



Investigating the Impact of Entrepreneurial Marketing and Organizational Climate on Organizational Ambidexterity in Tourism Startups

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the influence of entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate on organizational ambidexterity within tourism startups. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, the research was conducted among tourism startups operating in Mazandaran Province, Iran. Methodologically, this study adopts a descriptive-survey design and is classified as applied research in terms of its objective. The statistical population encompasses all senior executives and senior experts affiliated with startup enterprises registered in Mazandaran Province. According to official records, approximately 28 startup companies are formally registered in the province, comprising an estimated population of 288 senior managers and experts. Based on Cochran's sample size formula, a representative sample of 165 participants was determined. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select respondents. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire. To ensure instrument reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed and confirmed to exceed acceptable thresholds. Data analysis and hypothesis testing were performed using SmartPLS 4 and SPSS statistical software packages. The empirical findings reveal that entrepreneurial marketing exerts a statistically significant positive effect on both exploration and exploitation dimensions of organizational ambidexterity among tourism startups in Mazandaran Province. Furthermore, organizational climate demonstrates a significant and positive influence on both exploration and exploitation capabilities within the same context. These results underscore the strategic importance of fostering entrepreneurial marketing practices and cultivating a supportive organizational climate to enhance ambidextrous capabilities in tourism-oriented startup ecosystems.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurial Marketing, Organizational Climate, Organizational Ambidexterity, Tourism Startups

1. Introduction

In today's highly competitive landscape, startups are widely recognized as pivotal engines of innovation and economic growth, particularly within the tourism sector, which stands as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding industries globally. Entrepreneurial marketing, as a contemporary approach to business development emphasizing creativity, risk-taking, and opportunity exploitation, plays a crucial role in enhancing the success of these startups (Hills et al., 2022). Concurrently, organizational climate, serving as the foundational context that shapes internal interactions, culture, and behavioral patterns, can significantly influence startups' capacity to adapt to environmental changes and capitalize on emerging opportunities (Ahmadi et al., 2023). Organizational ambidexterity—defined as an organization's ability to simultaneously exploit existing resources and explore new opportunities—is regarded as a critical determinant of survival for tourism startups operating within volatile and uncertain environments (Rezvani et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the mechanisms through which entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate influence organizational ambidexterity warrant more comprehensive empirical investigation.

The tourism industry, particularly in the Iranian context, confronts multifaceted challenges, including rapid fluctuations in consumer demand, intensifying competitive pressures, and an imperative need for continuous innovation. To achieve sustainable success, tourism startups must strengthen their ambidextrous capabilities, enabling them to concurrently leverage existing assets while pursuing novel opportunities (Cohen & Levy, 2023). The central research problem addressed in this study is whether entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate can function as catalytic factors in enhancing organizational ambidexterity within tourism startups, and if so, through what mechanisms and to what extent such effects manifest.

Ambidextrous organizations effectively manage inherent paradoxes by simultaneously embracing exploration and exploitation, change and stability, efficiency and flexibility, among other dualities (Khalilnejad, 2024). Theoretically, the concept of organizational ambidexterity is rooted in strategic management and entrepreneurship literature, notably advanced by scholars such as March (1991), who emphasized the critical balance between exploitation and exploration. However, existing literature reveals notable gaps regarding the antecedents of ambidexterity within startup contexts, particularly in the tourism domain. For instance, Gomroki et al. (2020) demonstrated that entrepreneurial orientation, mediated by organizational ambidexterity, positively influences open innovation; however, their study did not specifically examine entrepreneurial marketing or organizational climate as antecedent variables. Similarly, Rezvani et al. (2020) investigated electronic word-of-mouth marketing as a driver of co-created value in tourism startups, yet its potential impact on organizational ambidexterity remains underexplored. International studies, such as those by O'Reilly and Tushman (2023), have predominantly examined ambidexterity within large, established organizations, with limited attention devoted to the unique dynamics of startup ecosystems.

A salient theoretical gap pertains to the absence of integrated conceptual models explicating the interrelationships among entrepreneurial marketing, organizational climate, and organizational

ambidexterity within the specific context of tourism startups. For example, while Hult et al. (2022) established that entrepreneurial marketing can enhance organizational performance, the potential mediating or moderating role of organizational climate in this relationship has not been empirically examined. Likewise, within the Iranian research context, studies such as Ahmadi et al. (2023) have explored organizational climate in isolation; however, its integrated relationship with entrepreneurial marketing and organizational ambidexterity has not received systematic scholarly attention. This theoretical lacuna underscores the necessity for research that concurrently examines these three constructs within a unified analytical framework.

Empirical evidence further corroborates the existence of this research gap. According to the World Tourism Organization (2023), the global tourism industry experienced a 7% growth in 2022 relative to the preceding year; however, tourism startups accounted for merely 15% of this expansion, suggesting deficiencies in opportunity exploitation and innovative capacity. These statistics highlight the pressing need for in-depth investigation into factors capable of strengthening ambidextrous capabilities within startup ventures.

From a practical standpoint, tourism startups in Iran face numerous operational challenges that accentuate the importance of fostering organizational ambidexterity. According to a report by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (2023), only 25% of tourism startups in Iran survive beyond three years—a figure substantially lower than the global average of 38%. This disparity may be attributed to weaknesses in exploiting existing resources and limited capacity for exploring new market opportunities. For instance, while the Iranian startup "Alibaba" has achieved notable growth through entrepreneurial marketing strategies, many smaller ventures have struggled to compete effectively due to inadequate organizational climates and insufficiently developed marketing approaches.

Furthermore, statistical indicators reveal a 12% decline in investment directed toward Iranian tourism startups in 2023 compared to 2022 (Iran Startups Association, 2023). This downward trend may reflect underlying deficiencies in organizational ambidexterity, which itself is influenced by entrepreneurial marketing practices and the prevailing organizational climate. In this regard, the present study aims to provide empirically grounded insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing ambidextrous capabilities within these startups, thereby assisting policymakers and managers in formulating more effective strategic interventions. Ultimately, by focusing on tourism startups in Iran, this research endeavors to address the core question concerning the impact of entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate on organizational ambidexterity, utilizing contemporary and rigorously collected empirical data.

Accordingly, the primary research question guiding this study is: Does entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate exert a significant influence on organizational ambidexterity among tourism startups in Mazandaran Province?

2. Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework

Over the past decade, tourism startups have emerged as prominent symbols of innovation and dynamism within the digital economy. Leveraging advanced technologies, novel business models, and entrepreneurial approaches, these nascent ventures have fundamentally transformed the tourism experience. Nevertheless, the survival and growth of such startups in a highly competitive landscape depend on a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Among these, entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate have been identified as critical antecedents of organizational ambidexterity. Organizational ambidexterity refers to an organization's capacity to simultaneously align exploratory and exploitative activities; in other words, the ability to balance innovation with the continuous refinement of existing processes (O'Reilly et al., 2022). This theoretical framework examines how entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate jointly influence organizational ambidexterity within tourism startups.

Entrepreneurial marketing, as a dynamic and innovation-driven approach, encompasses the proactive identification of emerging opportunities, rapid market responsiveness, calculated risk-taking, value innovation, and the creative utilization of constrained resources. This paradigm extends beyond conventional marketing by emphasizing the capacity of small and emerging firms to generate substantial market impact in volatile environments (Martin et al., 2021). Within tourism startups, entrepreneurial marketing facilitates the detection of latent traveler needs and swift adaptation to market fluctuations through strategic social media engagement, influencer partnerships, personalized tourism packages, and creative digital campaigns. This approach cultivates an ecosystem where startups can concurrently explore new opportunities (e.g., untapped markets or novel tourism experiences) and exploit existing resources (e.g., enhancing current service offerings and strengthening customer loyalty). Consequently, entrepreneurial marketing functions as a strategic catalyst for organizational ambidexterity (Zarei & Rezaei, 2023).

Conversely, organizational climate, defined as a shared pattern of employee perceptions regarding organizational practices and values, plays a decisive role in shaping behavioral norms and advancing strategic objectives. It encompasses multidimensional constructs such as innovation orientation, managerial support, organizational commitment, structural flexibility, and customer centricity. Within tourism startups, a positive and supportive organizational climate fosters an environment where employees freely propose novel ideas, embrace calculated risks, and respond agilely to market dynamics (Kim & Lee, 2023). Such an environment holds particular strategic value in contexts of high uncertainty, which are inherently characteristic of startup ecosystems. A supportive climate facilitates organizational ambidexterity by establishing an equilibrium between innovation and operational efficiency, as it simultaneously encourages exploratory initiatives (e.g., designing immersive tourism experiences) and exploitative practices (e.g., streamlining reservation workflows and optimizing post-purchase services) (Hosseini & Mohammadi, 2024). Empirical studies further indicate that organizations cultivating a robust climate for innovation and continuous learning demonstrate superior capabilities in reconciling inherently contradictory operational demands (Aghaei & Najafi, 2023).

As a strategic management construct, organizational ambidexterity comprises two core dimensions: exploration and exploitation. Exploration encompasses activities such as knowledge acquisition, radical innovation, experimental prototyping, and strategic risk-taking, whereas exploitation pertains to the refinement, optimization, and systematic implementation of existing knowledge and capabilities (Johnson et al., 2020). Within the volatile environment of tourism startups, the ability to dynamically balance these two dimensions constitutes a critical determinant of long-term viability. For instance, a startup may concurrently focus on piloting a novel eco-tourism experience (exploration) while algorithmically optimizing its online booking infrastructure (exploitation). Research consistently demonstrates that organizational ambidexterity not only enhances strategic performance but also significantly bolsters an organization's adaptive capacity in response to environmental turbulence (Zarei & Rezaei, 2023). However, achieving this delicate equilibrium remains highly challenging without the deliberate cultivation of internal enablers, particularly entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate.

The relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and organizational ambidexterity is fundamentally reinforced through the development of strategic agility and deep customer centricity. Startups that institutionalize entrepreneurial marketing within their organizational culture exhibit heightened capabilities in opportunity recognition while simultaneously allocating resources with greater efficiency to refine existing service portfolios. This strategic duality constitutes the foundational essence of organizational ambidexterity (Martin et al., 2021). Furthermore, by fostering an organizational climate characterized by psychological safety, continuous learning, and cross-functional collaboration, management enables employees to concurrently engage in exploratory innovation and exploitative optimization. In this regard, organizational climate functions as a critical enabling mechanism, exerting a catalytic influence on the realization of ambidextrous capabilities (Kim & Lee, 2023).

Ultimately, in a tourism ecosystem increasingly shaped by technological disruption, shifting cultural paradigms, and global crises (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), startups require robust adaptive and innovative competencies. The strategic integration of entrepreneurial marketing and a supportive organizational climate can foster a dynamic equilibrium within organizational ambidexterity. Such balance equips tourism startups not only with short-term resilience but also with the foundational architecture for sustainable long-term growth (Aghaei & Najafi, 2023). Accordingly, this theoretical framework posits that entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate, as two pivotal internal determinants, exert positive and statistically significant effects on organizational ambidexterity within tourism startups.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical synthesis, the conceptual model of the research is illustrated as follows:



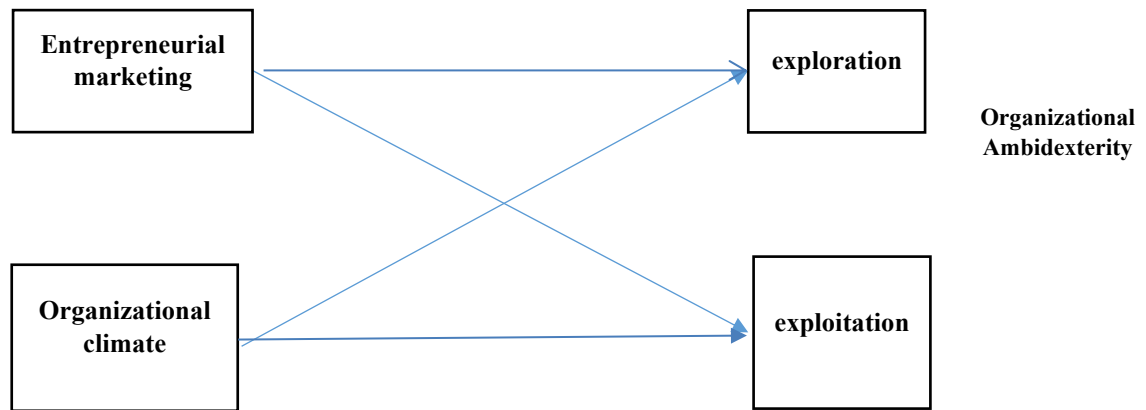


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model (Corchuelo et al., 2024)

Accordingly, the research hypotheses are formally formulated as follows:

- H₁:** Entrepreneurial marketing exerts a significant positive effect on exploration in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.
- H₂:** Entrepreneurial marketing exerts a significant positive effect on exploitation in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.
- H₃:** Organizational climate exerts a significant positive effect on exploration in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.
- H₄:** Organizational climate exerts a significant positive effect on exploitation in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is applied in terms of its objective and adopts a descriptive-correlational design regarding data collection and analysis procedures. To establish a robust theoretical foundation for this research, a comprehensive library-based review was initially conducted. During this phase, relevant definitions and theoretical models pertaining to the study's domain were systematically examined. Subsequently, based on the synthesized theoretical framework and in consultation with subject-matter experts, the conceptual model of the study was developed and refined.

The statistical population of this study comprises all senior executives and senior experts affiliated with startup enterprises registered in Mazandaran Province, Iran. According to official records, approximately 28 startup companies are formally registered in the province, with an estimated population of 288 senior managers and experts. Given this population size ($N = 288$), the required sample size was determined to be 165 participants based on Cochran's sample size formula. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure representative selection of respondents.

Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire instrument. For data analysis, the study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical approaches. Descriptive statistics—including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions—were employed to characterize the

research variables and demographic profiles of participants. Following descriptive analysis, inferential statistical procedures were conducted to test the research hypotheses. To assess instrument reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed and confirmed to exceed acceptable thresholds. Data analysis and structural equation modeling were performed using SmartPLS 4 and SPSS statistical software packages.

4. Findings

To evaluate the overall model fit, the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index was employed. Threshold values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 have been established in the literature as indicative of weak, moderate, and strong model fit, respectively (Wetzels et al., 2009). The GoF index is calculated using the following formula:

$$GoF = \sqrt{Comm\bar{u}nality \times \bar{R}^2}$$

where *Comm \bar{u} nality* represents the average of the communality values across the study's latent variables.

Table 1. Communality and R² Values for Research Variables

Latent Variable	R ²	Communality
Exploration	0.783	0.442
Entrepreneurial Marketing	—	0.518
Exploitation	0.645	0.629
Organizational Climate	—	0.617

Table 2. Results of Overall Model Fit Assessment

<i>Comm\bar{u}nality</i>	\bar{R}^2	GoF
0.5515	0.714	0.63

Based on the computed GoF value of 0.63, which substantially exceeds the threshold for strong model fit (0.36), the overall adequacy of the proposed structural model is confirmed.

The strength of the relationship between a latent construct and its observed indicators is represented by factor loadings. Factor loadings range between zero and one. Following established guidelines (Kline, 2010), factor loadings below 0.40 are considered weak and typically excluded from analysis; values between 0.40 and 0.60 are deemed acceptable; and loadings exceeding 0.60 are regarded as highly desirable. In this study, factor loadings for all research variables were computed and evaluated individually to ensure measurement model validity.

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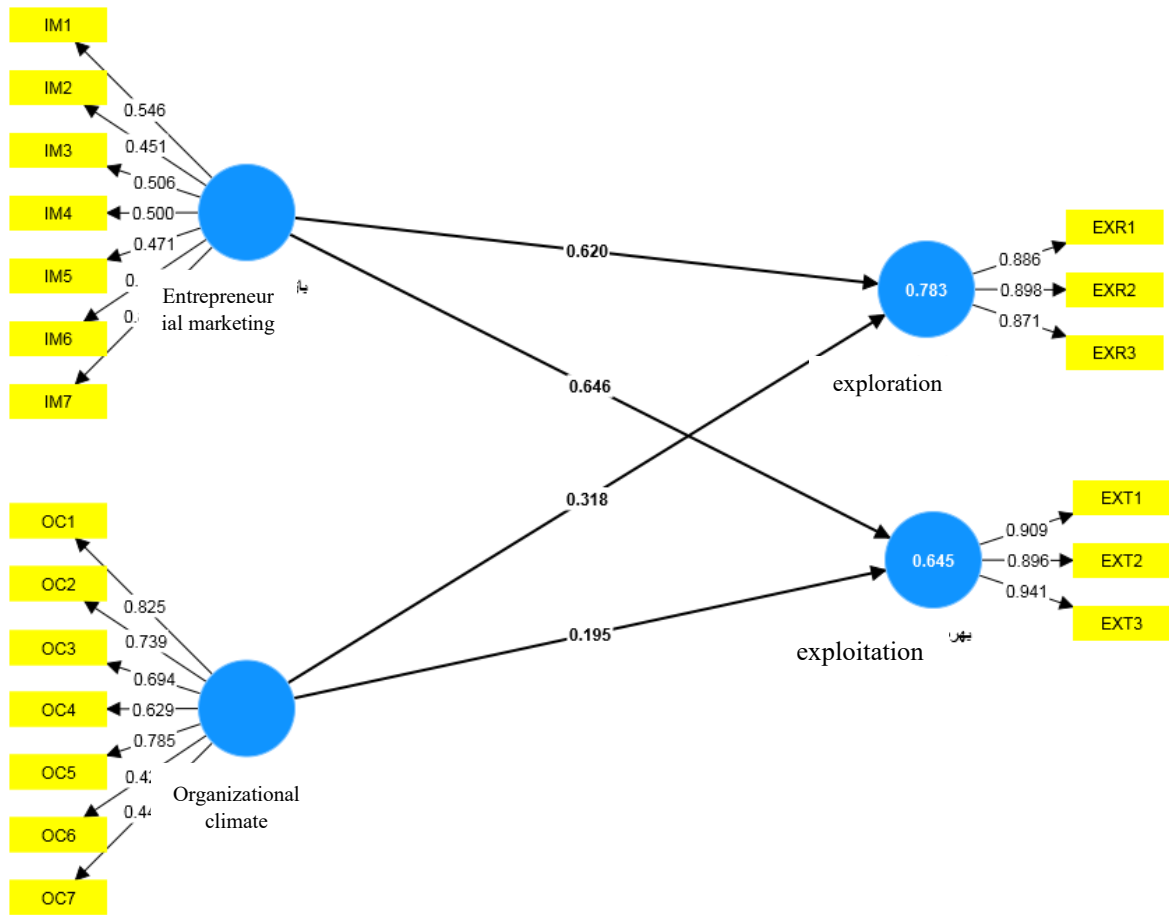


Figure 2. Standardized Factor Loadings of Model Indicators

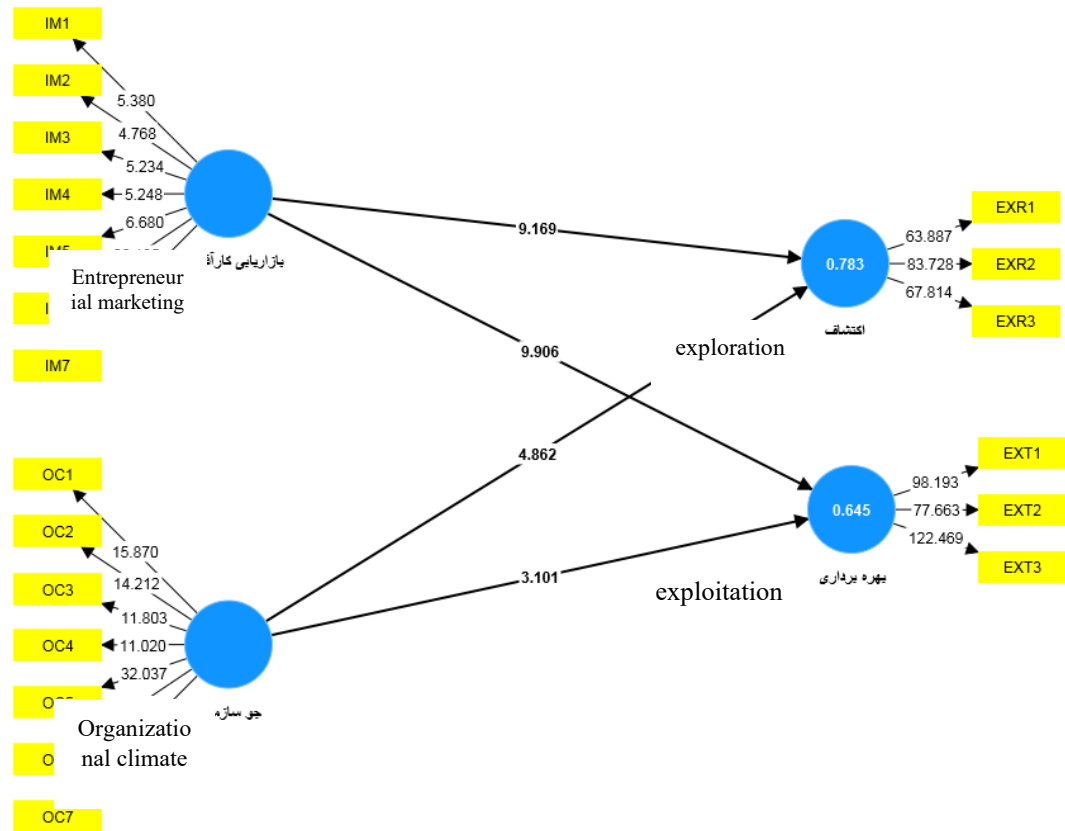


Figure 3. Significance Coefficients (t-values) of the Conceptual Model Paths

As illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, all factor loadings across the model's constructs exceed the threshold of 0.40, thereby confirming the acceptable reliability of the measurement models (Kline, 2010). SmartPLS 4 software, by default, evaluates structural relationships at a 95% confidence level. Given that the critical t-value for this confidence level is ±1.96, any path exhibiting a t-statistic outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96 is considered statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. The empirical data collected through the field survey were analyzed using SmartPLS 4, yielding the results presented below.

Table 3. Path Coefficients and Significance Statistics for Structural Model Paths

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H ₁	Entrepreneurial Marketing → Exploration	0.620	9.169	0.000	Supported
H ₂	Entrepreneurial Marketing → Exploitation	0.646	9.906	0.000	Supported

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H ₃	Organizational Climate → Exploration	0.318	4.862	0.000	Supported
H ₄	Organizational Climate → Exploitation	0.195	3.101	0.002	Supported

Hypothesis Testing Results

H₁: Entrepreneurial marketing exerts a significant positive effect on exploration in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.

The empirical results indicate that the path coefficient between entrepreneurial marketing and exploration is $\beta = 0.620$, with a corresponding t-statistic of $t = 9.169$ ($p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate a statistically significant and positive influence. Consequently, the first hypothesis is supported.

H₂: Entrepreneurial marketing exerts a significant positive effect on exploitation in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.

Analysis reveals a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.646$ between entrepreneurial marketing and exploitation, accompanied by a t-statistic of $t = 9.906$ ($p < 0.001$). This result confirms a robust, positive, and statistically significant relationship. Therefore, the second hypothesis is supported.

H₃: Organizational climate exerts a significant positive effect on exploration in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.

The path coefficient linking organizational climate to exploration is $\beta = 0.318$, with a t-statistic of $t = 4.862$ ($p < 0.001$). These statistics indicate a positive and statistically significant effect. Accordingly, the third hypothesis is supported.

H₄: Organizational climate exerts a significant positive effect on exploitation in tourism startups within Mazandaran Province.

The estimated path coefficient between organizational climate and exploitation is $\beta = 0.195$, with a t-statistic of $t = 3.101$ ($p = 0.002$). This result confirms a positive and statistically significant influence, albeit of comparatively smaller magnitude relative to the other paths. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is supported.

Collectively, the empirical findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial marketing exerts a statistically significant positive influence on both exploration ($\beta = 0.620$, $p < 0.001$) and exploitation ($\beta = 0.646$, $p < 0.001$) dimensions of organizational ambidexterity among tourism startups in Mazandaran Province. Furthermore, organizational climate demonstrates a significant positive effect on both exploration ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$) and exploitation ($\beta = 0.195$, $p = 0.002$)

capabilities within the same context. Notably, entrepreneurial marketing exhibits stronger predictive power for both ambidexterity dimensions compared to organizational climate, suggesting its paramount strategic relevance in fostering dual innovation capabilities within tourism startup ecosystems. These results provide robust empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and underscore the critical importance of integrating entrepreneurial marketing practices with a supportive organizational climate to enhance ambidextrous performance in dynamic, resource-constrained environments.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the hypothesis testing demonstrate that both entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate exert statistically significant effects on exploration and exploitation dimensions within tourism startups operating in Mazandaran Province. The confirmation of the first and second hypotheses indicates that entrepreneurial marketing—encompassing innovation-oriented, customer-centric, and opportunity-seeking approaches—positively and significantly influences both exploration (identifying novel opportunities and generating innovations) and exploitation (optimizing existing resources and implementing established strategies). These findings underscore the pivotal role of entrepreneurial marketing in enhancing tourism startups' capacity to discover emerging markets, deliver innovative products and services, and effectively leverage their constrained resource bases.

The third and fourth hypotheses further reveal that organizational climate, as a foundational context fostering a culture of innovation, calculated risk-taking, and collaborative engagement, significantly influences both exploration and exploitation capabilities. A supportive organizational climate, by cultivating a motivational and enabling environment, empowers employees and managers to experiment with novel ideas (exploration) while concurrently refining existing operational processes (exploitation). These results highlight the critical importance of synergistic alignment between internal organizational factors (organizational climate) and external strategic orientations (entrepreneurial marketing) in driving the success of tourism startups.

From an international perspective, Al-Qahtani and Yusli (2020) demonstrated that entrepreneurial marketing enhances organizational performance through proactive opportunity identification and creative resource utilization, emphasizing the strategic balance between exploration and exploitation—a finding consistent with the present study. Similarly, Hansen et al. (2020), in their bibliometric analysis of entrepreneurial marketing literature, underscored the significance of entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation in strengthening both exploratory and exploitative capabilities. More recently, Kim and Park (2024), investigating tourism startups across Asian contexts, found that an organizational climate grounded in innovation and flexibility significantly reinforces exploration and exploitation within dynamic environments, emphasizing the motivational role of organizational culture in fostering innovative behaviors—a conclusion aligned with the current findings regarding organizational climate. Additionally, Li and Zhang (2025) revealed that entrepreneurial marketing in tourism startups, particularly within highly

competitive regions, facilitates the discovery of new opportunities through customer experience enhancement and service innovation.

Nevertheless, certain distinctions merit attention. Amin Ebrahimabadi (2023) emphasized the mediating role of entrepreneurial passion in the relationship between opportunity identification, opportunity development, exploitation, and entrepreneurial marketing decisions. Unlike the present study, which directly examines the effects of entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate, this research highlights the influence of psychological factors, suggesting the need for further investigation into mediating mechanisms within the tourism startup ecosystem of Mazandaran Province.

The findings of this study affirm the vital contribution of entrepreneurial marketing and organizational climate in strengthening exploration and exploitation capabilities among tourism startups in Mazandaran. Entrepreneurial marketing, through its emphasis on innovation, customer centricity, and opportunity recognition, enables startups to identify novel market opportunities and utilize existing resources effectively within the competitive tourism landscape. Concurrently, a positive organizational climate, by promoting a culture of innovation and calculated risk-taking, provides an enabling environment for the successful implementation of such strategic initiatives. Comparative analysis with prior research indicates substantial alignment between these findings and both domestic and international studies, although certain investigations place greater emphasis on mediating factors such as entrepreneurial passion or digital technologies.

For managers of tourism startups in Mazandaran Province, it is recommended to strengthen organizational climate through targeted training programs, encouragement of team-based collaboration, and the cultivation of an innovation-oriented culture, thereby establishing a conducive foundation for the effective execution of entrepreneurial marketing strategies. Furthermore, prioritizing the identification of emerging opportunities within the tourism market—such as developing eco-tourism offerings or leveraging digital technologies—can foster sustainable competitive advantages. Future research endeavors may explore the mediating roles of factors such as entrepreneurial passion or the impact of emerging technologies to deepen understanding of the dynamic mechanisms shaping tourism startup ecosystems.

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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.