

**GENERIC STRATEGIC POSITIONING AND COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE: A CASE OF SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN
NAIROBI METROPOLITAN REGION, KENYA**

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my special thanks to my family for they have been my pillar of encouragement and motivation during the entire period I undertook this research.

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Several academicians, practitioners and individuals helped me to write this project, from the fact that studies of this nature are seldom the outcome of individual effort or their authors alone.

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OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Generic strategies: Refer to a concept introduced by Michael Porter in his book "Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance," are fundamental strategies that businesses can employ to gain a competitive advantage within their industry.

Competitive Advantage: Is an advantage over rivals obtained by giving customers more value, either through lower prices or by offering benefits and services that make higher prices justifiable.

Positioning: In the realm of business and marketing, involves strategically creating a unique and favorable impression of a product, brand, or company among consumers in a specific target market.

Cost leadership: Is a strategic approach employed by a company to gain a competitive edge by positioning itself as the producer or provider with the lowest costs within its industry or specific market segment.

Market focus: Often termed market segmentation, entails the procedure of subdividing a broader market into smaller, well-defined segments according to specific attributes, requirements, inclinations, or behaviors exhibited by potential customers.

Differentiation strategy: Involves the act of setting a company's products, services, or brand apart from those offered by competitors through means that generate perceived value and establish a distinct presence in the minds of customers.

Focus Strategy: Also known as a niche strategy is a business approach that concentrates on serving a specific segment of a broader market in a highly targeted and specialized manner.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CUCK: Cooperative University College of Kenya

MBV: The Market-Based View

RBV: The resource-based viewpoint

TUK: Technical University of Kenya

MMU: Multimedia University of Kenya

ABSTRACT

Despite the widely acknowledged significance of positioning strategies, scholarly research in marketing has allocated minimal attention to empirically grounded investigations into the strategic positioning approaches employed by public institutions to enhance their competitive advantage. Porter's generic strategies, which outline how a business seeks competitive advantage across its selected market scope, served as the foundation for the study. The specific aims of the study encompassed the evaluation of cost leadership strategy effect on the competitive advantage of chosen public universities in Kenya, the examination of the effects of a market focus strategy on the competitive advantage of the same institutions and the assessment of the effects of a differentiation strategy on their competitive advantage. Grounded in the Market-Based View Theory, Resource-Based View Theory, and Open Systems Theory, the research employed a descriptive survey methodology to delve into the strategic positioning methodologies employed by selected public universities in Kenya. The study focused on the Nairobi metropolitan area, encompassing three recently chartered public universities, including members from the small and medium-sized university category. They included: Technical University of Kenya (TUK), Multimedia University of Kenya (MMU) and Co-Operative University according to the Commission for University Education's website (www.cue.or.ke). Employees from the three selected public universities in the Nairobi metropolitan region made up the target demographic. The study employed a stratified sampling technique, in which a stratum was a subset of the population that shares at least one attribute. The study used 10% to select participants from each stratum. The study sampled 278 members of Teaching staff, 110 members of Management staff and sample of 2361 students. Thus, the total sample size of the study comprised of 2749 respondents. The primary approach for data collection involved employing a semi-structured questionnaire to gather information directly from participants. This method assessed the degree to which various strategic planning practices are utilized across the selected public universities. Concurrently, secondary data was acquired by scrutinizing educational journals, online blogs, social media platforms, and course materials. The data refinement process entailed editing, coding and tabulating the collected information to identify any irregularities in the responses. Moreover, specific numerical values were assigned to the responses to facilitate further analysis. For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as tabulations, percentages and measures of central tendency were employed. These quantitative reports enabled the formulation of generalized findings regarding the impact of competing strategies on the performance of public universities. Furthermore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish the correlation between strategic positioning and the competitive advantage of public universities. At a 5% significance level, all predictor variables were found to significantly contribute to competitive advantage, as their p-values were below 0.05. Among these, Focus Strategy ($\beta = 0.474$) emerged as the most significant factor, demonstrating its critical role in driving competitive advantage for public universities in Kenya. The study concluded that universities can enhance and improve their competitive advantage by adopting and strengthening cost leadership, focus and differentiation strategies.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Organizations today operate in a genuinely competitive global environment, necessitating the implementation of strategies that increase their competitiveness (Kahiga, 2017). Firms in the twenty-first century economy operate in uncertain and changing conditions (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020). Businesses work to gain a competitive edge on a global scale by utilizing innovation, economies of scale, and brand awareness. The ability to hold a larger market share and surpass rivals in terms of profitability the main performance metric is an organization's competitive advantage (Mutuku, Muathe & James, 2019). A better performance than the industry average is made possible by the company's superior competitive position. How to maintain a competitive advantage is given more consideration as competition heats up. To maintain their dominance in a variety of markets, multinational firms such as Amazon and Toyota, for example, use sophisticated logistics networks and effective production techniques to cut costs (Lemoine & Dagnæs, 2003). Similar to this, companies like Apple and Tesla set themselves apart from the competition by being innovative, high-end, and sustainable, establishing themselves as leaders in their fields (Mutuku, Muathe & James, 2019). These global strategies allow businesses to meet the needs of a wide range of global customer bases while maintaining their competitiveness.

In order to maximize operations and gain access to wider markets, companies in the region coordinate their strategies with common economic policies and trade agreements. According to Amighini et.al., (2023), the European Union's single market, for instance, facilitates smooth trade and regional supply chain integration,

which benefits European businesses like Volkswagen. In order to appeal to local viewers, Netflix produces regionally specific shows, such as K-dramas, in Asia (Sarkar & Yang, 2024). In order to increase production and distribution efficiency and generate value for the company and the local economy, companies such as Samsung also make use of regional trade agreements. These tactics show how businesses adjust to local conditions in order to maintain a competitive edge.

Companies/organizations place a strong emphasis on accommodating cultural quirks, customer preferences, and niche market demands. Coca-Cola, for example, adapts its drinks to local preferences by providing fruit-flavored drinks in Africa and less sweetened options in Europe (Haji, 2018). By tackling the particular difficulties faced by the unbanked population, M-Pesa transformed financial services in Kenya and showed how innovation catered to local needs can provide a competitive advantage. Similar to this, international companies like KFC adapt their menus and supply chains to suit local tastes by using regional ingredients and introducing regional specialties.

Strategies are defined by various theorists such as Mintzberg (2017), stating that strategies are plans, tricks, perspectives, patterns, and positions in a series of decisions. Leiblein et.al., (2022) describes strategy as a unique method. That is, you consciously choose an alternative course of action to provide your own combination of values. According to World Health Organization (2018) strategy entails an organization's long-term goals and objectives being stated, an action plan being adopted, and the resources needed to attain those goals being allocated. Strategies are important to an organization because they help define and communicate its unique position. Strategy determines how a company's resources, capabilities and skills, can be aggregated to generate a competitive advantage (Ovans, 2015). Strategic reactions,

according to Osita-Ejikeme and Amah (2022) realign businesses to respond to a continually changing, tumultuous business environment.

According to Kailer (2021) a strategy that generates a competitive advantage is good and is utilized to set a company apart from its competitors by providing a valuable, unique, and difficult-to-copy advantage. According to Saqib (2023) positioning as a strategy describes how a company competes and survives in the marketplace. A combination of unique resources and a high level of skill gives an organization a competitive advantage. Di Vaio et.al, (2021) posits that, evaluating a company's objective market position necessitates access to both internal and external analyses, along with the capability to integrate them, is essential.

1.1.1 Competitive Advantage

In their study, Mugo (2020), define competitive advantage as a firm's edge over competitors in the same industry. When a company has an ability or set of abilities that makes it better than its competitors, it does indeed have a competitive advantage (Ferreira, Coelho & Moutinho, 2020). Competitive advantage is a tactic goal that helps a business grow. When a business model has the right mix of things, it can better serve and meet the needs of its surrounding area (Johnson et.al., 2020). Factors like access to natural resources, well-trained and skilled people, human resources, and new technologies are some of them. A corporation can get a competitive advantage by implementing value-adding methods that its competitors aren't doing. Firms establish and preserve competitive advantage, according to Nayak et.al., (2022) due to their capability to keep improving, inventing, and upgrading their competitive advantages over time. Competitive advantage aids a company in combating competition and traps

customers. The competitive advantage can take any shape or form, as long as it aids the company in increasing and maintaining market share.

According to Saqib (2023) sustainable competitive advantage plays an important part in a company's strategic positioning versus its competitors. Competitive advantage is described as the extended advantages of putting a novel value-creating strategy into practice that is not being executed concurrently by a competitor, as well as the unavailability of the strategy's benefits to be duplicated. De Wit and Altbach (2021) highlight the escalating national and international competition within the university sector, coinciding with a surge in demand from stakeholders. Concurrently, Anderson (2021) observes a growing rivalry among universities, with collaborative efforts and franchise operations on the rise. This intensification of competition has led some universities to experience diminished student enrollment. Consequently, the imperative for universities to establish a competitive advantage is apparent, necessitating strategies that foster prosperity and success (Trunina, Pryakhina & Bilyk, 2021; Seroshtan and Ketova, 2020; Marinho, Silva & Santos, 2020).

In recent years, the emergence of new universities and the elevation of colleges to university status have accentuated the competition further (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2019; Kithinji & Nasong'o, 2023). This phenomenon has amplified competition as the services offered are akin, providing customers with an array of choices (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). While competition often leads to enhanced services, it can also prompt some institutions to compromise quality to secure enrolment. In the contemporary landscape, quality has evolved into a pivotal competitive strategy within the global market (Marinho, Silva & Santos, 2020). In the midst of this competitive academic milieu, where students are endowed with numerous alternatives, universities must rigorously investigate the factors that

facilitate student attraction and retention (Alserhan & Shbail, (2020). For universities aiming to secure a competitive edge in the future, the exploration of innovative and effective methods to allure, retain, and cultivate stronger relationships with students becomes paramount.

1.1.2 Generic Strategic Positioning

Positioning is the process of using a company's marketing resources to create a clear, unique, and attractive image in the minds of target customers in comparison to competitors (Zhu, 2020). Positioning, according to Mintzberg (2017) is a process that affects consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing patterns based on competitive conditions and facilities of a company in the target market. Positioning is also defined as the act of designing to create a distinct image in the minds of customers in comparison to competitors, based on distinct features (Saqib, 2020). The goal of positioning is to find and retain a strong purchase justification that provides a real or perceived advantage.

Generic strategic positioning refers to the overall approach an organization adopts to set itself apart from rivals and create a sustainable competitive advantage within its industry or market (Firoz et.al., 2019). According to Firoz et.al., (2019) these positioning strategies were initially outlined by Michael Porter and are widely used as a framework for businesses to define their competitive direction. Porter's generic strategies describe how a business aims to obtain a competitive advantage within the parameters of the market it has selected (Greckhamer & Gur, 2021). These strategies encompass three or four fundamental approaches: differentiation, cost leadership, and focus strategy. An organization must opt for one of two pathways to achieve competitive advantage either by keeping expenses lower than competitors or by

distinguishing itself based on attributes that customer's value, allowing it to command premium prices.

A company selects one of two scope options: focus, which targets specific market segments, or a broad industry-wide approach that spans multiple market segments (Salsabila et.al.,2021). The chosen generic strategy reflects decisions related to the kind of competitive edge sought as well as the size of the market the business serves.

Similarly, universities have established connections with auxiliary institutions such as intermediate level schools, hospitals, and research organizations (Blake & Gallimore, 2021). This effort aims to enhance market viability and cultivate relationships with clients, thereby contributing to the expansion of market reach and long-term viability. Epstein and Roy (2021) highlight that having a beneficial presence in most major cities across Kenya and an extensive network of branches fosters both market expansion and sustainability. However, the influence of these Porters' generic strategies on the growth of universities in Kenya remains unclear.

1.1.3 Public Universities in Kenya

A university is an establishment dedicated to advanced education and research, conferring academic degrees across different tiers (including diplomas, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees) in a wide array of subjects as stipulated by the university's regulations. The public universities in Kenya were instituted through parliamentary legislation with the purpose of engaging in research, utilizing their extensive range of proficient personnel in various fields (Kibuku, Ochieng & Wausi, 2020).

There has been growth in national and international competition in the university sector with the demand of stakeholders being high (King'oo, Kimencu & Kinyua,

2020). Since the 1990s, the competitive landscape within which universities function has been undergoing transformation due to the privatization of universities and the liberalization of Kenya's economy. This shift has prompted universities to adapt by adjusting their positioning to address emerging challenges and align with strategic and performance goals.

Public universities, like those in most African countries, receive government funding. This implies that the universities are reliant on the strength of the national economy. Kenya now has approximately 30 public universities distributed across the country. The aspiration to enhance the quality of higher education and learning, as well as absorb the growing number of students, who have completed their high school education, has increased universities in the country. It has become more popular for people to go to university because more people are graduating from high school.

Public universities have undergone and are currently undergoing adjustments to survive and compete successfully as a result of economic liberalization and volatility, as well as new government policies (Lin & Wang, 2020). Universities that wish to increase a competitive advantage perhaps in the future, you'll have to start looking for new and innovative strategies to attract, recollect, and create greater student connections.

In response to these shifts, public universities have capitalized on students' interest in education by augmenting their capacity to accommodate a larger student body. They have also introduced courses tailored to specific market segments. Furthermore, universities have established collaborations with supplementary institutions such as colleges, research centers, and hospitals. This approach has not only enhanced market viability but has also contributed to the expansion and enduring nature of market

growth. The universities' market expansion and sustainability are facilitated by their strategic positioning in key urban centers throughout Kenya and an extensive network of branches.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the past few years there has been an emergence of new universities and colleges being upgraded to universities (Blake & Gallimore, 2021). With this increase in the number of universities there has been an increase in competition among universities as students have options to choose from, considering the services offered are similar (Kibuku, Ochieng & Wausi, 2020). With the expansion in the number of degree options available, competition among these institutions has strengthened, giving prospective students a wider range of universities to select from (Allen et. al., 2022).

Due to increasing competition, universities have had to take a more strategic approach to gaining or maintaining market share. Allen (2019) sees positioning as a vital weapon in combating market competition and as a component of improving competitiveness. Universities, like any other business, require outstanding tactics to help them grow and gain a competitive advantage (Kharub, Mor & Sharma, 2019). As a result, in today's competitive academic environment, when students have numerous options, it's important to research aspects that help institutions attract and retain students.

Research by Blake and Gallimore (2021) found that cutting-edge technology helped the organization develop a long-term competitive advantage through positioning tactics. The study, however, was limited to the telecommunications industry. Lin and Wang (2020) investigated the relationship between positioning strategies and commercial bank performance in Kenya, finding that positioning strategies improve

the bank's performance in a favorable and substantial way. The study, however, was based on commercial banks.

Despite the fact that positioning methods are universally regarded to be important; marketing scholars have paid little attention to empirically based research on the strategic positioning methods utilized by public institutions to influence their competitive advantage.

According to Hicks and Dalton (2019) universities are increasingly forming joint partnerships and franchising businesses in order to compete. Due to the high level of competitiveness, several colleges have relatively low student enrollment (King'oo, Kimencu & Kinyua, 2020). The necessity for universities to gain a competitive edge is self-evident, necessitating the development of strategies that allow them to grow and prosper (Blake & Gallimore, 2021). This study therefore aimed to fill the gap and sought to establish how strategic positioning influences competitive advantage of public universities within the Nairobi metropolitan region in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were:

- i. To determine the effect of cost leadership strategy on the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya.
- ii. To ascertain the impact of focus strategy on public universities in Kenya's competitive advantage.
- iii. To determine the effects of differentiation strategy on the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya.

1.4 Research Questions

This study sought to respond to the following questions:

- i. How does the cost-leadership strategy affect Kenya's public universities' ability to compete?
- ii. How does the focus strategy affect Kenya's public universities' ability to compete?
- iii. How does Kenya's public universities' competitive advantage benefit from differentiation strategies?

1.5 Justification and Significance of the Study

Numerous studies on competitive strategies have been conducted in Kenya, albeit in various circumstances but not public university context. Notwithstanding this context, not much research has been done to ascertain how competitive strategies affect Kenyan public universities as they function in this setting. Because of economic instability, new government policies, liberation, the rise of numerous private universities, and the granting of charters to become fully fledged technical colleges, public universities have had to adapt in order to remain viable and competitive. The urge to close this information gap inspired the planned investigation. Thus, the study aimed to examine generic strategic positioning and competitive advantage among selected public universities in the Nairobi metropolitan region, Kenya.

This research holds significant value for policymakers within public institutions as it would provide them with concrete insights into how positioning strategies influence their operations and contribute to their competitive advantage. It will also guide them in identifying the specific positioning strategies that should be adopted to ensure their continued competitiveness.

Kenyan government has allowed higher education to open up therefore creating a very competitive environment for the upcoming and existing stakeholders in the industry. The conclusions of this study will aid the government as a regulator of educational institutions since it would provide insight into the numerous positioning tactics that institutions might use to impact their competitive advantage. The information acquired in this study will aid the government in formulating policies that benefit Kenya's best positioning strategies in various sectors.

The outcome of this research will aid scholars and academicians as it lays the groundwork for subsequent investigations. The study's conclusions will initiate discussions regarding positioning strategies among students and scholars. Moreover, this research serves as a valuable resource for future researchers exploring related topics, as well as for academicians delving into the same subject matter.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This paper emphasis was on the generic positioning tactics used by Kenyan universities. The study looked at how strategic positioning techniques are used in Kenyan public universities and how they affect their competitive advantage. This research was limited to Nairobi's metropolitan region public universities. It entailed gathering data from management personnel which was significant during data collection as factors like time and geographical distance might have imposed limitations that hinder the collection of data from all higher education institutions across the country. Nairobi metropolitan region selection was justified by the fact that university competitiveness in the region was higher than in any other area of the country.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter compiled material from other researchers who have worked in the same field. Theoretical review, empirical review, conceptualization, and operationalization were the specific areas covered here.

2.2 Empirical Review

This study was based on Porter's generic strategies outline how an organization seeks to gain a competitive edge within the parameters of its selected market scope (Islami, Mustafa, & Topuzovska 2020). Different strategies are discussed in this session including: cost leadership strategy, focus strategy, and differentiation strategy and competitive advantage.

2.2.1 Cost Leadership Strategy and Competitive Advantage

Haque, Munawaroh et al., (2021) conducted a study on the "Bakoel Zee" marketing strategy in BSD and competitive advantage in cost leadership and differentiation of SMEs. Among the three strategies, cost leadership is the most distinct. It comprises charging customers a lower price than what the competitor charges (Ali & Anwar, 2021). This strategy aims to be the best in the business by having the lowest costs (cost advantages). If a company wants to be the low-value producer in its field, Blake and Gallimore (2021) says that's the way to do it. The ways that a company can get a better price are many and depend on how it is set up. Most businesses will try to be cost leaders in order to get proprietary technology economies of scale, more access to resources, and a say in policy. A low-cost business must look for and take advantage of every possible cost advantage. A lot of an organization's general performance is

based on cost leadership (Haseeb & Shabbir, 2023). This is one of the ways organizations can make sure that they improve their general performance.

On the other hand, sustainable competitive advantage is a prolonged process enabling a company to sustain its lead over rivals (Tian, Wang & Wang, 2022). In contrast to short-term benefits like being the first to introduce a new product, a sustainable competitive advantage can be integrated into a company's core, ensuring its dominance for years or even decades (Lin & Wang, 2020). Establishing such an advantage often demands concentrated endeavors, consistent innovation, and perhaps even some fortuitous occurrences. When possessing a low-cost advantage, adopting a low-cost leadership strategy, maintaining cost-effective operations across related sections or business units, and employing cost-efficient personnel are essential. Public universities should outsource operations where they do not have a cost advantage to other public institutions where they do (King'oo, Kimencu & Kinyua, 2020). For public institutions to be effective cost leaders, they need to have a large portion of the market. Public institutions need a sizable share of the market in order to be effective cost leaders. Large-scale production and distribution, economies of scale, technology improvements, service/product design, input cost reduction, and resource capacity utilization are all ways to achieve cost leadership. A single company can be a cost leader in a given industry, as Porter (1998) points out; hence, adopting such a plan is the optimal strategic option (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020).

Costs can be lowered by making changes in our processes; gaining from the learning curve; exploiting economies of scale; designing products that reduce operational costs; and undertaking reengineering activities. As part of an effort to be more efficient and responsive to the market, companies can use low-cost or cost-leadership strategies. Because the public institution has access to low-cost materials or

breakthrough proprietary technology, prices may be decreased. In order to be the lowest-cost leader, public universities don't have to compromise revenues, because a high revenue is acquired by gaining a significant portion of the market (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020). Increased demand and market share are the effect of lower prices. For emerging businesses that require substantial sums of money, public institutions can act as a low-cost leader by erecting entrance barriers. Market dominance means that price cuts are less likely to affect the overall market price (Mintzberg, 2017). There are some drawbacks to the cost-leadership strategy. A public university is at risk of losing money if prices are dropped too sharply, which is neither good for consumers nor the public sector.

This broad strategy comprises becoming the lowest-cost producer in a certain industry for a particular degree of quality. Even in the event of a pricing conflict, the public university can derive advantages while its competitor incurs losses. Even if there is no price war, public institutions which can deliver more inexpensively will remain profitable for longer as the industry matures and prices decline. Frequently, a cost leadership strategy is focused on a broad market (Khan, Niqab, & Hanson, 2021).

According to Grinerud, Aarseth and Robertsen (2021) the concept of low-cost relative to competitors is a common theme among public universities that achieve low cost leadership. The public university has a long-term cost advantage over its competitors, which it can use to either undercut its competitors and gain more market share at their expense, or make more money by selling at the market rate. Competitive advantage for a low-cost leader comes from having lower overall costs than their competitors. This means that the public university needs to be better at efficiency and cost control than its private counterparts, as well as always looking for new ways to cut costs and save money (Saqib, 2020). In order to be a successful low-cost producer, you have to

cut costs all the way through your business. It's important for a company to run efficiently so that it can provide goods or services at a lower price than its competitors. A public institution that plans, makes, and sells a service or product that is similar to its competitors' more efficiently and also has a wider market reach is a cost leader (Osita-Ejikeme & Amah, 2022).

The most critical factor for a public university seeking to cut costs competitively is to maintain efficiency across all activities in order to effectively manage each expense and uncover new areas for cost reduction. As per Kailer (2021), efficiency, or how much inputs are required for each unit of output, is the most important aspect of the cost leadership strategy. When it comes to determining efficiency, cost-effectiveness and asset parsimony play a key role. The combination of cost efficiency and prudent resource utilization illustrates a public university's commitment to cost leadership. A university's performance can be improved if it is able to use the least amount of operational costs and assets necessary to achieve the goal sales (Mugo, 2020). Public colleges place a high value on asset utilization, employee productivity, and discretionary spending. As a result of cutting costs and assets per unit of output, they have a significant advantage over their rivals in terms of customer acquisition and retention (Ngunjiri & Ragui, 2020). With regard to generic operational efficiency solutions, we feel that they are more likely to be copied by competitors and peers over time, resulting in the loss of competitive cost advantages.

As a result, colleges appear to be optimizing capacity usage and capitalizing on economies of scale. Additionally, they are developing relationships with service providers, suppliers, and other auxiliary groups. To minimize cost exploitation, public institutions establish long-term relationships with their agencies and work with a diverse set of vendors (Allen, 2019). Additionally, governmental

institutions place a high premium on career advancement and outsource distribution and other services to decrease operational expenses.

Significantly, Kibuku, Ochieng, and Wausi (2020) emphasize that the adoption of cost leadership as a generic strategy doesn't necessarily imply that the products or services being offered should have the lowest price. Frequently, positioning products solely on the basis of low price might lead to perceptions of inferior quality, appealing only to a specific market segment. Cost leadership can be leveraged by organizations not only to secure a competitive advantage but also to enhance their products and services. This can be accomplished by incorporating value-added elements through a value leadership strategy, ultimately leading to improved customer satisfaction (Munyoki, 2015).

2.2.2 Focus Strategy and Competitive Advantage

Organizations can employ a focus approach to obtain aggressive gains by establishing themselves in a market niche (Yan, 2020). The focus strategy is designed for limited niches with specialized requirements. This strategy concentrates on a certain customer institution, geographic market, or product line segment (Munyoki, 2015). The primary goal of the focus approach is to provide products and services to niche markets. According to Blake and Gallimore (2021), the firm only caters to a specific market niche. Following that, the corporation sells items and services to a specific market segment, taking into consideration the segment's demands and needs.

The technique is used to break into a market by focusing on a certain section or collection of segments within a given industry (Hicks & Dalton, 2019). The emphasis is primarily on establishing a competitive edge in the segment, rather than on achieving a competitive advantage overall. The competitive advantage is founded on

lower costs or the capacity to offer something unique to specialized members. According to Lin and Wang, (2020) there are two categories of focus strategies: cost-focused and differentiation-focused. In a cost-focused strategy, the firm strives to reduce costs, whereas in a differentiation-focused strategy, it pursues to differentiate itself within the specific market segment. A focus strategy centers on serving a specific buyer segment that seeks unique product features; while a cost-focused strategy caters to a buyer segment that seeks satisfaction at a reduced cost (Strauch, 2021). In return, the firm's focus plan is to target a specific market sector (Farah, Munga, & Mbebe, 2018). This can represent a product line, a geographic area, or a specific consumer group (Mintzberg, 2017). This strategy is centered around enhancing market share by operating in markets that larger competitors have overlooked or find less attractive. It thrives in situations where customers possess distinct preferences and the market hasn't been saturated by existing competitors. However, for a focus strategy to be successful, the industrial area must be significant enough to support expansion but not so critical to other key competitors that it becomes a distraction (Kathanya, Ndegwa & Oringo, 2021).

Conversely, Taha states that a focus strategy centered on differentiation relies on the presence of a specific buyer segment that demands distinctive services and product attributes (Taha, 2023). A public university's focus strategy focuses on a certain market niche (Gregersen & Ørmen, 2023). The public university can opt to concentrate on a particular consumer demographic, service or product category, geographical region, or specific service area (Taha, 2023). Focus in an industry is also based on having a small number of competitors.

According Kasri et.al., (2023) focus tries to get more market share by operating in a small market or market that aren't very appealing to bigger competitors or aren't

important to them. Geographical variables, customer traits, and service and product standards or requirements are all aspects that contribute to niches. It's important to pick an industry segment that is big enough to have significant growth opportunities but not so significant to other major competitors that they don't pay attention to it. Market penetration or market expansion could be one of the main ways to focus on.

The competitive advantage of a focuser relies on either providing lower costs compared to competitors targeting the same market segment or delivering something unique to niche members that competitors cannot match (Gregersen & Ørmen, 2023). The foundation of focusing lies in selecting a market niche characterized by distinct buyer preferences. This niche could be defined by geographical exclusivity, specific service requirements based on certain physiological aspects, or unique attributes that resonate with a particular social class. It's only when they're used with other strategies like differentiation or cost leadership that focus-based strategies are used by public colleges of all sizes. It works best when consumers have very specific tastes and other public universities haven't tried to get into the same market (Taha, 2023).

The focus strategy is a strategic approach used by public universities to achieve a competitive advantage by focusing on a specific niche or segment of the market. This strategy involves identifying and selecting a specific target market, such as adult learners returning to higher education or students interested in a particular field of study. Public universities tailor their educational programs to cater to the unique needs and preferences of their target market, such as creating specialized degree programs, offering flexible class schedules, providing online or distance learning options, or designing specific support services. They may also invest in specialized resources and facilities that cater to the needs and interests of their target market.

Effective branding and marketing are crucial components of the focus strategy for public universities. In order to boost their competitive advantage, institutions clearly communicate their specialization and the benefits they offer to their chosen target market, while developing a strong online presence and marketing materials that resonate with the intended audience. Focused public universities establish partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and community groups that align with the needs and interests of their target market. These collaborations create opportunities for internships, research projects, and employment prospects, enhancing the university's appeal to its chosen demographic.

Continuous research and adaptation are essential for the effectiveness of a focus strategy for public universities. Balancing focus with a broader mission of providing accessible and affordable education is also crucial. Public universities must ensure their focus strategy aligns with applicable government regulations and funding guidelines, being aware of legal and ethical considerations when serving specific student populations.

2.2.3 Differentiation Strategy and Competitive Advantage

Differentiation strategies encompass the marketing tactics employed by companies to establish a robust identity within a specific market. These strategies are also recognized as segmentation strategies. Differentiation strategies can also be defined as positioning the brand to set itself apart from the competition and build its own image (Adıgüzel, 2020). Differentiation strategies strive to gain a competitive edge by supplying one-of-a-kind items with desirable qualities like quality, innovation, and customer service. Differentiation can be based on a range of elements, including the product itself, the delivery mechanism, and others. According Kyungu (2019) with

these differentiating features, companies add value to their customers and reward them at premium prices. Companies adopting a differentiating strategy create value through customer loyalty, price elasticity, brand image, advertising and marketing strength, novelty, fashion, and the exact image achieved through their own distribution channels (Msinga et.al., 2018). Therefore, these companies seek to make positive profits by investing in the development of services or products that provide accurate characteristics that can be applied to their customers. The latest advanced technologies related to differentiation are more likely to produce results in the short term and are at higher risk of failure for these strategies compared to less up-to-date strategies (Muchiri, 2018). Means of achieving a differentiating strategy do not easily help maximize production efficiency.

Wilkins (2020) states that differentiation methods are marketing techniques employed by public institutions to create a distinct identity in a market. Public universities use this method to introduce different varieties of the same fundamental services and products with the same name in a certain service and product category, effectively covering the whole range of services and products accessible in that category. Differentiation strategies may also be defined as the positioning of brands in order to set them apart from their competitors and create their own image (Saqib, 2020). A differentiation strategy involves a public university's endeavor to create and promote distinctive services and products tailored to various customer segments. This approach is typically adopted when a public university possesses a distinct competitive edge and can sustain a resource-intensive advertising campaign. It stands as one of three fundamental marketing strategies available to any public university. To effectively uphold this strategy, the public university should possess the following capabilities: robust research and development proficiencies, adept product and service

engineering capabilities, strong creative competencies, effective collaborations with distribution channels, adept marketing skills, and rewards linked predominantly to subjective evaluations. Additionally, the university must effectively communicate the significance of differentiating product and service attributes, emphasize continuous enhancement and innovation, and attract highly skilled and innovative personnel (Haseeb & Shabbir, 2023).

Stone, Migacz and Wolf (2021) posit that distinctive services and goods for specific target markets are the goal of a public university's differentiation strategy. In cases where a university has a strong competitive advantage and is able to afford a costly advertising campaign, this strategy is often used. Every public university has the option of using this strategy, along with the other two. Strong research and development, services and product engineering, creativity, strong collaboration with distribution channels and marketing, as well as incentives based mostly on subjective measurements are all prerequisites for the public university to successfully implement this plan. Public universities must be able to express the importance of distinctive service and product features, stress continual development, and attract a diverse student population, among other things. According to research in the service industry (Kraus, 2022), public colleges frequently use services and product differentiation to differentiate their offerings from those of their competitors.

According to Bardy, Holzäpfel and Leuders (2021) the goal of a differentiation strategy is to create products and services that stand out from the competition because of their unique features and benefits that customers value. The public university may be allowed to charge a greater price for these services and goods because of the added value they provide. An increase in tuition is expected to help pay for higher costs involved with delivering unique services and goods to students. The public university

may be able to pass on price increases to its customers, who are unable to simply find substitute services and products, due to the specific qualities of the services and items.

In order to differentiate themselves from the competition, public universities must have significant exposure to cutting-edge scientific research, a strongly skilled and talented services and product development and sales team (Bardy, Holzäpfel & Leuders, 2021). Fruitful differentiation is founded on research into the values and behaviors of purchasers from a variety of regions, needs, and behaviors to ascertain what they value and consider significant. To enhance customer preference for the services and products, the desired attributes are then implemented into the services and products. Services and products with features that differ considerably from those of competitors are the foundation for competitive advantage. Differentiation efforts can result in increased expenses. It is possible to achieve profitably differentiated products and services by lowering the cost of difference or increasing sales volume to compensate for lower profit margins (Czinkota, Ronkainen & Cui, 2022).

A public university's services and products can be worth more to clients than they are to the public because of their uniqueness or how they are perceived to be unique, not because they are more expensive (Chen, Yeh & Wang, 2021). This is called the differentiation approach. It is important for a public institution to be unique in its field in a way that customers value. This goal is called "distinctiveness". The public university's ability to beat its competitors and make more money than other businesses is because it can sell its unique services and products for more than what it costs to make them (Saqib, 2020).

Haque et.al., (2021) argues that you may differentiate products and services in many ways. Distinguishing techniques include unique attributes, attentive customer care,

rapid service and product innovation, technological leadership, perceived grandeur and status, technical design, diversified tastes and performance. Rather than cutting costs, a public institution utilizing the differentiation method should focus on investing in and developing distinctive features that customers would notice. Overall, developing and maintaining innovativeness, creativity, and organizational learning within a public university is the most important success factor in terms of plan implementation (Haseeb & Shabbir, 2023).

Stone, Migacz and Wolf (2021) assert that whatever a public institution may do to boost buyer value becomes a possible point of differentiation. After identifying a basis of buyer value, adding value to its services and products by adding desirable attributes at a reasonable cost is a must. These characteristics may improve the effectiveness of the services and goods or make them more cost-effective to utilize. Differentiation possibilities might arise from actions taken at any point along the cost chain of an activity.

According to Liu (2023) a public university can gain a competitive advantage by providing greater value to its consumers than the cost of providing it, either through distinction or efficiency. Differentiating public universities from their competitors is accomplished through a variability of sales, marketing, and associated services, as well as product and technology advances. Differentiation refers to how distinct a service or product, as well as its additions, are perceived. A public institution that uses a differentiation strategy can charge above-market pricing because buyers believe the services and products are unique in some way. There are at least two sorts of differentiation strategies, according to Czinkota, Ronkainen and Cui (2022): those who come up with new services and products, and those who do a lot of marketing and keep an eye on their image. Creative flair, good basic research services, and

product engineering are all significant success criteria that lead to a differentiator's profitability (Stone, Migacz & Wolf, 2021).

According to Liu (2023) the advantages of executing differentiation strategy include increased revenue relative to competitors due to quality, brand loyalty, and decreased consumer demand elasticity.

2.3 Theoretical Review

2.3.1 Resource Based View Theory

Since 1983, when Dayt advocated a number of competitive advantage techniques, the concept of sustained competitive advantage has been in existence. The resource-based view theory is the most common paradigm for identifying competitive advantage sources. Wernefelt (1984), Rumelt (1984), and Barney (1984) were the first to propose the theory (1986). Its objective is to illustrate how a business's internal sources of competitive advantage contribute to its ability to retain a competitive edge (Bates and Flynn, 2005). The notion of a resource-based view is centered on an organization's abilities and resources. Organizational resource heterogeneity, which refers to the systematic distinctions across organizations in an industry in terms of the resources they manage, and resource immobility, which asserts that resources are relatively stable within businesses, are the two basic assumptions of the resource-based theory. The notion posits that an organization's competitive advantage is dependent on both internal resources and competencies (Wilburn, 2011).

The notion describes how a company's key internal resources serve as a baseline for its strategy and success from the inside out. Barney (1991) examines the relationship between an organization's resources and its capacity to sustain a competitive edge over time. The approach is used to determine the capacity of several firms' resources

to produce a sustainable competitive edge. The resources are valuable, scarce, difficult to copy, have no alternatives, and be used by the organization to establish a sustained competitive advantage (Wilburn, 2011). If a resource misses some of these characteristics, it may only provide a brief competitive advantage or possibly become a liability for the company. As a result, to obtain and sustain a competitive edge, businesses must assess and develop resources that provide them with long-term distinctive competency.

The inputs to a company's manufacturing process are referred to as resources. The resource-based view idea states that an organization begins by examining its resources and then assesses the potential for value generation by putting in place the correct strategy to earn maximum value in a long-term way.

There are three types of resources: intangible assets, organizational capabilities and tangible assets (Pearce and Robinson, 2007). The term "tangible assets" refers to a company's physical and financial resources that it uses to give value to its consumers. Financial resources, production facilities, real estate, raw materials and equipment such as computers and machinery, are examples of these resources found on a company's balance sheet as assets. These resources are only available to the company, not to the customers. Despite the fact that these tangible resources are critical to a firm's positioning strategy, they can be a source of competitive nature because they are susceptible to harm from individuals or natural occurrences.

Intangible assets, on the other hand, include things like brand names, a company's reputation, patents and trademarks, technical know-how, organizational morale, franchises, and an organization's cumulative experience. These assets are crucial to a company's positioning strategy in terms of gaining and maintaining a competitive

advantage. Intangible resources are more valuable than actual resources since they represent the firm's future worth. A group of resources' capacity to complete a challenging task in an activity is called a capability. Every business has a unique set of skills and resources that serve as the foundation for both its primary source of income and strategy.

According to Porter, strategic development begins with an examination of an organization's relative position in its industry, whereas resource-based theory is a strategy formulation process. When a firm's external environment is in flux, resources and competencies within the company, says Grant (2001), are what allow it to establish its own character. There are faults in the theory, like its inability to be applied in the real world and infinite regress, however it does not apply to smaller enterprises (Barney & Clark, 2007). As a result of the superior competitive advantage, unique organizational resources finally result in better performance. An organization with scarce resources may seek to adopt new technology in order to make their resources more difficult to duplicate.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) helps organizations create and maintain a competitive advantage by leveraging their unique internal resources. These resources can support Porter's generic strategies, such as differentiation or cost leadership. The RBV helps organizations assess their internal resources and capabilities to determine the most suitable strategy. For instance, if a company lacks resources for cost leadership but has unique expertise or intellectual property, it may be better suited for differentiation. The relevance of dynamic capabilities—which let organizations modify and adjust their resources and capabilities over time—is another point of emphasis for RBV. This allows them to respond to changing market conditions and evolve their chosen Porter's strategy accordingly.

The theory is significant because it illustrates that public institutions can deploy response methods based on their resource capacity. The resource-based viewpoint (RBV) is a management paradigm that public universities can use to evaluate strategic options for improving performance. Additionally, RBV directs managerial attention on the university's internal capital in an effort to discover those assets, abilities, and competencies capable of delivering superior results. The theory is applied to elucidate how public universities attain competitiveness by delivering enhanced value to customers through innovative and novel approaches. This involves a strategic emphasis on identifying and harnessing resources to establish a sustained competitive advantage over the long term.

The Resource-Based View Theory, in short, is concerned with how internal resources such as intellectual property, human capital, and physical assets—form the basis of competitive advantage. Edith Penrose (1959), Jay Barney (1991), Birger Wernerfelt (1984), David J. Teece, Gary Pisano, and Amy Shuen (1997), Richard Rumelt (1984), Michael Porter (1980s), and other proponents have influenced the theory by highlighting the distinctiveness of resources, their strategic use, and their ability to adapt in dynamic markets.

2.3.2 Market Based View Theory

This study was guided by the Market-Based View (MBV) proposed by Bain (1968), which posits that factors related to the industry and external market orientation play a pivotal role in shaping corporate growth. The Market-Based View (MBV) of strategy asserts that the fundamental determinants of a company's growth are enterprise dynamics and external marketplace orientation (Peteraf & Bergen 2003; Porter, 1980). The firm's market-based view (MBV) concentrates on the relationship between the strategies of organizations and their external contexts (Grant, 1991).

According to this theory, all companies in an industry have equal access to strategic resources. Additional assumption is that these resources are exceedingly mobile in the MBV (Barney, 1991). According to Peteraf and Bergen (2003), a company's ability to develop is dependent on its ability to exploit imperfections in the market where it offers its products or services. To put it another way, a company must select a place within the company where it can best defend itself against and compete with external forces. In the MBV, a competitive advantage can be acquired by doing strategically relevant operations at lesser costs or distinctively based clients value (Porter et al., 2004).

The MBV proves that differentiating one's self from the competition, narrowing one's focus, and driving down costs are all viable options for long-term success in a given industry while also surpassing the competition.

In conclusion, the Market-Based View (MBV) Theory highlights that the main factors influencing competitive advantage are external market conditions, including industry structure, competitive forces, and market positioning. This theory's foundation was laid by proponents such as Joe S. Bain (1956), who emphasized barriers to entry as crucial to industry profitability, and Edward Mason (1939), who developed the Structure-Conduct-Performance paradigm. By highlighting the alignment between organizational capabilities and external demands, Philip Selznick (1957) made a contribution. Building on these concepts, Michael Porter created the Five Forces Framework in the 1980s, which is still a fundamental component of MBV and explains how businesses can gain a competitive edge by adapting to outside influences. The theory was further shaped by the joint efforts of Caves and Porter (1977), who improved our knowledge of industry structure and competitive dynamics. Collectively, these proponents have emphasized how crucial it is to match strategies

with external market opportunities and threats in order to gain a sustained competitive edge.

2.3.3 Open Systems Theory

Organizations were once thought to be closed systems that were self-contained and isolated from the outside world, according to classical views. Traditional theories haven't taken into account various environmental effects that have an impact on an organization's efficiency; hence most academics and theorists have accepted the open systems theory. Open system theory was developed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1956 and instantly applied to a wide range of fields (Scott, 2003).

The open systems perspective sees agencies as both hierarchical and loosely connected. In open structures, there are a few hints of clustering and ranges. It is assumed that all significant corporations are composed of a number of subsystems, each receiving input from other systems and producing outputs that can be used by other subsystems (Hatch, 1997). Subsystems are not usually represented in a company operation by departments; alternatively, they may mimic patterns of interest. Within a subsystem, interdependencies and links are usually closer than between subsystems. These "strong subassemblies" give the entire system a huge survival advantage (Gortner, Mahler & Nicholson, 1997).

The open systems theory assumes that each organization is unique, and that its structures should be able to accommodate such differences in opportunities and difficulties. Environmental factors, both general and specific, have a significant impact on open systems. The specific environmental factors are related to the firm's networks (Hatch 1997). The general environment is made up of four factors that are influenced by the organization's geographic location.

The proponents of this theory say that as businesses operate, they will be influenced by events, changes, or forces from the outside world (Burnes, 2000). As a result, any business that wants to succeed must constantly interact with the ever-changing external environment. Firms that want to be successful and effective must work hard to adapt to changes in their particular environments. This is due to the fact that businesses are both environmentalists and reliant on the environment (Ansoff.et.al, 1990). They must build a fit to the environment in order to maintain competitiveness (Duncan, 1972).

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) showed that a corporation can keep its operations going in any system by interacting with the outside world. Barriers let it interact with the outside world and feed on itself, but they also let it pass through them. They keep going by exchanging information with the outside world to keep them alive. Firms that work in open systems are very adaptable, but those that work in closed systems aren't because they aren't permeable and don't interact with the outside world. Firms should keep in touch with their surroundings all the time in order to find resources that will help them keep or improve their performance. Carmeli and Tischer (2004) say that businesses have to compete for limited resources in order to stay alive. Only businesses that are compatible with their surroundings and position themselves in the right way can stay alive.

Open Systems Theory's focus on external interactions and adaptation helps organizations make more informed decisions about how to position themselves relative to competitors. For example, they may choose differentiation to stand out in a crowded market, or they may opt for focus to serve a specific niche in response to changing customer preferences.

This theory was important to the study because it says that in order for the university to meet its goals and stay competitive, it must operate as an open system that takes the environment into account when making decisions. If the university doesn't do this, it won't be able to meet its goals. In this case, when organizations work together, they provide important resources that help businesses stay alive or change in order to stay alive (Bardy, Holzäpfel & Leuders, 2021). According to the open systems management approach, every business is an open system that is influenced by its surroundings. This means that all businesses are affected by the environment in which they work.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a visual representation of the relationship between the variables (independent and dependent). The performance of public universities was the dependent variable in this study, whereas cost leadership methods, differentiation strategies, and market focus were the independent variables. The link between the dependent variable and the independent factors was depicted using a conceptual framework

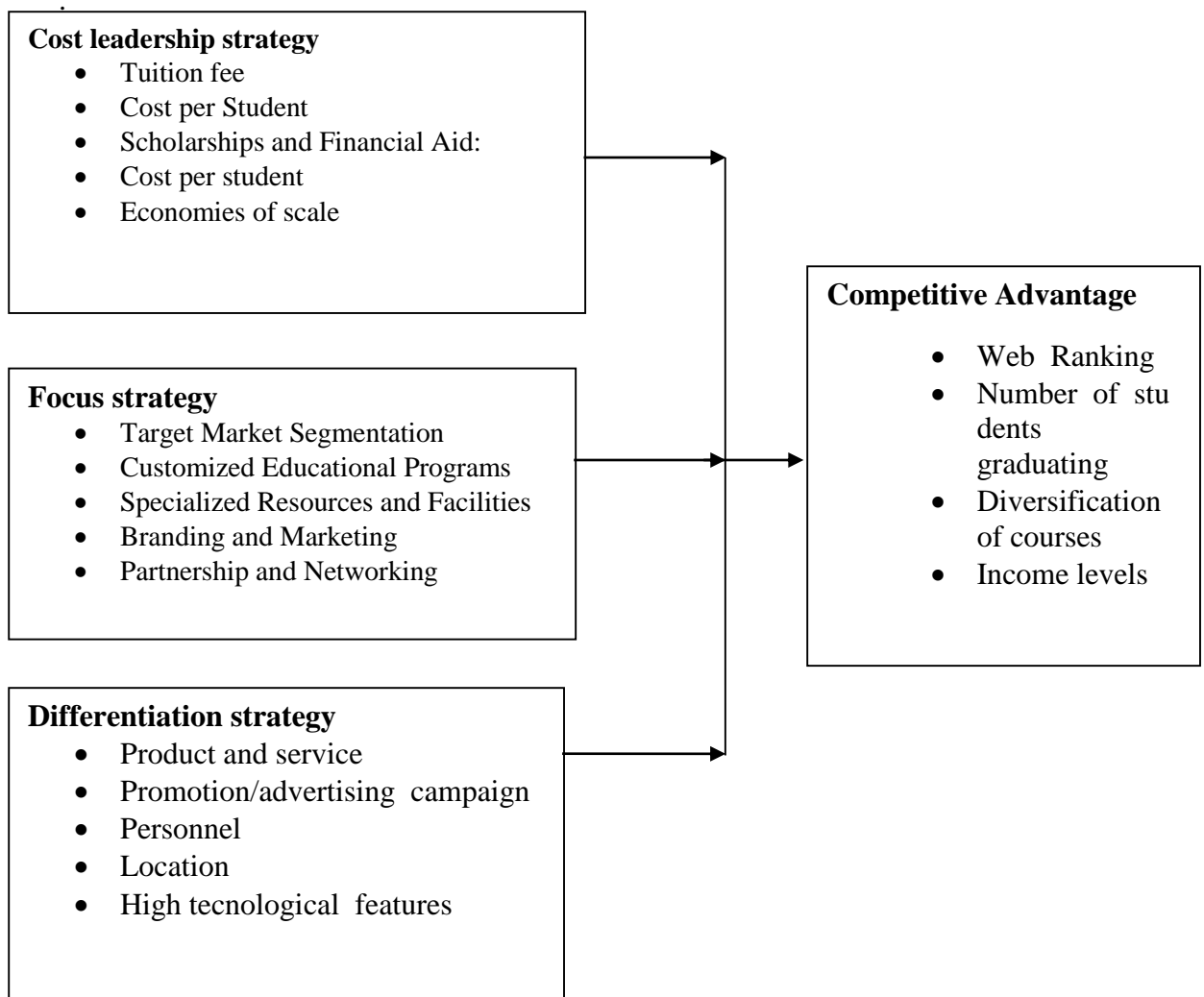


Figure 2:1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2024)

A company using a cost-leadership pricing strategy would offer the same product in multiple markets at different price points. This strategy can also involve charging various prices for the same products to different socioeconomic or geographic segments of the market. It explains how public universities acquire a competitive advantage in terms of resource capacity, mass production, and economies of scale, mass distribution, developing partnerships as well as productivity and containment of cost.

Intangibility, informational components and tangibility of product or services are all covered by a market focus strategy. In terms of benefit sought/preferences, physiological features, social class, and income level, successful market focus techniques give the supplier a competitive advantage.

Differentiation strategies refer to a public university's approach to developing and marketing unique products for various client segments. When a public institution has apparent competitive advantages, such as product/service, price, location, promotion/advertising campaign, staff, and technological leadership, this strategy is typically used.

2.5 Summary of literature gap

As observed, public universities aspire to establish market control and accommodate as many students as possible while managing the expectations of both students and society regarding performance. To achieve broader reach, many public universities in Kenya have opted to open branches or satellite centers, aiming to enhance accessibility and save costs. However, there has been a challenge in balancing the three Porter's generic strategies, which describe how a business achieves a competitive edge in the market niche it has selected.

Presently, numerous satellite campuses face the threat of closure, and certain courses with limited applicants are on the verge of being discontinued. This trend has led to the emergence of new private universities and technical colleges, obtaining charters to operate in an environment similar to that of public universities, often resulting in the discontinuation of courses or closure of satellite campuses (Kilonzo et al., 2021). Consequently, a pertinent question arises: What distinctive elements do these new institutions bring to the market to capture it and optimize performance? By looking at how Porter's generic strategies affected public universities' performance, as the study did, this question was successfully answered.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this section the research identified the procedures and techniques that were used in the collection, processing and analysis of data. Precisely, the following subsections were incorporated; research design, target population, data collection instruments, data collection procedures and finally data analysis

3.2 Research Design

Descriptive survey was employed in the study with the goal of examining the strategic positioning techniques used by public universities in Kenya. According to Cash, et.al., (2022) descriptive design is concerned with determining who, what, when, where, which, and how a phenomenon occurs. Things are typically explained by providing measurements of an event. Typically, descriptive research designs are organized and customized to assess the characteristics mentioned in a research topic. A survey was deemed best research design as the research aims to ascertain what strategic factors contribute to the success of the public universities. Thus, a survey is most appropriate as it enables a general picture of the situation to be highlighted.

3.3 Description of Study Variables

This study aimed at investigating how generic strategic positioning relate with competitive advantage in particular public universities in the metropolitan area of Nairobi, Kenya. The study's particular goals were to ascertain how Kenya's public universities' competitive advantage was impacted by the cost leadership strategy, to find out the effects of focus strategy on the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya and to determine the effects of differentiation strategy on the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya.

The independent variable was generic strategic positioning measured in three porter's generic strategies including: cost leadership, focus strategy and differentiation strategy. The dependent variable was competitive advantage which was measured in terms of: web ranking, number of students graduating, and diversification of courses as well as income levels. The three porter's generic strategies were believed to affect the competitive advantage of the selected public universities in Kenya

3.4 The Study Locale

The study locale refers to the specific geographic area where the research is conducted. In this case, the study locale was the Nairobi Metropolitan Region in Kenya. The study focused on selected public universities within this region to analyze and understand the generic strategic positioning and competitive advantage in the higher education sector.

The Nairobi Metropolitan Region, being a hub of economic, political, and cultural activities in Kenya, provides a dynamic context for examining how public universities navigate competitive challenges and position themselves strategically in the higher education landscape. The specific universities chosen within this region were the primary subjects of investigation in the study.

3.5 Target Population

A population is a group of individuals, events, or objects that share observable characteristics (Mantzas, Richdale & Dissanayake, 2022). In social sciences, a demographic population refers to a group of people sharing certain demographic attributes, such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, education level, or geographic location (Vespa, Armstrong & Medina, 2018). A population, according to Rakhimberdina, Liu and Murata (2020) is a well-defined group of people, elements,

services, as well as events, as well as a group of items or homes that are being studied. A population is a collection of people, things, or elements that have one or more shared characteristics. The homogeneity of the population of interest is ensured by this definition.

Nairobi metropolitan area has 3 small and medium public universities that were given the charter recently, including Technical University of Kenya (TUK), Co-Operative University of Kenya and Multimedia University of Kenya. Employees from the 3 of the public universities in the Nairobi metropolitan region make up the target demographic.

Table 3:1: Target Population

	Teaching staff	Management staff	Students	Total
Technical University of Kenya	628	225	15000	15853
Multimedia University of Kenya	1171	420	3610	5201
Co-Operative University	980	452	5000	6432
Total	2779	1097	23610	27486

Source: Commission for University Education (2023)

3.6 Sampling Design

Sampling design is a crucial aspect of research methodology, particularly in situations where it's not feasible to study an entire population (Kerr, Ardington & Burger, 2020). It involves drawing conclusions about the features of a population by choosing a subset, or sample, from a larger population. Proper sampling design ensures that the

sample chosen is representative and unbiased, so that the conclusions drawn from the sample can be generalized to the larger population.

The study employed a stratified sampling technique, in which a stratum was a subset of the population that shared at least one attribute. This method according to Chen et.al., (2020) enables the researcher to conduct a thorough investigation on a small sample of people chosen to give information. The study used only 10% to select participants from each stratum. A sample size equivalent to 10% of the target population was considered sufficient, as long as it ensured dependable data analysis and enabled the assessment of the significance of variations between estimates. The study sampled 278 members of Teaching staffs, 110 members of Management staff and 2361 students. Thus, 2749 respondents made up the study's sample size.

The study sample included students, teaching and management staffs who were on session during the data collection period. This inclusion criterion was based on availability and willingness to participate in answering the questionnaire.

Table 3:2: Study Sample

	Teaching 1staffs	Management staff	Students	Sub total
Technical University of Kenya	628*10%	225*10%	15000*10%	1626
Multimedia University of Kenya	1171*10%	420*10%	3610*10%	159
Co-operative University	980*10%	452*10%	5000*10%	143
Total	278	110	2361	2749

Source: Researcher (2024)

3.7 Data Collection

Primary data collection method was employed to gather information through a semi-structured questionnaire in order to measure the extent to which various strategic planning practices are utilized in the various public universities. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions made up the questionnaire's structure. Quantitative data was collected through closed-ended questions, while qualitative data was obtained through open-ended questions. These are simple to examine using statistical techniques and allow for cross-group comparisons. The self-completion semi-structured questionnaire was dropped and picked later. Data was collected from different managers of the respective public universities. Structure of the specific public university was considered. The researcher engaged three research assistants to administer the research instrument in order to fast-track data collection.

Secondary data was collected by reviewing educational journals, online blogs, and social media platforms and course texts. Therefore, it enabled comparisons of the strategies utilized by the public universities in the recent years. The data enabled the researcher to acquire stakeholders' views on the management of the public universities. Also provided comparisons between the different views of key stakeholders in the industry.

3.8 Pilot Study

A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary research project that is carried out prior to the main research to test and improve various aspects of the research design and data collection process. It is also referred to as a feasibility study or a pretest (Haslbeck, 2021). A pilot study's main goal is to find possible problems, enhance processes, and make the required changes before carrying out the main research project. It helps

researchers make sure the primary study is properly designed, effective, and likely to produce reliable and valid results.

There is a risk of research instrument mistakes; however, these errors can be reduced by doing a pre-test of the research instruments to establish their dependability. A pilot study is essential in a study since it allows researchers to make changes to the research instrument before the actual study. To determine the applicability of the research instrument, similar data analysis procedures were employed as in the final research.

The researcher worked with 6 Deans/Directors and senior management workers from Machakos University Kenya, accounting for 10% of the total sample. Two research assistants were recruited to aid in data collection. There were two sections on the questionnaire: one for personal information and the other for study factors.

Questionnaire item precision in respect to the research topics is crucial. An important part of this process is making sure that participants can comprehend the survey's questions so that the results can be as accurate as possible. Pretesting the research instrument is critical in order to determine its validity and reliability. The questionnaires were distributed to selected employees participating in the pilot, and their suggestions for how to enhance the questionnaire was taken into account. The goal of pretesting research instruments, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021) is to reduce ambiguity and vagueness in instrument measurement. Furthermore, the researcher's capacity to uncover instrument flaws and highlight sections that need to be aligned in order to accomplish the intended goal.

3.8.1 Validity

Ovan and Saputra (2020) define the degree to which a research study correctly measures or evaluates what it purports to measure is known as its validity. Ensuring the accuracy and significance of study results and conclusions is a crucial aspect of research methodology. The validity of a proposition is determined by how closely it aligns with accepted definitions of knowledge and truth. Insofar as an attitude scale measures what it purports to measure, it is deemed valid. Consequently, it relates to how well a tool asks the right questions. Ovan and Saputra (2020) state that, validity is the accuracy and importance of conclusions drawn from research findings. The researcher consulted with his or her supervisors, department lecturers, and coworkers regarding the instrument's items. These individuals' advice aided the researcher in determining the validity of the study instruments. Clarifications, suggestions, and other comments were included in the guidance.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability is a concept in research methodology that refers to the stability, consistency, and dependability of measurement (Shao & Ye, 2021). In other words, a measurement or research instrument is considered reliable if it consistently yields similar results when applied to the same phenomenon or group of participants under consistent conditions. When a study instrument produces similar results when delivered to different groups of people, it is considered valid. A pilot study was conducted among selected deans and administrators working at Machakos University to assess the reliability of the instrument to be used in the study and a reliability coefficient was obtained. Cronbach's alpha was employed as an internal consistency reliability test. This method is appropriate if every component instrument is measured by more than one answer. The dependability of a

research instrument is measured by the alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1, with a number closer to 1 indicating a more dependable research instrument. The instrument's reliability is accepted at a level of 0.7.

3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for the study. Qualitative data gathered through literature review was analyzed thematically in line with study objectives. Quantitative data gathered through questionnaire was cleaned. Data clean-up involved editing, coding, and for detection of any anomalies in the responses and assigned specific numerical values to the responses for further analysis. Completed questionnaires were double-checked for consistency and completeness. After that, the data was coded and reviewed for mistakes and omissions (Younas, Shahzad & Inayat, 2022). The results were displayed using the mean, percentages, and frequency tables.

Quantitative data gathered was analyzed using descriptive statistics tabulations, percentages and measures of central tendency, quantitative reports were constructed. This allowed the findings on the influence of competing strategies on the performance of public universities to be generalized.

In addition, a multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the association between strategic positioning and public university competitive advantage. Multiple regressions are a versatile data analysis tool that can be used whenever quantitative variables (the dependent) need to be investigated in connection to other variables (expressed as independent or predictor variable). Non-linear relationships can exist, independent variables can be quantitative or

qualitative, and the impacts of a single variable or numerous factors can be studied with or without the effects of other variables.

The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y = Competitive Advantage

α = Constant Term β_1 , β_2 and β_3 , = Coefficients of determination of the independent variables

X_1 = Cost leadership

X_2 = Focus

X_3 = Differentiation

ε = Error term

3.10 Ethical Considerations

There was no plagiarism in the research study, and any work that is used or quoted was properly cited. The researcher and team's guiding principles in the field and during the entire data collection process were integrity and honesty.

During the administration of data collection tools to participants, the researcher took meticulous care to protect their privacy and rights. Prior to the actual distribution of the instruments, participants received an outline of the study's objectives presented in their chosen language. Before fully disclosing all study criteria, the researchers sought participants' consent to partake in the research. To uphold confidentiality, the names of questionnaire respondents were not included on the questionnaire itself. Moreover, no form of coercion was exerted to secure participation in the survey at any level. The

results of the study were presented without distortion or researcher influence, regardless of their position.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

In order to achieve the study's objectives, the data gathered in the field were analyzed, presented, and interpreted as detailed in this chapter.

4.1.1 Response Rate

Table 4.1 shows that out of a sample of 2749, 2261 completed questionnaires were returned, representing an 82.2 percent response rate. According to Mugenda (2008), a response rate of 50% is required to be considered satisfactory, and a chance of 70% is considered adequate.

Table 4.3: Response Rate

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Responded	2261	82.2
Did not respond	488	17.8
Total	2261	82.2

This suggests that the 82.2% response rate was sufficient and suitable for analysis, drawing conclusions, and making inferences.

4.1.2 Reliability Analysis

To ascertain the questionnaires' reliability, a pilot study was conducted. The sample respondents were involved in the pilot study. After that, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency that determines whether a particular item on a scale measures the same construct. The study's benchmark, the Alpha value threshold of 0.7, was set by Gliem and Gliem (2003). Each objective was given a Cronbach alpha value, forming a scale.

Table 4.4: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach Alpha coefficient score	No. Of Items	Comments
Cost leadership	0.887	5	Reliable
Market Focus	0.832	5	Reliable
Product differentiation	0.866	5	Reliable
Competitive Advantage	0.843	5	Reliable

The table indicates that the cost leadership ($\alpha=0.887$) in the project administration process was followed by market focus ($\alpha=0.832$), competitive advantage ($\alpha=0.843$), and product differentiation ($\alpha=0.866$). The fact that all of the variables' reliability values were higher than the recommended cutoff point of 0.7 shows that they were all dependable.

4.2 Background Information

Analyzing the participant's demographic data was the first step in the research. The data analyzed in this section primarily consists of the following: profession, age range, gender classification, and highest level of education

4.2.1 Distribution of Participants by Gender Group

The gender category of the respondents was asked to be indicated. The presentation of participation equity with respect to gender group required the use of this information.

Table 4.5: Gender Category

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	714	31.6
Female	1547	68.4
Total	2261	100.0

The majority of the respondents in this study—68.4%—were clearly female, while 31.6% were male, according to the study's findings. The results indicate that both men and women participated fairly in this study.

4.2.2 Age Bracket

It was requested of the respondents to specify their age range. In order to guarantee that all age groups were represented in this study, this information was requested.

Table 4.6: Age bracket

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 30 years	1003	44.4
30 – 40 years	714	31.6
40 – 50 years	346	15.3
50 and above	198	8.8
Total	2261	100.0

The majority of participants (44.4%) were between the ages of 20 and 30, according to the results. Thirty to forty years old accounted for 31.6% of the respondents, forty to fifty years old for 15.3% of participants, and fifty years and older for 8.8% of respondents. This suggests that a fair representation of respondents from different age groups participated in the study, allowing for the inclusion of perspectives from these age groups.

4.2.3 Highest Academic Qualification

Participant's academic qualification is closely linked to individual's ability in interpreting and responding to research questions. Respondents were asked to list their greatest educational degree in this regard.

Table 4.7: Highest Academic Qualification

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate/Diploma	322	14.2
Degree	1418	62.7
Masters	498	22.0
PHD	23	1.0
Total	2261	100.0

According to statistical findings, the majority of participants (62.7%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree (22.0%), a certificate or diploma (14.2%), and a

PHD (1%). Based on the study findings, it is clear that most of the respondents were literate and could easily respond to the study questions.

4.2.5 Category

Respondent were asked to indicate their category.

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching staff	269	11.9
Non-teaching staff	109	4.8
Students	1883	83.3
Total	2261	100.0

Results show that majority (83.3%) of the respondents self-reported as students, 11.9 % were teaching staff category 4.8% belonged to Non-teaching staff. This implies that students, teaching staff and non-teaching staff were involved in this study.

4.3 Positioning Strategies and Competitive Advantage

4.3.1 Cost Leadership

Respondents were asked to express their agreement level concerning cost leadership and competitive advantage.

Table 4.8: Cost Leadership

Statements on Cost Leadership	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
The university charges lower Tuition Fees than the competition	2261	1.00	5.00	3.79	0.75
The university is continuously Maintaining a lower cost per student through efficient use of educational facilities, faculty, and support staff.	2261	2.00	5.00	3.76	0.77
The university is offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs to reduce the need for physical infrastructure and maintenance.	2261	2.00	5.00	3.81	0.75
The university providing financial assistance to students to help reduce their out-of-pocket expenses.	2261	2.00	5.00	3.84	0.71
As part of Economies of Scale, the university is efficiently utilizing resources to accommodate a larger student body, thus spreading the cost of education across more students.	2261	1.00	5.00	3.76	0.81

It was established from the mean results that majority of the respondents agreed that their universities were providing financial assistance to students to help reduce their out-of-pocket expenses ($M = 3.84$ $SD = 0.71$). The findings established that some universities offer grants to help students attend conferences, present research, or participate in study abroad programs. Also, some Universities provided affordable meal plans or establish food pantries to assist students experiencing food insecurity.

It was also established as indicated in the mean results that most of those surveyed concurred that universities were offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs to reduce the need for physical infrastructure and maintenance ($M = 3.81$ $SD = 0.75$), offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs is a strategy that many universities around the world have adopted to reduce the need for extensive physical infrastructure and maintenance. These discoveries correspond with study conclusions by Waiganjo, (2019) that offering courses online reduces the need for extensive physical infrastructure, including classrooms, laboratories, and administrative buildings. This leads to cost savings in construction, maintenance, and utilities.

Further, the investigator discovered that most of the participants as per the mean results agreed that universities charged lower tuition fees than the competition ($M = 3.79$ $SD = 0.75$). The findings established that some universities offered reduced tuition rates for students or provide waivers to make education more affordable, in some cases Universities offer loans with favorable terms to help students cover tuition, fees, and living expenses where repayment was deferred until after graduation. These results are in support of research inferences by Lin & Wang, (2020) that

providing financial assistance aligns with the goal of making higher education accessible and promoting diversity and inclusivity within the student body.

Descriptive results established that as part of economies of scale based on the mean results majority of the respondents are cognizant of the fact that the universities were efficiently utilizing resources to accommodate a larger student body, thus spreading the cost of education across more students ($M = 3.79$ $SD = 0.81$). The findings established that implementing energy-efficient practices in campus facilities can lead to substantial cost savings. This included using sustainable building designs, energy-efficient equipment, and initiatives to reduce overall energy consumption. These findings tally with research deductions by King'oo, Keyence & Kinyua, (2020) that continuous improvement, innovation, and strategic planning are essential for sustaining lower costs per student without compromising educational quality.

Most of the universities were continuously maintaining a lower cost per student through efficient use of educational facilities, faculty, and support staff as indicated by the mean results from the respondents ($M = 3.76$ $SD = 0.77$) Maintaining a lower cost per student through the efficient use of educational facilities, faculty, and support staff is a strategic goal for many universities. These findings tally with research deductions by Aiginger and Rodrik, (2020) efficient resource allocation allows institutions to provide quality education while optimizing operational expenses.

4.3.2 Focus Strategy

The researcher requested the to indicate their agreement levels regarding market focus and competitive advantage.

Table 4.9: Focus Strategy

Statement on Focus Strategy	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
The university follows segmentation based on income level	2261	2.00	5.00	3.87	0.64
The university follows segmentation based on physiological aspects of customers	2261	2.00	5.00	3.76	0.73
The university follows segmentation based on technological capacity	2261	2.00	5.00	3.84	0.76
The university observes segmentation according to client requirements.	2261	2.00	5.00	3.89	0.75
The university observes segmentation based on social class	2261	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.59
The university serves a wide market segment	2261	2.00	5.00	3.64	0.76

The findings showed that, based on the mean results, most respondents agreed that universities practiced segmentation based on social class (M = 4.00 SD = 0.59). The findings established that observing segmentation based on social class in universities is a phenomenon that reflects socio-economic disparities in access to higher education. Universities implemented diversity and inclusion initiatives to create a more equitable and representative student body. These efforts aim to break down barriers and ensure that education is accessible to individuals from all social classes. These findings tally with research deductions by Blake and Gallimore (2021) that segmentation based on social class in universities requires a comprehensive approach that considers both systemic and individual factors which involved creating an inclusive environment that fostered equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds

Descriptive results as per the mean results established that majority of the respondents agree that universities followed segmentation based on customer needs (M = 3.89 SD

= 0.75) The findings revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that recognizing the unique needs of international students, universities may offer specialized support services, including language assistance, cultural orientation programs, and immigration support. These results are in support of research inferences by Mintzberg, 2017 that observing segmentation based on student needs is a student-centric approach that aims to enhance the overall university experience and contribute to student success.

Majority of the respondents based on the mean of the results agreed to a great extent that universities observed segmentation based on income levels (M =3.87 SD =0.64). The findings established that Universities segment their program and course offerings to align with the diverse income levels of students. This could include scholarships, grants, and work-study opportunities tailored to students with varying financial circumstances. These results support study conclusions by Lin and Wang, (2020) that Universities segment financial assistance programs to address the specific financial needs of different student groups.

It was also established most of the universities follows segmentation based on technological capacity as per the mean results obtained from the respondents (M =3.84 SD =0.76). The findings revealed that providing access to digital libraries, research databases, online collaboration platforms, and other tools that enhance the learning and research experience. Acknowledging variations in technological literacy, universities provide segmented technology support services and this ensured that students receive the necessary assistance based on their comfort and familiarity with digital tools. These results are in support of research inferences by Gregersen & Ørmen, (2023) that segmentation can extend to the availability of online courses in

that Universities provide a variety of online programs and courses to cater to students who prefer or require the flexibility of remote learning.

The researcher established that the majority of the respondents as per the mean results are in agreement that most of the universities follow segmentation based on physiological aspects of customers ($M = 3.76$ $SD = 0.73$) The findings established that Universities provide on-campus medical facilities and healthcare services to address the physiological health of students. This includes general health clinics, counseling services, and specialized medical care. These results are in support of research inferences by Taha, (2023) that considering physiological aspects in their offerings and services, universities aim to create an environment that supports the overall well-being of their diverse student populations. This approach aligns with a holistic view of education that acknowledges the interconnectedness of physical and mental health with academic success.

Further, the researcher established that most of the universities served a wide market segment as per the mean results from the majority of the respondents ($M = 3.64$ $SD = 0.76$). The findings established that demographic shifts and changes in educational demand require universities to adapt. Serving a wide market segment allows institutions to respond to evolving societal needs and educational trends. Most of the universities have mission statements that emphasize in serving the community, promoting inclusivity, and advancing knowledge. These results are in support of research inferences by Munyoki, (2015) serving a wide market segment ensures that a diverse pool of individuals can acquire the knowledge and skills needed for various professions and industries.

4.3.3 Product Differentiation Strategy

The researcher requested the participants to designate their agreement levels on the following assertions about product differentiation and competitive advantage.

Table 4.10: Product differentiation and competitive advantage

Differentiation Strategy	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
The university distinguishes itself from rivals with its distinctive goods and services.	2261	2.00	5.00	3.80	0.78
The university uses differentiation based on place	2261	2.00	5.00	3.77	0.77
The university uses promotion/advertising to differentiate its products and services	2261	3.00	5.00	4.02	0.63
The university employs technology to innovate new products.	2261	2.00	5.00	3.68	0.80

Majority of the respondents agreed that universities used preferment/advertising to differentiate its products and services as per the mean results (M = 4.02 SD =0.63).

The findings established that universities were utilizing online advertising, including social media advertising, search engine marketing and display ads, enables universities to target specific audiences based on demographics, interests, and online behavior. These findings concur with study deductions by Wilkins (2020) that promoting initiatives contribute positively to society and can resonate with socially conscious students.

It was also established that the universities offered distinct products and services compared to their competitors as per the mean results from the majority of the respondents (M = 3.80 SD = 0.78). The findings revealed that some universities differentiate themselves through distinctive teaching methods. This involves experiential learning, project-based coursework, flipped classrooms, or other innovative pedagogical approaches. Universities also offer specialized and unique academic programs that are not widely available elsewhere. These discoveries

correspond with study conclusions by Saqib, (2020) that Universities often articulate unique selling points in their promotional materials, marketing campaigns, and outreach efforts to attract students who resonate with their distinctive offerings and educational philosophy.

Further, the researcher established that as per the mean results, the many of the participants agreed that most of the universities used differentiation based on place ($M = 3.77$ $SD = 0.77$). The findings established that some universities aligned their academic offerings with regional strengths and specializations. For example, universities in a tech hub emphasized programs in technology and innovation. Also, Universities located in regions rich in natural resources may leverage these resources in their academic programs. This includes programs in environmental science, agriculture, or natural resource management. These results are in support of research inferences by Kyungu (2019) that by leveraging the distinctive features of their geographical location, universities aim to attract students who are drawn to the specific attributes and opportunities associated with that place. The sense of place becomes an integral part of the overall university identity and contributes to the student experience.

Descriptive results as per the obtained mean results established that the majority of respondents agree that universities use technology to innovate new products ($M = 3.68$ $SD = 0.80$). The findings established that Universities have adopted online learning platforms and learning management systems (LMS) to offer courses and degree programs in a digital format. This provides flexibility for students and expands access to education beyond traditional classroom setting. These findings tally with research deductions by Msinga et.al. (2018) that the use of technology enables universities to

implement remote and blended learning models. This flexibility accommodates diverse student needs and allows for a combination of in-person and online instruction.

4.3.4 Competitive Advantage

The study participants were to point out their agreement levels on the following assertions about competitive advantage.

Table 4.11: Competitive Advantage

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Our student numbers graduating has gone up	2261	3.00	5.00	3.87	0.60
The university income levels have grown	2261	2.00	5.00	3.49	0.89
The university ranking has improved	2261	3.00	5.00	4.09	0.66
The university has done Diversification of courses	2261	2.00	5.00	3.74	0.80

The highest number of the participants agreed that most of the university ranking had improved as per the mean results ($M = 4.09$ $SD = 0.66$), the numbers of student graduating have gone up as per the mean results ($M = 3.87$ $SD = 0.60$) it was also established as per the mean results that most of the universities had done diversification of courses ($M = 3.74$ $SD = 0.80$) however participant were not absolute that university income levels had grown. These results are consistent with the research findings by Blankson, (2015) competitive advantage aids an organization in combating competition and traps clients. The competitive advantage can take any shape or form, as long as it aids the company in increasing and maintaining market share.

4.4 Regression Analysis

4.4.1 Model Summary

Multiple regression analysis was used in this paper to examine the relationship between the predictor variables. The multiple regression measurements in the study were coded, entered, and computed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS V 21.0). The table below displays the model summary;

Table 4.12: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.592 ^a	.350	.349	.36592

Source: Research data, 2024

The model fit was assessed in the study using the coefficient of determination. The adjusted R², also referred to as the coefficient of multiple determinations, represents the percentage of the dependent variable's variance that can be explained by the independent variables alone or in combination. The independent variables under study (cost leadership, product differentiation, and cost leadership) account for 34.9% of the variations in the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya, according to the model, which had an average adjusted coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.349.

4.4.2 ANOVA

Using the ANOVA technique, the study went on to test the model's significance. The table below tabulates the results.

Table 4.13: Summary of One-Way ANOVA results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	162.874	3	54.291	405.468	.000 ^b
Residual	302.207	2257	.134		
Total	465.081	2260			

Source: Research data, 2024

Critical value = 2.50

The study found that the ANOVA statistics' significance level for the regression model was .000%, meaning that the data could be used to make inferences about the population parameters because significance and the p-value, remained less than 5%. Cost leadership, focus strategy, and product differentiation have a significant impact on Kenya's public universities' competitive advantage, as evidenced by the computed value being higher than the critical value ($405.468 > 2.55$). The significance value of the model was less than 0.05, indicating its significance.

4.4.3 Coefficients of Determination

Additionally, the model for the study was established using the coefficient table. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 4.14: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.716	.051		53.489	.000
Cost leadership	.332	.021	.278	15.927	.000
Market Focus	.521	.020	.474	26.258	.000
Product differentiation	.469	.023	.379	20.486	.000

Source: Research data, 2024

According to the output produced by SPSS, which is shown in the above table, the equation

($Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \epsilon$) becomes:

$$Y = 2.716 + 0.278X_1 + 0.474X_2 + 0.379X_3$$

Using the regression model that was previously obtained, Cost leadership and this relationship are positively and significantly correlated with competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya since $\beta = 0.278$, p-value = 0.000, it can be concluded that a unit change in cost leadership increases the competitive advantage of public universities by 0.278 units hence: Competitive Advantage = $2.716 + 0.278$ Cost

Leadership. These findings tally with research deductions by King'oo, Kimencu & Kinyua, (2020) that continuous improvement, innovation, and strategic planning are essential for sustaining lower costs per student without compromising educational quality.

Additionally, there is a strong and favorable correlation with focus strategy and competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya since $\beta = 0.474$, p-value = 0.000 therefore: Competitive Advantage=2.716 + 0.474 Focus Strategy. These results are in support of research inferences by Gregersen & Ørmen, (2023) that segmentation can extend to the availability of online courses in that Universities provide a variety of online programs and courses to cater to students who prefer or require the flexibility of remote learning.

A positive and significant relationship in product differentiation and competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya is also noted since $\beta = 0.379$, p-value = 0.000 therefore: Competitive Advantage=2.716 + 0.379 Product Differentiation. This corresponds with study conclusions by Saqib, (2020) that Universities often articulate unique selling points in their promotional materials, marketing campaigns, and outreach efforts to attract students who resonate with their distinctive offerings and educational philosophy.

The analysis was carried out with a significance level of 5%. The criterion for evaluating the significance of the predictor variables in the model involved comparing the obtained probability value with $\alpha=0.05$. The predictor variable was significant if the probability value was less than α . Since the probability values of each predictor variable in the model were less than $\alpha=0.05$, all of them were considered significant.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The chapter addressed the research findings in light of the study's objectives. The study aimed to examine the influence of cost leadership strategy, market focus strategy, and differentiation strategy on the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya. Special emphasis was placed on determining the effects of each strategy on the aforementioned competitive advantages. Based on the findings, the chapter also offers conclusions, suggestions, and areas that warrant more investigation.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The majority of the respondents in this study—68.4%—were clearly female. The majority of participants (44.4%) were between the ages of 20 and 30, according to the results. The majority of participants (62.7%) held a bachelor's degree, with (83.3%) of the respondents being self-reported as students.

The study revealed that universities are offering financial assistance to students to reduce out-of-pocket expenses, including grants, affordable meal plans, and food pantries. They are also offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs, charging lower tuition fees, and utilizing resources efficiently. This aligns with the goal of making higher education accessible and promoting diversity and inclusivity.

Universities often segment students based on social class, income level, technological capacity, and physiological aspects. This reflects socio-economic disparities in access to higher education. Universities implement diversity and inclusion initiatives to

create a more equitable student body. They also offer specialized support services for international students, align their programs with diverse academic interests, and provide scholarships, grants, and work-study opportunities. They also provide on-campus medical facilities and healthcare services to address students' physiological health. Universities must adapt to demographic shifts and changing educational demand, focusing on community service, inclusivity, and knowledge advancement.

The study found that universities use advertising and promotion to differentiate their services and products, utilizing online platforms like social media and search engine marketing. They offer unique products and services, differentiate themselves through teaching methods like experiential learning and project-based coursework, and offer specialized programs. Some universities align their offerings with regional strengths, such as tech hubs or regions rich in natural resources. Technology is also used to innovate new products, with online learning platforms providing flexibility and expanding access to education.

The study assessed model fit using the coefficient of determination, which represents the percentage of variance explained by independent variables. Cost leadership, product differentiation, and cost leadership account for 34.9% of competitive advantage variations in Kenyan public universities. The study found that cost leadership, focus strategy, and product differentiation significantly impact Kenya's public universities' competitive advantage, with a significance level of 0.000% and p-value less than 5%, indicating its significance.

The study found that cost leadership, focus strategy, and product differentiation are positively correlated with the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya. A unit change in cost leadership increases the competitive advantage by 0.278 units,

supporting the importance of continuous improvement, innovation, and strategic planning. Focus strategy extends to the availability of online courses, catering to students who prefer remote learning. Product differentiation also positively impacts the competitive advantage, as universities often articulate unique selling points in promotional materials and marketing campaigns.

At a 5% significance level, all predictor variables were found to significantly contribute to competitive advantage, as their p-values were below 0.05. Among these, Focus Strategy ($\beta = 0.474$) emerges as the most significant factor, demonstrating its critical role in driving competitive advantage for public universities in Kenya.

5.3 Conclusion

The Kenyan Public universities in conclusion, can increase their competitive advantage by embracing and strengthening the cost leadership, Market focus and Product differentiation strategies as they all have a significant influence.

The concept of low-cost relative to competitors is a common theme among public universities that achieve low cost leadership. By pursuing low costs, public universities in Kenya not only operate efficiently, but also become an effective price leader. Adoption of cost leadership strategies which include; Providing financial assistance to students, offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs to reduce the need for physical infrastructure, maintenance and utilities, charging lower tuition fees than the competitors, efficiently utilizing resources to accommodate a larger student body, thus spreading the cost of education across more students, had a favorable (positive) impact on Kenya's public universities' competitive advantage.

The study comes to the conclusion that Kenyan public universities had a competitive advantage thanks to their adoption of the market focus strategy. Market focus

strategies which include Segmentation based on income level, physiological aspects, technological capacity, customer needs and social class helps public universities to build strong relationships within each target market. Public universities in Kenya observed segmentation based on social class and market focus allowed universities to determine the particular requirements of a specialized market and create products that meet those needs.

The study concludes that adoption of differentiation strategy had a positive effect on the competitive advantage of public universities in Kenya, most of the public universities offered unique products and services from their competitors. Public universities used promotion/advertising to differentiate their products and services and that public universities in Kenya utilized using technology to innovate new goods.

5.4 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In order for the public universities to remain competitive they should embrace and enhance the three strategies of cost leadership (Providing financial assistance to students, offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs to reduce the need for physical infrastructure, maintenance and utilities, charging lower tuition fees than the competitors, efficiently utilizing resources to accommodate a larger student body, thus spreading the cost of education across more students), Market focus (Segmentation based on income level, physiological aspects, technological capacity, customer needs and social class) and product differentiation (use of advertising/promotion to differentiate their products and services, use of technology to innovate new unique products).

Before implementing the focus strategy, a public university in Kenya should understand the requirement and functions of the changing market trends. According to

the report, universities should collaborate with important parties and always look for new strategies to gain a competitive edge through product differentiation. Public universities must stay current, adjust to the competitive environment, and set themselves apart from the competition in order to draw in both domestic and international students and meet the demands of the businesses and government.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire

Please respond by selecting the appropriate checkbox () or by filling in the blanks with the required information.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This form asks you to provide some basic information about yourself in the slots provided below. Please select just one response option.

1. Gender

a) Male: [] b) Female: []

2. Age?

a) 20-30 [] c) 40-50 [] b) 30 -40 [] d) 50 and above []

3. Level of education

a) Certificate/Diploma [] c) Degree [] d) Masters [] d) PHD []

4. Years worked in this university?

a) 10 years and below [] b) 20 years and above c) Between 11 and 20 years []

5. Category

a) Teaching staff b) Non-teaching staff

**SECTION B: POSITIONING STRATEGIES AND COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE**

Cost Leadership

6. Show your level of agreement with the following assertions about Cost Leadership and competitive advantage

WHERE: 1. Not at all 2. To a less extent 3. Moderately 4. To a large extent 5.

1 Very large extent

Statements on Cost Leadership	1	2	3	4	5
The university charges lower Tuition Fees than the competition					
The university is continuously Maintaining a lower cost per student through efficient use of educational facilities, faculty, and support staff.					
The university is offering cost-effective online courses and degree programs to reduce the need for physical infrastructure and maintenance.					
The university providing financial assistance to students to help reduce their out-of-pocket expenses.					
As part of Economies of Scale the university is efficiently utilizing resources to accommodate a larger student body, thus spreading the cost of education across more students.					

7. What else can be done to enhance cost leadership by the university?

.....

Focus Strategy

8. Show your level of agreement with the following assertions about Focus and competitive advantage

WHERE: 1. Not at all 2. To a less extent 3. Moderately 4. To a large extent 5.

1 Very large extent

Statement on Focus Strategy	1	2	3	4	5
The university follows segmentation based on income level					
The university follows segmentation based on physiological aspects of customers					
The university follows segmentation based on technological capacity					
The university observes segmentation based on customer needs					
The university observes segmentation based on social class					
The university serves a wide market segment					

9. What else can be done to enhance market focus by the university?

.....

Product Differentiation Strategy

10. Show your level of agreement with the following assertions about product differentiation and competitive advantage

WHERE: 1. Not at all 2. To a less extent 3. Moderately 4. To a large extent 5. Very large extent

Statement on Differentiation Strategy	1	2	3	4	5
The university offers unique products and services from their competitors					
The university uses differentiation based on place					
The university uses promotion/advertising to differentiate its products and services					
The university utilizes technology as a way of innovating new products					

11. What else can be done to enhance creation of new unique products and services by the university?

.....

Competitive Advantage

12. Show your level of agreement with the following assertions about competitive advantage

WHERE: 1. Not at all 2. To a less extent 3. Moderately 4. To a large extent 5. Very large extent

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Our student numbers graduating have gone up					
The university income levels have grown					
The university ranking has improved					
The university has done Diversification of courses					

13. In your own opinion what else can be used to indicate firm's competitive advantage as compared to other competitors?

.....

End