

THE MODERATING ROLE OF NORMATIVE ISOMORPHISM ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND PERSONALITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA: A META-ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Although marketing literature reveals that brand personality can have a significant impact on organizational survivability in different contexts, a few studies have examined the role of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya. This study was anchored on brand personality model, and institutional isomorphism theory. Brand personality explains human traits attributed to brand names such as sophistication, competence, ruggedness, sincerity and excitement. Normative isomorphism describes forces that drive an organization to reconfigure its service delivery models towards homogeneity. With increased competition among organizations and more specifically public universities, maintaining brand personality is attributed to brand loyalty in the university context. Globalization of higher education services not only make universities to embrace best practices to promote service delivery but also seek to maintain similar standards in service delivery. This study broadly reviewed existing empirical studies, reports, projects and journal articles. Specifically, information was sought from materials that discussed brand personality, organizational isomorphism and brand loyalty. The study revealed that the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty of public universities was positively moderated by normative isomorphism. The study concludes that, for enhanced customer loyalty in the university context in Kenya, application of brand personality and complimented by normative isomorphism can effectively enhance customer loyalty of public universities. This study recommends that, for enhanced customer loyalty in the university context in Kenya, robust and explicit models should be developed to provide a better explanation on the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty from one context to another. The findings of this study contribute to theory by validating existing theories in the marketing literature and their applicability in marketing higher education services. The results will help policy makers such as Commission for University Education to develop and execute customer loyalty policies embedded on brand personality and normative isomorphism initiatives. Marketing management practitioners in the higher education service will as well appreciate the role of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in the university context.

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CONTRIBUTION/ORIGINALITY

This study contributes to existing literature by validating existing theories as well as extends new knowledge to marketing management practitioners as well as policy makers to appreciate the role of investing in brand personality and normative isomorphism to promote higher education services. The critical review of literature calls for robust empirical models to confirm convergence or divergence of the results of the current study.

INTRODUCTION

Brand personality are subjective views held by consumers and associated with favoured human traits such as sophistication, competence, excitement, sincerity and ruggedness (Tho, Trang & Olsen, 2016). Brand personality is a multi-faceted construct that contain a sub-set of dimensions which researchers operationalize and conceptualize differently in multiple sectors (Thongthip & Polyorat, 2015). The increased need for higher education services in both developed and developing countries has made universities to formulate, implement and evaluate brand personality strategy (Chin, 2016; Kuester & Krohmer, 2009 & Abdulsattar, 2019). For effective competitiveness, universities are embracing brand personality strategy (Vahdati & Mousavi, 2016). Brand personality variable was evaluated using five perspectives; brand excitement, sincerity, ruggedness, sophistication and competence and customer service delivery was measured using five antecedents; assurance, reliability, responsiveness, tangibility and empathy. However, constraints of replicating a study examining the impact of brand personality on customer service delivery are inevitable from one context to another, thus the need to find a robust model that can explain the moderating effect of strategic marketing partnerships on the relationship between brand personality and customer service delivery in the university context. Universities operating in Kenya and more especially public universities have been experiencing stiff competition from global and local private universities. Application of the traditional brand personality measures in the higher education context is attributed to conceptual and theoretical challenges (Amel, Ayman, Mohamed, & Alaa, 2018).

Isomorphism is process that compels organizations to adopt homogeneity in customer service delivery. It is a philosophy the explains how organizations embrace similar marketing practices over time. In the modern organizational life, isomorphism is regarded as a phenomena accelerated by external changes such as competition, technology, change of regulations, influence of globalization and employee diversity. Any effort by any organization towards product or service homogeneity is directly attributed to isomorphic pressures in the organization context. In the turbulent business environment characterized by globalization of businesses, organizations homogenization is key. The tendency of organizations striving to adopt similar practices, structures, processes and technology is the ultimate goal organizational legitimacy. Inability of organizations in different

contexts to embrace principles of isomorphism theory is attributed to sanctions which if not urgently addressed may taint the image of the organization. Efforts of any company to excel in any industry is attributed to isomorphic pressures, Organizational isomorphism is informed by institutional theory that emphasize on increased organizational legitimacy through compliance with pressures of the external marketing environment.

Di Maggio and Powell (1983) classify isomorphism concept into three typologies namely: normative isomorphism, coercive and mimetic. Normative isomorphism is explained as the practice where organizations adopt same patterns, processes, structures which aim to enhance professionalism. Professionalization in any system can be facilitated through standardized training to members that would result to sameness of services delivered to customers. Efforts of any organization to bridge service heterogeneity gaps can equally define what normative isomorphism is. Ability of the organization to conform or comply to regulations set out by quality regulatory bodies is viewed to be one of the ways of embracing service or product homogeneity. Coercive isomorphism is described as official and non-official pressures exerted on organization by existing or new legislations. Failure of organizations to conform to these legislations will result to organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Bondy (2009) opines that, coercive isomorphic pressures can trigger an organization to conform to societal laws, norms and values in order to avoid legal costs. Mimetic isomorphism is regarded as efforts of the managers seeking to replace the already existing models of service delivery with new models that tend to address environment uncertainties (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). Mimetic pressure can make organizations reconfigure their models, processes and systems in order to address the diverse needs of the stakeholders. To circumvent costs associated with production of goods and services, organizations can restructure and reconfigure their production processes in order to optimize productivity (Katopol, 2016). On the other hand, Beckert (2010) advanced another taxonomy which he terms as competition. To him, he views institutional change to be driven by competition which other scholars deliberately ignored when operationalizing the isomorphism concept in the organizational context. For the purpose of this study, normative isomorphism was selected from the three taxonomies to test its moderating effect on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty.

Customer loyalty is the consistent habit of customers sticking to a specific product or service produced by a company in the marketplace (Takaro, 2014). It involves the act of customers consistently using one brand over a long period of time without switching to competitor offerings in the market (Birori, 2014). Satisfied customers can convert to opinion leaders who positively influence others to use the same brand (Naidoo, Vannie & Mutinta, 2014). Organization that seeks to maintain customer loyalty should not only invest in product innovation but also strive to realign their marketing strategies with the changing business environment (Akin, 2017). Even though the marketing environment is unpredictable from one sector to another, brand personality strategy complimented by normative isomorphism is investable for organizations operating in the product and service sector (Bhakar, Sher, Shailja & Shilpa, 2012). Similarly, Aaker and Jennifer (1997) assert that for global competitiveness of firms, service or product homogeneity is an inevitable practice across sectors. In this regard, the authors conclude that, despite constraints of standardizing services, organizations in multiple sectors should can only enhance customer loyalty if they are committed in towards maintaining service standards or

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homogeneity. Internal and external forces that influence marketing strategies should be thoroughly evaluated in order to competitiveness of the firm in terms of customer attraction and retention (Thongthip & Polyorat, 2015). Brand personality variable adopted in this study was informed by using self-congruity advanced by Aaker (1997) and normative isomorphism variable was informed by institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

For any country to achieve its economic goals, investment in the higher education sector is key. For Kenya to actualize its Vision 2030, investment in higher education is key. Production of graduates with diverse knowledge and skills to fit in an industrialized economy is viewed as a strategic measure of customer service delivery in the university context (Richard, Fiona & John, 2017). Despite the fact that this is the case, customer service delivery in the university context has been an issue of concern for decades (Owino, 2013). Slow pace of economic growth rate and inability of the university graduates to secure formal employment is attributed to inability of the universities to maintain service delivery standards (World Bank, 2016). Despite development in the higher education sector in Kenya since independence, little is understood on how brand personality strategy can be applied in marketing higher education services from one country to another (Thongthip & Polyorat, 2015). This motivation behind this study was that, the new model adopted would reveal how brand personality complimented normative isomorphism would influence customer loyalty in the university context. The results of this study would also bridge the research gap between brand personality and normative isomorphism on customer loyalty in the university context.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

For any country to accelerate its economic growth, investment in higher education is considered to be the key driver (World Bank, 2016). As the number of the population increases amount countries, rethinking on expanding the higher education service sector is necessary (UNESCO, 2014). Maintaining high standards of customer loyalty among institutions of learning and more specifically public universities is considered to facilitate the growth of the economy directly or indirectly (Magutu, Mbeche, Bitange, Onserio, Nyaanga & Ogoro, 2010). For global competitiveness of organizations, adoption of brand personality can positively influence customer loyalty (Teimouri, Fanae, Jenab, Khouryn & Moslehpour, 2016). Organizations that effectively execute brand personality are likely to enjoy increased market share and profits, customer loyalty and enhances brand image (Wahome & Gathungu). However, other than brand personality, customer loyalty in any organization can be influenced by normative isomorphism practices (Bondy, 2009 & Katopol, 2016).

Despite the commitment of the government of Kenya to enhance customer service delivery in public universities in Kenya, little has been achieved in terms of customer loyalty (Malechwanz & Mbeke, 2016; Magutu et al., 2010). Equally, the Commission for University of Education (2016) asserts that, customer loyalty has been compromised in public universities in Kenya due to increased number of students' enrolment and constraints of funds to invest in capacity development and physical infrastructures such as hostels, libraries, lecture halls. Inability of the graduates to secure jobs in the labour market is an issue of concern to employers, the government, parents, graduates and development partners such as United Nations

(Federation for Kenya Employers, 2018). Despite the efforts of the public universities to produce thousands of the graduates into the labour market annually, more than 50 percent of them are not able to secure any formal employment in the public or private sector for many years (Federation for Kenya Employers, 2018). The high rate of unemployment among the graduates and the slow pace of economic growth rate have been attributes to issues of customer loyalty in public universities (Commission for University Education, 2016). Based on the issues of customer loyalty in the public universities in Kenya, it was on this premise the current study sought to examine the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty. However, it was viewed from marketing literature that, there exist deficiencies in evidence on how brand personality and complimented by normative isomorphism can be used to promote customer loyalty in the university context.

Scholars have revealed a significant influence of isomorphism on organizational survivability (Akani, 2015; DiMaggio et al., 1983; Seyfried, Ansmann & Pohlenz, 2019); however, the studies examined variable of the current in partially and isolation. Further, the studies operationalized variables of the current study using different theories such as resource-based stakeholder, dynamic capability and institutional theories thus theoretical gaps sought to be addressed by the current study. Moreover, the studies were confined to different countries and were skewed towards strategic management discipline contrary to marketing discipline of the current study. Even though brand personality positively influences customer loyalty as viewed from marketing literature (Teimouri et al., 2016; Fateh & Boualem, 2014), a study is yet to be conducted to advance a model that can robustly explain on how normative isomorphism can moderate the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in the university context. Many studies have been undertaken in developed countries examining the application of brand personality strategy in marketing higher education services and mixed results have been reported (Vjollca & Shyle, 2015), thus pertinence of this study.

Previous studies have indicated a positive link between brand personality and customer loyalty (Charraz & Muhammad, 2014; Bouhlel, Mzoughi, Hadiji & Slimane, 2011; Banahene, 2017 & Abdulsattar, 2019); however, the studies have examined variables of the current study partially and in isolation thus making brand personality model (Aaker, 1997) not explicit to explain customer loyalty in the university setting. Further, failure of the studies in examining the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty makes the findings non-generalizable in this study. Despite the fact that most of the studies have appraised brand personality as a predominant factor of customer loyalty, some studies have established differences between brand personality and customer loyalty from one context to another (Abdulsattar, 2019; Richard, Fiona & John, 2017; Abdulsattar, 2019). Nevertheless, the studies were confined to developed economies and their findings cannot be generalized in the developing economies. Further, some studies were limited to tangible products contrary to pure services of this study. Some studies have examined the link between brand personality and purchase intentions (Rubiyanti & Iqbal, 2014), contrary to the integrated approach of the current study.

Studies in Kenya have revealed a positive and significant link between brand personality and brand performance (Mutinda, 2016; Waithaka, 2014; Wahome & Gathungu, 2013); however, the variables of the current study were operationalized and conceptualized differently using brand personality model (Aaker, 1997),

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institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985) of the current study. For instance, Mutinda (2016) measured brand personality using smartphones among university students, Withaka (2014) adopted evolutionary and behavioural theories, while Wahome and Gathungu (2013) measured hospitality services in the tourism sector in Kenya using brand personality. To clear contradictions of the findings of the studies conducted internationally and locally, the current study sought to examine the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty. Theoretical constraints were addressed by the current study adopting self-congruity theory and institutional isomorphism theory to conceptualize and operationalize the variables. Methodological research gaps were addressed by adopting a meta-analysis approach which relied on extensive review of related empirical studies, reports and journal articles to make conclusions and recommendations concerning the phenomena of the current study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The overall objective was to assess the moderating role of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand personality is described by Aaker (1997) as a set of favoured human traits associates to a specific brand name. Numerous studies have applied brand personality model in measuring brand performance (Rubiyanti & Iqbal, 2014; Yasin, Jamotainte & Salami, 2013). However, constraints of operationalizing and conceptualizing constructs of the model are inevitable. Services being intangible in nature, reconfiguration of the model from one context to another is necessary (Teimouri et al., 2016). Rubiyanti and Iqbal (2014) postulate that, consolidated dimensions of brand personality can strongly influence customer purchase intentions unlike the individual intentions. Consolidated brand personality dimensions are revealed to have a strong impact on purchase intentions of tangible products and more specifically smart phones among university studies (Mutinda, 2016); however, the study examined the moderating effect of product involvement on the relationship between brand personality and customer purchase intentions but failed to examine the moderating effect of strategic marketing partnerships on the relationship between brand personality and customer service delivery in the university context. Kotler (2010) acknowledge that organizations operating in multiple sectors can improve their performance by effectively implementing brand personality.

Dimensions of brand personality which involve brand sophistication, competence, sincerity, excitement and ruggedness are recognized as drivers of organizational performance if effectively embraced (Aaker, 1997). Even though there is no consensus among the scholars on the measurement of the five dimensions on business-to-business and business-to-consumer brands (Charraz & Muhammad, 2014), to a larger extent, marketing literature has revealed a significant link between consolidated brand personality perspectives and brand performance (Ewa & Wawrzyniec, 2019). A brand's sophistication is considered to be an aspect that enhances customer service delivery (Ali & Marjan, 2012). The authors contend that brand sophistication can be promoted by integrating state of the art technology in

systems. Automation of service systems and equipping employees with appropriate computer skills can promote brand performance. Similarly, Banahene (2017) demonstrates that adoption of user-friendly systems by organizations as well as using digital platforms to market products and services can give an organization a competitive edge. Brand competence can be demonstrated by organization through training employees to embrace professionalism and good interpersonal relations with key stakeholders of the firm (Aaker & Jennifer, 1997). Organization with highly qualified, experienced and skilled are likely to attract and retain customer. Employee competence is directly correlated with customer loyalty from one organization to another (Abdulsattar, 2019).

Customers are likely to develop strong emotional connectedness with brands in the marketplace if they are provided with sincere information. Fulfilment of customer promises not only enhances customer loyalty but also improved brand equity (Amel, Ayman, Mohamed & Alaa, 2018). Brand excitement is directly correlated with customer service delivery in any organization (Charraz & Muhammad, 2014). The authors assert that, organizations committed to customer centric culture have a competitive edge against their competitors in the market. Excited customer can easily convert into opinion leaders thus attraction and retention of customers. Brand ruggedness can have a significant impact on customer service delivery if effectively managed (Cleff, Dörr, Vicknair & Walter, 2013). The authors opine that, firms committed in developing new products, integrating technology in service delivery, developing human capital and consumer research are likely to remain a head in the competitive industry.

Researchers have investigated the impact of brand personality on performance of products and services (Banahene, 2017; Bouhleb, Mzoughi, Hadiji & Slimane, 2011); However, variables of this study were examined partially and in isolation. For instance, a study by Banahene (2017) treated student self-concept as the moderating variable between brand personality and brand engagement. The research gap of the study was addressed by the current study replacing student self-concept with normative isomorphism and brand engagement was replaced with customer loyalty. Further, the study used a single approach in data analysing contrary to meta-analysis approach of the current study. Whilst a study by Bouhleb et al. (2011) examined the effect of brand personality on purchase intention of mobile phones. The study focused on tangible products with sensory confirmation perspectives contrary to higher education services of the current study which are described as pure services. Scholars have demonstrated that for global competitiveness of firms, responding to isomorphic pressures such as normative, coercive and mimetic is inevitable. For sustainable competitiveness, organizational leaders should seek to realign their strategies with changing business trends. In the changing business environment attributed to technological disruptions, influence of globalization, change of consumer needs and change of industry regulations, large and small organizations should always review their strategies in order to remain relevant in the business contexts (Popadiuk, Rivera & Bataglia, 2014; Seyfried, Ansmann & Pohlenz, 2019; Wobodo, Asawo & Asawo, 2017; Katopol, 2016; Gichuke & Okello, 2015; Gabriel & Arbolo, 2015). The studies conclude that, legitimacy of the organization is dependent on product redesign, process and system improvement. However, the studies were skewed towards strategic management contrary to marketing discipline of the current study. The studies disregarded examining the effect of brand personality on customer loyalty in a moderated manner. For sustainable competitiveness of the universities, standardizing products or services is inevitable (Wambu, 2011). This study sought to address the

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methodological gaps of the studies by adopting a meta-analysis approach which provided an opportunity to assess results of comparable studies, overcome limitation of sample size, instruments and biasness of individual studies. Further, meta-analysis approach was preferred because it facilitated the researcher to review statistical data from multiple scientific studies to solve the same problem.

Many scholars have revealed a significant link between brand personality and customer loyalty but not none of them attempted to examine the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in the university context (Khian et al., 2017; Richard et al., 2017; Amel et al., 2018; Sanjay, 2015 & Mutinda, 2016). However, it is observed the studies were confined to different contexts and different methodologies thus constraints of generalizing their findings from one context to another. For instance, a study by Khian et al. (2017) was limited to banking sector in Malaysia, a study by Richard et al. (2017) was undertaken in the United Kingdom and adopted a linear regression method contrary to meta-analysis, Amel et al. (2018) carried their study in Egypt and exploratory research design was adopted to select respondents, a study by Mutinda (2016) was undertaken in the university context in Kenya and postgraduate students were used as respondents contrary to meta-analysis of the current study which relied on a combined review of statistical results from multiple studies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Brand personality model (1997) and institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) were used to inform the variables of the study as demonstrated in **Figure 1**. The five dimensions used to measure the independent variable (brand personality) are: brand sophistication, competence, sincerity, excitement, ruggedness. The moderating variable (normative isomorphism) was measured using standardized employee training and standardized adherence to quality assurance regulations while the dependent variable (customer service delivery) is evaluated using positive word of mouth, customer referrals, profits and volume of sales.

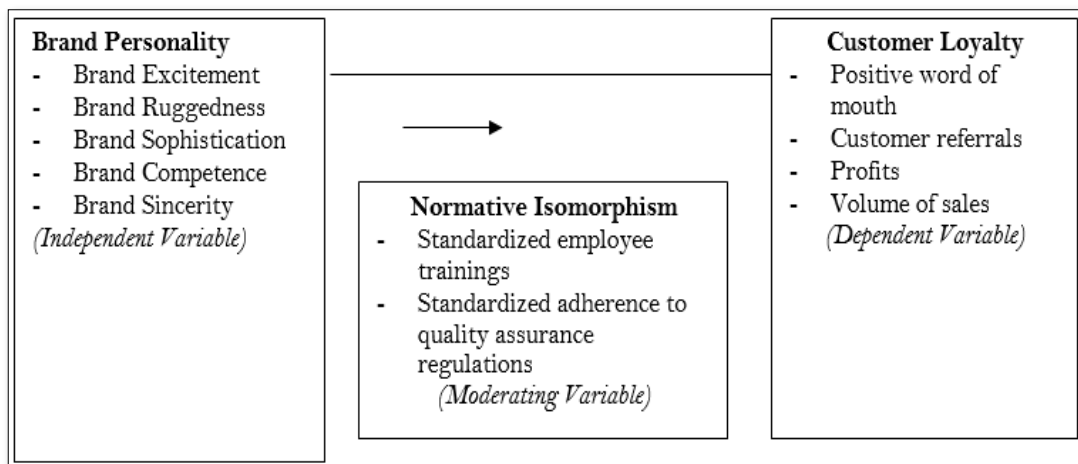


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

CONCEPTUAL HYPOTHESIS

Based on the theoretical logic, the subsequent hypothesis was formulated from the conceptual framework shown in **Figure 1**:

H₀₁: There is no significant moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted exploratory research design which facilitated discovery of new knowledge by determining the extent to which aggregated findings of related existing statistical studies can effectively explain the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya. Principles of exploratory research design were applied to explain the relationship between variables of the study in an integrated manner. The approach of data collection in this study was purely desktop research. Relevant materials in relation to brand personality and customer loyalty were extensively reviewed to: Reports, journal articles, books, conference papers and reports published between 1983 and 2019 were evaluated. Conclusions and recommendation were derived by critically examining multiple statistical results of quantitative studies conducted. The review of existing literature was conducted in accordance to protocols and guidelines recommended in statistical literature. Journal articles, reports, theses, projects that assessed brand personality on customer loyalty were included while published literature of the contrary view were excluded. For precision of findings, journals published in peer-reviewed journal were prioritized in the review process. For qualitative studies, key themes of transformative leadership such as individualized, motivational and intellectual inspiration were evaluated and matched with the findings of the current study as well as contrast were made in relation the findings. For quantitative studies, statistics such as mean scores, standard deviation, coefficient of variation and r-square were evaluated with an aim of ascertaining the statistical link between transformative leadership dimensions and organizational competitiveness. Specifically, studies which comprised significance values less than 0.05 when a relationship effect was tested between the variables helped to make a conclusion that there exists a positive link between transformative leadership and public university competitiveness.

FINDINGS

Out of the 52 papers reviewed, it was generally revealed that transformative leadership practices such as individualized, motivational and intellectual inspiration had a positive and significant impact on competitiveness of public universities in Kenya. Although there existed constraints of operationalizing and conceptualizing variables of the current study from one context to another, it was generally concluded that, university competitiveness is positively influenced by transformative leadership. A direct and indirect link between brand personality, normative isomorphism and customer loyalty was confirmed across sectors. Out of the 52 papers reviewed, it was hypothesized that there exists a significant moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya. The quantitative statistics such as mean scores, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation and r-square of the

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majority of the papers reviewed supported the alternative hypothesis of the current study. For most of the papers reviewed, a Likert scale types of measurement was used to measure items of the instruments where, 5 denoted strongly agree and 1 denoted strongly disagree. However, after comprehensive review of the papers, mean scores greater 3 were noted thus indicating a significant link between brand personality and customer loyalty. Further, isomorphism was found to influence organizational survivability. By using R-square, it was revealed that there existed a positive significant link between variables of the current study. In fact, the significance value for most of the papers reviewed was less than 0.05, implying a significant relationship between variables of the current study. Using coefficient of variations, it was also established that brand personality and normative isomorphism had a significant influence on customer loyalty. Subsequently, a summary of the findings is depicted in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Analytical interpretation of data.

Total Numbers of Papers Reviewed	Objective	Hypothesis	Analysis Technique	Interpretation	Conclusion
52	To determine the moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in among public universities in Kenyan	H ₀₁ : There is no significant moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya.	Content Analysis	A positive influence between variables was confirmed if the mean scores of the study reviewed ranged between the critical value of 3.00-5.00 and vice versa A positive link was confirmed between variables if the significance values of individual variable was less than 0.05 and vice versa	Null hypothesis was rejected and a conclusion drawn that there is a significant moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya.

Source: Literature Review

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that brand personality complimented with strategic marketing partnerships can positively improve customer service delivery in the university context. The results of this study suggest that brand personality complimented by normative isomorphism can positively enhance customer loyalty

among public universities in Kenya. In this study, normative isomorphism identified to positively moderate the link between brand personality and customer loyalty in the university context are standardized employee training and standardized adherence to quality assurance regulations. This position is supported by (Popadiuk, Rivera & Bataglia, 2014; Seyfried, Ansmann & Pohlenz, 2019; Wobodo, Asawo & Asawo, 2017) who concluded that customer loyalty in any organization is promoted by readiness of the organizations to embrace versatile strategies that can proactively address isomorphic pressures. The authors identified that firms that engaged in restructuring, rebranding, change management, product redesign and integrated technologies in service delivery can positively experience a significant improvement in customer loyalty.

The findings of this study contribute to theory by adding to brand personality model (Aaker, 1997) and institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The results of this study imply that customer loyalty in the university context can be enhanced using the indirect path of normative isomorphism and complimented with brand personality. Marketing of higher education services can be effectively promoted by using principles of the theories. However, despite other scholars have extensively applied the theories in evaluating different products and services from one context to another (Melchorita, 2013; Russo & Cesarani, 2017; Fateh & Boualem, 2014; Khan & Haque, 2012), it is noted from the studies that research on normative isomorphism in the university context is understudied thus the need for future researchers to develop explicit and robust models that effectively describe the direct and indirect effect of normative isomorphism on customer loyalty from one context to another. Considering the fact that there is no agreement on the specific definition and metrics to measure nor mative isomorphism from one context to another, future studies should seek to redefine the institutional isomorphism theory in order to find a better model that effectively explains customer loyalty in the university context.

CONCLUSION

This study identified that, normative isomorphism positively moderates the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya. The findings of this study depict that principles of institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) can be effectively applied to market higher education service in the university context. The findings demonstrate that customer s loyalty in the university context can be improved if the universities are in a position to recognize the role of normative isomorphism practices such as standardized employee training and adherence to quality assurance regulations set out by quality regulatory bodies such as Commission for University Education (CUE). From brand personality theory (Aaker, 1997) and institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), it can be deduced that brand sophistication, competence, ruggedness sincerity and excitement can directly influence customer loyalty. Similarly, brand personality complimented by normative isomorphism practices such as standardized training and adherence to quality assurance regulation set out by CUE. For global competitiveness of public universities in in the ever-changing marketing environment, emphasize on brand personality and normative isomorphism practices is key.

CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND POLICY

The findings of the current study validate the existing theories in marketing literature and expands knowledge to institutional theory. This study reveals that, despite multi-dimensionality of the brand personality construct, brand personality (Aaker, 1997) and institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) can effectively adopted to explain customer loyalty in the university context. However, some scholars have suggested the reconfiguration of the brand personality for better explanation of customer loyalty in the university context. The findings of this study extend new knowledge on how brand personality and normative isomorphism practices can be applied to promote customer loyalty in the university context. Investment on brand personality by university management complimented with normative isomorphism can strongly enhance customer loyalty in the university context. Positive word of mouth, increased number of student referral and increased revenue collection are some of the aspects that can be used to measure customer loyalty in the public university context when brand personality and normative isomorphism are effectively embraced. The government of Kenya would use this information to formulate policies that promote customer loyalty. Appreciation of brand personality strategy and normative isomorphism by policy makers would facilitate development and implementation of policies that enhance customer loyalty in the university context. The findings would help the government prioritize the role of enhancing economic growth through maintaining high standards of customer service delivery in public universities by using integrated marketing approaches rather than the conventional linear approaches of marketing.

CONTRIBUTION TO MARKETING MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

The findings of this study will help universities managers appreciate the indirect role of normative isomorphism complimented by brand personality on customer loyalty in the university context. University managers would have an in-depth understanding on how to improve customer loyalty using a direct and indirect path of normative isomorphism practices complimented with brand personality. University managers would appreciate the role of consolidated brand personality dimensions on promoting customer loyalty the university context. Emphasize on brand personality perspectives; brand sophistication, ruggedness, sincerity, excitement and competence is considered to influence customer loyalty in the university context if complemented by normative isomorphism practices such standardized employee trainings and standardized adherence to quality assurance regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that normative isomorphism positively moderates that relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty among public universities in Kenya. However, for enhanced customer loyalty in the university context, university managers should jointly use brand personality normative isomorphism in marketing higher education services. Managers of public universities in Kenya should develop approaches that appreciate the integrated methods of enhancing customer loyalty rather than using linear conventional marketing approaches which are less effective.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH FRONTIERS

The findings of this study were limited by constraining of operationalizing the moderating role of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in the university context in Kenya. The current study suggests that future researchers should seek to develop novel frameworks anchored on different theories other than theories used in this study to provide a better explanation on the direct and indirect moderating effect of normative isomorphism on the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in the university context. Future researchers should seek to adopt robust statistical analysis methods such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to unravel the on how normative isomorphism practices can effectively explain customer loyalty from one context to another. Considering the fact that this study sought to measure brand personality views of individual students to measure customer loyalty, it is appropriate for future researchers to use both interview schedules and structured questionnaires to collect data. Exploratory or and mixed research designs are also recommended contrary to the cross-sectional research design of the current study which heavily relied on existing literature. Exploratory research design would result to development of a completely novel theory that can give a better explanation on how brand personality and normative isomorphism can be used to enhance customer loyalty in the university context.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors of the paper have no competing interest.

CONTRIBUTION

The authors acknowledge that the results of the study contribute significantly to the world of scholars, researchers, educators and marketing management practitioners.

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