

The Model for Managing Entrepreneurial Commitment: Literature Review of Entrepreneurial Commitment and a Proposal for a New Model

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Abstract—Researchers have long focused on entrepreneurial commitment as an entrepreneurial behavior pattern. However, research on entrepreneurial commitment has been diffuse and fragmented, and research perspectives are limited compared to the diverse problems raised. As a theoretical study, this article aims to review entrepreneurial commitment research and propose a new model to serve as a basis for future research. Through a narrative literature review, we analyze the accumulation of entrepreneurial commitment research and the theory behind it and propose a new model through a comparative analysis with a broader accumulation of commitment research in social psychology, organizational psychology, and business strategy. To date, entrepreneurial commitment research has been mainly based on theories such as goal commitment, the three-component model of workplace commitment, and escalation of commitment. These studies often consider commitment as a psychological state, and little attention has been paid to commitment as an action or the interaction between actions and psychological states. Researchers have also yet to study process studies, which focus on how and why things appear, change, or end. This article proposes a model for managing entrepreneurial commitment that incorporates commitment as an action and enables process research. This model makes it possible to study a wider range of entrepreneurial behavior patterns and entrepreneurial phenomena from the perspective of entrepreneurial commitment.

Keywords—commitment, entrepreneurial commitment, managing entrepreneurial commitment, entrepreneurial behavior pattern, behavioral commitment

I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers have long paid attention to entrepreneurial commitment as an entrepreneurial behavior pattern [1–3]. For example, researchers have argued that entrepreneurs need commitment to overcome information asymmetry under uncertain circumstances to mobilize resources from resource providers [2], and that in the face of uncertainty and scarce resources, entrepreneurs need to be flexible in making incremental commitments in resource investment [1, 4, 5]. They have also argued that they need to research from various perspectives, such as the relationship between an entrepreneur's honesty and trust (Kenneth Arrow) [6], its impact on the entrepreneurial process [7], and its impact on the success or failure of the firm (Donald Sexton) [6]. In fact, researchers have studied entrepreneurial commitment from the perspective of factors that connect intentions and actions toward founding a company [8–13], that are related to sales scale [14], and that lead to excessive resource investment [15–17]. All of these studies agree that commitment directs entrepreneurs' actions and significantly impacts their

businesses.

However, there needs to be more research on entrepreneurial commitment [11, 18], and research perspectives are limited compared to the diverse raised problematics mentioned above. In addition, as research accumulates, it remains diffuse and fragmented [7]. As the literature accumulates, it is useful to organize the research accumulation and influential trends to identify new directions and challenges for the future [19]. Therefore, as a theoretical study, this article aims to review entrepreneurial commitment research and propose a new model that will serve as a foundation for future research. Through a narrative literature review [20], we analyze the accumulation of entrepreneurial commitment research and the theory behind it and propose a new model through a comparative analysis with a wider range of commitment research accumulation in social psychology, organizational psychology, business strategy, etc.

As we will see, entrepreneurial commitment literature was mainly based on theories such as goal commitment, the Three-Component Model (TCM) of commitment, and escalation of commitment. These studies have often considered commitment as a psychological state and have paid little attention to commitment as an action or the interaction between actions and psychological states. In addition, researchers have mainly conducted variance studies that explain phenomena by focusing on the relationship between dependent and independent variables, and there have been few studies on process studies [21–23] that focus on how and why things appear, change, and end over time.

This article reviews the accumulation of entrepreneurial commitment research that has not been organized so far and shows how the literature is fragmented by the theories that have been borrowed. It also contributes to the entrepreneurial commitment literature by identifying shortcomings in previous research and presenting future research directions. In addition, it proposes a model that incorporates commitment as an action for a basis of future research, making process research possible. This is an important contribution to the literature on entrepreneurship as it enables the study of a wider range of entrepreneurial behavior patterns and entrepreneurial phenomena from the perspective of entrepreneurial commitment.

In the following sections, we review the accumulation of research on entrepreneurial commitment and the theory behind it. Then, we summarize the broader trends in commitment research, propose a model that will serve as a foundation for future research, and discuss its implications.

II. ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMITMENT LITERATURE

Given the purpose of this article and the current state of entrepreneurial commitment research, which is still an emerging research field and is fragmented in various fields, we first made a wide list of articles and then extracted papers that fit the purpose of this article.

We used Web of Science (WoS), a database widely used in literature analysis [24, 25], to extract 41 articles that contained “entrepreneurial commitment” in the title, abstract, or keywords. In addition, since there may be studies that discuss entrepreneurial commitment even if they do not use the word “entrepreneurial commitment” itself, we extracted 2,059 articles in WoS that contained “entrepreneur*” and “commitment” in the title, abstract or keywords. Taking into consideration the purpose of narrative literature reviews, which is to efficiently review, critique, and synthesize influential literature and generate new frameworks and perspectives on a topic, and the “tension between the statistical benefits of including a large number of primary studies and conducting a high-quality review of fewer studies” [26], we extracted 104 that met one of the following criteria in WoS: (a) articles selected as Highly Cited Papers, (b) articles with 300 or more citations in all databases, or (c) articles classified as Review Articles. In addition, we added 32 articles by searching for articles using words such as “entrepreneurial commitment” and “entrepreneur’s commitment” on Google Scholar, resulting in a list of 177 articles in total. Next, to ensure the authors understand the content and the quality of the extracted articles, we excluded articles written in languages other than English and proceedings papers. Then, we narrowed the list to articles that discuss entrepreneurial commitment as entrepreneurial behavior patterns as a research topic. Specifically, we used the following three inclusion criteria for the review: (1) whether the research topic is entrepreneurial behavior pattern or the entrepreneurial process, (2) whether the article discusses the entrepreneur’s own commitment rather than employee organizational commitment or stakeholder commitment (investment) to the company, and (3) whether the article discusses commitment to the business or entrepreneurship, rather than specific actions within the business, such as commitment in foreign markets or commitment to sustainability.

Analyzing these articles, we found that research on entrepreneurial commitment has been conducted mainly based on theories such as goal commitment, the TCM of workplace commitment, and escalation of commitment. We also found that most empirical studies are variance studies that attempt to clarify the relationship between dependent and independent variables through self-reports via questionnaires, and that researchers have rarely conducted process studies that focus on how and why things appear, change, or end over time. In the following section, we present entrepreneurial commitment research by each borrowed theories¹.

¹ In addition to the three theoretical backgrounds mentioned, there are other studies such as extending Ulrich’s intellectual capital framework to explore the relationship between entrepreneurial capital and commitment [27] and inductive studies that combine research on the life cycle/stages of business development with the resource-based view of the firm [8], but none of them have had a significant impact on the entrepreneurial commitment literature. While we do not deny the importance of these studies, we will not cover them in the following sections, given the purpose to review, critique,

A. Research Using Goal-Setting Theory

One trend in entrepreneurial commitment research is based on goal-setting theory, which is a part of motivation research. Goal-setting theory is a theory that explains why some people perform better than others in work-related tasks. Since the 1960s, when the theory was proposed, it has focused on the concept of goal commitment as an important moderator for making set goals work as intended [28]. It is defined as one’s own commitment to a goal and is mainly measured by self-report [29], and goal difficulty and performance are positively related in people with high goal commitment compared to those with low goal commitment [30].

Entrepreneurship research has long sought to explore what distinguishes entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs and has attempted to explain it through factors such as traits, cognitions, and intentions. With intention estimated to explain only about 30% of the act of starting a business, the literature has focused on commitment bridging the gap between intention and action [10]. For example, [9] argued that nascent entrepreneurs’ goal commitment to the goal of “founding a company” is determined by the entrepreneur’s self-efficacy for that goal and the desirability of that goal, and that these two factors lead to the founding of a company. Uy [31] also applied a measure of goal commitment to entrepreneurial commitment to study the dynamic relationship between the entrepreneur’s perception of the progress of their business and the intensity of their efforts, and reported that goal commitment worked to prevent the intensity of their efforts to start a business from weakening even when progress was poor. In addition to the goal commitment to founding a company, [32] considered the relationship between goal commitment and the passion of entrepreneurs. In this way, researchers researched the influence of goal commitment on entrepreneurship from several perspectives.

In empirical studies, researchers have followed the goal-setting theory to view commitment as a psychological state of the entrepreneur, measuring the entrepreneurs’ psychological state through self-reporting via questionnaires and conducting variance theory research to explore the relationship with the targeted objective (such as starting a company or growing the business).

B. Research Using the Three-Component Model of Commitment

Another trend in entrepreneurial commitment literature is research that borrows from organizational psychology’s TCM of organizational commitment and workplace commitment.

Initially, organizational psychologists focused on the concept of commitment in terms of its impact on employee retention. However, researchers proposed that the effect of organizational commitment goes beyond turnover, and that employees with high organizational commitment are more likely to share the organization’s goals and values, and work hard for the organization in addition to retention [33]. In addition, with the widespread acceptance of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), organizational psychologists examined the concept of

and synthesize influential literature and generate new frameworks and perspectives on the topic.

commitment mainly in studying organizational commitment. They applied scales designed to measure organizational commitment to utilize commitment to other targets [34].

Among organizational commitment studies, the TCM of organizational commitment proposed by [35] had a dominant influence on organizational psychology due to its integrative explanation and ease of operation. Meyer [36] generalized it to workplace commitment in general, becoming more influential in the organization and management literature. TCM is a theory that commitment can be measured as “the force that binds an individual to a course of action related to one or more goals” as the sum of three commitment bases (affective, normative, and continuance). Specifically, desire bases are associated with affective commitment, perceived costs are associated with continuance commitment, and felt obligations are associated with normative commitment.

In entrepreneurial commitment research, for example, [10–12] used TCM to deepen what distinguishes entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs, as well as goal commitment. In addition, [11, 12, 14, 37] based on the multiple commitment foundations of TCM (and theories developed from it), conducted research to explore how entrepreneurial behavior patterns and business performance are affected not only by the level of commitment but also by the commitment profile (for example, the balance of affective, normative, and continuance commitment).

With some exceptions, empirical studies based on TCM also measure entrepreneurial commitment through self-reporting using a questionnaire and study the relationship between entrepreneurial behavior patterns and business performance as a variance study.

C. Research Using the Theory of Escalation of Commitment

The third trend in entrepreneurial commitment research is based on the escalation of commitment theory [38, 39]. The escalation of commitment theory, which Staw studied since the 1970s, argues that even if a negative outcome is revealed as a result of a decision, it becomes difficult to reverse the initial decision due to personal responsibility for the initial decision, motivation to justify the initial decision, and the existence of a norm of consistency in cultural and organizational norms. Staw developed this theory through various laboratory experiments, and researchers applied this theory not only to entrepreneurship but also to management in general, demonstrating it in many contexts.

In entrepreneurship research, researchers paid attention to the escalation of commitment theory for a long time. For example, [7] presented in a case study that escalation of commitment can occur among entrepreneurs. McCarthy [17] utilized the escalation of commitment theory and focused on the relationship between sales growth and reinvestment, and argued that entrepreneurs are more likely to increase their investment in the business even in the face of negative financial feedback. Additionally, [16] conducted empirical research based on Staw’s model of escalation of commitment theory on the factors that lead entrepreneurs to persist in underperforming companies. They expanded the model by adding factors such as the environmental munificence, which is the extent to which the environment can support sustained growth. In this way, various research on entrepreneurial

behavior patterns used the escalation of commitment theory.

Empirical research on entrepreneurship that utilizes escalation of commitment theory was mainly based on variance theory, which operationalizes factors such as personal responsibility for the initial decision and the motivation to justify the initial decision with other indicators. They attempts to clarify the relationship with dependent variables such as subsequent investment activity.

III. A BROADER ACCUMULATION OF COMMITMENT LITERATURE

As mentioned in the previous section, much of the entrepreneurial commitment literature to date was based on theories, such as goal-setting theory, TCM of workplace commitment, and escalation theory of commitment. However, the concept of commitment attracted attention in psychology and sociology since around 1950, and since then, researchers studied it from various angles [40]. In order to lay the foundation for future research, given that the entrepreneurial commitment literature has overlooked some trends in commitment literature, this section focuses on summarizing several trends in commitment research, namely, commitment as an action, commitment as a psychological state, and commitment as a managerial action, not to provide a comprehensive history of commitment research.

A. Commitment as an Action

The concept of commitment, which attracted attention in psychology and sociology, also attracted attention in management literature since around 1960. One of the early theories that attracted attention was the side-bet theory [41], which states that people are bound to action through the accumulation of side bets (actions that directly involve other benefits that are not necessarily related to the action that is the subject of the commitment). Becker [41] does not limit to cases where side bets are made intentionally but describes how a person’s involvement with an organization becomes a de facto side bet that leads to commitment to that organization. TCM also incorporates the side-bet theory to conceptualize continuance commitment [35].

During the same period, the “behavioral school” of commitment, which has its intellectual roots in Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, attracted attention. This theory states that when a person acts, their subsequent actions are bound in a certain direction [42–44]. Unlike TCM and goal commitment, which consider commitment as a psychological state, these schools of thought study the phenomenon in which an action affects a person’s subsequent actions and cognition, and they consider commitment as an action. For example, the literature has demonstrated through experiments that a group that was initially asked to put up a small sign and complied was more likely to allow a larger sign than another group that was not requested [45], and that subjects who received less reward for an action consistent with their beliefs showed greater resistance to subsequent counterarguments than subjects who received more reward [46]. The literature claims that the degree of binding effect of an initial action varies depending on visibility, irreversibility, and volition, and that the stronger these three factors are, the stronger the influence on a person’s subsequent actions [43, 44].

The theory of escalation of commitment is in this trend considering commitment as an action, and is about a specific context when a negative outcome is revealed as the result of some decision. Researchers have widely studied psychological biases (including unconscious ones) that a certain action influences a person's subsequent actions, not limited to such specific contexts. Still, researchers on entrepreneurial commitment rarely refer to such researches. In recent years, there have been studies focusing on commitment as an action, and there are also claims that we should pay attention to the subtle relationship in the interaction between actions and psychological states [47–50].

B. Commitment as a Psychological State

At the same time as psychology as a whole started to pay attention to attitudes and cognitions, from around 1970, commitment research also began to pay more attention to attitudes and cognitions. Mowday [33] distinguished between behavioral commitment and attitudinal commitment² in discussing organizational commitment and stated that the focus of each research is different. They argued that the former focused on actions that exceed formal and/or normative expectations and the latter focused on when personal identity is tied to the organization or when organizational goals and individual goals become increasingly integrated or aligned. As we saw in the previous section, TCM and goal commitment consider commitment as a psychological state. There is discussion as to which of the two views is dominant [40], but there is consensus that the two views deal with different aspects of commitment and are interrelated, and that actions and psychological states interact [35, 40, 50]. Meyer [35] and Meyer [36] define commitment as the force that binds an individual to a set of actions related to one or more goals, while [33, 40, 51] and others consider commitment as a psychological bond. In addition, some studies, such as goal commitment and target-free measure of [51], claim that it is a unidimensional construct, while others, such as TCM, argue that it is based on multi-dimensional constructs. Even within the trend of considering commitment as a psychological state, the discussion about the definition of the construct and specific measurement scales continues [40, 34].

In addition, even within the trend of considering commitment as a psychological state, researchers stated that recent changes in organizational environments and research into the phenomenon of commitment in diverse cultures require more attention to process issues and qualitative research [52]. Still, there are surprisingly few process studies and qualitative studies in entrepreneurial commitment research.

C. Commitment as a Managerial Action

Recently, the concept of commitment has been attracting attention in business strategy literature [53, 54]. Sull [53]

defines commitment as “any actions that an entrepreneur or manager takes that bind the organization to specific behaviors in the future” and, more precisely, as “an action taken by an agent in a time period that increases the probability that the agent's organization will behave in a specified way in subsequent time periods by increasing the future costs of deviating from the specified behavior, up to the limit of excluding altogether the possibility of alternative courses of action” [53]. Sull [53] also states that “commitments are actions, not a person's state of attachment to, say, an organization or its goals,” and considers commitment as an action. While much of the previous literature on commitment in social psychology and organizational psychology has focused on the impact on the actors themselves, research in business strategy is characterized by focusing on the connection between executives and the organization and by including the impact of executives' actions on stakeholders inside and outside the organization. In the past, organizational scholar Selznick's research focused on the connection between executives and organizations. Selznick [55] sees commitment as “ways of acting and responding that can be changed, if at all, only at the risk of severe internal crisis” and claims that commitment has the effect of shaping the character of an organization. Recent commitment research in strategic management has inherited this lineage. As is evident from the expression that increases the future costs of alternative courses of action, these commitment theories are similar to the side-bet theory [53]. Although the focus and the breadth of influences differ, these theories also see commitment as an action, and their research subjects overlap with other commitment research.

IV. A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMITMENT: A MODEL FOR MANAGING COMMITMENT PHENOMENON

As reviewed in the previous section, researchers explored commitment in various fields, including social psychology, organizational psychology, and business strategy. Fig. 1 shows a synthesis of the thinking from the three trends.

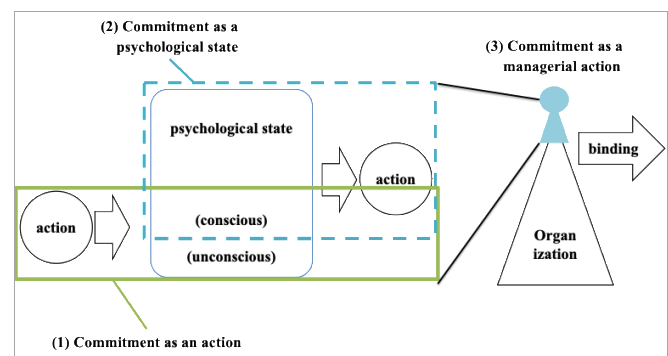


Fig. 1. A synthesis of the thinking from the three trends.

First, commitment as an action (1. solid line), which has been studied mainly in social psychology (Kiesler, Becker, Salancik, Staw, etc.), focused on psychological biases (including unconscious) that a certain act affects the person's subsequent actions and cognition. The research subject is the phenomenon in which the first act has an impact, both conscious and unconscious, on subsequent cognition, psychological state, and actions, and the starting action is considered as commitment. Second, commitment as a

² Some, such as [35] and [40], argued that there are problems with defining commitment as an attitude because it does not fit with the current portrayal of attitudes in the psychology literature. In the psychology literature, the tripartite (affect-behavior-cognition) view of attitudes has been supplanted in the psychology literature by the view of attitudes as summary evaluations, and it is now considered that the term "attitude" does not adequately describe the concept of commitment. Therefore, in this article, we follow the recent literature in not using the term attitude, but rather using the terms psychological state or mindset.

psychological state (2. dotted line), which has been studied mainly in goal-setting theory and organizational psychology (Mowday, Meyer, Klein, etc.). They consider commitment as a psychological state (bond/force) of an individual who is connected to a certain object, goal, or action, and study the phenomenon in which that psychological state affects subsequent actions. Third, in the context of management, commitment theory in business strategy or organizational science (Sull, Ghemawat, Selznick) considers commitment as a management action (3. Human-shaped figure) that binds the organization as well as the individual and prevents them from deviating from a specific course of action. The difference from the first two is that the scope of the research also includes the impact on the organization beyond the actor.

These three research trends have been studying roughly overlapping phenomena but with slightly different focuses and from different angles. In this article, based on the abundant accumulation of commitment literature to date, we propose to distinguish between the “phenomenon” of commitment, the “psychological state,” and the “actions.” Researchers who view commitment as a psychological state, as an act, and as a managerial act all study the phenomenon in which a certain direction is given (bonded) to the person’s future actions by some act or psychological factor. By considering this phenomenon as commitment (phenomenon) and classifying the acts and psychological states that cause such a phenomenon as “commitment acts” and “commitment mindsets,” respectively, each concept can be made clearer. In recent years, [49, 50] also argued that separating commitment’s psychological state and behavioral aspects may be difficult in practice and that new efforts to reintegrate disparate findings may be fruitful. We agree with their arguments.

As seen in the literature review, among these commitment studies, entrepreneurial commitment research has been based mainly on commitment as a psychological state and the theory of commitment escalation. Researches on commitment as an action and commitment as a managerial action have not been fully utilized. This is because entrepreneurship research has emerged relatively recently, and researchers have borrowed from commitment research, which was gaining attention at that time. The trend of considering commitment as an action is not limited to the specific contexts that the escalation of commitment theory targeted, and future research on entrepreneurial commitment can be expanded by using the trend.

Researchers have focused on entrepreneurial commitment because it may be a key to unraveling entrepreneurial behavior patterns and business success or failure in contexts specific to entrepreneurship (e.g., resource mobilization under conditions of uncertainty and information asymmetry, resource investment decisions under high uncertainty and strong resource constraints, or a combination of multiple such situations). In this article, we propose a model of managing commitment phenomenon, as shown in Fig. 2, that can elucidate such entrepreneurial behavior patterns. This is a model for studying the behavior pattern of entrepreneurs (managing commitment phenomenon) that optimizes the impact of the commitment phenomenon by capturing the chain of positive and negative effects caused by the commitment phenomenon and strategically and intentionally

making (or not making) a commitment actions toward the achievement of aims. It is composed of the following elements: (1) context, (2) commitment mindset, (3) commitment action, (4) effects, including binding effects, (5) dealing with the commitment phenomenon, and (6) cognition and reaction by the stakeholders. (As the behavioral school says, it assumes that the visibility of the commitment actions affects the subsequent binding effects, so we include the elements of cognition and reaction by the stakeholders.) For example, in a context of anticipating that they will run out of cash, entrepreneurs, with tension and enthusiasm, approach fund-raising activities from investors. Investors may ask him to do actions such as presenting a business plan and signing an investment contract, which would have binding effects and other effects on the entrepreneur themselves and the organization, and the entrepreneur would try to deal with the commitment phenomenon while predicting such effects. This model assumes the behavior pattern of such entrepreneurs. Studying the phenomenon of entrepreneurial commitment based on this model makes it possible to study the subtle interactions between actions and psychological states that have been overlooked until now and the phenomenon of commitment as a process theory.

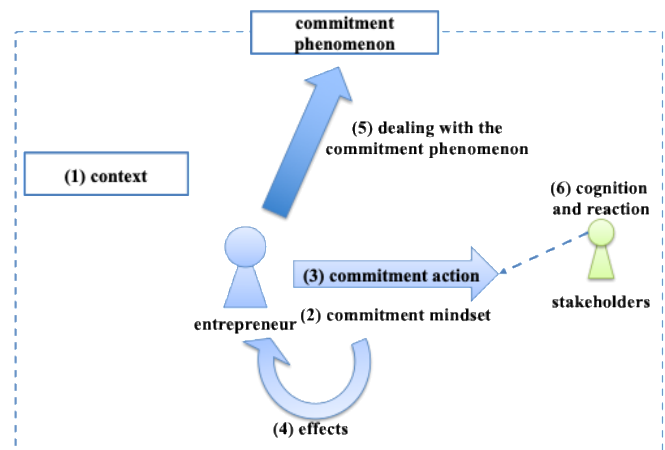


Fig. 2. The model for managing entrepreneurial commitment.

V. DISCUSSION

Researchers have focused on entrepreneurial commitment as a factor that explains entrepreneurial behavior patterns in the entrepreneurial context, such as resource mobilization, resource input, and the entrepreneurial process, and that has a significant impact on business. However, compared to the issues raised, the scope of research to date has been limited, and the accumulation of research has been fragmented. In light of this situation, this article reviews the accumulation of entrepreneurial commitment research, analyzes the trends of broader commitment research, and proposes a new model that will serve as a foundation for future research. This article contributes to developing the entrepreneurship field in the following three ways.

First, this article contributes to the entrepreneurial commitment literature by identifying trends in entrepreneurial commitment research. Through a narrative review, this article shows how previous entrepreneurial commitment research has been fragmented based on goal-setting theory, the TCM of workplace commitment, and the escalation of commitment theory.

Second, we identify commitment theories that have been overlooked in the entrepreneurial commitment literature. Both goal-setting theory and the TCM of workplace commitment consider commitment as a psychological state, and entrepreneurial commitment literature overlooked the behavioral school, which considers commitment as an action, and recent commitment theories in business strategy. In addition, previous entrepreneurial commitment studies have mainly focused on variance theory to understand entrepreneurs' psychological state through questionnaire surveys. However, in recent commitment studies, process studies and qualitative researches that can capture more subtle meanings have attracted more attention. The second contribution of this article is to identify shortcomings in previous entrepreneurial commitment studies and to present future research topics.

The third contribution of this article is to propose a model that incorporates commitment as an action for a basis of future research. The model of managing commitment phenomenon proposed in the previous section aims to simultaneously capture the entrepreneur's psychological state and actions when making actions or decisions that bind the direction of their subsequent actions, and to capture how they interact over time. This model, which considers entrepreneurial commitment as an interaction between actions and psychology states, makes it possible to capture entrepreneurial commitment from multiple perspectives through observations, interviews, and collecting archival data. It is possible to analyze, for example, what actions entrepreneurs take when mobilizing resources based on what psychological state they have, what consequences these have on resource mobilization, other binding effects, and the entrepreneur's subsequent actions or psychological state. It is also possible to analyze what actions entrepreneurs take when investing resources based on what psychological state they have, what consequences these have on resource investment, other binding effects, and the entrepreneur's subsequent actions or psychological state. In this way, by proposing a model that can be used as a reference in future empirical research, this study makes it possible to study a wider range of entrepreneurial behavior patterns and entrepreneurial phenomena from the perspective of entrepreneurial commitment, thereby contributing to the literature on entrepreneurship.

However, like all research, this article has limitations. This article is a theoretical study based on a literature review of entrepreneurial commitment research and broader trends in commitment research, so it needs to be critically examined in future empirical research that builds on this research. In addition, research on both entrepreneurship and commitment is progressing daily, and the proposed model needs to be updated from time to time in light of these research results. We hope that the model of managing commitment proposed in this study will serve as the basis for exploratory and evaluative researches using various methods, including qualitative and quantitative methods, and that it will expand research on entrepreneurial commitment and entrepreneurship.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SY and SS were involved in the study design and research conduct; SY wrote the paper with support from SS; all authors had approved the final version.

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