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STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND COMPETITIVENESS OF COMMERCIAL PARASTATALS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between strategic management practices and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The specific objectives were as follows; to examine the relationship between strategy formulation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya and to establish the relationship between strategy implementation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The study was anchored on Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. This study used a descriptive research design. This study only focused on Training and Research, Public Universities and Tertiary Education/Training parastatals in Kenya which are 21 in number. In every parastatal the study target 1 top manager, 3 middle level managers and 5 lower-level managers hence a total of 189 management employees. The total target population was therefore 189 respondents. Management employees were targeted since they were in a better position to provide information on the relationship between strategic management practices and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The study adopted stratified sampling technique in selecting participants. The sample size was 128 respondents. This study used a structured questionnaire as data collection tool to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The research utilized an adopted questionnaire as the data collection tool to ensure that the questions were appropriate for the study. A pilot test was done in order to examine the requisite requirements that were necessary for the study. Data analysis was undertaken in two methods by use of SPSS. First, descriptive statistics were undertaken which involved computation of means and standard deviations for observations about variables. The study concluded that strategy formulation had a positive and significant relationship with the competitiveness of Kenya's commercial parastatals. The study also concluded that strategy implementation had a positive and significant relationship with competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. Based on the findings, the study recommended that commercial parastatals in Kenya should; establish structured mechanisms such as regular consultative forums, digital feedback systems, and cross-departmental planning sessions to actively involve internal and external stakeholders in strategy formulation; ensure timely budget disbursement, allocate adequate human and financial resources at strategy implementation phase, and institute clear, organization-wide communication channels to align all staff with strategic goals.

Key Words: Strategic Management Practices, Competitiveness, Commercial Parastatals, Strategy Formulation, Strategy Implementation.

Background of the Study

Strategic management has become a crucial framework for improving the competitiveness of organizations, especially for commercial parastatals. These entities operate at the crossroads of public service and business interests, relying on strategic management to manage their complex environments effectively. Recent data highlights their significant economic contribution; in Kenya, commercial parastatals generate around 10% of the nation's GDP (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Strategy formulation is fundamental to strategic management, as it sets the direction and long-term goals for an organization. Effective formulation is particularly important for commercial parastatals to align with national development goals. A report by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, 2022) highlights that aligning organizational strategies with national priorities is essential. For example, Kenya Power has aligned its strategic planning with the Big Four Agenda, focusing on infrastructure and industrialization. This alignment has led to a reported 15% increase in operational efficiency in the past year (Kenya Power, 2023), illustrating the direct benefits of well-aligned strategies.

Competitiveness in Kenyan commercial parastatals is closely tied to the effective implementation of strategic management practices. However, a study by the Institute of Economic Affairs (2023) reveals that only 60% of these parastatals achieve their strategic goals on time due to challenges like bureaucratic inefficiencies and resource constraints. For example, delays in the Kenya Ports Authority's (KPA) port modernization projects, highlighted in its 2023 report, have negatively impacted service delivery and competitiveness. Overcoming these barriers through streamlined processes, timely resource allocation, and enhanced accountability is crucial for improving performance and strengthening their competitive edge both locally and globally.

Recent findings emphasize that comprehensive strategic management practices can lead to notable organizational competitiveness. A 2023 survey by the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) found that parastatals with robust strategic management frameworks experienced a 12% rise in financial performance compared to those with less structured approaches (NSE, 2023). This improvement is attributed to better alignment of strategic goals, and right organizational culture. These findings underline the critical role of strategic management practices in driving the success of commercial parastatals.

In conclusion, this study's background illustrates how strategy formulation, and Strategy Implementation are essential for enhancing the competitiveness of commercial parastatals. The integration of these practices enables organizations to navigate complex environments and achieve their goals effectively. Current statistics demonstrate the tangible benefits of strategic management, including improved efficiency, financial performance, and alignment with national goals. As commercial parastatals face ongoing challenges, adopting effective strategic management practices will be crucial for their continued growth and success.

Statement of the Problem

Commercial parastatals are vital to the economic growth and development of many countries, particularly in Africa. However, their competitiveness has been a concern in recent years. Research has shown that state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Africa have an average return on equity (ROE) of around 2.5%, which is lower than that of private sector companies in the region (African Development Bank, 2019). This poor performance can be attributed to the lack of effective strategic management practices in these organizations. For instance, a survey found that only 30% of SOEs in Africa have a clear strategic plan in place, while 60% lack a performance monitoring and evaluation system (World Bank, 2017).

The absence of effective strategic management practices in commercial parastatals can have far-reaching consequences for their competitiveness. Studies have shown that commercial parastatals that adopt strategic management practices such as strategic planning, performance measurement, and benchmarking tend to perform better than those that do not (Otieno & Okech, 2015). For example, commercial parastatals in Kenya that adopted strategic planning had an average return on assets (ROA) of 15.6%, compared to 6.3% for those that did not adopt strategic planning (Otieno & Okech, 2015). This highlights the importance of strategic management practices in improving the competitiveness of commercial parastatals.

Despite the importance of strategic management practices, many commercial parastatals in developing countries lack the capacity to implement these practices effectively. A report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2018) found that 70% of SOEs in developing countries lack the necessary skills and expertise to implement strategic management practices. This is often due to inadequate training and development programs, as well as a lack of resources and infrastructure (Muriithi & Ngari, 2015).

The poor performance of commercial parastatals has significant implications for the economy as a whole. The International Monetary Fund (2019) estimates that the average annual loss of SOEs in Africa is around 1.5% of GDP, which is a significant drain on the economy. Furthermore, less competitive commercial parastatals can also have negative impacts on the provision of essential public services, such as electricity, water, education, and transportation. For instance, Kenya Airways, Mumias Sugar Company, and Telkom Kenya have faced significant performance challenges, prompting government plans for privatization. This indicates that the competitiveness of these entities is below expectations and warrants further investigation from various perspectives to develop effective policies for improvement. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the relationship between strategic management practices and competitiveness of commercial parastatals, in order to identify ways to improve their performance and contribute to the economic development of the country.

Objectives of the Study

General objectives

The study's general objective was to investigate the relationship between strategic management practices on competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya.

Specific objectives

i. To examine the relationship between strategy formulation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya.
ii. To establish the relationship between strategy implementation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is a cornerstone of strategic management, positing that an organization's sustained competitiveness stems from the strategic utilization of its internal resources, which must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). This framework underscores the importance of resource evaluation and strategic alignment during the formulation of competitive strategies. For commercial parastatals in Kenya, this involves leveraging distinct strengths such as government support, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and specialized expertise. For instance, Kenya Power effectively capitalizes on its unique market position as a near-monopoly in energy distribution, utilizing its extensive networks to maintain operational dominance and deliver critical services to millions.

RBV also emphasizes the importance of aligning these internal resources with strategic objectives to respond to external market challenges effectively. For Kenyan parastatals, this alignment often involves mobilizing internal capabilities to create value in highly competitive or regulated environments. The Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA), for example, has successfully built its competitiveness by strategically leveraging its extensive farmer networks and world-class tea-processing infrastructure. This approach has positioned KTDA as a global leader in the tea industry, showcasing the power of resource-based strategy formulation in ensuring long-term competitiveness in dynamic markets (Kamau & Muthoni, 2019).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) highlights the importance of continuous resource improvement and innovation as key drivers of sustained competitiveness, particularly for parastatals in dynamic industries. Consistent investment in upgrading resource capabilities is essential to maintaining a competitive edge, as demonstrated by the Kenya Ports Authority (KPA), which has adopted advanced technologies in cargo handling and logistics to enhance operational efficiency and service quality, strengthening its regional and global competitiveness (KPA Annual Report, 2022). This aligns with Barney’s (2018) assertion that organizations must develop unique, valuable, and hard-to-replicate capabilities to secure long-term success. By prioritizing innovation and resource optimization, parastatals like KPA can effectively navigate market changes and sustain their competitive positions.

Intangible resources also play a vital role in the RBV framework, particularly organizational culture, brand reputation, and stakeholder relationships. These assets, often overlooked, can be decisive in achieving competitiveness. Kenyan parastatals, such as the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), have demonstrated this by focusing on public goodwill and enhancing customer relations. Through strategic public engagement and efficiency-driven reforms, KRA has improved its image and operational effectiveness, creating a virtuous cycle that enhances its competitive edge (Ochieng & Sije, 2021). These examples underscore that both tangible and intangible resources are indispensable for sustained strategic success.

Despite its strengths, RBV faces limitations in dynamic and volatile environments, which are typical of Kenyan parastatals. Political and economic instability, rapid technological changes, and regulatory shifts often create challenges that RBV’s assumption of a relatively stable environment may not adequately address. To mitigate this, parastatals must integrate adaptive strategies with the RBV framework. For example, employing scenario planning and proactive risk management ensures resilience against external shocks. Research by Ngugi et al. (2020) highlights that Kenyan parastatals leveraging such adaptive strategies remain competitive even amidst external uncertainties, complementing the strengths of a resource-based approach.

Therefore, the Resource-Based View provides a robust theoretical lens for understanding how strategy formulation can drive competitiveness in commercial parastatals. By effectively harnessing unique resources, fostering innovation, and valuing intangible assets, parastatals can secure a strong strategic position. However, to fully capitalize on RBV’s strengths, these organizations must also develop flexible strategies that address external volatility. By doing so, Kenyan parastatals can bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, ensuring sustained competitiveness in a challenging and evolving landscape.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) has far-reaching implications for the competitiveness of commercial parastatals. According to Teece et al. (2016), a firm's ability to adapt and evolve its resources and capabilities in response to changing environmental conditions is a key driver of competitiveness. This is particularly relevant for commercial parastatals, which must rapidly respond to changes in the market, technology, and customer needs to achieve sustainable competitiveness. In fact, the ability to adapt and evolve is critical for commercial parastatals to stay ahead of their competitors and maintain their market position.

In the context of strategy implementation, the DCT highlights the importance of dynamic capabilities in integrating and reconfiguring internal and external resources to address changing environmental conditions. As noted by Helfat and Peteraf (2015), dynamic capabilities involve the ability to sense and seize opportunities, and to transform and reconfigure resources to address changing market conditions. This requires commercial parastatals to have a deep understanding of their internal and external environments, as well as the ability to rapidly respond to changes in the market. Commercial parastatals with strong dynamic capabilities are better equipped to implement strategies that respond to changing environmental conditions and stay ahead of their competitors.

One of the key implications of the DCT for commercial parastatals is the importance of ambidexterity in strategy implementation. According to O'Reilly and Tushman (2013), ambidexterity refers to the ability of an organization to simultaneously explore new opportunities and exploit existing ones. This requires commercial parastatals to balance their focus on short-term performance with their need to invest in long-term growth and innovation. Commercial parastatals that can balance exploration and exploitation are more likely to achieve sustainable competitiveness by leveraging their dynamic capabilities to respond to changing environmental conditions.

Moreover, the DCT emphasizes the role of leadership in strategy implementation. According to Teece (2014), leaders play a critical role in sensing and seizing opportunities, and in transforming and reconfiguring resources to address changing environmental conditions. In the context of commercial parastatals, this means that leaders must be able to identify and prioritize opportunities, and develop strategies that leverage the organization's dynamic capabilities to respond to changing market conditions. Effective leaders must also be able to create a culture that encourages experimentation, learning, and innovation, and provides employees with the autonomy and resources they need to respond to changing environmental conditions.

Furthermore, the DCT highlights the importance of organizational culture in strategy implementation. As noted by Sirmon et al. (2011), organizational culture plays a critical role in enabling or hindering the development of dynamic capabilities. Commercial parastatals that possess a culture that encourages experimentation, learning, and innovation are more likely to develop strong dynamic capabilities and achieve sustainable competitiveness. This requires a culture that values flexibility, adaptability, and continuous learning, and provides employees with the autonomy and resources they need to respond to changing environmental conditions.

Therefore, the DCT provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to the competitiveness of commercial parastatals. By leveraging their dynamic capabilities, commercial parastatals can achieve sustainable competitiveness and stay ahead of their competitors. As noted by Zahra et al. (2018), dynamic capabilities are critical for firms operating in rapidly changing environments, and commercial parastatals are no exception. By understanding the importance of dynamic capabilities, ambidexterity, leadership, and strategy control, commercial parastatals can develop the capabilities they need to succeed in today's fast-paced and competitive business environment.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework refers to a diagrammatic set of interrelated ideas on a particular phenomenon and it's characterized by cause, and effect relationships which help interpret more and hence make it easily understandable. This makes it more direct and easily predictable (Svinicki, 2019). It is a diagram that explains the relationship between dependent and independent variables. In this study, the independent variables will be Strategy Formulation, and Organizational Culture while the dependent variable will be the Competitiveness.

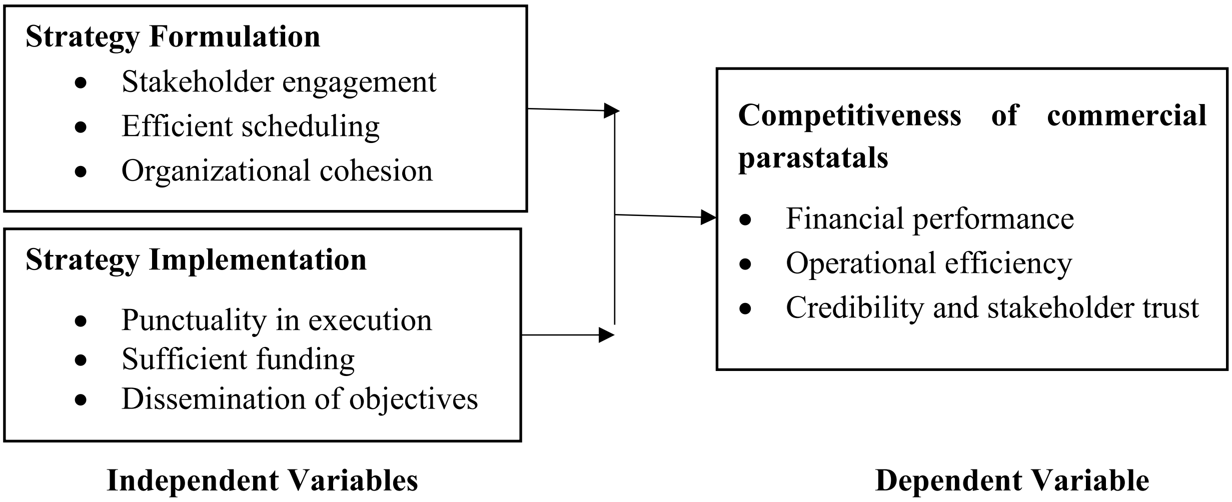

Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

Strategy Formulation

Strategy formulation is the first step in the strategic management process and involves crafting a roadmap for the organization's future. This phase begins with an extensive analysis of both the internal and external environments of the organization, typically through tools like SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal) analysis, and competitive benchmarking (Shamila, Muhammad & Sohail, 2022). In this stage, the organization's leaders set long-term goals, prioritize actions, and choose the most appropriate strategic direction—whether it be market penetration, product development, diversification, or cost leadership. The strategy must align with the organization's vision, mission, and core values while also being flexible enough to adapt to external changes. A well-constructed strategy serves as a guide for all organizational actions and decisions, ensuring alignment across departments and teams (Nyamurangwa & Irechukwu, 2023).

Stakeholder engagement is the process of identifying, understanding, and communicating with individuals or groups that have a vested interest in the activities, decisions, or performance of an organization. These stakeholders can include employees, customers, investors, suppliers, government bodies, and local communities, each of whom may have different concerns, expectations, and levels of influence (Okwemba & Njuguna, 2022). Engaging stakeholders involves actively listening to their needs, providing transparent information, and fostering open lines of communication. This engagement can be achieved through meetings, surveys, focus groups, or regular updates. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial because it helps build trust, ensures alignment with organizational goals, and can lead to more informed decision-making. Moreover, it can prevent conflicts, reduce resistance to change, and even generate opportunities for collaboration, innovation, or market expansion. Successful engagement results in stronger relationships with key players, improving the overall sustainability and reputation of the organization (Karimi, Kiriri & Njenga, 2023).

Efficient scheduling refers to the process of organizing tasks, events, or resources in a way that maximizes productivity while minimizing waste or delays. It involves identifying key priorities, allocating appropriate time and resources, and ensuring that all activities are completed within specified timeframes (Owich, Katuse & Ngari, 2024). An efficient schedule considers factors such as team availability, deadlines, and potential bottlenecks, and it often requires balancing competing demands or unexpected interruptions (Shamila, Muhammad & Sohail, 2022). Tools like project management software, time-blocking techniques, and Gantt charts are commonly used to track progress and ensure that tasks are aligned with overall project goals. Proper scheduling not only improves operational efficiency but also enhances coordination among teams, reduces stress, and ensures that resources are used optimally. By improving scheduling processes, organizations can meet deadlines, increase output, and enhance customer satisfaction, while also maintaining a healthier work-life balance for employees (Nyamurangwa & Irechukwu, 2023).

Organizational cohesion refers to the sense of unity and togetherness within an organization, where all members work collaboratively toward common goals and share a collective sense of purpose. It is built on trust, open communication, and alignment of individual and team objectives with the organization's overall mission (Okwemba & Njuguna, 2022). High levels of organizational cohesion foster a positive work environment, where employees are motivated, engaged, and committed to the success of the company. This cohesion is often cultivated through effective leadership, a shared organizational culture, and collaborative work practices that encourage mutual respect and teamwork (Karimi, Kiriri & Njenga, 2023). When an organization is cohesive, decision-making processes are smoother, problems are addressed more quickly, and employees are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles. On the other hand, a lack of cohesion can lead to disorganization, confusion, and a fragmented workforce, resulting in inefficiencies, lower morale, and decreased productivity. Therefore, organizational cohesion is vital for long-term success, as it strengthens internal relationships and helps the company navigate challenges more effectively (Owich, Katuse & Ngari, 2024).

Strategy Implementation

Strategy implementation is the process of translating strategic plans into actionable steps, ensuring that the organization's resources, capabilities, and activities are effectively aligned with the chosen strategy (Mayers, 2020). This stage is often more complex than formulation, as it requires translating high-level goals into concrete actions, allocating resources (such as finances, personnel, and technology), and making changes in the organization's structure or operations to support the strategy. Successful implementation requires clear communication of the strategy to all members of the organization, setting clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations (Onyegbula & Nwoye, 2023). Additionally, leadership and change management are critical factors during this phase, as implementing new strategies often involves overcoming resistance and aligning the organization's culture, values, and practices with the new strategic direction. Monitoring progress and making adjustments as necessary is also vital during implementation to address unforeseen challenges or opportunities (Ochanda, 2020).

Punctuality in execution refers to the timely completion of tasks, projects, and initiatives within the designated deadlines. It is a critical element in maintaining productivity, fostering trust, and ensuring that organizational goals are met effectively (Mbaka & Mugambi, 2020). Timeliness in execution demonstrates a commitment to performance and efficiency, ensuring that resources, whether human or financial, are utilized optimally. It involves careful planning, prioritization, and the proactive management of potential obstacles that could delay progress. Organizations that prioritize punctuality in execution are better able to meet customer expectations, avoid unnecessary costs, and maintain a competitive edge in the market (Njagi & Kombo, 2020). Furthermore, timely execution ensures that other related tasks or projects are not delayed, allowing for smooth workflows and reducing the risk of backlogs or operational disruptions. A culture of punctuality also promotes accountability, as teams and individuals are held responsible for meeting deadlines, leading to increased overall performance and a reputation for reliability (Mayers, 2020).

Sufficient funding is the financial backbone of any successful project or business operation. It involves ensuring that there are adequate resources available to cover all expenses, from initial investments to operational costs and unforeseen contingencies. Without sufficient funding, even the best-laid plans and strategies may fail to be executed effectively, leading to delays, cutbacks, or incomplete objectives (Onyegbula & Nwoye, 2023). Securing and managing adequate funding requires careful forecasting, budgeting, and often, external funding sources such as investors, loans, or grants. Organizations must regularly evaluate their financial health, ensuring that they maintain a balanced cash flow to support both short-term operations and long-term growth. Sufficient funding allows organizations to invest in necessary resources, such as talent, technology, and infrastructure, which are essential for delivering quality products or services. It also enables organizations to remain agile, responding to market changes and expanding operations when opportunities arise (Ochanda, 2020).

Dissemination of objectives refers to the process of clearly communicating the organization's goals, targets, and strategic plans to all relevant stakeholders, including employees, leadership, and external partners (Mbaka & Mugambi, 2020). Effective dissemination ensures that everyone within the organization understands the company's direction and how their individual roles contribute to the achievement of overarching goals. This communication can take many forms, such as meetings, newsletters, or digital platforms, and should be continuous and transparent to maintain alignment and engagement (Njagi & Kombo, 2020). When objectives are disseminated effectively, it fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, as employees are better equipped to prioritize tasks and make decisions that are in line with organizational goals. Furthermore, it helps in minimizing misunderstandings, misalignments, and conflicts, enabling smoother collaboration and a shared vision for success. In a rapidly changing business environment, clear and consistent dissemination of objectives is key to keeping the team focused and motivated, ensuring that all efforts are directed towards the same outcomes (Mayers, 2020).

Empirical Review

Strategy Formulation

Akunne *et al* (2023) examined strategy formulation and resource availability determinants in competitiveness of electricity distribution companies in Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting 400 staff members of the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC), one of the major DISCOs in Nigeria. The study encompasses roles directly involved in or significantly influencing strategy formulation and resource allocation, including senior management, strategic planning, resource management, operations, financial analysis, and workforce management teams. Data collection was conducted with a robust emphasis on validation and reliability, ensuring the accuracy of measurements. The findings reveal that while strategy formulation did not exhibit a significant influence on operational efficiency, resource allocation plays a pivotal role in enhancing operational performance. The study concluded that strategy formulation (SF) did not exhibit a significant impact on operational efficiency, the strong influence of resource allocation (RA) underscores its pivotal role in enhancing DISCO's operational competitiveness.

Njue and Njoroge (2023) conducted an analysis of Generic Strategies' Influence on Competitiveness of Equity Bank Limited in Kenya. Descriptive research design has been applicable where generic strategies form the independent variables while competitive advantage is the dependent variables. For this study, facts and figures will be collected at the Equity bank's headquarters located in Nairobi. The questionnaires were issued to the management staff at the headquarters of Equity Bank in Nairobi to fill in the responses needed for the research study in the data collection exercise to make valuable generalization on the application of generic strategies by the Equity Bank to be marketable. The theoretical population in this project was 50 managers in the headquarters of equity Bank which is located in Nairobi. Census was used where all respondents in the target audience were involved in the study. The results from data analyzed depicts that cost leadership strategy influence on competitiveness of Equity Bank Ltd in Kenya is reducing. Similarly, the influence of market segmentation strategy on competitiveness of Equity Bank Ltd is giving the Bank a good status towards winning its business rivals. Moreover, the influence of focus strategy on the competitiveness of Equity Bank Ltd in Kenya is low. The study concluded that the Equity bank

Ltd in Kenya should incorporate thoroughly the sub- variables of cost leadership, differentiation and focus strategy as indicated by the conceptual framework of this researched project so as to gain more competitiveness

Maina (2024) conducted a study on the influence of strategic management practices on competitiveness of Kenyan tea. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study targeted organizational population consisting of all one hundred and forty-two (142) member organizations of the East African Tea Trade Association who participate in the tea auction at Mombasa. The accessible population comprised of four (4) top managers from the 142 organizations translating to five hundred sixty-eight (568). The sample size consisted of one hundred and five (105) organizations where the four top managers were drawn from translating to four hundred and twenty (420) managers which was obtained using Slovin's formula (1960). The main instrument used to collect primary data from the sampled respondents was a questionnaire. Regression results indicated that the strategic management practices were statistically significant in explaining competitiveness of Kenyan tea. The data analyzed revealed that majority of variations in competitiveness of Kenyan tea is influenced by market development, product development, strategic planning and strategic alliances. The P- Value of F statistics indicated that all the independent variables jointly are significant in influencing the competitiveness of Kenyan Tea. The study concluded that strategic management practices influenced competitiveness of Kenyan tea.

Ole-Kisirkoi (2022) examined strategic factors influencing competitiveness of commercial banks in Kenya. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The target population comprised of the 43 commercial banks in Kenya. The banking sector's employees as at December 2015 were 36,212. The 43 commercial banks also served as the study's unit of inquiry as well as units of analysis. The research used census method by collecting data from all the 43 commercial banks. The study mainly relied on primary data that was obtained by administering questionnaires and interview schedules to the respondents in the 43 banks. Secondary data was also used in this research, drawn from annual reports of the CBK and commercial banks. The main results of the study were that there was a positive and significant relationship between strategic leadership, strategic planning, and strategic adoption of technology, strategic innovativeness, strategic human resource competencies, and competitiveness of commercial banks in Kenya. The study concluded that strategic formulation was a key driver of competitiveness of commercial banks in Kenya.

Strategy Implementation

Iqbal et al (2022) assessed the dynamics of strategic implementation in higher education in khyber pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan) with focus on the role of middle management. A standardized questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents selected through stratified random sampling technique in both academic and administrative sections of universities. The Structure Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed for exploratory and confirmatory factory analyses while Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM 3.0) was used for the measurement of path models of the study. The results show that strategy implementation consists of service enhancement, market growth, and student facilities was shown to be significantly influenced by middle management's strategic tasks of advocating alternatives (CA), synthesizing information (SI), and executing deliberate strategy (IDS). The results also showed that the strategic role of middle management in facilitating adaptability (FA) in strategy implementation was not significantly related to facilitating adaptability. Management and policymakers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, may use findings of the study to better understand the critical nature of middle management in higher education, particularly as it pertains to the development and execution of effective strategies in the setting of universities there. The study concluded that strategy implementation has a significant influence on competitiveness.

Acquaah and Yasai-Ardekani (2023) researched whether the strategic implementation of a combination competitive strategy yield incremental performance benefits. This study examined the competitive implications of implementing generic competitive strategies, and whether the implementation of a combination competitive strategy yields an incremental performance benefit over a single generic competitive strategy using data from Ghana, a Sub-Saharan African economy implementing economic liberalization policies. Two types of singular generic competitive strategies are analyzed: cost-leadership and differentiation. The study findings from the overall sample provide support for the viability and profitability of implementing coherent generic competitive strategies — cost-leadership, differentiation, and the combination of the singular strategies. The results further indicate that firms implementing a combination strategy tend to experience substantial incremental performance benefits over those implementing only the cost-leadership strategy. However, the incremental performance benefits to firms implementing a combination strategy do not significantly differ from the performance of firms implementing only the differentiation strategy. Furthermore, firms that implement a coherent competitive strategy (combination, cost-leadership, or differentiation) tend to gain considerable incremental performance benefits over firms that are stuck-in-the-middle. The study concluded that implementing a combination strategy is not always beneficial in transition economies.

Choge and Deya (2023) examined the influence of strategy implementation on competitiveness of micro-finance institutions in Kenya. The study employed descriptive research design and targeted all the 48 MFIs in Kenya. A census was used whereby all the 48 MFIs were included in the study. Purposive sampling was used to identify 5 employees from each of the MFI (human resource, procurement, accounting, marketing and finance managers) giving a total of 240 respondents as the sample size. Self-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data was analyzed by mixed method where both qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed. The findings from the study revealed that allocation of resources, roles and responsibilities, leadership styles and organizational structure had a significant influence on the competitiveness of MFIs in Kenya. The study concluded that through adequate resource allocation and ensuring roles are properly assigned enhanced competitiveness

Nyamboga and Gongera (2024) conducted an evaluation of strategy implementation on organization competitiveness: case of Kenya Wildlife Service, Garissa County. A census study of 47 respondents was considered for this study. The researcher used primary data which was collected using self-administered questionnaires and semi structured interviews. The collected data was coded and entered in computer software. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed by organizing data into appropriate categories. The study found that the strategic implementation of KWS strategic plans was faced by myriad of challenges such as inadequacy of funds, staff shortages, lack of training and motivation, poor orientation of the employees, inappropriate communication flow, and lack of information technology. The study concluded that strategic implementation has a significant influence on competitiveness of Kenya Wildlife Service.

Kibicho (2023) assessed the determinants of strategy implementation in the insurance industry in Kenya. To achieve the objective of this study, data was collected from the managers in insurance firms in Kenya. The study used mixed methods research design to collect and analyses the data. The data was collected using questionnaires. The target population of the study was the entire 51 registered insurance companies operating in Kenya. The study found out that to a very great extent Choice of strategies on advertising and promotion affects the strategy decisions of company while to a great extent Choice of Staff; Product development and Choice of branch networks affects the strategy decisions of company. The study concluded that to a very great extent, Choice of branch networks affects the strategy decisions of company while Choice of Staff; Choice of strategies on advertising and Product development affects the strategy decisions of company and its competitiveness as well.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design, gathering information through questionnaires administered to a selected sample of respondents. This study targeted commercial parastatals in Kenya. Commercial state corporations in Kenya are categorized based on their core functions and mandate. This study focused on Training and Research, Public Universities and Tertiary Education/Training. This study only focused on Training and Research, Public Universities and Tertiary Education/Training parastatals in Kenya which are 21 in number. In every parastatal the study target 1 top manager, 3 middle level managers and 5 lower-level managers hence a total of 189 management employees. The total target population was therefore 189 respondents. The study adopted stratified sampling technique in selecting participants. The technique is crucial as it ensures that all units in the target population have equal chance of being used in the study. It involves segregating the population into different strata so that a sample is drawn in all strata. The study adopted the formula developed by (Yamane, 1967) to arrive at a sample of 128 respondents

Table 1: Sample Size

Category	Target Population	Sample size
Top Managers	21	14
Middle Managers	63	43
Lower Managers	105	71
Total	**189**	**128**

(State Corporations Advisory Committee (SCAC), 2024)

This study only used primary data collected through a questionnaire. Kothari et al. (2019) also note that surveys, especially questionnaires with closed-ended and open-ended questions, are the most common tools for assessing institutional performance. Data analysis was undertaken in two methods by use of SPSS. First, descriptive statistics was undertaken which involved computation of means and standard deviations for observations about variables. This means that each construct for every variable was analyzed into mean so that inferences can be obtained. Considering that the study used ordinal scale in Likert's scale, the data was coded to make it possible to get the quantitative data for running the statistics. Second, inferential statistics were obtained in terms of regression analysis

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The sample size of this study was 128 and it comprised of management employees working in commercial parastatals in Kenya. The researcher distributed 128 questionnaires to the respondents during data collection process and 108 were fully filled and returned to the researcher thus making a response rate of 84.4%. Kothari (2019) argues that a response rate which is more than 50% is considered adequate while excellent response rate is usually above 70%. This implies that the response rate in this study is good for making conclusions as well as recommendations.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Strategy Formulation and Competitiveness

The first specific objective of the study was to examine the relationship between strategy formulation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on statements relating to strategy formulation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 2.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the team actively participates in discussions and decision-making during the strategy formulation process (M=3.932, SD=0.850). In addition, the respondents agreed that stakeholders are consistently involved in the strategy formulation process, ensuring their perspectives are considered (M=3.923, SD=0. 0.798). Further, the respondents agreed that the timeline for strategy formulation is clearly defined and adhered to throughout the process (M=3.884, SD=0.610). The findings are in line with the findings of Akunne *et al* (2023) who revealed that strategic formulation positively correlates with competitiveness. In addition, Njue and Njoroge (2023) confirmed that effective strategic formulation strengthens competitiveness.

From the results, the respondents agreed that milestones and deadlines are set to ensure timely progress and completion of the strategy formulation (M=3.779, SD=0.646). In addition, the respondents agreed that team members collaborate effectively, ensuring a unified approach to strategy formulation (M=3.776, SD=0.768). Further, the respondents agreed that there is a shared understanding and alignment of goals across all levels of the organization during strategy development (M=3.762, SD= 0.751). The findings concur with the findings of Maina (2024) who established that strategy formulation is statistically significant in explaining competitiveness. In addition, Ole-Kisirkoi (2022) found that effective strategy formulation significantly boosts competitiveness.

Table 2: Strategy Formulation and Competitiveness

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
The team actively participates in discussions and decision-making during the strategy formulation process.	3.932	0.850
Stakeholders are consistently involved in the strategy formulation process, ensuring their perspectives are considered.	3.923	0.798
The timeline for strategy formulation is clearly defined and adhered to throughout the process.	3.884	0.610
Milestones and deadlines are set to ensure timely progress and completion of the strategy formulation	3.779	0.646
Team members collaborate effectively, ensuring a unified approach to strategy formulation.	3.776	0.768
There is a shared understanding and alignment of goals across all levels of the organization during strategy development.	3.762	0.751
Aggregate	**3.843**	**0.737**

The respondents were further requested to indicate how else strategy formulation relates with competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. From the results, the respondents indicated that a well-formulated strategy helps in prioritizing resources to critical areas that enhance competitive advantage. Allocating resources toward technology, infrastructure, or skill development can help them provide better services and improve efficiency. In addition, the respondents indicated that strategic formulation helps in assessing risks such as regulatory changes, economic downturns, and competitors' actions, allowing them to develop proactive strategies to mitigate these risks and stay competitive.

Moreover, the respondents indicated that strategy formulation can guide investments in innovative technologies that improve operational efficiency and customer experience. Embracing digital platforms or automation, for instance, can significantly increase competitiveness in the market. In addition, the respondents indicated that a well-structured strategy ensures that the organizational culture is aligned with the goals of their organization, creating an environment of accountability, innovation, and high performance. A motivated and capable workforce is key to maintaining competitiveness.

Strategy Implementation and Competitiveness

The second specific objective of the study was to establish the relationship between strategy implementation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on the statements relating to strategy implementation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The results were as shown in Table 4.4

From the results, the respondents agreed that key milestones in the strategy implementation process are consistently met on time (M=3.877, SD= 0.872). In addition, the respondents agreed that delays in the execution of the strategy are minimal and are promptly addressed (M=3.859, SD=0.706). Further, the respondents agreed that there is a clear process for managing and monitoring the budget throughout the strategy implementation (M=3.818, SD= 0.738). The findings are in line with the findings of Iqbal et al (2022) who revealed that overall strategy implementation had a strong positive effect on firm competitiveness. In addition, Acquaah and Yasai-Ardekani (2023) confirmed that strategy implementation is crucial to achieving a competitive advantage.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the necessary funding is available on time to ensure smooth execution of the planned activities (M=3.791, SD= 0.616). In addition, the respondents agreed that the strategy implementation progress is regularly communicated to all stakeholders (M=3.711, SD=0.650). Further, the respondents agreed that key information about the strategy implementation is shared effectively across the organization (M=3.703, SD=0.716). The findings concur with the findings of Choge and Deya (2023) who established that allocation of resources, roles and responsibilities, leadership styles and organizational structure had a significant influence on the competitiveness of MFIs. In addition, Nyamboga and Gongera (2024) found that strategic implementation has a significant influence on competitiveness of KWS.

Table 3: Strategy Implementation and Competitiveness

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
Key milestones in the strategy implementation process are consistently met on time.	3.877	0.872
Delays in the execution of the strategy are minimal and are promptly addressed.	3.859	0.706
There is a clear process for managing and monitoring the budget throughout the strategy implementation.	3.818	0.738
The necessary funding is available on time to ensure smooth execution of the planned activities.	3.791	0.616
The strategy implementation progress is regularly communicated to all stakeholders.	3.711	0.650
Key information about the strategy implementation is shared effectively across the organization.	3.703	0.716
Aggregate	**3.793**	**0.716**

The respondents were further requested to indicate how else strategy implementation relates with competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. From the results, the respondents indicated that effective strategy implementation allows their organization to streamline their operations, reduce wastage, and optimize resource allocation. This leads to cost savings and better service delivery, which enhances competitiveness. In addition, the respondents indicated that in a dynamic market, the ability to implement innovative strategies helps their organization remain adaptable to changing consumer needs, technological advances, and regulatory shifts. This innovation can foster a competitive edge in a crowded market.

Moreover, the respondents indicated that strategy implementation that focuses on improving customer service and experience can directly influence customer satisfaction. This leads to greater customer loyalty, repeat business, and a positive reputation, which strengthens the organization's competitive standing. In addition, the respondents indicated that a well-executed strategy helps their organization identify and form beneficial strategic partnerships, both locally and internationally. These partnerships can bring in new resources, technology, or access to new markets, boosting competitiveness.

Competitiveness

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 4.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the organization consistently achieves strong financial results, outperforming its competitors in profitability (M=3.860, SD= 0.862). In addition, the respondents agreed that the financial performance of the organization provides a solid foundation for reinvestment and growth (M=3.833, SD=0.720). Further, the respondents agreed that the organization streamlines its processes to minimize waste and maximize productivity (M=3.812, SD= 0.598). The findings are in line with the findings of Hassan *et al* (2020) revealed that competitive advantage through innovation leads to improved financial outcomes. In addition, Ali *et al* (2022) confirmed that operational efficiency is a critical factor in gaining competitive advantage in service industries.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the organization effectively leverages technology and innovation to enhance operational efficiency (M=3.745, SD=0.743). In addition, the respondents agreed that the organization is viewed as a trusted leader in its industry by customers, partners, and stakeholders (M=3.723, SD=0.733). Further, the respondents agreed that consistent ethical practices and transparency contribute to the organization's credibility and market position (M=3.684, SD=0.661). The findings concur with the findings of Khan *et al* (2020) who found that competitive advantage acts as a mediator between resources and financial success. In addition, Wang *et al* (2022) established that transparent, accountable governance leads to higher market confidence and better financial outcomes.

Table 4: Competitiveness

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
The organization consistently achieves strong financial results, outperforming its competitors in profitability.	3.860	0.862
The financial performance of the organization provides a solid foundation for reinvestment and growth.	3.833	0.720
The organization streamlines its processes to minimize waste and maximize productivity.	3.812	0.598
The organization effectively leverages technology and innovation to enhance operational efficiency.	3.745	0.743
The organization is viewed as a trusted leader in its industry by customers, partners, and stakeholders.	3.723	0.733
Consistent ethical practices and transparency contribute to the organization's credibility and market position.	3.684	0.661
Aggregate	**3.776**	**0.720**

The respondents were requested to indicate how else is competitiveness related to commercial parastatals in Kenya. From the results, the respondents indicated that competitiveness drives their organization to enhance their operational efficiency. To stay ahead of competitors, they streamline their operations, reduce wastage, and adopt lean management practices. This leads to improved service delivery and reduced operational costs, making their organization more attractive to consumers and clients. In addition, the respondents indicated that they continually understand consumer needs and preferences, which drives improvements in product and service offerings. The need to stay ahead of competitors forces them to regularly engage with stakeholders, implement feedback loops, and deliver tailored solutions.

Moreover, the respondents indicated that the competition for skilled workers drives them to improve their human resource policies. This may include offering better incentives, continuous professional development programs, and fostering a positive work culture to attract top-tier employees, ultimately leading to enhanced organizational performance. In addition, the respondents indicated that they look beyond the domestic market to expand into new regions or diversify their service offerings. By expanding into new geographic areas or exploring new product lines, they reduce their dependence on a single market, mitigating risks and capitalizing on growth opportunities.

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (strategy formulation and strategy implementation) and the dependent variable (competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya) dependent variable. Pearson correlation coefficient range between zero and one, where by the strength of association increase with increase in the value of the correlation coefficients.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients

		Competitiveness	Strategy Formulation	Strategy Implementation
Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	108		
Strategy Formulation	Pearson Correlation	.890**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	108	108	
Strategy Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.852**	.379	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.071	
	N	108	108	108

From the results, there was a very strong relationship between strategy formulation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya (r = 0.890, p value =0.000). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Ndegwa and Wambua (2022) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between strategy formulation and competitiveness.

The results also revealed that there was very strong relationship between strategy implementation and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya (r = 0.852, p value =0.003). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.003 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings conform to the findings of Kariuki and Mwangi (2022) that there is a very strong relationship between strategy implementation and competitiveness.

Regression Analysis

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	**(Constant)**	0.227	0.061		3.721	0.000
	strategy formulation	0.389	0.101	0.388	3.851	0.000
	strategy implementation	0.356	0.092	0.357	3.870	0.002

a Dependent Variable: competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya

The regression model was as follows:

$$\mathbf{Y = 0.227 + 0.389X_1 + 0.375X_2 + \varepsilon}$$

According to the results, strategy formulation has a significant effect on competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya β_1=0.389, p value= 0.000). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.000 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Ndegwa and Wambua (2022) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between strategy formulation and competitiveness

The results also revealed that strategy implementation has significant effect on competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya, β1=0.356, p value= 0.002). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.002 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings conform to the findings of Kariuki and Mwangi (2022) that there is a very strong relationship between strategy implementation and competitiveness

Conclusions

The study concludes that strategy formulation has a positive and significant relationship with competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. Findings revealed that stakeholder engagement, efficient scheduling and organizational cohesion relates with the competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya.

The study also concludes that strategy implementation has a positive and significant relationship with competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. Findings revealed that punctuality in task execution, sufficient funding and dissemination of organizational objectives relates with the competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya.

Recommendations

Since stakeholder engagement was found to positively relate with competitiveness, parastatals should establish structured mechanisms such as regular consultative forums, digital feedback systems, and cross-departmental planning sessions to actively involve internal and external stakeholders in strategy formulation.

Since accountability, collaboration, and openness to innovation drive competitiveness, parastatals should embed a performance appraisal system tied to strategic goals, encourage cross-functional teamwork through incentive programs, and support innovation by allocating funds for pilot projects and rewarding idea generation.

Areas for Further Research

The study established that the independent variables namely, strategy formulation and strategy implementation accounted for 78% of the variations in competitiveness among commercial parastatals in Kenya. This indicates that while these strategic management practices play a significant role in shaping competitiveness, 22% of the variance remains unexplained, suggesting the existence of other influential factors. To bridge this gap, the study recommends further research to explore additional determinants of competitiveness within commercial parastatals. Such factors may include technological innovation, market dynamics, leadership effectiveness, government policies, financial resource allocation, and human capital development. Investigating these elements could provide a more holistic understanding of the drivers of competitiveness and contribute to the development of more comprehensive strategic frameworks for enhancing organizational performance within Kenya's commercial parastatals.

Additionally, this study focused specifically on the relationship between strategic management practices and competitiveness of commercial parastatals in Kenya. As a result, the findings may not be directly generalized to other organizations operating within different sectors or business environments in Kenya. Given the unique operational structures, regulatory frameworks, and industry dynamics that may influence competitiveness across various organizations, this study recommends further research to examine the relationship between strategic management practices and competitiveness in other sectors, including private enterprises, non-governmental organizations, and state-owned corporations outside the commercial parastatal sector.

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