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STRATEGIC QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SOFT DRINK MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study was to establish the influence of strategic quality management practices on operational performance of soft drinks manufacturing firms in Nairobi County. Specifically, the study sought to measure the impact of continuous improvement on operational performance of soft drinks manufacturing firms in Nairobi County and to quantify the effect of customer management on operational performance of soft drinks manufacturing firms in Nairobi County. This study was guided by the stakeholder theory, and agency theory to explain the relationship between the study variables. The research adopted descriptive survey method. The target population included 64 soft drinks manufacturing firms listed to be operating in Nairobi County. The unit of observation were heads of operations and human resource unit of each soft drinks manufacturing firm. The total target was 128 respondents. The findings of the study indicated that continuous improvement and customer management had a positive impact on the performance of the soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study recommends that firms should foster a culture of quality within the organization by involving employees at all levels in the audit process and encouraging them to take ownership of quality improvement. The targeted firms should also consider factors such as geographical location, production capabilities, and sustainability practices when selecting suppliers, as these can impact the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the supply chain. The study also recommends policies that encourage collaboration between soft drink manufacturers and other stakeholders, such as government agencies, industry associations, and research institutions, to address shared challenges and opportunities.

Key Words: strategic quality management practices, continuous improvement, customer management, operational performance, soft drinks manufacturing firms

Background of the Study

Quality is critical element especially where production or service delivery is concerned. This is because it determines customer satisfaction (Bremer, 2016). Though the term has evolved overtime resulting to divergent views on the term, renowned quality gurus in the likes of Deming, Juran, Crosby, Feigenbaum, Ishikawa and Garvin believed that quality is when there is variety reduction, continuous improvement of products/services and zero defect (Bremer, 2016). Though there is diversity in the definition of quality from different scholars, the commonly agreed definition portrays quality as simply the fitness of use of a product or service (Bremer, 2016; Calingo, 2014; Nzioka, 2016). Many organizational leaders identify quality as an aggressive competitive weapon.

Empirical evidence (Nzioka, 2016) suggests that productivity together with profitability increase with the increase in quality. Enhancement of the quality of a product has a strong relationship to increased market share (Gluck, Kaufman, & Walleck, 2017). Recent studies (Garvin, 2017) suggest that quality is a management function and it is a fundamental component of competitive strategy. A major emphasis on the thinking quality gurus is that quality can be managed only when the top management gets involved. Top management has the duty to make innovative decisions, commit resources to support innovation and continuous improvement. This is what brings the aspect of strategic approach to quality (Bremer, 2016). This implies that in order to manage quality, strategies must be formulated, goals and objectives set, plans developed and implemented together with using management systems to monitor as well as taking corrective actions (Uko, 2018).

Strategic quality management has therefore been defined by some scholars (Samer, 2019; Walsh, 2018) to be the process of setting and attaining high-level objectives in a firm with the drive of the managing administration. (Herzallah, Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez & Munoz Rosas, 2019) advanced another description for strategic quality management. According to the studies, it is the process of incorporating a set of practices through effective utilization of resources to provide better quality products and services. Previous studies have shown that over the years the issue of quality management has been the first priority for most of the manufacturing companies (Bremer, 2016). This has in turn created success-making firms with an emphasis on the quality and reliability are more successful. These companies are even inclined to high pricing of their goods resulting to higher profit margins making quality an essential component for sustainability of customer satisfaction over the life time of a product (Uko, 2018).

Strategic quality management has received increased attention at the global arena and leaders of manufacturing firms must adopt some strategic quality practices that support performance. Strategic quality management practices strive to enhance quality of products by joining the clear efforts of employees, customers, competitors, suppliers together with the government to come up with a quality that fits the demands and assumption of a customer (Garvin, 2017). Additional surveys (Uko, 2018) show customer focus, leadership, benchmarking, time-to-time improvement, planning, public participation, working with suppliers and carrying out management on facts are the core concepts of quality management. For the purpose of this study, customer management practices, workforce management practices, supplier management practices and continuous improvement practices were discussed to determine the relationship with operational performance.

Some other components of strategic quality management techniques are six sigma, business process re-engineering, learning organization, ISO standards and more (Uko, 2018). Six Sigma refers to the improvement method that involves self-drive while in business process re-engineering (BPR) is a tool to make a business process efficient in time and cost. It is the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service and speed (Upadhaya, Munir & Blount, 2014). As far as quality is concerned, some scholars (Rureri, 2018) have viewed a

learning organization as an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself.

With ISO standards, an organization is able to improve its manufacturing process, its service or documentation procedure and has all the requirements for standardization and quality assurance (Rureri, 2018). Embracing strategic quality operations has helped big companies in the manufacturing industry around the world enjoy better qualities, involvement of employees, better relationships at work, satisfaction for both the employees and customers, better communication, productivity, profitability and a high share of the market (Rureri, 2018). Briefly, strategic quality management practices allow institutions improve their operations while at the same time enhancing customer satisfaction and consequently retention.

Operational performance entails having an efficient flow of operations in the organization such as reducing delivery lead-time, reducing inventory and ensuring optimal level in the machines (Zhu, Sarkis & Lai, 2018). In order for organization to be competitive, they have to make use of the different performance objectives. They are the cost, quality, speed, dependability and flexibility. In order for the firms to strive to remain competitive through strategic quality management actions, a good comprehension of the complications and efficacy associated with operational performance of such institutions can give a platform to judge the success or failure of the industry.

Strategic quality management practices can deliver a wide range of benefits, which enhance competitiveness, and performance of supply chain partners (Hudnurkar, Jakhar & Rathod, 2017). Some of these benefits are; innovative products, cost management, improved efficiency and risk management as well as delivering incremental business value to customers (Giannakis & Papadopoulos, 2016). Working strategic quality management actions are able to enhance an environment that ensures trust among firms with a common understanding together with enhancing communication, which significantly creates operational performance (Lavastre, Gunasekaran & Spalanzani, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The manufacturing sector in Kenya has faced significant challenges that has seen its contribution to GDP drop significantly giving rise to fears of premature deindustrialization KAM (2020). Despite the very competitive and ready market, the soft drink manufacturing sector is struggling to access full potential of the region due to increasing price of raw materials, rising competition, physical challenges in producing products and delivering them to a highly fragmented end consumer. According to Standard Bank (2019), an analysis of the Kenyan market reveals that the operating landscape comes with challenges global markets have overcome or learned to manage with time.

Soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County face the challenge of differentiating themselves from their competitors while maintaining a high level of quality and profitability. According to Braunscheidel and Suresh, (2019) companies making soft drinks in the world have emphasized on the requirement of SQM practices to enhance their operational excellence despite their high competition. The practices identified include strategic continuous management, strategic workforce management, strategic supplier management and strategic customer management.

Nevertheless, there exists problems that affect these practices. Lack of continuous process improvement and low supplier management along the supply chain within an organization leads to ineffective cooperation within the supply chain link thus negatively affecting operational performance (Fawcett, Jones & Fawcett, 2018). Kaminsky and Simchi-Levi (2018), observed poor performance, high operation costs, reduced service level, low utilization of resources, and not responding to customers' expectations are because of strategic quality management practices

absence in organization operations. Thus, strategic quality management practices adoption desire for soft drink manufacturing firms.

There is evidence from past studies (Gundi, 2018) to suggest that the soft drink industry in Kenya is one of the fast growing sectors in Kenya with both local and multinational companies thus making it one of the very competitive industries. Clearly, the business environment in which the industry operates is constantly changing and this has necessitated the firms to adapt strategies for survival and ultimately meet customer needs (Kimani, & Matata, 2015). Thus, the current study will be conducted on the effect of strategic quality management practices on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County.

Previous studies (Wambua, 2017) have demonstrated how most of these firms have tried to create a competitive edge over their rivals by diversifying their products, developing new markets and penetrating the market through aggressive promotions. These efforts have borne insignificant results in terms of their operational performance - which begs the question as to whether the firms are applying the right strategies.

SQM practices adoption and application in the U.S manufacturing industry was seen as a reliable way that organizations can use to marshal customer satisfaction at lower cost, minimized wastage and superior quality. The studies done in developing economies (Rosca, 2015) on the same field are more concerned with organizational performance. To fill in this missing gap, the research examined strategic quality management practices impact in the soft drink sector focusing on continuous improvement, customer management, supplier management and workforce management.

Research Objectives

i. To measure the impact of continuous improvement practices on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County
ii. To quantify the effect of customer management practices on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing companies in Nairobi County

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Stakeholders' Theory

Stakeholders' theory has its origin from Freeman (1984) as cited by (Fontaine, Haarman, & Schmid, 2006). Stakeholder theory contends that firms produce externalities that affect many stakeholders which are both internal and external (Lavassani & Movahedi, 2019; Reuter, Goebel & Foerstl, 2021; Freeman, 2010). Externalities often cause stakeholders to increase pressures on firms to decrease negative impacts and increase positive impacts (Sarkis, Gonzalez-Torre & Adenso-Diaz, 2020). Stakeholder theory further states that organizations are responsible toward various stakeholders since they are expected to react to their different claims as an attempt to legitimize their existence (Freeman, 2010; Park-Poaps & Rees, 2019). This theory also suggests that firms are rooted in a network of relationships with stakeholders and that these firms allocate varying amounts of resources and attention to these stakeholders (Parmar *et al.*, 2020).

This theory exists in the context of the basic premise that internal and external groups will influence organizational practices; externalities may be internalized via stakeholder pressures between supply chain partners (Björklund, 2020; Freeman, 2010). Since stakeholders are usually closely associated with social organizations, hence the confounding relationships with institutional theory could exist. This is so especially if there are norms and legitimacy aspects of stakeholder theory that go beyond institutional theory (Reuter, Goebel & Foerstl, 2021; Björklund, 2020).

Even though unique perspectives have been implemented through other theories such as sphere of influence, where the firm's field of influence may impact supply chain partner environmental initiatives and innovations (Sarkis *et al.,* 2020; Matos & Hall, 2017). Globally-centered stakeholder theory could be more relevant as globalization of strategic quality management practices have prompted continuous growth in stakeholder arena (Björklund, 2020). Regarding the functions of stakeholder theory and pressures on strategic quality management methods, extensive research prospects still emerge (Lavassani & Movahedi, 2019; Sarkis *et al.,* 2020). Therefore, the stakeholder engagement is expected to affect how supply chain partners engage each other (Park-Poaps & Rees, 2019). This theory will be used in this study to support the considerations in developing a supply chain strategy, which is predominantly concerned with the fulfillment of customer orders.

Agency Theory

Agency theory was advanced by two American Economists, Jensen and Meckling in 1976. The theory viewed corporations as sets of contracts between management, shareholders and creditors. Precisely, management which provided stewardship was viewed as "Agent" while the shareholders and creditors who were providers of finances were viewed as the "Principals". Corporate governance is grounded on agency theory, based on the agents and the principal link. In the scope of professional pension plans, the plan participants and the funding organizations serve as the principals, and the plan managers serve as the agents.

Information asymmetry poses the biggest problem for principal-agent relationships in the environment of companies that produce soft drinks. Managers have information advantage regarding the investment opportunities and financing policies over the shareholders and other stakeholders. Mwangi (2018) argued that this relationship exposes soft drink manufacturing firms to the agency problems where the interests of the agents are not necessarily the same as those of the principals. The shareholders want to maximize the returns on their investments, while the agents want to maximize their own compensations within the agreed compensation contract. This is referred to as the agency conflict.

Extra resources must therefore be expended for monitoring the performance of agents in order to minimize losses arising from the choice of an investment mix, the risks associated with such choices and the information asymmetries. Obviously, the Agency problem arises in organizations because the corporate decisions made by the Agents (managers) on behalf of the principals (shareholders) bind the latter (Copeland & Weston, 2017). Because it clarifies that directors as well as managers serve as agents for shareholders who act as principals in the soft drink manufacturing firms, this theory is helpful in this research. As agents, they make choices that should optimize the use of organizational resources and, as a result, boost operational performance as well as shareholder value.

Conceptual Framework

A theoretical structure helps to link the research variables diagrammatically (Zikmund *et. al.,* 2019). This study contains independent variables (strategic quality management practices) and the dependent variable (operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms) linked by a theoretical structure. Figure 1 shows the theoretical background of the investigation.

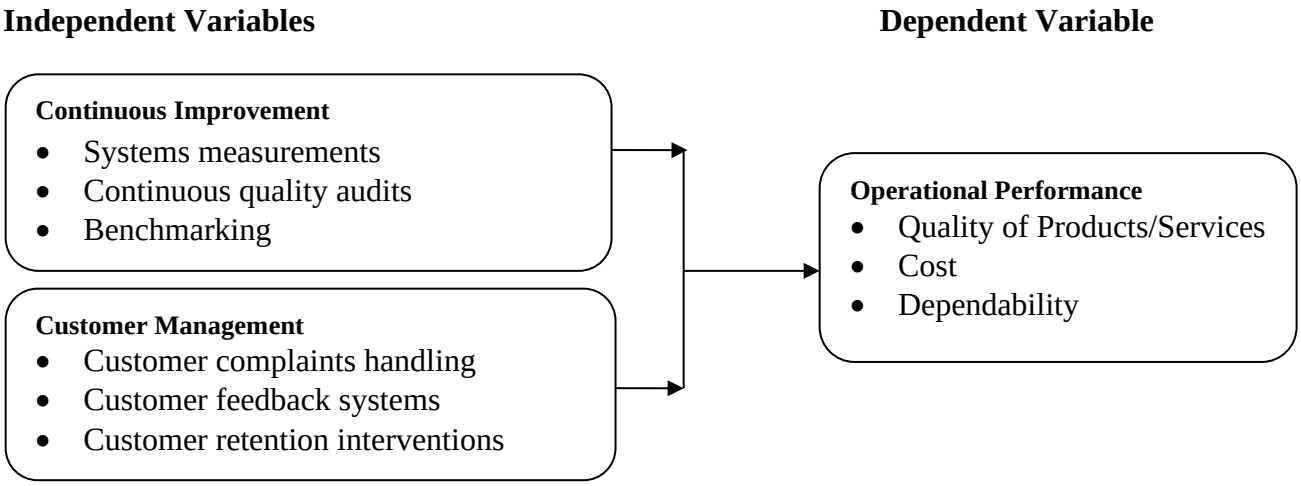

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Continuous Improvement

Strategic continuous improvement is the process of improving firm operations, products, services and staff to improve quality (Suleman & Gul, 2017). Quality product comes from a quality process. This means that quality should be built into the process. Quality at the source is the belief that it is far better to uncover the source of quality problems and correct it than to discard defective item after production. If the source is not corrected the problem will continue. Hence TQM focuses on studying, understanding and improving processes (Petersen, 2019).

Process management concerns the value adding system and involves the policies, procedures and practices that are required to control the process. The process management construct examines how key processes are designed, implemented managed and improved to support the organizations strategy and actions plan (Danese, 2018).

TQM emphasizes on Continuous process improvement, this involves ongoing activities aimed at process simplification and reduction or elimination of process waste it systematically pursues to attain trivial, incremental variations in procedures in attempts to advance efficacy as well as quality (Wong & Wong, 2017). This study conceptualizes continuous improvement in terms of system measurements, quality audits and benchmarking.

Customer Management

A crucial component of the ISO 9001:2008 standard is customer focus. One criterion, for instance, is that "Top management shall guarantee that customer needs are defined and are satisfied with the objective of boosting customer satisfaction under the section on management responsibility. Senior management is now responsible for maintaining good customer connections (Evans & Lindsay, 2018). Customer wants are primarily the source of the primary driving force for company operations to develop quality targets.

As per Kumar and Balakrishnan (2016), the guiding premise for businesses implementing TQM initiatives is customer connections. The top management's committed dedication to executing TQM is unquestionably required because senior management may have the power and influence to govern the overall TQM implementation. Customer satisfaction pattern data should be backed by factual evidence. Customers' assessments of the businesses' level of satisfaction should be discussed. The current study focuses on customer complaints handling, customer feedback systems and customer retention interventions.

Operational Performance of Soft Drink Manufacturing Firms in Kenya

Performance is the nature and quality of an organization's behaviors to complete their main tasks and functions and to generate profit and there are two core dimensions of business performance: operational and financial performances (Chavez *et al.,* 2018). Operational performance relates to a company's performance in serving customers in terms of quality, flexibility, on time delivery (Wang *et al.,* 2017). Cost and service performance categories can be added to operational performance, and service performance is frequently used to gauge operational service performance in relation to service quality, on-time delivery, and flexibility of the service (Daugherty *et al.,* 2018).

Zhu and Sarkis (2018) distinguished that organization's operational performances are measured against set indicators or performance objectives. Organization output is measured through performance a measure of manufacturing cycle time, and reliability, which influences the customer satisfaction and market share (Voss, Åhlström, & Blackmon, 2019). According to Slack, Chambers and Johnston (2017), cost, flexibility, dependability, speed, and quality are the main performance objectives for an organization and which are aligned towards customer satisfaction requirements.

Operational performance entails having an efficient flow of operations in the organization such as reducing delivery lead time, reducing inventory and ensuring optimal level in the machines (Zhu, Sarkis & Lai, 2018). In order for organization to be competitive they have to make use of the 5 different performance objectives. This study will focus on the cost, quality and dependability operational performance objectives among the soft drink manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Empirical Literature Review

Continuous Improvement

Empirical studies show positive relationship between TQM and cost reduction; Ayandele and Akpan (2019) study on the practice, challenges and benefits of TQM in Nigeria manufacturing firm revealed significant reduction in operating expenses and manufacturing costs were recorded by firms that implemented TQM. Madar (2018) investigated the implementation of TQM in British Airways. The study revealed that TQM has an important role in British Airways and its implementation continuously improve British Airways performance, it enabled British Airways to meet its internal and external client's needs in terms of service and product quality and also enable it to develop an efficient and profitable business through cost reduction.

Samat, Ramayah, and Saad (2019) explored association between TQM practices, market orientation, and the connection between TQM practices and service quality. The findings demonstrated that employee empowerment and customer orientation had a substantial impact on market orientation, whereas information and communication, customer focus, and continuous improvement had a substantial impact on service quality. After examining the connection between TQM, market orientation, and performance, Wamalwa (2018) came to the following conclusions: businesses that effectively implementing TQM possess better and more effective performance; market orientation seems to have a strong and positive relationship association with performance; and finally Superior quality is a result of both total quality control and a focus on the market.

TQM and innovation have a good link, according to several research (Hung, Lien, Fang & McLean, 2017; Lee, Ooi, Tan & Chong, 2016). Opinions suggesting a positive link between TQM and innovation posited that companies implementing TQM in their business systems and corporate culture are fertile environments because TQM promotes principles coincident with innovation (Prajogo & Sohal, 2018). Total quality management culture requires changes in manager's employees believe attitude and behaviors to focus on continuous improvement. This require commitment to a culture emphasizing trust, empowerment, entrepreneurship, teamwork

cooperation, risk taking and continuous improvement (Kaluarachi, 2018) hence innovation success.

Martinez-Costa and Martinez-Lorente (2017) emphasizes that TQM principle Continuous improvement is also critical to the success of innovation through encourages changes and creative in organizing works. Sadikoglu and Zehir (2019) study found that all elements of TQM are significantly and positively associated with innovative performance. Empirical Literature commonly agrees that there is a positive association between innovation particularly product innovation and differentiation strategy (Prajogo & Sohal, 2018).

Customer Management

Verhoef et al (2018) suggests that organizations that have implemented customer practice see beyond having products and services that only satisfy the customer needs. He explains that customer focus goes beyond customers only and the whole supply chain has to be considered. Verhoef et al (2018) argue that an organization should have reliable suppliers, who create products that meet customer needs. These products should also be delivered without delays, standard pricing and a friendly after-sales service rather customer care. According to Tajeddini, Elg and Trueman (2018), a customer focused organization should keep on developing and improving all the key departments involved. Customer focus also lead to innovation (Bon & Mustafa, 2013), employee satisfaction and good financial results, (Anaza & Rutherford, 2021; Chotekorakul et al. 2018).

Tobe and Thomas (2018) emphasize that loyalty is more profitable. The expenses to gain a new customer is much more than retaining existing one. Loyal customers will encourage others to buy from you and think more than twice before changing their mind to buy other services. Customer loyalty is not gained by an accident, they are constructed through the sourcing and design decisions. Designing for customer loyalty requires customer-centered approaches that recognize the want and interest of service receiver. Customer loyalty is built over time across multiple transactions. A relationship with a customer is equally important in customer loyalty and this requires that company work in a broader context that extends beyond itself, as no company can be world class at everything (Tobe &Thomas (2018).

It is the responsibility of the firm to provide avenues where customers can be able to air their feedback which the firm can use in for future reference. With customer focus, the organization works with the customer from planning a product up to when the product is delivered. This reduces the chances of having poor quality products. In other words, quality products tend to satisfy customers (Zhu, Lin, Tsai & Wu, 2019). Additionally, customers feel very important when they are consulted and their view is taken into account. Their participation assures them and instills a positive perception which generally improves customer loyalty and customer satisfaction (Pan, Sheng & Xie, 2021). Verhoef et al. (2018) says that in the process of executing customer focus strategy, organization provides social media platforms where customers can air their feelings. The practice of customer focus is most likely of value to the customer by ultimately improving the overall quality of the products (Mokhtar, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation applied the descriptive research design in the process of determining the findings in relation to the relationship between SQM practices and operational performance. The target population for this study were operations and human resource heads in the 64 firms identified in the study offering the research 128 participants. The unit of observation were the soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County and the unit of analysis were 1 head of operations and 1 head of human resources in all the 64 firms making a total of 128 units of analysis. The study adopted a census sampling method concerning the element of investigation, which is the 64 firms

that manufacture soft drinks in Nairobi. The enquiry used a cross-sectional survey of 128 respondents who were the unit of observation. This research embraced first-hand information that were assembled by aid of issuing of questionnaires. This research used first-hand information that was assembled by issuance of questionnaires to 128 respondents. The questionnaires had open-ended and closed-ended questions

To improve dependability of investigation tools, a mock investigation on 10% of the study target respondents were targeted and this forms a total of 13 respondents from soft drink manufacturing firms. For great accuracy pilot studies, 10% to 20% of the trial ought to be made of the pilot test size (Loannidis, Fanelli, Dunne, & Goodman, 2015). Data analysis takes many forms but this research analyses the quantifiable data using numerical approaches that ranged from descriptive statistics like mean, percentages, variation coefficient, standard deviation as well as one sample t-test was utilized in demographic information analysis. Inferential statistics like correlations and regressions were also be utilized. The most appropriate software recommended by Mackey and Gass (2015) was the SPSS version 23.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

103 respondents dully and returned the administered questionnaires. This represented 89.56% response rate which is good for a research study. Morton et al. (2012) postulated that a rate of response of 70% and above is good for a research study.

Descriptive Results

Continuous Improvement

The study used primary data in its analysis. Structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used to measures the level of agreement or disagreement of the respondents with the statements presented in the questionnaire. A summary of the responses on the questions on continuous improvement are tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Results for Continuous Improvement

	SD	D	N	A	SA		
	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	M	Sdev
The company has continuous improvement of quality systems	1 1%	13 12.6%	16 15.5%	34 33%	39 37.9%	3.9	1.1
The quality systems contributes to zero defect of quality objectives	8 7.8%	13 12.6%	21 20.4%	29 28.2%	32 31.1%	3.6	1.3
There is continuous monitoring and improvement of quality systems and procedures	0 0%	18 17.5%	24 23.3%	28 27.2%	33 32%	3.7	1.1
Quality audits are carried out continuously as per ISO certification requirements.	8 7.8%	15 14.6%	18 17.5%	25 24.3%	37 35.9%	3.7	1.3
There is continuous improvement reviews through internal quality audits	5 4.9%	13 12.6%	25 24.3%	20 19.4%	40 38.8%	3.7	1.2
There is a policy for making continuous improvement of products quality for every individual in the company	5 4.9%	15 14.6%	22 21.4%	26 25.2%	35 34%	3.7	1.2
The firms benchmarks its quality against other quality management practices best practices	7 6.8%	6 5.8%	16 15.5%	25 24.3%	49 47.6%	4.0	1.2
The company has set time limit to meet efficiency of products delivery	5 4.9%	11 10.7%	21 20.4%	25 24.3%	41 39.8%	3.8	1.2
There are set benchmarks for internal quality realization and conformity	1 1%	6 5.8%	21 20.4%	41 39.8%	34 33%	4.0	0.9

It can be observed from the results tabulated that the statement, the company has continuous improvement of quality systems recorded the following responses. 39(37.9%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 34(33%) of them were in agreement whereas 16(15.5%) did not take

any side. The line mean of the statement was 3.9 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.1 indicating that the responses were in agreement that the improvement of quality systems by the company is continuous.

The zero defect of quality objectives are achieved through quality systems attracted the following responses. 21(20.4%) of the responses were neutral, 29(28.2%) of them agreed, 32(31.1%) of those contacted were in strong agreement with the statement. The mean and the corresponding standard deviation of the stamen were 3.6 and 1.3 respectively implying that the respondents were in agreement that the achievement of zero defect of the quality objectives is possible through quality systems contributes.

Furthermore, the responses regarding the question on whether improvement and monitoring of quality procedures and systems was continuous pointed out the following. 28(27.2%) of the respondents contacted were in agreement, 24(23.3%) recorded a neutral position whereas 33 (32%) indicated a strong agreement with the statement. The mean and the standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.1 in that order meaning that the respondents were in agreement that there was continuous improvement and monitoring of the quality systems and also procedures.

With respect to whether there is continuous quality audits as per ISO certification requirements, 25(24.3%) of those contacted agreed, 37(35.9%) had a strong agreement while 18(17.5%) held a neutral stand. The line mean and standard deviation were 3.7 and 1.3 implying that quality audits were continuously done according to the requirements of ISO certification.

With respect to the question, there is internal quality audits, which is a continuous improvement review, 40(38.8%) of the responses strongly agreed, 25(24.3%) did not take any side whereas 20(19.4%) held a neutral stand. The mean and the line standard deviation were 3.7 and 1.2 indicating that level of agreement among the responses that there were audits done internally internal.

The company has a policy responsible for individual's continuous improvement of the quality of products received the responses as follows. 22(21.4%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 26(25.2%) of those contacted agreed and 35(34%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.2 in that order. This implies that the there was a policy within the company that helped in improving the quality of individual products continuously.

In addition, with regards to the question, the company uses the other quality management practices best practices of the firms to benchmark its quality, 49(47.6%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 25(24.3%) of them were in agreement and 16(15.5%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 4.0 and 1.2 in that order implying that the other quality management practices best practices aided the company in improving its quality.

Furthermore, with regards to the question, the efficiency of products delivery of the company has set time limit, 41(39.8%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 25(24.3%) of them were in agreement and 21(20.4%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.2 in that order implying that the respondents were in agreement that the company has achieved its efficiency of delivering products by setting time limits.

With respect to the question, the internal quality conformity and realization has set benchmarks, 34(33%) of the responses strongly agreed, 41(39.8%) were in agreement whereas 21(20.4%) held a neutral stand. The mean and the line standard deviation were 4.0 and 0.9 indicating that there are benchmarks set for internal quality conformity and realization.

Customer Management

The study used primary data in its analysis. Structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used to measures the level of agreement or disagreement of the respondents with the statements presented in the questionnaire. A summary of the responses on the questions on customer management are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Results for Customer Management

	SD	D	N	A	SA		
	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	M	S Dev
Mechanism exists for customer complaints handling	6 5.8%	12 11.7%	16 15.5%	27 26.2%	42 40.8%	3.8	1.2
The company has customer complaints procedure where customers are attended to	7 6.8%	13 12.6%	19 18.4%	27 26.2%	37 35.9%	3.7	1.3
The company has consistent tracking of complaints and procedures for all cases of complaints	11 10.7%	15 14.6%	17 16.5%	20 19.4%	40 38.8%	3.6	1.4
The Company conducts customer feedback surveys regularly	9 8.7%	8 7.8%	23 22.3%	32 31.1%	31 30.1%	3.7	1.2
The company stresses the importance on obtaining feedback on its quality control systems from customers	4 3.9%	15 14.6%	19 18.4%	30 29.1%	35 34%	3.7	1.2
The company is committed to customer retention by ensuring quality products	11 10.7%	14 13.6%	17 16.5%	24 23.3%	37 35.9%	3.6	1.4
Customer needs are reviewed regularly to meet changing customer preferences and expectations.	3 2.9%	10 9.7%	27 26.2%	29 28.2%	34 33%	3.8	1.1
Customer needs and expectations are communicated throughout the company	9 8.7%	5 4.9%	13 12.6%	31 30.1%	45 43.7%	4.0	1.2
There is improved customer loyalty leading to repeat business	6 5.8%	12 11.7%	18 17.5%	27 26.2%	40 38.8%	3.8	1.2

It can be observed from the results tabulated that the statement, mechanism exists for customer complaints handling recorded the following responses. 42(40.8%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 27(26.2%) of them were in agreement whereas 16(15.5%) did not take any side. The line mean of the statement was 3.2 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.2 indicating that the responses were in agreement that there exist mechanism for handling customer complaints. There is a company procedure for customer complaints for attending to customers received the responses as follows. 19(18.4%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 27(26.2%) of those contacted agreed and 37(35.9%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.3 in that order. This implies that the company had a procedure where customers are attended to.

In addition, concerning the question, there was a consistent tracking of complaints and procedures for all cases of complaints in the company, 40(38.8%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 20(19.4%) of them were in agreement and 17(16.5%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.6 and 1.4 in that order implying that the tracking of complaints and procedures for all cases of complaints by the company was consistent. With respect to the question, customer feedback surveys were regularly conducted by the company, 34(22.3%) of the responses strongly agreed, 32(31.1%) were in agreement whereas 23(22.3%) held a neutral stand. The mean and the line standard deviation were 3.7 and 1.2 indicating that the company did regularly conduct surveys on customer feedback.

The importance on obtaining feedback on the control systems of quality from customers is emphasized by the company received the responses as follows. 19(18.4%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 30(29.1%) of those contacted agreed and 35(34%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.2 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that the company lays

strong emphasis on the need to obtain feedback from customers on its quality control systems. Furthermore, with regards to the question, the ensures quality products company to retain customers, 37(35.9%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 24(23.3%) of them were in agreement and 17(16.5%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.6 and 1.4 in that order implying that the respondents were in agreement that the company achieves customer retention by providing quality products.

There is a regular review of customer needs to meet changing customer expectations and preferences on the other hand received the responses as follows. 27(26.2%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 29(28.2%) of those contacted agreed and 34(33%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.1 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that in order to meet changing customer preferences and expectations, customer needs are reviewed regularly. With respect to the question, communication of the needs and expectations of customer are done throughout the company, 45(43.7%) of the responses strongly agreed, 31(30.1%) were in agreement whereas 13(12.6%) held a neutral stand. The mean and the line standard deviation were 4.0 and 1.2 indicating that needs and expectations of customers are communicated in the entire company.

There is improved loyalty by the customers that has led to repeat business received the responses as follows. 18(17.5%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 27(26.2%) of those contacted agreed and 40(38.8%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.2 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that there is the improved customer loyalty has resulted in repeat business.

Operational Performance

The dependent variable of the study was operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi City County. The study adopted primary data in its analysis. Structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used to measures the level of agreement or disagreement of the respondents with the statements presented in the questionnaire. A summary of the responses on the questions on operational performance are tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Results of Operational Performance

	SD f %	D f %	N f %	A f %	SA f %	M	S Dev
The organization is works on economy of scale (large-scale production to reduce the cost per unit).	8 7.8%	12 11.7%	14 13.6%	32 31.1%	37 35.9%	3.8	1.3
The organization provides cost effective service to customer.	7 6.8%	12 11.7%	27 26.2%	20 19.4%	37 35.9%	3.7	1.3
Supplier management reduces administrative costs.	3 2.9%	12 11.7%	21 20.4%	29 28.2%	38 36.9%	3.8	1.1
SQM reduces the average unit manufacturing cost.	5 4.9%	20 19.4%	22 21.4%	26 25.2%	30 29.1%	3.5	1.2
SQM helps the organization reduce the inventory to minimum level to the extent that does not hinder the continuation of work	5 4.9%	10 9.7%	24 23.3%	35 34%	29 28.2%	3.7	1.1
SQM has led the organization to choses their suppliers on the basis of high-quality.	4 3.9%	11 10.7%	29 28.2%	24 23.3%	35 34%	3.7	1.2
SQM has assisted in improving the quality of goods, works and services offered to the beneficiary.	2 1.9%	17 16.5%	18 17.5%	32 31.1%	34 33%	3.8	1.1
The adoption of strategic quality management practices has greatly enhanced product quality.	7 6.8%	10 9.7%	19 18.4%	29 28.2%	38 36.9%	3.8	1.2

It can be noted that the question, the organization is works on economy of scale (large-scale production to reduce the cost per unit) recorded the following responses. 37(35.9%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 32(31.1%) of them were in agreement whereas 14(13.6%) did not take any side. The line mean of the statement was 3.8 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.3 indicating that the organization is works on economy of scale (large-scale production to reduce the cost per unit). The organization provides cost effective service to customer received the responses as follows. 27(26.2%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 20(19.4%) of those contacted agreed and 37(35.9%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.3 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that the organization provides cost effective service to customer.

It is clear from the results tabulated that the statement, supplier management reduces administrative costs received the following responses. 38(36.9%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 29(28.2%) of them were in agreement whereas 21(20.4%) did not take any side. The line mean of the statement was 3.8 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.1 indicating that the responses were in agreement that supplier management reduces administrative costs. SQM reduces the average unit manufacturing cost received the responses as follows. 22(21.4%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 26(25.2%) of those contacted agreed and 30(29.1%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.5 and 1.2 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that SQM reduces the average unit manufacturing cost.

Furthermore, with regards to the question, SQM helps the organization reduce the inventory to minimum level to the extent that does not hinder the continuation of work, 29(28.2%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 35(34%) of them were in agreement and 24(23.3%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.1 in that order implying that the respondents were in agreement that SQM helps the organization reduce the inventory to minimum level to the extent that does not hinder the continuation of work. It can be observed from the results tabulated that the statement, SQM has led the organization to choses their suppliers on the basis of high-quality received the following responses. 35(34%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 24(23.3%) of them were in agreement whereas 29(28.2%) did not take any side. The line mean of the statement was 3.7 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.2 indicating that the responses were in agreement that their SQM has led the organization to choses their suppliers on the basis of high-quality.

It can be noted from the results tabulated that the statement, SQM has assisted in improving the quality of goods, works and services offered to the beneficiary received the following responses. 34(33%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 32(31.1%) of them were in agreement whereas 18(17.5%) did not take any side. The statement recorded a mean of 3.8 and an SD was 1.1, which means that SQM had assisted in improving the quality of works, goods and services offered to the beneficiary. In addition, concerning the question, the adoption of strategic quality management practices has greatly enhanced product quality, 38(36.9%) of those contacted recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 29(28.2%) of them agreed and 19(18.4%) of them were neutral. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.2. The findings meant that the responses did agree that the adoption of strategic quality management practices had greatly enhanced product quality.

Supplier management leads to proper storage conditions according to the specifications received the responses as follows. 19(18.4%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 34(33%) of those contacted agreed and 36(35%) had a strong agreement.

The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.2 in that order. This implies that the respondents agreed that supplier management leads to proper storage conditions according to the specifications. It can be observed from the results tabulated that the statement, supplier management leads to an increased quality information sharing in order to enhance operational efficiency received the following responses. 30(29.1%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 32(31.1%) of them were in agreement whereas 21(20.4%) did not take any side. The line mean of the statement was 3.6 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.3 indicating that the responses were in agreement that supplier management leads to an increased quality information sharing in order to enhance operational efficiency.

SQM has increased customer satisfaction levels received the responses as follows. 24(23.3%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 29(28.2%) of those contacted agreed and 36(35%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.2 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that SQM has increased customer satisfaction levels. Collaboration with suppliers have enhanced more conformity with technical set specifications received the responses as follows. 18(17.5%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 46(44.7%) of those contacted agreed and 33(32%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 4.0 and 0.9 in that order. This implies that the respondents agreed that collaboration with suppliers have enhanced more conformity with technical set specifications.

Customer management leads to improved product quality and variety received the responses as follows. 25(24.3%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 36(35%) of those contacted agreed and 33(32%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.9 and 1.0 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that customer management leads to improved product quality and variety. In addition, concerning the question, the firm introduces new products from competitors to ensure competition, 39(37.9%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement, 33(32%) of them were in agreement and 27(26.2%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 4.0 and 0.9 in that order implying that the respondents were in agreement that the firm introduces new products from competitors to ensure competition.

The organization quickly modifies products to meet major customer's requirement received the responses as follows. 20(19.4%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 35(34%) of those contacted agreed and 37(35.9%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 4.0 and 1.0 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that the organization quickly modifies products to meet major customer's requirement. It can be observed from the results tabulated that the statement, the organization provides a high level of customer service to its major customers received the following responses. 40(38.8%) of the responses recorded a strong opinion, 36(35%) of them were in agreement whereas 15(14.6%) did not take any side. The line mean of the statement was 4.0 whereas its corresponding standard deviation was 1.0 indicating that the responses were in agreement that the organization provides a high level of customer service to its major customers.

There is high response to dynamic customer needs received the responses as follows. 18(17.5%) of the participants in the study did not take any position regarding the statement, 33(32%) of those contacted agreed and 34(33%) had a strong agreement. The mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.8 and 1.1 in that order. This implies that the respondents were in agreement that there is high response to dynamic customer needs. Finally, with regards to the question, SQM helps organization through suppliers have enhanced more conformity with technical set specifications, 30(29.1%) of the respondents recorded a strong opinion with regards the statement,

34(33%) of them were in agreement and 21(20.4%) of them were neutral. The line mean and standard deviation of the statement were 3.7 and 1.1 in that order implying that the respondents were in agreement that SQM helps organization through suppliers have enhanced more conformity with technical set specifications.

Inferential Results

Inferential statistics entail correlation and regression statistics of the study. Correlation statistics is used to determine the direction and strength of relationship between strategic quality management practices and operational performance of the companies chosen in the study. Regression on the other hand determines the linear relationship between the dependent and the independent variables of the research.

Correlation Statistics.

The study determined the correlation between continuous improvement, customer management, supplier management, workforce management and operational performance. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Results

		Operational Performance	Continuous Improvement	Customer Management
Operational Performance	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	103		
Continuous Improvement	Pearson Correlation	.570**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
	N	103	103	
Customer Management	Pearson Correlation	.614**	.397**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
	N	103	103	103

From the results, continuous improvement has a statistically significant and positive relationship with operational performance ($p=0.000<0.05$, $r=0.570$) giving the implication that it has a positive impact on operational performance of the companies under research. In addition, customer management recorded a positive (0.614) and statistically significant relationship ($p=0.000<0.05$) with operational performance implying that customer management positively affects operational performance of the firms that manufacture soft drinks in Nairobi County.

Regression Results.

The study further conducted a regression analysis to determine the linear relationship between the firms 'operational performance and the independent variables, which are, continuous improvement, supplier management.

Table 5: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.738a	0.545	0.527	0.29186

From the findings shown in Table 5, it is clear that the estimated model explains to a tune of 54.5% of the total variations in the operational performance of the companies under study. The Chi Squared value of 0.545 in the estimated model supports this conclusion. This therefore has the

implication that the identified variables are significant in explaining the variations in the firm's operational performance.

Table 6: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10.009	4	2.502	29.435	.000b
Residual	8.348	98	0.085		
Total	18.357	102			

The results presented in Table 6 points out that the estimated model is statistically significant. This is evidenced by the estimated P value in the model (0.000<0.05) and also the estimated F value (29.375) less than the F critical 2.4472 in the F tables. The estimated results can therefore be used to give reliable inference.

The coefficients of the variables of study, continuous improvement, customer management, supplier management and workforce management were estimated in the study. The coefficients were used to estimate the linear regression model of the study. The results are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.713	0.29		2.462	0.016
Continuous Improvement	0.295	0.071	0.323	4.155	0.000
Customer Management	0.275	0.079	0.313	3.498	0.001

Dependent Variable: Operational Performance

The estimated linear regression model was,

$$\mathbf{Y = .713 + .323X_1 + .313X_2}$$

The findings recorded a positive (.323) and statistically significant (0.000<0.05) coefficient of continuous improvement meaning that a unit improvement in strategies of the under study will result in 0.323 units improvement in the operational performance of the firms. In addition, customer management had a positive (0.313) and significant (0.001<0.05) linear relationship with operational performance implying that improving the customer management strategies by a unit will yield a corresponding 0.313 units improvement in the operational performance of the firms.

Hypothesis Testing

Continuous Improvement

The hypothesis tested was,

H_{01}: The adoption of continuous improvement practices has no impact on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing companies in Nairobi County.

The first objective of the study was to determine continuous improvement impact on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County. After analyzing the data in the study, the results indicated that continuous improvement recorded a positive (r=0.323) and statistically significant (p=0.000<0.05) relationship with operational performance of Nairobi County based soft drink manufacturing companies. The study therefore rejected the null hypothesis

and made the conclusion that continuous improvement positively affect operational performance of Nairobi County based soft drink manufacturing companies.

A summary of these findings meant that continuous improvement affects positively on the operational performance of the firms under research. Kaziliunas, (2018) in a study postulated that continuous improvement of processes, people, system, team work, performance, communication and reward systems are all essential components of a good quality management system and ISO 9000 accreditation. In addition, by adopting the culture to improve processes and output, organizations are assured improved efficiencies and cost savings (Hammer, 2017). Total quality management culture requires changes in manager's employees believe attitude and behaviors to focus on continuous improvement. This require commitment to a culture emphasizing trust, empowerment, entrepreneurship, teamwork cooperation, risk taking and continuous improvement (Kaluarachi, 2018) hence innovation success.

Customer Management

The hypothesis tested was,

H_{02}: The implementation of customer management practices has no effect on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County.

The second objective of the study was to determine customer management effect on the operational performance of the firms that manufacture soft drinks in Nairobi. Upon the analysis of the data in the study, the results indicated that customer management recorded a positive ($r=0.313$) and statistically significant ($p=0.001<0.05$) relationship with operational performance of Nairobi County based soft drink manufacturing companies. The study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that customer management positively affect operational performance of Nairobi County based soft drink manufacturing companies. This implied that customer management has a positive effect on the operational performance of firms that were targeted in the study.

Customer focus is one of the strategies that are usually used by various organizations in pursuit of success. Customer focus is usually described as the consistent efforts that an organization puts in, to meet and satisfy the needs of its customers. The practice of customer focus has been identified as pivotal for any organization seeking to reach a level of sustainable performance (Cai, 2019; Mokhtar, 2019). Customer focus is essential because customer expectations are dynamic. Therefore, in order to implement the practice of customer focus successfully, the organization must draw extensively on customer data which typically provides information that enable employees to engage more fully to address customer related issues. Verhoef et al (2018) argue that an organization should have reliable suppliers, who create products that meet customer needs. These products should also be delivered without delays, standard pricing and a friendly after-sales service rather customer care. Tobe and Thomas (2018) emphasize that loyalty is more profitable. The expenses to gain a new customer is much more than retaining existing one. Loyal customers will encourage others to buy from you and think more than twice before changing their mind to buy other services.

Conclusions

The study demonstrated that strategic quality management practices, particularly continuous improvement efforts, have a positive effect on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County. Njuguna and Gathungu (2019) investigated the effect of continuous improvement on the operational performance of manufacturing firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. They found that continuous improvement initiatives, such as employee training, process improvement, and waste reduction, positively influenced operational performance. By focusing on systems measurements, continuous quality audits, and benchmarking, soft drink

manufacturing companies can optimize their operations, enhance product quality, and ultimately achieve greater success in a competitive market. The study concludes that regular quality audits ensure that the soft drink manufacturing firms adhere to established standards and regulations while identifying opportunities for process improvement. Continuous improvement entails continuous improvement of processes, people, system, teamwork, performance, communication, and reward systems. In addition, it also involves the improvement of processes and output as well as the overall quality. This improvement requires changes in manager's employees believe attitude and behaviors to focus on continuous improvement.

The study found a positive relationship between effective customer management practices and the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County. Companies that employed customer complaints handling, customer feedback systems, and customer retention interventions as performance indicators were better positioned to meet customer needs, improve customer satisfaction, and enhance overall operational efficiency. Kariuki and Mugambi (2015) investigated the effect of customer relationship management (CRM) on the operational performance of commercial banks in Kenya. They found that the implementation of CRM strategies, such as customer data analysis, personalized services, and customer feedback mechanisms, positively influenced operational performance. This study concludes that soft drink manufacturing firms that review their customer needs regularly tend to also meet the changing customer preferences and expectations. The study concludes that soft drink manufacturers that address issues promptly and effectively, can minimize the negative impact on their operations, learn from customer feedback, and implement improvements that lead to higher product quality and customer satisfaction.

Recommendations

The findings recommend that the targeted firms should implement real-time monitoring and data collection systems to track key performance indicators such as production throughput, equipment downtime, and waste generation. The study also recommends that firms should foster a culture of quality within the organization by involving employees at all levels in the audit process and encouraging them to take ownership of quality improvement initiatives. Lastly the study recommends the use benchmarking results to set realistic targets for the firm and develop strategies to close performance gaps, ultimately improving overall operational performance.

Customer management is a critical factor influencing the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County. By using customer complaints handling, customer feedback systems, and customer retention intervention, firms can enhance their customer management practices and improve overall performance. The study recommends that firms need to regularly analyze complaint data to identify recurring issues or trends and implement corrective actions to prevent future occurrences. The study also recommends firms should foster a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging employees to view customer complaints as opportunities to learn and enhance the customer experience. The study also recommends firms should encourage employees to embrace customer feedback as a valuable resource for identifying areas of improvement and optimizing the customer experience.

Policy Recommendations

Policymakers have a crucial role in creating a conducive environment for soft drink manufacturers in Nairobi County to thrive. By considering workforce management, supplier management, customer management, and continuous improvement, policymakers can develop targeted policies and initiatives that support these areas. The study recommends that policy makers should support vocational training and skill development programs to create a skilled workforce that meets the

needs of the soft drink manufacturing industry. The study also encourages the development of local suppliers through policies and incentives, such as tax breaks and grants, to promote a more resilient and sustainable supply chain. The study recommends consumer protection laws and regulations that promote transparency in labeling, pricing, and marketing of soft drinks, enabling customers to make informed choices. The study also recommends policies that encourage collaboration between soft drink manufacturers and other stakeholders, such as government agencies, industry associations, and research institutions, to address shared challenges and opportunities.

Recommendations for Further Studies

The study recommends that further research be conducted to extend the geographical scope of the study to include soft drink manufacturing firms in other regions of Kenya or in other East African countries to examine the findings and identify potential regional variations in the implementation of SQM practices and their impact on operational performance. The study also recommends exploration of barriers and challenges faced by soft drink manufacturing firms in Nairobi County, Kenya, in implementing SQM practices and identify strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Limitations of the Study

The focus on Nairobi County, Kenya, limits the applicability of the findings to other regions or countries with different cultural, economic, and regulatory contexts. The study was also limited by lack of confidence by the respondents in providing the needed information. This is because they feared the leaking of confidential information and were therefore reluctant to respond to the questionnaire. To mitigate the limitation, they were provided with a letter of introduction, which assured them of the purpose of the study, which was academic. They were assured that the information would not be leaked to any other party. The study further faced the limitation of the methodology used in the study. This is because the study could not exhaust all the methodologies and therefore adopted just a few of them. The study curbed this limitation by recommending future studies to adopt the other methodologies.

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