

INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS OF MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICE PROVIDERS IN KENYA

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One of the most important questions faced by business leaders in the strategic management process is a choice of how to adopt a market penetration strategy whereby a firm gains more usage from existing customers and also seeks to attract customers from existing competitors. The mobile service industry has recently experienced a quick succession of mobile service innovations, in deciding on the optimal timing of each service launch, carriers need to consider a complex array of technological, regulatory, and strategic factors. In spite of wide-ranging research on market penetration strategy, very little empirical research has observed the relationship between the market penetration strategies and competitiveness in mobile telecommunication sector. Based on this background, this study sought to investigate market penetration strategy and competitiveness of mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya. The study population consists of all the mobile Service providers in Kenya which according to a list obtained from Communications Commission of Kenya as at July 2010 are four. Given the small number of firms a census study was conducted. The data for this study was collected from primary sources using a semi-structured questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that contextual factors as extraneous variables influence both the independent and the dependent variable directly. This study is significant since it is hoped that findings and recommendation of the study will provides a greater understanding of appropriate contextual factors influences customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. In this sense, the study will contributes to knowledge in terms of effective strategy implementation and its contribution to organizational performance.

Key words: Contextual factors, customer experience management and organizational competitiveness

Introduction

Developing a market strategy allows an organization to align resources to greatest opportunities with a goal of increasing revenue and market share and achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. A marketing strategy is a plan, which combines product development, promotion, distribution, and pricing. It essentially identifies the organization's goals, and explains how they will be achieved within a specific timeframe.

The central argument of this research is that the organizational competitiveness of a telecommunications service provider emanates from strategy implementation. There is considerable support for this argument; competitive advantage is realized based on three factors (Sudarshan D, 1995): the firm's marketing strategy, implementation of this strategy and the industry context (Porter's Model, 1979). The purpose of competitive strategy is to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) and thereby enhance a business performance (Bharadwaj,etal 1993). One of the major objectives of marketing strategy is to enhance the long-term financial performance of a firm.

According to Ansoff (1957), a firm may choose one of four product-market growth strategies, including market penetration, market development, product development, or diversification. Ansoff suggests the safest growth option is to adopt a market penetration strategy whereby a firm gains more usage from existing customers and also seeks to attract new customers in their existing market. A slightly riskier option may be to adopt the market development strategy of attracting new types of customers for the current products of the firm from either new channels of distribution, or new geographic areas. Alternately, a firm may engage in product development by producing entirely new products, different versions of existing products, or different quality levels

of existing products to be sold in its current markets. The riskiest strategy overall is suggested to be a diversified approach where new products are developed for new markets. Ansoff's product-market expansion grid provides a useful though not exhaustive framework for looking at possible strategies to cope with the problem of strategic windows and finding way of creating overlapping strategic windows.

Mobile phone services in Kenya have operated as a duopoly with Safaricom and airtel Kenya (formerly Kencell , Celtel and Zain) taking the lead since 2000. The original intention of the Kenya Communications Act (KCA 1998) —to liberalize telecommunications in Kenya—has largely been met. Growth was tremendous: from 17,000 mobile subscribers in 1999 to 29.7 million by June 2012. In December 2007, France Telecom acquired 50% of Telkom Kenya and proceeded to launch its Orange brand in Kenya in September 2008. Now called Telkom Orange, In November 2008 Econet was launched, bringing to four the total number of operators.

A price war has characterized Kenya's mobile communications market in 2008 and 2009, following the market entry of the third and fourth network, Econet Wireless Kenya (EWK, in which India's Essar acquired a stake), and Telkom Kenya under the Orange brand with its new majority shareholder, France Telecom. Subscriber growth is now forecast to slow over the coming years, and rapidly falling ARPU(average revenue per user) levels have driven one of the incumbents, Airtel, deeper into negative earnings, leaving only the market leader, Safaricom, with a net profit, although reduced. The operators are developing new revenue streams from third generation broadband and mobile banking services. With market penetration rates in Kenya's broadband and traditional banking sector still extremely low, the mobile networks have an

opportunity to relive the phenomenal growth rates seen in the voice sector in recent years.

Statement of the Research Problem

Confronted with the fierce competition in today telecommunication marketplace, there have been many marketing strategies for service providers to plan and implement with evidence that shows consumers tend towards other competitors when they cannot be satisfied with the service quality. However, Safaricom Ltd has maintained its dominance in defiance of the price war championed by airtel, Yu and Orange has captured in the CCK report (June 2012) Safaricom had subscription market share of 64%,airtel 16.5%,Orange 10% and Yu 9%.

In view of the above the challenge for telecommunication service providers is to attract more customers, focus on building good quality relationship with customers, make customers satisfied, build trust, and step by step obtain organizational competitiveness, through customer experience. The current study therefore endeavour's to establish the relationship between market penetration strategies and organizational competitiveness in the mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya.

Research Focus

This study is significant since it is hoped that findings and recommendation of the study will benefit different stakeholders as explained herein. Firstly, this study will provides a greater understanding of contextual factors influences customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

Secondly, there is growing calls for companies to be more customer oriented, there has been widespread concern that, firms can no longer compete solely on providing superior value through

their core services, but rather they must enter into the realm of customer experience management, creating long-term, emotional bonds with their customers (Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan, 2008). This research contributes to marketing literature by advancing and utilizing comprehensive metrics to assess customer experience management.

Theoretical Framework

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of strategy advances that “contingency perspective” should be included in any assessment of the perspective value of organizational resources and capabilities (Barney 2001) given that marketing is an adaptive, boundary –spanning business function, then the business environment context may moderate the impact of different types of marketing strategy on business performance (Sin et al 2005). In this regard, since organizational capabilities is affected by organizational settings, it is expected that a variety of contextual factors will affect the influence of marketing penetration strategies on customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. Although there are many important contextual issues this study limits itself to the following contextual factors: Industry presence market leader/follower, Order of industry entry Pioneer/late entrants, Size (number of employees) and Ownership structure

The market leader is a contextual factor of interest to this study. Market leader represents the most dominant form of market interferes in a specific market industry. Usually, there is in one industry one firm that interacts as the market leader. It is characterized by having the largest market share. Furthermore, the market leader determines pace and bases of competition as for example the pricing or advertising intensity and its ability to create a benchmark which means that it then influences the activities of other companies (Wilson and Gilligan, (2006).

There are three key strategies for market leaders in order to achieve and maintain its strong position. The first strategy is the expansion of the overall market (Wilson and Gilligan, 2006). According to Wilson and Gilligan (2006), "the company typically stands to gain the most". In addition, the strategy implies the identification of new uses of product (Wilson and Gilligan, 2006). The second strategy for market leaders is to guard their existing market share. This may be done in several ways. In order to maintain their market share, companies concentrate on their significant competitive advantage(s). Furthermore, continuous product innovation and process is important to increase the competitive effectiveness and value to the customer (Wilson and Gilligan, 2006). Heavy advertising, strong customer and distributor relations are important in this strategy. The third strategy for market leaders in order to remain leaders is the expansion of market share. This involves heavy advertising, improved distribution, price incentives and new product development (Wilson and Gilligan, 2006). Furthermore, market leaders may build mergers and takeovers.

In most cases, pioneers continue to hold the biggest market share even after the entry of followers into the same market. High profitability can be maintained through high entry barriers in the form of resource control (control of technology, locations, managers and key employees). Also, the inevitable learning curve can positively influence the pioneer's market share. These advantages are summarized in the teachings of one of Sun Tzu. Sun Tzu wrote: "Generally, whoever comes first to the battlefield, and awaits the enemy, will be rested; but, whoever comes last and has to go straight into battle, will be tired. So, one who is skilled in war constrains the others but is not constrained by the others" (Cu Sun, 2005).

Organizational size and age are variables that are commonly recognized in the marketing and

strategy literature as influencing organizational performance O'Sullivan and Abela (2007). This study proposes that the more the number of employees, the more likely it may have achieved effective market penetration strategies to influence customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. Ebben and Johnson (2005) asserted that larger firms have significant advantages in the marketplace over small firms, with firm size often being viewed as an indicator economies of scale and market power (Bowen & Wiersema, 2005). Firm size has also been associated with greater firm development. Cohen (1987) suggested firm size provides advantages in the conduct of firms' R&D (Research and Development) efforts or their innovative activities (Galbraith, 1952).

In addition, the researcher proposes that ownership structure of an organization significantly influences the management decision and strategies adopted by the organization. For instance, it is commonly held that government-owned organizations are generally inefficient and ineffective compared to their privately-owned peers. In the same vein, a foreign owned multinational organization is expected to reflect totally different marketing expertise compared to a local competitor since the former has access to better management expertise from global network. Ownership structure of the organization determines the management style practiced in such organization and this may influence the effectiveness of its adopted strategies. The relationship between ownership structure and corporation performance has received considerable attention in the finance literature. The typical achievement among ownership structure and firm performance researches are the results of Jensen and Meckling (1976). They divided shareholders into internal (investors with management right) and external shareholders (investors without ballot right). The conclusion of their research was that the value of firm depends on the internal shareholder's share,

which is called ownership structure. Hence, this study will establish whether the ownership structure of an organization, that is whether wholly privately owned; wholly privately foreign owned; partly privately local and foreigner owned; wholly state owned; partly state and publicly owned; or partly publicly and privately local owned influences the relationship between market penetration strategies and customer experience management as well as organizational competitiveness.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of strategy advances that “contingency perspective” should be included on any assessment of the perspective value of organizational resources and capabilities (Barney 2001) given that marketing is an adaptive, boundary –spanning business function, then the business environment context may moderate the impact of different types of marketing strategy on business performance (Sin et al 2005).in this regard ,since organizational capabilities is affected by organizational settings, it is expected that a variety of contextual factors will affect the influence of marketing penetration strategies on customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. Although there are many important contextual issues this study limits itself to the following contextual factors: Industry presence market leader/follower, Order of industry entry Pioneer/late entrants. , Size (number of employees) and Ownership structure.

Organizational size and age are two variables that are commonly recognized in the marketing and strategy literature as influencing organizational performance (O’Sullivan and Abele, 2007).Organizational size may be operationalized in teams of the firm’s total net assets. In

addition, number of employees, sales and retail outlets are all appropriate indicators of organizational size.

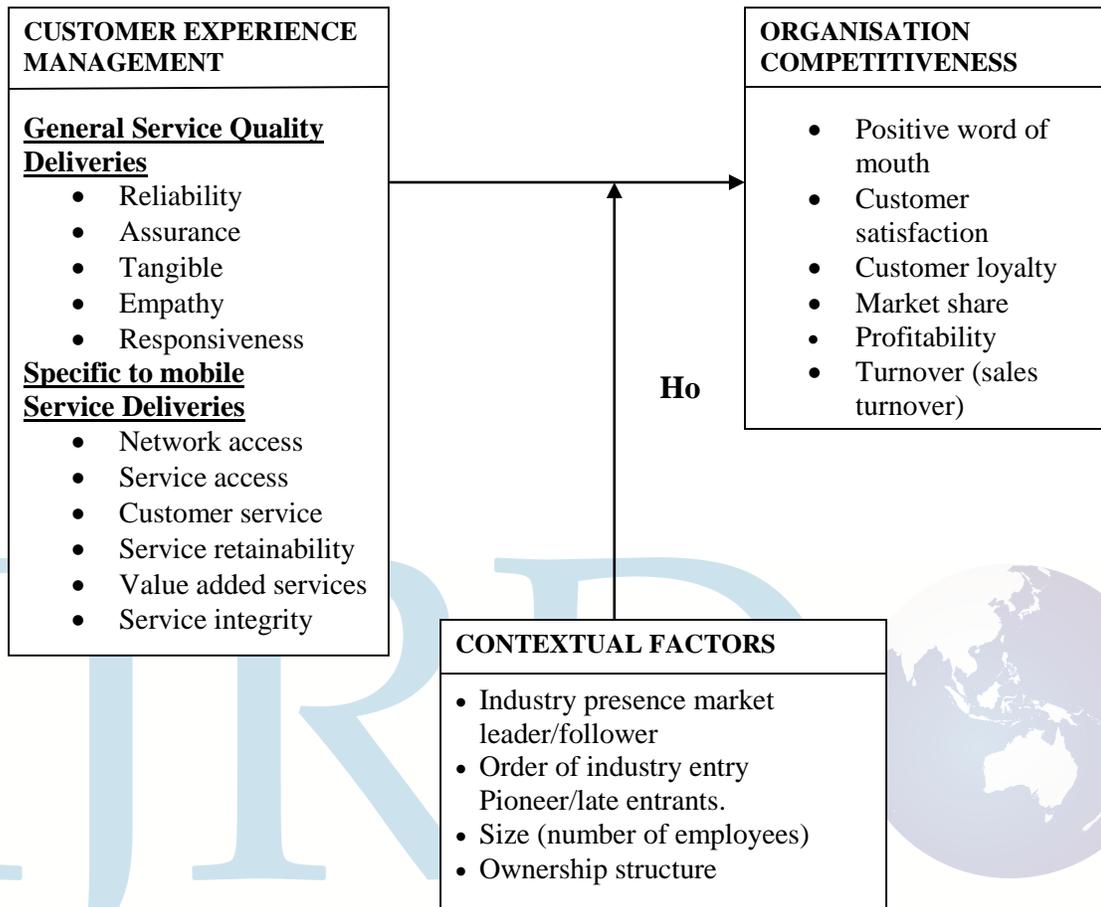
Thus, contextual factors are expected to influence customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. The following null hypothesis has been suggested.

H₀: Contextual factors have no impact on customer experience management and organisational competitiveness.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework and hypothesis of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the influence of contextual factors on customer experience management and organizational competitiveness





Research Methodology

Research Design

The study used descriptive and correlational census research design as it sought to generate quality information regarding how contextual factors influences customer experience management and organisational competitiveness. The study aimed to describe and establish the association among the key study variables, namely, customer experience management, organizational competitiveness and contextual factors. This study design was cross-sectional in nature as the research respondents were interviewed once. Cross-sectional studies have been found to be robust

for effects of relationship studies (Coltman, 2007; O'Sullivan and Abela 2007; and Raman and Kumar, 2008).

Population of the Study

This is a census study of all mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya as at January 2011 and still in existence by the anticipated time of data collection in the year 2011 were studied.

A complete list of the mobile service providers obtained from Communication commission of Kenya indicates that there are four firms namely Safaricom Ltd, Airtel, Telkom/Orange and Essar Telkom (yu).

Sample Size

In order to produce statistically valid results through the utilization of multivariate analytical techniques, a large sample size is required. (Hair, Anderson, Talham and Black, 1995). For the purposes of this research the sample consisted of Marketing Managers and customers. The choice of the Marketing Manager was purposive. Purposive sampling technique also called judgment sampling is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. The researcher decides what need to be known and sets out to find who can and willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Bernard 2002, Lewis et al 2006).

Data Collection and instrument

Data collection is the process of collecting information related to the study from the respondents using data collection instrument. Data collection also requires that the study identifies the procedure adopted in collecting information related to the study. The following subsections describe data collection instrument and data collection procedure adopted for purposes of the study.

In order to achieve the stated objectives data collection instrument was used. That is, questionnaire. This instrument was ideal for the study as it helped to elicit or collect primary data. Quite often, the questionnaire is considered as the heart of a survey operation (Hair, et al, 1995). The questionnaire was designed based on five point Likert-type scales. The questions were constructed to generate data in answer to specific target research questions and help to achieve the objectives of the study. Closed-ended questions were used to save time and to motivate the respondent to answer. Conscious effort was made to select only literate subscribers as respondents because of the use of self-administered questionnaires as data collection instrument.

Measurement of Variables

The key variables of this study are independent variables and dependent variables. The independent variables in this study were itemised as contextual factors and dependent variable as customer experience management and organisational competitiveness.

In this study, the dependent variables are itemised as organizational competitiveness and Customer experience management. Reviews of the literature provide a broad perspective of business performance measures that will guide the operationalization of organizational competitiveness. According to O'Sullivan and Abela (2007) common market and financial measures of output in firm-level marketing performance studies have been profit, sales growth and market share. However, Eccles (1998) suggests that the leading indicators of business performance cannot be found in financial data alone. For instance, customer satisfaction often reflects a company's economic condition and growth prospects better than its reported earnings do. According to Rauen et al (2009) they lamented that the ability to deliver a customer experience

consistently aligned around customer needs and intentions has a significant impact on a company's ability to create customer loyalty. In turn, loyal customers have a demonstrable impact on the top line, by buying more or buying more frequently and referring other customers to the company. Consequently, this study operationalized organizational competitiveness in terms of customer behaviour outcomes and, market and financial outcome.

This study was guided by Jayachandran et al (2005) who suggest that the performance of an organizational action designed to obtain competitiveness is more meaningful when it is assessed in relation to the competition since firm gain competitiveness over their rivals. At the same time, Ambler (2000) points out that the performance output metrics adopted as competitive measures are only relevant if the company understands their score relative to that of competitors. Coltman (2007) also argues that to develop some sense of comparativeness, it is important for respondents to assess performance relative to that enjoyed by competitors. This is useful because, taken in isolation, an organization's performance, whether strong or weak, contains only limited meaning.

Validity and Reliability of Measures

An extensive review of the relevant existing conceptual and empirical literature on customer experience management, organizational competitiveness and contextual factors produced measures for each variable. These measures were used to construct the questionnaires. Therefore, the measurement scale which was used in the questionnaire are deemed to have fact and construct validity because they reflect the key components of customer experience management, organizational competitiveness and contextual factors as described in the extent literature and also since they are validated measure previously applied in related studies. In order to ensure content

validity, the preliminary questionnaire was pre-tested on a pilot to a set of customer for comprehension, logic and relevance. Respondents in the pre- test were drawn from customer internet service providers, which are similar to those in the actual survey in terms of background characteristics, familiarity with the topic of research and attitudes and behaviour of interest. The pre-tested internet service providers were not be part of the target population of the study so as to avoid biasness in the assessment biases. As recommended by Malhotra (2007), the questionnaire pre-test was prepared through personal interview in order to observe the respondents reactions and attitudes. All aspects of the questionnaire were tested including question contents, wording, sequence, form and layout, question difficulty and instructions. The feedback obtained was used to revised the questionnaire before administering it to the respondents.

Reliability is defined as be fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures (Bryman and Bell, 2003). There are three prominent factors related to considering whether a measure is reliability: stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency. In this study, internal reliability was considered. Bryman and Bell (2003) suggested that a multiple-item measure in which each answers to each questions are aggregated to form an overall score, the researcher ensured that all the indicators are related to each other.

The questionnaire was tested for reliability by using Cronbach coefficient alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items. This is a method of estimating reliability of test scores by the use of a single administration of a test ((Patterson and Sharma 2004). For the purpose of this study, the items were considered reliable when they yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above. This figure is usually considered desirable for consistency levels (Bryman and Bell, 2003)). However, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha that is less than 0.70 implied that the research

instruments was not dependable and the researcher make necessary adjustment before using the instruments to collect data

Results and Discussion

The influence of contextual factors on customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

Table 4.11, shows that there were significant positive correlations between contextual factors on the one hand and market penetration strategy implementation ($r= 0.277$, $p<0.005$); customer experience management ($r= 0.412$, $p<0.005$); organizational competitiveness ($r= 0.315$, $p<0.005$) on the other.

Table: The relationship between contextual factors, market penetration strategy implementation, customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

		contextual factors	Market penetration strategy implementation	Customer Experience Management	Organizational Competitiveness
contextual factors	Pearson Correlation	1	.277**	.412**	.315**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	193	188	193	192
Market penetration strategy implementation	Pearson Correlation		1	.680**	.579**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000
	N		200	195	194
Customer Experience Management	Pearson Correlation			1	.574**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N			200	199
Organizational Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation				1
	N				199

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

The results indicate that contextual factors as extraneous variables influence both the independent and the dependent variable directly. This implies that the contextual factors of industry presence, order of industry entry, workforce size; and ownership structure are likely to increase market penetration strategy implementation, customer experience management, and organizational competitiveness.

Conclusions

The study established that contextual factors impact directly on market penetration strategy implementation which in essence impacts directly on both customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. This finding is consistent with the views of Sin *et al* (2005), that since marketing is an adaptive, boundary spanning business function, then the business environment context may moderate the impact of different types of marketing strategy on business performance.

Indeed, the contextual factor of market domination has come to the fore more lately with the introduction of porting services. There has been a lot of controversy particularly between Safaricom and Airtel. This can possibly be explained by its strategies suggested by Wilson and Gillingham (2006) that market leaders aim to guard their existing market share through concentrating on their competitive advantage among other ways. Contrary to the views of Cu Sun (2005), that in most cases, pioneers continue to hold the biggest market share even after the entry of followers into the market, Airtel has not been able to achieve this in the Kenyan market. This has led to several re-branding thus denying it the pioneer status. This finding for the Kenyan case may be as a result of the size of the firm. As observed by Ebben and Johnson (2005), larger firms have significant advantages in the market place over small firms, with firm size often being viewed

as an indicator of economies of scale and market power. Indeed the current study established that for the four firms, Airtel posted the smallest workforce acting as an indicator to the firm size.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Despite the fact that this study produced important results, it also faced certain limitations which in turn offer opportunities for further research. First, the selection of factors included in the conceptual framework is not exhaustive. Certainly, other factors could provide additional knowledge into the effect of market penetration strategy on organization competitiveness.

The study variables namely market penetration strategy, customer experience management; contextual factors and organization competitiveness are not optimal. Future researchers may still establish other relevant measures of these variables and even change the conceptual framework to set out different interrelations between these variables in order to bring more knowledge in the field of market dynamics.

Second, like most empirical research, the findings of this study are based on information generated from customers and managers of the mobile service providers which is self-reported data. The information that an organization generates is not the only source of information about its market penetration strategy and organizational competitiveness. It may be prudent to combine internal information with those collected from external sources namely competitors, current and potential customers, relevant government agencies and private sector. To address this limitation, future researchers can combine the viewpoints of all stakeholders in the industry in order to generate more valid conclusions.

Third, the research did not explore the sensitive issues of pricing in the mobile service providers. Studies can be conducted in future on the pricing policy in mobile telephony.

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