

Understanding the emergence of entrepreneurial passion

The influence of perceived emotional support and competences

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Abstract

Purpose – Recent research acknowledges entrepreneurial passion's outcomes, but far less is known about how entrepreneurial passion comes about. In this study, the authors are interested in the emergence of entrepreneurial passion, and how competences and social network are associated with entrepreneurial passion. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors investigate whether entrepreneurial passion emerges out of socialisation, entrepreneurial experience or various combinations thereof. The authors tested the hypotheses on a data set of entrepreneurs who started their businesses with government financial support ($n = 1150$).

Findings – The findings show that within a social environment, perceived emotional support is positively associated with entrepreneurial passion. Moreover, entrepreneurs' task-related competence moderates this relationship positively. By investigating the emergence of entrepreneurial passion, the authors contribute to prior passion literature, which has mainly focused on its consequences.

Originality/value – The findings demonstrate both how entrepreneurial passion is associated with and how perceived emotional support can stem from unexpected sources, such as from a government-based start-up grant. For entrepreneurs, an increased awareness of passion's emergence could better encourage them in their entrepreneurial endeavours. To people who are engaged in promoting entrepreneurship, our findings emphasise the symbolic and emotional aspects of instruments intended to support entrepreneurship.

Keywords Competences, Entrepreneurship, Socialization, Entrepreneurial passion, Perceived emotional support

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Entrepreneurial passion is increasingly becoming acknowledged as an important factor in understanding how entrepreneurial intentions are built (Biraglia and Kadile, 2017), how persistent and committed entrepreneurs are during their start-up attempts (e.g. Breugst *et al.*, 2012; Cardon and Kirk, 2015; Fisher *et al.*, 2018; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014), how invention and radical innovation happens (Strese *et al.*, 2018) and how they grow their businesses (Drnovsek *et al.*, 2016) and improve performance (Ho and Pollack, 2014). Entrepreneurial passion is defined as “intense positive feelings experienced by engagement in entrepreneurial activities” (Cardon *et al.*, 2009, p. 517).



The entrepreneurial process is often riddled with challenges and disruptions (e.g. Bygrave and Hofer, 1991; Van Gelderen *et al.*, 2011), which could tempt entrepreneurs to pursue other, easier career paths (e.g. employment) (Folta *et al.*, 2010). However, entrepreneurial passion could aid entrepreneurs in overcoming these challenges (Chen *et al.*, 2009; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). Strongly passionate entrepreneurs are more likely to dedicate time and resources towards their ventures and their ventures are accordingly more likely to survive and become profitable ventures compared to those operated by less passionate entrepreneurs (e.g. Drnovsek *et al.*, 2016; Ho and Pollack, 2014; Stenholm and Renko, 2016). As shown, the majority of previous research has focused on the outcomes of entrepreneurial passion, but far less is known about its emergence (Murnieks *et al.*, 2018) – how entrepreneurial passion comes about. In this study, we will demonstrate how the development of entrepreneurial passion is an outcome of a socialisation process stemming from perceived emotional support as well as individual-level competences.

Addressing the development of entrepreneurial passion is challenging for several reasons. Theoretically, it makes entrepreneurial passion approaches one-sided, with the focus being predominately on its consequences. This could be a result of the entrepreneurial passion concept's immaturity and lack of legitimacy, which requires pioneering scholars to prove its impact and importance in order to increase its legitimacy (Cardon *et al.*, 2012). However, the theoretical framing simultaneously needs a sophisticated understanding of entrepreneurial passion's emergence in order to enhance entrepreneurship theory. Practically, focusing predominantly on consequences of entrepreneurial passion and less on its emergence limits our ability to help entrepreneurs and communities build entrepreneurial passion and benefit from knowing that it matters. Only by knowing about these antecedents can policy-makers and entrepreneurs themselves advance initiatives to increase entrepreneurial passion.

Accordingly, the question remains regarding whether entrepreneurial passion is something that emerges externally out of social environment socialisation, internally through individual competences or various combinations hereof. Thus, we study passion from two different perspectives: the socialisation and the competence perspective. In the socialisation perspective, we argue that passion can develop externally from outside influences such as the perception of emotional support. In the competence perspective, we argue that passion can develop internally within individuals because of their competences. Specifically, in the socialisation perspective, we suggest that entrepreneurs who receive financial support through public start-up funding also perceive this funding and the related process with interviews and assessments as emotional appraisal, which subsequently influences their entrepreneurial passion development (Cardon *et al.*, 2013) through an increased engagement in entrepreneurial activities (Gielnik *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, in the competence perspective, we suggest entrepreneurial experience functions as antecedent of entrepreneurial passion due to its task-relatedness. Finally, we suggest that the development of passion, through the perception of monetary resources as emotional support, depends on individuals' competences in terms of task-related entrepreneurial experience.

Our study makes three important contributions to the entrepreneurial passion literature, as well as one contribution to social support theory. Together, these bring forward our understanding of important aspects which are associated with entrepreneurial passion. First, our results extend entrepreneurial passion's competence perspective (Dalborg *et al.*, 2015; Thorgren and Wincent, 2013) by arguing that the emergence of passion derives from entrepreneurial experience. Second, we also contribute further to the competence perspective by arguing that entrepreneurs' passion emerges as a product of environment socialisation. This takes place in a two-step process, wherein short-term external stimuli are slowly internalised into entrepreneurial passion's more long-term state through an increased engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Third, our results show contingencies between the competence and socialisation perspectives emphasising that these do not function in isolation but are dependent on each other. Fourth, our study contributes to entrepreneurship's social

support theory by showing how various support types intermingle. Financial support has influence not only through its economic functions, but also through the perception of emotional support attached to receiving the financial support. Instead of directly addressing emotional support, we focus on how entrepreneurs perceive government grants, i.e. the emotional meaning they attach to it. Accordingly, we question previously clear distinctions between various support types.

Our study proceeds as follows: first, we discuss the theoretical background and argue for the hypotheses. Then, we introduce data and methods used in testing the hypotheses. We test our hypotheses on a unique data set of Finnish entrepreneurs who started their businesses with government financial support ($n = 1,150$). After going through the results, we conclude and discuss the main findings.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Passion as an important human behaviour driver (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003) is studied widely in many domains (e.g. Ho *et al.*, 2011; Lavigne *et al.*, 2012), including entrepreneurship. Passion has been defined in different ways, but these definitions share themes, such as “strong inclination” (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), “strong desire” (Philippe *et al.*, 2010) and “intense positive feelings” (Cardon *et al.*, 2009) related to a certain activity or objective. The emphasis on a specific focus and affection for a certain activity is what separates passion from motivation (Murnieks *et al.*, 2014). Following Cardon *et al.* (2009, p. 517) definition of entrepreneurial passion as “intense positive feelings experienced by engagement in entrepreneurial activities”, we emphasise individuals’ subjectivity of those feelings as an entrepreneurial behaviour driver.

As an emerging research field, entrepreneurial passion has been subject to a primary focus on theory building, however, empirical studies on entrepreneurial passion are increasingly emerging (e.g. Collewaert *et al.*, 2016; Davis *et al.*, 2017; Gielnik *et al.*, 2015; Fisher *et al.*, 2018; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014). The empirical studies dominantly focus on how entrepreneurial passion impacts – often through self-efficacy (e.g. Biraglia and Kadile, 2017; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014) – various entrepreneurial consequence types, including entrepreneurial intention (Biraglia and Kadile, 2017), commitment and persistence (e.g. Breugst *et al.*, 2012; Cardon and Kirk, 2015; Fisher *et al.*, 2018; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014; Stenholm and Renko, 2016), investment decisions (e.g. Chen *et al.*, 2009; Mitteness *et al.*, 2012; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014), new venture growth (Drnovsek *et al.*, 2016), financial performance (Ho and Pollack, 2014), managers’ decision to exploit new product opportunities (Klauckien *et al.*, 2013) and entrepreneurship motives (Thorgren *et al.*, 2014). There is also an increasing interest in entrepreneurial passion as a dynamic construct that develops over time (Collewaert *et al.*, 2016) and depends on individuals’ prior efforts (Gielnik *et al.*, 2015). However, this research stream’s main interest has been entrepreneurial passion’s consequences, while its materialisation has been mostly neglected. Although not addressing antecedents of passion directly, Cardon *et al.* (2009) underline three important focus areas for research in entrepreneurial passion. First, there is a need for clearly distinguishing between the experience of actual passion and other episodic positive emotions; second, research needs to move away from trait-based explanations of why passion influences the behaviour of entrepreneurs differently, and third, passion is not necessarily stable over time, but may change during the entrepreneurial process (Cardon *et al.*, 2009). In attempts to further touch upon these antecedents, some studies have investigated “who” possesses passion. These works investigate how entrepreneurial passion depends on identity and entrepreneurship type (Thorgren and Wincent, 2015; Yitshaki and Kropp, 2016). Dalborg *et al.* (2015) and Thorgren and Wincent (2013) suggest that passion is derived from individuals’ competences.

In this study, we will address the appearance of entrepreneurial passion. Because of such passion’s importance in driving various entrepreneurial outputs (e.g. Baum and Locke, 2004; Drnovsek *et al.*, 2016; Ho and Pollack, 2014; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of its emergence (Murnieks *et al.*, 2014).

Our study is not set for explaining entrepreneurial passion's outcomes or suggesting causal dependencies. Instead, we will rely on entrepreneurial passion's competence perspective, as suggested by Dalborg *et al.* (2015) and by Thorgren and Wincent (2013). The competence perspective is an inside-out perspective on the development of passion arguing that individuals' competences and their perception of competences influence their passion development (Dalborg and Wincent, 2015; Thorgren and Wincent, 2015). We will complement this with a socialisation perspective with its focus on how individuals are influenced and motivated by their social surroundings (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Based hereon, we argue that passion not only stems from entrepreneurial experience, but it is also socialised through interactions with the broader social environment (see Table I).

Studies show that passion develops from individual competence perspective (Dalborg *et al.*, 2015; Thorgren and Wincent, 2013), and we focus on entrepreneurial experience to argue for the competence perspective. In developing our hypotheses, we begin by arguing for the individual influences on entrepreneurial passion from, respectively, the competence and socialisation perspective. Hereafter, we argue for why we expect those two perspectives to have combined influences on entrepreneurial passion.

Social networks in supporting entrepreneurial passion

It is well established that entrepreneurs obtain valuable resources and support from their social networks (Jonsson, 2015), which helps them perform as entrepreneurs. The various support types that they obtain from the social environment range from financial support (Shane and Cable, 2002), advice (Greve and Salaff, 2003) and assistance (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Kim *et al.*, 2013) to emotional support (e.g. Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998; Toegel *et al.*, 2013; Van Auker and Werbel, 2006). Most previous studies, however, have investigated different support or resource types in isolation, without considering potential spill overs between them, or without considering their co-existence. This is also the case in studies that look at public policy inventions' instrumental value (e.g. Baumgartner and Caliendo, 2007), including financial support (Tokila, 2009).

We focus on spill overs between two support types, even though they are coming from the same sources and are provided simultaneously. Specifically, we are interested in how the perception of emotional support attached to financial support socialises entrepreneurs into developing entrepreneurial passion. This is relevant as studies show that, surprisingly, the perception of support often builds more confidence for individuals than actual support: "It appears that people who have a strong psychological sense of support fare better in the face of adversity than those who are less sanguine about the support they can garner. Paradoxically, a strong sense of support seems to give people the confidence to cope without needing to marshal their network's resources" (Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010, p. 512). Hence, whether the intended meaning of the government grant was beyond the financial value does not influence the positive consequences of the perceived emotional meaning of the grant for the recipients (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010; Klyver *et al.*, 2018).

	Competence perspective	Socialisation perspective
View	Inside-out	Outside-in
Assumption	Passion comes from within and is developed through individual's competences and abilities	Passion comes from the outside, and is developed through socialisation and outside influences
Main references	De Clercq <i>et al.</i> (2012) Dalborg <i>et al.</i> (2015) Thorgren and Wincent (2013)	Adler and Kwon (2002) Borgatti and Cross (2003)
Variables	Entrepreneurial experience	Perceived emotional support

Table I.
Competence and
socialisation
approaches of
entrepreneurial passion

The spill over between emotional and financial support can also be defined as financial support's emotional meaning (e.g. Barling *et al.*, 1988; Semmer *et al.*, 2008; Tardy, 1994). This implies that financial support, apart from its economic benefits, carries and signals a symbolic message of understanding and esteem that is equally important to entrepreneurs and which functions through socialisation. The symbolic message may vary from situation to situation, but most importantly, it is subjectively interpreted and perceived by individuals. Thus, even though individuals receive similar amounts of financial support, they will interpret this symbolic message subjectively, and the perceived emotional support or meaning will vary. The symbolic message "communicates to the support recipients that they are cared for and accepted (see Sarason *et al.*, 1996), and thus relates to the very basic need of 'belongingness' or 'relatedness'" (Semmer *et al.*, 2008, p. 238).

We argue that the more emotional support that entrepreneurs attach to receiving financial support to their start-up, the more likely they are to develop entrepreneurial passion as a function of the socialisation process commenced by emotional support. This entrepreneurial passion socialising process takes place in a parallel two-step process. First, the perceived emotional support related to the financial support initially ignites positive emotions and affect, which makes entrepreneurs more willing to engage with their surroundings and initiate activities (Fredrickson, 2001), as well as increase more favourable perceptions of objects, ideas and persons (Bower, 1991; Isen, 2002). Emotions can direct individuals' behaviours towards entrepreneurship (Hatak and Snellman, 2016). Accordingly, entrepreneurs are riding a wave of positive emotions boosted by the received support's inspired trust. Second, this initial shot of positive emotion lasts for only a short while after the actual moment of receiving the financial support, and it must develop into more intense feelings in order to have a long-term effect. This implies that these kinds of shots of positive emotions residing internally within entrepreneurs towards a certain activity lead to actual passion, as opposed to the more momentary emotions caused by external stimuli (Cardon *et al.*, 2013; Wincent *et al.*, 2008). This is in line with Cardon *et al.* (2009) calling for a clear distinction between episodic emotions and the actual experience of passion resulting from engagement with entrepreneurial activities. Related hereto, Gielnik *et al.* (2015) argue that entrepreneurs' engagement in activities, their effort, enhances entrepreneurial passion. To explain why entrepreneurs increase their engagement in entrepreneurial activities, we build on the arguments made by both Cardon *et al.* (2009) and Gielnik *et al.* (2015). We argue that the experience of episodic emotions will increase entrepreneurs' engagement in entrepreneurial activities, which over time can turn into entrepreneurial passion. We thereby extend the argument put forth by Gielnik *et al.* (2015) by adding a new layer explaining the increase in effort and entrepreneurial activities as a result of the perception of emotional support. Put differently, experiencing positive emotions related to a specific activity will encourage entrepreneurs to increase their engagement with this activity (Fredrickson, 2001), and this increased engagement may over time lead to entrepreneurial passion.

Thus, as entrepreneurs start engaging more with the surroundings and initiate new positive-emotion-supported activities because of the perception of emotional support, they slowly develop more intense feelings and passion for their entrepreneurial ventures. Accordingly, based on the above, we assume that perceived emotional support enhances entrepreneurial passion, and we hypothesise that:

H1. Perceived emotional support is positively associated with entrepreneurial passion.

Competences in supporting entrepreneurial passion

In addition to the socialisation of entrepreneurial passion, we argue that another aspect associated with the emergence of entrepreneurial passion is the alignment of entrepreneurial experience with the entrepreneurial career path.

In an entrepreneurial context, the task-relatedness of competences is understood as the degree to which skills and competences are related and transferrable to the tasks and challenges associated with being an entrepreneur, or whether they are detached from such tasks and challenges (Unger *et al.*, 2011). Oftentimes, task-related competences manifest through start-up or industry experience, while non-task-related competences take the form of education and general employment experience. In this study, we focus on the role of task-related competences in entrepreneurial passion's emergence.

Having previous entrepreneurial experience provides a valuable knowledge base that is both easily transferrable and useful when evaluating opportunities (Dimov, 2010). Opportunity evaluation is a cognitive process that takes place under asymmetric information and unpredictable outcome conditions, and which involves developing confidence and beliefs of what the future will be like if an opportunity is pursued (Dimov, 2010; Haynie *et al.*, 2009; Keh *et al.*, 2002; Wood *et al.*, 2014). It is a subjective mental valuation of a specific opportunity based on its unique features (Davidsson, 2015; Welpé *et al.*, 2012).

Dimov (2010) introduces the term "opportunity confidence", which is defined as "sufficient confidence or conviction by the nascent entrepreneur in the feasibility and operability of the opportunity at hand" (Dimov, 2010, p. 1124). He argues that entrepreneurial experience enhances venture emergence through opportunity confidence, as experience results in better opportunity evaluation abilities and making more justified opportunity feasibility decisions.

Following Dimov's (2010) work, we argue that entrepreneurial experience is a task-related competence and when embedded with opportunity confidence will subsequently enhance entrepreneurial passion's emergence. Entrepreneurial experience, along with its related confidence and opportunity feasibility beliefs, will – similarly to perceived emotional support – ignite intense and positive feelings that, in turn, slowly support entrepreneurial passion. To further understand this link between entrepreneurial experience and positive feelings, we build on Gielnik *et al.* (2015) and their study on entrepreneurial effort, where they find that higher levels of effort positively influence the experience of positive emotions. We argue that entrepreneurial experience is a consequence of consistent entrepreneurial effort and therefore entrepreneurial experience leads to positive emotions. Where Gielnik *et al.* (2015) study effort in current entrepreneurial tasks, we study prior entrepreneurial experience understood as prior entrepreneurial effort and argue that prior entrepreneurial effort increases the experience of positive emotions just as opportunity confidence does. When entrepreneurs experience positive emotions based on past experiences and feel confident about the opportunities at hand, their passion for pursuing them likely grows stronger. However, negative entrepreneurial experiences, such as bankruptcy or failure, can also lower passion among those with task-related competence (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013), but despite the negative experiences failed entrepreneurs still re-enter entrepreneurship (Hsu *et al.*, 2017). Bernile *et al.* (2017) show that CEOs' negative past experiences make them behave more conservatively than before. However, we argue that the length of experience and the subsequent expression of years of prior entrepreneurial effort leads to a valuable learning experience that subsequently translates into opportunity confidence. We argue that this learning takes place as a result of both negative and positive prior experiences; they all combine into learning through experience which constitutes as a solid base for new projects. With this increased learning, as a result of effort expressed in experience, positive feelings are ignited which, in turn, slowly support entrepreneurial passion development.

On the other hand, entrepreneurs with less task-related experience and thus less prior entrepreneurial effort will not have the same confidence, which will make them less passionate or their passion for entrepreneurship develops slower. Moreover, entrepreneurs with less task-related competence may have other sources for their passion, such as enjoying their role as an entrepreneur (Murnieks *et al.*, 2018) or that the venturing stems from a possibility to work with entrepreneurs' own hobbies (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). Based on

the above, we argue that previous entrepreneurial experience will enhance entrepreneurial passion, and we hypothesise that:

H2. Previous entrepreneurial experience is positively associated with entrepreneurial passion.

Competence as moderator in the relationship between perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion

Perceived emotional support is expected to socialise entrepreneurial passion through positive emotion triggering, which subsequently develops into more intense entrepreneurial activity feelings and passion. In addition, entrepreneurial experience is also expected to influence whether entrepreneurs develop high or low entrepreneurial passion levels because of its task-relatedness. However, the question remains as to whether the perceived emotional support and competences function as two independent and isolated aspects or whether they are contingent on each other as either complementary or compensatory (e.g. Klyver and Schenkel, 2013; Semrau and Hopp, 2016).

Following the complementarity perspective, we argue that entrepreneurs with superior task-related competences in the form of entrepreneurial experience are better able to translate and transform the perceived emotional support into entrepreneurial passion (e.g. Batjargal, 2007; Florin *et al.*, 2003). The task-related experience enables entrepreneurs to better understand and feel the symbolic message and emotional support, and they will thereby benefit from the symbolic message. This will, consistently with the complementary perspective, enhance their entrepreneurial passion. Based on the above, we hypothesise competence as a moderator in the perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion relationship, as follows:

H3. The relationship between perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion is positively moderated by previous entrepreneurial experience.

The hypothesised theoretical model is graphically illustrated in Figure 1.

Methodology

Data

We test our hypotheses with survey data. The data were collected in late 2011 from Finnish entrepreneurs who had launched their businesses with government financial support. The sample frame included individuals ($n = 17,885$) who had received a start-up grant[1] from the Finnish government. The final sample included 13,792 individuals who had updated their contact information in the Ministry of Employment and the Economy’s database. Since 2005, the start-up grant has been available for all new entrepreneurs, and about 40 per cent of new Finnish entrepreneurs annually make use of this support (author anonymity).

Data were collected from new entrepreneurs with valid e-mail addresses via an internet-based survey tool. We received a total of 3,380 responses, which equates to a 25 per cent response rate.

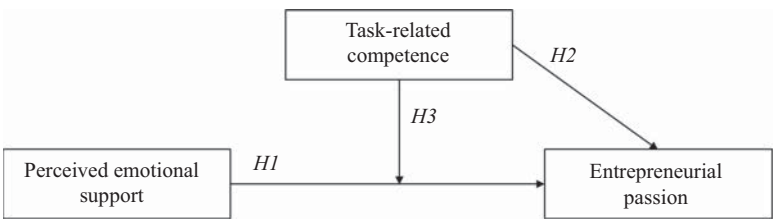


Figure 1.
Hypothesised model

We include in our analyses those new entrepreneurs who had been running their businesses maximum of 24 months ($n = 1,150$). Based on this selection we seek to investigate the emotional aspects among nascent entrepreneurs who are still in their early stages of running their businesses. This enables us to address the role of emotions among early-stage entrepreneurs, a topic which has focused mostly on established business owners (Cardon *et al.*, 2005, 2012). Using χ^2 tests, we found that in our sample, the share of males is slightly higher than in the entire sample. Moreover, in our analyses, the respondents are slightly younger on average than in the entire sample. Based on the respondents' educational background, we found no significant differences. In our sample, the average respondent age was 40.5 years and 51 per cent were men. Out of all of the respondents, 12 per cent had previous entrepreneurship experience which had lasted on average 6.2 years. The majority of respondents' businesses, 67 per cent, provided business or personal services.

Variables

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable, entrepreneurial passion, was measured with the scale developed by Cardon *et al.* (2013) (see Appendix for all latent variables and the items used to measure them). The scale was comprised of 10 items capturing three sub-dimensions of passion: inventing, founding, and developing. Respondents were asked to answer statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. The construct reliability (CR) for entrepreneurial passion measure was 0.84, which was above the 0.70 acceptability threshold (Hair *et al.*, 2010), indicating high internal consistency.

Independent variables

The first of our independent variables, perceived emotional support, was operationalised using four items, which measured the perceived emotional support generated by the received start-up grant public support. In addition to directly addressing the emotional side of receiving funding, we include the motivational and self-efficacy aspects of perceived emotional support in our measure in order to enhance to face validity of the scale. Accordingly, we define perceived emotional support based on emotional, motivational, and self-efficacy aspects. This enables us to study the perceived emotional support and extend our approach from studying purely instrumental support to also cover its by-product: the perceptions related to receiving emotional, informational and appraisal emotional support (House, 1981). Our definition leans on House's (1981) definition of emotional, informational and appraisal support. Emotional support comprises, among other issues, trust, empathy, and listening (House, 1981). This we addressed by asking the respondents their opinion on a statement "Receiving the start-up grant had a broader meaning for me than just the financial support". Informational support covers reception of advice and suggestions and the latter covers self-evaluation, affirmation and feedback (House, 1981). As entrepreneurs are advised to seek outside assistance for emotional support (Shepherd, 2004) to gain access to information and advice, but also to receive external signals of legitimacy (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003) via the feedback they received during the application process of start-up grant. Thus, we consider that this information support works as the motivational aspect and asked the respondents to respond to a statement, such as "Receiving a start-up grant encouraged me to become an entrepreneur". This enables us to include the motivational aspect as a relevant intangible resource attached to the emotional side of received funding. This is further supported by previous research which highlights how emotional support positively influences entrepreneurial risk-taking (Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998) or individuals' career choices (Patzelt and Shepherd, 2011).

Moreover, entrepreneurs' work is intertwined with customer feedback, but it also comprises uncertainty, physical and mental strain as well as fear and anxiety about their own future (Boyd and Gumpert, 1983; Kets de Vries, 1980). Accordingly, this generates new

information on entrepreneurs' behaviour; they face continuous considerations of their self-efficacy and source of affirmation of their career as an entrepreneur. Thus, we need to include the strength of individual's belief in her perceived capability to perform entrepreneurial actions (Chen *et al.*, 1998). This was addressed with a statement "Receiving a start-up grant increased my beliefs of me as an entrepreneur". Thus, we consider that the aspects of self-efficacy and intentions are incremental part of measuring perceived emotional support.

This emotional attachment took place before the survey date, i.e., when the respondent received the government start-up grant, and thus, we asked the respondents to answer to a question directly associated to the perceptions of receiving start-up grant. Accordingly, we assume that perceived emotional support precedes the entrepreneurial passion perceptions collected in the survey. We asked each respondent to answer statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. This scale's CR was 0.87 suggesting a high internal consistency of the scale (Hair *et al.*, 2010). We also tested the scale among an excluded sub-sample of entrepreneurs who had been entrepreneurs for longer than 24 months by the time of the survey. In this sample, perceived emotional support scale's CR was also 0.87, which suggests that the scale is acceptable also among more established entrepreneurs.

We measured task-related competence with a variable asking the respondents' earlier entrepreneurial experience in years. Previous experience in entrepreneurship has been found to have a role in individuals' entrepreneurial behaviour (Davidsson and Honig, 2003).

Control variables

We adjusted the analyses for respondents' gender (1 = female, 0 = male), age, their employment status by the time of receiving the grant, the new venture's status (1 = still in operation, 0 = not in operation), the venture's industry and the start-up grant amount received. As age has been shown to influence who does and does not start new ventures (Shane, 2003), we controlled our analyses for age. Similarly, due to possible gender differences in entrepreneurship engagement (Klyver *et al.*, 2013), we controlled for gender. In addition, we controlled the analyses for the respondents' employment status (1 = unemployed, 0 = employed). These data were received from the grant administrator's registry. Moreover, we adjusted the analyses for the managerial experience (1 = yes, 0 = no), because it can influence entrepreneurs' success in various environments (Debrulle *et al.*, 2014). We also control the analyses for the respondent's self-reported educational attainment as previous research has shown that educational background has a role in entrepreneurial activity (Brüderl *et al.*, 1992; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Shane, 2003). This was measured by means of an item covering 1 = primary education, 2 = vocational school, 3 = college and 4 = university education that indirectly imply the years of education.

Passion is a dynamic construct that develops and changes over time (Collewaert *et al.*, 2016). Further, since entrepreneurial effort and success not only depend on entrepreneurial passion but also influences it, it matters whether entrepreneurs' ventures are still in operation (Gielnik *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, the venture's status (still in operation or not) at the time of the survey was adjusted for in our analyses. In addition, we controlled our analyses for the total received start-up grant amount, as financial capital potentially impacts passion (Kim *et al.*, 2006). This was retrieved from the grant administrator's registry, which consists of the related information for all individuals who have received the start-up grant. Finally, we adjusted the venture's industry analyses. Based on a categorical self-reported venture industry item, we recoded the matter into three dummy variables (1 = yes, 0 = no) each for the trade, manufacturing and construction industries, using the most prevalent industry, service, as a reference variable. The variables' descriptive and correlation statistics are summarised in Table II.

Variable	CR	AVE	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Entrepreneurial passion	0.84	0.37	3.83	0.75	0.67 ^a											
2. Perceived emotional support	0.87	0.63	3.34	1.03	0.06*	0.73 ^a										
3. Entrepreneurial experience			0.12	0.32	0.06*	-0.06										
4. Gender (ref. female)			0.49	0.50	-0.04	0.20**	-0.05									
5. Individual's age			40.5	9.73	0.10**	0.02	0.19**	-0.09**								
6. Education			0.24	0.43	-0.02	0.04	-0.07*	0.08*	0.04							
7. Managerial experience			0.08	0.27	0.06*	-0.08**	0.26**	-0.13*	0.19**	0.05						
8. Employment status (ref. unemp.)			0.55	0.50	-0.07*	0.07*	0.13**	-0.03	0.16**	0.00	0.01					
9. Average amount of received grant			2,265	378	0.00	0.04	-0.01	0.01	-0.05	-0.03	-0.02	0.02				
10. Venture survival (ref. yes)			0.94	0.24	0.13**	-0.03	-0.03	-0.05	-0.04	-0.02	-0.06*	-0.02	0.04			
11. Trade			0.15	0.36	0.08**	-0.01	-0.01	0.06*	0.02	0.05	-0.07*	-0.02	-0.04	0.01		
12. Manufacturing			0.08	0.27	-0.06	-0.04	-0.02	-0.09**	-0.06	-0.07*	-0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.12**	
13. Construction			0.09	0.28	0.00	-0.01	0.01	-0.27**	0.02	-0.14**	-0.01	-0.01	0.04	0.06	-0.13**	-0.09**

Notes: $n = 1,150$. CR, construct reliability; AVE, average variance explained. ^aAlong-diagonal (italic): square root of average variance extracted (AVE).
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table II.
Descriptive and
correlation statistics

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to validate our hypothesised model's latent variables, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to validate our conceptual model comprising two factors. The results show that the thresholds of CFI and RMSEA were fulfilled (Hair *et al.*, 2010), and thus, the model fits data well ($\chi^2(69) = 672.51$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 9.75$, CFI = 0.966; RMSEA = 0.051).

Further, as we used cross-sectional, self-reported survey data from single respondents, the results could be affected by common method variance (CMV) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Accordingly, to assess the risk, we analysed CMV using Harman's single-factor test with exploratory factor analysis (EFA). In this test, the focus is on the first factor and its factor model effect. In our case, the first EFA factor accounted for 34 per cent of the data variance, suggesting that CMV should not have a substantial effect on our results.

The face validity of the items employed in this study was evaluated first by discussing the items with a group of research scholars working in entrepreneurship and new venture creation. Second, the items were evaluated and modified based on the discussions with the experts of the start-up grant system working at the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. These analyses were followed by the analysis of convergent and discriminant validity which indicates that our latent variables are reliable constructs (Table II). In relation to the construct validity, the average variance estimate (AVE) values for perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion show that perceived emotional support's value (0.631) reached the 0.50 cut-off value (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010), but entrepreneurial passion's 0.37 was below the cut-off value. However, the discriminant validity assessment (comparison between squared AVE values and construct correlations) shows that the entrepreneurial passion construct items explain its own variance more than they correlate with the perceived emotional support construct. These results were used in calculating sum variables for perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion.

Hypothesis testing

We tested the hypotheses with hierarchical regression analyses in order to properly enable moderation effect analyses. The structural equation modelling (SEM) does not, unfortunately, fit well in analysing moderation effects. While running the regression analyses, we ensured that multicollinearity was not an issue by analysing the variance inflation factor (VIF) values. They were all below a value of 2, and thus, below critical values (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Our results show that perceived emotional support is positively associated with entrepreneurial passion ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$) (Table III). This suggests that the perceived emotional support attached to a financial instrument enhances entrepreneurial passion. This result supports our *H1*. Further analyses show that the effect size of perceived emotional support is $f^2 = 0.042$, which falls between small and medium effect size (Cohen, 1988). As we are investigating a by-product of the received a start-up grant, it is natural that it will have a relatively small effect size.

The results also show that entrepreneurial experience is also positively associated with entrepreneurial passion ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), which supports our *H2*. This finding illustrates how entrepreneurial experience can increase entrepreneurial behaviour's attached positive emotions. The effect size based on Cohen's f^2 for entrepreneurial experience is 0.031, which also indicates that the effect size is relatively small (Cohen, 1988) for entrepreneurial experience.

With regard to entrepreneurial experience's assumed interaction effects, our results show that entrepreneurial experience positively moderated the association between perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that entrepreneurial experience enhances perceived emotional support's association with entrepreneurial passion, and it supports our *H3*. Figure 2 illustrates the interaction of

Table III.

Perceived emotional support, competences, and entrepreneurial passion

	Direct effects	Moderated effects	Full model
Perceived emotional support	0.07*	0.07*	0.09**
Entrepreneurial experience	0.07*	0.08**	0.06*
Perceived emotional support $\times$ entrepreneurial experience		0.09**	0.09**
Gender (ref. female)			-0.05****
Individual's age			0.09**
Managerial experience (ref. yes)			0.04
Employment status (ref. unemployed)			-0.09**
Education			-0.03
Amount of start-up grant received			0.00
Venture survival (ref. yes)			0.13***
Trade			0.07*
Manufacturing			-0.04
Construction			-0.02
Constant	3.83***	3.83***	3.28**
R^2	0.01	0.02	0.06
Adj. R^2	0.01	0.01	0.05
ΔR^2	0.01*	0.01**	0.05***
F-value	4.64*	6.39***	5.74***

Notes: $n = 1,150$. Dependent variable: Entrepreneurial passion. All coefficients are standardized regression coefficients. OLS regression, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; **** $p < 0.10$

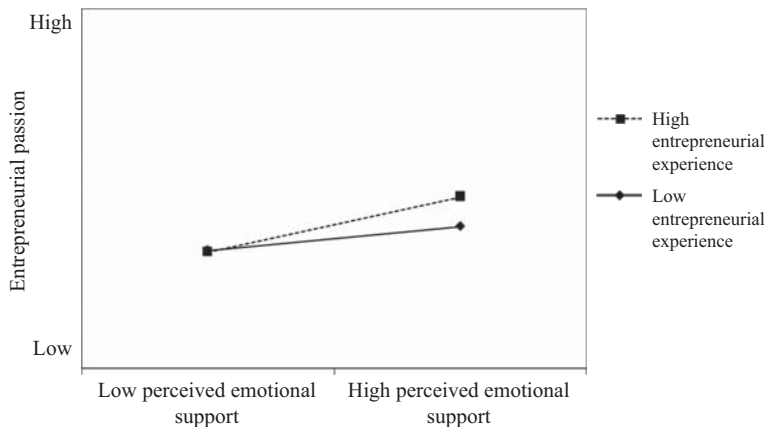


Figure 2.
Interaction of perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial experience on entrepreneurial passion

perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial experience on entrepreneurial passion. Entrepreneurial passion is stronger among those who have higher perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial experience. In addition, the finding suggests that entrepreneurial passion is stronger among those who obtain entrepreneurial experience even if their perceived emotional support would be low.

In order to validate our results, we ran the analyses with a sub-sample of entrepreneurs who had been running their businesses more than 24 months. Among those who had been entrepreneurs for more than 24 months ($n = 1,698$), perceived emotional support was positively associated with entrepreneurial passion ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, the results on entrepreneurial experience's association with entrepreneurial support ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.10$) is similar to our main model. The interaction effects, however,

were not statistically significant in this sub-sample. In all, these robustness tests support perceived emotional support's and the supportive association of entrepreneurial experience with entrepreneurial passion.

Discussion

With unique data on Finnish entrepreneurs who have received a public start-up grant, we were able to identify two important aspects which are associated with entrepreneurial passion. Our results show how the perceived emotional support attached to receiving a government-based grant is associated with a socialising process that is related to entrepreneurial passion. Moreover, we show how entrepreneurial passion is associated with the entrepreneurial endeavour's alignment with entrepreneurs' competences. Finally, we showed a complementary synergy between perceived emotional support and task-related competences, which emphasises how they are contingent on each other. More specifically, task-related competences in the form of entrepreneurial experience positively moderate the relation between perceived emotional support and entrepreneurial passion.

Our study makes several contributions, three of which are related to entrepreneurial passion theory and one of which is related to social support theory. By suggesting two aspects important to entrepreneurial passion's emergence and one contingent effect, the first three contributions add to entrepreneurial passion theory, which has so far primarily investigated and theorised about passion's consequences (Murnieks *et al.*, 2018), such as persistence, commitment, survival and so on. The fourth contribution deals with how various support types are embedded and intermingle with each other.

First, we add to prior suggestions that passion is something derived from competences. Dalborg and Wincent (2015, p. 974) "uncover a skill-based explanation of how founder passion develops", as they showed that being engaged in entrepreneurship based on pull motives (Gilad and Levine, 1986; Kirkwood, 2009) increases passion through self-efficacy. In a similar vein, Thorgren and Wincent (2013) showed that project leaders' self-perceived competence impacts their obsessive passion. Specifically, we extend the competence perspective on entrepreneurial passion's emergence by arguing that task-related competences influence entrepreneurial passion development. Thus, although entrepreneurial passion's emergence depends on entrepreneurs' competences, it also very much depends on the competences' relatedness and alignment with their entrepreneur career considerations.

When competences are task-related, here as entrepreneurial experience, it increases confidence in the proposed opportunity's feasibility (Dimov, 2010), igniting intense and positive feelings that in turn slowly increase entrepreneurial passion (Cardon *et al.*, 2013). To other labour market contexts and in a broader sense, this implies that the alignment of competences with career options is necessary for competences to translate into career passion. Without such alignment, career-related passion is less likely to develop.

Second, we add to the entrepreneurial passion emergence competence perspective by arguing that entrepreneurs' passion could develop as an environment socialisation product. We suggest that this happens in a two-step parallel process: First, the perceived emotional support initially ignites positive emotions, making entrepreneurs more willing to engage with their surroundings (Fredrickson, 2001), even to overcome the challenges arising from increased level of uncertainty (Brundin and Gustafsson, 2013), as well as more favourably changing their perception of objects, ideas and persons (Bower, 1991; Isen, 2002); second, these activities and changing perceptions slowly socialise into more intense feelings for their entrepreneurial endeavours. Our results suggest that the perceived emotional attachments matter also among nascent entrepreneurs and not solely among established business owners as previous studies show (Cardon *et al.*, 2005, 2012). Our findings also imply that the development of entrepreneurial passion stems from multiple, cumulative means of experiences and abilities in combination with how emotional support is perceived.

Theoretically, this suggests that future research could extend the scope of antecedents of entrepreneurial passion outside of the entrepreneur to the networks of entrepreneurs including strong ties in terms of friends and family members, but also more weak ties like government officials.

This far there is, however, little research on the persistence of entrepreneurial passion, but previous research suggests that entrepreneurial passion stays relatively stable over time (Cardon *et al.*, 2013; Stenholm and Renko, 2016) and that entrepreneurial passion enhances the persistence of entrepreneurial actions (Cardon and Kirk, 2015). Thus, external stimuli in the form of perceived emotional support are slowly and subsequently internalised into entrepreneurial passion that is more long-term and emotionally stable (e.g. Cardon *et al.*, 2013; Wincent *et al.*, 2008). This way, as our results imply, one-shot perceived emotional support can translate and internalise into entrepreneurial passion and more stable emotional states that enable entrepreneurs to stay persistent and committed in challenging periods. Thus, our findings extend the prior results on how emotional support access enhances entrepreneurs' performance (e.g. Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Gielnik *et al.*, 2015; Hanlon and Saunders, 2007). However, less is known about how perceived emotional support exchange at one point in time potentially makes entrepreneurs persist, survive, and perform somewhat better later (Fisher *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, we suggest that if such perceived emotional support develops into more stable entrepreneurial passion, this could potentially explain why emotionally support received in one period of time matters for later entrepreneurial output stages.

Third, we demonstrate how the aspects of perceived emotional support and competences are contingent on each other. Consistent with the complementary perspective (Klyver and Schenkel, 2013; Semrau and Hopp, 2016), entrepreneurs with task-related experience are better able to perceive the emotional support and transform it into entrepreneurial passion (Bower, 1991; Fredrickson, 2001; Isen, 2002).

Fourth, our study contributes to entrepreneurship's social support theory (e.g. Kim *et al.*, 2013; Neergaard *et al.*, 2005) by showing how various support types interact and intermingle (e.g. Barling *et al.*, 1988; Semmer *et al.*, 2008). Our findings demonstrate that public funding in the form of a start-up grant's otherwise very instrumental value (Tokila, 2009) also carries an important emotional meaning for entrepreneurs (Semmer *et al.*, 2008), and that this emotional meaning is important for entrepreneurs' passion development. This means that financial support has an impact not only through its economic function (e.g. Baumgartner and Caliendo, 2007; Tokila, 2009), but also through the perceived emotional support attached to receiving it. Support is thus holistically provided, and various types are not easily distinctive, but rather are closely related and embedded in each other. Accordingly, previous clear distinctions between various support types (e.g. Kim *et al.*, 2013) might be questionable and studying them in isolation and as distinct categories misses out on important and relevant interdependencies – they should therefore be studied in combination.

Limitations and implications

Although in this study, we focus only on issues preceding entrepreneurial passion, it is important to also remember the number of studies focusing on entrepreneurial passion's consequences (e.g. Biraglia and Kadile, 2017; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014; Stenholm and Renko, 2016). The majority of these studies treat passion as a positive entrepreneurial behaviour driver. Although not explicitly treated in our study, our correlations show a positive association between passion and venture survival, thus confirming prior studies. However, there could also be a dark side to entrepreneurial passion, whereby an individual's entrepreneurial passion reaches a level so high that it becomes counter-productive, i.e., displaying a curvilinear effect of passion. Too much passion or its obsessive forms

(Fisher *et al.*, 2018) can lead to over-commitment and result in an entrepreneur insisting on a less attractive business idea for too long.

Our study indicates that perceived emotional support obtained in specific timeframes, which we know impacts various entrepreneurial outcomes (e.g. Davidsson and Honig, 2003), probably does so because it translates into entrepreneurial passion, which is longer-lasting and guides both resources and time allocation. Future research should continue this work with a longitudinal design in order to establish entrepreneurial passion as perceived emotional support's cognitive bridge with start-up survival and performance. This would also enable our scholarship to overcome the cross-sectional assessments of predictors of entrepreneurial passion. Simultaneously, our study suggests a new pathway through which competences impacts entrepreneurial outcome. Besides enabling entrepreneurs to handle difficult and complex tasks and challenges, competences aligned with an entrepreneurial career also help entrepreneurs build passion, thereby enhancing the likelihood of them persisting when they encounter disruptions, temptations and difficulties. One example of this is to go more into depth with entrepreneurial experience, which can consist of positive events such as growth and profit but also more negative events like failure and bankruptcy. These research endeavours should also address the multidimensionality of competences and their measurement (Dimov, 2017).

Still, due to use of cross-sectional data, we need to recognise the potential bias of reverse causality. A longitudinal design would also enable ruling out possible reverse causality issues. Our study does not directly claim causality, but we suggest a positive association between entrepreneurial experience and perceived emotional support with entrepreneurial passion's development. In order to dig deeper into the mechanism of factors preceding entrepreneurial passion and as our results show, it could also be the case that entrepreneurial passion drives the entrepreneur to gain entrepreneurial experience, i.e., because he is passionate, he is driven to start his own company, and the government grant could be awarded as a response to an entrepreneurial passion display. Although we have not directly addressed this with our analyses, our empirical analysis is carried out in a setting that resembles a longitudinal design in order to separate the independent from the dependent variables. The entrepreneurs all received a grant at a specific point in time, and at the time of data collection, they were asked about the current status of their entrepreneurial passion. Similarly, their task- and non-task-related competences have taken place before the perceptions of entrepreneurial passion occur. Accordingly, we seek to employ them in understanding the emergence of entrepreneurial passion, which is dynamic in its nature. Thus, in this sense, our study follows "the mechanism movement in the social sciences", which "is primarily concerned with the nature of explanations, not about causality or methods for establishing it" (Kim *et al.*, 2016, p. 277).

An interesting future research avenue would also be to more closely study whether there are effect differences between perceived emotional support attached to a government-based grant and perceived emotional support received from other sources in entrepreneurs' social network. We would expect different effects due to how cultural norms and expectations embedded in various social roles differ from the government agency's role (Kim *et al.*, 2013).

With our study's findings, we demonstrate both how passion is associated with and how the perception of emotional support can stem from unexpected sources, i.e., in our case, a government grant. For entrepreneurs, this is an interesting finding because it shows how not only people within their network but also different activities can lead to developing entrepreneurial passion. An increased awareness of passion's antecedents, as well as its consequences, could better encourage entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial endeavours. To people who are engaged in promoting entrepreneurship in different ways – e.g., through public or private advisory or mentoring, or through public or private financing – this study crucially emphasises being aware of the symbolic and emotional aspects of entrepreneurial

activities, as well as the provision of instrumental or financial support. Acknowledging these somehow hidden mechanisms and effects could help to improve advisory and mentoring programs, as well as improve the process of providing financial support. In practice, when designing the policy interventions public policy-makers should pay attention to the entire spectrum of their focus groups: entrepreneurs, small business owners and those thinking about an entrepreneurial career. As their needs vary, the support is not always only about the funding or contextual support, but also the related process. Thus, e.g. providing financial support for novel entrepreneurs has more meaning than “just the money”. Accordingly, practitioners should pay attention to the way in which potential recipients of governmental support are handled and assessed, because it has an enormous and long-term influence on individuals’ passion towards entrepreneurship and their entrepreneurial careers. Finally, to other labour market contexts, our results imply that the career option alignment of competences is necessary for competences to translate into career passion. Without such alignment, career-related passion is less likely to develop.

Note

1. The start-up grant is a financial support size of €650 per month (for a maximum of 10–18 months).

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Appendix. Latent variables and the items used in the analyses

Entrepreneurial passion*

- It is exciting to figure out new ways to solve unmet market needs that can be commercialised.
- Searching for new ideas of products/services to offer is enjoyable to me.
- I am motivated to figure out how to make existing products/services better.
- Scanning the environment for new opportunities really excites me.
- Establishing a new company excites me.
- Owning my own company energises me.
- Nurturing a new business through its emerging success is enjoyable.
- I really like finding the right people to market my product/service to.
- Assembling the right people to (possibly) work for my business is exciting.
- Pushing my employees and myself to make our company better motivates me.

Perceived emotional support*

- Receiving a start-up grant had a broader meaning for me beyond the financial support.
- Receiving a start-up grant increased my beliefs of me as an entrepreneur.
- Receiving a start-up grant increased my engagement in becoming an entrepreneur.
- Receiving a start-up grant encouraged me to become an entrepreneur.

Competences

- Task-related competence: Entrepreneurial experience (experience in years).

*All of the statements were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree.

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