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Ethical Partnerships and Governance: Scaling Strategies for Social Enterprise Performance in Enugu Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This study investigates ethical partnerships and governance (licensing partnerships, franchise partnerships, and strategic partnerships) influence on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis, drawing on the relational view of competitive advantage to explain the role of partnership quality and alignment.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design involving 3,667 registered social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis, from which a sample of 258 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. A stratified random sampling technique with proportional allocation was employed to select respondents, and the data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis.

Findings

The results show that licensing partnerships have a statistically significant negative effect on financial performance (B = -0.320, p = 0.002), indicating that increased reliance on governance through licensing arrangements is associated with lower financial performance among social enterprises. In contrast, franchise partnerships exert a positive and highly significant effect (B = 0.770, p = 0.000), suggesting that stronger governance through franchising arrangements is associated with improved financial performance. Strategic partnerships exhibit a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with financial performance (B = -0.121, p = 0.348), indicating that their effect is not sufficiently strong to influence financial outcomes. These findings highlight that while franchising governance mechanisms may enhance financial sustainability, licensing arrangements may constrain financial performance, depending on their structure and implementation.

Originality
This study extends the relational view by providing empirical evidence on how different forms of ethical contractual partnerships affect financial performance in social enterprises within an emerging economy context. It highlights the need for deliberate and mission-aligned partnerships, offering practical insights for policymakers and social enterprise leaders in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Ethical Partnerships, Governance, Performance, Scaling Strategy, Social Enterprises, Enugu Metropolis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social enterprises (SEs) have emerged globally as innovative mechanisms for addressing critical societal challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Combining entrepreneurial practices with mission-driven objectives, these organizations operate at the intersection of commerce and social value creation (Nicholls, 2006). In Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, SEs often fill gaps left by inadequate state services and overburdened nonprofit sectors. They address diverse needs, from expanding access to healthcare and education to advancing environmental sustainability, through locally driven, context-sensitive models (FSD Kenya, 2020; Baba & Akinola, 2019; Okonkwo et al., 2025). SEs are thus increasingly recognized for their capacity to balance financial sustainability with social impact through innovative and adaptable strategies (Yunus et al., 2010; Raja et al., 2023; Okonkwo et al., 2026).

A critical determinant of SE success is the capacity to scale impact without compromising core values or mission integrity. Scaling, in this context, encompasses not only growth in size or geographical reach but also enhanced operational efficiency and deepened social impact (Islam, 2021; Palmié et al., 2023). Achieving meaningful scaling often requires both internal capabilities and external linkages that provide the necessary resources, expertise, and legitimacy (Do, 2019). Among these external linkages, contractual partnerships, formalized agreements between SEs and public, private, or nonprofit entities, have become vital mechanisms for enabling growth. These partnerships can offer access to finance, technology, infrastructure, and distribution networks, thus enhancing the capacity of SEs to expand their operations and sustain their social missions (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012).

However, scaling through contractual partnerships raises critical questions of ethics and participatory governance. Partnerships that privilege financial outcomes over inclusivity and accountability risk undermining the social mission they are meant to support (Choi, 2015; Ugwa et al., 2020). Conversely, partnerships grounded in ethical values and participatory governance can democratize decision-making, enhance trust, and promote equitable resource sharing, ultimately strengthening both financial performance and social outcomes (Cumming et al., 2021; Massey & Johnston-Miller, 2016). Existing literature highlights the complex dynamics of contractual partnerships in SEs, noting that differing institutional logics, power asymmetries, and governance arrangements can significantly influence partnership success (Voltan & De Fuentes, 2016; Chowdhury, 2012). Yet, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how specific forms of contractual partnerships, namely licensing, social franchising, and strategic alliances, affect the financial performance of SEs in resource-constrained settings such as Nigeria.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the financial outcomes of these contractual partnership strategies among social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis. It places particular emphasis on how ethical frameworks and participatory governance principles shape the design, implementation, and outcomes of these partnerships. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to both scholarly understanding and practical strategies for scaling social enterprises in a way that is financially sustainable, ethically sound, and socially inclusive. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of ethical contractual partnership scaling strategies on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis, with attention to the ethical and participatory dimensions of these partnerships. The specific objectives of this study are threefold;

1. To examine how ethically structured licensing partnerships influence the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis.
2. To assess the effect of participatory and ethically managed social franchising on the performance of these enterprises in the study area.
3. To evaluate how strategic alliances that integrate ethical principles and inclusive governance shape the financial outcomes of social enterprises in the study area.

The following null hypotheses was formulated and tested;

1. Ethically structured licensing partnerships have no significant effect on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis.
2. Participatory and ethically managed social franchising has no significant effect on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis.
3. Strategic alliances have no significant effect on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis.

This study has several sections, they are; the literature review, methodology, findings, conclusion and appendices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Social Enterprise

The concept of social enterprises, though not new in practice, has recently gained significant traction in academic discourse due to its appeal to a diverse range of actors, ideas, and business models (Hulgård, 2010). In the UK, social enterprises are defined as businesses with primarily social objectives, where profits are principally reinvested to advance those objectives rather than maximize returns for shareholders or owners (Mswaka, 2015). This interpretation often aligns with the nonprofit model, which contrasts with the more flexible, hybrid interpretations common in developing economies (Collavo, 2018).

Adeyeye and Eniola (2022) describe social enterprises as businesses that address social or environmental challenges through market-based operations. They classify social enterprises into four broad categories: business or trading enterprises, financial institutions, community-based organizations, and charities/non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The EMES Network (2012) further refines this understanding by emphasizing that social enterprises are typically initiated by citizen groups with the explicit aim of delivering community benefits. These organizations intentionally limit financial returns for investors, value their operational independence, and willingly engage with the economic risks associated with their social missions. Scholars such as Defourny and Nyssens (2006) and Haugh (2007) underscore

that social enterprises deploy market mechanisms to pursue social goals, with profits reinvested to support these aims. They are critically distinguished by their blended value proposition, which include integrating social and commercial objectives, reflecting a dual commitment to social impact and financial sustainability (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014; Haigh & Hoffman, 2014).

Social enterprises are distinguished by several defining characteristics. Primarily, they are mission-driven organizations that pursue social, environmental, cultural, or economic objectives as their core purpose, rather than prioritizing profit generation for shareholders or owners. This mission is usually enshrined in their foundational documents, guiding all organizational activities (Islam, 2021). A hallmark of social enterprises is their reliance on commercial activities to generate the majority of their revenue, aiming for financial self-sufficiency rather than dependence on grants or donations. While some may begin with external funding, the long-term goal is sustainability through income from goods and services (Islam, 2021; Okonkwo, and Ugwa 2020).

Another key feature is the reinvestment of profits to advance the enterprise's social mission. Instead of distributing earnings to private investors, social enterprises channel surplus resources back into their operations or community impact initiatives (Okonkwo, et al., 2026). Ethical principles underpin their operations, with many adhering to the "triple bottom line" approach, balancing social, environmental, and financial outcomes. These values are often explicitly stated and serve as a framework for decision-making (Islam, 2021; Ebrahim et al., 2014).

Social enterprises can take various legal forms, including for-profit, nonprofit, or hybrid structures. Their identity is not defined by legal classification but by their mission orientation and operational model. Importantly, they are voluntarily established and managed by citizens, maintaining a high degree of autonomy (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Islam, 2021; Okonkwo, et al., 2023). Stakeholders typically have participatory rights, including the ability to contribute to governance and withdraw from the enterprise if desired. Moreover, social enterprises emphasize inclusiveness and democratic engagement, often involving service users and local communities in decision-making processes, thereby promoting participatory governance and reinforcing local democracy through economic activity (Okonkwo, et al., 2023).

The four categories into which social enterprises are typically divided, business or trading enterprises, financial institutions, community-based organizations, and charities/NGOs, reflect the structural and functional diversity of the sector as well as the various ways in which commercial strategies are in line with social objectives (Adeyeye & Eniola, 2022). In order to combat poverty and encourage entrepreneurship, financial institutions like cooperative banks and microfinance institutions increase access to credit and financial literacy (Armendáriz & Morduch, 2010). Business or trading enterprises adopt earned-income models that incorporate social goals into profit-generating activities (Alter, 2007). Charity/NGOs are increasingly using social enterprise approaches to increase sustainability and scale impact beyond donor dependence (Dees et al., 2004), while community-based organizations concentrate on addressing local needs through participatory governance and social capital development (Pearce, 2003).

Financial Performance and Social Enterprises

Financial performance in social enterprises is understood as a multidimensional concept that extends beyond profit to encompass financial

sustainability, resource mobilization, and the ability to support mission-driven activities, requiring a blended assessment of economic viability and social impact (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Bagnoli & Megali, 2009; Obiezekwem et al., 2025). Accordingly, traditional indicators such as profitability, liquidity, efficiency, and asset utilization (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009) are complemented by integrative frameworks including the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997), the Balanced Scorecard adapted for social missions (Kaplan & Norton, 1992; 1996), Social Return on Investment (Nicholls et al., 2012), and Blended Value Accounting (Emerson, 2003). Among these, the Balanced Scorecard is adopted in this study as it enables a holistic evaluation of financial performance by aligning financial, operational, learning, and stakeholder dimensions with both mission and market objectives, making it particularly suitable for hybrid social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis.

Scaling Strategies

Scaling social impact refers to the process by which social-purpose organizations expand their influence to address social problems at a scale commensurate with their magnitude (Dees et al., 2004). The literature identifies four major dimensions of scaling: scaling wide, which involves increasing the number of beneficiaries or geographic reach (Andre & Pache, 2016; Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Desa & Koch, 2014; Westley et al., 2014; Zhao & Han, 2020); scaling deep, which entails enhancing service quality or diversifying offerings (Han & Shah, 2020; Moore et al., 2015); scaling through system change, which targets policy, legal, and institutional transformation (Desa & Koch, 2014; Westley et al., 2014); and scaling for the disadvantaged, which emphasizes serving neglected or underserved populations (Cho & Kim, 2017; Crucke & Decramer, 2016; Weber et al., 2012).

Scaling strategies is described as the tactical approaches employed by social enterprises to extend their impact (Han & Shah, 2020). Early typologies distinguished between dissemination, affiliation, and branching, with increasing degrees of central control (Dees et al., 2004). Others have categorized scaling strategies based on levels of organizational control and diffusion, from open knowledge sharing to mergers and institutional advocacy (Mulgan et al., 2007; Lyon & Fernandez, 2012; Weber et al., 2015). A widely accepted classification separates strategies into two broad types: internal/direct and external/indirect (Scheuerle & Schmitz, 2016; Weber et al., 2015).

Internal strategies such as capacity building and organizational growth focus on strengthening the enterprise's internal competencies and infrastructure, these are largely under the organization’s control and ensure readiness for scale (Han & Shah, 2020). In contrast, external strategies like contractual partnerships and knowledge dissemination rely on relationships and networks in the form of licensing, franchising and strategic alliances, so as to influence beyond the organization’s boundaries, facilitating scale through replication, adaptation, or advocacy (Dees et al., 2004; Weber et al., 2015). This dual approach ensures both operational robustness and ecosystem engagement, critical for sustainable scaling. Recent work by Islam (2021) consolidates these strategies into two approaches: organizational growth and ecosystem growth, capturing both internal development and external influence mechanisms.

As concerning scaling social impact through organizational growth strategy, Islam (2021) two main approaches; product/service expansion and geographic expansion. Product/service expansion, involves to diversify, improve, and adapt their offerings to meet emerging needs, while geographic expansion demonstrates how replication, adaptation, or franchising across locations

allows SEs to bring proven models to broader populations. These two approaches reveal the dual focus of organizational growth: intensifying impact within existing domains and extending reach into new contexts (Islam 2021). Islam (2021) highlights that scaling social impact encompasses more than just numerical growth, also requiring adaptability, contextual responsiveness, and risk management. Significantly, the existing research highlights that both the expansion of products/services and the expansion into new geographic areas involve opportunities alongside potential unforeseen outcomes, ranging from a loss of focus to overextended capabilities (Katre & Salipante, 2012; Battilana et al., 2015; Eiselein and Dentchev 2021). In total, this collection of research reveals that organisational growth strategies present small and emerging enterprises with structured routes to expansion, requiring meticulous planning, tracking, and synchronisation with core objectives.

Types of Contractual Partnerships in Social Enterprise Scaling

Contractual partnerships represent a key external scaling strategy that social enterprises employ to expand their impact beyond internal growth. These partnerships involve formalized agreements between the social enterprise and external bodies, such as governments, private firms, NGOs, or academic institutions, to collaborate on specific goals, share resources, and deliver value to underserved populations (Weber et al., 2015). In taking advantages of the strengths and capacities of others, social enterprises can scale their operations more efficiently and sustainably. Scholarly literatures identify several prominent types of contractual partnerships, each serving a unique strategic purpose. They are strategic alliances, franchising and affiliation agreements, licensing agreements, supplier and distributor agreements among others.

Strategic Alliances

Strategic alliances are a critical partnership type for social enterprises, defined as collaborative agreements in which two or more organizations combine resources and capabilities to achieve shared objectives and gain competitive advantage (Išoraitė, 2009). Such alliances help social enterprises navigate globalization, uncertainty, and increasing business complexity, and may take the form of public–private partnerships (PPPs), corporate partnerships, NGO/nonprofit collaborations, academic and research alliances, and supplier or distributor agreements. PPPs enable access to public funding, infrastructure, and policy support, facilitating large-scale service delivery aligned with development priorities (Seelos & Mair, 2007; Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Weber et al., 2015). Corporate partnerships support market expansion and product co-development through access to capital, supply chains, and distribution networks (Austin et al., 2006; Lyon & Fernandez, 2012), while NGO and nonprofit collaborations enhance legitimacy, community trust, and mission-aligned scaling (Dees et al., 2004; Mulgan et al., 2007). Academic and research partnerships strengthen innovation and evidence-based practice (Moore et al., 2015; Islam, 2021), and supplier–distributor alliances support efficient production, quality control, and cost management (Desa & Koch, 2014; Cho & Kim, 2017). Strategic alliances hold promise for resource sharing and innovation, but without ethical governance, they risk mission drift and power imbalances. Thus, this study evaluates their financial impact through the following hypothesis:

Franchising

Franchising and affiliation agreements are formal scaling mechanisms that allow social enterprises to replicate their models through independent operators under defined standards and shared branding, enabling rapid expansion without direct operational control (Bradach,

2003; Islam, 2021). In social franchising, the franchisor provides the model, brand, and quality frameworks, while franchisees implement locally with support in training, marketing, and assurance, applied in education, health, and inclusion (Giudici et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2015). Benefits include scalable growth, brand consistency, local ownership, shared risk, and revenue; challenges involve control loss, monitoring, relationship management, and regulations (Islam, 2021). However, scholar have recently raised concerns about franchising's impact on financial performance, often pointing to issues like relational risks, power imbalances, and agency problems (Minarikova, et. al., 2020; Sadovnikova, et. al., 2023). Accordingly, this study seeks to examine this and tests the following hypothesis:

Social Branching and Affiliation Models

Social enterprises adopt branching or affiliation models for context-sensitive replication while protecting mission integrity. Huybrechts et al. (2017) highlight how multi-stakeholder collaborations in fair-trade networks merge centralized coordination with local autonomy for scalability and responsiveness. In Africa, Maseno and Wanyoike (2022) emphasize community-based expansion leveraging trust and cultural fit over formal franchises, enhancing flexibility amid institutional voids (Ciambotti et al., 2022). Branching thus complements franchising for stronger local ties, though ethical management impacts on financial outcomes in Nigeria remain underexplored.

Licensing

Closely related, and deserving of distinct attention, is licensing, which involves granting rights to third parties to use a social enterprise's intellectual property, business model, or brand. Unlike franchising, licensing may offer greater flexibility and is often used to replicate interventions across new geographies or sectors (Weber et al., 2015; Han & Shah, 2020). It enables social enterprises to maintain oversight of their innovation while scaling rapidly and cost-effectively. Licensing can also serve as a revenue stream through fees or royalties, thus positively influencing financial performance (Han & Shah, 2020).

Unlike franchising, licensing does not typically involve replicating an entire business model, instead, it centers on licensing products (e.g., educational content, medical protocols), licensing processes or toolkits (e.g., training manuals, data platforms) as well as licensing brand use under specific quality standards. Typical examples of licensing are; a social enterprise may license its early childhood education curriculum to NGOs in other countries or a health-focused social enterprise might license its mHealth software to clinics in low-income settings. This is done to ensure wide dissemination while preserving brand identity and quality (Dees et al., 2004; Bradach, 2003; Weber et al., 2015; Han & Shah, 2020).

Prior empirical studies on the determinants of scaling performance have largely been qualitative, with limited quantitative, hypothesis-driven investigations (Bacq & Eddleston, 2018; Bloom & Smith, 2010; Cannatelli, 2017). Building on this evidence, this study examines whether ethically structured licensing partnerships translate into measurable improvements in financial performance for social enterprises. Hence, it hypothesizes:

Theoretical Framework

Relational View of Competitive Advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998)

The Relational View of Competitive Advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998) provides a valuable lens for understanding how social enterprises can achieve superior performance through contractual partnerships. The theory

posits that competitive advantage arises not only from firm-specific resources, which was also emphasized in a similar theory Resource-Based view postulated by Barney (1991), but also from collaborative relationships that foster co-created, hard-to-imitate value (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Lavie, 2006). For social enterprises, contractual partnerships such as licensing, franchising, or strategic alliances enable access to complementary assets and capabilities, which are essential for scaling social and economic impact. Embedding themselves in relational networks, affords social enterprises the opportunity to take advantage of trust, shared knowledge and joint problem solving which will overall enable them overcome resource constraints and enhance sustainability value (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Lavie, 2006).

Key principles of the relational view include relation-specific assets, knowledge-sharing routines, complementary resources, and effective governance mechanisms. These principles highlight how unique, partner-specific investments, structured knowledge exchange, aligned capabilities, and sound governance contribute to sustained performance. In social enterprises, this may translate into tailored delivery systems, partner training, and collaborative innovations that enhance operational and financial outcomes.

The theory's relevance to this study lies in its emphasis on external linkages as drivers of performance. By focusing on how social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis engage in ethically structured partnerships, the study applies the relational view to explore how contractual collaborations foster financial success through co-created value rather than internal resources alone.

Choi (2015) explored how different types of partnerships affect the social performance of Korean social enterprises, revealing that while public and social partners contributed both financial and marketing support, their financial contributions unexpectedly had negative effects, similar to those of private partners. Peng et al. (2023) extended this line of inquiry by showing that Chinese social enterprises benefit most from diversified scaling strategies, with knowledge dissemination, organizational growth, and contractual partnerships significantly enhancing performance, especially for nonprofits. Voltan and De Fuentes (2016) added a nuanced perspective, demonstrating how navigating conflicting institutional logics within partnerships is vital for successfully scaling social innovations.

Chowdhury (2012) emphasized that social enterprises manage complex institutional logics that shape partnership strategies and knowledge transfer processes more than cultural factors do. Similarly, Park et al. (2018) illustrated how small social enterprises can build sustainable collaborations with large corporations by leveraging trust, social capital, and relational governance to overcome power imbalances. Arigu et al. (2024) echoed this insight in the Nigerian context, showing that partnerships between social enterprises and impact investors thrive when built on shared values and complementary resources.

Sanzo-Pérez and Álvarez-González (2022) highlighted that close cooperation between Spanish social enterprises and nonprofits strengthens innovation and sustainability. Susanto et al. (2020) linked social entrepreneurship to enhanced organizational learning, partnerships, competitive advantage, and ultimately better business performance within Indonesia's creative industries. Complementing these findings, Nguyen et al. (2021) demonstrated that ecosystem partnerships in Vietnam play a key role in linking social entrepreneurial traits to impact, while Murthy et al. (2021) revealed that even when business-nonprofit partnerships end, spinouts can provide a pathway for sustained social impact.

Research Gap

Although partnership-based scaling strategies are common in social enterprise practice, empirical studies linking these strategies to financial performance remain limited, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Existing research has largely emphasized social impact or conceptual models, often neglecting the economic value created through partnerships. To address this gap, the present study examines how ethically structured contractual partnerships, such as licensing, social franchising, and strategic alliances, affect the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis, drawing on the Relational View to highlight the role of relational assets, governance mechanisms, and knowledge-sharing routines. Building on this foundation, the study develops and tests hypotheses on whether ethically structured licensing, participatory social franchising, and ethically governed strategic alliances significantly influence financial performance. These hypotheses, while grounded in the literature, remain underexplored empirically and will guide the subsequent analysis.

3. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was used for this study conducted in Enugu Metropolis, which comprises Enugu North, South, and East local government areas. The population of social enterprises in Enugu metropolis is 3667, comprising NGOs 105 and cooperative societies 3562 according to records from Enugu State Board of internal Revenue 2025, and Ministry of Human Capital Development and Poverty Reduction/Cooperative, 2025. In determining the sample size, Taro Yamane's formular was adopted. This is derived mathematically as shown below.

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

Where;
n = the sample size,
N = Population of the study
e = level of significance
1 = Unit (a constant value)
e = error margin

$$n = \frac{3667}{1 + 3667(0.06)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3667}{1 + 3667(0.0036)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3667}{1 + 13.2012}$$

$$n = \frac{3667}{14.2012}$$

= 258.1
Therefore n = 258
The stratified random sampling technique was adopted and the sample size proportionally distributed across the metropolis thus;
Formula for proportional allocation:

$$n = \text{n x } \frac{N_i}{N}$$

Where:

- n_i = sample size for subgroup
- n = total sample size
- N_i = population size of subgroup
- N = total population size

Given:

- Total population N = 3667
- NGOs population N_{NGO} = 105
- Cooperatives population N_{Coop} = 3562
- Total sample size n = 258

$$n_{NGO} = 258 \text{ x } \frac{105}{3667} = 7.38 = 7$$

$$n_{coop} = 258 \text{ x } \frac{3562}{3667} = 250.62 = 251$$

Final sample distribution:
NGOs = 7
Cooperatives: 251

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by three academic experts in social enterprise research and piloted with 20 organizations. Adjustments were made to ensure both face and content validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha: licensing (0.920), social franchising (0.708), and strategic alliances (0.790), indicating acceptable levels of internal consistency. The items were adapted from previously validated scales in the social enterprise and strategic management literature (e.g., Desa & Koch, 2014; Lyon & Fernandez, 2012; Han & Shah, 2020), with wording adjusted to fit the Enugu Metropolis context. Each construct was measured using multiple items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Data analysis included descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) and multiple regression to investigate the relationship between scaling strategies and the financial performance of social enterprises.

Model Specification

Model 1: Testing (Contractual Partnerships Strategy)

H_{01}: Contractual partnership scaling strategy has not significantly enhanced the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis.

Simple Linear Regression

$$FP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CPS_i + \varepsilon i \quad (1)$$

Where;

- FP_i = financial performance outcomes of social enterprises i
- $CPSi$ = Contractual Partnerships Strategy (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
- β_0 = Intercept
- β_1 = Coefficient capturing the effect of Contractual Partnerships Strategy
- εi = Error term

Explicit Model with Controls:

$$FP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LIC_i + \beta_2 SOF_i + \beta_3 STA_i + \beta_4 AGE_i + \beta_5 EDU_i + \beta_6 YOP_i + \varepsilon i \quad (2)$$

Where;

- LIC_i = Licensing (dummy)
- SOF_i = Social franchising (dummy)
- STA_i = Strategic alliances (dummy)
- AGE_i, EDU_i, YOP_i = Control variables (Age, Education, Years of Operation)
- $\beta_1 - \beta_7$ = Coefficient
- εi = Error term

Decision Rule in the Hypotheses Testing

Using SPSS package, regression analysis was run at significance level of 0.05 with the degree of freedom (df) = (n-1), to determine the order of importance of the explanatory variables in explaining the variations observed in the dependent variables. The t-test was performed to test the significance of each of the explanatory variables at the alpha levels of 5%. The null hypothesis was accepted if the p-value is less than or equal to the 0.05 significant level. Otherwise, the null hypothesis was rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted.

4. FINDINGS

The number of duly filled and returned questionnaires are 182 out of the 258 distributed, representing 70.54%.

Table 1 Demographic Data of Respondents

Variables	Description	Frequency	Percent (%)
Distribution of Respondents	Founder/Owner	32	17.6
	Manager	24	13.2
	Staff	126	69.2
	Total	182	100.0
Years of Operation	Less than 1 year	39	21.4
	1 – 3 years	21	11.5
	4 – 6 years	33	18.1
	7 – 9 years	36	19.8
	10 – 12 years	35	19.2
	13 – 15 years	18	9.8
	Total	182	100.0
Highest Educational Qualification	HND/B.Sc	97	53.3
	M.Sc/PhD	34	18.7
	ND/NCE	18	9.9
	SSCE	33	18.1
	Total	182	100.0
Age of Respondent	BELOW 25 years	6	3.3
	26 – 35 years	47	25.8
	36 – 45 years	103	56.6
	46 yrs AND ABOVE	26	14.3
	Total	182	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents. Overall, the sample was dominated by staff members, enterprises with less than a decade of operation, respondents holding tertiary qualifications (HND/B.Sc.), and individuals within the 36–45 years age bracket. These distributions reflect a respondent pool largely composed of mid-career professionals engaged in relatively young enterprises.

Regression Analysis Result

Table 2: Regression Analysis Result

The table illustrated the regression output relating licensing strategy, social franchising strategy, strategic alliances and financial performance outcomes.

Variable	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Licensing	-0.335	-3.190	0.002	Significant
Social Franchising	0.677	5.864	0.000	Significant
Strategic Alliances	-0.114	-0.941	0.348	Not Significant

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Alliances, Licensing, Franchising

Table 2 presents the regression results on the effect of licensing, social franchising, and strategic alliances on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis. The model was statistically significant ($F = 14.423$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the scaling strategies jointly explain variations in financial performance. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.196$) shows that approximately 19.6% of the variation in financial performance is explained by the three partnership strategies included in the model.

The results reveal that licensing has a significant negative effect on financial performance ($\beta = -0.335$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that greater reliance on licensing arrangements is associated with lower financial performance. Social franchising exerts a significant positive effect on financial performance ($\beta = 0.677$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increased adoption of franchising strategies enhances financial outcomes. In contrast, strategic alliances have a negative but statistically insignificant effect on financial performance ($\beta = -0.114$, $p = 0.348$), implying that they do not significantly influence financial performance within the study context.

Discussion

Findings of this study on contractual partnership and financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis aligns with scholarly submissions in various ways.

The finding that licensing has a negative and statistically significant effect on financial performance ($B = -0.320$, $\beta = -0.335$, $p = 0.002$) suggests that as social enterprises increase their licensing activities or comply

more strictly with licensing requirements, their financial performance tends to decline. This finding aligns with Choi (2015), who observed that while financial support from public and private partners was common, it often had a negative impact on social performance. Similarly, Murthy et al. (2021) highlighted that some formal partnerships fail to produce sustained effect, potentially due to misaligned expectations or value systems, a situation that licensing arrangements could mirror when imposed externally without strong alignment to enterprise goals.

Social franchising exhibits a positive and highly significant impact on financial performance (B = 0.770, β = 0.677, p = 0.000). This variable was the strongest predictor in the model. This result is strongly supported by several empirical studies. This result can be explained by the combination of local ownership and standardized support systems, making social franchising a highly effective growth model. It reduces operational risks, increases outreach, and ensures consistency in service delivery, all while strengthening financial health. For social enterprises seeking both mission fulfillment and financial viability, franchising offers a proven pathway to scale and sustainability. For instance, Sanzo-Pérez and Álvarez-González (2022) found that partnerships, when embedded into the core strategies of social enterprises, significantly foster social innovation and sustainability, both of which contribute to long-term financial viability. Likewise, Nguyen et al. (2021) emphasized that high-quality ecosystem partnerships significantly enhance social impact and performance outcomes, particularly in low-income contexts. Voltan and De Fuentes (2016) also provide insight into the success of partnerships when organizations navigate multiple institutional logics effectively. Observably, the analysis suggests that social alliances, potentially built on shared social missions and trust, create synergy rather than conflict, echoing Park, et. al., (2018) and Okonkwo and Ugwa (2020), descriptively asserted that leveraging social capital helps small enterprises establish meaningful, value-generating partnerships with larger firms.

The analysis shows that Strategic Alliances have a negative but statistically insignificant effect on financial performance (B = -0.121, β = -0.114, p = 0.348). This indicates no meaningful relationship between strategic alliances and improved financial outcomes in this model. This finding aligns with the concerns raised in Chowdhury (2012) and Arigu et al. (2024), where the complexity of managing multiple institutional partnerships often hinders rather than helps performance, especially when partners have divergent goals or value systems. Chowdhury argued that social enterprises are shaped by intricate, sometimes conflicting logics that affect knowledge transfer and value creation. In the same vein, scholars found that successful collaboration between SEs and investors in emerging economies depends heavily on compatibility and complementarity (Arigu et al. 2024; Okafor et al., 2023; Okafor et al., 2025). If strategic alliances lack such alignment, as might be the case in Enugu, they may fail to produce tangible benefits, explaining the statistical insignificance in the results. Moreover, Murthy et al. (2021) suggest that not all partnerships are meant to be permanent or yield sustainable benefits. The dissolution of strategic alliances, especially if they are not properly managed or aligned, may lead to stagnation or misallocation of resources, which may explain the observed weak and negative influence. These results highlight the importance of partnership quality and alignment, rather than mere existence, in

shaping the financial success of social enterprises.

The study raises important theoretical implications by reinforcing the relevance of the relational view of competitive advantage in understanding partnership dynamics within hybrid organisations. It highlights that not all partnerships are beneficial; rather, only those that exhibit strategic alignment in mission, complementarity of resources, and mutual trust are likely to produce tangible financial benefits. In doing so, it adds empirical depth to the discourse on context-sensitive partnership value in emerging economies, particularly in Nigeria and Enugu Metropolis, and extends the relational view by clarifying how the financial performance of social enterprises is mediated by the nature and quality of external partnerships. For social enterprise leaders, the study underscores the importance of prioritising high-quality partnerships over the mere number of collaborations. Finally, governments and support institutions should work to reduce structural barriers and create incentives for mission-aligned partnerships, including through the creation of hubs, grants, or tax breaks for social enterprises engaged in social franchising. Revisiting licensing and regulatory frameworks can further help mitigate unintended negative consequences for socially focused enterprises.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are put forward. Government and policymakers should re-examine the structure and financial demands of licensing frameworks, streamline procedures, and reduce associated costs to ease the burden on social enterprises. They should also implement awareness campaigns and training programmes to support efficient compliance and empower beneficiaries without imposing financial strain. Social enterprises are encouraged to promote and strengthen social franchise arrangements by collaborating actively with community-based organisations and mission-aligned stakeholders that share similar goals and approaches to value creation, with development agencies playing a facilitating role. Furthermore, social enterprises should critically reassess their strategic alliances to ensure alignment of values and pursuit of tangible outcomes, giving priority to complementarities in resources or knowledge over considerations of prestige or scale. Such partnerships should be guided by frameworks that include clear performance benchmarks and well-defined exit strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of licensing, social franchising, and strategic alliances on the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis. The findings revealed that licensing has a statistically significant negative effect, social franchising significantly enhance financial performance, while strategic alliances do not show a significant effect. These results suggest that not all partnerships contribute equally to performance, and that alignment, trust, and shared values are essential ingredients in successful collaborations. While regulatory requirements such as licensing may hinder growth, robust social franchising present a powerful lever for financial performance. In conclusion, concerning social enterprises in Enugu metropolis, licensing engagement reduces financial performance, social franchising enhances it through combining traditional franchising and social mission, and strategic alliances have no significant effect on financial performance. Therefore, social enterprises must be deliberate and strategic in choosing partners, and governments must craft policies that enable rather than constrain their growth. Future research should further examine the role of institutional contexts and delve deeper into the qualitative dimensions of successful partnerships in emerging economies.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides insights into how licensing, social franchising, and strategic alliances influence the financial performance of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis, but several limitations should be acknowledged. First, its focus on Enugu restricts generalisability to other Nigerian or sub-Saharan contexts with different institutional conditions. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Third, reliance on self-reported measures, despite demonstrated reliability, introduces potential bias.

Future studies could adopt longitudinal and cross-regional approaches to strengthen external validity. Qualitative case studies may further illuminate how trust, governance, and ethics shape partnership quality. Researchers could also extend the scope beyond financial performance to assess social and environmental outcomes, offering a more comprehensive triple bottom line perspective.

Ethical Statement

This research did not involve animals. Human participants (representatives of social enterprises in Enugu Metropolis) were engaged in accordance with internationally recognized ethical guidelines, including the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. No harm or risk was associated with participation**.**

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