Customer Relationship Management and Competitive Advantage: A Case of Kenya School of Government

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Abstract

The Kenya School of Government faces competition from higher educational institutions in offering educational services. The general objective of the study was to establish the relationship of customer management strategies and competitive advantage of Kenya School of Government. The study employed descriptive research design. The population of study was 140 employees from different departments at Kenya School of Government from which a sample size of 104 respondents were picked by stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected using questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis. The results revealed that customer acquisition strategies, customer retention strategies, customer participation strategies and customer communication strategies have a significant effect on competitive advantage. It is recommended that Kenya school of Government should adopt customer need assessment to enhance competitive advantage through alignment of customer search intent to content upgrades, establishment of distribution network, and participation in customer promotions events. The institution should further strive to improve communication with customers by engaging them in consultative talk before selling a service to them, creating a platform for the customers to lodge complaints and compliments, personalize customer communications, give priority to customer calls and listen carefully to customer needs, views and requests.

Keywords: *customer acquisition strategies, customer retention strategies, customer participation strategies, customer communication strategies, competitive advantage, Kenya School of Government.*

Introduction

In the current business environment, institutions need to enhance their competitive edge by adopting various strategies that are customer oriented. Managers of successful companies are aware of this fact. They also recognize that customers are the heart of any business and should be treated like kings and queens. They therefore make every effort to effectively manage relationships with customers (Coltman, Devinney & Midgley, 2011). Top managers are also aware that a customer's needs are not cast in stone. Customer needs and buying patterns change with time (Ernst, Hoyer, Krafft, & Krieger, 2011). To meet these dynamic needs, organizations formulate various strategies. CRM can be used as an applied strategy in institutions of higher learning (Radda, Uzodinma, Akanno, Isa, Abdulkadir, Abba & Abdulmajid, 2015). CRM is a widely implemented strategy for managing learning institution's interactions with students, staff and other stakeholders (Akroush, Dahiyat, Gharaibeh & Abu-Lail, 2011). Once CRM is clearly articulated as a strategy and the ways of executing the same, it can be a superior edge which other institutions cannot copy easily like other products or services (Meihami & Meihami, 2014).

The application of CRM in the institution may grant the institution a competitive advantage over the other learning institution (Sulaiman, Abdullah & Ridzuan, 2014). A good relationship with individual customers gives the learning institution a competitive edge over other institutions. To be customer oriented business, customer needs have to be given priority (Zamil, 2011).

In the context of our study, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) involves managing institution's interactions with students, staff, college management and educational stakeholders in order to attain competitive advantage over other institutions offering educational services (Madziwa, 2016). It involves using technology to organize, automate, and synchronize institutions processes. The objectives of CRM are to enhance service delivery to students and other clients within the institution (Long, Khalafinezhad, Ismail & Rasid, 2013). CRM in learning institutions may involve understanding the clients' behavior through effective communication strategies. According to Long *et al.* (2013) major CRM include interaction management, relationship development, customer service, employees' behavior, effective communication strategies and physical environment.

The relationship with customers is critical in achieving competitive advantage (Sulaiman, Abdullah & Ridzuan, 2014). As it shows, this definition regards CRM as a strategy with a main goal of delivering a distinguished value to the customer through improving marketing productivity (Soliman, 2011). There are four main categories of CRM strategies: these are acquisition, retention, relationship expansion and divestment strategies (Kumar, Aksoy, Donkers, Venkatesan, Wiesel & Tillmanns, 2010). The major benefits perceived from the use of CRM are that it leads to better organization performance, enhanced competitive advantage, enhances market effectiveness and enhances organization learning (ElKordy, 2014).

To attain a sustainable competitive advantage, companies require insight about their customers. By understanding customer needs and value, enterprises can increase the value of each customer relationship (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). Understanding the value of each customer relationship enables organizations to segment customers into portfolios of relationships that foster competitive advantage (Kumar *et al.,* 2010). In order to accomplish the organizational

goals, organizations find ways on how things should be done. Hence CRM processes are the activities the organizations perform related to identifying their customers, managing and maintaining relationships with them.

In the context of the study, Kenya School of Government requires CRM to remain competitive. The Kenya School of Government (KSG) is a state corporation established under an Act of Parliament (Act No.9 of 2012). The School is the successor of the Kenya Institute of Administration (KIA), Kenya Development and Learning Centre (KDLC) and the Government Training Institutes (GTIs) in Mombasa, Matuga, Embu and Baringo. Its establishment is aimed at building competencies for the Government, developing and developing leadership and promoting best practices in public service delivery.

The Kenya School of Government derives its mandate from the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 and the legislation establishing it. As enshrined in the Constitution, the School is charged with: public service transformation through inculcating public service values and ethics; enhancing transformative leadership; development of core skills and competencies for officers; and cultivating a culture of results-oriented service delivery in the public service. In addition, the Act establishing the School gives it the mandate of providing learning and development programmes to build capacity for the Public Service.

The functions of the Kenya School of Government as stipulated in the Kenya School of Government Act, 2012 are to: provide training, consultancy and research services designed to inform public policy, promote national development and standards of competence, and integrity in the Public Service; promoting continuous learning for public service excellence; provide programmes that promote a culture of decency, honesty, Kenya School of Government work, transparency and accountability among public servants; facilitating the establishment of professional networks and think tanks to develop and grow public sector leaders; developing linkages and collaborations with institutions of learning, professional organizations, private sector, schools of government and other similar institutions across the world. Therefore, from the above mandate and functions of Kenya School of Government, it is evident that customer relationship management is critical in managing clients while discharging their duties. The general objective of the study was to establish the relationship between customer acquisition strategies, customer retention strategies, customer participation strategies, and customer communication strategies with competitive advantage of Kenya School of Government.

Customer Acquisition Strategies

Customer Acquisition Strategies involves customer need assessment, strategies to acquire referral customers, and customer promotion and distribution networks. Acquiring new customers is a relevant process that consists of several stages, in which only certain prospects can be transformed into actual customers (D'Haen & Van der Poel, 2013). Customer acquisition process is part of the customer-firm relationship that begins with the consumers' first interaction with the firm and proceeds through the first purchase until the first repeat purchase (Arnold, *et al.,* 2011). According to Filip and Voinea (2012), customer acquisition is necessary for every organization that starts creating a business, expanding their business, products and services, and it is effective in situation where the switching cost is relatively low and repeat purchases are rare. In acquiring

customers it is essential for organization to choose the right customers to serve before they decide how they can best acquire them (Jobber, 2010; Shukla, 2013).

Customer Retention Strategies

Customer retention strategies include customer follow ups, loyalty program to retain customers and provision of quality services (Wiesel & Tillmanns, 2010). Customer retention involves a series of strategies that must be taken into consideration in order to attract and retain customers by ensuring that service providers deliver the expected service first. According to Shukla (2013), customer retention is about increasing the sales by endlessly satisfying and serving the customers so that they keep coming back. In order to ensure the customer retention is successful, the quality of the service needs to be able to satisfy or go beyond the customer expectations (Filip, &Voinea, 2012). It is also vital to identify or predict the customers' future needs. Customer retention can be done in many ways, like for example by the use of customers' loyalty program, providing the service that is beyond the customer expectations to maintain trust and satisfaction of the customers and by opening an open feedback from customers to ensure that the company is providing the service that is still relevant and needed with the customers (Zulkifli & Tahir, 2011). Customer retention has been argued by Arnold *et al.* (2011), that it is less costly compared to customer acquisition, as customers that are satisfied and believe in certain services tend to increase the switching cost in terms of trust and convenience.

Customer participation strategies

The customer participation strategies include seminars, comments dropped at suggestion boxes and organizational commitment to clients. According to the work of Soliman (2011), customer participation strategies can be made through commitment to convince customers that their feedback is taken seriously. Customer participation is a feeling of psychological ownership among organizational members (Alibhai, 2015). Customer participation aims at boosting organizational processes by developing a flexible environment which allows for innovation and improved service delivery. The CRM Practices approach involves achieving broad employee interest, customer participation and contribution in the process of service delivery (Abdullateef & Salleh, 2013). To attain a sustainable competitive advantage, companies require insight about their customers. By understanding customer needs and value, enterprises can increase the value of each customer relationship (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). Understanding the value of each customer relationship enables organizations to segment customers into portfolios of relationships that foster competitive advantage (Kumar, *et al.,* 2010). In order to accomplish the organizational goals, organizations find ways on how things should be done. Hence CRM processes are the activities the organizations perform related to identifying their customers, managing and maintaining relationships with them.

Customer Communication strategies

Customer communication strategies entail providing a platform to complaints and compliments, engaging customers and responding to customers inquiries on time. An organization should be in a position to keep existing customers through effective communication channels (Cherapanukorn, 2017). Organisations can increase performance if they boost their customer retention rate by 5 percent (Milovic, 2012). According to Rajab, Shiamwama and Otiso (2014), if an organization is willing to make a stable relationship with its customers, there are different

ways of having interaction with customers including interaction along touch points and distribution channels. The main purpose is to find out how and when the customers would like to interact with the organization (Makena, 2012). The interaction activities should be well customized and organized through the available touch points provided in relation to the customer profiles developed by data gathered from the former records of the customers.

Husain (2013) stresses that there should be a carefully tailored communication with the customers to improve customer engagement. Indeed, firms create and maintain portfolios of profitable customer relationships by identifying valuable customers, ensuring better communications with them, and customizing products and services to meet their needs. The aim of communication effectiveness is to keep the clients up-to-date on their information in most convenient manner (Cherapanukorn, 2017). It is essential to have a strong communication with the clients to ensure they have complete knowledge regarding their needs, risks involved on expected outcomes. Further, effective communication also helps customers to get through the ups and downs of variable services offered. Thus, the greater is the communication effectiveness; the stronger is the relationship commitment.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables   **Dependent Variable**

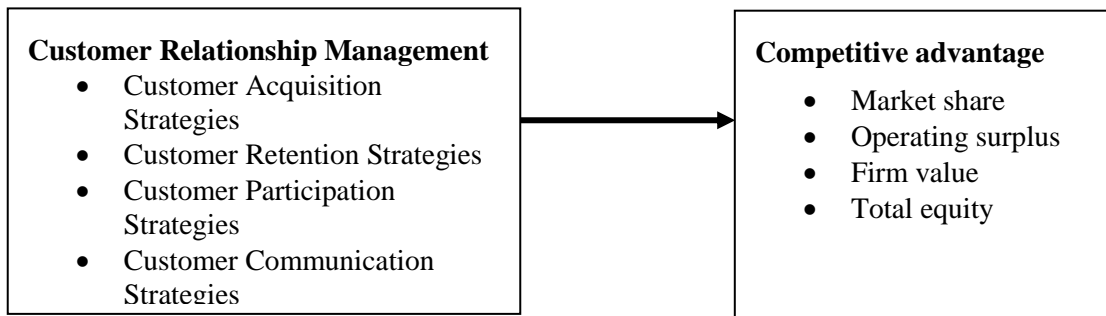| Customer Relationship Management	Competitive advantage
• Customer Acquisition Strategies • Customer Retention Strategies • Customer Participation Strategies • Customer Communication Strategies	• Market share • Operating surplus • Firm value • Total equity

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Design and Methodology

The study applied descriptive research design. The study focused on 5 five campuses making the Kenya School of Government. The units of observation were employees from customer service department, Human Resource, Technical and IT Department, Strategy and Innovation Department and Finance Department. The target population of the study is 140 employees drawn from various departments at Kenya School of Government as some are policy makers and other are managers of customer relationship in the institution thus interacting with the customers on a day to day basis. The study used Yamane (1967) to calculate a sample size of 104 employees. Stratified random sampling was used to select the 104 KSG employees. Data was collected using questionnaire. Questionnaires were issued to the KSG employees. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23 was used to organize code and analyze information and generate quantitative report. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis. Correlation established the association between variables. Regression

analysis was used to establish the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable. The following multiple regression model was used to estimate the coefficient;

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Competitive Advantage, X_1 = Customer Acquisition Strategies, X_2 = Customer Retention Strategies, X_3 = Customer Participation Strategies, X_4 = Customer Communication Strategies, βs are the regression coefficients and ε is the error term.

Results and Discussion

Correlation Analysis

Table 1 presents the results of the Correlation Analysis. The results revealed that Customer Acquisition Strategies and Competitive Advantage are positively and significantly associated (r=0.542, p=0.000), the table further indicated that Customer Retention strategies and Competitive advantage are positively and significantly associated (r=0.553, p=0.000). Similarly, results showed that Customer Participation Strategies and Competitive Advantage were positively and significantly associated (r=0.567, p=0.000). Finally, according to the results, Customer communication Strategies and Competitive advantage are positively and significantly associated (r=0.515, p=0.000). This implies that an improvement in Customer Acquisition Strategies, Customer Retention strategies, Customer Participation Strategies and Customer Communication Strategies leads to an improvement in Competitive Advantage of an institution.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix

		Competitive Advantage	Customer Acquisition Strategies	Customer Retention Strategies	Customer Participation Strategies	Customer Communication Strategies
Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	1.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Customer Acquisition Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.542**	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
Customer Retention Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.553**	.788**	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000			
Customer Participation Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.567**	.821**	.749**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		
Customer Communication Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.515**	.766**	.812**	.740**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

These correlation results are consistent with the conclusion made by Woodruff (1997) that, driven by more demanding customers, global competition, and slow-growth economies and industries, many organizations search for new ways to achieve and retain a competitive advantage. Past attempts have largely looked internally within the organization for improvement, such as reflected by quality management, re-engineering, downsizing, and restructuring. The next major source for competitive advantage likely will come from more outward orientation toward customers. The results are also in agreement with the findings of Ntabo (2014) which showed that, increased customer confidence in their products, increased repeat purchases, improved customer confidence in the company, enhanced customer relationships with the company and its programs and improved how customers view the company in general and that results into improved competitive advantage of the company .

Regression Analysis

The results presented in table 2 indicate the fitness of model used of the regression model in explaining the study phenomena.

Table 2: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.692	.562	.433	.60672

From the results on table 2, Customer Communication Strategies, Customer Participation Strategies, Customer Retention Strategies, and Customer Acquisition Strategies were found to be satisfactory variables in explaining Competitive Advantage of an institution or organization. This fact is supported by coefficient of determination also known as the R square of .562. This means that Customer Communication Strategies, Customer Participation Strategies, Customer Retention Strategies and Customer Acquisition Strategies explain56.2% of the variations in the dependent variable, which is Competitive advantage. In statistics, significance testing the p-value indicates the level of relation of the independent variable to the dependent variable. If the significance number found were less than the critical value also known as the probability value (p) which is statistically set at 0.05, then the conclusion would be that the model is significant in explaining the relationship; otherwise, the model would be regarded as non-significant. The results are consistent with the findings of Soliman (2011) which asserted that, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a comprehensive strategy that includes the process of acquiring certain customers, keeping them and co-operating with them to create a distinguished value for both the organization and the customer to enhance competitive advantage of the firm. The results are further in agreement with the findings of West, Ford and Ibrahim (2015)in which it was indicated that, sustaining competitive advantage, business organizations must have the capability of implementing strategies based on the organization's internal strength/capabilities, ability to respond to environmental opportunities, avoid or improve internal weaknesses as well as the ability to neutralize threats. Table 3 gives the outcomes on the examination of the difference (ANOVA).

Table 3: Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	18.595	4	4.649	72.629	.000
Residual	32.762	89	.368		
Total	51.357	93			

The outcome of the analysis of variance show that the general model was statistically significant. Further, the outcomes suggest that Customer Communication, Customer Participation Strategies, Customer Retention Strategies and Customer Acquisition Strategies are good indicators of Competitive Advantage. This was supported by an F statistic of 72.629 and the reported p value (0.000) which was less than the conventional probability of 0.05significance level. The regression of coefficient table is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.181	.262		4.510	.000
Customer acquisition strategies	.275	.0147	.087	18.71	.009
Customer Retention strategies	.199	.074	.227	2.689	.025
Customer participation strategies	.260	.103	.286	2.524	.043
Customer communication strategies	.243	.099	.052	2.455	.033

Regression of coefficients results in Table 9 shows that Customer acquisition strategies and Competitive advantage are positively and significantly related (r=.275, p=0.009). The table also indicate that Customer Retention Strategies and Competitive Advantage are positively and significantly related (r=.199, p=0.025). Similarly, results showed that Customer Participation Strategies and Competitive Advantage were positively and significantly related (r=.260 p=0.043). The results further showed that, Customer Communication Strategies and Competitive Advantage were positively and significantly related (r=.243 p=0.033). This implies that an improvement in Customer Acquisition Strategies, Customer Retention Strategies, Customer Participation Strategies and Customer Communication Strategies leads to an improvement in Competitive Advantage of an institution. The regression results are consistent with those of Kaura (2013) which showed that, Competitive advantage is achieved by deliberately selecting a distinctive set of activities to deliver a unique mix of customer value, either through implementing a value-creating strategy not simultaneously being employed by current or prospective competitors or through superior execution of the same strategy as used by the competitors. The results are further in agreement with the findings of Borsaly (2014) who asserted that, competitive advantage is sustained when customers continue to do business with the company, in the face of competition, while maintaining its profitability. Therefore, each company must find ways to attract and retain profitable customers.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, a number of conclusions can be made; customer acquisition is necessary for every organization that starts creating a business, expanding their business, products and services, and it is effective in situation where the switching cost is relatively low and repeat purchases are rare in addressing customer acquisition strategy, organization needs to involve a number of indicators some of which are: the organization should participate in conducting customer need assessment, participate in institution's customer promotions events, establish distribution network and institution aligns customer search intent to content upgrades. Services offered by the institution should be up to standard since that is one way by which a company can improve on its competitiveness in an environment where there are many players.

Conclusion can be made further that, customer participation strategies involves holding regular seminars to engage customers, taking with utmost seriousness it deserves on the issues raised customers, rewarding customers for their contribution and educating and sensitizing customers about the products and services offered by the organization. Based on the findings it suffices to conclude that, since customer communication strategies is positively and significantly associated with competitive advantage, institutions should strive to improve their communication with their customers by adopting some of the strategies which include; engaging customers in a consultative talk before selling product or service to them, creating a platform for the customers to lodge complaints and compliments, having personalized customer communication, giving priority to customer calls and listening carefully to customer needs, views, reviews and requests. Finally, it can be concluded that, the four independent variables which were customer acquisition strategies, customer retention strategies, customer participation strategies and customer communication strategies have influence on the competitive advantage in that, they may result into an institution improving its market share, institution improving its sales volume, an institution improving in its overall value and also improving in its total equity. Achieving a sustainable competitive advantage can help organizations establish a self-sustaining position in the marketplace

Recommendations

Organizations should adopt measures such as conducting customer needs assessment to enhance competitive advantage, aligning customer search intent to content upgrades, establishing distribution network, participating in customer promotions events among others. All these measures if adopted and implemented can enhance competitive advantage of the institution.

Institutions should strive to improve communication with their customers by adopting some strategies which include; engaging customers in a consultative talk before selling product or service to them, creating a platform for the customers to lodge complaints and compliments, having personalized customer communications, giving priority to customer calls and listening carefully to customer needs, views, reviews and requests (post-choice or post- purchase results evaluation).

Employees should always ensure they conduct themselves in a manner that can attract and retain customers whenever they interact, by ensuring that, they offer services with high level of ethics and professionalism, conducting regular customer follow up. Further, Employees should always

be courteous when dealing with customers and regularly reviewing customer retention strategies in order to align them to customer changing trends in the ever dynamic business environment.

Suggestion for further study

While this study successfully examines the effects of customer relationship management on competitive advantage of Kenya School of Government, it also presents rich prospects for several other areas to be researched on in future. It would however, be useful to carry out a similar study across heterogeneous industries such as construction, health and hospitality among others to see whether the same results would be replicated.

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