

# Are Board Member's Strategic Orientations Associated with Customer Focus? Empirical Evidence from Insurance Companies in Uganda

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the potential association between the strategic orientations of board members and customer focus within Ugandan Insurance firms. The evaluated strategic orientations encompass analysis, proactiveness, futurity, defensiveness, riskiness, and aggressiveness. Using a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, the research was conducted among a population of 131 insurance companies licensed in Uganda for 2023. The study's effective sample revealed a 74.7% response rate. The study findings reveal that board members' strategic orientations are positively and statistically significantly associated with customer focus. The findings further reveal that the most important board member strategic orientations in the insurance sector in Uganda are analysis, defensiveness, and futurity with a customer focus. The study findings further reveal that futurity is negatively and statistically significant with a customer focus. The study concludes that board member strategic orientations are strongly associated with customer focus in the insurance companies in Uganda. The study recommends that top management enhance strategic orientation awareness among board members, align with customer-focused goals, select board members with diverse orientations, and conduct regular board member evaluations.

**Keywords:** Board members, customer focus, insurance companies in Uganda, strategic orientation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic orientation refers to a company's chosen course of action to instill the right behaviors to achieve superior business performance in the foreseeable future (Handoyo *et al.*, 2023; Uzoamaka *et al.*, 2020). It encompasses how a company adjusts to the external competitive landscape (Akpa *et al.*, 2020) and involves practices, processes, decision-making, and actions contributing to organizational growth (Nasir *et al.*, 2017). It guides and influences the behaviors and decisions when selecting a particular business strategy. Despite being a subject of interest across various disciplines like marketing, management, and entrepreneurship, there is no unanimous agreement on the definition of strategic orientation in prior literature, as evident from the discussion above. This study will adopt the definition emphasizing strategic orientation's impact on organizational behavior and performance (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Uzoamaka *et al.*, 2020).

As highlighted by Bruneel *et al.* (2022), the strategic orientation of a firm places significant emphasis on the role of its board of directors, as noted by Pugliese and Wenstøp (2007). Essentially, the board of directors carries out both monitoring and service functions, as described by van den Heuvel *et al.* (2006). In the context of startups, it is anticipated that the board's monitoring role is less emphasized than its service-oriented functions. Like boards in entrepreneurial settings, the likelihood of encountering agency problems, as outlined by Fama and Jensen (1983), is diminished because Chief Executive Officers, often the founders, are expected to have a more substantial alignment with the company's shareholders during the startup phase. Their primary focus revolves around creating value for the company, as emphasized by Garg (2013, 2012).

Various strategic management scholars have uniquely operationalized strategic orientation (Adiguzel & Sonmez-Cakir, 2022; Bagire *et al.*, 2014; Balodi, 2020; Boohene, 2018; Bruneel *et al.*, 2022; Handoyo *et al.*,

2023; Kagzi & Patky, 2023; Nasir *et al.*, 2017; Otache, 2019). Venkatraman (1989) introduced metrics for assessing the aspects of analysis, including riskiness, futurity, defensiveness, analysis, proactiveness, and aggressiveness. These aspects can be divided into two groups: The entrepreneurial strategy approach, characterized by variables such as riskiness, aggressiveness, futurity, and proactiveness, and the conservative strategy approach, which is represented by the dimensions of defensiveness and analysis. This is further supported by Gupta and Basu (2014). On their side, Miles *et al.* (1978) identified four strategic postures of reactors, analyzers, defenders, and prospectors, along with different problems facing organizations on performance. For purposes of this study, Venkatraman (1989) strategic orientation dimensions will be useful because they are inclusive of both conservative and entrepreneurial approaches to strategic orientation. Kaplan and Norton (1992) also set the customer focus perspective performance, which is the foundation for the dependent variable under study, highlighting the value of customer retention, revenue growth, and profitability. The selection of metrics for the Customer Perspective of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is contingent upon the preferred customer profile and the worth delivered by the organization (Niven, 2002).

The essence of the Customer Perspective lies in directing attention towards the intended clientele, enabling organizations to formulate strategies aligned with the specific customer segment they aim to engage. In search of answers to whether board member's strategic orientations are associated with customer focus, it is vital to ask the following questions to insurance sector players in Uganda:

1. Does your company possess the capability to maintain its customer base compared to other industry players? Furthermore, does your organization implement a customer loyalty program?
2. Do your organization's customers usually refer friends and relatives? As an organization, do you receive compliments from your customers? Does your organization respond to the customer complaints promptly?

Businge *et al.* (2023) affirm that non-financial performance measures matter in a corporate setting, explicitly using a balanced scorecard. Customer focus projected the highest influence that was positive and significant. An organization with a market orientation positions the customer as the foremost entity on the corporate organizational hierarchy (Bennett & Cooper, 1981). Recognizing the importance of giving priority to customers has become crucial for any company aspiring to achieve enduring performance (Mokhtar, 2013). This enduring performance signifies an organization's capacity to adeptly and promptly tackle evolving challenges tied to customers, which is especially vital due to the ever-shifting nature of customer preferences (Mukerjee, 2013). Thus, significant stress is laid upon maintaining a strong 'customer focus'. The essence of customer focus is defined by a set of principles that prioritize the interests of customers above all else while still acknowledging the concerns of other stakeholders like owners, managers, and employees, all aimed

at fostering a profitable and sustainable long-term enterprise (Deshpandé *et al.*, 1993). Additionally, customer focus involves an organization's unwavering commitment to comprehending and meeting their customers' current, historical, and future needs, wants, and anticipations proactively to ensure consistent growth (Bartley *et al.*, 2007).

Prioritizing customers is primarily driven by the goal of meeting their expectations, as emphasized by (Tajeddini *et al.*, 2013). True customer focus within organizations can only be achieved when it becomes deeply ingrained as a cultural element across the entire organization, as noted by (Kennedy *et al.*, 2002). Organizational culture is defined as a set of shared foundational assumptions that a group develops while navigating the challenges of adapting to the external environment and fostering internal cohesion. These assumptions prove effective to the extent that they are considered valid, and they are passed on to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and emotionally respond to these challenges, according to Schein (1999). Through the examination of over 1,000 organizations, researchers have found that the impact of organizational culture on business performance surpasses that of individual talent by a factor of two to four. Culture plays a central role in determining business success, and when an organization nurtures the right culture, it translates external commitments into internal employee engagement and supportive behaviors (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2016). Crook (2008) confirms that companies that promptly and effectively address customer complaints can achieve several positive outcomes, including an increase in customer referrals and the ability to manage a larger customer base. The performance of Uganda's insurance companies has been linked to shifts in strategic behavior and a reluctance to adopt new business approaches (Businge *et al.*, 2023; UIA, 2019). Notably, the insurance sector in Uganda has witnessed a rise in documented customer complaints (IRA, 2019). The question that remains is whether the strategic orientations of board members are connected to customer focus.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various scholars in the field of strategic management have defined and applied strategic orientation in distinct manners (Adiguzel & Sonmez-Cakir, 2022; Bagire *et al.*, 2014; Balodi, 2020; Boohene, 2018; Bruneel *et al.*, 2022; Handoyo *et al.*, 2023; Kagzi & Patky, 2023; Nasir *et al.*, 2017; Otache, 2019). Venkatraman (1989) introduced metrics for assessing various aspects of analysis, which encompass riskiness, proactiveness, defensiveness, futurity, aggressiveness, and analysis itself. These aspects are categorized into two groups: the entrepreneurial strategy approach, characterized by futurity, proactiveness, riskiness, and aggressiveness, and the conservative strategy approach, represented by the dimensions of analysis and defensiveness. In a separate study, Miles *et al.* (1978) identified four strategic postures: reactors, analyzers, defenders, and prospectors, each associated with distinct challenges organizations face concerning their performance. For this study, Venkatraman (1989) dimensions of strategic

orientation will be employed as they encompass both conservative and entrepreneurial approaches to strategic orientation.

Businge et al. (2023) posit that customer focus is the most influential metric of the non-financial performance of Ugandan insurance companies. Therefore, organizations that adopt a proactive approach gain a strategic advantage by responding to customer demands, implementing innovative campaigns, and achieving higher pricing power (Anwar & Ali Shah, 2020). According to Mahar and Ghumro (2020), competitive aggressiveness and autonomy are crucial factors contributing to the success of organizations. Furthermore, empirical evidence from experiments supports the notion that entrepreneurial orientation significantly influences organizational performance (Khanagha et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial orientation pertains to a disposition for risk-taking, encompassing proactivity and aggressiveness directed at competitors to uncover fresh prospects to attain a competitive edge (Handoyo et al., 2023). Firms with an entrepreneurial orientation exhibit an inclination and readiness to undertake risks, proactively pursuing opportunities for exploration and exploitation (Handoyo et al., 2023).

According to Madhani (2018), a business's capability to meet the needs of its customers is a key indicator of its overall well-being and prospects. This directly and enduringly influences the company's forthcoming performance. The fundamental objective of a company is to generate value for its customers, and achieving contented customers is the definitive and legitimate definition of its purpose (Drucker, 1954). Research has demonstrated that customer satisfaction poses significant challenges for competitors seeking to lure away a company's customer base, thanks to heightened loyalty, reduced sensitivity to price fluctuations, the safeguarding of existing customers from competitive advances, lower future transaction costs, diminished expenses related to rectifying errors, reduced costs associated with acquiring new customers, and an enhanced reputation for the firm (Fornell, 1992). The significance of customer loyalty as a strategy for attaining enduring competitive advantages in the global competitive arena has been underscored by Aksoy (2013).

In an organization that revolves around its customers, the dedication to service quality and customer satisfaction is demonstrated through a shared set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and established behavioral norms (Hale, 1996). A culture that prioritizes customers is crucial in encouraging empowered behavior among employees when providing services, as it is the organization's "concepts, convictions, and principles that inspire employees to take actions centered around customers" (Bowen & Basch, 1992). Employees are empowered and given opportunities to interact with customers, allowing them to understand what customers truly value deeply. Organizations that place customers at the forefront concentrate on delivering value to ensure that customers genuinely receive the expected benefits. Companies that adopt a customer-centric approach are more likely to provide quality service, enhance customer satisfaction, and achieve organizational objectives more efficiently and effectively (Cano et al.,

2004). In a quantitative study of B2B marketing firms in the chemical industry, researchers found that a culture emphasizing customer orientation strengthens customer relationships and equips firms to navigate the challenging market landscape more adeptly (Lostakova & Stejskalova, 2014). Consequently, it can be theorized that the strategic orientations of board members demonstrate a statistically significant connection with customer focus.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, which was chosen based on the recommendations of (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). This design enabled the researcher to collect data from various participants simultaneously, offering the advantage of capturing a snapshot of the variables' relationships at a specific moment. By adopting this approach, the study minimized the potential impact of temporal fluctuations in the investigated variables. Furthermore, it facilitated the comprehension of relationships among the variables and allowed for comparisons across different respondents, thus enabling the formulation of conclusive findings. According to Nachimias and Nachimias (1982), this research design aids in determining if significant influence exists amidst variables at a specific time. Numerous studies have endorsed the reliability of outcomes derived from cross-sectional designs, particularly in studies focused on relationships (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007).

The study encompassed all Ugandan Insurance Companies as of July 31, 2022, totaling 131 licensed entities offering diverse services, including Bancassurance, Life, non-life, Health, and re-insurance. The Insurance Regulatory Authority (IRA) provided a list of these licensed firms. The unit of analysis was the individual insurance company. Given the small and manageable population, a census was recommended, following Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) guidance. Selection focused on licensed and regulated firms, compliant with statutory and reporting requirements by IRA, promoting inter-industry comparisons. Respondents were board Chairpersons or Company Secretaries, aligned with insurance corporate governance best practices.

The researcher employed primary data sources for the study's variables, utilizing quantitative closed-ended questions across these variables. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire developed from literature featuring a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5) to gauge responses. This method, administered simultaneously to respondents, was deemed optimal. Limited access to information from privately held dominant insurance firms hindered secondary data collection, as their lack of listing on the Uganda stock exchange restricted open access. Consequently, a five-point Likert scale was used to assess customer focus through opinions (Lumumba, 2019; Bwire, 2018). The quantitative data was analyzed, and test results included mean scores, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, one sample t-test, p-values, and inferential statistics.

#### 4. FINDINGS

A total of 80 out of 108 insurance companies responded to the research, which resulted in a response rate of 74.7%. This figure highlights most of the intended participants engaging in the study. However, there is a potential scenario wherein only companies with more robust corporate governance standards may have chosen to respond to the questionnaires.

##### 4.1. Board Strategic Orientation

The study sought to determine the central tendency and dispersion of data on strategic leadership. Strategic orientation was measured using a set of 22 statement items. Strategic orientation was gauged using a series of 22 statement items. Respondents were requested to rate these statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (5-very large extent, 4-large extent, 3-moderate extent, 2-less extent, and 1-not at all) based on attributes such as aggressiveness, analysis, defensiveness, futurity, proactiveness, and riskiness. The assessment produced mean scores, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation. Mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, and one-sample tests (t-values) were employed to summarize the ratings on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Strategic orientation serves as an alternative that can dynamically instill capabilities within an ever-evolving business environment and swiftly empower organizations to adapt to these changes (Al-Barghouthi, 2014). The strategic orientation of a business enterprise revolves around identifying, gathering, and analyzing intelligence to create novel insights about customers, competitors, and markets (Morgan et al., 2003). Strategic orientation fosters dynamic capabilities in a constantly changing business environment, facilitating organizations' rapid responses to these transformations (Al-Barghouthi, 2014). Table I displays the outcomes of the descriptive analysis of strategic orientation.

Table I displays results regarding the expressions found within the statements on strategic orientation. The mean score for aggressiveness averaged 1.84, with a standard deviation of 1.13 and a coefficient of variation of 61.78, indicating significant variability from the mean and a relative variation of 61.78%. Every facet of aggressiveness exhibited noteworthy differences among the surveyed companies, as evidenced by their manifestations (high t-values,  $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value below 0.05 implies that the observed sample mean is unlikely to have arisen solely due to chance. However, both the average mean score and individual mean scores were below the decision point. The study's outcomes suggested that the dimension of aggressiveness within the surveyed companies indicated a lack of aggressiveness.

Most respondents indicated that, to a lesser extent, the company's information systems offer support for decision-making, as reflected by the statement with the highest mean score on the aggressiveness dimension ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ,  $CV = 57.72$ ). However, the results suggest that the surveyed companies' boards do not use price-cutting strategies to augment market share, indicating an absence of price wars. Additionally, the companies showed that their boards prioritize cash flow and profitability over

seeking a dominant market share position. According to Basu and Gupta (2013), aggressiveness in a board's behavior is characterized by a drive for market share expansion at the expense of competitors. An aggressive company is willing to take bold steps to gain a competitive edge, which does not align with the observed behavior of Ugandan Insurance companies based on the findings.

The mean score for the analysis was 4.09, with a standard deviation of 1.13 and a coefficient of variation of 27.63%, indicating a considerable deviation from the mean and a relative variability of 27.63%. Across all analyzed dimensions, statistically significant differences were observed among the surveyed companies, as evidenced by high t-values ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value less than 0.05 indicates that the observed sample mean is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The average mean and individual mean scores from the surveyed companies align closely with all the statements within the analysis dimension. The study's results highlighted that the surveyed companies demonstrated a high level of proficiency in implementing an analysis-oriented approach, contributing to a strong customer focus.

The majority of respondents indicated that, to a significant degree, the company's board prioritizes gaining market share over profitability, as evidenced by the statement with the highest mean score in the analysis dimension ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ,  $CV = 25.84$ ). Nevertheless, the board enhances its decision-making process through rigorous analysis when faced with important decisions. Additionally, the findings from the surveyed companies underscore the board's emphasis on utilizing planning techniques and fostering effective coordination among various functional areas. It is crucial to note that analytical thinking and decision-making play a pivotal role in solving problems and strategically planning within a company, as Coy et al. (2008) suggested. The results strongly suggest that Ugandan Insurance companies exhibit high analytical thinking and decision-making capabilities.

The mean score for defensiveness was 3.51, with a standard deviation of 1.24 and a coefficient of variation of 35.43%, indicating a notable deviation from the mean and a relative variability of 35.43%. Across all dimensions of defensiveness, statistically significant differences were observed among the surveyed companies, as indicated by high t-values ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value less than 0.05 signifies that the observed sample mean is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The average mean and individual mean scores from the surveyed companies align moderately with all the statements within the analysis dimension. The study's results highlighted that the surveyed companies demonstrated a commendable proficiency in implementing a defensiveness-oriented approach, contributing to a positive customer focus.

Most respondents indicated that, to a moderate degree, the company's board emphasizes service quality through the utilization of quality circles, as demonstrated by the statement with the highest mean score in the defensiveness dimension ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ,  $CV = 36.84$ ). The results also reveal that the surveyed companies' boards employ cost control systems to monitor performance and frequently utilize production management techniques.

TABLE I: BOARD STRATEGIC ORIENTATION (N = 80)

| Statement/question   | Mean  | Std. dev. | CV    | t-value | p-value |
|--|-------|-----------|-------|---------|---------|
| <b>Aggressiveness</b>  |       |           |       |         |         |
| The board sacrificed profitability to gain market share                                    | 2.46  | 1.42      | 57.72 | 2.908   | <0.001  |
| The board cut prices to increase market share  | 1.74  | 1.06      | 60.92 | -2.206  | <0.001  |
| The board often sets prices below the competition  | 1.53  | 0.93      | 60.78 | -4.581  | <0.001  |
| The board often seeks market share position at the expense of cash flow and profitability  | 1.64  | 1.11      | 67.68 | -2.934  | <0.001  |
| Average  | 1.84  | 1.13      | 61.78 |         |         |
| <b>Analysis</b>  |       |           |       |         |         |
| The board emphasizes effective coordination among different functional areas               | 4     | 1.18      | 29.50 | 15.160  | <0.001  |
| When confronted with a major decision, we try to develop through analysis                  | 4.1   | 1.05      | 25.61 | 17.878  | <0.001  |
| Information systems provide support for decision-making                                    | 4.18  | 1.08      | 25.84 | 18.071  | <0.001  |
| The board emphasizes the use of planning techniques  | 4.06  | 1.2       | 29.56 | 15.311  | <0.001  |
| Average  | 4.09  | 1.13      | 27.63 |         |         |
| <b>Defensiveness</b>   |       |           |       |         |         |
| The board occasionally conducts significant modifications to service technology            | 3.35  | 1.24      | 37.01 | 9.709   | <0.001  |
| The board uses cost control systems to monitor performance                                 | 3.59  | 1.14      | 31.75 | 12.412  | <0.001  |
| The company often uses production management techniques                                    | 3.49  | 1.26      | 36.10 | 10.535  | <0.001  |
| The board emphasizes service quality through the use of quality circles                    | 3.61  | 1.33      | 36.84 | 10.874  | <0.001  |
| Average  | 3.51  | 1.24      | 35.43 |         |         |
| <b>Futurity</b>  |       |           |       |         |         |
| Forecasting key indicators of operations is common   | 4.06  | 1.15      | 28.33 | 16.025  | <0.001  |
| Formal tracking of significant general trends is common                                    | 3.98  | 1.24      | 31.16 | 14.218  | <0.001  |
| We conduct a "what if" analysis of critical issues   | 3.81  | 1.23      | 32.28 | 13.143  | <0.001  |
| We emphasize basic research to provide us with a future competitive edge                   | 3.64  | 1.3       | 35.71 | 11.225  | <0.001  |
| Average  | 3.87  | 1.23      | 31.76 |         |         |
| <b>Proactiveness</b>   |       |           |       |         |         |
| Our organization is always the first one to introduce new brands or products on the market | 2.83  | 1.25      | 44.17 | 5.901   | <0.001  |
| Constantly on the lookout for businesses that can be acquired                              | 3.71  | 1.36      | 36.66 | 11.252  | <0.001  |
| Constantly seeking new opportunities related to the present operations                     | 4.15  | 1.08      | 26.02 | 17.800  | <0.001  |
| Competitors generally preempt us by expanding capacity ahead of them                       | 2.85  | 1.19      | 41.75 | 6.379   | <0.001  |
| Average  | 3.385 | 1.22      | 36.04 |         |         |
| <b>Riskness</b>  |       |           |       |         |         |
| Tend to support projects where the expected returns are certain                            | 3.65  | 1.18      | 32.33 | 12.495  | <0.001  |
| New projects are approved on a stage-by-stage basis rather than with blanket approval      | 3.58  | 1.1       | 30.73 | 12.809  | <0.001  |
| We seem to adopt a rather conservative view when making major decisions                    | 3.13  | 1.08      | 34.50 | 9.287   | <0.001  |
| Our operations can generally be characterized as high-risk                                 | 2.5   | 1.04      | 41.60 | 4.286   | <0.001  |
| Average  | 3.215 | 1.1       | 34.21 |         |         |

Additionally, the boards occasionally implement significant changes to service technology. The defensiveness approach is often motivated by a desire to maintain stability, mitigate risks, and preserve existing affairs (Basu & Gupta, 2013). Therefore, the findings suggest a moderate inclination toward defensive behavior among Ugandan Insurance companies.

The mean score for futurity was 3.87, with a standard deviation of 1.23 and a coefficient of variation of 31.76%, indicating a substantial deviation from the mean and a relative variability of 31.76%. Across all dimensions of futurity, statistically significant differences were observed among the surveyed companies, as indicated by high t-values ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value less than 0.05 signifies that the observed sample mean is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The average mean and individual mean scores from the surveyed companies align moderately with

all the statements within the analysis dimension. The study's results highlighted that the surveyed companies demonstrated a commendable proficiency in implementing a futurity-oriented approach, contributing to a positive customer focus.

In the futurity dimension, the statement with the highest mean score received substantial agreement from most respondents, indicating that forecasting key operational indicators within the company is a common practice to a large extent ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.15$ ,  $CV = 28.33$ ). Additionally, the results reveal that formal monitoring of significant general trends is prevalent, and companies often engage in 'what if' analysis for critical issues. Notably, the company emphasizes conducting fundamental research to secure a competitive advantage in the future. In decision-making, the futurity dimension involves considering temporal factors and a forward-looking time

orientation, as Venkatraman (1989) described. It entails balancing effectiveness, which focuses on longer-term considerations, and efficiency, which prioritizes shorter-term considerations.

The mean score for proactiveness was 3.385, with a standard deviation of 1.22 and a coefficient of variation of 36.04%, indicating a considerable deviation from the mean and a relative variability of 36.04%. Across all proactiveness dimensions, statistically significant differences were observed among the surveyed companies, as indicated by high t-values ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value less than 0.05 signifies that the observed sample mean is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The average mean score surpassed the decision point. However, individual mean scores varied among the surveyed companies, ranging from a large extent, moderate extent, to a lesser extent across the statements within the proactiveness dimension. The study's results highlighted that the surveyed companies demonstrated a commendable proficiency in implementing a proactiveness-oriented approach, contributing to a positive customer focus.

In the proactiveness dimension, the statement with the highest mean score received substantial agreement from most respondents, indicating that the company actively and consistently seeks new opportunities related to its current operations to a large extent ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ,  $CV = 26.02$ ). Moreover, the results from the surveyed companies indicate a continual pursuit of potential businesses for acquisition. Conversely, the statement indicating that competitors typically outpace the company by expanding capacity ahead received a lower mean score, with most respondents indicating a lesser extent of agreement ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $CV = 41.75$ ). The statement about the company consistently being the first to introduce new brands or products on the market fell below the decision point, signifying a lesser extent of agreement. These findings illustrate the organization's proactive and opportunistic approach to market opportunities, actively shaping market trends, expectations, and demand (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). A proactive enterprise distinguishes itself from a reactive one by taking the initiative in initiating actions (Miller & Friesen, 1983).

The mean score for riskiness was 3.215, with a standard deviation of 1.1 and a coefficient of variation of 34.21%, indicating a significant deviation from the mean and a relative variability of 34.21%. All dimensions related to riskiness displayed statistically significant disparities among the surveyed companies, as demonstrated by high t-values ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value less than 0.05 signifies that the observed sample mean is highly improbable to have occurred by chance alone. The average mean score exceeded the decision point score. Nevertheless, individual mean scores exhibited variations across different statements. The study's findings indicated that the riskiness orientation dimension was effectively implemented within the surveyed companies, contributing to a positive customer focus.

In the riskiness dimension, the statement that garnered the highest mean score received a moderate level of agreement from the majority of respondents, indicating that the company tends to support projects with certain expected

returns to a moderate extent ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ,  $CV = 32.33$ ). Additionally, the results indicated that new projects are evaluated and approved in stages in the surveyed companies rather than receiving blanket approval. This suggests that companies take a more cautious approach when making significant decisions. On the other hand, the statement about the general characterization of the company's operations as high-risk received the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ,  $CV = 41.60$ ). The interaction between risk-taking and its impact on the organization's economic performance is crucial in strategic management (Bromiley, 1991).

#### 4.2. Customer Focus

In this study, "customer focus" refers to a strategic orientation adopted by a company where customer needs and preferences are prioritized in all aspects of business decisions and operations. The study examined how insurance companies have endeavored to attract, retain, cultivate loyalty, obtain referrals, and gather feedback from their clients in the market. Adopting a customer-centric approach can enable companies to cultivate stronger customer relationships, enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction, and propel business growth and prosperity. Therefore, giving weight to customer focus becomes imperative for businesses aspiring to achieve long-term success. The statements outlined in Table II delineate the measures implemented by companies to ensure the delivery of high-quality services to their clients, thereby influencing the performance of insurance companies. The table includes the means, standard deviations, and coefficients of variation, providing a comprehensive overview of the data distribution.

The findings presented in Table II detail the expressions of customer focus. The mean score for customer focus averaged 3.86, with a standard deviation of 0.91 and a coefficient of variation of 23.58. These outcomes suggest that customer focus has a moderate impact on the company's performance, as indicated by the notable deviation from the mean and a relative variability of 23.58%. Across all dimensions of customer focus, significant differences were observed among the surveyed companies, demonstrating high t-values ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value less than 0.05 indicates that the observed sample mean is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The mean score for customer focus surpassed the decision point score. The study's results indicated the well-managed customer focus within the surveyed companies, indicating an overall strong emphasis on customer satisfaction and performance. Addressing customer complaints promptly received the highest mean score within the customer focus dimension ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ,  $CV = 17.79$ ). However, the remaining statements indicated a more moderate extent. The surveyed companies reported receiving compliments from their customers, being successful in retaining customers compared to industry peers, customers typically referring friends and relatives, and establishing customer loyalty programs. Crook (2008) affirms that companies that promptly and effectively handle customer complaints can enjoy various positive outcomes, including increased customer referrals and increased capacity to manage a more extensive customer base.

TABLE II: CUSTOMER FOCUS (N = 80)

| Statement/question  | Mean | Std. Dev. | CV    | t-value | p-value (2-tailed) |
|---|------|-----------|-------|---------|--------------------|
| Our organization can retain its customers compared to its peers in the industry | 3.93 | 0.81      | 20.61 | 21.314  | <0.001             |
| Our organization has a customer loyalty scheme                                  | 3.26 | 1.19      | 36.50 | 9.506   | <0.001             |
| Our organization's customers typically refer friends and relatives to us        | 3.81 | 0.97      | 25.46 | 16.729  | <0.001             |
| Our organization receives compliments from our customers                        | 3.94 | 0.92      | 23.35 | 18.862  | <0.001             |
| Our organization promptly responds to customer complaints                       | 4.36 | 0.66      | 15.14 | 31.982  | <0.001             |
| Average   | 3.86 | 0.91      | 23.58 |         |                    |

TABLE III: REGRESSION MODEL WITH BOARD STRATEGIC ORIENTATION TO PREDICT CUSTOMER FOCUS

| R              | R-squared                   | Adjusted R-squared | Std. error of the estimate |         |         |         |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 0.98           | 0.967                       | 0.964              | 0.230                      |         |         |         |
|                | Sum of squares              | df                 | Mean square                | F       | p-value |         |
| Regression     | 113.745                     | 6                  | 18.957                     | 356.947 | <0.001  |         |
| Residual       | 3.877                       | 73                 | 0.053                      |         |         |         |
| Total          | 117.622                     | 79                 |                            |         |         |         |
| Coefficients   |                             |                    |                            |         |         |         |
|                | Unstandardized coefficients |                    | Standardized coefficients  |         | t       | p-value |
|                | B                           | Std. error         | Beta                       |         |         |         |
| (Constant)     | 0.322                       | 0.155              |                            |         | 20.074  | 0.042   |
| Aggressiveness | -0.031                      | 0.035              | -0.021                     |         | -0.884  | 0.379   |
| Analysis       | 0.760                       | 0.059              | 0.599                      |         | 120.823 | <0.001  |
| Defensiveness  | 0.625                       | 0.044              | 0.560                      |         | 140.248 | <0.001  |
| Futurity       | -0.091                      | 0.044              | -0.081                     |         | -20.071 | 0.042   |
| Proactiveness  | -0.052                      | 0.036              | -0.039                     |         | -10.436 | 0.155   |
| Riskiness      | -0.066                      | 0.043              | -0.040                     |         | -10.535 | 0.129   |

4.3. Board Strategic Orientation and Customer Focus

The research investigated the impact of strategic orientation on customer focus. The elements of strategic orientation include aggressiveness, analysis, defensiveness, futurity, proactiveness, and riskiness. The study calculated the averages for each element and conducted a regression analysis with customer focus as the dependent variable. The outcomes are displayed in Table III.

Table III outlines the impact of board strategic orientation dimensions on customer focus. The research identified a robust correlation between board strategic orientation dimensions and customer focus (R = 0.983). Consequently, enhancing the board's strategic orientation is likely to enhance the customer focus of Ugandan Insurance companies. The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.967) signifies that the combined board characteristics construct account for 96.7% of the variance in customer focus, while the remaining 3.3% is attributed to unaccounted factors in the model.

The ANOVA results, utilizing the F statistic, demonstrate a significant impact of board strategic orientation dimensions on customer focus (F = 356.947, p < 0.001). This significance at a 95% confidence level indicates that board strategic orientation constructs serve as robust predictors of customer focus for insurance companies in Uganda. However, the Significance column value is notably small, indicating a p-value less than 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis. This suggests that board strategic orientation significantly influences customer focus among

insurance companies in Uganda. Businesses that perform exceptionally well, such as the one examined in this study, are characterized as being “distinctly cautious, prudent, and make judicious use of their defensive skills, analytical capabilities, and future-oriented management” (Morgan et al., 2003).

The composite index coefficient for the board's strategic orientation dimensions, specifically in analysis and defensiveness, exhibited the most significant positive influence on customer focus. The outcomes indicate that analysis significantly impacts customer focus (β = 0.760, t = 12.823, p < 0.001), as well as defensiveness (β = 0.625, t = 14.248, p < 0.001). Conversely, futurity was found to have a negative and significant impact on customer focus (β = -0.091, t = -2.071, p = 0.042). This suggests that analysis, defensiveness, and futurity play vital roles in determining the customer focus of Ugandan Insurance Companies. These findings align with Venkatraman (1989) suggestion of a conservative approach to strategy through the dimensions of analysis and defensiveness, which were found to have a positive and statistically significant relationship with customer focus. However, they also deviate from Venkatraman (1989) viewpoint, as futurity emerged as a statistically significant strategic orientation, indicating an entrepreneurial orientation. This implies that the results present a combination of perspectives.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study's findings confirm that the strategic orientations of board members are linked to customer focus within the insurance sector in Uganda. Specifically, there is a statistically significant association between these strategic orientations and customer focus, with individual significance observed in analysis, defensiveness, and futurity orientations.

Analytical thinking and decision-making are crucial for effective problem-solving and strategic planning within a company (Coy et al., 2008). The results predict that insurance companies in Uganda are highly analytical since they are statistically significant with customer focus. Analysis pertains to the overarching problem-solving stance of an organization, encompassing the inclination to delve deeper into the underlying causes of issues. This entails using knowledge about the organization's internal and external aspects to develop the best solution choices (Miller & Friesen, 1984) and directing resources towards selected goals (Grant & King, 1982). This aspect also aligns with Fredrickson's (1984) emphasis on a comprehensive trait as a crucial component in the strategic management process. The analysis dimension is linked to Mintzberg (1973) planning mode and corresponds to the planning-oriented category identified in Miller (1983) study on different types of firms.

The defensiveness approach is often driven by a desire to maintain stability, minimize risks, and preserve the status quo (Basu & Gupta, 2013). Hence, findings project a moderate defensive behavior of insurance companies in Uganda. Organizations with a defensive orientation focus on a specific product and market sphere characterized by limited variability, often emphasizing the protection of existing products, markets, and core technology rather than pursuing the creation of novel offerings or market expansion (Miles & Cameron, 1982). Within this domain, they uphold their dominance by directing their endeavors towards cost-effective production, often at the expense of exploring external business prospects and other developments within their surroundings (Miles et al., 1978), consequently intentionally diminishing their capacity to adapt (Oktemgil & Greenley, 1997).

The futurity dimension in decision-making refers to considering temporal factors and time orientation, particularly regarding the future (Venkatraman, 1989). It involves striking a balance between effectiveness, which focuses on longer-term considerations, and efficiency, which emphasizes shorter-term considerations. The aspect of futurity pertains to the future, encompassing temporal factors and the time focus inherent in decision-making. It becomes evident in pivotal strategic choices, where a harmonious equilibrium is maintained between effectiveness and the focus on longer-term implications, as opposed to efficiency and the emphasis on short-term gains. This forward-looking perspective is also evident in the intentional establishment of enduring associations by firms with suppliers or strategic allies aimed at nurturing sustainable competitive advantages that beneficially influence business performance (Ganesan, 1994).

## 6. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that board members' strategic orientations are associated with customer focus in Ugandan insurance companies. This is evidenced by a strong correlation ( $R = 0.983$ ) between these dimensions, indicating that improved board strategic orientation can enhance customer focus. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.967$ ) demonstrated that board characteristics explain 96.7% variation in customer focus. ANOVA results ( $F = 356.947$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) confirmed the significant influence of board strategic orientation on customer focus. The composite index analysis highlighted the positive impact of defensiveness ( $\beta = 0.625$ ) and analysis ( $\beta = 0.760$ ) on customer focus, while futurity had negative influence ( $\beta = -0.091$ ). The study further concludes that the most important strategic orientation dimensions to customer focus in Uganda insurance companies are (1) analysis, (2) defensiveness, and (3) futurity, which significantly influence customer focus.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis and defensiveness emerged as the foremost strategic orientation (SO) aspect, closely followed by the futurity dimension. Senior management should thoroughly examine the consequences of these notable patterns in the Strategic Orientation and customer focus connection, ensuring a deep understanding of the advantages stemming from adept problem-solving skills and the integration of forward-looking, long-term planning while devising fitting strategies. Therefore, the study further recommends that the top management of Insurance companies in Uganda:

1. Foster a clear understanding among board members of the pivotal role their strategic orientations play in influencing customer focus. Regular workshops or training sessions can help appreciate the significance of dimensions like analysis, defensiveness, and futurity.
2. Ensure the board's strategic orientation aligns with the organization's customer-focused goals. Prioritize alignment between analytical problem-solving capabilities and long-term future-oriented planning to formulate more effective strategies.
3. Consider selecting board members with a diverse range of strategic orientations, focusing on a balanced representation of analysis, defensiveness, and futurity. This can bring a comprehensive perspective to decision-making and strategy development.
4. Invest in enhancing the board's analytical skills and problem-solving capabilities. This can be achieved through workshops, training, or even recruiting members with a strong data analysis and strategic planning background.
5. Implement a systematic board evaluation process that assesses the strategic orientation contributions of individual board members. This can help identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement concerning enhancing customer focus.



## 8. LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study did not go without limitations. First, the study focused on insurance companies in Uganda, which may not represent all sectors. The study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey, which is time-bound. Furthermore, the study employed primary data and a quantitative approach. Future researchers should focus on other sectors like manufacturing and use secondary data.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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