



ORIGINAL PAPER

Romanian Student Perceptions of Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: This study examines Romanian students on various aspects of entrepreneurship, including the specificities of entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurial lifestyle, entrepreneurial role models, the desirability of starting a business, the feasibility of starting and sustaining a business, and barriers to entrepreneurship.

The empirical data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to students from the faculties of the University of Craiova. The analysis of these data provided important insights into understanding young people's perceptions and expectations regarding entrepreneurship.

The findings of this investigation may have implications for the development and implementation of entrepreneurship education programs within Romanian higher education institutions. Understanding students' perceptions and expectations can help to design more effective and relevant programs that will lead them to perceive entrepreneurship as a possible career opportunity.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship; Romania; entrepreneurship perceptions; entrepreneurial career intentions*

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1. Introduction

The entrepreneurship literature commonly addresses factors that determine entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial behavior. However, this literature scarcely investigated how the image of entrepreneurs, their lifestyle, and their activities, at the social and individual levels, influence the intentions and actions of individuals to start their businesses.

In the Romanian context, no recent studies have addressed this topic in the academic field. Given this research gap, this study aims to explore Romanian students' perceptions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs.

The objectives of this research are to assess students' entrepreneurial intentions, to identify the factors that facilitate and hinder the initiation of entrepreneurial ventures, and to explore students' perceptions (positive or negative) of entrepreneurs and their role in community development. From these objectives, the research questions are: RQ1: Is an entrepreneurial career desirable for Romanian students?; RQ2. What are the factors that influence students' perception of entrepreneurship?; RQ3. Is there a correlation between students' perception of entrepreneurship and their entrepreneurial intentions?

2. Literature review

Most of the studies from different scientific fields have related the positive impact of entrepreneurship on economic, technological, social, and political development and environmental welfare (Carree & Thurik, 2005; Neumann, 2021).

Entrepreneurship has an important role in economic growth and development (Carree & Thurik, 2005), and makes economies more competitive and innovative (EC, 2013). Startups and young firms are important in creating new jobs (Bednarzik, 2000) and increasing productivity (Nickell, 1996; Decker et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship can help a country's economy grow balanced and rapidly (Yusuf & Albanawi, 2016) and aid in regional development (Neumann, 2021).

In transition countries entrepreneurs can act as reformers, playing an important role in designing new business models (McMillan & Woodruff, 2003). Entrepreneurs can bring additional welfare to transition societies by creating new jobs, providing consumer goods, limiting the market power of state firms, and stimulating reforms.

In comparison, the dysfunctional aspects induced in society by entrepreneurship are little addressed in the literature. Zahra & Wright (2016) identified potential dysfunctions for entrepreneurship: resistance to technological change (some entrepreneurs sabotage new technologies to maintain a competitive position or to preserve a status quo in their industry); political influence control and abuse of power (some entrepreneurs may engage in influencing the political agenda of the country in which they operate, may support politicians to block countries' access to international markets, they may engage in corruption); waste of natural resources (concerned to procure raw materials efficiently, entrepreneurs may disrupt the natural balance of some ecosystems through their activities); hazardous working environments in some small firms (in some entrepreneurial companies the working environment may become toxic due to the actions or personality of the entrepreneur, excessive competition between employees, staff turnover).

Baumol (1996) has underlined that the institutional framework related to entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in determining the impact of entrepreneurship in an economy, both positive and negative. Sánchez-Escobedo et al. (2011) found that entrepreneurial activity can be influenced by formal factors (supporting bodies and regulations on entrepreneurship, costs and procedures of starting a business) and

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informal factors (entrepreneurial role models, entrepreneurship, and attitudes towards entrepreneurs' activities). Through investigating extensive literature in the field, Neumann (2021) identified several factors that determine the nature of the impact of entrepreneurship in society, positive or negative: industry affiliation; regional population density (in urban areas the effect is more pronounced and more positive compared to rural areas); regional entrepreneurship density (the impact of entrepreneurship decreases in regions with high entrepreneurship rates); institutions and culture (social norms and cultures have stronger and more positive effects on the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth); local development; innovativeness; firm survival; firm size; degree of internalization; motivation (opportunity-driven entrepreneurial activity have a greater impact than necessity-driven entrepreneurial activity); growth ambitions; qualification (firms founded by people with academic degrees seem to have a more positive direct effect on employment); gender and age.

The consequences of entrepreneurship, observed objectively (using social-economic indicators) and the subjective social and individual perceptions of these effects, influence the orientation of individuals towards entrepreneurship, but also the shaping of the image of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in the respective community.

Studies on entrepreneurial intentions, perceptions towards entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship on nationally representative samples are very few in Romania.

An earlier study (Mediafax, 2013), conducted on a sample of 5887 urban respondents, revealed that Romanians have a negative perception of employers, with 68.9% of respondents considering that they are not role models in the spirit of responsibility towards work.

The Romanian Startup Barometer (EY, 2019), conducted on a sample of 374 entrepreneurs, revealed that 74% of the respondents considered that entrepreneurship is not sustained by Romanian mentalities and values (compared to 60% in a similar survey in 2017 and 60% in 2016). The survey also shows that 73% of respondents consider that business failure is perceived negatively in Romanian society and is penalized. The entrepreneurs considered as role models for the respondents were: Elon Musk (7%), Jeff Bezos (6%), and Steve Jobs (5%). 75% of the respondents consider that Romanian schools do not prepare young people to become entrepreneurs. For 41% of respondents, mentoring and discussions with other entrepreneurs are the main source of learning. The main barriers for entrepreneurs in starting and developing a business are mentality and fear of failure (20%); poor education (12%); and fiscal unpredictability (12%).

The Amway Global Entrepreneurship Report (Amway, 2020) reveals that 75% of respondents want to start their own business (57% global average). The same study shows that 63% of respondents considered that they possess the necessary skills for starting a business, only 30% of respondents consider that they have adequate resources for starting a business, 50% suppose that family and friends would not dissuade them from starting a business and 71% would leverage their social network if starting a business). According to the same report, 68% of Romanian respondents mention that the most desirable benefit of starting their own business is the opportunity to work at something they are passionate about, and 68% of Romanian respondents also mention that the most desirable benefit is the possibility to be their boss. The main barrier Romanian respondents see in starting their own business is raising needed capital (45% of respondents).

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A 2022 survey (RBL, 2022), conducted on a sample of 1109 people from all counties in Romania, revealed the following perceptions of entrepreneurs: 65% of the respondents consider Romania a country where honest people can succeed in business; only 41.9% could point to a Romanian businessman they consider a role model; 63.4% consider Romanian entrepreneurs to be rather honest (up 40.4% from 2011 when a similar survey was conducted); 65.5% think that businessmen should intervene when the state does not solve problems in society (35.3% consider that intervention should be through funding).

A recent survey (Enescu, 2024), conducted on a sample of 1071 people, representative of the population aged 18-65 in urban areas, reveals that the image of entrepreneurs in Romania has significantly improved between 2012 and 2024. According to a previous survey in 2012, 65% of respondents believed that "Entrepreneurs get rich at the expense of their employees" and 56% of respondents considered that "In Romania, only those who steal make money". A similar survey in 2024 reveals that 23% of the respondents state that the model of professional success they would choose is that of a businessman/entrepreneur. Enescu (2024) considers that this evolution can be explained by the power of models: external models (the mediatization of famous foreign entrepreneurs in Romania), and internal models (direct or indirect contact with honest, hard-working, self-realized Romanian entrepreneurs).

According to international research based on an online questionnaire, conducted by the multinational company Ipsos (2023), 26% of Romanians trust business leaders, compared to the global average of 25%. A higher level of trust in business leaders was recorded in Indonesia (47% of respondents), India (40%), and Thailand (37%).

The situation is not significantly different for the younger generation in Romania. According to a 2022 market survey (Apostol et al., 2022), conducted on a sample of 1212 young people (16-24 years old), 36% of the respondents stated that they intended to start their own business, but not in the next year, while 8% expressed intention to initiate their business within the next year. The main barriers to starting their own business were: lack of financial resources (mentioned by 78% of respondents); lack of knowledge about starting a business (66%); and lack of mentors to guide them in entrepreneurship (64%). The main motivations for starting their own business were: the desire to contribute to society (30% of respondents); the possibility to do what they want/like (20%); and the opportunity to earn more than one salary (19%).

The perception of entrepreneurs is a subjective construct based on individual norms, beliefs, rules, and procedures (Arroyo-Barrigüete et al., 2023). Volkmann & Tokarski (2009), citing several studies, considered that a distinction should be made between the image of an entrepreneur at a distance and close up. The distance image is a stereotypical image resulting from mass psychology, while the close-up image is the result of individual experience.

Although in the literature there is a predominance of approaches that reflect the positive role of entrepreneurship at the economic-social level, in practice, at the level of individuals in certain communities or generalized to communities at some point in time, entrepreneurs may have a negative image (as previously mentioned in the studies on Romania). Thus, entrepreneurs may be perceived as exploiters of employees' labor, greedy, concerned only with profit and enrichment, ruthless, and egoistic. This image is augmented by the media, which mainly report economic illegalities or associate businessmen with problems such as unemployment, and poverty (Volkmann & Tokarski, 2009).

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The perception of entrepreneurs is an important element in the development of entrepreneurship. When entrepreneurship is socially legitimized and a significant proportion of the members of a community associate entrepreneurship with positive values, new business start-ups are stimulated in that community (Guzmán Cuevas & Cáceres Carrasco, 2001). In a European Union (EC, 2013) paper, containing a strategy for reigniting entrepreneurship in Europe, one of the three crucial pillars of this strategy is the emphasis on entrepreneurial role models. The entrepreneurial culture at the European level can be transformed by changing the perception towards entrepreneurs through positive communication on entrepreneurial success stories, on the value created by entrepreneurs in society, and on the benefits of a career in entrepreneurship. Public and private institutions should engage in this endeavor.

Recent research on the perceptions of entrepreneurship among young people in Romania is scarce. Volkmann & Tokarski (2009) investigated the image of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship among students in Germany, Romania, Latvia, Italy, and Austria. Romanian students attributed high ethical standards to entrepreneurs (in contrast to students in other countries). Romanian students were also the most inclined to see themselves as entrepreneurs.

Gasse & Tremblay (2011) conducted a similar study on a sample of students from Canada, Tunisia, France, Romania, Great Britain, Colombia, and Germany. According to the results of this study, Romania has a high rate of students who intend to start a business. Romanian students associate entrepreneurship with project development and business development, similar to Canadian, French, and Tunisian students, in contrast to British, Colombian, and German students who associate entrepreneurship with business creation elements. Romanian students also consider in a lower proportion, compared to students from other countries, that entrepreneurship can be developed in large firms, in the public sector, or in non-profit organizations.

Badulescu & Badulescu (2013) conducted a study on a sample of 88 Romanian PhD students from several fields (Science, Engineering, Economics, Medicine, etc.). The study revealed that a significant proportion of the respondents have a formal and declarative interest in business (also determined by the tendency to conform to a "trend", especially in Central and Eastern Europe, and Asia, respectively a positive and constantly improving image of the entrepreneur), but also a superficial knowledge of the realities and requirements for an entrepreneurial career.

Perceptions towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, the image of the entrepreneur in a community, change over time as a result of economic, social, political, and cultural changes in that community. Because we have not identified any recent study on this topic contextualized to young educated Romanians, we consider that our research approach, structured on the research questions inserted above, is an opportune one, of national and European relevance.

3. Methodology and results

The sample was selected from students of several faculties of the University of Craiova. We sent an e-mail invitation to 800 students briefly explaining the objectives of the study. Of the 800 invitations sent, 500 were sent to students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and 300 to students from other faculties. Students were invited to complete an online questionnaire (Google Forms). The invitations to students and the collection of responses were sent out between July and September 2024.

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We received 178 questionnaires, of which we eliminated 9 partially completed questionnaires (more than 30% of the data were missing).

The final questionnaire had 28 questions. Several studies addressing similar topics were consulted to develop the questionnaire (Martz et al., 2007; Izedonmi & Okafor, 2010; Goliath et al., 2014; Lee-Ross, 2017; Rahim & Mukhtar, 2021; Skorupa & Stepień, 2024). This questionnaire was obtained after two stages of testing with groups of 15 students. These iterations aimed to ensure that any confounds were avoided.

The structure of the sample by faculty, gender, age, and cycle degree can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the analyzed sample

		Frequency	Percent
Faculty	Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	108	63.9
	Faculty of Sciences	15	8.9
	Faculty of Horticulture	10	5.9
	Faculty of Mechanics	8	4.7
	Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics	6	3.6
	Faculty of Law	6	3.6
	Faculty of Electrical Engineering	6	3.6
	Faculty of Physical Education and Sport	3	1.8
	Faculty of Social Sciences	3	1.8
	Faculty of Letters	2	1.2
	Faculty of Theology	1	.6
Gender	Faculty of Agronomy	1	.6
	Female	101	59.8
	Male	68	40.2
Age	18-25 years	107	63.3
	25-30 years	12	7.1
	30 + years	50	29.6
Type of study programme	Bachelor	118	69.8
	Master	49	29.0
	PhD	2	1.2

From the 169 respondents, 38.5% had taken an entrepreneurship course in college. Moreover, 36.09% of the respondents have a very close family member (parents, brother/sister, grandparents) who has or has had their own business. 7.7% of respondents already have their own business.

The seventh question of the online questionnaire assessed students' perceptions of successful career options in Romanian society. Students could choose a maximum of three alternatives. The responses indicated that a career as a businessman/entrepreneur is perceived as most frequently associated with professional success by 53.4% of respondents. The subsequent career paths are associated with professional achievement in Romania: doctor (51.1%); lawyer/lawyer/judge (33.7%); IT-ist (28.7%); mayor/minister/parliamentarian (26.4%).

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About a third of the respondents point to a Romanian entrepreneur they appreciate and who inspires them. There are very many entrepreneurs mentioned. The most frequently mentioned are Ion Țiriac and Paul Nicolau (nicknamed Pescobar), the owner of several fish restaurants, active on social media. Also, about a third of the respondents indicated a foreign entrepreneur who inspires them. The most frequently mentioned is Elon Musk.

A five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for questions on entrepreneurial intentions, self-assessment of entrepreneurial career skills and competencies, perceptions towards starting own business, and perceptions towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship (questions 11-28).

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of questions 11-14 regarding entrepreneurial intentions. Analyzing the data in this table, it can be seen that students have a relatively strong aspiration to become entrepreneurs, with moderate optimism about the perspective of starting their own business within a time horizon of 10 years or less. Students are aware of the risks involved in starting their own business. Students' confidence that they can be able to cope with entrepreneurial activities is moderate, very close to neutral.

Table 2

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11. In a horizon of a maximum of 10 years, I will own my business.	3.4970	.33240
Q12. I want to be an entrepreneur.	3.7811	.35598
Q13. I expect it will be easy for me to become an entrepreneur if I choose to become one.	3.0237	.21964
Q14. There are many risks when opening and running your own business.	4.2012	.99750

Using an independent samples t-test, we analyzed whether there are differences between students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEBA) and students from other faculties of the University of Craiova in terms of the level of aspiration to start their own business and confidence in their abilities in case of engaging in entrepreneurial activity. We considered such an analysis necessary because students in economics are supposed to be more familiar with the peculiarities and challenges of entrepreneurship.

Analyzing the data in Table 3, it can be observed that the significance value for Levene's test is greater than .05 for both variables studied. Thus, we can observe a higher intensity of aspirations of business students to start their businesses and a higher confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities, but the differences are not statistically significant.

Table 3

	Faculties	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q12. I want to be an entrepreneur.	FEBA	3.8426	.072	.434 (E.v.a)
	Others	3.6721		
Q13. I expect it will be easy for me to become an entrepreneur if I choose to become one.	FEBA	3.0741	.324	.476 (E.v.a)
	Others	2.9344		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

Questions 15-20 aimed to analyze students' perceptions of the conditions that ensure success in entrepreneurship. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 4. Based on these data, it can be concluded that students in the study sample consider perseverance as an essential factor in entrepreneurial success. Students also perceive entrepreneurs as innovators. Factors of moderate importance in entrepreneurial success are specific entrepreneurship education and certain native qualities. Also, being financially resourced to start a business does not guarantee the success of that business, just as luck is considered marginal to entrepreneurial success.

Table 4

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q15. It takes a lot of perseverance to succeed as an entrepreneur.	4.5680	.82904
Q16. I believe that a successful entrepreneur is always an innovator.	4.0296	1.08795
Q17. Being a successful entrepreneur requires specific education.	3.6686	1.24748
Q18. To succeed in entrepreneurship, all you need is chance.	2.0769	1.04654
Q19. To succeed in entrepreneurship requires certain native traits.	3.3018	1.17415
Q20. Anyone can become a successful entrepreneur if they have enough money to start a business.	2.4970	1.21069

Through questions 21-28, we aimed to identify some coordinates of the image of entrepreneurs among students at the University of Craiova. The descriptive analysis is presented in Table 5.

Students tend to consider that entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen. This suggests that respondents associate entrepreneurship with high social status and material well-being.

The perception that retired entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen is less clear among students (very close to neutral). The difference between the answers to questions 21 and 22 can be explained by the fact that respondents assume that entrepreneurs may experience some financial/material difficulties in retirement if their businesses are not stable enough, i.e. entrepreneurs do not have long-term financial plans.

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Respondents have a strong belief that entrepreneurs have a positive impact on society. This reflects an understanding among students of the role of entrepreneurship as a driver of development and innovation in society.

The average of the answers to question 24 shows that students consider, despite a stereotype, that entrepreneurs are not completely independent. Although entrepreneurs have certain degrees of freedom, their activity is under the influence of constraints generated by external factors (business partners, financial institutions, public authorities, and the labor market).

Also, the negative image of entrepreneurs as 'exploiters' of employees is not dominant, but it is a perception present among students, as their answers to question 26 reveal.

The average of responses to question 27, close to neutral, reveals a mixed perception of entrepreneurs. An important part of the student respondents considers Romanian entrepreneurs to be focused on short-term profit without creating long-term value.

The answers to question 28 show that students do not generally perceive that success requires transgressing ethics or law, but there is a significant minority (20%) who believe these behaviors are occasionally necessary.

Table 5

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q21. Entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen.	3.4438	.95030
Q22. Entrepreneurs have a high standard of living in retirement.	3.2189	1.04909
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	3.8166	.99197
Q24. Entrepreneurs are totally independent.	2.8817	1.08461
Q25. Entrepreneurs do not have a personal life.	2.3077	1.21008
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	2.6036	1.22581
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	2.8402	1.24089
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	2.4556	1.31366

Using an independent samples t-test, we further analyzed whether there are differences in Romanian students' perceptions of the image of entrepreneurs depending on the faculty they attend (we focused on the differences between students in economics and those who attend a faculty in another field). We retained questions 23, 26, 27, and 28 for analysis. The summarized data are presented in Table 6.

It can be observed that there are no statistically significant differences between the students of different faculties regarding the image of entrepreneurs (positive and negative sides). A larger but not statistically significant difference is observed in the question related to the positive role of entrepreneurship in the economic and social development of a region/country. Thus, economics students believe, to a greater extent than students from other fields, that entrepreneurs have a positive impact on society.

By analyzing the data in Table 6 it can be highlighted for Q26-Q28 it can be seen that students of economics are less in agreement with the negative statements regarding entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

Table 6

	Faculties	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2- tailed)
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	FEBA	3.8519	.679	.540 (E.v.a)
	Others	3.7541		
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	FEBA	2.5278	.023	.293 (E.v.n)
	Others	2.7377		
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	FEBA	2.7963	1.529	.542 (E.v.a)
	Others	2.9180		
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	FEBA	2.3981	.384	.451 (E.v.a)
	Others	2.5574		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

In Table 7, we have summarized the ANOVA analysis carried out to test whether age is a factor influencing students' perceptions regarding entrepreneurs. It can be seen that there are no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of students in the three age groups towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. However, it can be said that the perception of the positive role of entrepreneurs in society increases with increasing age, but at the same time, the skepticism towards business ethics and legality also increases.

Table 7

		Mean	Sig.
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	18-25 years	3.7944	.927
	25-30 years	3.8333	
	30 + years	3.8600	
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	18-25 years	2.6636	.617
	25-30 years	2.3333	
	30 + years	2.5400	
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	18-25 years	2.9346	.415
	25-30 years	2.5833	
	30 + years	2.7000	
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	18-25 years	2.3645	.472
	25-30 years	2.5000	
	30 + years	2.6400	

In Table 8 we have summarized the results of the independent samples t-test analyzing the differences in perceptions of entrepreneurship depending on the existence of an entrepreneur among the respondents' very close relatives (parents, brothers/sisters, grandparents). There are no statistically significant differences in the answers to the analyzed questions between the two categories of respondents. Surprisingly, respondents with a close relative who is an entrepreneur are slightly more inclined to associate business success with ethical compromises.

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Table 8

	Close relatives are entrepreneurs.	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	Yes	3.7705	.040	.671 (E.v.n)
	No	3.8426		
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	Yes	2.4754	.056	.309 (E.v.a)
	No	2.6759		
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	Yes	2.6557	.122	.147 (E.v.a)
	No	2.9444		
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	Yes	2.6066	.187	.263 (E.v.a)
	No	2.3704		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

In Table 9, we have summarized the results of the independent samples t-test analyzing the differences in perceptions of entrepreneurs according to the existence of an entrepreneurial model declared by the respondents. We find that respondents who have an entrepreneurial home-grown model have a more favorable view of entrepreneurs as opposed to those who do not have such a model (the difference is statistically significant in Q27 and significant in Q28).

Table 8

	Respondents constantly follow/admire a Romanian entrepreneur.	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	Yes	4.0000	.070	.104 (E.v.a)
	No	3.7328		
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	Yes	2.5472	.190	.687 (E.v.a)
	No	2.6293		
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	Yes	2.4717	.528	.009 (E.v.a)
	No	3.0086		
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	Yes	2.1698	.073	.056 (E.v.a)
	No	2.5862		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

Finally, we analyzed the correlation between respondents' willingness to become an entrepreneur (Q12) and their perceptions towards entrepreneurs (Q21-Q28). Table 10 presents the results of this analysis. It is found that, in general, the correlations between the willingness to become an entrepreneur and perceptions of entrepreneurship are weak and statistically insignificant. A statistically significant correlation is only observed between the perceived high standard of living of entrepreneurs after retirement and the willingness to become an entrepreneur.

Table 10

		Q12. I want to be an entrepreneur.
Q21. Entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen.	Pearson Correlation	.150
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.052
Q22. Entrepreneurs have a high standard of living in retirement.	Pearson Correlation	.260
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	Pearson Correlation	.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.184
Q24. Entrepreneurs are totally independent.	Pearson Correlation	.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.729
Q25. Entrepreneurs do not have a personal life.	Pearson Correlation	.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.765
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	Pearson Correlation	.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	Pearson Correlation	.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.491
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	Pearson Correlation	.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.246

Discussion and conclusions

The first conclusion of our study, starting from the first research question, is that a career in entrepreneurship is perceived by students as socially desirable, i.e., most of the respondents (53.4%) consider that in Romanian society professional success is associated mainly with the status of businessman/entrepreneur (the next professions indicated are medicine - 51.1%; lawyer/prosecutor/judge - 33.7%). The majority of respondents (60.2%) want to become entrepreneurs ("agree" and "strongly agree"). In addition, 52.1% of the respondents believe that in 10 years or less, they will start their own business.

Although numerous studies identify socio-cultural factors as predictors for entrepreneurial intentions, there are, however, few studies that distinctly identify and analyze the social desirability of an entrepreneurial career or the social status of entrepreneurs (Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016; Mehtap et al., 2017; Badghish et al., 2023).

The social status of the entrepreneur and the social desirability of an entrepreneurial career do not necessarily influence the entrepreneurial intentions of individuals in a community. Soomro & Honglin (2018) conducted a comparative study on the entrepreneurial intentions of adults in China and Pakistan. According to this study, entrepreneurship is considered a socially desirable career in China, and this cultural element is a positive and highly significant predictor of entrepreneurial

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intentions. In Pakistan, although entrepreneurs have a high level of status and respect in society, this does not induce the respondents to move towards entrepreneurship, preferring a stable job.

Not in all communities the social status of entrepreneurs is high, i.e. entrepreneurial careers are not very socially desirable. Thus, a survey of a sample of students from Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia (Petković et al., 2018) revealed that respondents believe that an entrepreneurial career is not sufficiently valued in society (the score is higher in Serbia and lower in Croatia).

In this context, it is worth noting that the University of Craiova's student respondents perceive entrepreneurship as a socially valued career. Romania, as well as the previously mentioned communities in the former Yugoslav area, experienced for 45 years a communist regime in which private initiatives were suppressed, mostly forbidden, and demonized through propaganda. In addition, an important part of the entrepreneurial class that emerged in the early transition period, on the background of inexperience and immaturity of the Romanian society, through their activity, exploiting certain pre-1990 established informal networks or certain legislative weaknesses, affected the image of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship (Văduva, 2016). Although young respondents were not contemporaries of these periods, the collective mindset may have exerted influence on them. Therefore, we appreciate the fact that 53.4% of the respondents consider that in the current Romanian society professional success is associated with the status of entrepreneur/businessman.

Investigations carried out to answer the second research question revealed that respondents generally have a rather positive view of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, but are not very far neutral. Between respondents' perceptions of entrepreneurs, there are no statistically significant differences determined by the faculty they are attending, age, or the existence of a close relative who owns a business. More important, but not statistically significant, differences are observed between the responses of students who have an entrepreneurial model and those who do not. Our study revealed that about two thirds of the respondents do not have a Romanian or foreign entrepreneur role model. It was also found that the majority of Romanian and foreign entrepreneurs mentioned as role models are male, while female entrepreneurial role models are missing.

Studies in the field have reported similar findings, i.e. entrepreneurial role models can have a positive impact on individuals' attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Boldureanu et al., 2020; Abbasiachavari & Moritz, 2021).

In light of these considerations, a practical implication of our study could be to identify at the University of Craiova multiple solutions to facilitate student interactions with entrepreneurs and exposure to successful entrepreneurial narratives. These solutions could be: inviting successful entrepreneurs to share their experiences at conferences and workshops; including real case studies of successful local entrepreneurs in university entrepreneurship courses; organizing mentoring programs in partnership with local entrepreneurs; and developing podcasts with successful entrepreneurs accessible to students for free on internal educational platforms.

The final finding of our study was that there is generally no difference between students' perceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship and their willingness to start their businesses. The exception is the perception of a high standard of living for entrepreneurs in retirement. This result is somewhat surprising from two points of view: financial security in retirement is more desirable for young respondents than independence or immediate financial success; entrepreneurship is perceived as offering a

high standard of living in retirement, although entrepreneurship does carry the risk of entrepreneurs' income and thus the risk of irregular pension contributions. Along these lines, Alpeza (2021) shows that despite some preconceptions about the financial security of entrepreneurs, some entrepreneurs may face the challenge of securing the necessary sources of funding in retirement. Mastrogiacomo & Dillingh (2015) highlight a high level of uncertainty about the future financial wealth of entrepreneurs (compared to older generations) and refer to the debate on the desirability of compulsory social insurance for entrepreneurs. A career in entrepreneurship, even a successful one, does not inherently ensure financial security in retirement. Entrepreneurs need, as any other citizen, financial education, preparation and planning for retirement from the perspective of financial resources, and consistent responsible financial behavior.

Finally, we highlight some limitations of the research. First, our research is exploratory and should be extended (e.g. it should be carried out on a sample including students from other universities located in socio-culturally different regions). In addition, it is necessary to review the variables that may influence students' perceptions towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, as most of the variables analyzed in this study do not generally lead to statistically significant differences. Second, a fairly high percentage of the student respondents lack knowledge about the economic and social environment and business (they have not studied entrepreneurship as a compulsory course, do not have family members involved in business, and do not consistently follow business information). Third, the responses were collected electronically and the sample does not have the characteristics of a random sample.

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