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STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN HOTELS IN CENTRAL REGION COUNTIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of strategic management practices on sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised of 272 staff members drawn from management, finance, operations, ICT, human resource, and customer relationship departments of three-star and four-star hotels. The findings revealed that strategic management practices were widely implemented across the surveyed hotels. Correlation analysis established significant positive relationships between all strategic management practices and sustainable competitive advantage. Multiple regression analysis revealed that the four strategic management practices jointly explained 66% of the variation in sustainable competitive advantage ($R^2 = 0.66$). Further, all four practices had a positive and statistically significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage: environmental scanning ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.001$), strategy formulation ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.007$), strategy implementation ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), and strategic communication ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$). Strategy implementation emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable competitive advantage, followed by strategic communication, environmental scanning, and strategy formulation. Qualitative findings corroborated the quantitative results by highlighting leadership commitment, employee involvement, effective communication, continuous environmental monitoring, and innovation as key drivers of competitiveness. The study concluded that strategic management practices significantly influence sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya. Sustainable competitiveness is achieved not only through effective strategic planning but also through disciplined implementation, strong communication systems, and continuous adaptation to environmental changes. The study recommended that hotel managers strengthen strategy implementation mechanisms, institutionalize structured communication systems, formalize environmental scanning processes, and adopt inclusive and data-driven strategy formulation approaches to enhance long-term competitiveness and sustainability. The findings contribute to strategic management theory and provide practical insights for hotel managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to improve the competitiveness of Kenya's hospitality sector.

Key Words: Canning, Strategy Formulation, Strategy Implementation, Strategic Communication

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INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic business environment, hotels must adopt robust strategic management practices (SMPs) to achieve and sustain competitive advantage, defined as maintaining superior performance through unique, valuable, and hard-to-imitate capabilities (Napitupulu et al., 2025). In hospitality, this is achieved by aligning internal resources with external market opportunities to enhance service quality, innovation, and customer loyalty (Napitupulu et al., 2025). Environmental scanning enables hotels to analyze political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors, anticipate trends, and improve strategic responsiveness (Napitupulu et al., 2025).

The pursuit of sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) is critical in the hospitality industry, where competition, evolving customer expectations, and environmental uncertainties create strategic challenges. Hotels must navigate economic fluctuations, health crises, and technological change, making effective strategic management practices (SMPs) essential (Gomes et al., 2021; Napitupulu et al., 2025). Key SMPs include environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic communication, which enhance resilience and sustained performance.

The African hospitality industry faces increasing competition due to economic volatility, infrastructural constraints, and global shocks, with rising operational costs and fluctuating tourism demand intensifying the need for strategic management practices (SMPs) to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Sarsour & Aldalou, 2021). Mid-range and domestic hotels, in particular, must adopt structured approaches such as environmental scanning, strategy formulation, and strategy implementation to survive and differentiate. Evidence from Zambia and Zimbabwe shows that these practices enhance performance, growth, and competitiveness (Wasamunu et al., 2022; Sylva & Amah, 2021).

In Kenya, the hotel industry has increasingly adopted strategic management practices (SMPs) to sustain competitiveness in a market characterized by fluctuating tourist arrivals, rising operational costs, and evolving customer expectations. Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) is now understood to depend on systematic practices such as environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic communication rather than short-term or reactive actions (Mutinda & Njoroge, 2022; Omondi, 2024). These practices enable hotels to align internal capabilities with external market conditions, enhance service differentiation, and build long-term resilience.

Empirical evidence shows that Three-star and Four-star hotel establishments have been more proactive in integrating strategic management and sustainability into their operations. Serena Hotels has embedded environmental scanning and sustainability-oriented strategy formulation, resulting in reduced costs, enhanced brand reputation, and attraction of eco-conscious travellers (Serena Hotels, 2023). Similarly, Sarova Hotels has strengthened its competitive position through strategic communication of corporate social responsibility initiatives, improving stakeholder engagement and reputational capital (Mutinda & Njoroge, 2022).

In Kenya, the regulation and classification of hotels are overseen by the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) under the Tourism Act, 2011, which replaced earlier frameworks such as the Restaurant and Hotel Act Cap 494. The Act defines a hotel as an establishment providing accommodation, with or without food and beverage services, to paying guests and mandates classification based on standardized criteria.

Hotels are rated on a one- to five-star system reflecting infrastructure quality, service standards, amenities, operational systems, and overall guest experience (Tourism Regulatory Authority, 2022). Within this framework, three-star and four-star hotels occupy a strategically important position by

offering a balance between quality service and affordability.

These hotels typically provide professional service standards, modern amenities, and structured operations while remaining accessible to domestic and regional travellers. Consequently, they attract business travellers, conference delegates, domestic tourists, and international visitors seeking value without five-star pricing (Republic of Kenya, 2021). In Central Region Counties, three-star and four-star hotels are vital in supporting business tourism, meetings, conferences, and domestic leisure travel. Their operations significantly contribute to regional economic development and employment creation.

Despite their importance, three-star and four-star hotels operate in a highly competitive environment marked by rising operational costs, increasing customer expectations, rapid technological change, and competition from luxury hotels and alternative accommodation providers. These pressures necessitate the adoption of effective strategic management practices to sustain competitiveness. Continuous environmental scanning enables hotels to anticipate market trends and regulatory changes. Strategy formulation guides competitive positioning and resource allocation. Strategy implementation ensures plans translate into improved performance outcomes. Strategic communication aligns internal and external stakeholders while enhancing brand visibility. Understanding how these practices contribute to sustainable competitive advantage is therefore critical for the long-term viability of three-star and four-star hotels in Kenya's Central Region Counties.

Statement of the Problem

The hotel industry operates in a highly competitive environment where sustainable competitive advantage is crucial for performance and survival (Mongerwa, 2024). Sustainable competitive advantage is achieved when a firm uses resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable to outperform competitors (Kumar, 2021). However, the Kenyan hotel sector faces fluctuating demand, rising operational costs, technological disruption, and intense competition, requiring effective strategic management practices.

Kenyan hotels recorded occupancy rates between 31% and 34% before COVID-19, which is significantly lower than established tourism destinations such as Italy (70-78% during peak seasons in 2024-2025) and Spain (61-62% in 2024) (KNBS, 2021; Lock, 2021). Additionally, staff turnover exceeding 50% in some categories undermines service quality (Wachira & Kandie, 2021). Central Region counties, despite their strategic location and growing tourism potential, face intense competition, seasonal demand fluctuations, and rising costs. National data show occupancy dropped from 30.3%–38.6% in 2023 to 25.6%–31.1% in 2024 (KNBS Economic Survey 2025 as reported by The Star), while energy and labor costs continue to rise (The Star, 2025; ILO sector studies).

Although studies show strategic management practices such as environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic communication positively influence competitive advantage (Fatoki, 2021; Wasamunu et al., 2022; Onyekwelu, 2020), Kenyan research has largely focused on tourism subsectors, with limited evidence on three-star and four-star hotels (Owiyo, Mulwa, & Thuo, 2023). With bed-night occupancy at 28.9% in 2024 (KNBS Economic Survey data reported by Frontier Africa Reports, 2025), this study examines how strategic management practices influence sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

To establish the influence of strategic management practices (environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic communication) on the sustainable competitive advantage of three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties in Kenya. The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- To assess the influence of environmental scanning practice on the sustainable

competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels in Central region Counties in Kenya.

- To establish the influence of strategy formulation practice on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels Central Region Counties in Kenya.
- To assess the influence of strategy implementation practice on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels Central Region Counties in Kenya.
- To determine the influence of strategic communication practice on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels Central Region Counties in Kenya.

The study's research hypotheses were;

- **H_{o1}**: Environmental scanning practice has no significant influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels in Central Region Counties in Kenya.
- **H_{o2}**: Strategy formulation practice has no significant influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels in Central Region Counties in Kenya.
- **H_{o3}**: Strategy implementation practice has no significant influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels in Central Region Counties in Kenya.
- **H_{o4}**: Strategic communication practice has no significant influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of Three-Star and Four-Star hotels in Central Region Counties in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, originally advanced by Barney (1986) and later formalized by Barney (1991; 2021), posits that an organization's ability to achieve and sustain competitive advantage depends on the internal resources and capabilities it controls. According to RBV, firms attain sustainable competitive advantage when they possess resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN), enabling them to outperform competitors over time.

RBV assumes that firms differ in their resource endowments and that these resources are imperfectly mobile across organizations, making them difficult to imitate or transfer (Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2021). In service-based industries such as hospitality, intangible resources including human capital, organizational culture, service quality, technological competence, and brand reputation are particularly critical in shaping competitive outcomes (Napitupulu et al., 2025).

Porter's Competitive Advantage Theories

Porter's Competitive Advantage Theories particularly the Generic Strategies Framework and the Five Forces Model explain how firms achieve superior performance through strategic positioning and by responding effectively to industry forces (Porter, 1980; Porter, 1985; Porter, 2008). These theories remain highly relevant in the hospitality industry, where competition, cost pressures, and differentiation challenges are pronounced, especially in emerging economies (Theuri, Ndiao, & Mathenge, 2024).

Porter's Generic Strategies framework identifies cost leadership, differentiation, and focus as the primary means through which firms achieve competitive advantage. In this study, the theory directly supports the objective of examining the influence of strategy formulation on sustainable competitive advantage. Strategy formulation involves making deliberate choices regarding cost

structures, service differentiation, target markets, and competitive positioning. For three- and four-star hotels in Central Region counties, strategic choices such as adopting energy-efficient technologies, offering differentiated guest experiences, or focusing on niche markets (e.g., business travelers or eco-tourists) are critical in shaping competitive outcomes (Musili & Mutinda, 2021; Wachira & Kandie, 2021).

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory, introduced by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), extends RBV by emphasizing an organization's ability to integrate, reconfigure, and renew resources in response to rapidly changing environments. While RBV explains the source of competitive advantage, Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how that advantage is sustained through adaptability, learning, and innovation (Teece, 2018; Teece, 2020).

Dynamic capabilities are commonly conceptualized through three core processes: sensing opportunities and threats, seizing opportunities through strategic action, and transforming or reconfiguring resources to maintain alignment with environmental changes (Teece, 2020). This theory directly supports the objectives of examining the influence of environmental scanning and strategic communication on sustainable competitive advantage. Environmental scanning facilitates the sensing of market trends and threats, while strategic communication enables coordination, knowledge sharing, and alignment of organizational actions during change processes.

Conceptual framework

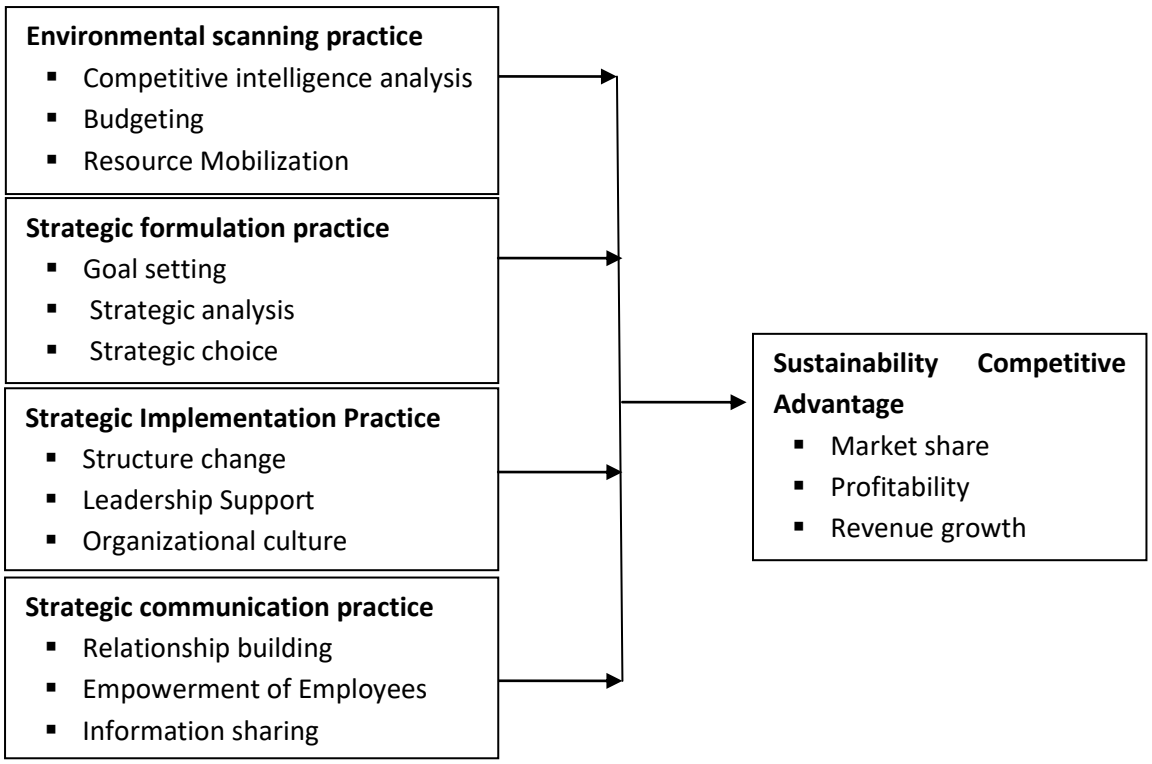


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Empirical Literature

Empirical literature from global, regional, and local contexts consistently demonstrates that environmental scanning is a critical determinant of sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality industry, particularly in environments characterized by uncertainty, intense competition, and rapidly changing customer preferences.

Environmental scanning refers to the systematic monitoring and interpretation of political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental (PESTEL) factors to inform strategic decision-making and organizational responsiveness (Teece, 2020; Salih & Alnaji, 2021).

Globally, studies conducted in mature hospitality markets indicate that hotels that invest in structured environmental scanning systems achieve superior competitive positioning and long-term performance. For example, Salih and Alnaji (2021), in a multi-country study of hospitality firms in Europe and Asia, found that environmental scanning significantly enhanced strategic agility, innovation capability, and service differentiation, which in turn strengthened sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, Teece (2020) observed that hotels operating in volatile global tourism markets that continuously scanned technological trends, customer preferences, and regulatory changes were better positioned to adapt their service offerings and sustain competitiveness over time.

Strategy formulation is widely recognized as a critical determinant of sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality industry, particularly in environments characterized by intense competition, economic uncertainty, and evolving customer expectations. Strategy formulation involves defining organizational direction, setting long-term objectives, and designing competitive strategies that align internal capabilities with external environmental conditions (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2020; Teece, 2020). For three-star and four-star hotels, effective strategy formulation is essential for balancing cost efficiency with service differentiation in order to remain competitive within increasingly saturated markets.

Globally, empirical studies demonstrate a strong relationship between effective strategy formulation and sustained competitiveness in the hospitality sector. Studies conducted in Europe, Asia, and North America indicate that hotels with formalized strategic planning processes achieve superior market positioning, customer loyalty, and financial performance compared to those relying on ad hoc or reactive planning (UNWTO, 2022). Salih and Alnaji (2021) found that deliberate formulation of competitive strategies such as differentiation through service innovation and focus on niche markets significantly enhanced long-term competitiveness in mid-tier hotels operating in highly competitive destinations. These findings underscore the importance of aligning strategic choices with changing customer preferences and market dynamics.

While strategy formulation defines an organization's long-term direction, strategy implementation determines whether strategic intentions are successfully translated into tangible performance outcomes. Strategy implementation involves aligning leadership, organizational structures, human resources, financial investments, operational processes, and organizational culture with strategic priorities (Hrebiniak, 2013). In the hospitality industry, effective strategy implementation is particularly critical due to the service-intensive nature of hotel operations and the direct involvement of employees in delivering customer value.

Globally, empirical studies consistently demonstrate that successful strategy implementation is a key determinant of sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality sector. Research conducted in Europe, Asia, and North America shows that hotels with strong execution capabilities achieve superior service quality, customer satisfaction, and long-term competitiveness compared to those that focus primarily on planning without effective execution (Teece, 2020; UNWTO, 2022). Mid-tier hotels, including three-star and four-star establishments, benefit significantly from effective implementation because they operate under tighter resource constraints and must balance cost efficiency with service differentiation.

Studies further indicate that implementation effectiveness is influenced by leadership commitment, employee involvement, performance

monitoring systems, and organizational culture. Hotels that integrate strategic objectives into daily operations, staff training, and performance appraisal systems are more likely to sustain competitive advantage over time (Hrebiniak, 2013; Teece, 2020).

Strategic communication is increasingly recognized as a critical enabler of sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. Strategic communication refers to the deliberate, structured, and continuous exchange of information between hotel management and key stakeholders including employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, and local communities with the aim of aligning organizational objectives, enhancing coordination, and strengthening brand positioning (Teece, 2020). In service-oriented industries such as hospitality, where service delivery depends heavily on human interaction and coordination, effective strategic communication serves as a vital link between strategy formulation and successful strategy implementation.

Globally, empirical studies demonstrate that effective strategic communication significantly enhances competitiveness in the hospitality sector. Research conducted in Europe and North America shows that hotels with clear internal communication systems achieve higher employee engagement, service consistency, and customer satisfaction, which contribute to sustained competitive advantage (UNWTO, 2022). Salih and Alnaji (2021) found that hotels that institutionalized strategic communication practices such as regular staff briefings, feedback mechanisms, and digital communication platforms were more effective in aligning employee behavior with strategic goals, leading to improved service quality and brand loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a convergent parallel research design. The target population of this study was the staff working in the 30 Three-star and Four-star hotels in Central Region Counties of Kenya. The staff population included managers, financial officers, operations officers, ICT officers, human resource officers, and relationship-building officers. Since the population was heterogeneous in terms of professional roles, a carefully designed sampling strategy was necessary to ensure representativeness and reliability of findings. The sampling frame for hotels was constructed using the official list of registered three-star and four-star hotels obtained from the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA), Kenya. At the time of the study, there were 30 three-star and 30 four-star hotels in the Central Region counties, including Nyeri, Murang'a, Kirinyaga, Nyandarua and Kiambu. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select hotels that met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The sample size of 162 was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, applied at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data to capture a comprehensive view of the influence of strategic management practices on sustainable competitive advantage in Three-star and Four-star hotels within the Central Region Counties of Kenya. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions. The closed-ended items were designed on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," to measure the perceptions of respondents regarding environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategic communication, and sustainable competitive advantage.

The study applied both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques consistent with the convergent parallel mixed methods research design. Quantitative data obtained through semi-structured questionnaires were first coded, entered, and cleaned using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25). Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize demographic information of

respondents and to describe the study variables. Inferential statistics were then applied to test the hypotheses and establish the relationships between the independent variables (strategic management practices) and the dependent variable (sustainable competitive advantage). Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of associations between the study variables. Multiple regression analysis was subsequently conducted to determine the predictive power of each independent variable on sustainable competitive advantage. The regression model took the following form:

$$Y = \beta 0 + \beta 1X1 + \beta 2X2 + \beta 3X3 + \beta 4X4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Sustainable Competitive Advantage
β0 = Constant term
β1, β2, β3, β4 = Regression coefficients
X1 = Environmental Scanning
X2 = Strategy Formulation
X3 = Strategy Implementation
X4 = Strategic Communication
ε = Error term

FINDINGS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

A total of 162 questionnaires were administered to respondents across the selected three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties. Out of these, 138 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 85.2%. This response rate is considered highly satisfactory for social science research and provides a strong basis for reliable statistical analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), a response rate above 60% is adequate for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, while rates above 70% are regarded as very good. Therefore, the 85.2% response rate achieved in this study exceeds the recommended threshold and enhances the credibility, reliability, and generalizability of the findings within the study context.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

This section presented the descriptive statistical analysis of data collected from respondents drawn from the selected three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize, organize, and interpret the data in order to provide an overall understanding of respondents' perceptions regarding strategic management practices and sustainable competitive advantage.

The analysis utilized both frequencies and percentages to summarize categorical variables, and means and standard deviations to analyse responses measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Frequencies and percentages were primarily used in earlier sections to describe organizational characteristics and response patterns, while means and standard deviations were applied to the scale-based items measuring the study constructs.

The mean score was used to determine the central tendency of responses and to assess the overall level of agreement with statements relating to environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategic communication, and sustainable competitive advantage. In interpreting the results, a mean score above 3.0 indicated a positive perception or general agreement that the practice was adopted within the hotel, while a mean score below 3.0 suggested disagreement or limited adoption of the practice. Mean values close to 5.0 reflected strong agreement, whereas values close to 1.0 reflected strong disagreement.

The standard deviation was used to measure the dispersion of responses around the mean. Lower standard deviation values indicated a higher level of consensus among respondents, suggesting relatively uniform perceptions regarding a particular practice. Conversely, higher standard deviation values indicated greater variability in responses, reflecting differing perceptions among respondents.

Descriptive statistics are essential in providing preliminary insights into the extent to which strategic management practices are implemented within the sampled hotels. They offer an empirical overview of the strength and consistency of these practices before examining their statistical relationships with sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, the descriptive findings provide a contextual foundation for the subsequent inferential analyses, including correlation and multiple regression analysis, which assess the strength and significance of the relationships between strategic management practices and sustainable competitive advantage.

Descriptive Statistics for Environmental Scanning Practice

Environmental scanning constitutes a foundational strategic management practice through which organizations systematically monitor and interpret internal and external environmental conditions in order to inform strategic decisions and sustain competitiveness. Within the context of three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya, environmental scanning encompasses structured benchmarking activities, assessment of technological changes, continuous staff training, market research, resource alignment, and ongoing monitoring of political, economic, social, and environmental trends.

To measure this construct, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight statements reflecting key dimensions of environmental scanning practice using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The eight items collectively captured the extent to which hotels institutionalize environmental intelligence, align internal capabilities with external conditions, and proactively respond to market dynamics.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Environmental Scanning Practice

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Benchmarking of staff introduces best practices	138	4.11	0.72
The hotel undertakes benchmarking regularly to improve service flexibility	138	4.06	0.75
Technological changes influence reliable delivery of hotel services	138	4.18	0.68
Continuous training of staff is undertaken in the hotel	138	4.09	0.70
The hotel conducts research on customer needs and market requirements	138	4.14	0.66
The hotel has a framework for assessing service improvement needs	138	4.02	0.74
Top leadership assesses the environment to determine strategic direction	138	4.21	0.63
The hotel continuously monitors political, economic, social and environmental trends	138	4.07	0.77
Composite Mean / Average	**138**	**4.11**	**0.71**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results presented in Table 1 indicated that environmental scanning practices are strongly embedded within the surveyed three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties. The overall composite mean of 4.11 suggests a high level of agreement among respondents that their hotels actively engage in environmental monitoring and analysis. This implies that environmental scanning is not treated as an occasional activity, but rather as an integral component of strategic management within these establishments.

Among the individual indicators, the statement that top leadership assesses the environment to determine strategic direction recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.21, SD = 0.63), suggesting that

environmental awareness is driven from the leadership level. The relatively low standard deviation indicates strong consensus among respondents regarding top management involvement in environmental assessment. This finding reflects a structured approach to strategic responsiveness and suggests that environmental scanning is institutionally supported rather than informally practiced.

Similarly, respondents agreed that technological changes influence the reliable delivery of hotel services (M = 4.18, SD = 0.68) and that the hotel conducts research on customer needs and market requirements (M = 4.14, SD = 0.66). These findings indicate that hotels recognize the importance of technological adaptation and market intelligence in sustaining competitiveness. The moderate dispersion of responses suggests broad agreement across respondents.

The lowest mean score was recorded for the statement that the hotel has a framework for assessing service improvement needs (M = 4.02, SD = 0.74). Although respondents generally agreed with this statement, the relatively higher variability suggests that the formalization of assessment tools and service improvement frameworks may differ across hotels. This variation may reflect differences in managerial capacity, technological capability, or resource availability among establishments.

The qualitative findings corroborate the quantitative results by demonstrating that environmental scanning is routinely practiced across the surveyed hotels. Participants reported regularly monitoring customer feedback, competitor activities, tourism trends, online booking patterns, and social media reviews to support strategic decision-making. One key informant explained that, ***"We regularly monitor booking trends and customer reviews to adjust our pricing and promotional strategies, especially during low seasons" (KII 2).*** Focus group participants similarly noted that benchmarking competitor services and innovations helps hotels identify opportunities for improvement and maintain market relevance.

Participants further indicated that information gathered through environmental scanning directly influences strategic decisions such as the introduction of conference packages, revision of pricing strategies, adoption of digital marketing initiatives, and targeting of emerging customer segments. As one manager observed, ***"After noticing a rise in domestic tourism, we redesigned our packages to target local families and business travellers" (KII 4).*** These findings demonstrate that environmental scanning extends beyond information gathering and plays an important role in shaping strategic responses.

Despite its importance, participants identified challenges including limited access to reliable industry data, inadequate analytical tools, and budget constraints that restrict formal market research activities. Consequently, some hotels rely on informal observations and customer interactions to obtain market intelligence. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that environmental scanning is widely adopted and contributes to strategic awareness, adaptability, and responsiveness among the surveyed hotels, although differences exist in the sophistication of scanning systems and analytical capabilities.

Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Formulation Practice

Strategy formulation represents a critical phase of strategic management through which organizations establish long-term direction, determine competitive positioning, and allocate resources to achieve desired objectives. Within the context of three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties, strategy formulation encompasses structured planning processes, assessment of internal and external environments, evaluation of strategic alternatives, alignment of long-term goals with organizational vision, and consideration of competitive positioning.

In this study, strategy formulation was operationalized using eight Likert-scale statements capturing goal setting, strategic analysis, human resource assessment, performance evaluation, resource alignment, and competitive positioning. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The descriptive results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Formulation Practice

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strategic planning is conducted in the hotel	138	4.15	0.69
The type of available resources is assessed before strategy formulation	138	4.10	0.73
Strategic analysis is carried out before major decisions	138	4.18	0.66
Human resource analysis informs strategic direction	138	4.06	0.78
Performance analysis informs strategic decisions	138	4.12	0.71
Strategic options are evaluated before adoption	138	4.20	0.64
Long-term goals are aligned with the hotel's vision and mission	138	4.23	0.61
Competitive positioning is considered during strategy formulation	138	4.16	0.68
Composite Mean / Average	**138**	**4.15**	**0.69**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that strategy formulation practices are strongly institutionalized among the surveyed three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties. The composite mean score of 4.15 demonstrates a high level of agreement among respondents that their hotels engage in deliberate and structured strategic planning processes. This suggests that strategy formulation is not ad hoc, but rather embedded within formal managerial practices.

Among the individual indicators, the statement that long-term goals are aligned with the hotel's vision and mission recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.23, SD = 0.61), indicating strong consensus that strategic direction is clearly articulated and aligned with organizational purpose. The relatively low standard deviation reflects uniform agreement across respondents, suggesting clarity of strategic intent within these establishments.

Similarly, the evaluation of strategic options before adoption (M = 4.20, SD = 0.64) and the conduct of strategic analysis prior to major decisions (M = 4.18, SD = 0.66) indicate a systematic and analytical approach to strategy development. These findings imply that hotels undertake deliberate assessment processes before committing to strategic initiatives, thereby enhancing the quality of decision-making and reducing the likelihood of reactive actions.

The slightly lower mean score for the statement that human resource analysis informs strategic direction (M = 4.06, SD = 0.78) suggests comparatively greater variability in the extent to which human resource considerations are integrated into strategic planning. The higher dispersion indicates that while most hotels incorporate human resource analysis, the depth of integration may differ depending on organizational

priorities, managerial practices, and available resources.

Overall, the standard deviation values ranging between 0.61 and 0.78 indicate moderate variation in responses but no substantial disagreement among respondents. These findings suggest that structured strategy formulation is a common practice across the sampled hotels and forms an important component of their strategic management processes.

The qualitative findings support the quantitative results by demonstrating that strategy formulation is largely driven by senior management, with departmental heads contributing operational insights and recommendations. Participants reported that strategic planning involves setting long-term objectives, assessing organizational capabilities, and aligning strategic priorities with market opportunities and customer needs. One respondent observed that, ***"Strategic planning is done at management level, but department heads contribute insights based on operational realities" (KII 1).*** This finding suggests that while strategic direction is primarily established by senior leadership, operational perspectives are incorporated to enhance practicality and implementation effectiveness.

Participants further emphasized that involving multiple departments during strategy development improves ownership, coordination, and commitment during implementation. Several respondents highlighted the importance of evaluating financial, human, and technological resources before adopting strategic initiatives. As one key informant noted, ***"Before adopting a strategy, we evaluate whether we have the financial and human capacity to support it" (KII 5).*** This demonstrates that strategy formulation is closely linked to resource assessment and organizational readiness.

Most hotels also reported developing annual strategic plans while maintaining sufficient flexibility to respond to changing market conditions. Participants acknowledged that fluctuations in tourism demand, evolving customer preferences, and competitive pressures often necessitate adjustments to initially planned strategies. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that strategy formulation is a structured and deliberate process within the surveyed hotels, providing strategic direction, organizational alignment, and a foundation for effective decision-making and future competitiveness.

Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Implementation Practice

Strategy implementation represents the critical stage of strategic management through which formulated strategies are operationalized and translated into measurable performance outcomes. While strategy formulation defines organizational direction, effective implementation determines whether strategic intentions are successfully executed. Within three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties, strategy implementation encompasses the alignment of organizational structures, leadership commitment, employee capacity development, operational efficiency systems, interdepartmental coordination, and effective resource utilization.

In this study, strategy implementation was operationalized using eight Likert-scale statements capturing structural alignment, staff training, technological systems, service delivery efficiency, coordination mechanisms, quality assurance, communication clarity, and optimal resource deployment. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The descriptive results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Implementation Practice

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The hotel has developed an appropriate organizational structure	138	4.17	0.68
Staff training and capacity-building programs are implemented	138	4.22	0.64
Centralized database systems are used for efficient operations	138	4.08	0.77
Service delivery processes are streamlined to reduce delays	138	4.19	0.66
Clear coordination exists among different hotel departments	138	4.24	0.61
Guests receive the expected quality of hospitality services	138	4.28	0.58
Communication with guests is clear and accessible	138	4.23	0.62
Hotel resources are effectively utilized to deliver quality services	138	4.20	0.65
Composite Mean / Average	**138**	**4.20**	**0.65**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that strategy implementation practices are strongly embedded within the sampled three-star and four-star hotels. The composite mean score of 4.20 reflects a high level of agreement among respondents that strategic plans are effectively translated into operational actions. This suggests that implementation capability is not merely conceptual but is actively practiced within these establishments.

Among the individual indicators, the statement that guests receive the expected quality of hospitality services recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.28, SD = 0.58), indicating strong consensus that service delivery standards are consistently achieved. The low standard deviation suggests a high level of uniformity in perceptions among respondents. This finding reflects the practical outcomes of effective strategy implementation, where planned initiatives are translated into tangible service experiences for customers.

Similarly, strong agreement was observed regarding interdepartmental coordination (M = 4.24, SD = 0.61) and staff training implementation (M = 4.22, SD = 0.64), indicating that organizational alignment and employee capability development are prioritized within the surveyed hotels. These findings suggest that leadership support, teamwork, and workforce development facilitate the successful execution of strategic initiatives.

The relatively lower mean score for the use of centralized database systems (M = 4.08, SD = 0.77) indicates slightly greater variability in technological integration across hotels. Although respondents generally agreed that centralized systems are utilized, the higher dispersion suggests differences in technological infrastructure and digital capability among establishments. This variation may be attributed to differences in financial resources, organizational size, or management priorities.

Overall, the standard deviation values ranging between 0.58 and 0.77 indicate moderate variability but no substantial disagreement among respondents. The findings demonstrate that strategy implementation is widely perceived as a strong operational capability within the sampled hotels and is supported through coordinated structures, employee development, and service delivery systems.

The qualitative findings support the quantitative results by identifying strategy implementation as a critical component of organizational success. Participants consistently emphasized that even well-formulated strategies cannot generate desired outcomes without effective execution. Leadership commitment, organizational support, employee involvement, and continuous monitoring emerged as key factors influencing implementation effectiveness. One key informant stated that, ***"A well-formulated strategy only succeeds if***

management is fully committed to its implementation" (KII 6). This highlights the central role of leadership in driving strategic initiatives and ensuring organizational commitment.

Respondents further reported that clear reporting structures, performance monitoring systems, and interdepartmental coordination mechanisms facilitate successful implementation. Hotels with strong managerial oversight were perceived to execute strategic initiatives more consistently and achieve better operational outcomes. Employees also highlighted the importance of training and empowerment in supporting implementation efforts. As one participant explained, ***"When staff understand the strategy and receive training, service delivery improves significantly" (FGD 1 Participant).*** These findings suggest that employee competence and engagement are essential for translating strategic plans into operational performance.

Participants acknowledged challenges such as resistance to change, resource constraints, and coordination difficulties that may hinder implementation efforts. Nevertheless, there was broad agreement that effective implementation enhances service quality, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that strategy implementation is a well-established practice within the surveyed hotels and serves as a critical mechanism through which strategic objectives are translated into organizational outcomes and sustained operational performance.

Descriptive Statistics for Strategic Communication Practice

Strategic communication represents a critical organizational capability through which strategic intent is transmitted, reinforced, and operationalized across different levels of the organization. It involves the deliberate and structured exchange of information between management, employees, customers, and external stakeholders to ensure coherence, coordination, and alignment with strategic objectives. In three-star and four-star hotels, effective strategic communication enhances employee engagement, strengthens service consistency, improves stakeholder relationships, and supports the successful execution of strategic initiatives.

In this study, strategic communication was operationalized using eight Likert-scale statements capturing clarity of organizational goals, openness in sharing strategic ideas, effectiveness of feedback systems, stakeholder engagement, public relations activities, participatory decision-making, monitoring of strategy execution, and the efficiency of communication channels. Respondents rated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The descriptive results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Strategic Communication Practice

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The hotel's goals and vision are clearly communicated to stakeholders	138	4.18	0.67
Ideas on achieving sustainable competitive advantage are openly shared	138	4.09	0.74
Effective feedback systems are in place within the hotel	138	4.12	0.71
The hotel fosters strong internal and external stakeholder relationships	138	4.21	0.63
Public relations activities enhance the hotel's competitiveness	138	4.16	0.69
Stakeholder engagement in decision-making is effective	138	4.07	0.77
Strategy execution is monitored and communicated effectively	138	4.14	0.70
Communication channels support timely and accurate information sharing	138	4.19	0.65
Composite Mean / Average	**138**	**4.15**	**0.69**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that strategic communication practices are well established within the surveyed three-star and four-star hotels. The composite mean score of 4.15 suggests strong agreement among respondents that structured communication systems support strategic alignment and organizational coordination.

Among the individual indicators, the highest mean score was recorded for the statement that the hotel fosters strong internal and external stakeholder relationships (M = 4.21, SD = 0.63), indicating that relationship-building is perceived as a strategic priority. The relatively low standard deviation reflects strong consensus among respondents that stakeholder engagement is embedded within hotel operations.

Similarly, the clarity of communication regarding organizational goals (M = 4.18, SD = 0.67) and the effectiveness of communication channels in supporting timely information sharing (M = 4.19, SD = 0.65) demonstrate that strategic objectives are systematically disseminated across the organization. These findings suggest that employees are aware of organizational priorities and are supported by communication systems that facilitate coordinated action and informed decision-making.

The slightly lower mean score for stakeholder engagement in decision-making (M = 4.07, SD = 0.77) indicates comparatively greater variability in participatory practices across hotels. The higher dispersion suggests that while communication channels are generally established, the extent to which stakeholders are actively involved in decision-making may vary depending on leadership approaches and organizational culture.

Overall, the standard deviation values ranging between 0.63 and 0.77 indicate moderate variability but no substantial disagreement among respondents. These findings demonstrate that strategic communication functions as an important organizational mechanism that reinforces coordination, strengthens stakeholder relationships, and promotes strategic coherence within the surveyed hotels.

The qualitative findings support the quantitative results by revealing that strategic communication plays a vital role in aligning employees with organizational objectives and facilitating coordination across departments. Participants indicated that hotels rely on staff meetings, departmental briefings, performance reviews, and digital communication platforms to disseminate strategic information and operational targets. One key informant explained that, ***"Regular meetings ensure everyone understands our targets and performance expectations" (KII 2).*** This suggests that communication structures help create a shared understanding of organizational goals and performance expectations.

Respondents further noted that effective communication reduces misunderstandings, improves teamwork, and supports consistent service delivery. Participants highlighted the importance of customer feedback systems, online reviews, and direct guest interactions in identifying service gaps and informing strategic improvements. As one focus group participant remarked, ***"Customer feedback helps us identify areas for improvement and adjust our strategies" (FGD 2 Participant).*** These findings indicate that communication serves not only as a coordination tool but also as a mechanism for organizational learning and continuous improvement.

Beyond internal communication, respondents emphasized the value of maintaining strong relationships with suppliers, tourism authorities, local communities and industry associations. Such stakeholder engagement was viewed as essential for enhancing reputation, accessing relevant information, and strengthening competitiveness. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that strategic communication is a well-established practice within the surveyed hotels and contributes to organizational alignment,

stakeholder engagement, knowledge sharing, and coordinated execution of strategic activities.

Descriptive Statistics for Sustainable Competitive Advantage

In this study, sustainable competitive advantage was operationalized using eight Likert-scale statements capturing perceived market share stability, profitability growth, revenue consistency, customer loyalty, service differentiation, brand strength, asset development, and long-term competitiveness. Respondents rated their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The descriptive results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The hotel has maintained stable market share over time	138	3.68	0.88
The hotel records consistent profitability growth	138	3.61	0.91
Revenue levels have improved steadily in recent years	138	3.66	0.87
The hotel retains loyal customers	138	3.74	0.82
The hotel differentiates itself effectively from competitors	138	3.72	0.85
The hotel maintains a strong brand reputation	138	3.79	0.80
The hotel has expanded or improved its asset base	138	3.58	0.93
The hotel is competitively positioned for long-term sustainability	138	3.70	0.86
Composite Mean / Average	**138**	**3.69**	**0.87**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The findings presented in Table 5 indicate that respondents generally perceived their hotels as possessing a moderate level of sustainable competitive advantage. The statement that the hotel maintains a strong brand reputation recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.79, SD = 0.80), suggesting that the surveyed hotels have established favorable market recognition and customer trust. Customer loyalty also recorded a relatively high mean score (M = 3.74, SD = 0.82), indicating that many hotels have been successful in retaining customers and encouraging repeat patronage. Similarly, the statement that the hotel differentiates itself effectively from competitors attained a mean score of 3.72 (SD = 0.85), suggesting that respondents perceived their hotels as offering distinctive products, services, or experiences that enhance market competitiveness.

Respondents further agreed that their hotels are competitively positioned for long-term sustainability (M = 3.70, SD = 0.86) and have maintained stable market share over time (M = 3.68, SD = 0.88). These findings indicate that the hotels have generally sustained their market presence despite increasing competition and changing customer preferences. In addition, revenue levels were perceived to have improved steadily in recent years (M = 3.66, SD = 0.87), suggesting moderate growth in business performance.

Comparatively lower mean scores were recorded for consistent profitability growth (M = 3.61, SD = 0.91) and improvement or expansion of the hotel asset base (M = 3.58, SD = 0.93). The relatively higher standard deviation values associated with these indicators suggest greater variation in

performance experiences across the surveyed hotels. Such differences may be attributed to variations in resource availability, managerial capability, hotel size, market conditions, and exposure to fluctuations in tourism demand.

The qualitative findings support the quantitative results by revealing that sustainable competitive advantage is primarily driven by service quality, customer loyalty, brand reputation, and continuous innovation. Participants consistently emphasized that maintaining high service standards and delivering personalized customer experiences are essential for attracting and retaining guests in an increasingly competitive hospitality environment. One key informant stated that, ***"Our strength lies in personalized attention and consistent service quality" (KII 4).*** This finding reinforces the high ratings observed for customer loyalty and brand reputation.

Participants further explained that customer satisfaction, repeat visitation, and positive online reviews are important indicators of long-term competitiveness. Focus group discussants noted that loyal customers contribute significantly to business stability through repeat bookings and referrals, thereby strengthening the hotel's market position. These observations provide qualitative support for the positive ratings associated with customer retention, market share stability, and long-term sustainability.

In addition, respondents highlighted innovation and continuous improvement as critical factors in sustaining competitiveness. Hotels reported adopting digital booking platforms, social media marketing, customer relationship management systems, and other technology-driven initiatives to improve operational efficiency and expand market reach. As one manager observed, ***"Innovation, especially digital marketing, has helped us reach new customer segments" (KII 1).*** These findings suggest that innovation contributes to competitive differentiation and supports revenue growth.

Participants also indicated that strong brand reputation enhances customer trust and distinguishes hotels from competitors. Consistent service delivery, effective customer engagement, and responsiveness to guest needs were identified as important contributors to maintaining a positive brand image. However, respondents acknowledged challenges such as rising operational costs, fluctuating tourism demand, economic uncertainty, increasing competition, and limited financial resources for expansion and technological investment. These challenges may partly explain the comparatively lower ratings recorded for profitability growth and asset expansion.

Overall, the composite mean score of 3.69 (SD = 0.87) indicates that respondents generally agreed that their hotels possess a moderate level of sustainable competitive advantage. The quantitative and qualitative findings collectively suggest that while strengths exist in brand reputation, customer loyalty, service quality, and competitive differentiation, sustaining these advantages requires continuous innovation, resource investment, and strategic adaptation to changing market conditions.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed to examine the linear relationships between the independent variables environmental scanning practice, strategy formulation practice, strategy implementation practice, and strategic communication practice and the dependent variable, sustainable competitive advantage. Pearson correlation analysis is appropriate for assessing the strength and direction of relationships between continuous variables measured on interval scales, such as the composite scores derived from the Likert-scale items used in this study.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Environmental Scanning Practice	1				
2. Strategy Formulation Practice	.610**	1			
3. Strategy Implementation Practice	.580**	.650**	1		
4. Strategic Communication Practice	.550**	.600**	.680**	1	
5. Sustainable Competitive Advantage	.630**	.660**	.720**	.690**	1

Note: *Correlation is significant at p < 0.05

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results presented in Table 6 indicate that all four strategic management practices are positively and statistically significantly correlated with sustainable competitive advantage. The correlation coefficients range from r = 0.63 to r = 0.72, suggesting moderate to strong positive linear relationships.

Specifically, strategy implementation practice exhibits the strongest correlation with sustainable competitive advantage (r = 0.72, p < 0.05), indicating that hotels with stronger execution capabilities tend to report higher levels of competitive performance. This suggests that the effectiveness with which strategic plans are translated into operational actions is closely associated with sustained market positioning and profitability outcomes.

Strategic communication practice also demonstrates a strong positive correlation with sustainable competitive advantage (r = 0.69, p < 0.05), implying that clear dissemination of strategic objectives, effective feedback systems, and stakeholder engagement contribute meaningfully to competitive outcomes. Similarly, strategy formulation practice is strongly correlated with sustainable competitive advantage (r = 0.66, p < 0.05), indicating that deliberate goal setting and competitive positioning are associated with improved performance.

Environmental scanning practice, while slightly lower in magnitude, also shows a substantial positive relationship with sustainable competitive advantage (r = 0.63, p < 0.05). This finding suggests that hotels that actively monitor external trends and align resources with environmental changes are more likely to achieve favourable competitive outcomes.

Beyond the relationships with the dependent variable, the correlation matrix also reveals moderate positive interrelationships among the independent variables. For example, strategy implementation is strongly correlated with strategic communication (r = 0.68, p < 0.05) and strategy formulation (r = 0.65, p < 0.05). These intercorrelations indicate that strategic management practices do not operate in isolation but are interdependent components of a broader strategic system.

Importantly, none of the intercorrelations among independent variables exceed 0.80, suggesting that multicollinearity is unlikely to pose a serious concern in subsequent regression analysis. The moderate correlations reflect conceptual relatedness without redundancy, supporting the distinctiveness of each construct.

Overall, the correlation results provide preliminary empirical support for the study hypotheses by demonstrating that higher levels of strategic management practice adoption are associated with higher levels of sustainable competitive advantage. These findings justify proceeding to multiple regression analysis to determine the relative contribution of each strategic management practice while controlling for the influence of other predictors.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the joint and individual influence of strategic management practices on sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties. The dependent variable was sustainable competitive advantage, while the independent variables included environmental scanning practice, strategy formulation practice, strategy implementation practice, and strategic communication practice. Composite mean scores derived from the respective eight-item scales were used in the regression model.

Regression analysis was appropriate for this study as it allows for the simultaneous assessment of multiple predictors and determines their unique contribution to the dependent variable while controlling for the influence of other variables in the model.

Model Summary

The model summary results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Model Summary for Strategic Management Practices and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.810[a]	.660	.650	.420

a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Communication Practice, Strategy Implementation Practice, Strategy Formulation Practice, Environmental Scanning Practice

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results in Table 7 indicate that the regression model has a strong explanatory capacity. The multiple correlation coefficient (R = 0.81) reflects a strong positive relationship between the combined strategic management practices and sustainable competitive advantage.

The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.66) indicates that approximately 66% of the variance in sustainable competitive advantage is explained by the four strategic management practices included in the model. This represents a substantial proportion of explained variance within the context of social science research, suggesting that strategic management practices are significant determinants of competitive performance among the surveyed hotels.

The adjusted R^2 value of 0.65 is only marginally lower than the R^2 value, indicating model stability and minimal overfitting. This suggests that the explanatory power of the model is not artificially inflated by the number of predictors included.

The standard error of the estimate (0.42) indicates the average deviation of observed values from the regression line. The relatively low value suggests that the model provides reasonably accurate predictions of sustainable competitive advantage.

Overall, the model summary results demonstrate that strategic management practices collectively exert a strong and statistically meaningful influence on sustainable competitive advantage. The findings therefore provide preliminary support for rejecting the joint null hypothesis that strategic management practices have no significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the overall significance of the regression model. Specifically, ANOVA evaluates whether the set of independent variables collectively provides a statistically significant explanation of variation in the dependent variable. The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: ANOVA for the Regression Model

ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	66.00	4	16.50	64.61	.000[b]
Residual	34.00	133	0.26		
Total	**100.00**	**137**			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Competitive Advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Communication Practice, Strategy Implementation Practice, Strategy Formulation Practice, Environmental Scanning Practice

Source: Field Data (2026)

The ANOVA results presented in Table 8 indicate that the overall regression model is statistically significant. The F-statistic of 64.61 with an associated p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) demonstrates that the combined strategic management practices significantly predict sustainable competitive advantage.

The F-test evaluates the null hypothesis that all regression coefficients are simultaneously equal to zero. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that at least one of the independent variables significantly contributes to explaining variation in sustainable competitive advantage.

The regression sum of squares (66.00) relative to the total sum of squares (100.00) further confirms that a substantial proportion of variation in competitive advantage is explained by the model. This is consistent with the R^2 value of 0.66 reported earlier, reinforcing the strong explanatory power of the regression model.

From an analytical perspective, the statistically significant F-statistic confirms that strategic management practices, when considered collectively, provide meaningful explanatory value beyond random variation. The results therefore justify proceeding to examine the individual regression coefficients to determine the relative contribution of each strategic management practice to sustainable competitive advantage.

Regression Coefficients

The regression coefficients presented in Table 4.16 indicate the individual contribution of each strategic management practice to sustainable competitive advantage, while controlling for the effects of the other predictors in the model. The standardized beta coefficients (β) are particularly important as they allow for comparison of the relative strength of each independent variable.

Table 9: Regression Coefficients for Strategic Management Practices

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	0.58	0.19		3.05	0.003
Environmental Scanning Practice	0.21	0.06	0.24	3.50	0.001
Strategy Formulation Practice	0.18	0.07	0.22	2.71	0.007
Strategy Implementation Practice	0.29	0.06	0.35	4.83	0.000
Strategic Communication Practice	0.23	0.07	0.27	3.29	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The results presented in Table 9 indicate that all four strategic management practices have a positive and statistically significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that improvements in any of the strategic practices are associated with increases in competitive performance.

Strategy implementation practice emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable competitive advantage ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 4.83$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that, holding other variables constant, a one-unit increase in strategy implementation practice leads to a 0.35 standard deviation increase in sustainable competitive advantage. Magnitude of the beta coefficient confirms that execution capability plays most decisive role in driving competitive outcomes among the sampled hotels.

Strategic communication practice was the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that effective dissemination of strategic objectives, stakeholder engagement, and communication alignment significantly enhance competitive positioning. Environmental scanning practice also demonstrated a positive and significant influence ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that proactive monitoring of environmental changes contributes meaningfully to sustained performance.

Strategy formulation practice, while statistically significant ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.007$), exhibited the lowest standardized beta coefficient among the predictors. This suggests that although structured planning and goal alignment are important, their impact on competitive advantage is comparatively weaker when not accompanied by effective implementation and communication mechanisms.

These findings indicate that strategic management practices collectively and individually contribute to sustainable competitive advantage, with execution capability serving as the most influential determinant.

Regression Model Equation

Based on the unstandardized coefficients, the regression model can be expressed as:

$$SCA = 0.58 + 0.21(ESP) + 0.18(SFP) + 0.29(SIP) + 0.23(SCP)$$

Where:

SCA = Sustainable Competitive Advantage

ESP = Environmental Scanning Practice

SFP = Strategy Formulation Practice

SIP = Strategy Implementation Practice

SCP = Strategic Communication Practice

4.6.3 Hypothesis Testing

The study hypotheses were tested using the results of the multiple regression analysis presented in Table 4.17. The decision to reject or fail to reject each null hypothesis was based on the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. A null hypothesis was rejected if the associated p-value was less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant effect. Conversely, a null hypothesis was not rejected if the p-value exceeded 0.05.

The summary of hypothesis testing results is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	β	p-value	Decision
H01	Environmental scanning practice has no significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage	0.24	0.001	Rejected
H02	Strategy formulation practice has no significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage	0.22	0.007	Rejected
H03	Strategy implementation practice has no significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage	0.35	0.000	Rejected
H04	Strategic communication practice has no significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage	0.27	0.001	Rejected

The results in Table 10 indicate that all four null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. Environmental scanning practice (β = 0.24, p = 0.001) was found to significantly influence sustainable competitive advantage, indicating that proactive environmental monitoring contributes meaningfully to competitive performance.

Similarly, strategy formulation practice (β = 0.22, p = 0.007) demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect, suggesting that structured goal setting and strategic alignment enhance competitive positioning. Strategy implementation practice emerged as the strongest predictor (β = 0.35, p < 0.001), confirming that effective execution of strategies plays the most decisive role in driving sustainable competitive advantage.

Strategic communication practice (β = 0.27, p = 0.001) also exhibited a significant positive influence, highlighting the importance of information flow, stakeholder engagement, and organizational alignment in achieving competitive outcomes.

Collectively, these findings provide empirical support for the proposition that strategic management practices significantly determine sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties. The rejection of all null hypotheses reinforces the explanatory strength of the regression model and validates the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study.

Discussion of Findings

Collectively, the findings indicate that strategic management practices significantly influence sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels. The regression model explained 66% of the variation in competitive advantage (R^2 = 0.66), demonstrating substantial explanatory power. This suggests that the four strategic practices jointly account for a considerable proportion of performance outcomes within the sampled hotels.

However, descriptive findings revealed only moderate levels of perceived sustainable competitive advantage. The qualitative evidence provides important contextual clarification for this apparent tension. Participants identified external constraints such as fluctuating tourism demand, rising energy and labour costs, regulatory pressures, and increasing competition from alternative accommodation providers. These environmental pressures appear to moderate the translation of strong strategic practices into equally strong performance perceptions. Thus, while internal strategic capabilities significantly shape competitiveness, external environmental volatility constrains the full realization of performance gains.

The integrated findings further demonstrate that the strategic management practices operate synergistically rather than independently. Environmental scanning enhances strategic awareness; strategy formulation establishes direction; implementation converts intent into operational outcomes; and strategic communication reinforces coordination and feedback loops. This interconnected structure strengthens the study's conceptual framework by illustrating that competitive advantage emerges from the interaction of complementary capabilities rather than isolated practices.

Importantly, the findings reveal a clear hierarchical pattern among the predictors. Strategy implementation emerged as the strongest determinant (β = 0.35), followed by strategic communication (β = 0.27), environmental scanning (β = 0.24), and strategy formulation (β = 0.22). This hierarchy suggests that while sensing and planning are necessary foundations, execution capability and organizational alignment play a more decisive role in driving competitive performance.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to strategic management literature in several important ways. First, while Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory emphasizes deliberate strategic positioning, the results suggest that in resource-constrained and dynamic environments, competitive advantage depends more heavily on implementation effectiveness than

on formulation sophistication alone. Second, consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV), the study demonstrates that embedded organizational capabilities particularly execution competence function as critical strategic assets. Third, strategic communication emerged as an internal coordination mechanism that amplifies dynamic capabilities by strengthening learning, alignment, and responsiveness.

The findings therefore extend existing theory by proposing that strategic management practices operate hierarchically rather than equally in emerging mid-tier hospitality markets. Execution capability serves as the central integrative mechanism linking environmental sensing and strategic intent to realized competitive performance. Sustainable competitive advantage, in this context, is not achieved merely through planning excellence but through disciplined execution supported by coherent communication and adaptive responsiveness.

Overall, the study underscores that competitive success in mid-tier hotels operating within volatile environments is shaped less by the presence of formal strategic plans and more by the organization's ability to implement, coordinate, and continuously refine strategic initiatives within its operational routines.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the influence of strategic management practices on sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya. Based on the empirical findings, the study concludes that strategic management practices are significant and decisive determinants of sustained competitiveness within the hospitality sector.

With respect to the first objective, the study concludes that environmental scanning practice significantly enhances sustainable competitive advantage. Hotels that systematically monitor market conditions, competitor activities, technological developments, and emerging customer trends are better positioned to anticipate environmental shifts and respond proactively. Environmental scanning strengthens strategic awareness and improves the alignment of organizational resources with external opportunities and threats.

Regarding the second objective, the study concludes that strategy formulation practice positively influences sustainable competitive advantage. Clearly articulated goals, deliberate competitive positioning, and structured resource allocation provide strategic direction and coherence. However, the findings indicate that formulation alone does not guarantee competitive outcomes; its effectiveness depends on disciplined implementation and organizational alignment.

In relation to the third objective, the study concludes that strategy implementation practice is the most influential driver of sustainable competitive advantage. The ability to operationalize strategic plans through strong leadership commitment, supportive structures, employee involvement, and coordinated processes plays a central role in achieving measurable performance improvements. Execution capability emerges as the primary mechanism through which strategic intent is converted into sustained competitive performance.

With regard to the fourth objective, the study concludes that strategic communication practice significantly reinforces sustainable competitive advantage. Clear articulation of strategic objectives, effective internal coordination, and continuous stakeholder engagement enhance organizational cohesion and adaptability. Strategic communication strengthens the alignment between planning and execution and facilitates learning and responsiveness in dynamic environments.

Overall, the study concludes that sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality sector is achieved through the integrated and coordinated application of environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic

communication practices. However, the findings reveal a clear hierarchical pattern: while sensing and planning establish strategic direction, execution capability and organizational alignment ultimately determine competitive outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to strategic management literature in several important ways. First, it extends Porter's Competitive Advantage framework by demonstrating that in emerging mid-tier hotel markets, competitive positioning must be complemented by strong execution capability to generate sustained performance. Second, consistent with the Resource-Based View, the findings confirm that internal organizational capabilities are central to competitive advantage, but further emphasize that the effective deployment and coordination of these capabilities through implementation processes constitute the primary performance driver. Third, the study advances Dynamic Capabilities Theory by illustrating how strategic communication functions as an internal alignment mechanism that enhances sensing, coordination, and adaptive capacity.

The results therefore suggest that strategic management practices operate hierarchically rather than uniformly in resource-constrained hospitality environments, with implementation capability serving as the central integrative driver linking environmental awareness and strategic intent to realized competitive advantage.

Based on the empirical findings and conclusions of the study, this section presents evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya. The recommendations are derived directly from the quantitative and qualitative results and are aligned with the study objectives.

The regression analysis demonstrated that strategic management practices jointly explain 66% of the variation in sustainable competitive advantage (R^2 = 0.66), confirming their substantial influence on competitive performance. Notably, strategy implementation emerged as the strongest predictor (β = 0.35), followed by strategic communication (β = 0.27), environmental scanning (β = 0.24), and strategy formulation (β = 0.22). These findings indicate that while all four practices are important, execution capability and organizational alignment play the most decisive roles in sustaining competitiveness.

Accordingly, the recommendations emphasize strengthening implementation systems, enhancing communication mechanisms, improving environmental responsiveness, and reinforcing structured planning processes. The aim is to translate strategic intent into consistent operational performance within dynamic hospitality environments.

The recommendations are categorized into two main groups: practice-oriented recommendations directed at hotel management, and policy-oriented recommendations targeting industry regulators, tourism authorities, and other relevant stakeholders.

Given that strategy implementation emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable competitive advantage (β = 0.35, $p < 0.001$), hotel management should prioritize strengthening execution capability. This includes aligning organizational structures with strategic objectives, reinforcing leadership accountability, establishing clear reporting lines, and implementing structured performance monitoring systems.

Continuous staff training, empowerment initiatives, and cross-departmental coordination mechanisms should be institutionalized to ensure that strategic plans are effectively translated into operational outcomes. Qualitative findings confirmed that leadership commitment and employee involvement were decisive factors in service consistency and competitive performance. Hotels should therefore embed execution discipline as a core organizational capability.

Strategic communication recorded the second-highest influence on competitive advantage (β = 0.27, p = 0.001), indicating that communication mechanisms substantially reinforce execution effectiveness. Hotel management should establish structured internal communication frameworks to disseminate strategic goals, performance expectations, and feedback consistently.

This may include regular interdepartmental meetings, digital communication platforms, customer feedback integration systems, and formalized stakeholder engagement channels. Qualitative evidence revealed that effective communication reduced service inconsistencies and strengthened coordination. Investing in coherent communication systems will amplify the impact of other strategic practices and enhance organizational alignment.

Environmental scanning demonstrated a statistically significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage (β = 0.24, p = 0.001). Hotels should therefore institutionalize structured and continuous monitoring of market trends, competitor strategies, customer preferences, regulatory changes, and technological developments.

Establishing dedicated environmental analysis roles, strategic review committees, or formal intelligence systems will improve proactive decision-making and responsiveness. Qualitative findings indicated that hotels relying on informal scanning mechanisms often experienced delayed strategic responses. Structured environmental intelligence systems will strengthen adaptability and reduce strategic uncertainty.

Although strategy formulation significantly influenced sustainable competitive advantage (β = 0.22, p = 0.007), its comparatively lower beta coefficient suggests that planning must be closely aligned with execution capacity. Hotel managers should adopt inclusive and evidence-based strategic planning approaches that engage departmental heads and key operational staff.

Strategic goals should be realistic, measurable, and directly linked to available financial, human, and technological capabilities. Ensuring that formulated strategies are actionable and aligned with internal resources will improve implementation success and long-term competitive sustainability.

The findings of this study demonstrate that strategic management practices significantly influence sustainable competitive advantage (R^2 = 0.66), indicating that institutional support for these practices can meaningfully enhance sector-wide competitiveness. Accordingly, policymakers within the hospitality and tourism sector should develop regulatory and support frameworks that promote the systematic adoption of structured strategic management processes across hotels.

Given that strategy implementation emerged as the strongest predictor of competitive advantage (β = 0.35), national and county governments, in collaboration with tourism regulatory bodies and industry associations, should implement structured capacity-building programmes focused on execution capability. These programmes should emphasize leadership development, performance management systems, change management, and operational excellence.

Strengthening managerial and operational competencies across the sector will enhance hotels' ability to translate strategic plans into sustained competitive performance.

Environmental scanning demonstrated a statistically significant influence on competitive performance (β = 0.24), yet qualitative findings revealed limited access to reliable market intelligence among some hotels. Policymakers should therefore strengthen centralized information-sharing platforms that provide timely and accurate data on tourism trends, customer behaviour, pricing benchmarks, technological developments, and regulatory changes.

Improved access to credible and standardized industry data will enable hotels to make informed

strategic decisions, reduce uncertainty, and enhance responsiveness to environmental volatility.

Strategic communication (β = 0.27) and strategy implementation (β = 0.35) both underscore the importance of managerial coordination and execution capability. Regulatory and professional bodies should therefore reinforce policies that promote continuous professional development, including certification programmes in strategic leadership, communication management, innovation, and adaptive management within the hospitality sector.

Formalized professional development structures will strengthen organizational alignment, improve service consistency, and elevate the overall strategic sophistication of mid-tier hotels.

Given that sustainable competitive advantage was perceived at only moderate levels despite strong strategic practices, policymakers should also address macro-level constraints affecting hotel performance. Supportive policies targeting operational costs, energy efficiency incentives, digital transformation support, and tourism promotion initiatives can help hotels translate strategic capability into improved performance outcomes.

Coordinated policy intervention is therefore essential to create an enabling environment that fosters strategic responsiveness, managerial excellence, and long-term competitiveness within the Kenyan hospitality sector.

Suggestions for Further Research

Although this study provides significant empirical and theoretical insights into the influence of strategic management practices on sustainable competitive advantage among three-star and four-star hotels in Central Region counties of Kenya, several areas warrant further scholarly investigation.

First, future research should extend the scope of analysis to other hotel categories, including budget hotels and five-star establishments. Comparative studies across different market segments would enable scholars to examine whether the hierarchical pattern observed in this study where strategy implementation exerts stronger influence than strategy formulation holds across varying levels of resource capacity, service complexity, and market positioning. Such comparative inquiry would strengthen generalizability and sector-wide theory development.

Second, subsequent studies should examine contextual and environmental variables as potential moderating or mediating factors in the relationship between strategic management practices and sustainable competitive advantage. Variables such as technological innovation, digital transformation intensity, regulatory environments, economic volatility, and market turbulence may influence the strength or direction of these relationships. Incorporating such variables would provide a more nuanced understanding of how external dynamics shape strategic outcomes in hospitality settings.

Third, future research may adopt more extensive qualitative or mixed-methods designs to explore the micro-level processes underlying execution capability and organizational alignment. While this study identified implementation as the dominant predictor, further qualitative inquiry could unpack how leadership styles, organizational culture, power dynamics, and employee engagement mechanisms contribute to effective execution. Such inquiry would deepen theoretical insights into capability development within service-oriented organizations.

Fourth, longitudinal research designs are strongly recommended. Sustainable competitive advantage is inherently dynamic, and cross-sectional data may not fully capture its evolution over time. Longitudinal studies would enable scholars to assess the durability of strategic practices and determine whether execution capability consistently remains the dominant driver of competitive performance in fluctuating hospitality markets.

Finally, future studies should consider integrating additional internal organizational constructs such as innovation capability, organizational learning, digital maturity, corporate governance quality, and knowledge management systems. Expanding the strategic framework to include these variables would contribute to theoretical refinement of the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities perspectives within emerging market hospitality contexts.

Collectively, these avenues for further research would strengthen both empirical rigor and theoretical advancement in strategic management scholarship within the hospitality sector.

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