

# ONLINE PLATFORMS AND THE STIMULATION OF CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP – THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY AND THE PERCEPTION ABOUT WORK AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to explore creativity in the context of online platforms, to analyze the profile of creative entrepreneurs, the sources of creativity, specific motivations, to identify the interests and aspects common to the entrepreneurs present on the online platforms, as well as the way in which creative entrepreneurship changes the perception about business, work and self-employment. For this study, we used qualitative data collected following the elaboration and administration of an interview consisting of a series of questions regarding: the entrepreneurial experience on the online platform, the accessibility of the online platform, the sources of creativity, the role of creativity in creating a new product, the motivation for starting the creative business, the perception about work and self-employment, etc. A number of 30 handmade product creators were interviewed who market their products on Etsy-type online platforms. After analyzing and interpreting the data, the main conclusion of the paper is that, the existence of online platforms, the relatively low level of technical skills required for their use, directly influences the initiation of creative businesses, facilitates the entry into the niche markets of newly created products, stimulating in this way the manifestation of creativity and the initiation of new businesses. Also, online platforms radically change the perception of work and self-employment in order to stimulate it.*

**Keywords:** *Creative entrepreneurship, Creative economy, On-line platforms, Creativity and business, On-line start-up entrepreneurship, Business profile.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, much emphasis is placed on the transition from the industrial to the intellectual Cera. In particular, much attention is given to the development of the creative economy, which is based on intellectual activities, the generation of new knowledge, of design-thinking, creative imagination and creativity. The creative, imaginative potential becomes a major production resource. A key element of this type of economy is the category of people with creative thinking, capable of creating something new. The ability to enter the market with the results of creativity gives birth to the creative industry, the creation of creative business communities.

In this context, e-commerce platforms that support product creators are not a trend, but a necessity, because they facilitate remote interaction, everything that entails displaying and presenting the result of creativity, entering the market, presenting new products, stages of marketing and interaction with customers through virtual networks, etc.

This research presents an analysis of the creative sources and motivational sources of the creators behind the small online businesses that sell handmade products and personalized products. Our study provides information for researchers interested in examining how online microenterprises in niche markets are motivated to create and for decision makers who want to develop policies to support creative entrepreneurship.

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## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Previous theoretical concerns have demonstrated the direct association between creativity and the initiation of new businesses (Sternberg, 1999; Lee et al., 2004; Florida, 2008). Sternberg (1999) defines creativity as the ability to produce new, unexpected, but also appropriate, useful new things. Sternberg and Lubart (1999) define entrepreneurship as a form of creativity and can be labeled as business or entrepreneurial creativity because most of the time new businesses are original and useful. Although it is a multidimensional concept, creativity is measured by the Bohemian Index (Florida, 2002), a method of quantifying the proportion of „bohemians” and other creative people from an artistic point of view in a region. The Bohemian Index measures the artistic creativity and intellectual dynamism of a region, the openness of a region to creativity not necessarily directly associated with technological and business innovations (Lee et al., 2004).

Stimulating entrepreneurship, especially creative entrepreneurship through online platforms, is currently a new resource for stimulating economic development. In the specialized literature, interdisciplinary concerns have begun to appear with common analysis points regarding the use of online platforms by creative companies, increasing the use of these platforms and stimulating creative entrepreneurship, the influence that these platforms have in displaying products and entering the niche markets of handmade creative products, the use of these platforms especially by women and the influence that creative products have on purchasing intentions, the vision on work in creative activities through self-employment, etc.

We consider relevant the concerns for: the analysis and creation of theoretical models of sales of micro-enterprises through online platforms, for the valorization of products that include creativity, that are made manually and customized, and that have higher prices and are aimed at niche segments of the market (Church and Oakley, 2018), concerns for the development and empirical testing of the components of a business model relevant to the online platforms used by creative companies, proposing a holistic business model, based on creativity and the complexity of the product portfolio (Chandna and Salimath, 2018), the significance of marketing handmade products on online platforms, such as Etsy, for predominantly female sellers and its emancipatory effects, analyzes its work and limitations on online platforms (Jourdain, 2018), studies that explore whether manual production versus machine affect the attractiveness of the product, the effect of handmade on purchase intentions is analyzed (Fuchs et al., 2015), the opportunities offered by the online platforms, such as Etsy, to those who have not previously had access to this, but also analyze the issues that undermine these opportunities, foreshadowing the competition on the online platforms of creative products (Close, 2016).

The present work is part of our previous research area on stimulating entrepreneurship, especially among young people and women (Dodescu and Pop-Cohuț, 2018; Dodescu, Pop-Cohuț, 2018; Dodescu and Pop-Cohuț, 2015; Dodescu, Bădulescu and Pop-Cohuț, 2012) and aims to analyze the profile of creative entrepreneurs, identifying specific motivational aspects, identifying common interests and aspects of entrepreneurs present on online platforms.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As this research aims to analyze the profile of creative entrepreneurs, identifying specific motivational aspects, identifying common interests and aspects of entrepreneurs present on online platforms, as well as how creative entrepreneurship changes their perception about business,

work and self-employment, the method used was the semi-structured qualitative interview (in-depth interview). This method allows an in-depth understanding of both the specifics of each case and the elements common to all (Steinar, 2008). The interview guide was organized into four discussion topics to highlight the importance of creativity in entrepreneurship, motivations of creative entrepreneurship, perception of work and self-employment. **Topic 1 *General information*** about the respondent: name, surname, age, level of education, company name and field of activity, how the activity began, business experience, how many years have they been active on the online platform. **Topic 2 *Creativity and its sources***: sources of creativity, the role of creativity in creating a new product, the influence of time and flexible program in the act of creation, the influence of customer feedback in the act of creation. **Topic 3 *The importance of the online platform in starting and running the business***: the accessibility of the online platform, the skills needed to use the online platform, the role of the online platform in ensuring the visibility of creative products, the impact of the online platform in promoting niche products, the role of the online platform in accessing a larger market and so increasing sales. **Topic 4 *The impact of the existence of the online platform and shaping the perception of work and self-employment***: the motivation of starting a business with products that incorporate a high level of creativity, especially handmade products and if this motivation was influenced by P2P platforms, the existence of an online store on P2P platforms, the number of hours worked in creative fields and the decision regarding self-employment by starting an online business, the motivation to continue the online business and the motivation to recommend to other product creators the use of the online platform.

The sample was chosen by a sampling technique without probability, both by evaluation and by identification. The selection of the respondents targeted handmade product creators, creative entrepreneurs with a minimum experience of 3 years, the main selection criterion being the continuity of the activity on the online platform. In a first step, potential respondents were emailed the interview guide and then the meetings for the individual interviews were set. Out of a total of 75 potential respondents contacted online, 30 creators were interviewed, including 28 women and 2 men. Data collection was carried out between February and September 2019. For the analysis of the obtained answers we used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.

This paper examines creativity and its sources, the role of creativity in creating a new product, the motivation of starting a creative business, the importance of the online platform in starting and running the online business and ensuring the visibility of the created products, as well as the impact of the existence of the online platform in the outlining of the perception of work and self-employment. Therefore, in our research we started from the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis One:** There is a positive correlation between creativity manifested through the creation of products with a high degree of originality and creativity and the initiation of business in creative fields.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is a positive correlation between the existence of online platforms and the initiation of online businesses in creative fields.

### 3. RESULTS

From a total number of 30 respondents, 28 are women, aged 25 to 45 years old. All respondents have higher education and business experience of: less than 5 years - 30%, between 5 and 10 years – 43.3%, more than 10 years' experience – 26.7%. All respondents have online businesses

on an Etsy-type platform. None of these businesses operate in the classic format of shops or other forms of commerce. All respondents are also product creators, very few work in a team – 6.6%. The businesses operate in the following fields of activity: jewellery (12 businesses - 40%), clothing (4 businesses – 13.33%), interior design accessories (6 businesses – 20%), art (1 business – 3.33%), footwear and leather goods (2 businesses – 6.67%), ceramic objects (2 businesses – 6.67%), woodworking (2 businesses – 6.67%), winemaking (1 business – 3.33%). The main motivations for starting a business: freedom to create new products (26.7%), freedom of decision - independence 20%, the existence of the online platform 20%, online marketplace 16.7%, the created products have positive feedback 13.3%, financial independence (3.3%).

*Regarding creativity and its sources, we asked creators to define creativity, which are the sources of their creativity, what is the role of creativity in creating a new product and whether there is a direct link between creativity and the flexibility of the working hours. The main words that define creativity were: colour, joy, well-being, naturalness, the desire to do something else, the desire to create something new, permanent concern for doing something, etc. “Creativity is simply the process of turning a dream into a healthy dose of passion and endurance.” (EI)*

The sources of creativity were defined, as follows: nature 33.3%, colours 16.7%, new materials 16.7%, surrounding objects 10%, travel 6.7%, beautiful things 6.7%, new ideas, flea markets, magazines – 3.3% each. *“Creativity is a natural thing! The mind relaxed and began to imagine the strangest and most unexpected objects of decoration: the forks came to life, the cups began to light, the wool dolls became waking lights, the hooks and pencils became lamps” (AD).* We observe some ease in defining the sources of creativity: nature, beautiful things, available materials etc., product ideas are created freely, unconstrained or not imposed by a boss, they develop naturally, through experimentation and constant concern for creation.

Defining the identity of their own products is done in terms of colour, light, joy, wellbeing. The product creators are very concerned about the originality and the degree of creativity included in the products offered to customers, they want the product to create emotion, unique experiences but also functionality, they are open to all things modern, to change and to experimentation, they are optimistic, courageous. They are realistic about the future course of the business; they know very clearly what motivates them and what future projects they have. A positive factor in the creation of new products is the positive feedback received from the customers as well as the constant source of new ideas that motivate them. *“Our clients are very attentive to the meanings of the objects, to every detail. They are aware of the difference between a handmade product and a series or factory product and appreciate the creative process. Thanks to them we feel the joy of creating, because without this feedback the enthusiasm is lost. No one creates just for themselves.” (IR).*

If we were to make a general characterization of the profile of handmade product creators, it would be: higher education not necessarily in the field in which they show their creativity, from the urban environment; they have a creative background stretching back to childhood, they are concerned with creating something new, they have shown their creativity in a period of time when they re-thought their lives, changed their priorities or simply had more free time, for example during maternity leave/childcare leave; they are very hard-working, conscientious and dedicated people, they care constantly improving their working techniques, they are open to learning, they love the freedom of expression, they appreciate the quality and not the quantity of things, they are people who love beauty, who emanate simplicity, naturalness. *“This year was a year of study and discovery. I learned about myself that I actually like to learn! I learned that*



*challenges stimulate me and that I do not shy away from new projects that I know nothing about. I have recently completed a series of courses in interior design and responsible design”.* (IM)

Regarding the importance of the online platform in starting and running the business, product creators say the online platform is: very accessible - 70%, accessible – 26.6%, average accessibility – 3.3%. The use of the platform does not require technical skills other than the basic ones when using a computer: very low technical skills 50%, low technical skills 20%, average technical skills 6.7%, high technical skills 16.7% and very high technical skills 6.7%. The pre-formatting of online stores, the description of the steps in uploading and the pre-formatted product presentation structure, as well as the requirements regarding the image of the uploaded products ensure the uniformity of the presentation of the products present in the online stores on the platform and ensure the visibility of the creative products. The online platform plays an important role in promoting niche products, personalized products and those that incorporate a high level of novelty and creativity: to a great extent 60%, to quite a big extent 16.7%, to a medium extent 3.3%, to a small extent 10%, to a very small extent 10%.

*Regarding the impact of the existence of the online platform and shaping the perception of work and self-employment,* the product creators say that the existence of the online platform was essential in the presence on the online market of their products, and therefore their income. Most of them tried selling their products in classic format through trade fairs, but the impact of marketing the products, of the visibility, the access to the advised consumers was very small. The opening of the online store has greatly increased the visibility of the niche products created, they have managed to sell their products and reach the target consumer. The sale of the created products and therefore the purpose of the creative act motivates and excites them and this is the basis of new ideas and projects. This motivational aspect caused them to rethink their work time, sometimes make radical career decisions, some gave up their main job which they had obtained after years of education and qualifications, and have chosen this path after going through many searches, experiments etc. Self-employment was a viable option to all respondents. *“Three years ago, I did not think that from a person working a corporate job, dedicated to the company, someone who worked without having a strict schedule, trying to be at home at least as much as to my family to recognize me, I will end up developing my own business.”* (AD)

Also, we cannot neglect the impact of online business on the lives of entrepreneurs, both in terms of working time and lifestyle. The analysis of the interviews reveals that starting an online business in the creative field has a major impact on the working time, the time spent on product creation, its presentation, etc. Working time is no longer perceived as working time, it increases the degree of involvement in work, in the creative process, in product innovation, in improving the working technique, in finding technical solutions, it is perceived as quality time. *“Time goes by without me getting bored, without too many breaks, but at the end of the day there is a pleasant tiredness because another day has ended – another day when I have done a lot and I can tell a nice story about it.”*(PM) Although most respondents see *freedom* as essential in their creative endeavour, these entrepreneurs allocate a higher than average number of hours to work and are, thus, *“tired, but smiling”*. Thus, 50% work between 8 and 10 hours per day, 30% work about 8 hours per day, 13.3% work between 6 and 8 hours per day and 6.7% work between 4 and 6 hours per day. This business opportunity has also led to changes in the attitude about self: the level of confidence, personal satisfaction, pride and self-esteem increases, they are more independent, they gain job satisfaction and especially satisfaction regarding the products created by them.

The positive experience gained through the platform determines them to become promoters of creative entrepreneurship, to recommend the initiation of new businesses to other product creators: the flexible program, the positive experiences, the desire to be their own boss, the freedom to do things in their personal style, the possibility to use their skills and competences to the full capacity, professional satisfaction, financial independence, responsibility, decision-making, personal and professional development.

### 3.1. Association, correlation and regression of variables

The independent variables for this study are: *Creativity* (C, in what follows – with a number of 5 questions), *the existence of P2P online platforms* (PON, in what follows - with a number of 5 questions) and the dependent variable is *starting online businesses in creative fields* (IAC, in what follows – with a number of 7 questions).

*Creativity* includes the answers regarding the field of activity, the sources of creativity, the role of creativity in the creation of new products, the influence of the flexible work time in expressing creativity, the number of hours worked per day. *The existence of P2P online platforms* describes the accessibility of the online platform, the skills needed to use the online platform, the role of the online platform in ensuring the visibility of creative products, the impact of the online platform in promoting niche products, the role of the online platform in accessing a larger market and thus increased sales. *Starting online businesses in creative fields* describes the motivation of starting a business with products that include a high level of creativity, especially handmade products and, if this motivation was influenced by P2P platforms, the existence of an online store on P2P platforms, the decision regarding self-employment by initiating of an online business, the motivation to continue the online business and the motivation to recommend to other product creators to use the online platform.

With the help of the computer software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the three categories of factors that characterize C, PON and IAC, the variables were aggregated, by the *method of associating variables with T-Test analysis*. Following verification of the correlation between the aggregated variables using Pearson's Chi-square for pairs C - IAC (Sig value = 0.685) and PON – IAC (Sig value = 0.291) the significant connection between creativity and business start-up in creative fields was confirmed, as well as between the existence of online platforms and business start-up in creative fields. In both cases, a significantly higher correlation is observed than the statistical threshold (statistical threshold Sig > 0.05 shows a significant approximation between variables). To see the relationship between the independent variable C and the dependent variable IAC, we used the Pearson correlation and regression analysis: R=0.377, R Square 0.142, Sig. (2-tailed)=0.00 and for the independent variable PON and the dependent variable IAC, namely: R=0.534, R Square = 0.285; Sig. (2-tailed)=0.00, and the correlation coefficient is statistically significant for both pairs, it is  $p < 0.05$ .

As can be seen from the results, we can state that **Hypothesis One: *There is a positive correlation between creativity manifested through the creation of products with a high degree of originality and creativity and the initiation of business in creative fields – is valid*** (R=0.377,  $p < 0.05$ ), there is a positive correlation but not a very close one. Not all product creators have the courage to start a business, the vast majority prefer to market these products in classic style, for example through trade fairs. Also, even though an impressive number of creators use P2P platforms to market their products, the vast majority do not start an online business. Also,

**Hypothesis Two:** *There is a positive correlation between the existence of online platforms and the initiation of online businesses in creative fields – is valid* ( $R=0.534$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), there is a good positive correlation. Currently, the development of online platforms and the ease of use are a decisive factor in the decision to open an online store. The fact that they do not require additional technical skills, the preformatting of online stores and the way of presenting products facilitates the visibility and online presence of products created on the global market.

#### 4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

We consider that the topic of this paper, namely the impact of the existence of online platforms on the development of businesses in areas that include a high level of creativity, is insufficiently studied. Although these platforms allow entrepreneurs to set up online businesses with ease, the business models on these platforms are not yet studied in depth. The fact that only a part of the participants in the transactions on these platforms have started an online business and that a good part of the participants are natural persons who occasionally sell products made by them does not allow to know exactly the economic and financial impact of these transactions. Although this online business model is aimed at handmade products, with a high degree of creativity and proposes a high price strategy, we consider the perception of consumers about these products interesting. These consumers are shifting from mass production and production in series to personalized, original products. Also, we consider it attractive to continue the research that will strengthen our understanding of the implications of e-commerce in consumer behavior, of strategies to support creativity, including by stimulating creative entrepreneurship.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Although online platforms are already more than 10 years old and allow entrepreneurs to set up online businesses with relative ease, business models and support for product creators remain an area that is under-analyzed. In this paper we have tried to highlight the fact that the existence and development of these virtual platforms contribute to the highlighting of the original products, which include manual work, characterized by creativity and originality and thus can lead to the growth of the creative economy.

We consider that at the level of analysis achieved, we have reached the objectives set: on the one hand, to identify if there is a positive correlation between the time available, the sources of creativity and the manifestation of creativity by making products with a high degree of originality and creativity and, on the other hand, if there is a positive correlation between the existence of online platforms and the initiation of online business in creative fields. However, we must admit that our study has limitations, especially related to the sample size and its relevance to the number of users of the online platform, the fact that we interviewed only experienced product creators who already have an online business in the creative field, as well as the fact that everyone has opted for self-employment, so we can consider them as business models and promoters of online businesses among product creators. The results obtained can help new conceptualizations of creative economies, the role of virtual platforms in capitalizing on creativity and starting new businesses, in knowing the creative behavior, including the perception of work and creativity in the context of self-employment.

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