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TÍTULO: Investigar la relación entre orientación empresarial y desempeño de la empresa. El papel mediador de la estrategia de diferenciación e innovación.

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RESUMEN: El objetivo fue investigar la relación entre la orientación empresarial y el desempeño de la empresa, mediando el papel de diferenciación e innovación. La población estadística incluía 530 empresas industriales. El método de muestreo fue aleatorio y el tamaño de la muestra fue de 223 personas con la fórmula de Cochran. El método de investigación fue descriptivo-correlacional y los datos fueron recolectados a través de un cuestionario. Regresión y SPSS, se utilizó la versión 20. Los resultados mostraron que había una relación positiva significativa entre la orientación empresarial y el desempeño y la estrategia de diferenciación en las pequeñas y medianas empresas. También hubo una relación positiva significativa entre la orientación empresarial y la innovación, así como entre la orientación empresarial y el desempeño con el papel mediador de la estrategia de diferenciación e innovación en las pequeñas y medianas empresas.

PALABRAS CLAVES: orientación empresarial, desempeño, estrategia de diferenciación, innovación.

TITLE: Investigating the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. The mediating role of differentiation and innovation strategy.

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ABSTRACT: The purpose was to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance, mediating role of differentiation and innovation. The statistical population included 530 industrial companies. Sampling method was random and sample size was 223 people using Cochran formula. The research method was descriptive-correlational and data were collected through a questionnaire. Regression and SPSS, version 20 was used. The results showed there was a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance and differentiation strategy in small- and medium-sized enterprises. There was also a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation as well as between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of differentiation and innovation strategy in small- and medium-sized enterprises.

KEY WORDS: entrepreneurial orientation, performance, differentiation strategy, innovation.

INTRODUCTION.

Organizations need innovation, leadership, and in general, entrepreneurship to fulfill their goals and missions. The new wave of changes in societies, new technologies, and ever-increasing innovations have made organizations adapt to new conditions for accountability, sustainability, value creation, and better performance. As such, it can be said that entrepreneurship is a necessary tool, and one of the appropriate tools for entrepreneurship growth is the existence of an organizational structure consistent with the concepts of entrepreneurship. Organizational structure is more than just a diagram

and a model for communication and coordination that links human resources, technology, tasks, and generally the environmental elements of an organization to achieve its goals. (Aghazadeh, 2006)

DEVELOPMENT.

Statement of the Problem.

The development of small- and medium-sized industries is the key to the economic development of the next decade. In addition, the intensification of global competition, increasing uncertainty, and the increasing demand for diverse products have made these industries more attractive.

Although large industries are still considered by economic policymakers to have the benefits of mass scale effects, production scope, experience, and organizational impact, due to the transportation effect, market size, effective selection and control, the advantages of small and medium-sized industries have made these industries the first choice in the production of most goods.

The most comprehensive definition of entrepreneurial orientation was provided by Morris *et al.* (1993). He believed that if a firm continually innovated, risked, and actively promoted its products, then the company would have an entrepreneurial orientation. Morris and Kuratko (1987) also defined entrepreneurial orientation as the tendency of senior management to take calculated risks, be innovative and pioneer in his field. Entrepreneurial orientation is also seen as an important organizational process that leads to the survival and improvement of corporate performance.

As an element of strategic orientation, entrepreneurial orientation reflects the type of corporate decision-making and creative style in practice. Among the key indicators of entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurship, and risk-taking policies can help companies identify and capture new business opportunities as well as predict and discover potential markets.

Theoretical foundations.

Firm performance.

Every company strives to organize its operations in the most effective way. As a result, interest in management and performance measurement has been increased substantially in the last twenty years. In particular, it is important to consider the evolution of the concentration of performance from a financial perspective to a non-financial perspective.

Since the mid-1980s, companies have emphasized the growing need to control business processes. Companies realized that in order to compete in a constantly changing environment, it is imperative to monitor and improve their performance, and measurement is recognized as a critical element for improving business performance. A management and performance appraisal system must be balanced and dynamic to support decision-making processes by collecting, describing, and analyzing information.

The concept of balance explains the need to use different metrics and perspectives and provides a holistic view of the organization. The concept of dynamics addresses the need to develop a system that continually monitors the internal and external context of the organization and reviews goals and priorities. (Tatichi *et al.*, 2008)

Concept of organizational performance.

Organizational performance is considered as an important task of human resource management in facilitating organizational effectiveness. Much attention has been paid to the role of organizational performance evaluation in recent years. According to experts, an effective organizational performance appraisal system can provide a wealth of benefits to organizations and their employees. Zahra and O'Neill (1998) stated that a performance appraisal system: (a) provides specific performance feedback to improve employee performance; (b) determines employee training

requirements; (c) provides and facilitates staff development; (d) links between personnel conclusion and performance, and (e) enhances employee motivation and productivity. Zahra (1991) also argued that evaluating organizational performance should be used for multiple supervisory and development purposes, including (a) evaluating individual organizational performance in terms of organizational needs, (b) anticipating employee feedback to improve or enhance their behavior, and (c) allocating remuneration and promotion of persons.

Organizational entrepreneurship.

The concept of firm entrepreneurship has evolved over the last 30 years (Hitt *et al.*, 2002). Other researchers have considered organizational entrepreneurship as a concept that includes entrepreneurial efforts that require organizational support, guarantee, and resource allocation to implement innovative activities in the form of organizational, process, and product innovation. (Zahra *et al.*, 1999) This view is also consistent with Doern (2009), view suggesting that innovation is a very broad concept that includes “creation, development, and application of new ideas and behaviors”. Innovation can be about a new product or service, an executive resource or a new plan or program that relates to the members of the organization.

Doern considered organizational entrepreneurship as the creation, development, and implementation of new ideas and behaviors. In this sense, organizational entrepreneurship is an energizing and enhancing ability of a company or organization to acquire innovation skills and abilities.

In this context, corporating entrepreneurship refers to rebuilding and enhancing a company's ability to acquire innovation skills and capabilities.

In a broad view, entrepreneurship entails an innovative process, which is constantly growing that ultimately leads to an entrepreneurial event. Conceptually, by examining entrepreneurship as a phenomenon at the level of an organization that emphasizes "how" entrepreneurship occurs rather than emphasizing "why" or "what happens" that entrepreneurship occurs, the last phrase has a great

deal of attention to the personality of the individuals, which has made many advances in the field. However, the term entrepreneurial behavior as a company-wide phenomenon must be defined in a way that be consistent with findings and methodology.

In an attempt to standardize the use of terms in the context of organizational entrepreneurship, Sharma and Chrisman (1999) distinguished entrepreneurial activities based on activities that are performed independently of those activities carried out within an organization. The first type of activities was designated as "Independent Entrepreneurship" and the second type was considered as "Corporate Entrepreneurship".

Background of the study.

Farahani, Shabani, and Ghafari (2012), in a study entitled "Investigating the Impact of Entrepreneurship and Marketing Information on the Performance of Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises in Markazi Province", found that entrepreneurial orientation plays an important role in enhancing firm performance. That is, both directly and indirectly, it affects corporate performance by influencing the exploitation of information.

Moghadam and Hejazi (2014), in a study entitled "The Impact of Entrepreneurial Orientation on Banking Performance with an Emphasis on the Mediating Role of Market Orientation", showed that in general, there is a significant direct relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance as well as an indirect one through market orientation, and the variable of market orientation has a significant effect on it.

Imanipour and Zivdar (2008) in a study entitled "Investigating the Relationship between Corporate Entrepreneurship Tendency and Performance", found that tendency to firm entrepreneurship has a positive and significant correlation with performance.

Hosseini, in his research titled "Investigating the Relationship between Entrepreneurial Orientation and Small Business Performance in Yazd City" in 2007, found that there is a significant and positive relationship between the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, including innovation, autonomy, risk-taking, pioneering, and aggressive competition, and performance of small businesses.

Zehir, Can and Karaboga (2015), in a study entitled "Entrepreneurial orientation and Performance: The Mediating Role of Innovation and Differentiation", found that there was a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance, and this relationship was influenced by differentiation and innovation strategies.

Mason *et al.* (2015), in a study entitled "Understanding the Effect of Entrepreneurial Orientation on SME Performance; the Role of Financing Structure", showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and the performance of small and big enterprises. The financial structure also has a moderating role in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and corporate performance.

Adner and Levinthal, (2008) point out from their research results that market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation have significant effects on learning orientation, respectively. In addition, the learning orientation has a significant impact on innovation, and subsequently, innovation has a significant effect on performance.

Research methodology.

The type of this research was descriptive-correlational in terms of its collection and implementation. The present study was a descriptive and non-experimental research in terms of data collection and analysis, in which the researcher tried to answer a real question and answer that existed in practice during a research process. The statistical population of the study included all 530 industrial companies in Sanandaj. The sampling method of this study was in the form of simple random sampling. The sample size was obtained using Cochran formula and 223 individuals were selected as sample.

The most important methods of data collection in this research were library studies and field research. Experts, advisors, and consultants, as well as experts and managers of the field, were used to develop the questionnaire. In order to measure reliability, Cronbach's alpha method and SPSS, version 20, software were used.

A researcher-made questionnaire was used to measure entrepreneurial orientation using research literature and a balanced scorecard (Ing Woo and Long Lu) was used to measure firm performance. In this study, in order to answer the questions, the following inferential analyzes were used by SPSS software.

Research objectives.

The overall purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance, with the mediating role of differentiation strategy and innovation.

Minor goals.

They are:

- Determining the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- Determining the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- Determining the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- Determining the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- Determining the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Research hypotheses.

They are:

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.
- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Research Model.

In this study, the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on performance through the mediating role of differentiation strategy and innovation was examined.

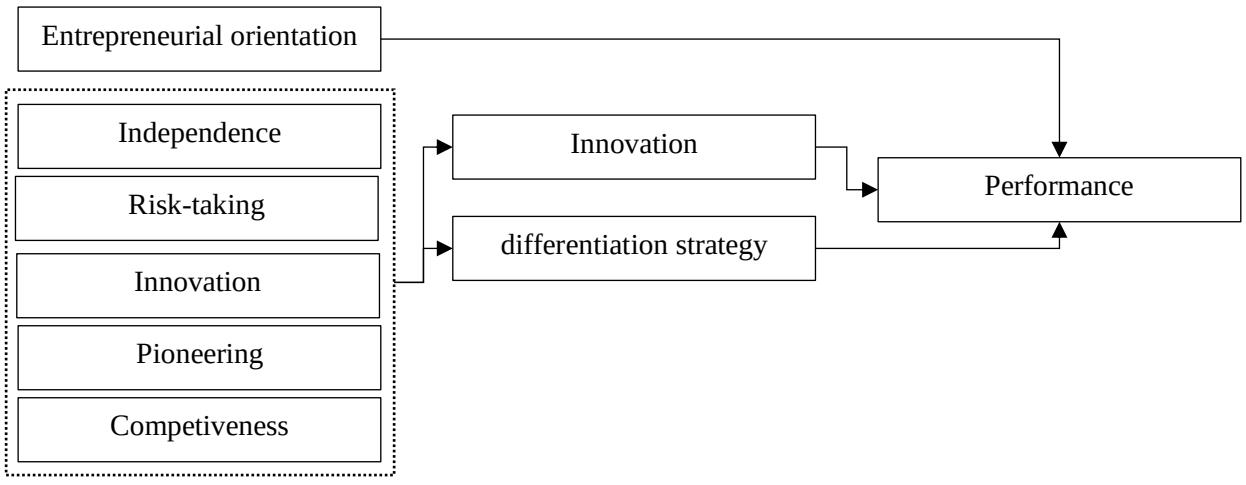

Figure 1. Research model: Obtained from Zehir *et al.* (2015).

Findings.

Descriptive statistics.

The sample in this study consisted of 223 persons, of whom 157 were male and 66 were female; 14 were between 25-35 years old, 115 were between 45-35 years old, and 94 were between 46-55 years old. Also, 14 had less than 2 years of experience, 99 had experience of 2-5 years, 81 had experience of 10-15 years and 16 had experience of 15 years or more. Of these 223, 8 had associate degrees, 37 had undergraduate degrees, and 78 had postgraduate degrees and above.

Inferential statistics.

Multicollinearity effect.

One of the assumptions of regression is the absence of a collinearity effect of the independent variables. If the VIF index be also less than 2, there would be no collinearity effect between the independent variables.

Table 1. Variance tolerance index and variance inflation factor.

Multicollinearity indices.		
Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Innovation	.895	1.02
Differentiation strategy	.985	1.36
Entrepreneurial orientation	.875	1.089
Firm performance	.908	1.163

Independence of errors.

Another assumption is the independence regression of errors, which must be rejected as assuming a correlation between errors. The Watson-Durbin statistic can be used to check this assumption.

Assumption of normality of data.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Data were analyzed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test. The results have been reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality of data.

The status of variables	Performance	Entrepreneurial orientation		
Normal variables	223	223	N	
	3.7249	3.8309	Average	Normal parameters
	1.19441	0.77828	The standard deviation	
	0.228	0.132	Absolute	The differences
	0.128	0.058	Positive	
	-0.228	-0.132	Negative	
	3.402	1.974	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	
	0.894	0.071	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	

As Table 2 shows, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z was not significant at the 5% level for all variables. Thus, the variables "entrepreneurial orientation" and "performance" had a normal distribution.

The first research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Table 3. Results of the Pearson correlation between entrepreneurial orientation and performance

Correlation			
		Performance	Innovation
Performance	Pearson correlation	1	0.57
	Significance		0.001
	Number	223	223

As the table above shows, there was a correlation of 0.57 between entrepreneurial orientation and performance, which was significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, there was a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance. Due to the interval measurement scales, linear regression was used, the results of which have been reported in the following tables.

Table 4. Regression results for entrepreneurial orientation and performance.

Model		Sig.	R2adj	R2	R	F	Mean squares	Degrees of freedom	The sum of the squares
1	Regression	0.000	0.310	0.314	0.570	100.939	99.298	1	99.298
	Residual						0.984	221	217.409
	Total							222	316.708

As can be seen in the table, the sig value was less than 0.01, indicating the significance of the regression model. According to the hypothesis regression test, the coefficient of determination (R Square) between the variable of entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance was 0.314. That is, the entrepreneurial orientation variable predicted approximately 31% of changes in firm performance.

Table 5. Standard, non-standard coefficients and t-statistic of variables entered in the regression equation.

Model		Standard coefficients		Non-standard coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	Constant	.403	.337		1.194	.234
	Entrepreneurial orientation	.224	.022	.570	10.047	.000

The table above shows standardized and non-standardized regression coefficients that the entrepreneurial orientation variable was significant at the 0.01 level. For a unit increase in the entrepreneurial orientation variable, there was a 0.222-unit increase in firm performance.

The second research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Table 6. Pearson correlation results between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy

Correlation			
		Performance	Differentiation
Performance	Pearson correlation	1	0.46
	Significance		0.000
	Number	223	223

As the table above shows, there was a correlation of 0.46 between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy, which was significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, there was a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy. Due to the interval measurement scales, linear regression was used, the results of which have been reported in the following tables.

Table 7. Regression results for entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy.

Model		Sig.	R2adj	R2	R	F	Mean squares	Degrees of freedom	The sum of the squares
1	Regression	.000	.213	.216	.465	61.006	68.513	1	68.513
	Residual						1.123	221	248.195
	Total							222	316.708

As can be seen in the table, the sig value was less than 0.01, indicating the significance of the regression model. According to the hypothesis regression test, the coefficient of determination (R Square) between the variable of entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy was 0.216. That is, the entrepreneurial orientation variable predicted approximately 22% of changes in the differentiation strategy.

Table 8. Standard, non-standard coefficients and t-statistic of variables entered in the regression equation.

Model		Standard coefficients		Non-standard coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	Constant	2.114	.218		9.688	.000
	Entrepreneurial orientation	.439	.056	.465	7.811	.000

The table above shows standardized and non-standardized regression coefficients that the entrepreneurial orientation variable was significant at the 0.01 level. For a unit increase in the entrepreneurial orientation variable, there was a 0.439-unit increase in the differentiation strategy.

The third research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Table 9. Pearson correlation results between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation.

Correlation			
		Performance	Innovation
Performance	Pearson correlation	1	.34**
	Significance		.000
	Number	223	223

As the table above shows, there was a correlation of 0.34 between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation, which was significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, there was a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation. Due to the interval measurement scales, linear regression was used, the results of which have been reported in the following tables.

Table 10. Regression results for entrepreneurial orientation and innovation.

Model		Sig.	R2adj	R2	R	F	Mean squares	Degrees of freedom	The sum of the squares
1	Regression	.000	.118	.122	.349	61.006	38.629	1	38.629
	Residual						1.258	221	278.078
	Total							222	316.708

As can be seen in the table, the sig value was less than 0.01, indicating the significance of the regression model. According to the hypothesis regression test, the coefficient of determination (R Square) between the variable of entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy was 0.12. That is, the entrepreneurial orientation variable predicted approximately 22% of changes in innovation.

Table 11. Standard, non-standard coefficients and t-statistic of variables entered in the regression equation.

Model		Standard coefficients		Non-standard coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	Constant	2.417	.248		9.758	.000
	Entrepreneurial orientation	.339	.061	.349	5.541	.000

The table above shows standardized and non-standardized regression coefficients that the entrepreneurial orientation variable was significant at the 0.01 level. For a unit increase in the entrepreneurial orientation variable, there was a 0.33-unit increase in innovation.

The fourth research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Given the mediating role of the differentiation strategy in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance, path analysis was used, the results of which have been presented in the chart and table below. To obtain the total effect amount, the direct and indirect effects of entrepreneurship and differentiation strategy were pooled. The results have been presented in the following table:

Table 12. The direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

	Direct effect	Indirect effect	The total impact
Entrepreneurship	0.57		0.57
Differentiation strategy	0.36	0.46	0.10
Total effects			0.67

Firm Performance = Direct Impact (Entrepreneurial orientation) (0.57) + Indirect Impact (Differentiation Strategy) (0.10) = 0.67.

According to the results of the path analysis test, the direct impact of entrepreneurial orientation on firm performance was 0.57 and the indirect impact of differentiation strategy on firm performance was 0.10 ($p \leq 0.05$). Regarding the direct and indirect effects, it can be said that differentiation strategy had a positive and significant effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. The beta obtained from the effect between variables has been shown in Chart 1.

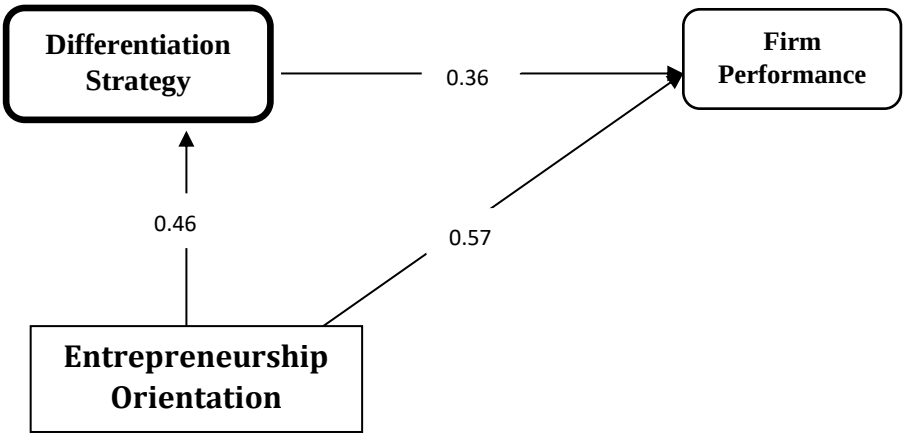

Chart 1. Direct and indirect relationship path analysis of differentiation strategy in entrepreneurial orientation and performance.

The fifth research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.

Given the mediating role of the innovation in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance, path analysis was used, the results of which have been presented in the chart and table below. To obtain the total effect amount, the direct and indirect effects of entrepreneurship and innovation were pooled. The results have been presented in the following table:

Table 13. The direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

	Direct effect	Indirect effect	The total impact
Entrepreneurship	0.57		0.57
Innovation	0.25	0.34	0.05
Total effects			0.65

Firm Performance = Direct Impact (Entrepreneurial orientation) (0.57) + Indirect Impact (Innovation) (0.08) = 0.65

According to the results of the path analysis test, the direct impact of entrepreneurial orientation on firm performance was 0.57 and the indirect impact of innovation on firm performance was 0.08 ($p \leq 0.05$). Regarding the direct and indirect effects, it can be said that innovation had a positive and significant effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. The beta obtained from the effect between variables has been shown in Chart 2.

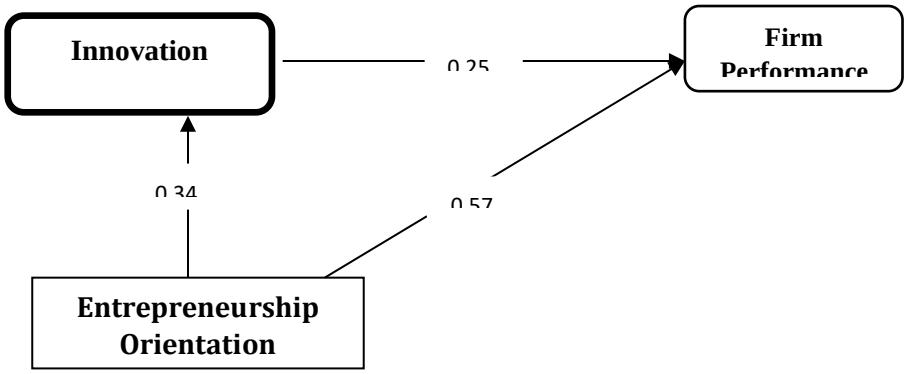

Chart 2. Direct and indirect relationship path analysis in entrepreneurial orientation and performance.

Discussion.

The first research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance in SEMs in Sanandaj.

The results of the regression showed that there was a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance in SEMs in Sanandaj.

As organizations develop innovative behaviors, they continually integrate product manufacturing processes to create value for customers. All of these factors, directly and indirectly, affect the organization and are essential in the organizational industry. Because the business nature of organizations requires future changes and events to be anticipated, future opportunities can be appropriately exploited and strategies can be employed to maintain and improve the operations of organizations. This finding was consistent with that of Mason *et al.* (2015), Moghadam and Hejazi (2014), Farahani, Shaabani and Ghafari (2012).

The second research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.

The results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj. Gaining a competitive advantage is possible through producing a unique product that is unique from a customer's perspective compared to similar products. The purpose of the product differentiation strategy is to offer products and services that are unique to the industry in question as a product or service and is offered to customers that are not very price sensitive. This finding was consistent with the findings of Mason *et al.* (2015), Moghadam and Hejazi (2014), Farahani, Shaabani and Ghafari (2012).

The third research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.

The results of linear regression showed that there was a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj. In enterprise entrepreneurship, innovation means the creation of new products, services, and technologies. Strategic entrepreneurship is, therefore, one of the key aspects of innovation. In fact, the primary goals of the organization are addressed in this dimension and can affect the performance of the organization. This finding was consistent with the findings of Mason *et al.* (2015), Moghadam and Hejazi (2014), Farahani, Shaabani and Ghafari (2011) and Shirako *et al.* (2012).

The fourth research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of differentiation strategy in SEMs in Sanandaj.

According to the results of the path analysis test, the direct impact of entrepreneurial orientation on performance had a positive and significant impact. Regarding the direct and indirect effects, it can be

said that differentiation strategy had a positive and significant effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.

When an organization is aggressive, innovation, initiative, and risk-taking are among the strategies of the organization, and the organization emphasizes identifying opportunities, evaluating and exploiting them. Organizations that emphasize on the entrepreneurial process, have their own organizational, innovative, initiative, and risk-taking strategies.

Entrepreneurship-oriented organizations are in the midst of aggressive competition and have characteristics such as the amount of resource commitment, the organization of the risks associated with resource allocation to achieve innovation and the improvement of market share. Innovation refers to efforts to think, creativity, modernity, and technological leadership in products and processes. In addition, initiative, risk-taking, and independence refer to the actions of individuals or teams that are inclined to launch a new business idea or insight. This finding was consistent with the findings of Mason *et al*.

The fifth research hypothesis.

- There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance with the mediating role of innovation in SEMs in Sanandaj.

According to the results of the path analysis test, the direct impact of entrepreneurial orientation on performance was a positive and significant effect. Regarding the direct and indirect effects, it can be said that innovation had a positive and significant effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.

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