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How Does Entrepreneurial Institutional Environment Influence Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation? The Mediation Role of Individual Creativity

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ABSTRACT
In the study of entrepreneurship, the external entrepreneurial environment is a very important factor affecting entrepreneurial behavior and performance. Among them, institutional environment has attracted the attention of scholars because of its incentive and restrictive role in innovation strategy selection and performance. Complex institutional environment can induce different strategic decisions. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to analyse the tendency of entrepreneurs' strategic choice intention, that is, the individual entrepreneurial orientation, from the perspective of institutional environment. Based on this, this paper proposes two questions: first is what differentiated impact the different dimensions of the institutional environment will have on entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation. Second, what is the intermediary mechanism of the institutional environment affecting the entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation. Our study makes contributions to the entrepreneurship literature by enriching the entrepreneurial orientation research from the organizational level to the individual level, discussing the entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation based on the institutional environment, further revealing the interaction mechanism between entrepreneurs and institutional environment, which is different from the theoretical viewpoints that emphasize the intrinsic mechanism of entrepreneurs to promote entrepreneurship, and making up for the insufficiency of previous studies in the simplification of institutional environment dimension.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial institutional environment, individual entrepreneurial orientation, individual creativity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting a business is a development process in which entrepreneurs respond to, continuously improve and adapt to the environment, and this process of improving and adapting to the external environment often leads to the "innovation" [1]. In the study of entrepreneurship, the external entrepreneurial environment is a very important factor affecting entrepreneurship [2]. Among them, institutional environment has attracted the attention of scholars because of its incentive and restrictive role in innovation strategy selection and performance [3]. Complex institutional environment can induce different strategic decisions [4]. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to analyse the tendency of entrepreneurs' strategic choice from the perspective of institutional environment, that is, the individual entrepreneurial orientation. Based on this, this paper proposes two questions: first is what differentiated impact the different dimensions of the institutional environment will have on entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation. Second, what is the intermediary mechanism of the institutional environment affecting the entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation.

Our study makes four contributions to the entrepreneurship literature. Firstly, this article improves the research on the antecedents of individual entrepreneurial orientation. Previous research on entrepreneurial orientation is mostly based on the firm level, not the individual, which primarily studied the influence of entrepreneurial orientation on entrepreneurial performance and success, but there's still a research gap on how IEO is generated. Therefore, our study empirically investigates the antecedents of IEO. Secondly, different from the theoretical viewpoints that emphasize the intrinsic mechanism of entrepreneurs to promote entrepreneurship, this paper discusses the entrepreneurs' IEO based on the institutional environment, further reveals the interaction mechanism between entrepreneurs and institutional environment, and enriches the research results of entrepreneurship theory. Thirdly, from the perspective of creativity, this paper reveals the transmission mechanism between the institutional environment and the individual entrepreneurial orientation. Fourthly, this paper analyses the action mechanism of different dimensions of institutional environment on the differentiated influence of individual entrepreneurial orientation, which makes up for the

insufficiency of previous studies in the simplification of institutional environment dimension.

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Institutional Environment and IEO

The entrepreneurial institutional environment is a formal and informal institutional framework for entrepreneurship [5]. Institution has a great influence on the entrepreneurs' strategic orientation. In fact, the entrepreneurs' strategic decision reflects the opportunities or limitations contained in the institutional environment [4]. According to the upper echelon theory proposed by Hambrick and Mason [6], the entrepreneurial behaviour and performance of firms was determined by the strategic tendency and choices of entrepreneurs, which is commonly described as the individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO) [7]. Therefore, we proposed the first research question of our study: what differentiated impact the different dimensions of the institutional environment will have on entrepreneurs' IEO.

The entrepreneurial process is embedded in the institutional environment, and a good institutional environment will create a fair and favourable environment for entrepreneurial activities [8]. It is conducive to entrepreneurs' fair access to resources, so as to improve their strategic choice for entrepreneurship and guide innovative entrepreneurial activities. In addition, a fair and perfect legal system and effective constraints on government rights can not only avoid excessive government regulation and inhibit entrepreneurial activities, but also prevent opportunists from rent-seeking activities [9]. Therefore, it's conducive to stimulating entrepreneurs' IEO. In this institutional environment, individuals will regard the success of others' entrepreneurship as an incentive to themselves, and believe that if they start their own businesses, they can improve their economic conditions and social status like them [10]. In the face of various resources and entrepreneurial opportunities provided by the entrepreneurial institutional environment, the task of IEO is to fully identify and develop these opportunities to continuously create new profit points [11]. From this point of view, entrepreneurs' IEO is the strategic and adaptive response to entrepreneurial institutional environment. Entrepreneurial institutional environment, to a large extent, improves enterprise innovation performance through the implementation of entrepreneurs' IEO.

According to the new institutional theory, the enterprise's behaviour and the result must conform to the legitimacy requirement of the environment [12]. The legitimacy of entrepreneurial and innovative activities comes from the requirements of regulation, norms and cognition contained in the institutional framework [13]. As for new enterprises, the behaviour and strategic choice of enterprises mainly come from their entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial teams, so the regulations, norms and cognition under the institutional framework have an important influence on entrepreneurs' IEO. Specifically:

Entrepreneurial regulations in institutional environment mainly includes regulations and government policies that can promote innovation and venture capital, promote enterprises to obtain entrepreneurial resources and reduce the risk of failure [14]. A sound intellectual property protection system, government-funded projects and tax relief and other policies can stimulate the willingness of entrepreneurs to choose entrepreneurship-oriented strategies [15]. Perfect laws and regulations can ensure the smooth implementation of entrepreneurs' IEO, so as to obtain better entrepreneurial performance. Therefore, a good entrepreneurial regulatory environment has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurs' IEO.

Entrepreneurial norms in institutional environment, as people's recognition of entrepreneurial activities and innovative ideas [16], entrepreneurial norms in institutional environment stipulate how enterprises innovate and how to pursue innovative results. The culture, beliefs and norms of the environment entrepreneurs live in will influence their entrepreneurial orientation [17]. In general, the environment with a low degree of uncertainty avoidance will help entrepreneurs to take proactive and innovative strategic stances [18]. Therefore, good entrepreneurial norm environment has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurs' IEO.

Entrepreneurial cognition refers to the structure of innovation and entrepreneurial knowledge shared by people, which is reflected in entrepreneurial opportunity identification and development as well as operational management ability [19]. An institutional environment with a high degree of entrepreneurial awareness is the foundation for both entrepreneurs and employees to take entrepreneurship as their strategic orientation, which is conducive to entrepreneurs and enterprises to timely and accurately grasp entrepreneurial opportunities, effectively deal with entrepreneurial risks and problems, and successfully transform them into entrepreneurial performance [20]. Therefore, good entrepreneurial cognition environment has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurs' IEO.

Above, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Institutional environment has a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurs' IEO.

H1a: Entrepreneurial regulations have a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurs' IEO.

H1b: Entrepreneurial norms have a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurs' IEO.

H1c: Entrepreneurial cognition have a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurs' IEO.

2.2. Individual Creativity and IEO

Creativity affects entrepreneurial activities in many ways. For example, people with high creativity are more likely to adopt divergent thinking, which is helpful to generate more and better entrepreneurial ideas, thus affecting the growth of enterprises [21]; creativity helps to enhance innovation, which is one of the key dimensions of entrepreneurship;

creativity is also essential to both organization and resource integration [22]. However, the specific discussion on the relationship between creativity and the entrepreneurs' IEO has not been well studied theoretically and empirically.

The logic of the impact of entrepreneurs' creativity on their IEO includes the following points. Firstly, compared with the mature task, the inherent innovation requirements of entrepreneurial activities make people with high creativity tend to maintain a positive attitude towards entrepreneurial activities [23], and feel that their precious creativity is more likely to play in entrepreneurial activities than in other jobs. Secondly, entrepreneurs with high creativity are more likely to have stronger confidence and self-efficacy in their own creativity [24], and are more capable of starting businesses and expecting good results. Thirdly, with the goal of achieving new forms of value and taking the lead in action, entrepreneurs will take measures to continuously stimulate novel and useful ideas to support their development of products, services and processes that distinguish them from their competitors [25]. Coupled with the imitability of competitive advantage, entrepreneurs must keep new ideas flowing throughout the organization. Creativity is the essence of entrepreneurship [26]. The higher the creativity of entrepreneurs, the more entrepreneurial resources will be transferred to creative activities, and the higher entrepreneurial orientation will be. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Individual creativity has a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurs' IEO.

2.3. The Mediating Role of Individual Creativity

Perfect laws, regulations and intellectual property rights protection system can fully protect entrepreneurs and encourage them to give full play to their creativity for innovation [27], so as to improve their strategic choice tendency for entrepreneurship. If entrepreneurs are in an institutional environment with high recognition of entrepreneurial activities and innovative ideas, they will be encouraged to generate more innovative ideas and take the initiative to make proactive and innovative strategic choices [28]. An entrepreneurial cognitive environment that encourages innovation and perfect knowledge structure can help entrepreneurs and enterprises correctly identify and grasp entrepreneurial opportunities and turn opportunities and problems into advantages and performance through their own creativity [29]. If entrepreneurs are in an institutional environment with high recognition of entrepreneurial activities and innovative ideas, they will be encouraged to generate more innovative ideas and take the initiative to make proactive and innovative strategic choices [30]. An entrepreneurial cognitive environment that encourages innovation and perfect knowledge structure can help entrepreneurs and enterprises correctly identify and grasp entrepreneurial opportunities and turn opportunities and problems into advantages and performance through their own creativity. Thus, we proposed the hypothesis:

H3: Individual creativity mediates the relationship between institutional environment and IEO.

3. METHOD

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The investigation of this study lasted for 10 months from August 2018 to June 2019. As the social resources of the researcher and the research group are mainly from northeast China, we chose Dalian, Panjin, Shenyang, Changchun and Harbin as the survey sample, and the sample information is mainly from the local business incubator parks and high-tech industrial parks. We collected samples through early contact and later online network research. During the early contact, we first made a brief introduction of this survey, and then established contact information such as We-chat and email address with the survey objects. In the later stage, we collected questionnaires through online network links, so as to facilitate the screening of questionnaires and ensure the quality of effective questionnaires.

Since August 15, 2018, the research group has distributed a total of 300 questionnaires. By June 31, 2019, 264 questionnaires have been recovered, and 23 invalid questionnaires (too short filling time, blank items, etc.) have been excluded. Finally, 241 valid questionnaires have been retained, with an effective recovery rate of 80%.

3.2. Measures

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the measurement, our study adopts the effective scale which has been confirmed for times, and makes appropriate adjustments according to the purpose of the study and the specific situation in China, as a tool for collecting empirical data. The variables were measured by Likert 5 scale, 1 for "completely inconsistent or very low", 5 for "fully consistent or very high".

3.2.1. Institutional environment

To measure the entrepreneurial institutional environment, we employed Busenitz's three sub-dimension scale [31], which includes entrepreneurial regulation (4-item), entrepreneurial norms (4-item) and entrepreneurial cognition (4-item). Cronbach's alpha value for the entrepreneurial regulation subscale is 0.892, for the entrepreneurial norms' subscale is 0.912, and for the entrepreneurial cognition subscale is 0.898.

3.2.2. Individual creativity

Individual creativity was measured using 5 items developed by Teres and Amabile [32], and the Cronbach's alpha value is 0.787.

3.2.3. Individual entrepreneurial orientation

IEO was measured by 10 items developed by Bolton and Lane [7], and the Cronbach's alpha value is 0.850.

3.2.4. Control variables

In this study, gender, age, industry, education background and enterprise size were used as control variables.

3.3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The distribution characteristics of the sample are as follows: among the respondents, 65.56% are male and 34.44% are female. In the terms of industry, the surveyed enterprises involve manufacturing industry (23.25%), service industry (22.57%), software and communication industry (17.76%), financial industry (10.13%), real estate industry (8.49%), energy and environmental protection industry (5.73%), transportation industry (2.77%) and other industries (9.30%). On the whole, the distribution of samples is relatively uniform and there is no over concentration phenomenon (See Table 1).

The mean value, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of variables involved in this study are shown in Table 2. The results of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis show that the mean and standard deviation of each variable are basically within a reasonable range, and the correlation coefficient between variables is basically normal and there is a correlation relationship.

3.4. Reliability and Validity

3.4.1. Reliability

In this study, Cronbach's coefficient and construct factor load were used to test the reliability of the scale. As shown in Table 3, Cronbach's coefficients of variables involved in the study were all higher than the standard of 0.700, and the combined reliability (CR) exceeded the critical value of 0.700, indicating that the scale has a high level of reliability.

3.4.2. Validity

For the maturity scale, the validity level can be tested directly by confirmatory factor analysis. In this study, Amos 24 was used for confirmatory factor analysis. The results showed that χ^2/df (< 3), CFI (> 0.900), RMSEA (< 0.08) and other indexes were in a good range, GFI and AGFI were also within the acceptable range (> 0.800), and the fitting degree of the model was good.

Table 1 Characteristics of the research samples (N=241)

Control Variables	Item	Frequency	Percentage	Control Variables	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	158	65.56	Industry	Manufacturing	56	23.25
	Female	83	34.44		Service	54	22.57
Age	≤30	50	20.71		Software and communication	44	17.76
	30-35	97	40.36		Financial	25	10.13
	36-40	55	22.67		Real estate	19	8.49
	41-45	24	9.93		Energy and environmental protection	14	5.73
	≥46	15	6.33		Transportation	7	2.77
					Other	22	9.30
Educational Background	High School	26	10.65	Enterprise size	≤50	27	11.20
	Bachelor	114	47.33		51-100	47	19.50
	Master	57	23.7		101-150	75	31.12
	Doctor	21	8.66		151-200	65	26.97
	Others	23	9.66		≥200	27	11.21

Table 2 Descriptive **statistics and correlations (N=241)**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender										
2 Age	-0.045									
3 Industry	0.308**	0.309**								
4Educational Background	0.179**	-0.042	0.164*							
5 Enterprise Size	-0.003	0.339**	0.208**	-0.013						
6 Entrepreneurial	-0.054	-0.208**	-0.237	0.048	-0.145*	0.792				

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Regulation										
7 Entrepreneurial Norm	.095	-0.195**	0.017	-0.080	-0.066	0.083	0.805			
8 Entrepreneurial Cognition	0.025	-0.144*	-0.051	0.020	0.038	0.099	0.361**	0.910		
9Individual Creativity	0.006	-0.188**	0.002	0.025	-0.163*	0.245**	0.436**	0.455**		
10 IEO	0.025	-0.236**	-0.021	0.036	-0.139*	0.293**	0.568**	0.543**	0.818**	
Mean	1.449	2.304	5.672	2.700	3.566	3.233	3.955	3.698	3.853	3.642
S.D.	0.554	1.424	2.038	1.218	1.502	1.039	0.885	0.844	0.690	0.689

N=241, *p < 0.05 (two-tailed test), **p < 0.01 (two-tailed test), ***p<0.001(two-tailed test)

Table 3 Reliability of construct measures (N=241)

Variables	Factor loading	Variables	Factor loading
Entrepreneurial Regulation	0.892	Individual Creativity	0.787
ER1	0.885	IC1	0.704
ER2	0.846	IC2	0.707
ER3	0.858	IC3	0.723
ER4	0.851	IC4	0.774
Entrepreneurial Norm	0.912	IC5	0.783
EN1	0.893	Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.850
EN2	0.882	IEO1	0.830
EN3	0.882	IEO2	0.830
EN4	0.880	IEO3	0.828
Entrepreneurial Cognition	0.898	IEO4	0.831
EC1	0.887	IEO5	0.826
EC2	0.874	IEO6	0.831
EC3	0.844	IEO7	0.825
EC4	0.858	IEO8	0.832
		IEO9	0.841
		IEO10	0.835

Table 4 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Variables	IC		IEO		IEO	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Control Variables						
Gender	-0.030	-0.054	-0.010	-0.044	0.013	-0.001
Age	-0.176	-0.054	-0.111	-0.063	-0.125	-0.072
Industry	0.090	0.112	0.022	0.087	0.146	0.163
Educational Background	0.007	0.014	0.009	0.036	-0.153	-0.066
Enterprise size	-0.122	-0.149	-0.034	-0.101	-0.012	-0.013
Independent Variables						
Entrepreneurial Regulation		0.134**		0.189***		
Entrepreneurial Norm		0.196***		0.346***		
Entrepreneurial Cognition		0.376***		0.409***		
Individual Creativity						0.290***
R^2	0.053	0.289	0.064	0.458	0.042	0.345
Adjusted R^2	0.030	0.260	0.040	0.436	0.018	0.314
F Value	2.259	10.056***	2.738	20.907***	1.734	11.229***

N=241, *p < 0.05 (two-tailed test), **p < 0.01 (two-tailed test), ***p<0.001(two-tailed test)

4. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The research uses the hierarchical regression analysis method and SPSS 20. to estimate and evaluate the direct and indirect contributions of entrepreneurial institutional environment on IEO. And the mediating effects were tested by using the bootstrap procedure in Amos 24.0, and the bootstrap sample of 2000 was specified (See Table 4).

Model 4 shows that the entrepreneurial regulation, norm and cognition had significant positive effects on IEO specifically, which confirm the validity of H1a, H1b and H1c. Model 6 shows that the individual creativity has a significant positive effect on IEO, confirming the validity of H2.

According to Baron et al. [33], if the significance between the independent variable and the dependent variable weakens after the introduction of the mediating variable, it is a partial mediating effect, and if it becomes insignificant, it is a complete mediating effect.

After introducing the intermediary variable individual creativity, the influence of the entrepreneurial institutional environment on IEO is weakened. At the same time, individual creativity and IEO are significantly positively correlated. Therefore, individual creativity plays a part of the mediating role in the impact of the entrepreneurial institutional environment on IEO. Then, using Bootstrapping method to analyse the indirect effect of the mediator variable, the results show that the indirect effect of individual creativity between the institutional environment and IEO is [0.314, 0.473] in the 95% confidence interval, excluding 0, the indirect effect is significant, which further shows that the H3 has been verified.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

This study explores the relationship among the institutional environment, individual creativity and entrepreneurs' IEO. The results show that the entrepreneurial regulatory environment, normative environment and cognitive environment have a significant positive impact on entrepreneurs' individual creativity. Specifically, good entrepreneurial regulatory environment, sound intellectual property protection system, government funded projects and tax reduction and exemption policies can encourage entrepreneurs to choose entrepreneurial oriented strategies; entrepreneurial normative environment with low degree of uncertainty avoidance and high public recognition of entrepreneurial activities and innovative ideas can help entrepreneurs take a proactive and innovative strategic attitude. And the institutional environment with a high degree of entrepreneurial awareness is conducive to entrepreneurs to accurately grasp entrepreneurial opportunities and effectively deal with entrepreneurial risks.

Secondly, from the perspective of creativity theory, we find that creativity plays a partial mediating role in the influence of entrepreneurial institutional environment on entrepreneurs' IEO. Specifically, if entrepreneurs are in an institutional environment with high recognition of entrepreneurial activities and innovative ideas, they will be encouraged to generate more innovative ideas and take the initiative to make proactive and innovative strategic choices. An entrepreneurial cognitive environment that encourages innovation and perfect knowledge structure can help entrepreneurs and enterprises correctly identify and grasp entrepreneurial opportunities and turn opportunities and problems into advantages and performance through their own creativity.

5.1. Theoretical Significance

Firstly, this paper responds to the call to extend entrepreneurial orientation research from the organizational level to the individual level. According to the upper echelon theory, the strategic choice of entrepreneurs has an important impact on enterprise behaviour and performance [6]. Therefore, the research on entrepreneurship orientation at the individual level can better understand the reasons for the difference of strategic behaviour and results of new enterprises. Further, our research has improved the empirical research on the antecedents of entrepreneurship orientation at the individual level.

Secondly, different from the theoretical viewpoints that emphasize the intrinsic mechanism of entrepreneurs to promote entrepreneurship, this paper discusses the individual entrepreneurship orientation based on the institutional environment, further reveals the interaction mechanism between entrepreneurs and institutional environment, and enriches the research results of entrepreneurship theory.

Thirdly, from the perspective of creativity, this paper reveals the transmission mechanism between the institutional environment and IEO, and it's a valuable exploration to explain the internal mechanism of entrepreneurial institutional environment IEO. Other mediating variables and moderating variables can be introduced in future research.

Fourthly, this paper analyses the action mechanism of different dimensions of institutional environment on the differentiated influence of IEO, which makes up for the previous studies in the simplification of institutional environment dimension.

5.2. Practical Significance

Firstly, the entrepreneurial institutional environment, such as the intellectual property protection system, government-funded projects and tax relief and other policies, has an important impact on the IEO of entrepreneurs. Therefore, how policy makers provide institutional support for the entrepreneurs of new enterprises in the system design will be the core of policy reform.

Secondly, in the face of the constantly changing and increasingly fierce competitive environment, entrepreneurs

should pay attention to the understanding and evaluation of their IEO to better promote entrepreneurial performance and entrepreneurial results in order to continuously gain competitive advantages.

Thirdly, we should correctly understand the mediating effect of creativity in the entrepreneurial institutional environment on the orientation of individual entrepreneurship. If entrepreneurs are in an institutional environment with high recognition of entrepreneurial activities and innovative ideas, they will be encouraged to generate more innovative ideas and take the initiative to make proactive and innovative strategic choices.

5.3. Limitation and Future Research

Firstly, all the data in the empirical part of this study are static data from the cross section, without in-depth discussion on the enterprise life cycle and dynamic sustainability of growth, so the obtained results are only reflected in the relationship between three variables in a certain growth stage. In addition, the sample size of this study is 241. Therefore, in order to make the research results more universal, subsequent studies should expand the sample size and obtain time series data through continuous tracking.

Secondly, the scale in this paper adopts foreign mature scale, but future research needs to develop local scale in Chinese context according to the actual situation in China.

Thirdly, in this study, the measurement of entrepreneurial institutional environment, individual creativity and entrepreneurship orientation all adopt self-evaluation method, which cannot avoid the problem of same-origin bias and common method bias. Future research could try to adopt the third party evaluation method.

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