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Research Article

# Franchising Practices and Competitive Advantage of Telecommunication Companies in Kenya

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***Abstract***— Competition is at the core of firm success or failure. In a competitive market, companies sometime find it necessary to adopt franchising practices which have value creating potential that makes them an important source of competitive advantage. In Kenya, competition in the telecommunication sector is very stiff and it has led to some companies recording low growth rates as result of low profit margins, customer base and revenues. The current study sought to determine the effect of franchising practices on competitive advantage of telecommunication companies in Kenya. This study adopted mixed methods research design which was used to determine the effect of strategic alliances practices on competitive advantage of Telecommunication Companies in Kenya. Target population was 1263 respondents drawn from 2 out of the 3 Telecommunication companies that fall under the category of tier 1 Telecommunication companies in Kenya. The sample size was 304 respondents. The study adopted both cluster and simple random sampling techniques. The study used both primary data and secondary data where questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect primary data while documentary analysis guide was used to collect secondary data. The study adopted content validity where the questionnaires were validated using expert's opinion. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (α) co-efficient. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and content analysis. The research found that franchising practices had a significant effect on competitive advantage with ($\beta$ =0.614, $p<0.05$). The study concluded that franchising practices have a significant effect on a company's market competitiveness. The study recommended that customers at customer care desks should be served in an efficient manner. Telecommunication companies should have suitable internet services to enhance their competitive advantage in the market place.

***Keywords—*** Franchising practices, competitive advantage, Telecommunication companies, Kenya

## 1. Introduction

Franchising practices have increasingly become popular in the global arena [1]. Firms that adopt franchising practices and are able to implement them well have been able to record remarkable performance attributed to gaining competitive advantage [2]. Franchising practices when adopted are supposed to enhance market power, increase efficiencies and facilitate firms access to new or critical resources or capabilities while entering new markets [21]. When firms partner with other firms to create the opportunity to share the resources as well as capabilities, franchising practices adopted can help firms achieve their main objectives [22]. Franchising practices provide many advantages for strategic partners. These advantages include; technology transfer, organizational effectiveness, reduction of costs in design as well as after-sales services. It also contributes to improvement of financial performance and it creates more opportunities [3].

For franchising practices to yield positive results, it requires actions as well as capabilities that are able to drive the success of the firms [4]. Some firms are able to effectively adopt actions as well as capabilities that can drive the success of the firms while others find it hard to fully adopt actions as well as capabilities that are able to drive firms' success [5]. In the telecommunication sector, franchising practices are being adopted globally however the failure rate in strategic alliances are experienced across the globe which is attributed to lack of cooperation, conflict, poor information exchange as well as opportunistic behavior among others [6]. The telecommunication industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Firms in the telecommunication sector have adopted franchising practices which is a hallmark for achievement of competitive advantage [7]. However, the failure of franchising practices in the telecommunication sector across the world is high [8].

In Iran, the telecommunications industry is one of the key industries which has adopted various franchising practices in order to gain competitive advantage [9]. The main reason why telecommunication firms adopt franchising practices are access to resources, knowledge, technology, skills, as well as markets [10]. In the UK, the number of franchising practices has been on the increase since the late 1970s [11]. Telecommunication companies have been increasingly adopting franchising practices to manage the practical risks as well as for improvement of market performance [12]. In Nigeria, strategic alliances have existed since the early 1980s [13]. Firms through franchising practices competitive positioning have been able to gain entry to new markets, supplement critical skills as well as share risks or costs which mostly have been associated with environmental challenges as well as major development projects [14]. In Kenya, franchising practices are a common norm in telecommunication industry. Franchising practices are considered to be mechanisms for help to produce more powerful as well as effective competition modes [15].

Telecommunication companies enhance increase in network access and broadband services facilitated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which contributes to economic growth [16]. Through mobile penetration in both developing as well as developed countries, it contributes to an increase in economic growth [17]. Telecommunication infrastructure that is modern is not only important for enhancement of domestic growth but it connects the domestic market of commodities and credit with international commodity as well as financial markets which enhances smooth flow of foreign investment and positive value of net exports [18]. All these aspects result into enhancement of the value addition in GDP of an economy. Telecommunication companies provide opportunities for increasing the efficiency of interaction and coordination which are known to enhance the success of economic activities [20].

Competition advantage in the telecommunication sector in Kenya is very stiff which has led to exit of some telecommunication companies in the telecommunication industry. For example, exit of Orange and yu Mobile. Some telecommunication companies are recording low growth rates as result of low profit margins, customer base and revenues. For example, in 2023, Telecommunication companies with low profit margins include Telkom Kenya at 2.3% and Azanuru Technologies Limited, 0.75% [23]. Low profits in a highly competitive industry possess a great challenge on a firm sustainability if such firms are not able to record an increase in profits in future [24]. A study by [25] on strategic alliances and performance of Information Communication Technology companies in Kenya revealed that strategic alliance had enabled ICT companies to improve their market share as well as achieve an improvement in operational efficiency. The study further established those strategic alliances enhances organizational performance of ICT companies. A methodological gap exists as the study had not provide justification for the research design adopted which the current study seeks to provide. Another study was done by [26] on the linkages of strategic alliances and the performance of Telecommunication Companies in Kenya. Findings revealed that strategic alliances enhance performance of Telecommunication Companies. A conceptual gap existed as the study as franchising practices were not within the scope of their study which the current study sought to add and therefore enhance the scope of the existing body of knowledge on the subject matter. The current study sought to incorporate franchising practices and provide justification for the research design adopted and hence address both the conceptual and methodological gaps. The study provided policy recommendations that sought to help to enhance growth in profit of the Telecommunication companies. Therefore, this study addressed this research question; how does franchising practices affect competitive advantage of telecommunication companies in Kenya?

## 2. Related Work

A study was conducted by [27] on effects of franchising on industry competition. The study was conducted in the hospitality industry in United States of America. The aim of the study was to determine how franchising influences competitive conditions at the industry level. The study was based on firm-level data from annual reports, firm-level financial data from the COMPUSTAT database, Consumer Price Index data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as well as industry-wide economic data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The data drawn from these documents was for the period between 1991 to 2015. The sample size was 285 hotels based on 6-digit NAICS industry classifications from 1991 to 2015. The study used secondary data which was analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The study established that franchising involvement discourages industry dynamic competition. A contextual gap exist as the study was conducted in a different geographical setting.

Another study was done by [28] on the effect of international franchising on competitive advantage of domestic firms in Ukraine and Georgia. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of international franchising on emerging market firms as well as the various ways to realize a competitive advantage in developing economies through resource identification, capabilities and strategies of both franchisees as well as local businesses. The study was an exploratory, qualitative case study and it targeted 14 case companies in Ukraine and Georgia. The study used primary data which was collected using interview schedule. Data collected in the study was analyzed using thematic analysis as well as fuzzy set of qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) which were used to gain an in-depth knowledge of international franchising and competitive advantage of domestic firms in Ukraine and Georgia. The study established that franchising enhances competitive advantage of domestic firms. The study used exploratory, qualitative case study. The current study filled the gap by using simple and multiple regression.

A study was done by [29] on effects of strategic alliances on the growth of market share of Commercial Banks in Malaysia. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of strategic alliances on the growth of market share of Commercial Banks Malaysia. The study used a case study research design and targeted 182 directors and senior managers. The study used primary data which was collected using questionnaires. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Franchising practices was among constructs of strategic alliances adopted in the study and findings on this construct revealed that franchising practices have a positive significant relationship with market share. A contextual gap existed as their study was conducted on Commercial Banks while the current study will be done on Telecommunication companies.

A study was done by [30] on franchising strategy and competitive advantage of International Foreign Fast-food firms in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to determine whether franchising strategy enhances competitive advantage of International Foreign Fast-food firms in Kenya. The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional research design. The study targeted all International Foreign Fast-food firms in Kenya. The study used both primary data and secondary data which was collected using both questionnaire and documentary analysis guide. Data collected in the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics. A conceptual gap existed as dealerships and mobile money agents were not within the scope of the study which the current study sought to incorporate.

A scholar known as [27] researched on the effects of franchising practices on competitive advantage in Airtel Kenya Limited. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of franchising practices on competitive advantage in Airtel Kenya Limited. The study adopted exploratory case study research design. The study used primary data which was collected using interview schedule and analyzed using content analysis. The study established that Airtel Kenya had engaged in strategic alliances such as partnership with banks, airlines, internet providers, mobile handset makers as well as health insurance firms which enhance competitive advantage of the firm. A conceptual gap existed as the study had not adopted affiliated marketing practices which the current study sought to add and therefore enhance the existing body of knowledge on effects of franchising practices on competitive advantage of firms. Literature reviewed led to the development of the following hypothesis statement;

**$H0_1$:** Franchising practices have no significant effect on competitive advantage of telecommunication companies in Kenya.

## 3. Methodology

The study adopted convergent mixed methods research design. It is a type of a research design which is characterized with combination of both qualitative and quantitative data [23]. It is a type of a mixed methods design where both quantitative and qualitative data is collected simultaneously but analyzed separately and after analysis the results are usually merged or integrated [29]. In this study, both qualitative data and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires, interview guide and documentary analysis guide. Convergent mixed methods research design facilitated collection of data that will help to determine the effect of strategic alliances practices on competitive advantage of Telecommunication Companies in Kenya. Target population was 1263 respondents who comprise of 598 employees in Airtel and 665 employees of Telkom Kenya Ltd which are the 2 out of the 3 Telecommunication companies that fall under the category of tier 1 Telecommunication companies in Kenya. Safaricom was not be considered in this study because it has a high market share of 67% [27]. The sample size of the study was 304 respondents who comprise of senior management staffs. The study adopted cluster sampling technique and simple random sampling technique to select the managers. The study used both primary data and secondary data. The study adopted content validity where the questionnaire was validated using expert's opinion. The researcher adopted the Cronbach's Alpha (α) model.

$$\alpha = \left(\frac{k}{k-1}\right)\left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{k}\sigma_{y_i}^2}{\sigma_x^2}\right)$$

$$\begin{aligned} &where \quad k = number \quad of \quad scale \quad items \\ &\sigma_{y_i}^2 = \text{var}\,iance\ associated\ with\ i \\ &\sigma_x^2 = \text{var}\,iance\ associated\ with\ the\ observed\ total\ scores \end{aligned}$$

According to [28] a reliable research instrument should have a Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of greater than or equal to 0.7. Reliability of qualitative data was tested using verification of the steps of the research through examination of such items as raw data, data reduction products, as well as process notes. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data using indexes such as mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were used to draw conclusions from data using statistical tests such as regression analysis which was used to test the hypotheses. If the p-value was less than 5% the null hypothesis was rejected. Regression model adopted was as follows:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$……………………………………………..$H0_1$

Y represents competitive advantage
**α** represents the intercept (regression constant)
**$\beta_1$** is regression co-efficient
**$X_1$** represent franchising practices
**ε** represents error term

Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25 aided in analysis. Qualitative data collected via interview schedule was analyzed using content analysis where findings were summarized into common thematic narratives.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

The respondents were to respond on 1, whether dealerships increases earning capacity, 2, engaging in dealerships gives the company a competitive edge, 3, the services offered by the company through mobile money agents increases the company's earning capacity, 4, having mobile money agents is the best strategic alliance practice the company has ever made over years, 5, having customer care desks has improved quality of services provided at the company, 6, how efficient 6, Customers are served at customer care desks enhances customer satisfaction, 8, the company has more customers due to suitable Internet services that the company provides and internet services provided by the company makes it more competitive in the market place. Findings were presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for Franchising Practices

| Statements | | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | F | 3.5993 | 1.17640 |
| | % | | |
| 2. | F | 4.3071 | .93555 |
| | % | | |
| 3. | F | 4.1348 | .90767 |
| | % | | |
| 4. | F | 3.9738 | 1.25778 |
| | % | | |
| 5. | F | 3.6367 | 1.14011 |
| | % | | |
| 6. | F | 3.8165 | 1.22014 |
| | % | | |
| 7. | F | 3.5730 | 1.32263 |
| | % | | |
| 8. | F | 4.4644 | .97798 |
| | % | | |

The study results revealed that dealerships increase earning capacity. The study is in agreement with that of [20] that dealerships increase earning capacity. The study also established that engaging in dealerships gives the company a competitive edge. The study by [25] established that engaging in dealerships gives the company a competitive edge. The study had established that the services offered by the company through mobile money agents increases the company's earning capacity. In the study by [37], it was also established that the services offered by the company through mobile money agents increases the company's earning capacity. The study also established that having mobile money agents is the best strategic alliance practice the company has ever made over years. Findings resemble that of [38] that having mobile money agents is the best strategic alliance practice the company has ever made over years.
The study had established that having customer care desks has improved quality of services provided at the company. Findings resemble that of [28] that having customer care desks has improved quality of services provided at the company. Results revealed that how efficient Customers are served at customer care desks enhances customer satisfaction. Findings are in-tandem with that of [26] that how efficient Customers are served at customer care desks enhances customer satisfaction. It was established that the company has more customers due to suitable Internet services that the company provides. The study by [21] also established that the company has more customers due to suitable Internet services that the company provides. Findings showed that internet services provided by the company makes it more competitive in the market place. Findings are similar to that of [27] that internet services provided by the company makes it more competitive in the market place.

**4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Competitive Advantage of Telecommunication Companies**

The study also sought to assess the competitive advantage of Telecommunication Companies. Indicators of competitive advantage considered in the study were; market share, customer satisfaction scores (NPS & CSAT), differentiated products and growing sales volume. Findings were presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for Competitive Advantage

| | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sales volume | 7.00 | 10.00 | 8.3000 | 0.94863 |
| Number of differentiated products | 7.00 | 9.00 | 8.0000 | 0.66667 |
| Market share | 7 | 10.00 | 8.2000 | 1.03280 |
| NPS | 6 | 10.00 | 8.3000 | 1.05935 |
| CSAT | 7 | 9.00 | 7.6000 | 0.69921 |
| | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| Sales volume | 7.00 | 10.00 | 8.3000 | 0.94863 |
| Number of differentiated products | 7.00 | 9.00 | 8.0000 | 0.66667 |
| Market share | 7 | 10.00 | 8.2000 | 1.03280 |
| NPS | 6 | 10.00 | 8.3000 | 1.05935 |
| CSAT | 7 | 9.00 | 7.6000 | 0.69921 |

In relation to sales volume, the item had a minimum of 7.00, maximum of 10.00, mean of 8.3000 and a standard deviation of 0.94863. In regards to number of differentiated products, the item had a minimum of 7.00, maximum of 9.00, mean of 8.0000 and a standard deviation of 0.66667. In relation to market share, the item had a minimum of 7.00, maximum of 10.00, mean of 8.2000 and a standard deviation of 1.03280. In regards to number of differentiated products, the item had a minimum of 7.00, maximum of 9.00, mean of 8.0000 and a standard deviation of 0.66667. The study sought to test Customer satisfaction scores and NPS & CSAT were adopted. In regards to NPS, the item had a minimum of 6.00, maximum of 10.00, mean of 8.3000 and a standard deviation of 1.05935. On CSAT, the item had a minimum of 7.00, maximum of 9.00, mean of 7.6000 and a standard deviation of 0.69921.

**4.3 Time Series Analysis**

The competitive advantage of Telecommunication companies was presented graphically in a bid to establish the trend over the five years. The results as shown in Figure 1.

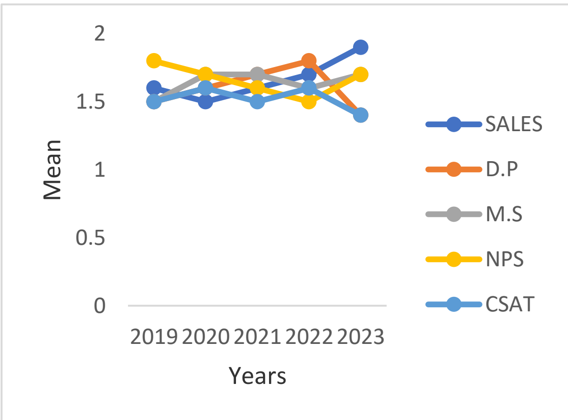


Figure 1 Trend Analysis of Competitive advantage

 

As per figure 2, there was a decrease in NPS between 2019 and 2022 but it increased in 2023. Market share of both of the telecommunication companies increased between 2019 and 2020, remained constant in 2021 but decreased in 2022 and 2023. In regards to number of differentiated products, it increased between 2019 and 2022 but decreased in 2023. In relation to sales volume, it decreased between 2019 and 2020 but increased between 2021 and 2023. In regards to CSAT, it increased between 2019 and 2020 but decreased in 2021, increased in 2022 and decreased in 2023.

### 4.4 Regression analysis

Model summary, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and regression co-efficients results were presented below. Simple linear regression results on franchising practices and competitive advantage were presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Simple linear regression results on franchising practices and competitive advantage

| a. Model Summary | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | .456ª | .208 | .108 | | 1.61715 | |
| Note: Predictors: (Constant), franchising practices | | | | | | |
| b. ANOVA | | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 5.479 | 1 | 5.479 | 2.095 | .000ᵇ |
| | Residual | 20.921 | 8 | 2.615 | | |
| | Total | 26.400 | 9 | | | |
| Note: Dependent Variable: competitive advantage<br>Predictors: (Constant), Franchising practices | | | | | | |
| c. Individual co-efficient | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. |
| | | | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 37.375 | 2.152 | | 17.368 | .000 |
| | Franchising practices | .102 | .071 | .456 | 1.447 | .000 |
| Note: Dependent Variable: competitive advantage | | | | | | |

As per Table 3, adjusted R-square was 0.108 which shows that 10.8% of competitive advantage can be explained from franchising practices. The model was fit for the data, (F=2.095, P<0.05) and franchising practices had a significant effect on competitive advantage (β=0.102, p < 0.05). An increase in franchising practices by one unit increases competitive advantage *of* Telecommunication companies in Kenya by 0.102 units. Franchising practices help to improve the competitive advantage of a company. The study by [22] also established that franchising practices have a significant positive effect on competitive advantage. The study had hypothesized that $H0_1$: Franchising practices have no significant effect on competitive advantage of telecommunication companies in Kenya. Based on the regression results, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and it was deduced that franchising practices had a significant positive effect on competitive advantage of Telecommunication companies. Findings are in agreement with that of [25]; [19]; [28]; [30] that franchising practices have a significant effect on competitive advantage. The respondents interviewed opined that;

"Through dealership, the initial sales process of a company and delivery of after sales services is affected all which have an impact on the competitive advantage of a telecommunication company. The initial sales process of a company and delivery of after sales services have an impact on sales, repeat sales and reputation all which have an effect on the competitive advantage of a company. The respondents opined that mobile money transfer had enhanced the competitive advantage of the telecommunication companies through provision of innovative products and solutions which enables the telecommunication companies to transform their money-transfer platforms into integrated service all which enhance their market competitiveness. Through customer care desks, any enquiries and complaints are attended to and clients are attended to fast enough all which improves the competitive advantage of a telecommunication company."

## 6. Conclusion and Future Scope

The study concluded that franchising practices have a significant positive effect on competitive advantage. Competitive advantage improves when the telecommunication companies adopt franchising practices. On this construct, the study concludes that adoption of dealerships by telecommunication companies is able to increase their earning capacity. When telecommunication companies engage in dealerships, it gives them a competitive edge. When telecommunication companies offer services through mobile money agents, it increases the company's earning capacity. The study also concludes that having customer care desks, improves service quality. Having suitable Internet services increases the customer base of telecommunication companies. The study recommended that the firms' management as well as policy makers in the telecommunication industry should engage in dealerships as it helps to increase earning capacity. Telecommunication companies should continue to offer services through mobile money agents so as to increase their earning capacity. Customers at customer care desks should be served in an efficient manner. Telecommunication companies should have suitable Internet services to enhance their competitive advantage in the market place. A further study should be conducted on the same research topic, but the focus should be on other telecommunication companies in Kenya. It would be interesting to know whether the observed findings hold for all the other telecommunication companies in Kenya.

**Data Availability**
Data is available online through all search engines.

**Conflict of Interest**
No conflict of interest exists whatsoever.
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None

**Authors' Contributions**
The author has enhanced the existing literature on Franchising Practices and Competitive Advantage of Telecommunication Companies.

 

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