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Mediating role of thriving and moderating role of
competitive psychological climate**

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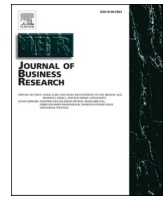
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Psychological empowerment and creative performance: Mediating role of thriving and moderating role of competitive psychological climate

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ABSTRACT

The vital importance of employees' creative performance has been repeatedly emphasised in both academic and practitioner research. While prior literature has pointed towards the importance of psychological empowerment as a key antecedent of creative performance, mainly a direct link has been established with equivocal findings. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources framework and the Conservation of Resources theory, this study seeks to account for the influence of perceived psychological empowerment on creative performance by investigating the underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms. A conceptual model derived from the literature is tested among salespersons in both developing (Pakistan; $n = 219$) and developed (South Korea; $n = 201$) country contexts. Our findings across both the samples demonstrate that thriving partially mediates the relationship between perceived psychological empowerment and creative performance. Moreover, the direct effect of thriving and the indirect effect of perceived psychological empowerment on creative performance are found to be weaker under highly competitive climate. However, competitive climate is found to bolster the direct effect of psychological empowerment on creativity across both samples implying that competitive climate can be a double-edged sword. The paper further discusses the academic and managerial implications emerging from the findings.

1. Introduction

Creativity-related behaviours have been widely considered critical, especially in developing customer support systems in organisations (Dong et al., 2015). Extant research argues that besides individual capabilities and skills, organisational context-related factors strongly impact employee creativity. This implies that by creating the right conditions organisations can increase creative behaviour among its employees (Miao and Wang, 2016; Kalra, Dugan and Agnihotri, 2021). On the other hand, improper organisational conditions could potentially diminish creativity (Jiang and Gu, 2016). In this respect, prior literature has pointed towards the importance of psychological empowerment for enhancing employee creativity (Yang, Gu and Liu, 2019).

Psychological empowerment has been related to creativity as empowered employees are “motivated to experiment with new ways of doing things and try creative methods of solving problems” (Zhang and Bartol, 2015, p.33). As psychological empowerment is essentially motivational in nature (Maynard, Gilson and Mathieu, 2012), based on

the Job Demands-Resources framework (JD-R; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), psychological empowerment can be considered as a personal resource (Quinones, Van den Broeck and De Witte, 2014). Against this backdrop, employee creativity has been explained as an outcome of personal resources (e.g., Jeng, 2018) and psychological empowerment has been related to employee creativity across several empirical studies. While prior studies mainly demonstrate a direct, positive relationship between psychological empowerment and employee creativity (e.g., Sun et al. 2012; Yang, Gu and Liu, 2019), results have been mixed with studies also demonstrating insignificant relationship between the two constructs (e.g., Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). A review of the literature on the psychological empowerment-creativity relationship (see Table 1) reveals possible reasons for such equivocality.

First, prior research examining the importance of psychological empowerment for employee creativity has mainly investigated its direct effect, which fails to fully explain why psychological empowerment is related to creative performance. A few studies that understand the mediating mechanisms (e.g., Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Nguyen and Doan

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Table 1
Review of studies that relate empowerment to Employee Creativity.

Study	Type of relationship hypothesised	Study findings	Sample profile
Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	163 R&D personnel from Turkish software firms
Wei, Yuan and Di (2010)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	497 employees in a large telecommunication firm in China.
Sun et al (2012)	Direct relationship	Within subject effect of psychological empowerment on employee creativity is found to be significant at $p < 0.10$	385 employees and 113 supervisors from different pharmaceutical firms in China.
Pan, Sun and Chow (2012)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity, this relationship is moderated by work-unit structure	367 employees in marketing, R&D and engineering firms in China
Amundsen and Martisen (2015)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment is not found to influence employee creativity	173 employees in Norwegian healthcare sector
Javed et al (2017)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	183 supervisor-employee dyads from 5-star hotels in Pakistan
Duan et al (2018)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	380 employees from different Chinese businesses
Mubarok and Noor (2018)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	246 employees from project-based NGOs in Pakistan
Adeel, Batool and Ali (2019)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	387 employees from a bank in Pakistan
Yang, Gu and Liu (2019)	Direct relationship	Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity	460 employees in Chinese banking sector
Nguyen and Doan (2021)	Indirect relationship	Creative process engagement and intrinsic motivation partially mediate the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee creativity	420 employees from Vietnamese telecommunication enterprises.

2021) have focused on creative process engagement and intrinsic motivation. However, researchers in the creativity literature have been encouraged to look beyond the commonly investigated motivational processes of intrinsic motivation, creative self-efficacy and prosocial motivation (see Liu et al. 2016) to other alternative mediating

mechanisms that may underlie creativity (Liu et al. 2016; Hughes et al. 2018), such as thriving (Shahid, Muchiri and Walumbwa, 2021). Hence, more research is required to advance our understanding of the distinctive role of different types of mechanisms in explicating the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee creativity.

Second, while personal resources (such as psychological empowerment) have been advocated to influence creativity (Yang, Gu and Liu, 2019), research has rarely examined the boundary conditions under which psychological empowerment will be more or less likely to be related to employees' creative performance. More research has therefore been called to examine contextual influences that foster a work environment, which can facilitate or thwart the effects of personal resources on employees' creativity-related outcomes (Kwon and Kim, 2020; Shahid, Muchiri and Walumbwa, 2021).

Finally, more research examining the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee creativity is required for extending our understanding of this relationship across different work settings (Wei, Yuan and Di, 2010) and cultures (Sun et al., 2012; Duan et al., 2018), due to variations in the work practices across different contexts (Brough et al. 2013).

Our study addresses the above-noted gaps in the creativity literature. Drawing on the JD-R framework and the COR theory, the key objective of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance by investigating the underlying mechanisms across diverse cultural contexts. In doing so, our study contributes to the extant literature in several ways.

First, our study attempts to account for the psychological empowerment-creativity relationship, which has remained elusive and inconsistent in the literature (Seibert, Wang and Courtright, 2011; Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). In particular, we draw on the concept of the 'resource gain cycle' (Hobfoll, 2011) from the COR theory and investigate the unexplored mediating role of thriving to help explain how and why psychological empowerment influences creativity. Thriving, which is defined as "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538), has been argued to be another personal resource that can be triggered by psychological empowerment (Kim and Beehr, 2020) as part of the 'resource gain cycle' (Hobfoll, 2011). We posit that thriving may aid in translating the positive effect of psychological empowerment experienced by employees into their creative performance as individuals are in a much better position to recognise problems and come up with new ideas when they experience vitality, and are learning and growing at work, i.e., thriving (Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009). This also allows us to respond to recent call in the creativity literature (Shahid, Muchiri and Walumbwa, 2021) to look into thriving as a key mechanism that may underlie employee creativity.

Second, we study the moderating role of a key job demand – competitive psychological climate, which refers to 'the degree to which employees perceive organizational rewards to be contingent on comparison of performance against that of their peers' (Brown, Cron, & Slocum Jr, 1998, p. 89), as job demands have been argued to interact with personal resources to influence work-related behaviours (Crawford, LePine and Rich, 2010; Bakker and Sans-Vergel, 2013; Tadić et al., 2015). As most employees work in a highly competitive climate, which can be a key contextual influence on their creative performance (Zhao et al. 2016), we explore how competitive climate may regulate the direct and indirect (via thriving) effects of psychological empowerment on creative performance. This investigation may help explain prior inconsistent results in the literature regarding the psychological empowerment-creativity link, and contribute to the burgeoning research exploring the regulating role of competitive climate, which also remains equivocal (Schrock et al. 2016; Ye et al. 2020). Understanding such contextual influences may provide organisations with useful insights into the conditions that can impact the effectiveness of personal resources for stimulating employee creativity.

Finally, we test our framework across salespeople in both developed (South Korea) and developing (Pakistan) countries to provide a more nuanced understanding of the development of creative performance in the sales context by highlighting any cross-cultural variations due to differences in work practices across developed and developing nations (see Brough et al. 2013). In doing so, we address calls in the creativity literature for systematic studies in the under-researched sales context (Evans et al. 2012; Miao and Wang, 2016; Kalra et al. 2021) across developing and developed countries, especially from countries outside of the USA and Europe, as such studies have been scarce (Brough et al. 2013; Liu et al. 2016; Guo et al., 2018). Thus, this study is likely to expand our understanding of the psychological empowerment-creative performance relationship across different cultural settings while addressing the critical issue of generalisability.

The next sections review the extant literature on constructs considered in this study, develop the conceptual model based on the JD-R framework and the COR theory, and then present and explain the results from the two samples. We conclude by discussing the academic and managerial implications of our study and future research directions.

2. Theoretical framework

We develop our conceptual model using two inter-related theoretical frameworks – the JD-R framework and the COR theory. Due to its flexibility and relevance in exploring the task environments, the JD-R framework has been utilised in numerous studies across different contexts including sales management (e.g., Allison et al., 2016; Bande et al., 2021; Guenzi and Nijssen, 2021)). The JD-R framework (Bakker et al., 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) looks at important physical, psychological, social and organisational aspects of a job that could either act as a job-resource or a job-demand. While job demands might not always be negative, they could often turn out to be stressors if employees have to expend significant effort in meeting them from which employees cannot recover completely (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). Job resources, on the other hand, help to neutralise the negative impact of job demand, satisfy basic needs like the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness as well as help in personal growth, learning and development (Lewig et al., 2007). The JD-R framework has been expanded to include both job resources as well as personal resources. The presence of resources leads to job engagement and positive job outcomes while their absence could lead to cynical attitudes towards work (Schaufeli, Bakker and Van Rhenen, 2009). In this study, we investigate the role of a key personal resource – psychological empowerment - in stimulating creative performance.

The COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001) deals with how individuals conserve and expend their resources. An important proposition of this theory is the concept of the ‘resource gain cycle’. According to this proposition, personal resources help individuals to accumulate additional personal resources leading to a ‘resource gain cycle’ (Hobfoll, 2011). In this study we draw from this idea of how individuals accumulate a sequence of resources in their task environment to achieve positive outcomes. As such, we postulate that the personal resource of psychological empowerment would lead to another personal resource – thriving, as part of the ‘resource gain cycle’. These personal resources are likely to encourage creative performance.

According to the JD-R theory, the interplay between an employee’s job demands and job and personal resources determines significant job outcomes including employees’ job attitudes, inclinations and behaviours (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Hence, we study the moderating role of a key job demand– competitive psychological climate. In particular, this study understands how competitive psychological climate interacts with personal resources of psychological empowerment and thriving to influence creative performance. The conceptual framework is provided in Fig. 1.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Psychological empowerment and thriving

Developed by Spreitzer (1996), psychological empowerment, unlike structural empowerment, is a motivational construct comprising four sub-dimensions: perception of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact. ‘Meaning’ is linked to the fit between the requirements of a task and an employee’s personal values and ideas; ‘competence’ is linked to the notion of self-efficacy, which relates to the self-perception about the employee’s ability to perform a task successfully; ‘autonomy’ is linked to the concept of self-determination, and is related to the employee’s perception of the ability to choose his/her own tasks, and ‘impact’ is related to the belief that the employee’s contribution to the job makes an impact on the overall performance of the organisation. The combined effect of these dimensions is expected to provide psychological empowerment in a job (Quinones et al., 2014). Psychological empowerment has been associated with a range of positive job and individual-related consequences such as employee performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Maynard et al., 2012).

‘Thriving’ is defined as a positive psychological state characterised by joint sense of vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Vitality is a

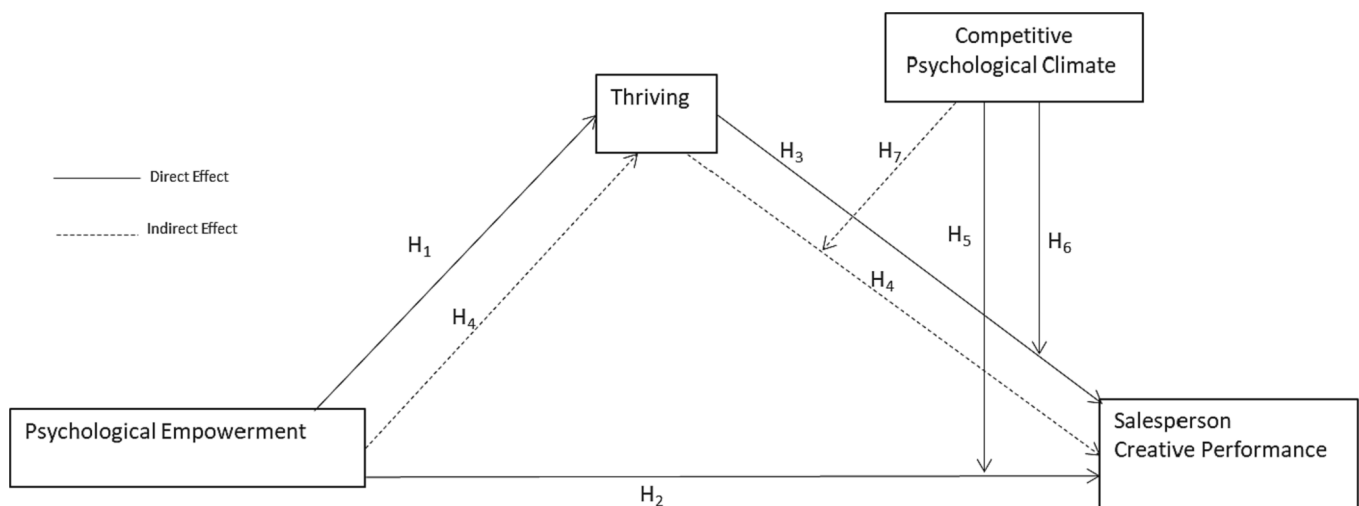


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

positive state of 'having energy' and 'feeling alive', while learning is defined as employees' feelings that they are able to acquire or are acquiring or applying valuable knowledge (Spreitzer et al., 2005). 'Thriving' as positive psychological state has received significant research attention over the past decade (for a recent review please see Kleine, Rudolph and Zacher, 2019). 'Thriving' has been associated with several personal and job resources in the past. Job engagement, positive affect and psychological capital have been found to positively impact employee perception of thriving (Kleine et al., 2019).

In this study we hypothesise a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and thriving by drawing on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2011). According to the model, personal resources help individuals to accumulate additional personal resources leading to what is called a 'resource gain cycle' (Hobfoll, 2011). Psychological empowerment has been considered as a personal resource in several studies (e.g., Quinones et al., 2014). Therefore, we hypothesise that employees with higher levels of perceived psychological empowerment will be able to acquire and possess another personal resource – thriving. Psychological empowerment enables employees to feel that they are more in control of their work, which leads to several positive attitudinal outcomes (Maynard et al., 2012; Shahid et al., 2020). As Kim and Beehr (2020) argue, psychological empowerment leads employees to seek more challenging goals and engage in more active learning, which are considered as indicators of thriving. According to Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving, employee perceptions of autonomy to take decisions and being competent in their job are important antecedents of thriving as they drive employees to be proactive, persistent and to have an exploratory attitude linked to learning. Further, positive meaning from their work encourages employees to be more exploratory in their tasks, thereby improving learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The impact dimension of psychological empowerment makes employees feel that they have made a difference to the organisation's decisions, which could improve employee perceptions about their connectedness to the organisation and thus energise them to get engaged (Spreitzer et al. 2005). Kim and Beehr (2020) also found a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and thriving. Thus, we hypothesise:

H1: Psychological empowerment positively influences thriving.

3.2. Psychological empowerment and creative performance

According to Wang and Netemeyer (2004), creative performance is conceptualised as the number of new ideas generated or behaviours exhibited by an employee in performing his/her job activities. It may involve, for instance, developing new solutions to old problems, seeing old problems in a new perspective, or analysing and solving new problems. Frontline employees, whether in sales or service jobs, encounter customer-related problems as part of their regular routine and are presented with numerous opportunities to exhibit their creativity (Ye et al., 2020; Ozturk and Karatepe, 2019). Due to the emphasis on developing or exploring novel ideas and novel solutions, creative performance requires significant levels of self-efficacy and autonomy, as well as motivation.

Psychological empowerment, which is rooted in building individual belief in the meaning, autonomy, impact and competence in work-related roles can be expected to provide greater impetus to creative performance. As Gilson and Shalley (2004) observe, when employees discover greater meaning to their work, they take time to consider their immediate tasks from different perspectives, in turn, leading to the discovery of new ideas in performing their tasks. Further, autonomy at work gives employees opportunities to think beyond existing routines and start looking at novel ways of performing existing tasks, leading to greater creative performance (Amabile and Gitomer, 1984). Prior empirical studies have also demonstrated a direct positive relationship between psychological empowerment and employee creativity (see Table 1 for a review of extant studies). Hence, we hypothesise:

H2: Psychological empowerment positively influences creative performance.

3.3. Thriving and creative performance

Employees with high levels of thriving are expected to feel a sense of growth and prosperity (Feeney and Collins, 2015) and therefore are less prone to stagnation. Hence, thriving is associated with learning new techniques, skills and seeking new opportunities (Jaiswal and Dhar, 2017), which, in turn, may lead to creative behaviour. As Kleine, Rudolph and Zacher (2019) observe, when individuals are learning, they are in an ideal position to recognise opportunities for improvement and change. Learning is also considered extremely important in the context of frontline employees as learning is found to be a strong antecedent of creativity (Yang, Lee and Cheng, 2016). Previous studies have found a positive association between the components of thriving and employee creativity. For instance, employee creativity has been established as an outcome of learning in studies by Gong et al., (2009), Hirst, Van Knippenberg and Zhou (2009), as well as Liu et al. (2013). Kark and Carmeli (2009) found a positive linkage between vitality and employee creativity. Among salespersons, Wang and Ma (2013) found that a learning orientation positively influences salesperson creativity. Further, a direct empirical relationship between thriving and employee innovative behaviour has also been observed in several empirical studies (e.g., Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009; Wallace et al., 2016). Hence, based on the extant findings we hypothesise:

H3: Thriving positively influences creative performance.

Also based on H1, H2 and H3, we propose:

H4: Thriving mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance.

3.4. Moderating role of competitive psychological climate

Based on the JD-R theory, we posit competitive psychological climate as a moderating variable in the relationship between psychological empowerment, thriving and employee creative performance. 'Competitive psychological climate' is defined as an organisational facet whereby employees working in the organisation overwhelmingly feel that their rewards are contingent upon comparison of their performance with that of their peers (Brown et al., 1998). In many organisations, a competitive psychological climate is inferred through written and unwritten protocols, which may comprise a model of reward distribution based on performance comparison, perceived rivalry with other employees as well as a culture of consistent status comparisons (Li, Wong and Kim, 2016).

Based on social comparison theory (Klein, 1997) and often based on studies in western cultures, individuals are expected to compare themselves with others to affirm their competence and hence inherently prefer to compete with others. It is also assumed that competition may focus attention on the task and thus lead to greater performance (Fletcher, Major and Davis, 2008). On the other hand, competition is also deemed to be detrimental (Kohn, 1999) since competition could lead to unhealthy outcomes like lack of co-worker support, eventually leading to decreased organisational performance.

It is argued that the beneficial or detrimental effect of competitive climate i.e., employees perceiving this organisational demand as a 'challenge' or 'hindrance' depends on the context in which the employees work or their occupation (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel 2013; Zhao et al. 2016). In work contexts where outcome of the competition is critical to employment and not just secondary, and where employees experience a real fear of losing (their job or status), competitive psychological climates are associated with stress and burnout (Fletcher et al., 2008), and thus are perceived as a 'hindrance' demand (LePine et al., 2005) because of the heavy emphasis on high-performance and favouring high-performing employees. For instance, in personal selling context where competition is crucial to the job as the stake of not

outperforming others is high, competitive psychological climate is more likely to be perceived as hindrance demand because such a work environment can build tension and conflict (Menguc et al. 2017) leading to stress and uncertainty (Keller et al., 2016), thereby resulting in undesirable outcomes such as unethical behaviour (Hochstein, Zahn and Bolander 2017) and knowledge hiding (Han et al. 2020), which can be detrimental to employee creativity (Peng, Wang and Chen, 2019).

Prior studies based on the JD-R framework have shown that 'hindrance demands' negatively interact with personal resources to reduce the impact of personal resources on work-related behaviours (Crawford, LePine and Rich, 2010; Bakker and Sans-Vergel, 2013; Tadić et al., 2015). As creative behaviour is suggested to be a function of both one's individual resources and the environment (Amabile, 1983; Kalra et al. 2022), thus, employees working under highly competitive climate will be less likely to engage in creative behaviour as they may feel less enthusiastic to tackle work-related problems that involve significant changes to the scope of their prescribed jobs. Considering that creativity involves intense cognitive, psychological, and physical exertions by employees that form part of a long-term endeavour (Kwon and Kim 2020), the presence of such a taxing demand (i.e., competitive climate) is likely to dampen the positive effect of personal resources on creative performance.

In particular, psychological empowerment perceived by employees influences their creative performance by establishing their belief in the meaning, autonomy, impact and competence in creative selling roles. In other words, employees are likely to engage in creative behaviours when they discover greater meaning to their work, and enjoy autonomy at work that gives them opportunities to self-regulate and be independent to creatively look for novel ways of working (Yang, Gu and Liu, 2019; Javed et al., 2016). Such employees believe they can have an impact, as they have the freedom to generate new ideas with the confidence that these ideas will be valued (Sun et al. 2012). However, when they perceive a competitive climate that emphasises the final outcome and high-performance, it is likely to mitigate the effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance as such a high pressure and demanding climate inhibits their ability to take charge of their work processes, and reduces their intrinsic motivation to creatively design and control their work (Menguc et al. 2017).

Furthermore, from the resource depletion perspective (Hobfoll et al. 2018), employees working under highly competitive climate tend to go through energy depleting process and are likely to experience decreased overall level of resources as such a climate is associated with higher levels of unhealthy strain, which results in employee stress and burnout (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Spurk et al. 2021). Consequently, under such a climate, employees try and maintain the same level of personal resource input for fulfilling core job responsibilities because saving their own jobs becomes their key priority (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). This results in lower available personal resources for creativity that often involves deviation from the set task processes (see also Hu and Wang, 2022). Hence, in the case of creative performance, which often requires relatively demanding and intensive effort (Shalley and Gilson, 2004) by employees, perceived competitive climate is likely to adversely impact the ability of the personal resource of psychological empowerment for stimulating creative performance. Thus:

H5: The direct impact of psychological empowerment on creative performance will be negatively moderated by competitive psychological climate such that the effect will be weaker under a high (vs low) perceived competitive psychological climate.

Competitive psychological climate is likely to dampen the effect of thriving on creative performance because the undue emphasis on high performance may impede their motivation for learning new techniques, skills and seeking new opportunities to indulge in creativity. Under such a climate, employees interpret that their organization values hard results rather than hard work (Menguc et al. 2017), and therefore strive to protect themselves against potential resource loss such as loss of job or other resources associated with employment (Hu and Wang 2022) by

focusing on core job responsibilities (e.g., working longer hours) and outperforming their peers rather than seeking new opportunities to improve and modify their work processes. Also, based on the resource depletion perspective (Hobfoll et al. 2018), as discussed above, employees who work under a highly competitive climate are likely to go through energy decreasing process (Spurk et al. 2021). Hence, they are likely to conserve their personal resource of thriving i.e., utilise their positive energy and learning skills, for fulfilling core task responsibilities to safeguard their employment and status instead of channelling it towards creativity that involves significant level of risk-taking and persistent effort to search for novel solutions. Thus:

H6: The direct impact of thriving on creative performance will be negatively moderated by competitive psychological climate such that the effect will be weaker under a high (vs low) perceived competitive psychological climate.

The above mediating and moderating hypotheses (H4, H5) represent an integrated framework whereby thriving mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance, and competitive psychological climate moderates the relationship between thriving and creative performance. Thus, it is logical to assume that competitive climate also moderates the strength of the indirect relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance via thriving. In this respect, based on the conservation of resources and JD-R theories, we propose a moderated mediation model (Edward and Lambert, 2007) as the effect of personal resources – both direct and indirect – cannot be considered in isolation from the social context (Menguc et al., 2017) such as competitive psychological climate. As previously suggested, a weaker relationship between thriving and creativity is likely under highly competitive climate. Hence, the indirect effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance via thriving may also be weaker when the competitive climate is perceived to be high. Specifically, when employees perceive a stressful demand of intense competition, it is likely to erode the positive indirect effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance as the influence of thriving, which emanates due to empowerment, on their creativity may be diluted. On the other hand, when the competitive climate is low, thriving becomes more influential in stimulating creativity, which implies that the indirect effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance via thriving will also be strengthened. Taken together, it is hypothesised:

H7: The indirect impact of psychological empowerment on creative performance through thriving will be moderated by competitive psychological climate such that the indirect effect will be weaker under a high (vs low) perceived competitive psychological climate.

4. Methodology

Data were collected from salespeople in both the developed (South Korea) and developing (Pakistan) country contexts for two key reasons – a) to test the generalisability of the model as multi-country studies provide support for the robustness of the underlying theory (Cadogen, 2010), which helps in achieving greater generalisability of the hypothesised relationships (e.g., Glosenberg et al., 2019; Ma, Yang and Yoo, 2020), and b) to provide a more nuanced understanding of the salesforce creative performance by highlighting any cross-cultural variations due to the differences in work practices across developed and developing nations (see Brough et al. 2013). South Korea and Pakistan were selected because they are regarded as suitable representatives of developed and developing countries, respectively (unctadstat.unctad.org). For instance, with a low score in masculinity, compared to Pakistani managers, South Korean managers are expected to place greater emphasis on consensus, equality and quality of work life, and therefore incentives like free time and flexibility are preferred (hofstede-insights.com). This may have implications for how personal resources, such as psychological empowerment, may influence employees' creative performance. Highlighting any cross-cultural variations is likely to advance creativity

literature as systematic comparative studies between developing and developed countries, especially from countries outside of the USA and Europe, are scarce (Brough et al. 2013; Guo et al., 2018).

In the Pakistani sample, data were collected from medical representatives in one multinational firm in Pakistan. The questionnaires were distributed by one of the researchers through branch offices and administered in English since most of the respondents were quite familiar with that language. The Pakistani sample comprised 219 respondents with a mean age of 30.62 years and a mean experience of 5.9 years. Of the respondents, 9 % were females.

In South Korea, the study involved a survey among 201 salespersons from South Korea. Respondents comprised 135 salespersons from a pharmaceutical firm and 66 salespersons from a beverages company. The mean age of the respondents was 37.08 years with the mean experience being 8.2 years. In the sample, 15.4 % of the respondents were females. The survey questionnaire was administered through the branch offices of these companies by one of the researchers. The survey instrument was translated into Korean and then back-translated into English to test the face-validity of the questionnaire.

4.1. Construct operationalisation

The constructs used in the study were operationalised based on established measurement scales. Psychological empowerment was measured using the 12-item scales developed by Spreitzer (1995) which was divided into the four sub-constructs: meaning, autonomy, impact, and competence. 'Thriving' was measured based on a seven-item scale which was a truncated version of the scale developed by Porath et al (2012). Since the samples comprised salespersons, 'creative performance' was measured using a seven-item creative selling performance scale developed by Wang and Netemeyer (2004). 'Competitive psychological climate' was measured using a three-item scale based on the scale developed by Brown et al., (2002). Seven-point Likert scales were used for measuring responses anchored between "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree". For creative performance, the anchors were "almost always" and "practically never".

4.2. Measurement model validation

The measurement model was validated through a confirmatory factor analysis procedure. For the Pakistani sample, the goodness of fit indices were adequate (chi-square/d.f = 1.99; CFI = 0.911; IFI = 0.90 and RMSEA = 0.068). All the items loaded on their predicted latent constructs with all standardised loadings greater than 0.5. The items used in the study and the standardised loadings are provided in Appendix 1. In the South Korean sample, the measurement model goodness of fit indices were also adequate (chi-square/d.f = 1.89, CFI = 0.92; IFI = 0.91 and RMSEA = 0.067). The items loaded significantly on the predicted latent constructs with standardised loadings greater than 0.5. For both the samples, the AVEs for all the latent constructs were above 0.5, with composite reliability also being above 0.7. The convergent validity of the scales was thus established. Discriminant validity was measured using the Bagozzi and Phillips (1982) method where the chi-square differences between restricted and un-restricted CFA models between the pairs of constructs were calculated. The chi-square differences were significant for each of the pairs of constructs for the two samples, which established discriminant validity for the measures in both the samples. The minimum difference between any two pairs for one degree of freedom was 37.2 in the Pakistani sample and 44.36 in the South Korean sample.

4.3. Invariance testing

Since we were comparing two different contexts, we tested the two measurement models for invariance. Configural invariance was found to be established as the unconstrained model showed excellent fit: (chi-

square/d.f = 1.992; $p \leq 0.01$); CFI = 0.911; TLI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.049). To test the metric invariance, we constrained the regression weights to be equal across the two samples. The chi-squared goodness of fit comparison showed that the two samples have full metric invariance as the difference in chi-square/d.f values of the unconstrained and constrained model was only marginally significant ($\Delta\chi^2/d.f = 31.88$ for 21 d.f, $p \geq 0.05$) and also taking into account the marginal difference in the other goodness of fit values between unconstrained and constrained models ($\Delta CFI = 0.002$; $\Delta TLI = 0.00$ $\Delta IFI = 0.001$; $\Delta RMSEA = 0.001$). Hence the regression weights from both the samples can be compared although they are from two different contexts. Details of the model goodness of fit and invariance testing are provided in Table 2. The standardised loading for the items used along with the AVEs and composite reliability values are provided in Table 3.

4.4. Common method bias

Since the independent and dependent variables were collected from the same source at the same point in time, common method variance was tested. To a certain extent, the effect of common method variance was reduced through providing clear instructions to the respondents and paying attention towards appropriate design of the questionnaire. To examine the impact of any common method variance, Harman's test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) results showed that a single factor did not account for more than 20 % of the variance for both the samples, thus suggesting that common method variance is not a serious concern in this study. We also conducted the single factor test through the CFA model. According to Malhotra et al. (2006; p. 1867), "the method biases are assumed to be substantial if the single factor model fits the data." The single factor CFA model did not fit the data in either the Pakistani sample (chi square/df = 7.14, CFI = 0.416, TLI = 0.31 and RMSEA = 0.172) or the South Korean sample (chi-square/df = 3.82, CFI = 0.74; TLI = 0.690; RMSEA = 0.118). Thus, we can conclude that common method bias is not a significant problem in the two samples.

5. Results

To test the conceptual model, composites of constructs were created by calculating the average value across the items. The mean, standard deviation and the correlation between constructs are shown in Table 4. Age, experience of the employee in the organisation and gender were considered as control variables. For the South Korean sample, the two different industries (beverages and pharmaceuticals) were included as a dummy variable in the analysis.

The model was tested in two stages. In the first stage, we used model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples from the Process Macro (Hayes, 2013) to test mediation. The control variables were also included in the analysis. For the South Korean samples, since the data were collected from two different organisations, an organisation dummy was included in addition to the control variables. The results are shown in Table 5 for both the Korean and Pakistani samples.

The bootstrap simulation results showed positive, significant results for the path from psychological empowerment to thriving in Pakistan ($\beta = 0.468$; $p \leq 0.00$) as well as in South Korea ($\beta = 0.453$; $p \leq 0.00$). Hence, H1 was found to be supported in the Pakistani and South Korean

Table 2
Invariance Testing Results – Goodness of fit indices.

	$\chi^2/d.f$	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Pakistan Sample	1.99	0.911	0.901	0.900	0.068
South Korea Sample	1.89	0.920	0.903	0.910	0.067
Configural invariance model	1.99	0.911	0.900	0.912	0.049
Metric invariance model					
Unconstrained model	1.992	0.911	0.900	0.912	0.049
Constrained model	1.979	0.909	0.900	0.911	0.048

Table 3
Scale Items, Standardised loadings, AVE, Composite Reliability.

	Pakistan sample		South Korea sample	
	Standardised Loading	AVE/CR	Standardised Loading	AVE/CR
Psychological Empowerment		0.513/0.746		0.500/0.733
The work I do is very important to me	0.849		0.813	
My job activities are personally important to me	0.898		0.673	
The work I do is meaningful to me	0.811		0.851	
I am confident about my ability to my job	0.793		0.825	
I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities	0.830		0.766	
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job	0.723		0.534	
I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job	0.802		0.819	
I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work	0.854		0.935	
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job	0.738		0.888	
My impact on what happens in my department is large	0.745		0.835	
I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department	0.928		0.812	
I have significant influence over what happens in my department	0.878		0.859	
Salesperson Creative performance		0.737/0.951		0.570/0.901
Making sales presentations in innovative ways	0.843		0.647	
Carrying out sales tasks in ways that are resourceful	0.885		0.756	
Coming up with new ideas for satisfying customer needs	0.883		0.817	
Generating and evaluating multiple alternatives for novel	0.871		0.870	
Having fresh perspectives on old problems	0.847		0.744	
Improvising methods for solving a problem when an	0.845		0.610	
Generating creative selling ideas	0.832		0.804	
Thriving		0.613/0.759		0.771/0.875
In my work I find myself learning often	0.732		0.751	
In my work I continue to learn more and more as time goes by	0.851		0.800	
In my work I see myself continually improving	0.604		0.941	

Table 3 (continued)

	Pakistan sample		South Korea sample	
	Standardised Loading	AVE/CR	Standardised Loading	AVE/CR
In my work I feel alive and vital	0.574		0.753	
In my work I have energy and spirit	0.619		0.912	
In my work I feel alert and awake	0.764		0.694	
In my work I am looking forward to each new day	0.743		0.753	
Competitive Psychological Climate		0.650/0.847		0.576/0.803
My manager frequently compares my performance with that of my co-workers	0.847		0.795	
The amount of recognition you get in this company depends on how you perform compared to others	0.838		0.723	
My co-workers frequently compare their performance with mine	0.729		0.757	

samples. The direct path from psychological empowerment to creative performance was found to be significant for both the South Korean sample, ($\beta = 0.401$; $p \leq 0.00$) and the Pakistani sample ($\beta = 2.22$; $p \leq 0.05$). Thus, H2 was supported for both the Pakistani and South Korean samples. The direct path from thriving to creative performance was significant in both the Pakistani sample ($\beta = 0.230$; $p \leq 0.10$) and in the South Korean sample ($\beta = 0.388$; $p \leq 0.01$). Thus, H3 was also supported in both Pakistan and South Korea. The indirect effect was also found to be significant for both the Pakistani sample ($\beta = 0.106$, $p \leq 0.10$) and for the South Korean sample ($\beta = 0.176$, $p \leq 0.00$). Thus, H4 was also supported for both the samples. We also conducted Sobel's test to further check the mediation effects. The Sobel's test statistic was significant for both the South Korean sample (4.10; $p \leq 0.00$) and for the Pakistani sample (1.74; $p \leq 0.10$). Since the indirect effect was found to be significant and the direct effect was also found to be significant in both the samples, partial mediation was established in both the samples.

To test H5 and H6, we added interaction terms in the regression equation. The results from the moderation analysis are shown in Table 6. The moderating impact of competitive climate on the direct relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance was found to be positive and significant in the case of the Pakistani sample ($\beta = 0.128$; $p < 0.10$) as well as the South Korean sample ($\beta = 0.124$; $p \leq 0.00$). Hence, the moderating relationship was found to be significant but in the opposite direction of what was proposed in H5 in both the Pakistani and South Korean samples.

The moderating impact of competitive climate on the relationship between thriving and salesperson creative performance was found to be negative and significant in both the Pakistan sample ($\beta = -0.161$, $p \leq 0.05$) and the South Korean sample ($\beta = -0.181$, $p \leq 0.01$). Hence H6 found support in both the samples.

In the next stage, using model number 15 from the Process macro developed by Hayes (2013), the moderated mediation hypotheses H7 was tested. The control variables were included in the analysis. To test the moderated-mediation hypotheses, as per Hayes (2018), we considered (i) the index of moderated-mediation and (ii) the conditional indirect effect at different values of the moderator. For the Pakistani sample, the index of moderated-mediation was found to be significant as the CI did not contain the value 0.00. Further, the results showed conditional effects of competitive climate on the indirect relationship

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients. The correlation coefficients below the diagonal are the correlations from the South Korean sample while the correlations from above the diagonal are from the Pakistani sample.

	Mean (Pakistan)	SD (Pakistan)	Mean (South Korea)	SD (South Korea)	Psy Emp	Thriving	Salesperson Creative Performance	Competitive Climate	Age	Experience	Gender
Psy Emp	5.592	0.738	5.170	0.756	1	0.605***	0.275***	0.451***	0.083	0.008	-0.149**
Thriving	5.652	0.574	5.000	0.573	0.596***	1	0.257***	0.457***	0.025	-0.067	-0.112
Salesperson Creative Performance	4.772	0.992	4.940	0.758	0.595***	0.547***	1	0.239***	0.059	-0.081	-0.156**
Competitive Psychological Climate	6.009	0.915	2.800	1.030	0.191**	0.233**	0.220**	1	-0.027	-0.038	-0.105
Age	30.620	5.380	37.080	10.080	0.178**	0.048	0.129	0.158**	1	0.534**	0.270***
Experience	5.913	2.968	8.200	6.670	0.129	-0.051	0.014	0.177**	0.696***	1	0.221***
Gender					-0.028	0.007	-0.179**	-0.179**	-0.144**	-0.029	1

Table 5

Mediation Analysis.

Pakistani Sample				South Korean Sample											
Model 1: Dependent variable – Thriving				Model 2: Dependent variable – Salesperson Creative Performance											
Direct Effects				Model 1: Dependent variable – Thriving				Model 2: Dependent variable – Salesperson Creative Performance							
	β	SE		β	SE		β	SE		β	SE				
Constant	3.079***	0.302	2.092***	0.755	2.678***	0.261	0.909**	0.404		0.401***	0.068				
Psychological Empowerment	0.468***	0.042	0.222**	0.109	0.453***	0.044	0.388***	0.089		0.005	0.005				
Thriving			0.230*	0.140			0.005	0.005		-0.000	0.000				
Age	0.002	0.007	0.026*	0.014	0.003	0.004	-0.001*	0.000		-0.368	0.116				
Experience	-0.015	0.012	-0.040	0.025	-0.001*	0.000	-0.117	0.092		-0.117	0.092				
Gender	-0.021	0.114	-0.437	0.234	0.025	0.093	-0.072	0.073		-0.117	0.092				
Industry					-0.072	0.073									
R ² = 0.371, F = 31.55 (df1 = 4.00; df2: 214), p < 0.01				R ² = 0.117, F = 5.651 (df1 = 5.00; df2: 213), p < 0.01				R ² = 0.375, F = 23.43 (df1 = 5.00; df2: 195), p < 0.01				R ² = 0.446, F = 26.041 (df1 = 6.00; df2: 194), p < 0.01			
Indirect Effects															
Thriving			Effect	Boot SE	Thriving		Effect	Boot SE							
			0.106*	0.063			0.176***	0.044							

*** p < 0.00; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

Table 6

Results from the Moderation analysis.

	Pakistani Sample						South Korean Sample								
	Model 1 Dependent variable: Salesperson Creative Performance			Model 2 Dependent variable: Salesperson Creative Performance			Model 1 Dependent variable: Salesperson Creative Performance			Model 2 Dependent variable: Salesperson Creative Performance					
	β	S.E	t-value	β	S.E	t-value	β	S.E	t-value	β	S.E	t-value			
Constant	4.614***	0.394	1.870	4.633***	0.394	11.767	4.929 ***	0.188	26.187	4.994 ***	0.183	27.309			
Psychological Empowerment	0.164 **	0.081	2.026	0.133	0.084	1.576	0.303***	0.051	5.866	0.301***	0.050	6.030			
Thriving	0.130*	0.080	1.614	0.098	0.082	1.185	0.223***	0.051	4.340	0.229***	0.050	4.581			
Competitive Psychological Climate(CPC)				0.091	0.083	1.087				0.058	0.042	1.376			
PE*CPC				0.128*	0.075	1.704				0.124***	0.047	2.639			
Th*CPC				-0.161**	0.076	-2.120				-0.181***	0.047	-3.875			
Age	0.026	0.014	1.802	0.027	0.014	1.883	0.005	0.006	0.958	0.003	0.006	0.474			
Experience	-0.040	0.026	-1.565	-0.041	0.025	-1.615	-0.001	0.001	-0.775	0.000	0.001	-0.304			
Firm							-0.117	0.092	-1.274	-0.090	0.091	-0.984			
Gender	-0.438*	0.234	-1.870	-0.468	0.232	-2.014	-0.368	0.116	-3.170	-0.366***	0.113	-3.252			
R ² = 0.117; F = 5.007, p < 0.001				R ² = 0.342, F = 5.651; p < 0.01				R ² = .487F = 22.807; p < 0.01				R ² = 0.492, F = 20.578, (d.f = 9; 191) p < 0.01			

*** p < 0.00; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

between psychological empowerment and creative performance, such that the indirect relationship via thriving was found to be significant only at low but not at the mean/high levels of competitive climate. These results further suggest that thriving transmits the effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance only when perceived competitive climate is low in the Pakistani sample. The South Korean sample also showed similar result with a significant index of moderated-

mediation. However, the indirect effect was found to be significant from low to mean values of competitive psychological climate. Thus, H7 was found to be supported in both the samples as the requirements of a significant moderated-mediation effect were satisfied (Hayes, 2018). Results of the moderated-mediation analysis are shown in Table 6. The conditional indirect effects for the South Korean and Pakistani samples were plotted in Figs. 2 and 3 respectively. The slope of the conditional

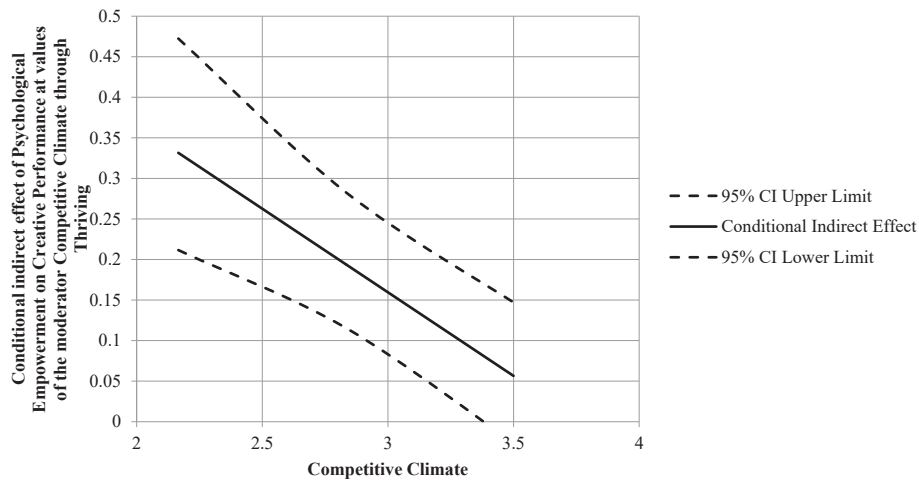


Fig. 2. Conditional Indirect Effect of Psychological Empowerment on Creative Performance through Thriving moderated by Competitive Psychological Climate (South Korean sample).

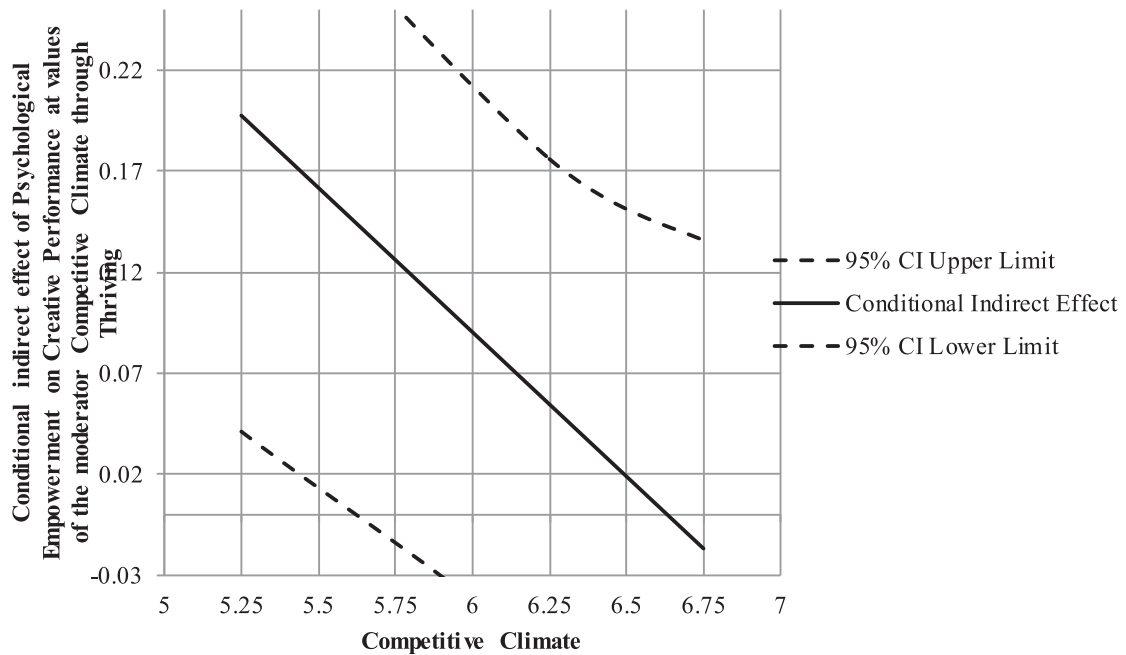


Fig. 3. Conditional Indirect Effect of Psychological Empowerment on Creative Performance through Thriving moderated by Competitive Psychological Climate (Pakistan sample).

indirect effect is broadly similar for both the Pakistani and South Korean sample.

6. Discussion

Although much literature has investigated a direct link between psychological empowerment and creativity, results have been mixed (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015; Yang, Gu and Liu, 2019). This study provides a deeper understanding of the psychological empowerment-creative performance relationship by investigating the underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms in the under-researched sales context across diverse cultural settings - Pakistan and South Korea. The results from the two samples establish generalisability by providing broad support for the conceptual framework, and help explain previous inconsistent findings in the creativity literature.

Specifically, as hypothesised, a direct relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance was found to be

significant across both the samples. Our study establishes that psychological empowerment provides the essential nutriment for creative performance in the sales context. This study further extends earlier work that supports the role of psychological empowerment in positively influencing employees' creative performance (Duan et al. 2018; Adeel et al. 2019) by uncovering the mediating role of thriving and the moderating mechanism of competitive psychological climate to account for this relationship.

Our findings across both the samples demonstrate that thriving partially mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and salesperson creative performance. Responding to calls in the creativity literature for exploring alternative mechanisms beyond the commonly investigated motivational processes (Liu et al. 2016; Hughes et al. 2018; Shahid, Muchiri and Walumbwa, 2021), this study is the first to clarify that thriving, which is grounded in the COR theory, can be another explanatory mechanism for understanding how and why psychological empowerment is related to creative performance. In other

words, salespersons who feel psychologically empowered engage in greater creative performance because psychological empowerment also helps them to thrive in their jobs, which stimulates their creativity. By demonstrating that the personal resource of psychological empowerment leads employees to gaining additional personal resource of thriving, which influences their creative performance, this study validates and underscores the significance of 'resource gain cycle' (Hobfoll, 2011) for boosting creativity, and extends the COR theory and its related body of creativity literature (e.g., Jeng, 2018; Park, Choi and Wu, 2021) to the unique and under-researched personal selling context.

The exploration of the moderating impact of competitive psychological climate further contributes to the extant creativity literature as few studies have outlined the contextual conditions that regulate how personal resources of psychological empowerment and thriving influence creative performance (Kwon and Kim, 2020; Shahid, Muchiri and Walumbwa, 2021). While competitive psychological climate has been argued to act both as a challenge demand as well as a hindrance demand (Spurk et al. 2021), the effect of competitive psychological climate on creative performance remains unclear (Zhao et al. 2016), particularly in the sales force context (Schrock et al. 2016). In this respect, our study reveals interesting findings, which point towards the fact that the regulating impact of competitive psychological climate may not be straightforward.

Consistent with the previous findings in this field (e.g., Fletcher et al. 2008, Li, Bonn and Ye, 2019), our study establishes competitive climate as a hindrance job-demand for thriving in the personal selling context. Results from the salesperson samples across both developed and developing country contexts demonstrate the negative moderating impact of competitive climate on the direct relationship between thriving and creative performance. Thus, it can be inferred that increasing level of performance expectations and extreme pressures created by competitive climate dampen the effect of thriving on salesperson creative performance.

In contrast, for the effects of psychological empowerment, it seems that competitive psychological climate may not be detrimental even in the highly stressful and demanding personal selling context. In both the Pakistani and Korean samples, the effect was found to be significant and positive. Possibly, while psychological empowerment provides salespeople with opportunities to think out of the box and discover new ways of performing existing tasks, leading to greater creative performance (Amabile and Gitomer, 1984), highly competitive climate motivates psychologically empowered salespeople to put in extra efforts to be creative and truly stand out amongst their peers. When the climate is highly competitive, salespeople tend to become more aware of social comparisons at workplace (Lam, 2012) as such a climate provides a clear message that only the best employee will be rewarded (Hu and Wang, 2022). As such, given the freedom to innovate, the effort expended in proactively being creative to outperform other colleagues is likely to be more noticeable and lead to valued outcomes under a highly competitive climate. Hence, under a highly competitive climate, the impact of psychological empowerment on creative performance is accentuated since employees observe their organization's practices in the context of their own personal situation (Brown, Cron, and Slocum 1998). This study further contributes to the research stream that advocates competitive climate to be constructive for salespeople (e.g., Brown et al. 1998; Arnold et al. 2009; Schrock et al. 2016) by demonstrating its positive moderating effects for creative performance across both developed and developing country contexts.

However, our finding on the constructive effect of competitive climate comes with a caveat as our moderated-mediation results demonstrate that highly competitive climate dampens the indirect positive effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance through thriving. While highly competitive climate motivates psychologically empowered salespeople to be more creative so they can be recognised amongst their peers, it also inhibits the effect of thriving on creative performance. Possibly, due to the extreme stress and pressures

experienced by salespeople under such a climate, thriving becomes less influential in stimulating their creativity, which gets more directly influenced by the empowerment and their freedom to innovate.

Although we find similar results across both Pakistan and South Korea, some subtle differences are noted, which may point towards the variations in work practices across developed and developing nations (see Brough et al. 2013). While the moderated-mediation effect was observed only when competitive climate value was low in the Pakistani sample, this effect was observed even when competitive climate value rises from low to the mean value in the South Korean sample (see Table 7). Possibly, as South Korea has a lower score in masculinity and a much higher score in long-term orientation than Pakistan (hofstede-insights.com), employees in South Korea tend to adopt a more pragmatic and long-term oriented approach. They seem to focus more on trans-generational corporate durability, shared vision, steady growth, and strong interpersonal ties, which transcend short-term profitability. As such, even when competition levels rise from low to the mean, thriving remains influential for creative performance among South Korean employees. On the other hand, in Pakistan, thriving seems to be highly sensitive, and is able to translate the positive effects of psychological empowerment on creative performance only when the competitive climate is low.

Our study thus significantly contributes to and extends prior research that examines competitive psychological climate as a moderator (e.g., Lam, 2012; Li, Bonn and Ye, 2019; Ye et al. 2020) by enhancing our understanding of its novel regulating effects in the sales context as the effect of competitive climate, particularly for creative performance, remains unclear (Zhao et al. 2016) with some studies demonstrating a negative effect (e.g., Amabile et al., 1996) whereas others finding a positive effect (e.g., Shalley and Oldham, 1997). In this respect, our findings reveal that competitive psychological climate can be a double-edged sword, as it can have both destructive as well as constructive effects on the relationship between personal resources and creative performance. It is, in fact, the nature of personal resource that matters as the moderating impact of competitive climate may vary for different personal resources, which warrants further investigation. As such, this study extends and contributes to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), the JD-R framework (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), and the related emerging body of work in the creativity literature (e.g., Jeng, 2018; Park, Choi and Wu, 2021), by refining our understanding of the interplay between the job demands and personal resources that determines creative performance.

7. Managerial implications

As salesperson creativity may be critical for achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty, and subsequently greater competitive advantage (Avey et al., 2012), this study provides important insights for improving the creative performance of salespeople across developed and developing country contexts. First, the study underlines the importance of psychological empowerment in stimulating creative performance among the sales force. Psychological empowerment not only directly influences creative performance, but it also helps to trigger feelings of thriving among salespeople, which then spurs creativity among them. As such, sales managers need to pay special attention to the work design, leadership practices and organisational support provided to employees to psychologically empower their sales employees (Maynard, Gilson and Mathieu, 2012).

Second, thriving as a mediating pathway clarifies the role of psychological empowerment in a highly competitive climate such as personal selling, and helps managers to gain a more nuanced view of the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance. As thriving is a key personal resource that directly influences creativity of salespersons, organisations may benefit by nurturing environments that help their salespeople thrive. Besides ensuring psychological empowerment, organisations

Table 7
Moderated-mediation results.

Pakistan sample					South Korean sample				
CPC	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	CPC	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
5.250	0.188	0.0745	0.035	0.333	2.170	0.328	0.0674	0.205	0.4696
6.250	0.045	0.0626	-0.083	0.164	2.833	0.189	0.0432	0.109	0.2790
6.750	-0.026	0.0771	-0.186	0.113	3.500	0.051	0.0444	-0.037	0.1427
Index of moderated-mediation					Index of moderated-mediation				
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
	-0.143	0.062	-0.268	-0.027	CPC	-0.207	0.056	-0.320	-0.098

*CPC – Competitive Psychological Climate.

may provide a work environment characterised by mutual trust, co-operative co-workers, and supportive leadership (see [Kleine, Rudolph and Zacher, 2019](#)) to help their employees thrive.

Third, this study points towards the role of contextual factors such as competitive climate, which influences creativity of the sales force. This study finds competitive climate to be a double-edged sword that can bolster the impact of psychological empowerment on creative performance whilst corroding the impact of thriving on creative performance at the same time. Hence, competition may motivate psychologically empowered salespeople to be more creative and stand out as star performers, however, it builds up stress and burnout that diminishes employee well-being ([Fletcher et al. 2008](#)) and erodes the effect of thriving on their creativity. As also demonstrated by our moderated mediation analysis, the indirect positive impact of psychological empowerment via thriving cannot be observed at high levels of competitive climate. This implies that even though competition accentuates the effect of psychological empowerment on creative performance, highly competitive environments may ultimately reduce the impact of thriving, which may lead to an overall net loss in creative performance (also see [Fletcher et al. 2008](#)). Hence, striking a balance between competition and employee well-being may be the key to enhancing sales creativity through psychological empowerment.

Interestingly, our moderated-mediation results further reveal that in a developing country context such as Pakistan, thriving seems to be highly sensitive to the stress and pressures of a demanding competitive climate as thriving can help in translating the positive effects of psychological empowerment on creativity only under a low competitive climate. The study thus advises sales managers, especially in the developing country contexts, to reduce their dependence on fostering climates of intense competition as a motivation mechanism if they wish to spur creativity. Even when frontline employees feel they have the autonomy to act, and perceive their rewards to be based on high performance, the extreme pressures and stressful environment created under highly competitive climate may ultimately stifle their creativity by depleting the effect of their personal resource of thriving.

8. Limitations and areas for future research

The study is not devoid of limitations. While the study model was tested across developed and developing country contexts, the limitations inherent in a cross-sectional design and the limitations imposed by convenience sampling method cannot be ignored. Future studies could attempt to reproduce this study through a more rigorous longitudinal design, and test the model among employees other than salespeople. Further, we did not include any organisational or group-level variables in our analysis. The impact of such variables cannot be ruled out. Hence, multi-level research designs may provide better insights into salesperson creativity.

Future researchers could provide greater clarity to the relationship between psychological empowerment and creative performance by understanding other mediating mechanisms apart from thriving. For instance, the mediating effect of other personal resources like organisation-based self-esteem or optimism ([Xanthopoulou et al. 2009](#))

could be studied.

Since personal selling can be a highly demanding context ([Schrock et al. 2016](#)) whereby salespeople may be inundated with different types of demands such as role, emotional and customer demands, further studies could explore the moderating role of variables like role stress, emotional dissonance or customer mistreatment in the relationship between psychological empowerment and salesperson creativity.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sunil Sahadev: Conceptualization, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision. **Kirk Chang:** Resources, Supervision, Resources. **Neeru Malhotra:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Ji-Hee Kim:** Resources. **Tanveer Ahmed:** Resources. **Philip Kitchen:** Supervision, Review and editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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