



LEVERAGING STRATEGIC BENCHMARKING AND ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY FOR INNOVATION PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY IN INDONESIAN SMEs

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ABSTRACT

Innovation is crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to remain competitive in a changing market. However, many SMEs struggle due to limited resources and a lack of agility. This study delves into an unexplored area: how knowledge-driven capabilities like strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity contribute to innovation performance by fostering organisational agility. Drawing on Dynamic Capability Theory, the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) and Open Innovation Theory, the research argues that learning from industry leaders and utilising external knowledge significantly boosts innovation, particularly when companies can swiftly adapt to environmental changes. Data were gathered through a quantitative survey of SME owners and managers in Indonesia and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings demonstrate that both strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity have a substantial positive impact on organisational agility and innovation outcomes. Importantly, organisational agility acts as a key mediator in these relationships, explaining a considerable amount of variance in agility ($R^2 = 0.587$) and innovation performance ($R^2 = 0.671$). These results offer a fresh perspective for Indonesian SMEs on how combining benchmarking, external knowledge utilisation and operational responsiveness can enhance their innovative capabilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's unpredictable business landscape, innovation is essential for an organisation's long-term survival. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia – vital economic drivers and job creators – developing new products and refining processes are crucial to meet evolving market demands. Despite their importance, these businesses often face challenges like limited access to external knowledge and difficulties adapting to changing environments.

To overcome these challenges, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to develop organisational capabilities that enable them to identify opportunities, acquire valuable knowledge, and convert this into innovative results. One capability that is becoming increasingly popular in strategic management literature is strategic benchmarking. This involves comparing an organisation's strategies, practices and performance to those of industry leaders, in order to identify best practices and areas for improvement (Anand & Kodali, 2008). Benchmarking activities provide organisations with valuable insights into market trends, technological developments, and managerial practices, all of which can stimulate innovation and drive improvement. Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of benchmarking on organisational learning, adaptability, and overall performance (Adebanjo et al., 2023).

Another key factor driving innovation is absorptive capacity. Zahra and George (2002) define this as an organisation's ability to acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit external knowledge. Strong absorptive capacity enables organisations to recognise valuable information, integrate it into their operations, and use it to drive innovation. Research consistently demonstrates a positive impact of absorptive capacity on organisational learning, innovation capability, and overall firm performance (Lane et al., 2006; Volberda et al., 2010).

While strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity facilitate knowledge acquisition and utilisation, successful transformation into innovative outcomes hinges on an organisation's ability to respond rapidly to environmental shifts. Organisational agility has therefore emerged as a crucial capability. It is defined as an organisation's ability to detect environmental changes and respond effectively through flexible and adaptive actions (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Agile organisations are better equipped to convert acquired knowledge into innovative products, services, and business processes that enhance performance. Previous research has demonstrated that organisational agility can significantly enhance innovation performance and adaptability (Dubey et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2023).

Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2018), the Knowledge-Based View (Grant, 1996), and Open Innovation Theory (Chesbrough, 2003) all explain the relationships between strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility, and innovation performance. These theories emphasise the acquisition of external knowledge, the development of organisational capabilities, and the transformation of knowledge into superior outcomes. Consequently, strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity are expected to enhance innovation performance directly and indirectly via organisational agility.

Turning knowledge into innovation effectively hinges on organisational agility. This involves recognising and adapting efficiently to environmental changes (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). While earlier research has explored these factors individually, comprehensive evidence is lacking on how organisational agility links knowledge-based capabilities to innovation outcomes, particularly in the resource-constrained context of Indonesian SMEs. To address this gap, this study proposes an integrated model grounded in Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2018), the Knowledge-Based View (Grant, 1996) and Open Innovation Theory (Chesbrough, 2003).

While previous research has explored strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility and innovation performance, these variables have generally been investigated individually. Furthermore, there is little empirical evidence on how organisational agility mediates the link between strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity and innovation performance, especially in Indonesian SMEs. This highlights the need for a more integrated framework that explains how knowledge-based capabilities drive innovation through organisational agility.

This study investigates the impact of strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity on innovation performance within Indonesian SMEs, as mediated by organisational agility. The findings will contribute to the strategic management literature and provide SME managers with practical guidance on how to enhance innovation in increasingly competitive markets.

This study's key contribution lies in its focus on agility as a mediating factor. It clarifies that benchmarking and absorptive capacity are important but also explains how they translate into performance through responsive action. Conducting the research within Indonesian SMEs broadens the applicability of current theories to emerging markets and provides practical insights for SME leaders seeking to maintain their competitive edge.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This quantitative study examined the relationship between strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility, and innovation performance in Indonesian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from respondents at a single point in time via a structured questionnaire (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). The proposed research model was analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. This approach is well-suited to examining complex relationships among latent variables and testing mediation effects (Hair et al., 2022).

This quantitative study employed a cross-sectional survey to investigate the relationships between strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility and innovation performance. Data were collected from owners and managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia using purposive sampling. This ensured participants had a solid grasp of strategic operations. The study's goal was to gather responses from 150 individuals but ultimately received 128 usable surveys, representing an

impressive 85.3% response rate. To qualify, participating SMEs must have been operational for at least three years and actively engaged in innovation activities.

The study focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia. The sample included SME owners, managers, and individuals involved in strategic decision-making. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the respondents had relevant knowledge of organisational strategies, innovation, and business operations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). In order to be included in the study, SMEs had to be at least three years old and have engaged in innovation activities within the last three years.

Data were collected via a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measurement items for strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility and innovation performance were adapted from established scales in previous research.

The research model was evaluated using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0. This method is well-suited for examining complex mediating relationships as per Hair et al. (2022). The measurement scales were drawn from previously validated instruments: strategic benchmarking was based on Anand and Kodali (2008) absorptive capacity on Zahra and George (2002) organisational agility on Doz and Kosonen (2010) and innovation performance on OECD (2018). Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Previous empirical research has identified strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity and organisational agility as key drivers of organisational innovation and performance. Table 1 provides a summary of relevant studies examining these variables.

Table 1. Previous Research

No.	Researcher (Year)	Research Title	Variables Studied	Key Findings	Relevance to This Study
1.	Anand & Kodali (2008)	Benchmarking the Benchmarking Models	Strategic Benchmarking	Benchmarking enhances organisational learning and performance, as well as knowledge and learning.	It supports the idea that strategic benchmarking is a valuable source of external knowledge and learning.

2.	Lane et al. (2006)	The Reification of Absorptive Capacity	Absorptive Capacity	Boosting an organisation's learning and innovation potential requires absorptive capacity.	It highlights absorptive capacity as a key driver of innovation.
3.	Volberda et al. (2010)	Absorbing the Concept of Absorptive Capacity	Absorptive Capacity	An organisation can enhance its adaptability and foster innovation by gaining and applying external knowledge.	It emphasises the connection between an organisation's absorptive capacity and its agility.
4.	Doz & Kosonen (2010)	Embedding Strategic Agility	Organizational Agility	Organisations that are agile are better at adapting to changes in their environment and dealing with uncertainty.	It supports organisational agility as a dynamic capability.
5.	Dubey et al. (2021)	Leveraging organisational agility to drive artificial intelligence-powered supply chain analytics.	Organizational Agility and Performance	The performance and innovation of an organisation can be improved by its agility.	It establishes a link between organisational agility and innovation performance.

6.	Ahmed et al. (2023)	Organisational Agility and Innovation: Insights from Emerging Economies	Organizational Agility and Innovation Performance	Agile firms are more innovative and competitive.	It supports the direct link between organisational agility and innovation performance, which is important for businesses looking to improve their operations and stay competitive in the market.
7.	Adebanjo et al. (2023)	Benchmarking's Evolving Role in Boosting	Strategic Benchmarking and Performance	Benchmarking is a key part of helping organisations to learn and develop new ideas.	It establishes a link between strategic benchmarking and innovation performance.
8.	OECD (2018)	Oslo Manual 2018	Innovation Performance	Innovation performance is a measure of an organisation's ability to generate and successfully implement new ideas.	It provides the conceptual basis for measuring innovation performance.

Source: Author's own work (2026)

Research Gap

Previous research has thoroughly explored the impact of strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility and innovation performance (Anand & Kodali, 2008; Volberda et al., 2010; Dubey et al., 2021). However, most studies have examined these variables in isolation and focused predominantly on large organisations. There is limited empirical evidence explaining how organisational agility mediates the relationships between

strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity and innovation performance, particularly within Indonesian SMEs.

Furthermore, although organisational agility is recognised as a key dynamic capability that boosts adaptability and innovation (Teece, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2023), its role in transforming knowledge-based capabilities into innovative performance has not been explored. This study therefore proposes an integrated framework that explains how strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity contribute to innovation performance through organisational agility in Indonesian SMEs.

Research Framework

Based on Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2018), the Knowledge-Based View (Grant, 1996) and Open Innovation Theory (Chesbrough, 2003), this study proposes that strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity enhance innovation performance directly and indirectly via organisational agility. Organisational agility is expected to act as a mediating mechanism, enabling SMEs to transform external knowledge and benchmarking insights into innovative outcomes. The proposed research framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

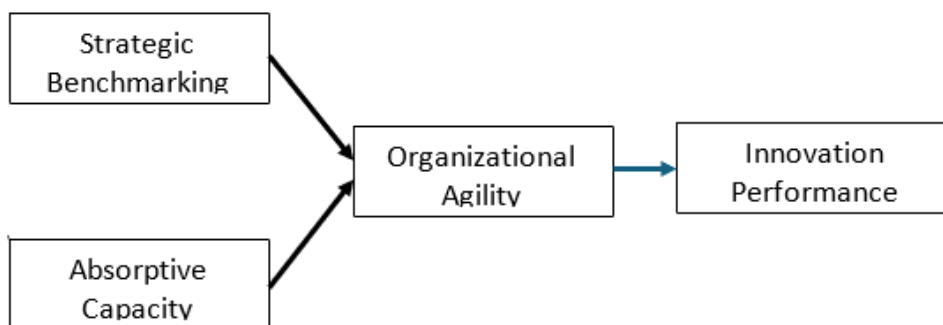


Figure 1. Research Framework

Based on the proposed framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Strategic benchmarking has a positive and substantial impact on organisational agility.
- H2: An organisation's absorptive capacity has a positive and substantial impact on its agility.
- H3: Organisational agility has a positive and substantial impact on innovation performance.
- H4: Strategic benchmarking has a positive and substantial impact on innovation performance.
- H5: Absorptive capacity has a positive and substantial impact on innovation performance.
- H6: Organisational agility bridges the gap between strategic benchmarking and innovation performance.
- H7: Organisational agility bridges the gap between absorptive capacity and innovation performance.

Measurement and Operationalization

- ❖ **Strategic benchmarking** was assessed using indicators adapted from Anand and Kodali's (2008) research. These indicators covered the firm's practices in comparing its strategies processes and performance to industry leaders.
- ❖ **Absorptive capacity** was measured using Zahra and George's (2002) proposed dimensions encompassing knowledge acquisition assimilation transformation and exploitation.
- ❖ **Organisational agility** was evaluated using indicators adapted from Doz and Kosonen (2010). These indicators assess responsiveness flexibility and speed in adapting to environmental change.
- ❖ **Innovation performance** was assessed using innovation outcome indicators adapted from the 2018 OECD Oslo Manual.

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

H1: Strategic benchmarking significantly enhances an organisation's agility.

H2: Organisational agility is significantly improved by a high absorptive capacity.

H3: Organisational agility significantly boosts innovation performance.

H4: Strategic benchmarking significantly boosts innovation performance.

H5: A high absorptive capacity significantly boosts innovation performance.

H6: Organisational agility plays a crucial role in strengthening the link between strategic benchmarking and innovation performance.

H7: Organisational agility plays a crucial role in moderating the link between absorptive capacity and innovation performance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This section presents the empirical results of an analysis conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This analysis examined the relationships between strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity, organisational agility, and innovation performance.

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the measurement model was evaluated to confirm that the constructs met the required standards of validity and reliability. The results showed that all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Furthermore, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, confirming that the constructs effectively explained their indicators' variance (Hair et al., 2022).

The reliability assessment yielded satisfactory results. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency. Furthermore, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values ranged from 0.421 to 0.842, which is below the recommended threshold of

0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). These findings confirm that the measurement model met the necessary standards of validity and reliability.

The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity. Indicator loadings exceeded 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity according to Hair et al. (2022). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values both exceeded 0.70, establishing reliability. Discriminant validity was confirmed by HTMT ratios ranging from 0.421 to 0.842, all below the 0.90 threshold as per Henseler et al. (2015).

Evaluation of the structural model showed that strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity explained 58.7% of the variance in organisational agility ($R^2 = 0.587$). Together, strategic benchmarking, absorptive capacity and organisational agility explained 67.1% of the variance in innovation performance ($R^2 = 0.671$). These results suggest that the proposed model has considerable explanatory power (Hair et al., 2022).

An evaluation of the structural model revealed that strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity accounted for 58.7% of the variance in organisational agility ($R^2 = 0.587$). The full model explained even more, 67.1% of the variance in innovation performance ($R^2 = 0.671$). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated satisfactory predictive relevance with Variance

Inflation Factor (VIF) values below 5.0 and Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values above zero. Effect sizes (f^2) demonstrated medium to large impacts for the main paths. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	SB $\rightarrow$ OA	0.391	5.782	0.000	Supported
H2	AC $\rightarrow$ OA	0.428	6.317	0.000	Supported
H3	OA $\rightarrow$ IP	0.452	7.114	0.000	Supported
H4	SB $\rightarrow$ IP	0.214	3.108	0.000	Supported
H5	AC $\rightarrow$ IP	0.281	4.256	0.000	Supported
H6	SB $\rightarrow$ OA $\rightarrow$ IP	0.177	4.018	0.000	Supported
H7	AC $\rightarrow$ OA $\rightarrow$ IP	0.194	4.562	0.000	Supported

Source: Author's own work (2026)

3.2 Discussion

Strategic benchmarking can significantly boost organisational agility. Small and medium-sized enterprises that actively compare their practices with those of industry leaders are better placed to identify environmental changes and adapt their strategies accordingly. This is consistent with the argument of Anand and Kodali (2008) that benchmarking fosters organisational learning and drives strategic improvement.

The results also show that absorptive capacity has a positive impact on organisational agility. Those with stronger capabilities to acquire, assimilate, transform and exploit external knowledge are more adaptable to market changes and environmental uncertainty. This is consistent with the Knowledge-Based View, which regards knowledge as a strategic organisational resource (Grant, 1996), and supports the findings of previous research by Volberda et al. (2010).

Furthermore, organisational agility was found to have a significant positive impact on innovation performance. This suggests that agile organisations are better at turning knowledge resources into innovative products, services, and business processes. This finding is consistent with Dynamic Capability Theory, which emphasises the importance of adaptability for achieving superior organisational outcomes (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2018). The study also revealed that strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity directly boost innovation performance. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that actively learn from external sources and effectively utilise their acquired knowledge are more likely to achieve successful innovation outcomes. This is consistent with previous research emphasising the importance of external knowledge acquisition and organisational learning in fostering innovation.

Perhaps more importantly, organisational agility plays a key role in mediating the relationships between strategic benchmarking and innovation performance, and between absorptive capacity and innovation performance. This suggests that acquiring knowledge and developing learning capabilities does not automatically lead to successful innovation. Organisations also require agility to transform this knowledge into effective innovation outcomes. Consequently, organisational agility is a vital link between knowledge-based capabilities and innovation performance among Indonesian SMEs.

Strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity significantly enhance organisational agility. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that actively learn from industry leaders are better equipped to recognise and respond to environmental changes (Anand & Kodali, 2008). Furthermore, agility serves as a crucial intermediary, facilitating the transformation of knowledge into innovation. This aligns with Dynamic Capability Theory, which asserts that simply acquiring knowledge isn't sufficient; organisations must also possess the adaptability and resource restructuring capabilities (Teece, 2018). The mediating role of agility is particularly important for Indonesian SMEs, highlighting its role in linking learning initiatives to improved performance.

4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the influence of strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity on innovation performance within Indonesian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), considering organisational agility. Drawing on Dynamic Capability Theory, the Knowledge-Based View, and Open Innovation Theory, the study proposed a comprehensive framework that explains the role of knowledge-based capabilities in driving innovation.

This study identifies organisational agility as a key mechanism for fostering innovation in Indonesian SMEs through strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity. It draws on Dynamic Capability Theory, the Knowledge-Based View and Open Innovation Theory to develop a comprehensive framework illustrating how knowledge is transformed into improved performance. What distinguishes this work is its focus on agility as the essential connector enabling SMEs to translate external knowledge into tangible innovative outcomes.

The findings revealed a significant correlation between strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity, indicating their positive impact on organisational agility. SMEs that actively benchmark industry leaders and effectively utilise external knowledge are more responsive and adaptable in fast-paced business environments. Furthermore, the study revealed that improved organisational agility significantly boosts innovation performance.

Theoretically, these findings broaden the Knowledge-Based View by demonstrating that knowledge is a dynamic resource whose value is unlocked through organisational responsiveness. Consequently, SME owners should invest in benchmarking and knowledge acquisition but also cultivate agile structures like flexible decision-making and rapid market sensing to ensure these resources drive successful innovation.

This suggests that agile organisations are better at transforming knowledge resources into innovative products, services, and business processes. Furthermore, it was found that strategic benchmarking and absorptive capacity directly influence innovation performance. More importantly, organisational agility was found to significantly mediate these relationships. This suggests that knowledge acquisition and organisational learning are more effective at driving innovation outcomes when firms have strong adaptive capabilities.

These findings contribute to the literature on strategic management by extending Dynamic Capability Theory, the Knowledge-Based View, and Open Innovation Theory in the context of Indonesian SMEs. They emphasise the importance of integrating knowledge acquisition, organisational learning, and agility to improve innovation performance in increasingly competitive business environments.

From a managerial standpoint, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) should enhance their benchmarking activities, encourage organisational learning, and develop agile structures to enable them to adapt swiftly to environmental shifts. Such efforts could lead to better innovation outcomes and sustained competitiveness.

However, this study has limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts observation of temporal changes, and focusing on Indonesian SMEs may limit generalisability. To deepen our understanding of SME innovation performance, future research should adopt

longitudinal approaches and include variables such as digital transformation, innovation capability, environmental dynamism and entrepreneurial orientation.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The cross-sectional design limits observations of temporal change. To enhance generalisability, future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches or multi-group analyses like comparing manufacturing and service SMEs. Cross-country comparisons would also provide broader insights into how differing institutional environments impact SME innovation and agility.

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