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Research Paper

The Effect of Competitive Advantage on the Relationship between Strategic Change and Performance of Firms in the Alcohol Industry in Kenya

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Abstract:
This paper examined the effect of competitive advantage on the relationship between strategic change and firm characteristics on performance of firms in the alcohol industry in Kenya. Previous studies dwelt on effect of limited aspects of strategic change such as marketing leaving out critical aspects like scope of strategies, resource deployment patterns and competitive advantages. The study was underpinned by the Resource-Based Theory (RBT). The study adopted a mixed method survey research design using qualitative and quantitative methods. The population was 25 local firms registered by Kenya Revenue Authority by 2012 and approved by National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse, (NACADA) by 2015. A saturated sample consisted of 100 respondents to get primary data. Correlation and regression analysis were used to determine the relationship between competitive advantage and organizational performance. Pearson correlation was used to describe how the variables were related and the strengths of the relationship between competitive advantage and organizational performance. Findings revealed that there was a fairly strong significant positive correlation between competitive advantage and organizational performance.

Keywords: Competitive Advantage, Organizational Performance and Resource Based Theory (RBT).

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I. INTRODUCTION

The study of strategic change has long occupied an important position in the larger field of strategic management. Strategic change has been recognized as an important phenomenon because it represents the means through which organizations maintain alignment with shifting competitive, political, economic, social, technological, and legal environments which occasionally pose threats to their continued survival and effectiveness. Interest in strategic change seems to have heightened, and many studies examining the occurrence, antecedents, and performance consequences of strategic change have appeared (Lant, Milliken and Batra, 1992, Zajac and Kraatz 1993).

The study into strategic change and organizational performance in the alcohol industry in Kenya is deficient. However, the literature on the relationship between strategic change and organizational performance (OP) has revealed unequivocal findings. Some studies have found that strategic change enhances performance (Hambrick and Schecter, 1983; Haveman, 1992; Zajac and Kraatz, 1993) while in other studies it reduces performance (Jauch, Osborne, and Glueck, 1980) another set of studies has found that no relationship exists (Kelly and Amburgey, 1991) or mixed relationships (Smith and Grimm, 1987).

Methodological reasons may account for these contradictions. First, changes in strategy were conceptualized differently across all the studies; the direction, resource deployment and magnitude of changes may both need to be examined to assess performance effects, for example if the change is of large magnitude and resources are deployed in the wrong direction, it may result in poorer organizational performance. Second, interactions between organizational variables and strategic change may not be completely captured in these studies due to narrow definition of strategic change.

I.1 Research Objective

The general objective was to determine the effect of Competitive Advantage on the relationship between strategic change and performance of firms in the alcohol industry in Kenya

I.2 Hypothesis

The researcher postulated the following hypothesis which was tested.

Hypothesis 1 (H01): The effect of competitive advantage on the relationship between strategic change and performance of firms in the alcohol industry in Kenya is negative.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1Introduction

Strategic change has been recognized as an important phenomenon because it represents the means through which organizations maintain alignment with shifting competitive, political, economic, social, technological, and legal environments which occasionally pose threats to their continued survival and effectiveness. The conceptualization of strategic change as changes in the content of a firm`s strategy as defined by its scope, resource deployments, competitive advantages and synergy, is based upon the view of strategy as a pattern of a firm's resource allocations (Mintzberg, 1978).

The study into strategic change and organizational performance in the alcohol industry in Kenya is deficient. However, the literature on the relationship between strategic change and organizational performance (OP) has revealed unequivocal findings. Some studies have found that strategic change enhances performance (Hambrick and Schecter, 1983; Haveman, 1992; Zajac and Kraatz, 1993) while in other studies it reduces performance (Jauch, Osborne, and Glueck, 1980) another set of studies has found that no relationship exists (Kelly and Amburgey, 1991) or mixed relationships (Smith and Grimm, 1987).
The study argued that firms that enjoy competitive advantage from the perspective of quality of products, ability to introduce new products, ability to modify existing products to meet unique customer needs and ability to cater to customer needs for "new" features exhibit comparatively better performance

II.2 Theoretical Review

The RBT stipulates that in strategic management the fundamental sources and drivers to firms' competitive advantage and superior performance are mainly associated with the attributes of their resources and capabilities which are valuable and costly-to-copy (Barney, 1991, Peteraf and Bergen, 2003). Academics and practitioners in management have long been interested in strategic change. The RBT of strategy sees a firm's resource base as a primary driver of strategic change (Gilbert, 2005; Teece, Pisano, and Shuen, 1997). The intuition is that the current resource base shapes the menu of strategic options available to a firm. The resource base can be both an enabler and a constraint to strategic change.
The main tenet of the RBT is that resource characteristics influence the strategic options available to a firm (Wernerfelt, 1984; Teece, Pisano, and Shuen 1997). Flexible resources allow firms to explore distant market opportunities and to diversify widely. The Resource Based Theory (RBT) suggests that the resources possessed by a firm are the primary determinants of its performance, and these may contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage of the firm (Wenerfelt, 1984). According to Barney (1991), the concept of resources includes all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc. controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Building on the assumptions that strategic resources are heterogeneously distributed across firms and that these differences are stable overtime, the study examined the link between strategic change concept of competitive advantage on organization performance.

II.2.1Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage is the creation of a perceived or real advantage for a product or a brand over rival products in the eyes of the target market. Without understanding the competitor, a marketer cannot realistically differentiate his or her products from those of competitors. More recent research has begun to recognize the use of resource-based capabilities in gaining and maintaining competitive advantage (Chandler & Hanks, 1994). Reaching back to the traditional strategic management concept of distinctive competence (Andrews, 1971), the resource-based view argues that competitive advantage results from a firm's resources and its capabilities.
While resources are relatively tangible, capabilities are less readily assigned a monetary value, and are often deeply embedded in organizational routines and practices, thereby making them less subject to imitation by

present or potential competitors (Dierkx & Cool, 1989). These capabilities have been termed "distinctive competencies" and generally refer to the unique skills and activities that a firm can do better than its competitors. When competition intensifies, the possession of these competencies should become increasingly important for the firm's continued success.

In this research specific attention was given to competitive advantage from the perspective of quality of products, ability to introduce new products, ability to modify existing products to meet unique customer needs and ability to cater to customer needs for "new" features. This represents value and quality, the main elements of which can be labelled: "cost-based", "product-based", and "service-based". Previous studies have shown a significant relationship between cost-based advantage and organisational performance. Although there are several studies that confirm a positive relationship between competitive advantage and organizational performance (Gimenez & Ventura, 2002; Morgan et al., 2004), relatively few have analyzed the link between product aspects and organizational performance of firms in the alcohol industry in Kenya.

II.2.2 Organizational Performance

Organizational performance (OP) is a measure of how a manager utilizes the resources of the organization efficiently and effectively to accomplish the goals of the organization as well as satisfying all the stakeholders (Jones and George, 2009). In their contribution, Richard, Devinney, George, and Johnson (2009) defined organizational performance as the real output measured against the intended or expected output. For indicators of a firm‟s performance, financial data is preferable, but firms are often unwilling to disclose this type of confidential information to the public unless the law requires them to do so. Financial performance is a subjective measure that uses annual sales. Although financial data remain popular, subjective performance measures have been widely used in strategy-related and organizational research (Dess and Robinson, 1984; Powell and Dent-Micallef, 1997).

II.2.3 Empirical Literature

The link between the effect of competitive advantage in the relationship between strategic change and organizational performance has not been the subject of much attention among alcohol industry researchers in Kenya. Some important areas are underexplored in the relationship between strategic change and performance. First, the subject has been primarily investigated in the context of Western countries, and inadequate attention has been given to middle economies. Second, for the studies that have been done in Kenya the focus has not been in the alcohol industry. For example, Mwende et al. (2013) studied the "Impact of the Alcoholic Drinks Control Act, 2010 on Marketing Strategies of East African Breweries Limited in Kenya." The specific objects were to: determine the effects of the Alcoholic Drinks Control Act, 2010 (ADCA 2010), on promotional activities by East African Breweries Limited; establish the effects of the ADCA 2010, on corporate social responsibility activities by East African Breweries Limited; assess the effects of the ADCA 2010 on the quality of alcoholic drinks and determine the effects of the ADCA 2010 on market expansion for East African Breweries Limited. The study found that the Act limits the company`s market expansion by 56% and its corporate social responsibility such as sports sponsorship by 41%. However, the study did not dwell on competitive advantage as a critical dimension of strategic change. In another study

Ismail, Rose, Abdullah and Uli, (2010) empirically examined the relationship between organizational competitive advantage and performance moderated by the age and size of firms. The research was conducted among 127 manufacturers listed in the 2008 Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers Directory. Overall, the study provides empirical support for the Resource-Based View (RBV) of Malaysian manufacturers regarding the issue of competitive advantage. However, the effect of competitive advantage on organization performance in the alcohol industry as opposed to manufacturing sector is yet to be explored considering that different industries have different critical success factors. In addition the study was conducted in Malaysia and not Kenya. Lastly, Firms that enjoy cost-based competitive advantages over their rivals, have been shown to exhibit comparatively better performance (Gimenez and Ventura, 2002; Morgan, Kaleka, and Katsikeas, 2004). Furthermore, a significant relationship between product-based advantage and the performance of organizations has also been identified. Firms that experience a product-based competitive advantage over their rivals such as, higher product quality, packaging, design and style have been shown to achieve relatively better performance (Gimenez and Ventura, 2002; Morgan et al., 2004). However, these studies fail to address effect of competitive advantage on the relationship between strategic change and organizational performance among alcohol firms in Kenya. Addressing this important gap, this study focused on alcohol industry in a middle economy (Kenya) and explored the effect of competitive advantage on the relationship between strategic change and performance of firms in the alcohol industry in Kenya.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted among alcohol firms in Kenya. This study adopted a concurrent mixed method research design using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Nieuwenhuis (2008) explains that researchers, who opt for using mixed methods, adhere to the notion that qualitative and quantitative research are compatible and that both can be used in a single study.

A census survey was conducted on 25 firms in the alcohol industry in Kenya. Self administered questionnaires were sent to the firms and respondents constituted four senior staff of each of the firms. Respondents, selected on saturated basis comprised Chief Finance Officers, Marketing Managers, Chief Executives and other managers responsible for strategic issues. Primary data was collected on strategic change and firm characteristics. Secondary data on organizational performance parameters such as return on sales, sales growth and overall performance was derived from the firms` annual statements External sources included relevant journals, publications and the internet, all regarding organizational performance.

To validate the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted to collect data from a sample of three firms. The main instrument for data collection was a semi structured questionnaire since they are fast, cheap and can be self-administered (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Primary data was collected using interviews with firms' employees. This allowed respondents to share anything they think was relevant and ask questions back.

Reliability of the instrument for data collection was tested by assessing the scale's internal consistency- the degree to which the items that make up the scale 'hang together'. This was done using Cronbach's alpha. According to Orodho (2009), a questionnaire has good internal consistency if the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale is above 0.7. In this study a Cronbach alpha coefficient established was .925.

Questionnaires were tested for content validity to establish the quality of the instruments. Content validity was done by three experts, that is, two in the academic field and one practicing professional who helped and assisted in looking at the relevance of the study issues and ensured accurate information.

There were six interviewees in total for this research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.105) state that "qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of the triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researched". It represents the extent that the data and its methods are accurate, correct and exact. As there are no measures for determining the validity of the qualitative research, it should be considered as a degree of validity rather than being absolutely quantified (Cohen et al. 2000). The purpose of interviewing is so that other people`s perspectives on a topic can be established. The study interviewed six respondents in accordance with Kuzel (1992) who recommends that 6–8 data sources or sampling units often will be sufficient when homogeneous samples. The aim was to identify "information-rich" participants who have certain characteristics, detailed knowledge, or direct experience relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Pope and Mays 1995).

Data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach is deemed better because descriptive methods tend to be stronger in validity but weak in reliability (Kibwage, 2002 and Odondo, 2007). Moderated Multiple Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses that firm characteristics moderate the relationship between strategic change and performance.

The process of analyzing qualitative data involved noticing, identifying, categorizing, and coding steps. The notes made and materials collected during the interview were marked and labeled for later use. Once the data was coded, the researcher organized the data into themes or categories.

The themes had a number of categories or subcategories: firm characteristics theme had these categories; managerial capabilities, specific product dimensions and brand portfolio.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

Correlation and regression analysis were used to determine the relationship between the variable of competitive advantages and organizational performance. Pearson correlation was used to describe how the variables were related and the strengths of the relationship between competitive advantage and organizational performance. The response rate was 93% which is above minimum acceptable limit since according to Oso et al (2009) the acceptable response rate for survey questionnaire administered personally by the researcher must be achieved above 80%.

The findings of the study revealed that most firms in the Alcohol Industry in Kenya enjoy competitive advantage which has subsequently positively affected overall performance in their organizations. It was discovered that this competitive advantage emancipated in the perceived quality of products, introduction of new products and modification of existing products to meet the unique client needs and environmental changes. For example, about three quarters [75.3% (70)] of the managers who took part in the study confirmed that their firms have been able to introduce completely new products and services, which they said had significant influence on organization overall performance. These results confirm previous findings of strong sales effects of new-product introductions (Booz, Allen and Hamilton 1982).

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On the same note, it emerged from the study findings that considerable proportion of the firms has been able to modify existing products to meet unique customer needs. This was indicated by 68.6% (63) of the firm managers who participated in the study. In addition, more than four out of every five, 82.8% (97), senior managers of firms in the Alcohol Industry observed that in overall, their customers rate the quality of their products and services as excellent.

From the interview it was noted that firms have been able to introduce new products to capture new market as one of the interviewees revealed: we unlocked our potential by wooing female drinkers with beer made from malt and lemon, in a bid to expand our market share. This is in addition to our existing products within our range that are popular among female drinkers. To emphasize the importance of new products, analysis of internet documents revealed the following from one of the firms: our company is leveraging its channels and brands to expand into niches such as low carbohydrates (which is mostly directed to women), cider, and wine.

For most firms, successful new products are engines of growth (Cohen, Eliashberg and Ho 1997). Therefore, in order to boost organizational performance, executives should focus on new-product introductions.

Similarly, the findings of the study show that most firms have altered their product offerings to meet unique client needs and unique environmental changes, as revealed by 62.4% (58) of the managers from those firms. Nonetheless, it emerged from the findings of the study that most of the firms in the Alcohol Industry have always strived to cater for the customer needs for "new" features, as revealed by 75.3% (70) of the senior managers of these firms who took part in the survey. Consistent with these results is the findings from Ali, (2014) who revealed that East African Breweries Limited has new products produced based on customers feedback, offer low priced products with higher quality, has brand/ line extensions customized to satisfy the needs.

Many products in the market are distinguished using features. With regard to extra features a review of internet documents revealed that: Central Glass Industries remarkably supported the packaging renovation agenda of one of the firms by specifically designing and producing her new look beer bottles in Kenya and Uganda, both of which have been received very well by the markets

The hypothesis, "the effect of strategic change on the competitive advantages of firms in the alcohol industry is negatively related with organization performance". To investigate this relationship an inferential statistic, correlation coefficient was computed using the bivariate correlation analysis. The independent variable used was the scores from the views of respondents on competitive advantages' questionnaire; while dependent variable was the organization overall performance scores also generated from the views the respondents. After conducting the necessary preliminary analyses to ensure suitability of data, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient analysis was conducted.

Table I: Pearson Correlation: Competitive Advantage versus Organizational Performance

		Competitive Advantage	Organizational Performance
Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	1	.635**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	93	93
Organizational Performance	Pearson Correlation	.635**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	93	93

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

From Table I, the findings of the study show that there was a fairly strong, positive, significant positive correlation between the two variables [$r = .635$, $n=93$, $p < .001$]. The statistical significance led to the rejection of the null hypothesis; hence the study concluded that there was significant positive effect of strategic change on the competitive advantages on organization overall performance in firms in alcohol industry in Kenya. The implication of these findings is that an improvement of strategic change on the competitive advantages is associated with high levels of organizational performance of the firms in alcohol industry in Kenya.

However, to get an idea of how much variance the two variables (competitive advantage and organization performance) share, a coefficient of determination was calculated. The coefficient of determination value of $R^2 = .4032$, which was established indicate that the two variables share about 40 per cent of their variance. This means that there was a reasonable overlap between the two variables; implying that competitive advantage helped to explain about 22 per cent of the variance in respondents' scores on the organization performance scale.

It was important to find out the level of contribution competitive advantages made of the independent variables included in the model in the prediction of the dependent variable. From the output box of coefficients (Table II), a look at the Beta values under standardized coefficients reveals that competitive advantages contributed differently to the model.

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Table II: Coefficients: Organization Performance Vs Strategic Change

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	.826	.283		2.919	.004	.264	1.388
	Scope of strategies	.444	.098	.461	4.532	.000	.249	.639
	Resource Deployment Pattern	.096	.063	.123	1.532	.129	-.029	.221
	Competitive Advantage	.273	.088	.289	3.097	.003	.098	.448
a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance								

Coefficients of the independent variables in the organization performance model are shown in Table II. Competitive advantages made a statistically significant (PV<.05) contribution to the equation, Hence, it was concluded that the competitive advantages made significant contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (organization performance in firms within alcohol industry). The research aimed at establishing the relationship between competitive advantage and organizational performance of alcohol firms in Kenya. The results indicate that there is a strong relation between competitive advantage and organizational performance of alcohol firms in Kenya.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

These findings collate with the literature review: Firms that enjoy cost-based competitive advantages over their rivals, have been shown to exhibit comparatively better performance (Gimenez and Ventura, 2002; Morgan, Kaleka, and Katsikeas, 2004). Furthermore, a significant relationship between product-based advantage and the performance of organizations has also been identified. Firms that experience a product-based competitive advantage over their rivals such as, higher product quality, packaging, design and style have been shown to achieve relatively better performance (Gimenez and Ventura, 2002; Morgan et al., 2004). Similar to this study is another study conducted by Raduan et al., (2009), it is concluded that there is a positive relation between unique edge and organizational success. Competitive edge is able to significantly predict the variance in the performance of the organization.

These studies provide support for the importance of competitive advantages in enhancing organizational performance. The management should be keen on the competitive advantage constructs of quality of product and services, introduction and modification of products and services and catering for varied customer needs for gaining the high organizational performance. Particularly, the management should learn to introduce new products to capture new market such as wooing female drinkers with beer made from malt and lemon, in a bid to expand the market share. More so, the channels and brands to expand into niches such as low carbohydrates which are mostly directed to women provide more advantage to firms. Therefore, in order to boost organizational performance, executives should focus on new-product introductions with unique

characteristics. The management should alter their product offerings to meet unique client needs and unique environmental changes, as revealed by findings. One possible explanation for these results is that firms that enjoy a significant relationship between product-based advantage and the performance of organizations have also been identified. Firms that experience a product-based competitive advantage over their rivals such as, higher product quality, packaging, design and style have been shown to achieve relatively better performance (Gimenez and Ventura, 2002; Morgan et al., 2004). There is an important association among competitive advantage and the organizational performance constructs of sales growth, market share and overall performance. This research can add to the body of knowledge by extending the Recourse Based View by investigating the comparative importance placed upon organizational products traits towards attaining the competitive advantage and increasing organizational performance. Any organizational management can therefore use these results to improve the firm's competitive advantage to gain the higher organizational performance.

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