International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management
United Kingdom Vol. IV, Issue 9, September 2016
http://ijecm.co.uk/ ISSN 2348 0386

ASSESSMENT OF CORE COMPETENCES INFLUENCING COMPETITIVENESS OF EVENT MANAGEMENT FIRMS IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

R. W. Kang'ethe
School of Business, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya
kangetherahab@gmail.com

V. Wanambiro
School of Business, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya

Abstract

Event management has gained popularity over time. Given that only few firms have managed to penetrate the Kenyan market in the sector implies that there are a number of challenges that limit many firms from joining the industry. When only a few players are operating in the event management business, it becomes relatively expensive for other firms to hire event management services. This study assessed the core competences influencing competitive advantage of event management firms in Nakuru County, Kenya. It specifically established the effect of skilled human resources on competitiveness of event management firms. More so, the study was guided by resource-based view theory and relational view of competitive advantage. The study adopted cross sectional survey design. The study targeted the 162 employees working with event management firms in Nakuru County. A sample of 63 respondents was drawn using stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect primary data. Questionnaire was pilot tested in order to determine its reliability and validity. The collected data was subject to both descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS. It was established that skilled human resources were very important core competencies in enhancing competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County. The study recommended that event management firms ought to strive to have requisite resources and above all, competent and skilled workforce in order to boost their competitiveness.

Keywords: Competitiveness, core competences, event management, event management firms, skilled human resources

INTRODUCTION

There is interlinking amongst a firm's strategy, competitive advantage, organizational capabilities and industry key success factors. In general, core competences are premised on the resources available to the firm. Such resources may either be tangible, intangible or human. However, more specifically, these resources may fall under financial, physical, human, technological or reputational categories. It is asserted that there exist a relationship among resources, capabilities, core competencies and competitive advantage. Resources are the source of a firm's capabilities while capabilities, in turn, are the source of a firm's core competencies. A firm's core competencies are the foundation for its competitive advantage in the industry (Barney, 2001).

In Kenya, industrialization reflects that of other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where part of the growth constraining factors are poor economic factors which otherwise would enhance processing and value addition (Mutunga, 2014). The constraining factors are as a result of resource inadequacy. In the same light, Ngoru (2015) in a study on competitive strategy implementation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya noted that resources do play an important role in strategy implementation. In the same light, it was asserted that indeed resources and capabilities of a firm are the basis of competitive advantage. Moreover, Ngoru held the view that sufficient resources are fundamental in strategy implementation; and that failure in strategy implementation is majorly due to lack of resources such as time and people.

Competitiveness is described as the ability to execute something in a way that competitors find it hard to imitate (Kotler, 2000). In the same perspective, Rao (2005) holds the opinion that in order to successfully build sustainable competitive advantage or competitiveness, firms ought to provide buyers with products that are perceived as superior. The author further observed that competitive advantage has three phases. They include build up period, in which case strategic moves are successful in producing competitive advantage; benefit period where the yields of competitive advantage are realized; and long benefit period where a firm has sufficient time to earn above average profits and recoup on investments made to create the aforementioned advantages. According to Papulova and Papulova (2006), actual competitive advantage implies that manufacturing firms in Latvia are able to satisfy their customers' needs more effectively than their rivals. From a general perspective, competitive advantage is achieved when real value is added for customers. The authors noted that small and midsized enterprises in the country which understand their customers can create competitive advantage and as such benefit from lower prices and loyalty of customers. Capacity maximization in turn lowers costs.

An event is described as a unique occasion which is temporary and stems from the mix of management, programs, setting and people (Getz, 2005). In addition, Shone and Parry (2001) state that events arise from non-routine occasions which have leisure, cultural, personal or organizational objectives that are unique from daily life activities. The object of such events is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people. Events are also described as specific rituals or celebrations that are consciously planned and created with the aim of marking special occasions (Allen et al, 2008). Generally, events can be categorized according to size and scale of operations. They range from small event firms that offer services to local customers to international firms that have a global appeal. Sporting event management firms are a good example of international firms.

Event management firms are relatively new enterprises in Kenya according to Korir (2012). In the same breadth, Korir and Schulz (2012) examined network dynamics dimension factors in event management in Kenya. Their focus was on event management firms in Nairobi, Kisumu and Uasin Gishu Counties. The fact that the study was able to access 271 entrepreneurs in this sector underpins the huge interest event management has elicited among investors in Kenya. An interesting fact is that only few empirical studies have hitherto been conducted on event management; a pointer that necessitated research in this area.

Statement of the Problem

Event management has gained popularity over time particularly in Kenya. This is proved by the fact that there are many tenders regarding event management that are advertised by many entities, both public and private, in the media. As such, the importance of event management cannot be understated. Given that only few firms have managed to penetrate the market in the sector implies that there are a number of challenges that limit many firms from joining the industry. When only a few players are operating in the event management business, it becomes relatively expensive for other firms to hire event management services. It is, therefore, crucial to identify those core competences that enable event management firms to have competitive advantage. This would enhance a level playing ground for any entrepreneur who would be interested in joining the sector. Ultimately, the consumers of these services would benefit from affordable event management services.

It is against this backdrop that the current study was carried out with the aim of determining the effect of core competencies of event management firms on competitive advantage. The study is anticipated to benefit the policy makers and practitioners in the field of event management. More so, the scholars, researchers, writers and other persons in the academia are expected to benefit from the study.

General Objective

To assess the core competences influencing competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Specific Objective

To determine the influence of skilled human resources on competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County

Research Hypothesis

H_0: The influence of skilled human resources on competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County is not significant.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part reviews the theories and models pertinent to core competencies and competitiveness. They include resource-based view theory and relational view of competitive advantage.

Resource Based View Theory

Early works by Penrose (1959), Andrews (1971), Peteraf (1993), Collins and Montegomery (1995) culminated to the resource based theory of the firm. The theory argues that the key to sustained competitive advantage of firms are the factors available to the firm for use in producing goods and services that are valuable, durable, non-substitutable and costly to copy. The resources may be tangible or intangible human assets (Peteraf& Margaret, 1993). Human resources comprise of the skills and knowledge and involve expertise in designing, producing, distributing and servicing the products of the firm. Human capital is vital and is essential for an organization to retain its best people who would ensure better management and better culture in the organization. Awino (2015) while quoting Boudreau and Berger (1985) state that a business's distinctive competence is made up of the skills of the employees of the organization and the resource based view provides a framework for viewing human resource as apool of capital.

The internal resources of the firm have been divided into financial resources, physical resources, technological resources, reputation and organizational resources (Grant 1991). Other authors classify the resources as tangible such as the human, financial or physical resources and the intangible such as reputation, organization know how, patents and rights (Aosa, Bagire & Awino, 2012). Barone and DeCarlo (2003) in support of Porter (2008) argue that building a sustainable competitive advantage revolves around differentiating a product along attributes that are important to the customers, coupled with a strategy that makes use of resources that are available or can be obtained to differentiate the business from its rivals.

Aosa et al (2012) argue that different configuration of strategies and resources used by the firm results to different performance outcomes. The author argues that both the tangible and the intangible resources should be integrated and emphasized in firms while developing a strategy aimed at achieving competitive advantage. Resource based theory assumes that resources are evenly distributed and developed across firms and, therefore, explain the ability of the firms to compete (Duncan, Ginter & Swyane, 1998). However, firms do not have similar resources and if so do not have the resources to a similar extent. From the resource based view, it can be argued that firms with marginal resources are only able to break even for they can at least recover the overall cost, those with inferior resources disappear perhaps due to their inability to effectively compete due to the weak or obsolete resources. Therefore only firms with superior resources that are costly to imitate, durable, non-substitutable and rare are able to compete effectively and make profits and therefore able to survive the competition. As such, the core competence at the disposal of event management firms largely influence their competitiveness and the kind of generic strategies they can adopt to ensure they have a competitive edge over their rivals.

Relational View of Competitive Advantage

The theory states that competitive advantage of a firm stems from the collaboration or social relations between firms, rather than the firm's distinctive resources (Lavie, 2006). Dyer and Singh (1998) suggest the four potential sources of inter-organizational competitive advantage. This includes the relation specific assets, knowledge sharing routines, complementary resources or capabilities and effective governance. In regards to the specific assets, Dyer et al (1998) argues that firms seek advantages by creating assets that are specialized in conjunction with the assets of the alliance partner. Further productivity gains are realized when the firms are willing to make transaction specific investments. The three assets specificity identified comprise the site specificity where production stages that are immobile in nature are located close to one another to reduce transportation costs and costs of coordinating activities; physical asset specificity involve the transaction specific investments for example customized machinery. This physical asset specialization has been argued to result to product differentiation; human asset specificity involve transaction specific know how accumulated by transactors through long standing relationships. This is argued to better communication between the parties and therefore enhance quality and speed to market.

Dyer et al (1998) further argue that inter-firm knowledge sharing routines result to inter-organizational learning which is critical for competitive success. Studies on inter-firm knowledge sharing routines suggest that a firm's alliance partners are the major sources of new ideas that result to performance enhancing technology and innovation. Therefore alliance partners generate rents by developing superior inter-firm knowledge sharing routines. To generate rents, firms need to exploit its resources in conjunction with the complementary resources of another firm in order to generate greater rents than the sum of those obtained from the individual endowment of each partner. While quoting Oliver (1997), Dwyer et al states that strategic alliances allow firms to procure assets, competencies or capabilities which are not available in the market. Dwyer cites an example of alliance between Coca-cola and Nestle in distributing hot canned drinks through vending machines in Japan. Effective governance is noted to create relational rents through influencing the willingness of alliance partners to engage in value creation activities. It is further argued that the firm's critical capabilities are not individual skills or tacit knowledge but the relational resources or capabilities generated through social relationships between organizations.

Relational capital is seen as key in small firms such as the SMEs. This is ascribed to the fact that the small firms are aware of their lack of fundamental resources and thus have more incentive towards negotiating and collaborating with other firms (Ahuja, 2000). It is further noted that bigger firms endowed with resources are less induced towards network formation.From the relational theory, it can be deduced that firms can develop relationships that can result into competitive advantage and that a firm acting alone is not able to gain competitive advantage which is determined by the dynamic interactions between organizations to create mutual benefit. In present day this has been demonstrated by the formation of (EMAK) Event managers association of Kenya.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

This section reviews empirical studies so far conducted on core competencies and competitiveness advantage. In particular, the studies reviewed touch on skilled human resources in light of competitiveness.

Skilled Human Resources and Competitiveness

Hitt (1997) stated that a sustainable competitive advantage is usually achieved through creating unique resources, capabilities and core competencies. Drawing from the resource based view, Hitt asserted that unique resources and capabilities of a firms' internal environment are the bridge to strategic competitiveness. Ramirez and Hachiya (2006) assessed the effect of organizational capital on sales in Japanese firms. The study demonstrated that despite the firm's possession of technology, human capital positively influenced the firms' productivity and market capitalization. An earlier study by Lee and Miller (1999) on employee commitment, strategy and performance in Korean firms found that development of human capital resulted in an enhanced firm productivity. Further, it was noted that a committed and talented workforce serves as a valuable and inimitable resource that drives firms to achieve desired goals. Yukl (2009) argued that a company's human capital affects the extent to which it effectively engages in innovative adaption. In addition, Yukl observed that efficiency and innovative adaption result into enhanced firm performance which in turn results to competitive advantage.

King, Fowler and Zeithaml (2001) noted that competencies are vital in attaining competitive advantage and profitability when they looked into managing organizational competencies for competitive advantage among the middle level managers in the textile and hospital sectors in the United States. They noted that the most fundamental strategic resources are the knowledge and skills that an organization accumulates over time otherwise known as competencies. Firms that possessed competencies which were more tacit, retained value in the changing environment, were more embedded in the organization's mission, value and culture rather than in employees were found to have a competitive edge over their rivals. The authors further noted that the competencies should be agreed upon by the managers and strategic decision makers in order to share the understanding of the most important source of competitive advantage and increase the likelihood of successful implementation.

Enz (2010) looked into the competitive dynamics and creating sustainable advantage. The author cited Outback Steakhouse, a Korean restaurant in the hotel industry. It is noted that the restaurant has gained competitive advantage by possessing superior resources. Among the fundamental resources are the human resources and the operational processes under which the differentiation strategy used by the restaurant is built on. The human resources utilized in the restaurant included the skills, training of the managers and employees as well as their organization.

Locally, Mutunga, Minja and Gachanja (2014) examined the ability of human capital on attaining sustainable competitive advantage in the food and beverage firms in Kenya. Precisely, human capital referred to the innovative adaption and operational efficiency in these firms. The study found that human resources are major contributors to sustainable competitive advantage. Further, it was established that internal processes relied largely on how the human capabilities were harnessed to attain sustainable competitive advantage. Awino (2015) in his review on the link between business strategy, internal resources, national culture and competitive advantage noted that effective and efficient utilization of human resources on business strategy is a core resource for achieving a competitive advantage. Sagwa, Obonyo and Ogutu (2015) found that competitive strategy positively moderated the relationship between employee outcomes and firm performance of firms listed in the Nairobi securities exchange. Employee outcome implied the employee competence, skills and capabilities as resources to the organization. Further Sagwa et al noted that firms need to align their employee outcomes with the competitive strategy that such firms adopt in order to achieve a sustained competitive advantage and outsmart their rivals.

Several Kenyan authors such as Mutunga et al (2014) and Awino (2015) have examined human resources as one of the core competences that influence competitiveness of firms. The authors have examined the ability of human capital on attaining sustainable competitive advantage in the food and beverage firms in Kenya (Mutunga et al., 2014); and effective and efficient utilization of human resources on business strategy as a core resource for achieving a competitive advantage (Awino, 2015); However, the focus on event management firms has been given quite a wide berth.

Competitiveness

Porter (2008) argued that firms gain competitive advantage through maximization of core competencies and management aspects such as culture, human capital and advanced technology. Grant (2001) asserted that firms need to constantly develop their resource base if they wish to obtain sustainable competitive advantage. Barone and Decarlo (2003) noted that building a sustainable advantage requires firms to differentiate their products from their rivals in the industry relative to customer requirements, in their assessment of strategy, leadership and culture in Pennsylvania. Robert and Dowling (2002) in their study on market share, profitability and public image noted that firms with a good public image had superior performance and had an easier time in obtaining competitive advantage.

McGee (2002) noted that firms gain strong competitive advantage in the industry if such a firm has strong research and development capabilities. The strong research and development is observed in the firm's product development process and that strong research capabilities lead the market with innovation. In his study made in the pharmaceutical industry, it was noted the key source of competitive advantage was quality of their products. On the other hand Ajaero (2010) argues that firms gain competitive advantage through strong marketing strategies, however such firms must have requisite resources before rolling out strong marketing research, campaigns and advertisements in their quest to achieve competitive advantage. Further, Ajaero argues that holding exclusive re-selling or distribution rights is a great source of competitive advantage. Firms holding exclusive rights to a given product are observed to have a sustainable competitive advantage.

Another study was carried out on sustainable competitive advantage among insurance firms in Kenya (Ilovi, 2011). The study sought to determine how the firms create sustainable competitive advantage and challenges faced when creating such an advantage. The study found that majority of the surveyed firms use cost leadership strategy to create sustainable competitive advantage. However it was discovered that the firms faced numerous challenges such as not considering the process of strategy implementation, when implementing strategies to obtain competitive advantage. The study recommended that firms in the industry should re-evaluate their strategies in order to stay ahead of competition.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework describes the presumed relationship amongst study variables as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework indicates that there is one independent variable namely skilled human resources. Competitiveness is the dependent variable. It was hypothesized that, there existed a relationship between skilled human resources and competitiveness amongst event management firms.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A research design is the roadmap of conducting a study. The present study adopted cross sectional survey research design. According to Kothari (2008) cross sectional surveys are quantitative in nature. The aspect of survey was based on the premise that the study involved employees drawn from various event management firms in Nakuru County, Kenya and also that the study was conducted at a specific point in time.

Target Population

Target population constitutes members who share common characteristics (Kothari, 2004). The findings of the study are generalized to this population. The study targeted the 162 employees working with the 9 event management firms in Nakuru County. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study population across the 9 event management firms.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame is the list of study subjects from which the study sample is picked. Sampling frame for the study was obtained from the payroll register of the Nakuru County Treasury. The payroll provided all the list of the staffs and their designations and contacts thus a list of the targeted staffs in finance was extracted. The sampling frame is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Study Population

Event Management Firm		**Number of Employees**
i.	Ashleys Events and Decors	50
ii.	AfribeautyEvents	24
iii.	Bonfire Adventures	27
iv.	G Events	9
v.	Youngsoon Events	7
vi.	Planet Events	10
vii.	Blossom and Bloomers	12
viii.	Carol Decors and Events	9
ix.	Double M	14
Total		**162**

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample is a subset of the target population. A good sample should, therefore, be a representative of this population. Nassiuma's (2000) formula was used to calculate the size of the sample as demonstrated.

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{C^2 + (N-1)e^2}$$ Where

n = sample size

N = population size

C = coefficient of variation (50%)

e = error margin (0.05)

Substituting these values in the equation, estimated sample size (n) was:

$$n = \frac{162\,(0.5)^2}{0.5^2 + (162-1)0.05^2}$$

$$n = 62.07$$

$$n = 63 \text{ respondents}$$

The 63 sampled respondents were drawn from the study population using stratified random sampling method. This was due to the fact that each of the 9 event management firms was unique particularly in terms of the number of staff it employed. Therefore, in order to ensure fair and equitable distribution of the sampled respondents, it was imperative to adopt this sampling method. Table 2 outlines the distribution of the sampled respondents.

Table 2: Distribution of Sampled Employees

Event Management Firms (Strata)		Number of Sampled Employees
i.	Ashleys Events and Decors	19
ii.	AfribeautyEvents	9
iii.	Bonfire Adventures	11
iv.	G Events	4
v.	Youngsoon Events	3
vi.	Planet Events	4
vii.	Blossom and Bloomers	5
viii.	Carol Decors and Events	4
ix.	Double M	5
Total		**63**

Research Instrument

A research instrument refers to the tool employed to collect data. The choice of research instrument is determined by the kind of data to be collected and the nature and distribution of respondents. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data from the sampled respondents with a view of seeking the employees' opinion regarding core competences and competitiveness of their respective firms. The instrument was structured in such a way that, besides capturing background information, it enabled collection of data pertinent to study variables (skilled human resources and competitiveness). The close ended questions pertinent to study variables were on a Likert scale. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) questionnaires are appropriate tools for collecting primary data in survey studies as was the case in the present study.

Pilot Study

Before embarking on the collection of data for the main study, the research questionnaire was pilot tested. The rationale of the pilot study was to determine both the reliability and validity of the research instrument. The instrument was pilot tested amongst employees working with event management firms in Nyandarua County which borders Nakuru County to the East.

Reliability Testing

The reliability (internal consistency) of the research instrument was assessed. This study employed the Cronbach alpha (α) to test the instrument's reliability. This method is the most widely used and accepted according to Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008). The reliability threshold was alpha equal to or greater than 0.7 ($\alpha \geq 0.7$). The results of the reliability test are as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability Test Results

Study Variable	**Test Items**	**Alpha (α)**
Skilled human resources	8	0.810
Competitiveness	6	0.842

Table 3 shows that all the two study variables as reflected in the questionnaire were reliable. This was due to the fact that the reliability of each of them exceeded alpha value of 0.7 ($\alpha > 0.7$).

Validity Testing

Validity testing seeks to ensure that indeed the research instrument measures what it purports to measure (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). A valid instrument, therefore, measures what it is intended to measure. The supervisors' expert opinion was sought in order to determine the content validity of the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

Upon the validation of the research instrument, the next step was to collect the data. This study relied on primary data that were collected from the sampled respondents using a reliable and validated structured questionnaire. The requisite consents and permits were obtained before the administration of the questionnaire on the sampled respondents. The questionnaires were issued through the management of each of the targeted event management firms. The respondents were allowed about 5 working days to fill in the questionnaire. The filled questionnaires were collected through the same avenues they were administered.

Data Processing and Analysis

The collected questionnaires were thoroughly checked to ensure that they are filled as required. This was followed by editing, coding and analysis. The collected data were processed and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics and with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. Descriptive analysis consisted of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. On the other hand, inferential analysis was in form both Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis. The study findings were presented in form of tables. The following regression equation guided the study. The regression model used is as shown below.

$Y=\beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \varepsilon$

Where:

Y	=	Competitiveness
B_0	=	Constant
X_1	=	Skilled human resources
ε	=	Error Term
$\beta_{1,}$	=	Régression coefficient of the independent variable

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Response Rate

The response rate refers to the number of questionnaires that are filled appropriately and returned. In this study, 63 questionnaires were issued to the sampled respondents whereby 49 were successfully filled and returned. Therefore, the response rate was calculated as follows

(49/63)100 = 77.78%

According to Nulty (2008), response rates of 60% or more are both desirable and achievable thus, 77.78% was considered adequate for the study.

Descriptive Findings

This section presents the descriptive findings and associated discussions. The descriptive statistics have been used to discuss the findings particularly the means and standard deviations. The findings relate to skilled human resources and competitiveness of event management firms.

Skilled Human Resources

The study sought to establish the level of agreement or disagreement with the statement provided regarding skilled human resources in event management firms. The outcomes of the analysis are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Skilled Human Resources

	n	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Our firm has experienced staff	49	3	5	4.71	.540
Our firm is forced to outsource human resources when need arises	49	3	5	4.61	.640
Our firm employees are well remunerated	49	3	5	4.59	.574
Experienced and competent employees enhance the competitiveness of our firm	49	3	5	4.57	.612
Our firm has competent skilled staff	49	4	5	4.49	.505
Our employees have worked for our firm for a substantial period of time	49	3	5	4.31	.742
The size of staff members is adequate for all events	49	1	5	3.86	1.443
Our firm has many employees	49	1	5	3.35	1.234

It was strongly admitted (mean ≈ 5.00; std dev< 1.000) that even management firms had experienced staff and they were also forced to outsource human resources when need arose. Respondents further strongly agreed (mean ≈ 5.00; std dev> 1.00) that the firms' employees were well remunerated and that experienced and competent employees enhanced the competitiveness of the firm. It was concurred (mean ≈ 4.00; std dev> 1.00) that the firms had competent skilled staff and that the employees had worked for their firms for a substantial period of time. In addition, the respondents agreed (mean = 3.86; std dev = 1.443) that the size of the staff members was adequate for all events. It was, however, not clear (mean = 3.35; std dev = 1.234) whether the firms had many employees or not.

Competitiveness

The study respondents provided their opinions regarding competitiveness of the event management firms they worked with. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Competitiveness of Event Management Firms

	n	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Our firm is competitive in event management	49	4	5	4.73	.446
Our firm has sufficient physical resources that give it an edge over its competitors	49	3	5	4.49	.582
Our firm's employees are a source of its competitiveness	49	3	5	4.27	.758
Our firm commands a sizeable market share	49	2	5	4.24	.855
The advanced technology adopted by our firm has enhanced its competitive advantage	49	2	5	4.20	.790
Our firm has abundant financial resources that have enhanced its competitiveness	49	3	5	4.18	.565

It was established that respondents strongly agreed (mean = 4.73; std dev = 0.446) that the firms were competitive in event management. It was further agreed (mean 4.00; std dev< 1.000) that the firms had sufficient physical resources that gave them an edge over their competitors and that the firms' employees were a source of their competitiveness. Moreover, respondents admitted (mean = 4.24; std dev = 0.855) that event management firms had a sizeable market share. In addition, it was concurred (mean 4.00; std dev<1.000) that advanced technology adopted by the firms and abundant financial resources enhanced their competitiveness.

Inferential Findings

The study sought to determine the relationship between skilled human resources and competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County. As such data was subjected to analysis to unearth the existing relationship between these constructs. The correlation analysis done showed the strength, direction and significance of the relationship in this case between human resources and competitiveness of the said firms. More so, regression analysis enabled determination of the extent to which core competencies (skilled human resources) influenced competitiveness of event management firms.

Relationship between Skilled Human Resources and Competitiveness

The relationship between skilled human resources and competitiveness of event management firms was also evaluated. Table 6 presents the findings.

Table 6: Relationship between Skilled Human Resources and Competitiveness

		Competitiveness
Skilled Human Resources	Pearson Correlation	.677**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

n = 49; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the findings, the relationship between skilled human resources and competitiveness of event management firms was moderately strong, positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.677$; $p < 0.01$) at 0.01 significance level. This meant that as event management firms continued to have more skilled staff, their competitiveness increased in tandem. The implication was that skilled human resources to a large extent determined competitiveness of the firm. As such skilled human resources were fundamental in enhancing competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County.

Influence of Skilled Human Resources on Competitiveness

In addition, the study determined the influence of skilled human resources on competiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County. The effect of these core competencies on competitiveness was established using regression analysis (Table 7).

Table 7: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.389	.760		1.829	.074
	Skilled human resources	.518	.113	.567	4.574	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Competitiveness

$Y=\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$

$Y= 1.389+ 0.518X_1$

The study established that skilled human resources significantly influenced competitiveness of event management firms ($t = 0.186$; $p < 0.05$). This implied that the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it was noted that skilled human resources were very critical in enhancing competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County. As such it is imperative for the firms to fully equip their workforce with the necessary skills in order to further enhance their competitiveness.

Summary of Findings

The study noted that the event management firms had experienced staff. However, they were also forced to outsource human resources when need arose. In addition, it was strongly admitted that the firms' employees were well remunerated and that experienced and competent employees enhanced the competitiveness of the firm. Moreover, the study ascertained that the firms' employees had worked for the firm for a substantial period of time and as such were competent and skilled. In addition, it was noted that the size of the staff members was adequate for all events. It was however unclear clear whether the firms had many employees. The relationship between skilled human resources and competitiveness of event management firms was significant.

It was strongly agreed that the firms were competitive in event management. It was further agreed that the firms had sufficient physical resources that gave them an edge over their competitors and that the firms' employees were a source of their competitiveness. Moreover, it was noted that the firms had a sizeable market share. It was further admitted that advanced technology adopted by the firm and abundant financial resources enhanced the firm competitiveness. The study further noted that 45.8% of the competitiveness of event management firms in Nakuru County was as a result of investigated core competencies. The relationship between core competencies and competitiveness of these firms was significant ($F = 14.531$; $p < 0.05$). It was established that the most vital core competence in the firm was skilled human resource as it had the greatest influence on competitiveness of event management firms.

CONCLUSIONS

It is argued that employees can break or make a firm. The study noted that event management firm had adequate and experienced staffs that were well remunerated. As such the experienced and competent employees largely and significantly enhanced competitiveness of the firm. It was therefore inferred that skilled human resources were critically important in enhancing competitiveness of event management firm. Coupled with other factors such as physical and financial resources, employees with necessary skills, experienced and competent enable a firm achieve a competitive advantage over rivals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was noted that skilled human resources were vital in enhancing competitiveness of event management firms. Therefore the study recommended that event management firms should ensure that all their workforce have requisite skills and competencies. This can be done through training and workshops and refresher courses to upgrade employee skills based on the changes in the market.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study touched on the targeted firms, respondents, and research instrument. The targeted firms were not located at the same place which made it quite time consuming and hectic to access them. To counter this limitation, the researcher minimized the number times she visited the firms. Some respondents were quite skeptical to participate in the study. Regarding this limitation, the researcher explained to them the importance of the study to their firms. They were further assured of the confidentiality of their identity and any information obtained from them. The other limitation was on the research instrument. The instrument was not able to collect free opinions of the respondents since it contained close-ended questions. In respect of this limitation, it was ensured that the instrument adequately captured the data that tallied with the objectives of the study.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study suggests that a research on the effect of firm core competencies on organizational performance be carried out in Kenya. In addition, it is suggested that a study on the factors that determine strategy implementation in event management firms in Kenya be conducted. It is also suggested that an investigation into the core competencies of event management firms other than skilled human resources and their effect on firm competitiveness be ascertained. More so, scholars are encouraged to carry out an empirical investigation on influence of core competencies on competitive advantage of firms in different sectors.

REFERENCES

Ahuja,G. (2000.) Collaboration networks, structural holes and innovation: A longitudinal study. Admin Sci Quart 45(3), 425-455.

Andrews, K.R. (1971). The Concept of Corporate Strategy. Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin.

Aosa,E., Bagire, V., &Awino, Z. (2012).The interaction of personal factors, structure and performance in NGOs. DBA Africa Management Review, 2, 2(3), 5-41.

Awino, Z.B. (2015, March 20).Business Strategy, Internal resources, National Culture and Competitive Advantage: A Critical Review.A paper presented at 1st DBA-Africa Management Review International Conference.

Barney, J.B. (2001). Is the resource-based "view" a useful perspective for strategic management research? Yes. Academy of Management Review, 26, 41-56.

Barone, M.J., & T.E. DeCarlo (2003).Emerging Forms of Competitive Advantage: Implications for Agricultural Producers. Midwest Agribusiness Trade Research and Information Center Research Paper 03-MRP 5.

Collis, D.J., & Montgomery, C. A. (1995). Competing on resources: Strategy in the 1990s. Harvard Business Review, 73(4), 118-128.

Duncan, W.J., Ginter,P.M.,& Swyane,L.E. (1998). Competitive advantage and internal organizational assessment. Academy al Management Executive,12(3).

Dyer,J.H., &Singh,H.(1998). The relational view: Cooperative strategy and sources of inter-organizational competitive advantage, Academy of Management Review, 23, 660-679.

Enz, C. A. (2010). Competitive dynamics and creating sustainable advantage. Cornell: Cornell University, SHA School.

Grant,R.M. (2001).The resource based theory of competitive advantage: Implications for strategy formulation. Retrieved on 19th January 2016 from: https://www.skynet.ie

Grant, R.M. (1991). The resource-based theory of competitive advantage: Implications for strategy formulation, California Management Review 33(3), 114-135.

Ilovi,C.M. (2011).Sustainable Competitive Advantage in the Insurance Industry in Kenya. Retrieved on May 3rd, 2016 from: www.ijecm.co.uk.

Kimberlin, C.L., &Winterstein, A.G. (2008).Research fundamentals. Am J Health-Syst Pharm, 65.

King,A.W.,&Zeithaml,C. (2001). Competencies and firm performance: Examining the causal ambiguity paradox. Strategic Management Journal, 22, 75-99.

Kothari, C.R. (2008). Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques. New Delhi, India: New Age International Publishers.

Kothari, C.R. (2004). Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques, (2ndEd.). New Dehli: New Age International Publishers Ltd.

Kotler, P. (2000). Marketing Management, (10th Ed.), New York: Prentice Hall.

Lavie,D.(2006). The competitive advantage of interconnected firms: An extension of the resource-based view. Academy of Management Review, 31,638-658.

Lee, J., & Miller, D. (1999). People matter: commitment to employees, strategy and performance in Korean firms. Strategic Management Journal, 20,579-593.

Mugenda, O.M., & Mugenda, B.G. (2009).Research Methods-Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. Nairobi: Acts Press Publishers.

Mutunga,S.L. (2014).Perceived effects of selected macroeconomic indicators on sustainable competitive advantage in food and beverage firms In Kenya. European Journal of Business and Management 6(30), 97.

Mutunga,S.L., Minja,D.,&Gachanja, P. (2014).Innovative adaptation and operational efficiency on sustainable competitive advantage of food and beverage firms in Kenya. European Journal of Business and Innovation Research, 2(2), 32-50.

Nassiuma, K. (2000). Survey sampling: Theory and methods. Nairobi, Kenya: Nairobi University Press.

Ngoru,F.W. (2015). Assessment of factors determining competitive strategy implementation in small medium enterprises (SME'S) – Case Study on Gem Arch Plans.

Oliver,C. (1997). Sustainable competitive advantage: Combining institutional and resource-based views. Strategic Management Journal, 18, 167-713.

Papulova,E. &Papulova,Z. (2006).Competitive strategy and competitive advantages of small and midsized manufacturing enterprises in Slovakia. Retrieved on 5th June 2016 from:https://www.ecoman.ktu.it.

Penrose, E. T. (1959). The theory of the growth in the firm. Oxford: Blackwell.

Peteraf,M.A.(1993). The cornerstones of competitive advantage: A resource-based view. Strategic Management Journal, 14, 179-19.

Porter,M.E.(2008). The five competitive forces that shape strategy.Harvard Business Review, 86(1), 78-93.

Porter,M.E.,&Kramer,M.R. (2006).Strategy & society. The link between competitive advantage and corporate social responsibility.Harvard Business Review, 84(12), 78-92.

Ramirez, P.G. &Hachiya, T. (2006). How do firm specific organizational capital and other intangibles affect sales, value and productivity? Evidence from Japanese firm-level data. International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management, 3, 265-282.

Rao, P. M. (2005). Sustaining competitive advantage in a high-technology environment: A strategic marketing perspective, ACR 13(1), 33-47.

Roberts, P., &Dowling, G.(2002). Corporate reputation and sustained superior financial performance, Strategic Management Journal 23(12), 1077–1093.

Sagwa,V.E., Obonyo,P.K.,&Ogutu,M. (2015). Moderating effect of competitive strategy on the relationship between employee outcomes and performance of firms listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange. International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research, 2307-4531.

Yukl, G. (2009). Leading organizational learning: A reflection on theory and research. Leadership Quarterly, 20, 49-53.

