Industrial Marketing Management 124 (2025) 266–286

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/indmarman

The influence of key account management on competitive advantage and firm performance: A dynamic capability approach

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Key account management orientation
Key account management capability
Relational capability
Competitive advantage
Performance
B2B supplier

ABSTRACT

Grounded in the dynamic capability view of the firm, the present research examines the mechanism of the influence of key account management orientation on the market and financial performance of B2B supplier firms and proposes a model of key account management orientation–organizational capabilities–competitive advantages–performance relationships. This research offers a nuanced understanding of how strategic orientation in key account management can drive sustainable competitive advantage and operational excellence. Examining the survey data of 568 B2B supplier firms based in Europe and conducting confirmatory factor analysis and covariance-based structural equation modeling through AMOS 23.0, we find that key account management orientation significantly affects relational and key account management capabilities that, in turn, result in differentiation advantage and key account management effectiveness. These competitive advantages subsequently enhance levels of market and financial performance. Moreover, the current research indicates that while formalization and innovativeness attenuate the effects of key account management orientation on relational and key account management capabilities respectively, environmental impact complements these capabilities augmenting key account management effectiveness. Moreover, in the case of managing relationships with key accounts, satisfaction is complementary to the acquired differentiation advantage, increasing levels of financial performance.

1. Introduction

In the current hyper-competitive and high-velocity business environment, managing relationships with key customers, suppliers, and R&D collaborators has become essential (Ivens, Kasper-Brauer, Leischnig, & Thornton, 2024; Ivens, Leischnig, Pardo, & Niersbach, 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Peters, Ivens, & Pardo, 2022). Key account management (KAM) focuses on handling relationships with strategically important customers, who are crucial for a firm's long-term success (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Kadam, Niersbach, & Ivens, 2023). These relationships, although a small subset of the supplier's portfolio, contribute significantly to financial gains (Herhausen, Ivens, Spencer, & Weibel, 2022). Conceptual and empirical research has examined various aspects of KAM (Feste, Ivens, & Pardo, 2022; Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010). For instance, while Speakman and Ryals (2012) evaluate individual key account (KA) managers or KAM teams, Leischnig, Ivens, Niersbach, and Pardo (2018) focus on the organizational implementation of KAM.

The existing literature on KAM has evolved across several key themes. First, the research has emphasized corporate strategy, focusing on the identification and implementation of decisions in alignment with KAM to enhance competitive advantage and seize market opportunities (Guesalaga, 2014; Ivens, Pardo, Salle, & Cova, 2009; Pardo, 1999). Second, studies have examined value creation and co-creation within KAM, arguing that firms must leverage their existing structures and align internal processes to effectively use intelligence, integrate KAM procedures, and adapt to new business models and strategies pertinent to customer industries (Hakanen, 2014; Kumar, Sharma, & Salo, 2019; Pardo, 1997; Ranjan, Friend, & Malshe, 2024). Third, research has addressed the dynamics of KAM teams and intra-firm cooperation, highlighting that poor coordination and communication often lead to KAM failures, whereas successful KAM necessitates collaboration and harmonization (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021). Fourth, the literature has explored the design and

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2024.12.002
Received 1 October 2023; Received in revised form 12 November 2024; Accepted 2 December 2024
Available online 13 December 2024

management of KAM structures, indicating that effective KAM structures require organizational adaptations that prioritize customer demands, sales intelligence, and the development of customer-centric units (Brehmer & Rehme, 2009; Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015). Fifth, KAM performance has been a focal point of research, with studies identifying relational (Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Sharma, 2006), technological (Davies & Ryals, 2014; Salojärvi, Sainio, & Tarkiainen, 2010), organizational (Guenzi, Georges, & Pardo, 2009; Workman, Homburg, & Jensen, 2003), and behavioral drivers (Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 2000; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b) as critical factors. Additionally, recent research has expanded to include topics such as digital marketing capabilities and knowledge gaps (Herhausen, Miočević, Morgan, & Kleijnen, 2020; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021), intra- and inter-organizational identification (Peters et al., 2022), KAM configurations (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2024), and gender issues within KAM (Ivens, 2023).

Despite the extensive literature, a detailed review reveals that previous empirical studies lack any exploration of how the integration of relevant KAM practices affects performance; specifically, existing research offers only isolated insights into KAM, often examining only one or a few practices, which is insufficient for a complete and integrative understanding of the domain (Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023). Moreover, the objective of a systematic KAM approach is to create a competitive advantage and to recognize KAs' potential value early and leverage this potential over the long term (e.g., Guesalaga, Gabrielsson, Rogers, Ryals, & Marcos Cuevas, 2018; Homburg, Workman, & Jensen, 2002). Consequently, KAM performance is of great importance for research and practice and remains one of the key areas for further research in the field of KAM (Peters, 2024). Although prior studies have identified several factors influencing KAM performance, the current state of research lacks an integrative perspective that addresses the interaction among strategic KAM practices affecting performance outcomes (Peters, 2024; Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023).

Addressing this critical gap, the present research focuses on key account management orientation (KAMO), incorporating attitude-related values (customer orientation, top-management commitment, inter-functional coordination) and behavior-related values (ability to customize, top-management involvement, inter-functional support), and empirically examines its influence on market and financial performance. Arguably, the strategic perspective that explains how KAM contributes to a firm's market position, competitive advantage, and performance still requires closer attention (Chaker, Habel, Hewett, & Zablah, 2024; Ivens et al., 2018); thus, casting light on the performance implications of KAMO is a noteworthy contribution to the literature, as this strategic resource has potential for developing organizational capabilities and thus contributing to organizational success (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Itani, Kalra, & Rostami, 2024; Ivens et al., 2018). Moreover, the comprehensive review of the literature indicates that a more nuanced understanding of how firms can effectively capitalize on strategic KAM practices requires insight into the contingencies and/or mechanisms through which these strategic resources are leveraged (Itani et al., 2024; Ivens et al., 2018; Murray, Gao, & Kotabe, 2011; Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023). That is, in the realm of KAM, there is a diverse array of research; nevertheless, studies in this field have not clarified how KAM practices relate to competitive advantage and firm performance (Chaker et al., 2024; Ivens et al., 2018). Accordingly, further empirical investigation is needed to understand the role of organizational capabilities as deployment mechanisms of strategic KAM practices seeing that the capabilities can enhance the effectiveness of KAM and facilitate the reconfiguration of resources essential in a dynamic business environment, thereby enabling suppliers to achieve improved KAM performance outcomes (Chaker et al., 2024; Itani et al., 2024; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2024). Thus, addressing this key research gap, the current research proposes a theoretical framework that integrates key components of KAM practices and sheds light on the contingencies and mechanisms through which they influence B2B supplier firms' market and financial performance.

This research provides important insights for practitioners and scholars as to why some B2B supplier firms are more adept at responding to their key accounts, particularly in the current complex and turbulent business environment (Chatterjee, Feng, Nakata, & Sivakumar, 2023). As the study highlights the performance implications of strategic KAM practices, it enables practitioners and academics to understand how KAMO as a strategic resource leads some B2B supplier firms to thrive while others flounder in the market, disrupted by environmental crises, political instability, and post-Covid-19 challenges (Dixit, Correia, & Gunasekar, 2023; Epler & Leach, 2021). Accordingly, this study explores the mechanism through which KAMO as a strategic resource affects market and financial performance. While experts indicate that KAMO is critical for driving performance (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014), it is important to empirically assess the mechanism through which this strategic resource can enhance market and financial performance (Itani et al., 2024; Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023). This mechanism comprises organizational capabilities and competitive advantages, and a clear understanding of it is significant for B2B supplier firms, as it helps them to effectively implement strategic KAM practices to drive performance (Itani et al., 2024; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2024).

KAM's contribution to competitive advantage and firm performance has been studied from resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capability view (DCV) (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991; Barney & Arikan, 2005; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Ferreira & Ferreira, 2024; Helfat et al., 2023; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Wernerfelt, 1984). These theories uncover the tangible and intangible resources (e.g., information systems with customers, key account managers, customer orientation, senior management support) and dynamic capabilities (e.g., the selection of key accounts, the development of KAM programs, establishment of performance metrics, market sensing, opportunity creation) underpinning KAM (Guesalaga et al., 2018). Moreover, it is argued that top management and KA managers must build KAM capabilities to attain KAM effectiveness and performance in the market, achieve account-related objectives (Herhausen et al., 2022), and support the profitability and financial sustainability of B2B firms (Guesalaga et al., 2018). For instance, it is suggested that top management plays an important role in unlocking organizational resources and mobilizing actors to help KA managers fulfill their role in building relationships with KAs, consistently with the overall organizational objective (Ivens et al., 2018). Like Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014), this study introduces KAMO as a manifestation of firms shifting towards relationship quality with customers.

Successful implementation of KAM, premised upon the development of long-term relationships of mutual benefit, necessitates two categories of values: those related to management's attitude regarding the strategic importance of KAs and those related to the actions necessary for the success of a KAM program. Accordingly, KAMO integrates two sets of values: attitude-related values (customer orientation, top management commitment, inter-functional coordination) and behavior-related values (ability to customize, top management involvement, inter-functional support) (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013). While attitude-related values focus on meeting the individual needs of KAs, ensuring top management's commitment to the importance of KAM, and utilizing resources in a coordinated manner to create superior value for KAs, behavior-related values involve delivering a set of customized activities to KAs, securing senior management's participation in KAM, and offering inter-departmental support to those responsible for KAM (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). Therefore, all these constituents of KAMO represent strategic KAM practices that can contribute to performance, as implementing KAM is a significant driver of performance at organizational and account levels (Homburg et al., 2002; Workman et al., 2003). Besides, as these strategic KAM practices have the potential for developing organizational capabilities and competitive advantages, it is essential to examine the mechanism through which KAMO as a strategic resource contributes to performance (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014;

Itani et al., 2024). Moreover, limited studies have addressed the factors (organizational and external) that the relationship between KAMO and performance might be contingent upon (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015a). Web Appendix 1 illustrates the summary of the related articles.

The present research explores the pivotal role of KAMO in shaping firm performance through the development of relational capabilities and KAM capabilities. In a dynamic and competitive business environment, understanding the mechanisms through which KAMO contributes to firm performance is critical for both scholars and practitioners. This study extends the RBV and DCV by elucidating how KAMO enhances competitive advantages and performance outcomes. Grounded in the DCV of the firm, this research examines the influence of key account management orientation on the market and financial performance of B2B supplier firms and proposes a model of key account management orientation–organizational capabilities–competitive advantages–performance relationships. This research offers a nuanced understanding of how strategic orientation in key account management can drive sustainable competitive advantage and operational excellence.

Thus, the current study aims to make significant contributions to the existing literature on KAM. Considering the significance of KAMO, the current research addresses shortcomings in the existing literature by examining the processes through which KAMO affects firm performance. This examination is based on the following linkages: strategic resources → organizational capabilities → competitive advantage → business performance (Itani et al., 2024; Ketchen, Hult, & Slater, 2007; Murray et al., 2011). As a major theoretical contribution, this study first considers relational and KAM capabilities as the mechanisms of the influence of KAMO on competitive advantages, and thus, contributes to the KAM literature by indicating that KAMO as a strategic resource and relational and KAM capabilities are not mutually exclusive but complementary (Bamel & Bamel, 2018; Makadok, 2001). That is, the organizational capabilities represent the glue that binds the strategic KAM practices together, and they facilitate their effectual deployment in the market place, leading to competitive advantage (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018).

Second, as the study indicates the impacts of relational and KAM capabilities on KAM effectiveness and differentiation advantage, it contributes to the KAM domain by revealing that relational and KAM capabilities are significant determinants of KAM outcomes; hence, their influence on performance results from the creation of competitive advantages for the firm (Efrat, Hughes, Nemkova, Souchon, & Sy-Changco, 2018). Accordingly, extending the KAM literature, the current research posits that relational and KAM capabilities are the main factors that facilitate effective deployment of strategic KAM practices, leading to better value offerings to customers and competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Efrat et al., 2018; Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). Third, the present study illuminates the performance implications of KAM effectiveness and, thus, provides empirical support for the notion that KAs form a significant proportion of a firm's business, thereby exerting significant effects on its overall performance (Herhausen et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). Besides, the study reveals the influence of differentiation advantage on firms' market and financial performance, thus providing empirical evidence for the view that competitive advantages are the main drivers of performance and not simply synonyms or proxies for performance (Bodlaj & Čater, 2022; Tan & Sousa, 2015). Arguably, though there is general consensus that KAM is beneficial for firms, it is essential to understand the possible effect of each of the potential performance drivers of KAM identified in the literature (Herhausen et al., 2022; Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023).

Moreover, the current research casts light on the contingency factors that can influence the associations between KAMO and performance. While prior studies have focused primarily on direct associations between KAMO, relationship quality, and performance (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013, 2015a), there is limited empirical research paying attention to elements that the relationship between KAMO and performance might be contingent upon (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Sandesh, S, S, and Paul, 2023). This study empirically examines the moderating effects of formalization on the relationship between KAMO and relational capability and supports the view that formalized KAM approaches act as a hindrance to effectively responding to the demands of KAs (Workman et al., 2003). Besides, examining the moderating effects of technological and market innovativeness on the relationship between KAMO and KAM capability, the study provides empirical evidence for the notion that radical innovativeness is a considerably costly process that can complicate the development of effective organizational capabilities and limit the firm's capacity to be involved in customer value creation (Story, Boso, & Cadogan, 2015; Tellis, Prabhu, & Chandy, 2009). Furthermore, the current research evaluates the moderating effects of the environmental impact on the association among organizational capabilities and competitive advantage contributing to sustainability marketing by positing that performing sustainable practices result in mutually beneficial relationships with key B2B buyers and superiority in the market (Kapitan, Kennedy, & Berth, 2019). Finally, as the present study examines the moderating effects of satisfaction on associations among competitive advantage and performance, it contributes to the extant literature on relationship quality seeing that most prior studies have evaluated the direct influence of relationship quality on firm performance (e.g., Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014), thus overlooking its contingency roles.

The remaining sections of this article are organized as follows: we first discuss the underpinning theory of the research, followed by the development of hypotheses and the conceptual model. Next, we clarify the methodology and the data analysis, examining the research hypotheses and discussing the findings. Finally, we present the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature review

The concept of "national account" was initially introduced by Roger M. Pegram in 1972 to designate significant customers. Subsequently, terms like "key account," "global account," and "strategic account" gained prominence. KAM involves the identification of KAs within the existing customer base and the utilization of resources and capabilities to foster collaborative, enduring, and mutually advantageous partnerships (Kumar et al., 2019; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b). KAM holds a crucial position in the domain of B2B marketing and, more importantly, the concept of relationship marketing has gained significant acceptance, particularly as an effective approach for managing high-profile customers (Herhausen et al., 2020, 2022; Kumar et al., 2019). Consequently, KAM has emerged as a robust tool within the realm of relationship marketing, serving as a mechanism for cultivating and maintaining strategic customer relationships (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Sandesh et al., 2023). The existing literature on KAM has explored several central themes.

First, studies have concentrated on the identification and implementation of corporate strategies within the framework of KAM. In this context, KAM is viewed as a vital competitive advantage, enabling companies to allocate both internal and external resources effectively to meet corporate objectives and address market challenges (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Guesalaga, 2014). Consequently, corporate strategies, particularly at the top management level, are identified as critical success factors for KAM, contributing to efficient customer portfolio management and successful corporate change management (Tzempelikos, 2015; Workman et al., 2003). Second, research has investigated the creation and co-creation of value in KAM, emphasizing the use of intelligence and the integration of KAM processes to align with business strategies relevant to customer industries (Pardo, 1997; Ranjan et al., 2024). These studies analyze behaviors related to value, such as those that create and claim value, and they closely examine the function of KAM teams as knowledge integrators since these teams play a crucial role in acquiring, assimilating, and applying knowledge to generate value for firms (Hakanen, 2014; Kumar et al., 2019). Third, research has explored KAM teams and intrafirm cooperation, highlighting that the successful implementation and subsequent execution of KAM necessitate extensive coordination and harmonization among various departments and KAs (e.g., Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010). This involves inter-functional alignments, collaborative initiatives, social and professional interactions, and knowledge transfer; therefore, effective KAM depends on team collaboration, corporate coordination, and harmonization (Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021). Fourth, research has focused on KAM structures that ensure alignment between inter-organizational design elements (such as account portfolio definition, account business planning, account-specific value propositions, and account management processes) and intra-organizational design elements (including organizational integration, support capabilities, account performance management, and the profile and skills of account teams) (Kumar et al., 2019). These studies suggest that effective KAM structures necessitate organizational adaptations that prioritize customer needs, leverage sales intelligence, and foster the development of customer-centric units (e.g., Brehmer & Rehme, 2009; Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015). Fifth, research has concentrated on KAM performance, identifying various drivers, such as relational, technological, organizational, and behavioral factors (e.g., Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Davies & Ryals, 2014; Guenzi et al., 2009; Salojärvi et al., 2010; Sengupta et al., 2000; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b; Workman et al., 2003). These studies collectively indicate that the success of KAM largely depends on achieving an optimal strategic, operational, and personal alignment between the supplier firm and KAs, as this alignment facilitates greater investment in relational assets, social bonds, and activities aimed at enhancing satisfaction (Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021; Sharma, 2006). Moreover, recent research has broadened its scope to encompass topics such as digital marketing capabilities and knowledge gaps (Herhausen et al., 2020; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021), intra- and inter-organizational identification (Peters et al., 2022), KAM configurations (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2024), and gender issues in KAM (Ivens, 2023).

Accordingly, the comprehensive review of the existing literature reveals that previous empirical studies on KAM practices and their impact on performance lack integration. These studies typically examine isolated aspects of KAM, thus failing to provide an integrative understanding of the field (Sandesh et al., 2023). Besides, there remains a significant need to explore the strategic perspective of KAM, particularly how it contributes to a firm's market position, competitive advantage, and performance (Chaker et al., 2024; Ivens et al., 2018). Hence, emphasizing the performance implications of KAMO integrating attitude- and behavior-related values represents a noteworthy contribution to the literature, as this strategic resource has the potential to develop the organizational capabilities driving organizational success (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Itani et al., 2024; Ivens et al., 2018). Moreover, the detailed review of the literature indicates that a deeper understanding of how firms can effectively leverage strategic KAM practices requires insights into the contingencies and mechanisms through which these resources are utilized (Itani et al., 2024; Ivens et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2011; Sandesh et al., 2023). Though there is a diverse array of research on KAM, the studies have not sufficiently clarified the relationship between KAM practices, competitive advantage, and firm performance (Chaker et al., 2024; Ivens et al., 2018). While it is acknowledged that KAMO is critical for driving performance (e.g., Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014), empirical research is needed to assess the mechanisms through which this strategic resource can enhance market and financial performance (Itani et al., 2024; Sandesh et al., 2023). These mechanisms encompass organizational capabilities and competitive advantage, and understanding them is crucial for B2B supplier firms aiming to effectively implement strategic KAM practices (Itani et al., 2024). Furthermore, prior studies have focused primarily on the direct relationships between KAMO, relationship quality, and performance (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013, 2015a), with limited empirical attention dedicated to the factors that might moderate these relationships (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Sandesh et al., 2023). Thus, examining the contingency factors that influence the relationships between KAMO, organizational capabilities, competitive advantage, and performance constitutes a significant contribution to the literature (Sandesh et al., 2023).

2.1. Theoretical foundations

The current research is grounded on the DCV that is an extension of the RBV, as it addresses the antecedents of competitive advantage by positing that performance disparities among firms are derived from resources that can be utilized to generate distinctive internal capabilities (Atuahene-Gima, 2005; Barney, 1991; Efrat et al., 2018). The DCV posits that firms require organizational capabilities to effectively reconfigure their resources in order to achieve competitive advantage; that is, a firm's ability to integrate and reorchestrate resources leads to the firm's competitiveness (Bamel & Bamel, 2018; Barreto, 2010; Makadok, 2001). In fact, the capabilities are built on the idiosyncratic characteristics of managers and history-honed routines and culture of the organization; thus, they are considerably more difficult for rivals to replicate, which results in competitive advantage (Ferreira, Coelho, & Moutinho, 2020). Accordingly, the term "resources" refers to the accumulation of tangible and intangible assets that are employed by firms to generate value from the execution of strategic actions (Popli, Ladkani, & Gaur, 2017) whereas "organizational capabilities" refers to a firm's knowledge, skills, and routines that enable it to employ and improve the value of its resources (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Hosseini et al., 2024; Marvi, Foroudi, & Cuomo, 2024). In fact, organizational capabilities empower a firm to implement value-adding tasks effectively, and they are deeply rooted in routines and processes that are difficult to replicate (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008; Wilden, Devinney, & Dowling, 2016). Prior studies in the literature have relied on the RBV and DCV to evaluate the relationships between firm resources, capabilities, and performance (Bodlaj & Čater, 2022; Efrat et al., 2018; Ferreira et al., 2020; Morgan, Vorhies, & Mason, 2009; Reimann, Carvalho, & Duarte, 2022; Rodríguez-Pinto, Carbonell, & Rodríguez-Escudero, 2011). As KAMO integrates both the cultural and the behavioral aspects of market orientation in responding to the needs of KAs, it is conceptualized as a strategic resource that can result in competitive advantage and increased performance (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Guesalaga et al., 2018). Accordingly, the current research has considered KAMO as a strategic resource that can lead to superior performance outcomes.

According to the RBV, possessing distinctive resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable enables a company to attain sustained competitive advantage over the long term; however, this strategic perspective has been criticized for failing to take into account the contingencies and/or the deployment mechanisms through which strategic resources result in competitive advantage and better performance (Morgan et al., 2009; Wilden et al., 2016). Arguably, strategic resources only have potential value, and the realization of this potential requires other organizational elements (Ketchen et al., 2007). That is, based on the DCV, firms need to constantly integrate, reconfigure, and renew their resources through organizational capabilities in line with dynamic market conditions, and this process enables them to upgrade and reconstruct their competencies to achieve sustained competitive advantage (Ferreira et al., 2020).

Previous studies have mostly examined the direct relationship between strategic resources and performance outcomes (e.g., Buli, 2017; Seepana, Huq, & Paulraj, 2021); however, focusing on a direct linkage between resources and performance does not adequately elucidate the development and deployment of strategic resources and their impacts on performance outcomes. Thus, the role of organizational capabilities as the deployment mechanisms of the firm's strategic resources need to be taken into consideration. Accordingly, the existing literature reveals that KAMO is associated with firm performance (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015a); nevertheless, KAMO is a precursor to organizational capability building (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2018), and the true value of KAMO depends on the development of organizational capabilities, such as relational and KAM capabilities (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Herhausen et al., 2022). Web Appendix 1 provides a summary of the related articles. In fact, the development of capabilities is a prerequisite for the attainment of sustained competitive advantage (Ketchen et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2011). On that account, simply evaluating the straightforward relationship between KAMO and performance cannot contribute to the DCV, as it does not take into account the fundamental elements of this view including the strategic resource–organizational capability–competitive advantage–organizational performance linkages. Therefore, drawing on the DCV as our theoretical foundation, we go beyond the simple KAMO–performance association and consider the roles of organizational capabilities (i.e., relational capability and KAM capability) and competitive advantage (i.e., KAM effectiveness and differentiation advantage) in the context of this association.

2.2. KAMO, relational capability, and KAM capability

Customer-centricity has been recognized as a critical factor in strengthening buyer–supplier relationships; in fact, the success of a relationship hinges heavily on the organization's capacity to take on and execute a customer-centered approach and view customer relationships as assets (Day, 2000; Jayachandran, Sharma, Kaufman, & Raman, 2005). While customer orientation focuses on all exchanges with customers throughout the sale process in order to maintain customer relationships, KAM concentrates on the individual account, reallocating resources from other non-key accounts (Homburg et al., 2002). As a result, adopting a flexible mindset, that is, KAMO, is essential for a firm to be able to move away from traditional sales and focus on strengthening relationships with KAs (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013). Accordingly, KAMO manifests itself as the supplier firm's inclination and capacity to effectively address the KA's needs, incorporating cultural and behavioral aspects of market orientation in a B2B setting (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). Yet, there are conceptual differences between KAMO and market orientation, as certain customers are strategically important for the supplier; in fact, market orientation considers all customers to be equally important whereas KAMO differentiates strategically important customers (KAs) from average customers (Homburg et al., 2002). Accordingly, KAMO represents a set of values that reflect the supplier firm's attitude and actual behavior towards the management of the relationship with KAs; these include attitude-related values (customer orientation, top-management commitment, inter-functional coordination) and behavior-related values (ability to customize, top-management involvement, inter-functional support) (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).

Given that value creation in buyer–supplier relationships requires building business bonds and retaining long-term relationships with KAs, a critical organizational capability enabling a supplier to attain competitive advantage and improved performance is the relational capability. This organizational capability denotes the supplier's skills to effectively handle customer relationships so that the two enterprises are eventually able to develop mutually beneficial bonds (Chang & Huang, 2022; Theoharakis, Sajtos, & Hooley, 2009). The relational capability is composed of information sharing and conflict resolution capabilities, as they affect the supplier's customer relationship management capacity (Richards & Jones, 2009; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b). Information sharing denotes the extent to which two enterprises interchange useful and confidential information, like cost structure, whereas conflict resolution refers to the degree to which the two companies can manage disagreements constructively and avoid future conflicts and resentment (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). Accordingly, implementing KAMO practices, a supplier pays careful attention to the needs of the KA and, thus, becomes more inclined to set up effective channels of communication and exchange knowledge that can benefit both parties (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013). Furthermore, when the supplier firm practices KAMO, the top management will be more involved with executing KAM procedures, thus helping to resolve potential conflicts with KAs (Homburg et al., 2002). On that account, we propose the following research hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive association between a supplier's KAMO and its relational capability.

Another organizational capability empowering a supplier firm to respond effectively to the needs of KAs is KAM capability, which can result in competitive advantage and improved performance (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2018). The KAM literature has not given adequate attention to KAM capabilities, and prior research focuses on various capabilities from a range of perspectives. For instance, while some studies focus on the skills KA managers need (e.g., Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b), others discuss firm-level capabilities, locating them on the supplier's side (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018). Accordingly, in line with Ivens et al. (2018) and Herhausen et al. (2022), we focus on firm-level KAM capabilities encompassing reactive (or outside-in) KAM capabilities and proactive (or inside-out) KAM capabilities. In this view, KAM capability is defined as intricate sets of skills and accumulated knowledge that manifest in routines utilized to manage strategically important customers, incorporating multiple actors and input flows (Herhausen et al., 2022). More specifically, reactive KAM capability is mainly related to market sensing and competitor sensing. It enables the supplier firm to comprehend general customer expectations regarding the KAM program, and it makes sure that the supplier's KAM program matches what the market needs; also, proactive KAM capability is triggered by requirements that are specific to the supplier's KAs, such as the development of unique manufacturing processes or supply chain solutions (Ivens et al., 2018). Therefore, supplier firms implementing KAMO practices are able to effectively develop KAM capabilities, as in these firms, not only individual actors but also organizational actors, such as KA managers or KAM teams, use their intelligence and skills in a well-organized manner, and they effectively gather intelligence on KAs' needs and expectations, providing specific valuable solutions and adapting value-adding actions (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013; Herhausen et al., 2022). Moreover, inter-functional coordination and support enables them to involve various functional units, such as supply chain management, operations, or customer service, in the management of KAs and, thus, they are better able to sense the market environment and develop relevant practical solutions to satisfy the specific needs of KAs. On that account, we propose the following research hypothesis:

H2: There is a positive association between a supplier's KAMO and its KAM capability.

2.3. Relational capability, KAM capability, KAM effectiveness, and differentiation advantage

Relational capability refers to the critical organizational competencies that affect the success of a buyer–supplier relationship (Chang & Huang, 2022; Newbert, 2006). Relational capability reflects the supplier's skills, specifically information sharing and conflict resolution, in managing customer relationships effectively so that, eventually, the two companies can develop mutual bonds (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). While information sharing reflects the degree to which the two companies exchange useful and confidential information, such as cost structure, conflict resolution refers to the degree to which the two companies resolve disagreements productively, while avoiding tensions and future ill-will (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). KAM effectiveness refers to the extent to which organizational goals regarding the organization's KAM program are achieved. This implies achieving better relationship outcomes for KAs in comparison to average accounts (Feste et al., 2022; Herhausen et al., 2022; Richards & Jones, 2009). Arguably, supplier firms benefiting from dominant communication competencies are better able to effectively manage their relationships with their customers and achieve desired relationship outcomes; moreover, suppliers that are capable of proficiently resolving conflicts arising in KAM programs are more successful at achieving KAM effectiveness (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013; Workman et al., 2003). In fact, the regular and transparent communication between the supplier and KAs, and the successful settlement of conflicts, will contribute to fostering a cooperative and positive climate in the relationship, and this positive atmosphere precedes the supplier's KAM effectiveness (Bai, Kusi-Sarpong, Khan, & Vazquez-Brust, 2021; Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995; Workman et al., 2003). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's relational capability and its KAM effectiveness.

Relational capabilities are found to be critical factors in the establishment and maintenance of long-term relationships with KAs, thus enabling supplier firms to achieve strategic KAM objectives and differentiation advantage (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). Differentiation advantage refers to the degree to which the firm provides unique offerings in comparison to rivals, taking into account the firm's advantageous brand position (Murray et al., 2011). Relational capabilities play a crucial role in attaining a differentiation advantage, as the establishment and subsequent nurturing of enduring, mutually beneficial relationships with customers constitute a foundational source of sustained competitive advantage (Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1999). It can be argued that competencies in customer relationship management are closely intertwined with the achievement of differentiation advantage (Ling-yee & Ogunmokun, 2001; Foroudi, 2019, 2023). Specifically, proficient supplier firms capable of fostering strong bonds with key customers are better equipped to customize their product offerings and solutions to align with customer expectations, thereby gaining a competitive edge through differentiation. Additionally, competencies in conflict resolution contribute to mutual adaptation and commitment, fostering a supplier's dedication to crafting effective products and solutions that surpass competitors' offerings and consequently securing a distinctive market position. On that account, we believe that relational capabilities are essential competencies that lead a supplier to manage its KAM programs effectively, to offer unique solutions, and, thus, to achieve differentiation advantage. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's relational capability and its differentiation advantage.

KAM as an organizational-level capability pertains to designing, monitoring, and coordinating the KAM program, incorporating all actors, activities, and resources; in fact, organizational KAM competencies are procedures used to ensure the consistency of decisions regarding the overall structure of a firm's KAM program (Homburg et al., 2002; Storbacka, 2012). KAM capability refers to a complex bundle of skills and accumulated knowledge that come to the fore in routines used to manage strategically important customers involving multiple actors as well as input flows (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018); on that account, this organizational capability is not identical to marketing capabilities or sales management capabilities, as they pertain particularly to handling large numbers of clients through customer exchanges (Ivens et al., 2018). More specifically, while reactive KAM capability enables supplier companies to carefully observe the general environment and, hence, to sense the market and competitor actions in order to better manage the relationships with KAs, proactive KAM capability empowers the suppliers to offer their KAs specific solutions, such as manufacturing or supply chain solutions, to better meet their expectations and successfully control their relationships (Ivens et al., 2018). Hence, KAM capability plays a key role in proficiently managing KAM programs and developing mutually beneficial relationships with KAs, thus resulting in KAM effectiveness. Arguably, Herhausen et al. (2022) indicate that both reactive and proactive KAM capabilities have significant positive influences on KAM effectiveness. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's KAM capability and its KAM effectiveness.

Reactive and proactive KAM capabilities are also significant determinants of differentiation, as Herhausen et al. (2022) indicate that in addition to possessing KAM resources, the development of organizational routines is crucial in determining the supplier's competitiveness in the market. It can be argued that, through the development of reactive KAM capabilities, supplier firms can effectively sense market dynamics and competitor actions. This heightened awareness allows them to establish distinctive and mutually beneficial relationships with KAs; additionally, proactive KAM capabilities empower these firms to offer unique solutions tailored to their KAs' specific needs. Consequently, this proactive approach not only enhances their ability to meet the expectations of their KAs but also fosters competitiveness and differentiation within the market (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018). Accordingly, taking into account this discussion, we believe that KAM capability is an essential organizational capability that contributes to differentiation advantage, and so we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's KAM capability and its differentiation advantage.

2.4. KAM effectiveness, differentiation advantage, and performance

KAM effectiveness has been recognized as a competitive advantage that results in higher levels of market performance outcomes and indicates the degree to which desirable relational outcomes for KAs have been achieved (Badawi & Battor, 2020; Workman et al., 2003). More specifically, KAM effectiveness denotes the extent to which a supplier firm can attain better relationship outcomes for KAs relative to ordinary clients, and it also shows the degree to which both enterprises in a buyer–supplier relationship can perceive the relationship to be beneficial, productive, and satisfying (Richards & Jones, 2009). Market performance refers to the extent to which the firm achieves its market-related goals, such as market share and customer satisfaction (Herhausen et al., 2022). Accordingly, supplier firms that employ relevant strategic resources and organizational capabilities to manage their KAM programs are able to develop mutually beneficial relationships with their KAs and accomplish satisfactory relationship outcomes; thus, the acquired KAM effectiveness acts as a competitive advantage and brings the firm market performance results (Herhausen et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). KAs arguably offer valuable market insights and early indications of market changes, and they constitute a significant portion of the supplier firm's business; hence, success in managing these accounts directly influences overall market performance (Herhausen et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's KAM effectiveness and its market performance.

Financial performance refers to the degree to which the firm achieves its financial goals, such as return on investment and profitability (Tzempelikos, 2015). Concerning buyer–supplier relationships, performance can be influenced by the quality of the relationship between the two parties; hence, KAM effectiveness has positive effects on KAM performance and leads to improved financial performance outcomes (Richards & Jones, 2009). In fact, increased KAM effectiveness results in the customer providing more business to the supplier firm, while operational costs decrease due to economies of scale in servicing the KA; additionally, the supplier firm becomes less vulnerable to competitors' initiatives, which it may not need to counter directly (Gounaris &

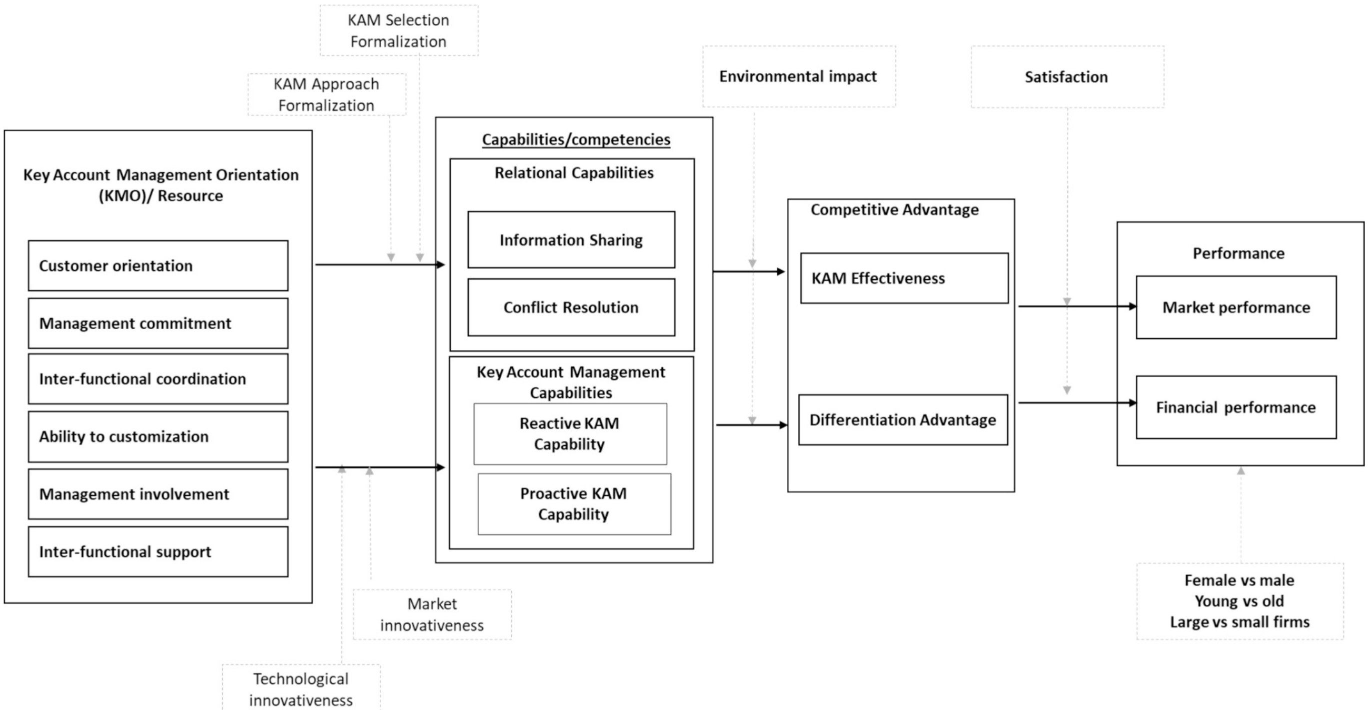

Fig. 1. Research conceptual model.

Table 1
Descriptive profile of respondents.

Respondents' profile		Number (N)	Percent (%)
Gender			
	Male	274	48.2
	Female	294	51.8
Age			
	Under 25 years old	1	0.2
	25–34 years old	54	9.5
	35–44 years old	221	38.9
	45–54 years old	195	34.3
	55–64 years old	89	15.7
	65 years old and over	8	1.4
Education			
	PhD	43	7.6
	Postgraduate	305	53.7
	Undergraduate	219	38.6
	Pre-university	1	0.2
Firm size			
	Small (< 50 employees)	273	48.1
	Medium (50–250 employees)	191	33.6
	Large (> 250 employees)	104	18.3
Years of experience			
	Less than 1 year	51	9
	1 to 3 years	169	29.8
	3 to 5 years	162	28.5
	More than 5 years	186	32.7

Tzempelikos, 2014; Richards & Jones, 2009). On that account, we believe that KAM effectiveness as a competitive advantage element affects financial performance outcomes, and so we propose the following hypothesis:

H8: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's KAM effectiveness and its financial performance.

Previous studies in the literature reveal that resources and capabilities like KAMO and relational competencies contribute to the supplier firm's success in managing relationships with KAs, thus leading to the firm's competitive advantage (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b). Arguably, when supplier firms are able to utilize their resources and competencies to develop unique solutions for their KAs, they create superior value for them and develop a distinctive brand position resulting in differentiation advantage (Murray et al., 2011). Differentiation advantage refers to the degree to which the firm provides unique and high-quality products or services in comparison to rivals, and it also takes the firm's advantageous brand position into account (Andersén, 2021; Zou, Fang, & Zhao, 2003). This competitive advantage serves as a key driver of performance rather than being synonymous with it. Specifically, delivering superior value to customers and meeting their needs more effectively than competitors leads to a differentiation advantage, which in turn contributes to enhanced firm performance (Foroudi, 2019; Nazarian et al., 2017; Tan & Sousa, 2015). Furthermore, prior studies in the literature have revealed that differentiation advantage is among the main predictors of business performance; for instance, Bodlaj and Čater (2022) and Gupta, Malhotra, Czinkota, & Foroudi, 2016a,b indicate that innovation competencies result in differentiation advantage that in turn enhances business performance. Similarly, Zhou, Brown, and Dev (2009) indicated that a firm's differentiation advantage leads to greater market performance. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H9: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's differentiation advantage and its market performance.

The existing literature suggests that differentiation advantage is a crucial factor in determining financial performance, as it equips a firm to surpass its competitors (Murray et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2009). In fact, offering unique and high-quality products and services fosters customer loyalty, and since loyal customers are less sensitive to price changes, firms can command premium prices; besides, an advantageous brand position attracts new customers, thereby enhancing profits and overall financial performance (Foroudi, 2020; Foroudi & Foroudi, 2021; Zhou et al., 2009). Moreover, Murray et al. (2011) reveal that new product development competencies bring about differentiation advantage that subsequently augments firm financial performance. On that account, we believe that differentiation advantage has a positive impact on the financial performance of the firm, and so we propose the following hypothesis:

H10: There is a positive relationship between a supplier's differentiation advantage and its financial performance.

2.5. The moderating effects of KAM formalization and innovativeness

Formalization has been recognized in the existing literature as a crucial component of KAM programs, as it is a significant internal approach to generate value in relationships with KAs (Feste et al., 2022; Leischnig et al., 2018). KAM formalization denotes the degree to which the management of relationships with strategic accounts is governed by established guidelines and procedures, and it is directly related to a firm's KAM strategy (Homburg et al., 2002). However, the existing literature has not yet agreed on whether formalization is beneficial for KAM. In fact, while some studies reveal that the KAM approach and selection formalization enables supplier firms to better manage relationships with their KAs (Feste et al., 2022; Herhausen et al., 2022), other studies indicate that less formalized KAM approaches result in better relationships with KAs and enable the firm to achieve desirable relational outcomes (e.g., Workman et al., 2003). KAM approach formalization refers to the extent to which the treatment of the most important customers is governed by rules and standard procedures (Feste et al., 2022). Certain studies indicate that less formalized KAM approaches result in better relational outcomes and increased KAM effectiveness; specifically, higher levels of formalization introduce more bureaucratic obstacles and reduce the flexibility needed to address the demands of KAs while KAM inherently requires agile and flexible problem-solving strategies to respond effectively to these demands (Feste et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). Therefore, we believe that increased levels of KAM approach formalization attenuate the positive

Table 2
Measurement analysis.

Construct	Mean	SD	Factor loadings	AVE	CR	α
Customer orientation	5.28	1.77	0.75–0.96	0.82	0.95	0.96
Management commitment	5.36	1.73	0.87–0.98	0.87	0.97	0.97
Inter-functional coordination	5.43	1.68	0.88–0.95	0.86	0.94	0.94
Ability to customize	4.98	1.65	0.69–0.96	0.79	0.93	0.93
Management involvement	5.34	1.66	0.76–0.97	0.79	0.95	0.95
Inter-functional support	5.36	1.55	0.93–0.97	0.90	0.96	0.96
Information sharing	5.35	1.41	0.73–0.95	0.79	0.93	0.93
Conflict resolution	5.40	1.48	0.89–0.93	0.85	0.94	0.94
Reactive KAM capability	5.48	1.56	0.86–0.94	0.83	0.93	0.93
Proactive KAM capability	4.46	1.44	0.87–0.94	0.81	0.93	0.92
KAM effectiveness	5.29	1.38	0.87–0.91	0.80	0.94	0.94
Differentiation advantage	5.11	1.79	0.92–0.97	0.90	0.96	0.96
Market performance	5.28	1.42	0.81–0.97	0.79	0.95	0.96
Financial performance	5.39	1.42	0.80–0.99	0.83	0.93	0.93
KAM approach formalization	5.37	1.35	0.64–0.96	0.72	0.91	0.90
KAM selection formalization	5.36	1.53	0.88–0.94	0.85	0.95	0.95
Technological innovativeness	5.14	1.34	0.66–0.89	0.66	0.85	0.84
Market innovativeness	5.32	1.49	0.89–0.97	0.89	0.96	0.95
Environmental impact	5.36	1.40	0.89–0.96	0.86	0.96	0.95
Satisfaction	5.36	1.51	0.71–0.99	0.76	0.90	0.89

SD stands for standard deviation. AVE stands for average variance extracted. CR stands for composite reliability. α stands for Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3
Inter-construct correlation and the square root of the average variance extracted.

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12	X13	X14	X15	X16	X17	X18	X19	X20
X1	***0.90***																			
X2	0.35**	***0.93***																		
X3	0.38**	0.58**	***0.92***																	
X4	0.31**	0.46**	0.43**	***0.89***																
X5	0.40**	0.55**	0.45**	0.46**	***0.89***															
X6	0.20**	0.24**	0.27**	0.23**	0.23**	***0.95***														
X7	0.17**	0.28**	0.32**	0.19**	0.22**	0.22**	***0.88***													
X8	0.24**	0.26**	0.32**	0.25**	0.23**	0.17**	0.41**	***0.92***												
X9	0.13**	0.22**	0.24**	0.19**	0.19**	0.18**	0.21**	0.26**	***0.91***											
X10	0.21**	0.29**	0.32**	0.29**	0.26**	0.21**	0.37**	0.39**	0.31**	***0.90***										
X11	0.22**	0.31**	0.38**	0.26**	0.23**	0.11**	0.06	0.08*	0.12**	0.17**	***0.89***									
X12	0.06	0.21**	0.20**	0.18**	0.07	0.17**	0.33**	0.44**	0.22**	0.37**	0.10*	***0.95***								
X13	0.24**	0.22**	0.26**	0.26**	0.22**	0.18**	0.24**	0.19**	0.17**	0.27**	0.17**	0.25**	***0.89***							
X14	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.12**	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.08*	0.06	0.09*	***0.91***						
X15	0.20**	0.29**	0.32**	0.19**	0.20**	0.23**	0.32**	0.39**	0.23**	0.39**	0.12**	0.26**	0.30**	0.01	***0.85***					
X16	0.13**	0.35**	0.29**	0.27**	0.23**	0.21**	0.39**	0.45**	0.24**	0.41**	0.08*	0.32**	0.23**	0.03	0.47**	***0.92***				
X17	0.28**	0.20**	0.26**	0.22**	0.29**	0.20**	0.27**	0.30**	0.22**	0.44**	0.15**	0.22**	0.26**	0.07	0.41**	0.32**	***0.81***			
X18	0.23**	0.32**	0.31**	0.27**	0.26**	0.16**	0.31**	0.45**	0.21**	0.33**	0.07	0.27**	0.20**	0.00	0.37**	0.43**	0.30**	***0.94***		
X19	0.19**	0.30**	0.32**	0.18**	0.22**	0.23**	0.35**	0.39**	0.18**	0.28**	0.04	0.29**	0.24**	−0.02	0.39**	0.43**	0.30**	0.55**	***0.92***	
X20	0.20**	0.27**	0.29**	0.24**	0.24**	0.20**	0.21**	0.22**	0.14**	0.21**	0.22**	0.22**	0.16**	−0.03	0.31**	0.26**	0.28**	0.20**	0.16**	***0.87***

The bold italicized figures on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVEs. Below-diagonal figures are correlations between constructs. * ($P < 0.05$). ** ($P < 0.01$). X1: Customer orientation. X2: Management commitment. X3: Inter-functional coordination. X4: Ability to customize. X5: Management involvement. X6: Inter-functional support. X7: Information sharing. X8: Conflict resolution. X9: Reactive KAM capability. X10: Proactive KAM capability. X11: KAM effectiveness. X12: Differentiation advantage. X13: Market performance. X14: Financial performance. X15: KAM approach formalization. X16: KAM selection formalization. X17: Technological innovativeness. X18: Market innovativeness. X19: Environmental impact. X20: Satisfaction.

impacts of KAMO on relational capabilities, and so we propose the following hypothesis:

H11a: KAM approach formalization weakens the relationship between a supplier's KAMO and its relational capability.

KAM selection formalization is defined as the extent to which the selection of the most important customers is governed by rules and standard procedures (Feste et al., 2022). In addition to the general formalization of KAM approaches, the processes for selecting KAs are crucial for achieving desirable relational outcomes and KAM effectiveness; arguably, selecting inappropriate accounts, whose business strategies focus solely on operational efficiency and price advantages, can lead to negative effects, such as opportunity costs (Storbacka, 2012). Therefore, choosing the right KAs is essential for achieving successful relational outcomes and KAM initiatives. Moreover, prioritizing strategic account relationships is a fundamental process in KAM and a key to its effectiveness; nevertheless, formalized selection procedures reduce the flexibility needed to choose the right KAs and prioritize strategic relationships, and high levels of formalization hinder the ability to provide special treatment for selected KAs (Feste et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). Accordingly, we believe that increased levels of KAM selection formalization attenuate the positive impacts of KAMO on relational capabilities, and so we propose the following hypothesis:

H11b: KAM selection formalization weakens the relationship between a supplier's KAMO and its relational capability.

Innovativeness has been considered as a competency bringing about competitiveness and better performance outcomes (Lee, O'Cass, & Sok, 2016; Tsai, 2015). It denotes a firm's willingness to embrace new concepts in order to develop and introduce new products; more specifically, it reflects the extent to which the newly developed products are novel and superior in comparison to those of rivals (Cillo, De Luca, & Troilo, 2010). Innovativeness can be divided into market innovativeness and technological innovativeness. While market innovativeness focuses mainly on enhancing customer benefits based on market insights, technological innovativeness, which refers to the extent to which firms highlight state-of-the-art technologies in their new products (Ding & Ding, 2022; Foroudi, Akarsu, Marvi, & Balakrishnan, 2021), mostly emphasizes the utilization of these technologies (McNally, Cavusgil, & Calantone, 2010). Though technological innovativeness can create value, prior studies indicate that considerably higher levels of technological innovativeness can reduce the company's capacity to build up organizational capabilities and achieve advantageous performance outcomes, as pursuit of radical innovation is a markedly expensive undertaking that consumes a considerable share of firm resources and overstretches budgetary constraints (e.g., Foroudi, 2019; Story et al., 2015). Moreover, supplier firms tend to rely on laws to safeguard intellectual property rights, using patents, copyrights, and trademarks; thus, this process complicates the relationship between the supplier firm and other stakeholders, affecting the ability to manage relationships with KAs (Sheng, Zhou, & Lessassy, 2013). On that account, we propose the following hypothesis:

H12a: Technological innovativeness weakens the relationship between a supplier's KAMO and its KAM capability.

Market innovativeness refers to the degree by which firms increase the level of novelty and uniqueness to highlight new product features and customer benefits (Ding & Ding, 2022). Certain studies indicate that high levels of market innovativeness can cause adoption barriers for customers; besides, firms tend to encounter considerable costs when building new markets or introducing new products into existing markets (Kock, Gemünden, Salomo, & Schultz, 2011). Arguably, in the case of high innovativeness, existing capabilities might be cannibalized, and complementary resources might lose their value, as they cannot be used in the new context; thus, as the resource configurations required for new products differ from existing ones, more organizational costs are incurred, and the firm's ability to provide effective and successful solutions is limited (Kock et al., 2011; Story et al., 2015). Moreover, an excessive focus on market innovativeness can result in a constrained set of opportunities being available for the organization, as it diverts managers' focus from a "me-too" strategy that has been found to be effective for generating value for customers (Tellis et al., 2009). On that account, we propose the following hypothesis:

Table 4
Assessment of the structural models.

Structural model statistics	Main effects (Model 1)	Interaction effects (Model 2)
χ^2, df, IFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA	4731.80, 1502, 0.91, 0.91, 0.91, 0.06	5558.50, 1914, 0.92, 0.91, 0.92, 0.05
Path	Path estimate	Path estimate
KAMO → RC	0.67 (6.77)**	0.48 (6.00)**
KAMO → KAMC	0.94 (6.21)**	0.71 (6.24)**
RC → KAME	−0.22 (−2.84)**	−0.13 (−1.67)
RC → DA	0.62 (6.48)**	0.61 (6.09)**
KAMC → KAME	0.58 (5.74)**	0.74 (6.08)**
KAMC → DA	−0.07 (−0.98)	−0.12 (−1.29)
KAME→ MP	0.13 (3.16)**	0.11 (2.74)**
KAME → FP	0.09 (2.25)*	0.10 (2.28)*
DA → MP	0.19 (4.74)**	0.18 (4.40)**
DA → FP	0.06 (1.45)	0.07 (1.78)[a]
Interactions		
KAMO x KAMAF → RC		−0.35 (−4.03)**
KAMO x KAMSF → RC		−0.01 (−0.13)
KAMO x TI → KAMC		−0.21 (−2.90)**
KAMO x MI → KAMC		−0.21 (−2.96)**
RC x EI → KAME		0.22 (2.70)**
RC x EI → DA		−0.06 (−0.85)
KAMC x EI → KAME		0.16 (1.94)[a]
KAMC x EI → DA		−0.01 (−0.20)
KAME x ST → MP		−0.06 (−1.50)
KAME x ST → FP		−0.01 (−0.39)
DA x ST → MP		−0.03 (−0.80)
DA x ST → FP		0.08 (1.91)[a]
Controls		
Gender → MP / FP	0.00 (−0.19) / 0.01 (0.28)	0.00 (−0.13) / 0.01 (0.38)
Age → MP / FP	0.08 (2.08)* / -0.02 (−0.63)	0.07 (1.93)[a] / -0.01 (−0.35)
Firm size → MP / FP	0.00 (−0.12) / 0.03 (0.77)	0.00 (−0.06) / 0.03 (0.77)

T-values are in parentheses. [a](P < 0.10). * (P < 0.05). ** (P < 0.01). KAMO: Key Account Management Orientation. RC: Relational Capability. KAMC: Key Account Management Capability. KAME: Key Account Management Effectiveness. DA: Differentiation Advantage. MP: Market Performance. FP: Financial Performance. KAMAF: Key Account Management Approach Formalization. KAMSF: Key Account Management Selection Formalization. TI: Technological Innovativeness. MI: Market Innovativeness. EI: Environmental impact. ST: Satisfaction.

H12b: Market innovativeness weakens the relationship between a supplier's KAMO and its KAM capability.

2.6. The moderating effects of environmental impact and satisfaction

In today's high-velocity business environment, supplier firms' sustainable practices and operations and the ways they are managed have become critical for the development of pertinent marketing strategies resulting in competitive advantage (Vachon & Klassen, 2008). In fact, acting sustainably has become paramount for managing long-term buyer–supplier relationships and for achieving competitiveness, as three-quarters of B2B buyers dismiss potential supply chain partners who fail to meet sustainability criteria (Kapitan et al., 2019). One of the most important sustainability practices implemented by successful suppliers is consideration of the environmental impact of the company and its products; accordingly, environmental impact denotes the extent to which the supplier controls the environmental consequences of its operations and products (Kapitan et al., 2019). Prior studies in the literature indicate that executing such sustainability practices unlocks better market positions and competitive advantage; arguably, supplier firms who are involved in sustainability marketing and actually control the environmental impact of their operations are better able to manage their relationships with B2B buyers and achieve product and brand differentiation (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Chiou, Chan, Lettice, & Chung, 2011). Therefore, we believe that supplier firms' concern for the environmental impact of their products strengthens the associations between their relational capabilities and competitive advantage, and so we propose the following hypothesis:

H13: Environmental impact strengthens the relationships between a supplier's relational capability and its a) KAM effectiveness and b) differentiation advantage.

As environmental impact refers to the degree to which the supplier firm controls the environmental consequences of its operations and products, execution of this sustainability practice indicates that the firm is more adept at sensing the market environment and responding to the needs of key B2B buyers (Kapitan et al., 2019). Additionally, the firm has better control over its procedures and operations and is able to provide pertinent solutions for key B2B buyers, thus benefiting from effective and mutually rewarding relationships and brand differentiation (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Chiou et al., 2011). On that account, we believe that supplier firms' concern for the environmental impact of their goods and services strengthens the associations between their KAM capabilities and competitive advantage, and therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H14: Environmental impact strengthens the relationships between a supplier's KAM capability and its a) KAM effectiveness and b) differentiation advantage.

The extant literature indicates that the level of satisfaction in buyer–supplier relationships plays an essential role in the attainment of performance, particularly in B2B contexts (Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Richards & Jones, 2009; Tzempelikos, 2015). Satisfaction denotes the degree to which the supplier has the potential to sustain and/or augment the level of business the KA offers to the supplier, and it involves the assessment of the quality of the buyer–supplier relationship (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). Satisfaction in buyer–supplier relationships has been identified as a critical determinant of supplier firms' performance, as a significant portion of the supplier's business is derived from the KAs, which, in turn, affects the firm's overall performance (Workman et al., 2003). Accordingly, satisfied KAs are more willing to continue their business with the firm, and this mutually beneficial relationship brings about higher levels of market and financial performance (Tzempelikos, 2015). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H15: Satisfaction strengthens the relationship between a supplier's KAM effectiveness and its a) market performance and b) financial performance.

In other words, when levels of satisfaction with the supplier firm improve, the supplier receives more orders from the KAs, and this enhanced beneficial relationship results in a reduction in operational costs and less vulnerability to competitors' actions (Jones, Richards, Halstead, & Fu, 2009). Furthermore, prior studies indicate that satisfaction concerning buyer–supplier relationships is a main predictor of financial and non-financial performance (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Gupta, Foroudi, & Yen, 2018; Tzempelikos, 2015; Marvi, Zha, & Foroudi, 2024). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis regarding the moderating roles of satisfaction – the proposed research model can be seen in Fig. 1.

H16: Satisfaction strengthens the relationship between a supplier's differentiation advantage and its a) market performance and b) financial performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection and sample characteristics

Using an online survey, KA managers and other units with pertinent job positions, such as national, regional, and global account managers and other relevant job positions in small, medium-sized, and large enterprises (operating in various industries, such as IT, automotive, pharmaceuticals, consumer goods, etc.) were canvassed in Europe in 2023. The online survey was open to participants via a shared link to an online survey platform, and they were contacted through emails and professional networks, such as LinkedIn. To further persuade the respondents to take part in the survey, a managerial summary of study findings was offered as a reward. Moreover, the respondents were assured that their participation would be voluntary and would be completely anonymous. As a result, a relatively high response rate of 30 % was achieved. Furthermore, as the initial step in the sampling process, a sample cleaning procedure was implemented to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information provided in the study. Accordingly, responses related to participants with current positions outside of KAM and responses with considerable amounts of missing data were excluded from the analysis (32 responses). Thus, this sampling procedure resulted in a valid data set of 568 responses for further analysis. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. As shown in the table, 51.8 % of respondents were female while 48.2 % were male. Concerning the age of respondents, most were 35 to 44 years old (38.9 %), and regarding their education, most had finished their postgraduate studies (53.7 %). In regard to their experience, the majority of those surveyed had been engaged in the field for more than five years (32.7 %), and concerning the size of their organizations, 51.9 % were considered as medium-sized and large firms.

3.2. Measurement

The current research's constructs were measured by adopting measures from previous studies and standard seven-point Likert-type scales were utilized. For the measurement of KAMO incorporating six subdimensions, namely, customer orientation, top-management commitment, inter-functional coordination, ability to customize, top-management involvement, and inter-functional support, relevant scales including 25 measurement items were adopted from Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014). Likewise, relational capability including two subdimensions, namely, information sharing and conflict resolution, was measured using the scales provided by Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014). KAM capability incorporating two sub-constructs of reactive KAM capability and proactive KAM capability was measured employing the scales provided by Herhausen et al. (2022). Concerning competitive advantage, to measure KAM effectiveness, a four-item scale was adopted from Feste et al. (2022), and a three-item scale was adopted from Murray et al. (2011) to measure differentiation advantage. Regarding performance outcomes, market and financial performance was measured using the relevant scales provided by Herhausen et al. (2022) and Tzempelikos (2015). In respect of the moderating variables, KAM approach and selection formalization was measured employing the scales provided by Feste et al. (2022). For the measurement of technological and market innovativeness, pertinent scales were adopted from Ding and Ding (2022). To measure environmental impact, a four-item scale was adopted from Kapitan et al. (2019). Finally, to measure satisfaction, a three-item scale was adopted from Guesalaga (2014). The full description of the measurement scales and items used in the present research can be found in Appendix 1.

3.3. Analysis

Prior to hypotheses testing, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted through AMOS 23.0 to ensure that the scales benefit from satisfactory measurement properties. Then, to examine the research hypotheses, covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) was utilized, as this approach incorporates multiple measures of the concepts to reduce measurement error, is considered suitable for representing theoretical concepts, and produces a more reliable estimate of the relationships among the constructs (Foroudi et al., 2023; Foroudi, Marvi, & Cuomo, 2024; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Furthermore, when the research is meant to test or confirm a theory, CB-ESM is given priority over its alternatives (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Accordingly, the structural model assessment includes two models using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 23.0. First, a baseline model was utilized to evaluate the main effects whereas, in the second phase, an interaction model was employed to assess the interaction effects.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

In order to assess the research constructs' measurement properties and evaluate their validity, reliability, and robustness, CFA was conducted. The fit indices reveal an acceptable model fit, with $\chi^2 = 7094.94$, df = 2499, IFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.05. As shown in Table 2, all standardized factor loadings exceed 0.6, and they are statistically significant at the 0.01 level; besides, average variance extracted (AVE) values for the research constructs are higher than the satisfactory level of 0.5, thus indicating the convergent validity of the research constructs (Foroudi & Dennis, 2023; Hair et al., 2014). Concerning the internal consistency reliability of the research constructs, all reliability values (i.e., Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability) are above the threshold of 0.7, thus representing satisfactory levels of reliability (Hair et al., 2014). Moreover, to make certain that all the research constructs benefit from discriminant validity, the square roots of AVEs were compared with inter-construct correlation values. According to Table 3, the square roots of AVEs exceed the correlation values; therefore, the discriminant validity of the research constructs is achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Finally, as a single-informant approach was utilized for data collection, assessment of common method bias (CMB) was taken into consideration. To do so, we conducted the Harman's single factor test, which is a widely applied technique when a single-informant approach is utilized (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). This examination necessitates implementation of an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) while limiting the number of extracted factors to one. The results of the EFA indicate that the single factor accounts for merely 26.5 % of the total variance and, thus, CMB is not a main concern. Overall, all research constructs, therefore, exhibit satisfactory measurement properties, and we can proceed with structural model assessment.

4.2. Structural models

In line with the procedures recommended by Ping (1995), the research hypotheses were tested by applying CB-SEM, and two structural equation models were employed using maximum likelihood estimation. In order to test H1 to H10, a main effect model with direct paths among the research constructs was estimated. The results of the baseline structural model indicate that the model fits the data sufficiently well, with $\chi^2 = 4731.80$, df = 1502, IFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.91, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06. Second, in order to test the moderating effects, H11 to H16, an interaction model was estimated. To operationalize the interaction terms, first, the predictor and moderating variables were mean centered to inhibit the issue of multi-collinearity, and then, single item indicators representing the product of the variables were utilized (Morgan et al., 2009; Ping, 1995). Similarly, the interaction model's fit indices, $\chi^2 = 5558.50$, df = 1914, IFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, CFI = 0.92, and RMSEA = 0.05, indicate satisfactory statistical power enabling us to have confidence in the results. Table 4 presents the results of the assessment of the structural models.

As shown in the table, KAMO exerts a significant positive influence on relational capability ($\beta = 0.67$, $P < 0.01$) and KAM capability ($\beta = 0.94$, $P < 0.01$); thus, H1 and H2 are supported. Concerning H3 to H6, the results indicate that relational capability significantly and positively influences differentiation advantage ($\beta = 0.62$, $P < 0.01$) whereas KAM capability affects KAM effectiveness ($\beta = 0.58$, $P < 0.01$); thus, only H4 and H5 are supported. Regarding the influences of competitive advantage on performance outcomes, H7 to H10, the results show that similar to KAM effectiveness significantly affecting market performance ($\beta = 0.13$, $P < 0.01$) and financial performance ($\beta = 0.09$, $P < 0.05$), differentiation advantage exerts significant positive effects on market performance ($\beta = 0.19$, $P < 0.01$) and financial performance ($\beta = 0.07$, $P < 0.10$); thus, the related hypotheses are supported.

Regarding the moderating effects of KAM approach and selection formalization, H11a and H11b, the analysis reveals that KAM approach formalization significantly weakens the relationship between KAMO and relational capability ($\beta = -0.35$, $P < 0.01$), thus supporting H11a. Concerning the moderating effects of innovativeness, the analysis shows that both technological innovativeness ($\beta = -0.21$, $P < 0.01$) and market innovativeness ($\beta = -0.21$, $P < 0.01$) significantly weaken the association between KAMO and KAM capability, thus supporting H12a and H12b. Regarding the moderating effect of the environmental impact, H13 and H14, the results reveal that consideration of the environmental impact of the company and products significantly complements relational capability, thus affecting KAM effectiveness ($\beta = 0.22$, $P < 0.01$), and it also strengthens the relationship between KAM capability and KAM effectiveness ($\beta = 0.16$, $P < 0.10$), thus supporting H13a and H14a. Moreover, regarding the moderating effects of satisfaction, H15 and H16, the analysis shows that satisfaction only strengthens the association between differentiation advantage and financial performance ($\beta = 0.08$, $P < 0.10$), thus supporting H16b. Finally, concerning the control variables, the results indicate that only KA managers' age significantly affects market performance ($\beta = 0.08$, $P < 0.05$); hence, the younger the KA managers, the better the market performance.

5. Discussion-theoretical and practical implications

The present study provides important findings contributing to the extant KAM literature, specifically by casting light on the contingencies and mechanisms through which KAMO results in enhanced market and financial performance. The study reveals that KAMO is a critical strategic resource enabling supplier firms to develop relational competencies. KAMO as the manifestation of the supplier's paradigm shift towards a relationship-marketing approach to design and implement KAM programs sets the grounds for certain relational skills to flourish, namely, information sharing and conflict resolution (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). That is, when the supplier firm is committed to being customer oriented, and when top management shows high levels of commitment and involvement in KAM programs, the firm is better able to resolve conflicts with KAs and to share essential information with them. Accordingly, this finding expands the literature on the implications of KAMO, indicating that KAMO is a significant prerequisite for the development of relational competencies, particularly information sharing and conflict resolution (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b). This study also reveals that KAMO empowers supplier firms to develop outside-in and inside-out KAM competencies. That is, when the supplier firm is customer oriented, and top management is actively involved in KAM practices, it is better able to develop organizational routines pertaining to designing, monitoring, and coordinating the KAM program. Hence, by leveraging KAMO as a strategic resource and developing effective organizational routines, the firm actively senses the market environment to better manage relationships with KAs and offers specific manufacturing or supply chain solutions to effectually meet their expectations and control the relationships. This finding significantly adds to the literature on the implications of strategic KAM practices, as it provides empirical support for the notion that strategic resources are prerequisites for the development of organizational capabilities, and KAMO plays a key role in building such competencies (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Murray et al., 2011; Seepana et al., 2021).

5.1. Relational capability vs KAM capabilities

According to the findings, the development of relational capabilities, namely, information sharing and conflict resolution, results in higher levels of differentiation advantage for B2B supplier firms. In fact, the ability to create long-lasting and mutually-beneficial relationships with customers has become paramount for survival, as these relational competencies are among the main drivers of sustained competitive advantage (Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1999). Furthermore, this result extends the findings of previous studies indicating that the development of relational competencies, particularly the building up of cooperative long-lasting relationships with business partners, brings about enhanced levels of differentiation advantage (Ling-yee & Ogunmokun, 2001). The results also reveal that relational capabilities do not have a significant impact on KAM effectiveness.

In contrast, KAM capability is found to be a significant determinant of supplier firms' KAM effectiveness. This finding adds to the current body of knowledge on the implications of KAM capabilities, as it empirically reveals that establishing organizational routines, such as KAM capability, significantly determines the outcomes in KAM, and both reactive and proactive KAM capabilities are among the main drivers of KAM effectiveness (Herhausen et al., 2022).

5.2. KAM effectiveness, differentiation advantage, and performance

Moreover, the results reveal that KAM effectiveness is a significant determinant of market and financial performance. That is, the more the supplier firm achieves better relationship outcomes for its KAs, the more it achieves market-related and financial goals, such as increased market share, customer satisfaction, and return on investment. This result extends the findings of previous research, indicating that KAs represent a substantial percentage of the firm's business; thus, performing well with these accounts is directly reflected in the firm's performance (Herhausen et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). Additionally, according to the results, differentiation advantage results in enhanced levels of market and financial performance. That is, differentiation advantage as a competitive advantage is a main driver of performance rather than a synonym or proxy for performance (Bodlaj & Čater, 2022; Tan & Sousa, 2015). This finding expands the literature on the role of differentiation advantage in achieving superior performance, as it provides empirical support for the notion that offering a superior value to customers and meeting their needs better than rivals do enables the firm to achieve higher performance outcomes (Bodlaj & Čater, 2022; Morgan, Feng, & Whitler, 2018; Morgan, Kaleka, & Katsikeas, 2004).

5.3. Contingency factors

Regarding the influences of contingency factors on associations among KAMO, organizational capabilities, competitive advantage, and performance, the findings reveal that KAM approach formalization attenuates the impacts of KAMO on relational capability. In fact, as there is heterogeneity among KAs, formalized approaches hinder the provision of special treatment to customers, and this finding is in line with the study of Workman et al. (2003), which states that formalizing the approach to KAs leads to bureaucracy and impedes flexibility in responding to the demands of KAs; thus, lower levels of formalization bring about more desirable relational outcomes. The results also demonstrate that technological and market innovativeness act as suppressors of the association among KAMO and KAM capability; accordingly, B2B supplier firms should be cautious about adopting highly innovative procedures in responding to the demands of KAs. In fact, radical innovativeness impedes the development of KAM capability since it is a considerably costly process, consuming a substantial proportion of firm resources and shifting managers' attention from a me-too strategy that has been found useful for customer value creation (Story et al., 2015; Tellis et al., 2009). Moreover, this study reveals that consideration of the environmental impact of the company and products is an important factor complementing the development of relational and KAM capabilities, which, in turn, result in enhanced levels of KAM effectiveness. Accordingly, supplier firms that are competent in sustainability marketing practices and that control the environmental consequences of their actions are better able to meet their customers' expectations and develop effective solutions for them. This finding is a significant contribution to the literature, as it provides empirical support for the view that supplier firms that are involved in sustainability marketing and that actually monitor the environmental impact of their operations are capable of effectively managing relationships with B2B buyers and KAs (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Kapitan et al., 2019). Finally, the results indicate that satisfaction strengthens the influence of differentiation advantage on the firm's financial performance. Therefore, satisfaction in buyer–supplier relationships complements supplier firms' differentiation advantage in achieving higher levels of financial performance, and this finding expands the literature on the performance implications of relationship quality, indicating that satisfaction is a significant determinant of financial performance outcomes (Tzempelikos, 2015; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015b).

5.4. Theoretical implications

As a major concept in the key account management field, KAMO has attracted considerable attention from researchers. Despite the increasing strategic importance of managing inter-organizational relationships with KAs, there is a limited number of empirical studies casting light on the process through which KAMO influences supplier firms' performance. On that account, the current research examined the roles of organizational capabilities (i.e., relational and KAM capabilities) and competitive advantage (i.e., KAM effectiveness and differentiation advantage) in the KAMO-performance relationship. Furthermore, the present research has assessed how internal and relationship-related factors moderate the aforementioned relationships. Thus, by developing a model of KAMO–organizational capabilities–competitive advantage–performance relationships, we provide significant contributions to the KAM literature. The study of KAM's strategic contribution fills a critical gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of how KAM influences firm performance in dynamic and uncertain market conditions. In practical terms, our research offers valuable guidance for managers seeking to enhance their firm's competitiveness and performance through effective KAM practices. The insights gained from this study are particularly timely and relevant given the ongoing market disruptions and the need for firms to adapt their strategies accordingly. Moreover, KAMO's unique combination of these dimensions makes it an ideal mediating variable. Its comprehensive nature allows it to bridge the gap between strategic intent and operational execution, thereby mediating the relationship between KAM practices and firm performance. Other variables might capture only specific aspects of this process, but KAMO's multidimensionality provides a more complete and nuanced understanding of how KAM influences performance.

First, this study indicates that KAMO as a strategic resource enables B2B supplier firms to develop relational and KAM capabilities. Therefore, this finding significantly contributes to the KAM literature, indicating that strategic KAM practices and relational and KAM capabilities are not mutually exclusive but complementary (Bamel & Bamel, 2018; Makadok, 2001). That is, relational and KAM capabilities are processes that activate and harness the potential of strategic KAM practices through combining, renewing, and developing them (Barreto, 2010; Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). Accordingly, KAMO as a strategic resource is reconfigured and leveraged effectively through organizational capabilities (i.e., relational and KAM capabilities) in order to match the market conditions and achieve sustained competitive advantage (Ivens et al., 2018; Wilden et al., 2016). Second, this study reveals that KAM capability brings about higher levels of KAM effectiveness. This finding contributes to the literature on the implications of KAM practices, as it posits that KAM capability represents the glue that binds together strategic assets, such as attitudinal and behavioral elements of KAMO, and it facilitates their effective deployment in the marketplace, resulting in KAM effectiveness and competitive advantage (Herhausen et al., 2022; Hooley, Broderick, & Möller, 1998; Ivens et al., 2018). Therefore, KAM capabilities act as organizational routines through which supplier firms alter and orchestrate their KAMO practices in order to effectively meet KAs' expectations, minimize conflicts, maximize complementarities inside and outside the firm, and create value-adding strategies that lead to sustained competitive advantage (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Ivens et al., 2018; Teece, 2012).

Third, this study shows that relational capability empowers supplier firms to achieve differentiation advantage. This finding empirically supports the role of KAM and the relationship marketing approach in achieving competitive advantage and performance outcomes, indicating that relational capabilities have indirect effects on performance; more specifically, their influence on performance comes from the creation of competitive advantage for the firm (Efrat et al., 2018). That is, through the development of relational capabilities (i.e., information sharing and conflict resolution competencies), supplier firms are more proficient at reducing conflicts, enhancing mutual communication channels, comprehending the unique needs of their KAs, and providing effective solutions that meet KAs' expectations; hence, these organizational routines are the main determinants of the firm's differentiation advantage. This result contributes to the notion of KAM and relationship marketing, revealing that through the establishment of effective relationships with KAs, firms develop competencies to perform a coordinated set of KAM practices and deploy these strategic resources in a way that leads to firms offering better value to customers and obtaining competitive advantage (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). Thus, the current research contributes to the extant KAM literature by providing a better understanding of how the relational capabilities lead to competitive advantage (Barney, Wright, & Ketchen, 2001; Efrat et al., 2018; Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014).

Fourth, this study indicates that KAM effectiveness brings about higher levels of market and financial performance. This finding contributes to the extant literature on KAM, as it clarifies the performance implications of KAM effectiveness. Arguably, this result serves as empirical evidence for the notion that KAs constitute a significant proportion of a firm's business, thereby exerting a considerable influence on its overall performance. In fact, as KAs typically possess valuable insights into market dynamics and are adept at signaling impending changes, excelling in managing these accounts directly affects the firm's standing in the market. Furthermore, effective management of KAs often serves as a reference point or exemplar of a firm's capabilities, influencing other customers' purchasing decisions based on the prestige associated with these accounts (Herhausen et al., 2022; Workman et al., 2003). Consequently, KAM effectiveness emerges as a pivotal determinant of firm performance. Similarly, the study reveals that differentiation advantage leads to enhanced market and financial performance. This finding supports the notion that competitive advantage are not synonyms or proxies for performance, but they manifest themselves as the main drivers of performance (Bodlaj & Čater, 2022; Tan & Sousa, 2015). Moreover, this result empirically supports the roles of

Table 5
Future research avenues.

Key construct	Definition	Future research direction	Key reference
Key account management orientation (KAMO)	KAMO represents a set of values reflecting the supplier's attitude and actual behavior towards the management of the relationship with KAs; these include customer orientation, management commitment, inter-functional coordination, ability to customize, management involvement, and inter-functional support.	• Examining how KAMO interacts with other strategic orientations, such as entrepreneurial orientation, to influence organizational capability development	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2013, 2014)
Relational capability (RC)	RC reflects the supplier's skills, specifically information sharing and conflict resolution, in managing customer relationship effectively so that eventually the two companies can develop mutual bonds.	• Examining complementarity between relational capability and other theoretically and managerially meaningful capabilities, such as project management capability, which might transform the effects of KAMO on competitive advantages and performance	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014) Hengstebeck et al. (2022)
Key account management capability (KAMC)	KAMC refers to a complex bundle of the skills and accumulated knowledge that materialize in routines used to manage strategically important customers involving multiple actors as well as input flows.	• Examining the contingency effects of market dynamism on the associations among KAM capability, competitive advantages, and performance • Focusing on specific KAM capabilities and applying methods, such as fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), to identify capability configurations contributing to performance outcomes • Identifying theoretically and managerially meaningful moderators and mediators in the KAM capability-performance association	Herhausen et al. (2022) Ivens et al. (2018)
Key account management effectiveness (KAME)	KAME refers to the extent to which organizational goals regarding the organization's KAM program are achieved. This	• Identifying determinants of KAM effectiveness in various contexts, as culture and environmental factors might	Feste et al. (2022) Herhausen et al. (2022) Richards and Jones (2009)

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Table 5 (*continued*)

Key construct	Definition	Future research direction	Key reference
	implies achieving better relationship outcomes for KAs in comparison to average accounts.	influence KAM outcomes	
Differentiation advantage (DA)	DA refers to the degree to which the firm provides unique offerings in comparison to rivals, taking into account the firm's advantageous brand position.	• As it is argued that differentiation and cost leadership strategies can coexist in a company, future research might benefit from including cost advantage in the model.	Bodlaj and Čater (2022) Murray et al. (2011)
Market performance (MP)	MP refers to the degree to which the firm achieves its market-related goals, such as market share and customer satisfaction.	• Conducting multiple-informant surveys and measuring market performance based on customers' perspectives and objective measures	Herhausen et al. (2022) Workman et al. (2003)
Financial performance (FP)	FP refers to the degree to which the firm achieves its financial goals, such as return on investment and profitability.	• Examining performance implications of KAM practices while utilizing objective measures of financial performance	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2013, 2014) Tzempelikos (2015) Workman et al. (2003)
Key account management approach formalization (KAMAF)	KAMAF refers to the extent to which the treatment of the most important customers is governed by rules and standard procedures.	• Examining impacts of KAM approach formalization on development of KAM capabilities in various contexts, as KAM is a concept related to national and corporate culture	Feste et al. (2022) Homburg et al. (2002)
Key account management selection formalization (KAMSF)	KAMSF is defined as the extent to which the selection of the most important customers is governed by rules and standard procedures.	• Examining the interplay of KAM selection formalization and other organizational factors, such as centralization, affecting development of KAM capabilities	Feste et al. (2022) Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
Technological innovativeness (TI)	TI refers to the extent to which firms highlight state-of-the-art technologies in the new products.	• As implications of innovativeness might be contingent upon environmental turbulence, future research can benefit from examining the interplay of technological innovativeness and technological turbulence impacting organizational capability development.	Ding and Ding (2022)
Market innovativeness (MI)	MI refers to the degree to which firms increase the level of novelty and uniqueness to highlight new product features and customer benefits.	• Examining the interplay of market innovativeness and market turbulence affecting organizational capability development	Ding and Ding (2022)
Environmental impact (EI)	EI refers to the degree to which the supplier firm controls environmental consequences of its operations and products.	• Identifying antecedents of the environmental impact and evaluating its competitive-advantage and performance implications	Kapitan et al. (2019)
Satisfaction (ST)	ST refers to a positive affective state that results from the appraisal of all aspects of a firm's working relationship with another firm.	• Examining the moderating effects of other relationship quality factors, such as trust and commitment, on the relationships among KAM effectiveness, differentiation advantage, and performance	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014) Guesalaga (2014) Tzempelikos (2015)

competitive advantage in achieving superior KAM performance outcomes, as it reveals that the influences of relational and KAM capabilities on firm performance are actualized through competitive-advantage elements (Efrat et al., 2018; Ketchen et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2011).

Fifth, concerning the influences of the contingency factors on associations among KAMO, organizational capabilities, competitive advantage, and performance, the study reveals that KAM approach formalization attenuates the relationship between KAMO and relational capability. This finding serves as significant empirical evidence for the notion that formalized KAM approaches act as a hindrance to providing special treatments to KAs; in fact, these formalized approaches lead to bureaucracy and impede flexibility in developing mutually beneficial relationships with KAs and responding to their needs (Workman et al., 2003). Also, the study reveals that technological and market innovativeness weaken the relationship between KAMO and KAM capability. This finding supports the view that high levels of innovativeness can complicate the development of effective organizational capabilities, thus facilitating the process of responding to the demands of KAs; in fact, radical innovativeness is a very costly process that accounts for a substantial proportion of a firm's resources, limiting the firm's capacity to be involved in customer value creation (Story et al., 2015; Tellis et al., 2009). However, according to the findings, environmental impact significantly strengthens the relationships among relational capability, KAM capability, and KAM effectiveness as a competitive advantage. This finding serves as empirical support for the notion of sustainability marketing, positing that generating and delivering sustainable solutions is an effective mechanism for satisfying customers' and stakeholders' needs; as a matter of fact, performing sustainable practices, such as consideration of the environmental impact of the company and its products and services, enables the firm to develop long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with key B2B buyers and, thus, to achieve competitive advantage and superiority in the market (Kapitan et al., 2019). Moreover, this study indicates that satisfaction in buyer-supplier relationships strengthens the association between differentiation advantage and financial performance. This finding provides significant empirical evidence for the performance implications of relationship quality, as it reveals that satisfaction as an indicator of relationship quality complements the firm's differentiation advantage, thus affecting its financial performance. Therefore, it empirically supports the view that as satisfaction with a supplier increases, the supplier firm's revenues from the customer should also increase, and it is likely that its profitability, market share, and return on investment will eventually increase as well (Jones et al., 2009; Tzempelikos, 2015).

Overall, developing a theoretical model incorporating formerly under-researched, yet essential, constructs of organizational capabilities and competitive advantage and examining the contingency roles of internal and relationship-related elements results in a better understanding of how KAMO as a strategic resource realistically affects the market and financial performance of B2B supplier firms.

5.5. Practical implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study has some significant implications for practitioners, too. The first important implication concerns the development of organizational capabilities resulting from the adoption of KAMO, as the study indicates that KAMO as a strategic resource exerts a positive influence on relational and KAM capabilities. Accordingly, internalizing KAMO enables supplier firms to develop relational capabilities and improve relationships with KAs. In fact, leveraging this strategic resource, supplier firms are able to establish effective channels of information sharing and reduce levels of conflict with KAs. These competencies bring them better expertise development, more effectual processes, and improved internal communications; this ultimately safeguards long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with KAs. Moreover, KAMO empowers them to better sense the market and competitors and, thus, provide advantageous solutions for these strategic value-adding customers. For instance, managers should employ attitudinal and behavioral elements of KAMO to develop effectual organizational routines of designing, monitoring, and coordinating the KAM program, as these competencies facilitate consistent decision-making regarding the overall KAM program and bring the firm the capacity to effectively manage relationships with strategically important customers and meet their expectations. Therefore, KA managers should consider KAMO as a strategic asset since it ensures the development of successful relationships with KAs and enables the supplier firm to better sense the market environment and provide pertinent solutions for key B2B buyers. In addition, understanding the mediating role of KAMO has significant practical implications for managers. It provides insights into which aspects of KAMO are most effective in driving performance, enabling managers to allocate resources and efforts more efficiently. By highlighting the importance of top-management commitment, inter-functional coordination, and customization, our research offers actionable guidance on optimizing KAM practices to enhance competitiveness and performance.

Second, the findings reveal that organizational competencies in information sharing and conflict resolution are instrumental in fostering higher levels of differentiation advantage for supplier firms. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed global business environments, causing supply chain disruptions, shifts in consumer behavior, and accelerated digital transformation. Firms must adapt their strategies to stay competitive in this volatile landscape, and KAM is crucial in this adaptation, helping firms build and maintain strong relationships with key customers. Our findings highlight that competencies in information sharing and conflict resolution significantly enhance differentiation advantage for supplier firms. This is especially critical for B2B firms in the post-COVID-19 era and amid ongoing political crises, emphasizing the need to nurture customer relationships (Bond III et al., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Dixit et al., 2023; Epler & Leach, 2021; Kang, Diao, & Zanini, 2021). The post-pandemic "new normal" presents unique challenges and opportunities, such as the shift to remote work and changing customer expectations. KAM provides a structured approach to managing these changes, ensuring firms meet the evolving needs of key accounts. Our research offers practical insights into optimizing KAM practices to drive better outcomes and provides valuable guidance for managers aiming to enhance their firm's competitiveness and performance amidst ongoing market disruptions.

Consequently, it is advisable for firms to cultivate effective channels of communication with KAs and adeptly address raised issues and challenges. This capability strategically positions firms to deliver enhanced value propositions and cultivate enduring relationships with KAs, thereby fostering sustained differentiation advantage. Furthermore, the research underscores the significance of KAM capability as a determinant of supplier firms' KAM effectiveness. Therefore, firms are encouraged to invest in developing both outside-in and inside-out KAM competencies. Specifically, actively monitoring the market environment and discerning competitor actions should become ingrained practices within these organizations. Additionally, fostering efficacious routines to provide tailored manufacturing or supply chain solutions to meet KAs' expectations is paramount. These organizational routines serve as the cornerstone for proficiently managing relationships with KAs and promptly responding to their evolving needs.

Third, the present research underscores the pivotal role of KAM effectiveness in shaping both market and financial performance. Consequently, the primary directive for managers is to eschew a laissez-faire or superficial approach to KAM (Herhausen et al., 2022), as it invariably leads to diminished effectiveness and poorer performance, thereby misrepresenting the true potential of KAM. Thus, it is imperative for managers to consistently foster the development of organizational competencies that enable the firm to achieve superior relationship outcomes with KAs. This emphasis on KAM effectiveness is instrumental in driving the firm's market and financial performance. Moreover, the research suggests that supplier firms achieve enhanced market and financial performance through differentiation advantage. Thus, the direct influence on performance is not solely attributed to KAMO or relational capability in isolation. This discovery underscores the critical importance of the managerial focus on differentiation advantage as the fundamental mechanism through which relational competencies translate into improved market and financial performance. In essence, KAMO serves as an impetus that influences the development of firms' relational capabilities and differentiation advantage, thereby affecting performance outcomes. Consequently, KA managers should prioritize differentiation advantage as the underlying mechanism by which KAMO and relational competencies contribute to performance enhancement.

Fourth, managers should exercise caution with regard to the formalization of KAM practices, as formalized approaches impede the internalization of KAMO and the development of relational capabilities. Arguably, B2B supplier firms should refrain from enforcing strict rules and standard procedures when dealing with strategically important customers, as doing so can result in increased bureaucratic hurdles and lower levels of flexibility in addressing the demands of KAs, especially when KAM actually requires agile and flexible problem-solving approaches (Feste et al., 2022). Hence, KA managers are advised to follow flexible procedures for managing specific customer relationships and meeting the customers' expectations should they ask for adjustments of extant agreements, as a lack of flexibility can ultimately threaten the continuity of the relationship. Indeed, KA managers should exhibit flexibility in anticipating scenarios where key customers may request adjustments to existing agreements. Additionally, they should incorporate flexibility into the criteria used to determine whether to accommodate such requests. Besides, it is imperative for managers to identify the key dimensions along which key customers anticipate flexibility from their suppliers (Ivens, 2005). Similarly, high levels of technological or market innovativeness should be avoided, as this consumes a large proportion of organizational resources, complicates the relationships with KAs, and, thus, hinders development of KAM capabilities. Nevertheless, managers should foster their firms' sustainable practices, and they ought to consider the environmental impact of their operations since acting sustainably has become essential for the management of long-term buyer–supplier relationships, and our results indicate that consideration of the environmental impact by supplier firms complements their relational and KAM capabilities, thus enhancing KAM effectiveness. Finally, our results indicate that satisfaction, which is an indicator of relationship quality, complements differentiation advantage, augmenting financial performance. Therefore, suppliers are encouraged to build close and long-term relationships with KAs, appropriately satisfying their needs, as this perspective on KAM brings about higher levels of financial performance.

5.6. Limitations and future research

The present research has some limitations, which provides noteworthy future research avenues. First, we utilized a single informant survey, collecting data from KA managers of supplier firms. Though choosing the appropriate key informant can help improve the accuracy of the data, multiple informants could help cross-validate the data and eliminate the possibility of common method bias. Second, we tested our hypotheses using survey data from B2B suppliers operating in Europe, which could limit the generalizability of our findings to a specific context. Accordingly, future research is encouraged to extend our study to other research contexts. Third, concerning the moderating variables, this study examined the effects of formalization, innovativeness, environmental impact, and satisfaction, which are mainly internal and relationship-related factors. Therefore, seeing as the external environment can play a significant role in the relationships among strategic resources, capabilities, competitive advantage, and performance, future studies have an opportunity to investigate the impacts of external factors, such as competitive intensity or technological turbulence, on the aforementioned associations. Overall, the present research's key constructs and related directions for future research can be seen in Table 5.

6. Conclusion

The present study makes important contributions to the marketing literature, particularly that concerning KAM, casting light on contingencies and mechanisms through which KAMO enhances market and financial performance in B2B supplier firms. Our analysis indicates that KAMO is a key strategic resource that empowers supplier firms to develop relational and KAM capabilities which, in turn, bring about competitive advantage in terms of differentiation advantage and KAM effectiveness. Thus, these competitive advantage enable the firms to benefit from higher levels of market and financial performance. Moreover, this study reveals that contingency factors play important roles in the association between KAMO and performance. In fact, while KAM approach formalization and innovativeness weaken the relationships among KAMO, relational capability, and KAM capability, environmental impact complements these organizational capabilities, thus enhancing KAM effectiveness. Also, satisfaction in buyer–supplier relationships is complementary to differentiation advantage, hence increasing financial performance.

Arguably, these findings provide a strategic focus on KAM and clarify the competitive-advantage and performance implications of KAM practices. Previous studies have examined various aspects of KAM including the implementation and profitability of KAM practices (Ivens et al., 2024), the personality and selling skills of KA managers (Hengstebeck, Kassemeier, & Wieseke, 2022), the gender issues in KAM (Ivens, 2023), and the cultural factors affecting KAM (Kadam et al., 2023). Nevertheless, empirical studies scrutinizing KAM through a strategic perspective and clarifying its organizational and performance implications are scarce; that is to say, while prior studies have enhanced our understanding of the key building blocks of KAM (e.g., Hengstebeck et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2024; Kadam et al., 2023; Pardo, Ivens, & Wilson, 2014; Peters et al., 2022), empirical studies that take a strategic view on KAM and elucidate how it results in competitive advantage and augmented firm performance would contribute significantly to the existing literature (Gosselin & Bauwen, 2006; Ivens et al., 2018). Therefore, the current research adopted the RBV and DCV of firms and shed light on the contingencies and mechanisms of the influence of KAMO as a strategic resource on B2B supplier firms' market and financial performance. The study indicates that relational and KAM capabilities are indispensable for effectively leveraging KAMO, transforming its attitude and behavior-related values into differentiation advantage and KAM effectiveness; these, in turn, enhance firms' market and financial performance. Besides, the findings reveal that KAM approach formalization and innovativeness act as suppressors of the associations among KAMO, relational capability, and KAM capability whereas environmental impact strengthens the influence of the capabilities on KAM effectiveness, and satisfaction is complementary to differentiation advantage augmenting financial performance. On that account, addressing the lack of empirical research integrating relevant KAM practices affecting performance (Sandesh et al., 2023), this study proposes a strategic resource-organizational capabilities-competitive advantage-performance framework and elucidates the contingencies and mechanisms of the influence of KAMO on firm performance.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Farbod Fakhreddin: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Pantea Foroudi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision. **Kaouther Kooli:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Study constructs, measurement items, and source

Construct	Measurement item	Source
Key Account Management Orientation		
Definition: KAMO represents a set of values reflecting the supplier's attitude and actual behavior towards the management of the relationship with KAs; these include customer orientation, management commitment, inter-functional coordination, ability to customization, management involvement, and inter-functional support (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		
Customer orientation		
Definition: Customer orientation represents the supplier's focus towards meeting the KA's individual needs through delivering superior value (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		
KCO1	Satisfying the needs of our key accounts is a major objective for us.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
KCO2	We always monitor the extent to which we satisfy our key accounts' needs.	
KCO3	We try to deliver superior value to our key accounts through our products/services.	
KCO4	We frequently measure the level of satisfaction of our key accounts.	
KCO5	We pay a lot of attention on the after-sale service of our key accounts.	
Management commitment		
Definition: It refers to top management's commitment to ensure that the company as a whole meets the needs of the KA (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		

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Construct	Measurement item	Source
KCT1	Top management affirms the importance of key account management as a major strategical orientation for the company.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
KCT2	Top management sets an example to key account management for the rest of the organization.	
KCT3	Top management closely overviews all the activities concerning the management of our key accounts.	
KCT4	Top management has no hesitation in spending a lot of time in order to contribute to the management of our key accounts.	
KCT5	Top management always stresses the importance that all units can contribute to delivering value to our key accounts.	
Inter-functional coordination		
Definition: It refers to an interdepartmental coordination to create superior value for the KA (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		
KCIF1	All units in our company share information with regard to key accounts.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
KCIF2	All units in our company realize that they can contribute in the delivering superior value to key accounts.	
KCIF3	All units in our company are willing to contribute when a problem with a key account occurs.	
Ability to customization		
Definition: It refers to the supplier's ability to deliver a set of customized activities to the KAs (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		
KCA1	We respond immediately to our key accounts' problems.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
KCA2	We adapt the level of our service quality according to our key accounts' needs.	
KCA3	We adapt our internal processes in order to meet our key accounts' needs.	
KCA4	We frequently and informally communicate with our key accounts.	
Management involvement		
Definition: It refers to the extent to which senior management participates in KAM (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		
KCMI1	Top-management allocates the required resources (money, time, personnel) for the key account management function.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
KCMI2	Top-management systematically monitors the key account management function within the company.	
KCMI3	Top-management intervenes, when necessary, in order to find solutions to problems that our key accounts face.	
KCMI4	Top-management actively participates in the designing of activities regarding our key accounts.	
KCMI5	Top-management compensates/rewards the actions and initiatives that lead to the development of the relationships with our key accounts.	
Inter-functional support		
Definition: It refers to the extent to which other departments provide the required help and support for the people responsible for managing the KAs (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014).		
KCIFS1	The other units contribute when needed to improve the management of our key accounts.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
KCIFS2	The managers who are responsible for managing our accounts have to try hard to obtain help from other units regarding our key accounts. (R)	
KCIFS3	Key account management is viewed as a "competitor" by other functional units. (R)	
Relational capability		
Definition: Relational capability reflects the supplier's skills, specifically information sharing and conflict resolution, in managing customer relationship effectively so that eventually the two companies can develop mutual bonds (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014).		
Information sharing		
Definition: It reflects the degree to which the two companies exchange useful and confidential information, such as cost structure (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014).		
RCIS1	In the relationships with our key accounts, it is expected that any information that might help the other party will be provided to them.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
RCIS2	Exchange of information in these relationships takes place frequently.	
RCIS3	It is expected that the parties will provide proprietary information if it can help the other party.	
RCIS4	It is expected that we keep each other informed about events or changes that may affect the other party.	
Conflict resolution		
Definition: It reflects the degree to which the two companies resolve disagreements productively, while avoiding tensions and future ill-will (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014).		
RCCR1	Most disagreements we experience are resolved productively, generating greater understanding between us.	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
RCCR2	The way we manage conflict or disputes tends to create stress, frustration, or ill-feelings in our relationships. (R)	
RCCR3	Disputes that arise between us are generally not worked out very well. (R)	
Key Account Management Capability		
Definition: KAM capability refers to a complex bundle of skills and accumulated knowledge that materialize in routines used to manage strategically important customers involving multiple actors as well as input flows (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018).		
Reactive Key Account Management Capability		
Definition: Reactive KAM capability refers to organizational routines of sensing the environment of the KAM program in order to react to related changes effectively (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018).		
KAC1	We are flexible to adapt to changes we are asked for by key accounts.	Herhausen et al. (2022)
KAC2	We are well prepared to accommodate changes in key accounts.	
KAC3	We have close personal relationships with our key accounts.	
Proactive Key Account Management Capability		
Definition: Proactive KAM capability refers to organizational routines of responding to specific requirements of the KAs, differing from requirements of regular customers, and controlling the KAM program (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018).		
KAP1	We anticipate changes in our key accounts' needs before we are even asked.	Herhausen et al. (2022)
KAP2	We understand the problems of our key accounts and work together proactively.	
KAP3	We present new solutions to our key accounts that they had not considered.	

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Construct	Measurement item	Source
Key Account Management Effectiveness		
Definition: KAM effectiveness refers to the extent to which organizational goals regarding the organization's KAM program are achieved. This implies achieving better relationship outcomes for KAs in comparison to average accounts (Feste et al., 2022; Herhausen et al., 2022; Richards & Jones, 2009).		
CAKEF1	Compared to your average accounts, how does your company perform with key accounts with respect to achieving mutual trust?	Feste et al. (2022)
CAKEF2	Compared to your average accounts, how does your company perform with key accounts with respect to achieving a reputation of fairness?	
CAKEF3	Compared to your average accounts, how does your company perform with key accounts with respect to maintaining long-term relationships?	
CAKEF4	Compared to your average accounts, how does your company perform with key accounts with respect to meeting sales targets and objectives?	
Differentiation advantage		
Definition: It refers to the degree to which the firm provides unique offerings in comparison to rivals, taking into account the firm's advantageous brand position (Murray et al., 2011).		
CADAD1	Relative to major competitors, we have a competitive advantage in terms of brand awareness.	Murray et al. (2011)
CADAD2	Relative to major competitors, we have a competitive advantage in terms of brand's mindshare.	
CADAD3	Relative to major competitors, we have a competitive advantage in terms of brand personality.	
Market performance		
Definition: It refers to the degree to which the firm achieves its market-related goals, such as market share and customer satisfaction (Herhausen et al., 2022).		
PMP1	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to achieving customer satisfaction?	Herhausen et al. (2022)
PMP2	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to providing value for customers?	
PMP3	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to securing its desired market share?	
PMP4	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to successfully introducing new products?	
PMP5	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to keeping current customers?	
PMP6	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to attracting new customers?	
Financial performance		
Definition: It refers to the degree to which the firm achieves its financial goals, such as return on investment and profitability (Tzempelikos, 2015).		
PFP1	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to sales?	Tzempelikos (2015)
PFP2	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to profits?	
PFP3	Relative to your competitors, how has your company, over the last three years, performed with respect to return of investment (ROI)?	
Key Account Management Approach Formalization		
Definition: KAM approach formalization refers to the extent to which the treatment of the most important customers is governed by rules and standard procedures (Feste et al., 2022).		
KFA1	Within our company, formal internal communication channels are followed when working on key accounts.	Feste et al. (2022)
KFA2	To coordinate the parts of our company working with key accounts, standard operating procedures have been established.	
KFA3	We have put a lot of thought into developing guidelines for working with our key accounts.	
KFA4	Our company has its own formal structures for key account management.	
Key Account Management Selection Formalization		
Definition: KAM selection formalization is defined as the extent to which the selection of the most important customers is governed by rules and standard procedures (Feste et al., 2022).		
KFS1	There is a standard process for almost all key account customer selection decisions.	Feste et al. (2022)
KFS2	There are rules and processes for selecting key account customers.	
KFS3	The procedure for selecting key account customers is standardized.	
KFS4	The process of selecting key account customers is comprehensively documented in writing (e.g. in manuals).	
Technological innovativeness		
Definition: It refers to the extent to which firms highlight state-of-the-art technologies in the new products (Ding & Ding, 2022).		
PIT1	Our new products incorporate state-of-the-art technology.	Ding and Ding (2022)
PIT2	Our new products involve major technological changes to existing products.	
PIT3	The technology of our new products is quite new to our industry.	
PIT4	The technology of our new products offers considerable improvements compared to existing products.	
Market Innovativeness		
Definition: It refers to the degree to which firms increase the level of novelty and uniqueness to highlight new product features and customer benefits (Ding & Ding, 2022).		
PIM1	Customers perceive our new product features as unique.	
PIM2	Our new products have introduced completely new features to the market.	
PIM3	The benefits that our products offer are new to customers.	
PIM4	Our products are brand new, never seen in the market before.	
Environmental impact		
Definition: It refers to the degree to which the supplier firm controls the environmental consequences of its operations and products (Kapitan et al., 2019).		
EIE 1	Environmental concerns are high among our company's priorities.	
EIE2	Our company is actively trying to lower emissions caused by the company.	
EIE3	Our company is leading initiatives to lower emissions.	
EIE4	I believe our company considers environmental impacts as part of their mission.	

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Construct	Measurement item	Source
Satisfaction		
Definition: It refers to a positive affective state that results from the appraisal of all aspects of a firm's working relationship with another firm (Guesalaga, 2014).		
RQS1	Our relationships with key accounts have been among the successful ones.	
RQS2	Our key accounts are very pleased with their working relationships with our company.	Guesalaga (2014)
RQS3	Overall, the quality of the relationships with our key accounts has fallen far short of our expectations. (R)	

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