

ENTREPRENEURIAL ADAPTABILITY, DIGITAL ORIENTATION AND SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVENESS IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM ENTERPRISES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. The rapid digitalization of tourism markets and the emergence of community-based tourism (CBT) as a distinct development paradigm have intensified scholarly interest in the determinants of entrepreneurial sustainability within small tourism enterprises. Existing literature has largely concentrated on technical digital competency as the primary driver of performance, while comparatively limited theoretical attention has been devoted to entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation as strategic behavioural antecedents of sustainable competitiveness. This paper proposes a conceptual framework that integrates dynamic capabilities theory, entrepreneurial orientation literature, and digital transformation scholarship to examine how entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation, individually and in combination, influence sustainable competitiveness in CBT enterprises. The proposed framework departs from conventional technical competency approaches by foregrounding strategic and behavioural entrepreneurial dimensions as the primary architecture of long-term competitive sustainability. Theoretical propositions are advanced for each hypothesized relationship, accompanied by a critical synthesis of contemporary literature published between 2020 and 2026. The paper contributes to the entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism literature by offering a reconstructed behaviour oriented analytical perspective, and provides implications for tourism development policymakers, entrepreneurial support institutions, and future empirical research agendas.

Keywords: *entrepreneurial adaptability, digital orientation, sustainable competitiveness, community-based tourism, dynamic capabilities*

Introduction

The global tourism industry has undergone extensive structural transformation characterized by the pervasive digitalization of business ecosystems, rapidly evolving consumer expectations, the proliferation of platform-based market dynamics, and intensifying competitive uncertainty at both local and global scales. Within this transformed landscape, community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises, which constitute a critical segment of sustainable tourism development in many developing and emerging economies face distinctive pressures arising from resource constraints, limited technological infrastructure, geographic remoteness, and growing dependence on digital distribution platforms (Tuyen et al., 2025; Sigala, 2020). The capacity of CBT entrepreneurs to maintain long-term competitive relevance under these conditions increasingly depends on strategic entrepreneurial capabilities that transcend

conventional technical competency frameworks. Extant entrepreneurship and tourism management literature has demonstrated that technical digital skills, while necessary, are insufficient in isolation to guarantee superior business performance outcomes (Baawain et al., 2025; Nambisan et al., 2019). A growing body of evidence suggests that enduring entrepreneurial sustainability is more fundamentally determined by behavioural and strategic entrepreneurial orientations, specifically, the capacity to adapt strategically to environmental change (entrepreneurial adaptability) and the proactive commitment to embedding digital innovation into core business processes (digital orientation). These behavioural dimensions align closely with the tenets of dynamic capabilities theory, which postulates that competitive advantage is sustained not through static resource possession but through the ongoing reconfiguration of capabilities in response to evolving environmental demands (Alves and Carvalho, 2025; Teece, 2007).

Despite the theoretical promise of this perspective, a significant conceptual gap persists within the CBT entrepreneurship literature. Existing frameworks have not systematically integrated entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation as co-determinants of sustainable competitiveness within CBT contexts, nor have they sufficiently theorized the mechanisms through which these behavioural dimensions translate into long-term competitive performance. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual framework grounded in dynamic capabilities theory, entrepreneurial orientation scholarship, and digital transformation literature. The framework advances three theoretical propositions that delineate the relationships between entrepreneurial adaptability, digital orientation, and sustainable competitiveness in CBT enterprises. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a critical synthesis of the relevant theoretical foundations. Section 3 develops the conceptual framework and advances the theoretical propositions. Section 4 elaborates on the practical and policy implications of the framework. Section 5 concludes with directions for future empirical research.

Theoretical foundations and literature review

Dynamic capabilities theory, entrepreneurial sustainability and digital orientation

Dynamic capabilities theory, originally advanced by Teece (2007) and subsequently refined across extensive empirical and theoretical scholarship, posits that firms sustain competitive advantage through the deliberate sensing of environmental changes, the seizing of emerging opportunities, and the reconfiguring of organizational assets and capabilities in response to competitive and technological disruptions. Within entrepreneurship research, dynamic capabilities have been operationalized as higher-order strategic competencies that enable firms to maintain alignment with evolving market demands beyond what static resource possession can achieve (Alves and Carvalho, 2025). This theoretical lens is particularly apposite for CBT entrepreneurship contexts, where resource scarcity, market volatility, and rapid digital transformation render static competency-based approaches fundamentally inadequate for explaining sustained competitive performance. Recent scholarship has extended dynamic capabilities theory to small enterprise and entrepreneurship contexts, demonstrating that even micro-enterprises operating within resource-constrained environments can develop and leverage dynamic capabilities to achieve sustainable competitive outcomes (Ooi and Memon, 2025; Sarfo et al., 2025). The application of this framework to CBT entrepreneurship is theoretically significant because it reconceptualizes entrepreneurial

sustainability as a process of continuous capability renewal rather than a static state of competency attainment. Entrepreneurial adaptability, as theorized in this paper, represents the operational manifestation of dynamic capabilities within individual CBT entrepreneurs encompassing cognitive flexibility, strategic learning orientation, and proactive environmental responsiveness as core constituent dimensions.

Digital orientation represents an important dynamic capability that enables firms to recognize and exploit opportunities arising from digital transformation. Digital orientation refers to an organization's strategic commitment, managerial mindset, and entrepreneurial willingness to embed digital technologies, digital platforms, and data-driven processes into its core business model and value creation activities (Kindermann et al., 2021). Unlike digital capability or digital competence, which primarily concern technical skills and technological resources, digital orientation reflects a broader organizational philosophy encompassing strategic vision, innovation culture, and leadership commitment towards digital transformation. The integration of digital orientation with Dynamic Capabilities Theory is conceptually compelling because digitally oriented firms are better positioned to perform the sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes emphasized by DCT. Through digital orientation, organizations can more effectively sense environmental changes using digital intelligence and market analytics, seize opportunities through digital innovation and business model transformation, and reconfigure internal processes and resources to respond to technological and competitive disruptions. Vrontis et al. (2022) demonstrated that digital entrepreneurial orientation enhances organizational resilience, knowledge creation, and innovation capability among SMEs, while Raby and Ardito, (2026) identified digital strategic orientation as a significant driver of innovation performance and competitive advantage. Similarly, Verhoef et al. (2021) highlighted that successful digital transformation depends heavily on an organization's strategic orientation towards digitalization rather than merely the adoption of digital technologies.

Entrepreneurial adaptability represents the individual-level expression of these dynamic capabilities and reflects an entrepreneur's capacity to respond strategically to market, technological, and environmental uncertainties (Joussen et al., 2025). Specifically, cognitive adaptability aligns with sensing capabilities through opportunity recognition and strategic learning; behavioural adaptability reflects seizing capabilities through adjustments in business practices, resource deployment, and innovation activities; while relational adaptability supports reconfiguring capabilities through the restructuring of stakeholder relationships and collaborative networks. The integration of entrepreneurial adaptability with Dynamic Capabilities Theory suggests that entrepreneurs who continuously learn, innovate, and reconfigure resources are better positioned to achieve resilience and sustained competitive advantage in rapidly evolving business environments. Overall, entrepreneurial adaptability represents the manifestation of dynamic capabilities at the entrepreneurial level through cognitive, behavioural, and relational adaptability. Digital orientation serves as the strategic and technological enabler that allows entrepreneurs to continuously update their knowledge structures, adjust business practices, and strengthen collaborative networks in response to environmental uncertainty. Consequently, Dynamic Capabilities Theory offers a robust theoretical foundation for explaining how digitally oriented entrepreneurs develop adaptive capabilities that enhance resilience, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

Digital transformation in tourism entrepreneurship

Digital transformation constitutes a pervasive organizational phenomenon encompassing the comprehensive integration of digital technologies into business strategy, value creation processes, and stakeholder engagement systems (Vial, 2019). Within tourism industries, digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped competitive dynamics, customer behaviour, distribution channel structures, and operational systems across enterprises of varying scales (Buhalis and Moldavska, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). For CBT enterprises specifically, digital platforms represent both an opportunity for expanded market reach and a source of competitive pressure, as the capacity to leverage digital tools effectively increasingly differentiates high performing from low performing enterprises within the same sector (Li et al., 2022; Shaharuddin et al., 2023). Zhang et al. (2025), in a comprehensive systematic review of digital transformation and tourism performance, identified that the relationship between digital adoption and competitive outcomes is consistently moderated by the strategic orientation and adaptive capacity of the entrepreneur, rather than being a direct, automatic consequence of technology acquisition. This finding reinforces the theoretical position advanced in the present paper that digital transformation effectiveness within CBT entrepreneurship is fundamentally contingent upon the behavioural dispositions and strategic orientations that the entrepreneur brings to the technology adoption and integration process. Accordingly, digital orientation is conceptualized in this framework not as a technical competency but as a strategic entrepreneurial disposition that reflects a proactive, innovation embedded commitment to digital value creation.

Entrepreneurial adaptability: Conceptualization and theoretical significance

Entrepreneurial adaptability refers to the dynamic capacity of entrepreneurs to perceive, interpret, and respond strategically to shifts in market conditions, competitive structures, technological trajectories, and socio-environmental demands (Kraus et al., 2022). This construct encompasses three interrelated dimensions: cognitive adaptability (the capacity to reframe strategic assumptions and update mental models in response to new information); behavioural adaptability (the capacity to modify operational routines, resource configurations, and innovation strategies); and relational adaptability (the capacity to reconfigure stakeholder relationships and collaborative arrangements in support of competitive renewal). Collectively, these dimensions constitute a higher order entrepreneurial capability that transcends technical skill acquisition and reflects the strategic character of the entrepreneur as an adaptive agent within competitive ecosystems. Recent empirical evidence from entrepreneurship and tourism management scholarship consistently confirms the strategic significance of entrepreneurial adaptability as a determinant of sustainable business performance. O'Connor et al. (2025) demonstrated that entrepreneurial resilience, a closely related construct significantly mediates the relationship between environmental turbulence and tourism enterprise performance, suggesting that adaptive capacity functions as a strategic buffer against competitive and environmental shocks. Ooi and Memon (2025) further established that adaptive innovation capacity positively and significantly influences SME competitive advantage and sustainability performance, particularly within resource constrained contexts characteristic of CBT enterprises. These findings collectively establish entrepreneurial adaptability as a theoretically central and

empirically validated determinant of sustainable competitiveness within tourism entrepreneurship.

From the perspective of dynamic capabilities theory, entrepreneurial adaptability corresponds most directly to the reconfiguring capability, the strategic capacity to restructure organizational assets, processes, and orientations in response to environmental change (Teece, 2007). This alignment provides strong theoretical justification for the propositions advanced in this paper regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial adaptability and sustainable competitiveness. Entrepreneurs who demonstrate high adaptive capability are theorized to exhibit superior capacity for identifying and capitalizing on emergent market opportunities, managing competitive disruptions without losing strategic coherence, and sustaining innovation momentum across diverse environmental conditions (Do et al., 2024; Ed-Dafali et al., 2023).

Digital orientation: Conceptualization and theoretical significance

Digital orientation is conceptualized in this paper as a strategic entrepreneurial disposition that reflects a proactive, sustained, and innovation embedded commitment to integrating digital technologies, platforms, and transformation processes into the core value creation logic of the enterprise (Baawain et al., 2025; Kindermann et al., 2021). Distinct from technical digital competency, which concerns the possession of specific digital skills; digital orientation encompasses the strategic vision, organizational culture, and entrepreneurial intentionality that underpin meaningful and sustained digital transformation. This conceptualization aligns with Chatterjee et al. (2021), who demonstrated that entrepreneurial orientation towards digital innovation significantly enhances organizational resilience and knowledge creation capability in SME contexts, and with Ardito et al. (2021), who identified digital strategic orientation as a critical enabler of SME innovation performance. Within CBT entrepreneurship contexts, digital orientation carries theoretical relevance because it determines the extent to which digital transformation transcends the adoption of individual digital tools and becomes embedded as a sustained strategic capability. Entrepreneurs with strong digital orientation proactively explore digital platform opportunities, integrate customer data into innovation processes, and align digital transformation with long-term business model reconfiguration activities that collectively generate durable competitive advantages rather than transient performance improvements (Baawain et al., 2025; Elia et al., 2020). The distinction between digital competency and digital orientation is therefore critical to the theoretical contribution of the present framework: it is not the possession of digital knowledge that primarily determines sustainable competitiveness, but rather the strategic disposition that governs how that knowledge is applied in the pursuit of long-term entrepreneurial value creation.

Sustainable competitiveness in community based tourism

Sustainable competitiveness within CBT entrepreneurship scholarship is understood as the capacity of enterprises to maintain long-term operational continuity, stakeholder value creation, and market relevance while adapting to economic, technological, and socio-environmental transformations (Ed-Dafali et al., 2023). This multidimensional construct integrates organizational resilience, strategic adaptability, innovation continuity, customer relationship sustainability, and community value alignment as essential dimensions of enduring competitive performance. The conceptualization

adopted in this paper therefore extends beyond conventional financial performance metrics to encompass the broader social and ecological sustainability dimensions that are intrinsic to the CBT development paradigm (Ooi et al., 2025; Tuyen et al., 2025). Recent literature has increasingly theorized sustainable competitiveness as the outcome of dynamic interaction between entrepreneurial behavioural orientations and environmental contextual factors, rather than as a static state attained through resource accumulation (Wang et al., 2023; Nambisan et al., 2019). Within CBT contexts, this dynamic conceptualization is particularly pertinent because CBT enterprises operate simultaneously within competitive market environments and within community governance structures that impose distinctive value and accountability constraints. Sustainable competitiveness in this context therefore demands not only superior market performance but also the maintenance of community trust, cultural authenticity, and environmental stewardship dimensions that further elevate the strategic importance of entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation as determinants of holistic competitive sustainability.

Conceptual framework and theoretical propositions

Building upon the theoretical foundations reviewed in Section 2, this paper proposes a conceptual framework (*Figure 1*) that positions entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation as dual strategic antecedents of sustainable competitiveness in CBT enterprises. The framework is grounded in dynamic capabilities theory and integrates entrepreneurial orientation and digital transformation perspectives to offer a behaviour centred reconceptualization of entrepreneurial sustainability in CBT contexts. Three theoretical propositions are advanced to articulate the hypothesized relationships within the framework.

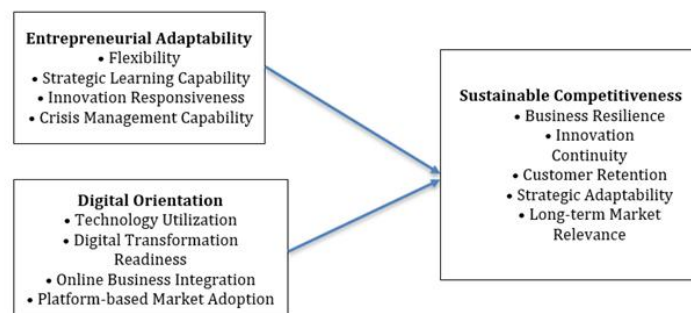


Figure 1. Research framework on sustainable competitiveness among tourism entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial adaptability and sustainable competitiveness

Entrepreneurial adaptability is theorized as the primary strategic antecedent of sustainable competitiveness in CBT enterprises. This proposition is grounded in dynamic capabilities theory, which posits that the capacity for capability reconfiguration; the operational core of entrepreneurial adaptability constitutes the foundational mechanism through which competitive advantage is sustained across changing environmental conditions (Alves and Carvalho, 2025; Teece, 2007). CBT entrepreneurs who exhibit high adaptive capacity are theorized to sustain competitive relevance through superior environmental scanning, faster strategic learning cycles,

more flexible resource reallocation, and a greater propensity to identify and pursue emergent market opportunities before less adaptive competitors. The theoretical rationale for this proposition is further supported by evidence from adjacent entrepreneurship and innovation literatures. Do et al. (2024) demonstrated that strategic adaptability positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SME performance in developing economy contexts analogous to those in which many CBT enterprises operate. Kraus et al. (2022) established that adaptability constitutes a critical entrepreneurial capability within digitally transformed economies, reinforcing its theoretical centrality within the proposed framework. Furthermore, O'Connor et al. (2025) provided evidence that entrepreneurial resilience operationalized as the adaptive capacity to recover and reconfigure following environmental disruption, particularly predicts sustainable performance outcomes in tourism enterprise contexts. Proposition 1: Entrepreneurial adaptability is positively and significantly associated with sustainable competitiveness among CBT enterprises.

Digital orientation and sustainable competitiveness

Digital orientation is theorized as the second strategic antecedent of sustainable competitiveness in CBT enterprises. Entrepreneurs with strong digital orientation are conceptualized as more capable of leveraging digital platforms for market expansion, employing digital analytics for customer insight generation, and embedding digital innovation into service development and operational management processes. These capabilities collectively contribute to durable competitive advantages that are difficult for competitors to imitate because they are rooted in the entrepreneur's strategic vision and organizational culture rather than in the mere possession of specific digital tools (Baawain et al., 2025; Elia et al., 2020). The theoretical mechanisms through which digital orientation influences sustainable competitiveness in CBT contexts include: (i) enhanced digital market reach, enabling CBT enterprises to access global tourism demand more effectively; (ii) improved customer experience management through digital engagement, personalization, and feedback integration; (iii) more agile operational adaptation facilitated by digital monitoring and analytics capabilities; and (iv) accelerated innovation cycles through platform enabled co-creation and knowledge exchange. Martín-Rojas et al. (2013) and Ardito et al. (2021) provided corroborating evidence that digital strategic orientation significantly predicts innovation performance in SME contexts, while Shaharuddin et al. (2023) demonstrated that digital orientation positively influences business performance among tourism entrepreneurs in the Malaysian context specifically. Proposition 2: Digital orientation is positively and significantly associated with sustainable competitiveness among CBT enterprises.

The complementary interaction of entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation

Beyond their individual contributions, entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation are theorized to interact in a mutually reinforcing manner that amplifies their combined influence on sustainable competitiveness. Specifically, digital orientation is conceptualized as a strategic amplifier of entrepreneurial adaptability, a disposition that channels adaptive capacity towards digitally enabled forms of value creation, market responsiveness, and competitive innovation. This interaction reflects the theoretical proposition that the performance returns on entrepreneurial adaptability are enhanced when the adaptive entrepreneur operates within a digitally embedded strategic

orientation, because digital platforms extend the reach, speed, and precision with which adaptive entrepreneurs can identify, pursue, and sustain competitive opportunities. This theoretical position is consistent with Ed-Dafali et al. (2023), who demonstrated that strategic orientation and digital readiness jointly and interactively determine competitive advantage in emerging market SME contexts, and with Nambisan et al. (2019), who theorized that digital entrepreneurship effectiveness is most pronounced when behavioural entrepreneurial capabilities are integrated with strategic digital orientation. The implication for the proposed framework is that CBT entrepreneurship development programmes seeking to maximize sustainable competitiveness outcomes should cultivate both entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation as complementary, mutually reinforcing strategic capabilities rather than treating them as independent or substitutable development targets. Proposition 3: The combined presence of high entrepreneurial adaptability and strong digital orientation produces synergistic effects that further enhance sustainable competitiveness beyond the independent contributions of each construct.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretical contributions

This paper makes three primary theoretical contributions to the entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism literature. First, it advances a behaviour centred conceptual framework that reconceptualizes sustainable competitiveness in CBT enterprises as the outcome of dynamic entrepreneurial orientations rather than static technical competency accumulation. This reconceptualization extends dynamic capabilities theory into CBT entrepreneurship contexts, filling a significant theoretical gap identified in the existing literature (Baawain et al., 2025; Tuyen et al., 2025). Second, the paper introduces the concept of digital orientation as a strategic entrepreneurial disposition distinct from technical digital competency, thereby offering a more nuanced and theoretically precise account of how digital transformation influences sustainable competitive performance in small tourism enterprises. Third, the proposed framework advances the theoretical proposition that entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation interact in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner, generating competitive sustainability outcomes that exceed what either capability could produce independently.

These contributions collectively advance the theoretical understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship in CBT settings by demonstrating that enduring competitive performance is rooted in the dynamic, behavioural architecture of the entrepreneur rather than in the possession of specific technical resources or market advantages. This perspective aligns with and extends the growing body of entrepreneurship scholarship that calls for more contextually sensitive, behaviour-centred theoretical frameworks capable of capturing the complexity of entrepreneurial sustainability in community-based and resource-constrained organizational contexts (Ooi and Memon, 2025; Do et al., 2024; Nambisan et al., 2019).

Practical and policy implications

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper carries substantive practical implications for tourism development agencies, entrepreneurship support institutions, and policymakers engaged in designing and implementing CBT entrepreneurship development programmes. Most critically, the framework challenges the predominant

emphasis on technical digital training within existing entrepreneurship development initiatives, arguing that sustainable competitive outcomes are more effectively achieved through integrated programmes that cultivate entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation alongside technical competency development. This implies a need for curriculum redesign within CBT entrepreneurship capacity-building programmes to incorporate modules on adaptive leadership, strategic innovation orientation, digital value creation, and environmental responsiveness.

At the policy level, the framework suggests that tourism development funding and institutional support mechanisms should prioritize the creation of adaptive entrepreneurial ecosystems, collaborative environments in which CBT entrepreneurs can access strategic mentoring, peer learning networks, digital innovation resources, and market intelligence services that reinforce both adaptive capacity and digital orientation development (Shaharuddin et al., 2023; OECD, 2021). Such ecosystems would provide the institutional architecture through which the theoretical complementarities between entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation can be realized in practice, ultimately strengthening the long-term sustainability and competitive resilience of CBT enterprises as key contributors to inclusive and environmentally responsible tourism development.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed a conceptual framework that positions entrepreneurial adaptability and digital orientation as the primary strategic antecedents of sustainable competitiveness in community-based tourism enterprises. Grounded in dynamic capabilities theory and informed by a critical synthesis of contemporary entrepreneurship and digital transformation literature, the framework advances three theoretical propositions that reconceptualize sustainable competitive performance as the outcome of dynamic, behaviour-centred entrepreneurial orientations rather than static technical competency acquisition. The paper contributes to the entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism literature by offering a theoretically rigorous, behaviour-oriented analytical perspective that fills a significant gap in the existing CBT entrepreneurship literature. The conceptual framework presented in this paper is subject to limitations inherent to theoretical scholarship, most notably the absence of empirical validation. Future research should test the proposed theoretical propositions through rigorous empirical designs, including quantitative structural analyses and qualitative case study approaches, to establish the empirical boundary conditions and contextual moderators that shape the relationships between entrepreneurial adaptability, digital orientation, and sustainable competitiveness in CBT contexts. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable for capturing the developmental dynamics through which adaptive capacity and digital orientation evolve over time in response to changing competitive environments. Additionally, future scholarship should examine the potential moderating roles of institutional environment quality, community governance structures, and digital infrastructure accessibility in conditioning the strength and direction of the proposed framework relationships. The incorporation of emerging technological variables, including artificial intelligence integration, platform economy dynamics, and sustainability-oriented digital innovation that represents a productive direction for extending the framework in response to the next wave of digital transformation within global tourism entrepreneurship.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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