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As we invite readers to embrace this journal, it should be noted that its sustainability depends on the initiative of the entire readership. Above all, it is hoped that the articles will stimulate useful yet healthy debate that will help give more critical insights on the themes discussed in this second volume (issue). We hope such analysis and views will feature in subsequent issues.

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Gaining Competitive Advantage in Hotels through the Application of Information Technology: a case of 2 – 5 star rated hotels

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Abstract

This study was a response to the present crisis in Kenyan hotels that are threatened by a dwindling international market share. It sought to establish a clear relationship between Information Technology Application as the independent variable, and Competitive Advantage, the dependent variable. A number of previous studies have suggested that Information Technology (IT) can be used as a strategic instrument that enables a company to achieve Competitive Advantage. In this study the effects of applying information technology on Competitive Advantage were measured through the seven dimensions of the construct, Competitive Advantage Provided by an Information Technology Application [CAPITA]. These dimensions are: Primary Activity Efficiency, Support Activity Efficiency, Resource Management Functionality, Resource Acquisition Functionality, Threats Response, Pre-emptiveness, and Synergy. Information was surveyed in Nairobi city, the Kenyan Coast and Nature Reserves Clusters, using the cross-sectional exploratory survey research design. The study used structured interview schedules as data collection instruments. The study focused on 2, 3, 4, and 5-star rated hotels, which constitute a significant 79 per cent of the total number of 2 to 5-star rated hotels in the country. Cluster and stratified probability sampling was complemented with simple random probability sampling. With complex sampling 30 respondents in management were interviewed from 30 hotels within the three principal tour circuits in the country. Data was gathered in the ordinal scale of measurement and Spearman’s rank correlation analysis and its related test of significance were applied appropriately.
to the data. The study established that the seven dimensions of the CAPITA construct do respond to the Application of IT in hotels. This study has also successfully proven the alternate hypothesis: there is a relationship between the Application of information technology and Competitive Advantage in Kenyan hotels. The analysis confirmed a strong correlation between the response of Competitive Advantage in the seven dimensions of the CAPITA construct of hotels, to the Application of IT in hotels, as well as with their star rating or the quality of facilities and personnel in hotels.

**Keywords:** competitive advantage, e-Hotels, information technology, CAPITA constructs.

**Introduction**

Information Technologies have revolutionised the management of hotels and introduced a paradigm shift in the way of business operations (Buhalis 1997). Information technology brings with it a fast pace of information exchange and online inquiries, data processing, and analysis that promote easier and more incisive decision-making. The hotel and leisure industry is under increasing pressure to provide the means for those who wish to stay connected to do so, including personal mobile communication, and convenient high-speed access (Connell 2002). The hotel customer is now taking an active role in the purchase process (Gilbert & Perry – Powell 2003). Faster and easier communication with these customers that helps them make decisions on what hotel products to consume is an urgent priority, if the hotels will stay competitive. It is therefore becoming critically necessary for hotels in Kenya today to invest in equipping themselves with the necessary skills and technologies to support such a clientele. This would help expand their market reach both, locally, regionally and internationally. E-hotels are an available option. With efficient IT, systems changes can be monitored and the evolution of customers' expectations checked.

**The Problem**

In present day Kenya, the international market supplies the bulk of the hotel clients who visit to see the tourist attractions that are available locally (Economic Survey 2005). As a predominant target market they have the advantage of a relatively high spending power. These international clients though display increased dependency on e-commerce. Unfortunately, e-commerce is relatively new in Kenya and there is competition from regional rivals like Seychelles, the Republic of South Africa, Uganda, and Tanzania. In these circumstances, it is apparent that, classified hotels in the country are faced with the threat of a shrinking international market share. For this reason, Kenyan hotels must strive to maintain a competitive advantage over their international competitors. This calls for innovation such as the one this research pursued, that enables these hotels to gain a competitive edge, and thereby increase customer attraction through positive application of Information Technology. The initiative can only succeed though when clarity on the currently contended relationship is established between efficiency, performance, or productivity in hotels and the application of Information Technology (Clemon 1991, Brynjolfsson 1993, Cho & Olsen 1998). Also where it is confirmed that e-hotels improve customer relations, marketing and reservations management systems, when in use in hotels as some researchers have so far asserted (Cho & Olsen 1998, McFarlan 1984, Porter & Millar 1985).

**Aims and Objectives**

This study took up the challenge to reverse the present trends in Kenyan hotels where they are suffering diminishing competitiveness, as their international market share progressively dwindles. The study sought an understanding of the efficiency of information flows in a hotel within the context of productivity and eventual provision of the resource – the room, and it's supporting services and