




# Designing an Entrepreneurial Marketing Model with a Sustainable Tourism Approach in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The main objective of this research is to design an entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era.

**Methodology:** The research methodology is applied in terms of purpose; qualitative in terms of method; and exploratory with an inductive philosophy in terms of data nature. The study participants were experts and managers in the tourism industry with more than seven years of experience and relevant educational backgrounds. A purposive sampling method and theoretical judgment were used to select participants for the interviews. Data collection was conducted in the field using semi-structured interviews based on a protocol. Data analysis was performed using the grounded theory method, Strauss and Corbin's systematic approach, and open, axial, and selective coding with ATLAS.ti software.

**Findings:** The coding results were categorized into five groups.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that the causal factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era include customer orientation and resource leveraging; intervening factors include advertising and creativity; contextual factors include risk-taking, innovation orientation, and opportunity orientation; identified strategies include networking, tourism content creation, and value creation; and finally, the identified outcomes include cultural value of tourism and the historical significance of tourism.

**Keywords:** *entrepreneurial marketing, sustainable tourism, post-COVID-19.*

## 1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship encompasses all activities and actions related to the identification and exploitation of opportunities (Meftahi et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship, as a deliberate and planned behavior, is considered a significant factor in economic development and job creation. It involves understanding and acting under conditions of uncertainty. Supporting the development and growth of investments based on creativity and innovation is essential. In its modern sense, entrepreneurship is defined as "taking responsibility, pursuing opportunities, and meeting needs and wants through innovation" (Cunningham et al., 2016).

Entrepreneurial marketing is considered an economic function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers, and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders. It is characterized by innovation, risk-taking, and proactive activities that may occur without currently controlled resources (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Entrepreneurs are responsible for innovation and creativity within organizations and strive to turn an idea into a profitable reality. Innovation involves the practical implementation of ideas leading to the introduction of new or improved goods or services (YuSheng & Ibrahim, 2020). Innovation often occurs through the development of products, processes, services, technologies, artworks, or business models made available to markets, governments, and society by innovators (Gyimah, 2022). The concept of entrepreneurial marketing focuses on the capability for innovation and the development of ideas aligned with an intuitive understanding of market needs, potentially providing a significant competitive advantage for companies actively seeking innovative options for their customers. Business development heavily relies on innovation as a competitive resource (Karimi Zand & Tayebi, 2023).

Sustainable tourism is a concept that encompasses the complete tourism experience, including economic, social, and environmental considerations, as well as improving tourist experiences and addressing the needs of host communities (Mathew, 2022). Tourism can relate to travel for leisure, business, and visiting friends and relatives, and it can include various means of transportation related to tourism. This may involve transport to public places and local transport to and from accommodations, entertainment, recreation, dining, and shopping. There is currently broad consensus that tourism should be sustainable (Skryl & Gregoric, 2022). In fact, all forms of tourism can be

sustainable if properly planned, developed, and managed (Finke et al., 2020). Global tourism accounts for approximately eight percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. This percentage considers air travel and other significant environmental and social impacts, which are not always beneficial to local communities and their economies (Liu et al., 2022). Tourism development organizations are promoting sustainable tourism practices to mitigate the negative impacts resulting from the growing influence of tourism. Challenges associated with sustainable tourism include displacement and resettlement, environmental impacts, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The displacement or resettlement of local communities can result from increased access to areas for tourists. Construction projects for building roads and new housing for tourists can disrupt the natural world and local environment (Magrane, 2021).

Events in cities, whether natural disasters or infectious diseases, have always led to significant changes in the world and even in the way humans live. The outbreak of COVID-19 is considered one of the most significant events in human history, which from the outset has significantly altered human life and even the environment. Tourism has faced numerous changes as managers implemented strict regulations on its operations. Tourists' attitudes were also affected, and many of them attempted to continue visiting global attractions differently and safely, either virtually or in person, during the pandemic. Consequently, it is anticipated that the practice of tourism will change compared to the pre-COVID era, ushering in a new chapter for tourism enthusiasts. Therefore, the primary question of this research is: What is the entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era?

## 2 Methods and Materials

This research is applied in terms of purpose and qualitative with a grounded theory approach in terms of method. The primary aim of the present study is to design an entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era. While various models exist in this domain, they are not tailored to the context and conditions of each organizational system in the country, and their generalizability to the national system is uncertain. Data collection in this part of the research is survey-based and exploratory. At this stage, through survey methods and in-depth, structured, and purposeful interviews, concepts, categories, and classifications regarding entrepreneurial

marketing with a sustainable tourism approach are identified. To achieve this goal, a protocol was developed to guide (using unpredictable and exploratory auxiliary questions) all sample individuals toward the unified research objective.

The study population includes experts and senior managers in the tourism industry with more than five years of work experience, as well as university professors in the field of business management. In this stage of the research, a segment of the statistical population is selected as a sample, and the necessary evidence is collected. Sampling in the qualitative study section is purposive and theoretical. In qualitative research, the selection of the research sample is purposive. In this method, the researcher selects the desired research sample purposively with knowledge and awareness of the target community. Theoretical sampling is also employed because interviews continue until no new elements or discussions arise, indicating theoretical saturation. The sample size continues until better understanding and saturation are achieved. The data collection method is field-based, and qualitative data are collected through interviews. The interview duration, after mutual agreement, ranged from 45 to 120 minutes. The most important question in the interview was about the factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era, with remaining questions based on the interviewee's responses within the framework of the paradigmatic model and informational needs of the categories. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and reviewed multiple times for extracting key points. To ensure internal validity, member checking (feedback to interviewees), peer debriefing, and minimizing researcher biases and assumptions were used. Additionally, after each interview, the emerging pattern was presented up to that point, and if the interviewee had any comments, they were discussed. For external validity, methods such as constant comparison in data analysis, avoiding initial assumptions in conclusion, and collecting data from multiple

information sources with coding shared among experts for their feedback on labels and coding were utilized. Data reliability was demonstrated by showing the decision-making path, providing all raw and analyzed data, codes, categories, study process, initial goals, and questions to experts, and audit checks by knowledgeable individuals confirming the accuracy of all research steps. Additionally, reliability between two coders was achieved with the assistance of a doctoral student, coding three interviews, yielding an internal thematic agreement of 78%, which is above the 34% threshold, thereby confirming the reliability of the coding.

To calculate test-retest reliability, several interviews were randomly selected as samples and coded twice at short, specified intervals, comparing the codes for consistency. In each interview, similar codes in both intervals were marked as "agreement," and dissimilar codes as "disagreement."

### 3 Findings and Results

Data analysis from interviews and coding stages in grounded theory was conducted in three stages:

**Open Coding:** In this initial step, by analyzing sentences and viewpoints, primary codes were extracted. Subsequently, common and emphasized codes from all interviewees, along with important codes from the researcher's perspective, were identified as final codes with their sources. The collected data were coded to easily identify similarities and differences. A sample of the initial extracted codes in one of the categories.

**Axial Coding:** In the second stage, known as axial coding, the researcher compared the coded data, clustering them into appropriate categories. Open and axial coding stages could be concurrent or sequential.

**Selective Coding:** After axial coding, selective coding begins, linking categories to the central category, shaping the theory.

**Table 1**

*The Results of Thematic Analysis*

Role	Selective Code	Axial Code
Causal Conditions	Customer Orientation	Competitive Advantage Entrepreneurial Alertness Customer Relationships Easy Access to Services Suitable Equipment Employee Grooming Service Quality Service Development and Delivery

	Resource Leveraging	Specialized Services Crew Training Excessive Consumption and Waste Reduction Using Sustainable Nature of Resources Planning
Contextual Conditions	Risk-taking	Organizational Risk
	Innovation Orientation	Strategic Risk Financial Risk Operational Risk Knowledge Coping with Potential Threats Use of New Technologies Digital Marketing for Promoting Activities
	Opportunity Orientation	Offering Discount Packages with Emphasis on Sustainable Tourism Providing Relevant Environmental Information Access to Previous Information and Knowledge Optimism and Self-sufficiency Use of Social Networks Positioning of Handicrafts Creating Sustainable Job Opportunities
Intervening Conditions	Advertising	Advertising Local and Native Recreational Programs
	Creativity	Using Social Networks for Advertising Advertising Ecotourism Accommodations Uniqueness of Effect Being Innovative and Idea-oriented Authenticity and Originality in Tourism Content Offering Combinations in Tourism Emotional Reactions Responding to Changes in Customer Needs Emotional Reactions
Strategic Conditions	Networking	Attracting Like-minded Customers Proximity and Building Personal Relationships Developing Campaigns Friendly and Intimate Relationships with Travelers High Commitment, Interaction, and Participation in Community and Institutions Continuous Contacts and Long-term Relationships with Customers Virtual and Augmented Reality Word-of-mouth Marketing Participation in Specialized Exhibitions Participation in International Exhibitions Personal and Emotional Relationships between Leaders and Travelers Friendly Gatherings with Employees, Partners, and Customers Offering and Improving New Products Based on Friends' and Acquaintances' Recommendations Smart Billboards
	Tourism Content Creation	Aesthetic Stimulation Related to Tourism Attractiveness of Tourism Content Special Attention to Content Design Providing Emotional and Entertaining Benefits in Tourism Enjoyable Tourism Content Related to the Environment
	Value Creation	Conducting Tours with Emphasis on Social Responsibility Offering Guides for Responsible and Sustainable Travel Promoting Environmental Conservation in Tourism Tours Preserving Environmental Diversity
Outcomes	Cultural Value of Tourism	Scope of Impact and Influence of Sustainable Tourism Spiritual Tourism (Providing Symbolic Meaning)
	Historical Significance of Tourism	Emphasis on and Derived from Local and Indigenous Culture  Respect for Local Beliefs and Culture Promoting Eco-friendly Travel Strengthening National Identity

Causal Condition Coding: Data analysis in this section seeks to identify factors affecting entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era. From interviews, 13 axial codes were identified from two selective codes, customer orientation and resource leveraging.

Contextual Condition Coding: This section aims to identify factors influencing the selection of appropriate strategies in the current situation. Qualitative analysis has identified three selective codes—risk-taking, opportunity orientation, and innovation orientation—from 16 axial codes.

**Intervening Condition Coding:** Intervening factors refer to general factors influencing strategies. The analysis has identified two selective codes—advertising and creativity—from 10 axial codes.

**Strategic Coding:** The analysis of interview texts in this section aims to identify actions and interactions resulting from the central idea. The analysis has identified three selective codes—networking, tourism content creation, and value creation—from 24 axial codes.

**Outcome Coding:** The application of selected strategies results in outcomes. The analysis of interview texts has identified three selected outcomes of entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era from seven axial codes. Each of these factors was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews, indicating their equal importance, which varies depending on existing conditions and work environments.

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

Given the primary aim of the research, which is to present an entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era, a qualitative grounded theory approach using Strauss and Corbin's systematic approach was employed to analyze the interviews. From the interviews, 70 axial codes and 11 selective codes were identified. Subsequently, the identified selective codes were categorized into five groups: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes. The identified causal factors influencing the entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era include customer orientation (competitive advantage, entrepreneurial alertness, customer relationships, easy access to services, suitable equipment, employee grooming, service quality, service development and delivery, specialized services) and resource leveraging (crew training, excessive consumption and waste reduction, using sustainable nature of resources, planning).

The strategic factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era include networking (attracting like-minded customers, proximity and building personal relationships, developing campaigns, friendly and intimate relationships with travelers, high commitment, interaction, and participation in community and institutions, continuous contacts and long-term relationships with customers, virtual and augmented reality, word-of-mouth marketing,

participation in specialized exhibitions, participation in international exhibitions, personal and emotional relationships between leaders and travelers, friendly gatherings with employees, partners, and customers, offering and improving new products based on friends' and acquaintances' recommendations, smart billboards); tourism content creation (aesthetic stimulation related to tourism, attractiveness of tourism content, special attention to content design, providing emotional and entertaining benefits in tourism, enjoyable tourism content related to the environment); and value creation (conducting tours with emphasis on social responsibility, offering guides for responsible and sustainable travel, promoting environmental conservation in tourism tours, preserving environmental diversity).

The contextual factors influencing the entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era include risk-taking (organizational risk, strategic risk, financial risk, operational risk); innovation orientation (knowledge, coping with potential threats, use of new technologies, digital marketing for promoting activities, offering discount packages with emphasis on sustainable tourism, providing relevant environmental information); and opportunity orientation (access to previous information and knowledge, optimism and self-sufficiency, use of social networks, positioning of handicrafts, creating sustainable job opportunities).

Additionally, the intervening factors influencing the entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era include advertising (advertising local and native recreational programs, using social networks for advertising, advertising ecotourism accommodations); and creativity (uniqueness of effect, being innovative and idea-oriented, authenticity and originality in tourism content, offering combinations in tourism, emotional reactions, responding to changes in customer needs, emotional reactions). Finally, the outcomes of the entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era result from the cultural value of tourism (scope of impact and influence of sustainable tourism, spiritual tourism (providing symbolic meaning)) and historical significance of tourism (emphasis on and derived from local and indigenous culture, respect for local beliefs and culture, promoting eco-friendly travel, strengthening national identity).

Given the post-COVID-19 conditions, entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach can be an effective solution for creating successful businesses in the

tourism sector. Entrepreneurs can establish businesses that are both economically profitable and contribute to sustainable tourism by considering the environment and local communities. To this end, entrepreneurs can use various strategies to create sustainable tourism businesses. Some of these suggestions include:

- Establishing Local and Indigenous Accommodations: Entrepreneurs can promote sustainable tourism by creating local and indigenous accommodations. These accommodations are typically built in rural and indigenous areas, allowing tourists to connect with and learn about the local culture and lifestyle.
- Creating Local Businesses: Entrepreneurs can develop local businesses such as handicraft shops, local restaurants, and more to help develop the local economy while providing services to tourists.
- Using Technology: Entrepreneurs can use various technologies such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and more to enhance the tourist experience at destinations and facilitate business management processes.

This study is one of the first to consider entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach as a whole and model it within the paradigmatic framework in Iran. Therefore, for future studies, several suggestions can be made. This research utilized a qualitative (grounded theory) approach, so it is recommended to use other qualitative methods for combining dynamics and modeling by experts and scholars in future studies.

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The limitations of this research include the limited studies on the research topic, the variables of entrepreneurial marketing and sustainable tourism, and the issues related to the post-COVID-19 era. Especially with the combination of the topics raised in this research in Iran and the identified factors, it can provide better horizons for discovering efficient applications among the target organizations by future researchers.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Authors Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

## Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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