Entrepreneurial Elements and Performance of Small and Medium Tea Farming Enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya

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Abstract

Performance is a critical indicator of organizational success, encompassing the effectiveness of organizational processes, systems, and human resources. Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a key driver of organizational performance by enhancing competitiveness, innovation, and business sustainability. Despite Murang'a County generating approximately KES 17.8 billion in smallholder tea earnings in 2024, the performance and long-term sustainability of small and medium tea farming enterprises remain inconsistent, with entrepreneurial attributes such as creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and networking receiving limited scholarly attention in this context. This study therefore examined the relationship between entrepreneurial elements, creativity, innovation, risk-taking propensity, and entrepreneurial networking, and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya. The study was guided by the Entrepreneurial Creativity Theory, Schumpeterian Theory of Innovation, Knight's Theory of Risk, and Stakeholder Theory. A descriptive research design was adopted, and primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to 341 respondents selected through simple random sampling from 2,300 registered tea farming enterprises. Entrepreneurs, farm managers, and land administrators served as units of observation. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 28, employing descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, alongside Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that creativity had the strongest positive and significant correlation with performance ($r = 0.561$, $p = 0.000$), followed by entrepreneurial networking ($r = 0.378$, $p = 0.000$), innovation ($r = 0.312$, $p = 0.001$), and risk-taking propensity ($r = 0.258$, $p = 0.004$). The refined multiple regression model demonstrated that all four entrepreneurial elements jointly and significantly explained 74.0% of variance in enterprise performance ($R^2 = 0.740$, $F = 53.05$, $p = 0.000$), with entrepreneurial networking emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.317$), followed by risk-taking propensity ($\beta = 0.306$), innovation ($\beta = 0.228$), and creativity ($\beta = 0.222$). The study concludes that creativity, innovation, risk-taking propensity, and entrepreneurial networking are significant determinants of tea farming enterprise performance in Murang'a County. The study recommends that farmers adopt modern farming technologies, embrace calculated risk-taking supported by structured risk management, strengthen stakeholder networks through cooperatives and digital platforms, and pursue product innovation and market diversification to enhance productivity, profitability, and long-term enterprise sustainability.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Elements, Performance, Small and Medium, Tea Farming Enterprises, Murang'a County, Kenya*

1.1 Background of the Study

Entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as a critical driver of organizational performance, competitiveness, and business sustainability across diverse industries globally. Tea is one of the world's most significant agricultural commodities, supporting over 13 million jobs across more than 35 nations, with smallholder producers accounting for approximately 60% of global tea output (FAO, 2023; International Tea Committee, 2022). Despite their central role in the global supply chain, tea SMEs face persistent performance challenges including volatile prices, rising production costs, climate change impacts, and stringent quality requirements from international markets. In response, researchers and policymakers increasingly recognize that entrepreneurial factors, including managerial skills, innovation, access to market information, and an entrepreneurial mindset, significantly enhance the productivity, profitability, and resilience of farming SMEs (OECD, 2019; Lumpkin & Dess, 2001). Entrepreneurial capabilities are therefore regarded as crucial determinants of success for small and medium tea enterprises operating in today's competitive global marketplace.

At the global level, key entrepreneurial strategies, such as innovating farm management, adopting improved technologies, diversifying into value-added products, and engaging in strategic market positioning, have been shown to help tea SMEs remain internationally competitive (Porter, 2008; World Bank, 2020). Evidence from agricultural entrepreneurship consistently demonstrates that enterprises embracing creative practices, innovative technologies, calculated risk-taking, and strategic networking achieve superior productivity and profitability outcomes compared to those relying on traditional approaches. However, despite growing recognition of their importance, the adoption of entrepreneurial practices among agricultural SMEs remains constrained by limited access to information, inadequate institutional support, and risk-averse cultures. These challenges are particularly pronounced in developing economies where smallholder farmers lack the business skills and resources necessary to translate entrepreneurial capabilities into sustained performance improvements (OECD, 2019).

Across Africa, tea production is a vital economic driver, particularly in East African nations including Rwanda, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, and Kenya, where the sector generates export income, provides rural employment, and reduces poverty (UNCTAD, 2021). Tea enterprises across the region operate largely through cooperatives or factory-based models, with performance closely tied to entrepreneurial decision-making (ETP, 2021). However, tea SMEs in Africa face considerable constraints including inadequate financial access, insufficient entrepreneurship training, limited market knowledge, and poor technology adoption (IFAD, 2020). Research from East Africa demonstrates that poor managerial abilities, limited innovation capacity, and insufficient business support services negatively affect farm revenue and production (Mwangi & Kariuki, 2018). Regional policymakers increasingly recognize entrepreneurship development as a strategic mechanism for strengthening agricultural SMEs and enhancing competitiveness within tea value chains, fostering resilience, productivity, and profitability (African Development Bank, 2022).

In Kenya, entrepreneurial skills are recognized as essential to improving the performance of tea farming micro and small enterprises, particularly in Central Kenya where the sector has a strong historical presence. Despite this, many smallholder farmers face persistent challenges related to poor business management, limited access to modern technology, and inadequate entrepreneurial education (Ongaro & Mwai, 2019). Many farmers continue to rely on traditional farming

techniques and lack the business skills necessary to scale operations and compete effectively in local and international markets (Mutai, 2022). Programs aimed at enhancing entrepreneurial education and improving access to financing, including training workshops led by the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA) and agricultural extension services, have demonstrated some success in improving farmer performance by building financial literacy, sharpening marketing strategies, and promoting modern farming techniques (Karogo & Karingu, 2020).

Murang'a County is one of Kenya's leading tea-producing counties, generating approximately KES 17.8 billion in smallholder earnings in 2024 and contributing nearly 20% of national smallholder tea revenues (Tea Board of Kenya, 2024). Despite this significant contribution, the performance and long-term sustainability of small and medium tea farming enterprises in the county remain inconsistent. Farmers face adverse climatic variability, rising input costs, and persistent inefficiencies within the tea value chain, including inequitable pricing mechanisms and heavy operational levies that suppress enterprise profitability (Muendo, 2023; Wambugu & Mose, 2022). While existing research explains enterprise performance mainly through gaps in managerial and technical competencies, entrepreneurial attributes such as creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and networking, which shape how farmers recognize opportunities and adapt strategically to market conditions, have received limited scholarly attention in this context (Njeru & Kihara, 2021), underscoring the need for the present study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Murang'a County is one of the leading contributors to Kenya's tea sector, with smallholder farmers generating approximately KES 17.8 billion in 2024, representing nearly 20% of national smallholder tea earnings (Tea Board of Kenya, 2024). Despite this significant contribution, the performance and long-term sustainability of small and medium tea farming enterprises in the county remain inconsistent. Farmers increasingly face adverse climatic variability, rising input and production costs, and persistent inefficiencies within the tea value chain, particularly inequitable pricing mechanisms and heavy operational levies, all of which continue to suppress enterprise profitability and growth (Muendo, 2023; Wambugu & Mose, 2022). Structural challenges such as the oligopolistic tea marketing system and fluctuations in global tea prices further constrain farmers' income and market power (Kinyanjui, 2022).

Existing research tends to explain enterprise performance mainly in terms of gaps in farmers' managerial, technical, and business competencies (Njeru & Kihara, 2021). While these skills do help improve operational efficiency, they do not fully explain how farmers recognize opportunities or adapt strategically to changing and difficult market conditions. Entrepreneurial attributes such as innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and networking play an important role in shaping these strategic decisions. However, their contribution to tea farming enterprises has received limited scholarly attention.

Entrepreneurial performance is influenced not only by individual competencies but also by key entrepreneurial elements such as innovation, access to resources, managerial capabilities, networking, and market orientation (Lennick-Hall et al., 2020). The impact of these entrepreneurial elements on the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County has not been sufficiently examined. Also, there is limited empirical evidence on the influence of entrepreneurial elements on the performance of these enterprises.

This gap in empirical evidence presents both policy and practical challenges, as existing interventions may place excessive emphasis on farmer-level capacity building while overlooking broader systemic barriers and entrepreneurial factors that could substantially enhance enterprise performance. Consequently, there is a need for a systematic investigation into the relationship between the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. Such a study would provide evidence-based insights to inform enterprise development strategies and sector-specific policy interventions (Chepkoech et al., 2020).

1.3 Research Objectives

i. To establish the relationship between creativity and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya.
ii. To find out the relationship between innovation and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya.
iii. To establish the relationship between risk-taking propensity and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya.
iv. To determine the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature on the variables under study, which include creativity, innovation, risk taking propensity, and entrepreneurial networking in relation to the performance of small and medium tea enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya. It presents an analysis of theories that support the study and gives a conceptual framework and finally the empirical review.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

A theory is a group of statements, supported by evidence that is meant to explain some phenomena. Theories provide a generalized explanation to an occurrence of phenomena (Kombo & Tromp, 2019). Theoretical review helps a researcher clearly to see the independent and dependent variables of a study. The theories reviewed and which inform this study are Creativity Theory, Schumpeterian Theory of Innovation, Knight's Theory of Risk, and Stakeholder Theory.

2.1.1 Entrepreneurial Creativity Theory

Entrepreneurial Creativity Theory suggests that creativity has shifted from being viewed as mystical or divinely inspired to being recognized as a critical driver of business performance, particularly in environments marked by rapid change. Over the years, creativity has been conceptualized in various ways, but research consistently highlights it as the generation of ideas that are both novel and useful. For ideas to be considered useful, they must also be appropriate and aligned with organizational goals. Such ideas may come from reconfiguring existing resources or introducing entirely new concepts into the organization (Eno-Obong, 2006; James & Drown, 2012). Critics argue that defining creativity based on novelty, usefulness, and appropriateness introduces challenges, particularly in measuring creativity objectively. Nieman (2006) points out that creativity is often judged subjectively within a specific domain, based on cultural and

knowledge structures that individuals must understand in order to create meaningful contributions. Determining what is creative depends heavily on domain experts—gatekeepers who evaluate the value and novelty of ideas. These gatekeepers may include not only experts but also individuals with influence within the field (Faltin, 1999).

According to Cannon (1985), there is a long-standing connection between creativity, innovativeness, and small businesses. Earlier studies support the idea that an entrepreneur's creative or innovative actions significantly influence organizational success (Kris & Kurz, 1981). Several factors support this view: the entrepreneur acts as a mold maker; open and organic business structures foster creativity; small enterprises often balance limited resources with flexibility and quick decision-making; and small firms produce a disproportionate share of new products and processes (Rogers, 1961). The ability of entrepreneurs to break free from bureaucratic limitations and create new opportunities has historically fueled the growth of many successful ventures (Okpara, 2007). The current study is informed by this idea, which emphasises the close relationship between innovation and the success of Kenyan small and medium-sized tea growing businesses. It strengthens the connection between entrepreneurial creativity and firm performance by highlighting the critical role that entrepreneurs' inventiveness plays in propelling business expansion.

2.1.2 The Schumpeterian Theory of Innovation

Entrepreneurial activities are central to economic development, and meaningful economic change cannot occur without them. These activities include introducing new or improved products, adopting novel production methods, opening new markets, sourcing new materials, and creating fresh forms of industrial organization. Bula (2012) describes entrepreneurs as risk-takers, coordinators, organizers, innovators, leaders, and individuals who fill gaps in the market. Okeke and Okechukwu (2014) add that entrepreneurial-driven growth forms the backbone of a virtuous cycle that expands an economy. Through breakthrough technologies and fast-growing ventures, entrepreneurs generate new wealth that fuels further economic progress. Eroglu and Picak (2011) emphasize that entrepreneurship is rooted in risk-taking and innovative thinking, where entrepreneurs identify opportunities, create new solutions, and accept the possibility of failure.

According to Hessels, Gelderen, and Thurik (2008), key motivations for entrepreneurial innovation include the pursuit of new or improved ideas, the desire for independence and flexibility, personal vision for organizational direction, the challenge of applying one's full capabilities, and the drive for self-actualization through increased responsibility and broader decision-making. McCaffrey (2009) further explains that entrepreneurs are the agents who introduce change into the economic system by launching innovations. Once these innovations emerge, they stimulate imitation and competition, gradually eroding entrepreneurial profits until the economy stabilizes at a new equilibrium. This theoretical perspective supports the second research question by clarifying how innovation shapes the performance of small and medium tea farming Enterprises in Murang'a County, Kenya.

2.1.3 Knight′s Theory of Risk, Uncertainty and Profit

Risk-taking propensity is rooted in McClelland's (1961) argument that entrepreneurs succeed by taking significant risks to pursue opportunities despite uncertainty. Because entrepreneurship

inherently involves unpredictable conditions, Liles (1974) notes that entrepreneurs must tolerate uncertainty affecting finances, careers and personal well-being. Many scholars similarly view entrepreneurs as individuals who bear residual uncertainty (Venkataraman, 1997). Knight's work provides the central theoretical basis for this view. Knight (1921) distinguished calculable risks—whose probabilities can be estimated and insured—from non-calculable uncertainty, where outcomes cannot be predicted. He argued that entrepreneurs earn profit as compensation for assuming non-calculable uncertainty (Knight, 1933), effectively becoming the primary risk-bearers in dynamic environments characterized by imperfect information (Bianchi & Henrekson, 2005). As residual claimants, entrepreneurs gain returns for innovation, adaptation, and absorbing uncertainty (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996). Critics caution that this theory oversimplifies risk–profit linkages, noting that high risk may lead to losses and that profit can also arise from skill, market power, or chance (Hebert & Link, 1988). While Knight refined Cantillon's earlier distinction between risk and uncertainty, he placed less emphasis on the entrepreneur's role as a market stabilizer (Hebert, 1981).For this study, Knight's perspective provides a useful foundation for examining how risk-taking propensity influences the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Kenya.

2.1.4 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, introduced by Ian Mitroff in 1983, argues that a wide range of parties—customers, shareholders, suppliers, employees, government, communities, competitors, and trade associations—have the power to influence an organization and must therefore be recognized as essential stakeholders. The theory proposes that organizational success depends on the ability to create value for most of these groups, emphasizing sustainable value creation rather than focusing solely on profit. In this view, business performance is assessed not only through financial returns but also through the broader value generated for all stakeholders. Stakeholder theory has evolved over time to highlight the importance of managing relationships among stakeholders and addressing their diverse, and sometimes conflicting, interests (Preble, 2018). In the context of this study, the theory underscores the importance of building strong stakeholder relationships through effective networking. The tea sector involves multiple stakeholders, each contributing to production, value addition, financing, innovation, and regulatory compliance. This perspective supports the need for collaboration and cooperation within the sector to enhance the adoption of innovative practices and ultimately improve performance.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework presents the key variables in a study and illustrates the relationships between them. Hrebiniak (2021) describes it as a structured set of concepts that helps organize and interpret information. It provides a basis for linking independent and dependent variables. In this study, entrepreneurial elements are examined within the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem, acknowledging that external environmental factors may influence enterprise performance.

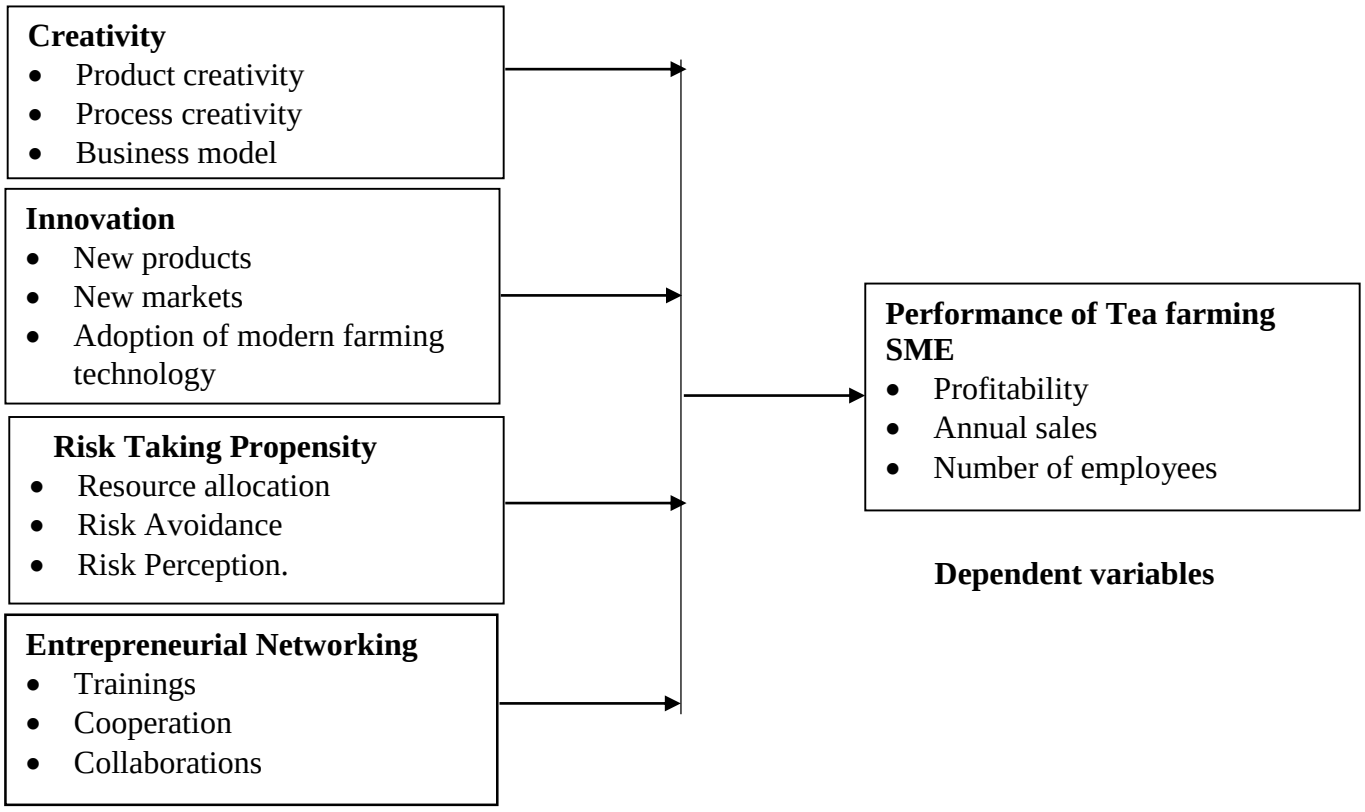

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical evidence consistently confirms that creativity positively influences SME performance across diverse contexts. Creativity, defined as the cognitive ability to generate novel and useful ideas through recombining and adapting existing knowledge, serves as a critical precursor to innovation and competitive advantage (Amabile & Pratt, 2023; Baldacchino, 2009). In agricultural settings, creative farmers demonstrate significantly higher adaptive capacity, with Kenyan agricultural SMEs showing superior yields during drought conditions (Mwangi & Otieno, 2022), while Kenyan agripreneurs with high creative problem-solving skills achieved significantly higher profit margins through product diversification (Chebo & Kipchumba, 2023). For tea farming SMEs specifically, creative practices including intercropping, integrated pest management, and specialty tea diversification have been linked to higher net returns and household incomes in Kenya's key tea-growing counties (Omondi, Chepkwony & Langat, 2023). However, barriers including limited extension services, peer pressure, and fear of failure constrain adoption (Njeru, Mwangi & Kirimi, 2024).

Innovation, defined as the systematic introduction of new products, processes, or markets to achieve superior outcomes, has a robustly documented positive relationship with SME performance (Mbogo, 2020; Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2021). A meta-analysis of 124 studies across 32 countries confirmed strong correlations between innovation orientation and SME

performance (Hossain, Ibrahim & Uddin, 2022), with Ugandan SMEs implementing product innovations achieving 41% higher export revenues and Nigerian SMEs recording 37% higher growth rates (Turyakira & Mbidde, 2022; Adegbuyi et al., 2021). For tea farming enterprises specifically, process innovations such as precision farming in Nandi County delivered 22% higher productivity and 19% higher quality scores (Kipruto & Chepkwony, 2024), while integrated innovation approaches in Kericho County produced 41% higher net returns (Ochieng, Cheboi & Koskei, 2023). Despite these benefits, resource constraints, risk aversion, and weak institutional support remain persistent barriers to innovation adoption among smallholder tea farmers (Musara & Nieuwenhuizen, 2020).

Risk-taking propensity, involving calculated commitment of resources to opportunities with uncertain outcomes, is widely recognized as a core entrepreneurial attribute with significant implications for SME performance (Kaul, 2013; Shepherd, Williams & Zhao, 2023). Research reveals a curvilinear relationship between risk-taking and performance, with moderate calculated risk-taking significantly enhancing revenue growth while excessive speculative risk-taking increases business failure probability by 37% among Kenyan SMEs (Wachira & Kihoro, 2022; Muia, Mwangi & Kilonzo, 2023). For tea farming contexts specifically, farmers investing in irrigation systems despite uncertain returns achieved 33% higher yields through incremental risk mitigation strategies (Chepkwony & Lagat, 2023), while farmers with diversified income sources were 2.4 times more likely to adopt multiple innovations (Omondi, Chepkwony & Langat, 2024). However, barriers including lack of reliable market information (68%), limited credit access (62%), and cultural norms favoring risk avoidance significantly constrain calculated risk-taking among Kenyan tea farmers (Njeru, Otieno & Cheboi, 2024).

Entrepreneurial networking, defined as the purposeful development of relationships enabling access to resources, information, and opportunities, is a critical determinant of SME performance, with network diversity proving more important than network size, explaining 31% of variance in resource acquisition among European SMEs (Alkahtani, Nordin & Khan, 2020; Meester, Van Gils & Voordeckers, 2024). Indonesian manufacturing SMEs with collaborative relationships achieve 45% higher innovation adoption rates than isolated firms, while Kenyan SMEs with strong international networks achieve 47% higher export intensity (Sulistyo & Ayuni, 2020; Okeyo, Gathungu & K'Obonyo, 2023). For agricultural SMEs specifically, Kenyan coffee farmers with strong vertical and horizontal networks achieved 29% higher prices and 24% lower input costs (Mburu, Mwangi & Otieno, 2023), while tea farmers utilizing digital platforms alongside traditional networks demonstrated 31% higher information access scores (Ochieng, Cheboi & Koskei, 2024). Despite these benefits, geographical isolation, limited trust, and exclusion of women from male-dominated networks remain significant barriers (Makhura & Mkhari, 2023).

Enterprise performance is a multidimensional construct encompassing profitability, sales growth, operational efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, and sustainability outcomes, with no single indicator adequately capturing its complexity (Harrison & Wicks, 2013; Santos & Brito, 2024). For tea farming SMEs specifically, performance is shaped by internal factors including educational attainment, with Murang'a County farmers having secondary education or higher achieving 23% higher productivity and 18% higher profitability, resource availability, and accumulated entrepreneurial experience (Mwangi & Otieno, 2022; Njeru, Mwangi & Kirimi, 2023). Digital technology adoption further drives performance, with farmers using mobile advisory services and

digital record-keeping achieving 21% higher productivity than non-adopters (Ochieng, Cheboi & Koskei, 2024). In Murang'a County specifically, top-performing farmers achieve green leaf yields of 4,500 kg per hectare compared to a county average of 2,800 kg, with entrepreneurial elements, including calculated risk-taking, creativity, and networking, collectively explaining significant variance in farm profitability and quality premiums (Tea Directorate, 2024; Muia, Mwangi & Kilonzo, 2023).

3.1 Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design, enabling systematic characterization and explanation of the existing relationships between entrepreneurial elements and enterprise performance among tea farming SMEs in Murang'a County (Rassel et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017). The target population comprised 2,300 registered small and medium tea farming enterprises operating within Murang'a County, as listed in the Kenya Tea Development Agency directory (2024). Applying Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level, a sample of 341 respondents was derived, representing 14% of the target population, exceeding the recommended 10% minimum threshold for adequate representation (Kothari, 2014). Simple random sampling was employed to select respondents, ensuring equal probability of selection and minimizing bias. Entrepreneurs, farm managers, and land administrators served as units of observation, providing firsthand insights into the entrepreneurial practices and performance of their respective enterprises.

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered through a drop-and-pick-later method and Google Forms over one week, following receipt of JKUAT research authorization. A pilot test involving 34 respondents, representing 10% of the sample, was conducted in Kangema Sub-County to assess instrument quality, with pilot findings used solely for refinement and excluded from final analysis (Kultar, 2017). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha with a threshold of 0.7 (Seltman, 2014), while content validity was established through expert evaluation and literature review, and construct validity confirmed through Exploratory Factor Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0, employing descriptive statistics, means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations, alongside inferential techniques including Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression, modeled as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$, with ANOVA used to assess overall model significance.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

The study sought to establish how creativity, innovation, risk taking propensity and entrepreneurial networking influence on performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. The results are discussed in sections below.

4.1 Response Rate

The study sought to establish the response rate achieved during the data collection process. A total of 341 questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents. Of these, 256 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, while 85 were not returned. This resulted in an overall response rate of 75%, as illustrated in Figure 2. According to Lund (2023), a response rate of 50% or higher is considered adequate for descriptive studies. Therefore, the response rate of 75% achieved in this

study was considered satisfactory and sufficient to support reliable data analysis and the generalization of findings to the target population.

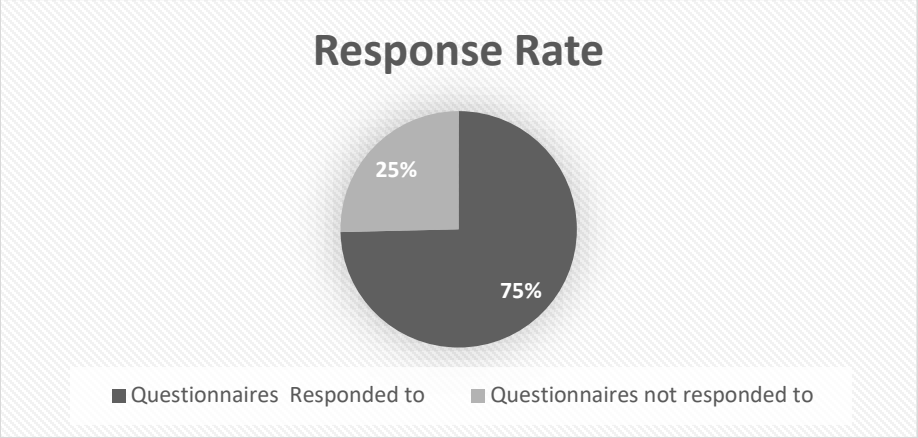

Figure 2: Response Rate

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

Creativity and Performance

Creativity among small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County was found to be generally high, recording an aggregate mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.90). Process creativity emerged as the most prominent dimension, with adoption of new farming and processing methods recording the highest mean (M = 4.85, SD = 0.36), reflecting strong consensus on the central role of innovative production practices in enhancing operational efficiency. Product creativity was similarly evident, with regular modifications to product quality, packaging, and features (M = 4.65, SD = 0.79) and introduction of new or improved tea products (M = 4.25, SD = 0.92) widely practiced. Business model creativity was comparatively underdeveloped, with innovations aimed at reducing production costs (M = 3.31, SD = 1.20) and new pricing or sales approaches recording the lowest mean (M = 3.19, SD = 1.25), suggesting continued reliance on traditional marketing mechanisms that limit revenue growth opportunities.

Innovation and Performance

Innovation was practiced to a moderate extent among tea farming enterprises, recording an overall mean of 3.67 (SD = 1.28), with notable variation across enterprises. Product innovation emerged as the most prominent dimension, with regular improvement of existing products through new features recording the highest mean (M = 3.92, SD = 1.39), followed by product development as a growth strategy (M = 3.52, SD = 1.12). Market innovation was reflected in active exploration of new customer segments (M = 3.82, SD = 1.35), though efforts to actively seek new markets recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.51, SD = 1.24), indicating continued reliance on existing channels. Technological innovation was moderately adopted, with investment in new productivity-enhancing technologies recording a mean of 3.60 (SD = 1.30), though high neutral responses suggest uneven technology adoption capacity. These findings collectively demonstrate that while

innovation contributes to enterprise competitiveness, market development strategies require greater investment.

Risk-Taking Propensity and Performance

Risk-taking propensity among tea farming enterprises was moderate, recording an overall mean of 3.55 (SD = 1.34), indicating that while enterprises acknowledge the importance of calculated risk-taking, significant variation exists in actual risk-taking behavior. The willingness to invest in innovative activities despite potential financial losses recorded the highest mean (M = 3.68, SD = 1.38), followed by careful risk evaluation before major decisions (M = 3.59, SD = 1.41) and delay of decisions until risks are minimized (M = 3.56, SD = 1.27), reflecting a predominantly cautious and controlled approach to entrepreneurial risk. Willingness to allocate resources to projects with uncertain outcomes was relatively low (M = 3.48, SD = 1.36), while employee involvement in operational risk assessment recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.42, SD = 1.30), indicating weak institutionalization of formal risk management systems. These findings suggest that prevailing risk aversion may constrain innovation adoption, market exploration, and overall enterprise growth.

Entrepreneurial Networking and Performance

Entrepreneurial networking was the most highly developed entrepreneurial capability among tea farming enterprises, recording an overall mean of 4.57 (SD = 0.89) with a low standard deviation reflecting strong consensus. Cooperation with organizations to access resources and support services recorded the highest mean (M = 4.89, SD = 0.35), reflecting strong agreement that partnerships with cooperatives, government agencies, and financial institutions provide critical enterprise support. Long-term stakeholder relationship maintenance followed closely (M = 4.85, SD = 1.15), while active participation in professional training networks (M = 4.57, SD = 0.78) highlighted networking's role in knowledge acquisition and competency development. Networking's contribution to access to funding, customers, and opportunities was unanimously affirmed (M = 4.31, SD = 1.27), and collaborative productivity improvement with other farmers and enterprises also recorded a high mean (M = 4.25, SD = 0.92), collectively demonstrating that networking is a critical driver of enterprise sustainability, market access, and competitive performance.

Performance of Tea Farming Enterprises

Tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County exhibited moderate to high levels of performance across key indicators, with individual item means ranging from 3.5 to 3.8. Employment growth emerged as the strongest performance dimension, with the number of employees having increased over three years recording the highest mean (M = 3.8, SD = 1.0), reflecting expanded operational capacity and improved business sustainability. Sales growth followed, with annual sales steadily increasing over three years (M = 3.6, SD = 1.1), indicating improved revenue-generating capacity and market participation. Profitability, market demand, and sales target achievement all recorded identical means (M = 3.5, SD = 1.1), suggesting that while enterprises generally sustain operations and meet sales targets, a considerable proportion continues to face profitability challenges attributed to market volatility and operational constraints. These findings indicate that strengthening entrepreneurial capabilities, particularly creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and

networking, could further enhance enterprise profitability, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

4.3 Correlation Results

The study conducted a Pearson correlation analysis to establish the relationship between entrepreneurial elements (creativity, innovation, propensity to take risks, and entrepreneurial networking) and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. The correlation coefficients and significance levels are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

Correlations		Creativity	Innovation	Propensity to take risks	Entrepreneurial Networking	Performance
Creativity	Pearson Correlation	1.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Innovation	Pearson Correlation	0.123	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.179				
Propensity to take risks.	Pearson Correlation	0.148	0.116	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.109	0.235			
Entrepreneurial Networking	Pearson Correlation	.272**	.239**	.351**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	0.007	0.000		
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.561**	.312**	.258**	.378**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001	0.004	0.000	
	N	256	256	256	256	134

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between creativity and performance ($r = 0.561$, $p = 0.000$). This was the strongest correlation among all the independent variables examined in the study. The findings suggest that tea farming enterprises that frequently introduce new products, adopt improved production methods, modify product quality, and implement creative business practices tend to achieve higher levels of performance. Creativity enables enterprises to respond effectively to changing market demands, improve operational efficiency, and create competitive advantages that enhance profitability and growth. The strong correlation indicates that creativity is a critical determinant of performance among tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County.

The findings also revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between innovation and performance ($r = 0.312$, $p = 0.001$). The correlation coefficient indicates a moderate positive association between the two variables. This suggests that enterprises that invest in new technologies, improve existing products, develop new products, and explore new customer segments are more likely to experience improved performance. Innovation contributes to enhanced productivity, market expansion, and customer satisfaction, which ultimately translate into better business outcomes. The results therefore demonstrate that innovation plays an important role in supporting the growth and competitiveness of tea farming enterprises.

The study established a positive and statistically significant relationship between propensity to take risks and performance ($r = 0.258$, $p = 0.004$). Although the relationship was weaker compared to creativity and innovation, it remained significant. The findings imply that tea farming enterprises that are willing to invest in uncertain opportunities, support innovative activities, and make strategic decisions under conditions of uncertainty are likely to achieve better performance. Risk-taking enables enterprises to exploit emerging opportunities and adapt to changing market conditions. However, the relatively lower correlation coefficient suggests that risk-taking alone may not be sufficient to drive performance unless combined with other entrepreneurial capabilities.

The results further revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking and performance ($r = 0.378$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates a moderate positive association between networking and enterprise performance. The findings suggest that tea farming enterprises that actively collaborate with other farmers, participate in professional networks, maintain strong stakeholder relationships, and leverage networks to access resources and opportunities tend to perform better. Networking facilitates access to information, markets, training, financing, and technical support, all of which contribute to improved business performance. The results underscore the importance of social and professional networks in enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of tea farming enterprises.

The correlation analysis also examined the relationships among the independent variables. The results show that entrepreneurial networking had significant positive relationships with creativity ($r = 0.272$, $p = 0.004$), innovation ($r = 0.239$, $p = 0.007$), and propensity to take risks ($r = 0.351$, $p = 0.000$). These findings suggest that enterprises with stronger networks are more likely to exchange knowledge, access new ideas, gain market information, and develop confidence in pursuing innovative and risk-oriented activities.

On the other hand, the relationships between creativity and innovation ($r = 0.123$, $p = 0.179$), creativity and risk-taking propensity ($r = 0.148$, $p = 0.109$), and innovation and risk-taking propensity ($r = 0.116$, $p = 0.235$) were positive but statistically insignificant. This indicates that although these variables move in the same direction, the relationships are weak and not strong enough to be considered statistically meaningful within the sampled tea farming enterprises.

The correlation results suggest that enhancing entrepreneurial elements can significantly improve the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. Among the four variables, creativity emerged as the most influential factor, followed by entrepreneurial networking, innovation, and propensity to take risks. The findings imply that tea farming enterprises should prioritize creative product and process improvements, strengthen networking and collaborative partnerships, invest in innovation, and adopt calculated risk-taking strategies to achieve higher profitability, sales growth, employment growth, and overall enterprise performance. The absence of excessively high correlations among the independent variables (all correlation coefficients below 0.80) suggests that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a concern, indicating that each entrepreneurial element contributes uniquely to explaining variations in the performance of tea farming enterprises. Therefore, the results provide preliminary evidence that entrepreneurial elements are important drivers of enterprise performance and warrant further examination through regression analysis.

4.4 Linear Regression Analysis

The study used linear regression to assess the influence of entrepreneurial factors and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

Linear Regression between creativity and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

The study sought a simple linear regression between creativity and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

Table 2: Linear Regression-Creativity and Performance

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.314	0.099	0.095	0.480

Predictors: (Constant), Creativity; Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.510	1	5.510	23.891	0.000
Residual	50.276	255	0.231		
Total	55.786	256			

Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	1.550	0.386		4.020	0.000
Creativity	0.450	0.092	0.314	4.888	0.000

Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

The model summary results indicate a positive relationship between creativity and enterprise performance ($R = 0.314$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.099$) shows that creativity explained 9.9% of the variation in the performance of tea farming enterprises. This suggests that creativity contributes to enterprise performance, although other factors account for the remaining variation. The ANOVA results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 23.891$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that creativity significantly predicts the performance of tea farming enterprises. The regression coefficients further showed that creativity had a positive and significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.450$, $t = 4.888$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that a one-unit increase in creativity leads to a 0.450-unit increase in enterprise performance. The regression equation was expressed as:

$$Y = 1.550 + 0.450X_1$$

The findings suggest that enterprises that embrace creative practices such as product improvement, adoption of innovative farming methods, and operational enhancements are more likely to achieve better performance. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis that creativity has no significant effect on the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County was rejected. The study therefore concludes that creativity has a positive and statistically significant effect on enterprise performance.

Linear Regression between Innovation and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

The study sought a simple linear regression between Innovation and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

Table 3: Linear Regression- Innovation and Performance

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.158	0.025	0.020	0.500

Predictors: (Constant), Innovation; Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.391	1	1.391	5.573	0.019
Residual	54.395	255	0.250		
Total	55.786	256			

Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	2.495	0.397		6.289	0.000
Innovation	0.234	0.099	0.158	2.361	0.019

Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

The model summary results indicate a positive relationship between innovation and enterprise performance ($R = 0.158$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.025$) shows that innovation explained 2.5% of the variation in the performance of tea farming enterprises. This suggests that innovation contributes to enterprise performance, although its explanatory power is relatively low. The ANOVA results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 5.573$, $p = 0.019$), indicating that innovation significantly predicts the performance of tea farming enterprises.

The regression coefficients further showed that innovation had a positive and significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.234$, $t = 2.361$, $p = 0.019$). This implies that a one-unit increase in innovation leads to a 0.234-unit increase in enterprise performance. The regression equation was expressed as: $Y = 2.495 + 0.234X_2$

The findings suggest that enterprises that invest in product improvement, market expansion, and new technologies are more likely to achieve improved performance. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis that innovation has no significant effect on the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County was rejected. The study therefore concludes that innovation has a positive and statistically significant effect on enterprise performance.

Linear Regression between Risk Taking Propensity the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

The study sought a simple linear regression between Propensity to take risk and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

Table 4: Linear Regression -Risk-Taking Propensity and Performance
Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.364	0.132	0.128	0.471

Predictors: (Constant), Propensity to Take Risk; Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7.387	1	7.387	33.271	0.000
Residual	48.399	255	0.222		
Total	55.786	256			

Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	1.915	0.264		7.242	0.000
Risk-Taking Propensity	0.390	0.068	0.364	5.768	0.000

Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

The model summary results indicate a positive relationship between propensity to take risks and enterprise performance ($R = 0.364$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.132$) shows that

propensity to take risks explained 13.2% of the variation in the performance of tea farming enterprises. This suggests that risk-taking propensity is an important predictor of enterprise performance. The ANOVA results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 33.271$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that propensity to take risks significantly predicts the performance of tea farming enterprises. The regression coefficients further showed that propensity to take risks had a positive and significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.390$, $t = 5.768$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that a one-unit increase in risk-taking propensity leads to a 0.390-unit increase in enterprise performance. The regression equation was expressed as:

$Y = 1.915 + 0.390X_3$

The findings suggest that enterprises that are willing to undertake calculated risks, invest in new opportunities, and make strategic decisions under uncertainty are more likely to achieve improved performance. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis that propensity to take risks has no significant effect on the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County was rejected. The study therefore concludes that propensity to take risks has a positive and statistically significant effect on enterprise performance.

Linear Regression between Entrepreneurial Networking and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

The study sought a simple linear regression between Entrepreneurial Networking and performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county.

Table 5: Linear Regression-Entrepreneurial Networking and Performance

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.240	0.058	0.053	0.491

Predictors: (Constant), Entrepreneurial Networking; Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3.218	1	3.218	13.347	0.000
Residual	52.567	255	0.241		
Total	55.786	256			

Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	2.108	0.363		5.809	0.000
Entrepreneurial Networking	0.355	0.097	0.240	3.653	0.000

Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

The model summary results indicate a positive relationship between entrepreneurial networking and enterprise performance (R = 0.240). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.058$) shows that entrepreneurial networking explained 5.8% of the variation in the performance of tea farming enterprises. This suggests that entrepreneurial networking contributes positively to enterprise performance. The ANOVA results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 13.347$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that entrepreneurial networking significantly predicts the performance of tea farming enterprises. The regression coefficients further showed that entrepreneurial networking had a positive and significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.355$, $t = 3.653$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that a one-unit increase in entrepreneurial networking leads to a 0.355-unit increase in enterprise performance. The regression equation was expressed as:

$$\mathbf{Y = 2.108 + 0.355X_4}$$

The findings suggest that enterprises that actively collaborate with other farmers, participate in professional networks, and maintain strong relationships with stakeholders are more likely to achieve improved performance. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis that entrepreneurial networking has no significant effect on the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County was rejected. The study therefore concludes that entrepreneurial networking has a positive and statistically significant effect on enterprise performance.

Multiple Linear Regression

The multiple linear regression model was used to determine the effects of entrepreneurial factors and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a county. The results were as shown in the table 6 below.

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regression
Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.420	0.177	0.161	0.462

Predictors: Creativity, Innovation, Risk-Taking Propensity, Entrepreneurial Networking

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9.858	4	2.466	11.539	0.000
Residual	45.927	252	0.214		
Total	55.788	256			

Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	1.332	0.460		2.897	0.004
Creativity	0.344	0.103	0.240	3.342	**0.001**
Innovation	0.166	0.113	0.112	1.476	0.141
Risk-Taking Propensity	0.360	0.089	0.336	4.020	**0.000**
Entrepreneurial Networking	0.019	0.120	-0.013	0.161	0.872

Dependent Variable: Performance of Tea Farming SMEs

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of creativity, innovation, propensity to take risks, and entrepreneurial networking on the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. The results showed a moderate relationship between the independent variables and performance ($R = 0.420$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.177$) indicates that the entrepreneurial factors explained 17.7% of the variation in enterprise performance, while the remaining 82.3% was explained by other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R^2 was 0.161. The ANOVA results revealed that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 11.539$, $p = 0.000$), implying that the entrepreneurial factors jointly had a significant effect on the performance of tea farming enterprises.

The regression equation was:

$$Y = 1.332 + 0.344X_1 + 0.166X_2 + 0.360X_3 + 0.019X_4$$

Where: X_1 = Creativity, X_2 = Innovation, X_3 = Propensity to Take Risks, and X_4 = Entrepreneurial Networking.

The findings showed that creativity ($\beta = 0.344$, $p = 0.001$) and propensity to take risks ($\beta = 0.360$, $p = 0.000$) had positive and statistically significant effects on enterprise performance. However, innovation ($\beta = 0.166$, $p = 0.141$) and entrepreneurial networking ($\beta = 0.019$, $p = 0.872$) had positive but statistically insignificant effects. Based on the standardized beta coefficients, propensity to take risks ($\beta = 0.336$) was the strongest predictor of performance, followed by creativity ($\beta = 0.240$). The study therefore concludes that while entrepreneurial factors collectively influence the performance of tea farming enterprises, only creativity and risk-taking propensity significantly contribute to improved performance in Murang'a County

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between creativity, innovation, risk-taking propensity, entrepreneurial networking, and the performance of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. The conclusions were based on the empirical findings, relevant theories, and the study objectives. The study concluded that creativity is an important entrepreneurial attribute that is positively associated with enterprise performance. The findings showed that entrepreneurs who demonstrated higher levels of creativity were more likely to achieve better business performance. Creativity enabled entrepreneurs to identify new opportunities, solve business challenges, adopt improved farming and management practices, and respond effectively to changing market conditions. As a result, creative enterprises experienced improved productivity, operational efficiency, and profitability. The study also concluded that innovation has a positive and significant relationship with enterprise performance. Tea farming enterprises that adopted new technologies, improved production methods, and modern marketing approaches performed better than those relying on traditional practices. Innovation enhanced product quality, increased production efficiency, reduced operational costs, expanded market access, and improved customer satisfaction. These improvements contributed to higher profitability and strengthened the long-term sustainability of the enterprises.

Regarding risk-taking propensity, the study found a positive relationship with enterprise performance, although the relationship was not statistically significant. The findings suggest that

entrepreneurs who are willing to take calculated risks, such as investing in new technologies, diversifying products, or exploring new markets, are more likely to improve business performance. However, the statistical results indicate that risk-taking alone was not a significant predictor of performance among the sampled enterprises. Nevertheless, prudent risk-taking remains an important entrepreneurial practice for supporting business growth and competitiveness. The study further concluded that entrepreneurial networking has a positive and statistically significant relationship with enterprise performance. Enterprises that maintained strong relationships with suppliers, buyers, financial institutions, extension service providers, and other stakeholders achieved better performance than those with limited networks. Entrepreneurial networking improved access to information, markets, financial resources, technical support, and new business opportunities. It also encouraged knowledge sharing and the adoption of improved farming practices, thereby enhancing productivity and enterprise competitiveness.

The study concludes that creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial networking are key factors associated with improved performance among small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County. Although risk-taking propensity showed a positive relationship with performance, its effect was not statistically significant. The study therefore emphasizes the importance of promoting creativity, encouraging innovation, and strengthening entrepreneurial networks to enhance the growth, profitability, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability of small and medium tea farming enterprises.

6.1 Recommendations

The study recommends that tea farm owners, managers, and policymakers in Murang'a County should prioritize creativity and innovation as strategic drivers of enterprise performance. Farmers should continuously introduce new or improved tea products, adopt modern farming technologies including precision farming and digital farm management systems, and develop value-added products that diversify revenue streams and strengthen market competitiveness. Agricultural extension services should be strengthened to provide farmers with creative skills, technical knowledge, and access to modern sustainable farming practices. Policymakers and agricultural institutions should design targeted programs that support innovation through training, knowledge sharing, research and development, and financial and technical incentives for technology adoption. These combined measures will improve productivity, reduce operational costs, enhance product quality, and contribute to sustained profitability and long-term enterprise growth among small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County.

Tea farm owners and managers should adopt a proactive and strategic approach to risk-taking, investing in carefully evaluated opportunities such as adopting new technologies, diversifying income sources, and exploring new markets, supported by thorough planning, market analysis, and structured risk management strategies. Building organizational resilience through contingency planning and adaptation mechanisms is essential for managing market fluctuations, climate variability, and other operational uncertainties. Agricultural support institutions, financial organizations, and extension service providers should offer training and advisory services to strengthen farmers' risk assessment and decision-making capabilities. Policymakers should facilitate access to affordable agricultural insurance, credit facilities, and reliable market information to reduce the negative effects of risk and encourage entrepreneurial behavior. By embracing calculated risk-taking while institutionalizing sound risk management practices, tea

farming enterprises will be better positioned to exploit emerging opportunities and achieve sustained long-term performance improvements.

Tea farm owners and managers should actively invest in entrepreneurial networking by building and sustaining strong relationships with fellow farmers, agricultural extension officers, input suppliers, buyers, financial institutions, research organizations, and cooperatives. These networks provide invaluable access to information, technical expertise, financial resources, and market opportunities that collectively enhance productivity, profitability, and competitive positioning. Agricultural support institutions, cooperatives, and government agencies should facilitate networking through farmer forums, training workshops, agricultural exhibitions, and collaborative programs that promote knowledge sharing and partnership development across the tea value chain. Farmers should additionally leverage digital communication platforms and industry associations to expand professional networks and access wider markets and support services. Strengthening entrepreneurial networks will improve resource mobilization, stimulate innovation adoption, enhance market access, and ultimately contribute to the sustainable growth, competitiveness, and long-term viability of small and medium tea farming enterprises in Murang'a County.

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