



The Mediating Role of Knowledge Sharing and Intrapreneurship in the Relationship Between Social Capital and Innovation in Tourism Industry Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the mediating role of knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship in the relationship between social capital and innovation in tourism enterprises operating in Mazandaran Province. This research is applied in purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection method. The statistical population consisted of 420 managers and senior experts of tourism businesses in Mazandaran Province. According to Morgan's sampling table, 201 participants were selected through a convenience sampling method. Data were collected using four standardized questionnaires: the Social Capital Questionnaire adapted from Ozcan et al(2022), the Knowledge Sharing Questionnaire from Al-Tit et al(2022), the Innovation Questionnaire from Jorfi et al(2013), and the Intrapreneurship Questionnaire from Brown et al(2001). The face and content validity of the instruments were confirmed by academic experts, and their reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, including Structural Equation Modeling with SPSS 25 and PLS 4 software. The results indicated that knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship play significant mediating roles in the relationship between social capital and innovation. Furthermore, social capital had a significant positive effect on knowledge sharing, intrapreneurship, and innovation, while both knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship directly influenced innovation in tourism businesses. Accordingly, it can be concluded that strengthening social capital and promoting a culture of knowledge sharing in organizational environments can enhance innovation levels and foster intrapreneurial development within the tourism industry.

KEYWORDS: Social Capital, Knowledge Sharing, Intrapreneurship, Innovation, Tourism Industry

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1. Introduction

The contemporary world is characterized by rapid changes in technology, customer expectations, and work practices, compelling organizations to design and implement innovative structures and approaches to survive and remain competitive (Kabiri Naeini et al., 2023). To effectively respond to these dynamics, organizations must develop flexible structures and innovative strategies aimed at enhancing creativity and productivity. Knowledge management, as a key organizational tool, facilitates the identification, storage, and sharing of knowledge, thereby improving organizational performance and strengthening innovative capabilities (Wang et al., 2022).

Within this context, effective leadership plays a critical role by motivating employees and aligning individual and organizational goals, thus supporting the achievement of innovation-driven objectives (Kabiri Naeini et al., 2023). The tourism industry, as one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors of the global economy, requires continuous innovation and the effective utilization of social and intellectual capital to maintain competitiveness in international markets. Social capital, encompassing networks of relationships, mutual trust, and collaboration among stakeholders, provides a fertile ground for fostering innovation in tourism enterprises (Rezaei et al., 2023).

In this regard, knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship serve as crucial mediating mechanisms, transforming social capital into tangible innovative outcomes (Zarei et al., 2022). Recent research indicates that social capital—through its relational networks, trust, and collaborative ties—plays a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing innovation in this sector (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 2021; Kim et al., 2023). Furthermore, social capital facilitates access to external resources and reduces transaction costs, creating a conducive environment for process and product innovation in tourism (Wang et al., 2022).

However, the real impact of social capital on innovation emerges only when knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship operate as mediating mechanisms (Zarei et al., 2023). In Iran, despite abundant cultural and natural resources, tourism businesses have yet to fully exploit their innovative potential (Ahmadi et al., 2023). Examining the mediating roles of knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship can therefore provide managers with strategic insights to transform social capital into a source of innovation-driven growth.

According to the Iran Tourism Association Report (2023), the innovation rate in domestic tourism enterprises is merely 15%, compared to the global average of 26%, highlighting the need for revising knowledge-based and entrepreneurial mechanisms. This study, focusing on Iranian tourism businesses, aims to develop a conceptual model that clarifies the mediating roles of knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship, while proposing practical strategies to enhance innovation in this industry. The findings are expected to assist managers, policymakers, and researchers in identifying effective mechanisms for sustainable tourism development and competitive advantage through innovation.

2. Theoretical framework and research background

Social capital, as a network of relationships and social connections, plays a pivotal role in fostering and enhancing innovation within organizations, as these networks facilitate access to informational and supportive resources (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Through networks of trust, collaboration, and knowledge exchange, social capital generates competitive advantage and strengthens the organization's innovative capacity. Knowledge sharing is a systematic process for transferring and utilizing knowledge among organizational members and has been identified as a key mediator between social capital and innovation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2020). This process, by enhancing organizational learning and promoting coordination among employees, plays a critical role in improving innovative performance. Intrapreneurship enables the identification and exploitation of innovative opportunities within the existing organizational framework, thereby reinforcing organizational innovative capabilities and sustaining competitive advantage (Pinchot, 2020).

Various studies indicate that social capital, through communication networks and trust-based relationships, together with knowledge-sharing processes, provides a conducive environment for organizational innovation, while the presence of intrapreneurship further strengthens this relationship (Wang et al., 2022). Promoting a culture of knowledge sharing and encouraging employees' creative and risk-taking behaviors not only enhances innovation but also improves organizational performance in delivering innovative services and products within the tourism industry (Nobakht et al., 2020). Moreover, organizations with high social capital that consistently share knowledge are more likely to succeed in innovation and product development. In the tourism sector, this process is particularly critical, as innovation in tourism services and products requires the coordination of social networks and effective utilization of organizational knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2020; Lee et al., 2024).

Recent international studies have further highlighted the significance of social capital, knowledge sharing, and intrapreneurship in driving innovation within tourism enterprises. Thompson and Johnson (2024) demonstrated that social capital, through networks of trust and strong relational ties, facilitates innovation, and that entrepreneurial leadership amplifies this effect (Thompson & Johnson, 2024). Lamberg et al. (2024), examining peer-to-peer accommodation platforms, found that social capital—particularly its relational dimension—exerts a strong influence on knowledge sharing, with knowledge sharing serving as a partial mediator between social capital and service innovation (Lamberg et al., 2024). Additionally, Lee et al. (2024) indicated that digital transformation in tourism organizations facilitates the knowledge-sharing process, thereby enhancing digital innovations.

Kim et al. (2023), in their study conducted in South Korea, emphasized that social capital—through communication networks and trust—has a significant positive effect on knowledge sharing, with knowledge sharing fully mediating the relationship between social capital and service innovation (Kim et al., 2023). Chen et al. (2023) found that intrapreneurship enhances employees' creative initiatives, and that social capital facilitates this process by providing access to resources and networks (Chen et al., 2023). Similarly, Lee et al. (2023) demonstrated that social capital

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strengthens organizational innovation through enhanced relationships and trust, highlighting the critical role of knowledge sharing, although intrapreneurship was not examined in their study (Lee et al., 2023).

Teece et al. (2023) demonstrated that social capital has a positive effect on intrapreneurship, with intrapreneurship partially mediating the relationship between social capital and innovation, particularly in the development of sustainable innovative tourism services (Teece et al., 2023). Similarly, Wang et al. (2022) highlighted the mediating role of knowledge sharing between social capital and innovation, showing that networks of trust and collaboration facilitate knowledge sharing, which in turn enhances organizational innovation (Wang et al., 2023). Antila et al. (2021) further emphasized that social capital positively impacts intrapreneurship, and that intrapreneurship fully mediates the relationship between social capital and innovation, particularly within tourism enterprises (Antila et al., 2021).

Regarding the domestic literature, several studies have confirmed the significance of social capital, knowledge sharing, and intrapreneurship in fostering innovation within the tourism industry. Ahmadi Bavill (2024) demonstrated that social capital facilitates the resolution of collective problems and that sustained collaboration among employees enhances both psychological comfort and organizational effectiveness (Ahmadi Bavill, 2021). Kabiri Naeini et al. (2023) found that knowledge management positively influences organizational entrepreneurship and leadership, with leadership playing a critical mediating role in this relationship (Kabiri Naeini et al., 2023). Mahmoudi et al. (2022) showed that social capital positively affects knowledge sharing, and that knowledge sharing along with intrapreneurship amplifies the impact of social capital on innovation (Mahmoudi et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hoseinpour Jaghanab et al. (2021) and Najafi Toveh Khoshkeh & Azadi (2020) emphasized the pivotal role of social networks and knowledge sharing in generating innovative services and fostering entrepreneurial behaviors in the tourism sector (Hoseinpour Jaghanab et al., 2021; Najafi Toveh Khoshkeh & Azadi, 2020).

The review of both domestic and international literature indicates that social capital, knowledge sharing, and intrapreneurship, through their mediating roles, transform human and social resources into tangible innovations and innovative services. Social networks, trust, and collaboration among employees, coupled with a supportive organizational culture, provide the necessary foundation for the development of innovative services, process improvements, and enhanced organizational sustainability. Consequently, these factors are considered essential pillars for growth and innovation, particularly in the tourism industry, and require the design of practical models and frameworks tailored to the organizational structures and environmental conditions of this sector.

The present study aims to develop a conceptual and analytical model to examine the relationships among social capital, knowledge sharing, intrapreneurship, and innovation within tourism businesses, and to analyze the mediating role of these variables in enhancing innovation. This research seeks to demonstrate how strengthening social capital, knowledge sharing, and intrapreneurship can enhance the innovation capacity and overall performance of tourism enterprises, thereby contributing to sustainable economic and competitive advantages and ensuring organizational success in dynamic and competitive environments.

Based on the literature review, the research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Main Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between social capital and innovation in tourism businesses.
- **H2:** Intrapreneurship mediates the relationship between social capital and innovation in tourism businesses.

Sub-Hypotheses:

- **H1a:** Social capital has a significant effect on innovation in tourism businesses.
- **H1b:** Social capital has a significant effect on intrapreneurship in tourism businesses.
- **H1c:** Social capital has a significant effect on knowledge sharing in tourism businesses.
- **H1d:** Intrapreneurship has a significant effect on innovation in tourism businesses.
- **H1e:** Knowledge sharing has a significant effect on innovation in tourism businesses.

Based on the literature review and research background, the conceptual framework (model) of the study is presented below.

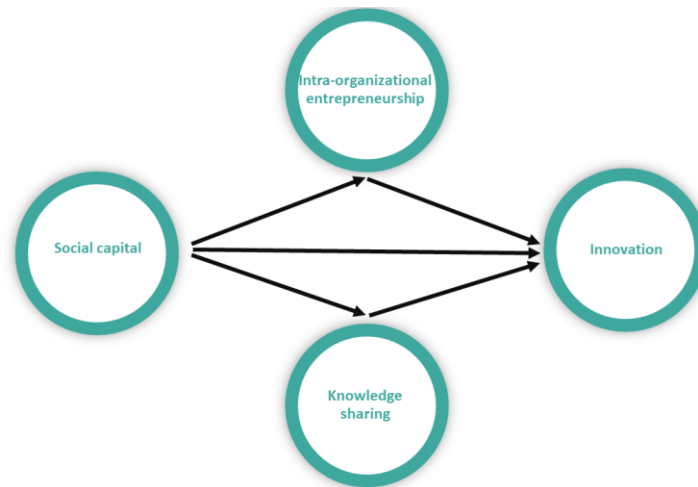


Figure 1. Research model

3. Research methodology

This study is applied in terms of its purpose and, based on the data collection method, falls under the category of descriptive-survey research. The statistical population comprises all senior managers and senior experts of tourism businesses in Mazandaran Province. A total of 36 active companies in this sector were identified, and according to the obtained statistics, the total number of senior managers and experts is approximately 420 individuals. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's table, the sample size was determined to be 201 participants. The sample, including senior managers and senior experts, was selected using the convenience sampling method and subsequently studied. Data were collected using four standardized questionnaires:

1. **Social Capital** – adapted from Özcan et al. (2022), consisting of 6 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”);

2. **Knowledge Sharing** – based on the instrument by Al-Tit et al. (2022), including 6 items on the same five-point Likert scale;
3. **Innovation** – adapted from Jorfi et al. (2013), comprising 6 items to measure the level of innovation;
4. **Intrapreneurship** – derived from Brown et al. (2001), with 6 items assessing the degree of intrapreneurial behavior.

The reliability of the instruments was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.81 for social capital, 0.82 for knowledge sharing, 0.78 for innovation, and 0.87 for intrapreneurship, all exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability values ($CR > 0.70$) also confirmed the internal consistency. Content validity was assessed and approved by a panel of 10 experts in management and tourism. Construct validity was verified through exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Data were gathered through both in-person distribution and online questionnaires. To analyze the data, the study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS version 4. Unlike covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), which emphasizes model fit and is typically used for well-established theories, the PLS-SEM approach is prediction-oriented and suitable for exploratory studies, theory development, and modeling complex relationships among constructs. The analysis process consisted of two main components:

1. The measurement model, used to assess reliability and validity;
2. The structural model, used to test the research hypotheses.

Convergent validity ($AVE > 0.50$), discriminant validity ($HTMT < 0.85$), and composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$) were all verified. The significance of path coefficients was evaluated through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was conducted to confirm the non-normal distribution of data and justify the use of the PLS method.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality of data was guaranteed, and no conflicts of interest were reported. These methodological and ethical considerations ensured the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the research findings.

4. Findings

The findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the research participants indicated that 65.67% (132 individuals) were male and 34.33% (69 individuals) were female. In terms of age distribution, 4.48% (9 individuals) were between 20 and 30 years old, 44.78% (90 individuals) were between 31 and 40 years old, 33.33% (67 individuals) were between 41 and 50 years old, and 17.41% (35 individuals) were 50 years old or above.

Regarding educational background, 4.48% (9 individuals) held education below the bachelor's level, 64.18% (129 individuals) held a bachelor's degree, and 31.34% (63 individuals) possessed a master's degree or higher. Additionally, the findings related to work experience indicated that 7.96% (16 individuals) had less than 10 years of experience, 52.24% (105 individuals) had between 10 and 20 years of experience, 32.84% (66 individuals) had between 21 and 30 years of experience,

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and 6.97% (14 individuals) had more than 30 years of professional experience. Overall, the majority of respondents had work experience ranging from 10 to 20 years.

To assess the model fit, three components were examined: measurement model fit, structural model fit, and overall model fit. In the first step, the validity of the measurement model was evaluated through reliability and validity assessments.

The primary criterion for assessing reliability is the factor loadings, which represent the correlation of each indicator with its corresponding construct. The minimum acceptable value for a factor loading is 0.4. It is noteworthy that if any factor loading is below 0.4, the researcher should either revise the corresponding indicator or remove it from the model (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2016). According to the results presented in Table 1, all factor loadings exceed 0.4, indicating an adequate fit and satisfactory reliability of the constructs in the research model.

Table 1. Factor loads of research variables

Components	Indicator variables	KS	SC	IN	IE
		Knowledge Sharing	Social Capital	Innovation	Intrapreneurship
Organizational innovation and creativity	IE1				0.438
Organizational support for innovation	IE2				0.483
Intrapreneurship	IE3				0.523
Organizational risk-taking in innovation	IE4				0.828
Employee participation in innovation	IE5				0.824
Resource support for intrapreneurship	IE6				0.879
Innovation in products and services	IN1			0.573	
Continuous improvement of operational processes	IN2			0.503	
Use of innovative technology in services	IN3			0.683	
Innovation in business models	IN4			0.784	
Service differentiation compared to competitors	IN5			0.688	
Innovation and development of sustainable services	IN6			0.711	
Tacit knowledge sharing	KS1	0.779			
Explicit knowledge management	KS2	0.782			
Formal knowledge sharing	KS3	0.738			
Individual knowledge sharing	KS4	0.500			
Conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge	KS5	0.519			
Accelerating organizational learning	KS6	0.542			
Relational social capital	SC1		0.794		
Organizational trust	SC2		0.796		
Cognitive social capital	SC3		0.729		
Intra-organizational collaboration and interaction	SC4		0.576		
External social capital	SC5		0.927		
Social norms	SC6		0.508		

According to the data analysis algorithm implemented in PLS software, following the assessment of the factor loadings of the indicators, the next step involves calculating and reporting Cronbach's

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alpha coefficients and composite reliability. As observed in Table 2, the obtained values for all research constructs exceed 0.7. This finding indicates that the data collection instruments exhibit satisfactory and acceptable reliability, and the questionnaires employed in the study demonstrate adequate internal consistency.

Table 2. The results of Cronbach's alpha criterion and composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted of hidden research variables

Latent Variable	Indicator	Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$)	Composite Reliability (CR > 0.7)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.5)
Knowledge Sharing	KS	0.824	0.824	0.629
Social Capital	SC	0.814	0.872	0.541
Innovation	IN	0.784	0.822	0.640
Intrapreneurship	IE	0.871	0.833	0.672

The second criterion in assessing the fit of the measurement models is convergent validity, which reflects the degree of correlation between each construct and its corresponding indicators. The critical threshold for this index is 0.5 (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2016). As presented in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs exceeds 0.5, indicating an acceptable level of convergent validity. Therefore, based on the obtained values, all latent variables in this study demonstrate adequate convergent validity.

Subsequently, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The results in Table 3 show that the square root of the AVE for each latent variable is greater than its correlations with all other constructs. Consequently, the discriminant validity of the model is confirmed, ensuring that each construct is empirically distinct from the others.

Table 3. Divergent validity calculation

Latent Variable	Indicator	KS	SC	IN	IE
		Knowledge Sharing	Social Capital	Innovation	Intrapreneurship
Knowledge Sharing	KS	0.655	–	–	–
Social Capital	SC	0.585	0.735	–	–
Innovation	IN	0.624	0.656	0.663	–
Intrapreneurship	IE	0.221	0.618	0.512	0.687

In the measurement model assessment phase, the structural model of the research was examined. The structural model specifies the relationships and mutual influences among latent variables. To evaluate the goodness of fit of the structural model, the t-statistics (t-values) were first employed. According to the results depicted in Figure 2, all t-values for the research hypotheses exceeded 1.96, indicating that, at a 95% confidence level, the relationships among the variables are statistically significant.

The second criterion for evaluating structural model fit is the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous variables. The R^2 value reflects the extent to which exogenous variables explain

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the variance in endogenous variables. According to theoretical benchmarks, R² values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are interpreted as weak, moderate, and strong, respectively. Based on the results presented in Figure 3 and Table 4, the R² values for the endogenous variables in this study fall within an acceptable range, indicating that the structural model exhibits robust explanatory power.

To assess the overall model fit, the Goodness of Fit (GOF) index was used. According to conventional standards, GOF values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 indicate weak, moderate, and strong fit, respectively. This index is calculated using the following formula:

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{communalities} \times R^2}$$

Communalities are obtained from the average of the communalities of the latent variables of the research.

Table 4. Communality and R2 of research variables

Latent Variable	نشان	R2	Communality
Knowledge Sharing	KS	0.343	0.502
Social Capital	SC	–	0.461
Innovation	IN	0.561	0.428
Intrapreneurship	IE	0.382	0.538
<u>Communality</u>	<u>R²</u>	<u>GOF</u>	
0.482	0.429	0.455	

Given the obtained Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) value of 0.455, it can be concluded that the overall research model demonstrates a very satisfactory level of fit. Accordingly, the next step involves testing the research hypotheses using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach.

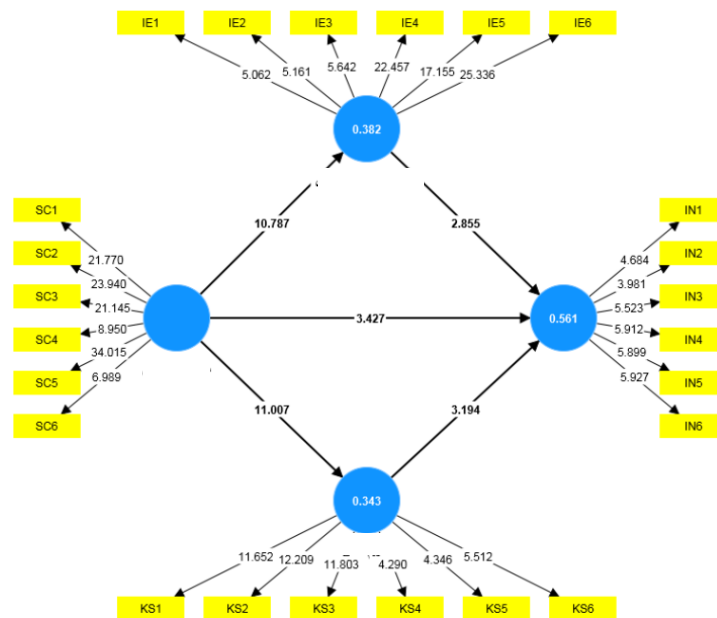


Figure 2. T-values to evaluate the structural part of the Model

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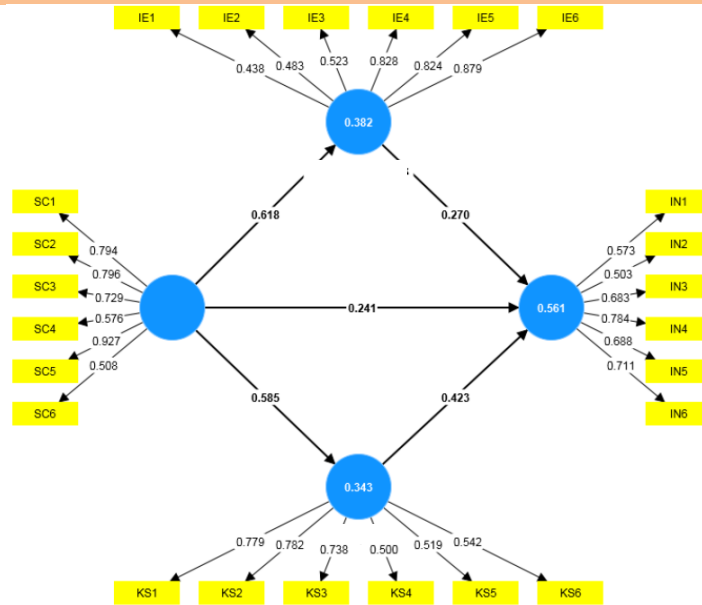


Figure 3. Standardized Coefficients of the Research Model

Table 5 presents the results of the direct relationships and significance coefficients within the research model.

Table 5. The results of the direct relationship and significant coefficients of the research model

Path	t-Statistic	Path Coefficient (β)	Significance Level	Hypothesis Test Result
Knowledge Sharing → Innovation	3.194	0.423	0.002	Supported
Social Capital → Knowledge Sharing	11.007	0.858	0.000	Supported
Social Capital → Innovation	3.427	0.241	0.001	Supported
Social Capital → Intrapreneurship	10.787	0.618	0.000	Supported
Intrapreneurship → Innovation	2.855	0.270	0.005	Supported
Social Capital → Intrapreneurship → Innovation	2.590	0.167	0.010	Supported
Social Capital → Knowledge Sharing → Innovation	2.478	0.248	0.014	Supported

Sub-Hypothesis 1: Social capital has a significant effect on innovation in tourism enterprises. Based on the findings presented in Figures 2 and 3, the standardized path coefficient between social capital and innovation is $\beta = 0.241$. The t-statistic is 3.427, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96. These results indicate that the effect of social capital on innovation is positive and statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the research hypothesis (H_1) is supported. It can be concluded that social capital plays a significant role in enhancing innovation within tourism enterprises.

Sub-Hypothesis 2: Social capital has a significant effect on intrapreneurship in tourism enterprises.

According to the results from Figures 2 and 3, the standardized path coefficient between social capital and intrapreneurship is $\beta = 0.618$, with a t-statistic of 10.787, exceeding the critical value

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of 1.96. These findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between social capital and intrapreneurship. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the research hypothesis (H_1) is confirmed. Thus, social capital exerts a significant influence on intrapreneurial activities within tourism organizations.

Sub-Hypothesis 3: Social capital has a significant effect on knowledge sharing in tourism enterprises.

The results illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 show that the standardized path coefficient between social capital and knowledge sharing is $\beta = 0.585$, with a t-statistic of 11.007, which is greater than 1.96. This indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and H_1 is supported. Therefore, social capital significantly facilitates knowledge sharing in tourism enterprises.

Sub-Hypothesis 4: Intrapreneurship has a significant effect on innovation in tourism enterprises. Based on Figures 2 and 3, the standardized path coefficient between intrapreneurship and innovation is $\beta = 0.270$, with a t-statistic of 2.855, exceeding the critical value of 1.96. These results indicate that intrapreneurship positively and significantly influences innovation. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and H_1 is supported. It can be concluded that intrapreneurial activities substantially contribute to innovation in tourism enterprises.

Sub-Hypothesis 5: Knowledge sharing has a significant effect on innovation in tourism enterprises.

The findings from Figures 2 and 3 indicate that the standardized path coefficient between knowledge sharing and innovation is $\beta = 0.423$, with a t-statistic of 3.194, exceeding the critical threshold of 1.96. This demonstrates a positive and statistically significant relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and H_1 is confirmed. Consequently, knowledge sharing significantly enhances innovation in tourism enterprises.

Main Hypothesis 1: Knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between social capital and innovation in tourism enterprises.

Based on the results presented in Table 5 and the effects of the path coefficients in the mediation analysis shown in Table 6, and following the Sobel test framework, three possible scenarios for mediation are considered:

1. **Full mediation:** If the direct effect (c) is not significant, but both paths a (independent variable \rightarrow mediator) and b (mediator \rightarrow dependent variable) are significant, the mediator (M) fully mediates the relationship.
2. **No mediation:** If the direct effect (c) is significant, but either a, b, or both are not significant, the mediator does not mediate the relationship.
3. **Partial mediation:** If the direct effect (c) is significant and both a and b are also significant, the mediator (M) partially mediates the relationship.

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Table 6. Effects of coefficients in mediation mode

	Variable		
	a	b	c
β Coefficient	0.585	0.423	0.241
Significance (p)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Indirect effect		Direct effect	Total effect
a*b		c	(a*b)+c
0.248		0.241	0.489

Based on the beta coefficients and significance levels for Social Capital, Knowledge Sharing, and Innovation, the third condition of mediation is satisfied. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is confirmed. Consequently, it can be concluded that Knowledge Sharing partially mediates the relationship between Social Capital and Innovation in tourism enterprises, and the first main hypothesis of the study is supported.

Main Hypothesis 2: Intrapreneurship mediates the relationship between Social Capital and Innovation in tourism enterprises.

Table 7. Effects of coefficients in mediation mode

	Variable		
	a	b	c
β Coefficient	0.618	0.270	0.241
Significance (p)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Indirect effect		Direct effect	Total effect
a*b		c	(a*b)+c
0.167		0.241	0.408

Based on the data presented in the preceding tables and the mediation analysis coefficients outlined in Table 7, and in accordance with Sobel's mediation framework, it can be inferred that, given the standardized beta coefficients and significance levels for the relationships among social capital, knowledge sharing, and innovation, the third mediation condition is satisfied. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is supported. These findings indicate that knowledge sharing functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between social capital and innovation within tourism enterprises. Consequently, the second principal hypothesis of the study is empirically validated, highlighting the role of knowledge sharing as a mechanism through which social capital translates into innovative outcomes in the tourism sector.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that social capital plays a pivotal role in enhancing innovation within tourism enterprises, and this effect is further reinforced through the mediating mechanisms of intrapreneurship and knowledge sharing. Social capital, by fostering mutual trust, strong relational networks, and shared norms, creates a conducive environment for effective knowledge exchange and the emergence of entrepreneurial behaviors, ultimately leading to innovations in tourism products, processes, and services.

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The hypothesis testing results demonstrated that social capital exerts a direct influence on innovation, intrapreneurship, and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the two mediating variables—knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship—strengthen the relationship between social capital and innovation. These findings suggest that organizations endowed with stronger social capital, owing to higher levels of trust and internal collaboration, are better equipped to leverage collective knowledge and transform it into impactful innovative outcomes.

Specifically, intrapreneurship functions as a critical driver of change and creativity, enhancing initiative, risk-taking propensity, and the identification and exploitation of new opportunities. Concurrently, knowledge sharing operates as a communication mechanism that facilitates the exchange of experiences and information among employees, thereby creating the conditions necessary for continuous innovation and the improvement of service processes.

The study's findings align with previous international research (Oyoo et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023), demonstrating that social capital enhances intra-organizational interactions and knowledge flows, thereby supporting the development of innovative capabilities within the tourism industry. Collectively, these results highlight that the synergy of social capital, knowledge sharing, and intrapreneurship forms a foundational mechanism for driving innovation and sustaining competitive advantage in tourism enterprises.

This study provides valuable insights into the mediating roles of knowledge sharing and intrapreneurship in the relationship between social capital and innovation within the tourism sector. Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the exclusive use of self-reported questionnaires may introduce common method bias and limit the depth of construct measurement. Second, the study's sample was confined to tourism enterprises in a single region, constraining the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the research model did not incorporate potentially influential factors such as organizational culture, digital maturity, and leadership styles, which may modulate the observed relationships.

Future research is encouraged to: (1) explore the impact of emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and virtual reality—on knowledge sharing and innovation in tourism; (2) examine how organizational culture and transformational leadership influence the social capital–intrapreneurship nexus; (3) conduct cross-sectoral and cross-regional comparative studies to enhance external validity; and (4) adopt mixed-methods approaches to provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay among social capital, intrapreneurship, and innovation. Such investigations can advance both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for fostering innovation-driven competitiveness in the tourism industry.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.