# Affective Commitment in Entrepreneurial Students: The Effect of Environmental Factors

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**Abstract:**

Research on how affective commitment in entrepreneurs is shaped through contextual influence is limited, despite the relevance this entrepreneurial behavior has on venture outcomes. To address this knowledge gap, we present a theoretical framework to support our hypotheses and use a structural equation model to test them. We analyze the effects of the university environment, family entrepreneurial background, and subjective norms on the affective commitment of entrepreneur students using data from the 2018 Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS). Our results indicate a positive direct effect of the university environment and subjective norms on affective commitment. Furthermore, subjective norms mediate the relationships between the university environment and the family's entrepreneurial background and affective commitment, and the total influence effect of family background and university environment on affective commitment was proven to be statistically significant through bootstrapping. Our research makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to the literature on the mechanisms that shape affective commitment for student entrepreneurs since previous research has focused on personal traits instead of social environment. For practical implications, we underscore the importance of providing a university environment with resources such as courses, orientation, and support related to entrepreneurial behaviors, thereby equipping student entrepreneurs with the necessary tools for success and calling for awareness among family businesses that want to promote the continuance of entrepreneurial behaviors in their next generations.

**Keywords:** Affective Commitment, Entrepreneurship, Subjective Norms, University Environment, Family Background

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## 1. Introduction

Since individuals are not isolated but rather part of a society with specific conditions, various factors shape their behaviors, including entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors (Delgado-Piña *et al*., 2008; Lechuga-Sancho *et al*., 2020; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017). For students, aspects like the university environment, family background, and social context have been found to influence these attitudes and behaviors (Bergmann *et al*., 2016; Lechuga-Sancho *et al*., 2020; Moreno-Gómez *et al*., 2019; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017). The literature on student entrepreneurship and the contextual influences on entrepreneurial behavior, such as affective commitment, has taken more relevance in recent years (Bergmann *et al*., 2016; Calza *et al*., 2020; Martínez-Bobillo *et al*., 2021; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017).

Research on affective commitment has been highlighted as important since it influences various venture outcomes, such as firm performance, growth, innovation, survival, and resilience during stressful events (Anwar ul Haq *et al*., 2018; Kleine *et al*., 2024; Lahti *et al*., 2019; Murnieks *et al*., 2020; Robinson, 2008). However, most studies on affective commitment have focused on its manifestation as a characteristic of employees to their employers (García-Cruz & Real-Fernández, 2018; Meyer *et al*., 1993; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Sallan *et al*., 2018; Teo *et al*., 2020) or as a mediator variable for entrepreneurial outcomes (Anwar ul Haq *et al*., 2018) rather than exploring how affective commitment can be fostered and developed by entrepreneurs (Bloemen-Bekx *et al*., 2019).

Previous research in the field of entrepreneurial affective commitment has focused on how person-oriented factors influence affective commitment and how it is related to the way entrepreneurs evaluate the performance of their ventures (Campos-Valverde et al., 2024). However, the crucial aspect of how environmental factors shape affective commitment has yet to be considered. Our study aims to address this significant research gap, specifically in the context of entrepreneurial students and the environmental factors that influence their affective commitment, offering a novel perspective on this area.

Identifying these context factors and their relationship with entrepreneurial behavior is beneficial for developing adequate policies for entrepreneurial capabilities that can increase and improve entrepreneurship activities (Delgado-Piña *et al*., 2008; Lecuna, 2014). Thus, empirical studies exploring how affective commitment works in this research field deserve more attention, and it is necessary to study the development of affective commitment across cultural contexts (Bloemen-Bekx et al., 2019; Lahti et al., 2019). With this study we provide a theoretical framework and empirical evidence approach to the context-related elements that influence the affective commitment of entrepreneurs to their ventures, bringing a novel perspective to the field.

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Based on these considerations, our research aims to identify the nuanced relationships among the social environment (studied as subjective norms), the university environment, family background, and the affective commitment displayed by student entrepreneurs toward their ventures. Thus, this study pretends to answer the following research questions: a) How do the subjective norms, the university environment, and the family entrepreneurial background of entrepreneurial university students impact their affective commitment? b) How do the university environment and the family entrepreneurial impact vary based on subjective norms?

As outlined below, the following sections of this article are section 2, which provides the theoretical background supporting our hypotheses, as well as the hypotheses and research model; section 3, which contains the details of the methodology we used to address our research questions; section 4, which contains the results obtained through the model estimation; section 5, which discusses these results; and section 6, which contains the conclusions, implications, and future research.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Scholars have pointed out that even if individual characteristics are important factors in predicting individuals' behaviors, situational variables like the environment and organizational context are also key for studying entrepreneurial behaviors, especially for student entrepreneurs (Bergmann *et al*., 2016; Delgado-Piña *et al*., 2008; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017). External elements influence intentions through individuals' attitudes toward specific activities (Arshad *et al*., 2016; Blanco-Mesa *et al*., 2023; Cabana-Villca *et al*., 2013). Entrepreneurial activities have been found to vary across countries (Martínez-Bobillo *et al*., 2021). Culture can influence entrepreneurship through social legitimation and psychological traits (Laskovaia *et al*., 2017). Cultural differences can lead people in different countries to react and behave differently when facing the same situations (Nazarian *et al*., 2017).

Institutional theory provides an important theoretical background for studying these cultural differences (Martínez-Bobillo *et al*., 2021; Olarewaju *et al*., 2022). North (1990) defines institutions as those constraints intended to regulate, guide, and limit human behavior in a society. Institutions are known to influence economic activities, as in the case of entrepreneurship (Muralidharan & Pathak, 2017; North, 1990). Previous research has highlighted the relevance of institutions for entrepreneurship, as they may increase or decrease motivation and the tendency to participate in entrepreneurial activities and promote or block entrepreneurial development (Escandón-Barbosa *et al*., 2019; Olarewaju *et al*., 2022).

Institutions can be either informal or formal (North, 1990). Elements such as laws, policies, economic regulations, and rules can be considered formal institutions (Olarewaju *et al*., 2022), while informal institutions include cultural beliefs, values, expectations, and subjective norms that are not written but shared among society members (Muralidharan & Pathak, 2017). The effectiveness of behavior depends strongly on the institutional environment (Shirokova *et al*., 2021). Institutions are significant in constructing individuals' beliefs (Mainela *et al*., 2018). Most student entrepreneurs lack work experience, meaning the university context and family background have greater weight in promoting entrepreneurial behavior (Bergmann *et al*., 2016).

### 2.1 University environment and affective commitment

University programs focused on entrepreneurship learning have been identified to promote entrepreneurial behavior (Bergmann *et al.*, 2016; Blanco-Mesa *et al.*, 2023; Cabana-Villca *et al.,* 2013; Figueiredo-Nery & Figueiredo, 2008; Lechuga-Sancho *et al.*, 2020; Morris *et al*., 2017; Robinson, 2008). Multiple elements of the educational environment, such as values, norms, or curricular programs, are key factors for founding and nurturing entrepreneurial behaviors in students, and universities themselves can represent strategic partners in providing or facilitating the acquisition of important resources for entrepreneurial activities (Cabana-Villca *et al.*, 2013; Morris *et al.*, 2017), like entrepreneurial competencies, strategic thinking, and opportunity identification capabilities (Blanco-Mesa *et al*., 2023; Robinson, 2008). Robinson (2008) proposed a teaching technique for universities based on mimicking the development of an individual business plan to prepare students to understand and face entrepreneurship experiences, difficulties, required commitment, and failure management as a mechanism to increase success rates in entrepreneurship growth. He mentioned that individuals working on individual business plans based on their own ideas increase their motivation and engagement within the program development and their interest in becoming entrepreneurs. In this way, universities can help students have positive experiences regarding entrepreneurship, which, based on affective event theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), we would expect to lead to feelings of affective commitment toward the target of these experiences, entrepreneurship. Therefore, we propose hypothesis H1:

> H1: The university environment positively influences the affective commitment of entrepreneur students.

### 2.2 Entrepreneurial family background

Family entrepreneurial background has also been highlighted as a key predictor for understanding entrepreneurial behavior (Moreno-Gómez *et al*., 2019). Having a family with a specific occupational background, such as entrepreneurship, may contribute to developing a commitment to that occupation (Blanco-Mesa *et al*., 2023; Meyer *et al*., 1993). In addition, previous generations that engaged in entrepreneurial activity would result in more entrepreneurs in the newer generations, due to inherited wealth that serves as initial capital to found a new enterprise (Lecuna, 2014).

Marchisio *et al.* (2010) indicated that the affective commitment of next-generation family members can be reduced if participation in the family business is limited. Furthermore, the continuity of vocation associated with family businesses drives entrepreneurs to accept lower returns in exchange for maintaining transgenerational motives (Voordeckers *et al*., 2024), meaning that emotional motivation can play a greater role than monetary motivation.

Dawson *et al*. (2015) studied how entrepreneurial family background, individual identity, and career interest are related to affective commitment to family businesses in Canada and Switzerland and found that individuals with an identity and a career aligned with their family firms had greater affective commitment to their family enterprise. Gimenez-Jimenez *et al*. (2021) determined that affective commitment mediates the relationship between family background and offspring succession intentions for family ventures, which implies that affective commitment is directly affected by family entrepreneurial background. Additionally, Romaní *et al*. (2022) reported that the willingness to succeed in an entrepreneurial parental role is determined by factors such as affective and normative commitment when studying family ventures in Latin American countries. Thus, we ground H2 as follows:

> H2: Family background positively influences affective commitment in entrepreneur students.

**2.3 Subjective norms and affective commitment**

Subjective norms act as regulatory forces that affect individuals' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Blanco-Mesa *et al*., 2023; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017). Subjective norms are informal institutions widely known to be strong predictors of attitudes and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived expectations and behaviors from important and referential groups can shape individuals' intentions to fulfill social roles, impacting their motivation (Delgado-Piña *et al*., 2008; Lechuga-Sancho *et al*., 2020). In addition, social information processing theory indicates that the social environment has direct and indirect effects on judgments about work, and even personal predispositions for affective traits can be influenced by the environmental context (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Expectancy-violation theory proposes that society members are more likely to display a extreme reaction when individuals characteristics and behaviors align with or exceed the stereotype-based expectation, meaning that individuals that exhibit more positive attributes than expected, will likely receive a greater positive reaction (Jussim *et al*., 1987); based on this theory, entrepreneurial academics have suggested that individuals engage with or disconnect from actions or behaviors based on the level of social acceptance that they perceive they will receive (Hmieleski & Sheppard, 2019). We propose that individuals who believe that their environment will react positively to them pursuing an entrepreneurial career have greater commitment than those believing that they will have a negative reaction. To this degree, hypothesis H3 is presented as follows:

> H3: Social subjective norms positively influence the affective commitment of entrepreneur students.

**2.4 The mediator role of subjective norms**

Subjective norms are the perceptions that individuals have about social pressure related to how they should behave (Dotong & Manalang, 2023), and according to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), they are conditioned by other beliefs and motivator factors (Ajzen, 1991; Dileo & Pereiro, 2019). The social cognitive theory indicates that socio-environmental structures influence the behaviors and attitudes of individuals differently based on their family backgrounds and education, among other factors (Bandura, 2001; Blanco-Mesa et al., 2023)

The literature on entrepreneurship intentions based on the theory of planned behavior shows that universities that provide entrepreneurship training and classes motivate entrepreneurial behavior and influence individuals' beliefs (Bergmann *et al*., 2016; Robinson, 2008). Based on the theory of human capital, the higher the knowledge provided, the more cognitive capabilities are built-in students, and the perception of higher capabilities to perform a task is associated with higher motivation (Delgado-Piña et al., 2008). In addition, entrepreneurial training provides tools for developing action plans that help entrepreneurs build implementation intentions, which subsequently drive commitment to the intended behavior (Lechuga-Sancho *et al*., 2021). Therefore, we propose hypothesis H4 as follows:

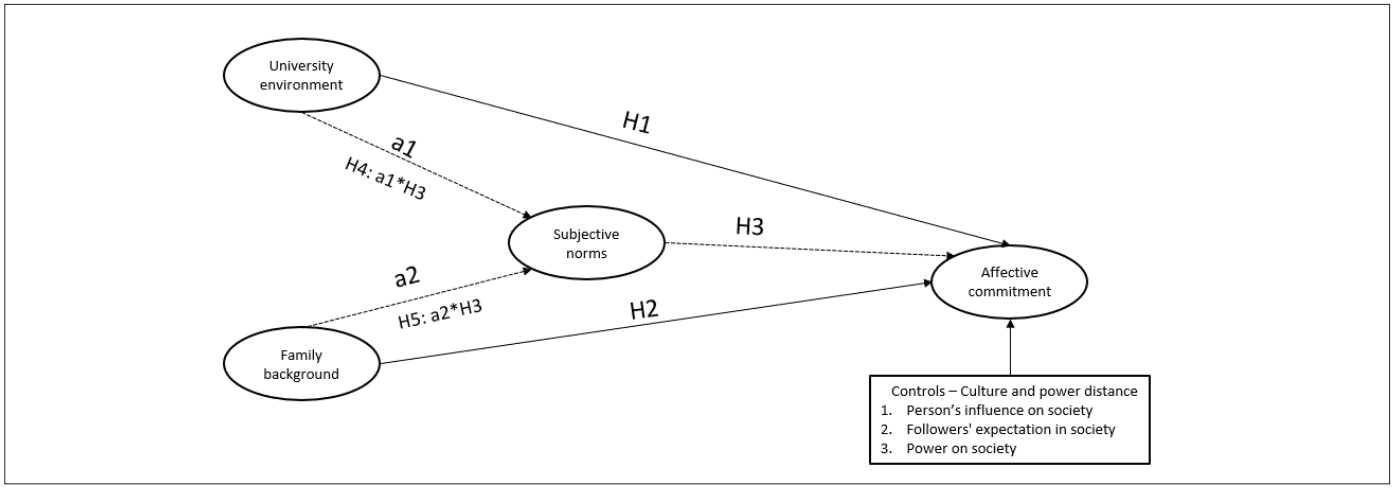
> H4: Social subjective norms positively mediate the effect of the university environment on the affective commitment of entrepreneur students.

Previous research indicates that parental role and family entrepreneurial background have a positive influence on subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991; Dileo & Pereiro, 2019; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017). Multiple scholars have pointed out that individuals who are raised in an entrepreneurial family usually have greater motivation toward the family business, especially when they become involved in daily work (Bloemen-Bekx *et al*., 2019; Dawson *et al*., 2015), which can be explained by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This theory describes how individuals' behaviors and beliefs are shaped by how they see themselves and, in the case of individuals with a family entrepreneurial background, are frequently stimulated by their relatives to feel proud and satisfied with identifying as entrepreneurs or as part of the family business (Dawson *et al*., 2015). Also, scholars have indicated that previous family experience in entrepreneurship provides an opportunity to know beforehand the risks, required capabilities, and benefits associated with this type of economic activity (Delgado-Piña *et al*., 2008), thus decreasing uncertainty. Then, we present hypothesis H5 as follows:

> H5: Social subjective norms positively mediate the effect of family entrepreneurial background on the affective commitment of entrepreneur students.

Our research model can be summarized as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Research model with the proposed relationship between the environmental variables and affective commitment (Source: own elaboration)




## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Data collection and sample

The Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Student's Survey (GUESSS) collects information on student entrepreneurship under five major categories: entrepreneurial intentions, nascent entrepreneurship, growth and performance, family firm succession, and entrepreneurial influencing factors (GUESSS, 2003-2024). The subtopics for these categories may vary from one wave to another. We employed the GUESSS 2018 wave dataset, which included a scale to evaluate the affective commitment of active entrepreneurs, identified through the GUESSS questionnaire's affirmative response to the following query: "Are you already running your own business/are you already self-employed?".

In total, active entrepreneurs composed a dataset of 23,415 students. In the subsequent phase of database exploration, we refined the sample to include only those students who provided complete responses to all study variables. This thorough filtering process resulted in a final sample of 20,716 students, grouped by region, gender, and age, as described in Table 1. The selection criteria further ensured alignment with the country-specific data reported in the 2018 Global Competitiveness Report and the 2018 Global Entrepreneurship data, encompassing 41 countries within the total set, from which 33 are represented in our population.

**Table 1**. Demographic characteristics of the sample (Source: own elaboration)

| Characteristic | Representation in Total |
|---|---|
| **Regions** | |
| Asia | 40% (7 countries) |
| Latin America and Brazil | 38% (9 countries) |
| Europe | 20% (16 countries) |
| Africa | 2% (1 country) |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 63% |
| Female | 37% |
| Not specified | 0% |
| **Age** | |
| 20 to 29 | 55% |
| Less than 20 | 22% |
| 30 to 39 | 15% |
| Older than 30 | 6% |
| Not specified | 2% |

Note: For more details, see Appendix 1.

### 3.2 Research variables

#### A. Dependent, independent, and mediator variables

*Affective commitment:* Affective commitment was studied according to the scale proposed by Dawson *et al*. (2014), which is used by the GUESSS. Items (for example, "I feel as if my business's problems are my own") are scored using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) and indicate students' attachment to their ventures. An exploratory factorial analysis was used to determine whether the items reflected a latent variable (Jakobsen & Mehmetoglu, 2016). Cronbach's alpha was used to prove the scale's reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.7323, KMO=0.658, Bartlett test p=0.000, three items); then, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the validity and reliability of this latent variable (factor loading values were between 0.74 and 0.86, all items were significant for the latent variable generated, AVE=0.65>0.5, CR=0.85>0.7, unidimensional factor).

*University environment:* The GUESSS measures the university environment using three items based on Franke & Lüthje (2004) (such as "There is a favorable climate for becoming an entrepreneur at my university"). Items are scores on a 7-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 7=very much). It indicates how students feel about their university environment regarding entrepreneurship. An exploratory factorial analysis was used to determine whether the items reflected a latent variable. Cronbach's alpha was used to prove the scale's reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.9168, KMO=0.742, Bartlett test p=0.000, three items); then, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the validity and reliability of this latent variable (factor loading values were between 0.90 and 0.95, all items were significant for the latent variable generated, AVE=0.86>0.5, CR=0.95>0.7, unidimensional factor).

*Subjective norms:* The GUESSS uses three items from Liñán & Chen (2009) to measure subjective norms. Items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1=very negatively, 7=very positively). It represents students' perceptions of how people in their environment (for instance, "Your close family") would react if they pursued a career as an entrepreneur. An exploratory factorial analysis was used to determine whether

the items reflected a latent variable. Cronbach's alpha was used to prove the scale's reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.7801, KMO=0.660, Bartlett test p=0.000, three items); then, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the validity and reliability of this latent variable (factor loading values were between 0.79 and 0.90, all items were significant for the latent variable generated, AVE=0.70>0.5, CR=0.87>0.7, unidimensional factor).

*Family entrepreneurial background:* Participants indicated whether their parents are also entrepreneurs, yielding a categorical variable where Yes indicates that one or both parents are entrepreneurs and No indicates that neither parent is an entrepreneur.

**B. Control variables**

The literature has shown that society's cultural values can either foster or diminish the entrepreneurial orientation development of countries (Lee & Peterson, 2000) and influence the characteristics of developed entrepreneurial activities (Laskovaia *et al*., 2017). Therefore, we used the cultural scales of power distance from the GUESSS as control variables for this research, as has been done previously in research on entrepreneurship engagement (Uriarte *et al*., 2023).

*Person's influence on society (P.In.S):* Participants used a 7-point Likert scale to indicate whether, in their society, individuals' influence is determined more by ability and contribution to society (1) or by having a position of authority (7). This measure is based on GLOBE cultural dimensions (House *et al*., 2004),

*Followers' expectations in society (F.Ex.S):* Participants used a 7-point Likert scale to indicate whether, in their society, followers are expected to question leaders when they disagree (1) or to obey without questioning (7). This measure is based on GLOBE cultural dimensions (House *et al*., 2004).

*Power on society (P.S):* Based on the power distance dimension as evaluated by the GUESSS, P.S is measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where participants indicate whether the power in their societies is mostly shared throughout society (1) or concentrated at the top (7). This measure is based on GLOBE cultural dimensions (House *et al*., 2004),

### 3.3 Statistical procedure

We performed analysis in two phases. The first phase consisted of two steps. In the first step, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis for the itemized variables (university environment, subjective norms, and affective commitment) to determine the existence of a new latent variable. Then, we followed the guidelines of Acock (2013), Hair *et al*. (2019), Kline (2005), and Blunch (2016) to perform a confirmatory factor analysis aimed at assessing the validity and reliability of these latent variables. The results of the CFA demonstrate that the latent variables utilized in this study are valid and reliable (see Appendix 2). In the second step, we performed post hoc statistical tests to evaluate whether common method bias was present in the dataset utilized in this study (Podsakoff *et al*., 2023). To this end, we employed the confirmatory factor analysis-based unmeasured latent variable (UMLV) technique (Cote & Buckley, 1987). The results of the post hoc tests indicate that common method bias is not a concern in this study (for more details, see Appendix 3).

In the second phase, we used a structural equation model (SEM) with STATA 18 to test our hypotheses based on Acock (2013) and Jakobsen & Mehmetoglu (2016). The SEM method is recommended for testing mediation hypotheses (Cardella *et al*., 2024; Nitzl *et al*., 2016) and it is broadly used in social science for testing the relationship of context and individual variables to validate that it exists and is statistically significative (Blanco-Mesa *et al*., 2023), as is the case for our research model. We employed a bootstrap analysis with 5000 iterations, based on Hayes, 2017 and supported in other studies, like the ones performed by Anwar ul Haq *et al*. (2018) and Lechuga-Sancho *et al*. (2021), to estimate the standard error and statistical significance of these effects.

## 4. Results

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix and the means and standard deviations for our variables. The values indicate weak positive correlations between family entrepreneurial background and university environment, subjective norms, and affective commitment; moderate correlations between university and subjective norms and affective commitment; and moderate correlations between subjective norms and affective commitment. A mean higher than 3 for the control variables indicates that most answers are close to the upper level. More than half of respondents agree that power is based on authority. With respect to followers' expectations, more participants indicated that they were expected to obey the leaders without question. The power distance is indicated to be mostly concentrated at the top. These control variables are positively and moderately correlated. They also present a positive correlation with affective commitment, but based on the coefficient values, these correlations can be classified as weak.

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix, means, and standard deviations for the model variables (source: own elaboration)

| Variables | Mean | Std. Dev | Min | Max | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.Univer Environment | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | |
| 2.Subjective Norms | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.32** | 1 | | | | | |
| 3.Family Ent Background | 1.54 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 | 0.07** | 0.07** | 1 | | | | |
| 4.Person's influence | 4.63 | 2.08 | 0 | 7 | 0.10** | -0.01 | -0.02* | 1 | | | |
| 5.Followers' expectation | 4.46 | 2.08 | 0 | 7 | 0.11** | -0.01 | -0.04** | 0.59** | 1 | | |
| 6.Power on Society | 5.17 | 1.88 | 0 | 7 | 0.07 ** | 0.04** | -0.03** | 0.52** | 0.51** | 1 | |
| 7.Affective commitment | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.31** | 0.32** | 0.04** | 0.09** | 0.09** | 0.11** | 1 |

The hypothesis test for direct effects using SEM is shown in Table 3. The results affirm that the university environment positively affects affective commitment (β=0.2225, p=0.0000), which supports H1. Family entrepreneurial background is found to be not significantly related to affective commitment (β=0.0190, p=0.1440); thus, H2 is rejected. Subjective norms are positively related to affective commitment (β=0.2495, p=0.000), confirming H3. In addition, the university environment (β=0.3142, p=0.000) and family entrepreneurial background are positively related to subjective norms (β=0.1056, p=0.000), which are important outcomes for testing H4 and H5. For the control variables, followers' expectations (β=0.0182, p=0.000) and power over society (β=0.0324, p=0.000) significantly affected affective commitment.

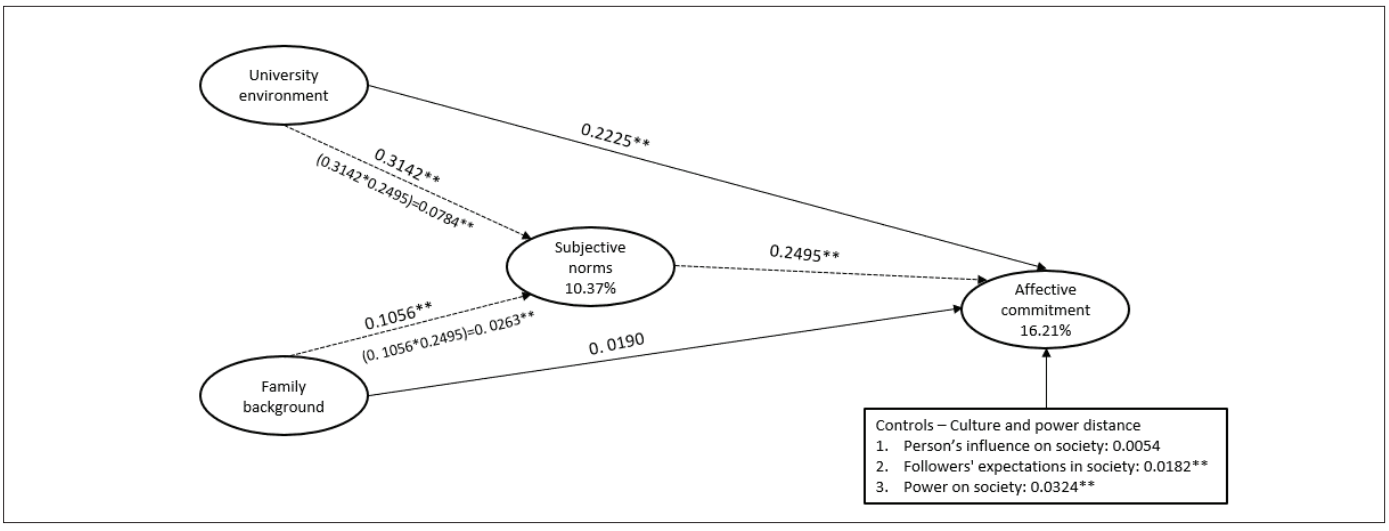
**Table 3.** Correlation estimates for the proposed relationships between environmental factors, affective commitment, and control variables (Source: own elaboration)

| Variables | Coefficient | Bootstrap std. Err. (5000 iterations) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Subjective Norms** | | | | |
| University Environment | 0.3142** | 0.0078 | | |
| Family Ent Background | 0.1056** | 0.0136 | | |
| _cons | -0.1631** | 0.0222 | | |
| **Affective commitment** | | | **Indirect** | **Total** |
| Subjective Norms | 0.2495** | 0.0082 | | |
| University Environment | 0.2225** | 0.0078 | 0.0784** | 0.3009** |
| Family Ent Background | 0.0190 | 0.013 | 0.0263** | 0.0454* |
| Person's influence | 0.0054 | 0.0043 | | |
| Followers' expectation | 0.0182** | 0.004 | | |
| Power on Society | 0.0324** | 0.0045 | | |
| _cons | -0.3033** | 0.0299 | | |
| Observations | 20716 | | | |
| RMSEA | 0.0460 | | | |
| Prob. RMSEA <= 0.05 | 0.8400 | | | |
| CFI | 0.9780 | | | |
| SRMR | 0.0012 | | | |
| R2 Subj Norm | 0.1037 | | | |
| R2 Affect Comm | 0.1621 | | | |

chi2 = 0.000

We found a positive and significant indirect (β=0.0784, p=0.000) and total effect (β=0.3009, p=0.000) of the university environment on affective commitment with subjective norms as mediators, supporting H4. Family background has a positive and significant indirect influence (β=0.0263, p=0.000) on affective commitment through subjective norms, and the total effect is also significant (β=0.0135, p=0.0010), supporting H5. Therefore, our results demonstrate the mediating role of subjective norms on the relationships between the university environment, family entrepreneurial background, and affective commitment. Figure 2 visually represents the results obtained for our research model.

**Figure 2.** SEM estimations for the proposed research model with the interactions between environmental factors, affective commitment, and control variables (source: own elaboration)




Note: The covariance between the university environment and family background is cov= 0.0329, p=0.000. Significance levels at *p<0.05, **p<0.01, **p<0.001

## 5. Discussion

For the first research question (How do the subjective norms, the university environment, and the family entrepreneurial background surrounding the entrepreneurial university student impact their affective commitment?), our results show that university environments that promote entrepreneurial behavior increase the affective commitment levels of entrepreneur students, which supports hypothesis H1; this finding is congruent with our literature review: the university environment is a formal institution (North, 1990), and as an institution, it has been previously identified as having a nurturing role for entrepreneurial behaviors through values and learning programs (Morris *et al*., 2017; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017; Robinson, 2008).

This result is also consistent with previous findings; for example, university learning opportunities have been associated with greater entrepreneurial motivation (Rivero & Ubierna, 2021), and formal entrepreneurial training has a direct effect on entrepreneurial behavior that is mediated by the entrepreneurial university climate (Lechuga-Sancho *et al*., 2021). This finding is inconsistent with the findings of Bergmann *et al*. (2016), who found statistical evidence of an effect of university characteristics on the activities of nascent entrepreneur students (people who already made the decision and created a plan to start a venture) but not on new entrepreneurs (people who started their business less than 3.5 years before they were part of the study and were studying at the university). However, it is important to highlight that these are reference insights since the studied variables are different from those in this research.

Regarding family entrepreneurial background, our analysis indicates no significant direct influence on affective commitment, thus rejecting H2. Some authors have identified family background as a predictor of entrepreneurial behavior (Moreno-Gómez *et al*., 2019) and individuals' commitment to the same occupation as their parents (Meyer *et al*., 1993), but it has also been highlighted that affective commitment can be reduced if participation in the family business is low (Marchisio *et al*., 2010), or conditioned by economic inequality (Lecuna, 2014), or being identified as not having a statistical significance on entrepreneurial intentions, as it is the case of Delgado-Piña et al. (2008), which may explain why our results show no statistical significance. This result conflicts with the findings of Gimenez-Jimenez *et al*. (2021), who reported that family business exposure has a positive direct effect on affective commitment, Bloemen-Bekx *et al*. (2019), who reported that informal family governance mechanisms increase affective commitment in family businesses, and Moreno-Gómez *et al*. (2019), who reported that having an entrepreneur parent increases entrepreneurial intention by nearly 15%.

For subjective norms, we found that individuals who felt more supported by their environment to pursue an entrepreneurial career reported higher levels of affective commitment, indicating that subjective norms directly affect affective commitment, supporting H3. This result was expected based on institutional theory (North, 1990). As we mentioned in our literature review, subjective norms are informal institutions (Muralidharan & Pathak, 2017; North, 1990) that shape behaviors among society's members. Additionally, individuals are expected to engage in or disconnect from entrepreneurial behavior based on social acceptance to avoid adverse reactions, as predicted based on the expectancy-violation theory (Jussim et al., 1987; Hmieleski & Sheppard, 2019), making subjective norms indirectly associated with entrepreneurial intentions. For our second research question (How do the university environment and the family entrepreneurial impact manifest variations based on subjective norms? We found that subjective norms mediate the effects of the university environment and family entrepreneurial background on affective commitment levels.

There is an indirect effect of the university environment on affective commitment through subjective norms, as proposed in H4, which adds to the direct effect posited in H1 to shape the total effect of the university environment. This finding complies with our literature review, where we mentioned how university environments that provide entrepreneurial learning classes motivate entrepreneurial behavior and influence individuals' beliefs (Bergmann *et al*., 2016). When the mediating effect of subjective norms is added to the model, the indirect and total effects of family entrepreneurial background are positive and statistically significant, thereby supporting H5. These results adhere to our theoretical framework, as expected, because family is one of the main constructs for subjective forms (Ajzen, 1991; Dileo & Pereiro, 2019; Soria-Barreto *et al*., 2017), and since individuals with a family entrepreneurial background are frequently stimulated by their relatives to identify as entrepreneurs (Dawson *et al*., 2015), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) is also applicable to support our results. Our research outcomes are like those of other studies that analyzed the effects of subjective or social norms on entrepreneurial behaviors. For example, Arshad *et al*. (2016) demonstrated that social norms are directly related to entrepreneurial attitudes.

From a practical view, we have seen that entrepreneurs with an affective commitment that nourishes their willingness to succeed in personal business are like familiar bonds such as those between parents and children, as mentioned by Lahti *et al*. (2019). Working in programs that promote entrepreneurship has given the authors the experience of witnessing various start-ups being established with the help of a university and family context that provides support to entrepreneurs and motivates them to engage in their businesses through positive events and satisfaction (which aligns with the affective events theory of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). Therefore, the results of this study could benefit students interested in becoming entrepreneurs, as they highlight how their sociocultural context influences their affective commitment. We believe there is an important opportunity for entrepreneurs to learn about this bonding and to search for strategies to help them manage their affective commitment (such as through counseling, delegation, trust, or support networks) to maintain a long-term vision that allows them a good balance between motivation and flexibility to make objective decisions.

Universities and family businesses could also use our results to promote entrepreneurial behavior in their students or the next generation. As we mentioned above, the university and family environments play important roles in supporting entrepreneurial behaviors (Caba-

na-Villca *et al*., 2013; Robinson, 2008). In the case of universities, it is especially important to remember that they have an ulterior obligation to create educational plans for professional profiles capable of satisfying societies' necessities (Marzo-Navarro *et al*., 2018).Universities can leverage our results highlights to consider how subjective norms in their specific context are shaping affective commitment and include resources in their learning programs to compensate for the lack of support from other informal institutions influencing their students. Some examples of recommended actions for universities include promoting social spaces that inspire and connect students with more experienced peers and providing counselor help and entrepreneurial career orientation.

In a similar manner, we encourage family businesses to develop awareness regarding the way they involve younger generations in venture activities and how they express about entrepreneurial careers around them. These impressions can influence the perception of acceptance and further affective commitment of these younger generations if they decide to become entrepreneurs in the future. We urge both universities and family businesses to account for the capabilities, passions, and affinities of individuals to recommend tailored learning programs instead of imposing on them, as students working in a university environment frequently complain about having to take certain mandatory classes, causing them to feel rejected.

Our results and the literature review performed for our theoretical framework support our research on how environmental factors influence affective commitment. However, we need to mention certain limitations that should be noted when reviewing this study. First, since the GUESSS survey selects different entrepreneurial influencing factors to study from one year to another, our research is limited to a transverse study of data from 2018. We encourage future researchers to work on an instrument to measure affective commitment and the effect of the environmental factors used for this analysis in a longitudinal study. Similarly, since we used the dataset from 2018, the results are from the pre-pandemic context. Scholars have mentioned how the pandemic changed cultural and economic activities, including entrepreneurship (Calvo *et al*., 2023). Future research would benefit from gathering data on the post-pandemic context.

In addition, the results from this research are useful for generalizing the studied variables, but they are limited when studying other scenarios that were not included in the GUESSS survey. For example, previous researchers have indicated that entrepreneurs' engagement may decrease when facing negative experiences such as financial distress (Kleine *et al*., 2024), which is not part of the questionnaire. Future research may find it useful to use instruments that include other variables previously associated with affective commitment and are not measured by the GUESSS survey. Finally, the population considered for this research consists of entrepreneurial students, which was previously mentioned as a potential limitation to generalizability; therefore, future research would benefit from repeating this research among a larger sample of entrepreneurs (Laskovaia *et al*., 2017).

## 6. Conclusions

Affective commitment can be described as an emotional bond that individuals build towards their job (Sallan *et al*., 2018) This study examined the relationships among university environment, entrepreneurial family background, and affective commitment in a sample of 20 716 active entrepreneur university students collected by the GUESSS project, using STATA 18 to perform an SEM analysis. The study's proposed model also evaluated the mediating role of subjective norms in these relationships.

Answering our first research question: "How do the subjective norms, the university environment, and the family entrepreneurial background of entrepreneurial university students impact their affective commitment?", results show that a university environment and subjective norms that support entrepreneurial behavior have a positive direct impact on affective commitment, but a direct impact of entrepreneurial family background on affective commitment was not found to be statistically significant.

For our second question: "How do the university environment and the family entrepreneurial impact vary based on subjective norms?" the mediation analysis answers by demonstrating that a university environment that supports entrepreneurial behavior increases its total impact over affective commitment through an indirect mechanism where first positively influencing subjective norms, that would consequently increase affective commitment. When the mediation of subjective norms for entrepreneurial family background, the total impact of this variable becomes statistically significant, with a positive value, meaning that an entrepreneurial family background combined with a positive perception of acceptance of an entrepreneurial career positively increases the values of affective commitment.

According to our experience working with entrepreneurs, the concept of affective commitment is not as well known in the entrepreneurship field as it is in established firms, and previous research has focused primarily on person-oriented factors, turning this study relevant to increase documentation and interest in this topic and encourage them to continue investigating it.

By highlighting how formal and informal institutions, such as universities, families, and social norms, are related to affective commitment, our findings support the integration of these concepts to predict affective commitment in entrepreneurial university students, which constitutes another contribution to entrepreneurial literature. We argue that being immersed in a university environment that promotes entrepreneurial behavior and having an entrepreneurial parental background and a supportive environment among family, close partners, and friends for an entrepreneurial career fosters stronger bonds between entrepreneurs and their ventures.

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