

How do transport companies execute strategies in a volatile environment? A qualitative inquiry

Transport
companies
execute
strategies

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study was to explore how transport companies in Uganda execute strategies in a turbulent business environment.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted an exploratory qualitative methodology using the data collected through an open-ended instrument. Utilizing the qualitative data analysis software QSR NVivo9, the data were analyzed following the Gioia's methodology. Verbatim texts were used to explain the emergent themes.

Findings – The study's findings show that to successfully execute strategies, companies in Uganda communicate, coordinate and put control systems in their operations. The activities undertaken include customer care, timely settlement of complaints, comfortable seats, playing local music, partnerships with reliable fuel stations, setting up strategic offices, cost management, use of experienced drivers, sub-renting vehicles and inspections.

Originality/value – The study produces a pioneering result of how transport companies execute strategies in a turbulent business environment, an aspect that has not been adequately highlighted in previous studies.

Keywords Strategy execution, Transport sector, Road transport, Uganda

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Within the strategic management framework, strategy execution has emerged as the pivotal stage in ensuring organizational performance (Noble, 1999; Okumus, 2003; Schühly, 2022). This is because the strategy acts as the guiding force for the long-term direction of an organization, while the process of executing the strategy transforms strategic objectives into tangible results (Srivastava and Sushil, 2014). Even if an organization formulates brilliant strategies, its potential remains untapped without effective execution (Zagotta and Robinson, 2002; Greer *et al.*, 2017). In sectors such as transportation, characterized by significant uncertainties and challenges in achieving unique strategies, successful execution of solid and robust strategies becomes paramount for establishing and enhancing a company's long-term competitive position, survival and performance vis-à-vis industry rivals (Peprah and Ayaa, 2022). Consequently, the successful execution of strategies leads to improved operational efficiency, enabling transport companies to reduce costs, streamline processes and enhance productivity (Batarce, 2021). For organizations like transport companies in Uganda that operate in a turbulent environment, effective execution of strategies enables them to adapt to the changing environment and adjust their operations in order to stay ahead of the competition (Goldstein *et al.*, 2010; Tejeiro Koller, 2016). The development agendas such as the Third Uganda National Development Plan (2021–2025), Uganda's Vision 2040 and SDG 11, all acknowledge the need for an efficient transport system as a factor of production and hence, the need to pay more attention to the execution of strategies in the sector in order to achieve social and economic transformation.

Despite notable advancements in strategic management, the significance of these achievements has been overshadowed by persistent failures in strategy execution, capturing increased attention from strategy scholars (Srivastava, 2015; Greer *et al.*, 2017; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021). Global deficiencies in strategy execution are evident. For instance, Cândido and Santos (2015) revealed that 44% of firms in Europe and the USA fell short in implementing their formulated strategies. In China, Li, Guohui and Eppler (2008) reported a similar trend with an 83% failure rate. In East Africa, Kangethe's study (2018) uncovered a 46% failure rate in Kenya, slightly lower than Uganda's 64% (Naturinda, 2022). Within the Uganda's transport sector, the Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) indicates that 45% of road transport firms (which dominate 95% of passengers and freight traffic) have collapsed while attempting to implement numerous strategies (MoWT, 2022). It is worth noting that each transport company in Uganda pursues unique strategies which require different executions. For example, companies like Pioneer Easy Bus Ltd. have aimed at expanding nationwide and beyond but have failed to even extend their operations within the small territory of the Kampala Metropolitan Area over the past decade. Since its establishment in 2012, the company has never generated any profits (Monitor, 2021). Similar situations have occurred with other companies such as Gaaga Coaches Ltd., Elgon Flyer Uganda, Akamba Bus Company, Bahama Blessings and Kampala Coaches. Despite their well-developed strategic plans, most of them had to close their businesses instead of expanding operations along different routes in the country.

To execute the expansion strategy successfully, owners of transport companies have tried hiring managers to take over the management of the business. However, many of the owners delegated their children and relatives to run the business who have limited knowledge, skills and experience in the implementation of unique strategies in transport (East African Family Business Survey Report, 2021). Additionally, most transport companies are run by owner-managers without any functional board to oversee the companies' strategic decision-making (Agireasaasi, 2023). Besides, the existing laws in Uganda provide for licensing of transport companies and guidance on traffic rules but do not pay any attention to the management and governance of the transport companies (Uganda Traffic and Road Safety Act, 2020), yet this is the springboard of executing strategies. Amidst all this, Uganda has one of the highest fuel prices in Africa, currently at 5,020 Uganda shillings (1.35 dollars) per litre of gasoline. This is

coupled with increasing inflation rates of 10.4% at the beginning of 2023 compared to 10.2% at the end of 2022 (Bank of Uganda report, 2023), increasing maintenance costs and high taxes (Agiresaasi, 2023). This turbulent environment has created difficulties for road transport companies to run and manage their business effectively. Additionally, Uganda is a landlocked country that relies on road transport, highlighting further the difficulties.

There are studies on strategy execution in the literature. However, these studies are limited in a number of ways towards determining successful strategy execution. Extant literature shows that strategy execution is at its initial stages and studies have focused on conceptualizing and developing measures of the phenomenon (De Oliveira *et al.*, 2019; Amoo *et al.*, 2019) with limited focus on exploring factors that explain strategy execution, especially in the transport sector. The authors also note that the majority of prior studies on strategy execution focus on sectors such as the; finance (see, Chetty, 2010; Kiruthu *et al.*, 2019; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020); telecommunications (see, Aaltonen and Ikävalko, 2002); health (see, Obeidat *et al.*, 2017; De Oliveira *et al.*, 2019; Hartveit *et al.*, 2019); higher education (see, Parnell, 2008; Siam, 2017; Murunga and Karugu, 2019); public service (see, Kiliç and Aktuna, 2015; Bhimavarapu *et al.*, 2019; Doeleman *et al.*, 2022) and fisheries industry (see, Vigfusson *et al.*, 2023). A few studies that have tried to explain strategy execution in the transport sector (see, Katana, 2017) derived responses from the shipping industry, which significantly differs in scale, operations and target client from the target respondents of this study. Besides, scholars like Tawse and Tabesh (2021) have called for a better understanding of the many factors contributing to an effective strategy execution. We fill these gaps by addressing the following research question:

RQ. How do transport companies in Uganda execute strategies successfully in a volatile environment?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 is a literature review providing the study setting, a theoretical framework and a review of existing empirical literature forming a basis of our research question. Section 3 provides the methodology, while Section 4 provides the findings of the study that are discussed under Section 5. The final section provides conclusions and implications of the study.

2. Literature review

2.1 Study setting

This study focuses on road transport firms in Uganda. According to the MoWT, road transport accounts for 95% of passenger and freight traffic (MoWT, 2017). Private firms and individuals, licensed and regulated by the Transport Licensing Board under MoWT, provide road transport services. These companies are categorized into buses and commuter taxi companies. Currently, national roads constitute approximately 25% of the road network and handle over 80% of total road traffic. Historically, the Uganda Transport Company (UTC) and the Peoples Transport Company (PTC) managed public transport services in Uganda from the 1970s to the 1980s. However, due to various challenges, both companies collapsed in the early 1990s, leading to privately-run firms and individuals entering the transportation industry (Ndibatya and Booyesen, 2020). Presently, private individuals and companies are responsible for providing public road transport services, allowing each entity to formulate and implement its own unique strategies. The road transport domain encompasses passenger service vehicles (such as buses, minibuses, taxis and Boda Boda), cargo vehicles, private motor vehicles and donkeys to a limited extent. According to Uganda's Traffic and Road Safety Act (2020), any vehicle intending to operate public transport in Uganda must be registered with MoWT. The registration process involves obtaining a designated route for the vehicle's operation. The owner is required to present their national identity card and the vehicle's logbook for verification. Additionally, the owner must pay for a passenger service vehicle (PSV) license and third-party insurance for each vehicle before it becomes eligible for operation.

2.2 Strategy execution

[Hrebiniak \(2006\)](#) defined strategy execution as a disciplined process or a logical set of activities that enable an organization to take a strategy and make it work. It comprises of the daily structures, systems and operational goals that set a team up for success. Successful CEOs understand the need for a sound business strategy and invest significant time, effort and money in strategy development. [Zagotta and Robinson \(2002\)](#) mention that the real value of strategy can only be recognized through execution. [Kaplan and Norton \(2001\)](#) further argue that the ability to execute a strategy is more important than the quality of the strategy itself. Hence, the brilliant strategy ever devised will not get an organization anywhere if it cannot be executed ([Zagotta and Robinson, 2002](#)). Thus, achieving strategic success necessitates not only having a suitable plan but also having it implemented successfully and on schedule ([Arnoud, 2008](#)).

2.2.1 Strategy execution in transport sector. Within the transport sector, strategy execution is accompanied by dynamism and uncertainty of the environment, making it a bit challenging for managers to meet the set goals well. According to [Al Amri \(2011\)](#), uncertainty persists due to internal factors including project interdependencies, lack of human resources development plans and the need for more information and integrated planning. These constraints and setbacks often lead to ad hoc requests and random changes in priorities. External uncertainty is principally related to changes in resources and demand changes. With the acceleration of urbanization and motorization, traffic problems such as congestion and accidents are getting worse, especially in developing countries ([Zou et al., 2013](#)). This uncertainty is worsened by external factors such as inflation, fuel changes, regulatory requirements, poor infrastructure and high cost of spares and repairs. Such environments require adaptability to change operations and processes in order to survive in the industry ([El Sawy and Pavlou, 2008](#)).

While [Al Amri \(2011\)](#) emphasized management and leadership, organizational culture, structure, processes/systems and resources as key drivers to successful strategy execution in the transportation sector, [Kravchenko \(2008\)](#) argues that it requires mobilizing employees and management to put formulated strategies into action. In Mozambique, a study by [Amosse et al. \(2021\)](#) indicated that to implement a community transport strategy effectively, there was a need to develop a community-based transport program that uniquely emphasized community ownership and leadership at all stages. Decision-making is by consensus within each community, which allows flexibility to local conditions and supports local skills and capacity building for financial management. Moreover, in Uganda, the MoWT argues that firms can successfully implement strategies by minimizing road crash fatalities, injuries and accidents ([The National Road Safety Action Plan, 2022/2026](#)).

2.2.2 Strategy executions in the volatile business environment. Scholars indicate that in a volatile environment, there is a need for sound systematic implementation of strategies through synergies and partnerships with all stakeholders ([Udobofo, 2021](#)). [Oke et al. \(2012\)](#) argue that innovation through research and development and environmental assessment are crucial in execution strategies in less centralized and formalized establishments. The transport business in Uganda is less centralized and operates in a volatile environment that is characterized by high price fluctuations, unstable fuel prices, traffic jam, business failure among transport companies, changes in fiscal policies like transportation taxes and regulation. Despite these complexities, the Ugandan government and various stakeholders continue to work on improving the road transport sector. Initiatives are aimed at enhancing road infrastructure, implementing road safety measures and addressing regulatory and governance issues.

2.3 Complex adaptive system theory

The complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory asserts that organizations operate in a dynamic environment where outcomes can hardly be anticipated ([McMillan, 2008](#)). In this perspective, the emergent properties of systems on the point of chaos are interpreted as the dynamic

interaction of agents in a system which simultaneously reacts to and creates their environment. This environment is, therefore, not a given but rather a co-created fitness landscape, in which the agents most likely to flourish are those who can readily adapt to changing circumstances and influence the behavior of others. The theory assumes that each system's internal dynamics affect its ability to change in a manner that might be quite different from other organizations. These open systems must be capable of reacting to changes in external environmental systems and can thrive in uncertain conditions. Thus, this theory has been applied in this study since the transport business in Uganda is very volatile characterized by free entry and exit, non-existence of mandatory guidelines on how the business is supposed to be run. Yet, companies are expected to flourish in such environment. The theory offers a framework which enables comprehension of nonlinear relationships, typical in a turbulent transport business environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research method with the help of an interview guide to examine how different companies execute strategies in a volatile environment. This methodology was adopted because it offers greater anonymity to respondents and often elicits more honest responses (Erickson and Kaplan, 2000). The approach enables researchers to describe the meaning of lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon for several individuals (Creswell, 2013; Ssekiziyivu *et al.*, 2023). The companies were registered and licensed by the MoWT to carry out transport business in Uganda.

3.2 Sample technique and procedure

The study employed a purposive sampling method to collect qualitative data. The method involved selecting participants based on their knowledge about the study topic, experiences and willingness to participate. The senior staff within the company (managers and directors) were considered because they were well positioned to provide accurate responses. Before the interviewing process started, the researchers made personal visits to these companies to determine the willingness of respondents (senior managers) to participate in the interview and appointments were made. This was intended to create rapport and minimize the possibility of wasting time with unprepared interviewees. In addition, the researcher ensured that different managers and directors from all the routes were included in the sample in order to ensure full representation of views from all companies in different regions in Uganda. The unit of analysis was a transport company (commuter taxi and bus company), while the unit of inquiry was a senior manager in that company (general manager, director, finance manager and operations manager).

3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method, which enabled the generation of descriptions grounded in reality (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The questions in the interview guide were open-ended and designed to get in-depth information from the managers and directors of the transport companies in relation to the study objective. Interviews were conducted until the saturation point was reached (Miles and Huberman, 1994), which was after the 15th interview. By the 15th interviewee, the researchers started noticing that the interviewees were presenting similar views on the areas under investigation. Each interview lasted for about 40–60 min.

During the interviews, we asked probing questions whenever the interviewees mentioned events of interest until nothing new was being elicited (Kaawaase, 2022). Probing questions such as “could you describe this? How? Why?” allowed the researchers to get detailed

information about the areas of interest. The interviewees were interviewed from their workplaces at their time of convenience. Both audio recordings (with permission from the interviewees) and notes were taken to ensure the accuracy in the data collected (Uganda Data Protection and Privacy Act, 2019). The study received ethical review and approval as well as institutional permission for publication.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed following the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012). Here, the study deployed a three-stage coding methodology that combines deductive and inductive approaches underpinned by a prior understanding of strategy execution and their manifests (see, Figure 1). The first stage involved coding (1st order coding) of the relevant concepts from the empirical data. At this stage, the “raw” concepts identified were broad as they emerged from the interviewees. In the second stage of coding, the first-stage concepts were narrowed, specified and grouped into what we referred to as second-order themes. In the third stage, the emerging second-order themes were further grouped to culminate into the construct of interest known as the aggregated dimension. The aggregated dimensions were modelled into NVIVO software (Nvivo version 9) to come up with the reality hierarchical model (see Figure 2) that explains the strategy execution.

4. Findings

4.1 Respondents characteristics

From Table 1, gender distribution showed that the majority of the respondents (80.0%) were male. This implies that the males dominate in the execution of strategies in the sector compared to females. Regarding education, results show that the majority (40.0%) had attained a bachelor’s degree. These findings imply that the respondents were knowledgeable enough to understand the concepts under study and their implications for the sector. Regarding experience, most respondents (40.0%) had spent 11–15 years working with the company, implying that these respondents had adequate information the strategy execution

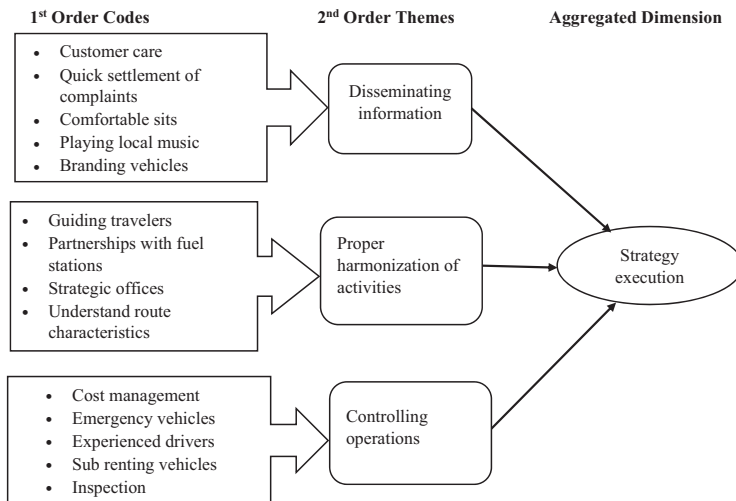
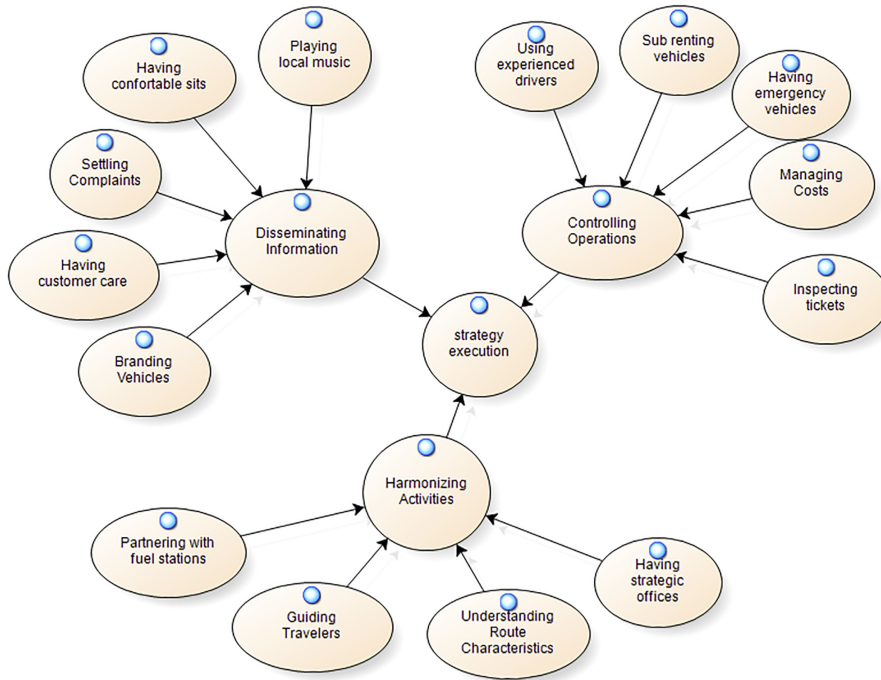


Figure 1. Data analysis and structure

Source(s): Authors’ own work



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2.
A reality hierarchical
model of strategy
execution

Category	Item	Number	100%
Gender	Male	12	80.0
	Female	3	20.0
Education	Certificate	4	26.7
	Diploma	2	13.3
	Degree	6	40.0
Position	Masters	3	20.0
	Finance manager	2	13.3
	Operations manager	3	13.3
	General manager	4	26.7
Experience	Director	6	46.7
	1-5 years	1	6.7
	6-10 years	2	13.3
	11-15 years	6	40.0
	16-20 years	4	26.7
Route	21 years and above	2	13.3
	Western	5	33.3
	Eastern	1	6.7
	Northern	2	13.3
	West Nile	2	13.3
	Central	2	13.3
	Across border	3	20.0

Source(s): Primary data

Table 1.
Background
characteristics of
interviewees

issues since they had stayed for quite some time. Results further indicate that the majority of respondents who participated in the study were directors (46.7%). This implies that employees had the relevant information that the researcher asked about the formulation and execution of strategies in the transport sector. In terms of route, interviewees indicated that their companies (33.3%) were taking the western route. This is attributed to many towns and tourist attractions found mainly in Uganda's western part. Hence, many companies are attracted to the opportunity of transporting travelers and business people on that route.

4.2 How transport companies in Uganda execute strategies

The findings show that transport companies in Uganda generally execute strategies through disseminating quality information, proper harmonization of activities and controlling operations. These themes and subthemes are shown in [Figures 1 and 2](#).

4.2.1 Disseminating quality information. The following excerpts describe how transport companies execute strategies through disseminating quality information.

4.2.1.1 Having good customer care. Interviewee 2 stated "[...] we are courteous while communicating to our customers; we use words such as thank you, sorry, try us next time, etc... This has created a good relationship with our customers. . . . Sometimes we travel with the passengers and interact with them directly to evaluate our services and areas of improvement." Another interviewee stated, "[...] when a customer requests us to stop somewhere to pick up a bite, water or short call, we always abide." Interviewee 6.

Similarly, interviewee 15 stated, "[...] we have customer care numbers written on all our taxis to help our customers with information regarding our services, transport fares, etc. While in transit, our customers are advised to take good care of their belongings as a security measure. Those who forget them, we always keep them at our offices where they can pick them." The above narratives mean that when transport companies give good customer services to their passengers in transit, it attracts more customers and in the long run, companies generate more revenue.

4.2.1.2 Responsiveness to customer complaints. Interviewees mentioned that when disagreements arise between the passengers and the company employees, designated staff react quickly to address any misunderstanding. For instance, interviewee 1 had this to say "[...] when River Katonga busted its banks, vehicles going to west were diverted to take Mpigi-Gomba- Ssembabule route. This was a longer route and we increased fares from 30,000/= to 50,000/- to compensate for the additional kilometers. But after serious complaints from customers who had started abandoning our buses, we reduced the fares to 40,000/- and we were able to get back our customers".

4.2.1.3 Having comfortable vehicles. Interviewee 3 mentioned that, "[...] we travel for longer distances across Uganda . . . we ensure that our buses are adjustable, spaced, fitted with AC and charging and free internet so that a customer can get exact service he/she would enjoy when in their own vehicle". This implies that providing comfort to customers communicates quality services that attract them to continue using the same buses.

4.2.1.4 Playing customized local music. All the interviewees mentioned that playing customized local music makes them happy and appreciates the services offered by the company. Interviewee 3 had this to say "[...] our passengers prefer Congolese music and Ugandan music to western music. So, we play with their preferences. This makes them keep using our buses."

4.2.1.5 Branding vehicles. Interviewees mentioned that branding vehicles help them distinguish themselves from competitors, making it easy for customers to recognize them quickly. For instance, interviewee 10 stated, "[...] our buses are all painted green with the name link bus. We are very visible. Our customers can easily identify and recognize these buses It makes it easy for customers to trust us and travel with us".

4.2.2 *Proper harmonization of activities.* Transport companies revealed that they execute strategies through proper harmonization of activities to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in their daily operations. Interviews with different respondents further confirmed this.

4.2.2.1 *Guiding travelers.* From the data, interviewee 2, for instance, attests to these facts. “[. . .] we use our own brokers whom we have trained well to handle our clients properly. Given that some of our customers are illiterate, they need guidance on travel information.” Interviewee 6 also mentioned that “[. . .] we use Takulas (brokers) to get for us passengers . . . they fill your taxi very fast and you are able to set off on time.”

4.2.2.2 *Partnerships with fuel stations.* Interviewees revealed that they partner with different petrol stations. For instance, interviewees 2 stated that “[. . .] we have partnerships with fuel pumps who give us genuine fuel at a lower market price.” This implies that partnerships with fuel stations help transport companies to operate at a low cost, which helps them to maximize profits.

4.2.2.3 *Having strategic offices.* Interviewee 14 stated, “[. . .] we have set up numerous offices within the different bus parks and upcountry so that we can be very visible to our clients in order to get our services very fast.” This observation underlines that transport companies set up different offices to provide convenience to their customers.

4.2.2.4 *Understanding of route characteristics.* Interviewee 12 stated that “[. . .] you need to assess the nature of businesses that are associated with that kind of route you take. . . . For us we had to choose a busy route which has a lot of tourism activities that looks busy. We have daily customers who travel with us”. Such a finding shows that busy routes help transport companies to operate consistently at full capacity.

4.2.3 *Controlling operations.* This construct describes how the interviewees execute strategies through proper controlling of operations.

4.2.3.1 *Cost management.* Interviewee 1 stated that “[. . .] I own my own petrol station which helps me to balance fuel well which is the biggest operational cost. . . . This helps me to track fuel consumption very well since I am the one who fuels the whole fleet of buses and know the consumption of each bus.” Another interviewee, 12, also mentioned that “[. . .] I take my taxis to the garage by myself and ensure that the mechanics work on them when am around They (mechanics) cannot exaggerate the spares’ cost and cannot quote any spare that has not been used on my vehicle.” These statements imply that the manager’s physical presence helps minimize operating costs.

4.2.3.2 *Having emergency vehicles.* Results from the interviews indicate that having emergency vehicles help transport companies to keep their loyal customers. For instance, interviewee 2 stated that “[. . .] we have over 100 buses and in case of any technical challenge, we simply bring another bus to rescue our passengers. . . . during busy seasons like Christmas, school times and Easter seasons we are able to transport all of them (passengers) without losing them to competitors.” The above response implies that having emergency vehicles ensures continuous operation of activities to satisfy customers’ needs and retaining them.

4.2.3.3 *Use of experienced drivers.* All the interviewees revealed that the use of experienced drivers is a control mechanism to minimize costs. For instance, interviewee 13 said, “[. . .] all our drivers have over eight years. They rarely cause fatal accidents. They are careful on the road”. With interviewee 14 stating that, “[. . .] all our drivers are sourced from already existing companies and have enough experience. We do not risk using inexperienced drivers who can easily mess up with passengers’ life.”. This implies that using experienced drivers minimize penalties that would have happened due to reckless driving.

4.2.3.4 *Sub-renting vehicles.* Interviewee 12, mentioned that “[. . .] we give out our taxis on contract terms and we expect the driver and his conductor to report a certain agreed amount of money to us every day. We set a minimum amount they must pay us and the balance is for them. . . . it motivates them to work hard rather than when we used to give them salary They were reluctant to look for passengers”. The above result suggests that such companies

can get continuous income without making any loss. As such, the companies are saved from spending a lot of money on monitoring the vehicle and paying maintenance costs.

4.2.3.5 Inspection. Interviewees further mentioned that they are able to achieve set targets by inspecting the vehicles when they are in operation. Interviewee 2 mentioned that “[. . .] each bus is verified by over four inspectors from Kampala to Mbarara to ensure that all passengers have tickets to avoid conductors from putting their own passengers without tickets.” The other important aspect of inspection is checking the driving speed. For instance, interviewee 14 had this to say “[. . .] we have a machine that detects speed in each bus. If a driver is over speeding, it sends my boss and me a signal on our phones and I straight away call the driver to stop over speeding. When a driver repeatedly over speeds, we suspend them and we can even terminate their contract with us”. The above responses show that inspection leads to the minimization of cost of repairs and maximization of vehicles’ value.

5. Discussion

Findings indicate that transport companies in Uganda successfully execute their strategies through properly disseminating information. Therefore, proper communication of their operations to the workers and passengers ensures effectiveness and efficiency. For instance, the study revealed that transport firms provide customer care to the travelers and are quick at settling their complaints, which improves the company’s reputation. Also, the results indicate that transport companies play local music in the buses/taxis rather than western music. This strategy brings passengers comfort, making them frequently use the services of such buses. Likewise, branding buses increases the visibility of the company’s buses/taxis. As these buses move through the city, they capture attention and create impressions among a large number of people. This continuous exposure to the brand helps in brand recall and can attract more users of the companies’ services. Such results concur with studies by [Moreno-Gómez et al. \(2023\)](#), who contend that that marketing communication strategy in the form of brand equity generates a long-term competitive advantage among Colombian SMEs. While [Moreno-Gómez et al. \(2023\)](#) add value to this study; it was however done in a developed country. Our study generates new knowledge on strategy execution by using insights from a less developed country, Uganda. The results are also in line with the CAS theory, which states that agents most likely to flourish are those that adapt to changing circumstances which makes the theory relevant to this study.

The findings also show that transport companies in Uganda put numerous controls such as use of experienced drivers, sub renting of vehicles and inspection to enable them succeed in achieving their goals. This implies that when this is done, operational costs are minimized. This is supported by [Rounaghi et al. \(2021\)](#) who mention that strategic cost management leads to the achievement of sustainable competitiveness in a dynamic environment in manufacturing companies. [Razmara et al. \(2018\)](#) further add that safe and secure driving was paramount in improving taxi business performance in Bandar Abbas, Iran. Whereas [Rounaghi et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Razmara et al. \(2018\)](#), add to the body of knowledge on strategy execution, their studies are too specific on cost management and secure driving. Our study however, is more generic as it goes ahead to bring out other elements like inspection, emergency vehicles, use of experienced drivers and sub renting vehicles. This further contributes to the CAS theory, which states that as systems interact with each other, they are capable of reacting to changes in external environmental systems ([Goldstein et al., 2010](#)).

On the harmonization of activities, the study identified that several transport companies in Uganda have partnerships with petrol stations to provide them with low-cost fuel that minimizes costs. Nonetheless, these companies have limited collaborations in other strategic aspects like maintenance and repairs, marketing and financing which hamper the execution of related strategies. Also, transport companies have strategic offices in different regions. Though this is not a requirement by law in Uganda, it helps in coordinating both passengers

and their goods and monitors the vehicles' operations in transit. Similarly, transport firms guide travelers in making travel choices. This improves reputation and retains customers leading to the achievement of marketing strategy. More so, transport firms understand and identify profitable routes to operate on. This enables them to get a lot of business on such routes to finance their set strategies. The above discussions are supported by earlier scholars (Sull *et al.*, 2015; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021) who posted that to execute their strategies; companies must foster coordination across units and build the agility to adapt to changing market conditions. The scholars, however, discussed strategy execution by reviewing the literature. Our study discusses the strategy execution by using theory to explain practice. The CAS theory emphasizes adaptability in operations to match with changing environments, which necessitates them to survive in a volatile industry.

6. Conclusion and implications

The study examined the actions taken by transport companies in Uganda to execute strategies successfully. The findings have shown that successful companies communicate effectively with their customers, coordinate activities and control their operating systems in order to remain competitive in the transport sector.

The contribution of this study is, first, it adds to the body of existing literature on strategy execution by showing how companies especially in the road transport sector that has been largely ignored can survive in a volatile environment. It directly answers calls by Greer *et al.* (2017) and Tawse and Tabesh (2021), for a better understanding of the many factors that contribute to the strategy execution. From the CAS theory, transport firms need to reorganize themselves in a bid to facilitate their adaptability in complex operating circumstances.

Second, the study has significant practical implications for the owners and managers of transport companies. Transport companies should consider setting up a board to oversee the formulation and execution of set strategies. Owners also need to employ experienced and skilled managers and organise refresher training for everyone who is directly playing a role in implementing strategies in the company. In addition, transport companies should also ensure strategic alliances in areas of marketing, finance, maintenance and repairs with key stakeholders. These partnerships will go a long way in minimizing costs and getting genuine service.

Third, to policymakers, while the MoWT plays a great role in licensing transport companies to carry out public transport, there is a need to formulate laws regulating the operations in the sector to ensure that transportation services are provided adequately and that users of these services are protected from excessive prices or unfair practices in the sector. This will protect infant companies from being pushed out of business.

This study has limitations just like any other studies. While the emphasis has been on public transport in Uganda, the study concentrated on only public transport offered by PSV companies, paying less attention to air, rail and water transport. Future studies should consider these other sectors to provide a comparison of how such companies can execute strategies successfully. In addition, although qualitative data provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, there is some self-reporting bias. Additionally, we recommend that longitudinal studies be carried out to understand the strategy execution in volatile environments.

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Further reading

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