

Bridging Art and Business A Study on the Relationship Between Artistic Creativity, Emotional Intelligence and Entrepreneurial Mindset in Chinese Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the interplay between artistic creativity, emotional intelligence, and the entrepreneurial mindset among university students in China. With the growing emphasis on innovation and cross-disciplinary competencies in higher education, understanding how creative capacities and emotional awareness influence entrepreneurial thinking has become increasingly vital. Through a quantitative approach involving structured surveys and statistical analysis, the research explores whether emotional intelligence serves as a mediating factor between artistic creativity and entrepreneurial mindset. The findings aim to provide insights into how arts-based education can foster entrepreneurial potential and inform educational strategies that bridge the divide between artistic training and business-oriented outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Artistic creativity; Emotional intelligence; Entrepreneurial mindset; Entrepreneurial spirit; Chinese higher education; Innovation; Creative entrepreneurship

1 Introduction

1.1 Research significance and objectives

In the context of global educational reform and innovation-driven development, Chinese higher education institutions are placing increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship education to cultivate interdisciplinary talents equipped with both creative thinking and practical skills^[1]. According to recent policy initiatives from China's Ministry of Education (2020), entrepreneurship education should not only address business and technological competencies but also foster students' holistic development—particularly in creativity and emotional capability^[2].

Despite these advancements, the role of artistic disciplines remains underrepresented in mainstream entrepreneurship education. Artistic creativity—defined as the capacity to generate novel, meaningful, and contextually appropriate ideas (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Amabile, 1983)—is often relegated to the margins of entrepreneurial discourse. However, such creativity plays a foundational role in fields like design innovation, cultural entrepreneurship, and user experience, where emotional appeal and aesthetic value are central to business success^[3].

Similarly, emotional intelligence (EQ)—the ability to perceive, understand, and manage one's own and others' emotions (Goleman, 1995; Salovey Mayer, 1990)—is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in entrepreneurial contexts. Emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to manage stress, collaborate in teams, navigate ambiguity, and persist in the face of failure (Baron Markman, 2003), all of which are essential traits for successful entrepreneurs.

This study aims to construct a theoretical framework to examine the relationship between artistic creativity and the entrepreneurial mindset, while exploring whether emotional intelligence acts as a mediating variable. The entrepreneurial mindset refers to a set of cognitive and behavioral tendencies characterized by opportunity recognition, innovation, resilience, and self-efficacy (Kuratko Morris, 2018).

The significance of this study lies in three dimensions:

Theoretical contribution: Bridging the gap between arts education and entrepreneurship research by highlighting their conceptual and empirical intersections^[4].

Practical value: Informing pedagogical strategies for cultivating entrepreneurial capabilities among students in artistic and interdisciplinary programs.

Policy relevance: Providing recommendations for integrating creative and emotional competencies into the broader framework of entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities.

The primary objectives of this study are to:

Analyze the direct impact of artistic creativity on students' entrepreneurial mindset;

Examine the mediating role of emotional intelligence in this relationship;

Assess the consistency of the model across different demographic and academic variables, such as gender, major, and year of study.

1.2 Research questions

This research is guided by the following key questions:

What is the relationship between artistic creativity and entrepreneurial mindset among students in Chinese higher education?

How does emotional intelligence influence both artistic creativity and entrepreneurial mindset?

Does emotional intelligence serve as a mediating factor between artistic creativity and entrepreneurial mindset?

Are there any differences in these relationships across demographic or academic variables such as gender, major, or year of study?

2 Literature review

2.1 Artistic creativity

Artistic creativity refers to the ability to generate original and meaningful expressions, often within visual, musical, literary, or performance contexts. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), creativity involves producing work that is both novel and appropriate within a specific domain. In arts education, this manifests through divergent thinking, aesthetic sensitivity, and innovative exploration—attributes which are highly valuable in entrepreneurial endeavors^[5].

Amabile's (1983) Componential Theory of Creativity further identifies three core components essential to creativity: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic motivation. These factors can help individuals navigate ambiguous or rapidly changing environments—conditions that are characteristic of entrepreneurship.

In business and innovation settings, artistic creativity is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for opportunity recognition, brand storytelling, product differentiation, and user-centric design (Fillis Rentschler, 2010). Creative individuals tend to exhibit higher tolerance for risk and ambiguity, and their capacity for visualizing abstract possibilities makes them particularly well-suited to entrepreneurial roles (Florida, 2004). However, in China's higher education system, the entrepreneurial potential of students in the arts remains underexplored due to traditional academic silos that separate artistic training from commercial outcomes^[6].

2.2 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide thinking and behavior. Goleman (1995) popularized the concept, breaking it down into key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

In entrepreneurial contexts, EQ is a critical asset. High emotional intelligence allows individuals to better handle uncertainty, manage interpersonal dynamics, and persist after setbacks (Baron Markman, 2003). These capabilities are crucial in venture creation, team formation, leadership, and customer engagement.

Recent empirical studies suggest that EQ not only supports leadership effectiveness (Boyatzis, 2006), but also positively influences opportunity evaluation, risk assessment, and strategic decision-making in entrepreneurial environments (Zampetakis et al., 2009). EQ can also enhance creativity by enabling individuals to engage more deeply with complex emotional and social stimuli—factors that often inspire innovative thinking (Ivcevic et al., 2007).

Importantly, emotional intelligence may act as a psychological bridge between artistic creativity and entrepreneurial success by enhancing communication, motivation, and resilience^[7].

2.3 Entrepreneurial mindset

The entrepreneurial mindset encompasses a cognitive and behavioral orientation toward opportunity identification, innovation, self-efficacy, and risk-taking (McGrath MacMillan, 2000). It is not confined to launching new ventures, but also

applies to intrapreneurship, social innovation, and problem-solving in various professional settings.

Kuratko and Morris (2018) argue that cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset involves developing future orientation, value creation, and adaptability, which can be shaped by both emotional and creative competencies. In particular, students who score high on entrepreneurial mindset scales tend to demonstrate initiative, resilience, and proactive problem-solving—traits that overlap with those nurtured in arts education and emotional development^[8–12].

In the Chinese educational context, entrepreneurship education has traditionally focused on business and technology disciplines. However, recent initiatives highlight the importance of soft skills—such as creativity, empathy, and emotional regulation—as part of a more holistic entrepreneurial profile (Wang Wang, 2022).

By synthesizing the above constructs, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on creative entrepreneurship by examining the interrelationships among artistic creativity, emotional intelligence, and the entrepreneurial mindset in the setting of Chinese higher education.

3 Research design

3.1 Research subjects

This study focuses on undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Chinese higher education institutions, particularly those majoring in visual arts, design, music, performing arts, and interdisciplinary programs that integrate art and entrepreneurship. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure diversity across gender, academic background, and geographic regions.

Participants were drawn from several universities in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, each recognized for either their strong arts programs or entrepreneurship education. After removing incomplete and invalid responses, a total of 580 valid questionnaires were collected. While this number provides a basis for statistical analysis, the geographic distribution and institutional representation may still limit generalizability—a point addressed in the limitations section^[13].

3.2 Research instruments

The study employed a structured questionnaire comprising three validated scales that measure the core variables: artistic creativity, emotional intelligence, and entrepreneurial mindset. Each item used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

3.2.1 Artistic creativity scale

Adapted from two established frameworks:

Creative Achievement Questionnaire (CAQ) by Carson et al. (2005), which assesses real-life creative accomplishments across domains;

Consensual Assessment Technique (Amabile, 1982), adapted for self-assessment of creative engagement and perceived creative self-efficacy.

The revised scale for this study includes 10 items, with dimensions covering:

Artistic engagement (e.g., participation in exhibitions or creative projects),

Creative self-perception (e.g., belief in one's originality),

Divergent thinking tendencies.

Example item: "I often find novel ways to express my ideas through artistic media."

3.2.2 Emotional intelligence scale

Adopted from the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (2002), this scale consists of 16 items across four dimensions:

Self-emotion appraisal,

Others' emotion appraisal,

Use of emotion,

Regulation of emotion.

Example item: "I have a good understanding of my own emotions."

The WLEIS has been widely validated in Chinese academic contexts and demonstrates high reliability and cross-

cultural robustness.

3.2.3 Entrepreneurial mindset scale

Based on the Entrepreneurial Mindset Profile (EMP) developed by the Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative (ELI) and adapted for academic research by Davis et al. (2016). The adapted scale consists of 12 items, measuring:

Opportunity recognition,

Risk propensity,

Initiative and persistence,

Future orientation.

Example item: "I enjoy identifying new opportunities that others may overlook."

All three scales demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.80.

3.3 Research procedure

The research followed a structured sequence of steps:

Literature Review

A comprehensive analysis of previous studies provided the theoretical framework for variable selection and model construction.

Questionnaire Design and Pilot Testing

Initial versions were reviewed by field experts and piloted with 50 students to ensure clarity, content validity, and reliability.

Data Collection

Surveys were distributed both online and offline via university mailing lists, faculty referrals, and student organizations. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

Data Cleaning and Preparation

Incomplete or logically inconsistent responses were removed. The final dataset was coded and entered into SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 for analysis.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographics and variable distributions.

Pearson correlation tested relationships between variables.

Multiple regression analysis identified predictors of entrepreneurial mindset^[13].

Mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples.

Robustness checks included subgroup analysis and alternative model specifications to test consistency.

Harman's single-factor test was used to control for common method variance.

4 Empirical analysis (revised)

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide a demographic and statistical overview of the participants and the three core variables.

Among the 580 valid responses:

Gender distribution: 58% female, 42% male.

Academic level: 72% undergraduates, 28% postgraduates.

Major breakdown:

Visual Arts: 30%

Design: 27%

Music and Performing Arts: 18%

Interdisciplinary Arts Entrepreneurship Programs: 25%

The mean values and standard deviations for the key constructs were as follows:

These values suggest a relatively high level of self-perceived creativity and emotional awareness among respondents, as well as a moderately strong orientation toward entrepreneurial thinking.

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Artistic Creativity	3.84	0.62
Emotional Intelligence	3.91	0.55
Entrepreneurial Mindset	3.76	0.59

4.2 Correlation analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the bivariate relationships between the three key variables:

Variable Pair	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)
Artistic Creativity ↔ Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.42	p 0.001
Artistic Creativity ↔ Emotional Intelligence	0.47	p 0.001
Emotional Intelligence ↔ Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.55	p 0.001

All correlations are statistically significant and positive, with emotional intelligence showing the strongest association with entrepreneurial mindset, implying a potential mediating relationship.

4.3 Regression analysis

To further assess predictive relationships, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted.

Model 1: Entrepreneurial Mindset regressed on Artistic Creativity

$\beta = 0.42$, $t = 8.03$, $p 0.001$

Model 2: Entrepreneurial Mindset regressed on Emotional Intelligence

$\beta = 0.55$, $t = 10.12$, $p 0.001$

Model 3: Entrepreneurial Mindset regressed on both variables

Artistic Creativity: $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 4.12$, $p 0.001$

Emotional Intelligence: $\beta = 0.42$, $t = 8.26$, $p 0.001$

When both predictors were included, the coefficient for artistic creativity decreased, suggesting partial mediation by emotional intelligence.

4.4 Mediation analysis

To formally test the mediating role of emotional intelligence, a mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. The results were:

Indirect Effect (Artistic Creativity → Emotional Intelligence → Entrepreneurial Mindset):

$\beta = 0.196$, 95% CI [0.141, 0.257]

Direct Effect (Artistic Creativity → Entrepreneurial Mindset, controlling for EQ):

$\beta = 0.21$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.31]

This confirms that emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between artistic creativity and entrepreneurial mindset. In other words, students with higher creative capacity may develop a stronger entrepreneurial mindset in part due to enhanced emotional competencies^[14].

4.5 Robustness checks

To verify the consistency and validity of the findings, additional analyses were conducted:

Subgroup Analysis:

The mediation model held across gender and major subgroups, although the indirect effect was slightly stronger among students in interdisciplinary programs.

Alternative Model Specification:

Adding control variables (e.g., GPA, academic year) did not significantly alter the direction or strength of the primary relationships.

Common Method Bias:

Harman's single-factor test showed that no single factor accounted for the majority of the variance (first factor = 28.6%), reducing concerns about common method variance from self-reporting^[15].

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study investigated the relationships among artistic creativity, emotional intelligence, and entrepreneurial mindset within the context of Chinese higher education. Based on a structured survey and quantitative analysis of 580 university students, the results yield the following key conclusions:

(1) Artistic creativity has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial mindset.

Students with higher levels of artistic creativity tend to exhibit greater entrepreneurial initiative, opportunity recognition, and innovative thinking. This finding underscores the entrepreneurial value of arts education, which extends beyond aesthetics and expression to influence business-relevant competencies.

(2) Emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of entrepreneurial mindset.

Emotional intelligence significantly correlates with core elements of entrepreneurial thinking, such as resilience, self-efficacy, and interpersonal collaboration. Emotionally intelligent individuals are better prepared to cope with uncertainty, navigate social dynamics, and persist through entrepreneurial challenges^[16].

(3) Emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between artistic creativity and entrepreneurial mindset.

The mediation model confirmed that emotional intelligence serves as a psychological mechanism through which artistic creativity contributes to the formation of entrepreneurial mindset. This supports a “Creativity → EQ → Entrepreneurship” pathway model.

(4) The model is robust across subgroups.

Subgroup analysis demonstrated the model’s stability across gender, academic major, and year of study. Notably, the mediation effect was slightly stronger among students in interdisciplinary programs, highlighting the benefits of cross-domain integration.

In summary: The combination of artistic creativity and emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in developing students’ entrepreneurial mindset, offering a theoretical and empirical foundation for integrated models of “creativity + emotion + business” in entrepreneurship education^[17].

5.2 Recommendations

To foster the integration of arts and entrepreneurship education and enhance students’ entrepreneurial potential, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

(1) Incorporate emotional intelligence training into arts and entrepreneurship curricula

Universities should embed EQ development into existing courses through activities such as emotional regulation workshops, mindfulness exercises, reflective writing, and collaborative simulations to strengthen students’ emotional awareness, interpersonal skills, and stress management abilities.

(2) Promote cross-disciplinary project platforms combining “art + entrepreneurship”

Encourage the launch of cross-college programs like “Creative Product Incubation” or “Cultural Entrepreneurship Studios” to break down barriers between art and business faculties and offer real-world opportunities for students to transform creative ideas into viable ventures.

(3) Elevate the role of arts education in institutional entrepreneurship strategies

Universities should redefine the value of arts students in entrepreneurship ecosystems by establishing targeted support initiatives such as funding schemes, mentorship networks, and recognition programs tailored for cultural and creative startups^[18].

(4) Diversify and develop faculty teams

Recruit faculty members with hybrid expertise in both art and business or real-world entrepreneurial experience. Offer ongoing professional development in emotional intelligence, creativity, and entrepreneurial pedagogy to empower educators across disciplines.

(5) Advocate for policy-level support of creative entrepreneurship

Educational authorities and local governments should launch dedicated funding streams and flexible evaluation frameworks for creative entrepreneurship projects. Creative ventures should receive equitable access to university incubators and national innovation competitions alongside tech-based startups.

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