

Understanding Sustainable Student Entrepreneurship: A Qualitative Study of Career Adaptability, Family Support, and Digital Competency

Ika Zutiasari¹, Agus Hermawan², Sopiah³, Divia Rahmania Putri⁴

¹Universitas Negeri Malang – ika.zutiasari.fe@um.ac.id

²Universitas Negeri Malang – agus.hermawan.fe@um.ac.id

³Universitas Negeri Malang – sopiah.fe@um.ac.id

⁴Universitas Negeri Malang – divia.rahmania.2304116@students.um.ac.id

Article Info

Article history:

Received 08 07, 2026

Revised 09 30, 2026

Accepted 10 01, 2026

Keywords:

Sustainable Entrepreneurship
Career Adaptability
Family Support
Digital Competency
Qualitative Study

ABSTRACT

The sustainability of student entrepreneurship has become increasingly important in the digital economy, where University students are expected not only to establish new ventures but also to sustain and grow them amid dynamic business environments. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of university students in sustaining their entrepreneurial ventures by examining the roles of these three factors. A Qualitative phenomenological approach was employed. The participants consisted of university students who had continuously operated their business for at least three years. Data were collected through in-depth-semi-structured interviews, observations, document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The findings reveal for major themes. First, entrepreneurial intention evolves into entrepreneurial behavior through continuous learning, opportunity recognition, and entrepreneurial persistence. Second, career adaptability enables student entrepreneurs navigate early-stage business challenges through the dimensions of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Third, family support functions as both an enabling and constraining factor by providing emotional, financial and motivational resources that influence entrepreneurial sustainability. Fourth, digital competency strengthens business resilience by facilitating innovation, digital marketing, customer engagement, and adaptive decision-making in rapidly changing markets.

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Corresponding Author:

Ika Zutiasari
Faculty of Economics and Bussines, Universitas Negeri Malang
Email: ika.zutiasari.fe@um.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in the global workplace today are influenced by advances in digital technology and the dynamics of globalization. The phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the transition to Society 5.0 require the workforce to have competencies that go beyond mere technical expertise. It is estimated that around 39 to 40 percent of the core competencies required by the workforce will change in the next five years [1] [2] [3]. People are expected to have the ability to adapt to the work environment in which they work, considering how important adaptability is for job success. Career adaptability is an individual's readiness to face tasks, changes, and challenges related to career development. Savickas explains that career adaptability consists of four main dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence [4][5][6][7]. In the context of entrepreneurship, this ability helps students survive market changes and develop flexible business strategies. Several studies show that it is important for lecturers in higher education, especially in Business Education

Study Programs, to understand students' career adaptability and their interventions. [8] [9] [10]. Higher education institutions, through various entrepreneurship programs, have attempted to increase students' interest in building businesses from the beginning of their studies. However, many student businesses have stalled. Based on a preliminary study, researchers tried to distribute questionnaires to Business Education Study Program students in Indonesia and found that out of 173 respondents, 60.7% had tried to develop a new business but only lasted less than 6 months.

The sustainability of entrepreneurship in Business Education students requires the ability to adapt to changes in the business environment. Career Adaptability is one of the psychological assets that enable students to face career transitions effectively [4][11][12][13]. Students who have high adaptability will be better prepared to manage uncertainty and make strategic decisions in developing a business. In further observations, researchers tried to review the condition of career adaptability of Business Education students in Indonesia by distributing questionnaires to 279 students. Based on the results of the study, it was stated that the condition of student career adaptability was in the very high category with a grand mean of 4.25 where the scale used was a Likert scale of 1-5 with the most dominant dimension of concern. This indicates that students have a very strong future orientation. In addition to individual factors, family is also the first social environment that influences entrepreneurial decisions [14][15][16]. Family support is the emotional, financial, and motivational support was provided by family. This support serves as a primary source of motivation, strengthening individuals in facing challenges, reducing stress, increasing self-efficacy, and strengthening resilience in running a business [17] [18] [15]. Several previous studies have revealed that family support can increase students' self-confidence in running a business, especially when facing the risk of failure. On the other hand, the digital transformation forces students to have digital competency so they can utilize various digital platforms in running a business [19][20][21]. Digital Competency refers to students' ability to use digital technology effectively, critically, creatively, and responsibly. This competency is a crucial factor in increasing the competitiveness of student businesses through digital marketing, digital financial management, customer communication, and product innovation. [22]

A review of prior research reveals a gap regarding the limited number of qualitative studies exploring the interplay between career adaptability, family support, and digital competence in transforming entrepreneurial intentions into actual entrepreneurial behavior, as well as how these factors support the sustainability and development of student-owned businesses. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of Business Education students in Indonesia, where entrepreneurship education serves not only to spark entrepreneurial intentions but also to build the capacity to sustain entrepreneurial activities within a dynamic, digital-centric environment. Based on this background, there are several research questions (RQ), RQ1: How do students change their Entrepreneurial Intention into Entrepreneurial Behavior in starting a business? RQ 2: What is the Role of Career Adaptability in overcoming business challenges in the early stages? RQ3: How does Family Support facilitate or hinder Sustainable Entrepreneurship? RQ 4: How does Digital Competency enable business continuity and growth? The sustainability of student entrepreneurship is a complex phenomenon and is not only influenced by students' ability to manage a business but by their readiness to adapt to change, family support and digital competency. These three aspects interact with each other in shaping students' ability to maintain, develop and adapt their business to the dynamics of a constantly changing business environment.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted a qualitative method using a case study approach. The selection of this method was based on the research objective, which is to understand in depth how students build sustainable entrepreneurship through psychological and contextual factors. This study used a purposive sampling technique, namely selecting informants deliberately based on certain criteria. The subjects of this study were students of the Business Education Study Program in Indonesia. The informant criteria in this study were, 1) Students who have successfully built a business for more than 3 years, 2) come from the Business Education study program, 3) Use Digital Media in their business activities. The number of informants was adjusted to the needs until data saturation was achieved. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation and documentation. The data analysis technique for this study used the Miles, Huberman and Saldana model [23] which includes, data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was carried out through source triangulation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore in-depth the experiences of students in building sustainable entrepreneurship through the perspectives of Career Adaptability, Family Support, and Digital Competency. Data analysis was conducted thematically based on the results of in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The

informants for this study consisted of 22 students of the Business Education Study Program in Indonesia. The data collection process was carried out through interviews, both in person and online. The data analysis process resulted in four main themes that directly answer the research questions, namely:

3.1 Transforming Entrepreneurial Intention into Entrepreneurial Behavior

Analysis shows that students do not automatically change their entrepreneurial behavior. This process occurs through several stages, including the emergence of motivation for independence, which develops through a series of real-life experiences in building a business. All informants were student entrepreneurs with businesses that had been running for at least three years. The students revealed that the decision to start a business did not arise spontaneously, but rather began with an entrepreneurial intention that developed through learning experiences, observing market opportunities, and a desire to achieve economic independence. Informants emphasized that having an intention is not enough to make a business grow into a sustainable enterprise. The change from entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial behavior occurs when students make decisions about launching a product or service, dealing with customers, managing business risks, and evaluating their business development. The initial phase of a business is the most challenging period because most informants face limited capital. Students still have limited business experience and struggle to balance their time between academic activities and business management.

This experience becomes a turning point that shapes entrepreneurial behavior. With more than three years of experience, they develop a proactive character that seeks solutions, is oriented towards learning, and has a strong commitment to continuously improving the business model according to changing customer needs. Thus, entrepreneurial behavior is not only defined as the act of starting a business, but also reflects the ability to sustainably maintain, develop, and adapt a business. These findings demonstrate a gap between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial behavior. Although many have the intention to become entrepreneurs, only a small proportion are able to implement this intention into concrete action and sustain their businesses in the long term. This condition indicates that the transformation of intention into behavior is influenced by a continuous learning process, experience facing business challenges, and the ability to make decisions under conditions full of uncertainty. This finding supports the Theory of Planned Behavior [24], which explains that intention is a predictor of behavior, but the realization of behavior is influenced by perceived behavioral control and the availability of opportunities to act. These opportunities are realized through direct experience running a business, the ability to manage risk, and the courage to make decisions.

The results of this study also align with previous research that found that entrepreneurial behavior develops through the process of identifying and solving problems and learning from business experience [25]. The sustainability of entrepreneurial activity is influenced not only by initial intention [26] and [27], but also by long-term commitment, the ability to adapt to change, and persistence in facing various business challenges. Students who are able to sustain their businesses are seen through their consistency in running them. Based on these findings, the transformation from entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial behavior cannot be understood as a single event, but rather as a continuous developmental process that can shape a more mature entrepreneurial mindset.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings complement the Theory of Planned Behavior, which conceptualizes intention as an important antecedent of behavior, while also highlighting the importance of the intention behavior transition. In the context of students entrepreneurship, intention provides the motivational direction, but actual behavior requires individuals to mobilize resources, respond to contextual condition, and maintain action over time. The findings therefore suggest that entrepreneurial intention should not be treated as the final indicator of entrepreneurial development. Instead, greater attention should be given to the mechanisms through which intention is converted into sustained entrepreneurial action. Overall, the finding demonstrates that entrepreneurial intention is the starting point, rather than the endpoint, of students entrepreneurship.

3.2 The Role of Career Adaptability in Overcoming Early Business Challenges.

Research results indicate that career adaptability is a psychological resource that enables students to navigate the most critical phase of establishing a business in the early stages. Based on interviews, career adaptability is not only reflected in students' readiness to plan their future careers but also in their ability to make decisions, explore opportunities, and maintain confidence in the face of business uncertainty. This study developed an interview guide developed by Savickas, based on four main dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence [5].

The analysis shows that the concern dimension reflects students' ability to view business as part of their future career choices. Informants explained that from the outset, they realized that the decision to become an entrepreneur was a long-term investment, not simply an activity to earn extra income. This awareness

encouraged them to set business goals, develop business development targets, and prepare strategic steps to face business competition. The control dimension emerged when students faced several decision-making challenges during business operations. Students explained that they prioritized the use of limited capital, established marketing strategies, managed finances, and managed time between academic and business operations. This ability fostered a sense of responsibility for business development. Regarding the curiosity dimension, research findings indicate that important factors that help students survive in the early stages of a business are their ability to recognize opportunities. Informants strive to seek information on market trends, changes in consumer behavior, and developments in digital technology. Before making a decision on a problem, students evaluate various available alternatives, participate in training facilitated by their university, and utilize various learning resources independently. This ability encourages students to innovate in products, market segments, and marketing activities. The final dimension is reflected in the students' own experiences; most informants have experienced business failure, such as sales that fell short of targets, products that turned out to be unpopular, and mistakes in business management. These experiences did not lead to business termination but instead became learning processes that improved their ability to overcome various business challenges.

These four dimensions do not operate separately but form an interconnected adaptation process. Concern provides long-term direction and goals, control helps students make independent decisions, curiosity encourages exploration of opportunities and innovation, while confidence strengthens resilience in the face of failure. The integration of these four dimensions enables students to maintain their businesses despite facing various environmental changes. These findings support Career Construction Theory [5]; [28] explains that career adaptability is a psychosocial resource for dealing with career transitions and challenges. This finding is also in line with previous research which shows that Career Adaptability can reduce the impact of psychological stress in entrepreneurial activities and increase the ability to survive business dynamics [29].

3.3 The Role of Family Support in Facilitating Sustainable Student Entrepreneurship

Research results indicate that family support is an external factor that plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of student businesses. Forms of support provided by families include emotional, informational, appreciation, motivational, and in some cases, financial support. These findings indicate that students' success in maintaining their businesses is determined not only by individual abilities but also by the quality of social support received from their families. Emotional support was the most common form of support received by informants. Students received trust, attention, and encouragement when facing challenges related to their businesses. Family provided a place to share, providing psychological support and reducing emotional stress related to the risks of entrepreneurship. This enabled students to remain committed to their businesses.

Some students received financial support in the form of business capital, provision of business premises, and assistance related to operational activities. However, interestingly, informants viewed this financial assistance not as a primary factor in business success but rather as a form of family trust in the students' ability to manage the business. This suggests that the sustainability of student entrepreneurship is more influenced by the quality of relationships and family support than the amount of financial assistance received [30]; [31]. The third form of support provided by the family is informational support. The family plays a role as a source of information in business decision-making. The family is the primary forum for discussion and learning environment, thus shaping how students approach various business challenges. This finding aligns with Social Support Theory, which explains that social support functions as a resource that helps individuals cope with stress [32]; [33]. It also enhances the ability to face challenges and strengthens psychological well-being. In the context of entrepreneurship, the family is the closest source of support, providing emotional, social, and material resources for entrepreneurs. These results are consistent with previous research that found social support contributes to increased career adaptability, ultimately strengthening individuals in facing career and entrepreneurial challenges [33].

3.4 The Contribution of Digital Competency to Supporting Business Sustainability

Digital competency is understood as students' ability to utilize digital technology effectively, creatively, and responsibly to support business operations. Referring to the Digital Competency Framework developed by the European Commission [34], digital competency refers to the ability to build communication and networks through digital platforms, the ability to produce creative and engaging marketing content, the ability to maintain data security, transactions, and privacy in digital business activities, and the ability to utilize digital technology to solve business problems and create innovation.

The research results show that technological developments are changing the way businesses are run. Students are gradually utilizing various digital platforms as part of a sustainable business strategy. The research findings indicate that students actively utilize digital information to understand market changes. Informants

routinely monitor product trends through social media and analyze customer feedback. The ability to access this information enables students to make faster and more accurate decisions than relying solely on intuition. In addition, students actively utilize digital learning resources such as webinars, podcasts, and business communities to improve their entrepreneurial knowledge. This shows that digital competency is not only related to technology but also relates to the ability to learn independently/self-directed learning that supports sustainable business development [35]. All informants' businesses utilize digital media as the primary means of building communication with customers and expanding business networks. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp Business, Facebook, and marketplaces are used to promote products, provide customer service, receive feedback, and build long-term relationships with consumers. Figure 1 shows one of the digital media used by informants in this study.

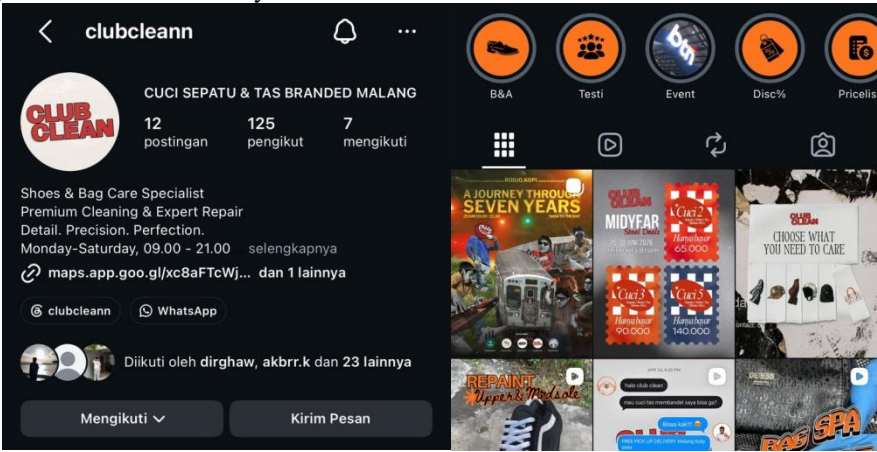


Figure 1. Developed digital media

Overall, the research results indicate that digital competency is not merely technical skills in using digital devices, but has evolved into a strategic capability that determines the sustainability of student businesses. Competence in acquiring information, building communication, and creating content enables students to improve operational efficiency and strengthen relationships with customers. This finding aligns with previous research, which revealed that digital competency is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for individuals to participate effectively in the digital society.

3.5 Sustainable Entrepreneurship Model

Sustainable student entrepreneurship is conceptually defined primarily in terms of business viability, as well as the capacity to adapt and maintain business operations over time [36]. This definition is grounded in the empirical characteristics of the participants, who had operated their businesses for at least three years and demonstrated continued efforts to adapt their products, customer engagement, and digital business practices. Based on the research findings, the sustainability of student entrepreneurship is not influenced by a single factor, but rather by the interaction of psychological, social, and technological factors. This study proposes the SSE-CADS Model as a conceptual framework that explains how Career Adaptability, Digital Competency, and Family Support contribute to the development of entrepreneurial behavior and resilience, ultimately resulting in sustainable entrepreneurship. This model is developed into the diagram shown in Figure 2. The SSE-CADS model was developed through a systematic qualitative analysis process using raw data derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data processing involved the creation of initial codes, categories, and key themes. The relationships between the identified themes were then examined and synthesized into a conceptual SSE-CADS model which illustrates how career adaptability, family support, and digital competence interact to strengthen resilience and entrepreneurial behavior, ultimately supporting sustainable student entrepreneurship. These findings were systematically and summarized in table 1,

Table 1. Empirical Findings Underlying the SSE-CADS Model

Interview Finding	Initial Code	Emerging Theme
“I was worried about whether my Business could Continue, so i Started thinking about what i needed to prepare for the future.”	Planning, responsibility	Career Adaptability
“..... and take responsibility fo the decision”		
I keep looking for new ideas and trying different ways to attract customer	Exploring opportunities; trying new approaches	Career Adaptability
“My Family may not always provide money, but they support my decision to continue the business”	Motivation Support, emotional support	Family Support

“My Family always encourages me when I feel tired or want to stop”		
“I use my social media to promote my products and communicate with customers”	Social Media Marketing, Communication	Digital Competency
“When I do not know how to do something, I search for tutorials and learn by myself”	Self-directed learning	Digital Competency
“I evaluate what went wrong and change the way I run the business”	Evaluation, adaption; problem solving	Entrepreneurial resilience
“I’ve been running the business for several years. Along the way, I’ve changed how I manage it based on what I’ve learned and experienced”	Continuity, adaptation	Sustainable student Entrepreneurship

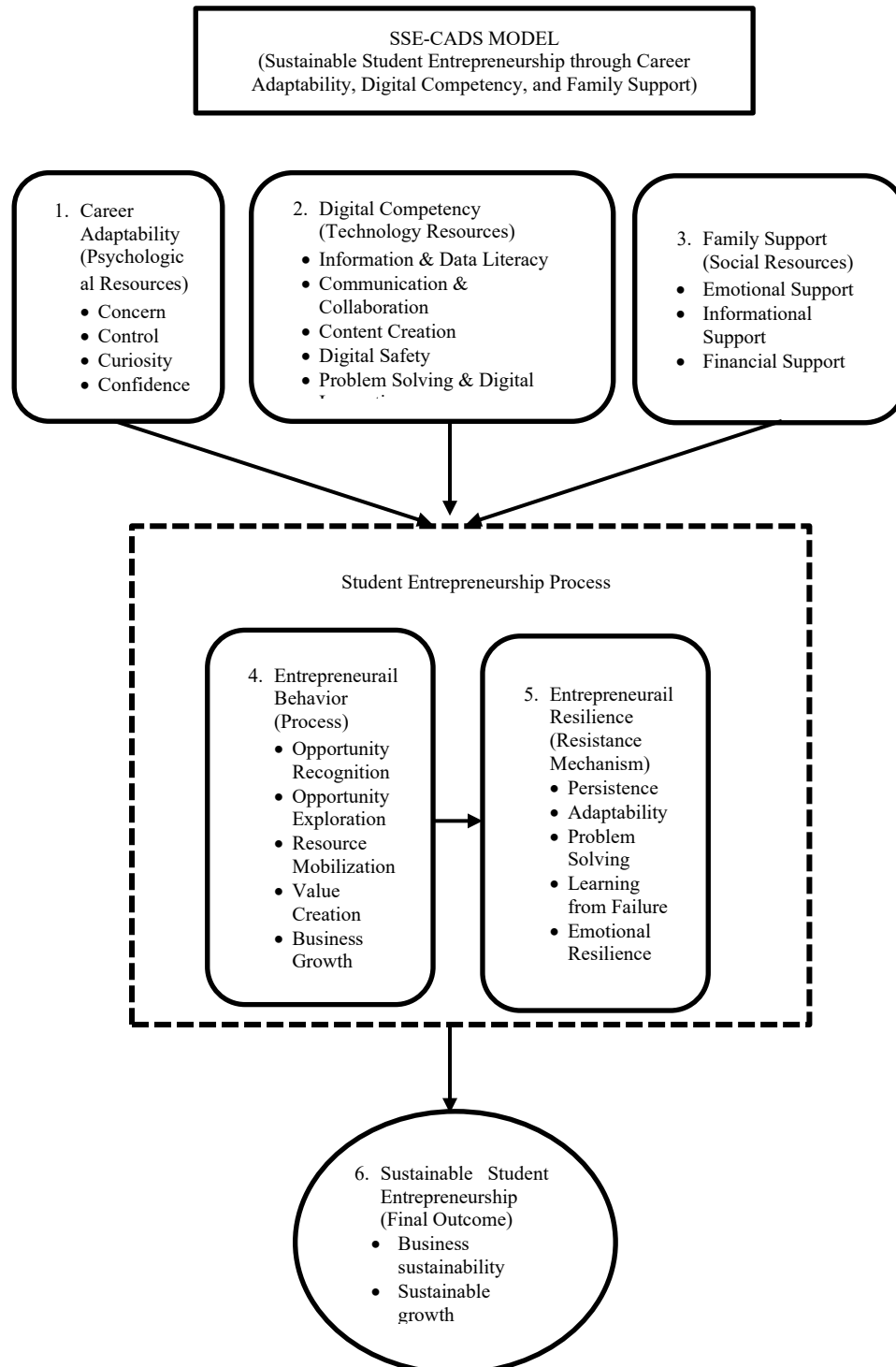


Figure 2. SSE-CADS Model

Figure 2 is a conceptual model explaining the process of developing sustainable student entrepreneurship. This model shows that entrepreneurial intention does not directly result in business sustainability, before undergoing a transformation into entrepreneurial behavior. In this process, Career Adaptability as a psychological resource, digital competency as a technological resource, and Family support as a social resource synergize to form entrepreneurial resilience, namely the ability to adapt, survive, continue learning, and innovate in facing the dynamics of the business environment. Ultimately, this process leads to the realization of Sustainable Student Entrepreneurship, characterized by the ability to maintain a business in the long term, improve business performance and growth, create sustainable innovation, and provide economic and social value.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the sustainability of student entrepreneurship is a dynamic process due to the interaction between psychological, social, and technological factors. The transformation of entrepreneurial intention into entrepreneurial behavior occurs through a process of learning, experience, opportunity recognition, and adaptability in facing business challenges, especially at the start of a business. Career adaptability is a psychological resource that strengthens students' abilities in planning, making decisions, exploring opportunities, and overcoming various business obstacles. Family support acts as a social resource through informational and instrumental emotional support that increases student motivation and resilience, while digital competency is a strategic capability that supports innovation and operational efficiency through the use of digital technology. Universities need to develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem that integrates strengthening adaptive abilities, family support, and digital competency to produce sustainable young entrepreneurs.

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