

# Competition and Ownership Concentration: Exotic Tools for corporate governance in Firms

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**Abstract-** Both competition and ownership concentration (OC) plays an important role in determining the better performance of the firms. Corporate Governance (CG) is an abstract concept that calls for better coordination among all stakeholders. The conflict between any two stakeholders (Type I) or among one kind of stakeholder (Type II) is called an agency problem. CG is meant to reduce it and lead to better governance of the firms and better performance, as can be vouched globally. Competition is an extraneous factor, and OC is an endogenous factor. Hence, it is justified to call them exotic tools for corporate governance in a firm.

**Index Terms—** Competition; Corporate Governance; Ownership Concentration; Firms; Agency problems

## I.INTRODUCTION

Competition is the presence of more than one player who deals in the same line of business (RASTOGI et al., 2022, Kanoujiya et al., 2022). Competition plays a vital role in ensuring appropriate behavior by the corporate for the betterment of the customers and other stakeholders (Al-Khouri, 2012, Guidi, 2021). Competition forces the corporate to have reasonable cost and pricing mechanisms and ensure they are governed aptly. No business operates in isolation. Mutual interdependence is the order of the day and now even the way of life for business houses. This analogy can be extended to using the marketplace to procure all types of factors of production, mainly capital and labor (Dean and Kretschmer, 2007). A company has to access the marketplace for both. If a firm does not play by the book, it may face repercussions of backlash from the market. Hence, companies must ensure that they are operating as per the law of the land. Competition, how-so-much intense it may be, does not provide a leeway for businesses to

digress and may resort to such practices which are not fit for them (Kanoujiya et al., 2023, Agarwal et al., 2023, Rastogi et al., 2022).

Competition is a market condition that is exogenous to the business houses. They are supposed to live with it as they cannot change the business line quickly. The competition also forces businesses to behave aptly. Competition's impact on a firm's performance is also highlighted in various studies diverse for various sectors (Agarwal et al., 2023; Bloom et al., 2013; Kaunyangi, 2014; Nickel, n.d.; Rastogi et al., 2022; Suzuki, 2014; Teller et al., 2016) Hence it is logical to consider competition as a tool for better governance or corporate governance (Estrin, 2002).

Apart from the competition, what shapes CG is the Ownership Concentration (OC). OC describes the extent of concentration of ownership in the hands of some large shareholders who may or may not be the promoters of the firm. Literature dictates that promoter's holdings and firm performances have linear and non-linear relationships. Concentrated holdings, especially in the hands of promoters (members of a family who own the firm), increase the firm performance. In such a case, the independent director's role gets restricted to the role of a counselor providing expert ideas to promoters for increasing efficiency (Gill & Kaur, 2015; Kavya & Shijin, 2017; Mishra & Kapil, 2017). However, in certain other cases of family-owned firms, promoters sabotage the interest of minority shareholders by routing one firm's resources to the other. This is done through a number of ways, including inter-corporate advances and guarantees. Such interventions by promoters make the profitability of the firm go for a toss (Chauhan et al., 2016; Haldar2011, n.d.; Selarka, 2005; Subramanian, 2018). (Altaf & Shah, 2018) talks about the existence of a U-shaped relationship between OC and corporate performance. OC exercises a positive influence on the

firm performance up to a certain threshold, beyond which it starts influencing the firm performance negatively. India, in particular, has witnessed OC since the British reign, and the phenomenon has only become more pronounced ever since. In recent years concentrated holdings in India have become more of a norm.

Since the corporate world has witnessed a transition from democratic voting rights (one member, one vote) to plutocratic voting rights (one share, one vote), CG mechanisms have altered as well (Pandey & Sahu, 2019; Sheikh, 2018a). Chakrabarti (2005) has talked about several ways through which promoters surpass their voting rights beyond their holdings. Tunneling and cross-holding are two ways identified in Malaysia and India through which dominant promoters exercise expropriation. Hence the existence of an independent audit committee also becomes crucial (Hamid et al., 2016).

It is for the reason of the protection of stakeholders that several studies regard diffused ownership to be beneficial for the overall health of the firm (Alipour, 2013; Demsetz & Villalonga, 2001; Earle et al., 2005a; Fama et al., 1983). Since family-based firms with concentrated holdings are dominant in the entire Asian region, understanding OC along with competition becomes a vital phenomenon. Moreover, Indian firms with an evolution of corporate culture have also evolved their ownership structure which is complex, making it crucial to assess in the light of CG (Deb & Dube, 2017). Though dominant in India, the issue finds scattered mention globally. (Kuznetsov & Muravyev, 2000) Mentions how the benefits of concentrated holdings fail to flow down to the minority shareholders. Thus, the benefit of the blockholders fails to stand in consonance with the minority shareholders.

The vitality of CG disclosures lies in the protection of the interest of various stakeholders and not just minority shareholders. The protection of the vested interest of these stakeholders is mandatory since inherent agency issues characterize corporates (Bhimavarapu et al., 2023; S. S. Shingade & (India), 2019).

This study is an attempt to dissolve the literature gap, which witnesses no current assessment done on studying the cumulative impact of extraneous (Competition) and endogenous factors (OC). CG and its subsets influence various dimensions of corporates,

including valuation (S. Singh et al., 2023; S. Singh & Agarwal, 2023). Governance holds a central position for every institutional body. Hence going beyond corporate, strong governance is suggested for cooperative bodies as well (S. Singh et al., 2022). While OC potentially impacts competition and vice-versa, CG aims to mitigate the downside of both Competition and OC. It is for this reason that policymakers always formulate policies that can optimally strike a balance between extraneous and endogenous factors.

Since the idea behind conceptualizing CG norms is ensuring transparency, long-term sustainable risk management, and legal compliance, CG enhances investors' interest and confidence. This is because investors focus on governance mechanisms to ensure the safety of their investments. Better governance helps to improve the accessibility of capital and lowers the cost of raising capital (Bushee, 1998; Chen et al., 2007; Chhaochharia et al., 2012; Klapper & Love, 2004; Parrino et al., 2003). Hence companies with sound governance mechanisms are better placed to attract and retain investors. A company's sound governance practices get characterized by the quality of the board instead of the independence of the board. Though the adoption of the independent board has gained momentum of late in developing economies like India, there is no evidence of its impact on the firm's performance (Sarkar, 2009). By referring to past literature, this study has discussed various scenarios in which Competition and OC impact CG in different ways.

## II.COMPETITION AND FIRMS

Firms face diverse levels of competition depending upon their standing, anywhere between perfect competition and monopoly. In a perfect competition market, there is a free flow of information. However, as the competition sways away from perfect competition toward monopoly, information asymmetry increases (Liu et al., 2022a). One school of thought holds that competition keeps the firm motivated and on the path of discipline in CG compliance (Cheng et al., 2013; Giroud & Mueller, 2010a). Another aspect talks about the detrimental impacts of competition. Competition leads to internal misappropriation of information with the dual motive of concealing the firm performance and making personal gains (Ali et al., 2014; Sheikh, 2018b)

In the face of competition, firms following CG codes find stability in their operations due to proper disclosure and accountability norm fulfillment (Ben Jonathan et al., 2022). (S. Singh, 2023) though holds a contradictory view mentioning that disclosures are detrimental to dividends. Firms following proper disclosure norms reduces the probability of asymmetrical information dissemination, which provides the firms with competitive advantages (Assidi, 2023). Further, firms operating in highly competitive environments report better social performances, including sustainability promotion (Bhattacharya Sankar Sen, 2004; Du et al., 2007; Galbreth & Ghosh, 2013; Leong & Yang, 2020). The competition also moderates the relationship between transparency and valuation. This moderating role of competition gets particularly enhanced for firms with weak CG in place (Liu et al., 2022).

### III. OWNERSHIP CONCENTRATION AND FIRMS

Divorced ownership and control were first introduced as a CG issue by Berle and Means (1932). OC is a vital element of CG mechanisms as it shapes the operational and managerial outlook of the firms. Ownership structure takes up different forms when considered in developed and developing countries. For certain developing countries like India, OC reportedly improves the firm performance. This improved performance is owed to an active engagement of the promoters in management which also helps in minimizing the agency costs (Nashier & Gupta, 2020). Bhaumik and Selarka (2012) also report an improved performance post-merger and acquisition by Indian firms that have concentrated holdings in the hands of promoters and directors.

Studies conducted in developed economies provide additional and complementary insights into the topic. In the developed economy of the United Kingdom, firms with concentrated holdings of owners are reported to outperform firms under managerial control in terms of profitability. Such firms reportedly provide high returns to their equity holders, have better growth rates in net sales and assets, and they maintain better profit margins when compared with their counterparts. However, when considering the valuation ratio and sales return, firms with diffused OC are better performers (Leech & Leahy, 1991).

However, there is literature specifying the immediate need for reassessment of the impacts of OC on investor protection. OC helps the mighty shareholders direct the course of cash flows (Kavya & Shijin, 2017b). Hence the impact of OC needs continuous monitoring in emerging economies. This is particularly true for emerging economies with no adequate framework in place to ensure investor protection. Minority shareholders are often reportedly on the receiving end of expropriations.

Often facilitated by legal loopholes, transfer pricing, and investment dilutions are some of the forms in which insiders with concentrated holdings make and prefer personal gains (Barberis et al., 2000; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). OC also makes management get plagued and stunted with minimal discretion allowed in decision-making. This restriction imposed on management proves detrimental to improving firm performance. Liquidity of the firm also goes for a toss, provided the opacity of information flow in firms with concentrated holdings. Low liquidity levels further assist in private benefit extraction as the market prices become non-reflective of the misappropriations (Barclay & Holderness, 1989; Burkart et al., 1997; Heflin & Shaw, 2000; Romano, 1993).

Notable efforts in understanding the dynamics of OC are expended in estimating the coalition between minority and dominant blocks of stakeholders. (Zwiebel, 1995) talks about the creation of "own space" by the dominant block. The dominant block extends no consideration to minority holders when making important decisions that mark the existence of conflict. To verify the stated conflict between the dominant block and minority holders an empirical analysis is undertaken. Bedo & Ács (2007) undertook a cross-sectional quantitative study considering 669 companies from various geographical regions of Europe. Results highlighted coalition to be the cause of deteriorating corporate firm performances. The benefits of the existence of every blockholder get overshadowed by the costs involved in resolving the conflicts between such blocks. The same study also reports the instance of non-dominance of the largest blockholders. In the absence of dominance of the largest block, there lies an opportunity of benefit for shareholders owing to the existence of these blocks and improved firm performance.

#### IV. COMPETITION, OWNERSHIP CONCENTRATION, AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Numerous studies continue to analyze different dimensions of the relationship between OC and CG (Bozec & Bozec, 2007; Earle et al., 2005b; Edwards & Nibler, n.d.; Grassa, 2018; Hu & Izumida, 2008; Li et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2015; Schmalz & Ross, 2018). Literature also witnesses several analyses on the relationship between Competition and CG (Doohq et al., n.d.; Estrin, n.d.; Giroud & Mueller, 2010b; Kelsey & Milne, n.d.; Mayer, 1997). Though (K. Singh & Rastogi, 2023) provide a holistic analysis of OC, transparency, and board as constituent components of CG a glaring gap in literature centralizing competition in the configuration exists. A configurational approach centralizing both Competition and OC concerning CG is attempted to be addressed in this work.

#### V. OWNERSHIP CONCENTRATION, TRANSPARENCY, SHAREHOLDERS ACTIVISM, DIVIDEND AND PROFITABILITY

Shareholders activism is an active involvement of the investors in the corporate firm to exercise influence on various policies of the firm including the dividend policy (DP). Dividend policy also gets influenced by the transparency, OC and the competition. Contrary to the popular beliefs, shareholders activism is reported to either exercise negative influence on the profitability or is shown to impact dividend policy insignificantly in several studies (S. Shingade et al., 2022; S. Shingade et al., 2022). Similarly (Bhimavarapu, Rastogi, Gupte, et al., 2022) brings into light the repercussion of transparency on profitability, which again is contrary to the popular belief.

#### VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ever-increasing corporate expropriations and window dressing explains the significance CG holds in ensuring transparency, protecting stakeholders, and guarding firms' performances. Though conflicting views exist on whether or not firm value gets significantly impacted by CG norms, CG acts as a catalyst in promoting transparency. The significance of transparency for smooth business operations is discussed in various studies (Bhimavarapu et al., 2022). Concealing material information and

expropriations for personal gains often gets the firms trapped in legal proceedings and impacts goodwill. Such corporate malpractices, as highlighted in several studies, not just impact the cost of raising equity but also severely increases return volatility (Anderson et al., 2009; Chou et al., 2011; Duru et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2022c; Rajgopal & Venkatachalam, 2011). Both competition and OC cumulatively determine the compliance of CG norms and get impacted by the same.

In certain instances, competition acts as a catalyst in obstructing the free flow of information. The intention underlying concealed information varies from gaining a competitive advantage to availing of personal gains. In other instances where the goodwill of competing firms dictates their equity-raising capability, competition acts as a catalyst in ensuring transparency and complying with CG norms (Bhattacharya et al., 2003; Gupta et al., n.d.; Huang & Zhang, 2012; Kanodia et al., 1998; Shleifer, n.d.; Titman et al., 2003).

This study concludes that CG norms guard firm values. This study concludes that competition in corporate firms with concentrated holdings has a diverse impact on compliance with CG norms. Some firms ensure compliance with CG since the cost of raising equity decreases and agency costs are reduced. However, some firms with concentrated holdings obstruct information flow and transparency to gain competitive advantage or personal expropriation by majority block. This obstruction, though, proves to be counterproductive. Since, in the face of heavy competition, there exists a thin profit margin, attempts to divert limited resources towards personal gain can jeopardize the market share of the firms. In both circumstances, this study concludes that although compliance with CG norms has both costs and benefits, CG norms must definitely be complied with. Since CG mechanisms help reduce agency costs and aid in external supervision, it is in the best interest of the investors and stakeholders that these norms be followed despite the level of competition and concentrated holdings.

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