

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Competitive Management Strategies of Small Private Clinics in Tashkent

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Abstract

The expansion of private healthcare in Uzbekistan has made competition between clinics more visible, especially in Tashkent. This article examines how small private clinics remain competitive in the presence of larger medical centres. The study is based on a questionnaire completed by 14 clinics. The data were analysed through simple descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies and percentages. The findings show that the strongest competitive positions of small clinics are built around service quality, specialization, brand reputation, and direct communication with patients. Digital tools, especially social media and messaging applications, also play a practical role in promotion and patient contact. The article argues that small clinics do not mainly compete by lowering prices. Instead, they rely on differentiation, patient-oriented service, and selective adaptation to market pressure. The study is small in scale, but it gives a clear picture of how local clinics respond to competition in a realistic urban setting.

KEY WORDS

Private clinics, healthcare management, competition, service quality, digital promotion, Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

In Uzbekistan, the private health sector has grown rapidly over the last decade. In Tashkent, patients can choose between large multidisciplinary medical centres and a wide range of smaller private clinics. This has created a more competitive environment in which clinics are expected not only to provide treatment, but also to think strategically about management, patient communication, and market positioning.

Large clinics usually have stronger financial resources, wider service portfolios, and better-known brands. Small clinics, by contrast, often operate with narrower budgets and fewer employees. However, they may also have advantages that are

easier to notice at the patient level: faster service, closer communication, more flexible management decisions, and clearer specialization. For this reason, competition in healthcare is not decided by size alone.

The practical question behind this article is simple: how do small private clinics in Tashkent stay attractive to patients when they compete with larger medical centres? This question matters for both management and policy. From a management perspective, it helps explain which strategies are realistic for small healthcare businesses. From a policy perspective, it can show what kind of support might

strengthen the diversity of private medical services in the city.

The study aims to identify the main competitive strategies used by small private clinics, the role of digital tools in this process, and the factors that most strongly influence patient choice. The article uses a simple structure and simple analysis so that the results remain clear and accessible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competition is generally understood as a process that encourages organizations to improve quality, efficiency, and responsiveness. In healthcare, this process is more complex because patients evaluate both technical and service-related aspects of care. Studies in healthcare management show that patients often choose providers on the basis of trust, reputation, waiting time, staff attitude, and convenience, not only on the basis of price [1; 2].

A useful starting point is Porter's framework of generic competitive strategies. Porter explains that organizations usually compete through cost leadership, differentiation, or focus [3]. In healthcare, cost leadership means relying mainly on lower prices, while differentiation refers to offering something patients consider better or more distinctive, such as higher service quality, stronger doctor reputation, or better patient experience. Focus strategy means concentrating on a narrower segment or specialty.

For small clinics, differentiation and focus are usually more realistic than pure price competition. Smaller providers may not be able to match the purchasing power, advertising budgets, or technological scale of large medical centres. Yet they can become competitive by concentrating on specific services, maintaining a recognizable image, and building stronger relationships with patients [4]. This is especially relevant in services such as dentistry, diagnostics, women's health, and laboratory work, where a focused clinic can form a clear identity.

Marketing literature also supports the importance of service quality and patient satisfaction in service industries. Kotler and Keller note that service organizations compete through perceived value, service consistency, and communication with clients [5]. In healthcare, that communication increasingly happens through digital channels. Social media, websites, and messaging applications are not simply advertising tools; they also help clinics answer questions, remind patients of appointments, and maintain contact after a visit [6].

Studies related to healthcare reform in post-Soviet and developing contexts additionally show that private providers often grow in environments where public systems are under pressure and where patients seek faster or more personalized services [7]. In Uzbekistan, the expansion of private medicine has been linked to modernization, urban demand, and broader market reforms. Local authors similarly stress that service quality, specialization, and management flexibility are central for the success of private medical organizations [8; 9].

Based on this literature, the present study treats small clinic competitiveness as a practical combination of four elements: service quality, specialization, reputation, and communication. The survey was designed around these elements and around the common strategies visible in everyday clinic practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a small-scale survey design. The questionnaire was distributed to 14 small private clinics located in Tashkent. The sample is limited, but it is suitable for an exploratory article because the purpose is to describe tendencies rather than to make broad statistical claims about the whole healthcare market.

The questionnaire included items on competitive strategy, marketing tools, factors affecting patient choice, responses to competition from larger clinics, and views on possible external support. Most questions were closed-ended, which made it possible to count responses and convert them into percentages. Since the total number of respondents was 14, each response corresponds to 7.1 percentage points.

The analysis is intentionally simple. First, the responses were grouped by topic. Second, the number of clinics selecting each option was counted. Third, percentages were calculated to show the relative weight of each answer. The results are presented through tables and figures because the article is meant to provide a clear descriptive picture rather than a complex statistical model.

The approach has two limits. First, the sample is not large enough for inferential analysis. Second, the findings depend on self-reported answers from clinic representatives. Even so, the data are useful for identifying the practical language of competition among small clinics and for showing how they describe their own strategies.

RESULTS

1 Main competitive strategies

The first question asked clinics which main competitive strategy they rely on most. The answers show that quality-related differentiation is clearly stronger than price competition. As Table 1 shows, 42.9% of clinics named service quality as their leading strategy. Another 28.6% pointed to specialization. Only 14.3% chose lower prices, and the same proportion selected personalized care.

This pattern is important because it suggests that small clinics do not try to win the market by being the cheapest option. Instead, they try to be the better or more suitable option. In practical terms, this means better interaction with patients, more confidence in a narrow service area, or a more comfortable experience. For a small clinic, such strategies are more sustainable than competing head-to-head with large centres on cost.

Table 1. Main competitive strategies reported by clinics

Strategy	Number of clinics	Percentage
Service quality	6	42.9%
Specialization	4	28.6%
Lower prices	2	14.3%
Personalized care	2	14.3%

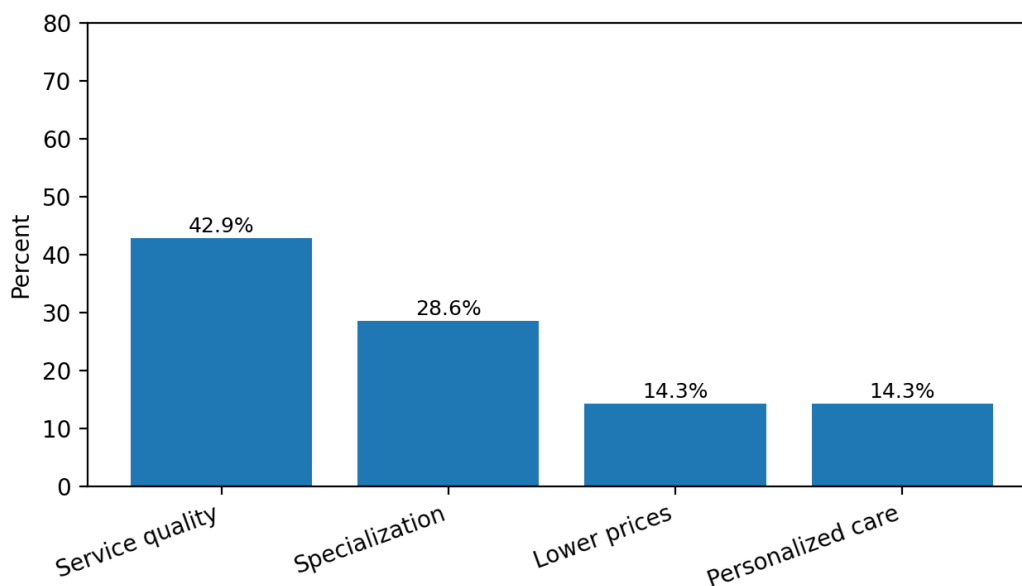


Figure 1. Main competitive strategies of small private clinics

2 Marketing and digital communication tools

The next group of responses concerns the marketing tools clinics use most actively. Here, the results show that digital communication has become a regular part of clinic management. Social media is the most widely used tool: 8 of the 14 clinics (57.1%) selected it. Internet advertising and word-of-mouth recommendations were each reported by 35.7% of clinics, while discounts and promotions were selected by 28.6%. Partnerships were less common at 21.4%.

When these results are viewed together with the broader digital communication data, the tendency becomes even clearer. Social media, Telegram or similar messaging tools, and online booking are now part of how many clinics stay visible and accessible. In other words, communication itself has become a competitive resource. It is not only the medical service that matters; it is also how easily patients can find the clinic, ask questions, and make contact.

Table 2. Use of digital technologies and communication tools

Tool	Number of clinics	Percentage
Social media	10	71.4%
Telegram or messaging apps	9	64.3%
Online appointment booking	6	42.9%
Website	4	28.6%

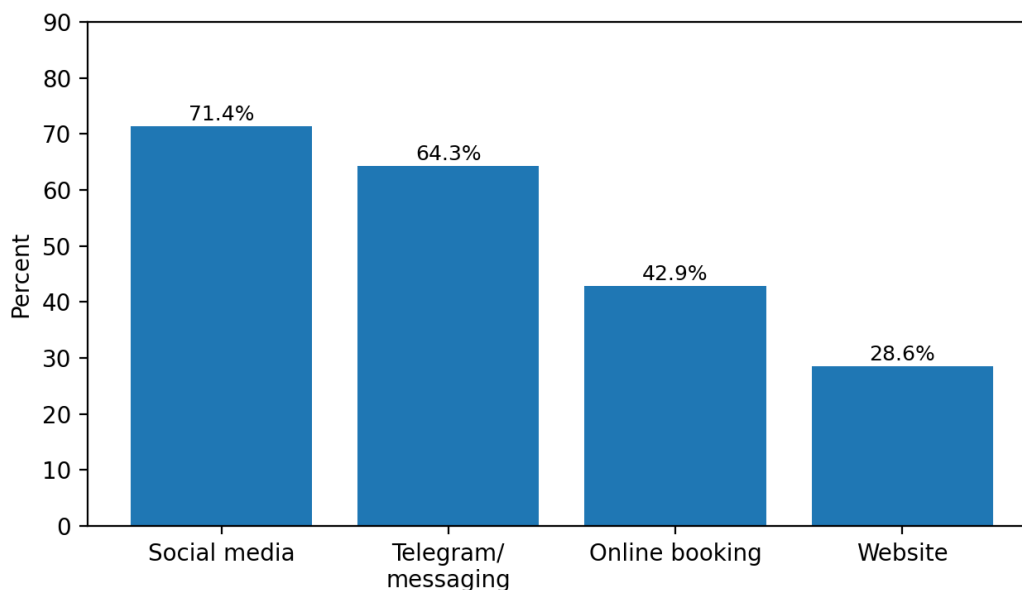


Figure 2. Use of digital technologies by clinics

3 Factors that influence patient choice

The survey also asked respondents which factor has the strongest influence on a patient's choice between a small clinic and a large clinic. Service quality was selected most often, by 71.4% of respondents. Brand reputation followed closely at 64.3%. Recommendations from others were chosen by 42.9%, price by 35.7%, and location by 28.6%.

These figures show that patient choice is shaped more by confidence than by convenience alone. Quality, reputation, and recommendation all point to trust. Even though location and price are still relevant, they do not appear to outweigh the clinic's image and perceived quality. This helps explain why many small clinics invest in personalized service and communication: such practices support the reputation that later influences patient choice.

Table 3. Factors influencing patient choice between small and large clinics

Factor	Number of clinics	Percentage
Service quality	10	71.4%
Brand reputation	9	64.3%
Recommendations	6	42.9%
Price	5	35.7%
Location convenience	4	28.6%

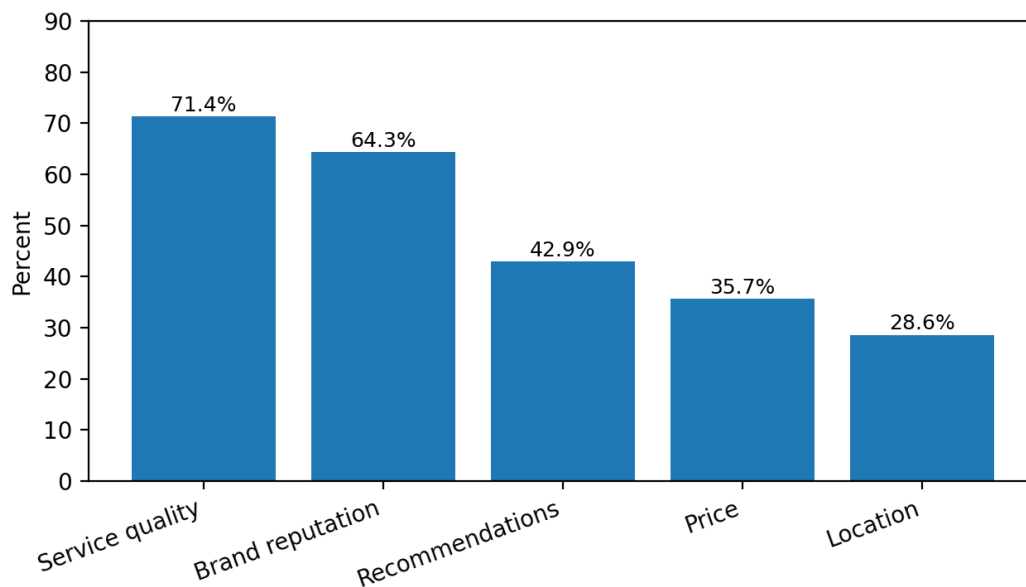


Figure 3. Main factors influencing patient choice

4 Adaptation to competition and external support

Two additional questions help interpret the results. When clinics were asked how they had adapted their services or strategy in response to larger competitors, the largest share, 64.3%, said that they had improved customer service. A further 21.4% reported lowering prices, while 7.1% said that they had introduced new services and another 7.1% selected all listed measures. This result again places patient experience at the centre of competition.

Respondents were also asked what kind of state or association support would be most useful for small clinics. Half of the clinics (50.0%) preferred financial incentives, 42.9% preferred tax relief, and 7.1% selected all forms of support. This indicates that clinic managers do not see competitiveness as only an internal issue. They also connect it to the wider business environment and to the costs of operating in a regulated healthcare market.

DISCUSSION

The results fit well with the basic expectations from the literature. First, small clinics appear to rely mainly on differentiation and focus rather than price competition. This supports Porter's view that organizations do not need to dominate every dimension of competition; they need to choose a clear strategy [3]. For small clinics, quality and specialization seem to be the most realistic basis for such a strategy.

Second, the findings confirm the importance of service management in healthcare. The strongest results concern service quality, reputation, recommendations, and improved customer service. These are all closely tied to patient experience. In a medical context, patient experience does not mean only friendliness. It also includes speed, clarity of communication, trust in staff, and the general sense that the clinic is attentive and reliable [1; 5].

Third, the data show that digital tools are becoming routine rather than optional. Even if only a minority of clinics maintain full websites, many already use social media and messaging applications. For small organizations, these tools are relatively low-cost ways to strengthen visibility and patient contact. They allow clinics to combine marketing with practical communication, which is especially useful in a service sector where responsiveness affects reputation [6].

At the same time, the results suggest that brand reputation matters almost as much as service quality. This is an important point for small clinics. A clinic may be technically competent, but unless patients hear about it through recommendations, online visibility, or consistent service impressions, its competitive position remains weak. Reputation therefore acts as a bridge between internal quality and external market success.

Overall, the survey portrays competition among clinics as a human-centred process. The strongest strategies are not the most aggressive or expensive ones. They are the ones that

make patients more confident, more comfortable, and more willing to return.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations. The sample includes only 14 clinics and covers only Tashkent. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all private clinics in Uzbekistan. The article also relies on self-reported answers, which may reflect how clinics see themselves rather than how patients would evaluate them. Finally, the analysis is descriptive only. It does not test relationships statistically and does not include financial data or direct patient surveys.

Despite these limits, the study remains useful as a compact empirical snapshot. It shows clearly which strategies local clinics themselves consider most important and which dimensions of competition are strongest in practice.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how small private clinics in Tashkent remain competitive in a market that includes larger medical organizations. Using survey data from 14 clinics, it found that the most important competitive strengths are service quality, specialization, reputation, and communication with patients. Price competition exists, but it is not the dominant strategy.

The data also show that digital tools now play a practical role in clinic competitiveness. Social media, messaging applications, and online booking help clinics stay visible and accessible. In addition, the results underline the importance of patient trust. Service quality and brand reputation were the two strongest factors influencing patient choice.

In simple terms, small clinics stay competitive not by trying to be large, but by trying to be clear, reliable, and patient-focused. For managers, this means investing in service standards, targeted specialization, and consistent

communication. For future research, a larger sample and direct patient responses would make it possible to compare clinic self-perception with patient evaluation.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

Competitive Strategies of Small Private Clinics in Uzbekistan

Purpose: This questionnaire is designed to identify how small private clinics remain competitive in relation to larger medical organizations. The answers are used only for educational and research purposes.

Section1. General information

1. What is the specialization of your clinic?
2. How many employees work in the clinic?

3. How long has the clinic been operating?

Section 2. Competition and strategy

4. What is the main competitive strategy of your clinic?

5. How has your clinic adapted its services or strategy in response to competition from large clinics?

6. Which factor, in your opinion, has the greatest influence on patient choice between a small and a large clinic?

Section 3. Marketing and communication

7. Which marketing tools do you use most actively?

8. Does your clinic use social media for promotion?

9. Does your clinic use Telegram, WhatsApp, or similar messaging tools to communicate with patients?

10. Does your clinic offer online appointment booking?

11. Does your clinic have a website?

Section 4. Support and development

12. What kind of support from the state or professional associations would be most useful for small clinics?

13. In your opinion, what is the main challenge for small private clinics in the current market?

14. Please add any brief comment about how small clinics can strengthen their competitive position.