

Competitive Aggressiveness and Its Role in The Growth of Public Transport Enterprises in Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya. Public transport enterprises significantly contribute to the national economy, yet they encounter numerous challenges in their operating environment, such as evolving policies, regulatory changes, taxation issues, poor infrastructure, and inconsistent law enforcement, all impacting growth. While competitive aggressiveness is often deemed crucial for entrepreneurial success, exploring its effects in the Kenyan public transport sector is limited. This study addresses this gap, grounded in the resource-based view (RBV) theory of competitiveness. Employing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study surveyed all 261 public transport enterprises operating in Nairobi County. Data were collected via questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Results indicate a significant positive effect of competitive aggressiveness on enterprise growth ($\beta = 0.704$; $p < 0.05$). The study concludes that low levels of competitive aggressiveness among public transport entrepreneurs limit sectoral growth. It recommends fostering a more aggressive competitive approach to support enterprise expansion within this critical sector.

Keywords: Competitive Aggressiveness, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Growth of Enterprises, Public Transport

A. INTRODUCTION

Public transport systems are essential for economic development globally, facilitating movement, employment creation, trade, and social interaction (Jedynak & Wąsowicz, 2021). In developed nations, public transport is managed mainly by government or private entities with substantial state support, ensuring operational efficiency and regulatory compliance (Domeny, 2024). In contrast, in developing regions, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, the public transport sector is predominantly driven by private entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and small companies (Timokhina et al., 2020). This reliance on private operators, combined with an absence of streamlined policies and standardized operations, often hinders the sector's ability to operate efficiently and sustainably, affecting its capacity to meet growing demand (Taysaeva et al., 2022).

African public transport entrepreneurs face numerous challenges, including fragmented regulations, inconsistent law enforcement, high taxation, and limited infrastructure. These conditions prevent many small and medium public transport enterprises (SMEs) from scaling or sustaining operations, especially during economic or social disruptions. As noted by (Taysaeva et al., 2022), this stagnation often results in business closures within the first two years of operation. This phenomenon contrasts with studies such as those by (Mwesigye et al., 2021), which suggest that sustained growth in SMEs is a critical indicator of long-term viability in other sectors. In Kenya, public transport plays an essential role in the economy, supporting over 90% of passenger travel across the country, employing nearly one million people, and generating upwards of Ksh 200 billion annually (Ministry of Roads and Transport, 2023). However, despite its economic significance and adherence to regulatory oversight by the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA), the sector has shown limited growth in recent years, with the number of licensed vehicles dropping by approximately 44% from 2019 to 2022 (Economic Survey, 2023). The limited expansion and insufficient service capacity during peak demand leave large areas underserved, particularly outside Nairobi, where operations are heavily concentrated (World Bank, 2023).

Entrepreneurial orientation, especially competitive aggressiveness, has been identified as a potential growth driver in enterprise contexts. Competitive aggressiveness refers to an entrepreneur's proactive approach to outperforming competitors through competitive pricing, marketing campaigns, and structural adjustments like mergers and acquisitions (Nnaemeka et al., 2021; Civelek, 2022). Such attributes are crucial in competitive industries, where timely responses to market shifts and proactive actions can significantly impact growth and

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sustainability (Usoroh, 2021). Despite the importance of these competitive strategies, studies focusing on Kenya's public transport sector have yet to thoroughly explore the potential role of competitive aggressiveness in fostering enterprise growth.

Public transport enterprises in Kenya serve a critical socio-economic function, accounting for the majority of daily commuter traffic and providing employment across a diverse network of associated roles. However, despite meeting operational requirements and contributing significantly to the economy, the sector remains constrained, evidenced by a declining fleet and limited geographic expansion. This stagnation raises questions about whether entrepreneurial strategies, specifically competitive aggressiveness, can drive substantial sectoral growth. Addressing these gaps, this study investigates the influence of competitive aggressiveness on the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya. While empirical evidence underscores the role of competitive strategies in enterprise development, limited research exists on this dynamic within Kenya's public transport sector, highlighting the relevance and necessity of this study.

The objectives of this study are: 1) to assess the level of competitive aggressiveness among entrepreneurs within Kenya's public transport sector; 2) to evaluate the current growth status of public transport enterprises in Kenya, and 3) to examine the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the growth of these enterprises.

Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in the resource-based view (RBV) theory, which provides a foundational understanding of how competitive aggressiveness drives sustainable competitive advantage and growth in enterprises (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1986; Peteraf, 1993). The RBV posits that firm-specific resources and capabilities are essential for enhancing performance and establishing a competitive position. According to this perspective, an organization's internal resources—rather than external competitive conditions—are central to achieving long-term advantage (Peteraf, 1993; Lopes, Ferreira & Farinha, 2021). Therefore, firms that leverage unique, valuable, and difficult-to-imitate resources can generate sustainable returns that distinguish them from competitors.

In line with RBV, competitive aggressiveness is a form of strategic orientation that reflects a firm's intent to outmaneuver rivals through bold, proactive actions, such as pricing strategies, innovative marketing, and product differentiation (Mailani, Hulu, Simamora, & Kesuma, 2024). Competitive aggressiveness can be especially valuable for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in sectors with limited tangible assets. While they may lack the resource scale of larger competitors, SMEs can harness intangible assets—such as creativity, specialized knowledge, customer relationships, and market agility—to pursue aggressive strategies that seize market opportunities and promote growth (Kellermanns et al., 2016).

This perspective is particularly relevant in the public transport sector, where entrepreneurs face an intensely competitive landscape. By leveraging unique internal resources and developing competitive traits, such as agility and market insight, entrepreneurs in this sector can enhance their enterprise's resilience and ability to grow. The RBV framework thus provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze how competitive aggressiveness can drive the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya despite challenges posed by regulatory and environmental factors. Accordingly, this study employs the RBV theory to explore how entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness impacts the growth of public transport enterprises, underscoring the significance of resource-based capabilities in overcoming competitive pressures within the Kenyan context.

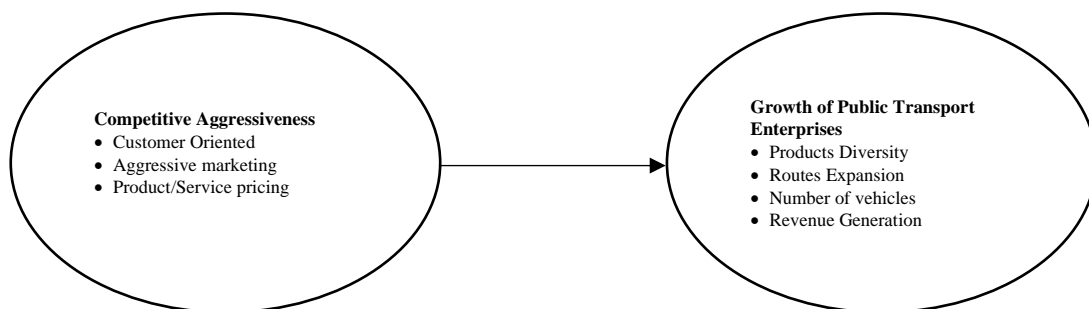


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, which integrates descriptive and correlational approaches to explore characteristics within a population and assess relationships among variables without experimental manipulation. This design was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of Kenya's public transport sector's characteristics, behaviors, and conditions. The descriptive aspect facilitated the analysis of key attributes related to entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness and enterprise growth, while the correlational aspect allowed the examination of relationships between competitive aggressiveness and business growth in public transport enterprises. This design was particularly relevant to the study's third objective: assessing the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and enterprise growth, which was addressed through correlational analysis (Pearson's correlation coefficient) and regression analysis to quantify the strength and direction of these relationships.

The target population for this study consisted of public transport enterprises operating within Nairobi City County. Nairobi was selected due to its prominence as Kenya's capital and largest public transport hub, housing over 40% of the nation's public transport companies and serving as a representative sample for the broader Kenyan public transport sector. Additionally, Nairobi's public transport policies often set precedents for national policies, making it an ideal focal point for the study. According to the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA), 669 public transport enterprises are registered as SACCOs (Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies) or companies in Kenya, with 261 based in Nairobi City County. Given the manageable size of the target population and the constraints of time and budget, a census approach was utilized, surveying all 261 enterprises to ensure comprehensive data collection (Young, 2018).

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire to capture information on each variable of interest. The questionnaire included open-ended and closed-ended questions organized into sections to address each study variable systematically. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a subset comprising 10% of the sample to ensure data reliability and validity. Following this, data was administered in person at the respondents' workplaces to maximize response rates and data accuracy. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed for data analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the general characteristics of the data, while inferential analyses, including Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis, were conducted to explore the relationships between competitive aggressiveness and growth within the public transport sector.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The study achieved a response rate of 82.4%, with 215 out of the targeted 261 entrepreneurs from public transport enterprises in Kenya participating. According to Sataloff and Vontela (2021), a response rate exceeding 60% is sufficient for adequately representing the target population and supports the validity of conclusions and recommendations based on the collected data.

Entrepreneurs' Competitive Aggressiveness in Public Transport Enterprises

This study assessed competitive aggressiveness among entrepreneurs in Kenya's public transport sector. Key dimensions of competitive aggressiveness, including customer orientation, aggressive marketing, and strategic pricing, were evaluated. These elements are instrumental in defining the extent to which entrepreneurs proactively compete within their industry. Respondents rated their agreement with statements reflecting these competitive behaviors, with findings presented in Table 1. The results indicate that most respondents disagreed with statements regarding customer orientation. Specifically, most respondents disagreed that their respective SACCOs prioritized customer preferences and expectations to enhance satisfaction (Mean = 2.77, SD = 1.92). Similarly, respondents indicated that their SACCOs rarely collected customer feedback to gauge their opinions and experiences (Mean = 2.27, SD = 1.10). These findings suggest limited efforts in aligning services with customer needs, a critical aspect of competitive aggressiveness.

Regarding marketing strategies, respondents largely disagreed with the notion that their SACCOs frequently marketed services to expand customer reach, as shown by a mean of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.07. Furthermore, there was a general disagreement that companies performed frequent competitor analysis to identify and adopt best practices (Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.02). Respondents also disagreed with the statement that their SACCOs developed strategies based on competitor offerings as benchmarks (Mean = 2.39, SD = 1.33).

These responses indicate a lack of proactive competitive strategies, such as benchmarking and regular market analysis, which could otherwise enhance service offerings.

When considering measures taken to enhance competitive advantage, most respondents disagreed that their companies actively sought to outperform competitors by delivering superior services (Mean = 2.60, SD = 1.32). The findings imply that competitive aggressiveness, as an aspect of entrepreneurial orientation, may not be fully leveraged within Kenya's public transport enterprises, potentially limiting growth and market differentiation. These findings align with (Usoroh, 2021), who argues that competitive aggressiveness in service provision enables small businesses to focus more acutely on customer needs, thereby enhancing competitiveness. Similarly, (Civelek, 2022) found that customer orientation, particularly through actively seeking and addressing customer feedback, is essential for modern enterprises to adapt to dynamic market demands and sustain performance. However, (Nnaemeka et al., 2021) emphasize that firms must adopt competitive aggressiveness through cost leadership, price differentiation, and quality enhancement to ensure sustained market presence and growth.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Competitive Aggressiveness

| Statements | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|------|-----------|
| Our Sacco has always upheld the expectations and preferences of the customers to enhance their satisfaction | 2.77 | 1.92 |
| Our Sacco always collects feedback from the customers to assess their views and opinions | 2.27 | 1.10 |
| We carry out frequent marketing of the Services of our Sacco/company to reach more customers | 2.76 | 1.07 |
| Our Sacco/company has taken necessary measures to ensure more people are aware of its existence and the services offered | 2.58 | 1.09 |
| We carry out frequent analyses of our competitors to establish what best they do to enhance their services | 2.53 | 1.02 |
| When coming up with strategies on how to run the Sacco, we focus on what the competitors are offering to have a benchmark | 2.39 | 1.33 |
| We have a pricing framework that we focus on when setting prices for our services | 2.18 | 1.19 |
| We have taken measures to ensure we enhance our competitive advantage by offering better services than our competitors | 2.60 | 1.32 |
| Our competitive aggressiveness has contributed to the current performance of the Sacco | 2.75 | 1.27 |

Source: Research data, 2024

Growth of Public Transport Enterprises

The study aimed to assess the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya, with respondents reporting on revenue growth from 2017 to 2021. As shown in Figure 2, most indicated that revenue growth during this period was low, suggesting that most public transport enterprises have experienced limited expansion. Rising operational costs were cited as a significant factor inhibiting profit generation, consequently impacting the capacity of these enterprises to fund expansion efforts effectively.

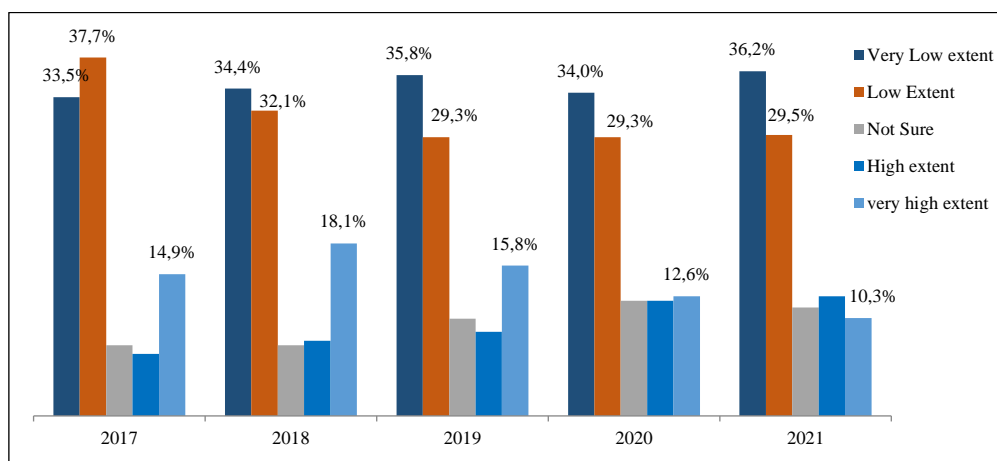


Figure 2: Extent of Revenue Growth

Source: Research data, 2024

Respondents also rated their profit margins and market share within the sector, with findings in Figure 3 indicating that both were generally low. These results suggest persistent stagnation across the industry, with minimal competitive progress or market capture by public transport enterprises.

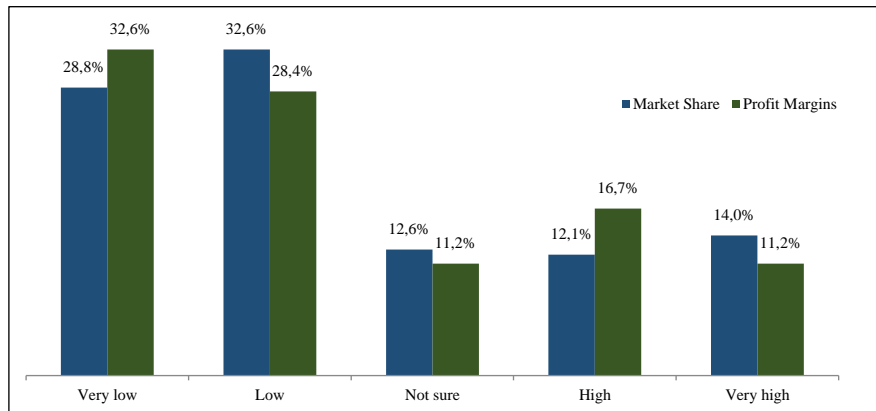


Figure 3: Market Share and Profit Margins

Source: Research data, 2024

Further, respondents detailed the number of new vehicles purchased in response to demand growth over the past two years. As shown in Figure 4, 8.3% of companies reported no new vehicle acquisitions, 32.6% acquired between 1 and 3 vehicles, and only 14.4% added more than 10 vehicles. These results point to minimal growth across the industry, with few enterprises significantly expanding their fleets.

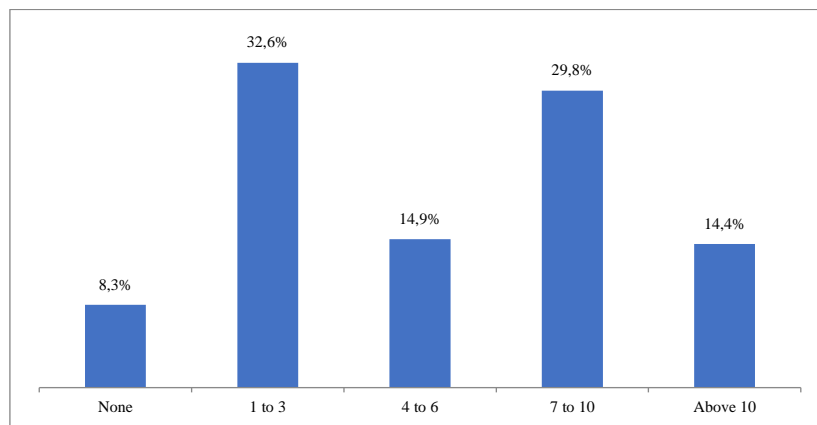


Figure 4: Newly Purchased Vehicles for the Past Two Years

Source: Research data, 2024

When asked about factors affecting enterprise growth, respondents highlighted several key challenges. Reduced business activity, restrictive regulations, and high taxes were identified as significant constraints by 61.9% of respondents, while 67% noted the adverse effects of unforeseen events, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, 56.7% of respondents pointed to increased competition as a primary factor in the sector's decline. These findings underscore a range of operational and external pressures that continue to impact growth within Kenya's public transport industry.

Table 2: Aspects Affecting Growth of the Public Transport Industry

| | Very Low extent | Low extent | Not Sure | High extent | Very High extent |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|----------|-------------|------------------|
| Reduced Business | 11.6% | 10.7% | 17.7% | 35.3% | 24.7% |
| Business regulations | 19.5% | 19.5% | 19.1% | 23.3% | 18.6% |
| Taxes and levies | 8.4% | 15.8% | 14.0% | 42.8% | 19.1% |
| Unforeseen circumstances | 8.8% | 10.2% | 14.0% | 44.2% | 22.8% |
| Increased competition | 13.0% | 12.6% | 17.7% | 33.0% | 23.7% |

Source: Research data, 2024

Relationship between Competitive Aggressiveness and Growth of Public Transport Enterprises

To evaluate the association between competitive aggressiveness and the growth of public transport enterprises, Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was calculated. Results in Table 3 indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation (r = 0.726, p < 0.01), implying a 72.6% association between competitive aggressiveness and enterprise growth. As a correlation coefficient above 0.6 is considered strong, these findings demonstrate a meaningful relationship between competitive strategies and growth outcomes. This was further confirmed by a two-tailed test at a 95% confidence level, with a probability value of less than 0.01, affirming the significance of the relationship. These results align with findings from Sorama and Joensuu-Salo (2023), who reported a strong correlation between competitive aggressiveness and SME success, although they contrast with Kiyabo and Isaga (2020), who observed a weaker correlation within microenterprises.

Table 3: Correlation Results

| | | Growth of Public Transport Enterprises | Competitive Aggressiveness |
|--|---------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Growth of Public Transport Enterprises | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .726** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 215 | 215 |
| Competitive Aggressiveness | Pearson Correlation | .726** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 215 | 215 |

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

Source: Research data, 2024

To further investigate the impact of competitive aggressiveness on enterprise growth, a linear regression analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis that competitive aggressiveness has no significant effect on the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya. As shown in Table 4, the regression model yielded an R-squared (R²) value of 0.526, indicating that competitive aggressiveness accounts for 52.6% of the variance in enterprise growth. This demonstrates the predictive capacity of competitive aggressiveness as a factor contributing to growth in Kenya’s public transport sector.

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results in Table 4 show an F-statistic of 236.826 (p < 0.001), which confirms the model’s statistical significance in predicting the relationship. According to Pal et al. (2019), a significant F-statistic supports the model’s capacity to explain a substantial portion of the variance in the dependent variable.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient (β) for competitive aggressiveness was found to be 0.704, implying that a one-unit increase in competitive aggressiveness would result in a 0.704 increase in enterprise growth. With a p-value of 0.000, this relationship was statistically significant, leading to rejecting the null hypothesis. These results suggest competitive aggressiveness significantly influences growth within Kenya’s public transport enterprises. This conclusion aligns with studies by Paulus and Hermanto (2022), who found that competitive aggressiveness is crucial for enterprise growth, and Diaz and Sensini (2020), who demonstrated its role in determining modern enterprises' performance.

Table 4: Regression Model Results on Competitive Aggressiveness and Enterprises’ Growth Model Summary

| R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------|-------------------|------|
| .726 ^a | .526 | .524 | .48516 | | | |
| ANOVA Test | | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | |
| Regression | 55.745 | 1 | 55.745 | 236.826 | .000 ^b | |
| Residual | 50.136 | 213 | .235 | | | |
| Total | 105.881 | 214 | | | | |
| Regression of Coefficients | | | | | | |
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| (Constant) | .736 | .142 | | | 5.172 | .000 |
| Competitive Aggressiveness | .704 | .046 | .726 | | 15.389 | .000 |

Source: Research data, 2024

Discussion

This study examined the influence of entrepreneurs' competitive aggressiveness on the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya. The findings revealed that few enterprises actively prioritized customer expectations and preferences, with minimal effort to gather customer feedback or build strong customer relationships. This lack of customer engagement hinders entrepreneurs' understanding of customer needs and, consequently, their ability to meet these needs effectively. Furthermore, marketing efforts were insufficient among most enterprises, as was the analysis of competitors to identify best practices that could be adapted to foster growth. In a volatile sector such as public transport, continuous competitor analysis and responsiveness to market dynamics are crucial for sustained growth.

The findings also indicated that most enterprises had not implemented strategies to enhance their competitive advantage through superior service offerings. This suggests that competitive aggressiveness, a critical element of entrepreneurial orientation, was generally underutilized within these enterprises, potentially compromising their competitive position and growth potential. The study further assessed the effectiveness of competitive aggressiveness in promoting enterprise growth. Regression analysis demonstrated that competitive aggressiveness significantly influences growth in Kenya's public transport sector. These results suggest that enterprises could experience more substantial growth if entrepreneurs adopt competitive strategies that emphasize business diversification, enhanced service marketing, and active incorporation of customer needs and preferences.

CONCLUSION

Public transport enterprises in Kenya benefit significantly from adopting a stance of competitive aggressiveness, defined as the firm's capacity and readiness to directly and vigorously challenge competitors to secure market entry or improve its positioning. Competitive aggressiveness is crucial in fostering growth within this sector by enabling enterprises to anticipate and counter competitors' strategies, thereby mitigating potential threats. An aggressive approach also equips enterprises to adapt swiftly to changing market dynamics, such as new regulations, economic fluctuations, or evolving customer preferences. Although competitive aggressiveness can strengthen the growth of public transport enterprises in Kenya, the findings revealed a general reluctance among enterprises to embrace aggressive marketing and service differentiation—key strategies for countering competition and bolstering growth.

The study recommends that entrepreneurs in Kenya's public transport sector adopt a more competitively aggressive approach to drive growth. This includes investing in aggressive marketing to expand their customer base and differentiating their services by prioritizing high-quality offerings, thus establishing a stronger market position for sustained growth and expansion.

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