

Strategic Quality Management Practices on Operational Performance of Soft Drink Manufacturing Firms in Nyeri County, Kenya

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to establish the effect of strategic quality management practices on operational performance of soft drinks manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. Specifically, the study sought to determine the effect of strategic customer management on operational performance of soft drinks manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. This research was based on the stakeholder theory to explain the relationship between the study variables. The study intends to collect primary data using questionnaires. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study targeted 20 soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County, Kenya and the heads of operations, marketing section and human resource in the 20 soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County, Kenya giving a total of 60 respondents selected for the purpose of this study. Since the study population is small, the study worked with entire population which is census. Data collection instrument was questionnaires. Both primary and secondary data was collected. Piloting was done to test to validity and reliability of data collection instrument. Once data is collected, it was crosschecked and verified for errors, completeness and consistency. It was coded, entered and analysed descriptively using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 27). Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between variables in the study hypotheses. ANOVA and multiple linear regression analysis was adopted computed to determine the statistical relationship between the independent variable and the dependent. Information assembled was evaluated using descriptive and inferential statistics ranging from frequencies, percentages, correlation and regression. Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 24 was used for data analysis.

Keywords: Strategic Quality Management Practices, Operational Performance, strategic customer management, soft drinks manufacturing firms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic Quality Management (SQM) has emerged globally as a critical driver of operational performance, particularly within manufacturing sectors such as the soft drink industry. SQM refers to the integration of quality principles into organizational strategy, emphasizing continuous improvement, customer focus, process optimization, and leadership commitment. Across developed and emerging economies, firms adopting SQM practices have demonstrated improved efficiency, reduced waste, enhanced product consistency, and increased competitiveness. From a global standpoint, quality management has evolved from traditional inspection-based systems to more comprehensive frameworks such as Total Quality Management (TQM), ISO 9001 certification, and Six Sigma (T. Prunet et al., 2024). These approaches emphasize

defect prevention, process standardization, and data-driven decision-making. For instance, multinational beverage companies have leveraged Six Sigma and lean production systems to minimize production errors and enhance operational efficiency, leading to significant cost savings and improved product quality (Antony et al., 2021).

Globally, empirical evidence indicates a strong positive relationship between SQM practices and operational performance. A study by Tarí and Sabater (2020) found that firms implementing TQM practices recorded improvements in productivity, customer satisfaction, and operational flexibility. Similarly, Psomas and Jaca (2019) demonstrated that ISO 9001-certified manufacturing firms exhibited superior process efficiency and reduced operational costs compared to non-certified firms. These findings suggest that structured quality management systems provide a competitive advantage in highly standardized industries such as soft drink manufacturing. In the context of operational performance, SQM practices influence key dimensions such as production efficiency, cost reduction, product quality, and delivery reliability. Globally, firms that emphasize continuous improvement and employee involvement tend to achieve higher operational performance outcomes. According to a study by Zeng et al. (2022), the integration of quality management with organizational strategy significantly enhances operational outcomes by aligning processes with customer expectations and market demands. In the beverage industry, this alignment is critical due to stringent quality standards, health regulations, and intense market competition.

Furthermore, globalization and technological advancements have reinforced the importance of SQM practices. Digital quality management systems, automation, and real-time data analytics are increasingly being used to monitor production processes and ensure consistency. Research by Sahoo (2021) highlights that firms adopting digital quality management tools experience improved process control and faster decision-making, thereby enhancing operational performance. However, global studies also highlight challenges in implementing SQM practices. These include high implementation costs, resistance to change, lack of skilled personnel, and inadequate management commitment. In developing countries, such challenges are often exacerbated by limited resources and weak institutional frameworks. Despite these constraints, firms that successfully institutionalize SQM practices tend to achieve sustainable operational improvements. In relation to soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County, Kenya, global perspectives suggest that adopting strategic quality management practices can significantly enhance operational performance. Local firms can benefit from aligning with international standards such as ISO 9001, adopting continuous improvement methodologies, and leveraging technology to optimize production processes. By integrating global best practices with local operational realities, these firms can improve efficiency, reduce waste, and remain competitive in both domestic and regional markets. Evidently, strategic quality management practices are globally being appreciated by many firms both in manufacturing and service because companies are aggressively seeking ways to improve the products/service they offer (Marzooq, H., & Nisa, N (2022). A number of buyers require suppliers to embrace strategic management practices and this has given rise to the global adoption strategic quality management practices (Ogbari & Borishade, 2015). Studies have shown that in the global business environment, quality has become the most important driver of competition (T. Prunet et al., 2024).

A key aspect for firms in the global business to make strategic quality part of their practices is the benefit of increased international trade, domestic market share, customer satisfaction, the need for customer/supplier partnership, increase in external pressures, the ever changing consumer demands and preferences and government pressures (Javed, 2015). One of the broadly referred studies on strategic quality management practices are the International quality study done by the American Quality Foundation. According to Kaynak, (2017) the strategic quality management practices have a fundamental impact on the performance of most of the U.S. companies. Chief Executive officers (CEOs) in most of the companies U.S. link quality closely with profitability (Owen, 2017). As such, organizations have to spend time and effort on the implementation of strategic quality management practices and include quality in their strategic planning process (T. Prunet et al., 2024). The studies further suggest that benefits of quality improvement are not only reflected on operational cost reduction but also on the increase of business profits.

While the connection between operational performance and strategic quality management practices has been studied globally, there remains no proof of direct causation. The mechanism for improving results has been the subject of much research. Lo, Yeung, and Cheng (2017), identified operational improvements such as cycle time reduction and inventory reductions as following from certification. Internal process improvements in organizations lead to externally observable improvements. The benefit of increased international trade and domestic market share, in addition to the internal benefits such as customer satisfaction, interdepartmental communications, work processes, and customer/supplier partnerships derived, far exceeds any and all initial investment. A number of studies revealed that a large percentage of companies found

their strategic quality management efforts failed to live up to their expectations mostly due to lack of effective work force management and low supplier management (Helmold, M. 2023).. Therefore, it appears that quality practices are important for continuous survival of organizations. Given the complex relationship between growth, costs and quality, and with the increasing competitive, business survival pressure and the dynamic, changing customer-oriented environment, strategic quality management practices could be a major strategic issue for the survival of organizations in the manufacturing sector (Zhu & Sarkis, 2018).

In most of the African economies, manufacturing sector has been found to contribute more to the GDP, employment levels and the exports (Marina, 2015). A number of setbacks have faced the sector in terms of infrastructure, sub-standard imports and high cost of energy (Musonnafa, et al., 2022). Managers of the African manufacturing firms constantly seek to find a way of having a competitive advantage over the others (Aminga, 2015). Thus, a study on the relationship between strategic quality management practices and organizational performance is critical for organizations and researchers to better understand the effects of strategic quality management practices onto different levels of organizational performance (Yehuala, A. 2023). The concept of strategic quality management practices became adopted in some African economies like Burkina Faso in early 1990s (Rosca, 2015). Following the advent of privatization due to structural adjustment programs, this brought fundamental changes in management practices. Quality management practices became embedded in the manufacturing sector and presented a critical part of the success of manufacturing firms (Abbas, J. 2020).

The quality management practices put strong emphasis on empowerment of employers, customer service and charismatic leadership (Chebet, M. M. 2020). Through progressive discussions on quality management, most of the manufacturers in Burkina Faso learned about a growing interest in management concepts such as quality circles, continuous improvement and finally total quality management (TQM) (Hassis, et al., 2023). Quality management practices were taken as a firm-wide management thinking of continuously enhancing the worth of products, services as well as processes by focusing on customers' needs and expectations (Prunet et al., 2024). In the late 1990s, the concept of strategic quality management practices gained ground when the Japanese firms operating in Burkina Faso introduced quality control circles as a bottom – up management strategy (Karsten & Pennink, 2015). This stimulated the desire to initiate a far-reaching change in most of the firms' management practices. As such, strategic quality management practices was embraced as a new way of operating Burkina Faso business organizations particularly those operating in agro- industry, food and industrial production (Helmold, M. 2023).

Locally, strategic quality management practices has been at the center of every manufacturing company (Nzioka, 2016). The business environment in which firms operate today is constantly changing and this has necessitated firms to adapt to such changes for survival and continuance meeting customer needs (Kimani, & Matata, 2015). Adoption and use of SQM practices in the manufacturing sector in Kenya is seen as a reliable way that organizations can use to marshal customer satisfaction at lower cost, minimized wastage and superior quality (Janet, M., & Mirioba, G. 2024). In Kenya, the adoption of SQM practices have been done in firms such cement manufactures where process reengineering, ISO certification and six sigma have been used as a way of improving operational performance (Kimani, & Matata, 2015).

Studies by Kiprotich and Chebet (2017) have indicated that adoption of quality management practices has resulted to prompt delivery of services, quality of the products had improved in terms of reduced customer complaints' and the ability of product to meet the local and international standards. Further studies (Njenga & Kidombo, 2017). have shown that implementation of strategic quality management practices had a positive influence on the organizations' return on assets thus improving its performance (Mwangi, et al., 2021). Past studies (Kimani, & Matata, 2015) suggest that quality management is any practice that produces better products while decreasing cost and increasing consumer satisfaction levels. Ntwiga, et al., (2021) states that when quality management practices are applied in the manufacturing firms, it is able to produce positive effects within the organizational networking (Njenga & Kidombo, 2017). The concept of SQM has also been incorporated in the Kenyan education sector and found to bear positive results in performance of students (Chepket & Cheluget, 2017)..

Soft drinks manufacturing firms globally have incorporated the need of having strategic quality management practices due to the increased global competition as it's an enabler of operational excellence (Braunscheidel & Suresh, 2019). However, there are challenges facing strategic quality management 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). Simchi-Levi, 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 lack of strategic quality management practices in organization activities. Thus the need of soft drink manufacturing firms to adopt strategic quality management practices.

The soft drink industry in Kenya is part of the wider economy employing about two million people and contributing about 3% to the GDP (Aila, 2015). The industry operates in a perfect competition and as a result the market becomes overcrowded. The players in the industry have to content with fierce competition and diminishing profits (Kimani, & Matata, 2015). 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 to such changes for survival and meet customer needs (Kimani, & Matata, 2015). Being part of the food industry, the conditions for operations are quite stringent and the manufacturers are expected to consistently adhere to quality requirements that guarantee customer satisfaction (Aila, 2015). 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. Though strategic quality management practices have been found to have fundamental impact on performance of most of the U.S. companies (Kaynak, 2017) very little is known in the developing economies.

Adoption and use of SQM practices in the manufacturing sector in U.S. 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 proposed study was to explore the effect of strategic quality management practices in the soft drink industry with a focus on strategic continuous improvement, strategic customer management, strategic supplier management and strategic workforce management. Therefore the study sought to examine the effect of strategic customer management on operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County.

2. STRATEGIC CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

Customer focus is a key requirement of ISO 9001:2008 standard. For example, in the Management Responsibility section, one requirement is "Top management shall ensure customer requirements are determined and are met with the aim of enhancing customer satisfaction". This puts the responsibility for customer relations on senior management (Evans & Lindsay, 2018). For business enterprises, the significant driving force to establish the quality goals basically originates from customer needs. Kumar and Balakrishnan (2016), pointed out that strategic customer relations is the underpinning principle for firms to implement TQM programs. Since senior management may have the influence and authority to dominate the entire TQM implementation, dedicated commitment from top management about implementing TQM is certainly a necessity. Trend data of customer satisfaction should be supported by objective evidence. The organizations should discuss with customers their satisfaction perceptions. The current study focuses on customer complaints handling, customer feedback systems and customer retention interventions.

Continuous improvement, often referred to as continuous improvement process (CIP) or continuous improvement management (CIM), is a systematic and ongoing approach to enhancing an organization's products, services, processes, and operations (Alasfoor, et al., 2023). Continuous improvement is not a one-time event but rather an iterative and ongoing cycle of improvement. It involves regularly identifying opportunities for enhancement, implementing changes, and evaluating the outcomes (Azadeh, et al., 2022). The process relies on data and metrics to identify areas in need of improvement and measure the impact of changes. Data analysis helps organizations make informed decisions (Hassan, et al., 2022). Studies have shown that continuous improvement of processes, people, system, team work, performance, communication and reward systems are all critical success factors for quality management system and for successful results of ISO 9000 certification (Wang, et al., 2020).

Hammer (2017) argues that by adopting this culture to improve processes and output, organizations are assured improved efficiencies and cost savings. Continual improvement, innovation and learning should be about proactively seeking to learn about customers, processes and behaviours and to improve upon existing practices (Guillaume 2022). Georgiev and Georgiev (2017) found out that driving factors for the implementation of ISO 9001 are product quality improvement,

customer requirements, process improvement and enhanced company image and competitiveness. 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 the relationship between TQM practices and service quality as well as the relationship between TQM practices and market orientation. The results showed that employee empowerment, information and communication, customer focus and continuous improvement had a significant effect on service quality and employee empowerment and customer focus had a significant effect on market orientation. Wamalwa, (2018) investigated the relationship between TQM and market orientation and performance they concluded that organizations that successfully implemented TQM have better and effective performance, market orientation has strongly and positively relationship with performance and finally Total quality management and market oriented both lead to superior quality.

The literature review synthesizes existing research on continuous improvement and its impact on organizational performance. Key topics include the principles of continuous improvement, methodologies such as Lean management and Six Sigma, and case studies illustrating successful implementation strategies. Alasfoor, M., Alghamdi, S. A., & Abualfaraj, A. F. (2023) studied on the impact of continuous improvement on organizational performance. The study found out that continuous improvement has a positive impact on organizational performance.

3. METHOD

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study targeted 20 soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County, Kenya and the heads of operations, marketing section and human resource in the 20 soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County, Kenya giving a total of 60 respondents selected for the purpose of this study. Since the study population is small, the study worked with entire population which is census. Data collection instrument was questionnaires. Both primary and secondary data was collected. Piloting was done to test to validity and reliability of data collection instrument. Once data is collected, it was crosschecked and verified for errors, completeness and consistency. It was coded, entered and analysed descriptively using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 27). Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between variables in the study hypotheses. ANOVA and multiple linear regression analysis was adopted computed to determine the statistical relationship between the independent variable and the dependent.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Effect of Strategic Customer Management on Operational Performance of Soft Drink Manufacturing Firms in Nyeri County

The second specific objective of the study was to examine the effect of strategic customer management on operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on the statements relating to the effect of strategic customer management on operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. The results were as shown in Table 4.1.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the company has customer complaints procedure and mechanism for customer complaints handling where customers are attended to. This is supported by a mean of 3.774 (std. dv = 0.745). In addition, as shown by a mean of 3.737 (std. dv = 0.844), the respondents agreed that the company has consistent tracking of complaints and procedures for all cases of complaints through conducting customer feedback surveys regularly. The respondents also agreed that the company stresses the importance on obtaining feedback on its quality control systems from customers. This is shown by a mean of 3.565 (std. dv = 0.647). The respondents also respondent that customer needs are reviewed regularly and communicated throughout the company to meet changing customer preferences and expectations. This is shown by a mean of 3.713 (std. dv = 0.513). With a mean of 3.670 (std. dv = 0.837), the respondents agreed that company is committed to customer retention by ensuring quality products. In addition, the respondents agreed that there is improved customer loyalty leading to repeat business. This is shown by a mean of 3.680 (std. dv = 0.787).

Table 4.1: Effect of Strategic Customer Management on Operational Performance of Soft Drink Manufacturing Firms in Nyeri County

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The company has customer complaints procedure and mechanism for customer complaints handling where customers are attended to	3.774	0.745
The company has consistent tracking of complaints and procedures for all cases of complaints through conducting customer feedback surveys regularly.	3.737	0.844
The company stresses the importance on obtaining feedback on its quality control systems from customers	3.565	0.647
Customer needs are reviewed regularly and communicated throughout the company to meet changing customer preferences and expectations	3.713	0.513
Company is committed to customer retention by ensuring quality products	3.670	0.737
There is improved customer loyalty leading to repeat business	3.680	0.787
Aggregate	3.982	0.808

4.2. Effect of Operational Performance of Soft Drink Manufacturing Firms in Nyeri County.

The objective was to assess the effect of operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to the effect of operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. A 5 point Likert scale was used where 1 symbolized strongly disagree, 2 symbolized disagree, 3 symbolized neutral, 4 symbolized agree and 5 symbolized strongly agree. The results were as presented in table 4.2.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the organization provides cost effective service to customer. This is supported by a mean of 4.261 (std. dv = 0.957). In addition, as shown by a mean of 3.958 (std. dv = 0.802), the respondents agreed that strategic supplier management reduces administrative costs, average unit manufacturing cost as well as inventory to minimum level to the extent that does not hinder the continuation of work. The respondents further agreed that SQM has led the organization to choose their suppliers on the basis of high-quality, assisted in improving the quality of goods, works and services offered to the beneficiary. This is shown by a mean of 3.803 (std. dv = 0.752). The respondents also agreed that strategic supplier management leads to proper storage conditions according to the specifications, an increased quality information sharing in order to enhance operational efficiency and increased customer satisfaction levels. This is shown by a mean of 3.792 (std. dv = 0.843). With a mean of 3.743 (std. dv = 0.925), the respondents agreed that the firm introduces new products from competitors to ensure competition to meet major customer's requirement. The respondent also agreed that SQM helps organization through suppliers have enhanced more conformity with technical set specifications, high response to dynamic customer needs as well as providing a high level of customer service to its major customers. This is shown by a mean of 3.761 (std. dv = 0.901).

Table 4.2: Operational Performance of Soft Drink Manufacturing Firms in Nyeri County.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The organization provides cost effective service to customer	4.261	0.957
Strategic supplier management reduces administrative costs, average unit manufacturing cost as well as inventory to minimum level to the extent that does not hinder the continuation of work	3.958	0.802
SQM has led the organization to choose their suppliers on the basis of high-quality, assisted in improving the quality of goods, works and services offered to the beneficiary	3.803	0.752
Strategic supplier management leads to proper storage conditions according to the specifications, an increased quality information sharing in order to enhance operational efficiency and increased customer satisfaction levels	3.792	0.843
The firm introduces new products from competitors to ensure competition to meet major customer's requirement.	3.543	0.925
SQM helps organization through suppliers have enhanced more conformity with technical set specifications, high response to dynamic customer needs as well as providing a high level of customer service to its major customers	3.761	0.901
Aggregate	3.797	0.826

4.3 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics in the current study focused on correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship while regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between dependent variable (the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County and the independent variable (strategic customer management).

4.3.1 Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (strategic customer management) and the dependent variable (the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County) dependent variable. Pearson correlation coefficient range between zero and one, where by the strength of association increase with increase in the value of the correlation coefficients. The current study employed Taylor (2018) correlation coefficient ratings where by 0.80 to 1.00 depicts a very strong relationship, 0.60 to 0.79 depicts strong, 0.40 to 0.59 depicts moderate, 0.20 to 0.39 depicts weak.

Table 4.3: Correlation Coefficients

		Operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms	Strategic customer management
Operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	55	
Strategic customer management	Pearson Correlation	.868**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	55	55

From the results, there is a very strong relationship between strategic customer management and the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County ($r = 0.868$, $p \text{ value} = 0.001$). The relationship was significant since the $p \text{ value}$ 0.001 was less than 0.05 (significant level).

4.3.2 Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (strategic customer management) and the dependent variable (the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County).

Table 4.4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.801	.735	.728	1.119

a. Predictors: (Constant), strategic customer management.

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables. The r -squared for the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.735. This implied that 73.5% of the variation in the dependent variable (the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County) could be explained by independent variables (strategic customer management).

Table 4.5: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	201.334	1	50.334	830.943	.001 ^b
	Residual	10.237	54	.069		
	Total	211.271	55			

a. Dependent Variable: the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms

b. Predictors: (Constant), strategic customer management

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the model was a good fit for the data. F calculated was 830.943 while the F critical was 2.024. The p value was 0.000. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05, the model was considered as a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model can be used to predict the influence of strategic customer management on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms.

Table 4.6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	(Constant)	.711	.108		6.583
	Strategic customer management	.660	.234	2.709	2.821

a Dependent Variable: Operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms

Table 4.6 showed that if strategic customer management is all held constant, the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County would be at 0.711.

The operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County = 0.711 + 0.660(strategic customer management).

The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = 0.711 + 0.660X_2 + \varepsilon$$

According to the results, strategic customer management has significant effect on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. $\beta_1=0.660$, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concluded that strategic customer management has significant effect on the operational performance of soft drink manufacturing firms in Nyeri County. $\beta_1=0.660$, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The study came up with the following recommendations; the soft drink manufacturing firm's management should have strategic customer complaints procedure and mechanism for customer complaints handling where customers are attended to and consistent tracking of complaints and procedures for all cases of complaints through conducting customer feedback surveys regularly. The company should have a good relationship with major suppliers who are ISO certified and and maintain long term relationship with suppliers as suppliers.

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