



Turning Entrepreneurial Orientation into Performance: The Role of Innovation and Customer Experience in Mountain Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how entrepreneurial and customer-centered capabilities contribute to the performance of tourism organizations operating in Romanian mountain destinations. An integrated model linking Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC), Customer Orientation (CO), Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC), and Entrepreneurial Performance (EPTO) was tested using PLS-SEM based on data collected from 120 managers of mountain tourism organizations. The findings support all hypothesized direct relationships and reveal two significant mediation mechanisms. TOIC mediates the relationship between EO and CO, while CEMC mediates the relationship between CO and entrepreneurial performance. The study contributes to tourism management research by demonstrating how entrepreneurial orientation is progressively translated into performance through innovation, customer orientation, and experience management capabilities. The findings also provide practical insights for mountain tourism organizations seeking to strengthen competitiveness through innovative and customer-centered strategies.

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1. Introduction

Tourism organizations operate in an increasingly dynamic environment shaped by changing customer expectations, digital transformation, intensified competition, and growing demand for personalized and memorable experiences. Mountain tourism organizations also face specific challenges, including seasonality, accessibility constraints, environmental pressures, and considerable heterogeneity in visitor motivations. As a result, maintaining competitiveness requires more than the efficient delivery of conventional tourism services. Organizations need to continuously identify emerging opportunities, innovate their offerings, understand evolving tourist preferences, and manage customer experiences across multiple interactions and touchpoints.

Within this context, entrepreneurship and customer experience management represent two complementary perspectives for understanding how tourism organizations can respond to market transformations. An entrepreneurial orientation encourages organizations to proactively identify opportunities, experiment with new ideas, introduce innovative services, and respond rapidly to changes in their competitive environment. At the same time, innovation becomes particularly valuable when it enables organizations to adapt their tourism offerings to tourists' changing expectations. New tourism products, digital solutions, personalized services, and creative uses of local natural and cultural resources can expand the value proposition of mountain tourism organizations while contributing to their differentiation from competitors.

However, innovation alone does not ensure that new offerings generate superior value for tourists. Tourism organizations also need to maintain a strong customer orientation while systematically understanding visitor needs, preferences, behaviors, and expectations. Customer Experience Management Capability represents an important organizational mechanism through which customer knowledge can be transformed into personalized services, coordinated interactions, effective use of tourist feedback, and consistent experiences involving employees and external partners.

Despite the growing managerial importance of these issues, an important research gap remains concerning the mechanisms connecting entrepreneurial behavior with customer experience management and organizational performance in mountain tourism. Entrepreneurship, tourism innovation, customer orientation, and customer experience have frequently been approached as distinct research domains.

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Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how these organizational orientations and capabilities operate sequentially. In particular, greater understanding is required of how entrepreneurial orientation translates into customer-focused behavior through the organization's capacity to innovate its tourism offering and how customer orientation subsequently generates entrepreneurial performance through effective customer experience management.

The present study aims to develop and empirically test a structural model explaining how Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC), Customer Orientation (CO), and Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC) contribute to the Entrepreneurial Performance of Tourism Organizations (EPTO). The model proposes that entrepreneurial orientation stimulates both tourism offering innovation capability and customer orientation, while innovation capability further strengthens customer orientation. Customer orientation is expected to foster customer experience management capability, which subsequently contributes to entrepreneurial performance. Beyond these direct relationships, the study investigates two mediation mechanisms: the mediating role of TOIC in the relationship between EO and CO and the mediating role of CEMC in the relationship between CO and EPTO.

The study therefore contributes to a more integrated understanding of competitiveness in mountain tourism while offering a managerial perspective on how tourism organizations can transform entrepreneurial initiatives into customer-centered and performance-oriented outcomes.

2. Theoretical Background

Tourism has progressively shifted from a service-centered logic toward an experience-centered perspective in which competitive advantage increasingly depends on organizations' ability to understand tourists, innovate their offerings, and orchestrate memorable interactions throughout the customer journey. Traditional approaches primarily emphasized service quality and satisfaction, whereas contemporary tourism management conceptualizes the tourist experience as a complex outcome generated through interactions among visitors, service providers, local communities, technological environments, and destination resources. Pine and Gilmore (1998) anticipated this transition through the experience economy perspective, arguing that organizations increasingly differentiate themselves by creating memorable experiences rather than merely delivering products and services. This perspective is particularly relevant to tourism, where perceived value encompasses functional, emotional, social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions.

The evolution of Customer Experience Management (CEM) reflects this broader conceptual shift. Customer experience cannot be reduced to individual transactions or isolated encounters because tourists evaluate their experiences through a sequence of interactions occurring before, during, and after a visit (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Contemporary research has consequently moved beyond conventional assessments of service quality and satisfaction toward more holistic approaches incorporating emotions, co-creation, technology, sustainability, and broader stakeholder outcomes. Agapito and Sigala (2024) reinforce this evolution by advocating an integrative reconsideration of customer experience in tourism and emphasizing the need to move beyond static and predominantly consumer-centric approaches. Such a perspective is particularly appropriate for mountain tourism, where experiences emerge from interactions between tourism services, natural environments, local communities, cultural authenticity, and increasingly digital touchpoints.

Mountain destinations represent a particularly relevant context for examining the intersection between entrepreneurship, innovation, and customer experience. Unlike more standardized forms of tourism, mountain tourism combines natural resources, outdoor activities, local culture, hospitality, authenticity, and technology into complex tourism offerings. At the same time, mountain destinations face distinctive challenges associated with seasonality, accessibility, environmental vulnerability, and pressures on natural resources (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005). These conditions increase the importance of continuously recognizing emerging opportunities and adapting tourism services accordingly. Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), reflected in innovativeness, proactiveness, opportunity seeking, and willingness to accept calculated risks, can therefore provide the strategic impetus for developing novel tourism offerings. Rather than passively responding to market changes, entrepreneurially oriented tourism organizations can proactively explore opportunities for diversification, introduce new experiences, and mobilize destination resources in innovative ways.

Innovation becomes especially relevant because mountain tourism organizations can respond to seasonality and changing tourist expectations by diversifying their offerings through thematic hiking, ecotourism, cycling, wellness activities, cultural experiences, and other alternative tourism products. Digitalization further expands this innovative capacity. Information technologies have transformed how tourists plan, consume, evaluate, and communicate their experiences, making technology an integral component of contemporary tourism value creation. Smart tourism research demonstrates that technological infrastructure can be combined with human and social resources to generate more personalized, interactive, and memorable visitor experiences (Boes et al., 2015). More recently, Aarabe et al. (2025) identify emerging technological themes in tourism customer experience research, including phygital experiences, artificial intelligence-enabled personalization, and virtual and augmented reality. These developments indicate that tourism innovation increasingly involves combining physical destination resources with digital capabilities to produce differentiated and adaptive experiences.

From this perspective, Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC) represents the organization's ability to transform recognized opportunities into new or substantially improved tourism services and experiences. Entrepreneurially oriented organizations should be more willing to experiment with novel service configurations, introduce digital technologies, creatively leverage natural and cultural resources, and invest in innovative projects despite uncertainty. EO therefore provides the strategic orientation toward opportunity recognition and experimentation, whereas TOIC captures the organization's ability to operationalize this orientation through concrete changes in its tourism offering. Accordingly:

H1: Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) positively influences Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC).

Entrepreneurial behavior also requires sensitivity to market signals. Mountain tourists constitute a heterogeneous market characterized by different motivations and expectations. Some visitors seek adventure and challenging outdoor activities, whereas others prioritize relaxation, well-being, interaction with nature, cultural authenticity, or engagement with local communities (Pearce, 2005; Pomfret, 2006). Identifying entrepreneurial opportunities in such an environment therefore requires tourism organizations to understand these differences and anticipate changes in tourist preferences. Customer Orientation (CO) complements entrepreneurial behavior by directing opportunity recognition toward the creation of customer value. Organizations that proactively anticipate market developments should consequently be more inclined to collect, interpret, and incorporate information about tourists into their strategic decision-making. Thus:

H2: Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) positively influences Customer Orientation (CO).

Innovation capability provides another important mechanism for strengthening customer orientation. Tourism innovation does not simply involve introducing novelty; it also allows organizations to continuously adapt their value propositions to changing visitor expectations. Digital platforms, mobile applications, social media, and data-driven systems simultaneously provide information about tourists and facilitate more rapid adaptation of tourism services. In smart tourism environments, technology enables real-time recommendations, personalized information, interactive experiences, and continuous communication with visitors. Aarabe et al. (2025) reveal that the customer experience literature increasingly emphasizes such hybrid and technology-enabled configurations, reinforcing the close connection between innovation and personalization.

This process is also consistent with the logic of value co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that customers increasingly participate actively in value creation rather than functioning as passive recipients of predefined offerings. In tourism, visitors book and configure services online, publish reviews, share images and experiences, communicate preferences, and contribute to destination reputation. Tourism organizations use these interactions as inputs for service innovation and adaptation. TOIC therefore function as the organizational mechanism through which market information and emerging opportunities are translated into customer-relevant offerings. Organizations capable of creatively combining destination resources, technology, and customer information should be better equipped to respond to evolving tourist expectations. Consequently:

H3: Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC) positively influences Customer Orientation (CO).

Understanding tourists, however, does not automatically ensure that an organization successfully manages their experiences. Customer experience extends beyond individual transactions and encompasses customers' subjective responses to multiple direct and indirect interactions with an organization (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). This distinction is especially important in tourism, where visitors evaluate not only accommodation, transportation, restaurants, or individual attractions but rather the cumulative experience generated by numerous interconnected touchpoints. The integration of Customer Relationship Management with Customer Experience Management therefore requires tourism organizations to move beyond transactional information toward understanding tourists' perceptions, emotions, and experiences throughout the complete customer journey.

Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC) reflects the organization's ability to translate such customer knowledge into systematic experience-design and management processes. In mountain tourism, this capability includes segmenting visitors, personalizing services, collecting and using feedback, coordinating interactions across touchpoints, and facilitating collaboration among employees and external partners. The heterogeneous motivations of mountain tourists make such capabilities particularly important. Adventure-oriented visitors, for example, may value novelty, challenge, and exploration, while other segments may prioritize relaxation, safety, authenticity, or cultural immersion. Customer orientation provides the informational foundation for identifying these expectations and embedding them into service and experience design. Hence:

H4: Customer Orientation (CO) positively influences Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC).

The strategic relevance of CEMC lies in its potential contribution to entrepreneurial and competitive performance. Memorable tourism experiences influence tourists' satisfaction, behavioral intentions, recommendation, and destination loyalty. Kim et al. (2012) demonstrate that memorable tourism experiences

encompass dimensions that extend substantially beyond functional service performance, including novelty, involvement, local culture, meaningfulness, and positive emotions. Authenticity constitutes another important experiential resource. Wang (1999) shows that tourism experiences may generate existential authenticity through activities and interpersonal interactions, suggesting that experiential value does not depend exclusively on the objective authenticity of tourism products or attractions.

These considerations are especially relevant to mountain tourism, where local traditions, gastronomy, community interactions, outdoor activities, landscape, and direct contact with nature provide distinctive experiential resources. Such resources may become sources of differentiation when tourism organizations possess the capability to integrate them into coherent experiences. CEMC therefore extends beyond the management of individual service encounters and reflects an organization's ability to integrate customer knowledge across physical and digital touchpoints and continuously redesign experiences in response to evolving expectations. This capability becomes increasingly relevant as tourism experiences evolve toward personalized, technology-enabled, and hybrid configurations (Aarabe et al., 2025).

At the same time, effective CEM should not be assessed exclusively through immediate satisfaction outcomes. Agapito and Sigala (2024) suggest that contemporary tourism experience management requires a broader perspective incorporating meaningful experiences, sustainability, and stakeholder well-being. In mountain destinations, where tourism development is closely intertwined with fragile natural environments and host communities, the ability to create value while preserving environmental and cultural resources becomes especially important. Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005) similarly emphasize the need to reconcile tourism development with the environmental and social characteristics of mountain regions. Consequently, CEMC constitutes a strategic mechanism through which customer knowledge, technology, employees, partners, local resources, and community interactions are transformed into differentiated experiences capable of strengthening tourist attraction, retention, competitive positioning, and economic outcomes. Therefore:

H5: Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC) positively influences the Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization (EPTO).

The proposed framework additionally suggests two mediation mechanisms. First, Entrepreneurial Orientation may not automatically translate into stronger Customer Orientation. Entrepreneurial intent needs to be operationalized through organizational mechanisms capable of transforming identified opportunities into new tourism services and experiences. Innovation capability performs this intermediary role. Entrepreneurially oriented organizations identify opportunities and demonstrate greater willingness to experiment, whereas TOIC allows them to translate this orientation into new services, digital solutions, experience configurations, and creative combinations of destination resources. These innovations subsequently enhance the organization's capacity to address changing tourist preferences. In other words, entrepreneurial orientation stimulates opportunity-seeking behavior, while innovation capability converts this behavior into market-relevant adaptations. Accordingly:

H6: Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC) mediates the relationship between Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and Customer Orientation (CO).

Second, customer knowledge alone may be insufficient to produce superior entrepreneurial performance. Tourism experiences are cumulative and multidimensional, encompassing functional attributes alongside emotions, authenticity, interpersonal interactions, technology, local culture, and memories. Memorable tourism experiences strengthen tourists' longer-term relationships with destinations and stimulate revisit and recommendation behaviors (Kim et al., 2012). Similarly, contemporary CEM research suggests that organizations need to orchestrate increasingly complex combinations of physical and digital interactions (Aarabe et al., 2025), while simultaneously recognizing the broader human and sustainability dimensions of experience creation (Agapito & Sigala, 2024).

CEMC consequently performs a transformational role by embedding customer understanding into the design, personalization, coordination, monitoring, and continuous improvement of tourism experiences. The distinction between CO and CEMC is theoretically important: Customer Orientation reflects the organization's strategic emphasis on understanding tourists and creating customer value, whereas CEMC represents its capability to operationalize that orientation throughout the tourism experience. Superior performance should therefore emerge not simply because an organization understands its customers, but because it systematically convert such understanding into differentiated and memorable experiences. Thus:

H7: Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC) mediates the relationship between Customer Orientation (CO) and the Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization (EPTO).

3. Methodology

We administrated an online questionnaire presented in the Appendix that was distributed to more than 200 tourism accommodation organizations operating in mountain destinations across Romania between April and June 2026. The survey targeted respondents occupying managerial positions and directly involved in decisions related to service development, marketing, customer relationships, and customer experience management.

The final sample comprised 120 respondents representing accommodation organizations operating in mountain tourism destinations. Villas and guesthouses constituted the largest category, accounting for 51.7% of the sample, followed by hotels (26.7%). Chalets, mountain lodges, and aparthotels represented 13.3%, while resorts and tourism complexes accounted for the remaining 8.3%. The predominance of villas and guesthouses reflects the study's emphasis on relatively small-scale accommodation businesses, which represent an especially relevant setting for investigating entrepreneurial initiatives and customer experience management in mountain tourism.

Respondents occupied managerial positions that provided them with sufficient knowledge of organizational strategy, service development, customer relationships, and organizational performance. General managers and owner-managers constituted the largest group (40.0%), followed by marketing managers (24.2%). Sales and reservations managers represented 14.2% of respondents, while operations and front-office managers accounted for 13.3%. The remaining 8.3% consisted of business development and destination managers. Thus, respondents were directly involved in decisions concerning tourism offerings, marketing, customer relationships, operations, or organizational development.

The sample also exhibited substantial professional experience in tourism. Managers with between 6 and 10 years of experience constituted the largest category (28.3%), followed by those with 11–15 years (22.5%) and 3–5 years (20.8%). Respondents with more than 15 years of experience represented 16.7%, whereas 11.7% had less than three years of experience. Overall, 67.5% of respondents had at least six years of professional experience in tourism, supporting their suitability as knowledgeable informants for evaluating organizational-level practices and capabilities.

Accommodation capacity further demonstrates the predominance of small and medium-sized businesses. Organizations with up to 10 rooms or accommodation units represented 30.8% of the sample, while those with 11–20 rooms accounted for 29.2%. Consequently, 60.0% of the organizations operated no more than 20 rooms or accommodation units. Organizations with 21–50 rooms represented 24.2%, while only 15.8% operated more than 50 rooms or units.

Finally, independent and family-owned businesses represented 69.2% of the sample, compared with 19.2% belonging to local or regional groups and 11.7% affiliated with national or international hotel chains.

PLS-SEM was selected to test the proposed conceptual model because it enables the simultaneous assessment of multiple relationships among latent constructs, including both direct and mediation effects. Its prediction-oriented nature is particularly suitable for examining how EO, TOIC, CO, and CEMC contribute to EPTO. PLS-SEM is also appropriate for the study's moderate sample size of 120 respondents and does not require strict multivariate normality assumptions. The analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4, encompassing the assessment of both the measurement and structural models.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model proposed in this study, illustrating the hypothesized relationships among the five constructs: Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC), Customer Orientation (CO), Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC), and Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization (EPTO). The model incorporates five direct relationships (H1–H5) and two mediation effects (H6–H7), reflecting the proposed sequential process through which entrepreneurial orientation and innovation capabilities translate into customer-oriented practices, enhanced customer experience management, and superior entrepreneurial performance.

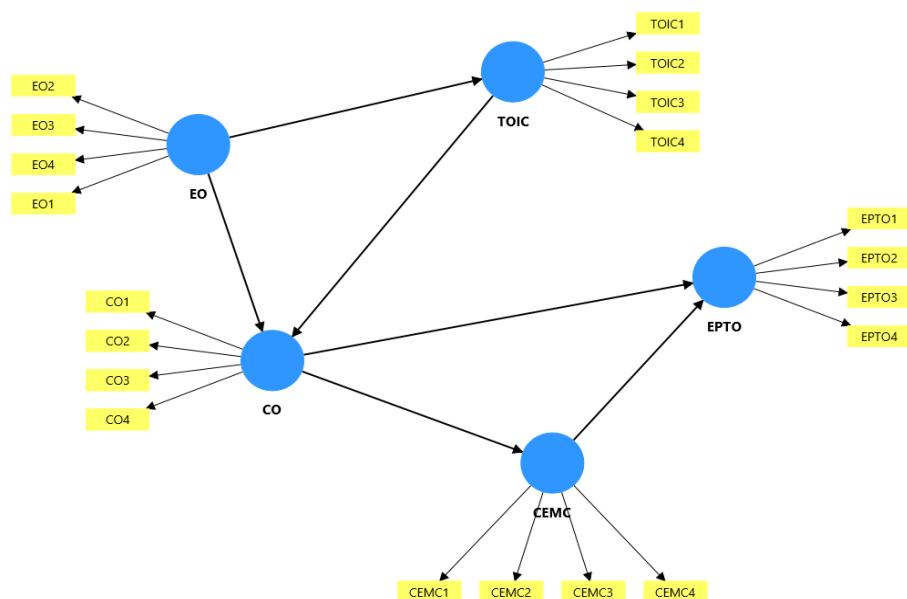


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research

Source: SmartPLS 4 software output

4. Findings

Figure 2 presents the estimated structural model and the path coefficients obtained through the PLS-SEM analysis. The figure provides an overview of the magnitude and direction of the relationships among Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC), Customer Orientation (CO), Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC), and Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization (EPTO).

The outer loadings indicate strong indicator reliability across all five reflective constructs, with values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The consistently high loadings suggest that each indicator shares a substantial proportion of variance with its corresponding latent construct and adequately represents the underlying concept.

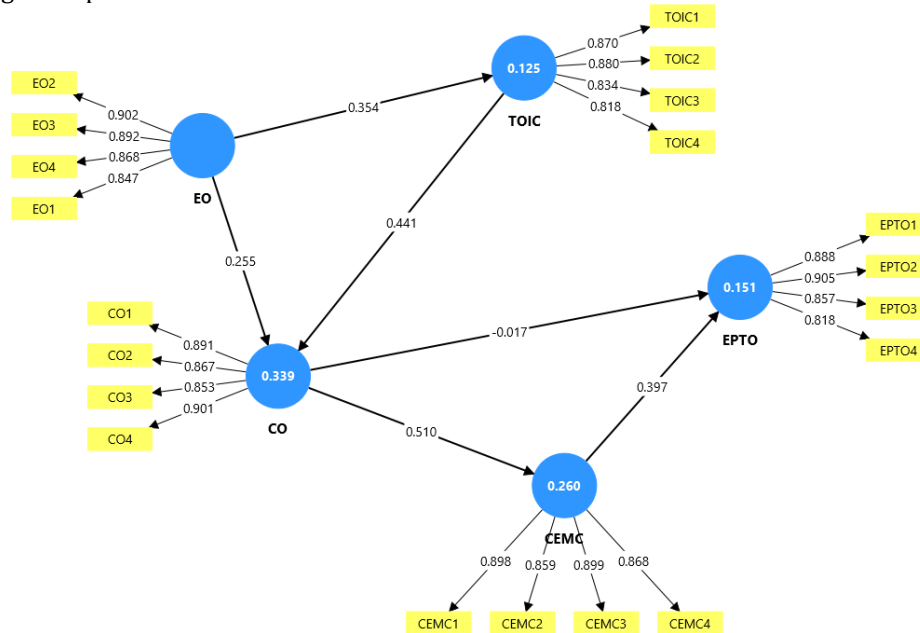


Figure 2. Coefficient paths in the structural model

Source: SmartPLS 4 software output

Figure 2 indicates that all hypothesized direct relationships are positive, providing initial support for the proposed structural model. The strongest relationship is observed between Customer Orientation and Customer Experience Management Capability ($CO \rightarrow CEMC$; $\beta = 0.510$), followed by Tourism Offering Innovation Capability and Customer Orientation ($TOIC \rightarrow CO$; $\beta = 0.441$). Customer Experience Management Capability also shows a substantial positive relationship with Entrepreneurial Performance ($CEMC \rightarrow EPTO$; $\beta = 0.397$), while Entrepreneurial Orientation positively influences both Tourism Offering Innovation Capability ($EO \rightarrow TOIC$; $\beta = 0.354$) and Customer Orientation ($EO \rightarrow CO$; $\beta = 0.255$).

Table 1 presents the assessment of the measurement model in terms of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. The evaluation considers Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the five constructs included in the conceptual model.

Table 1. Convergent validity test

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (ρ_a)	Composite reliability (ρ_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CEMC	0.904	0.907	0.933	0.777
CO	0.901	0.904	0.931	0.771
EO	0.900	0.907	0.930	0.770
EPTO	0.890	0.898	0.924	0.753
TOIC	0.873	0.874	0.913	0.724

Source: SmartPLS 4 software output

Table 1 confirms satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity across all five constructs. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.873 (TOIC) to 0.904 (CEMC), while composite reliability values (ρ_c) range from 0.913 to 0.933, indicating high construct reliability. Moreover, all AVE values substantially exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.724 (TOIC) to 0.777 (CEMC).

Table 2 presents the assessment of discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). We use this criterion in order to evaluate the extent to which the five latent constructs are distinct from one another by examining the correlations between indicators across constructs.

Table 2. Discriminant validity test – Heterotrait – Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Construct	CEMC	CO	EO	EPTO	TOIC
CEMC					
CO	0.562				
EO	0.189	0.454			
EPTO	0.430	0.210	0.182		
TOIC	0.315	0.598	0.393	0.175	

Source: SmartPLS 4 software output

Table 2 confirms satisfactory discriminant validity across the five constructs, as all HTMT values remain well below the commonly recommended threshold of 0.85. The highest HTMT value is observed between TOIC and CO (0.598), followed by CEMC and CO (0.562) and EO and CO (0.454). The remaining inter-construct values are considerably lower, ranging from 0.175 to 0.430.

To assess the significance of the hypothesized relationships, a bootstrapping procedure was performed in SmartPLS 4. This approach was used to estimate the significance of the structural path coefficients and indirect effects based on their corresponding *t*-statistics and *p*-values.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EO -> TOIC	0.354	0.360	0.082	4.300	0.001
EO -> CO	0.255	0.253	0.072	3.557	0.001
TOIC -> CO	0.441	0.445	0.066	6.690	0.001
CO -> CEMC	0.510	0.513	0.071	7.169	0.001
CEMC -> EPTO	0.397	0.407	0.089	4.480	0.001
EO -> TOIC -> CO	0.156	0.160	0.045	3.497	0.001
CO -> CEMC -> EPTO	0.203	0.209	0.056	3.637	0.001

Source: SmartPLS 4 software output

Entrepreneurial Orientation positively and significantly influences Tourism Offering Innovation Capability ($\beta = 0.354$, $t = 4.300$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that organizations with a stronger entrepreneurial orientation demonstrate a greater capacity to develop innovative tourism offerings. This result provides support for H1.

A positive and statistically significant relationship is also observed between Entrepreneurial Orientation and Customer Orientation ($\beta = 0.255$, $t = 3.557$, $p = 0.001$). Entrepreneurially oriented tourism organizations therefore appear more likely to emphasize understanding and responding to tourists' evolving needs and expectations, supporting H2.

Tourism Offering Innovation Capability has a positive and significant effect on Customer Orientation ($\beta = 0.441$, $t = 6.690$, $p = 0.001$). The magnitude of this relationship suggests that the ability to innovate and adapt tourism offerings represents an important mechanism for enhancing organizational responsiveness to customers, thus supporting H3.

Customer Orientation exerts the strongest direct effect identified in the structural model on Customer Experience Management Capability ($\beta = 0.510$, $t = 7.169$, $p = 0.001$). This finding highlights the central role of understanding customer needs and preferences in developing the organizational capability to effectively design and manage tourism experiences, providing support for H4.

Customer Experience Management Capability positively and significantly affects Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization ($\beta = 0.397$, $t = 4.480$, $p = 0.001$). Organizations that are more capable of systematically managing customer experiences therefore tend to report stronger entrepreneurial and competitive outcomes, supporting H5.

The indirect effect of Entrepreneurial Orientation on Customer Orientation through Tourism Offering Innovation Capability is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 3.497$, $p = 0.001$). This result demonstrates that innovation capability acts as a significant mechanism through which entrepreneurial orientation is translated into stronger customer orientation, providing support for the mediation proposed in H6.

Finally, the indirect effect of Customer Orientation on Entrepreneurial Performance through Customer Experience Management Capability is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.203$, $t = 3.637$, $p = 0.001$). Customer orientation therefore contributes to performance by strengthening the organization's ability to transform customer knowledge into effectively managed tourism experiences, supporting the mediation relationship proposed in H7.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how entrepreneurial and customer-centered organizational capabilities interact to enhance the performance of tourism organizations operating in mountain destinations. By integrating Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC), Customer Orientation (CO), Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC), and Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization (EPTO) within a single conceptual framework, the study provides a sequential perspective on how entrepreneurial initiatives can be transformed into customer value and organizational outcomes. The empirical findings support all hypothesized relationships, showing that EO positively influences both TOIC and CO, while TOIC further strengthens CO. Customer orientation emerged as a particularly important antecedent of CEMC, which, in turn, positively contributes to entrepreneurial performance. The mediation results further clarify these mechanisms by demonstrating that TOIC mediates the relationship between EO and CO, while CEMC mediates the relationship between CO and EPTO. Overall, the findings suggest that entrepreneurial behavior generates stronger outcomes when it is translated into innovation capabilities and subsequently embedded in customer-oriented and experience-management practices.

The findings provide relevant managerial implications for mountain tourism organizations. Managers should consider entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, customer orientation, and experience management as complementary rather than independent managerial priorities. Encouraging experimentation and proactively identifying emerging tourism trends should be accompanied by the organizational capacity to translate opportunities into new or substantially improved offerings. This may involve diversifying tourism products, creatively leveraging natural and cultural resources, adopting digital solutions, and adapting services to changing visitor expectations. At the same time, managers should systematically collect and use customer information and feedback to personalize services and coordinate the different touchpoints of the tourism experience. Particular attention should be given to smaller independent and family-owned accommodation businesses, which constitute a substantial part of mountain tourism and may use their organizational flexibility, proximity to customers, and local embeddedness to develop distinctive and authentic experiences.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on a cross-sectional research design, meaning that the relationships identified among the constructs cannot capture their evolution over time. Longitudinal research could investigate how entrepreneurial and customer experience capabilities develop and interact across different stages of organizational development. Second, the empirical investigation is restricted to tourism organizations operating in Romanian mountain destinations, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other geographical and tourism contexts. Comparative studies involving mountain destinations from different countries could determine whether institutional, cultural, or destination-specific conditions influence the proposed relationships. Third, the analysis relies on self-reported assessments provided by managers, potentially introducing common method and perceptual biases. Future studies could combine managerial responses with objective performance indicators, customer evaluations, online reviews, or other secondary data.

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Appendix

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat disagree
- 4 – Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 – Somewhat agree
- 6 – Agree
- 7 – Strongly agree

Construct 1 – Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)

- EO1.** Our organization continuously identifies new development opportunities in mountain tourism.
- EO2.** We introduce innovative tourism services and experiences ahead of our main competitors.
- EO3.** We are willing to invest in innovative projects even when they involve a certain degree of risk.
- EO4.** We anticipate market changes and rapidly adapt our organization's strategies.

Construct 2 – Tourism Offering Innovation Capability (TOIC)

- TOIC1.** We continuously develop new or significantly improved tourism services.
- TOIC2.** We rapidly adapt our tourism offering to changes in tourists' preferences.
- TOIC3.** We creatively leverage local natural and cultural resources in the development of tourism services.
- TOIC4.** We implement technologies and digital solutions to diversify and modernize our tourism services.

Construct 3 – Customer Orientation (CO)

- CO1.** Understanding tourists' needs is a key priority in our decision-making process.
- CO2.** We continuously adapt our services to tourists' needs and preferences.
- CO3.** We systematically analyze information regarding tourists' behavior and expectations.
- CO4.** Our managerial decisions are oriented toward creating superior value for tourists.

Construct 4 – Customer Experience Management Capability (CEMC)

- CEMC1.** We design our tourism services by considering the entire tourist experience before, during, and after service consumption.
- CEMC2.** We systematically collect and use tourist feedback to improve the experience we provide.
- CEMC3.** We personalize tourism services and experiences according to the characteristics of different tourist segments.
- CEMC4.** We ensure effective collaboration between our staff and partners to deliver a consistent and coherent tourism experience.

Construct 5 – Entrepreneurial Performance of the Tourism Organization (EPTO)

- EPTO1.** Over the past three years, our organization has improved its competitive position in the mountain tourism market.
- EPTO2.** The entrepreneurial initiatives implemented by our organization have contributed to improving its economic performance.
- EPTO3.** Our organization attracts and retains tourists to a greater extent than its main competitors.
- EPTO4.** We believe that our organization continuously strengthens its competitive advantage through innovation and customer orientation.