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Organizational Transparency and Knowledge Management Infrastructure as Drivers of Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Private HEIs: A Prisma-Based Systematic Review

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Abstract

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) faced increasing competition for students, faculty, funding, and reputation. This situation made sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) a critical strategic issue. Organizational transparency (OT) and knowledge management infrastructure (KMI) were frequently identified as key governance and capability factors, but their combined influence on SCA had not been systematically reviewed. This study aimed to systematically review recent literature on how organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure were defined, implemented, and linked to sustainable competitive advantage in private higher education institutions. A systematic literature review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Database searches were completed in December 2025 using Google Scholar, MDPI, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025 were identified. The screening process involved duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 38 studies met the criteria and were included in the review. No formal risk-of-bias assessment was applied. A narrative synthesis approach was used to analyze and integrate findings across studies. Most reviewed studies reported that organizational transparency strengthened trust, accountability, credibility, and stakeholder confidence when information disclosure was accurate, timely, and relevant. Several studies also noted that excessive or poorly managed transparency reduced decision quality and weakened institutional trust. Regarding KMI, the majority of studies emphasized the importance of technological, structural, and cultural infrastructures in supporting knowledge creation, sharing, and utilization. The SECI model was frequently identified as an effective framework for transforming tacit and explicit knowledge into strategic institutional capabilities. Overall, the evidence indicated that institutions with stronger OT and KMI practices demonstrated higher levels of innovation, adaptability, governance quality, and organizational resilience.

Keywords: *Organizational Transparency, Systematic Literature Review, Davao City*

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Introduction

The concept of sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) is a key indicator of long-term organizational success in both corporate organizations and higher education institutions (HEIs). In a knowledge-driven economy, private HEIs compete for student enrollment, qualified faculty, research funding, partnerships, and institutional reputation. Unlike short-term performance, SCA refers to an institution's ability to sustain resilience, adaptability, and credibility over time. For private HEIs, this advantage increasingly depends on effective knowledge management and transparent governance practices.

Organizational transparency (OT) refers to the open disclosure of accurate, timely, and relevant information to stakeholders. In higher education, transparency is associated with

accountability, trust, governance quality, and institutional legitimacy. Knowledge management infrastructure (KMI) consists of the technological, structural, and cultural systems that support knowledge creation, sharing, and application. In HEIs, KMI facilitates collaboration, innovation in teaching and research, and the retention of institutional knowledge. Together, OT and KMI function as strategic resources that support long-term institutional performance.

The role of OT and KMI is supported by resource-based and knowledge-based perspectives. The resource-based view (RBV) explains SCA as a result of valuable and well-organized institutional resources, while the knowledge-based view (KBV) highlights knowledge as the most critical strategic asset in HEIs. The SECI model further explains how tacit and explicit knowledge are continuously converted through socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. Transparent practices support trust and knowledge sharing, while KMI enables knowledge to be transformed into institutional capabilities that sustain competitive advantage.

Despite increasing scholarly attention, research on OT, KMI, and SCA remains fragmented. Existing studies often examine these constructs separately or focus on limited outcomes such as trust or innovation. Findings also differ across national and institutional contexts, limiting generalizability to private HEIs. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic synthesis that integrates definitions, mechanisms, and empirical evidence across studies. Therefore, a systematic literature review is needed to consolidate current knowledge and clarify the strategic role of organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure in sustaining competitive advantage in private higher education institutions.

Research Questions

This systematic literature review aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How is organizational transparency (OT) defined and examined in the literature, and what outcomes are associated with it in higher education institutions?
2. How does knowledge management infrastructure (KMI), in terms of technology, structure, and culture, support innovation, collaboration, and long-term institutional resilience in higher education institutions?
3. How is sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) conceptualized in higher education research, and to what extent are organizational transparency (OT) and knowledge management infrastructure (KMI) identified as key predictors of SCA?

Methods

Protocol and Registration

This systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A review protocol was developed *a priori* to define the objectives, eligibility criteria, search strategy, screening procedures, and synthesis approach. However, the protocol was not registered in an external registry. No major deviations from the original protocol were made during the review process. Minor adjustments included refining exclusion criteria during full-text screening to improve conceptual relevance and clarity.

Search Strategy

A systematic search of the literature was conducted in December 2025 using four electronic databases: Google Scholar, MDPI, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. These databases were selected to capture both mainstream peer-reviewed journals and discipline-specific studies relevant to higher education research. Google Scholar and ResearchGate were included to ensure broader coverage of education and management studies that may not be indexed consistently in subscription-based databases, particularly studies from developing and emerging higher education systems.

Standard databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC were not used due to limited institutional access at the time of the review. To reduce potential bias, database-specific filters and strict inclusion criteria were applied consistently across all searched platforms.

The following Boolean search string was used across all databases, with minor syntax adjustments to fit database requirements:

> ("organizational transparency" OR "organizational openness") AND ("knowledge management infrastructure" OR "knowledge management systems") AND ("sustainable competitive advantage" OR "competitive advantage") AND ("higher education institution" OR "university" OR "college")

Search filters were applied to limit results to peer-reviewed journal articles, written in English, published between 2021 and 2025, and available in full text. Searches were conducted at the title, abstract, and keyword levels where database functionality allowed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025, written in English, and accessible in full-text. Studies were included if they examined organizational transparency, knowledge management infrastructure, sustainable competitive advantage, or their relationships within higher education institutions. Both empirical and conceptual studies were considered to capture a broad understanding of the topic.

The exclusion criteria eliminated studies published before 2021, non-English publications, gray literature and unpublished manuscripts. Studies conducted outside higher education contexts were excluded. Duplicate records and articles that could not be retrieved in full-text were also removed.

Screening Process

The screening process followed the PRISMA 2020 framework and was conducted by a single reviewer. All records identified from the database searches were imported into Microsoft Excel for organization and screening. Duplicate records were identified and removed before screening.

Title and abstract screening was conducted independently by the reviewer based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Records that were clearly irrelevant or inaccessible in full text were excluded at this stage. Full-text screening was then performed to assess eligibility in detail.

The initial database search identified 144 records. After removing 32 duplicate records, 112 articles were screened at the title and abstract level. Of these, 35 reports could not be retrieved in full text and were classified as "reports not retrieved." Seventy-seven full-text

articles were assessed for eligibility, and 39 articles were excluded for the following primary reasons: irrelevance to higher education context (n=15), lack of focus on OT, KMI, or SCA (n=13), conceptual mismatch with review objectives (n=7), and non-peer-reviewed publication status identified at full-text review (n=4). A total of 38 studies were included in the final synthesis.

PRISMA Flow Diagram

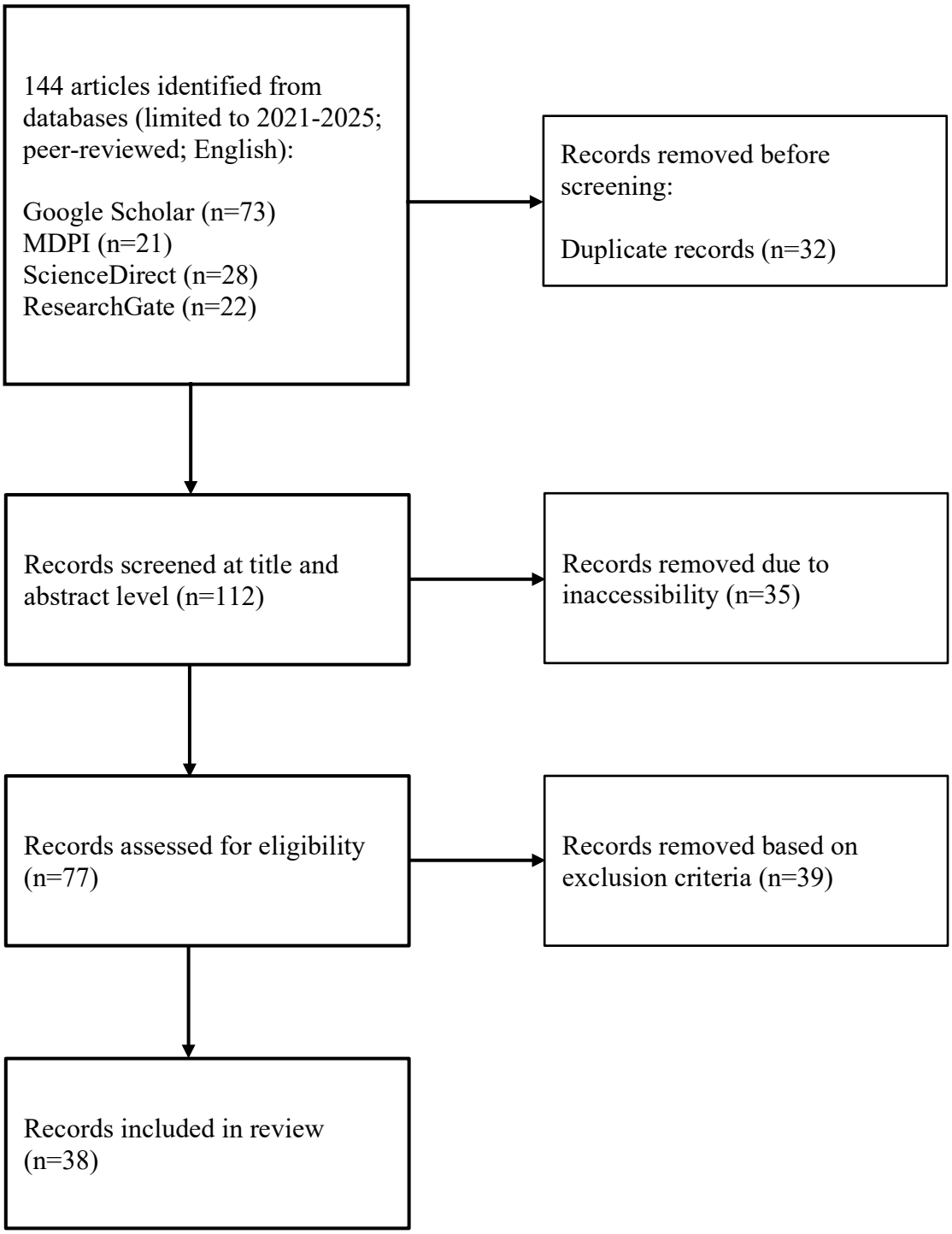

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Design

Quality Appraisal and Risk of Bias

A quality appraisal was conducted for all included studies using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklists, selected based on the methodological design of each study. The appraisal assessed key criteria such as clarity of objectives, methodological rigor, data collection procedures, and validity of conclusions.

Quality appraisal was performed by a single reviewer and recorded using Microsoft Excel. Studies that failed to meet minimum quality thresholds or demonstrated serious methodological weaknesses were excluded during the eligibility stage. The results of the quality appraisal informed the synthesis by prioritizing higher-quality evidence in the interpretation of findings.

Data Extraction

Data extraction was conducted using a structured extraction template developed in Microsoft Excel. The template was pilot-tested on a small subset of studies and refined before full extraction. The following data were extracted from each included study: author and year published, country or region, sample characteristics, definitions and operationalization of organizational transparency, knowledge management infrastructure, and sustainable competitive advantage, theoretical frameworks used, key findings, and reported limitations.

All data extraction was conducted by the same reviewer to ensure consistency. Extracted data were reviewed multiple times to minimize errors and ensure accuracy.

RESULTS

Source	Country	Population	Key Findings
Albu and Christensen (2024)	-	Literature Review	The study highlights that transparency in the digital era cannot be reduced to mere disclosure of information; rather, it functions as a performative practice, where digital infrastructures actively shape what is visible, how it is interpreted, and who gains access to it.
Alfawaire and Atan (2021)	Jordan	HEIs	The authors provided empirical evidence which revealed that knowledge management processes significantly enhance sustainable competitive advantage, with organizational innovation acting as a partial mediator in this relationship.
Artyukhova et al. (2024)	Ukraine	HEIs	Universities with stronger transparency profiles foster external trust, improve internal decision-making, and enhance their ability to attract students, funding, and partnerships.
Asbari and Asbari (2025)	Indonesia	HEI Students	The SECI model provides a practical mechanism for facilitating knowledge creation and transfer in HEIs by converting tacit into explicit knowledge and embedding it into institutional practices
Awulor et al. (2022)	Nigeria	HEI Decision-makers	The study argues that effective organizational decision-making

			depends on the accuracy and timeliness of data embedded within management information systems.
Bayraktar et al. (2025)	-	Literature Review	Their proposed conceptual framework for feedback in educational settings emphasize accuracy and reliability of information as it reinforces trust between educators and students.
Camboni and Porcellacchia (2023)	-	Literature Review	Disseminating irrelevant information leads to information waste, which undermines organizational transparency and weakens stakeholder trust.
Chalab and Nan (2023)	Iraq	HEIs	Strategic clarity significantly predicts improvisational behaviors such as innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking, all of which are essential for institutional competitiveness.
Dahri et al. (2024)	Malaysia and Pakistan	HEIs	Accuracy of AI-generated information significantly influences student trust, satisfaction, and performance.
Dneprovskaya and Shevtsova (2023)	Russia	HEI Staff and Administrators	KM in higher education is best conceptualized through the SECI model, with knowledge flows moving back and forth like waves rather than following a rigid sequence.
Fahn and Zanarone (2021)	-	Literature Review	Organizational transparency influences relational contracts by fostering accountability and credibility, thereby eliciting trust and higher effort. However, it also has a potential downside by creating social comparisons that undermine satisfaction and profitability.
Feng (2024)	China	HEIs	Improved financial information disclosure directly enhances public trust and governance efficiency, positioning HEIs more competitively in the higher education market.
Fitrios et al. (2022)	Indonesia	HEIs	IT capability and user competence significantly improve the quality of accounting information systems, which in turn produces more timely accounting information for decision makers in HEIs
Galgotia and Lakshmi (2022)	India	HEIs	Successful KM implementation in HEIs depends on integrating technology, structure, and culture.
Giordano and Victoravich (2024)	United States	HEI Administrators	Irrelevant information reduces skepticism and weakens judgment, consistent with the dilution effect.
Gonsalves and Lin (2025)	United Kingdom	HEIs	UK HEIs often equate transparency with making information clear and

			available, but this limited approach undermines its potential to build stakeholder trust and institutional competitiveness
Grisales and Acevedo (2022)	Colombia	HEIs	The study demonstrated that human, structural, and relational capital are fundamental intangible assets that foster innovation, enhance institutional reputation, and build stakeholder trust. These factors together drive sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) in higher education institutions.
Guzik et al. (2025)	Poland	HEIs	The study found that peer learning, collaborative projects, and simulations facilitate socialization and externalization, while digital platforms support combination and internalization, embedding knowledge-sharing into HEI culture.
Hidayat and Sensuse (2022)	Indonesia	HEIs	IT infrastructure and KM systems are essential components for achieving institutional adaptability and smart campus indicators.
Khilji (2022)	Pakistan	University Students	Virtual Learning Environments, when supported by KM practices, significantly enhance cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement among students.
Král and Schnackenberg (2024)	-	Literature Review	Transparency is not a linear or universally positive concept. It is shaped by institutional, societal, and leadership forces that can create both positive and negative outcomes.
Kumari et al. (2023)	India	HEI Faculty	Organizational culture and collegiality significantly enhance trust, which in turn predicts readiness to adopt KM practices, while top management support alone is insufficient.
Kvantaliani (2022)	Europe	HEIs	The study demonstrates that student attraction and retention practices are vital for HEIs' sustainable competitive advantage.
Lingappan (2024)	India	HEI Staff and Administrators	Knowledge management must be understood as a strategic, future-oriented process integrated into institutional planning, not merely a support function
Mahdi and Nassar (2021)	-	Literature Review	KM processes, when strategically supported, transform human and social capital into dynamic organizational capabilities that sustain resilience and competitiveness.

Norval et al. (2022)	United Kingdom	HEI Stakeholders	The study supports the claim that disclosure is not just a legal requirement but a strategic enabler of organizational transparency and long-term competitiveness.
Pattaro et al., (2022)	Netherlands, Portugal, Italy	HEIs	The authors support the argument that clarity and structured dissemination are essential elements of organizational transparency that directly contribute to institutional competitiveness.
Phiri et al. (2024)	Africa	HEIs	The study emphasizes that HEIs must align their internal strengths with external opportunities and threats to sustain resilience and long-term competitiveness.
Riccio et al. (2022)	Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Oceania	HEIs	The study found that SECI-driven processes, when supported by technological, structural, and cultural infrastructures, become sources of long-term differentiation and resilience.
Rukmana and Widhianto (2023)	Indonesia	HEI Staff and Administrators	Implementing a KMS through the SECI model supports strategic development and formalizes knowledge-sharing procedures in private universities
Saker (2024)	-	Literature Review	The systematic literature review highlights that a clear and strategic communication plan reduces the risks of irrelevant information and enhances organizational transparency.
Santos et al. (2024)	Brazil	HEI Staff and Administrators	Sustainable knowledge management in HEIs depends on cultural enablers such as trust, rewards, leadership, and communities of practice, which collectively foster collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing.
Sitiari et al. (2024)	Indonesia	HEIs	Knowledge management significantly influences sustainable competitive advantage, and this relationship is strengthened by business strategy as a mediator.
Sivagnanam et al. (2022)	India	HEI Faculty	Robust knowledge management infrastructure and system quality amplify knowledge management processes, strengthen employee commitment and performance, and enable HEIs to maintain continuity and resilience during crises.
Sugianto et al. (2021)	Indonesia	HEIs	KM systems such as expertise search mechanisms enhance institutional capability by improving knowledge

			dissemination, decision-making, and academic branding, with iterative system design ensuring adaptability and accessibility.
Trunina et al. (2021)	Russia	HEI Administrators	Academic programs should be managed as strategic products, with transparency serving as a central mechanism to build institutional credibility and strengthen competitive advantage
Tullio and Torre (2022)	Italy	HEIs	Timeliness through online dissemination enhances transparency but can undermine institutional credibility if it weakens formal assurance mechanisms.
Wu (2025)	China	HEI Administrators	Digital knowledge management structured on the SECI framework improved administrative efficiency, institutional agility, and competitiveness of Chinese HEIs in global education markets.

Table 1. Summary of Literature

As shown in Table 1, a total of 38 studies were included in the review, consisting of empirical studies and literature reviews conducted across diverse national and institutional contexts. The studies examined organizational transparency, knowledge management infrastructure, and sustainable competitive advantage in higher education institutions using qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, and conceptual approaches. Due to heterogeneity of research designs, samples, measurement tools, and outcomes, the findings were synthesized thematically.

Discussion

Organizational Transparency as a Strategic Driver of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The reviewed literature consistently showed that organizational transparency is a multidimensional governance mechanism that influences sustainable competitive advantage by shaping trust, accountability, and institutional credibility. Transparency was not treated as a simple act of disclosure but as a strategic practice shaped by institutional, societal, leadership, and digital forces (Král & Schnackenberg, 2024; Albu & Christensen, 2024). When effectively implemented, transparency strengthened governance quality, improved decision-making, and enhanced stakeholder confidence, all of which are essential for long-term competitiveness in higher education institutions (HEIs).

Several studies emphasized that the quality of transparency depends on how information is disclosed (Fahn & Zanarone, 2021). Meaningful disclosure enhanced usability, comprehension, and stakeholder trust, thereby supporting institutional legitimacy and competitive positioning (Norval et al., 2022). In contrast, fragmented, excessive, or poorly structured information weakened access and reduced transparency outcomes, as observed in HEIs across the Netherlands, Portugal, and Italy (Pattaro et al., 2022). These findings indicate that transparency contributes to SCA only when disclosure is strategically designed and aligned with stakeholder needs.

Clarity, accuracy, timeliness, and relevance emerged as critical dimensions of effective transparency. Clear strategic roles and responsibilities strengthened institutional alignment and innovation-related behaviors, which are central to maintaining competitiveness in dynamic environments (Chalab & Nan, 2023; Gonsalves & Lin, 2025). Accurate and reliable information embedded in management and feedback systems enhanced trust and decision quality, reinforcing institutional credibility and competitive advantage (Awulor et al., 2022; Bayraktar et al., 2025; Dahri et al., 2024).

Moveover, timely disclosure improved responsiveness and efficiency, but excessive reliance on rapid digital dissemination risked weakening formal assurance mechanisms if not carefully managed (Fitrios et al., 2022; Tullio & Torre, 2022). Finally, several studies cautioned that irrelevant information undermined judgment and stakeholder trust, potentially eroding competitive advantage unless mitigated through clear communication strategies (Camboni & Porcellacchia, 2023; Giordano & Victoravich, 2024; Saker, 2024).

Knowledge Management Infrastructure as a Foundation for Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The literature strongly supported knowledge management infrastructure (KMI) as a core determinant of sustainable competitive advantage in higher education institutions. Knowledge management was consistently framed as a strategic, future-oriented process rather than a support activity, with competitiveness emerging from how effectively institutions convert knowledge into institutional capabilities (Lingappan, 2024; Galgotia & Lakshmi, 2022).

The SECI model provided a dominant analytical framework for explaining how knowledge creation and transfer contribute to competitiveness. Studies emphasized that effective knowledge flows occur through continuous interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, supported by appropriate infrastructure (Dneprovskaya & Shevtsova, 2023; Asbari & Asbari, 2025). When knowledge management systems were aligned with the SECI cycle, institutions were better able to formalize knowledge-sharing practices and support strategic development (Rukmana & Widhianto, 2023).

Technological infrastructure played a critical role in enabling knowledge accessibility, institutional adaptability, and learning outcomes. Digital platforms, smart campus systems, and KM-supported learning environments strengthened institutional agility and student engagement, thereby reinforcing competitive positioning (Hidayat & Sensuse, 2022; Khilji, 2022). Structural infrastructure further enhanced resilience by embedding KM processes into organizational routines, decision-making, and crisis response mechanisms (Sivagnanam et al., 2022; Sugianto et al., 2021). These structural elements ensured continuity, improved performance, and preserved institutional knowledge, all of which supported long-term competitiveness.

Cultural infrastructure emerged as a decisive factor in translating KM systems into sustainable advantage. Trust, collegiality, leadership support, and communities of practice fostered knowledge-sharing behaviors that enabled innovation and collaboration (Santos et al., 2024; Kumari et al., 2023). Without cultural alignment, even advanced KM technologies failed to generate competitive benefits. Overall, the evidence showed that sustainable competitive advantage arises when technological, structural, and cultural KM infrastructures are jointly developed and strategically integrated.

Interaction of Organizational Transparency and Knowledge Management Infrastructure in Achieving Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Several studies indicated that organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure are interdependent drivers of sustainable competitive advantage. Transparent governance practices improved the quality, credibility, and usability of institutional knowledge, while robust KM systems enhanced the accuracy and strategic value of disclosed information. This interaction can strengthen institutional trust, student attraction, and retention practices, which are essential for long-term competitiveness (Kvantaliani, 2022).

Empirical evidence showed that transparency directly enhanced public trust, governance efficiency, and institutional credibility, positioning HEIs more competitively in national and global education markets (Trunina et al., 2021; Feng, 2024; Artyukhova et al., 2024). At the same time, knowledge management processes transformed human, structural, and relational capital into dynamic capabilities that sustained resilience and competitive advantage (Mahdi & Nassar, 2021; Grisales & Acevedo, 2022).

Studies further demonstrated that KM practices strengthened competitive advantage through mediating mechanisms such as innovation and business strategy (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021; Sitiari et al., 2024). SECI-driven processes embedded knowledge-sharing into institutional culture and administrative systems, enabling HEIs to achieve differentiation, agility, and global competitiveness (Guzik et al., 2025; Wu, 2025; Riccio et al., 2022).

Overall, the synthesis showed that sustainable competitive advantage in higher education institutions is most effectively achieved when organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure are strategically aligned (Phiri et al., 2024). Transparency fosters trust and governance quality, while KM infrastructure operationalizes knowledge into institutional capabilities, together enabling HEIs to sustain long-term competitiveness across diverse contexts.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesized recent empirical and conceptual studies to explain how organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure jointly contribute to sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) in private higher education institutions. The main contribution of this review lies in integrating these two constructs into a single explanatory framework, showing that transparency strengthens governance and trust, while knowledge management infrastructure transforms information and expertise into institutional capabilities that sustain competitiveness over time.

The evidence reviewed was generally strong and consistent in showing that organizational transparency positively influences trust, accountability, governance quality, and institutional credibility when information is clear, accurate, timely, and relevant. Across different higher education contexts, transparency supported better decision-making and stakeholder confidence, which are core elements of SCA. However, the findings also consistently warned that excessive, fragmented, or irrelevant disclosure reduced information usability and weakened trust, indicating that transparency contributes to SCA only when it is strategically managed rather than applied indiscriminately.

The review further demonstrated that knowledge management infrastructure plays a foundational role in sustaining competitive advantage. Strong evidence showed that technological, structural, and cultural infrastructures enabled knowledge creation, sharing, and application, which supported innovation, adaptability, and institutional resilience. The SECI

model emerged as a widely applied and effective framework for explaining knowledge flows and capability development. At the same time, the literature suggested that SECI-based systems may face context-specific limitations, particularly in private HEIs with limited resources, hierarchical cultures, or weak incentives for knowledge sharing, which may constrain full implementation.

Despite these contributions, several methodological limitations were identified. Most reviewed studies were cross-sectional, context-specific, and relied on self-reported data, limiting causal inference and generalizability. There was also limited longitudinal evidence examining how transparency and knowledge management jointly influence SCA over time, particularly in private higher education institutions. These limitations suggest that the conclusions, while well-supported, should be interpreted with caution.

Taken as a whole, this review confirmed that sustainable competitive advantage in private HEIs is most effectively achieved when organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure are strategically aligned. Transparency enhances trust and governance quality, while knowledge management infrastructure operationalizes knowledge into dynamic capabilities, together supporting long-term competitiveness.

Recommendation

Based on the synthesized findings, private higher education institutions should adopt organizational transparency as a strategic governance mechanism, not merely as a regulatory or compliance requirement. Institutions should focus on the quality of disclosure, ensuring that information is accurate, timely, relevant, and clearly structured. Clear communication frameworks should be used to minimize information overload and prevent the negative effects of excessive or irrelevant transparency on decision-making and stakeholder trust.

In line with the evidence, HEIs should invest in integrated knowledge management infrastructure. Technological systems should be supported by appropriate organizational structures and a strong knowledge-sharing culture. The SECI model may serve as a practical guide for designing KM systems, but institutional leaders should adapt it to their specific organizational context, resource capacity, and cultural conditions. Leadership support, trust-building mechanisms, and incentives are essential to ensure that KM practices translate into sustainable competitive advantage rather than remaining symbolic initiatives.

For future research, more empirical studies focusing specifically on private higher education institutions are needed. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies should examine the combined and dynamic effects of organizational transparency and knowledge management infrastructure on SCA over time. Future research should also explore mediating mechanisms such as innovation capability, strategic alignment, and stakeholder trust, as well as contextual factors that may limit or strengthen the effectiveness of SECI-based knowledge management systems in private HEIs.

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