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ENTREPRENEURIAL IMAGINATIVENESS: A JANUSIAN-COGNITION LENS ON THE ROLE OF MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Innovativeness is at the very heart of entrepreneurship (Acs & Audretsch, 1990; Karlsson et al., 2021). The creativity underpinning and driving innovation is of continued interest in both entrepreneurship and the wider management literature (Lumpkin & Pidduck, 2021). Understanding the creative drivers that help to explain and predict why some entities are more innovative than ostensibly similar others hold widespread relevance because the implications are multilevel in nature and have considerable scope. This includes, but is not limited to; research on the creative dynamics in individuals such as their new venture ideation or opportunity quantity and quality (Fredericks et al., 2019), research on firms such as the innovative performance and creative flair of company product lines (Godart et al., 2015), studies on innovation across industries (Eliasson & Eliasson, 2006), and perhaps most salient to governments and public policymakers; research on the innovativeness of regions and nations (Fernández-Serrano et al., 2019). Recent studies suggest that creativity varies between regions because creativity is dependent on a combination of both *internal* (i.e., people, culture, resources) and *external* factors (i.e., policies, trade, and facilitating organizations) (Montalto et al., 2019). Regions seeking to develop entrepreneurial activity, then, can invest in their ecosystems to promote creative and innovative new ventures (Svare & Gausdal, 2015), but also, and perhaps most critically, their people (Rodríguez-Pose & Lee, 2020).

However, our knowledge of these internal “people inputs” to regional innovation outcomes in entrepreneurship remains underdeveloped and fragmented (Kirzner, 1999). Research has long shown that creativity is the product of cross-pollination of ideas (Ward, 2004). As a result, education is a frequently examined focal variable associated with entrepreneurially creative outputs (Uhlbach, Tartari, & Kongsted, 2022). While helpful to an extent, the limitation of a focus on education is that education tends to be highly standardized (Hjorth, 2009). Thus, this substantially weakens the utility of formal education as an insightful variable offering much added-nuance to our current understanding as it suggests that teaching a population the same information will make them all creative in more or less the same way (Johannisson, 2016). However, Schumpeter (1950; 2002) cast the entrepreneur as the *personification of innovation* (Hagedoorn, 1996); an individual with the creative perspective to make transformative change. It would seem that there is a leap, from the knowledge available to all within the region and that which allows an entrepreneur to identify creative solutions and emerge as an innovative actor. An intriguing question then emerges: how and when *does* unique entrepreneurial creativity arise? Creative-cognition research suggests that building highly idiosyncratic schemas are essential for creativity to thrive (Simonton, 2008). As

such, while some vital base knowledge inputs are standardized across individuals (i.e., through education); rare or novel experiences may be the critical ingredients providing the inputs for original *combinations of ideas* to emerge (Damian & Simonton, 2014).

This paper seeks to address this phenomenon by considering idiosyncratic multicultural experience as a potentially rare/novel experience-input category contributing to entrepreneurial innovativeness. Specifically, we draw from Schema Theory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) and examine the Janusian-Process effects of foreign cultural experiences in cultivating the creative, social, and practical schemas underpinning entrepreneurial imaginativeness (Kier & McMullen, 2018). Janusian-thinking research dates back to Rothenberg's (1971) seminal work investigating generalizable psychological processes among genius performers across fields of expertise, from Einstein's development of the theory of relativity, to various authors' great works of fiction (Rothenberg, 1979). Janusian thinking can be defined as one's "capacity to conceive and utilize two or more opposite or contradictory ideas, concepts, or images simultaneously" (Rothenberg, 1971, p. 175) and is underpinned by the development and stimulation of diverse schemas—mental maps that help organize and process stimuli (Tang, 2016). We integrate with this the burgeoning stream of research on the role of multicultural experience in cultivating entrepreneurial cognitions and skillsets (e.g., Pidduck, 2020; Pidduck et al., 2020a; 2020b; Pidduck & Zhang, 2021; Vandro & Franke, 2016). Specifically, multicultural experience is framed as a uniquely effective category of diversifying experience for providing idiosyncratic cognitive shocks which expands an individual's cognition in unorthodox ways, resulting in creatively enhanced schemata (e.g., Maddux et al., 2021). As such, we develop a model that delineates how and when aspects of multicultural experiences can function as potent drivers of entrepreneurial imaginativeness; the foundation for a regional populations' entrepreneurship and innovation activity. Hypotheses are first tested across two survey-based studies on samples of working adults—Study 1 (n=287), Study 2 (n=640)—from around the world with varied professional, educational, and entrepreneurial backgrounds—reflecting the population of interest, prospective entrepreneurs.

We make several important contributions to entrepreneurship research. First, to the emergent field of entrepreneurial creativity and imaginativeness (Kier & McMullen, 2018) we demonstrate the importance of idiosyncratic schema development toward entrepreneurial imaginativeness. Specifically we identify multicultural experiences as being a useful source of unique schemas facilitating creative, social and practical imaginativeness contributing to new venture ideation. Second, beyond the normative conclusion for potential entrepreneurs (i.e., explore cultures to be more imaginative), our research has intriguing regional development policy implications (Blackburn & Schaper, 2016). Policymakers can support and encourage individual-level multi-cultural experiential activities for the purpose of entrepreneurial creativity. Policymakers have long used these activities to promote fellowship, educational experiences, or diasporization (e.g., Israel's birthright trips, Abramson, 2017); but our findings suggest that these experiences may have key value in entrepreneurship.

In this truncated academy of management best paper proceedings, we provide our hypotheses below and then proceed to an overview of the two studies along with figures displaying results succinctly. We encourage interested parties to reach out to the corresponding authors for a full draft of this work is desired. *Hypothesis 1.* Breadth of living abroad experience is positively related to (a) practical imaginativeness and (b) social imaginativeness. *Hypothesis 2.* Depth of living abroad experience is positively related to a) creative imaginativeness and b) practical imaginativeness. *Hypothesis 3.* (a) Practical imaginativeness and (b) social imaginativeness mediate the relationship between breadth of living abroad experience and number of new venture launch attempts. *Hypothesis 3.* a) Creative imaginativeness and b) practical imaginativeness mediate the relationship between depth of living abroad experience and number of new venture launch attempts.

METHODS

The hypotheses are tested across two studies. In Study 1, we sought to establish preliminary support for the links between breadth and depth of living abroad experience and the three dimensions of entrepreneurial imaginativeness (i.e., Hypotheses 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Probing the relationship among dimensions of living abroad experience and entrepreneurial imaginativeness

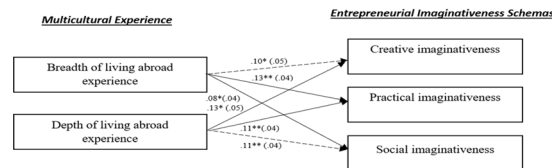


Fig. 1. Results of theoretical model. Note. Unstandardized path coefficients are reported. Solid lines represent relationships of interest in the current study, and dashed lines represent relationships tested and controlled for but not formally hypothesized. For the ease of readability, we omitted the path estimates from control variables in the model. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

In Study 2, findings from Study 1 are replicated and the whole model is tested (Hypotheses 1-4).

Figure 2. Probing relationships among dimensions of living abroad experience, entrepreneurial imaginativeness and new venture attempts

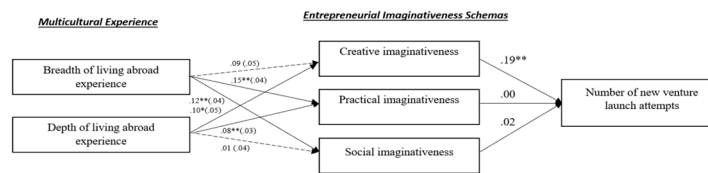


Fig. 2. Results of theoretical model. Note. Unstandardized path coefficients are reported. Solid lines represent relationships of interest in the current study, and dashed lines represent relationships tested and controlled for but not formally hypothesized. For the ease of readability, we omitted the path estimates from control variables in the model. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

BRIEF SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A flourishing body of research in entrepreneurship is emerging on the role of entrepreneurial imaginativeness. Indeed, it plays a vital role in the ideation, initiation and development of new ventures. Thus far, empirical studies have focused solely on its ideation-based outcomes—the number and quality of ideas produced. Little is known, though, on both its antecedent mechanisms and whether imaginativeness actually associates with more initiation of new ventures. Drawing from Schema Theory and the Janusian-thinking process, this paper probed the emergence of creative, social, and practical cognitive schemas undergirding entrepreneurial imaginativeness through an increasingly prominent form of experience among professionals—stints living abroad. Evidence was found that depth and breadth (number of different cultures) of living abroad experiences relate to imaginativeness dimensions in unique ways. Further, the authors suggests that developing these cognitive schemas also leads to a greater likelihood of venturing. In sum, this paper seeks to continue the scholarly conversation surrounding the utilization of the multicultural experiences as a valuable input and potentially competitive resource for nascent entrepreneurship.

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