The Influence of Competitive Intensity on the Market Orientation of Private Security Firms in Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to establish the influence of competitive intensity on the market orientation of private security firms in Mombasa County. The study targeted private security firms that are members of the Kenya Security Industry Association (KSIA) and they were 52 firms. A cross-sectional research design was adopted and a census of the target population was done. Thirty seven (37) firms responded leading to a 74% response rate. Data was collected from key informants using a semi-structured questionnaire and data analysis was done using simple regression analysis. The results indicated that competitive intensity explained 28.4% of the variation in the market orientation of the private security firms (R^2 = 0.303, Adjusted R^2 = 0.284). The results also indicated that the influence of competitive intensity on the market orientation of private security firms was significant (P = 0.000). The regression coefficients indicated that competitive intensity positively and significantly influenced the market orientation of the private security firms (t = 3.904, β = 0.598, P = 0.000). Based on these results, the study rejected the null hypothesis H_1 which stated that competitive intensity has no significant influence on market orientation. The study concluded that competitive intensity in the private security industry positively and significantly affects the market orientation of private security firms in Mombasa County. The study results also imply that managers of private security firms and firms in other industries should closely monitor the competitive intensity and utilize the information to make strategic, operational and control decisions relating to the market orientation of the firms

Keywords: Competitive Intensity, Market orientation, Private security firms, Mombasa County.

1. Introduction

Competitive intensity is one of the factors that contributes to environmental hostility and the relationship between competitive intensity and the market orientation of a business firm is a key determinant of firm performance. Competition in an industry may continually work to drive down firm-level performance and Sorensen (2019) argued that when competitive intensity in an industry is high, it tends to lower a firm's overall performance. The current business environment is characterized by intense competition among business firms as a result of globalization and changes in customer needs and wants (Brownhilder, 2019). Market orientation has been

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presented by Scholars as a valuable concept that business firms can adopt to protect themselves against competitive forces and market fluctuations. Market orientation is considered an important capability and it has been acknowledged as a key source of competitive advantage (Kaylan, 2020). The competitive intensity in the business environment is constantly increasing and this implies that in order for a business firm to respond effectively, it needs a strong market orientation to enable the firm to focus on the external environmental issues that affect the firm's ability to achieve customer satisfaction.

1.1 Competitive Intensity

Competitive intensity is defined by Sorensen (2019) as the degree of competition within an industry. Competitive intensity is also defined by Zhang, Wang and Song (2020) as the degree of competitive actions within an industry. Competitive intensity is high when there are many competing firms in an industry which are offering similar products and this reduces the opportunities for business firms to achieve market growth. A high level of competitive intensity is characterized by similar product offerings and price competition among business firms. Competitive intensity in the industry is healthy if it acts as a driver for innovation within business firms and leads the firms to explore new markets and find new ways of competing (Williams, 2021). Scholars have identified various determinants of the level of competitive intensity. For instance, Bowen (2020) suggested that an industry with a large number of firms offering identical products will have a high level of competitive intensity. This is because the many firms end up competing for the same customers and this increases rivalry. On the other hand, firms that sell differentiated products that other firms cannot easily imitate tend to face less competition. In addition, when the industry is dominated by one or a few firms, there is less rivalry. This implies that the extent of firm concentration in an industry influences the level of competitive intensity. The costs of a business such as high fixed costs and low switching costs can also influence the level of competitive intensity in the industry (Porter, 1985). High switching costs lead to a decrease in competition but when switching costs are low, then industry competition tends to be quite high. Another factor influencing competitive intensity in an industry is the market growth rate and Jensen (2021) opined that when a market is growing rapidly, the competition between firms will be less intense. However, a slow market growth rate increases competitive intensity because when growth is slow, the industry is usually close to saturation. A market that is close to saturation does not have many new customers to attract but there could still be room for new entrants that can find untapped opportunities (Lewis, 2020).

1.2 Market Orientation

Market orientation is the company wide process of generating marketing intelligence relating to current and future customer needs, sharing this information across departments and responding to the intelligence accordingly (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Another definition is given by Narver and Slater (1990) who define market orientation as an organizational culture that enables business firms to create superior value for customers efficiently and effectively. They further suggested that market oriented firms do not focus on customers only but also on competitors as well as having inter-functional coordination. A more recent definition of market orientation is given by Miller (2020) who states that market orientation is a customer-centric business approach that guides a firm's strategies, decision making and operational activities. The implication of these definitions is that a firm that is market oriented is the one that identifies the needs and wants of target customers and then strives to satisfy those needs better than competitors.

Market orientation has traditionally been studied from a behavioural perspective (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) and a cultural perspective (Narver & Slater, 1990). This paper adopted the cultural perspective of market orientation because it requires a firm to have a strong focus on its customers, competitors and inter-functional coordination which helps to create superior customer value. The cultural perspective of market orientation also has three dimensions which are customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. The customer orientation dimension requires a business firm to have a good understanding of customer needs and wants in order to develop products that satisfy needs better than those of rival firms (Rosenior, 2022). The competitor orientation dimension is concerned with the identification of strengths, weaknesses, capabilities and strategies of competitor firms. This information about competitors is then shared with all departments to facilitate inter-departmental coordination which is the third dimension. Inter-departmental coordination requires all the departments within the firm to work together using the customer and competitor information to create superior products that satisfy customer needs better than competitor products. According to Hamman (2020), the top management of a business firm should be at the fore front of coordinating the sharing of customer and competitor information between departments so that the organization response to the information can be effective. Market orientation is therefore needed in every organization as a strategic tool that can lead to customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (Liu & Wang, 2021).

1.3 The Private Security Firms

Societies have over time devised techniques of protecting themselves and their properties from real and perceived threats (Kaguru & Ombui, 2019). Private security firms exist in Kenya as a consequence of the security gaps that are cause by the financial and manpower limitations of the government (Mkutu & Sabala, 2017). The Government of Kenya passed the Private Security Regulation Act (2016) to regulate private security firms. The act defines private security to include activities such as cash in transit services, installation of closed circuit television (CCTV) systems, installation of access control systems, private investigations and consultancy, car tracking, manned guarding and provision of guard dog services. Therefore, business firms engaging in one or more of these activities are classified as private security firms. The Private Security Regulatory Authority (PSRA) is the regulator of all private security firms operating in Kenya.

The private security firms operating in Mombasa as at October 2023 were 52 firms and this was according to the data provided by the Private Security Regulatory Authority Mombasa office. The increased threat of terror attacks and other security threats at shopping malls, airports, hotels, hospitals, entertainment spots and learning institutions have driven up the demand for private security services. The interesting thing is that even Government institutions have hired private security firms to support the government security. Private security firms tend to experience a high demand for their services when incidents of insecurity increase. The most common private security services offered by private security firms in Mombasa County include manned guarding of public and private assets, providing guard dogs, cash in transit services, installation of car tracking and alarm systems, installation of electric fences and CCTV systems.

1.4 The Research Problem

The competitive intensity in the private security industry necessitates the private security firms to have a customer and competitor orientation since the firms tend to offer similar services, Market orientation is a key asset for firms operating in industries with a high level of competitive intensity (Mello, 2020). Existing literature lacks research studies that have been done on the influence of competitive intensity on market orientation. This implies that there is very little knowledge in literature about the influence of competitive intensity on market orientation of business entities. This is because scholars have focused on studying competitive intensity as a moderator of the market orientation and firm performance relationship (Sorensen, 2019; Julien et al., 2021). A study by Talari and Khoshroo (2022) on the impact of competitive intensity on brand performance with the mediating role of market orientation and organizational learning of Fast Moving Consumer Goods firms in the Food and Chemical Industries in Iran. The findings indicated that competitive intensity has a significant effect on market orientation and organizational learning. Another study by Tuyet and Ninh (2023) on the influence of competition of the performance of firms. There is a need for competitive intensity to be studied as an independent variable to establish its influence on the firms' level of market orientation. A contextual gap also existed because existing studies on competitive intensity and market orientation concepts have been done in the banking, manufacturing, hospitality and higher education sectors and the private security industry has largely been left out. This study sought to address this contextual gap by investigating the influence of competitive intensity of the market orientation of private security firms in Mombasa County.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical review

2.1.1 The Market Based View

The Market Based View (MBV) is a framework that looks at business strategy from a market requirements perspective. It is based on the Industrial Organization (IO) paradigm that was proposed by Bain (1968) on how the structure of an industry affects firm behaviour and performance. The MBV was advanced further by Porter (1985) who argued that the level of competition in an industry depends on five basic competitive forces. The five forces that determine the structural conditions of an industry are the intensity of competition between firms existing in the industry, threat of new entrants, threat of substitute products, bargaining power of customers and bargaining power of suppliers. According to Porter (1996), competitive intensity is high when there are many firms in an industry offering undifferentiated products to the same target customers. This can limit the firm's ability to charge higher prices. This implies that higher levels of competitive intensity within an industry can lower a firm's overall performance.

Similarly, Sorensen (2019) suggested that industry concentration also influences firm performance. Industry concentration is the degree to which sales in the industry are concentrated on a few firms (Concentrated industry) or on many firms (fragmented industry). In concentrated industries, competition is generally lower and this leads to higher overall performance (Sutton, 2021).

The threat of new entrants also influence the operations of existing firms depending on the entry barriers. Entry barriers refer to the costs and government regulations that potential entrants outside the industry would have to incur and comply with in order to enter and compete in the industry. Higher market entry barriers thus lead to a better performance for current firms in the industry. The threat of substitute products increases the level of competitive intensity when there are many low-cost substitute goods or services available (Martens, 2020) because of lower customer switching costs. In terms of bargaining power, if a firm's bargaining power over customers is lower, the firm would not be able to negotiate higher prices for its products and thus its market performance would be lower. This would also be the case if the firm has a lower bargaining power over the supplier firms. According to Porter (2008), these five forces affecting industry competition are not equally critical for all industries because their strength varies from one industry to another and they also change from time to time.

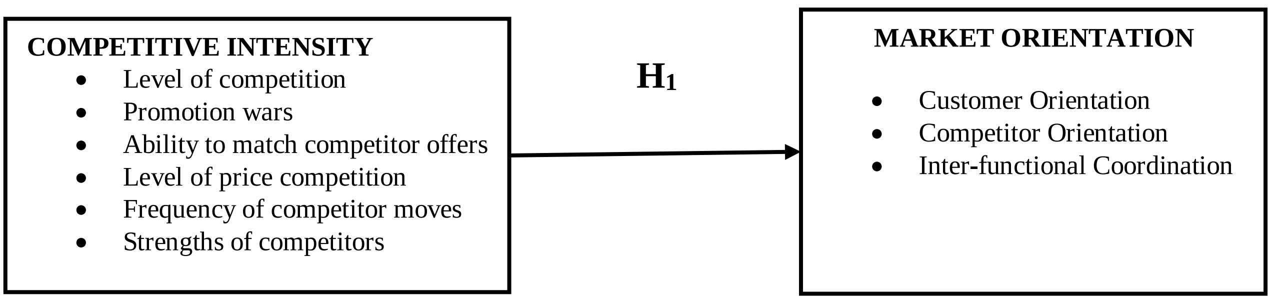
The MBV was a relevant theoretical model for this study because the five forces apply to the private security industry. The security risks in the country and Mombasa County in particular affect the customer's bargaining power because the private security firms have more knowledge on security matters than customers. This information asymmetry may give private security firms an advantage over customers. The threat of substitutes is limited because the substitute to private security services is the public sector which includes the Kenya Police Service which faces financial and manpower limitations. The bargaining power of supplier firms is also affected since there are many suppliers of security items such as CCTV systems, guard uniforms and alarm systems among other security items. The level of competition among private security firms in Mombasa is quite high since data from the Private Security Regulatory Authority (2024) Mombasa office indicated that there are were 52 firms licensed and operating in Mombasa County. However, barriers to entry have been influenced by the Private Security Act Number 13 of 2016 which now make it difficult for new entrants to enter the private security industry. This affects the level of competition and performance of the existing private security firms.

2.2 Competitive Intensity and Market Orientation

Competitive intensity affects industry profitability in the medium and long-term and this implies that the level of competition in the industry can be a barrier to a firm's market orientation (Dubihlela & Dhurup, 2015), an organization does not have to develop a market orientation if it operates in a familiar, stable and predictable market (Lewis, 2020). Industry competition can influence the success of failure of business firms and hence the importance of market orientation to a business depends on industry competition. This is because a strong market orientation is needed for the firm to respond to the impact of competitive intensity on business operations. According to Zairi (2021), the greater the competitive intensity in the industry, the stronger the firms' market orientation should be. This is because business firms that are market oriented tend to focus on understanding customer needs and wants, monitoring of competitor actions and responding to them effectively (Leone, 2019).

In industries with a high level of competitive intensity, firms that are not market oriented tend to lose customers to competitors (Milad, 2021). Business firms that are in the early stages of a market's development when there are few competitors tend to benefit from primarily focusing on competitors as they develop their market orientation (Wilson, 2019). When the level of competitive intensity in the industry is high, the more aggressive a business must be in identifying customer needs and creating superior solutions to satisfy customer needs. Very few studies have looked into the influence of competitive intensity on the market orientation of business firms and yet market orientation is considered a key determinant of firm performance. This study therefore focused on studying the influence of competitive intensity on the market orientation of private security firms in Mombasa County and Figure 2.1 illustrated the conceptual model of the study.

2.3 *Conceptual model*



Source: Author (2024)

The hypothesis that was formulated from the relationship depicted in the conceptual model was;
H_1: Competitive intensity has no significant influence on market orientation

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted the cross-sectional research design because it allowed the researcher to collect data from respondents at one point in time and it was cost effective as well. The target population included all the private security firms that were registered members of the Kenya Security Industry Association (KSIA) and they were 52 firms in number. A census study was conducted since the study population was relatively small. The measurement of competitive intensity was done using a six-point scale developed by Sorensen (2009) while market orientation was measured using the MKTOR scale developed by Narver and Slater (1990). A pilot study was done to evaluate the reliability and the research instrument by administering the questionnaire to marketing managers of 10 private security firms that were not registered with KSIA and modifications to the research instrument were made accordingly. The study used the key informant method by targeting marketing managers as the respondents. Data analysis was done using simple linear regression.

3.1 Response Rate

The study targeted 52 private security firms in Mombasa County through a Census. Thirty seven (37) firms responded and this was a 74% response rate. Grooves (2020) suggested that a response rate of 70% or higher is acceptable though there is no consensus among scholars on the response rate that is statistically significant. However, Baruch and Holtom (2018) argued that the average response rate for data collected form organizations is 35 to 37%. Reyes (2019) on the other hand suggested that a response rate of 60% is good and 70% is very good. Therefore, the response rate for this study was considered to be very good since the key informants were marketing managers who tend to be extremely busy.

3.2 Respondent Profile

The researcher sought to identify the respondent characteristics such as gender, work experience in the private security industry and educational level. This information helped to understand the nature of the individual respondents who provided data on the research variables. Table 3.1 provides the details of gender, educational level and work experience of the respondents.

Table 3.1: Respondent characteristics

Variable	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male Female **Total**	30 7 **37**	81.1 18.9 **100.0**
Educational level of respondents	Diploma Bachelors Masters Other **Total**	5 24 5 0 **37**	21.6 64.9 13.5 0 **100.0**
Respondent work experience in the industry (in number of years)	Below 10 10 – 20 Over 20 **Total**	14 17 6 **37**	37.8 45.9 16.2 **100.0**

Source: Research data (2024)

The data from Table 3.1 on the respondents and firm characteristics indicated that majority of the respondents were male and this was expected since security is perceived to be a male dominated occupation. This finding was in tandem with that of Suda (2002) who examined gender disparities in the Kenyan labour market and found that female employees remained below 30% compared to male employees who held a disproportionately larger share of positions in the labour market. Majority of the respondents also had a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education. In terms of work experience, most of the respondents had worked for between 10 – 20 years and this implied that they had sufficient industry experience to provide the required research data.

3.3 Reliability and Validity of the Competitive Intensity and Market Orientation Scales

The reliability of the scales used to measure competitive intensity and market orientation was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha. Scholars have argued about the lower limit of the Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach (1951) proposed a lower limit of 0.5 while Nunally and Bernstein (1994) proposed that an alpha co-efficient of 0.7 or higher indicates that the measures are reliable. However, Bagozzi and Youjae (2012) recommended a coefficient of 0.6 or higher but stated that a lower limit of 0.5 could still be used. There is no consensus among authors on what the lower limit of the Cronbach's alpha co-efficient should be. The reliability analysis results indicated that the competitive intensity scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82 while the market orientation scale was 0.9. This indicated that the competitive intensity and market orientation scales were very reliable. Content validity of the Competitive intensity scale was ensured by adopting the measurement scale developed by Sorensen (2009) while that of market orientation was ensured by adopting the MKTOR scale of Narver and Slater (1990). Factor analysis was done to establish construct validity and the factor loadings fell between 0.46 and 0.869. Therefore, since the factor loadings were above the 0.4 threshold proposed by Field (2013), the construct validity was confirmed. Face validity was established through face to face discussions with marketing managers of private security firms that were not members of KSIA.

4. Tests of the Assumptions of Regression Analysis

The data collected on competitive intensity and market orientation was subjected to tests for the assumptions of regression analysis. Linearity was checked using the deviation from linearity. The deviation from linearity was found to be 0.718 which is greater than 0.05 and this confirmed that the relationship between competitive intensity and market orientation was linear. Normality was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests and both tests provided P-values that were greater than 0.05. This confirmed that the data collected on competitive intensity and market orientation was normally distributed. The presence of autocorrelation was tested using the Durbin-Watson test. According to Field (2009), a Durbin-Watson tests statistic that fall between 1.5 and 2.5 usually indicate the absence of autocorrelation among the study variables. The value of the Durbin-Watson tests statistic was 1.6 and this indicated that autocorrelation was not present in the data.

5. Test of Hypothesis, Interpretation and Discussion of Results

5.1 Testing the Influence of Competitive Intensity on Market Orientation

The objective of this study was to establish the influence of competitive intensity on the market orientation of private security firms in Mombasa County. The hypothesis formulated for testing was; **H_1:** Competitive intensity has no significant influence on market orientation

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This hypothesis was tested using simple regression analysis. Table 5.1 provides the model summary of the results of the regression analysis.

Table 5.1: Summarized regression model of Competitive Intensity and Market Orientation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.551[a]	.303	.284	.59503
a. Predictors: (Constant), CI				

Source: Research data (2024)

The summarized model provided in Table 5.1 shows that the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.551 and this indicated that the relationship between competitive intensity and market orientation as moderate and positive. From the regression model, competitive intensity explained 28.4% of the variation in market orientation ($R^2 = 0.303$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.284$). The other 71.6% was explained by other factors that were not considered by this study. Table 5.2 provides the outcomes of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on competitive intensity and market orientation.

Table 5.2: ANOVA results of Competitive Intensity and Market Orientation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.398	1	5.398	15.245	.000[b]
	Residual	12.392	35	.354		
	Total	17.790	36			
a. Dependent Variable: MO						
b. Predictors: (Constant), CI						

Source: Research data (2024)

Analysis of Variance was done to test the significance of the regression model and the results in Table 5.2 indicate that the model was significant (F = 15.245, P = 0.000). This indicated that the regression model was robust enough to explain the relationship between competitive intensity and market orientation and therefore the use of regression analysis was justified. Table 5.3 provides the regression coefficients of competitive intensity and market orientation.

Table 5.3: Coefficients of the Influence of Competitive Intensity on Market Orientation

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-3.083E-005	.098		.000	1.000
	CI	.598	.153	.551	3.904	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MO

Source: Research data (2024)

The results from Table 5.3 indicated that the Beta coefficient was 0.598 and this was statistically significant. The results also showed that t = 3.904 and P = 0.000 which indicated that competitive intensity positively and significantly affected market orientation. These results let to the rejection of the null hypothesis H_1 which stated that competitive intensity has no significant influence on market orientation.

6. Discussion of the Results

The study results of this study support the arguments of Zairi (2021) that the greater the competitive intensity, the stronger the market orientation of the firms. The study results also lend support to the suggestion by Rumil (2020) that when competitive intensity is high in an industry, it implies that customers in that industry have many alternative options. This requires firms to have a better understanding of both customer needs and competitor actions through market orientation. A study by Simmers (2019) found that firms in industries in which competitive intensity is high have a strong customer and competitor orientation. He further argued that such firms have established infrastructure for identifying customer needs and monitoring competitor activities through the marketing information systems. The study results also imply that competitive intensity in an industry necessitates managers of business firms to collect and analyze information about customers and competitors through inter-functional coordination. This leads to a higher level of market orientation for the firms.

7. Conclusion

Based on the results of the simple linear regression analysis, the study concluded that competitive intensity positively influenced the market orientation of private security firms in Mombasa County. This can be attributed to the fact that competitive intensity in the private security industry influences the marketing managers of private security firms to put in place infrastructure such as a marketing information system. This makes it possible for the managers to collect and analyze information about customer needs and wants and competitor behaviours as well as sharing this information with all functional units for use in making strategic decisions, operational decisions and control decisions.

8. Implications of the Study Results

The results of this study have implications on theory, management practice and policy making. From a theoretical perspective, the hypothesized relationship between competitive intensity and market orientation is positive and statistically significant. The study results lend support to the Market Based View's suggestions that the success of a business firm is dependent on external environmental factors such as industry competition, threat of new entrants, threat of substitutes, bargaining power of buyers and suppliers. These market conditions have a significant role in the choice of marketing activities that a firm will engage in. From a management practice perspective, the study results imply that managers of private security firms and firms in other industries should closely monitor the competitive intensity in the industry and then utilize the information collected to make strategic, operational and control decisions relating to the market orientation of the firms. In terms of policy making, the study results suggest that competitive intensity have a positive effect on market orientation and therefore, the Competition Authority of Kenya (CAK) guised by the Competition Act No. 12 of 2010 should closely monitor competitive intensity in the private security industry and other industries to ensure that there is no abuse of a dominant position by industry players. This will protect consumers and other business firms from unfair business practices such as exploitative pricing that may result when the firms' bargaining power is higher than that of customers or when the supplier power is higher.

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