# Exploring the Mediating Role of Innovative Capability between Entrepreneurial Leadership and MSME Performance

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**ABSTRACT.** This study sought to ascertain the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on the performance of food and beverage MSMEs in Cilacap. The research sample comprised 130 MSME participants. The sample was obtained using an online survey. This study employed Smart PLS 3.0 for analysis. The study indicates that entrepreneurial leadership positively influences MSME performance and innovative capability. Innovative capability favourably influences MSME performance and mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and MSME success. This study's drawback lies in its focus on food and beverage MSMEs in Cilacap, hindering the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or locations with distinct features. This study enhances the literature by empirically confirming the mediating function of Innovative Capability between Entrepreneurial Leadership and the performance of MSMEs, specifically within Indonesia's food and beverage industry. These findings emphasize the necessity for MSME leaders to cultivate entrepreneurial attributes and promote an atmosphere conducive to innovation. Organizations can enhance their performance metrics by investing in the Innovative Capabilities dimension, which encompasses a strategy emphasis on innovation, a conducive company culture, and practical knowledge management. Policymakers and practitioners can utilize these insights to build training programs and policies that foster leadership development and innovation in MSMEs. Additional research is advised to investigate other mediating or moderating variables, like technological advancements, market situations, or organizational frameworks.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial leadership; MSME performance; Innovative Capability
JEL Classification: D23; L26; O31

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## INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium companies (MSMEs) within the food and beverage industry significantly contribute to the economic development of Cilacap, Indonesia (Triwibowo & Yusuf, 2024). These enterprises generate employment and stimulate local economic development by producing value-added products from the region's plentiful agricultural resources (Pratiwi & Ardian, 2024). In Cilacap, food and beverage MSMEs play a crucial role in the local economy, showcasing the community's entrepreneurial spirit and cultural heritage (Harvie, 2015). Despite their significance, these enterprises encounter obstacles such as restricted capital availability (Rachmawati et al., 2022), technological progress (Yuwono, Tajudin, et al., 2024), and market growth, which impede their competitiveness both domestically and internationally (Yuwono, Suroso, et al., 2024). Recent data indicates that enhancing the capacities of MSMEs is essential for sustaining their growth (Yuwono, Novandari, et al., 2024) and augmenting their contribution to the regional economy (Rachmawati et al., 2022; Yuwono, Triwibowo, et al., 2024).

Entrepreneurial leadership (EL) significantly impacts the success of MSMEs, particularly within the dynamic food and beverage industry. Entrepreneurial leadership is defined by the capacity to innovate, embrace risk, and actively pursue new chances, essential traits for manoeuvring in a competitive company environment (Renko et al., 2015). The efficacy of food and beverage MSMEs is frequently assessed by their growth, profitability, and market share, all of which can be substantially enhanced through proficient entrepreneurial leadership (Yuwono et al., 2025). Prior studies have established a positive correlation between EL and the performance of MSMEs; however, research explicitly targeting the food and beverage sector remains scarce (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). Obstacles to EL in this setting comprise insufficient leadership capabilities, constrained resources, and opposition to change, which may impede the implementation of new methods (Fontana & Musa, 2017). Addressing these obstacles is essential for MSMEs to enhance their performance and maintain long-term growth (Yuwono, Tajudin, et al., 2024).

The significance of entrepreneurial leadership in the performance of food and beverage MSMEs is paramount, as it cultivates an atmosphere that promotes innovation and flexibility (Nor-Aishah, 2020). Innovative capability is a crucial mediating variable in converting entrepreneurial leadership into measurable performance results (Simba & Thai, 2019). Innovative capability encompasses the procedures and frameworks that facilitate the creation of innovative goods, services, and operational methodologies within enterprises. Examining this mediation effect can bridge the information gap regarding the influence of entrepreneurial leadership on the performance of MSMEs in the food and beverage industry (Hazlina Ahmad et al., 2010). Although acknowledging its significance, empirical investigations examining Innovative Capability as a mediator in this environment remain limited, underscoring the necessity for targeted research (Zhao et al., 2011).

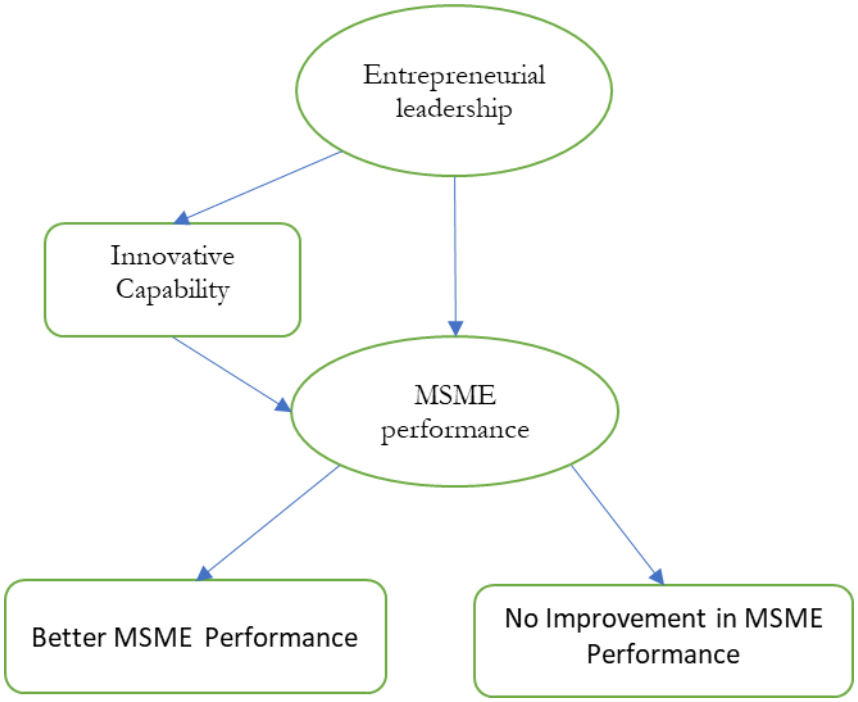
Innovative Capability encompasses knowledge management, technical proficiency, and a culture that fosters creativity and experimentation (Lawson & Samson, 2001). This is crucial for Entrepreneurial Leadership to enhance the performance of food and beverage MSMEs (Yuwono et al., 2022) by promoting the creation and execution of innovative concepts (Saunila, 2020). Numerous research has investigated additional mediating variables between Entrepreneurial Leadership and business performance, including organizational learning (Bontis et al., 2018),

market orientation (Hakala, 2011), and employee engagement ((Miao et al., 2018). The mediating role of Innovative Capability remains underexplored, particularly within the context of food and beverage MSMEs (Simba & Thai, 2019). This study seeks to address this gap by examining the mediating role of Innovative Capability in the link between Entrepreneurial Leadership and MSME performance, as recommended by Simba & Thai (2019). This research aims to furnish empirical information that guides practitioners and policymakers in enhancing the performance of MSMEs via leadership development and entrepreneurial innovation. Informed by prior literature, we evaluated the subsequent hypotheses:

H1. Entrepreneurial leadership has a positive effect on MSME performance.
H2. Entrepreneurial leadership has a positive effect on Innovative Capability
H3. Innovative Capability has a positive effect on MSME performance.
H4. Innovative Capability mediates the relationship between Entrepreneurial leadership and MSME performance.

## METHODS

Data was gathered from Food and Beverage MSMEs in Cilacap using an online questionnaire. Out of the 200 surveys distributed, merely 130 were returned. The analysis was conducted utilizing Smart PLS version 3.0 software. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale comprising the following response options: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) slightly agree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Moreover, the notion was evaluated utilizing the structural model presented by. Figure 1 delineates the analytical framework for this study. This concept posits that entrepreneurial leadership in MSMEs, mediated by innovative capability, can yield more excellent performance than those who do not cultivate innovative capability within their entrepreneurial leadership.




Source: Authors' own creation

**Figure 1**. Analytical framework

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The loading factor value determines validity testing and discriminant validity, whilst discriminant validity is examined using the average variance extracted value. Following the validity assessment for EL, IC, and MSME performance, the findings indicate that one IC indicator has a loading factor value below 0.70. Subsequently, after removing an invalid indicator, the Average Variance was computed for each variable. The extracted findings exhibit Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of 0.816, 0.945, and 0.885, all exceeding the threshold of 0.50. This research instrument is dependable. Reliability testing is conducted by evaluating the composite reliability (CR) value. The study's composite reliability (CR) values for the entrepreneurial leadership (EL), innovation capability (IC), and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) performance variables are 0.930, 0.945, and 0.885, respectively. These numbers demonstrate that each variable is dependable, as they surpass the criterion of 0.70. The data presented in Table 2 indicates that the instrument is dependable.

**Table 2**. Data Quality Test

| Variable | Item | Loading Factor | Result | CR | AVE | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Entrepreneurial leadership | EL1 | 0.910 | Valid | 0.930 | 0.816 | Reliable |
| | EL2 | 0.881 | | | | |
| | EL3 | 0.919 | | | | |
| Innovative Capability | IC2 | 0.972 | | 0.972 | 0.945 | |
| | IC3 | 0.972 | | | | |
| MSMEs Performance | PERFORM1 | 0.939 | | 0.958 | 0.885 | |
| | PERFORM2 | 0.940 | | | | |
| | PERFORM3 | 0.942 | | | | |

Source: Authors' own work

**Table 3.** Dirrect Effect

| Direct Effect | | Sample Mean | T-Statistic | T-Critical | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Entrepreneurial leadership → MSMEs Performance | 0.228 | 3.112 | 1.978 | Rejected Null Hypotheses |
| H2 | Entrepreneurial leadership → Innovative Capability | 0.577 | 9.425 | | |
| H3 | Innovative Capability → MSMEs Performance | 0.656 | 8.691 | | |

Source: Authors' own work

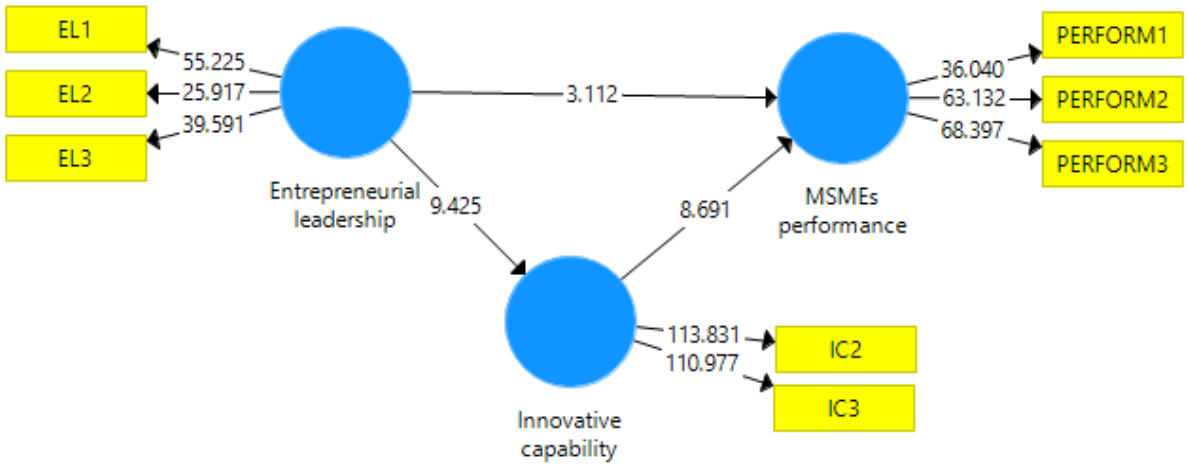
Figure 2 illustrates the process of hypothesis testing using structural model evaluation. The figure results from bootstrapping tests comprising 500 resamplings conducted using the SmartPLS 3.0 application. Figure 2 demonstrates that this study encompasses multiple hypotheses to be evaluated by empirical data gathered from the field. Entrepreneurial leadership significantly influences the performance of MSMEs. Entrepreneurial leadership impacts MSME performance through the mediation of Innovative Capability.

**Table 4.** Indirrect Effect

| **Hypotheses** | **Mediation** |
|---|---|
| Indirect Effect (T-Statistic) | Innovative Capability |
| Entrepreneurial leadership and MSMEs Performance | 5.939 |

Source: Authors' own work

This study's findings are displayed in Tables 3 and 4. The influence of Entrepreneurial leadership on MSME performance is statistically significant (t = 3.112 > 1.978). The influence of Entrepreneurial leadership on Innovative Capability is statistically significant (t = 9.425 > 1.978). The direct effect of Innovative Capability on MSME performance is statistically significant (t = 8.691 > 1.978). Furthermore, Table 4 assesses the influence of the mediating variable (Innovative Capability) on the association between Entrepreneurial Leadership and MSME Performance (t = 5.939 > 1.978). The results corroborate the stated hypothesis. The null hypothesis, which posits no enhancement in MSME performance, is rejected.




**Source**: Authors' own creation

**Figure 2**. Structural equation modeling results

## DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that Entrepreneurial Leadership significantly enhances the performance of MSMEs in the food and beverage industry in Cilacap. The favourable correlation suggests that the facets of Entrepreneurial Leadership—visionary leadership, innovativeness, and proactiveness—significantly enhance the growth of MSME sales, earnings, and assets. The beneficial impact arises from entrepreneurial leaders' ability to foresee the future, adopt innovation, and proactively adapt to market fluctuations, enhancing organizational performance (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). These findings correspond with (Gupta et al., 2004), who discovered that visionary and proactive leadership enhances firm performance by cultivating a creative atmosphere. Miao et al. (2018) noted that entrepreneurial leadership enhances performance via strategic decision-making and opportunity recognition. In contrast, specific studies, such as Anderson & Sun (2017), indicate that the influence of leadership on performance may be contingent upon contextual factors, such as organizational culture and market dynamics. This

study empirically validates the positive impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership on the performance of MSMEs within a specific geographical context, offering practical insights for business leaders in Cilacap.

The results showed that Entrepreneurial Leadership positively affects Innovative Ability in food and beverage MSMEs in Cilacap. This positive effect is due to entrepreneurial leaders encouraging a strategic focus on innovation, fostering an organizational culture that supports innovation, and implementing effective knowledge management practices (Chen et al., 2016). Entrepreneurial leaders' emphasis on innovativeness and proactivity encourages employees to engage in the creative process, increasing the company's ability to develop new products and processes (Jung et al., 2003). These findings are consistent with the research of Renko et al. (2015), who found that entrepreneurial leadership is the primary driver of innovative ability in organizations. Similarly, Miao et al. (2018) reported that leadership styles that promote vision and innovation positively influence the innovation capacity of companies. Conversely, some studies, such as Linton & Kask (2017), show that without adequate resources, the impact of leadership on innovation may be limited. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the important role of Entrepreneurial Leadership in enhancing Innovation Capability, emphasizing the need for leaders to foster an innovation-friendly environment..

This study establishes that Innovative Ability positively influences MSME performance, suggesting that a strategic emphasis on innovation, a conducive organizational culture, and practical knowledge management enhance sales, profit, and asset growth (Saunila & Ukko, 2014). The beneficial impact arises from the inventive capacities of MSMEs, which allow them to develop distinctive value propositions, enhance operational efficiency, and adapt successfully to evolving market demands (Terziovski, 2010). Furthermore, Rosenbusch et al. (2011) performed a meta-analysis that validated the affirmative correlation between innovation and SME success. Conversely, Quaye & Mensah (2019) noted that innovation does not inherently lead to improved performance without market readiness, highlighting the necessity for market alignment. This research underscores the significance of cultivating innovative capacities in MSMEs to enhance performance in the competitive food and beverage sector (Yuwono, Triwibowo, et al., 2024).

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that Innovative Ability mediates the relationship between Entrepreneurial Leadership and MSME performance. This means that Entrepreneurial Leadership improves Innovative Ability, leading to better performance results (García-Morales et al., 2012). This mediation occurs because entrepreneurial leaders promote a strategic focus on innovation, build a supportive organizational culture, and facilitate knowledge management, resulting in more excellent innovative outputs that drive performance (Mohamad & Sidek, 2013). These results align with Simba & Thai (2019), ound that innovation capability fully mediates the influence of transformational leadership on organizational performance. In addition, Jansen et al. (2009) ound that innovation capability fully mediates the influence of transformational leadership on organizational performance. However, Tang & Hull (2012) state that the mediating effect can vary depending on industry characteristics and market turbulence. The contribution of this study is significant because it provides empirical evidence on how Innovation Capability functions as a bridge between Entrepreneurial Leadership and performance, offering strategic insights for MSMEs that aim to improve leadership and innovation for competitive advantage.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Entrepreneurial Leadership significantly enhances the performance of food and beverage MSMEs in Cilacap, both directly and indirectly, via the mediating role of Innovation Capability. The observed positive effects indicate that the dimensions

of Entrepreneurial Leadership—visionary leadership, innovativeness, and proactivity—are crucial in promoting a strategic emphasis on innovation, cultivating an organizational culture conducive to innovation, and executing effective knowledge management practices. This innovative capability subsequently results in considerable improvements in sales, profit, and asset growth. The mediating role of Innovative Capability underscores its significance as a conduit through which entrepreneurial leadership translates into superior MSME performance.

While the findings offer significant insights, the study is constrained by several limitations. It is geographically confined to food and beverage MSMEs in Cilacap, which may restrict the applicability of the results to other regions or sectors. The cross-sectional design collects data at a singular moment, precluding the analysis of temporal changes and developments. Furthermore, dependence on self-reported data may introduce biases, such as social desirability bias, potentially compromising response accuracy. Additionally, the sample size may diminish the statistical power of the findings, suggesting that future research could benefit from more extensive and diverse samples.

This study enhances the literature by empirically substantiating the mediating function of Innovative Capability between Entrepreneurial Leadership and the performance of MSMEs, specifically within Indonesia's food and beverage industry. This study expands the comprehension of the impact of leadership styles on organizational competencies and performance results. This research emphasizes the necessity for MSME leaders to cultivate entrepreneurial attributes and promote an atmosphere conducive to innovation. Organizations can enhance their performance metrics by investing in the Innovative Capabilities dimension, which encompasses a strategy emphasis on innovation, a conducive company culture, and practical knowledge management. Policymakers and practitioners can utilize these insights to build training programs and policies that foster leadership development and innovation in MSMEs.

Subsequent research should rectify the constraints of this study by encompassing a broader scope that incorporates diverse places and industries to enhance the generalizability of the results. Longitudinal studies examine the evolving relationship among Entrepreneurial Leadership, Innovative Capability, and MSME performance. Furthermore, investigating additional potential mediating or moderating variables—such as technology advancements, market conditions, or organizational frameworks—can yield a more thorough comprehension of the determinants affecting MSME performance. Examining the influence of external factors, such as governmental regulations or economic variations, can yield profound insights into the dynamics of MSMEs across many contexts.

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