

RURAL YOUTH AND THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR IN FARMER PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS (FPOS): EXAMINING THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR USING PARTIAL LEAST SQUARES STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING (PLS-SEM)

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial behaviour among rural youth plays a vital role in transforming the agrarian economy particularly through collective institutions like Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). This study aims to examine the psychological and contextual factors influencing entrepreneurial behaviour among rural youth engaged in FPOs, guided by Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The model proposes that entrepreneurial behaviour is predicted by behavioural intention, which in turn is shaped by entrepreneurial attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. A structured questionnaire was administered to a purposive sample of 200 rural youth across three agriculturally significant districts in Tamil Nadu namely Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Erode selected for their prominence in coconut cultivation. Respondents were active members of coconut-based Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), providing a relevant institutional context for the study. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate both the measurement and structural models. The results confirmed the reliability and validity of the constructs. Behavioural intention was found to significantly predict entrepreneurial behaviour. Among the predictors of intention, perceived behavioural control exhibited the strongest influence followed by entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial attitude. Subjective norms however had an insignificant effect. The findings underscore the centrality of individual belief systems particularly confidence in one's capability and perceived control over entrepreneurial tasks in shaping rural youth's entrepreneurial intention and behaviour. The study also highlights the enabling role of FPOs as a platform for entrepreneurial engagement. Policy implications point to the need for targeted capacity-building programs, institutional support and localized entrepreneurial ecosystems that foster motivation, skills, and opportunities for rural youth.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurial Behaviour, Rural Youth, Farmer Producer Organization, Theory of Planned Behaviour and Structural Equation Modeling.

1. INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector in India, which employs nearly 46.1% of the total workforce during 2023-2024 (PLFS Annual Report, 2024) is currently experiencing a paradigm shift from subsistence farming to market-oriented agribusiness models (Raman & Rani, 2024). This transformation in Indian agriculture is increasingly fueled by a strategic shift toward rural entrepreneurship, value chain integration and the strengthening of collective institutional mechanisms (Chengappa, 2018). Within this evolving ecosystem, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as critical institutions designed to aggregate the efforts of small and marginal farmers, who together constitute more than 86% of India's landholding population (Malik & Kajale, 2024). FPOs serve as a collective voice enabling members to access quality inputs at lower costs, negotiate better prices for their outputs and reduce dependency on intermediaries (Nikam et.al, 2023). Functioning as legal business entities, FPOs are positioned to access formal credit facilities (Nikam et.al, 2019) and diversify into value-added agribusiness ventures, thereby enhancing their operational and financial sustainability (Jose et.al, 2024). FPOs facilitate bulk procurement of quality inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and machinery at lower prices, thereby reducing individual production costs (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2021).

According to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (2021), India has the largest youth population in the world, with over 365 million individuals aged 15–29 years which accounts for approximately 27% of the total population. A significant proportion of this demographic resides in rural areas, where underemployment, lack of livelihood opportunities and migration to urban centers remain persistent challenges (Choithani et.al, 2021; Ezeudu & Tukur, 2024). Despite growing educational levels, many rural youth are disengaged from agriculture due to low profitability, limited access to resources and outdated practices (White, 2012; Lindsjo et.al., 2021). In light of these factors, the role of Farmer Producer Organizations becomes increasingly critical in engaging rural

youth. FPOs serve not only as platforms for collective input procurement and improved market access, but also as avenues for youth engagement in agribusiness initiatives, value-added activities and leadership development (SFAC, 2020).

Youth involvement in FPOs is crucial, as they are generally more inclined to adopt advanced technologies, engage in value-added enterprises and explore diversified income sources (Patil et.al, 2025). With a significant proportion of these youth residing in rural areas, there is immense potential to harness their energy, innovation and adaptability for transforming traditional farming into a more modern, technology-driven and entrepreneurial activity (Henning et.al, 2022). The numerous government initiatives have been launched to promote youth-led agribusinesses, their impact remains varied across regions. Schemes such as Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana – RAFTAAR (RKVY-RAFTAAR), which provides funding and incubation support for agri-startups (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2020) and the Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres (ACABC) scheme, which supports agri-graduates in establishing independent ventures (MANAGE, 2021) are designed to encourage entrepreneurship among rural youth. Additionally, the Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) initiative by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) aims to build capacity and promote enterprise creation in farming and allied sectors (ICAR, 2020).

Given the strategic role of youth in agricultural innovation, it is essential to understand the behavioural factors driving their entrepreneurial engagement. While institutional support creates enabling conditions, the decision to pursue agripreneurship is shaped by complex psychological and social influences. This study adopts Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control shape intentions and actions. Applying TPB to youth in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) enables a deeper understanding of how internal motivations and external factors influence their entrepreneurial participation.

2. Theoretical Framework

Youth entrepreneurship in agriculture is influenced by complex psychological and behavioural factors, best understood through established behavioural theories. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and its extension, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), provide valuable frameworks for examining how intentions lead to action. TRA, proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), suggests that behaviour is driven by intention, shaped by attitudes and perceived social norms. However, recognizing that not all behaviours are fully under volitional control, Ajzen (1991) introduced perceived behavioural control in TPB to account for external constraints. These theories are especially relevant for rural youth engaged in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), where entrepreneurship is shaped not only by personal attitudes and social expectations but also by access to resources and institutional support.

2.1. Theory of Reasoned Action

The TRA explains behaviour through two key predictors of intention: attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norm. Attitude reflects one's evaluation of the behaviour's outcomes, while subjective norm refers to perceived social pressure (Alshammari, 2020). For example, a rural youth may intend to start an agribusiness if they view it positively and feel supported by their community. However, TRA assumes full control over actions—an assumption that often fails in agricultural contexts marked by land, financial, and skill-related constraints, thus necessitating TPB's broader perspective.

2.2. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

To address the limitations of TRA, Ajzen (1991) proposed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which builds on TRA by adding a third construct namely Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC). TPB suggests that entrepreneurial behaviour is influenced by three interrelated components such as attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control all of which shape an individual's entrepreneurial intention and subsequently their actual behaviour (Dinc & Budic, 2016). In the context of FPOs, TPB provides a useful lens to understand how youth form intentions toward entrepreneurial activities. It considers not only their personal attitudes and perceived social expectations, but also their perceived control over performing entrepreneurial tasks (Bhardwaj et.al, 2024). This makes TPB a more comprehensive and suitable framework for studying entrepreneurial behaviour in rural agricultural environments (Sabah, 2016).

Building upon the foundational constructs of TPB, this study incorporates Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) as an additional variable to better capture the psychological dimension of youth entrepreneurship. While perceived behavioural control in TPB reflects an individual's belief in their ability to perform a behaviour, entrepreneurial self-efficacy offers a more specific and nuanced measure of confidence in executing various entrepreneurial tasks such as opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, and business planning (Chen et.al, 1998; Khalil, 2024). Several scholars have emphasized that ESE serves as a critical predictor of entrepreneurial intention, particularly among youth and first-time entrepreneurs (Chen et al., 1998; Zhao et al., 2005). By integrating ESE into the TPB framework, the study seeks to enrich the understanding of how internal beliefs about entrepreneurial capability influence the motivation to engage in agribusiness ventures within FPOs. This extended model is expected to provide a more comprehensive explanation of youth entrepreneurial behaviour, offering valuable insights for designing targeted interventions and capacity-building programs (Tjano & Janse van Rensburg, 2020). The conceptual model for the study is presented in the Figure 1, indicates the extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework. Based on the proposed conceptual framework and the interrelationships among the latent variables, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Entrepreneurial attitude has a significant positive effect on behavioural intention among rural youth in FPOs.

H2: Subjective norms have a significant effect on behavioural intention among rural youth in FPOs.

H3: Perceived behavioural control has a significant positive effect on behavioural intention among rural youth in FPOs.

H4: Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a significant positive effect on behavioural intention among rural youth in FPOs.

H5: Behavioural intention has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial behaviour among rural youth in FPOs.

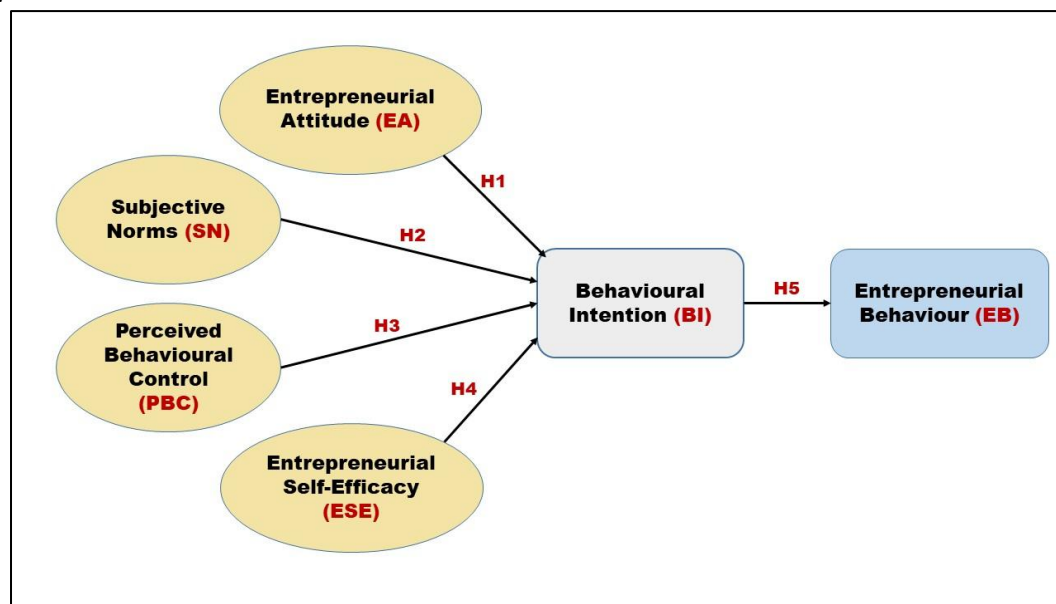


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Study Area

The present study was conducted in three agriculturally significant districts of Tamil Nadu namely Coimbatore, Erode and Tiruppur. These districts were purposively selected due to their strong presence of active Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), particularly those engaged in coconut cultivation and related value chain activities. Coconut is one of the prominent crops in these regions, with substantial scope for aggregation, processing and marketing making coconut-based FPOs highly relevant for promoting rural entrepreneurship. Given the increasing institutional support for commodity-specific FPOs, especially under schemes supported by SFAC, NABARD and state agricultural departments, these districts provided an ideal setting to examine how youth engage in entrepreneurial activities through coconut FPOs. The study thus focused on rural youth members affiliated with these FPOs to capture insights into their behavioural patterns, aspiration and entrepreneurial intent within the coconut value chain.

3.2. Sampling Procedure

A purposive multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents for the study. In the first stage, three districts such as Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Erode were purposively selected based on their prominence in coconut cultivation and the active involvement of rural youth in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). In the next stage, rural youth members affiliated with various coconut-based FPOs across these districts were identified. Selection was based on factors such as active membership in FPOs, participation in group activities and availability for data collection. A total of 200 rural youth were purposively sampled, ensuring proportional representation from each district and enabling meaningful statistical analysis of entrepreneurial behaviour within the FPO context.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected from rural youth members of coconut-based Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) across Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Erode districts using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework, incorporating validated scales for constructs such as attitude toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, entrepreneurial intention, and entrepreneurial behaviour. A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used to capture responses.

Prior to final data collection, the instrument was pre-tested with a small group of respondents (not included in the final sample) to ensure clarity, relevance and reliability. Data were collected through personal interviews to ensure consistency and accuracy, especially in rural settings where digital literacy may be limited. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

For data analysis, the study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for exploratory research and its ability to handle complex models with multiple latent constructs and smaller sample sizes. The analysis included both measurement model assessment (for reliability and validity) and structural model evaluation (to test hypothesized relationships). Descriptive statistics were also computed to summarize demographic and background characteristics of the respondents

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model assessment was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the latent constructs employed in the study. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), while indicator reliability and convergent validity were examined through standardized outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), respectively (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et.al, 2015). All measures met the recommended thresholds, indicating that the measurement model demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity, allowing for further structural model analysis.

4.1.1. Reliability and Convergent Validity

To assess the reliability and validity of the latent constructs, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were examined as presented in Table 1. All constructs demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency reliability with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.733 to 0.866, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Similarly, composite reliability values (ρ_c) ranged from 0.833 to 0.900, confirming the constructs' internal consistency as all values surpassed the minimum acceptable level of 0.70. Convergent validity was assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where all constructs achieved AVE values between 0.555 and 0.637. These values are above the threshold of 0.50, indicating that the latent constructs explain more than half of the variance of their respective indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Consequently, the results provide evidence of satisfactory construct reliability and convergent validity, confirming that the measurement model is adequate for further structural model analysis. The standardized factor loadings were examined to assess indicator reliability, with all items loading above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019) which is given in the Table 2, indicating strong contributions to their respective constructs. For Behavioural Intention, item loadings ranged from 0.709 to 0.793, while Entrepreneurial Attitude ranged from 0.733 to 0.802 and Entrepreneurial Behaviour from 0.741 to 0.862. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy showed slightly lower but acceptable loadings between 0.718 and 0.784. The items for Perceived Behavioural Control and Subjective Norms ranged from 0.743 to 0.888 and 0.752 to 0.817, respectively. These results confirm that all indicators are reliable and unidimensional, supporting their inclusion in the measurement model.

Table 1. Construct validity and reliability

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (ρ_a)	Composite reliability (ρ_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Behavioural Intention (BI)	0.806	0.81	0.865	0.562
Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA)	0.866	0.871	0.9	0.599
Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB)	0.85	0.857	0.893	0.625
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE)	0.733	0.735	0.833	0.555
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	0.81	0.827	0.875	0.637
Subjective Norms (SN)	0.79	0.793	0.864	0.613

Table 2. Individual Indicator: Factor Loadings

	BI	EA	EB	ESE	PBC	SN
BI1	0.793					
BI2	0.745					
BI3	0.709					
BI4	0.747					
BI5	0.752					
EA1		0.794				

EA2		0.802				
EA3		0.783				
EA4		0.769				
EA5		0.733				
EA6		0.762				
EB1			0.78			
EB2			0.752			
EB3			0.814			
EB4			0.741			
EB5			0.862			
ESE1				0.738		
ESE2				0.784		
ESE3				0.718		
ESE4				0.739		
PBC1					0.743	
PBC2					0.748	
PBC3					0.806	
PBC4					0.888	
SN1						0.817
SN2						0.752
SN3						0.767
SN4						0.795

4.1.2. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity of the measurement model was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio as presented in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct (diagonal values in Table 3) should be greater than its correlations with other constructs (off-diagonal values), thereby confirming discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results demonstrate that this condition is satisfied for all constructs, with square root of AVE values ranging from 0.745 to 0.798, consistently exceeding the respective inter-construct correlations. Specifically, the square root of AVE for Entrepreneurial Behaviour is 0.791, which is greater than its correlations with Entrepreneurial Attitude (0.592), Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (0.627), and Behavioural Intention (0.515), thus confirming its discriminant validity. Furthermore, the HTMT values presented in Table 4 are all below the conservative threshold of 0.85 recommended by Kline (2011), with the highest HTMT value being 0.793 between Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy and Entrepreneurial Behaviour. These findings collectively support the establishment of discriminant validity for all constructs in the measurement model.

Table 3. Fornell – Larcker Criterion

	BI	EA	EB	ESE	PBC	SN
BI	0.75					
EA	0.574	0.774				
EB	0.515	0.592	0.791			
ESE	0.576	0.404	0.627	0.745		
PBC	0.434	0.413	0.327	0.272	0.798	
SN	0.34	0.467	0.421	0.283	0.506	0.783

Table 4. Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT Ratio)

	BI	EA	EB	ESE	PBC	SN
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BI						
EA	0.674					
EB	0.589	0.689				
ESE	0.74	0.501	0.793			
PBC	0.515	0.49	0.406	0.355		
SN	0.417	0.566	0.511	0.375	0.622	

4.2. Structural Model Assessment

4.2.1. Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping procedures to assess the significance of the hypothesized path relationships. From the Table 5, the path from Behavioural Intention to Entrepreneurial Behaviour is statistically significant with a path coefficient of 0.515 ($t = 7.703$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that behavioural intention positively influences entrepreneurial behaviour. Similarly, Entrepreneurial Attitude significantly predicts Behavioural Intention ($\beta = 0.350$, $t = 5.148$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals with a favourable entrepreneurial attitude are more likely to form strong behavioural intentions. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy also shows a significant positive influence on behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.390$, $t = 5.971$, $p < 0.001$) highlighting the critical role of confidence in one's entrepreneurial capabilities. The effect of Perceived Behavioural Control on behavioural intention is significant but comparatively weaker ($\beta = 0.202$, $t = 2.628$, $p = 0.009$) indicating that while perceived control contributes to intention, its impact is less substantial. However, the path from Subjective Norms to Behavioural Intention is not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.036$, $t = 0.427$, $p = 0.670$) implying that perceived social pressure does not significantly influence the formation of entrepreneurial intention among the respondents. These findings support the theoretical underpinnings of the model with most constructs demonstrating significant predictive relationships.

Table 5. Hypothesis Path Validation Analysis

Hypothesis	Association	Co-efficient (β)	T statistics	P values	Result
H1	EA -> BI	0.350	5.148	0.000	Accepted
H2	SN -> BI	- 0.036	0.427	0.67	Rejected
H3	PBC ->BI	0.202	2.628	0.009	Accepted
H4	ESE -> BI	0.393	5.971	0.000	Accepted
H5	BI -> EB	0.515	7.703	0.000	Accepted

4.2.2. R² Analysis and Effect Size Analysis

The R² values reflect the predictive accuracy of the model for the endogenous constructs which is presented in the Table 6. The R² value for Behavioural Intention is 0.501, indicating that 50.1% of the variance in Behavioural Intention is explained by its predictors such as Entrepreneurial Attitude, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Perceived Behavioural Control, and Subjective Norms. Similarly, the R² value for Entrepreneurial Behaviour is 0.265, meaning that 26.5% of its variance is explained by Behavioural Intention. According to Cohen's (1988) classification, R² values of 0.26 or above are considered substantial, values between 0.13 and 0.26 are considered moderate, and values between 0.02 and 0.13 are considered weak. Based on this criterion, both Behavioural Intention (R² = 0.501) and Entrepreneurial Behaviour (R² = 0.265) exhibit substantial levels of explanatory power. These findings suggest that the structural model demonstrates strong predictive capability for the key outcome variables in the study.

The effect size (f^2) values were examined to assess the individual impact of each exogenous construct on its corresponding endogenous variable. As per Cohen's (1988) guidelines, effect sizes can be interpreted as trivial when less than 0.02, small at 0.02 or above, medium at 0.15 or higher, and substantial when equal to or greater than 0.35. From the Table 7. Perceived Behavioural Control had a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.247$) on Behavioural Intention, indicating a meaningful contribution. Entrepreneurial Attitude ($f^2 = 0.034$) and Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy ($f^2 = 0.020$) showed small effects, suggesting modest influence. The effect of Behavioural Intention on Entrepreneurial Behaviour was trivial ($f^2 = 0.012$), while Subjective Norms exhibited a substantial effect ($f^2 = 0.674$) on Behavioural Intention, highlighting its strong predictive power in the model.

Table 6. R square for the equation

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Behavioural Intention (BI)	0.501	0.522
Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB)	0.265	0.276

Table 7. Effect size of Individual Constructs

	f^2	Effect Size
BI -> EB	0.012	Trivial
EA -> BI	0.034	Small
ESE -> BI	0.02	Small
PBC -> BI	0.247	Medium
SN -> BI	0.974	Substantial

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB) among rural youth through the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which links behaviour to intention shaped by attitude, norms and control. The structural model presented in Figure 2 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the key constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Specifically, Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), and Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) were found to significantly predict Behavioural Intention (BI), which in turn significantly influenced Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB). This confirms the applicability of TPB in the context of rural youth engaged in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).

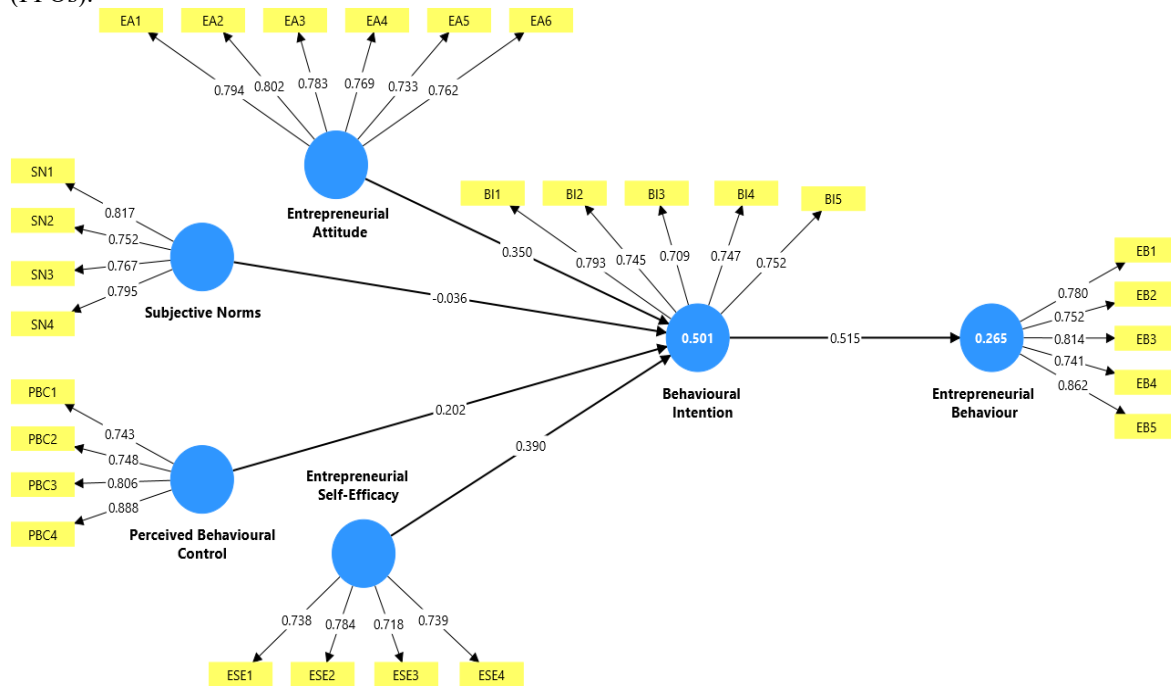


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

The Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA) of rural youth in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) plays a critical role in shaping their behavioural intention toward entrepreneurship (Dioneo-Adetayo, 2006). This construct reflects youth member's psychological inclination to perceive entrepreneurship as beneficial, fulfilling and socially valued. Key indicators that shaped this construct include the belief that entrepreneurship offers greater livelihood security compared to salaried employment (EA1, $\alpha = 0.794$) (Cho et.al,2016) and that it brings personal satisfaction and pride (EA2, $\alpha = 0.802$) (Goss, 2005). Respondents also highlighted how entrepreneurial ventures promote independence and self-reliance (EA3, $\alpha = 0.783$) (Osadolor et.al, 2021). Youth recognized entrepreneurship as a vehicle for innovation in agriculture (EA4, $\alpha = 0.769$) (Pan et.al, 2024). Additionally, entrepreneurship was perceived as a desirable and respected career path within their communities (EA5, $\alpha = 0.733$). The inclusion of (EA6, $\alpha = 0.762$), a reverse-coded item served to enhance response consistency and reduce acquiescence bias, a common concern in attitudinal surveys (Spector, 1992; Podsakoff et al, 2003). Its satisfactory factor loading indicates that, although the overall entrepreneurial attitude among respondents was positive, a minor proportion expressed hesitation potentially attributed to concerns such as fear of failure, perceived risk or inadequate institutional support (Deligianni et.al, 2025).

The Subjective Norms (SN) construct reflects the extent to which rural youth in FPOs perceive social pressure or support from significant referents to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Ajzen, 1991). In the present study, youth indicated that encouragement from family members played a pivotal role in their entrepreneurial intentions (SN1, $\alpha = 0.817$). Peer influence also emerged as important, as many respondents noted that seeing friends or colleagues succeed in entrepreneurship inspired their own interest (SN2, $\alpha = 0.752$) (Kacperczyk, 2013). Moreover, the approval and recognition from local leaders and community elders (SN3, $\alpha = 0.767$) were seen as validating their entrepreneurial aspirations, underscoring the cultural dimension of entrepreneurial

acceptance in rural societies (Urban & Kujinga, 2017). Lastly, institutional actors such as FPO managers and extension agents were also perceived to influence youth decisions (SN4, $\alpha = 0.795$), highlighting the role of formal support systems in fostering positive social norms around entrepreneurship (Kibler et al., 2017). These findings suggest that strengthening both familial and institutional encouragement can enhance rural youth's confidence and motivation to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.

The Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) construct captures rural youth's perceived capacity to engage in entrepreneurial activities, considering both internal abilities and external enablers. Rooted in Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, PBC reflects an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing entrepreneurial behaviour based on resource access, skills, and institutional support. In the current study, rural youth identified confidence in managing an agri-enterprise as a central element of their entrepreneurial capability (PBC1, $\alpha = 0.743$), aligning with prior work by Bandura (1997) on the influence of perceived competence. Access to necessary resources, including finance and inputs through FPOs (PBC2, $\alpha = 0.748$), was also highlighted as a key facilitator, echoing findings from Chandegara (2023) and Mahlaole & Malebana (2021) on structural support in rural contexts. The belief in one's ability to overcome challenges (PBC3, $\alpha = 0.806$) reinforces the role of resilience in entrepreneurial persistence, particularly in the face of market and climatic uncertainties (Lewellyn et al., 2024). Finally, the reverse-coded item (PBC4, $\alpha = 0.888$) captured latent perceptions of difficulty. However, lower agreement with this statement among most respondents suggests that rural youth generally perceived entrepreneurship as manageable, reinforcing the robustness of the PBC construct. These findings affirm that rural youth in FPOs possess a high level of perceived behavioural control, supported by both personal confidence and institutional facilitation (Kundu et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) reflects rural youth's belief in their capability to successfully carry out entrepreneurial tasks and responsibilities, especially within the structured environment of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) (Pant et al., 2024). Rooted in Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy plays a central role in shaping behavioural intention by influencing how individuals think, feel and act in the face of entrepreneurial opportunities and challenges. In the context of this study, entrepreneurial self-efficacy captures the psychological readiness and confidence of rural youth to transform ideas into viable ventures despite resource constraints and systemic barriers (Ghouse et al., 2024). Key indicators contributing to this construct include the confidence to identify market opportunities and mobilize necessary resources (ESE1, $\alpha = 0.738$), which suggests a strategic orientation towards innovation and growth (Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008). Respondents also felt capable of making timely and effective decisions (ESE2, $\alpha = 0.784$), a trait critical for navigating dynamic agricultural markets (Esfandair et al., 2019). The ability to manage risks and adapt to changing environmental or market conditions (ESE3, $\alpha = 0.718$) highlights resilience and adaptive capacity essential traits for entrepreneurship in rural settings (Alcalde- Calonge et al., 2024). The reverse-coded item (ESE4, $\alpha = 0.739$) registered low levels of agreement among respondents, indicating that the majority of rural youth did not perceive a lack of leadership capability. This strengthens the construct validity of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) and reflects a strong sense of confidence in leading and coordinating group-based entrepreneurial initiatives within the FPO context (Giwu & Mdoda, 2024).

Behavioural Intention (BI) represents the motivational state that reflects the rural youth's readiness and commitment to engage in entrepreneurial activities within Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). Ajzen (1991) posits in the Theory of Planned Behaviour that an individual's intention is the strongest predictor of their entrepreneurial actions. Key indicators that shaped this construct include the youth's strong aspiration to start their own agri-enterprises in the near future (BI1, $\alpha = 0.793$) consistent with prior findings on rural entrepreneurial motivation (Krueger et al., 2000). Respondents also expressed their willingness to take concrete steps toward business initiation such as preparing a business plan or seeking resources (BI2, $\alpha = 0.745$) (Linan & Chen, 2009; Esfandiar et al., 2019). The belief in continuing along the entrepreneurial path despite potential setbacks or lack of external support (BI3, $\alpha = 0.709$) highlights determination and resilience key traits observed in successful rural entrepreneurs (Kautonen et al., 2015). Furthermore, youth reported prioritizing entrepreneurship over salaried employment as a preferred long-term career choice (BI4, $\alpha = 0.747$), aligning with growing trends of self-employment preferences among rural populations (Nowinski et al., 2019). In contrast, the reverse-coded item (BI5, $\alpha = 0.752$) received lower levels of agreement among respondents, indicating that the majority of rural youth surveyed demonstrated a clear commitment toward sustained entrepreneurial engagement. The acceptable factor loading and internal consistency of this item not only enhance the psychometric robustness of the Behavioural Intention construct but also serve to validate the presence of genuine cognitive engagement and response reliability (Spector, 1992; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Entrepreneurial Behaviour reflects the actual execution of entrepreneurial intentions through observable actions such as opportunity recognition, innovation adoption, risk-taking, and venture creation (Al-Mamary & Alraja, 2022). It represents the transformation of mindset into practice, particularly within the rural FPO (Farmer Producer Organization) context where youth are expected to demonstrate agency, leadership and adaptability. In the present study, youth demonstrated strong entrepreneurial involvement, as evidenced by their initiation of income-generating activities through FPOs (EB1, $\alpha = 0.780$) and their proactive efforts in solving challenges related to farming and marketing (EB2, $\alpha = 0.752$). Their openness to experimenting with value addition and exploring new agricultural opportunities (EB3, $\alpha = 0.814$) further highlights their innovation orientation. Additionally, involvement in managing or co-managing agri-enterprises (EB4, $\alpha = 0.741$) and a moderate

tendency to avoid risk (reverse-coded EB5, $\alpha = 0.862$) point to varying levels of entrepreneurial maturity and confidence. These behavioural outcomes validate the theoretical proposition that intention alone is insufficient unless supported by action (Bird, 1988; Krueger, 2000) and reinforce that FPO-affiliated youth are actively bridging the gap between planning and execution in entrepreneurial endeavours. The findings further affirm that entrepreneurial behaviour is influenced not only by internal psychological factors but also by contextual supports within FPO structures, resonating with the work of Nabi et al. (2017) on entrepreneurial action in resource-constrained settings.

6. Limitation of the Study

The present study provides meaningful insights into the entrepreneurial behaviour of rural youth in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), yet certain limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality as the relationships observed between variables may evolve over time. A longitudinal approach could better capture the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial development. The study was conducted within three agriculturally significant districts of Tamil Nadu which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with distinct socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response biases including social desirability or inflated self-perceptions of entrepreneurial capacity. While the Theory of Planned Behaviour provided a strong theoretical framework, it does not fully encompass external structural and contextual factors such as access to capital, infrastructure, institutional support or market conditions which are also crucial in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes. Addressing these limitations through mixed-method designs and broader more diverse samples could enhance future research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of rural youth entrepreneurship.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined the entrepreneurial behaviour of rural youth within Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a guiding framework. The findings validate the TPB model in this context, demonstrating that entrepreneurial behaviour is significantly influenced by behavioural intention, which is itself shaped by entrepreneurial attitude, self-efficacy and perceived behavioural control. Among these predictors, perceived behavioural control emerged as the most influential factor underscoring the importance of youth confidence and perceived capability in driving entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurial attitude and self-efficacy also contributed meaningfully while subjective norms had limited influence suggesting that personal motivation outweighs social expectations in this setting. The results highlight the central role of psychological and motivational factors in fostering entrepreneurship among rural youth. FPOs provide a supportive institutional environment that can strengthen these internal drivers. To promote rural entrepreneurship effectively, there is a need for tailored interventions that build entrepreneurial competencies, enhance self-belief, and offer practical support. The study underscores the need for inclusive entrepreneurship policies, capacity-building programs and localized support systems to empower youth as agents of rural transformation.

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