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Impact of Future Time Perspective on Entrepreneurial Career Intention for Individual Sustainable Career Development: The Roles of Learning Orientation and Entrepreneurial Passion

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Abstract: This study addressed the underlying mechanisms through which future time perspective (FTP) motivates entrepreneurial career intention. By focusing on entrepreneurship as an important career decision for individual sustainable career development, we argued that the generic use of a learning orientation approach mediates the effect of the presence of an extended FTP on individual entrepreneurial career intention. We also posited that entrepreneurial passion for founding moderates the relationship between learning orientation and individual entrepreneurial career intention. Using a survey data of 416 students attending a Chinese public sector university, we found that FTP enhanced learning orientation, which, in turn, stimulated entrepreneurial career intention. Moreover, the positive relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention became strong as entrepreneurial passion for founding increased. Results were discussed in terms of implications for theory and practice.

Keywords: future time perspective; entrepreneurial career intention; learning orientation; entrepreneurial passion; sustainable career development

1. Introduction

Sustainable career development is crucial to personal survival and self-realization value [1–4]. Although individuals have many opportunities to make career choices, they increasingly face the challenges and obstacles of career sustainability across their lifespan in a complex and uncertain world [2,5]. Sustainable careers refer to “sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual” [2] (p. 7). Different from other career paradigms, the sustainable career perspective focuses explicitly and intensively on individual and contextual factors related to career management [6]. Entrepreneurial career decisions, particularly for the formation of entrepreneurial career intention, are emerging and important issues in sustainable career development research and practice [2,3,7–10]. Entrepreneurial career intention refers to the intention to pursue a career in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship “involves taking risks, making decisions, taking advantage of opportunities, acting in uncertain environments in a proactive and innovative way, in order to achieve objectives that are specific to each entrepreneur” [11] (p. 2). The subject of entrepreneurial career intention has recently attracted extensive attention from scholars [12–15], as such an intention is theorized as a critical step to the actual entrepreneurial startup behaviors and subsequent success

in an established venture [16]. Therefore, scholars must shed light on the forming mechanism of entrepreneurial career intention in the entrepreneurial career and entrepreneurship research fields [17].

Prior research found that along with situational and individual factors, such as an unfavorable financial setting, the absence of regular job career choices [8], age [8], gender [18,19], proactive personality [16], and self-efficacy [9] may influence entrepreneurial career intention [20,21]. Despite their insight, however, previous studies that investigated the antecedents of entrepreneurial intention ignored the role of people's time-related cognitions [22]. This gap is especially notable because research has increasingly highlighted the importance of time perspective in driving individual motivation and behavior [21–26]. Time perspective relates to how individuals respond to time and how they arrange and categorize personal and social interactions in temporal terms, including the past, present, and future [26–29]. In particular, future time perspective (FTP), which is defined as “the present anticipation of future goals” [30] (p. 122), can be created by setting motivational goals in the future and by developing long-range behavioral projects to achieve these goals [30]. Research demonstrates that individuals with a deep FTP likely enhance their motivation, learning activity, persistence, and performance [30–33]. In this study, we thus addressed this gap by investigating if individuals' FTP is associated with their entrepreneurial career intentions and how this link is unfolded.

By building on socioemotional selectivity theory [34,35], which emphasizes that the perception of time plays a critical role in choosing and pursuing personal goals, we claimed that individuals' FTP could predict their entrepreneurial career intentions. When time is perceived as expensive, goals aimed at optimizing the future are prioritized. Such goals often relate to the task of ascertaining one's role in society (e.g., receiving social acceptance) and one's vocational or career interest (e.g., becoming financially independent) [35].

Furthermore, learning orientation and entrepreneurial passion are viewed as crucial individual characteristics for targeting individual future goals and behaviors [36]. Learning orientation represents individuals' tendency to continuously improve insights, knowledge, and understanding and, therefore, taps into their cognitive abilities [37,38]. Entrepreneurial passion refers to an intense positive emotion that is related to entrepreneurial activities [39]. However, little is known about how learning orientation (as a cognitive process) and entrepreneurial passion for founding (as an emotional process) influence the relationship between FTP and individual entrepreneurial career intention. Accordingly, we investigated the roles of learning orientation and entrepreneurial passion in linking FTP and individual entrepreneurial career intention.

Using a survey data of 416 students from a Chinese public sector university and by exploring the underlying mechanisms through which FTP motivates individual entrepreneurial career intention, our study contributed to the research on FTP, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial career intention, and sustainable career perspective [2] in three ways. First, we answered a previously underexplored theoretical question about how FTP translates into entrepreneurial career intention. By exploring the direct and indirect influences of future time-related cognitions on individual entrepreneurial career intention, we demonstrated the importance of nourishing FTP among individuals as it can significantly boost their entrepreneurial ambitions.

Second, by checking the moderating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding on the relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention, our study contributed to entrepreneurship research. Entrepreneurial passion for founding provides individuals with coherence in terms of goal-directed cognitions and behaviors [39]. Learning-oriented individuals with a strong entrepreneurial passion for founding tend to have the willingness and the ability to engage in identifying entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby increasing the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention to pursue opportunities [40]. Therefore, we posited that entrepreneurial passion for founding moderates the relationship between learning orientation and individual entrepreneurial career intention. We highlighted the important role of individual entrepreneurial passion for founding in forming entrepreneurial career intention by identifying the question of which personal factors or

emotions may enhance or impede the transformation of entrepreneurship-specific motivations into the intention of genuinely becoming entrepreneurs [30].

Third, we contributed to the literature on entrepreneurial career intention and the perspective of a sustainable career. We highlighted the previously unexplored cognitive and emotional drivers of the formation of entrepreneurial career intention by investigating the mediating role of learning orientation between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention and the moderating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention. Our study provided a nuanced understanding of the determinants of the formation of entrepreneurial career intention, thereby adding to the perspective of a sustainable career [2,4,9,41].

2. Theory and Hypotheses

2.1. Mediating Role of Learning Orientation

Individual career uncertainty prevails in our world today. Sustainable careers can be achieved through one's lifespan. A key factor having sustainable careers is "person-career fit, or the extent to which an individual's career experiences are compatible with their needs, values, interests, and talents" [6] (p. 2). Entrepreneurship is an important career option. An increasing number of individuals have chosen an entrepreneurial career [16], which is attractive, but arguably full of high uncertainty [40]. As such, protecting the career sustainability of entrepreneurs over time is of utmost importance [2]. However, research in the field of sustainable entrepreneurial career is still in its infancy.

Entrepreneurial career differs from traditional ones in organizations [42]. Bird defined an entrepreneurial career as "the process of deciding to begin and to continue operating as an entrepreneur" [43] (p. 173). Farrington et al. defined an entrepreneurial career as "owning and managing one's own small business" [44] (p. 4). The two key tasks in the first stage of entrepreneurship are the identification of entrepreneurial opportunity and the formation of entrepreneurial intention [18,40]. By building on the insight from prior studies, we defined entrepreneurial career intention as a state of mind in which people intend to create their own business and occupy different roles in running their own business and engage in the necessary entrepreneurial activities during their future working life. Entrepreneurial career intention reveals the amount of struggle and tenacity of an individual who is eager to perform actions to start a new business [43,45,46]. Knowing what drives people to become entrepreneurs remains a significant issue in entrepreneurship studies [17]. Given the increasing importance of entrepreneurship in contemporary careers [15,47], uncovering the determinants of entrepreneurial career intention is crucial.

Time perspective is defined by Zimbardo and Boyd [28] as "the often non-conscious personal attitude that each of us holds towards time and the process whereby the continual flow of existence is bundled into time categories that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to our lives" (p. 51). Zimbardo and Boyd [29] argued that time perspectives "exert a dynamic influence on many important judgments, decisions, and actions" (p. 18). Generally, time perspectives can be categorized into three types: past time perspective, present time perspective, and FTP [26–29]. As a cognitive-motivational construct [13,23,27,31], FTP reveals a general future orientation [27] and refers to a person's perception of his future and his expectations of upcoming goals in the current moment [48]. FTP comprises global and domain-specific subjective expectations and evaluations of the future and is a complex way of organizing subjectively one's cognitions, evaluations, and behaviors concerning the future [26].

We argued that FTP could help individuals form entrepreneurial career intentions for two major reasons. First, FTP enables individuals to identify a desirable and feasible entrepreneurial opportunity, which is often considered a strong predictor of the intention to become entrepreneurs to pursue the opportunity. FTP helps people obtain the capacity to look far ahead in the future, such that individuals high in FTP can anticipate the more distant future [21,30], deal with long time intervals wherein they can set motivational goals, plans, and projects, conduct present actions, and strive toward goals in the future [13,23,30,31]. Individuals with FTP tend to formulate long means-goals structures [21].

Individuals high in FTP are greatly inspired toward goals situated in the future, thereby developing and enhancing their cognitions and actions essential for achieving the goals [26–28,49]. As a consequence, individuals with FTP tend to be willing to exert more efforts to engage in the proactive exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities [13,26,27]. People high in FTP are also more likely to believe they can discover many entrepreneurial opportunities because they perceive the amount of time they have left to search for the opportunities to be greater than people with low in FTP [18]. As such, individuals with FTP tend to discover more promising entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby increasing their likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention to pursue opportunities [3,13,17,18,50].

Second, FTP provides individuals with the requisite motivation to transform entrepreneurial opportunities identified in the intention to choose an entrepreneurial career. FTP helps people gain the capacity to ascribe high value to mid-range future goals, such that individuals high in FTP can perceive present tasks as more valuable because they lead to more highly valued future goals [21,30]. Individuals with FTP are likely to attribute considerable significance to their present actions on searching for entrepreneurial opportunities [18,26,27]. Accordingly, people with FTP tend to conscientiously plan for, practice for, and cope with the processes and consequences of entrepreneurial opportunity identification, which enable them to find feasible and desirable opportunities [26,27,30,51]. Individuals high in FTP also tend to believe they are better able to cope with unavoidable negative future consequences and obtain positive future consequences [26], thereby attaining a sense of mastery and control over the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities [27]. As a result, individuals with FTP tend to increase their confidence in the transformation of identified opportunities into entrepreneurial career intention [3,13,18,33]. For these reasons, we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *FTP is positively associated with entrepreneurial career intention.*

Individual learning is a dialectical process that involves people's access to current information and their capacity to integrate such a new understanding in their present base of knowledge [37]. Learning is thus a process through which individuals convert new experiences into combinations of fresh and existing information [52]. Learning orientation refers to the propensity of individuals to continually search for fresh information [53] to obtain and master new abilities [54,55]. Learning theory indicates that the propensity to obtain fresh understanding and eventually incorporate this understanding into an existing knowledge base improves individual ability needed to cope with issues and uncertain circumstances; the reason is that the continuous updating of a current knowledge base improves the ability to identify new alternatives to present issues [21].

The future theory of time helps us recognize why the actions and decisions of individuals are affected by the conscious and unconscious expectations of their future selves [56]. Research on the motivational dynamics of time perspective emphasizes the role of the future as a regulatory aspect of human behavior [30,57]. FTP incorporates affective and cognitive components [49,58]. The affective component is defined as a temporal attitude [51] and represents future events' emotional valence. The cognitive components of FTP contribute to the nature of future-projected events, in terms of time extension (i.e., how far these events will be projected in the future) and in terms of content (i.e., degree of objective realism, number of future-projected events, and clarification of such objectives). The future may be optimistically viewed with a sense of trust in achieving future goals or may instead be regarded as somewhat challenging [59]. Scholars highlight the positive relationship of FTP with several key constructs, such as academic achievement [31,32,60], motivation [23], and career adaptability [48].

We argued that individuals with high FTP likely formulate a strong learning orientation for two important reasons. First, FTP shapes individual behavior because it serves as a guideline, particularly in uncertain circumstances, by cognitively structuring the future and by evaluating possible means (strategies) and outcomes [13,29]. FTP is a type of instrumentality for individuals to reach a goal in the future [30,51,58]. People with FTP tend to place effort into present activities that they perceive to be instrumental in achieving future goals [21,23,30]. Thus, individuals high in FTP are likely to be

dedicated to their current learning tasks to upgrade the knowledge base needed to achieve future goals [26,29]. Second, as noted previously, FTP helps people place a high value on future goals [21,23,30]. Individuals with FTP tend to be willing to sacrifice present enjoyment and study hard to develop the skills and competencies essential for achieving valuable future goals [24,29]. Empirical studies support this line of reasoning. For example, Zimbardo and Boyd [29] showed that individuals with FTP learned more. Based on the above logic, we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *FTP is positively associated with a learning orientation.*

Learning orientation reflects individuals' propensity to build a knowledge base and develop skills and competencies continuously. It acts as a critical trigger for individual entrepreneurial career intention [40]. We argued that learning orientation is associated positively with individual entrepreneurial career intention for three major reasons.

First, learning orientation helps people enhance their knowledge base, acquire skills and competencies, and master new situations [38], which contributes to the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities [50]. Individuals with a strong learning orientation have both the willingness and ability to engage in a proactive search for entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby increasing the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention to pursue opportunities [18,40,50].

Second, learning orientation enables individuals to increase their self-efficacy in identifying entrepreneurial opportunities [55]. Learning orientation is powerful for decreasing the uncertainty that underlies complicated assignments [53,58] because it improves individuals' ability to cope with difficulties through continuous updating of present knowledge that allows them to see different alternatives [40,60,61]. Thus, individuals with high learning orientation will never succumb to challenges and hardships in the process of searching for entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby enhancing their confidence to find out promising opportunities [40,50,55].

Third, learning orientation motivates individuals to transform feasible and desirable opportunities into entrepreneurial career intention [18,40,50]. A key characteristic of a career as an entrepreneur is the intrinsic probability of failure and the related challenge of reducing the chances of failure [13,40]. Learning orientation helps people increase their commitment to highly valued future goals [30,38,40,55]. Thus, individuals with a strong learning orientation are willing to be well prepared to cope with challenging tasks [40,55], uncertainties, and risks in the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities [13,44]. Individuals with a powerful learning orientation tend to be interested in complicated and knowledge-intensive tasks and activities [40] and perceive that they can deal effectively with the problems of future entrepreneurial operations [40,60–62]. As such, individuals with high learning orientation are likely to adapt themselves more easily to the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby enhancing their motivation to transform promising opportunities into the intention to choose a career as an entrepreneur [18,40,50,55].

Following the above logic, we expected a mediating role of learning orientation between FTP and individual entrepreneurial career intention. Thus, we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Learning orientation mediates the relationship between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention.*

2.2. Moderating Role of Entrepreneurial Passion for Founding

Entrepreneurship is considered a tale of passion [39]. The nature of entrepreneurial passion is conceptualized by Cardon et al. [39] as “consciously accessible, intense positive feelings experienced by engagement in entrepreneurial activities associated with roles that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur” (p. 517).

In terms of the three distinct sets of tasks and activities of an entrepreneurial process, entrepreneurial passion is divided into three types: (1) passion for inventing, which pertains to activities associated with inventing new products or services, (2) passion for founding, which pertains to activities associated with assembling financial, human, and social resources essential for creating a new venture,

and (3) passion for developing, which pertains to activities associated with nurturing, growing, and expanding an established venture [63]. We only examined entrepreneurial passion for founding because this study focused solely on individuals who are not yet entrepreneurs. Individual passion for founding refers to activities that focus on building new ventures to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities [39]. Although research indicates that passion is important in entrepreneurial processes, the role of passion for founding in the formation of entrepreneurial career intention has not received adequate attention in empirical research [36,39,63–66].

We argued that entrepreneurial passion for founding strengthens the positive relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention for three major reasons. First, entrepreneurial passion for founding enables individuals to become involved in novel and creative tasks and activities, specifically germane to the intention of a career as an entrepreneur [39,63]. When individuals have a strong entrepreneurial passion for founding, such individuals with a learning orientation tend to establish actively a new knowledge base and acquire new skills and competencies [38]. They also engage in seeking proactively for promising entrepreneurial opportunities, which constitutes an important trigger for forming entrepreneurial career intention to pursue opportunities [39,40,50,63].

Second, entrepreneurial passion for founding activates individuals' persistence in goal pursuit [39]. When individuals' entrepreneurial passion for founding is high, such individuals with learning orientation are likely to be willing to exert continuous efforts to integrate new knowledge into their present knowledge base and cope with obstacles and impediments during the process of identifying and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby increasing their confidence to seek out desirable and feasible opportunities [39,40,55,63].

Third, entrepreneurial passion for founding has a positive effect on individuals' absorption with tasks and activities associated closely with the intention to choose a career as an entrepreneur [39]. When individuals have a strong entrepreneurial passion for founding, such individuals with learning orientation tend to enhance their commitment to future goals [40,55] and then to be concentrated and engrossed deeply in identifying entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby enhancing their motivation to transform promising opportunities into entrepreneurial career intention [39,40,55,63].

Following this reasoning, we expected entrepreneurial passion for founding to enhance the positive effect of learning orientation on entrepreneurial career intention. Thus, we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Entrepreneurial passion for founding moderates the positive relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention.*

Building on the above hypotheses, we proposed our conceptual model, as shown in Figure 1.

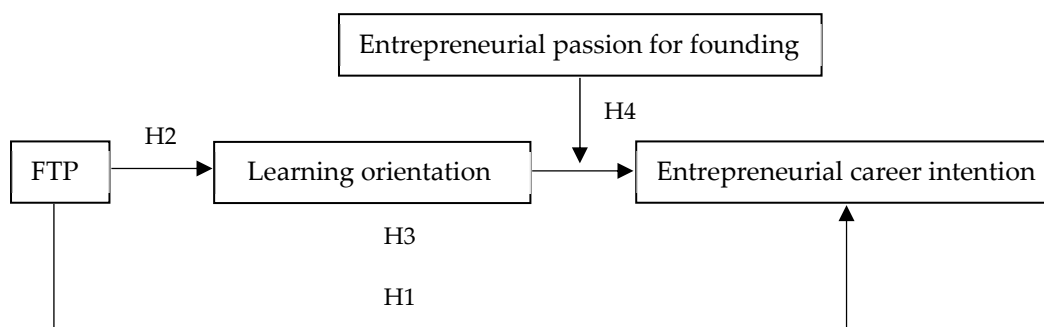


Figure 1. Conceptual model of this study.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

In line with previous studies that examine entrepreneurial career intention [46], we tested our hypotheses with questionnaire data gathered from a sample of university students attending a large public sector university in Anhui Province, China. To improve the relevance and face validity of the questionnaire [67], we conducted informal interviews with three professors and two doctoral students whom we asked to identify unclear, vague, or unfamiliar terms and who ensured that our items were clear and understandable. We ensured the confidentiality of our respondents to reduce socially desirable responses and to increase respondent candidness. We also assured the respondents that right or wrong answers to the items on the questionnaire do not exist to decrease evaluation apprehension.

The current study was conducted following the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants finished the survey voluntarily and anonymously. In the survey, participants filled in information on their gender, age, education, and family business and rated the measurement items of FTP, entrepreneurial career intention, learning orientation, and entrepreneurial passion for founding.

A total of 416 completed and usable questionnaires were received, resulting in an overall response rate of 92.4%. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the sample.

Table 1. Sample demographic information.

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	254	61.1
	Female	162	38.9
Age	<25 years	207	49.8
	25–30 years	150	36.0
	>30 years	59	14.2
Education	Undergraduates	244	58.7
	Postgraduates	114	27.4
	Ph.D. students	58	13.9
Family Business	Yes	113	27.2
	No	303	72.8

3.2. Measures

The measurement items for FTP, entrepreneurial career intention, learning orientation, and entrepreneurial passion for founding are reported in Appendix A.

FTP. We measured FTP with six future-subscale items from the scale of [68] and on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never true to me) to 7 (always true to me).

Entrepreneurial career intention. Entrepreneurial career intention indicates respondents' perception of the likelihood of them starting a business [11,46] because the intention to engage in an activity is often considered a good predictor of actual engagement in the act [45]. We measured entrepreneurial career intention with the four items from BarNir et al. [69], Crant [70], and Moriano et al. [71] and on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (definitely not) to 7 (definitely yes).

Learning orientation. We measured learning orientation with the six-item scale developed by VandeWalle [38]. On a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), respondents indicated the extent to which they are prone to develop new skills.

Entrepreneurial passion for founding. We measured entrepreneurial passion for founding with the four-item scale from Cardon et al. [63]. Accordingly, we used three items to measure intense positive feelings for founding and one item to measure identity centrality for founding on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Control variables. Following previous studies, we controlled for gender, age, education, and family business in our analysis because they might influence entrepreneurial career intentions [72,73]. We measured gender with a value equal to 1 for male and 2 for female. We measured age on a three-point scale (“1” = less than 25 years, “2” = 25–30 years, and “3” = more than 30 years). We measured education on a three-point scale (“1” = undergraduates, “2” = postgraduates, and “3” = Ph.D. candidates). We measured family business with a value equal to 1 for respondents without close self-employed family member and 2 otherwise.

3.3. Reliability and Validity of Measures

We used previously validated measurement items, thereby helping ensure the validity of our measure of constructs. We assessed the reliability of the four constructs with Cronbach’s alpha, and each scale had reliabilities greater than the recommended 0.70 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Assessment of the reliability and validity of constructs.

Construct	Item	Standardized Factor Loading	Cronbach’s Alpha	AVE
FTP	FTP1	0.948	0.94	0.68
	FTP2	0.715		
	FTP3	0.771		
	FTP4	0.755		
	FTP5	0.950		
	FTP6	0.758		
Learning Orientation	LO1	0.841	0.94	0.71
	LO2	0.808		
	LO3	0.888		
	LO4	0.851		
	LO5	0.810		
	LO6	0.848		
Entrepreneurial Passion for Founding	EPF1	0.764	0.86	0.61
	EPF2	0.776		
	EPF3	0.830		
	EPF4	0.741		
Entrepreneurial Career Intention	ECI1	0.705	0.88	0.62
	ECI2	0.861		
	ECI3	0.839		
	ECI4	0.724		

Notes. FTP1, FTP2, etc. are items for measuring FTP. LO1, LO2, etc. are items for measuring learning orientation. EPF1, EPF2, etc. are items for measuring entrepreneurial passion for founding. ECI1, ECI2, etc. are items for measuring entrepreneurial career intention. All the standardized factor loadings were significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed tests).

We used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the four constructs in Table 2. The CFA results indicated that the measurement model with the four constructs showed good fit ($\chi^2 = 465.117$, degrees of freedom (df) = 160, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.951, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.959, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.045) [74]. All the standardized factor loadings were significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level, and all items substantively loaded on their corresponding latent constructs, thereby offering evidence of convergent validity (see Table 2). All the average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.50 (see Table 2) [75], and the intercorrelation between two constructs was less than the square root of the AVE values of the two constructs for all pairs of constructs (see Table 3) [76], thereby providing evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.39	0.49								
2. Age	1.64	0.72	−0.12 *							
3. Education	1.55	0.73	−0.03	0.13 **						
4. Family Business	1.27	0.45	−0.10 *	0.02	0.01					
5. FTP	4.30	10.48	−0.03	0.06	0.11 *	0.05	0.82			
6. LO	4.60	10.52	−0.04	−0.06	0.03	−0.05	0.39 **	0.84		
7. EPF	4.00	10.47	−0.03	−0.05	0.06	−0.01	0.36 **	0.54 **	0.78	
8. ECI	4.10	10.35	−0.03	−0.07	0.02	−0.02	0.48 **	0.59 **	0.54 **	0.79

Notes. $n = 416$. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. SD = Standard deviation. LO = Learning orientation, EPF = Entrepreneurial passion for founding, and ECI = Entrepreneurial career intention. The values on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE values of the constructs.

3.4. Assessment of Common Method Bias

We conducted Harman's single-factor test to evaluate a possible common method bias. The test could categorize the items into four constructs with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, thus accounting for 69.27% of the variance. The first construct did not account for the majority of the variance (44.42%) and was under the threshold value of 50% [77]. Thus, common method bias was not an issue in our data.

4. Results

We employed the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes [78] to test the hypotheses. We mean-centered the independent and moderating variables before generating interaction terms to reduce the potential problem of multicollinearity [79]. Table 3 shows the correlation matrix and the descriptive statistics of measures. Table 4 presents the regression results with learning orientation as the mediating variable.

In Table 4, FTP was positively related to entrepreneurial career intention ($b = 0.45, p < 0.001$), hence supporting H1. FTP had a positive effect on learning orientation ($b = 0.41, p < 0.001$), thus supporting H2. Moreover, learning orientation mediated the relationship between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention because the 95% CI (0.12, 0.22) for an indirect effect did not include zero, thereby supporting H3.

Table 5 presents the results of the moderating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding on the relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention. The interaction term between learning orientation and entrepreneurial passion for founding had a significant positive relationship with entrepreneurial career intention ($b = 0.08, p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H4.

To facilitate interpretation, we plotted this significant interaction effect in Figure 2 by comparing high entrepreneurial passion for founding (i.e., one SD above the mean) with low entrepreneurial passion for founding (i.e., one SD below the mean). We also performed a simple slope test [79]. As illustrated in Figure 2, the positive relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention became weak ($b = 0.23, p < 0.001$; 95% CI (0.12, 0.33)) at low levels of entrepreneurial passion for founding and strong ($b = 0.47, p < 0.001$; 95% CI (0.39, 0.55)) at high levels of entrepreneurial passion for founding, thus providing further support for H4.

Table 4. Regression results for the mediation effect.

Outcome: ECI	b	se	R²	
			0.24	
Constant	2.80 ***	0.35		
FTP	0.45 ***	0.04		
Age	−0.17 *	0.08		
Gender	−0.08	0.12		
Education	−0.04	0.08		
Family Business	−0.12	0.13		
Outcome: LO	b	se	R²	
			0.17	
Constant	3.66 ***	0.41		
FTP	0.41 ***	0.05		
Age	−0.18	0.10		
Gender	−0.14	0.14		
Education	−0	0.10		
Family Business	−0.24	0.16		
Outcome: ECI	b	se	R²	
			0.42	
Constant	1.29 ***	0.33		
LO	0.41 ***	0.04		
FTP	0.28 ***	0.04		
Age	−0.10	0.07		
Gender	−0.02	0.11		
Education	−0.04	0.07		
Family Business	−0.02	0.12		
Indirect Effect	Effect	Boot se	95% CI	
	0.17	0.02	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
			0.12	0.22
Normal Theory Test for Indirect Effect	Effect	se	Z	
	0.17 ***	0.02	6.88	

Notes. $n = 416$. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. ECI = Entrepreneurial career intention and LO = Learning orientation. b = Unstandardized regression coefficient, se = Standard error, R^2 = R square, Boot se = Boot standard error, CI = Confidence interval, Boot LLCI = Boot lower limit confidence interval, Boot ULCI = Boot upper limit confidence interval, and Z = Z value.

Table 5. Results of regression for the moderation effect.

Variable	b	se	R²
			0.43
Constant	4.01 ***	0.27	
LO	0.35 ***	0.03	
EPF	0.27 ***	0.04	
LO x EPF	0.08 ***	0.02	
Age	−0.04	0.07	
Gender	0.04	0.11	
Education	−0.02	0.07	
Family Business	0.03	0.11	

Notes. $n = 416$. *** $p < 0.001$. b = Unstandardized regression coefficient, se = Standard error, and R^2 = R square. LO = Learning orientation and EPF = Entrepreneurial passion for founding.

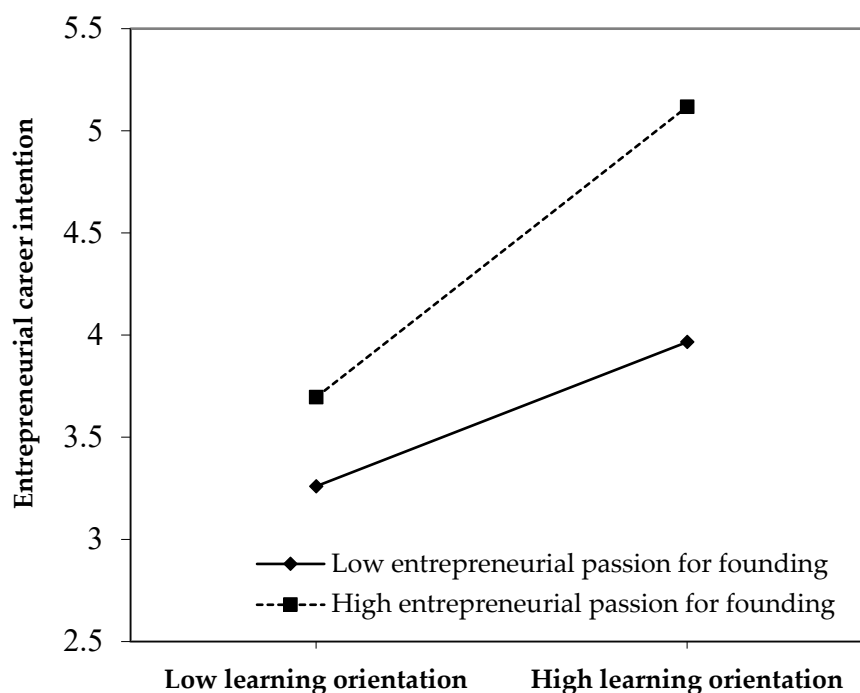


Figure 2. Moderating effect of entrepreneurial passion for founding on the learning orientation–entrepreneurial career intention relationship.

5. Discussion

In this study, we investigated the underlying mechanisms through which FTP motivates individual entrepreneurial career intention. Our study yielded two major findings. First, we found that learning orientation partially mediates the effect of FTP on individual entrepreneurial career intention. Second, entrepreneurial passion for founding strengthens the positive relationship between learning orientation and individual entrepreneurial career intention.

5.1. Implications for Theory

The contributions of this study are three-fold. First, we added to the literature on FTP. Scholars embrace the time perspective and emphasize the importance of FTP in stimulating individual cognition and behavior [3,21–25]. The consequences of FTP are limited to motivation (e.g., [23,56]), persuasion (e.g., [24]), self-efficacy (e.g., [33]), self-regulated learning [21], career adaptability [48], and academic achievement (e.g., [32]).

However, limited concerted efforts have been exerted to explore how FTP is linked to entrepreneurial career intention, especially from a sustainable career perspective. As previously noted, this situation presents a critical gap in the literature. In this study, we highlighted the role of FTP in helping form individual entrepreneurial career intention by examining the effects of FTP on learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention. We found that FTP not only directly increases the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention but also indirectly increases this likelihood through the favorable mediating role of learning orientation. Our study thus demonstrated that FTP could drive individual adaptive activity (e.g., learning orientation) to obtain future entrepreneurial career goals [30]. In this vein, our research supported the argument that keeping future goals that are internally regulated is essential, especially when learning is viewed as instrumental in obtaining these valuable future objectives [40]. In sum, our study improved the scholarly understanding of the previously underexplored consequences of FTP.

Second, we extended entrepreneurship research. Scholars emphasize the importance of passion in entrepreneurial processes, but the role of passion in forming entrepreneurial career intention has not been investigated enough in previous empirical studies. In this work, we focused on the passion for founding a new venture. Therefore, our research differed from prior studies that pay attention to entrepreneurial passion in a general sense. We argued that learning orientation helps increase entrepreneurial career intention among individuals with a high entrepreneurial passion for founding [34,39,64,65]. We found that the positive effect of learning orientation on entrepreneurial career intention becomes strong as entrepreneurial passion for founding increases. We shed light on the previously underexplored role of such emotional factors as an entrepreneurial passion for founding in positively strengthening the relationship between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention. Our study thus demonstrated the important role of entrepreneurial passion for founding in considering individuals' plans for their future entrepreneurial career decisions and actions [13,39,66].

Third, we advanced research on entrepreneurial career intention and added to the perspective of a sustainable career. As previously noted, prior research confirmed that an unfavorable financial setting and the absence of regular job career choices [8], age [8], gender [18,19], proactive personality [16], and self-efficacy might influence entrepreneurial career intention [17,18] as the antecedents of entrepreneurial career intention. However, we still know little about when and how FTP, learning orientation, and entrepreneurial passion for founding affect the formation of individual entrepreneurial career intention. Specifically, researchers attempt to map the motivational implications of referring to the future significance of the current activities [18,56] over the past years. However, only a few studies have linked FTP with entrepreneurial career intention [13,21,23,30].

As previously indicated, we found that the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention is not only directly increased by FTP but also indirectly increased by FTP via learning orientation as the pathway. We also verified that entrepreneurial passion for founding strengthens the positive effect of learning orientation on individual entrepreneurial career intention. Thus, our study identified FTP as an important influencing factor of entrepreneurial career intention and provided new insights for scholars to consider FTP in the entrepreneurial career intention domain.

Moreover, we identified learning orientation as an important antecedent of entrepreneurial career intention. Our findings showed that individuals who value learning goals and processes seem to be equipped to starting their own company [30] and offer support for the prior argument that learning orientation may function as a dynamic input for career-relevant consequences (e.g., entrepreneurial career intentions) in such a situation [8,52]. In addition, our study complemented existing research on entrepreneurial career intention by highlighting the previously underexplored emotional (entrepreneurial passion for founding) and cognitive (learning orientation) drivers of entrepreneurial career intention. Overall, this work offered a deep understanding of the forming mechanism of entrepreneurial career intention and thus contributed to the perspective of a sustainable career [2].

5.2. Implications for Practice

Our study provided two practical implications. First, not everyone is suited to start a business as their career choice. Individuals, firms, universities, and governments must understand the driving roles of cognitive factors, such as FTP and learning orientation, in fostering entrepreneurial career intentions. In general, individuals with deep FTP and strong learning orientation tend to form entrepreneurial career intentions. Potential entrepreneurs thus should evaluate their FTP and learning orientation before they aim for entrepreneurship as a career choice to sustain their entrepreneurial career development. FTP and learning orientation can be improved through appropriate self-training and external training. Self-training is an internal motivation driven process. External training for universities and governments is also important. Therefore, firms and universities should conduct supporting programs to enhance potential entrepreneurs' FTP and learning orientation and help them acquire the cognitions, resources, and capabilities needed for future entrepreneurship. Governments must also

formulate appropriate policies to stimulate potential entrepreneurs' FTP and learning orientation and help them obtain other supports.

Second, individuals, firms, universities, and governments should pay attention to the joint roles of cognitive (learning orientation) and emotional (entrepreneurial passion for founding) factors in facilitating the formation of entrepreneurial career intentions. Similarly, individuals with a high learning orientation and intensive entrepreneurial passion for founding tend to increase their entrepreneurial career intentions. Entrepreneurial passion for founding can also be enhanced through appropriate self-training and external training. Overall, individuals, firms, universities, and governments must focus on the important roles of FTP, learning orientation, and entrepreneurial passion for founding in increasing the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention to facilitate sustainable entrepreneurial career development.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study has several limitations that guide future research. First, given that we restricted our sample to university students studying in China, we could not ascertain if our results could also be generalized to individuals who have been working but have not yet started a business. Therefore, future research may use samples from different settings to ascertain the generalizability of our findings. Second, following previous studies (e.g., [13,54,80]), we relied on subjective ratings, rather than on objective criteria when measuring constructs. Nevertheless, we expressed confidence in the robustness of our findings from the results of the evaluation of common method bias. Prior research (e.g., [81]) provided further support for our approach, which finds remarkable evidence of convergent, discriminant, and construct validity of the subjective measures. To an extent, future research may, therefore, use objective measures. For example, gaining relatively objective measures for FTP from archival sources may enhance the rigor of results in upcoming studies.

Third, the causality direction is usually a concern in cross-sectional studies. However, we believed that reversed causality is an insignificant issue in this study for two reasons. On the one hand, we followed theoretical logic in prior literature when testing the arguments in our work. On the other hand, Simons and Peterson demonstrated that the significant results of moderating effects made simple reverse-causality arguments less tenable [82], and this finding further supported our approach. Both reasons thus offer strong support to our theory. We still encourage future research to use longitudinal data to investigate the relationship between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention over time.

Fourth, the complexity of the hypothesized model is always a concern in studies with mediating and moderating variables. Our study focused on exploring the mediating role of learning orientation between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention and the moderating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention. Thus, we did not examine the other underlying mechanisms through which FTP affects the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention. For example, we did not analyze the moderating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding between FTP and learning orientation. We also did not analyze the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention and the moderating role of learning orientation between entrepreneurial passion for founding and entrepreneurial career intention. Analyzing such complex relationships may provide additional insights into the understandings of how FTP shapes individual entrepreneurial career intention. Therefore, future research could investigate such complex relationships further.

6. Conclusions

We shed light on the underlying mechanisms through which FTP helps enhance the likelihood of forming entrepreneurial career intention by investigating the mediating role of learning orientation between FTP and entrepreneurial career intention and the moderating role of entrepreneurial passion for founding between learning orientation and entrepreneurial career intention. We believed that this study should be of concern to those who are researching, teaching, and supporting entrepreneurship as

it explained the previously underexplored interplay among FTP, learning orientation, entrepreneurial passion for founding, and the formation of entrepreneurial career intention for the sustainable career development of individuals. We hope to inspire academics to conduct further work in the fascinating research field of entrepreneurship and sustainable career development.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Measurement items.

FTP	
FTP1	I go in an orderly path to the future, in the direction of the objectives I established long ago.
FTP2	I know very well who I am and where I am going in life.
FTP3	When I make plans for the future, I am sure that I will achieve them.
FTP4	I have projects for what I want to do in the long term.
FTP5	I have many plans for the future.
FTP6	I have my future well-defined.
Entrepreneurial career intention (ECI)	
ECI1	I think that in the future I will create my own company.
ECI2	I think it is that I will someday start my own business.
ECI3	I consider creating my own business from present to five years from now.
ECI4	It is likely that I will personally own a small business in the relatively near future.
Learning orientation (LO)	
LO1	I often read materials related to my work to improve my ability.
LO2	I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from.
LO3	I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.
LO4	I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work, where I will learn new skills.
LO5	For me, the development of my workability is important enough to take risks.
LO6	I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent.
Entrepreneurial passion for founding (EPF)	
EPF1	Owning my own company energizes me.
EPF2	Nurturing a new business through its emerging success is enjoyable.
EPF3	Establishing a new company excites me.
EPF4	Being the founder of a business is an important part of who I am.

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