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Customer Focus, Product Diversification and Competitive Advantage of Pharmaceuticals in Nairobi City, Kenya

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between customer focus, product diversification and competitive advantage among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya. It draws on the first two objectives of a wider study of strategic management drivers and competitive advantage. The study was guided by Strategic Management Theory and supported by the Resource-Based View and Profit Maximisation Theory. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, targeting 105 middle- and senior-level managers across 15 pharmaceutical manufacturing companies. A census approach was used, and structured questionnaires were distributed; 76 usable responses were returned, representing a 72% response rate. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression in SPSS. Customer focus had a positive, statistically significant relationship with competitive advantage ($r = .610$, $p < .01$) and explained 37.2% of its variance in the simple regression model ($R^2 = .372$; $\beta = .610$, $p < .001$). Product diversification was also positively and significantly associated with competitive advantage ($r = .489$, $p < .01$), explaining 23.9% of its variance ($R^2 = .239$; $\beta = .489$, $p < .001$). The results indicate that both understanding customer needs and managing product portfolios are relevant to competitive positioning. Customer focus showed the stronger individual relationship. Because the design was cross-sectional and relied on self-reported data, the findings indicate statistical associations and predictive relationships rather than definitive causation. The paper recommends systematic use of customer intelligence and selective, market-informed product diversification.

Keywords: *Competitive Advantage, Customer Focus, Pharmaceutical Manufacturing, Product Diversification, Strategic Management.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing firms operate in competitive environments shaped by changing customer expectations, production costs, technological development and pressure to maintain product quality. Pharmaceutical manufacturers face these pressures alongside regulatory requirements governing medicines and manufacturing standards. Their competitive position depends not only on production capacity but also on how effectively they understand market needs, manage product portfolios and deploy organisational resources. Customer focus refers to the deliberate alignment of products, services and business decisions with customer needs and expectations. It involves gathering and using customer feedback, monitoring satisfaction, maintaining product quality and responding to changes in demand. A customer-oriented firm is better placed to identify valued product attributes, sustain customer relationships and make market-informed decisions. Prior research in Kenya has associated customer focus with competitiveness among large manufacturing companies (King'oina et al., 2022; Munyua & Rukangu, 2022). However, the strength of this relationship may vary by industry and outcome measure.

Product diversification involves expanding a firm's product range or entering additional product segments to reach new customers, reduce dependence on a narrow portfolio and create revenue opportunities. Diversification may strengthen competitive positioning where new products fit market demand and the firm's capabilities. It may also increase complexity, investment requirements and managerial demands if undertaken without sufficient market analysis. Studies of Kenyan manufacturing sectors have reported positive relationships between diversification and

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performance or sustainable competitive advantage (Mucheru et al., 2024; Omosa et al., 2022), although evidence specific to pharmaceutical manufacturers in Nairobi remains limited.

➢ *Statement of the Problem*

Kenya's manufacturing sector is an important contributor to economic growth and industrial development. However, its contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) and its growth have remained below the government's aspirations. Kenya Vision 2030 identifies manufacturing as a key sector for industrialisation, with the government targeting an increase in its contribution to GDP from approximately 13% to 25% by 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2020; Kenya Economic Survey, 2019). Achieving this target requires manufacturing firms to strengthen their competitive advantage in an environment characterised by increasing domestic and international competition, changing customer needs, and technological developments.

Customer focus and product diversification are potential strategic drivers of competitive advantage among manufacturing firms. Customer focus enables firms to understand customer preferences and respond to changing market demands, while product diversification allows firms to serve different market segments and broaden their product offerings. However, the extent to which these strategies contribute to competitive advantage may vary across industries and organisational contexts. Pharmaceutical manufacturing companies, in particular, operate in a market where customer requirements, product availability, quality, and the ability to respond to changing demand may influence their competitive position.

Previous studies have examined strategic drivers and organisational performance in other sectors. Waheti (2020) found that strategic drivers influenced the performance of commercial banks in Kenya, while Muthoka (2017) established a positive relationship between strategic drivers and the performance of state corporations. Nevertheless, these studies focused on banking and state corporations rather than pharmaceutical manufacturing companies. Their findings therefore provide limited evidence on the specific influence of customer focus and product diversification on competitive advantage in Kenya's pharmaceutical manufacturing industry.

The limited sector-specific evidence creates a need to establish how customer focus and product diversification influence competitive advantage among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County. This study therefore seeks to establish the effect of customer focus on competitive advantage and examine the effect of product diversification on competitive advantage among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

➢ *Objectives*

The study from which this paper is drawn examined strategic management drivers and competitive advantage among large pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County. This paper is deliberately limited to its first two objectives: (1) to establish the effect of customer focus on competitive advantage; and (2) to examine the effect of product diversification on competitive advantage. Competitive advantage was assessed in the source study through indicators including market share, product quality, customer loyalty and operational efficiency. The paper addresses the need for sector-specific evidence to inform how pharmaceutical manufacturers can strengthen their market position.

The study was guided by two research questions: To what extent does customer focus relate to competitive advantage among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County? In what ways does product diversification relate to competitive advantage among these companies? The paper is justified by its practical relevance to pharmaceutical managers and its contribution to research on strategic management in an emerging-market manufacturing context.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➢ *Theoretical Literature*

Strategic Management Theory provides the overarching perspective for understanding how firms formulate, implement and evaluate strategies in response to their internal capabilities and external environment. Porter's (1980) competitive strategy framework emphasises the importance of industry conditions and strategic positioning. In this paper, customer focus represents a market-oriented strategic choice, while product diversification represents a portfolio and growth decision. The theory suggests that these choices should be aligned with organisational goals, resources and competitive conditions.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) complements this perspective by explaining why some firm resources and capabilities may support competitive advantage. Barney et al. (2021) discuss the continuing relevance of resource-based theory to value creation. Customer knowledge, trusted customer relationships and the organisational routines used to translate feedback into action may be valuable capabilities. Similarly, a firm's capacity to develop, register, manufacture and market differentiated products may support its competitive position when competitors cannot easily replicate those capabilities. RBV also implies that merely adopting a practice does not guarantee advantage; its value depends on how it is developed and combined with other resources.

Profit Maximisation Theory offers an additional rationale for the two variables. Customer focus may contribute to revenue through satisfaction, repeat purchasing and customer retention. Product diversification may create additional revenue streams and reduce dependence on a limited range of products. However, diversification can also raise development, compliance, production and marketing costs. Financial benefits therefore depend on the relationship between expected demand, investment and the firm's ability to execute its strategy.

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➢ *Customer Focus and Competitive Advantage*

Customer focus involves identifying customer needs and incorporating them into product and service decisions. In pharmaceutical manufacturing, customer-related information may come from distributors, pharmacies, hospitals, procurement entities and other market channels. Acting on this information can help firms respond to demand, improve service reliability and maintain product quality. Customer orientation is particularly relevant in a sector where product quality, availability and trust influence purchasing and supply relationships.

Kenyan evidence supports the relevance of customer focus to manufacturing competitiveness. King'oina et al. (2022) examined customer focus and competitiveness among large manufacturing companies in Kenya, while Munyua and Rukangu (2022) similarly addressed the relationship in the large-manufacturing context. Dahir et al. (2026) focused specifically on customer orientation and performance among pharmaceutical manufacturing firms in Kenya. These studies provide a relevant empirical basis, although performance and competitive advantage are related but distinct outcomes.

The source study's literature review also recognises that customer orientation may not produce the same results in every setting. Its value depends on whether firms gather reliable information and convert it into decisions about product availability, quality, service and market priorities. The present analysis therefore tests the relationship in the specific context of pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County.

- Hypothesis 1 (H_{01}): Customer focus has no statistically significant relationship with competitive advantage among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County.

➢ *Product Diversification and Competitive Advantage*

Product diversification can help manufacturers serve additional market segments, respond to different customer requirements and reduce reliance on a small number of products. For pharmaceutical firms, diversification may involve adding products or therapeutic categories, subject to market demand, technical capacity and regulatory requirements. It may improve market reach when new products complement the firm's existing capabilities and meet identifiable needs.

Empirical studies in Kenya have linked diversification to organisational outcomes. Omosa et al. (2022) examined product diversification in selected tea factories and reported a positive relationship with performance. Mucheru et al. (2024) investigated diversification strategy and sustainable competitive advantage among cement manufacturing companies in Kenya. Karanja and Njoroge (2023), as cited in the source project, examined product diversification strategy in the Kenyan pharmaceutical industry. These studies provide support for considering diversification as a potential strategic driver, but differences in sectors, measures and research designs limit direct generalisation.

Diversification is not automatically beneficial. A broader product portfolio can increase research and development costs, inventory complexity, marketing demands and regulatory workload. Poorly selected products may spread resources too thinly or fail to generate sufficient demand. The likely contribution of diversification therefore depends on strategic fit, market intelligence, manufacturing capacity and implementation. The present paper examines whether respondents' assessments of product diversification are associated with competitive advantage in Nairobi's pharmaceutical manufacturing context.

- Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}): Product diversification has no statistically significant relationship with competitive advantage among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County.

➢ *Research Gap and Conceptual Framework*

The literature reviewed in the source project points to evidence linking customer focus and product diversification with competitiveness or performance in manufacturing. However, studies differ in sector, geographical context and dependent variable. Evidence on general manufacturing performance cannot fully establish how these two strategic drivers relate to competitive advantage in pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County. This paper addresses that contextual gap using the primary survey data reported in the source project.

The conceptual framework positions customer focus and product diversification as independent variables and competitive advantage as the dependent variable. Customer focus is reflected in practices such as understanding customer needs, customer satisfaction and responsiveness. Product diversification concerns the expansion and management of the product portfolio. Competitive advantage is assessed through market share, product quality, customer loyalty and operational efficiency.

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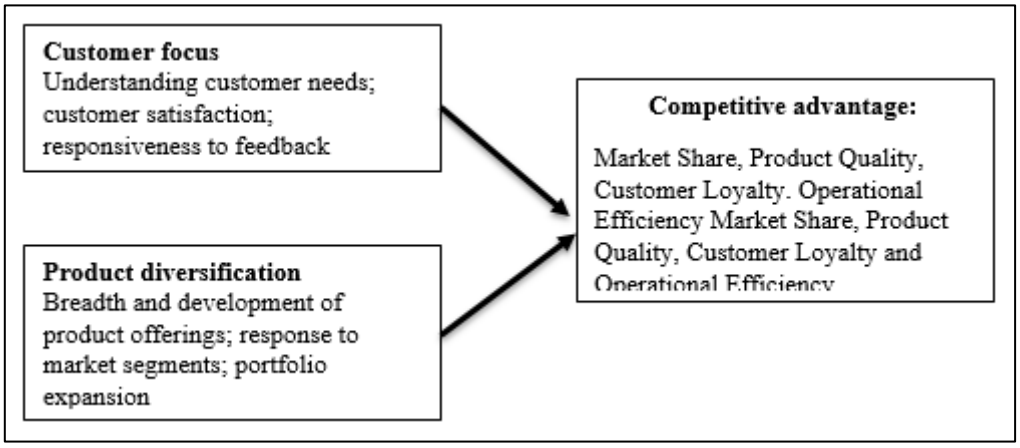


Fig 1 Conceptual Relationship: Customer Focus → Competitive Advantage; Product Diversification → Competitive Advantage.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between the selected strategic management drivers and competitive advantage at one point in time. The target population comprised 105 middle- and senior-level managers from 15 pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in Nairobi City County. The source project reports that the managers represented functions including strategic planning, operations, finance, human resources, sales and marketing, regulatory affairs, and supply chain management.

A census approach was adopted because the target population was manageable and the researcher sought responses from all eligible managers. Structured questionnaires were used to collect standardised information on customer focus, product diversification and competitive advantage. The source project reports that ten employees from different managerial levels participated in a pilot study to assess the clarity and suitability of the instrument. Content validity was reviewed with guidance from the research supervisor and relevant experts. Cronbach's alpha was used in the wider study to assess internal consistency.

Of the 105 questionnaires distributed, 76 were returned, producing a response rate of 72%; 29 questionnaires were not returned. The data were coded and analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarised responses, while Pearson's product-moment correlation assessed the direction and strength of the relationships. Simple linear regression was used to estimate the predictive contribution of each objective variable separately. Statistical tests were evaluated at the 5% significance level. The hypotheses were rejected where the reported p-value was below .05.

For each objective, the simple regression model can be represented as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$, where Y denotes competitive advantage, X denotes either customer focus or product diversification, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 is the regression coefficient and ε is the error term. Because the design was cross-sectional and the measures were questionnaire-based, results are interpreted as associations and statistical prediction rather than proof of causation. The source project reports a final analytic sample of 76 for the regression models.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Response Rate

Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage
Returned	76	72%
Not returned	29	28%
Total distributed	105	100%

The 72% response rate provided 76 responses for analysis. Findings below are presented in line with the first two objectives and their corresponding hypotheses.

➢ *Objective 1: Customer Focus and Competitive Advantage*

The study found a positive and statistically significant relationship between customer focus and competitive advantage ($r = .610$, $p < .01$). In the simple regression model, customer focus explained 37.2% of the variation in competitive advantage ($R^2 = .372$; adjusted $R^2 = .364$). The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 74) = 43.875$, $p < .001$, and the standardised regression coefficient was positive and significant ($\beta = .610$, $p < .001$). The reported coefficient indicates that stronger customer focus scores were associated with higher competitive advantage scores.

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Table 2 Customer Focus and Competitive Advantage

Statistic	Customer focus model
Pearson correlation (r)	.610, $p < .01$
R^2 / adjusted R^2	.372 / .364
F statistic	$F(1, 74) = 43.875$, $p < .001$
Standardised coefficient	$\beta = .610$, $p < .001$
Decision on H_{01}	Reject the null hypothesis

The result suggests that customer focus was an important strategic factor for the pharmaceutical manufacturers included in the study. Understanding customer requirements and responding to market feedback may help firms align product quality, supply and service with buyers' expectations. The result is consistent with the focus of Kenyan studies by King'oina et al. (2022) and Munyua and Rukangu (2022), which examined customer focus in relation to manufacturing competitiveness. It also has sector relevance alongside Dahir et al. (2026), who examined customer orientation among pharmaceutical manufacturing firms in Kenya. Because the studies differ in outcome measures and analytical approaches, the comparison supports contextual relevance rather than exact equivalence.

The null hypothesis that customer focus has no statistically significant relationship with competitive advantage is rejected. This decision is based on the significant correlation and simple regression results. The findings do not establish that customer focus alone causes competitive advantage, since other organisational and market conditions may also contribute.

- *Objective 2: Product Diversification and Competitive Advantage*

Product diversification also showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with competitive advantage ($r = .489$, $p < .01$). The simple regression model explained 23.9% of the variation in competitive advantage ($R^2 = .239$; adjusted $R^2 = .228$). The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 74) = 23.196$, $p < .001$, and the standardised coefficient was positive ($\beta = .489$, $p < .001$). Thus, respondents reporting stronger product diversification also tended to report higher competitive advantage.

Table 3 Product Diversification and Competitive Advantage

Statistic	Product diversification model
Pearson correlation (r)	.489, $p < .01$
R^2 / adjusted R^2	.239 / .228
F statistic	$F(1, 74) = 23.196$, $p < .001$
Standardised coefficient	$\beta = .489$, $p < .001$
Decision on H_{02}	Reject the null hypothesis

The result indicates that diversification was associated with competitive advantage, although its individual explanatory power was lower than that of customer focus. In the pharmaceutical sector, diversification may help firms address additional market segments and respond to changing demand, provided that new products are supported by appropriate market analysis, manufacturing capability and regulatory compliance. The result is consistent with the general direction of findings reported by Omosa et al. (2022) in Kenyan tea factories and Mucheru et al. (2024) among cement manufacturers. Karanja and Njoroge (2023), cited in the source project, provide a closer sector comparison through their focus on product diversification in the Kenyan pharmaceutical industry.

The null hypothesis that product diversification has no statistically significant relationship with competitive advantage is rejected. However, the result should not be interpreted as a recommendation to expand product lines without appraisal. Diversification may require substantial resources and can be less effective where products lack strategic fit or where firms cannot support the additional quality, supply and marketing requirements.

Table 4 Comparison of the Two Objectives

Variable	Correlation with competitive advantage	Variance explained (R^2)	Standardised β	Interpretation
Customer focus	$r = .610$, $p < .01$	.372	.610, $p < .001$	Stronger positive individual relationship
Product diversification	$r = .489$, $p < .01$	.239	.489, $p < .001$	Positive significant relationship, with lower individual explanatory power

Across the two objective-specific models, customer focus had the stronger relationship with competitive advantage and explained a larger share of its variance than product diversification. The difference suggests that customer-oriented capabilities may have more immediate relevance to competitive positioning than portfolio expansion alone in the firms studied. Nevertheless, the two strategies are not necessarily alternatives: customer intelligence can guide decisions about which products to develop, retain or discontinue.

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The results in this paper come from the separate simple regression models. The wider project also analysed four strategic drivers simultaneously and found that customer focus remained significant in the multivariate model (β = .328, p = .007), whereas product diversification did not make a statistically significant unique contribution after the other variables were controlled (β = .114, p = .285). This additional result qualifies the individual-model finding: product diversification was positively related to competitive advantage when examined alone, but its independent contribution was not statistically distinguishable from the other strategic factors in the combined model. It should not be mistaken for a result from a two-predictor model limited to the objectives in this paper.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first objective established a positive and statistically significant relationship between customer focus and competitive advantage among the pharmaceutical manufacturing companies studied. Customer focus explained 37.2% of the variance in competitive advantage in the simple regression model and showed the stronger relationship of the two variables examined. The second objective found a positive and statistically significant relationship between product diversification and competitive advantage, with diversification explaining 23.9% of the variance. Both null hypotheses were rejected.

For management practice, pharmaceutical manufacturers should establish consistent processes for collecting and using customer feedback, monitoring satisfaction and identifying changes in market demand. Customer information should inform decisions about product quality, availability, service and commercial priorities. Product diversification should be selective and evidence-led. Before expanding product lines, managers should assess customer demand, product-market fit, regulatory requirements, production capacity and the resources needed to maintain quality and reliable supply.

For theory, the results are consistent with Strategic Management Theory's emphasis on aligning strategic choices with organisational goals and market conditions. They also support the relevance of RBV by suggesting that customer-related knowledge and the capability to manage a product portfolio may be strategic resources. The results do not establish that these resources are rare or difficult to imitate, so the RBV interpretation should remain measured.

For policy and industry support, pharmaceutical manufacturing programmes should encourage market intelligence, product-development capability and collaboration between firms, research institutions and relevant industry bodies. Support for diversification should be accompanied by attention to regulatory compliance and product quality rather than treating the number of product lines as a sufficient indicator of competitiveness.

Further studies could use longitudinal designs and objective market indicators to assess whether customer focus and diversification precede changes in market share, customer retention or operational efficiency. Research across pharmaceutical manufacturers in other Kenyan counties could assess the generalisability of the results. Future work could also test whether the relationship between diversification and competitive advantage depends on firm size, innovation capability, regulatory capacity or strategic human capital.

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