



Double Degree Programme

Value-creating Digital Marketing Practices in Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia: The Mediating Role of Practitioner Enactment and Praxis

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DECLARATION AND STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that this research work on the topic: **“Value-creating Digital Marketing Practices in Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia: The Mediating Role of Practitioner Enactment and Praxis”** is original and the author alone and the work has not been submitted to any other university. All references have been properly acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Meraf Yohannes'.

Meraf Yohannes

June 2025

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ACRONYMS

AI - Artificial Intelligence

AVE – Average Variance Extracted

CB-SEM – Covariance Based Structural Equation Modelling

CoBE – College of Business and Economics

CR – Composite Reliability

CRM – Customer Relationship Management

CSA – Covariance Structure Analysis

DCM – Digital Content Marketing

EC – Environmental Context

ERIC – Education Resources Information Centre

ETOA – Ethiopian Tour Operators Association

eWOM – electronic Word of Mouth

GSCA – Generalized Structured Component Analysis

HC – Human Competence

HRM – Human Resources Management

HTMT – Heterotrait-Monotrait

ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies

IT – Information Technology

ITO – Inbound Tour Operators

KCI – Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures

MAP – Marketing-as-Practice (Practitioner enactment and Praxis)

MDPI – Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute

OC – Organizational Context

ODAD – Journal of Organizational Behaviour Research

PARIHS – Promoting Action on Research Implementation in Health Services

PBS – Practice Based Studies

PLS – Partial Least Square

PMTD – Praxis Model for Technology Development

PR – Public Relations

RBV – Resource Based View

RGU – Robert Gordon University

ROI – Return On Investment

SEM – Structural Equation Modelling

SEO – Search Engine Optimization

SMEs – Small and Medium sized Enterprises

SRMR – Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

TC – Technological Context

TETOA – Talak Ethiopia Tour Operators Association

TOE – Technology-Organization-Environment

UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

VC – Value Creation

VIF – Variance Inflation Factor

VRIN – Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable

ABSTRACT

This study explores how Ethiopia's inbound tour operators (ITOs) adapt digital marketing practices to create business value in the face of changing global tourism system dynamics and competitive challenges. While digital marketing is paramount to improving competitiveness, there remains limited understanding of how practitioners in emerging economies adapt these practices to their specific organizational and environmental contexts. Building on the Marketing-as-Practice (MAP) framework, the Resource-Based-View (RBV), and the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) model, the study uses a mixed-methods approach. It combines SMARTPLS-based quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews, to consider how digital marketing practices are shaped by internal and external contextual factors. The study shows that, while technological, organizational, environmental and human competence contexts all significantly shape practitioner behaviour, they are mediated through, and translated by, practitioners' enactment and praxis, which ultimately drive value creation. Practices relating to social media engagement, CRM integration, and content creation can generate value when meaningfully informed by proactive and context-sensitive enactments by practitioners, while outmoded tools, skill gaps and cultural resistance serve to prevent success. The findings challenge traditional linear models, highlighting the central role of agency in practitioners' ability to leverage digital resources, and help to contribute to advancing theory on marketing praxis and digital transformation in tourism. Practical recommendations for augmenting human capital, fostering digital innovation and improving the competitiveness of Ethiopia's inbound tourism sector are provided.

Key Words: *Inbound Tour Operators; Digital Marketing; Marketing-as-Practice; Practitioner Enactment; Value Creation; Ethiopia*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The global tourism industry is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies. Most tourism businesses, inbound tour operators (ITOs) in particular, are increasingly leveraging digital marketing tools—such as social media platforms, content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and customer relationship management (CRM) systems—to engage international travellers, strengthen brand visibility, and gain competitive advantage (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Ranatunga et al., 2023). Digital marketing not only facilitates real-time communication and customer engagement but also allows tourism firms to tailor offerings, monitor customer behaviour, and assess the performance of promotional strategies. This has positioned digital marketing as a critical factor in shaping tourist perceptions, service quality, and satisfaction (M. Sharafuddin et al., 2024; Dr. Nikhil S., 2023).

Despite the ever-growing tendency to digital marketing all over the world, the application of digital marketing also varies in developed and developing countries like Ethiopia. In rural tourism or tourism development potential areas whose culture and nature have not been corrupted by the modernization are enormous in Ethiopia. Inadequate infrastructures, shortage of digital skills and promotional capacity, disintegrated and uncoordinated marketing efforts are the main known bottlenecks affecting Ethiopia tourism sector performance (Sintayehu T., 2016; Belete J., 2020). Inbound tour operators (ITOs) the main value chain actors of tourism and focuses mainly on Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. ITOs faced various challenges including weak information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure (very limited scope of broadband and mobile internet access, expensive internet service), telecommunications systems development in Ethiopia are monopolistic by state owned telecom companies (Demeke et al., 2016), thus tourism business in Ethiopia still run its operations based on word of mouth marketers or recommendations, and there is limited use of modern digital channels (Adu-Gyamfi & Korneliussen,

Yet the increasing access to mobile technologies and the rapid growth of internet penetration in Ethiopia presents enormous potential. Digital innovations and technologies such as social media marketing, online booking systems, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) are becoming increasingly understood by Ethiopian tour operators as valuable tools for attracting high-value tourists from Europe, North America, and Asia (Gretzel et al., 2015; UNCTAD,

2022). This is certainly true in the Ethiopian capital and ‘gateway city’ Addis Ababa, which is not only the capital of Ethiopia, but also an important entry point of international visitors and home to a variety of ITOs ranging from small companies to large travel enterprises. Furthermore, it has the potential and opportunities to successfully grow its tourism sector because of its status as a diplomatic capital and due to its geographic connectivity (Tessema, 2022; Sheferahu, 2016).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate how inbound tour operators create value and build competitive advantage from adopting and becoming involved, as practitioners, in digital marketing in Addis Ababa. Particularly, the researcher strived to examine how the actors make sense and enact digital marketing practices within prevalent opportunities and limitations in the context of Addis Ababa. The study employed the Marketing-as-Practice (MAP) approach, the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) perspective to interpret how organizational routines, capabilities, and contextual dimensions influence and shape how the engaging in digital marketing becomes strategic.

Through a mixed-methods design, the study explores key questions about which digital practices are mostly used, how and why they are translated in the local reality, and what kind of affordance they provide. The purpose is therefore to provide a rich account of practitioner agency in shaping digital marketing success under bounded resources. The study, consequently, will contribute to theoretical conversations on marketing praxis and digital transformation in tourism and provide practical insights to policy makers, tour operators and development partners with an interest to foster a more competitive and sustainable tourism sector in Ethiopia.

1.2. Problem Statement

The rapid digital transformation of the tourism industry has significantly reshaped how inbound tour operators engage with prospective travellers, particularly through digital marketing. While research has examined the strategic use of digital tools (e.g., social media, content marketing, SEO) in tourism (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Järvinen & Karjalainen, 2015), there remains a lack of nuanced understanding of how digital marketing practices are enacted and adapted by practitioners in real-world organizational contexts. Much of the existing literature emphasizes technological capabilities and outcomes (Pereira & Ribeiro, 2016; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2017), but often overlooks the everyday actions, routines, and reflexive adaptations of marketing professionals that constitute these practices in situ.

Moreover, although the concept of value creation through digital marketing is well acknowledged, limited attention has been paid to the social and organizational processes—or praxis—that underpin sustained competitive advantage in this domain. This presents a significant gap, particularly in the application of practice theory to the tourism marketing field. Practice theory offers a valuable lens to explore how digital marketing is not merely a set of tools or strategies, but a dynamic constellation of routinised behaviours, tools, and shared knowledge enacted by practitioners (Reckwitz, 2002; Nicolini, 2012).

In the context of inbound tour operators—who must adapt to changing traveller expectations, global competition, and digital disruption—understanding how practitioners enact, adapt, and maintain digital marketing practices is critical to sustaining long-term competitiveness. However, empirical studies of enactment and practitioner praxis remain scarce, especially in small to medium-size inbound tourism enterprises embedded in culturally and geographically diverse markets.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining the value-creating digital marketing practices of inbound tour operators in Ethiopia through the practice theory lens. By zooming in on practitioner enactment and praxis, this research aims to uncover how digital marketing practices are developed, adapted and embedded in organisational routines to drive competitive advantage.

It is interesting how inbound tour operators are really leaning into digital tools nowadays. Things like CRM platforms, AI personalization, and data analytics are becoming standard for marketing. Nevertheless, even though these companies are investing in the tech, there is often a real disconnect when it comes to the people side of things. Practitioners don't always have the right skills—or the time—to fully make use of what these tools can offer.

The hard reality is that marketing doesn't happen in a vacuum whereby a lot of what's done is shaped through interactions within the industry—through networks, partnerships, or even just shared norms.

Still, there is limited knowledge about a few key things:

- How exactly do these tour operators connect their use of marketing tech with practitioner skills to 'actually' create value?

- How do marketing practices shift and evolve across different firms, especially in a way that builds broader digital capabilities for the sector?
- And how does the Marketing-as-Practice lens help us make sense of how marketing strategies are being put into action in real tourism businesses?

There is a big research opportunity here, especially if one wants to understand not just the tools, but how people ‘*use*’ them in practice.

Ethiopian inbound tour operators face challenges in adopting and leveraging technology, despite the growing importance of digital literacy in tourism. While some firms have embraced digital booking platforms, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and artificial intelligence-based services, many still rely on traditional methods. The lack of empirical research on the relationship between technology adoption, technological competence, and value creation in Ethiopia’s inbound tourism sector presents a knowledge gap. This study seeks to bridge this gap by evaluating the factors influencing technology adoption, assessing the technological competence of tour operators, and identifying strategies to enhance digital capabilities for improved performance.

By addressing these gaps, this study aims to enhance the knowledge about strategic application of marketing technologies in the inbound tourism sector.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What digital marketing practices do inbound tour operators in Ethiopia enact, and how do practitioners adapt these practices in response to contextual factors? (Araujo et al., 2010; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990)
2. How do digital marketing resources and organizational and environmental factors influence the enactment of marketing practices and resulting marketing praxis? (Barney, 1991; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990)
3. How does the enacted digital marketing praxis contribute to value creation for inbound tour operators? (Araujo et al., 2010; Barney, 1991)

1.4. Research Objectives

1.4.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to identify Value-Creating Digital Marketing Practices in Inbound Tour Operators by Examining Practitioner Enactment and Praxis for Competitive Advantage

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

1. To identify and describe the digital marketing practices enacted by inbound tour operators in Ethiopia and examine how marketing practitioners adapt these practices in response to organizational and environmental factors.
2. To assess the influence of digital marketing resources, organizational readiness, and environmental pressures on the enactment and effectiveness of digital marketing practices among inbound tour operators.
3. To analyse how the enactment of digital marketing praxis by practitioners contributes to value creation for inbound tour operators.

1.5. Scope of the Study

Creswell (2009) noted that narrowing down a research project by specifying a period, location, population, or issue to be examined enables the researcher to concentrate on the focus and tackle the research problem efficiently in terms of resources and time. Consequently, this study will concentrate solely on Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia, with a particular emphasis on those based in Addis Ababa. The target population for this study will be limited to the Executive staff, as they are considered knowledgeable enough to answer the questionnaire. Additionally, the study will be confined to the perspectives on the performance of these inbound tour operators. Other industry participants, such as hotels or airlines, are not included in this research, although the findings may also be beneficial to other stakeholders.

1.5.1. Thematic Scope

In the fast-paced world of marketing, the use of technology is crucial in gaining a competitive position and interacting with customers (Asikin et al., 2024; Monika & Kavita, 2024). Digital marketing is growing rapidly where advancement requires complete knowledge of techniques needed to reach the audience (Minga & Przybylska, 2024). Therefore, this study aims at exploring the primary issues of practicing digital marketing and assessing the competencies of

marketers in embracing technological advancements. Research on these two areas is expected to address the issues regarding the effectiveness of digital marketing practices in the industry.

This study focuses on the most used strategies of digital marketing such as website optimization, social media SEO, content and email marketing, CRM marketing, pay per click advertising, and AI and data analysis tools for marketing. These components need further attention from corporate management to improve organization's visibility, engagement, and conversions (Minga & Przybylska, 2024; Monika & Kavita, 2024).

Moreover, this research strives to assess the level of proficiency possessed by marketers regarding the newest technologies to enhance their practices. The evaluation is going to focus on two main areas: soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills in this case refer to the management or segmentation of clients to be categorized, digital marketing deployment, and quantitative evaluation and ROI interpretation. Encompassing both technical and strategic elements, this assessment aims to address the practical violence involving foreign skill sets and the strategies to be implemented to improve their productivity within the context of advanced digital marketing environment.

With such broad scope, we hope to enhance the ongoing debate around digital marketing efficacy and prepare the workforce with essential skills, providing valuable insights for academic inquiry and real-world applications.

1.5.2. Geographic Scope

Due to time and economic constraints, the study was limited to those inbound tour operators in Addis Ababa only and did not include firms in other regions.

1.6. Limitation of the Study

The limitation of the study is attributed to limited availability of resources. There are very few limited reference materials available on the study subject matter in the context of Ethiopia that could be used as secondary reference and to be used as comparison source for the study findings. Moreover, the limitation in time and cost to conduct the study influenced the selection of the firms that are in a particular geography (Addis Ababa) and third, the data is collected from one sub – sector in the tourism and hospitality industry and thus has effect to generalize the findings to the industry.

1.7. Significance of the Study

The growing online presence of the tourism sector has changed the ways in which inbound tour operators interact with overseas travellers, and digital marketing is an essential requirement for their business success and survivability. Although a great deal of the extant research on HRM in the human resource and marketing literature has centred on digital marketing strategies, consumer behaviour and technology adoption, there remains a significant dearth in our understanding of the experiences and practices of marketing professionals who are directly involved in implementing and developing digital marketing strategies on the ground.

The contribution of this study is that it provides a new theoretical lens (practice theory) to analyze how inbound tour operators perform and modify their digital marketing practices to generate value and obtain competitive advantage. Unlike classic research, which centres on strategy or technology, we spotlight marketing professionals' real-world behaviour, practices and reflections. It offers valuable implications for small/medium-sized tour operators which hopes to better its online presence and offers contributions to organisational learning and innovation. It provides also context-based knowledge for policymakers and for tourism industry stakeholders that are interested in strengthening digital capabilities.

1.8. Operational Definitions

Definition of Key Concepts:

Technological Context: Refers to the internal and external technologies relevant to an organization, including existing digital infrastructure, access to digital tools (e.g., social media platforms, CRM systems, and analytics software), and the perceived ease of use and usefulness of these technologies. In this study, it captures the extent to which inbound tour operators in Ethiopia adopt and utilise digital marketing technologies (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Oliveira & Martins, 2011).

Organizational Context: Represents the internal capabilities and characteristics of a firm that influence its ability to implement digital marketing, such as organizational size, structure, leadership support, and availability of resources. It refers to how these organizational factors support or hinder the integration of digital marketing practices (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Baker, 2012).

Environmental Context: Denotes the external factors surrounding an organization, including industry competition, customer expectations, regulatory frameworks, and technological change. This study considers how these external pressures affect tour operators' engagement in digital marketing (Oliveira & Martins, 2011; Ifinedo, 2011).

Human Competence: Describes the knowledge, skills, and abilities of marketing practitioners required to implement digital marketing strategies effectively. It focuses on digital literacy, creativity, and adaptability of staff within inbound tour operations in Ethiopia (Grant, 1991; Teece, 2007; Chinomona & Sandada, 2013).

Practitioner Enactment and Praxis: This refers to how operators implement digital marketing strategies, shaped by both theoretical insights and practical realities in the Ethiopian tourism context. The operationalization here could investigate how these practices are situated within the socio-economic fabric of the country, with an emphasis on cooperation among different tourism stakeholders, as discussed by Abdalla et al. regarding coopetition dynamics in the tourism sector (Abdalla et al., 2022).

Value-Creating Digital Marketing Practices: This encompasses strategies that enhance customer engagement, improve brand awareness, and increase sales through digital platforms, including social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing. The application of the Resource-Based View (RBV) can guide understanding how such practices can leverage unique resources inherent to Ethiopian inbound tour operators to create competitive advantages (Buhalis, 2019).

1.9. Organization of the Study

This thesis has five chapters.

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces the thesis. It contains the introduction, background, research problem, objectives, scope, significance of the study, limitations, and operational definitions of keywords.

Chapter 2: This chapter reviewed prior literature and investigated the details of including different models that explain the listed variables and their relationships.

Chapter 3: This chapter describes the data collection tool, methodology, research process, and data analysis methods.

Chapter 4: The fourth chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 5: Finally, the thesis was summarized with conclusions and recommendations based on the findings

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

2.1.1 Practice Theory as a Theoretical Lens

Practice Theory provides a useful lens through which to examine how digital marketing is performed and emerges in organizations. Practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996; Nicolini, 2012) conceptualises practices as routinised behaviours that consist of the interlinking of materials (e.g. digital tools), competences (skills) and meanings (intentions, shared meanings). These practices are understood to be also socially situated, historically contingent, and always emergent.

The Practice-based studies (PBS) is the innovation in the study of organisation (S. Katila, 2020). The practice-based study focuses on the collective forms of knowing, doing or the organising (Gherardi, 2019; Silvia Gherardi's, 2021). In the book *How to Conduct a Practice-Based Study*, Silvia Gherardi provides students and researchers with a thorough-yet-accessible guide to the theory and application of PBS methodology. She emphasises the inextricable links between humans and technology, which leads her to propose a posthumanist approach. The book will cultivate readers' sensibilities to the methodological implications of their own work by presenting and discussing accessible accounts of PBS scholars at work in organization studies. (Gherardi, 2019). Gherardi suggests that forms of knowing are entrenched in the material world and knowledge is in things rather than residing in people's head. Meanwhile, she indicates that practical knowledge or practices are pragmatic, situated temporally, discursively and materially as well as in historical-cultural surroundings (Iben Jensen, 2015). The practice-based approach integrates aspects such as aesthetics, embodiment and sociomateriality. Thus, it also opens new vistas on organizational phenomena, particularly those that become visible when the lens is shifted towards "the apparently insignificant" and the "ordinary": 'small objects can be beautiful (Silvia Gherardi's, 2021). "Practice-based studies on knowing and learning in organizations have gained considerable traction in the past years, providing valuable insights for research in management and organisational studies (S. Katila, 2020)

Under the inbound tourism stream, practice theory helps examine how digital marketing is not simply implemented through a predetermined strategy; rather, it is performed and developed through lived experiences and exchanges of practitioners. As theorists such as Orlikowski (2000) have observed, technology is taken up and used through lived practices; it is not simply

used in a vacuum according to what it ‘is’. It is interpreted, negotiated, mediated, and modified through everyday practices within the organizations. The theory enables an analysis of how practices of digital marketing are enacted, sustained, and transformed. Practitioners do not only implement marketing or follow a static plan, but they also perform marketing as lived practices. Practice theory thus enables an understanding of how praxis is performed, sustained, and developed, through focusing on the reflexive occasions in which practitioners adapt and negotiate digital marketing routines (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

2.1.2 Marketing as a Practice (MAP) Framework

The MAP framework (Figure 2.1) conceptualises marketing as a set of everyday practices shaped by the routines, skills, and tools used by marketers, rather than solely as strategic planning (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007). This perspective is instrumental for analysing how Ethiopian inbound tour operators engage with digital marketing in context-specific ways. It shifts attention from marketing outcomes to the socio-cultural and institutional processes through which marketing is performed, highlighting the dynamic interplay between practitioner capabilities and technological tools.

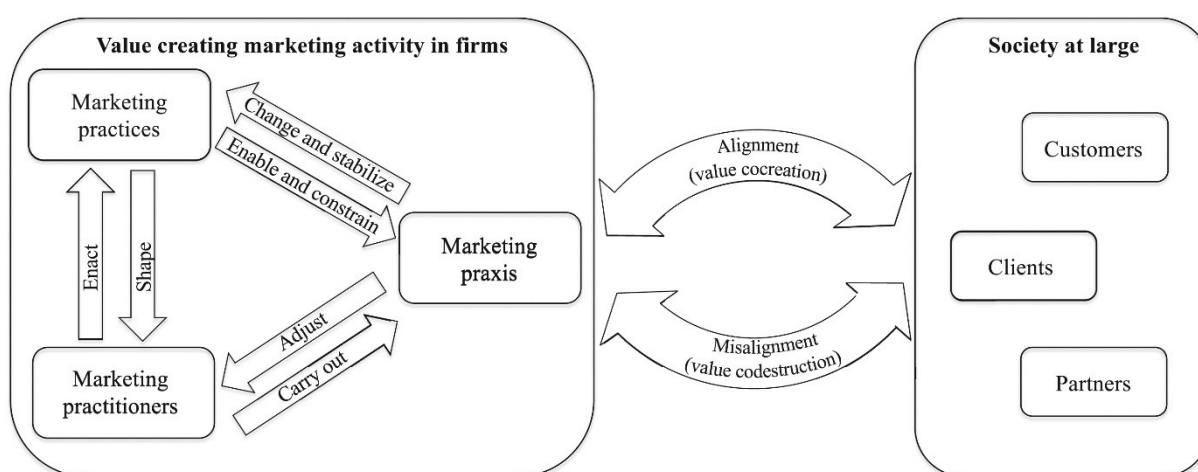


Figure 2.1. Marketing-as-Practice Framework (MAP) Source: Skålen, P., et al., (2022).

A. Practitioner Behaviour and Contextual Dynamics

MAP provides a useful lens to understand how Ethiopian tour operators adapt digital marketing to fit local cultural narratives and consumer behaviour. This echoes broader tourism scholarship, such as Buhalis (2019), which underscores the necessity of contextually informed marketing strategies—like tailoring content to reflect visitor experiences and cultural relevance. Additionally, the framework helps analyse how operators respond to external shocks—like

COVID-19 or economic downturns—by adjusting their digital strategies to maintain resilience and relevance (Hsu et al., 2023).

B. Marketing Practice as a Site of Value Co-Creation

Value generation in tourism marketing is seen through the interaction between practitioner expertise and digital tools. MAP highlights how these interactions contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty. This aligns with Huang et al. (2014), who emphasize the role of interpretive skills in enhancing tourist engagement. Thus, operators' ability to translate tourism experiences into compelling digital narratives is key to delivering perceived value.

C. Competitive Pressures and Innovation

MAP also sheds light on the challenges tour operators face in a competitive landscape. For instance, informal competitors can pressure formal businesses to refine service quality and marketing efforts (Abdalla et al., 2022). The framework enables exploration of how formal operators creatively respond by using local knowledge to innovate and differentiate their digital marketing strategies (Mwesiumo et al., 2021). These adaptive practices are essential for sustaining a competitive edge in a fluid and informal tourism economy.

2.1.3 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm (Barney, 1991) offers a foundational perspective for analysing how inbound tour operators in Ethiopia can attain competitive advantage through the strategic use of internal resources. Centred on the VRIN attributes—valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable—the RBV framework emphasizes leveraging distinctive assets and capabilities to generate sustained performance in a competitive environment. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant for exploring value creation via digital marketing in the Ethiopian tourism context.

A. Identifying Strategic Resources

RBV distinguishes between tangible assets (e.g., digital infrastructure) and intangible ones (e.g., cultural expertise, local stakeholder networks), both of which can be mobilized for strategic marketing. Ethiopian tour operators can utilise culturally embedded knowledge, specialized offerings, and trust-based local relationships to differentiate their digital strategies (Uyanik, 2023). These resources, when recognized and effectively used, contribute directly to marketing value and competitiveness.

B. Building Capabilities for Competitive Edge

Beyond identifying resources, RBV highlights the need for firms to develop competencies in deploying them. For inbound operators, this includes digital fluency, content creation skills, and data-driven customer engagement (Nath et al., 2010). Through RBV, one can examine how such capabilities are cultivated to enhance responsiveness and market performance in digitally mediated environments.

C. Innovation Through Resource Integration

The ability to combine and adapt resources underpins innovation, a key aspect of RBV. Ethiopian operators can integrate human capital, local knowledge, and technology to create novel marketing approaches. This aligns with findings by Nath et al. (2010), who show that performance gains often stem from resource synergy, not just possession. For instance, blending traditional narratives with digital storytelling may yield compelling marketing propositions.

D. Aligning Internal Resources with Market Realities

Although RBV centres on internal strengths, its strategic application requires sensitivity to external dynamics such as competition, customer expectations, and regulatory factors. The model thus supports analysing how firms can adapt resource use in response to shifting market conditions, enhancing marketing flexibility and strategic fit (Peteraf & Barney, 2003).

E. Sustaining Long-Term Advantage

Central to RBV is the idea of continuous resource development to maintain advantage. In the context of Ethiopian inbound tourism, this means that operators must invest in evolving capabilities—technological, human, and relational—to remain relevant amid industry fluctuations (Hu & Kee, 2021). Strategic resource management, therefore, becomes essential for resilience and long-term success.

RBV serves as a vital analytical framework for examining how inbound tour operators in Ethiopia can derive competitive advantage through digital marketing by mobilizing their distinctive resources and capabilities.

- **Resource Identification and Leverage:** Operators often possess unique cultural insights, localized service offerings, and digital tools. The RBV helps investigate how these are transformed into marketing assets (Gupta & Malhotra, 2013).

- **Capability Assessment:** Effective digital marketing depends on capabilities in content design, platform management, and data analysis. The RBV lens uncovers where skill gaps lie and where capacity-building is needed (Khin & Ho, 2019).
- **Innovation Enablement:** Innovation stems from creatively combining resources. Tour operators that use local stories, user-generated content, or niche packages exemplify how RBV supports marketing differentiation (Liu et al., 2022; Pratono, 2023).
- **Strategic Positioning via Resource Configuration:** RBV reveals how resource integration—such as combining cultural capital with digital tools—enhances market positioning (Chen et al., 2023).
- **Resilience Through Resource Adaptation:** In disruptive environments, pandemics or economic shocks (Zhang et al., 2022) RBV can provide a way to understand how firms re-arrange resources to be flexible

To sum up, the Resource-Based View framework provides a firm foundation for analysing how firms (Ethiopian inbound tour operators) can create and sustain competitive advantage through digital marketing. By focusing on the strategic use and continual development of internal resources and capabilities, RBV offers a reliable approach to understanding value creation in a rapidly evolving tourism sector.

2.1.4 Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) Framework

The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework by Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990) offers a multidimensional perspective to elucidate how digital marketing practices are adopted and implemented by inbound tour operators in Ethiopia. Examining the nexus of technological capabilities, organizational readiness, and environmental influences, TOE promotes a meaningful assessment of the enabling and constraining factors shaping marketing innovation within the tourism sector.

A. Technological Dimension

The technological context concerns the availability, operation, and perceived usefulness of digital tools. Tourism sector marketing frequently relies on technologies such as social networking sites, customer analytics systems, and CRM systems to generate visibility and foster engagement. Vinh et al. (2023) demonstrate that the effective adoption of technological resources is related to enhanced marketing capabilities and responsiveness to customers.

In Ethiopia, infrastructural and limited access to digital tools may pose a challenge to broad adoption of new technology. Still, TOE model suggests inquiring into how existing

technologies can be capitalized upon and/or adapted for increased competitiveness at home and abroad.

B. Organizational Dimension

Organizational factors are the internal capabilities of the firm such as the size of the firm and the characteristics of leadership, strategic orientation, and human resources that affect technology adoption. Existing studies notably emphasize the decisive impact of leadership support and digital literacy on the tourism enterprises' innovation process (Hoti, 2015).

For Ethiopian inbound tour operators, gaining insight into how internal decision-making structures and workforce skills influence digital marketing strategies may identify opportunities to facilitate a more innovative organisational orientation. The aspect also highlights the notion of how internal processes align with technological goals to enhance performance.

C. Environmental Dimension

The environmental context of the TOE framework reflects external pressures, such as those related to competition, regulatory regimes, and consumer expectations. As evidenced by Fahim et al. (2022) as well as Elsaeed et al. (2024), the larger socio-economic and market context can have a notable impact on firms' willingness to embrace new technologies.

The environmental analysis is beneficial to the operators in Ethiopia because it shows how competition dynamics and changing consumer behaviour force them to change their marketing strategies. It helps them to be responsive and aware of their marketing strategies within their contexts. In their study of digital platform for digital transformation of innovation, Li, Yigitcanlar & Foth (2022) stressed the power of the TOE framework in testing the understanding value in digital transformation. The framework has three components by linking the context of technological infrastructure, that of organisational infrastructure and environmental.

D. Integrative Understanding of Value Creation

In practice, TOE application empowers inbound operators to evaluate digital readiness, identify organizational loopholes and better serve the market conditions. The holistic picture allows operators to create personalized, and customer intended marketing strategies to increase customer awareness, value and competitive advantage in the long run.

TOE framework provides a strong analytical frame to examine how Ethiopian inbound tour operators adopt and embark on digital marketing practice. The interaction of technological, organizational, and environmental contexts will facilitate the understanding of the contextual challenges/ opportunities, thereby providing appropriate marketing strategies.

2.1.5 Integration of the MAP, RBV, and TOE Frameworks

The researcher strongly believes that developing a comprehensive understanding of value-creating digital marketing practices of inbound tour operators in Ethiopia requires synthesising insights from three complementary theoretical lenses: the Marketing-as-Practice (MAP) framework, the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm and Technology-Organisation-Environment (TOE) model. These three theoretical perspectives offer different but not necessarily alternative insights. When used together, they provide a multidimensional and complementary analytical basis. This section reviews how the recursive combination of these theories informs the conceptual lens of this study.

A. Practitioner Enactment and Resource Utilization

The MAP framework considers marketing as a constellation of contextually embedded practices accomplished by professionals. It focuses on the interpretative and performative qualities of marketing work and looks at how practitioners make sense of their environment and make strategy come true through their engagement with consumers and their performances of routine practices.

This lens is complemented by the RBV, which draws attention to the strategic nature of internal firm resources on enabling competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Such resources may, for instance, include digital literacy, access to marketing technology, localized cultural knowledge, and strong community networks (Pretis & Osimani, 2019) in the case of inbound tour operators.

In a study drawing on MAP and the RBV, the researcher examines not only what firms have, but also how practitioners interactively engage with and mobilise resources in their daily marketing practices. This joint perspective provides understanding of how the enactment of marketing is contingent on both practitioner agency and organisational capacity.

B. Technological and Organizational Alignment

Extending this analytical framework, the TOE framework considers structural factors to influence technology adoption. In particular, the TOE framework considers three contexts—

namely, technological (e.g., the usability of the system and digital infrastructure), organizational (e.g., firm size, managerial support, digital skills), and environmental (e.g., competition, market trends, and policy environment) – into consideration when analysing adoption behaviour (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990).

When paired with the RBV, the TOE provides a framework for assessing how internal capabilities match up to external demands and the available technical options. This combined view is especially pertinent to Ethiopia's tourism context, in which inbound tour operators frequently face the challenge of aligning limited infrastructure with changing consumer expectations and competitive pressure (Abdalla et al., 2022).

This configuration of resources within the firm and enablers outside the firm is fundamental for formulating effective digital marketing strategies and is an important axis of analysis in this research.

C. Environmental Adaptation and Strategic Responsiveness

The environment context of the TOE framework identifies the impact of the context, in terms of regulatory environment, socio-economic context and informal competition, on marketing practice. These pressures shape the extent to which firms mobilise their resources and adopt technologies.

RBV highlights the environmental pressures and demand signals affecting advertising in the third-party pay dispute (Barwise & Meehan, 2010), followed by consideration of how such pressures affect advertising. RBV in this context identifies how firms react in the face of such pressures by modifying resources and adapting strategy (Liu & Hull, 2015). In MAP, attention is focused on how individual members of marketing staff make sense of and navigate such

This triangulation offers a window into understanding how Ethiopian inbound tour operators adapt their marketing strategies to changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and competition within the industry to improve their innovation and resilience capabilities.

D. Innovation and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Innovation for sustained competitive advantage is at the overlap of these three research frameworks: RBV treats innovation through the strategic deployment of rare and inimitable

resources. MAP frames innovation through the practices of practitioners, as they improvise and adapt. TOE indicates the technological and environmental constraints for innovation to occur (Isoherranen & Kess, 2011; Shultz et al., 2012).

Taken together, these frameworks comprehensively guide Ethiopian tour operators in understanding how to utilise internal capabilities and digital tools to co-create value with customers and achieve long-lasting market differentiation.

E. Summary of Theoretical Integration

The proposed synthesis of MAP, RBV and TOE with the aim of exploring digital marketing practices assumes that digital marketing organisations in the Ethiopian inbound tourism industry perform marketing as a practical day-to-day activity (MAP), as a resource-dependent process of resources (RBV) and as a technology-mediated phenomenon embedded in a fluid environment, and that collectively these notions would provide a comprehensive theoretical insight.

By examining the interplay between practitioner agency, firm-level resources, and external contingencies, this study is positioned to offer a rich and context-sensitive analysis of how inbound tour operators create value through digital marketing. This integrated framework serves as the theoretical backbone of the research and informs both the design and interpretation of empirical findings.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Digital Marketing in Global Tourism: Trends, Practices, and Challenges

Digital technologies have changed the entire world of the tourism industry. Digital marketing is also at the heart of tourism firms' competitiveness and means of communication and value co-creation with tourists (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Inbound tour operators use digital marketing as a strategic medium and not just a way to sell to and/or attract tourists, but as tools that influence tourist interaction, experience and wellbeing (Dr. Nikhil S., 2023) and destination competitiveness (Gupta, 2018).

A. Evolving Role of Digital Marketing in Tourism

The advent of digital marketing is redefining the way in which tourism services are marketed and consumed. More precisely, the Internet has become a real want to real time information

about tourist services as it makes it possible for tourists to experience the images, reviews, and content that directly impact the influx of visitors to certain tourism destinations (Gupta, 2018). Unlike traditional form of marketing communication strategies, the digital ones provide in real time insights into consumer behaviour and consumption activities and easily track their performance (Meçe, 2023), as well as impact perceptions on tourism service quality, promotional offers, and sustainability, which also affect satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Sharafuddin et al., 2024). Therefore, it is imperative to align digital marketing strategies with sustainability and service quality initiatives to enhance the attractiveness of tourism destination and build long-term relationships with tourists (Chin et al., 2021; Ramadan et al., 2023).

B. Tools, Engagement, and Consumer Empowerment

Digital tools, including social media platforms, content marketing, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and search engine optimization (SEO), have transformed the way in which tourism experiences are marketed and consumed (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Specifically, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TripAdvisor have facilitated an environment for tourists to become co-creators of value, whereby tourists share experiences and influence the decisions of peers (Garcia-Haro et al., 2021). Empowered in this participatory environment, firms are placed under greater pressure to deliver. Consequently, consumer power has shifted to the extent that a consumer, rather than an organisation, holds a

The range of tools--search engine, email marketing, digital advertising, online PR, etc.--broadened their targeting and personalization options. Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain and IoT enabled companies to achieve hyper-personalization and better operational efficiency, but the tools introduced other problems to solve, such as data privacy issues and integration difficulties (Safonov et al., 2024).

C. Digital Transformation Challenges in SMEs

Yet, adopting digital marketing into small and medium sized tourism enterprises (SMEs)' business has been a challenging task. Lack of managerial cognisance, resource disadvantages and uneven access to technologies hinder SMEs effectively embracing digital transformation (Alford & Jones, 2020; Kraft et al., 2022); SMEs face challenge in embedding ICT in their operational business models and adapting to their antiquated business practices in the digital age (Bocarando Lara et al., 2017). Although peer networks and engagement with academia have proven to be successful in enhancing digital literacy (Alford & Jones, 2020), how digital work

are enacted as part of their daily business activities is still ill-understood (Lokuge & Duan, 2021).

D. Gaps in Existing Research

Notwithstanding a wealth of studies on digital marketing, the extant literature is still predominantly guided by adoption models and outcome-oriented performance frameworks (Järvinen & Karjaluoto, 2015), eluding the social and organizational dimensions of digital practice in constructively situated contexts. A particular dimension of digital practice that the literature has shied away from is the practitioner-level dynamisms in the enactment of digital tools (how practitioners use, appropriate, and resist them while being influenced by their norms and values) and how prominent these digital dynamics are in developing contexts and amongst SMEs in dealing with consumers (their practices are the outcome of mutually dependent interactions of individuals, digital tools, and contextual factors). Addressing this is the focus of this study as it attempts to establish the situated and embodied practice of digital marketing enactment in Ethiopia's inbound tourism.

2.2.2 Value Creation Through Digital Marketing: A Practice-Based and Human-Centred Perspective

Digital marketing creates value not only by increasing levels of consumer satisfaction and loyalty, but also by positively enhancing the firm's competitive positioning. In the context of digital marketing, Digital Content Marketing (DCM) facilitates these goals through perceived relevance by building engagement and trust and increasing the strength of the consumer-brand relationship (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). In practice, DCM is concerned with value co-creation and experiential engagement. Essentially, it is how firms use content that allows customers to actively engage in crafting their experiences (Rowley, 2008). Loyalty, in turn, sustains competitive advantage by driving repeat revenue, word-of-mouth advocacy, and customer acquisition efficiency (Arslan, 2020).

More recently, AI has become instrumental in value creation through hyper-personalized recommendations, predictive modelling, and optimization of marketing workflows. Machine learning enables firms to tailor offerings, anticipate needs, and enhance user engagement, while predictive analytics uncovers behavioural trends and customer lifecycle shifts. AI also supports operational efficiency by identifying strengths and areas for improvement. However, challenges like data privacy and implementation costs remain barriers (Zupok, 2024).

In tourism, digital marketing adds value by delivering personalized experiences, building trust, and leveraging data analytics for smarter decision-making (Vecchio et al., 2017). Mobile apps simplify user interactions, while user-generated content on social platforms amplifies trust and engagement (Bharti et al., 2024). Context-aware digital systems further enrich customer journeys by aligning services with situational and individual preferences (Kachniewska, 2014). Multichannel strategies—especially websites and social media—extend visibility, with personalization and eWOM playing key roles in boosting brand perception (Sakas et al., 2022).

Much of the digital marketing literature prioritizes strategic outcomes, often overlooking the organizational processes and human dynamics that enable them (Lueg & Lueg, 2018). Recent research acknowledges the importance of human agency—roles, negotiations, power structures—in shaping customer engagement and loyalty outcomes (Lahcen YachouAityassine et al., 2022). Social media, while powerful, requires careful integration to mitigate associated risks (Toulis, 2022). Moreover, digital marketing strategies in SMEs show stronger performance when complemented by talent management, suggesting that strategic effectiveness relies on ambidextrous organizational capabilities (Pergelova & Yordanova, 2024). These findings align with earlier views that strategy formation is deeply intertwined with internal social structures and actors' influence (Hutt et al., 1988).

A practice-based perspective reframes value creation, shifting from firm-centric offerings to customer practices as the unit of analysis (Korkman et al., 2010; Holttinen, 2013). Within such processes, value originates in the socially constructed practices that incorporate the product into a broader – than a use situation – socio-material context. Rather than fixed, value emerges as a transactional property, co-created, not in standalone use acts but in the nested and scaffolded practices of service ecosystems (Holttinen, 2010). This approach is consistent with the postmodern marketing horizon, which stresses the need for firms to function as upholstery of customers' practices and not only as extending the production model (Dominici & Yolles, 2016).

In tourism, this perspective suggests that value is co-created (or sometimes diminished) through the many ways in which offerings combine with the everyday practices of the holiday makers (Sørensen et al., 2020). Understanding the meaning structures of different practices enables tourism operators to enrich or change value propositions by adapting to or innovating the practice's current patterns (Holttinen, 2013). Entrepreneurs can experience mutual value-creation from participating in practices that put offerings in use by embedding themselves in

consumer practices and treating their competences as ingredients in the customers' practices, not means for structuring consumers' experiences (Korkman et al., 2010).

2.2.3 Practitioner Enactment and Praxis: Enactment and Praxis in Organizational Contexts

Enactment and praxis are key notions of practice theory. Whereas enactment captures the performance of practices in given settings, contingent on resources, norms and objects at hand, the notion of praxis highlights the reflective and adaptive nature of practice, in the sense that practitioners continuously adjust actions according to new emerging situations (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

In digital marketing, this may include responding to platform algorithm changes, trying out different content formats, or learning from campaign analytics. Praxis occurs at a micro-level and is often invisible in top-down strategy frameworks and yet is vital to longevity, competitiveness, and innovation (Warde, 2005). As inbound tour operators operate in volatile and competitive markets, a grounded understanding of the praxis undertaken by practitioners can show the key mechanisms which drive digital marketing success.

2.2.4 Competitive Advantage in Tourism

Abundant empirical research supports the importance of adopting digital resources for firms to attain competitive advantage in tourism. Firms with improved digital resources (e.g., digital marketing, analytics capability) were found to have significant advantages. For example, firms with improved analytics capability were found to have better customer retention and a larger market share. This provides evidence for the RBV's view that a firm's stronger resource base leads to better competitive positioning in the tourism market (Kumar & Rodrigues 2020). In addition, RBV suggests that firm-specific resources can produce considerable competitive advantage if digital resources are used effectively in digital marketing practice.

Moreover, brand differentiation has become explored dimension of Ethiopian inbound tourism. (Gelaw et al., 2023) demonstrates that unique content such as virtual tour of Ethiopian heritage sites can be a powerful differentiator, allowing operators to distinguish themselves in a competitive market. This differentiation can attract customers and increase their engagement with the unique cultural and historical storytelling associated with Ethiopian tourism, ultimately enhancing customer loyalty (Gelaw et al., 2023). However, despite the compelling examples in existing literature of these resources, the practical considerations of such resources remain unexplored.

2.2.5 Digital Marketing in Ethiopian Tourism: Current Trends and Emerging Opportunities

Digital marketing in the Ethiopian tourism industry is rapidly evolving with the increasing use of social media and mobile technology. Assessing the present status and opportunities is important for actors who want to leverage digital technology to promote tourism.

A. Current Landscape

Digital Platforms including social media in Ethiopia tourism marketing Digital platforms including social media allow for direct communication with customers and are an essential parts of tourism marketing (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Studies done have showed the role of user generated content and interactions created through social media has caused to increase engagement and visibility for marketers (Shamy et al., 2023; Deb & Mallik, 2023; Icoz et al., 2018). Mobile technology and mobile applications allowed for tourism information to be disseminated and accessed which then created a means of communication (Wahyuni et al., 2021).

However, there are still systemic obstacles to overcome, including inadequate infrastructure and a lack of strategic focus in their digital marketing efforts. Tourism companies should adopt social media analytics to gain deeper insights into consumer behaviour and adjust their content strategies accordingly (Zhang & Dai, 2024; Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018). Data-driven personalisation can enhance user experience and improve brand reputation (Deb & Mallik, 2023). As travellers increasingly use digital tools and platforms for travel planning, tourism boards must implement comprehensive and competitive digital strategies to remain relevant (Hussein et al., 2024; Mallick, 2023).

B. Opportunities for Growth

Ethiopia's tourism sector has substantial potential in improving its market positioning by utilising the power of digital marketing. Social media campaigns could play a big role in differentiating offerings such as cultural heritage or natural beauty (Alzaydi & Elsharnouby, 2023; Sulistiani & Syarifuddin, 2024). Visual storytelling on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook could be used to attract audiences all around the world. On the other hand, the trend of experiential and eco-tourism could appeal to many tourists who are seeking environmentally friendly travel (Imad & Chan, 2021; Zheng, 2023).

Innovative approaches such as gamification are likely to appeal to younger people. Integrated marketing approaches such as SEO, email marketing and influencer marketing can be incorporated into such segmentation to further optimise outreach and engagement (Xu, et al., 2017; Briez, et al., 2021; Kontis & Skoultzos, 2021). User-generated content is increasingly perceived as more credible in comparison to traditional sources of advertising, thus appealing to a sense of authenticity and further reinforcing the influence of peers (Deb & Mallik, 2023). Utilizing the sphere of influence upon local influencers also further extends the reach of products to consumers.

Additionally, building a strong data infrastructure can enhance customer insights, allowing for more precise targeting and dynamic marketing strategies (Zhang & Dai, 2024; Hussein et al., 2024).

Ethiopian tourism is at a Phase of its development that, properly promoted by digital marketing, could accelerate sectoral growth. The country has accessed some basic tools infrastructure and platform to digital marketing but should be well adapted, customized, and scaled up. Overcoming existing capacity limitations and aligning initiatives with broader strategic goals will be essential for unlocking the full potential of digital tourism promotion.

2.2.6 Synthesis and Research Gaps

Analysing the digital marketing practices of the inbound tour operators of Ethiopia by reconciling and reflecting theory in practice to identify critical themes, insights and gaps existing body of knowledge. Synthesis of theoretical and empirical gaps about the actual practices of digital marketing enabling practitioners to creating competitive advantages of digital marketing in Ethiopian tourism contexts.

2.3 Research Gaps

2.3.1 Theoretical Gaps

One major theoretical gap that exists in the literature is the lack of studies that integrate the Marketing as Practice (MAP) perspective, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) contexts for the analysis of the dynamics of digital marketing in emerging tourism markets such as Ethiopia. MAP emphasizes the practices of marketers and its effect on the marketing industry. On the other hand, RBV focuses on how resources and capabilities lead to competitive advantages through the implementation of effective marketing strategies. TOE enables positioning such marketing strategies in the broad technological,

organizational, and environmental context. The integration of these perspectives will provide further insights into how inbound tour operators in Ethiopia could contextualize global digital marketing trends and practices into local conditions with due consideration given to their resource constraints.

Moreover, it seems that there is not enough attention given to the agency of practitioners themselves in adapting digital marketing tools in low- resource constraints. While most existing literature on digital marketing accentuates the importance of technological advances for the improvement of firm performance, they neglect how actors in organizations are mobilizing resources in creating these digital practices. Practitioner agency is central to understanding how local actors face the balancing act challenge of digitally engaging in emerging marketing practices, while remaining rooted in specific socio-cultural and economic environments (Roult et al. 2016; Rismayani et al., 2021).

2.3.2 Empirical Gaps

Empirically, there is little research that shows how Ethiopian tour operators balance the impact of global digital trends and pressing realities in the local tourism market. The limited investigation on the topic indicates that researchers have not fully understood the whole spectrum of challenges and strategies that local operators face when attempting to introduce and implement digital marketing initiatives effectively. A better understanding of how Ethiopian inbound tour operators utilise social media, as well as other digital tools, would help see the extent to which the operators' marketing practices fit in or departure from the global best practices in the industry (Zeng, 2013; Malenkov et al., 2021).

Additionally, there is a significant deficiency of metrics that link digital tactics or practices such as social media to competitive outcomes, such as: booking rates, customer retention, in the Ethiopian tour operating business. Although research indicates that social media is valuable to business value creation globally, but it is hardly connected in the Ethiopian tour operating context and therefore, the understanding of its efficacy to drive operational success in these firms is far from complete (Gupta & Dhaliwal, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2020). Further, in absence of such metrics, it becomes very difficult to quantify the return on investment of digital practices and tactics that are being undertaken. Hence, this leads to tactical myopia for most practitioners.

The synthesis shows that, although existing marketing theories provide a theoretical lens to evaluate the digital marketing practice of inbound tour operators in Ethiopia, there are substantial theoretical and empirical research gaps that are left unexplored. Thus, bridging this

gap requires focusing on both the integrative theories (encompassing local marketing practice) and the theorization of practitioners' agility in resource-constrained environment. Also, moving the discourse forward through empirical research that tests the relationships between digital marketing practices and organizational performance will be a key to further developing the theoretical foundation of the discipline, establishing firm benchmarks, diagnosing new competitive advantage strategies in Ethiopian tourism industry.

2.3.3 Bridging the Gap in Existing Literature

Despite the relevance of practice theory to organizational studies, its application to tourism marketing remains limited. Most tourism and hospitality research still treat digital marketing as a set of tools or static strategies rather than a complex, evolving set of practices enacted by people (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Moreover, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how value is created through practitioner-led digital marketing routines, particularly in the context of small and medium-sized inbound tour operators.

In doing so, this study, informed by practice theory, aims to address this gap by providing nuanced insights about the dynamics at the organisational and practitioner levels that inform digital marketing success. Such a theoretical lens allows us to reveal how in tourism marketing, attaining competitive advantage is not simply relational to technology; nor is it only about the successful implementation of marketing strategies, but rather, it encompasses the enactment and adaptation of digital marketing practices.

2.4 Conceptual Framework and Development of Hypotheses

This study, as stated in the research questions, examines the influence of firm internal strategies on innovation practices, the impact of innovation practices on firm performance and the mediating role of innovation practices between firm internal strategies and firm performance. The following subsections will elaborate on the relationship of the innovation determinants, innovation practices and firm performance.

The proposed conceptual model as shown in Figure 2.2 hypothesized the relationship between Contextual factors such as technological, organizational, environmental and human with practitioner enactment and value creation. Thus, the conceptual model depicts the relationship between the multidimensional constructs supported based on the review of earlier research that is discussed in the following subsection.

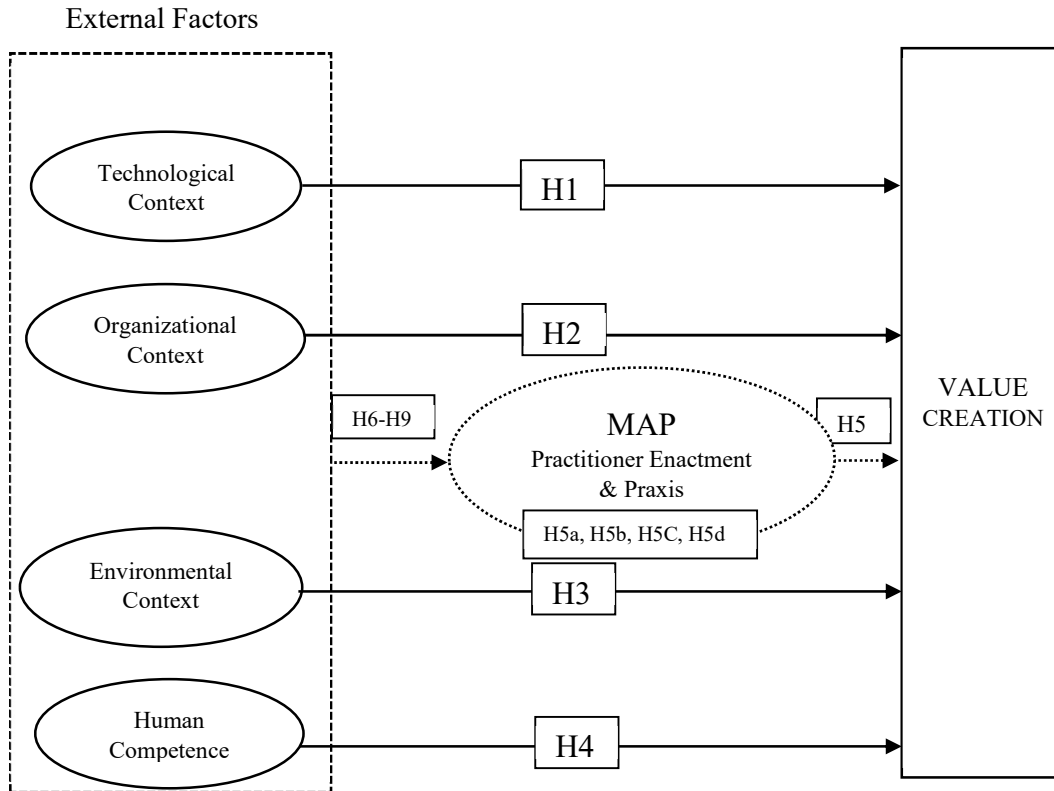


Figure 2.2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

2.4.1 Development of hypothesis

This section discusses the relationship of the constructs to propose hypothesis of the research.

2.4.1.1 Technological Context and Its Role in Value Creation

A growing body of research confirms that technological context—defined by the availability and integration of digital tools—plays a critical role in enhancing value creation across sectors, especially through digital transformation and marketing.

A. Theoretical Foundations

The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) emphasizes how the technological environment influences innovation and performance. Technologies such as AI, analytics, and digital platforms are now central to improving efficiency, customer engagement, and competitiveness (Herhausen et al., 2020; Alwana & Alshurideh, 2022).

B. Evidence from Practice

- **Digital Marketing:** Personalized, data-driven campaigns using SEO and social media tools have been shown to significantly improve brand engagement and value generation (Alwana & Alshurideh, 2022; Fedorova, 2023).
- **Digital Transformation:** Integrating advanced technologies into business operations enhances innovation and agility. Studies confirm that transformation initiatives drive value by improving customer experience and reducing costs (Clauss et al., 2019; Baiyere et al., 2020).
- **Data Analytics:** Tools that support real-time insight generation and customer personalization contribute to better decision-making and relationship management, particularly in B2B settings (Kim & Moon, 2021).
- **Technological Infrastructure:** A solid digital foundation enables innovation. For instance, tour operators in Ethiopia that adopted digital tools saw significant growth in customer acquisition (Bayelegne et al., 2022).

Technological context significantly shapes value creation by enabling firms to innovate, operate efficiently, and better serve customers. While other contextual factors matter, digital capability remains a core strategic asset in today's business environment.

Hypothesis 1: Technological Context has a significant positive relationship on value creation

2.4.1.2 Organizational Context and Value Creation

Research consistently shows that organizational context—including culture, structure, and human capital—plays a pivotal role in shaping value creation. These internal dynamics influence how firms identify opportunities, deploy resources, and adapt to external conditions.

A. Cultural Influence

Organizational culture affects innovation and strategic responsiveness. Trust-based, autonomous cultures encourage value-generating behaviours (De Clercq et al., 2011). In Ethiopia's tourism sector, collaborative cultures supported effective digital strategies (Bayelegne et al., 2022). However, culture often acts indirectly—its alignment with knowledge systems is key to transforming values into outcomes (ODAD, 2023).

B. Structure and Operational Efficiency

Decentralized and flexible structures support responsiveness and innovation. Delivery firms in Makassar (KCI, 2023) and banks in Palestine (Semantic Scholar, 2019) illustrate how structural adaptability fosters cross-functional collaboration. Structured problem-solving also enhances resource utilization (Nickerson et al., 2007).

C. Human Capital and Leadership

Skilled employees and visionary leadership are essential for turning capabilities into results. Andersén (2011) highlights their synergy—leaders direct, while staff innovate. In Ethiopia, investment in digital skills and empowerment led to improved performance (AAU-ETD, 2024). Leadership also fosters entrepreneurial behaviour and new value creation (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000).

D. Interaction with Technology and Environment

The TOE framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) emphasizes the interplay between organizational and external contexts. Data-driven initiatives, for instance, succeed only within cultures that prioritize analytics (Bayelegne et al., 2022).

Organizational context is a core enabler of value creation, but its effects are mediated by innovation, strategic alignment, and external conditions. Future research should explore sectoral variations and develop integrative, multi-level models.

Hypothesis 2: Organizational Context has a significant Positive effect/relationship on value creation

2.4.1.3 Environmental Context and Value Creation

Environmental context—encompassing regulation, market dynamics, stakeholder demands, and ecosystem collaboration—is a key driver of organizational value creation. Research consistently affirms its positive influence on innovation, performance, and sustainability.

A. Sustainability as Strategic Value

Environmental sustainability increasingly underpins value generation. Practices like environmental accounting and green investment boost legitimacy and stakeholder trust while supporting long-term financial returns (Pinto, 2014). Circular economy strategies and green

entrepreneurship not only lower risk but also spark innovation and expand market opportunities (Arena et al., 2021; Circular Value Creation, 2022).

B. Collaborative Ecosystems

Value creation is now often co-produced within ecosystems—networks of firms and stakeholders engaged in joint innovation. Effective ecosystem governance, resource alignment, and structural design amplify collective value beyond individual firm capacity (Khademi, 2020). Arena et al. (2021) highlight how actor roles, relationships, and coordination shape innovation outcomes within these ecosystems.

C. Regulation and Market Pressure

External forces, such as environmental regulations and competitive intensity, further influence value creation. Early compliance with sustainability standards can enhance brand reputation and strategic positioning (Pinto, 2014; Emerald Insight, 2022). Ecosystem participation also offers risk management and performance benefits (Khademi, 2020).

D. Tourism Sector Insights

In tourism, sustainable practices paired with digital tools have proven effective. Ethiopian tour operators adopting these approaches experienced stronger market growth and engagement (Bayelegne et al., 2022), reinforcing the link between environmental strategy and multi-dimensional value creation.

Environmental context fosters innovation and differentiation but requires skilled navigation to measure and manage both tangible and intangible value over time.

Hypothesis 3: Environmental Context has a positive significant relationship on value creation

2.4.1.4 Practitioner Competence and Its Positive Relationship with Value Creation

Practitioner competence—comprising the skills, knowledge, and abilities professionals bring to their roles—is widely recognized as a key driver of value creation across sectors. A growing body of literature supports the significant and positive relationship between practitioner competence and organizational value.

A. Theoretical Foundations

Rooted in the resource-based view (RBV), practitioner competence is seen as a strategic resource that underpins competitive advantage (Mourtitzen, 1998). Penrose (1959) emphasized that managerial capabilities shape how firms utilise resources, while Felin and Hesterly (2007) and Starbuck (1992) underscore that individual knowledge and abilities are central to value creation, especially in service-oriented contexts.

B. Empirical Evidence

- **Customer Value Creation:** Eggert et al. (2006) found that competences in problem-solving, customer understanding, and relationship management enhance business customer satisfaction and value creation.
- **Value Co-Creation in Public Services:** Majjala et al. (2024) identify collaboration, communication, and empathy as key competencies enabling professionals to co-create value effectively with service users.
- **Professional Development:** Studies in healthcare and public services (Peng et al., 2022; Hendricks et al., 2021) show that ongoing skills development improves practitioners' adaptability and their capacity for co-creating value in complex environments.
- **Competency Frameworks:** Bradley et al. (2021) argue that clearly defined, context-specific competencies support education, assessment, and effective practice, thereby strengthening value delivery.

C. Competence Clusters for Innovation

Jääskeläinen et al. (2017) identify four critical competence clusters—networking, creative problem-solving, technological, and entrepreneurial—which collectively enhance innovativeness and value generation.

D. Collaborative and Citizen-Centric Competence

In public administration, the competence of practitioners regarding stakeholder engagement and facilitation is one of the key antecedents of participatory value creation (Palumbo et al., 2024), since endowing citizens with professional competence in interaction with participants helps government to improve both the legitimacy of the process and the outcomes of public service delivery.

Practitioners' competencies have an important effect on value creation. They will ensure that resources are used effectively, people are engaged, the environment is adapted as needed, and

innovation is facilitated in complex and ever-changing organisational environments. These competencies matter even more when organisations adopt to complex and dynamical socio-organisational environments where collaborative value co-creation or co-responsiveness at

Hypothesis 4: Environmental Context has a positively significant relationship on value creation

2.4.1.5 Practitioner Enactment as a Mediator Between Technology and Value Creation

Recent scholarship suggests that technology does not alone create value but rather specializes in how professionals interact and use the technology. Drawing from organizational theory, technological mediation, and digital marketing literature, practitioner enactment has become the necessary intermediary, transforming technological potential into performance outcomes.

Technologies are tools that influence and are influenced by user behaviour (Kudina, 2019). Their value is determined by how individuals interact with them in real-world contexts. For example, in digital education, users enhanced learning outcomes by creatively adapting to technical limitations (Nicolaou & Sevilla-Pavón, 2018, cited in ERIC, 2021). This highlights the significance of user adaptation in realizing value.

Technology must be actively integrated into workflows to yield benefits. In fields like mediation, success hinges on how practitioners incorporate digital tools into established practices (Kovach, 2019). Without thoughtful adaptation, technological advantages remain untapped (Kudina, 2019).

A. Conceptual Frameworks

The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) and the Marketing-as-Practice (MAP) approach (Skålén et al., 2022) both assert that technology contributes to value only when mediated by context-specific human action. Together, these frameworks emphasize that practitioner-led application is essential to technological success.

B. Empirical Evidence

Research in digital marketing shows that tool effectiveness depends on practitioner skills and adaptability (Badari et al., 2024). Kudina (2019) and Kovach (2019) further confirm that value emerges through the thoughtful, ethical, and strategic use of technology.

Technology supports value creation only when practitioners skilfully adapt and apply it. Their agency and contextual engagement serve as the critical link between digital capability and organizational outcomes.

Hypothesis 5a: MAP mediates the effect of technological context on value creation

2.4.1.6 Practitioner Enactment as a Mediator Between Organizational Context and Value Creation

Research increasingly shows that the influence of organizational context on value creation is mediated by how practitioners engage with and respond to their work environment. Culture, structure, leadership, and resources shape conditions, but value is realized through practitioner action.

A. Organizational Context and Practitioner Behaviour

Organizational culture and structure guide how employees interpret roles and act. Flexible systems foster autonomy and innovation (Schein, 2010; Andersén, 2011), while rigid structures may limit practitioner initiative and reduce value outcomes.

B. Enactment as the Value Driver

Enactment refers to how individuals perform and adapt in their roles. Studies show that technologies, strategies, and leadership only produce value when practitioners actively engage and adjust them to their context (Badari et al., 2024; De Clercq et al., 2011; Skålén et al., 2022).

C. Integrating Theory and Practice

The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and TOE framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) both support the idea that resources alone are insufficient—value depends on how people mobilize them. Practitioner enactment bridges internal resources and actual performance.

D. Evidence from Practice

Tourism and digital marketing studies (e.g., Bayelegne et al., 2022) show that supportive organizational environments enable practitioners to tailor strategies effectively. Similar findings across innovation and leadership research confirm this mediating role.

Organizational context provides the foundation, but value is created through practitioner enactment. This perspective explains why similar organizations may achieve different outcomes based on how individuals engage with their environment.

Hypothesis 5b: MAP mediates the effect of Organizational context on value creation

2.4.1.7 Practitioner Enactment as a Mediator Between Environmental Context and Value Creation

Research increasingly supports that environmental context shapes value creation primarily through practitioner enactment. External factors—such as regulation, market dynamics, and societal expectations—offer opportunities and constraints, but their impact depends on how practitioners interpret and act upon them.

A. Environmental Context and Practitioner Response

Environmental pressures, including sustainability mandates and collaborative ecosystems, encourage firms to innovate and adapt (Yang et al., 2021; Anderson & Korsgaard, 2011). However, value is not automatically derived from these conditions; it requires practitioner engagement to translate external cues into effective strategies.

B. Mediating Role of Enactment

Practitioner enactment—adaptive, context-sensitive action—is the mechanism that converts environmental signals into tangible outcomes (RGU Repository, 2023). In innovation and entrepreneurship, professionals co-create value by aligning practices with environmental trends (MDPI, 2018).

C. Empirical Support

- Ecosystem studies show that favourable conditions yield value only when actively leveraged by practitioners (Anderson & Korsgaard, 2011).
- Sustainability-focused firms succeed when practitioners embed environmental goals into operations (Busco et al., 2024).
- Innovation outcomes depend on how well individuals scan and respond to external trends (MDPI, 2018).

D. Theoretical Alignment

The Marketing-as-Practice and TOE frameworks both affirm that environmental influences are operationalized through human agency (Skålén et al., 2022; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990).

Value creation in response to environmental factors hinges on practitioner enactment. Context enables—but it is skilled, adaptive human action that activates—value.

Hypothesis 5c: MAP mediates the effect of Environmental context on value creation

2.4.1.8 Practitioner Enactment as a Mediator Between Practitioner Competence and Value Creation

Recent literature confirms that abilities of practitioner for value creation are not enough for themselves; practitioners can co-create value or work towards it through enactment where enactment is characterised by active and conscious participations, devotion of time, active reflectivity and contextual sensitivity during performing the abilities in practice. So, competence serves as potential and value creation is realised through enact

A. Competence and Its Activation Through Enactment

While competence consists of necessary skills and knowledge (Barney, 1991; Felin & Hesterly, 2007), its utility and worth arises from how it is enacted. In line with the Marketing-as-Practice (MAP) view, enactment refers to the set of practical, situated performances that represent a lived competence and turn potential into outcomes (Skålén et al., 2022).

B. From Capability to Action

Empirical research has demonstrated that professionals with high competencies in any specific discipline are better able to adapt practices, collaborate, and nurture the creation of value. For instance, Majjala et al. (2024) identified that in public services, value co-creation takes place only if highly competent professionals actively enact their communication and collaboration skills to achieve service goals. Moreover, Badari et al. (2024) showed that digital marketing value co-creation was improved when highly competent professionals enacted their competencies in carrying out a digital marketing strategy.

C. Enactment as the Mediating Mechanism

Enactment translates competence into value by “transforming knowledge into relevant social action, or adaptive behaviour” (Wickramasinghe & Davison, 2004, p. 112) which suggests that

individuals who successfully enact appropriate embodiment transform such competence into value outcomes. Empirical evidence from the fields of healthcare, education and marketing endorse “that service quality, satisfaction, or other value outcomes are a function of

Practitioner competence enables value creation only when enacted. Enactment is the "crucial bridge" that demonstrates that the effects of professionalism depend on practitioners’ exercised actions within their context.

Hypothesis 5d: MAP mediates the effect of Human competence on value creation

2.4.1.9 Practitioner Enactment, Praxis, and Value Creation in Inbound Tourism Marketing

In the setting of inbound tourism, practitioner enactment is seen as intentional and sometimes reflective performance of professional roles that has an important role in forming value. Value is understood here not just as financial return, but a multi-dimensional outcome formed through interaction, experience or other forms of co-creation with stakeholders.

Value is thus the outcome of practitioners’ interpretative and reflexive work in responding to changing tourist expectations, cultural conventions, and digital environments. This perspective on value foregrounds how within marketing-as-practice frameworks, marketing professionals enact and shape value through mundane practices which collectively seek to ‘make sense’ of what value is and why it matters, rather than pursue pre-ordained plans (Skålén et al., 2022). In enacting value, marketing professionals can reflexively produce and re-produce value through their own processes of sensemaking— to reconfigure their marketing content, narratives, and media ecologies in ways that imaginatively align visitor motivations and local

Research shows that it is through this enactment that social processes believed to be critical to the generation of value are set in motion. For example, practitioner enactment of community-led storytelling or sustainable destination branding produces not just authenticity but also social and cultural value through joint collaborations and dialogue with local stakeholders (Oke et al. 2022). For making these valuable outcomes, enactment needs to be treated as antecedents of value co-creation, which leads to relational and place-based value as well as profit.

Moreover, such knowledge can further be enhanced through praxis—reflective, transformative action. When tourism marketers critically evaluate their marketing strategies and marketing outcomes to iterate over existing practices (or adapt to new ones), they re-facilitate offerings that better resonate with a range of diverse audiences. This practice would enable an

understanding of how the needs of tourists, the aspirations of host communities, and the long-term vision of the destination can be aligned (Håkansson et al., 2023).

Narrative inquiry also portrays the construction of marketing value as a processual phenomenon based on selective mobilisation and combination of communicated strategic intent, cultural narrative interpretation, and ongoing adaptation work by practitioners (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2018). It then follows a process-oriented view on marketing value in recognising that value in tourism products is not fixed in the products themselves but ever emergent from the interaction between practitioners and tourists, between practitioners, and between contexts.

There is evidence that value creation in inbound tourism is bound to the enactment and praxis of practitioners and is primarily affected by their reflective and responsive enactment. Marketing practitioners are involved in co-created outcomes resulting in economic, social and experiential value. The findings indicate the importance of recognising and releasing practitioner agency in crafting innovative and dynamic marketing practice consonant with stakeholder values.

Hypothesis 5: Practitioner enactment and praxis (MAP) has a positive and significant relationship with value creation

2.4.1.10 Technological Context and Practitioner Praxis in Tourism

A growing body of research indicates the pivotal role of digital infrastructure in planning and shaping practitioners' reflection behaviour in a tourism industry context. Professional tourism practitioners learn to adapt their modus operandi and reflect on their practices, aided largely by the proliferation of online technologies, including online booking systems, social media and mobile technologies (Fatima Gillani et al., 2020; Buvár & Gáti, 2023).

The pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of the sector, requiring operators to continually interact with consumers online and tailor segmented offerings to them based on data-driven strategies (Paulino & Guio Bragato, 2024). These technologies are mediating increasingly our relationship with clients, as well as transforming what professionals do (Fenwick & Edwards, 2016).

The Praxis Model for Technology Development (PMTD) gives to understand how participatory engagement with technology can enable the industry to innovate (creative praxis) and learn

continuously (reflective praxis) and thereby support tourism professionals to transform their practices (Salbego & Nietzsche, 2023).

The evidence suggests that when practitioners actively use technology to aid their work, they improve one or more of responsiveness, personalisation, or critical reflection: all key aspects of praxis in tourism work (Kordelas, 2023).

Hypothesis 6: Technological Context has a significant and positive relationship with MAP.

2.4.1.11 Organizational Context and Practitioner Praxis in Tourism

Research increasingly emphasises the importance of organisational context in how tourism professionals adopt and implement novel practices. Leadership, culture, access to resources and internal communication all directly affect the extent to which practitioners can act reflectively and engage in transformative work.

Given the mutable consumer demands and the rapid advances in technologies that exist in tourism contexts, supportive organisational environments can enable practitioners to innovate, adapt and personalise delivery of their services. Studies examining other applied settings, such as healthcare and education, suggest that strong leadership and collaborative cultures can facilitate use of evidence-based methods by practitioners and promote their continuous professional learning (Cummings et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2020). These findings are relevant to tourism as frontline staff work increasingly in technology-enabled customer facing environments that demand flexibility and responsiveness.

Frameworks such as PARIHS highlight that the implementation of an innovation is dependent on context, or the ‘organisational conditions in which the new ... processes are to be implemented’ (Kitson et al., 2008). In the case of tourism firms, this context is the conditions in which the digital tools, market strategies and customer experience design can be aligned to the wider organisational goals by the firm teams.

Organizations that create a culture of reflexivity and shared learning, McCormack et al (2017) claim, are well positioned to support practitioner praxis: reflective, informed, intentional and committed action directed at improving service outcomes. While Jansson (2013) cautions that change is negotiated by “subtle power games and local conventions, rules and norms” (p. 278), echoing Orwell’s (1946) observation that organizing can quash vitality, the broader literature

is firmly of the view that enabling organisational structures are facilitatory of practitioner engagement and change

In sum, in the context of tourism, favourable organisational contexts in the form of visionary leadership, open dialogue and learning opportunities, enable practitioners to fully perform their roles, think critically, and contribute to the innovation of dynamic service delivery.

Hypothesis 7: Organizational Context has a significant and positive relationship with MAP

2.4.1.12 Environmental Context and Practitioner Praxis in Inbound Tourism Marketing

The external environment—shaped by shifting market trends, competitor actions, and regulatory pressures—strongly influences how tourism marketers carry out and rethink their roles. Rather than operating in a vacuum, practitioners engage in ongoing adaptation and reflection, responding to dynamic conditions that shape both strategy and execution.

In inbound tourism, marketers need to constantly update their approaches as traveller preferences, digital trends, and sustainability expectations change by the minute. Moreover, competitor innovations or government policies (such as new rules on eco-certification or online promotion) require marketers to modify campaigns and/or adopt new tools. These pressures induce proactive action rooted in a deeper reflection on what works and why.

This context fosters praxis—purposeful, reflective action. Tourism marketers often are expected to question existing practices and refine them based on feedback and environmental shifts, which helps create more relevant and impactful marketing strategies.

Studies confirm that external pressures often drive strategic renewal and practitioner engagement (Jansen et al., 2006). Even in highly regulated sectors like healthcare, practitioners adapt through reflection and innovation—paralleling how tourism marketers adjust to changing policies and traveller expectations (Braithwaite et al., 2017).

As dynamic environments encourage professionals to adopt flexible, learning-oriented routines (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000), in tourism, this could mean adjusting messaging to meet sustainable travel trends or testing new digital platforms for visitor engagement.

As the ‘frame of the portrait’, environmental context plays a crucial role in shaping both the actions and reflective processes of tourism marketing practitioners. It acts as a promoter for innovation, learning, and more responsive, proactive marketing practices.

Hypothesis 8: Environmental Context has a significant and positive relationship with MAP

2.4.1.13 Human Competence and Praxis Among Marketing Practitioners in Inbound Tourism

In the realm of inbound tourism, the competencies of marketing practitioners—encompassing strategic knowledge, digital literacy, communication skills, and reflective thinking—are pivotal to effective implementation and adaptive practice. As global travel patterns evolve and digital platforms increasingly influence destination choices, marketing professionals must consistently align their actions with shifting consumer expectations and contextual demands.

Competence enables practitioners to engage with complex tasks such as market segmentation, digital content creation, and data-driven strategy development. Research across service-oriented sectors confirms that skilled professionals are more likely to implement evidence-based approaches, adapt campaigns to emerging trends, and engage target audiences meaningfully (Metz et al., 2021; Benner, 2001). Schön's (1983) concept of the "reflective practitioner" emphasizes that competence extends beyond technical expertise to include critical reflection on practice, which is essential for ongoing innovation.

For inbound tourism marketers, this reflective capacity facilitates the fine-tuning of messaging, the evaluation of campaign effectiveness, and the development of culturally sensitive narratives that resonate with diverse traveller segments. Eraut (2004) further distinguishes between formal and tacit knowledge, highlighting that, successful practitioners in dynamic environments—as in tourism—rely on experience-based insights as much as academic training. This is particularly relevant when marketing authentic local experiences, managing reputational risks, or responding to real-time feedback across social platforms. Empirical evidence also links practitioner competence to improved campaign outcomes and organizational learning.

In tourism, where brand perception and word-of-mouth significantly influence consumer behaviour, competent marketers are instrumental in driving visibility, engagement, and conversion in international markets. Human competence, therefore, is foundational to practitioner praxis in inbound tourism marketing. It equips professionals with the ability to execute strategic roles effectively while continuously reflecting, adapting, and innovating in response to environmental and market dynamics.

Hypothesis 9: Human Competence has a significant and positive relationship with MAP

2.5 Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Technological Context has a significant positive effect/relationship on value creation

Hypothesis 2: Organizational Context has a significant Positive effect/relationship on value creation

Hypothesis 3: Environmental Context has a positive significant effect/relationship on value creation

Hypothesis 4: Human competence Context has a positive significant effect/relationship on value creation

Hypothesis 5: MAP has a significant and positive relationship with value creation

Hypothesis 5a: MAP mediates the effect of technological context on value creation

Hypothesis 5b: MAP mediates the effect of Organizational context on value creation

Hypothesis 5c: MAP mediates the effect of Environmental context on value creation

Hypothesis 5d: MAP mediates the effect of Human context on value creation

Hypothesis 6: Technological Context has a significant and positive relationship with MAP.

Hypothesis 7: Organizational Context has a significant and positive relationship with MAP.

Hypothesis 8: Environmental Context has a significant and positive relationship with MAP.

Hypothesis 9: Human Competence has a significant and positive relationship with MAP.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Initially the study was intended to be an entirely qualitative study. As the researcher progressed through developing the thesis, it became evident that data collection through solely qualitative means was going to be a challenge. Not only was the list of ITOs not up to date, but it was also almost impossible to get enough informants as most of them have very tight schedules or inaccessible. Hence, the researcher reverted to conducting a mixed method approach.

This chapter explains the proposed methodology that was applied to achieve the research objectives and prove the hypotheses. The chapter, thus, covers research philosophy and design, sampling procedure, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical consideration applied in conducting the study.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study adopts a pragmatic research philosophy, which reflects a balanced and practical approach to understanding complex phenomena in real-world contexts. Pragmatism does not align strictly with either the positivist or constructivist paradigms but instead prioritizes the research problem and the usefulness of the findings in addressing practical issues.

Positivism holds that reality is objective and measurable, prioritizing hypothesis testing and results that can be generalized through scientific methods (Saunders et al., 2016; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). On the other hand, constructivism perceives reality as socially constructed and subjective, focusing on context-specific, qualitative insights rather than broad generalizations (Saunders et al., 2016). Critical realism ‘bridges’ these paradigms by recognizing an external reality while also acknowledging that human interpretation and social structures shape knowledge (Saunders et al., 2016). Pragmatism, in contrast, adopts a problem-solving approach, valuing both qualitative and quantitative methods as tools for addressing practical research questions. It dismisses strict adherence to any single epistemology, highlighting the usefulness of various forms of knowledge in real-world applications (Creswell, 2009; Saunders et al., 2016; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

This study employs a pragmatic approach to explore how Ethiopian inbound tour operators utilise digital marketing amidst diverse contextual influences. The adaptability of pragmatism

supports a mixed-methods design, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of both empirical patterns and lived experiences.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

In alignment with the pragmatic research philosophy, this study adopts a mixed methods research design. Pragmatism supports methodological pluralism, recognizing that no single method is sufficient to capture the full complexity of a research problem (Creswell, 2009). Given the multifaceted nature of digital marketing practices among inbound tour operators in Ethiopia, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was considered both appropriate and necessary.

The mixed methods approach enables a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives. The quantitative phase focuses on identifying patterns and relationships among key variables—such as technological readiness, organizational capacity, environmental factors, and human competence—and their influence on practitioner enactment and value creation. This phase involves the use of structured surveys and statistical analysis to generate generalizable findings across a larger sample.

In contrast, the qualitative phase offers deeper insight into the lived experiences and contextual nuances behind these relationships. Through interviews with marketing practitioners and decision-makers, this phase captures how digital marketing strategies are interpreted, adapted, and enacted within specific organizational and environmental contexts.

The integration of both data types allows for triangulation and a richer understanding of the research problem. It also enhances the validity and utility of the findings by combining the generalizability of quantitative methods with the contextual depth of qualitative inquiry (Saunders et al., 2016; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Ultimately, the mixed methods design reflects the core tenet of pragmatism: that the choice of research methods should be guided by what works best to address the research questions and inform practical outcomes. By drawing on the strengths of both approaches, this study aims to produce findings that are not only theoretically grounded but also relevant and actionable for practitioners and policymakers in Ethiopia's tourism sector.

3.4 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis described the level at which the research was performed, and which objects were researched. This study's analysis unit was comprised of (but not limited to) managers and marketing executives of Inbound Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. Sampling from Addis Ababa is believed to be crucial because it serves as Ethiopia's primary hub for inbound tourism, where the largest concentration of tour operators is found and is the main entry point for international tourists (Azeb, 2018; Abebaw, 2020). The city's significance as a political and economic centre also influences national tourism strategies and marketing practices (Bayelegne et al., 2022). Addis Ababa is home to both large agencies and small businesses, including being the diplomatic capital of Africa, making it ideal for exploring diverse digital marketing practices (Abebaw, 2020; Bayelegne et al., 2022). Given its competitive and dynamic tourism market, focusing on this area allows for an in-depth understanding of how digital marketing contributes to value creation and competitive advantage in Ethiopian inbound tourism (AAU-ETD, 2024). This is especially important as digital tools continue to evolve in the urban tourism landscape (Bayelegne et al., 2022; AAU-ETD, 2024).

3.5 Population and Sample

For a total population of 500 (based on data acquired from Ethiopia's Ministry of Tourism, 2024), the recommended sample size-assuming a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error-is **217**. This is based on standard sample size tables and formulas, such as those by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) and widely used in educational and social science research. (Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W., 1970; SurveySparrow. 2024)

Calculation using Slovin's Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size (500)
- e = margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{500}{1 + 500 \times (0.05)^2} = \frac{500}{1 + 1.25} = \frac{500}{2.25} \approx 222$$

Sample size tables also confirm that for a population of 500, the needed sample size at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error is **217**. Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970)

Summary:

- **Population:** 500
- **Sample size (95% confidence, 5% margin of error):** 217–222 (Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W., 1970; SurveySparrow. 2024)

For practical purposes, the study will use **220** samples of inbound tour operators in Ethiopia.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Due to the fragmented nature of the Ethiopian inbound tourism industry and the absence of updated formal lists of such businesses, non-probability sampling methods were employed to recruit relevant respondents. More specifically, purposive sampling was employed for the initial outreach and snowball sampling to gain access to a wider range of practitioners.

In the current study, the snowball sampling method was particularly effective in locating and enlisting those tour operators who were otherwise inaccessible through traditional sampling methods. Indeed, as Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) pointed out, snowball sampling is well suited to studies on hidden, hard-to-access, or special populations, while social networks form the basis for access in this kind of research. This involved identifying an initial set of “seed” participants based on their role in the preparation or execution of digital marketing strategies within their respective companies and asking these “seed” participants to recommend colleagues or other individuals in the field who met the criteria of the study.

This approach was inexpensive and easy to implement, and it provided access to a deeper pool of more contextually relevant actors who were engaged in the digital marketing environment of inbound tourism to Ethiopia (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Noy, 2008). Participation was solicited through email invitations, as well as informal referrals through the personal and professional networks of the researcher, and data was collected using semi - structured interviews and structured surveys.

While snowball sampling has proven useful as a method of rapidly expanding the pool of research participants, it is important to recognize its limitations. Snowball sampling can introduce sampling bias as study participants are likely to recruit people they know, who may

share the same traits, similar experiences or attitudes resulting in a homogeneous sample (Heckathorn, 2011). While using snowball sampling, controlling for the make-up of the sample is difficult and as a result sample representativeness is compromised. Someone that uses snowball sampling has little control over sampling method and little to no control over the composition of the sample, and it depends on the ability of the researcher to successfully network and use the contacts to get M reference to $M + 1$.

To minimize the limitations, exponential discriminative snowball sampling was used where participants provide multiple referrals, but the researcher selects only those who meet specific eligibility criteria for inclusion (Stivala et al., 2016). In this case, those inbound tour operators who not only are registered, but also are active in their business were sampled. Ethical considerations, particularly regarding participant confidentiality and informed consent, were carefully managed throughout the process.

The sample size in the qualitative phase was determined by the point when no new themes or issues were being identified; known as theoretical saturation (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). A purposive list of ITOs compiled from the Ethiopia ministry of Tourism was used in quantitative survey followed by a snowballing technique within firms and/ or fellow affiliated operators.

This blending of purposeful and snowball sampling techniques allowed the researcher to tap into the knowledge of practitioners and overcome the context of an atomised and informal Ethiopia's inbound tourism industry that lacks directories across multiple national and subnational economic sectors. It also supported the practice-theoretical orientation of the study that embraces the lived experiences and enactments of marketing practitioners operating in dynamic organisational and environmental contexts.

3.7 Forms and Sources of Data

The different methods of data collection to conduct study are mainly categorized as primary and secondary. Primary data should be collected originally by the researcher through different means such as observation, interview, questionnaires, content analysis, and focus group discussions, among others. Secondary data is obtained from published and unpublished sources such as reports, books, letters, unpublished biographies etc. (Kothari, 2004; Creswell, 2009; Neuman, 2014).

In this study, data was gathered using both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was gathered using questionnaires from executives in the selected sample from inbound tour operators through interviews with relevant parties in the sector. Secondary data was

gathered from earlier literature and from Ethiopian ministry of tourism database.

3.8 Data Collection

Gathering data is an essential part of research design, as it allows researchers to collect information about participants' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to the subject being studied (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This research utilised a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative primary data to thoroughly address the research questions. This approach is consistent with the pragmatic paradigm, which highlights the importance of methodological adaptability and the use of diverse data sources to enhance the practical significance and depth of the findings (Cameron & Prince, 2009).

3.8.1 Quantitative Data Collection

For collecting the primary data, the researcher used a self-administered questionnaire. Survey is one of the most popular methods of collecting data in social science research since it enables the researcher to collect a suitable number of responses from a sample or large group efficiently (Neuman, 2013). It is also thought appropriate to collect from respondents with busy schedules as it is easy to understand, it saves time and retrieving them back is not difficult (Mahesar, 2015; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016)

The questionnaire consisted of seven-point Likert scale close ended questions. The design of this study enables detailed response yet allows easy analysis of the data collected. Questions were adapted from recognized surveys to make sure questions are proper and valid (Al-Ansari, 2014; Qiang, 2018; Gunday et al., 2011; Sinkula et al., 1997; Terziovski, 2010). The final version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The study focused on managers or senior marketing personals of inbound tour operators found in Addis Ababa. The initial sample frame was the 500 registered inbound tour operators. Even though the intended sample size was 220 respondents, to accommodate non-response, the questionnaire was directly distributed to the whole 500 firms via email and WhatsApp mediums. To increase the response rate the researcher used snowball approach which is the most common and more convenient means to reach those hardly reachable populations (Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. 2001). As a result, a total of 280 valid responses were collected which accounts for 56% response rate and which is above the minimum acceptable threshold of 30% (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.8.2 Qualitative Data Collection

In addition to the survey results, qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility in pursuing issues of importance, while also maintaining the consistency of the discussions. Key participants were chosen among the two major institutional industry associations, recognized by Ethiopian Ministry of Tourism: Ethiopian Tour Operators Association (ETOA) and Talak Ethiopia Tour Operators Association (TETOA).

The managers of five selected firms from ITOs were interviewed. The managers from the selected firms were selected based on their relevant experience and knowledge which was significant in enriching the qualitative data (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Interviews were designed to confirm and enrich the survey findings following the principle of triangulation that is typically used in mixed methods research.

3.9 Questionnaire Development

A questionnaire is simply a 'tool' for collecting and recording information about a particular issue of interest. It is made up of a list of questions but should also always have clear instructions and space for answers or administrative details (Patel & Joseph, 2016). In this research, the main consideration was given to clarity of each question to reduce the possibility for the participants to misunderstand the main points of the question.

3.10 Measures of the Study

The study's independent, mediating and dependent variables are discussed in this section. Technological context, Organizational context, Environmental context and Human Competence are the independent variables that are external factors whereas Value Creation is the dependent variable. The mediating variable here is practitioner enactment and praxis delegated by the Marketing as a practice (MAP) framework.

In measuring value creation, respondents were requested to rate their degree of agreement if their digital marketing practices have improved their market share, giving them advantage over competitors and enhanced their brand recognition. The investigation adopted the Resource Based View metrics for evaluating value creation as used by Soto-Acosta & Meroño-Cerdan (2008) as well as explained by Zubac. A et al. (2010).

Measurement of external factors such as Technological, Organizational, Environmental and Human competence was done through participants' ratings of their agreement to the influence of these factors. The investigation mainly adopted the TOE framework (Yeh, C.-H., Lee, G.-G., & Pai, J.-C., 2014; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Barney, 1991; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

To measure practitioner enactment and praxis, participants were asked to rate their degree of agreement on their usage and frequency of digital marketing tools and was adapted from Skålén, P., Cova, B., Gummerus, J., & Sihvonen, A. (2022) and Siggelkow et al., (2023). See appendix C.

3.11 Data Processing and Analysis

Data analysis is the computation of measures of the collected data to search for relationship and test the hypothesis (Kothari, 2004). Data analysis is categorized to descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics provides basic information on the variables of the population through simple statistics as mean, mode, standard deviation and error. Inferential statistics is the drawing of inferences based on set of observations, estimation of values of the population and test of significance to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Kothari, 2004; Neuman, 2014). Thus, in this study analysis was made using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

The first step in data analysis is data screening that requires editing, coding, checking for error, missing value, presence of outlier, normality and statistical violations. Then data was entered to statistical software to conduct descriptive and inferential analysis to verify the research hypothesis. Data screening in this study was conducted using Microsoft Excel and the study constructs are tested with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

SEM is a second-generation multivariate data analysis method to assess complex relationships between direct and indirect latent variables. SEM can estimate complex interrelated relationships simultaneously unlike the first-generation technique and combines factor analysis, regression analysis or path analysis. (Hair, 2006; Carvalho & Chima, 2014). Unlike the conventional regression method, SEM analyses multiple relationships among and between variables to test hypothesized relationship (Carvalho & Chima, 2014). Thus, in this study SEM statistical tool is used since the construct of this study has intervening and mediating relationship.

3.11.1 Data Analysis Methods

The study integrates qualitative and quantitative findings through triangulation and meta-interpretation, ensuring a robust and holistic understanding of digital marketing practices in Ethiopian inbound tour operators. Triangulation involves comparing qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups with quantitative survey trends and performance data (Flick, 2018). This approach aligns with Denzin's (2012) assertion that triangulation strengthens credibility by reducing bias and confirming patterns across data sources.

By synthesizing practitioners' stories about difficulties with survey findings about practitioner enactment and praxis, this study generates new actionable insights for advancing digital strategies. This process of interpretation, (Bazeley, 2018), connects subjective experience and objective measurement in generating a nuanced framework responsive to the tourism ecosystem in Ethiopia.

3.11.2 Justification for a Mixed-Methods Approach

As shown by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), using the mixed-methods design improves validity, adds to its practical utility, increases the comprehensiveness of findings. First, integrating interviews and observations with objective quantitative data resolves the drawbacks of singular use of qualitative methods (e.g., limited in generalizability) and quantitative methods (e.g., missing contextual details), resulting in more practical, contextually consistent, and statistically significant findings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Second, relating qualitative insights into strategic decision-making to its quantitative outcomes, provides tour operators with evidence-based propositions on how to optimize digital tool (Bayelegne et al., 2022).

The employment of mixed methods design also captures both macro-level trends and micro-level enactment. As emphasised in literature, this dual focus ensures the research addresses both strategic priorities and operational realities, (Badari et al., 2024).

3.12 Model Specification

Based on the research variables described in the conceptual framework (chapter 2), the following model is specified.

$$1. Z_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_{xz}X_i + U_{zi}$$

rewriting

$$Z_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1x_1 + \alpha_2x_2 + \alpha_3x_3 + \alpha_4x_4 + u_{zi}$$

$$2. Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_{zy}Z_i + \beta_{xy}X_i + u_{yi}$$

rewriting

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + (\beta_1Z_1 + \beta_2Z_2 + \beta_3Z_3 + \beta_4Z_4) + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + u_{yi}$$

Where,

α_0 and β_0 are constants

Z_i = Practitioner Enactment and Praxis,

X_i = External factors,

Y_i = *Value Creation*

α_{xz} = *coefficients of external factors*

β_{zy} = *coefficients of practitioner and praxis*

U_{zi} and u_{yi} are error terms

3.13 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are fundamental to ensuring the quality of measurement in research. Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement tool—its ability to yield stable, error-free results over repeated applications (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Peeters and Harpe (2020) further emphasize that reliability involves the homogeneity of scale items, whereby the items collectively measure the same underlying construct. On the other hand, validity concerns the accuracy with which a concept is measured. It examines whether the construct's conceptual and operational definitions capture the essence of what is intended to be assessed (Hair et al., 2021).

In this study, both reliability and validity were assessed. For reliability, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used. Although Cronbach's alpha is a widely accepted measure of internal consistency, it has been critiqued for underestimating reliability by being overly sensitive to the number of items in a scale (Peters, 2014). Therefore, as recommended by Hair et al. (2021), composite reliability was also employed, particularly suitable for PLS-SEM, as it provides a more robust estimate.

To ensure construct validity, both convergent and discriminant validity were tested. Convergent validity assesses whether items that are supposed to measure the same construct are related, while discriminant validity ensures that constructs are distinct and not overlapping (Jalil Azlis-

Sani et al., 2013). Additionally, scale refinement was guided by key reliability indicators such as inter-item correlation (Hajjar, 2018).

Following current methodological recommendations, this study adopted multiple indices to strengthen the accuracy and consistency of its measurement instruments.

3.14 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations hinge on two primary aspects: conducting the study following the need for scientific knowledge and safeguarding the rights of research participants. Researchers must be aware of ethical requirements from the outset of their study, rather than identifying ethical concerns midway or at the conclusion of the research (Cohen, 2007). As a result, the researcher has diligently adhered to the ethical standards mandated by both the universities and the research field to the best of her knowledge and capability.

Among the ethical issues to be addressed are:

- Fulfilling the ethical obligations expected of a researcher Avoiding the collection of information from respondents for personal gain.
- Ensuring the confidentiality of data obtained from the target group.
- Maintaining a professional demeanor with research participants and avoiding any actions of embarrassment.
- Refraining from plagiarism and properly citing all reference materials used in the study.
- Conducting analysis and presenting study results in accordance with the collected data.
- Adhering to a rigorous scientific approach to achieve credible study outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the result of the data analysis is presented through compiling the information gathered through quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques. The main findings of the result of the study are presented in major sections including preliminary data examination, characteristics of the respondent and the firm, and the result of inferential statistics by assessing the measurement model and the structural model to test the proposed hypothesized relationship. The data screening and descriptive statistics were analysed using Excel and the inferential statistics is analysed by using SMARTPLS 4.1.1.1 statistical software.

The common research in education is categorized as exploratory (theory generating) and confirmatory research (theory testing) (Guarino, 2004). The statistical approach used to analyse exploratory research is called first generation and the latter is called second generation. Examples of first-generation techniques are linear regression, logistic regression, analysis of variance, and so on; and second-generation multivariate analysis include Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Guarino, 2004; Yahaya, Murtala, & Onukwube, 2019). The caveat of first-generation model is that the limitation to simple model analysis or test one link at the same time and the assumption to measure the variables without considering systemic or random errors (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004).

The second-generation techniques overcome these limitations and allow working on complicated model in a single analysis and to present in simple picture model. The statistical procedure test sophisticated and complex models that contains higher order constructs, mediation and moderation construct (Elangovan & Rajendran, 2015; Gerow et al., 2010). SEM assess the measurement model to validate the relation between latent variables and set of indicators and the structural model, meaning the relation between dependent and independent latent variables in a single analysis. The result of the analysis integrates the influence of measurement errors on the model and provides combined result of factor analysis and the test of hypothesis (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004; Elangovan & Rajendran, 2015).

There are three different approaches to conduct SEM that varies in the statistical assumptions called Covariance – based SEM (CB – SEM), Partial Least Squares (PLS) and Generalized Structured Component Analysis (GSCA) (Wong, 2013; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004; Guarino, 2004). CB-SEM is applied in case of large sample size and the data distribution is normal. CB

– SEM is also called Covariance Structure Analysis (CSA) and is the statistical tools used include LISREL, AMOS and EQS. PLS on the other hand do not require the normality assumptions and is best applied with smaller sample sizes. PLS constructs are tested using tools as SmartPLS and WarpPLS. The third approach is GSCA is mainly used in case of non-linear relationship of variables. The application of GSCA is limited to rare literatures and thus is not being widely applied for education research (Wong, 2013; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004; Guarino, 2004).

PLS SEM is used in this study due to various reasons including the procedure doesn't require population assumption, the sample size requirement is not highly affected by the complexity of the construct, the user – friendly graphical interface of SMARTPLS to comprehend the analysis easily, predictive precisions are most important and test complex path modelling including mediation in the construct using single analysis.

4.2 Preliminary Data Examination

4.2.1 Data Screening

The raw data gathered through questionnaire should be edited and coded to prepare the data for entry to proceed with the analysis (Zikmund et al., 2013). The raw data is susceptible to errors made by the respondent or by the interviewer called respondent and non-respondent error. Data editing and coding check the errors in the initial stage of data analysis. Data editing refers to checking data for completeness, consistency and clarity to prepare the data for coding (Zikmund et al., 2013; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The respondents of the questionnaire returned may not answer part of the question resulting in missing data. There are different approaches to manage missing data depending on the number of unanswered questions. If the questionnaire contains significant number of missing data greater than 25% of the questions, it is recommended not to include the questionnaire in data entry, otherwise if the missing data is lesser the common procedure the approach is to assign midpoint in an interval scale for the missing value or adjust the software to ignore the missing data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Data coding is to assign numerical values or classify the data to represent the responses in the data collection instrument (Zikmund et al., 2013; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016)

The researcher conducted data editing to check for completeness and consistency on the date of receiving the questionnaire to clarify the responses on due time. The total questionnaire

gathered was 281, of which 65 questionnaires had zero or less than 0.25 standard deviation value and thus were disregarded from the data entry. The data entry to PLS software was made directly from google forms as it has a supporting feature, which made the process of data entry very easy and error free.

4.2.2 Assumption testing

Outliers are observations that are distinct as compared to other observations and are characterized as distinct value on a variable called univariate outlier or unique combination of values across two or more variables called multivariate outlier (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013; Hair et al., 2006). In this study, the data is tested for outliers using Excel and no outliers were found.

Normality test assesses the normal distribution of the data and the two methods to conduct the test are skewness and kurtosis. Skewness is related to the symmetry of a distribution whereas kurtosis measures how peaked a distribution is (Neuman, 2014; Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013). The rule of thumb to test normality using statistics is by dividing the skewness or kurtosis value with the related standard error to compare the coefficient with the normal Z score table. The Z score associated with a 99% confidence level is ± 2.58 one of the commonly applied critical values (Hair et al., 2006).

Based on the calculation for skewness in this study (Table 4.2) the data is negatively skewed. On the other hand, Kurtosis results are obtained following the same procedure and the result indicates that the data has heavier tails than normal distribution, with a sharper peak and more data in the tails. One of the advantages of using SEM PLS statistical software is that it does not require normality assumption to be fulfilled.

4.3 Response Rate

A google form link to the questionnaire was shared with 281 respondents using snowball approach to attain the study objectives of getting valid responses. The researcher made sure to mark all the questions as required to ensure all questions are dealt with and minimise the number of unusable questionnaires. 65 questionnaires were removed from the data set as their standard deviation was either zero or below the recommended 0.25, which was a result of respondent misconduct. Table 4.1 shows the response rate.

Table 4.1: Response rate

Total Population	Distributed Questionnaire		Returned and Useful	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
500				

281	56.2%	216	43.2%
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Source: Own Survey data (2025)

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

Zikmund, (2002) and Neuman, (2013) propose altering data to facilitate comprehension and offer a more perceptive analysis of the subject matter. Descriptive statistics encompass the research variables' standard deviations, means, and frequencies, emphasizing the sample's key characteristics. Each non-characteristic question in the questionnaire survey is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where 7 indicates strong agreement, and 1 indicates strong disagreement with each item in the study's latent constructs. Table 8 shows the items' mean values and standard deviations. The overall agreement among respondents on the statements used to measure the survey's variables is evident from the average values across all indicators.

Table 4.2.: Values of Means, Standard Deviations, Excess kurtosis and Skewness of items

Construct	Item	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Excess kurtosis	Skewness
Technological Context	TC1	216	5.676	0.826	6.845	-1.866
	TC2		5.514	0.923	3.633	-1.233
	TC3		5.644	0.927	4.327	-1.48
	TC4		5.731	0.968	4.052	-1.504
	OC1		5.796	0.97	5.006	-1.76
	OC2		5.718	1.031	4.248	-1.68
	OC3		5.708	1.14	4.07	-1.675
Environmental Context	EC1	216	5.759	1.066	6.413	-2.184
	EC2		5.935	0.711	1.371	-0.685
	EC3		5.755	1.147	4.55	-1.827
	EC4		5.968	1.082	7.438	-2.233
	HC1		5.778	1.035	5.336	-1.84
	HC2		5.708	1.051	3.752	-1.706
	HC3		5.611	1.03	3.379	-1.439
Practitioner Enactment and Praxis	MAP01	216	5.657	0.954	4.934	-1.713
	MAP02		5.639	1.018	5.763	-2.012
	MAP03		5.648	1.048	4.499	-1.831
	MAP04		5.727	0.993	6.631	-2.031
	MAP05		5.681	0.869	5.25	-1.464
	MAP06		5.764	0.955	7.52	-2.274
	MAP07		5.681	0.779	5.931	-1.565
	MAP08		5.787	0.888	6.128	-1.687
	MAP09		5.755	0.962	6.765	-1.971
	MAP10		5.75	0.857	7.465	-2.03
	MAP11		5.769	0.924	8.688	-2.217

	MAP12		5.847	0.844	4.915	-1.423
Value Creation	VC1	216	5.935	0.779	7.623	-1.661
	VC2		5.88	0.79	8.961	-1.936
	VC3		5.833	0.805	7.807	-1.778
	VC4		5.755	0.816	6.381	-1.574
	VC5		5.694	0.995	6.851	-2.224
	VC6		5.69	0.893	6.18	-1.744
	VC7		5.736	0.981	6.718	-2.085
	VC8		5.699	0.917	6.818	-2.055
	VC9		5.759	1.003	6.223	-2.048

Adapted from: Ringle, C. M., Wende, S., and Becker, J.-M. 2024. "SmartPLS 4." Bönningstedt: SmartPLS, <https://www.smartpls.com>.

4.5 General Characteristics of Survey Participants

This section presents general characteristics of survey participants based on the result of the survey questionnaire in section 2 of the google form used, related to respondent characteristics, firm characteristics and digital marketing tools utilised by the firms.

4.5.1 Respondent Characteristics

The characteristics of the respondents are explained in terms of respondents' role in the organization and years of experience in digital marketing. The result of the survey is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Respondent characteristics

	Measure items	Frequency (n - 281)	Percent
Role in the Organization	Owner/Manager	53	18.9
	Marketing Staff	139	49.5
	Digital Marketing Specialist	127	45.2
	Others	18	6.7
Years of Digital Marketing Experience	Less than a Year	4	1.5
	1 – 3 Years	24	8.5
	4 – 6 Years	83	29.5
	Over 6 Years	170	60.5

The survey result indicates that majority of the participants (49.5%) are marketing staff. Managers or owners comprise around 18.9% and digital marketing specialists 45.2%. More than half of the respondents, 60.5% have over 6 years of digital marketing experience, whereas 29.5% have 3 to 6 years and 8.5% have 1 to 3 years of the same experience. It is worth noting

that most managers are also marketing staff and/or digital marketing specialists juggling multiple roles.

4.5.2 Firm Characteristics

The findings on the characteristics of firms are related to firm size (Number of employees), Number of Employees in Marketing/Digital Marketing, Digital marketing tools utilised, year of establishment and primary tourist markets. The results of the survey are summarized in Table 4.4.

The findings indicate that almost all inbound tour operators have less than 50 total employees (where 47.7% have 10 or less and 52% have 11 to 49 employees), making these firms small and medium enterprises (SMEs). more than half of inbound tour operator firms in Ethiopia (57.7%) have been in business for over 10 years where the majority (60.9%) have 3 or less employees in marketing and/or digital marketing roles. Other departments include sales (2.1%), IT administrator, travel consultant, web and database administrator and dealer, each comprising 0.4%. The primary tourist markets for these firms are Europe (90%), Asia (74.4%), Africa (63.7%), and North America (52.3%). All the firms seem to be actively using digital marketing tools with social media marketing leading (98.6%).

Table 4.4: Firm characteristics

Measure items		Frequency	Percent
Number of Employees	Less than 10	135	47.7%
	11 – 49	146	52%
	50 – 249	0	0
	More than 250	0	0
	Total	281	100%
Establishment	Under 3 years	15	5.3%
	3 to 5 years	31	11%
	6 to 10 years	87	31%
	Over 10 years	148	52.7%
	Total	281	100
Number of Employees in Marketing/Digital Marketing	1 – 3	171	60.9%
	4 – 7	93	33.1%
	8 – 15	15	5.3%
	More than 15	2	0.7%
	Total	281	100
Primary Tourist Market (multiple response item)	Europe	253	90%
	Asia	209	74.4%

Digital Marketing Tools Actively Used (multiple response item)	North America	147	52.3%
	Africa	179	63.7%
	Social Media Marketing	276	98.6%
	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	246	87.9%
	Content Marketing	217	77.5%
	Email Marketing and CRM Campaigns	231	82.5%
	Pay-per-click advertising	202	72.1%
	Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in marketing	144	51.4%
	Data analytics for customer insights and campaign	145	51.8%
	LinkedIn	1	0.4%

4.6 Data Analysis and Discussion

This part of the chapter presents the results of analyses that are conducted using the statistical technique discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter follows the widely accepted reporting style of PLS analysis as suggested by previous studies (Chin, 2010).

The goal of the model in this study is to explain value creating digital marketing practices of inbound tour operators in Ethiopia by examining practitioner enactment and praxis.

First, the validity and reliability of the measurement model is assessed, the structural model is validated. Since this paper involves assessing the mediating role of practitioner enactment and praxis (MAP) on value creation (VC), a post hoc analysis is conducted to examine this effect. The structural model ascertains the significance of hypothesized relationships. Different hypotheses were proposed to evaluate the relationship of predictors on the outcome.

4.6.1 Measurement Model Assessment

Quality of the constructs in the study is assessed based on the evaluation of the measurement model. The assessment of the quality criteria starts with evaluation of the factor loadings which is followed by establishing the construct reliability and construct validity.

4.6.1.1 Factor Loading

Factor loading refers to the “extent to which each of the items in the correlation matrix correlates with the given principal component. Factor loadings can range from -1.0 to +1.0, with higher absolute values indicating a higher correlation of the item with the underlying

factor” (Pett et al., 2003, p. 299). None of the items in the study had factor loading less than the recommended value of .50 (Hair et al, 2016). Hence, no items were further removed. Factor loadings are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5.: Factor Loadings

	01. TC	02. OC	03. EC	04. HC	05. MAP	06. VC
TC1	0.783					
TC2	0.847					
TC3	0.819					
TC4	0.860					
OC2		0.886				
OC3		0.899				
OC4		0.850				
EC1			0.776			
EC2			0.656			
EC3			0.760			
EC4			0.697			
HC2				0.901		
HC3				0.867		
HC4				0.868		
MAP01					0.799	
MAP02					0.791	
MAP03					0.854	
MAP04					0.798	
MAP05					0.776	
MAP06					0.782	
MAP07					0.710	
MAP08					0.766	
MAP09					0.799	
MAP10					0.665	
MAP11					0.739	
MAP12					0.520	
VC01						0.679
VC02						0.737
VC03						0.706
VC04						0.751
VC07						0.815
VC08						0.768
VC09						0.784
VC10						0.841
VC11						0.811

4.6.1.2 Indicator Multicollinearity

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistic is utilised to assess multicollinearity in the indicators (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). According to Hair et al (2016) multicollinearity is not a serious issue if the value for VIF is below 5. Table 4.6 presents the VIF values for the indicators in the study and reveals that VIF for each of the indicators is below the recommended threshold.

Table 4. 6. Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) for indicators

	VIF
TC1	1.666
TC2	2.065
TC3	1.964

TC4	2.158
OC2	2.432
OC3	2.545
OC4	1.751
EC1	1.330
EC2	1.225
EC3	1.584
EC4	1.457
HC2	2.281
HC3	2.090
HC4	1.991
MAPo1	2.641
MAPo2	3.019
MAPo3	3.777
MAPo4	2.555
MAPo5	2.277
MAPo6	2.411
MAPo7	2.097
MAPo8	2.324
MAPo9	2.629
MAP10	1.845
MAP11	2.282
MAP12	1.658
VCo1	1.655
VCo2	2.022
VCo3	1.926
VCo4	2.032
VCo7	2.466
VCo8	2.114
VCo9	2.264
VC10	2.823
VC11	2.318

4.6.1.3 Reliability Analysis

According to Trochim, W. M. K. (2006), reliability is defined as the extent to which a measuring instrument is stable and consistent with the essence of reliability is repeatability. If an instrument is administered repeatedly, it will yield the same results. The two most used methods for establishing reliability include Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). The results for both these methods are presented in Table 4.7. The Cronbach's Alpha ranged from .699 to .930 whereas Composite Reliability statistics ranged from .810 to .9. Both indicators of reliability have reliability statistic over the required threshold of .70 (Hair et al, 2011). Hence, construct reliability is established.

Table 4. 7. Construct Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability roh_a & roh_c)

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
01. TC	0.846	0.848	0.897
02. OC	0.852	0.852	0.910
03. EC	0.699	0.714	0.814
04. HC	0.853	0.859	0.911
05. MAP	0.930	0.938	0.940
06. VC	0.912	0.917	0.928

4.6.1.4 Construct Validity

Statistically using PLS-SEM, construct validity is established when there is convergent validity and discriminant validity.

A. Convergent Validity

“Convergent validity is the degree to which multiple attempts to measure the same concept agree. The idea is that two or more measures of the same thing should covary highly if they are valid measures of the concept” (Bagozzi et al., 1991, p. 425). When the AVE value is greater than or equal to the recommended value of .50, items converge to measure the underlying construct and hence convergent validity is established (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity results based on the AVE statistics in the current study show that all the constructs have CR values greater than .50. Hence, convergent validity is not an issue. Table 4.8 shows the AVE value for each of the constructs.

Table 4.8. Construct Convergent Validity (AVE)

Average variance extracted (AVE)	
01. TC	0.685
02. OC	0.772
03. EC	0.524
04. HC	0.773
05. MAP	0.569
06. VC	0.589

B. Discriminant Validity

“Discriminant validity is the degree to which measures of different concepts are distinct. The notion is that if two or more concepts are unique, then valid measures of each should not correlate too highly” (Bagozzi et al., 1991, p. 425).

i. Fornell and Larcker Criterion

according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE for a construct is greater than its correlation with all other constructs. In this study, square root of AVE (in Bold and Italics) for a construct was found greater than its correlation with other constructs (Table 4.9). Hence, providing strong support for establishment of discriminant validity.

Table 4.9. Discriminant Validity – Fornell & Larcker Criterion

01. TC	02. OC	03. EC	04. HC	05. MAP	06. VC
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01. TC	0.828					
02. OC	0.736	0.878				
03. EC	0.664	0.628	0.724			
04. HC	0.706	0.742	0.626	0.879		
05. MAP	0.740	0.744	0.664	0.749	0.755	
06. VC	0.731	0.732	0.658	0.731	0.839	0.767

Note: Bold and Italics represent the Square-root of AVE

ii. Cross Loadings

Cross loadings help assess if an item belonging to a particular construct loads strongly onto its own parent construct instead of other constructs in the study. The results (table 4.10) show that factor loading of all the items is stronger on the underlying construct to which they belong instead of the other construct in the study (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Hence, based on the evaluation of cross-loadings, discriminant validity is attained.

Table 4.10. Discriminant Validity – Cross Loadings

	01. TC	02. OC	03. EC	04. HC	05. MAP	06. VC
TC1	0.783	0.576	0.467	0.549	0.562	0.632
TC2	0.847	0.607	0.572	0.605	0.602	0.602
TC3	0.819	0.586	0.532	0.482	0.621	0.549
TC4	0.860	0.663	0.622	0.692	0.663	0.634
OC1	0.649	0.886	0.580	0.643	0.631	0.631
OC2	0.646	0.899	0.518	0.632	0.651	0.639
OC3	0.642	0.850	0.557	0.678	0.675	0.657
EC1	0.595	0.552	0.776	0.544	0.615	0.571
EC2	0.393	0.351	0.656	0.342	0.441	0.403
EC3	0.453	0.447	0.760	0.487	0.440	0.449
EC4	0.448	0.442	0.697	0.411	0.385	0.455
HC1	0.680	0.694	0.624	0.901	0.709	0.701
HC2	0.574	0.629	0.512	0.867	0.639	0.561
HC3	0.601	0.630	0.506	0.868	0.622	0.657
MAP01	0.630	0.686	0.516	0.653	0.799	0.709
MAP02	0.601	0.700	0.625	0.639	0.791	0.651
MAP03	0.605	0.666	0.640	0.703	0.854	0.721
MAP04	0.602	0.585	0.531	0.573	0.798	0.696
MAP05	0.558	0.569	0.480	0.600	0.776	0.638
MAP06	0.552	0.629	0.515	0.659	0.782	0.681
MAP07	0.493	0.517	0.385	0.513	0.710	0.549
MAP08	0.595	0.563	0.480	0.522	0.766	0.650
MAP09	0.607	0.549	0.490	0.535	0.799	0.691
MAP10	0.495	0.426	0.470	0.516	0.665	0.510
MAP11	0.568	0.466	0.486	0.487	0.739	0.635
MAP12	0.320	0.214	0.332	0.249	0.520	0.364
VC1	0.508	0.498	0.468	0.481	0.538	0.679
VC2	0.529	0.509	0.466	0.510	0.573	0.737
VC3	0.462	0.485	0.526	0.475	0.535	0.706
VC4	0.577	0.638	0.514	0.553	0.624	0.751
VC5	0.663	0.690	0.577	0.713	0.748	0.815
VC6	0.592	0.525	0.595	0.590	0.652	0.768
VC7	0.550	0.486	0.420	0.513	0.612	0.784
VC8	0.619	0.580	0.529	0.588	0.737	0.841
VC9	0.519	0.612	0.441	0.580	0.726	0.811

iii. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

HTMT is an assessment of discriminant validity based on the estimation of the correlation between the constructs. Discriminant validity is established based on the HTMT ratio. However, the threshold for HTMT has been debated in existing literature; Kline (2011) suggested a threshold of .85 or less, while Teo et al (2008) recommend a liberal threshold of .90 or less. The HTMT results show (table 4.11) that HTMT ratio for less than the required threshold of .90.

Table 4.11. Discriminant Validity – HTMT

	01. TC	02. OC	03. EC	04. HC	05. MAP	06. VC
01. TC						
02. OC	0.865					
03. EC	0.845	0.800				
04. HC	0.825	0.868	0.793			
05. MAP	0.828	0.817	0.800	0.826		
06. VC	0.828	0.825	0.812	0.819	0.896	

4.6.1.5 Model Explanatory Power and Goodness of Fit (Model's predictive capabilities)

To ascertain the goodness of fit, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (F^2), and the predictive relevance measure (Q^2) were assessed in the present study.

E. R-Square

The R^2 represents the variance explained in each of the endogenous constructs and is a measure of the model's explanatory power (Shmueli & Koppius, 2011), also referred to as in-sample predictive power (Rigdon, 2012). Simply, it means how much change in the dependent variable can be accounted by one of more independent variable(s). For example, a variable Y influenced by X1, X2, and X3 has a R-Square value of 0.623. This would mean that 62.3% change in Y can be explained by X1, X2, and X3.

There are different R-square values and thresholds that have been identified in existing research. The R^2 ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a greater explanatory power. Falk and Miller (1992) recommended that R^2 values should be equal to or greater than 0.10 for the variance explained of a particular endogenous construct to be deemed adequate. As a general guideline, Cohen (1988) suggested R^2 values for endogenous latent variables are assessed as follows: 0.26 (substantial), 0.13 (moderate), 0.02 (weak). But acceptable R^2 values are based on the research context, and in some disciplines, an R^2 value as low as 0.10 is considered satisfactory, as for example, in predicting stock returns (e.g., Raithel, Sarstedt, Scharf, & Schwaiger, 2012).

Chin (1998), however, recommended R^2 values for endogenous latent variables based on: 0.67 (substantial), 0.33 (moderate), 0.19 (weak). In more recent studies, Hair et al. (2011) & Hair et al. (2013) suggested in scholarly research that focuses on marketing issues, R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can, as a rough rule of thumb, be respectively described as substantial, moderate or weak consecutively.

The results in Table 4.12 show that R^2 for all the endogenous constructs is over 0.67 showing that the model explanatory power is substantial (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4.12. R-Square and Adjusted R-Square values of the model

	R-square	R-square adjusted
05. MAP	0.691	0.685
06. VC	0.751	0.745

The results of the analysis reveal R^2 value of .751 for VC. This shows that a 75% variance in VC can be attributed to External factors (TC, OC, EC & HC) and MAP. Based on the recommended 0.10 cutoff value (Falk and Miller, 1992) results indicated that our model obtained acceptable R^2 statistics for VC is substantial.

F. F-square

To better estimate the explanatory value of each exogenous variable in the model, the change in R^2 is estimated if a given exogenous construct is omitted from the model. This method is referred to as effect size (F^2). A variable in a structural model may be affected/influenced by several different variables. Removing an exogenous variable can affect the dependent variable. F-Square is the change in R-Square when an exogenous variable is removed from the model. F-square is effect size (≥ 0.02 is small; ≥ 0.15 is medium; ≥ 0.35 is large) (Cohen, 1988).

The effect size is the measure of influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. In PLS path model, when an independent variable is excluded from the model, it measures the variation in squared correlation values and ascertain whether the excluded independent variable has a strong effect on the value of dependant variable. The impact of predictor variable is high at the structural level if F^2 is 0.35 and it is medium if F^2 is 0.15 and small if F^2 is 0.02 (Cohen, 1988). The model's F^2 effect size shows how much an exogenous latent variable contributes to an endogenous latent variable's R^2 value. In simple terms, effect size assesses the magnitude of strength of relationship between the latent variables. The result (table 4.13) revealed that f-square effect size ranged from 0.014 (negligible) for EC on VC to 0.332 (large) for MAP on VC.

Table 4.13. F-Square values of the model

	01. TC	02. OC	03. EC	04. HC	05. MAP	06. VC
01. TC					0.071	0.020
02. OC					0.066	0.018
03. EC					0.045	0.014
04. HC					0.104	0.019
05. MAP						0.332
06. VC						

In this study, the influence on VC is assessed through several predictor variables. According to Hair et al, (2013), it is recommended that f^2 effect size shall also be presented. F^2 effect size statistic specifies if removal of an independent variable from the model can have a substantial impact on the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2013). The analysis results of f^2 statistic show that in the context of the present study, the removal of MAP will have a significant influence on VC. The effect size and its significance are presented in table 4.13 above.

G. Q-Square

This is predictive relevance that measures whether a model has predictive relevance or not and it should be > 0 . Further, Q^2 establishes the predictive relevance of the endogenous constructs. Q^2 values above zero indicate that the values are well reconstructed and that the model has predictive relevance. A Q^2 above 0 shows that the model has predictive relevance. Q^2 : 0.02, 0.15, 0.35 for weak, moderate, and strong degree of predictive relevance of each effect (Hair et al., 2013). Finally, the Q^2 values for the endogenous constructs was over 0; hence, predictive relevance was established.

Table 4.14. Q-Square: Predictive Relevance of the model

	Q^2_{predict}	RMSE	MAE
05. MAP	0.654	0.616	0.427
06. VC	0.622	0.653	0.440

Effect size (Q^2) for predictive relevance of VC was .622. The statistic indicates that the independent variables have a high effect in producing the Q^2 showing a higher predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2016).

Apart from the mentioned statistics, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) can also be used as a measure of fit where a value less than .010 or 0.08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) is considered a good fit. The value of SRMR in the present study is 0.065.

4.6.2 Structural Model Assessment

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the next step is the evaluation of structural path for the evaluation of path coefficients (relationships amongst study constructs) and their statistical significance. This substantiates the proposed hypotheses.

Figure 4.1. Structural model analysis: Bootstrapping

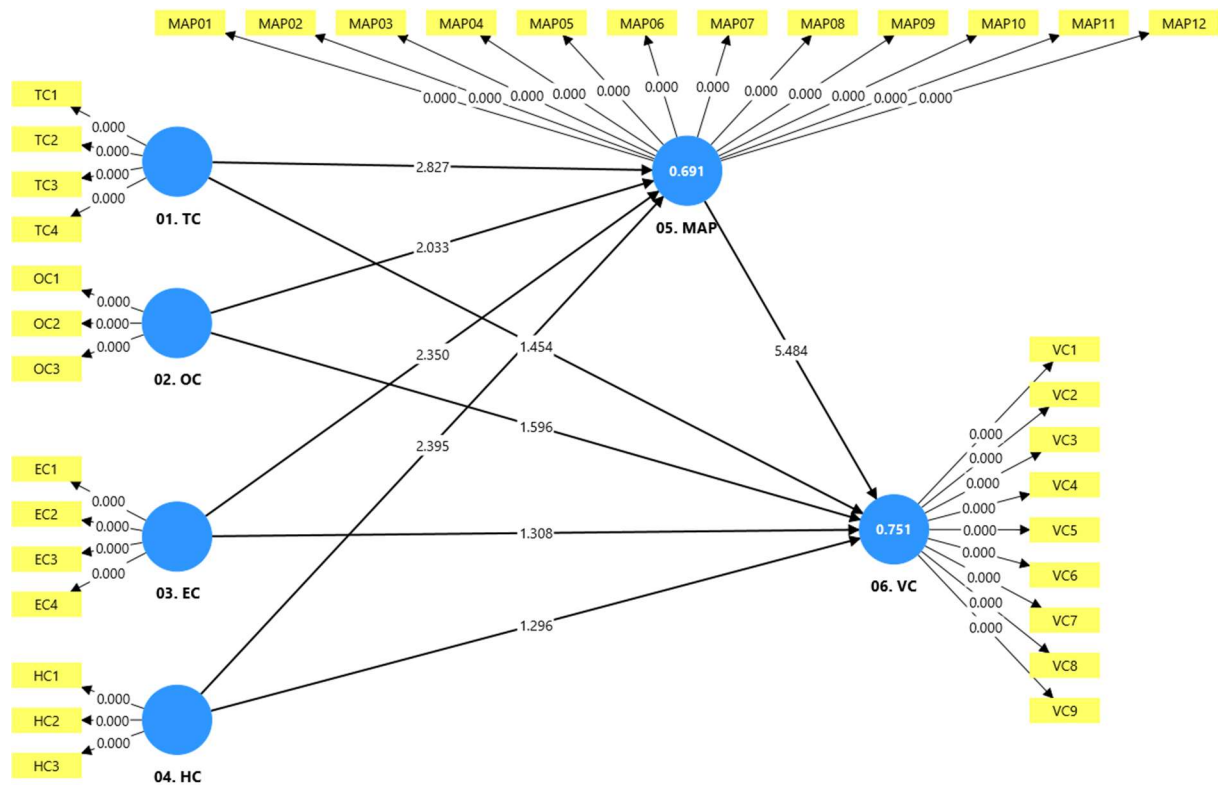


Table 4.15. Direct Relationships

HYPOTHESES	BETA COEFFICIENT (B)	STANDARD DEVIATION (STDEV)	T STATISTICS (O/STDEV)	P VALUES
01. TC -> 06. VC	0.122	0.084	1.453	0.146
02. OC -> 06. VC	0.118	0.074	1.601	0.109
03. EC -> 06. VC	0.086	0.066	1.304	0.192
04. HC -> 06. VC	0.116	0.090	1.291	0.197
05. MAP -> 06. VC	0.517	0.093	5.527	0.000
01. TC -> 05. MAP	0.245	0.088	2.784	0.005
02. OC -> 05. MAP	0.242	0.121	2.007	0.045
03. EC -> 05. MAP	0.167	0.071	2.336	0.020
04. HC -> 05. MAP	0.291	0.122	2.383	0.017

Note: β = Beta coefficient, SE = Standard Error, T = t-statistics, P = Probability (P) value, Relationships are significant at P 0.001, TC: Technological Context, OC: Organizational Context, EC: Environmental Context, HC: Human Competence, MAP: Practitioner Enactment and Praxis, VC: Value Creation.

H1 evaluates whether Technological Context significantly and positively affects VC. The results revealed that Technological Context has an insignificant and positive impact on value creation ($\beta = 0.122$, $t = 1.453$, $p = 0.146$). Hence, H1 was not supported. The results are presented in Table 4.15 (above). The structural model is presented in Figure 4.1 (above).

H2 evaluates whether Organizational Context (OC) has a significant Positive effect/relationship on value creation. The results revealed that Organizational Context has an insignificant and positive impact on value creation ($\beta = 0.118$, $t = 1.601$, $p = 0.109$). Hence, H2 was not supported.

H3 evaluates whether Environmental Context (EC) has a positive significant effect/relationship on value creation. The results revealed that Environmental Context has an insignificant and impact on value creation ($\beta = 0.086$, $t = 1.304$, $p = 0.192$). Hence, H3 was not supported.

H4 evaluates whether Human competence (HC) has a positive significant effect/relationship on value creation. The results revealed that Human Competence has an insignificant impact on value creation ($\beta = 0.116$, $t = 1.291$, $p = 0.197$). Hence, H4 was not supported.

H5 evaluates whether practitioner enactment and praxis (MAP) has a positive significant effect/relationship on value creation. The results revealed that MAP has a significant and positive impact on value creation ($\beta = 0.517$, $t = 5.527$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H5 was supported.

H6 evaluates whether Technological Context significantly and positively affects MAP. The results revealed that Technological Context has a significant and positive impact on MAP ($\beta = 0.245$, $t = 2.784$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H6 was supported.

H7 evaluates whether Organizational Context significantly and positively affects MAP. The results revealed that Organizational Context has a significant and positive impact on MAP ($\beta = 0.242$, $t = 2.007$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H7 was supported.

H8 evaluates whether Environmental Context significantly and positively affects MAP. The results revealed that Environmental Context has a significant and positive impact on MAP ($\beta = 0.167$, $t = 2.336$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H8 was supported.

H9 evaluates whether Human Competence significantly and positively affects MAP. The results revealed that Human Competence has a significant and positive impact on MAP ($\beta = 0.291$, $t = 2.383$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H9 was supported.

4.7 Mediation Analysis

Mediation occurs when a construct, referred to as mediator construct, intervenes between two other related constructs. More precisely a change in the exogenous construct in the PLS path modes. When such an effect is present, mediation can be a useful statistical analysis, if

supported by theory and carried out properly. As shown in the figure below, a direct effect (p_3 between Y_1 and Y_2) describes the relationships linking two constructs with a single arrow while indirect effects (e.g. indirect effect of Y_1 on Y_2 in the form of $Y_1 \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y_2$ sequence) are those structural model paths that involve a sequence of relationships with at least one intervening construct involved.

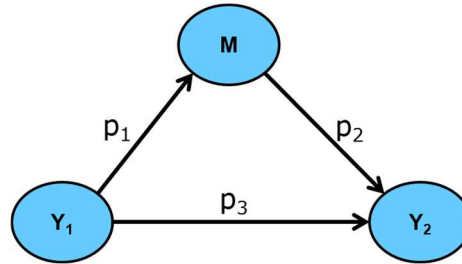


Figure. 4.2: A Simple mediation model. Source: Hair et al. (2016)

The indirect effect, computed as the product $p_1 \cdot p_2$, represents the mediating effect of the construct M on the relationship between Y_1 and Y_2 . Finally, the sum of the direct and indirect effect is referred to as the total effect (i.e., $p_1 \cdot p_2 + p_3$ in the figure).

4.7.1 Mediation Analysis Procedure

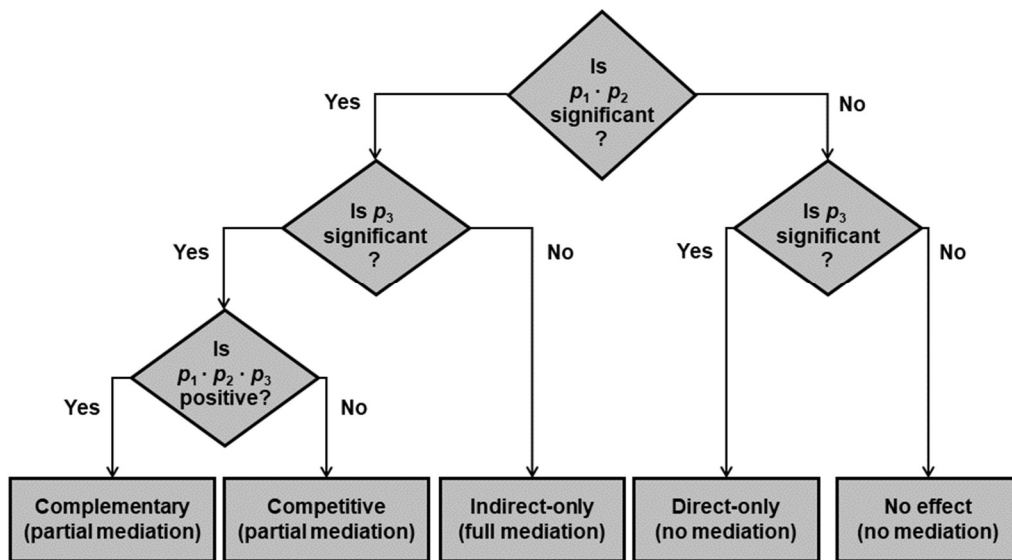


Figure 4.3: Mediation analysis procedure. Source: Hair et al., (2021)

Mediation analysis of the model constructs

Following are the hypotheses for the model's mediation analysis.

Hypothesis 5a: MAP mediates the effect/relationship of technological context on value creation

Hypothesis 5b: MAP mediates the effect of Organizational context on value creation

Hypothesis 5c: MAP mediates the effect of Environmental context on value creation

Hypothesis 5d: MAP mediates the effect of Human context on value creation

Mediation analysis was performed to assess the mediating role of MAP in the relationship between Technological Context and Value Creation. The results, as in Table 4.16, revealed a significant indirect effect of TC on VC through MAP (H5a: $\beta = 0.127$, $t = 2.732$, $p < 0.001$). The total effect of TC on VC was still significant ($\beta = 0.249$, $t = 2.498$, $p < 0.001$), with the inclusion of the mediator the direct effect of TC on VC was not significant ($\beta = 0.122$, $t = 1.454$, $p < 0.001$). This shows a complete mediating role of MAP in the relationship between TC and VC. Hence, H5a was supported.

Table 4.16. Mediation Analysis Results

Direct Effect		Hypotheses	Specific Indirect Effect			Results
β	T		β	T	P	
0.122	1.454	TC $\rightarrow$ MAP $\rightarrow$ VC	0.127	2.732	0.003	Full mediation
0.118	1.596	OC $\rightarrow$ MAP $\rightarrow$ VC	0.125	1.921	0.027	Full mediation
0.086	1.308	EC $\rightarrow$ MAP $\rightarrow$ VC	0.086	2.291	0.011	Full mediation
0.116	1.296	HC $\rightarrow$ MAP $\rightarrow$ VC	0.151	2.037	0.021	Full mediation

Note: TC: Technological Context, VC: Value Creation, MAP: Practitioner Enactment and Praxis, β : Path coefficient, T: t-value, P: p-value

In the relationship between Organizational Context and Value Creation. The results, as shown in Table 4.16, revealed indirect effect of OC on VC through MAP (H5b: $\beta = 0.125$, $t = 1.921$, $p > 0.001$) to be significant. The total effect of OC on VC was significant ($\beta = 0.243$, $t = 2.438$, $p < 0.001$), with the inclusion of the mediator the effect of TC on VC was not significant ($\beta = 0.118$, $t = 1.596$, $p < 0.001$). This shows full mediating role of MAP in the relationship between OC and VC. Hence, H5b was supported.

In the relationship between Environmental Context and Value Creation from the same table, a significant indirect effect of EC on VC through MAP (H5c: $\beta = 0.086$, $t = 2.291$, $p < 0.001$) is revealed. The total effect of EC on VC was also significant ($\beta = 0.172$, $t = 2.101$, $p < 0.001$), with the inclusion of the mediator the direct effect of EC on VC was not significant ($\beta = 0.086$, $t = 1.308$, $p < 0.001$). This shows a complete mediating role of MAP in the relationship between EC and VC. Hence, H5c was supported.

In the relationship between Human Competence and Value Creation, Table 4.16 revealed a significant indirect effect of HC on VC through MAP (H5d: $\beta = 0.151$, $t = 2.037$, $p > 0.001$).

The total effect of HC on VC was significant ($\beta = 0.267$, $t = 2.201$, $p > 0.001$), with the inclusion of the mediator the effect of HC on VC was not significant ($\beta = 0.116$, $t = 1.296$, $p < 0.001$). This shows a full mediating role of MAP in the relationship between HC and VC. Hence, H5d was supported.

4.8 Discussion of research Quantitative and Qualitative results

This section presents detail discussion on the findings of the study in relation to previous research and literature review to review the practice of digital marketing on value creation in inbound tour operators in Addis Ababa through assessing practitioner enactment and praxis. The semi structured interview was conducted with key representatives from ETOA and TETOA and selected inbound tour operator firms' employees and/or owners who have participated in the survey to substantiate the findings of the survey result. The interview was conducted with ETOA's president Ato Fitsum Gezahgne and Ato Nahom Admassu from TETOA and Ato. Matias Belema, Ato Lulu Hussien and Mr. Mark Chapman.

4.8.1 Technological Context, practitioner enactment and praxis, and value creation

H6: Technological context has a significantly positive relationship with practitioner enactment and praxis

The study findings support that technology has significant positive relationship with practitioner enactment and praxis. The study result aligns with previous research (G. Finger & Paul Finger, 2013; Phillips, 2016; Nietzsche et al., 2021; Prakash, 2013; Fatima Gillani et al., 2020; Duffy & Ney, 2015; Buvár & Gáti, 2023; Paulino & Guio Bragato, 2024), that emphasize the importance of considering contextual factors and user perspectives in designing and implementing technological interventions and in shaping digital marketing practices and practitioner enactment. Technology context is characterized by the firm's initiation to devise technology management framework, use up – to-date technologies, allocates resources to invest in new technologies, proactively tries new methods and improves internal processes, consider technology as competitive advantage and develops capability to adopt new technologies.

In Ethiopian inbound tour operators, digital technologies are having growing importance Entrepreneurial marketing practices, including innovativeness and proactiveness, significantly impact business sustainable development (Tolossa et al., 2024). More importantly, e-marketing affects customer satisfaction, with motivation and technical skills being significant factors as discussed by Mezgebe (2020).

H1: Technological Context has a positive and significant relationship with value creation

This hypothesis is rejected whereby technological context has no significant relationship with value creation. This finding contradicts with previous research results (Jintanee Ru-Zhuc et al., 2022; Ruël & van der Kaap, 2012; Zaidi & Othman, 2013; Corsaro & Anzivino, 2021).

The modern value chain of the tourism sector is aided by Information and Communication Technology to create value and be competitive in the international market. However, the managers of Ethiopian tourism firms either do not update the systems to be competent in the dynamic market, or still widely practice using traditional means. Increasing technological scope without integration can negatively impact firm value (Lee & Balasubramanian, 2010).

From the discussions with representatives of ETOA and TETOA, tour operators mostly prefer to follow the “old ways of doing business” and relatively adopt old technologies by using them for longer period with lack of proper expertise. The main constraint to adopt up to date technologies is reluctance on using digital marketing in its fullest capacity or limited knowhow.

H5a: Practitioner enactment and praxis mediates the relationship between technology context and value creation

The research findings indicate that ‘practitioner enactment and praxis’ fully mediates the relation between technology context and value creation. This finding is consistent with previous research (Luna-Reyes et al., 2016; Ellway & Dean, 2016; Constantinides & Barrett, 2006; Holttinen, 2013)

4.8.2 Organizational Context, practitioner enactment and praxis and value creation

H7: Organizational context has a positive and significant relationship with practitioner enactment and praxis

The study findings support that organizational context has a significant positive relationship with practitioner enactment and praxis. The study result is consistent with previous research findings (Cummings et al., 2010; Smith & Manfredo, 2011; Cummings et al., 2004; Cummings et al., 2010). Organizational context is characterized by the firm’s approach to adopt new ideas, exchange new knowledge, skills, success and failure among colleagues, encourage and empower staff to take risks and reward innovative outcomes, and provide flexible organizational structure. In discussion with good performing firms in digital marketing, the insight obtained is that employees are encouraged to be creative and try new marketing

approaches using digital tools. The firms also devise competitive incentives such as bonuses and allocates budget to support promising ideas. However, consistent with Jansson (2013), they also stress on the fact that organizational change practices are context-specific and conditioned by mundane assumptions, emphasizing the importance of power, practical wisdom, and paradox in human interactions. These findings highlight the complex relationship between organizational context and practitioner behaviour, underscoring the need for further research to understand and optimize this connection.

H2: Organizational context has a positively significant relationship with value creation.

This hypothesis is not supported by the study indicating Organizational context has no significant relationship with firm performance. Again, the study contradicts with previous research findings (Barakat et al., 2022; López Sánchez et al., 2010; Sánchez et al., 2016; Ruël & van der Kaap, 2012; Ruël & van der Kaap, 2012). Recent studies, however, have explored the relationship between organizational context and value creation, yielding mixed results. Allouch and Hafiane (2022) found that organizational capital had a non-significant positive effect on value creation in large Moroccan firms, suggesting that efforts to codify tacit knowledge and improve organizational capital were ineffective. Similarly, Lenart-Gansiniec and Sułkowski (2020) reported that organizational learning was not related to value creation in Polish local governance units. However, Ruël and van der Kaap (2012) discovered that contextual factors facilitating e-HRM usage were positively related to HRM value creation, although they unexpectedly weakened the relationship between e-HRM usage and value creation when high. These findings indicate that the relationship between organizational context and value creation is complex and may depend on various factors, including the specific organizational setting, the type of value creation measured, and the presence of mediating variables (Lenart-Gansiniec & Sułkowski, 2020).

In Ethiopian Inbound Tour Operators, firms are reluctant to engage in digital marketing practices and have limited understanding of the difference between digital marketing and digital presence. Most managers of Inbound tour operators in Ethiopia assume that having social media accounts and websites is enough to be counted as fully utilising state of the art marketing activities. Moreover, there is a limited practitioner skill inhibiting value creation (Georgise et al., 2014; Waktola et al., 2024; Gebreslassie, 2020; Brixiová & Ncube, 2013).

H5b: Practitioner enactment and praxis mediates the relationship between organizational context and value creation

The research hypothesis, Practitioner enactment and praxis fully mediates the relationship between organizational context and value creation, is supported. This result aligns with prior research findings (Ellway & Dean, 2016; Holttinen, 2013; Ellway & Dean, 2016; Meijerink, 2014; Holttinen, 2013; Wieland et al., 2016).

4.8.3 Environmental context, practitioner enactment and praxis and value creation

H8: Environmental context has a positive and significant relationship with practitioner enactment and praxis

In line with previous research studies (Llorenç Bagur-Femenías et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2008; Kassinis & Soteriou, 2003; González Benito & González Benito, 2007), the hypothesis is also supported based on the current research result. Environmental context is characterised by coordination of tour operators to serve the target market and create value, develop dialogue with the government and potential travellers, respond proactively to competitor action and share market information to develop common understanding of traveller and competitor attitudes. From the discussion the researcher had with the interviewees, this doesn't seem to be the case and the two associations, ETOA and TETOA are working to fill the gap and strengthen dialogue and coopetition amongst inbound tour operators within Ethiopia as well as abroad.

H3: Environmental context has a positive and significant relationship with value creation

Contrary to previous research (Ellway & Dean, 2016; Gregori & Holzmann, 2022; Wieland et al., 2016; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2020), the research findings do not support the hypothesis that that environmental context has a significantly positive relationship with value creation. The relationship between environmental performance and value creation is complex and context dependent. There are studies that, however, support the study's findings and find no significant impact (Lu et al., 2011; Pérez-Calderón et al., 2012; Nadeem et al., 2019; Pérez-Calderón et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2011). Despite inconsistent findings, environmental factors can influence industry attractiveness, business positioning, and competitive advantages (Rodríguez & Ricart, 2000). These studies highlight the importance of considering environmental variables in business strategy, even if not all companies need to adopt explicit environmental strategies.

This conclusion also seems to be supported by the interview results. According to the discussion with the informants, the harsh reality is that most inbound tour operators are “not willing” to engage in the international market and only use their business as a way of going abroad for “other different purposes”, which limits the national goal of the tourism sector of enhancing

earnings from export. Moreover, the ‘trade intelligence’ of tour operators in Ethiopia to comprehend market trends and timely communicate is limited. The two associations strive to support the firms with information on international tourism trade fares and promote linkage with other countries’ tourism boards and destination management organizations.

H5c: Practitioner enactment and praxis mediates the relationship between environmental context and value creation

This hypothesis is supported in this study with a complete mediation role of practitioner enactment and praxis in the relationship between environmental context and value creation. This is consistent with the study by Sajilan & Tehseen (2019).

4.8.4 Human competence, practitioner enactment and praxis and value creation

H9: Human competence has a positive and significant relationship with practitioner enactment and praxis

Concurrent to previous research, (Omland, 2009; Triyonggo et al., 2015; Metz et al., 2021; McGuire et al., 2015), the research findings support this hypothesis confirming the significantly positive relationship that human competence has with practitioner enactment and praxis. This relationship is characterized by how marketing professionals implement theories and practices in real- world contexts, emphasizing the interplay between marketing practices, practitioners, and praxis in creating value (Skålén et al., 2022). This approach bridges the gap between theory and practice, addressing the often-disconnected nature of marketing strategy and implementation (Smith et al., 2015). Praxis involves applying practical wisdom to uncertain situations, while critical praxis questions existing norms to improve practices (Hopwood et al., 2021). The interview results also affirm this notion that there are significant relationships between employee competencies and business performance. However, many employees in Ethiopian Inbound Tour Operation lack essential marketing and customer handling skills, leading to poor service quality ratings as also discussed in prior research (Potluri & Awgichew Abiye Zeleke, 2009; Admkew Haile Mengesha, 2015). Hence many tour operators outsource digital marketing professionals.

H4: Human competence has a positive and significant relationship with value creation

Contrary to previous studies (Díez et al., 2010; Růžicková & Novák, 2010; Yeh & Kung, 2013; Cannavacciuolo et al., 2012), the hypothesis is rejected based on the data analysis of the study. However, there are studies that support the finding. However, other studies find no significant

relationship (Wati & Kurniawati, 2020; Ifleh et al., 2018). Similarly, Wati & Kurniawati (2020) concluded that human resource competence does not significantly affect employee performance in their study of a government department. Ifleh et al. (2018) also found no link between human capital and value creation in Moroccan hotels. These mixed findings suggest that the relationship between human competence and value creation may be context-dependent and influenced by various factors. This is also true in Ethiopia where this relationship is complex and not always straight forward. From discussions with a couple of inbound tour operators, human competence alone does not guarantee value creation as there are multiple other factors involved from the government to social actors to the local context.

H5d: Practitioner enactment and praxis mediate the relationship between human competence and value creation

In line with prior research (Ellway & Dean, 2016; Wieland et al., 2016; Kelleher et al., 2019; Kelleher et al., 2019; Pérez Toro & Alberto, 2009), the study findings reveal that practitioner enactment and praxis fully mediate the relationship between human competence and value creation.

4.8.5 Practitioner enactment and praxis and value creation

H5: Practitioner enactment and praxis have a positive and significant relationship with value creation

The study's findings align with earlier research, reinforcing the hypothesis that there is a significant link between practitioner enactment, praxis, and value creation. Value creation is viewed as a dynamic process that merges practice with experience, where practitioners engage in sensemaking activities shaped by both individual and contextual influences (Ellway & Dean, 2016). This viewpoint broadens to include a wider understanding of actor involvement in value creation, suggesting that all economic and social actors contribute equally by performing and molding value co-creation practices through institutional work (Wieland et al., 2016). Value is associated with practices rather than products, with value creation being a socially constructed process affected by practice-specific meaning structures, context, and consumer resources (Holttinen, 2010). These findings underscore the necessity of comprehending value creation as a multifaceted, dynamic process that involves numerous actors and practices.

As it can be applicable in Ethiopia, integrating themed attractions can provide opportunities for value co-creation but may also lead to value co-destruction (Sørensen et al., 2020). Studies

emphasize the importance of understanding entrepreneurial behaviour and its effects on firm performance in African contexts, offering insights for promoting tourism development and success in Ethiopia and similar cultural and business environments (Eyana et al., 2017; Eyana, 2017).

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, Proposition, AND Implication FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Conclusion

This thesis attempts to discuss the digital marketing practice of inbound tour operators in Ethiopia. It aims to understand the impact of diverse contextual factors on such practice and its contribution toward organizational value creation. To this end, the study specifically investigated the technological context, organizational readiness, environmental pressures, and human competences that shape digital marketing praxis and how such praxis mediates the relationship between those external/internal factors and value creation. Following are key findings of the study.

Summary of Key Findings

- Inbound tour operators in Ethiopia adopt digital marketing tools, including social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), customer relationship management (CRM), content marketing, email campaigns, and online booking systems. However, their effective utilisation is influenced by organizational and environmental factors. Operators often face constraints such as gaps in digital marketing skills, which compel them to adapt through, informal training, and outsource to an external agency. Moreover, cultural differences, weak institutional support, and fragmented industry coordination shape how practitioners plan and execute digital marketing initiatives. To overcome these challenges, marketing professionals exhibit significant adaptability, leveraging contextual knowledge and improvisation to create value, maintain competitiveness, and attract global tourists. This highlights the importance of practitioner agency in bridging the gap between global digital marketing trends and local operational realities.
- Technological, organizational, environmental factors, and human competence do not directly impact value creation statistically. However, those factors were granted a significant positive influence on the enactment of digital marketing practices by practitioners. Although these contextual conditions do not seem to provide value directly, they are, nonetheless, deemed as essential inputs affecting how marketing practitioners design and implement digital strategies.
- Enactment and praxis of the practitioner significantly and positively contribute to value creation. More importantly, the mediation analysis revealed that the enactment of digital marketing practices significantly mediates the interplay between contextual factors

(technological, organizational, environmental, and human competence) and value creation. Thus, these findings reaffirm the essential role of practitioner agency in exploiting resources effectively and manoeuvring through environmental complexities to create value.

This study contributes to the theoretical debate by providing further support for the argument that organizational value in the digital marketing context is not based on resources owned, but rather on the effective and contextually appropriate use of those resources by practitioners. It furthers an understanding of digital marketing as a socially constructed and enacted practice, in which outcomes arise from both structural conditions and individual agency.

Practically, the research underlines the need for organizational capabilities developed that enable innovation and responsiveness by practitioners. Inbound tour operators seeking digitally driven competitive positioning must consider human resource development, a culture of adaptability, and technological infrastructure aligned with practitioner needs as essential strategies.

In closing, this paper asserts that the creation of value in digital marketing within the inbound tourism sector of Ethiopia is a result of practitioner-driven practice, determined by an expansive technological, organizational, and environmental context. Further research could build on this study by examining longitudinal effects or exploring similar dynamics in other contexts within emerging markets.

5.2 Propositions

From the research findings and conclusions of this study, following are some recommendations directed toward practitioners and policymakers involved in Ethiopia's tourism industry. These recommendations concern the improvement of digital marketing efforts targeting inbound tour operators.

Strengthen Practitioner Competence and Capacity Building

Practitioner enactment and praxis are pivotal in determining value creation, thus implying that tour operators should invest continuously in the development of digital marketing skills. Contents of training programs, workshops, and certifications on digital tools, content creation, analytics, and strategic planning need to be prioritized so that marketers are equipped with the necessary skills to adapt to ever-changing market conditions.

Align Technological Investments with Practitioner Needs

Value creation is not an automatic function of technological infrastructure. Accordingly, the adoption of technology must be matched with the actual needs and skills of marketing specialists. Investment choices should be based on real-life tool and platform usage and planned for with continued support in integrating them into everyday marketing activities.

Foster Organizational Readiness and Flexibility

Agile Marketing practices must be supported through organizational structure and culture. That means fostering cross-functional teamwork, eliminating bureaucratic impediments to innovation, and taking small bets on digital tactics. Leadership needs to nurture a culture in which practitioner-led projects are valued and encouraged.

Encourage a Responsive and Supportive External Environment

Collaboration among different stakeholders including industry associations, governmental bodies, and tourism boards is essential in creating an ecosystem that enhances value in the context of fostering digital transformation. Strategies for supporting digital transformation may include creating incentives for digital innovations, formulating tourism marketing policies at the national level, and providing equal opportunities for all players within the industry to access the infrastructure needed digitally.

Develop Policy Frameworks to Support Digital Marketing in Tourism

Policymaking bodies need to capture digitally marketed tourism and the intent to market Ethiopia as a travel destination for tourists as one of the objectives under Ethiopian tourism and branding policy framework. Provisions on the fostering of digital literacy, data privacy, electronic business, and tourism marketing should be in place in line with the overall nation's tourism development strategy, subsequently supporting national tourism development strategy.

Encourage Best Practice Dissemination and Learning Initiative

The establishment of informal forums where tour operators can discuss emerging challenges and share experiences in the context of digital marketing can foster an exchange of best practices and facilitate elevating the industry. This can include industry forums, digital repositories chronicling achievements, collaborations, central structures organized for competition like conferences or routinely held conferences.

5.3 Implication for Future Research

The current analysis has been conducted concerning the inbound tour operators in Ethiopia and their practice of digital marketing. Even though it offers notable contributions, there is still room for additional academic work.

Through conducting the research interview, the researcher found out that most tour operators in Ethiopia are small tour operators that can basically fall into one of 4 categories regarding digital marketing:

1. They outsource to an external agency
2. They employ an individual who manages some part of it
3. They manage it themselves
4. They don't do anything on digital Marketing other than the very basic steps

Future research will yield better results if they take these categories into consideration. Consequently, the following suggestions are proposed to guide future research efforts:

Longitudinal Studies on Practitioner Praxis and Value Creation

Incremental research could use longitudinal approaches to scrutinize the impacts of digital marketing practice and its execution over time. There is likely a relationship between the continued use of certain digital strategies and the eventual long-term value or competitive edge a company can achieve which drives the digital transformation of tourism enterprises.

Comparative Studies Across Countries

There is a value in looking at other countries that have emerging markets. This case study could focus on inbound tour operators and analyse the differences between them, both culturally and concerning regulations. Also, what is their level of infrastructure, and how does it affect the use of digital marketing tools?

Quantitative Expansion with Larger and More Diverse Samples

Gathering data from multiple sources can help with forming new hypotheses. Also, the results can be said to be more applicable and more valid. Within Ethiopia, including other parts of the country would allow for the study of various firms, linking the public with private partnerships, and thus creating a diverse grouping of constituents.

A deeper Qualitative Exploration of Practitioner Perspectives

Although this study utilised a mixed methods approach, it mostly relied on quantitative data due to time constraints. Future work could consider the lived realities of marketing practitioners

by utilizing a deeper qualitative approach. This would enrich understanding about how these practitioners navigate obstacles, strategically decide, and respond to various pressures.

Centring Customers Outcomes

Further studies may delve into the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer participation, satisfaction, and loyalty within the inbound tourism industry. Integrating the viewpoint of customers (tourists, travel agents, larger tour operators etc.) would enhance understanding of how digital marketing is value-driven sculpted from the supply and demand sides.

Emerging Technologies in Digital Marketing

With the wider availability of tools like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and augmented reality, new research could investigate how these technologies are utilised by inbound tour operators for advanced marketing purposes. Examining the readiness for adoption and the use of such technologies could yield valuable perspectives on the progression of the industry.

Evaluation of Policy and Institutional Support Framework

Subsequent studies might also take a holistic approach to explore how institutional and policy support affect digital marketing, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sector. Examination of national tourism policies, digital infrastructure policies and public-private partnership agreements of influence on the marketing capability would help to direct policy focus and allocation.

5.4 Insight on the MAP framework

The Marketing as a Practice framework can stimulate further research target that include the digital marketing practices that create value among inbound tour operators in Ethiopia. It raises questions on how local operators understand and perform marketing within their specific contexts. Moreover, it opens possibilities for qualitative research that analyses the intricacy of marketing practices and value, customer satisfaction, and competitive positioning within the hospitality and tourism unit.

In short, the Marketing as a Practice framework supports analysing value-adding inbound digital marketing practices of tour operators from Ethiopia. It helps conceptualize the interaction between action, context, and value creation in tourism marketing and enhance the existing frameworks and literature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research questionnaire with introduction (In English)

Greetings!

My name is Meraf Yohannes, and I am currently conducting research for my master's thesis at **Addis Ababa University** and **Mainz University of Applied Sciences (Germany)** as part of the requirements of my double degree in Quality Management and International Business.

You are invited to participate in this research study on the topic: **"Value-Creating Digital Marketing Practices in Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia: Examining Practitioner Enactment and Praxis for Competitive Advantage."**

The purpose of this study is to explore how inbound tour operators in Ethiopia implement digital marketing strategies, and how these practices contribute to business competitiveness. Your responses will help generate valuable insights into industry practices, challenges, and opportunities in the digital marketing landscape.

Your Participation:

- The questionnaire will take approximately **10 - 15 minutes** to complete
- Participation is **completely voluntary**.
- You may choose to withdraw at **any point** without any consequences.
- All responses will be **kept confidential** and will be used strictly for academic purposes.
- No personally identifying information will be disclosed in the research report or any publications.

By proceeding to fill out this questionnaire, you acknowledge that:

- You have been informed about the nature and purpose of the study.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You understand that your responses will remain anonymous and confidential

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at:

✉ Meraf.yohannes@aau.edu.et; merafyohannes@gmail.com | ☎ +251910127605;
+4915781345422

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this study.

Section 1: Organizational and Practitioner Profile

1. Role in the organization:

☐ Owner/Manager ☐ Marketing Staff ☐ Digital Marketing Specialist ☐ Other:

2. Years of digital marketing experience:

☐ <1 ☐ 1–3 ☐ 4–6 ☐ >6

3. Size of your organization:

☐ Micro (<10 staff) ☐ Small (10–49) ☐ Medium (50–249) ☐ Large (250+)

1. Company age (years):

☐ <3 ☐ 3–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ >10

2. Number of employees in marketing/digital marketing:

☐ 1–3 ☐ 4–7 ☐ 8–15 ☐ >15

3. Primary tourist markets served:

☐ Europe ☐ Asia ☐ North America ☐ Africa ☐ Domestic ☐ Other: _____

4. Which Digital Marketing Tools does your organization actively use? (Select all that apply)

☐ Social media marketing (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)

☐ Search engine optimization (SEO)

☐ Content marketing (blogs, videos, infographics)

☐ Email marketing and CRM campaigns

☐ Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising

☐ Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in marketing (chatbots, personalization)

☐ Data analytics for customer insights and campaign optimization

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly Agree)

Section 2: Technological Context (TC)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our organization has access to up-to-date digital marketing tools (e.g., SEO, social media automation, CRM).							
We have the technical capacity to implement and maintain digital marketing platforms.							
The digital marketing technologies we use are compatible with our existing systems.							
We actively monitor new digital tools to improve marketing performance.							
Section 3: Organizational Context (OC)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We allocate sufficient budget and staff to digital marketing initiatives.							
Our organizational structure facilitates digital marketing decision-making.							
Employees involved in digital marketing receive regular training.							
Section 4: Environmental Context (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We adopt digital marketing practices in response to competitors' actions.							
Customer preferences (e.g., use of mobile, social media) influence our digital marketing strategy.							
Government regulations and data privacy policies influence our digital marketing efforts.							
Infrastructure limitations (e.g., internet connectivity) hinder our digital marketing practices.							
Section 5: Human Resources and Competencies (HC)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Employees regularly receive training in new digital marketing strategies.							
We have access to expert staff for analytics, SEO, and digital content creation.							
Our staff is proficient in integrating AI or automation tools in marketing workflows							

Section 6: Practitioner Enactment and Praxis (MAP)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our marketing activities follow clearly defined digital strategies and guidelines.							
We use standardized tools and processes (e.g., content calendars, marketing funnels) to manage our digital marketing.							
Our marketing practices are informed by data analytics and regular performance reviews.							
There is a culture of experimentation and learning in how we approach digital marketing.							
I have sufficient knowledge and skills to execute digital marketing tasks effectively.							
I actively contribute to planning and executing digital marketing campaigns.							

Our team members collaborate effectively across roles in marketing projects.							
We regularly share knowledge and best practices among team members.							
We frequently modify our digital marketing tactics in response to changes in the tourism market.							
Our marketing team learns from trial and error in campaign execution.							
We integrate feedback from clients and stakeholders into marketing practices.							
Marketing decisions are influenced by real-time situations and contextual judgment, not just pre-set plans.							

Section 7: Value Creation (VC)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our digital marketing practices give us an advantage over competitors.							
We can attribute increases in bookings or customer inquiries to our digital marketing efforts.							
Our digital marketing performance contributes significantly to our overall business success.							
Digital Marketing has enhanced customer loyalty and repeat bookings							
We regularly invest in upgrading our digital marketing technology.							
Our IT infrastructure effectively supports our digital marketing operations.							
Our organization effectively integrates digital marketing with overall business strategy.							
We are agile in adjusting our marketing strategy in response to market feedback.							
We can quickly implement new digital marketing tools when needed.							

Thank you for taking your time to respond to the questions!

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Guide

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.

My name is Meraf Yohannes, and I am currently conducting research as part of my master's thesis at Addis Ababa University and HS Mainz, University of Applied Sciences (Germany) on the topic: **"Value-creating Digital Marketing Practices of Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia: The Mediating Role of Practitioner Enactment and Praxis."**

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of how digital marketing technologies and strategies are being adopted and implemented by inbound tour operators, as well as the challenges and opportunities that come with them. Your insights will be invaluable in helping to understand current industry practices, workforce competencies, and the broader tourism environment.

The interview will take approximately **30 to 45 minutes**. With your permission, I would like to **record the conversation** for accuracy in analysis. All information shared will be kept **confidential** and used strictly for academic purposes. You have the right to decline answering any question or to withdraw from the interview at any time without any negative consequences.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Participant Consent Form

Topic of Study:

Value-Creating Digital Marketing Practices of Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia: The Mediating Role of Practitioner Enactment and Praxis

Researcher:

Meraf Yohannes

Department of Management, Addis Ababa University

Email: meraf.yohannes@aau.edu.et; merafyohannes@gmail.com

Phone: +251910127605

Purpose of the Study:

This study explores the use of digital marketing strategies among Ethiopian inbound tour operators, aiming to understand how these practices influence business performance and quality management.

Procedures:

You will participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Confidentiality:

All data collected will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity and the name of your organization will not appear in the thesis or any publications. Data will be securely stored and only accessible to the researcher and academic supervisor.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose to skip any question or withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Consent Statement:

By signing below, you confirm that:

- You have read and understood the information above.
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this research.
- You consent to the audio recording of this interview.

Participant's/Organization's Name:

Researcher's Name:

Signature:

Signature:

Date:

Date:

Interview Questions for Managers and/or Marketing Specialists of Inbound Tour Operators in Ethiopia

Practitioner Enactment and Praxis (MAP)

1. Can you describe how you personally contribute to the development and execution of digital marketing strategies in your organization?
2. How do you adapt or modify digital marketing practices in response to challenges or changes in the tourism market?
3. In what ways do you collaborate with other team members or external partners when planning digital marketing campaigns?
4. Could you share an example of a digital marketing initiative that created significant value for your company? What was your role in it?
5. How do you incorporate local cultural or contextual knowledge into your digital marketing content and approaches?

Technology, Organization, and Environment (TOE)

6. What digital marketing technologies are currently available to your organization, and how do they influence your marketing practices?
7. How supportive is your organization's leadership in adopting new digital marketing tools and strategies?
8. What external factors, such as competition or customer behaviour, affect your digital marketing decisions? What about human resources? How competent are they?
9. Are there any regulatory or infrastructural challenges that impact how you use digital marketing? How do you deal with these challenges?

Resources and Competitive Advantage (VC)

10. What key resources (skills, tools, data) do you think give your organization an edge in digital marketing compared to competitors?
11. How do you assess the effectiveness of your digital marketing efforts in contributing to your company's competitive advantage?
12. What gaps or limitations do you perceive in your organization's digital marketing capabilities? How could these be addressed?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix C: Survey Constructs, Items and Supporting References

Construct	Item	Supporting References
Technological Context	Our organization has access to up-to-date digital marketing tools (e.g., SEO, social media automation, CRM).	Oliveira & Martins (2010); Ainin et al. (2015); Leeftang et al. (2014); Ghobakhloo et al. (2011); Voola et al. (2012); Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990); Lin & Lin (2008); Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019); Dwivedi et al. (2021); Alford & Page (2018); Ghobakhloo et al. (2011) Bharadwaj (2000); Wang & Kim (2017); Trainor et al. (2014); Oliveira & Martins (2010); Ghobakhloo et al. (2011); Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019); Mariani et al. (2023); Dwivedi et al. (2021); UNCTAD (2022); Trainor et al. (2014); Wang & Kim (2017); Chatterjee et al. (2021); Järvinen & Karjaluo (2015); Chatterjee et al. (2021); Mariani et al. (2023)
	We have the technical capacity to implement and maintain digital marketing platforms.	
	The digital marketing technologies we use are compatible with our existing systems.	
	We actively monitor new digital tools to improve marketing performance.	
Organizational Context	We allocate sufficient budget and staff to digital marketing initiatives.	
	Our organizational structure facilitates digital marketing decision-making.	
	Employees involved in digital marketing receive regular training.	
Environmental Context	We adopt digital marketing practices in response to competitors' actions.	
	Customer preferences (e.g., use of mobile, social media) influence our digital marketing strategy.	
	Government regulations and data privacy policies influence our digital marketing efforts.	
	Infrastructure limitations (e.g., internet connectivity) hinder our digital marketing practices.	
Human Competence	Employees regularly receive training in new digital marketing strategies.	
	We have access to expert staff for analytics, SEO, and digital content creation.	
	Our staff is proficient in integrating AI or automation tools in marketing workflows.	
Practitioner Enactment and Praxis	Our marketing activities follow clearly defined digital strategies and guidelines.	Reckwitz (2002); Nicolini (2012); Schau et al. (2009) Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019); Wirtz et al. (2019) Järvinen & Karjaluo (2015); Siggelkow et al. (2023)
	We use standardized tools and processes (e.g., content calendars, marketing funnels) to manage our digital marketing.	
	Our marketing practices are informed by data analytics and regular performance reviews.	
	There is a culture of experimentation and learning in how we approach digital marketing.	

	I have sufficient knowledge and skills to execute digital marketing tasks effectively.	Reckwitz (2002); Nicolini (2012); Schau et al. (2009)
	I actively contribute to planning and executing digital marketing campaigns.	Wang & Kim (2017); Chatterjee et al. (2021)
	Our team members collaborate effectively across roles in marketing projects.	Nicolini (2012); Schau et al. (2009)
	We regularly share knowledge and best practices among team members.	Trainor et al. (2014); Schau et al. (2009)
	We frequently modify our digital marketing tactics in response to changes in the tourism market.	Nicolini (2012); Schau et al. (2009)
	Our marketing team learns from trial and error in campaign execution.	Mariani et al. (2023); Wirtz et al. (2019)
	We integrate feedback from clients and stakeholders into marketing practices.	Reckwitz (2002); Schau et al. (2009)
	Marketing decisions are influenced by real-time situations and contextual judgment, not just pre-set plans.	Järvinen & Taiminen (2016); Nicolini (2012); Schau et al. (2009); Nicolini (2012)
Value Creation	Our digital marketing practices give us an advantage over competitors.	Teece, Pisano, & Shuen (1997);
	We can attribute increases in bookings or customer inquiries to our digital marketing efforts.	Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019); Järvinen & Karjaluoto (2015)
	Our digital marketing performance contributes significantly to our overall business success.	Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019); Kumar et al. (2013)
	Digital marketing has enhanced customer loyalty and repeat bookings.	Kumar & Reinartz (2016); Järvinen & Taiminen (2016)
	We regularly invest in upgrading our digital marketing technology.	Bharadwaj et al. (1993); Chatterjee et al. (2021)
	Our IT infrastructure effectively supports our digital marketing operations.	Bharadwaj (2000); Wang & Kim (2017)
	Our organization effectively integrates digital marketing with overall business strategy.	Teece et al. (1997); Bharadwaj (2000)
	We are agile in adjusting our marketing strategy in response to market feedback.	Teece (2007); Day (2011)
	We can quickly implement new digital marketing tools when needed.	Chatterjee et al. (2021); Mariani et al. (2023)