

THE INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND COMPETITIVENESS OF INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Competition among firms sets center stage for a race where every competing entity seeks to emerge the winner by scooping as much from the market and financial returns. A competitive and efficient service sector is a pre-requisite for economic development and growth. The massive competition in the service market leads to consumer exploitation prompting organizations and governments to set tactical approaches and policies to enhance their competitiveness. The general objective of the study was to establish the influence of strategic leadership on competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya. The specific objective of the study was to determine the influence of strategic communication on internet service providers in. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population of the study was 108 top management team of established internet service providers in Kenya. Since the sample is small (108), a census method was used to ensure all targeted respondents participate in the study. Primary data was collected using close ended questionnaires while secondary data on ROA was collected using a secondary data collection sheet. The researcher dropped the questionnaires physically at the respondents' place of work. The raw primary data collected was coded prior to being input into SPSS statistical analysis software and then cleaned to ensure accuracy and completeness of the information obtained. Descriptive data was summarized using descriptive analysis; while inferential statistics was used to

generate correlation and multiple regression analysis. Analyzed data was presented in form of tables and graphs. A total of 108 questionnaires were sent to the targeted 108 top management team from each of 12 established internet service provider companies in Kenya for data collection; from which 101 questionnaires were returned completely filled, depicting a response rate of 93.5% which is good for generalizability of the research findings to a wider population. From the study results, both descriptive and inferential statistics showed that the four conceptualized independent variables significantly predicted competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya (dependent variable). The study concluded that internet service provider firms in Kenya that engage in feasible strategic communication approaches can realize a significant improvement in their competitiveness in internet service provision. The study recommends that top management team of internet service providers should craft viable strategic communication approaches that enable them sustain their competitiveness in internet service provision in Kenya. A similar study can be done using longitudinal study approach with time series data for about 10-year period so as to establish the feasibility of strategic leadership on competitiveness of all internet service provider companies in Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Competitiveness is the capacity of an endeavor to expand its piece of the overall industry, benefit and development while managing its situation in the market for a timeframe. Ibrahim and Abou (2019) allude that competitiveness revolves around flourishing made from monetary action that makes an incentive by giving items and administrations at costs over their expense of generation. Organizational competitiveness is reliant on dynamism, advancement and the capacity to change and modify. Corporate institutions achieve competitive advantage if they produce superior products or services that they bring forth on market at lower prices than their competitors. Alshubaily and Altameem (2017) indicated that competition among firms sets center stage for a race where every competing entity seeks to emerge the winner by scooping as much from the market and financial returns.

The quest for competitive advantage always ranks high in the crafting of strategic framework for an organization (Singh, Burgess & Heap, 2016). In the current era, strategic management has been identified as an imperative for competition and enhanced performance as it improves efficiency in respect of production and allocation of goods and services in the organization. According to Alshubaily and Altameem (2017), strategic management may be viewed as a collection of decisions and actions that results in the formulation and implementation of plans designed to achieve the objectives of a firm. To Chigudu (2020), strategic management is a phenomenon that involves decision making, proper execution of the idea so as to achieve the particular target or objective of the organization. It can be summed up that strategic management encompassed a set of organizational activities that results in strategic intent, formulation of plans, execution and control of the performance in a business enterprise (Vaghefi & Tulu, 2019).

Strategic management drivers are those factors that help in the translation of strategic thoughts into performances that can be attained. According to Singh, Burgess and Heap (2016), the drivers aim to help organizations achieve or exceed planned performance. Some of these drivers entail relationship management of customers, organizational learning, and strategic leadership. Strategic management drivers provide tools for firms' survival, growth and help them to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors. Firms use strategic leadership to protect them from a very unpredictable business environment and ensure survival and growth (Watzlaf, & Parmanto, 2019).

Candido and Santos (2015) argue that in the highly competitive environment of the 21st century, organizations must be able to effectively change through the application of effective strategies, quickly and in a way that the competitors will be unable to imitate. Strategic management drivers and competition has implications to access to financial resources, allocation of funds,

competitiveness and development of service and manufacturing industries, levels of economic growth and the degree of financial stability. Strategic management practices involve the critical dimensions of strategic intent, formulation, implementation, control of strategy (Singh, Burgess & Heap, 2016; Chigudu, 2020). It is a collection of managerial decisions and actions that have a bearing on the long-term performance of a corporation.

According to Birkhoff and Moriarty (2020), a competitive and efficient service sector is a prerequisite for economic development and growth. Organizational capacity to attain competitiveness has been a leading motivation among investors, business executives as well as policy formulators across the globe. The massive competition in the internet service sector leads to consumer exploitation prompting organizations and governments to set tactical approaches and policies to enhance their competitiveness (Imbambi, 2018).. In today 's turbulent business environment, internet service firms are faced with changes in technology, consumer demand, customer expectations, competition, regulations and globalization among many aspects.

According to Barney (2015), the rigorous rivalry in operating atmosphere changes at a high rate leading to very high levels of precariousness affecting competitiveness of firms in the service (Harrigan, 2017).

Strategic leadership has been found to improve organizational competitiveness of organizations across various settings. To this end, Alharthy, Rashidm, Pagliari and Khan (2017) allude that although 80% of the organizations have the right strategies, rarely 14% have succeeded to implement them due to lack of strategic leadership among other factors. Chigudu (2020) studied Zimbabwe's challenges of strategic management in the wake of sustainable development and found that 80% of strategy implementation efforts fail among the Zimbabwean firms mainly due to leadership related causes. Kagumu (2016) further allude that the main problem of managers and owners of service firms in today's dynamic competitive business environment is lack of requisite leadership since organizations spend a lot of money, personnel and other resources in creating their strategic plans., thus negatively affecting the firms' competitiveness.

Gikunju, Gakure and Orwa (2018) studied the determinants of performance of tea industry in Mount Kenya Region; Njue and Ongoto (2020) examined the relationship between strategic management practices and change implementation in selected public universities in Kenya. The foregoing studies reveal that the lower competitiveness of organizations are a pointer to the fact that they lack strategic leadership among other factors, thus key drivers to effective organizational competitiveness is the existence of strategic communication, strategic direction, control and knowledge/skills, expertise, team-work as exemplified in the strategic human resources. Several studies examined leadership variables partially or in isolation. Further, constraints of operationalization and contextualization of strategic leadership dimension are not exhaustive from context to context.

Statistics from the Communication Authority of Kenya quarterly report (2021) on competition, tariffs and market analysis-April-June, 2021, shows a downward trend analysis. For instance, data/internet total subscriptions dropped from 46.74-43.74 million, while total broad band subscriptions dropped from 27.48-25.77 million, thus making some internet service providers to strongly invest in fibre internet solution to remain competitive.

Further, in terms of market share in 2021, Safaricom lost 0.2% points in market share-recorded 64.2% shares, Airtel Networks Ltd gained 0.3% points; recorded 26.9%, Equitel dropped by 0.2% points-recorded 2.3% market shares; Telkom Kenya ltd and Jamii Telecommunications ltd market shares remained unchanged at 6.2% and 0.3% respectively (Communication Authority of Kenya quarterly report, 2021). Economic surveys (2021) pointed at leadership wrangles, among other causes of drop in competitiveness of the internet service providers. Therefore, it is on this premise this study sought to examine the influence strategic leadership on competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research collects data from members of a population and helps the researcher get the descriptive existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behavior or values. The target population of the study will be the top management team of established Internet Service Providers, regulated by the Communications Authority of Kenya. A sample of 108 top level management team of established Internet Service Providers, regulated by the Communications Authority of Kenya. Self-administered structured questionnaires were used to collect data. A pilot study was done to determine validity and reliability. Data was analyzed using SPSS statistical analysis software.

Results

Descriptive results are summarized as measures of central tendency and dispersion of the Likert scale of measurements. In terms of interpreting the mean responses and mode, first, the mean of strategic communication is 3.501 (round to 4 is great extent on the likert scale) with a std deviation of 0.89363 and a mode of 4.00 (great extent on likert scale) implying that most respondents were of the opinion that strategic communication has to a great extent contributed to the competitiveness of the internet service provider firm. These results are supported by some previous studies (Heide, Gronhaug, & Johannessen, 2014) which reveals that over 66 percent of firms fail to coordinate strategic activities because of poor strategy communication, which is often caused by managers' inability to communicate strategies in a meaningful manner to other organizational members and key stakeholders.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

		Strategic communication	Competitiveness of internet service providers
N	Valid	101	101
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.5010	3.6525
Median		3.4461	3.2936
Mode		4.00	4.00
Std. Deviation		.89363	1.04847
Skewness		-.599	-.720
Std. Error of Skewness		.240	.240
Kurtosis		-.395	-.345
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.476	.476

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis was computed using Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient to determine linear relationship between the study’s independent variable strategic communication and the outcome variable (competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya).

The results showed that strategic communication (0.724) had positive significant relationship with the dependent variables (competitiveness of internet service providers) in Kenya.

Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis show an R^2 of 0.849 from which we can infer that the study model explains 84.9% of variations in the competitiveness of studied internet service providers in Kenya while other factors or variables not in the study’s model accounts for only 15.1% of competitiveness of studied internet service providers in Kenya; thus it is a good study model. The other variables in the study were strategic direction; strategic control; and strategic human resource focus;

Further, the ANOVA results shows the F-statistical value is significant ($F=135.429$, significant at $p<.01$), which confirms the fitness of the model. That is, the study’s conceptualized independent variables (strategic communication, strategic direction, strategic control, and strategic human

resource focus) are indeed different from each other and therefore influence competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya (outcome variable) in a different manner.

Discussion of study findings

Descriptive statistics showed that the mean of strategic communication is 3.501 (round to 4 is great extent on the likert scale) with a std deviation of 0.89363 and a mode of 4.00 (great extent on likert scale) implying that most respondents were of the opinion that strategic communication has to a great extent contributed to the competitiveness of the internet service provider firm.

Multiple regression analysis showed that strategic communication has positive significant influence on competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya ($\beta = 0.294$ (0.093) at $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that a single increase in effective strategic communication approaches by top management team in the company will lead to 0.294 unit increase in the competitiveness of internet service providers in Kenya

Both descriptive and inferential statistics are supported by Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (2017) who analyzed use of strategic communication as public relations exercise in 183 established SMEs in India and found that company communication experts must understand the attitudes and concerns of the consumer, employee, and public interest groups to establish and maintain good cooperative relationships with concerned stakeholders.

Quirke (2017) study on middle level managers also many strategic managers lack an understanding of the meaning and role of strategy communication. Similarly, employees often feel confident about their job performance but, in fact, they have no idea what their organization actually wants to accomplish in terms of competitiveness which must then be well expressed in the company's communication strategy.

However, the result differ with Wallsten and Mallahan (2019) who studied the direct link between competition, communication of prices, and speed; by constructing a series of logit and OLS regressions to measure the effect of the number of ISPs on both the speed and price of connection, the study found that there was a positive relationship between number of providers and the speed of connection and a negative relationship between number of providers and communication of prices.

Conclusion

First, internet service provider firms in Kenya that engage in feasible strategic communication approaches can realize a significant improvement in their competitiveness in internet service provision.

Recommendations

First, top management team of internet service providers should craft viable strategic communication approaches that enable the firms sustain their competitiveness in internet service provision in Kenya.

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