

MARKET PENETRATION STRATEGIES AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF STAR-RATED HOTELS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of market penetration strategies on the operational performance of star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Ansoff's Growth Theory and adopted a quantitative research design. The target population comprised 64 star-rated hotels classified by the Tourism Regulatory Authority, with general managers, finance managers, and customer service managers serving as respondents. A stratified purposive sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 130 respondents, out of which 118 valid responses were obtained. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of IBM SPSS Statistics. The findings revealed that market penetration strategies such as loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising were moderately adopted among star-rated hotels. Correlation analysis established a strong positive and statistically significant

relationship between market penetration strategies and operational performance ($r = 0.785$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further revealed that market penetration had a positive and statistically significant effect on operational performance ($\beta = 0.217$, $p = 0.013$). The study concludes that effective implementation of market penetration strategies enhances occupancy rates, customer satisfaction, service quality, and overall operational efficiency among star-rated hotels. The study recommends that hotel managers should strengthen loyalty programs, adopt targeted promotional pricing, and intensify local advertising and digital marketing campaigns to enhance competitiveness and operational performance within Nairobi City County.

Keywords: Market Penetration Strategies, Operational Performance, Star-Rated Hotels, Nairobi City County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry plays a critical role in promoting tourism, employment creation, and economic growth, particularly in urban destinations such as Nairobi City County, which serves as Kenya's major centre for business travel, conferences, and international tourism activities (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2025). However, star-rated hotels continue to experience operational challenges characterized by fluctuating occupancy rates, inconsistent customer satisfaction, and difficulties in maintaining service quality despite increasing competition within the sector (Alzoubi et al., 2021; Njoroge, 2022). In response to these challenges, hotels have increasingly adopted market penetration strategies such as loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising to strengthen customer retention, increase occupancy levels, and improve operational efficiency (Bukoye & Muritala, 2023; Nyoro, 2024). Market penetration

strategies are considered important growth approaches because they enable organizations to strengthen their market position through enhanced customer engagement, promotional activities, and improved service delivery within existing markets (Rajan Shah et al., 2022). Empirical studies have further demonstrated that market penetration strategies positively influence hotel performance through improved occupancy and customer retention (Lim & Ok, 2022; Musau, 2023). Nevertheless, existing findings remain inconsistent (Kamau & Waithaka, 2020; Magothe et al., 2023) and context dependent (Dagnaw et al., 2025; Hidayat & Darmawan, 2024), with limited studies specifically examining the effect of market penetration strategies on operational performance among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Nairobi City County serves as Kenya's principal hub for business tourism, conferences, and urban hospitality activities, making the operational performance of star-rated hotels critical to the sustainability and competitiveness of the hospitality industry. Despite this strategic importance, many hotels continue to experience inconsistent operational performance characterized by fluctuating occupancy rates, uneven customer satisfaction levels, and challenges in maintaining service quality. Recent industry reports indicate persistent underutilization of hotel capacity within the sector. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2025), the national hotel occupancy rate in 2024 stood at only 28.9% of available bed-nights, while the Tourism Regulatory Authority (2025) reported a decline in room occupancy in Nairobi City County from 38.6% in November 2023 to 27.9% in November 2024. In addition, variations in customer satisfaction and service delivery continue to affect operational efficiency and customer retention among hotels, with some establishments experiencing declining customer loyalty and inconsistent guest experiences (Alzoubi et al., 2021; Njoroge, 2022). These trends suggest persistent operational challenges and weakening competitiveness among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County.

To address these challenges, many hotels have increasingly adopted market penetration strategies such as loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising to strengthen customer retention, improve occupancy levels, and enhance market visibility. Although previous studies have reported that market penetration strategies positively influence organizational performance through improved customer attraction and market share (Dagnaw et al., 2025; Hidayat & Darmawan, 2024), existing findings remain inconsistent and context dependent. Further, limited studies have specifically examined the effect of market penetration strategies on operational performance among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Most existing studies have focused on general organizational performance or competitive advantage without emphasizing operational performance indicators such as occupancy rates, customer satisfaction, and service quality (Kamau & Waithaka, 2020; Musau, 2023). This creates a contextual and empirical gap regarding the extent to which market penetration strategies influence operational performance within Nairobi's hospitality sector. Therefore, the study sought to examine the effect of market penetration strategies on the operational performance of star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To establish the effect of market penetration strategies on the operational performance of star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Research Question

What is the effect of market penetration strategies on the operational performance of star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya?

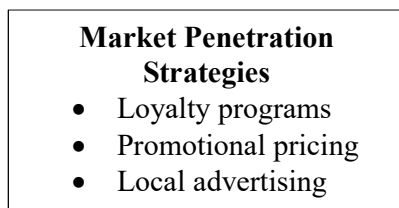
LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review - Ansoff's Growth Theory

This study was anchored on Ansoff's Growth Theory, which explains organizational growth through strategic alternatives such as market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification (Ansoff, 1957). Among these strategies, market penetration focuses on increasing market share within existing markets through approaches such as competitive pricing, customer retention initiatives, promotional campaigns, and improved service delivery, and is considered the least risky growth option because it builds on existing products and customer bases (Rajan Shah et al., 2022). In the hospitality industry, market penetration strategies are commonly applied to strengthen customer loyalty, increase occupancy rates, and improve operational efficiency through repeat patronage and enhanced utilization of available resources. Star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County have increasingly adopted loyalty programs, digital marketing, and enhanced guest experiences to attract and retain customers in a highly competitive environment (Nyoro, 2024). The theory therefore provided the foundation for understanding how market penetration strategies influence operational performance by enhancing customer retention, optimizing resource utilization, and improving hotel productivity. Although the theory assumes relatively stable market conditions and may not fully capture rapid technological and market changes affecting the hospitality sector, it remained relevant in explaining how hotels leverage existing markets to improve operational outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable



Dependent Variable

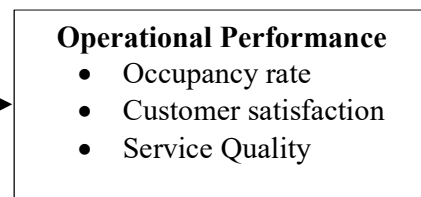


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Market Penetration Strategies

Market penetration strategies refer to strategies employed by organizations to increase market share using existing products and services within current markets, and in the hospitality industry it is essential for enhancing customer retention, strengthening brand visibility, and

improving competitiveness in highly dynamic market environments (Bukoye & Muritala, 2023). Star-rated hotels commonly implement penetration strategies aimed at attracting repeat customers, increasing occupancy levels, and maximizing utilization of available resources. In this study, market penetration strategies were measured using loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising campaigns. Loyalty programs were used to encourage repeat patronage by offering incentives such as discounts, reward points, and exclusive services to returning guests, thereby enhancing customer loyalty and occupancy rates (Lim & Ok, 2022). Promotional pricing involved temporary price reductions and special offers designed to attract customers during low-demand periods and improve room occupancy and revenue generation (Magothe et al., 2023). Local advertising focused on increasing awareness of hotel services within the local market through media promotions, community engagement, and digital marketing campaigns targeting domestic customers. Through these approaches, market penetration strategies enabled hotels to strengthen their competitive position and improve operational outcomes such as occupancy stability, customer retention, and service utilization (Alkasim et al., 2024).

Operational Performance

Operational performance refers to the extent to which an organization effectively utilizes its resources and operational systems to deliver quality services and achieve desired organizational outcomes (Purbowo et al., 2022). In the hospitality industry, operational performance reflects the ability of hotels to maintain efficient operations while meeting or exceeding customer expectations in service delivery. In this study, operational performance was measured using occupancy rate, customer satisfaction, and service quality. Occupancy rate assessed the proportion of available rooms occupied over a given period and served as an indicator of market demand and efficiency in capacity utilization. Customer satisfaction reflected guests' perceptions regarding the extent to which hotel services met their expectations and influenced repeat visits and customer loyalty (Panigrahi et al., 2024). Service quality measured the reliability, responsiveness, consistency, and professionalism of hotel services offered to guests, which are critical determinants of customer experience and organizational reputation (Njoroge, 2022). These dimensions provided a comprehensive assessment of hotel operational effectiveness by integrating both quantitative and qualitative indicators of performance.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have demonstrated that market penetration strategies significantly influence operational performance in the hospitality industry through improved occupancy rates, customer retention, and enhanced operational efficiency. Lim and Ok (2022), using an experimental research design, established that promotional discounts significantly increased hotel booking intentions and occupancy levels, although the study was limited by its experimental rather than operational focus. Similarly, Rajan Shah et al. (2022) found that promotional pricing, product bundling, and targeted advertising improved guest numbers and facility utilization among hotels in Arusha, Tanzania, though contextual differences limited direct application to Nairobi hotels. In Nairobi, Biketi (2024) established that e-marketing strategies, including online promotions and social media advertising, significantly enhanced direct bookings and occupancy levels among five-star hotels, although the study relied heavily

on managers' perceptions without objective operational data. Likewise, Musau (2023) reported that loyalty programs, targeted promotions, and web-based marketing strategies strengthened customer retention and occupancy stability, thereby improving operational performance among five-star hotels in Nairobi. Collectively, these studies support the argument that market penetration strategies positively influence hotel operational performance through enhanced market visibility, customer loyalty, and improved utilization of hotel capacity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research design targeting 64 star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County classified by the Tourism Regulatory Authority into two-star, three-star, four-star, and five-star categories. The hotel served as the unit of analysis, while general managers, finance managers, and customer service managers formed the units of observation because of their direct involvement in strategic planning, financial management, and service delivery. A stratified purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure balanced representation across hotel classifications and managerial roles. From a target population of 192 respondents, a sample size of 130 respondents was determined using Slovin's formula at a 95 percent confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error (Kothari & Garg, 2019). Primary data were collected using structured self-administered questionnaires, and a pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the research instrument. Data were processed through editing, coding, and entry into IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, particularly regression analysis, were applied to determine the effect of market penetration strategies on operational performance at a significance level of 0.05.

The study adopted the following regression model: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$, Where: Y = Operational performance, β_0 = Constant Term, β_1 = Regression coefficient for market penetration strategies, X_1 = Market penetration strategies and ϵ = error term.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Statistics

Respondent Characteristics

The study obtained 118 valid responses drawn from two-star, three-star, four-star, and five-star hotels in Nairobi City County, with five-star hotels contributing the largest proportion of respondents (30.5%). The respondents comprised general managers (31.4%), finance managers (38.1%), and customer service managers (30.5%), indicating balanced representation across key managerial functions involved in strategic, financial, and operational decision-making. In addition, most respondents possessed considerable industry experience, with 39.0% having worked in the hotel industry for over 15 years and 30.5% having between 6 and 10 years of experience. This distribution suggests that the respondents were sufficiently knowledgeable to provide reliable information regarding market penetration strategies and operational performance among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County.

Market Penetration Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize respondents’ perceptions regarding market penetration strategies adopted by their hotels. The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1 Market Penetration Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Our hotel has effective loyalty programs that encourage repeat customers	118	1.00	5.00	3.0424	1.16497
Promotional pricing (discounts, offers) is frequently used to increase occupancy	118	1.00	5.00	3.0763	1.18507
Local advertising campaigns help sustain competitiveness	118	1.00	5.00	3.0085	1.25743
Market penetration strategies have strengthened our local market position	118	1.00	5.00	2.9068	1.11698
Valid N (listwise)	118				

The findings indicate moderate adoption of market penetration strategies among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County. Promotional pricing strategies recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.0763), suggesting that hotels frequently use discounts and special offers to enhance occupancy levels and attract customers. Loyalty programs also recorded moderate agreement (M = 3.0424), indicating that hotels have implemented customer retention initiatives aimed at encouraging repeat patronage. Similarly, local advertising campaigns registered a moderate mean score (M = 3.0085), implying that hotels utilize promotional and advertising channels to strengthen market visibility and competitiveness. However, the statement that market penetration strategies had strengthened the hotel’s local market position recorded the lowest mean score (M = 2.9068), suggesting relatively lower confidence among respondents regarding the overall effectiveness of these strategies. The standard deviation values, ranging from 1.11698 to 1.25743, indicate moderate variability in responses, reflecting differences in the implementation and effectiveness of market penetration strategies across the sampled hotels. Overall, the results suggest that although market penetration strategies are widely applied among star-rated hotels, their effectiveness in improving competitiveness and operational outcomes varies across establishments.

Operational Performance Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to assess respondents’ perceptions regarding operational performance in their hotels. The results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2 Operational Performance Descriptive Statistics

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
The hotel consistently achieves high occupancy rates	118	1.00	5.00	3.2034	1.14399
Customer satisfaction levels have improved over recent years	118	1.00	5.00	3.2119	1.15360
Service quality standards are continuously maintained and enhanced	118	1.00	5.00	3.0932	1.23335
Growth strategies adopted by the hotel have improved overall operational performance	118	1.00	5.00	3.0593	1.14945
Valid N (listwise)	118				

The findings indicate moderate levels of operational performance among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County. Customer satisfaction improvement recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.2119$), closely followed by the consistent achievement of high occupancy rates ($M = 3.2034$), suggesting that hotels are relatively effective in attracting, retaining, and satisfying customers. Service quality standards also recorded moderate agreement ($M = 3.0932$), indicating continuous efforts by hotels to maintain and enhance service delivery. However, the perception that growth strategies had improved overall operational performance recorded a comparatively lower mean score ($M = 3.0593$), implying that the impact of these strategies may not be uniformly experienced across all hotels. The standard deviation values, ranging from 1.14399 to 1.23335, indicate moderate variability in responses, reflecting differences in operational performance levels among the sampled hotels. Overall, the results suggest that operational performance among star-rated hotels is relatively stable, although there remains an opportunity to strengthen the effectiveness of growth strategies in generating improved operational outcomes.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to examine the direction and strength of the relationships between market penetration strategies and operational performance. The correlation analysis results indicated that market penetration strategies had a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with operational performance among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County ($r = 0.785$, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggested that improvements in market penetration strategies, such as loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising, are associated with enhanced operational performance in hotels. The positive relationship implies that hotels implementing effective market penetration strategies are more likely to experience improved occupancy rates, customer satisfaction, and service quality. The

statistically significant correlation provides preliminary evidence supporting the study objective that market penetration strategies positively influence operational performance among star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of market penetration strategies (MPS), on operational performance (OP).

Model Summary

The model summary results are presented in Table 3:

Table 3 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change	Durbin – Watson
1	.869 a	.755	.746	.47742	.755	86.844	1	11 3	.000	1.770

a Predictor: (Constant), MPS

b Dependent Variable: OP

The results indicate a strong relationship between market penetration strategies and operational performance (R = 0.869). The coefficient of determination (R² = 0.755) shows that 75.5% of the variation in operational performance is explained by market penetration strategies. The adjusted R² value of 0.746 confirms that the model remains robust after adjusting for the number of predictors. The standard error of estimate (0.47742) indicates a relatively low level of prediction error. The F-statistic (F = 86.844, p < 0.001) shows that the regression model is statistically significant, indicating that market penetration strategies had a significant effect on operational performance.

ANOVA Results

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether the overall regression model significantly predicts operational performance. The results are presented in Table 4:

Table 4 ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	79.179	1	79.179	86.844	0.000
Residual	25.756	113	0.228		
Total	104.935	117			

Dependent Variable: OP
 Predictor: (Constant), MPS

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 86.844$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that market penetration strategies had a significant effect on operational performance. The model provides a good fit for the data and is suitable for explaining variations in operational performance. The regression sum of squares (79.179) represents the variation in operational performance explained by the model, while the residual sum of squares (25.756) represents the unexplained variation. The total sum of squares (104.935) reflects the overall variability in operational performance. The significant F-statistic confirms that market penetration strategies contribute meaningfully to explaining variations in operational performance.

Regression Coefficients

The regression coefficients were examined to determine the contribution of market penetration strategies (MPS) to operational performance. The results are presented in Table 5:

Table 5 Regression Coefficients

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	0.135	0.169		0.800	0.425		
	MPS	0.217	0.086	0.218	2.519	0.013	0.290	3.444

Dependent Variable: OP

Based on the unstandardized coefficients, the regression model is expressed as: $OP = 0.135 + 0.217(MPS) + \epsilon$, Where: OP = Operational Performance and MPS = Market penetration strategies. The constant (0.135) represents the predicted level of operational performance when market penetration strategies was held constant at zero. The findings indicate that market penetration ($\beta = 0.217$, $p = 0.013$) had a positive and significant effect on operational performance, implying that a one-unit increase in market penetration strategies leads to a 0.217 increase in operational performance, holding other factors constant.

Discussion of findings of Market Penetration strategies on Operational Performance

The study established that market penetration strategies had a positive and statistically significant effect on the operational performance of star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County. The findings imply that strategies such as loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising enhanced occupancy rates, customer retention, and service efficiency among hotels. The findings agree with Musau (2023), who established that loyalty programs and targeted promotional strategies improved occupancy stability and customer retention among five-star hotels in Nairobi. The findings are also consistent with Rajan Shah et al. (2022), who found that promotional pricing and targeted advertising significantly improved operational efficiency and market share among hotels in Tanzania. Similarly, Biketi (2024) reported that online promotions and digital marketing campaigns enhanced occupancy levels and operational performance among hotels in Nairobi. Therefore, the findings confirm that effective market penetration strategies strengthen competitiveness and improve operational outcomes in the hospitality sector.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The findings revealed that star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County moderately adopted market penetration strategies such as loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising to strengthen competitiveness and improve occupancy levels. Correlation analysis demonstrated a strong positive relationship between market penetration strategies and operational performance, indicating that improvements in market penetration strategies are associated with enhanced operational outcomes. Further, regression analysis established that market penetration strategies had a positive and statistically significant effect on operational performance. The findings imply that strategies aimed at attracting and retaining existing customers significantly contribute to improved occupancy rates, customer satisfaction, service quality, and overall operational efficiency among star-rated hotels.

Conclusions

The study concludes that market penetration strategies have a positive and statistically significant influence on the operational performance of star-rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Loyalty programs, promotional pricing, and local advertising were found to enhance customer retention, occupancy stability, and service efficiency. The study therefore concludes that hotels that effectively strengthen their position within existing markets are more likely to achieve improved operational performance and sustain competitiveness within the hospitality industry.

Recommendations

The study recommends that managers of star-rated hotels should strengthen customer loyalty programs through reward systems, discounted repeat bookings, and personalized guest experiences in order to encourage repeat patronage and improve customer retention. Hotels should also adopt targeted promotional pricing strategies during low tourism seasons to stabilize occupancy levels and revenue generation. In addition, hotel management should

intensify local advertising and digital marketing campaigns through social media platforms, local media channels, and online promotional platforms to increase market visibility, attract more customers, and enhance operational performance within Nairobi City County.

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