

Exploring the Meaning of Entrepreneurial Passion in Thai Startups Through LEGO® Serious Play®

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to investigate the meaning of entrepreneurial passion in Thai startups using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP), a qualitative research tool that provides a tangible and participatory approach to data collection and analysis and enables the exploration of metaphorical representations of entrepreneurial passion. Qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews and LEGO® model. A total of 33 participants were selected from startups covering 11 different sectors. The findings confirmed three main aspects of entrepreneurial passion: positive emotions when overcoming difficulties, a sense of achievement, and fulfilling one's identity. They shed light on how entrepreneurial passion develops within the unique setting of Thai startups. Despite limitations such as demographic similarity and reliance on self-reported data, the study offers valuable insights into maintaining passion among Thai startup employees, thereby enriching the field of entrepreneurial passion, and enhancing its understanding.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Passion, Thai Startups, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, Qualitative Research.

1. Introduction

Startups operate in a volatile and uncertain environment due to their fragile and precarious nature. This setting is marked by swift changes and challenges, as underscored by Salamzadeh and Kesim (2017). In Thailand, the startup ecosystem has shown consistent growth, boasting over 1,500 businesses spanning nine sectors. Notably, major corporations have invested more than 30,000 million baht in startups, and both public and private incubation centers have expanded, as reported by the National Innovation Agency in 2021. For a startup to succeed, the driving force of entrepreneurial passion can be immensely valuable. Entrepreneurs who are fueled by passion are better equipped to navigate the challenges of launching and scaling a business, as they are more likely to persevere through difficulties and maintain their enthusiasm (Cardon et al., 2005). It is worth noting that in this study, entrepreneurs extend

beyond the founders of startups. Employees can also exhibit entrepreneurial traits, frequently contributing innovative ideas to their organizations. These ideas may lead to the development of intrapreneurs within the company or even the creation of spin-off firms, as discussed by Hellmann (2007).

In the Thai context, the startup industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, fueled by the government's Digital Thailand strategy (Thailand Board of Investment, 2016). With over 1,500 startups across nine industries, notable investments exceeding 30,000 million baht and a projected worth of 10 trillion baht by 2025 (National Innovation Agency, 2021), Thailand's startup ecosystem is flourishing. Passion plays a crucial role in driving startup success, with founders citing market opportunities and social impact as key motivators (National Innovation Agency, 2021). However, challenges such as limited funding and talent shortages persist (Google Temasek & Bain, 2020), compounded by cultural factors such as the traditional Thai value and predominant preference for working in large firms rather than in small ones. This mindset may deter some individuals from fully engaging in startup ventures (National Innovation Agency, 2021). Despite these challenges, the industry's potential for growth remains high, driven by the expansion of e-commerce and increasing demand for online services.

Therefore, focusing on startup context is crucial because it offers insights necessary for fostering innovation, creating jobs, and driving economic growth, which are all essential for long-term success and prosperity. Especially in Thai startup context, according to the National Innovation Agency (2021), Thailand's startup environment has experienced a steady increase, accompanied by significant investments and governmental support aimed at fostering startup growth. Consequently, Understanding the dynamics of startups will help to develop targeted strategies to support new businesses, boost the economy, and create a favorable environment for sustained progress. Ultimately, by delving into the world of startups, it can pave the way for inclusive and sustainable economic development, benefiting society as a whole.

Entrepreneurship is a constantly evolving field that drives innovation, economic progress, and societal advancement. Recently, researchers have turned their attention to the concept of passion within entrepreneurship. In this context, passion refers to the profound enthusiasm and unwavering commitment that individuals invest in their entrepreneurial endeavors. It serves as a driving force, empowering entrepreneurs to tackle challenges, persist in adverse conditions, and ultimately achieve success in their ventures. Despite the increasing interest in entrepreneurial passion, research gaps persist, prompting scholars to explore this relatively uncharted area further. The existence of this research gap has been apparent for some time. While extensive research has examined the outcomes associated with entrepreneurial passion, there is a noticeable lack of studies delving into the origins and development of this critical aspect of entrepreneurial behavior. Scholars like Murnieks, Mosakowski, and Cardon (2012) and Newman, Obschonka, Moeller, and Chandan (2021) have acknowledged this issue. A significant deficiency in the existing body of literature revolves around our limited understanding of how entrepreneurial passion takes root.

For the research question, understanding the startup context in Thailand is crucial for various reasons, Thailand's vibrant startup ecosystem provides a rich and diverse landscape for investigating the dynamics of entrepreneurial passion. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP) emerges as a particularly suitable methodology for this research due to its hands-on, experiential nature, which facilitates deep insights into complex concepts like entrepreneurial passion. By engaging participants in interactive sessions, LSP allows researchers to uncover nuanced perspectives and motivations within the startup environment. Moreover, the LSP methodology focuses on creativity and problem-solving aligns closely with the entrepreneurial

mindset, making it an invaluable tool for exploring the link between LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and entrepreneurial passion. Through this research approach, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial passion and its role in driving startup success in Thailand. Consequently, this study aims to address the fundamental research question: What is the meaning of entrepreneurial passion experienced by startup employees in Thailand?

2. Literature Review

- Passion

Over the past decade, the concept of passion has garnered substantial attention in both mainstream media and business circles, sparking extensive discussions and debates. In the realm of organizational behavior and management literature, the spotlight has predominantly been on the notion of work passion (Ho, Wong, & Lee, 2011). This heightened interest in passion is underscored by a significant surge in scholarly research (e.g. Curran, Hill, Vallerand, & Standage, 2015). Passion, in its essence, signifies a powerful emotion characterized by enthusiasm and excitement (Pollack, O'Boyle, Kirkman, & Ho, 2020). Within academic literature, passion is often defined as "a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important and identify with, and in which they invest significant time and energy" (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). It is a term that encapsulates an individual's intense interest in a particular subject or activity, whether it be a sport, hobby, romantic relationship, or artistic pursuit.

Historically, empirical studies on passion have primarily focused on the domain of romantic passion within psychology (Hatfield & Walster, 1978). Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love, for instance, categorizes passion as one of the essential components of a love relationship. This passion encompasses a spectrum of emotions, including sexual arousal, self-esteem, self-actualization, affiliation, dominance, and submission. Often referred to as romantic passion or passionate love, it represents a psychological state characterized by intense emotions and a strong desire for someone, sometimes verging on obsession (Hatfield & Walster, 1978; Sternburg, 1986).

Passion, however, extends beyond the romantic realm and also finds its place in the business context, particularly in relation to economic activities aimed at engaging customers through the expression of passion for products (Chen, Yao, & Kotha, 2009). For instance, Starbucks effectively conveys its passion through products by creating an environment beyond a mere coffee shop, a space for customers to connect and socialize (Kumar & Luo, 2006). This form of passion, distinct from the romantic context, relates to a person's emotional attachment to their profession (Baum & Locke, 2004). It falls under the category of 'general passion,' characterized by an employee's dedication to achieving work-related goals driven by their passion (Pollack et al., 2020). In this context, passion aligns with motivational theories, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Lawler, 1968), as well as expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964).

Diving deeper into the concept of passion, Vallerand et al. (2003) introduced a dualistic model, suggesting that passion can possess both positive and negative attributes. This model draws from the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and posits that an individual's passion for a specific pursuit may contain both positive and negative aspects, influencing the outcomes of their engagement in that activity. Notably, for an activity to qualify as a passion, it must hold significant meaning in an individual's life and be something they engage in regularly. The dualistic model further distinguishes between two types of passion: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion embodies a healthy equilibrium between one's personal interests and other life aspects. Those with harmonious passion derive deep

satisfaction and pleasure from their activities, engaging in them willingly without feeling compelled. This openness fosters positive experiences and is often associated with work engagement (Vallerand & Houlfort, 2019).

Conversely, obsessive passion is characterized by internal pressures that drive individuals to partake in a particular activity. Those with obsessive passion may feel compelled or pressured, leading to conflicts between obligations and passionate pursuits. This type of passion can result in negative psychological states, such as emotional exhaustion, and lower job satisfaction (Donahue et al., 2012; Houlfort et al., 2014).

-Entrepreneurial Passion

The psychology of passion has been extensively studied, notably by Vallerand et al. (2003). Research on passion in entrepreneurial behavior dates back to as early as 1951, with Schumpeter's pioneering work (1951). In recent times, entrepreneurial passion has gained recognition as a pivotal factor in business success, as emphasized by Cardon, Wincent, Singh, and Drnovsek (2009). Passion, from an entrepreneurial perspective, goes beyond mere duty; it becomes a sentiment akin to 'love' for one's business (Cardon et al., 2009). Much of the existing literature on entrepreneurial passion has focused on its outcomes, exploring the consequences of such fervor (Baum, Locke, & Smith, 2001; Cardon & Kirk, 2015; Drnovsek, Cardon, & Patel, 2016). Additionally, entrepreneurial passion has recently garnered increased attention from passion research scholars, recognizing it as a distinct and significant field within the broader passion research domain (Adomako, Mole, Franklin & Murniek, 2022; Luu, 2023; Vanhees, Schepers, Vandekerckhof, & Michiels, 2023).

This growing interest, however, reveals a research gap. As highlighted by Newman et al. (2021), ongoing debates in the entrepreneurship field revolve around how to conceptualize and measure passion in specific contexts. Furthermore, the processes governing the development of passion and its associations with various outcomes remain relatively unexplored due to the emerging nature of this research domain. To address this gap, this study integrated the Self-Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968; Burke, 1980), the Self-Regulatory Theory (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010), and the concept of grit (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). By combining these theories and concepts, our goal was to uncover the complex processes that underlie the development of entrepreneurial passion, a crucial element for business success.

The interaction of self-identity, self-regulation, and grit within the entrepreneurial context was essential for understanding how entrepreneurial passion evolves and impacts entrepreneurial outcomes. This comprehensive approach aimed to provide insights into the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial passion, contributing to the ongoing discourse in this evolving field of study. Additionally, in the Thai context, research has explored the factors influencing work passion in Thailand across various sectors, including SMEs, family businesses (Virunhagarun & Boonsathorn, 2017), small hotels (Kasai & Boonsathorn, 2018), and the life insurance industry (Boonsathorn & Sirakiatsakul, 2019). However, there is a significant gap in understanding entrepreneurial passion especially among Thai startup employees. Furthermore, empirical studies focusing on entrepreneurial passion within the Thai context are notably lacking.

- LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP)

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP) serves as a valuable qualitative research tool, offering a tangible and participatory approach to data collection and analysis. In contrast to conventional meetings where discussions are often monopolized by a minority, what LSP terms a 'Lean Backward Meeting', this method actively encourages engagement from the majority. By employing LEGO® bricks as a medium, LSP helps unlock diverse perspectives, ideas, and insights among participants (Rasmussen Consulting, 2023). LSP is an innovative technique for

facilitating creative problem-solving and decision-making, utilizing LEGO® bricks as tools for self-expression and communication (Lego, 2022). The core process involves four main stages: (i) posing a question, (ii) building a LEGO® model in response, (iii) sharing the model's story, and (iv) reflecting on the insights gained. A facilitator initiates the process with an open-ended question, prompting participants to construct a LEGO® model representing their thoughts within a specified time frame. They then explain the rationale behind their unique creations, fostering discussion. It is crucial to note that LSP is not an instructional tool; facilitators do not impart knowledge but rather guide participants in developing their ideas and viewpoints (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014). In essence, LSP offers a visually concrete approach to qualitative research, promoting interaction and collaboration among participants. It holds promises as a means to gain insights into entrepreneurial passion and its antecedents among Thai startup employees.

3. Methodology

-Data Collections

This study employs qualitative methodology. A total of 33 participants were selected from 11 startups covering 11 industries as determined by the National Innovation Agency (Public Organization) or NIA (2022) to participate in group interviews (3 participants per group) using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP) method. However, data collection continued until saturation was reached. The selection of participants follows specific criteria:

1. 3 participants were chosen from various job functions within each of the 11 startups. The startup environment often requires employees to be versatile and handle multiple tasks (Fitta, Dewi, & Idulfilastri, 2020).
2. Three passionate employees representing different entrepreneurial roles, as described by Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek (2009) - inventor, founder, and developer - were selected from each startup industry by each startup company.
3. Participants needed a minimum of one year of experience in their current startup company, aligning with the average duration of employment in startups (National Innovation Agency, 2021).
4. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 42 years in 2023, as they belong to the millennial generation, which was once considered the most entrepreneurial generation in history (Kauffman Foundation, 2015). Millennials are typically born between 1981 and 1996 (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Table 1: 11 Startup Industries as Determined by NIA (2022)

No	Startup industries categorized by NIA (2022)	3 Distinct Entrepreneurial Roles Cardon et al. (2009)			Total Participants
		Inventor	Founder	Developer	
1	EdTech	1	1	1	3
2	MedTech	1	1	1	3
3	DeepTech	1	1	1	3
4	FinTech	1	1	1	3
5	Business Service	1	1	1	3
6	Lifestyle & Entertainment	1	1	1	3
7	TravelTech	1	1	1	3
8	MarTech	1	1	1	3
9	FoodTech & AgTech	1	1	1	3
10	IndustryTech	1	1	1	3
11	PropertyTech & UrbanTech	1	1	1	3
Total	11 Industries	1	1	1	33

The selection of the 33 participants was based on the 11 startups and their representatives of the 3 distinct types of entrepreneurial passion identified by Cardon et al. (2009) – inventors, founders, and developers. 33 participants were enough as 5-25 participants are sufficient to investigate phenomenon in qualitative research (Cresswell & Clark, 2017). This also ensures a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon across various sectors and roles, enhancing the richness and diversity of insights gathered. Additionally, this study deliberately chose a wide range of industries to ensure maximum variation sampling, a common strategy in qualitative nursing research (Sandelowski, 1995). Furthermore, adhering to specific age criteria allows for the inclusion of individuals from the millennial generation, known for their entrepreneurial spirit, thus providing valuable perspectives relevant to the study's objectives.

To tap into the collaborative potential of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY (LSP) and promote psychological safety within teams, a group interview format was adopted, involving three participants from each startup industry. Group interviews, known to facilitate effective information gathering through LSP, were considered suitable for this study. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY (LSP) is a methodology that utilizes LEGO® bricks as a medium for communication and problem-solving. It involves four core processes as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Core Processes of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY (LSP)

Process	Description
1. Building	Participants construct physical models using LEGO® bricks to represent their thoughts, ideas, and experiences.
2. Sharing	Each participant explains their model to the group, providing insights into their perspectives and interpretations.
3. Reflecting	Group members engage in open discussion and reflection, exploring connections between the models and uncovering deeper insights.
4. Synthesizing	Facilitators guide the group in synthesizing the collective knowledge and identifying key themes or patterns emerging from the discussion.

Each group interview lasted between 120-180 minutes and took place in the participants' meeting rooms or private co-working spaces. Before starting each interview, participants received comprehensive information about the study's background, objectives, and methodologies. They were also briefed on the confidentiality measures in place and assured of their right to decline any questions. The main questions are divided into two primary parts. The first part involves asking participants to construct a LEGO® model that represents their experiences. For example, they may be asked, "Tell me about one of your startup activities or experiences that make you feel passionate?". Participants were then encouraged to create a LEGO® model depicting their response. Subsequently, participants were requested to elaborate on the narrative behind their LEGO® model. The second part delves deeper into their stories. Participants were provided with a 'red brick' to place on their model, indicating the most significant aspect of their LEGO® creation. They were then prompted to share a story related to this key element.



Figure 1: Red Brick for Identifying the Important Part of the Model

In addition to the interview, photographs were taken of each participant's LEGO® model to facilitate data analysis. Following each interview, voice recordings were made, and transcriptions were produced to ensure accuracy during thematic analysis. This approach involves examining and identifying themes within the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

- Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been selected as the method for data analysis in this study, with a focus on the identification and examination of recurring themes within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2008). This method is renowned for its simplicity, flexibility, and adaptability to diverse research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2008; King, 2004). Moreover, thematic analysis is valuable for the comparative analysis of participants' perspectives and for the systematic summarization of crucial aspects within extensive datasets (King, 2004). It also enriches the analysis and the data collection involved by using LEGO® models with accompanying photographs, and interview data. Consequently, the six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2008) was applied to reveal significant patterns relating to participants' perspectives on entrepreneurial passion within Thai startups. Based on Braun and Clarke's (2008) comprehensive six-phase analysis framework. The comprehensive six-phase framework includes:

1. Familiarization with the data: This initial phase entails immersing oneself in the dataset to gain a thorough understanding of its contents.
2. Generation of initial codes: Key concepts, ideas, or patterns within the data are systematically coded to facilitate further analysis.
3. Exploration of themes: Codes are organized into potential themes, allowing for the identification of overarching patterns and connections.
4. Review and refinement of themes: Themes are carefully reviewed and refined to ensure their accuracy and relevance to the research objectives.
5. Definition and naming of themes: Each theme is clearly defined and labeled to concisely capture its essence and significance.
6. Presentation of findings: The final step involves presenting the findings, incorporating relevant quotes and examples to illustrate each theme and provide a cohesive narrative of the results.

By applying six-phase framework, this study aims to uncover recurring patterns of significance within the dataset, shedding light on participants' perspectives on entrepreneurial passion within Thai startups.

4. Findings

The objective of this study was to delve into the interpretation of entrepreneurial passion as perceived by Thai startup employees. The outcomes were derived by analyzing the responses of interviewees using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP) method. The findings can be categorized into three principal themes: 1) a positive emotion when overcoming difficulties, 2) a sense of accomplishment, and 3) identity fulfillment. The participants' task involved constructing a LEGO® model that symbolized a startup-related activity or encounter that ignited their passion. Following this, they were instructed to place a 'red brick' on the model to emphasize the specific aspect that held significance in relation to their passion, thus facilitating a more in-depth exploration of the particulars.

- Positive Emotions When Overcoming Difficulties

The concept of "positive emotions when overcoming difficulties" pertains to individuals' capacity to maintain a positive outlook, attitude, and perspective even when they confront challenging situations or adversities within startup environments. This involves fostering

resilience and a constructive mindset, enabling employees to navigate obstacles with hope, determination, and the ability to identify opportunities amidst challenges. It is noteworthy that these positive emotions persist whether employees achieve success or encounter setbacks.

A significant majority (specifically twenty-four out of thirty-three participants) emphasized that within the context of entrepreneurial passion, positive emotion when overcoming difficulties signifies individuals' ability to uphold favorable feelings, attitudes, and viewpoints, even in the face of demanding circumstances. These challenges could manifest within their work or team dynamics within the startup setting. Moreover, those difficulties can be divided into two main types.

(i) Task Difficulties

Participants in this study effectively convey this essence in their story, highlighting how they not only maintain their passion in the face of challenges and difficulties but intensify their passion for their work. Their stories serve as examples of individuals with entrepreneurial passion who embrace challenges with a positive outlook, viewing them as catalysts for personal and professional growth. As one interviewee stated:

“My model showed a bunch of stuff that different customers wanted, so I decided to use different colors and layers for it. That also stood for the strange problems and challenges I faced. But you know what? I still enjoy working on it because every problem I deal with makes me better. So, I even stuck a smiley face on top of the model”



Figure 2: LEGO® Model Representing an Employee's Complicated Work and Multiple Revisions Before Completion

When asked by the researcher about the significance of her model and why she didn't place the red brick on a particular part as shown in Figure 2, she explained that she regarded every element of her model as vital. Consequently, she chose not to single out any specific aspect because she held a deep affection for every task she undertook.

(ii) Relationship Difficulties

In the context of understanding entrepreneurial passion, the capacity to maintain a positive perspective when surmounting challenges isn't limited to tasks alone. It extends into the realm of interpersonal challenges, where individuals must navigate and overcome issues related to relationships and collaboration within the dynamic startup environment.

In addition to challenges related to tasks, there are also challenges within the domain of teamwork. Several participants noted that they perceive team conflicts as opportunities to amalgamate diverse ideas into something innovative. Among those who discussed team conflicts as opportunities, many opted to represent a team meeting using LEGO® models, utilizing various LEGO® pieces to symbolize the different individuals present in that specific meeting room.

One Interviewee chose to depict a challenging scenario through a LEGO® model, representing a passionate situation within a startup. In his model, he symbolized a meeting room marked by frequent heated debates and arguments. What was particularly noteworthy

was his positive perspective regarding these conflicts. He viewed them as valuable opportunities for arriving at conclusions and determining future directions. Regarding the placement of the red brick, he chose to position it on top of the meeting room table, symbolizing his enduring optimistic sentiments toward his team and leaders (Figure 3). As he further explained “*even though we have many disagreements during meetings, they still hold the most significant role in this model*”



Figure 3: LEGO® Model Representing Meetings with the Team

- A Sense of Achievement

The concept of ‘Sense of achievement’ pertains to the emotional and psychological satisfaction that individuals derive from successfully completing tasks, achieving their goals, or making significant contributions within their work environment or organization. When individuals accomplish tasks or reach their objectives, it often leads to an increase in their self-esteem and confidence, particularly when these tasks or goals were challenging and demanded substantial effort. Entrepreneurial passion frequently involves the setting of ambitious goals and pursuing them with unwavering dedication. The attainment of such goals contributes significantly to the sense of achievement.

Among the thirty-three interviewees, sixteen individuals discussed their passionate commitment to the sense of achievement associated with successfully completing tasks, achieving goals, and making noteworthy contributions to their work or organization. One interviewee provided detailed insights into his model, which represented his entrepreneurial passion (see Figure 4). The model depicted a customer-sucking machine, a metaphor for his role, which involves interacting with and attracting a substantial number of customers. At the core of this model stood a figure representing himself, actively engaged in the task of identifying and attracting customers, aligning with his overarching goal of meeting the company's sales targets. Notably, he chose to place the red brick within the machine, symbolizing the numerous accomplishments he has achieved over time. He mentioned that “I'm really enjoy seeing when customers pay their invoices because that's when I know we're making a profit according to our sale target.”



Figure 4: LEGO® Model Representing a Customer-Sucking Machine

The story shared above underscores the role of a sense of achievement in fueling the entrepreneurial passion of Thai startup employees. These participants exemplify how their passion for their work propels them to achieve success on both professional and personal fronts. Additionally, it highlights that those well-defined goals are a crucial element of entrepreneurial passion, serving as a pathway to accomplishments.

- Identity Fulfillment

Identity fulfillment encompasses the sense of contentment and harmony individuals experience when their personal values, skills, and interests seamlessly integrate with their roles and responsibilities within their job or organization. It signifies a profound connection between an individual's core identity and their professional life. Furthermore, this sense of identity fulfillment offers them the opportunity to authentically express their uniqueness in their day-to-day tasks or special endeavors. Engaging in various tasks within startup environments enables them to attain a state characterized by unwavering commitment to their work.

Several interviewees underscored the significant connection between their work and their sense of identity fulfillment. As they explained, their jobs not only provided them with opportunities to engage in novel experiences but also enabled them to infuse their identities into each assigned project.

One interviewee, who had previously worked in the engineering field, shared his transition to his current startup role (Figure 5). He expressed how working in a startup had granted him the freedom to be authentic. He constructed a model symbolizing his younger self, brimming with ideas at the age of twenty. His work in the startup had rejuvenated that youthful enthusiasm within him, making him feel as if he were in his twenties once more. He positioned the red brick in front of himself to signify his ability to rediscover his authentic self. As he stated:

“Upon transitioning to work in this startup, I discovered the liberating aspect of being myself which is the 'me' I used to be, being full of ideas. It's almost like I've gone back to my twenties (chuckles). My current role empowers me to think differently and swiftly embrace new methods.”



Figure 5: LEGO® Model Representing Interviewee in his Twenties Full of Ideas

Another interviewee, who transitioned from the engineering sector to a startup, places a significant emphasis on the evolution of his identity. He acknowledges a substantial shift between his past and present roles. In the past, he was deeply engrossed in machinery and technical aspects. However, in his current role as a salesperson, his primary interactions revolve around engaging with customers. Despite this notable difference, he derives immense satisfaction from his current position, which allows him to apply skills such as a service-oriented mindset and a deep understanding of people. These facets contribute to his enjoyment and passion for his present work. He firmly believes that these skills would have remained underutilized had he continued in his previous engineering role. In his LEGO® model, he artistically depicted a meeting room filled with clients, symbolizing his vital role as a salesperson (Figure 6). As he explained:

“However, upon shifting to my current role as a salesperson, I had to undergo significant adaptation to become more empathetic and attuned to customers. This role seems to fulfill the skillset I was missing during my time as an engineer, and because of this, I genuinely appreciate my current self as a salesperson.”



Figure 6: Tor's LEGO® Model Representing Meetings with Clients

The above description underscores that a profound sense of identity fulfillment can manifest itself when an individual's core values, competencies, and passions seamlessly merge with the roles and duties inherent in their occupation or affiliation.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

- Positive Emotion When Overcoming Challenges

This investigation has shed light on a noteworthy dimension of entrepreneurial passion: the experience of positive emotions when overcoming obstacles. This aspect resonates with the concept of work passion introduced by Zigami et al. (2009), which underscores the profound positive emotions individuals encounter in their work. When establishing a link between the positive feelings triggered by challenges in entrepreneurial passion and Zigami et al's (2009) work passion, it becomes evident that these two concepts share a common foundation in emotional engagement. Within the realm of entrepreneurial passion, these positive feelings amidst adversity inspire individuals to persist and invest emotionally in their work, akin to how work passion fosters joy and fulfillment in task engagement.

In the context of this study, the term 'difficulties' refers to a broad spectrum of challenges faced within startup teams. These challenges encompass a variety of issues, ranging from obstacles related to tasks to interpersonal conflicts and differing viewpoints among team members. They represent an essential aspect of the obstacles that individuals in startup environments encounter while cultivating their entrepreneurial passion.

- Sense of Achievement

Another crucial aspect of entrepreneurial passion is the feeling of accomplishment, which entails the satisfaction individuals experience when they successfully complete tasks, meet goals, or make significant contributions to their work or organization. This dimension aligns with Lord et al.'s (2010) self-regulatory theory, which highlights elements such as goal setting, planning, progress tracking, and adapting strategies to achieve desired results. The connection here is in the sense of accomplishment within entrepreneurial passion, where individuals strive for and achieve their objectives, mirroring the self-regulation process. The feeling of accomplishment can be considered as the emotional expression of effective self-regulation, as the attainment of goals is met with positive emotions and a sense of fulfillment.

The self-regulatory theory, proposed by Lord et al. (2010), places significant emphasis on the stages of goal setting, planning, progress monitoring, and adjusting strategies to achieve desired outcomes. This theoretical framework aligns with a sense of achievement in entrepreneurial passion, as both highlight the crucial role of establishing and realizing goals. The connection between these concepts lies in the observation that the sense of achievement in entrepreneurial endeavors involves individuals striving for and successfully attaining their objectives, resembling the self-regulation process. Essentially, the sense of achievement can be seen as the emotional expression of effective self-regulation, where reaching goals generates positive emotions and an overarching sense of fulfillment. This close correspondence

underscores how the process of self-regulation contributes to the sense of achievement and, consequently, the overall dynamics of entrepreneurial passion.

- Identity Fulfillment

The concept of identity fulfillment, as explored in the domain of entrepreneurial passion, resonates strongly with the principles presented in identity theory and the entrepreneurial passion framework. Despite their distinct perspectives, these concepts collectively emphasize the utmost significance of aligning personal attributes with professional roles, illuminating the profound impact of congruence on an individual's engagement and motivation.

The identity theory, initially introduced by Stryker (1968) and later elaborated upon by Burke (1980) suggests that individuals inherently seek a state of harmony between their self-concept and the roles they undertake. In this context, identity fulfillment occurs when individuals successfully merge their personal identity and values with their occupational responsibilities. This principle seamlessly extends into the realm of entrepreneurship, where the amalgamation of personal passions and competencies with entrepreneurial ventures cultivates a deep sense of fulfillment. Thus, this concept closely aligns with the identified aspect of identity fulfillment in the entrepreneurial passion model, highlighting how the alignment between personal identity and professional pursuits can serve as a driving force behind entrepreneurial passion. This further elucidates the intricate dynamics that ignite the fervor of individuals within the startup environment.

In conclusion, as the findings show, the results are influenced by demographic factors such as age, generation, and professional background. For instance, individuals from the millennial generation (those aged between 27 to 42 years) are more likely to exhibit certain traits and values that align with entrepreneurial passion, such as a strong desire for autonomy, purpose-driven work, and a willingness to take risks. Additionally, the diversity of experiences and perspectives within this demographic group contributes to the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial passion. Thus, demographics play a crucial role in shaping the emotional journeys, goal pursuits, and identity alignment observed among individuals in startups, ultimately influencing the core aspects of entrepreneurial passion highlighted in the discussion.

- Managerial Implications

Based on the findings and discussion, several managerial implications can be drawn for fostering entrepreneurial passion within startup environments.

- Firstly, managers should recognize the importance of creating a positive and supportive work culture that encourages employees to embrace challenges with resilience and optimism. This could involve providing opportunities for skill development, promoting open communication, and offering emotional support during difficult times.
- Secondly, fostering a sense of achievement among employees by setting clear goals, providing feedback, and recognizing their contributions could enhance their motivation and satisfaction levels.
- Finally, aligning personal values and interests with job responsibilities could contribute to a sense of identity fulfillment, leading to greater engagement and commitment. By addressing these aspects, managers can effectively nurture entrepreneurial passion among their employees, fostering a thriving and innovative startup ecosystem.

- Limitations and Future Studies

This study offers valuable insights into entrepreneurial passion within the context of Thai startups. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the study mainly involved millennial startup employees from a specific geographic area, primarily Bangkok, Thailand. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data gathered through the innovative LEGO® Serious Play® method, while yielding rich qualitative information,

introduces a subjective element. The participants' interpretations of the metaphors and models they created may not fully capture the nuances of their experiences, potentially affecting the data's accuracy. Additionally, as is common in qualitative research, the potential for researcher bias exists, particularly in data analysis and interpretation.

This study paves the way for further research to enhance our grasp of entrepreneurial passion in startup contexts. For future research, diversifying the participant demographics to encompass various age groups and cultural backgrounds, not limited to millennials, may yield a more holistic outlook and unveil potential generational or cultural distinctions. Moreover, from a methodological perspective, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can offer a more complete perspective on the phenomenon, enriching our understanding of both the underlying factors and their quantitative significance. Moreover, experimental studies have the potential to explore causal relationships, shedding light on how different factors directly influence entrepreneurial passion and guide targeted interventions.

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