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Relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority.

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Abstract
The concept of competitive advantage has gained attention of managers in both private and public sector in the recent times. Organizations are acquiring their competitive advantage through implementation of a value-creating strategy or business model that is not being applied by a huge number of current or prospective competitors at the same time. Institutions trying to compete in a given target industry vary in their mission, goals, objectives, strategies, and resources at any given time. Some are cash-strapped, while others are well-established and experienced in the market. Some aim for rapid market share growth, while others aim for long-term profits. Competitive advantage is the ability of a company to generate and provide value to its customers that is greater than the expense of doing so. Customers seek value, and they are prepared to pay for it. The maritime business has a lot of assets. As a result, the majority of the modifications have been made to improve margins through lowering costs. Economies of scale have been the industry's motto for achieving cost savings. As a result, maritime logistics companies solidified via mergers and acquisitions and created alliances to achieve worldwide coverage. maritime logistics companies change their business models to focus on creating value by offering integrated logistics offerings. The purpose of this study was to analyze the Relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority. The study was anchored on resource based theory. The study used positivist research philosophy and design was correlation research design. The target population for this study consisted of 201 maritime logistics firms operating at Kenya Ports Authority with all the CEOs being taken as the respondents and sample size. Data was collected using a five point likert scale questionnaire. Piloting was done in Nairobi containers deport at Embakasi. Correlation and multi linear regression analysis was respectively used to establish the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables and the influence of strategic orientation variables on competitive advantage while descriptive statistics was used to generate means and standard deviation from the collected data. It was found that majority of the CEOs of Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya were male. Further, the majority of the CEOs were between 41-50 years of age. Moreover, the study found that majority of the work force was Bachelors holders. Majority of the CEOs of Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya agreed that there was an extent of market orientation (r=0.778, P=0,000) on competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya. This study concluded that market orientation had a positive significant relationship with competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya. The study recommends that Board and management of Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya should install an inter-functional coordination in the organization that enhances market orientation.

Key words: *Market orientation, competitive advantage.*

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I. Introduction

According to Foye, (2018), competitive advantage is what distinguishes an institution's goods or services from all other options available to a customer. In a competitive climate, the techniques work for any company, country, or individual. The competitive edge of a company comes from its diverse, strategic, and organization-specific resources, which are difficult to duplicate.

When a company implements a value-creating strategy or business model that is not being applied by a huge number of current or prospective competitors at the same time, it gains a competitive advantage. The fundamental strategy or unique resources that an organization sources and use to generate higher results than its rivals in the similar industry are referred to as competitive advantage. Institutions trying to compete in a given target industry vary in their mission, goals, objectives, strategies, and resources at any given time. Some are cash-strapped, while others are well-established and experienced in the market. Some aim for rapid market share growth, while others aim for long-term profits (Chern et al., 2014).

Competitive advantage is the ability of a company to generate and provide value to its customers that is greater than the expense of doing so. Customers seek value, and they are prepared to pay for it. Value is created by delivering cheaper rates than competitors for comparable benefits, or by giving a unique benefit that more than compensates for the higher price (Porter & Kramer, 2007). To have a competitive advantage, a company must either have something that others don't, do something better than others, or do something that other companies can't. competitive advantage is at the heart of strategic management (Robbins et al., 2019).

Due to the business possessed and distributed resources and capabilities advantage, competitive advantages include a positioning and performance advantage over competitors. As a result, a competitive advantage is described as a significant advantage over competitors as a result of cost allocation and operation results that are dependent on positioning strategy. Since competitive advantage could be copied, the competitive edge in deterring the acquiring of goods or service providers to relax (Korsakienė et al., 2015). Creating and maintaining a competitive edge for a business requires successful technical advances (Martín-de Castro et al., 2013). The amount of money spent on research, development, and the introduction of new products are the determining factors in attaining a dominant position in the market (Zemplinerová, 2010).

Organizations must tackle future problems and incorporate features of their environment for a more favorable alignment to get a competitive advantage. As a result, for efficient strategic management, businesses must pay attention to strategic thinking (Alnasser, 2014). Competitors with cheaper resources can copy low-order competitiveness such as cost advantage. Because of the upper ranks of sustainability of such sources of competitive advantage due to their difficulty being imitated by competitors, it is suggested for firms to adopt strong brand image and technological innovation in various business processes as sources of competitive advantage (Boone & Kurtz, 2015).

Due to the business possessed and distributed resources and capabilities advantage, competitive advantages include a positioning and performance advantage over competitors. As a result, a competitive advantage is described as a significant advantage over competitors as a result of cost allocation and operation results that are dependent on positioning strategy. Since competitive advantage could be copied, the competitive edge in deterring the acquiring of goods or service providers to relax (Korsakienė et al., 2015). Creating and maintaining a competitive edge for a business requires successful technical advances (Martín-de Castro et al., 2013). The amount of money spent on research, development, and the introduction of new products are the determining factors in attaining a dominant position in the market (Zemplinerová, 2010).

Maritime logistics companies provide the most cost-effective means of transportation per unit weight, with a total twenty-foot equivalent unit capacity of 22.7 million. Ten out of thirty shipping lines share 85.4 percent of worldwide maritime cargo, demonstrating the fierce competitiveness in the maritime logistics market. Competitiveness in the global marketplace is a requirement for a company's survival. The competitiveness of the European Union shipping industry is increasing, so a directive on reporting formalities was implemented to simplify and harmonize administrative procedures for shipping companies by eliminating paper filings and introducing the principle of reporting only once thru the development of national single windows (UNCTAD, 2021).

The performance of ports as maritime hubs influences the time, cost, and efficiency of commerce, all of which influence the level of international competitiveness and the amount of trade. As focus strategy becomes an integrated set of measures done to produce goods or services that suit the needs of a particular competitive segment, the impacts of port efficiency stretch to the competitive of industries in the hinterlands, particularly in landlocked nations (ACET, 2021). The maritime business has a lot of assets. As a result, the majority of the modifications have been made to improve margins through lowering costs. Economies of scale have been the industry's motto for achieving cost savings. As a result, maritime logistics companies solidified via mergers and acquisitions and created alliances to achieve worldwide coverage (Fransoo & Lee, 2012).

A company that operates with a customer-first or market attitude is said to be market oriented. Market orientation is a term used in marketing, but it most commonly refers to a free enterprise system in which businesses and consumers can freely purchase and sell. When a company is market-oriented, the satisfaction of its consumers' requirements and wants becomes its major business driver. Furthermore, market orientation is the business culture that most efficiently and effectively produces the required processes for the creation of higher value for customers and, as a result, superior company performance (Ali et al., 2020). market orientation is viewed as a competitive approach that most effectively develops the proper behavior to increase customer value and ensures superior long-term results for businesses. More specifically, market orientation is built on buyer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination.

Statement of the problem

In 2018, Kenya Port Authority total maritime logistics production was 30,923MT, with 1,303,862 twenty-foot equivalent unit in containerized traffic. This expansion has been the result of a concerted effort by all of the major stakeholders and players in the maritime logistics industry. Kenya, as a developing country, is strongly reliant on global shipping lines, and its maritime logistics are dominated by international corporations whose interests and loyalty are to their home countries (Kitimo, 2019). Although there is fierce rivalry among maritime logistics firms, this does not translate into lower rates for importers, as commodities once landed still have equivalent economies of scale (Marete, 2018). The ability of the numerous maritime logistics corporations to compete effectively among themselves comes into focus as they vie for a restricted clientele and a modestly increasing tonnage. This comes especially after the government of Kenya passed a policy and instruction to transfer all containers through Standard gauge railway, the arrival and operationalization of Standard gauge railway which is deemed to have an impact on trade along the Kenyan coast.

Many studies look at competitive advantage using the resource-based view theory, which states that organizations can gain and maintain a competitive edge by efficiently allocating resources (Shibin et al., 2017). Several empirical investigations looked into resource-based perspective theory in specific industries (Wong & Yip, 2019). Prior research has also highlighted the role of a country's government in influencing multinational firms' business activity and competitive advantage (Lorentz et al., 2018). While most studies look at competitive advantage in the international logistics industry through the lens of resource-based view theory (Chahal et al., 2020), only a few have looked at the role of governmental policies in driving competitive advantage (Acciaro, 2015). Yu et al., (2018) looked at the impact of procurement management capabilities, supply chain capabilities, and information systems on competitive advantage, although neither study looked into the impact of government initiatives or regulation. Competitive advantage is frequently obtained from resource-based aspects; nevertheless, policies, as well as the institutional and legal environment, have an impact (Chang & Lai, 2017).

As a result, there is a research deficit in the Kenyan marine logistics business, as there are few studies addressing resource based theory. This research raises the question, what is the relationship between market orientation and the competitive advantage of marine logistics companies? Thus, this study analyzed the relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port Authority.

II. Literature review

This theory was first proposed in the mid-1980s by Wernerfelt, (1984), and Barney, (1986), and it has since become one of the most widely used current approaches to the study of persistent competitive advantage. Supporters of this viewpoint claim that instead of looking for competitive advantage in the competitive world, companies should look for it within their own walls. The fundamental assumption of resource-based view theory is that companies compete in terms of their resources and capabilities, and that most resource-based view researchers prefer to look inside the company and flip to the factor market conditions that the firm must contend with, in order to find some possible causes of sustainable competitive advantages while controlling for all external environmental factors (Peteraf & Bergen, 2003). For the consideration of numerous strategic concerns, including as conditions for sustained competitive advantage and diversification, an inward-looking approach has proven to be both powerful and useful (Foss & Knudsen, 2003). The Resource Based View is a commonly used theory in management, marketing, and entrepreneurship literature that recognizes the importance of a company's internal skills and resources, and how their successful deployment leads to increased productivity and long-term competitive advantage (Jogaratnam, 2017). As a result, a company that wants to improve its performance and gain a competitive advantage must make its resources uncommon and difficult to duplicate, as well as ensuring that they are used effectively and efficiently (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2017).

To acquire, establish, and maintain their competitive edge, maritime logistics firms in Kenya ports authority can rely on their tangible and intangible resources. The Resource Based View is a commonly used theory in management, marketing, and entrepreneurship literature that recognizes the importance of a company's internal skills and resources, and how their successful deployment leads to increased productivity and long-term competitive advantage (Jogaratnam, 2017). As a result, a company that wants to improve its performance and gain a competitive advantage must make its resources uncommon and difficult to duplicate, as well as ensuring that they are used effectively and efficiently (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2017). Resource-based theory is pertinent to this research since it deals with organizational resources as a source of competitive advantage. Infrastructure, reputation, experienced workforce, strategic locations, adaptable processes, and appropriate cash flow are some of the resources available to maritime logistics firms. If these resources are properly exploited, they will be able to gain and maintain a competitive advantage in their respective marketplaces. Any firm needs resources to fulfill its obligations to its target market and meet the expectations of its consumers and other stakeholders.

Empirical literature

In Ghana, Asomaning and Abdulai, (2015) conducted a study on the Empirical Evidence of the Market Orientation-Market Performance Relationship in Ghanaian Small Businesses. The quantitative technique was used for the study since the majority of the analysis was quantitative and most hypotheses were tested, and the descriptive research design was chosen primarily because it was a cross-sectional design with data obtained primarily through questionnaires. The inferential study design was also used since it included correlation and regression, which aided in determining the link between variables and the strength of that relationship. The findings revealed a favorable relationship between market orientation, its constituents, and small business market performance. In Botswana, Jaiyeoba et al., (2018) conducted research on sectoral variations in market orientation and performance among small service enterprises. statistically significant variations were found between each component and the two sectors in two of the three components of market orientation, namely intelligence generation and intelligence responsiveness. Finally, there were considerable differences in organizational commitment, team spirit, and customer satisfaction across the two industries. Mahmoud et al., (2016) investigated the relationship between market orientation, learning orientation, and innovation, as well as the impact of innovation, market orientation, and learning orientation on firm performance, utilizing a developing country as a case study (the Ghanaian banking domain). The study used a nationwide survey of senior executives from 28 Ghanaian banks to assess five research propositions using multiple linear regression analysis. Market orientation has a large impact on innovation, while learning orientation has a big impact on innovation, according to the findings. Furthermore, the relationship between market orientation and business performance is mediated through innovation. Abbate and Cesaroni, (2017) looked at 74 academic spin-offs in Italy and Spain to see if they used a Market Orientation approach to running their enterprises and how it affected their economic and innovative success. Their research found that some aspects of Market Orientation (specifically, the generation and dissemination of information about customers and competitors) have a direct impact on a firm's ability to develop technological innovations and profit; the concept may pose a challenge for spin-off companies and even result in inefficiencies in certain circumstances, especially when external stimuli require firms to respond quickly.

III. Methodology

The research philosophy for this study was positivist. The researcher utilized a correlation research design in which the data from the respondents was corrected only once. The target population for this study consisted of 201 maritime logistics firms operating at Kenya Ports Authority. The sample size of this study consisted of 201 CEOs of the Maritime logistics firms operating at Kenya Ports Authority. The researcher employed questionnaires in this investigation. Primary data was collected using a single structured questionnaire that captured all of the study's variables. Research instrument was pretested by carrying out a pilot study in embakasi container depot involving 20% of the target population. Data was examined and analyzed using a Software (SPSS) Version 24.0 through descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, and cross tabulations was used for presenting the findings.

Response rate

In the end a total of 140 responses were received out of a target population of 201 respondents. This represented 69.7% response rate which was considered good for analysis as stated by Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) that response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting, response rate of 60% is generally good while a response rate of above 70% is excellent.

Data Reliability Assessment

Cronbach's Alpha is a coefficient of reliability that gives an estimation of data generalization without any bias (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). In this study, the researcher sought to assess the reliability of the data collected to measure the various variables in the study. To measure this, Cronbach Alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the data collected. In a research study, Cronbach Alpha value greater than 0.7 is regarded as satisfactory for reliability assessment (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha for Reliability Assessments

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha Values
Market Orientation	5	0.897
Competitive advantage	6	0.889

Respondents' characteristics

majority of the respondents (93.6 %) were male while female accounted for 6.4%. This gender distribution is unequal and implies that there were more men CEOs working in the Maritime Logistics Firms operating in

Kenya Port authority compered to women in Kenya. Further, this study found that majority of the respondents (39.3%) was between 41-50 years of age. This means that the CEOs workforce in this sector is mature enough and poses the much needed experience and exposure to stir the sector into greater heights. The results further indicate that most respondents' highest Level of Education was bachelor degree accounted by 40.0%. Those with masters accounted for 22.1%. The result also indicated that 37.9% of the respondents had other qualifications which this study assumed to be diploma holders and certificates holders as well as professional qualifications and certifications. This implies that the respondents are well educated and are aware of the issues of strategic orientation on Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority.

Influence of market orientation on competitive advantage

To assess the extent of market orientation on competitive advantage in Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya, CEOs were requested to respond on five attributes of market orientation of the Maritime Logistics Firms they represented.

Table 2. Influence of market orientation on competitive advantage

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is inter-functional coordination in my organization that enhance goal achievement	140	4.1571	.94657
Managers in my organization acquire market information that is relevant	140	4.2071	1.01426
There is adequate organization-wide sharing of market information	140	4.1000	1.14615
Managers are committed to utilization of market information in my organization	140	4.0214	1.08268
Managers in this organization have a shared interpretation of market information	140	4.0071	.99997
Average	**140**	**4.0986**	**.63721**

From these results majority of the CEOs agreed that there was an extent of market orientation on competitive advantage in Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya.

These results correspond with the results of a study conducted separately by Asomaning and Abdulai, (2015) where they revealed a favorable relationship between market orientation, its constituents, and small business market performance. It was suggested to owners/managers that they establish a market-oriented culture.

In fact, "Managers in my organization acquire market information that is relevant" is the aspect of market orientation that received the highest mean (M=4.2071, SD= 1.01426). This meant that management of these Maritime Logistics Firms emphasized more on acquisition of market information that is relevant compared to other attributes of market orientation.

Competitive advantage as a result of Market orientation

In order to assess the extent of competitive advantage in Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya, CEOs were asked to respond on six attributes of competitive advantage of the Maritime Logistics Firms they represent. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Competitive advantage

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is effective supply chain management in this organization	140	4.2714	1.45850
There is high rate of organizational responsiveness in this firm	140	4.8857	.58869
There is high rate of growing market share in this firm	140	4.5786	1.05304
This is increased customer satisfaction in this organization	140	4.4714	1.21999
This organization has high returns on investment	140	4.4929	1.17832
There is cost leadership in this organization	140	4.8214	.63776
Average	**140**	**4.5869**	**.52798**

From these results it is evident that organizations which are responsive to their competitive advantage enjoys high rate of organizational responsiveness in this firm, this was so because the aspect of "there is high rate of organizational responsiveness in this firm" scored the highest mean (M= 4.8857, SD = 0.58869). From these results, the researcher therefore deduced that there is to a large extent a competitive advantage in Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya.

Testing of Hypothesis
This study sought to establish the link between the independent variable (Marketing orientation) and dependent variable (competitive advantage).

Table 4: Testing of Hypothesis

		Competitive Advantage	market orientation	Deductions
Competitive Advantage	Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho)	1.000	.778	Positive
	Sig. (P-Value)	.	.000	Reject H_o
market orientation	Correlation Coefficient	.778	1.000	Positive
	Sig. (P-Value)	.000	.	Reject H_o

To establish the relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Ports authority, a null hypothesis was tested.
The null hypothesis that there was a relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Ports authority was tested.
The following were the null hypotheses used:
H01: There is no relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Ports authority.
H02: There is a relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Ports authority.
The results in Table 4 shows a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.778 which is statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This leads to rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternate hypothesis that there is a there is a relationship between market orientation and Competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Ports authority. This means that on overall, market orientation is positively related to competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Ports authority.
These findings agree with the findings of Dubihlela and Dhurup, (2015) who investigated the impact of market orientation on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses in South Africa. The results showed that market orientation had a favorable impact on company performance. Competitive intensity was also highlighted as a barrier to small and medium firms conducting market orientation activities, with the findings indicating that competitive intensity had a negative impact on small and medium enterprise market orientation.

IV. Conclusion

The study concludes that market orientation had a positive significant relationship ($r= 0.778$, $p<0.05$) between competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya. Market orientation has the second effect on competitive advantage among Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya compared to other independent variables such as entrepreneurial, process and technology.

V. Recommendation

It is recommended that Board and management of Maritime Logistics Firms operating in Kenya Port authority in Kenya should install an inter-functional coordination in the organization that enhance goal achievement, have the managers in the organization acquire market information that is relevant and that the board should ensure that there is adequate organization-wide sharing of market information

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