EFFECT OF FOCUS STRATEGY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PAY-AS-YOU-GO SOLAR FIRMS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The rise of globalization has led to the implementation of business-level strategies in companies to achieve superior performance in a specific market or industry. These strategies include cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies. The study was intended to investigate the effect of focus strategy on performance of solar companies. A theoretical review was done of Michael Porter's generic strategies, this was further followed by a literature review of various authors and their views concerning solar companies adopting pay as you go business model and the business level strategies, the study also examines the performance measurement of solar companies adopting pay-as-you-go business models. The study used a descriptive research design to investigate the relationship between business-level strategies and the performance of solar companies using pay-as-you-go models in Kenya. The target population was Heads of Departments of 18 companies which are currently afloat in Kenyan Market. Census survey was conducted on the major 7 heads of department which were most similar across the solar companies in each of these companies that is; Human Resource, Sales, After sales, Marketing, Finance, Training and the Informational Technology departments thus the study targets a total of 126 participants. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered by interviewing the respondents. The researcher employed correlation research design. It was evident from the results that Focus strategy (β = .480, p <.05) had positive significant effect on performance. The unstandardized β coefficient of cost leadership shows that unit change in the Focus strategy causes 0.437 units increase in organizational performance levels of Pay-As-You-Go solar firms in Kenya. The findings also shows that Focus strategy had positive significant effect on performance. This suggests that focus strategy has an effect on the performance of Pay-As-You-Go solar firms in Kenya. The firms should also establish more strategic partnerships and good relations for better prices and hence reducing procurements costs, it also recommended that, in order to intensify the effect focus strategy on organizational performance, and Pay-As-You-Go Solar Firms in Kenya need to focus on providing superior customer service, investing in research and development, striving to have an outstanding strong image and reputation for quality innovation.

INTRODUCTION

In the face of increasing globalization, the effects of business-level strategies implemented are of great significance in organizations. Johnson et al. (2020) defines business-level Strategy as a plan of action that a company takes to create and sustain a unique competitive advantage in a particular market or industry by focusing on the needs and preferences of a specific customer segment. In their documentation, Christopher et al., (2019) defines business-

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level Strategy as a plan of action that a company takes to achieve superior performance in a specific market or industry by focusing on a few core competencies and delivering them consistently to customers. Business-level strategies include cost leadership strategies, differentiation strategies and focus strategies. The Strategy emphasizes the importance of creating and sustaining a unique competitive advantage, focusing on core competencies, delivering value to customers, and using processes and practices to achieve strategic objectives. For this purpose, the research sought to determine the relationship between business-level Strategy and the performance of solar firms adopting pay as you go business model.

The study conducted by Montoya-Duque et al. (2022) highlights the global significance of ensuring universal access to inexpensive and clean energy, with particular emphasis on its importance for off-grid and low-income areas. New business models, such as the Pay-as-you-go (PAYG) model, have emerged as a viable option for delivering sustainable energy to off-grid regions, particularly inside African nations. the pay-as-you-go model enables low-income earners to buy and own a solar home system at considerably affordable terms of purchase as they will pay daily, weekly or monthly depending on their financial capability and as they do that, they utilize the product, and this has been very effective and instrumental.

Approximately 840 million individuals across the globe lack access to energy, while more than 1 billion people are connected to an inconsistent power infrastructure. The provision of electricity access to underserved groups is contingent upon the extension of the primary grid, as these populations currently lack connectivity to it. Nevertheless, the process of grid development necessitates substantial financial investment and considerable time for the construction of new infrastructure. According to a study conducted one alternative to the expansion of grid infrastructure is the utilization of power generated from distributed solar photovoltaic (PV) systems. The declining prices associated with these systems present a potential avenue for these communities to acquire power access without the need for grid expansion. Nevertheless, the establishment of distributed renewable energy systems to meet electricity demand and enhance supply reliability poses significant challenges, particularly in rural regions, due to the required upfront investments. The PAYG business model has been developed as a solution to tackle the issue of limited energy access and to offer affordable electricity generated from renewable sources. This model leverages existing technologies in these regions to facilitate payment transactions. The implementation of this business model has been facilitated by several critical factors, including the widespread adoption of mobile payment technology, the abundance of solar resources, the decreasing costs of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems and batteries, and the growing awareness of these technologies. The prevalence of companies providing Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) systems is increasing, and intense rivalry within this industry exerts downward pressure on costs, resulting in greater affordability for consumers. The implementation of Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) payment mechanisms within the solar industry has facilitated the provision of environmentally friendly electricity to disadvantaged individuals within our society. As a result of this characteristic, lives have undergone substantial beneficial transformations.

Statement of the problem

According to a report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Kenya's total installed solar capacity reached 349 MW in 2020, making it the country with the highest installed solar capacity in East Africa. As the adoption of solar energy increases across the globe

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and in Kenya specifically, it comes with challenges of Management of the solar operations, financial efficiency, and general organizational structure management at different levels and with that adoption of business level strategies such as focus strategy, differentiation strategy, and cost leadership strategy would be an essential tool to enhance efficiency profit maximization and wealth maximization of these businesses as they minimize on costs. The cost of a solar system in Kenya can vary depending, on various factors, such as the size and capacity of the system, the type of panels used, and the installation and maintenance costs. As a rough estimate, a small solar system that can power essential appliances such as lights, phone charging, and small electronics can cost between KES 15,000 to KES 50,000. For larger solar systems that can power more devices and even run a small business or home, the cost can range from KES 100,000 to KES 300,000 or more. With the inflation experienced in the country and the harsh economic times experienced during and after the Covid-19 pandemic raising the financial cost of purchasing a solar home system becomes a challenge. Thus, a plan like a pay-as-you-go is better for a country whose significant population lives below the poverty line, as per the World Bank, (2020).

General Objective

The study's objective was to determine the effect of focus strategy on the organizational performance of Pay-As-You-Go solar firms in Kenya Figure 1.

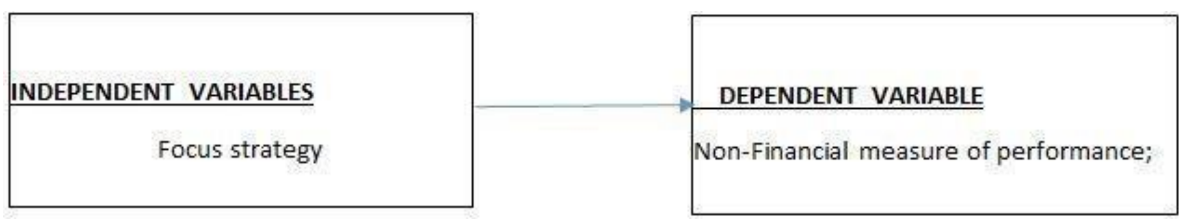

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Cost Leadership Strategy

This particular approach places a strong emphasis on optimizing efficiency. The company aims to leverage economies of scale and experience curve effects through the production of large quantities of standardized products. The product is sometimes regarded as a fundamental, utilitarian item manufactured at a comparatively affordable price and offered to a wide consumer demographic. Sustaining this strategic approach necessitates a persistent pursuit of cost savings across all facets of the enterprise. The distribution strategy in question aims to achieve the broadest possible dissemination. Promotional strategy frequently entails the endeavor to portray low cost as a desirable attribute. According to Allen et al. (2006), a firm that is able to design, create, and market a product with greater efficiency than its competitors is said to have successfully adopted a cost leadership strategy. The use of cost reduction measures throughout the activity cost chain is indicative of a low-cost leadership approach (Tehrani, 2003; Beheshti,

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2004). Efforts to minimize expenses will permeate across the entirety of the corporate workflow, encompassing activities ranging from manufacture to the ultimate stage of product sales. According to Akan et al. (2006), it is advisable to outsource any approaches that do not contribute to cost minimization in order to uphold a low-cost basis.

The ability to maintain low costs enables a company to offer relatively standardized products that meet the needs of a wide range of clients at a competitive price. By offering these products at low rates, the company can acquire a competitive edge and increase its market share (Bauer & Colgan, 2001; Hyatt, 2001; Davidson, 2001). These articles elucidate that by achieving cost efficiency throughout the entire process, a company can establish a price that is lower than that of its competitors. Consequently, this will lead to increased sales since the competition will be unable to match the company's low-cost foundation. Sustaining the low-cost basis over extended durations would result in a constant expansion of market share and sustained profitability, hence leading to improved performance. Nevertheless, existing literature consistently emphasizes that the long-term viability of a competitive advantage achieved via a low-cost approach hinges on the competitor's capacity to either replicate or establish a lower cost structure compared to the current market leader. According to Colgan (2001), In order to uphold a low-cost foundation, a company endeavors to exercise control over manufacturing costs, enhance capacity utilization, regulate material supply and product distribution, and minimize additional expenditures such as research and development and promotion (Nguyen et al., 2009)). According to Jayaraj & Dharamraj (2016), a firm can achieve a competitive advantage in terms of low-cost operations by implementing strategies such as mass production, mass distribution, leveraging economies of scale, utilizing advanced technology, optimizing product design, capitalizing on the learning curve benefit, maintaining a workforce dedicated to low-cost production, reducing the size of the sales force, and minimizing expenditure on marketing activities. The cost efficiency of a firm's processes will be subject to intensive scrutiny by decision makers in a cost leadership organization. The fundamental factor influencing the cost leadership strategy will be the ability to sustain a low-cost foundation.

A large percentage of the market is necessary for low-cost leadership to be successful (Richardson & Dennis, 2003; Hyatt, 2001, as referenced by Allen et al., 2006). Smaller market participants or newly established enterprises may not derive advantages from the aforementioned strategy, as the effects of mass manufacturing, widespread distribution, and economies of scale are unlikely to significantly influence these entities. The adoption of a low-cost leadership strategy is typically more feasible for larger organizations. Market leaders can enhance their market position by leveraging the benefits derived from scale and knowledge within a low-cost leadership strategy. Is there any advantage to using a low-cost strategy compared to other strategic typologies? Is it possible for a company that adopts a low-cost strategy to achieve better performance than another company with a different competitive strategy. According to Sim et al., (2023), firms that are able to maintain low costs may still achieve profitability even in a highly competitive environment. This ability to remain profitable despite intense competition can be seen as a defensive mechanism against rival enterprises.

Additionally, the authors note that these low costs can potentially serve as barriers to entry, since new competitors would need significant resources in order to offer goods or services at a price equal to or lower than that of the cost leader. As elucidated within the scholarly context of competitive advantage, the act of heightening barriers to competition is anticipated to yield a durable and enduring competitive advantage. Based on the preceding discourse, it can be inferred

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that the implementation of a low-cost competitive strategy has the potential to yield a durable competitive advantage. The implementation of a low-cost leadership strategy has the potential to serve as a competitive approach that can yield a durable advantage in the market. According to the study conducted by Kim et al. (2023), nevertheless, the strategy of low-cost leadership is accompanied by a drawback, namely a reduced level of consumer loyalty. The perception of customers regarding the quality of a product may be negatively influenced by the presence of relatively low prices. The perceptions of customers towards these products will contribute to an inclination to transition towards a higher-priced option that conveys a perception of superior quality.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study examined the significance of employing Porter's generic strategies on the performance of firms, as outlined in the research titled "Linking Porter's Generic Strategies to Firm Performance." The researcher use questionnaires as a research tool, while econometric models are utilized to quantify these associations. Various statistical techniques, like as t-tests, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multivariate regression analysis, are employed in this study (Islami et al., 2020). According to the results of the econometric analysis, a company's performance improves when it adopts a differentiation strategy rather than one of the other two main strategies outlined by Porter. The study in question fails to consider the PAYG business model, which limits its usefulness for entrepreneurs and scholars seeking to explore opportunities in this particular field.

The study conducted by Olson et al. (2021) focuses on the relationship between business strategy and the management of digital marketing. The corporate environment has experienced a significant transformation due to the introduction of the Internet, leading to the birth of various digital marketing strategies. The research methodology involved the administration of questionnaires to both the management and owners of the enterprises under study. Subsequently, a T-test was employed to conduct statistical analysis. The findings indicate that marketing managers are faced with the task of prioritizing and selecting digital marketing approaches to invest in, given the emergence of these new strategies. This article examines these concerns by analyzing four company methods. This study primarily focuses on the field of digital marketing and provides a comprehensive overview of Porter's three generic methods.

The study conducted by Allen et al., (2006) examines the correlation between strategic practices, organizational performance, and Porter's generic strategies. The study employed factor analysis and regression analyses to examine distinct strategic practices linked to each generic Porter strategy. Additionally, the study identified specific strategic practices that exhibited a stronger association with higher levels of organizational performance within each generic strategy. The investigation unveiled noteworthy strategic practices that exhibit a substantial association with organizational performance in relation to each of Porter's generic strategies. Moreover, the study revealed a fundamental compilation of strategic practices that more precisely delineate each general Porter approach. The study has examined competitive strategies in a broad sense, without specifically highlighting each strategy that is being addressed and emphasized in this study. An empirical investigation conducted by Shafiee et al., (2016) revealed that organizations who implemented a concentrated approach had superior levels of profitability and return on assets in comparison to those that pursued a more expansive market

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strategy. In a similar vein, Grant's (221) study revealed that organizations who prioritize a specialized market strategy tend to have more growth in revenue and market share compared to those that choose a more generalized market approach. The focus of these studies typically is on consumers who choose to make one-time purchases of products, neglecting the larger population who want to utilize pay-as-you-go (PAYG) methods for their consumption.

The existing body of empirical research on the performance implications of a focus strategy in pay-as-you-go enterprises is currently minimal. Nevertheless, some scholarly investigations have analyzed the effects of implementing a focus strategy on the operational outcomes of various enterprises. According to a study conducted by Chesula & Kiriinya (2018) the industry exhibits a significant level of rivalry, with firms predominantly employing tactics of product differentiation and low-cost leadership. Additional tactics encompass strategic partnership plans and strategies that focus on specific markets. The research employed a descriptive survey approach, utilizing a combination of stratified and purposive sampling strategies within the mobile telecommunications business in Kenya. The study's findings indicated that the implemented tactics resulted in a notable enhancement of the firm's overall performance. Nevertheless, the primary emphasis was placed on the telecommunications sector. The analysis placed greater emphasis on two of Porter's competitive generic strategies. In contrast, the present study centers its attention on the adoption of PAYG (Pay-As-You-Go) business models within the solar industry in Kenya, while placing particular emphasis on the application of all three of Porter's generic tactics.

In their study titled "Organization motivation, employee job satisfaction, and organizational performance" the authors aim to investigate the correlation between organizational characteristics and performance outcomes. conducted a study examining the interplay of organizational motivation, employee job satisfaction, and organizational performance. The study utilized sampling techniques and questionnaires as primary means of data collecting, while employing other data analysis approaches such as exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests within the organization. The research employs an empirical methodology, wherein data is gathered and analyzed from actual organizations in order to derive results and draw generalizations. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while this study primarily examines the relationship between organizational motivation and employee job satisfaction, there are additional elements that could potentially impact organizational performance which were not taken into account or adequately controlled for throughout the analysis. The presence of unexplained variables has the potential to generate confounding effects on the observed connections.

In their study, examined the interconnections between management, social sustainability, reputation, and financial performance. The researchers employed the utilization of a sample as a means of collecting data in the investigation. In contrast, a methodology was implemented for data analysis that involved conducting an empirical study by integrating various secondary data sources, including Newsweek Green ranks, Bloomberg, and Compustat. This approach was adopted in order to mitigate the potential influence of common method variance on the analysis outcomes. The researchers analyze the correlations between different variables and the consequences of financial success. investigate the interconnections among Management, social sustainability, reputation, and financial performance within American corporations. Simultaneously, the aforementioned report, whose source remains undisclosed, presumably examines a distinct array of variables and their influence on the financial performance. It is

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imperative to take into account any confounding variables and factors that may exert influence on the relationships being examined. The study should investigate if it adequately accounts for potential confounding variables that could influence both the independent and dependent variables.

According to the study conducted by Nimeh et al. (2018) on the subject of Lean supply chain management methods and their impact on performance. Research investigates the correlations between distinct variables and the achievement of desired results in the context of company operations. The study conducted by Nimeh et al. aims to investigate the correlations between lean supply chain management methods and performance within the context of manufacturing organizations. Simultaneously, the aforementioned study, whose source remains undisclosed, is presumed to examine a distinct array of variables and their influence on performance. The study conducted by Nimeh et al. primarily centers on manufacturing enterprises, whereas the other study, whose source is not stated, presumably explores a distinct industry or context. Variations in industry attributes, supply chain dynamics, and operational methods might have an impact on the outcomes and restrict the applicability of findings to different sectors or settings. The validity of the research constructs was assessed by manufacturing organizations through the utilization of questionnaires and sample methodologies for data collection, as well as the application of exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The analysis was conducted using principal component analysis and the promax rotation method. All of the items were inputted concurrently, and as anticipated from the outset, seven different factors emerged. The present study examines the associations between the variables of interest, necessitating careful consideration of the directionality and causality behind these associations. The cross-sectional approach employed in this study may provide limitations in terms of establishing causal linkages and determining the chronological sequence of the variables.

Duanmu et al. (2018) conducted a study that investigates the correlation between certain parameters and outcomes related to environmental performance. Duanmu and colleagues conduct a study to examine the role of market competition on environmental performance in China, exploring a range of factors and their effects on environmental performance. The researchers employed the Questionnaires method for data collection and utilized t-test data analysis, among other statistical techniques. The present study examines the correlation between market competitiveness and environmental performance, emphasizing the significance of considering the directionality and causality of this association. The cross-sectional approach employed in this study may provide limitations in terms of establishing causal linkages and determining the chronological sequence of the variables.

In their publication titled "When does market share matter?", Edeling and Himme (2018) examine the significance of market share. The present study aims to examine the association between market share and performance outcomes by conducting a meta-analysis of existing research on the market share–performance link. The study seeks to provide new empirical generalizations to the existing body of knowledge in this area. Edeling and Himme (year) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the circumstances in which market share has an impact on performance. The study employed various data collection methods, including sampling, and utilized Univariate statistics and Model-free evidence data analysis to draw their conclusions. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that Meta-analyses may be vulnerable to the influence of publication bias, wherein research with statistically significant or good outcomes are more likely to be published. The authors ought to discuss their approach in addressing

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publication bias, as well as any sensitivity studies undertaken or methods implemented, such as the utilization of a funnel plot to evaluate it. Therefore, it is important to consider the generalizability of the findings from the meta-analysis in relation to the specific characteristics of the studies included, such as the industry and geographic scope. The authors ought to consider discussing the applicability of the findings to a particular industry, context, or temporal framework.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a correlational approach to investigate the link between organizational tactics and the success of solar businesses that have adopted a pay-as-you-go pricing structure. The study was conducted in Nairobi, which serves as the primary location for the headquarters of these companies on a sample of population pay-as-you-go sector firms in Kenya. All the7 heads of department of 18 companies which are currently afloat in Kenya was interviewed using census survey. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires administered through interviewing the respondents, while secondary data were to be collected by the use of relevant publications and reports. This study employed pilot testing of 10% of 18 companies that was, 2 companies to enhance the feasibility of the study. The questionnaire demonstrated a content validity after expert review at the school of business in Maseno University, indicating good instrument validity following comprehensive revision. Data was analyzed using both descriptive statistics as well as linear regression model.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

The researcher distributed a total of 126 questionnaire across seven major departments in 18 companies. The table below shows the response of the study Table 1.

Table 1
Response Rate

Sample size	Response	Response rate	Non- responsive	Non-responsive rate
126	119	94.4%	7	5.6%

Out of the 126 questionnaires distributed, 119 were fully filled and returned. This is equivalent to 94.4% response rate.

Effect of Focus Strategy on Organisational Performance

The first objective of the study sought to determine the effect of focus strategy on the organizational performance of Pay-As-You-Go solar firms in Kenya. A corresponding hypothesis ‘Focus strategy does not affect the organizational performance of Pay-As-You-Go Solar Firms in Kenya’ was therefore formulated. To test this hypothesis, mean organisational performance was regressed against focus strategy. Both summary models and coefficient model are presented in the Table 2.

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Table 2
CORRELATION ANALYSIS OF FOCUS STRATEGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Correlations			
		Organizational performance	Focus Strategy
Organizational performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.796**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	119	119
Focus Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.796**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	119	119
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

From the correlation table, it can be seen that the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r=.796$, $p<.05$) suggests a strong and positive correlation between organizational performance and focus strategy. The p-value<0.005 implies the correlation is significant. This implies that organizational performance is positively associated with focus strategy such that enhancing focus strategy positively improves the organizational performance. The summary of the Focus strategy model, as presented in Table 2, indicates that the independent variable accounts for 63.3.6% of the variance in organizational performance, denoted by an r2 value of 0.633. This means that focus strategy ($\beta = 0.796$, $p <.05$), has a positive effect on organizational performance. Therefore the null hypothesis, H01: Focus strategy does not affect the organizational performance of Pay-As-You-Go Solar Firms in Kenya was rejected. Islami et al., (2020) study about Linking Porter's generic strategies to firm performance conforms to this current study findings. According to study also are line with the current study.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed a statistically significant beneficial relationship between the adoption of a focus strategy and the overall performance of the business. The elucidation of this phenomena was responsible for the observed variability. The findings suggest that the adoption of the independent variable emphasis strategy has a statistically significant and favorable influence on the performance of the organization. Initial findings indicate that the focus approach significantly influences the organizational success of Pay-As-You-Go Solar Companies in Kenya. This discovery is significant because it identifies specific areas that can be addressed to improve the accuracy of performance predictions related to the implementation of the Pay-As-You-Go Solar Firms' emphasis strategy in Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the initial finding, it is advisable to enhance the focus strategy on organizational performance of Pay-As-You-Go Solar Firms in Kenya. These firms should strive to improve their focus as a business strategy, as it was observed to have a significant and positive impact on firms' performance. It is vital for organizations to possess strategies that are well-defined and exact.

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