

# Nexus Between Customer Relationship Management And Competitive Advantage Among Container Freight Stations In Mombasa County, Kenya.

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## Abstract

A company's ability to consistently generate larger profits than its rivals is attributed to a collection of traits or competencies known as competitive advantage. Gaining a competitive edge might come from creating high-end, niche services and products that are rare to get elsewhere or from being able to reduce expenses much below those of competitors, improving profit margins. In a rapidly expanding market distinguished by intense rivalry and substitute service suppliers, customers possess the liberty to select from the array of accessible alternatives. The global economic boom has had a significant impact on Kenya's CFS industry growth, increasing international trade and, in turn, increasing competition for established container terminals, which has naturally resulted in a decline in customer loyalty. The difficulty for CFSs is to determine what motivates customers to choose a certain CFS in light of the rising competition and port services' extension to private investors. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate Nexus between customer relationship management and competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Institutional Theory. The research used descriptive research design and the target population was all the 21 licensed container freight stations in Mombasa county where the respondents included the CEO, Finance manager, commercial managers and operations managers of the licensed CFS. Data was collected by use of questionnaires that were administered to the respondents physically and online where applicable. Pretesting of the research instrument was done in Nairobi county. Data was analyzed by help of SPSS version 29. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied in the analyses where relationships were tested by use of regression. findings were presented in tables charts and graphs. All ethical considerations were made in this study. The study found a strong positive correlation coefficient 0.685 between customer relationship management and competitive advantage which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study concluded that Customer relationship management influences competitive advantage of container freight stations in Mombasa county and has a strong relationship of correlation coefficient of 0.685 which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study recommends Use of CRM systems to collect and analyze customer data, such as shipping patterns, cargo volumes, service preferences, and feedback. Teach employees how to use CRM information to provide better customer service.

**Keywords:** Customer relationship management, Competitive advantage, Container freight station.

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## I. Background Of The Study

Competitive advantage is termed as a set of characteristics or skills that give a company a competitive advantage in regards to its capacity to continuously create more returns than its competitors (Dagnino et al., 2020). A business may get a competitive edge by creating high-end, niche goods and services that are rare to get elsewhere or by being able to reduce costs much below those of its rivals, improving profit margins (Huang et al., 2015). As stated by Barney (2021), an enterprise has a competitive advantage when it can generate value through methods that are either distinct or more cost-effective compared to those of its rivals. Additionally, for a competitive edge to be beneficial, the firm's identity must be viewed uniquely from competitors' and customers' perceptions of it must be favorable.

The main sources of competitive advantage include professional reputation, organizational ties, and technological innovation. Starting with the organization's resources, we can see that every company is made up of a variety of skills and resources. A competitive edge can be established and maintained thanks to these accessible resources and inventive skills (Zahra, 2021). These assets and skills assist a business optimize on its key capabilities and foster innovation, partnerships, and reputation (Gibson et al., 2021). Specialized expertise areas arising from the interplay of technology systems, structures, and work ethos are known as core competences (Jalil et al., 2021).

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Organizations usually attain a sustainable competitive advantage when they leverage their distinctive resources, talents, and capabilities to create exceptional value (Davis & DeWitt, 2021). The resource-based perspective is the source of this argument, which maintains that unique resources and capabilities are what really determine competitive advantage (Barney, 2021). The ability of an enterprise to surpass its competitors with regard to revenue generated defines its competitiveness. A company's competitiveness originates from two sources: distinctiveness in the context of niche markets or better quality offers, and lower cost, which emanates from economies of scale. To be long-term sustainable, a competitive advantage's sources must be distinctive and difficult to imitate (Al-Mamary&Alshallaqi, 2022).

Customer relationship management and competitive advantage are seen as essential elements required to operate successfully and efficiently in today's cutthroat business climate (Thongrawd et al., 2020). Drawing from an abundance of research on Customer Relationship Management, it is proposed that companies might achieve greater profitability and sustainability in the cutthroat market by focusing on retaining their current clientele rather than pursuing new business (Sofi et al., 2020). This can be achieved by continuing to build long-lasting relationships with their current clients and attending to their needs. Customer relationship management's primary goal is to maximize the business's long-term growth and profitability through a thorough understanding of its customers' behavior (AlQershshi et al., 2020). It seeks to improve integration and provide more useful input in order to calculate the ROI in various domains.

A common-use facility that is not an airport or seaport and provides a full range of services for processing and storing containers, with customs controlling the inbound and outgoing flows by any relevant form of transportation, is known as a container freight station (Parola, 2023).

In Kenya, the first CFSs were created within the port in 2000, primarily to handle de-stuffing of smaller than container load cargo with the intention of alleviating overcrowding at the Port of Mombasa. The Commissioner of Customs appoints Container Freight Stations as stewards of imported commodities. Customs, in accordance with Section 45 of the Customs Act of 1962. With rising demand for space as a result of a rise in cargo landings at the port, there was a need to improve port capacity through the usage of current private sector capabilities.

### **Statement Of The Problem**

Apart from ports in trade and the maritime sector, container freight stations have been hailed as this nation's next great economic booster. In a rapidly expanding market distinguished by intense rivalry and substitute service suppliers, customers possess the liberty to select from the array of accessible alternatives. The global economic boom has had a significant impact on Kenya's CFS industry growth, increasing international trade and, in turn, increasing competition for established container terminals, which has naturally resulted in a decline in customer loyalty. Due to this expansion, there is now more rivalry for transshipment cargo, and customers' satisfaction with container terminals' services is now the primary factor influencing the demand for each service provider's entire product (Yap, 2020). To give customers the proper products and high-quality services, it is vital to comprehend the aspects that manipulate their decision-making. Container Freight Stations must not only fully comprehend their market sectors but also create custom solutions for their customers.

The difficulty for CFSs is to determine what motivates customers to choose a certain CFS in light of the rising competition and port services' extension to private investors. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the Nexus between customer relationship management and competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County, Kenya.

### **Purpose Of The Study**

The purpose of the study was to establish the Nexus between customer relationship management and competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County, Kenya.

## **II. Literature Review**

The vast field of institutional theory is composed of many viewpoints. with relation to how institutions and society interact. Three streams of institutional research were created as a result of these variances in perspective, and each stream has a distinct the definition of institutions as a result of the methodology and presumptions used (Scott, 2013). The first line of inquiry assumes that people make rational decisions to maximize their interests and is usually studied in the field of economics (Nickerson & Bigelow, 2008). Known by the name "rational choice institutionalism," this branch of institutional study focuses on the ways in which explicit regulatory processes such as those that establish rules, enforce compliance, monitor them, and apply rewards or penalties have an impact on behavior. According to (Maroy& Pons, 2023), institutions are the "humanly devised" social norms that organize interpersonal relationships by offering believable expectations about how other people will act. Since laws and regulations are established to further interests, the logic of institutions in this stream is therefore instrumental (Geels, 2004).

Maroy and Pons (2023) state that the routines, norms, conventions, and formal or informal procedures ingrained in organizational structures are what the second line of research, or "old institutionalism," defines as institutions. This stream, which has strong support in sociology, postulates that morality, as expressed in March's "logic of appropriateness," governs individual rationality and guides choice by outlining both the obligations to others and the proper goals and ways to achieve them (Geels, 2004). Since morality is the cornerstone of a stable social order, moral considerations are crucial to this line of inquiry (Scott, 2013).

CFSs are institutions that have structures and formal way of executing their operations. In such institutions there is interplay between various organizational factors such as culture, technology, relationship with stakeholders, organizational policies, risk management, innovation capabilities and many more. The way organization manages these inter plays determines whether they acquire competitive advantage or lose their competitiveness, hence the relevance of this theory to this study.

**Empirical Review**

According to a study by Fan, (2018), strategic customer management benefits competitive advantage in the context of Pakistani Dongpa logistics. A company's capacity to find, acquire, and hold onto profitable clients determines how profitable it can be. Strategic customer management has been shown by Wang and Gao (2021) to have a favorable impact on competitive advantage. Many businesses struggle to maintain their competitive advantage in the ever-evolving modern environment (Mahdi et al., 2019). Putri and Setiawan (2022) investigated how client relationship management (CRM) affected small and medium-sized businesses in Afghanistan's competitive advantage (CA). The study used a quantitative methodology to investigate the relationship between CRM metrics and the competitive advantage of SMEs in Afghanistan. The investigation makes use of a set of 485 processing SMEs that were assessed in Afghanistan. The findings show that, while just three CRM indicators significantly affect SMEs' competitive advantage, there is no substantial association among (KCF) and SMEs' competitive advantage.

**III. Methodology**

This study used a descriptive research design and was conducted in Mombasa, Kenya involving all the licensed container freight stations which totaled to twenty-one. Data was corrected only ones from a target population of eighty-four senior managers working in these CFSs that were purposively sampled. SPSS version 29 was used to analyze the collected data, descriptive and inferential statistics were then used for presenting the results.

**Response Rate, Reliability of Instruments and Respondent Characteristics**

The study was conducted in Kenya and focused on 21 licensed container freight stations operating in Mombasa County where the respondents were the CEO, Finance manager, commercial managers and operations managers of the licensed CFS.

**Response rate**

A total of 60 responses were received out of a target population of 84 respondents. This represented 71.4% response rate. According to Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), response rates above 50% are deemed suitable for analysis and reporting, above 60% are commonly regarded as good, and above 70% are deemed excellent. Khan (2011) offers a similar guideline, stating that a response rate of more than 70% is considered to be extremely good. Furthermore, according to Dixon and Royce A. Singleton (2012), a response rate of 50% is deemed adequate, and a rate of 70% or higher is regarded as very good. Thus, based on these suggestions, it can be inferred that the study's response rate was sufficient, boosting confidence in the study's ability to be generalized. This information served as the foundation for the analysis and findings presented in this chapter.

**Reliability Assessment of Data Collection Instrument**

Cronbach's Alpha is a coefficient of reliability that gives an estimation of data generalization without any bias. In this study, the researcher sought to assess the reliability of the data collected to measure the various variables in the study.

The purpose of reliability assessment was to assess the internal consistency of the data collected by the research questionnaires. To measure this, Cronbach Alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the data collected. In a research study, Cronbach Alpha value greater than 0.7 is regarded as satisfactory for reliability assessment. The table 1 shows and presents the results of this test.

**Table 1: Cronbach Alpha for Reliability Assessments**

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha Values
Customer relationship management	6	0.976
Competitive advantage	5	0.962

As presented in Table 1, Cronbach alpha values for all the variables; customer relationship management and competitive advantage were greater than 0.7. From these results it can be concluded that the constructs measured had the adequate reliability for the subsequent stages of analysis since all the Cronbach Alpha values were greater than 0.7.

**Respondents’ characteristics**

The study sought to determine the respondents’ characteristics such as gender, age, and level of education. The results of respondents’ characteristics were presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:  
Respondents’ characteristics**

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender of the Respondent	Male	85	91.7
	Female	5	8.3
Experience of the respondents	Less than 5 Yrs.	6	10
	Between 5-10	13	21.7
	Between 11-20	25	41.7
	Over 20 Yrs.	16	26.7
Age	Less than 25 Yrs.	5	8.3
	Between 25–35 years	24	40
	35-45 years	21	35
	Over 45 Years	10	16.7
Level of Education	Diploma	9	15
	Bachelor	31	51.7
	Masters	10	16.7
	Other	10	16.7
Position held	CEO	3	5
	Finance manager	8	13.3
	Commercial manager	15	25
	Operation manager	34	56.7

Results in Table 2 indicate that majority of the respondents (91.7%) were male while female accounted for 8.3%. This gender distribution implies that there were extremely very many more men staffs working in the licensed container freight stations operating in Mombasa County compared to women. Moreover, it implies that this container freight stations is more men oriented. In addition, majority of the respondents (40%) were between 25-35 years of age.

This means that the container freight stations workforce is mature enough and poses the much needed experience and exposure to stir the container freight stations into greater heights. The results further indicate that most respondents’ highest Level of Education was bachelor degree accounted by 51.7%. Those with masters and others accounted for 16.7% and 16.7% respectively.

This implies that the respondents are well educated and well understand the issues of the influence of management strategies on competitive advantage among container freight stations.

**Influence of Customer relationship management on competitive advantage**

To determine the extent of influence of customer relationship management on competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County respondents were requested to respond on 6 attributes of customer relationship management of the container freight stations in Mombasa County they represented. Table 3 presents these analyzed results of data from the respondents pertaining the extent of innovation in container freight stations in Mombasa County.

**Table 3:  
Customer relationship management**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Extent does customer relationship management influence Competitive Advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County	60	3.7000	0.77678
In this CFS there is high level of customer retention	60	3.1333	1.47828
Our Customers are loyal to the operations of this CFS	60	3.0667	1.09956

There is profitability from the relationship we have with our customer	60	3.5833	1.52150
In this CFS there is customer satisfaction	60	3.2000	1.29143
We experience customer referrals in this CFS	60	3.2333	1.53256
<b>Average</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>3.9833</b>	<b>1.54002</b>

From these results majority of the respondents agreed that there was an extent of customer relationship management on sustainable competitive advantage in container freight stations in Mombasa County in Kenya. These results correspond with the results of a study conducted by Fan, (2018), strategic customer management benefits competitive advantage in the context of Pakistani Dongpa logistics. According to the report, organizations must match their customer strategy with their goals and objectives in order to succeed over the long run. The study came to the conclusion that Mari Petroleum Company Ltd.'s competitive advantage in Pakistan is positively impacted by strategic customer management. According to the study, businesses should put more of an emphasis on making sure they maximize strategic customer management. Additionally, in order to improve customer connections, businesses must integrate a thorough grasp of client demands, habits, and beliefs.

Furthermore, “In this CFS there is high level of customer retention” is the attribute of customer relationship management that received the highest mean (M=3.3700, SD= 0.77678). This meant that management of these container freight stations focused more on high level of customer retention compared to other attributes of customer relationship management such as “Our Customers are loyal to the operations of this CFS” which got the least mean (M=3.0667, SD=1.09956).

Based on these results, the study reveals that there is a large extent of customer relationship management (M=3.9833, SD=1.54002) on sustainable competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County.

### **Competitive advantage**

To investigate the influence of customer relationship management and competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County respondents were requested to respond on 6 attributes of competitive advantage of the container freight stations in Mombasa County they represented. Table 4 presents these analyzed results of data from the respondents pertaining the extent of innovation in container freight stations in Mombasa County.

**Table 4:  
Competitive advantage**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
This CFS has a reasonable market share compared to the competitors	60	3.8333	.99433
In my CFS we experience high profit margins	60	3.8667	1.07934
There is good return on investment in this CFS	60	3.5333	1.26848
There are high levels of customer satisfaction	60	2.7167	1.04948
There is high level of brand equity in this CFS	60	3.5500	1.46629
<b>Average</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>3.5000</b>	<b>1.17158</b>

From these results majority of the respondents agreed that there was an extent of management strategies on sustainable competitive advantage in container freight stations in Mombasa County in Kenya. These results correspond with the sentiment Davis and DeWitt, (2021) who noted that organizations usually attain a sustainable competitive advantage when they leverage their distinctive resources, talents, and capabilities to create exceptional value.

Furthermore, “In my CFS we experience high profit margins” is the attribute of competitive advantage that received the highest mean (M=3.8667, SD= 1.07934). This meant that management of these container freight stations focused more on high profit margins experience compared to other attributes of competitive advantage such as “There are high levels of customer satisfaction” which got the least mean (M=3.7167, SD=1.04948).

Based on these results, the study reveals that there is a large extent of competitive management (M=3.5000, SD=1.17158) on management strategies among container freight stations in Mombasa County.

### **Relationship between customer relationship management and Competitive Advantage**

Following the successful completion of normality tests for the variable distribution, correlation analysis was performed to examine the potential relation between customer relationship management and

competitive advantage. The bivariate correlation results between customer relationship management and competitive advantage of CFS in Mombasa county are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Bivariate Correlation analysis results**

		<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	<b>Customer relationship management</b>	<b>Deductions</b>
<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho)	1.000	.685	Positive
	Sig. (P-Value)	.	.000	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
<b>Customer relationship management</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.685	1.000	Positive
	Sig. (P-Value)	.000	.	Reject H <sub>0</sub>

The results in Table 8 shows a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.685 which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This leads to rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternate hypothesis that there is an influence of customer relationship management on competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County, Kenya.

This means that on overall, customer relationship management is positively related to sustainability of competitive advantage among container freight stations in Mombasa County, Kenya.

These findings, agree with the findings of Putri and Setiawan (2022) who investigated how client relationship management (CRM) affected small and medium-sized businesses in Afghanistan's competitive advantage (CA). The study used a quantitative methodology to investigate the relationship between CRM metrics and the competitive advantage of SMEs in Afghanistan. The investigation makes use of a set of 485 processing SMEs that were assessed in Afghanistan. The findings show that, while just three CRM indicators significantly affect SMEs' competitive advantage, there is no substantial association among (KCF) and SMEs' competitive advantage.

In the same vein, these findings support the view of Haseeb et al., (2019), that competitive advantage is positively impacted by effective customer management. The competitive approach is a discipline in management that focuses on the objective of the company, searches for opportunities, assesses whether they align with the company's strategic direction, outlines the stages to success, and regularly considers possibilities. Because the study arrangement is a single unit of evaluation, it was used as a case study. Interviews were employed in the study to collect data. Director of the nation, supervisor of public relations, finance, human resources, manager of the human rights program, manager of monitoring and evaluation, manager of the program for promoting tranquility, supervisor of investigation and development of capacity, supervisor for raising awareness of issues through advocacy, supervisor for grants, supervisor for natural resource program, and supervisor for finance manager were all interviewed using the interview guide.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Customer relationship management influences competitive advantage of container freight stations in Mombasa county and has a strong relationship of correlation coefficient of 0.685 which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). CRM enables organizations to gather and analyze customer data to better understand their preferences, behaviors, and needs. By using this information to personalize interactions and tailor offerings, businesses can enhance customer satisfaction and build long-term loyalty. Satisfied and loyal customers are less likely to switch to competitors, thereby solidifying the organization's competitive position. Effective CRM strategies help businesses nurture relationships with existing customers, increasing retention rates and maximizing customer lifetime value. By proactively addressing issues, offering personalized experiences, and anticipating future needs, organizations can reduce churn and foster ongoing revenue streams from loyal customers.

#### **V. Recommendations**

Use CRM systems to collect and analyze customer data, such as shipping patterns, cargo volumes, service preferences, and feedback. Adopt a Customer-Centric Approach: Concentrate on comprehending the particular needs, preferences, and expectations of shipping companies, freight forwarders, and other clients using the CFS.

Utilize CRM data to customize offerings and services to match the needs of particular clients. Provide value-added services, flexible scheduling, and choices for accelerated processing based on past interactions and customer profiles. This personalization can set the CFS apart from rivals providing more conventional services.

Use CRM software to help you communicate with customers more easily. Update customers in real time with cargo status, arrival times, and operational modifications. To foster confidence and dependability, be open and honest about service costs, handling fees, and legal compliance requirements.

Teach employees how to use CRM information to provide better customer service. Equip front-line staff with the skills and resources they need to respond quickly to client questions, handle problems efficiently, and go above and beyond in terms of customer service. Good customer experiences can boost competitive standing by encouraging repeat business and recommendations.

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