

Harmonious and obsessive passion as microfoundations of new venture internationalization

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurs are central to international entrepreneurship research, yet their role has been conceptualized mainly through cognitive lenses that emphasize knowledge and heuristics, while important affective-motivational microfoundations, such as passion, remain underexplored. This omission matters because microfoundational forces, including entrepreneurs' passion, are key to understanding variance in entrepreneurial decision-making and, in turn, heterogeneity in internationalization behavior. Moreover, depending on the type of passion—harmonious or obsessive—entrepreneurs may respond differently to the experiences that arise during international venturing, an activity marked by high stakes and uncertainty. We integrate the dualistic model of passion into the context of new venture internationalization to examine *how harmonious and obsessive passion interrelate with international venturing*. Drawing on 36 semi-structured interviews with international entrepreneurs from Germany, we identify a recursive model that links passion, internationalization behavior, and entrepreneurial identity. Our findings suggest core differences between harmoniously and obsessively passionate entrepreneurs. Harmonious passion fosters *adaptive internationalization* by enabling entrepreneurs to frame foreign complexity as enrichment, experiment with entry moves, and recombine roles, creating a fertile ground for learning and identity expansion. In contrast, obsessive passion fosters *rigid internationalization*, which means that entrepreneurs equate expansion with personal validation and exert tight control to protect a fixed identity. With these findings, we aim to inject affective-motivational microfoundations into international entrepreneurship theory and extend passion research by highlighting harmonious and obsessive pathways within the internationalization context.

1. Introduction

International entrepreneurship (IE) research has developed a rich understanding of how entrepreneurs pursue opportunities in international markets (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005) by drawing on a range of resources at their disposal (Fariborzi et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2011; Schwens et al., 2018). Although the individual entrepreneur is unquestionably center-stage in these elaborations (Coviello, 2015; Weerawardena et al., 2007), the entrepreneur is primarily portrayed as a carrier of knowledge stocks, social capital, or decision heuristics that shape firm-level behavior and outcomes (Santangelo et al., 2025), with little to no attention to individuals' emotions or affective states (Grego et al., 2025).

This view, however, overlooks that entrepreneurs' decision-making is driven not only by cognitions and (social) resources but also hinges

significantly on other microfoundational forces such as their passion (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks, Cardon et al., 2020). Yet the literature offers limited insight into how these affective-motivational microfoundations both shape and are reshaped by internationalization (Santangelo et al., 2025; Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022). This omission is problematic because it reduces decision-makers to "cold" analytical calculators (Brundin et al., 2022), mistakenly conceptualizes emotions and cognitions as antagonists (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), and thus offers an unrealistic account of important strategic decisions such as internationalization (Grego et al., 2025; Maitland & Sammartino, 2015). We follow recent calls to incorporate emotional microfoundations into the study of internationalization to better capture the realities of decision-making (e.g., Grego et al., 2025; Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022), which allows us to better understand *how and why* international venturing unfolds (Santangelo et al., 2025).

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One of the most prominent microfoundational constructs in entrepreneurship research is entrepreneurs' passion (Cardon et al., 2009; Newman et al., 2021). Although decades of research have linked passion to creativity, persistence, venture growth, and performance (Cardon et al., 2009; Drnovsek et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2021; Zhao & Liu, 2023), almost none of that work is part of the internationalization conversation (Adomako & Ahsan, 2022; Andersson & Ghannad, 2025). Importantly, passion is not a unitary force. The dualistic model distinguishes between harmonious passion—in which the entrepreneurial activity is freely and flexibly integrated into the self—and obsessive passion—in which it is rigidly internalized and compels continued engagement, even when it conflicts with other life domains (e.g., Ho & Pollack, 2014; Stroe et al., 2020; Vallerand et al., 2003). Harmonious passion fosters autonomous motivation, openness to feedback, and adaptive goal adjustment, whereas obsessive passion fuels urgency, high-stakes commitment, and reluctance to deviate from a dominant course of action (Bélanger et al., 2013a; Bélanger et al., 2013b; Vallerand, 2015).

These contrasting modes of functioning associated with harmonious and obsessive passion (Kakarika et al., 2022) are likely to play an important role in new venture internationalization. Entrepreneurs driven by harmonious passion may approach foreign expansion as a learning arena—experimenting with entry modes, adapting products to local markets, and pacing commitments in response to changing conditions. In contrast, those driven by obsessive passion may pursue rapid, tightly controlled entries that align with a pre-set vision, double down when obstacles arise, and shape the international path in ways that protect the core activity that defines them. If so, early differences in passion may help explain the striking heterogeneity in internationalization patterns (Baum et al., 2015; Schwens et al., 2018). In addition, the disorienting feedback entrepreneurs often encounter in foreign environments may either amplify or temper each type of passion, creating a bidirectional relationship whose contours remain unclear. Accordingly, we ask: *How do new venture internationalization patterns and entrepreneurs' harmonious and obsessive passion interrelate?*

To examine this question, we analyze 36 semi-structured interviews with 23 entrepreneurs who led their firms into foreign markets. Employing an inductive approach (Gioia et al., 2013), we develop initial insights into how passion and new venture internationalization interrelate, and we identify and map the underlying mechanisms that connect them.

By doing so, this study provides several contributions. First, it introduces entrepreneurs' passion as an affective-motivational microfoundation of new venture internationalization. While prior work has usefully emphasized entrepreneurs' knowledge, networks and capabilities (Bembom & Schwens, 2018; Fariborzi et al., 2025; Morgan et al., 2018; Schwens et al., 2018; Sui et al., 2015), international business scholars have called for more fine-grained microfoundational accounts (Santangelo et al., 2025) that explain *how* emotions and identity-related processes (Astakhova et al., 2022; Pollack et al., 2020) translate into internationalization behaviors (Ambos et al., 2025; Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022). Emotional processes, in particular, remain underdeveloped, limiting the realism of research on decision-making (Grego et al., 2025). Building on Vallerand et al.'s (2003) dualistic model of passion, we show that harmonious and obsessive passion are important affective-motivational forces that systematically shape entrepreneurs' attention, receptivity to foreign feedback, identity reconfiguration, and international commitments. Harmonious passion supports exploratory search, flexible coordination, and identity enlargement, which reinforce experiential learning and incremental commitment. Obsessive passion, by contrast, narrows attention, prioritizes validation-seeking and tight control, and thereby produces commitments that are prone to escalation. By specifying these intermediate psychological and behavioral processes, our study advances the micro-to-macro debate (Coviello et al., 2017; Santangelo et al., 2025), and offers an empirically grounded affective antecedent that IB microfoundations scholarship can use to

link entrepreneurs' psychology to firm-level international learning and outcomes.

Second, by focusing on the international arena, we advance the literature on passion and entrepreneurial identity, which has largely examined adjustment processes in relatively stable organizational contexts (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Caza et al., 2018). Although recent conceptual work, such as Kakarika et al. (2022), offers valuable insights into how entrepreneurs' passion develops during venture growth, it largely assumes a stable external environment. We instead bring these debates into the context of international markets, which are institutionally diverse and often more volatile (Cui et al., 2023; Teece, 2025), and argue that this setting is especially well suited to reveal how passion becomes behaviorally consequential. Bringing the dualistic model of passion into this context clarifies how identity-relevant engagement with internationalization can be understood in terms of harmonious and obsessive modes of internalization (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015), rather than in generic terms of "more" or "less" passion. In doing so, we respond to calls in the passion literature to move beyond decontextualized examinations and to specify the conditions under which different forms of passion emerge and matter (Astakhova et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Pollack et al., 2020; Zhao & Liu, 2023). By situating harmonious and obsessive passion in a high-stakes, boundary-spanning context, and by linking the dualistic view of passion to identity-based accounts of entrepreneurship (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014), we not only connect the passion and identity literatures more closely to microfoundational work in international business (Coviello et al., 2017; Santangelo et al., 2025; Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022), but also offer a more context-sensitive and integrated account of how passion becomes central to identity-related processes and behaviorally consequential for opportunity pursuit across national borders.

2. Conceptual backdrop

Passion is a strong inclination toward an activity that individuals like or even love, find important, and invest substantial time and energy in, such that the activity becomes part of their identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Passion plays a key role in how entrepreneurs manage their ventures under uncertainty (Cardon & Kirk, 2015; Cardon et al., 2009; Zhao & Liu, 2023), and is therefore highly relevant to the internationalization process. Research has shown that passion substantially shapes entrepreneurial motivation, behavior, and performance. Prior studies underscore its critical role in influencing entrepreneurial action and a range of both individual-level outcomes (Hubner et al., 2020) and venture-level achievements (Gielnik et al., 2020; Lex et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021), including firm growth and performance (Drnovsek et al., 2016; Zhao & Liu, 2023).

Research on entrepreneurial passion has grown rapidly, but it has also produced distinct conceptual streams that emphasize different mechanisms and, in turn, support different forms of theorizing (Astakhova et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Pollack et al., 2020). Recent syntheses (e.g., Newman et al., 2021; Pollack et al., 2020; see Appendix A for an overview) note that entrepreneurial or work passion is commonly approached through at least two perspectives: (a) a role- or identity-based view, which defines passion as intense positive feelings toward identity-relevant entrepreneurial activities (Cardon et al., 2009), and (b) a dualistic, internalization-based view, which distinguishes between harmonious and obsessive passion based on autonomous versus controlled internalization (Vallerand et al., 2003). Notably, both perspectives converge in viewing passion as an affective-motivational force with an identity-relevant component that shapes behavior.

Our study examines how passion operates as an affective-motivational microfoundation of new venture internationalization and how cross-border expansion experiences, in turn, shape entrepreneurs' passion and identity work. This aim requires a framework that (1) centers intrapersonal motivational regulation (not only outward expression or

role content), (2) explains heterogeneity in entrepreneurs' adaptation vs. rigidity under uncertainty, and (3) is compatible with the idea that internationalization is identity-relevant yet continuously shaped by feedback from unfamiliar environments. In other words, we need a model that clarifies why entrepreneurs with similar resource endowments may still pursue markedly different internationalization logics—some oriented toward learning and recalibration, others toward control and escalating commitment.

Building on prior entrepreneurship research (e.g., Fu et al., 2022; Gielnik et al., 2017; Ho & Pollack, 2014; Murnieks et al., 2014; Murnieks et al., 2016; Murnieks, Cardon et al., 2020; Stroe et al., 2018, 2020), and given our interest in the dual modes through which passion is internalized and influences behavior and decision-making—rather than the content of entrepreneurial roles—we draw on Vallerand et al.'s (2003) dualistic model. This framework not only explains how harmonious and obsessive passion emerge, but also specifies *how* and *why* the mode of internalization shapes subsequent behavior and decision-making, which matches well with our impetus to inform the affective and identity-based microfoundations of international business behavior (Santangelo et al., 2025). International business research increasingly argues that explanations of internationalization benefit from specifying such micro-foundational mechanisms that underlie cross-border commitment, learning, and adaptation (Coviello et al., 2017; Santangelo et al., 2025; Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022). By differentiating between harmonious and obsessive passion, the dualistic model allows us to theorize how entrepreneurs' affective-motivational states (Ho & Pollack, 2014; Stroe et al., 2018) can produce systematically different internationalization paths under similar foreign-market uncertainty.

Harmonious passion results from autonomous and flexible internalization: the activity is important, yet the individual—in our case the entrepreneur—remains free to disengage or adjust when circumstances warrant. Obsessive passion, in contrast, reflects a controlled and rigid internalization: the activity becomes a compelling obligation, making disengagement feel threatening and prompting resistance to feedback that jeopardizes the core identity. Empirical evidence across domains shows that harmonious passion is associated with exploratory learning, adaptive goal revision, and psychological well-being, whereas obsessive passion predicts intense effort and bold commitment coupled with elevated stress and reduced flexibility (Curran et al., 2015; Pollack et al., 2020; Vallerand, 2015).

The distinction between harmonious and obsessive passion is highly relevant to early internationalization. Entering foreign markets confronts entrepreneurs with unfamiliar institutions, cultural logics, and operational complexity (Sui et al., 2019). Although research grounded in resource- and knowledge-based views explains how entrepreneurs navigate these challenges (Autio et al., 2000; Bai et al., 2019), it cannot fully explain why firms with similar resources follow markedly different internationalization trajectories (Schwens et al., 2018). Passion offers a plausible micro-level explanation. Entrepreneurs driven by harmonious passion are more likely to engage in iterative learning (Laskovaia et al., 2022)—experimenting with gradual entry modes, adapting offerings to local market needs, and adjusting their pace in response to emerging knowledge. By contrast, entrepreneurs driven by obsessive passion are more likely to pursue rapid, tightly controlled entries that protect their original vision, to double down in the face of setbacks, and to interpret disconfirming feedback through a defensive lens (Kakarika et al., 2022). Uncovering these motivational underpinnings offers a way to unveil internationalization decisions and reveal otherwise overlooked heterogeneity among internationalizing ventures.

Importantly, internationalization is not only influenced by passion—it is also a transformative process that is expected to shape it on the way. Recent research emphasized the dynamic nature of passion, showing that short-term experiences can trigger meaningful changes in it (e.g., Bélanger et al., 2013a; Collewaert et al., 2016; Kakarika et al., 2022). Accordingly, international activities are likely to shape, amplify, or alter both types of passion. Successes in foreign markets may

validate the growth-oriented narrative of harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs, reinforcing their passion and long-term engagement. Conversely, such experiences may deepen obsessively passionate entrepreneurs' identity investment and the extent to which their self-worth is tied to business outcomes. Likewise, setbacks abroad may dampen harmonious passion or, alternatively, intensify obsessive effort. These feedback dynamics suggest that passion functions not only as an antecedent to international moves but also as an evolving outcome shaped through experiential learning during new venture internationalization.

Despite its documented relevance for entrepreneurial behavior, venture performance, and growth (e.g., Drnovsek et al., 2016; Murnieks, Klotz et al., 2020; Zhao & Liu, 2023), the role of passion in new venture internationalization remains largely unexplored. Existing theory has tended to treat new venture internationalization and passion as separate domains. Reviews of the international entrepreneurship literature identify entrepreneurs' prior international experience, network ties, and cognitive schemas as central drivers of cross-border expansion (Jiang et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2011; Velez-Ocampo et al., 2025) and call for more fine-grained microfoundations (Santangelo et al., 2025), and even nanofoundations (Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022), yet affective-motivational constructs such as passion are typically absent.

Conversely, research on entrepreneurial passion rarely addresses international contexts (Newman et al., 2021; Pollack et al., 2020). A few exceptions point in promising directions. Prior work links entrepreneurs' passion to firms' international and growth outcomes. Adomako et al. (2020) find that passion drives the internationalization of Ghanaian small firms, especially where domestic institutional voids push entrepreneurs toward foreign markets. Relatedly, Adomako and Ahsan (2022) show that the performance effects of passion depend on its domain and on firm resources: passion for inventing and developing improve SME performance while passion for founding undermines it, with financial resource availability strengthening—and resource flexibility weakening—the payoff from passion. Andersson and Ghannad (2025) likewise show that entrepreneurs' imprinting histories shape their passion, mindset, and start-up motivation in ways that produce distinct internationalization trajectories. Thus, despite strong reasons to expect that harmonious and obsessive passion influence internationalization in different ways—and are themselves shaped by it—the mechanisms at this intersection remain underdeveloped. This study tackles that gap by investigating how the two types of passion and new venture internationalization relate to one another.

3. Methods

Our qualitative study explores how different types of entrepreneurs' passion—harmonious and obsessive—relate to internationalization decisions and behavior in new ventures. To capture these affective-motivational microfoundations of internationalization patterns, we needed access to entrepreneurs' lived experiences, motivations, and decision-making processes in rich detail. We therefore employed an inductive theory-building design (Gioia et al., 2013), which is well suited for phenomena in a nascent state of theorizing, where the underlying mechanisms are not yet well specified and where entrepreneurs' passion, identity work, and internationalization decisions are likely to unfold recursively rather than linearly. Using iterative qualitative data collection together with constant-comparison analysis, we examined how entrepreneurs with internationalization experience made sense of foreign-market opportunities, uncertainty, and feedback, and how these experiences related to distinct patterns of commitment, adaptation, and identity reconfiguration. By following the principle of emergence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we allowed concepts and categories explaining the relationship between passion and internationalization to emerge from the data, while maintaining a transparent coding process consistent with current standards in qualitative research (Magnani & Gioia, 2023; Rouse et al., 2025).

3.1. Data collection and sample

We conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with founders or co-founders of German ventures that had begun to internationalize. Their main characteristics are shown in Table 1. We used purposive sampling and restricted the sample to ventures from one home country to hold the legal and institutional context constant. Focusing on internationalizing ventures ensured direct experience with the focal phenomenon. We identified candidates through LinkedIn searches (“founder” / “co-founder,” location = Germany) and personal referrals. LinkedIn profiles provided detailed information about potential participants, which allowed us to exclusively sample entrepreneurs whose profiles fit our target population. We verified the information from LinkedIn profiles by screening other sources, such as venture websites, social media pages, and additional online content, for evidence of cross-border activity before extending an invitation (see Table 2). We contacted more than 120 international entrepreneurs; 23 agreed to participate. Of these, 11 agreed to be interviewed twice, and one participant (ID22) was interviewed three times, resulting in a total of 36 semi-structured interviews. We continued sampling until thematic saturation was reached Guest et al. (2006). For the 12 cases with multiple interviews, the time span between interviews ranges from 11 months (ID22) to 1.5 years (ID2; see Appendix C). This allowed us to observe within-case changes over time and added a longitudinal component to part of our empirical evidence.

At the time of the first interviews, the entrepreneurs had a mean age of 37 years ($SD = 8.5$), and one participant was female. Most of the 23 ventures were micro-businesses with 2–9 employees (56.5%), followed by six small ventures with 10–49 employees (26.1%) and four medium-sized ventures with 50 or more employees (17.4%). The mean venture size was 18 employees ($SD = 20.8$), with a median of 7 employees. Our sample spans a range of sectors, including software, energy, defense technology, health, and nutrition.

The sample includes both established startups and very recent launches. Most ventures (69.57%) were founded in 2020 or later and were therefore very young at the time of data collection. Mean venture age was 4.13 years ($SD = 4.09$), and most ventures were less than 10 years old (Hubner et al., 2020), in line with the study’s focus on early internationalization. Some ventures internationalized immediately upon founding, whereas others waited several years. Nearly 70% of the ventures internationalized immediately upon founding. Five ventures internationalized within one to five years (about 21.7%) after their founding. This suggests that our sample is consistent with the “born global” phenomenon documented in the literature (Baum et al., 2015; Coviello, 2015).

3.2. Interview protocol

We used a semi-structured interview guide (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) that balanced a set of questions with openness to emerging themes (Kvale, 2009). Prior to each interview, participants provided informed consent for recording. We assured interviewees of the confidentiality and anonymity of their data. Interviews were conducted mainly in German (a few were held in English at the entrepreneur’s request). Each interview lasted 20 to 60 minutes, was transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. The full corpus comprises 740 transcript pages (182,138 words in 22,550 lines).

The interview guide evolved over the course of the study. Early interviews began with background questions about the entrepreneur and the venture and then explored (1) the entrepreneur’s passion and its development, (2) the effects of internationalization on day-to-day tasks and passion-related activities, (3) decision-making around foreign expansion, and (4) perceived outcomes and future aspirations. As the analysis progressed, we refined the probes to delve more deeply into episodes in which passion and international moves appeared to shape one another. Throughout, we remained flexible and followed informants’ leads, consistent with best practice in qualitative interviewing

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The interview guide is provided in Appendix B.

3.3. Data analysis

We conducted a multi-step interpretive analysis to examine the interplay between entrepreneurs’ passion and internationalization. This analysis unfolded in three steps, beginning with the identification of distinct passion patterns and culminating in the development of a theoretical model.

Step 1: Identifying within-person passion patterns. Before engaging in systematic coding, we conducted an initial exploratory review of each interview to surface recurring affective orientations and motivational patterns related to entrepreneurial engagement. Drawing conceptually on the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), we noted clusters of expressions and behaviors that resembled *harmonious passion*, *obsessive passion*, a *mixed pattern*, or a more *pragmatic, low-passion orientation*¹. We treated these patterns as prototypical configurations that co-occurred with specific emotional dynamics and behavioral tendencies. This framing allowed us to remain open to within-case variation over time while still analytically sensitizing our coding to the different ways passion was articulated and enacted across the sample. For example, some entrepreneurs who expressed high excitement and urgency often also described struggling to “switch off” or “let go,” which aligned with features of obsessive passion. In contrast, others expressed a sense of purpose and sustained, balanced involvement without signs of pressure or compulsion, aligning more closely with harmonious passion.

Harmonious passion refers to an autonomous form of engagement in which the entrepreneurial activity is important yet remains in harmony with other life domains. This type of passion typically involves intrinsic enjoyment, flexible persistence, and emotional enrichment. For example, Interviewee 2 reflected, “*I think it’s really cool to work internationally. I personally enjoy it a great deal, and it’s a lot of fun for me*” (ID2 t1:289–299). Similarly, Interviewee 17 stated, “*It makes me much more excited to grow with this internationalization*” (ID17 t1:191–192). In the same vein, Interviewee 5 described: “*What’s really enjoyable is getting to know new and interesting people and cultures. Discovering new markets and understanding how people think—this is what I find exciting*” (ID5 t1:334–339). These quotes illustrate the affective joy and intrinsic motivation central to harmonious passion, as the interviewees describe emotionally enriching international experiences rather than extrinsic motivation.

Obsessive passion, by contrast, reflects a more rigid, identity-fused form of engagement in which the venture comes to dominate the individual and generates emotional conflict when barriers arise. For example, Interviewee 23 stated: “*I often push myself to the limits of my psychological and physical capacity but right now, I honestly can’t imagine trading this life for anything else*” (ID23 t1:836–841). Similarly, Interviewee 22 remarked, “*Eyes on the prize. You have to have it. You need to have it more than anybody else*” (ID22 t1:293) and further, “*We need to have a global scale. Otherwise, there is no reason to exist*” (ID22 t1:326). These quotes reflect the all-consuming, pressured, and overwhelming nature of *obsessive passion*, especially as it is tied to a rigid sense of mission and an existential, competitive drive. It is important to note that harmonious and obsessive passion represent dominant orientations rather than mutually exclusive categories. Even strongly obsessive cases (e.g., ID23, ID18) revealed occasional traces of harmonious engagement. This coexistence is theoretically expected, as both types of passion exist

¹ Based on transcript content, field notes, and memo reflections, the distribution of initial passion typologies across the 23 cases at the first interview round (t1) was as follows: Harmonious Passion: ID1, ID2, ID3, ID4, ID5, ID8, ID10, ID12, ID13, ID14, ID16, ID17, ID20, ID21; Obsessive Passion: ID9, ID18, ID19, ID22, ID23; Mixed Passion Patterns: ID6, ID11, ID15; Pragmatic (Low-Passion) Orientation: ID7

Table 1
Sample overview.

ID	Gender	Education	Age	Company size	Venture founding year	Start of international activities	Industry	Type of product	Customer target group
1 ^c	Male	University degree	43	70	2012	2015	Software	Enterprise software platform	B2B
2 ^{ac}	Male	PhD	45	50	2020	2020	Packaging	Reusable packaging	B2B
3	Male	University degree	48	32	2016	2018	Software	Hardware-software hybrid industrial SaaS	B2B
4	Female	University degree	46	3	2014	2019	Health	Medical device sale and rental	B2C
5 ^c	Male	University degree	36	28	2017	N/A	Digital Marketing	Digital recruiting and HR marketing service	B2B
6 ^a	Male	University degree	28	3	2023	2023	Digital Marketing	AI-powered e-commerce SaaS tool	B2B
7 ^c	Male	University degree	28	22	2021	2022	Energy	Climate-tech renewable energy installer SaaS	B2B
8	Male	University degree	54	7	2018	2023	Real Estate	Home-building service (Physical and digital products)	B2B
9 ^c	Male	University degree	35	11	2022	2022	Technology	Precision fluid handling product	B2B
10	Male	University degree	40	60	2020	2020	Software	Enterprise industrial 3D software	B2B
11 ^c	Male	University degree	40	2	2021	2021	Food & Nutrition	Food ingredient product	B2C / B2B
12 ^c	Male	PhD	35	20	2020	2020	Deep-tech	Hybrid analog-digital computing hardware	B2B
13 ^c	Male	University degree	49	4	2008	2023	Finance	Sustainable green investment management service	B2B
14 ^c	Male	PhD	N/A ^b	2	2022	2022	Software	Compliance software and services	B2B
15 ^c	Male	University degree	26	2	2023	2023	Consulting / Logistics	Supply chain consultancy and technology	B2B
16 ^a	Male	High school	19	2	2023	2023	Clothing	Customized premium sneaker retail product	B2C
17	Male	University degree	31	6	2024	2024	AI / LLMs	Enterprise AI software platform	B2B
18	Male	University degree	30	50	2022	2022	E-Commerce	Digital gifting platform for creators	B2B
19	Male	PhD	40	4	2024	2024	AI	AI healthcare compliance software platform	B2B
20 ^c	Male	University degree	36	9	2023	2023	Cybersecurity	Cybersecurity penetration testing platform service	B2B
21 ^a	Male	University degree	31	4	2023	2023	Digital Marketing	Performance marketing agency service	B2B
22 ^c	Male	PhD	38	20	2022	2022	Food & Nutrition	Sustainable protein ingredient product	B2B
23	Male	University degree	37	3	2019	2019	Defense Technology	Defense hardware-software systems manufacturer	B2B

^a Entrepreneur has left startup and/or venture is no longer active.^b Entrepreneur was not willing to share exact age^c Entrepreneur was interviewed multiple times.**Table 2**
Overview of the included data.

Data Type	Quantity
Semi-structured interviews	36 semi-structured interviews / 740 pages / 182,138 words
Online content (interviews)	2 interviews / 1,703 words
Social media – LinkedIn post	45 posts / 4,232 words total
Social media – LinkedIn biography / info	8 biographies & info / 198 words total
Social media – X post	5 posts / 369 words total
Website of the startup	9 websites / 1,624 words total

Note: This table summarizes the materials included in the qualitative analysis. All interview data was fully transcribed and anonymized. Online content was archived at the time of analysis.

within an individual to some degree, although one is usually more salient (Vallerand, 2015).

Step 2: Inductive coding and thematic analysis. With the passion types in mind, we proceeded to inductively code the interview corpus, focusing on how passion and internationalization relate to one another. Two researchers independently conducted line-by-line open coding of

each transcript, using in-vivo labels that reflected informants' original language and framing. We compared codes iteratively and grouped them into higher-order categories to develop second-order themes that captured patterns across cases. To ensure rigor, we held regular coding meetings to challenge assumptions, refine code definitions, resolve inconsistencies through discussion, and test emerging ideas against the data. These sessions supported theoretical sensitivity while safeguarding against premature closure. As coding progressed, we observed that passion types were systematically associated with distinct patterns of internationalization behavior, identity work, and strategic adaptation. Once no new themes appeared in successive interviews (Guest et al., 2006), we synthesized related second-order themes into aggregate dimensions. These dimensions reflected the central mechanisms linking entrepreneurs' passion and internationalization.

Step 3: Developing a model. The final analytical step involved constructing a theoretical model that explains how entrepreneurs' passion shapes and is shaped by internationalization. We examined patterns within and across cases and gradually developed our research model. The data revealed a recursive dynamic in which passion types give rise to particular internationalization patterns, which then feed back into the entrepreneur's affective and identity landscape. These feedback loops

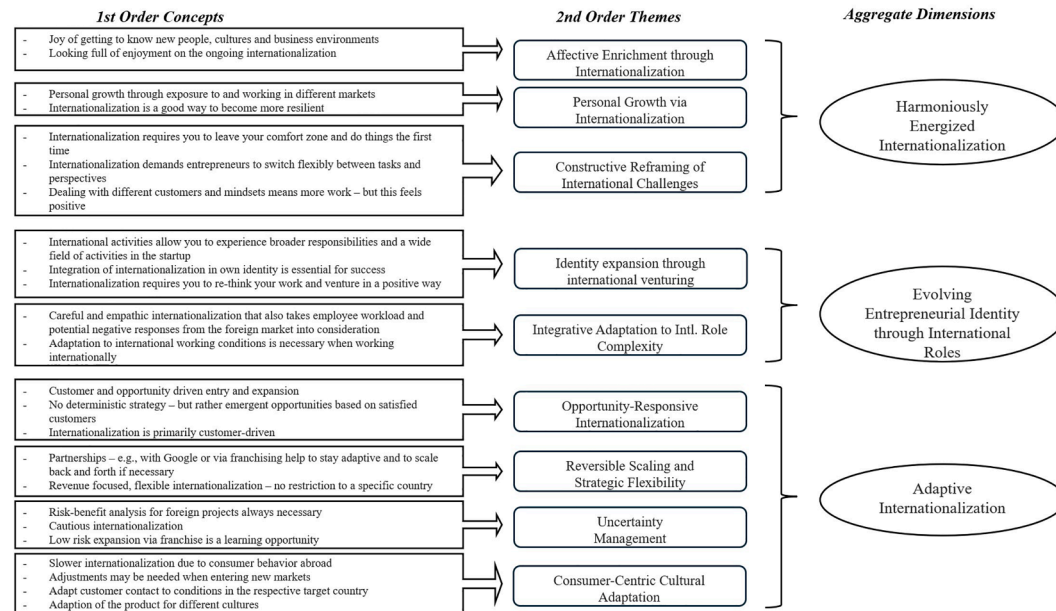
became the core of our theoretical model, which we present in the findings section.

4. Results

Our findings reveal that observable internationalization approaches are rooted in underlying affective-motivational microfoundations that

connect entrepreneurs' passion, identity, and strategic action. As shown in Fig. 1, the results point to recursive processes in which entrepreneurs' dominant passion pattern shapes how they interpret international opportunities and challenges, how they integrate internationalization into their entrepreneurial identity, and how they pursue international growth. In turn, internationalization experiences feed back into entrepreneurs' emotional engagement and sense of self, reinforcing or

Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs



Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs

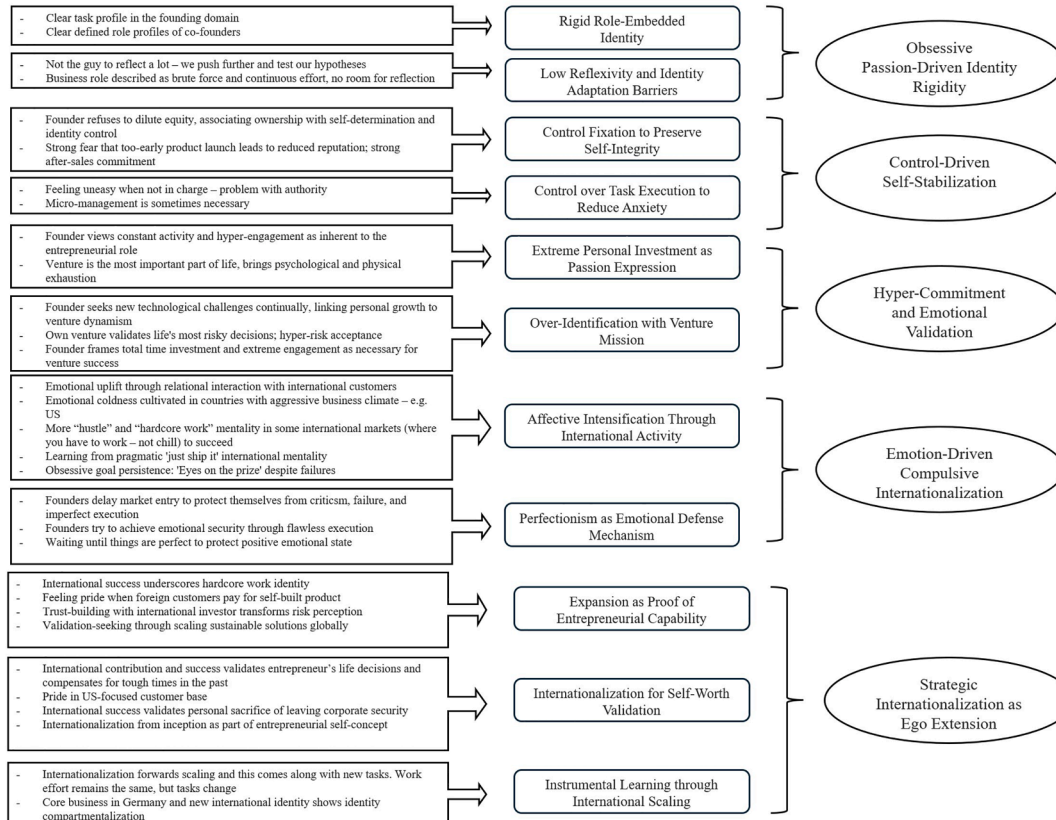


Fig. 1. Concepts, themes, and aggregate dimensions.

redirecting subsequent strategic behavior.

Across the model, this recursive dynamic gives rise to two broad passion-specific patterns: one characterized by greater openness, flexibility, and adaptation in response to international demands, and another characterized by stronger control, rigidity, and self-protective responses. The findings suggest that internationalization is not only a strategic process but also an affective and identity-relevant one, in which entrepreneurs' passion meaningfully shapes whether international expansion unfolds in a more adaptive or more rigid manner.

4.1. Findings for harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs

We begin with a detailed examination of entrepreneurs who predominantly exhibited harmonious passion ($n = 14$). These entrepreneurs described their work as energizing and meaningful and integrated internationalization into their entrepreneurial identity with openness to learning and adaptation. Their international strategies were responsive, flexible, and opportunity-oriented, and their narratives consistently emphasized intrinsic enjoyment and a positive approach to challenges. These cases yielded three aggregate dimensions: *evolving entrepreneurial identity through international roles*, *harmoniously energized internationalization*, and *adaptive internationalization*.

Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs appear able to develop their entrepreneurial identity through the new roles and tasks associated with increasing international activity. This identity development reinforces a sense of purpose and autonomy, allowing these entrepreneurs to absorb complexity without losing motivational coherence. Rather than resisting international demands or treating them as external burdens, they often incorporate a broader understanding of who they are and what their ventures represent.

This pattern is evident in how entrepreneurs reflected on the responsibilities that emerged through international exposure. Identity expansion was often accompanied by deliberate adaptation to different ways of working. Interviewee 14 explained: *"The mentalities are very different—you have to adjust when working with colleagues or companies in India, China, Japan, or the U.S. These are very different worlds"* (ID14_t1:320–323). The need for adaptation was not viewed as a loss of control but as professional development—an essential part of operating effectively in unfamiliar settings. Interviewee 17 highlighted that internationalization brought new customer relationships, cultural variation, and additional work, but viewed these changes positively: *"It adds to the workload, because then you have to deal with different customers, with different mindset, with different background, but I think it is more positive work"* (ID17_t1:195–202).

Similarly, Interviewee 7 acknowledged the fundamental role adaptation in international activities, as the entrepreneurial role identity shifted from sales executor to global strategist, with a primary focus on hiring and managing a growing international team: *"My role has completely changed since last time. I've basically moved internally from sales to HR and now focus more on finding the right people and building the structures globally"* (ID7_t2:63–71). Another harmoniously passionate entrepreneur described the evolution of his role identity as *"naturally adapting"* (ID20_t2:68), which reflects a flexible and adaptive approach to change. He deliberately stepped back from some operational tasks in order to adjust to the international role and move toward more strategic responsibilities. Rather than diluting their focus, such developments appeared to deepen entrepreneurs' sense of role and strengthen their capacity to navigate international uncertainty and diversity.

Taken together, these findings suggest that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs do not merely react to new international demands. Rather, they internalize those demands as part of an evolving entrepreneurial identity—adjusting with sensitivity, reflecting with intention, and expanding their role accordingly. This suggests that exposure to international markets can trigger identity work and reshape how entrepreneurs understand both their business and themselves, at least when they are driven by harmonious passion.

With regard to internationalization behavior, we identified two recurring dimensions among harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs. First, they exhibited a pattern of adaptive internationalization, driven by responsiveness to customers, local contexts, and situational constraints. Second, their internationalization was fueled by intrinsic motivation and enjoyment, a dimension we examine in the following section.

The adaptive pattern was marked by flexibility, contextual awareness, and a willingness to adjust scope and speed flexibly in response to market signals. Rather than following predefined expansion paths, entrepreneurs often pursued internationalization through emergent opportunities, such as meeting an international business partner by chance at a trade fair (ID5_t2:488–489). Interviewee 13 described this open and opportunistic approach to internationalization as follows: *"I've decided for myself that whenever a good opportunity arises somewhere in the world, it should be seized"* (ID13_t2:84–85). Similarly, Interviewee 2 noted: *"We went international very quickly. [...] We received inquiries and initially approached things quite opportunistically"* (ID2_t1:120–133).

This flexible responsiveness was often paired with deliberate risk management. For example, the same entrepreneur explained how franchising enabled them to balance growth with caution: *"To be honest, we are still very opportunistic. Through our franchise program, we can open up new countries with relatively little risk. And if we find suitable partners, we go ahead"* (ID2_t1:307–310). Another harmoniously passionate entrepreneur described a similar approach: *"We moved quickly beyond the EU, into Brazil and Mexico, so that we could cushion this risk. That is one reason. The other reason is, of course, that we approached it rather opportunistically. The markets in these new regions are large. In Latin America, we face little competition"* (ID7_t2:172–176). Rather than being driven by ambition alone, international engagement reflected a combination of internal readiness, risk management and the exploration of external opportunity—a pattern that distinguishes adaptive internationalizers from their more aggressive and rigid counterparts. Interviewee 2 summarized this adaptive internationalization approach as follows: *"We make decisions, then we learn from what happens out in the market, and then we adjust our strategy accordingly"* (ID2_t1:552–553). Adaptive internationalization, then, is not a fallback strategy but an intentional orientation. It allows these entrepreneurs to pursue global engagement while preserving alignment with their core values, operational capacity, and learning.

Another central theme among harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs was their affective engagement with internationalization itself. For these entrepreneurs, cross-border activity was not merely a strategic endeavor but also an emotionally meaningful and energizing process. Their reflections clustered around three closely related mechanisms: *affective enrichment*, *personal growth*, and the *constructive reframing of challenges*.

Several entrepreneurs described how international engagement provided enjoyment and stimulation beyond instrumental benefits. Entrepreneurs described this *affective enrichment through internationalization* as a *"booster and surge of motivation"* (ID20_t2:306–307). Interviewee 5 reflected on the energizing nature of cultural and market diversity: *"What's really enjoyable is getting to know new and interesting people and cultures. Discovering new markets and understanding how people think—this is what I find exciting"* (ID5_t1:334–339). Similarly, Interviewee 2 described international engagement as personally enriching: *"I was recently in India as well, to clarify a few things on site and take a closer look. That is definitely very, very exciting. Not everything you know as a working environment in Germany applies there—it is completely different. For me personally, that is enriching"* (ID2_t2:373–375). Rather than viewing internationalization as a strain or distraction, these entrepreneurs experienced it as emotionally enriching—an avenue for expressing interest, curiosity, and interpersonal motivation.

Entrepreneurs also described international engagement as a catalyst for personal development. This second theme—*personal growth through internationalization*—emerged clearly in Interviewee 5's reflections: *"What is interesting, of course, is that you get to know other markets and*

different conditions. So, you keep discovering and learning new things" (ID5_t1:86–87). Similarly, Interviewee 7 emphasized that international engagement is a catalyst for personal development, particularly regarding emotional regulation and adaptability in the face of unforeseen challenges: "Yes, you just do not get as nervous anymore when something does not work out [...]. So, in that sense, you become a bit more resilient" (ID7_t2:384–388). These statements illustrate that internationalization requires not only strategic capability but also emotional regulation and adaptability—qualities that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs actively develop and strengthen.

The third theme, *constructive reframing of international challenges*, captures how these entrepreneurs interpreted complexity not as obstruction, but as an exciting stimulus. Interviewee 13 explained how he viewed the challenges of internationalization, and the adaptations they required, as exciting opportunities to solve problems: "You encounter different cultures and a different mindset [...]. And I think, at the end of the day, that means we have to tailor our product accordingly to those needs. And I think that is always exciting, because the challenge lies in understanding and translating whether the problems abroad are different in nature from the ones we are dealing with here—and then, of course, translating that back into the product and making the product experience so compelling again that it can create real value for our international customers as well. I think that is actually pretty exciting" (ID13_t1:418–428). Thus, the demands of internationalization are not downplayed, rather, they are interpreted as valuable and enriching. Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs therefore appear to sustain, and even deepen, their motivation in response to international complexity, viewing it as a context for growth, learning, and the expansion of their entrepreneurial role.

4.2. Findings for obsessively passionate entrepreneurs

While harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs often reinterpret their identity in response to international complexity, those with obsessive passion tended to exhibit a more fixed and compartmentalized self-concept. Their identities were closely tied to specific functional roles and accompanied by a strong reluctance to engage in reflection or adaptation when confronted with new cross-border demands. This rigidity provided a sense of psychological control and continuity, but it also constrained flexibility and developmental responsiveness. The identity rigidity was often revealed through the maintenance of strict role boundaries within the founding team. Interviewee 18 described a clear division of labor based on domain expertise: "One of my co-founders does backend, the other does frontend, and I do the business stuff [...]" (ID18_t1:205–209). Similarly, Interviewee 19 emphasized that he deliberately avoided areas outside his technical role: "I'm always the tech guy in these ventures. [...] If you ask me about market conditions for the U.S., that's not my area, I hand that straight to my co-founder" (ID19_t1:7–14). In another case, an entrepreneur with a fixed self-view recognized the mismatch between his current identity as a purely technical expert and what the venture needed at that stage, yet he did not consider adaptation or personal development. Instead he externalized it as a venture-level problem: "I'm a techie, but I can see that the venture is missing a manager, and that is precisely the problem the venture has" (ID12_t2:552–553). Taken together, these themes point to a pattern of identity rigidity in which entrepreneurs anchor themselves in role certainty and endurance. Although this structure may support short-term focus and drive, it constrains international adaptability and personal development, particularly in response to the diverse and shifting demands of international entrepreneurship.

Among entrepreneurs with obsessive passion, a pronounced need for control emerged as a mechanism for maintaining psychological stability and decision authority, especially under international uncertainty. Whereas harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs often embraced flexibility or delegated responsibility, obsessively passionate individuals tended to retain oversight, ownership, or executional primacy. This

behavior appeared to be grounded not only in operational routines but also in deeper convictions about trust and responsibility. One expression of this pattern was a tendency to limit who could be trusted with strategic access to the venture. Interviewee 9 described strong relational boundaries as central: "I mean, you know, I would never bring someone into the company whom I don't know. You have to trust them completely" (ID9_t1:1058–1059). This suggests that control is not only about systems or outputs, but also about maintaining relational boundaries and psychological safety by limiting relational permeability and cultural unpredictability. Another form of control-stabilization was evident in Interviewee 22, who framed entrepreneur-level micromanagement as an unavoidable part of his leadership style: "Every job has the daily annoying little jobs that have to be done [...] Sometimes some micro-management is necessary" (ID22_t1:166–169). Although expressed with some resignation, this view reinforces the idea that obsessive entrepreneurs often feel personally accountable for upholding standards, even in mundane or bureaucratic areas, especially in the absence of a clear delegation structure. Taken together, these patterns reflect how obsessive passion can give rise to a self-stabilizing control logic, in which oversight, limited trust, and centralized responsibility function as emotional safeguards. Although such control may provide psychological coherence, it can also hinder adaptive delegation and relational scaling, especially in fluid international environments.

Another defining feature of obsessive passion in our data was deep emotional attachment to, and over-identification with, the venture. For these entrepreneurs, the startup was not merely a professional project, it was the central structure around which life, identity, and self-worth were organized. They described the venture as their "philosophy of life" (ID11_t1:440) and described venture problems as a personal "life crisis" (ID12_t2:187) for them. We label this pattern hyper-commitment and emotional validation. It manifested in relentless personal investment and in a tendency to derive validation not only from success, but also from investing in the venture itself. One recurring theme was extreme personal investment as an expression of passion, along with the belief that success was a direct function of how much time, energy, and money entrepreneurs devoted to the venture. Interviewee 18 expressed this logic with striking clarity: "Honestly, I believe if you just put in more time, you get more out. [...] I genuinely believe more is more" (ID18_t1:331–340). Another obsessively passionate entrepreneur described such extreme personal investment as an inherent part of the entrepreneurial role: "I mean vacation for me is not something where I turn off my mind. That simply does not exist anymore. So it is a trade-off. This is how it goes. If you want to have your own business this is the price you are gonna have to pay. Whether you like it or not" (ID22_t2:209–213). Interviewee 15 conveyed a similar view: "Accordingly, it varies from a normal full-time week, 30, 40 hours up to: there's no weekend and you do your 70, 80 hours" (ID15_t2:238–240). He continued: "It's completely normal for us to write emails to China at 10pm, because it just gets done and we get an order at 9:30pm, because for self-employed people there's no end to the workday" (ID15_t2:252–255). The phrase "completely normal" shows how deeply this hyper-commitment had been internalized. Unlike harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs, who developed more sustainable ways of integrating work and life, obsessively passionate entrepreneurs maintained a rigid, all-consuming form of engagement from which they derived validation. The extreme personal investment extended beyond time and energy to personal financial sacrifice. For example, Interviewee 12 described continuing to work for the venture without any personal income: "I then continued working for the company for a few more months without pay, until I realized that this was completely absurd, because I was the only co-founder working full-time in the company" (ID12_t2:229–231). Taken together, these quotes highlight these entrepreneurs' difficulty disengaging mentally from the venture. They also suggest a rigid and inflexible view of what an entrepreneurial life should look like, one in which compulsive and all-consuming patterns are regarded as necessary for success.

Another theme was over-identification with the venture's mission,

which appeared when entrepreneurs framed the venture not as something they ran, but as something they *were*. Interviewee 23 articulated this fusion of identity and venture with unambiguous conviction: “*This [the startup] is by far the most significant. I can say with a clear conscience that it’s the most exciting time of my life, also the most exhausting, the most emotionally intense. I often push myself to the limits of my psychological and physical capacity*” (ID23.t1:834–837). This quote illustrates how emotional intensity, existential importance, and personal limits converged. The venture is not merely important, it is self-defining.

Taken together, these patterns show how obsessive passion can create a motivational structure grounded in validation through effort and identity fusion. Although this structure generates endurance and drive, it also increases the risk of emotional exhaustion and burnout, especially when performance fluctuates or international pressures amplify complexity. The result is a form of hyper-commitment in which passion becomes both the fuel and the trap.

As another dimension, we identified emotion-driven compulsive internationalization among obsessively passionate entrepreneurs. Here, internationalization appeared less as a strategic choice and more as a deeply emotional act—a stage for the expression of passion, pressure, and perfectionism. Across cases, entrepreneurs described international growth in affective terms, driven by a mix of excitement, a search for validation, and a compulsion to meet self-imposed standards.

The first mechanism, affective intensification through international activity, captured the energizing emotional engagement of many entrepreneurs associated with foreign contexts. Interviewee 18 emphasized how location choices reflected a desire to immerse the venture in environments where high performance is both necessary and socially reinforced: “*Our philosophy was always: the first 20 or 30 employees should become millionaires, and they have to work like crazy to get there. [...] That kind of hard work culture isn’t as strong in Germany as it is in places like London or New York. [...] You have to hustle, you can’t just chill*” (ID18.t1:443–451). Here, international markets were not merely business frontiers but emotional arenas, symbolizing the entrepreneur’s values and served as spaces in which to enact those values under pressure.

The second mechanism, perfectionism as emotional defense, became apparent when entrepreneurs hesitated to enter markets without full confidence in product readiness. Interviewee 9 reflected on the inner logic of this delay: “*We were always on the mindset that the product had to be really great before we could even show it*” (ID9.t1:671). He continued: “*We said that our product has to [...] be developed exactly to the point where we are willing to sell it all—because we are somewhat afraid that if we push it out too early, you end up doing nothing but support*” (ID9.t1:699–701). This mindset illustrates how obsessively passionate entrepreneurs link emotional security to flawless execution. Waiting until things are “really great” becomes a way of protecting the self from exposure and failure.

These accounts illustrate how internationalization can serve not merely as a vehicle for growth, but also as a domain of emotional intensity, personal validation, and defensive perfectionism. For obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, global expansion is not solely a question of market entry, but also a matter of managing the emotional burden tied to their entrepreneurial self-concept. This dynamic creates internal tension: on the one hand, expansion is pursued as a source of affirmation and momentum; on the other hand, it exposes entrepreneurs to uncertainty that their perfectionism seeks to avoid. As a result, internationalization can simultaneously excite and destabilize them—activating conflicting impulses to accelerate and to control, to reach outward and to retreat inward. This countervailing dynamic may contribute to emotional overload and strategic inconsistency.

Among obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, internationalization sometimes emerges as more than an operational choice—it becomes a strategic extension of the ego. In these narratives, an international presence affirms the entrepreneur’s personal journey, legitimizes prior sacrifices, and symbolizes a mission seen as worthy of global scale. Here, going international is not only about growth, but also about projecting

ambition and personal significance across borders. One entrepreneur describes plans to host a major international event, such as a large workshop in the United States or a roadshow in Silicon Valley, at a cost of approximately €50,000. At the same time, he acknowledged that, although such an event might generate substantial visibility and prestige, its value for the venture could be more symbolic than economic (ID12.t2:327–336). In a similar vein, Interviewee 11 highlighted several sources of external validation that were highly motivating: “*It is all the feedback you receive from the outside. Whether it is this award or the various events where you are invited as a keynote speaker. You see the whole response coming from others. You see all the feedback about the impact the product is making. That shows that what you are doing has a purpose. It shows that what you are doing truly matters. I have worked with large corporations that entered product development with us and then left with positive impressions, trying to set up a similar project themselves*” (ID11.t2:372–380).

For obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, international expansion serves as external validation and proof of entrepreneurial capability. It is not only a way to grow, but also a way to demonstrate that their product, vision, and execution meet a standard that extends beyond local boundaries. International customers, particularly early ones, are not merely buyers; they function as proof points of entrepreneurial legitimacy. Interviewee 19 exemplified this logic in reflecting on his first international sale: “*What honestly felt really great was when a customer was willing to pay for a product I had built. That first sales deal, that was intense*” (ID19.t1:457–460). This was not simply a commercial moment, it was a psychological inflection point that turned effort into confirmation. For entrepreneurs with obsessive tendencies, such experiences reinforce the belief that internationalization is not just about markets but also about proving capability on a larger stage.

Closely linked to capability signaling is the deeper emotional process of self-worth validation. Here, international success becomes a way for entrepreneurs to make sense of personal risk, justify difficult decisions, and assign meaning to their sacrifices. Interviewee 19 linked international traction to his own biography: “*I gave up the safe harbor of a corporate job to raise this baby, so to speak. And of course it feels good*” (ID19.t1:433–435). International validation serves not only to confirm business logic, but also to reaffirm the entrepreneur’s personal life choices. Interviewee 22 offered a more future-oriented perspective, linking the venture’s identity and his own aspirations to global impact: “*Our strategy is international. [...] Our goal is to be an international company. And I think if you want to have an impact, this should be the goal, your vision in the long-term*” (ID22.t1:207–211). In this framing, geographic scale becomes a mirror of existential ambition. The entrepreneur’s sense of relevance and success depends on the scope of the venture’s reach.

Fig. 2 synthesizes our findings into a recursive model that links passion, international behavior, and entrepreneurial identity. Internationalization confronts entrepreneurs with new challenges and opportunities, unfamiliar rules, new partners, and heightened personal exposure. How these conditions are appraised depends on the entrepreneur’s dominant passion type. When filtered through harmonious passion, such challenges are framed as *personal-growth opportunities*. Entrepreneurs experience energizing affect, embrace cultural and regulatory novelty, and incorporate new roles into the self. The outcome is identity expansion—a richer, more flexible self-concept that accommodates the venture’s widening scope. Under obsessive passion, the same challenges are framed as *potential threats to entrepreneurs’ core identity*. The emotional response is one of vigilance, as entrepreneurs tighten control, guard boundaries, and strive for rigid execution. The resulting identity work is identity containment, which preserves a narrow, role-specific sense of self.

Entrepreneurial identity, in turn, shapes the cognitions and behaviors that guide international expansion, again with distinct patterns emerging by passion type. Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs, feeling harmoniously energized, tend to define their role in terms of ongoing exploration. Their self-view legitimizes curiosity and flexibility, leading to decision-making that favors adaptive internationalization.

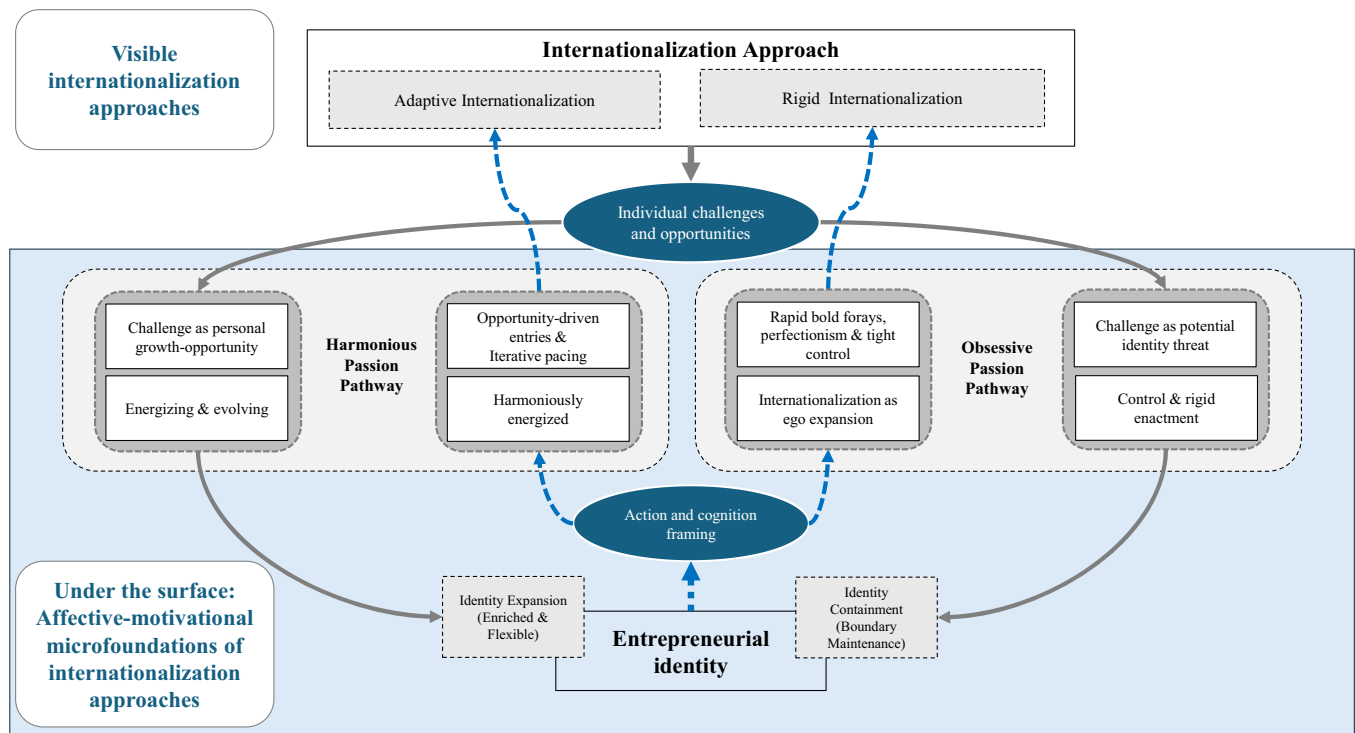


Fig. 2. Conceptual model.

They pursue emergent opportunities, enter markets through small and reversible commitments, and adjust rapidly in response to local feedback. The positive emotions associated with each successful adjustment reinforce this outward-oriented mindset, making entrepreneurs more likely to approach the next foreign challenge as another opportunity to experiment and learn.

Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, by contrast, experience identity as something to defend and prove. They scan the environment for validating milestones and potential threats. Cognitively, they narrow their attention to risk containment and flawless execution. Behaviorally, they pursue validation-seeking, control-oriented internationalization: bold, highly scripted entries when success appears likely, followed by pauses or retreats when perfection cannot be assured. Thus, identity shaped by harmonious passion channels exploratory cognition into opportunity-driven action, whereas identity shaped by obsessive passion channels defensive cognition into perfectionistic action, completing the recursive mechanism through which passion, identity, and internationalization influence one another.

5. Discussion, implications, and limitations

This study provides new insights into the reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurs' passion and internationalization. Drawing on longitudinal qualitative data from 23 entrepreneurs, we demonstrate that passion not only drives international activities but is also shaped by new venture internationalization. By identifying distinct patterns associated with harmonious and obsessive passion, we contribute to the literature in multiple ways: (1) We introduce passion as a relevant microfoundation of international entrepreneurship, thereby advancing understanding of how different passion types account for heterogeneity in internationalization behavior and strategy. By doing so, we also advance the microfoundational discourse itself, by moving beyond simplified notions of individual actors to incorporate personal, identity-central attributes that recursively interact with firm-level and macro-level phenomena (Ambos et al., 2025; Whittington, 2025). (2) We contribute to the recent discourse about how entrepreneurs can regulate

their passion (Lex et al., 2022) and thus enhance understanding of how different passion types can influence identity work and adaptive responses during international expansion. Beyond these main contributions, we also highlight and discuss contributions to the broader IB literature, such as learning- and commitment-oriented models of internationalization processes (Schweizer & Vahlne, 2022).

5.1. Passion as a microfoundation of international entrepreneurship

Recent work in international business highlights the need to “open the proverbial black boxes” of individual-level mechanisms to better understand firm-level internationalization trajectories (Santangelo et al., 2025). Our study responds directly to calls for novel theoretical lenses in IB research (Delios et al., 2024), underscores the critical role of emotion in decision-making (Grego et al., 2025), and addresses the need for deeper microfoundational understanding (Santangelo et al., 2025). In this respect, our study also speaks to recent work (e.g., Ambos et al., 2025), which advocates for understanding individual-level factors as building blocks for firm-level strategies, as we identify entrepreneurs' passion as a key affective-motivational antecedent.

We propose that passion offers international business scholars a qualitatively distinct microfoundation—one that shifts attention from who decision makers are and what resources, such as knowledge or networks, they possess to the still underexplored question of *why* they channel those assets into risky cross-border commitments. Whereas prior international entrepreneurship research has focused mainly on the who-what couplet, the *why* question—that is, the motivational and emotional forces that energize internationalization—remains insufficiently theorized (Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022).

Entrepreneurs' passion addresses this lacuna. As Coviello (2015) notes, it reflects deep-seated identity investments and motivational energy that drive entrepreneurs to discover, enact, and persist in pursuing foreign opportunities despite uncertainty. By foregrounding passion as the affective engine behind commitment decisions, our study extends microfoundational theorizing beyond cognition and social capital (Santangelo et al., 2025), and sheds light on the motivational

mechanisms through which individual heterogeneity shapes divergent internationalization paths. This view of individual agency also allows us to sidestep the “empty bathtub” fallacy critiqued by Whittington (2025), by portraying entrepreneurs not as isolated rational actors but as socio-materially embedded agents whose enduring passions recursively interact with macro-level international markets. In turn, this aligns with a more dynamic and less hierarchical view of micro-macro relations and offers a stronger account of how micro-level phenomena both shape and are shaped by higher-level outcomes.

Differentiating between harmonious and obsessive passion provides a theoretically fertile organizing framework that allows us to better understand entrepreneurs’ motivations and identity shifts, from the entrepreneur’s initial reading of a foreign opportunity through to the affective after-effects of early cross-border encounters. Among harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs, foreign expansion is woven into a narrative of identity enlargement. New markets, cultures and institutional demands are interpreted not as deviations from a core plan but as invitations to broaden the self. This identity work is accompanied by an adaptive strategic posture such that entrepreneurs pursue opportunistic entries, iterate business models in response to local feedback and calibrate speed to internal capacity. Crucially, the emotional valence of internationalization is positive, for instance when entrepreneurs speak of “energizing” workload increases and “exciting” regulatory challenges. Such affective enrichment transforms uncertainty into a self-reinforcing learning loop; motivation is replenished precisely through exposure to novelty. Theoretically, this mechanism clarifies why ventures with similar knowledge stocks and network reach can diverge markedly in early international breadth: harmonious passion supplies the intrinsic rewards that keep adaptive search processes in motion long after the marginal cognitive gains of learning have declined.

Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs follow a contrasting journey. In this case, internationalization functions less as a canvas for identity development and more as a stage for identity (or self-) validation. Entrepreneurs invest extraordinary effort in cross-border moves because each successful milestone promises proof that past sacrifices were justified. This validation logic produces an emotionally intense, yet fragile, commitment pattern: bold initial moves are common, but progress stalls whenever product perfection or partner trust fails to meet self-imposed standards. The need for control, role rigidity and reluctance to delegate amplify this brittleness, making strategic pacing highly sensitive to external affirmation. From a theoretical standpoint, obsessive passion reveals an affective pathway to outcome volatility and over-internationalization risk, phenomena that resource- or cognition-based accounts struggle to predict. It shows that the same knowledge and networks may be channeled into rapid escalation, pause, or even retreat, depending on whether passion is directed inward for identity expansion or outward for identity validation.

Juxtaposing these two passion orientations therefore enriches international-entrepreneurship theory on three fronts: First, it highlights that motivational heterogeneity—rather than differences in resources or information alone—shapes the timing, direction, and form of cross-border moves. Second, it reveals how affective feedback loops can either stabilize (in the case of harmonious passion) or destabilize (in the case of obsessive passion) international growth trajectories. Third, it draws scholars’ attention to the under-examined emotional costs that may accompany aggressive expansion strategies. In short, the harmonious–obsessive distinction offers a robust conceptual foothold for future work aiming to link the entrepreneur’s internal experience with the observable heterogeneity of new venture internationalization paths.

While our study is mainly geared towards international entrepreneurship it may also be informative to the broader internationalization literature, such as process models of internationalization (Coviello et al., 2017; Vahlne & Johanson, 2017, 2020). Viewing the Uppsala model through our affective-motivational lens recasts its well-known knowledge-commitment loop as an *affective commitment cycle*. Harmonious passion reduces the felt downside of small experimental entries, thereby

accelerating the cycle of experiential learning and incremental commitment. Conversely, obsessive passion can inflate perceived upsides, prompting premature resource escalation even when external signals advise caution, thereby disrupting the learning process by pushing for pre-set visions regardless of disconfirming feedback.

In a parallel vein, our findings further enhance the understanding of cognitive processes and identity regulation in IB. While Eriksson and Tippmann (2024) identify “constructive imagination” as critical in overcoming internal disagreement and enabling international commitment decisions, our study suggests harmonious passion as a potential antecedent for this cognitive process. Its focus on learning, flexibility, and intrinsic enjoyment creates the psychological conditions that foster such constructive imagination. In stark contrast, obsessive passion can exacerbate challenges related to bounded rationality and bounded reliability (Georgakakis et al., 2023). It narrows an entrepreneur’s focus, making them less open to new information, and can lead to behaviors like over-promising or persisting with failing strategies, thus providing a novel affective microfoundation for these core IB problems.

5.2. Passion regulation and identity work while venturing internationally

Our second contribution lies in specifying how different types of passion regulate identity work in the inherently dynamic context of internationalization, thereby bridging two literatures that have rarely intersected. Prior identity-focused research in entrepreneurship has typically modeled adjustment processes inside relatively stable organizational or domestic settings (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Caza et al., 2018). Even recent passion scholarship that does theorize change (e.g., Kakarika et al., 2022) tends to assume a constant external environment. In contrast, international markets evolve continuously—with each entrepreneurial decision to enter, scale, reorder, or exit a market—meaning that the entrepreneur’s identity and the external context co-evolve rather than shift sequentially. Our findings show that this co-evolutionary landscape accentuates the role of passion type in shaping *how* identity is managed when the ground keeps moving.

For entrepreneurs high in harmonious passion, cross-border novelty is processed as a resource for identity *evolution*. Because their self-worth is anchored in intrinsic enjoyment and value congruence, fresh role demands, whether negotiating an unfamiliar regulatory regime or leading a multicultural team, are framed as opportunities to enlarge or adapt the self. Identity work therefore takes a reflective, dialogic form in which provisional selves are explored, incongruent feedback is assimilated, and new roles are aligned with enduring values. This elasticity enables entrepreneurs to maintain psychological coherence while continuously updating the identity repertoire needed to navigate shifting foreign conditions.

Entrepreneurs dominated by obsessive passion pursue the opposite strategy, identity *containment*. Their self-worth seems to hinge on high-stakes performance in narrowly defined roles, so they react to foreign complexity by tightening boundaries, preserving established hierarchies, and discounting cues that threaten role clarity. While this protective stance can supply short-term certainty, it constrains the adaptive sense-making required when markets, partners, and legitimacy standards mutate simultaneously. Consequently, obsessive passion is associated with bottlenecks in identity adjustment that can slow or derail strategic change abroad.

By integrating these patterns, we make three key advances. First, we conceptualize passion as a *mode of functioning* that conditions whether entrepreneurs interpret identity transitions as opportunities for enrichment or as threats requiring defense. Second, we uncover the *micro-processes*—such as expansive reflection versus boundary maintenance—through which these distinct functioning patterns unfold in environments characterized by volatility and change. Third, we identify internationalization as a critical empirical arena in which the interaction between passion and identity regulation becomes most visible, demonstrating that affective orientations can either facilitate or

hinder adaptation when both the entrepreneur and the market are evolving simultaneously. In doing so, we extend the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) beyond its motivational focus, demonstrating that passion type also shapes the mechanisms through which entrepreneurs renegotiate their identities as they navigate cross-border expansion.

Our findings also speak to the wider “affective revolution” in entrepreneurship research, which argues that emotions act both as inputs to and outcomes of entrepreneurial action (Baron, 2008; Portocarrero et al., 2025). Placing that perspective in the border-spanning context shows that foreign shocks are powerful conditioners of entrepreneurs’ emotional states, reinforcing calls for event-based and experience-sampling methods that can trace passion trajectories in real time rather than retrospectively (e.g., Astakhova et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021).

5.3. Practical implications

Practical implications arise for multiple groups. For entrepreneurs, an early self-assessment of one’s passion type is a low-cost diagnostic that can pre-empt strategic drift. Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs typically thrive on learning from cross-border surprises yet may advance too cautiously; pairing their intrinsic motivation with stretch goals or external accountability partners can keep them from under-exploiting emergent opportunities. Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, by contrast, may benefit from explicit “pause points” in their international roadmaps, milestones at which advisers review market feedback before further resources are committed, as well as reflective routines such as quarterly journals that document how foreign encounters reshape personal and venture goals. Investors, boards, and mentors can use passion profiles during due-diligence and accelerator intake. Harmonious passion signals steady, adaptive experimentation, whereas obsessive passion flags both bold first moves and escalation-of-commitment risk. Mitigation tactics include governance structures that separate strategic go/no-go decisions from day-to-day execution and the deliberate pairing of obsessively passionate CEOs with co-founders who possess more reflective orientations. Ecosystem builders and policy makers can tailor support services accordingly—platform programs that reward iterative learning amplify the upside of harmonious passion, while structured mentoring on risk pacing and emotional regulation cushions the downside for obsessive entrepreneurs. Finally, executive-education and coaching providers might integrate affective-motivational self-management and identity-work modules into international entrepreneurship curricula; role-play exercises that simulate high-uncertainty negotiations surface latent passion orientations, and guided reflection or cognitive-behavioral tools help entrepreneurs cultivate the identity flexibility needed for sustainable international growth.

5.4. Limitations and future research

This study is exploratory and qualitative; as such, it invites additional inquiry. Several limitations merit explicit acknowledgment and point to future research trajectories. First, our entrepreneur pool leaned heavily male, with a single female interviewee. Prior work indicates that gender can color the intensity, triggers, and behavioral expression of entrepreneurial passion (Kyriakopoulos et al., 2024; Murnieks, Cardon et al., 2020). A more gender-balanced, and ideally intersectional sample could reveal whether harmonious and obsessive orientations manifest differently across gendered experiences of risk, legitimacy, and work–family trade-offs in international markets. Our sample covers a variety of venture types and trajectories, involving a few cases, in which the entrepreneur left the startup or the startup was no longer active in the second interview round. We encourage further research to explicitly track re-entrant entrepreneurs and failure-recovery trajectories to explore their affective-motivational microfoundations in the context of

new venture internationalization.

Second, we concentrated on the dualistic model’s quality dimension, but passion can also be parsed by *object* (e.g., passion for people, for a product, and for a social mission) and by *role identity* (Cardon et al., 2009; Cardon, Glauser et al., 2017; Warnick et al., 2018). Those foci may influence how entrepreneurs process foreign information and allocate attention across opportunity sets. Future studies might map how multiple passion objects combine, perhaps even conflict, when ventures juggle social impact goals with rapid geographic scaling. On a related note, internationalization decisions are often collective. Emerging evidence on team entrepreneurial passion (Cardon, Post et al., 2017; Santos & Cardon, 2019) suggests that affective convergence or divergence inside founding groups could amplify or dampen the identity-work patterns we observed. Longitudinal, multi-informant designs (see e.g., Taggar et al., 2024) could capture passion contagion, affective fault lines, and their consequences for cross-border coordination.

Third, we intentionally restricted the study to German startups to hold institutional conditions constant, yet the generalizability of our claims may suffer. Perceptions of passion differ across cultures (Burke et al., 2015; O’Keefe et al., 2022). Thus, comparative research across institutional logics, say export-oriented Nordic ecosystems versus high-uncertainty emerging markets, could test whether harmonious passion retains its adaptive edge under weaker rule-of-law conditions, or whether obsessive passion’s need for control is tempered in collectivist cultures.

Finally, there are methodological options for future research given that identity regulation and passion are inherently dynamic. Experience-sampling methods, digital trace data (e.g., email sentiment, GitHub commits), or physiological measures could complement retrospective interviews and reduce common-method bias. Cross-lagged panel designs would allow stronger causal inferences about the co-evolution of passion states and international growth milestones. In a parallel vein, future work could link passion-identity configurations to objective measures such as export intensity, foreign sales growth, or survival, thereby clarifying whether the adaptive advantages inferred for harmonious entrepreneurs translate into tangible economic gains—and under what boundary conditions they might not.

6. Conclusion

This study introduces passion as a critical affective-motivational microfoundation in international entrepreneurship research. Qualitative data revealed how internationalization shapes—and is shaped by—entrepreneurs’ passion, emphasizing a bidirectional relationship. Our findings show that expanding internationally challenges entrepreneurs’ identities and triggers adjustments in both passion and strategic behavior. Harmonious passion fosters adaptability and strategic alignment with international demands, while obsessive passion may drive persistence but also introduces rigidity. These findings highlight how passion shapes entrepreneurs’ responses to cross-border challenges, extending both passion theory and microfoundational perspectives in internationalization research.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Mirjam Nicole Streeb: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Nicolas Drack:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Matthias Baum:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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Appendix A: Overview of relevant entrepreneurial passion and work passion research

Key paper	Main theoretical framing / conceptualization	Open questions	Implications for our research
Adomako, S., Mole, K. F., Franklin, R. J., & Murnieks, C. Y. (2023). Entrepreneurial passion and venture profit: Examining the moderating effects of political connections and environmental dynamism in an emerging market. <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , 41(2), 204-232.	- Entrepreneurial passion is an intense positive feeling tied to identity-central entrepreneurial activities - Tests link to venture profit - Moderators: political ties and dynamism	- Which passion forms predict which outcomes? - Which contextual moderators matter most? - Any non-linear or long-term effects?	- Shows that entrepreneurial passion can translate into tangible performance benefits but that these effects are contingent on contextual features, reinforcing our argument that passion is a context-dependent microfoundation. - Suggests that the effects of harmonious and obsessive passion on internationalization outcomes, such as growth and profitability, are likely moderated by features of both home and host environments (e.g., institutional support, political ties), which we can highlight when specifying the boundary conditions of our arguments.
Astakhova, M. N., Cardon, M. S., Ho, V. T., & Kong, D. T. (2022). Passion for work passion research: Taming breadth and promoting depth. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> , 43(9), 1463-1474.	- Conceptual review of passion streams - Clarifies overlap and construct confusion - Calls for precise, context-sensitive theorizing	- How to distinguish passion from adjacent constructs? - How to choose passion conceptualization/object? - How to integrate context, time, levels?	- Supports our explicit choice of the dualistic model of entrepreneurial passion and our focus on passion for entrepreneurial activity/internationalization; justifies the need to state clearly which passion construct we adopt and why. - Helps us frame our study as answering calls for more theoretically precise and contextually grounded passion research, rather than treating "passion" as a generic, uniformly positive disposition.
Cardon, M. S., Glauser, M., & Murnieks, C. Y. (2017). Passion for what? Expanding the domains of entrepreneurial passion. <i>Journal of Business Venturing Insights</i> , 8, 24-32.	- Expands passion "objects" - Passion can target multiple activities - Beyond inventing/founding/developing	- How to model multiple passion objects? - How do objects interact with passion quality? - Which objects matter in internationalization?	Helps us justify specifying the focal activity domain in our study (internationalization-related activities) while arguing that "quality of internalization" (harmonious/obsessive) is crucial for explaining heterogeneous internationalization behavior.
Cardon, M. S., Wincent, J., Singh, J., & Drnovsek, M. (2009). The nature and experience of entrepreneurial passion. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 34(3), 511-532.	- Role-identity view of entrepreneurial passion - Intense positive feelings + identity centrality - Passion tied to role domains - Passion is dynamic over time - Focus on within-person change - Passion can rise or fade	- How to capture dark sides without regulation dimension? - How does passion vary across contexts/time? - Which events shift passion trajectories? - How do milestones/shocks reshape passion? - How does context affect these dynamics?	We build on the identity logic (passion as identity-relevant) but argue it is insufficient for our aims unless complemented by a mechanism that explains adaptive vs maladaptive engagement—hence our choice of DMP.
Collewaert, V., Anseel, F., Crommelinck, M., De Beuckelaer, A., & Vermeire, J. (2016). When passion fades: Disentangling the temporal dynamics of entrepreneurial passion for founding. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> , 53(6), 966-995.	- Meta-analysis of DMP research - HP linked to adaptive outcomes - OP linked to mixed outcomes	- When does OP become more harmful/helpful? - How do culture and context matter? - What changes over time after shocks?	Supports our process orientation: we treat internationalization as a context in which passion is not static, and we extend dynamics thinking by focusing specifically on shifts in "quality" (harmonious/obsessive) tied to cross-border learning and action.
Curran, T., Hill, A. P., Appleton, P. R., Vallerand, R. J., & Standage, M. (2015). The psychology of passion: A meta-analytical review of a decade of research on intrapersonal outcomes. <i>Motivation and Emotion</i> , 39(5), 631-655.			Provides cumulative quantitative evidence that the harmonious-obsessive distinction is empirically robust across domains, and that obsessive passion operates as a "double-edged sword," aligning with our focus on both adaptive and rigid internationalization patterns.
De Mol, E., Ho, V. T., & Pollack, J. M. (2018). Predicting entrepreneurial burnout in a moderated mediated model of job fit. <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , 56(3), 392-411	- Job fit predicts burnout via HP/OP - Passion as mediator - Destiny beliefs as moderator	- How do fit, passion, burnout co-evolve? - Which moderators shift passion into strain/resource? - Do patterns generalize to internationalization?	Strengthens our theoretical choice to adopt the dualistic model of passion as the core framework and supports our claim that affective-motivational microfoundations can help explain why entrepreneurs with similar resources and knowledge experience different combinations of well-being, strain, and performance when engaging in demanding activities such as new venture internationalization.
De Mol, E., Ho, V. T., & Pollack, J. M. (2018). Predicting entrepreneurial burnout in a moderated mediated model of job fit. <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , 56(3), 392-411			Shows that harmonious and obsessive entrepreneurial passion have distinct implications for well-being even when both are rooted in favorable conditions like high job fit, reinforcing our focus on passion "quality" rather than intensity alone.
De Mol, E., Ho, V. T., & Pollack, J. M. (2018). Predicting entrepreneurial burnout in a moderated mediated model of job fit. <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , 56(3), 392-411			Supports our use of the dualistic model as a microfoundation that can transmit contextual demands (here job fit, in our case internationalization) into behavioral and strain outcomes, and suggests that high-stakes international expansion may differentially foster harmonious or obsessive passion with possible consequences for founder exhaustion and rigid persistence.
Ho, V. T., & Pollack, J. M. (2014). Passion isn't always a good thing: Examining entrepreneurs' network centrality and financial performance with	Entrepreneurship application of DMP	Which mechanisms explain HP/OP divergence?	Provides field-valid precedent that DMP is appropriate "within" entrepreneurship and especially relevant when outcomes can be mixed—mirroring our

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a dualistic model of passion. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> , 51(3), 433–459.	• HP/OP linked to network/performance outcomes • Mixed consequences of passion • Process model of passion and role identity • Role salience, feedback, transitions matter • Passion evolves with identity management	• When can OP have advantages? • How to test process model longitudinally? • Which role shifts foster HP vs OP? • How do strategic arenas shape passion?	internationalization setting where engagement may help growth yet also create rigidity.
Kakarika, M., Biniari, M., Guillén, L., & Mayo, M. (2022). Where does the heart lie? A multistage process model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity management. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> , 43(9), 1562–1578.			• Offers a processual identity-based lens that we can use to interpret how founders' harmonious and obsessive passion around internationalization is tied to ongoing role identity work. • Supports our argument that internationalization experiences serve as powerful role-related triggers that can stabilize or shift passion type, and helps us integrate dualistic passion with entrepreneurial identity theory in motivating and interpreting our findings.
Murnieks, C. Y., Mosakowski, E., & Cardon, M. S. (2014). Pathways of passion: Identity centrality, passion, and behavior among entrepreneurs. <i>Journal of Management</i> , 40(6), 1583–1606.	• Identity centrality shapes passion and behavior • Identity-based pathway model • Passion energizes entrepreneurial action	• What changes passion–identity links in transitions? • How do regulation processes interact with identity?	• Supports our microfoundational focus (how founder-level motivation links to strategic behavior), while motivating why we add DMP: internationalization is a high-demand context likely to differentiate harmonious vs obsessive engagement beyond identity centrality alone.
Newman, A., Obschonka, M., Moeller, J., & Chandan, G. G. (2021). Entrepreneurial passion: A review, synthesis, and agenda for future research. <i>Applied Psychology: An International Review</i>	• Broad review of entrepreneurial passion literature • Highlights fragmentation and pluralism • Identifies underexplored areas	• How can research become more cumulative? • Which contexts remain thinly studied? • Which designs best capture dynamics?	• Reinforces the need for a clearer “fit” argument: we can leverage the review's synthesis to justify why our context (internationalization) and our model (DMP) address underexplored combinations of context + mechanism + dynamics.
Pollack, Jeffrey M., Violet T. Ho, Ernest H. O'Boyle, and Bradley L. Kirkman. (2020). Passion at work: A meta-analysis of individual work outcomes. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> , 41(4), 311–331.	• Meta-analysis of passion at work • Distinguishes general, dualistic, role-based passion • Different streams predict different outcomes	• When should each passion stream be used? • Which moderators explain stream differences? • Can streams be combined?	• Directly supports our table-based comparison and our “fit-for-aim” justification: because our research goal is to explain heterogeneity (beneficial vs costly engagement), we foreground the dualistic model (HP/OP) as the most appropriate mechanism, while acknowledging role-based EP as the dominant entrepreneurship-specific conceptualization.
Riar, F. J., Qian, S., Miao, C., Debicki, B. J., & Kellermanns, F. W. (2025). Meta-analytic review, synthesis, and directions for the future of entrepreneurial passion research. <i>European Management Journal</i> , 43(1), 42–58.	• Meta-analytic synthesis of EP antecedents/outcomes • Highlights heterogeneity • Calls for better theorized contingencies	• Which moderators explain variation? • What role do context, time, measurement, level play? • Which strategic contexts remain underexplored?	• Supports our positioning of internationalization as a theoretically meaningful contingency: we respond to calls for context-sensitive explanations by examining a high-complexity strategic setting where passion's “benefits vs costs” are likely to diverge by type (harmonious/obsessive).
Schwarte, Y., Song, Y., Hunt, R. A., & Lohrke, F. T. (2023). Passion as process: Three perspectives on entrepreneurial passion and an integrated path forward. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 156, 113474.	• Passion as process framework • Integrates identity, regulation, expression views • Calls for aligned theory and measurement	• How to integrate perspectives without collapse? • Which designs capture passion as process?	• Directly supports our conceptual move: we locate our contribution in the “regulation” perspective (harmonious vs obsessive) and show why this is the best match to our aim of explaining heterogeneous internationalization behaviors and learning trajectories.
Stroe, S., Wincent, J., & Parida, V. (2018). Untangling intense engagement in entrepreneurship: Role overload and obsessive passion in early-stage entrepreneurs. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 90, 59–66.	• Role overload can foster OP • Stressors shape passion quality • Early-stage entrepreneurship especially relevant	• Which other stressors shift HP/OP? • What are long-term consequences? • What about internationalization pressures?	• Bolsters our argument that internationalization—often high-load and high-stakes—can be a plausible trigger shaping passion quality (harmonious vs obsessive) and thus a key microfoundation for explaining heterogeneity in internationalization pathways.
Thorgren, S., & Wincent, J. (2015). Passion and habitual entrepreneurship. <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , 33(2) 216–227.	• DMP applied to habitual entrepreneurship • Passion profiles differ across founder types • Quality of passion matters behaviorally	• What shapes passion profiles across ventures? • How stable are profiles over time? • How do profiles affect scaling/internationalizing?	• Provides evidence that strong entrepreneurial passion is common among experienced founders but that its quality (harmonious vs obsessive) varies and matters for behavior, supporting our effort to use the dualistic model to explain heterogeneous strategic paths.
Vallerand, R. J. (2015). <i>The psychology of passion: A dualistic model</i> . Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199777600.001.0001	• Integrative exposition of DMP • Clarifies mechanisms and consequences • Focus on internalization/regulation	• Which boundary conditions matter in entrepreneurship? • Can contexts or interventions shift passion type?	• Suggests that prior entrepreneurial careers and habitual venturing may shape the passion configurations entrepreneurs bring into internationalization decisions, which we can consider when interpreting patterns in our data and in outlining boundary conditions.
Vallerand, R.J., Blanchard, C., Mageau, G.A., Koestner, R., Ratelle, C., Léonard, M., ... Marsolais, J. (2003). Les passions de l'âme: On obsessive and harmonious passion. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 85(4), 756–767.	• Original DMP article • Passion as strong inclination to valued activity • Distinguishes HP vs OP by internalization mode	• How do entrepreneurial contexts shape internalization? • How stable are HP/OP over time and across roles?	• Provides the core definitional and theoretical basis for treating passion as heterogeneous in “quality,” enabling us to theorize distinct microfoundations (harmonious vs obsessive) for internationalization.
Vallerand, R. J., Salvy, S.-J., Mageau, G. A., Elliot, A. J., Denis, P. L., Grouzet, F. M. E., & Blanchard, C. (2007). On the role of passion in performance. <i>Journal of Personality</i> , 75(3), 505–534.	• Passion linked to goals, practice, performance • HP tied to mastery and well-being	• How do these pathways extend to entrepreneurship? • When does OP become adaptive vs maladaptive?	• Provides evidence that both harmonious and obsessive passion can fuel substantial effort and achievement, but via different motivational routes and with different implications for well-being.

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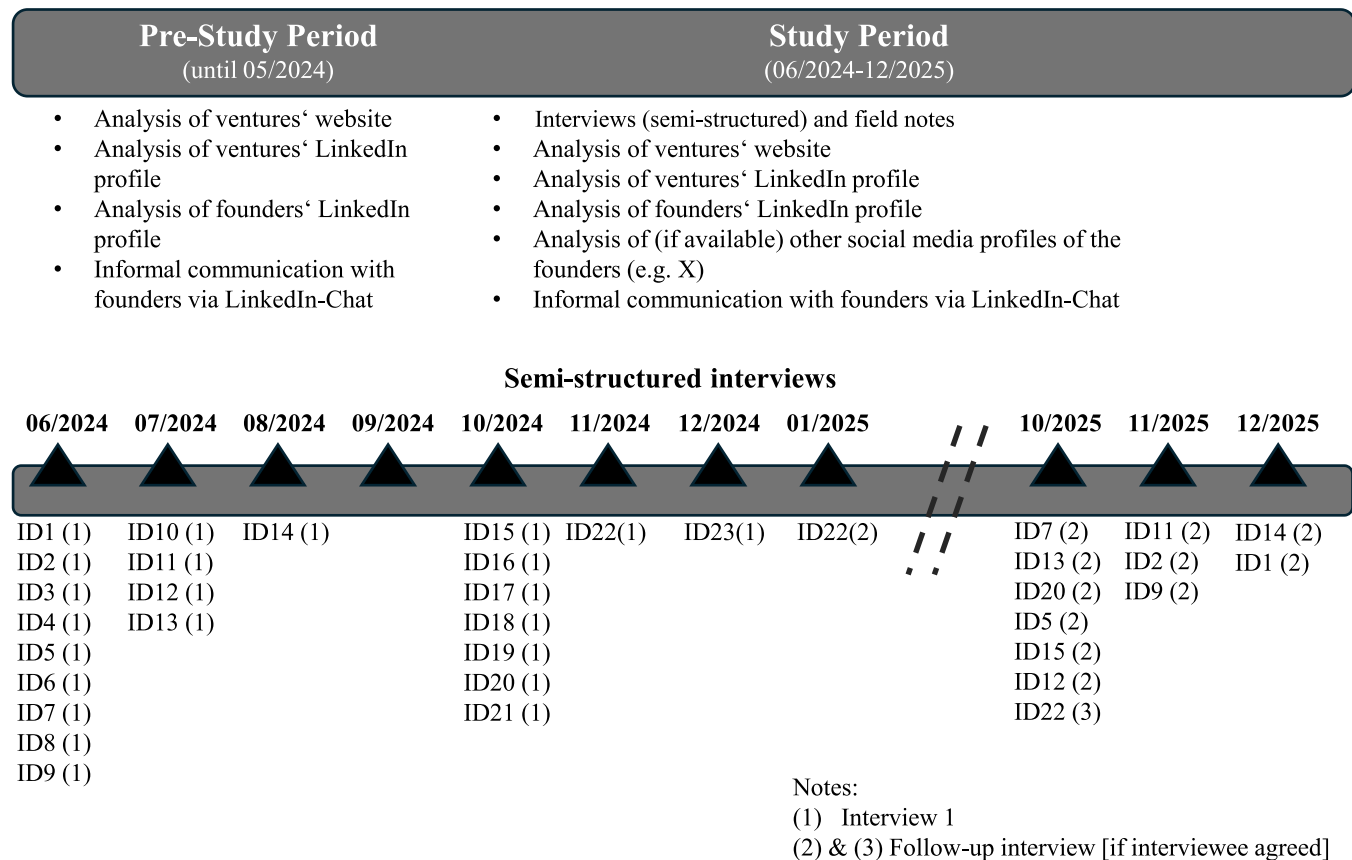
	• OP tied to effort but ambivalent outcomes	• How does uncertainty alter these links?	• Supports our argument that in internationalization it is the *quality* of passion (harmonious vs. obsessive), not merely its intensity, that shapes how much and how rigidly entrepreneurs invest in cross-border activities. • Justifies using the Dualistic Model of Passion to theorize distinct goal patterns (learning/mastery vs. validation/performance) and commitment trajectories in new venture internationalization.
Walsh, G., & Cunningham, J. (2024). Business failure and entrepreneur experiences of passion. <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , 42(3) 283–307.	• Qualitative study of passion around failure • Passion is dynamic and identity-laden • Documents constructive and problematic effects	• Do patterns generalize to other major events? • When does OP foster resilience vs escalation? • How to combine DMP and identity longitudinally?	• Reinforces our view of entrepreneurial passion as event-sensitive and closely tied to identity, supporting our focus on the bidirectional relationship between internationalization experiences and passion. • Encourages us to discuss how foreign market setbacks, disappointments, or reversals might differentially reshape harmonious and obsessive passion, and to highlight both constructive and potentially harmful passion-driven responses in high-stakes international contexts.
Warnick, B. J., Murnieks, C. Y., McMullen, J. S., & Brooks, W. T. (2018). Passion for entrepreneurship or passion for the product? A conjoint analysis of angel and VC decision-making. <i>Journal of Business Venturing</i> , 33(3), 315–332.	• Distinguishes passion targets in investor judgments • Entrepreneur passion and product passion both matter • Passion object shapes evaluation	• How do different passion targets combine/conflict? • How do targets interact with HP/OP?	• Supports the need to be explicit about *what* the entrepreneur is passionate about when theorizing internationalization, and it strengthens our argument that target-only distinctions still miss regulatory quality—hence our use of DMP.
Zhao, H., & Liu, Q. (2023). Entrepreneurial passion: A meta-analysis of three measures. <i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i> , 47(2), 524–552.	• Meta-analysis of three EP measures • Measurement choice affects findings • Compares major operationalizations	• When should scholars prioritize quality vs domain vs intensity? • How to align measure with theory?	• Our research aims require explaining adaptive vs maladaptive engagement in internationalization; that aim is better served by DMP's quality distinction than by intensity-only or domain-only measures.

Appendix B: Interview questions

The interviews were mainly conducted in German. Below is the translated English version.

1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself?
Age / Education / Previous experience
2. Could you please briefly introduce your startup?
Industry / Product(s) / Business model / Number of employees / Current stage of the startup / Your current role in the startup?
3. Please take a few minutes to think about why you enjoy your entrepreneurial activity, why you value it, and why you invest time and energy in it.
 - Looking back: Has it always been like this? What has changed for you since the founding?
 - In your opinion, how has your role as an entrepreneur influenced the activities you mainly perform now? Are these still activities you are passionate about? In what way? How is it different from when you started?
4. Since when have you been operating internationally, and how did the internationalization process unfold?
 - Specifically regarding internationalization: What has changed for you because of it? What tasks were added, and which ones could or had to be delegated?
 - What does internationalization mean for the activities you are particularly passionate about? Does it enhance them, allowing you to do more, or does it reduce them, allowing you to do less?
 - What do you think are the reasons why it feels different for you now compared to the beginning?
5. What impact has this had on your role in the startup? Please compare your role before and during/after internationalization.
6. How do you make decisions within your startup, particularly in regard to internationalization activities?
7. What positive or not-so-positive events related to internationalization have stayed in your memory?
8. What impact did these events have on you as a founder?
9. What impact did these events have on other stakeholders in your startup?
10. How do you evaluate the outcomes/activities related to internationalization so far?
11. Where do you see your startup in the future?
12. What role does internationalization play in that vision, and what role do you personally see for yourself?

Appendix C: Data collection process



Graphical representation based on the structure used in [Preller et al. \(2020\)](#)

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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