

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Competitive Advantage: The Mediating Role of Knowledge Sharing in Enterprises

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Abstract: This study investigates how entrepreneurial orientation (EO) translates into competitive advantage (CA) and examines whether knowledge sharing (KS) functions as a mediating mechanism in this relationship. Although prior research has widely confirmed the positive association between EO and organizational performance, the internal processes through which entrepreneurial posture generates competitive value remain insufficiently explored. In particular, integrating entrepreneurship theory with the knowledge-based view (KBV) of the firm calls for a deeper understanding of how strategic orientation is translated into sustainable CA through organizational knowledge processes. Drawing on the KBV and entrepreneurship literature, this study develops and empirically tests a model linking EO, KS, and CA. EO is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking, whereas KS is viewed as a key organizational process that enables the diffusion and integration of knowledge. The research is based on data collected through a CAWI survey conducted in 2026 among 256 enterprises operating in Poland. All constructs were measured using validated multi-item scales assessed on a five-point Likert scale. The proposed hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling with bootstrapping. The results demonstrate that EO has a significant positive effect on both KS and CA. KS also positively influences CA and partially mediates the relationship between EO and CA. These findings suggest that EO enhances competitiveness not only directly, through strategic posture and opportunity exploitation, but also indirectly, through intensified knowledge-sharing processes that enable organizational learning and capability development. The study contributes to the literature by integrating entrepreneurship and knowledge management perspectives and by identifying KS as a key organizational mechanism linking EO with CA. The findings extend prior research by providing empirical evidence from enterprises operating in Central Europe. From a managerial perspective, the results highlight the importance of aligning entrepreneurial initiatives with a supportive knowledge-sharing climate to achieve sustainable competitive outcomes.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial orientation, Knowledge sharing, Competitive advantage, Enterprises, Knowledge-based view

1. Introduction

Competitive advantage (CA) refers to the set of attributes and capabilities that enable a firm to outperform its competitors and sustain superior results over time. In markets that are increasingly saturated and volatile, building and maintaining such an advantage becomes especially challenging and strategically important. From a strategic management perspective, firms operate within specific industry contexts that influence their competitive positioning and strategic choices. As a result, organizations must design context-sensitive strategies to navigate complex and evolving competitive environments (Peteraf & Bergen, 2003). Consistent with the resource-based view, long-term CA is grounded in a firm's ability to acquire, develop, and effectively leverage valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resources (Barney, 1991).

Against this backdrop, entrepreneurial orientation (EO) has emerged as a key strategic posture that strengthens a firm's competitive capacity. A substantial body of empirical research shows that firms characterized by innovativeness, proactiveness, and a willingness to take risks tend to achieve higher performance levels and reinforce their market position (Rocha et al., 2025). These entrepreneurial behaviours enable organizations to recognize emerging opportunities, adapt to environmental shifts, and differentiate themselves from competitors. Nevertheless, although the positive link between EO and firm performance is well documented, the mechanisms underlying how EO translates into CA remain insufficiently explained (Tajeddini et al., 2023). Existing studies largely focus on direct performance outcomes, while comparatively less attention has been paid to the internal organizational processes that transform entrepreneurial posture into sustained competitive value. In this regard, knowledge sharing (KS) appears to be a particularly relevant intermediary mechanism. However, empirical evidence regarding its mediating role remains fragmented and inconclusive.

Previous research offers mixed evidence regarding the mediating role of knowledge sharing (KS) in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and organizational outcomes. While some studies indicate that KS serves as an important intermediary mechanism linking EO with improved performance and other positive outcomes (Hormiga et al., 2017; Qasim et al., 2025), others report non-significant mediation effects (Hanifah et al., 2021). At the same time, studies that draw on both entrepreneurship theory and the knowledge-based view of the firm often treat EO and knowledge processes as distinct constructs, examining

them in isolation rather than exploring their mutual interaction. This conceptual separation suggests the need for a more integrated perspective that explains how EO and KS jointly shape competitive advantage (CA).

In response to this gap, the primary aim of this study is to clarify the process through which EO contributes to CA by identifying KS as a central organizational mechanism that connects strategic posture with competitive outcomes. By integrating insights from entrepreneurship and knowledge management research, the study proposes and empirically tests a model in which KS mediates the relationship between EO and CA. Empirically, the study advances existing literature by analysing these relationships within a sample of Polish enterprises using structural equation modelling.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 1 outlines the research problem, theoretical foundations, and study objectives. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and develops the research hypothesis. Section 3 describes the methodology and measurement model. Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical results. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main contributions, highlights managerial implications, and identifies limitations and avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Sharing

KS refers to the behaviours through which individuals exchange information, experience, and expertise within an organization. It includes both the transfer of task-related knowledge and the sharing of insights that emerge through social interaction and collaboration. In practice, KS encompasses activities aimed at solving problems, generating new ideas, and supporting the implementation of organizational processes (Wang & Noe, 2010). Because knowledge represents a critical organizational resource and a key source of competitive differentiation, its value increases when it is disseminated and collectively applied. In this sense, KS constitutes a central process through which individual knowledge is transformed into organizational capability (Ritala & Stefan, 2021).

Despite its strategic relevance, KS remains a complex and often challenging organizational process. Employees may hesitate to share knowledge they perceive as personally valuable or as a source of power, creating barriers to systematic knowledge exchange (Alajmi & Al-Qallaf, 2022). As a result, KS is shaped not only by individual motivation but also by organizational structures, social dynamics, and contextual conditions. As Wang and Noe (2010) emphasize, knowledge sharing involves both voluntary behaviours and formal mechanisms that facilitate knowledge transfer, storage, and retrieval. Over time, these mechanisms can institutionalize sharing practices and embed them within organizational routines.

A key distinction in the literature concerns tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is codified, documented, and relatively easy to communicate through formal systems such as manuals, databases, or digital platforms (Reychav & Weisberg, 2010). Its dissemination is typically supported by information technologies and standardized procedures. In contrast, tacit knowledge is experiential, context-dependent, and difficult to articulate. It is primarily transmitted through interpersonal interaction, shared experiences, and socialization processes (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). Because tacit knowledge often underlies creativity and innovation, its effective transfer depends heavily on trust, strong interpersonal relationships, and collaborative work environments. Accordingly, the processes involved in sharing tacit and explicit knowledge differ substantially. While explicit KS can be enhanced through formal documentation systems and technological infrastructures, tacit KS requires supportive organizational cultures, leadership practices that promote openness, and strong social ties among employees (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). These relational conditions are essential for overcoming individual reluctance and enabling the deeper exchange of insights and experience.

Empirical research consistently shows that effective KS contributes to greater innovation, improved performance, cost efficiency, and the development of intellectual capital (Wang & Noe, 2010). By facilitating the integration and application of dispersed knowledge resources, KS strengthens organizational learning and absorptive capacity. Consequently, it serves as a fundamental mechanism linking individual expertise with collective outcomes and sustained competitive advantage.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Orientation

EO describes a firm's overall strategic posture toward entrepreneurial activity. It is reflected in how organizations make decisions, structure their processes, and implement practices to identify and exploit opportunities. In essence, EO captures how firms innovate, take the initiative, and position themselves in competitive, rapidly changing environments. It is most commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising

innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness, which together determine a firm's entrepreneurial capacity and long-term development potential (Rauch et al., 2009).

The multidimensional character of EO has been widely acknowledged in the literature. Lumpkin and Dess proposed a broader conceptualization that, in addition to innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness, also incorporates autonomy and competitive aggressiveness (Bolton & Lane, 2012). This extended perspective underlines that entrepreneurship at the firm level goes beyond innovation alone and represents a broader pattern of strategic behaviour. In this sense, EO can be understood as an organizational orientation that shapes growth trajectories, adaptability, and performance outcomes (Rauch et al., 2009).

Among the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO), innovativeness is commonly regarded as its core component. It reflects a firm's capacity and willingness to develop and implement new ideas, products, services, or processes, fostering experimentation and creative problem-solving. Empirical evidence indicates a positive relationship between innovativeness and organizational performance, particularly in dynamic and competitive environments (Lomberg et al., 2017). Risk-taking denotes the readiness to commit significant resources to initiatives with uncertain outcomes and to depart from established routines. While it is a defining element of entrepreneurial behaviour, its effectiveness depends on balanced risk assessment and management (Tang et al., 2008). Contextual factors, such as ownership structure, may moderate this dimension; for example, family firms often exhibit more cautious risk profiles than non-family firms (Naldi et al., 2007). Proactiveness refers to anticipating and acting on future market opportunities ahead of competitors. By pursuing first-mover advantages and shaping the competitive environment, proactive firms strengthen innovation efforts and enhance their potential for sustained competitive advantage (Craig et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2008).

2.3 Hypotheses Development

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) plays a significant role in stimulating knowledge sharing (KS) within organizations. Proactiveness, as a forward-looking and opportunity-seeking posture, promotes openness to exchanging information and experiences (Rauch et al., 2009). Anticipating future customer needs requires integrating both explicit and tacit knowledge, thereby intensifying internal knowledge flows and supporting collaborative learning (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Consequently, entrepreneurial firms are more likely to implement practices that enhance employee engagement in knowledge exchange (Nghah et al., 2018). Innovativeness, a core dimension of EO, reflects support for experimentation and the development of new products and processes (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Innovation depends on combining diverse expertise, which encourages a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous improvement. Risk-taking further highlights the importance of KS, as pursuing uncertain opportunities requires integrating diverse perspectives and shared organizational learning (Covin & Slevin, 1991). Empirical evidence indicates that EO strengthens knowledge generation, absorption, and dissemination within organizations (Hernández-Linares et al., 2023).

Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *EO has a positive effect on KS in the enterprise.*

Empirical studies also provide robust evidence of a positive relationship between EO and competitive advantage (CA). Entrepreneurial firms are more likely to pursue innovative strategies, adapt quickly to market changes, and effectively exploit emerging opportunities, which strengthens their competitive positioning. For instance, Rocha et al. (2025) found that EO significantly enhances sustained CA in a study of 300 small and medium-sized enterprises in Morocco. Similarly, Tajeddini et al. (2023), based on data from 246 retail and consumer service firms in Japan, show that EO contributes to sustained CA through differentiation strategies and effective risk management practices. These findings indicate that EO strengthens firms' ability to build and sustain competitive advantage across diverse industry and institutional contexts.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: *EO has a positive effect on CA in the enterprise.*

KS is a central organizational process that reinforces a firm's CA. From the knowledge-based perspective, knowledge functions as a strategic resource that supports better decision-making and value creation (Grant, 1996). By enabling employees to exchange expertise and experience, KS enhances problem-solving and speeds up the development of innovative products and services - key drivers of competitiveness (Qasim et al., 2025). Empirical studies also indicate that KS improves organizational performance by helping firms utilize their intellectual capital more effectively and cultivate a collaborative culture focused on continuous improvement (Hanifah et al., 2021). Organizations that actively encourage KS strengthen both innovation capability and

operational efficiency, leading to improved market outcomes such as higher sales and stronger competitive positions (Sulistyo & Ayuni, 2019; Arsawan et al., 2020). Furthermore, KS facilitates opportunity recognition and more informed decision-making, enabling firms to adapt quickly to environmental changes and sustain their competitive edge (Pratono et al., 2019).

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis was developed:

H3: *KS has a positive effect on CA of the enterprise.*

Prior empirical research suggests that KS may serve as a crucial mechanism linking EO with organizational outcomes. While EO fosters innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking, translating these entrepreneurial tendencies into tangible organizational results requires effective processes of knowledge diffusion and integration (Kmieciak, 2020). In this regard, KS enables insights, experiences, and ideas generated through entrepreneurial activities to spread across units and become embedded in broader organizational practices. Direct empirical evidence for this mediating role is provided by Hormiga et al. (2017), who show that KS mediates the relationship between EO and performance in academic research groups.

Subsequent studies support this mechanism in various contexts. KS has been found to mediate the relationships between EO and innovation performance (Gunawan et al., 2016; Qasim et al., 2025) and between EO and project success (Latif et al., 2021). These findings imply that an entrepreneurial posture leads to stronger outcomes when supported by knowledge-sharing routines that enable learning and coordination. However, the results are not entirely consistent. Hanifah et al. (2021) report no significant mediating effect of KS in the EO-innovation performance relationship, suggesting that contextual and organizational conditions may influence the strength of this link.

From a theoretical standpoint, the transformation of EO into competitive outcomes relies on internal social exchange processes that sustain knowledge flows. Entrepreneurial behaviors create potential value, but this value becomes organizational only when knowledge is effectively shared, recombined, and integrated into collective practices (Hormiga et al., 2017). Accordingly, KS can be viewed as a central organizational process through which entrepreneurial posture is translated into competitive advantage.

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: *KS mediates the relationship between EO and CA.*

3. Methods

To achieve the research objective, a CAWI survey was conducted in 2026 among 256 enterprises operating in Poland. The largest group comprised small enterprises (39.5%), followed by microenterprises (35.2%), while medium-sized enterprises accounted for 25.4% of the sample. Regarding ownership structure, family firms accounted for the majority of the sample (57.0%), whereas non-family firms accounted for 43.0% of the surveyed enterprises. In terms of firm age, the largest category included growing firms operating for 6–15 years (42.6%). Young firms (up to 5 years old) accounted for 32.0% of the sample, while mature firms (operating for more than 15 years) accounted for 25.4% of the surveyed enterprises.

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales assessed on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 5 represented “strongly agree.” The measurement items were adapted from previously validated instruments to ensure content validity and theoretical alignment. EO was measured with 9 items developed by Hughes and Morgan (2007), KS with 8 items adapted from Santos et al. (2023), and CA with 3 items proposed by Navarro-García et al. (2024). All constructs were specified as reflective latent variables, assuming that the observed items reflect the underlying theoretical dimensions.

Before testing the hypotheses, the measurement model's adequacy was evaluated by assessing internal consistency reliability and convergent validity (Table 1). The results show that EO, KS, and CA exhibit high internal consistency, as all reliability coefficients exceed recommended thresholds, indicating that the items consistently capture their respective constructs. Moreover, the AVEs for all variables exceed the accepted minimum level, confirming convergent validity and indicating that the latent constructs explain a substantial share of the variance in their indicators. Overall, these findings support the measurement model's reliability and validity and justify proceeding with the structural analysis.

Table 1: Measurement Model: Items, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Construct	Item*	α	CR	AVE
Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)				
EO1	Risk-taking by employees is positively perceived in our company.	0.915	0.915	0.549
EO2	We encourage employees to take calculated risks related to new ideas.			
EO3	Our organization emphasizes both exploration and experimentation in pursuing opportunities.			
EO4	We actively implement improvements and innovations in our operations.			
EO5	Our company is creative in its operating methods.			
EO6	Our company continuously seeks new ways of operating.			
EO7	We always strive to take the initiative in every situation.			
EO8	We are excellent at identifying opportunities.			
EO9	We are the first to initiate actions and implement solutions.			
Knowledge Sharing (KS)				
KS1	I always share my work-related experience or know-how with colleagues.	0.911	0.911	0.563
KS2	Whenever requested, I share work-related knowledge with colleagues.			
KS3	I enjoy sharing my professional knowledge with colleagues.			
KS4	I actively participate in discussions about complex work issues.			
KS5	I willingly share work-related reports with colleagues.			
KS6	I provide colleagues with materials related to my responsibilities.			
KS7	I share official work-related documents with colleagues.			
KS8	I share digital work-related materials (e.g., e-documents, links).			
Competitive Advantage (CA)				
CA1	My company has a cost advantage over competitors.	0.861	0.863	0.678
CA2	My company has an advantage in product/service differentiation.			
CA3	My company has an advantage in stakeholder relationship quality.			

To verify the instrument's structure, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3345.47$; $p < .001$), confirming the appropriateness of performing factor analysis. According to the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues > 1), three factors were extracted, jointly explaining 64.3% of the total variance. The resulting factor structure is consistent with the proposed theoretical model (EO, KS, CA).

4. Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess differences in respondents' perceptions. Figure 1 presents box-and-whisker plots for the nine EO items. The results indicate a moderately developed level of EO, with mean values ranging from approximately 3.0 to 3.6 on a 7-point scale. Risk-taking (EO1–EO2) shows the lowest scores, suggesting it is less embedded in organizational practice. Higher means are observed for innovativeness and experimentation (EO3–EO6), particularly creativity and the search for new operating methods, while proactiveness (EO7–EO9) occupies an intermediate position. The substantial overlap of confidence intervals indicates limited differences between dimensions and a relatively coherent EO profile.

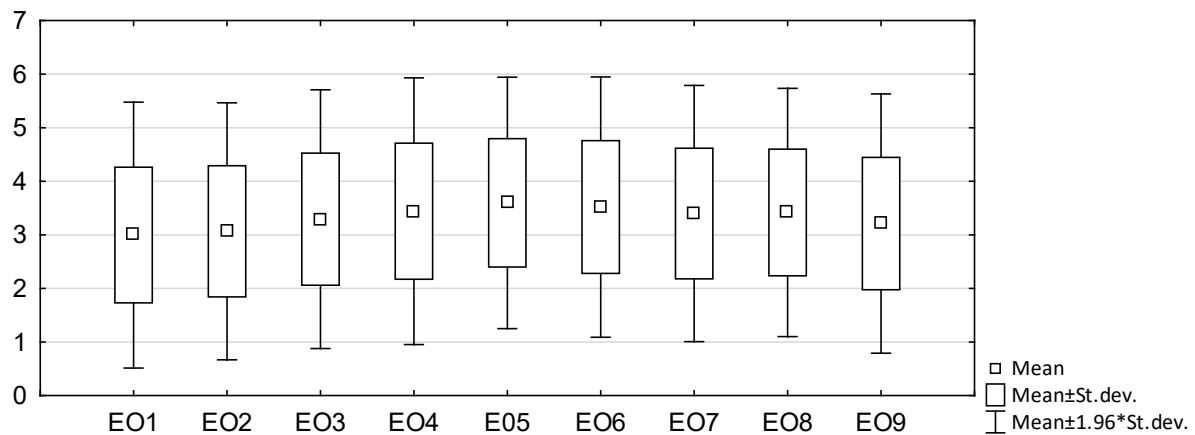


Figure 1: Box-and-whisker plot for the EO variable

Figure 2 presents box-and-whisker plots for the eight KS items. The results indicate a relatively high level of knowledge-sharing behaviors, with mean values ranging from approximately 3.4 to 3.8 on a 7-point scale. Voluntary sharing of experience and responsiveness to colleagues (KS1–KS3) show the highest scores, while participation in discussions and sharing materials (KS4–KS6) are slightly lower but still high. The overlap of confidence intervals suggests limited differences between items and a generally consistent knowledge-sharing culture.

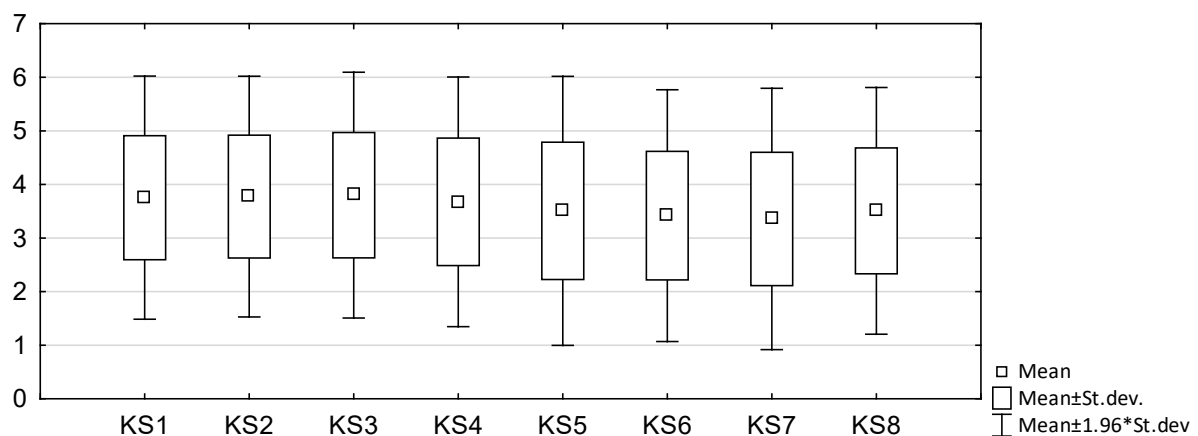


Figure 2: Box-and-whisker plot for the KS variable

Figure 3 presents box-and-whisker plots for the three CA items. Mean values range approximately from 3.3 to 3.6 on a 7-point scale, indicating a moderate level of perceived CA. Stakeholder relationship quality (CA3) shows the highest mean, followed closely by product/service differentiation (CA2), while cost advantage (CA1) is slightly lower. The substantial overlap of confidence intervals suggests only minor differences between dimensions. Overall, the results indicate a relatively balanced competitive profile, with a slightly stronger emphasis on relational and differentiation-based advantages than on cost leadership.

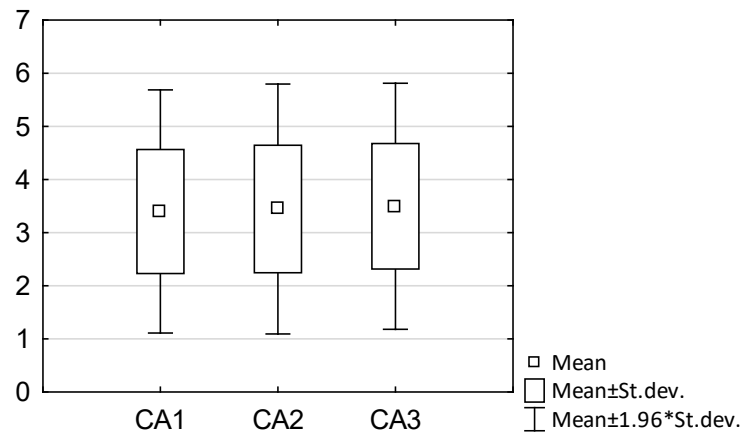


Figure 3: Box-and-whisker plot for the CA variable

With a 5-point Likert scale, the mean scores (EO: $M = 3.327$; KS: $M = 3.599$; CA: $M = 3.447$) indicate a moderate level of the examined constructs, slightly above the neutral midpoint (3.0), with KS rated highest. The standard deviations near 1 suggest moderate dispersion of responses, indicating noticeable variability among respondents without strong polarization (Tab. 2).

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and correlation analysis (n=256)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. EO	3.327	0.949	1.000		
2. KS	3.599	0.938	0.599***	1.000	
3. CA	3.447	1.047	0.634***	0.520***	1.000

$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

All constructs are positively and moderately correlated. The strongest association is observed between EO and CA ($r = .634$), followed by EO and KS ($r = .599$), indicating that the relationships hypothesized in the structural model are preliminarily supported at the correlational level.

Table 3: Structural model results – direct effects (bootstrapping, 5,000 resamples)

Hypothesis	Path	β	STDEV	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	EO $\rightarrow$ KS	0.592	0.064	9.213	< .001	Supported
H2	EO $\rightarrow$ CA	0.480	0.067	7.164	< .001	Supported
H3	KS $\rightarrow$ CA	0.216	0.064	3.388	< .001	Supported

The results indicate that EO has a positive and statistically significant effect on KS, supporting H1 and suggesting that a stronger entrepreneurial posture is associated with more intensive knowledge-sharing practices. EO also exerts a significant positive direct effect on CA, confirming H2, while KS positively influences CA, supporting H3. Overall, the findings demonstrate that EO enhances CA both directly and indirectly through KS (Tab. 3).

Table 4: Structural model results – indirect (mediating) effect

Hypothesis	Path	β	STDEV	t-value	p-value	Result
H4	EO $\rightarrow$ KS $\rightarrow$ CA	0.128	0.041	3.104	.002	Supported

The indirect effect of EO on CA through KS is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.128$, $p = .002$), supporting H4. This finding indicates that KS partially mediates the relationship between EO and CA (Tab. 4).

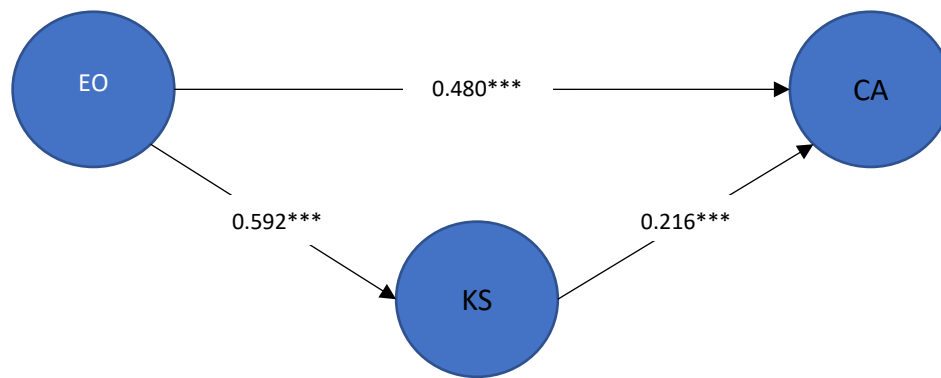


Figure 4: Research model

The findings are broadly consistent with previous research on the relationships among EO, KS, and organizational outcomes. The positive association between EO and KS confirms earlier evidence that an entrepreneurial posture stimulates internal knowledge processes (Nghah et al., 2018; Hernández-Linares et al., 2023). The results also support the theoretical arguments advanced by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) and the meta-analytic conclusions of Rauch et al. (2009), suggesting that EO shapes not only a firm's strategic positioning but also its internal patterns of collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The significant impact of EO on CA corresponds with a well-established body of research linking EO to superior performance and competitiveness (Rauch et al., 2009; Lomberg et al., 2017). The present findings further complement those of Sulistyo and Ayuni (2019) and Arsawan et al. (2020), which indicate that EO fosters sustainable CA by enhancing innovation and adaptability. Similarly, the positive relationship between KS and CA aligns with the knowledge-based view (Grant, 1996) and empirical studies demonstrating that knowledge exchange supports innovation and performance improvements (Hanifah et al., 2021; Pratono et al., 2019). Finally, the identified mediating role of KS reinforces prior evidence that knowledge-sharing processes connect EO with organizational outcomes (Hormiga et al., 2017; Gunawan et al., 2016; Qasim et al., 2025). At the same time, the partial mediation observed in this study aligns with Hanifah et al. (2021), indicating that EO contributes to CA through multiple pathways, with KS as an important, but not exclusive, mechanism.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the links between EO, KS, and CA in mature enterprises. The findings indicate that firms with a stronger entrepreneurial orientation share knowledge more actively and achieve higher competitive advantage. KS also has a direct positive effect on CA. Importantly, KS partially mediates the EO–CA relationship, meaning that EO enhances competitiveness both directly and indirectly through internal knowledge-sharing processes.

The mediating effect of KS clarifies how entrepreneurial behaviour turns into concrete organizational results. Activities such as experimentation, proactive initiatives, and calculated risk-taking generate potential value, but this value becomes organizational only when knowledge is exchanged and collectively applied. EO sets the direction and drive, whereas KS ensures diffusion and integration. Without effective knowledge flows, entrepreneurial efforts may remain isolated within individuals or teams. In this way, KS links strategic intent with collective capability. The partial mediation also suggests that EO shapes CA through several channels. Beyond KS, EO may strengthen competitiveness by improving responsiveness, opportunity recognition, and adaptability in dynamic settings. This underlines the complementary roles of strategic orientation and internal processes: EO defines the posture, while KS embeds and sustains its outcomes across the organization.

From a managerial perspective, promoting entrepreneurial behaviour alone is not enough. Firms must cultivate open communication, trust, and collaboration. Formal knowledge systems should be supported by informal interactions that enable tacit knowledge exchange. Aligning entrepreneurial initiatives with a strong knowledge-sharing climate increases the likelihood that innovation and proactiveness will result in lasting competitive benefits.

The study has limitations. Its cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and self-reported data may introduce bias. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs, incorporate objective performance measures, and examine contextual factors - such as leadership style, organizational culture, or industry turbulence - that may influence the EO–KS–CA relationship.

Ethics Declaration: I declare that ethical clearance was not required for the research.

AI Declaration: During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized ChatGPT and Grammarly to enhance linguistic correctness and translation quality.

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