	0.19*	0.55*	0.66*	0.71*	0.79*	1*	0.81*
e6	0.12	0.21*	0.33*	0.2*	0.28*	0.32*	0.31*	0.26*	0.12	0.14*	0.18*	0.21*	0.19*	0.6*	0.73*	0.78*	0.84*	0.81*	1*

Source: Author's own calculations. * Significant at the 0.90 level.

Results

The key findings of the theoretical-statistical analysis indicate that an altruistic life purpose strengthens entrepreneurial intention among college students. This relationship can be explained through various theoretical mechanisms. A life purpose oriented toward the collective well-being tends to foster a positive attitude toward entrepreneurial actions aligned with that goal. In the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), favorable attitudes drive intention (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals with altruistic purposes may perceive entrepreneurship as a means to achieve their social goals, generating positive expectations about its outcomes. Furthermore, their social environment (family members, professors) typically supports goals with social impact, reinforcing their plans.

According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), intrinsic motivation—driven by interest and internal meaning—is more enduring than extrinsic motivation. Young people with altruistic purposes focus on internal goals (contributing to society) rather than external

incentives (money, prestige). The literature indicates that intrinsic motivation generates inherent pleasure in the activity and promotes persistence, in contrast to extrinsic motivation, which is linked to external rewards and negative emotions. In the present model, this would explain why an altruistic (intrinsic) purpose enhances the intention to start a business: by viewing entrepreneurship as a source of personal satisfaction derived from making an impact on the community or the world, the individual becomes more firmly committed to the idea of starting their own business.

This study suggests that even when measuring general entrepreneurial intention, an altruistic purpose transforms entrepreneurship into a vehicle for broader impact. The correlations suggest that the young people in the sample perceive entrepreneurial opportunities as compatible with their altruistic ideals. Therefore, the data suggest that altruistic purposes are not incompatible with the intention to start a business; on the contrary, they can make entrepreneurship a goal that is consistent with one's life purpose.

Well-being studies have found that having clear and meaningful goals helps individuals overcome obstacles (Hill et al., 2016). The significant correlation indicates that purpose provides psychological strength (self-confidence, sense of mission) that translates into a greater perception of entrepreneurial ability (perceived control in the TCP).

The data suggest that an altruistic life purpose increases entrepreneurial intention, and this can be explained through several theoretical frameworks: the reinforcement of positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship (TPB) and sustained intrinsic motivation (SDT). Thus, the study integrates these frameworks to explain the combined mechanism: essentially, altruistic values and motivations strengthen young people's willingness to launch business ventures, whether or not they have a social purpose.

Conclusions

Previous studies have shown that people with a sense of purpose may be more likely to make sound financial decisions and pursue long-term goals (Hill et al., 2016). This article reinforces that understanding, noting that students with a stronger sense of purpose and a broader scope of purpose increase their intention to become entrepreneurs upon completing their college studies.

This study offers a substantial theoretical contribution by demonstrating how altruistic life purpose is positively linked to entrepreneurial intention among college students. Integrating the theory of planned behavior and self-determined motivation, it is argued that young people with values of benevolence and social goals develop favorable attitudes toward entrepreneurship and high intrinsic motivation—factors that explain their greater intention to become entrepreneurs. Specifically, the significant positive relationship found suggests that altruistic goals do not inhibit entrepreneurial initiative but rather channel it toward impactful projects

On a theoretical level, this study expands the literature on entrepreneurial intentions by including life purpose as a relevant antecedent. Among the practical implications, it is worth noting that entrepreneurial training programs should incorporate reflections on life purpose and social responsibility. For example, designing workshops that help students identify altruistic goals and demonstrate how entrepreneurship can fulfill them can reinforce their entrepreneurial attitude and self-efficacy. These approaches could increase the intrinsic motivation of young entrepreneurs, as suggested by motivational theories. In summary, it is worth noting that the social dimension of entrepreneurship can inspire altruistic young people to channel their purpose into business initiatives.

The results suggest that the broader the life purpose, the greater the intention to become an entrepreneur. Based on this, it would be advisable for entrepreneurship education programs to incorporate sections on personal development and life purpose to foster the intention to become an entrepreneur among students. In this regard, it is not only important to discover one's personal life purpose but also to broaden it—that is, to consider how our lives can impact people or communities far away.

Future research could explore this relationship using mixed-methods approaches. Qualitative research could delve deeply into how young people align their purpose with their entrepreneurial aspirations (through interviews or focus groups). Longitudinal studies would examine whether altruistic purpose maintains its influence throughout the actual entrepreneurial process. Another approach could involve experimental trials in educational settings, which could test interventions that strengthen the connection between purpose and entrepreneurship by measuring changes in intention. It would also be interesting to compare contexts: for example, assessing whether this altruistic-entrepreneurial link differs in urban/industrial areas compared to rural settings. Future longitudinal studies could be particularly valuable for understanding how life purpose evolves and how these changes influence entrepreneurial intention and success over time.

In conclusion, by focusing the analysis on altruistic life purpose, this study highlights a profound personal factor that strengthens entrepreneurial intention among youth. It implies rethinking entrepreneurial education: not only as the acquisition of technical skills, but also as the cultivation of transcendent aspirations. A greater sense of purpose among adolescents and young students not only reduces the risk of risky behaviors but also increases the likelihood that they will engage in altruistic or entrepreneurial activities with a greater impact on the community.

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