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GEOGRAPHICAL DIVERSIFICATION STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE OF FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESSES IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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ABSTRACT
Family businesses have an important role in the development of economies of emerging countries like Kenya. However, despite the numerous efforts to improve the performance of family-owned businesses in Kenya, they continue to face significant challenges that threaten their sustainability. This study aimed at determining the influence of geographical diversification strategy on the performance of family-owned businesses in Nairobi County. It was anchored on the Ansoff Matrix, adopted positivist philosophy and used ex post facto research design. The target population was top and middle managers from 226 family-owned businesses in Nairobi County. The sample size consisted of 399 respondents. Data was collected by structured questionnaires and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The findings established that geographical diversification strategy had a statistically significant (β=0.616, $p < .001$) relationship with the performance of family-owned businesses. It was concluded that geographical diversification emerges as a vital strategy for enhancing the performance of family-owned businesses. The study recommended that family business owners in Kenya should expand into diverse regions to reduce risks and boost performance. Future studies should explore the influence of geographical diversification on small versus large family businesses in Nairobi County, Kenya.
KEYWORDS: *Strategic Choices, Geographical Diversification Strategy, Performance, Family-Owned Businesses*

INTRODUCTION

Organizational performance measures how well resources are utilized to meet strategic goals. It is vital for ensuring long-term growth, and preserving the business legacy (Schultz, 2019). For family businesses, high performance strengthens market competitiveness and supports smooth generational transitions, securing the business's future across changing economic landscapes. According to Ozbun (2022), organizational performance reflects how effectively financial, human, and informational resources are used to achieve strategic goals for family business. It gauges the firm's success in meeting management objectives, balancing tradition with innovation, and sustaining long-term growth across generations (Bozic & Poola, 2023). Strong performance ensures legacy preservation and competitive market positioning for family businesses (Mani, 2022).

For family firms to sustain strong performance in today's dynamic and turbulent business environment, the leadership must embrace strategic choices. Strategic choices involve decisions made by organizational leaders to guide a firm's direction and actions (Harney, 2016). Geographic diversification is a vital strategic choice for family-owned businesses, enabling them to connect with broader markets and reduce exposure to local economic shocks, inflation, and market-specific risks (McFee, 2022; Chu et al., 2021). It supports continuity during uncertainty, preserves legacy, and fosters long-term growth across generations (Giones et al., 2019). This strategy typically begins locally and expands regionally, nationally, and internationally, depending on market potential (Ahmed & Simba, 2019).

Geographical diversification allows family firms to tap into economies with varying growth rates, enhancing resilience and competitiveness (Oladimeji & Udosen, 2019; Gonzales, 2021). It also delivers value through economies of scale and scope, cost efficiencies, improved governance, and synergy gains. However, failure to act decisively can lead to stagnation and pressure from stakeholders demanding change (Struckell et al., 2022). Success depends on effective management and alignment with the strategic context of expansion decisions (Tsai et al., 2019).

In Kenya, family firms are a cornerstone of the business ecosystem, representing 70% of registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and employing 60% of the workforce in the small business sector (Njoroge, 2019). Their extensive presence underscores their vital contribution to economic development, job creation, and entrepreneurial growth. Operating across sectors such as retail, manufacturing, and services, these businesses play a key role in sustaining local communities and promoting inclusive economic participation (Asoko Insight, 2020).

Similarly, in Nairobi County, the most populated county in Kenya, family-owned businesses dominate the commercial landscape (Statistica, 2019). These enterprises play a vital role in the local economy, contributing significantly across sectors such as retail, services, education, manufacturing, and hospitality (Asoko Insight, 2020). Known for their resilience, strong community ties, and adaptability, they range from small ventures to medium-sized firms and large corporations. However, despite their economic importance and potential, many family-owned businesses in Nairobi struggle to survive long-term and often fail before realizing their full growth capacity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite numerous efforts to improve the performance of family-owned businesses in Kenya, many continue to face significant challenges that threaten their sustainability. Kiilu and Ntale (2018) observe that these enterprises often collapse due to weak financial systems, poor sales performance, costly litigation, lack of professionalism, disregard for core organizational values, and the absence of a clear strategic vision. This pattern is evident in the decline of once-prominent family-owned firms such as Nakumatt Holdings Limited (Nandonde, 2020), Tuskys Supermarket (Shitanda & Margaret, 2023), and ARM Cement (Mwaniki, 2022), which struggled to adapt to competitive pressures and operational inefficiencies.

Despite the growing importance of strategic expansion, few local studies have examined the role of geographical diversification in enhancing the performance of family-owned businesses in Nairobi County. As these enterprises face increasing market saturation and economic volatility, understanding how expanding into new regions can mitigate risks and improve outcomes becomes critical. This study seeks to bridge the existing knowledge gap by investigating the influence of geographical diversification strategy on performance of family businesses in Nairobi County.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of geographical diversification strategy on the performance of family-owned businesses in Nairobi County.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H0: Geographical diversification strategy has no statistically significant influence on the performance of family-owned businesses in Nairobi County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the theoretical review, empirical review and conceptual framework that underpins the study.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of the study on geographical diversification and performance of family-owned businesses. The Ansoff Matrix that anchors the study is highlighted.

Ansoff Matrix Model

The Ansoff Matrix, developed by Igor Ansoff, in 1957 provides a strategic framework for business growth through two primary dimensions: product growth and market growth (Ansoff, 1965). It outlines four strategic options, market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification, each offering a pathway for firms to expand their reach and improve performance. This model is particularly suitable for anchoring a study on geographical diversification strategy and the performance of family-owned businesses, as it emphasizes the strategic importance of entering new markets to achieve sustainable growth (Asaf et al., 2023).

The Ansoff Matrix, offers a strategic framework for business growth by focusing on two key dimensions: product growth and market growth (Loredana, 2017). It presents four strategic options, market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification, each providing a distinct pathway for firms to expand their operations and enhance performance. This model is especially relevant for family-owned businesses seeking to navigate competitive environments.

The model highlights the strategic importance of businesses entering new markets, particularly through market strategies like geographical diversification (Dawes, 2018). The Ansoff Matrix helps firms identify growth opportunities, manage risks, and align their strategies with long-term objectives. It serves as a valuable tool for informed decision-making and sustainable expansion. In family-owned businesses, the Ansoff Matrix offers a practical framework for evaluating growth strategies, particularly geographical diversification as a form of market expansion. This strategy aligns with Ansoff's model by enabling firms to enter new regions, helping them overcome local market saturation and economic instability. It provides actionable options for top managers aiming to boost performance, resilience, and competitiveness. Through diversifying geographically, family businesses can strategically position themselves for sustainable growth in dynamic market environments. The Ansoff Matrix is relevant in Nairobi's competitive business landscape as it guides geographical diversification decisions by family businesses. It helps family business owners assess market expansion opportunities, align strategies with performance goals, and manage risks.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The empirical review section highlights past related studies to geographical diversification strategy and performance of family-owned businesses. The focus is on findings from both global and local contexts.

Geographical diversification strategy and performance of family-owned businesses

Geographic diversification is a suitable strategy for enhancing the performance of family-owned businesses, as it enables firms to access broader markets and reduce vulnerability to local economic shocks (Awino et al., 2017). It enables family firms to expand beyond their immediate environment, and in the process ensure continuity, and achieve long-term prosperity, particularly during times of uncertainty and market instability (Giones et al., 2019). This strategic approach supports sustainable family business performance through tapping into diverse economic conditions, spreading risk, and maintaining competitiveness while preserving core family values and legacy across generations (McFee, 2022).

Rajesh (2023) conducted a study titled geographical and segment diversification effect on the financial performance of the I.T sector in India. The target population comprised listed I.T firms in India, with a sample size of 12 firms representing 93% of the market share. The study utilized panel data and applied regression analysis to examine the relationship between diversification and financial performance. Findings revealed that international diversification strongly impacts firm profitability, leading to the recommendation that small-scale Indian I.T firms should confidently pursue international diversification to enhance financial outcomes.

In Spain, Pongelli et al. (2021) investigated whether family-centred goals impact family firm export performance and whether the extent of geographical focus of the firm's strategy changes this relationship. The focus was to establish the combined effects of geographical and product diversification on the performance of manufacturing SMEs. The target population consisted of Spanish manufacturing companies with over 10 employees while the sample size was 195 family-owned businesses. The study involved 2217 SMEs and 21,138 observations. The findings established that having family firms that strongly prioritise economic goals leads to greater success when they compete in the international market, unlike family firms that focus more on non-economic goals. The goals that family firm owners emphasize can either facilitate or inhibit sales internationally.

Osorio et al. (2020) examined the combined effect of product and geographical diversification on performance of manufacturing companies in Kenya. The target population included manufacturing companies in Spain with 10 or more employees, and the sample size consisted of 2,217 SMEs with 21,138 observations. Data was collected from the Survey on Business Strategies covering the period 1994–2014. The researchers performed empirical analysis to assess diversification impacts. Findings indicated that product diversification positively enhances profitability for SMEs engaged in geographical diversification, while unrelated product diversification may significantly impair performance, especially for firms with low or high levels of international diversification.

A study by Njari and Muathe (2018) aimed to establish the influence of geographical expansion strategy on the growth of East African Breweries Limited (EABL) in Kenya. The descriptive research design was adopted by the study. 225 respondents were targeted. This comprised 4 managers and 221 employees. The population was grouped into four strata namely the production department, sales department, quality assurance department and the production department. A census of 4 managers was done and 140 employees were selected through simple random sampling. Questionnaires and interviews were used as data collection instruments. The study established that the geographical expansion strategy had a significantly positive effect on the growth of EABL through the acquisition of new customers. Mochabo et al. (2017) conducted a study on geographical diversification and financial distress of commercial banks listed in the Nairobi Securities Exchange. The target population comprised commercial banks listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange, with a sample size of 10 listed banks. Panel data was collected from published financial and audited statements spanning 2006 to 2015. The researchers employed descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The findings revealed a positive and significant correlation between geographical diversification and financial distress. The study recommended moderate adoption of geographical diversification to improve the financial health of commercial banks.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Geographical Diversification Strategy

- Competitive advantage
- Economies of scale
- Risk diversification
- Sales volume
- Efficiency

Performance of Family-Owned Businesses

- Market share
- Customer satisfaction
- Employee satisfaction
- Number of new products/services
- Revenue growth
- Profit

Independent Variable **Dependent Variable**

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a positivist philosophy and employed an ex post facto research design. The target population included top and middle managers from 226 family-owned businesses in Nairobi County, each operating for over ten years. A stratified random sampling technique was used to categorize the population, followed by simple random sampling within each stratum. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula, ensuring statistical representativeness and precision.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size, N = population size, and e = acceptable sampling error

using the formula, $n = \frac{226}{1+226(0.05)^2}$ -a total of 399 respondents were selected

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire comprising both open-ended and closed-ended questions. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was employed. Additionally, a pilot study involving 39 family-owned businesses in Nakuru County was conducted to enhance the validity of the research tool. The collected data was sorted, coded, and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, while inferential analysis utilized binary logistic regression to examine the relationship between independent variables and a binary outcome variable.

To validate the binary logistic regression model, several assumptions were tested: linearity of the logit using the Box-Tidwell test, independence of errors through the Durbin-Watson test, multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with values above 10 indicating concern, homoscedasticity via residual plots, and outlier detection using leverage values and Cook's distance. The study findings were clearly presented using tables and figures for enhanced clarity and interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section presents the descriptive and inferential results of geographical diversification strategy and performance of family-owned businesses in Nairobi County.

Descriptive Results

The results on how geographical diversification strategies influence the performance of family-owned businesses is provided. This was measured using the Likert scale of 1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree, and the results, expressed as percentages and mode.

Table 1 Descriptive results of geographical diversification strategy

Geographical Diversification Strategies	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	Mode
Competitive advantage influences new branch opening decisions.	6	6	88	4
More locations improve customer reach and accessibility.	11	10	79	5
Expenses remain stable despite opening new branches.	66	15	19	2
International branches increase currency fluctuation risk exposure.	13	13	74	4
Global branches raise political risk for organization.	16	12	72	4
Regional operations stabilize yearly sales volume fluctuations.	11	6	83	4
Branch expansion directly impacts product sales volume.	9	5	86	4
Expansion affects production efficiency across all operations.	51	1	48	2
Departmental efficiency changes with branch network expansion.	5	9	86	4

The statement “Competitive advantage influences new branch opening decisions” registered 88% agreement, indicating firms prioritize internal strengths when expanding. This reflects strategic intent in leveraging competitive advantage for market positioning. Gachoki et al. (2022) affirm that firms with strong internal assets perform better in geographic diversification.

“Branch expansion directly impacts product sales volume”, 86% agreed, confirming that expansion boosts sales. Businesses report performance gains through broader market access. Luo and Maksimov (2021) validate this, noting that strategic geographic growth improves competition and customer engagement.

Similarly, “Departmental efficiency changes with branch network expansion” had 86% agreed, indicating expansion affects internal operations like IT and accounting. Firms acknowledge the need for restructuring and integration. Rajesh (2023) emphasizes that geographic growth demands scalable and adaptive management systems.

Interestingly, “Expenses remain stable despite opening new branches” generated 66% disagreed, indicating expansion often raises costs. This reflects industry-specific cost variations and operational strain. Mbai et al. (2022) caution that without strategic planning, expansion may lead to inefficiencies and financial pressure.

The findings indicate that geographic expansion enhances sales, customer access, and operational efficiency, but demands strategic planning to manage rising costs and internal restructuring. Firms benefit most when leveraging competitive strengths and diversifying regionally.

Inferential Results

This section presents the correlation and regression results derived from hypothesis testing of geographical diversification strategy and performance of family-owned businesses.

Correlation Results

The correlation results of the independent and dependent variables are illustrated in this section.

Table 2 Correlation analysis

	Performance of Family-Owned Businesses	Geographical Diversification Strategies
Performance of Family-Owned Businesses	1	.734**
Geographical Diversification Strategies	.734**	1

Geographical diversification significantly boosts performance (r = 0.734) by expanding market reach and reducing local risks. However, success demands strategic planning and operational capacity to avoid inefficiencies and financial strain (Gachoki et al., 2022).

Regression Analysis

This section used binary logistic regression to analyze the impact of geographical diversification on family business performance, categorized as high or low. Key outputs included model significance, explanatory power, and predictor strength, direction, and statistical relevance.

Table 3 Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	**df**	**Sig.**
Step 1	Step	262.832	1	0.000
	Block	262.832	1	0.000
	Model	262.832	1	0.000

The Chi-square value of 262.832 (df = 1, $p < .001$) confirms the logistic regression model's statistical significance, showing that geographical diversification strategy enhances performance prediction in family-owned businesses. This aligns with findings by Tsai et al. (2019) and Mehmood et al. (2019), who demonstrated that strategic variables improve model accuracy and business outcomes.

Table 4 Model Summary

Step	**−2 Log Likelihood**	**Cox & Snell R^2**	**Nagelkerke R^2**
1	262.573	0.500	0.667

The results show geographical diversification strategy explains 50–66.7% of performance variation. These values exceed typical benchmarks for strategic research. Supporting studies (Chu et al., 2020) confirm that geographical diversification strategy significantly enhances firm performance in family-owned businesses.

Table 5 Variables in the Equation

Variable	**B**	**S.E.**	**Wald**	**df**	**p-value**	**Odds Ratio**
Geographical Diversification						
No Geographical Diversification (RC)						1.000
There is Geographical Diversification	0.616	0.308	4.000	1	0.000	1.852

Logistic regression results show geographical diversification significantly boosts business performance ($\beta = 0.616$, $p < .001$). The odds ratio of 1.852 indicates family-owned firms are over 1.8 times more likely to perform well when diversifying geographically. This supports findings by Gonzales (2021) on diversification's role in accessing varied markets, reducing risks, and enhancing competitiveness, especially vital in Nairobi's saturated business landscape.

H0: Geographical diversification strategy has no statistically significant influence on the performance of family-owned businesses in Nairobi County, Kenya.

The findings demonstrated a substantial and statistically significant relationship between geographical diversification strategy and performance of family-owned businesses. This led to rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Conclusion

It was concluded that geographical diversification emerges as a vital strategy for enhancing the performance of family-owned businesses. By expanding into multiple regions, businesses can mitigate localized risks, access broader markets, and unlock operational efficiencies. Whether small or large, family enterprises must embrace geographic diversification not only as a risk management tool but also as a pathway to innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth. These findings affirm that geographical diversification strategy is essential in navigating today's competitive and volatile business environment.

Recommendations
Family business owners in Kenya should expand into diverse regions to reduce risks and boost performance. Geographical diversification enhances resilience, customer reach, and innovation. Success depends on solid market research, efficient operations, and adaptable leadership to sustain growth.

Area For Further Research
Future studies should explore the influenec of geographical diversification on small versus large family businesses in Nairobi County, Kenya. This should also escalate similar studies in other counties in Kenya for comparative purposes.

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