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Unconventional entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

The present article, which opens this special issue, focuses on unconventional forms of entrepreneurship not captured sufficiently by current theory. Changes in society and escalating economic difficulties have led to a mutation in entrepreneurship, driven less by conventional professional interest and more by passion, a new paradigm that in turn has opened the door to an unconventional approach to entrepreneurship. We here seek to discern the main elements that help define the unconventional entrepreneur, including 1) the role that passion plays, notably in the pursuit of leisure and adventure; 2) the important role of tribes before, during, and after entrepreneurial creation; and 3) liquid society as a cause of the identity crisis and a factor of the quest for entrepreneurial recognition. Lastly, we discuss the possibility of this unconventional entrepreneur being part of a type of governmentality as a perfect example of neoliberal alienation.

1. Introduction

‘Unconventional’ is a rather trendy word in the management realm. When a scholar wants to break free from previous works, s/he states that s/he is studying an unconventional phenomenon or developing an unconventional approach. This may be a way of avoiding formulaic research and routine content (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). Unconventional ‘somethings’ have flourished across management disciplines such as “unconventional marketing” (Cova & Saucet, 2014), “unconventional finance” (Buchner & Wilkinson, 2015), “unconventional management research” (Clair et al., 2016), and even “unconventional research contexts” (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010). Much of the time, these works overly use terms such as “alternative” or “new” in attempting to break with the mainstream of their discipline.

Here, we propose returning to the etymology of unconventional: not adhering to established convention or accepted standards. In the entrepreneurship discipline, an established convention corresponds to the standard – if not canonical – profile of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur. Even if the last decade has seen a flurry of research on such alternative profiles as the accidental entrepreneur (Shah & Tripsas, 2007), the user entrepreneur (Haeffliger, Jäger, & Von Krogh, 2010), and the lifestyle entrepreneur (Bredvold & Skälén, 2016), entrepreneurship seems to face difficulties in breaking free from the Schumpeterian figure.

The point of departure to breaking free from it is thus the notion of opportunity recognition that lies at the core of the entrepreneurial process. Ardichvili, Cardozo, and Ray (2003, p.106) argue that “identifying and selecting the right opportunities for new businesses are among the most important abilities of a successful entrepreneur”. Conventionally, and corresponding to the stereotypical entrepreneur, opportunity recognition consists in recognising the opportunity first and then developing an organisational development path as described in the traditional literature. Unconventionally, we argue that opportunity recognition is not a necessary first step, and that the desperate search for opportunities could end in failure. We propose looking at

entrepreneurship as a shared passion and communal incentive to develop something that could become a successful business venture. Passion and interaction with other passionate people as well as the environment lead to generating potential opportunities (Cova & Guercini, 2016). We thus argue that the entrepreneur's profile pertains to the single entrepreneur, while obviously the literature has moved on to consider the entrepreneurial team (Lechler, 2001) and the community sharing the passion (Martin & Schouten, 2014).

The unconventional entrepreneur distances himself from the mythical figure of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur. “Unconventional” entrepreneurship is neither bound by nor accords with the conventional approach involved in planning, launching, and developing a new venture. By definition, “conventional” entrepreneurs operate in an uncertain environment (Knight, 1921) where they are able to create Schumpeterian opportunities in view of the opportunity-seeking activities or alertness and readiness to recognize them (Casson, 1982; Kirzner, 1979). This means they are prepared to take responsibility for overcoming the challenges inherent in ever-present uncertainty. By so doing, they make things easier for other actors (wage-earners, banks, etc.), but in exchange expect to be rewarded. The problem with this model is the rapid acceleration of change in information-rich societies (Rosa, 2013) in which uncertainty has become so widespread that it transcends elite entrepreneurs' traditional areas of intervention. In liquid times, society requires people to take an entrepreneurial stance, not primarily due to the need to incorporate technological innovations or maximize profit, but because entrepreneurship offers a way to cope with precariousness and uncertainty.

In an unstable world, people may be reassured by (and hang onto) passions they can use as springboards to act on the world that surrounds them (Seregina & Schouten, 2017). Such passions become “sources of stability” (Castel, 2009) and can, when developed across a wide range of leisure or hobby activities, lead to new forms of entrepreneurship. Indeed, an entrepreneur's commitment may be fuelled by motives superseding the rational search for profit; it could be based on passions

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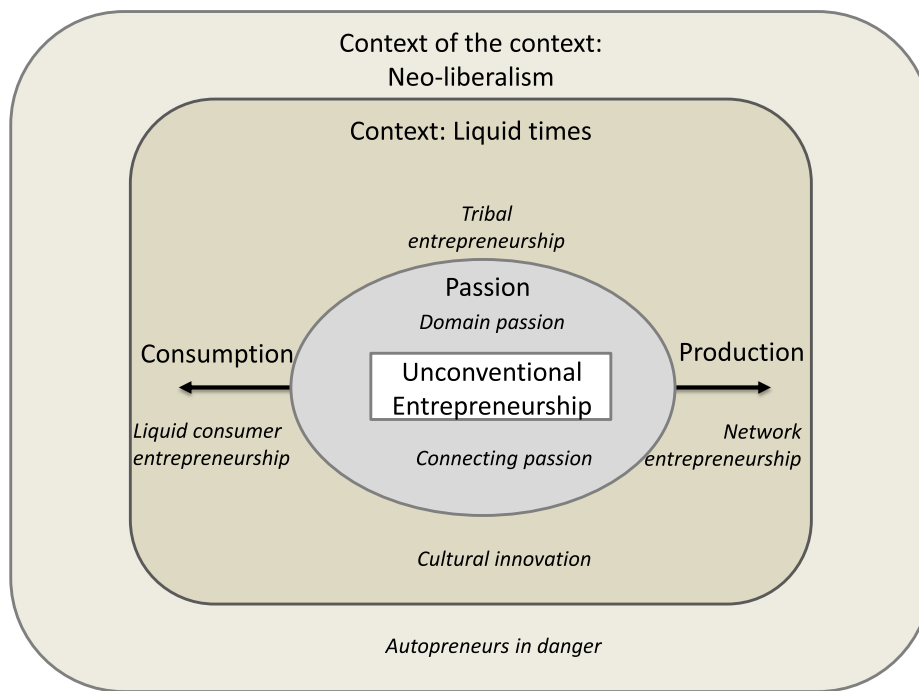


Fig. 1. Contextualizing unconventional entrepreneurship.

unrelated to professional experience but linked to personal aptitudes and leisure preferences. Such passions are located in other domains of the actors' existence, namely, consumption instead of production. After all, the main driver of most consumption is passion, since this is what causes individuals to consume certain products or brands and share their passion with fellow users/consumers (Stebbins, 2007). At the same time, most passions foster the development of competencies, skills, and knowledge. In turn, this sparks innovation (Martin & Schouten, 2014).

Consumption and entrepreneurship have long been recognised as fundamental economic and social phenomena (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). The interface between the two is increasingly relevant for research on consumers, business owners, and manager experience. Consumer experience and entrepreneurship are commingled for many entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial consumers have commercialised their personal leisure innovations in industries ranging from sporting equipment to youth products, stereo components, or new media. Recent studies propose new business models (Guercini, 2014) revolving around users' lifestyles and experiences (Shah & Tripsas, 2007). There is, however, another way to analyse the connection between consumption and entrepreneurship (Goulding & Saren, 2007). Consumers gain expertise, and their experience is fuelled by passions that bind them to a community (Haefliger et al., 2010; Hietanen & Rokka, 2015). Passions – along with skills and social relationships (Guercini & Ranfagni, 2016) – then become key factors in generating entrepreneurship, as in the case of Nick Woodman who invented the GoPro to share his consuming passion for surfing.

Contemporary consumption might then be construed as a reservoir of skills, passions, and communities enabling innovative entrepreneurship that in turn creates a positive dynamic for the economy, for people, and for society in general.

The focus in this conceptual paper is on the main dimensions of unconventional entrepreneurship spanning consumption and innovation. Thus, in the first section, we focus on the role of passion as a stabilising force. The emphasis here is on the different types of passion and how they correspond with entrepreneurship. In the second section, we look at the entrepreneur's passion, and particularly the role that fan tribes play in this variant. The third section contextualises the

emergence and diffusion of these forms of non-conventional entrepreneurship, detailing how Western societies have been liquefied and have changed people's lives. The final section looks at how this unconventional entrepreneurship affects individual wellbeing. In sum, these sections capture the main themes evoked throughout this special issue, namely, unconventional entrepreneurs, liquid society, domain passion, connecting passion, emotional labour, and cultural competency.

2. Passions and entrepreneurship

Perseverance is a leading challenge in today's world, a challenge that increasingly confronts people with instability, insecurity, and uncertainty (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Since the 17th century, work has structured Western societies' relationship to the world, as well as the social relations and the general *Weltanschauung*. In more recent times, however, work has become less of a stabilising factor and has largely mutated into a fleeting “liquid” (Bauman, 2007). Lifetime employment in a single company disappeared long ago, progressively depriving work of its ability to structure identities, especially over the past 30 years. Westerners have therefore turned towards new sources of identity, to wit, ordinary passions they now represent as inexhaustible sources of meaningful experience (Bromberger, 1998; Seregina & Schouten, 2017).

Passion has become a refuge for many individuals who no longer find stability or recognition through work. It is a way of escaping boredom and stress. Many university graduates launch their careers, for instance, as senior managers in large industrial groups, even if the job does not precisely correspond to their aspirations. Within a relatively short period of time, they succumb to a sense of disappointment that weighs on them day after day. They expected more meaningfulness in their daily lives, hoping for less routine and boredom. This is compounded by a lack of recognition, a feeling that who they are and what they do is undervalued. For many, passion becomes a way out of this impasse (Stebbins, 2014).

Research shows that passion can play an important role in times of crisis. Bromberger (1998) suggests that many “ordinary passions” – like the passion for genealogy – occur at a critical juncture in people's lives.

In addition, research into “serious leisure” demonstrates that the systematic pursuit of a sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling amateur activity or hobby can help develop new skills, derive meaning, and positively transform lives (Stebbins, 2007, 2014). For instance, bodybuilders’ passionate involvement in their activity often creates a sea change that re-structures their lives (Coquet, Ohl, & Roussel, 2016). Similarly, surfers talk about being “saved” from depression by an activity that gives them pleasure and a new sense of purpose (Spewart, Burrows, & Shaw, 2010, p. 1192). Passion is also highly contagious (Cardon, 2008), and can be shared with fellow fans, thus creating a whole new community. Indeed, it is due to their emotional charge that passions lend themselves to being shared and experienced as a group. Passions maintain, renew, and continually create emotions that structure a person’s social and economic world. A shared passion resonates especially in liquid times when individuals are less mobilised by the validity of a cause and more by its collective experience (Hemetsberger, 2014; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Passions developed across a wide range of leisure or hobby activities – “domain passions” according to Milanese (2018) – may lead to new forms of entrepreneurship. Nowadays, the skills that people learn and develop through their everyday activities can become a driver of innovation. An entrepreneur’s commitment may be fuelled by motives that go well beyond the rational search for profit, entailing passions unrelated to professional experience but tied instead to personal aptitudes and leisure activities. The result is that domain passion cannot be assimilated with the kind of entrepreneurial passion that was so central. Melissa Cardon and her colleagues (see, for example, Cardon, Glauser, & Murnieks, 2017; Cardon, Vincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009) conceptualise entrepreneurial passion as an intense positive emotion towards entrepreneurial tasks and activities important to the entrepreneur’s self-identity. Having passion for value creation and influencing the world tends to be the main trait associated with entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial passion is what motivates them to persevere despite their project’s trials and tribulations. This differs from domain passion that triggers the development of unconventional entrepreneurship and belongs to the private realm of life: passion for art, culture, sport, cooking, etc.

Consumption studies are useful to understand the process by which a domain passion transforms a hobby into an entrepreneurial venture (Cova & Guercini, 2016). The best expressions of consumer competency now occur in communities that share the same passion, be it a sporting activity such as mountain climbing or snowboarding, a fictional focus such as Harry Potter, or brands such as Lego (Geraghty, 2015; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, & Espersen, 2017). These groups galvanise consumers’ creativity and help them share their passion. Some may invent Star Wars sequels while others will develop new climbing gear or skateboards. Fans will exchange their work, which eventually culminates in an entrepreneurial venture (Goulding & Saren, 2007). The fans analysed in this consumption corpus are not individuals looking to start a business but ones who produce – for playful purposes – something that is functionally or symbolically useful for themselves and other members of their group. This could induce a more structured way of producing, ultimately resulting in launching a business. Note that this domain passion concept is also found in business creation studies (in sectors such as sports tourism), and refers broadly to the way in which people professionalise their passions (Dubois & Terral, 2014). All these studies describe individual trajectories, often involving athletes who, much like lifestyle entrepreneurs, have had a series of intermediate experiences besides deciding to make a profession out of their passion (Bredvold & Skälén, 2016).

Domain passion and entrepreneurship are commingled in many entrepreneurs’ backstories. Through their consumption, these “connecting passions” help people reconcile the quest for individual growth with their need to engage in a business activity (Ranfagni & Runfola, 2018). Leisure activities both nurture expertise (Stebbins, 2014; von Wallpach et al., 2017) and develop participants’ experiences, fuelled by

the passions binding all the different members of the community (Haeffliger et al., 2010). Instead of getting bored in a large company, people here have the possibility to live their passion and from their passion. This strengthens their sense of identity and makes it possible to found a business rooted in a community context. Making passion central to identity has become so widespread so as to constitute one of the main drivers of contemporary entrepreneurship (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018). Passions can affect entrepreneurial intention (Fayolle & Liñán, 2014) and form the basis of a business (Shah & Tripsas, 2007).

3. It takes a tribe: The role of community for entrepreneurship

Nick Woodman, founder and CEO of GoPro, tells his story in the following words: “I first really started developing the idea back in 2002 while on surf trip in Australia with a couple of friends. We were living out of a Toyota van, putting in about 5,000 miles surfing the East, South and West Coasts. I was spending most of my time in the water, sharing amazing moments and waves with my friends. I was also shooting photos (this was pre-YouTube!) from the beach, but from that distance my shots weren’t doing the surf or my friends justice. Some of the most intense and memorable moments in cranking surf were just that, memories. I’d kill for some GoPro footage of that trip! Ironically, that trip is what fired me up to come home and finally start GoPro to create ‘the invisible camera,’ a wearable camera so convenient that you forget you’ve got it on”.¹

Woodman’s story is emblematic at several different levels. First, it was during a surfing holiday that he first came up with his camera idea, upon his return conceptualising the invention of an “invisible camera” so easy to carry around that people would forget they had it on them. Woodman had surfer friends test and improve many of his initial prototypes before ultimately coming up with a wide-angle camera whose great popularity in his own community made it much easier for him to try and conquer the rest of the world.

What this example shows is that launching innovative new ventures sometimes involves relatively unconventional processes and competencies. The person driving the process will be someone who in his/her private life is a big fan of a given sporting, cultural, or other activity. To take full advantage of the passion (shared with other fans, i.e., the tribe), the person imagines (and often self-produces) a system that will be adopted first by fellow fans and then unerringly by other consumers. This creation of a market place (Martin & Schouten, 2014) subsequently encourages the entrepreneur to start the business. Note that tribes are construed here as sets of individuals who are not homogeneous (in terms of their objective social characteristics) but linked by one and the same passion (Maffesoli, 1996). Pagano, Petrucci, and Bocconcelli (2018) clearly highlight this in their study of the transformation of the Ratatà Festival, born in a community of enthusiasts of a variety of contemporary figurative arts, into an entrepreneurial venture.

The main distinction between unconventional entrepreneurs and their conventional counterparts thus pertains to the role that the tribe plays, and the activities that the entrepreneur develops – and continues to develop in conjunction with the tribe – long after the company has been founded (Cova & Guercini, 2016). Tribes have a considerable impact on the entrepreneurs’ start-up process, exercising this through on- or offline exchanges of the experiences, ideas, and productions generated by the activity in question. In short, unconventional entrepreneurs are not subject to the kind of transformation where individuals transition from their status as consumers (or users) to fully-fledged entrepreneurs. They attain this latter status but remain consumers since they continue engaging in certain activities that are shared with their fan tribes. Being an entrepreneur does not prevent them from living their passion; quite the contrary, the former reinforces the latter, hence the consumption that is part of it. The fact that unconventional

¹ <https://www.malakye.com/news/3518/gopro-with-founder-inventor-nick-woodman>.

entrepreneurs maintain their passions and tribes even after their company has successfully launched is a very good indicator of how blurred the boundaries have become between consumption, production, and entrepreneurship. There is a connective passion (Ranfagni & Runfola, 2018) between the personal and professional spheres of the people involved.

Unconventional entrepreneurs are also able to transition beyond their status as fan consumers to become entrepreneurs operating beyond the scope of the tribe. Such entrepreneurs have their feet in two camps, interacting with tribes at a professional level while maintaining tribal roots at an individual level. According to Will Dean (2017), CEO and founder of Tough Mudder (a gruelling 10-mile mud-soaked obstacle course launched in 2010 and generating \$100 million in revenue), “it takes a tribe” to be successful today. In less than a decade, Tough Mudder grew from a ramshackle obstacle course in Pennsylvania to a global phenomenon with more than 3 million participants. It did this thanks to the shared passion of the people who co-created the movement working together with Dean, thereby helping to develop a tribe (Dean, 2017).

Unconventional entrepreneurs are members of a consumer tribe and, as such, they understand the tribe's values, translating them into market offers, and serving consumers in a “liquid position” between the tribe and the wider marketplace (Biraghi, Gambetti, & Pace, 2018). They therefore act as cultural intermediaries combining the needs of the tribe and the features of the mass-market into a “cultural package” that can be shared and instrumentalised. Traditionally, cultural intermediaries alter the conceptions of what (hence who) is deemed legitimate, desirable, and worthy. They play different roles, linking artists and cultural producers to consumers in cultural and media industries such as fashion, music, and literature (Nixon & Du Gay, 2002). Unconventional entrepreneurs perform similar roles in those areas they feel passionate about. To exploit cultural opportunity, they accept the cultural mission (Pedeliento, Bettinelli, Andreini, & Bergamaschi, 2018) of bridging the inside community with outside society. Marketplace literacy gained through purposeful investments in cultural capital allows them to envisage a different (and untapped) cultural expression for their business. This is then used to create an offer that is radically different from those of existing competitors.

Beyond cultural competency, unconventional entrepreneurs manage and commercialise emotional bonds. This type of entrepreneurship requires significant and novel forms of emotional labour from both the entrepreneur and the broader tribe (Mardon, Molesworth, & Grigore, 2018). These novel forms involve the vocalisation of self-conscious and other-praising moral emotions. Martin and Schouten (2014, p. 862) highlight in the case of the Minimoto community that “in addition to consuming fun in big doses, the rider performs fun for others, spreading desire, attracting other potential riders, and acting as a catalyst for the formation of a community of practice”. At the same time, unconventional entrepreneurs must carefully balance their emotional bonds with their commercial interests to avoid perceptions of the type of value slippage (Cova & Paraque, 2018) that could prompt other-condemning emotions within a community, which – if improperly managed – may be detrimental to the entrepreneur's commercial ventures (Mardon et al., 2018). Brinks and Ibert (2015) show that in the case of Geocaching – an outdoor game of searching for hidden objects using the Global Positioning System (GPS) – members of the community may quit their involvement due to disagreeing with the commercialization dynamics of the game. Boyaval and Herbert (2018) argue that this is the other side of the coin. Unconventional entrepreneurs want to please the community but some adjustments and choices have to be made to fit their own agenda. Even if their endeavour is conducted with passion, it is also a project that, at some point, is expected to deliver a return on investment. The balance seems hard to maintain but remains essential for unconventional entrepreneurs who do not want to disappoint their tribe.

4. Unconventional entrepreneurship in liquid times

A key question is why unconventional entrepreneurship has started to emerge at this time. One fundamental factor is the accelerating change (Rosa, 2013) that has come to characterise Western societies, encapsulated in Bauman's (2007) concept of liquid modernity. Bauman (2007) uses the metaphor of liquidity to explain how everyday life moved from being stable and secure to greater uncertainty and rapid change. He also applies the adjective in a very precise context. Society is to be considered liquid if the situation people find themselves in and wherein they act changes before they have the time to consolidate their behaviour into procedures and habits. This is a form of society that first arose when the solid era of producers was replaced by the liquid era of consumers, fluidifying all aspects of everyday existence. With the advent of liquid times, society went from being work-centred to a situation where people's lives increasingly centred on consumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Life in a liquid society became precarious, unfolding under conditions of uncertainty, instability, and insecurity (Bauman, 2007; Beck, 2009), with the only constant being accelerated change (Rosa, 2013). Social conditions or structures lost their stability, and their life expectancy shortened (Bauman, 2007) at an accelerated pace (Rosa, 2013). A market logic based on instrumental rationality would come to permeate all aspects of life as a result of neoliberalism (Sennett, 1998) and extreme individualisation (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Liquid times and neoliberal society contrast with solid times when industrial society was based on “solid” social institutions. In liquid times (Bauman, 2007), social formats morph continually, an acceleration that shifts from the technological and economic spheres to become a cultural factor setting the pace of everyday social life (Rosa, 2013).

Where the Soviet miner and “Hero of Socialist Labour” Aleksei Stakhanov embodied productive modernity in a planned system, entrepreneurs are the embodiment of liquid times where planning becomes impossible. Stakhanov was no entrepreneur but instead epitomised an approach to work that became a model for all workers in stable modern society. Of course, when modernity died, so did this model of the wage-earning employee working for a company. The figurehead of work today is the entrepreneur, not in the Schumpeterian sense of the term but the unconventional entrepreneur driven by the primacy of consumption in contemporary life. Hence, the new concept of “prosumption”, intertwining production and consumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), and narrowing “the use and utility of the far more restrictive and solid concepts of production and consumption” (Ritzer & Rey, 2016, p. 168). Unconventional entrepreneurs are supposed to absorb and express liquidity by eliminating the barriers between private (consumption) and professional (production) lives. Moreover, their codes of conduct are supposed to apply everywhere. Each individual becomes an entrepreneurial subject, living their lives like a company and behaving entrepreneurially at every level (Scharff, 2016). People are asked to use “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988) to shape their identity corporeally and cognitively so that they may be recognised both off- and online (Honneth, 1996).

We are witnessing the proliferation of individuals who have become their own Pygmalion and are on a never-ending identity quest to give meaning to their lives. Unlike past eras when identity and community relations were fixed institutionally, in liquid times, self-identity must be routinely created and sustained through a multiplicity of experiences. If contemporary life is characterised by liquidity, i.e., uncertainty, insecurity, and instability (Bauman, 2007; Beck, 2009; Rosa, 2013), worth asking is how people's lives might be anchored. In today's unstructured and under-defined environment, where individuals feel increasingly lost despite the comforts that Western technology affords them, scholars from different disciplines (Philippe, Vallerand, & Lavigne, 2009; Seregina & Schouten, 2017) have started arguing that passion can provide the stability, meaning, and social recognition that people crave. Thus, unconventional entrepreneurship based on domain

passion is increasingly becoming the figurehead of today's society. The time factor, and more specifically the period of life, seems to be important in the decision to found a firm for such entrepreneurs. This decision is more likely to be motivated where there are gaps in the professional career (Vellera & Hamdi-Kidar, 2018), that is, when the individual more intensively feels the liquidity of life.

Liquid times have not created the unconventional entrepreneur. History is filled with passionate people creating flourishing businesses. In 1991, frustrated by the inability of his bike to keep up with his limit-pushing stunts, Mat Hoffman, a BMX pro rider, started creating his own line of bikes, thus revolutionizing the sport, the community, and the business. Other notorious examples can be found in the ski, surfboard, and snowboard industries. What liquid times have changed is the magnitude of the phenomenon. Thanks to social media, members of a community can easily connect and thus share new ideas and innovations. Under pressure to build, develop, and maintain their identities, people invest more time and effort in their passions. With the development of e-commerce, it is rather easy to test a new niche product. All these elements concur to multiply the cases of unconventional entrepreneurship. Unconventional entrepreneurs do not consider themselves entrepreneurs. The study that Boyaval and Herbert (2018) conducted on retrogaming ventures shows that fewer than half of their informants label themselves 'entrepreneurs', showing reluctance to choose a side and a determination to stand by their identity as players. Unconventional entrepreneurs have trouble taking on a specific role, enacting a hybrid entrepreneurial status. This can influence their orientation as well as performance (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014), not only in terms of performance measurements (for example, level of sales or profits), but above all, once the sustainability of the business is guaranteed, the parameter with respect to which it must be evaluated (for example, in terms of well-being).

5. Governmentality and the dark side of unconventional entrepreneurs

For most people today, unconventional entrepreneurship represents absolute emancipation, allowing the perfect combination of private passion and professional success. Emancipation is usually defined as the process of being liberated from constraints that can be physical, intellectual, moral, or spiritual (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Having said that, a more critical vision does exist based on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality (Foucault, 1988) and its extremisation in a neoliberal context. Within such vision, unconventional entrepreneurs tend to be portrayed as exemplars of alienation, pursuing goals or following practices that no external actor or factor obliges them to follow, and which they do not really desire or approve of (Rosa, 2013).

Rather than being liberated from the alienation experienced in large companies, unconventional entrepreneurs can be prisoners of a new form of alienation, one that does not stem from an external constraint (as is the case in hierarchical systems) but instead from within the individual. This is because such entrepreneurs try to stay in tune with liquid times, in much the same way as the "autpreneurs" that Ashman, Patterson, and Brown (2018) describe. It is difficult in today's society to escape alienation, which is omnipresent, influencing everyone in all aspects of their lives, and drawing additional strength from its invisibility, something people impose upon themselves (Rosa, 2013). This also makes it impossible to criticise and combat. Much as Stakhanov came to represent communist alienation, today it is the entrepreneur who represents neoliberal alienation.

Neoliberalism is the dominant ideology of liquid times (Scharff, 2016), a form of governmentality in people's lives where they become "entrepreneurs of themselves" (Foucault, 1988), finding connections in society through the choices they make, the risks they take, and the ensuing responsibilities for themselves and for others. What is internalised here is an affective structure inspired by neoliberal ideology. This shapes people's everyday affairs and encourages them to replace

mainstream employment with the challenges and excitement of unconventional entrepreneurship. Neoliberalism encourages self-centred subjectivity whereby individuals pursue their self-interest by seeking popularity at all costs. Unconventional entrepreneurs can be considered the perfect embodiment of neoliberal idealism: "A yearning human who on the surface is very much an autonomous and expressive individual with many desires, just that these desires they have been borrowed from neoliberal ideals" (Ashman et al., 2018,). This is especially true of "autpreneurs" who develop their own YouTube and other digital platforms where they engage in intense emotional labour. In the words of Ashman et al. (2018), there are "three main wellsprings - the dynamics of competition, the creativity dispositif, and technologies of the self - [that] detrimentally affect the quality of their lives and collectively institute a 'cruel optimism' which promises much, but delivers little". Cruel optimism is understood here as "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011, p. 1), as we can observe with micro-celebrity consumers and influencer marketers (Kedzior, Allen, & Schroeder, 2016).

The inducement to manage and transform one's self and/or tribe into an entrepreneurial business producing and selling emotional labour, such as intimate videos, has a substantial effect on entrepreneurs' psyche (Scharff, 2016). In a liquid context (Bauman, 2007), performance alone counts, with everyone encouraged to behave like an athlete. Whether this involves a person's work, play, or love life, they must act like a superhero. The quest is driven by the unfettered desire to exist and develop one's own identity (Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardon, 2014). People are compelled to demonstrate the same abilities as athletes, particularly where business is concerned. Necessary skills include fast adaptation, permanent change, mental and physical flexibility (Ehrenberg, 2010). Ordinary individuals such as athletes are often applauded today for their anticipatory capabilities, vigilance, and flexibility. Sport is more than sport, and has become a state of mind, a means of self-assessment, a way of analysing one's relationships with others – all in the context of a society where competition is everywhere and where everyone is encouraged to compete (Ehrenberg, 2010).

The danger to which the autpreneur is exposed is an element that complements the others presented in this article and helps define a framework within which the unconventional entrepreneurship is placed (see Fig. 1).

6. Conclusions

This conceptual piece focuses on unconventional entrepreneurship in light of the recent transition to a liquid society and the consequences for (mainly Western) individuals and entrepreneurship. The article reveals the centrality of passion - lived in a community or tribe context – as a way for people to give meaning to their personal lives. Against this backdrop, the rise of impassioned entrepreneurship becomes a vehicle to imbue professional life with meaning. Connecting passions that link private and professional lives help people gain emotional and cultural competencies, assets they can use to successfully lead companies through liquid contexts. The other side of the coin, however, is the risk that people who have become the entrepreneurs of their own lives will suffer alienation rather than self-fulfilment. The present article has therefore re-investigated contemporary entrepreneurship issues by incorporating so-called unconventional forms into an updated theoretical framework rooted in sociology.

As a theme linked to the recognition of opportunities and the creation of new artefacts and solutions, entrepreneurship does not develop independently of the environment and society in which individuals and economic actors operate and make their life choices. Forms of entrepreneurship portrayed today as unconventional have their own justification in a context of societal change that in turn impacts the diffusion and re-composition of the entrepreneurial function. Hence, that commonly defined as unconventional entrepreneurship may not be a marginal phenomenon but – for better or for worse – a new

entrepreneurial standard characterising today's liquid Western societies.

This article introduces the special issue of the *Journal of Business Research* on "Sources of unconventional entrepreneurship: Passion and consumption". The focus here is on examining theories, approaches, methods, and case studies that may shed light on the role and relevance of unconventional entrepreneurship, including the role that consumption-based passion plays in its emergence. The different articles comprising this issue focus specifically on approaches centred on case studies that deal with the creation of small businesses by consumers and/or users, the intersection between production and consumption, and the role of passion in entrepreneurship.

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