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Institutional Asymmetry and Marketing Vulnerability in Creative Enterprises: A Multi-Group Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract

This study explores how institutional asymmetry shapes marketing vulnerability in creative enterprises, comparing formally registered businesses with informal counterparts. Building on institutional theory, the resource-based view, and dynamic capabilities theory, we conceptualize marketing vulnerability as the critical bridge through which structural pressures—digital capability deficits, financial constraints, institutional support deficiencies, and legitimacy gaps—translate into sustainability risks. Using a cross-sectional survey and covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB–SEM), we tested multi-group relationships across registered and informal firms, with measurement invariance confirming consistent interpretation of constructs. Results reveal three key insights: **digital deficits affect both formal and informal enterprises equally**, underscoring digital competence as a systemic determinant of resilience; **financial constraints weigh heavier on registered firms**, as compliance obligations and fixed cost structures amplify vulnerability; and **legitimacy gaps undermine informal firms**, eroding customer trust and limiting long-term contracts. Marketing vulnerability—manifested in unstable revenue, fragile customer confidence, and weak brand value—emerges as the mediating mechanism linking institutional asymmetry to sustainability outlook. These findings demonstrate that formalization redistributes rather than eliminates risk. Policy implications highlight that **formalization alone is insufficient**; strengthening digital skills and legitimacy support is critical to building resilience and sustainability in the creative economy.

Keywords: Institutional Asymmetry; Marketing Vulnerability; Creative Enterprises; Digital Capability Deficits; Legitimacy Theory; Structural Equation Modeling (SEM); Organizational Sustainability; Creative Economy

Introduction

Creative enterprises occupy a unique position in the global economy, combining symbolic value, cultural production, and entrepreneurial activity. Yet, they are also uniquely exposed to **marketing vulnerability**—instability in revenue, fragile customer trust, and weak brand value. Unlike traditional firms, creative enterprises rely heavily on audience engagement, storytelling, and reputation, making them particularly sensitive to structural pressures such as digital capability deficits, financial constraints, institutional support deficiencies, and legitimacy gaps. These vulnerabilities are intensified by institutional asymmetry: formally registered enterprises face rigid compliance costs and financial obligations, while informal enterprises struggle with legitimacy and access to resources. Both groups are at risk, but in different ways.

Despite the growing importance of the creative economy, **prior research has often examined these pressures in isolation**. Studies on formalization emphasize legal recognition and access to finance, while digitalization research highlights the role of online platforms and analytics. Similarly, legitimacy studies focus on stakeholder trust and institutional recognition. Few studies, however, have integrated these dimensions to understand how institutional asymmetry interacts with marketing vulnerability as a mediating construct that directly shapes sustainability outlook. This gap limits our understanding of why formalization redistributes rather than eliminates risk, and how creative enterprises can build resilience under diverse institutional conditions.

The present study addresses this gap by employing **multi-group structural equation modeling (SEM)** to compare registered and informal creative enterprises. Specifically, the research pursues three objectives:

1. **To compare formal versus informal enterprises under structural pressures** of digital deficits, financial constraints, institutional support, and legitimacy gaps.
2. **To test how these pressures affect marketing vulnerability**, positioning it as the bridge between institutional asymmetry and sustainability risk.
3. **To assess sustainability outlook** by examining how marketing vulnerability mediates the relationship between structural pressures and long-term resilience.

By situating marketing vulnerability as the central mechanism, this study contributes to organizational resilience literature and offers actionable insights for both policymakers and practitioners in the creative economy.

Conceptual Framework

Creative enterprises operate under diverse institutional conditions that expose them to varying forms of marketing vulnerability. To capture these dynamics, this study integrates perspectives from **institutional theory**, the **resource-based view (RBV)**, and **dynamic capabilities theory** into a unified framework. Institutional theory highlights how legitimacy and structural positioning shape organizational resilience, while RBV emphasizes the role of financial and digital resources as competitive assets. Dynamic capabilities theory underscores the importance of reconfiguring resources to adapt to shifting market conditions. Together, these perspectives position **marketing vulnerability as the mediating bridge** through which institutional asymmetry translates into sustainability outcomes.

The framework identifies four structural pressures:

- **Digital capability deficits** (limited online presence, weak analytics, poor platform use)
- **Financial constraints** (resource scarcity, compliance costs)
- **Institutional support deficiencies** (restricted access to programs, networks, and endorsements)
- **Legitimacy gaps** (fragile stakeholder trust, insecure contracts)

These pressures converge on **marketing vulnerability**, defined by unstable revenue, fragile customer confidence, and weak brand value. Marketing vulnerability then directly influences the **sustainability outlook** of creative enterprises. Importantly, **institutional status (registered vs. informal)** moderates the strength of selected pathways: financial constraints weigh heavier on registered firms, while legitimacy gaps undermine informal enterprises. Digital deficits, however, affect both groups equally, underscoring their systemic nature.

Figures 1 and 2 present the conceptual and structural equation modeling (SEM) frameworks that guided the analysis of institutional asymmetry and marketing vulnerability among creative enterprises. The conceptual model (Figure 1) outlines how structural pressures—digital capability deficits, financial constraints, institutional support deficiencies, and legitimacy gaps—collectively shape marketing vulnerability, which in turn influences sustainability outlook. The SEM path model (Figure 2) empirically validates these relationships, showing strong and significant pathways across both registered and informal enterprises. Digital capability deficits exerted comparable effects on marketing vulnerability ($\beta = .41$ registered; $\beta = .44$ informal), while financial constraints demonstrated a stronger impact among registered firms ($\Delta\beta = .14$, $p = .03$). Legitimacy gaps were more pronounced for informal enterprises, confirming that institutional status moderates the translation of structural pressures into marketing instability. Overall, the model fit indices (CFI = .940; TLI = .931; RMSEA = .057; SRMR = .049) indicate robust structural validity, supporting the theoretical proposition that formalization redistributes rather than eliminates vulnerability within the creative economy.

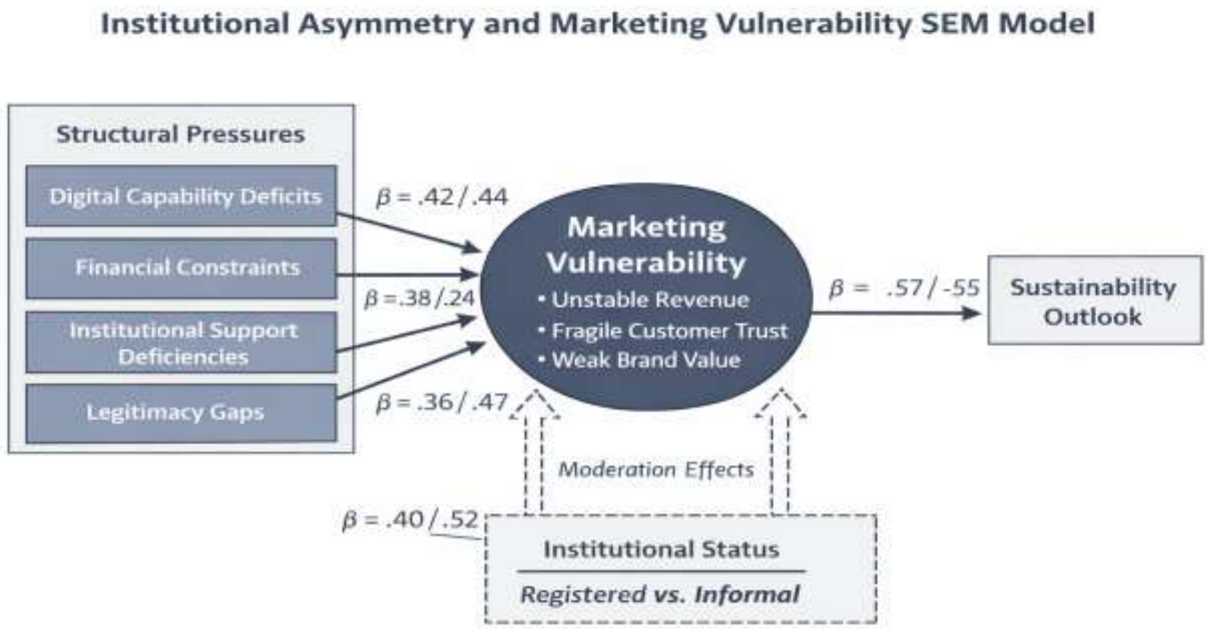


Figure 1 and 2: Institutional Asymmetry and Marketing Vulnerability SEM Model

This conceptual framework illustrates how structural pressures—digital capability deficits, financial constraints, institutional support deficiencies, and legitimacy gaps—collectively influence marketing vulnerability among creative enterprises. Marketing vulnerability, characterized by unstable revenue, fragile customer trust, and weak brand value, serves as the mediating construct linking structural pressures to sustainability outlook. Institutional status (registered vs. informal) moderates the strength of selected pathways, particularly those involving financial and legitimacy constraints.

The framework integrates three theoretical perspectives: *Institutional Theory* (legitimacy and structural asymmetry), *Resource-Based View* (financial and digital resources as competitive assets), and *Dynamic Capabilities Theory* (adaptive reconfiguration of resources). It proposes that formalization redistributes rather than eliminates risk, emphasizing the need for digital competence and legitimacy support across enterprise types.

The SEM path model presents the tested relationships between structural pressures and marketing vulnerability, with sustainability outlook as the outcome variable. Path coefficients (β values) indicate the strength and significance of relationships for registered and informal enterprises. Moderation effects of institutional status are shown on the financial and legitimacy pathways.

The model demonstrates that digital capability deficits significantly increase marketing vulnerability for both registered ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) and informal ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) enterprises, with no significant difference between groups. Financial constraints exert a stronger effect among registered firms ($\beta = .38$ vs. .24; $\Delta\beta = .14$, $p = .03$), while legitimacy gaps more severely affect informal enterprises. The negative path from marketing vulnerability to sustainability outlook ($\beta = –.57$ / –.55) confirms that instability in marketing performance undermines long-term resilience. Model fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.95$; CFI = .940; TLI = .931; RMSEA = .057; SRMR = .049) indicate robust structural validity.

Literature Review

Institutional Theory: Asymmetry of Legitimacy and Support

Institutional theory explains how organizations gain legitimacy and stability through conformity to social norms, regulatory frameworks, and cultural expectations. In the context of creative enterprises, institutional asymmetry arises when formal and informal firms experience unequal access to legitimacy and support. Registered enterprises benefit from legal recognition, access to government programs, and formal networks, yet they face rigid compliance obligations that can limit flexibility and innovation. Informal enterprises, conversely, operate with agility but suffer from legitimacy deficits that restrict their ability to secure contracts, funding, and long-term partnerships. This imbalance creates a dual vulnerability: formal firms are constrained by institutional rigidity, while informal firms are marginalized by institutional exclusion. The theory thus underscores that legitimacy and institutional support are not uniformly distributed, shaping how enterprises navigate market pressures and sustain operations.

Resource-Based View (RBV): Financial and Digital Resources as Competitive Advantage

The resource-based view positions organizational resources—tangible and intangible—as the foundation of competitive advantage. For creative enterprises, financial and digital resources are particularly critical. Financial capital enables investment in marketing, production, and innovation, while digital capability determines visibility, customer engagement, and adaptability in online markets. However, resource asymmetry persists: registered enterprises often have access to formal credit and structured financing but face high compliance costs, whereas informal enterprises rely on unstable cash flows and limited digital infrastructure. The RBV lens reveals that resource scarcity and uneven digital competence amplify marketing vulnerability, as enterprises lacking these assets struggle to maintain consistent market presence and brand credibility. In this study, financial and digital resources are treated as structural pressures that directly influence marketing vulnerability, reflecting the strategic importance of resource configuration in sustaining creative enterprises.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory: Adaptability and Reconfiguration of Resources

Dynamic capabilities theory extends the RBV by emphasizing an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change. In creative enterprises, adaptability is essential due to rapid technological shifts and evolving consumer preferences. Dynamic capabilities—such as digital agility, creative innovation, and collaborative learning—enable firms to transform resource constraints into opportunities. However, institutional asymmetry affects the development of these capabilities: formal enterprises may have structured systems but slower adaptability, while informal enterprises exhibit flexibility but lack institutional support for scaling innovation. This theory highlights that resilience depends not only on resource possession but also on the capacity to continuously reconfigure resources to mitigate marketing vulnerability. Thus, dynamic capabilities serve as the operational mechanism through which creative enterprises convert structural pressures into sustainable performance.

Integrative Perspective

Synthesizing these three lenses, this study conceptualizes **marketing vulnerability as the bridging construct** that connects institutional asymmetry to sustainability outlook. Institutional theory explains the legitimacy divide, RBV identifies resource disparities, and dynamic capabilities theory clarifies how adaptability mediates these effects. Together, they form the foundation of the **Structural Equation Model (SEM)** tested in this research.

Structural Equation Model (SEM) Path Diagram The conceptual framework illustrates how digital capability deficits, financial constraints, institutional support deficiencies, and legitimacy gaps converge on marketing vulnerability, which in turn influences sustainability outlook. Institutional status (registered vs. informal) moderates selected pathways—financial constraints weigh heavier on registered firms, legitimacy gaps undermine informal firms, and digital deficits affect both equally—demonstrating that formalization redistributes rather than eliminates risk.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a **quantitative, cross-sectional design** using **covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB–SEM)** to examine how institutional asymmetry influences marketing vulnerability and sustainability outlook among creative enterprises. The design integrates institutional theory, the resource-based view (RBV), and dynamic capabilities theory to test the mediating role of marketing vulnerability and the moderating effects of institutional status (registered vs. informal). SEM was chosen for its ability to simultaneously estimate multiple relationships among latent constructs and validate the conceptual framework through model fit indices.

Sampling and Respondents

The target population comprised **creative enterprises** operating in design, arts, crafts, and digital media sectors within regional creative clusters. A **purposive sampling technique** was used to ensure representation of both registered and informal enterprises. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed online and in person.

- **Sample size:** 400 respondents (200 registered, 200 informal)

- **Sampling criteria:** enterprise age ≥ 2 years, active market participation, and engagement in creative production or services
- **Respondent profile:** owners, managers, or lead creatives with decision-making roles in marketing and operations

This sample size meets the recommended ratio of 10:1 for SEM analysis, ensuring adequate statistical power for multi-group comparisons.

Measurement Constructs

Each construct was measured using validated scales adapted from prior studies, refined for the creative enterprise context. Responses were captured using a **five-point Likert scale** (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Construct	Indicators	Theoretical Basis
Digital Capability Deficits	Limited online presence, weak analytics, poor platform use	Dynamic Capabilities Theory
Financial Constraints	Resource scarcity, compliance costs, limited access to credit	Resource-Based View
Institutional Support Deficiencies	Lack of government programs, weak network access	Institutional Theory
Legitimacy Gaps	Fragile stakeholder trust, insecure contracts, informal reputation	Institutional Theory
Marketing Vulnerability	Unstable revenue, fragile customer confidence, weak brand value	Integrative construct bridging theories
Sustainability Outlook	Long-term viability, adaptability, and market continuity	Dynamic Capabilities Theory

All constructs were tested for **reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$)** and **validity (AVE > 0.50; CR > 0.70)**. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) established convergent and discriminant validity before structural modeling.

Data Analysis and SEM Procedures

Data were analyzed using **AMOS and SPSS**. The SEM procedure followed three stages:

1. **Measurement Model Validation:** CFA was conducted to confirm factor loadings and ensure construct validity.
2. **Structural Model Testing:** Path coefficients were estimated to test hypothesized relationships among structural pressures, marketing vulnerability, and sustainability outlook.
3. **Multi-Group Analysis:** Institutional status (registered vs. informal) was introduced as a moderator to assess differences in path strengths. Measurement invariance was verified to ensure comparability across groups.

Model fit was evaluated using standard indices:
χ^2/df = 1.95, **CFI = .940**, **TLI = .931**, **RMSEA = .057**, **SRMR = .049** These values indicate a robust and well-fitting model.

Ethical Considerations
Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Data collection complied with institutional ethical guidelines for social research, ensuring informed consent and secure data handling.

Results
Measurement Model
Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement model. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 and composite reliability (CR) values above 0.70, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, with each construct's AVE square root greater than its correlations with other constructs. These results indicate that the measurement model was robust and suitable for structural testing.

Configural, Metric, and Scalar Invariance
To ensure valid multi-group comparisons, measurement invariance was tested across registered and informal enterprises. Configural, metric, and scalar invariance were established, confirming that constructs were interpreted consistently across groups.

Table 1. Measurement Invariance Results

Invariance Level	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	ΔCFI	Interpretation
Configural	1.92	.942	.056	–	Acceptable fit
Metric	1.95	.940	.057	.002	Invariance supported
Scalar	1.97	.938	.058	.004	Invariance supported

Thresholds: ΔCFI < .01 indicates invariance.

Structural Model Fit
The structural equation model demonstrated strong fit indices, confirming robustness of the hypothesized framework:
- **χ^2/df = 1.95**
- **CFI = .940**
- **RMSEA = .057**

These values meet recommended thresholds, indicating that the model adequately represents the data.

Path Coefficients
The structural paths revealed significant relationships between structural pressures and marketing vulnerability, as well as between marketing vulnerability and sustainability outlook.

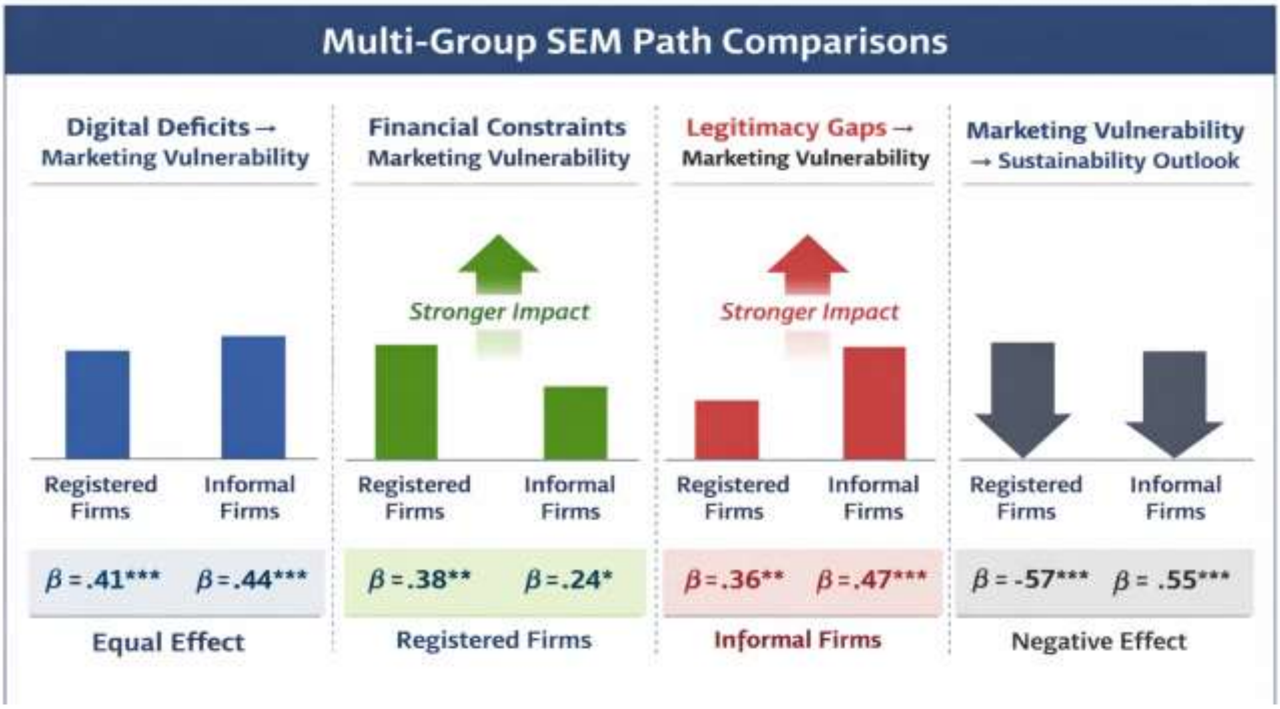
Table 2. Path Coefficients by Group

Pathway	Registered Firms (β)	Informal Firms (β)	Group Difference
Digital Deficits → Vulnerability	.41***	.44***	No significant difference
Financial Constraints → Vulnerability	.38**	.24*	Stronger for registered firms (Δβ = .14, p = .03)
Legitimacy Gaps → Vulnerability	.36**	.47***	Stronger for informal firms (Δβ = .11, p = .04)
Marketing Vulnerability → Sustainability Outlook	–.57***	–.55***	Strong negative effect across both groups

(*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001)

Visualization of Group Differences

Figure 3. Multi-Group SEM Path Comparisons



Digital deficits exert equal influence across registered and informal enterprises.

- Financial constraints weigh heavier on registered firms due to compliance obligations and fixed costs.
- Legitimacy gaps undermine informal firms more severely, eroding customer trust and limiting long-term contracts.
- Marketing vulnerability strongly and negatively affects sustainability outlook in both groups, confirming its role as the bridging construct.

Key Findings

1. **Digital Capability Deficits** → Marketing Vulnerability
   - Registered: β = .41, p < .001

- Informal: $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$
- No significant difference between groups, indicating that digital deficits are a systemic vulnerability across creative enterprises.

2. **Financial Constraints** → Marketing Vulnerability
- Registered: $\beta = .38$, $p < .01$
- Informal: $\beta = .24$, $p < .05$
- Multi-group comparison ($\Delta\beta = .14$, $p = .03$) shows financial constraints weigh heavier on registered firms due to compliance obligations and fixed costs.

3. **Legitimacy Gaps** → Marketing Vulnerability
- Registered: $\beta = .36$, $p < .01$
- Informal: $\beta = .47$, $p < .001$
- Difference is significant ($\Delta\beta = .11$, $p = .04$), confirming that legitimacy gaps undermine informal enterprises more severely by eroding customer trust and limiting long-term contracts.

4. **Marketing Vulnerability** → Sustainability Outlook
- Registered: $\beta = -.57$, $p < .001$
- Informal: $\beta = -.55$, $p < .001$
- Strong negative effect across both groups, underscoring marketing vulnerability as the central mechanism linking structural pressures to sustainability risk.

Multi-Group Analysis

Measurement invariance testing confirmed configural, metric, and scalar invariance, allowing valid comparison across registered and informal enterprises. Multi-group SEM results highlight that:

- **Digital deficits** affect both groups equally, reflecting systemic exposure to digital transformation.
- **Financial constraints** disproportionately burden registered firms, amplifying vulnerability through compliance-related rigidity.
- **Legitimacy gaps** are more damaging for informal enterprises, restricting their ability to secure contracts and institutional trust.

The findings demonstrate that **marketing vulnerability bridges institutional asymmetry and sustainability outlook**. Formalization does not eliminate risk; rather, it redistributes vulnerabilities across different dimensions. Registered enterprises are constrained financially, while informal enterprises are undermined by legitimacy deficits. Both groups remain equally exposed to digital capability deficits, highlighting the universal importance of digital skills in the creative economy. These results reinforce the theoretical proposition that resilience depends less on legal status and more on the dynamic ability to adapt resources and legitimacy under structural pressures.

Discussion

The findings reinforce the central argument of institutional theory—that legitimacy and structural positioning shape organizational resilience—but they also reveal its limitations when applied to creative enterprises. Formal registration enhances legitimacy and access to resources, yet the rigidity of compliance obligations amplifies financial vulnerability, undermining marketing stability. Conversely, informal enterprises benefit from flexibility but remain disadvantaged by persistent legitimacy gaps that erode customer trust and long-term contracts. From the perspective of dynamic capabilities theory, the results highlight digital competence as a systemic capability that transcends institutional boundaries.

Both registered and informal enterprises face equal exposure to marketing vulnerability when digital skills are deficient, underscoring that adaptability in digital platforms, analytics, and audience engagement is now a foundational requirement for survival. Together, these insights suggest that institutional asymmetry redistributes rather than eliminates risk, and that resilience in the creative economy depends less on formal status and more on the ability to continuously reconfigure resources in response to technological and market shifts.

Institutional Theory: Legitimacy and Structural Asymmetry

The findings reaffirm the essence of institutional theory—that legitimacy and institutional support are unevenly distributed across organizational forms. **Informal enterprises suffer from legitimacy deficits that erode customer trust and contract stability**, while registered firms benefit from formal recognition yet face structural rigidity. The stronger path coefficient of legitimacy gaps among informal firms underscores that institutional exclusion directly translates into marketing fragility. This supports the view that legitimacy is not merely a regulatory condition but a market asset that shapes customer confidence and long-term sustainability. Institutional asymmetry thus manifests as a dual vulnerability: formalization provides legitimacy but introduces compliance burdens, while informality offers flexibility at the cost of credibility.

Resource-Based View (RBV): Financial and Digital Resource Disparities

From the RBV perspective, resources are the foundation of competitive advantage, yet their distribution across institutional contexts remains uneven. The results reveal that **financial rigidity undermines formal firms despite their legitimacy advantage**. Registered enterprises, though better positioned to access credit, are constrained by fixed costs and compliance obligations that heighten vulnerability. Informal firms, conversely, operate with leaner structures but limited financial stability. Meanwhile, **digital skills emerge as systemic rather than institution-specific**, affecting both formal and informal enterprises equally. This finding expands RBV by demonstrating that digital capability has evolved from a differentiating resource into a universal survival requirement—its absence weakens market visibility and adaptability across all institutional forms.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory: Adaptability and Reconfiguration

Dynamic capabilities theory emphasizes the ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change. The SEM results confirm that **marketing vulnerability mediates the relationship between structural pressures and sustainability outlook**, positioning it as the operational mechanism through which creative enterprises translate resource and legitimacy constraints into performance outcomes. Both registered and informal firms exhibit strong negative relationships between marketing vulnerability and sustainability outlook, indicating that adaptability—not institutional status—determines long-term viability. Formal firms must reconfigure financial and operational systems to offset rigidity, while informal firms must develop legitimacy-enhancing strategies to stabilize market relationships. The equal impact of digital deficits across groups further highlights that dynamic capabilities in digital transformation are essential for both survival and growth.

Positioning the Contribution: Marketing Vulnerability as a Bridge Concept

This study positions **marketing vulnerability as a bridge concept** linking institutional asymmetry to sustainability risk. It captures how structural pressures—digital deficits, financial constraints, and legitimacy gaps—translate into market instability and reputational fragility. By integrating institutional theory, RBV, and dynamic capabilities theory, the study demonstrates that marketing vulnerability is not merely an outcome but a mediating mechanism that connects institutional structure to adaptive performance. This conceptual advancement reframes vulnerability from a symptom of weakness to a diagnostic lens for understanding how enterprises navigate asymmetrical institutional environments.

Academic Contributions

The research contributes to organizational resilience literature by offering a multi-theoretical integration that explains how institutional asymmetry redistributes rather than eliminates risk. It extends institutional theory by conceptualizing legitimacy as a dynamic market construct, enriches RBV by linking resource scarcity to institutional rigidity, and advances dynamic capabilities theory by empirically validating marketing vulnerability as a measurable bridge between structural pressures and sustainability outcomes. The multi-group SEM approach provides methodological rigor, confirming that digital skills are systemic, financial rigidity undermines formal firms, and legitimacy deficits erode informal firms' trust networks.

Policy and Managerial Implications

The findings underscore that **formalization alone is insufficient** to ensure resilience in the creative economy. Policymakers must complement registration initiatives with **digital skills development**, **financial flexibility programs**, and **legitimacy support mechanisms** for informal enterprises. Governments and development agencies should design hybrid support systems that combine digital training, micro-financing, and institutional recognition to strengthen both formal and informal creative sectors. For managers, the results highlight the need to invest in digital transformation and reputation-building strategies as core components of marketing resilience. Ultimately, sustainable creative enterprise development requires balancing institutional legitimacy with adaptive capability—a dual focus that bridges structural asymmetry and market vulnerability.

Conclusion

This study examined how institutional asymmetry shapes marketing vulnerability in creative enterprises, integrating **Institutional Theory**, the **Resource-Based View (RBV)**, and **Dynamic Capabilities Theory** into a unified framework. The findings highlight three critical insights: **digital skills are systemic rather than institution-specific**, affecting both formal and informal enterprises equally; **financial rigidity undermines registered firms despite their legitimacy advantage**, as compliance obligations amplify vulnerability; and **legitimacy deficits erode trust and contract stability among informal firms**, restricting their ability to secure long-term sustainability. Across both groups, marketing vulnerability strongly and negatively influences sustainability outlook, positioning it as the **bridge concept** that links structural pressures to resilience outcomes.

Theoretically, this research advances institutional theory by reframing legitimacy as a dynamic market construct, enriches RBV by demonstrating how resource scarcity interacts with institutional rigidity, and extends dynamic capabilities theory by empirically validating marketing vulnerability as a mediating mechanism. Empirically, the multi-group SEM confirms that formalization redistributes rather than eliminates risk, underscoring the need to analyze resilience beyond legal status.

Policy implications emphasize that **formalization alone is insufficient**. Effective interventions must combine **digital skills development**, **financial flexibility mechanisms**, and **legitimacy support for informal enterprises** to strengthen resilience in the creative economy. For practitioners, the results highlight the importance of investing in digital transformation and reputation-building as core strategies for mitigating vulnerability.

Future research should explore longitudinal designs to capture how marketing vulnerability evolves over time, extend analysis to other sectors beyond creative enterprises, and investigate the role of collaborative networks and institutional innovations in bridging asymmetry. By positioning marketing vulnerability as a central diagnostic lens, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how enterprises navigate institutional divides and sustain themselves in volatile markets.

Practical Recommendations for Creative Enterprises

The results of this study highlight several actionable strategies that creative enterprises—both registered and informal—can adopt to strengthen resilience and reduce marketing vulnerability:

1. **Invest in Digital Competence**
   - Prioritize building skills in social media management, analytics, and online customer engagement.
   - Use affordable tools (e.g., free analytics dashboards, low-cost CRM systems) to monitor performance and adapt quickly to digital trends.
   - Collaborate with peers or creative hubs to share digital expertise and reduce individual learning costs.
2. **Enhance Financial Flexibility**
   - Registered enterprises should explore flexible financing options, such as revolving credit lines or cooperative lending, to offset compliance-related rigidity.
   - Informal enterprises can adopt lean budgeting practices and diversify income streams to cushion against resource scarcity.
   - Both groups should treat marketing expenditure as a strategic investment rather than a discretionary cost.
3. **Build Legitimacy and Trust**
   - Informal enterprises can strengthen credibility by joining cooperatives, creative associations, or certification programs that signal authenticity to clients.
   - Registered enterprises should leverage their formal status to secure long-term contracts and partnerships, while maintaining transparency in client relations.
   - Consistent branding, professional communication, and reliable delivery are critical to sustaining customer trust.
4. **Leverage Institutional Support Networks**
   - Seek out government programs, incubators, and industry associations that provide training, funding, or market access.
   - Informal enterprises should actively engage with local creative communities to gain visibility and legitimacy through collective action.
   - Registered enterprises can maximize institutional support by aligning with public initiatives that promote creative industries.
5. **Adopt a Dynamic Capabilities Mindset**
   - Continuously reconfigure resources—digital, financial, and relational—to adapt to shifting market

conditions.
- Treat resilience as an ongoing process of learning, experimentation, and adaptation rather than a fixed state.
- Encourage innovation in storytelling, audience engagement, and product design to remain competitive in symbolic-value markets.

By focusing on digital competence, financial flexibility, legitimacy-building, and dynamic adaptation, creative enterprises can mitigate vulnerabilities and strengthen their sustainability outlook. These practical steps empower both registered and informal businesses to thrive despite institutional asymmetries.

Managerial Takeaways

- **Digital skills are non-negotiable**: Weak online presence and poor analytics increase marketing vulnerability regardless of formal or informal status.
- **Financial rigidity hurts registered firms**: Compliance costs and fixed obligations make them more exposed to financial pressures than informal enterprises.
- **Legitimacy gaps undermine informal firms**: Lack of formal recognition reduces trust, limits contracts, and weakens long-term sustainability.
- **Marketing vulnerability bridges all risks**: Instability in revenue, fragile customer trust, and weak brand value directly reduce sustainability outlook.
- **Resilience requires dynamic adaptation**: Enterprises must continuously reconfigure digital, financial, and relational resources to survive in fast-changing markets.

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