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## Influence of Competitive Aggressiveness on Performance of Agricultural Co-Operatives in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*The purpose of the study was to analyze the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of agricultural co-operatives in Uasin Gishu County. The study was guided by the objective to establish the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of co-operative societies in Uasin Gishu County. The study was also guided by the Situational Leadership theory in discussing competitive aggressiveness as a construct of Entrepreneurial Orientation. This study adopted a descriptive research design to understand the influence of proactiveness on performance. The study area was in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya with approximate target population of 414 staff in 63 registered agricultural co-operatives. Stratified sampling technique was used to select a sample of 203 respondents. Primary data was collected by quantitative methods. Pilot testing was carried out to test the validity and reliability of the instruments. Regression analysis was used for the analysis of the quantitative data, where data was then represented in descriptive tables and inferential form. Relationships between different variables were analyzed using a regression model. The study concluded that competitive aggressiveness was significant. It has an influence on performance of co-operatives in Uasin Gishu County. The findings from this study would be useful to policy makers, researchers, development planners and Uasin Gishu County, in the attempt to achieve entrepreneurship development which is crucial to attainment of Vision 2030.*

**Keywords;** Competitive aggressiveness, entrepreneurship, performance, firm entrepreneurship

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1. Background Information*

There are no doubting the underlying and substantial social, cultural, and economic benefits of entrepreneurship, a fact that has made governments around the world take an increasingly active role in fostering what seems to be currently regarded as a necessary phenomenon. Domingo (2010). For this purpose, it was introduced in the Kenyan School curriculum in the year 1990 with an objective that it would lead to venture creation which would eventually lead to creation of jobs, raise the standard of living and help reduce the level of poverty Kenya (1999). So far since then, many Kenyans have gone through this curriculum. There are a large number of studies suggesting that small business play a major role in job creation (Curran, 2000; Davidson, and Delmar1997; Gibb 2000 Hamilton and Dana 2003; Robbins et.al.2000; Tonge et.al.2000; Westhead and Bivley 1995; Boumal 2004). Though the concept of entrepreneurship has been around for a long time its resurgent popularity implies "a sudden discovery" The American system of free enterprise has always engendered the spirit of entrepreneurship. Hold (2010) America was discovered and nourished by entrepreneurs and it became the world economic power through entrepreneurial activity. He emphasized that the future rests squarely on entrepreneurial ventures founded by creative individuals who are inspired and can instigate progress (Vesper 1985; Hisrich 1988; Waitthaka 2018; Namusonge, 2012). That is the reason French, British, and Austrian economists wrote enthusiastically about entrepreneurs as the change agents of progressive economies. Today there is no indisputable definition of entrepreneurship or entrepreneur (Covin, 2012). This has not deterred entrepreneurs instead they have plunged ahead with tremendous energy to forge new enterprises. However, some new ventures survive while others fail at their startup stage. This brings to the fore the most important research question in the field of entrepreneurship i.e. why some new ventures fail while others survive. Studies carried out by (Rhee and Jay Hyuk in Hong Kong, 2009; Kurako, (2012); Nteere, (2012) on the empirical test on factors at different stages of enterprise growth of internal environment, realized that factors co- exist that determine new venture survival and that there was need to perceive entrepreneurship as a multifaceted phenomenon that needed further investigation. Wagner (2012) and Zarr (2014) have shown that almost 80% of small businesses fail within 10 years of launching. The same research also shows that those businesses that fail follow the same paths to destruction when these issues could be avoided by just some understanding the social and

cultural factors that determine the formation and growth of enterprises, and a little help from experts and consultant ROK, (2010). Mark Zarr, (2014) 46% of small enterprises fail due to incompetence which include; emotional pricing, lack of planning and pricing knowledge, 30% due to lack of managerial experience which includes poor customer credit policies, rapid growth, and borrowing too much money while 11% due to lack of experience in industry which includes inadequate inventory, inability to compete, unaware of suppliers and wasted advertising budgets. Poor management and a shortage of funds have been identified as the main cause at start-up deaths globally say a majority of small businesses fold up after an average of 18 months due to failure to stand up to competition (ROK, 2009, 2010). About 80% of startups are expected to fail ... the failure rate is not localized, even in advanced economies the mortality rate is just as high." (Mukti ) Harvard Professor Mukti Khairi is equally blunt and categorical in his assessment of SMEs' life expectancy the track record is well known and sobering for any entrepreneur: 90 per cent of all new ventures fail at start-ups often lack vital resources, must compete against established companies, have little or no track record with which to woo customers and investors.

### 1.2. *Competitive Aggressiveness*

It's an entrepreneurial skill to outperform industry rivals in a marketplace, and characterized by responsiveness in terms of confrontation or reactive action ((Lumplkin & Dess, 2011). Entrepreneurs should not necessarily be owners or founders, but could be employees as well (Lilla, 2012). The view that ownership is required for entrepreneurship was challenged by Murphy, *et al.*, (2006). Entrepreneurial activity refers to new activities in an enterprise hence, the emergence of new goods or services can occur within new or established enterprises through different methods of use Davidsson (2003). The entrepreneurial continuum includes firm entrepreneurship (Intrapreneurship) as well (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990; Zahra *et al.*, 1999). A firm entrepreneur is someone particularly rich in initiative within an enterprise, who struggles to realize an idea often at the expense of current rules and norms (Sundbo, 1998). Pioneers of field entrepreneurship studies looked at what entrepreneurs do as opposed to what traits they possessed (Gantsho, 2006). For instance, entrepreneurship was viewed from the perspective of Economics and Business Management (Nieman *et al.*, 2003). Cantillon showed the role of an entrepreneur as taking risks such as the uncertainty of buying goods at certain prices and selling them at uncertain prices, and bringing about equilibrium of supply and demand that includes combining the factors of production within a firm (Gantsho, 2006). Consequently, firm entrepreneurship focuses on the culture within an enterprise to become more entrepreneurial in nature in order is to compete in the turbulent enterprise.

#### 1.2.1. *Co-operative*

An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise (ICA, 1995). Thus, cooperative societies need to establish competitive advantage through continuous innovation, whether related to the creation of new product and services, production and business models (Mokaya, 2012). Equally he suggests that this needs adaptability, speed, aggressiveness, determination, boldness and innovativeness that he refers to all leading to one-word entrepreneurial orientation. In the current cooperative framework, members are undecided in their desire to make employees and enterprises more entrepreneurial (Herbert and Brazeal, 1999; Develtere, Pollet, & Wanyama, 2008; 2013).

Global literature shows that successful cooperatives have engaged in entrepreneurial discourse (Kuratko & David, 2008; Tangen, 2003; Bhukuth, Roumane, Terrany, & 2018). In New Zealand and South Africa which also have the best cooperative movements, have supported the development of MSMEs, the informal sector businesses, created sustainable employment and improved the social standing of the members and their families (Wanyama, 2008; World Cooperative Monitor, 2014). Besides organizing its members, it encourages bulk purchasing, giving advice to small entrepreneurs, offers its members services such as negotiating strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, trainings, workshops, linking businesses on opportunity recognition and enterprise development, cooperative audit, and financial services including savings, insurance and housing schemes and offering small business loans (Kruger, Reilly, and Danner, 2000). World Cooperative Movement (2014) competitive aggressiveness had a positive main effect on firm performance, but this effect was stronger in high-velocity industries than in low-velocity industries.

#### 1.2.2. *Objectives*

The study objective was to examine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of cooperative societies in Kenya. Several items from the questionnaire measuring competitive aggression were used to get the information on the competitive aggressiveness.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. *Situational Leadership Theory*

Propounded by, Blanchard and Hersey (1969) which was called "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership" and in mid-1970s, it was renamed the situational leadership theory. It was first refined by Lotham, 1982, 1985, 1990) and lately by McGrath and MacMillan (2000). While developing the theory, they suggested that in dynamic markets where there is increased uncertainty and competitive pressure, a new type of a leader is required. They described this as the "entrepreneurial leader." They had in mind the fact that, the fast-changing markets or situations give those with an "entrepreneurial" approach the ability to exploit opportunities to gain advantage for their organization faster than others. That Senior managers are ultimately responsible for providing a vision regarding what the company can be and how it can get there and that they must shape the corporate purpose (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2010; Higdon, 2000).

According to this theory, leadership is primarily asset of skills rather than traits. These skills include the ability to direct, motivate and support subordinates while helping the group stay focused on the job (McGrath and MacMillan, 2000; Kerry 2018). These frameworks hold that anyone placed in the same position would learn and apply the same skills, and that their effectiveness would depend more on how well they learned and applied the necessary skills rather than on any inherent traits. They allude that a co-operative leader, relying on situational leadership theory could appoint almost any qualified person to a management position; provide leadership training as needed to support them in their new role. Lumpkin and Dess (1999; Razak, Zainol, & Hassan, 2018) shares this view that entrepreneurial orientation can be learned just like management skills are learned, and outcome is realized in performance of enterprises. However, successful corporate entrepreneurs tend to maintain consistent, positive beliefs and assumptions that can be summarized as entrepreneurial mindset (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000; Gökçaya. & Özbağ, 2015).

For this study, while entrepreneurial initiatives are driven by the staffs. The practice within co-operative societies, is that entrepreneurship is a collective responsibility where in entrepreneurial firms, personnel at all levels should actively participate in the process of recognizing and exploiting innovative opportunities where the beginning point is the role of leaders (Kacperczyk 2012; Wiklund & Shephard, 2011). In a radical departure from his earlier recognition of an entrepreneur as an outstanding individualist, Schumpeter says explicitly, that the term entrepreneur does not have to be one person (Clemence 2009).

This theory is flexible and it adapts to the existing work environment and the needs of the organization. It is not based on any specific skill of the leader; instead, he or she modifies the style of management to suit the requirements of the organization. Such a leader could lead the co-operative firm into greater heights. Accordingly, the fundamental underpinning the situational model is that there is no single "best" style of leadership (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011; Kacperczyk 2012).

Mokaya (2012) effective leadership is task relevant, and the most successful leaders are those who adapt their leadership style to the performance readiness, (ability and willingness) of the individual or group they are attempting to influence and /or lead. Consequently, effective leadership varies not only with the person or group that is being influenced, but it also depends on the task, job or function that needs to be accomplished (Idris, 2013; Koech, 2012). Blanchard and Hersey (1969) characterized leadership styles in to their followers in to four categories; Directing which they said is one way communication in which the leader defines the roles of the individual or group and provides the what, how, why, when, and where to do the task, Coaching – while the leader is still providing the direction, he or she is now using two-way communication and providing the socio-emotional support that will allow the individual or group being influenced to buy into the idea, supporting- this is how shared decision –taking about aspects of how the task is accomplished and the leader is providing fewer task behaviors while maintaining high relationship behavior, and delegating where the leader is still involved in decision. A number of researches are directed towards understanding types of leadership styles (Kerry, 2018; Igbal, 2015; Alqatawenh, 2018) but less is known about situational leadership style on cooperatives which this study theory attempts to address. However, some researchers posit that the process and responsibility is normally passed to the individual or group the leader stays to monitor progress (Alqatawenh, 2018; Abu-Ruman, 2016).

Igbaekemen, (2015) of these, no one style is considered optimal for all leaders to use all the time but the emphasis is on how organizations, agencies, parastatals, industries, and countries can get effective *leadership style* to achieve set goals. Effective leaders need to be flexible, and must adapt themselves according to the situation. Moreover, McGrath & MacMillan (2000) on turning to transactional enactment, they argue that these calls for an ability to build a vision of what future transaction sets might emerge, and then exploit whatever opportunities do emerge. The ability to forge opportunities in the face of uncertainty lies at the heart of entrepreneurial ability. Richard Cantillon (1734) in his classic work placed entrepreneur's function at the center of economic progress while Schumpeter (1934) specified entrepreneurship to be leading driver of economic development, that it entails doing things that are not generally done in the ordinary course of business routine. This type of leader must also handle problems innovatively and quickly in order to overcome them. This, according to studies, is highly correlated with the improvement of employee's productivity (Cnaff & Wright, 2013)

The Situational leadership theory was considered relevant because it emphasizes that anybody with basic literacy skills can learn entrepreneurial skills and apply them for the betterment of the co-operatives in Uasin Gishu County (Blanchard, 2010). Nteere, (2012), a variety of people with deferring personalities and from different backgrounds have emerged as effective leaders in different situations. He emphasizes that the person who becomes the leader of the work group is thought to be the person who knows best what to do and sent by the group as the most suitable leader in the particular situation. For competitive aggressiveness to take place, there has to be leadership in co-operatives (De Pree, 2004; Wanyama, 2012). For this study, co-operatives may not afford to hire classic leaders, but the leaders within their co-operatives could be trained to offer classic leadership services (Blanchard, 2010; ILO, 2101). Nga'nga (2018) on the perceived influence of strategic leadership on organizational performance notes that different leadership styles affect effectiveness and performance.

According to Chebii (2016) entrepreneurial competitiveness can be directed towards achieving specific firm outcomes, including sustainability (Gundry et al., 2014). Consequently, a firm's focus on sustainability leads to a greater emphasis on long-term viability and impact, and it relies on an approach to competition that effectively applies new processes in ways that benefit the stakeholders of the organization (Wong, Tjosvold & Liu, 2009). Today's co-operatives need effective leaders who understand the complexities of the rapidly changing global environment (ICA, 2012). Blanchard (2010), there has to be someone who makes work to be done, who understands the total task to be accomplished and is able to determine new and innovative ways to accomplish the tasks. A good leader needs to achieve a balance between the

types of responsibilities in co-operative situation (Shamsuddin, & Shahadan, 2012; Rutherford, 2007). To combine the entrepreneurial aspects of the co-operatives and to convince the members to agree to the entrepreneurial undertaking calls for a situational leader who should be able to cope with competition, risk and innovativeness (Cnaff & Wright, 2013; Rauch et al., 2009; Osoro, 2012).

Of the registered agricultural co-operatives in Uasin Gishu county, only 32 percent are functional this situation needs situational leader, basically an entrepreneurial leader that can identify new opportunities and make them thrive, meet the expectations of wealth creation and employment (Uasin Gishu County Integrated Strategic Plan 2012). In this study, co-operative leaders must possess entrepreneurship skills to be successful, and effective entrepreneurial orientation requires situational leadership skills (Wanyama et al., 2009; Sharma et al., 1999; Blanchard, 2010; Wanyama, 2012; ILO, 2012).

## 2.2. Variable Review

### 2.2.1. Competitive Aggressiveness

Lumpkin and Dess (1996) refers to a firm's propensity to directly and intensely challenge its competitors to achieve entry or improve position to outperform industry rivals in the marketplace, this characterized by responsiveness in terms of confrontation or reactive action. Competitive aggressiveness or competitive aggressions are terms used interchangeably in this work.

Competitive aggression as a dimension of an Entrepreneurial Orientation refers to the type of intensity and head-to-head posturing that new entrants often need to compete with existing rivals (Wiklund & Covin, et al., 2012). In contrast to proactiveness, this relates to market opportunities. Competitive aggressiveness refers to how enterprises relate to competitors and respond to trends and demand that already exist in the marketplace with regard to competitors. Competitive aggression, as a component of an entrepreneurial orientation, also reflects a willingness to be unconventional rather than rely on traditional methods of competing which might extend to changing contexts, how things are done, or expending more resources than the competition (Kusumawardhani et al., 2009; Otieno, 2014, Waithaka, 2016). In the following consideration of the literature relating to competitive aggressiveness, different conceptions are considered in terms of their expected or predicted associations. These associations are derived with reference to the potential shaping of competitive aggressiveness by contextual factors, or predicted associations between competitive aggressiveness and entrepreneurial performance (Oscar, 2013). Self-confidence was found to have a moderating influence on the relationship between loan access, entrepreneurial opportunity and women entrepreneurs' sales performance in Nigeria (Ekpe, 2011).

The study was based on Porters model (1993) on structural analysis of competitive forces based on five competitive forces and they include the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers, the threat of substitute products, and rivalry among existing firms. For low performing enterprises, however, whether this passivity may be a response to the low level of performance of the enterprise itself, or a cause of it is unclear (Covin and Wales, 2012). This conception would have implications in terms of the potential shaping of competitive aggressiveness by earnings if a low level of competitive aggressiveness was the result of lower performance. If this were so, a significant association would be expected to be found between earnings or continuance satisfaction as predictors of competitive aggressiveness. However, Covin and Covin (1990; Kiriku, 2012) caution that a passive competitive orientation might place lower levels of constraints upon resources than that of an aggressive competitive orientation though this passive competitive orientation might be more appropriate in certain contexts.

## 3. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The descriptive analysis was for the variable of the study which was influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance, on performance of agricultural co-operatives within Uasin Gishu County. The study variables to be measured was competitive aggressiveness on performance of co-operatives in Uasin Gishu county. It was assessed as to its influence on performance of agricultural co-operative societies in Uasin Gishu County. Performance was determined using; sales volume, assets, profits, dividends, expanded market share.

Table 1 on competitiveness and as to whether other cooperatives can access the market easily, 32.0 percent strongly agreed, 43.8 percent agreed, 17.7 percent, neutral, while 6.4 percent disagreed. The responses on whether other products have close substitutes, 47.8 percent agreed, 26.1 percent strongly agreed while 21.2 percent were neutral and 4.9 percent disagreed. Competition is also measured by the superiority of product. As to whether the cooperatives produces services or product of superior quality 50.7 percent agreed, 28.1 percent strongly agreed, 17.7 percent were neutral while 3.4 percent disagreed. Expanded market may signify performance. As to whether the cooperative has expanded its market significantly, 58.1 strongly agreed, 29.1 percent agreed, while 8.4 percent were neutral. 4.4 were disagreed. As to whether the cooperatives has more sales compared to its competitors, the respondents who strongly agree were 61.6 percent, agree 24.1 percent, neutral 9.9 percent while those who disagreed were 4.4 percent.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
Other co-operatives can access the market easily.	0.0	6.4	17.7	43.8	32.0
Other products have close substitutes.	0.0	4.9	21.2	47.8	26.1
The co-operatives produce services or product of superior quality.	0.0	3.4	17.7	50.7	28.1
The co-operative has expanded its market significantly.	.0	4.4	8.4	29.1	58.1
The co-operatives have more sales compared to its competitors.	0.0	4.4	9.9	24.1	61.6
Our suppliers are steady and prompt.	0.0	2.0	11.8	36.0	50.2
My firm business takes a bold or aggressive approach when competing.	0.0	2.0	17.2	44.8	36.0
My firm tries to undo and out maneuver the competition in non-price dimensions as best as we can.	0.0	0.0	16.3	40.4	43.3
Our rivals have more strength and are large.	0.0	2.5	12.8	46.8	37.9
Our products are extremely important to the buyer.	0.0	4.4	12.3	40.9	42.4
Sometime my firms compete aggressively in price.	0.0	0.0	10.3	44.8	44.8

Table 1: Competitive Aggressiveness

To answer the question whether the suppliers are steady and prompt 50.2 percent strongly agreed, 36.0 percent agreed, 11.8 percent reported neutral while 2.0 percent strongly disagreed. Whether my firm business takes a bold or aggressive approach when competing, 36 percent strongly agreed, 44.8 percent agreed 17 percent, neutral while 2.0 percent disagreed.

As to whether my firm tries to undo and out maneuver the competition in non-price dimensions as best as we can 43.3 percent strongly agreed, 40.4 percent agreed, 16.3 percent were neutral. As to whether our rivals have more strength and are large 37.9 percent strongly agreed, 46.8 percent agreed, 12.8 percent neutral while 52.5 percent disagreed. As to the importance of our products are extremely important to the buyer, 42.4 percent strongly agreed, 40.9 percent agreed, 13 percent neutral while 4.4 percent. As to whether sometimes my firm competes aggressively in price 44.8 percent strongly agreed, 44.8 percent agreed, while 10.3 percent were neutral.

#### 4. Regression Results

The hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of co-operative societies in Uasin Gishu County. The hypothesis addressed the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance. The Information in this section was based on; production of quality products, presence of patented products, effective networking, and products of close substitutes and, decrease in sales volume. The market having expanded significantly, the suppliers are steady and prompt, and my cooperative can access the market easily. Regression results on competitive aggressiveness indicate that a one unit increase in competitiveness will lead to an increase in performance by ( $\beta = .461$ ,  $t = 4.268$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) therefore we reject the null hypothesis that competitive aggressiveness does not influence performance and accept the alternative. This would seem to indicate that the percentage of employee involvement in competitive aggressiveness is an important factor in predicting performance in co-operatives. This study agrees with studies by Covin and Covin (1990) who argue that a passive competitive orientation might place lower levels of constraints upon resources than that of an aggressive competitive orientation. According to this a passive competitive orientation might only be more appropriate in certain contexts. However, the study disagrees with (Kiiru, 2012) findings reveal that competitive aggressiveness is not correlated with performance for nonprofit firms. He emphasized that engaging in competitive aggression does not necessarily mean improved performance because it also comes with costs in pursuing opportunities. However, there is a possibility that agricultural co-operatives in the county have been motivated to compete so as to benefit from the various awards that the county under co-operative movement is offering. The co-operative societies that are outstanding in performance in various areas are given various presents which act as a motivation (Uasin Gishu county strategic Plan, 2012). The county has set up the county co-operative day in every month of July where members are taught on various issues, and the co-operatives that have performed outstanding in

various ways are recognized and awarded accordingly. The study agrees with Sucheta et al., (2015) who found competitive aggressiveness to have a positive effect on firm performance, but this effect was stronger in high-velocity industries than in low-velocity industries. The low-velocity industries include agricultural industries.

## 5. Conclusion

The level of influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance among co-operatives is a mere forty six percent, when other things are held constant. This study also agrees with a study by Covin, (1990) which found that high-performing firms often exhibit an aggressive competitive orientation when faced with environmental hostility, while low-performing firms tend to be more passive when operating in hostile environments. However, co-operatives within the county seem to have embraced competition as a strategy. Competitive aggressiveness is a factor that influence performance of co-operatives in Uasin Gishu.

## 6. Recommendation

A panel data should be used to carry out another research to enable comparisons to be made.

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