Role of Brand Identity on the Relationship between Communication with Customers and Customer Loyalty among Selected Supermarkets in Western Kenya

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Abstract— **A customer who stays longer with an organization brings forth a lot of benefits. This forces organizations to employ a number of strategies to keep in touch with customers and in the long run built customers loyalty. The purpose of the study was to examine the role of brand identity on the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty among selected supermarkets in Western Kenya. The study was guided by social exchange theory and the study applied explanatory survey research design. The target population of the study was 30,200 respondents drawn from the four supermarkets namely, Choppies, Tuskys, Khetias, and Naivas operating in Western Kenya. The study adopted a stratified random Sampling method from which a sample of 395 customers was obtained using Yamane's formula. Cronbach alpha method was used to test the reliability of the research instruments while factor analysis and expert judgment was used to   test the validity of the research instruments. Further, the data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. To test the null hypotheses multiple regressions was used. Mediation test was conducted following Barron and Kenny four steps. Further, Sobel test was used to test the level of significance of the mediation. The results revealed that Communication with customers had significant effect on Customer loyalty. Further, Brand identity had partial mediation effect on the relationship between Communication with customers and Customer loyalty. The study recommends that supermarket management should put more emphasis on Communication with customers strategies since they influence Brand identity and hence Customer loyalty. The study provides new theoretical insight into factors influencing customer loyalty by incorporating Brand identity as a mediator in the relationship between Communication with customers and customer loyalty.**

Index Terms— **Brand identity, Communication with customers, customer loyalty.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Highlight Customer loyalty is looked as the commitment to a product or certain brand that makes the customer to continuously buy that product without having an intention of switching to any other products that can serve the same purpose (Abubakar, Mokhtar, & Abdullattef, 2014).

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Customer loyalty is equally seen as a physical and emotional commitment that customers give in exchange for their needs being met (Stone, Woodcock, & Machtynger, 2000). For the purpose of retaining customers, organizations have developed customer loyalty schemes that guide them in making choices that will influence them on how to retain and influence customer behavior positively towards the company's products and services through rewarding customers that are loyal (McMullan & Gilmore, 2008). The business environment has become so competitive leaving organizations with no option than to come up with ways to sustain customers trust and enhance good practices in their business operations (Levy & Weitz, 2007).

A lot of changes in the marketplace are being envisaged and this brings in the importance of communication with customers as has been evidenced by (Marketing Science Institute, 2010) research priorities for the period 2010- 2012 where most of research priority topics looks at the challenges in marketing communications and managing brands in the new, transformed market place and hence the aim of this construct is to critically look into the concept of communications with customers and how it affects brand identity and how it influences customer loyalty.

Brand identity is the image a company passes across about its product or product category (McCormack, and Cogan, 2004). Brand identity portrays what the brand is and its associated promises to the customers (Aaker, 2002). Thus, (Kostehjk and Erik, 2008), maintains that every brand should create a unique identity in the market, let people look at your brand as being strong, since strong brands creates more brand satisfaction (Taylor, et. al., 2004), let it appear powerful, desirable and unique which should be formulated on the basis of three qualities of a good brand, namely; durability, consistency and realism. Brand identity reflects the company' attempts to develop a desired brand image that is developed in consumer's mind which is quiet important and incase it is flawed, the overall brand identity will be castrated (Yatundu, Otiso, Rajab, 2016). For Strong brands they portray a brand identity that is well defined and explained (McCormack & Cogan, 2004). Brand identity is the image an organization conveys about its products, it gives a picture of what the brand is and what the customers expect to get as they consume it (Aaker, 2002). Every organization must be able to create a brand that has unique identity that looks strong and powerful that is formed on the basis of three qualities

namely; durable, consistent and realistic (Kostelijk, 2008). According to (Silverman, 2001) and (Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004) strong brands create brand satisfaction which leads to brand commitment that eventually creates loyalty.

Currently, organizations appear to focus more on customer loyalty (Ngambi & Ndifor, 2015). A number of scholars have carried out studies locally in line with social bonding and customer loyalty. A study carried out by (Karanja & Gakure, 2012) on the importance of customer loyalty on fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) at Unilever Nairobi Kenya, revealed that customer loyalty enhanced customer commitment, helped in retaining the already established customers, improved the brand image of the FMCG and provided customer experience which led to repeated purchase. Muturi, (2004) did a research on factors that determine customer loyalty of phone users to a mobile phone service provider in Nairobi. The findings were service quality; price indifference and perceived value were the major factors to be considered. Tanui, (2007) did a study on factors that contributed to the customer loyalty of petrol stations in Nairobi and the findings were two aspects: attractiveness of the brand personality and perceived quality. Mungai, (2008) did a study on the factors that determine customer loyalty at the port of Mombasa. He found out that customer satisfaction; perceived quality and brand loyalty were the main determinants. Kibeh, (2013) did a research on the relationship between customer relationship marketing and customer loyalty in the mobile telecommunication industry in Kenya. The findings were that, the quality of a service, effective communication of pricing policies, flexible pricing and a positive brand image generates favorable customer loyalty among people. Faraji, Otiso,Mboya, Ngacho,(2019) did a study on Mediating effect on brand identity in the relationship between social support and customer loyalty among selected supermarkets in Western Kenya region. The findings were that brand identity significantly mediated the relationship between social support and customer loyalty.

The study sought to build on the present literature by examining whether an organization that takes advantage of communication with customers actually improves their customer loyalty and if it added value. The researcher introduced a mediating variable Brand identity to see how it affected both communications with customers' construct and customer loyalty.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to assess the role of brand identity on the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty among selected supermarkets in western Kenya.

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H01): Brand identity does not significantly affect the relationship between social support and customer loyalty among supermarkets in western Kenya.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A set of broad ideas and principles taken from related fields of study and used to build up a subsequent presentation is referred to as a conceptual framework (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). For this study the conceptual framework figure 1 shows the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty among supermarkets in western Kenya.
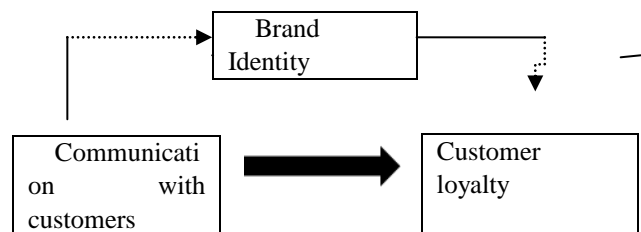

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have been done in relation to communication and customer loyalty. Abtin & Pouramin, (2016) did a study on the effect of relationship marketing on customer loyalty in Kerman Iran insurance company. The study was carried out through a survey method using questionnaires as the main instrunment for data collection. The researcher quotes (Kortler, 2002) who considered electronic customer relationship management (ECRM) as a way to attract and retain valuable customers through increase of efficiency and effectiveness of the communications.The study further provides mechanism that can be used to overcome the challengess of the current CRM operations through the use of Integrated customer relationship management(ICRM), a concept that defines and establishes communication with customers on the basis of their needs (Elahi & Heidari, 2008). The findings are that there is a relationship between customer loyalty and communicaion,trust,satisfaction,management and competence. The study gives managers and employees of companies the ability on how to create a positive atmosphere to increase their customer loyalty.

A related study was done by (Gaurav, 2016), who looked at the impact of relationship marketing on customerr loyalty with a basis of indian automobile industry. The study employed exploratory and causal research where systematic saampling was used to identify the sample.The study considered a sample of size of 510 who involved the owners of two wheelers and four wheelers at Hyderabad.Through multiple regression analysis there was revelations that the constructs under study including commmunication contributed significantly to customer loyalty and predicted substantial percentage of the variation in customer loyalty.

Another study was done by (Hossain & Suchy, 2013) on the influence of customer satisfaction on loyalty, a study on mobile telecommunication industry in Bangladesh, identified factors of services that influence customer loyalty.The study

focused on six factors namely; comunication, price structure, value added service, convenience, customer service and sales promotions.Among the five constructs tested, communication was among the constructs that showed positive correlations with customer loyalty, with communication being the highly correlated while sales promotion showing no relationship with customer loyalty.With the above findings, most organizations have bought the dea of communication and embarked on using it to position themselves and build strong customer loyalty and sustain competition (Achour, Said, & Boerhannueddin, 2012). Therefore this study proposed that:-

H0a): There is no significant relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty among selected supermarkets in western region in Kenya.

VI.   Methodology

This study used explanatory survey research design. The main objective of the study was to establish the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between social support and customer loyalty among selected supermarkets in western region in Kenya. To test the study hypothesis, questionnaire developed was used to collect data. The items were scored in a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree). The construct validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using factor analysis (Rattray & Jones, 2001) and confirmed by several lecturers in marketing management. The reliability was evaluated by Cronbach's alpha and the calculated coefficient of (0.933) for overall items represented a high and desirable internal consistency. The population considered in this study consisted of the customers in four selected supermarkets in Western region in Kenya. For sampling, the (Yamane, 1967) formula was used. The sample size, as calculated by the following formula, was (395).

n=   30,200 /   = 395
    1+30200(0.05x0.05)

A total of 395 questionnaires were distributed to respondents out of which 360 were successfully retrieved. Of the 360 collected questionnaires, only 341 were found to be useful for further analysis. First, to confirm the significance of the correlation between independent factors and the dependent factor, Pearson correlation analysis was performed. Next, to create variable composites from the original attributes and to identify smaller set of factors that explain the variances between attributes factor analysis all variables were entered in the analysis model simultaneously, was conducted. Finally, regression relationships among variables of this study were investigated by standardized coefficients and provided significance levels in SPSS software by which hypothesis is either rejected or accepted.

VII.   Results

The demographic data show that 54.5% of the customers from the supermarkets sampled were female with 45.5% being male. Most of the shoppers are middle aged between (30-49) years. From the data 35.2% and 30.5% of the respondents have bachelor's degrees and diploma levels of

education respectively, hence most the shoppers have tertiary education and hence able to understand the items being asked. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	155	45.5
	Female	186	54.5
	Total	341	100
Age	20-29 years	85	24.9
	30-39	128	37.5
	40-49	71	20.8
	above 50 years	57	16.7
	Total	341	100
Education	PhD	4	1.2
	Masters	38	11.1
	Bachelors	120	35.2
	Diploma	104	30.5
	Certificate	75	22
	Total	341	100

Source: Research Data (2019)

Internal consistency (reliability) of measures is evaluated by calculating Cronbach's alpha. As the variables' means in Table 2 show, the coefficients for value variable are between (0.847) and (0.884) that represent good internal consistency and hence acceptable reliability. All correlations are within the expected direction and are statistically significant. Highest and lowest correlation coefficient respectively belongs to relationship between brand identity and customer loyalty (r = 0.688) and relationship between brand identity and communication with customers (r = 0.534).

Table 2 Internal consistency and correlation of variables

Variables	Brand Identity	Communication with customers	Customer loyalty
Brand Identity	(0.884)	0.534**	0.688**
Communication with customers		(0.870)	0.568**
Customer loyalty			(0.847)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note. N = 341; The values in parentheses are reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ** p < 0.01

As shown in Table 3, for communication by the supermarket to the customers, 2 components were extracted, the first 4 loaded on the first component relating provision of timely, trustworthy and extensive information on new services by the supermarket and the remaining 2 loading on the second component relating to understanding of information and fulfilling of promises by the supermarkets.

Table 3 Communication with customers Rotated Component Matrix

	1	2
Supermarket communicate extensively to customers	0.863	
Provision of timely and trustworthy information	0.839	
Information on new services	0.637	
Tailor made communication	0.519	0.513
Supermarket fulfils promises		0.799
Ease of understanding information		0.849
Eigen Values	2.296	1.983
% of Variance	38.261	33.056
Cumulative %	38.261	71.317
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.872	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity; Approx. Chi-Square	894.880	
df	10	
Sig.	0.000	

Extraction Method: Principal component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
Source: Research Data (2019)

The cumulative variance contributed by the two components is 70.053% with the first component accounting for 38.261% while the second accounts for 33.056% of the cumulative variance. Sampling adequacy was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure (KMO measure) of sampling adequacy.

As evidenced in Table 3 above, KMO was greater than 0.5 (0.872), and Bartlett's Test was significant, $\chi2 = 894.880$, p-value < 0.05.

Table 4 Brand identity Rotated Component Matrix

	1	2
The customer knows the name of the supermarket	0.769	
The customer trusts the supermarket's products	0.856	
The customer rates the supermarket highly	0.856	
The customer knows the common color of the supermarket products packaging		0.783
The customer knows the supermarket logo		0.899
Eigen Values	2.302	1.763
% of Variance	46.035	35.254
Cumulative %	46.035	81.29
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.851	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Approx. Chi-Square	922.145	
df	10	
Sig.	0.000	

Extraction Method: Principal component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

On brand identity, 2 components were extracted, the first 3 loaded on the first component relating to the customer knows the name of the supermarket, trust the products and rates the supermarket highly and the remaining 2 loading on the second component relating to the customer knows the color of the supermarket products packaging and log as shown in Table 4. The cumulative variance contributed by the two components is 81.29% with the first component accounting for 46.035% while the second accounts for 35.254% of the cumulative variance.

Sampling adequacy was tested using the Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO measure) of sampling adequacy. As evidenced in Table 4, KMO was greater than 0.5 (0.851), and Bartlett's Test was significant, $\chi2 (10) = 922.145$, p-value < 0.05.

In Table 5, for customer loyalty, 2 components were also extracted, the first 1 loaded on the second component relating to preference to pay higher prices to my supermarket than leave for another supermarket and the remaining 4 loading on the first component relating to I would say great things about my supermarket and recommend it to other people as well as consider it as my first choice in future. The cumulative variance contributed by the two components is 81.436% with the first component accounting for 59.376% while the second accounts for 22.06% of the cumulative variance.

Table 5 Customer loyalty Rotated component matrix

	1	2
I prefer to pay my supermarket higher prices than leave for a competitor		0.979
I like to say positive things about my supermarket to other people	0.851	
Customer likely to recommend the supermarket to a friend or relatives	0.901	
I never seriously considered changing my supermarket	0.811	
I will consider my supermarket as my first choice in future	0.860	
Eigen Values	2.969	1.103
% of Variance	59.376	22.06
Cumulative %	59.376	81.436
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.849	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	875.2	
df	10	
Sig.	0.000	

Extraction Method: Principal component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
Source: Research Data (2019)

Sampling adequacy was tested using the Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO measure) of sampling adequacy. As evidenced in Table 5, KMO was greater than 0.5 (0.849), and Bartlett's Test was significant, $\chi2 (10) = 875.2$, p-value < 0.05.

VIII. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The summary statistics showed the steps taken to arrive at the role of brand identity in the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty. First, the communication with customers strategies explained about 32.4% of the variance in supermarket's customer loyalty with an effect size of 0.569 (t = 12.748, p< 0.05).

Second illustration was the significant impact of communication with customers strategies that explained 29.0% of the variance in brand identity (the mediating variable) with an effect size of 0.539 (t = 11.758, p< 0.05). Next, the findings showed that brand identity explained about 47.3% of the variance in supermarket's customer loyalty with

an effect size of 0.688 (t = 17.415, p< 0.05). Last, upon introduction of the mediator, communication with customers' strategies explained about 53.0 % of the variance in the supermarket's customer loyalty up from 32.4 % that had been explained earlier meaning that brand identity increased the explanatory power by 20.6 % and therefore the null hypothesis was thus rejected and it was concluded that brand identity significantly mediated the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty.

In order to examine whether the hypotheses was significant, Z values were obtained and examined the significant of the direct effect (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Baron and Kenny indicated that sobel test provided a significant test for the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable via the mediator. The Z-value obtained was t=9.78113631 that was more than the significant level 1.96 and was hence significant. The null hypothesis was not supported and therefore it was concluded that brand identity mediated communication with customers to customer loyalty.

Table 6 Summary of Hypothesized Testing Results

Hypothesis	Beta values	P values	Decision
H_{0va}): Brand identity does not significantly affect the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty among supermarkets in western region in Kenya.	0.280	< 0.05	Reject the H_0

Source: Research Data (2019)

IX. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

On the role of brand identity on the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty, the study had postulated one null hypothesis:

H0ia): Brand identity does not significantly mediate the relationship between communication with customers and customer loyalty.

From the findings there was partial mediation in the relationship between variables where CWC=(β=0.569 (t = 12.748, p< 0.05) and BI= (β=0.535, t=12.072, p<0.05).). The null Hypothesis was therefore rejected. Based on these findings, it means that as organizations strive to build up customer loyalty through communication with customers, brand identity cannot be wished away as it remains a critical component for the success being established and would require consideration of other factors such as age, sex and education in order to get it right. The underlying differences for brand preference require proper consideration in order to ensure that each group is well catered for. Brand remains a mental flow that is created in the mind of consumers and forms part of the brand image established by the consumer (Yatundu, Otiso, Rajab, 2016). For brands to be successful in the market, they must believe in themselves through retention of its identity and must be owned by the stakeholders (Laforet,2010, Yatundu, Otiso, Mboya & Ngacho, 2019). Consumers will want to associate with brands that are

compatible with themselves, one that carries their belief. This leaves organizations with trying to find out what the customers belief is in a product before rolling them out. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies done by (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2008, Yatundu, Otiso, Mboya & Ngacho, 2019), which emphasized on the importance of brand identity as a critical tool for product differentiation and brand management. Hence it can be concluded that whereas organizations may emphasize on other strategies like improving the quality of customer service (Otiso, Chelangat& Bonuke, 2012), social support (mboya 2017, Yatundu, Otiso, Mboya & Ngacho, 2019), employing of loyalty programs (Ahmed & Gabriella, 2012) , organizations should invest more in brand identity creation that can improve brand image and perceived brand equity (Yatundu, Otiso, Rajab, 2016)   which ultimately leads to customer loyalty.

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