Effects of Competitive Strategies on Sustainable Competitive Advantage of Container Freight Stations in Kenya: Case of Focus Container Freight Station in Mombasa

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Abstract: *This study investigated the effects of competitive strategies on sustainable competitive advantage of container freight stations in Kenya, case of Focus Container freight Station. The aim of every firm in the market is to outsmart the competitor leading to development of competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is considered as the prolonged benefit of implementing some unique combination of internal capabilities and external advantages that differentiate between competitive and non-competitive industry players. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the effect of differentiation strategy on creating a sustainable competitive advantage, to ascertain the effect of technology strategy on sustainable competitive advantage, to establish the effect of resource management strategy on attaining a sustainable competitive advantage and to determine the effect of diversification strategy on sustainable competitive advantage at Focus Container Freight Station. The literature revolved around the resource-based view theory, Market-based view theory and Competitive advantage theory. The methodology of the study was descriptive survey design with a population of 200 employees of Focus container freight Stations in Kenya. A questionnaire both structured and unstructured was used to collect data from a sample size of 114 respondents of Focus container freight Station. Pilot test was conducted using 12 questionnaires before commencing the process to establish the validity and accuracy of the study. For correctness, completeness, coding and tabulation of data, SPSS software version 21 using Cronbanch alpha model was used. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, frequency counts and percentages, standard deviations where correlation analysis was used to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables through multiple regressions. The coefficient of determination of 0.18 explained the extent of change in dependent variables to change in independent variables. The study concluded that differentiation strategy, technology strategy, organization resource management and diversification strategy had a strong positive and significant correlation on sustainable competitive advantage of container freight stations in Kenya. The study also concludes that CFSs in Mombasa are emphasizing on technology and diversification strategy to increase and enhance sustainable competitive advantage. The study recommended that container freight stations does lots of improvement on customer satisfaction and enhance diversification strategy to other different products and services. The study recommends that container freight management to restructure their policies and systems in order to encourage and cultivate the aspect of sustainable competitive advantage.*

***Key Words:** Differentiation, Technology, Resource Management & Diversification.*

Introduction

The first shipping container was invented and patented in 1965 by an American named Malcom Mc Lean. From that moment on, the container shipping industry has improved its performance at an impressive pace, with containers production reaching high numbers, megacarrier container ships reaching 14,000 TEUs (World Cargo News, 2006), and the seaports container terminals expanding the capacity already increased by the existing ones. As container volumes continue to grow, seaport access becomes a critical factor for the seaports' competitive advantage. Therefore, progress only in the maritime part of the transport chain and in seaport terminals, without improvements in seaport inland access, is not sufficient for the entire CFS module. According to Pil and Rothenberg 2003, the concept of CFSs requires the investigation of previous names of these inland terminals all over the world: Gueterverkehrszentren in Germany, Plateformes Multimodales Logistiques in France,

Freight villages in UK or Interporti in Italy, Inland Port in US, Inland container Depots in India and Asia, Estacao Aduaneira do Interior in South America. They all provide transshipment from one mode to another as well as auxiliary services such as warehouses, customs, maintenance workshops and others (Roso, 2009).

Maritime trade is increasingly becoming an important dimension of East Africa's growing economy. Despite relatively low GDP growth rates in 2007-2008, container imports at the port of Mombasa have risen at an average rate of 10% per annum since 2005. In the year 2010, the port managed to handle a total of 618,186 TEUs against a designed handling capacity of 250,000 TEUs per annum. A projected annual growth of 5% of the economies of the EAC member states for the next five years means that the port will continue to operate beyond capacity. As a critical link in the logistical chain and the major channel for the importation of raw materials for manufacturing into the region, the operational effectiveness of the port will have a direct impact on the competitiveness of goods from the EAC region (KSC Report,2011).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There is an extensive plea and indication that an organization must build a distinctive competitive advantage to grow and be profit oriented in the long run. According to Porter 1990, 2003, Rugman 1990, 1991, Dunning 2000, cited by (Aiginger 2006 et al). Porter explains that the feature of a sustainable competitive advantage and strategy has been observed to be key in leading organizations all over the world. For a sustainable competitive advantage, an organization must have in place strategies that are superior to its competitors. If superior and competitive strategies are effectively adopted, an organization can achieve long-term and sustainable profitability and competitive advantage.

The CFS module has been used in many ports worldwide to address the problem of port congestion. India, South Africa and Nigeria are some of the countries that have used this model. However, in Kenya delay in container transfer has been linked to rise in ship waiting time to between 6-7 days, meaning that large volumes of cargo are discharged at the same time leading to delays in transfer of cargo and subsequent congestion at the CFSs. Frequent breakdown of the KWATOS and CAMIS systems leads to delays in releasing containers from the port. CFS operators claim that these two systems fail four hours daily on average (KSC report, 2011). This is operational inefficiency; King (2007), in his narration explains that, sustainable competitive advantage results

from factors such as operational efficiency, types of diversification and organizational structures among others. There has been constant complaints from stakeholders on how CFS capitalize on the system breakdown to charge unfair dues to cargo owners in terms of remarshalling charges and CFS rent, Siginon report (2012). It's from these complaints that have led many CFS facilities to strategically think of other alternative ways of generating more sales while retaining their customers in order to survive in their industry.

While various studies have been conducted to determine the competitive strategies and challenges facing seaports in general, few have been done specifically on container freight stations in Mombasa. Muriithi (2007) did a study of empty containers by logistics firms in Mombasa. Khamis (2006) did strategic planning at KPA while Mwakanongo (2007) did a survey of corporate governance practices in shipping companies operating in Kenya. Nduta (2012) in her study on strategies for developing competitive advantage among firms noted that there is little information on CFSs as no study has been carried on the CFS business concept. She recommends further in-depth case study of a single CFS. A critical look at these studies indicate that there has been a great emphasis on the challenges facing port terminals and other associated dry ports but none has been carried out on CFS stations operating on a 10km radius (as per the customs requirement) within the seaport environment like the case of Mombasa port.

Arising from the above studies, a good number of the CFS facilities apply competitive strategies in order to survive in their industry but the challenges have not been conclusive enough to justify a generalization. An analysis of these challenges would therefore propose on the best strategies to be adopted in order to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. This study seeks to make a unique contribution in filling this significant gap and it will focus on Focus Container Freight Station that offers cars, LCL and FCL handling and storage services. The study therefore seeks to identify which strategies would be formulated to establish a sustainable competitive advantage at Focus Container Freight Station.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to establish the effect of competitive strategies on sustainable competitive advantage at container freight stations.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the effect of differentiation strategy on creating a sustainable competitive advantage at Focus Container Freight Station in Kenya.
2. To ascertain the effect of technology strategy on sustainable competitive advantage at the Focus Container Freight Station in Kenya
3. To establish the effect of resource management strategy on attaining a sustainable competitive advantage at Focus Container Freight Station.
4. To determine the effect of diversification strategy on sustainable competitive advantage at Focus Container Freight Station.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How can differentiation strategy help create a sustainable competitive advantage?
2. How can technology strategy yield a sustainable competitive advantage?
3. How does resource management strategy contribute towards a sustainable competitive advantage?
4. What is the effect of diversification strategy to attaining a sustainable competitive advantage?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the following theories resource based theory, market based theory and competitive advantage theory were integrated.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is an analytical tool with several variations and contexts. It is used to make conceptual distinctions and organize ideas. Strong conceptual frameworks capture something real and do this in a way that is easy to remember and apply.
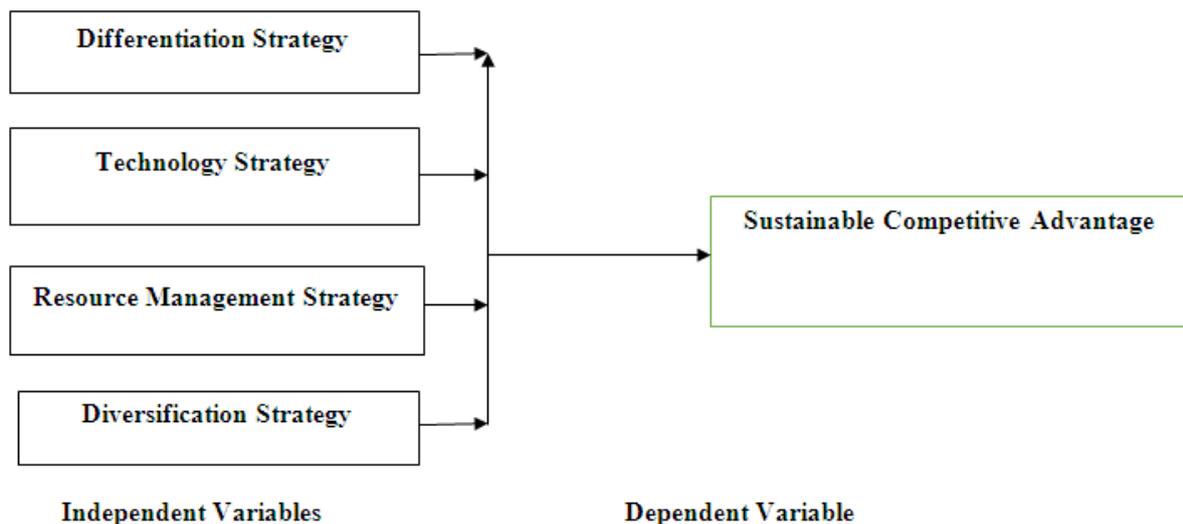

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research design was a comprehensive plan for data collection in an empirical research project. It is a "blue print" for empirical research aimed at answering specific research questions or testing specific hypotheses (Bhattacherjee, 2012). A descriptive research design was used to carry out the study. According to Kothari (2009), descriptive research studies are those studies which are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual or of a group. A descriptive research is directed at making careful observations and detailed documentation of a phenomenon of interest (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The descriptive approach described the strategies for developing sustainable competitive advantage at FOCUS CFS.

3.2 Target Population

Department	No. of employees per dept	Sample Staff
Accounts	15	9
Commercial	37	21
Clearing and forwarding	31	18
Warehousing	45	25
Administration	72	41
Total	200	114

3.3 Sample Size, Sampling Method and Technique

Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010), defined a sample as the segment of a population that is selected for investigation. It is a subset of a population.

A sample size is the number of items to be selected from the population or universe to constitute a sample (Kothari, 2009). He further argued that an optimum sample is one which fulfills the requirement of efficiency, representativeness, flexibility and should not be too small. Ochieng (2014) asserted that, a sample size should be a representative of the general population. This study took a sample of 114 employees from a said population of 200 employees as it's a unit of analysis. This sample size of 114 employees represented a sample ration of 57% of the total population targeted for the study.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data was thoroughly examined and checked for completeness and comprehensibility. The collected primary data was first sorted out for completeness, reliability and consistency which were done through analysis of internal reliability and internal consistency. This involved physical sorting of the returned questionnaires to remove the incomplete ones then checking for related questions to determine internal reliability as well as going through specific questions for each of the questionnaires to determine consistency margins thus discarding questionnaires not falling within margins. Kothari (2009), defines analysis as the computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationship that exist among data-groups.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Differentiation Strategy	0.824	6
Technology Strategy	0.746	7
Resource Management	0.723	6
Diversification Strategy	0.834	5

The overall Cronbach's alpha for the three categories which is 0.752. The findings of the pilot study shows that all the three scales were reliable as their reliability values exceeded the prescribed threshold of 0.7 (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008).

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Sustainable Competitive Advantage

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your firm is the low cost producer in the sector	70	2.59	1.291
The firm offers differentiated products, and they are produced at the lowest cost	70	3.06	1.226
The firm is operating in one or a few specific market nitches and offers standard products.	70	3.50	1.225
The firm is operating in one or a few market nitches	70	3.76	.970
The firm is not the lowest cost producer in the sector	70	4.01	.860
The firm offers many differentiated products	70	4.16	.862
The firm is operating in one or a few specific market nitche ad offers standard products	70	4.29	.801
The firm is operating in one or a few market nitches	70	4.39	.666
Valid N (listwise)	70		

The first objective of the study was to determine the effect of sustainable competitive advantage on the performance of the organization. Most of the respondents agreed that the firm is operating in one or a few market nitche with a mean score of 4.39 and a standard deviation of 0.666. Therefore it strategically required for the organization to diversify its business in order to clinch other markets globally in order to have a competitive perspective (Allion, 2015). Most of the respondents agreed that the firm is not the lowest cost producer in the sector with a mean score of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 0.860 which signify a high response rate.

4.2.2 Differentiation Strategy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Customer satisfaction	70	4.47	.631
Your market share	70	4.44	.629
Customer repeat	70	4.44	.605
Employees satisfaction	70	4.46	.630
Cost reduction	70	4.39	.748
Employee productivity	70	4.46	.652
Valid N (listwise)	70		

The second objective of the study was to determine the effect of differentiation strategy on sustainable competitive advantage. Most of the respondents had opinion of great extent that customer satisfaction is a key factor in differentiation strategy with a mean score of 4.47 and a standard deviation of 0.631. The results clearly implicate that the way organization satisfies their customers is a key parameter of differentiation strategy in any organization thus it leads to sustainable competitive advantage (David, 2013). Most of the respondents had opinion of great extent that market share is a key contributor to differentiation strategy with a mean score of 4.44 and a standard deviation of 0.629 which signifies a high response rate. Most of the respondents had opinion that cost reduction is a

key strategy for differentiation with a mean score of 4.39 and a standard deviation of 0.748 which implies that organization should employ cost

reduction factor in order for them to have a sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors (Haveman, 2009)

4.2.3 Technology Strategy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reduce transaction costs	70	4.46	.846
Improve quality of service/product	70	4.46	.674
Work with large firms /local/international organizations	70	4.36	.781
Improve control of your business process organization	70	4.37	.820
Increase flexibility of your firm	70	4.26	.829
Increase your ability to innovate	70	4.41	.712
Contribute to solving your problem of lack of resources and access to technology	70	4.41	.732
Valid N (listwise)	70		

The third objective of the study sought to determine the effect of technology on sustainable competitive advantage. Most of the respondents agreed that contribute to solving the problem of lack of resources and access to technology has a great impact with a mean score of 4.41 and a standard deviation of 0.732. Most of the respondents agreed that increase of flexibility of the firm has a positive impact to the competitive advantage with a mean score of 4.41 and a standard deviation of 0.712. The results clearly depicts that staff in the organization should always be flexible to any drastically changes made in the organization (Lawrence, 2011).Most of the respondents strongly agreed that organizations should strive to reduce transaction cost with a mean score of 4.5 and a standard deviation of 0.846.

4.2.4 Organization Resource Management

Table 4.5 Organization Resource Management

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The organization has a formal policy of career planning and development	70	4.51	.697
The organization encourages employees to suggest product/process improvement	70	4.46	.606

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The organization resources are equally allocated and deployed	70	4.51	.794
The organization has a constant review of its financial investment	70	4.43	.734
The management gives importance to strategic training	70	4.47	.793
Training and development practices support business goals of the organization	70	4.31	.877
Valid N (listwise)	70		

The fourth objective of the study sought to determine the effect of organization resource management on the sustainable competitive of the organization. Most of the respondents fully agreed that the organization has a formal policy of career planning and development with a mean score of 4.51 and a standard deviation of 0.697 indicating a high response rate. The results clearly indicate that organization should have clear career planning and development structure which is a contributor to strategic quality management (Gallier, 2006). Most of the respondents fully agreed that the organization resources are equally allocated and deployed with a mean score of 4.51 and a standard deviation of 0.794. Most of the respondents fully agreed that the management gives importance to strategic training with a mean score of 4.47 and a standard deviation of 0.793 which implicates that management level in any organization has the role of investing in much training programs for the employees in order to enhance higher strategic quality management standards (Chandler, 2012).

4.2.5 Diversification Strategy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low cost of operation increases profits	70	4.47	.696
Low cost of operation increases sales revenue	70	4.37	.854
Diversification improves stability/survival of the organization	70	4.39	.921
Diversification leads to growth of the organization	70	4.34	.883
Diversification puts your organization above your rivals	70	4.53	.653
Valid N (listwise)	70		

4.3 Correlation Analysis

4.3.1 Coefficient of Correlation

	Competitive Advantage	Differentiation	Technology	Organization Resource Management	Diversification
Competitive Advantage	1				
Differentiation	.269	1			
Technology	.167	.384	1		

Organization Resource Management	.297	.000	.000	1	
Diversification	.250	.229	.091	.505	1

According to the findings, it was clear that there was a positive correlation between the independent variables, differentiation, technology, organization resource management and diversification the dependent variable organizational performance. The analysis indicates the coefficient of correlation,

4.3.2 Coefficient of Determination

are equal to 0.269, 0.167, 0.297 and 0.250 for differentiation, technology, organization resource management and diversification. This indicates strong positive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.425[a]	.180	.130	5.40358

a. Predictors: (Constant), Diversification Strategy, Technology Strategy, Differentiation Strategy, Organization Resource Management

The model explains the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. This means that 18.0% of the relationship is explained by the identified four factors namely differentiation, technology, organization resource management and diversification. The rest 82% is explained by other factors in the Container Freight Station Focus not

4.4 Regression Analysis

4.4.1 Analysis of Variance

studied in this research. In summary the four factors studied namely, differentiation, technology, organization resource management and diversification explains or determines 18% of the relationship while the rest 82% is explained or determined by other factors.

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	417.457	4	104.364	3.574	.000[b]
	Residual	1897.914	65	29.199		
	Total	2315.371	69			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Competitive Advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Diversification Strategy, Technology Strategy, Differentiation Strategy, Organization Resource Management

The significance of the regression model indicates that the regression model is statistically significant in predicting effects of competitive strategies on sustainable competitive advantage at container freight

stations. Basing the confidence level at 95% the analysis indicates high reliability of the results obtained. The overall Anova results indicates that the model was significant at F = 3.574, p = 0.000.

4.4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	29.910	8.852		3.379	.000
Differentiation Strategy	.665	.246	.344	2.705	.000
Technology Strategy	.443	.191	.312	2.321	.000
Organization Resource Management	.127	.257	.071	.493	.000
Diversification Strategy	.346	.265	.178	1.306	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The regression equation was:
$$Y = 29.910 + 0.665X_1 + 0.443X_2 + 0.127X_3 + 0.346X_4$$
Where;
Y = the dependent variable (Sustainable Competitive Advantage)
X_1 = Differentiation Strategy
X_2 = Technology Strategy
X_3 = Organization Resource Management
X_4 = Diversification Strategy

The regression equation above has established that taking all factors into account Sustainable Competitive Advantage as a result of differentiation, technology, organization resource management and diversification strategy) constant at zero sustainable competitive among CFSs will be 29.910. The findings presented also shows that taking all other independent variables at zero, a unit increase would rise in all the four variables with increase in the scores of sustainable competitive advantage among CFSs. This therefore implies that all the four variables have strong positive relationship with sustainable competitive advantage the dependent variable

5 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions were drawn:

The results reveal that differentiation strategy had a positive and significant correlation on sustainable competitive advantage of container freight stations in Kenya.

The results reveal that technology strategy had a positive and significant correlation on sustainable competitive advantage of container freight stations in Kenya. The study reveals that technology plays a critical role of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of activities within set up organizations.

The results reveal that organization resource management strategy had a strong positive and significant correlation on sustainable competitive advantage of container freight stations in Kenya. The study also concludes that in any set up organization of freight there must be enough manpower to perform duties and other assigned responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

The results reveal that diversification strategy had a weak positive and significant correlation on sustainable competitive advantage of container freight stations in Kenya.

5.1 Recommendations

The Study recommends that container freight stations should focus on their original line of

operation while ensuring effectiveness and efficiency for a sustainable competitive advantage.

The study recommends that container freight stations should research more on workable and sustainable technology systems before committing their resources on the current technology thus enhancing competitive advantage. This should include upgrading of their systems to reach international standards and help meet the ever growing demand of the market and economy at large.

Container freight stations do lots of investing in recruitment and training of personnel who are able to perform well at the work place. This will lead to efficient operations with minimal costs so as to be able to handle the ever increasing throughput, thus enabling attainment of sustainable advantage.

The study recommends that container freight stations should carry out improvements on customer satisfaction and focus on their original line of operation for better yields. The study recommends the container freight management to restructure their policies and systems in order to encourage and cultivate the aspect of sustainable competitive advantage.

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