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Abstract

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of information communication technology (ICT) on the relationship between international marketing strategy and performance of tour firms in Kenya. Information communication technology was computed as a composite of social media use, use of websites and automation of internal business processes. The moderating effect of information communication technology on the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance, established that information communication technology and international marketing strategy accounted for 49.4% variation on firm performance. Moderation is established if the effect of interaction on performance of tour firms in Kenya is significant. The interaction of information communication technology with international marketing strategy showed that the firm performance did not improve significantly. The R^2 increase of 0.1% indicated that interaction term did not have significant influence. However the overall model was statistically significant. The study has made contribution to theory, policy and practice. It also stated recommendations and has additionally made suggestions for future research. The key informants of the study comprised senior management such as CEO/MD, Marketing Manager, Business/ Operations Manager. Others were IT, Director Client Relations.

Keywords: *International Marketing Strategy, Information Communication Technology, Firm Performance & Kenya.*

1.1 Introduction

Business has been evolving over the years and great strides have been made with the advancement in technology and technological processes. Globalization and technology has opened up many geographical areas such that firms can be seen to strive to take advantage of these developments. The current business era is aptly referred to as the digital age in reference to the technological advancements which have enabled businesses to collaborate with each other and grow. Risko and Wiwczarowski (2014) backs up this view by stating that a favorable environment for international businesses is due to globalization, information technology development and strengthening of WTO-GATT. The internet, for instance, has made people from all over the world to connect as is illustrated in the way products and or services from various parts of the globe can be marketed and exchanged at the click of a button and almost on a real time basis. International marketing has thus gained prominence over time and is more empowering now to the consumer due to these innovations.

As technology in itself is considered an enabler (Howells, 2005), information communication technology development has provided an enabling business environment (Luchetti & Sterlacchini, 2004). Its adoption is greatly influencing how businesses are run such that firms have gained efficiency at reduced costs and increased the size of prospective markets (Luchetti *et.al*, 2004). The interest in international marketing by firms, and how to go about it, through the influence of information communication technology as one of the factors presents an opportunity for more research by scholars.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) in its current form is a relatively new area and is interchangeably referred to as information technology (IT). The ICT term means convergence of unified communication encompassing range of technologies such as computers and computer software for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing and analyzing (ICT Authority, 2014). UNCTAD (2011) gives broad concept of information communication technology changing the lives of the world's population. OECD (2009a), as cited in UNCTAD (2011) notes that information communication technology covers a diversity of information communication technology products, goods and services that enable the functioning of information processing and communication through electronic means.

Bloom, Garicano, Sadun and Reenen (2014) discuss that information communication technology has two distinct components that comprise cheap storage processing of data being easier to access via information technology while the communication component comprises cheap wired and wireless communication. The communication components communicate with each other through email and mobile devices (Bloom, *et.al*, 2014). UNCTAD (2011) groups the information communication technology equipment into communication equipment, computers and peripherals, manufacturing services for ICT equipment, consumer electronics and components, business and productivity.

In giving perspective on what the concept entails, Hollenstein (2004), discusses some of the benefits of information communication technology adoption which includes saving labour through automation of internal processes and, lowering inventory requirements. Autor, Levy and Murnane (2003) in their research established that computerization is linked with diminished labour input of monotonous manual and cognitive tasks and improved labour input of non-routine cognitive tasks. Bloom, *et.al*, (2014) thus cite Autor, *et.al*, (2003) and summarise the argument by stating that

automation is the key way by which information communication technology impacts division of labour.

Hamill and Gregory (1997), agree that an internet connection enhances communication with existing foreign business partners and produces substantial information on market trends. Before computer networks became so widespread, (Tolhurst *et.al*, 1994), researchers depended on printed materials such as journals, technical reports, letters, conferences and face to face meetings. As a result of various innovations, ICT has immensely had an impact on the way businesses are run and contributed to globalisation. This can be seen in the emergence of the internet and associated activities such as online procurement and payments; online conferences, training opportunities and social media usage.

McFarlane and Sakellariou (2002) confirm that information communication technology provides an increasing range of tools for manipulation of digital data as well as enable access to an immense variety and range of content which underpins the information age. Email is a significant part of communication on the internet as a whole (Collin, 1999) and it set precedence as the popular means of electronic communication, both at business/corporate and at an individual level. It utilized the capabilities of the internet (Cooper, *et.al*, 1995) and continues to be a leading electronic communication medium.

Social media has more than ever connected the world to the extent that various organizations are utilizing it as channel of formal communication with potential clients. Boyd and Ellison (2008) gives a definition on social network sites by stating that the sites are services that are accessed over a network connection (web based) that allow individuals to collaborate through the list of connections made within a restricted system. Boyd, *et.al*, (2008) further illustrate that as the phenomena of user generated content and the use of social media grew, websites began concentrating on media sharing and started becoming more collaborative. Examples of the common ones listed were Flickr (for photo sharing), YouTube (video sharing) and one of the most popular ones, Facebook. As an indication to show that online presence of an organization is key, Briones, Kuch, Lim and Yin (2011) demonstrate that social media is necessary and effective in the emergent digital age due to the use of primarily Twitter and Facebook by Red Cross in the development of two way dialogue.

In relation to this study, Bazini and Elmazi (2009) give further impetus by stating that information communication technology developments permeate every aspect of tourism marketing. Bazini, *et.al*, (2009) further highlights that rapid advancements of information technology notably World Wide Web (www) as well as the internet have generated opportunities and challenges for the tourism sector. This is a similar view shared by Garin-Munoz and Perez-Amaral (2011) who posits that the sector has been a pioneer in development and adoption of ICT applications through which there has been emergence of competitive markets hence contributing to lowering of tourist products. Stienmetz, Levy and Boo (2012) suggest that the internet has been an important information communication technology channel in destination management and tourism primarily due to the fact that it facilitates the transmission of information and communication in a fast and inexpensive technique. The most popular channel in the tourism area has been the destination websites (Stienmetz, *et.al*, 2012). Information communication technology adoption thus plays a key role in enhancing business transactions.

1.2 Tour firms in Kenya

According to the World Tourism Organization, Africa attracted less than 4% of the total world tourists in 2012 and years earlier in 1997 it accounted for 2% (GoK, 2013). This would be considered rather slow growth. The tourism industry in Kenya is considered a big contributor to the country's economy. It is the country's third major foreign exchange earner behind tea and horticulture and it is also a key employer, contributing to about 13.7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 12% of total wage employment (GoK, 2013). The World Bank Group (2010) noted Kenya as a tourism jewel despite the issues that affected it in 2008 which led to the deterioration in the number of tourists visiting the country. Subsequent elections have also led to a further decline on number of visitors to the country as has been noted in various media, both local and international. This necessitated the need to aggressively market the country.

The country is famed for its various product lines such as the 'safari' tourism, coastal, business and conference tourism. The Government of Kenya is therefore committed to the growth in this sector through the creation of bodies such as Kenya Tourism Board (KTB). KTB is a parastatal body mandated to market Kenya both locally and internationally and on its website, the organization markets Kenya interactively as shown by the listing of the country's attractions as well as directory resources. Through visiting the website www.magicalkenya.com, a potential visitor gets to experience a virtual tour of the country before they set out to make physical visit to the country. The website also has quick links to tour operators, accommodation and tourism attractions. The Kenya Tourism Development Corporation is mandated to extend investment financing for the tourism industry.

The Vision 2030 Plan, identifies tourism as one of the top priority sectors towards achieving its development blue print of making Kenya one of the tourism destinations globally (GoK, 2012). The industry includes hotels, hospitality industry, suppliers, government, and students. Other associated auxiliary services include tour van operator, air-travel operator, forex bureaus, language centers, tourism literature/newsletters publications, and international conference and delegates facilities.

Tour operators form part of the link that offer services to the travelling public hence it is critical for them to be familiar with the opportunities and challenges that impact performance while marketing the country as a destination. Holloway (1998) as cited by Roper (2005) defines tour operators as firms that procure separate elements of services such as accommodation and transport which they combine into a package and sell directly or indirectly to consumers.

Additionally, World Bank (2010) considers the tour firms as critical industry intermediaries that are well integrated into worldwide distribution systems that link suppliers, customers and other intermediaries, seamlessly. In addition to being intermediaries, Trunfio, Petruzzellis and Nigro (2006) note that tour operators also address and influence the demand towards destinations hence stimulating the need for tourism. Caldwell and Freire (2004) suggest that travel and tourism is one of the fastest evolving industries and ranks first among the export groups. Algieri, *et.al*, (2017) aptly note that in the previous years, international tourism has undergone sustained growth and consequently becoming one of the major and rapidly growing economic sectors worldwide.

Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO) is one of the foremost tourism trade associations in Kenya that represents the interests of the leading and most experienced tour operators in the

country. Its mandate is to ensure that the tour operators uphold professionalism in the services that they offer. The membership which comprises over 400 firms, offer a wide range of services (KATO, 2017). The tour firms do handle a small number of visitors as noted from previous studies.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of information communication technology (ICT) on the relationship between international marketing strategy and performance of tour firms in Kenya.

2.1 Literature Review

Diffusion of innovation theory which anchors the information communication technology concepts, originated in communication, as one of the early social science theories. A key underpinning of the theory is that innovations will be adopted more rapidly if they are perceived as being better than previous options (Rodgers, 2003). It is an extensively utilized theoretical framework in the subject of technology diffusion and adoption as noted by Sahin (2006). It is worth noting that innovation is communicated through particular channels over time, through this process. Murphy, Olaru, Schegg and Frey (2003) explain that scholars have studied how organizations and individuals adopt new technologies referred to as diffusion of innovations, from different perspectives.

Sanchez, Ruiz and Zarco (2007), state that innovation orientation has a bearing on the technology decisions that a firm makes and in that way, this ultimately leads to performance of the firm. Ghemawat (2001) notes that information technology and especially global communication is changing the world into a small comparatively similar place. Globalization accelerates technology through increased competition and propagates it through foreign direct investment. It is worth to note that globalization and information technology (IT) are correlated in that globalization of production and financial markets, is as a result of reduction in communication costs and rapid technological change. From a technological perspective Keegan (2008) explains that distance was the pre- contemporary world variable of highest significance. Internet is totally independent of distance.

The internet is a connection of networks (Bradley 1999) through-out the world. As aptly stated by Levitt (1983), a dominant power, drives the world towards a converging commonality and that power is technology. The internet has improved the way we trade goods for money and has immensely reduced the geographical barriers between buyers and sellers. Pirakatheeswari (2009) outlines its efficacy and how it enables a manufacturer in India and a consumer from any part of the world to trade through the World Wide Web.

Moen, Madsen and Aspelund (2008) found that international Danish and Norwegian SMEs did not frequently utilize ICT. It was mainly used for search of market information and for development of long term customer relationships. In business marketing, this consequently presented new understanding on the limitations and the potential of ICT in international business.

In another related study, Aspelund and Moen (2008) attempted to address the relationship between the advances in information communication technology and the growing number of small international firms. The study found that to an extent, information communication technology enabled small firms with strong international visions and with advanced technology, to follow

niche strategies in international markets. Hynes (2010) for purposes of clarity had categorized SMEs into three categories as follows: micro firm as a firm which has less than ten (10) employees; small firm as a firm which has less than fifty (50) staff and medium firm as a firm which has a workforce of less than two hundred and fifty (250) workers.

Lee, Huang and Chang (2017) studied the performance effect of technological diversification by incorporating financial slacks and firm size as moderators. The study confirmed that expansions of the technological capabilities of a firm, is a significant determinant of performance and that technological diversification and performance is positively moderated by a firm's abundant financial resources, greater size and a combination of these factors.

Ackroyd (2002) argues that productivity has been impacted considerably due to the influence of new technology. The availability of integrated managed information systems (MIS) has contributed to the effective coordination of otherwise physically remote plants and offices. In what may be seen to be the convergence of marketing and technology coming together, Sheth, *et.al*, (2005) outlined what constitutes e-marketing strategies for example as demonstrated in the use of technologies such as mobile phones to conduct marketing firms' communication. Typically through the utilization of e-marketing, there would be an increase in reach and a reduction in cost which would be the goal of any firm. To illustrate this fact, Sheth *et.al* (2005) further outlines the existence of provision of products and services in digitized format for instance in the airline industry where e-marketing strategies allows for provision of e-tickets and boarding passes.

Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) note that social media is gaining a reputation as an important element of destination marketing organization (DMO) strategy. They further affirm that social media equips destination management organizations with a tool to enable them reach a global audience using limited resources.

2.2 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

The relationship between international marketing strategy that comprises product, place/distribution, competitive pricing, promotion; information communication technology that comprises use of websites, social media and automation of internal business processes; and firm performance that comprises financial (foreign exchange earnings; sales revenues) and non-financial (visitors from new /source markets; partnerships with firms overseas/reciprocating businesses) is depicted in Figure 1.

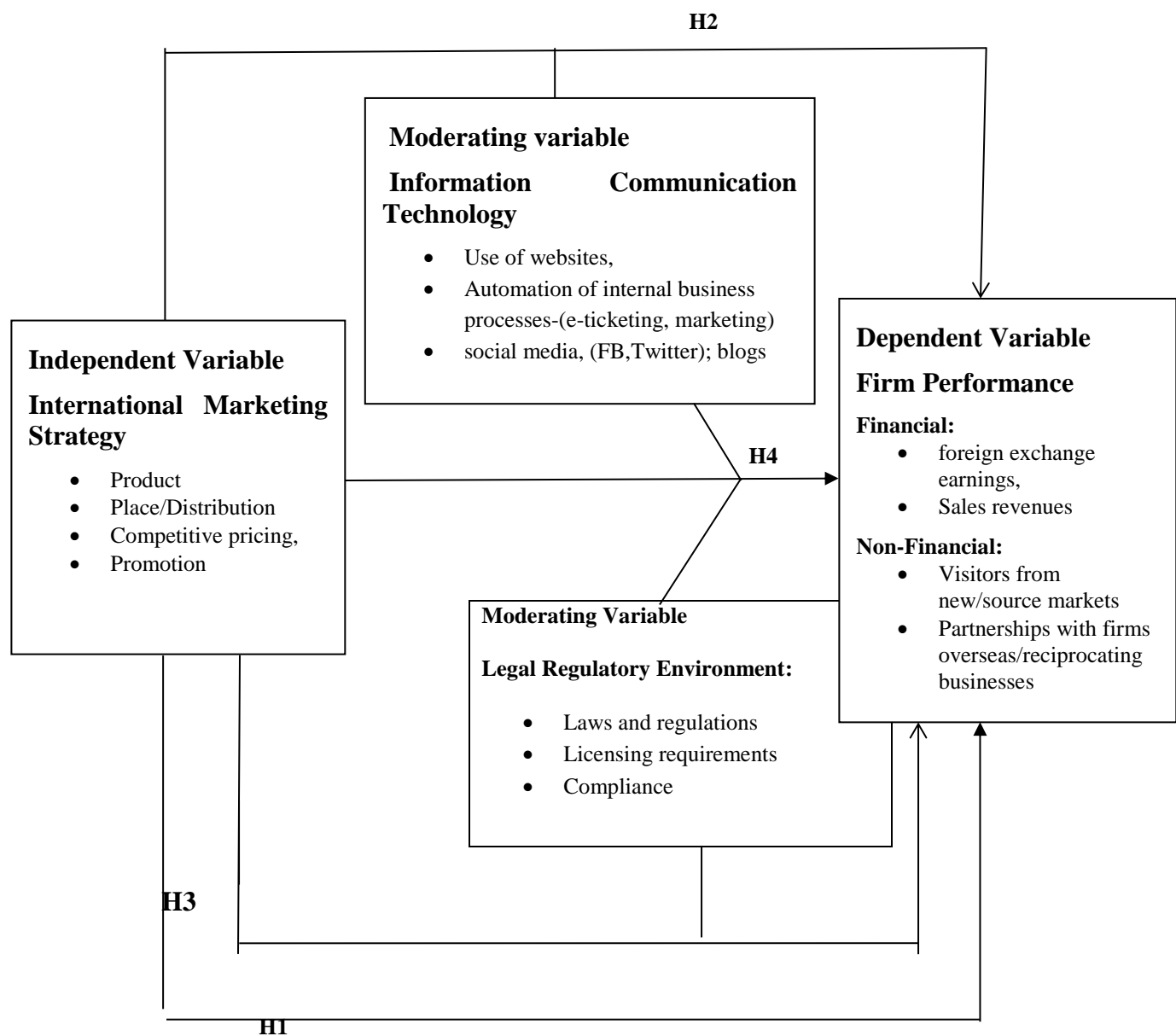


Figure 1: Conceptual model

2.2 Hypotheses of the study

From the conceptual model in Figure 1, firm performance is directly influenced by international marketing strategy. The hypothesis derived from the literature review is stated as follows:

H₀: The relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance is influenced by information communication technology

3.1 Methodology

The study took the approach of a descriptive cross sectional survey as it effectively connected the empirical data to the objectives of the study at a specific point in time. A number of scholars have successfully used this approach (Njeru, 2013; Yabs, 2012; Njanja, *et.al* 2012; Kosure, 2015; and Kithusi, 2015).

The study relied on both secondary and primary data. Primary data was collected based on a questionnaire developed on the concepts of the study aligned to its objectives and hypotheses, as used by previous researchers (Machuki, 2011; Njeru, 2013, Fuentes Fuentes, Saez & Montes, 2004; Hollenstein, 2004). The questionnaire consisted of both structured and unstructured questions and was divided into: background information, firm international marketing strategy, information communication technology and firm performance.

The secondary data was collected from published sources such as the tour association (KATO) website, firm websites, magazines, newspapers, tourism fairs/exhibitions such as the Tourism Fair held at Sarit Centre, Nairobi on 14th to 18th March, 2018. Additional secondary data was also obtained from brochures fliers from entry and exit points and from other previous researches. Both electronic and physical methods were used to administer and follow up on the respondents. The questionnaire was first distributed electronically via electronic mail (email), as all the targeted respondents had listed email contacts on the register, as retrieved from the KATO website. Prior to the start of the actual data collection exercise, the researcher made the necessary arrangements such as reviewing some of the tour operator guides, magazines to establish the office contacts and or contact persons. The researcher engaged a team of research assistants who had been trained prior to the start of the data collection exercise and they also provided additional administrative support.

4.1 Reliability and Validity

4.1.1 Reliability Test

The reliability of an instrument refers to its ability to produce consistent and stable measurements. Bagozzi (1994) expounds that reliability can be discussed from two perspectives: the extent of accuracy and the extent of inaccuracy. Cronbach alpha was used in the study to measure internal consistency by determining how well items on a test relate to all other items and to the total test internal coherence of the data. The reliability is expressed as a coefficient between 0 and 1 thus the higher the coefficient, the more reliable the test is.

As shown in Table 1, all variables were reliable with a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient greater than 0.7. Specifically firm performance (FP) with 18 items had the highest reliability ($\alpha=.937$) followed by information communication technology (ICT) with 22 items ($\alpha=.910$) and international marketing strategy (IMS) ($\alpha=.875$) with 16 items. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was very high, that is, Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient ($\alpha=.959$) with 71 items hence the instrument was reliable and could be used for further analysis.

Table 1: Reliability Results

Variable	Items	Cronbach's alpha (a)
IMS	16	0.875
ICT	22	0.910
LREG	15	0.881
FP	18	0.937
Overall	71	0.959

Source: Primary Data

4.1.2 Test of validity

Validity test is done to show the degree to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Kothari, 2004). The questionnaire was shared with various parties to get their opinion on the suitability of its use before pilot testing. The questionnaire had first been piloted informally with the research assistants to see if they could answer and or understand the questions and if the questions would be easily understood by the intended recipients.

Prior to that, the instrument had also been reviewed by scholars and fellow PhD students and also by the researcher's academic supervisors during the various stages of the thesis proposal development stage and subsequent presentations before it was formally accepted. This was done before the commencement of the actual data collection exercise. The aim was to refine it to ensure that the questions were easily understood, aligned to the research objective and that the entire questionnaire/ set of questions were applicable to the target population and industry. The areas of review included the length of the questionnaire as if it was too long then respondents would get discouraged. This has been noted previously by Mugenda, *et.al* (1999). It was also pertinent to review the duration spent in filling it thus the researcher, having indicated that it would take not more than 20 minutes, needed to determine approximately how many minutes it took to fill and if the wording and sentences were easily understood.

It was also reviewed by a tourism stakeholder who was not part of the population of study and was to assist in testing on if the questions resonated with the tourism industry and with the tour operators in particular. The tourism stakeholder had advised that he would find it easier to answer it as long there was no question insinuating financial figures or requiring him as a respondent, to give out customer information and also the questionnaire should not be too long. The researcher took all this feedback into consideration and this is what informed the nature of how the questions were structured.

The actual pilot test with the tour firms was carried out using a sample of 27 respondents which was 10% of the 270 firms under study. They were randomly selected by using formulae i.e. since the firms on the list were listed according to categories, the pilot needed to be representative of all

the categories. There were 5 categories in total. The researcher randomly picked 6 firms each from Category A & Category D; 12 firms from Category E; 1 firm from Category B and 2 firms from Category C.

The exercise commenced as the country was gearing up for elections and at the time, a small number of the firms had scaled down their operations or applying a “wait and see” approach before they engage in any activities. Accompanying the (pilot) questionnaire was the letter from KATO HQ to introduce the researcher to the members and to request for their participation. Thus out of the 27 firms that were contacted, 8 firms responded within a short period of time. Five respondents responded within two days and another three firms thereafter. They confirmed that the questionnaire was straightforward and the questions were easily understood. There being no further changes to the questionnaire, and also the input from the academic supervisors having been incorporated, the questionnaire was then administered to the rest of the intended respondents.

4.2 Measures of Information Communication Technology

The sub constructs which were used to measure information communication technology were: use of websites, automation of internal business processes and social media. Respondents were asked to rate the statements posed on the variable measures of information communication technology by indicating the extent to which the same applied in their respective firms. Responses were given on a 5- Point Likert type scale ranging from 1 being not at all to 5 being to a very large extent. The scores of ‘not at all’ and ‘To a small extent’ have been taken to represent a statement affirmed to, as to a limited extent, equivalent to mean score of 0 to 2.5. The score of ‘To a moderate extent’ has been taken to represent a statement affirmed to, as to a moderate extent, equivalent to a mean score of 2.6 to 3.4. The score of ‘To a large extent’ and ‘To a very large extent’ have been taken to represent a statement affirmed to, as to a great extent, equivalent to a mean score of 3.5 to 5.0.

Table 2: Mean and Stand Deviation for Measures of Information Communication Technology

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	CV
Use Of Websites			
Frequently updated websites	4.29	0.807	0.188
Website in international languages	2.74	1.453	0.530
Interactive website	4.3	0.835	0.194
Website policies - customer info protection	4.53	0.695	0.153
Staff recruitment - ICT skills	4.13	1.008	0.244
Upskilling of staff in tech	4.32	0.84	0.194
Overall	4.05	0.939	0.232
Automation Of Internal Business Processes			
Improved service delivery	4.3	0.86	0.200
Best ICT practices	4.01	0.84	0.209
Internal processes automation - E-marketing	4.09	0.907	0.222
Internal processes automation - Electronic banking	4.09	1.037	0.254
Internal processes automation - Mobile banking	4.07	1.207	0.297
Marketing activities support	4.19	0.799	0.191
Tech tools investment	4.65	0.598	0.129
Overall	4.2	0.903	0.215
Social Media			
Social media - Twitter / FB	4.09	0.996	0.244
Electronic platforms - SMS / WhatsApp	3.05	3.297	1.081
LinkedIn	2.49	1.105	0.444
Other media e.g Faves, TripAdvisor	3.42	1.22	0.357
Active social media pages	4.05	1.155	0.285
Real-time updated pages	3.8	1.157	0.304
Brand marketing tools	3.89	1.014	0.261
Customer feedback mechanism	4.39	0.8	0.182
Integrity of transactions	4.19	1.049	0.250
Overall	3.71	1.31	0.353

Source: Primary Data

As shown in Table 2 under use of websites; to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: Website policies - customer info protection (mean of 4.53, std dev of 0.695 and CV of .153), Upskilling of existing staff to keep abreast with technology (mean of 4.32, std dev of 0.84 and CV of .194), website is interactive and easy to navigate ((mean of 4.30, std dev of 0.835 and CV of .194) and firm's frequently updated with information on products and services (mean of 4.29, std

dev of 0.807 and CV of .188). The statement that Website information translated into various international languages had the highest CV value of 0.530. The statement that customer information protected based on website policies had the lowest CV of 0.153. This means that the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

On automation of internal business processes –(e-marketing, e-ticketing); to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: investment in technology tools such as computers (desktops, laptops, tablets), mobile phone (mean of 4.65, std dev 0.598 and CV of .129) , improvement on firms’s service delivery (mean of 4.3, std dev of 0.86 and CV of .200), support of marketing activities of the firm (mean of 4.19, std dev 0.799 and CV of .191), embraced automation of internal business processes such as e-marketing (mean of 4.09, std dev 0.907 and CV of .222), embraced automation of internal business processes such as electronic banking (credit card payments), embraced automation of internal business processes such as mobile banking(mean of 4.07, std dev of 1.207 and CV of .297), best ICT practices embedded in firm’s business operations (mean of 4.01, std dev of 0.84 and CV of .209).

The statement that embraced automation of internal business processes such as: mobile banking had the highest CV value of 0.297. The statement that investment in technology tools such as computers (desktops, laptops, tablets), mobile phone had the lowest CV of 0.129. This means that the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

On Social media (Facebook/Twitter), blogs; to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: customer feedback mechanism (mean of 4.39, std dev of 0.8 and CV of 0.182), integrity of transactions conducted on social media sites (mean of 4.19, std dev 1.049 and CV of 0.250), use of social media and electronic platforms –Twitter /Facebook (mean of 4.09, std dev of 0.996 and CV of 0.244), active social media pages (mean 4.05, std dev of 1.155 and CV of .285), brand marketing tools (mean of 3.89, std dev of 1.014 and CV of .261), social media pages are updated in real time basis (mean of 3.8, std dev of 1.157 and CV of .304). The statement that: use of social media and electronic platforms as follows- SMS Services/ Whatsapp/ Telegram/Hike Groups, had the highest CV value of 1.081. The statement that: customer feedback mechanism, had the lowest CV of 0.182. This means the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

In summary, on the measure of information communication technology, automation of internal business processes (e-marketing, e-ticketing) had the highest overall mean of 4.2 and followed by use of websites which had an overall mean of 4.05 and finally social media(Facebook/Twitter),blogs which had an overall mean of 3.71. This means that majority of the respondents to a great extent consider automation of internal business processes as the best contributor on information technology to the firm.

4.3 Measures of Firm Performance

The sub constructs which were used to measure firm performance were: financial foreign exchange earnings, sales revenues, and non financial-visitors from new/source markets and partnerships with firms based overseas/reciprocating businesses. Respondents were asked to rate the statements posed on the variable measures of firm performance by indicating the extent to which the same applied in their respective firms. Responses were given on a 5-Point Likert type scale ranging from 1 being not at all to 5 being to a very large extent. The scores of ‘not at all and ‘To a small

extent' have been taken to represent a statement affirmed to, as to a limited extent, equivalent to mean score of 0 to 2.5. The score of 'To a moderate extent' has been taken to represent a statement affirmed to, as to a moderate extent, equivalent to a mean score of 2.6 to 3.4. The score of 'To a large extent' and 'To a very large extent' have been taken to represent a statement affirmed to, as to a great extent, equivalent to a mean score of 3.5 to 5.0.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation for Measures of Firm Performance

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	CV
Foreign exchange earnings			
Increased number - international visitors	4.27	0.989	0.232
Foreign exchange earnings - stable currency rates	3.85	1.005	0.261
Foreign exchange earnings - travel advisories	4.48	0.940	0.210
Foreign exchange earnings - international business expansion	4.14	0.829	0.200
Overall	4.190	0.940	0.224
Sales revenues			
Sales increase - demand for products	4.23	0.831	0.196
Sales increase - ICT platforms	4.08	0.814	0.200
Sales increase - competitive pricing strategy	4.29	0.735	0.171
Sales increase - untapped markets	3.57	1.005	0.282
Overall	4.04	0.846	0.209
Visitors from new source markets			
Increase in first time visitors	3.92	0.991	0.253
Increase in loyal / return customers	4.26	0.885	0.208
Service delivery improvement – automation	4.2	0.841	0.200
Easily accessible info - products & services	4.41	0.748	0.170
Tourism products diversification	4.07	0.861	0.212
Overall	4.17	0.865	0.207
Partnership with firms based overseas/reciprocating businesses			
Efficient booking - tour requests	4.35	0.821	0.189
Efficient marketing - products & services	4.24	0.818	0.193
Cost control measures	4.32	0.814	0.188
Faster resolution - customer queries	4.55	0.663	0.146
Qualified employees	4.6	0.589	0.128
Overall	4.41	0.741	0.168

As shown in Table 3, under financial –foreign exchange earnings; to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: impact of travel advisories on foreign exchange earnings (mean of 4.48, std dev of 0.940 and CV of .210), increase in number of international visitors (mean of 4.27, std

dev of 0.989 and CV of .232), expanded international business opportunities (mean of 4.14, std dev of 0.829 and CV of .200) and stable international currency rates (mean of 3.85, std dev of 1.005 and CV of .261). The statement stable international currency rates had the highest CV value of 0.261. The statement that expanded international business opportunities had the lowest CV of 0.200. This means that the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

On financial –sales revenues, to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: competitive pricing strategy has contributed to increase in sales (mean of 4.29, std of 0.735 and CV of 0.171), increase in sales due to demand for our products (mean of 4.23, std of 0.831 and CV of 0.196), increase in sales due to the use of ICT-driven platforms (mean of 4.08, std dev of 0.814 and CV of .200) and revenue from untapped/ overlooked markets (mean of 3.57, std dev of 1.005 and CV of .282). The statement that revenue from untapped, overlooked markets had the highest CV value of 0.282. The statement competitive pricing strategy has contributed to increase in sales had the lowest CV of 0.171. This means that the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

On non financial- visitors from new source markets; to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: information pertaining to products and services is easily accessible (mean of 4.41, std dev of 0.748 and CV of 0.170), increase in loyal/return customers from source markets (mean of 4.26, std dev of 0.885 and CV of 0.208), automation of our processes has led to efficient service delivery for visitors (mean of 4.2, std dev 0.841 and CV of .200), diversification of tourism products (mean of 4.07, std dev of 0.861 and CV of .212) and increase in number of first time international visitors (mean of 3.92, std dev of 0.991 and CV of 0.253).

The statement increase in number of first time international visitors had the highest CV value of 0.253. The statement information pertaining to products and services is easily accessible had the lowest CV of 0.170. This means that the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

On non financial partnerships with firms based overseas/ reciprocating businesses; to a great extent; the respondents were of the opinion that: qualified, well trained employees (mean of 4.6, std dev of 0.589 and CV of .128), faster resolution of customer queries, complaints (mean of 4.55, std dev of 0.663 and CV of .146), efficient booking of tour requests (mean of 4.35, std dev of 0.821 and CV of .189), cost control measures (mean of 4.32, 0.814 and CV of 0.188) and efficient marketing of our products and services (mean of 4.24, std dev of 0.818 and CV of 0.193). The statement efficient marketing of our products and services had the highest CV value of 0.193. The statement qualified, well trained employees had the lowest CV of 0.128. This means that the statement reported the lowest variation in response.

In summary, on the measures of firm performance, partnerships with firms based overseas/ reciprocating businesses, had the highest overall mean of 4.41, followed by foreign exchange earnings which had an overall mean of 4.19, visitors from new source markets had overall mean of 4.17 and finally sales revenues which had an overall mean of 4.04. This means that majority of the respondents to a great extent consider partnerships with firms based overseas/ reciprocating businesses, as the best contributor on firm performance.

4.4 Test of Hypothesis

This section presents the findings of tests of hypothesis of the study. The study focused on four specific objectives and four hypotheses. The hypothesis that were tested were: The relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance is influenced by information communication technology;

A composite index for each of the study variables was computed as the sum of the responses divided by the total number of measurement items. International marketing strategy was measured as a composite index of product, place/distribution, competitive pricing and promotion. Information communication technology was measured as a composite index of use of websites, automation of internal business processes-(e-ticketing, marketing) and social media, (FB, Twitter); blogs while firm performance was measured as a composite index of foreign exchange earnings, sales revenues, visitors from new/source markets and partnerships with firms' overseas/reciprocating businesses.

4.5 Moderating Effect of Information Communication Technology on the Relationship between International Marketing Strategy and Firm Performance

The second objective was to establish the influence of information communication technology (ICT) on the relationship between international marketing strategy and performance of tour firms in Kenya. It assessed how the effect of independent variable on dependent variable changes when a moderator is introduced.

Ho: The relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance is influenced by information communication technology

Stepwise regression analysis proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used. The first step involved testing the influence of international marketing strategy and performance of tour firms in Kenya. The second step involved testing the effect of independent variables (international marketing strategy and information communication technology) on criterion variable (performance of tour firms in Kenya). In the third step, an interaction term (computed as the product of standardized values for international marketing strategy and information communication technology) was introduced and tested for its significance on firm performance. Moderation is established if the effect of interaction on performance of tour firms in Kenya in the third step is significant. The regression results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Results for Moderating Effect of Information Communication Technology on the Relationship between International Marketing Strategy and Firm Performance

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics R Square Change	F Change
1	.682 ^a	.465	.460	.44221	.465	81.773
2	.703 ^a	.494	.483	.43244	.494	45.402
3	.703 ^a	.495	.478	.43445	.495	30.037
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.991	1	15.991	81.773	.000 ^b
	Residual	18.382	94	.196		
	Total	34.372	95			
2	Regression	16.981	2	8.490	45.402	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.392	93	.187		
	Total	34.372	95			
3	Regression	17.008	3	5.669	30.037	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.365	92	.189		
	Total	34.372	95			
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.542	.299		5.161	.000
	International Marketing Strategy	.683	.076	.682	9.043	.000
2	(Constant)	1.229	.322		3.814	.000
	International Marketing Strategy	.521	.102	.520	5.094	.000
3	ICT	.240	.105	.235	2.301	.024
	(Constant)	.675	1.500		.450	.654

Model Summary					
International Marketing Strategy	.680	.433	.679	1.571	.120
ICT	.389	.406	.380	.958	.341
Interaction Term	-.208	.551	-.281	-.378	.706

a. Dependent Variable: Firm Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), International Marketing Strategy

c. Predictors: (Constant), ICT, International Marketing Strategy

b. Predictors: (Constant), Interaction term, ICT, International Marketing Strategy

In step one international marketing strategy was regressed on firm performance. The results in Table 4 indicated that international marketing strategy accounted for 46.5 percent of the variation in firm performance ($R^2 = 0.465$, $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). The overall model was significant ($F = 81.773$, $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). International marketing strategy was also individually statistically significant ($\beta = 0.683$, $t = 9.043$, $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). This implied that one unit increases in international marketing strategy causes units increase in firm performance. The findings in first step were significant.

In step two when moderator, information communication was introduced the influence of international marketing strategy on firm performance improved. Information communication was and international marketing strategy accounted for 49.4 percent variation on the firm performance. The overall model was significant ($F = 45.402$, $P\text{-value} = 0.00$). F change was significant. Similarly beta coefficients were statistically significant ($\beta_1 = 0.521$, $t = 5.094$, $P\text{-value} = 0.00$ & $\beta_2 = 0.240$, $t = 2.301$, $P\text{-value} = 0.024$). The findings in the second step were significant.

In step three, the interaction term was introduced in the regression model. All the variables international marketing strategy, information communication and interaction term were entered into the regression model. The findings shows that R^2 (.495) did not improve significantly from step two to step three. The R^2 increase of 0.1 percent was an indication that the interaction term did not have a significant influence on firm performance. The regression coefficients showed significant improvement when the interaction term was include in the model. The overall model in step three was statistically significant ($F = 30.037$, $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). The results supported the hypothesis that the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance is influenced by information communication technology. Hence hypothesis two was supported.

4.6 Discussions

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of information communication technology (ICT) on the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance of tour firms in Kenya. This objective was tested through testing the hypothesis H2 which stated that the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance is influenced by information communication technology.

The testing of the hypothesis was done in three steps using stepwise regression and the last step involved testing the significance of interaction term for its significance on firm performance. Moderation is considered to have taken place if this step is significant. The measurable dimensions of the moderator variable, information communication technology were: use of websites; social media (FB, Twitter); blogs and automation of internal business processes (e-marketing, e-ticketing).

The finding was that information communication technology as a moderator improved the influence of international marketing strategy on firm performance. Information communication technology accounted for 49.4 per cent variation on firm performance. The overall model was significant ($f=45.402$, $P\text{-value}=0.000$). F change was significant. The interaction term was introduced in the regression model and the finding shows that R^2 (.495) did not improve significantly. The R^2 increase which was at 0.1 percent showed the interaction did not have a significant influence on firm performance however the overall model showed that it was statistically significant. ($F=30.037$, $P\text{-value}=0.000$). The results supported the second hypothesis of this study that the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance is influenced by information communication technology.

This overall finding on information communication technology is consistent with Mihajlovic (2012) who in a study on tour operators in Croatia stated that introduction of information technology is extremely significant and concludes that information communication technology leads to rationalization which is evident in time management. Pires, *et.al*, (2006) found that marketing strategy rests on a control premise and further states that information communication technology is enhancing the number and quality of value propositions by enhancing consumer and empowering them.

Further on tour operator activities, Ma, Buhalis and Song (2003) noted that in China, a large number of tour operators have little adoption of information communication technology facilities other than using desktop computer for typing purposes. This is not fully consistent with the finding in the current study which found that majority of the firms had invested in technology tools, had embedded other information communication technology practices and also supported firm marketing activities to a great extent through application of information communication technology. Hudson and Lang (2002), noted that as far back then, destination marketing organizations were slow to adopt information technology in their operations and that very few had designed websites to enable customers to move quickly and easily. The current study however found that majority of the firms already had websites which were frequently updated to a great extent but may not have been fully in use.

A SWOT analysis of the Kenyan tourism sector had revealed that there was low adoption of information communication technology (institutional /sectoral) amongst many other weaknesses. (GoK, 2013). The current study however reveals that there is an appreciation on the general use of information communication technology aspects although there is still more that needs to be done in view of the ever changing technology landscape.

5.1 Conclusion

The moderating effect of information communication technology on the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance, the study established that information

communication technology and international marketing strategy accounted for 49.4% variation on firm performance. Moderation is established if the effect of interaction on performance of tour firms in Kenya is significant. The interaction of information communication technology with international marketing strategy showed that the firm performance did not improve significantly. The R^2 increase of 0.1% indicated that interaction term did not have significant influence. However the overall model was statistically significant.

This study was based on the tourism sector specifically on tour firms in Kenya. The theories that grounded the entire study were: Internationalization Theory, Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory, Environmental Dependence Theory of Organizations and Profit Impact of Market Strategy (PIMS) Theory. All the four hypotheses were supported. All the variables correlated were positive and statistically significant. International marketing strategy and information communication technology independently related strong, positively and statistically significant with firm performance.

5.2 Implications of the Study

This study contributes to the knowledge of international marketing strategy, information communication technology, legal regulatory environment and firm performance theoretically by linking the internationalization theory, diffusion of innovation theory, profit impact of market theory and environmental dependence theory of organizations.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

The study findings supported the opinion that had been put forward that international marketing strategy has a direct relationship with firm performance. The internationalization theory anchored the study. Some of the theory proponents such as Buckley, et.al (1999) had indicated that firm internationalization is a key issue in international business research while Rundh (2003) had observed that several researches referred to internationalization process and export marketing. As this current study is based on a service industry, Shanker (2008) had noted that tourism as a service industry earns the country foreign exchange without exporting the goods or national wealth.

The study provides a basis for further empirical research. It tested the relationship between international marketing strategy and firm performance and as moderated by information communication technology and legal regulatory environment as separate moderators. It also tested the joint effect of the variables, international marketing strategy, information communication technology and legal regulatory environment on firm performance.

Other researchers can therefore have a basis to further research on the relationships and would expound on this particular research so as to fill in any knowledge gaps. A few researches have linked international marketing strategy, information communication technology, legal regulatory environment and firm performance in different contexts and independently but this study attempted to link all the variables together to extend knowledge. More so this study now provides knowledge in the area of study both theoretically and empirically in the context of Kenya.

5.4 Policy Implications

As the tourism sector is an important contributor to the economy, both in terms of being an employer and also a foreign exchange earner, the policy makers need to make informed decisions. The national government and county government can use this research to formulate or to reformulate their strategies in order to grow the sector. The government has already taken a step

forward in the recent creation of the Tourism Research Institute. This study can thus provide a starting point as a source of secondary data for the institute as the study makes contribution to evidence-based research to the tourism sector.

5.5 Implications for Practice

This study has shown that international marketing strategy is a strong predictor of performance and that information communication technology and legal regulatory environment play a significant role on the relationship. To the practitioners in the fields of marketing and international business, it may appear as though the areas are two separate functional areas but this study brings into sharp focus the synergy that is apparent between the two fields. This study focused on how tour firms may penetrate international markets to get international visitors to visit Kenya.

International marketing practitioners would perhaps derive some of the implications from this study to inform their decisions when drawing up strategies. The practitioners in the tourism sector are conducting their businesses during this current era of digitalization of various business sectors and even more evident, is the existence of the new innovations in place which may either grow their businesses or drive them out of business. For instance there are a number of applications (apps) and also websites that are fast becoming intermediaries in the tour travel industry. The potential international consumers are now more empowered and can essentially book their itineraries without involving a tour operator through using some of these platforms and complimenting with others. Examples of some of the platforms are Booking.com and Viator. The tour firms under the umbrella of KATO could consider creating an app that would be accessible to a wider reach through channels such as Google Play Store such that international visitors can access from mobile devices (mobile phones and tablets), complement this with access to the KATO website so as to engage the individual firms or collectively.

The practitioners can re-innovate mechanisms of using some of these platforms. Some of the suggested areas would be for the firms to use their social sites actively, include promotional offers and using language that resonates with the large demographic of travellers especially the youthful who are likely to use these facilities.

Another area is for the firms to look at having international brand ambassadors who are bloggers or vloggers (Youtube). The vloggers usually have a huge online social media following running into millions of subscribers thus making them influencers. As an example, at least two international vloggers/ social media influencers have recently visited Kenya and between them, they have approximately 3.9 million online followers. The tour firms in Kenya would need to tap into this by partnering with these personalities to drive up the numbers if they were to consider. The tour firms can also identify a Kenyan or Kenyans who may have huge international online following such as some of our sportsmen and women, film celebrities and other prominent personalities who they can partner with as brand ambassadors to bring in international visitors.

Information communication technology generally presents the tour operators with many opportunities but at the same time this is guided within the legal framework that protects the consumers as well as the service providers. Information communication technology has enabled sharing of data of all sorts and this must be protected at all costs within the various data protection frameworks. Therefore by partnering in this manner they would be assured of validated channels.

5.6 Implications for Methodology

The current study relied on a combination of methods to successfully carry out the research and subsequently to test the relationship between the variables. Tourism industry in Kenya has witnessed dwindling numbers over the last few years hence the contribution of tour firms is envisaged to be key.

The current study also used a combination of methods to collect data. Primary data was collected via questionnaire although short interviews were done where possible prior to the beginning of the research and in the course of the study so as to have a better overview of what entails the industry. Analysis was done using simple and multiple regression as well as correlation analysis so to determine the relationships among the variables. This generally confirms that the methodology that was used is suitable as the data that was collected could be organized and analysed appropriately.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

The study had a few limitations, as is common with any research but they did not affect the results or the quality of the research. The first limitation was the unwillingness and or unavailability of some of the respondents to participate in the survey. This was however partly attributed to the timing of the data collection exercise as it was during a prolonged electoral process period.

In the course of the research, there was hindrance of getting a singular repository of additional research data that was entirely specific to the tourism industry. To this end and in a rather timely manner, a research institute, Tourism Research Institute has since been launched, as at March, 2018. Although it is still at its formative stage, one of its mandates will be to provide guided research and provide a pool of research findings. Future researchers and academics who may research on the tourism industry, of which the tour firms are a valued stakeholder, or related thematic area will perhaps find it easier to access data going forward.

5.8 Suggestions for further research

This research focused on the tour firms who are members of the Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO). Future researchers might want to research on tour firms that are not members of KATO, the firms that are independent of any association membership.

Further, future research may also be focused in other institutional or sectoral areas that deal with tourism and also the new innovation of searching for accommodation and travel via application-driven platforms (“apps”). These are anchored on the disruptive technological innovations such as Airbnb and Uber respectively but they also operate within a legal framework. There are also other areas such as the virtual tour operator.

The study can also be replicated in other sectors such as education, manufacturing, agricultural or health to determine if similar results can be achieved.

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