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Technology Adoption and Competitive Advantage of Local Airlines in Kenya: A Case Study of 748 Air Services

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of technology adoption on the competitive advantage of local airlines in Kenya, using 748 Air Services (Fly748) as the case. Kenya's domestic aviation market is expanding and highly competitive, yet results differ sharply between carriers, and little evidence exists on whether the use of digital systems helps small scheduled operators compete; most Kenyan studies concern Kenya Airways or large foreign carriers. A descriptive-correlational design was adopted. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 37 staff of 748 Air Services, comprising 13 supervisory and management staff and 24 operational employees. Technology adoption was measured through online booking and check-in, revenue management, digital maintenance planning, mobile money payments and technology in daily operations. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression in SPSS. Technology adoption was moderately high (mean = 3.59, SD = 0.49) and had a strong, positive and significant relationship with competitive advantage ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$). Technology adoption explained about 61 percent of the variation in perceived competitive advantage ($R^2 = 0.61$, $F(1, 35) = 54.38$, $p < 0.001$).**:** Technology adoption is an important source of competitive advantage for a small scheduled airline. The study recommends that the airline treat digital investment as a strategic priority, strengthen its revenue management capability, and that regulators support the digitisation of smaller carriers.

Keywords: *technology adoption, competitive advantage, local airlines, resource-based view, digital systems, Kenya*

1. Introduction

Competitive advantage is a firm's capacity to perform better than its rivals in the same market, either by delivering its services at a lower cost or by offering value that customers cannot easily obtain elsewhere (Ali & Anwar, 2021). In aviation this advantage is hard to win and easy to lose. Margins are thin, many of the largest costs such as aircraft leases, insurance and crew must be paid whether an aircraft flies full or empty, and a seat that is not sold before departure can never be sold. Under these conditions, the way an airline runs its daily operations, rather than its size or history, largely determines whether it outperforms competitors.

Technology has become central to these operations. Airlines now sell most of their seats through websites and mobile applications, price them with revenue management systems, plan maintenance with digital tools and engage customers through online channels. Evidence from other markets shows that airlines which invest in information technology gain in quality, flexibility, innovation and cost (Alzuod, 2026), and that digitalisation helped carriers such as Emirates remain competitive through the COVID-19 disruption (Okuneye, 2022). In Kenya, where mobile money and smartphone use are widespread, digital booking and payment have become a basic expectation of passengers as well as a source of efficiency for airlines.

Kenya's domestic aviation market includes Kenya Airways, Jambojet, Safarilink, Skyward Express and 748 Air Services (Fly748), and competition on the busiest domestic routes keeps intensifying. Travel and tourism contributed about Ksh 1.2 trillion to the economy in 2025, a 10 percent increase on the previous year (HapaKenya, 2025). 748 Air Services returned to scheduled operations in 2026 with routes linking Nairobi to Mombasa and Diani (Khusoko, 2026), placing it on some of the country's most competitive leisure and business routes against both low-cost and established niche carriers. As a small operator rebuilding its position, the airline offers a useful setting in which to examine whether technology adoption contributes to competitive advantage.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Although demand for air travel in Kenya has grown, this growth has not translated into consistent performance across carriers. Kenya Airways recorded a net loss of about Ksh 17.2 billion in 2025 after grounding aircraft for lack of engines and spare parts, a year after posting a record profit (Airspace Africa, 2025; Finance in Africa, 2026). Over the same period Jambojet led African airlines on load factor at 80.4 percent and held about 52 percent of the domestic market (Dawan Africa, 2025). Carriers serving the same market therefore achieve very different results, which raises the question of which operational practices explain the difference.

Technology adoption is a plausible part of the answer, but the evidence is limited in three ways. Conceptually, Kenyan studies have examined information and communication technology in relation to general performance rather than competitive advantage (Irungu, 2022), or have treated technology as one of several broad organisational resources (Al Amin & Maina, 2020). Contextually, the available evidence concerns Kenya Airways or large foreign carriers such as Royal Jordanian and Emirates (Alzuod, 2026; Okuneye, 2022), leaving small scheduled local operators largely unstudied. Methodologically, some studies rely on secondary data rather than on the views of staff who use the systems. Without such evidence, small carriers with limited capital risk under-investing in technology, or investing in systems that bring little competitive return. This study addresses this gap.

1.2 Objective and Hypothesis of the Study

The objective of the study was to examine the contribution of technology adoption strategies to the competitive advantage of local airlines in Kenya's aviation industry, using 748 Air Services as the case. The study tested the following null hypothesis:

H_0: Technology adoption has no significant influence on the competitive advantage of local airlines in Kenya's aviation industry.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review: The Resource-Based View

The study is anchored on the resource-based view (RBV) developed by Barney (1991). The RBV looks inward at what a firm controls rather than at its external market position, and holds that lasting competitive advantage arises from resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and without close substitutes (Donnellan & Rutledge, 2019). Because resources are unevenly distributed across firms, and because barriers such as unique history and socially complex routines prevent rivals from copying them, firms in the same industry can achieve persistently different results (Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2021).

Critics argue that the RBV is difficult to operationalise and can be circular, since a resource is often judged valuable only after it has produced success. It has also been criticised for underplaying fast-changing environments, a weakness addressed by the dynamic-capabilities extension, which stresses a firm's ability to renew and absorb new resources such as digital technology (Ma, Khan, Khan, & XiangYun, 2021). Despite these criticisms, the theory remains one of the most widely used explanations of performance differences between firms.

The RBV is appropriate for this study because an airline's booking platforms, revenue management systems and maintenance software are strategic resources whose value depends on how skilfully they are used. Two airlines may purchase similar systems, yet only the one that integrates them into its pricing, scheduling and customer service will gain an advantage. Shen, Yeh and Lin (2022) make the same point, showing that information technology strengthens competitive advantage when it is aligned with a firm's business processes.

2.2 Empirical Review

Alzuod (2026) examined the impact of information technology use on sustainable competitive advantage at Royal Jordanian Airlines. Using a survey of airline employees analysed through regression, the study found that information technology use significantly and positively enhanced competitive advantage measured through quality, flexibility, innovation and cost. The study directly supports the present one but was set in a large Middle Eastern carrier.

Irungu (2022) investigated the influence of information and communication technology on the performance of the aviation industry, using Kenya Airways as a case. Through a descriptive case study using questionnaires, the study established that ICT use improved performance. It offers Kenyan evidence on technology, but it focused on a large full-service carrier and measured performance rather than competitive advantage.

Okuneye (2022) examined the role of digitalisation in airline performance during COVID-19 using balanced scorecard data from Emirates Airline. The findings showed that digitalisation produced gains in efficiency, revenue management and customer satisfaction. Its emphasis on revenue management is relevant here, but the study relied on secondary data from a single global carrier.

Al Amin and Maina (2020) studied organisational resources and the competitive advantage of airline companies operating in Kenya. Using a descriptive survey and regression analysis, they found that financial, technological and human resources each had a positive and significant effect on competitive advantage. The study grounds technology in the RBV within the Kenyan airline industry, but it treated technology as a broad resource category rather than as a distinct operational strategy.

Shen, Yeh and Lin (2022) explored how information technology affects business competitive advantage from the perspective of information technology technicians. They found that information technology strengthens competitive advantage when it is fitted to the firm's

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business processes. The study supports the technology variable but was not set in aviation or in Kenya.

2.3 Research Gaps

The reviewed studies consistently associate technology with better airline outcomes, but three gaps remain. First, several studies measured general or financial performance rather than competitive advantage (Irungu, 2022; Okuneye, 2022). Second, the evidence comes mainly from large carriers such as Kenya Airways, Royal Jordanian and Emirates, and none of the reviewed studies examined a small scheduled local airline that has recently re-entered the Kenyan market. Third, some studies relied on secondary data rather than primary evidence from the staff who operate the systems. The present study addresses these gaps by measuring competitive advantage directly, using primary data from both management and operational staff of 748 Air Services. Table 1 summarises the studies reviewed.

Table 1: Summary of Empirical Studies and Research Gaps

Author (Year)	Focus and method	Key finding	Gap addressed by this study
Alzuod (2026)	IT use and sustainable competitive advantage; employee survey, regression	IT use significantly enhances competitive advantage	Large Middle Eastern carrier; this study covers a small Kenyan airline
Irungu (2022)	ICT and performance at Kenya Airways; descriptive case study	ICT use improves performance	Measured performance, not competitive advantage
Okuneye (2022)	Digitalisation and performance at Emirates; secondary data	Digitalisation improves efficiency and revenue management	Secondary data; this study uses primary data
Al Amin & Maina (2020)	Organisational resources in Kenyan airlines; survey, regression	Technological resources raise competitive advantage	Technology treated broadly, not as an operational strategy
Shen, Yeh & Lin (2022)	IT and competitive advantage; technician perspective	IT aligned to processes strengthens advantage	Not set in aviation or in Kenya

Source: Review of literature (2026).

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the hypothesised relationship between technology adoption, the independent variable, and competitive advantage, the dependent variable, together with the indicators used to measure each.

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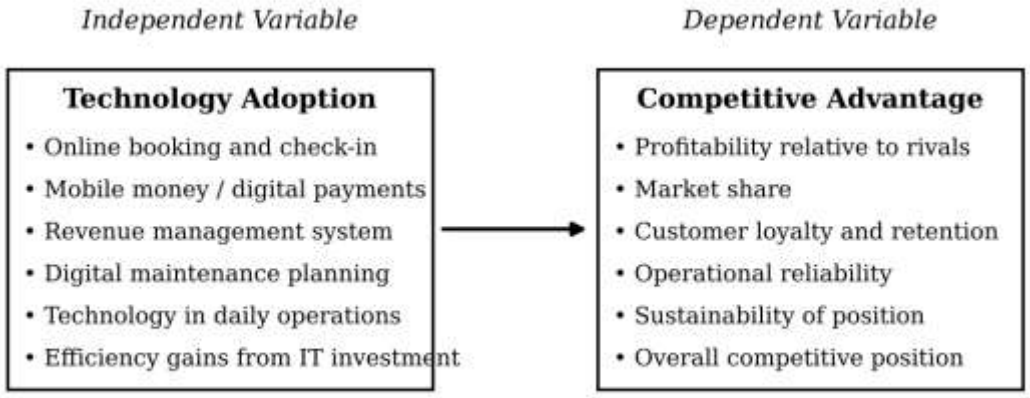


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2026).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component documented the extent to which 748 Air Services had adopted technology and the level of competitive advantage it enjoyed, while the correlational component established the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. This design suits studies that describe variables and measure the associations between them without manipulating any of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

3.2 Population and Respondents

The general population comprised the scheduled local passenger airlines licensed by the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority, from which 748 Air Services was selected as the case because it is a licensed scheduled carrier that returned to service in 2026 and because its management granted access for data collection. The airline was the unit of analysis, while individual employees were the units of observation. Usable responses were obtained from 37 staff: 13 supervisory and management staff, who provided an oversight perspective, and 24 operational employees, who provided an implementation perspective on how digital systems are used day to day.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Technology adoption was measured with seven statements covering online booking, mobile check-in, revenue management, technology in daily operations, digital maintenance planning, mobile money payments and efficiency gains from technology investment. Competitive advantage was measured with six statements covering profitability, market share, customer loyalty, operational reliability, sustainability of the airline's position and its overall competitive position. All items were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Content and face validity were established through item-by-item review of the questionnaire by the supervisor and specialists in strategic management, following Bolarinwa (2015). The instrument was pre-tested on four management staff of Skyward Express, a licensed scheduled carrier outside the study population (In, 2017). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with 0.70 as the acceptable threshold (Taber, 2018). As shown in Table 2, both scales met this threshold.

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Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Comment
Technology adoption	7	0.78	Reliable
Competitive advantage	6	0.86	Reliable

Source: Research data (2026).

3.5 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

An introductory letter was obtained from the Management University of Africa and a research permit from NACOSTI before data collection. Questionnaires were administered through the drop-and-pick method. Participation was voluntary and preceded by signed informed consent, respondents remained anonymous, and results are reported only in aggregate form.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were coded and analysed in SPSS. Means, standard deviations and percentages described the variables, Pearson correlation measured the strength of the association, and simple linear regression tested the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance using the model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$$

where Y is competitive advantage, X is technology adoption, β_0 is the constant, β_1 is the regression coefficient and ε is the error term.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 3 shows that the respondents had a range of airline experience, with most having worked in the industry for between one and ten years, and that over half held a bachelor's or master's degree. The respondents were therefore sufficiently experienced and educated to give informed views on the airline's use of technology.

Table 3: Profile of Respondents (n = 37)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Position	Supervisory/management	13	35.1
	Operational employees	24	64.9
Airline experience	Below 1 year	7	18.9
	1–5 years	14	37.8
	Above 5–10 years	10	27.0
	Above 10 years	6	16.2
Education	Certificate	4	10.8
	Diploma	12	32.4
	Bachelor's degree	15	40.5
	Master's degree	6	16.2

Source: Research data (2026).

4.2 Descriptive Results for Technology Adoption

A mean above 3.5 was interpreted as agreement that a practice is in place, 2.5 to 3.5 as neutral, and below 2.5 as disagreement. Table 4 shows that technology adoption had a composite mean of 3.59 (SD = 0.49), indicating moderate agreement that the airline has adopted digital systems. Respondents agreed most strongly that technology supports the airline's daily operations (mean = 3.70; 68 percent agreement). Mobile money payment (3.62) and digital maintenance planning

(3.62) were also rated relatively highly, reflecting the Kenyan market, where mobile money is the norm. The revenue management system had the lowest agreement rate (49 percent), and respondents were neutral on whether technology investment had improved efficiency (3.49), suggesting that the airline has adopted customer-facing systems faster than it has exploited the analytical systems that drive pricing and efficiency.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Technology Adoption

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree (%)
The airline uses online platforms for booking	3.59	0.90	54
The airline uses mobile platforms for check-in	3.54	0.77	62
The airline uses a revenue management system to manage seat pricing	3.59	0.69	49
Technology supports the airline's daily operations	3.70	0.70	68
The airline uses digital tools to plan aircraft maintenance	3.62	0.72	59
Customers can pay using mobile money options	3.62	0.59	62
Investment in technology has improved the airline's efficiency	3.49	0.80	51
Composite mean	**3.59**	**0.49**	

n = 37. Source: Research data (2026).

4.3 Descriptive Results for Competitive Advantage

Table 5 shows that competitive advantage had a composite mean of 3.82 (SD = 0.66). Respondents agreed most strongly that the airline is more profitable than its main competitors and operates more reliably than its rivals (each mean = 3.95), and 73 percent agreed that it has maintained a strong market share. Customer loyalty was the lowest-rated indicator (3.59), suggesting that repeat patronage is still developing for an airline that only recently returned to scheduled service.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Competitive Advantage

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree (%)
The airline is more profitable than its main competitors	3.95	0.94	70
The airline has maintained a strong share of the market	3.84	0.83	73
Customers frequently choose the airline again	3.59	0.93	57
The airline operates more reliably than its rivals	3.95	0.85	73
The airline is well placed to keep its advantage in the future	3.84	0.83	62
Overall, the airline holds a strong competitive position	3.76	0.76	68
Composite mean	**3.82**	**0.66**	

n = 37. Source: Research data (2026).

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was used to establish the strength and direction of the relationship between technology adoption and competitive advantage. Table 6 shows a strong, positive and

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statistically significant relationship (r = 0.78, p < 0.001). Higher levels of technology adoption were therefore associated with higher levels of perceived competitive advantage.

Table 6: Correlation between Technology Adoption and Competitive Advantage

Variable	Competitive advantage (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	n
Technology adoption	0.78**	< 0.001	37

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Research data (2026

4.5 Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis. Table 7 shows that technology adoption explained 61 percent of the variation in perceived competitive advantage ($R^2 = 0.61$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.60$), with the remaining 39 percent attributable to factors outside the model, such as capacity utilisation, cost management and market conditions.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.78	0.61	0.60	0.42

Predictor: (Constant), Technology adoption. Source: Research data (2026).

The analysis of variance in Table 8 shows that the model was statistically significant, F(1, 35) = 54.38, p < 0.001, confirming that technology adoption is a significant predictor of competitive advantage.

Table 8: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9.54	1	9.54	54.38	< 0.001
Residual	6.14	35	0.18		
Total	15.68	36			

Dependent variable: Competitive advantage. Source: Research data (2026).

Table 9 presents the regression coefficients. The fitted model is Y = 0.05 + 1.05X. The coefficient for technology adoption was positive and significant (B = 1.05, t = 7.37, p < 0.001), meaning that a one-point increase in technology adoption on the five-point scale is associated with an increase of about 1.05 points in perceived competitive advantage. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 9: Regression Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.05	0.52		0.09	0.926
Technology adoption	1.05	0.14	0.78	7.37	< 0.001

Dependent variable: Competitive advantage. Source: Research data (2026).

4.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings show that technology adoption has a strong, positive and significant influence on the competitive advantage of 748 Air Services. This agrees with Alzuod (2026), who found that information technology use significantly enhanced competitive advantage at Royal Jordanian Airlines, and with Irungu (2022), who found that ICT improved performance at Kenya Airways. It also agrees with Al Amin and Maina (2020), who found that technological resources significantly raised the competitive advantage of Kenyan airlines. The present study extends this evidence to a small scheduled operator, showing that the link between technology

and competitiveness holds not only for large carriers with substantial IT budgets but also for a small airline rebuilding its position.

The results lend support to the resource-based view. Booking platforms, mobile payment channels and maintenance planning tools act as strategic resources that allow the airline to reach passengers directly, reduce distribution costs and keep its few aircraft serviceable. The pattern within the technology items is also instructive. Customer-facing systems such as mobile money payment and online booking were rated more highly than the revenue management system and the efficiency benefits of technology investment. Consistent with Shen, Yeh and Lin (2022) and Okuneye (2022), this suggests that the greatest remaining gains lie not in acquiring more systems but in integrating analytical tools, particularly revenue management, into everyday pricing and scheduling decisions.

For a small airline, digital channels offer a way to compete without the cost of an extensive sales network. In a market where fares on the main domestic routes are visible and easily compared online, and where passengers expect to book and pay by phone, an airline that is easy to transact with gains an advantage that rivals cannot quickly close. This may explain why technology adoption carried so much weight in respondents' assessment of the airline's competitive position.

5. Summary

The study examined the influence of technology adoption on the competitive advantage of local airlines in Kenya, with 748 Air Services as the case. Data from 37 management and operational staff showed that technology adoption was moderately high (mean = 3.59), with the strongest ratings for the role of technology in daily operations, mobile money payment and digital maintenance planning, and the weakest for revenue management and the efficiency gains of technology investment. Perceived competitive advantage was relatively strong (mean = 3.82). Technology adoption had a strong positive correlation with competitive advantage ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$) and explained about 61 percent of its variation, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that technology adoption is a significant source of competitive advantage for a small scheduled airline in Kenya. Digital booking, mobile payment and maintenance systems help 748 Air Services reach customers directly, operate reliably and compete with larger carriers on the country's busiest routes. However, the airline has adopted customer-facing technology faster than the analytical systems that drive pricing and efficiency, which limits the full value of its digital investment. For small carriers with limited capital, technology is therefore best treated as a strategic capability to be developed, not merely as a support function.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for Practice

- The management of 748 Air Services should treat digital investment as a strategic priority. Within six months, the Head of Information Technology, working with the Head of Commercial and Sales, should strengthen the booking website and mobile platform and widen mobile money payment options, tracking the share of bookings made through direct digital channels each month.

- The airline should upgrade and fully use its revenue management system within twelve months, and integrate digital maintenance planning with flight scheduling, reviewing revenue per available seat and unplanned aircraft downtime every quarter.
- The airline should train its commercial, operations and engineering staff in revenue management, digital scheduling and maintenance systems, and include these skills in recruitment requirements, since the low rating of revenue management points to a skills gap as well as a systems gap.

7.2 Recommendations for Policy

- The Kenya Civil Aviation Authority, the Kenya Airports Authority and the ministries responsible for transport and tourism should consider measures that lower the cost of digital infrastructure for small scheduled carriers, such as shared airport digital services and support for adopting booking, payment and maintenance systems.
- Aviation training institutions should expand curriculum coverage of revenue management, airline data analytics and digital operations so that the industry has a pool of staff able to run these systems.

7.3 Areas for Further Research

- The study covered one airline and 37 respondents and relied on perceptions. Future studies should examine technology adoption across several local airlines, including low-cost, niche and full-service carriers, to allow comparison and wider generalisation.
- Future research could combine perception data with objective measures such as the share of direct digital bookings, load factor and revenue per available seat, and could use longitudinal designs to establish causal effects over time.

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