



Role of Mental Image in Achieving Competitive Advantage: A Field Study at Food Industrial Companies in Hodeidah Governorate, Republic of Yemen

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Abstract: This study aimed to determine the role of mental image across its dimensions (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) in achieving competitive advantage across its dimensions (cost, quality, delivery, and flexibility) within food industry companies in Hodeidah Governorate. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study targeted a population of 403 managers and administrators within the investigated companies, using a questionnaire developed for data collection. Data analysis and hypothesis testing were conducted utilizing SPSS and AMOS 24 software. The study revealed that while the overall mental image plays a positive role in achieving competitive advantage, this positive impact is driven specifically by the affective and cognitive dimensions, whereas the behavioral dimension showed no significant positive role. Based on these findings, the study recommends that companies enhance their strategic focus on managing corporate mental image as a vital intangible asset. This should be achieved by coordinating marketing efforts to strengthen positive customer perceptions toward the companies, their products, and their brands to directly drive competitive advantage.

Keywords: mental image, competitive advantage, food industrial companies.

دور الصورة الذهنية في تحقيق الميزة التنافسية: دراسة ميدانية في شركات الصناعات الغذائية في محافظة الحديدة بالجمهورية اليمنية

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الملخص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد دور الصورة الذهنية بأبعادها (البعد الوجداني، البعد المعرفي، والبعد السلوكي) في تحقيق الميزة التنافسية بأبعادها (التكلفة، الجودة، التسليم، والمرونة) في شركات الصناعات الغذائية بمحافظة الحديدة، واستخدم المنهج الوصفي التحليلي كمنهج للدراسة، وكان مجتمع الدراسة الإداريون في شركات الصناعات الغذائية (محل الدراسة) البالغ عددهم (403)، وتم تطوير استبانة لجمع البيانات، وتم تحليل البيانات واختبار الفرضيات باستخدام برنامجي التحليل الإحصائي (SPSS) وكذلك برنامج (AMOS24) وتوصلت الدراسة إلى أن هناك دور إيجابي للصورة الذهنية في تحقيق الميزة التنافسية في شركات الصناعات الغذائية (محل الدراسة)، وجود دور إيجابي للبعد الوجداني والبعد المعرفي في تحقيق الميزة التنافسية، وعدم وجود دور إيجابي للبعد السلوكي في تحقيق الميزة التنافسية في الشركات، تعزيز الاهتمام بإدارة الصورة الذهنية للشركات باعتبارها أحد الأصول غير الملموسة ذات الأثر المباشر في تحقيق الميزة التنافسية، وذلك من خلال تنسيق الجهود التسويقية بما يعزز إدراك العملاء الإيجابي تجاه الشركات ومنتجاتها وعلاماتها التجارية. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الصورة الذهنية، الميزة التنافسية، شركات الصناعات الغذائية.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The business environment is witnessing rapid developments as a result of globalization, technological advancements, increased competition, and the constantly changing needs and desires of customers in both the goods and services sectors. The marketing environment has also become highly competitive and complex. The success of companies no longer depends solely on product quality and price reductions, but rather on gaining competitive advantage (CA) and enhancing the organization's standing and image among customers (Al-Shiker, 2021; Barney & Hesterly, 2015).

CA is one of the most influential factors for companies, and it is an objective that companies strive to achieve using all available means and resources. Achieving a CA allows a company to possess unique characteristics that distinguish it from others and provide added value that exceeds or differs from what competitors offer in the market. This enables the company to offer customers a wider range of benefits than its competitors, or to offer the same benefits at a lower price. The importance of CA is increasing in light of rapid technological changes, the emergence of competing companies, and the expansion and intensification of competition, particularly for food industrial companies (Hitt et al., 2024).

For these companies, CA has become a primary objective, driving the mobilization of all available material, human, and technological resources. It contributes to achieving a competitive edge and leadership, and fosters customer loyalty and trust (Boucekifa & Bendaïda, 2020).

Furthermore, competitive advantage is achieved through various factors and techniques employed by companies, including brand image. Brand image represents the sum of impressions and knowledge formed by customers regarding companies, and the resulting behaviors and responses to their products and services (Zameer et al., 2020).

Ouarad et al. (2024) stated that brand image is a fundamental factor in achieving CA, given its close connection to public interactions, attitudes, and preferences, as well as its role as an indicator reflecting customer satisfaction

levels. A positive MI also contributes to enhancing a company's ability to differentiate itself and improve its competitive position, thus supporting its continued success and sustainability in competitive business environments. It is crucial for companies to focus on building and maintaining a positive public image, emphasizing its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, and to be creative in shaping this image. This will help them differentiate themselves from competitors, gain public satisfaction, and achieve a larger market share.

Food processing companies in the Republic of Yemen are important organizations at the national level, as they are a pillar of the national economy. They cover a significant portion of the local market's food needs and represent one of the largest industrial sectors in Yemen, according to the report conducted by the Federation of Yemen Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FYCCI, 2022). This necessitates that industrial companies work to enhance their CA beyond that of their competitors by improving their public image. Therefore, this study will examine the role of public image in achieving a CA for food processing companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Competitive Advantage (CA)

2.1.1. Definition and Significance

CA is a crucial management topic for industrial companies, given the intense competition among them imposed by the open market and the large influx of manufactured goods into the country. This necessitates industrial companies increase their focus on CA, as it contributes to the continuous development of company processes, helps them achieve market dominance, and secures a larger market share than their competitors. It is also a significant criterion for the success of industrial companies (Ali, 2009). Management researchers have offered numerous definitions of the concept of CA. This variation stems from differing perspectives and visions regarding the elements that enable organizations to achieve CA. Al-Salmi (2001, p. 104) defined CA as "an advantage or element of superiority for an organization achieved by adopting a specific

competitive strategy that distinguishes it from its competitors." Mohyaldeen (2024, p. 63) defined it as "the company's ability to achieve an advantage that distinguishes it from competing organizations and gains that exceed those achieved by other competing organizations in the same activity." Al-Hubaishi and Al-Qurashi (2024, p. 10) perceived it as "a company's ability to prepare and implement strategies that place it in a better position than other organizations operating in the same field." It is also viewed as "an organization's endeavor to create and possess unique characteristics that distinguish it from other organizations operating in the same field in order to achieve differentiation from them" (Haffad & Abdellah, 2020, p. 634). Furthermore, it is defined as "everything that distinguishes one organization from another and achieves added value for customers in a way that exceeds or differs from what competitors offer in the market, either by providing more benefits than competitors or by providing the same benefits at a lower price" (Hili et al., 2017). Based on the above, CA has been defined as a strategic action undertaken by companies to offer a product whose benefits exceed those of competing products by achieving high product quality at lower costs and a faster ability to meet customer needs and desires.

2.1.2. Dimensions of Competitive Advantage

Researchers have offered diverse perspectives on the dimensions of competitive advantage (CA), reflecting differences in theoretical and operational approaches. Within the operations strategy literature, Ward et al. (1998) identified four commonly accepted competitive priorities: cost, quality, delivery, and flexibility. Accordingly, the present study adopts these four dimensions to operationalize competitive advantage. These dimensions have also been adopted by many other studies (Sorour & Mohammed, 2013; Beneddine, 2023; Tawwaf & Al-Oudi, 2024). The following is a presentation of these dimensions, addressing each dimension and its measurement indicators in accordance with the objectives of this study:

1. **Cost:** Cost refers to "producing the product requested by the customer at a low cost by reducing all expenses related to the product's production processes" (Al-Absi & Ali, 2024, p. 401). Alternatively, it can be defined as "the most important processes

used by the organization to reduce production and marketing costs, minimize waste and losses, and ensure that products are offered at competitive prices" (Al-Nuaimi, 2021, p. 148). It can also be perceived as "the ability of companies to offer their products at the lowest possible cost compared to competitors" (Al-Absi & Ali, 2024, p. 391). It is viewed as a company's ability to offer its products at the lowest cost compared to competitors by reducing production process costs and material and equipment requirements, and by optimally utilizing available resources to ensure cost differentiation. Cost is a crucial factor in determining an organization's survival and continuity. Reducing costs, whether in production, distribution, or product promotion, to a level lower than competitors increases an organization's ability to achieve a competitive advantage. In this study, the cost dimension was measured through the following indicators: the company's ability to reduce production input costs (materials and equipment), its use of modern technologies that ensure cost reduction, and its ability to offer the product to customers at a lower cost than competitors.

2. **Quality:** Quality is "the characteristics that products must possess in terms of conformity to specified standards, suitability for use, freedom from defects, and suitability to customer requirements" (Mohyaldeen, 2024, p. 65). It also means "doing things correctly to deliver products that meet customer needs and desires" (Al-Ahdal, 2025, p. 17). Furthermore, it is "the characteristics that products must possess in terms of conformity to specified standards, suitability for use, freedom from defects, suitability of design specifications to customer requirements, and after-sales services such as maintenance and warranty" (Al-Ta'i & Qadadah, 2008, p. 12). It is also "the set of qualities and characteristics through which a product achieves the ability to meet customer needs and desires and exceed their expectations" (Attia, 2020, p. 57). To achieve quality, an organization needs to understand and analyze the factors and sources of excellence, such as utilizing competencies and skills, using high-performance modern technologies and

techniques, and continuously developing production processes and marketing policies to ensure the organization's ability to deliver high-quality products that provide value to customers. As added by Said (2020), quality was measured through the following indicators: the extent to which the product conforms to pre-planned specifications; the level of continuous development, improvement, and renewal of the product and production processes; the extent to which the product meets customer needs and desires while exceeding expectations; the existence of a quality control system adopted by companies and supported by senior management; adherence to modern methods, techniques, and technologies in production processes; the availability of training and qualification programs for employees in industrial companies on quality systems; and obtaining international quality certifications such as ISO certifications.

3. **Flexibility:** Flexibility means “the ability of organizations to respond quickly to the many and changing needs of customers by producing a wide range of products, modifying and improving products, or introducing new products in order to meet the needs, desires, and tastes of customers” (Sammani et al., 2016, 211). Flexibility also means “the ability to adapt to changes and offer diverse products and services” (Al-Hubaishi & Al-Qurashi, 2024, 12). It is “the ability to respond quickly to customer needs that result from rapid changes in their desires, tastes, and preferences.” (Abu Hadi, 2019, p. 65), and Na et al. (2019) describe it as the ability of processes to change from one product to another at the lowest cost, with adaptability and responsiveness using minimal effort, time, and cost. Boubakeur (2013, p. 16) identified four requirements for flexibility: product flexibility, achieved through the introduction of new or modified products; mix flexibility, achieved through the production of a diverse range of products; size flexibility, achieved through the production of products in multiple and varied sizes and packaging; and delivery flexibility, achieved through the ability to deliver products at different times and in different ways. The flexibility dimension can be measured through the following

indicators: the company's ability to respond quickly to changes required by customers; its ability to keep pace with developments in the industrial sector; its ability to produce products that meet changing customer needs and desires; and its ability to attract individuals capable of responding quickly to changes occurring in the organization's work environment.

4. **Delivery:** Delivery refers to "reducing the required delivery times and providing products to customers on schedule, while adhering to speedy processing and minimizing waiting times" (Sorour & Mohammed, 2013, p. 376), and it is "a company's ability to meet its obligations on time, while reducing delivery time through faster development and reduced production process time" (Fanghor & Boughsiba, 2021, p. 35). Delivery refers to companies delivering their products faster and more conveniently to customers than their competitors, and on time. Delivery dimension, represents a fundamental basis for achieving superiority over competitors by "reducing the time required to deliver the product to customers, and this is achieved through speed and reducing the time required for production processes, starting from the design of the product and ending with its delivery to the customer" (Abu Hadi, 2019, 66). This was confirmed by Evans and Collier (2007), who stated that time in today's society is one of the important and fundamental resources that contribute to achieving a CA for the organization by shortening the time required to deliver the product to the customer, because customers want a quick response to their requests and short waiting periods. Post-delivery is measured through the following indicators: the extent to which companies are able to deliver the product on time, in the appropriate place for the customer, and in a time faster than competitors and using means that suit the customer.

2.2. Mental Image (MI)

2.2.1. Definition and Importance

A company's brand image represents the impression formed in customers' minds about a company. This perception is linked to the

company, its products and services, and the features that distinguish it from others (Abidalghafoor, 2021). Creating a positive MI has become a primary goal for companies seeking to survive, as it plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior and decisions. Furthermore, it is considered a tangible intangible asset for companies and a source of their wealth if this image is positive (Terchani et al., 2022).

Definitions of MI are numerous. Armstrong and Kotler (2015) defined it as the position a product occupies in a customer's memory compared to competitors' products in the market. Majeed (2017) defined it as the mental impressions customers have resulting from an organization's ability to differentiate its products from those of its competitors. Others have focused on the MI based on the organization itself. Kamoush and Malik (2017, p. 76) defined it as the mental image formed in customers' minds about organizations as a result of direct or indirect experience with them. Khawaldia et al. (2022, p. 15) defined it as the final results of the subjective impressions that are formed by individuals and groups towards the organization. Based on what was mentioned previously, the MI of industrial companies can be defined as the impressions that are formed by customers, investors and partners about industrial companies, which are formed based on the quality of their performance, products and the strength of their brand and result from direct or indirect contact with them.

2.2.2. Dimensions of Mental Image:

Scholars and researchers have offered diverse perspectives on defining the dimensions of MI. This diversity stems from the varying contexts in which mental image studies were conducted, with each researcher selecting dimensions appropriate to their specific study environment. The current study identifies three dimensions of mental image: the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. These dimensions were also identified in studies by (Al-Manzuoa et al., 2025; Al-Shammari, 2023; Ouarad et al. 2024; Rahmoun, 2022). These dimensions will be discussed as follows:

1. **The Cognitive Dimension:** The cognitive dimension is a fundamental pillar in the formation of MI. It represents the set of beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge that individuals hold about a particular subject—

whether it be a company, brand, government organization, public figure, tourist destination, or other entity. This dimension is linked to the intellectual or informational content that forms the basis of the image and subsequently influences the formation of emotional and behavioral responses (Hamioud, 2017). The cognitive dimension represents the information through which an individual perceives a subject, issue, person, or institution. This information forms the foundation upon which the MI is built. The accuracy of the MI depends on the accuracy of the information individuals obtain, and a distorted image results from inaccurate and erroneous information" (Hijab, 2007). Information is the first building block upon which the MI is constructed (Ouarad et al., 2024, p. 17).

2. **The Affective Dimension:** The affective dimension is one of the main components of the MI. It reflects the feelings and emotional impressions that individuals form toward a specific object, such as a company, product, or brand. This dimension is part of the tripartite model of image or attitudes, which views the image as an interconnected cognitive, emotional, and behavioral construct (Rahmoun, 2022). The affective dimension refers to "the feelings and emotions that influence attitudes toward a particular subject, and it also represents an assessment of the emotional quality of feelings toward companies and the various environments that surround them" (Abbas & Ali, 2022, p. 41). Agapito et al. (2013) emphasizes that feelings are a pivotal part of perceived images, as they represent the emotional response that mediates the relationship between what individuals know (the cognitive dimension) and what they expect to do (the behavioral dimension). The affective dimension is the most influential element in shaping attitudes and images of companies, as feelings act as a mediator between beliefs and behavior, and contribute to transforming abstract knowledge into preference or aversion. The importance of the affective dimension in industrial companies lies in the fact that it enhances institutional trust, identity and belonging among the public, brand loyalty,

and a positive response to public relations campaigns (El-Banawey, 2018).

3. **The Behavioral Dimension:** The behavioral dimension refers to the practical aspect of the MI, that is, what an individual is expected to do in the future based on their knowledge and feelings. The behavioral dimension encompasses the set of responses or reactions an individual makes toward a specific subject (Agapito et al., 2013). These reactions occur after processing internal and external influences that generate behavior stemming from feelings toward the organization, product, or brand, expressing the individual's attitude toward them (Ouarad et al., 2024). The process of behavioral reaction is preceded by the process of perception, which involves receiving, organizing, and analyzing information about the company. This is followed by behavioral attitudes, represented by practical responses—positive or negative—toward the company, its products, or its brand (Rahmoun, 2022). Hamioud (2017) indicated a positive relationship between brand image and consumer behavior, confirming that the MI plays a role in driving individuals toward biased behaviors that reflect their assessment of the relationship between their perception and reality. Behavioral factors that lead to continued dealings with the company if the opportunity arises, recommending the use of the company's products to others, and increasing dealings with the company.

2.3. Relationship Between Mental Image and Competitive Advantage

MI is a fundamental entry point for building a CA. It is a suitable tool for achieving a competitive edge and attaining results and advantages that surpass competitors (Ouarad et al., 2024). There is a strong correlation between MI and CA, as companies seeking to gain a strong CA must focus on MI as a source of superiority (Ghezail & Merrakchi, 2016). A strong MI is considered CA for companies, as is a stable MI for companies and their products. This creates positive impressions of the company among customers, exceeding those of competitors, and increases trust in the company and its products. It helps the company position itself and build a

strong and sustainable CA. This was confirmed by Al-Taweel and Hassan (2018), which showed that companies' focus on improving their brand image with the public increases their competitiveness and achieves continuous competitive excellence.

From the foregoing, it is clear that MI is a source of CA. When a company's image is positive and favorable to the public, it becomes an advantage that makes the public prefer the company and its products. Conversely, when the image is weak and negative, it undermines the company's CA and makes the public less inclined to favor its products and services. Therefore, it is evident that a strong CA must be reflected and translated into a strong brand image in the minds of customers. Thus, it can be said that the relationship between MI and CA is complementary. MI is a crucial input for CA, and the CA that companies achieve through product quality, innovation, creativity, rapid delivery, and quick response to customer needs and desires further enhances the company's brand image.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous studies that are related to the independent variable, the dependent variable, and studies that link the two variables, as well as what distinguishes the current study from previous studies are discussed.

3.1. Studies Related to Competitive Advantage

- Al-Mekhlafi and Al-Mujahid (2025) aimed to determine the impact of strategic intelligence on achieving CA in Yemeni telecommunications companies. The study concluded with several key findings, including: a high level of CA in the companies studied and a positive relationship between strategic intelligence and CA.
- Tawwaf and Al-Oudi (2024) aimed to analyze the relationship between marketing innovation (product innovation, pricing innovation, promotion innovation, distribution innovation, and enabling environment) and the CA of the companies studied. The study concluded with several key findings, including a correlation between marketing innovation (product innovation, pricing innovation, promotion innovation, distribution innovation, and enabling

environment) and the CA of pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Yemen.

- Al-Hada and Zaid (2024) aimed to determine the role of strategic orientation and its dimensions (entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and entrepreneurial orientation) in enhancing CA. The study concluded with several key findings, including: a high level of competitive advantage in the universities under study, and a positive relationship between strategic orientation and its dimensions (entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and entrepreneurial orientation) and CA.
- Al-Absi and Ali (2024) aimed to determine the impact of strategic planning on achieving CA in private cement manufacturing companies in Yemen. The study concluded with several key findings, including: a high level of CA in the factories under study; and a statistically significant positive impact of strategic planning on achieving CA.
- Mohyaldeen (2024) aimed to determine the role of strategic leadership in achieving CA in private hospitals in Sana'a, the capital city. The study concluded with several key findings, including: a high level of CA in the factories under study. The study found that the dimensions of flexibility and quality were most prevalent, while the dimension of innovation was least prevalent. The study also demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect of strategic leadership on CA.
- Al-Ofairi and Al-Hajri (2023) aimed to determine the accounting impact of the target costing approach on CA in manufacturing companies in Yemen. The study concluded with several key findings, including: the high level of CA in the companies studied, and the fact that using the target costing approach in accounting enhances CA.

3.2. Studies Related to Mental Image

- Al-Shammari and Ali (2024) aimed to determine the impact of marketing innovation on building organizational image and to identify the mediating role of product quality in the relationship between marketing innovation and corporate image in private hospitals in Karbala, Iraq. The

study concluded that marketing innovation influences the formation of organizational image and has a positive impact on service quality in the hospitals under study.

- Al-Makhlafi and Al-Khalidi (2022) aimed to determine the relationship between social responsibility and corporate image in mobile phone companies in Yemen. The most important findings were: the level of availability of a corporate image in the companies under study, according to the opinions of the study sample, was high; and a correlation existed between social responsibility and the corporate image of the mobile phone companies under study, with the economic and environmental dimensions having the most positive impact.
- Ahmed and Al-Qahtani (2021) aimed to identify the factors that contribute to building the MI of Iraqi industrial companies. It employed a documentary approach, reviewing several relevant studies. The most important findings were that improving quality, enhancing public relations with customers, utilizing social media, and employing innovative marketing methods all contribute to building the MI of Iraqi industrial companies.
- Abedalla and Suhaiby (2020) aimed to determine the mediating role of a positive MI in the relationship between the quality of banking services and customer satisfaction in Yemeni banks. The most important findings were that the level of availability of a positive MI in the banks under study, according to the study sample, was high; there was a correlation between the quality of banking services and customer satisfaction, as well as between the quality of banking services and brand image; and a positive MI played a mediating role in the relationship between the quality of banking services and customer satisfaction in Yemeni banks in Sana'a.

3.3. Studies Addressing Mental Image and Competitive Advantage

- Rachman et al. (2025) aimed to explore the role of reputation management and MI for achieving CA within Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. The results showed that building a positive MI through quality

educational services, a clear corporate identity, and effective communication with stakeholders directly contributes to enhancing the competitiveness of educational institutions.

- Al-Bambawy (2024) aimed to determine the impact of companies' green marketing practices on enhancing MI and its relationship to achieving CA among consumers of typical electric car companies in Egypt. The study reached several conclusions, most notably: the positive impact of companies' green marketing practices on enhancing MI and achieving CA for the companies studied; and the positive role of MI in achieving CA for the companies studied.
- Ouarad et al. (2024) aimed to demonstrate the impact of the dimensions of the MI of natural products—namely, the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions—on achieving CA, as measured by indicators such as growth, differentiation, innovation, and cost leadership. The study concluded that there is a direct relationship between the MI of natural products and CA. The stronger and more established the MI of natural oils, the greater the CA they possess.
- Al-Zuhairi (2022) aimed to demonstrate the mediating effect of MI on the relationship between social responsibility and sustainable CA. It also sought to identify the relationship between MI and social responsibility, as well as the relationship between MI and sustainable CA. The study reached several conclusions, most notably: the presence of a mediating effect of MI on the relationship between social responsibility and sustainable CA, as well as a direct relationship between MI and sustainable CA.
- Al-Taweel and Hassan (2018) aimed to identify the role of MI in achieving CA in soft drink companies. The study concluded with several key findings, most notably: MI plays a positive role in achieving CA in the soft drink companies studied.
- Ghezail and Merrakchi (2016) aimed to demonstrate the role of the characteristics of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – specifically, horizontal organizational structure, haphazard

strategies and plans, and a narrow information system – in enhancing MI and CA in a sample of SMEs in Ghardaia Province. The study concluded with several key findings, most notably: characteristics of small and medium-sized enterprises plays a positive role in enhancing MI and CA in SMEs in Ghardaia Province.

3.4. Distinction of the Current Study from Previous Studies

The current study was conducted within the Yemeni regulatory environment, which differs significantly from previous studies conducted under different economic, social, and political conditions. Specifically, the study focuses on food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no previous study has addressed these variables within the Yemeni industrial sector, particularly in the context of the food industry.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The industrial sector in the Republic of Yemen is performing modestly, limited to a small number of industrial activities, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Despite the efforts of industrial sector companies to achieve excellence by improving their performance and products, they face significant challenges that hinder their growth and differentiation. These challenges include the relative novelty of the sector and its weak competitiveness and productivity. As Rubio-Andrés et al. (2024) noted, new organizations have low and limited competitiveness due to their limited resources and capabilities, which impedes their performance and growth in the market. The report "Made in Yemen: A Strategy for Industrial Recovery and Economic Growth" conducted by Bin Jalal and Abdulkader (2025) indicated that the weak performance of the industrial sector in Yemen stems from declining production and reduced competitiveness due to the conflict, weak infrastructure, heavy reliance on imported inputs, and the poor implementation of legal frameworks and industrial policies. This negatively impacts companies' ability to achieve excellence and growth. Therefore, it is essential for industrial companies to work on strengthening their CA by enhancing their

relationships with customers and suppliers and improving their public image (Antwi et al., 2024).

Industrial companies in general, and food processing companies in particular, in the Republic of Yemen face strong competition due to the flooding of local markets with imported food products and rising production costs. This makes it difficult for local products to compete with imported ones, as explained by the Industrial Sector Department of the Central Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the capital city, which stated that: “Local food industries are in a situation that requires finding effective solutions to support them and develop their competitiveness in light of intense competition and the flooding of the local market with imported products” (FYCCI, 2024).

The intense competition faced by food manufacturing companies in Yemen necessitates that their management allocate a portion of their material, financial, and human resources to improving their corporate image. However, interviews conducted by the researcher in November 2024 with 15 marketing specialists from four food manufacturing companies in Hodeidah Governorate, regarding the extent to which these companies adopt strategies to enhance their MI and CA, revealed that the companies prioritize increasing sales over cultivating a positive image for themselves and their products. Furthermore, the surveyed respondents indicated that the companies' management's efforts to promote a better corporate image—whether cognitive, emotional, or behavioral—were insufficient to keep pace with developments and effectively counter the fierce competition. Instead, they focused heavily on boosting sales through discounts, exhibitions, or gifts.

Despite the importance of MI in helping companies face intense competition in the food industry, researchers, through a desk review of studies addressing the two variables of this study, found no research examining MI and CA in Yemeni food companies. This indicates a research gap, suggesting that the topics of these two variables require further investigation and deeper analysis to obtain up-to-date information related to them, bridge the research gap, and contribute to improving the competitive advantage of food companies. Therefore, the

research problem can be formulated in the following main question:

What is the role of MI, with its dimensions (affective, cognitive, and behavioral), in achieving CA in food companies in Hodeidah Governorate?

5. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The importance of this study is evident in its subject matter: the role of MI in achieving CA. This importance can be categorized into two aspects:

5.1. Theoretical Importance

The study contributes to developing and testing a conceptual framework and a knowledge model that focuses on the nature of the relationship between the two variables of the study. This contributes to enhancing the body of knowledge and enriching the Yemeni library in particular, and the Arab library in general. It also offers suggestions that will open up broader avenues for research and knowledge, and allow for the continuation of ongoing developmental research in the fields of MI and CA.

5.2. Practical Importance

The practical importance of this study lies in the recommendations it presents, based on its findings. These recommendations aim to enhance the competitiveness of food manufacturing companies in Hodeidah Governorate and assist leaders and managers in these companies to adopt marketing strategies that focus on developing the company's position and improving its MI. This will strengthen their competitive standing and help them face the challenges posed by intense competition in this sector.

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The current study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To measure the level of CA achieved in its dimensions (quality, cost, flexibility, and delivery) in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.
2. To determine the level of MI in its dimensions (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

- To identify the role of MI in its dimensions (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) in the CA of food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework clarifies the study variables, their dimensions, the relationship between these variables, and the direction of this relationship. The dimensions of the independent variable, MI, were “affective”,

“cognitive”, and “behavioral” (Al-Sarairah, 2019; Beneddine, 2023; Boubakeur, 2013; Ouarad et al., 2024; Sorour & Mohammed, 2013; Tawwaf & Al-Oudi, 2024). The dimensions of the dependent variable, CA, were “cost”, “quality”, “flexibility”, and “delivery” (Al-Absi & Ali, 2024; Al-Mekhlafi & Al-Mujahid, 2025; Mohyaldeen, 2024). The conceptual framework clarifies the relationship between MI with its dimensions (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) and CA, as illustrated in Figure 1.

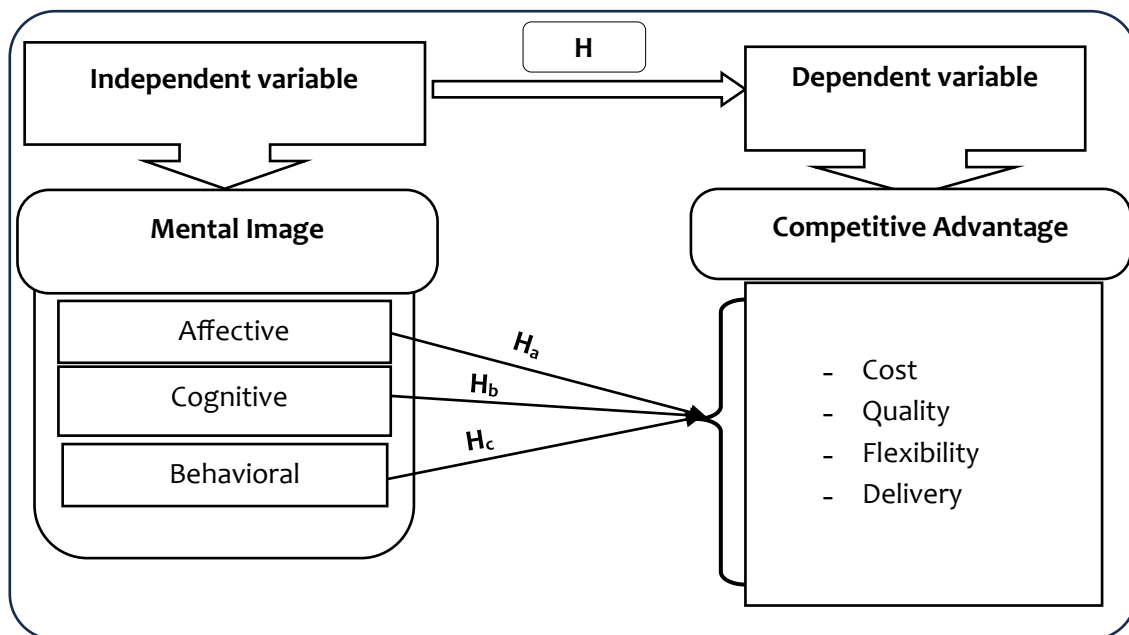


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

8. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses were formulated by referencing relevant studies on the two study variables (Al-Bambawy, 2024; Al-Zuhairi, 2022; Ouarad et al., 2024; Rachman et al., 2025). The hypotheses are as follows:

H: **Main Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant role for MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

The following sub-hypotheses branch out from this main hypothesis:

H_a: There is a statistically significant role for the affective dimension in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

H_b: There is a statistically significant role for the cognitive dimension in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

H_c: There is a statistically significant role for the behavioral dimension in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

9. METHODOLOGY

9.1. Research Design

For the purposes of achieving the study's objectives, the descriptive-analytical approach was used. This approach describes and studies human phenomena as they are in reality. The current study seeks to examine the role of MI as an independent variable in achieving CA as a dependent variable. This aligns with the descriptive-analytical approach, which aims to provide data, and information about the problem under study, in order to analyze and interpret this data, understand its implications, and interpret it to achieve the study's objectives.

9.2. Study Population

The study population consisted of administrators working in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate. Six food industrial companies with (200 or more) employees and a lifespan of more than ten years were selected, as they are the most stable companies and the most capable of achieving a CA. More realistic results can be obtained from them compared to newly established companies. Administrators were selected, among them were those who hold the following

administrative positions: - General managers - Department managers - Heads of sections - Supervisors - Specialists - totaling (403) individuals, as they are the individuals who have the most knowledge, understanding and awareness of the availability of the study variables in their companies. A comprehensive census was conducted by distributing (403) questionnaires to all population, of which (375) questionnaires were returned, and only (370) questionnaires were valid for analysis. All these are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Population and Questionnaire Distribution

No.	Company	Year Established	Company Age (Years)	Total Employees	Senior Management*	Unit Managers/ Department Heads	Supervisors/ Specialists	Sample Size	Questionnaires	
									Distributed	Valid
1	Yemeni Company for Flour Mills and Grain Silos – Al-Sanabel	2003	22	614	1	28	35	64	64	58
2	Yemeni Sugar Refinery Company – Al-Saeed Sugar	2008	17	595	1	20	45	66	66	62
3	National Dairy and Food Company – NADFOOD	2013	12	675	1	23	52	76	76	69
4	Darhem Industries Co. Ltd. – DECO	1980	45	800	2	18	40	60	60	58
5	United Company for Dairy and Food Products – NANA	1978	47	960	2	23	46	71	71	63
6	Yemeni Dairy Manufacturing Company – Yemani	1978	47	1,150	2	20	44	66	66	60
Total	—	—	—	4,794	9	132	262	403	403	370

* Senior management includes general managers, executive directors, deputies, and advisors.

9.3. Research Instrument

The study relied on the questionnaire as a tool for collecting the data and information necessary to achieve the study's objectives, as it is one of the most suitable scientific research tools that can be used to collect data for achieving the objectives of the field study. The questionnaire was designed with its first section, which includes demographic and functional variables, which included: (gender, age, length of service, academic qualification, job title, and company), and its second section, which included the basic data for the study variables

distributed over two variables. The independent variable (mental image) included (14) statements distributed over (3) dimensions, and the dependent variable (competitive advantage) included (20) statements distributed over (4) dimensions. The questionnaire was developed based on a review of the relevant literature and adapted from established instruments used in previous studies to identify competitive advantage items (e.g., Al-Alimi & Al-Sanabani, 2023; Bayadi, 2020; Mohyaldeen, 2024), and to identify mental image items (Ben Nasser, 2024; Khatatbeh et al., 2022; Ouarad et al., 2024).

9.4. Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

9.4.1. Convergent Validity

This study used structural equation modeling (SEM), and a composite reliability coefficient was employed. All latent variables were greater than 0.70, thus, exceeding the acceptable threshold defined by Hair et al. (2010). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to validate the factors, and the items were measured and developed based on CFA. The questionnaire was finalized after arbitration and

distribution of 55 items. The loading coefficient was less than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014).

The average variance extracted (AVE) and loading coefficients were used to verify convergence validity, a key type of validity in SEM. The extracted mean variances for the latent variables were greater than 0.50 and the loading coefficients were greater than 0.70; this indicates convergence validity between the questionnaire components and items. Table 2 shows that all loading coefficients were greater than 0.70, and that the extracted mean variance was greater than 0.50.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Mental Image	Affective Dimension	M1_1	0.683	0.870	0.573
		M1_2	0.762		
		M1_3	0.744		
		M1_4	0.837		
		M1_5	0.751		
	Cognitive Dimension	M2_1	0.885	0.881	0.599
		M2_2	0.737		
		M2_3	0.729		
		M2_4	0.698		
		M2_5	0.805		
	Behavioral Dimension	M3_1	0.804	0.857	0.546
		M3_2	0.785		
		M3_3	0.681		
		M3_4	0.685		
		M3_5	0.732		
Competitive Advantage	Cost	Y1_1	0.657	0.873	0.581
		Y1_2	0.743		
		Y1_3	0.871		
		Y1_4	0.725		
		Y1_5	0.798		
	Quality	Y2_1	0.864	0.876	0.586
		Y2_2	0.686		
		Y2_3	0.731		
		Y2_4	0.751		
		Y2_5	0.785		
	Flexibility	Y3_1	0.705	0.884	0.605
		Y3_2	0.853		
		Y3_3	0.730		
		Y3_4	0.789		
		Y3_5	0.804		
	Delivery	Y4_1	0.655	0.874	0.544
		Y4_2	0.770		
		Y4_3	0.834		
		Y4_4	0.731		
		Y4_5	0.815		

Note. AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability.

9.5. Reliability of the Study Constructs

This test is used to determine the reliability of the study instrument (questionnaire) in collecting reliable data. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire. Acceptable alpha values

which range from (0.60) to (0.70), while values greater than (0.70) indicate a high degree of reliability of the instrument (Hair et al., 2014). Reliability was further confirmed through factor analysis and the determination of composite reliability, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability of the Study Constructs

Variable	Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	CR
Competitive Advantage	Cost	0.868	0.873
	Quality	0.815	0.876
	Flexibility	0.881	0.884
	Delivery	0.873	0.874
	Total	0.929	0.966
Mental Image	Affective Dimension	0.865	0.870
	Cognitive Dimension	0.847	0.881
	Behavioral Dimension	0.859	0.857
	Total	0.919	0.952

Note. CR = composite reliability.

Table 3 shows that the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) and composite reliability were very high for the study instrument constructs. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged between (0.815) and (0.949), while the composite reliability coefficient ranged between (0.856) and (0.967). This confirms that the instrument is suitable for achieving the objectives of this field study, and the results can be relied upon to generalize to the study population with a very high degree of certainty.

9.6. Statistical Analysis Methods

The study relied on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25) and the AMOS 24

program in the process of analyzing the data and testing the hypotheses. The arithmetic mean, frequencies, percentages, and the coefficient of deviation were used for descriptive analysis, and the regression coefficient, coefficient of determination, and critical value were used to test the hypotheses.

9.7. Participants' Characteristics

The personal characteristics of the study sample members according to the questionnaires valid for analysis were represented in gender, age, years of experience, educational level, and job by determining the frequency and percentages as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 370)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	345	93.24
	Female	25	6.76
Education Level	High school	45	12.16
	Diploma	88	23.78
	Bachelor's degree	224	60.54
	Master's or PhD degree	13	3.51
Age (years)	< 30	79	21.35
	30-40	181	48.92
	41-50	91	24.59
	> 50	19	5.14

Variable	Category	n	%
Years of Experience	≤ 5	58	15.68
	6–10	93	25.14
	11–15	92	24.86
	> 15	127	34.32
Job Title	General Manager	4	1.08
	Deputy General Manager	2	0.54
	Executive Director	2	0.54
	Department Manager	26	7.03
	Division Head	9	2.43
	Section Head	80	21.62
	Group Supervisor	70	18.92
	Specialist	177	47.84
Total		370	100.00

Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents in the study population were male (93.24%), while females comprised only 6.76%. This result can be explained by the fact that the nature of work in the industrial sector in Yemen relies heavily on fieldwork and production, requiring significant physical exertion, thus necessitating a high percentage of male workers.

The results also indicate that the majority of respondents (60.54%) held a bachelor's degree. Researchers attribute this to the companies under study prioritizing employees with scientific knowledge and expertise, including university graduates with the qualifications to efficiently perform assigned tasks.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents (48.92%) were in the 31-40 age group. This is attributed to the fact that companies tend to attract active and productive age groups, who generally possess practical experience along with physical and mental capabilities. Table 4 also shows the consistency of the study sample's respondents according to their length of service. The study sample showed that 34.32% of respondents had more than 15 years of service, followed by 25.14% with 6-10 years, and then 24.86% with 11-15 years. Only 15.68% of the study sample had 5 years or less of service. This indicates that companies value retaining experienced employees due to their knowledge of company procedures and suggests a degree of job stability and loyalty within the companies studied.

Table 4 shows the disparity of the study population of respondents in terms of job title. The study population of respondents who were specialists had the majority, with a percentage of (47.84%). This result reflects the nature of the administrative structure in the industrial companies under study, where the broad base consisted of administrative specialists, and the numbers decrease as the job title and administrative level increase, with the higher administrative levels being the fewest in number.

10. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

10.1. Descriptive Statistics

The level of achievement of CA with its dimensions, and the level of availability of the MI with its dimensions in food industry companies in Hodeidah Governorate, was determined through descriptive analysis of the responses of the study population to the statements of the instrument (questionnaire), using arithmetic means and standard deviations, as well as the relative weight of the sample responses.

10.1.1. Competitive Advantage

To assess the level of achievement of CA and its dimensions (cost, quality, flexibility, and delivery) in food manufacturing companies in Hodeidah Governorate, the mean, and standard deviation of each dimension and of the overall variable were calculated using SPSS software. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Competitive Advantage and Its Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)	Interpretation	Rank
Quality	4.37	0.53	87.40	Very High	1
Delivery	4.16	0.65	83.20	High	2
Flexibility	4.12	0.67	82.40	High	3
Cost	4.00	0.74	80.00	High	4
Overall CA	4.16	0.53	83.20	High	—

Table 5 shows that food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate possess a high level of CA, with an overall arithmetic mean of 4.16 and a relative weight of 83.20%. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.53 indicates a consensus among community members regarding this high level of competitive advantage, reflecting a shared perception of these companies' strong competitive performance in general.

Analyzing the dimensions of CA reveals that quality is the cornerstone of these companies' competitive strategy, ranking first with a "very high" level of achievement, the highest arithmetic mean of 4.37, and a relative weight of 87.40%. The extremely low standard deviation of 0.53 underscores the strong consensus on these companies' superiority in providing high-quality products as a key CA. This trend is further supported by strong performance in the delivery and flexibility dimensions, which ranked second and third respectively, both achieving a "high" level of achievement. The delivery dimension achieved a mean score of 4.16, while flexibility

scored 4.12, indicating that the companies possess effective logistical capabilities and a good ability to adapt to market changes.

The cost dimension, despite achieving a "high" level with a mean score of 4.00 and a relative weight of 80.00%, ranked last. It is noteworthy that the standard deviation for this dimension was the highest among all dimensions (0.74), which may indicate greater variation in performance or in the sample's opinions regarding the companies' cost management efficiency compared to the other dimensions. Overall, it can be concluded that these companies' strategy is based on high-quality excellence, supported by delivery efficiency and flexibility, rather than focusing on price competition through cost reduction.

10.1.2. Mental Image

To determine the overall level of availability of the MI in its dimensions in food industry companies in Hodeidah Governorate, the responses of the study sample were analyzed and interpreted, and the results were as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Mental Image and Its Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)	Interpretation	Rank
Affective	4.37	0.55	87.40	Very High	1
Behavioral	4.03	0.63	80.60	High	2
Cognitive	4.01	0.69	80.20	High	3
Overall MI	4.14	0.54	82.80	High	—

Table 6 shows that the MI of food manufacturing companies in Hodeidah Governorate is rated as "high," with an overall mean of 4.14, a standard deviation of 0.54, and a relative weight of 82.80%. These indicators reflect a positive perception among customers of these companies, manifested in their feelings towards them, their awareness of them, and

their behavior when dealing with them. This demonstrates that the companies have succeeded in building a significant brand presence in the local market, albeit to varying degrees across the three dimensions.

The affective dimension ranked first in terms of availability, with an overall mean of 4.37, a

standard deviation of 0.55, and a relative weight of 87.40%, which is classified as "very high." These results indicate that customers hold strong positive feelings towards the companies and feel satisfied and content when dealing with them, which enhances their loyalty and contributes to strengthening the emotional connection with the brand. This dimension is an indicator of companies' success in building emotional connections that extend beyond the product's commercial function.

The behavioral dimension came in second place, with a mean of 4.03, a standard deviation of 0.63, and a relative weight of 80.60%, classifying it as "high." These results reflect that customer behavior toward companies, such as recommending them or repeat purchases, demonstrates a good degree of positive engagement, albeit relatively less than the emotions associated with them. This suggests that the emotional image partially translates into supportive behavior, highlighting the importance of strengthening behavioral incentives and linking them to actual loyalty.

The cognitive dimension came in last place, with a mean of 4.01, a standard deviation of 0.69, and a relative weight of 80.20%, also classified as "high." These results indicate that customers possess a good understanding of the nature of

companies and their products, and are aware of their characteristics and CA. However, this cognitive understanding does not reach the level of emotional engagement, necessitating enhanced communication messages that highlight the corporate identity and unique characteristics.

Based on the above, it can be said that the brand image of food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate is generally positive, with a clear advantage in the emotional dimension and a relative disparity in the behavioral and cognitive dimensions. This disparity suggests that building a MI is not solely based on feelings, but requires translating them into clear understanding and supportive behavior from customers.

10.2. Hypothesis Testing

10.2.1. Main Hypothesis Testing

The main hypothesis states that: There is a statistically significant role for MI in the CA of food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

To confirm the direct role of the dependent variable, structural equation modeling was used, relying on the Amos v.24 software. Figure 2 shows the cognitive structural model.

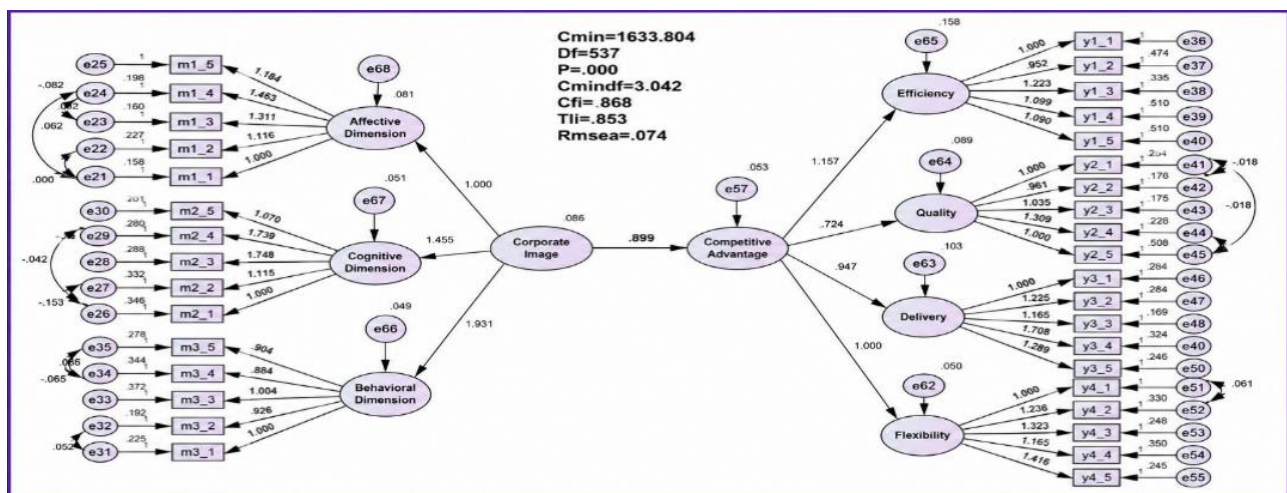


Figure 2: Structural Model of the Role of MI in Achieving CA

Figure 2 shows that the results of the conformity quality indicators for the role of MI in achieving CA in food industry companies show that the degree of achievement falls within the acceptable conformity values indicators, as the standard Chi-square value (3.042) reached acceptable and less than the maximum limit (5),

and the root of the approximate mean error (RMSEA) reached (0.074), which is less than the specified value of (0.08) or less, and the comparative conformity index (CFI) reached (0.868), which is within the acceptable value and close to one, and the value of the Tucker Lewis index (TLI) was (0.853), which is also within the

acceptable value and close to one, which suggests the conformity of the cognitive model of the study data. The results also show the

coefficient of determination (R^2), standard error (S.E), critical value (C.R), and impact factor (β) between the two variables, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Role of Mental Image in Achieving Competitive Advantage

Path	β	R^2	SE	C.R.	p-value
MI $\rightarrow$ CA	0.899	0.723	0.121	7.430	< 0.001

Note. θ = standardized path coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; SE = standard error; C.R. = critical ratio.

Table 7 shows that the critical value (CR=7.430) exceeded the critical value of (± 1.96), being greater than (1.96). The probability value was 0.001, which is less than ($P < 0.05$). This confirms the significant role of MI in achieving CA for food industry companies. The coefficient of determination ($R^2=0.723$) indicates that (72.3%) of the variance in achieving CA for food industry companies is due to improving MI, while the remaining (27.7%) is due to other factors not addressed by the model. The predictive value (regression coefficient) ($\beta=0.899$) indicates that a one-unit improvement (100%) in MI leads to an (89.9%) increase in achieving CA for food industrial companies.

Based on the outputs of the structural model for the main hypothesis, the hypothesis is accepted as follows: Brand image plays a statistically significant role (at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$) in achieving competitive advantage in food manufacturing companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

This result is remarkably consistent with a number of previous studies that have

demonstrated the role of brand image in achieving competitive advantage across diverse sectors. In the electric vehicle industry, Al-Bambawy (2024) confirmed a positive role for brand image in achieving competitive advantage, while Ouarad et al.'s (2024) study in the natural oils industry found a direct relationship between the brand image of natural products and competitive advantage. In the sector closely related to the current study, soft drink manufacturing companies, Al-Taweel and Hassan (2018) indicated a positive role for brand image in achieving competitive advantage.

To test the sub-hypotheses stemming from the main hypothesis, the researcher adopted the structural model and used structural equation modeling, based on the (Amos) program, to test the sub-hypotheses of the direct effect of the dimensions of the independent variable (affective dimension, cognitive dimension, behavioral dimension) in achieving competitive advantage for food industry companies in Hodeidah Governorate, as shown in Figure 3.

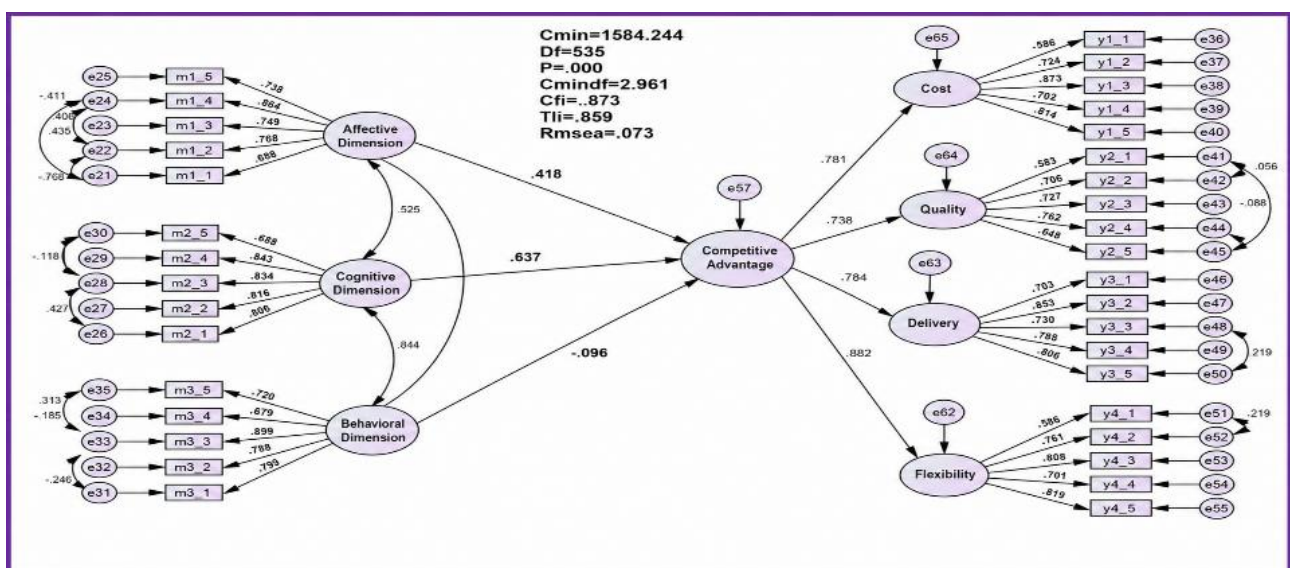


Figure 3: Path Model of the Role of MI Dimensions in Achieving CA

Figure 3 shows that the results of the conformity quality indicators show the role of the dimensions of the independent variable (MI) in the dependent variable achieving (CA) among food industry companies in Hodeidah Governorate, as the degree of its achievement falls within the indicators of acceptable conformity values, as the standard chi-square value (2.961) reached acceptable and less than the maximum limit (5), and the root of the approximate mean error (RMSEA) reached (0.073), which is less than the specified value of

(0.08) or less, as well as the comparative conformity index (CFI) reached (0.873), which is within the acceptable value and close to one, and the value of the Tucker Lewis index (TLI) was (0.859), which is also within the acceptable value and close to one, which suggests the conformity of the cognitive model of the study data. The results also show the standard error (SE), the critical value (C.R), and the impact factor (β) of the effect of the dimensions of the independent variable on the dependent, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Role of Mental Image Dimensions in Achieving Competitive Advantage

Path	β	SE	C.R.	p-value
Affective Dimension $\rightarrow$ CA	0.442	0.084	5.282	< 0.001
Cognitive Dimension $\rightarrow$ CA	0.584	0.115	5.081	< 0.001
Behavioral Dimension $\rightarrow$ CA	-0.069	0.097	-0.708	0.479

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error; C.R. = critical ratio.

Table 8 confirms the validity of the sub-hypotheses derived from the main hypothesis as follows:

Sub-hypothesis 1 (Ha): There is a statistically significant role for the affective dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

Table 8 shows that the critical value (CR=5.282) exceeded the critical value (± 1.96), being greater than (1.96), and the probability value ($P < 0.05$) also confirmed the statistical significance of the role of the affective dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies. Furthermore, the regression coefficient (β) was ($\beta = 0.442$), a positive value indicating a positive role for the affective dimension of MI in achieving CA in food manufacturing companies. A one-degree improvement (100%) in the affective dimension MI leads to a 44.2% increase in CA for food industrial companies, making it a crucial factor in distinguishing these companies in the competitive market.

Based on the model's outputs, the first sub-hypothesis is accepted as follows: There is a statistically significant role for the affective dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

This finding aligns closely with a growing trend in previous studies emphasizing the exceptional importance of the affective

dimension in shaping brand image and its impact on competitive performance. A study by Ouarad et al. (2024) on natural oil producers indicated that the emotional dimension of MI positively and significantly influences the achievement of CA, confirming that positive feelings toward the product constitute a strong driver of preference and loyalty. Similarly, a study by Al-Zuhairi (2022) found that the emotional dimension of brand image plays a statistically significant mediating role in the relationship between social responsibility and sustainable CA, as the emotional aspect represents a vital link between organizational practices and customer perceptions. Notably, these results are consistent with the findings of Ghezail and Merrakchi (2016), which concluded that organizational characteristics influence the enhancement of MI and, consequently, CA, and that the emotional dimension serves as the bridge through which organizational efforts are transformed into competitive gains.

The second sub-hypothesis (Hb): The cognitive dimension of MI plays a statistically significant role in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

Table 8 shows that the critical value (CR=5.081) exceeded the critical value of (± 1.96), as it was greater than (1.96), and the probability value ($P < 0.05$) also confirmed the statistical significance of the cognitive dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient (β) was ($\beta=0.584$), a positive value indicating a positive role for the cognitive dimension of MI in achieving competitive advantage in food industrial companies. A one-degree improvement (100%) in the cognitive dimension of MI leads to a 58.4% increase in CA for food manufacturing companies, making it the most influential dimension among MI dimensions in enhancing the competitiveness of these companies. Based on the model's outputs, the third sub-hypothesis is accepted as follows: The cognitive dimension of MI plays a statistically significant role in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

This result aligns with previous studies that highlighted the pivotal importance of knowledge and information in shaping MI and its impact on CA. For example, Rahmoun's study (2022) in the banking sector indicated that MI, with its cognitive dimensions, contributes to shaping customer perceptions. Similarly, Ouarad et al.'s (2024) study on natural oil producing companies emphasized the impact of the cognitive dimension on achieving CA indicators such as excellence and innovation. The current study provides even clearer evidence of the significant relative importance of this dimension, demonstrating that its impact significantly surpasses that of the affective dimension. This reflects the priority given to rational and objective considerations in customers' evaluation of food manufacturing companies. This also aligns with Al Zuhairi's (2022) finding that the cognitive aspect represents the logical foundation upon which customers base their decisions and preferences.

The third sub-hypothesis (H_c): There is a statistically significant role for the behavioral dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate.

Table 8 shows that the critical value ($CR = -0.708$) did not exceed the critical value of (± 1.96), as it was less than (-1.96). Furthermore, the high probability value ($P = 0.479$) significantly exceeds the acceptable significance level (0.05), which confirms the lack of statistical significance for the role of the behavioral dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies. This result indicates that customer behavioral intentions are not

translated directly and effectively into a CA for these companies.

Based on the model outputs, the third sub-hypothesis, "There is no statistically significant role at the level of the behavioral dimension of MI in achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate", is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted,

Comparing this finding with previous studies reveals a discrepancy with Rahmoun's (2022) study in the banking sector, which concluded that MI, with its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, contributes to shaping customer perceptions. Meanwhile, Ouarad et al.'s (2024) study in the natural oils sector emphasized the impact of behavioral dimensions on achieving CA indicators. Notably, the current study offers a novel perspective, indicating a gap between customers' behavioral intentions and the actual achievement of CA in the food industry sector in Hodeidah Governorate. This discrepancy in results can be attributed to several factors, including the governorate's specific economic and social conditions, which may influence customers' ability to translate their behavioral intentions into actual purchasing decisions.

11. CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of the research, several conclusions were drawn:

1. MI contributes to achieving CA. It represents a significant factor and an intangible asset that can be leveraged to enhance competitiveness.
2. Intellectual conviction, representing the cognitive dimension, strengthens the level of trust in industrial companies and gives them a competitive advantage over their rivals.
3. Emotional conviction, representing the affective dimension, increases loyalty to industrial companies and enhances their competitiveness.
4. The behavioral dimension of brand image does not significantly contribute to achieving CA in food industrial companies in Hodeidah Governorate. This indicates that the relationship between customer behavior and MI is not at the required level to achieve

a CA for the companies under study, according to the respondents' perspective.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results and conclusion, the following are some recommendations:

1. Senior management in industrial companies should prioritize managing the company's image as an intangible asset with a direct impact on competitiveness. This can be achieved by coordinating marketing efforts to foster positive customer perceptions of the company, its products, and its brands.
2. Marketing management should enhance the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the company's image by providing clear and reliable product information and building positive emotional relationships with customers. These dimensions play a crucial role in increasing trust and loyalty, thereby supporting competitiveness.
3. Marketing management should focus on developing the behavioral dimension of the company's image through interactive marketing programs that encourage customers to adopt positive behaviors toward the company's products. This helps translate positive perceptions into actual practices that enhance competitiveness.
4. Senior management should develop an integrated communication strategy that promotes behavioral and cognitive interaction and links emotional perceptions to actual purchasing decisions. This contributes to solidifying the company's position in customers' minds and shaping their behavior.
5. A similar study can be conducted in other sectors, such as banking, pharmaceuticals, IT, healthcare, and higher education.

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