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## Organisational Creativity and Innovative Performance: The Role of Realised Absorptive Capacity and Customer Orientation in Gastronomic Firms

Flor de Meliza Ccorisapra-Quintana<sup>1\*</sup>  | Alonso Portocarrero-Rivera<sup>2</sup> 

1. Corresponding Author, Faculty of Administration, Universidad Tecnológica del Perú, Perú. Email: [c21383@utp.edu.pe](mailto:c21383@utp.edu.pe)

2. Faculty of Administration, Universidad La Salle, Arequipa – Perú. Email: [aportocarrero@ulasalle.edu.pe](mailto:aportocarrero@ulasalle.edu.pe)

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### ABSTRACT

The dynamic environment of gastronomy firms in developing economies demands the implementation of strategies to enhance innovative performance. This study examines the mediation of realised absorptive capacity and customer orientation in the link between organisational creativity and innovative performance. Using a sample of 207 gastronomic firms in Arequipa (Peru) - a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, the theoretical model was tested using Partial Least Squares structural equation modelling. The results indicate that organisational creativity positively impacts innovative performance, an effect amplified through realised absorptive capacity and customer orientation. The study extends theoretical insights on organisational creativity and innovative performance in gastronomic firms and enriches the dynamic component model by incorporating these mediators. Additionally, it deepens the understanding of open innovation theory by validating the model proposed, contributing to strategic approaches for fostering innovation in the gastronomic sector of developing economies.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last 20 years, the gastronomy industry has experienced significant transformations in management and services, establishing itself as a major tourist attraction and a key driver of economic development (Pasco-Dalla-Porta et al., 2021). This sector has also gained global recognition, with the rise of new ventures creating a dynamic and competitive environment (Pérez-Gálvez et al., 2017; Ontaneda & Quiroga, 2020). The current competitive environment of the business ecosystem requires implementing strategies both in management and in the services offered to retain and attract new customers (Pasco-Dalla-Porta et al., 2021; Pérez-Gálvez et al., 2017), highlighting the critical role of creativity and innovation. In this regard, Esparza-Huamanchumo et al. (2022) emphasise the need to explore internal organisational factors linked to innovative performance (IP), as continuous creativity and innovation in processes, products and services are essential for delivering unique consumer experiences (Ontaneda & Quiroga, 2020; Hurtado-Palomino et al., 2023).

While creativity refers to the generation of novel and valuable ideas, innovation encompasses the process of transforming the ideas into tangible products, services, or practices that create value (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Fetrati et al., 2022; Martínez de Albeniz & Galarraga, 2022). The literature identifies two primary approaches to studying creativity: individual-collective and organisational-contextual levels (Fetrati et al., 2022). Several theoretical models have been developed to explain organisational creativity (OC), including the interactionist model (Woodman et al., 1993), the componential model (Amabile, 1988), personal and contextual factors (Oldham & Cummings, 1996), the multilevel and sense-making perspective (Drazin et al., 1999), and the dynamic componential model (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Recent studies highlight the latter as particularly valuable for understanding how ability, motivation, and environment contribute to creativity and innovation processes (Darvishmotevali et al., 2020). Nevertheless, research gaps remain, particularly regarding the role of organisational strategies in enhancing creativity (Fetrati et al., 2022) and the empirical validation of creativity-innovation links within the culinary sector (Presenza et al., 2018).

Open innovation theory suggests that organisations can improve innovative performance by interacting with their ecosystem (customers, suppliers, competitors, universities, and others), transforming acquired knowledge into sustainable and competitive products and services (Chesbrough & Bogers, 2014). In this context, realised absorptive capacity (RACAP) emerges as a critical factor within dynamic capabilities, reflecting the ability to transform and exploit new external knowledge (Algarni et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2021; Hurtado-Palomino et al., 2022). Furthermore, the development of this theory has highlighted the role of absorptive capacity in the innovation process (Elidjen et al., 2022). However, there is still a need to analyse the components of absorptive capacity separately to explain in detail the incidence of absorptive capacity (Algarni et al., 2023). Furthermore, Lim and Ok (2021) suggest empirically testing the implications of absorptive capacity in developing countries due to the limited resources and capabilities in organisations to implement innovation-promoting strategies. It has also been highlighted that the interplay between transformational and explorative capabilities, organisational creativity and innovative performance allow for a better understanding of how firms leverage external knowledge to promote their innovation in dynamic market environments.

Customer orientation (CO) is another essential factor, enabling organisations to identify and adapt to market needs (Yang et al., 2022). That is, by identifying customer needs, organisations have greater knowledge about consumer preferences. Helal (2022) suggests that restaurant managers use customer orientation to recognise current and future customer desires. Furthermore, Zhao (2022) considers it a valuable line of research to examine the mediating and moderating effects of customer orientation on performance indicators. It is important to highlight the contribution of the customer in creativity and innovation because it allows organisations to seize opportunities based on identified needs, validating creative ideas, adapting to individual requirements for products, services and experiences and creating competitive advantages. Drawing on this argument, we aim to analyse the mediating role of customer orientation in the relationship between absorptive capacity and innovative performance in gastronomic firms.

The above arguments lead us to formulate the following aims: 1) to analyse the effect of organisational creativity on innovative performance; 2) to analyse the mediating effect of realised absorptive capacity on the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance; and 3) to analyse the mediating effect of customer orientation on the relationship between

organisational creativity and innovative performance. This research is justified from a theoretical perspective because it presents an unprecedented study model in the gastronomy sector of a developing economy, i.e., it explains the impact of realised absorptive capacity and customer orientation as variables leading organisational creativity to improve innovative performance. Furthermore, the practical contribution benefits organisations in the gastronomy sector in their management decision-making processes. This is also a valuable contribution because gastronomy is one of the most developed sectors of the economy and has been the centre of multiple ventures in recent years. Nonetheless, problems of sustainability in the market have been observed, arguably due to problems stemming from low professionalisation in the management of the companies.

This introduction is the opening section of the study. It is followed by a review of the literature and the formulation of our hypotheses. In the third section, the methodological process is explained. The fourth section presents the descriptive and inferential statistical results. Finally, the discussion and conclusions are presented.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### **2.1. Innovative Performance**

Innovative performance represents the outcome of developing and implementing creativity and innovation activities. Numerous studies highlight that innovative performance is influenced by multiple organisational factors, underscoring the benefits of an innovation-oriented approach. These benefits include gaining competitive advantage (Algarni et al., 2023), achieving business growth (Islam & Wahab, 2021), enhancing efficiency (Rubio-Picón et al., 2023), adapting to market changes (Bernal-Torres et al., 2023) and creating customer value (Sánchez-Gutiérrez et al., 2019).

Our review of the literature identified studies examining the antecedents of innovative performance. For example, De la Gala-Velásquez et al. (2023) analyse the effect of organisational flexibility on innovative performance, concluding that it has a positive influence by enabling firms to respond swiftly and efficiently to competition. Similarly, Patwary et al. (2022) investigate the mediating effect of organisational creativity in the relationship between knowledge management practices and innovative performance, highlighting how creative capacity can enhance the outcomes of knowledge strategies. Meanwhile, Ahmed et al. (2024) explore the impact of the dimensions of organisational creativity on product innovative performance, demonstrating that factors such as the novelty and utility of creativity are crucial for developing differentiated products.

Although these studies provide significant insights and are particularly recent, gaps remain in the detailed and in-depth understanding of the implications of internal and external factors on the innovative performance of gastronomic firms. Furthermore, most research focuses on general service contexts or technological industries, leaving a gap in the literature on how these factors interact within the gastronomic sector, which is characterised by its high creative intensity and constant need for innovation.

### **2.2. Organisational Creativity and Innovative Performance**

Traditionally, in terms of its contribution to innovation, creativity has been studied at the level of the individual (Fetrati et al., 2022; Tajeddini, 2015). Amabile (1988) defines individual creativity as the generation of useful and novel ideas, arising from an individual's creative processes. However, recent studies have increasingly focused on organisational creativity, recognising its critical role in driving innovation within firms (Gao et al., 2021). In this context, Woodman et al. (1993) conceptualise organisational creativity as the generation of new ideas aimed at improving processes and products, enabling firms to remain competitive and sustainable in dynamic markets.

Creativity and innovation are complementary organisational capabilities that, together, enable firms to maintain their sustainability in highly competitive environments (Fetrati et al., 2022; Souto, 2022). In essence, creativity serves as the primary input for the implementation of new processes and products, while innovation transforms these creative ideas into tangible outcomes. To understand the theoretical and practical links between these two variables, we explored previous studies, finding various approaches adopted (Souto, 2022; Patwary et al. 2022). For example, Souto (2022) claims that organisational creativity has a positive effect on sustainability-oriented innovation in firms. Patwary et

al. (2022) argue that firms that implement organisational creativity are more likely to benefit in innovation outcomes.

Moreover, creativity has been linked to learning processes, such as the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, both internal and external, to strengthen innovation efforts. This facilitates the development of novel products and services (Zizlavsky, 2016). Additionally, Gomes and Wojahn (2017) emphasise that fostering communication within organisations enhances knowledge sharing, collaboration, and idea generation, ultimately leading to improved innovative performance.

Despite these advances, limited research has examined the interplay between organisational creativity and innovative performance in the gastronomic sector. This industry, characterised by its dynamic nature and the need for constant creativity to meet evolving consumer demands, provides a unique context in which to explore this relationship. Addressing this research gap, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1.** Organisational creativity influences innovative performance in gastronomic firms.

## **2.2. Mediating Role of Realised Absorptive Capacity**

Our exploration of the previous literature indicated that the dynamic capability of organisations is commonly assessed through adaptive, absorptive, and innovative capabilities (Wang & Ahmed, 2007; Ruiz-Ortega et al., 2023; Beigi et al., 2023; Akbari et al., 2020). Furthermore, several studies highlight the need for further research on the effects of absorptive capacity and its components (Elidjen et al., 2022; Novino, 2022). Studies on absorptive capacity often divide it into two components: potential and realised absorptive capacity (Elidjen et al., 2022; Algarni et al., 2023). The first pertains to the organisational ability to acquire and assimilate internal and external knowledge, while the second refers to the ability to transform and exploit acquired and assimilated knowledge (Zhao et al., 2021; Hurtado-Palomino et al., 2022). The present study focuses on realised absorptive capacity due to its benefits for firms during the innovation process (Algarni et al., 2023).

Focusing on the relationships between organisational creativity and realised absorptive capacity, we found evidence supporting a potential link between these variables. In this regard, Gong et al. (2013) argue that the interaction between creativity and realised absorptive capacity improves performance, i.e., when workers understand and react creatively to market demands and these are accepted and applied in the firm. In addition, Seo et al. (2015) argue that creative self-efficacy influences absorptive capacity, enhancing, in turn, individual creativity. In the same vein, Cavazotte and Paula (2021) conclude that the creativity of R&D teams has a positive impact on absorptive capacity. However, no studies have yet analysed these links (organisational creativity and realised absorptive capacity) in the field of gastronomic firms.

It is also important to assess the contribution of realised absorptive capacity to innovative performance. Zhao et al. (2021) highlight that absorptive capacity mediates the relationship between knowledge sharing and innovative performance. Similarly, Cavazotte and Paula (2021) explain that absorptive capacity promotes innovation in organisations. In the same line, Abualoush (2022) argues that absorptive capacity has a positive impact on innovation; however, with this relationship being enhanced through human capital. Moreover, Cruz-Ros et al. (2021) analyse the effect of transformation and exploitation capacity on innovation, concluding that both dimensions have significant effects. Drawing on these studies, it can be inferred that the effect of organisational creativity on innovative performance is enhanced when the organisation effectively transforms and exploits the knowledge identified internally and externally. The following research hypothesis is based on the above.

**H2.** Realised absorptive capacity mediates the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance in gastronomic firms.

## **2.3. Mediating Role of Customer Orientation**

In the context of marketing, market orientation has been identified as a key strategic approach for organisations, being assessed through three dimensions: customer orientation, competitor orientation and cross-functional coordination (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Tajeddini & Trueman, 2012; Tajeddini, 2015; Smirnova et al., 2018; Kim & Qu, 2020). Customer orientation is conceptualised as

understanding and addressing customers' needs, while competitor orientation refers to the proactive and strategic response to competitors' actions. On the other hand, cross-functional coordination involves the efficient use of both tangible and intangible resources to improve customer service (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Tabasi Lotfabadi et al., 2023).

In the current research, the customer orientation dimension has been selected because firms need to obtain information from customers to identify their needs, tastes and preferences, which are essential to ensure the survival of the firm (Demuner-Flores et al. 2022; Frambach et al., 2016; Tajeddini, 2010). Moreover, in a competitive business ecosystem, companies strive to satisfy their customers' needs to retain their market position (Zhao, 2022).

The interaction between organisational creativity and customer orientation has been studied by various authors (Miao & Wang, 2016; Tseng, 2019; Racela & Thoumrungroje, 2020). Some studies suggest that these organisational strategies can positively complement and reinforce each other, while others suggest that there may be tensions and conflicts between the two (Frambach et al., 2016; Han & Kim, 2019). For example, Miao and Wang (2016) argue that the interaction between relational and functional customer orientation positively affects creativity, while Tseng (2019) asserts that customer orientation has an impact on customer satisfaction through employee creativity. Additionally, Racela and Thoumrungroje (2020) conclude that customer orientation can drive the generation of creative ideas.

Meanwhile, a number of studies have reported a negative relationship (Greenley et al., 2005; Im & Workman, 2004; Zhou et al., 2005). For instance, Im and Workman (2004) explain that customer orientation is negatively related to new product creation, because customers are not always willing to try new products. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2005) report that market orientation has a negative effect on innovation. Furthermore, Govindarajan et al. (2011) conclude that customer orientation has a negative effect on disruptive innovations, and Frambach et al. (2016) explain that excessive customer orientation can create disadvantages in identifying emerging customer needs. Despite these findings, our model postulates that customer orientation can positively drive creativity towards better innovation outcomes.

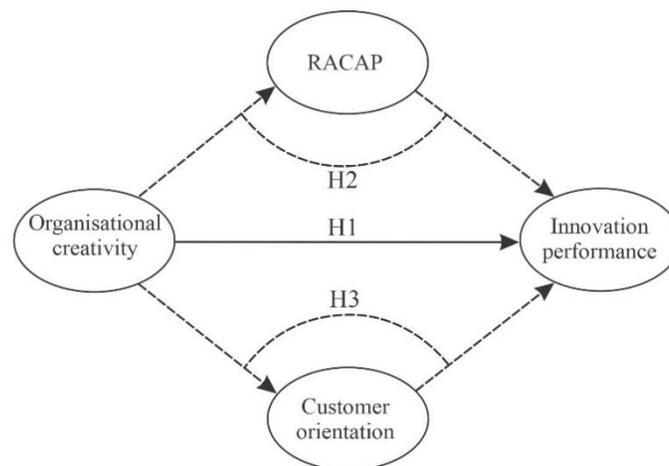
By integrating customer needs, companies understand customer preferences and expectations and, based on this information, can develop new creative ideas (Rumanti et al., 203). Additionally, companies may consider customers as a source of continuous feedback for product and service development, enabling them to improve their performance (Racela & Thoumrungroje, 2020). Moreover, knowledge of demanders' preferences helps differentiate their product and service offerings in their business ecosystem (Espino-Rodríguez et al., 2023; De Vasconcelos et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, several authors argue that customer orientation has a positive effect on firm performance (Zhang & Aumeboonsuke, 2023; Velázquez et al., 2023; Tajeddini, 2011). In this context, Velázquez et al. (2023) claim that a customer-centric strategic posture is conducive to innovative performance. Furthermore, Neneh (2018) concludes that customer orientation has a positive effect on the performance of female-led firms. Finally, Tajeddini (2011) argues that customer orientation positively influences new product development. In summary, market orientation is assumed to play an essential role in achieving optimal innovative performance.

Based on these arguments, we propose the following research hypothesis.

**H3.** Customer orientation mediates the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance in gastronomic firms.

Figure 1 shows the theoretical model of our research. H1 suggests the influence of organisational creativity on innovative performance, while H2 represents the mediating effect of realised absorptive capacity on the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance. Finally, H3 implies the mediating effect of customer orientation on the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance.



**Fig. 1. Theoretical Research Model**  
Source. Own preparation.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Population and Sample

The Arequipa region has been characterised for its significant gastronomic wealth (Cánepa-Koch et al., 2011), having been recognised by UNESCO as a creative city of gastronomy, which highlights the importance of research in this economic sector (Hurtado-Palomino et al., 2022). The study population corresponds to gastronomic enterprises in the Arequipa region, corresponding to ISIC 5610 (restaurants and mobile food service activities); ISIC 5630 (beverage service activities) and ISIC 5629 (other food service activities). To determine the population, the National Superintendence of Customs and Tax Administration (SUNAT) was requested to provide information on incorporated enterprises; after excluding enterprises with fewer than three workers on the payroll and two years of seniority, a final population of 395 enterprises was obtained for the entire Arequipa region.

**Table 1. Restaurant Classification by Concept**

Restaurant concept	Fi	%
Ethnic cuisine restaurants	28	13.50
Fish and seafood restaurants	15	7.20
Red meat and poultry restaurants	40	19.32
Fast food restaurants	29	14.00
Fusion restaurants	86	41.50
Cafe-bar restaurants	9	4.34

Source. Own preparation.

The data were collected in the last quarter of 2022 by means of interviews with the manager or administrator of the restaurants located in the department of Arequipa, selected through convenience sampling. A total of 207 valid surveys were obtained, representing a response rate of 52.41% of the study population, with a margin of error of 4.71%, and a confidence level of 95%. Specifically, Table 1 presents the profile of the businesses surveyed, which correspond to ethnic cuisine restaurants (13.5%); fish and seafood restaurants (7.2%); red meat and poultry restaurants (19.32%); fast food (14.0%); fusion restaurants (41.50%); and café-bar restaurants (4.34%).

#### 3.2. Measurement Instruments

To identify the measurement instruments, prior knowledge about the variables in question was explored. The items were adapted for the business context and reviewed by academic researchers and business executives before their final application. Furthermore, all items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Finally, the items for each variable are presented in the research appendix.

*Organisational creativity.* Organisational creativity has been characterised by the organisational ability to create, apply, and implement new ideas in the operations and services of companies

(Woodman et al., 1993). The five items proposed by Lee and Choi (2003), recently used by Darvishmotevali et al. (2020) and others, were adapted to measure this variable. Cronbach's alpha for the construct is 0.943, which indicates the high reliability of the instrument.

*Innovative performance.* This has been conceptualised as the result of internal and external innovation strategies that result in new products and services. Moreover, this construct can be assessed objectively and subjectively (Wei & Chen, 2023). In the present study, it was subjectively assessed through a set of items on process and product innovation (Prajogo & Amed, 2006). Specifically, it was measured with six items adapted from previous studies (Prajogo & Amed, 2006; Hurtado-Palomino et al., 2022). Cronbach's alpha for this variable is 0.898, higher than the accepted threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).

*Realised absorptive capacity.* This is considered as the entrepreneurial ability to transform and exploit new knowledge identified internally or externally. This capability was evaluated through seven items adapted from Flatten et al. (2011). The reliability of this construct also meets the acceptance criteria ( $\alpha = 0.924$ ).

*Customer orientation.* This is considered as understanding and attending to the needs of customers. The four items for customer orientation were adapted from Yang et al. (2022). Cronbach's Alpha for the construct is 0.783, slightly exceeding the reliability threshold (Hair et al., 2019).

*Control variables.* Firm size, family-ownership and firm age were considered in this research. Firm size was assessed through the number of workers on the payroll. In addition, to address our research purposes, it is recommended that organisations present a minimum structure to develop their business operations (Martínez-Pérez et al., 2016). To measure family ownership, we asked whether family members have majority ownership and work in the company, which was dichotomously evaluated. Firm age was evaluated through the number of years they had been operating in the market (age); this factor is important because companies require a minimum time to adapt and consolidate in the market.

## 4. Statistical Analysis and Results

The statistical procedure used to test the hypotheses of the study was structural equation modelling (SEM) with the partial least squares (PLS) technique. Smart-PLS v. 4.1.0.4 software was used to conduct the analysis. In this regard, the literature supports the benefits of using this technique in the field of business sciences, because it can be evaluated with small samples and non-parametric data (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the analysis of the results is divided into three sections: 1) the descriptive results of the study; 2) the results of the measurement model at the indicator and construct level; 3) the results of the structural model.

### 4.1. Descriptive Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive and correlational statistics. The results show that the mean number of workers corresponds to micro and small enterprises, the characteristic of developing countries ( $\bar{X} = 9.6908$  workers). Furthermore, the mean firm age indicates they are young enterprises ( $\bar{X} = 10.4444$  years), possibly founded during the boom of the gastronomy industry in Peru (Pérez-Gálvez et al., 2017). Additionally, the means for the constructs of organisational creativity, customer orientation, realised absorptive capacity and business performance exceed the average of the measurement scale (3.5). However, the mean of the responses for organisational creativity ( $\bar{X} = 5.4580$ ) should be highlighted, arguably reflecting that the research was conducted in gastronomic firms in a city recognised by UNESCO as a Creative City of Gastronomy. Additionally, a low standard deviation was found for all variables in the study.

Table 2 presents the correlations between the study variables, where firm size is related to innovative performance ( $R=0.187^{**}$ ), with age and family ownership having no relationship. Organisational creativity is positively related to innovative performance ( $R=0.515^{**}$ ), realised absorptive capacity ( $R=0.574^{**}$ ), and customer orientation ( $R=0.526^{**}$ ). Similarly, customer orientation is related to innovative performance ( $R=0.565^{**}$ ), and realised absorptive capacity suggests a positive association ( $R=0.631^{**}$ ).

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

Factors	$\bar{X}$	$\Sigma$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Size	9.6908	-	1.000						
2. Age	10.444	-	0.273**	1.000					
3. Family-owned	-	-	0.197*	-0.103	1.000				
4. Organisational creativity	5.4580	1.2321	0.143*	-0.100	0.131	1.000			
5. RACAP	5.3975	1.0625	0.232**	0.009	0.142*	0.547**	1.000		
6. Customer orientation	5.322	1.0161	0.025	0.006	-0.001	0.469**	0.462**	1.000	
7. Innovative performance	5.3647	1.0361	0.187**	0.010	0.093	0.443**	0.566**	0.483**	1.000

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Source. Own preparation.

#### 4.2. Results of the Measurement Model

Table 3 presents the external loadings, means and standard deviations of the items. First, the external loadings of the indicators are higher than 0.70, except for items CO1 (0.699) and CO (0.696), corresponding to customer orientation, where the external loadings are lower than 0.70. However, they have been maintained in the construct measurement because they do not create problems of reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Next, reliability and construct validity were analysed (Table 3), where Cronbach's alpha and internal consistency coefficient values exceeded the minimum accepted threshold of 0.7 for all the variables (Hair et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the average variance extracted (AVE) measures convergent validity, with the results showing values above 0.5 for all constructs.

Table 4 shows the discriminant validity, which was examined using the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), with values below 0.85 in all cases for the different concepts (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, discriminant validity is established.

**Table 3. Reliability, Construct, and Discriminant Validity**

Variables	Items	Loadings	Mean	SD	$\alpha$ >0.7	Rho_a >0.7	AVE >0.5
1. Organisational creativity	OC 1	0.879	5.410	1.326	0.943	0.945	0.814
	OC 2	0.919	5.600	1.34			
	OC 3	0.901	5.280	1.389			
	OC 4	0.883	5.590	1.380			
	OC 5	0.827	5.420	1.394			
2. Customer orientation	CO 1	0.699	5.190	1.366	0.783	0.806	0.609
	CO 2	0.696	5.230	1.331			
	CO 3	0.872	5.430	1.188			
	CO 4	0.84	5.420	1.345			
3. Realised absorptive capacity	RACAP 1	0.792	5.240	1.346	0.924	0.929	0.685
	RACAP 2	0.851	5.350	1.328			
	RACAP 3	0.833	5.390	1.248			
	RACAP 4	0.826	5.470	1.276			
	RACAP 5	0.813	5.310	1.356			
	RACAP 6	0.840	5.520	1.210			
	RACAP 7	0.836	5.500	1.214			
4. Innovative performance	IP 1	0.852	5.430	1.192	0.898	0.902	0.664
	IP 2	0.765	5.360	1.246			
	IP 3	0.810	5.430	1.167			
	IP 4	0.769	5.310	1.244			
	IP 5	0.837	5.270	1.367			
	IP 6	0.851	5.390	1.276			

**Table 4. Assessment of Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratios)**

Construct	HTMT			
	1	2	3	4
1. Organisational creativity	1			
2. Customer orientation	0.617	1		
3. RACAP	0.616	0.634	1	
4. Innovative performance	0.56	0.676	0.695	1

Source. Own preparation.

**4.3. Results of the Structural Model**

We also checked for multicollinearity issues across the predictor variables, using the variance inflation factor (VIF), with the values for organisational creativity (VIF=1.759), realised absorptive capacity (VIF=1.790) and customer orientation (VIF=1.666). All antecedent variables of the dependent variable exhibit values that are below 3.3 (Hair et al., 2019).

To test Hypothesis 1, organisational creativity and innovative performance were analysed ( $\beta = 0.541$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with the coefficient of determination being  $R^2 = 0.285^{***}$ , i.e., the influence is moderate (Bagheri et al., 2023). This result endorses the first research hypothesis (see Table 5).

For Hypothesis 2, we analysed the mediating effect of realised absorptive capacity on the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance ( $\beta = 0.313$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), where the coefficient of determination was  $R^2 = 0.462^{***}$ , showing that the mediation is partial (Nitzl et al. 2017). This result allows us to accept the second research hypothesis (see Table 5).

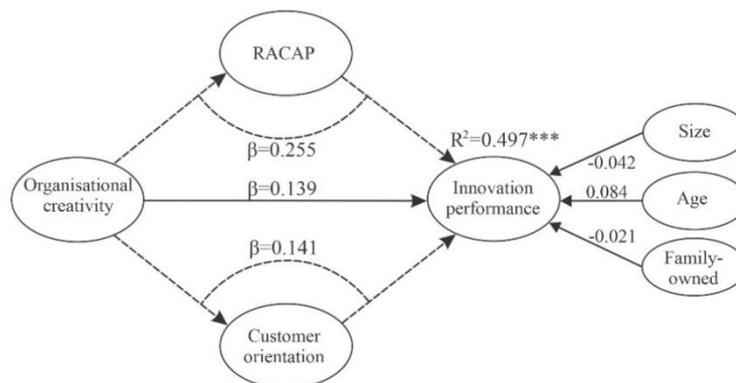
Finally, the mediation of customer orientation was added to the previous model to test Hypothesis 3 ( $\beta = 0.141$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with the coefficient of determination being  $R^2 = 0.497^{***}$ . The partial nature of the mediation in this model is evident. These results confirm the third research hypothesis (see Table 5).

Furthermore, Figure 2 graphically presents the results of the research.

**Table 5. Assessment of Direct and Indirect Effects**

Hypothesis	Direct and indirect relation	Path coefficient	p	t	95% ICSC	Hypothesis decision
H1	OC→PI	0.541	0.000	8.314	[0.418 - 0.636]	Accepted
H2	OC→RACAP→PI	0.313	0.000	6.075	[0.233 - 0.401]	Accepted
H3	OC → CO→PI	0.141	0.003	2.770	[0.065 -0.234]	Accepted

Source. Own preparation.



**Fig. 2. Summary of the Final Structural Models**  
Source. Own preparation.

Table 6 shows the values of the predictive validity scores. The model offers a high predictive value as it can be observed that all root mean square error (RMSE) and mean absolute error (MAE) indicators have positive values. Furthermore, it can be observed that the highest  $Q^2$  values are related to IP3 (Sales of new products or services have increased) and IP6 (The company is more flexible due to improved operational processes). Furthermore, the model also offers a level of prediction for the innovative performance variable of 0.366.

**Table 6. Predictive Validity Scores**

	PLS			LM		PLS-LM	
	$Q^2$ predict	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE
IP1	0.222	1.100	0.869	1.121	0.881	-0.021	-0.012
IP2	0.185	1.236	0.868	1.333	0.924	-0.097	-0.056
IP3	0.291	1.077	0.844	1.135	0.850	-0.058	-0.006
IP4	0.239	1.042	0.787	1.089	0.792	-0.047	-0.005
IP5	0.222	1.100	0.840	1.149	0.881	-0.049	-0.041
IP6	0.271	0.999	0.813	1.054	0.834	-0.055	-0.021

Source. Own preparation.

Table 7 presents the results of the structural invariance analysis, which evaluates how the control variables of size, age and family ownership influence the direct relationships examined in the study. For the relationship between OC and IP, no significant differences were found concerning firm size or age, as the p-value exceeded 0.05 in most cases. However, a significant difference was observed in family-owned firms. This is likely due to the higher commitment and preservation of traditional values in family businesses, combined with greater flexibility in decision-making processes. These characteristics may facilitate the transformation of organisational creativity into innovation. In contrast, non-family firms often prioritise short-term objectives and goal achievement, which may limit the development and utilisation of organisational creativity.

On the other hand, the relationship between OC and RACAP, showed significant differences concerning firm age. Younger firms (10 years or less) demonstrated greater flexibility, adaptability and openness to new ideas, enabling them to capitalise on organisational creativity more effectively in terms of realised absorptive capacity. In contrast, older firms tend to develop rigid structures and routines, which may reduce their ability to transform and exploit creative knowledge. This rigidity likely affects their innovative performance, as they may focus more on efficiency and process optimisation than on leveraging creativity for innovation (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Testing Structural Invariance**

Path	Variable	Group	$\beta$	Difference	p-Value
OC→PI	Size	≤ 10	0.106	0.028	0.864
		> 10	0.592		
	Age	≤ 10	0.071	-0.069	0.658
		> 10	0.14		
	Family-owned	Yes	0.296	0.415	0.004
		No	-0.119		
OC→RACAP	Size	≤ 10	0.592	0.101	0.422
		> 10	0.491		
	Age	≤ 10	0.693	0.273	0.011
		> 10	0.42		
	Family-owned	Yes	0.586	-0.009	0.923
		No	0.594		
RACAP→PI	Size	≤ 10	0.42	0.269	0.167
		> 10	0.151		
	Age	≤ 10	0.471	0.202	0.220
		> 10	0.269		
	Family-owned	Yes	0.29	0.535	0.103
		No	0.535		
CO→PI	Size	≤ 10	0.235	-0.187	0.363
		> 10	0.423		
	Age	≤ 10	0.202	-0.177	0.318
		> 10	0.379		
	Family-owned	Yes	0.226	-0.032	0.828
		No	0.257		

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Discussion of the Results

Our study was based on the dynamic componential model proposed by Amabile and Pratt (2016), which posits that creativity and innovation emerge from the interaction of skills, motivation, and environment. Within this framework, the research analysed the impact of organisational creativity on innovative performance. Additionally, it explored the mediating role of realised absorptive capacity and customer orientation in the relationship between organisational creativity and the innovative performance of gastronomic firms. This approach responds to the need to understand the mediating and moderating factors influencing organisational performance (Zhao, 2022). The findings offer valuable insights into the theoretical connections among organisational creativity, realised absorptive capacity, and innovative performance within the gastronomic sector.

Firstly, our results confirm that organisational creativity has a positive influence on innovative performance, a finding consistent with previous research (Fetrati et al., 2022; Souto, 2022; Patwary et

al., 2022), which highlights the importance of creativity as a key determinant of innovation. However, these results are novel in the context of gastronomic enterprises. These findings suggest that organisational creativity should be fostered to enhance innovative performance, which is in line with theories that emphasise creativity as a competitive advantage in service-oriented organisations. For example, many restaurants create unique and highly creative dishes by mixing local and international cuisines, a practice that reflects their innovativeness (De la Gala-Velásquez et al., 2023).

Second, our findings suggest that realised absorptive capacity improves the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance. This result coincides with previous studies by Zhao et al. (2021), Cavazotte and Paula (2021) and Cruz-Ros et al. (2021), which emphasise the importance of transforming and exploiting external knowledge to maximise innovation. Our research extends these findings by locating them within the gastronomic sector, where the effective assimilation of knowledge, such as culinary trends or supplier innovations, can aid creative outcomes. For example, restaurants that combine local and international cuisine transform knowledge into innovative dishes, exemplifying the importance of realised absorptive capacity.

Thirdly, our results indicate that customer orientation mediates the relationship between organisational creativity and innovative performance in gastronomic firms. This finding builds on previous research (Helal, 2022; Makona et al., 2023) identifying customer orientation as a key driver of innovation. In contrast to previous studies, our results suggest that an excessive focus on the customer may hinder the impact of creativity on innovation, as firms may prioritise customer preferences over novel ideas. This insight highlights the importance of balancing customer insights with organisational creative strategies.

The results obtained have important implications for the development of business knowledge and practice. From a theoretical perspective, this research expands and enriches the literature on organisational creativity by contextualising its impact on the gastronomic sector, an area little explored in innovation studies. Moreover, the inclusion of realised absorptive capacity and customer orientation as mediating variables provides a deeper understanding of how these factors interact to enhance innovative performance in gastronomic firms.

In terms of practical implications, it is recommended that managers of gastronomy companies actively encourage creativity at all organisational levels. This includes establishing processes to acquire, assimilate, transform and exploit external knowledge, which can significantly improve innovative performance in a competitive environment. It is also suggested that firms harness customer feedback to refine innovative ideas promoted within the organisation. However, it is equally important to involve other stakeholders, such as suppliers and competitors, through benchmarking and collaboration efforts, thus diversifying and enriching the sources of creativity.

This holistic approach can help gastronomy firms respond effectively to market challenges while strengthening their capacity for sustainable innovation.

### **5.3. Limitations and Future Lines of Research**

This research study has some limitations that could be overcome in future research. First, the study was conducted in a regional economic context; thus, it would be interesting to extend the research to the national level, given the extensive culinary wealth of the country. Second, the research was carried out under a cross-sectional approach, i.e., the data were collected at a single point in time. Thirdly, due to the characteristics of the study, the results of the research could be used in companies in similar countries.

As for future lines of research, we propose new variables be added to the study model, such as environmental dynamism, dynamic capabilities, organisational culture, strategic leadership and strategic orientation variables. It is also recommended to extend the research to the national sphere. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate customers' valuation of creativity and innovation.

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## **Appendix**

### **Innovative performance**

IP1: The number of product or service innovations has improved.

IP2: Profitability of new products or services has increased.

IP3: Sales of new products or services have increased.

IP4: The number of business process innovations has increased.

IP5: Costs for process improvements have been significantly reduced.

IP6: The company is more flexible due to improved operational processes.

### **Organisational creativity**

OC1: Our company has produced a lot of new and useful ideas (service/product)

OC2: Our company fosters an environment that favours the ability to produce novel and useful ideas (service/product)

OC3: Our company spends a lot of time producing novel and useful ideas (products and/or services).

OC4: Our company considers that producing novel and useful ideas (products and/or services) is an important activity.

OC5: Our company actively produces novel and useful ideas (products and/or services).

### **Customer orientation**

CO1: New product ideas come from the marketplace.

CO2: New products offer superior value to customers.

CO3: We develop new products that respond to customer needs.

CO4: We actively seek market information to improve our understanding of customers' needs.

### **Realised absorptive capacity.**

RACAP1: Our employees have the ability to structure and utilise collective knowledge.

RACAP2: Our employees enable the absorption of new knowledge, its preparation for the future and its application.

RACAP3: Our employees successfully link existing knowledge with new points of view.

RACAP4: Our employees are able to apply new knowledge in their practical work.

RACAP5: Our managers support the development and testing of new products/services.

RACAP6: We regularly rethink existing technology and adapt it according to new knowledge.

RACAP7: We have the ability to work more effectively by adopting new technologies.