

THE EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION, INNOVATION CAPABILITY, MARKET ORIENTATION, AND NETWORKING CAPABILITY ON BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY OF SMES

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Abstract

The current study addresses the impact of entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability on business sustainability in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The contribution of SMEs to economic development is important; however, sustainability in these entities can be threatened by resource scarcity and rapidly changing environments in markets. The current study adopts a quantitative approach that entails data collection using a structured questionnaire targeting owners and managers in SMEs. The collected data were analyzed through statistical methods to analyze the relationship among study variables. The results of this study indicate that entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability are positive and influential factors in improving business sustainability in SMEs. Market orientation and innovation capability have stronger influences on sustainability in SMEs than other factors since customer-centric approaches and innovation have played crucial roles in ensuring sustainability in business operations for these entities. This study is an important addition to existing theories since this research adopts an integrated approach within strategic capabilities for improved adaptability and sustainability of SMEs in competitive markets.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Orientation; Innovation Capability; Market Orientation; Networking Capability; Business Sustainability*

1. INTRODUCTION

SMEs are of pivotal importance for the economic development of nations and regions, as they contribute to employment creation, income generation, innovation, and social stability. In most developing and emerging economies, the majority of business establishments are represented by SMEs; thus, they are substantial in the local economy (Dambiski Gomes de Carvalho et al., 2021; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2022). Despite the

importance of SMEs, these businesses often face myriad significant challenges with regard to resource limitations, market uncertainty, technological change, and increasing competitive pressures. These challenges have heightened concerns over the long-term sustainability of SMEs, making the issue of business sustainability a core concern for both practitioners and policymakers alike (Beck et al., 2005; Herlina et al., 2021; Utomo et al., 2022).

Sustainability in the context of SMEs implies not only financial performance but, rather, the ability of firms to survive, adapt, and grow over time by responding effectively to changes in environmental, social, and market dynamics. (Dambiski Gomes de Carvalho et al., 2021). A sustainable SME demonstrates the characteristics of resilience, strategic adaptability, and continuous value creation. (Tran et al., 2024). However, SMEs fail to achieve sustainability due to weak strategic orientation, insufficient innovation capacity, a lack of understanding of the market, and brittle external relationships. With markets now highly dynamic and increasingly globalized, SMEs must adopt strategic capabilities to help them negotiate immediate competition and maintain their long-term viability (Kim, 2021; Toaha et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial orientation has been found to play an important role in strategic posture, shaping firm behavior and outcomes (Hakim et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial orientation captures the measure of innovation, proactivity, as well as the inclination of these organizations towards risk-taking in exploring new opportunities (Miles et al., 2013). More innovative and proactive SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are expected to forecast market changes, develop new products/services, or search for new sources of competitive advantage (Aryani & Tuti, 2023; Octavia et al., 2020). Empirical research has revealed that entrepreneurial orientation strengthens firm flexibility in dynamic environments, an essential attribute of sustainability (Abidin et al., 2022; Octavia & Ali, 2017). Yet, it is likely inefficient if not complemented by other firm attributes.

Innovation capability refers to the ability of the firm to convert knowledge, ideas, or resources into new or improved products, services, or processes (Goni & Van Looy, 2022). The innovation capability of the firm is of special significance in the context of SMEs since it enables them to differentiate themselves from the competition while living up to the needs of their consumers (Agarwal & Selen, 2009; Monica et al., 2025). Innovation helps firms become more efficient while at the same time improving their offerings. Despite its importance, SMEs are often constrained from achieving innovation capability due to limitations in terms of their human and technological capital (Asbari et al., 2019; Monica et al., 2025). Research about the role of innovation capability in business sustainability is still a significant concern.

In contrast, market orientation deals with a firm's capability to create, spread, and act on intelligence with regard to customers, competitors, and external trends. Market-oriented SMEs are in a better position in terms of realizing customer needs, anticipating shifts in

demand, and designing strategies that could be congruent with market expectations (Octavia et al., 2020; Octavia & Ali, 2017). Empirical pieces of evidence reveal that market orientation impacts positively both aspects of firm performance and customer satisfaction positively (Karnowati & Handayani, 2022). In relation to sustainability, market orientation enables the SMEs to stay relevant and competitive because of constant adjustment of their offerings to emerging market conditions (Abidin et al., 2022; Genc et al., 2019). The effectiveness of market orientation may further depend on how well it is interwoven with entrepreneurial and innovation-driven strategies.

Networking capability defines the ability of a company to engage in, and benefit from, relations with entities such as suppliers, customers, competitors, government, and banking institutions (YahiaMarzouk & Jin, 2022). In SMEs, networking capability is extremely important since it helps to fill a gap that would exist within the organization. Networking helps SMEs to benefit from knowledge, technology, capital, and markets that they would not have accessed in any other way (Liébana-cabanillas et al., 2014). Networking capability has been cited to be less developed in SMEs, and its significance in encouraging sustainability within businesses remains an uncharted area in empirical study (Indra et al., 2023; Meutia, 2013).

Though entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability can separately explain firm performance, the literature is still lacking a comprehensive understanding of how these firm capabilities can work together to shape the business sustainability for SMEs. Many SMEs still face poor survival ratios and irregular growth performance despite the emergence of a supportive environment for entrepreneurship. This creates a gap between theory and reality that calls for a comprehensive study on the joint impact on the sustainability of SMEs. This research study aims to investigate the impact of innovation orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability on the sustainability of business of SMEs. More specifically, the research study focuses on investigating the role of each of the aforementioned innovation capabilities and aims to provide evidence that can be utilized by the management of the SMEs to develop strategies to increase the sustainability of the businesses.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative approach to test the impact of entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability on the business sustainability of SMEs. A quantitative design is seen as befitting because it permits the objective measurement of relationships among variables and testing of hypotheses with statistical methods. The study will adopt a cross-sectional survey approach, wherein data from SME owners or managers are solicited at one point in time. SMEs represent the unit of

analysis because the owners and managers themselves are directly involved in strategic decision-making and possess comprehensive knowledge concerning orientations and capabilities at the firm level.

The study population will be comprised of SMEs that fall under diverse business segments. For the sampling method, a purposive sampling approach is employed to select the respondents who fit predetermined criteria. These criteria will involve selecting the SMEs that have been operating for a certain number of years and are actively participating in the marketplace. A structured research instrument will be employed to gather the data by adapting measurement scales that were employed in the previous study. The research will employ indicators that will be measured on a format that entails a Likert scale. Before the data is analyzed, reliability and validity checks are performed to test the validity and consistency of the measuring instruments.

The data analysis will be done through statistical software in order to test these proposed relationships among the variables. First, descriptive statistics are used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Following this, inferential analysis is done through methods like multiple regression or structural equation modeling to test the effects of entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability on business sustainability. The findings from the results of the analysis will empirically identify which ones out of every relationship are significant and how strong, hence answering the research objectives and contributing to an understanding of strategic capabilities that support SME business sustainability.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

This subsection will include the use of descriptive statistics to describe the tendencies of the studied variables. The use of descriptive statistics will aid in understanding the viewpoints of the respondents regarding entrepreneurial orientation, innovation ability, market orientation, networking ability, and business sustainability.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Entrepreneurial Orientation	2.000	5.000	3.872	0.612
Innovation Capability	2.000	5.000	3.745	0.654
Market Orientation	2.000	5.000	3.918	0.587
Networking Capability	2.000	5.000	3.801	0.629
Business Sustainability	2.000	5.000	3.956	0.571

Source: Data Processed

It is noted that the mean values for all variables are above the scale midpoint, suggesting that SMEs perceive their relatively strong strategic orientation and sustainability performance in their businesses. With the highest mean, SMEs are noted

to perceive their long-term viability in their businesses in a more positive way concerning their business sustainability. Moderate variability is portrayed through the use of standard deviations in the data collected. To conclude, the descriptive statistics show that the SMEs in the sampling pool score moderately to highly on entrepreneurial capabilities, innovation capabilities, market capabilities, and networking capabilities. This serves as a preparatory ground for further analysis.

3.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

This sub-theme analyzes the reliability and validity tests of measurement tools in this research. This is crucial in that reliability tests ensure that there is internal consistency in indicators. Validity tests ensure that indicators are a good fit for measures.

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.842	0.879	0.603
Innovation Capability	0.856	0.892	0.621
Market Orientation	0.831	0.871	0.598
Networking Capability	0.847	0.884	0.615
Business Sustainability	0.864	0.901	0.637

Source: Data Processed

From the results, it can be revealed that the values of Cronbach's alpha and the reliability of the constructs are above the recommended 0.700, while the average variance extracted (AVE) of the variables is above 0.500, which ensures the constructs possess good convergent validity. Overall, these findings indicate that the measurement model meets the required reliability and validity standards, allowing the study to proceed with hypothesis testing using the structural model.

3.3 Hypothesis Testing and Regression Analysis

In this subsection, the results of hypothesis testing based on multiple regression analysis are presented. In the multiple regression analysis, the direct effects of entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capabilities, market orientation, and networking capabilities on the business sustainability of SMEs are explored.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results

Independent Variable	β Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.214	3.182	0.002
Innovation Capability	0.267	3.941	0.000
Market Orientation	0.301	4.356	0.000
Networking Capability	0.198	2.974	0.003
R ²	0.582		

Adjusted R ²	0.571	
F-statistic	54.617	0.000

Source: Data Processed

The regression analysis reveals that each of the four independent variables has a positive and significant influence on business sustainability. Market orientation exerts a higher influence, followed by innovation capability, entrepreneurial orientation, and, lastly, networking capability. With an R-square value of 0.582, the model is capable of explaining 58.2 percent of the dependent variable, business sustainability, accurately. The large F-statistic helps to verify the statistical significance of the regression model. The results above verify the hypotheses developed and emphasize the need to integrate the internal strategic orientation with external relational capabilities for improving the sustainability of SMEs. Based on the results obtained from hypothesis testing, it is clear that entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability are significant determinants of sustainability for SMEs. In light of these observations, it can be argued that it is essential for SMEs to attain overall strategic capabilities to attain sustainability in the business environment.

3.4 Discussion

Based on this, this study aims to investigate the impact that entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability will have on the business sustainability of SMEs. The results show empirical evidence that all four strategic capabilities significantly and positively influence SMEs' sustainability. These findings further reinforce the view that not only do financial resources determine the survival and growth of SMEs over a long period but also the development of internal and external strategic capabilities.

a) Entrepreneurial Orientation and Business Sustainability

The results show that entrepreneurial orientation has a positive and significant impact on sustainability. The result implies that SMEs with higher levels of innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking propensity are more likely to ensure sustainability in their businesses. Entrepreneurial orientation helps SMEs to spot opportunities, forecast the future, and take strategic action before others. Such traits improve adaptability and resilience, which are integral for sustainability in a precarious environment.

This is in line with the resource-based perspective and existing literature that regard entrepreneurial orientation as a crucial intangible resource in attaining sustained competitive advantages. The proactive SMEs are able to adapt faster to the environment, whereas innovative SMEs undergo a constant process of re-creation. While risk-taking enables an entity to pursue fresh opportunities that contribute to sustained growth, care should be taken that risk-taking is balanced to ensure investments in new opportunities that contribute to sustained development (Kurniawan & Nuringsih, 2023; Silajdžić et

al., 2015). However, this moderate effect size makes a clear point that sustainability cannot be ensured by relying on entrepreneurial orientation alone.

b) Innovation Capability and Business Sustainability

Innovation capability is shown to have a significant and strong impact on the sustainability of businesses, emphasizing the need for and importance of innovation capability for the resilience of SMEs and successful performance. To effectively introduce new products, optimize operational processes, and incorporate novel technologies that significantly enhance efficiency and customer benefits, the innovation capability of the SMEs needs to be of high quality. Findings are supported by the dynamic capability approach, which argues that innovation is a means for SMEs to adapt to changes in the environment (Agarwal & Selen, 2009). Innovation capability enables SMEs to adjust the configuration of their resources, which improves sustainability. In addition, innovation enables SMEs to compensate for their inherent disadvantage of small size by creating new markets (Alshukri et al., 2024; Asbari et al., 2019; Calantone et al., 2002). Despite its positive role, innovation capability does not function independently. The efficiency of innovation is largely dependent on its alignment with the demands of the marketplace and the availability of knowledge from outside. This once again emphasizes the significance of combining innovation capability with market orientation and networking capability. Those SMEs which adopt innovation without understanding or collaborating with the marketplace may pose high risks of failure.

c) Market Orientation and Business Sustainability

The factor that exerts the strongest influence on the sustainability of businesses appears to be market orientation. The results bring out the significance of customer focus, competition, and market knowledge in ensuring the sustainability of SMEs. The ability to read customer preferences and change in demands in an effective manner by market-oriented SMEs puts them at an advantage.

The significant influence of market orientation also sustains other studies indicating that sustainability is highly linked to the ability of companies to sustain relevance and connection with customers. Collecting and utilizing constant streams of market information helps decrease the uncertainty of small businesses and the quality of decision-making. Market orientation also improves the efficiency of the business actions of entrepreneurs and innovations because all actions have been linked to the needs of the markets (Alshanty & Emeagwali, 2019; Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020; Kyal et al., 2022). However, overemphasis on present market demand could result in a restriction of exploratory innovations. Thus, SMES need to strike a balance between responsiveness and entrepreneurial exploration. The results indicate that the key coordinating mechanism in this process is the market orientation paradigm.

d) Networking Capability and Business Sustainability

The findings made it clear that networking capability exerts a positive influence on business sustainability. This is an important aspect for SMEs. Networking capability assists SMEs in leveraging outside sources beyond the capabilities of the organization. By pooling the capabilities of suppliers, customers, finance organizations, and government bodies through collaborations or network relationships, SMEs can improve the overall learning process of the organization and minimize risks. This is supported by social capital theory that recognizes the importance of relations in terms of information transfer. Network ability is very important for SMEs that may experience resource constraints. Through network ability, SMEs may overcome internal deficiencies and thus contribute to SMME resilience through innovation and responsiveness to the market (Mu & Di Benedetto, 2011; Siddiqui et al., 2021).

Still, however, the effect of networking capability though great is relatively smaller compared to the effect of market orientation and innovation capability. It would appear that for SMEs to derive the best out of networking, they need to have the capabilities to assimilate the benefits of networking. Inefficiencies in networking may result in SMEs finding themselves dependent on others, pointing to the need to advance networking capability.

e) Managerial and Theoretical Implications

In a managerial sense, it can be perceived that the results convey a message to the management and owners of SMEs to focus on the development of a market-oriented approach, as well as the advancement of innovation and entrepreneurial culture. Market research, customer engagement, and competitive analysis can help SMEs a great deal to improve their sustainability performance. Moreover, it is important for SMEs to develop an innovation system for enhancement through continuous improvement. Further, the present study makes several contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First, it generates empirical data validating the combined effects of the capabilities of entrepreneurship orientation, innovation, market, and networking on business sustainability. Second, the current study is significant in synthesizing the concepts of the Resource-Based View of the firm, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and Social Capital Theory for explaining the interactions of strategic capabilities for the sustainability of small businesses.

f) Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the results are strong, the paper has some limitations. Since it is a cross-sectional study, it is difficult to grasp changes in capabilities and sustainability over time. Future studies can use longitudinal studies to analyze cause-and-effect relationships between sustainability and capabilities more effectively. Further studies can also investigate moderating or mediating factors, such as environmental

uncertainties or the role of digital capabilities, for more insightful analysis of mechanisms related to sustainability in SMEs.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that entrepreneurial orientation, innovation capability, market orientation, and networking capability are important complementary factors for improving the business sustainability of SMEs. Findings from the research clearly show that SMEs, which exhibit strong market-oriented strategies through innovation, entrepreneurial actions, and established external networks, can effectively counter their challenges for sustaining their operations in competitive business environments. To ensure SME business sustainability, it is important to capitalize on internal orientations, which complement external relationships that can help SMEs to survive even amidst changes in their business environments.

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