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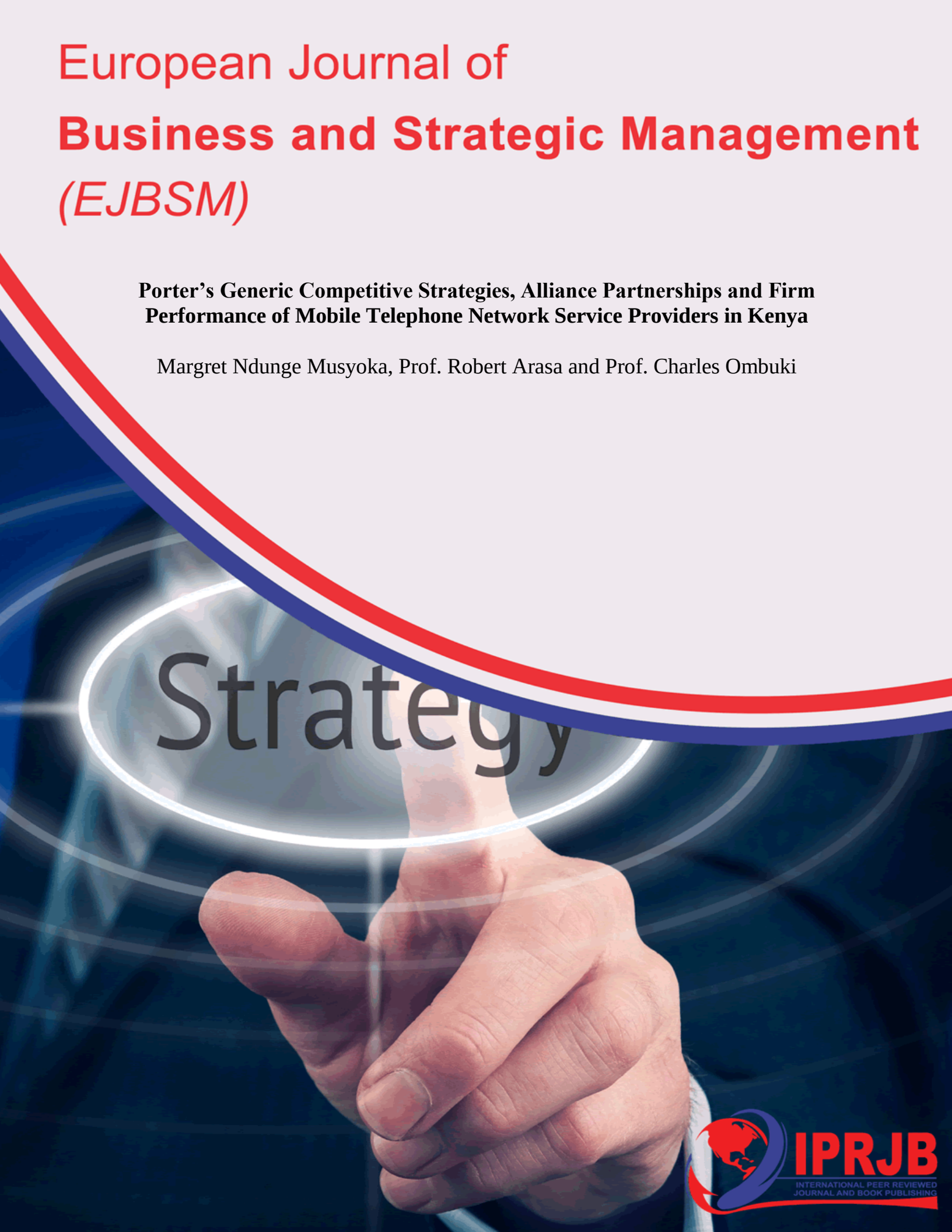

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Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies, Alliance Partnerships and Firm Performance of Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to investigate on focus strategy, partnership alliances and firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya.

Methodology: The study used positivism research philosophy and descriptive research design methodology. The target population was all the 66 mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. Primary data was gathered through use of structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression modeling was used to aid in data analysis.

Findings: Descriptive analysis portrayed that the 61 mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya registered had increased returns with a composite score of 3.84. Hierarchical regression results portrayed that partnership alliances moderated the relationship between focus strategy and performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya as far as Equity Alliance component is concerned with (p value of .04) which is less than the critical value (.05). Franchises, Diagonal alliances, Focus Strategy, Vertical alliances, Joint Ventures, Equity alliances, and Horizontal alliances had no statistically significant moderating effect.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: Generally, firms should consider partnership alliances as a conditional factor in the relationship between focus strategy and firm performance other than treating it as a pure predictor. Further, the management of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya should consider the extent to which individual components of partnership alliances moderate Porters' competitive strategies to performance linkage. On the other hand, the current study is possibly the first of its kind in making distinct involvement of strategic management knowledge frontiers. This was achieved through harmonizing and endorsing the hypotheses of the three theories that while Porter's generic differentiation strategy significantly influence performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya, the moderating effect of alliance partnerships gives a more comprehensive explanation to management as to why many such firms prefer the alliance partnerships instead of an apparent increase in profitability caused by the porter's strategic moves. That is, the Resource Based View Theory, syncretic paradigm theory and transaction cost theory have received an empirical support through this study for the theories are relevant to strategic decisions other than the Porters ones which affects the overall business objectives. Therefore, the three theories are significant to the current study since they alert managers to contrast in-house transaction costs with outdoor costs before choosing to execute inside or without.

Keywords: *Partnership Alliances, Focus Strategy, Firm Performance, Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers*

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INTRODUCTION

Increased competition, disruptions and dynamics in business environment continue to exert pressure on firms to pursue effective strategies and partnership alliances to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Abdirizak, 2019; Wheelen, et al. 2018). Empirical evidence demonstrates how companies leverage Porters' competitive strategies (Islami, Mustafa & Latkovikj, 2020), such as product differentiation strategy among others strategies so as to maintain market share (Kiarie, 2020). A competitive strategy is a long-term plan that assist a business gain a competitive advantage over its opponents. A firm position itself by leveraging its strengths. Porter (1985) in his model argued that a firm's strengths ultimately fall into one of two headings: cost advantage and differentiation. By applying these strengths in either broad or narrow scope, three generic strategies will arise as the consequences of this strategic move: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. These strategies apply at the business unit level. They are known as generic strategies because they do not originate from the firm or industry. Porter's framework proposes that firms that pursue any of these competitive strategies would develop a competitive advantage that would enable them to outperform competitors in that industry. Further, these firms engage themselves in partnership alliances to ensure competitive advantage is rest assured. So, apart from Porter's generic competitive strategies, alliance partnerships have a remarkable contribution towards the sustainability of a firm against stiff competition in the market.

Strategic alliance are partnerships of two or more corporations or business units that work together to achieve strategically significant objectives that are mutually beneficial to the parties (Drucker, 2016). Alliance partnerships is a voluntary agreement among enterprises that includes exchange of products and development of technologies or services (Gulati, 1998). Besides, the motives of the strategic alliance are comprised of possibilities related to better and faster access to technologies, ability to establish in new markets, reduce financial and political risk, form added value. From the firm perspective, Zaman (2016) identify alliance partnerships as ones in which the major source of return is stimulation of demand. Examples of such alliances include cross-selling, advertising, and promotion. Such alliances can give manufacturers entry into new geographical markets or customer segments, thereby increasing product demand. On the other hand, Zhang, (2015) define alliance partnerships as lateral relationships among firms intended to build user or consumer awareness of the returns they offer.

An important characteristic of the consumer perspective is that the motivation to form these alliances often arises out of demand side considerations such as favorable consumer preferences for the products that come out of these alliances, in contrast to partner-side factors such as mutual liking among alliance partners or cost minimization (Zhang, 2015). Ingredient branding, dual branding, and sharing of distribution channels are examples of such alliance partnerships. Alliance products span such diverse industries as technology (Compaq computers with Intel microprocessors), food products (Diet Coke with NutraSweet), and financial services (Shell Chase Bank MasterCard). Alliances can be classified as diagonal alliances, vertical alliances, joint ventures, equity alliances, horizontal alliances, and franchises (Madhok, Keyhani and Bossink, 2015). A diagonal alliance is described as a partnership of two companies in different industries. An inter-firm collaboration comprising two parties from alternate levels of value chain with a fundamental goal of internal augmentation by subcontracting ensuing value chain operations is referred to as a vertical alliance (Mong'are, 2016). On the other hand, horizontal alliances comprise two firms from similar value chain category largely to cut down costs (Madhok,

Keyhani, and Bossink, (2015). A joint venture is an agreement by two or more companies who decide to form a new company or two or more parties to form a new single entity/company to undertake a certain project/venture (Xu, (2015). Equity alliances are formed when one company acquires equity stake of another company and vice versa and these shareholdings make the company stakeholders and shareholders of each other (Mamédio, Rocha, Szczepanik & Kato, 2019). Franchising is where a franchiser gives the right to use a brand-name and corporate concept to a franchisee who has to pay a fixed amount of money but the franchiser keeps the control over pricing, marketing and corporate decisions in general (Kim, 2015). Licensing is when company pays for the right to use another company´s technology or production processes. Use of alliances partnerships has precipitated enduring industry changes, the disruptive impacts of which have been exacerbated by the technological changes that they facilitated. As alliance partnerships have become more prevalent, managers have learned to take their transformative powers for granted; they now treat alliance partnerships as yet another trait characterizing competitive behaviors with which they must cope in order for their firms to survive and thrive.

Although heightened competition cut across all sectors, the present-day mobile telephone network industry stands out as one of the few sectors categorized as most turbulent globally (Asena, 2019). Also, not all alliances attain their objectives because the type of an alliance, determines its performance (Weber, 2014). For instance, Standard and Poor's market intelligence (2020) strategy and annual commoditization tracker analysis of the result for telecommunications providers worldwide points at the global shrinking Average Revenue Per User (ARPU), nose-diving profitability, sky-rocketing liability and dwindling cash flow, Kenya Mobile Subscriptions and Penetration uprising trends and Kenya mobile telephone operator declining market Share.

The aforementioned low performance trends witnessed for telecommunications providers worldwide is majorly attributed to hyper-competition (HoRy, 2018) which is occasioned by fast disruptive, fast changing, short life cycle technologies and products (Ayaga and Nnabuko, 2019) as well as increasing and changing customer needs and tastes (HoRy, 2018). Still, inability to manufacture and control all requisite resources, forces them to depend on these companies (Rahul, 2020). Further, some firms are stuck to beaten-path competitive strategies (Yu, Xu& Dong, 2019) while others fail embracing any competitive strategy (Kuratko, & Hoskinson, 2018).

Problem Statement

Mobile telephone network industry in Kenya which is made up of 66 firm as per (CA, 2020) has significantly added to the development of the country's economy. According to Economic Survey Report, (2021), Telecommunication companies, radio and television broadcasting, publishing activities, internet service providers among others were recorded as the major contributors in the sector, contributing approximately Sh325 billion as at 2019. Mobile phone and mobile money subscriptions also recorded an upward trajectory of 126 per cent and 67 per cent respectively in 2020, as compared to 111 per cent and 61 per cent in 2019, respectively. It was also revealed that total mobile money transfers in the country increased from Sh4.3 billion to Sh5.2 billion in 2020 (Mwancha & Ouma, 2017). The sector has emerged to be the main source of government revenue particularly through duty remittance (KNBS, 2019). Undoubtedly, the mobile subsector has been expanding, currently boasting of over 59 million subscribers (CA, 2020) in Kenya. This success has been associated to alliances

formed amongst the market players. For example, Wananchi Group, in collaboration with Google and wireless data service management company Aptilo Networks, launched Wazi Wi-Fi, which is a high-speed wireless broadband network service hub in Nairobi, Kenya. This collaboration has fostered business opportunities to those players (Aptilo Networks AB, 2017). Airtel Kenya, Pan Africa Life Assurance Limited and MicroEnsure entered into an alliance partnership to provide a life insurance product. It also entered into a partnership with Nokia with the latter assigned the role of providing Airtel clients with value added services such as Nokia Life, Nokia Xpress Browser and Nokia Store Operator Billing on their mobile phones. Airtel Kenya further collaborated with Chase Bank and Visa to allow Airtel Money users to withdraw money from their Airtel Money accounts. Other partners were, Samsung Inc. and Apple Inc., offered their mobile phone customers across the country an opportunity to purchase their smartphone using Airtel outlets (CA, 2020).

Safaricom since its inception has witnessed several alliance partnerships such as that of KCB bank of MKaro which enable clients to pay school fees directly into school bank accounts using the mobile money transfer platform and borrow without necessarily having a bank account (KCB, Report, 2017). Further, KCB bank signed into a mobile phone banking alliance with CEVA a world's leading organization where clients can transfer money through mobile phone to any network in Kenya and globally (KCB, 2018). Other alliance partnership with KPLC focusing on payment of electricity bills using M-pesa was witnessed between 2012 and 2018. There exists another alliance partnership between Safaricom verses Cooperative bank characterized by range of products and services which include M-Pesa, 24-hour customer service, ATM top-up, third party top-up, and Emergency Top-up (Sema Mobile Final Report 2020).

Nevertheless, the sector has also faced both performance fluctuations and stiff competition challenges within and without over the years even with continuous alliance partnership formations with other strategic organizations. For instance, between 2017 and 2019, the mobile telephone network market experienced some downward and oscillating trends evident by the performance reports of some of the giant players in this industry such as Safaricom which whose market share sunk to 63.7 percent from 64% in 2018, Telkom's 6.3% from 8.8% and Equitel's 2.8 from 4.3% of the portion of the overall industry as at September 2018 (CA, 2019). Notably, it is only Airtel that did not experience market share shrinkage for it gained from 22.3% in 2018 to 27.2% in 2020. Contrary to comparison of 2017, performance transfer of cash increased in 2018 where people utilizing the mobile banking totaled to 22.8 million and 1.6 million for Safaricom and Airtel respectively in 2017 (CA, 2016). Further, the same mixed fortune was displayed in profitability where Safaricom recorded Kshs. 48.4 billion improved returns while Airtel posted a deficiency of 5.95 billion in the year 2017(CA, 2019). Other players with similar performance experience were Finserve Africa whose returns dropped from 11% to 8% in 2020. Also, the market share for sema mobile services remained below 0.0 per cent. For instance, net returns for Sema Mobile dropped from € 7,254 to € 7,038 between 2019 and 2020 (Sema Mobile Final Report 2020). It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at assessing the moderating effect of alliance partnerships on the relationship between focus strategy and firm performance in the context of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya is a timely and rewarding intervention.

Research Objective

To examine the relationship between Porter's generic competitive strategies, alliance partnerships and

firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya.

i) To assess the moderating effect of partnership alliances on the relationship between focus strategy and firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study is underpinned by Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, Syncretic Paradigm theory and transaction cost theory.

Resource Based View Theory (RBVT)

The first proponent of this theory was Penrose (1959) and later refined by Barney (1991) who associated inter-firm collaborations to performance. Resource-Based Theory (RBV) holds that assets or resources can be strategically be key if they are scant, dear and non-duplicable. The theory emphasizes that business operations could post sterling performance when individual employees exhibit insights, experiences, abilities and gifts which are intangible assets. Further, a business can post superior performance when physical assets such as machines, gadgets and apparatuses are described by their specialized qualities and effectiveness. The RBV theory in a nutshell emphasizes that if a firm owns resources with the four mainstream characteristics, namely; valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable then such a firm can survive any competition in the market and make remarkable profit margins amongst its peers in the market (Barney, 1991). The theory advocate for a firm owning strategic resources and not just the normal resources that any firm can acquire but those which are (strategic resource) as opined by (Rahul, 2020 and Mamédio, Rocha, Szczepanik and Kato, 2019). The theory refers such resources as strategic resources unlike the normal ones which have no impact in the market.

According to RBV theory, it is difficult for a competing firm to imitate resources of another organization through replicating for they are protected by various legal rights such as trademarks, patents, and copyrights, which ensures they are difficult for the competition to imitate. For non-substitutable resources, the theory is of the view that competitors cannot find alternative ways to gain the benefits that a resource provides. Further, comparing tangible and intangible assets, the RBV theory advocate that the resources that are difficult to see, touch, or quantify, such as the knowledge and skills of employees, a firm's reputation, and a firm's culture are more of strategic resource as compared to the physical assets. Hence, intangible resources are more likely to meet the criteria for strategic resources and CEOs of firms who wish to achieve long-term competitive advantages should therefore place a premium on trying to nurture and develop their firms' intangible resources (Barney, 1991). Also, according to the RBV theory, firms with dynamic capability, that is the unique ability to improve, update, or create new capabilities, especially in reaction to changes in its environment are competitive in the market arena. Said differently, a firm that enjoys a dynamic capability is skilled as it continually adjusts its array of capabilities to keep pace with changes in its environment. The RBV theory is applicable for the current study for it underpins the concept of mobile telephone firms in the industry adopting competitive strategies such as the commonly known Porter's generic competitive strategies or alliance partnerships to excel in the telecommunication industry. The theory portrays that for a firm to make competitive sense, it has to go a notch higher to own requisite assets to execute their systems and content adequately. Activities that are aligned to a company's objectives contribute a component that is

part of what is required in allocating a firm's resources into plausible setting.

The Syncretic Paradigm Theory

The syncretic paradigm theory pinpoints the returns offered by both competition and collaboration. It also points out the risk that managers who focus on competition might tend to ignore the returns that were offered by collaboration (Arndt& Pierce, 2018).

The syncretic paradigm is a middle ground between the competitive paradigm and the cooperative paradigm. The competitive paradigm held that firms attained competitive advantage in two key ways, either through achieving some advantageous position in the industry such as cost leadership, differentiation or focus, or through developing and using internal core competencies to develop superior products and services (Galvin et al, 2020).The cooperative paradigm, on the other hand, held that firms existed in networks characterized by interdependent relationships motivated by a desire to gain collaborative advantages through strategic collaboration (Andrevski, et al., 2016). Therefore, the syncretic paradigm is a hybrid paradigm that highlight the returns of both approaches, by advocating firms to deploy their core competencies to maximize value for both themselves and their competitors. This approach was applicable in the global airline industry. This theory is useful in this study for the reality is, firms always seek innovative ways of operating in their capacity as independent legal entities. Additionally, those firms engaged in alliance partnerships strategy seek to optimize their profitability through maintaining and growing their individual market share. Firm performance was a consequence of both competitive and collaborative behavior. However, this theory is constrained by limited human relations to rational tenets, for example, transparency which cannot fit in certain conditions.

Transaction Cost Theory

Fundamentally, transaction cost theory, often times referred to as transaction cost economics (TCE) theory, has established itself at the center of organizational economics as a dominant lens to view organizational boundary decisions (Ketokivi and Mahoney, 2016). This theory has its inception in Coase (1937) and later it was significantly developed by Williamson's (1979). Contrary to the neoclassical theory of the firm as a production function with zero transaction cost, TCE considers the firm as a governance structure with positive transaction cost (Williamson, 1998). This theory suggests that the actual nature of transactions with respect to the goods transferred and environments in which they are performed is determined by costs. Parties involved in transactions develop agreements that are materialized into contracts. According to this theory, some form of governance mechanism is necessary for agreements in order to be able to stave potential risk derived from opportunistic behavior.

Based on three 'behavioral' assumptions (perceived opportunism controllability, bounded rationality, and risk neutrality) and three transaction characteristics (asset specificity, uncertainty, and transaction frequency), TCE advocates that organizations choose governance structures (such as alliance partnerships) that minimize transaction costs (Williamson, 1998). TCE has a broad scope that is applicable to any issue that arises as or can be formulated as a contracting problem (Peng, 2021). Thus, TCE has wielded its influence far beyond the pales of economics into strategic management and business research in general and in particular in international business (Williamson 1979). Basically, the theory gives method of reasoning for a partnership's presence, development and re-appropriating of specific capacities (Williamson, 1981). Williamson (1988) opines that organizations endeavor to eliminate costs by swapping assets with different organizations just as red tape costs. To this theory, organizations and markets have progressed toward becoming frameworks which compose and fit business dealings. Williamson (1981) adds that more costs come to fruition from sharing of resources affected by changing economic situations, corruption, dangers, obliged prudence just as key firm resources. Thus, inter

organizational trading costs consequently soar, inferring it is canny to abstain from re-appropriating by restricting to inner exchanges if an organization understands the above market components are in play.

This theory is significant to the current study since it alerts managers to contrast in-house transaction costs with outdoor costs before choosing to execute inside or without. Pisano (2015) declares that costs are decreased at the time the kind of governance is equivalent to its transaction dynamics. Intelligently, this theory sees partnerships or network alliances as the middle of component that associates the market and partnership's pecking request henceforth the most extreme fitting framework or instrument to regulate dealings between market place and an organization. Therefore, collaborations (alliances) empower organizations diminish operational costs especially production costs particularly when alliance partners seek after comparative objectives (Cuypers, Hennart, Silverman &Ertug, 2021). Nevertheless, a few partners can be opportunistic that is the reason this theory prescribe joint venture or equity model which eliminates such dangers as it is focused on value sharing. Further, this theory perceives threat of shrewd propensities as most noteworthy coalitions' obstacle (Gatobu & Maende, 2019) hence well fitting in this study whose moderating variable is alliance partnerships.

Empirical Review

Most firms in the market survive based on how strategic they position themselves or on the basis of their partnership alliances they enter into. Past literature has proven that these alliances and strategies commonly referred to as Porter's generic competitive strategies has positively contributed to firm performance in many ways. In the study of Suparman (2016) the effect of market segmentation strategy and positioning on customer and its impact on customer satisfaction on Sudanese restaurants in Bandung City, Indonesia. The results show that the implementation of market segmentation strategy affect the positioning, the implementation of the strategy of market segmentation and positioning affect to the value of customers, also, the implementation of the strategy of market segmentation, positioning and customer value significantly affect customer satisfaction. It was also empirically proven that the price and returns are still relevant for use as the analysis in determining the value of the customer. Market segmentation and positioning have an impact on customer value. It also shows that aspect of price, product, location as well as the promotion does not act as predictors of positioning. Thus, the level of satisfaction achieved becomes unpredictability of the relationship between market segmentation and positioning and customer value.

Nadia, Shahrina, Hadi, and Naseebullah (2018) study sought to determine what make consumer sign up to Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs) as well as predict Malaysian consumer behavior in utilization of PHEVs. To achieve this, a sample of 403 respondents from Malaysia forecasted the customer's intention to adopt PHEVs by using the extended theory of planned behavior. The empirical outcome using the partial least square investigation exposed that all four constructs, subjective norm, personal moral norm, perceived behavioral control, and attitude ominously shows an indirect effect. The study predetermined all the four major constructs by their respective environmental concern. Whereas, hyperbolic discounting moderated the relationship between intention and utilization. The fostering result verifies that the relevance of the extended theory of planned behavior had a good explanatory power in the line of predicting the Malaysian consumers' intention to adopt PHEVs.

Shitseswa, Kwendo and Chiseno (2019) investigated the effect of Porter's competitive strategies on the performance of mobile phone service providers in Kenya. Descriptive statistics revealed that focus competitive strategy in the telecommunication gave firms competitive advantage in Kenya. There was a strong positive significant relationship between focus competitive strategy and performance. This

implied that focus competitive strategy was a significant predicator of mobile phone service providers' performance in Kenya. Therefore, an increase in focus competitive strategy such as specific market segment, product differentiation, competitive price and innovation would enable the firms to gain competitive advantage which would results to increase in efficiency, customer relationship and customer satisfaction thus superior performance.

Kalam (2020) carried out a study on market segmentation, targeting and positioning strategy adaptation for the global business of Vodafone Telecommunication Company. The findings of the study show that product development strategies especially market segmentation, targeting and positioning, helped Vodafone mobile network provider of UK, the second biggest network provider in the world in penetrating into the foreign markets. For instance, the introduction of 5G network helped in luring the customers across the globe to Vodafone. Along with this, mergers and acquisitions; strategic alliances and partnerships are also assistance towards expanding the scope and arena of the supply chain network.

Salavou (2017) argues that companies which capture the reality of hybrid strategies as the most attractive choices in modern day cut-throat competition, always get an upper hand on the market share. In the study of Shitseswa, Kwendo and Chiseno (2019) engaged with departmental heads from 8 logistics organizations in Pretoria, South Africa utilizing qualitative technique and processing the data with content analysis, results demonstrated that organizations can decrease new market uncertainties through alliances. The study further settled that the more noteworthy the varieties in the new market for an alliance, the more prominent the potential for profiting by organizations. The discoveries further demonstrate that collusions or alliances accelerate market entry and increment in product lines particularly for multinationals looking to venture into business sectors that are foreign.

Madhok, Keyhani and Bossink (2015) likewise upheld this finding when they affirm that organizations join alliances significantly improve organization standpoint and status, to draw in coordinated collaborators, have sufficiency, pull in forthcoming investors and get government endorsement. However, qualitative strategy isn't suitable in this study as it cannot successfully measure performance that can best be resolved through quantitative methods.

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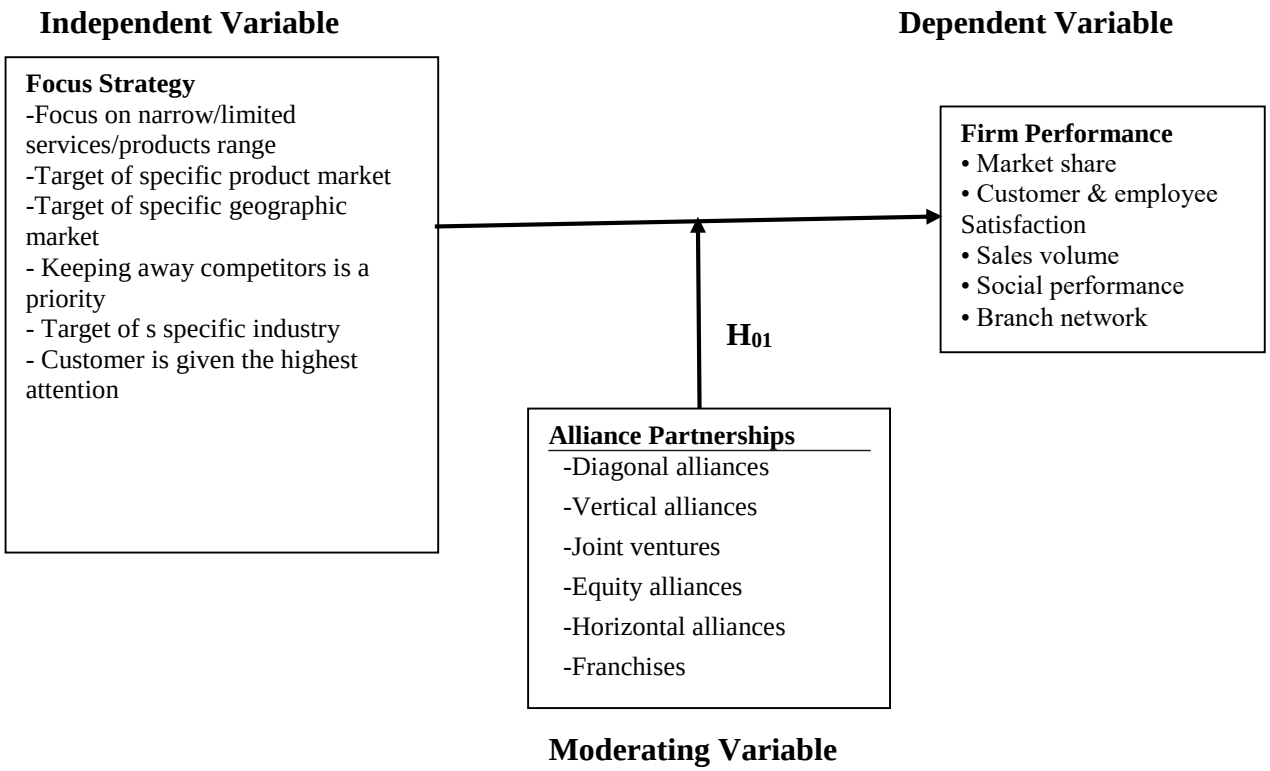
Conceptual framework



The conceptual framework above portrays the nature of the research gaps this study aimed at bridging. From past studies, it has been empirically proven that conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps have been in existence. For instance, past studies (Nadia, et al. 2018; Suparman, 2016 and Kalam (2020) focused on the bivariate models where by the researcher used Porter's strategic factors to estimate firm performance. Other studies (Salavou, 2017 and Gatobu and Maende, 2019) measured the study variables using dissimilar proxies even when the theme of the study was similar to others. Again, the physical locality where these studies were undertaken varied from one place to another and the results from one study could differ due to contextual viewpoint. The current study covers firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. In this study, firm performance was gauged using Market share, customer and employee satisfaction, sales volume, social performance and branch network. Again, the current study is multivariate where by in addition to the predictor variable being used as it is many studies to predict the outcome of performance, this study has incorporated partnership alliance which is a moderator.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used positivism research philosophy and descriptive research design methodology. The target population was all the 66 mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. Primary data was gathered through use of structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression modeling was used to aid in data analysis. Data was presented by use of graphs, pie charts and tables. A pilot study was conducted in order to establish the validity and reliability of data collection instruments. This study tested for both content and constructs validity. On the other hand, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability of the data collection instrument. Descriptive and inferential analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. Results were presented using mean, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages. Hierarchical multiple linear regression model was used to test the moderating effect of partnership alliances on the relationship between focus strategy and performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Population Frame

Unit of Analysis	Number of firms	Firm Officials
Tier 1 firms	12	12
Tier 2 firms	30	30
Tier 3 firms	24	24
Total	**66**	**66**

Source: Author (2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

A total of 63 respondents were issued with questionnaires, from which 61 successfully filled and returned the questionnaires, making a response rate of 96.8 percent. On the other hand, 2 questionnaires were not returned representing a non-response rate of 3.2 %. According to Rubin and Babbie (2016), return rates of 50% are acceptable for analysis, 60% good for analysis and over 70% are very good for analysis as well as publishing. Accordingly, the response rate achieved in this study was good and sufficed for the study to draw reasonable and viable conclusions. The high response rate was attributed to effective administration of the questionnaires particularly, a close follow up of the respondents.

Bio-Data Analysis

Annual (2020) Profit (In KES Billion) of the 61 Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers in Kenya

One of the key determinants of company performance especially in the private sector is profitability although certain public enterprises maximize this indicator for the same purpose. This article set out to measure returns of input of processes such as Porters' generic competitive strategies by establishing yearly profitability levels of the mobile telephone providers pursuing these competitive strategies as presented and summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Annual (2020) Profit (In KES Billion) of the 61 Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers in Kenya

Profit	Frequency	Percent
Below 50	45	74
Between 50-100	0	0
Between 100-150	1	2
Between 150-200	15	24
Over 200	0	0
Total	**61**	**100.0**

Evidently, statistics paint a worrying trend of the mobile telephone network service provider's profitability performance. Notably, majority of the firms posted dismal profitability portfolio of 50 billion Kenya shillings. Tellingly, the mobile telephone service providers are not doing well in terms of return on investment, which is an earlier cursor to ineffective systems and or processes such as the competitive strategies pursued in gaining an upper hand in the volatile industry.

Market Share (Q4 2020) of the 61 Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers in Kenya

Just like profitability, market share is a cursor to the state of performance of a firm. In fact, before profitability is determined, one of the initial pointers and determinants of the latter is the market share. This study presents the market share of those firms in the Q4 of 2020 as shown in Table 3

Table 3: Market Share (Q4 2020) of the 61 Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers *in Kenya*

Subscribers (Market Share)	Frequency	Percent
Below 1	7	11
Between 1-20	1	2
Between 20-40	40	65
Between 40-60	1	2
Over 60	12	20
Total	**61**	**100.0**

Clearly, findings in Table 3 point to varying trends in market share with most respondents represented by over 78% (i.e., 11%+2%+65%) indicating that most mobile telephone firms have less than 40% of the market share of the industry.

Pursuance of Diverse Porter's Strategies to Gain Competitive Advantage by the 61 Mobile Telephone Network Service Providers in Kenya

The respondents representing the 61 firms were asked the extent to which their respective organizations adopted the Porter's strategies so as to take advantage of competitive edge. The response was as portrayed in Table 4

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Table 4: Pursuance of diverse Porter's Strategies to gain Competitive Advantage by the 61 mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NONE	1	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Pursue Focus Strategy	14	23.0	23.0	24.6
	Pursue Cost Leadership Strategy	11	18.0	18.0	42.6
	Pursue Differentiation Strategy	24	39.3	39.3	82.0
	Pursue two Porter's Strategies	5	8.2	8.2	90.2
	Pursue the three Porter's Strategies	6	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 portrays that majority (98.4%; i.e., total of those firms which adopted only one strategy, those which adopted either two of the strategies or adopted the three strategies at ago) of the mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya which adopted the Porter's competitive strategy. Only 1.6% of all the firms failed to adopt either of the strategies. That is, 14 out of 61(23%) mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya concentrated on focus strategy so as to win a competitive edge in the market. Another 11 out of 61(18%) of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya pursued cost leadership strategy to win the market. While those firms which persuaded differentiation, strategy were represented by the highest percentage for they were 24 out of 61(39.3%) of the total firms. On the other hand, those firms which pursued either two or the three Porter's strategies were 5(8.2%) and 6 (9.8%) respectively. This was a low percentage as compared to those organizations which focused on a pure strategy without combining.

Descriptive Findings

Competitive Advantages of Focus Competitive Strategy

Respondents rated their perceptions towards the accrued competitive value generated by the focus competitive strategy in pursuit of competitiveness in the scenarios using the Likert scale of 1-5 used in the pretests and study as summarized and presented in Table 5

Table 5: Competitive Advantages of Focus Competitive Strategy Utilization

Competitive Advantage	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sig.
This strategy focuses on narrow/limited services/products range	4.07	0.78	0.005
Specific product market is targeted through this strategy	4.13	0.84	0.002
Through this strategy, specific geographic market is targeted	4.20	0.76	0.004
A key priority of this strategy is to keep away competitors	4.28	0.74	0.000
A specific industry is targeted through this strategy	3.04	1.37	0.003
In this strategy, the customer is given the highest attention	2.99	1.34	0.000
Composite mean	3.78		

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Generally, Table 5 on responses of analyzed data, demonstrates that focus competitive strategy adds value to competitiveness of mobile telephone companies in Kenya. Results reveal focus competitive strategy adds more value to a firm's competitiveness in four aspects which included keeping away competitors (mean=4.28, SD=O.74), targeting specific geographic market (mean=4.20, SD=O.76), product market (mean=4.13, SD=O.84), and narrow/limited services/products range (mean=4.07, SD=O.78). In comparison, analyzed data divulges that focus competitive strategy specializing in a specific industry (mean=3.04, SD=1.37) as well as according customers the highest attention (mean=2.99, SD=1.34) add less value to the companies' competitive superiority. Overall, the composite mean computed (3.78) demonstrates focus competitive strategy as effective in enhancing competitive advantage of mobile telephone network companies in Kenya.

Focus Competitive Strategy and firm Performance

Respondents were requested to indicate the level of performance resulting from the accrued competitive advantages of utilization of the focus competitive strategy to the mobile telephone network companies. Using a Likert scale of 1-5 where: 5= Very High; 4= High; 3= Not Sure; 2= Low; 1= Very Low, respondents rated the influence of Porter's focus competitive strategy on performance of mobile telephone network companies as summarized and presented in Table 6

Table 6: Focus Competitive Strategy Influence on Firm Performance

Returns	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sign.
Increased organization revenue	3.52	1.058	0.027
Increased market Share	3.23	0.990	0.015
Rising sales volume	3.43	0.846	0.004
High shareholder value and satisfaction	3.49	1.074	0.045
Branch network expansion	3.28	1.035	0.003
Increased corporate social responsibility activities	2.90	1.313	0.027
Composite Mean	3.30		

Principally, Table 6 demonstrates positive impact that the focus competitive strategy enhances performance among the mobile telephone network companies in Kenya. Results show continuous implementation of the focus competitive strategies leads to better performance. Results indicate focus competitive strategy most effective impact on performance was increased organization revenue (mean=3.52, SD=1.058) followed by shareholder value and satisfaction (mean=3.49, SD=1.074) then rising sales volume (mean=3.43, SD=.846). The influence of the focus strategy slightly reduced on branch network expansion (mean=3.28, SD=1.035 and market share (mean=3.23, SD=.990). Findings demonstrate focus strategy had least effect on corporate social responsibility activities (mean=2.90, SD=1.313). A computed composite mean of 3.30 points to positive impact of the focus competitive strategy to organizational performance among the Kenya mobile telephone network providers.

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The Influence of Alliance partnerships Strategy on firm Performance

Respondents were requested to indicate the level of performance resulting from the accrued competitive advantages of utilization of the alliance partnerships strategy to the mobile telephone network companies. Using a Likert scale of 1-5 where: 5= Very High; 4= High; 3= Not Sure; 2= Low; 1= Very Low, the respondents rated performance level of mobile telephone network companies as summarized and presented in Table 7

Table 7: The Influence of Alliance Partnerships Strategy on Firm Performance

Returns	Mean	Std. Dev.
Increased organization revenue	3.06	1.038
Increased market Share	3.23	0.902
Rising sales volume	3.43	0.826
High shareholder value and satisfaction	3.10	0.907
Branch network expansion	3.07	0.854
Increased corporate social responsibility activities	3.15	0.679
Composite Mean	3.17	

Clearly, the utilization of alliance partnerships strategy resulted into more increased rising sales volume (mean=3.43, SD=.826) than market share (mean=3.23, SD=.902), corporate social responsibility activities (mean=3.15, SD=.679) and high shareholder value and satisfaction (mean=3.10, SD=.907). At the bottom of alliance partnerships strategy influence on performance were branch network expansion (mean=3.07, SD=.854) and organization revenue (mean=3.06, SD=1.038). Overall, alliance partnerships strategy influence on organization performance is positive and strong.

Inferential Statistics

Correlation Analysis

Correlation was measured using correlation coefficient which ranged from +1 to -1. Correlation coefficient of +1 indicates perfect influence of respective competitive strategy and firm performance. While -1, indicated inverse relationship between independent and dependent variable. There is no correlation if correlation coefficient is zero. Correlation coefficient ranging between, 0.01 to 0.5, indicate weak positive and from 0.6 to 0.9, there is strong positive influence of independent variables on dependent (Sekaran, 1992) as indicated by Table 8

Table 8: Correlation Analysis on Porter's Competitive Strategies and Firm Performance

		Firm Performance	Focus Strategy	Cost Leadership Strategy	Differentiation Strategy
Firm Performance	Pearson Correlation	1			
Focus Strategy	Pearson Correlation	0.823**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000			

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As shown in Table 8, focus competitive strategy had a strong positive and significant influence on firm performance in telecommunication industries in Kenya (r= 0.823, p value <0.05).

Regression Analysis

Model Summary

The study conducted a Hierarchical multiple regression analysis to establish the moderating effect of Alliance Partnerships on the relationship between Cost Leadership Strategy and firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. From Table 9 it shows that change in Adjusted R^2 was -.029 (ie .630-.659) which was significant for R^2 change was (.012). This implies that moderation occurred.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.836[a]	.699	.659	.63810409	.699	17.576	7	53	.000
2	.843[b]	.710	.630	.66452760	.012	.311	6	47	.928

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

An ANOVA test was carried out at 5% level of significance to establish whether the regression model was a good fit for the data. The F-statistics value was 17.576 (P=.000). This implies that the predictor and the moderator taken together significantly influenced performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya as indicated in Table 10

Table 10: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	50.097	7	7.157	17.576	.000[b]
Residual	21.580	53	.407		
Total	71.677	60			
Regression	50.922	13	3.917	8.870	.000[c]
Residual	20.755	47	.442		
Total	71.677	60			

a. Dependent Variable: Firm Performance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Franchises, Diagonal alliances, Focus Strategy, Vertical alliances, Joint Ventures, Equity alliances, Horizontal alliances
c. Predictors: (Constant), Franchises, Diagonal alliances, Focus Strategy, Vertical alliances, Joint Ventures, Equity alliances, Horizontal alliances, JV_FS, DA_FS, FR_FS, HA_FS, FA_FS, EA_FS

F Calculated was 17.576 (with p=.000) implies that the overall model was statistically significant at 95% confidence level and hence suitable to estimate firm performance.

Coefficients

The study established the moderating effect of partnership alliances on the relationship between focus strategy and of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. The results were as shown in

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Table 11

Table 11: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.154	.470	.327	.745	
	Focus Strategy	.901	.084	.830	10.753	.954	.000
	Diagonal alliances	-,217	.173	-.100	-1.254	.215	.900
	Joint Ventures	-.050	.191	-.023	-.264	.793	.765
	Equity alliances	.140	.187	.064	.749	.457	.776
	Horizontal alliances	-.119	.190	-.054	-.628	.533	.762
	Vertical alliances	.060	.175	.028	.346	.731	.878
	Franchises	.125	.183	.057	.682	.498	.801
2	(Constant)	.134	.511	.263	.794	
	Focus Strategy	1.229	.557	1.132	2.207	.032	.023
	Diagonal alliances	-.179	.189	-.082	-.945	.349	.819
	Joint Ventures	-.068	.204	-.031	-.332	.742	.728
	Equity alliances	.098	.207	.045	.476	.637	.688
	Horizontal alliances	-.156	.211	-.071	-.742	.462	.673
	Vertical alliances	.060	.193	.028	.312	.756	.779
	Franchises	.191	.204	.088	.935	.354	.699
	DA_FS	.021	.199	.027	.104	.917	.089
	JV_FS	-.094	.233	-.126	-.404	.688	.063
	EA_FS	-.187	.280	-.263	-.667	.508	.040
	HA_FS	.041	.231	.055	.179	.859	.064
	FA_FS	-.135	.229	-.200	-.590	.558	.054
	FR_FS	.129	.230	.186	.563	.576	.056

a. Dependent Variable: Firm Performance

In model two, from Table 11 focusing strategy (ie predictor) and Equity Alliance partnership (the interaction term) were statistically significant. That is, for both the predictor and the moderator, ie (Equity Alliance) were statistically significant, therefore partial moderation took place. The rest of the proposed moderators affiliated to Alliance Partnership, namely; Franchises,

Diagonal alliances, Focus Strategy, Vertical alliances, Joint Ventures, Equity alliances, and Horizontal alliances had no statistically significant moderating effect.

The model developed from this analysis was presented as follows;

PER=0.134+2.207FS-0.945DA-0.332JV+0.476EA-0.742HA+0.312VA+0.935FR+ 0.104DA*FS-0.404JV*FS-0.667EA*FS+0.179HA*FS-0.590VA*FS+ 0.563FR*FS

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussions

All companies (100%) were in partnership with all the six categories of alliances namely horizontal, vertical, joint ventures, equity, franchises and diagonal alliances. Overall, the coefficient study outcomes summarized at F with $P<0.05$, for all the two levels of testing for moderation gave a picture of a positive and significant relationship between alliance partnerships and firm performance among of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. In quantifying the degree of influence, alliance partnerships entity accounted for statistically significant influence on firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya. More specifically, the two-stage model test for moderation based on focus strategy experienced partial moderation effect. So briefly, Alliance Partnerships generally have a moderating influence between porter generic competitive strategies and firm performance of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya.

Also, research findings revealed that the choices made by companies which entered into alliance partnerships to reduce costs and risk, new market and access the outside resources was not based on their suitability to Porter's competitive strategies. On its effect on performance, the utilization of alliance partnerships strategy resulted into more increased rising sales volume than market share, corporate social responsibility activities and shareholder value and satisfaction. At the bottom of alliance partnerships strategy influence on performance were branch network expansion and organization revenue.

Conclusions

It was portrayed that firms were in partnership under all the six categories of alliances namely horizontal, vertical, joint ventures, equity, franchises and diagonal alliances. This resulted into costs and risk reduction, new market and access the outside resources which positively impacted on performance in terms of sales volume, market share, corporate social responsibility activities and shareholder value and customer satisfaction. More specifically, some of the individual components of partnership alliances showed statistically significant moderating effect such as equity alliance. While the rest of alliance categories had moderating effect which was not statistically significant with vertical alliance ranked second, followed by franchise, then joint venture alliances and lastly horizontal alliance in that order.

Recommendations

Alliance partnerships are a condition which can moderate the direction of the relationship between focus strategy and firm performance and the top management of mobile telephone network service providers in Kenya need to consider incorporating the aspects such as Equity Alliance partnership which portray statistically significant especially if a firm is adopting focus strategy to promote firm performance.

Also, since any hunting exercise of entering in to a partnership alliance entails investment of resources

of some kind, top management need to consider being selective when choosing the partnership alliances to engage in for some may not optimally contribute towards positive influence on the firm performance.

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