

Relational Marketing Agility and Entrepreneurial Marketing in Tourism: A Conceptual Frameworks for Sustainable Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

This conceptual paper develops an integrative model explaining how Relational Marketing Agility (RMA) operates as a mediating dynamic capability that strengthens the linkage between Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) and Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA) in entrepreneurial tourism. Responding to increasingly dynamic tourism environments, shifting customer expectations, and intensified digital-based competition, this study synthesizes insights from Entrepreneurial Marketing, the Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV), relational capability, and agile marketing. Through systematic literature integration, RMA is conceptualized as a higher-order dynamic capability consisting of customer-sensing agility, relational adaptation agility, and rapid response capability. The proposed framework argues that RMA mediates the influence of EM on SCA by enabling tourism firms to identify relational opportunities, adjust engagement strategies, and respond swiftly to evolving customer needs. This model advances theoretical understanding by positioning RMA as a pivotal mechanism that transforms marketing innovativeness into long-term competitive strength within experience-driven tourism markets. As one of the earliest conceptual articulations of RMA in entrepreneurial tourism, the study contributes to dynamic capabilities literature and provides a foundation for future empirical research. It also offers strategic guidance for tourism SMEs aiming to enhance competitiveness through the development of agile relational capabilities.

Keywords: relational marketing agility, entrepreneurial marketing, sustainable competitive advantage, tourism industry, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is among the most dynamic and competitive global industries, characterized by high volatility, rapidly shifting customer expectations, and increasing digital transformation. In such an environment, entrepreneurial tourism firms particularly SMEs must adopt innovative and opportunity-driven marketing strategies to survive and sustain growth. Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) has been widely recognized as a strategic orientation that enhances innovation, customer value creation, and opportunity exploitation in tourism contexts. While EM has shown positive effects on various performance dimensions, empirical findings regarding its ability to generate sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) remain inconsistent.

These inconsistencies indicate that EM alone may not automatically translate into sustainable outcomes, especially in contexts where customer experiences, relationships, and digital interactions evolve rapidly. Scholars therefore emphasize the importance of examining the mechanisms that transform EM into long-term competitiveness. Marketing agility a firm's capability to sense, respond, and adapt to market changes has emerged as a relevant mechanism. However, existing agility research remains overly focused on process agility or decision-making agility, leaving the relational domain underexplored.

This gap is particularly significant in tourism, an industry fundamentally grounded on relational and experiential interaction between service providers, visitors, and digital platforms. To address this gap, this conceptual paper develops a theoretical model in which Relational Marketing Agility (RMA) acts as a mediating dynamic capability enabling EM to produce sustainable competitive advantages. By integrating EM, the DCV, and relational marketing perspectives, the study offers a novel conceptualization of relational agility and its strategic role in entrepreneurial tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM)

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) represents the fusion of entrepreneurial orientation and marketing logic, emphasizing innovativeness, proactiveness, opportunity focus, customer intensity, calculated risk-taking, and creative resource leveraging. Foundational studies differentiate EM practices in small entrepreneurial firms from traditional marketing in large organizations (Morris et al., 2002). Subsequent research examines how EM affects innovation, performance, and competitive advantage (Miles & Darroch, 2006; Morris et al., 2019).

In tourism, EM contributes to product/service innovation, personalized experiences, and rapid responsiveness critical in experience-based industries (Harrington et al., 2018;

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Alqahtani & Uslay, 2020). Recent studies emphasize EM's role in digital competitiveness and customer-centric innovation in SMEs (Kraus et al., 2020). However, EM's long-term impact remains inconsistent unless supported by complementary capabilities that convert entrepreneurial actions into sustainable outcomes (O'Cass & Weerawardena, 2009; Hitt et al., 2011). This reveals a conceptual gap regarding the mechanisms linking EM to SCA.

Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV)

The Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV) explains how organizations achieve SCA through capabilities that enable them to sense opportunities/threats, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources under changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2007). The microfoundations managerial cognition, processes, routines, and structures create deeper explanatory richness (Teece, 2014; Pavlou & El Sawy, 2011).

In tourism research, dynamic capabilities help firms respond to technological disruption, demand uncertainty, and evolving visitor preferences (Pereira-Moliner et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). Digital transformation has also become an integral dimension of dynamic capabilities (Mina et al., 2025). The DCV aligns naturally with EM, providing theoretical grounding for understanding how entrepreneurial behaviors translate into sustained competitive advantage.

Marketing Agility and Marketing Capabilities

Marketing agility refers to a firm's ability to rapidly sense market dynamics, adjust marketing strategies, and respond effectively (Day, 2011; Day & Schoemaker, 2016). Recent studies confirm strong links between marketing agility and organizational performance (Zhou et al., 2019). The rise of digital customer behavior further amplifies the importance of agility in marketing systems.

Yet, current literature predominantly focuses on operational or decision-making agility. The relational dimension of agility how firms sense and respond to changes in customer relationships remains underdeveloped, despite its importance in tourism and service contexts (Kalaighnam, 2021). This gap directly motivates the conceptual development of RMA.

Relational Marketing and Relational Marketing Agility (RMA)

Relational marketing emphasizes long-term value co-creation, trust, relational interaction, and stakeholder engagement (Grönroos, 1994; Payne & Frow, 2005; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In tourism, relational approaches drive visitor loyalty, satisfaction, co-created experiences, and destination competitiveness (Fyall & Proctor, 2011).

By integrating DCV with relational marketing, Relational Marketing Agility (RMA) emerges as a capability allowing firms to: 1. sense relational shifts, 2. adapt interaction strategies, and 3. rapidly deliver personalized engagement.

Studies in digital tourism highlight how social media, AI, big data, and digital platforms enhance relational agility (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2014). However, RMA has not been systematically conceptualized as a dynamic capability representing a novel contribution of this paper.

Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA) in Tourism

Sustainable Competitive Advantage in tourism extends beyond physical assets to include experiential differentiation, relational quality, customer loyalty, and continuous innovation (Barney, 1991; Evans & Moutinho, 2016). Tourism SMEs must build capabilities to reconfigure offerings and maintain relevance amid market turbulence.

RMA provides a relational mechanism through which tourism firms can sustain value creation and adapt to evolving customer expectations supporting long-term competitive advantages.

RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) fosters innovation, proactivity, and customer value creation key drivers of competitive differentiation in tourism (Barney, 1991; Mandasari, 2023). Empirical studies support the positive impact of EM on competitive advantage across tourism and service-based SMEs (Hasanah, 2024; Irawan & Rosita, 2023).

Proposition 1: Entrepreneurial Marketing has a positive influence on Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

EM strengthens relational responsiveness by enabling organizations to quickly identify customer needs, personalize offerings, and adapt relationship strategies (Noor, 2025; Mejeed, 2025). Entrepreneurial firms with high customer intensity and innovation orientation are more capable of relational adaptation (Hashem, 2024; Gummerus, 2017).

Proposition 2: Entrepreneurial Marketing positively influences Relational Marketing Agility.

Marketing agility has been shown to mediate the relationship between marketing practices and performance (Mejeed, 2025). When EM enhances relational agility, the firm becomes better able to translate opportunity-driven marketing action into competitive advantage (Panduro-Ramirez et al., 2024).

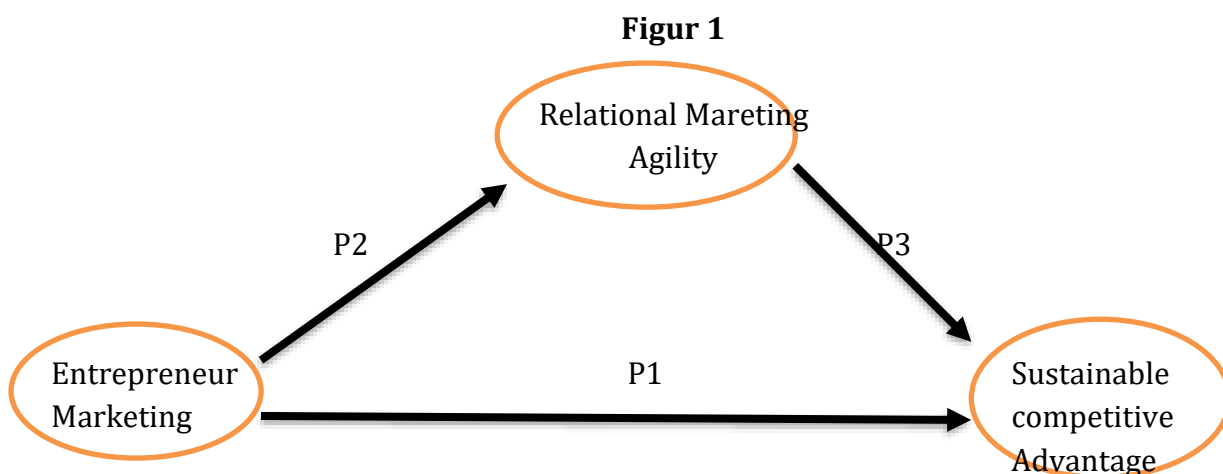
Proposition 3: Relational Marketing Agility mediates the effect of Entrepreneurial Marketing on Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

RMA enables quick adaptation of relational strategies, strengthens customer value and loyalty, reduces switching costs, and enhances competitive positioning especially in service-intensive industries (Gummerus, 2017; Hashem, 2024).

Proposition 4: Relational Marketing Agility positively influences Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

Conceptual Model

Based on the research propositions that have been outlined in the chapter above, the research propositions can be described as follows:



DISCUSSION

This conceptual paper proposes RMA as a higher-order dynamic capability explaining how EM transforms into SCA in entrepreneurial tourism. The integration of EM, DCV, and relational marketing yields several contributions.

First, the study demonstrates that EM alone is insufficient for sustaining long-term competitiveness unless supported by dynamic capabilities. EM-driven innovation and customer engagement tend to be episodic; RMA enables stabilization of competitive outcomes through repeatable relational adaptation.

Second, RMA fills a critical gap in the marketing agility literature by moving beyond operational agility toward relational agility essential in tourism where relational experiences shape visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Third, aligning RMA with DCV microfoundations clarifies its functional mechanisms: customer-sensing agility, relational adaptation, responsive engagement. This provides a theoretically grounded explanation of

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how relational agility enhances competitiveness in dynamic markets. Fourth, digital technologies play a central enabling role. AI, analytics, and digital platforms strengthen the firm's sensing and response capabilities, making RMA both scalable and sustainable.

Managerially, the model implies that tourism firms must invest in relational competence, digital sensing tools, service flexibility, and organizational learning to cultivate relational agility.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual study advances the understanding of competitive advantage in entrepreneurial tourism by introducing Relational Marketing Agility (RMA) as a mediating dynamic capability linking Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) to Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA). EM provides the entrepreneurial drive and customer-centric innovation, yet its effectiveness in generating sustained advantage depends heavily on the firm's ability to relationally sense, adapt, and respond.

RMA functions as a scalable and repeatable capability that enhances customer interaction, strengthens loyalty, and supports continuous experiential innovation key components of sustainable advantage in tourism.

Future research can empirically test the proposed propositions, operationalize RMA dimensions across tourism sectors, and examine moderating variables such as digital maturity and environmental turbulence.

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