

Identifying Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Marketing with a Sustainable Tourism Approach in the Post-COVID-19 Era



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Abstract: The aim of this study is to identify the factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era. This study was conducted using thematic analysis. The research method is fundamental in terms of purpose. The statistical population consisted of theoretical (academic) and practical (managers, expert consultants, and tourism sector specialists) experts, among whom 14 individuals were purposefully selected based on their knowledge and experience. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool. Following the summarization of the interviews, coding and concept analysis were performed. The reliability of the study was assessed using inter-coder reliability, which was calculated as 82%, exceeding the baseline threshold of 60% and indicating acceptable reliability. The findings identified the factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era, comprising 11 dimensions and their subcomponents. These factors were categorized into 11 main themes: networking, advertising, tourism impact content, creativity, cultural tourism value, opportunity-seeking, customer orientation, innovation orientation, risk-taking, resource leveraging, and value creation, along with 68 sub-themes or components.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial marketing, sustainable tourism, post-COVID-19.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship encompasses all activities and actions related to recognizing and exploiting opportunities [1]. As a deliberate and planned behavior, entrepreneurship is considered an influential factor in economic development and job creation [2, 3].

Entrepreneurship is inherently tied to decision-making in uncertain conditions [4, 5]. It fosters the development and expansion of investments based on creativity and innovation [6]. In its contemporary concept, entrepreneurship is defined as "taking responsibility, pursuing opportunities, and fulfilling needs and desires through innovation" [7].

Entrepreneurial marketing integrates fundamental aspects of marketing and entrepreneurship, guiding customers toward the creation of new markets rather than merely serving existing ones. Consequently, the core idea of entrepreneurial marketing is that a business must be capable of rendering its own product obsolete before

its competitors do. Entrepreneurial marketing is divided into three distinct branches. The first branch is entrepreneurship orientation, characterized by innovation and risk-taking, with a primary focus on developing new goods and services in the market. The second branch is marketing orientation, emphasizing customer satisfaction. The third branch is opportunity orientation, which involves identifying and exploiting opportunities and is interconnected with the other two branches. The intersection of these three branches constitutes entrepreneurial marketing [5, 8, 9].

A key consideration in this field is the distinction between entrepreneurial marketing and conventional marketing. These differences manifest in four domains. The first domain is strategic orientation: conventional marketing adopts a customer-centric (market-making) strategic orientation, whereas entrepreneurial marketing follows an innovation-centric (idea-generating) strategic orientation. The second domain pertains to strategy: conventional marketing strategies emphasize top-down approaches, segmentation, targeting, and positioning, whereas entrepreneurial marketing strategies emphasize bottom-up approaches, targeting a limited customer base, and further market expansion [10].

The concept of entrepreneurship is based on creativity and nonlinear thinking, avoiding rigid forecasting and planning. This characteristic has made traditional marketing less effective in contemporary entrepreneurial firms. Entrepreneurial marketing effectively bridges this gap by integrating diverse perspectives from marketing, management, and entrepreneurship [11]. Entrepreneurial marketing is considered an economic function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers while managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders [12]. It is distinguished by innovation, as innovation involves the practical implementation of ideas leading to the introduction of new goods or services or improvements in the provision of goods or services [13]. Moreover, innovation frequently occurs through the development of products, processes, services, technologies, artistic works, or business models made available to markets, governments, and society by innovators [14]. The concept of entrepreneurial marketing focuses on innovation capability and the development of ideas based on an intuitive understanding of market needs, potentially providing a significant competitive advantage for companies actively seeking innovative options for their customers [15]. Business development heavily relies on innovation as a competitive resource [16].

Sustainable tourism is a concept that encompasses the complete tourism experience, including economic, social, and environmental considerations, as well as enhancing tourists' experiences and addressing the needs of host communities [17]. One of the most prominent characteristics of the tourism industry is that many of the businesses operating in this sector, such as restaurants, travel agencies, and accommodations, are small and often family-run [18]. Tourism can involve travel for leisure, business, or visiting friends and relatives, and it may include transportation services related to tourism. It may also encompass public transportation to and from destinations, as well as local transportation to accommodations, entertainment venues, recreational sites, dining establishments, and shopping centers. There is now widespread consensus that tourism should be sustainable [19]. Indeed, all forms of tourism can achieve sustainability if they are properly planned, developed, and managed [20, 21].

Global tourism accounts for approximately eight percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. This figure includes emissions from air travel as well as other significant environmental and social impacts that do not always benefit local communities and their economies [18]. 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 accessibility to tourist destinations.

Construction projects for roads and new tourist accommodations, even if only campsites, disrupt natural ecosystems and local environments [22].

The literature on entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach highlights various dimensions related to marketing strategies, innovation, risk management, and the impact of external factors such as crises and technological advancements. Pourjavad et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of market orientation, customer orientation, and marketing strategies in improving business performance, particularly in the hospitality industry [8]. Hatami Nasab (2023) identifies innovation, risk-taking, and financial self-efficacy as key entrepreneurial factors affecting opportunity creation in higher education institutions, while also recognizing the mediating role of industrial and entrepreneurial networks [23]. Pazaki (2024) explores forward-thinking business strategies, market orientation, cost efficiency, and brand orientation as critical components in entrepreneurial decision-making, revealing that dominance in the market is the primary outcome of these variables [24]. Araei et al. (2022) provide a strategic framework for entrepreneurial marketing, integrating internal organizational factors, strategic planning, and consumer behavior analysis, but their study does not focus on sustainable tourism or post-pandemic challenges [25]. Landaran Esfahani and Rahimi Lenji (2022) analyze the impact of COVID-19-related anxiety on tourism in Isfahan, highlighting the direct influence of investment levels and public perception, yet their research lacks an emphasis on sustainable tourism and marketing entrepreneurship [26]. More recent studies, such as Deb et al. (2024), highlight the role of digital marketing, perceived ease of use, and social media in enhancing business performance in tourism, showing that service providers' adoption of digital tools directly influences tourist expectations [10]. Sharma and Hasti (2024) explore factors affecting small-scale home-based tourism businesses, identifying government support, environmental sustainability, and community participation as key determinants, while also addressing the challenges of technological adaptation, low income, and high overhead costs [27]. Polas and Raju (2021) demonstrate a positive relationship between entrepreneurial opportunity recognition, opportunity exploitation, and marketing decisions, mediated by entrepreneurial passion, though they do not integrate sustainability or post-pandemic tourism considerations [28]. Choe et al. (2021) analyze the statistical impact of COVID-19 on South Korea's inbound tourism market, focusing solely on visitor decline without considering entrepreneurial strategies [29]. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) critiques the rapid recovery efforts of the tourism industry, arguing for a more ethical and responsible approach to tourism reform, yet fails to address entrepreneurial marketing in sustainable tourism [30]. Despite these contributions, the literature lacks an integrated framework that examines entrepreneurial marketing within the specific context of sustainable tourism in the post-COVID-19 era, indicating a need for research that merges these perspectives to develop a holistic marketing model.

Events occurring in cities, whether natural disasters or infectious disease outbreaks, have historically led to lasting changes on Earth and in human lifestyles. Disease outbreaks are among the most significant historical events that have profoundly altered human life and the environment since their emergence. In this context, it is anticipated that tourism practices will undergo transformations compared to the pre-pandemic era, ushering in a new phase of global tourism. Therefore, the central research question of this study is: What is the entrepreneurial marketing model with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era?

2. Methodology

This research is applied in terms of its objective and has been conducted using a qualitative approach. The present study aims to identify the factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era. The statistical population consists of experts with higher education in various

fields of management, who have prior experience in publishing research articles on the subject and possess at least ten years of professional experience in the relevant field. The selection of experts was purposive, and interviews continued until data saturation was achieved. During the interviews, the researcher carefully formulated questions to ensure the quality and validity of the interview setting remained intact.

Sampling was conducted using purposive and theoretical methods. In qualitative research, sample selection follows a purposive strategy, wherein the researcher, with a clear understanding of the target population, deliberately selects participants relevant to the study. The participants in this phase were selected based on the following predetermined criteria:

- A minimum of ten years of experience in the tourism industry.
- Recognition as knowledgeable individuals in the field of tourism.
- Participation as project managers in at least two consultancy projects.
- Possession of an academic degree (at least a master's degree) in tourism management, business management, or related disciplines.
- Willingness to participate in the research.

The participants were selected from among experts and professionals in the tourism industry with over ten years of work experience, specifically those with expertise in business management. In this phase of the study, some accessible participants were chosen as the sample, and the necessary evidence was collected. Sampling was conducted through purposive and theoretical methods, ensuring that participant selection was made with full awareness of the research objectives. Theoretical sampling was also employed, meaning interviews continued until no new themes or discussions emerged, indicating theoretical saturation.

The sample size was determined progressively until a comprehensive understanding was achieved, and theoretical saturation occurred. A total of fourteen interviews were conducted. Data saturation was reached by the ninth interview, but to ensure thorough coverage, interviews continued until the thirteenth, where interviews from the tenth onward yielded no new codes and were entirely repetitive.

Interviewing is recognized as the primary method of data collection in qualitative research, providing participants with an opportunity to express their worldviews and experiences in their own language. The objective of these interviews was to elicit in-depth responses from participants, making them unrestricted discussions in which participants could share insights based on their experiences. An interview protocol was developed to guide the process. Through in-depth, semi-structured, and purposive interviews, the study aimed to identify key concepts, categories, and classifications relevant to the research objective.

The validity of dimensions and components was assessed using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR), with results showing CVR values above 0.62—the minimum acceptable threshold for a ten-member expert panel—confirming content validity. The research evidence was gathered through primary sources, including interviews and questionnaires. Given the mixed-method nature of the study, each approach is separately detailed.

Textual data were structured into specific concepts, with each text segment assigned a code for open conceptualization. Various coding techniques were employed, including line-by-line coding. Open coding was performed in a step-by-step manner. During the selection of sub-themes, coded concepts were grouped into thematic families, refining and distinguishing categories from main themes. At this stage, categories and subcategories were linked. In the main themes phase, data were integrated into a small set of abstract concepts and categories. Ultimately, themes were extracted from the identified categories, and the research questions were addressed based on the relationships between these themes.

3. Findings and Results

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, the factors influencing entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era consist of 11 dimensions and their respective sub-components. These are classified into 11 main themes: networking, advertising, tourism impact content, creativity, cultural tourism value, opportunity-seeking, customer orientation, innovation orientation, risk-taking, resource leveraging, and value creation, along with 68 sub-themes or components.

Table 1. Identification of Dimensions and Components

Dimensions	Components
Networking	Attracting like-minded customers, proximity and establishing personal relationships, campaign development, friendly and intimate interactions with travelers, high commitment, engagement and participation in communities and institutions, continuous contact 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 tour leaders and travelers, friendly gatherings with employees, partners, and customers, offering and improving new products based on recommendations from friends and acquaintances, smart billboards.
Advertising	Promoting local and indigenous recreational programs, utilizing social media for advertising, advertising eco-lodges.
Tourism Impact Content	Arousing aesthetic appreciation related to tourism, attractiveness and appeal of tourism content, special attention to design in content, providing emotional and entertaining benefits in tourism, enjoyable tourism content related to the environment.
Creativity	Uniqueness of the effect, being innovative and idea-driven, authenticity and originality in tourism content, presenting combinations in tourism, emotional reactions, responsiveness to changes in customer needs, emotional responses.
Cultural Tourism Value	Scope of influence and impact of sustainable tourism, spiritual tourism (providing symbolic meaning), historical significance of tourism, emphasis on and inspiration from local and indigenous culture, respect for the beliefs and culture of local people, promoting eco-friendly travel, strengthening national identity.
Opportunity-Seeking	Access to prior knowledge and information, optimism and self-sufficiency, use of social media, positioning of handicraft industries, creating sustainable employment opportunities.
Customer Orientation	Competitive advantage, entrepreneurial alertness, customer relations, easy access to services, proper equipment, neatness of staff, quality of services, development and provision of services, specialized services.
Innovation Orientation	Knowledge, dealing with potential threats, use of modern technologies, digital marketing for promoting activities, offering discount packages with an emphasis on sustainable tourism, providing environment-related information.
Risk-Taking	Organizational risk, strategic risk, financial risk, operational risk.
Resource Leveraging	Staff training, reducing excessive consumption and resource waste, utilizing the sustainable nature of resources, planning.
Value Creation	Organizing tours with an emphasis on social responsibility, providing responsible and sustainable travel guides, promoting environmental conservation in tourism tours, preserving biodiversity.

The findings of the study indicate that networking plays a significant role in entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era. Participants emphasized the importance of attracting like-minded customers, establishing personal relationships, and developing campaigns that foster engagement. One interviewee stated, "Building close relationships with travelers helps in creating a loyal customer base that actively participates in our tours and events." Additionally, networking involves maintaining long-term relationships with customers through continuous communication, leveraging virtual and augmented reality, and utilizing word-of-mouth marketing. Presence in specialized and international exhibitions, as well as fostering emotional and personal relationships between tour leaders and travelers, further strengthens networking efforts. The integration of smart billboards and recommendations from friends and acquaintances were also noted as effective strategies.

The role of advertising was underscored as a crucial factor in promoting sustainable tourism. Participants highlighted the effectiveness of advertising local and indigenous recreational programs and leveraging social media to reach wider audiences. One expert stated, "Social media has become our primary tool for promoting eco-lodges and sustainable travel experiences, allowing us to connect directly with interested travelers." The emphasis

on digital marketing has reshaped the way businesses in the tourism industry communicate their offerings to potential customers.

The content of tourism impact was identified as another essential dimension. Aesthetically appealing and well-designed content enhances customer engagement and interest in tourism experiences. Participants pointed out that the ability to evoke aesthetic appreciation and provide emotionally engaging and entertaining content is vital. One interviewee noted, "Tourism content should not only be informative but also visually captivating and emotionally compelling to attract modern travelers." The alignment of tourism-related content with environmental sustainability also contributes to its overall appeal.

Creativity was found to be a defining characteristic of successful entrepreneurial marketing strategies. Unique and innovative approaches, authenticity in tourism content, and the ability to respond to changing customer needs were all emphasized. One respondent stated, "Innovation and uniqueness set businesses apart in the competitive tourism market; travelers seek new and creative experiences." Emotional engagement and responsiveness to evolving consumer preferences were also identified as key factors in sustaining interest in tourism offerings.

The study further highlighted the cultural value of tourism, emphasizing the impact of sustainable tourism practices on cultural identity and historical preservation. The role of spiritual tourism in providing symbolic meaning and strengthening national identity was frequently mentioned. A participant remarked, "Respecting and integrating local traditions into tourism activities enhances authenticity and attracts culturally conscious travelers." Eco-friendly travel promotions and efforts to respect indigenous beliefs and customs were also deemed essential.

The dimension of opportunity-seeking was identified as a key driver in entrepreneurial marketing within the tourism industry. Participants emphasized the importance of access to prior knowledge and information, optimism, and self-sufficiency in identifying and leveraging opportunities. One expert stated, "Using social media and digital tools allows us to identify new trends and market opportunities quickly." Positioning handicraft industries and creating sustainable employment opportunities were also considered essential strategies in opportunity-driven tourism marketing.

The study found that customer orientation is a fundamental factor in shaping tourism marketing strategies. Competitive advantage, entrepreneurial alertness, and strong customer relationships were frequently mentioned. Participants highlighted the importance of providing easy access to services, ensuring high-quality service standards, and maintaining professional and well-groomed staff. One interviewee noted, "Customers appreciate seamless and high-quality services, which contribute significantly to their overall travel experience and satisfaction." The development of specialized services and continuous improvement in service delivery were also emphasized as critical components.

Innovation orientation emerged as a significant aspect of sustainable tourism marketing. The use of digital marketing, modern technologies, and innovative approaches to promote tourism activities was highlighted. One participant stated, "We must embrace technological advancements and digital platforms to stay competitive in the evolving tourism landscape." Additionally, providing environmental information and offering discount packages focused on sustainable tourism were strategies found to enhance innovation-led marketing efforts.

The findings also revealed that risk-taking is an inherent component of entrepreneurial marketing in tourism. Participants acknowledged the necessity of taking calculated risks in various areas, including organizational, strategic, financial, and operational risks. One interviewee explained, "Tourism businesses must be willing to take strategic risks to innovate and grow, even in uncertain times." The ability to assess and manage these risks effectively was considered vital for long-term success.

The study identified resource leveraging as another essential factor in sustainable tourism marketing. Effective resource management, reducing excessive consumption and waste, and utilizing sustainable resources were all highlighted. One respondent noted, "Training staff and optimizing resource use are crucial for maintaining sustainability in tourism operations." Proper planning and strategic resource allocation were also emphasized.

Finally, value creation was identified as a critical outcome of entrepreneurial marketing strategies in sustainable tourism. Organizing tours with an emphasis on social responsibility, providing responsible travel guides, and promoting environmental conservation were noted as impactful practices. One participant remarked, "Sustainability must be embedded in every aspect of tourism marketing to ensure long-term benefits for both travelers and local communities." The commitment to preserving biodiversity and encouraging responsible tourism behaviors were key themes in this dimension.

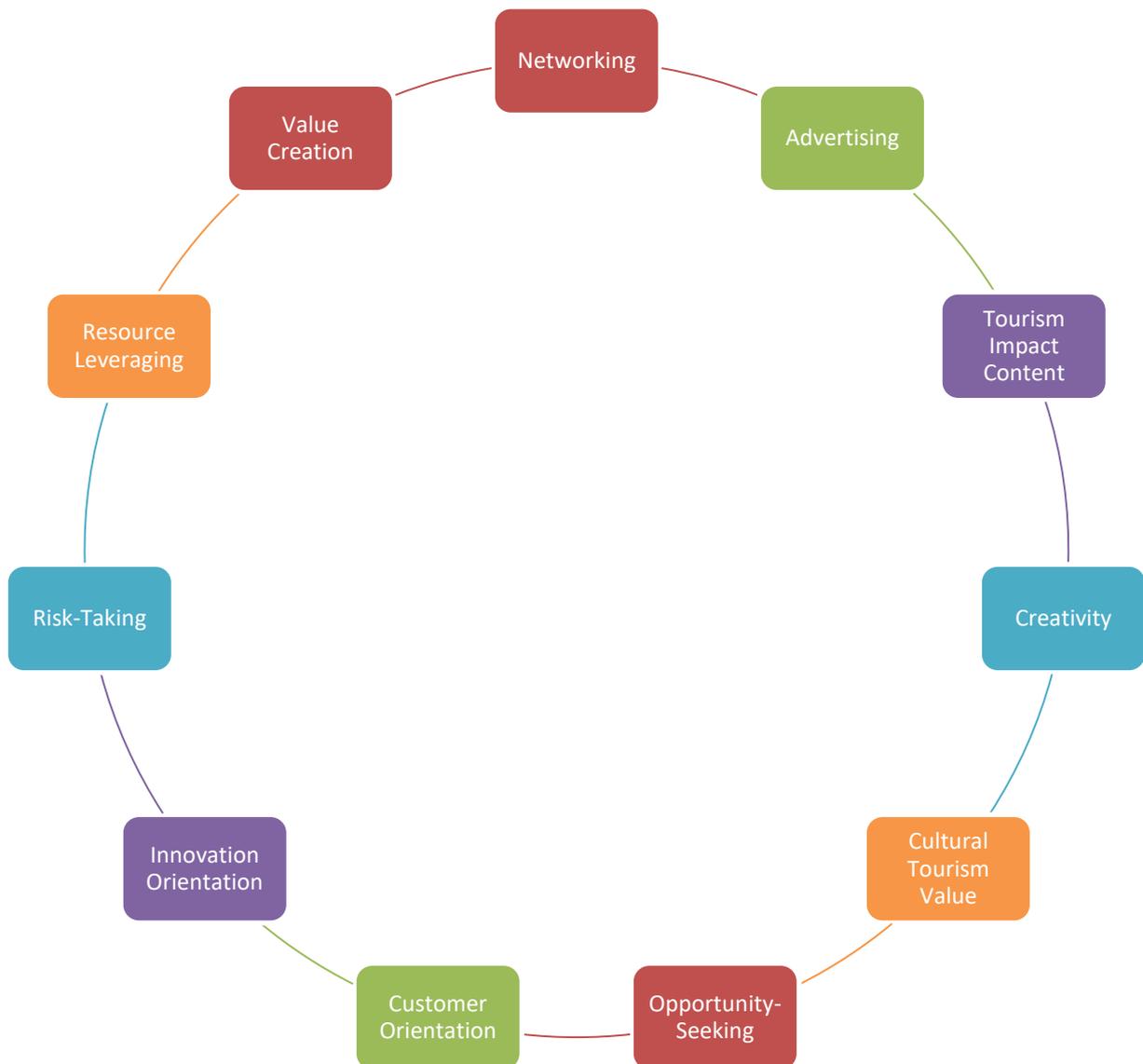


Figure 1. Entrepreneurial Marketing Model with a Sustainable Tourism Approach in the Post-COVID-19 Era

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that entrepreneurial marketing with a sustainable tourism approach in the post-COVID-19 era is influenced by eleven key dimensions, including networking, advertising, tourism impact content, creativity, cultural tourism value, opportunity-seeking, customer orientation, innovation orientation, risk-taking, resource leveraging, and value creation. These dimensions reflect the integrated nature of marketing and entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism, where businesses must adopt innovative strategies, leverage digital tools, and engage in proactive networking to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving industry. Networking emerged as a core component, emphasizing the role of customer engagement, personal relationships, and participation in industry events to foster loyalty and business growth. Advertising, particularly through social media and digital platforms, has also become essential, highlighting the need for tourism businesses to adapt to changing consumer behaviors and technological advancements.

The results align with prior research that underscores the importance of market orientation and customer-centric strategies in entrepreneurial marketing. Pourjavad et al. (2024) found that market research, customer focus, and well-structured marketing strategies significantly enhance business performance, particularly in the hospitality industry [8]. Similarly, Hatami Nasab (2023) highlighted the role of innovation, risk-taking, and financial self-efficacy in shaping entrepreneurial success, indicating that businesses that actively seek opportunities and leverage resources effectively are more likely to achieve long-term sustainability [23]. The findings also support the conclusions of Pazaki (2024), who identified forward-thinking business strategies, market awareness, and brand orientation as essential factors in entrepreneurial decision-making [24].

The role of digital marketing in tourism, as emphasized in this study, aligns with Deb et al. (2024), who identified perceived ease of use, social media marketing, and digital adoption as crucial factors for business success in the tourism industry. The increasing reliance on digital platforms suggests that businesses must enhance their online presence and utilize targeted marketing campaigns to attract and retain customers [10]. Additionally, the importance of innovation in entrepreneurial marketing resonates with the findings of Sharma and Hasti (2024), who pointed out that sustainability, government support, and efficient service delivery are key drivers of small-scale tourism business growth [27].

The study also underscores the significance of opportunity-seeking and risk-taking in entrepreneurial marketing. Opportunity-seeking is critical for businesses looking to capitalize on emerging trends and market demands, particularly in the post-pandemic tourism sector. The findings support Polas and Raju (2021), who demonstrated a positive relationship between opportunity recognition, opportunity development, and entrepreneurial marketing decisions [28]. Risk-taking, an inherent aspect of entrepreneurship, was also identified as a crucial factor, reinforcing the conclusions of Araei et al. (2022), who discussed the role of strategic risk management and organizational adaptability in fostering business success [25].

Another key finding of this study is the role of cultural tourism value in shaping sustainable marketing strategies. Cultural tourism, which emphasizes the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, has gained traction as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism. The results align with the arguments presented by Higgins-Desbiolles (2020), who critiqued rapid tourism recovery efforts and advocated for a more ethical and responsible approach to tourism development [30]. The emphasis on cultural sustainability and eco-friendly travel promotions further

supports the work of Landaran Esfahani and Rahimi Lenji (2022), who analyzed the impact of COVID-19-related anxiety on tourism and found that public perception plays a crucial role in shaping tourism trends [26].

The study also highlights the importance of value creation in entrepreneurial marketing, particularly through the organization of socially responsible tours and the promotion of biodiversity conservation. This finding aligns with Choe et al. (2021), who examined the impact of COVID-19 on South Korea's inbound tourism market and emphasized the need for adaptive strategies to mitigate economic losses [29]. Furthermore, the integration of resource leveraging in tourism marketing strategies suggests that businesses must optimize their use of resources and invest in staff training to maintain sustainability, supporting the arguments made by Sharma and Hasti (2024) regarding the role of efficient service delivery in sustainable tourism development [27].

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of entrepreneurial marketing in sustainable tourism. The findings suggest that businesses must adopt a multi-dimensional approach that incorporates digital marketing, innovation, customer engagement, and sustainability to navigate the challenges of the post-pandemic era. While the literature has explored various aspects of marketing and entrepreneurship in tourism, there remains a need for a comprehensive framework that integrates these elements into a cohesive strategy. By bridging the gap between entrepreneurial marketing and sustainable tourism, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on responsible tourism development and business sustainability.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research limits its generalizability to a broader population. The findings are based on expert interviews, which, while valuable for in-depth insights, may not fully capture the perspectives of all stakeholders in the tourism industry. Second, the study focuses primarily on the post-COVID-19 era, meaning that the findings may not be directly applicable to different economic or social contexts. Additionally, the study does not quantify the impact of each identified factor, making it difficult to determine the relative importance of different dimensions in shaping entrepreneurial marketing strategies.

Future research should explore quantitative approaches to validate and expand upon the findings of this study. Conducting large-scale surveys or experimental studies could provide more generalizable results and offer a deeper understanding of the relationships between entrepreneurial marketing dimensions and business performance in sustainable tourism. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how marketing strategies evolve over time and assess their long-term impact on tourism sustainability. Future studies should also consider cross-cultural analyses to determine how entrepreneurial marketing strategies vary across different regions and tourism markets.

Tourism businesses should prioritize digital marketing strategies to enhance customer engagement and attract new audiences. Investing in social media advertising, search engine optimization, and content marketing can help businesses establish a strong online presence. Additionally, fostering strong relationships with customers through networking, personalized services, and community engagement can enhance brand loyalty and long-term success. Businesses should also embrace innovation by developing unique tourism experiences and integrating sustainability into their operations. Finally, policymakers and industry stakeholders should support sustainable tourism initiatives by providing incentives for businesses that adopt eco-friendly practices and contribute to cultural preservation.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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