Brand Loyalty and Customer Citizenship Behavior Among Students of Selected Universities Within Mount Kenya Region

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Abstract

Purpose: Enrollment in Kenya's public universities has been declining. This study sought to determine the effect of brand loyalty on customer citizenship behavior among students of selected universities within Mount Kenya region. The study is anchored on Keller brand theory.

Methods: The study adopted a descriptive research survey. The accessible target population was 3000 4th year students from selected universities within Mount Kenya region. The study used a sampling formula proposed by Israel (2009) to obtain the required sample size of 254 respondents from the study. Primary data was collected using both closed and open-ended questionnaires. The questionnaires were carefully structured pre-tested and adjusted to meet the demands of the study. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results: According to correlation outcome, brand loyalty had a strong positive and significant correlation with customer citizenship behavior (r =0.658, p=0.000). Regression findings showed that brand loyalty had a positive and significant effect on customer citizenship behavior (β=0.174, p=0.002<0.05).

Conclusion: The study concluded that brand loyalty contributes significantly to enhanced customer citizenship behavior. The university management should create brand loyalty for the university by ensuring they offer quality education which can enhance competitiveness and thus increase the number of students enrolling in the universities.

Keywords: *Brand loyalty, customer citizenship behavior, universities in Mount Kenya region*

1.0 Introduction

According to Groth (2015), brand equity is far less clear, complex, and obscure in countries like the United States, necessitating a more thorough, nuanced, and tribal approach to brand design and communication. Simple fixes are no longer sufficient. To develop relevance and encourage bottom-up relevance, simplicity must be implemented at a complicated level. To establish a strong cultural footprint in markets around the world, brands must assume local relevance. Local brands help organizations stay still when the marketing environment changes. To stay agile and active and continue to create value, brands must now do the opposite.

Brands are currently in a profound ideological crisis in nations like South Africa, and traditional communication forms are getting increasingly stale and out of date. The major global brands'

universal principles and homogeneous messaging have worn thin, and they are no longer relevant for an increasingly demanding client seeking authenticity at any cost. This is especially true for the younger generation and customers in huge growing countries like Nigeria or Egypt, where underlying cultural values are significantly different (Bove, 2016).

In Tanzania, brand equity refers to the financial value gained from a customer's impression of a product or service's brand name, rather than the product or service itself. It is the premium value that educational institutions take from the product or service resulting in a recognizable name versus the same equivalent. Customers are willing to pay a greater price for a product or service when they can receive the same product or service for a lower price from competitors with favorable brand equity. Simply described, a brand asset is a product or service's added value. The power of a successful brand to capture client preferences and experiences is its ultimate value. In fact, for universities and other higher education organizations, branding is increasingly becoming a strategic priority. To create significantly distinct brands that effectively express their advantages (Jevens, 2012).

Customer Citizenship Behavior (CCB) is an activity of customer choice versus the regular needs for exchange across different institutions in Kenya, according to Christian Gllide, Stefano Pace, Simon, Pervan, and Carolyne Strong (2011). The results of their study, "Exploring the Limits of Customer Behavior: Managers should grasp the time, location, and practice in which their brand might play a role, according to "A Focus on Consumer Rituals." This will enable colleges to position their brands to benefit from and participate in CCB initiatives. Youjae Yi, Tashik Hong, and Hyoji Lee (2013) indicated that another behavior related to the client's citizenship comes from the basic behavior of the client's citizenship.

According to Keller (2013), CBBE occurs when clients have a high level of brand knowledge and familiarity, as well as certain promising and unique brand associations. When a university wishes to grow its product line, brand equity is a classic example of a situation when it is vital. Universities can boost the possibility that customers will consume their new product by linking it with a current and successful brand if brand equity is good. If Meru University of Science and Technology develops a new course of study, the university will likely keep it under the same name rather than create a new one. Customers' good associations with a new product make it more appealing than if it were branded with an unfamiliar name.

1.1 Problem statement

The growing number of higher learning institutions in Kenya and around the world has emphasized the importance of brand equity in customer decision-making. Kohonor (2012) studied the role of brand equity in a number of different learning institutions. His study established that 85% of customers who want to join higher learning institutions always look at the branding of the university. This was because the dimensions of brand equity often affect preferences and intentions of customers to consume the institution's services.

Despite the role of brand equity, enrollment in public universities has been declining in the past three years (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2020). KNBS report recorded that the country's total university enrollment declined by 1.9% to 509,473 in the academic year (2019-2020), from 519,462 in the previous academic year, with enrollment in public universities decreasing by 4.7%, from 433,245 in 2018-19 to 412,845 before the end of the academic year (2019-2020). The decline in university enrollment points to poor customer citizenship behavior, which results in to decline in demand for university services.

Miller (2014) studied the emergence of many universities in Kenya which has increased competition amongst themselves. The study established that the Higher Institute of Education

should leverage its brands by enhancing marketing strategies and providing a variety of programmes to attract and retain more students because there is a steady increase of learners and stiff competition among the Higher Institute of Education. Okonkwo (2017) investigated how branding affects customer satisfaction at Higher Institute of Education. The study indicated that exerting pressure among higher learning institutions and how they offer their services to their customers influence customer satisfaction. In the financial sector, Rambocas, Kirpalani, and Simms (2018) explored the relationship between brand equity and client behavioral intentions. The finding showed that customer happiness partially mediates the relationship between brand equity and customer behavioral intentions, according to the findings. The current study sought to determine the effect of brand loyalty on customer citizenship behavior among students of selected universities within Mount Kenya region.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant effect of brand loyalty on customer citizenship behavior among students of selected universities within Mount Kenya region.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Keller's brand theory

Keller established his brand philosophy in 1993. Starting from brand knowledge represented as an associative network in which associations are nodes, the theory is defined by customer-based brand equity at the individual level. Keller defined brand equity as the variation in customer response to marketing in 2012. The idea behind brand equity is to use pleasant experiences to influence how people perceive a product or service. A company must establish an environment in which customers have pleasant sentiments, thoughts, and perceptions about the brand. Brand expression, brand representation, brand equity, brand feeling, brand valuation, and brand relationship are among the 6 characteristics identified by Keller's thesis.

Brand highlighting is used as a metric of brand awareness in this theory, which is about brand loyalty (Keller, 2014). According to Keller's theory, ensuring adequate brand loyalty is the first step in building a successful brand; the goal is to create brand recognition and mental associations with a specific product class or customer need. Kerri-Ann et al. (2014) used the Keller theory when they looked at the effects of promotional techniques on organizational performance. His research proved that brand had meaning in product promotion by connecting tangible and intangible brand associations. The study further found that brand as suggested by Keller's theory was meant to characterize brand performance through product promotions.

Asop (2017) investigated the impact of product branding on manufacturing company sales performance. Keller's brand theory is used in this study to identify brand responses to current brand perceptions and judgments based on the combination of linkages established in brand meaning. Branding ratings have been found to include overall quality, reliability, attention, and excellence. He discovered that customers' attitudes toward brands are emotional responses to brands, of which Keller (2012) named six types: warmth, pleasure, excitement, security, social approbation, and self-esteem.

Keller's brand theory relates brand justice to civic behavior of customers in higher education because it talks about brands and studies focus on brand assets. The answer to the brand is the relationship with the brand in theory and research, which is meant to generate an intense and active bond between the customer and the brand. The summit of the pyramid is resonance, which refers to the nature of the customer-brand relationship. It consists of four components:

behavioral loyalty, commitment to relationships, a sense of community, and active participation (Keller, 2011). Ovidiu (2015) highlights how brand value is tied to patents, brands, and channels, which can create a significant competitive advantage on which Higher institutes of education are built, based on Aaker's idea. Brand assets in schools are protected by trademarks from competitors that try to deceive customers by utilizing identical names, emblems, or packaging.

Keller's Brand Equity Theory is greatly related to brand equity on customer citizenship behavior which is one of the variables under study. The theory promotes strategic brand management in institutions. The notion of brand equity theory is simple: to develop a powerful brand, you must mold customers' perceptions and feelings about institutional products. Higher learning institutions like the University of Science and Technology rely much on brand equity to pool their customers.

The main purpose of Kelle's Brand Theory is to promote brand equity which affects customer citizenship behavior. Kelle's Brand Theory is linked to objective one which talks of effect of brand image on customer citizenship behavior where brand identity is one of the variables in this study. Branding has been greatly promoted by Kelle's Brand Theory. The ultimate goal of the University of Kenya's branding team is to raise awareness of the institution's brand loyalty. This can be done in several ways, but one way is to use Keller's theory of brand equity. With the advancement of marketing, the customer has become the main focus of higher education. HLI should learn how to keep their customers happy and hence get the benefits of brand loyalty.

2.2 Empirical Review

Nashua (2010) studied the history of the start of brand loyalty. According to his research, the first evidence of branding dates back to 1777, when artisans were forced by medieval guilds to affix trademarks to their creations to preserve them as works of high art. The study also proved that signing artwork was the first step toward branding for artists. Many organizations that provide free samples of their goods and services will use brand loyalty to identify and set themselves apart from their competitors. This is known as branding, and as a result, institutions are using specific branding behaviors to define themselves.

According to a follow-up study by Nashua (2012), institutions need to brand themselves because marketers are working to weaken rather than strengthen brands. Higher education institutions can establish their marketing identity through branding. The study goes on to say that creating a brand name through trust is facilitated by brand loyalty, which also acts to differentiate offerings. According to the results of his research, the goal of brand loyalty is to help target consumers recognize and get familiar with branded products so they will be more likely to accept them.

Valarie (2018) did a study on the advantages of brand loyalty on value performance of organizations. His study established that brand loyalty has value and offers many advantages to customers among them it offers protection when it identifies the seller. It also enables a customer to make repeat purchases of branded items found satisfying. It makes it easier for the seller to process orders and track down problems. It enables the manufacturer to differentiate their products from those of competitors. Furthermore, branding may add to the customer's psychological satisfaction and sense of security.

Moreover, Raja (2010) in her study suggests that branding identity of a learning institution helps it to be successful. A successful brand helps an organization to have a sustainable differential advantage. Differential advantage simply means that consumers have a motive to choose that brand over rivals' brands, which contributes to the phenomenon of brand loyalty in

the marketplace. A key concern in the institution's strategy is the importance of brand loyalty. A significant amount of long-term investment is needed to develop a branded institution, particularly for packaging, sales promotion, and advertising.

According to Aaker (2013), a brand's core indicator is its level of brand loyalty. Raising brand recognition and promoting communication activities are based on the brand's loyal following. Additionally, it might lead to associations that help define the brand. A choice that increases brand recognition and fosters brand loyalty is crucial because, on occasion, it succinctly and rationally conveys the main idea or important associations of a product. Brand identities may be incredibly effective communication tools.

Furthermore, a brand-aware consumer can tell a product apart from its rival, and brand loyalty demonstrates the source of the service or good. Customers who have strong brand loyalty may even be willing to spend more since they have more faith in the brand. Brand loyalty sets one seller's goods and services apart from another. It aids clients in locating goods that could be advantageous to them. Along with this, it conveys information regarding the caliber of the commodity or service. It is these many benefits that make brands popular among customers and generate or create brand assets that enable products to be superior to others. Those brand benefits or assets are called brand equity. According to Kevin and Keller (2015), brand equity dimensions can be achieved through brand loyalty management.

According to Aaker (2013), brand loyalty awareness results from combining a brand's name and/or symbol with its resources, obligations, and values. Brand equity dimensions are another name for brand loyalty inputs. Perceived quality, brand association, brand awareness, brand name awareness, and proprietary brand assets are the five brand inputs or dimensions. A brand's name, symbol, and associated assets and liabilities that increase or decrease the value that a good or service offers to a company and/or its clients are collectively referred to as brand equity. Strong brand loyalty benefits from a high degree of brand awareness and experience among consumers. Kotler et al. (2015) claimed that a learning institution can get a competitive advantage by having a strong brand equity. Pekka Tuominen (2010) clarified that a learning institution's brand recognition and growth are important assets.

2.3 Conceptual framework

Independent Variable   **Dependent Variable**

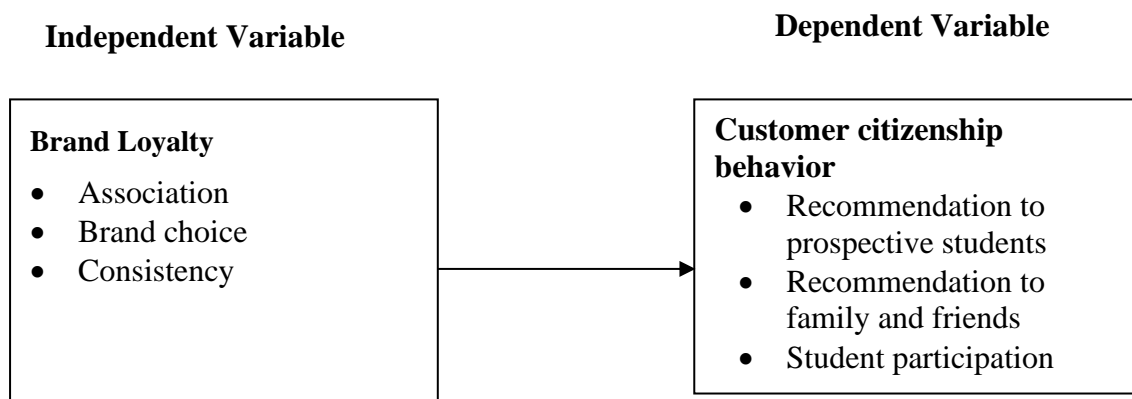| Brand Loyalty	Customer citizenship behavior
• Association • Brand choice • Consistency	• Recommendation to prospective students • Recommendation to family and friends • Student participation

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The research design is used to structure the study to show how all the main parts of the research project, the sample or group, intervention, treatment, and all research parameters work together to try to answer the main research question (Oso & Onen, 2015). This research employed descriptive research. The case's most notable feature is its application to real-life, current human circumstances, as well as its public accessibility via written reports.

3.2 Target population

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2015), the target population is all individuals, objects of study or research. The target population was 3000 fourth (4th) year students from selected Universities in Mount Kenya region using purposive sampling as shown in table 3.1.

Table 1: Target Population

University	Total	Proportion (%)
Embu University	300	10
Meru University of Science and Technology	750	25
Kenya Methodist University	375	13
Dedan Kimathi University	500	17
Chuka University	675	23
Karatina University	400	12
Total	**3000**	**100**

3.3 Sample size and sampling procedures

A sample is a group of people chosen from a wider population for research (Gay 1992). The formula presented by Israel (2009) was used to calculate the requisite sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where n = sample size, N = population size e = error of sampling. Substituting into the formula;

$$n = \frac{3000}{1 + 3000 * 0.06^2}$$

$n = 254$

Hence the sample size,

$$\underline{n \approx 254}$$

As a result, the sample size was set at 254 people. Because this sample size is greater than 30, it can be analyzed using most statistical methods.

Table 2: Sample size

University	Total	Proportion (%)	Sample size
Embu University	300	10	25
Meru University of Science and Technology	750	25	64
Kenya Methodist University	375	13	32
Dedan Kimathi University	500	17	42
Chuka University	675	23	57
Karatina University	400	12	34
Total	**3000**	**100**	**254**

3.4 Research instrument

Primary data were collected with closed and open questions in the questionnaire. The type of data to be collected, the amount of time available, and the study's objective all influence which instrument is used. This has several benefits, including secrecy, time savings, and less interviewer bias. Low cost, easy accessibility, personal contact with a widely distributed sample (Fowler, 1993), and the ability to measure findings are all advantages of questionnaires. However, questionnaires must be used with caution because they can easily confuse respondents, cause them to despair, or fail to gather crucial information for research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). The study used Likert scale questionnaires as the instrument to collect data.

3.5 Methods of data analysis

Data analysis is very important to understand the research results. The collected data was processed to check for omissions and errors and finally coded and uploaded into the Social Sciences Statistics Package (SPSS) version 24. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The features of the study design were determined using descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation. Derivative statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, were used to determine relationships between study constructs. Data was presented using frequency tables and graphs.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Brand Loyalty

Descriptive results for brand loyalty are captured in Table 1.

Table 1: Brand loyalty

Average	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
I am very proud to be associated with this University	12.40%	14.40%	5.70%	33.00%	34.50%	3.63	1.40
I intend to join this university for my postgraduate studies	5.20%	13.40%	4.10%	30.40%	46.90%	4.01	1.23
This university will always remain my first university.	4.60%	17.50%	6.70%	41.20%	29.90%	3.74	1.19
I would recommend this university to others	9.80%	4.60%	26.80%	36.60%	22.20%	3.57	1.17
I would not switch to another University brand no matter what	12.40%	6.70%	9.80%	24.70%	46.40%	3.86	1.39
Average						**3.76**	**1.28**

The results in Table 1 show that at 67.5% the majority of respondents agreed that they were very proud to join the university (mean = 3.63, SD = 1.40). Furthermore, the majority of respondents (77.3%) indicated that they want to continue their postgraduate studies at the institution (mean = 4.01, SD = 1.23). This is a result of branding since it enhances consumer confidence and trust (Tran et al., 2020)The results further show that the majority of respondents 71.1% agree that their university will always be my first choice (mean = 3.74, SD = 1.19). Majority of respondents agreed that they would recommend this university to others, with 58.8% agreeing. (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.17). The results further indicated that the majority of respondents amounting to 71.1% agreed that they would not switch to another university brand (mean = 3.86, SD = 1.39).

The average mean of the responses was 3.76, indicating that the majority of people agreed with the statement about brand loyalty. This implied that most of the respondents acknowledged the importance of brand loyalty as a component of brand equity and this was expected to impact customer citizenship behavior. Brand loyalty acts as a significant motivation behind decisions since it provides product differentiation (Tran et al., 2020).

4.1.2 Customer citizenship behavior

Descriptive results for customer citizenship behavior are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Customer Citizenship behavior

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std.Dev
This university is highly recommended by me to potential students.	11.90%	2.60%	7.20%	32.50%	45.90%	3.98	1.31
My family members and I suggest this university.	11.90%	0.00%	15.50%	28.90%	43.80%	3.93	1.29
I recommend this university to anyone interested in furthering their education.	9.80%	3.10%	26.30%	26.30%	34.50%	3.73	1.24
I tell my friends about this university.	11.90%	14.90%	15.50%	33.00%	24.70%	3.44	1.33
I explain to other students about other resources in the university	9.80%	3.60%	16.00%	39.20%	31.40%	3.79	1.21
I fill out lecturer evaluation forms	11.90%	0.50%	12.90%	27.80%	46.90%	3.97	1.3
When the university asks for information, I respond.	4.10%	7.70%	13.40%	22.20%	52.60%	4.11	1.16
I can share my thoughts and feelings with the university administration	10.80%	5.20%	8.20%	28.40%	47.40%	3.96	1.32
I am always ready to defend my university	11.30%	7.20%	16.50%	38.10%	26.80%	3.62	1.27
I am always ready to market my university	10.80%	14.40%	14.90%	30.40%	29.40%	3.53	1.34
Average						**3.81**	**1.28**

The results in Table 2 show that at 78.4% the majority of respondents agreed that they would recommend their university to prospective students (mean = 3.49, SD = 1.32). The results further indicated that a majority of 72.7% of respondents agreed that they would recommend their university to family members (mean = 3.93, SD = 1.29). Furthermore, the majority of respondents (60.8%) agreed that they would recommend their university to anyone interested in pursuing higher education (mean score = 3.93, SD = 1.29). Majority of respondents (57.7%) agreed that they would suggest their university to family members (mean score = 3.44, SD = 1.33). The results also showed that 70.6% of respondents agreed that they explained other university resources to other students (mean = 3.79, SD = 1.21). Additional results showed that the majority of respondents 74.7% agreed that they filled out the teacher evaluation form (mean = 3.97, SD = 1.30).

The findings revealed that 74.8 percent of respondents consented to share information when the university requested it (mean score = 4.11, SD = 1.16). The results further indicated that most of the respondents, 75.8%, agreed that they could share their thoughts and feelings with the university management (mean = 3.96, SD = 1.32). The results showed that most of the respondents, 64.9%, agreed that they were always ready to defend their university (mean = 4.11, SD = 1.16). The results further show that the majority of respondents, 59.8%, agree that they are always ready to bring my university to market (mean = 3.53, SD = 1.34).

The average mean of the responses was 3.81, suggesting that the majority of students agreed with the statement on customer civic conduct. This implied that most of the respondents demonstrated positive customer citizenship behavior. These findings are in agreement with a study conducted by Tan et al. (2017), who demonstrated that student's self-esteem has a positive impact on Customer Citizenship Behavior.

The respondents were further asked to describe how else their institution would do to promote customer citizenship behavior. The following were some of the areas that were stated could help to promote customer citizenship behavior in universities; improving students' commitment, improving student trust, improving the university infrastructure, and increasing brand assets as well as associations.

4.2 Correlation analysis

Table 3 shows the correlation results on the relationship between brand equity components and customer citizenship behavior.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Results

		Customer Citizenship Behavior	Brand loyalty
Customer Citizenship Behavior	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Brand loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.658**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Customer citizenship behavior and brand loyalty showed a substantial and positive link (r = 0.658, p = 0.000). This suggested that better customer citizenship behavior will follow improvements in brand loyalty. The results corroborate those of Han et al. (2022), who found a positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand citizenship.

4.3 Regression analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of brand loyalty on customer citizenship behavior. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: Regression of coefficient

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	-0.079	0.187		-0.421	0.674
Brand loyalty	0.174	0.055	0.17	3.164	0.002

The findings demonstrated a strong and positive correlation (β=0.174, p=0.002<0.05) between consumer citizenship behavior and brand loyalty. This meant that a one-unit increase in brand loyalty would result in a 0.174-unit rise in customer citizenship behavior. The results support the hypothesis by Qureshi et al. (2022) that citizenship behavior is positively impacted by internal brand loyalty. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis indicated that there is no significant effect of brand loyalty on customer citizenship behavior among students of selected universities within Mount Kenya region was rejected.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The study sought to establish the effect of brand loyalty on customer citizenship behavior among students of selected universities within Mount Kenya region. The majority of responders, according to the results, expressed great pride in being connected to this university. According to additional findings, the majority of respondents said that their university would always be their top choice. The majority of respondents said that they would suggest this university to others, according to the data. According to additional findings, the majority of respondents said that their university would always be their top choice.

The correlation results demonstrated a strong positive and substantial relationship between consumer citizenship behavior and brand loyalty. Regression analysis of the coefficients revealed a strong and positive correlation between consumer citizenship behavior and brand loyalty. The results of the hypothesis test indicated that among students at particular universities in the Mount Kenya region, brand loyalty had a major impact on consumer citizenship behavior.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between brand loyalty and customer citizenship behavior. The study concluded that universities with students who were proud to be associated with the institution had better customer citizenship behavior.

6.0 Recommendations

The university management should pay special attention to the university brand to create customer citizenship behavior in students and increase the number of students. Furthermore, university administration should pay close attention to what constitutes brand loyalty, as some customer behavioral patterns, such as purchasing apathy, cheap pricing, and avoidance of significant switching costs, may not represent loyalty.

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