

**EFFECT OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE  
OF ANIMAL FEEDS MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN UPPER  
EASTERN AND CENTRAL KENYA**

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## DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

### Student Declaration

This submission was solely my own creation and had not been submitted for a degree at any other university or for any other recognition.

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### Supervisor Approval

I verify that the research outlined in this project was conducted by the candidate under my direct supervision.

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## DEDICATION

This proposal was a dedication to my wife Irene Kinya.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who had played a role in completing this proposal. I am particularly thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Robert Obuba, for his invaluable guidance, consistent support, and scholarly insights. His expertise and encouragement had played a vital role in shaping the direction and quality of this project. I would also like to acknowledge Mount Kenya University Library, Meru campus, for providing the essential resources, facilities, and a conducive learning and research environment. The institutional support had been crucial in achieving the completion of this proposal.

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## ABSTRACT

Over time, enhancing a company's performance had mainly involved securing a competitive position compared to industry peers. There was a growing focus on understanding how to establish and maintain a competitive advantage in the face of increasing competition. A competitive advantage results in improved performance by cultivating greater customer loyalty, heightened satisfaction, improved financial outcomes, and a larger market share. As a result, organizations were increasingly working to strategically position themselves within their industries to surpass competitors. Despite implementing various strategic changes to maintain a competitive edge, companies in the animal feed manufacturing sector, including those in the central and upper east regions of Kenya, confront intense competition from both established and new players. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of strategic positioning on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. The specific research objectives will involve investigating the influence of continuous improvement, strategic leadership, strategic assets, and product differentiation on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. The competitive advantage theory, the capability-based view theory, the market-based view theory, and the resource-based view theory will all provide insights into the research. Employing an explanatory research design, the study will focus on 96 animal feed manufacturing firms in Central and Upper Eastern Kenya. The selection process purposefully chose branch managers and operations managers or their equivalents from each firm, forming a sample size of 192 respondents. The census methodology was applied, covering the entire population and chosen based on the desired level of precision. Primary data was collected through research questionnaires, and descriptive and inferential statistics was utilized for data analysis. The research will adhere to ethical standards and principles, presenting the findings through charts and tables. Charts and tables were utilized to present the findings of the study. The conclusions drawn from the results suggest that implementing continual enhancement yields a beneficial and noteworthy impact on competitive advantage within the Animal feeds manufacturing firms in Central and Upper Eastern Kenya. Similarly, the adoption of strategic leadership exhibits a constructive and considerable influence on competitive advantage within Animal feeds manufacturing firms in Central and Upper Eastern Kenya, as does the utilization of strategic assets and product differentiation. The study advises animal feeds manufacturing firms to prioritize bolstering strategic leadership across managerial echelons, from mid-level managers to top executives, to ensure they grasp their responsibilities in fostering and preserving competitive advantage over the long haul.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>AKEFEMA:</b> | Association of Kenya Feed Manufacturers                    |
| <b>EO:</b>      | Entrepreneurial Orientation                                |
| <b>IFIF:</b>    | International Feed Industry Federation                     |
| <b>LO:</b>      | Learning Orientation                                       |
| <b>MBV:</b>     | Market-Based View  |
| <b>MO:</b>      | Market Orientation   |
| <b>MSMEs:</b>   | Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises                        |
| <b>NACOSTI:</b> | National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation |
| <b>QMPs:</b>    | Quality Management Principles                              |
| <b>RBV:</b>     | Resource-Based View Theory                                 |
| <b>SMEs:</b>    | Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises                         |

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

In the contemporary business landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, companies encounter the difficulty of navigating a multifaceted and ever-evolving environment. This dynamic context was shaped by various influences, including globalization, frequent and unpredictable changes, and the increasing reliance on information technologies (Petricevic & Teece, 2019). Numerous enterprises diligently pursue optimal tactics to bolster their market standing. Securing and upholding a competitive advantage, coupled with strategic implementation, frequently ensures a company's longevity in the market and favorable financial results (Amesho et al., 2022). The evaluation of firm performance entails examining the effectiveness with which a company utilizes its fundamental resources to yield revenue (Taouab & Issor, 2019). This evaluation acts as a broad measure of a firm's financial health over a certain period and enables benchmarking against peers within the same sector or across various sectors. Financial performance can be measured using several indicators, including operational revenue, operating profit, operational cash flow, and total sales volume. Additionally, a thorough examination of financial statements may reveal insights such as margin growth rates and changes in debt levels, providing a more nuanced understanding for analysts and investors (Taouab & Issor, 2019).

In the contemporary global landscape, businesses operate within highly competitive environments, necessitating the adoption of strategies aimed at enhancing their competitiveness (Kahiga, 2017). A company's competitive advantage refers to its capacity to secure a stronger foothold within an industry and surpass rivals in achieving the primary objective of profitability (Mutuku et al., 2019). This advantageous market

position empowers the company to attain performance levels that exceed the industry average. As competition intensifies, there's an increasing emphasis on retaining this competitive edge.

A competitive advantage is identified in a company when its profit margins and profit growth outpace those of its rivals who are vying for the same customer base. The sustainability of this advantage was determined by the behaviors and strategic elements that foster a lasting preference among a significant number of customers for the products or services of a business over those offered by competitors (Tan et al., 2022). As Eklof and colleagues (2020) highlight, the benefits of a competitive advantage are evident in diverse performance metrics, such as customer loyalty, enhanced customer satisfaction, better financial results, and expanded market presence. Consequently, the main goal of a competitive strategy was to surpass the performance of competitors. The three widely acknowledged methods for establishing a competitive advantage were through differentiation, cost efficiency, and focus (Khan et al., 2021).

Companies often strategize their positioning by leveraging their strengths or advantages over competitors. The notion of Sustainable Competitive Advantage holds significant importance in determining an organization's strategic positioning in comparison to its rivals (Author et al., Year). According to Simiyu and Makhamara (2020), competitive advantage refers to the long-term advantage a company gains by implementing a unique value-creating strategy that competitors were not using at the moment and cannot easily replicate. This advantage empowers companies to uphold exceptional performance and retain a prominent market position by consistently adjusting and innovating their strategies to outpace competitors. It underscores the importance of developing and nurturing unique capabilities, resources, or approaches that provide a firm with a distinctive edge in the marketplace.

Australian companies were increasingly focusing on strategic positioning within their respective industries to gain a competitive edge. In the competitive landscape, organizations adopt various positioning strategies, such as surpassing competitors' barriers, successful competition through preemptive actions, remaining unpredictable, misleading competitors, or overcoming rivals' market-based maneuvers (Muro, 2019). Arsawan et al., (2022) endorse the idea of organizations assessing their competitive advantage in comparison to market counterparts and implementing positioning strategies to enhance their standing if found lacking. Consequently, companies define their strategic orientation by pinpointing the most effective defensive measures against competitive forces, recalibrating the dynamics to strengthen their market position, and proactively choosing a competitive approach ahead of their rivals' actions. This process involves a thorough analysis of the competitive landscape, enabling businesses to make informed decisions that capitalize on their unique strengths and mitigate potential vulnerabilities. By doing so, they can not only defend their current market share but also identify opportunities for growth and expansion, ensuring long-term success and sustainability in an ever-evolving marketplace.

Paker (2021) investigated the positioning tactics of internationally and culturally varied service brands, examining the methods through which brands such as Visa, MasterCard, Amex, and Diners Club establish their market position. The findings revealed that although there isn't a universally preferred positioning strategy among these four brands, Visa, MasterCard, and Amex predominantly favor a strategy centered around brand name recognition. Diners Club, however, did not show a clear preference for this strategy. In a separate study, Grant (2021) investigated strategic positioning within the food industry in Denmark, focusing on how companies achieve and maintain a long-term competitive edge. This research underscores the varied approaches to positioning

in different markets and industries, highlighting the significance of tailored strategies to secure a sustainable competitive advantage. In Paker's study (2021), the positioning strategies of global and multicultural service brands were examined, with a specific focus on Visa, MasterCard, Amex, and Diners Club. The research revealed a tendency towards brand name positioning among Visa, MasterCard, and Amex, while Diners Club's approach in this regard was less evident. Grant (2021) investigated the Danish food industry to understand how strategic positioning contributes to sustaining a competitive advantage. The research identified key factors such as product innovation, high-quality offerings, efficient use of resources, innovation, market sensitivity, differentiation strategies, cost efficiency, and pricing tactics as drivers of competitive advantage. Miao, Saide, and Muwardi (2021) examined the banking industry in Turkey, focusing on how strategic positioning and quality considerations influence the sector's competitive landscape. Their findings highlighted that banks positioned themselves based on pricing, targeting specific market niches, adopting technological advancements, providing top-notch product services, serving the needs of SMEs and mortgage banking, ensuring accessibility to credit, enhancing delivery mechanisms, promotional activities, establishing a solid reputation, and pursuing differentiation strategies are essential components.

Furthermore, Chung and Song (2021) conducted research on how strategic positioning influences the performance of the airline sector in Korea. They noted that enhancements in performance were associated with aspects like competitive pricing and efficiencies in production and service costs, operational cost efficiencies, unique products and services, distinctive business processes, and innovative technologies employed by airlines. In Malaysia, the prosperity of cooperative organizations hinges significantly on their capacity to maintain a competitive edge and realize enhanced organizational

performance. Othman et al., (2018) had highlighted that the utilization of resources to deliver value to customers was instrumental in fostering a sustainable competitive advantage, which, in turn, catalyzes superior performance. For cooperatives to stay ahead in the competition, it was imperative for them to continue offering innovative and dynamic services while employing strategies that leverage their competitive advantages, alongside being attuned to environmental considerations. Achieving standout performance was possible through the execution of effective strategies, which were borne out of a deep understanding and recognition of the organization's primary competitive advantages (Othman et al., 2018).

To strengthen their competitive edge, the bulk of SMEs in Nigeria's manufacturing sector had embraced strategic orientation (Adeoye et al., 2019). The Nima (2022) study, which examined how strategic positioning helps Safaricom Limited achieve a durable competitive advantage, was one of the strategic positioning studies carried out in Kenya. According to the report, Safaricom had a significant competitive advantage thanks to its use of cutting-edge technology. The company's capacity to sustain its competitive advantage was further aided by the broad adoption of its Mpesa service. Furthermore, Nzioka and Kariuki (2021) looked into the connection between Kenyan commercial banks' performance and their strategic posture. According to the results, strategic positioning significantly and favorably affects organizational performance, especially when it comes to performance evaluation. Riaz and colleagues (2023) investigated the factors influencing the banking industry's implementation of strategic positioning in mobile banking. Their findings indicated that some banks had moderately embraced mobile banking, focusing on leveraging it as a strategic tool to enhance customer satisfaction, drive revenue growth, and enhance their standing in the market. In addition, a study on strategic positioning as the cornerstone of creating a long-lasting

competitive advantage in Kenyan supermarkets was carried out by Musyoka (2023). The study's findings emphasized a number of supermarket competitive advantage tactics, such as cost-maximization, recapitalization, rebranding, and enhanced customer service.

### **1.1.1 Strategic Positioning**

Decisions regarding an organization's brand and corporate image within a particular market are integral to its strategic positioning. By definition, positioning was a tactic used to pinpoint and allocate resources to particular market niches. Continuous improvement was deeply ingrained in Japanese culture, with the goal of continuously improving all elements pertinent to the transformation process (turning inputs into outputs) (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2013). Putting strategic positioning into practice requires more sophisticated business operations, which adds to the organization's operating expenses. As a result, more sophisticated management strategies, instruments, and data become crucial (Nyawira, 2015). Introducing a new product may not necessarily enhance the return on capital invested, as it might simply attract customers from the company's other products. Additionally, poor implementation could lead to one product cannibalizing another in the market (Huikkola et al., 2022).

When a company actively looks to grow into markets other than its present ones, it chooses to take a strategic stance. In an ideal world, a company creates a unique good or service that was widely favored in every market niche, independent of cost or location. In such a scenario, the company doesn't need to be as concerned about strategic positioning (Varriale et al., 2022). Strategic positioning was a managerial practice aimed at enhancing the overall institutional strategy, intending to effectively distinguish firms from competitors on a global scale (Friesenbichler & Reinstaller, 2022). The foundation of a global positioning strategy lies in the corporation's desire to position its

product in the customer's perception relative to its competitors. This strategy was critical due to its broad-reaching impact on customer accessibility (Gigauri, 2019).

In China, the perspective offered by Momaya and Gupta (2013) highlights that companies develop competencies as they enter and navigate new market territories. The strategy for global positioning was understood as a complex construct, characterized by six pivotal dimensions: securing a share in the global market, emphasizing value creation activities, standardizing products, executing competitive strategies across borders, maintaining uniform marketing approaches, and ensuring the coordination of value-creation efforts (Tallman et al., 2018). This comprehensive approach facilitates companies in crafting a robust global presence, enabling them to leverage their unique strengths and capabilities on an international scale.

According to Fuertes et al. (2020), strategic leadership in the United States was a sign of strategic positioning and was seen as an energizing process that helps the executive team of manufacturing organizations accomplish organizational goals. It was used to get a competitive edge and effectively traverse the strategy-making process. Effective strategy development is thought to necessitate strategic leadership, encompassing the ability to anticipate, foresee, remain adaptable, and motivate others to implement strategic changes as needed. A manager's skill in developing tools that could benefit the organization significantly influences the firm's performance (Agwu, 2018). Furthermore, by ingraining strategic thinking as a corporate culture across the whole firm, the strategic orientation method was displacing the conventional approach to strategic management.

According to a study by Deutscher et al. (2016) the success of high-technology enterprises in Europe was contingent upon their configurations; firms exhibiting high levels of LO, MO, and EO tend to surpass those with different configurations in

performance. Market orientation had a larger impact on performance for enterprises undertaking globalization transition in China, according to research by Abbu and Gopalakrishna (2021). The research indicates that market orientation significantly influenced a company's success in China. When a company actively searches out outside markets and creates partnerships with overseas companies, the impact on sales growth was amplified.

Strategic assets were crucial for a company's competitive capability and had enhanced the performance of the textile industry in Pakistan (Shujaat, Naghavi, & Mubarak, 2019). Njenga (2017) states that company assets include both physical and intangible elements and were a source of core competency differentials. Gaining a competitive advantage involved attracting consumers in a particular market, while a sustainable competitive advantage stemmed from unique capability differentials. These differentials leveraged intangible resources such as reputational assets and leadership skills, which were harder for competitors to replicate or substitute compared to tangible resources.

Micro, Small, and MSMEs in South Africa frequently employed product diversification as a strategy to gain a competitive advantage (Maziriri, 2018). To surpass competitors, these companies concentrate exclusively on either cost leadership or distinctiveness. A business that successfully implements a differentiation strategy or a cost-management plan was better equipped to attain higher levels of modern efficiency (Rounaghi et al., 2021). While cost leadership was mostly attained via performance and operational improvement, differentiation depends on unique services or innovative products. Geke's (2021) research suggests that companies should enhance strategic leadership in key management roles to ensure awareness of their responsibilities in sustaining the long-term competitive advantage of banks. The study specifically examined the sustainable competitive advantage of commercial banks in Kenya. Core capacity differentials were

based on properties and leadership, where properties were the practical differences that result from a combination of experience and knowledge.

### **1.1.2 Animal Feeds Manufacturing Firms**

In 2016, the Association of Kenya Feed Manufacturers (AKEFEMA) released a study stating that the 23 accredited feed manufacturers in Kenya provide around 60% of the country's animal feed needs, with unregistered feed manufacturers providing the other 40%. Nairobi and the central region of Kenya had a considerable concentration of animal feed makers, mostly because of the area's high concentration of commercial poultry and dairy farms. The International Feed Industry Federation (IFIF) said in 2020 that the combined percentage of poultry and dairy feeds produced in Kenya was 41% and 39%, respectively, of all animal feeds produced in the country. Small-scale businesses make up 90% of the animal feed sector. These were followed by medium-sized businesses, which produce 1,000–5,000 tons monthly, and large-scale businesses, which produce more than 5,000 tons monthly. Maize and wheat were the main cereal grains and their derivatives used in the manufacture of animal feed. In Kenya's cutthroat manufacturing sector, positioning in the majority of businesses represents how customers see an organization's or product's performance on certain criteria in comparison to that of its rivals. Manufacturers of animal feed must thus either improve or maintain their consumers' perceptions of them. In light of this, the research looks at how strategic positioning affects a firm's success.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of companies producing animal feeds. Consequently, intense competition has emerged, putting established companies under pressure to maintain their market share or risk losing it to

new entrants (Achieng, 2016). The majority of animal feed production businesses were centered in Kenya's major cities. Business activity was being hindered by the growing price of wheat on the international market as well as a scarcity of raw materials (Varpio, 2022). When combined, these factors create a hostile environment for businesses, which means that in order for them to grow and maintain their present market positions, they must make the best strategic decisions. This may also make it easier for businesses to grow into other cities since there may be less competition in the market. The industry was characterized by intense competition. Companies in the industry had been driven to improve their production capacities and tighten their control over expenditures by competition for market share. The company's strategic choices assist it to compete effectively, maintain its relevance, and maintain its client base by overcoming market forces. As a result, the business performs better and beats its competitors (Kowo et al., 2018). This had forced industry participants to embrace new management techniques. Plans for a company's expansion should consider its internal resources, competitive environment, and business agility (Roberts, 2018).

The link between corporate efficiency and expansion goals had been the subject of several studies. For example, King'ori (2018) examined how different pricing strategies affected the prosperity of agrochemical companies in Nairobi County's Industrial Area. The study demonstrated how the companies distinguished themselves via innovation and high-quality products. The present research will examine how animal feed manufacturing companies in Kenya's Central and Upper Eastern regions were affected by strategic positioning factors such product differentiation, strategic leadership, continuous improvement, and strategic assets. Research by Farhiya (2015) on strategic positioning as a source of long-term competitive advantage indicates that the positioning strategies adopted by a company lay the groundwork for developing and

organizing the fulfillment of the business's mission. According to the report, in order for an organization to succeed in strategic positioning, it must improve its capacity to mobilize the resources needed to support its plans and introduce new goods and services that would provide value and improve performance. While the present research will incorporate several strategic positioning techniques and analyze their effect on competitive advantage, the previous study mostly focused on product and service differentiation.

Kang's (2021) research examined the impact of strategic positioning on the performance of the Korean airline sector. The study found that competitive advantage was derived from operating cost advantages, pricing competitiveness, and production and service cost advantages. Additionally, airlines' results were enhanced by the employment of unique technology, distinctive goods and services, and unique business procedures. The industrial sector was isolated since the aforementioned research primarily examines the aviation business. The conceptual and contextual gaps identified in the reviewed studies will form the basis for the researcher's investigation into the impact of strategic positioning on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing companies in Kenya's Upper Eastern and Central regions.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

This study will evaluate the impact of strategic positioning on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.

### **1.4 Specific Objectives**

The following specific objectives will guide the study.

- i. To examine the effect of continuous improvement on competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.

- ii. To establish the effect of strategic leadership on competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.
- iii. To examine the effect of strategic assets on competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.
- iv. To determine the effect of product differentiation on competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study was based on the following questions:

- i. What was the effect of continuous improvement on competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya?
- ii. How does strategic leadership affect competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya?
- iii. To what extent does strategic assets affect competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya?
- iv. What was the effect of product differentiation on competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Companies worldwide currently navigating shifts in their operational landscapes due to technological advancements and the implementation of new policies. In response to these changes, company management was actively exploring innovative business practices to bolster their competitive edge and avoid being overtaken by rivals. This research is highly valuable for the management of animal feed manufacturing firms in Kenya's Upper Eastern and Central regions, providing deeper insights into strategic positioning and its role in achieving competitive advantage. The study's findings are particularly relevant to practitioners in the animal feed manufacturing sector seeking to

improve their competitive position. Additionally, organizations in various sectors aiming to enhance performance and gain a competitive edge through strategic change management practices can benefit from these insights, as the study serves as a valuable resource on strategic management within subsidiary companies.

The Association of Kenya Feed Manufacturers (AKEFEMA) stands to gain valuable insights from this study as it strives to formulate new policies and revise existing regulations in the Animal Feed manufacturing sector. Many firms, including those within the industry, often resort to unfair trading practices to maintain market share and stay ahead of competitors. However, this research sheds light on fair and legal strategic positioning practices that companies can adopt to sustain their competitive advantages, laying the groundwork for informed policy formulation.

Ultimately, this study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field of strategic management. It serves as an essential reference for future researchers, scholars, and academicians conducting further studies in this area.

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The study will examine the competitive advantage and strategic positioning of companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya that manufacture animal feed. The primary goal of this research is to determine how acquiring a competitive advantage is impacted by strategic leadership, product differentiation, continuous improvement, and strategic assets. We'll examine a variety of strategic positioning techniques to determine their effects. Data was collected by distributing questionnaires to respondents from 96 animal feed manufacturing firms in the Upper Eastern and Central regions of Kenya. The selected firms were represented by two top managers each, who were chosen based on their active participation in the decision-making processes of their respective companies.

The study's geographical focus on Upper Eastern and Central Kenya was justified by the concentration of animal farming activities in these regions and the presence of several animal feeds firms with their headquarters situated there. The study's target population will consist of 192 top managers, including branch managers and operations managers (or equivalents), from the 96 animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central In Kenya, the self-administered questionnaires were distributed and collected during the research period from January to March 2024. The chosen timeframe for the study aligns with the reliance on manufactured feeds by a significant number of animals during this period, primarily due to prevailing drought conditions.

### **1.8 Limitations to the Study**

This research extensively relied on primary data gathered from respondents. The validity of the data will hinge on how various issues related to the use of primary data were addressed. Unlike secondary data, which can be sourced from various outlets, the primary data collected for this study was limited to a specific time, place, and number of participants. To address this limitation, the study will employ scientific sampling techniques to select an appropriate sample, ensuring the authenticity and generalizability of findings beyond specific settings.

Concerns may be raised by the study's respondents (managers) that the information collected might be leaked to rival firms for competitive advantage. To mitigate this limitation, the study will declare in advance its commitment to observing all ethical considerations for research, assuring participants that the information was kept confidential and solely utilized for academic purposes.

The research may encounter difficulties in accessing all participants owing to their demanding schedules, which could lead to a lower response rate. To counter this challenge, the study will implement a drop-and-pick-later approach for data collection

and, where feasible, utilize email communications with the consent of the respondents. Another potential obstacle was the scarcity of sufficient local literature to underpin the research. To overcome this, the study will broaden its literature base by integrating sources from various regions, thereby enriching the research framework and ensuring a comprehensive analysis.

### **1.9 delimitation of the study**

The study focused on Upper Eastern and Central Kenya, possibly overlooking other regions or countries where similar firms operate. This geographical boundary could limit the generalizability of findings to a broader context. The study will specifically concentrate on animal feeds manufacturing firms, potentially excluding other related industries or sectors. This delimitation might restrict the applicability of findings to industries outside of animal feed manufacturing.

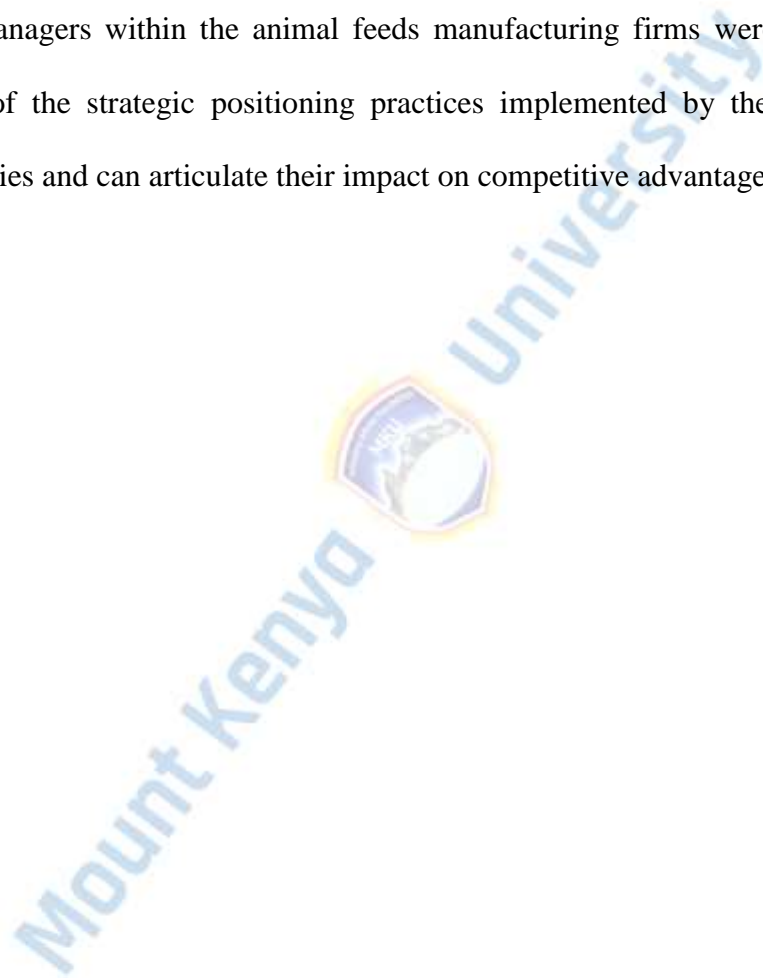
Due to resource constraints and accessibility issues, the study was delimited to two top managers within these firms. This could affect the representativeness of the sample and its ability to reflect the entire population accurately.

### **1.10 assumptions of the study**

This study was based on certain fundamental assumptions;

- i. That animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya share similar characteristics, challenges, and opportunities, allowing for meaningful generalizations across the sector.
- ii. It was assumed that the selected animal feeds manufacturing firms had implemented and maintained consistent strategic positioning practices during the study period, enabling the examination of their long-term impact on competitive advantage.

- iii. It was assumed that the selected firms and their managers were willing to participate in the study, share information openly, and provide insights into their strategic positioning practices.
- iv. That the findings from the study on strategic positioning in animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya can offer insights applicable to similar industries and regions.
- v. That managers within the animal feeds manufacturing firms were sufficiently aware of the strategic positioning practices implemented by their respective companies and can articulate their impact on competitive advantage.



### **1.11 Operational Definition of Key Terms**

**Continuous Improvement:** signifies to an ongoing effort within an organization to enhance its processes, products, or services. Continuous improvement involves a purposeful and continuous endeavor to discover small but lasting improvements in various aspects of an organization's operations. The primary goal of this approach was to continuously enhance efficiency, quality, and overall performance of the organization, guaranteeing consistent progress over time (Singh & Singh, 2015).

**Strategic Leadership:** This concept pertains to the capacity of leaders to adeptly steer an organization through a fluctuating and competitive landscape, aiming to fulfill its long-term aspirations and goals. The successful implementation of strategic decisions aligns with the organization's vision, mission, and core values. It also takes into account external factors such as market dynamics, competitive pressures, and changes in societal norms (Samimi et al., 2022).

- Strategic Asset:** This pertains to the resources that a company needs to sustain its future performance. These resources encompass financial assets and personnel (Gavrikova et al., 2020).
- Strategy Positioning:** This outline how a company distinguishes itself in the market by generating distinctive value that surpasses that of its competitors (Chereau et al., 2018).
- Product Differentiation:** this refers to strategic process by which a company designs, produces, and markets its products or services in a way that sets them apart from competitors, making them unique and appealing to the target audience (Pellegrino, 2019).
- Competitive Advantage:** This pertains to a company's ability to surpass the market's average performance and achieve exceptional outcomes (Sigalis, 2015).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this section, we will delve into the extensive body of theoretical and empirical literature that has been reviewed for this study. The study also encompasses the conceptual framework, providing a concise overview of the literature review and identifying areas where further research is needed.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Review**

This segment focuses on analyzing the theories that underpin the study, a crucial step in hypothesizing the interplay between independent and dependent variables. The research was grounded in several theoretical frameworks, including the Theory of Competitive Advantage, RBV Theory, MBV, and Capability-Based View. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive lens through which the study's hypotheses were developed, offering insights into how organizations leverage their resources, capabilities, and market position to achieve competitive advantage.

##### **2.2.1 Competitive Advantage Theory**

According to Porter (1985), the Competitive Advantage Theory emphasizes the importance of companies implementing strategies that focus on delivering top-notch products and commanding higher prices in the market. Porter highlights the crucial role of enhancing productivity growth in national strategies. Within this context, the term "competitive advantage" denotes a company's capacity to outperform others in the same market or sector, accomplished through a multitude of factors and resources. Given the demanding nature of the current market, there has been a surge in research interest surrounding the attainment of superior performance and competitive advantage. According to Macharia and Titimba (2018), a firm gains a competitive edge by

implementing a strategy that generates value and is challenging for competitors, both present and future, to imitate.

A number of researchers, including Omalaja and Eruola (2011), had provided critiques of Competitive Advantage Theory. These critiques raise concerns that were thought-provoking and inquire about the validity of the theory as a scientific notion. According to the findings of their research, having a competitive edge was not necessarily a necessary and sufficient prerequisite for experiencing greater returns. Some people believe that there was no theory of competitive advantage that can be disproved without resorting to ideology. This leads them to suggest that competitive advantage is, at most, a metaphor useful to those in strategic management. Despite this, Liu and Wilson (2013) utilize competitive theory to enhance the ability to sustain a competitive advantage in challenging business environments. The Competitive Advantage Theory, relevant to this investigation, posits that a company's unique characteristics give it an edge over competitors, leading to higher performance. According to Josiah (2013), a company that had a competitive advantage may effectively execute strategies that allow it to outperform both existing rivals and future competitors. According to Powell (2001), the theory proposes that a business strategy can impact various resources directly under someone's control, and these resources can provide a competitive advantage. Competitive edge can be gained through improved performance and a dominant position in production resources. The theory suggests that a firm can maintain a competitive advantage by continually enhancing the quality of its products and services. Therefore, continuous improvement is considered a vital component of competitive advantage. This theory was used to explore how businesses can achieve and sustain a competitive edge.

### **2.2.2 Resource Based View**

Wernerfelt (1984) first introduced the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, which gained widespread recognition for explaining the primary sources of competitive differentiation. RBV emphasizes the importance of a company's unique resources in achieving a competitive advantage. According to this notion, the resources that a company owns were closely connected to the strategy that the company employs. These resources were among the most important factors that determine how efficiently the firm carries out its operations and how well it outperforms both its existing rivals and those that may emerge in the future. Day and Wensley (1988) introduced a paradigm that identifies superior resources and superior talents as fundamental sources of sustained competitive advantage.

According to RBV, these key sources of advantage are referred to as capabilities and assets. Capabilities are the cohesive elements that link these assets together, allowing them to be used advantageously against competitors. Assets are the accumulated resources a company holds, while capabilities are the aspects that connect these assets.

According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), for a firm to establish a competitive advantage, the resource in question must have characteristics such as being currently scarce, providing economic value, being non-substitutable, being difficult to copy, and being difficult to acquire in the market. The RBV is founded on two fundamental assertions well-established in strategic management theory. The first assertion is that the capabilities and resources possessed by current or potential competing firms may differ (resource heterogeneity), and the second assertion is that these differences must be permanent (resource immobility) (Mata et al., 2005).

In spite of the fact that the RBV offers advantages to both practitioners and academics, it had been subjected to criticism from those who were opposed to it, such as Bromiley and They contend that there was an excessive amount of optimism about the potential outcomes that may be achieved by the theory, especially with regard to the absence of criteria for generalizability and the deficiencies in definitional aspects. Nevertheless, the theory had garnered universal recognition among academics such as Almarri and Gardiner (2014) when it comes to understanding how the assets and competencies of an organization contribute to the acquisition of a competitive advantage. RBV is considered relevant to the current research because it highlights the essential role that strategic assets play in organizations achieving a competitive advantage. This relevance is based on the arguments presented.

### **2.2.3 The Market-Based View theory**

Peteraf and Bergen (2003) explain that the Market-Based View (MBV) thesis, established by Mason and Bain in 1950, emphasizes the idea that a company's success is primarily driven by industry characteristics and its orientation towards the external market. It suggests that a firm's value can be attributed to its competitive position within the industry. To distinguish itself from other competitors, this strategic stance involves a variety of diverse operations. Furthermore, the manner in which a company carries out these operations in a variety of ways further establishes its strategic position, which in turn influences its performance and profitability depending on the structure of the industry and the competitive dynamics (Schendel 1994).

As underlined in Hoskisson's strategic thinking development (Hoskisson et al. 1999), the MBV includes the positioning school of strategy theories with concepts from industrial organization economics. This was a significant contribution to the advancement of strategic thinking. An awareness of a company's external environment

and its influence on performance was the primary focus during this phase. It also considered the industry as a whole and the company's market position compared to its rivals. In formulating their strategies, businesses often analyze their competitive advantage by examining the external environment competitors all contribute to determining a company's market power, which helps explain its performance relative to other companies. According to Kull et al. (2016), the most frequently emphasized sources of market power include negotiating power, monopoly, and barriers to entry. Critics of the Market-Based approach, such as Moon et al. (2000), tend to favor the resource-based approach, which emphasizes a company's resources and capabilities. This perspective suggests that a firm's value can be explained by its unique product differentiation activities, considering the threats from substitutes and the bargaining power of buyers and suppliers. Companies strive to gain strategic leadership and sustain a competitive edge by controlling a significant portion of the market and erecting barriers that prevent new competitors from entering the market. Accordingly, the Market-Based View was congruent with the strategic leadership variable that was being investigated in this particular research.

#### **2.2.4 Capability-Based View**

Amit and Shoemaker (1993) presented a theory that puts an emphasis on the fact that capabilities serve as the foundation for competitive advantage, while resources serve as the basis for these capabilities, as Grant (1991) pointed out. According to their argument, sustainable competitive advantages were not derived from an organization's resources but rather from the talents of the organization. According to Haas and Hansen (2005), it is crucial for a company to possess the necessary skills in order to gain a competitive edge. They highlight the significance of effectively utilizing capabilities to carry out essential operations within the firm. Amit and Shoemaker (1993) highlighted

that capabilities encompass a company's aptitude to effectively utilize resources, often in conjunction with organizational processes, to accomplish a targeted objective. Capabilities encompass the distinctive processes within an organization that evolve over time through intricate interactions among its resources, whether they are information-based, physical, or intangible. Grant (1996) defines organizational capability as the company's aptitude for consistently executing a productive task that contributes to value creation by transforming inputs into outputs.

Simon et al. (2003) highlighted the significance of organizational learning, indicating that abilities and learning within an organization are vital aspects of a company's strategy, whether stated explicitly or implicitly. In his study, Zack (1999) emphasized the importance of acquiring new knowledge and skills in order to gain a competitive edge. In their study, Lee et al. (2001) examined how a company's success is influenced by its internal capacities and external networks. According to their findings, dynamic capabilities form the basis for product differentiation in the propositions companies present. Companies with high dynamic capacities are said to have highly distinct products, giving them an edge over their competitors. This idea posits that product differentiation results from dynamic capabilities and serves as a predictor of the competitive advantage a company possesses.

### **2.3 Empirical Literature Review**

This part of the study was dedicated to reviewing pertinent literature related to the research theme. It aimed to dissect the theoretical foundations underpinning the study, scrutinize how strategic positioning was applied within organizations, and assess the different strategies linked with strategic positioning and their effects on organizational performance. Furthermore, this section will explore the objectives of the study while pinpointing any lacunae in the current body of knowledge. This comprehensive review

not only enriches the research framework but also ensures a well-rounded understanding of the subject matter, facilitating the identification of new avenues for investigation.

#### **2.4 Continuous Improvement and Competitive Advantage**

Continuous improvement, as defined by Backlund and Sundqvist (2018), was an attempt that was both systematic and ongoing, with the goal of improving goods, services, or processes systematically. The primary goal of continuous improvement was to steadily improve several aspects of an organization's performance, including its efficiency, effectiveness, quality, and overall performance. The concept that making consistent, tiny, incremental adjustments over a period of time might result in large benefits over the long run was the foundation of this method.

Terziovski (2021) conducted a study in Australia to investigate the influence of various management techniques, such as continuous improvement and innovation management, on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The research findings indicated that innovation strategy and formal structure are key drivers of continuous improvement. The study also hypothesized that these factors had an impact on performance. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that the research demonstrated that businesses often do not have a deliberate and systematic implementation of innovation culture. A substantial correlation was found between the presence of a management strategy and a system for continuous improvement and innovation and the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It was essential for managers to implement these principles to prevent the collapse of SMEs. The research also highlighted that a management strategy emphasizing continuous improvement and innovation emerged as the most important predictor of excellent performance among SMEs. This study, however, hypothesizes that benchmarking, ongoing quality audits,

and system improvements directly influence market share and boost competitive advantage.

In the study conducted by Matthews and Marzec (2017), an empirical inquiry into operational improvement focused on process, continuous, and quality improvement in the United Kingdom. The results highlighted the critical role of continuous improvement within operations management. The research determined that continuous improvement generally involves addressing customer complaints or adjusting needs, as well as proactively detecting and eliminating issues and waste. According to Grover et al. (2018), these findings align with strategic management studies that emphasize the need for businesses to continually improve their operations to maintain a competitive edge in ever-changing environments. However, it is important to note that the study focused on Britain, a developed nation, while the forthcoming research will concentrate on Kenya, a developing country with diverse economic, social, and cultural settings. Njenga (2017) conducted a correlational study in Kenya to investigate continuous improvement processes and competitive positioning within the real estate agency market. The research involved 150 real estate agencies divided into three distinct groups. Specifically, it examined how strategies such as system lock-in strategies, whole customer solution strategies, and best product strategies impact the performance of the real estate agency industry in Kenya. The findings revealed a significant positive association between competitive positioning and continuous improvement systems. Moreover, the study found that most real estate firms recognize and adhere to the eight quality management principles (QMPs) that underpin continuous improvement systems. However, it is important to note that while this study focused on real estate agents, the forthcoming research will concentrate on the manufacturing sector of animal feed suppliers.

## **2.5 Technology Adoption and Strategic Positioning in the Kenyan Feed Industry**

The Kenyan feed industry is undergoing a profound evolution propelled by the integration of advanced technologies and strategic business maneuvers. Technological advancements have become pivotal in revolutionizing various aspects of the industry, ranging from feed formulation to distribution and marketing.

One significant impact of technology adoption is evident in precision nutrition. Modern feed manufacturers in Kenya are leveraging sophisticated data analytics and modeling tools to formulate customized feed solutions tailored to the specific nutritional requirements of different livestock species. By precisely calibrating feed compositions based on scientific data and insights, manufacturers can optimize animal performance, improve feed efficiency, and ultimately enhance profitability for farmers.

Advancements in feed processing technologies have led to the development of innovative processing techniques aimed at improving feed quality and digestibility. Techniques such as extrusion, pelleting, and micronization are being employed to produce feeds with enhanced palatability, nutrient availability, and shelf stability. These technologies not only contribute to better animal health and productivity but also align with global quality standards, positioning Kenyan feed manufacturers as competitive players in the international market.

Digitalization has transformed various aspects of the feed industry value chain. Digital platforms and mobile applications are being utilized for inventory management, supply chain optimization, and real-time monitoring of production processes. Additionally, digital marketing strategies, including social media advertising and e-commerce platforms, are facilitating direct engagement with customers, enabling feed manufacturers to expand their market reach and enhance brand visibility.

Feed industry players in Kenya are adopting proactive approaches to enhance their competitive positioning. Vertical integration is being pursued to strengthen control over the value chain, from raw material sourcing to distribution channels. Partnerships and collaborations with research institutions, technology providers, and farmer cooperatives are fostering innovation and knowledge exchange, driving market differentiation and growth.

The convergence of technology adoption and strategic positioning is driving significant transformations in the Kenyan feed industry. Through the integration of advanced technologies and strategic initiatives, feed manufacturers are enhancing product quality, efficiency, and market competitiveness, positioning themselves for sustained growth and success in an increasingly dynamic and competitive market landscape.

### **2.5.1 Technological Advancements**

Technological advancements have revolutionized the feed industry in Kenya, leading to improved production processes, product quality, and efficiency. One notable advancement is the adoption of precision nutrition technologies, which enable feed manufacturers to formulate customized feed solutions tailored to the specific nutritional requirements of different livestock species and production stages. By leveraging data analytics and modeling tools, manufacturers can optimize feed formulations to maximize animal performance and minimize feed wastage, ultimately improving profitability for farmers.

Advancements in feed processing technologies have led to the development of novel processing techniques that enhance feed digestibility and nutrient utilization. Extrusion, pelleting, and micronization are some of the techniques employed to produce feeds with improved palatability, digestibility, and shelf stability. These technologies not only

enhance the nutritional value of feeds but also contribute to the overall health and productivity of livestock, leading to higher returns for farmers.

Digitalization has revolutionized various aspects of the feed industry, including supply chain management, quality control, and marketing. Digital platforms and mobile applications enable manufacturers to streamline inventory management, track raw material sourcing, and monitor production processes in real-time. Additionally, digital marketing strategies such as social media advertising and e-commerce platforms facilitate direct engagement with customers, allowing manufacturers to promote their products and services more effectively.

### **2.5.2 Strategic Positioning**

In response to evolving market dynamics and competitive pressures, feed industry players in Kenya are strategically positioning themselves to capitalize on emerging opportunities and mitigate potential threats. One strategic approach is vertical integration, whereby feed manufacturers expand their operations upstream or downstream in the value chain. This may involve backward integration into raw material production, such as cultivating maize or soybean for feed ingredients, or forward integration into distribution and retail channels to enhance market access and control.

Partnerships and collaborations are increasingly being leveraged to drive innovation and market expansion. Collaborations between feed manufacturers, research institutions, and technology providers facilitate knowledge transfer, research, and development of new feed formulations and production techniques. Similarly, partnerships with agricultural extension services and farmer cooperatives help manufacturers disseminate technical information, training, and support to smallholder farmers, thereby expanding market reach and promoting sustainable livestock production practices.

Differentiation through product innovation and branding is a key strategic initiative adopted by feed manufacturers to stand out in a crowded market. By developing unique feed formulations targeting specific livestock species, production systems, or nutritional requirements, manufacturers can carve out niche segments and command premium prices. Building strong brands based on quality, reliability, and sustainability helps manufacturers cultivate customer loyalty and preference, fostering long-term relationships and market share growth.

Market diversification is a strategic imperative for feed manufacturers seeking to reduce dependency on volatile domestic markets and explore new growth opportunities. Export-oriented strategies targeting regional and international markets offer potential avenues for expansion and revenue diversification. Leveraging Kenya's strategic geographic location, established trade networks, and adherence to quality and safety standards, manufacturers can tap into growing demand for high-quality animal feeds in neighboring countries and beyond.

## **2.6 The Role of Strategic Positioning in Animal Feeds Manufacturing Firms**

In the highly competitive landscape of the animal feeds manufacturing industry, strategic positioning plays a crucial role in determining the success and sustainability of firms. This paper explores the significance of strategic positioning within the context of animal feeds manufacturing firms, examining its impact on competitiveness, market share, and overall performance. By analyzing various strategic positioning strategies adopted by these firms, this research aims to provide insights into the dynamics of the industry and offer recommendations for firms operating in this sector.

Strategic positioning encompasses the deliberate efforts of a firm to create a unique and valuable position within its industry, effectively differentiating itself from competitors and catering to the needs of its target market. In the context of animal feeds

manufacturing firms, strategic positioning involves decisions related to product differentiation, target market selection, distribution channels, and pricing strategies, among others.

One of the key aspects of strategic positioning in animal feeds manufacturing firms is product differentiation. With numerous players operating in the market, firms must develop products that stand out in terms of quality, nutritional value, and suitability for various animal species. This requires continuous research and development efforts to innovate and introduce new products that address emerging market trends and consumer preferences. By strategically positioning their products as superior or unique compared to competitors, firms can gain a competitive advantage and capture market share.

Target market selection is another crucial element of strategic positioning. Animal feeds manufacturers must identify and prioritize specific market segments based on factors such as geographic location, livestock population, and purchasing power. By focusing their resources and marketing efforts on high-potential market segments, firms can optimize their sales and distribution strategies, thereby maximizing their market penetration and revenue generation.

Furthermore, strategic positioning extends to distribution channel management. Effective distribution channels are essential for reaching target customers efficiently and delivering products in a timely manner. Animal feeds manufacturers must carefully evaluate and select distribution partners, considering factors such as coverage, reliability, and cost-effectiveness. By establishing strong relationships with distributors and optimizing logistics processes, firms can enhance their market reach and customer satisfaction levels.

Pricing strategy is also integral to strategic positioning in the animal feeds manufacturing industry. Firms must carefully balance pricing decisions to remain

competitive while ensuring profitability. Factors such as input costs, competitor pricing, and perceived value must be taken into account when setting prices for feed products. Additionally, firms may adopt dynamic pricing strategies to respond to market fluctuations and seasonal demand patterns, thereby optimizing revenue and market share.

In addition to these key components, strategic positioning in animal feeds manufacturing firms involves continuous monitoring of market trends, competitor activities, and regulatory developments. Firms must stay agile and adaptable, adjusting their strategies in response to changing market conditions and emerging opportunities or threats. By maintaining a proactive approach to strategic positioning, firms can sustain their competitive advantage and achieve long-term success in the dynamic animal feeds industry.

Strategic positioning plays a vital role in determining the competitiveness and success of animal feeds manufacturing firms. By focusing on product differentiation, target market selection, distribution channel management, and pricing strategies, firms can create unique value propositions and gain a competitive edge in the market. However, achieving and maintaining strategic positioning requires ongoing effort, innovation, and adaptability to navigate the complexities of the industry effectively. Through strategic positioning, animal feeds manufacturers can drive growth, enhance profitability, and establish themselves as leaders in the marketplace

## **2.7 Competitive Landscape Analysis of Animal Feeds Manufacturing in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya**

Animal feeds manufacturing in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya presents a dynamic and competitive landscape shaped by various factors such as market demand, regulatory

frameworks, technological advancements, and the availability of raw materials. This analysis delves into the key players, market dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in the sector.

The demand for animal feeds in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya is primarily driven by the region's vibrant agricultural sector, characterized by significant livestock farming activities. With a growing population and increasing urbanization, the demand for livestock products such as meat, milk, and eggs is on the rise, consequently driving the need for high-quality animal feeds.

Several key players dominate the animal feeds manufacturing sector in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. These include established companies with a wide distribution network, as well as smaller, niche players catering to specific market segments. Companies like Company A, Company B, and Company C have established themselves as market leaders, leveraging their extensive experience, quality products, and brand reputation to maintain a competitive edge.

The animal feeds manufacturing industry in the region is characterized by intense competition, driven by factors such as pricing, product quality, innovation, and customer service. Companies often engage in aggressive marketing strategies to expand their market share and attract new customers. Additionally, technological advancements play a significant role in improving production efficiency and developing innovative feed formulations tailored to the specific nutritional needs of different livestock species.

Despite the growth opportunities, animal feeds manufacturers in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya face several challenges. One major challenge is the fluctuation in raw material prices, particularly maize and soybean, which are primary ingredients in most feed formulations. Economic uncertainties, weather patterns, and market dynamics contribute to price volatility, impacting production costs and profit margins.

Another challenge is the prevalence of counterfeit products in the market, which not only undermines consumer confidence but also poses health risks to livestock. Regulatory agencies are tasked with enforcing quality standards and cracking down on illicit trade practices, but the issue persists, requiring continuous vigilance and collaboration between stakeholders.

Despite the challenges, the animal feeds manufacturing sector in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya offers significant growth opportunities. The increasing awareness of the importance of nutrition in livestock production, coupled with rising disposable incomes among farmers, is driving demand for high-quality, scientifically formulated feeds. Companies that invest in research and development to develop innovative products tailored to the evolving needs of the market stand to gain a competitive advantage.

The government's initiatives to promote agribusiness and improve the agricultural value chain through policies, incentives, and infrastructure development present opportunities for expansion and investment in the sector. Collaborations between private sector players, research institutions, and government agencies can facilitate knowledge transfer, technology adoption, and capacity building, fostering a conducive environment for sustainable growth.

In the animal feeds manufacturing sector in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya is characterized by a competitive landscape shaped by market demand, technological advancements, and regulatory frameworks. While facing challenges such as price volatility and counterfeit products, the industry offers significant opportunities for growth and innovation. Companies that adapt to market dynamics, invest in quality and innovation, and collaborate with stakeholders are well-positioned to thrive in this dynamic environment.

## **2.8 Strategic Leadership and Competitive Advantage**

Strategic leadership was a type of leadership that places an emphasis on the capacity to form and influence the overall direction, strategy, and vision of an organization rather than just directing it. It entails steering the company toward its long-term objectives and adapting to an environment that was always changing, which goes beyond the day-to-day management duties that were typically performed. Strategic leaders were responsible for making crucial decisions that aligned with the organization's mission and contributed to its success.

In the context of private universities in Iraq, Al-Mahdi (2021) conducted a study to investigate the influence of strategic leadership on achieving a competitive advantage. The research aimed to determine how strategic leadership skills contribute to establishing a sustainable competitive advantage across all private colleges in Iraq. Data was collected through a "self-administered questionnaire." The results showed a significant positive association between strategic leadership capabilities and the ability to maintain a competitive edge over time. Additionally, the study emphasized that human and social capital are essential sources of sustained competitive advantage, requiring constant nurturing and growth. The importance of strategic leadership competencies for organizational success was highlighted, focusing on cultivating and protecting the mix of organizational resources, capabilities, and knowledge to build a sustainable competitive advantage.

In contrast to the current research, which will focus on animal feed manufacturing companies in Kenya, Omar's study focused on private institutions in Iraq. In a recent study, Geke (2021) explored the relationship between strategic leadership and sustainable competitive advantage within the context of Kenyan commercial banks. The study sought to explore how strategic leadership techniques impact long-term

advantages of financial institutions in Kenya. Using a descriptive research approach, the study focused on 43 commercial banks, collecting data through questionnaires and analyzing it using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that strategic leadership is crucial for maintaining a competitive benefit for moneymaking banks in Kenya over time. Strategic leaders were identified as essential individuals capable of anticipating opportunities and challenges. While the previous study focused on the financial sector, particularly commercial banks, the current research will concentrate on the manufacturing sector.

In a study conducted by Kahiga (2017), the focus was on examining how strategic leadership practices can influence the competitive position of the National Bank of Kenya. Our main focus was on investigating the ways in which strategic leadership practices enhance the competitiveness of the National Bank of Kenya. Through conducting interviews, data was collected using an actual study methodology. The findings indicated that the National Bank of Kenya primarily utilized strategic leadership practices, including establishing strategic direction, maintaining core skills, and providing frequent training and development opportunities. These practices were found to strengthen staff unity while working towards shared objectives. Similar to the study by Geke (2021), Kahiga's research was conducted within the banking sector. However, the present study will focus on animal feed manufacturing companies.

## **2.9 Strategic Assets and Competitive Advantage**

When we talk about a company's strategic assets, we were referring to the rare and important resources, skills, or competences that it holds, which provide it with an edge over its competitors in the market where it operates. In order to shape a company's strategy and ensure its continued success over the long run, these assets were very necessary. Strategic assets were often difficult for rivals to mimic or reproduce, which

provides a significant advantage to the organization that controls them by offering a competitive advantage. A research study by Gavrikova et al. (2020) focused on the concept of project management as a strategic asset. The most important point of this study was to explore the features that define a strategic asset in project management and investigate the methods firms use to build and sustain this advantage. The research emphasized the significance of strategic assets in determining a firm's strategy and competitive advantage. These assets were found to be unique, indispensable, impossible to replicate, and specifically tailored to meet the firm's requirements. A Resource-Based View (RBV) analysis was employed, focusing on internal assets as a primary source of competitive advantage.

In a study conducted by Kyengo and Kilika (2017), they explored the relationship between strategic assets, competitive capacities, and company performance in Kenya. Their research revealed that strategic assets are key factors in shaping a company's competitive capabilities and overall achievements. The company gained a competitive edge thanks to its valuable and distinctive assets, which were not easily replicated or imitated. The study emphasized the significance of intangible resources in sustaining a competitive edge, highlighting the need to retain a competitive advantage. It should be noted that this research did not explore the competitive advantage that companies possess, a gap that the current study aims to address.

### **2.10 Product Differentiation and Competitive Advantage**

Setting a good or service apart from the competition is crucial in order to gain a competitive edge consumers, especially in contrast to comparable offers from rivals, was referred to as product differentiation (Wambaka & Adegbuyi, 2021). However, product differentiation was not the same as product differentiation. One of the

objectives of product differentiation was to provide a perceived value for the consumer that distinguishes the product from others and makes it more appealing to the customer.

Within the context of Nigeria, Abubakar and Mohammad (2019) conducted research to study how product differentiation leads to competitive advantage and organizational effectiveness. Their results indicated a strong correlation between product differentiation and organizational success. This highlights the significance of manufacturing companies placing a high priority on innovation, excellent design, and distinctive characteristics in their goods. According to the findings of the research, making investments in product differentiation strategies might provide businesses with a major competitive advantage in their respective industries and assure their long-term viability. On the other hand, it was only focused on Nigeria and did not investigate other significant aspects, such as strategic assets and leadership in strategic positioning.

Maina et al. (2018) investigated how differentiation tactics influenced the market share of tea export companies in Kenya. They evaluated various tactics, including pricing, value-added products, operational processes, consumer incentives, and distribution networks. Surprisingly, the research found that these differentiation methods did not significantly impact the market share of tea export companies. This study seeks to address a previously unexplored situation within the animal feed manufacturing industry, thereby contributing to the already existing reservoir of knowledge.

## **2.11 Environmental Analysis and Strategic Positioning in the Kenyan Feed**

### **Industry**

The Kenyan feed industry operates within a dynamic and multifaceted environment shaped by various internal and external factors. This research aims to conduct an environmental analysis of the Kenyan feed industry and explore the strategic

positioning adopted by industry players to navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

The Kenyan feed industry plays a crucial role in supporting the country's livestock farming sector, which constitutes a significant component of the agricultural economy. With a growing population and increasing urbanization, the demand for livestock products such as meat, milk, and eggs is on the rise, driving the need for high-quality animal feeds. Moreover, Kenya's strategic location within the East African region positions it as a key player in the regional feed market, presenting opportunities for market expansion and export-oriented strategies.

The political and regulatory environment significantly impacts the operations of feed industry players in Kenya. Government policies, regulations, and interventions related to agriculture, trade, and investment have implications for feed production, distribution, and marketing. For instance, policies aimed at promoting local content and value addition may incentivize feed manufacturers to source raw materials domestically, thereby reducing dependency on imported inputs and enhancing the resilience of the industry against external shocks.

Economic factors such as GDP growth, inflation rates, and exchange rate fluctuations influence consumer purchasing power, input costs, and market demand for animal feeds. Volatility in commodity prices, particularly maize and soybean, which are primary feed ingredients, can impact production costs and profit margins for feed manufacturers. Moreover, economic downturns or fluctuations in disposable incomes may affect farmers' ability to invest in animal production, thereby influencing the demand for feed products.

Social and cultural trends play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards animal feeds and livestock products. Increasing

awareness of food safety, nutrition, and environmental sustainability among consumers is driving demand for organic, natural, and ethically sourced feed products. Additionally, cultural practices, dietary preferences, and traditional livestock rearing methods influence the types and formulations of feeds preferred by different farmer segments.

Technological advancements have become a driving force behind innovation and efficiency improvements in the feed industry. The adoption of precision nutrition technologies, feed processing innovations, and digitalization tools is enhancing feed formulation accuracy, product quality, and production efficiency. Furthermore, advancements in biotechnology and feed additives are enabling manufacturers to develop value-added products with enhanced nutritional profiles and health benefits for livestock.

Environmental sustainability is increasingly becoming a focal point for industry stakeholders, driven by concerns over resource depletion, climate change, and environmental degradation. Feed manufacturers are exploring sustainable sourcing practices, waste reduction strategies, and renewable energy solutions to minimize their environmental footprint and comply with regulatory requirements. Moreover, investments in research and development are aimed at developing eco-friendly feed formulations and production processes that promote environmental conservation and resilience.

In response to the dynamic environmental factors, feed industry players in Kenya are adopting strategic positioning strategies to enhance their competitiveness and long-term viability. Vertical integration, diversification, and market differentiation are common strategic approaches aimed at strengthening market presence, mitigating risks, and capturing new growth opportunities. Additionally, collaborations, partnerships, and

alliances with stakeholders across the value chain are facilitating innovation, knowledge transfer, and market expansion initiatives.

## **2.12 SWOT Analysis of Animal Feeds Manufacturing Firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya**

The animal feeds manufacturing sector in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya plays a crucial role in supporting the region's vibrant livestock farming industry. A SWOT analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats facing these firms.

One of the primary strengths of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya is their established distribution networks. Many firms have extensive reach, covering both urban centers and rural areas where livestock farming is prevalent. These distribution networks enable firms to effectively deliver their products to a wide customer base, thereby increasing market penetration and sales.

Several firms in the region have built strong brand reputations over the years. These brands are synonymous with quality and reliability, earning the trust and loyalty of customers. Strong brand recognition not only drives customer preference but also provides a competitive advantage in a crowded market. Customers are more likely to choose products from recognized brands, even if they come at a slightly higher price point.

Some animal feeds manufacturing firms have invested in modern production facilities and technologies. These investments have enhanced production efficiency, allowing firms to meet growing demand while maintaining consistent product quality. Modern technologies also enable firms to develop innovative feed formulations tailored to the

specific nutritional needs of different livestock species, further strengthening their competitive position in the market.

Despite their strengths, animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya also face several weaknesses. One common weakness is the reliance on imported raw materials, particularly maize and soybean, which are staple ingredients in many feed formulations. Fluctuations in global commodity prices and exchange rates can significantly impact production costs, affecting the profitability of firms reliant on imported inputs.

Some firms may struggle with limited financial resources or access to affordable credit. This hinders their ability to invest in research and development, expand their operations, or upgrade their production facilities. Limited financial resources may also constrain firms from effectively competing with larger, more established players in the market, thereby limiting their growth potential.

Regulatory compliance and quality control issues pose challenges for some animal feeds manufacturing firms. Ensuring compliance with regulatory standards and maintaining consistent product quality requires significant investments in testing, monitoring, and staff training. Firms that fail to meet regulatory requirements risk reputational damage and legal repercussions, which can erode customer trust and market share.

Despite the challenges, animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya have several opportunities for growth and expansion. One significant opportunity lies in the increasing demand for high-quality animal feeds driven by the region's growing population and expanding livestock farming activities. Firms that can capitalize on this demand by offering innovative products tailored to the specific needs of different livestock species stand to gain a competitive advantage.

Government initiatives aimed at promoting agriculture, agribusiness, and value addition present opportunities for collaboration and investment. Firms that partner with government agencies, research institutions, and other stakeholders can access funding, technical support, and market linkages, thereby facilitating their growth and market penetration. Additionally, the adoption of sustainable practices and certifications can open up new market segments, particularly among environmentally conscious consumers and export markets.

Despite the opportunities, animal feeds manufacturing firms in the region also face several threats that could impact their viability and competitiveness. One of the primary threats is the volatility of raw material prices, particularly maize and soybean. Fluctuations in raw material prices can significantly affect production costs and profit margins, posing challenges for firms operating on thin margins.

Competition from both domestic and international players presents a threat to market share and profitability. Larger multinational corporations with greater financial resources and economies of scale may undercut prices or offer incentives to gain market dominance, squeezing out smaller, local firms. Additionally, the proliferation of counterfeit products in the market undermines consumer confidence and poses health risks to livestock, eroding trust in legitimate brands and impacting sales.

Animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya operate in a dynamic and challenging environment characterized by strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. While facing challenges such as reliance on imported raw materials, regulatory compliance issues, and competition, these firms also have opportunities to capitalize on growing demand, government support, and market expansion. By leveraging their strengths, addressing weaknesses, and proactively

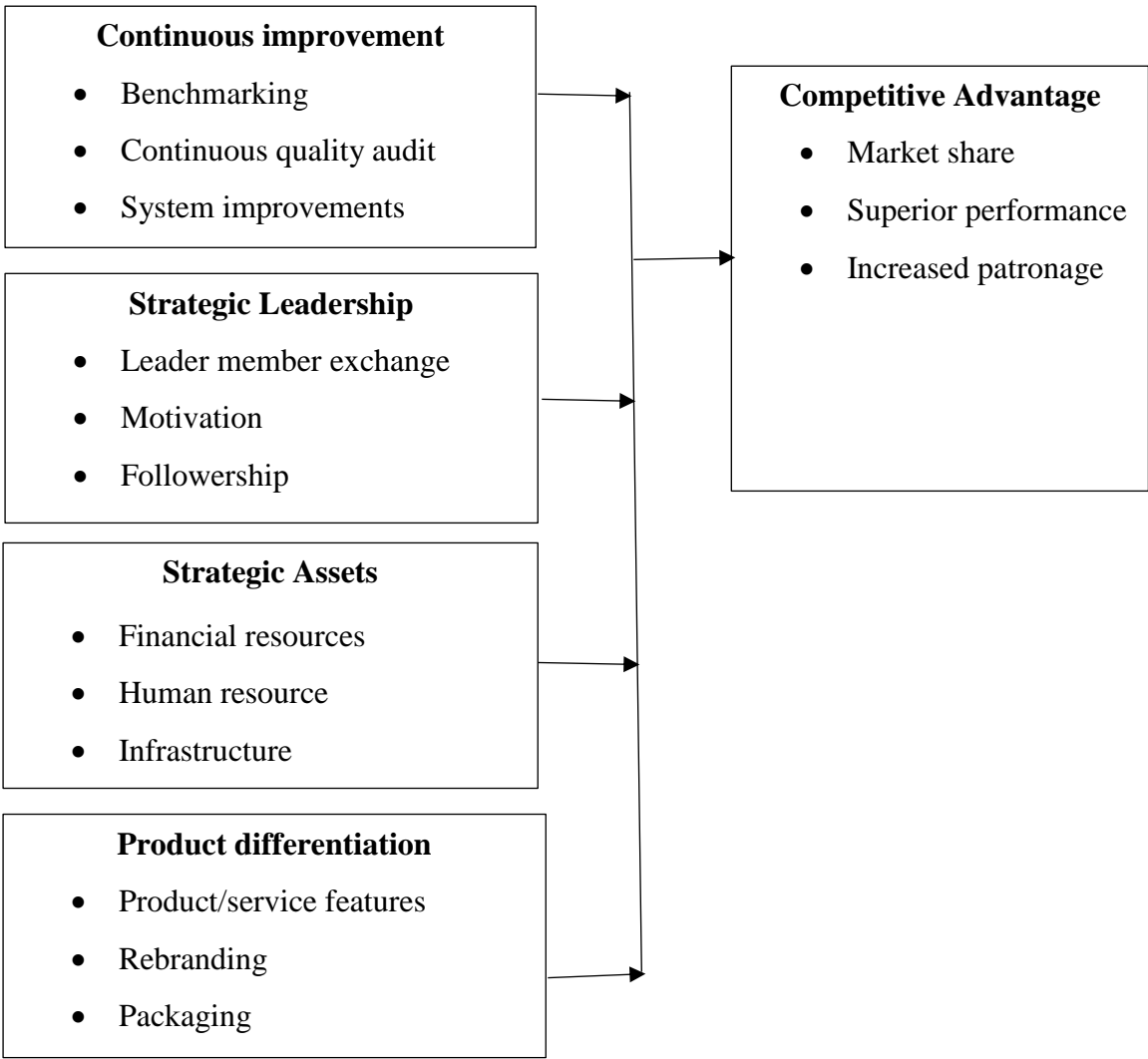
responding to threats, these firms can position themselves for sustainable growth and success in the long term.

### **2.13 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual structure is like a blueprint; it shows the hypothesized relationships between predictor variables and outcome variables, as highlighted by Varpio et al., (2020). In Figure 1, the framework suggests that the practice of strategic positioning significantly influences a firm's competitive advantage. This was visualized through a diagram that maps out the interactions between variables, showcasing how the independent variables affect outcome variable. Independent variable is strategic positioning, which includes things like product differentiation, strategic leadership, and continuous growth. The outcome variable, competitive advantage, was measured by indicators like market share growth, enhanced performance, and increased customer loyalty. This structure provides a clear depiction of the expected dynamics between the strategic initiatives undertaken by a firm and its success in achieving a competitive edge in the market.

**Independent Variables**

**Dependent Variables**



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source: Researcher (2024)

**2.14 Summary of Literature Review and Research Gaps**

The ongoing sector will present the brief of the various previous studies reviewed and the research gaps identified therein.

**Table 1: Summary of Literature Review**

| Author(s) | Purpose | Results | Recommendations | Research Gap(s) | Addressing gaps |
|-----------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|-----------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|

|                     |   |   |   |  |   |
|---------------------|---|---|---|--|---|
| Al-Mahdi (2021)     | The impact of strategic leadership on private colleges' ability to compete in the Iraqi environment | According to the research, strategic leadership competencies had a major beneficial influence on long-term competitive advantage.       | To increase productivity and expand more quickly, businesses should make sure that their product lines were expanded, replaced, improved, repositioned, and introduced with new products. | The study however only focused on strategic leadership which was only one indicator of strategic positioning   | This study will adopt four strategic positioning indicators   |
| Terziovs k i (2021) | Kenyan commercial banks' sustained competitive advantage and strategic leadership.                  | According to the report, strategic leadership was crucial to Kenyan commercial banks' ability to maintain a competitive edge over time. | Small firms should mirror large firms with respect to formal strategy and structure as innovation culture and strategy were closely aligned throughout the innovation process             | Only one indicator of strategic positioning i.e., strategic leadership was adopted. The study also focused on the financial sector (commercial banks). | This study adopted strategic leadership, continuous improvement, strategic assets and product differentiation |

|               |  |  |   |   |   |
|---------------|--|--|---|---|---|
| Njenga (2017) | Systems of continuous development and competitive positioning in Kenya's real estate agency market | The study's findings indicate that competitive positioning and continuous improvement systems had a strong positive link.          | Real estate firms should focus on should combine organizational learning and operational improvements through strategic organizational learning to maintain the fit between improvement efforts and goals | The study failed to incorporate other strategic positioning indicators. The study also emphasized the real estate industry.   | This study adopted strategic leadership, continuous improvement, strategic assets and product differentiation |
| Kahiga (2017) | Strategic leadership techniques' impact on Kenya's national bank's competitive advantage.          | The study found that the strategic leadership practices strengthened the unity of employees in walking towards the same direction. | Commercial banks should make consideration to pool more funds to invest in advanced technologies and research and development in order to maintain competitiveness and overall bank performance           | Competitive advantage was only assessed through market share indicator. A univariate analysis on the influence of strategic leadership was done and not multivariate analysis of various strategic positioning indicators | This study used market share, superior performance and increased patronage                                    |

|                      |  |   |   |   |  |
|----------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| Singh & Singh (2015) | The influence of cutting-edge management techniques and continuous enhancement on the performance of SMEs  | According to the report, innovation management strategy and system as well as continual improvement were important indicators of SME success. | To boost their performance, SMEs should concentrate on innovative management strategies and ongoing improvement.      | This study focused only on continuous improvement hence there was conceptual gaps since strategic positioning involves other factors besides continuous improvement Firm performance and not competitive advantage was the dependent variable | This study will combine four strategic positioning indicators to assess their influence on competitive advantage |
| King'oo (2015)       | The goal of the research was to investigate what makes a strategic asset in project management and the strategies businesses use to create and maintain an edge. | Research indicates that a company's strategy and competitive edge are closely tied to its strategic assets.                                   | Firms should be guided by asset management strategies in project management as it is critical to strategic directions | The study did not include other factors that companies use to develop and sustain competitive advantage besides strategic assets  | This study will combine four strategic positioning indicators to assess their influence on competitive advantage |

|                              |   |   |  |  |  |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Kyengo and Kilika (2017)     | Competitive Capabilities, Strategic Assets, and Firm Performance in Kenya   | The study concluded that strategic assets were significant to competitive capabilities and firm performance   | Based on the importance of capabilities, a firm should leverage on its ability to apply its capabilities to perform important activities within the firm to enhance competitive advantage. | This study moderated the relationship between strategic assets and firm performance using competitive capabilities, therefore there were methodological gaps                                       | This study will only use competitive advantage as dependent variable and not a moderator   |
| Abubakar and Mohammed (2019) | In Nigeria, product differentiation was a method for gaining a competitive edge and achieving optimum organizational performance. | The study established that however little the significance product differentiation holds in relation with organizational performance, there was a positive relationship between the variables | To remain viable, firms should prioritize a strategy of product differentiation which was a more viable option than strategies based on efficiency and price                               | The study used competitive advantage as the dependent variables. The study also failed to consider other key variables of strategic positioning such as strategic assets and strategic leadership. | This study will use competitive advantage as the dependent variable. This study also will combine four strategic positioning indicators to assess their influence on competitive advantage |

|                |  |   |  |  |  |
|----------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| King'oo (2015) | The impact of differentiation strategies on Kenyan tea export companies' market shares | The outcome of results indicated that the effect of differentiation strategies on market share of the firms was insignificant | The government should develop policies and strategies that support the application of differentiation strategies | Only one indicator of competitive advantage (market share) was adopted. The study also failed to incorporate other strategic positioning practices besides product differentiation | This study will incorporate other strategic positioning practices besides product differentiation                |
| Kasyoka (2011) | How Safaricom Limited gains a competitive edge via strategic positioning               | The study found out that cutting-edge technology helped Safaricom Limited to achieve a competitive advantage                  | The government should formulate policies to regulate cost differentiation in the mobile telephony industry       | The study adopted cutting edge technology, Based-View and generic strategies as the strategic positioning practices influencing competitive advantage                              | This study will adopt strategic leadership, continuous improvement, strategic assets and product differentiation |

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section outlines the methods and techniques employed in conducting the study. It covers various aspects such as the research design, target population, data collection instruments, validity and reliability of these instruments, the pilot study, data collection methods, data analysis and presentation, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This research employed an explanatory research design, a method outlined by Haydam and Steenkamp (2020) that focused on uncovering information about who, what, where, when, and how much. The choice of the design was informed by the primary objective of establishing a meaningful relationship and elucidating how various factors supported the subjects under investigation. This approach was deemed appropriate for exploring the influence of strategic locating on the competitive benefit of animal feed manufacturing organizations in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. Employing this design will enable the researcher to acquire in-depth knowledge about how strategic positioning affects the performance of these firms. It will provide a thorough comprehension of the variables central to the research problem, facilitating a nuanced analysis of the strategic maneuvers that contribute to a firm's competitive edge in the marketplace.

#### **3.3 Location of the Study**

The examination seeks to gather information from regions where small-scale dairy farming was predominant. To achieve this, the investigator will consider counties in the central Kenya comprising of Kiambu, Nyeri Kirinyaga and Murang'a county while upper Eastern will comprise of Embu, Tharaka Nithi and Meru County.

### 3.4 Target Population

The target audience for the research consists of the businesses from which data will be collected (Rahi, 2017). The specific group under investigation will encompass animal feed manufacturing firms located in Central Kenya (Kiambu, Murang'a, Kirinyaga, and Nyeri) and Upper Eastern Kenya (Embu, Tharaka Nithi, and Meru), according to the AKEFEMA., these regions will collectively house a total of 96 animal feed manufacturing firms. This research will centre on these 96 firms, detailed in Table 2, focusing on two key individuals from each firm: the branch managers and the operations manager or their equivalents.

**Table 2: Animal Feed Manufacturing Firms per County**

| Targeted Counties    | Number of firms | Number of Respondents<br>Per Firm (2) | Targeted<br>population |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Kiambu County        | 26              | 26 * 2 (respondents)                  | 52                     |
| Murang'a County      | 19              | 19* 2 (respondents)                   | 38                     |
| Nyeri County         | 16              | 16 * 2 (respondents)                  | 32                     |
| Kirinyaga County     | 15              | 15 * 2 (respondents)                  | 30                     |
| Meru County          | 9               | 9 * 2 (respondents)                   | 18                     |
| Embu County          | 7               | 7 * 2 (respondents)                   | 14                     |
| Tharaka Nithi county | 4               | 4 * 2 (respondents)                   | 8                      |
| Total                | 96              |                                       | 192                    |

**Source: Association of Kenya Feed Manufacturers (AKEFEMA, 2022)**

### 3.5 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Whole residents will be counted in a census method that was picked for this study. Based on the desired level of precision. The accuracy of the results hinges on the human factor, with optimal outcomes achieved through impartiality and the absence of bias.

Conversely, the presence of bias or partiality may result in distorted findings (Patel & Patel, 2019). The target group was thought to be manageable, which led to this choice of approach, Census methods involve gathering information from the entire population, providing a complete and inclusive representation of the target group. By including every segment of the population, a more comprehensive and precise representation of the general characteristics is achieved. Therefore, the study included a total of 192 respondents as the sample size.

### **3.6 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

This pertains to the methods chosen for gathering information and the process of creating these methods. Questionnaires were employed as the primary data collection instruments for gathering information from the chosen participants. We decided to use this tool because it perfectly met our data needs, we were short on time, and it aligned perfectly with our study goals.

#### **3.6.1 Questionnaires**

The study will gather original data using questionnaires that participants will complete themselves. These questionnaires, designed with a structured format, were pivotal in capturing information on how strategic positioning influences the competitive advantage of animal feed enterprises in Central and Upper Eastern Kenya. To ensure comprehensive data collection, the questionnaires will include both open-ended questions, for gathering nuanced qualitative insights, and closed-ended questions, suitable for straightforward quantitative analysis. The questionnaire was split into two sections. Section A will collect background information from the respondents, while Section B will include statements pertaining to strategic positioning and competitive advantage. These statements will reflect the study's key areas of focus, such as continuous improvement, strategic leadership, strategic assets, product differentiation,

and competitive advantage. In order to streamline the process of gathering data, a convenient "drop and pick up later" approach was adopted for distributing and collecting questionnaires.

### **3.7 Reliability of the Research Instruments**

The Cronbach alpha was used to evaluate the credibility of the research instruments. coefficient, as recommended by Langsford et al. (2018). Reliability, as noted by Langsford et al., refers to the consistency of measurements and is determined by the instrument's ability to produce stable scores across multiple administrations. Additionally, the test-retest method was employed to further evaluate reliability. Before the main research, a preliminary study was carried out in five animal feed companies located in Nyandarua County. These organizations were not part of the primary investigation. The pilot study sought to evaluate the clarity and suitability of the questions, confirm the relevance of the gathered information, assess the comprehensibility of the language utilized, and gauge the content credibility of the instruments through feedback received. This preparatory phase was crucial for refining the questionnaire and improving its effectiveness for the primary investigation.

### **3.8 Validity of the Research Instruments**

Sürücü and Maslakci (2020) argue that legitimacy refers to how well an instrument accurately measures the intended construct within the particular context of its use. To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaires and interviews will undergo a thorough review and consultation process with a university supervisor. Factor analysis was employed to assess the instruments' validity, and modifications were made to enhance their content and overall impression based on the comment offered by the supervisor. Questionnaire was meticulously structured to ensure its alignment with each research question, thus ensuring comprehensive coverage.

The questionnaire will be evaluated by independent experts, along with a statistician, to ensure its face and content validity, as well as conceptual clarity and investigative bias. It was crucial to highlight that, in utilizing the information obtained through the questionnaire, no cumulative scores were employed for interpretation purposes; instead, individual item responses were considered. According to Hajjar (2018), a pre-test was conducted to evaluate the instrument's effectiveness in collecting the desired information as intended by the researcher.

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher will initially secure a letter of introduction from the postgraduate directorate at Mount Kenya University to facilitate acquiring a research permit from the NACOSTI. Following this, permission to conduct the research will be sought from the administration of an animal feeds company. Upon obtaining consent, the researcher will schedule visits to respondents in Central Kenya (Kiambu, Murang'a, Kirinyaga, and Nyeri) and Upper Eastern (Embu, Tharaka Nithi, and Meru) for orientation and confirmation of data collection dates. Once participation is confirmed, specific dates will be set, and appointments will be made with both organizational authorities and study participants. Participants will be provided with sufficient time to respond to the questionnaire items. Once they have completed the questionnaires, they will be collected for further data analysis.

### **3.10 Data Analysis and Presentation**

We will utilize both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to analyze the data that has been collected. After the data has been collected, a thorough review of the questionnaires will be conducted to guarantee their accuracy, consistency, and completeness. Before the final analysis, a thorough cleaning process was conducted to eliminate any discrepancies. Subsequently, the data was categorized based on

similarities and then tabulated. To facilitate statistical analysis, the responses were coded into numerical form.

The study employed a range of presentation formats, including tables, pie charts, and percentages, to effectively condense and convey the participants' responses. The impact of independent variables on the dependent variable was determined using multiple regression analysis in the context of inferential statistics. This analytical technique evaluated the relative influence of each independent variable by examining its covariance with the dependent variable, which proved useful for predictive purposes. Although traditionally applied to interval variables, regression analysis was also used by some social scientists with ordinal data. It's important to note that, like correlation, regression analysis assumes a linear relationship between variables.

### **3.11 Assumption of the Regression**

In regression analysis, it is important to consider that variables should ideally have a normal distribution. Additionally, accurately estimating the relationship between dependent and independent variables depends on the linearity of these relationships. The assessment of linearity was conducted by utilizing the Pearson correlation. Verification of multicollinearity was conducted using the VIF, while evaluation of normality was performed by assessing skewness. It has been suggested that errors terms at each level of the model followed a normal distribution, based on the normality assumption.

In its most basic form, multiple regression analysis entailed identifying the optimal linear relationship to elucidate how variations in the outcome variable (Y) depended on variations in the predictor variables (X). Following the estimation of this relationship, the equation expended was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- $X$  represented the independent variables (specifically,  $X_1$  for continuous improvement,  $X_2$  for strategic leadership, for strategic assets and  $X_4$  for product differentiation).
- $Y$  was the dependent variable (competitive advantage).
- $\beta$  denoted the coefficients of the independent variables.
- $\varepsilon$  signified the error margin.

The data analysis was performed using the SPSS, a software commonly used for statistical analysis. Responses from questionnaires and interview guides were encoded into the software for analysis. The findings were then presented using tables for clear visualization and interpretation.

### **3.12 Ethical Consideration**

The research placed great emphasis on ethical considerations, particularly in ensuring confidentiality. Measures were taken to protect the identity of respondents, maintaining the integrity of the data for academic purposes only, and ensuring honesty by accurately representing the collected information. Respect for the rights of participants was paramount throughout the data collection process, and the researcher demonstrated tolerance and patience in their interactions. An introductory letter accompanying the questionnaire reiterated the study's objectives and assured participants of the researcher's commitment to preserving their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This study sought to determine how strategic positioning affects the competitive advantage of the animal feeds manufacturing companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. It is, however, important to indicate that the findings of this research may not be necessarily generalizable or representative of every other company. It is, therefore, recommended that similar studies be conducted in other counties across the country and a comparison and generalization of results be made. More so is the fact that further studies are recommended to expound on other factors which have an effect on the competitive advantage in companies manufacturing animal feeds. This could be achieved by including an intervening variable which could help the study in gaining an in-depth understanding of the subject matter.

#### 4.2 Response Rate

The research aimed to gather responses from 192 participants through distributed questionnaires. Ultimately, the researcher successfully collected 153 completed inquiry form.

**Table 4: Response Rate**

|       | Response          | Frequency  | Percent      |
|-------|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| Valid | Response Rate     | 153        | 79.7         |
|       | Non-Response Rate | 39         | 20.3         |
|       | <b>Total</b>      | <b>192</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Source: Researcher (2024)**

A good response rate of 79.7% was achieved, therefore implying that 20.3% of the intended sample did not participate. Mugenda and Mugenda (2009). They opine that a response rate of 50% is good for analysis, 60% is good, whereas anything above 70

percent great. The response rate was achieved and is good for conclusions and representative of the population. The probable reason a high response rate was achieved is that the researcher administered the questionnaires personally and so anytime some areas were unclear to the participants, they were clarified to ensure cooperation.

### 4.3 Reliability Test

Blumberg (2011) says the ultimate objective of reliability is to reduce errors and biases in the data-gathering instruments. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, I administered it to 20 respondents, accounting for 10% of the sample population of my study, selected from the five companies dealing with animal feed in Nyandarua County. Significantly, the respondents in the experimental test were different from those in this main research, which meets the argument by Saunders and Lewis (2012) that it is not necessary to statistically sample the respondents to pilot test. The findings of the pilot study are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Reliability Test**

|       |                          | Cronbach Alpha | Number of Items |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Valid | Continuous Improvement   | 0.837          | 4               |
|       | Strategic Leadership     | 0.879          | 4               |
|       | Strategic Assets         | 0.736          | 4               |
|       | Product Differentiation  | 0.848          | 4               |
|       | Competitive Advantage    | 0.764          | 5               |
|       | <b>Overall Statistic</b> | <b>0.813</b>   |                 |

Source: Researcher (2024)

An alpha coefficient greater than 0.7 is acceptable for the assessment of reliability (Garson, 2012). As shown in Table 5, it was established that the Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs was 0.813, which depicted that each variable was above the recommended threshold of 0.7. Consequently, this confirmed that the research instrument was reliable.

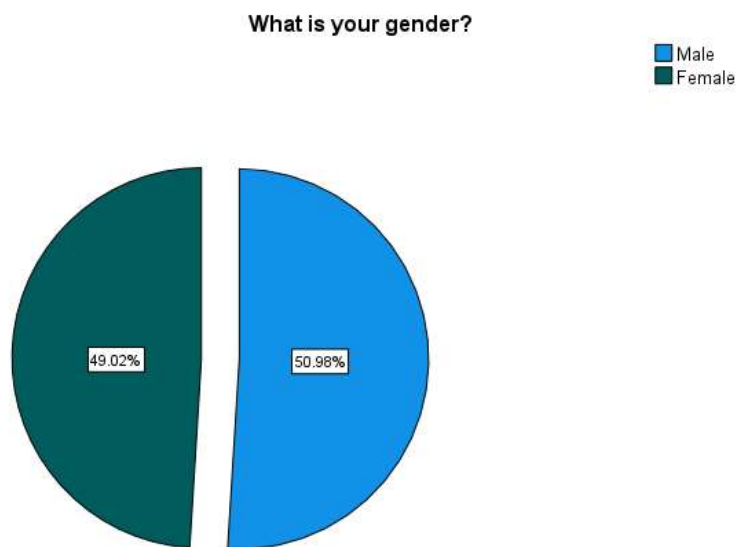
#### 4.4 Demographic analysis

The following subsection detailed participant selection information.

##### 4.4.1 Gender of the Respondents

In this section, we will discuss the analysis of the general information of the respondents, including their gender, age, level of management, and work experience.

The results are as shown in Figure 2.



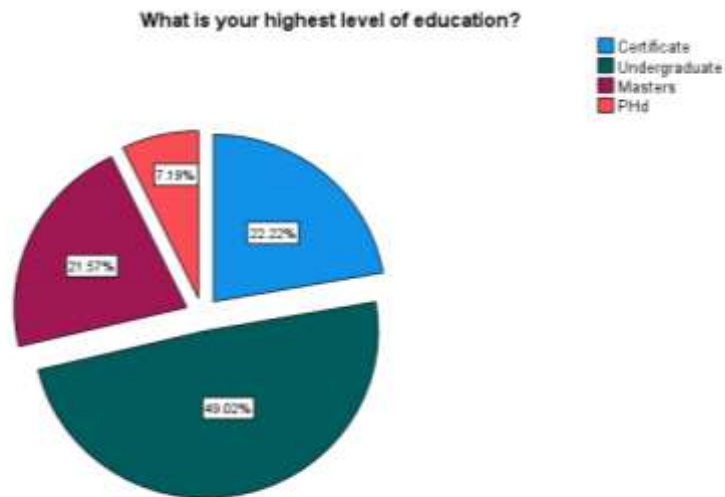
**Figure 2: Gender of the Respondents**

Source: Researcher (2024)

It was rightly captured by the survey that one of the major factors forming part of the diversity in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya animal-producing firms is gender. The outcomes revealed that the greater part, comprising 50.98% of the total participants, were male, whereas 49.02% were female.

#### 4.4.2 Highest Level of Education

Further to this, Figure 3 identifies the highest level of education that has been analyzed thus far in this study.



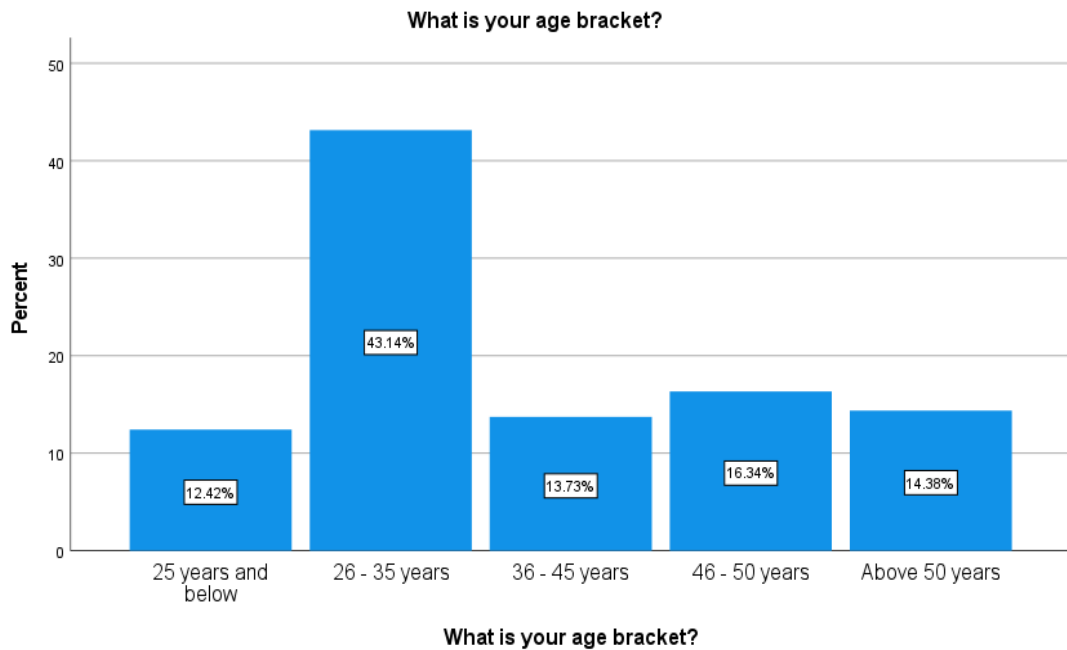
**Figure 3: Highest Level of Education**

Source: Researcher (2024)

According to the highest level of education attained, the results among respondents were that 49.03% had an undergraduate degree, and 21.57% had a master's degree. Additionally, 7.19% of respondents reported holding a PhD as their highest academic qualification. A notable proportion (22.22%) indicated possessing certificate-level qualifications in various fields. These findings suggest that the sector demands a high level of education among its workforce, reflecting the professional and competitive nature of the industry.

#### 4.4.3 Age of the Respondents

Figure 4 below presents the findings with respect to age, which also was analysed as a characteristic of the participants.



**Figure 4: Age of the Respondents**

Source: Researcher (2024)

From Figure 4, it can be demonstrated that the age group of 26-35 years had the highest percentage of respondents, at 43.14%. The other major group was the age bracket of 40-50 years old, at 16.34%, then slightly above 50 years, at 14.38%. 13.73% of the respondents were in the age group of 36-45 years, then those respondents aged 25 years and below, at 12.42%. From the results above, it can be concluded that the category of the population which is highly productive of respondents was within the age brackets of 26-45 years.

#### 4.5 Descriptive Analysis

This section presents the descriptive analysis of the variables used in the study. Key variables in the descriptive analysis include continuous improvement, strategic orientation, strategic resources, and product differentiation—all of which are central to the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing companies in the Central and

Upper Eastern regions. To summarize the responses across more than two indicators in each variable, mean and standard deviation were used.

#### 4.5.1 Continuous Improvement and Competitive Advantage.

The study sought to establish how continuous improvement impacted the competitive advantage of the animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. The responses were used to compute the averages and the standard deviations for each of the statements. The outcome is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Continuous improvement and competitive advantage**

| Statement   | N   | Min | Max | Mean        | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-------------|----------------|
| We do point of reference of services with other firms       | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.82        | 1.005          |
| There is continuous quality audit                           | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.89        | 0.964          |
| Systems improvement enhances competitive advantage          | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.80        | 1.019          |
| Competitive advantage is enhanced by continuous improvement | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.94        | 1.006          |
| Valid N (listwise)  | 153 |     |     |             |                |
| <b>Overall statistic</b>                                    |     |     |     | <b>3.81</b> | <b>0.999</b>   |

Source Researcher (2024)

From Table 6 above, the participants agreed that their firms are actively involved in benchmarking activities conducted with other firms signaled by a mean score of 3.82 with a standard deviation of 1.005. Besides, the participants agreed, in a similar way, that quality audits are continuously conducted, signaled by a mean score of 3.89 with a standard deviation of 0.964, and lastly, that systems improvement yields a competitive advantage since it had a mean score of 3.80 with a standard deviation of 1.019. In a similar fashion, they agreed that competitive advantage is enhanced by continuous improvement initiatives; here, the mean was 3.94 with a standard deviation of 1.006. As seen in the last row above, the mean score averaged at 3.81, whilst the standard

deviation was 0.999. Initially, the respondents would agree on matters related to continuous improvement positively and further a competitive advantage within the animal feed manufacturing firms operating within the Upper Eastern and Central regions of Kenya.

The study results above resonate with the outcome of a survey conducted by Rupert in 2017 on the importance of continuous improvement regarding Operations Management. The results of Rupert indicated that continuous improvement is, in effect, all about being flexible to customer information all the time and being able to adapt to any new requirements at the same time as being proactive in finding and eliminating wastage and inefficiencies. Terziovski conducted a piece in 2010, and it also indicated that SME's management of success is positively influenced by the adoption of a strategy and system that has continuous improvement and innovation management at its heart.

#### **4.5.2 Strategic Leadership and Competitive Advantage.**

In doing this stage of the research, the respondents were to indicate their agreement from the extent the strategic leadership within their organization describes the true scenario. The answers were used to establish the means and the standard deviations for the respective statements, having their respective answers. The findings are displayed in the Table 7.

**Table 7: Strategic Leadership and Competitive Advantage**

| Statement  | N   | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|-----|-----|-----|------|----------------|
| The company has leader-member exchange.                      | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.90 | 0.961          |
| Employee motivation increases the company's competitive edge | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.59 | 1.001          |
| The company has a positive culture of followership           | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.81 | 0.912          |

|   |     |   |   |             |              |
|---|-----|---|---|-------------|--------------|
| Strategic leadership enhances the competitive advantage of the firm | 153 | 1 | 5 | 3.87        | 1.004        |
| Valid N (listwise)  | 153 |   |   |             |              |
| <b>Overall Statistic</b>  |     |   |   | <b>3.79</b> | <b>0.970</b> |

Source: Researcher (2024)

The participants indicated that leader-member exchange is present within the organization, with a mean score of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.961. Additionally, they agreed that enhancing worker motivation contributes to the firm's competitive advantage, reflected in a mean score of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 1.001. The mean score for followership was 3.81, with a standard deviation of 0.912. Participants also believed that strategic leadership enhances firm competitive advantage, as indicated by an average score of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 1.004. The mean score for the impact of strategic leadership on competitive advantage was 3.79, with a standard deviation of 0.970, demonstrating a significant influence.

These findings are consistent with previous research by Omar (2014), which found a strong positive correlation between strategic leadership capabilities and sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, Nyawira (2015) confirmed the essential role of strategic leadership in sustaining competitive advantage for commercial banks in Kenya over time.

#### **4.5.3 Strategic Assets and Competitive Advantage.**

The study then sought to determine the effect of strategic assets on the competitive advantage of animal feeds manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. The data collected was then used to find the mean and standard deviation each statement had based on the views of the respondents. These are summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8: Strategic Assets and Competitive Advantage.**

| statements | N | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------|---|-----|-----|------|----------------|
|------------|---|-----|-----|------|----------------|

|  |     |   |   |             |              |
|--|-----|---|---|-------------|--------------|
| Sufficient financial resources bolster the company's competitive edge                    | 153 | 1 | 5 | 3.73        | 0.833        |
| For the company to maintain its competitive edge, adequate human resources are essential | 153 | 1 | 5 | 3.96        | 1.003        |
| The firm has adequate infrastructure for smooth operations                               | 153 | 1 | 5 | 3.77        | 0.990        |
| The firm's infrastructure affects its competitive edge                                   | 153 | 1 | 5 | 3.87        | 0.950        |
| Valid N (listwise)   | 153 |   |   |             |              |
| <b>Overall statistic</b>   |     |   |   | <b>3.83</b> | <b>0.944</b> |

Source: Researcher (2024)

The data majorly agreed that having enough financial resources plays a part in giving the firm a competitive advantage, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.73, with a standard deviation of 0.833. Similarly, they agreed that the firm needs to have sufficient human resources to sustain a competitive advantage, with a mean score of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 1.003. They also agreed that the firm has enough infrastructure in place to ensure proper operations, with a mean score of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.990. The mean score was 3.87, with a standard deviation of 0.950, when participants assessed whether the firm's infrastructure impacts competitive advantage. The section's mean score was 3.83, with a standard deviation of 0.944, indicating that strategic assets significantly impact the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing firms in the Upper Eastern and Central regions of Kenya.

This finding aligns with a study by Kam (2009), which emphasized the importance of strategic assets in shaping a firm's strategy and competitive advantage. Kam's research highlighted that strategic assets encompass a firm's diverse resource combinations that possess value, rarity, uniqueness, and alignment with organizational objectives.

#### 4.5.4 Product Differentiation and Competitive Advantage.

The study aimed to assess the impact of product differentiation on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing companies in the Upper Eastern and Central regions of Kenya. Participants evaluated the extent to which various statements related to product differentiation applied to their organization, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. On this scale, a rating of 5 indicates strong agreement, 4 indicates agreement, 3 indicates neutrality, 2 indicates disagreement, and 1 indicates strong disagreement. The means and standard deviations for each statement were calculated based on the participants' responses. The results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9: Product Differentiation and Competitive Advantage**

| Statements  | N   | Min | Max | Mean        | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-------------|----------------|
| We offer a unique range of services that set us apart from our competitors. | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.90        | 0.934          |
| We do rebrand from time to time   | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.79        | 1.034          |
| Our services are efficient and effective                                    | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.80        | 0.895          |
| Product differentiation provides firms with competitive advantage           | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.84        | 0.922          |
| Valid N (listwise)  | 153 |     |     |             |                |
| <b>Overall statistic</b>  |     |     |     | <b>3.83</b> | <b>0.946</b>   |

Source: Researcher (2024)

Based on the research findings, participants expressed a strong belief in the exceptional quality of the company's services when compared to its competitors. This was evident from the average score of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.934. They were also in favor of periodic rebranding, with an average score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.034. In addition, the respondents gave high ratings to the efficiency and effectiveness of the services, with an average score of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 0.895. In

addition, it was found that product differentiation plays a significant role in enhancing the company's competitive advantage, as indicated by a mean score of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 0.922. The average score for this section was 3.83, with a standard deviation of 0.946. This indicates that product differentiation plays a significant role in determining the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturers in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. According to a study conducted by King'oo (2015), it was discovered that differentiation strategies have a notable impact on a company's market shares.

#### 4.5.5 Competitive Advantage

The study sought to evaluate how respondents perceive the distinct competitive advantages of animal feed manufacturing companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. Participants were requested to provide ratings on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, indicating their level of agreement with different statements concerning competitive advantage within their organization. The scale was defined as follows: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. The findings are conveniently presented in Table 10.

**Table 10: Competitive Advantage**

| Statements  | N   | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|-----|-----|------|----------------|
| Our company dominates a significant portion of the market | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.86 | 1.008          |
| When compared to rivals the company performs better       | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.86 | 0.967          |
| We have guidelines for achieving competitive tactics      | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.84 | 0.848          |
| Our company uses a variety of competitive tactics         | 153 | 1   | 5   | 3.57 | 0.946          |

|  |     |   |   |             |              |
|--|-----|---|---|-------------|--------------|
| Strategic positioning creates and maintains a competitive edge | 153 | 1 | 5 | 3.78        | 1.001        |
| Valid N (listwise)   | 153 |   |   |             |              |
| <b>Overall statistic</b>                                       |     |   |   | <b>3.78</b> | <b>0.954</b> |

Source: Researcher (2024)

According to the results, participants unanimously acknowledged that their organization has a substantial presence in the market, scoring an average of 3.86 with a standard deviation of 1.008. According to their findings, the company surpasses its competitors with an impressive mean score of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 0.967. In addition, the respondents pointed out that the company has implemented guidelines to gain a competitive edge, with an average score of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 0.848. The company's use of different competitive strategies was recognized, with an average score of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 0.946.

When it comes to achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage through tactical positioning, the respondents were in agreement, with an average score of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.001. The data in this section shows an average of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 0.954. The findings align with the study conducted by Rupert (2017), highlighting the importance of strategic positioning in making management decisions related to market placement, brand and corporate image, and targeting specific customer segments to maximize benefits. In order to effectively tackle the challenges posed by today's competitive landscape, organizations need to seamlessly incorporate improved performance and quality strategies into all aspects of their operations. This will help them stay ahead of the competition and maintain a strong position in the market.

## 4.6 Inferential Analysis Results

Regression and correlation were the primary inferential techniques used to analyze the effects of strategic positioning on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturers in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. The techniques used in this study examined the connection between the independent and dependent variables by carefully analyzing the significance of the coefficients, with a confidence level of 95%.

### 4.6.1: Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation method was used to calculate coefficients that assess the strength and direction of relationships between the variables. On a scale of +1 to -1, a coefficient of zero indicates that there is no correlation between the variables. A Pearson coefficient greater than 0.5 is generally considered to be strong. The correlation findings can be found in Table 11.

**Table 11: Correlation matrix**

|                         |                     | Continuous improvement | Strategic leadership | Strategic assets | Product differentiation | Competitive advantage |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Continuous improvement  | Pearson Correlation | 1                      |                      |                  |                         |                       |
|                         | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                        |                      |                  |                         |                       |
|                         | N                   | 153                    |                      |                  |                         |                       |
| Strategic leadership    | Pearson Correlation | 0.598*                 | 1                    |                  |                         |                       |
|                         | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.000                  |                      |                  |                         |                       |
|                         | N                   | 153                    | 153                  |                  |                         |                       |
| Strategic assets        | Pearson Correlation | 0.466*                 | 0.384*               | 1                |                         |                       |
|                         | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.007                  | 0.003                |                  |                         |                       |
|                         | N                   | 153                    | 153                  | 153              |                         |                       |
| Product differentiation | Pearson Correlation | 0.527*                 | 0.459*               | 0.595*           | 1                       |                       |
|                         | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.004                  | 0.000                | 0.020            |                         |                       |
|                         | N                   | 153                    | 153                  | 153              | 153                     |                       |

|                       |                     |  |        |        |        |        |     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----|
| Competitive advantage | Pearson Correlation |  | 0.761* | 0.736* | 0.654* | 0.851* | 1   |
|                       | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | 0.015  | 0.002  | 0.014  | 0.005  |     |
|                       | N                   |  | 153    | 153    | 153    | 153    | 153 |

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

Source: Researcher (2024)

The study examined how ongoing improvement, managerial oversight of strategic assets, and product differentiation impact the competitiveness of animal feed manufacturing companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. We conducted Pearson correlation analyses to investigate the connections between these variables. The findings, as shown in Table 11, uncovered noteworthy positive connections between every factor and competitive advantage.

The analysis revealed a significant positive connection with competitive advantage, as indicated by the correlation coefficient ( $r(153) = 0.761$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding highlights the importance of continuous improvement. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Njenga (2017) on continuous improvement systems within the Kenyan real estate agency sector.

In the same vein, it is worth noting that strategic leadership demonstrated a strong positive relationship with competitive advantage. This finding was supported by a coefficient of ( $r(153) = 0.736$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding aligns with Omar's (2014) research, which highlighted the importance of strategic management in bolstering long-term competitive advantage.

The study found that strategic assets have a strong positive correlation with competitive advantage ( $r(153) = 0.654$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding supports the research conducted by Kam (2009) on the significance of strategic assets in influencing a company's strategy and competitive advantage.

As well, there was a significant and positive relationship between product differentiation and competitive advantage ( $r(153) = 0.851; p < 0.05$ ). The findings align with a study conducted by Dirisu, Oluwole, and Ibidunni (2013) on product differentiation in Nigeria, emphasizing its influence on organizational performance.

The findings highlight the importance of constantly improving, having effective leadership, valuable assets, and unique products to gain a competitive edge for animal feed manufacturing companies in specific regions of Kenya.

#### 4.6.2 Regression Analysis

A thorough examination was carried out to establish a mathematical relationship between strategic positioning and gaining a competitive edge. These are the conclusions that have been given. The summary results offer a brief summary of the regression findings, as displayed in the model. The results can be found in Table 12.

**Table 12: Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .826 <sup>a</sup> | 0.683    | 0.675             | 0.357                      |

a. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic positioning variables in predicting competitive advantage, the study employed the coefficient of determination. Based on the analysis, it was found that strategic positioning played a significant role in determining competitive advantage. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.675 further supports this finding. This indicates that the model functions as a reliable predictor.

In addition, a statistical analysis known as ANOVA was performed to investigate the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

**Table 13: ANOVA**

| Model        | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 4.099          | 4   | 1.025       | 24.556 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual     | 272.620        | 149 | 1.842       |        |                   |
| Total        | 276.719        | 153 |             |        |                   |

- a. Dependent Variable: competitive advantage
- b. The table above displays a significance level of .000, indicating that the model effectively predicts the connection between strategic positioning and competitive advantage.

The findings of the multiple regression study, as presented in Table 14, illustrate clear connections within strategic positioning variables and gaining a competitive edge. The research question was interpreted using the regression coefficients.

**Table 14: Regression analysis results**

| Model                   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients<br>Beta | t     | Sig.  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|
|                         | B                           | Std. Error |                                   |       |       |
| 1 (Constant)            | 3.276                       | 0.562      |                                   | 5.869 | 0.000 |
| Continuous Improvement  | 0.465                       | 0.081      | 0.100                             | 1.177 | 0.001 |
| Strategic Leadership    | 0.601                       | 0.086      | 0.015                             | 0.177 | 0.012 |
| Strategic Assets        | 0.573                       | 0.079      | 0.057                             | 0.690 | 0.000 |
| Product Differentiation | 0.509                       | 0.085      | 0.026                             | 0.309 | 0.008 |

a. Dependent Variable: competitive advantage

Source: Researcher (20240)

Enhancing your competitive advantage involves a combination of factors. These include continuous improvement, strategic leadership, strategic assets, and product differentiation. By focusing on these elements, you can elevate your position in the market and stand out from the competition.

According to the results in Table 14, when all other factors are kept at zero, the competitive advantage is found to be 3.276. In addition, the results show that continuous improvement has a significant impact, with a  $\beta_1$  value of 0.465 (p-value =

0.000, which is lower than  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The continuous improvement of animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya has a positive and significant impact on their competitive advantage. Hence, even a slight improvement in continuous enhancement would lead to a significant boost in the competitiveness of these firms.

The findings are consistent with Terziovski's (2010) study on the effects of implementing constant advancement and creativity management strategies on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Terziovski found that the implementation of continuous enhancement and creativity in management strategies has a strong correlation with the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). On the other hand, the results of a study conducted by Rupert in 2017 present a different perspective. According to his findings, continuous improvement does not have a significant impact on competitive advantage.

The beta coefficient for strategic leadership is 0.601, which demonstrates an important and favorable effect on competitive advantage with a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, a small rise in strategic leadership can result in a significant boost of 60.1% in competitive advantage for animal feed manufacturing companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.

The research conducted by Nyawira (2015) provides support for the correlation between strategic leadership and sustainable competitive advantage in commercial banks in Kenya. It has been observed that strategic leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining a competitive edge for commercial financial institutions in Kenya, as Nyawira has concluded. On the other hand, a study conducted by Kahiga (2017) yielded different findings, indicating that the widely used strategic leadership practices had little impact on the competitive advantage of the National Bank of Kenya.

The beta coefficient for strategic assets is 0.573, signifying a positive and significant impact on competitive advantage at a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, a one-unit improvement in strategic assets would result in a 57.3% increase in competitive advantage at these firms.

The research conducted by Kyengo and Kilika (2017) in Kenya highlights the significance of strategic assets in improving competitiveness and firm performance. Their findings underscore the importance of these assets in driving success. In a study conducted by Kam (2009), the focus was on managing projects as a strategic asset and its impact on a company's strategy and competitive advantage.

The impact of product differentiation on competitive advantage at animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya is found to be positive and significant, with a beta coefficient of 0.509 and a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, a slight improvement in product differentiation would result in a significant boost of 50.9% in competitive advantage for these companies.

The findings align with King'oo's (2015) research on the impact of differentiation tactics on the customer base share of tea exporting businesses in Kenya. It concluded that differentiation strategies significantly affect market share.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

It reflects a detailed summation of the major findings, inferences arising out of the findings, and recommendations made on the conclusions drawn. The findings are based on the research objectives.

#### 5.2 Summary of Findings

The study sought to establish the effect of strategic positioning on competitive advantage by firms manufacturing animal feed in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. The study set out to establish, through an empirical investigation, the effect that continuous improvement has on the competitive advantage of such firms. Descriptive findings were established, and the benchmarked companies, continuous quality auditing, and improved systems enabled the competitive advantage. The overall mean value score of 3.81 indicates more specifically that continuous improvement significantly enhances competitive advantage. Inferential analysis further established that there was a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.761$ ) between continuous improvement and competitive advantage. The regression analysis further confirmed that continuous improvement significantly influences competitive advantage ( $\beta_1 = 0.465$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) in animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.

The second objective of the study was to establish the effect of strategic leadership on competitive advantage in animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. Descriptive results revealed that leader-member exchange exists in the organization, worker motivation leads to an improved competitive advantage, a good spirit of followership in the firm, and strategic leadership leads to an enhancement of the competitive advantage of the firm, respectively, with an overall mean score of 3.79.

The correlation results indicated that there is a strong positive association of strategic leadership with competitive advantage in animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya ( $r = 0.736$ ). Regression results also establish that strategic leadership had a positive, significant influence on competitive advantage in these firms ( $\beta_1 = 0.601$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.012$ ).

The third objective was to analyze the influence of strategic assets on the competitive advantage of animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. From the descriptive findings, the availability of financial resources leads to competitive advantage. Similarly, the availability of a large human resource base is important in the competitive advantage in the firm. Equally, the firm has a sufficient infrastructure for smooth operations, and competitive advantage relies on the infrastructure of the firm, with a general mean of 3.83, meaning a significant influence of strategic assets on competitive advantage. From the results shown in Table 4, there is a positive and statistically significant influence between strategic assets and competitive advantage in animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya ( $r = 0.654$ ). Further, Table 5 confirmed that strategic assets are positively and significantly influenced by competitive advantage in the firm ( $\beta_1 = 0.573$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.008$ ).

The last goal sought to establish the effect of product differentiation on competitive advantage in animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. Descriptive findings showed that the firm's services are unique compared to competitors. The firm engages in periodic rebranding of its services. The firm's services are efficient and effective. Generally, product differentiation gives the firm a competitive advantage. The correlation coefficient  $r$  is  $= 0.851$ . Therefore, there is a strong positive and significant relationship between product differentiation and competitive advantage.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study concludes, based on the results, about the effect of some strategies on competitive advantage. The study infers that the implementation of continuous improvement practices significantly influences competitive advantage. The specific practices through which competitive advantage is likely to be boosted include benchmarking services with other firms, continuous quality audits, and improved systems. The implementation of strategic leadership positively and significantly influences competitive advantage. The study infers that if there be strong motivation and a high spirit of followership be engendered within the firm, then strategic leadership will be enhanced and competitive advantage within the firm improved.

Also conclusive in this research is that employing strategic assets has a positive and significant influence on competitive advantage. This would enhance competitive advantage in the company with adequate financial resources, adequate human resource, and satisfactory infrastructure for smooth operations.

There is adequate evidence from the analysis that adoption of product differentiation has a positive and significant contribution to competitive advantage in animal feed manufacturing firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. Particularly, the development of uniqueness in the services from the competitors, rebranding the services after specific intervals, and improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of services in the firms would boost significantly competitive advantage.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

From the objectives and findings of the foregoing study, the following recommendations are drawn:

1. In order to remain ahead in the service industry, one would recommend that the firm emphasize continuous improvement in both product and service innovation.

It means that ongoing improvements in existing products and service delivery have to occur to cater to constantly changing needs and tastes of consumers.

2. The management hierarchy for such animal feed manufacturing companies should therefore be enhanced with good care from strategic leadership at middle levels to the topmost levels of management. This will also help ensure that there is good alignment of people at all relevant levels, keeping in mind the roles they play in ensuring the organization protects and enhances the competitive advantage for the long run.
3. Another recommendation drawn from this study is that much investment in intangible assets is required by manufacturers in the animal feed sector because these are their assets likelier to offer them a long-lasting competitive advantage as opposed to tangible resources. The organization has to ensure that the organization does not restrict the utilization of these resources to certain business units of the organization but the same can be used throughout the organization whenever opportunities for greater gains can be realized.
4. There should be product differentiation, which is making the products developed or services different from the other competitors' own offerings. This calls for the consistent implementation of fresh and distinctive features or services that make the company unique from others in its market.

### **5.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

This study sought to determine how strategic positioning affects the competitive advantage of the animal feeds manufacturing companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya. It is, however, important to indicate that the findings of this research may not be necessarily generalizable or representative of every other company. It is, therefore,

recommended that similar studies be conducted in other counties across the country and a comparison and generalization of results be made. More so is the fact that further studies are recommended to expound on other factors which have an effect on the competitive advantage in companies manufacturing animal feeds. This could be achieved by including an intervening variable which could help the study in gaining an in-depth understanding of the subject matter.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Participant's Informed Concept

#### **EFFECT OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF ANIMAL FEEDS MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN UPPER EASTERN AND CENTRAL KENYA**

Dear Participant,

You were warmly invited to participate in a research study led by Peter Mwiki Kairira, who was pursuing a Master of Business Administration at Mount Kenya University. This invitation was extended to you so that you can make an informed decision about your participation after understanding the study's objectives, the methods that was employed, the potential risks and benefits involved, and the procedures that was followed.

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the influence of strategic positioning on the competitive advantage among animal feed manufacturing firms located in the Upper Eastern and Central regions of Kenya. This study seeks to understand how these firms leverage strategic positioning to enhance their market standing and performance.

Your decision to participate in this study was completely voluntary. You had the absolute right to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without facing any negative consequences or losing any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. It's important to note that participating in this research was not associated with significant risks. Nonetheless, the researcher was committed to minimizing any potential discomfort and ensuring the confidentiality of your responses.

While there may not be immediate direct benefits to you from participating in this research, your involvement will contribute valuable insights into the field of business administration, specifically in the area of strategic positioning within the animal feed

industry. The knowledge gained from this study could potentially benefit similar firms and the broader academic community by providing a deeper understanding of effective strategic practices.

If you choose to participate, you was asked to provide honest and precise responses to the questions in the questionnaire. The process was expected to take approximately 20 minutes of your time. Your responses will play a crucial role in the success of this research, and utmost confidentiality will be maintained to protect your identity and the information you provide.

Should you had any questions or require further clarification about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator, Peter Mwika Kairira, at 0710114141, or the academic supervisor, Dr. Robert Obuba, at 0729709826. Additionally, if you had concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, you were encouraged to contact the Chairman of the Ethical Review Committee at Mount Kenya University, P.O Box 342-01000, Thika.

Your assistance and contribution to this important research endeavor were greatly valued, and we thank you in advance for your consideration and potential participation.

### **CONSENT**

I had thoroughly reviewed the information presented and had the chance to inquire about any uncertainties. I acknowledge that my involvement was entirely voluntary, and I had the liberty to withdraw at any point, without providing a justification or incurring any expenses. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent document. I willingly consent to participate in this research.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix II: Questionnaire**

This survey was designed for the purpose of collecting vital data for the research project titled 'Evaluating the Impact of Strategic Positioning on the Competitive Edge of Animal Feed Production Companies in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya'. Your contribution by filling out this survey was crucial to the advancement of this research. We earnestly urge all participants to thoughtfully answer the survey questions. Rest assured, the information you supply will be exclusively used for scholarly purposes and maintained with the strictest confidentiality. Your input was greatly valued in this academic endeavor, and we guarantee that your responses will be safeguarded with the utmost care and privacy.

### **SECTION A: Demographic Information**

1. What was your gender?
  - a) Male
  - b) Female
  
2. What was your highest level of education?
  - a) Certificate/Diploma
  - b) Undergraduate
  - c) Masters
  - d) PHD
  
3. What was your age bracket?
  - a) 25 years and below
  - b) 26-35 years

- c) 36-45 years [ ]
- d) 46-50 years [ ]
- e) Above 50 years [ ]

**SECTION B: Objectives of the Study**

**Key: 5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Don’t Know, 2 – Disagree and 1 – Strongly Disagree**

**(1) Continuous Improvement**

1. Indicate the degree to which you agree on the statements regarding continuous improvement and competitive advantage

| Statement  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| We do benchmark of services with other firms                 |   |   |   |   |   |
| There was continuous quality audit                           |   |   |   |   |   |
| Systems improvement enhances competitive advantage           |   |   |   |   |   |
| Competitive advantage was enhanced by continuous improvement |   |   |   |   |   |

2. In your opinion, what else can be done to maintain continuous improvement of the company?

.....

**... (2) Strategic Leadership**

1. Indicate the degree to which you agree on the statements regarding strategic leadership improvement and competitive advantage

| Statement  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| There was leader member exchange within the organization |   |   |   |   |   |

|   |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Employee motivation increases the company's competitive edge.       |  |  |  |  |  |
| The company had a positive culture of followership.                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Strategic leadership enhances the competitive advantage of the firm |  |  |  |  |  |

2. What other practices could be utilized to enhance strategic leadership of the organization?

.....

...

**(3) Strategic Assets**

1. Indicate the degree to which you agree on the statements regarding strategic assets and competitive advantage

| Statement  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sufficient financial resources bolster the company's competitive edge.                     |   |   |   |   |   |
| For the company to maintain its competitive edge, adequate human resources were essential. |   |   |   |   |   |
| The firm had adequate infrastructure for smooth operations                                 |   |   |   |   |   |
| The firm's infrastructure affects its competitive edge.                                    |   |   |   |   |   |

2. In your opinion, were strategic assets important in enhancing competitive advantage of the company? Explain your answer.

.....

...

**(4) Product Differentiation**

1. Indicate the degree to which you agree on the statements regarding product differentiation and competitive advantage

| Statement   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Our services were unique as compared to competitors               |   |   |   |   |   |
| We do rebrand from time to time                                   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Our services were efficient and effective                         |   |   |   |   |   |
| Product differentiation provides firms with competitive advantage |   |   |   |   |   |

2. What else can be done to enhance creation of new unique products and services by the company?

.....

**(5) Competitive Advantage**

Indicate the degree to which you agree on the statements regarding competitive advantage


| Statement   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Our firm controls a large market share                |   |   |   |   |   |
| When compared to rivals, the company performs better. |   |   |   |   |   |
| We had guidelines for achieving competitive advantage |   |   |   |   |   |
| Our company uses a variety of competitive tactics.    |   |   |   |   |   |

Strategic positioning creates and maintains a competitive edge.

|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|



## Appendix III: ERC Certificate



# Mount Kenya University

REF: MKU/ISERC/3544  
TO: PETER MWIKA KAIRIRA  
REG: MBA/2023/43630

Date: 28 March 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: EFFECT OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF ANIMAL FEEDS MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN UPPER EASTERN AND CENTRAL KENYA**

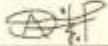
This is to inform you that **Mount Kenya University** has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is **2588**. The approval period is **28/03/2024 - 27/03/2025**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

- i. Only approved documents including informed consents, study instruments, MTA will be used
- ii. All changes including amendments, deviations and violations are submitted for review and approval by **Mount Kenya University**
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to **Mount Kenya University** within 72 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affect the safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to **Mount Kenya University** within 72 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to **Mount Kenya University**

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke> and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Alfred Owino, PhD**  
Chairman, Mount Kenya University ISERC

*The Chairman*  
*Mount Kenya University*  
*Ethics Review Committee*  
*P.O. Box 342-0100, Thika*

---

Main Campus, General Kago Road, P.O. Box 342-01000 Thika.  
Cell: +254 709 153 000 | +254 709 153 200  
Email: [info@mku.ac.ke](mailto:info@mku.ac.ke), Web: [www.mku.ac.ke](http://www.mku.ac.ke)  
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## Appendix IV: Introduction Letter



### DIRECTORATE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

MBA/2023/43630

2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2024

*National Commission for Science Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI)  
Off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete,  
P.O Box 30623- 00100  
NAIROBI, KENYA*

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: PETER MWIKA KAIRIRA - REGISTRATION NO. MBA/2023/43630**

The purpose of this letter is to introduce the above named student who is pursuing **Master of Business Administration** in the department of **Accounting and Finance** in the school of **Business and Economics**.

The title of the research is **"Effect of Strategic Positioning on Competitive Advantage of Animal Feeds Manufacturing Firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya."** It has been cleared by the University's Ethics Review Committee (Certificate attached) and now has to proceed to the field to collect data between **April, 2024 and June, 2024**.

Any assistance accorded to the student will be highly appreciated.

Thank you.

For   
Dr. Samuel M. Karega, Ph.D.  
Director, Graduate Studies

*Mount Kenya University  
P.O. Box 342-01000, THIKA  
Director of the Directorate  
Graduate Studies*

Enc.

Main Campus, General Kago Road, P.O. Box 342-01000 Thika.  
Cell: +254 709 153 000 / +254 709 153 200  
Email: info@mku.ac.ke, Web: www.mku.ac.ke  
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**Appendix V: Research Permit**


  
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Date of Issue: 13/April/2024

**RESEARCH LICENSE**



**This is to Certify that Mr. PETER KAIRIRA MWIKA of Mount Kenya University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Meru on the topic: EFFECT OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF ANIMAL FEEDS MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN UPPER EASTERN AND CENTRAL KENYA for the period ending : 13/April/2025.**

License No: NACOSTI/P/24/34569

  
 Director General  
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

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See overleaf for conditions

**Appendix VI: Field Authorization**



**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION  
STATE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNAL SECURITY AND  
NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

Telegrams:  
Telephone:  
Email: [ccmeru@yahoo.com](mailto:ccmeru@yahoo.com)  
Fax:

**COUNTY COMMISSIONER  
MERU COUNTY  
P.O BOX 703-6020  
MERU**

When replying please quote  
Ref: ED.12/3/VOL IV/138  
and Date:

13<sup>th</sup> May, 2024

All Deputy County Commissioners  
**MERU COUNTY**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION. PETER MWIKA KAIRIRA**

This is to inform you that **Peter Mwika Kairira** ID. No.25879399 of Mount Kenya University has reported to this office as directed by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation and will be carrying out research on **“Effect of Strategic Positioning on Competitive Advantage of Animal Feeds Manufacturing Firms in Upper Eastern and Central Kenya.”**

Since authority has been granted by the said Commission, and the above-named person has reported to this office, he can embark on his research project for a period ending 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2025.

Kindly accord him the necessary assistance he may require.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Betty'.

**BETTY KINANDA  
FOR: COUNTY COMMISSIONER  
MERU COUNTY**

EFFECT OF STRATEGIC  
POSITIONING ON  
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF  
ANIMAL FEEDS  
MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN  
UPPER EASTERN AND CENTRAL  
KENYA

by PETER MWIKA

---

**Submission date:** 21-May-2024 04:32PM (UTC+0300)

**Submission ID:** 2382478673

**File name:** peter\_final\_project\_2\_.docx (327.06K)

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## EFFECT OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF ANIMAL FEEDS MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN UPPER EASTERN AND CENTRAL KENYA

### ORIGINALITY REPORT

|                                |                                |                           |                              |
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