Influence of Technology Alliances on Performance of Telecommunication Organizations in Kenya: A Case of Safaricom Limited.

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Abstract

Strategic alliances are a common scenario in businesses and organizations. This is attributable to the rising number of business collaborations anchored on affiliations that have caused enormous changes to business culture and the running of organizations. In Kenya's telecommunication industry, three of the four main operators have not matched the performance of the industry leader through the years. This has partly been associated with the level of involvement in strategic alliances. This paper sought to establish how technology alliances influence performance of telecommunication organizations in Kenya; particularly, at Safaricom PLC. A descriptive research design, case study method, was employed. Six thousand staff working at Safaricom headquarters formed the target population. The sample comprised those in top management and departmental management positions. Stratification was done according to the management level in the organization. A sample size of 105 respondents was selected via simple random sampling. Primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was sourced through survey, using questionnaires. Data was analyzed descriptively and using inferential techniques. Descriptive analysis involved generating first and second order averages. Inferential analysis was done using regression and correlation analysis. Results were presented in tables. Results showed a direct and statistically significant relationship between organizational performance and technology alliances. The study recommends telecommunication firms to invest heavily in technology since their products are dependent on technology which is diverse and dynamic. Further, telecommunication firms should target technology alliances that help bring about robust innovation, research and development, as well as invest in trained and skilled manpower to keep up with global trends and dynamism of the sector. There was a statistically significant high degree of positive correlation result between technology alliances and organizational performance, a perspective that deviated from earlier findings.

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1.0   Introduction

Globally, strategic associations and pacts have become a common scenario in businesses and organizations. Various reasons such as enhancing industry performance by creating a competitive advantage for products in the world markets have occasioned these alliances. Ivatury and Mas (2008) emphasized that strategic alliances are an integral component of plans for economic sustainability of business organizations. These alliances have become so important in recent times. Berger et al. (2009) noted that the most frequently emerging practice in organizations is the formation of alliances with other business entities and institutions such as brokerage firms, mobile providers and financial institutions.

Chowdhury and Uk (2013) define strategic alliances as mutually agreed upon and officially profit-oriented collaborations between companies. According to this definition, the alliance can be reminiscent of equity positions or a legitimate arrangement including, but not restricted to consortiums, joint ventures, collaborative arrangements, licensing arrangements, and other forms of collaboration. Chowdhury and Uk (2013) note that strategic alliances are made up of an arrangement of cooperation between two or more business entities that together have a rewarding common strategy.

Firms forming strategic alliances share resources so as to pull off an exceptional performance and boost their reputation, develop their market share, and gain access to a pool of resources that they did not have

as single entities. In so doing, Doz and Hamel (1998) indicate that alliances give firms the opportunity to pool properties, resources, competencies and expertise so as to realize mutual goals.

> *"Strategic alliances are made up of an arrangement of cooperation between two or more business entities that together have a rewarding common strategy."*

This is informed by the realization that the possibility of individual firms profiting from these benefits of partnership lies outside the firms themselves, and the stewardship of an individual firm lacks the capacity to directly control these resources. Additionally, there has been growing competition emanating from the dynamic world markets which have led to a scenario where organizations have found it challenging to indulge in business alone.

De Man and Duysters (2005) shared similar sentiments stating that, compared to any other time in the past, most of the resources, capabilities and skills fundamental to a firm's present and future affluence, exist in the macro-environment of a firm in which the management lacks direct control. Essentially, the management has to ponder outside the micro-environment of the firm so as to stay

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aggressive. There are several types of alliances that business entities can engage in. These are production alliances, collaborations in design, licensing technologies, joint marketing / promotion, contracts in research and development, joint selling or distribution, and alliances formed for outsourcing (Coopers & Lybrand, 1997).

These, according to Dean and Yunus (2001), can further be classified into three broad categories of alliances; namely, production and manufacturing alliances (made up of alliances involving suppliers, procurement and combined manufacturing), marketing and sales alliances (which include agreements in joint marketing and retailers who provide value addition), and alliances associated with technology and know-how (comprising development of new technologies and joint research activities by industry players / academic and other institutions). These alliances may also be hybrids of various types, which can span from ordinary licensing arrangements to more complex hybrid alliances.

Organizational performance is a multi-dynamic and multi-faceted concept. In his description, Griffins (2006) stated that organizational performance refers to an organization's capacity to obtain and make use of its immeasurable worth and limited resources in a prompt manner, while pursuing its predetermined operational goals. Similarly, Kirkman et al. (2004) noted that organizational performance implies a production process with the aim of achieving certain outcomes. Kirby (2005) explored organizational performance and broke it down to about three broad areas that relate to firm outcomes; that is, shareholder return (economic value realized and total shareholder return); economic performance (return on investment, profit, return on assets); and market performance (market share, sales).

However, to avoid bias as a result of distinctive asset valuation and local tax treatment, it is advisable to anchor sales and capital returns on the firm's operational profits rather than the after-tax returns net profit (Momanyi & Mihas, 2018). The question of performance is quite customary in management research and its design and definitions are seldom justified in a straightforward manner. In this paper, performance will be evaluated based on the company's growth. Measuring organizational performance may also be attained by use of a balanced scorecard which estimates the learning and growth of a firm, its financial performance, its internal business processes, and its customer performance. Corporate, economic, environmental and social performance can also be included in organizational performance (Norman & MacDonald, 2004).

In terms of the benefits that accrue to a firm in an alliance, Momanyi and Mihas (2018) observed that firms enjoy four kinds of benefits; namely, significantly lower amount of capital required and lower risks associated with development of unprecedented technologies and products; faster and less cumbersome entry to markets and knowledge acquisition; scope and scale economies; and a shot at impacting the concerned industry,

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and the competition structure thereof. They further noted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) incorporate alliances as an integral part of networking and acquisition of strategic resources; thereby enhancing a desirable competitive edge over rival players through actualization of tangible assets, such as production capacity, human capital, financial capital and appliances, as well as intangible assets like entrepreneurial and ingenious capabilities, knowhow, training in the organization, image, and branding.

Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) has licensed five mobile phone operators over the last two decades (Gatobu & Maende, 2019). These operators are Safaricom Public Limited Company (PLC), Airtel Kenya, Telkom Kenya (Orange), Essar Telecom Kenya Limited (YU) and Jamii Telecommunications Limited. The main competitors in the industry are Safaricom PLC, which is a joint venture between Telkom Kenya and Britain's Vodafone in a 60 / 40 percent sharing respectively, and accounts for 67.4 percent of the market share, while Airtel Kenya accounts for 22.6 percent market share (Tharamba et al., 2018). Presently, four of the aforementioned companies are operational in Kenya.

These are Safaricom PLC (initiated in 2007 with exclusive ownership as an auxiliary to Telkom Kenya), Airtel Kenya (a subsidiary of Bharti Airtel Limited, ranked third among phone companies in Africa), Telkom Kenya (whose ownership is divided between the government of Kenya and France Telecom in a 30 / 70 percent sharing respectively), and Jamii Telecommunications Limited. The

most popular operators are Safaricom PLC and Airtel Kenya. Essar Telecom Kenya Limited exited the industry in 2015 after Safaricom PLC and Airtel Kenya acquired it; with Safaricom acquiring the network, Information Technology (IT) and office infrastructure assets; and Airtel Kenya taking over the subscribers (Segelan, 2015).

In 1997, Safaricom PLC began its operations in Kenya, albeit under Telkom Kenya offering ancillary services. It was licensed in 1999 and officially launched in October 2000. Vodafone group Public Limited Company of the United Kingdom, the global leader in telecommunication, received a 40% stake and management mandate for Safaricom in May 2000. In 2008, by way of an initial public offering, Safaricom's structure of shareholders took shape as follws: 35% to the government of Kenya, Vodafone Kenya Limited with 40% and Free Float listed at the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) at 25%. As at the end of 2019, Safaricom had a 62.4% market share with 31.8 million subscribers.

Safaricom PLC is in the business of availing an array of mobile telephone services which include voice, messaging, mobile money transfer (M-Pesa), data, fixed broadband, and converged utilities so as to have a well-connected society. Safaricom PLC has seven strategic pillars; namely, giving the customer the first priority; providing sustainable business; culture and the people; transforming cost; digital first; creating excellence in operations (by developing technologies that enable a digital society); and offering relevant products. The company

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has over 1,500 staff, majority of them stationed in Nairobi, with others in the company's other retail outlets in cities / towns such as Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Eldoret among others. The company is sufficiently versed with a countrywide network of dealerships so as to avail its products and services to its customers throughout the country (Safaricom, 2019).

Safaricom PLC's financial performance in the last seven years has been on an upward trajectory up to 2020, posting a net income of KES 38.104 billion in 2016, and rising to KES 73.658 billion in 2020 (Safaricom, 2020). The performance dropped in the last two years to KES 57.960 billion in 2022. Key performance indicators (service revenue, earnings before interest and tax, net income and free cash flow) dipped in 2021, but rose significantly in 2022 (Safaricom, 2022). The other three aforementioned operators have not matched this performance that the industry leader has had over the years. Various reasons have been given for that, including the level of involvement in strategic alliances.

It is imperative to understand the dynamics of strategic alliances within Safaricom PLC that have been part of the company's success. The arising question therefore is: how has the company partnered with other entities to ensure a remarkable performance over the years? Being in an industry that relies vastly on technology to keep up with global competition, this paper aimed at bridging this gap by exploring technology alliances at Safaricom PLC, and how the alliance influence the company's performance and

that of telecommunication organizations at large.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This paper employed a descriptive research design, case study method, since it aimed at describing particular components of interest and identifying the association between components of interest, as well as performance of telecommunication organizations in Kenya. Adoption of case study technique was informed by the fact that the unit of analysis was Safaricom PLC, and the objective was to conduct an intensive, descriptive and holistic data analysis using information sourced from key individuals. Target population was six thousand staff working in different departments within the headquarters of Safaricom PLC, where the decision-making hub of the company is based. The staff comprised top management and departmental management positions.

To select the sample, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used. Stratification criteria was based on the management level in the organization. Management levels were divided into two broad strata; namely, top management and departmental management. Departmental management level consisted of the following six departments: marketing, technology, enterprise business unit, resources and facilities, finance, and consumer sales. These six departments and the top management made up seven strata. Simple random sampling was used to constitute the final sample size, where fifteen respondents were selected from each stratum, making a total sample size of 105 respondents. Purposive

method was used to select key informants from each stratum because respondents were particular persons of interest who were knowledgeable about the topic under study. The paper utilized primary and secondary data. Raw data was sourced through survey, whereas journals, annual reports from Safaricom PLC and online publications were the sources for secondary data. Survey data was collected by the researcher using questionnaires.

Association between the response variable (organization performance) and the predictor variable was established via regression analysis. A regression model was fitted to the data and was specified as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

The variables in the model were defined as follows:

$Y \rightarrow$ Response variable (organization performance).

$\beta_0 \rightarrow$ Vertical intercept.

$\beta_1 \rightarrow$ Regression coefficient for technology alliances.

$X_1 \rightarrow$ Technology alliances.

$\varepsilon \rightarrow$ Model stochastic term.

To facilitate analysis of the collected data, descriptive and inferential analysis techniques were used. Descriptive analysis was done mainly for quantitative data where descriptive measures were generated.

Inferential analysis was done to enable generalizations to be made upon the population from which the sample was derived.

Regression and correlation analysis were conducted. The regression coefficient was obtained so as to predict and establish the magnitude of change in the endogenous variable, owing to a unit change in the exogenous variable. Coefficient of Spearman correlation was established to estimate the association, in terms of magnitude and direction, between organizational performance and the independent variable. Data was arranged, summarized and interpreted accordingly, and inferences were made. Results from the analysis were presented in tables for dissemination.

3.0   Results and Discussion

General Characteristics of the Sample

105 respondents were studied. However, data was successfully obtained from 82 respondents. This represented a completion rate of 78 percent which, according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), is adequate and a representative for statistical analysis and reporting. General characteristics of the participants were summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

General Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic	Label	Frequency	Percent
Years of service	Less than 1 year	4	5
	1 – 5 years	22	27
	6 – 10 years	32	39

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	Above 10 years	24	29
	Total	82	100
Same department	No	62	76
	Yes	20	24
	Total	82	100

Two main characteristics of the sample were considered necessary for the study; that is, the duration of service (years of service) that a respondent had served, and whether or not one had served in one department all through. Concerning the years of service, table 1 indicates that 39 percent of the respondents have been in service for six to ten years, while 29 percent have been serving for a period exceeding ten years. Cumulatively, more than half of the participants (68%) had served for a period of six years and above. Twenty two respondents (27%) have served at the company for a period of between one and five years, while four respondents (5%) have served for less than a year. A bigger percentage of respondents had therefore worked for a considerable amount of time, and could therefore comprehend the strategic alliances in the company.

Technology Strategic Alliances

Technology alliances were studied to find out their influence on performance of telecommunication industries in Kenya. Respondents gave their opinion on the extent to which alliances were present at Safaricom PLC. A five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (to no extent) to 5 (to a very great extent) was used to measure the variable. Resulting choices of the respondents are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2

Presence of Technology Alliances

Technology alliance	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Innovations realized	82	3	5	4.59	0.736
Technology transfer	82	2	5	4.55	0.772
Research and development	82	1	5	4.45	0.918
Training and skilled manpower	82	1	5	4.44	0.848
Budget allocation to investment in modern technology & business expansion	82	1	5	4.41	0.902
Investing capital, equipment, scientific & technological resources	82	1	5	4.34	0.892

Results in Table 2 show that the most significant technology alliances are those inclined towards realization of innovations, scoring a mean of 4.59. These are followed by those that brought about technology transfer, with a mean score of 4.55, and those that enhance research and development, with a mean score of 4.45. However, it is

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important to note that all the technology strategic alliances had a mean score above 4.0, implying that they all contributed towards firm performance to a great extent. This would be expected since telecommunication industry falls under information, communication and technology sector, whose relevance and efficiency relies heavily on technological advancements.

Technology Strategic Alliances and Organizational Performance

Analysis on how organizational performance was influenced by technology alliances was conducted. This was measured on a five point Likert scale, with the number codes 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Results obtained thereof were shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Technology Alliances' Influence on Organizational Performance

Performance indicator	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Increased growth in market share annually	82	2	5	4.61	0.662
Enabled growth in profitability	82	2	5	4.56	0.722
Increased annual growth in sales	82	1	5	4.55	0.788
Ensured satisfactory return on assets	82	2	5	4.43	0.832

All the organizational performance indicators had mean scores above 4.0 as observed in table 3. This was an indication that most participants strongly agreed with the statement that strategic alliances had an influence on organizational performance, and the same was further asserted by the low standard deviation scores. The most notable influence on organizational performance was an increased growth in the market share for the firm annually, which scored a mean of 4.61, followed by growth in profitability and annual sales, and finally ensuring satisfactory return on assets, whose mean score is 4.43.

Regression and Correlation Analysis

To establish the nature and magnitude of the association between technology alliances and organizational performance, simple linear regression analysis was done since the model captured just one exogenous variable. To establish variation in the endogenous variable, the results in Table 4 were obtained.

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Table 4

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard error of the estimate
1	0.686	0.471	0.464	0.50394

To establish the explanatory power of the model, coefficient of determination r^2 was obtained. The coefficient gave a value of 0.471. This indicates that 47.1 percent of total variation in the outcome variable was as a result of the predictor: technology alliances. However, 52.9 percent of the variation in the outcome variable was captured by the disturbance term (error term) meaning that there are other exogenous variables that are responsible for the variation. This was not within the scope of the current paper. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was done to ascertain the overall significance of the regression model as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5

ANOVA

Model		Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance
1	Regression	18.074	1	18.074	71.172	0.000
	Residual	20.316	80	0.254		
	Total	38.390	81			

The F statistic obtained is 71.172 whose probability value (p-value) is 0.000. Since the p-value is below 0.05, then the captured F statistic implied statistical significance at 5% significance level. Consequently, the overall regression model was confirmed to be significant.
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To come up with the estimated regression model that would be used to predict the endogenous variable for given values of the predictor variable, parameter estimates were obtained. Table 6 below summarizes parameter estimates as follows

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Table 6

Parameter Estimates of the Regression Model

Model	Estimate	Standard error	t-statistic	Significance
(Constant)	8.944	1.592	5.618	0.000
Technology alliances	1.970	0.343	5.743	0.000**

Given the parameter estimates, the estimated regression equation was expressed as:

$$\hat{Y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \widehat{X_1}$$
$$\hat{Y} = 8.944 + 1.970 X_1$$

The vertical intercept of the regression line was observed to be 8.944. Regression coefficient for technology alliances was 1.970. This shows the existence of a direct association between organizational performance and technology strategic alliances. A unit increase in technology strategic alliances predicted an increase in organizational performance by 1.970 units. The corresponding t-statistic and p-value were observed to be 5.743 and 0.00 respectively. With the p-value being below 0.05, it was deduced that the association between technology alliances and organizational growth was statistically significant at 5% significant level. This significant positive relationship would be associated with the fact that

telecommunication sector is a technology based industry, and is therefore expected to invest heavily in technological advancements and alliances to boost performance and profitability. This observation matched the results by Camison et al. (2014) who remarked that the association existing between technologically advanced strategic alliances and research, and development and performance is moderated by the creation of knowledge-based peculiar capacities. They further asserted that the level of growth of a firm's stock of knowledge generated from collaboration in alliances was dependent on the firm's development of technologically advanced capacities, and that these would eventually lead to growth in the overall performance of a firm.

Since linear regression analysis was adopted, Pearson correlation coefficient was derived. The results generated are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

Correlation Analysis

		Organizational performance	Technology alliances
Organizational performance	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.686**
	Significance (2-tailed)		0.000
	Number	82	82

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Results obtained indicate that technology alliances positively influenced organizational performance. Technology alliances variable registered a high degree of positive correlation (0.686) with organizational performance, as captured by a correlation coefficient value above 0.5. This relationship was also seen to be statistically significant at 5% significance level as indicated by a significance value of less than 0.05.

However, the positive correlation results deviate from the findings of Muthoka and Oduor (2014) who established that strategic alliances that were technologically motivated had a strong, negative correlation with organizational performance. In this paper, the positive relationship on technology alliances is attributed to the fact that Safaricom PLC is a telecommunication company and as such the company invests heavily in technology and this in turn influence its performance positively.

4.0   Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to establish influence of technology alliances on the performance of Kenya's telecommunication organizations. Data analyzed showed that technology strategic alliances influenced organizational growth positively. This influence was statistically significant at 5% significance level. It was observed that technology alliances associated with innovations; modern technology and business expansion; research and development; and training and skilled manpower influenced performance of an organization greatly.

Consequently, it was deduced that telecommunication firms invest heavily on technology and technological resources since most of their products are dependent on technology which is diverse and dynamic. Therefore, to withstand the stiff competition and thrive in business, firms can only align and work with partners that provide a platform of equally or more competitive technology. This is further informed by the nature of the sector which is mostly a service sector whose consumer trends show an upsurge towards affordable, reliable and advanced technology.

5.0   Recommendations

Given the service-based nature of the telecommunication sector, firms should target technology alliances that help bring about robust innovation, research and development as well as training and skilled manpower that is able to keep up with the global trends and dynamism of the sector. Since technology is an ever changing phenomena, and it is meant to improve efficiency, firms ought to keep up with the technological trends so as to tap into any new areas through research, as well as optimize on any opportunities and potential for revolutionizing the services thereof.

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