

# Influence of Brand Management Practices on Customer Satisfaction among Universities in Kenya

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## Abstract

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of brand management practices on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya. The study was founded on three theories namely: Customer based brand equity model, expectation confirmation theory and consumer utility theory. The study adopted descriptive research design, the target population comprised of students from all 70 universities registered and accredited to operate in Kenya, with a population of 443,783 students enrolled for various undergraduate degree programs from which a sample of 384 students was drawn. Data was analyzed using a combination of four different statistical analysis methods that included descriptive statistical analysis, factor analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis. The study revealed that brand management practices had significant influence on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya, with  $R^2=0.238$ ;  $p$ -value = 0.000. It was concluded that an increase in brand management practices result in an increase in the levels of customer satisfaction among the students across all the three university categories. The study recommends that policy can be developed that encourages inculcating brand management practices within universities in Kenya. Policy can be developed to encourage measurement and reporting of performance along brand management practices as used in this study. To sustain customer satisfaction through branding, the universities should identify ways in which their brand can create value to customers. This can be enhanced through quality service, superior technology, positive attitude among the employees (both teaching and non-teaching) as well as reputable professors who exhibit high integrity and knowledgeable, among other initiatives. The managers should also strive to integrate branding initiatives into the university marketing activities and exploiting secondary associations such as country of origin, heritage, ranking, institutional cooperation, value for money, integrity, accessibility, among others.

**Key words:** *Branding, Brand Management, customer satisfaction, universities, brand image.*

## 1. Introduction

Brand management is the analysis, planning and implementation of branding strategies intended to influence the market perception towards a product or service. For effective branding, it is important to establish a cordial relationship with the customers. According to Keller (2001), brand management practices include brand positioning (the place a product occupies in the mind of the relative to substitutes); brand identity (the noticeable elements that give a brand a distinction from the rest; brand personality (the human personality traits or characteristics that are assigned to a brand); and brand recognition (ability of a consumer to identify a brand positively through its logo, tag line, package or design).

According to Kapferer (2008), brand identity refers to the meaning attributed to a brand from the owner's perspective. Similarly, Aaker (1991) supports that brand identity refers to how the organization see itself whereas brand image represents how others see the organization. Brand image is the outsiders' perception and interpretation of the brand identity. Several brand identity frameworks have been proposed, with most of them sharing the opinion that brand identity is sender based whereas brand image is receiver based. For the purpose of this study, a university brand identity refers to how the institution sees itself whereas brand image refers to how the institution is perceived by the outsiders, including but not limited to the customers (students), sponsors, parents, employers, competitors, regulators among others.

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), brand positioning refers to the act of designing a brand to occupy a distinct place in consumers' mind. This may be based on tangible and intangible attributes that are associated with the brand. According to Keller (1993), brand positioning creates an emotional relationship that enables the consumers to segregate among competing brands and building loyalty. Brand managers focus on generating positive brand equity by promoting awareness, linking the brand to some tangible or intangible abstract in order to distinguish it and generate favorable position in the consumers' mind. Generally, Erdem and Swait (1998) contend that satisfied consumers will be willing to spend more money and effort on brands that they perceive to be of high value to them.

According to Samiee, Shimp, and Sharma (2005), the level of brand recognition will influence consumer's choice process and gives a brand a competitive advantage in the market. Those brands that enjoy top of mind recognition stand a higher chance to be chosen compared to less recognized brands. Similarly Keller (1993) argues that a brand that enjoys a favorable mindshare is likely to translate to a high market share.

Keller (2001) points out that if a brand consistently offers positive experiences over many years of regular use, it acquires a human like characteristics. The added values can emanate from experience of using the brand and character based on the personality of the brand users. This may lead to the belief that the brand will deliver uniform and consistent quality. This can be justified by the physical appearance of the brand, the name, color, texture, shape, and packaging design among other tangible characteristics. Brand personality play a major role in influencing students' choice of the institution as well as the specific programmes offered. In Kenyan context, due to increased competition, stringent regulations and a well-informed population due to technological advancement, most local and foreign universities are investing more in brand building initiatives to enhance their competitiveness. For example, the University of Nairobi has enhanced her marketing and positioning strategy through increased promotion, through advertisement in the local media and online platforms. Other public and private universities have followed suit.

Customer satisfaction refers to the feeling of contentment after a customer compares between the perceived performance and expectation. The level of satisfaction depends on the rate at which the performance matches the expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Similarly, in the university education context, Elliot and Shin (2002) observe that customer satisfaction in higher education institutions is as a result of a short evaluation of the overall education experience by the students during their campus life. In this regard, consumer satisfaction is an evaluation process with a fulfillment response, affective response, psychological state and overall evaluation (Fornell, 1992).

Maslen (2012) forecasted that demand for university education internationally is expected to grow exponentially, at the rate of approximately 3% between the period of 2005 and 2025. This will see the student population grow to 262 million by 2025, with the highest growth expected in the third world countries especially in India and China. Such growth is expected to pose more challenges to the universities as they compete in attracting quality students from across the world.

According to the Commission for University Education (2015), the number of universities in both public and private increased tremendously, from 65 in 2012/2013 to 70 in 2014/15, with a total students' population of 443,783. The high student population and the number of universities have led to increased competition not only among the Kenyan universities but globally. As a survival mechanism, universities have focused on improving customer service, creating and implementing new and innovative academic programs, education quality and research output. This makes the universities more competitive and attractive to the students' and stakeholders (Waithaka, 2014; Bourner & Flowers, 1997). Key to these developments is faculty members who need continuous character development, professional development, orientation towards quality teaching, applied research and student engagement (Waithaka, 2014).

## **2. Problem Statement**

As universities continue to develop strategies to be more globally competitive, the institutions need to enhance competitiveness through branding and building a strong corporate image by understanding the customer needs and satisfying them more effectively and efficiently than the competitors. Both local and international universities have continuously embraced brand management practices as well as building a strong corporate image to gain a competitive advantage in the industry. This has been characterized by the increased number of local universities advertising in the local media, increased public relations activities and event sponsorships, increased use of personalities such as chief executives, musicians, comedians, and politicians among others in brand endorsements. : Some of the universities constantly appearing in promotional media include: the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Zetech, KEMU, JKUAT, Strathmore, Mount Kenya University, USIU, and Daystar University among others. This study sought to establish the effects of these brand building initiatives on students' overall satisfaction with the university services. An analysis of previous studies revealed that influence of brand management practices on customer satisfaction in the higher education institutions has not received sufficient attention. This study therefore intended to establish the role of brand management practices in influencing customer satisfaction in universities in Kenya, with corporate image and customer characteristics as the mediating and moderating variables respectively

The general objective of the study was to determine the influence of brand management practices on customer satisfaction among universities in Kenya.

### 3. Literature Review

The study was anchored on two main theories; the consumer based brand equity model, and the consumer utility theory. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), the model is based on the premise that the customer determines the strength of a brand based on their knowledge and experience. It is the responsibility of the marketers therefore to develop appropriate marketing strategies that will give the customers positive experiences by positively influencing their thought processes, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions and opinions. De Chernatony, Harris, and Christodoulides (2004) argue that measuring customer satisfaction was instrumental in understanding the CBBE model. This study will seek to determine the extent to which brand management practices (as perceived by the students) influences customer satisfaction.

Utility theory in consumer economics assumes that consumers will think about the choices in order to maximize the utility rationally. Consumer attains decisions account for perceived risks and consequences under conditions of uncertainty in purchase decision making (Baker, 2001). However, this economic vantage cannot fully explain purchasing behaviour in terms of choice between two or more products (Kotler, 2001). It broadly captures psychological concerns that people have but does not consider cost and benefit in terms of consumer attitudes. Utility theory in psychology states that consumer choice behaviour is predicted whether it is rational or irrational (Fishburn, 1968).

Brand management is the analysis, planning and implementation of branding strategies intended to influence the market perception towards a product or service. For effective branding, it is important to establish a cordial relationship with the customers. According to Keller (2001), brand management practices include brand positioning (the place a product occupies in the mind of the relative to substitutes); brand identity (the noticeable elements that give a brand a distinction from the rest; brand personality (the human personality traits or characteristics that are assigned to a brand); and brand recognition (ability of a consumer to identify a brand positively through its logo, tag line, package or design).

Juran (1991) argues that the level of satisfaction depends on the extent to which the product/service features matches the customer needs. When performance exceeds the expectation, the customer is said to be delighted, whereas, if the performance is less than the expectations, the customer becomes dissatisfied. Whereas Bolton and Drew (1991) contend that it is a judgment made on the basis of a specific service encounter, Oliver (1997) views it as an emotional reaction which influences attitude and is consumption specific

### 4. Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive cross sectional survey design. A descriptive cross-sectional survey is appropriate in collecting data to make deductions and conclusions about a population of interest and has been regarded as a representative of the population from which researchers collect data. According to Lomax and Raman (2008), cross-sectional studies have robust effects on relationship studies. Additionally descriptive survey design allows for collection of large data from sizable population. This facilitates the researcher to give organized, consistent and interrelated summary of variables under study (Sandelowski, 2000). According to Babbie (2013), a descriptive design tends to be more specific, accurate and involves description of events in a carefully planned way.

The target population for this study was undergraduate university students in Kenyan local universities. The study used a multistage sampling procedure that involved two stages. The first stage was sampling 30% of the universities in each category using a simple random sampling method. Since the categories were established, the researcher developed a source list from which 21 universities representing 30% of the target population was picked using random sampling. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), at least 30% of the cases per group are required for research. A number was given to every university this was written on pieces of papers and placed in a container, folded and shuffled. A number was picked at a random. The process was repeated until the required sample of 21 universities was attained.

The second stage used systematic random sampling, selecting every 5th student entering the main gate of the main campus of the selected university. Purposeful sampling was applied strategically to ensure equitable

distribution of respondents based on gender, the program enrolled and the year of study. This helped reduce biasness and ensured fair representation. To arrive at the sample size of the university students, the researcher utilized Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table.

**Table 1: Sample Size**

Strata	No. of Universities	Percentage %	Sample size	Percentage (384/21 *100%)	Sample Size
Public Universities	33	30	10	18.29	183
Private Individual owned Universities	18	30	5	18.29	91
Private Institutional owned universities	19	30	6	18.29	110
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>		<b>21</b>		<b>384</b>

Source: Commission for University Education (2015)

#### 4.1 Reliability, Validity and Diagnostics Tests

According to Winter (2000), reliability and validity are tools of an essentially positivist epistemology. Reliability test measures the internal consistency of each variable and investigates if each individual question used to create the variable will be measuring the same aspect while the validity test measures the extent to which a scale measures the variable it is supposed to measure (Zikmund, 2000). Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results after repeated trials. Reliability of the research instrument is its level of internal consistency over time (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). To check on whether the items in the questionnaire measured the expected theorized variables in the conceptual model, the questionnaire was pretested. The selected respondents were asked to rate the clarity of the items in the questionnaire and comment on the time used to fill one questionnaire. The researcher used the most common internal consistency measure known as Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ). It indicates the extent to which a set of test items can be treated as measuring a single latent variable (Cronbach, 1951). The recommended value of 0.7 was used as a cut-off of reliabilities. A pilot study of 25 students was undertaken to establish the reliability of the questionnaires using internal consistency approach by use of SPSS version 21.

#### 5. Study Findings

Brand management practices was operationalized along four practices namely; Brand identity, Brand positioning and association, Brand recognition and Brand personality. To capture data on these operational indicators, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5 – point Likert scale to what extent the various aspects of the indicators applied in their university. The results of one sample t-test are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Brand Management Practices**

Statement	M	SD	t	CV (%)	Sig-2 tailed-value
<b>Brand Identity</b>					
The university has a unique identity	3.84	1.29	55.86	34	0.00
The university gives me a sense of belonging	3.87	1.19	61.77	31	0.00
The university expresses who I am	3.8	1.18	61.15	31	0.00
The university has a unique culture	3.85	1.22	59.03	32	0.00
The university enjoys strong heritage/history	3.86	1.27	57.93	33	0.00
The university brand is consistent across all campuses	3.71	1.26	56.43	34	0.00
The university slogan is appealing	3.94	1.17	63.43	30	0.00

The university Logo is unique	4.08	1.07	69.52	26	0.00
The university Logo is attractive	3.94	1.14	66.52	29	0.00
The University Colours are Appealing	3.94	1.25	60.77	32	0.00
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.88</b>	<b>1.204</b>	<b>61.24</b>	<b>31.2</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Brand Positioning and Association</b>					
The university name is easy to pronounce	4.17	1.19	67.07	29	0.00
I am proud to be associated with this university	4.15	1.07	73.09	26	0.00
The university brand is associated with prominent people	3.85	1.21	60.93	31	0.00
University programmes are perceived to be of high quality	3.90	1.15	63.83	29	0.00
The university has a good reputation	3.88	1.11	66.44	28	0.00
The university has a global appeal	3.63	1.24	55.83	34	0.00
The university is popular in the local market	3.78	1.28	56.82	34	0.00
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>1.178</b>	<b>63.43</b>	<b>30.14</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Brand Recognition</b>					
I understand the meaning of this university name	3.68	1.18	64.06	37	0.00
I know the mission and vision of this university	3.84	1.28	57.25	33	0.00
I know the colours of this university	4.03	1.31	52.70	29	0.00
I can remember the logo of this university	4.01	2.49	29.44	29	0.00
I can recall the slogan of this university	3.85	1.36	50.16	33	0.00
I understand the management structure of this university	3.59	1.18	64.06	36	0.00
I know the ranking of this university locally and globally	3.77	1.28	57.25	66	0.00
<b>I know all programmes offered in this university</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>52.70</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.79</b>	<b>1.423</b>	<b>53.45</b>	<b>37.62</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Brand Personality</b>					
The staff are Down-to-Earth	3.48	1.34	49.18	39	0.00
The management and staff are honest	3.46	1.31	50.00	38	0.00
The university is up to date	3.79	1.26	57.93	33	0.00
The brand is energetic and vibrant	3.74	1.20	58.27	32	0.00
The university is innovative	3.71	1.18	59.44	32	0.00
The students are Cheerful	3.8	1.23	57.84	32	0.00
There is a culture of sincerity in the university	3.48	1.34	56.18	34	0.00
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>1.265</b>	<b>55.54</b>	<b>34.28</b>	<b>0.00</b>

**N = 325**

Source: Researcher (2018)

The result in Table 2 show moderately high ranking with respect to brand management practices (Mean score above 3.5 was recorded for most of the brand management practices description). Notably, all statements had high t values yielding to statistically significant (p-values of less than 0.05). The aspect 'The university name is easy to pronounce' had the highest mean score of 4.17. The second highest mean score of 4.15 was scored for 'I am proud to be associated with this university'. The statements 'The staff are Down-to-Earth' and 'There is a culture of sincerity in the university' had the lowest means of 3.48, implying that majority of the respondents were neutral over the statements.

'I know the ranking of this university locally and globally' had the highest coefficient of Variation (CV) of 66 percent suggesting that there was a relatively high level of disagreement among the respondents that they were aware of their university ranking both locally and internationally. Conversely, the statements 'The University

Logo is unique’ and ‘I am proud to be associated with this university’ had the lowest coefficient of Variation (CV) of 26 percent each suggesting that there was a relatively high level of agreement among the respondents.

The study analyzed statements on customer satisfaction. To capture data on customer satisfaction, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5 – point likert scale to what extent the various aspects of the indicators applied in their university. The results of one sample t-test are presented in Table 3

**Table 3: Descriptive analysis for Customer satisfaction**

	M	SD	T	CV (%)	Sig. (2-tailed)
The fees charged is equivalent to the value I receive	3.39	3.12	21.23	92	0.000
The university offers good academic programmes	3.95	1.11	68.26	28	0.000
I feel secure when within the university	3.93	1.22	62.11	31	0.000
The students are generally disciplined	3.81	1.17	60.33	31	0.000
Lecturers are highly experienced	3.95	1.09	67.08	28	0.000
The class size is manageable (students/lecturer ratio)	3.88	1.27	57.87	33	0.000
The university offers a conducive learning environment	3.97	1.19	63.33	30	0.000
The university offers satisfactory customer service	3.74	1.24	57.46	33	0.000
The university library is well stocked with relevant material	3.72	1.22	59.11	33	0.000
The university has state of the art infrastructure	3.68	1.26	55.97	34	0.000
I am likely to further my career/education at this university	3.58	1.33	51.38	37	0.000
I am likely to recommend this university to a friend/associate	3.88	1.20	61.89	31	0.000
I am likely to remain committed to supporting this university as an alumnus	3.85	1.21	61.48	31	0.000
I am likely to bring my children or other dependents to this university	3.7	1.29	54.59	35	0.000
I am likely to talk favorably about this university	3.92	1.13	64.73	29	0.000
I am likely to give feedback to the university to help them improve their services	3.98	1.16	66.44	29	0.000
I am likely to look for a job at this university	3.52	1.30	50.86	37	0.000
Generally, I have a positive attitude towards this university	4.09	1.14	67.56	28	0.000

Source: Researcher (2018)

The result in Table 3 show moderately high ranking with respect to customer satisfaction (Mean score above 3.5) was recorded for most of the customer satisfaction description). Notably, all statements had high t values yielding to statistically significant (p values of less than 0.05). The aspect ‘Generally, I have a positive attitude towards this university’ had the highest mean score of 4.09. The second highest mean score of 3.98 was scored for ‘I am likely to give feedback to the university to help them improve their services’. The statement ‘The fees charged is equivalent to the value I receive’ had the lowest means of 3.39, implying that majority of the respondents were neutral over the statements.

‘The fees charged is equivalent to the value I receive’ had the highest coefficient of Variation (CV) of 92 percent suggesting that there was a relatively high level of disagreement among the respondents that they received what they paid for. Conversely, the statements ‘The University offers good academic programmes’, ‘Lecturers are highly experienced’, and ‘Generally, I have a positive attitude towards this University’ had the lowest coefficient

of Variation (CV) of 28 percent suggesting that there was a relatively high level of agreement among the respondents.

The general objective of the current study was to establish the influence of brand management practices, corporate image, and customer characteristics on customer satisfaction in universities in Kenya. Pearson product moment coefficient technique was used to conduct correlation analysis so as to ascertain the relationship among study variables. The relationship between variables was done for every category of the Universities in Kenya.

The study sought to establish the relationship between brand management practices and customer satisfaction. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Correlation Analyses for brand management practices and customer satisfaction**

**4 a) Correlation Analyses for Individual owned University**

		Brand Management	
		Practices	Customer Satisfaction
Brand management practices (BMP)	Pearson Correlation	1	.559**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Customer satisfaction (CS)	Pearson Correlation	.559**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 91

Source: Researcher (2018)

**4 b) Correlation Analyses for Institutional owned University**

		Brand Management	
		Practices	Customer Satisfaction
Brand management practices (BMP)	Pearson Correlation	1	.650**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Customer satisfaction (CS)	Pearson Correlation	.650**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 94

Source: Researcher (2018)

**4 c) Correlation Analyses for Public University**

		Brand Management Practices	Customer satisfaction
Brand management practices (BMP)	r	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Customer satisfaction (CS)	r	.378**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 140

Source: Researcher (2018)

**4 d) Correlation Analyses for All Universities**

		Brand Management	
		Practices	Customer Satisfaction
Brand management practices (BMP)	Pearson Correlation	1	.488**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Customer satisfaction (CS)	Pearson Correlation	.488**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 325

Source: Researcher (2018)

Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant positive correlation among brand management practices and customer satisfaction among individual owned university students ( $r = .559, p < 0.05$ ), Institutional owned University ( $r = .650, p < 0.05$ ), public universities ( $r = .378, p < 0.05$ ) and lastly all the universities ( $r = .378, p < 0.05$ ).

The objective was to establish the influence of brand management practices on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya. The predicted model relating brand management practices and customer satisfaction was presented using the linear regression model as:

$$CS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where  
 CS was customer satisfaction  
 $\beta_0$  was constant associated with regression model  
 $\epsilon$  was the error term  
 $X_1$  was Brand management practices  
 $\beta_1$  was coefficients of brand management practices indicators.

The study tested the influence of brand management practices on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya using regression analysis. Customer satisfaction (dependent variable) was regressed on brand management practices (Independent variable) and the relevant results are presented in Table 5.1. The regression analyses revealed that brand management practices had positive influences on customer satisfaction. The study results revealed a statistically significant positive linear relationship between brand management practices and customer satisfaction among students in public university ( $\beta = .385$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). The regression results also showed that brand management practices had explanatory power on customer satisfaction among students in public universities in Kenya in that it accounted for 14.9 percent of its variability ( $R\text{ square} = 0.149$ ). The ANOVA results in Table 5.1(b) show a  $p\text{-value}$  of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the model is statistically significant in explaining the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

**Table 5: Regression Results of brand management practices and customer satisfaction - All Universities**

**5 a) Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.488 <sup>a</sup>	.238	.236	1.007

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Management Practices  
 Source: Researcher (2018)

**5 b) ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	114.829	1	114.829	100.815	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	368.004	323	1.139		
	Total	482.833	324			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Management Practices  
 Source: Researcher (2018)

**5 c) Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.339	.173		13.512	.000
	BMPs	.475	.045	.488	10.643	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction  
 Source: Researcher (2018)

The model below summarizes the relationship between brand management practices and customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya;

$$CS = 2.339 + 0.488BMP + e$$

Where; CS is the customer satisfaction and BMP is Brand management practices.

From the above findings, brand management practices were found to influence customer satisfaction more in the private individual owned and private institutional owned universities than in public universities, with R square of 0.312, 0.423 and 0.149 respectively. This indicates that students in private universities are more sensitive to the branding and marketing initiatives when evaluating the services offered by their institutions. This means private



universities should focus more in branding compared to public universities. This can also be deduced to the fact that most public university students are government sponsored as opposed to those in private universities most of whom are self-sponsored.

The study reveals that brand management practices have significant influence on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya ( $R^2=0.238$ ; P value  $< 0.05$ ). The study also establishes that corporate image has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between brand management practices and customer satisfaction ( $R^2=0.213$ ; P value  $< 0.05$ ). Further, the study discloses that customer characteristics have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between brand management practices and customer satisfaction ( $R^2=0.200$ ; P value  $< 0.05$ ). Finally, the study revealed there was a joint effect of brand management practices, corporate image, and customer characteristics on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya ( $R^2=0.632$ ; P value  $< 0.05$ ).

## 6. Conclusion

The study concluded that brand management practices have a significant influence on customer satisfaction among university students in Kenya. Specifically, four brand management practices; brand identity, brand positioning and association, brand recognition and brand personality, were found to strongly influence customer satisfaction among the students. An increase in brand management practices results in an increase in the levels of customer satisfaction. It is evident that investment in branding gives a competitive advantage to institutions especially in a highly competitive industry. Kenyan universities, both public and private should continuously carry out a brand audit to assess their brand identity, position, image, associations as well as brand personality characteristics associated with their brand over time.

## 7. Study Implications

The study established a strong positive correlation between brand management practices and customer satisfaction. The management of universities needs to recognize the critical role of branding in influencing the overall satisfaction of their stakeholders, which eventually leads to growth and profitability. Due to the increased competition in the higher education sector, universities must pursue a differentiation strategy. Universities should embrace brand building initiatives in order to improve the institution's visibility in the market. These includes but limited to: establishing a unique identity and culture; developing appealing logos, slogans and corporate colours; identifying and pursuing a clear positioning and differentiation strategy; developing and nurturing positive associations; creating brand awareness through marketing communication in order to improve brand recognition; identifying and nurturing an appealing personality characteristics for the institution among other branding initiatives. The findings of this study can be used by managers in universities who seek to pursue strategic brand management as a strategy to influence customer satisfaction. The study suggest to managers to regularly conduct a brand audit of their university brand in order to establish branding gaps that would be negatively affecting their institutional growth.

## 8. Recommendations

This study used general brand management practices as its context. Further studies could concentrate on individual university attributes such as the corporate logo, symbol, slogans, color, and name among others. This will be important especially because different brand management practices influence decision making in many different ways. Additionally, the survey used in this study was quantitative in nature. One main benefit of quantitative analysis is that hypotheses can be directly tested based on the data collected. However, a future study incorporating qualitative analysis could serve to further explore the relationship between the variables under study. In-depth interviews could allow for deeper exploration of these measures as well as their association with institutional factors such as university ownership, management structure and institutional culture.

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