

Innovating through strategic alliances: Criteria for selecting partners and practical lessons from the BMW and GWM joint-ventureSACI Amel ^{1♦}, BELAIDI Abdelaziz ²1 Higher School of Commerce, Kolea, Tipaza, (Algeria), a_saci@esc-alger.dz2 Higher School of Commerce, Kolea, Tipaza, (Algeria), a_belaidi@esc-alger.dz

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Abstract :

In a context marked by rapid technological advancements and intense competition, innovation has become an essential factor for the success of companies and their competitiveness. To promote this innovation, an increasing number of companies choose to cooperate due to budget constraints, highlighting the importance of merging their resources to collectively tackle challenges. That means the partner selection process is crucial to ensure the success of this approach.

This article presents the results regarding the decisive criteria in the partner selection process for innovative collaborations, based on a literature review and a case study on the joint-venture between BMW and GWM. The results of this research highlight that complementarity, trust, an effective governance structure, and an aligned strategic vision are among the most significant factors that can lead to innovative outcomes.

Keywords: Cooperation, Joint-venture, Partner selection, Criteria, Innovation

Jel Classification: L24, O31, D23, L14, M21

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1. Introduction

In the current context, innovation has become an essential element for maintaining competitiveness in the market. However, companies often find themselves limited by their resources and means. Moreover, traditional internal research is proving to be less and less effective due to the increasing global competition. Thus, it is possible to turn towards the paradigm of open innovation (OI), which requires collaboration with external partners to promote innovation (Emden et al., 2006). Nowadays, many companies choose to enter into cooperation agreements in order to strengthen their competitive advantage through resource sharing. Collaboration can lead to innovation by sharing knowledge, accessing new markets, and sharing risks to ensure the success of cooperation (Franco & Haase, 2020) so the process of selecting and choosing partners has become crucial to ensuring the success of a collaboration given that 50% of failures are attributed to poor partner selection (Franco, 2010).

This article aims to explore the various selection criteria that can be considered when choosing a partner to enhance long-term innovation and creativity capacity, using the automotive industry as an example. Indeed this sector is currently facing several major challenges such as the need to master and develop new technologies to meet the changing demands of consumers, as well as to ensure stable production levels to guarantee the sustainability of its activities. They must also adapt to a globalized and uncertain economic environment, which is leading to an ongoing restructuring of industry players. In this context, one of the characteristics of this transformation is the rise of alliance and co-opetition strategies (Attias & Mira-Bonnardel, 2017).

However a fundamental question arises regarding these complex organizational structures : ***what criteria do companies consider when selecting a strategic partner to stimulate innovation ?***

The objective of this study is to explore this issue by focusing on an in-depth analysis of a particularly significant specific case : the "Spotlight" joint-venture formed by the BMW Group and Great Wall Motors (GWM). Established with the aim of manufacturing electric vehicles for BMW's MINI brand as well as models for GWM, this collaboration between China and Germany offers a unique opportunity to study partner selection processes within the framework of technological innovation.

Our approach is based on the central hypothesis that « *resource complementarity, strategic alignment, and mutual trust are key elements for the success of an innovative collaboration* »

More specifically, our hypothesis (H1) is that the interaction between technological resources has a positive impact on partner selection, that the alignment of long-term missions and strategic visions helps to consolidate the sustainability of the alliance (H2), and that the development of a trust-based relationship between partners promotes the effectiveness of cooperative governance (H3).

In order to make this research operational, our objective is to analyze two interdependent questions :

1. *What are the main criteria considered in the partner selection process for innovative initiatives ?*
2. *How are these criteria implemented in the specific context of the joint-venture between BMW and GWM ?*

Methodologically, our study opts for a qualitative approach based on the analysis of a single case. This approach is based on the knowledge of academic literature regarding strategic alliances, which is supplemented by the use of secondary sources such as specialized press articles, official communications from the involved companies, and institutional documents (Coombs, 2022). If this approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the main success factors of the examined strategic alliance, it is important to note that the absence of quantitative data represents a clearly identified and accepted methodological limitation in our study.

2. Literature Review

This literature review offers an organized synthesis of the main criteria used to select partners in the context of innovative cooperation. It is based on recent theoretical and empirical studies to better identify the key factors of a successful strategic alliance. This analysis will also allow us to position our study in relation to previous works and to highlight the specific contributions of this article.

2.1 The selection of partners : Selection criteria

The issue of partner selection has sparked keen interest among executives and strategy researchers, as the number of contracts and partnerships has continued to increase since the 1980s. Therefore, the selection of partners with whom to collaborate for innovation is of paramount importance. It is crucial to consider various selection criteria in order to ensure the success and mutual benefits of the collaboration for all stakeholders.

Regarding selection criteria, three main recurring criteria are generally identified in each research and study. First, the criteria that a potential partner must possess include their characteristics; second, the compatibility between the company and the potential partner; and finally, the experience and previous relationships to address the potential risks of the partner (Maryem, 2006).

2.1.1 The complementarity of resources and skills

This criterion is one of the most important and encourages companies to collaborate with external partners due to a lack of resources, as well as to share expertise in order to effectively promote innovation, thus creating synergy between partners by capitalizing on each other's strengths. Therefore, the complementarity of resources is an essential aspect to consider (Guertler & Lindemann, 2016).

➤ Complementarity of resources

In general, resources can be divided into two categories: tangible and intangible. Given the value of information, resources must be uncommon, hard to replicate, and non-replaceable in order to generate benefits and a competitive edge (Cefis et al., 2009).

- ✓ Companies primarily seek, for their innovation projects, a complementarity of resources and

technical knowledge, including patents, documents, and manufacturing processes, as well as know-how that can take the form of a product or method. This criterion is considered the most crucial when searching for a partner, as it is unique to each company and difficult to reproduce (imitate) (Maryem, 2006)

- ✓ Secondly, the relational resources and skills, such as "networking," of the potential partner include their formal and informal network, comprising their relationships and connections with their partners and local stakeholders, as well as their market knowledge. These elements are essential for accessing new markets and overcoming challenges. However, the most crucial aspect in the relational field is being able to anticipate the smooth progress, or lack thereof, of the collaboration (Maryem, 2006)
- ✓ Finally, financial resources are essential criteria for innovation projects, as the importance of R&D investments is a determining factor in the transition and maintenance of the innovator status (Cefis et al., 2009)

Potential partners should bring complementary skills and knowledge to those of the company, thereby fostering synergy and innovative solutions to market challenges, in addition to a complementarity of resources and skills (De Faria et al., 2010)

- The size of the company can play a crucial role in the partner selection process, as a larger company generally has resources in terms of technical infrastructure, specialized skills, and capital, which can impact the partners' ability to effectively carry out innovation projects (Maryem, 2006)

Partners with sufficient resources and a solid financial foundation will be able to invest in research and development, as well as in the implementation of innovative solutions.

➤ **Complementarity of Skills**

One of the primary criteria sought by all partners is the complementarity of skills in order to address gaps and play a crucial role in the success of joint-ventures (JVs) by allowing partners to leverage each other's unique strengths, thereby improving overall performance. Several studies have been conducted on this subject and indicate that technological complementarity and knowledge of the local market create synergies that improve the outcomes of cooperation and enable the achievement of objectives. This also facilitates better collaboration and resource sharing, especially in uncertain environments (Liu et al., 2022). Thus, it is crucial to have compatible and complementary skills to prevent operational conflicts which could lead to the company's failure (Geringer, 1991). Various quantitative methods are available to assess complementarity, particularly on a technological level, to help companies identify appropriate partners, which contributes to the success of their approach (X. Wang et al., 2021)

2.2.2 Reputation and Notoriety

For a company, its reputation represents its identity, image, performance and alignment with stakeholders. It is an intangible, incorporeal, and valuable asset that exerts an influence on its environment and can help increase its profitability.

A solid reputation helps strengthen business advantages and customer loyalty as it is gradually forged over time through various interactions with its environment and target audience. It is imperative to carefully examine the reputation and ethics of partner as these will directly influence the company's reputation and credibility. Moreover, they foster mutual trust and reduce the risks associated with transactions when they are positive (Casimiro Almeida & Matos Coelho, 2017; Franco & Haase, 2020). It is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis of these elements using measurable criteria and professional sources in order to prevent potential risks and ensure the establishment of a solid and sustainable partnership. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the reliability of partners as a crucial criterion as well as their adherence to commitments regarding deadlines and service quality (Rese, 2006)

2.2.3 Commitment – Involvement

The notion of collaboration is primarily based on commitment and sharing, as highlighted by several definitions of this concept (Bourgault & Daoudi, 2014). Collaboration is defined as « *the willingness of one partner to collaborate with another to achieve a common goal* » or in other words, as the commitment and efforts made to collaborate openly and proactively in order to promote the exchange of ideas and create added value together (Franco & Haase, 2020). This aspect is of crucial importance in the context of collaboration, as it affects performance and job satisfaction. The commitment of senior management is an essential element for the success of collaboration and should involve all members of the organization at all levels (Ylitalo et al., 2005)

2.2.4 The capacity for adaptation

A crucial aspect in the context of various organizational changes and external dynamics is the ability of the actors to collaborate openly and proactively, as well as their capacity to adapt to market changes, which play a decisive role in the success of the collaboration. It is essential to have a deep understanding of the partners' reactions to uncertainties and challenges encountered during the execution of a project, in order to anticipate potential obstacles and ensure the sustainability of innovation (Belkadi et al., 2017)

2.2.5 Previous Experience

This is a criterion that has been widely discussed in the literature to this day. It is also important to evaluate their experience in terms of innovation and management of similar projects. This ensures that they possess the skills and knowledge required to successfully complete the collaboration and innovation project (Bourgault & Daoudi, 2014)

2.2.6 Cultural Compatibility

A crucial organizational criterion to ensure the sustainability and success of collaboration. According to Hofstede, culture can be defined as a « *collective programming of the mind* » that distinguishes different groups. Cultural disparities exert an influence on cooperation within the framework of globalization, which can make collaboration more complex and lead to an increase in administrative costs to achieve success. It is essential to ensure that partners share common values, which will promote transparent communication and effective collaboration

(Hamir Basah, 2019; Ilyash et al., 2022; Sun, 2009)

2.2.7 Communication, Transparency, and Flexibility

In addition to the traditional criteria mentioned, clarity, transparency, and flexibility in communication and daily interactions between partners can play a crucial role in the success of the collaboration. A mutual understanding regarding objectives, roles, and responsibilities, combined with a willingness to make the necessary adjustments, fosters the establishment of robust and sustainable partnership relationships (Ylitalo et al., 2005)

3. Cooperation between BMW and GWM : The "Spotlight" joint-venture

Currently, the automotive industry is facing a period of profound transformation, characterized by various challenges and issues. Among these, one can mention the increasing electrification of vehicles, the growing pressure to reduce CO2 emissions (notably through government regulations) environmental standards ;global competition, as well as the constant need to innovate to remain competitive in a context of rapid technological development(Nicolas, 2025)

According to the latest statistics from the ACEA (European Automobile Manufacturers Association), sales recorded a 14.2% drop to 13.4 million. Among the factors that influenced these sales, the increase in purchase prices can be mentioned, which have risen by more than 30% over the past five years, far exceeding the modest growth in household disposable income.

In 2023, 58% of electric vehicles (EVs) were produced in China and by China globally, which has allowed it to consolidate its position as a major player in such a dynamic and crucial industry for the future of transportation and sustainable development. China's preeminence in this electric vehicle movement, supported by the government, makes it a major power in the global market. This situation has led to a restructuring of the sector by reducing costs and labor, prompting many groups to reconsider their competitiveness. This dynamic evolution of automobile production reflects changes in trade and investment, as highlighted by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 2024 (ONU, 2024)

Overall, the automotive industry is undergoing a significant shift towards electric vehicles, which involves regulatory and economic challenges, but also growth opportunities through strategic partnerships. Among these partnerships, we can mention those between several manufacturers such as the Japanese manufacturers 'Honda, Nissan, and Mitsubishi', as well as 'Toyota and Volkswagen' and the alliance between 'Stellantis and Hyundai-Kia'.

To respond to this trend, BMW and GWM have established a joint-venture called 'SPOTLIGHT' this collaboration aims to accelerate BMW's electric mobility strategy, strengthen GWM's presence in the global electric vehicle market, and consolidate BMW's position in the Chinese market, the most important for electromobility and it aims to help GWM accelerate its electric vehicle strategy and enter the European market with the electric MINI Cooper (Bernard Lalière, 2024)

3.1 Presentation of GWM

Great Wall Motors, also known as "GWM," is a Chinese company founded in 1976, specializing in the manufacture of pick-up trucks. It held the top spot in terms of sales volume for 21 years.

Starting in 2010, GWM intensified its efforts by staying true to its philosophy of excellence in the sectors of commercial vehicles and cars, and then successively introduced a range of Haval models as well as several sophisticated models. Among the brands are: Haval, Ora, Wey, and Tank. The company has continuously progressed to increase its market share by opening various R&D centers and acquiring a General Motors factory in India, then in Thailand (GWM, 2018, 2019)

3.2 Presentation of BMW

Founded in 1916, BMW, an acronym for « Bayerische Motoren Werke » in German, translating to "Bavarian Motor Works," is a German automobile manufacturer specializing in the production of high-end, luxury, sports cars, as well as motorcycles.

Initially recognized for its aircraft engine manufacturing, the company was born from the merger of two companies in Germany. In addition, BMW also owns the Mini and Rolls-Royce brands, thus forming the BMW Group, the innovative company, founded before the Second World War and still active.

In 2013, the BMW Group has twenty-four production sites around the world, spread across four continents, thus pursuing its goal of global market leadership. The group's success invariably depends on long-term planning and responsible management. This is what prompted it to develop a philosophy of ecological and social sustainability throughout the entire value chain, as well as to offer high-quality products and services incorporating sophisticated modern technology. The BMW Group plans to produce future MINI electric vehicles in China in partnership with Great Wall Motor (BMW Group, 2025)

3.3 The Joint-Venture "SPOTLIGHT AUTOMOTIVE LTD"

In 2018 during a series of Sino-German intergovernmental consultations, the joint-venture contract between GREAT WALL MOTOR "GWM" and BMW Holding B.V. "BMW" was established and formalized. In the presence of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and representatives of both governments in Berlin, the two parties have agreed to form a new joint-venture called "Spotlight Automotive Limited" with the aim of designing and manufacturing electric vehicles (EVs) of the MINI brand in China. Each party will hold a 50% stake in this joint venture, with a total investment of 5.1 billion RMB (approximately 780 million USD). The main objective of this initiative is to consolidate the position of both partners in the Chinese electric vehicle market (Spotlight, 2018)

The ultramodern production plant of Spotlight, located in Jiangsu, has an initial standard production capacity of 160,000 vehicles, with an increase planned according to its future production plans for the global market. This BEV (battery electric vehicle) joint venture project between BMW and GWM is the first of its kind on a global scale. It represents a key element of

MINI's ongoing development strategy within the BMW Group, marking an important step towards the future electrification of the brand (GWM, 2018, 2019, 2020)

3.4 Selection criteria for the joint-venture

The selection criteria and success factors of this partnership can be understood through various key elements, which are supported by the leaders of both parties through their official websites, press articles, as well as research on joint-ventures and coopetition in the automotive sector. Among the criteria identified in various studies, we find :

❖ Complementarity of resources and skills

The Spotlight alliance between BMW and Great Wall Motors (GWM) perfectly illustrates the strategic complementarity necessary for the success of a joint-venture :

- BMW brings its technological expertise and premium positioning
- GWM contributes with its knowledge of the Chinese market and its local production capabilities

As stated by an executive at a press conference: « *BMW Group has rich experience and will benefit from the advantages of collaborating with Great Wall Motors, the leader of the Chinese automotive industry, to stimulate the development and production of new products* »

This complementarity is found in other successful alliances like 'Renault-Nissan' where regional strengths (Europe/Asia) have enabled global expansion. Conversely, the lack of real complementarity contributed to the failure of certain alliances like 'Ford-Mazda' (Gewiss & Oestersporkmann, 2017; Jiang & Tidström, 2024; Rajan et al., 2021; Sussan et al., 2015)

❖ Strategic alignment

The executives statements highlight the crucial importance of a shared vision: « *This collaboration constitutes a significant reinforcement to BMW's overall strategy regarding new energy vehicles, as well as to GWM's international strategy* » (GWM, 2019, 2020). The focus on electromobility is at the heart of Spotlight's strategy.

This convergence of objectives contrasts with the failure of the alliance between 'Renault, Nissan, and Daimler in 2021' whose dissolution can be partly attributed to a strategic divergence. Initially focused on internal combustion vehicles, the alliance faced strategic disagreements during the transition to electric mobility, highlighting incompatibilities in long-term perspectives (Lee, 2015) (Y. Wang, 2022)

❖ Mutual trust and respect

Trust, respect and confidence play a fundamental role in the statements of Spotlight's leaders: « *Despite the difficulties caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, both parties have decided to continue the investment plan based on our confidence in the long-term good development of the Chinese market* » (GWM, 2018, 2019, 2020)

The robustness of relationships distinguishes sustainable partnerships from temporary collaborations. The example of 'Toyota-Suzuki' highlights how trust can help overcome cultural and organizational barriers. (Trappes, 2022) (Lee, 2015)

❖ The ability to adapt and local knowledge

The analysis of the Spotlight case reveals the crucial importance of adapting to the local context

- ✓ GWM provides a deep understanding of the Chinese market and its regulatory environment
- ✓ BMW brings its global vision and international standards

This factor recalls the success of the ‘Renault-Nissan alliance’ which was able to adapt its strategies to institutional and cultural constraints in different regions (Sussan et al., 2015). On the other hand General Motors failure in China with its partner in certain segments is partly explained by insufficient adaptation to the specifics of the local market (D’Agostini et al., 2014) (GWM, 2018, 2019, 2020)

❖ Management and Governance

The governance of Spotlight is distinguished by its balanced structural model

- ✓ The board of directors is composed of six members.
- ✓ The presidency is held by GWM and the vice-presidency by BMW
- ✓ Four-year terms are implemented to ensure stability

This model of collaborative governance stands out from the challenges faced by ‘Renault-Nissan-Daimler’ where « *leadership changes disrupted management and project continuity* » Thus governance is perceived as a determining factor that can lead to success or failure (Gewiss & Oestersporkmann, 2017) (GWM, 2019, 2020) (Goller et al., s. d.)

❖ Institutional involvement and commitment

Another essential factor lies in the involvement and commitment, both of the partner companies and the government authorities. In the context of Spotlight, trust has increased the commitment and motivation of GWM and the Chinese government supporting the project, as they feel supported and appreciated at this stage by BMW and the German authorities. Mutual support from the authorities is an essential element of the alliance.

This institutional dimension of commitment is also observed in other successful collaborations such as the partnership between Tesla and Daimler, characterized by a « *mutual commitment that has fostered technological advancement* » (Cheong et al., 2016). On the other hand, the failure of certain alliances such as the one between GM and PSA can be partly attributed to an imbalance in partner commitment and a lack of institutional support (Hani & Cheriet, 2013)

The active engagement of government authorities is of crucial importance in China, where international joint-ventures are integrated into a national strategy for technological development (GWM, 2019)

❖ Technological Capacity and Expertise

The testimonies highlight the importance of technological synergy « *With new technologies each processing plant will fully integrate GWM and BMW Group's advanced manufacturing philosophy and apply international cutting-edge production technology and quality management systems, thus becoming a benchmark factory that truly meets global regulations and market*

requirements » The combination of BMW's innovative expertise with over 100 years of experience and GWM's research and development infrastructure represents a significant advantage for Spotlight. This dynamic recalls the collaboration between Tesla and Daimler during which the sharing of technological resources fostered an acceleration of innovation (Cheong et al., 2016) (GWM, 2020; Y. Wang, 2022)

❖ **Production Capacity**

The productivity of Spotlight, which reaches 160,000 units per year, illustrates the efficiency of shared infrastructure. This operational success highlights the collaboration between PSA and Toyota with the aim of manufacturing small urban vehicles in Europe, which has allowed for significant economies of scale through the optimization of production capacities (GWM, 2020)

❖ **Innovation capacity**

Innovation plays a crucial role in the success of automotive partnerships, especially during periods of energy and technological transition. The example of Spotlight exemplarily illustrates this dynamic. The innovative collaboration between BMW and GWM is based on a strategic combination of research and development skills

- The evolution of the electric MINI
- The design of (EVs) at an optimized cost for global markets

Other similarities can be highlighted with Sino-Indian partnerships, illustrating how technological cooperation can promote quality improvement and the attainment of significant competitive advantages. We observe this same dynamic within the Renault-Nissan alliance, where innovation is seen as an essential element fostering value creation within alliances, allowing partners to merge their skills to design products that would have been beyond their reach if they had acted individually (Balcet & Ruet, 2011) (GWM, 2020)

4 Results and discussion

Our analysis of the collaboration between BMW and Great Wall Motors substantiates our hypotheses regarding the Spotlight relationship. The data analysis indicates that partner selection was grounded in a comprehensive assessment encompassing strategic, technological, and relational factors, hence validating our conceptual approach.

The primary hypothesis asserting that resource complementarity, strategy alignment, and mutual trust are crucial for the success of a creative partnership is validated in the examined scenario. The leaders unequivocally affirm the significance of these three dimensions: The BMW Group will gain advantages from its collaboration with GWM a prominent entity in the Chinese automotive sector underscoring the acknowledgement of organisational synergies. The joint venture represents a multifaceted strategy characterised by its equitable framework and delineated collaboration zones.

Empirical findings validate hypothesis H1 concerning the positive impact of technological resource synergy on partner selection. BMW's extensive expertise in luxury automobiles merges with GWM's manufacturing infrastructure and research and development competencies in new

energy. A leader affirms this complementarity by declaring that « *each factory will incorporate GWM and BMW's advanced manufacturing philosophy* » This collaboration yields an annual output of 160,000 units and fosters the advancement of novel electric vehicles.

The Spotlight case study confirms Hypothesis H2 regarding the strategic coherence and sustainability of the partnership. The alignment of strategic visions about electromobility underpins this collaboration, as indicated by the official statement: « *This cooperation enhances BMW's overarching strategy for new energy vehicles and GWM's global strategy* » This shared direction enhanced cohesion during the global health crisis, illustrating the robustness of the strategic alignment.

Also Spotlight corroborates our hypothesis H3 regarding the beneficial influence of trust on cooperative governance. The establishment of a six-member equal board of directors, featuring an alternating presidency, seeks to equilibrate decision-making authority. According to J. Goller, CEO of BMW Greater China, this institutionalised trust was essential throughout the pandemic trajectory. The two parties have resolved to proceed with the investment plan, owing to their trust in its long-term favourable progression.

The investigation uncovered significant criteria in the selection beyond our initial assumptions. Adapting to the local market is essential, particularly in China due to its intricate rules. The engagement and backing of governmental officials, especially the « *ongoing support from the Zhangjiagang municipal government* » are critical factors.

Ultimately, collaborative innovation emerges as a criterion for selecting the combined development of novel technological solutions. The triangulation of Spotlight data validates our hypotheses and enhances our comprehension of the specified criteria. This analysis corroborates the prior research conducted by (Bourgault & Daoudi, 2014) about the complementarity of talents. The establishment of trust mechanisms and strategic alignment elucidates the procedures proposed by (Franco, 2010; Franco & Haase, 2020)

5 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to identify the key criteria used in the process of selecting strategic partners for innovation, based on the case study of the Spotlight joint venture established between BMW and Great Wall Motors. At the end of this research, our results provide significant answers to our research question and confirm our initial hypotheses.

In response to our main research question which focuses on ***the criteria used by companies to select a strategic partner for innovation***, the analysis of the "Spotlight" case confirms that the partner selection process is complex and goes beyond the purely technical evaluation of capabilities. The empirical data collected fully confirm our main hypothesis that resource complementarity, strategic alignment, and mutual trust are key elements for the success of innovative collaboration (de Groote et al., 2023; X. Wang et al., 2021)

Regarding our first secondary hypothesis (H1), the results highlight that the combination of BMW's technological resources (expertise in high-end vehicles and advanced technologies) and GWM's resources (production capabilities and expertise in the Chinese market) played a decisive

role in the partner selection process. This complementarity facilitated an optimal allocation of resources and maximized the efficiency of the collaboration (Bourgault & Daoudi, 2014)

The analysis of the Spotlight case also confirms our second hypothesis (H2) on the importance of strategic coherence. The alignment of BMW and GWM's long-term perspectives on electromobility strengthened their partnership, thus withstanding temporary difficulties such as the COVID-19 crisis. This finding confirms the research of (Franco & Haase, 2020) (Attias & Mira-Bonnardel, 2017) which highlights the necessity of a deep understanding of the expectations, values, and visions of potential partners in order to establish a sustainable collaboration.

Regarding our third hypothesis (H3), the examination of the executives' statements and Spotlight's governance configuration confirms that the establishment of a trust relationship between BMW and GWM has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of their cooperative governance. The dualistic configuration of the board of directors and the clarity of decision-making mechanisms demonstrate how mutual trust fosters the management of conflicts inherent in strategic partnerships.

Regarding our inquiry into the practical implementation of these criteria within the specific framework of the BMW-GWM joint-venture, our study highlights a particularly elaborate selection and structuring process. Both parties have established a strict mutual evaluation methodology, which takes into account strategic aspects (convergence of electromobility objectives), operational aspects (synergy of production and innovation capacities), and relational aspects (progressive development of institutional trust).

Our results also highlight the critical importance of flexibility and adaptability in the context of a rapidly evolving automotive sector. The adaptability demonstrated by BMW and GWM in their collaboration to adjust to changes in the Chinese and global markets is a crucial element of their resilience (Widjajani & Nurjaman, 2020)

From a conceptual standpoint, this study aims to enrich the field of strategic alliances by developing an integrative conceptual framework for partner selection in innovation initiatives. It highlights the essential interdependence of strategic, relational, and organizational dimensions in the formation and maintenance of partnerships.

From a managerial perspective, our conclusions indicate that companies should prioritize a holistic approach when choosing their innovation partners, paying particular attention to:

- ✓ The balance between the complementarity and compatibility of technological resources
- ✓ The convergence of long-term strategic perspectives
- ✓ The establishment of formal and informal mechanisms promoting the development of trust.
- ✓ The creation of organizational capacity to adapt to uncertainties

The recommendations arising from our case study on Spotlight provide a practical framework for executives facing the challenges of partner selection in a complex and dynamic innovation

context.

The methodological constraints of our qualitative approach which relies on a single case study including the lack of in-depth quantitative data, indicate the relevance of conducting further research (Coombs, 2022). The conduct of longitudinal and comparative studies including other types of strategic alliances in the automotive field and beyond would be beneficial to consolidate the generalization of our results and deepen the understanding of the mechanisms involved in the effective selection of innovation partners.

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