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How Organizational Culture and Legitimacy Influence Knowledge Sharing and Creation: A Mediated Framework

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Abstract

This investigation explores the connection between organizational culture and institutional legitimacy within universities, with a focus on the intermediary effects of knowledge generation and dissemination activities. Drawing on a multifaceted theoretical framework that combines legitimacy theory, institutional theory, knowledge-based view, and stakeholder perspectives, the research evaluated a conceptual framework suggesting chained associations among these elements. Data were gathered from 370 managerial-level academic and administrative personnel at both state-funded and independent universities in Ecuador, and the model was assessed via structural equation modeling. The empirical evidence supports a positive association between organizational culture and institutional legitimacy, occurring both straightforwardly and through intermediaries. In particular, knowledge dissemination proved to be the primary mediating factor in this association, whereas knowledge generation lacked a straightforward impact on legitimacy but influenced it via dissemination. Comparative analysis across groups indicated notable variations between state and private institutions: in state universities, dissemination exerted a greater effect on legitimacy, while in private ones, culture demonstrated a stronger straightforward influence. These outcomes advance insights into mechanisms by which higher education entities secure and sustain societal acceptance through knowledge-handling practices, while providing actionable guidance for institutional leaders aiming to bolster legitimacy. Overall, the study highlights the value of fostering flexible cultures that promote knowledge generation and dissemination as key approaches to legitimacy enhancement in the modern landscape of tertiary education.

Keywords: Organizational culture, Knowledge creation, Knowledge sharing, Organizational legitimacy, Higher education institutions

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Introduction

The field of modern tertiary education is experiencing a profound shift that questions the conventional pillars of institutional acceptance. Within this evolving landscape, organizational culture stands out as a core factor—moving beyond its traditional view as a collection of common values—to function as an intricate replicative component that shapes institutional flexibility [1]. This shifted understanding is especially pertinent as universities address rising demands for institutional legitimacy, defined as the alignment perceived between university behaviors and societal norms [2].

Scholarly attention to the link between organizational culture and institutional acceptance has increased, driven by rapid changes in the tertiary sector [3, 4]. This linkage is crucial, given universities' obligation to affirm their societal contributions amid heightened worldwide rivalry and shifting expectations from interested parties. Current scholarship points out that entities lacking a flexible, knowledge-oriented culture encounter substantial obstacles in preserving societal acceptance [5].

The challenge grows because universities, as premier entities for handling knowledge, need to manage various facets of legitimacy: practical, ethical, and taken-for-granted [6]. Emerging investigations reveal that discrepancies between culture

and knowledge-handling approaches can substantially diminish an entity's ability to retain academic and social significance [7]. This issue is amplified in settings where creativity and flexibility are essential for enduring viability.

The current work expands knowledge of how key aspects of university culture affect the ability to gain, preserve, and restore acceptance. It employs a combined lens to investigate pathways through which culture drives knowledge production and distribution, along with their effects on institutional acceptance. This method responds to calls in recent scholarship for broader frameworks that reflect the layered nature of these connections [8].

The significance of this inquiry spans several areas. Initially, it adds to the developing body of work on culture and acceptance specifically in tertiary education, a domain needing more data-driven exploration [9]. Additionally, it probes the intermediary function of knowledge activities, yielding clues about pathways linking culture to institutional acceptance. Finally, it accounts for distinctions between state and private entities, recognizing that ownership type can markedly shape acceptance dynamics.

The paper is organized as follows. The next part outlines the conceptual foundation underpinning the associations among the primary variables, succeeded by hypothesis formulation and justification for the comparative group examination. The methods part details the study approach, sample, measures, and analytic techniques. Findings are subsequently reported, followed by an interpretation section that relates results to prior work. The paper ends with reflections on conceptual and applied contributions, key takeaways, recognition of constraints, and proposals for subsequent inquiries.

Theoretical framework

Organizational culture

Within higher education settings, organizational culture is viewed as an intricate network of common values, convictions, assumptions, and routines that guide actions and choices across all levels of the institution [10]. This view includes both visible elements, like formal rules and protocols, and subtler aspects, such as workplace atmosphere, interaction styles, and unofficial power networks. Its importance lies in its role in shaping flexible reactions to external shifts while upholding core institutional identity and unity [11].

In universities particularly, this culture exhibits unique traits that set it apart from other sectors. Research by Akanji *et al.* [12] on Nigerian institutions highlights dominant features like hierarchy, patriarchal elements, deference, and mutual reliance. These traits affect leadership approaches and governance, offering a lens to examine how culture impacts the building of legitimacy. The ranked structure typical in academia, separating faculty tiers and administrative roles, generates distinct cultural interactions that affect knowledge exchange and the formation of institutional acceptance.

Studies by Nauffal and Nader [13] on Lebanese universities amid instability uncover prevalent patterns where corporate-style culture overlaps with bureaucratic elements, resulting in heavily controlled operations blending both styles. Notably, private institutions often lean toward cultures prioritizing steadiness during upheaval, serving as a stabilizing force or buffer against risks. This insight is key to grasping how resilient cultures aid in gaining legitimacy in volatile settings, where sustaining consistency amid uncertainty plays a vital role in how stakeholders perceive and endorse the institution.

What marks university culture is its strong effect on knowledge production and distribution, given that these organizations are inherently focused on producing, storing, and transmitting knowledge. This aspect is crucial for legitimacy, as societal perceptions of universities hinge on their proven expertise in managing knowledge and their broader contributions to societal and economic progress [14].

Organizational legitimacy

Organizational legitimacy refers to a core social concept capturing the perceived alignment between an entity's practices, objectives, and the dominant norms in its surroundings [4]. It extends past mere adherence to regulations, incorporating broader social endorsement and approval from interested parties. Legitimacy manifests in multiple forms: pragmatic, rooted in tangible benefits for primary stakeholders; moral, stemming from ethical endorsement of activities; and cognitive, tied to the instinctive acceptance and understandability of the organization's role in society.

For universities, this becomes especially intricate owing to varied stakeholder groups and conflicting demands they must address. Institutions face expectations from regulators, learners and their families, employers, scholars, and the wider community, generating conflicts among legitimacy standards and necessitating advanced approaches to secure ongoing societal backing.

Evidence from the COVID-19 era illustrates how institutional resilience serves as a pivotal tool for building legitimacy in tertiary education. Shaya *et al.* [15] showed that universities with robust resilience strategies preserved and even enhanced their societal standing. Their results highlight that capabilities like knowledge handling—encompassing generation and dissemination—function as adaptable strengths that support adjustment and directly bolster legitimacy among stakeholders. This points to a linked progression where knowledge activities signal expertise and flexibility in tough times, thereby solidifying institutional recognition and support.

Scholarship on legitimacy stresses its dynamic nature, demanding perpetual upkeep and adjustment to evolving societal norms [3]. Universities need to repeatedly prove their significance, capability, and value congruence, treating legitimacy as an active, forward-looking effort rather than a passive outcome of compliance.

Institutional theory and higher education adaptation

Institutional theory portrays universities as functioning in layered fields with competing demands for alignment and acceptance. Mampaey [16] offers valuable perspectives on how these entities balance uniformity and uniqueness. Challenging the classic view of institutions as locked in sameness, Mampaey illustrates that they craft varied interpretations of established norms tailored to their particular settings.

This interpretive approach is essential for explaining how culture enables varied legitimacy pathways across institutions. Instead of uniform reactions to external forces, universities reinterpret demands in line with their unique circumstances, stakeholder setups, and goals [17]. Such adaptation permits retaining legitimacy alongside distinctive traits and edges.

Differences between public and private universities gain prominence through this theoretical view. Public ones follow logics stressing societal responsibility, inclusive access, and prudent resource use [18], fostering demands for open knowledge dissemination and community service that shape legitimacy. Private ones, by contrast, align with market-driven logics prioritizing client contentment, distinction, and value delivery [19], yielding strategies centered on cultural strength and service excellence.

This institutional lens clarifies varying patterns in links among culture, knowledge activities, and legitimacy by type. These variations stem from structured adaptations to differing environments and demands [20]. Grasping these forces is vital for crafting tailored approaches to legitimacy in varied tertiary education landscapes.

Stakeholder theory and university legitimacy

Stakeholder theory offers a vital lens for examining how universities handle intricate connections with diverse groups, each holding unique demands and assessment standards. These institutions function in settings involving numerous parties, requiring them to address the needs of learners and their families, employers and sectors, regulatory bodies, scholarly colleagues, and the general public simultaneously [21]. The core difficulty involves harmonizing these frequently conflicting requirements while preserving institutional unity and acceptance.

Building on the stakeholder framework outlined by Pedro *et al.* [21], universities need to employ advanced strategies for managing these relationships, acknowledging the varied nature of expectations among groups. State-funded institutions bear main responsibility toward citizens and oversight entities, generating demands for openness, resource effectiveness, and clear societal benefits [18]. This setup accounts for the heightened importance of knowledge dissemination in building legitimacy for public entities, as it offers tangible proof of institutional contributions and public worth.

In contrast, independent universities answer primarily to learners, households, and oversight committees [19]. Such parties generally assess institutions on teaching excellence, professional results, and investment returns. This arrangement underscores the greater role of organizational culture in private institutional legitimacy, since it shapes learner contentment, reputational standing, and market distinction [22].

From a stakeholder viewpoint, knowledge-handling activities act as tools for generating and conveying benefits to varied groups [23]. Efforts in knowledge production highlight institutional expertise and scholarly input, whereas dissemination promotes involvement with parties and delivers practical advantages. The varying focus on these activities by institutional category illustrates targeted responses to specific stakeholder priorities and judgment factors [24].

Knowledge-based view and university operations

The knowledge-based perspective positions universities as archetypal entities reliant on intellectual resources, where such assets form the main driver of competitive edge and societal contribution [25]. Accordingly, culture, knowledge generation, and dissemination form linked elements of an overarching system for managing knowledge that shapes institutional performance and acceptance.

Universities stand out as knowledge-focused organizations by merging the development of novel insights via research with the safeguarding and passing on of established insights through teaching. This twofold role imposes particular demands on knowledge handling that separate universities from similar entities [26]. The cultural supports essential for robust knowledge production—such as curiosity, teamwork, tolerance for uncertainty, and future-focused mindset—must coexist with needs for knowledge maintenance and structured transfer [27].

This viewpoint clarifies why knowledge generation affects legitimacy mainly via dissemination rather than straightforwardly. In academic settings, simply producing knowledge falls short for establishing acceptance unless it is broadly distributed and utilized [28]. This mirrors the implicit agreement between universities and society, where ongoing backing relies on widespread gains from scholarly work. Dissemination functions as the channel converting internal intellectual resources into societal advantages and stakeholder gains.

The chained connection among culture, knowledge production, and dissemination mirrors the cycle of knowledge handling in academic environments [25]. Culture supplies the guiding and operational base required for generating knowledge, while dissemination ensures that produced knowledge aligns with institutional goals and delivers stakeholder benefits. This approach stresses that university acceptance hinges not solely on production strengths but on integrated knowledge systems linking scholarly efforts to broader impacts.

Theoretical integration

Combining legitimacy theory, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and the knowledge-based view yields a robust structure for comprehending how universities establish and sustain societal acceptance via culture and knowledge-handling activities. Each lens adds distinct contributions while complementing and building upon the rest [8].

Legitimacy theory focuses on the continual effort to match institutional practices with societal norms, underscoring the need for universities to repeatedly affirm their significance and pertinence [4]. Institutional theory accounts for variations in these acceptance demands by organizational category and setting, producing diverse constraints and pathways for building legitimacy [16]. Stakeholder theory details the management of numerous, sometimes opposing requirements while upholding institutional consistency [21]. The knowledge-based view illuminates how intellectual pursuits and knowledge processes function as chief means for delivering stakeholder benefits and forging acceptance [25].

This combined structure indicates that building university legitimacy entails intricate, interconnected processes spanning various theoretical areas [6]. Culture acts as the core enabler, allowing institutions to address institutional forces, cultivate knowledge strengths, meet stakeholder needs, and formulate legitimacy arguments. Knowledge-handling activities stand out as key practical channels translating cultural principles into valued results for parties, with the progression from production to dissemination illustrating the conversion of internal strengths into evident, reachable impacts that stakeholders can assess and value [8].

Research model and hypotheses

The hypotheses emerge from a conceptual structure that examines the intricate links among organizational culture, knowledge-handling activities, and institutional acceptance within academic settings. Organizational culture is positioned as a core driver that straightforwardly affects knowledge mechanisms and the perception of institutional acceptance [1, 29, 30]. Knowledge-handling activities are separated into knowledge generation—involving innovative efforts and the development of intellectual resources [17, 31]—and knowledge dissemination, which supports distribution and communal application [25, 28, 32]. These activities serve as key intermediary elements in the connection between organizational culture and institutional acceptance [7, 22], pointing to a layered pathway through which academic entities foster and preserve societal endorsement and recognition [3, 18, 24].

The link between organizational culture and institutional acceptance forms a central pillar in current scholarship on university governance. Entities with strong, flexible cultures regularly exhibit elevated degrees of societal endorsement and recognition [23, 33, 34]. This association grows stronger when cultural principles align closely with evolving societal norms—a factor highlighted by Spanuth and Urbano [5] as vital for sustaining organizations in intricate environments.

Current investigations reveal that academic bodies achieving ongoing harmony between their culture and modern societal requirements see marked improvements in perceived acceptance [4]. Using structural equation modeling, Liao *et al*. [7] provided empirical proof that culture substantially shapes institutional acceptance. This connection gains added importance amid growing efforts in institutional self-validation, where entities employ advanced tactics to affirm their societal standing [2]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H1: Organizational culture positively affects institutional legitimacy.

Organizational culture acts as a primary enabler of an institution's ability to produce novel knowledge. Modern scholarship indicates that cultures fostering creativity and analytical thought are positively linked to greater outputs of influential scholarly work [27, 29]. This pattern holds special significance during the ongoing digital shift in tertiary education, where cultural flexibility largely dictates success in knowledge production [30].

Emerging studies show that elements of a learning-focused culture account for a considerable share of differences in new institutional knowledge development [35]. This link is further reinforced in environments promoting cross-disciplinary work and global partnerships. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Organizational culture positively affects knowledge creation processes.

An institution's readiness and ability to disseminate knowledge are closely tied to its cultural makeup. Current research demonstrates that cultures marked by strong collaboration and transparency produce far more knowledge exchange than those with rigid or insular features [28, 32]. This effect is heightened in digitally transforming contexts, where seamless knowledge flow offers a key edge.

Cultural principles emphasizing exchange account for much of the variation in dissemination practices [36], especially when considering elements like expected mutual benefits and individual psychological resources. Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Organizational culture positively affects knowledge sharing processes.

Knowledge generation serves as a vital predecessor to its successful dissemination within academic contexts. Recent investigations indicate that the strength of generation efforts reliably forecasts both the extent and caliber of transfer activities [37, 38]. This connection is bolstered in settings with advanced digital tools for knowledge handling.

Modern analyses confirm a positive link between the caliber of produced knowledge and the success of its distribution [39], particularly where solid systems exist for verifying and transferring knowledge. Research using structural equation modeling [14] provides statistical support for direct cultural impacts on sharing and strong results. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Knowledge creation processes positively affect knowledge sharing processes.

The ability to produce innovative knowledge directly shapes perceived institutional acceptance across stakeholder groups. Current scholarship reveals that steady output of influential knowledge is positively associated with notable gains in acceptance levels [3]. This effect intensifies when the knowledge tackles urgent societal challenges.

Superiority in knowledge generation stands out as a strong indicator of institutional acceptance [40], especially when it aligns with current societal priorities and sparks innovative change. Through structural equation modeling and robust findings, Sahibzada and Mumtaz [26] verified that knowledge creation directly impacts sharing, supporting its sequential role. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H5: Knowledge creation processes positively affect institutional legitimacy.

Proficiency in knowledge dissemination represents a pivotal factor for institutional acceptance in today's academic landscape. Entities with strong transfer mechanisms see substantial rises in societal acceptance measures [5]. This link strengthens when dissemination enables real-world application of knowledge in pertinent settings.

Emerging studies indicate that capabilities in knowledge transfer and sharing explain much of the differences in organizational acceptance [6], especially when aligned with new societal demands and local growth priorities. Using structural equation modeling, Liao *et al.* [7] showed that striving for legitimacy markedly improves knowledge-handling strengths. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Knowledge sharing processes positively affect institutional legitimacy.

Drawing on the conceptual foundations and hypothesis rationale outlined above, **Figure 1** depicts the proposed model guiding this empirical study, visualizing the suggested connections among organizational culture, knowledge activities, and institutional legitimacy within university settings.

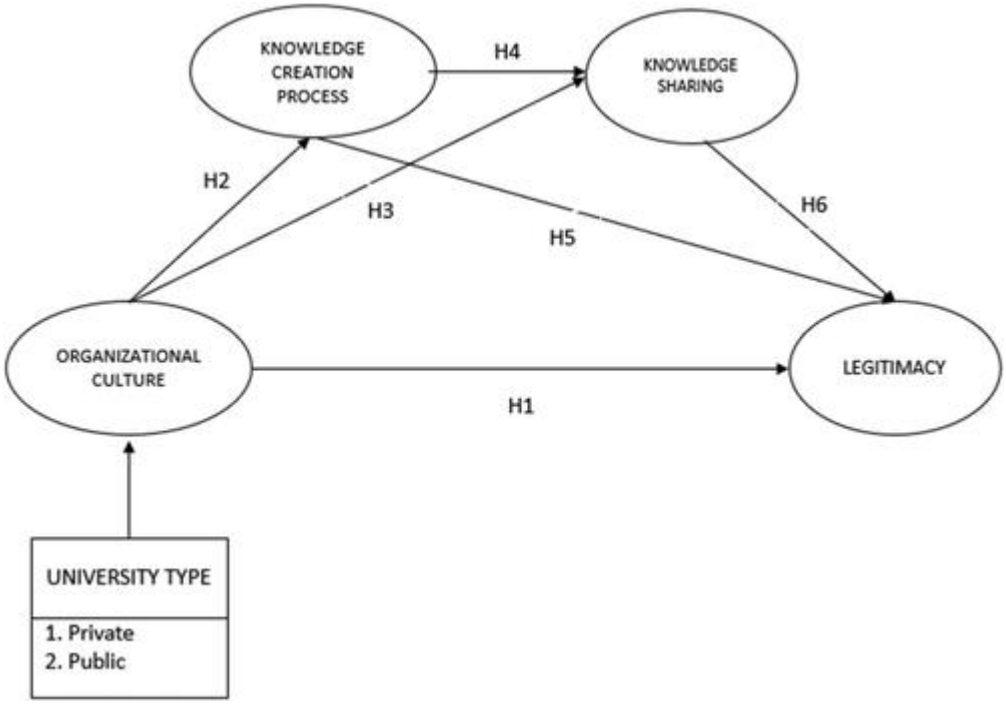

Figure 1. Proposed Theoretical Model

This investigation advances a framework that explores the interconnected dynamics among organizational culture, knowledge generation activities, knowledge dissemination, and institutional acceptance within academic environments. Organizational

culture is established as a primary driver impacting both knowledge-related activities and perceptions of institutional acceptance. Knowledge activities are categorized into generation, encompassing the development of novel insights, and dissemination, involving their transfer and broad distribution. These activities function as intermediaries in the association between organizational culture and institutional acceptance, indicating a multifaceted pathway through which academic entities establish and preserve societal endorsement. The framework additionally incorporates a comparative examination across state-funded and independent universities to detect potential variations in these associations based on institutional category.

Multigroup analysis

The rationale for testing the proposed framework separately for public and private universities rests on three key aspects. First, differences in oversight and financing models profoundly influence institutional operations. State institutions function within governmental oversight and rely on public funding, whereas independent ones answer to governing bodies and market forces, elements that directly shape their planning and operational choices [18, 24].

Second, approaches to knowledge handling display distinct features by institutional category. Independent universities often prioritize systems aimed at quick outcomes and practical advancements, while state universities emphasize foundational inquiry and extended societal contributions [19]. These distinctions manifest in their methods for producing and distributing knowledge.

Third, approaches to building acceptance address varying demands depending on the institutional form. State universities need to validate effective utilization of public funds and illustrate clear societal benefits, while independent ones are required to emphasize unique educational offerings and demonstrate value for investment [41, 42]. These core variances highlight the importance of a thorough side-by-side evaluation of the two institutional forms.

Materials and Methods

This research applies structural equation modeling to empirically assess the suggested integrative theoretical structure, investigating the layered connections among organizational culture, knowledge-handling activities, and institutional acceptance in tertiary education entities. The design includes multigroup comparison to contrast acceptance-building pathways between state and independent universities, offering perspectives on how institutional settings influence the links among these essential elements.

Sampling frame and sampling

The study's focus population comprised academic and administrative personnel holding leadership roles in state and independent universities across Ecuador. The sampling base was derived from authorized listings of tertiary institutions supplied by the national higher education authority. A stratified approach was implemented in two phases: initially, institutions were chosen, divided by category (state/independent), with random selection of units within each layer to maintain balanced proportions. The subsequent phase involved participant selection, where a systematic random method was applied to lists obtained from chosen institutions, with further stratification for sufficient coverage. Sample size was calculated using Soper's [43] tool, targeting a power level of 0.8, alpha of 0.05, anticipated effect of 0.2, four latent variables, and 35 observed items. The analysis recommended a minimum of 400 responses, with a goal of 200 per subgroup for validation purposes.

Instruments

The measures for this study were adapted from established scales in prior scholarship. Institutional acceptance was assessed via the scale from Miotto *et al.* [22]. Knowledge generation was captured using the instrument from Mehralian *et al.* [17], organizational culture items were drawn from Islam *et al.* [14], and knowledge dissemination from Goswami and Agrawal [44]. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert format, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Organizational culture, knowledge dissemination, and institutional acceptance were modeled as second-order reflective variables. Culture was defined through three lower-order reflective factors: teamwork (three items), growth and learning opportunities (five items), and leadership backing (six items). Dissemination was structured via two lower-order factors: documented (explicit) exchange (four items) and experiential (tacit) exchange (three items). Acceptance was similarly a higher-order variable with three facets: practical acceptance, ethical acceptance, and taken-for-granted acceptance, each with three items.

Knowledge generation was treated as a first-order variable with eight items. The culture scale evaluates views on member cooperation, institutional support for professional growth, and encouragement from top leadership. The generation scale examines the production of fresh insights via socialization, articulation, integration, and absorption processes. The dissemination scale gauges mechanisms supporting the flow of formalized (explicit) content and unspoken (tacit) know-how

and skills. The acceptance scale measures perceptions of the institution's utilitarian contributions, conformity to ethical standards and societal principles, and its status as a familiar and accepted entity.

Data collection

This study was carried out in full accordance with the ethical guidelines and requirements set by the Ethics Committee of the Technical University of Machala (UTMACH). The research design and ethical aspects were thoroughly evaluated and approved by the committee (Resolution No. CE 001/2023) before any recruitment began. The committee concluded that the observational design posed no risks to participants' physical or psychological well-being. All procedures involving human subjects complied with the university's ethical regulations and aligned with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration along with its subsequent amendments or equivalent standards.

Ethical clearance was obtained from UTMACH—where the author is employed as faculty—primarily due to scheduling constraints affecting the project timeline. As the author is pursuing a doctoral degree at CENTRUM Católica of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP), approval would typically have been sought from PUCP's Research Ethics Committee for Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (CEI-CCSSHHyAA) or the Research Ethics Committee for Life Sciences and Technology (CEI-CVyTech). However, both committees were not scheduled to reconvene until the third or fourth week of January 2023, which would have caused considerable delays. To preserve methodological integrity while meeting ethical obligations, authorization was therefore secured from the author's home institution, fully respecting the ethical standards of both universities.

This arrangement guaranteed continuous ethical supervision throughout the study while addressing practical limitations related to cross-institutional academic calendars. The author affirms that the process was handled with complete openness and in line with established protocols for inter-institutional doctoral work.

Data were gathered via online questionnaires distributed to academic and administrative personnel in leadership roles at state-funded and independent universities in Ecuador. Given that the study relied solely on anonymous questionnaires, informed consent was secured from every participant before their involvement, clearly explaining the study's objectives, data handling practices, and their unrestricted right to withdraw without any repercussions. Additionally, official permissions were obtained from participating institutions to facilitate access and fulfill administrative obligations. Invitations were distributed by email, with follow-up reminders sent to boost response rates. To reduce potential common method bias, strategies such as separating the measurement of predictor and outcome variables in time and emphasizing anonymity were applied [45].

Data analysis

The relationships among the variables were investigated through structural equation modeling (SEM). The analytical procedure followed the recommendations of Weston and Gore [46], beginning with model specification grounded in prior research. Care was taken to ensure the model was over-identified and employed validated instruments for all constructs. Estimation was performed using maximum likelihood, and model fit was evaluated with indicators including χ^2/df, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR [47].

Assumptions underlying SEM were verified through multivariate normality checks via the Mardia test, visual inspections for linearity, and variance inflation factors (VIF) to rule out multicollinearity. Common method bias was further examined using Harman's single-factor test and the latent common methods factor approach [48]. Reliability was evaluated with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), whereas convergent validity was assessed via average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity through Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios [49].

A multigroup comparison was performed to contrast findings across state and independent universities. This involved testing measurement invariance across groups (configural, metric, and scalar) following Steenkamp and Baumgartner [50]. Differences in path coefficients were assessed using chi-square difference tests, and indirect effects were examined via bootstrapping [51]. All computations were conducted in R, utilizing the lavaan package for SEM and semTools for multigroup procedures. This comprehensive analytical strategy enabled robust testing of the proposed framework linking organizational culture to institutional legitimacy via knowledge generation and dissemination processes.

Results and Discussion

This investigation employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the associations between latent constructs and their measurable indicators. In accordance with the cross-validation approach outlined by Weston and Gore [46], the overall sample (N = 370) was purposefully split into two groups: one subset for exploratory factor analysis (EFA, n = 120) and the remaining for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA, n = 250). This separation helped prevent overfitting, enhanced the generalizability of findings, and facilitated group comparisons based on institutional category (state-funded or independent), consistent with the guidelines for multigroup analysis provided by Steenkamp and Baumgartner [50].

Initially, a preliminary examination was performed to evaluate data quality, identify any absent responses, spot extreme values, and check for data entry mistakes. As emphasized by Podsakoff *et al.* [45], such early checks are crucial for reducing possible methodological artifacts that might undermine result validity. Multivariate normality was evaluated through Mardia's kurtosis coefficient, applying the benchmark set by Bollen [52], which suggests the value should fall below p*(p + 2), with p denoting the count of observed indicators. Here, the computed coefficient (217.43) was well below the threshold (19 × 21 = 399), affirming data normality and supporting the application of maximum likelihood (ML) estimation.

The EFA utilized the Promax oblique rotation with maximum likelihood extraction, aligning with Hair [53] suggestions for scenarios anticipating inter-factor correlations. Factor retention relied on eigenvalues exceeding 1, supplemented by communality values above 0.30. The appropriateness of factor analysis was confirmed via the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO = 0.941) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$), both substantially surpassing the acceptable levels recommended by Ringle *et al.* [54] for factorial procedures in social science research.

Drawing from the pattern matrix derived in the EFA, the baseline measurement model was developed. Although the analysis initially indicated three factors, the configuration was refined to four factors to better align with the theoretical conceptualization of legitimacy, thereby blending empirical results with conceptual grounding **(Figure 2)**. Scale psychometric quality was assessed through composite reliability (CR > 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50), following Fornell and Larcker [55] standards. Discriminant validity was verified using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) method, as advocated by Kock *et al.* [48] for its superior rigor over conventional approaches in distinguishing interrelated constructs.

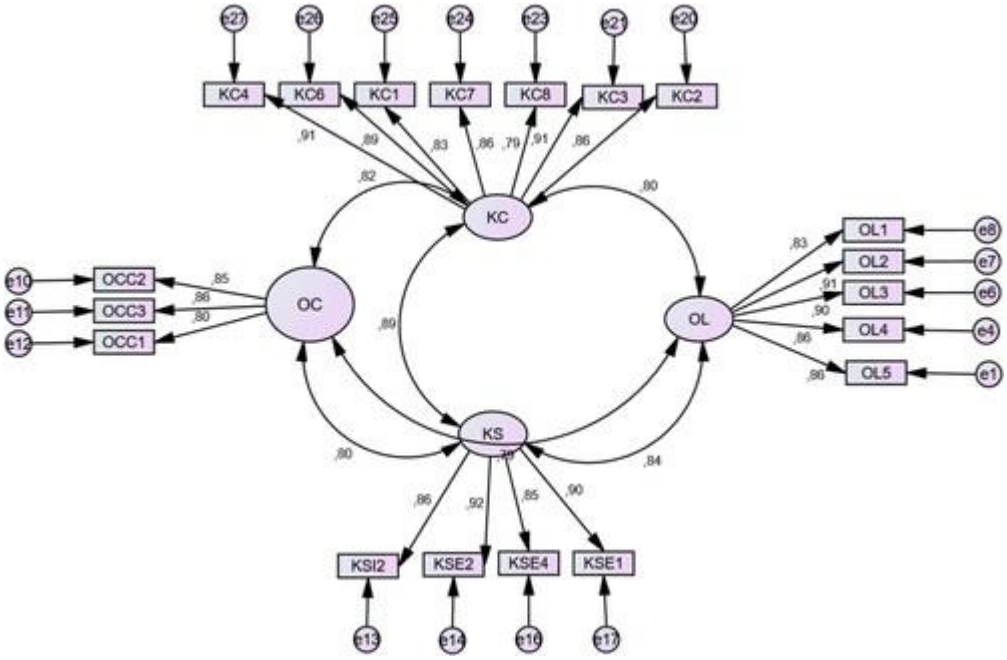

Figure 2. Confirmatory Factor Structure

Note: OC = Organizational Culture; KC = Knowledge Creation; KS = Knowledge Sharing; OL = Organizational Legitimacy; KCx = Knowledge Creation indicators; OCx = Organizational Culture indicators; KSx = Knowledge Sharing indicators; OLx = Organizational Legitimacy indicators.

Model fit was evaluated using a comprehensive set of indices as advocated by Gaskin and Lim (2019): normed chi-square (CMIN/DF, acceptable range 1–3), comparative fit index (CFI > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI > 0.90), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA < 0.08), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR < 0.08). This multi-metric strategy is critical, as Weston and Gore [46] warn against dependence on any single fit statistic.

Once the measurement model was confirmed, the structural model was constructed to test the hypothesized associations among constructs. Standardized loadings and squared multiple correlations were inspected to ensure no absolute values exceeded 1, ruling out improper solutions ("Heywood cases"). Mediation effects were assessed through significance testing of indirect paths using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, following Hayes [51], to produce reliable confidence intervals even under non-normal distributions of indirect effect products.

Variations between state-funded and independent universities were investigated via invariance testing. Measurement equivalence was established when the change in CFI across nested models did not exceed 0.01, in line with Cheung and Rensvold's criterion referenced in Steenkamp and Baumgartner [50]. This stepwise procedure—confirming invariance before comparing structural paths—is essential to guarantee that group differences are substantive rather than artifacts, as stressed by Ringle *et al.* [54].

Preliminary data screening verified data quality, revealing no entry errors, missing responses, or outliers, with all values confined to the 1–5 Likert range. Most items displayed negative skewness, reflecting a tendency toward higher ratings, though this did not impair subsequent factorial procedures.

The exploratory factor analysis reaffirmed the appropriateness of the method, yielding a KMO value of 0.941 and a highly significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$). The extraction initially suggested three factors, but alignment with established theory led to adoption of a four-factor solution, supported by the AMOS plugin developed by Gaskin and Lim [56] for structural equation modeling.

Early psychometric evaluation indicated strong reliability, with composite reliability (CR) exceeding 0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) surpassing 0.50 across constructs. Discriminant validity, however, presented issues. The HTMT matrix revealed an overly strong association between KS and KC (> 0.90), alongside elevated correlations between OLOC and KS, and between OLAC and OC (> 0.85), violating recommended cutoffs from Kock *et al.* [48]. These findings necessitated model refinement, guided by the correlation matrix and modification indices provided by AMOS, to establish adequate convergent and discriminant validity **(Table 1)**.

Table 1. Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analysis

	CR	AVE	OC	KS	KC	OL
OC	0.941	0.762				
KS	0.932	0.775	0.851			
KC	0.954	0.749	0.812	0.897		
OL	0.877	0.705	0.787	0.804	0.827	

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; OC = Organizational Culture; KS = Knowledge Sharing; KC = Knowledge Creation; OL = Organizational Legitimacy. The upper part of the table presents convergent validity measures (CR and AVE). The lower triangular matrix displays discriminant validity assessed via Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios. Diagonal elements are left blank as they reflect each construct's correlation with itself.

Following multiple refinements that preserved the theoretical essence of the constructs, a refined measurement model was achieved with robust psychometric characteristics. Factor loadings along with their corresponding confidence intervals are displayed in **Table 2**. The fit indices for the finalized model proved acceptable: normed chi-square = 2.895 (< 3), SRMR = 0.034 (< 0.05), RMSEA = 0.084 (marginally exceeding the strict cutoff), CFI = 0.946, and TLI = 0.936 (both surpassing 0.90). With the measurement model requirements fulfilled, the structural model was then developed **(Figure 3)**. The explained variance figures were substantial: the model accounted for 74.8% of the variation in OL, 67.9% of the variation in KC was attributable to OC, and 80.5% of the variation in KS was explained by OC and KC combined. All these R^2 values were well above the 0.50 benchmark that Ringle *et al.* [54] regard as evidence of strong predictive power in social science research **(Table 3)**.

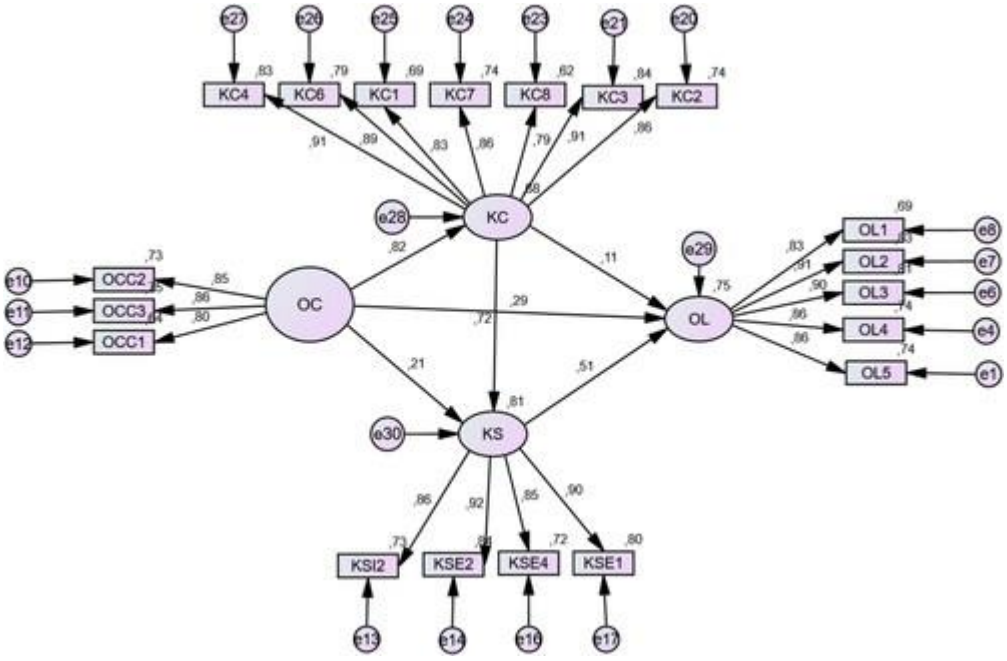

Figure 3. Final Structural Equation Model

Note: OC = Organizational Culture; KC = Knowledge Creation; KS = Knowledge Sharing; OL = Organizational Legitimacy.

Path values denote standardized regression coefficients. Values associated with observed indicators reflect factor loadings. All reported coefficients reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), with the exception of the direct path from KC to OL ($p = 0.359$). For simplicity, error terms and their covariances have been omitted from the diagram. Numbers within circles indicate error variances.

Table 2. Standardized Path Coefficients and Bootstrap Confidence Intervals

Parameter	Estimate	Upper	Lower	p
KC ← OC	1.134	1.320	0.976	0.001
KS ← OC	0.283	0.519	0.053	0.046
KS ← KC	0.714	0.884	0.546	0.001
OL ← OC	0.384	0.699	0.085	0.029
OL ← KC	0.110	0.386	-0.109	0.359
OL ← KS	0.499	0.778	0.258	0.001

Note: OC = Organizational Culture; KC = Knowledge Creation; KS = Knowledge Sharing; OL = Organizational Legitimacy. Lower and Upper columns indicate the bounds of 95% confidence intervals derived from bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

Table 3. Explained Variance (R^2) of Endogenous Constructs with Bootstrap Confidence Intervals

Parameter	Estimate	Upper	Lower	p
KC	0.679	0.749	0.593	0.001
KS	0.805	0.864	0.728	0.001
OL	0.748	0.802	0.669	0.002

Note: KC = Knowledge Creation; KS = Knowledge Sharing; OL = Organizational Legitimacy. Lower and Upper columns indicate the bounds of 95% confidence intervals obtained from bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

The evaluation of the direct hypotheses revealed that organizational culture (OC) exerts a positive and significant impact on institutional legitimacy (OL) ($\beta = 0.384$, $p = 0.029$), as well as on knowledge sharing (KS) ($\beta = 0.283$, $p = 0.046$) and knowledge creation (KC) ($\beta = 1.134$, $p = 0.001$). Additionally, knowledge sharing (KS) was found to positively and significantly affect institutional legitimacy (OL) ($\beta = 0.499$, $p = 0.001$). In contrast, the proposed direct influence of knowledge creation (KC) on institutional legitimacy (OL) was not supported, as the path coefficient was modest ($\beta = 0.110$) and failed to achieve statistical significance ($p = 0.359$). The path from KC to KS (H4) proved significant, consistent with the reported results.

Examination of specific indirect effects highlighted noteworthy mediation patterns **(Table 4)**. The indirect path from OC to KS via KC was statistically significant ($p = 0.001$), with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. Similarly, KS significantly mediated the association between OC and OL. However, the sequential indirect effect through KC → KS → OL fell short of significance at the conventional 95% level ($p = 0.093$). Conversely, the full chained pathway OC → KC → KS → OL demonstrated a significant indirect effect ($p = 0.001$). These findings indicate that KC fully mediates the relationship between OC and KS, whereas KS partially mediates the link from KC to OL, given the significant indirect effect ($p = 0.001$) alongside the non-significant direct effect ($p = 0.359$). This analytic strategy aligns with Hayes [51] guidelines for simultaneously assessing direct and indirect effects to elucidate the operative mechanisms.

Table 4. Direct and Indirect Effects Analysis for Mediation Testing

Indirect Path	Unstandardized Estimate	Upper	Lower	p	Parameter	p
OC → KC → KS	0.810	1.055	0.591	0.001	KC ← OC	0.001
OC → KC → KS → OL	0.404	0.678	0.197	0.001	KC ← OC	0.029
OC → KC → OL	0.125	0.451	-0.119	0.346	KC ← OC	0.029
KC → KS → OL	0.356	0.585	0.179	0.001	KC ← OC	0.359

Note: OC = Organizational Culture; KC = Knowledge Creation; KS = Knowledge Sharing; OL = Organizational Legitimacy. Lower and Upper columns indicate the bounds of 95% confidence intervals derived from bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The "Parameter" column identifies the associated direct path for each indirect effect, with its significance level provided in the final column.

To investigate potential variations between state-funded and independent universities, measurement invariance was evaluated first **(Table 5)**. The findings supported configural invariance, with acceptable fit statistics: CMIN/DF = 1.965, CFI = 0.944, TLI = 0.935, and RMSEA = 0.062. Furthermore, metric invariance (factor loadings), scalar invariance (intercepts), residual invariance (variances), and structural invariance were all established, as evidenced by ΔCFI changes below 0.01 across nested models, confirming the comparability of the measurement and structural framework across the two institutional categories.

Table 5. Measurement Invariance Test Results

Model	CMIN	DF	p	ΔCFI
Measurement weights	21.078	15	0.134	-0.001
Measurement intercepts	29.755	34	0.676	0.002
Structural covariances	42.766	44	0.525	0.001
Measurement residuals	56.781	63	0.696	0.001

Note: DF = Degrees of Freedom; CMIN = Chi-square Minimum Discrepancy; ΔCFI = Change in Comparative Fit Index. All ΔCFI values are below 0.01, supporting measurement invariance across groups based on the criterion advanced by Cheung and Rensvold.

The multigroup comparison indicated no overall significant differences in the structural model across institutional types ($p = 1$). Nevertheless, inspection of individual paths uncovered meaningful variations **(Table 6)**: the positive association between

organizational culture (OC) and knowledge sharing (KS) reached significance solely in state-funded universities; the link from OC to institutional legitimacy (OL) was more pronounced in independent universities (significant at the 99.9% level) compared to state-funded ones (significant at the 95% level); and the path from KS to OL exhibited greater strength in state-funded universities (significant at the 99.9% level) relative to independent universities (significant at the 95% level).

Table 6. Differences in direct effects by university type

Path name	*β* public	*β* private	*β* difference	*p-value* for difference	Interpretation
OC → KC.	0.824***	0.835***	−0.011	0.997	No differences: significance is high in both types of universities.
OC → KS.	0.291**	0.010	0.281	1	The positive relationship between OC and KS is significant only for public universities.
KC → KS.	0.641***	0.901***	−0.26	1	No differences: significance is high in both types of universities.
OC → OL.	0.202†	0.426**	−0.224	0.996	The positive relationship between OC and OL is stronger in private universities (significant at 99%) than in public universities (significant at 95%).
KC → OL.	0.086	0.159	−0.072	1	No differences.
KS → OL.	0.606***	0.363†	0.243	1	The positive relationship between KS and OL is stronger in public universities (significant at 99.9%) than in private universities (significant at 95%).

Note: OC = Organizational culture; KC = Knowledge creation; KS = Knowledge sharing; OL = Organizational legitimacy. †$p < 0.10$. *$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.01$. ***$p < 0.001$.

The structural equation modeling results substantiate the hypothesized associations among organizational culture, knowledge-handling activities, and institutional acceptance within academic environments. Guided by the integrative theoretical structure outlined earlier, these outcomes are interpreted through four complementary perspectives: legitimacy theory, institutional theory, the knowledge-based view, and stakeholder theory.

Legitimacy theory perspective

Through the lens of legitimacy theory, the results illustrate varied approaches universities adopt to foster acceptance via cultural elements and knowledge activities. The noteworthy positive link between organizational culture and institutional acceptance ($\beta = 0.384$, $p = 0.029$) corroborates the observations of Miotto *et al.* [22], who positioned culture as a key driver of legitimacy in tertiary institutions. This evidence indicates that universities proactively shape acceptance by aligning cultural attributes with societal norms, in line with the multifaceted view of legitimacy advanced by Suchman [57].

The substantial impact of knowledge dissemination on institutional acceptance ($\beta = 0.499$, $p = 0.001$) offers empirical backing for pragmatic legitimacy pathways, whereby universities affirm their worth through concrete benefits delivered to interested parties. This aligns with Spanuth and Urbano [5], who underscored the role of dissemination practices in building legitimacy, and builds upon their insights by quantifying this association's strength in academic settings. The larger coefficient relative to the direct culture-acceptance path implies that dissemination functions as the dominant channel for universities to establish and sustain societal endorsement.

Of particular interest is the lack of a direct connection from knowledge generation to acceptance ($\beta = 0.110$, $p = 0.359$), which diverges from Liao *et al.* [7] and questions conventional views linking research prowess directly to legitimacy. This pattern implies that, in tertiary contexts, simply producing knowledge does not suffice for gaining acceptance without effective distribution, reinforcing evolving legitimacy theory that prioritizes stakeholder perceptions and recognized contributions over isolated internal capacities.

The varying acceptance dynamics across state-funded and independent universities mirror differing legitimacy contexts and party expectations, echoing the arguments of Bitektine and Song [40] and Kalesnikaite and Baker [19] regarding diversity in legitimation strategies. State institutions exhibit a more robust dissemination-acceptance association ($\beta = 0.606$, $p < 0.001$), pointing to the prominence of moral legitimacy—rooted in ethical endorsement and community service—for public entities. Independent institutions display a stronger culture-acceptance tie, signaling heavier dependence on deliberate legitimacy efforts through institutional branding and party contentment, in keeping with market-oriented legitimacy processes.

Institutional theory lens

An institutional theory viewpoint clarifies how universities manage demands for conformity while preserving unique identities. The strong association between organizational culture and knowledge generation ($\beta = 1.134$, $p = 0.001$) reinforces Mehralian *et al.* [17], who linked supportive cultures to enhanced generation activities, and expands this by illustrating how

institutional settings influence internal operations. This suggests that universities cultivate cultures balancing external academic standards with their particular circumstances and stakeholder arrangements.

Observed systematic distinctions between state and independent universities highlight contrasting institutional logics and environmental forces, aligning with Mampaey's [16] interpretive framework, which posits that entities adapt institutionalized norms to fit their unique situations rather than applying standardized reactions to external demands. State universities function within frameworks stressing responsibility, societal contribution, and broad accessibility. The result that culture affects dissemination exclusively in state institutions ($\beta = 0.280$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that public logics impose particular cultural needs for treating knowledge as a communal resource.

Independent universities encounter pressures centered on market adaptability, operational effectiveness, and party fulfillment. The more pronounced culture-acceptance relationship in private settings reflects increased freedom to craft tailored legitimacy approaches, consistent with institutional theory's views on diverse reactions to field pressures [20].

The identified chained mediation route (OC → KC → KS → OL) shows how institutional demands translate into acceptance results via internal activities, advancing institutional theory by revealing how alignment processes function through knowledge-handling mechanisms that concurrently meet external expectations and generate stakeholder benefits.

Knowledge-based view insights

From a knowledge-based viewpoint, the results uncover the intricate management of intellectual resources in academic institutions, reinforcing and building upon prior scholarship on knowledge handling in tertiary organizations. The robust connection between knowledge generation and dissemination processes echoes Santos *et al.* [25] and Zaremohzzabieh and Mohd Rasdi [28], who maintain that generation serves as an essential predecessor to subsequent dissemination. The evidence affirms the ordered progression of knowledge activities in university environments, illustrating how generation efforts produce intellectual resources that gain organizational significance only through effective dissemination channels.

The observation that knowledge generation affects institutional acceptance solely via dissemination (partial mediation) advances the knowledge-based perspective by showing that intellectual assets need activation and distribution to yield stakeholder benefits. This challenges oversimplified models and advocates a refined framework where generation supports acceptance exclusively when paired with strong dissemination, especially relevant for comprehending legitimation in knowledge-centric entities.

The pronounced association between organizational culture and knowledge generation ($\beta = 1.134$, $p = 0.001$) aligns with and expands Iqbal *et al.* [27], who pinpointed culture as a vital enabler of knowledge activities. This result emphasizes culture's pivotal function in fostering intellectual resource development, revealing that environments promoting curiosity, teamwork, and creativity supply the essential guiding and operational foundation for successful generation.

The more prominent dissemination impacts in state-funded universities imply that varied institutional settings impose different demands on intellectual resource deployment. State institutions likely encounter greater pressure to distribute knowledge as a societal service, whereas independent ones may direct dissemination toward targeted parties, thereby enriching the knowledge-based view by illustrating how contextual factors influence knowledge-handling approaches.

Stakeholder theory analysis

A stakeholder theory lens yields valuable understanding of how universities navigate multifaceted relationships with diverse groups via cultural elements and knowledge activities, building on existing studies of multi-party dynamics in tertiary education. The contrasting influences of dissemination versus culture by institutional category mirror differing stakeholder compositions and priorities, reinforcing stakeholder theory's assertions regarding varied assessment standards across groups.

State-funded universities display more robust dissemination-acceptance associations, indicating that their key parties—such as regulatory bodies, citizens, and the broader community—place particular emphasis on knowledge distribution and community-oriented efforts. The effect size ($\beta = 0.606$ in state-funded versus 0.363 in independent universities) underscores dissemination's heightened importance for meeting public-sector demands, in agreement with Pedro *et al.* [21] on type-specific stakeholder priorities.

Independent universities exhibit stronger culture-acceptance ties, suggesting that their core parties—comprising learners, households, employers, and oversight boards—judge institutions primarily on cultural congruence, service excellence, and operational efficiency. This outcome reinforces and develops stakeholder theory's ideas on divergent legitimacy criteria among groups, consistent with recent contributions by Guba and Tsivinskaya [18] concerning acceptance evaluation in private tertiary sectors.

The uncovered mediation routes, notably the significant chained indirect effect via OC → KC → KS → OL, reveal how universities generate stakeholder benefits through cohesive cultural and knowledge-handling strategies, expanding Al-Zoubi *et al.* [23] explorations of links between institutional elements and knowledge transfer. This adds to stakeholder theory by pinpointing concrete internal pathways for producing and conveying stakeholder value.

The partial mediation role of dissemination in the culture-acceptance connection implies that universities need to equilibrate direct relationship oversight (via culture) with evidenced expertise and societal input (via dissemination). This equilibrium differs by institutional form, with state entities prioritizing contributory outputs and independent ones focusing on cultural harmony and party fulfillment.

Theoretical integration and implications

The synthesis of the four theoretical lenses demonstrates that building institutional acceptance in universities entails intricate, interconnected processes spanning multiple theoretical levels, in line with recent appeals for combined theoretical approaches in organizational studies [8]. Organizational culture functions as the core enabler, allowing universities to address institutional demands, cultivate knowledge strengths, meet stakeholder needs, and formulate acceptance arguments.

Knowledge-handling activities stand out as the chief practical channels converting cultural principles into outcomes valued by interested parties. The ordered connection between generation and dissemination illustrates the conversion of internal capacities into tangible, reachable impacts that stakeholders can assess and value. This evidence builds on earlier frameworks by Cooper *et al.* [8] and Zhong *et al.* [6], which treated these links separately, by offering a unified structure that connects scholarship on culture, knowledge handling, and institutional acceptance.

The consistent variations between state-funded and independent universities highlight that acceptance-building approaches need to match particular institutional settings and stakeholder arrangements, echoing Robertson and Beech [4] on diverse acceptance demands across contexts. State institutions depend more on dissemination to illustrate societal worth and contributions, whereas independent ones lean heavier on culture to foster party contentment and unique positioning.

These outcomes advance all four theoretical areas by revealing their interdependencies and complementary nature in sophisticated organizational environments. The research progresses legitimacy theory by clarifying how varied acceptance forms emerge via distinct internal pathways, develops institutional theory by showing how external demands convert into acceptance results through knowledge activities, deepens the knowledge-based perspective by illustrating the necessity of disseminating intellectual resources to produce stakeholder benefits, and adds to stakeholder theory by pinpointing how varying party setups shape institutional acceptance tactics.

Conclusion

The primary takeaway from this investigation is that institutional acceptance in academic entities arises from a chained interplay involving organizational culture and knowledge-handling activities. Culture impacts acceptance both straightforwardly and, more prominently, via the progression connecting knowledge generation and dissemination. In particular, a supportive culture boosts knowledge production, which then promotes its distribution; it is this distribution that most substantially enhances institutional acceptance within tertiary education.

As additional insights, the following stand out: (1) knowledge generation lacks a direct effect on acceptance but forms a crucial segment in the sequence OC → KC → KS → OL, underscoring the ordered character of knowledge activities tied to acceptance; (2) dissemination serves as the dominant intermediary between culture and acceptance, exceeding the direct cultural influence in strength; and (3) consistent distinctions appear in acceptance pathways between state and independent universities, with the former relying more on dissemination and the latter on culture.

Theoretical implications

This work provides four key conceptual advances. First, it offers empirical confirmation of the ordered impact of organizational culture on acceptance via knowledge-handling activities, thereby expanding prior frameworks from Cooper *et al.* [8] and Zhong *et al.* [6]. Second, it establishes that dissemination fully mediates the connection between knowledge generation and institutional acceptance, questioning established views presuming direct effects from scholarly efforts on recognition. Third, it delivers data-driven support for a combined theoretical structure merging legitimacy theory, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and the knowledge-based view, illustrating their reciprocal strengthening in explaining university acceptance formation. Fourth, it uncovers how institutional settings (state versus independent) consistently moderate acceptance pathways, enriching institutional theory by demonstrating how contrasting logics generate differing demands for acceptance approaches.

Practical implications

First, institutional leaders should focus on cultivating cultures that clearly promote teamwork, ongoing growth, and leadership encouragement, since these elements directly shape knowledge activities and institutional acceptance. This entails adopting personnel guidelines, reward frameworks, and leadership training initiatives that embed these principles.

Second, considering dissemination's strongest direct role in institutional acceptance, universities ought to allocate substantial resources to tools, infrastructures, and routines that enable efficient exchange of both documented and experiential knowledge.

This encompasses building digital systems, fostering exchange networks, and enacting guidelines that reward cooperation and transfer among faculty, staff, and outside parties.

Third, leaders must tailor acceptance-building efforts to their institutional category and stakeholder makeup. State-funded entities should emphasize dissemination programs that highlight societal benefits and contributions, such as outreach initiatives, open research access, and clear reporting on impacts. Independent entities should concentrate more on cultural enhancement to boost learner contentment, faculty involvement, and party connections, as these aspects more directly drive acceptance in competitive settings.

Fourth, although generation activities do not straightforwardly enhance acceptance, they provide vital groundwork for robust dissemination. Institutions should sustain strong scholarly and innovative efforts while linking them to distribution channels that render their benefits evident to parties. This calls for cohesive strategies connecting research quality with outreach, transfer, and teaching advancements.

Finally, since dissemination acts as the principal intermediary linking culture to acceptance, academic entities should establish structured supports for this activity. These could involve digital platforms, practice communities, and reward systems aimed at facilitating efficient exchange of both documented and experiential knowledge [23, 32].

Limitations and directions for future research

This investigation presents certain constraints that warrant attention when evaluating its outcomes. The cross-sectional approach limits the establishment of firm causal links, as it reflects only a momentary snapshot of legitimation dynamics that may change over time. Additionally, the particular geographic and sociocultural setting of the examined universities restricts the broader applicability of the results, given that notions of legitimacy can differ across educational frameworks, governance structures, and societal norms [19, 38]. The sole emphasis on academic institutions further confines the relevance of the insights to other knowledge-focused entities.

Moreover, the reliance on an internal viewpoint constitutes a constraint, since it omits assessments of legitimacy from outside parties—groups regarded as essential in shaping acceptance [40]. Although the adopted multi-theoretical lens yields thorough understanding, subsequent work could delve deeper into individual theoretical areas, especially investigating how particular institutional logics and stakeholder arrangements affect acceptance-building pathways in diverse educational landscapes and cultural settings. Upcoming studies might remedy this shortfall by including varied viewpoints on legitimacy and analyzing these interactions across a wider array of institutional and cultural environments. Additional inquiries could enhance the suggested framework by incorporating further elements, such as leadership oriented toward knowledge [31, 34], drivers of motivation for dissemination [33, 58], or alignment between individuals and the organization as a moderating influence [42]. Lastly, future scholarship could examine variations among knowledge forms (e.g., tacit versus explicit) and their distinct effects on institutional acceptance [25, 35].

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