ENTREPRENEURIAL IDEATION: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Creativity is key to producing novel and useful ideas that can be turned into viable business opportunities. However, little is known about how entrepreneurs employ creativity to develop ideas over time (Dimov, 2007). This study addresses this research gap by exploring the perspectives of entrepreneurs in creative industries. Specifically, we investigate the strategies that creative entrepreneurs pursue to engage in ideation processes. In so doing, we advance understanding of the opportunity identification process, which begins with the generation of business ideas and is influenced by the creative abilities of entrepreneurs (Ward, 2004). While prior studies investigated how ideas are turned into opportunities, idea creation processes have received scant consideration within entrepreneurship research (Gemmell et al., 2012). As opportunities cannot be brought into existence without initial ideas (Hayton & Cholakova, 2012), this leaves a gap in our knowledge of a crucial phase in the entrepreneurial process.

Method

We conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis (Cope, 2011). Set within the context of the UK craft industry, our study investigates 10 creative entrepreneurs. We employed a case study strategy and collected rich empirical evidence through four rounds of semi-structured interviews (resulting in 40 in-depth interviews), participant observations and review of relevant documents. By collecting data over 18 months, we obtained a longitudinal perspective and gained deep insights into the creative processes of entrepreneurs (Harrison & Rouse, 2015).

Results and Implications

Our findings highlight the continuous and cumulative nature of ideation processes. The conceptual framework we develop explains the relationship between creativity, ideas, personal style and market trends. Particularly, we propose that entrepreneurs employ creation strategies, which enable them to draw on their creativity to generate ideas. Simultaneously, they pursue discovery strategies, which facilitate spotting trends in the market in order to advance personal style and, by extension, creativity. Our study reveals the overlapping and intertwined nature of these processes. Thus, our findings contradict prevailing views, which juxtapose creation and discovery theories of entrepreneurial action. By incorporating style and trends into our discussion, we adopt a novel perspective and advance the emerging debate on entrepreneurial ideation. In addition, our study highlights the individuality of personal creativity, which has been largely overlooked by entrepreneurship research.

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