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INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL AND SUSTAINED COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR IN KENYA: A CASE OF SAFARICOM PLC-NAIROBI

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ABSTRACT

The rising interest in intellectual capital which was attributed to the rise of a new economy that is heavily dependent on technology and information. However, in as much as intellectual capital was noted to influence financial performance as well as forge a competitive advantage for firms, there is little literature available on the relationship between intellectual capital and sustainable competitive advantage in Kenya, and especially in the telecommunications sector, a gap which the research aimed at filling. This study aimed at evaluating the influence of intellectual capital on sustainable competitive advantage in the telecommunications industry with Safaricom PLC as the case study. The study embraced a descriptive research design which targeted Safaricom PLC Headquarters employees in Westlands, Nairobi. The research adopted a stratified random sampling method that included top management and employees of the 9 different departments within Safaricom PLC. The total sample of the project was 363 respondents comprising of employees from the 9 departments. The study used semi-structured questionnaires to collect the primary data from the respondents. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to process and analyze raw data from respondents. MS excel spread sheet tools were utilized in presenting the quantitative data in figures and tables. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to analyze data. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Further, inferential statistics were carried out to examine degree and extent of relationship between human capital, structural capital, relational capital and technological capital on sustained competitive advantage in the telecommunications sector. In conclusion, there was a positive correlation between intellectual capital on sustained competitive advantage in the telecommunications sector. The study

recommended that telecommunications sector Company employees like Safaricom PLC to be provided with training to improve their communication strategies.

Key Words: Intellectual capital, Human Capital, Organizational Capital, Technological Capital, Sustained Competitive Advantage, Organisational Performance and Innovativeness.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Bontis, (2008), human capital represents the human factor in the organization in terms of factors such as the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that give an organization its distinctive character. Human components of a firm are those that have the ability to attain a firm's competitive advantage. The study similarly highlighted that stimulation of elements towards goal achievement ought to be accorded a principle focus as this stimulation in turn largely aid in promoting a firm's success.

In the current business environment, more and more companies are receiving praises not for their wealth and physical attributes but on innovations to their business models and issues such as the design of operations and brand names. Examples of such firms include Airbnb, Uber and Apple which own very little physical assets but have excelled in their performance. Albertini and Berger-Remy (2019) also note that the importance of intellectual capital has been increasing in firms over the years with long-term performance.

According to Hatane, Wijaya, William and Haryanto (2018), the value of a company is derived from non-physical assets such as a company's database, human competence, firm performance, and other intangible assets that include, patent, product portfolio, trademarks, licenses as well as technology available in the company. Albertini and Berger-Remy (2019 define intellectual capital as a set of intangible resources and capabilities that are possessed or controlled by a firm. In the current business environment, more and more companies are receiving praises not for their wealth and physical attributes but on innovations to their business models and issues such as the design of operations and brand names. Albertini and Berger-Remy (2019) also note that the importance of intellectual capital has been increasing in firms over the years as it has been found to have a positive relationship with long-term performance.

Statement of the Problem

Studies have found out that some enterprises in Kenya face challenges in acquiring such intellectual capital or capabilities to influence their growth (Ngugi & Bwisa, 2013; Namusonge,

2004; Mwangi, 2011). However, one of the most inevitable issues in business world today is competition in which they affect the process of formulating operating policies for the company. Maditinos, et al. (2011) note that most challenges faced by most organizations in relation to intellectual capital factors relate to the management and measuring of such assets. Ability to develop a sustained competitive advantage today has well become difficult for organizations. Considering what poses complementary capabilities to deploy available resources there is need to explain the performance of the firm which indicates valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable resources that match market conditions in conceptualization of organizational innovativeness leading to conflicting and non-comparable results (Mugo, Wanjau & Avodo, 2012).

If Safaricom does not wisely use its intellectual capital effectively and efficiently, competitive advantage will not be sustained. Moreover, competitive advantage occurs from the production of resources (Porter, 2008). Intellectual capital has become widely acknowledged as knowledge assets within an organization. This study therefore aimed to test the intellectual capital factors that influence a sustained competitive advantage in telecommunications sector in Kenya with prime focus on Safaricom PLC-Nairobi.

Objectives of the Study

General Objectives

To explore the intellectual capital factors that influence sustained competitive advantage in telecommunications sector in Kenya- A case of Safaricom PLC.

Specific objectives:

i. To examine the influence of human capital on sustained competitive advantage in safaricom PLC.
ii. To examine the influence of structural capital on sustained competitive advantage in Safaricom PLC.
iii. To investigate the effect of relational capital on sustained competitive advantage in Safaricom PLC.
iv. To establish the influence of technological capital on sustained competitive advantage in Safaricom PLC.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Resource Based Theory

It has been acknowledged among powerful theories to describe, explain and predict organizational relationships (Barney, 1991). According to Penrose (1959), there is need to introduce work as a key element of growth and in this regard, in the 1980s and 90s that resource-based view (RBV) theory of a firm took a different shape (Wernerfelt, 1984).

Penrose's (1959) theory of growth of the firm examines the superior intangible intellectual capital resources and distinct competencies of a firm, it argues that two factors are the major determinants of a business's performance. Additionally, Penrose highlights the significance of management in utilizing available internal resources in terms of employees' experience and skills in transforming resources into products which satisfy consumers' wants and needs. Krstic (2014) describes Penrose's point of view as tremendous contribution to the development of the theory of intellectual capital. She further coined the concept of intellectual capital to show the significance of knowledge for growth and development of enterprises and national economies whilst enhancing exploitation of market opportunities.

In struggle for acquisition of new materials Wernerfelt (1984), built an explicitly competitive strategy through application of Porter's (2008) strategies which were very crucial techniques for analyzing industries and competitors to acquire certain resources that can be useful in markets and how the analysis can assist in evaluating different strategies.

Barney (1991) developed a resource-based theory which contends that an organization's internal resources, particularly human resources, may become a direct route to a sustained competitive advantage for the enterprise. The acronym VRIN which stands for valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable simply encompasses the required criteria. This theory suggests that these resources should be valuable and able to provide a foundation to develop a firm's capabilities for superior performance. A resource is considered to be rare when it is not common in nature.

Human Capital Theory

The human capital theory (HRT) was proposed by Mincer (1958), Schultz (1961), and Becker (1964) as they considered education as investment to be made by individuals which allows them to increase their human capital endowment. This investment increases productivity and, within the neo-classical framework of competitive markets in which this theory is developed,

future income. Thus, HRT establishes a causal relationship between education, productivity and income so that an increase of education produces a higher level of income and greater economic growth.

Schultz (1961) developed the human capital theory referring to Adam Smith as the original founder of the human capital concept, citing that the acquired wealth of the nations is derived from the acquired abilities of the people, particularly in terms of education, experience, skills, and health. Human capital is a combination of the knowledge, skills and abilities of a workforce party to an organization. Human capital may be defined as different persons generating, retaining and utilizing knowledge and skills.

The Theory of Intellectual Capital

Stewart, Edvinson and Malone (1997) developed the concept of intellectual capital which stated that when you possess knowledge, experience, organizational technology and professional skills, they provide competitive advantage in the marketplace. According to Kalokovic (2003), the non-tangible assets noticeably add the value of a firm's wealth or the market value of an organization. The intellectual capital theory originates from both management and macroeconomic theories. Kolaković et al. (2008), further outlines that intellectual capital theory is based on the premise that the wealth of the organization is contributed by all human, structural and relational capital and that value is created by transforming one form of capital into another form.

Krstic (2014) acknowledges Penrose's point of view as a tremendous input in intellectual capital. Bergh (2010) coined the concept of intellectual capital to show the significance of knowledge for growth and development of enterprises and national economies to improve exploitation of market opportunities. Edvinson and Malone's (1997) interpretation of intellectual capital emphasized differentiating explicit and implicit knowledge and highlighting that sustained competitive advantage of an organization can largely be achieved by employing both types of knowledge.

The Knowledge Based Theory

Sveiby (2000) developed knowledge-based theory by converting knowledge internally and externally through people who used their capacity to create value. Hunter (2002) states that a sustainable competitive advantage is anchored on the knowledge of an enterprise. This notion depicts that competitive advantage is mainly dependent on the ability of a firm to develop, differentiate, adopt and share its knowledge base.

The knowledge-based theory lays importance on knowledge as a resource which is impossible to copy, makes a difference and even generates sustained competitive advantage (Firer, & Williams, 2003). The knowledge-based view of an enterprise categorizes sets of skills into four different categories which are knowledge and skills of employees, technical systems, management systems as well as value and norms related to different forms of personalized and embedded knowledge together with the processes of knowledge generation and control.

Empirical Literature Review

According to Aragon, Barba, and Sanz (2003), training plays a very important role in human capital so that the company can obtain competitive advantage for a suitable long-term profitability and analyze the impact of influence on training and performance but also the nature of such a relationship in greater depth.

According to Abraham, (2004), human capital is considered as a strategic asset to organizational effectiveness whose importance is for profit organizations and measurement. This study bridges the gap between suggesting a behavioral approach to measuring organizational performance of local government authorities which possess strategic human capital to exhibit organizational competency and experience that is unique and valuable.

According to the research conducted by Barnabas (2016), business enterprises do not operate in an isolated space, but with some organized structures and systems and that these structures or systems influence other forms of intellectual capital. The structural capital necessitates innovation as discovered in research findings of Khalique (2018). A study carried out by Okpara (2015) proved that the structural capital impacts the performance of firms, which means the organization's competitive strength depends on elements of intellectual capital and that the structural capital is a viable platform for facilitating competitiveness and performance of the organizations.

The concept of structural/organizational capital is described by Maddocks and Beaney (2011) as management systems that facilitate performance of tasks and duties of all employees. According to Barnabas, Nwuche and Anyanwu (2016), organisations do not operate in a vacuum but within certain structures that influence intellectual capital in which structural capital enhances innovation, research and development as well as other workplace frameworks that has positive effect on competitive advantage and performance (Khalique, et al., 2018).

According to a research study conducted by Yitmen (2014) concerning Jordanian Telecommunication companies revealed that relational capital represents a hidden knowledge in customer choices including suppliers and relationships with partners. Relational capital is

best known for its social procedures as seen in the research findings of Hsu and Wang (2012) who argued that customer capital can be as a portion of relational capital. The extant literature pictures relational capital as a knowledge hidden in all relationships between a firm and its stakeholders.

According to studies by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2012) relational capital is an aggregate of resources consolidated in a firm by a reliable network of intra firm relationships. In this regard, it goes without saying that business capital is a vital part of intellectual capital and also is based on partnerships, alliances and joint ventures. Research conducted by Paldam (2000) stated that relational capital is the magnetic force that holds societies together. In light of this, it is quite clear that without relational capital, innovation, sharing of knowledge and productivity in an enterprise may be hindered.

Operational processes and methods used for transformation in generating the desired output, spans the skills, mechanism, and knowledge that are connected with accessibility, innovation of techniques of production which are based on intangibles increased by research and development activities of the firm through imitation of the technologies of other companies and adoption (Fernández, Montes, & Vázquez, 2010). According to Bromiley and Rau technological capital is a set of intangible assets based on innovations and technical procedures. On a similar note, according to Ramazan and Serhat (2009), technological capital is an intangible asset that is derived from technical knowledge and is an integrated part of intellectual capital that consists of knowledge that is responsible for the development of technical systems of an enterprise.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

In order to seek new ideas from the respondents and develop an insight to the intended problem under study, a descriptive research design was the most appropriate. A descriptive research design was used in this study since it enabled the researcher to seek new ideas from the respondents and develop an insight to the problems under the study. It portrayed the facts as they really were; if another researcher goes to the field now, he or she will find the situation as described.

The target population of the study was 6477 employees at Safaricom PLC headquarters in Westlands, Nairobi. The study targeted the employees from different departments in the institution. The organization had 9 main departments that ran the operations of the company. The survey involved employees at strategic, tactical, and operational levels. The total sample of the project was 363 respondents comprised of employees from the 9 departments: Customer

Service, Finance, Corporate Affairs, Special Projects, Corporate Security, Human Resources, Enterprise Businesses, Financial Services and Business Development. The study used semi-structured questionnaires to collect data. The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to process and analyze raw data and to generate inferential and descriptive statistics from the respondents. MS Excel spread sheet tools were utilized in presenting the quantitative data in figures and tables.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Correlation Analysis between intellectual capital and sustained competitive advantage.

The study sought out that correlation analysis between human capital and sustained competitive advantage and level of accessibility revealed a significant positive relationship between ease of access and availability of resources. The study showed a correlation coefficient value of 0.984. The correlation between structural capital and sustained competitive advantage indicated that there was a relationship between participation and opportunities available This showed moderately strong positive correlation value of 0.964. There was also a significant correlation between laid down rules governing and communication by stakeholders in telecommunications sector.

The study sought to establish the relational capital and sustained competitive advantage where involvement in organizational association and computer skills indicated that there was a weak negative correlation between participation and their role in the implementation of intellectual capital and sustained competitive advantage in the telecommunications sector. Integration of power relationships and co-operation established showed a weak negative correlation value of 0.193. Customer's employees and suppliers were found to weakly correlate with relational capital at a coefficient value of 0.142.

The findings are in line with a study by Sveiby, (2000) who stated that relational capital has a very low utilization of services offered by telecommunications sector dues to lack of knowledge about these services, thus questioning the nature of communication strategies adopted in low-income areas, and to an extent, the level of awareness about competitive advantage in telecommunications sector.

An analysis of the study findings on the relationship between technological capital and sustained competitive advantage in the telecommunications sector recognized a technological capital projection of (0.994). An analysis of the study findings indicated that there was a

positively weak correlation (0.941) between firm's tangible fixed assets and administrative structures.

Regression Analysis

Since a strong relationship existed between the study variables, a regression analysis was conducted to determine the level of significance.

According to Tornatzky and Fleischer (2010), regression analyses do not imply that the relationships are causal. It is therefore used to identify the significant factors in the model that explain the bulk of the variance in sustained competitive advantage.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Factors for Human Capital

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.922a	.840	.846	.31982

a. Predictors: (Constant), Human capital

Table 1 shows the output and the summary of the regression model between the independent variable and dependent variable. R-value indicates the correlation of the two variables is 0.922 and R2 explains the variance is 0.846 which means that 84% of the variance with regard to sustained competitive advantage can be explained by the changes in human capital.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Coefficients for Human Capital Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.778	.069		1.643	.000
	Human Capital	.746	.021	.656	1.445	.002

The coefficient for human capital in Table 2 shows the Beta value as 0.656 that indicates the strong positive relationship between the variables. Therefore, if the human capital of employees are reduced, it would bring a negative effect in the workload, administration and management. The results of the current study are in line with the study conducted by Abraham (2004) who attempted to bridge and suggest a behavioral approach when measuring human capital in order to examine the impact on financial performance within the local government.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Factors for Structural Capital

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.874a	.764	.764	.39982

[a.] Predictors: (Constant), structural capital

Table 3 presents the output summary of the regression model between independent variable and dependent variable. R-value indicates the correlation of the two variables is 0.874 and R2 explains the variance is 0.764 which means that structural capital has a great influence, of 76%, on the variance with regard to sustained competitive advantage. According to Grigoriev et al. (2014), structural capital was described as the method which is employed to transform input by generating the output that is desirable to all.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Coefficients for Structural Capital Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.778	.069		1.643	.000
	Structural Capital	.630	.052	.572	.525	.010

The coefficient table (Table 4) shows Beta value as 0.572 that indicates the strong positive relationship between these two variables. Therefore, if structural capital employees are not well managed then it will negatively affect the structure of an organization in the way it operates with its employees and cause more harm than good to the organization and to the customers that depend on them.

According to the study conducted by Colle (2002), attainment of competitive advantage is based on not only on equipment or appliances but also the achievement of organizational objectives to determine the existence of relational capital.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Factors for Relational Capital

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.868a	.753	.752	.04577

Predictors: (Constant), relational capital

Table 5 contains the output summary of the regression model between independent variable and dependent variable. R-value indicates the correlation of the two variables is 0.868 and R2 explains the variance is 0.752 which means that 75% of the variance with regard to sustained competitive advantage can be explained by changes in relational capital.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Coefficients for Relational Capital Coefficientsa

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.778	.069		1.643	.000
	Relational Capital	.633	.057	.584	.534	.005

The coefficient table (Table 6) shows Beta value as 0.584 that indicates the strong positive relationship between these two variables. Therefore, if relational capital is not improved or maintained then the relationship with employees will be negatively affected as well and the competitive advantage in the organization will bring about the downfall of the organization.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Factors for Technological Capital

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.862a	.743	.742	.2898

a. Predictors: (Constant), technological capital

Table 7 displays the output summary of the regression model between independent variable and dependent variable. R-value indicates the correlation of the two variables that is 0.862 and R2 explains the variance is 0.743 which means that 74% of the variance with regard to sustained competitive advantage can be attributed to changes in technological capital

Table 8: Multiple Regression Coefficients for Technological Capital Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.778	.069		1.643	.000
	Technological Capital	.524	.015	.528	.420	.003

The coefficient table (Table 8) shows Beta value as 0.528 that indicates the strong positive relationship between these two variables. This therefore means that technology in the organization has been fairly managed and needs to put more effort in ensuring that the employees as well as customers get the services that they deserve for the betterment of the organization.

Maddocks and Beaney (2011) recommended that performance of tasks and duties by the employees is best facilitated by infrastructure, such as management systems and the processes employed, that is very supportive.

Table 9: Multiple Regression factors for Intellectual Capital

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.816a	.724	.720	.39982

[a.] Predictors: (Constant), intellectual capital

Table 9 contains the output summary of the regression model between independent variable and dependent variable. R-value indicates the correlation of the two variables that is 0.816 and R^2 explains the variance is 0.724 which means that 72% of the variance with regard to sustained competitive advantage can be attributed to the influence of intellectual capital.

Table 10: Multiple Regression Coefficients for Intellectual Capital Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.778	.069		1.643	.000
	Intellectual Capital	.511	.014	.6442	.420	.002

Dependent variable; sustained competitive advantage

The coefficients table (Table 10) shows Beta value as 0.6442 that indicates the positive relationship between dependent variables and independent variables. Therefore, it should be noted that if the intellectual capital is not properly managed and enforced, then competitive advantage may lose focus in telecommunication sectors.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Human capital encouraged the Safaricom PLC respondents to participate in telecommunication sector environments in Kenya. Differences in accessibility levels hindered effective employee participation which implied that the level of accessibility and availability of resources was a determinant of how Safaricom PLC respondents understood human capital issues which motivated them to get involved. The study further concluded that education training and skills available for the respondents were better empowered for participation in the intellectual capital and sustained competitive advantage in the telecommunication sector.

On the influence of structural capital on respondents in Safaricom PLC telecommunication sector, the study concluded that structural capital measures put in place, opportunities available and decision making influenced respondents' participation in the telecommunication industries. The study further concluded that laid down rules, knowledge retention, and

communication by stakeholders resulted in better quality decisions of the organization as people provided technical expertise during decision making processes.

On the influence of relational capital, the study concluded that organisational association, computer skills and power relations had a significant influence in the telecommunication sector in Kenya. Skills and power relations would be improved. Internal and external stakeholders' input had a great influence on telecommunication sector. Respondents participated differently in the telecommunication sector as they had different levels of awareness in relational capital.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On human capital, the study recommended that existing government regulations should play a key role in ensuring that everyone gets involved in participatory decision-making processes especially in telecommunication sectors.

Based on the structural capital, the study recommended that measures put in place by the structures in Safaricom PLC should be meant for the organization's competitive strength depending on its structures rather than other elements of intellectual capital.

The study recommended that, for relational capital and sustained competitive advantage to be made aware by different stakeholders and the public the need to use media and peers for advertisement. Safaricom PLC respondents should be provided with adequate training so that they can improve.

On technological capital, the challenges faced in the telecommunication sector in trying to be part and parcel intellectual capital and have their voices heard should be solved by the existing government to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

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