

Article

How Entrepreneurship Education and Social Capital Promote Nascent Entrepreneurial Behaviours: The Mediating Roles of Entrepreneurial Passion and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship education and social capital have been addressed in entrepreneurship literature. However, the intervening mechanism under which these two factors influence nascent entrepreneurial behaviours remains underdeveloped. Using the data of 623 graduate students in China, this study investigates the influence of entrepreneurship education and social capital on nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, and examines the mediating roles of entrepreneurial passion and self-efficacy (ESE). The results indicate that entrepreneurship education and social capital promote nascent entrepreneurial behaviours through the intervening mechanisms of entrepreneurial passion and ESE. The results suggest that entrepreneurial behaviours must be developed through psychological mechanisms, including emotion and cognition. This study also provides practical implications regarding how to promote students' entrepreneurship.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education; entrepreneurial passion; entrepreneurial self-efficacy; nascent entrepreneurial behaviours; social capital



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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been considered to contribute to developing the economy and reducing unemployment [1,2], and a burgeoning number of studies have attempted to reveal the factors that drive entrepreneurship [3–5]. Nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, which refer to the actions of opportunity discovery and exploitation [3,6], are considered to be key elements of start-up efforts and great predictors of individual future career choice [7,8]. Recently, the existing research has addressed the roles of entrepreneurship education and social capital in driving entrepreneurship [4,5,9,10]. Entrepreneurship education facilitates the enhancement of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills [11,12]. Social capital creates an encouraging environment for entrepreneurship by providing individuals with resources from family members, friends, community, and society [13]. However, how entrepreneurship education and social capital influence nascent entrepreneurial actions needs to be understood further [8]. This study aims to investigate the intervening mechanism under which entrepreneurship education and social capital influence nascent entrepreneurial behaviours. The stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model posits that environmental factors can influence people's behaviours through shaping individual psychological organisms, especially emotions and cognitions [14,15]. Although a few studies have provided evidence that entrepreneurship education and social capital can enhance self-confidence or inspire positive emotion [9,16,17], there is a lack of an integrated perspective when exploring the intervening mechanism in the relationship between environmental factors (i.e., entrepreneurship education and social capital) and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours. Particularly, in entrepreneurship literature, entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) are regarded as central emotion and cognition fuelling entrepreneurial outcomes [18–21]. The former reflects the intense and positive emotional

desire to start activities [18], and the latter represents the confidence that an individual perceives themselves to have the ability to achieve entrepreneurial tasks [22]. Therefore, this study examines the mediating roles of entrepreneurial passion and ESE under which entrepreneurship education and social capital enhance nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.

This study contributes to the existing literature in the following ways. First, based on the S-O-R model, this study provides an integrative perspective of the underlying mechanism under which entrepreneurship education and social capital influence entrepreneurial behaviours. By investigating the mediating effects of entrepreneurial passion and ESE, this study addresses the critical roles of positive emotion and cognition in explaining how environmental support influences entrepreneurial behaviours [14,15]. Second, this study broadens the literature on how to drive nascent entrepreneurial behaviours by investigating the roles of environmental factors (i.e., entrepreneurship education and social capital) and psychological factors (i.e., entrepreneurial passion and ESE) in promoting nascent entrepreneurial behaviours [2,10,23]. Figure 1 shows the research model.

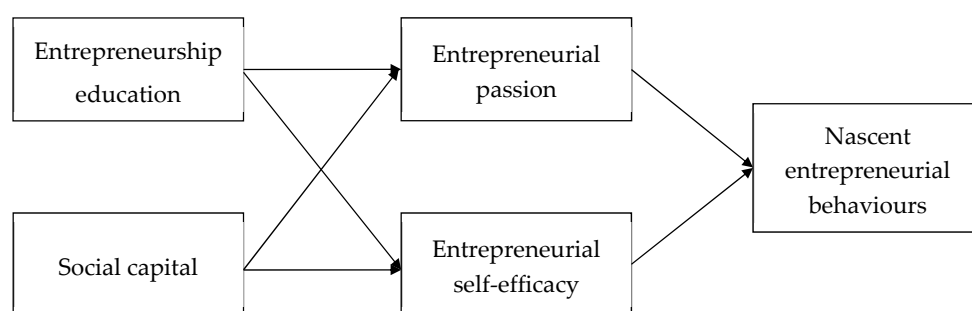


Figure 1. Research model.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Entrepreneurship Education and Nascent Entrepreneurial Behaviours

Nascent entrepreneurial behaviours refer to individual actions to discover and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities [3,6]. Discovery of entrepreneurial opportunity describes a person's act of searching, initialising, and developing a venture idea or improving products/services to make use of a specific market. Opportunity exploitation refers to individuals implementing their entrepreneurial ideas by collecting resources, developing products, and exploiting a new market. Nascent entrepreneurial behaviours usually indicate individual career choice to become an entrepreneur in the near future [7]. Previous research has investigated the antecedents of nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, such as identity aspiration, university education, human capital, and network ties [3,6,10,23].

Entrepreneurship education teaches the various aspects of starting and operating a new venture through a series of courses and practical activities that focus on providing knowledge and practical skills to increase the likelihood of entrepreneurial success [11,24]. Entrepreneurship education aims to enhance the positive attitude of individuals towards entrepreneurship and inspire their willingness to undertake entrepreneurial tasks [25]. It is the main source of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. It can also effectively explain the changes in entrepreneurial motivation [26].

To discover and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities, individuals need to use their entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to search for information, collect resources, and invent products or services in a highly volatile market. Entrepreneurship education enhances the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills of individuals, thereby reducing their perceived uncertainty and improving their confidence [26]. Acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and confidence allows individuals to utilise subjective comprehension and current information to identify or create business opportunities, as well as select and implement perceived attractive opportunities [10]. Entrepreneurship education can also trigger positive emotions by strengthening entrepreneurial motivation and enhancing

flexible learning, finally driving individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activities [16]. Thus, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Entrepreneurship education is positively related to nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.*

2.2. Social Capital and Nascent Entrepreneurial Behaviours

Social capital is the sum of all networks of relationships possessed by an individual [27]. It includes social interactions and ties (e.g., family members and close friends who have entrepreneurial experience), trust relationships people have with other network members (e.g., local governments and banks), and norms that encourage entrepreneurship in the network environments [13,27]. Social capital provides individuals with existing and potential resources in favour of entrepreneurship from the relationships of individual entrepreneurs, communities, networks, or societies [28]. Social capital also offers access to venture investors, critical information of competitors, and potential customers [28].

During opportunity discovery and exploitation, individuals need to make use of their networks and collect resources (e.g., finance, information, and technology resources) to develop and implement their venture idea. Individuals with high social capital can obtain resources, influence, and sponsorship for entrepreneurship, thereby enhancing their confidence and ultimately promoting their entrepreneurial actions [29]. Moreover, social capital creates an adequate and supportive social environment for people who want to have their own business [13]. The successful experience of family members and friends may reduce the perceived risk and enhance positive emotion toward entrepreneurship. The shared norms and values that encourage and support entrepreneurship in a community or society also motivate individuals to be active in entrepreneurship [30,31]. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Social capital is positively related to nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.*

2.3. Entrepreneurial Passion as Mediator

Woodworth and Schlosberg [32] pointed out that the environment is the source of stimuli impinging on the organism, producing a personal response. In the stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) model, stimuli are environmental factors external to individuals that catch their attention and may present in different forms. Response includes conscious or unconscious intentions and behaviours [33]. Organism refers to the psychological states such as cognition, emotion, and motivation underlying the effect of stimuli on individual response [15].

In the field of entrepreneurship research, Shaver and Scott [34] firstly introduced the S-O-R model and suggested a psychological approach to new venture creation. The S-O-R model indicates that various stimuli related to entrepreneurship in the external environment act on entrepreneurs' cognitive and/or affective processes (organism), which finally leads to entrepreneurs' responses. Michl, Welp, Spörrle, and Picot [14] and Virick, Basu, and Rogers [15] also adopted the S-O-R model to investigate emotions and cognitions as organisms in the entrepreneurial decision-making process, making the feature of an entrepreneurial opportunity and contextual layoff factors as stimuli and the resulting entrepreneurial behaviours or intentions as responses. In our study, entrepreneurship education and social capital can be regarded as stimuli, entrepreneurial passion and self-efficacy would be the organism, and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours may be seen as the personal responses to external stimuli.

Entrepreneurial passion is a conscious, accessible, and positive emotion towards entrepreneurship [18]. Individuals with entrepreneurial passion will experience intense emotions, activate their minds, and take actions to achieve their goals. Entrepreneurial passion is a unique affective experience that can be fostered [35]. Scholars have investigated entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial effort as the antecedents of entrepreneurial

passion [31,36]. The environmental factors or circumstances related to entrepreneurship can result in changes in individual psychological states [15]. Entrepreneurship education and social capital could be considered as external environmental factors that inspire entrepreneurial passion [16,17].

Entrepreneurial passion may be generated or nurtured through entrepreneurship education [16]. Since participating in entrepreneurial courses and practical activities will lead individuals to reflect on 'who I want to be', entrepreneurship education is conducive to developing an entrepreneurial identity [37]. When acquiring knowledge and skills through entrepreneurship education and complete practical activities related to venture creation, individuals will raise their endorsement of entrepreneurship and relatively define themselves as entrepreneurs [38]. This self-identification will make individuals attach considerable importance to entrepreneurial activities, thereby developing entrepreneurial passion [31]. Thus, entrepreneurship education can inspire entrepreneurial passion.

Social capital benefits the cultivation of entrepreneurial passion. Social capital includes social relationships with family members and friends who are entrepreneurs, trust relationships with banks and the government, and norms and values advocated by community and society that respect and encourage entrepreneurship [13]. Parents or close friends who have succeeded in entrepreneurship provide good examples and social support for individuals. The norms and values that encourage entrepreneurship in a social environment motivate individuals to define themselves as an entrepreneur and engage in entrepreneurship [9]. Individuals with a high level of social capital will develop their entrepreneurial identity and eventually become active in entrepreneurship and experience entrepreneurial passion [18,39]. Thus, social capital has a positive effect on entrepreneurial passion.

In circumstances with high uncertainty and high involvement, such as entrepreneurship, people intend to use emotions as cues to guide their behaviours [40]. Entrepreneurial passion is an intense and positive emotion that can be a crucial driver of entrepreneurial actions [18]. Individuals who are passionate about venture creation may increase their venturing efforts because entrepreneurial passion provides emotional energy, drive, and spirit for these venturing efforts [41]. Entrepreneurial passion pushes individuals to pay attention to discovering and exploiting opportunities in a highly changeable market environment and aids them in responding effectively and quickly in dynamic environments. That is to say, entrepreneurial passion acts as the driving force for efficient decision making and high involvement in entrepreneurial tasks [40]. Thus, entrepreneurial passion promotes nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.

Entrepreneurship education and social capital can be seen as forms of environmental support from universities, families, communities, and society which can stimulate emotional reactions and help people engage in venture creation [13,26]. Hence, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Entrepreneurial passion mediates the relationship between entrepreneurship education and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Entrepreneurial passion mediates the relationship between social capital and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.*

2.4. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy as Mediator

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy refers to a person's conscious belief in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks [22]. ESE describes the cognitive estimate of an individual that influences entrepreneurial intention and the possibility of turning such intentions into actual entrepreneurial actions [42]. ESE is also deemed an essential cognitive variable that links environmental factors and entrepreneurial actions [43].

Entrepreneurship education provides individuals with opportunities to learn about planning, start-ups, venture, finance, and growth, as well as to develop innovative business

models and participate in running simulated or real business, thereby increasing mastery experiences in entrepreneurship-related tasks [16]. Mastery experience is the interpretation of previous performance and is the main source of individual self-confidence to successfully undertake entrepreneurial tasks [44]. After accomplishing tasks in entrepreneurship education, individuals will have a high belief in their ability to complete entrepreneurial activities, indicating that high ESE is generated [10,45]. Thus, entrepreneurship education can increase ESE.

Social capital also facilitates the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy [42]. Social capital fosters entrepreneurship by providing information, knowledge, resources, and finances [6,13]. Support from family, close friends, and the social environment will reduce the perceived difficulty of entrepreneurship for individuals and increase their confidence in their ability to become an entrepreneur and thus, improve their ESE. Hence, there is a positive association between social capital and ESE.

ESE is one of the critical psychological elements driving individual entrepreneurial behaviours [46]. Individuals actively search for opportunity-relevant information in environment and intend to exploit the opportunities discovered because of their high entrepreneurial self-efficacy [7]. Consequently, entrepreneurial self-efficacy is effective in motivating nascent entrepreneurial behaviours. Based on the preceding discussion, entrepreneurship education provides mastery experiences for individuals, enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy and benefiting the discovery and exploitation of opportunity [10]. Social capital provides information, knowledge, resources, and finances for individuals [6]. These environmental supports will increase individuals' confidence in their capacity to become an entrepreneur and improve ESE, producing nascent entrepreneurial behaviours [9]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are constructed:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *ESE mediates the relationship between entrepreneurship education and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *ESE mediates the relationship between social capital and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours.*

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and Procedures

To verify these hypotheses, we surveyed 623 graduate students from the eastern, central, and southern regions of China. Assisted by the graduate school administrative staff members of four universities, 950 questionnaires were distributed to graduate students via the Internet. A total of 623 responses with completed answers were received. The response rate was 65.6%. The questionnaire included the descriptive information of participants and the measures of entrepreneurship education, social capital, entrepreneurial passion, ESE, and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours (The original questionnaire of this study is shown as the Supplementary Material). Participants were voluntary and informed that their responses will be anonymous and confidential.

A relatively equal distribution of male and female respondents (52.0% were male, and the rest female) was observed in our sample, which included master's (81.5%) and doctoral (18.5%) students. Participants came from a wide range of majors, including management, economics, computer sciences, engineering, chemistry, and language. The majority of participants were aged 23 to 29 (89.2%). Several participants had previous work experience (19.6%). Only a few participants had prior entrepreneurial experience (10.8%).

3.2. Measures

All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Entrepreneurship Education. We used the view of Jamieson [24] that entrepreneurship education includes theory-oriented and practice-oriented courses as a basis [11], and combined the current Chinese forms of entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship

education is usually conducted in Chinese universities as a series of entrepreneurship-related optional courses and practical activities [47,48]. In accordance with previous research [49], we assessed the extent to which students acquire knowledge through these courses and activities.

Social Capital. Following Nahapiet and Ghoshal [27], social capital was measured with the scale developed by Liao and Welsch [13]. The items include structural, relational, and cognitive aspects of entrepreneurial networks.

Entrepreneurial Passion. We adopted the measurement from Cardon et al. [50]. Nine items were used to measure passion for inventing and passion for founding because this study focused on the pre-launch phase of entrepreneurship [36].

Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy. ESE was measured by scales developed by Liñán, et al. [51].

Nascent Entrepreneurial Behaviours. The items measuring nascent entrepreneurial behaviours were developed by Farmer, Yao, and Kung-Mcintyre [3], including opportunity discovery and opportunity exploitation.

Control Variables. Previous research has indicated that age, gender, grade, and prior entrepreneurial experience correlate with individual nascent entrepreneurial behaviours [3,52]. This study controlled students' gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age (1 = below 20 years old; 2–10 = 21 years old to 29 years old; 11 = over 30 years old) and their grade (1 = first-year master, 2 = second-year master, 3 = third-year master, 4 = first-year Ph.D., 5 = second-year Ph.D., 6 = third-year Ph.D., 7 = other). This study also controlled prior entrepreneurial experience (1 = do not have, 2 = have).

3.3. Results

Before hypothesis testing, we assessed the reliability and validity of each construct. As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha of every construct exceeds 0.7, and the value of composite reliability (CR) of every construct is higher than 0.7, indicating high reliability of the measurement [53]. All the indicator factor loadings of every item exceed 0.6. Every construct has an average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.5, suggesting that the discriminant validity is adequate [54]. To test the discriminant validity of the measurement model, Table 2 presents that the value of the AVE square root of every construct surpasses the construct's correlation with any other construct, suggesting a high discriminant validity of the measurement [55]. To evaluate the overall model fit and validity of the constructs, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood procedure and the software LISREL 8.8. The results of this analysis met acceptable levels of fit criteria ($\chi^2 = 349.71$, $df = 78$, $CFI = 0.98$, $TLI = 0.97$, $RMSEA = 0.08$, $RMR = 0.04$), demonstrating the validity of our measured constructs.

Table 1. Analysis of reliability and validity.

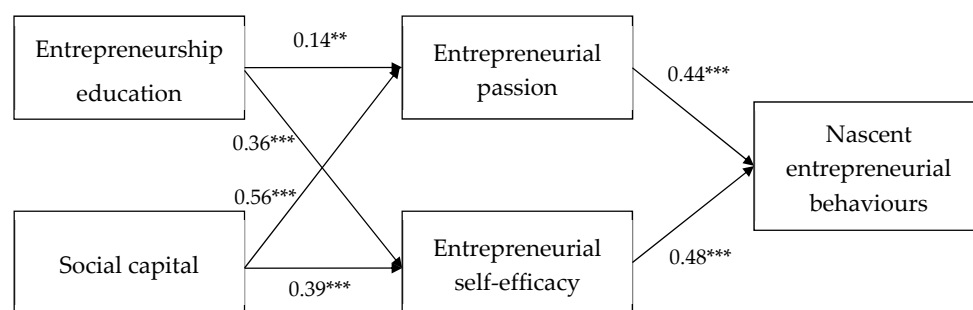
Variables	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Entrepreneurship education	0.62–0.85	0.96	0.96	0.59
Social capital	0.81–0.90	0.85	0.96	0.74
Entrepreneurial passion	0.75–0.90	0.95	0.96	0.72
ESE	0.74–0.91	0.93	0.95	0.74
Nascent entrepreneurial behaviours	0.70–0.91	0.95	0.96	0.67

To initially examine the hypotheses, this study employed structural equation modelling (SEM) by LISREL 8.8. Figure 2 shows the estimates obtained from SEM analysis. Figure 2 indicates that entrepreneurship education and social capital positively influence entrepreneurial passion ($b = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$; $b = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$). Entrepreneurship education and social capital positively influence ESE ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$; $b = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). The goodness-of-fit indices of this model met acceptable levels of fit criteria ($\chi^2 = 396.29$, $df = 81$, $CFI = 0.98$, $TLI = 0.97$, $RMSEA = 0.08$, $RMR = 0.04$), verifying the validity of the structural model.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Gender	1.48	0.50	-								
2	Age	5.93	1.83	−0.14 **	-							
3	Grade	2.85	2.31	−0.21 **	0.59 **	-						
4	Prior entre experience	1.89	0.31	0.04	−0.13 **	−0.01	-					
5	Entrepreneurship education	1.73	0.76	−0.11 **	−0.03	−0.06	−0.24 **	(0.77)				
6	Social capital	3.40	0.66	0.07	0.04	0.01	−0.11 **	0.27 **	(0.86)			
7	Entrepreneurial passion	3.43	0.80	−0.16 **	0.01	−0.03	−0.20 **	0.30 **	0.47 **	(0.85)		
8	ESE	2.29	0.79	−0.06	0.03	−0.07	−0.16 **	0.42 **	0.36 **	0.42 **	(0.86)	
9	Nascent entrepreneurial behaviours	2.74	0.80	−0.09 *	0.04	−0.06	−0.27 **	0.42 **	0.42 **	0.56 **	0.61 **	(0.82)

Note: n = 623. The values of the square root of AVE are on the diagonal. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$.

**Figure 2.** Results of structural equation modelling. Note: ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

This study also adopted the method of bootstrapping [56] to test the main effect of entrepreneurship education and social capital on nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, and the mediating effects of entrepreneurial passion and ESE. The results of Table 3 indicate that entrepreneurship education and social capital have positive effects on nascent entrepreneurial behaviours ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$; $b = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1 and H2. The results support the indirect effects of entrepreneurship education and social capital on nascent entrepreneurial behaviours via entrepreneurial passion and ESE (Table 4). A 95% confidence interval was set for the size of the indirect effect in the SPSS macro. The mediating effect was examined depending on whether it includes 0 in a 95% confidence interval. In Table 4, for the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion between entrepreneurship education and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, the 95% confidence interval is (0.02, 0.07), not including 0, which supports Hypothesis 3. To examine the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion between social capital and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, the 95% confidence interval is (0.11, 0.20), supporting Hypothesis 4. For the mediating role of ESE between entrepreneurship education and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, the interval is (0.09, 0.17), where 0 is not included, indicating that Hypothesis 5 is supported. The 95% confidence interval is (0.09, 0.17) for the mediating role of ESE between social capital and nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, showing that Hypothesis 6 is supported. The results suggest that both entrepreneurial passion and ESE are the mediators by which entrepreneurship education and social capital influence nascent entrepreneurial behaviours. Therefore, H1–H6 are all supported by our data.

Table 3. Main effects (N = 623).

Outcome Variable: Nascent Entrepreneurial Behaviours				
Model coefficients				
	coefficients	s.e.	t	p
Gender	−0.14 *	0.06	−2.52	0.01
Age	0.03	0.02	1.50	0.14
grade	−0.04 *	0.02	−2.47	0.01
Prior entrepreneurial experience	−0.39 ***	0.09	−4.38	0.00
Entrepreneurship education	0.29 ***	0.04	7.65	0.00
Social capital	0.40 ***	0.04	9.53	0.00
Model summary (total effect model)				
	R ²	ΔR ²	F	ΔF
	0.31	0.31	46.66 ***	6.00 ***

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Table 4. Indirect effects (N = 623).

Indirect Effect(s) Through:				
Entrepreneurial passion				
	Effect	SE (boot)	LLCI	ULCI
Entrepreneurship education	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.07
Social capital	0.15	0.11	0.11	0.20
Entrepreneurial self-efficacy				
	Effect	SE (boot)	LLCI	ULCI
Entrepreneurship education	0.13	0.02	0.09	0.17
Social capital	0.13	0.02	0.09	0.17

4. Discussion

Since entrepreneurship is conducive to reducing unemployment and developing the economy, it is vital to understand how entrepreneurial behaviours are promoted [1,2]. Drawing on the S-O-R model [14], this study investigated the effects of entrepreneurship education and social capital on the nascent entrepreneurial behaviours and examined the mediating roles of entrepreneurial passion and ESE in these relationships.

This study makes the following theoretical implications. First, this study enriches the drivers of entrepreneurial behaviours, especially in the context of higher education, by investigating the roles of entrepreneurship education and social capital. Previous research has explored the antecedents of nascent entrepreneurial behaviours, such as identity aspiration [3], university education [10], fear of failure [57], and network ties [23]. For graduate students, entrepreneurship education and social capital might be the main sources from which students can access support for their entrepreneurship [9,10]. The findings of this study provided evidence that entrepreneurship education and social capital can promote opportunity discovery and exploitation, making students actively engage in actual entrepreneurial activities [7,8].

Second, by examining the mediating roles of entrepreneurial passion and ESE, this study contributes a better understanding of the intervening mechanisms under which entrepreneurship education and social capital influence nascent entrepreneurial behaviours. Previous research has highlighted the mediating role of entrepreneurial cognition in the process of entrepreneurial decision making [9,10], while neglecting the potential effect of entrepreneurial passion, which is also seen as a central element driving entrepreneurship [18]. Based on the S-O-R model, some scholars call for the research of exploring the roles of cognition and emotion simultaneously in the relationship between environmental factors and individual intentions or behaviours [14]. Responding to these calls, this study found that entrepreneurship education and social capital result in entrepreneurial actions through increasing their entrepreneurial passion and ESE at the same time. The findings

also provide support for some studies which noted that entrepreneurship education would trigger positive emotion related to entrepreneurship [19,58].

Third, this study extends the literature of factors stimulating entrepreneurial passion. Prior studies have investigated the effect of entrepreneurial effort and entrepreneurial identity centrality on entrepreneurial passion [31,36]. Some scholars also appealed for the research of the link between social network and entrepreneurial passion [59]. The findings of this study showed that entrepreneurship education and social capital have significant impacts on entrepreneurial passion, which answered the call to investigate the antecedents of entrepreneurial passion [31,50,59].

4.1. Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide some practical implications for universities, government, and educators. Universities should implement measures to reinforce entrepreneurship education and social capital for students, and also focus on increasing students' passion and confidence. First, universities should introduce various entrepreneurship education programs, hold entrepreneurial competitions, and provide financial support and technical guidance for students to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Second, universities can encourage students to take internships in enterprises, offering them the chance to understand and learn how to operate a business. Third, universities could invite corporate leaders, investors, and entrepreneurs to conduct lectures. These measures can expand the forms of entrepreneurship education and assist students with contacting potential entrepreneurial partners, thereby raising the level of social capital. The findings also suggest that it is significant for governments to create a social environment where entrepreneurial activities are encouraged. To stimulate entrepreneurship, the government can enact preferential policies to reduce the interest rate of loans for entrepreneurial activities and advocate entrepreneurship through local media. Moreover, in designing entrepreneurship education, educators should not just focus on increasing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and abilities, but also be more concerned about developing entrepreneurial passion and ESE.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. First, the samples in this study were obtained from universities in China. Different countries may have differences in national culture, university teaching methods, family values, and social morality. Future research could obtain samples from multiple countries to incorporate and compare these differences. Second, this study used cross-sectional data. Considering that the outcome of entrepreneurship education may be delayed [8], individuals can take several years to prepare for entrepreneurship. Future research could conduct investigations over a more extended period to trace the effects of entrepreneurship education and social capital on entrepreneurial behaviours.

Supplementary Materials: The original questionnaire of this study is shown as the Supplementary Material. Available online at <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su132011158/s1>.

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