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# Strategic Planning and Competitive Advantage in Level Six Private Hospitals: Perspectives from Nairobi County, Kenya

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## Abstract

Despite the rapid growth of private level Six hospitals in Nairobi County, many continue to struggle with maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. Less than 30 percent of these hospitals report consistent growth in patient volumes and financial performance. This study was underpinned by Resource Based View theory and the Balance Scorecard Framework. The purpose of this study was therefore to assess the effect strategic planning on the competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study selected all Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County focusing on eight key departments within each hospital that play a critical role in supporting the hospital's strategic objectives. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design with descriptive and explanatory components was employed utilizing a census approach to include all 64 targeted respondents, eight senior managers from each Level Six private hospital owing to their key roles in strategic decision-making. The research instruments underwent tests for validity and reliability to ensure data quality. Data was examined using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24, utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that strategic planning explained a significant proportion of the variation in competitive advantage among Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County, Kenya. The ANOVA results showed that the model was significant in explaining the relationship between strategic planning and competitive advantage. Additionally, the findings showed that strategic planning, was positively and significantly related to competitive advantage. Strategic management planning is significant determinants of competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals and thus, private hospitals should scale up strategic planning to enhance competitiveness.

**Keywords:** *Strategic Planning, Competitive Advantage, Private Hospitals, Healthcare Management, Nairobi County, Kenya.*

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## 1.0 Introduction

Organizations must actively pursue gaining a competitive edge in order to prosper and maintain their operations in an increasingly competitive environment. According to Angeline et al. (2023) globalization, the quick advancement of technology and changing consumer tastes have made competition more fierce across all sectors. In order to overcome these obstacles, businesses must set themselves apart by utilizing distinctive assets, cutting-edge technology, effective procedures and solid client interactions assert that corporations can increase their market share, boost profitability and cultivate a devoted clientele by attaining a competitive edge (Achira, 2023). In strategic management, the term ‘competitive advantage’ refers to the abilities or capacities that enable a company to outperform its competitors (Kiarie Mwangi & Queen Omwenga, 2022). According to Kiarie et al. (2023), these traits can be attributed to a variety of variables including superior technology, distinctive resources, a strong brand reputation, cost efficiency or creative processes.

The core of competitive advantage is providing value to customers in a manner that is difficult for competitors to match (Kaluyu & Odollo, 2023). By consistently improving their value propositions and operational efficiencies, companies can develop a lasting competitive edge through effective strategic management. Effective strategic management practices help businesses stand out from the competition by fostering innovation, streamlining supply chains, and improving customer (Achira, 2023). Additionally, strategic management practices foster a culture of strategic thinking and ongoing improvement, enabling staff members at all levels to support the long-term success of the company.

Through ensuring that all organizational efforts are focused on gaining a competitive edge, this strategic alignment enhances the organization’s capacity to hold onto its market position and promote long-term growth (Angeline et al., 2023). There exists a wealth of research on the causes and effects of competitive advantage for hospitals worldwide. Around the world, hospitals are putting plans into place to guarantee a competitive edge. Hospital competition and other measures of competitive advantage were found to be statistically significantly correlated in a thorough analysis carried out in the United States (Mutter et al., 2018). Additionally, Mutter et al. (2018) noted that US hospitals are increasingly participating in benchmarking initiatives meant to boost their competitive advantages. For instance, multispecialty hospitals in India have reportedly altered their value chain to provide a long-term competitive edge.

In their research, Lin et al. (2020) demonstrated how perceived competition improves the treatment process of the fee-for-service payment system in China and provided empirical evidence in favor of the pro-competition policies implemented during the country's most recent national healthcare reform round. The study established that hospital competition improves the processes of healthcare in rural China. A study conducted in Europe examined the findings of empirical research on how hospital competition -including rivalry and market pressure- affects the standard of care in European nations. The study revealed that quality levels seem to be highly dependent on the market structures that are in place (Timofeyev et al., 2024). Hospitals offering similar medical services may differ in the quality and cost of care they offer. Quality is the sole criterion on which one may compete in market places with price controls. Whether price-cost margins are favorable or negative in this context determines the quality levels (Timofeyev et al., 2024).

According to Özgen Narcı et al. (2015) in their findings from a study taken among Turkish hospitals found that the degree of hospital competition seems to have no effect on efficiency. This opinion is supported by those who stated that Nigeria’s use of total quality management

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resulted in both customer satisfaction and a competitive advantage (Pezzuto, 2019). According to studies undertaken in Ghana, private hospitals have a greater competitive edge over public hospitals when it comes to customer satisfaction and loyalty indices (Darkwa, 2020).

In East Africa, Lamesgen et al. (2025) in their study suggest that hospitals embrace more creative approaches to get a competitive edge in a crowded and always changing market. Kenya's healthcare system is not immune to competition and health facilities have implemented tactics to solidify their position in the market. Documenting how employee empowerment enhances competitive advantage. Furthermore, the importance of strategic management practices in boosting competitive advantage in Kenyan private hospitals has been demonstrated by focusing on customer traits like empathy, adoption of cutting-edge technology and setting up satellite clinics in strategic locations as a source of competitive advantage (Achira, 2023). Given the turbulence and constantly shifting dynamics caused by a multitude of factors, a number of frameworks remain relevant in shaping strategic management practices in the healthcare industry. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic experience is one of the unpredictable insults to healthcare strategic planning that has had direct and indirect reductions in competitive advantage. To establish the type of competitive advantage a firm must achieve, managers must define and adopt specific methodologies that define a firm's strategy. This therefore means that the healthcare industry must have plans that ensure a sustained competitive advantage.

Strategy is derived from the ancient Greek word "στρατηγός" (strategos), which means "general" or "leader of an army" (Huebner & Flessa, 2022). Therefore, the science or study of warfare and all that a competent army commander ought to be aware of constitute the novel meaning of strategy. Strategic apex describes to the senior leadership responsible for shaping and guiding an organization's overall direction. Since strategy influences the entire organization, it falls under the primary duty of top executives to develop and implement it. Unlike operational decisions made at different levels, strategy is not a function of middle management. Instead, senior leaders make sure that strategic goals complement the purpose, vision, and long-term objectives of the company. Uncertainty is an inherent challenge in strategic planning, as predicting the long-term effects of decisions is extremely difficult. Organizations must navigate complex and ever-changing environments where market conditions, technological advancements, and external factors can shift unexpectedly. Given this uncertainty, strategic decisions require flexibility, adaptability, and continuous assessment to mitigate risks and seize opportunities. Strategic management is defined as "doing the right things", whereas operational management is defined as "doing things right" (Ramo, 2002).

The goal of strategic planning is "to do the right things right" by considering the long-term effects of our decisions in a complex and uncertain environment. While developing strategies, decision makers are not fully aware of all the variables rather they anticipate the emergence of new interdependencies, cope with unpredictability and make decisions on competition and alliances (Navarro-García et al., 2019). In management, strategy is the most important discipline. Strategic objectives, such as the company's vision and mission, are always the first step in the strategic management process. This is under the purview of business ethics, meaning that strategic management is impossible without ethical consideration of the goals and values that result.

According to Angeline et al. (2023) the term "competitive advantage" denotes an organization's ability to generate greater economic value than its rivals. A company gains a competitive edge when it successfully applies a value-creating strategy. Businesses with a competitive edge employ value-creating tactics that are not being used concurrently by any present or prospective rivals (Angeline et al., 2023). From an economics perspective,

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competitive advantage is an economic value that is maintained above average returns. Competitive advantage is difficult to measure and there are divergent views over how to operationalize this idea (Ntwiga et al., 2021). Economic value-creating businesses specifically integrate their inputs to produce a product whose perceived advantage outweighs the product's manufacturing costs.

The development of economic value as a result of competitive advantage, however, appears to be the common theme in literature. Businesses may do this by re-arranging their value chain in a different way than their rivals or, if they use a comparable value chain, by carrying out tasks more effectively than their rivals. A company's competitive edge is impacted by a variety of elements, including the nature of the business, the brand that customers are loyal to, manufacturing costs, distribution networks, quality and the context of the business environment (Karani & Gitau, 2019). According to Ngeche and Okello (2022) a competitive edge might be either short-term or long-term. Since the result of competitive advantage is typically to outperform rivals, companies that maintain a competitive edge may exceed their current market and join new ones where advantage competition is intense.

Given this fact, competitive advantage, like a company's vision, cannot be achieved and must instead be shaped and controlled by a change management plan that is acceptable. Strategic management is crucial for determining the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, which facilitates the utilization of external opportunities and the reduction of external issues (Angeline et al., 2023). Research indicates that the performance of health organizations is significantly enhanced by strategic management skills. According to Timofeyev et al. (2024), for a hospital to be competitive enough and for them to prosper or fail, strategic management must play an immense role.

According to the Ministry of Health (2025), Level Six hospitals are classified as 6A (National/Referral hospitals under the national government) and 6B (private/mission-based health institutions). Level 6 hospitals provide the highest standard of medical care in Kenya's healthcare system, offering more sophisticated and specialized services than those provided by lower-level establishments. Whether they are mission-based medical facilities, sizable private teaching hospitals, or national referral hospitals, these establishments are vital and their importance in Kenya's healthcare system can only be emphasized. Kenya's capital city, Nairobi County, is the nation's administrative, political, and economic center. With a diversified population of more than 4.5 million, it is one of Kenya's most populated counties. Rapid urbanization, an expanding middle class, and a booming private sector including a strong healthcare sector are the county's defining features. Some of East Africa's most cutting-edge medical facilities, including Level Six private hospitals, are located in Nairobi County. These hospitals provide highly specialized medical services and are categorized as tertiary facilities. In the fiercely competitive healthcare industry, private hospitals are vying for patients' attention by using cutting-edge technology, excellent patient care and strategic management practices. Nairobi's healthcare industry functions in a dynamic setting marked by rising healthcare expenses, a growing focus on patient happiness and an increase in demand for high-quality healthcare services (Lamesgen et al., 2025).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the rapid growth of private level Six hospitals in Nairobi County, many continue to struggle with maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. According to the Ministry of Health (2023), less than 30 percent of these hospitals report consistent growth in patient volumes and financial performance. Over 60 percent face challenges in implementing strategic plans effectively due to weak leadership structures, poor coordination, and limited innovation

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(MoH, 2023). Additionally, nearly 45 percent experience high staff turnover and low patient retention, indicating weak institutional competitiveness. In order to stay afloat, managers must be aware of the need to adjust their approach because the factors influencing the health care business are dynamic.

The health care industry is characterized by volatility, much like other industries like manufacturing or banking. As such, hospitals should implement methods that adapt to the changing environment. This state essentially renders just having a pool of different services and practices not to suffice the environmental change forces (Eisenhardt & Bingham, 2017). The health sector has not been exempted from the unstable climate and even referral and level six private hospitals are facing strong rivalry from diverse sources and having just a multi-specialty offering does not suffice (Singh et al., 2020).

According to Vahatalo and Kallio (2015), hospitals need to recognize the significant changes in their ecosystem and have the necessary resources to deal with them. Many have led to desperate and occasionally illogical reactions, like new marketing campaigns, new services and capital expenditures, in an attempt to find a winning combination to maintain their competitive advantage, only to end up with exorbitant costs and minimal results (Agwunobi & Osborne, 2016). These institutions provide specialized, high-quality healthcare while being financially viable, achieving and maintaining a competitive edge requires the application of strategic management practices, such as resource allocation, performance monitoring, strategic planning and innovation. The ways in which these strategic management practices affect competitive advantage in Nairobi County's Level Six private hospitals, however, are not well supported by empirical data. This study sought to address the identified conceptual, contextual, literature and methodological gaps by examining the effects of strategic management practices on competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County. The study focused on strategic planning, and its effect on competitive advantage which was measured using innovation and differentiation operational efficiency, market share, customer loyalty and brand strength.

## 1.2 Research Objective

To determine the effects of strategic planning on the competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County.

## 1.3 Research Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Strategic planning has no significant effect on competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by Resource-Based View theory and the Balance Scorecard Framework.

### 2.1.1 Resource-Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory hypothesizes that businesses use distinctive, priceless and inimitable resources to gain a long-term competitive edge (Barney, 1991). Strategic planning, as a managerial practice, enables organizations to identify, allocate and optimize these resources effectively. In the context of Level 6 private hospitals, strategic planning ensures alignment of organizational goals with available resources, fostering a competitive edge through efficient service delivery and operational excellence. In today's fast-paced, intensely competitive world, organizations should be active participants in the market and possess the tools and capabilities to respond to environmental changes (Ployhart, 2021). To

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gain a sustained competitive advantage, businesses must identify and seize resource possibilities while averting any risks (Gibson et al., 2021). The resource-based view (RBV) holds that a firm's access to uncommon, valuable, unique, and non-substitutable resources is essential to its capacity to remain competitive (Collins, 2020). The organization's ability to generate or obtain these resources affects its effectiveness, competitiveness and profitability.

RBV holds that resource exploitation is the source of wealth. To create economic value, organizations need to make better use of their resources as compared to their rivals. Businesses can use the RBV's foundations to adopt strategies that none of their current or prospective rivals can match, giving them a competitive edge (Chahal et al., 2020). The resources may be either material or immaterial. Furthermore, RBV relies on the essential principles of immobility i.e., (resources do not move from one business to another) and heterogeneity (each business has different abilities, skills and other resources) (Gibson et al., 2020). Notwithstanding RBV's benefits and advancements, some academics have questioned its applicability. Additionally, the RBV has been a topic of discussion because of its static nature (Assensoh-Kodua, 2019). Assuming a static perspective, RBV fails to explain how practical abilities could be strengthened and developed in rapidly evolving situations. Gibson et al. (2021) claimed that because of its rigidity, RBV's theoretical utility is up for discussion. The RBV lacks a proven technique that can direct businesses toward gaining a sustainable competitive advantage, according to some academics.

### **2.1.2 The Balanced Scorecard Framework**

Robert Kaplan and David Norton advanced the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) framework in the early 1990s. It is a popular tool for strategic planning and management in a variety of sectors, including healthcare, to improve internal and external communication, match business operations with the organization's vision and strategy and monitor organizational performance in relation to strategic goals (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). According to Quesado et al. (2018), the BSC is made up of four main view-points that help firms assess their strategic performance.

Outstanding results and output must be produced by the main business operations. The workforce's information system quality, leadership, culture and adherence to teamwork procedures are all included in the learning and growth metric. Employees will finish work quickly and effectively under effective leadership if they are sufficiently motivated and skilled. A crucial performance measurement tool that can assist organizations in tracking and assessing both short and long-term strategies is the BSC. The "BSC translates the often-unclear goals found in corporate mission statements into a strategic roadmap to be followed by employees" (Davis & Albright, 2004).

The BSC outlines precise measures that must be taken in order to convert organizational goals into feasible activities that can then demonstrate how those actions relate to the goals (Quesado et al., 2018). From the review of BSC literature within the healthcare industry, the BSC framework can play a significant role in improving performance monitoring and assessment procedures, especially at level six hospitals (usually tertiary care facilities providing advanced and specialized medical services). Through the integration of financial and non-financial metrics, it offers a comprehensive approach to performance measurement. Level Six private hospitals may measure their progress toward strategic goals, pinpoint areas for development, and make data-driven decisions thanks to performance monitoring and evaluation. Their competitive advantage is strengthened by this process of continual improvement, which guarantees efficiency, accountability and alignment with corporate objectives.

## 2.2 Empirical Literature Review

### 2.2.1 Strategic Planning and Competitive Advantage

An organization has to know where it is now and how it may implement specific tactics in order to decide on its future course. Promoting organizational-wide commitment to the selected strategy plan is crucial for successful performance (Mitaki & Gitonga, 2018). A corporation must so clearly express its objective and promote employee involvement. For the strategic planning course to be successful, all three of its steps (1) position determination, (2) strategy creation and (3) plan building must be followed. A well-thought-out plan does not guarantee that objectives will be reached on its own (Arokodare & Asikhia, 2020). Mulyaningsih et al. (2021), evaluated how strategic planning affected the competitive advantages of small and medium-sized businesses.

This study describes and explains the degree to which strategic planning affects SMEs competitive advantage in Sukabumi Regency, Indonesia, using a quantitative technique and an explanatory survey design. The study's findings, which were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM), demonstrated that strategic planning had a major influence on competitive advantage of SMEs in Sukabumi, Indonesia. Using competitive advantage as a mediating factor, Mashingaidze and Phiri (2024) examined the impact of strategic planning on business responsiveness performance. A quantitative survey and positivist paradigm were used in the study to gather and examine data from 206 micro, small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) in South Africa. SEM, or structural equation modeling, was used to evaluate the theories.

The findings revealed that strategy formulation significantly enhances competitiveness within the SDA movement by increasing the effectiveness of meeting organizational goals and objectives and raising awareness of strategic formulation. Hunitie (2018) examined how strategic planning and strategic thinking mediate the relationship between competitive advantage and strategic leadership. In particular, the study looked at three public hospitals in Jordan's healthcare system using a survey that was developed following a comprehensive review of the literature. The results demonstrated that competitive advantage, strategic planning, and strategic thinking are significantly impacted by strategic leadership.

Additionally, it was shown that competitive advantage and both strategic planning and strategic thinking were strongly and favorably correlated, with strategic thinking having a greater impact than strategic planning. The study concluded that as strategies are developed through strategic thinking and put into action through strategic planning, both strategic thinking and strategic planning are essential for attaining competitive advantage through strategic leadership. The study conducted by Osintsev and Khalilian (2023) examined whether innovation and strategic planning improve organizational performance. The study looked at how organizational performance, strategic planning, and innovation are related. Mutually strategic planning and innovation have a good effect on organizational performance, according to the findings. By encouraging innovation and putting strategic planning techniques into practice, managers and decision-makers in the healthcare industry may improve organizational performance, according to these findings.

### 2.2.2 Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage describes the unique position an organization occupies in its market by offering services or capabilities that are not easily replicated by competitors. Albarri (2024) emphasizes that competitive advantage is supported when hospitals adopt strategic intelligence to interpret market signals and respond proactively. Similarly, Gana and Andemariam (2020)

show that disciplined management practices in a mission hospital in Kenya translated into better patient retention and performance, confirming the role of structured strategy in building an edge. Tj, Wibowo, and Widjaja (2025) links human capital development to competitive strength, arguing that skilled personnel form a rare and valuable resource. Quan and Khan (2024) further establish that quality management not only boosts performance but also acts as a key driver of competitive positioning in healthcare.

Quality-based competitive advantage is a recurring theme across healthcare literature. When hospitals integrate effective quality management systems, they enhance both the tangible and intangible aspects of service, which are central to attracting and retaining patients. Quan and Khan (2024) note that in Chinese hospitals, quality processes increased staff satisfaction, which in turn mediated gains in sustainable performance and competitive positioning. Khanfar, Nafei, and Mujtaba (2024) highlight that digital twinning strengthens quality by ensuring efficiency and accuracy in service delivery, thereby supporting a hospital's distinctiveness. Zaid, Othman, Qubbaj, and Asaad (2025) add that Industry 4.0 tools, when anchored in total quality management, translate technological investment into long-term advantage. Shebeshe and Sharma (2025) also demonstrate in the manufacturing sector that sustainable supply chain practices reinforce reliability and reputation, which are equally vital sources of competitive edge in hospitals.

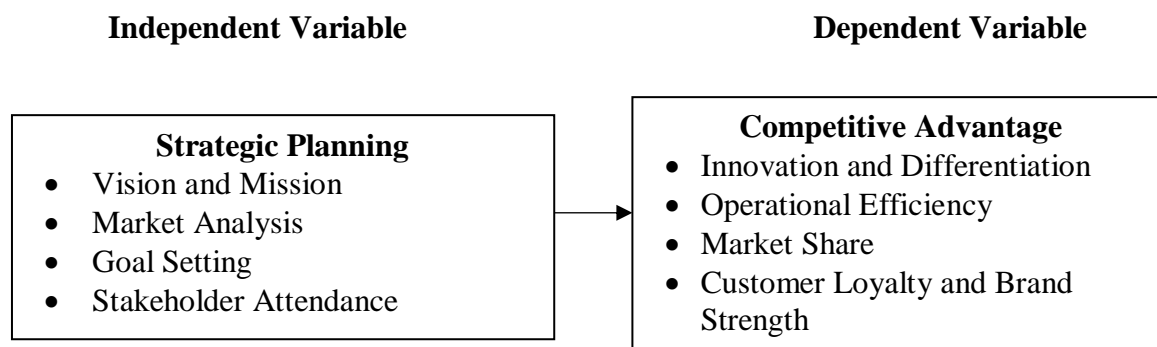
Competitive advantage is also influenced by market-facing strategies, where positioning and patient engagement play central roles. Juju and Supriadi (2024) argue that a thoughtful marketing mix and strong relationship marketing strategies provide organizations with differentiation that strengthens their performance. Gana and Andemariam (2020) found similar evidence in Kenyan hospitals, showing that deliberate strategic practices enabled facilities to compete effectively despite resource limitations. Albarri (2024) notes that in Palestine, hospitals that leveraged strategic intelligence achieved stronger alignment between services and patient expectations, enhancing competitive strength.

Quan and Khan (2024) similarly argue that patient-centered service quality creates loyalty, which is an essential pathway to a defensible competitive position. The human element remains at the core of sustainable advantage in hospital settings. Tj et al. (2025) contend that investment in human capital including skills, leadership, and organizational culture directly supports the creation of rare capabilities that underpin competitive success. Oweidat, Abu Shosha, Al-Harazneh, Al-Mugheed, Alzoubi, Alabdullah, and Abdelaliem (2025) further demonstrate that nurses' perceptions of job security contribute to improved performance, which indirectly strengthens hospital reputation and competitiveness.

Shebeshe and Sharma (2025) emphasize that sustainability practices especially in supply chains help institutions secure long-term trust and continuity, giving them an edge in competitive markets. Albarri (2024) reminds us that strategic intelligence is essential in identifying the right technologies and practices that align with hospital goals. Gana and Andemariam (2020) also illustrate that without deliberate strategic management, the potential of technology and sustainability remains untapped, underlining the importance of structured approaches in converting resources into lasting competitive advantage.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

The relationship that results between the independent and dependent variables is figuratively presented in the conceptual framework. This is illustrated below in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source: Author (2025)

### 3.0 Research Methodology

This study employed quantitative cross-sectional survey design with descriptive and explanatory components. This method works well for the current investigation since it enables a thorough analysis of strategic management practices and their observed effects within the target population. It enables the researcher to gather factual, current information that can be used to describe the extent and nature of these practices. This research used quantitative descriptive approach, using structured questionnaires to gather data from participants. This methodology allowed the researcher to measure the prevalence and trends of strategic management practices among top managers at sixth-level private hospitals in Nairobi, Kenya. The Staff in level six private hospitals in Nairobi County, Kenya formed the target population. These hospitals were picked because they are thought to use cutting-edge strategic management practices and represent the pinnacle of private healthcare delivery. The study targeted 64 senior managers, eight drawn from different departments in each hospital that includes Administration, Clinical, Nursing, Finance, Human Resources, Procurement and Transport, Marketing and Business Development, Engineering.

This study used a census approach, focusing on all 64 senior managers at eight level six private hospitals in Nairobi, Kenya as they held critical roles in strategic management. Given that the research seeks to comprehend strategy planning, resource management methods, innovation uptake, and performance monitoring and evaluation, a census approach was suitable as it enabled exhaustive data collecting from each stakeholder without the need for sampling. Senior managers shape the strategic direction in their domains, embodying the whole spectrum of strategic influence and supervision inside the business.

This study relied purely on primary data which was collected through self-administered questionnaires. Data was therefore gathered using structured questionnaires. Before collecting the data, consent to conduct the study was sought through the Post Graduate office from the Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (ISERC) for ethical review and the researcher obtained a permit from NACOSTI in order to collect data. Once approval was granted, the researcher contacted each of the six level six private hospitals in Nairobi County to schedule data collection visits. The questionnaires were distributed to all the 64-targeted respondents through the use of ‘drop and pick’. Until data is analyzed to answer the study questions, it is worthless. The process of preparing acquired data for analysis included editing,

coding, classifying and tabulating the data. Following that, data cleaning was the last step in ensuring that all data was accurate, free of errors, comprehensive, consistent and validated (Cooper & Schindler, 2018). Data analysis was aided by using SPSS software. Data analysis involved both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

The numerical data finally was scrutinized using descriptive statistics tools which are mean, median and mode. Regression analysis was used as the inferential statistics method.

The findings were presented in the form of tables.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta X + \varepsilon$$

Y=dependent variable

X= Strategic planning

$\varepsilon$  denotes other factors not included in the model.

#### 4.0 Findings and Discussion

The study targeted all 64 senior managers drawn from the eight Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County, Kenya. Questionnaires were distributed to this entire population using a census approach. Out of the 64 questionnaires administered, 48 were duly completed and returned, while 16 were not returned. The researcher was unable to secure permission to collect data in some facilities, which partly contributed to the unreturned questionnaires. The study initially aimed to conduct a census of all 64 identified members of the population. A response rate of 75% (48 respondents) was achieved. Consequently, this analysis is based on a complete enumeration of all willing participants. The primary limitation being potential non-response bias; The study therefore achieved a response rate of 75.0 percent. This rate is above the average response levels typically observed in organizational research surveys.

In terms of demographic information about the respondents, most respondents were female (62.5%) compared to 37.5% male. In terms of marital status, majority of respondents were married (75.0%), while 25.0% were single. This suggests that most senior managers in Level Six private hospitals are individuals with family responsibilities, which may shape their perspectives on resource management, innovation, and performance monitoring in hospital settings. Regarding positions held, majority (79.2%) were heads of departments, followed by directors (18.8%), with one respondent classified under “other. The age distribution shows that most respondents were between 35 and 54 years, with 35.4% each in the 35–44 and 45–54 categories. Respondents aged 55 years and above accounted for 22.9%, while only 6.3% were in the 15–34 bracket. Academic qualification results reveal that most respondents possessed at least a bachelor’s degree (43.8%) or a master’s degree (41.7%). Only 14.6% had diploma-level qualifications. This reflects the high educational standards required for senior management roles in Level Six private hospitals, ensuring that the respondents were well-equipped with the academic background to implement and assess strategic practices effectively.

Concerning work experience in current positions, 37.5% had worked for over 16 years, 31.3% for 6–10 years, and another 31.3% for less than 5 years. This distribution shows that the sample included both seasoned managers with extensive institutional knowledge and relatively newer leaders who may bring innovative approaches. Such diversity enriched the study by capturing perspectives shaped by both long-term experience and fresh outlooks. The demographic profile demonstrates that the study respondents were diverse in gender, age, education, and work experience, while being concentrated in positions of strategic authority. This composition provided a solid foundation for analyzing the effects of strategic management practices on competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County.

#### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

##### *Strategic Planning*

The study examined the effects of strategic planning on competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to strategic planning practices, including the existence of clear organizational goals, alignment of departmental objectives with hospital strategy, stakeholder involvement in planning, and the use of structured decision-making frameworks. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Strategic Planning**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
There is clarity of organizational vision and mission which are clearly defined and communicated	0.00%	0.00%	6.30%	39.60%	54.20%	4.48	0.62
There is a degree to which team or departmental goals align with the overall strategic objectives of the organization	8.30%	0.00%	16.70%	39.60%	35.40%	3.94	1.14
There is regularity/frequency in which the strategic plan is reviewed and updated (e.g., annually, biannually).	8.30%	0.00%	8.30%	31.30%	52.10%	4.19	1.16
There is stakeholder (e.g., employees, customers, partners) involvement and participation in strategic planning processes.	0.00%	0.00%	14.60%	31.30%	54.20%	4.4	0.74
The is a significant proportion of resources (financial, human, technological) allocated to high-priority strategic initiatives.	0.00%	0.00%	22.90%	18.80%	58.30%	4.35	0.84
The strategic plans developed are realistic, achievable and contribute to the hospital's success.	0.00%	0.00%	31.30%	22.90%	45.80%	4.15	0.87

Source: Field Data (2025)

Based on the results in Table 1, majority of respondents (93.8%) agreed that their hospitals had a clearly defined and well-communicated organizational vision and mission. This statement yielded a high mean of 4.48 and a low standard deviation of 0.62, indicating very strong consensus among respondents. This implies that clarity of vision and mission serves as a cornerstone of strategic planning in Level Six private hospitals, creating shared direction and purpose which enhances competitiveness in the healthcare sector. On the degree of alignment between departmental goals and the overall strategic objectives of the hospital, 75.0% of respondents agreed. This item recorded a mean of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 1.14, suggesting moderate consensus with some variability in perceptions. The implication is that while most hospitals ensure departmental objectives are tied to overarching strategies, inconsistencies may exist across units. Misalignment in a few departments could potentially weaken the overall effectiveness of strategic planning and hinder competitive positioning.

Concerning the frequency of reviewing and updating strategic plans, 83.4% of respondents agreed that hospitals regularly review their plans, either annually or biannually. The item produced a mean of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 1.16, reflecting general agreement but with more spread in responses. This implies that although strategic plan reviews are a widespread practice, some hospitals may lack uniformity in review cycles, which could reduce their ability to adapt quickly to dynamic healthcare challenges and competitive pressures.

Regarding stakeholder involvement in planning processes, 85.5% of respondents agreed that employees, customers, and partners were actively engaged. The statement posted a mean of 4.40 and a standard deviation of 0.74, showing strong agreement with limited variation. The implication is that participatory planning is a common feature in Level Six private hospitals, fostering inclusivity, ownership, and more effective implementation of strategies that reflect the interests of key stakeholders. When asked whether resources were allocated to high-priority strategic initiatives, 77.1% of respondents agreed. The item had a mean of 4.35 and a standard deviation of 0.84, reflecting strong support and relatively consistent views.

These finding suggests that resource allocation practices are generally aligned with strategic priorities, enhancing hospitals' capacity to invest in areas such as technology, human capital, and infrastructure, which directly strengthen their competitive edge. Moreover, 68.7% of respondents agreed that strategic plans developed were realistic, achievable, and contributed to hospital success. The statement yielded a mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.87, suggesting strong agreement but with more variation than other items. This implies that while most hospitals develop practical and impactful strategic plans, a portion of managers may perceive gaps between planning and implementation, possibly due to challenges in execution or resource limitations.

The descriptive results on strategic planning yielded high levels of agreement across all statements, with means ranging from 3.94 to 4.48 and standard deviations mostly below 1.0. This indicates that respondents generally agreed that strategic planning practices are effective in Level Six private hospitals, and their views were relatively consistent. These findings suggest that strategic planning enhances competitive advantage by providing clarity of vision, aligning departmental goals, involving stakeholders, ensuring resource prioritization, and creating realistic plans that can be effectively implemented. According to Bryson (2018), well-structured strategic planning not only improves internal alignment but also positions organizations to respond effectively to external pressures, a critical factor in highly competitive healthcare environments.

These findings are also consistent with the assertions by Mitaki and Gitonga (2018) that strategic planning is the process of deciding on the organization's message and then

establishing goals, plans and policies to ensure that resources are allocated to achieve these objectives. Strategic planning is choosing the most operative methods to assist an organization in realizing its objectives. Promoting organizational-wide commitment to the selected strategy plan is crucial for successful performance (Mitaki & Gitonga, 2018). A corporation must so clearly express its objective and promote employee involvement. For the strategic planning course to be successful, all three of its steps (1) position determination, (2) strategy creation and (3) plan building must be followed. A well-thought-out plan does not guarantee that objectives will be reached on its own (Arokodare & Asikhia, 2020).

*Competitive Advantage*

The dependent variable was level of competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to various aspects of competitive advantage and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Competitive Advantage**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
The organization has the ability to consistently introduce new products, services, or processes that set industry standards and outpace competitors.	0.00%	0.00%	14.60%	8.30%	77.10%	4.62	0.73
The organization has the ability to offer products or services at a lower cost than competitors while maintaining or improving profit margins, indicating operational excellence.	0.00%	0.00%	14.60%	35.40%	50.00%	4.35	0.73
The organization’s products or services offer unique benefits or features (Unique Value Proposition) that are not easily replicated by competitors.	14.60%	0.00%	14.60%	37.50%	33.30%	3.75	1.33
There is a large number of repeat customers who continue to choose the organization’s products or services over competitors, reflecting brand strength and customer satisfaction.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	43.80%	56.30%	4.56	0.5
The is a high level of awareness and positive perception of the organization’s brand among customers and stakeholders.	6.30%	8.30%	18.80%	33.30%	33.30%	3.79	1.18

Source: Field Data (2025)

Based on the results in Table 2, 85.4% of respondents agreed that their hospitals had the ability to consistently introduce new products, services, or processes that set industry standards and outpace competitors. This statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.62 with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.73, indicating strong agreement with minimal variation in responses. The implication is that Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County are perceived as innovation leaders in the healthcare sector, actively setting benchmarks and maintaining a competitive edge by regularly introducing industry-leading practices and services.

On operational excellence, 85.4% of respondents also agreed that their hospitals had the ability to offer products or services at a lower cost than competitors while maintaining or improving profit margins. This item posted a mean of 4.35 and a standard deviation of 0.73, showing high agreement with closely clustered responses. The implication is that hospitals are adopting efficient operational systems that enable them to manage costs while ensuring profitability, thereby enhancing their market competitiveness through affordability without compromising quality.

Regarding the uniqueness of products and services (unique value proposition), 70.8% of respondents agreed, while 14.6% were neutral and 14.6% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.75 with a higher standard deviation of 1.33, suggesting general agreement but with notable variability. The implication is that while many hospitals believe their services provide unique benefits that cannot be easily replicated, a portion of respondents expressed skepticism. This variability suggests that differentiation strategies are strong in some hospitals but less clear or distinctive in others, which could affect brand positioning and long-term competitive advantage.

On customer loyalty, an overwhelming 100% of respondents agreed that their hospitals had a large number of repeat customers who continued to choose their services over competitors. This statement achieved a very high mean of 4.56 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.50, indicating very strong consensus and tightly clustered responses. The implication is that brand strength and customer satisfaction are critical drivers of competitive advantage in these hospitals. High levels of repeat customers reflect not only patient trust and satisfaction but also long-term sustainability in a competitive healthcare market.

Finally, regarding brand awareness and perception, 66.6% of respondents agreed that their hospitals enjoyed a high level of awareness and positive perception among customers and stakeholders, while 18.8% were neutral and 14.6% disagreed. The mean was 3.79 with a standard deviation of 1.18, reflecting moderate agreement with noticeable variability. The implication is that while brand visibility and perception are generally positive, hospitals differ in how strongly their brand is positioned in the market. Some hospitals enjoy high reputation and visibility, while others may need to invest more in marketing, community engagement, and brand-building initiatives.

The descriptive results on competitive advantage showed consistently high agreement across most items, with mean scores ranging between 3.75 and 4.62. Respondents strongly endorsed hospitals' innovation capabilities, operational excellence, and customer loyalty, which were supported by relatively low standard deviations, indicating consensus. Areas such as unique value propositions and brand perception showed more variability, highlighting opportunities for improvement. The findings suggest that Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County enjoy strong sources of competitive advantage, particularly in innovation and customer retention, while continued investments in brand differentiation and visibility will further enhance their market leadership.

According to Porter (1990), sustainable competitive advantage is achieved by continuously strengthening innovation, cost efficiency, customer loyalty, and brand positioning dimensions well reflected in these findings. Andemariam (2020) found similar evidence in Kenyan hospitals, showing that deliberate strategic practices enabled facilities to compete effectively despite resource limitations. Albarri (2024) notes that in Palestine, hospitals that leveraged strategic intelligence achieved stronger alignment between services and patient expectations, enhancing competitive strength. Quan and Khan (2024) similarly argue that patient-centered service quality creates loyalty, which is an essential pathway to a defensible competitive position.

#### 4.2 Inferential Analysis Results

Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to examine the associations between the independent variable strategic planning and the dependent variable, competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County. The analysis explained whether these strategic management planning was positively or negatively related to competitive advantage and the degree of association among them. Table 3 presents the correlation results.

**Table 3: Correlation Analysis Results**

		<b>Competitive Advantage</b>
Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Strategic Planning	Pearson Correlation	.621**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

Source: Field Data (2025)

Correlation results in Table 3 show a strong positive and significant association between strategic planning and competitive advantage ( $r = 0.621$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that when hospitals engage in effective strategic planning, they are more likely to enhance their competitive positioning. These results are supported by studies such as Mwangi and Otieno (2023), who noted that structured planning enables healthcare organizations to set clear goals and optimize resource allocation for competitive outcomes. In addition, regression analysis results revealed that strategic planning, accounted for a significant proportion of the variation in competitive advantage among Level Six private hospitals in Nairobi County.

The ANOVA findings showed that the regression model was statistically significant in explaining the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, with an F-value of 26.246 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. These indicate that the effect of strategic planning, significantly predicts competitive advantage. This implies that improvements or deficiencies in these practices significantly influence the competitiveness of Level Six private hospitals. Table 4 shows regression coefficient results.

**Table 4: Regression of Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized T Coefficients	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.298	0.157	1.897	0.065	
1 Strategic Planning	0.284	0.059	0.324	4.814	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings shows that strategic planning had a positive and significant effect on competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.284$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). This was supported by a t-statistic of 4.814, greater than the critical value of 1.96, confirming its significance. This implies that a unit improvement in strategic planning practices results in a 0.284-unit increase in competitive advantage. This suggests that structured planning enables hospitals to allocate resources effectively, anticipate challenges, and achieve sustainable growth, consistent with the conclusions of Otieno (2023), who emphasized the importance of strategic foresight in healthcare organizations. In addition, Osintsev and Khalilian (2023) examined whether innovation and strategic planning improve organizational performance and found that mutually strategic planning and innovation had good effect on organizational performance.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Strategic planning is significant in strengthening competitive advantage in Level Six private hospitals. Clear vision and mission statements, alignment of departmental goals with hospital-wide objectives, stakeholder involvement, and periodic reviews of strategic plans provide a strong framework for positioning hospitals effectively in a competitive healthcare environment. Without well-structured planning processes, hospitals risk operational inefficiencies, fragmented efforts across departments, and limited adaptability in a rapidly evolving healthcare sector. Therefore, institutionalizing structured, participatory, and regularly reviewed strategic planning processes is essential for sustainable competitiveness. Strategic planning is the process of deciding on the organization’s message and then establishing goals, plans and policies to ensure that resources are allocated to achieve these objectives. Strategic planning is choosing the most operative methods to assist an organization in realizing its objectives.

## 6.0 Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study recommends that Level Six private hospitals should institutionalize comprehensive and participatory strategic planning practices. Hospitals should ensure that organizational vision and mission statements are not only clearly defined but also communicated effectively to all departments. Departmental goals must be continuously aligned with the hospital’s overall strategy through structured planning frameworks that include measurable milestones. Strategic plans should be reviewed regularly preferably annually or biannually to ensure they remain relevant in a dynamic healthcare environment. In addition, hospitals should create inclusivity by involving employees, customers, and partners in the planning process. Such practices will enhance ownership, improve implementation, and create agility in responding to changing patient needs and competitive market conditions.

With respect to resource management, the study recommends that hospitals should strengthen efficiency and accountability in the use of financial, human, and physical resources. Budget discipline should be institutionalized through strict monitoring systems that ensure resources

are allocated and spent in line with strategic priorities. Hospitals should also prioritize investments in critical departments such as emergency care, specialized units, and diagnostic services where the competitive advantage can be maximized. Furthermore, workforce productivity should be enhanced through continuous performance tracking and incentive-based mechanisms.

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