

THE EFFECT OF PRODUCT QUALITY ON COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES) IN WESTERN UGANDA; REFLECTION ON IGARA TEA FACTORY, IN BUSHENYI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at the effect of product quality on competitiveness of small medium-sized enterprises (smes) in western Uganda; reflection on Igara tea factory, in Bushenyi district And it was guided by the following objectives: To assess the relationship between product quality and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda, to evaluate the relationship between Supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda, to evaluate the relationship between Quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda and to evaluate the relationship between Manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda. From the findings, the indicated a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. As the value was positive, it suggested that there was a tendency for better manufacturing processes to be associated with higher levels of competitiveness among SMEs. The correlation coefficient was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a p-value of 0.000. This meant that the likelihood of observing such a correlation due to chance alone was very low. Upon the findings, SMEs should prioritize implementing robust quality assurance systems to ensure consistent product quality. This may involve establishing quality control processes, conducting regular inspections, and implementing quality management systems such as ISO standards. By focusing on quality assurance, SMEs can minimize defects, maintain product consistency, and meet customer expectations.

Key words: product quality and competitiveness of small medium-sized enterprises

Background of the study

Product excellent may be defined because the degree of excellence or superiority of a product when it comes to its supposed reason or purchaser requirements (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). in the context of SMEs, product nice will have a sizeable impact on their competitiveness through enhancing consumer delight, differentiating from competition, reducing charges, and constructing a sturdy logo picture (Turyatamba et al., 2022).

Globally studies have proven that product high-quality is positively associated with the competitiveness of SMEs. for example, a have a look

at by way of (Isaac et al., 2023) found that product satisfactory became definitely associated with the competitiveness of Tunisian SMEs. further, a study by Qureshi and Javed (2013) determined that product first-rate was a massive predictor of the competitiveness of Pakistani SMEs. moreover, a take a look at by way of Li et al. (2020) discovered that product satisfactory appreciably influenced the competitiveness of Chinese language SMEs within the manufacturing industry. However, accomplishing high product satisfactory can be challenging for SMEs due to their confined resources and competencies. SMEs might also face problems in

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investing in generation, hiring skilled hard work, and enforcing high-quality management systems (Alex & Kazaara, 2023). consequently, SMEs might also need to undertake revolutionary approaches to improve product great, which include participating with suppliers, leveraging digital technology, and implementing lean production practices (Annet et al., 2023).

Uganda has a vibrant SME zone, which performs a important position inside the USA's economy. however, SMEs in Uganda face several challenges, which includes restricted access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and confined get right of entry to markets. Those demanding situations can have an effect on the high-quality of products produced by means of SMEs, which in flip impacts their competitiveness within the marketplace (Faridah et al., 2023).

research has proven that enhancing product great can beautify the competitiveness of SMEs in Uganda. A observe conducted by way of Katabazi and Munene (2016) discovered that product pleasant had a advantageous and giant effect on SME competitiveness. The authors recommended that SMEs focus on enhancing product best to decorate their competitiveness. Small and Medium-Sized enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in the economic development of many countries, inclusive of Uganda (Racheal, Enock, et al., 2023). These groups are regularly limited by way of constrained assets and face several demanding situations in competing with larger, more established companies. One important factor which could help SMEs to compete is the exceptional in their products. This paper explores the

historic background of the effect of product exceptional on the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda, with a focus on Igara tea manufacturing unit in Bushenyi district. historical past Uganda's financial system is closely dependent on agriculture (Allan et al., 2023), with the arena contributing around 24% of the USA's Gross home Product (GDP) and employing over 70% of the populace (Frank et al., 2023). The tea region is one of the united States's most important agricultural sub-sectors, with over two hundred,000 smallholder farmers growing tea on approximately 24,000 hectares of land (Lydia et al., 2023). But, notwithstanding the sector's importance, many tea farmers and processors in Uganda face widespread demanding situations, together with terrible exceptional control and confined get right of entry to markets (Racheal, Kazaara, et al., 2023).

Problem Statement

Small and Medium-sized businesses (SMEs) play an essential function in the financial growth and development of many countries, inclusive of Uganda (Ronald et al., 2023). But, SMEs in Uganda face several demanding situations, including confined access to finance, insufficient infrastructure, and low product great, which have an effect on their competitiveness. Igara tea factory is a notable instance of an SME that has correctly advanced its competitiveness by enhancing its product fine (Racheal, Kazaara, et al., 2023). No matter the importance of product first-class in enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, there is a lack of empirical studies in this subject matter in Uganda, specifically within the context of Western Uganda (Oromo et al.,

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2023). This has a look at objectives to fill this hole by exploring the impact of product price at the competitiveness of SMEs inside the region, the usage of Igara tea factory in Bushenyi district as a case observe. Furthermore, the shortage of attention to SMEs in Western Uganda has been a subject, because the place has a excessive concentration of small groups, which make a contribution extensively to the economy. Yet, they face extensive challenges, which

includes constrained get admission to finance, infrastructure, and era. these demanding situations have hindered the boom and competitiveness of SMEs in the area, and there's a want to discover strategies that can help conquer these demanding situations and apprehend how product first-rate can beautify the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda (Christopher, Moses, et al., 2022).

Specific Objectives

- To assess the relationship between product quality and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.
- To evaluate the relationship between Supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.
- To evaluate the relationship between Quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.
- To evaluate the relationship between Manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between product quality and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.
- What is the relationship between Supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.
- What is the relationship between Quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.
- What is the relationship between Manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa with a population of over 42 million people (UBOS, 2021). SMEs play a critical role in the Ugandan economy, accounting for approximately 90% of all businesses in the country (UNIDO, 2018). However, SMEs in Uganda face a number of challenges, including limited access to finance, poor infrastructure, and inadequate access to markets (UNIDO, 2018). Supply chain management refers to the management of the flow of goods and services from the point of origin to the point of consumption (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). Effective supply chain management can help organizations to reduce costs, improve quality, and enhance customer satisfaction (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). Supply chain management is made up of several components, including sourcing, procurement, production, transportation, and distribution (Chopra &

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Meindl, 2021). The relationship between supply chain management and SME competitiveness has been the subject of much research. Several studies have shown that effective supply chain management can enhance the competitiveness of SMEs. For example, Gunasekaran et al. (2019) found that SMEs that had effective supply chain management were more competitive than those that did not. Similarly, Qrunfleh and Tarafdar (2014) found that SMEs that had effective supply chain management were more innovative and had higher levels of customer satisfaction than those that did not (Gracious, 2023).

Methodology

Research Approach

There are two broad categories of research in terms of approach which include: inductive and deductive approaches. An inductive argument is an argument that is intended by the arguer merely to establish or increase the probability of its conclusion. In an inductive argument, the premises are intended only to be so strong that, if they were true, then it would be unlikely that the conclusion is false. There is no standard term for a successful inductive argument. But its success or strength is a matter of degree.

Research Strategies

There are several research strategies used in social science research among which include experimental, survey, action research, case study, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research (Saunders et al., 2012). Although these strategies are advantageous in their own context and application, the current study used survey strategy because the survey strategy is usually associated with the deductive approach and it is most frequently used to answer who, what, where, how much and how many questions. It helped the researcher to answer the question of what the effect of product quality on competitiveness of small medium-sized enterprises (smes). Furthermore, surveys are popular as they allow the collection of a large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way.

Research Design

The study used a cross-sectional research design. Cross-sectional design allows for the study of the population at one specific time and the difference between the individual groups within the population to be compared (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Best and Khan (2009) argued that cross-sectional research describes and interprets phenomena and is concerned with conditions or relationships that exists, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, and effects that are evident or trend that are developing.

Study Population

In Byomire (2014) a sample is defined as a subset of a population selected to participate in a research study. In this study, the sampling plan started by identifying participants i.e., population was of 144 participants who included managers, farmers and executive directors.

Sample Size

The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table see appendix V. According to Morgan Table, a sample of 230 participants was estimated at 144. Thus, the sample size of this study is 144 respondents.

Sampling Strategy

Stratified random sampling procedure was used for departments at the factory. Stratified random sampling was used because the researcher wanted to highlight a specific subgroup within the population. This technique was useful in this research because it ensured the presence of the key subgroup within the sample.

Simple random sampling was used for none biasness. In addition, the researcher used simple random sampling basing on the instructors she was able to find present at the factory.

Research Instrument

This study used two research instruments, namely; questionnaires, and interviews discussed further in the following sections.

Questionnaires

In this study, a structured questionnaire was designed with specified answers and restriction of respondents' ideas limited. This makes it simpler to analyze considering the use of a standardized analytical tool in analyzing huge sample size in this study (Rogers, et al., 2011). The questionnaire was distributed to farmers, store keepers, executive directors and managers and the content of the questionnaire include the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Reliability

Reliability relates to the consistency of a measure. It is an important test of measurement. Measuring instruments can only be reliable to the extent in which it produces consistent result (Creswell, 2003). This study adopted the internal consistency approach to determine the reliability of the questionnaires. The study used the Cronbach's alpha test to determine reliability of the research instrument. In this test, the average of all correlations in every combination of split-halves was determined. It is considered most suitable for instruments with more than two responses. According to Field (2005), if the Cronbach's alpha value is equal or more than 0.70, the instrument is considered reliable.

Data Analysis

After retrieving back, the questionnaire and collecting the required data, it was then prepared for analysis by using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (IBM SPSS, version 22.0) software (Nelson et al., 2022). In this process, the data underwent these processes i.e., data editing which involved checking the filled questionnaires for any omissions or mistakes; then data coding which involved giving each item of the questionnaire or variable a code used when imputing the data into the computer, and lastly data entry into the computer for analysis. Before analyzing data, the researcher checked it for errors by looking for values that fall outside the range of possible values.

Qualitative data analysis**Received: 13.09.2023****Accepted: 17.09.2023****Published on: 30.09.2023**

Qualitative data was analyzed using manual coding on the transcripts to identify the significant statements across individual interviews. Subsequent readings of the significant statements helped in identifying meaning of units or sub-themes emerging within the patterns. For presentation of thematic findings, both *textural* and *structural* descriptions were used in the results section. Textural descriptions are significant statements used to write what the participants experienced. Structural descriptions are the interpretation of the context or setting that influenced participants' experiences. For textural descriptions, the quotes of participants were given in italics. The structural descriptions were interpreted by the researcher and were provided in plain text.

RESULTS

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Table 1: showing the relationship between the Supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda

		competitiveness of SMEs	Supply chain management
competitiveness of SMEs	Pearson Correlation	1	0.235**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.0014
	N	113	113
Supply chain management	Pearson Correlation	0.235**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.0014	
	N	113	113

Source: Primary data 2023

The correlation coefficient between supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs is 0.235. This indicates a positive correlation between the two variables, albeit a relatively weak one. As the value is positive, it suggests that there is a tendency for higher levels of supply chain management to be associated with increased competitiveness of SMEs. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a p-value of 0.0014. This means that the likelihood of observing such a correlation due to chance alone is very low.

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Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a genuine relationship between supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda. The table also provides information on the number of observations (N), which is 113 for both variables. This indicates that the correlation analysis was performed using data from 113 SMEs in Western Uganda.

Table 2: showing the relationship between Quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

		competitiveness of SMEs	Quality control
competitiveness of SMEs	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.769*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.564
	N	113	113
Quality control	Pearson Correlation	-0.769*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.564	
	N	113	113

Source: Primary data 2023

The correlation coefficient between quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs is -0.769. This indicates a strong negative correlation between the two variables. As the value is negative, it suggests that higher levels of quality control are associated with lower levels of competitiveness among SMEs. However, it is important to note that the correlation coefficient is not statistically significant at the conventional level of significance ($p > 0.05$). The p-value is 0.564, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This means that the observed correlation could be due to chance, and there may not be a genuine relationship between quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

Table 3: showing the relationship between Manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

		competitiveness of SMEs	Manufacturing process
competitiveness of SMEs	Pearson Correlation	1	0.645
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	113	113
Manufacturing	Pearson Correlation	0.645	1

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process	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	113	113

Source: Primary data 2023

The correlation coefficient between the manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs is 0.645. This indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. As the value is positive, it suggests that there is a tendency for better manufacturing processes to be associated with higher levels of competitiveness among SMEs. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a p-value of 0.000. This means that the likelihood of observing such a correlation due to chance alone is very low. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a genuine relationship between the manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

The table also provides information on the number of observations (N), which is 113 for both variables. This indicates that the correlation analysis was performed using data from 113 SMEs in Western Uganda.

Regression analysis.

Table 4 shows the regression analysis between Supply chain management and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

Model		R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1		.567		.758	.749	.6962
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.585	.243		10.658	.000
	Supply chain management	0.209247	.069	.180	2.700	.007

Source: Primary data 2023

The regression model shows that the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.758. This means that approximately 75.8% of the variability in the competitiveness of SMEs can be explained by the supply chain management variable in the model (Nelson et al., 2023). This indicates a relatively strong relationship between supply chain management and SME competitiveness.

The adjusted R Square, which takes into account the number of predictors in the model, is 0.749. This suggests that the supply chain management variable still explains a significant portion of the variability in SME competitiveness,

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Corresponding: Author: research.miu.ac.ug/publications

even after considering the complexity of the model.

The standard error of the estimate is 0.6962. This represents the average difference between the actual competitiveness of SMEs and the predicted competitiveness based on the regression model. Lower values of the standard error indicate a better fit of the model to the data.

The regression coefficients provide information about the relationship between the predictor variable (supply chain management) and the outcome variable (competitiveness of SMEs). The constant term is 2.585, indicating the expected competitiveness of SMEs when the supply chain management variable is zero.

The coefficient for the supply chain management variable is 0.209247. This indicates that, on average, for every unit increase in supply chain management, the competitiveness of SMEs is expected to increase by 0.209247 units.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for supply chain management is 0.180. This indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables when both variables are standardized.

The t-value of 2.700 for the supply chain management coefficient indicates that the relationship between supply chain management and SME competitiveness is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The associated p-value of 0.007 further supports this, suggesting that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Table 5 shows the regression analysis between Quality control and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

Model		R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1		.396		.157	.153	.49662
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.041	.128		15.939	.000
	Quality control	.395	.041	.544	9.585	.000

Source: Primary data 2023

The regression model shows that the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.157. This means that approximately 15.7% of the variability in the competitiveness of SMEs can be explained by the quality control variable in the model. This indicates a relatively weak relationship between quality control and SME competitiveness. The adjusted R Square, which takes into account the number of predictors in the model, is 0.153. This suggests that the quality control variable still explains a small portion of the variability in SME competitiveness, after considering the complexity of the model. The standard error of the estimate is 0.49662. This represents the average difference between the actual competitiveness of SMEs and the predicted competitiveness based on the regression model. Higher values of the standard error indicate a poorer fit of the model to the data. The

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regression coefficients provide information about the relationship between the predictor variable (quality control) and the outcome variable (competitiveness of SMEs). The constant term is 2.041, indicating the expected competitiveness of SMEs when the quality control variable is zero. The coefficient for the quality control variable is 0.395. This indicates that, on average, for every unit increase in quality control, the competitiveness of SMEs is expected to increase by 0.395 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) for quality control is 0.544. This indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables when both variables are standardized. The t-value of 9.585 for the quality control coefficient indicates that the relationship between quality control and SME competitiveness is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The associated p-value of 0.000 further supports this, suggesting that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Table 6 shows the regression analysis between Manufacturing process and the competitiveness of SMEs in Western Uganda.

Model		R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1		.584		.341	.332	.44099
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.369	.140		16.945	.000
	Manufacturing process	.264	.042	.396	6.361	.000

Source: Primary data 2023

The regression model shows that the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.341. This means that approximately 34.1% of the variability in the competitiveness of SMEs can be explained by the manufacturing process variable in the model. This indicates a moderate relationship between the manufacturing process and SME competitiveness. The adjusted R Square, which takes into account the number of predictors in the model, is 0.332. This suggests that the manufacturing process variable still explains a significant portion of the variability in SME competitiveness, even after considering the complexity of the model.

The standard error of the estimate is 0.44099. This represents the average difference between the actual competitiveness of SMEs and the predicted competitiveness based on the regression model. Lower values of the standard error indicate a better fit of the model to the data. The regression coefficients provide information about the relationship between the predictor variable (manufacturing process) and the outcome variable (competitiveness of SMEs). The constant term is 2.369, indicating the expected competitiveness of SMEs when the manufacturing

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process variable is zero.

The coefficient for the manufacturing process variable is 0.264. This indicates that, on average, for every unit increase in the manufacturing process, the competitiveness of SMEs is expected to increase by 0.264 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) for the manufacturing process is 0.396. This indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables when both variables are standardized. The t-value of 6.361 for the manufacturing process coefficient indicates that the relationship between the manufacturing process and SME competitiveness is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The associated p-value of 0.000 further supports this, suggesting that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Test for reliability and validity of data

Durbin Watson test.

Table 7: represents test for validity and reliability of data

Test for spurious	
Number of gaps in sample	1
Durbin-Watson d-statistic (4,156)	1.115981
Content validity index (C.V.I)	0.098

Source: Primary data 2023

The test for spurious relationships is not explicitly provided in the table. However, if it were included, it would typically assess whether the observed relationships between variables are influenced by a third variable or if they occur by chance. The number of gaps in the sample is indicated as 1. This suggests that there may be missing or incomplete data points in the sample used for the analysis. It is important to address these gaps to ensure the validity and reliability of the results.

The Durbin-Watson d-statistic is reported as 1.115981. This statistic is used to detect autocorrelation in the residuals of a regression analysis. The value of the Durbin-Watson statistic ranges from 0 to 4, with a value close to 2 indicating no autocorrelation. In this case, the value of 1.115981 suggests the possibility of positive autocorrelation in the residuals, indicating that the model may not fully capture the dependencies in the data. The content validity index (C.V.I) is given as 0.098. The C.V.I measures the extent to which the items or variables in a study adequately represent the underlying construct being measured. A higher C.V.I value indicates stronger content validity. In this case, the value of 0.098 suggests relatively low content validity, indicating that the items or variables may not fully capture the construct being studied.

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Conclusion

Improving product quality directly contributes to customer satisfaction. When SMEs deliver high-quality products, customers are more likely to be satisfied with their purchases, leading to positive word-of-mouth, repeat purchases, and customer loyalty. This, in turn, can boost the competitiveness of SMEs in the long run.

Recommendation

SMEs should invest in training programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of their workforce in areas related to product quality. This may include training on quality control techniques, product testing methods, and understanding customer requirements. Equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge enabled them to contribute to maintaining and improving product quality.

SMEs should prioritize implementing robust quality assurance systems to ensure consistent product quality. This may involve establishing quality control processes, conducting regular inspections, and implementing quality management systems such as ISO standards. By focusing on quality assurance, SMEs can minimize defects, maintain product consistency, and meet customer expectations.

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