

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 10 March 2026
Revised 28 April 2026
Accepted 28 June 2026
Initial Publish 24 July 2026
Published online 01 March 2027

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How to cite this article:
Bayazian sarkandi, F., Mohammadkazemi, R., & Azizi, M. (2027). Sublimation as a Catalyst for Entrepreneurial Action: A Thematic Analysis of Ego Strength's Mediating Role. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal*, 5(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.258>



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Sublimation as a Catalyst for Entrepreneurial Action: A Thematic Analysis of Ego Strength's Mediating Role

ABSTRACT

This study explores the psychological foundations of entrepreneurial action through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on sublimation and ego strength. While traditional entrepreneurship research emphasizes economic and behavioural determinants, it often overlooks the role of unconscious psychological processes. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach using thematic analysis to examine how sublimation transforms internal psychological tensions into entrepreneurial behaviour, and how ego strength mediates this relationship. The study employed semi-structured interviews with twelve experts and entrepreneurs from various backgrounds. The findings highlighted the themes of sublimation processes, ego strength dimensions, entrepreneurial action, pre-entrepreneurial adversities, and patterns of transformation. The results show that early life hardships, including poverty, deprivation, and lack of social support, facilitate psychological change. These adversities are channelled into constructive and socially valuable entrepreneurial pursuits through sublimation. Ego strength is identified as a key process that helps regulate emotions, maintain motivation, and translate internal impulses into on-going entrepreneurial behaviours. The research presents a model of the interaction between the constructs. Through a cross-disciplinary approach, combining psychoanalytic theory with entrepreneurship studies, the research provides a new understanding of the psychological processes driving entrepreneurship and advances both theory and practice in entrepreneurship development.

Keywords: Sublimation; Ego Strength; Entrepreneurial Action; Thematic Analysis; Psychological Transformation; Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been conceptualized through economic, behavioral, strategic, and sociocultural frameworks that emphasize opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, innovation, risk-taking, and venture performance. Within this dominant tradition, entrepreneurial action is often treated as the outcome of rational decision-making, market alertness, technological capability, and ecosystem support. Recent entrepreneurship studies have further expanded this perspective by highlighting the role of digital platforms, organizational agility, business model innovation, artificial intelligence technologies, entrepreneurial ecosystems, networking capacity, and entrepreneurial culture in shaping venture creation and firm performance [1-5]. These contributions have significantly advanced understanding of the external, organizational, and technological conditions that enable entrepreneurship. However, despite this progress, the internal psychological foundations of entrepreneurial action remain insufficiently theorized, particularly where entrepreneurship emerges from emotional tension, adversity, identity struggle, and unconscious motivational dynamics.

A growing body of scholarship suggests that entrepreneurship cannot be fully understood as a purely economic or cognitive phenomenon. Entrepreneurial action also involves personal meaning, identity construction, emotional regulation, and the transformation of lived experience into purposeful behavior. From this perspective, entrepreneurship is not merely a process of recognizing market opportunities but also a deeply psychological and existential project through which individuals construct agency, respond to uncertainty, and reconfigure the self in relation to social and economic conditions [6-8]. This is especially important when entrepreneurial behavior develops in response to constraint, deprivation, exclusion, or early adversity. In such cases, entrepreneurship may function not only as an economic strategy but also as a symbolic and psychological means of restoring autonomy, achieving recognition, and converting distress into socially valued achievement [9, 10].

The psychodynamic approach offers a valuable theoretical lens for explaining these deeper motivational processes. Psychoanalytic perspectives on identity emphasize that human action is shaped not only by conscious intention but also by unconscious conflict, desire, defense, fantasy, and the need for coherence in the self [11-13]. Within organizational and managerial studies, psychodynamic theories have long been used to understand leadership, group behavior, authority, resistance, emotional investment, and the symbolic dimensions of work [14-16]. Applied to entrepreneurship, this perspective suggests that venture creation may express more than strategic calculation: it may represent a psychologically meaningful response to internal conflict, social frustration, or unresolved developmental experiences. Classic clinical observations of entrepreneurs have similarly suggested that entrepreneurial drive may be associated with autonomy needs, control, achievement striving, and the transformation of inner tension into productive activity [17].

One of the most relevant psychoanalytic concepts for understanding this transformation is sublimation. Sublimation refers to the redirection of unacceptable, painful, conflicted, or socially problematic impulses into constructive, creative, and socially valued activities. In entrepreneurship, sublimation may help explain how individuals convert frustration, humiliation, deprivation, anger, insecurity, or unmet needs into innovation, persistence, market creation, and prosocial value generation. Rather than interpreting adversity only as a barrier, sublimation allows adversity to be understood as potential psychological raw material for creative action. This approach is consistent with studies that frame entrepreneurship as a site of fantasy, identity work, symbolic investment, and unconscious desire [7, 18, 19]. It also connects entrepreneurial action to broader processes of meaning-making, whereby individuals organize difficult experiences into coherent narratives of growth, achievement, and contribution [12, 20].

The role of adversity is particularly important in this framework. Poverty, deprivation, family instability, social exclusion, humiliation, lack of support, and restrictive developmental environments can shape both psychological vulnerability and entrepreneurial motivation. Entrepreneurship research has shown that poverty-related conditions influence opportunity perception, necessity-driven entrepreneurship, social mobility aspirations, and the ways individuals respond to structural limitation [9]. Ecological theories of development further indicate that individual behavior emerges from interactions between personal characteristics and nested environmental systems, including family, peers, institutions, culture, and broader socioeconomic structures [21]. Likewise, family embeddedness perspectives show that entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors are shaped by family context, intergenerational expectations, relational obligations, and social support systems [22]. Therefore, adversity should not be reduced to an individual psychological variable; it must be understood as a developmental and contextual condition that interacts with internal processes over time.

However, adversity alone does not automatically lead to constructive entrepreneurial action. Many individuals experience hardship without converting it into innovation, persistence, or social contribution. The transformation of adversity into entrepreneurship requires mediating psychological capacities that allow individuals to regulate emotion, tolerate frustration, delay gratification, sustain effort, and direct energy toward long-term goals. This is where ego strength becomes theoretically significant. Ego strength refers to the individual's capacity to maintain psychological balance, manage internal and external demands, regulate impulses, preserve reality testing, and function adaptively under pressure [23]. In the entrepreneurial context, ego strength may help individuals transform sublimated emotional energy into sustained action by enabling self-control, resilience, judgment, adaptive decision-making, and purposeful engagement.

The construct of ego strength is closely related to several psychological capacities that are central to entrepreneurship. Self-control theory emphasizes that goal-directed behavior requires the capacity to regulate impulses, persist despite fatigue, and maintain commitment in the face of competing desires [24]. Research on delay of gratification similarly demonstrates that the ability to postpone immediate satisfaction in favor of long-term outcomes is a critical foundation of adaptive achievement behavior [25]. Emotional intelligence theory also highlights the importance of perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions in effective functioning, leadership, and decision-making [26, 27]. In high-pressure domains, self-control strength has been associated with sustained performance under stress, suggesting that ego-related regulatory resources may be essential when individuals must act effectively despite uncertainty and emotional strain [28].

Entrepreneurship demands precisely these capacities. Entrepreneurs must tolerate ambiguity, confront failure, negotiate social judgment, manage limited resources, and sustain motivation through prolonged uncertainty. Resistance to change, fear of growth, and difficulty adapting to new organizational demands have been recognized as important barriers in small firm development [29]. In contrast, entrepreneurial orientation, networking, ecosystem readiness, and innovation capability require not only external resources but also internal psychological readiness to act, learn, and persist [3, 4]. Thus, ego strength may serve as a bridge between inner motivation and entrepreneurial behavior: sublimation may generate the psychological energy for action, but ego strength may organize, regulate, and stabilize that energy in ways that make sustained entrepreneurship possible.

Identity theory further strengthens this argument. Entrepreneurial action often requires individuals to construct new identities, narrate their past in meaningful ways, and reconcile contradictions between who they were, who they are, and who they aspire to become. Narrative identity theory explains that individuals create coherence by organizing life events into stories that provide direction, purpose, and continuity [20]. Psychodynamic theories of identity add that these narratives are not merely rational accounts but are also shaped by unconscious conflicts, defenses, fantasies, and ethical relations to the self and others [8, 11]. Social entrepreneurs, for example, have been shown to narrate their careers through existential and psychodynamic themes involving purpose, suffering, responsibility, and self-transformation [6]. Therefore, entrepreneurship may become a narrative arena in which sublimated pain is reorganized into a socially legitimate identity of competence, contribution, and innovation.

The importance of learning and developmental transformation also deserves attention. Experiential learning theory views learning as a process through which individuals transform experience into knowledge, adaptation, and action [30]. Entrepreneurship education research has similarly emphasized that entrepreneurship is not only a set of business skills but also a method of thinking, acting, experimenting, and learning from uncertainty [31]. More recent work in specialized fields,

including entrepreneurship education for nurses and healthcare professionals, shows that entrepreneurial learning is increasingly relevant beyond traditional business contexts and can support innovation, professional autonomy, and problem-solving in complex service environments [32]. These perspectives suggest that adverse experiences may become entrepreneurial resources only when individuals engage in reflective learning, meaning-making, and behavioral experimentation. In this sense, sublimation and ego strength may be supported by educational and experiential processes that help individuals reinterpret hardship and convert it into constructive action.

Contemporary entrepreneurship environments make these psychological processes even more relevant. Digital transformation, artificial intelligence, platform-based markets, and knowledge-intensive ecosystems are reshaping what entrepreneurs must do and how they must think [1, 2, 5]. Entrepreneurial alertness now involves not only recognizing traditional opportunities but also interpreting technological change, navigating ecosystem complexity, and rapidly adapting business models. Entrepreneurial culture at the ecosystem level also contains hidden drivers that shape how individuals perceive legitimacy, innovation, cooperation, and risk [3]. In such contexts, psychological flexibility, emotional regulation, identity stability, and the ability to transform uncertainty into action become increasingly important. The entrepreneur must not only identify external opportunity but also manage internal tension in environments that are volatile, ambiguous, and psychologically demanding.

Despite the relevance of these perspectives, existing entrepreneurship literature remains fragmented. Studies have examined entrepreneurial ecosystems, poverty, digital capability, networking, entrepreneurial education, identity work, and psychodynamic interpretations, yet few have integrated these dimensions into a process-oriented model explaining how early hardship becomes entrepreneurial action through sublimation and ego strength. Psychoanalytic entrepreneurship studies have suggested that unconscious motives and identity conflicts are involved in venture creation [18, 19], while identity scholars have emphasized narrative construction and self-fabrication [8, 20]. However, the specific mediating role of ego strength in translating sublimated psychological energy into sustained entrepreneurial behavior has not been sufficiently examined. This gap is especially important because entrepreneurship is not a single act but an ongoing process requiring persistence, adaptation, emotional endurance, and coherent self-direction.

A qualitative thematic approach is particularly appropriate for addressing this gap because sublimation, ego strength, adversity, and entrepreneurial identity are complex, subjective, and meaning-laden phenomena. Quantitative models can test associations among variables, but they may not fully capture how entrepreneurs interpret early life hardship, narrate transformation, regulate emotional conflict, and experience entrepreneurship as a form of psychological reconstruction. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify patterns across lived experiences while preserving the depth and contextual specificity of participants' accounts. Such an approach can clarify how entrepreneurs and experts understand the psychological pathways linking adversity, sublimation, ego strength, and entrepreneurial action, while also showing how family, culture, social networks, education, and environmental change shape this process.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to contribute to entrepreneurship research by developing a psychodynamically informed understanding of entrepreneurial action. By integrating psychoanalytic theory, identity theory, self-regulation research, experiential learning, ecological perspectives, and contemporary entrepreneurship scholarship, the study positions entrepreneurship as both an economic and psychological transformation process. It argues that sublimation may convert painful or conflicted experiences into constructive entrepreneurial motivation, while ego strength may mediate this process

by regulating emotional energy and sustaining action under uncertainty. This integrated view can enrich entrepreneurship theory, inform entrepreneurship education, and provide practical insights for supporting individuals whose entrepreneurial motivation is rooted in adversity, meaning-making, and the search for self-directed agency.

The aim of this study is to explore how sublimation functions as a psychological catalyst for entrepreneurial action and to explain the mediating role of ego strength in transforming early adversity and internal psychological tension into sustained entrepreneurial behavior.

Methodology

Research Design

The current research is a qualitative study based on a larger mixed-methods approach that considers the exploratory qualitative stage as the main focus. This stage will seek to determine the psychological mechanisms that support the relationship between sublimation and ego strength as well as entrepreneurial behaviour. Due to the subjective and abstract nature of these constructs, a qualitative design is considered to be the most appropriate to investigate the lived experience, meanings, and interpretations, which are not quantifiable using quantitative approaches. The thematic analysis is the main analysis method, which enables the identification, ordering, and interpretation of themes. This allows one to develop a theoretical framework on the basis of empirical stories, which could offer insight into the presence of psychological constructs in entrepreneurship.

Participants

Our research sample includes twelve purposely selected snowball participants who possess the required knowledge, skills, and experience in entrepreneurship and psychology. They are entrepreneurs, academics, consultants, and professionals from a range of disciplines such as business development, innovation ecosystems, psychology, and education. We sought out people who have either entrepreneurial experience or an understanding of psychological factors related to personal growth and behaviour. The diversity of the sample in terms of age, educational background, and experience ensured a rich information source. This allowed us to draw out a range of perspectives on the relationship between adversity, psychology, and entrepreneurship.

Data Collection

This research involved the collection of data through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to implement a consistent approach across all interviews while allowing flexibility to explore more specific topics and individual stories. The interviews did not follow a strict order of questions, but were based on a set of topics about sublimation, ego strength, entrepreneurial behaviour, and life experiences. This provided a more explorative conversation, where the interviewees offered details about their personal, childhood, challenges, motivations, and decision-making. Specifically, the interviews aimed to explore how people leveraged their personal difficulties to build entrepreneurial initiatives and how psychological factors helped them to keep going.

Data Analysis

The data gathered was analyzed using thematic analysis and had a systematic coding and categorization system. The transcripts of the interviews were initially read through to identify meaningful text units. These units were then coded so as to isolate key ideas, experiences, and patterns. The codes were clustered into sub-themes by the use of an iterative comparison and refining process that was followed by the grouping of the codes into wider thematic categories. This analysis led to the identification of a number of key themes, such as sublimation-associated processes, ego strength dimensions, the outcomes of entrepreneurial action, the pre-entrepreneurial hardships, and the patterns of transformation that may lead to entrepreneurship.

The thematic analysis also included a frequency analysis to determine how certain themes were prominent throughout the interviews, thus increasing the number of interpretations of the findings. Moreover, the connections between themes were analyzed to construct a conceptual model of how childhood adversity and transformation processes mediate towards sublimation, how sublimation mediates towards ego strength, and how the combination of both factors results in entrepreneurial action. To facilitate the process of coding and visualization, analytical software (MAXQDA) was used, which ensured rigor and transparency in the data handling.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

In order to ensure that the findings were credible and reliable, several measures were employed during the research. The rich and detailed data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and the iterative coding process enhanced consistency in creating themes. With the expert participants being high in the level of experience, this assisted in legitimizing the insights generated. Moreover, the transparency and reproducibility of the analysis were improved by codifying the codes into themes and using the analytical software. The fact that it is a conceptual model that is created on the basis of empirical data also helps to increase the analytical rigor of the study, as it will be possible to consistently describe the interrelations between the key constructs.

Findings and Results

The qualitative analysis, which has been done based on the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with twelve expert participants, has provided a rich and multi-dimensional insight into the psychological processes underlying entrepreneurial action. The findings show that there is a systematic progression of early life misfortunes to psychological transformation through sublimation, formation of ego abilities, and eventual demonstration of entrepreneurial behaviours. The results are classified into major thematic areas, which are all important components of the proposed conceptual model.

Participant Characteristics

The demographic and professional diversity of participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1*Characteristics of Participants in the Qualitative Phase*

Expert Code	Age	Education	Field of Entrepreneurship	Years of Experience
1	37	PhD	Innovation & Entrepreneurship Ecosystem	14
2	45	Master	Social Responsibility & Entrepreneurship	21
3	57	Master	Laboratory Chemical Materials	24
4	70	PhD	Non-profit Scientific Development	17
5	42	PhD	Non-profit Scientific Development	17
6	54	PhD	Business Consulting	16
7	65	PhD	University Professor	25
8	80	PhD	Academic Faculty	40
9	45	PhD	Psychology / Inner Peace Specialist	20
10	46	Master	Management Development	19
11	28	Master	Social Research	4
12	60	PhD	Business Transformation	18

This diversity of age, experience, and experience in the professional field made the data highly valuable and offered a possibility to study the entrepreneurial and psychological dynamics in all its aspects.

Theme Development Process

The thematic analysis was grounded on a systematic coding process in which raw interview transcripts were transformed into codes, sub-themes, and broad themes. Table 2 shows the coding/theme extraction of the interview data.

Table 2*Sample of Theme Extraction Process*

Interview Excerpt	Extracted Theme
"Helping others gave meaning to my success."	Helping others / Meaning-making
"Time is gold; I manage every minute effectively."	Efficient engagement
"Hope for a better tomorrow sustained me."	Hope
"I forged my will into steel and proved it possible."	Willpower
"We created a new and untapped market."	New market

These examples indicate how first-hand experiences were systematically framed into conceptual schemata, as the basis of the final thematic framework.

Major Thematic Categories

The analysis found six broad thematic areas describing the relationships between sublimation, ego strength, and entrepreneurial action.

Sublimation as a Transformative Mechanism

Sublimation became a key psychological process by which people could focus their inner tensions into productive and socially valuable entrepreneurship. Sub-dimensions that were part of this theme were inclination towards well-being, creative action, helping others, and efficient action. Respondents often wrote that entrepreneurship was a way to utilize their emotional energy, and inner struggles were turned into meaningful activities.

Ego Strength Dimensions

Ego strength was multidimensional in nature, and it supported enduring entrepreneurial behaviour. The analysis revealed the presence of important elements such as love, care, hope, competence, loyalty, wisdom, willpower, and purposefulness.

These dimensions indicate emotional control, resilience, moral disposition, and long-term commitment, which are some of the elements of successful entrepreneurial operations.

Entrepreneurial Action

Innovation and market creation were the main expressions of entrepreneurial action. The creation of new products and new market entry were repeatedly mentioned by the participants as the key characteristics of the entrepreneurial activity. These results are the externalization of the processes of the inner world in external manifestations in the form of economic and social contributions.

Pre-Entrepreneurial Hardships

Particularly, the stories focused a lot on the setbacks of childhood, such as humiliation, poverty, child labor, deprivation, lack of support, loss of guardianship, and strict upbringing. These experiences were the initial catalysts to subsequent mental change; they were the rough emotional content that was later sublimated into entrepreneurial drive.

Transformation Patterns Toward Entrepreneurship

The process of changing adversity into entrepreneurial action was mediated by a number of transformation processes. These were meaning-making, education and learning, role modelling, changes in the environment, spirituality, migration, changes in lifestyle, competition, and networking. These trends demonstrate how people redefine and rebuild their experiences to generate meaningful entrepreneurial journeys.

Contextual and Control Factors

The results also bring to the fore the effect of contextual factors like culture, family, social environment, and peer networks. These have been found to be constant among the participants, and they determined the direction and the strength of the development of entrepreneurship.

Frequency Distribution of Themes

The distribution and prominence of themes across participants are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

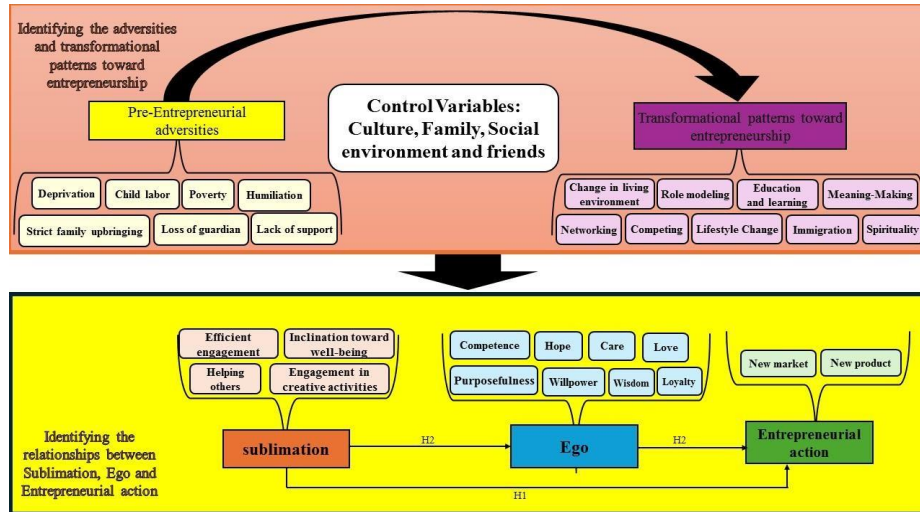
Main Themes and Frequency of Occurrence

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Frequency
Sublimation	Efficient engagement	12
	Helping others	11
	Well-being	8
	Creativity	7
Ego Strength	Love	12
	Hope	12
	Competence	12
	Willpower	12
	Purposefulness	12
	Wisdom	11
Entrepreneurial Action	New product	12
	New market	12
Hardships	Poverty	12
	Strict upbringing	10
	Humiliation	9
Transformation	Meaning-making	12
	Networking	12
	Learning	10
Control Variables	Culture, Family, Social Environment, Friends	12 each

The frequency analysis shows that the themes of efficient engagement, purposefulness, and entrepreneurial innovation were the most common among all participants, suggesting that they play a key role in the entrepreneurial process.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Study



A thematic analysis created a conceptual model that describes a process that is sequential and interrelated (Figure 1). Pre-entrepreneurial sufferings serve as the first motive, which is subjected to psychological and experience processes to convert it into energy in a sublimated form. The energy thus sublimated strengthens the ego and consequently leads to enduring entrepreneurial action, especially through innovation and market creation.

Figure 2

MAXQDA Output Visualization

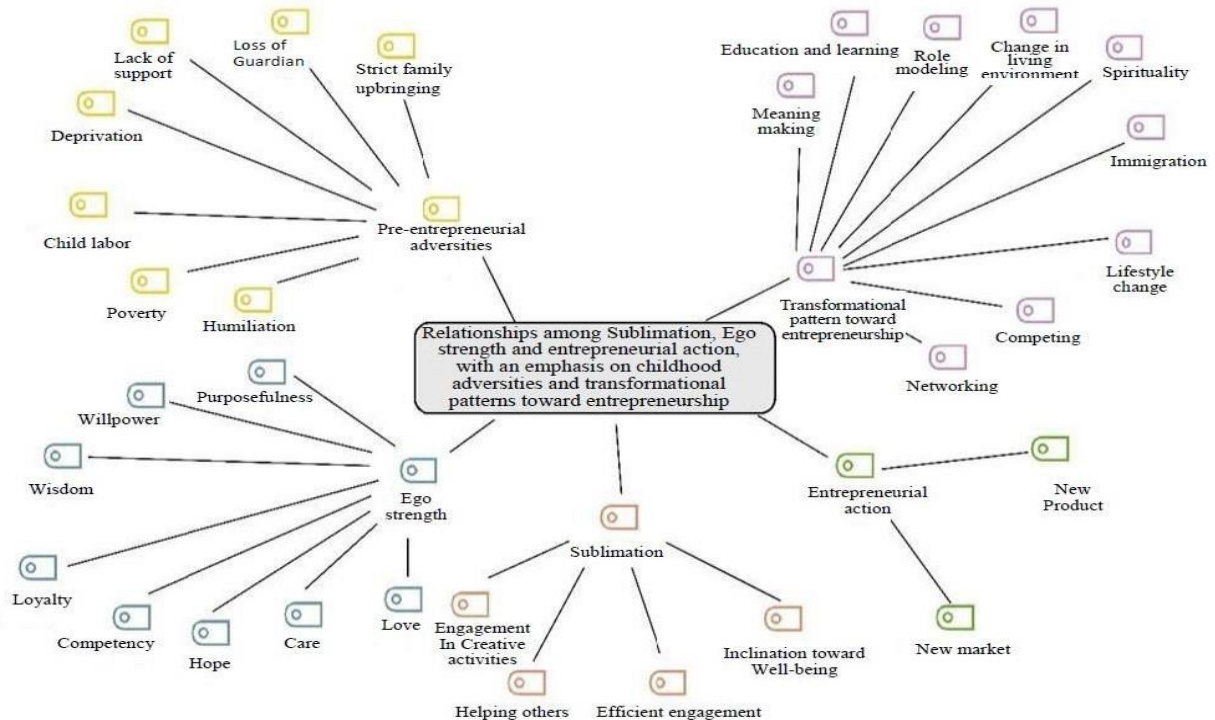


Figure 2 visualizes the coding structure and thematic relationships obtained after the qualitative analysis. The output of the MAXQDA gives a visual image of the coding framework and connections between the themes, which supports the validity of the identified categories and their connections.

On the whole, the findings demonstrate a logical psychological process between early adversity, sublimation, ego strength, and entrepreneurial action. The results indicate that the entrepreneurial behavior is not only a strategic or economic process but also a psychological transformation process. Their combination of thematic categories is solid empirical evidence of the suggested model and gives an opportunity to further theoretical and empirical evolution.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explain how sublimation functions as a psychological catalyst for entrepreneurial action and how ego strength mediates the transformation of early adversity and internal psychological tension into sustained entrepreneurial behavior. The thematic findings supported a sequential and psychodynamically meaningful model in which pre-entrepreneurial hardships, including poverty, humiliation, deprivation, strict upbringing, loss of support, and early exposure to difficulty, were not merely background biographical conditions but formative psychological experiences that shaped later entrepreneurial motivation. The results showed that participants repeatedly connected entrepreneurial action with processes of emotional transformation, meaning-making, and self-reconstruction. This finding is consistent with psychodynamic approaches that conceptualize identity and action as partly shaped by unconscious conflict, symbolic investment, and the effort to achieve psychological coherence [8, 11, 12]. It also aligns with psychoanalytic interpretations of entrepreneurship that view venture creation not only as a market-oriented behavior but also as an expression of desire, fantasy, self-repair, autonomy, and identity formation [17-19].

The first major finding was that sublimation emerged as a central transformative mechanism through which internal tension was redirected into constructive and socially valuable entrepreneurial activity. The most frequent subthemes under sublimation were efficient engagement, helping others, well-being, and creativity, indicating that participants did not describe entrepreneurship simply as profit-seeking, but as a disciplined, meaningful, and generative use of emotional energy. This supports psychoanalytic views of sublimation as a mature defense mechanism through which painful or conflicted psychological material is transformed into culturally valued achievement. In this study, entrepreneurship appeared as a practical field in which frustration, deprivation, and unmet needs could be converted into innovation, social contribution, and purposeful work. This finding is compatible with studies on social entrepreneurs' career narratives, which show that entrepreneurial identity often includes existential meaning, service orientation, and the transformation of personal struggle into social value [6, 7]. It also supports the idea that identity remains both stable and changeable, because individuals preserve continuity with their earlier experiences while reinterpreting them through new forms of action and achievement [13].

The second major finding concerned the mediating role of ego strength. The analysis identified love, hope, competence, willpower, purposefulness, care, wisdom, and loyalty as dimensions of ego strength, with several of these themes appearing across all participants. This indicates that sublimation alone is not sufficient to explain entrepreneurial action. Internal psychological energy must be regulated, organized, and directed through adaptive ego capacities. Ego strength helped participants tolerate uncertainty, maintain motivation, regulate emotions, and persist despite difficulty. This finding is

consistent with self-control theory, which emphasizes that sustained goal-directed behavior depends on regulatory strength and the capacity to manage impulses, fatigue, and competing demands [24]. It is also supported by research on delay of gratification, which shows that the ability to postpone immediate relief for longer-term goals is fundamental to adaptive achievement [25]. In entrepreneurial contexts, where uncertainty, failure, and delayed rewards are frequent, ego strength may therefore operate as a psychological infrastructure that enables sublimated motivation to become sustained entrepreneurial behavior.

The findings further suggest that ego strength is closely related to emotional intelligence and adaptive performance under pressure. Participants' references to hope, competence, wisdom, and purposeful persistence indicate that entrepreneurial action requires not only motivation but also the ability to understand and manage emotional experience. This corresponds with emotional intelligence theory, which emphasizes the role of emotional perception, understanding, and regulation in effective decision-making and interpersonal functioning [26, 27]. The findings are also aligned with work on self-control strength in demanding performance domains, where sustained achievement depends on the ability to maintain effort under psychological pressure [28]. Although entrepreneurship differs from sport and other performance settings, it similarly involves stress, ambiguity, competition, and the need to act decisively despite emotional strain. Therefore, the present results extend previous psychological literature by showing that ego strength may be particularly important in entrepreneurship because it translates inner transformation into outwardly observable innovation, market creation, and sustained venture activity.

The third important finding was that entrepreneurial action was expressed mainly through the creation of new products and new markets, both of which appeared across all participants. This demonstrates that the psychological processes identified in the study were not abstract or purely intrapsychic; they were externalized through concrete entrepreneurial outcomes. The movement from hardship to sublimation, and from sublimation to ego-mediated action, resulted in innovation-oriented behavior. This supports contemporary entrepreneurship research emphasizing entrepreneurial alertness, digital platform capability, organizational agility, business model innovation, and ecosystem-level drivers as important enablers of entrepreneurial performance [1, 3]. However, the present study adds that such outward competencies may have deeper psychological roots. Entrepreneurs may identify opportunities and create markets not only because they possess strategic alertness, but also because they have developed the internal capacity to transform adversity into disciplined, creative, and purposeful action.

The role of pre-entrepreneurial hardship was especially prominent. Poverty appeared as one of the most frequent background conditions, while humiliation, strict upbringing, deprivation, lack of support, child labor, and loss of guardianship also emerged as meaningful formative experiences. These findings align with research showing that poverty and entrepreneurship are deeply connected, particularly where deprivation shapes necessity, aspiration, resourcefulness, and the desire for mobility [9]. At the same time, the findings suggest that poverty does not influence entrepreneurship only through economic pressure; it may also shape psychological development by generating inner tensions that require symbolic and practical resolution. This interpretation is consistent with posttraumatic growth theory, which argues that adverse experiences can lead to new meanings, personal strength, and transformed life priorities when individuals actively reconstruct their relationship to suffering [10]. In the present study, adversity became psychologically productive when it was processed through sublimation, ego strength, learning, and meaning-making.

The transformation patterns identified in the study—meaning-making, learning, role modeling, environmental change, spirituality, migration, lifestyle change, competition, and networking—show that the pathway from adversity to entrepreneurship is not automatic. Participants described transformation as an active developmental process through which negative experiences were reinterpreted, reorganized, and converted into future-oriented agency. This finding corresponds strongly with narrative identity theory, which explains that individuals construct life stories to create unity, purpose, and direction across time [20]. It is also consistent with experiential learning theory, which views experience as the foundation for learning, adaptation, and development [30]. In this study, adversity became entrepreneurial capacity when individuals learned from experience, connected with role models, entered new environments, and developed narratives that made struggle meaningful. Thus, entrepreneurship can be interpreted as both an economic activity and a narrative-developmental project.

The contextual and control factors reported in the findings—culture, family, social environment, and friends—were also highly salient. Their repeated appearance across participants suggests that sublimation and ego strength do not develop in isolation. Rather, they are embedded in ecological and relational systems. This supports ecological developmental theory, which argues that human behavior develops through continuous interaction between the individual and multiple environmental systems [21]. It is also consistent with family embeddedness theory in entrepreneurship, which emphasizes that family relationships, responsibilities, values, and support structures shape entrepreneurial intention and action [22]. The role of networking in the findings further corresponds with contemporary evidence that entrepreneurial orientation and networking together enable firm performance, particularly in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises [4]. Therefore, the present study's model is not purely intrapsychic; it shows that psychological transformation is shaped by social and relational conditions.

The findings also have implications for entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial ecosystem development. If entrepreneurial action is partly rooted in sublimation, ego strength, and the transformation of adversity, then entrepreneurship education should move beyond technical instruction and include reflective, emotional, and identity-oriented components. This interpretation aligns with entrepreneurship education scholarship arguing that entrepreneurship should be taught as a method involving practice, experimentation, self-development, and adaptive thinking [31]. It also corresponds with newer work on entrepreneurship education for healthcare professionals, where entrepreneurial learning is increasingly linked with innovation, autonomy, and problem-solving in complex service contexts [32]. In addition, studies of artificial intelligence and ICT start-up ecosystems show that entrepreneurs now operate in increasingly dynamic and technology-mediated environments, making psychological adaptability even more important [2, 5]. Thus, the present study suggests that entrepreneurial education and support programs should strengthen emotional regulation, reflective identity work, resilience, and purposeful action alongside business planning and technical skills.

Finally, the findings contribute to organizational and leadership studies by demonstrating that entrepreneurial behavior can be understood through a psychodynamic lens that links internal conflict, identity construction, and action. Psychoanalytic approaches to organizations have shown that unconscious processes influence leadership, authority, group behavior, and resistance to change [14, 15]. Political and organizational leadership scholarship similarly highlights the role of judgment, agency, and adaptive conduct in uncertain environments [16]. The present study extends these perspectives by showing that entrepreneurs may transform inner conflict into socially visible leadership through innovation and market creation. It also

helps explain why some small firms resist growth or change: without sufficient ego strength, sublimated motivation may remain unstable or defensive rather than becoming adaptive entrepreneurial development [29]. Overall, the study supports a model in which entrepreneurship is not only an economic response to opportunity but also a psychodynamic process of transforming adversity into agency, creativity, and socially meaningful action.

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative design allowed deep exploration of subjective experience but limits statistical generalizability. The sample included twelve experts and entrepreneurs, which was appropriate for thematic analysis but may not represent the full diversity of entrepreneurial experiences across industries, cultures, socioeconomic groups, and developmental backgrounds. Second, the findings were based on self-reported narratives, and participants may have reconstructed past experiences in ways that emphasized coherence, meaning, or success. Third, because sublimation and ego strength are complex psychodynamic constructs, their interpretation depends partly on the researcher's analytical judgment. Fourth, the study focused on conceptual model development rather than causal testing, so the mediating role of ego strength should be interpreted as a theoretically grounded qualitative pattern rather than a statistically confirmed mediation effect.

Future research should test the proposed model using quantitative and mixed-method designs with larger and more diverse samples. Researchers can develop or adapt valid measures of sublimation, ego strength, adversity, meaning-making, and entrepreneurial action to examine direct, indirect, and moderating relationships among these constructs. Longitudinal studies are especially recommended because the transformation of hardship into entrepreneurial action is developmental and may unfold over many years. Cross-cultural studies would also be valuable to determine how family structure, social norms, poverty, migration, education, and entrepreneurial ecosystems influence the relationship between psychological transformation and entrepreneurship. Future studies may also compare necessity entrepreneurs, opportunity entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, and technology entrepreneurs to determine whether the proposed model operates differently across entrepreneurial types.

Entrepreneurship educators, consultants, incubators, and policymakers should consider the psychological foundations of entrepreneurial action when designing support programs. Training should not be limited to business planning, finance, marketing, and technology; it should also include reflective exercises, coaching, resilience-building, emotional regulation, narrative reconstruction, and mentorship. Entrepreneurs with histories of hardship may benefit from structured opportunities to reinterpret adversity as a source of learning, purpose, and disciplined action rather than as a fixed limitation. Incubators and entrepreneurship development centers can also integrate psychological assessment and personal development modules into their programs to strengthen ego capacities such as hope, willpower, competence, self-control, and purposefulness. Such practices may help entrepreneurs transform internal tension into constructive, ethical, innovative, and sustainable entrepreneurial behavior.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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