

The Influence of Patient Focus on Competitive Advantage in Hospitals within Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence implementing patient focus has on competitive advantage in hospitals within Nairobi. The study sought to determine the influence patient focus has on competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi. The study looked at the following aspects of patient focus: Reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and staff attitude assurance. While the constructs for competitive advantage were patient satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and operations effectiveness. The study was guided by positivism philosophy and adopted a descriptive correlational research design that entailed testing of hypotheses. The study was limited to both private and public hospitals, within Nairobi, targeting patients, who were admitted in these hospitals for more than 3 days during the study period and senior employees of the same hospitals. The sampling frame for the participants was the senior and clinical administrative staff and the patients or their relatives within the period of study. Simple random sampling was used to select the hospitals of study. While stratified random sampling was used to select the patients. The study collected primary data using self-administered open- and close-ended questionnaires. The collected data were coded into SPSS Version 23 software and the analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings were presented using tables and figures. The findings illustrated that patient focus significantly influenced competitive advantage. High responsiveness and good attitude, being reliable and empathy and assuring the patients of their state best enhance patients' and employee satisfaction that led to competitive advantage.

Keywords: Hospital, Patients' satisfaction, Quality improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Patient focus is the first level of programming the quality journey of the hospital. It is the orientation of the hospital toward serving the needs of the client, through understanding their current and the future needs and expectation.¹ Since customer focus is completely interconnected to operational performance, higher customer satisfaction and better market and financial performance.² To have satisfied customers, organizations are learning that they must have a satisfied workforce first. This will lead to competitive advantage.³ While competitive advantage is the organization's ability to attain market superiority.⁴ It is the core concept of strategic management that every firm seeks to retain. Porter provided a framework that models an industry as being influenced by five forces.⁴ Porters advised strategic business managers to work toward developing a competitive advantage over the organizations' rival. One of the ways of gaining competitive advantage over the business rival is through cost differentiation; another way would be through product differentiation. This in turn acknowledges that human capital is a key component of an organization that leads attaining competitive advantage. This is further echoed by the World Health Organization (WHO) has championed and supported the growing interest in healthcare quality, through supporting projects that address aspects of quality, such as service delivery, training, management and technical guidance, and spreading awareness of healthcare quality issues that are patient focused.

Numerous studies have been conducted in Kenya to determine the influence customer focus on competitive advantage in other sectors.⁵ These studies were conducted on various aspects of total quality management (TQM) within Kenya; however, there is little evidence of research and literature on employee empowerment and its influence on competitive advantage in the Kenyan healthcare

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sector.⁶ The study therefore sought to determine the influence patients' focus has on competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi.

The study was based on the Deming theory of profound knowledge and the resource-based view. Total quality management is a people focused management system that aims at continual increment in competitive advantage at a sustainable, affordable cost and an integral part of high-level strategy that operates horizontally across all departments while ensuring that all employees are involved extending to customer and supply chain.⁷

The Deming theory of profound knowledge is a management philosophy grounded on system theory. The application of such theory within the organizational systems that lead to learning the implementation processes that contribute to the continuous improvement of the processes, services, products, and employee fulfillment that would result to customer satisfaction.⁸ The foundation of TQM is philosophical based on scientific methods, since they involve people, tools, systems, and methods. These systems allow change while the philosophy is unchanged.⁴ Therefore, TQM is the durable and persistently improving effort by

every person in an organization to understand, meet, and surpass the expectation of the customer while involving the employees.

Deming asserted that quality can only be from the customer point of view and measured through their satisfaction level.⁹ Application of TQM has in the past decades become a norm within the service industry with the goal of ensuring high levels of competitive advantage. This was also echoed further that TQM is the main strategy for sustaining competitive advantage and is a means of running businesses to enhance its complete effectiveness and high levels of customer satisfaction that attains world class status through focusing on the needs of the customer.¹⁰ To have satisfied customers, organizations are learning that they must have a satisfied workforce first who are able to utilize the organizational inputs effectively to deliver the end results.

Study Objectives

The objective of the study was to determine the influence patient focus has competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi.

Hypothesis

(H₀₁) Patient focus does not have any influence on competitive advantage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer focus is among the most important TQM principles, since customers are the utmost judges of the quality of products or services that they receive.¹¹ Therefore, customer focus requires establishing needs of the customer and satisfying them in achieving the goals of the organization. The acquired perceptions of satisfaction and value are influenced by many elements throughout the customer experiences of purchase.⁴

Therefore, an organization is said to uphold the quality of products or services if their customers are satisfied. Customer focus is the most critical criterion that businesses need to put much attention and direct adequate resources to meet their expectations and ultimately customer satisfaction.¹² In the business arena and service rendering market, more emphasis is put on ensuring that the customers' needs are met based on requirements and not theoretical measures.¹³ The most successful organization in implementing total quality programs has defined quality from the customers' viewpoint.⁹ Therefore, attention to customer focus is a major principle of TQM. It has been observed that, all satisfied customers are considered income-generating resource for the organization. The principle of customer focus in the field of strategic management is considered as the whole process of identifying and founding, retaining, increasing, and whenever necessary dismissing relationships with customers and other stakeholders.¹²

There is a need to integrate operations with the customer in mind across all functions of an organization by conducting regular customer satisfaction surveys in order to better understand the needs of the customer and if they are being well met.¹¹ An organization that is customer focused keeps the leadership aware of the quality programs that are of high importance to the customer. This in turn makes continuous quality improvement to be embedded within the organizational culture and other processes.⁴ It takes hard work and discipline for an organization to create a culture of customer focus. Within the service industry, the dimension of importance to customer focus is responsiveness, competency access, credibility, communication, collaboration, understanding the customer, and continuous improvement.⁴ The

needs and requirements of a customer are put in the customers' own word referred to as "the voice of the customer".

Customer focus is thought to be the key TQM principle that has a significant and direct positive influence on customer satisfaction results and ultimate competitive advantage.¹⁴ Whereby competitive advantage is the ultimate goal of any organization to achieve and sustain market superiority.¹² Firms implementing a customer focus approach can simultaneously achieve competitive strategies. The focus on improving the quality of products and services to the organization's current customers (thereby increasing customer value), leads both to lower costs of production (cost leadership) which produce both greater profits and lower prices, and differentiation (the firm's products and services are seen as providing higher levels of reliability, quality, and value).⁴ Businesses are recommended to conduct customer satisfaction surveys on a regular basis in order to acquire the customer requirements and needs.⁸ This in turn helps to design, to produce, to deliver, and to apply what the customer truly needs leading to higher satisfaction levels.

Furthermore, customer focus is completely interconnected to operational performance, higher customer satisfaction, and better market and financial performance. This is to imply that when an organization accurately appreciates the expectations and requirements of the customers through regular and timely communication while giving and acknowledging customers' feedback; such an organization get potential to deliverable, high quality, easily acceptable products or services to its customers. This, then, results to satisfied customers.

Systematic monitoring of patient feedback and its application in the healthcare service or process improvement can result to higher patient satisfaction levels. When a hospital appreciates the patients' existing and future needs, anticipations, and complaints accurately and on time, then the hospital leadership team knows where to invest in profitable areas and sustain competitive advantage, market share, and total profitability. Effective customer focus efforts increase operational performance, customer results, and market and financial performance as such competitive advantage.¹⁵ After all, customer focus is the initial point of any quality initiative within the organization. Since it defines the relationship the organization has with the customers in order to be able to determine the needs of the customer. To have satisfied customers, organizations are learning that they must have a satisfied workforce first who will carry out the operations effectively leading to competitive advantage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology focus on the research philosophy, research design, data collection, population, sampling, data analysis techniques, and presentation methods to be used in the study. The researcher applied a positivist research philosophy. Mixed research design was used to target employees and patients of hospitals within Nairobi, from whom data were collected through self-administered questionnaire. The target population was the hospital employees and patients of level four, five, and six public and private hospitals within Nairobi. Simple random sampling was used to select hospital employee while stratified random sampling was used to select the patients. The questions were placed on a five-point Likert scale. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The following assumptions were made in order to make it necessary for a successful regression: Normality test, linearity test, multicollinearity test, and homoscedasticity test.

Data analysis formula:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + \varepsilon_i;$$

Where:

- α denotes the y intercept where x is zero;
- β_i is regression weight attached to the exogenous variables;
- ε is the error term.

Where;

- Y = competitive advantage
- X_i = patient focus

The main findings of the study were comprehensively discussed as illustrated in the below results.

RESULTS

A census was performed for all the registered level four, level five, and level six hospitals within Nairobi. Of the 46 hospitals, 31 (67.4%) responded. One hundred and fifty-nine questionnaires were administered to the hospital employees out of which 134 (87.3%) were properly filled and returned. Furthermore, 134 out of 159 patient’s questionnaires were properly filled and returned representing a response rate of 83.7%.

The study sought to examine the extent to which patient focus influences competitive advantage in hospital within Nairobi. Patient focus was measured using the following parameters namely, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and staff attitude assurance. The measures for competitive advantage were patient satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and operational effectiveness.

The data for the variable were analyzed and results presented in table forms. The study used the factor analysis, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics to analyze and present the results. The descriptive statistics used were frequencies, mean, and standard deviation (SD). The inferential statistics used were correlation coefficients, Chi-squared, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multiple linear regression analysis.

Results for Factor Analysis on Patient Focus

The parameter of patient focus was measured using 14 items to produce suitable measures. Factor analysis was carried out upon the items to ascertain any correlated parameters with the intention of reducing any unnecessary and redundant data. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy value associated with patient focus was 0.672. The value for the Barlett’s test was $\chi^2 (91, N = 268) = 1009.163, p < 0.05$. The result of the KMO test for the parameters of patient focus was 0.672. This is >0.6 , therefore, the results reveal that the sample was adequate.

Results for Descriptive Statistics on Patient Focus

The descriptive statistics for employee empowerment are presented Table 1. Percentage (%) distributions, mean (M), and SDs were the descriptive statistical analysis carried out. To give their opinions on statements relating to the influence of employee empowerment on competitive advantage. A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the percentage distribution of the responses, mean, and SD were also examined.

Correlation between Patient Focus and Competitive Advantage

Table 2 shows that the constructs for patient focus strongly and significantly correlate with competitive advantage. The results

revealed that competitive advantage had a weak positive and statistically correlation with responsiveness and attitude, $r (268) = 0.437, p < 0.05$, reliability, $r (268) = 0.427, p < 0.05$, empathy, $r (268) = 0.421, p < 0.05$, and assurance, $r (268) = 0.436, p < 0.05$. The findings also indicated that patient focus significantly correlates with competitive advantage, $r (268) = 0.438, p < 0.05$.

Chi-Squared Test on Patient Focus

This study sought to examine if there was a statistically significant association between patient focus and competitive advantage. The findings showed that there was a strong and significant association between patient focus and competitive advantage $\chi^2 (2574, N = 268) = 3338.327, p < 0.05$. The result of the Chi-square is indicated in Table 3.

One-Way ANOVA for Patient Focus

The one-way analysis of variance, more popularly referred to as the one-way ANOVA is a statistical technique that compares means of more than two sample variances. This study sought

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation for patient focus

	Descriptive statistics		
	N	Mean	Std. deviation
The hospital has a process of getting patient feedback.	134	3.67	1.149
There is a well-defined process of utilizing information derived from patient feedback.	134	3.55	1.101
Majority of our patients are happy with our services.	134	3.70	1.083
All our services are designed to meet the stated needs of our patients.	134	3.72	1.036
The hospital delivers on its promise to the customer accurately and dependably.	134	3.57	1.247
Our staff always respond promptly and positively to the patients’ needs.	134	3.76	0.959
The staff regularly ask their patients what they need and want.	134	3.67	1.060
The staff regularly check if the patients are comfortable.	134	3.84	0.988
The staff understand the process of dealing with a dissatisfied patient.	134	3.81	1.035
Our staff respond promptly to patient calls at all time.	134	3.60	1.070
Staff make decisions to solve problems for their patients.	134	3.49	1.102
Our patients have trust and confidence in the services we provide.	134	3.55	1.073
The hospital staff understand that the patient is most important customers.	134	3.70	1.076
We are always open and honest to our patients.	134	3.91	0.992

Table 2: Correlation between measures of patient focus and competitive advantage

		<i>Patient satisfaction</i>	<i>Employee satisfaction</i>	<i>Efficiency</i>	<i>Competitive advantage</i>
Responsiveness and attitude	Pearson correlation	0.386**	0.399**	0.434**	0.437**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<i>N</i>	268	268	268	268
Reliability	Pearson correlation	0.378**	0.392**	0.422**	0.427**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<i>N</i>	268	268	268	268
Empathy	Pearson correlation	0.369**	0.391**	0.416**	0.421**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<i>N</i>	268	268	268	268
Assurance	Pearson correlation	0.384**	0.399**	0.434**	0.436**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<i>N</i>	268	268	268	268
Patients' focus	Pearson correlation	0.386**	0.402**	0.434**	0.438**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<i>N</i>	268	268	268	268

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 3: Chi-squared test on patient focus

	<i>Patient focus</i>
Pearson Chi-square	3338.327
Df	2574
Asymp. Sig. (two-sided)	0.000

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

to conduct a one-way ANOVA test to ascertain whether there were significant differences between the means for competitive advantage for patient focus and the demographic variables of this study; age of the respondents, number of hospital beds, and type of hospital.

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing for Patient Focus

This study used the regression model to observe whether patient focus explained changes in competitive advantage. Various assumptions for regressions were carried out before conducting the regression analysis.

Assumptions for Regression Analysis Patient Focus

This study examined if the assumptions for regression were observed for patient focus. It conducted the required tests for linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and normality. These assumptions for linear regression were tested and they all met the assumption criteria (Tables 4 and 5).

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

A statistical tool that is carried out to examine if one or more independent variables predict the changes in the dependent variable is known as a regression analysis. This study used multiple linear regression analysis to examine the influence of patient focus on competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi. This study tested the null hypothesis:

H_{01} : Patient focus does not have a significant influence on competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi.

Regression Model Summary

From the regression model summary, the findings showed that patient focus explained 16% variation in competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi, $R^2 = 0.237$. This implies that 23.7% of the variations in competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi could be explained by patient focus.

Regression ANOVA

Table 6 presents the results of the regression ANOVA for patient focus and competitive advantage and these findings indicated that the model was statistically significant in linking patient focus and competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi, $F(5, 262) = 16.241, p < 0.05$. Thus, the findings indicated that the influence of patient focus on competitive advantage was statistically significant. The model was significant in giving explanation on the relationship. Based on the significance of the F -statistic, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Regression Coefficients for Patient Focus

The results in Table 7 showed that empathy and assurance positively and significantly predicted competitive advantage, $\beta = 0.478, t(268) = 3.240, p < 0.05$, and $\beta = 0.633, t(268) = 3.175, p < 0.05$, respectively. The results also show that responsiveness and reliability significantly predicted competitive advantage, $\beta = 0.482, t(268) = 2.557, p < 0.05$, and, $\beta = 0.592, t(268) = 3.860, p < 0.05$, respectively. Generally, patient focus positively and significantly predicted competitive advantage, $\beta = 0.070, t(268) = 7.611, p < 0.05$. The findings of the study implied that a unit change in patient focus would lead to an increase in competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi by 0.070 units. This study, therefore, concluded that patient focus positively and significantly predicted competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi.

Conclusion of Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis established that patient focus positively and significantly predicted competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi, $R^2 = 0.237, F(5, 262) =$

Table 4: One-way ANOVA on competitive advantage for patient focus

		ANOVA				
		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Age in years	Between groups	52.164	4	1.373	2.096	0.002
	Within groups	62.224	129	0.655		
	Total	114.388	133			
Number of hospital beds	Between groups	59.918	4	1.577	0.957	0.548
	Within groups	156.478	129	1.647		
	Total	216.396	133			
Type of hospital	Between groups	9.795	4	0.258	1.272	0.175
	Within groups	19.257	129	0.203		
	Total	29.052	133			

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Table 5: Regression model summary for patient focus

Model summary				
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.486 ^a	0.237	0.222	0.27850

^aPredictors: (Constant), customer focus, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and attitude, assurance

Table 6: Regression ANOVA for patient focus

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.298	5	1.260	16.241	0.000 ^b
	Residual	20.321	262	0.078		
	Total	26.619	267			

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

^aDependent variable: Competitive advantage

^bPredictors: (Constant), customer focus, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and attitude, assurance

Table 7: Regression coefficients for patient focus

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	1.440	0.024		60.561	0.000
	Responsiveness and attitude	0.482	0.189	2.931	2.557	0.011
	Reliability	0.592	0.153	3.555	3.860	0.000
	Empathy	0.478	0.147	2.926	3.240	0.001
	Assurance	0.633	0.199	3.823	3.175	0.002
	Customer (patient) focus	0.070	0.009	0.423	7.611	0.000

^aDependent variable: Competitive advantage

16.241, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.070$, $t(268) = 7.611$, $p < 0.05$. The results implied that 23.7% of the variance in competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi could be explained by patient focus. In addition, the regression model was found to be statistically significant in predicting the relationship between patient focus and competitive advantage as revealed by the *F*-statistic. The regression coefficient for patient focus implied that every unit change in patient focus

would cause 0.070 units of change in competitive advantage. A significance value of $p \leq 0.05$ was taken up by the study. The regression coefficient's *p* value (β) was $p < 0.05$. The study therefore concluded that patient focus positively and significantly influenced competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi. Therefore, the null hypothesis that patient focus has no significant influence on competitive advantage was rejected.

The model equation for patient focus was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + \epsilon_i$$

$$Y = 1.440 + 0.070 \text{ patient focus}$$

DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine the influence of patient focus on competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi, the correlation results revealed that process focus had a significant relationship with competitive advantage, $r(268) = 0.438, p < 0.05$. The simple regression analysis revealed that process focus positively and significantly predicted competitive advantage, $R^2 = 0.192, F(1, 266) = 63.151, p < 0.05; \beta = 0.083, t(268) = 7.947, p < 0.05$. This led to rejecting the null hypothesis that process focus has no significant influence on competitive advantage.

The findings from the analysis revealed that patient focus positively and significantly predicted competitive advantage within the hospitals in Nairobi, $R^2 = 0.237, F(5, 262) = 16.241, p < 0.05; \beta = 0.070, t(268) = 7.611, p < 0.05$. The findings of this study concur with the findings of a previous study which concluded that organizations should not guess the needs and expectation of their customers but should strive toward harmonizing the customer needs and the management perceptions through getting customer feedback about the customers' perceptions, requirements, and values.¹³ All these attributes of patient focus had a positive and significant influence on patient satisfaction level. This is in line with another study that demonstrated that patients are able to evaluate the doctors and nurse's skills when they are dealing with them; however, how the staff presented themselves determined how the patient will perceive the hospital care delivery systems.¹⁶ Furthermore, only those organizations that are capable to satisfy customers' needs and requirements will be in position to survive and compete effectively in the cutthroat business playing field. To be successful, firms should recognize the need to put customer first in every decision-making or perhaps, embrace a customer-focus or customer-centered culture.

CONCLUSION

The study established the relationship between patient focus and competitive advantage and concluded that hospitals with high competitive advantage are always open and honest to their patients as they understand that patients are their most important customers. The study also concluded that the best performing hospitals have staff who understands how to deal with dissatisfied patients by regularly checking on them and making available what they need to feel comfortable. This led to the conclusion that high responsiveness and good attitude, being reliable and empathy and assuring the patients of their best enhance competitive advantage.

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