

BAM 2023 CONFERENCE

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‘Tis The Wedding Season: Imagination Unravelling Entrepreneurial Opportunity

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Abstract

In this paper, I inquire into the imaginative processes of organizational actors and their interactions to argue how it is important for co-producing an entrepreneurial opportunity.

Organisational actors experience the organization differently because of their imaginative processes. To explore the imaginative processes, the paper introduces the case of the wedding planning industry in India that is network of various kinds of entrepreneurs including wedding planners, vendors, caterers. Based on extensive interviews, I was able to observe how imagination helps actors co create their imagined future.

While understanding their process of doing business, I noticed that amongst various social practices, trust played an important role in communicating their imagined future. Trust was used as a commodity between the organizational actors and through which their businesses sustained. Trust was co-created and reproduced by the actors. Therefore, the core research question became: How is trust commodified and communicated to aid the imaginative process of the various organizational actors and drives entrepreneurial opportunity?

In the results section, I empirically document the process of commodifying trust progressing from communication and its implications on the entrepreneurial opportunity. In the concluding discussion, I indicate the theoretical potential of the imaginative process for the literature on experiencing organizations differently and discuss its relevance for entrepreneurial opportunity.

Track: Cultural and Creative Industries (Creative industries entrepreneurship)

Word count: 2163 words

1. Introduction

Organization actors (entrepreneurs and vendors), experience organizations differently (Wasserman and Frenkel, 2015). They undergo future-making process together for creation of future events through mutual expectations (Thompson and Byrne, 2022). Both entrepreneurs and vendors express and enact imagined future for building an event and so an imagined future is co-produced (Comi and Whyte, 2018). The future is unknown as well as uncertain and is invented and it is through exercising imagination that the actors generate new meanings and significance (Chiles, Crawford and Elias, 2021). The imagined future becomes significant when it has found some use to the other actors. Under conditions of uncertainty, it is through imagined futures that organizations (in this context, the newly formed organizations before the occurrence of an event) motivate and find the rationale for their decisions, co-ordinated activities, manage stakeholders and compete with one another (Beckert, 2021). The imagined future is enacted and thus produced in and through artifacts, practices (Comi and Whyte, 2018) and social practices (Thompson, 2018).

However, current literature has not looked into commodification of these social practices. This paper bridges this gap by taking interviews from the setting of the wedding planning industry. This paper looks into the process of how trust was used as a commodity and how it was communicated to the actors.

In the concluding discussion, I indicate the theoretical potential of the imaginative process for the literature on experiencing organizations differently and discuss its relevance for entrepreneurial opportunity.

2. Methodology

The article is based on the empirical data comprising of 15 in-depth interviews with the wedding planners and the vendors in India (Bengaluru, Calcutta, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mysuru). The participants were invited to participate through WhatsApp (messaging app) based on what kind of weddings ('destination weddings (in popular cities)', 'local weddings') they offered, their budget, years of experience. Eight wedding planners and three vendors were interviewed to understand the perspective of various players in the wedding planning industry. The entrepreneurs were between nineteen to thirty years of age. They had two to seven years of experience in the wedding planning industry.

Data collection lasted for 6 weeks and consisted of 15 in-depth interviews (composed of 11 primary and 4 follow-up interviews). The follow-up interviews were carried out so as to resolve queries that came up from the first round of the study. Each of the primary interviews took place between 1-3 hours, and the follow-up interview took place between 45 and 60 minutes. Telephonic interviews were conducted owing to the comfort of the participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thorough anonymization has been undertaken to preserve the privacy of the study participants. The interviews were semi-structured. They were conducted in English, Hindi, and Kannada. Participants were requested to share their experiences and mention their role (wedding planner/vendor) in the wedding planning industry. To understand the process of maintaining relationships between the participants and other parties involved, they were questioned with "why" and "how" questions.

3. Role of imagination

Imagination enables the organizational actors to enact the imagined futures and materialise through the social practices that are co-created and reproduced by them (Thompson, 2018). The imagined futures are experienced temporally and that actors co-produce and enact through future-making practices (Wenzel *et al.*, 2020). The social practices are reinterpreted by the different participants differently reiteratively.

There were various social practices that were followed by many actors. Some believed in helping others. Others followed a practice of sending a note of gratitude after each event. Each of these practices was reinterpreted differently. An act of sending a gratitude note could also be seen as just a mandate.

"I send a small thank you note to the caterer, decorators, photographers, after the wedding gets over. I do this, so that they (vendors) will work for me next time as well."

The nature and origin of shared images also divulges that an entrepreneurial opportunity is not restricted to "an image in entrepreneur's head", but it is "situated, embodied and shared through recursive intersections" between entrepreneurs and the vendors, clients or other possible stakeholders (Popp and Holt, 2013).

The social practices get co-opted by the market. There is enactment of trust within the social practices and I see it from the way the participants are referred to others for business. The participants are referred by family and friends. This paper sees this enactment as both transactional and non-transactional and in par with the social norms and practices present.

"I (wedding planner) have helped many people trying to become wedding planners. I take them along to the shops I usually visit and introduce them. It also helps the shops get more customers. Many times, when I get requests to organise weddings and other events, I refer them to the new wedding planners to help start their business. I also involve in organising with them."

The referrals were seen as an essential part in the wedding planning industry. The actors would help each other in the industry only for the sole purpose of doing good. Sometimes, the actors would do it because it was important for them to gain new clients, so this became transactional and a necessity to build trust.

"We (wedding planner) maintain good relationships with our workers because they should be willing to come work for me on short notice in case of emergencies. I also have my own set of workers who work for my company. I invite them over to various Indian festivals that we celebrate. In fact, we celebrate Diwali with great pomp in our family. We present the workers with a silver chain along with a bonus."

Trust enacted is communicated or expressed to co-create imagined future. Trust was commodified in various ways by the actors. Sometimes, it would be by paying fee in time, or delivering materials in time or choosing the same actors again. During uncertainty in organizing an event in a new place, there is an enactment of trust in sourcing materials from the local vendors and renting the local vendors' services after spending a lot of time performing market survey to get the 'best things'. By already identifying a set of vendors in the places where events are usually organised by the wedding planners, there is some of amount of trust of the good quality. While selecting new vendors without any referrals, the entrepreneur experiences uncertainty regarding the quality of the service or the products. In these circumstances, the entrepreneurs stick to the what is certain such as the payment date, paying the complete amount of money after the goods have been delivered.

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"When we (wedding planners) select new vendors, we stick to the payment date and are always calling them and asking if the materials will be delivered in time. I don't know if they deliver good quality things or not. I don't want to make the prepayment. I'm not sure about them. It's difficult for them too. Because even they don't know if we'll pay them the full amount. It's difficult, but we take the risk."

"I (wedding planner) have been buying from the same vendors for many years. They know I will always pay them in time and won't cheat them of it. Sometimes, when I don't have the money at hand, they are fine with letting me work on credit because they know that I always pay them. And I also trust them to give good quality materials. Till now, I have never faced any problem."

Entrepreneurs use various forms of communication to construct the opportunities they set out to pursue (Liubertè and Dimov, 2021) and in the process of innovating. Entrepreneurs use their imagination to portray possible futures (Rindova and Martins, 2022).

4. Co-production of Entrepreneurial opportunity

Entrepreneurial opportunity is “constituted, expressed, enacted by mental and non-mental representations” (Dimov, 2020). Therefore, actors communicate in various forms to help others visualize an opportunity. They convince the others of the materialised form that is also valued by others in that particular social setup (Dimov, 2020).

Many a times, the organizational actors discuss amongst others to co-create the imaginations. The digital era helps in giving a physical shape to their imaginations. For example, when the photos of the style of the décor are exchanged, the entrepreneurs and the flower vendors are able to visualize their thoughts in a way both of them can understand and decide on.

"Since, it's the digital era, we (wedding planner) share photos for the decor online, .for flowers and everything. And it has become much easier to understand what they (clients) want. Usually these are just reference photos from Pinterest or Instagram and they (clients) themselves send the photos and ask us the price for such décor."

5. Discussion

The paper would benefit from a coherent theory. This paper also looks for suggestions into further communicative studies to better build an argument for driving the process of imagination. This paper would also benefit from a better structure to the arguments proposed.

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