EdinBurg Peer-Reviewed Journals and Books Publishers
Journal of Strategic Management
Vol. 6||Issue 3||pp 57-67||August||2026
Email: info@edinburgjournals.org||ISSN: 2789-4851

Effect of Focus Strategy on Organizational Performance of Bus Companies in Isiolo County, Kenya

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Accepted: 17 July 2026 || Published: 08 August 2026

Abstract

There have been poor-quality services and increased cases of inefficiencies in Kenyan bus companies, which have resulted in tough competition from minibusses. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of focus strategy on organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County, Kenya. A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population comprised 9 bus companies in Isiolo County, which also formed the unit of analysis. The unit of observation included 39 drivers, 56 conductors, 18 booking clerks, and 24 finance officers. A census method was used to include all respondents, who were issued with closed-ended questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted at Mabruk Bus Company in Marsabit County, selected using a simple random sampling method. Internal consistency was maintained through the use of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, while validity was ensured by examining both criterion and construct validities, among other types. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 27 to generate descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean. The study also conducted linear regression analysis, including model summary, analysis of variance, and regression coefficients. The results demonstrated that the majority of the respondents, 59 (52.7%), strongly agreed and 46 (41.1%) agreed, with a mean of 4.43, that their company focused on operating along selected routes to serve a particular market segment efficiently. Also, 56 (50.0%) strongly agreed, and 33 (29.5%) agreed, with a mean of 4.17, that their company's branding and promotional efforts were aimed at appealing to their target customers. However, 46 (41.1%) strongly disagreed, and 38 (33.9%) disagreed, with a mean of 2.07, that implementing a focus strategy had helped their company achieve better performance compared to competitors in their target market. Focus strategy had an F-Statistic of 77.40 and a p-value of 0.001, implying that the study rejected the null hypothesis that focus strategy had no significant impact on organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County. In conclusion, the bus companies had specific routes they provided their travelling services, which were branded and promoted effectively to stabilize their customer base within the identified routes. Nevertheless, different bus companies had similar focus strategies that led to duplication of modes of operations, hence unable to effectively compete with each other. The management of the bus companies is recommended to reposition their focus strategies to offer notable services such as value-added services to minimize duplication of transportation services.

Keywords: *Focus Strategy, Organizational Performance, Bus Companies, Isiolo County, Kenya*

How to Cite: Hassan, H. A., Chesigor, F., & Rintari, N. (2026). Effect of Focus Strategy on Organizational Performance of Bus Companies in Isiolo County, Kenya. *Journal of Strategic Management, 6(*3), 57-67.

1. Introduction

Organizational performance is defined as the level to which an organization attains its objectives strategically through the effective use of resources in a competitive and sustainable manner. Organizational performance in the bus transportation industry can be measured using various performance criteria, such as financial performance criteria like income generation, profitability, and market share, in addition to other non-financial criteria such as service reliability, customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, safety performance, and quality of service. A good-performing bus company earns sustainable income, offers good value for money to its customers, offers reliable transport services, observes high standards of safety, and adapts to a changing competitive environment (Ministry of Roads and Transport, 2024).

Globally, the performance of bus firms is largely impacted by the sustainable competitive strategy that can be developed and implemented within an organization. In Canada, bus companies still face numerous problems due to a lack of long-term strategic planning (Litman, 2024). In South Africa, bus transport firms experience deteriorating organizational performance due to market competition and inefficiencies in their operations and risk management systems (Walters & Manamela, 2016). In Uganda, the organizational performance of bus companies is hampered by centralized decision-making, where the owner is responsible for all operations in the firm (Stewart, 2024). In Kenya, poor implementation of human resource management leads to hiring unqualified drivers who cause road accidents, negatively impacting organizational performance (Mbandi et al., 2023).

Focus strategy is the effort and plans established by a bus company to concentrate on a specific market or area to offer its best services to meet customer demands more effectively than competitors (Senelwa et al., 2023). Therefore, in bus companies, focusing on specific target clients provides a chance to manage their demands more effectively than competitors. This could take the form of a bus company concentrating on specific routes, charging a consistent price, and establishing itself as a brand attributed to a region. According to Hansson et al. (2022), taking precedence in customer management at a bus company begins by providing strategic safety measures, driver competency, accountability, and assurance that the bus company is established to serve a specific area (Senelwa et al., 2023).

In Isiolo, few studies currently address the influence of transport strategies on the performance of bus companies, creating a gap in understanding how bus companies in Isiolo County could restructure their competitive strategies such as focus strategy, differentiation, cost leadership, and innovation strategy. The main reason is to realign strategies when managing a bus company's operations to handle customers' expectations, adhere strictly to transport schedules, protect the environment, and implement adopted technology as a means of remaining competitive.

1.1 Problem Statement

There have been poor-quality services and increased cases of inefficiencies in Kenyan bus companies, which have resulted in tough competition experienced from minibusses (Kimondio & Tumuti, 2024). These inefficiencies have resulted in delayed schedules, loss of clients' goods, poor customer service, and faulty booking technology (Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2020; Kimondio & Tumuti, 2024; Mbandi et al., 2023; Wanyua, 2024).

Furthermore, despite Isiolo County having an international road system connecting the county to other counties, there are only nine bus companies, signifying that road transport is not as vibrant as it should be (ISG, 2023). Furthermore, increased competition from other transport companies, such as vans, has resulted in the loss of a significant number of customers who value money. Despite these concerns, management has established less convincing strategic plans. This has exposed many bus companies to hefty fines from the government authorities and eventual closure for some of them.

Failure to address this concern would lead to continued witnessing of current bus companies collapsing after they have been in existence for a short duration, whereas other companies offering transportation through vans continue to thrive in the same environment (Mbandi et al., 2023; Muge et al., 2023). This therefore deterred potential bus companies from venturing into the transport sector, causing massive ineffectiveness in the entire sector as the population of commuters increases.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To determine the effect of focus strategy on organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County, Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

$H_0$1: The effect of focus strategy on organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County is not significant.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Contingency theory was developed by Fiedler (1960). Contingency theory argued that there was no single best strategy or management approach that fits all organizations. Instead, organizational performance depended on how well a firm's strategies were aligned with internal and external environmental conditions, such as market characteristics, customer needs, competition, and operational constraints. In relation to this study, bus companies that concentrated on specific routes, customer segments (such as commuters, students, or long-distance travelers), or service niches were likely to achieve better organizational performance if their focus aligned with the unique conditions of Isiolo County.

These conditions included dispersed settlements, varying travel demand, infrastructural challenges, and price-sensitive customers. By tailoring services to a defined market segment rather than serving the entire market, bus companies could optimize resource use, improve customer satisfaction, reduce operational inefficiencies, and ultimately enhance performance. Thus, Contingency Theory supported the idea that well-aligned focus strategies lead to improved organizational performance when they fit the specific context of Isiolo County.

2.2 Empirical Review

Service quality is a vital component for determining customer satisfaction in the public transport sector. In their study, Laisak et al. (2021), Igembe and Matonya (2024), and Senelwa et al. (2023) confirmed that service quality factors such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, accountability, empathy, and customer understanding are essential for customer satisfaction. For instance, while Laisak et al. (2021) indicated that the customers of Malaysian inter-district bus companies had low levels of customer satisfaction due to assurance, accountability, and customer understanding problems, Igembe and Matonya (2024) noted that dependability, awareness, and perceptibility were significant in increasing the customer satisfaction in the Dar es Salaam Rapid Bus Transit although there were some service assurance issues related to delays and interruptions. Moreover, Senelwa et al. (2023) pointed out that responsive services improved customers' satisfaction in public transport SACCOs in Nakuru County.

Nevertheless, Laisak et al. (2021) did not consider passenger satisfaction among private bus users, whereas Igembe and Matonya (2024) ignored some important variables, including bus safety conditions, driver competence, and strategies intended to increase service effectiveness. Moreover, Senelwa et al. (2023) did not include drivers in their sample group and did not conduct a sufficient analysis of how drivers' operational difficulties affect customer satisfaction.

3. Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population comprised 9 bus companies in Isiolo County, which also formed the unit of analysis. The unit of observation included 39 drivers, 56 conductors, 18 booking clerks, and 24 finance officers. A census method was used to include all respondents, who were issued with closed-ended questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted at Mabruk Bus Company in Marsabit County, selected using a simple random sampling method. The study maintained internal consistency using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This method ranges from 0 to 1, and a value of 0.7 and above indicates reliability.

Validity was ensured by examining both criterion and construct validities. Criterion validity was mainly anchored on the operationalization of the results through comparing them with what other studies have derived. Construct validity was ascertained by considering how indicators were able to represent the concept. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 27 to generate descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean. The study also conducted linear regression analysis, including model summary, analysis of variance, and regression coefficients.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study sampled 39 drivers, 56 conductors, 18 booking clerks, and 24 finance officers from the bus companies, who were issued with closed-ended questionnaires. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Sampled	Response	Percentage (%)
Drivers	39	33	85
Conductors	56	47	84
Booking clerks	18	13	72
Finance officers	24	19	76
Total	**137**	**112**	**81.8%**

Table 1 reveals that 112 out of 137 respondents participated in the study. The average response rate of the study was 81.8%, which was considered very good. Holtom et al. (2022) group response rates in three categories, whereby a response rate of less than 40% was considered low, a response rate between 50%-60% was considered good, a response rate of more than 60-70% was considered very good, and a response rate of more than 70% was considered

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Journal of Strategic Management
Vol. 6||Issue 3||pp 57-67||August||2026
Email: info@edinburgjournals.org||ISSN: 2789-4851

excellent. Therefore, having obtained a response rate of 81.9% provides a strong basis for analyzing the effect of competitive strategies on the organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County, Kenya.

4.2 Reliability Results

To assess the internal consistency of the study instruments, the study conducted a pilot study at Mabruk Bus Company in Marsabit County. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha
Focus Strategy	0.893
Organizational Performance	0.857
Average	0.875

According to Table 2, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for focus strategy is 0.893, and organizational performance is 0.857. The average Cronbach Alpha Coefficient is 0.875, which is above 0.7, indicating that the instruments used during piloting were reliable and internally consistent for use in the main study. This is in agreement with Ranganathan and Caduff (2023), who stated that a Cronbach alpha coefficient above 0.7 indicates reliability.

4.3 Descriptive Results of Organizational Performance of Bus Companies

The study's dependent variable was organizational performance, and the indicators assessed were: customer numbers, parcel management, fleet maintenance, and E-booking. The ordinal Likert scale used indicated that 1 represented strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Table 3 presents the descriptive results.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Performance of Bus Companies

Statements N=112	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Customer numbers have increased in this bus company over time	3 (2.7%)	5 (4.5%)	35 (31.3%)	25 (22.3%)	44 (39.3%)	3.91	1.062
There is a flawless parcel management process	45 (40.2%)	42 (37.5%)	6 (5.4%)	9 (8.0%)	10 (8.9%)	2.08	1.260
Fleet maintenance reduces the number of breakdown cases while traveling	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.6%)	7 (6.3%)	41 (36.6%)	58 (51.8%)	4.33	0.884
E-booking is allowed by the bus company.	20 (17.9%)	16 (14.3%)	18 (16.1%)	36 (32.1%)	22 (19.6%)	3.21	1.391
Competitive strategies have a positive influence on performance	4 (3.6%)	5 (4.5%)	10 (8.9%)	39 (34.8%)	54 (58.2%)	4.20	1.021

The statistical data in Table 3 show that 58 (51.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 41 (36.6%) agreed, with a mean of 4.33, that fleet maintenance had been encouraged to reduce the number of breakdown cases while traveling. In addition, 54 (48.2%) strongly agreed and 39 (34.8%) agreed, with a mean of 4.20, that competitive strategies had a positive influence on performance. Nevertheless, 45 (40.2%) strongly disagreed, and 42 (37.5%) disagreed, with a mean of 2.08, that there was a flawless parcel management process.

These results indicate an emphasis on operational reliability through fleet maintenance, which reduces the likelihood of vehicle failures and contributes to efficient transport services and improved customer satisfaction. Reliable transport services lead to customer satisfaction through efficient operations, including timely departures and arrivals. Efficient transportation operations reduce interruptions within business processes, build customer loyalty, and enhance organizational performance. The findings are consistent with Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1960), which states that organizational performance depends on the match between management approaches and environmental situations. In Isiolo County, where transport operators operate over long distances with poor roads, scattered locations, and fluctuating passenger demand, fleet maintenance becomes an adaptive approach to contingent factors.

The research results indicate that, despite having successfully developed strategies for competitive advantage that lead to high operational performance in organizations, there are still deficiencies in the complementary services offered by organizations, especially regarding parcel delivery. The combination of successful passenger transport and unsuccessful parcel delivery shows that performance within organizations is multi-dimensional and depends on the harmony of all service dimensions and not just success within one operational aspect. According to Contingency Theory, this situation arises because while certain strategies can be useful within passenger transport operations, the same strategies may not suit the needs of logistics and parcel delivery, since logistics involves different technology, tracking systems, client communication systems, and personnel skills.

This is in line with the assertions by Cowi (2023), who suggested that successful implementation of strategic measures in bus firms leads to operational efficiency and effectiveness, together with increased customer satisfaction. This is also in tandem with the assertion by Igembe and Matonya (2024) that consistent investments in maintenance and operations reduce service disruptions and improve organizational performance. Nevertheless, these findings also align with Al-Suleiman et al. (2023), who identified that firms in the transportation industry face difficulties in developing complementary services like parcel delivery. These services pose new challenges that require unique competences beyond just transporting passengers. Thus, while the firms have managed to align their fleet management strategies with the local environment, they have failed to align their parcel management strategy.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Focus Strategy

The study aimed to determine the effect of focus strategy on the organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County, Kenya. Indicators assessed were: target clients, specific routes of operations, bus fare pricing, and branding. Table 4 provides the results.

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Journal of Strategic Management
Vol. 6||Issue 3||pp 57-67||August||2026
Email: info@edinburgjournals.org||ISSN: 2789-4851

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Focus Strategy

Statements N=112	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Our company identifies and targets specific customer segments to tailor its bus services effectively	3 (2.7%)	12 (10.7%)	52 (46.4%)	28 (25.0%)	17 (15.2%)	3.39	0.962
Our company focuses on operating along selected routes to serve a particular market segment efficiently	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.6%)	46 (41.1%)	59 (52.7%)	4.43	0.732
The bus fare pricing strategy is designed to attract and retain specific groups of passengers	4 (3.6%)	6 (5.4%)	79 (70.5%)	17 (15.2%)	6 (5.4%)	3.13	0.741
Implementing a focus strategy has helped our company achieve better performance compared to competitors in our target market	46 (41.1%)	38 (33.9%)	11 (9.8%)	8 (7.1%)	9 (8.0%)	2.07	1.235
Our company's branding and promotional efforts are aimed at appealing to our targeted customer	4 (3.6%)	6 (5.4%)	13 (11.6%)	33 (29.5%)	56 (50.0%)	4.17	1.064

Table 4: The majority of the respondents, 59(52.7%), strongly agreed, and 46(41.1%) agreed, on a mean of 4.43, that their company focused on operating along selected routes to serve a particular market segment efficiently. Also, 56(50.0%) strongly agreed, and 33(29.5%) agreed on a mean of 4.17 that their company's branding and promotional efforts were aimed at appealing to their targeted customer. However, 46(41.1%) strongly disagreed, and 38(33.9%) disagreed on a mean of 2.07 that implementing a focus strategy had helped their company achieve better performance compared to competitors in their target market.

The results show that bus firms consciously narrow their focus to certain routes and specific consumer segments, thus implementing the practice of focus strategy. They recognize the significance of being specialists in markets where they have the know-how. Their brand and promotional efforts strengthen this specialization by addressing specific passenger segments rather than the entire transport market. From Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1960), this type of specialization would positively impact firm performance since organizations operate well when there is a fit between the environment and their strategy. Isiolo County is known for its dispersed population, uneven transport demand, poor infrastructure development, and price-sensitive consumers, and focusing on certain routes would allow firms to use their resources more effectively.

But there is a great paradox in the results obtained. Even though many organizations utilize focus strategy via route specialization, targeted branding, and customer segmentation, most of the respondents think that such strategies do not yield any better performance than their competitors'. This contradiction can be resolved on the basis of Contingency Theory. It states that competitive advantage is not created only because an organization uses a particular strategy; it must use a strategy more effectively in terms of its own internal strengths and environmental situation than its competitors. In Isiolo County, the majority of bus companies seem to follow a very similar focus strategy by serving the same profitable routes, targeting the same customers, having almost the same fares and promotional methods. Thus, the focus strategy has become an industry standard rather than an organizational strength. Because competitors follow more or less the same strategy, no organization has a strategic advantage over others.

The results are consistent with Shillingi (2025), who found that targeted strategic investments enhance organizational performance through the efficient allocation of resources in chosen market segments. Similarly, Ssekiziyivu et al. (2025) noted that concentrating organizational resources in well-defined markets improves efficiency and customer response. However, in contrast to the two studies, the current study results show that a focus strategy on its own does not necessarily ensure competitive advantage where competing organizations employ the same strategic orientation. This view is echoed by Walters and Manamela (2016), who posited that imitation of competitive strategies is widespread and leads to the loss of differentiation and limited growth potential. Similar sentiments were expressed by the World Bank (2024), which stressed that transport companies in dynamic environments must always innovate, improve governance, embrace new technologies, and diversify customer value to sustain competitiveness.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing Through Linear Regression

In this section, the study used linear regression to examine whether to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis indicating that the effect of focus strategy on the organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County was not significant. Table 5 provides model summary results

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.643[a]	.413	0.408	2.157

a. Predictors: (Constant), Focus Strategy
b. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

As per Table 5, focus strategy had an R of 0.643 and an R Square of 0.413, implying that it explains 41.3% of the variance in organizational performance. However, 58.7% are on other factors not examined in the study. The findings show that focus strategy had a positive and meaningful relationship with organizational performance. According to Sistig et al. (2025), increasing the number of vehicles led to increased operational costs, but at the same time, there was improved efficiency.

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Journal of Strategic Management
Vol. 6||Issue 3||pp 57-67||August||2026
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Table 6: ANOVA Test Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	360.120	1	360.12	77.40	.001[b]
	Residual	511.844	110	4.653		
	Total	871.964	111			

Table 6 reveals that focus strategy had an F-Statistic of 77.40 and a p-value of 0.001, implying that the study rejects the null hypothesis that focus strategy had no significant impact on the organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County. Igembe and Matonya (2024) established that by bus companies focusing on strategies like awareness, dependability, and perceptibility, the satisfaction rate improved significantly.

Table 7: Regression Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	13.484	3.378		3.992	.000
	Focus Strategy	.324	.126	.643	8.798	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

Table 7 above indicates, focus strategy positively and significantly affected the organizational performance ($\beta = .643$, $B = .324$, $t = 8.798$, $p = .001$). This means that for each unit increase in the focus strategy variable, the organizational performance increased by 0.324 units. The regression equation is: Organizational Performance = 13.484 + 0.324(Focus Strategy).

4.6 Summary

The results demonstrated that the majority of respondents, 59 (52.7%), strongly agreed and 46 (41.1%) agreed, with a mean of 4.43, that their company focused on operating along selected routes to serve a particular market segment efficiently. Also, 56 (50.0%) strongly agreed and 33 (29.5%) agreed, with a mean of 4.17, that their company’s branding and promotional efforts were aimed at appealing to their target customers. However, 46 (41.1%) strongly disagreed, and 38 (33.9%) disagreed, on a mean of 2.07, that implementing a focus strategy had helped their company achieve better performance compared to competitors in their target market. Focus strategy had an F-Statistic of 77.40 and a p-value of 0.001, implying that the study rejected the null hypothesis that focus strategy had no significant impact on the organizational performance of bus companies in Isiolo County.

5. Conclusion

The bus companies had specific routes they provided their travelling services, which were branded and promoted effectively to stabilize their customer base within the identified routes. Nevertheless, different bus companies had similar focus strategies that led to duplication of modes of operations, hence unable to effectively compete with each other. Over time, the customer numbers remained stagnant at the expense of high operational costs due to harsh weather and worn-out roads.

6. Recommendations

The management of the bus companies is recommended to reposition their focus strategies to offer notable services such as value-added services to minimize duplication of transportation services. Bus drivers should consider adopting predictive maintenance and consistent communication with management on areas that require attention, in an effort to reduce breakdowns. The operations staff, such as those in the finance department, should ensure that there are financial systems in place to maintain buses in their best condition without necessarily having to halt travelling schedules. For instance, they could introduce periodic servicing accounts that are consistently funded. The Ministry of Roads should ensure that the road infrastructure connecting major roads between counties is consistently constructed and repaired to minimize travelling inefficiencies.

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