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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of generic competitive strategies on performance of grain milling firms in Mombasa County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the effect of cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, cost focus and differentiation focus strategy on performance of grain milling firms. The study used a descriptive research design. This study targeted three different line managers which are branch managers, operations managers and departmental managers in these grain milling firms in Mombasa County. Stratified random sampling technique was used to choose a sample of 73 respondents. The study used primary and secondary data. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze information generated from respondents. Descriptive statistics analysis included mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics included correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis by use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. Analyzed data was presented in frequency and descriptive tables.The study findings revealed that the grain milling firms' commodity pricings are competitive in the market hence affordable to the customers. It was concluded that in order to offer competitive pricings, the grain milling firms develop cost control strategies to enable success in price controls. The grain milling firms have weak cross-departmental coordination and this weakness is rampant in the vital department of Research and Development. The study concluded that the grain millers frequently conduct targeted reduction of commodity prices with a view to meet specific customer costing needs. It is concluded that firms in the grain milling sector carry out market focused planning.The firms have a keen eye on operations and production overheads so as to minimize the costs. In addition, the firms reported to practice resource sharing with a mission of keeping operational costs at minimum. The study concluded that the firms choose mass production so as to minimize costs through economies of scale. The study recommended that the firms in the grain milling sector should develop strategies to offer competitive prices for the products to the market. This could be realized by developing cost control strategies in the production and operations processes. The study recommended that the firms should produce a wide array of high quality products so as to offer customers with a wide range of choices to make.

Key Terms: *Competitive strategy, Cost-leadership strategy, Differentiation strategy, Focus strategy, Strategy*

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has led to increased competition in every sphere of business which has led to manufacturing firms adopting both cost and differentiation strategies for effective organizational performance and excellence (Baroto, Abdullah, & Wan, 2018). This global shifts and changes in business environment have forced manufacturers to reconsider their status in terms of quality, cost and ability to deliver (Takala, 2018). Similarly, as cited in Takala (2018) posit that business environment today has increasingly become more competitive thus making organizations to also become dynamic and aggressive in identifying and adopting competitive strategies which enable profitable existence. According to (Johnson and Scholes 2017), competitive strategies entail the basis on which a business unit might achieve competitive advantage in its market.

Dynamic environment makes organization to strive to sustain superior performance through aligning its resources and abilities and this way it achieves a distinctive position in the market attracting a huge number of customers growing its market share for example. To sustain superior performance a firm must ensure it concentrates on identification and perception of customers' demands, concentration on customer, and improvement of the processes. Also calls for exploitation of organizational competences that are not easily imitable (Hosseini, Soltani, &Mehdizadeh, 2018). Grain milling firms are vulnerable to changes in their operating environment in many ways and these have great consequences on their operation. As a result of this vulnerability manufacturing firms are required to be proactive and able to formulate and adopt appropriate competitive strategies that will enable them to overcome the competitive challenges they experience in the environment they operate in.

Grain milling firms are organizations that granulate grain to deliver flour either utilizing semi-or completely programmed type factories. The reason for grain processing is to improve the edibility of the grain for human or creature utilization. For human utilization, the processing cycle expects to create an acceptable supper or flour.The goal here is to process the grain to a state of coarseness that is satisfactory to the purchaser. For creature utilization, the processing cycle expects to forestall the grain going straight through the creature stomach related framework without being completely processed. Instances of these grains incorporate wheat, rice, grain, maize, oats, millets, sorghum and blended grain among other dry grains. Grain milling is a business with a notoriously tight profit margin, so milling companies are always looking to reduce costs. One of the biggest expenses for a milling operation is energy consumption since the process involves so many pieces of equipment. In recent years, great strides have been made by equipment manufacturers in developing energy-efficient machinery.

Globally, business flour factories are a fundamental piece of the agrarian business all throughout the planet (FAU, 2021). Since it can accomplish the work that would require some investment to finish, grain is accessible to the overall population at an entirely sensible value (Rahmn, 2016). Near 183 flour mills are operational in the United States of America, as claimed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.In his study, Adewole, (2018) concludes that a company's general situation inside its industry decides if an association's benefit is above or underneath the business normal. The central premise of better than expected productivity over the long haul is feasible upper hand. The two essential sorts of upper hand joined with the extent of exercises for which a firm looks to accomplish them, lead to three procedures for accomplishing better than expected execution in an industry: cost leader, differentiation and focus.

In Africa, grain millers have been facing many challenges. In Zimbabwe, milling industry has hit turbulent times, amid revelations that some companies have suspended operations after a flood of cheap imported mealie-meal pushed them to the brink (Nyoni, 2021).A good example of such is wheat, although the population of Africa increased by 32%,the continent's wheat imports expanded by 68% surging to 47 million tons from 27.3 million tons.Market demands are expanding, the population is elevating and in the region of east Africa there is a shift from maize to wheat. Subsequently, people want different types of bread, the products are becoming more diversified. Largest markets in East Africa are Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. Switzerland-based company Bühler AG acknowledged this and rolled its African Milling School in Kenya, in 2015 (King, 2015).

In Kenya, competition exists in the grain milling sector due to the high advertising, price wars and frequent product launches experienced. Whilst competitive intensity is acknowledged to have effect on firm profitability, scanty attention has been paid to it by researchers in Kenya. The current study incorporates competitive intensity as a moderator to check how manufacturing firms choose their competitive strategies based on the intensity of competition in the market and how that eventually affects their firm performance (Khamila, 2020).

Grain milling firms are vulnerable to changes in their operating environment in many ways and these have great consequences on their operation. As a result of this vulnerability of these firms are required to be proactive and able to formulate and adopt appropriate competitive strategies that will enable them to overcome the competitive challenges they experience in the environment they operate in. Competitive strategy helps a firm to gain a competitive edge over its rivals and sustain its success in the market. A firm that does not have appropriate strategies cannot exploit the opportunity available in the market and will automatically fail.

Grain milling firms are organizations that granulate grain to deliver flour either utilizing semi-or completely programmed type factories.In Kenya, the number of registered millers in Kenya is 103. Estimated total installed corn milling capacity is 162-177 million tons. Production capacity of the largest 19 mills in the country is equal to 85-90 percent of total corn milling capacity.The quantity of business grain processing firms has developed throughout the long term. Kenya presently has 30 medium-to-enormous scope processing firms (90-610 metric tons for every 24hrs) and 75 limited scope mill operators with an expected pool limit of 83 metric tons each day. The oat processing industry is described by solid contest, high volumes and value delicate interest. Competition exists in the grain milling industry in Kenya due to the high advertising, price wars and frequent brand launches. Whilst competitive intensity is acknowledged to have effect on firm performance, scanty attention has been paid to it by researchers in Kenya.

The business environment in Mombasa County today is dynamic and volatile. Competition among milling firms is getting volatile as days go by due to globalization, dere6gulation, hyper global and domestic competition, and technological changes. Heightened competition exerts pressure on firms to be proactive and to design successful strategies that facilitate dynamic response to anticipated and actual changes in the environment. Negligence to formulate and implement a conducive competitive strategy has resulted to some firms facing declining profits and even losses example TSS. A serious strategy targets pushing organizations to acquire an upper hand and be in front of its rivals when they have dissected the qualities and shortcomings of their rivals and their own. This assists these organizations with beating the serious pressing factor on the lookout and simultaneously help to draw in help to draw in possible clients (Khamila, 2020). In this stunning time of development, with new companies and organizations tearing up standards and carrying worth to customers through more decision and utility, numerous organizations are presently selecting cutthroat procedure strategies to acquire an upper hand (Graham, 2020).The milling firms in Mombasa County, despite deploying different competitive strategies, they have continued to face stiff competition which has affected performance. With these many challenges facing grain millers, there is need to close the gaps in the empirical literature, extend and to clearly find the generic competitive strategies effect on the firms performance.

Various studies have been conducted by a number of scholars on competitive strategies in Kenya.Muiruri (2020) researched on relationship between competitive strategies and organizational performance of Supermarkets in Kenya. Atikiya (2016) did a study on competitive strategies effect on manufacturing firm’s performance in Kenya. However, the studies presented contextual gaps by focusing in other sectors and not grain milling firms.Kamuni (2019) did a study on competitive strategy and external environment on performance of food processing firms in Nairobi and revealed a positive effect. Based on the reviewed studies, very little has been focused on grain milling firms. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the effect of generic competitive strategies on organizational performance of grain milling firms in Mombasa County.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the effect of cost-leadership strategy on performance of grain milling companies in Mombasa County
- To determine the effect of differentiation strategy on performance of grain milling companies in Mombasa County
- To analyze the effectof cost focus strategy on performance of grain milling companies in Mombasa County
- To find out the effect of differentiation focus on performance of grain milling companies in Mombasa County

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study used three theories that are based on the objectives of the study. These theories include resource-based theory, configuration theory as well as Porter’s theory of competitive advantages. The theories explain more on the objectives which include cost-leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, cost-focus strategy as well as differentiation focus strategy.

Resource-Based Theory

Asset based hypothesis is a way to deal with accomplishing upper hand that surfaced in 1980s and 1990s after extraordinary works contributed by (Birger Wernerfelt)-Resource-based perspective on the firm,Prahalad and Hamel (The center capability of the company) and (Barney, Resource-based theories of competitive advantage: A ten-year retrospective on the resource-based view, 2001).Resource-based view hypothesis is an administrative system which is utilized to decide the company's essential assets in order to abuse these assets to accomplish economical upper hand. This hypothesis centers on the association's interior assets and the administration invests all the energy to distinguish these assets and their capacities and skills with the capacity to give an unrivaled upper hand (Resource-based View Theory, 2019).The supervisor invests exertion in recognizing, understanding and characterizing center capabilities and chooses the methodologies that best endeavors the inward assets of the firm to acquire upper hand from outside promising circumstances.

As per this hypothesis, the key administrative capacities incorporate recognizing the association's expected assets, assessing the assets in the VRIO rules. VRIO rules incorporates whether the assets are important, as in its anything but a firm to carry out methodologies that will work on its proficiency and viability, uncommon implying that the contenders can't make these assets accessible to them, imitable to imply that it can't be executed by different firms and finally non-substitutable, in that it can't be supplanted by other non-uncommon assets. Starting here, the chief necessities to create, sustain and ensure these assets. Hierarchical assets are arranged into substantial and theoretical assets. Unmistakable assets are the actual assets like monetary assets, HR, crude materials, plants and hardware, stock, brands, licenses and brand names. Elusive assets incorporate hierarchical practices and

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schedules like a company's standing, culture, information, experience and above all associations with clients and providers. There are two suppositions with respect to these assets and that is, heterogeneous and stationary assets. Heterogeneous accepts that each association has various abilities, capacities, assets, structures and these distinctions are the ones that make an organization one of a kind in its own specific manner. Fixed accepts that the assets claimed by an association are not versatile as in it can't be moved starting with one organization then onto the next.

Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage

The expression 'manageable upper hand' arose whenPorter in 2008 talks about the essential sorts of serious procedures that an organization can have (minimal expense or separation) to accomplish a since quite a while ago run practical upper hand. In his book Upper hand: making and supporting unrivaled execution, watchman discloses the imperative way to deal with business achievement. Feasible upper hand implies economical prevalent execution. He goes on to express that underlying states of an industry as proposed in his five power model, decides the normal presentation of the business. Generally solid cutthroat position and execution of a specific firm in an industry gets from two sorts of upper hand, for example low expenses and separation (Porter, On Competition, 2008)

Potter's methodology recommends that separation and cost administration look for upper hand in a wide picture of market industry. Separation includes choosing at least one rule utilized by purchasers in a market and afterward situating the business particularly to meet those measures. The procedures includes charging a premium for the item, regularly to reflect higher creation cost and additional worth added highlights accommodated the shopper (Doorman, 2012)

For cost authority methodology, the target of the firm is to turn into the least expense maker in the business. Whenever accomplished the selling cost can basically approach or almost the normal for the market, then, at that point the most minimal expense maker will appreciate the best benefits. A technique typically connected with huge scope business offering standard items. Cost center procedure is for organizations that look for a cheaper benefit in only one or fewer market sections. The item will be essential, maybe a comparable item to the expensive and included market pioneer, yet worthy to adequate clients (Kramer, 2006)

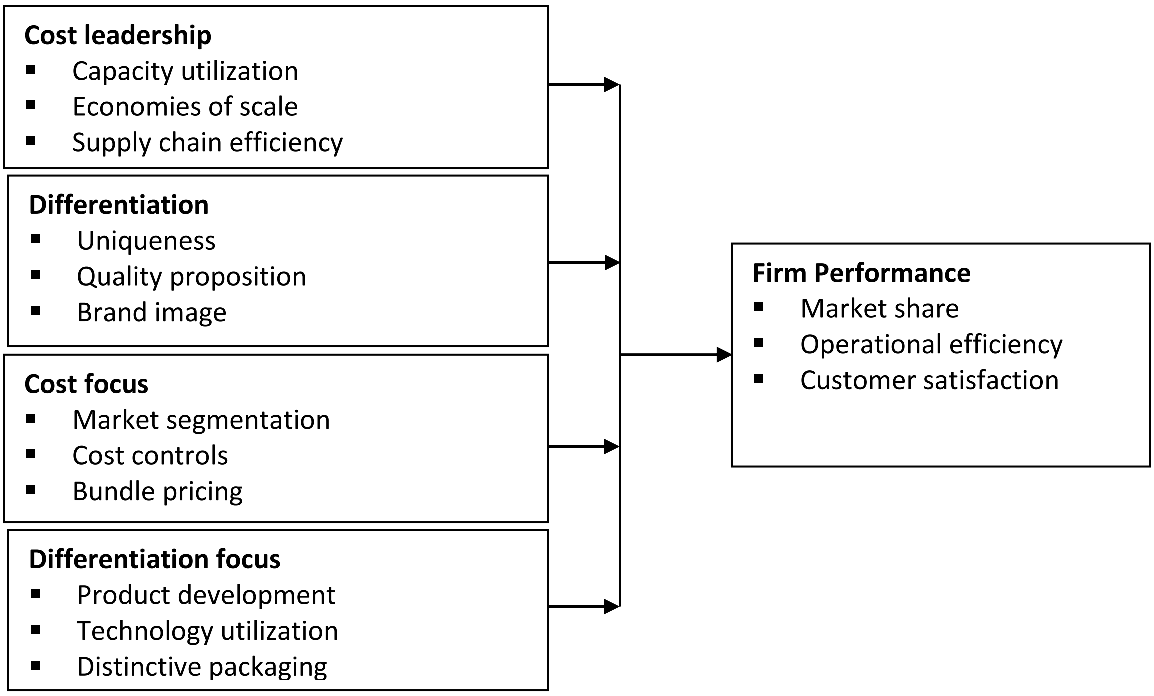
Configuration Theory

The configuration school which perceive strategy formulation as a transformation process was developed in the 1960s and 70s by Chandler in 1962, Mintzberg and Miller in late 1970s and Miles and Snow in 1978. Configuration theory posits that for each set of strategic characteristics, there exists an ideal set of organizational characteristics that yields superior performance. This means that the performance of an organization depends on the fit of environment and organizational design.

Configuration theory assumptions are that best performance can be achieved when organization structure matches external contingency factor. Only those organizations that align their operation with the current environment achieve maximum output. The general model implicit in configuration theory assumes that for organizations to be effective there must be an appropriate fit between structure, strategy and environmental context (Fincham& Rhodes, 2018).(Gao, 2017) argues that any firm's external environment is exogenous, so the firm must adjust its strategy according to the environmental constraints. As such, there are no universally optimal strategic choices for all businesses. In the context of this study, configuration theory links focus strategies and performance of grain milling firms.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a figure that shows the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable.



Independent variables **Dependent variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Review of Literature on Variable

The conceptualized theoretical constructs have been discussed in the following sub-sections and include cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus and differentiation focus, environmental turbulence and the dependent variable which is organizational performance.

Cost-Leadership Strategy

Watchman's conventional procedures are methods of acquiring upper hand at the end of the day, fostering the 'edge' that gets an organization the deal and removes it from the contenders. There are two primary methods of accomplishing this inside an expense administration system: expanding benefits by lessening costs, while charging industry normal costs, the subsequent one is expanding piece of the pie by charging lower costs, while as yet making a sensible benefit on every deal in light of the fact that the organization has diminished expenses. Cost initiative is tied in with limiting the expense for the association of conveying items and administrations. The expense administration procedure includes being the innovator as far as cost in your industry or market. Just being among the least expense makers isn't sufficient as you leave yourself totally open to assault by other minimal expense makers who may undermine your costs and consequently block your endeavors to expand portion of the overall industry (Roy, 2021).

Differentiation Strategy

Separation technique is the procedure that means to recognize an item or administration, from other comparable items, offered by the rivals on the lookout. It involves advancement of an item or administration that is exceptional for clients, as far as item configuration, highlights, and brand picture, quality or client care. Separation is the way to fruitful promoting, contending and assembling an organization's manageable upper hand. A predominant item or administration makes no difference without a method of some way or another telling your point of view clients about it. Your distinction can be any client advantage that isolates you from your rivals. You should find that distinction and convey it to your client. Separation depends on the idea that clients will pay more for a thing in the event that they see that it is unique and if the reason for the thing that matters is esteemed by the client. Separation includes accomplishing upper hand through pinpointing item or administration ascribes that clients see as significant and situating the firm to satisfy those needs better compared to the opposition (Wiki, 2021).

Cost-Focus Strategy

Center procedure frets about the ID of a specialty market and dispatching a one of a kind item or administration on the lookout. A specialty market is a limited fragment of an absolute market. A specialty can be distinguished dependent on specific issues, for example, a specific purchaser bunch, geographic uniqueness, exceptional item ascribes that bid distinctly to specialty individuals, a specific product offering portion. The zeroed in minimal expense procedure of going into a specialty market for a minimal price with a remarkable sort of item that has a unique need among the clients in the specialty market. This procedure is designated to those by means of so want to have interesting items for a minimal price. The organization that follows this methodology contends with the expense chiefs in the specialty market where it has an expense advantage. With this system, an organization focuses on little volume exclusively assembled item for which it has an expense advantage. The organization may receive this procedure to serve a purchaser portion, whose requirements can be happy with less expense contrasted with the remainder of the market (IEduNote, 2021).

Differentiation Focus

Firms that are effective in a center procedure can tailor a wide scope of item improvement qualities to a moderately thin geographic market section, or to a specific purchaser gathering or fragment. They additionally target market sections that are less defenseless against substitutes ow where a contest is most fragile to procure better than expected profit from speculation. The firm may accomplish separation from better gathering the requirements of a specific objective or lower costs in serving the objective, and may even accomplish both. Despite the fact that the center procedure doesn't accomplish separation according to the point of view of the market overall, it accomplishes one or both in its restricted market target. Frequently the center procedure of filling a restricted need or offering an item that a couple of will buy, takes into consideration items to be evaluated along with some built-in costs since the firm is fulfilling a little gathering of buyers (Train, 2016).

Firm Performance

In this dynamic environment an organization strives to sustain superior performance through aligning its resources and abilities and this way it achieves a distinctive position in the market attracting a huge number of customers growing its market share for example (Kamau, 2019). The concept of performance is based upon the idea that an organization is the voluntary association of productive assets, including human, physical, and capital resources, for the purpose of achieving a shared purpose (Barney, 2014). Those providing the assets will only commit them to the organization so long as they are satisfied with the value they receive in exchange, relative to alternative uses of the assets. As a consequence, the essence of performance is the creation of value

To sustain superior performance a firm must ensure it concentrates on identification and perception of customers' demands, concentration on customer, and improvement of the processes. Also calls for exploitation of organizational competences that are not easily imitable (Hosseini, Soltani, &Mehdizadeh, 2018). Competitiveness is analyzed by using past performance indicators or potential competitiveness indicators such as the market share, product cost, financial performance which includes profit, sales growth and returns of investment, non-financial performance including customer satisfaction, employee's growth, benchmarking and balanced scorecard which is identical with performance. The market position may enable a firm to earn profits that are higher

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than the average profit earned by its competitors (Sachitra, 2016). The performance metrics adopted in this study are market share, customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Empirical Literature Review

A research study conducted by Aklannawar, (2020) in his study on the benefits of cost leadership strategy in organizations, he concludes that Cost leadership is a technique utilized by associations whereby the expense of the item is decreased to acquire a more prominent piece of the pie and benefit. Each business requires a methodology to acquire brand acknowledgment in the present cutthroat market. Cost initiative is one of those techniques organizations use to create superior grade and standard items and selling them at a lower cost than its rivals. This thusly expands the market size. By inferring cost authority methodology an organization won't just acquire benefit, in the long run, the market size for that specific item will likewise increment. In the event that a standard item is accessible at a reasonable value, it turns out to be most favored item among the customers.

A research was conducted by Miller, (2020) on the 14 advantages and disadvantages of a company utilizing cost leadership strategy, concluded that Cost leadership styles center around asset association. The objective is to create labor and products at the most reduced conceivable expense by getting sorted out each likely asset around the current creation techniques. Cost initiative searches for explicit approaches to diminish cost all through their group. Pioneers hope to add insight, embrace economies of scale, change the production network, or utilize lean assembling procedures. This initiative style additionally searches for cost controls, overhead efficiencies and cost minimization in all offices. This works on the supportability of the business since when expenses are lower for a business, then, at that point there are less monetary dangers that could make the association bankrupt.

In her study, Azad, (2021) on cost leadership strategy on business performance, she found out that key arranging can take any association to its zenith. Cost-initiative methodologies requires the energetic quest for cost minimization and procedures like effective usage of size of creation, great buying technique, and current innovation and produce quality items. Organizations with the least expense of activity have higher odds of endurance during down occasions. Simultaneously, surplus capital can be used to finance development or ventures like examination, innovation overhauls and other business extension.

According to a study conducted by (Hudson, 2006), the study concluded that Many expense pioneers depend on economies of scale to accomplish productivity. Economies of scale are made when the expenses of offering labor and products conveyances as a firm can sell more things. This happens in light of the fact that costs are circulated across a more noteworthy number of things. Cost pioneers will in general share some significant qualities. The capacity to charge low costs and still make a benefit is testing. Cost pioneers figure out how to do as such by accentuating productivity. As a feature of the work to be effective, most expense pioneers spend minimal on publicizing, statistical surveying, or innovative work. Past existing contenders, an expense initiative procedure likewise makes benefits comparative with expected participants. In particular, the presence of an expense chief in an industry will in general deter new firms from entering the business in light of the fact that another firm would battle to draw in clients by undermining the expense chief's costs. Accordingly, an expense administration system makes obstructions to passage that ensure the firm and its current adversaries from new rivalry.

In his study, (Indeed-editorial, 2021) his findings were that numerous organizations decide to rebuild additional time and utilize fluctuating methodologies to progress and separate themselves in the commercial center. In the event that an organization needs to build benefits without high danger or bringing down its costs, the organization ought to consider making a separation methodology. A separation methodology is a methodology organizations create by furnishing clients with something novel, extraordinary and unmistakable from things their rivals may offer in the commercial center. The fundamental target of carrying out an alternate methodology is to increment upper hand. A business will for the most part achieve this by dissecting its qualities and shortcomings, the necessities of its clients and the general worth it can give. Separation system helps in discounted value rivalry. Separation technique permits an organization to contend in the market with some different option from lower costs. It additionally empowers better net revenues. At the point when items are separated and transformed into higher items, it offers greater freedom for bigger net revenues. In the event that the objective market will follow through on a greater expense for top quality or better worth, the organization may create more income with less deals.

Item separation is fundamental in the present monetary environment. It permits the merchant to differentiate its own remarkable item with contending items on the lookout and underscore the exceptional angles that make its item prevalent. When used effectively, vender again in upper hand by exhibiting why their items are special. A decent item separation system may acquire brand dependability, which is critical to any fruitful business. This procedure centers around purchaser's view of significant worth. However long the merchant keeps on giving better caliber, the client base will stay solid. The present monetary environment contains organizations in a strongly aggressive market. On the off chance that an item doesn't have reliably great, purchasers will go to contenders. Making an item that is special won't be sufficient to acquire the upper hand of item separation if the purchaser doesn't esteem what the dealer is separating on. The merchant should have an exhaustive comprehension of the purchaser's assumptions and how the item will be utilized (Investopedia, 2021).

Basically, separation in business alludes to the guideline of setting an organization a section from the opposition through a particular component, for example, the organization's dissemination organization or value point. It gives a better degree of significant worth than the clients and assists the organization with separating itself in the commercial center. All things considered, the fundamental point of any separation methodology is to expand the business' upper hand. Separation technique is good to go assists organizations with creating exceptional specialties inside cutthroat businesses or markets, accordingly empowering them to flourish. This thus expands client dependability. By working on the apparent nature of the organization's items, the organization can build brand faithfulness in any event, when at a greater cost point, which can assist the business with thriving (Gocardless, 2017).

According to (Gaille, 2018) a focus strategy is one where a company decides to concentrate the resources of its marketing strategy on either expanding into a narrow market or segment by entering it in the first place. It is typically implemented when the agency involved already knows its targeted demographics and can meet the needs of each consumer effectively. Cost focus strategy improves the pricing structure of the business. This is because when there is a higher level of loyalty within a consumer base, then a business is able to charge higher prices for their products. That is because consumers find value in supporting the brand because the brand supported them by meeting a specific need.

In his research work (Kokemillers, 2020) at the same time, cost focus strategy typically offers lower production costs. When the company is focused on providing a niche product to a targeted demographic, the company has more options from which to choose within its production cycles. The company is not going to be able to produce goods at a large enough scale to generate cost savings,

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though the company can give itself competitive advantage here if it focuses on cost-sensitive materials and lower production costs then it can target its customers who will appreciate the lower costs to expand a market share.

Cost focus strategy requires competing based on price to target a narrow market. A firm that flows this strategy does not necessarily charge the lowest prices in the industry. Instead, it charges low prices relative to other firms that compete within the target market. A company that has a narrow market and an advantage of a low cost business model may opt for the cost focus strategy. This is a very challenging approach for many companies, because niche markets with limited overall buying power can inhibit the company's ability to buy products and supplies at lower costs. Thus, a company that manages to set up a low-cost operation and distribution system can build a huge competitive advantage. Efficient operational processes, investments in automated inventory and management technology systems and effective marketing and pricing to attract targeted customers can contribute to success using this strategy (Lucidity, 2021).

The cost focus strategy is an evolution of the cost leadership strategy. There are two aspects to this strategy. The 'focus' refers to when a company focuses on a niche market, either by industry or geography, and becomes the expert in delivering for that service for an aggressive cost to them, much like the cost leadership strategy. This strategy helps the company to become the though leaders within an industry, providing a level of credibility to the company's overall story as well as generate customer loyalty by becoming the single trusted provider in the industry.

According to a research conducted by (Onishi, 2010), Separation center is a way to deal with upper hand wherein an organization endeavors to beat its opponents by offering an item that is seen by shoppers to be better than that of contenders despite the fact that its cost is higher, in receiving a separation center system, the organization centers around restricted market inclusion, looking for just to draw in a little, particular fragment. An engaged separation technique requires offering exceptional highlights that satisfy the requests of a tight market. While a separation technique includes offering remarkable highlights that appeal to an assortment of buyers, the need to fulfill the longings of a limited market implies that the quest for uniqueness is regularly taken to a higher level by firms utilizing an engaged separation system. In this manner the one of a kind highlights given by firms following an engaged separation methodology are regularly specific.

Centered separation procedure happens when an organization chooses to center its endeavors and beat its rivals in a single explicit region. Such a region could be a blend of an item highlight. The more honed is your center, the more critical contrast you will get with your endeavors. Interestingly, on the off chance that you don't accomplish an adequate level of center, your endeavors will be scattered, and may not accomplish as high separation procedure as the wellspring of upper hand (Spivak, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way. This design was appropriate for this study because it resulted to collection of huge data which is rich in results and at the same time allowed collection of data of the same participants in unchanged environment. This research design has been used successfully by researchers in the strategic management field (Kamau, 2019 and Azad, 2021). The target population for the study was ninety (90) managers from the five (5) grain milling firms in Mombasa County in Kenya. The justification for targeting the managers was that they were more knowledgeable about the competitive strategies and the firm performance of the grain milling firms for they were involved in the day to day running of the firms. The five grain milling firms included Mombasa Maize Mills, Kitui flour Mills (DOLA), Grain Industries ltd (AJAB), Umoja Flour Mills and Mzuri Flour Mills. The five grain milling firms were selected on the bases of them having their rich in information that the researcher was interested in head-quarters in Mombasa County in Kenya. The sampling frame for this study was a selection of grain milling firms within Mombasa County. These were Mombasa Maize Millers, Kitui Flour Mills, Umoja Flour Mills, Mzuri Flour Mills and Grain Industries ltd. The sample was calculated using the Yamane statistical formula. Given a target population of 90 and precision level of 0.95 the sample size was:

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = the minimum recommended sample size,

N = the target population size

e = is the allowed margin of error (0.05)

With a target population of 90 and precision level of 0.95, the sample size was:

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}=\frac{90}{1+90(0.05)^2}= 73$$

Therefore, the sample size for the study was seventy three (73) managers from the five (5) grain milling firms in Mombasa County in Kenya. Research instrument in this study consisted of a structured questionnaire that contains five pointed Likert scale where respondents were requested to indicate their opinion based on the statements provided. The close-ended questionnaires were used because the responses that were gathered were in a standardized way. The survey questionnaires are also relatively quick when information is collected from a large portion of a group. The multiple regressions model before the inclusion of the moderating variable was specified as:

$$Y= \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1+ \beta_2X_2+\beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4+\varepsilon \quad \text{.......................... } 1$$

Where:

Y= Firm Performance

$\boldsymbol{\beta_0}$ = Constant Term

$\mathbf{B_1}$, $\boldsymbol{\beta_2}$, $\boldsymbol{\beta_3}$ and $\boldsymbol{\beta_4}$= the Regression Coefficients of the Independent Variables,

$\mathbf{X_1}$= Cost Leadership Strategy

$\mathbf{X_2}$= Differentiation Strategy

$\mathbf{X_3}$ = Cost Focus Strategy

$\mathbf{X_4}$ =Differentiation Focus Strategy

ε= the Stochastic Error Term

FINDINGS

Cost Leadership Strategy

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale their level of agreement on several statements describing the cost leadership strategy of the firms. The results in Table 1 showed that respondents agreed that the company offers competitive prices to the customer and that the company develops detailed cost control strategies for price controls as indicated by a mean of 4.78 and mean of 4.05 respectively. Respondents also agreed that the company regularly evaluate the cost of operations to caution overhead costs (mean=4.63) and that the company practice resource sharing to save on operational cost (mean=4.00). The study findings revealed that respondents agreed that the company adopts high volume production to enjoy economies of scale (mean=4.91).

Table 1: Cost Leadership Strategy

	Mean	Std deviation
Our company offers competitive prices to the customer	4.78	.449
We develop detailed cost control strategies for price controls	4.05	.610
We regularly evaluate the cost of operations to caution overhead costs	4.63	.527
We practice resource sharing to save on operational cost	4.00	.282
We adopt high volume production to enjoy economies of scale	4.91	.117

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Differentiation Strategy

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale their level of agreement on several statements describing the differentiation strategy adopted by the firms. The results in Table 2 showed that respondents disagreed to the statement that there is strong coordination among our functions especially in research and development. Respondents agreed to the statement that the companies have a wide range of superior products as indicated by a mean of 2.69 and mean of 4.42 respectively. The respondents agreed to the statement that the companies have a well aligned distribution services for customers (mean=4.83). Respondents further agreed to the statement that the firms have a strong research team which helps to come up with superior products (mean=4.02).

Table 2: Differentiation Strategy

	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is strong coordination among our functions especially in research and development	2.69	.383
We have a wide range of superior products	4.42	.491
We have a well aligned distribution services for customers	4.83	.610
We have a strong research team which helps to come up with superior products	4.02	.705

Cost Focus Strategy

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale their level of agreement on several statements describing the cost focus strategy adopted by firms. The results in Table 3 showed that respondents agreed to the statement that the firms'lower costs of specific products to meet specific customer costing needs and that the firms conduct market focused planningas indicated by a mean of 4.58 and mean of 4.77 respectively. Respondents also agreed to the statement that the firms have loyalty programs for the repeat customers (mean=4.12) and that the firms focus on the overlooked markets to attain large market share (mean=4.01). The study results concur with the findings of the research work by Kokemillers (2020)which revealed that cost focus strategy typically offers lower production costs.

Table 3: Cost Focus Strategy

	Mean	Std. Deviation
We lower cost of specific products to meet specific customer	4.58	.333
We conduct market focused planning	4.77	.490
We have loyalty programs for our repeat customers	4.12	.605
Our company focuses on the overlooked markets to attain large market share	4.01	1.005

Differentiation Focus Strategy

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale their level of agreement on several statements describing the differentiation focus strategy adopted by firms. The descriptive results in Table 4 revealed that respondents agreed to the statement that the company is well known for producing high quality products and that the company benchmarks its products with other companies as indicated by a mean of 4.01 and mean of 4.58 respectively. Respondents also agreed to the statement that the company conducts product promotion for awareness in the market (mean=4.96). However, respondents were indifferent to the statement that the company has a specific market niche for its products (mean=3.11).

Table 4: Differentiation Focus Strategy

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Our company is well known for producing high quality products	4.01	.490
We benchmark our product with other companies	4.58	1.106
Our company conducts product promotion for awareness in the market	4.96	.269
Our company has a specific market niche for its products	3.11	.293

Bivariate Linear Correlation Results

Before running the regression analysis, the researcher run the correlation matrix in order to check whether there was association between variables and also checked whether there was a multicollinearity within the variable. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to aid in establishing correlation between the study variables of interest.

The findings of the correlation analysis indicated that there is a positive correlation between cost leadership strategy and organizational performance (r=0.497, p-value=0.000). Therefore, an increase in use of cost leadership strategy led to an increase in organizational performance. Regarding differentiation strategy, the correlation coefficient was also positive (r = 0.318, p-value < 0.001). This means that an increase in use of differentiation strategy in grain milling firms led to an increase in organizational performance.

Results of the study also showed that there is a significant positive correlation between cost focus strategy and organizational performance (r=0.415, p-value =0.009) implying that an increase in use of cost focus strategy improved the rate of performance of the grain milling firms. On differentiation focus strategy, the correlation coefficient was positive (r = 0.363, p-value < 0.000). This means that an increase in use of differentiation focus strategy in grain milling firms led to an increase in organizational performance.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation

		CLS	DS	CFS	DFS	ET	Performance
Cost leadership strategy	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	69					
Differentiation strategy	Pearson Correlation	.333**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
	N	69	69				
Cost focus strategy	Pearson Correlation	.710**	.615**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000				
	N	69	69	69			
Differentiation focus strategy	Pearson Correlation	.400**	.106**	.532**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
	N	69	69	69	69	69	
Performance	Correlation	.497**	.318**	.415**	.363**	.446**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.009	.000	.005	
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Organizational performance was regressed on cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, cost focus strategy and differentiation focus strategy. The results of multiple regression analysis are presented as follows.

Model Summary

The coefficient of determination (R squared) of 0.507 shows that 50.7% of organizational performance can be explained by cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, cost focus strategy and differentiation focus strategy. The adjusted R-square of 0.489 indicates that cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, cost focus strategy and differentiation focus strategy in exclusion of the constant variable explained the change in organizational performance by 48.9%, the remaining percentage can be explained by other factors excluded from the model. These results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.712[a]	.507	.489	0.59037

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cost leadership strategy, Differentiation strategy, Cost focus strategy, Differentiation focus strategy

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The result of Analysis of Variance for regression coefficient as shown in Table 7 revealed (F=12.959, p value = 0.000). Since the p-value is less than 0.05 it means that there exists a significant relationship between generic competitive strategies (cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, cost focus strategy and differentiation focus strategy) and firm performance of grain milling firms in Mombasa.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1159.453	5	231.890	12.959	.000[b]
	Residual	1127.309	63	17.893		
	Total	2286.762	68			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Cost leadership strategy, Differentiation strategy, Cost focus strategy, Differentiation focus strategy

Table 8: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	9.947	3.124		3.184	.000
	Cost leadership	.411	.168	.151	2.446	.005
	Differentiation strategy	.380	.142	.136	2.676	.028
	Cost focus	.470	.194	.159	2.422	.020
	Differentiation focus	.399	.138	.125	2.891	.011

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance

The derived regression coefficients of the model are:

$$\bar{Y} = 9.947 + .411X_1 + .380X_2 + .470X_3 + .399X_4$$

Results of the regression weights showed that all predictors had significant values below 0.05 implying that they are significant. Based on the results, holding all factors constant at zero, the change in organizational performance would be 9.947. Further, the regression results showed that a unit change in cost leadership would lead to 0.411 unit change in organizational performance. A unit change in differentiation strategy would lead to 0.380 unit change in organizational performance. Further, a unit change in cost focus would lead to 0.470 unit change in organizational performance and a unit change in differentiation focus strategy would lead to 0.399 unit change in organizational performance.

Table 9: Hypotheses Test Results

Hypothesis Statement	B	t	Action
$H_0$1: Cost leadership strategy has no significant effect on performance	0.411	2.446	Rejected
$H_0$2: Differentiation strategy has no significant effect on performance	0.380	2.676	Rejected
$H_0$3: Cost focus strategy has no significant effect on performance	0.470	2.422	Rejected
$H_0$4: Differentiation focus strategy has no significant effect on performance	0.399	2.891	Rejected

Discussion of Key Findings

Regression analysis formed a basis for achieving research objectives adopted in this study. This was done by considering the p values corresponding to each variable of interest. The first objective of the study sought to investigate the effect of cost leadership strategy on organizational performance. Regression analysis conducted proved that there was a positively significant effect of cost leadership strategy on the dependent variable as indicated by the values $\beta_1 = 0.411$, $t = 2.446$, $p<0.05$. The study concludes that a unit change in cost leadership strategy would lead to 0.411 unit change in organizational performance. Further, since the $p<0.05$, the null hypothesis that cost leadership strategy has no significant effect on organizational performance is rejected.

The second objective was to establish the effect of differentiation strategy on organizational performance. Regression analysis result showed a positively significant effect of differentiation strategy on organizational performance as indicated by the values $\beta_2 = 0.380$, $t = 2.676$, $p<0.05$. The study concludes that a unit change in differentiation strategy would lead to 0.380 unit change in organizational performance. On hypothesis testing, since $p<0.05$ null hypothesis that differentiation strategy has no significant effect on organizational performance is rejected.

Thirdly, the study sought to establish the effect of cost focus strategy on organizational performance. Regression analysis conducted showed that there was positive significant effect of cost focus strategy on the dependent variable as indicated by the values $\beta_3 = 0.470$, $t = 2.422$, $p<0.05$. The study concludes that a unit change in cost focus strategy would lead to 0.470 unit change in organizational performance. On hypothesis testing, since $p<0.05$, the null hypothesis that cost focus strategy has no significant effect on organizational performance is rejected.

Lastly, the study sought to investigate the effect of differentiation focus strategy on organizational performance. Regression analysis conducted showed that there was positive significant effect of differentiation focus strategy on organizational performance as indicated by the values $\beta_4 = 0.399$, $t = 2.891$, $p<0.05$. The study concludes that a unit change in differentiation focus strategy would lead to 0.399 unit change in organizational performance. On hypothesis testing, since $p<0.05$, the null hypothesis that differentiation focus strategy has no significant effect on organizational performance is rejected.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the grain milling firms' commodity pricings are competitive in the market hence affordable to the customers. It is concluded that in order to offer competitive pricings, the company grain milling firms develops cost control strategies to enable success in price controls. The firms have a keen eye on operations and production overheads so as to minimize the costs. In addition, the firms reported to practice resource sharing with a mission of keeping operational costs at minimum. The study concludes that the firms choose mass production so as to minimize costs through economies of scale.

The study concluded that the grain milling firms have weak cross-departmental coordination and this weakness is rampant in the vital department of Research and Development. The study concluded that the grain millers settle for a wide array of products which are of quality. This provides customers with a wide range of choices to make. Also the firms in the grain milling sector have a well aligned distribution channels which enables their products to reach wider customer base and the teams tasked with research and development are continuously innovating on new products with a view to differentiate their offering from those of competitors.

The study concluded that the grain millers frequently conducts targeted reduction of commodity prices with a view to meet specific customer costing needs. It is concluded that firms in the grain milling sector carry out market focused planning. This market focused planning enables the firms to meet the customer's demand with lowest cost possible. The firms were also found to design reward programs to award loyal customersand offer products at a subsidized rates and in many cases, the grain milling firms reported to continuously locate underserved markets to sell their products.

The study concluded that the firms in the grain milling sector are competing to produce high quality products. This is because the sector is competitive and the products are highly homogenized. Further, it is concluded that the firms carry out benchmarks from other well doing firms so as to avoid wheel reinvention and the firms intensively conducts product promotion for awareness in the market. The study concludes that the firms in the grain milling sector have low appetite for locating a specific market niche for product offering.

The study recommended that the management of grain milling firms should strengthen cross-departmental coordination. This is because it was revealed in the findings that there is weak coordination across the departments. The study recommends that the firms should produce a wide array of high quality products so as to offer customers with a wide range of choices to make. The grain milling firms should design well aligned distribution channels which enables their products to reach wider customer base.

The study recommended that the management of grain milling firms should compete in high quality products production to gain competitive advantage. This is because the sector is competitive and the products are highly homogenized. The study recommends that the firms should benchmark the best practices from the industry leaders and should intensively create product awareness through a mix of promotional practices.

The study recommended that the firms in the grain milling sector should develop strategies to offer competitive prices for the products to the market. This could be realized by developing cost control strategies in the production and operations processes. This would make it possible to control overhead costs from the source. Further, it is recommended that the firms should share resources across the departments to minimize duplicates common resources hence minimize operations costs. Also the firms should produce in large lots so as to enjoy economies of scale.

The study recommended that the grain millers should often carry out targeted price reduction on certain offerings with a view to meet specific customer costing needs. It is recommended that the grain millers should carry out market focused planning to enable the firms to meet the customer's demand with lowest cost possible. The firms' management should initiate loyalty programs to award loyal customers and offer products at a subsidized rate.

Areas for Further Research

This research provided empirical evidence on the generic competitive strategies and performance in the context of Grain milling firms. However, the generic competitive strategies were limited to cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus and differentiation focus parameters accounting for 50.7 variance in performance of Grain milling firms. It was therefore recommended for a study to be carried out in the other sectors like telecommunication sector which is highly competitive to investigate how generic competitive strategies could affect performance of the firms in that sector.

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