

**CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY AND COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE OF GETRUDES' CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my original and has not in its entirety or in part been presented to this or any other university.

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D61/5553/2017

This research project has been presented with my approval as the university supervisor



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DEDICATION

To God be the glory for enabling me take this career move. I wish to thank my sister and my daughters for giving me the necessary push to balance work and family

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This research project owes much to my supervisor Dr. Caren Angima who greatly contributed to make the process a success. Her persistence guidance, patience, accessibility and positive criticism shaped this work. My sister Mwikali Mutua who worked tirelessly to encourage me during the course of the project, thank you.

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ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

CBD	Central Business District
GCH	Gertrude's Children's Hospital
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KCB	Kenya Commercial Bank
PMMC	Precious Minerals Marketing Corporation

ABSTRACT

The level of customer service strategies that an organization adopts determines the customer satisfaction level, loyalty and referrals made by the existing customers. Organizations should therefore seek to deliver services that meet their customers' needs, especially in the competitive business climate of today. The objective of the study was to establish the use of customer service to enhance competitive advantage at Gertrude's Children's Hospital, Kenya. The researcher employed a case study research design with an interview guide being the main data collection instrument. Out of targeted ten managers to be interviewed, the researcher was able to interview eight managers from eight satellite hospital branches. The findings reveal that the hospital had adopted different forms of customer service strategies to remain competitive. The dominant customer service strategies that were found to be adopted by the hospital include timeliness of service, equipping the employees with the requisite skills to handle customers well, equipping its employees with relevant strategies, directing more resources to the customer service exercise, and top management support and customer satisfaction. The findings reveal that by the hospital training its employees in customer service skills it has been able to have satisfied clients whose needs are met starting from the reception to meeting the doctor. The research findings also reinforced the need for the hospital to direct not only human resources, but also financial resources to the customer service programs which were found to increase the hospitals level of competitive advantage as manifested by increase revenue, number of clients, branches opened and awards, both at the national and global level. The importance of incorporating customer feedbacks in development and adjustment of existing customer service strategies were found to be important in realization of firm competitiveness. The study recommends tailor made training of staff to handle the customer service challenges and always aim to make the customers satisfied on what they are offering. Similarly, it is recommended that the management purpose to incorporate their clients views when developing customer service strategies.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The level of customer satisfaction stands out as the most crucial indicator determining the quality of services rendered by an organization. Client's positive after-service reports enhance a service provider's goodwill in the market; consequently, expanding the extent of its operation. Wilson et al. (2016) describe the relationship between customer satisfaction and the expansion of business operations as applicable to the healthcare sector because patients are increasingly becoming aware of the quality of services being delivered to them as well as their rights. It is apparent that the more a patient is satisfied with the quality of healthcare service they have received from a health institution, the more likely they will recommend it to their friends; consequently, establishing its reputation in the society, and earning it a competitive advantage in the market.

Theoretically, the Kano model of customer service satisfaction propounds that competitive product meets basic attributes at a cost bearable by the market. According to Rotar & Kozar (2017) the Kano model is classification of the product attributes on the basis of how they are perceived by customers and this has effects on customer service. The competitiveness of a product according to the model is linked to the products basic attributes. In addition, the model is used in the analysis of customers needs and also determines that products requirements (Kano model analysis, 2014). The servqual model on the other hand integrates traditional managerial frameworks, operations, service designs and marketing activities with the aim of identifying the dimensions in service quality with a consideration of three factors; the company's image traditional marketing and external influences (Singh, 2016).

In Kenya, the government has implemented numerous efforts towards improving the access and quality of healthcare services in the Kenyan public and private hospitals. Interventions that have been implemented in the recent past include the free medical care for children less than five years across the country, free healthcare provision for expectant mothers as well as free delivery, as well as the universal health care; which is currently on the pilot, Universal health coverage (UHC) means that without financial hardship, all people should have accessibility to quality health services according to their need, institution of choice and at a particular time they need them.

The Government of Kenya has prioritized the achievement of UHC, as part of its Big Four Agenda. The suggested measures for the adoption of the UHC agenda for Kenya include: Enlisting 37,000 banking sector agent network to drive up the NHIF uptake, leveraging self-help organizations and faith-based organizations for sponsorship; recruiting upto 20 households through community health volunteers; Expanding the Linda mama programs to be available in mission hospitals; creating necessary legal reforms to align NHIF with the UHC; Facilitate the introduction of emerging forms of health care funding by steadily rising the budget allocation to health from 7 % in 2017 to 10% in 2022, as well as the implementation of a modern low-cost service delivery models such as eHealth for telemedicine, eHubs and mHealth that leverages technologies (parliamentary service commission 2018). Despite these efforts, the health sector continues to struggle with the quality of services offered at public hospitals. The study seeks to examine the relationship between customer service and the level of competitive advantage of health service providers while paying attention to the Gertrude Children's Hospital.

1.1.1 Concept of Customer Service

Customer service is characterized by the willingness of an organization to fulfill the desires and wants of its customers, and the willingness of a company to continually surpass the standards of its customers is therefore a component of customer service (Zaefarian et al., 2013). A customer service strategy involves a plan of action developed towards attaining certain objectives over a long time to meet the needs and the demands of the companies' customers. This is in a bid to enhance performance and to strengthen the operation of the company by attracting more customers. According to Prajogo and Oke (2016) customer service is a way of enhancing a brands quality in order to boost a company's return and therefore great customer service is established by equipping customers with knowledge about a product, resolving customers concerns and issues in good time as well as delivering quality customer experience.

Customer service strategies are of a wide range. According to Wood and Hall (2017) live chat is a customer strategy that uses different knowledge software streamlined with self-help options to improve customer service by eliminating long waiting hours on actual customer service queues. Barnett and Johnson (2015) also project the use of customer phone calls as a customer service strategy that involves company's listening to customers complaints and feedback concerning particular products and services in addition, learning from customers complaints and ensuring that each complaint is resolved is a strategy that leads to a long-term decrease in complaints and therefore customer satisfaction is improved. Obtaining meaningful feedback from customers nurtures a company's growth thus many organizations often admit their wrong in a bid to curtail the substantial loss of clients in addition Fante et al., (2016) notes that mobile support is a customer service strategy that helps to support customers by answering the questions they have regarding products.

1.1.2 Customer Service Strategies

Wilson et al. (2016) define customer service as the advice and help given by a business organization to the people in need of their goods and services. He further described it as the one-on-one direct interaction that is direct and happens between an enterprise representative and a customer inquiring about or intending to make a purchase. In addition, this is crucial for attaining customer satisfaction as well as for developing customer loyalty (Hill & Alexander, 2017). The action of taking care of the needs of clients by giving out professional assistance of high quality before, after and during a purchase is made, implies the kind of support offered to consumers that simulates their usage of a certain company's products and services (David, 2013).

Customer service can lead to competitive advantage by applying differentiation and focus strategy. This will involve focusing on customer satisfaction through market segmentation, product knowledge, leadership, feedback and reward system and training employees on empathy. Market segmentation entails subdividing the market of current and prospective consumers into segments, based on their characteristics. Through such segments, firms feel that they can respond to different marketing campaigns because they have common expectations and desires that provide better customer service.

Product knowledge will also lead to competitive advantages by ensuring that employee have a deep understanding of their products. Knowing the ins and outs of a product or service helps the customer and employee to have better interaction, thus resulting in excellent customer experience. The customer may, in turn, refer another individual to the company and also remain loyal to the firm. Maintaining or having returning clients gives the company a competitive advantage (Melsen & Schepers, 2016).

Leadership can also enhance create competitive advantage through ensuring customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by working on building infrastructure that supports customer service. Customer service is a long-term investment for a company and continually improving it (Anderson, 2016). Feedback system is appropriate can be executed by resolving or responding to client issues. Barnett and Johnson (2015) state that resolving customers' issues is a customer service strategy that relies on customer feedback concerning particular services or products. Listening and regularly analyzing customers concerns, resolving complaints and taking measures to ensure there is no repeat of such complaints enhances the customers trust in the services offered.

Competitive advantage can also be enhanced through training employees on empathy. Training employees on customer empathy this is vital especially if most of the services being offered to customers are acquired onsite. Onsite customer service is mostly given directly to the clients either at homes or their workplaces and therefore training employees on how to understand customers' emotions directly impacts customers' experience boosts their enthusiasm and reduces tension and frustration among clients (Rao & Seyyid, 2019).

1.1.3 Competitive Advantage

According to Namada (2018), competitive advantage is the situation in which a business organization is at a superior business position compared to its peers. Sigalas (2015) notes that it is the ability of an enterprise to outperform its rivals in the market following the unique nature of its products, quality, as well as the demand of its products are its competitive advantage. Moreover, Thompson et al. (2013) describe it as a condition that makes an enterprise's products better out of all the choices available for the consumers.

Competitive advantage is important as it distinguishes a business organization from its competitors in the market. It is a characteristic that enables organizations outperform other organizations in the industry (Porter & Kramer, 2002). Similarly, Thompson et al. (2013) note that for a company to enjoy a competitive advantage it should often have more clients and have the ability to sell its products at a comparatively reasonable price in a bid to have a higher brand loyalty in the market. According to Sigalas (2015), a company's level of competitive advantage can be measured through benchmarking, by comparing it to its competitors. Namada (2018) likens competitive advantage to its performance maintains that a company's level of competitive advantage can be measured through its profitability, productivity, costs as well as its market share.

1.1.4 Health Sector in Kenya

In Kenya, the health industry revolves around three main categories. The public sector, which is the largest in the industry and mainly, covers all the health facilities that are owned by government (dispensaries, clinics and hospitals), KEMSA which is the public pharmaceutical supply chain and medical schools. The current state of the public sector is that the primary and secondary levels of health were shifted from the national to county governments. The other sector is the non-commercial private sector which majorly involves the Faith Based Organization (FBO) and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). The third and last main player in the Kenyan health industry is the private commercial ("for-profit") sector which comprise of medical supplier/distributors, healthcare facilities, medical/pharmaceutical manufacturers, health management advisory and training institutions as well as health finance (health insurance) (KIPPRA, 2018).

A vast majority of the Kenyan population continues to struggle with access to reasonable health care services across the country. According to Abuya, Maina, and Chuma (2015), the number of those who have no proper access to healthcare services translates to about 35 million individuals. Mulupi, Kirigia, and Chuma (2013) observe that only 20 percent of the working populations have health insurance; leaving the other 80percent uncovered. In the recent past, the Government has implemented several initiatives for instance the free maternal delivery service, free medical care for children under five years, and recently; the universal health coverage. These initiatives were put in place to improve the general health care system and to reduce annual mortality related to all kinds of deaths by half by 2030.

Although the country's economic development seems to be the healthiest among the East African region economies, only 4.5 percent of the country's GDP got invested in the health sector in 2014. The figure was quite uncomfortable, given the high number of children below 15 years that are living within the country. However, according to Abuya, Maina, and Chuma (2015), insufficient investment into the health industry in the country fails to match up the vast needs of the population. Apart from access to health care services, Mulupi, Kirigia, and Chuma (2013) identifies issues such as Malaria, HIV and Aids infections as well as Poor sanitation and cancer as major issues that continue to persist in the health sector.

1.1.5 Gertrude's Children's Hospital

The Gertrude Children's Hospital (GCH) was established in 1947. The hospital is located in Nairobi, Kenya, and is one of the few hospitals in sub-Saharan Africa devoted exclusively to providing children with health care. According to Agutu et al . (2017), the hospital is a non-profit agency with responsibility for the provision of health services, the promotion of public health, study and training of healthcare professionals. Gertrude's Children's Hospital is committed to the

treatment of children as a basic concern and provides a supportive atmosphere for both staff and patients. The hospital and its satellites receives patients up to 300,000 adults as outpatients and gets admission of about 6,000 children per year as inpatients. Recently, the hospital has established the Gertrude Hospital Foundation, which now officially acting as the charity arm of the hospital. The foundation collects funds to promote the education of vulnerable children and to undertake numerous programs targeted at the less fortunate in the society.

The hospital stands out among all the other pediatric hospitals within the Eastern Africa region and operates to provide quality health care to children from within and outside the country. The hospital has 15 facilities located in other parts of Nairobi, while maintains its headquarters in Muthaiga Nairobi. The hospital medical staff consists of 250 nurses, 90 doctors, as well as another independent specialist who works together with the hospital's doctors to provide medical services of high quality (Agutu et al., 2015).

Migowa et al. (2017) describe the hospital as working with various other independent partners to provide children from less privileged backgrounds with essential health care services they need so much. The organization has patterned with other international and local institutions to provide a highly specialized service delivery system and professional training in Sub-Saharan Africa. Not only has the hospital been praised for the quality of service it provides to its clients, but also for their quality of customer care and this has not only earned the hospital a good reputation but has also earned it more customer referrals.

1.2 Research Problem

The customer care relates to health care management which involves understanding customers' needs and demands by creating a great mutual understanding, trust and extending various

services to potential customers. This type of customer relationship management and service helps to retain and acquire new potential customers' thus competitive advantage. According to Almunawar and Anshari (2012) for a hospital to acquire a competitive advantage there is the need to extend quality health care services in the healthcare environment so as to acquire potential customers and retain their use of current services and those extending into the future. This because there is growing competition with the onset of the hospital industry and therefore the provision of better health care customer service provides an opportunity to manage customer relations by providing better services and therefore less competition (Choi et al., 2012).

Torpie (2014) creates emphasis that customer centric model of customer service is essential in understanding how the experience provided to the patient is satisfactory to their needs. This increases the market share of the institution and this accrues them a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly difficult for organizations to offer customer experience that differentiates them from rivals, because the programs can be quickly matched, replicated and duplicated. In addition, the health sector has patients with unique needs and engaging them in abid to deliver the quality service that suits all of them independently is increasingly becoming a challenge.

According to Almunawar and Anshari (2012), the uniqueness of needs therefore presents the challenge of how to customize a customer service model that will suit all the varying needs of the patients being served by the hospital. Most customer care service models that exist have failed to capture the patient's individual needs and this has resulted in a gap that the study seeks to explore. In addition, even though private institutions rank highly on customer service as well as on the availability of machines and medicines, they have been criticized for increasing

incidences of misdiagnosis and overly high exploitative charges this has also posed a threat on their customer relations services.

An empirical study by Sheng et al. (2013) on the barriers of knowledge transfer as well as innovation competitive advantage in healthcare facilities found that satisfaction of customers was the most crucial indicator of the quality and the relevance and the relevance of healthcare service. Thompson et al. (2013) study on the quest on competitive advantage done in the United States further established that positive feedback from the clients greatly contributed to the prosperity of a healthcare service provider in the market. Torpie (2014) study on patient care and customer service done in the European nation relates the customer's goodwill on the services of a healthcare provider to the expansion of its operations.

Regionally, an empirical study by Naatu (2016) on how to build a brand competitive advantage in Ghana of precious minerals found that customer orientation and brand promotion are critical factors in the creation of the firm's competitive advantage. A similar study by Yeboah and Dominic (2014) on how quality customer service offers a competitive advantage to the telecommunication industry in Ghana found that customer' complaints of connection charges and registration required that the company improves its customers care services to accrue a competitive advantage. Locally, Kimaru (2014) research on the use of call centers as a means of competitive advantage by commercial banks in Kenya found that courtesy, timely access to services by customers and a good presentation of services to clients through call centers helped the bank to accrue a competitive advantage. In Kenya, there are limited studies done to investigate the relationship between customer care and competitive advantage of healthcare service systems. This study therefore sought to fill the gap by answering the question, how does customer service enhance competitive advantage at Gertrude's Children Hospital, Kenya?

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to establish the use of customer service to enhance competitive advantage at Gertrude's Children's Hospital, Kenya.

1.4 Value of Study

This study hopes to provide local research-based up-to-date data on the relationship between customer service and competitive advantage in the healthcare sector. These findings contribute to knowledge not only by providing empirical support to the existing literature and knowledge but also by contributing a local perspective to the already existing findings. Similarly, the study hopes to function as reference material to aspiring scholars in this area.

In policy formulation, the study findings might be used to inform government agencies and all the relevant stakeholders on the different strategies that should be considered during the policy making phase. The study highlights the existing gaps that should be considered in a bid to make the policies all inclusive. In addition, the study exposes the different areas that need to be improved during the policy formulation stage.

The study also hopes to highlight gaps in the medical sector that might need urgent attention from relevant stakeholders. The study informs institution managers on the impacts of customer service on attainment of competitive advantage. The study might inform the general public on their rights and what to expect from healthcare providers in terms of the quality and nature of services they receive.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter covers a theoretical review, customer service strategies and an empirical review on customer care and competitive advantage. It contains a discussion of customer service in relation to competitive advantage.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This section highlights the theoretical frameworks that guide the study and the theories supporting the study. The Kano model of analysis and the Servqual model will guide the study.

2.2.1 The Kano Model

The Kano model of customer satisfaction was proposed by Kano (1984) and colleagues in a bid to highlight the components that surround customer satisfaction in a division of the attributes that make a product. According to Kiran and Singh (2016) the Kano model was formulated as a model that categorizes and prioritizes the needs and demands of a customer. In addition, the model provides the manufacturer with guidelines for product during the lifecycle of a product in order to provide the customer with on-growing satisfaction when returning a new line of a product from the same manufacturer (Rotar & Kozar, 2017). The model gives manufacturers or service providers the ability to maximize on performance attributes and expectations regarding a product through the analyzing of customer needs by determining the specific product requirements.

The Kano model of customer satisfaction is relevant since it puts into consideration customer needs and provides customer response in three categories in a bid to meet their needs. The basic needs category contains requirements that are extremely essential in meeting the demands of the customer. However, when these requirements are not met the customer is often disappointed whereas when they are met the customers are delighted. The performance needs is the second category which differentiates competitors depending on the features the product has. Lastly the attractive needs category is the attractive spoken needs that the customer cannot deem. These needs are not expected by the customer and thereby the lack of their provision by service providers may not significantly affect the customers since they were not expecting to be provided with them (Bentz, 2017).

The Kano model is relevant in this study because of the need to assess customer care from the point of view of the final partaker of the service and not from the institution. An organization might feel that it has put in place effective customer service practices but unless the same is generating value from the point of view of the customer, then the expected competitive advantage will be lacking. Hence, it is always important to assess a customer service offering from an organization customer perspective and from the same, the competitiveness of the organization will be enhanced. This is the point of Kano model and therefore, in respect to GCH, establishment of a customer service is not an important determinant of competitiveness but rather how its customers perceive the service on whether it adds value.

2.2.2 The Servqual Model

The Servqual model was developed by Berry and Parasuraman as an instrument to measure quality and the gap between what customers expect in order for them to consider the actual service delivered as excellent and according to their expectations. Servqual was created to

evaluate the quality of the services rendered by companies and to calculate consumer expectations of the quality of the services provided by Ahuja et al. (2011). By performing a Servqual analysis, the model is used to examine the relationship between the customer's understanding of the service and their interpretation of the nature of the service delivered. The Servqual model has five dimensions, including efficiency, sensitivity, consistency, measurable information (communication, expertise, reputation, courtesy and security) and empathy (including original customer access and understanding / knowledge).

The model offers evidence that consumer satisfaction plays a major role in the customer's post-purchase decision-making process. This is an immediate antecedent of client loyalty and to the purpose of repurchase. Reports often suggest that the perceived price has a negative effect on the perceived interest of the consumer which does not contribute to the perceived quality of service. According to Ismael and Yunan (2016) the Servqual model is relevant because it provides evidence that customer value is of significance in customer's post-purchase practice and the process of decision making. This model therefore depicts customers' satisfaction and customer's intention of repurchasing products or re-utilizing the services offered by a company. According to Ali et al., (2017) the Servqual model is relevant today since it helps companies to create differentiation and gain a competitive advantage in addition, Jiang and Zang (2015) cites that the implementation of the facets of the model in terms of responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy have significant impact on customer loyalty, satisfaction and positive customer outcomes.

The Servqual model is critiqued for not being appropriate for all services offered and therefore it fails to be a reflection of the different range of service activities. In particular industries the Servqual dimensions were either added or deleted in places of appropriateness according to the needs of the customers and to suit particular service industries.

2.3 Empirical Review and Knowledge Gap

This section is a study of previous research studies focused on the research subject. It illustrates previous research that have been performed in the area of study. Bresser (2012) published a report about how small businesses learn the art of competitiveness through superior competitive advantage. The goal of the study was to figure out how a business would achieve a strategic edge over its competitors. It was a qualitative study which evaluates why businesses struggle to compete with higher companies. Cost, control, management, entry, and exit barriers are mentioned to play a critical role in competitive advantage. Business owners should utilize business strengths and resources to increase the likelihood of success. This research focused on competition and superior competitive advantage thus creating a conceptual gap.

Yeboah and Dominic (2014) in their research about how high-quality customer service provides a strategic edge to the telecommunications sector in Ghana, gathered data from customer service. The investigators sought to explain why quality customer service is essential in the survival of telecommunication companies. One hundred and fifty respondents were used as the sample size of the investigation. The data was presented and analyzed in diagrams. The researcher found out that customers complained of the high cost of connection and registration. It showed that companies need to improve on quality customer service to achieve a competitive advantage. The study was carried out in a different context, on the telecommunication industry in Ghana while the current study focuses on health sector in Kenya.

Saeidi et al., (2015) investigated the contribution of corporate social responsibility on financial performance of firms. The study incorporated customer satisfaction, competitive advantage and reputation as intervening variables whereby it was established that corporate social responsibility contributes significantly towards sustainable financial performance in firms citing that customer

satisfaction, competitive advantage and reputation contributes indirectly to the realization of enhanced financial performance and profitability. The study used mean, standard deviation and confirmatory factor analysis through SPSS to analyze data. The positive effect of CSR on company results is attributed to the positive impact of CSR on competitive advantage, credibility and customer satisfaction. Final results show that the relationship between CSR and firm success is influenced only by credibility and competitive advantage. These findings indicate a function for CSR to indirectly contribute to firm success by enhancing credibility and competitive advantage while increasing the level of customer satisfaction. While the study sought to investigate the firm outcome, it did not explore the effect of customer service but rather corporate social responsibility whose variables are different from the current study.

A similar study by Aghamirian et al., (2015) *Customer Knowledge Management Application in Gaining Organization's Competitive Advantage in Electronic Commerce* shows that knowledge from customers is a determinant factor in the survival and success of a firm. The study investigated 8 factors that influenced customer service and competitive advantage. Such factors included: consumer awareness, market experience, customer awareness, customer knowledge documentation and distribution, product and service quality, speed of product and service delivery, fair price and production satisfaction and the effect of customer knowledge management using competitive advantage variables in e-commerce. The thesis used the questionnaire as a data collection instrument and the data was statistically analyzed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, basic linear regression analysis and multiple regression analysis, and the results were calculated using the SPSS. The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of customer information management will lead to a competitive advantage for e-commerce organizations. While the study delved on knowledge management as a source of

competitive advantage, the same does not address the effect of customer service as a source of competitive advantage. This current research will address the same.

Naatu (2016) examined how to build and enhance a brand status with a competitive advantage. The inquiry aimed to define the methods for the identification of precious resources and how they influenced the competitive advantage. The study was carried out in two companies: ERNIE'S classic jewelry and precious minerals marketing corporation (PMMC). It uses descriptive analysis in analyzing the data that was obtained from surveys of customers and management. The study established that customer orientations and brand promotion are critical branding factors for creating a competitive advantage. Firm development through branding is recommended in the study. The study focused on how to build a brand to have a competitive advantage while this study focuses on customer service and competitive advantage.

Gebauer et al., (2017) conducted a study on competitive advantage through service differentiation by manufacturing companies. His study aimed at examining the relationship between innovativeness, the complexity of customer needs, service differentiation, customer centricity, and business performance. Three hundred thirty-two manufacturing companies were used as a sample size for the study. It was a qualitative study that established that service differentiation can increase customer-centricity. Innovativeness was found to improve competitive advantage. This study focused on service differentiation and competitive advantage, thus creating a conceptual gap.

Locally, a study by Abuya (2014) on improving competitive advantage of organizations through excellence in service delivery: a case study by Fairmont Hotels East Africa shows that understanding the services needed by consumers, managers and staff is relevant. In addition, the

study notes that in order for a company to meet service demands, the management should constantly measure service quality. As a design of study, qualitative methods were employed and the data was analyzed to obtain descriptive and inferential statistics. The study findings and results were presented using tabular formats and figures where necessary to clearly summarize the findings. The extent of the relationship between competitive advantage and excellence in service was obtained through correlation analysis. From the findings, it was established that organizational service excellence and competitive advantage have a direct relationship. However, though the study mirrors the current study with regard to the variables, the context of the study are different since it concentrated on the hospitality industry while the current study deals with a health facility set-up and therefore the customer service practices differ.

Kimaru (2014) has researched on the establishment of call centers by Kenya's commercial banks as a tool for competitive advantage. The goal of the study was to evaluate the competitive advantage provided by call centers. It found that courtesy, good presentation of services, and timely manner were essential in helping the banks gain a competitive advantage by using the call centers. This study presents conceptual and contextual gap as it focused on call centers as a source of competitive advantage by the commercial banks.

A Case Study on Kenya Commercial Bank has been carried out by Odhiambo (2015) on the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in Kenya's banking industry. The research was aimed at establishing the degree at which consumer satisfaction influences the quality of service. Data was analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics, where the results addressed on the basis of research questions. This showed that customer satisfaction and reliability have a positive relationship. Reliability in KCB is vital in customer satisfaction. This study presents a

knowledge gap since this study focused on service quality and customer satisfaction while the current study will focus on customer service and competitive advantage.

Jon (2016) concentrated on the building and measuring equipment of supply chain in Kenya in his research on customer service as a profitable marketing instrument. The goal was to explore the interface of marketing and logistics. This explored customer service challenges and opportunities as a strategic marketing tool for companies. The study shows that many organizations have an issue on customer service, and none of the organizations in the country has fully implemented and developed customer service programs. Customer service is essential during the buying process and should be explored to gain a competitive advantage. This study focuses on construction and measurement equipment of supply chains whereas this study focuses on the Health sector in Kenya.

Ngari and Bichanga (2017) research on the effect of competitive customer satisfaction strategies amongst commercial banks has found that competitive strategies adopted by commercial banks in Kenya have improved customer fulfillment and market focus strategy and differentiation strategy have been adopted to increase customer satisfaction by most commercial banks in Kenya. Bank management will devote additional financial and human capital to constantly track the highly competitive demand of customers to produce goods that meet potential consumer expectations in a creative manner. The research evaluated the results of the study by using descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis and content analysis. Unlike the current study which explore the effect of customer service on firm competitiveness, Ngari and Bichanga sought to evaluate the determinants of customer satisfaction among the commercial banks.

Milao (2018) carried out a study with an aim to establish factors that determines realization of competitiveness among Kenyan firms operating in the telecommunication sector. The study sought to evaluate the effect of innovation, staff training, customer orientation, and stakeholder involvement on competitive advantage. The data was qualitative, which was analyzed using SPSS and presented in a narrative format. It found that Safaricom was leading in the country whereby staff training, stakeholder involvement, innovation, and customer orientation were the significant determinants of competitive advantage. This study presents knowledge gap since it focuses on telecommunication industry in Kenya while this study focuses on health sector in Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the methods and procedures that guided the study. It covers four sections namely: the research design, the procedures employed during the process of data collection and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

A research design according to De Vaus (2006) is a description of how one plan to conduct the study. It is an overall that can be used to collect data and it is the basis through which the study subjects are selected as well as the site of study. It is a systematic plan to study a problem and bridges the gap between research questions and the actual execution and implementation of the research plans.

The study used a case study to intensively investigate a unit and explore an event thoroughly and deeply. A case study is an inquiry of a holistic nature in the natural setting as a way of investing different phenomena as well as the specification of terms in greater detail (Harling, 2012). It embodies an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, as well as encompass an approach comprehensive, with the logic of planning, gathering and data analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

Prior to conducting interviews, interview guides was used to collect primary data by directing the discussion toward information in relation to customer service as a strategic tool in enhancing competitive advantage at Getrudes Childrens' Hospital. The use of interview guides helped the

researcher know what to ask about, in what sequence, how to pose questions, as well as in what manner to pose follow-ups. They also provide guidance regarding what to do or say next, after the interviewee has answered the last question.

The interview guide was issued to 10 heads of satellite clinics. These clinics comprise: Donholm, Lavington, Embakasi, Kitengela, Junction, Thika, Syokimau, Muthaiga, T-mall and Buruburu clinics. Satellite managers were considered for the interview since they take part in strategy formulation and execution. Therefore, they are considered to have sufficient knowledge on customer service strategies.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data collected, the research used content analysis, interpreting and coding text information, to generate reproducible and relevant conclusions. Content analysis is a research method for assessing the existence within qualitative data of certain words, themes or concepts.

The researcher was able to measure and evaluate the existence, meanings and associations of these specific texts, themes or concepts through content analysis. The researcher made inferences about the messages inside the document, the author(s), the audience, and even the culture and time surrounding the document.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The research objective was to determine the effect of customer service strategy on the competitive advantage of Gertrude's' Children Hospital. Data was collected through the use of an interview guide. This chapter presents the analysis from the interviewees and discussion of the findings.

4.2 Response Rate

The researcher targeted 10 heads of satellite clinics of Gertrude's' Children Hospital, namely; Donholm, Lavington, Embakasi, Kitengela, Muthaiga, Junction, Thika, Syokimau, Muthaiga, T-mall and Buruburu clinics. This is because satellite managers are considered to be more appropriate for this research because they are involved in the day-to-day service delivery to clients. During the data collection process, the researcher was able to interview eight of the targeted interviewees. This represented a response rate of 80 percent, a position that was deemed to be adequate in the quest to realise the research objective.

In terms of the interviewee's background, the areas covered include education background, the work experience with Gertrude's hospital and the length of time that they had been working as head of the satellite clinics. In relation to the education level of the interviewees, it was found that all of them had post graduate education level, while in terms of their work experience within the organization, the results shows that the interviewees had worked for Gertrude's for a period ranging between 6 – 22 years. In relation to their work experience in the hospital under consideration, majority of the interviewees (6) had headed the satellite clinics for over four years. Only two of the interviewees had headed their work stations for less than four years. From the

interviewees educational and work experience, it can be concluded that they are knowledgeable with the operations of Gertrude's Children Hospital and that they can understand and answer accordingly the questions asked by the researcher.

4.3 Customer Service and Competitive Advantage

The competitiveness of a firm is not only derived from a single source but rather from a combination of different activities which are combined to create synergy on each other and thus resulting to a state of competitive advantage in its service offerings. The sources of competitiveness investigated were timeliness of services, employee – organization relationship, professionalism among the customer service staff, knowledge of product offerings, management leadership of the satellite hospital and adoption of the customer service strategy.

4.3.1 Timeliness of Services as a Source of Competitive Advantage

The first attribute of the satellite clinics that was investigated was the promptness of the service offerings. The interviewees stated that to be able to offer reliable services, the hospital need of various departments in the hospital to work together seamlessly starting from how the clients are ushered in the reception area, doctor's appointment, offering of laboratory services, pharmacy and eventually the payment system. Therefore, it was noted that to offer services that are considered prompt by clients and uniform across all the branches, the manager Muthaiga branch stated that *“the hospital had instituted appropriate operational planning, both during the designing of the satellite hospital to the actual planning of the day-to-day activities in the hospital. Different departments that are involved during the day-to-day operations work in sync for the timeliness of the services to be”*.

The other point that came out from the research was that the hospital recognizes the critical role that the organization's human resource plays in service delivery. Consequently, it was stated the timeliness of service delivery is achieved through deployment of the right employees to the right department in the hospital so that the time spend by a client in a particular section is minimized. Continuous training and development programs are also carried out among all the staff in order to sharpen service delivery capacity. Further, as the manager at Syokimau branch added; the hospital has *“Set service time standards and tracking to ensure that we are achieving them, from initiation of the first triage process to ensure timely prioritization and staff sensitization on sense of urgency during service delivery”*

The other strategy employed by the hospital to improve their service delivery timeliness is the establishment and adherence of formulation of policies and procedure documents in each hospital which is adapted to the needs of a particular satellite hospital.

4.3.2 Employees as a Source of Competitive Advantage

The organization recognizes employees as an important resource in the actualization of organization goals. The researcher sought to determine how management at the various Gertrude's hospital satellite branches empower its employees to fulfil their obligations and thus by extension achieve the organizational objectives. The employee-employer relationship was determined as a critical factor towards harmonious functioning of the hospitals and it is the responsibility of the employer to try and develop the same and get the most out of its staff. Gertrude's hospital was found to have initiated different strategies to try and increase employee support in realization of its strategic objectives.

The manager Buruburu highlighted that the hospital has established meetings between the head office managers and the satellite branches twice in a month and at the individual branch the branch champion has daily morning briefings with all the staff, in which an evaluation of the previous day activities was like and what is expected in the day. Similarly, the manager added that the hospital recognizes its employees through verbal and written appreciations, bonus offering and salary increment. The hospital further disseminates its strategic plans and objectives top bottom as well as incorporating employees' suggestions in the revised strategic plans.

In order to align staff performance to the hospitals goals, the manager Lavington branch stated that; the hospital undertakes *“tracking staff satisfaction through periodic surveys and using the feedback for decision making, staff involvement in some of the organizational decisions e.g. departmental plans and objectives and encouraging open door policy to enhance communication”*. With these organizational initiatives, the interviewees noted that the staff feel part and parcel of the organization decision making since their inputs are considered during the planning phase. The hospital also undertakes continuous sensitization on various hospital policies and values that guide its operations. This is supplemented through the practising open door policy and effective channel of communication between the management and staff, whereby complains and suggestions are shared and discussed.

In order for employees to perform their duties according to plan, the manager Embakasi branch explained that mystery head office staff will visit particular satellite branches and provide independent assessment of service offering quality and make suggestions directly to the manager. The hospital provides continuous professional development courses and workshops and that in the branch, there has been three on-job training workshops in the last nine months that are aimed at improving the staff professional competence.

The other source of Gertrude's hospital competitiveness emanates from the fact that employees are aware of the products and services that the hospital offer. Towards this end, it was found that the hospital uses different mechanism to update the staff on the available offerings. The manager – Kitengela branch noted that the common strategy they adopt to enhance employee knowledge of its products include dissemination of information through fliers/posters, emails to individual staff, updates from team leaders and the use of Q-pulse system of information. Product knowledge creates awareness among customers and once clients are aware and assured of a certain product in our organization it makes it easy for them to seek for these services and even refer others

4.3.3 Specialization of Service Provision as a Source of Competitive Advantage

The researcher sought to investigate the customer service strategies adopted by Gertrude's children hospital in their satellite clinics and how the same is a source of competitive advantage. The Lavington clinic manager highlighted that by the hospital implementing specialist clinics to handle specialized diseases, it has been able to maintain its market niche and they also benchmark their services against international accreditations. In addition, the manager in the Embakasi branch stated that; *“the hospital has made it a culture to appreciate our customers, getting it right fast time, listening from our customers, allowing open feedback and incorporating our customers in decision making. These strategies have led to improved customer satisfaction – based on last year' customer survey and customers seeking their services from the hospital and its affiliated satellite clinics”*

The findings suggest that the introduction of extended service times of the satellite clinics are intended to increase the hospital customer satisfaction by affording them the opportunity to seek the services at time periods that goes past the normal times. The manager Thika clinic noted that

they operate up to seven in the evening and there is need to increase the set time. The service pricing has also been adjusted to match the neighborhood through price discrimination. A case in point for example was highlighted by the manager Buruburu branch noted that they had to adjust their consultation downwards from Ksh 2850 to Ksh 1500/- for nutrition clinic to match the fee charged by other competing hospitals in the neighborhood. This is despite Gertrude's hospital being a well known brand and offering premium services. In addition, the satellite hospitals have designated days in which specialist doctors visit to offer specialist diagnosis and treatment of unique ailments. All these strategies are aimed at improving the hospitals' service offering to its customers.

4.3.4 Top Management Support and Competitive Advantage

Effective customer service and its eventual implementation is expected to be influenced by the level of support from the top management of Gertrude's hospital and its satellite outlets. On the question of how the satellite hospitals managers were implementing the customer service strategies and what is their role, it was noted that majority of the managers noted that they “*lead from the front*” by inspiring their staff by doing what they preach which is expected to result in committed team that has the will power to deliver great services. In addition, it was found that different managers have had to adopt unique strategies that are tailored to the specific environment that they operate in. Some of these strategies include offering goodies to customers whenever they visit the health facility on random days and also increasing level of empathy to clients.

The top management were found to quickly address customer issues by providing progress of how the same is being handled both within and outside the facility. As a result of the same, the manager Thika branch suggested; “*clients appreciates feedbacks, because it shows a sense of*

care from the institution since feedbacks leads to loyalty and willing to refer more customers”

The importance of all employees recognizing the need for the hospital to strategically position themselves was highlighted by the manager Buruburu branch who noted his role to facilitating strategic positioning, strategic partnerships, and distribution of responsibilities and thus create multiple pathways for testing ideas. This move was found to have increased their customers in the region by visiting the branch through increased revenue in 2018 over the 2017 by 18.4%. By the management being involved in clients’ matters, it was found that the hospital had increased the perception of clients on its dependability on the brand, life time value of the clients and high net promoters. Similarly, the satellite hospitals were found to involve their clients in decision making process.

With customer inputs in decision making process, it means a firm will have an upper hand in customers’ needs and can plan adequately. With the same it means that the hospitals processes will be aligned to market demands and this will increase the organizations’ supply curve generously. Hence the top management support was found to be critical to realizing competitive advantage. The capacity of the management to resolve customers’ issues was found, as stated by the manager Junction branch; *“It helps in increased sales, referrals and loyalty through the assurance of elevating the fears that the client could be having. Also Employees with strong empathy skills are also more productive and innovative. this results to increase efficiency and expand the number of problems one can solve for customers. Empathy also increases the morale of the employees and their retention”*. Consequently, the management ability to address client issues and training employees on empathy is paramount in an organization realization of competitive advantage.

4.3.5 Customer Satisfaction and competitive advantage

The fifth component investigated as a source of competitive hospital among the Gertrude's hospital satellite branches was the strategies employed by the hospitals to increase customer satisfaction. The areas investigated were in relation to training of employees, procedures for resolving customer complaints and the customers' service strategy put in place by the organization. The satellite branch customers were found to vary to include suppliers, opinion leaders in the locality and the sick. A number of strategies were adopted by the hospital branches towards addressing customer complain. These include adoption of customer complain charter that stipulates how the customer complaints are addressed, online system that makes it faster to respond to clients complains, team leadership at all times to ensure complaints are handled in the shortest time possible and having daily briefings that handles any customer complain that arose the previous working day. This makes the rate of addressing customer complain be shorten. In addition, whenever a customer leaves behind his/her contacts, they are contacted immediately by the hospital manager with a view to addressing their complaints. Through such strategies, it was found that the organization was able to increase their customer satisfaction and be able to be differentiated from other hospitals in the locality and therefore attract more clients.

The next phase after receiving customer complains is to deliver on hospital promise. The researcher sought to determine how the different satellite hospitals deliver to their undertakings. The manager Donholm branch stated that she adopts a varied approach that range from being responsive to client's complaints, monitoring key performance like net promoters and satisfaction rate, reliability on all of its operations, training and empowering staff and seeking feedbacks from the customer after addressing complaint. In some cases, the customer complaints have been related to the lack of hospital not being able to adhere to the prescribed time for

delivering a service. In this case, *“the hospital has been able to reviewing their various service times and making improvements where necessary”*

Similarly, the satellite branches undertake periodic tracking of set parameters, client feedback process and staff awareness during induction on what is expected. With these, the hospital has been able to attract more clients to its facilities and be able to charge a premium for its services. The results also reveal that acknowledgement of customers feedback has been key to the hospital clients being satisfied. Looking at areas of concern and making improvements goes a long way to improving customer satisfaction. On the use of the customer feedback to improve service delivery, the manager Kitengela branch noted that *“The data collected from customer feedback assists in strengthening of customer service skills, helps review on every touch point, improve customer interactions, and improve service delivery strategy. It also gives the clients a way to provide both positive, neutral and negative feedback which makes them feel engaged in operations of the hospital”* Further, the manager Donholm satellite branch noted that some of the measures put in place to ensure the organization deliver its promises to its clients and therefore target to improve their customer satisfaction include implementation of internal processes geared towards delivery of the customer promise, generation of reports to evaluate delivery of promises made by the organization, undertaking audit processes to evaluate adherence to the promise and also benchmarking the organization delivery against the best practice, not only in Kenya but the world since at present Gertrude’s hospital serves regional market with healthcare services.

The customer service strategies adopted by Gertrude’s hospital branches was evidenced through different outcomes in the organization. The manager Junction branch noted that the hospital currently has a strong brand name in child health across the continent and this has led to improved profitability. Through benchmarking exercises conducted over the period, it was noted that the hospital has become an internationally accredited hospital due to its service quality and

customer satisfaction experience. Thus the hospitals daily focus being focus on the customer, it was found that the state of the company competitiveness had improved to become the healthcare facility that the others target to emulate in terms of service delivery.

4.4 Discussion of the Findings

The research objective was to determine the effect of customer service strategy on the competitive advantage of Gertrude's Children Hospital. Customer service is the ability of an organization to meet the needs and desires of its customers and to consistently exceed the expectations of its customer. On the other hand, competitive advantage is a situation in which a business organization is at a superior business position compared to its peers in the sector or industry. The service strategies that were investigated by the research include market segmentation, product knowledge, leadership, feedback and reward system and training employees on empathy.

The study found that for the customer service strategies in an organization to be successful in realization of competitive advantage, the leadership of the organization must come out to fully support the initiative and see to it that the entire organization supports the strategy. Further, it was found that the organization leadership can enhance the firm competitive advantage by ensuring customer satisfaction. As Anderson (2016) noted, this can be achieved by working on building infrastructure that supports customer service. The study results shows that the organization leadership monitors the feedbacks emanating from customers since when effectively addressed will show the weaknesses present and thus be able to resolve customer complains. This point was highlighted by Barnet and Johnson who state that by an organization being able to resolve customers' issues is a customer service strategy that relies on customer feedback concerning particular services or products.

The study found that the ability of the hospital to offer timely services by reducing the turnaround time between when patients enter the health facility to when they leave determines its competitiveness. This finding is in line with a study by Kimaru (2014) while studying the strategies adopted by call centers as a source of competitive advantage by the commercial banks in Kenya. The study found that courtesy, good presentation of services, and timely manner of service delivery were essential in helping the banks gain a competitive advantage by using the call centers.

The results also reinforced the need for the hospital employees to show empathy to clients considering that a large proportion of the clients are in some form of pain. A show of empathy resulted in improved customer satisfaction, a point that is in line with Rao and Seyyid (2019) finding who found that competitive advantage was realised through training employees on how to understand customers' emotions as this directly impacts customers' experience, boosts their enthusiasm and reduces tension and frustration among clients. Continuous training and development programs were found to be undertaken by the organization in order to sharpen service delivery capacity. Jiang and Zang (2015) cites that the implementation of the facets of the servqual model in terms of responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy have significant impact on customer loyalty, satisfaction and increased firm competitive advantage.

The important role played by the hospital employees in provision of quality service was reinforced by the research finding whereby the interviewees pointed out that the in recognition of the critical role played by the staff, continuous training and development was undertaken in the organization. As the Kano Model (1984) suggests, the ability of a firm to come up with a product that performs and is attractive to the consumer, it is going to be a source of competitive advantage. Similarly, the findings that the hospital specializes on children, as a differentiation

strategy, was able to facilitate provision of services that is tailor made to that market segment and this resulted in a competitive advantage. As Thompson et al. (2013) note, for a company to enjoy a competitive advantage, it should often purpose to meet a certain market segment needs in a bid to have a higher brand loyalty in the market. From the overall research findings, it can be concluded that customer service strategies implemented by Gertrude's hospital through its satellite hospitals had resulted in gaining a competitive advantage of the hospital through such parameters as a premier child referral hospital, increased customer base, improved customer satisfaction and achievement of various global and local awards, and increased demand of its services.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This section presents the summary of the research findings and the conclusion derived from the findings. In addition, the section discusses the limitations and the recommendations thereon.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The objective of the study was to determine the effect of customer service strategy on the competitive advantage of Gertrude's' Children Hospital. The findings suggest that among the key customer service strategy employed by the hospital satellite branches was to ensure maintenance and improvement of the service reliability and quality at all times. The hospital has purposed to standardize the quality and predictability of its services such that upon a client visiting any of its branch, they will expect to receive the same quality of service. In addition to the quality of service and its reliability, the hospital has purposed to serve a particular segment of the market and in this case the child health. This specialization has resulted to immense repository of experience within the institution which has resulted to increased competitive advantage in the market. To meet the increased customer base from the resultant competitive advantage, the hospital has adopted operational strategies that enable various sections from reception to the pharmacy to work seamlessly to increase customer turnaround time. This findings imply that the hospital needs to come up with appropriate knowledge management process that will preserve the current staff with of a view of continuing to utilize their expertise.

The customer service strategies were found to be actualized better with the support of the top management at the hospital headquarters to the branches. This is done through addressing customer complaints and suggestions, training of employees on the customer service and

deployment of staff in areas where their strengths are visible. Within the same, the results reveals that employee-employer relationship is important if effective customer service strategies is to be actualized since a good partnership results in a synergy. To gain employee support, the hospital incorporates employees' feedback in its strategies, undertakes motivational practices such as bonus offering upon meeting a set targets, team building exercises and promotion of staff. With these organizational initiatives, the interviewees noted that the staff feel part and parcel of the organization decision making since their inputs are considered during the planning phase. The hospital also undertakes continuous sensitization on various hospital policies and values that guide its operations. The implication of the finding is that the establishment of peaceful labour relations in an organization is important if the hospital competitive advantage is to be actualized. This calls for the hospital management to invest and maintain appropriate labour relation with the unionisable employees through incorporating their views in the decision making process.

Similarly, the adoption of customer complain charter that stipulates how the customer complaints are addressed, online system that makes it faster to respond to clients complains, team leadership at all times to ensure complaints are handled in the shortest time possible and having daily briefings that handles any customer complain that arose the previous working day were found to have increased customer service and thus resulting in increased hospital competitive advantage. The implication of this findings is that for customer service to have an effect in organizational outcome, it is important that the customer feedback is given attention because establishment of a customer service practice is not useful if it is not going to change the perception of the hospital customer

5.3 Conclusion

The competitive advantage of an organization is not only derived from a single source but rather from a combination of different activities which are combined to create synergy on each other and thus resulting to a state of competitiveness in its service offerings. More so, the ability of an organization to utilize internal available resources in a manner that will address the needs of its clients is expected to result in improved firm competitiveness since the realization of the importance of a customer is important if an organization is to remain in business both in the short and long-term period. It is therefore imperative that an organization adopts different combinations of customer service strategies if it is to have significant effect on the organization outcome.

The success of a customer service strategy will depend to a large proportion on the ability of an organization to gain the support of customers in offering feedbacks on the strategies employed and how it can be adjusted to suit their needs. Hence in coming up with a customer service strategy, an organization need to factor in the input of its clients since from the same, will the strategy be able to achieve the desired competitive advantage. This implies that Gertrude's Children Hospital evaluates on a continuous basis the views of its customers and align its activities with what the customer wants at a particular point in time.

In addition, it can be concluded that the top management of the organization need to support the development and eventually the implementation of the customer service strategy by participating and showing their support through allocation of adequate resources, in terms of human resource and financial and other non-financial support to the exercise. The management should always remind the other staff members on the importance of customer service exercise and how the organization holds the same dear to its survival and be able to realize competitiveness.

5.4 Recommendation for Policy and Practice

From the research findings, the success of a customer service strategy will be dependent on internal organization resources such as human resources, physical facilities and employee-employer relationship. Consequently, it is important that Gertrude's hospital directs more attention and resources to provision of necessary internal resources such as training programs to staff as well as financial resources to the exercise. The hospital need to invest more on its physical facilities in tandem with capacity building on its employees that is currently being undertaken. The physical structures also play an important determinant to customer service and thus firm competitiveness.

The important role played by the hospital clients to successful implementation of customer service programs was established in the study. Therefore, it is important that the hospital implements customer feedbacks and if not, share the reasons with the concerned customer. Through the same, the clients will feel that their inputs are valued and be willing to make more and better customer service strategies and thus be able to realise customer satisfaction. Apart from the receiving customer feedbacks on how to improve the organization customers service practice, it is important that the hospital gets back to the individual customers that have raised the issues explaining what they have done in addressing their concerns.

The research findings also reinforce the need for the top management support for effective customer service strategies implementation in an organization. Therefore, it becomes necessary that the management of Gertrude's hospital should be seen to participate in the customer service programs by directing allocating more and dedicated resources to the exercise. This will enable the organization to achieve necessary competitiveness.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The key drawback of this research is that it was limited in scope in that it covered only one organization, Gertrudes Children's Hospital. This ensures that the results cannot generalize across other organization in the same industry on other sectors. Furthermore, the study used a case study method and it is important to use inferential techniques to further verify the findings.

This research was also constrained by other factors, in that certain interviewees might have been biased or misleading in their responses, given that they all focused on their employer or company that they were interested. It would therefore be appropriate as a control measure to validate the views of the managers by getting results from lower cadre staff that will remain anonymous. It would have been necessary for more informants to increase the number of respondents in this study and to better track the accuracy of the information provided.

5.6 Recommendation for Further Studies

The research was a case study in that it concentrated on only Gertrude's hospital. There is need to undertake a research among different hospitals in Kenya, both private and public to augment the results and make generalization of the findings.

The research interviewed eight interviewees holding the top management position and it is possible that their responses were biased. As a result, more respondents can be targeted from both the top management and as well as the middle level group to augment the responses. In addition, the views of the organization clients can be sought to compare with the results from the internal stakeholders. It is also suggested that a longitudinal study be undertaken to link the level of competitiveness that results from different forms of customer service. This is because the outcomes from a customer service strategy are not instantaneous, but rather over a period of time.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section A: Respondents Background

1. What is your highest level of education?
2. For how long have you been working in the at Gertrudes Children's Hospital?
3. For how long have you been in your current position at the organization?

Section B: Customer Service and Competitive Advantage

4. How does your organization ensure its services are delivered promptly?
5. How does the hospital ensure that staff have an excellent relationship with the organization?
6. What ways are used by the organization to ensure professionalism among customer service staff?
7. In what ways does the organization ensure its employees have knowledge of their products and services?
8. What customer service strategies adopted by the organizations in relation to enhancing competitive advantage?
9. Explain how product knowledge lead competitive advantage in your organization?
10. How does leading from the top lead to competitive advantage in your organization?
11. In what ways has resolving client issues result to competitive advantage?
12. How does delivering the promises lead to competitive advantage in your organization?
13. Explain Training employees on empathy enhance competitive advantage of the hospital?

14. How does the company ensure that customers are less dissatisfied?
15. What are the procedures put in place to resolve customer complaints?
16. What are the measures put in place to ensure the organization deliver its promises to its clients?
17. Explain how the customer service procedure has led to customer satisfaction?
18. How has the organization's customer service strategy led to competitive advantage?