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Competitive advantage versus cooperation in strategic management: a framework for success

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Abstract: Strategic management has traditionally emphasised competitive advantage as the cornerstone of firm success through frameworks such as Porter's positioning and the resource-based view (RBV). However, globalisation, digital transformation, and interfirm interdependencies have made cooperation an equally critical strategic logic. This conceptual paper addresses the gap in literature that treats these logics as mutually exclusive by proposing an integrated framework for achieving coopetitive advantage, the simultaneous pursuit of competition and cooperation. Drawing on RBV, dynamic capabilities theory, and coopetition grounded in game theory, the framework identifies drivers of competitive and cooperative advantage, contextual moderators, and strategic outcomes, including innovation, resilience, and value co-creation. The paper contributes theoretically by unifying fragmented perspectives and practically by offering guidance for managers operating in ecosystems, platform markets and global supply chains. It also outlines directions for empirical validation and contextual extension.

Keywords: alliance strategies; competitive advantage; cooperation; coopetition; dynamic capabilities; game theory; resource-based views; RBV; strategy; strategic alliance; strategic management; value co-creation.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The concept of competitive advantage has long served as the cornerstone of strategic management theory and practice. Foundational frameworks such as Porter's (1985) competitive forces model conceptualised strategy as driven primarily by industry structure and positioning, emphasisng rivalry, barriers to entry, and bargaining power as determinants of firm performance. This external focus evolved with the emergence of the resource-based view (RBV), which highlighted the importance of unique, valuable, rare,

inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources in sustaining competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney et al., 2021). More recently, RBV has been expanded to reflect the growing role of intangible resources, such as digital capabilities and data assets, in competitive differentiation (Mikalef et al., 2023).

To address critiques that RBV is overly static in turbulent markets, the dynamic capabilities theory (DCT) emerged, emphasisng a firm's ability to sense opportunities, seize them, and continuously reconfigure resources in response to environmental change (Teece, 2023; Zahra, 2022). Scholars increasingly note that dynamic capabilities are essential in markets shaped by rapid digital transformation, ecosystem interdependencies, and technological convergence (Wilden et al., 2023; Warner and Wäger, 2024).

While these perspectives have shaped decades of research, they largely advance competition-centric logics, encouraging firms to outperform rivals by leveraging proprietary resources or superior strategic positioning. However, modern markets – characterised by globalisation, platformisation, and systemic interdependence – challenge the assumption that competitive action alone can secure long-term success (Jacobides et al., 2018; Adner, 2017). Research shows that innovation and resilience increasingly emerge from collaboration among interdependent actors within ecosystems, supply networks, and cross-industry partnerships (Shipilov and Gawer, 2023; He et al., 2024).

This shift has amplified interest in collaborative strategies, including alliances, networks, and the concept of coopetition – the simultaneous pursuit of competition and cooperation among firms (Bouncken and Kraus, 2023; Ritala and Tidström, 2021). Recent studies highlight that coopetition helps firms access complementary resources, accelerate innovation, and manage environmental uncertainty, especially in high-tech, digital, and sustainability-oriented sectors (Wei et al., 2023; Lacoste, 2022). Yet despite this growing recognition, strategic management theory still lacks cohesive frameworks integrating these dual logics. Many models continue to treat competition and cooperation as mutually exclusive, creating a fragmented understanding of how they coexist and interact in practice (Bengtsson et al., 2023).

1.2 Problem statement

Although competitive advantage remains a central objective in strategic management, existing theoretical models provide limited insight into how firms balance the tension between competition and cooperation in dynamic environments. Much of the literature still privileges competitive positioning or internal resource development, while research on alliances and networks often emphasises cooperative benefits without fully addressing competitive risks and interdependencies (Dyer et al., 2018; Gulati et al., 2023).

This fragmentation is increasingly problematic as firms operate within ecosystems where collaboration with competitors, complementors, and platform leaders is essential for innovation and survival. Ecosystem-based competition requires firms not only to develop unique capabilities but also to participate in shared value creation processes, blurring the boundaries between rival and partner relationships (Shipilov and Gawer, 2023; Kapoor, 2023). Without an integrated framework, it remains unclear how organisations can simultaneously protect proprietary advantages while engaging in resource-sharing arrangements that enable adaptability and long-term resilience.

The absence of such integrative models is particularly acute in the digital economy, where coopetition and ecosystem alliances are becoming dominant organisational forms (Jacobides et al., 2018; Bouncken et al., 2023). As firms face increasing pressures from

technological disruption, regulatory shifts, and sustainability imperatives, understanding how competition and cooperation jointly shape strategic outcomes has become a critical theoretical and practical challenge.

1.3 Research questions

To address this gap, the following research questions guide this study:

1 How can firms simultaneously leverage competition and cooperation to achieve sustainable success in dynamic markets?

2 What conceptual framework best explains this duality and its implications for long-term strategic advantage?

1.4 Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework that integrates the dual logics of competitive advantage and cooperation within strategic management. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine the theoretical underpinnings of competition and cooperation in existing strategy literature.
- Propose an integrative model illustrating how these forces interact to shape sustainable advantage.
- Provide practical insights for strategic decision-making in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments.

1.5 Contribution

This paper offers two key contributions:

- Theoretical contribution: it combines competitive and cooperative logics into a unified conceptual framework, extending RBV and dynamic capabilities perspectives by incorporating insights from coopetition theory and ecosystem strategy (Adner, 2017; Ritala and Tidström, 2021). This integration advances strategic management theory beyond the traditional dichotomy of ‘compete or cooperate’.
- Practical contribution: the framework provides actionable guidelines for managers on when and how to compete versus cooperate, offering strategies for achieving resilience, innovation, and sustained performance in networked and digital markets.

2 Literature review

The literature on strategic management has bifurcated into two broad but increasingly interacting streams:

1 theories of competitive advantage that foreground firm level resources and positioning

2 studies of cooperation that examine interfirm alliances, networks and coopetitive arrangements.

Recent scholarship (2023 to 2024) emphasises that contemporary market architectures including platforms, digital ecosystems and global value chains make the interplay between competition and cooperation central to strategic success. The review below synthesises foundational work and integrates recent empirical and conceptual advances that motivate the integrative framework proposed in this paper.

2.1 Competitive advantage theories

Porter's industry structure perspective (Porter, 1985) and the RBV remain foundational: Porter highlights external positioning and industry forces, while RBV locates sustained advantage in VRIN resources (Barney, 1991). RBV's explanatory power for firm heterogeneity is well documented, but critics note its relatively static orientation when environments change quickly (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). DCT addresses this by specifying managerial routines such as sensing, seizing and transforming that enable firms to reconfigure resources and maintain advantage under turbulence (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2023).

Recent empirical research refines the operationalisation of DCT and its governance linkages. Heaton (2023) provides evidence that the performance payoff of dynamic capabilities depends on governance structures that align resource allocation with sensing outcomes, highlighting governance as a critical moderator of capability effectiveness. This finding underscores the argument that internal capability deployment cannot be understood apart from governance choices that determine how resources are protected and deployed.

Other recent work examines how dynamic capabilities manifest across portfolios and projects, showing that the micro dimensions of sensing, seizing and reconfiguring distinctly affect agility and performance. This evidence strengthens the claim that dynamic capabilities are the managerial mechanism through which firms combine the protection of proprietary advantage with outward engagement.

2.2 Cooperation and collaborative strategies

Parallel to resource centric views, a substantial body of research documents the strategic value of alliances, joint ventures, networks and open innovation for accessing complementary assets, sharing risk and accelerating innovation (Dyer et al., 2018; Gulati et al., 2012). As markets digitise, these collaborative forms have become central in sectors ranging from technology to pharmaceuticals and automotive manufacturing.

The coopetition literature, which studies simultaneous cooperation and competition, has matured, with recent syntheses focusing on innovation outcomes and governance challenges. A notable review by Corbo et al. (2023) synthesises research at the intersection of coopetition and innovation and concludes that coopetition can be a deliberate innovation strategy provided that appropriability regimes and governance arrangements protect value capture. This review calls for more fine grained empirical tests of when coopetition facilitates innovation versus when it creates leakage or rent dissipation.

Platform and ecosystem research further underscores why cooperation is increasingly strategic. Jacobides et al. (2024) show that platform complementarities and externalities create structural incentives for firms to cooperate, such as shared standards and infrastructures, while also generating internal failure risks that require orchestration. Their analysis clarifies why firms that simultaneously participate in ecosystems and compete for value capture must adopt orchestration and governance strategies to manage tensions.

Emerging studies on open innovation and public private collaboration also highlight boundary management challenges in cooperative settings, particularly when firms operate across institutional and regulatory divides. Recent work on open innovation governance finds that collaboration design and contractual forms significantly shape knowledge flows and appropriation outcomes.

2.3 Trade offs and tensions: competition vs. cooperation in ecosystems

Cooperation yields clear benefits, including knowledge pooling, reduced research and development costs and shared infrastructure, but it also creates strategic tensions such as the risk of opportunism, knowledge leakage, dilution of differentiation and bargaining asymmetries (Czakon et al., 2020; Tidström and Rajala, 2016). These tensions are especially visible in platform ecosystems where firms depend on shared standards and network effects while competing for complementary roles and revenue capture. The architecture of platforms thus produces a paradox between value co creation and value appropriation that firms must manage through governance, boundary choices and appropriability mechanisms. Recent contributions emphasise that the effectiveness of coopetition is contingent on contextual moderators including appropriability regimes, institutional pressures and the speed of technological change.

Behavioural and organisational microfoundations are also gaining attention: trust, managerial cognition and relational governance can determine whether coopetitive ties produce innovation or opportunism. Empirical studies and conceptual reviews published in 2023 to 2024 increasingly argue that without careful governance and trust building, cooperative arrangements can erode rather than enhance long term competitive positions.

2.4 Identified gap: absence of integrated models

Despite extensive work on competition and cooperation separately, scholarship lacks a comprehensive integrative framework that explains how firms can systematically combine firm protective strategies RBV with outward collaboration (coopetition) under dynamic environmental conditions. Recent research strengthens the components of such a synthesis, including dynamic capabilities, governance, platform complementarities and coopetition mechanisms, but these contributions remain dispersed across literatures (Heaton, 2023; Corbo et al., 2023; Jacobides et al., 2024). The result is a fragmented knowledge base: theory provides strong accounts of internal resource protection or relational advantage, but few studies specify the managerial processes and boundary conditions that enable firms to build coopetitive advantage, meaning the capacity to both protect and share value in ecosystems.

Addressing this conceptual gap requires an integrative framework that

a positions dynamic capabilities as the mechanism that mediates between protected resources and collaborative engagement

b identifies governance and appropriability regimes as moderators

c situates these relationships within platform and ecosystem structures and institutional contexts.

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper synthesises these elements to explain when and how competition and cooperation can be combined to produce innovation, resilience and sustained performance.

3 Theoretical foundations

Developing a conceptual framework that integrates competition and cooperation requires drawing from established theories in strategic management and organisational behaviour. This section synthesises four major theoretical perspectives RBV, DCT, game theory and coopetition, and institutional theory to provide a robust foundation for the proposed model. Recent scholarship (2023 to 2025) deepens these perspectives and highlights their relevance for understanding coopetitive advantage in dynamic ecosystem based environments.

3.1 Resource based view

The RBV remains a foundational theory explaining how firms derive sustained competitive advantage from their internal resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). RBV argues that resources must be VRIN to provide long term advantage (Barney et al., 2021). These resources include tangible assets such as manufacturing systems and intangible assets such as brand equity, intellectual property and organisational culture.

RBV continues to be important, but recent research highlights its limitations in contemporary ecosystem contexts. Contemporary studies argue that resource heterogeneity increasingly stems from relational resources, shared infrastructures and network positions, not only from firm internal assets (Dyer et al., 2018). Emerging research also emphasises the growing importance of complementary assets and ecosystem dependencies in shaping competitive advantage, particularly within digital platforms (Jacobides et al., 2018, 2024).

A 2023 review by Corbo et al. finds that firms increasingly rely on externally sourced knowledge flows and collaborative innovation networks, suggesting that resource based advantages are embedded not only within firms but also across interorganisational relationships (Corbo et al., 2023). Similarly, recent empirical work shows that relational embeddedness and alliance portfolios significantly influence resource renewal and innovation outcomes (Klimas, 2024).

Despite these shifts, RBV remains essential for understanding why firms continue to protect their core assets in coopetitive settings. The key challenge is reconciling resource protection with resource sharing, a tension at the heart of coopetition and innovation ecosystem strategies (Ritala and Tidström, 2021).

3.2 Dynamic capabilities theory: adapting in volatile markets

DCT extends RBV by emphasising the organisational processes that enable firms to adapt, transform and sustain competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2023). Dynamic capabilities involve three essential dimensions:

- sensing opportunities and competitive threats
- seizing opportunities through effective resource allocation
- transforming or reconfiguring resource bases to maintain alignment with evolving market conditions

Recent studies deepen DCT by demonstrating that dynamic capabilities are shaped by governance choices, organisational routines and ecosystem participation. Heaton (2023) provides evidence that governance structures determine how effectively firms can deploy dynamic capabilities, showing that sensing and seizing capabilities produce superior outcomes only when aligned with mechanisms that support collaboration, learning and resource flexibility.

Similarly, new empirical work finds that the microfoundations of dynamic capabilities, such as cross functional integration, ambidexterity and learning routines, significantly influence innovation outcomes in high velocity environments (Bechtel, 2023; Kraus et al., 2024).

DCT also provides a theoretical basis for understanding cooperation. Partnerships and networks expand a firm's sensing capabilities by exposing it to diverse knowledge pools and new technological trajectories (Thomas and Autio, 2020). However, DCT does not explicitly address the strategic tensions between competition and cooperation, underscoring the need to integrate DCT with coopetition theory to understand how capabilities evolve in interdependent ecosystems.

3.3 Game theory and coopetition: interdependence and strategic collaboration

Game Theory provides a rigorous analytical lens to examine strategic interdependence, which is central to coopetition. It conceptualises interactions as strategic games in which each firm's payoff depends on the actions of others (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996). This is particularly relevant in ecosystems where firms must collaborate to create value while competing to capture it.

Coopetition theory, grounded partly in Game Theory, argues that firms collaborating with rivals can achieve complementary benefits such as faster innovation, cost efficiencies and shared risk (Bengtsson and Raza Ullah, 2016; Bouncken and Kraus, 2023). Recent work confirms that coopetition enhances innovation performance when governance safeguards such as contracts, transparency mechanisms and embedded trust reduce risks of opportunism (Czakon et al., 2020; Corbo et al., 2023).

Sector specific evidence also reinforces the relevance of coopetition. For example, firms in electric vehicle manufacturing increasingly engage in joint research and development, platform sharing and standard setting while competing for customers and market share (Lacoste, 2022; Mariani and Czakon, 2023). These coopetitive interactions reflect a broader shift toward collaborative competition, especially in industries requiring high innovation investment.

Game Theory therefore provides conceptual tools for predicting cooperative equilibria, identifying payoffs and understanding how relational mechanisms mitigate opportunism. Combined with recent empirical advances, it provides a strong foundation for designing strategies that balance value co creation with value appropriation.

3.4 Institutional theory: the role of norms in shaping collaboration

Institutional Theory complements firm level and relational perspectives by examining how rules, norms and regulatory pressures shape organisational behaviour (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). Institutions influence the legitimacy of collaboration, particularly in highly regulated sectors such as healthcare, energy and finance.

Recent research shows that institutional pressures increasingly promote collaborative innovation, data sharing and interoperability, especially in digital and sustainability oriented industries (Peng et al., 2022; Figenschou et al., 2024). Such pressures often compel firms to balance competitive motives with cooperative compliance requirements.

Institutional Theory also explains cross national variation in coopetition practices. Studies highlight how cultural norms, regulatory frameworks and public sector policies shape firms willingness to collaborate with competitors and influence governance choices in alliances and ecosystems (Greenwood et al., 2017; Crick, 2023).

By integrating institutional perspectives, the analysis captures how external constraints and norms condition the balance between competition and cooperation, shaping both strategic behaviour and performance outcomes across different contexts.

3.4.1 Synthesis and theoretical integration

Each theoretical perspective contributes distinct insights to the competition–cooperation duality:

- RBV explains the importance of protecting firm-specific resources and capabilities.
- DCT highlights adaptability and the dynamic processes required to reconfigure resources in turbulent environments.
- Game theory and coopetition articulate the mechanisms governing interdependent strategic behaviour and collaborative value creation.
- Institutional theory incorporates the broader regulatory and normative forces that shape collaboration.

Individually, however, these theories are insufficient to explain how firms simultaneously compete and cooperate in modern ecosystems. Recent research highlights the need for an integrated framework combining resource protection RBV, adaptive capacity (DCT), relational strategy (coopetition), and contextual embeddedness (institutional theory). This synthesis forms the conceptual foundation for the coopetitive advantage framework proposed in this study.

4 Methodology

Although this study is conceptual in nature and does not involve empirical data collection, a rigorous methodological approach was adopted to ensure academic integrity, transparency, and replicability. The methodology details the nature of the study, the approach to literature synthesis, and the framework development process.

4.1 Nature of the study

This research is a conceptual study aimed at developing an integrative framework that combines the dual logics of competitive advantage and cooperation in strategic management. Unlike empirical research, conceptual studies focus on theory development, conceptual clarity, and the generation of new perspectives to address gaps in existing literature (Gilson and Goldberg, 2015). The objective is to provide a theoretically grounded model that explains how firms can simultaneously compete and collaborate to achieve sustainable advantage in dynamic environments.

4.2 Approach

The framework was developed through a systematic review and theoretical synthesis process. The review followed structured guidelines to identify, evaluate, and integrate relevant scholarly works published between 2018 and 2025, ensuring the inclusion of the most recent theoretical advancements and empirical insights

The review process involved:

- Keyword searches: terms such as ‘competitive advantage’, ‘coopetition’, ‘strategic alliances’, ‘dynamic capabilities’, and ‘ecosystem strategy’ were used across major academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science).
- Inclusion criteria: peer-reviewed journal articles and high-quality conceptual papers focusing on competition, cooperation, and strategic management.
- Exclusion criteria: articles lacking theoretical relevance, outdated studies, and non-English publications.

Following the literature review, theoretical synthesis was conducted using integrative conceptual modelling, which allows researchers to combine multiple theoretical perspectives into a unified framework (Jaakkola, 2020).

4.3 Framework development process

The development of the conceptual framework followed a structured three-stage process:

1 Identification of key constructs: core constructs were extracted from the reviewed literature, including competitive advantage drivers (e.g., resource heterogeneity, positioning), cooperative mechanisms (e.g., alliances, networks, ecosystem participation), and moderating factors (e.g., environmental turbulence, digital technologies).

2 Mapping interrelationships using theory triangulation: to ensure theoretical robustness, the relationships between constructs were mapped using a triangulation of multiple theories –RBV, DCT, and game theory (with coopetition concepts). RBV explains firm-level competitive positioning, DCT highlights adaptability, and game theory provides insights into strategic interdependencies. This triangulation approach enhances conceptual depth and comprehensiveness.

3 Validation of logical consistency: the preliminary framework was compared against prior conceptual models and recent empirical studies to verify consistency and avoid theoretical contradictions. Iterative refinement ensured that the framework reflects both academic rigor and practical relevance for strategic decision-making in contemporary business ecosystems.

4.4 Justification

Including a transparent methodology in conceptual research enhances its credibility and replicability (Jaakkola, 2020). By employing a systematic review, theory triangulation, and logical validation, this study ensures that the proposed framework is grounded in existing scholarship while offering novel insights. The structured approach also allows future researchers to empirically test, extend, or refine the framework across different contexts.

5 Conceptual framework

The development of the conceptual framework is driven by the recognition that competitive advantage and cooperation are no longer mutually exclusive but interdependent forces in modern strategic management. Organisations operating in dynamic and interconnected markets must balance these logics to achieve sustainable performance. This section explains the logic of integration, describes the key components of the proposed framework, and concludes with a visual representation of the model.

5.1 Logic of integration: why competitive and cooperative strategies must coexist

Traditional strategic management theories emphasise competition as the primary route to advantage, focusing on outperforming rivals through resource control, cost leadership, and differentiation (Porter, 1985; Barney et al., 2021). While this logic remains relevant, the increasing complexity of global business ecosystems, digital transformation, and innovation interdependencies challenge its sufficiency (Jacobides et al., 2018). Firms increasingly depend on partners and even competitors for resources, technology, and knowledge critical to innovation and resilience (Ritala and Tidström, 2021).

The rise of coopetition illustrates this shift, whereby firms collaborate to create value while competing to capture it (Bouncken and Kraus, 2023). For instance, technology giants collaborate on standards development while competing on product features, and pharmaceutical companies form R&D alliances despite competing for market dominance. Such relationships reflect a paradox: success requires both protecting proprietary advantages and engaging in value co-creation (Czakon et al., 2020).

Therefore, this framework proposes an integrative approach, recognising competition and cooperation as complementary forces rather than alternatives. The model aims to explain how firms can leverage both to achieve superior outcomes in volatile environments.

5.2 Framework components

The proposed framework comprises four primary components: drivers of competitive advantage, drivers of cooperative advantage, moderating factors, and strategic outcomes.

5.2.1 Drivers of competitive advantage

Competitive advantage remains rooted in the ability to leverage unique resources and strategic positioning (Barney, 1991; Teece, 2023). The following elements drive this logic:

- Unique resource endowments: firms derive advantage from VRIN resources such as proprietary technologies, strong brands, intellectual property, and human capital (Barney et al., 2021).
- Strategic positioning: effective positioning within an industry enables firms to exploit market structure advantages, using differentiation or cost leadership strategies (Porter, 1985).
- Dynamic capabilities: the ability to sense opportunities, seize them, and transform organisational resources to maintain competitiveness in fast-changing markets (Teece, 2023).

These factors enable firms to defend against competitive threats while capitalising on market opportunities.

5.2.2 Drivers of cooperative advantage

Cooperative advantage arises from inter-organisational relationships that create opportunities for resource sharing, learning, and innovation. Key drivers include:

- Strategic alliances and partnerships: collaboration enables access to complementary resources, risk sharing, and accelerated innovation (Dyer et al., 2018).
- Network embeddedness: participation in networks or ecosystems enhances relational resources, trust, and knowledge flows, which are critical for co-creating value (Thomas and Autio, 2020).
- Coopetition strategies: engaging in simultaneous cooperation and competition with rivals to combine complementary strengths while maintaining market differentiation (Ritala and Tidström, 2021).

These mechanisms allow firms to expand their resource base beyond organisational boundaries, fostering innovation and resilience.

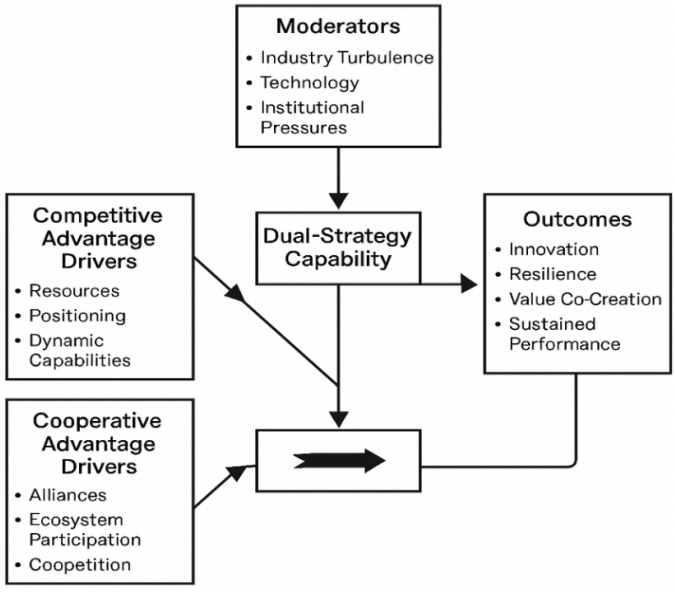
5.2.3 Moderators

The interplay between competition and cooperation is influenced by contextual factors that act as moderators:

- Industry turbulence: high levels of uncertainty, technological disruption, and market volatility amplify the need for both adaptability and interdependence (Zahra, 2022).
- Technological change: digitalisation and platform-based ecosystems increase connectivity and reliance on shared infrastructures (Jacobides et al., 2018).
- Institutional pressures: regulatory requirements, industry norms, and legitimacy concerns shape the scope and governance of cooperative arrangements (Scott, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2017).

These moderators determine the extent to which competitive and cooperative logics can coexist effectively.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



5.2.4 Strategic outcomes

Balancing competition and cooperation produces superior strategic outcomes compared to pursuing either logic in isolation:

- Innovation: joint knowledge creation enhances product and process innovation, particularly in high-tech sectors (Bouncken and Kraus, 2023).
- Resilience: collaborative networks buffer firms against environmental shocks by providing access to shared resources (Adner, 2017).
- Value co-creation and appropriation: firms achieve greater collective value while sustaining mechanisms to capture individual benefits (Czakon et al., 2020).

- Sustained competitive performance: integrating competitive and cooperative strategies enables long-term survival and growth in ecosystems.

5.3 The proposed conceptual framework

The framework positions competitive advantage and cooperative advantage as dual, interdependent forces that influence strategic outcomes, moderated by environmental and institutional factors. The logic assumes that firms that can simultaneously protect proprietary resources and leverage external collaborations will outperform those relying exclusively on competition or cooperation.

6 Discussion and implications

The integration of competitive and cooperative strategies within a unified framework offers several important contributions to strategic management theory and practice. As firms increasingly operate in digital, global and ecosystem-based environments, the ability to manage these dual logics has become essential for sustaining advantage. The following sections synthesise the theoretical significance of the proposed framework and outline its practical implications for organisational leaders.

6.1 Theoretical implications

6.1.1 Extending strategic management through 'coopetitive advantage'

The central theoretical contribution of this study is the development of the concept coopetitive advantage, which positions competition and cooperation not as trade-offs but as mutually reinforcing strategic logics. Traditional frameworks typically assume that firms either compete or collaborate. In contrast, recent ecosystem scholarship emphasises interdependence, shared value creation and complementarity among actors (Adner, 2017; Jacobides et al., 2018). This framework aligns with these contemporary dynamics by arguing that firms increasingly derive performance advantages from their ability to combine competitive differentiation with collaborative value creation.

The shift from a zero-sum perspective to a relational, co-creation paradigm challenges classical competitive advantage theory. It positions firms not as isolated entities but as embedded participants in interdependent networks where strategic outcomes depend simultaneously on rivalry and cooperation.

6.1.2 Integrating RBV, dynamic capabilities, and coopetition

A second major contribution is the integration of RBV, DCT, and coopetition theory into a single conceptual model. RBV emphasises the protection and leveraging of unique internal resources (Barney et al., 2021), while DCT focuses on how firms reconfigure and renew these resources in response to changing environments (Teece, 2023). Coopetition theory adds an interorganisational dimension, illustrating how firms collaborate with rivals to access complementary assets, co-develop innovations, and share ecosystem risks (Bouncken and Kraus, 2023).

By synthesising these literatures, the framework demonstrates that sustained advantage increasingly depends not only on internal resource strengths but also on a firm's ability to orchestrate resources across organisational boundaries while preserving distinctive capabilities. Recent studies highlight that dynamic capabilities play a critical role in managing the tensions inherent in coopetitive relationships – balancing openness with protection and trust with vigilance (Corbo et al., 2023; Mariani and Czakon, 2023). This integration advances theoretical understanding by showing how dynamic capabilities may serve as the underlying mechanism enabling firms to execute coopetitive strategies effectively.

6.1.3 Contextual moderators and boundary conditions

The framework further contributes by clarifying the conditions under which coopetition is most effective. Environmental turbulence, technological change and institutional pressures are identified as key moderators shaping the performance outcomes of coopetitive strategies. This responds directly to recent critiques that strategy research often offers universal prescriptions without acknowledging contextual variation (Zahra, 2022).

Studies on digital platforms and innovation ecosystems argue that the benefits and risks of coopetition vary significantly across industries, technological regimes and institutional settings (Jacobides et al., 2024; Figenschou et al., 2024). By explicitly embedding moderators into the framework, this study provides clearer boundary conditions and encourages future research to examine sector-specific configurations of coopetition.

6.2 Practical implications

The framework also offers actionable guidance for managers seeking to balance competitive and cooperative demands in dynamic environments.

6.2.1 Strategic guidelines for managing the duality

Managers frequently perceive competition and cooperation as incompatible. This framework underscores that, when deliberately managed, coopetition can enhance long-term performance. Key managerial guidelines include:

- Identify complementarities: collaborate with rivals or partners who possess complementary assets, technologies or market access to accelerate innovation and reduce investment risk.
- Protect proprietary resources: use contracts, selective information sharing and intellectual property safeguards to prevent knowledge leakage while enabling collaboration.
- Strengthen governance mechanisms: implement joint steering committees, performance metrics and trust-building routines to mitigate opportunism (Czakon et al., 2020).
- Engage in continuous monitoring: assess coopetition portfolios regularly to ensure alignment with evolving technologies, markets and regulatory landscapes.

These practices help firms leverage value co-creation without undermining competitive differentiation.

6.2.2 Implications for digital ecosystems and global supply chains

The competition–cooperation duality is especially salient in digital and supply-chain ecosystems where interdependence is high. Platform leaders, for example, collaborate on standards, data-sharing protocols and interoperability requirements while competing for users and complementary innovations (Jacobides et al., 2018). The framework helps clarify how firms can:

- Balance standardisation and differentiation by participating in collective industry initiatives without eroding unique capabilities.
- Utilise shared platforms to reduce costs and enhance reach while developing proprietary analytics, algorithms or customer experiences.
- Address regulatory and sustainability requirements by using cooperative arrangements to meet compliance expectations, reduce carbon emissions or improve traceability.

These insights are particularly relevant in sectors experiencing digital transformation, regulatory tightening and sustainability pressures.

6.2.3 Building organisational capabilities for coopetitive success

Effective implementation of coopetition requires organisational readiness. Firms must cultivate dynamic capabilities – especially sensing, collaboration, and learning routines – to manage interorganisational complexity. Practical steps include:

- Training leaders to understand and navigate coopetitive tensions
- Creating cross-functional teams that coordinate external partnerships
- Leveraging digital tools that enhance knowledge sharing and visibility across networks.

Recent research also suggests that organisational culture, psychological safety and managerial cognition play a substantial role in determining coopetition outcomes (Crick, 2023; Klimas, 2024). Cultivating these soft capabilities is therefore as important as formal governance mechanisms.

The framework:

- Provides a strategic roadmap for integrating competition and cooperation in volatile markets
- Offers managerial guidelines for ecosystem participation and innovation collaboration
- Encourages firms to embed coopetition as a deliberate, capability-driven strategy rather than an ad hoc tactic
- Clarifies how to balance value co-creation with value appropriation in platform and supply-chain environments

7 Future research directions

The conceptual framework proposed in this study establishes an initial foundation for understanding how firms integrate competitive and cooperative logics to create coopetitive advantage. However, advancing this line of inquiry requires a broader set of empirical, contextual, behavioural and methodological investigations. Future research should begin by empirically validating the model, given that its propositions remain conceptual. Quantitative approaches such as structural equation modelling (SEM) or partial least squares (PLS-SEM) can be used to test the relationships among the framework's key elements – drivers of competitive and cooperative advantage, moderating contextual conditions and strategic outcomes. Qualitative case studies, especially in industries experiencing technological disruption or undergoing ecosystem restructuring, would provide rich insight into how firms experience and manage coopetitive tensions in practice. Multi-method research designs could strengthen construct validity by triangulating patterns across different settings.

Future work should also examine how the framework operates across different industry and institutional contexts. Because coopetition manifests differently in digital platform environments, manufacturing-intensive sectors, and sustainability-driven industries, comparative studies can help clarify the boundary conditions of coopetitive advantage. For instance, firms in platform-based industries may prioritise network effects and complementor relationships, while supply chain – dependent sectors may emphasise risk-sharing and cost efficiency. In contrast, sustainability-focused industries such as renewable energy or automotive electrification face regulatory pressures that simultaneously promote cooperation and intensify competition. Examining these sector-specific dynamics can refine the generalisability of the framework.

Another promising direction involves exploring the microfoundations of coopetition. Behavioural and cultural factors – including managerial cognition, trust-building, risk perception, negotiation routines and organisational culture – play a critical role in determining whether coopetitive relationships thrive or fail. Understanding how mindsets, values and decision-making processes influence the management of competitive – cooperative tensions is essential, particularly as firms become more embedded in global and culturally diverse ecosystems.

Beyond these behavioural aspects, there is a need to investigate the dynamic evolution of coopetition over time. Coopetitive relationships are fluid and can shift as technologies change, market positions evolve or external shocks occur. Longitudinal studies could illuminate how firms transition between competitive, cooperative and hybrid postures, the mechanisms that sustain long-term partnerships and the influence of disruptive events such as technological breakthroughs, regulatory reforms or geopolitical instability. Such research would help conceptualise coopetition not merely as a strategic choice, but as an evolving capability.

Methodological innovation will also be important. Network analysis can map the structure and intensity of interfirm relationships within ecosystems, revealing patterns of dependence and influence that may not be visible through traditional methods. Agent-based modelling could simulate coopetitive interactions under different boundary conditions, providing insight into emergent system-level behaviours. Cross-level studies that connect individual managerial behaviours, organisational capabilities and ecosystem-level outcomes would also enrich the theoretical depth of coopetition research.

Collectively, these streams of inquiry can refine the construct of coopetitive advantage, strengthen its theoretical foundations and expand its practical relevance. By examining how coopetition unfolds across industries, cultures and temporal horizons, future research will be better positioned to understand the mechanisms that enable firms to thrive in interconnected and rapidly evolving business environments.

8 Conclusions

This paper has argued that the traditional dichotomy between competition and cooperation is no longer adequate for explaining strategic success in contemporary business ecosystems. Operating in environments characterised by volatility, digital transformation and interdependence, firms must cultivate coopetitive advantage – a dynamic capability that enables the simultaneous pursuit of competitive differentiation and collaborative value creation.

The conceptual framework developed here integrates insights from the RBV, DCT, coopetition research and institutional theory to explain how firms can manage this strategic duality. By identifying the drivers of competitive and cooperative advantage, moderating contextual conditions and a set of expected strategic outcomes, the framework advances a more comprehensive and relational understanding of how advantage is built and sustained in interconnected ecosystems.

This study makes three significant contributions to the strategic management literature. First, it synthesises previously fragmented theoretical perspectives to propose a unified explanation for how firms create and appropriate value in settings where competition and cooperation coexist. Second, it extends RBV and DCT by positioning dynamic capabilities as the underlying mechanism through which firms orchestrate resources both within and beyond organisational boundaries. Third, it deepens coopetition theory by embedding it within a multilevel model that incorporates environmental and institutional moderators, offering clearer boundary conditions for when coopetition enhances or undermines performance.

For practitioners, the framework offers actionable guidance for managing collaborative and competitive forces in digital ecosystems, global supply chains and innovation networks. It highlights the need for firms to identify complementarities, design governance mechanisms that safeguard proprietary assets, leverage shared platforms and invest in organisational capabilities that enable both responsiveness and interorganisational learning. The proposed model therefore serves as a strategic roadmap for managers seeking to navigate complex, interdependent environments without compromising competitive strength.

As a conceptual study, the framework is theoretical and has not yet been empirically validated. The absence of empirical testing limits the ability to confirm causal relationships, assess generalisability across industries or evaluate how coopetitive advantage evolves over time. The model also does not explicitly address potential negative outcomes of coopetition, such as partner opportunism, unintended knowledge spillovers or relational instability. Additionally, while the framework integrates multiple theoretical lenses, it may not fully capture sector-specific governance challenges or cultural differences in collaborative behaviour.

These limitations create opportunities for future work. Empirical studies – both quantitative and qualitative – are needed to test, refine and extend the relationships

proposed. Cross-country and cross-industry comparisons could illuminate how institutional environments shape coopetitive strategies, while longitudinal research could explore how coopetition dynamics evolve and how firms transition between competitive and cooperative stances in response to technological, regulatory or geopolitical disruptions.

Ultimately, this study aims to stimulate a new direction in strategic management research – one that embraces the paradoxical yet synergistic relationship between competition and cooperation as a pathway to innovation, resilience and long-term success. By encouraging scholars and practitioners to move beyond traditional binaries, the framework helps reimagine strategy as an inherently relational and dynamic process suited to the complexities of modern business ecosystems.

Declarations

No conflict of interest

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