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AIRLINE INDUSTRIAL UNREST AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**AHMED ABDIKARIM HASSAN****RESEARCH SCHOLAR****JOMO KENYATTA UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY****MOMBASA COUNTY****KARIM OMIDO****SR. LECTURER****TAITA TAVETA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE****KENYA****ABSTRACT**

The airline industry exists in an intensely competitive market. In recent years, there has been an industry-wide shakedown in form of strikes, which is bound to have far-reaching effects on the industry's trend towards expanding domestic and international services. In the past, the airline industry was at least partly government owned. This is still true in many countries, but Kenya airways is privately owned airline with royal Dutch airline KLM having the biggest share holding. The strategies it puts in place has to a large extent a bearing on operations and how management and staff work together. In Kenya the air travel market, both domestic and international, has been experiencing great competition in recent years due to both the civil aviation regulation and the increasing of customer awareness of service quality. Under the circumstance, airlines not only attempt to establish more convenient routes, but also introduce more promotional incentives, frequent flyer membership program and so on. Airlines hope to consolidate the market share and enhance profitability. However, strikes are bound to affect market share as well as influence margins. The purpose of this study therefore was to find out about airline industrial unrest and strategic management practices with specific reference to Kenya Airways.

KEYWORDS

Kenya airways, FBRSF, ICAO, KLM.

1.0 INTRODUCTION**1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The development of the powered aircraft in 1903 was to revolutionize intercity transportation. For the first time, the possibility arose for passengers and freight to be transported by air instead of over land or sea, making previously impossible trips not only possible, but practical and even attractive (Kiingwa, 2011). However, it was not until after the Second World War, more than 40 years later, that long distance intercity travel would cease to be dominated by rail. It took technological innovations during and after the Second World War, most notably the development of the jet engine, for aircraft to become sufficiently cost effective for aviation to compete with rail (Schumacher, 2009). This technological engine brought about complexity to management of its manufacturer because staff demanded for more benefits in line with the sales increase.

Customer demands and expectations are however, altering today's world, in the airline industry. Many of the airline companies have lost track of the true needs and wants of their passengers and are sticking to the outdated views of what airline services are all about (Gustafsson et al, 2012). Employee needs too have escalated upwards hence their making demands on management to fulfill their work related desires. Failure to balance between employee needs and customer demands has brought into question the strategies put forth by management.

Many airline managers think of passenger needs from their own perspective so their immediate focus is on cost reductions in driving to more efficient operations, keeping customers at a least priority in their strategic planning programs. But the customer should not be ignored (Boland, Morison, and O'Neil, 2010). The airline business must aim at fulfilling the individual customer needs or even reaching beyond these (Gustafsson et al 2012). However, at what cost to the employees. Airline performance at the national level has been dragged downwards as a result of employee strikes. What beckons in this research was to find out how these strikes influence strategic management practices consequently affecting the airline.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review summarizes information from the available literature in the same field of study. The specific areas covered here are theoretical review, empirical review and research gaps.

2.1 THEORETICAL REVIEW

Following deregulation in 1978 American Airways started a major route expansion policy in 1979. Its last Boeing 707 was retired in 1981 which reflected its zeal to expand to opening hubs. Consequently, it started developing its hubs round about the same time in the eighties (Geof, 2010). The African Airlines industry followed suit so as not to be left behind. It begun gearing up for a new wave of consolidation as operators sought ways to sail the financial storm suffered by most Airlines then. Coming up with strategies seemed the best solution but they were rather haphazard. The Nairobi-based African Airlines Association (Afraa, 2008), noted that through mergers, airlines would be able to expand into new markets, save costs and avoid competition from outside the continent. In light of this view, Ahmed (2012) affirms that "consolidation strategy is important for airlines to continue offering attractive services, reap economies of scale and to compete against the influx of mega global carriers," (Pierre, 2009). This must take due cognisance of pricing policy.

The observed chaotic airfare pricing is rooted in the unique nature of monopolistic competition with few barriers to entry and some amount of brand loyalty through frequent flyer programs. O'Connor (2011) concluded that the total costs are almost entirely fixed costs. The two principal variable costs are jet fuel and labour costs of the crew with the variable costs for passenger amenities being less than \$50 per ticket. Demsey and Goetz (2012) stated that the production costs of a flight are similar no matter how many seats are sold, or in other words, marginal costs are very low. Empty seats represent lost revenue since the cost to provide the seat has already been paid. Hence when management are pressed for staff demands, it ought to relook at its Mission and Vision to see whether they anchor to both staff and passenger demands notwithstanding labour laws prevalent.

2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Okemo (2009) says that an oligopoly is a slightly more interesting situation, where there are a number of major players, who act strategically in the market, based on the anticipation and reality of how the other major players behave. Strikes by one player could influence the management strategy of other players. David (2010) denotes that this is often shown in airline situations, for example, where one airline will announce employee salary increase, then other airlines will choose to copy or not, then the first airline might then cancel their employee anticipated salary rise if they don't think enough the implications could trickle downwards.

Braham (2009) says that initially the government adopted a regulatory approach to airlines. It willingly allowed - indeed, it mandated - that the airlines should be somewhere between oligopolies and monopolies, restricting the ability of airlines to compete against each other and limiting the ability of managers of new

airlines to enter the market. This created a complacent and stable situation where airlines were treated in a manner similar to utilities and hence could strategize in anticipation of the same.

2.3 CRITIQUE OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE

As can be realized in the foregoing material on theoretical literature, Dr. Hansman, (2012) asserted the pressure on management leading to employee strikes but however he did not reveal how this is so as propounded by Jayesh's (2008) ideology on infrastructural reasons possibly influencing managerial pressure. As pertains the empirical literature Orlando, (2012) attributed lack of evidence in stratagem direction by management. This view was added stone by Oyuke (2008) whose prediction of growth failed to meet expectations as was predicted by managerial strategies. This void lead to the fueling of why it was necessary to conduct research on airline industrial unrest and strategic management practices.

3.0 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are bound to assist a number of stakeholders. It will assist academicians and researchers. The findings of this research will also assist managers clarify strategic issues thus averting strikes. The strikes that would otherwise likely cause humongous expenses to airlines. The findings of this study will in addition open pathways for dialogue between management and staff representative to resolve misunderstandings and thereby reduce simmering tensions between them. The study will show importance of transparency in formulation of strategies to sort out staff issues by management.

4.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

After the second world war, an airline company was a symbol of modernism (Charles, 2011). To modernize, the existence of a national carrier was important investment for a country's image, hence Kenya also followed the same route after independence (Ngugi, 2009). Kenya had its national carrier the Kenya Airways which was important for economic & social-development of trade. But having a carrier was not enough. Minding staff welfare was hence what prompted the need for research.

The consumers in the market also had a little or no option since the only option was to travel by road (George, 2010). However, over time, Kenya Airways had to contend with competing with other national carriers. Given that the tourism sector was flourishing, there were more passengers in number and hence their demands as customers increased and so too the demand of workers. Thus competition, passenger and employee needs had to this day called for a relook into the managerial strategies to be employed for the firm to continue operating at a profit. Failure to do this exposed the company to strikes and lock-outs hence the need that prompted this research.

However, for many of these airlines, management appear not to have gotten their act in order quite yet judging from the frequency of employee strikes and tussles involving retrenchments and layoffs. Increasing competitors from international and local airlines further compound managerial task. This is bound to affect market share of the airline sector. The purpose of this study therefore was to find out about airline industrial unrest and strategic management practices with specific reference to Kenya Airways.

5.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

5.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The broad objective of this study was to find out about airline industrial unrest and strategic management practices.

5.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of this study were:

- i. To establish the effects of airline industrial unrest on competition strategies in airline routes
- ii. To determine the extent to which strikes have affected strategic operations
- iii. To find out how the airline operations have been affected by management choice of routes.
- iv. To find out how the airline managerial strategies counter act to the threat of strikes.

6.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This highlights the methodology used in this research. It covers the research design, study population, data collection methods and procedures; data analysis methods; and research ethical issues.

6.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design for this study was a descriptive survey. Mugenda (2009) states that a descriptive survey is one in which an attempt is made to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population and report events as they are. A descriptive survey report is therefore a study which requires the collection of quantifiable information.

6.3 TARGET POPULATION

The study targeted a population 40 respondents given that it is convenient based. The respondents emerged from top management at Kenya airways. In addition, agents of Kenya airways were incorporated in the study. Frequent passengers of Kenya airways were also covered in the study. The top management comprised of the Regional Sales Manager, the Reservations Manager and Customer Relations Manager. Five agents of Kenya Airways picked randomly were also selected. Employees were also be picked at random.

TABLE 6.1: TARGET POPULATION

	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
Top management	3	7
Travel agents	15	38
Employees	22	55
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Human Resources Department (2013)

6.4 CENSUS STUDY

The population being small in number was integrated wholly by the researcher in a census mode of research. A census research is one that incorporates the entire number of target population respondents (Johnstone, 2010). The purpose was to reflect industry portrayal characteristics as well as not to dilute the study findings hence the reason the entire target population was encompassed in the research.

6.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the process of packaging the information gathered, putting them in order and structuring its main components in a way that the findings can be easily and effectively communicated (Cooper and Schindler 2013). Data was collected using questionnaires. The procedure entailed the researcher personally administering the questionnaires to the respondents. Once administered, they were collected and analyzed. The presentation took form of tables and graphs.

7.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 RESPONSE RATE

The researcher distributed a total of 40 questionnaires to the target population and a total of 36 completed questionnaires were returned by the respondents. This represents a response rate of 90 percent. A diagrammatic representation is enumerated in the table and figure below.

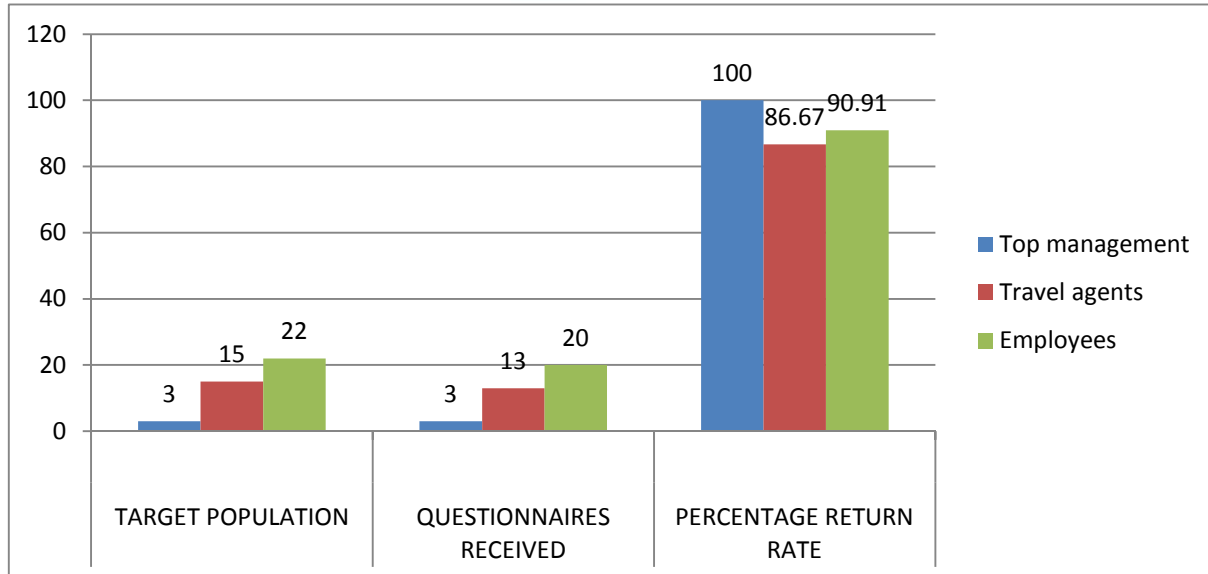
Response rate = $\frac{\text{Number of Questionnaires returned}}{\text{No of Questionnaires distributed}} \times 100$

TABLE 7.1: POPULATION RESPONSE

RESPONDENTS	TARGET POPULATION	QUESTIONNAIRES RECEIVED	PERCENTAGE RETURN RATE
Top management	3	3	100
Travel agents	15	13	86.67
Employees	22	20	90.91
TOTAL	40	36	90

Source: Researcher (2013)

FIGURE 7.1: SHOWING THE BREAKDOWN OF POPULATION RESPONSE



Source: Researcher (2013)

7.2 EXTRANEIOUS ISSUES AFFECTING STRATEGIES OF KENYA AIRWAYS IN LOCAL ROUTES

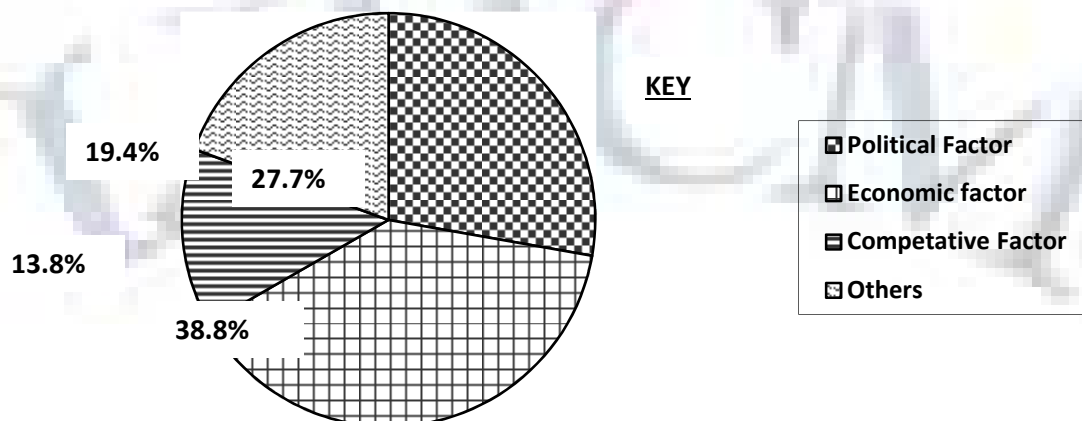
Respondents were asked to opine on extraneous issues affecting strategies of Kenya Airways in local routes that could form potential reasons that lead to industrial unrest. This is because these factors are the direct result of strategic management decisions perceived to lead towards organizational effectiveness. However as airlines compete, the inevitability of staff being put under pressure becomes high on account of the extraneous factors. This increases chances industrial strikes. As a consequence, staff were asked to shed light on this area. Table 7.2 illustrates this.

TABLE 7.2: EXTRANEIOUS ISSUES AFFECTING STRATEGIES OF KENYA AIRWAYS IN LOCAL ROUTES

Factors	Responses	% responses
Political factors	10	27.7%
Economic factors	14	38.8%
Competitive factors	5	13.8%
Other factors (technology and infrastructure)	7	19.4%
Total	36	100%

Source: Researcher (2013)

FIGURE 7.2: EXTRANEIOUS FACTORS AFFECTING STRATEGIES OF KENYA AIRLINES IN LOCAL ROUTES



Source: Respondents (2013)

Table 7.3 complements preceding information by revealing the effects of extraneous intervention towards risks associated with industrial unrest that is faced by management of Kenya Airlines. As shown therein, political factors led to reduced local travel therefore translating to passengers travelling less. When

passengers travel less, insecurity of tenure sores. This leads to industrial unrest. Its no wonder respondents scored a mean of 2.003 and a standard deviation of 0.43 thereby showing least inconsistency in the responses. Twenty five percent respondents agreed.

TABLE 7.3: SHOWING EFFECTS OF STRATEGIC ISSUES EXPERIENCED BY KENYA AIRWAYS

Strategic Issue	Effects	Mean	Standard Deviation	Responses	% responses
Political factors	- Reduced local travel - Job insecurity	2.003	0.43	9	25%
Economic factors	- Increased use of other transport modes - Reduced bonuses	2.441	0.33	13	36.1%
Competitive factors	- Increased competition by small carriers - Lack of loyalty - Deteriorated quality	1.901	0.72	7	19.4%
Infrastructure factors	- Carriers shifting to more safe and cost effective router -Retrenchments and Layoffs	2.390	0.44	7	19.4%
Total				36	100%

Source: Researcher (2013)

Insofar as economic factors were concerned, managerial strategies led to passengers using alternative competitive carriers while others opted to travel by personal means or bus. This resulted in reduced loyalty towards Kenya Airways which meant reduced profits and thus reduced bonuses among staff. It is these reduced bonuses that prompted industrial strikes and lockouts. A mean score of 2.441 and standard deviation of 0.33 were reflective of this.

When it came to competitive factors, respondents noted small passenger carriers eating into the market niche of Kenya Airlines. Responses however were highly skewed with a standard deviation of 0.72 and a mean score of 1.901 . This translated to loyalty of the airline being lost and thus led to quality degradation further leading to customer flight to competitive airlines. Industrial unrest therefore cropped up when the future seemed gloomy as a result.

Insofar as infrastructure is concerned, Kenya Airways has taken to the forefront in ensuring safety and cost effectiveness in order to enhance profits. But to reduce costs, staff numbers have been reduced too with only essential staff being maintained to increase margins much to the chagrin of staff. This has been a major contributor to industrial strikes. A mean score of 2.390 and a standard deviation of 0.44 is reflective of this.

Respondents were asked to establish the extent of improvement of managerial strategies in reduction of industrial unrest. The findings are contained in Table 7.4 enumerated below.

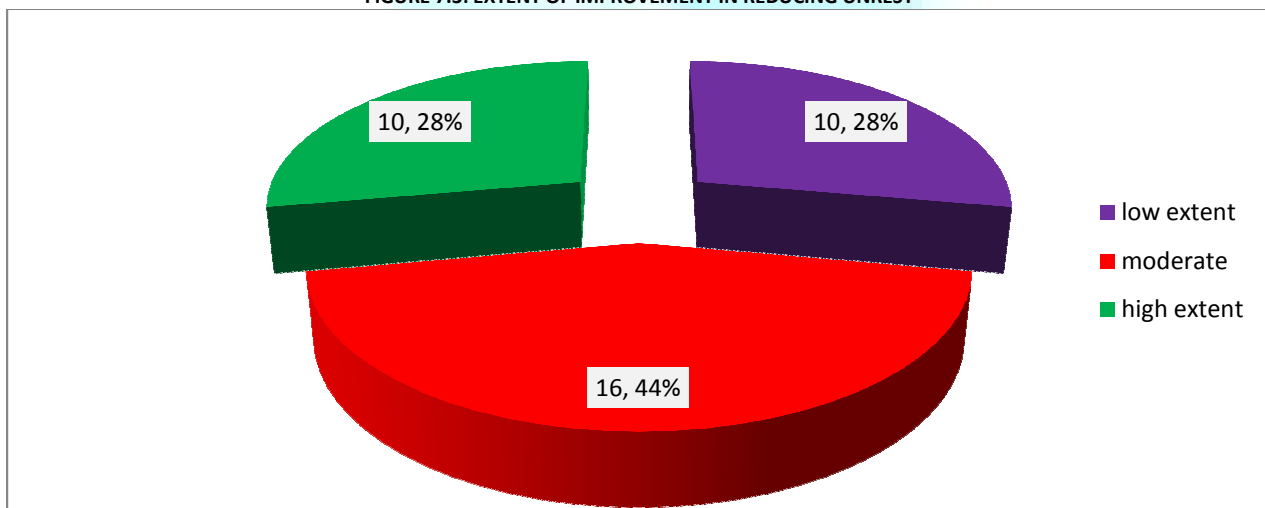
TABLE 7.4: EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN REDUCING UNREST

To what extent do you feel industrial unrest has reduced at Kenya Airways?	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness
Low extent	10	28	2.0000	0.75593	0.000
Moderate	16	44			
High extent	10	28			
Total	36	100			

Source: Research data (2013)

From Table 7.4, it is seen that 10, (28%) of the respondents noted improvements to a low extent, 16, (44%) of the respondents witnessed moderate improvement while 10, (28%) of the respondents noted improvements to a high extent. As per the illustration from Figure 4.5, it can be seen that a good number of respondents have seen moderate improvement emanating from managerial strategies in reducing industrial unrest. It can thus be said the strategies are working judging from a mean score of 2.00 and a standard deviation of 0.75593.

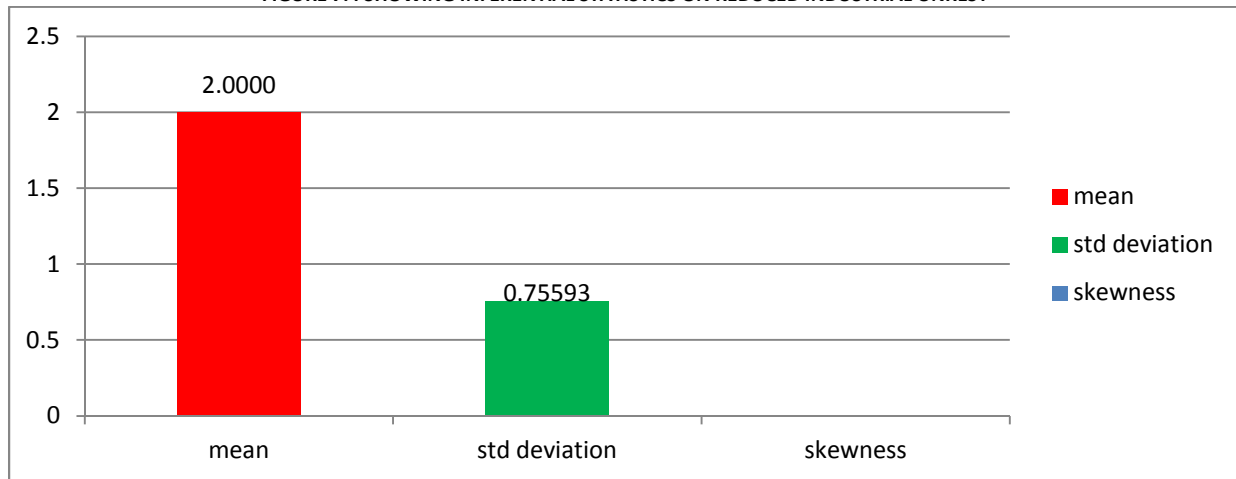
FIGURE 7.3: EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN REDUCING UNREST



Source: Researcher (2013)

The data is seen to be fairly distributed since it has a Skewness of zero as shown in Figure 7.3 above. Inferential statistics have been highlighted also below.

FIGURE 7.4 SHOWING INFERENTIAL STATISTICS ON REDUCED INDUSTRIAL UNREST



Source: Researcher (2013)

8.0 FINDINGS

8.1 SUMMARY

When asked on the extent to which strikes have affected strategic operations, respondents said that the airline operations insofar as infrastructure, staff and network, needed to introspect itself. In this regard, the respondents proposed an increase in frequency of local routes, improvement in infrastructure, and continuous training of staff.

The respondents also suggested that the airline should take into consideration flying into the new routes involving Ukunda, Lamu, Massai Mara and Eldoret with ukunda getting the highest number of respondents, followed by Lamu, Massai Mara and Eldoret. It was felt that this would enhance profits for Kenya Airlines, its agents and engage employees in work to the extent that they would have no time to contemplate industrial unrest for fear of job insecurity in the face of competition, retrenchments and layoffs.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Kenya airways is the leading regional carrier to Africa and Kenya national flag carrier with Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport as its hub. It provides passenger and cargo service linking international and domestic destinations. Management need to formulate strategies in line with these strengths attributed. But the entry of small carriers is a major challenge and therefore the airline should come up with strategies to satisfy their employees by looking into their welfare.

Given this potentially turbulent environment the patterns of change coming the underlying force driving these changes and above all the ability to align its strategies to respond to a changing business and aero-political environment. Kenya airways should therefore exploit change if it wants to achieve its vision which is to become a world class network.

10.0 CONCLUSION

From the research it is evident that the main factors affecting industrial unrest involved strategies encompassing political factors, social factors, competitive and infrastructural factors. Political factors accounted for the highest percentage followed by social factors, competitive factors and infrastructural factors in that order. Managerial strategies to counter to the threat of strikes was proposed to touch upon pricing and technology.

11.0 LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were faced during the study.

1. Carrying out a study is an expensive feat in relation to financial obligations. The numerous visits to offices to carry out research, typing and binding; all required money. The data received also needed a storage device and computer for processing. The researcher overcame this burden by seeking private sponsorship funds.
2. Some of the respondents feared to give all information because of the potential of their being victimized. The researcher overcame this by using good public relations techniques to convince the respondents so that they could give the information required.

12.0 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research being a survey was restricted to selected offices of Kenya Airways in Nairobi and Mombasa. It entailed 40 respondents. It targeted top management, travel agents and employees. The top management comprised of the Regional Sales Manager, the Reservations Manager and Customer Relations Manager. Five Kenya Airways agents picked randomly were selected. Employees were also picked at random.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fill in all your answers to all questions in the spaces provided.
2. Do not indicate your name on the questionnaire
3. It is absolutely important that all the sections have a response.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. Gender M () F ()
2. For how long have you worked for the organization?
 - a) Less than a year []
 - b) 2-5 years []
 - c) 5 and above []
3. Employee type:
 Managing Director
 General Manager
 Production Manager
 Chief Human Resource Officer
 Finance Manager
 Marketing Manager
 Other specify.....
4. What factors have affected the competitiveness in the traditional airline local routes?
 - a) Political factors
 - b) Economic factors
 - c) Competitive factors
 - Others
5. Explain how the factors stated above affect the competitive of airline in the local industry?
6. To what extent do you think these factors have affected the operations of the airline in the traditional local routes?
7. What do you think the airline should do to improve on its competitiveness?
8. Do you think Kenya airways need to introduce new routes to improve its competitiveness in the domestic network?
 - a.)Yes
 - b.)No
9. If yes which of the following routes /destinations do you propose?

Proposed routes	Tick the proposed route
Ukunda	
Lamu	
Massai Mara	
Eldoret	

10. What challenges are faced by the airlines in their daily operations in the traditional domestic routes?.....
 - a) Pricing issues
 - b) Seasonality in demand
 - c) Airport infrastructure
 - d) Stakeholders support
 - Others
 11. Have you ever experienced industrial unrest?
 - Yes
 - No
 - b. If 'yes' how many?
 12. What were the reasons for industrial unrest?
 13. State the nature of strategy competitors have adopted to counter KQ strategy.
 14. In your opinion, have strikes affected KQ operations?
 - Yes
 - No
 - b. If 'yes' how have these operations been affected?
 15. Do management meet the following?

i. Agents	ii. Employees	iii. Govt.	iv. Competitors	v. Amongst themselves	vi. Any other?...
b. What is the frequency of these meetings?					
i. Annually	ii. Bi-annually	iii. Weekly	iv. Daily	v. When the need arises	vi. Any other?.....
 - c. In your opinion, do they yield results?
 - Yes
 - No
- Please give your reasons

THANK YOU

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Thanking you profoundly

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