

COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS AND PERFORMANCE OF FLOUR MILLING COMPANIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The study was guided by Resource-Based View (RBV). A descriptive research design and positivism philosophy were adopted. The study targeted 59 registered flour milling companies in Kenya with 472 employees comprising 59 management employees, 177 supervisors and 236 junior staff. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a sample size of 212 respondents was obtained. Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire, while quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 28 through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis. From the 212 questionnaires administered, 167 were completely filled and returned, representing a response rate of 78.8%. The findings established a very strong and statistically significant relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in

Kenya ($r = 0.844$, $p = 0.001$). Regression results showed that competitive aggressiveness explained 26.6% of the variation in performance and had a positive and statistically significant influence on performance ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$). The study concluded that competitive aggressiveness positively and significantly influences performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The study recommends that the management of flour milling companies in Kenya should adopt a structured competitive aggressiveness strategy by actively strengthening their market positioning through differentiated product offerings, strategic pricing, strong distribution networks, and continuous brand visibility initiatives.

Key words: Competitive Aggressiveness, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Company Performance, Flour Milling Companies, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The manufacturing sector is a vital component of the global economy, encompassing industries involved in the transformation of raw materials into finished goods through mechanical, physical, or chemical processes (Subramaniam et al., 2023). It includes a wide range of activities, from the production of consumer goods like electronics and clothing to industrial products such as

machinery and vehicles. This sector drives innovation, supports millions of jobs, and significantly contributes to GDP in many countries (Ramadhan et al., 2024). Flour milling companies are businesses that specialize in processing cereal grains—primarily wheat, but also corn, rye, oats, and others—into flour and related products used in baking, cooking, and food manufacturing (Marei et al., 2023). These companies operate large-scale mills equipped with machinery that cleans, grinds, and refines grains to produce various types of flour, such as all-purpose, whole wheat, and specialty flours. Flour milling companies play a critical role in the food supply chain by converting raw cereal grains into flour, a staple ingredient used in a vast array of food products (Sakib et al., 2022).

In addition, these companies contribute to agricultural economies by providing a stable market for grain farmers. Through sourcing large volumes of raw grain, they support rural livelihoods and help stabilize grain prices (Vijaya et al., 2020). Many flour milling companies also invest in research and development to improve milling technologies, enhance product quality, and create specialized flour blends tailored to specific culinary needs or dietary requirements (Umoh et al., 2020). Furthermore, flour milling companies often engage in food safety, sustainability, and regulatory compliance initiatives. They must adhere to strict standards in hygiene, packaging, and labeling, ensuring that the flour reaching consumers is safe and meets health regulations (Oduro-Nyarko & Hervie, 2020).

Competitive aggressiveness involves the willingness to challenge competitors directly and assertively through bold strategies, such as aggressive marketing, pricing, or innovation. While this approach can increase market share, it requires careful risk management and ethical consideration (Oraya & Maina, 2023). Competitive aggressiveness encompasses persistence, adaptation and resilience. The company consistently works towards long-term goals, even in the face of challenges. The team demonstrates persistence in overcoming obstacles to achieve business objectives. The company swiftly adapts its strategies when competitors present new challenges and regularly adjusts its approaches based on the actions of competitors and market changes. The organization is flexible in adapting to competitive pressure to maintain an edge. The company is able to bounce back quickly from setbacks and continue moving forward, while resilience is an essential trait within the company culture, helping it stay competitive.

Previous empirical studies have examined entrepreneurial competencies in relation to the growth of agricultural small and micro enterprises (Chomba & Nyang'au, 2022), financial performance of small and micro enterprises (Kewaiy et al., 2021), and performance of women-owned agribusiness enterprises (Kimutai & Gakobo, 2023). However, these studies focused on SMEs and agribusinesses and did not specifically examine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The study therefore provides the basis for examining competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The performance of flour milling companies in Kenya has deteriorated in recent years, as reflected in declining profitability, reduced productivity, shrinking market shares, and increasing operational costs (KNBS, 2024). Although the milling industry contributes significantly to Kenya's food security and manufacturing sector, many firms continue to experience declining financial performance due to rising production costs, increased competition, supply chain disruptions, and an unfavorable business environment (Kimutai & Gakobo, 2023). For example, Unga Group, one of Kenya's leading flour millers, reported consecutive financial challenges that resulted in workforce reductions in 2023 following high financing costs, reduced consumer purchasing power, and declining sales volumes (Owino & Namusonge, 2023). The wheat milling industry is also highly fragmented, with Mombasa Maize Millers controlling approximately 22% of the market, Grain Industries 15%, Kitui Flour Mills 13%, Pembe Flour Mills 8%, Uzuri Foods 7%, Unga Group only 4%, while the remaining 31% is shared among numerous small millers (Oraya & Maina, 2023).

Performance challenges are further compounded by Kenya's heavy dependence on imported wheat. The country consumes approximately 900,000 metric tons of wheat annually, yet local production supplies only between 20% and 30% of national demand, forcing millers to rely on costly imports whose prices have increased significantly following global supply disruptions such as the Russia–Ukraine conflict (Chomba & Nyang'au, 2022). Consequently, production costs have continued to rise while profit margins have narrowed. Furthermore, the price of a 2 kg packet of maize flour increased from KES 144.54 in October 2024 to KES 169.41 in April 2025, representing a 17% increase (KNBS, 2025). Studies further indicate that inefficient working capital management accounts for up to 73.8% of variations in profitability among milling firms, while increasing raw material costs, inflation, and supply chain inefficiencies continue to reduce profit before tax and return on assets (Kewaiy et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial competencies have been identified as critical drivers of organizational performance because they enable firms to recognize opportunities, respond to environmental changes, innovate, and sustain competitive advantage (Owino & Namusonge, 2023). However, limited attention has been given to competitive aggressiveness and the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. To address this empirical and contextual gap, the current study sought to determine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: Competitive aggressiveness has no statistically significant influence on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory founded by Barney (1991) is a strategic management framework that focuses on the internal resources and capabilities of a firm as sources of competitive advantage (Sajjad, 2020). At its core, RBV posits that a firm's unique bundle of resources and capabilities can enable it to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and superior performance in the marketplace. Unlike traditional strategic management approaches that primarily focus on external factors such as market dynamics and industry structure, RBV emphasizes the importance of internal factors in determining a firm's success (Kampire, 2020). RBV theory entails identifying and leveraging a firm's distinctive resources and capabilities to create value and achieve strategic objectives (Shayo, 2020). Resources can include tangible assets such as physical infrastructure, financial capital, and technology, as well as intangible assets such as human capital, intellectual property, organizational culture, and reputation (Onyango et al., 2024). These resources are considered valuable if they enable the firm to exploit opportunities or neutralize threats in the external environment. Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to the firm's ability to effectively deploy and utilize its resources to perform specific activities and achieve desired outcomes (Muthoga et al., 2021). This theory was used to determine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structured representation of the key variables, concepts, or ideas and their relationships that underpin a research study (Kothari, 2019). A conceptual framework shows the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable (Creswell, 2019). In this study, the independent variable is competitive aggressiveness, while the dependent variable is performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

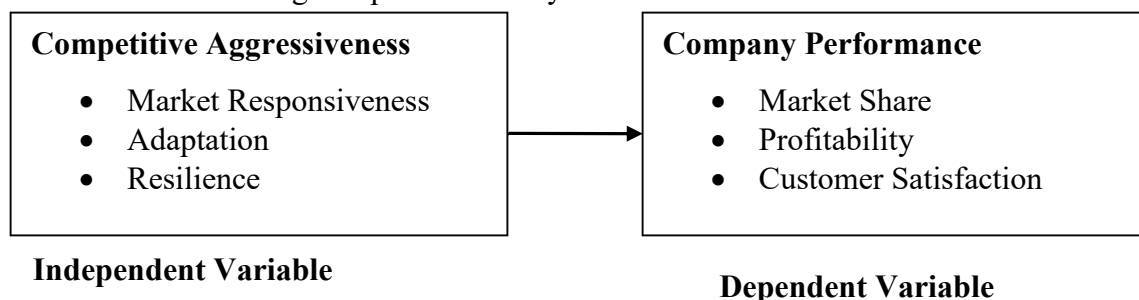


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Competitive Aggressiveness

Competitive aggressiveness refers to the proactive and assertive pursuit of market opportunities and competitive advantage, often characterized by a strong drive to outperform rivals. It involves taking bold actions to achieve goals, such as aggressively marketing products, entering new markets, or making strategic moves that disrupt competitors (Sajjad, 2020). Individuals or organizations exhibiting competitive aggressiveness are not afraid to challenge the status quo, take calculated risks, and push forward aggressively to seize opportunities. This competency is often linked to entrepreneurial spirit, where there is a constant desire to innovate, improve, and establish dominance within a particular market or industry (Kampire, 2020). Competitive aggressiveness helps organizations stay ahead of their competitors by anticipating their moves, responding swiftly to market changes, and striving to maintain a leadership position. However, it requires a balance of assertiveness and strategic thinking to ensure that aggressive actions are sustainable and do not lead to unnecessary conflict or burnout (Shayo, 2020).

Market responsiveness is the ability of a firm to quickly and effectively react to changes in the market environment, including competitor actions, customer preferences, and industry trends. It involves continuously monitoring the external environment and making timely adjustments to strategies, products, and operations to maintain or improve competitive position (Onyango et al., 2024). Firms with high market responsiveness are proactive in identifying emerging opportunities and threats, enabling them to respond swiftly through pricing strategies, product innovation, and improved service delivery. In both dynamic and competitive business environments, market responsiveness is critical for sustaining performance and achieving market relevance. It also allows organizations to remain flexible, learn from market feedback, and continuously refine their approaches to meet evolving customer needs and competitive pressures (Muthoga et al., 2021).

Adaptation refers to the ability of an organization to adjust its strategies and approaches in response to competitor actions and market changes. It enables firms to remain flexible under competitive pressure and maintain their competitive position.

Resilience refers to the capacity to recover from adversity, setbacks, or difficult situations and continue moving forward with strength and optimism. It is the ability to bounce back after facing challenges, whether they are personal struggles, business failures, or external crises (Onyango et al., 2024). Resilience involves emotional toughness, perseverance, and the ability to maintain a positive attitude during tough times. Resilient individuals are not easily discouraged and are able to find ways to overcome obstacles while maintaining their focus on their long-term objectives (Muthoga et al., 2021).

Empirical Review

The reviewed empirical studies generally indicate a positive relationship between competitive aggressiveness and organizational performance across different contexts. Bii et al. (2023) examined the effect of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of star-rated hotels in the

North Rift Region of Kenya and provided evidence on the role of competitive aggressiveness in organizational performance. Linyiru and Ketyenya (2020) examined competitive aggressiveness and performance of state corporations in Kenya, while Muthoga et al. (2021) investigated competitive aggressiveness and microinsurance uptake by micro and small enterprises in Kenya. These studies demonstrate the relevance of competitive aggressiveness in responding to competitive market conditions.

Similarly, Sajjad (2020) examined competitive aggressiveness among technology startups and highlighted the importance of competitive strategies in responding to market rivalry. Shayo (2020) examined the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and export performance of tourism firms in Tanzania and emphasized the role of competitive aggressiveness in sustaining performance in competitive environments. Onyango et al. (2024) further examined competitive aggressiveness and its role in the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya, emphasizing strategic dynamism, innovation and flexibility.

The reviewed studies provide evidence that competitive aggressiveness is relevant to organizational performance, but most have focused on hotels, state corporations, microinsurance, tourism, startups and public transport enterprises. Limited attention has been given to flour milling companies in Kenya, despite the intense competition, changing market conditions and operational pressures within the sector. The present study therefore addresses this contextual gap by examining the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design and a positivism philosophy to empirically examine the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The descriptive design enabled the researcher to gather and describe information from respondents, while positivism supported objective empirical testing and quantification of the relationships proposed in the study (Creswell, 2019; Grant, 2019).

Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 472 employees drawn from 59 registered flour milling companies in Kenya. The population consisted of 59 management employees, 177 supervisors and 236 junior staff. The 59 registered flour milling companies constituted the unit of analysis, while employees working in these companies constituted the unit of observation. The sampling frame was based on the list of 59 registered flour milling companies identified by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers as at 31 December 2024.

Table 1: Target Population and Sample

Category	Population	Sample
Management employees	59	28
Supervisors	177	78
Junior staff	236	106
Total	472	212

Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a sample size of 212 respondents was obtained. Simple random sampling was subsequently used to select respondents, giving each member of the population an equal chance of selection (Creswell, 2019).

Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. It contained closed-ended and open-ended questions arranged systematically according to the study variables. Most of the questions were measured using a five-point Likert scale to facilitate quantitative analysis (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019).

Validity and Reliability

A pilot test involving 21 respondents was undertaken to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument before the main study. Content validity was enhanced by aligning the questionnaire with the study objectives and conceptual framework, while construct validity was assessed through factor analysis. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable (Kultar, 2017; Singpurwalla, 2018).

Operationalization of Variables

Table 2: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Indicators	Measurement
Competitive aggressiveness	Market responsiveness; Adaptation; Resilience	Five-point Likert scale
Company performance	Market share; Profitability; customer satisfaction	Five-point Likert scale

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 28. Descriptive statistics were presented through frequencies, percentages, tables and figures, while inferential analysis involved correlation and regression analysis. For this article, competitive aggressiveness was operationalized using market responsiveness, adaptation and resilience, while performance of flour milling companies was measured using market share, profitability and sales.

Before regression analysis, the study conducted diagnostic tests for linearity, multicollinearity, normality and homoscedasticity. Linearity was assessed through scatter plots, multicollinearity

through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), normality through the Shapiro-Wilk test, and homoscedasticity through the Breusch-Pagan and Koenker tests.

The regression model for the study was specified as follows:

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

Where: Y = Performance of flour milling companies in Kenya; X_1 = Competitive aggressiveness; β_0 = Constant; β_1 = Regression coefficient; ε = Error term.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical test	Decision rule
H01: Competitive aggressiveness has no statistically significant influence on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.	Pearson correlation, F-test and t-test	Reject H01 where $p \leq 0.05$; otherwise fail to reject H01.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The researcher sampled 212 respondents who were each administered with the questionnaires. From the 212 questionnaires, 167 were completely filled and returned, hence a response rate of 78.8%. The response rate was considered as suitable for making inferences from the data collected. As indicated by Creswell (2019), a response rate that is above fifty percent is considered adequate for data analysis and reporting while a response rate that is above 70% is classified as excellent. Hence, the response rate of this study was within the acceptable limits for drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

Descriptive Statistics: Competitive Aggressiveness and Company Performance

The study sought to determine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

From the results, the respondents agreed that their company consistently works towards long-term goals, even in the face of challenges ($M=3.835$, $SD=0.878$). In addition, the respondents agreed that the team demonstrates persistence in overcoming obstacles to achieve business objectives ($M=3.824$, $SD=0.897$). Further, the respondents agreed that they are dedicated to maintaining momentum in competitive situations, regardless of setbacks ($M=3.819$, $SD=0.776$). The respondents also agreed that the company swiftly adapts its strategies when competitors present new challenges ($M=3.811$, $SD=0.885$). In addition, the respondents agreed that they regularly adjust their approaches based on the actions of competitors and market changes ($M=3.806$, $SD=0.605$).

From the results, the respondents agreed that their organization is flexible in adapting to competitive pressure to maintain an edge ($M=3.787$, $SD=0.768$). In addition, the respondents agreed that they are able to bounce back quickly from setbacks and continue moving forward ($M=3.768$, $SD=0.822$). Further, the respondents agreed that resilience is an essential trait within their company culture, helping them stay competitive ($M=3.746$, $SD=0.623$). The respondents agreed that their team demonstrates resilience by continuously finding new solutions, even after failures ($M=3.731$, $SD=0.756$).

Table 4: Competitive Aggressiveness and Company Performance

Indicator/Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Persistence		
Our company consistently works towards long-term goals, even in the face of challenges.	3.835	0.878
The team demonstrates persistence in overcoming obstacles to achieve business objectives.	3.824	0.897
We are dedicated to maintaining momentum in competitive situations, regardless of setbacks.	3.819	0.776
Adaptation		
The company swiftly adapts its strategies when competitors present new challenges.	3.811	0.885
We regularly adjust our approaches based on the actions of competitors and market changes.	3.806	0.605
Our organization is flexible in adapting to competitive pressure to maintain an edge.	3.787	0.768
Resilience		
We are able to bounce back quickly from setbacks and continue moving forward.	3.768	0.822
Resilience is an essential trait within our company culture, helping us stay competitive.	3.746	0.623
Our team demonstrates resilience by continuously finding new solutions, even after failures.	3.731	0.756
Aggregate	3.792	0.779

Respondents acknowledged that their firms are committed to long-term objectives, demonstrate persistence in the face of challenges, and continually adjust strategies to respond to competitor actions and market dynamics. These results align with Sajjad (2020), who conceptualized competitive aggressiveness as a firm's intensity in challenging competitors and responding effectively to market rivalry. According to Onyango et al. (2024), competitive aggressiveness fosters the strategic dynamism required for firms to outperform rivals through innovation, speed of execution, and strategic flexibility.

The respondents further indicated that companies demonstrating strong competitive aggressiveness tend to invest more in marketing, product differentiation, and customer relationship management to outperform rivals. They also engage in continuous improvement of production processes to reduce costs and enhance efficiency, thereby offering high-quality products at competitive prices. This assertive approach enables flour milling companies to strengthen their market position, attract loyal customers, and achieve better financial performance despite the intense competition within the industry.

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Company Performance	Competitive Aggressiveness
Company Performance	1	.844**
Competitive Aggressiveness	.844**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.001
N	167	167

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results revealed a very strong relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in Kenya ($r = 0.844$, $p = 0.001$). The relationship was statistically significant since the p-value was less than 0.05. The findings are in line with the results of Sajjad (2020), who revealed that there was a very strong relationship between competitive aggressiveness and company performance.

Test of Hypothesis

The study sought to determine the influence of competitive aggressiveness on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. To test the hypothesis, the study conducted univariate regression analysis in which performance of flour milling companies in Kenya was regressed on competitive aggressiveness. The predictive power of the model was based on R^2 while the F-statistic was used to determine the fitness of the model at $p < 0.05$. The significance of the study variable was also based on the p-value at the 0.05 significance level.

The null hypothesis was: H01: Competitive aggressiveness has no statistically significant influence on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

A univariate analysis was therefore conducted to test the null hypothesis. From the model summary findings in Table 6, the R-squared for the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and performance of flour milling companies in Kenya was 0.266. This indicates that 26.6% of the variance in performance of flour milling companies in Kenya is explained by competitive aggressiveness, while the remaining 73.4% is explained by other factors.

Table 6: Model Summary for Competitive Aggressiveness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.516 ^a	.266	.265		.70542

a. Predictors: (Constant), competitive aggressiveness

The analysis of variance was used to determine whether the regression model was a good fit for the data. From the ANOVA findings in Table 7, $\text{Prob} > F_{1,165} = 0.000$ was less than the selected 0.05 level of significance. This suggests that the model was fit to predict performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. Further, the F-calculated from the table (59.826) was greater than the F-critical from F-distribution tables (3.898), supporting the findings that competitive aggressiveness can be used to predict performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Table 7: ANOVA for Competitive Aggressiveness

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	27.161	1	27.161	59.826	.000 ^b
Residual	74.930	165	.454		
Total	102.091	166			

a. Dependent Variable: performance of flour milling companies in Kenya

b. Predictors: (Constant), competitive aggressiveness

From the results in Table 8, the following regression model was fitted:

$$Y = 0.240 + 0.347X_1$$

X_1 is Competitive Aggressiveness.

The coefficient results showed that the constant had a coefficient of 0.240, suggesting that if competitive aggressiveness was held constant at zero, performance of flour milling companies in Kenya would be at 0.240 units. In addition, results showed that competitive aggressiveness coefficient was 0.347, indicating that a unit increase in competitive aggressiveness would result in a 0.347 unit improvement in performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The p-value for competitive aggressiveness was 0.000, which is less than the set 0.05 significance level, indicating that competitive aggressiveness was significant. Based on these results, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that competitive aggressiveness has a positive and statistically significant influence on performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

Table 8: Beta Coefficients for Competitive Aggressiveness

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	0.240	.064		3.750	.003
Competitive aggressiveness	0.347	.089	0.346	3.899	.000

a. Dependent Variable: performance of flour milling companies in Kenya

The finding that competitive aggressiveness has a positive and statistically significant influence on performance is consistent with the broader evidence reviewed in the study. The result suggests

that persistence, adaptation and resilience can support flour milling companies in responding to intense competition, changing market conditions and operational challenges. The finding also extends previous evidence from other organizational contexts by providing empirical evidence from flour milling companies in Kenya.

Conclusion

The study concluded that competitive aggressiveness positively and significantly influences performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. The positive regression coefficient indicates that improvements in competitive aggressiveness are associated with improvements in company performance. Competitive aggressiveness explained 26.6% of the variance in performance, while the remaining variation may be explained by other factors.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the management of flour milling companies in Kenya should adopt a structured competitive aggressiveness strategy by actively strengthening their market positioning through differentiated product offerings, strategic pricing, strong distribution networks, and continuous brand visibility initiatives. Management should also encourage persistence, adaptation and resilience so that firms can respond effectively to competitor actions, market changes and operational setbacks.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This study was limited to the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya. Further studies could examine other entrepreneurial competencies and their influence on the performance of flour milling companies and other manufacturing firms in Kenya. Further research could also examine other factors affecting the performance of flour milling companies in Kenya.

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