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ABSTRACT

Every organization desires to realize maximum profits as well as enhance shareholders' interests. Today's changing business environment and consumer needs make it a challenge for firms to realize desired organizational performance. As such, to survive, such firms are forced to adopt various strategies essential in facilitating their performance. With a focus on Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Limited, this study sought to establish the competitive strategies that the organization could adopt to enhance its performance. In particular, the investigation focused on the three generic strategies including niche/focus strategy, differentiation strategy and cost leadership strategy and how they influenced the performance of the organization. The Ansoff matrix, Porter's generic model, resource-based perspective theory, Porter's five force model, and Porter's generic model were all used in the research. The investigation used a descriptive research approach, with the target population consisting of 45 members of the organization's management. The census method was used in the research sampling. The chosen data collection instruments were in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires. The 45-person target population was the focus of the structured questionnaire. The data collected to inform the study was analysed using content analysis for the in-depth interviews and descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) for the structured questionnaire. The study found that the organization had not attempted to adopt various cost leadership and focus strategies to help it achieve the desired performance. However differentiation strategy stood out as the firm's strength when it comes to increasing its performance. Based on the findings, the organization seems to have rarely used cost leadership. The study recommended outsourcing most of its internal operations. By outsourcing services such as marketing department and research and development, the firm will reduce its operational costs, allowing it to compete effectively in terms of pricing of its service delivery. Despite differentiation strategy being the most employed strategy, the study recommended the firm to further differentiate its service delivery by making them unique and customized to address emerging consumer needs. Focus being a rarely adopted strategy by Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Limited, the study recommended that the firm employ the strategy; this can be done by focusing on serving SMEs.

Key Words: *Cost Leadership, Differentiation, Focus Strategy*

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INTRODUCTION

Within the East African region, Kenya plays an important function in the international trade as a portal for import and export through its ports and border stations (Masila, 2009). International trade has its major players as the importers and exporters and other support players such as freight agencies, transport companies, clearing and forwarding entities and Non Vessel Owning Consolidating Companies (NVOCC) (Masila, 2009). Clearing and forwarding services, according to Njiru (2011), are actions that are related to the transportation, handling, packaging, storage and distribution of goods. Because of the rigorous export-import processes, the clearing and forwarding agents offer additional services such advisory services on customs and tax matters, official goods declaration, goods insurance and documentation.

Competition, advanced technology, globalization, dynamic economic environment and increased complexities in the supply chain activities has led to organizations needing to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness (Odongo, 2017).According to Njiru (2011), the clearing and forwarding industry is made up of several players that include Container Freight Station(CFS) operators, transporters of local and transit goods, shipping lines customs clearing agents, bonded warehouse firms and transit Warehouses.

The clearing and forwarding industry encompass all economic activities relating imports and exports of goods entering or leaving the country, as well as those goods in transit within the borders (Masila, 2009). There are procedures that are set out for the handling of goods at the seaports, airports and border stations by Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA). In trying to make its operations more efficient and eradicate corruption, KRA has automated its operations and also tightened its licensing rules (Njiru, 2011).

According to Adegbuyi, Oke, Worlu and Ajagbe (2015), an organization can achieve desired performance if its key competencies help it meet its long-term objectives. Ideally, organizational performance can be argued to be the result of a firm's functions. Hasnu (2016) describes it as an organization's actual production when compared to its intended or defined goals. Various studies have looked at the topic of organizational performance, and they have identified three important aspects that are used to measure organizational performance: financial performance, product market performance, and shareholder returns (Adegbuyi, et. al., 2015). It is through the measure of organizational performance that firms are able to determine their position in the market and how successful their operations are. Poor indicators of such measures as financial performance, shareholder returns and product market performance is an indication of a failing firm. In this investigation, organizational performance was measured in terms of the firm's financial performance particularly from its revenue collection.

Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Limited was established in June 2000, and incorporated as a private limited company by the registrar of companies in Kenya. The major competitors of the firm include but not limited to Ocean line freight and forwarders, Transami and Urgent Cargo. The company is a medium sized firm with a wide range of capacity offering customs clearing services, freight forwarding, warehousing and transportation of cargo (Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services, 2015).

In the customs clearance services, the company offers support to the client on the documentation of exportation and importation of goods. The freight forwarding services that SISCO offers have transparent pricing method, with a price breakdown to maximize customer satisfaction. Due to their clear understanding of specialty goods (such as fragile goods and goods that need cold storage) they are able to make sure that their clients goods arrive in good condition. To ensure goods arrive on time and avoid delays SISCO have a database of information about routes and optimization of the routes. After years working for larger firms, the need arose for a tailored and fast turn-around agency, to meet the specific needs for each client (Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services, 2015).

Since its inception, the organization has realized enhanced growth from 5 employees in 2000 to 180 employees currently and a current revenue of around 253million Kenya shillings. Apart from clearing automobiles and other goods for customers based in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, SISCO also has presence in other countries such as Italy and the USA and offers key services needed to meet the needs of clients looking for import and export services (Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services, 2015).According to their website Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services (2015), SISCO has a transport department to serve their clients. It has 2 low bed carriers for heavy goods, 3 low loaders for huge automobiles, 7 car carriers for standardized family cars.

However, despite its growth in the market, the company has experienced a decline in financial performance in the last few years. This has mainly been attributed to increased competition in the industry. According to KRA (2018) by April 2018 there were 888 clearing and forwarding companies who had met customs requirement allowing them to apply for renewal licenses as clearing and forwarding agents for the year. Nsahe (2017), in an article in the Forbes magazine, highlighted Siginon Group as the giant of logistics in Kenya with a revenue of $100 million per year. SISCO is considered a medium sized local firm.

Statement of the Problem

Businesses today have to deal with the dynamics of a changing environment. According to Koskey (2008) the industry is always challenged by factors that organizations have no control of. These factors always determine how companies make decisions about a company's strategy, objectives and its direction. The factors include but not limited to globalization, change in customers' preferences, port inefficiencies, technological advancements, and government legislation and regulations (Koskey, 2008).

Globalization has led to a rise in competition demanding players to look for ways to stay competitive in the market. Competition put pressure on the firm leading it to be proactive and come up with strategies that help with their competitiveness (Njiru, 2015). As a result of globalization organizations are faced with the task of clients having various options to choose from and are therefore forced to come up with strategies and strategic choices to enable them to continue to exist in the dynamic environment. According to Johnson and Scholes (2012) a credible strategic choice pushes a company to make strategic decisions that help it compete and win against its rivals. Globalization has made competition in the clearing and forwarding industry to become more intense as the service quality has become a crucial determinant of the client's satisfaction (Kitimo, 2020).

In Clearing and Forwarding industry, the customers' preferences and expectations have been changing as well. In a publication by Logistics Team Asia (2018) it is argued that consumers today are increasingly changing their preferences in relation to where, when, why and how they shop. This is mostly as a result of technological advancement in the industry. The customers now value timely responses on their enquiries, complete documentation, faster timely delivery and constant tracking of cargo during transportation (Aeromarine Capital Group Kenya 2020). To meet emerging consumer demands, organizations such as SISCO clearing have to adopt strategies that would set them apart from their rivals.

According to Masila (2009) most logistics companies ensure that they maintain high quality services and implementing customer feedback to gain competitive edge over rivals. For starters, Parola, Satta and Panayides (2015) argue that logistics companies are increasingly adopting various competitive strategies in an attempt to address emerging consumer needs. Although service quality and customer relationship are the most effective strategies in the logistics industry, they shouldn't be done at the expense of cost leadership because the customers are price sensitive (Nyaga, 2015).

It's also worth noting that changes in government laws and regulations have an impact on business operations. For example, an increase in taxes will increase the cost of operations and it may lead to direct job losses in the sector. At the same time, non-compliance with Government policies and regulations may lead to fines and penalties (Kitimo, 2020). Changes in government policy mean that SISCO have to realign their strategies to address the demands of such changes. Determining the best strategy to mitigate emerging legislations in the market is important in enhancing the performance of the firm as well as its competitive capability.

According to Odanga& Shale (2018) untrained agents, unfair competition and inefficiency at the ports are major challenges that impact the performance of firms in the clearing and forwarding industry. The Mombasa port's system inefficiency has led to increased storage charges since the containers take longer to be cleared from the port. This leads to artificial shortages causing price increase of products, which reduces the ability of firms to offer more competitive prices.

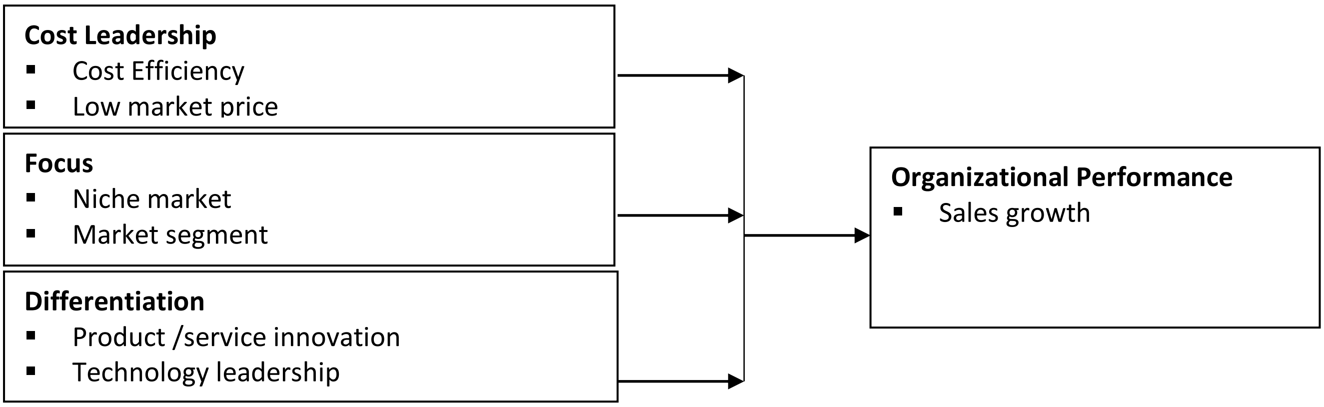
Moreover, there are very limited studies undertaken in competitive strategies adopted by the local clearing and forwarding firms in Kenya. The few studies on strategic management of clearing and forwarding firms in Kenya, found in the list of google scholar publications, are studies dealing with responses to changes in external environment (Koskey, 2008); effect of strategic orientation on performance (Kamau, 2020); management systems on supply chain performance (Jepherson, Ngugi, and Moronge, 2021); competitive strategies adopted in the logistics industry (Masila, 2009); strategic groups analysis (Njiru, 2011); application of Porter's framework (Olouch, 2003); the effect of mobile technology on performance (Abbas, 2016); and the impact of adoption of customs electronic procedures (Kwalia, 2012).

Therefore, there is a need to study how the local clearing and forwarding firms in Kenya respond to the competitive pressure coming from globalization and customers' preference changes and remain competitive. SISCO's experience in competitive strategic choices and implementation, as a local medium firm, could give invaluable information to understand the industry as well.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to understand the effect of competitive strategies on Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Ltd with the view of improving its performance. The study was guided by the following specific study objectives;

- To study the effect of cost leadership strategy on the performance of Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Ltd.
- To find out the effect of differentiation strategy on the performance of Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Ltd.
- To study the effect of focus strategy on the performance of Sisco Superior Cargo Handling Services Ltd.



Independent Variable **Dependent Variable**

LITERATURE REVIEW

Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies

Michael Porter created it in 1980. The model offers a description of how an organization pursues desired competitive edge in the industry it operates. According to Tanwar (2013), three strategies are proposed by the model: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategy. It is based on the idea that an organization's relative market position is crucial in deciding whether its profitability is higher or lower than the industry average. The theory is the key determinant of the direction an organization hopes to take. Cavaleri and Shabana (2018) argue that porter considered the three strategies to provide organizations with a clear course or plan of action that would enable them beat their competition.

Under cost leadership, the model posits that to achieve the strategy an organization has to set out to be among the low-cost producers in the market. Tanwar (2013) argues that adopting cost leadership approaches allows organizations to reduce their production costs and therefore be able to fairly price their goods or services compared to their competitors. It's important to remember that cost leadership can come from a variety of places, depending on the organization's structure. Such include economies of scale, leveraging new innovations, have preferential access to key resources needed to produce given goods and services among others. According to Islami, et. al. (2020) organizations looking to adopt the low-cost strategy have to identify and leverage all sources of cost advantage. Organizations that are able to achieve and sustain the low-cost strategy are likely to have an above average performance in the market they operate in for as long as the firm is still in control of prices at or near the industry average.

The differentiation strategy, on the other hand, is employed when a business wants to stand out or provide a unique experience in the industry that customers value. Moon, Hur, Yin and Helm (2014) argues that differentiation is about offering unique value to buyers that sets an organization apart from its competitors. The approach selects one or more valuable features to clients in a particular industry and tailors itself to satisfy those needs. An organization that uses this approach therefore rewards itself from the unique feature it offers the client by charging premium prices.

Finally, the model also proposes focus or niche strategy. Pulaj, Kume and Cipi (2015) posits that The strategy is based on a firm's choosing of a narrow competitive platform within a certain industry. In this case, the organizations decide to select a given segment or group of segments within a market and device their operations to address the identified groups. It's important to note that the strategy comes in two flavors: cost focus, which focuses on gaining a cost advantage in the target market, and differentiation focus, which aims to differentiate a company's target sector. In both cases, the strategy is founded on the variation between the segment being targeted and other segments in the market.

The Resource Based View (RBV) Theory

This theory was initially developed in 1984 by Wenefelt. The model holds that firms should focus on their internal environment to realize the resources within the organization that can help them gain a competitive edge. A competitive edge can be argued to be an advantage that an organization has over its rivals. It allows firms to generate sales or margin that are better than the competition in the market. Additionally, it also ensures that firms have a desired customer base compared to competition. As argued in the theory, the competitive advantage of a company is based on its internal resources and how these resources are used to help the company achieve the desired advantage (Shafeey &Trott, 2016).

Priem and Butler (2001) argue that in the model, resources play a key role in ensuring that organizations achieve the optimal performance and the desired competitive edge. The model posits that firms have to strategically position themselves based on their internal resources and ability to leverage the same resources effectively. According to Grant (2011), the key terms in resource-based theory are tangible resources, intangible resources, and capabilities.

Resource Based View theory has many strengths with regards to organizations' performance and strategy formulation. The theory offers an explanation of how firms can realize sustained competitive advantage through effective management of resources. This creates a competitive barrier within the operational environment and markets. The theory realizes sustained competitive edge through the uniqueness of resources within an organization and how a firm leverages the same (Njoroge, 2011). It will be a key theory for the current investigation as it will provide key insights on how the organization can leverage the resources it has in order to achieve the desired competitive advantage. By providing an explanation of how organizations could realize sustained competitive advantage by effectively using its resources, the theory would play a key role in guiding SISCO's competitive approach.

Porter's Five Force Model

Established by Porter in (1979), the five-force model is essential in understanding the external environment of an organization and how it affects it overall performance. The model is essential in developing an understanding of a firm's strength and weaknesses in the industry it operates in. Dobbs (2014) argues that the model has been leveraged by various organizations in an attempt to understand the industry and inform strategy formulation and implementation. It is essential to note that the model is mostly used in industry analysis. However, it can also be used in understanding sub-sectors of a given market in a manner that helps the organization understand their competition and realize desired strategies key in achieving sustainable competitive edge. Ideally, the model can be argued to be a business analysis tool that helps organizations identify and explain how competitive they are in a given market. The model proposes five elements that are thought to play an important role in affecting an organization's performance: supplier negotiating power, buyer bargaining power, industry competition, threat of new entrants, and finally, the threat of alternative products.

The negotiating power of buyers, according to the model, relates to the influence customers have over a company's activities. According to Dälken (2014), the greater the number of customers, the greater their negotiating power in terms of pricing and service delivery. On the other hand, if an organization serves a small number of clients, the firm reserves power of its customers meaning that clients have no influence on the operations of the firm. Similarly, the term bargaining power of suppliers as proposed in the model is used in reference to the power suppliers have over organizations they supply. The higher the number of suppliers the lower their bargaining power while a small group of suppliers have considerable power over the operations of the organization as they can determine pricing, quantity, quality among other aspects of the firms' operations.

With regards to rivalry within the industry, Aithal (2017) argues that the concept refers to the number of competitors in a given industry that offer similar products or services. The more an industry is characterized by rival firms, the lower the power of a firm to exercise control over the market. Conversely, the lower the number of competition in an industry, the higher the power of an organization to exert control in the market. Power shifts in competitive industries are as a result of customers looking for alternative products or services from rival firms offering better deals.

In relation to the threat of new entrants, Dälken (2014) posits that firms in a given industry are always affected whenever a new entrant enters the market. Whenever a new firm enters a given market, the performance of organizations operating in the same market is likely to be affected. As such, the easier it is for a new organization to enter and operate in a given industry, the lower the power of organizations in the same industry to take control of the market. A desirable environment for competitive operations can therefore be argued to be one with tough entry provisions to an industry.

Finally, as for the threat of substitute products, the more an industry is characterized by products that can be used instead of another product being offered by a firm the lower the power of the organization to exert control in the market. The term threat of substitute products in this case is used in reference to products offering almost similar values to already existing products such as deciding to use a cab instead of personal car. Such products significantly impact the operations of firms in a given industry as they have to rival the substitute products (Aithal, 2017).

Porter's five forces was a key model in the current investigation as it helped highlight how external forces were likely to impact the competitiveness of SISCO. Through the model, the study developed a better understanding of how external factors were likely to impact the performance of SISCO and thus realize which ones needed to be addressed using competitive strategies to enhance the firm's competitiveness.

Ansoff Matrix

Developed by Ansoff in (1957), the Ansoff matrix is also a tool for analysis. Also referred to as market expansion grid, the tool is used to evaluate and plan for growth strategies. It highlights four strategies that one can use to help their organization expand as well as evaluate existing risks associated with every approach. The model has been leveraged by various organizations and in particular marketing executives in developing a better understanding of the risks associated with inherent growth of their business as well as how they can avoid such risks to expand their market reach. Market penetration, product development, market development, and diversification are among the four strategies proposed by the product.

According to Hussain, Khattak, Rizwan and Latif (2013) market penetration is used in reference to when an organization looks to enhance sales in an existing market for an existing product. In this case, an organization focuses on increasing its market sharing by using the same products that exists in the market through penetration strategy such as price reduction, increased marketing and promotion, and partnership with rivals in the same market.

On the other hand, for product development, Gianos (2013) argues that the strategy involves an organization developing a new product for an existing market. The approach involves extensive research and development in an attempt to expand a firm's product range. The strategy is mostly used when an organization has realized a strong understanding of the market it operates in and have identified a need in the

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existing market. It can be achieved through various approaches including partnership with rivals, increased investment in research and development, and merging resources with competitors to realize a new product that better serves an existing market.

In relation to market development, the model posits that organizations should use this approach if they are looking to enter a new market for their existing products. In this case, a firm looks to expand its operations to new markets by targeting new locations, demographics, among others. Loredana (2016) argues that the approach is effective when organizations have the desired technology it can leverage in the new market, there is determined profitability in the new market, and when consumer behavior in the new market is not excessively different from the existing market. Various approaches can be used to realize this strategy including focusing on a different market segment, expanding regionally, and expanding into foreign markets.

Finally, as for diversification, organizations looking to adopt this approach enter a new market with a new product or service. Cleberg (2019) considers this strategy as one of the riskiest in the Ansoff matrix as it not only requires the organization to develop a new market but also a new product to serve the identified market. However, despite the risks involved, the approach is considered to be the most profitable when adopted effectively. It is known for increasing revenues, opening up entirely new revenue streams as well as customers and markets. Through the theory, the study would have a better understanding on how SISCO could grow its operations in the current marketing it was operating in. The theory would be instrumental in helping the organization devise ways it could expand its operations to help it achieve the desired competitive edge.

Empirical Review

The impact of cost leadership on organizational performance have been investigated by several studies. Stålbrand, Olofsson and Wang (2005) in their study looked into the strategy and strategic changes adopted by freight forwarding company in Sweden. The investigation carried out a case study on three firms from Sweden in order to determine which cost leadership and differentiation strategies are important to them in order to succeed in the industry. The study observed that the firms need to merge cost leadership and differentiation strategy in mitigating environmental and consumer changes being realized in the market. Cost leadership according to the investigation was the most preferred strategy for such firms to remain competitive, however, including differentiation as a competitive approach was observed to enhance the performance of the organizations and help them respond to emerging demands in the market.

Pathak (2015) on the other hand attempted to study the impact of fusing differentiation and cost leadership to help logistics firms realize desired organizational performance. The investigation posits that the container liner industry is pegged by a number of challenges that impacts its overall performance. Firms in this industry are noted to adopt various strategies key in helping them enhance their business performance. As a result, the investigator looked at the consequences of combining cost leadership and differentiation as a strategy for improving the performance of container liner companies, with a particular focus on Maersk. The investigation's findings revealed that cost leadership, followed by differentiation, had the greatest impact on the sector. A combination of the two strategies was found to have a considerable and favorable impact on the industry's performance. The study therefore made the recommendation for firms' operating in the industry to combine the two approaches to help them enhance their performance.

Tipping and Kauschke (2016) studied shifting patterns in the logistics industry. The investigation settled for a case study on Price Water House Coopers U.S. operations. It observes that like with every other industry, transportation and logistics industry has realized significant changes which brings with it both risks and opportunities. Through a review of literature, the study identified new technology, new markets, emerging consumer demands and new business approaches as key to helping organizations realize desired performance in the wake of emerging practices. According to the study, there is a need for the organization to focus on these key areas of performance to be better prepared for the future. By focusing on key aspects of the business, the study observes that the firm will be able to mitigate emerging challenges in these areas and better address the changing needs of its clients and industry at large.

Nash and Weidmann (2007) looked at how niche approach can be used to improve public transportation service in their study. The analysis provided a framework for thinking about specialized markets in the business. To assist inform its conclusions, it used a systematic review of literature and a descriptive technique. The study collected its data from secondary sources where it demonstrated that niche strategy positively influenced the performance of public transport services. It recommended the use of niche strategies in public transport to help public transport providers to enhance their service delivery and performance. The study argued for the need of a detailed analysis of concepts associated with niche marketing including travel time, premium services, pricing, among others in helping enhance performance of public transport providers.

Differentiation as a competitive strategy have been investigated by a number of studies. For starters, Aliqah (2017) in his investigation sought to study how differentiation strategy influences the performance of a firm. Surveying 33 industrial firms from various industries including logistics firms listed at the Amman Stock Exchange, The data in the study was analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The research found that differentiation had little effect on the performance of Jordanian manufacturing businesses. However, the analysis concluded that such businesses should employ a variety of product diversification tactics in order to improve their performance and remain competitive.

Madhushree, Revathi, and PS (2018) looked at green business competitive strategies, focusing on the case of Aegis Logistics. The study posits that every organization operates in a competitive environment and therefore every company is looking for strategies to outdo rivals in their respective industry. The study argues that green policies are among the differentiating strategies that firms are increasingly adopting to enhance their competitive edge. By carrying out a review of literature, the investigation observes that green policies are key in enhancing the competitive level of private firms as it not only enhances efficiency but also effectiveness of resource utilization. The study, therefore, recommended the adoption of green practices such as the use of hybrid engines in trucks, building green warehouses, among other green approaches by logistics firms to increase their competitiveness.

Various forms of competitive strategies have been studied and found to affect the performance of firms in different industries. Similarly, a number of studies have been carried out to identify the impact of competitive strategies on firm performance. Islami, et. al., (2020) in their investigation aimed to establish a link between competitive tactics and company performance in a competitive context, such as the Kosovo freight industry. The study's main goal was to see how Porter's generic strategies aid in achieving targeted organizational performance in enterprises in the Republic of Kosovo. It used questionnaires to collect its data. To examine the data acquired, the researchers built an econometric model and performed Pearson correlation analysis and multivariate regression analysis. The study's econometric findings revealed that implementing Porter's generic methods was critical to improving business performance. Of the three strategies, the investigation observed that product differentiation resulted in higher organizational performance as compared to the other two including cost leadership and niche/focus strategy.

On the regional level, Onyemejor (2015) looked into the impact of Nigeria's border nations' logistics performance and international trade. In particular, the investigation sought to determine solutions that could help the industry enhance its performance and therefore stay competitive in foreign trade. It also sought to understand the challenges the industry faces in relation to international trade. It took a comparative approach to help it answer its research questions. Data was collected from 100 people involved in the logistics industry and chosen randomly using questionnaires. Disabling policies, insufficient equipment handling, a lack of skilled employees, and bad infrastructure are among the issues facing the business, according to the research. On the other hand, the study demonstrated competitive strategy and addressing external forces were key in helping the industry enhance its performance. Reduced inventory, transportation costs, outsourcing, among other approaches were identified to be key in helping organizations enhance their performance.

METHODOLOGY

The investigation adopted a descriptive research design. The approach would ensure that the voice of the respondents was incorporated in the investigation given that findings of the study would be grounded on the experiences of the participants. This study unit of analysis was a case of single firm, SISCO Superior Cargo Handling Services Limited. The unit of observation is the management. All the 45 members of management at SISCO were included in the study. The study gathered both primary and secondary data. In-depth interviews and structured questionnaires were the most common methods for gathering primary data. The content analysis focused on the frequency of specified terms such as the employment of competitive strategies such as cost leadership, niche strategy, and differentiation strategy. This allowed the researcher to assess the influence of such strategies on the company's performance. The data from the structured questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive analysis.

FINDINGS

Impact of Cost Leadership on the Performance of SISCO

To help determine the frequencies for the descriptive statistics on the impact of cost leadership on SISCO's performance, the investigation used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3 indicating "indifferent," 4 indicating "agree," and 5 indicating "strongly agree." Table 1 showed the results of the data analysis below.

Table 1.

Impact of Cost leadership on the Performance of SISCO

The Statement	Strongly disagree % (frequency)	Disagree % (frequency)	Indifferent % (frequency)	Agree % (frequency)	Strongly Agree % (frequency)
The organization uses low prices for its existing products to remain competitive		14.3 (6)	57.1 (24)	28.6 (12)	
Organization develops new cost-effective products to remain competitive	19 (8)	57.1 (24)	23.8 (10)		
Organization uses knowledge gained from past experiences to lower cost of operations		11.9 (5)	28.6 (12)	59.5 (25)	
Our organization focuses on introducing new products that can reduce production and		26.2 (11)	57.1 (24)	16.7 (7)	

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operational cost			
Our organization focuses on searching for the economies of scale	11.9 (5)	31 (13)	57.1 (24)

Source: Research Data

The majority of management personnel (57%) couldn't tell for sure whether the company employs low prices for its services to be competitive, however roughly 29% believe it does." The majority of respondents (76%) do not feel the company produces new cost-effective items in order to stay competitive. Approximately 60% of respondents believe that the company leverages knowledge gathered from previous experiences to reduce operational costs. When asked if the company focuses on offering new products or services that can lower operating expenses, the majority (57 percent) said they were not sure. However, a similar proportion of respondents (57%) believed that the firm focused on finding economies of scale.

The findings of the study demonstrate that there is no use of low prices by the firm to help it enhance its competition and performance. Similarly, the firm focus on defending its existing products by reducing production and operational costs was noted to be moderate. Based on the responses, it is also apparent that the firm is not focused on developing on cost-effective products and services as a means of remaining competitive, even though it tries to use past experiences to lower the cost of operations and production. It also appears that the firm tries to gain some economies of scale.

From the findings, it is apparent that the organization has not attempted to adopt various cost leadership strategies to help it realize desired performance. The observations made by the lower-level managers are not in line with those observed in the interview with the top management as they contradict each other. Lower-level managers feel that the organization is yet to leverage its past experiences and their understanding of the market to reduce its costs as a means of increasing its performance. This is because the top management feels it has been employing cost leadership strategies in its customs clearance and freight forwarding services whereas the lower level management feel like the company is not employing the same on the other services which include warehousing and transportation of cargo.

As desired by the firm's low-level management, it is apparent that the organization has not resorted to using its past experience to achieve cost effective operations. The observations made in the study also do not align with those realized by Kogoh (2015) who demonstrated that the use of knowledge gained from past experiences in helping firm's reduce operational costs played a key role in aiding organizations to achieve cost leadership and enhance their competitiveness in the market. Similarly, as demonstrated by Obondi and Bett (2018), constantly searching for economies of scale is believed to be critical in achieving desired cost-leadership that is key in enhancing organizational performance which is not the case in this study. There is, therefore, a need for the firm to adopt additional cost leadership strategies such lowering the prices of its existing products. As demonstrated in the findings, it is apparent that the firm's pricing of its products and services is high compared to market averages as indicated by (KentexCargo. 2020). According to Stålbrand, Olofsson and Wang (2005), firms that look to achieve competitiveness have to lower the prices of its existing products to help them gain desired market share.

Impact of Differentiation on the Performance of SISCO

To help determine the frequencies for the descriptive statistics on the impact of differentiation on SISCO's performance, the investigation used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3 indicating "indifferent," 4 indicating "agree," and 5 indicating "strongly agree." Table 2 summarized the results of the data analysis.

Table 2.

Impact of Differentiation on the Performance of SISCO

The Statement	Strongly disagree % (frequency)	Disagree % (frequency)	Indifferent % (frequency)	Agree % (frequency)	Strongly Agree % (frequency)
The firm ensures that it offers unique services and products (e.g. putting trackers on their vehicles) to its clients as a technique of setting itself apart from rivals			33.3 (14)	50 (21)	16.7 (7)
The organization maintains high innovation adoption such as shipment tracking and intermodal transportation.			23.8 (10)	52.4 (22)	23.8 (10)
The firm uses specific channel of communication (e.g. an app) to reach its clients base		21.4 (9)	66.7 (28)	11.9 (5)	
The company has unique partnerships that have allowed it achieve more market share like storage firms with cold-rooms for perishable goods.			31 (13)	54.8 (23)	14.3 (6)
The leadership of the firm focuses on continuous improvement to help separate its service provision from rival firms			11.9 (5)	71.4 (30)	16.7 (7)

Source: Research Data

Table 2 above showed that a majority of the respondents 62% agreed with the statement that the firm offered unique services to help them increase their performance. Similarly, 76% of the management believed that the firm adopted and maintained high innovation to achieve competitiveness. 67% of the participants were however, not sure on whether the firm utilized specific means of communication as a strategy to increase performance. 69% of them were however, in agreement that the organization had unique partnerships to help it enhance its performance. There is also a strong agreement among the management as 88.1% of them backed the statement that the organization's leadership focuses on continuous improvement of its service provision as a means to help it increase its performance.

The findings of this investigation indicate that the firm offered its clients unique services and products to enhance its service delivery and overall performance. Additionally, the study also notes the firm uses innovation to improve services at the organization as a means of differentiating its service delivery from that of its rivals. It is also essential to note that the organization has established unique partnerships in the industry that allows it to increase its market share and differentiated services as a means of improving its performance. However, there is a moderate use of unique communication channels within the firm to help it differentiate its service delivering from that of its rivals.

The observations made by the lower management level meet those realized in the interview with the top management. It is apparent that differentiation is the firm's strength when it comes to increasing its performance. Both the top management and the employees realize the need for adopting various innovations as a means of differentiating their service provision with those of its rivals. Madhushree, Revathi and PS (2018) in their study also demonstrated that offering unique services and products helps an organization differentiate its service delivery from that of its rivals and thus improve its competitiveness and performance in the market. As noted by the top management and its support staff, SISCO's adoption of innovation has significantly helped the firm enhance its performance in the market.Aliqah (2017) has also argued that for a firm to differentiate its services effectively, there is a need to maintain high innovation adoption that would ensure the continuous improvement of products and services thus differentiating the firm's service delivery.

Impact of Focus Strategy on the Performance of SISCO

To help determine the frequencies for the descriptive statistics on the impact of focus strategy on SISCO's performance, the investigation used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3 indicating "indifferent," 4 indicating "agree," and 5 indicating "strongly agree." Table 3 summarizes the results of the data analysis.

Table 3.

Impact of Focus on the Performance of SISCO

The Statement	Strongly disagree % (frequency)	Disagree % (frequency)	indifferent % (frequency)	Agree % (frequency)	Strongly Agree % (frequency)
The Company has chosen to serve a particular segment of the market with some of its services to help it serve customers effectively and remain competitive	16.7 (7)	59.5 (25)	23.8 (10)		
The firm focuses on reaching a specific geographical market	16.7 (7)	61.9 (26)	21.4 (9)		
The company offers individual attention to given sets of customers' needs		21.4 (9)	54.8 (23)	23.8 (10)	
The company relies on its distribution channels to target specific market		18 (8)	26.2 (11)	54.8 (23)	

Source: Research Data

From table 3 above, it is apparent that the management (76%) did not believe that the organization chose to serve a particular segment of the market to help it remain competitive. Similarly, 78.6% of the participants did not agree with the statement that the firm focused on reaching a given geographical market. However, 54.8% of the respondents had a neutral view on the statement that the firm offered individual attention to given sets of its customers' needs while only 23.8% agreed. Another 54.8% of the management believed that the company relied on its distribution

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channels to target given markets as a means of remaining competitive.

It is apparent that as a future strategy, the firm needs to focus its operations to a given segment of the market. As demonstrated by the respondents, the firm rarely targets given segments of the market to increase its performance. Njiru (2011) in his investigation demonstrated that targeting given segments of the market played an essential role in facilitating a firm's performance. The top management through the interview observed that as a future strategy, it will focus on serving SMEs in the market to help the organization increase its competitiveness in the market. Liu and Wen (2012) have argued that focusing on reaching a specific market helps an organization to focus its operations and increase its competitiveness within the market. As observed by the respondents, this is a strategy that the firm is yet to exploit thus making it a desired plan for future operations as suggested by the top management in the interview. By focusing to serve SME's the study notes that the organization will be able to focus its attention and perform to desired standards. Tipping and Kauschke (2016) demonstrated that a firm that offers its client individual attention is likely to perform better than those that do not.

Impact of Competitive Strategies on the Performance of SISCO

To help determine the frequencies for the descriptive statistics on the impact of competitive strategies on SISCO's performance, the investigation used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3 indicating "indifferent," 4 indicating "agree," and 5 indicating "strongly agree." Table 4 summarizes the results of the data analysis.

Table 4.
Impact of Competitive Strategies on the Performance of SISCO

The Statement	Strongly disagree % (frequency)	Disagree % (frequency)	indifferent % (frequency)	Agree % (frequency)	Strongly Agree % (frequency)
The strategies adopted has resulted in increase in sales		16.7 (7)	14.3 (6)	54.8 (23)	14.3 (6)
The strategies adopted have increased revenue collection at the firm.			19 (8)	54.8 (23)	26.2 (11)
The strategies adopted have positively influenced the financial performance of the firm.			11.9 (5)	54.8 (23)	33.3 (14)

Source; Research Data

Table 4 above showed that a majority of the management (69%) were in agreement that the competitive strategies adopted by the firm had been essential in helping the firm increase its sales. Similar results can also be observed in the statement on whether the strategies adopted helped the organization increase revenue collection as most of the respondents (80%) believed in the statement. Finally, 88% of the management believed that the strategies the organization adopted positively influenced the financial performance of the firm.

The findings demonstrate that the adopted competitive strategies at the firm have enhanced not only its sales and revenue collection but also its general financial performance as indicated in its financial records of between 2010 and 2016 (SISCO 2016). Between 2010 and 2016 the firm realized an increase in revenue collection where it collected 208 million in 2010, 229million in 2011, 249million in 2012, 267 million in 2013, 294 million in 2014 and 297million in 2015.

This is in-line with the industry growth as reported by Ken research (2021) where it is observed that the industry grew by 7% in 2015 from 2010. The observations made by the lower managers also concur with those of top management in the interview as they argued that various competitive strategies adopted by the firm have helped it remain competitive and realize desired financial performance. In their research, Kerama and Simba (2019) discovered that competitive strategies had a crucial influence in improving organizational performance, particularly a firm's sales margin. Similarly, Ouma and Oloko (2017) also demonstrated that organizations that adopt competitive forces are likely to achieve enhanced revenue collection. Islami, Mustafa and TopuzovskaLatkovikj (2020) in their study has also demonstrated that competitive strategies have a positive correlation with the financial performance of an organization as demonstrated in the findings of this investigation.

In general, the interview and SISCO company records demonstrated that despite making profits in its initial years of operation, the organization had realized reduced performance over the last few years. This had been occasioned by various changes in the industry including changes in government regulations, increase in the number of competitors, as well as changes in consumer preferences. As a result of these changes, SISCO had attempted to adopt various competitive strategies such as differentiation through increased innovation and unique partnerships as well as niche strategy by focusing on SMEs in Kenya. It had also attempted to fend off competition in the industry by offering seamless services to its clients and addressing their unique needs by tailoring their pricing to meet their demands.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion of the study was that intense competition occasioned by high number of industry players, changing consumer needs as well as regular changes in government regulations significantly impacted the performance of the firm. Given the high competition in the market, SISCO had adopted various competitive strategies such as cost leadership through its open pricing that had been broken down as well as differentiation of services.

In the past, the company did not use cost leadership strategy as a competitive weapon. This is evidenced by the fact that the organization did not develop new cost-effective products and services as a means of remaining competitive. In as much as the firm uses its past experiences to try bring down its operational costs, it is demonstrated that the organization rarely focuses on defending its existing products by reducing operational costs.

Now the firm is trying to build its core competencies by a constant search for ways to improve its service delivery and enhance consumer experiences. The organization invested into various innovations that are key in helping enhance the experience of its clients, through the adoption of various strategies and technologies. In the international environment, the organization is adopting competitive strategies such as cost-leadership through outsourcing some of its services (partnerships across the world) to improve customer service quality and reduce its operational costs.

On the other hand, SISCO relied on differentiation strategy as its main competitive strategy to improve its competitive performance. Based on the findings, it is apparent that the firm offers unique services including tracking of cargo among others to enhance its performance. The firm’s continued investment on innovation has improved its service delivery performance. So far the firm does not use clients’ specific communication channels. But it can be concluded that its unique partnerships give it an added advantage to enhance its performance.

Finally, the study found that the organization rarely uses focus strategy as a competitive strategy to increasing performance. The organization is yet to choose to serve a given segment of the market as an approach to enhancing its performance. Additionally, it can also be concluded that the organization is yet to focus its operations on a given geographical location that could help it increase its performance. Part of the firms focus strategy only involves the organization offering individual attention to given sets of its clients as well as relying on its distribution channel to target given segments of the market.

The adoption of competitive strategies has played a vital role in increasing the firm's performance, according to the study's overall result. The findings demonstrate that the firm’s overall financial performance has increased as a result of the adopted strategies. Both the services and revenues of the firm have increased due to the adopted strategies. However, the organization can still enhance its performance through effective adoption of a combination of the competitive strategies.

Based on the findings, the organization seems to have rarely used cost leadership as a means of enhancing its performance. Outsourcing most of its internal operations can be used as an approach towards achieving the desired competitive advantage. By outsourcing services including its marketing department and research and development, the firm will be able to reduce some of its operational costs thus allowing it to compete effectively in terms of pricing of its service delivery.

The study also makes the recommendation that the firm further needs to enhance its differentiation strategy despite it being among its leading approaches to increasing performance the firm. There is need for the organization to further differentiate its service delivery by making them unique and customized to address emerging consumer needs. The firm also needs to constantly invest in various innovations such as the adoption of e-commerce platforms that allow virtual complete transactions with clients. Such innovations are essential in making their products unique and attractive to clients in the market as a technique of improving performance. As demonstrated in the findings, unique partnerships across the globe would also help the organization further enhance its performance as it would streamline most of its operations and offer clients enhanced services. Further recommendation is also made that the firm needs to continuously look for means of improving its service delivery to help it separate itself from its rivals.

The study recommended that the firm needs to employ focus strategy; this can be done by focusing on serving SMEs. SMEs in the country are on a rise and are increasingly adopting a global approach to their business operations. By placing themselves as a firm that looks into the needs of SME’s SISCO will be in a position to attract new clients and specialize their services in a manner that is unique in the market

Suggestions for Future Studies

According to the findings, a comparative study should be conducted to assist compare the findings of this investigation and another related to the same subject matter and addressing the same industry. Additionally, there is need to carry out investigation on each competitive strategy and how they are likely to affect the industry. Future studies can also be carried out on other competitive approaches to help determine their impact on organizational performance for clearing and forwarding firms such as SISCO Limited.

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