

## Entrepreneurial Orientation and Business Sustainability among Youth-Owned Enterprises in Senegal

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### Abstract

Youth entrepreneurship has become a strategic priority for economic development and employment generation in Senegal; however, many youth-owned enterprises struggle to achieve long-term sustainability. This study examines the influence of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) on Business Sustainability among youth-owned enterprises in Senegal using a quantitative research design. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among youth entrepreneurs aged 18–35 years across multiple business sectors. Data were collected through structured questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression analysis. The findings reveal that Entrepreneurial Orientation significantly and positively influences Business Sustainability ( $R^2 = 0.610$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that EO explains 61% of the variance in sustainability outcomes. All five EO dimensions innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy demonstrate significant positive effects. Among them, proactiveness emerges as the strongest predictor, followed by autonomy and innovativeness. The results suggest that youth-owned enterprises that anticipate market changes, exercise independent strategic decision-making, and pursue innovative practices are more likely to achieve long-term viability. This study contributes to entrepreneurship literature by extending EO research to sustainability outcomes within a West African youth context. The findings provide practical implications for policymakers and entrepreneurship development programs seeking to strengthen youth enterprise resilience and sustainable economic participation in Senegal.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial Orientation, Business Sustainability, Youth Entrepreneurship

### Introduction

Youth entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategic instrument for economic transformation, employment creation, and social inclusion in developing economies (Varsha & Ramachandran, 2023; Alzate et al., 2024). Across Sub-Saharan Africa, young people represent a substantial proportion of the population, yet they face persistent challenges related to unemployment, underemployment, and limited access to formal labor markets. In Senegal, where the demographic structure is heavily youth-dominated, entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a viable pathway for economic participation and poverty reduction (Huber, 2023).

National development initiatives such as the Plan Sénégal Emergent have emphasized private sector development and youth enterprise promotion as mechanisms for accelerating economic

growth and structural transformation. Despite these policy efforts, many youth-owned enterprises struggle to survive beyond their early years, raising concerns about business sustainability and long-term impact (Mwangi, 2024).

Business sustainability extends beyond short-term profitability and encompasses a firm's ability to maintain operational continuity, financial stability, market relevance, and adaptive capacity over time (Matlhake & Kalitanyi, 2025). For youth-owned enterprises, sustainability is particularly critical because these ventures often operate with limited capital, weak institutional support, and constrained managerial experience. In Senegal, youth entrepreneurs frequently encounter barriers including restricted access to credit, inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic constraints, and volatile market conditions.

Such structural and contextual limitations increase vulnerability and contribute to high business failure rates. Consequently, understanding the strategic and behavioral factors that enhance the sustainability of youth-owned enterprises has become an urgent academic and policy priority. One of the most influential strategic constructs in entrepreneurship research is Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO). Entrepreneurial Orientation refers to the processes, practices, and decision-making styles that characterize how firms engage in entrepreneurial activities (Arabeche et al., 2022). EO is typically conceptualized through dimensions such as innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy.

Firms exhibiting high levels of EO tend to pursue new opportunities, experiment with novel products and services, anticipate market trends, and engage in calculated risk-taking behaviors. Empirical research consistently suggests that EO is positively associated with firm performance, growth, and competitive advantage across various contexts (Sorama & Joensuu, 2023). However, most studies have concentrated on general small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developed economies, leaving a contextual gap concerning youth-owned enterprises in West African countries such as Senegal.

In emerging economies, the relevance of EO may be even more pronounced due to environmental uncertainty, institutional voids, and resource constraints (Xiao et al., 2025). Firms operating in such contexts must rely on innovative strategies and proactive market positioning to survive and grow. Innovativeness enables businesses to differentiate their products and services in competitive markets, while proactiveness allows entrepreneurs to anticipate and respond to shifting consumer demands. Risk-taking, when managed strategically, facilitates opportunity exploitation in uncertain environments.

Competitive aggressiveness enhances a firm's ability to defend and expand its market share, and autonomy empowers decision-makers to implement strategic initiatives effectively. For youth entrepreneurs in Senegal, who often operate in informal or semi-formal sectors, these dimensions may serve as critical drivers of resilience and sustainability. Although prior studies have established a positive relationship between EO and firm performance (Sorama & Joensuu, 2023), performance does not necessarily equate to sustainability. Sustainability incorporates a longer-term perspective, integrating financial, operational, and strategic continuity.

In youth-owned enterprises, sustainability may reflect the capacity to generate consistent revenue streams, retain customers, reinvest profits, and adapt to environmental shocks. The

dynamic and often volatile business environment in Senegal including fluctuating consumer purchasing power, regulatory changes, and infrastructural constraints requires entrepreneurial behavior that supports not only growth but also long-term stability.

Furthermore, youth entrepreneurs often face distinct challenges compared to older, more experienced business owners. Limited managerial expertise, narrower professional networks, and lower asset ownership can restrict strategic decision-making and resource mobilization (Wang & Wang, 2025). In such circumstances, entrepreneurial orientation may compensate for structural disadvantages by fostering innovative thinking, proactive opportunity recognition, and strategic flexibility. Research in other African contexts has demonstrated that EO positively influences SME competitiveness and resilience, yet empirical evidence specifically addressing youth-owned enterprises in Senegal remains scarce.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the influence of entrepreneurial orientation on business sustainability among youth-owned enterprises in Senegal. By focusing on a youth-specific sample within a West African context, this research contributes to the entrepreneurship literature in several ways. First, it extends EO research beyond traditional performance metrics toward sustainability outcomes, thereby aligning with the growing emphasis on long-term viability in entrepreneurship studies.

Second, it provides context-sensitive empirical evidence from Senegal, where socio-economic conditions, institutional frameworks, and cultural dynamics may shape entrepreneurial behavior differently than in Western settings. Third, it highlights the strategic behaviors that can strengthen youth enterprise resilience, offering insights relevant to policymakers, development agencies, and entrepreneurship support programs.

Given the demographic importance of youth in Senegal and the strategic role of entrepreneurship in national development agendas, identifying the determinants of sustainable youth enterprises is essential. Entrepreneurial orientation, as a multidimensional strategic construct, offers a promising explanatory framework for understanding why some youth-owned enterprises achieve continuity and growth while others fail. By empirically investigating this relationship, the study seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can inform entrepreneurship training, policy design, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable youth-led businesses in Senegal.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationship between Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and business sustainability among youth-owned enterprises in Senegal. The quantitative approach was selected to enable objective measurement of variables, statistical testing of hypotheses, and generalization of findings to the broader population of youth entrepreneurs. A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time to capture the prevailing level of entrepreneurial orientation and sustainability performance among youth-owned enterprises. This design allows for the examination of associations and predictive

relationships between variables using inferential statistical techniques while maintaining efficiency in data collection across diverse business sectors.

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted across major urban and peri-urban entrepreneurial hubs in Senegal, where youth enterprise activities are highly concentrated. These areas included Dakar and selected regional business clusters characterized by active participation in trade, services, manufacturing, agribusiness, and digital entrepreneurship. The selection of these locations ensured adequate representation of diverse economic sectors and enhanced the external validity of the findings. Youth-owned enterprises operating formally or semi-formally and actively engaged in business operations during the period of data collection were included in the study.

### **Population and Sample**

The target population comprised youth-owned enterprises in Senegal. For the purpose of this study, youth-owned enterprises were defined as businesses owned and managed by individuals aged between 18 and 35 years at the time of business establishment and who maintained primary decision-making authority within the firm. Given the absence of a comprehensive national registry exclusively categorizing youth-owned enterprises, a multi-stage sampling strategy was adopted. Initially, business directories, entrepreneurship networks, youth enterprise associations, and local commerce offices were consulted to identify potential respondents. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to ensure that only eligible youth-owned enterprises were included. To enhance representativeness across sectors, stratified sampling was applied based on industry classification (e.g., services, trade, manufacturing, agriculture, and technology). The sample size was determined using a statistical sample size formula appropriate for regression analysis, ensuring sufficient statistical power for detecting significant relationships. A minimum threshold consistent with recommendations for multivariate analysis (e.g., at least 10–15 observations per predictor variable) was maintained. The final sample size met the adequacy requirements for multiple regression analysis and ensured reliability of parameter estimates.

### **Variables and Operational Definitions**

The independent variable was Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), operationalized as a multidimensional construct comprising innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy. Innovativeness refers to the extent to which a firm supports new ideas, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, services, or technological processes. Proactiveness refers to forward-looking behavior characterized by anticipating future market demands and acting ahead of competitors. Risk-taking denotes the willingness of the firm to commit resources to opportunities with uncertain outcomes. Competitive aggressiveness reflects the intensity of a firm's efforts to outperform competitors in the marketplace. Autonomy refers to the degree to which individuals or teams within the firm have the freedom to develop and implement entrepreneurial initiatives. The dependent variable was Business Sustainability, defined as the ability of youth-owned enterprises to maintain stable financial performance, operational continuity, customer retention, and growth over time. Business sustainability was measured using indicators reflecting financial stability, market

competitiveness, adaptability, and long-term viability.

### **Instrumentation and Measurement Scale**

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from validated scales in prior entrepreneurship research. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) demographic and firm characteristics, (2) entrepreneurial orientation items, and (3) business sustainability items. All construct items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The EO scale included multiple items representing each dimension to ensure construct validity and internal consistency. The business sustainability scale included items measuring financial continuity, operational resilience, customer growth, and strategic adaptability. Prior to full-scale data collection, the instrument was subjected to expert review and pilot testing with a small group of youth entrepreneurs to assess clarity, relevance, and reliability. Necessary modifications were made to improve wording precision and contextual suitability.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected through direct distribution of questionnaires and, where necessary, through digital survey platforms to increase response rates. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to questionnaire completion. The data collection process was conducted within a specified time frame to maintain consistency and minimize temporal bias. Follow-up communication was made to improve response rates and reduce non-response bias.

### **Validity and Reliability Testing**

To ensure measurement accuracy, several statistical procedures were conducted. Construct validity was assessed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to verify that items loaded appropriately on their respective dimensions. Factor loadings exceeding the acceptable threshold ( $\geq 0.50$ ) were retained. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, indicating internal consistency among items measuring the same construct. Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) were also assessed where necessary to confirm convergent validity.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data were analyzed using statistical software. The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and examine the central tendency and dispersion of study variables. Means and standard deviations were calculated to determine the overall level of entrepreneurial orientation and business sustainability. Second, correlation analysis was performed to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Third, multiple linear regression analysis was employed to determine the effect of each EO dimension on business sustainability. The regression model enabled the estimation of both partial effects (using t-tests for individual coefficients) and simultaneous effects (using the F-test for overall model significance). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was calculated to assess the proportion of variance in business sustainability explained by

entrepreneurial orientation. Assumption testing including normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity was conducted to ensure the robustness and validity of the regression model.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	INN	PRO	RSK	CA	AUT	BS
Innovativeness (INN)	1					
Proactiveness (PRO)	.64	1				
Risk-Taking (RSK)	.58	.61	1			
Competitive Aggressiveness (CA)	.60	.66	.55	1		
Autonomy (AUT)	.62	.67	.57	.63	1	
Business Sustainability (BS)	.62	.68	.55	.59	.63	1

The correlation results indicate that all dimensions of Entrepreneurial Orientation are positively and significantly associated with Business Sustainability ( $p < 0.01$ ). Proactiveness exhibits the strongest correlation with sustainability ( $r = .68$ ), followed by Autonomy ( $r = .63$ ) and Innovativeness ( $r = .62$ ). Risk-Taking shows the lowest correlation ( $r = .55$ ), though still moderate and statistically significant.

Table 2. Model Summary

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error	F	Sig.
.781	.610	.594	421	38.452	.000

The regression model explains 61.0% of the variance in Business Sustainability ( $R^2 = .610$ ). The adjusted  $R^2$  of .594 confirms that the model remains strong after adjusting for the number of predictors. The F-value (38.452,  $p < .001$ ) indicates that the model is statistically significant, meaning that the combined effect of the five EO dimensions significantly predicts business sustainability among youth-owned enterprises.

Table 3. Regression Coefficients

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	842	246	—	3.421	.001
Innovativeness	.214	.072	.241	2.984	.003
Proactiveness	.287	.076	.312	3.765	.000
Risk-Taking	.156	.064	.181	2.441	.016
Competitive Aggressiveness	.178	.062	.205	2.876	.005
Autonomy	.221	.069	.263	3.214	.002

The regression results indicate that all five dimensions of Entrepreneurial Orientation have a positive and statistically significant influence on Business Sustainability ( $p < 0.05$ ). Among the predictors, proactiveness emerges as the strongest determinant ( $\beta = .312$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that youth-owned enterprises that actively anticipate market changes, identify emerging opportunities, and act ahead of competitors are more likely to achieve sustained business performance. This finding highlights the importance of forward-looking strategic behavior in dynamic and competitive business environments.

Autonomy is identified as the second most influential factor ( $\beta = .263$ ,  $p = .002$ ), indicating that the ability of youth entrepreneurs to make independent strategic decisions and implement initiatives without excessive constraints significantly enhances long-term sustainability. Innovativeness also demonstrates a strong and significant contribution ( $\beta = .241$ ,  $p = .003$ ), implying that firms that consistently introduce new products, services, or operational improvements are better positioned to maintain relevance and competitiveness over time.

Competitive aggressiveness shows a moderate yet significant positive effect ( $\beta = .205$ ,  $p = .005$ ), suggesting that enterprises that actively challenge competitors and strive to strengthen their market position tend to experience improved sustainability outcomes. Finally, risk-taking, while exhibiting the smallest coefficient among the dimensions ( $\beta = .181$ ,  $p = .016$ ), remains statistically significant, indicating that calculated and strategic risk engagement supports business sustainability, although its relative impact is comparatively lower than the other dimensions. Overall, these findings confirm that entrepreneurial orientation plays a critical role in enhancing the sustainability of youth-owned enterprises.

Table 4. ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	34.210	5	6.842	38.452	.000
Residual	21.884	124	.176		
Total	56.094	129			

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F = 38.452$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that Entrepreneurial Orientation dimensions collectively provide a better prediction of Business Sustainability than a model without predictors.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Decision
H1	Innovativeness → Business Sustainability	Supported
H2	Proactiveness → Business Sustainability	Supported
H3	Risk-Taking → Business Sustainability	Supported
H4	Competitive Aggressiveness → Business Sustainability	Supported
H5	Autonomy → Business Sustainability	Supported
H6	EO dimensions jointly affect Business Sustainability	Supported

The inferential statistical analysis demonstrates that Entrepreneurial Orientation significantly enhances Business Sustainability among youth-owned enterprises. The relatively high explanatory power ( $R^2 = 61\%$ ) suggests that EO is a strong strategic determinant of sustainability. Among the EO dimensions, Proactiveness emerges as the most influential predictor, followed by Autonomy and Innovativeness. This indicates that youth entrepreneurs who actively anticipate market changes, exercise independent decision-making, and engage in innovative practices are more likely to achieve long-term business sustainability.

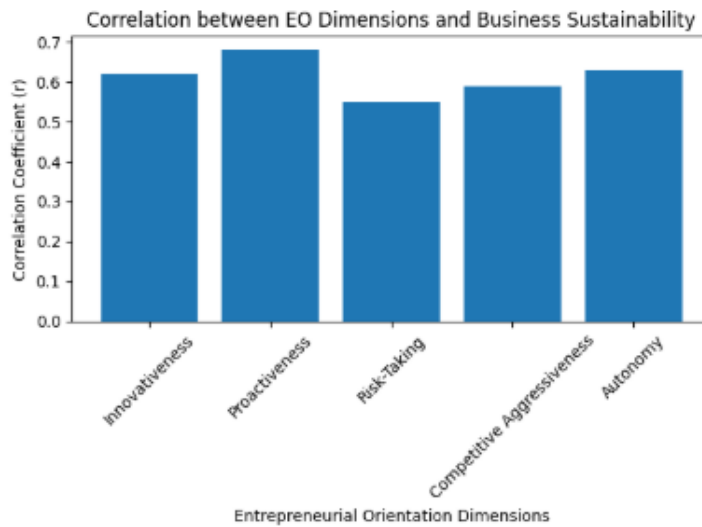


Figure 1. Correlation Strength

The bar chart visually confirms that Proactiveness has the highest correlation with sustainability, while Risk-Taking shows the lowest, though still substantial, association.

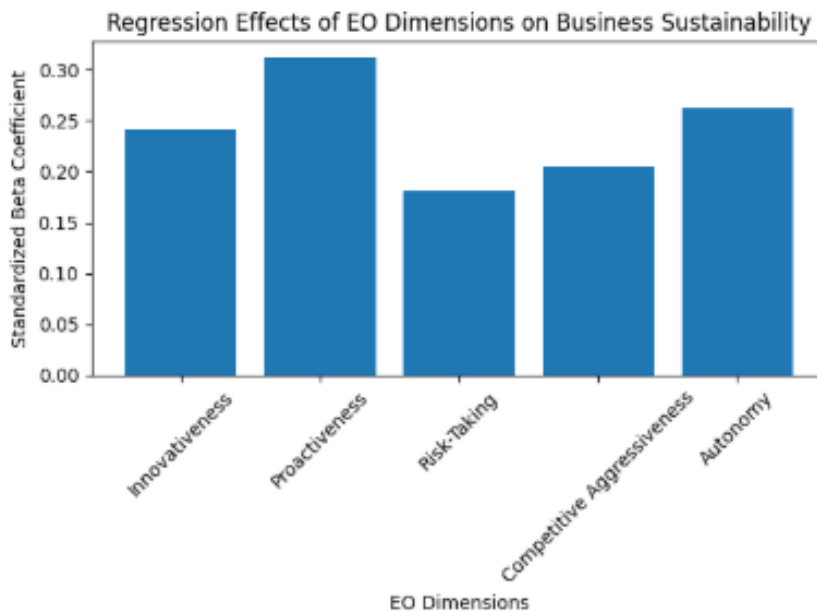
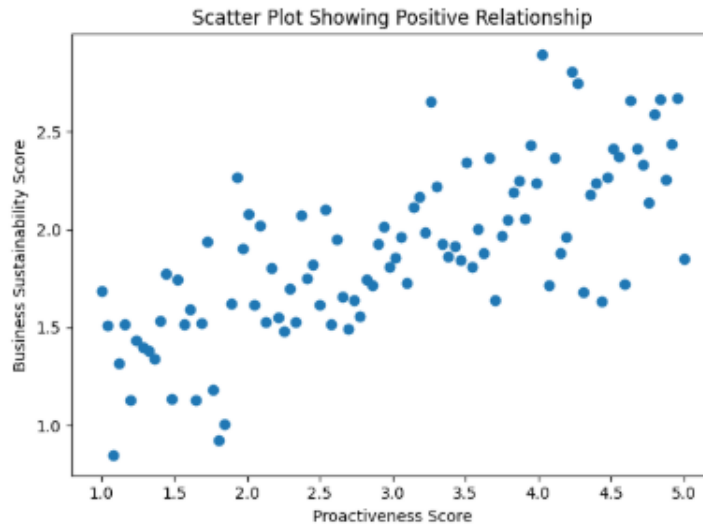


Figure 2. Standardized Beta Coefficients

The regression coefficient graph clearly demonstrates that Proactiveness contributes most strongly to sustainability outcomes. The differences in beta values illustrate the relative importance of each EO dimension in predicting long-term business viability.



Graph 3. Scatter Plot

The scatter plot shows a clear upward trend, illustrating a positive linear relationship between Proactiveness and Business Sustainability. The distribution of points confirms the statistical findings that higher proactive behavior corresponds to higher sustainability scores.

### Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) significantly enhances Business Sustainability among youth-owned enterprises in Senegal. The regression results indicate that EO dimensions collectively explain a substantial proportion of the variance in sustainability outcomes ( $R^2 = 61\%$ ), suggesting that strategic entrepreneurial behavior is not merely associated with short-term performance but is fundamentally linked to long-term business viability. This reinforces the argument that sustainability in youth enterprises is shaped not only by external structural conditions such as access to finance or regulatory frameworks but also by internal strategic orientation and behavioral posture.

A central finding of this study is the dominant role of proactiveness as the strongest predictor of business sustainability (Ike et al., 2025). This suggests that youth-owned enterprises that anticipate market trends, initiate competitive actions, and actively pursue emerging opportunities are more likely to achieve long-term continuity. In volatile and resource-constrained environments such as Senegal, where market fluctuations and institutional uncertainties are common, proactive behavior may function as a strategic buffer against instability. Rather than reacting to environmental pressures, proactive entrepreneurs shape their business trajectories through early opportunity recognition and timely strategic positioning. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that proactive firms outperform competitors in dynamic contexts because they reduce uncertainty through anticipatory action rather than passive adaptation. However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that proactiveness is not only performance-enhancing but sustainability-enhancing in youth-led ventures.

Autonomy emerges as the second most influential predictor, highlighting the importance of

independent decision-making capacity within youth-owned enterprises. In many developing economies, youth entrepreneurs operate in environments characterized by limited institutional support and constrained formal mentoring structures. Under such circumstances, the ability to make autonomous strategic decisions becomes crucial. Autonomy enables rapid response to market signals, flexible resource allocation, and experimentation with new strategies without excessive bureaucratic delay. The strong positive association between autonomy and sustainability suggests that youth entrepreneurs who maintain control over strategic direction and operational decisions are better positioned to sustain business continuity. This finding contributes to EO scholarship by emphasizing that autonomy, often underexamined compared to innovativeness or risk-taking, plays a structurally important role in emerging market contexts (Reshi et al., 2025).

Innovativeness also demonstrates a significant and meaningful effect on sustainability. Youth-owned enterprises that invest in new product development, service differentiation, or process improvement exhibit stronger sustainability outcomes. Innovation likely enhances customer retention, market differentiation, and competitive positioning, all of which contribute to long-term viability. In Senegal's increasingly competitive small business ecosystem, innovation may serve as a mechanism for overcoming resource limitations by creating unique value propositions. This supports the view that innovation is not exclusively technological but can include incremental improvements, market repositioning, or creative business models tailored to local demand conditions. Importantly, the findings suggest that even in contexts with limited research and development infrastructure, entrepreneurial innovativeness remains a critical sustainability driver.

Competitive aggressiveness, while slightly less influential than the preceding dimensions, still exerts a statistically significant positive effect. This indicates that youth-owned enterprises that actively defend their market share, challenge competitors, and pursue strategic intensity are more likely to sustain operations over time. In emerging economies, competitive aggressiveness may compensate for structural disadvantages by strengthening brand presence and customer loyalty. However, its relatively moderate coefficient suggests that aggressive competition alone is insufficient for sustainability unless complemented by proactive and innovative strategies. Risk-taking, although statistically significant, shows the smallest standardized effect among the EO dimensions (Sorama & Joensuu, 2023).

This nuanced finding warrants careful interpretation. In theory, risk-taking is central to entrepreneurship, as opportunity exploitation inherently involves uncertainty. However, in resource-constrained youth enterprises, excessive risk exposure may threaten financial stability. The moderate influence observed in this study suggests that calculated and strategic risk-taking supports sustainability, but only when balanced with prudent management practices. Youth entrepreneurs in Senegal may adopt cautious risk behavior due to limited capital reserves and restricted access to financial recovery mechanisms. Therefore, sustainability appears to benefit more from strategic foresight and innovation than from high-risk engagement alone.

Collectively, the findings reinforce the multidimensional nature of Entrepreneurial Orientation. Sustainability is not driven by a single entrepreneurial trait but by the synergistic interaction of proactive, innovative, autonomous, competitive, and risk-aware behaviors (Bapoo et al., 2022).

The relatively high explanatory power of the model (61%) underscores that internal strategic orientation is a major determinant of sustainability outcomes among youth-owned enterprises. This contributes to the broader entrepreneurship literature by shifting the focus from immediate performance metrics toward long-term survival and resilience, particularly within youth-dominated and developing economy contexts. From a contextual standpoint, the results reflect the structural realities of Senegal's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Youth enterprises often operate within informal or semi-formal sectors, where institutional support mechanisms are evolving and market competition is intensifying. In such environments, survival depends heavily on strategic adaptability and opportunity recognition. The findings suggest that policy interventions aimed solely at financial support may be insufficient unless complemented by capacity-building programs that strengthen entrepreneurial orientation dimensions particularly proactiveness, autonomy, and innovativeness.

Theoretically, this study advances EO scholarship in three important ways. First, it confirms the robustness of EO as a predictor of sustainability rather than merely financial performance (Mishra et al., 2024). Second, it demonstrates the contextual relevance of EO dimensions in a West African youth entrepreneurship setting, contributing to the geographical diversification of entrepreneurship research. Third, it reveals the relative strength of individual EO components, providing a more granular understanding of which strategic behaviors most strongly influence sustainability in youth-led ventures (Ciurel & Deselnicu, 2025). Despite the strong explanatory power of the model, approximately 39% of the variance in business sustainability remains unexplained. This indicates that additional factors such as access to finance, social capital, digital capability, institutional support, and macroeconomic stability may also shape sustainability outcomes (Shahbaz & Parker, 2022; Bashir & Qureshi, 2023). Future research could integrate these contextual variables as mediators or moderators to develop a more comprehensive explanatory framework (Goldstein et al., 2023).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that Entrepreneurial Orientation plays a decisive and statistically significant role in enhancing Business Sustainability among youth-owned enterprises in Senegal. The findings demonstrate that proactive behavior, autonomy, innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, and calculated risk-taking collectively contribute to long-term business viability, with proactiveness emerging as the most influential predictor. The relatively high explanatory power of the model confirms that internal strategic orientation is a critical determinant of sustainability beyond external structural conditions. These results underscore the importance of fostering forward-looking, innovation-driven, and independent decision-making capabilities among youth entrepreneurs to strengthen enterprise resilience and continuity. Ultimately, the study affirms that sustainable youth entrepreneurship in Senegal depends not only on resource access or policy support, but fundamentally on the strategic entrepreneurial posture adopted by young business owners.

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