



Measuring entrepreneurial passion: Conceptual foundations and scale validation [☆]



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ABSTRACT

Along with other affective and emotional dimensions, passion is at the heart of entrepreneurship. Yet past research on entrepreneurial passion (EP) has been hindered by the lack of a sound measurement instrument. Through a series of empirical studies conducted with samples from relevant populations, we develop and validate an instrument to capture EP and its inherent dimensions. We show that the task-specific dimensions of EP (intense positive feelings toward the domains of inventing, founding and developing, and the centrality of these domains to entrepreneurs' self-identity) are conceptually and empirically distinct from one another, and from other emotions and cognitions known to play a role in entrepreneurship. Our theory and results indicate that proper measurement of entrepreneurial passion incorporates the interaction between entrepreneurs' feelings and identity centrality for each domain. We discuss the implications of our model, instrument and findings for future research on the affective components of innovation and entrepreneurship. We also develop specific guidelines for using our validated instrument in future research.

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1. Executive summary

Passion is at the heart of entrepreneurship, because it can foster creativity and the recognition of new information patterns critical to the discovery and exploitation of promising opportunities (Baron, 2008; Sundararajan and Peters, 2007). Moreover, passion has been associated with entrepreneurs' ability to raise funds from investors (Cardon et al., 2009b; Mitteness et al., 2012; Sudek, 2006), and to hire and motivate key employees (Cardon, 2008). Accordingly, scholars have pressed for a deeper understanding of passion as a central element of entrepreneurial efforts (Cardon et al., 2009a; Chen et al., 2009).

In spite of this interest for understanding the nature, causes and effects of entrepreneurial passion (EP), there is a dearth of systematic empirical evidence for the role of passion in entrepreneurship. At the heart of this problem, scholars and practitioners have lacked a robust and validated instrument for measuring passion and its dimensions in the specific context of entrepreneurship. In addition, extant research has failed to articulate the theoretically-relevant relationships between the experience of intense positive feeling commonly associated with passion, and the meaning of these feelings for entrepreneurs' self-identity.

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To address these issues and advance theory and empirical research on EP, we develop and test a new instrument designed to capture the experience of passion in different domains of entrepreneurship (inventing, founding, and developing). Through a series of studies with different samples of entrepreneurs, we show that the dimensions of EP (intense positive feelings and identity centrality) are conceptually and empirically distinct from each other, and from other aspects of emotion and cognition known to play a role in entrepreneurship. More importantly, we demonstrate that relationships between EP and relevant outcomes are a function of interactions between intense positive feelings towards activities associated with each domain and the identity centrality of that domain to the entrepreneur.

At a theoretical level, our work clarifies the ontological nature of EP, its relevant dimensions (i.e., feelings and identity centrality) and its domains (i.e., EP for inventing, founding, and developing). Building on Cardon et al.'s (2009a) model of entrepreneurial passion, we articulate the role of identity centrality as an integral dimension of entrepreneurial passion. At a methodological level, we contribute a validated set of measures for investigating the antecedents and consequences of EP's dimensions and domains. Because such an instrument was not available before, scholars interested in studying passion in entrepreneurship had to rely on more generalized measures of passion, which do not reflect the challenges specific to entrepreneurship (Murnieks, 2007; Murnieks and Mosakowski, 2006). Finally, at an empirical level, we contribute evidence that the relationships between EP and relevant outcomes vary between different domains.

A primary implication of our work is to facilitate future research on the unique and distinct roles of EP in entrepreneurship, and especially to distinguish EP from other affective and emotional constructs. To this aim, we offer specific guidelines for using the instrument developed in this paper. By developing and validating an instrument for measuring the dimensions and domains of EP, we hope to help advance entrepreneurship research not only on the antecedents and consequences of EP, but also on the broader role of affect and emotion in what remains a fascinating human endeavor.

2. Introduction

Passion is at the heart of entrepreneurship (Cardon et al., 2005). Given the uncertain success of launching new products and services, and the challenges of developing new organizations with limited resources, passion can become a key driver of entrepreneurial action. More concretely, passion can “fuel motivation, enhance mental activity, and provide meaning to everyday work” (Brännback et al., 2006: 6). It can foster creativity and the recognition of new information patterns critical to the discovery and exploitation of promising opportunities (Baron, 2008; Sundararajan and Peters, 2007). Moreover, passion has been associated with the ability of entrepreneurs to raise funds from investors (Cardon et al., 2009b; Mitteness et al., 2012; Sudek, 2006), and to hire and motivate key employees (Cardon, 2008). Accordingly, scholars have pressed for a deeper understanding of passion as a central element of entrepreneurial efforts (Cardon et al., 2009a; Chen et al., 2009).

In spite of recent interest in the role of affect and emotions in entrepreneurship (e.g., Baron, 2008; Cardon et al., 2012; Foo, 2011; Foo et al., 2009), theory about the nature, dimensions, origins and effects of entrepreneurial passion (EP) is underdeveloped (Cardon et al., 2009a). More importantly, the development of such theories into concrete strategies for empirical research is limited, leading to a paucity of empirical findings (e.g., Murnieks, 2007). As a result, we lack systematic evidence about the critical role that passion may play in fostering entrepreneurs' increased efforts (Baum et al., 2001), dedication to relevant tasks (Bierly et al., 2000), persistence towards goals despite significant obstacles (Utsch and Rauch, 2000), or in improving new venture survival and performance.

Two issues appear particularly pressing. First, in spite of Vallerand et al.'s (2003) efforts to draw attention to the role of identity in passion (cf. p. 757–758), we still lack theoretically-consistent measures that account not only for the extent of one's feelings towards various activities, but also for the centrality of these activities for one's self-identity (Cardon et al., 2009a; Murnieks and Mosakowski, 2006; Murnieks et al., 2012; Perttula, 2004). From a theoretical standpoint, passion is more than the experience of strong emotions: it specifically concerns intense positive feelings for activities that are *central* and *meaningful* to an individual's self-identity (Cardon et al., 2009a; Farmer et al., 2011; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Murnieks and Mosakowski, 2006; Murnieks et al., 2012; Perttula, 2004). Therefore, measures of passion must specifically integrate the two dimensions of intense positive feelings and identity centrality. Second, we must show that the construct of entrepreneurial passion adds to our understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics. In other words, we must demonstrate that the measurement of entrepreneurial passion is distinct from other cognitive and affective variables that play a role in entrepreneurship, and that it casts new light on the factors and processes that foster entrepreneurship. Otherwise, passion may be construed to be simply an extension of other constructs already in the literature, such as positive affect (Baron, 2008) or optimism (Hmieleski and Baron, 2009).

To address these issues and advance theory and empirical research on EP, we develop and test a new instrument designed to capture the experience of passion in different domains of entrepreneurship (inventing, founding, and developing). Through a series of studies, we show that the dimensions of EP (intense positive feelings and identity centrality) are conceptually and empirically distinct from each other, and from other aspects of emotion and cognition known to play a role in entrepreneurship. We also show that the relationships between EP and relevant outcomes are a function of interactions between intense positive feelings towards activities associated with each domain and the identity centrality of that domain to the entrepreneur.

To our knowledge, ours is among the first empirical studies of passion to specifically examine the potentially interactive role that intense positive feelings and the centrality of target activities for the self-identity of respondents play in an overall model of passion. Thus, we contribute findings concerning this hitherto empirically unexplored aspect of passion. In addition, we help specify the nature of EP and its dimensions, and untangle the relationships between EP and other affective components in

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