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The Mediating role of competitiveness in the relationship between managerial creativity and tourism enterprise performance: Evidence from Yemen

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Abstract

This study investigates the mediating role of competitiveness in the relationship between managerial creativity and the tourism enterprise performance in unstable and resource-limited contexts such as Yemen. Although creativity plays a key role in enhancing organizational performance, the role of competitiveness as a mediator in this relationship remains underexplored, particularly in contexts facing similar challenges. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 472 general managers and executive directors representing 256 tourism companies affiliated with the Yemen Union for Tourism (YUT). The questionnaire, grounded in established prior research, captured dimensions of managerial creativity, competitiveness, and enterprise performance. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro, with reliability confirmed through Cronbach's alpha and minimal common method bias verified by Harman's single-factor test. The results reveal that managerial creativity positively influences both competitiveness and performance, while competitiveness serves as a key mediator that strengthens the relationship between managerial creativity and tourism enterprise performance by improving resource utilization, integrating technology, and enhancing service quality. Managerial creativity contributes to higher organizational outcomes when combined with strong competitiveness. The study underscores that enhancing competitiveness enables tourism enterprises to better leverage creative initiatives for sustainable performance in challenging environments. Moreover, combining innovative management practices with strategic investments in organizational efficiency, infrastructure, and human capital can foster sustainable growth and strengthen the resilience of Yemeni tourism enterprises. Tourism policymakers and managers should foster a culture of creative management and strategically invest in infrastructure and human capital. Such actions can enhance competitiveness, drive sustainable growth, and enhance the resilience of tourism enterprises in Yemen and similar developing contexts.

Keywords: Competitiveness, Managerial creativity, Tourism enterprise performance, Yemen.

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1. Introduction

The tourism sector is a vital economic sector that contributes significantly to promoting sustainable development, particularly in developing countries such as Yemen, where it relies on skilled human resources and effective management to enhance institutional performance and market competitiveness [1]. In this context, managerial creativity (MC) emerges as one of the elements contributing to enhancing the ability of tourism institutions to adapt to changing challenges and provide innovative services that meet customer expectations [2]. The tourism sector is one of the most important drivers of the global economy. In 2024, it contributed approximately US\$10.9 trillion to global GDP, representing 10% of the global economy, and provided approximately 357 million jobs worldwide [3]. In Yemen, the competitiveness of the tourism sector remains limited due to regulatory challenges and underdeveloped infrastructure. It is noted that the efficiency of tourism enterprises, the investment of natural & cultural resources, and the effective use of modern tools and systems all directly impact tourism business performance [4]. Therefore the sector's ability to compete with regional markets must be enhanced by continuously updating systems, developing competencies, and enhancing institutional performance to improve the level of tourism services

Recent studies indicate that MC is closely linked to the personal characteristics of managers, such as risk-taking and imagination, as well as overcoming psychological factors that limit innovation [2]. Moreover, MC encompasses key dimensions, including originality, flexibility, and problem-solving, which collectively contribute to developing innovative solutions, enhancing customer experience, and improving operational efficiency [8-5]. Furthermore, local economic conditions play an important role in determining the level of competitiveness of tourist destinations, as they can directly impact the performance of the tourism sector [1].

While tourism in Yemen represents a promising sector thanks to the country's unique natural & cultural resources, the weak management innovation and competitiveness of tourism enterprises limit the realization of its full potential [9]. Therefore, improving MC and competitiveness is essential to unlock the sector's full potential.

In the same context, competitiveness is considered a key mediating factor MC and the performance of tourism enterprises. It represents the ability to create an institutional environment that enables access to local and international markets, promotes economic growth, and equitable income distribution [10]. Competitiveness includes organizational efficiency, supporting infrastructure, and natural & cultural resources, which enable tourism enterprises to develop innovative strategies, such as improving electronic reservation systems or offering flexible tourism programs that take advantage of local resources [1, 11].

To contextualize this study, it is essential to consider how competitiveness has been defined in organizational literature. By referring to the broader concept, the notion of competitiveness itself varies depending on whether it applies to organizations, sectors, or nations, where Bertrand and Guillemet [12] define it as an organization's ability to achieve efficiencies equal to or exceeding those of competitors, rooted in its core strengths. In this regard, understanding this definition helps contextualize the challenges faced by Yemen's tourism sector and highlights strategic areas where improvements can enhance its competitive position, ultimately mediating the effect of MC on tourism enterprise performance (TEP).

In today's highly competitive business environment, tourism enterprises must adopt innovative management approaches that enable them to respond more effectively to changes and challenges and seize new opportunities, ensuring enhanced competitiveness and outstanding performance. In this context, Hasan [13] indicates that organizational creativity has a positive impact on the success of the tourism sector because creativity leads to innovation, improved service, efficiency, and high performance, which helps tourism companies maintain their ability to compete and adapt to their new customers.

Despite the significant importance of MC and competitiveness in improving the tourism enterprises performance, there is a scarcity of studies that explore the intertwined relationship between these variables in the context of the tourism sector in Yemen. The research gap in the current study is clearly evident in the lack of previous studies analyzing the mediating role of competitiveness in the relationship between MC and the performance of tourism enterprises. This would allow for a better understanding of how creative ideas and visions can be translated into applicable practical measures to enhance performance in the tourism sector. Therefore, this study aims to explore the mediating role of competitiveness in the relationship between MC and the performance of tourism enterprises in Yemen.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

This model illustrates how the independent variable (managerial creativity) affects the dependent variable (performance of tourist enterprises) through the mediating variable (competitiveness).

The resulting model and diagram clarify the relationships and integration of these variables, establishing the theoretical and intellectual framework for the study (see Figure 1).

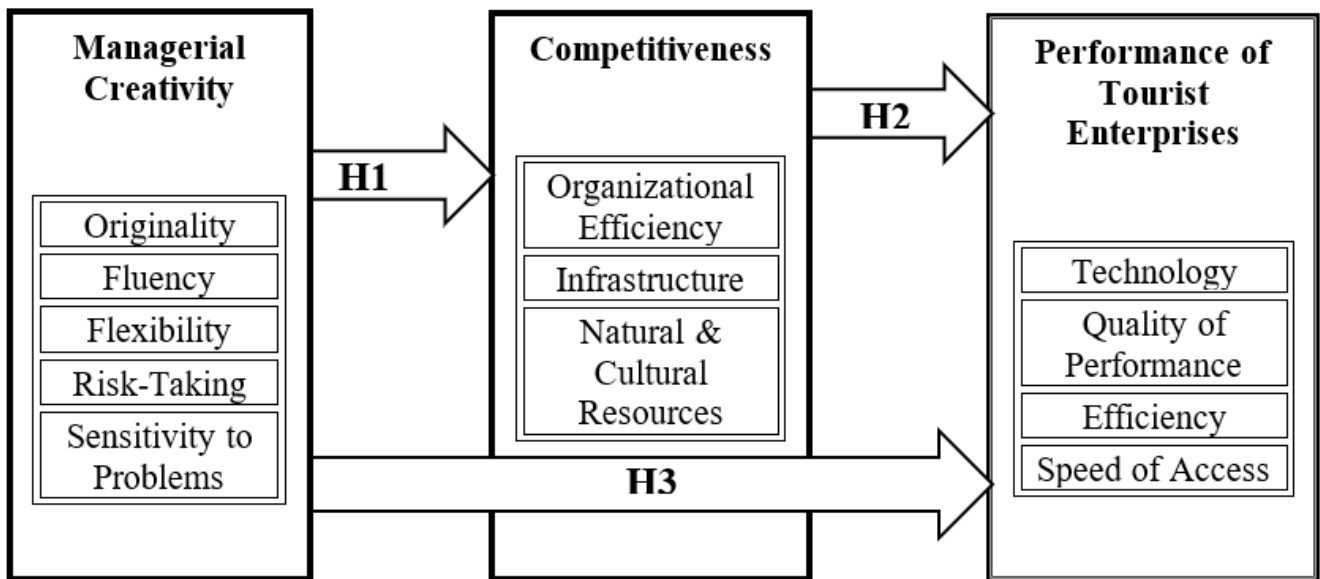


Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Managerial Creativity (MC)

MC is a cornerstone of successful and high-performing organizations aiming to achieve transformative changes in their administrative practices. It supports employees, fosters creative behaviors, and enhances efficiency and effectiveness. This creativity hinges on the creative ideas and methods that managers, regardless of their roles, bring to the table. It enables adaptability, cultivates a conducive environment for creativity, and empowers staff to perform tasks with autonomy. For example, a manager might creatively restructure workflows to minimize disruptions caused by frequent power outages or empower frontline staff to resolve specific customer issues on the spot, enhancing responsiveness. It also involves envisioning multiple solutions to emerging challenges and refining administrative systems to differ from past practices [14].

Additionally, MC encompasses the processes and actions undertaken by individuals—whether managers or employees—that reshape organizational structures, policies, and management approaches through novel problem-solving and decision-making techniques Ismail [15]. Ibrahim [16] views it as the ideas and practices introduced by managers and staff to create more efficient and effective administrative processes, ultimately benefiting organizations and society.

Several studies have explored managerial creativity. For instance, Ceko [17] examined its relationship with creativity and quality management culture in Europe during and post-crisis periods, finding a statistical link between creativity, creativity, and quality management, and recommending investment in these areas for competitive advantage. Rumanti, et al. [18] investigated how organizational creativity and open creativity enhance small and medium enterprise (SME) performance in Indonesia, concluding that both significantly improve business outcomes. Fyad [19] analyzed managerial creativity's role in boosting teacher performance in Jordanian public schools, identifying a significant impact and suggesting training programs to foster creativity. Sagr [20] explored MC as a pathway to competitive advantage in a Saudi university, proposing a plan aligned with national goals, while Amina [21] assessed its effects on job performance in an Algerian university, emphasizing the need for a creative climate.

2.2. Competitiveness

Organizations strive to enhance their competitiveness by creating environments that optimize resource allocation and ensure survival amid global economic fluctuations. This pursuit is vital in a world where market rivalry intensifies daily, pushing entities to innovate and improve productivity, quality, and performance while reducing costs to enhance consumer living standards. Developing competitiveness also addresses barriers like limited local markets, enabling economies of scale and operational efficiency [22].

Abushaiba and Zainuddin [23] highlight competitiveness as the ability to devise managerial strategies that bolster organizational capabilities in cost, quality, customer satisfaction, and timely delivery key competitive tools. It overcomes local market constraints, fosters creativity, and supports economic growth and improved living conditions by providing a competitive framework [24].

Studies on competitiveness include Elsevier and AEDEM [25], which explored competition's role in creativity efficiency and firm performance in Chinese manufacturing, finding an inverted U-shaped relationship and recommending tailored creativity strategies. González-Rodríguez, et al. [26] analyzed tourism destination competitiveness globally, noting that high relative advantages don't always translate to competitive edges, depending on developmental levels. Jasin [27] examined how online marketing and competitiveness affect SME performance, emphasizing digital media's role. Shouga Al-den [28] studied service marketing's link to university competitiveness in Yemen, identifying a strong positive relationship. While Bazazo and Qaddhat [29] assessed global tourism competitiveness indicators' impact on Arab tourism, linking investment climates to foreign investment attraction.

2.3. Tourism Enterprise Performance (TEP)

Performance improvement reflects the outcomes achieved by individuals and organizations through effort, responsibilities, and assigned tasks [30]. Relevant studies include Achmad, et al. [31] which identified support systems and stakeholders as key to improving tourism industry performance in Indonesia, recommending enhancements in spatial factors and infrastructure. Ding and Dalogon [32] explored how performance measurement systems, psychological empowerment, and creativity boost organizational performance in China, emphasizing interactive management systems. Maazib [33] examined electronic management's role in improving administrative performance in Yemeni pharmaceutical firms, finding a positive link. Jamila [34] assessed competitive vigilance's impact on firm performance in Saudi Arabia, advocating optimal resource use, while Arqawi, et al. [35] highlighted electronic marketing and knowledge management's roles in enhancing tourism agency and facility performance in Yemen and Palestine, respectively.

2.4. Research Hypotheses

H₁: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between MC and the Competitiveness of tourism enterprises.

H₂: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between competitiveness and the TEP.

H₃: Competitiveness mediates the relationship between MC and the TEP.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Data Collection

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among Managerial Creativity (MC), competitiveness, and Tourism Enterprise Performance (TEP) in Yemen. Data was gathered through a cross-sectional survey using structured questionnaires, carefully developed to capture the essential study variables. The questionnaire items were grounded in established theoretical frameworks and previous empirical research to ensure both relevance and rigor.

The dimensions and items of this study's variables were carefully developed based on previous research to ensure both relevance and validity. The questionnaire was designed to capture the three main constructs of the study:

- **Managerial Creativity:** Its dimensions were grounded in earlier studies, including Fyad [19], Kthiar and Al-Hindawy [36], Ahmed, et al. [37], Jamil, et al. [38], which provide comprehensive insights into measurable aspects of MC within organizational contexts.
- **Competitiveness:** The conceptualization and dimensions were informed by research such as González-Rodríguez, et al. [26], Jasin [27], Bazazo and Qaddhat [29], Abu Hadi [39] and Chareet and Kheloufi [40], highlighting the critical components of competitiveness in the business and tourism sectors.
- **Enterprise Performance:** Its framework and indicators were based on studies including Ogbari, et al. [41], Jamila [34], Arqawi, et al. [35], Gouasmia [42], Zubaida [43], Abachar [44], and Amr [45], covering both operational and strategic measures of organizational performance.

By building upon these established sources, the study ensures that all variables are firmly rooted in theory and practice, providing a reliable basis to examine the relationships between MC, competitiveness, and TEP in Yemen.

3.2. Participants

The study population comprised all travel and tourism enterprises and agencies that are members of the Yemen Union for Tourism (YUT) in the Capital Secretariat, Sana'a, totaling 256 companies and agencies employing 2,186 staff. The sample included all general managers (256) and executive directors (216) from these enterprises, bringing the total sample size to 472 participants. A comprehensive census was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants with extensive experience and practical involvement in various tourism activities, as well as membership in the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and connections with regional and international tourism sectors. Questionnaires were distributed to all selected participants, of which 305 were returned, and 300 were deemed valid for analysis. Table 1 presents a detailed classification of the study population and sample by sector and license type. Oral informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. This approach was chosen due to practical constraints related to accessibility and security within the research area, although it may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Table 1.
Study Population and Sample Size.

Type of License	Tourism Companies	Travel & Tourism Companies	Travel, Tourism & Ground Transport	Travel, Tourism & Umrah	Travel, Tourism, Hajj & Umrah	Total
Study Population	22	44	14	40	136	256
Number of Employees	198	396	126	360	1088	2186
Sample Size	44	88	28	40	272	472

3.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics summarized sample demographics and variable responses, correlation analysis assessed variable relationships, and mediation analysis via Hayes' PROCESS macro tested indirect effects. All tests used a 0.05 significance level.

3.4. Instruments and Measures

The questionnaire, developed based on theoretical foundations and prior studies, included 60 items: 25 for managerial creativity, 15 for competitiveness, and 20 for performance. It was reviewed by experts, including business administration faculty from various universities, whose feedback ensured clarity, relevance, and alignment with study goals. All borrowed scales and concepts were appropriately referenced to their original sources within the instrument development phase and literature review.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Table 2.
Validity and Reliability of Variables.

Construct	Sub-construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Managerial Creativity	Originality	0.787
	Fluency	0.659
	Flexibility	0.601
	Risk-Taking	0.818
	Sensitivity to Problems	0.727
Tourism Enterprise Performance	Technology	0.838
	Quality of performance	0.847
	Efficiency	0.838
	Speed of Access	0.888
Competitiveness	Organizational Efficiency	0.936
	Infrastructure	0.956
	Natural & Cultural Resources	0.670

As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's Alpha indicates good to excellent reliability across most subconstructs, with Speed of Access (0.888), Infrastructure (0.956), and Organizational Efficiency (0.936) showing the highest consistency, and Flexibility (0.601) the lowest yet acceptable reliability.

3.6. Common Method Bias

To mitigate common method bias from self-reported data [46], procedural steps included ensuring anonymity, clear instructions, and separating variable items. Harman's single-factor test confirmed no dominant factor, indicating minimal bias and supporting result validity.

4. Results

4.1. Organizational characteristics

Table 3.
Organizational Characteristics of Tourism Enterprises.

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Type of Facility:	Company	20	6.7%
	Group	25	8.3%
	Agency	255	85.0%
Number of Sectors Operated	3 or more	120	40.0%
	One sector	98	32.7%
	Two sectors	82	27.3%
Number of Branches	One Branch	136	45.3%
	Three or more	89	29.7%
	Two branches	75	25.0%
Facility Age	11–15 years	54	18.0%
	16 years	181	60.3%
	5–10 years	64	21.3%
	More than 16 years	1	0.3%

Most entities are agencies (85%), operate in multiple sectors (40.0%), have one branch (45.3%), and are over 16 years old (60.3%).

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1. Managerial Creativity

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistics for Dimensions of Managerial Creativity.

Dimension	Mean	SD	RII
Originality	6.089	0.645	87.0%
Fluency	5.233	0.947	74.8%
Flexibility	5.474	0.884	78.2%
Risk-Taking	5.917	0.836	84.5%
Sensitivity to Problems	5.617	0.921	80.2%
Managerial Creativity	5.666	0.674	80.9%

Originality (87%) and Risk-Taking (84.5%) are most valued, with Fluency (74.8%) least emphasized.

4.2.2. Competitiveness

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics of Competitiveness.

Dimension	Mean	SD	RII
Organizational Efficiency	3.903	1.617	55.8%
Infrastructure	3.774	1.773	53.9%
Natural & Cultural Resources	5.383	0.948	76.9%
Competitiveness	4.353	1.260	62.2%

Natural & cultural resources (76.9%) lead, with infrastructure (53.9%) least prioritized.

4.2.3. Tourism Enterprise Performance

Table 6.
Descriptive statistics of the Tourism Enterprise Performance.

Dimension	Mean	SD	RII
Technology	5.932	0.812	84.7%
Quality of Performance	5.447	1.209	77.8%
Efficiency	6.103	0.736	87.2%
Speed of Access	6.151	0.665	87.9%
Tourism Enterprise Performance	5.909	0.690	84.4%

Speed of Access (87.9%) and Efficiency (87.2%) are top priorities, with Quality (77.8%) slightly less emphasized.

4.3. Correlational Analysis

Table 7.
Correlational Analysis.

Variable	Competitiveness	Managerial Creativity	Tourism Enterprise Performance
Competitiveness	1		
Managerial Creativity	0.559**	1	
Tourism Enterprise Performance	0.356**	0.696**	1

Table 7 clearly shows that the strongest correlation is between Managerial Creativity (MC) and Tourism Enterprise Performance (TEP) (0.696), followed by MC and competitiveness (0.559). The correlation between competitiveness and TEP (0.356) is also significant but notably weaker, suggesting potential complexities in this relationship within the Yemeni context.

4.4. Hypotheses Testing (Path Analysis)

Table 8.
Hypotheses Testing Results.

Hypothesis	Pat	Path	B	SE	T	p
H1	a	Managerial Creativity -> Competitiveness	0.559	0.038	14.902	0.000
H2	b	Competitiveness -> Tourism Enterprise Performance	0.356	0.049	7.326	0.000
H3	a*b	Managerial Creativity -> Competitiveness -> Tourism Enterprise Performance	0.199	0.037	5.325	0.000

The results of the hypotheses testing using path analysis provide significant insights into the relationships among the variables.

In H1, the path from Managerial Creativity (MC) to competitiveness shows a path coefficient of 0.559, with a standard error of 0.038. The T-value of (14.902) and p-value (0.000) indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between MC and competitiveness, suggesting that higher levels of MC lead to greater competitiveness in the tourism sector.

For H2, the relationship between competitiveness and Tourism Enterprise Performance (TEP) also demonstrates a significant effect. The path coefficient is 0.356, with a standard error of 0.049. With a T-value of 7.326 and a p-value of 0.000, this path confirms that higher competitiveness in the tourism sector is positively associated with better TEP. However, the magnitude of this effect (B=0.356) is smaller compared to the direct effect of creativity on competitiveness (B=0.559), hinting that factors beyond the measured aspects of competitiveness might attenuate its impact on TEP.

Lastly, H3 examines the indirect effect of MC on the TEP through Competitiveness in the tourist sector. The path coefficient for this indirect relationship is 0.199, with a standard error of 0.037. The T-value of 5.325 and the p-value of 0.000 indicate that MC positively influences the TEP by enhancing competitiveness in the tourist sector. This path is also statistically significant, supporting the mediating role of competitiveness and showing that a portion of creativity's impact on TEP flows through improved competitiveness.

Finally, all hypotheses are supported, showing significant positive direct and indirect effects.

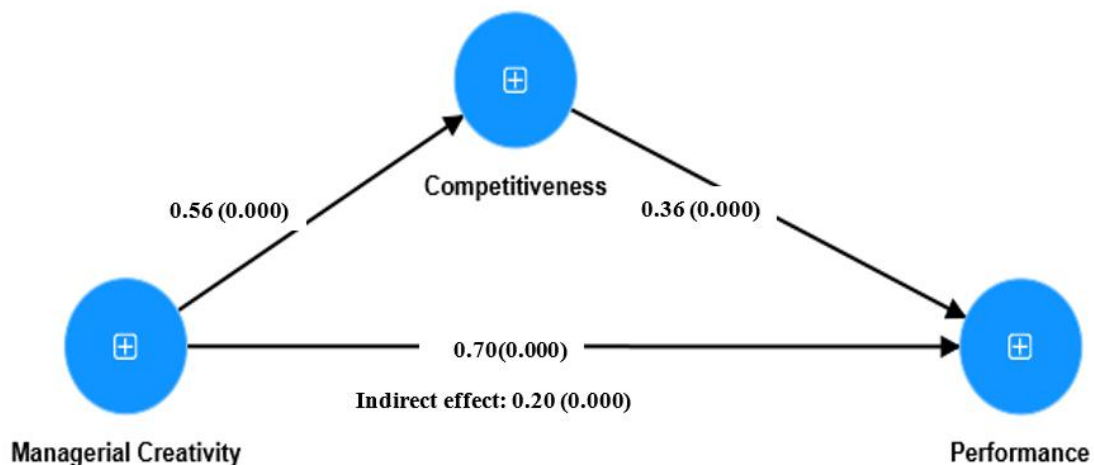


Figure 2.
Path analysis of the study variables.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal that tourism businesses in Yemen prioritize sectoral competitiveness as a bridge between Managerial Creativity (MC) and performance enhancement, driving renewal efforts to improve outcomes. This reflects their intent to leverage competitiveness and creativity management to address pressures from Yemen's ongoing challenges. Most entities (85%) are agencies, with 78% operating across multiple sectors and over 11 years of experience, underscoring the need for large-scale tourism investment partnerships and stronger competitive capabilities to expand the tourism economy and compete regionally.

Originality, risk-taking, and problem sensitivity ranked highest among creativity dimensions, indicating robust creative practices (e.g., developing unique offerings, adapting to risks, anticipating issues) that sustain performance diversity despite competitive declines. Natural and cultural resources topped competitiveness factors, affirming their value, while organizational efficiency and infrastructure followed, highlighting their role in enhancing performance. Speed of access and efficiency were the leading performance dimensions, emphasizing their modern significance in reaching clients and managing relationships effectively, potentially as creative workarounds for other systemic weaknesses.

A significant positive relationship exists between MC and competitiveness (H1 supported), aligning with studies like Al-Ajmi [47], Nazzal [22], which link creativity to competitive gains. Competitiveness strongly influences performance (H2 supported), consistent with Ogbari, et al. [41], Jasin [27], Jamila [34], and Amr [45]. The indirect effect of creativity on performance via competitiveness also holds (H3 supported), as supported by Rumanti, et al. [18], González-Rodríguez, et al. [26], Amina [21], and Bazazo and Qaddhat [29].

However, the discussion must acknowledge complexities. While MC shows a strong positive association with both competitiveness and TEP, its ability to single-handedly drive success in the Yemeni context is likely constrained. Factors such as persistent political instability, severe infrastructural deficiencies (as indicated by its lower score in competitiveness dimensions despite its importance), security concerns, and broader economic hardship act as significant external pressures that can limit the translation of creative initiatives and competitive positioning into tangible performance improvements. The relatively weaker, though still significant, link found between competitiveness and performance (compared to creativity's direct links) may reflect this reality; firms might possess competitive elements (like unique resources or efficient organization) but struggle to fully capitalize on them due to these overarching environmental constraints. Furthermore, while creativity is high, its impact might be contingent on the availability of basic resources and a minimally stable operating environment, suggesting a potential threshold effect. Counterarguments might posit that until fundamental issues of stability and infrastructure are addressed, the marginal gains from managerial creativity, while positive, may remain limited in scope.

6. Limitations and Future Proposals

The study faced constraints from limited relevant references and reliance on studies from differing contexts due to a research gap, compounded by exceptional local conditions during data collection. Specifically, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings; the results may not fully represent all tourism businesses across Yemen, particularly those in less accessible or more severely affected regions. This sampling strategy, while necessary due to security challenges, introduces potential selection bias. Furthermore, while the study identifies significant relationships between MC, competitiveness, and TEP, there are inherent weaknesses and complexities. The relatively modest effect size of competitiveness on TEP (path coefficient = 0.356) suggests that other unmeasured variables (e.g., severity of local conflict impact, specific government interventions, access to finance) likely play a substantial role in moderating this relationship. The cross-sectional design also prevents causal inferences; while the model posits MC leads to competitiveness and then performance, the relationships could be bidirectional or influenced by other factors over time. The study also relied on self-reported data, which carries the risk of social desirability bias, although steps were taken to mitigate this. Future research could explore creativity and performance during crises, assessing impacts across sectors and leveraging technology. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to track these relationships over time and establish causality more firmly. Qualitative research could also provide deeper insights into how managers creatively navigate extreme constraints and the specific barriers limiting the impact of competitiveness on performance in the Yemeni context.

List of Abbreviations:

MC: Managerial Creativity.
TEP: Tourism Enterprise Performance.
SD: Standard Deviation.
RII: Relative Importance Index.
GDP: Gross Domestic Product.
YUT: Yemen Union for Tourism.

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