RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKET PENETRATION STRATEGY AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT IN MOBILE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN KENYA.

[1]P. Ooga Gecheo, [2]J. Kuria Thuo, [3]J.Byaruhanga

[1] Country Coordinator-ESAMI Kenya
[2] Vice Chancellor, Gretsa University, Thika, Kenya
[3] Professor, Department of Social Science Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakamega, Kenya

Abstract
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 customer experience management of mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya. The study population consisted 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 findings of the study revealed that there were mean differences in market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management between these four mobile service providers. This study was significant since it is hoped that findings and recommendation of the study will provides a greater understanding of appropriate market penetration strategy implementation framework as well as how market penetration strategies influences customer experience management. In this sense, the study will contributes to knowledge in terms of effective strategy implementation and its contribution to organizational performance.

Key words: Customer Experience Management, Marketing Penetration strategy

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.

1.2 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.

1.1 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 appropriate market penetration strategy implementation framework as well as how market penetration strategies influences customer experience management. In this sense, it contributes to and extends knowledge in terms of effective strategy implementation and its contribution to organizational performance.

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.

Thirdly, the study focuses on customer experience management through market penetration strategies. This is useful in the understanding of the critical benefits accruing from an effective market penetration strategies and how customer experience management creates superior customer value. This research also sought to establish the role played by contextual factors on market penetration strategies to achieve customer experience management.

Finally, this research will add value to management practice by offering invaluable insights on marketing penetration strategies decisions to managers to bolster the customer experience management. In particular, this study will provide managers with greater understanding of the levels of commitment necessary to achieve sufficient market penetration strategies and the influence this would have on their customer experience management. Further, the study will provide elaborate framework on market penetration strategies and customer experience management that serve as appropriate evaluation metrics on the effectiveness of strategic implementation by an organization. This will make significant contribution to marketing practice since previous research has proved that competitive advantage is realized based on three factors (Sudarshan, 1995): the firm's marketing strategy, implementation of this strategy and the industry context (Porter's model,1979).Mangers will be enlightened on the various contextual factors that may facilitate or inhibit effective market penetration strategy and thereby affect customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Harmon (1997) argues that if an organization is to grow, more focus is needed on developing marketing strategies to create and deliver superior perceived customer value. For it is the emphasis on increasing value to the customer that will enable a firm to grow by penetrating existing segments, developing new markets, and creating new products and services. Customers have greater access to information about competitive products, which has led to an improved ability to articulate value expectations. Knowing what customers value and how the solutions a company provides meet those values is key to developing a viable marketing strategy.

Customer experience encompasses every aspect of a company's offering: the product and service, the quality of customer care, advertising, packaging, ease of use and reliability to name but a few. Poor experience is generally conceptualized as an 'expectation gap' - the difference between what the customer thinks they should be getting (built up by marketing promises and other experiences) and the experience that they receive (as a result of operational design for efficiency) (Millard 2006).

In today's competitive business environment, it is increasingly hard to differentiate mobile operators on image, offerings & promotions, call quality / coverage, cost, handset, customer service and billing. Most operators offer tariffs that match competitor deals, coverage and call quality is indistinguishable due to the mass roll-out of cell sites, and all operators have similar handset ranges and offer similar billing services. It is therefore argued that there is a clear potential for considering core aspect of customer experience in practice (and including it in any measurement frameworks) as stipulated in Figure1 (conceptual framework).

Parasuraman et al. (1988) indicate that service quality has become a significant differentiator and the most powerful competitive weapon that all service organizations seek to possess. For an organization to gain competitive advantage in terms of service quality, it must use technology to gather information on market demand and exchange information between organizations for the purpose of enhancing service quality. Service quality in the telecommunications has mainly been researched on the technical and/or on corporate strategies (Douligeris & Pereira, 1994; Gruber, Abdou, Richards, & Williams, 1986; Jung, 1996a; 1996b; Lim, Widdows, & Park, 2006; Lynch, Buzas & Berg, 1994; Takahashi, 1988). Those studies that looked at customers' side were done in North America (Ai, Martinez, & Sappington, 2004; Berg & Lynch, 1992; Turel & Serenko, 2004; 2006; Uri, 2003; 2004;), Europe (Athanassopoulos & Iliakopoulos, 2003; Gerpott et al., 2001; Lee, Lee, & Feick, 2001;) and Asia (Johnson & Sirikit, 2002; Kang & James, 2004; Kim, Park, & Jeong, 2004; Kim & Yoon, 2004; Wang & Lo, 2002; Wang, Lo, & Yang, 2004). It is clearly apparent that when it comes to measure confirmation/disconfirmation issues on the customer side the telecommunications industry does not have proper tools. The purpose of this research is to provide holistic framework to address the assertions by previous researchers that the telecommunication industry has no proper tool that has been designed to measure confirmation/disconfirmation issues from the customer perspective.

Grönroos (1984) brought forth two distinct service quality dimensions — technical and functional quality. Technical quality is what consumers get as an outcome of an interaction with a service provider. On the other hand, functional quality has to do with how the service is delivered

(Grönroos, 1984). McDougall and Levesque (2000) also studied the concept of technical quality, though in the form of core service quality (product/service related offerings). In service industry where technical quality is difficult to differentiate among competitors, functional attributes of service are potentially more important in customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 1984). More recently, Lim, et al (2006) identified five distinct dimensions of mobile service quality, and their direct and indirect effects on economic value, emotional value on loyalty intention through satisfaction. These are pricing, network, data, billing and, customer services.

Mobile Telecommunications markets can be divided by the type of services provided and by the telecommunications network used (Gerpott et al., 2001). In terms of sales, sales revenues and number of customers involved, Gerpott et al., (2001) noted that the mobile cellular telephony is by far the most important sub-market for mobile telecommunications. Due to the special characteristics of services, in general, and mobile services in particular, the consumer cannot be certain that the service provider will always provide the promised service quality (Gerpott et al., 2001); and, quality itself can only be measured by the customer (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

For usage-dependent contractual goods, a long-term relationship with customers is important for the service providers (Gerpott et al., 2001) and customer-oriented marketing strategies are essential for mobile carriers to retain their customers (Kim & Yoon, 2004). Van-der-Wal et al., (2002) used SERVQUAL to investigate service quality in a mobile telecommunications outlet in South Africa. Their results, not only confirmed that the instrument could be used to assess service quality in that industry, but also its overall reliability. The researcher concurs with the inclusion of SERVQUAL as a measure which addresses issues of customer experience management as captured in the conceptual framework.

Kang and James (2004) also used SERVQUAL to measure perceptions of customers' service quality of two distinct mobile telecommunications companies in South Korea. These researchers found that the initial 5-factor structure of SERVQUAL is confirmed through their study. Johnson and Sirikit (2002) used SERVQUAL to investigate service quality perceptions and their competitive analysis in the telecommunications industry and the results were that the instrument is recommended for process-driven service firms such as telecommunications, banking, retailing, health care, etc. (Johnson et al, 2002).Previous research have focused on SERVQUAL from the perspective of the customer but this research will measures SERVQUAL in the mobile telecommunication service providers perspective.

This research will extend the SERVQUAL measure from the general deliveries of service quality to those that are specific to the mobile telecommunication. The researcher has provided a thorough framework of measuring service qualities that are specific to mobile telecommunication. The general deliveries include; Kotler (1999); Bitner and Zeithaml, (2003) reliability means the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Gilbert,et al (1999) added that customers want performance to be consistent and dependable. Responsiveness means the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Gilbert,et al (1999) added that customer must see service provider as ready and willing to perform. Tangibles mean the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication material of an organization. Gilbert, et al (1999) added that customer look for quality in the equipment, facilities, and communication materials used to provide the service. Empathy means the provision of caring, individualized attention to the customer. Assurance means the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

The service deliveries that are a departure from the general service deliveries and are specific to mobile telecommunication service provides include; Network access means the network indication or signal on the display of mobile is a signal to a customer that he can use the service of this network operator. Service access means the speed to which the network operator gives to a customer to enable connectivity. Service integrity describes the quality of service during service use. Service retainability describes the termination of service (in accordance with or against the will of the user)

Another dimension that the researcher has addressed under customer experience management is customer service which means all features, acts, and information that augment the customer's ability to realize the potential value of a core product or service, according to Davidow,et al (1989). Langlois and Tocquer (1998) went another step deeper and defined customer service as a process that creates service quality for customers and there are two dimensions: technical quality and relational quality. Technical quality relates to the benefits offered to customers like availability of the network signal to enable a customer use the service. Relational quality describes the nature of the interaction between customer and the company like the relationship between the customer and the customer service representative.

In addition, Value Added Services (VAS) plays a crucial role to enhance customer experience management in mobile telecommunication industry and it enhances effective market penetration strategies which results to organizational competitiveness. VAS are enhanced services beyond standard voice calls and faxed transmissions that operators offer customers to encourage increased phone use. (Craig 1989) lamented that customer satisfaction program requires an understanding of the marketplace, and of the difference between minimum service requirements and value-added services. VAS are increasingly popular with mobile phone operators as they serve a very useful commercial purpose of driving up average revenue per user (ARPU) as well as responding to users' demands and expectations.

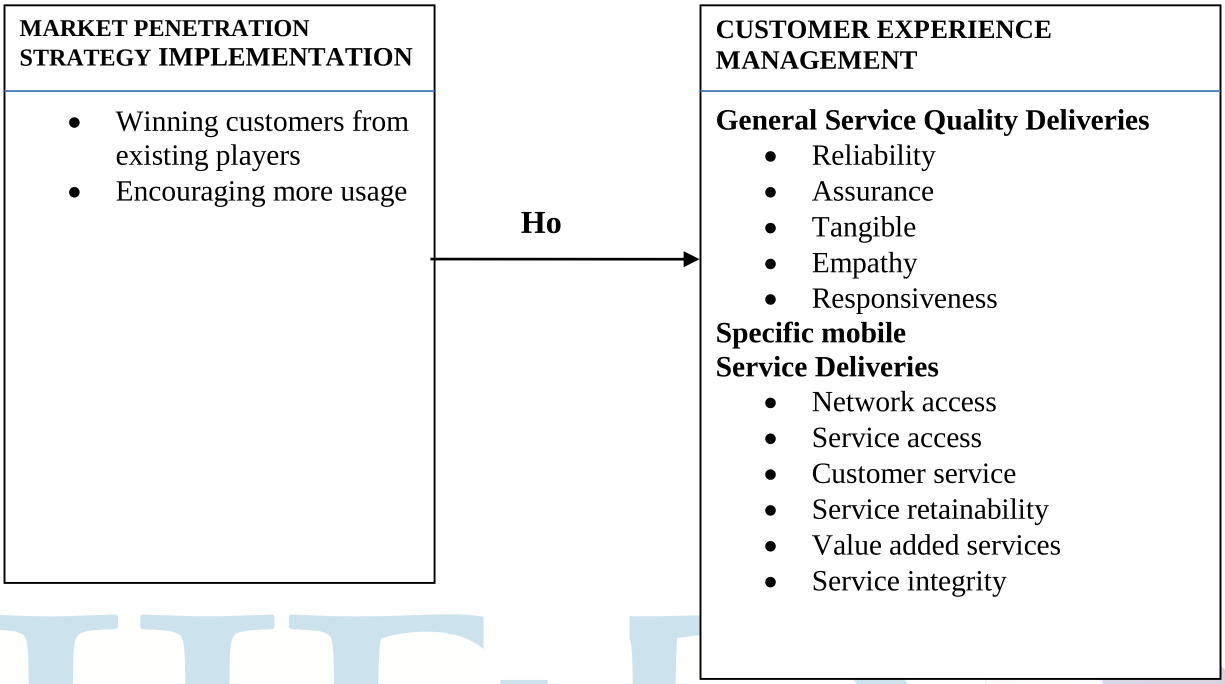
Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Harmon (1997) if an organization is to grow, more focus is needed on developing marketing strategies to create and deliver superior perceived customer value. For it is the emphasis on increasing value to the customer that will enable a firm to grow by penetrating existing segments, developing new markets, and creating new products and services. Customers have greater access to information about competitive products, which has led to an improved ability to articulate value expectations. Knowing what customers value and the solutions a company provides to meet those values, is key to developing a viable marketing strategy. The relevant null hypothesis is stated as.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between market penetration strategy and customer experience management.

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

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of relationship between Market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management



Research Methodology

Research Design

The study used descriptive and correlational census research design as it sought to generate quality information regarding how market penetration strategy influences organisational competitiveness. The study aimed to describe and establish the association among the key study variables, namely, market penetration strategies and customer experience management. 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 market penetration strategy and dependent variable was customer experience management. As discussed earlier, market penetration strategy embrace two elements (components) including winning customers from existing player and encouraging more usage. The study used Likert-type scale to assess the effects of market penetration strategy implementation namely; winning customers from existing player and encouraging more usage. An aggregate measure of market penetration strategy implementation was obtained by aggregating the mean score measures of market penetration strategy implementation in the particular organization.

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Validity and Reliability of Measures

An extensive review of the relevant existing conceptual and empirical literature on market penetration strategy and customer experience management produced measures for each variable. These measures were used to construct the questionnaire. 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 market penetration strategy and customer experience management 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 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 revise 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 relationship between Market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management

Before establishing the relationship between market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management, the researcher first tested whether there were any differences between aggregate customer mean responses pertaining to the two variables between the four mobile service firms. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test these differences.

Table 4.8 shows that with regards to winning customers from competitors, the mean differences were highly significant ($F_{3,\ 196}$= 45.861), P<0.005). With regards to encouraging more usage, the mean differences were also highly significant ($F_{3,196}$=33.022, p<0.005). Regarding general service quality deliveries the mean differences were again highly significant ($F_{3,\ 196}$= 32.594), (P<0.005). Regarding specific mobile services deliveries, the mean differences were equally highly significant ($F_{3,\ 196}$= 29.755) (P<0.005).

ANOVA Comparison of mean differences of market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management between the four mobile service firms.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Winning customers from competitors	Between Groups	61.660	3	20.553	45.861	.000
	Within Groups	87.840	196	.448		
	Total	149.500	199			
Encouraging more usage	Between Groups	57.640	3	19.213	33.022	.000
	Within Groups	114.040	196	.582		
	Total	171.680	199			
General service quality deliveries	Between Groups	48.626	3	16.209	32.594	.000
	Within Groups	96.972	195	.497		
	Total	145.598	198			
Specific mobile service deliveries	Between Groups	45.654	3	15.218	29.755	.000
	Within Groups	99.733	195	.511		
	Total	145.387	198			

To investigate the relationship between market penetration strategy and customer experience management, correlation analysis was performed. The results of this analysis are displayed in

The relationship between market penetration strategy and customer experience management.

		Winning customers from competitors	Encouraging more usage	General service quality deliveries	Specific mobile service deliveries
Winning customers from competitors	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	200			
Encouraging more usage	Pearson Correlation	.801**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	200	200		
General service quality deliveries	Pearson Correlation	.555**	.391**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	194	194	199	
Specific mobile service deliveries	Pearson Correlation	.678**	.636**	.488**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	198	198	193	199

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

As shown from the table, there was a strong positive inter correlation between the two aspects of market penetration strategy implementation of encouraging more usage and winning customers from competitors (r=0.801, p<0.005). There were also a positive correlations between general service quality deliveries and winning customers from competitors (r=0.555, p<0.005) on one hand and encouraging users (r=0.391, p<0.005) on the other; and between specific mobile service deliveries and winning customers from competitors (r= 0.678, p<0.005); encouraging more usage (r=0.636, p<0.005); and inter-correlation with general service quality delivery (r= 0.488, p<0.005).

These results indicate that there is indeed a positive/direct relationship between market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management. Furthermore, the positive inter-correlations between encouraging more usage and mining customers implies that an increase in any one of them is likely to increase the other one. This explains the observed significant mean differences in the mean responses in market penetration strategy implementation between the four mobile service firms. Thus as observed both Safaricom and Airtel appear to be encouraging more usage and hence winning customers from competitors.

Conclusions

Market penetration strategy implementation and customer experience management

The finding that marketing penetration strategy implementation has a positive influence on customer experience management is consistent with the views of Harmon (1997) that of an organization is to grow, more focus is needed on developing market strategies to create and deliver superior perceived customer value. Indeed, as observed by Dalrymple and Paisons (1995), promotion of more frequent and varied usage among users involves finding and promoting new uses among existing customers, while finding new target markets for the products. These views are best captured by Singh (2007) that mobile service providers should shift the focus from segmentation and instead start believing in population. As noted by Singh in the same article, “because of the falling tariffs and the falling handset prices world over, affordability is soon becoming a non-issue.” The key issue should then remain how to reach out to the subscribers by being aggressive in rolling out network and distribution.

These views possibly explain why both Safaricom and Airtel lead the way in marketing strategy implementation shown by this study. The two firms are aggressively rolling out new products (such as News alerts, Gehrit, SMS 2 email, top up other number, Sambaza and Mpesa for Safaricom; and Me2u, Airtel money, info services and entertainment for Airtel) with a view to reaching out to numbers.

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 and customer experience management 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.

Finally, 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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