



Exploring passion in hobby-related entrepreneurship. Evidence from Italian cases

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ABSTRACT

The paper builds upon research on passion in entrepreneurship to investigate domain passion in addition to entrepreneurial passion, and its role in the entrepreneurial process, thus expanding the conception of passion in entrepreneurship. The paper draws a picture of hobby-related entrepreneurship, focusing on entrepreneurs who start up a business out of a passion, cultivated in hobbies and leisure time, for the domain of their venture and product or service it provides. Two main questions are debated: how is domain passion related to entrepreneurial passion? What is the role of domain passion in the entrepreneurial process? The methodology adopted is qualitative, namely a qualitative approach including two cases of Italian companies. The empirical analysis allows to depict the hobby-related entrepreneurial process, triggered by domain passion. Domain and entrepreneurial passion activate a virtuous circle in which domain passion fuels and is fuelled by entrepreneurial passion.

1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that it takes passion to start a new business and passion and enthusiasm are deeply embedded in the practice of entrepreneurship. Starting from the Schumpeterian view of the entrepreneur (Schumpeter, 1951), researchers in the field of entrepreneurship studies have stressed the role of passion to explain entrepreneurial behaviours, as well as practitioners and successful entrepreneurs that have invoked the power of passion, positive energy and belief in a dream.

Entrepreneurship research has, to date, focused on passion in terms of a passion for activities related to the entrepreneurial process including the identification of new venture opportunities, the founding of new ventures, and new venture development. Such passion is defined “entrepreneurial passion” (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2006), that is a passion for the entrepreneurial process and the activities it entails, an enthusiasm and “love for one’s work” (Baum & Locke, 2004: 588). Thus, much attention has been devoted to the study of entrepreneurial passion, broadly defined as a passion for activities related to the entrepreneurial process, including the identification of new venture opportunities, the founding of new ventures, and new venture development (Breugst, Domurath, Patzelt, & Klaukien, 2012; Cardon et al., 2009; Cardon, Gregoire, Stevens, & Patel, 2013; Laaksonen, Ainamo, & Karjalainen, 2011; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2006; Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardon, 2014).

Besides entrepreneurial passions, many individuals have a passion

for activities in a particular domain and use entrepreneurship as a vehicle by which they pursue their domain passion professionally, in contrast with those who specifically seek to become entrepreneurs because they are passionate about the entrepreneurial process. In such cases, resources to undertake entrepreneurial paths can be acquired in different contexts such as consumption, hobbies and leisure time that can provide specific skills to promote new entrepreneurship (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2005).

More specifically, hobbies are typically pursued in one’s leisure time and for intrinsic and hedonistic enjoyment, relaxation and regeneration, without extrinsic influence and obligation. Stebbins (2001) argues that some hobbies are pursued as an expression of ability, purpose, and identity, involving more effortful engagement, challenge, and complexity thus implying more energy and effort, the development of self-efficacy in the activity and hobby monetization. Moreover, passions developed in leisure and hobbies activities drive consumption and sharing with other fellow users/consumers and may generate new forms of entrepreneurship (Cova & Guercini, 2016). Evidently, one might expect passion related to hobbies and leisure time to be an important factor in generating entrepreneurship and have some influence on start-up decisions.

While research on entrepreneurial passion has greatly contributed to the understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena, studies on entrepreneurs who are motivated to engage in entrepreneurial activities not out of a passion for such activities themselves, but rather out of a passion, cultivated in hobbies and leisure time, for the domain of their venture and the product or service it provides – domain passion – are

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limited.

In other words, extant research on passion in entrepreneurship largely focuses on entrepreneurial passion, while domain passion is under-investigated, resulting in a riveting, yet incomplete understanding of the nature of entrepreneurs' passion and its role in the entrepreneurial process. Moreover, when it comes to the entrepreneurial process, the literature has given attention either to the classic model of the entrepreneurial process (Reynolds & White, 1997), or to the end-user entrepreneurial process in studying user entrepreneurship (Shah & Tripsas, 2007). Limited research has considered the entrepreneurial process triggered by passion (Cova & Guercini, 2016), without specifying whether entrepreneurs possess domain passion, entrepreneurial passion, or both. At the best of author's knowledge, research concerning the entrepreneurial process triggered by domain passion is limited.

In light of the research gaps identified, the paper builds upon research on passion in entrepreneurship to investigate domain passion in addition to entrepreneurial passion, and its role in the entrepreneurial process, thus expanding the conception of passion in entrepreneurship. The paper draws a picture of hobby-related entrepreneurship, focusing on entrepreneurs who start up a business out of a passion, cultivated in hobbies and leisure time, for the domain of their venture and product or service it provides. More specifically, the paper addresses the following research questions: *i) how is domain passion related to entrepreneurial passion? ii) what is the role of domain passion in the entrepreneurial process?*

The paper is structured as follows. The literature review is presented in next section: definitions of passion from different disciplines are provided up to the definition of entrepreneurial passion, as well as a brief review of recent literature concerning different types of entrepreneurs and the motivations of individuals that become entrepreneurs through a process with characters different from the traditional view of entrepreneurial process. We then present the methodology adopted in our study, namely a qualitative approach including two cases of Italian companies founded by entrepreneurs who had previously cultivated their passions and developed their skills and expertise in hobbies practiced in their leisure time. Cases are described and discussed. A final section is dedicated to conclusive remarks, limits and further research directions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Entrepreneurial passion

Researchers and entrepreneurs believe that one reason some individuals start companies can be explained by passion (Dalborg, von Friedrichs, & Wincent, 2015). Most can agree with the view of passion “as any intense emotion that stirs humans with energy and deep longing to make difference” (Cardon et al., 2009: 515). The psychological view of passion is compatible with a feeling that is highly intense and positive, similar to excitement and joy, as an energy that gives individuals a sense of pleasure and promise (Rockwell, 2002). Such feeling involves consciously experienced changes in the internal affective state that are attributed to external stimuli and that are reflected upon and stored cognitively for later retrieval (Cardon et al., 2009).

Thus, social psychologists have treated passion as a motivational construct that contains affective, cognitive, and behavioural components (Chen, Yao, & Kotha, 2009). For example, passion is defined as “a psychological state characterized by intense positive emotional arousal, internal drive and full engagement with personally meaningful work activities” (Perttula, 2003: 15), and as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like [affective], that they find important [cognitive], and in which they invest time and energy [behavioural]” (Vallerand et al., 2003: 756). Chen et al. (2009) suggest that passion helps direct one's attention and actions and that it is a domain-specific motivational construct because one needs to have a target for passion, and this target is often a specific activity or a collection of activities that

embody certain implicit or explicit values.

In the entrepreneurship literature, attempts to define passion share a common emphasis on affect, especially positive affect and, more in general, on entrepreneurial passion. For example, Shane, Locke, and Collins (2003) called “selfish love of work” (2003: 268). Smilor (1997: 342) defined passion as the “enthusiasm, joy, and even zeal that come from the energetic and unflagging pursuit of a worthy, challenging, and uplifting purpose”. Smilor (1997) suggested that entrepreneurial passion is one of the most observed phenomena in entrepreneurship research. Despite this acknowledgment, the research field still lacks a theory-based definition of the concept. Cardon et al. (2009: 517) aimed to fill this gap by proposing a theory of entrepreneurial passion, conceptualizing the nature of the concept as “[...] consciously accessible, intense positive feelings experienced by engagement in entrepreneurial activities associated with roles that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur”. Similarly, building on the social psychological and entrepreneurship literature, Chen et al. (2009) define entrepreneurial passion as an entrepreneur's intense affective state accompanied by cognitive and behavioural manifestations of high personal value. Baum and Locke (2004) identify a positive correlation between passion – described as a driver, the determined, optimistic and persistent desire to succeed at one's own venture – and entrepreneurial commitment that encourages individuals to acquire the skills necessary to operationalize a business. Such passions foster the development of competencies, skills and knowledge that in turn foster innovation (Martin & Schouten, 2014).

Thus, starting from the definitions of entrepreneurial passion and drawing on the contribution by Cardon et al. (2009), in the present study entrepreneurial passion is broadly defined as an intense, positive feeling toward the entrepreneurial process and the activities it entails, such as opportunity identification, new ventures foundation and commercialization of new products and/or services.

2.2. Domain passion

Besides entrepreneurial passion, some authors discuss the target-specific nature of passion (Chen et al., 2009; Chen, Liu, & He, 2015; Murnieks et al., 2014; Vallerand et al., 2003). Passion is defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003). Chen et al. (2015) identify three core attributes of passion: (1) passion is accompanied by intense positive feelings; (2) passion regulates individual behavioural tendencies; (3) passion is a target-specific construct. The target-specific nature of passion implies the existence of a specific activity – domain – from which one's affective experiences originate, that is also the target toward which one is motivated to fulfil a persistent effort. Target activities, or domains, that have been studied in passion research include broad clusters. The first centres on general, amateur activities such as gambling (Mageau, Vallerand, Rousseau, Ratelle, & Provencher, 2005), physical activities (Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008) and internet and online games (Wang & Chu, 2007). A second cluster of target activities investigates employees' passion for work (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008; Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2011). Domain passion is often initially practiced as a hobby – activities done for intrinsic enjoyment, typically in one's leisure time. While some hobbies are defined as “casual leisure” (Stebbins, 1997) as they require little knowledge or skills and are pursued for purposes of relaxation, regeneration, or hedonistic enjoyment; others are pursued as an expression of ability, purpose, and identity, involving more effortful engagement, challenge, and complexity thus implying more energy and effort, defined as “serious leisure”. Serious leisure is anything but “trivial” to the more serious and devoted participants of, for example, kayaking, fishing, mountain climbing, and amateur astronomy (Stebbins, 1982, 2001). Time spent in the engagement in one's hobby is not motivated by and extrinsic reward and is viewed as a benefit, a way to accumulate information that may place hobbyist in situations

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