

**The show must go on:  
Creatives' entrepreneurial passion in times of crisis**

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## **Abstract**

Entrepreneurial passion ignites entrepreneurial activity and is related to positive motivational inspiration in creative entrepreneurs. One of the most significant obstacles faced in entrepreneurship is the uncertainty of a crisis, yet studies linking entrepreneurial passion and crisis are sparse. The UK Cultural and Creative Sector was particularly hard hit by the pandemic crisis: the mass gatherings of audiences in galleries, theatres and concert halls were terminated and the sector suffered a 'culture shock'. This situation resulted in growing interest in entrepreneurial passion from both academics and practitioners. The study resulted in a conceptual model outlining three types of strategies the participants adopted in the face of the crisis of the recent pandemic and the role of passion in creating and adopting these approaches. The study also has implications for the practice of participants in the Cultural and Creative Sector as well as for the public policy.

Word Count (without tables and references): 5,711

*Entrepreneurial passion...a sheer and pure love of what you do.*

(Lilac, the study participant)

Entrepreneurial passion ignites entrepreneurial activity and is related to positive motivational inspiration in creative entrepreneurs (Bhansing et al., 2018). This deeply intense emotion motivates individuals despite obstacles they may face when starting new ventures (Vallerand, 2008). One of the most significant obstacles faced in entrepreneurship is the uncertainty of a crisis, yet studies linking entrepreneurial passion and crisis are sparse (Stenholm and Renko, 2016). With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic entrepreneurs have been hurled into coping with a global crisis. The UK Cultural and Creative Sector was particularly hard hit by the crisis: the mass gatherings of audiences in galleries, theatres and concert halls were terminated and the sector suffered a ‘culture shock’ (OECD, 2020). This situation resulted in growing interest in entrepreneurial passion from both academics and practitioners. For example, Feng and Chen (2020) argue that governments should build innovative inclusive business centres to stimulate the entrepreneurial passion of entrepreneurs, particularly during times of crisis. Ratten (2021) calls for investigation into entrepreneurial passion and COVID-19 in order to accelerate economic recovery, as passion is found to enhance resilience that goes beyond business survival (Dahles and Susilowati, 2015).

This study responds to these calls by exploring the role of passion in creative entrepreneurs facing crisis. We do it by critically examining a sample of UK creative entrepreneurs through in-depth narrative enquiry. The study resulted in a conceptual model as well as practical recommendations for small enterprises in the Creative and Cultural Sector during times of crisis.

The article is divided into the following sections. The first section provides a literature review on entrepreneurship in the creative industries and entrepreneurial passion, in particular, in times of crisis. The next section describes the methodology of the empirical study. Then findings from the work are briefly presented. Following this, the discussion section analyses the entrepreneurial passion displayed in the study results and outlines distinctive contingent features, which argue for extension to current theory. It also considers the contextual specificity of these contingencies. Finally, the conclusion outlines the theoretical contribution of the study as well as its practical implications.

## **Theoretical background**

### *The creative and identity*

Understanding of the creative individual remains under-theorized (Patten, 2016) yet the creative is considered distinct and different from the mainstream (Caves, 2000). The concept of who is a ‘creative’ is complex. The meaning of self-identity is constructed by individuals on an ongoing basis; it is constantly changing to incorporate different social experiences based on creative individuals’ experience of their own social reality (Patten, 2016).

Creatives share some characteristics of entrepreneurial micro-identity (Yitshaki and Kropp, 2016) where they engage in creative activities, utilise resource opportunities and develop lifestyle ambitions for economic and aesthetic goals, which trigger entrepreneurial behaviours (Schulte- Holthaus, 2018). These passion-infused activities are central to their identity (Murnieks et al., 2014; Cardon et al., 2017).

In this article, creatives are understood to be visual as well as performing artists active within the Cultural and Creative Sector (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007). As they engage in entrepreneurial activity, the artists move from one role identity to another; while managing conflicts in this process is crucial to enable adjustment to changing circumstances (Mmbaga et al., 2020). Their role identity is central to the experience of entrepreneurial passion and is a dynamic concept: The creative entrepreneurs may adopt different role identities as their context changes (Cardon et al., 2009, Murnieks et al., 2014, Kakarika et al., 2022).

#### *Entrepreneurial passion*

The word 'passion' originates from the Latin root *patior* and has been considered 'the most observed phenomenon of the entrepreneurial process' (Smilor, 1997, p.342, cited in Cardon et al., 2009). Put simply, passion is an emotion. Vallerand (2015) established two main types of passion harmonious and obsessive, however a way in which this dualistic concept applies to creative entrepreneurs has not been yet explored. It has been established however that visual and performing 'creatives' show passion for their enterprises (Cardon et al., 2017; Schulte-Holthaus and Kuckertz, 2020). Entrepreneurial passion should be here understood as 'consciously accessible intense positive feelings experienced by engagements in entrepreneurial activities associated with roles that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur' (Cardon et al., 2009: 517).

Fisher et al., (2018) find that harmonious passion is considered to have more positive outcomes for entrepreneurs. They also find that obsessive passion focuses on an intense interest in a particular type of business-related activity. Therefore, passion in an entrepreneurial context can be both harmonious and obsessive. Obsessive passion at times takes on a negative workaholic 'dark side' (Rosa and Vianello, 2020). Passion in a creative industry context can come from passion for creative work, lifestyle and make-do bricolage (Schulte-Holthaus, 2018), however passion displayed by entrepreneurial founders can also 'fade' over time (Collewaert, et al., 2016).

#### *Entrepreneurial passion and crisis*

Passion is a driver for entrepreneurs to continue to persist despite considerable obstacles (Cardon et al., 2009). DeTienne et al., (2008) and Shepherd et al., (2011) found that persistent commitment can help entrepreneurial founders to cope with obstacles and setbacks; it can help them to learn from failure and to process negative emotions. In combination with persistence, Cardon and Kirk (2015) highlight self-efficacy as a driver alongside entrepreneurial passion and find strong persistence in entrepreneurs. Stenholm and Renko (2016) argue that in order to survive, make-do behaviour keeps a business going when entrepreneurial passion is displayed.

Entrepreneurship education as well as the founder's human capital are a major determinant of firm survival (Delmar and Shane, 2006). Grilli (2010) argues that in a context of crisis, entrepreneurs with general experience may exit their business, however, entrepreneurs with more specific experience and entrepreneurship education are more likely to persist, for example, through engaging in mergers and acquisitions. However, persistence may not always be desired and closing a business does not necessarily represent failure in a crisis (De Tienne et al., 2008).

The meaning of performance in the creative industries differs from other industry sectors. It encompasses both creative performance as well as economic performance and can be assessed by such measures as public recognition awards, inner vision and self-expression (Mylonas and

Petridou, 2018). Performance is connected to artists' independence, creative work and identity, together with winning and being nominated for awards (Schulte-Holthaus and Kuckertz, 2020), along with firm creativity, social reputation and career achievement (Chen et al., 2015). Indeed, Mylonas and Petridou (2018) find that creative personality and professional network ties represent key factors in the performance of micro arts firms.

Entrepreneurial passion for inventing and developing a venture, in combination with 'make-do' bricolage behaviours, predicts stronger performance and survival (Stenholm and Renko, 2016; Adomako et al., 2018). Creative entrepreneurs who operate on 'the margins of financial sustainability' (OECD, 2020) make-do with low financial resources and working from home. However, harmonious passion has been found to have a positive effect on happiness whilst having to work from home (Junjunan, 2021).

### Methodology

A narrative enquiry with a life story approach was adopted for the study, because it allows investigation of passion in creative entrepreneurship as a process over a life-time, which can be subdivided into episodes and focused upon. Rich insights from life-stories can be also intensely coded (Rae, 2004; Larty and Hamilton, 2011).

The timescale of the study was the time of the lockdown in England during the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, the data was collected in early May 2021, prior to the relaxing of UK Government COVID-19 restrictions. A purposive sample of 15 established experienced creatives engaged in the UK Creative and Cultural sector were interviewed. Each creative was the inventor-founder of their own creative micro-enterprise. Some but not all participants were considered 'elite' artists (Mikecz, 2012). There was a mix of male and female, and each had been entrepreneurially active for more than four years. More details about the participants have been listed in Table 1 below:

Participant	Occupation
Blue	Designer
Crimson	Dancer and choreographer
Green	Painter
Lilac	Architect
Navy	Designer and music band leader
Olive	Metal sculptor
Pink	Youth pop star
Red	Renowned punk singer
Rose	Musician, conductor
Sage	Figurative model maker
Scarlet	Dancer
Ultramarine	Illustrator, designer
Vermillion	Actor
Violet	Museum outfitter
Viridian	Painter

Three pilot interviews were conducted. The zoom interviews ran for between one and two hours fifteen minutes. The life-story approach used semi-structured in-depth interviews based

on life-stages (Rae and Carswell, 2001). Prompts were used about emotional depth of feelings of passion during lockdown. The interviews were recorded and digitally transcribed via Zoom captions. Notes were taken throughout to capture dialects and phrases that the digital transcription process might not decipher. Transcripts were also checked with recordings word-by-word to make sure they were accurate.

*Limitations of the method*

Interviewing elites causes unique methodological problems of access and etiquette (Mikecz, 2012). Life-stories are reliable because they are spoken directly from lived experience. However, perfect reliability is impossible and bias (Galdas, 2017), is likely. The narratives were based on life-experiences and this was found suitable for this study. However, they can be spoken in a way that glosses over complexity (McAlpine, 2016) which is required for an understanding of the process of entrepreneurial passion. Another limitation is the interviews might have captured only a limited number of the individual’s experiences and so information may be left out of a story. Also, hesitations or ‘hedging’ in the narratives may be difficult to interpret (McAlpine, 2016). Finally, narrative inquiry limits knowledge claims because it is less definitive compared to quantitative data approaches. However, it is ideal for gathering rich qualitative data.

*Coding*

All the transcripts were systematically coded, leading to the main three themes of ‘shining’, ‘subdued’ and ‘struggling’ as well as a contextual theme of transition during the pandemic (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Gibbs, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The data analysis was supported by NVivo.

Table 2. Coding scheme

Codes	Themes	Description
Technology-use	<b>SHINING</b> ENTREPRENEURIAL PASSION IN CREATIVES	Using social media strategy
Keep seizing opportunities		Opportunities and persistence
Creativity		Creative new ventures developed
Confidence		Confident self-efficacy harmony
Learning to control passion		Fuelling passion on demand
Creative identity/role		Founder-Inventor Passion for product/service
Financial recovery goals		Performance Solvency
Low-tech adoption	<b>SUBDUED</b> ENTREPRENEURIAL PASSION IN CREATIVES	Occasional use of social media
Creative identity/role		Founder-Inventor Passion for product/service
Make-do creativity		Bricolage
Financing strategies		Sources of funding
HR Learning goals		Entrepreneurial learning
Financial recovery planning		Seeking loans/ grants

↓		
Sparse technology use		Rare use of social media
Taking fewer opportunities, solutions and goals		Few low-risk opportunities taken, rely on existing small client base
Learning HR regret and costs reduction		Learning to be a survivor / bricolage
Creative identity/role		Founder-Inventor
Financial recovery uncertain		Passion for product/service
		Part-time work options
<b>STRUGGLING ENTREPRENEURIAL PASSION IN CREATIVES</b>		

## Findings

The findings section is organised according to the three ways passion impacted transitions among the creatives during the pandemic, which were identified in the coding process into three main themes of: Shining, Subdued and Struggling.

### *Theme 1: Shining*

For entrepreneurial passion to ‘shine’, technology took a positive enabling role in the creatives’ entrepreneurial passion. During the crisis, it was business as usual for the tech-savvy visual artists. Concurrently, the performing artists pivoted to online presentations feeling ‘surprised’ at how quickly they adapted.

#### *Passion for technology*

Passion intensified when technology was used routinely, either directly or via tech literate employees, associates or freelance suppliers; it was used for sales, marketing and services. Specifically, social media and Zoom, enabled connection with audiences, fuelled by passion. For example, they all presented online regularly, as Red mentioned: *‘I’ve been doing sing along with [name] lockdown sessions on Thursdays...And I do believe...it’s that passion for seeing somebody’*. Also, for example, one of the micro-enterprises had characteristics of ‘born global’ and described themselves as ‘covid-proof’ because they developed an app: *‘Technology is now here...now only our creativity holds us back’* (Blue).

The respondents found going online was helpful and encouraging: *‘Don’t, don’t, don’t lose it [passion]. Try and find outlets to maintain it... the museums have fought back. You can go online. You can hear people talking about it, you know even theatres are coming back. And the film world is still surviving. Don’t lose your passion, because if you lose your passion. You’re losing a bit of your soul and I think that’s really not a good idea’* (Violet).

#### *Passion for persistent seeking opportunity*

Use of technology as well as meeting people were opportunities that fuelled passion. For example, a hi-tech singer-songwriter met weekly with a musical associate; and this face-to-face with one other person fuelled and intensified their entrepreneurial passion. It was positively contagious between the two people and this resulted in what they considered high creative performance in lockdown: *‘Wrote thirty songs in lockdown...I ended up singing...any problems...we’ve worked round it’* (Pink). Also, *‘Doing it remote is a nightmare. To keep that going from a passionate point of view is really difficult. But we kept going’* (Violet). Overall, persistent opportunity-seeking was evident.

#### *Passion for creativity*

Passion intensified for online opportunities, and this led to creative solutions specific to the context of lockdown. Anticipating the launch of a creative venture was a point of deeper entrepreneurial passion. For example, a former designer turned painter set up an online art class with a florist delivery company: *'I do a Zoom live paint along master class... the peak of passion is just before it'*, and later added: *'Stay curious... with passion be interested...which is mindfulness'* (Viridian). Another example was a designer who started a new creative venture; they posted graphics about the pandemic on social media, branded the venture and designed a website. These images became a book which was then sold for charity. This experience was intense and obsessive which is illustrated in the following quotation: *'I combined the crisis with my creativity...that was obsessive...one thousand posts...and I published a book'* (Ultramarine). Another designer had a passion for starting-up a creative social enterprise. They spotted an opportunity and persisted: *'[The] goal was to help the graduates, the redundant and furloughed in the design industry...brilliant'* (Violet). Overall, creative solutions were abundant and applied to profit and not-for-profit ventures.

#### *Confidence*

Entrepreneurial passion and confidence were inter-connected and became playful which fuelled creative output. One participant in this group stood out as being almost euphorically passionate during the interview. *'Confidence is key with passion'* (Pink). Passion for successful creative ventures fuelled confidence.

#### *Passion for learning*

Passion for learning was evidenced across both visual and performing artists. Some of the participants learned how to switch on their passion at will and this was a useful tool when showcasing via Zoom: *'[I] need to meet people fired up with passion. I do exercise, dancing, meditation...get to a state of mind. I answer questions out loud to myself...It's an inner rehearsal getting energised ... So, keep learning. Learning is the key to passion... Keeping curious'* (Crimson). Another participant learned self-awareness to control their passion: *'You can get blinded by passion. Don't get too passionate'* (Red). Learning how to self-control and switch passion on and off was evident.

#### *Creative identity*

Each participant described having a passion for their creative pursuit. All of the participants were founder-inventors of their product or service. Additionally, each reported other passions which were wide ranging and included, passion for politics, people, learning, marketing, helping good causes and building relationships. These passions were integrated into their unique identities. Creative identity was clearly evident in connection with entrepreneurial passion: *'Passion means our purpose of unleashing the power of design to change the world for good...it's a blind date with a customer ... [I] show passion and creative entrepreneurship [to] clients'* (Blue). Everybody was passionate about their creative venture and described themselves as a 'creative'.

#### *Financial recovery goals*

Striving goals were held by the most financially successful entrepreneurs, however, formal goal setting was not evident. Instead, goals centred around physically getting back to offices and studios. Goals for gaining new clients were also discussed. For some respondents, the year 2020-2021 was 'the best': *'We've not stopped working throughout lockdown on Harry Potter*



and Tokyo 2023 and London 2024 ... One of our best years ever' (Violet). The primary goals were to reunite with colleagues in the physical space and continue to build their client base.

Table 3. Artistic transitions in the Shining theme.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Transition of artistic activity</b>	<b>Illustrative quotation</b>
Blue	Founder branding designer turned network founder and app developer. Passion for design and people.	<i>It is a romance... blind date with a consumer... That's fantastic... [getting] clients to engage because they feed off that passion.</i>
Crimson	Dancer and choreographer turned theatre in business director/coach turned online. Passion for theatre and people.	<i>There's nothing like that live experience of creating something together in the space it's a bit of magic.</i>
Green	Painter author and charity champion turned new product maker. Passion for painting and a cause.	<i>Even throughout my law degree I was, painting. I would vanish for days on end [painting].</i>
Navy	Designer, music band leader; employee engagement founder winner streamed concert. Passion for design and people.	<i>My passion is employee experience, and we have worked...with some of the most prestigious brands in the world.</i>
Pink	Youth pop star turned jingle composer; cause advocate, turned album writer-singer. Passion for music and a cause.	<i>We just kept going up... [alongside celebrities] Grace Jones, Toyah, Cliff Richard...Leo Sayer.</i>
Red	Singer founder of global touring political punk band with record label developed album. Passion for politics, music and a cause.	<i>...Performing live on stage in a personal memorial was a pinch me moment.</i>
Scarlet	Dancer turned theatre founder/stage production director turned online interviewer. Passion for dance and a cause.	<i>Physical theatre...allowed me to use my body to tell the stories that I was so passionate about as well and so excited about and so drawn to.</i>
Ultramarine	RCA illustrator and agency founder turned brand consultant and author. Passion for design.	<i>People ask me when I'm going to retire. I will say never because it's not a job it's a passion.</i>
Violet	RCA founder of museum and attraction outfitting started a good cause in lockdown. Passion for retail interior design and people.	<i>...one of my dream projects... MoMA... And we won it... And it was just incredible. It was just incredible.</i>
Viridian	Flower painter turned innovative home-delivery based online art facilitator. Passion for painting and multimedia.	<i>It's about images really, and imagery and capturing those and we use them turning them into paint or into digital or into film, and again music... I still love multimedia. I love to see images [with] music.</i>

**Theme 2: Subdued**

The group of creatives who had ‘subdued’ entrepreneurial passion were low-tech hands-on creatives who had sporadic entrepreneurial passion. Due to the pandemic, they did not network or regularly attend art galleries, concert halls and city places. They also did not mention using social media.

*Reduced make-do creativity*

Passion intensified sporadically with occasional small group face-to-face networking opportunities, as mentioned by Olive: ‘I exhibited with a jeweller in Oxford Art Shows... we collaborated...now I’m still making the [sculpted] trees because people need hope’. Faded passion came from sparse physical networking but their low-tech adoption prevented opportunity seeking, which reduced their creative output.

*Financing*

This group was focused on gaining access to financial support, rather than creating new business models for their ventures. For example, a bank loan led to creative problem solving in a practical hands-on manner leading to a new supply chain via a nursing home: ‘I got no government funding. I took a bounce-back loan because it’s the cheapest I’ll ever get’ (Sage). Limited use of technology could be identified in the ‘subdued’ group, which limited online passion display, but this was in combination with a strong hands-on approach as well as sporadic and unstructured creative entrepreneurial activities.

Table 4. Artistic transitions in the Subdued theme.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Transition of artistic activity</b>	<b>Illustrative quotation</b>
Olive	Metal sculptor with Sotheby’s sales turned collaborator-maker with undelivered orders. Passion for sculpture.	<i>The Sotheby’s connection was... very exciting to, you know, see my work, put in an auction and sell for a lot of money.</i>
Rose	Musician conductor and radio/television commentator turned online facilitator. Passion for music and people.	<i>Royal Albert Hall...nearest I get to in terms of that sort of performing ecstasy...all of the stars align.</i>
Sage	Figurative model-maker and public bronze monument sculptor turned home maker. Passion for sculpture.	<i>It’s kind of escapism for me. [My public sculpture fee was] £64,000, I would pick up the cheque... just weird. You know, it’s like, you can get paid for taking mud out the ground, creating something which you know is [now] beautiful.</i>

**Theme 3: Struggling**

This final ‘struggling’ group consisted of creatives who were previously financially and artistically active and successful, but this was halted by the pandemic. Lilac felt ‘reluctant’ and ‘war torn’ by personal business issues, the 2008 global financial crisis, Brexit and then COVID-

19: *'Rather than having one crash and getting another one, you might as well add them all together'*. Another participant mentioned: *'With COVID everything fell off a cliff overnight'* (Vermillion).

*Sparce technology use*

Use of social media was ad-hoc and un-prioritised. Vermillion commented: *'Social media is dark. I don't need to write my life story. I don't need to do anything other than stay in touch'*. And Lilac said: *'I found that using video communication on making presentations to clients is actually something that I wish was around a long time before'*.

*Taking fewer opportunities, solutions and goals*

Evidence can be found for ambiguous goals and lack of confidence. Persistence was waning and there was a focus only on non-tech networking: *'When I'm absolutely adamant [about what] I have to do now.... we can start getting around and meeting and talking to people in a face to face'* (Lilac) or *'Gradually, voice work has started to come back...I'm kind of hopeful things will work out...the next job will always come along'* (Vermillion). The entrepreneurial passion of the respondents in this group faded over time, which led to low take up on opportunities, as well as limited creativity and persistence. However, they engaged in exploration of local freelance work. Their passion was not extinguished: *'Passion keeps you going when you're getting nowhere.... I don't have a passion for journalism, it was just a job...my passion is film and theatre... passion isn't a focus on money'*.

*Uncertain financial recovery*

Respondents in this group were struggling to survive and recovery of their plans with this regard was unstructured and uncertain: *'So, I said just get through this...I would survive on £200 per week...so it's now £250 per week...but you just need to survive. I was lucky I worked for [local charities] so I could survive. I was spending less'* (Vermillion). The struggling group were creatives whose entrepreneurial passion was fading. The participants engaged only in sparce projects. The group did not promote themselves, did not use social media and preferred physical networking. Lack of confidence prevented them from seeking new opportunities and creative solutions.

Table 5. Artistic transitions in the Struggling theme.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Transition of artistic activity</b>	<b>Illustrative quotation</b>
Lilac	Architectural founder turned constructionist, lost solvency and re-founded consultancy. Passion for architectural design.	<i>It's... a sheer and a pure love of what you do...it's the reward of the sheer enjoyment, which is just as valuable as the reward of the project itself... the enjoyment of the process.</i>
Vermillion	Journalist, international actor and voice-over artist turned online facilitator. Passion for acting and voice-overs.	<i>Film in London...it was brilliant. I loved, I love, playing the bad guy.</i>

***Transition from before to during COVID-19***

A significant transition factor was the shift from mass social gatherings in gigs, concert halls, festivals, theatres and art galleries and exhibitions. In these places there was previous abundant opportunity for face-to-face networking and deepening of professional business relationships.

In the crisis, creatives were obliged to work from home in combination with 'ad hoc' working in recording studios and other creative places during short times of unlock. The following example illustrates how entrepreneurial passion has transitioned from intense to slightly faded, in a punk musician; whose creative practice is to leap off the stage into a 'mosh pit' area of fans (BBC, 2021). This 'chunked' section of narrative (Gibbs, 2014) is evocative of the contextual transition of the before and after crisis context.

**Pre-Covid-19:** *'I jump over the barrier and into the crowd of people who've been in that mosh pit and... just disappear in the crowd.... When the song finishes, and you're sweating you've got a massive grin on your face ... you're all in unison because that song made you feel part of something special. That's music, that's passion in music, you know, and bands can't interact with that crowd [now], that's crazy. Then there's something wrong eating at you, you know. You'd see us jumping about... absolute lunatics because we're having so much fun on stage. Because it breeds, you know. They see us really having a good time. It's infectious'* (Red).

**During-Covid-19:** *'We're just on that doorstep now of getting back out to what we call normality where we go back out to drink with friends, go to shows...and that's what's been missing ... people being close in mosh pits and things... they can't wait till next year...But I think I'm just gonna wait a bit. Just in case'* (Red).

To sum up, the participants' intense entrepreneurial passion for a product/service was fuelled by physical human interaction; it is seen as 'infectious' and 'fun'. Yet, the pandemic lockdown context made the passionate creatives more risk-avoidant in their entrepreneurial behaviour.

## **Discussion**

This section outlines further theorising and concludes with a model reflecting the role of creatives' entrepreneurial passion in their careers in times of crisis. Entrepreneurial passion in creatives does 'fade' in times of crisis, but it is not extinguished. Furthermore, it is displayed in different ways which have been categorised here into three groups: Shining, Subdued and Struggling. The discussion has been arranged according to these themes, followed by discussion of overall patterns of transitions experienced by creatives during the crisis of the pandemic and the role of passion in these transitions.

### **Theme 1: Shining**

The key features of the 'shining' entrepreneurial passion group during lockdown was that they all had a passion for their creative product-service. This applies to Cardon et al., (2017) and their study of sources of 'passion for what'. Furthermore, what they had a passion for was also what they were good at. This type of passion was fuelled by high levels of self-efficacy. Passion and confidence were intertwined in this group. Self-belief was an essential ingredient of the participants' entrepreneurial passion. Also, creatives in this group effectively embraced technology, although none described themselves as a 'tech entrepreneur' (Yitshaki and Kropp, 2016). Participants in this group stayed 'curious' and described themselves as 'inspired' and 'motivated' (Bhasling et al., 2018). At times, their passion became an 'obsessive' uncontrollable urge (Vallerand, et al., 2003), but rather than seeing this as negative, some recognised this as an opportunity to achieve high performance levels measured for example by high volume of 'likes' on a social media post. This extreme intensity of immersion in creative process can be described as 'absorption' (Cardon et al., 2009; Iyortsuun et al.,2019); and this was a feature of this group. Passion supported persistence and creativity (Cardon et al., 2013)

and increased the amount of time spent on creative activities (Murnieks et al., 2014). High 'performance' was in 'concordance' with creatives' entrepreneurial passion, which echoes the findings about creative entrepreneurs in 'rock n' roll' presented by Schulte-Holthaus and Kuckertz (2020). Highly effective networking in this group was positively reflected in artists' venture performance (Mylonas and Petridou, 2018). Creatives in this group learned how to switch their passion on and off. This has implications for training and education to support creative entrepreneurs to learn how to self-ignite their entrepreneurial passion when they need it. Finally, this 'Shining' group had strategic vision for their entrepreneurial ventures. Their survival strategies focused around continued use of technology with a passion for building relationships to enable business and artistic development.

Overall, there were 'shining' examples from both visual and performing artists about how to embrace entrepreneurial passion for venture performance. To sustain the business, they embraced technology as an enabling factor to increase business value (Ward and Daniel, 2012). Furthermore, their entrepreneurial passion was displayed via goal setting, entrepreneurial behaviour and effectiveness. Entrepreneurial learning represented an additional factor within the transitional entrepreneurial process (St-Louis and Vallerand, 2015) which is significant and warrants further exploration.

### ***Theme 2: Subdued***

There were tinges of sadness in this group's stories. The entrepreneurial passion of respondents in this group was 'subdued' during lockdown. Their passion appeared to 'fade', but it did not disappear (Collewaert et al., 2016). Participants in this group were over-reliant on face-to-face business development and did not embrace technological opportunities. While they would benefit from leveraging innovative digital solutions (Uhl and Gollenia, 2014), their wings were clipped by reduced hands-on assistance and no access to concert hall venues. This indicates a lack of confidence to pivot online in order to live stream their artistry, unlike the Shining group who developed digital strategies. Interestingly, one creative entrepreneur found an alternative supply chain as a display of passion-driven creative problem solving. The other two seized opportunities to exhibit and record soundtracks during times of unlock. This making-do formed 'bricolage' which represented strategies for artistic survival in this group during the pandemic (Stenholm and Renko, 2016).

Participants' aspirations in this group were decreased during the lockdowns. At the same time, they actively engaged in family-related activities; they were full of gratitude for this and full of hope in this area of their life. Indeed, one of the participants created a sculpture with 'hope' in the title, which can be interpreted as harmonious passion in the successful creative process (St-Louis and Vallerand, 2015). Furthermore, passion as intense emotional energy can rise from hope. It can positively connect to a collective identity which then leads to action (Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019; Ruebottom and Auster, 2018). Overall, passion in this group 'faded' during the pandemic (Collewaert et al., 2016). While they did not fully embrace technology to access their audiences and client-base, there was hope, make-do bricolage and desperation to find sources of government funding.

### ***Theme 3: Struggling***

Few of the respondents stood out for being in a position of struggling to survive artistically and financially. All had previous successful enterprising ventures for longer than twenty years. For example, Lilac had a business model that collapsed when switching from architectural

consulting to construction. The resulting insolvency was described as a ‘passion-killer’ episode. However, despite this, Lilac retained childhood-based passion for architecture, but without clear perspective or funding. The other, Vermilion, an established actor was ‘having to survive’ when government funding was not found. The respondent retained passion for acting, but with high level of uncertainty. These two narratives were slightly more chaotic compared to the others. For example, Lilac said: “*You want a passion killer. That’s where you go...Because all of a sudden, the business model changed.*”

Participants in this group had lost confidence and found themselves unable to mobilise financial resources. They were reluctant to find new opportunities via use of technology. But they were also unwilling to give up their identity as a passionate creative. Their identity appeared to remain stable and driven by the passion to do projects; in the end arts-related performance is however not only about profits (Paige and Literell, 2002). There was a lack of self-efficacy (Cardon and Kirk, 2015) and a focus on survival (DeTienne et al., 2008).

### ***The role of passion in creatives’ transitions during the pandemic***

Contextually the study is time-bound and represents transitions from pre-COVID-19 to during the pandemic.

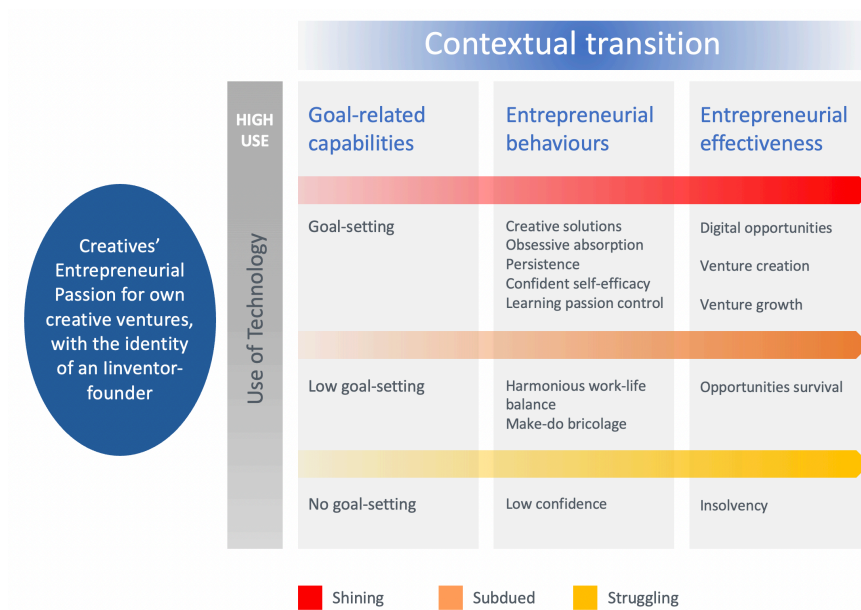
The pandemic lockdowns and social distancing made people lonely and one way to tackle this was to more intensively use technology (Shah et al., 2021). There were issues over readiness regarding such transition (Priambodo et al., 2021). The creatives’ technological resources, skills and willingness were inadequate in the Subdued and Struggling groups. Indeed, Priambodo et al. (2021) point out that the level of readiness steers business continuity in a volatile business environment. Passion for engagement with informational technologies represented important characteristics supporting necessary transitions. The study participants also experienced decline in subjective well-being, life-evaluation and identification of positive affect, which echoes the difficulties experienced during the 2008-09 recession in the USA (Collewaert et al., 2016).

The pandemic crisis was a time of home-working and new online working routines. The prospect of crowds rubbing together at gigs was guarded against, yet it is this mass crowd togetherness that normally fuels passion. Workplace ‘buzz’ impacts entrepreneurial passion (Bhansing, et al., 2017) yet COVID-19 restrictions isolated people and extinguished the stimulating buzz of studios and physical meeting places for creatives. There was also less opportunity to be aesthetically stimulated (Waistel, 2016). Places of creative enterprise in combination with the volatile livelihoods of creatives stirred up the precarious balance (Comunian and England, 2020).

The pandemic brought abrupt change to routines and livelihoods (Kapoor and Kaufman, 2020). Adopting daily routines of posting artworks on social media was applicable to all the ‘Shining’ passion creative entrepreneurs, but not to creatives in the other two groups. Instead, some creatives turned their passion towards charitable causes, which aided their sensemaking of the COVID-19 crisis. One way to heal and aid sense-making in the face of adversity is to engage in ‘writing cure’ (Kapoor and Kaufman, 2020) and two of the elite design-based creative entrepreneurs did this by writing a book and scribing a memoir. Indeed, creative activity was connected with being in the ‘flow’ and being ‘zen’ by two of the respondents. This approach represented harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), which enabled resilience and coping strategies in a crisis (Kapoor and Kaufman, 2020).

The following conceptual model captures the role of passion of creative entrepreneurial activities in a crisis.

**Figure 1.** ‘Model of Creatives’ Entrepreneurial Passion in Times of Crisis’ which further develops the generic model suggested by Cardon et al. (2017).



This model displays the creatives’ entrepreneurial passion for their own creative ventures (Cardon et al., 2017) of which they are the inventor-founder (Cardon et al., 2009). The model also features context and the mediating factor of use of technology and lists inter-connected features underneath each arrow bar.

In the three themes, the red arrow is ‘shining’ and indicates depth of obsessive passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) and persistence and survival (DeTienne et al., 2008) while capitalising on digital opportunities. The orange arrow is ‘subdued’ and this ‘fades’ over time and it is more akin to harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) and bricolage is a feature (Stenholm and Renko, 2016). The ‘struggling’ yellow arrow represents ‘faded’ entrepreneurial passion (Collewaert et al., 2016).

**Conclusion**

This study was set up to investigate the role of passion in creative entrepreneurs facing crisis. The research reported here suggests that entrepreneurial passion impacted the strategies creative communities adopted in the times of the recent pandemic crisis. Those strategies can be grouped into three themes deriving from the coding of the data: Shining, Subdued and Struggling. Passion for creative use of the information technology such as social media or

communication platforms, along with passion for learning and adaptation of agile behaviours has been identified as the main differentiating characteristics. ‘Shining’ creatives achieved high success venture performance. They made good use of technology, were open to learning and opportunity identification. They were confident and expressed higher self-efficacy. Interestingly, they seemed to be also able to self-manage their entrepreneurial passion, switching it on and off when required. The study participants in this group were more prone to exhibit persistent entrepreneurial behaviour and more likely to develop innovative creative solutions. Many adopted bricolage and effectuation as circumstances kept changing. The ‘Subdued’ creatives’ venture performance success was considerably less stable or positive, with many ups and downs. Participants in this category were showed to be slow and unconvinced adopters of technology and other innovative methods even when their existing business model was no longer suitable or viable. They were more concerned with harmony in their environment and work-life balance and focused on pursuing sources of funding and loans to aid survival. On the contrary, ‘Struggling’ creatives were neglectful of opportunities presented by information technology. Their entrepreneurial passion had faded, however, it was not extinguished. They used make-do bricolage to survive. Their survival strategies were unclear and their confidence was low.

The main theoretical contribution of the study is to the theory of entrepreneurial passion (Cardon et al., 2013; Cardon and Kirk, 2015; Cardon et al., 2017; Vallerand 2015), by considering the subject within the context of the creative industries and the crisis of the pandemic (see Figure 1).

The study also has implications for practice of participants in the Creative and Cultural Sector as well as for the public policy support of them in the times of crisis. Our recommendations respond to the issues derived from the findings and are aimed at strengthening the sector for increased resilience and economic recovery (Ratten, 2021). First, we suggest the establishment of sector specific online university courses for creatives, including university apprenticeship programmes. To complement this, training in confidence-building, goal-setting and digital literacy is recommended. Second, crisis funding for freelance actors and those who have experienced insolvency is required. This could be a peer support scheme for creatives or a governmental initiative. Third, it is recommended that creatives engage in storytelling to heal and aid sense-making.

The present study has a number of limitations that further research could aim to overcome. First, the investigation has been limited to British creatives who operated within a specific system of national restrictions as well as support schemes. While similar schemes were introduced in Europe and other countries, they differed in terms of scope and followed different temporal patterns. Second, our work represents only an initial advance into the study of the role of passion in times of crisis within the Creative and Cultural Sector. Our results could be extended by quantitative work to allow generalisations. Thirdly, more detailed investigation into experiences of participants with different contextual characteristics such as a profession, gender or size of their enterprise could bring important further insights and allow comparisons.

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