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INFLUENCE OF BRAND EQUITY ON FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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Abstract

This study sought to examine how brand equity influence financial performance of mobile telecommunication in Nairobi, Kenya. The population of the study comprised of two thousand seven hundred and fifty subscribers distributed across four mobile telecommunication firms. The study adopted mixed methods research design. Convenience sampling, stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires while secondary data was obtained from financial statements. Data was summarized and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics methods. The research findings indicate that brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness and brand association have a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms implying that the stronger the brand equity the stronger financial performance of the firms. It was concluded that there is potential to enhance financial performance by addressing *elements of concern to subscribers such as pricing, variety of products and services, reliability of network services amongst other issues which directly improves brand equity. It is recommended that mobile phone service providers invest more in new product development initiatives, improve their network systems to enhance reliability, invest further in branding, advertising & promotions and address issues of pricing in respect to benefits.*

Keywords: Brand equity, Financial performance, Telecommunication firms, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Firms are continuously faced with challenges in their operating environment, key amongst these challenges are increased globalization and competition. This has necessitated adoption of various strategies to compete and this includes focus on branding with the objective of building strong brand equity as sustainable competitive edge over its rivals in the industry. Evans, Berman (2008) defines brand equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service of a firm.” Brand equity concept refers to a marketing concept that describes a brand’s value. This value arises from the consumers’ perceptions and experiences as they interact with the brand and its environment. According to Jobber (2004), brand equity value can be positive or negative and determines the relative performance of the brand in the market. Positive brand equity exists where the consumers both users and potential users think highly of a brand while negative value exists where a brand consistently underperforms in terms of consumer expectations to a point where it is recommended for avoidance. Positive brand equity is inferred to mean strong brand equity and brands with strong brand equity are characterized by a customer base that is loyal to the brand and cannot be persuaded to switch to competing brands. Marketing practitioners therefore endeavor to build strong brand equity to attract and retain customers.

According to Evans, Berman (2008), key objective of every firm is to develop brand loyalty which enables firms to maximize sales and maintain strong brand equity. Brand loyalty is built over a long period of time as the brand grows from conception through the stages of introduction, growth and eventually maturing. In this process, the brand value is determined based on the perception of consumers and their actual behavior towards the brand. As the marketing mix is executed, the brand interacts and associates with the consumers and the public at large through various media, forums, personal interaction etc. This allows the consumers to develop associations that are either positive or negative and assist in determining how they behave towards the brand (Jobber, 2004). Genesis of perceived customer value can be traced to positive association that leads to product brand trial, brand purchase and repeat brand purchase. Customers' perceived benefits from brand usage far exceed the sacrificial costs associated with acquiring the brand.

Strong brand equity is important to firms as asserted by Jobber (2004). It enhances the value of proprietary firm and facilitates positive effects on the way consumers perceive a brand and thus elicits favorable consumer behavior. Brand equity bestows companies with the opportunity to carry out successful brand extensions which is an important function for business continuity and increasing revenues, and growing profitability levels. Strong brand equity further facilitates firms to create a competitive edge by creating a barrier to effects of competing firms especially those with weak brand equity.

Brand equity is perhaps the most important asset to a firm as argued by Kardes, Cline, Cronley (2011). This calls for a deliberate effort by marketing practitioners to continuously engage in the process of creating brands and strengthening them in consumers' minds. The process of creating strong brand equity starts with establishment of brand identity which typically involves brand name, packaging design, logo, product attributes, product usage and product benefits amongst other traits. This accords the consumer an opportunity to interact, feel and experience the brand through its product lines. The next step is to establish brand meaning which is basically what the brand promises and stands for in the face of the consumer. The third step entails eliciting consumer responses from the target consumer and this involves feelings, thoughts, reactions, emotions towards the brand based on their interaction. Final step is to build a strong relationship between the brand and the consumers. This takes long and success is determined by goodwill attached to the brand that is the brand equity.

Brand equity can be said to be the aggregate of assets and liabilities associated with a brand name which culminates in a relationship with its consumers reflected in the way they perceive, feel and act towards the brand. This has an effect on the brand's sales, distribution, price, demand, market share, revenues amongst other variables at the firm level and branding can be exploited by firms as an option in creating sustainable competitive advantage by building strong brand equity.

Scholars and marketing practitioners have identified various components that are used to represent brand equity construct. The variance in number of components is based on area of application of brand equity concept, product category or service. As much as there could be very many variables used to represent brand equity concept, there is general agreement that the most important components are five and these include brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand proprietary assets. According to Keller and Kevin Lane (2003), different approaches are used to measure brand equity at either consumer or firm level. Some of the factors used at firm level include sales volume, revenue, price commanded, cash flow and profit and these are associated with fifth component. The first four components are based on Consumer's perception are generally referred to as customer-based brand equity (CBBE) dimensions. The study adopted consumer-based brand equity approach concept to measure influence of brand equity variables on financial performance in mobile telecommunications sector in Kenya. The study sought to highlight how brand equity variables influence a brand's overall brand equity that determines the extent to which firms are able to achieve financial performance in terms of revenues. It is presumed that strong brand equity influences good financial performance in the market and similarly, weak brand equity influences poor financial performance. Financial performance is reflected at the financial level through operating incomes, profitability level and other operational indicators that are entrenched in a firm's corporate strategy as annual objectives.

Mobile Telecommunications Sector

According to Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) report (2014/15), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry development has driven global economic development in extraordinary way. Advancements in technology, infrastructure and fair pricing is attributed to the rapid growth in ICT enabling increased connectivity to billions of people around the world. By the end of 2014, the number of mobile subscriptions was 7 billion across the globe. In Sub-Saharan Africa, mobile telephony continues to revolutionize the uptake of ICT services such as mobile broadband and mobile money transfer services. In respect to mobile money uptake, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of mobile money accounts. In East African nations, 50% of the mobile phone subscribers have mobile money accounts with the majority being in Kenya.

According to World Bank reports, Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been growing at an average of 5.44% between 2004 and 2018. Amongst key contributors to this growth is the information and communications sector. One of the key contributing sub-sectors is mobile telecommunications which has key players such as Safaricom Kenya Limited, Airtel Networks Kenya Limited, Telkom Kenya Limited (Orange) and Finserve Kenya Limited (Equitel). According to Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) report (2016/17), by the end of June 2017, the number of mobile subscriptions stood at 40.2 million. Safaricom had the largest share of subscriptions with 72.6 %, followed by Airtel with 15.3 %, Orange 7.2% and Finserve 4.6%. These firms in mobile telecommunications sector are competing and fighting for consumers by offering their products and services to win consumers. This is done through innovation and branding of their product and service offers, branded customer service centres, branded promotional and advertising activities, offering attractive pricing mechanisms, rolling out new products and services amongst other activities.

Branding and Financial Performance in Mobile Telecommunication

Branding in Kenya's telecommunication sector continues to evolve with increased competition across the value chain. Branding refers to the process of developing a distinct products or services through use of brand name, logo, design, packaging, colours, or any other product or service features unique to seller's goods compared to its competitors

Mobile telecommunication firms endeavor to build strong brand equity through new product development, investment in telecommunications infrastructure, rebranding, brand extensions, advertising and promotional activities, establishment of customer service centres, enhancing dealership network, continued reviewed of tariffs amongst other activities. These marketing executions are implemented with a view to elicit a strong and positive consumer response to their products and service in respect to competing brands which leads to strong brand equity. Consumers respond differently to different stimuli, messages, products, services and elicit varied and diverse responses in terms of brand associations, attitudes, memory, usage etc. that determines their cognitive perception and behavior towards given brands and thus determining their performance in the market. This is important to marketers because it's a means to track and evaluate results of branding activities. Keller and Lane (2003), asserts that brand tracking process is important in understanding level of investment, where to invest and effective ways of investing in marketing activities to win the mind of consumer and subsequently determine their action towards a brand in terms of sales level, market share, operating incomes and profitability. Market share measured in percentage or value can be used to reflect outcome of marketing activities. Figure 1 indicates percentage market shares as at end of June 2017.

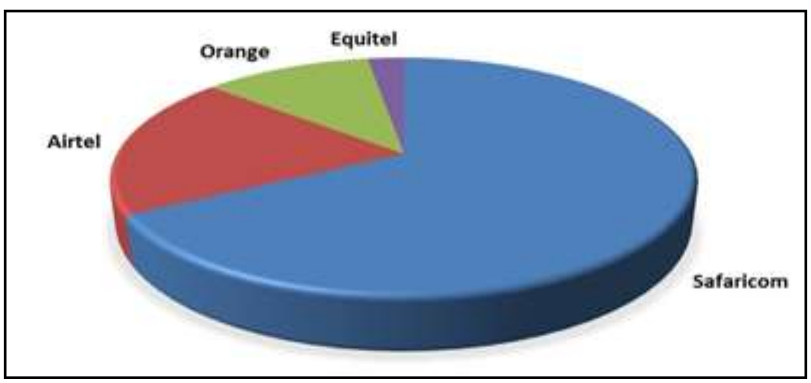

Figure 1: Mobile Network Services Market Share per Operator

Source: (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2017).

Key activities associated with advertising in mobile telecommunications sector include mainstream advertising in television, digital media, print media and radio. Key promotional activities include consumer promotions, dealer promotions, and sponsorship events amongst other activities. Other notable initiatives by firms in mobile telecommunications sector include wall branding, distributors and agents' shops branding and setting up of well branded customer service centres. The final and perhaps the most important function of marketing is new product development and innovation which concerns itself with the task of generating new products and services, rebranding and extending current portfolio to ensure continuity and growth in business. The level of marketing investment based on individual firm's strategy, however the most visible and attractive segment is money transfer and payment platform, emerging as m-commerce platform. Most commercial banks who have been collaborating with mobile phone companies in money transfer and payments, however banks have now up with their own money transfer/payment platforms to wade off competition from mobile firms. Banks feel threatened from revenue perspective and in one way or another they lose potential earnings to mobile phone firms. According to Communications Authority of Kenya reports, commercial banks are in the process of developing a cheap and fast money transfer process within customers who operate bank accounts.

Firm financial performance for purposes of this study means the level or extent to which a firm is able to achieve it financial goals. It is how well a firm is able to generate revenues by utilizing its assets and amongst these assets is brand equity classified as an intangible asset. Financial performance is used as a general measure or indicator of a firm's financial health over a given time frame and can be used to compare similar firms, industry or sector performance through comparison or aggregation. Measurement of firm performance is often a subject of discussion, especially non-financial measures that are subjective. However, there is consensus that goals set by organizations are results and outcomes for firm performance and there are several dimensions that influence firm's financial and non-financial performance such as staff, management, production, distribution, sales and marketing amongst other variables (Grannell & Chris, 2009).

Although different firms use different approaches to measure firm performance, the most widely used and accepted approach is financial approach that utilizes key operating parameters commonly referred to as key performance indicators (KPIs) such as revenues, turnover, market share, gross profit, net profit and return on investment amongst other variables (Bagorogoza & Waal, 2010). Profitability measures uses monetary unit and applies the generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) to measure profitability through evaluation of total revenue generated against expense used to generate it. Profitability measures include operating income (OI), contribution margin or gross profit (GP) margin and net profit before tax (NPBT).

Financial performance measures are at the firm level and it is an outcome of other factors that include brand equity that arises from effect of marketing activities on consumers. There could be other factors that also positively impact on firm performance such as strategy, staff and management. The objective of this study was to determine level of financial performance that is influenced by brand equity in mobile telecommunications firms. Operating income and total assets were used by this study to measure financial performance as a result of brand equity. This was correlated with the overall brand equity that is determined by various brand equity dimensions.

Statement of the Problem

Brand equity studies gained prominence amongst scholars from the year 1990s, with various studies across all continents covering selected products and service sectors, with most studies on consumer-based brand equity dimensions and their influence on brand equity. Documented studies include sectors such as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), airlines, sportswear and universities amongst others. Locally, studies done on brand equity and related areas include Ali (2014), Andai (2014), Asuma (2015), Charanah and Njuguna (2015) on various sectors and categories. Mumbi (2014) did an empirical study on consumer perception on mobile phone brands that focused on Nokia and Samsung handsets' performance. Other documented Studies done on brand equity were on various diverse sectors and little has been done in telecommunications sector in Kenya on brand equity especially a study on mobile firms involved in provision of mobile telecommunication services and drives the sector and therefore there are gaps in brand equity research covering mobile telecommunication service providers. Current challenges in this sector continued staff layoffs, retrenchments, firm exits amongst others.

To address challenges in performance, the study sought to understand the influence of brand equity on financial performance in mobile telecommunications sector and fill existing gaps in research with a holistic approach on brand equity. The study sought to answer the research question "What is the influence of brand equity on financial performance in mobile telecommunications firms?" This led to a better understanding on how strong customer loyalty, improved brand association, improved perceived quality and creating high brand awareness can lead to generally strong brand equity that subsequently improve operating incomes and acceptable profit levels. It is presumed that if the firms facing challenges in performance improve their brand building, they will create stronger brand equity that will significantly influence growth in sales, market share, revenues and subsequently improved financial performance that will lead to improved operational performance.

Objectives of the Study

i. To examine influence of brand loyalty on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

ii. To establish influence of perceived quality on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

iii. To determine influence of brand awareness on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

iv. To identify influence of brand association on financial performance of mobile telecommunications firms.

Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: Brand loyalty has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

H_{02}: Perceived quality has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

H_{03}: Brand awareness has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

H_{04}: Brand association has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Equity and Financial Performance concepts

According to Kotler, Keller (2006), brand equity is defined as added value endowed to products and services. Brand equity can also be defined on basis of effect and outcomes of a product or service with a brand name in comparison with those that do not bear brand names Keller 2003). Based on these definitions, it is important for marketing practitioners and firms to understand how they can apply this brand equity concept to develop value in their brands that translates to achievement of marketing objectives such as sales and market share which in turn can be articulated in financial performance of a firm. It is critical to determine how this concept can be developed through investment in marketing activities such as branding, advertising and promotional activities, distribution and selling activities etc.

These activities constitute factors or dimensions that influence brand equity concept and is viewed as the framework or interphase that consumers and customers interact with a firm's products and services and therefore provide a basis for judging the strength or weakness of a brand from consumer's perspective. Outcome of this relationship has a causal effect on sales and market share of a brand and subsequently the financial performance of a firm. For purposes of this study, the researcher seeks to review relationship between brand equity dimensions and firm performance by using already developed dimensions, adopting the generally accepted methods to determine influence of brand equity dimensions on mobile telecommunications sector with respect to their financial performance. As asserted by Kotler and Keller (2003), brand equity is an important intangible asset that has psychological and financial value to the firm.

Based on CBBE concept, there are four variables namely brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty. These variables work in tandem to determine how strong or weak the equity can be. These brand dimensions are often viewed as brand assets or liabilities based on consumers' minds. These assets are often represented by variables for instance brand awareness by use brand recognition and brand recall. Strong brand equity is inferred when a brand has high levels of awareness especially top of mind awareness that is determined by spontaneous recall and association of the brand to the category that leads to high sales, market share, revenue and profitability. Similarly, low brand awareness is attributed to weak brands and subsequent low market share, sales, revenues and profitability. Brand equity dimensions of loyalty, association and perceived quality has the same effect on brand equity. The stronger and the more positive these dimensions are, the stronger the brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Brand equity is viewed as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm/or to that firm's customers (Keller, 1998).

Most studies point out that brand equity variables have significant and positive effect on brand equity. Depending on the sector, product or service they could be more variables to be considered. It is further postulated that brand equity variables may have relationship amongst themselves and this has been confirmed in several studies. Brand dimension variables have varying levels of importance and similarly varying levels of influence on brand equity. This is determined by product, service or sector that is being studied. This study sought to adopt and use locally suitable dimensions for local mobile brands to measure their brand equity and how they affect firm's performance in terms of sales turnover (operating income). The dimensions that the study measured were derived based on local mobile phone customers' experiences, interactions and reactions to various mobile phone firms marketing activities. The dimensions were linked to the four variables that determined brand equity relative strength as explained in subsequent literature.

Perceived Quality and Financial Performance

It is defined as customers' perception of the overall quality or superiority of the product or service with respect to its intended purpose relative to its alternatives. It is important to note that perceived quality may not be determined objectively because the concept of quality is a summary construct (Kumar, 2007). In recent years the concept of perceived quality is viewed from the perspective of customer perceived value (CPV). Kotler and Keller (2006) asserts that due to continued competitiveness in the market, perceived value could be enhanced by increasing levels of functional and emotional benefits and reducing levels of associated costs in a brand with respect to competition and thus enhancing performance of the firm. This is associated with strengthening brand equity of a brand and similarly the strength of a brand could be reduced if the benefits are declining with respect to costs in the eyes of consumers. Therefore, in practice, brands interact with consumers through usage and experiences, advertising and promotional platforms, selling and distribution as well as through personal recommendations such as word of mouth. This forms the basis for consumers to judge a brand's quality based on their own perceptions which enhances firm financial performance (Kumar, 2007).

Based on the above understanding of relationship between brand equity and perceived quality, the following dimensions of product performance, reliability, customer service, customer value and product features were used by this study to link perceived quality as a variable for brand equity to examine its effect on financial performance. Perceived quality adds value to a brand and it includes the customer's verdict on its performance compared to its competitors. Brands perceived to be of superior performance enhances brand equity. Performance has an effect on how customers classify a product or a brand from their perspective (Aaker, Joachimsthaler, 2000). Brands that earn trust from customers are preferred even if prices are higher compared to its competitors (He, Wang, 2014). Customers perceive the product's value based on its benefits which, in turn, is influenced by the product's performance, features, quality, warranties, packaging and labeling (Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen, 2008).

Brands that do well in the market are often augmented in a way consumers feel and experience relevance, unique added benefits. Long term positive experience with a brand through usage leads to added values, familiarity and reliability which subsequently builds perceived high quality. Added values are derived from usage, labelling, brand positioning amongst other sources. This leads to that belief that a brand is effective in delivering its promise for example promised satisfaction and delivered uniform and consistent quality can be alluded to on pack design that clearly showcases the brand elements and manufacturer in the most reputable way and in line with consumer expectations (Bradley 1995, 517–519; de Chernatony – McDonald 1992, 18–19; Doyle 1998, 169–170; Jones 1986, 30–31). Strong brands with respect to perceived quality construct are able to successfully carry out brand extensions compared to weaker brands (Aaker 1991).

High quality customer service levels is an integral part of enhancing perceived quality in building strong brand equity. This is achieved through satisfaction of customer needs and Ako-Nai (2011) asserts that it is one of the biggest concerns for businesses today. Customer service is defined generally as deliberate series of activities put in place to enhance customers' satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is perceived state or feeling that a brand, product or service has met customer's expectation. Perceived high quality customer service is built in a brand through clear understanding of customer expectations and setting in place mechanisms to deliver the expectations consistently and better than competing brands. It employs use of distinct product benefits, strong brand communication, consistent and integrated advertising and promotional messages supported by strong personal and interpersonal skills amongst key staff. Canny (2014) confirms that employee's professional conduct, knowledge and skills are important elements to create superior customer service. This greatly enhances the value of a brand by creating strong perceived quality of a product or service.

Brand Awareness and Financial Performance

Brand equity building process starts with creation of brand awareness which refers to the ability of a potential consumer/buyer to identify and refer a brand to its product category. It is the extent a brand or its elements such as packaging, logo and advertising can be recalled by consumers and associating with its product category. This means that the consumers are cognizant of the brand and can easily be associated with specific products or category. It is important to establish a link between the brand and product class in determining brand awareness and further it should be evaluated in a continuum ranging from uncertain feeling that the brand is recognized to a belief that the brand is the only one in product category (Kracklauer, Quinn Mills & Seifert, 2004). Brand awareness is said to exist when the consumer have a deep and specific image of the product in mind (Zhuowei, Liping, 2015). This leads to spontaneous awareness that is associated to brands that are associated to their categories and the higher the spontaneous awareness the strong the brand equity.

Brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition denotes prior exposure of brand elements when one is given the brand cue and this type of awareness is commonly referred to as prompted awareness. This requires the consumers to be in a position to correctly differentiate brand as seen or heard before. This measures the minimal level of brand awareness and it is achieved through an aided recall assessment. Brand recognition is key particularly at the point of purchase when consumer needs to make purchase decision especially inside a store. Brand recall refers to level of awareness to retrieve brand information when given cues on brand or product category and is based on unaided brand recall and usually brands that pass brand recall test enjoy what is referred to as top of mind awareness (TOM). According to Keller (2003), brand awareness is characterized on basis of depth and breadth. Depth refers to likelihood a brand or its elements will come to mind at ease. Brands that are easily recognized have deeper level of awareness compared to those that can only just be recognized. Breath in brand awareness relate to assortment of purchase and usage situations which aid consumers to recall a brand and usually this is based on the organization of brand and product knowledge in memory.

Brand awareness can be said to be the catalyst for the other brand equity dimensions and financial performance of a firm. It constitutes an important part of brand equity and the higher the level of brand awareness the higher the chances of a particular brand being preferred in respect to its competitors (Kracklauer, Quinn Mills & Seifert, 2004). Equally, brands with high brand awareness levels tends to have good packaging designs, good advertising and promotional activities resonate well with its target consumers, and the combined effects of brand awareness subsequently translates to high sales and high market share for an organization leading to improved financial performance (Jones & Taylor, 2007).

Brand awareness inspire confidence even amongst consumers and leads to other elements of brand equity such as brand association and brand loyalty. Brand awareness further reinforces consumer perception of quality aspects. Brands with high brand awareness tend to enhance perceived quality of “well known” brands and it is generally accepted that this leads to better financial performance. This relationship between brand equity dimensions has been proven in previous research studies, however the proposed study is interested in specifically determining the influence of brand awareness dimension on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms (Hsin Hsin & Ya Ming, 2009).

Various studies have been done on measurement of brand awareness as a dimension of brand equity. Most used brand dimensions to measure brand awareness include brand recognition and brand recall which affects performance of organization in terms of sales volume (Jones, Tim, Shirley, Taylor & Harvir, 2008). Chang, and Liu (2009) advocates for use of balanced non-criteria scale to measure brand awareness. They prescribe use of category to prompt consumer brand awareness that is rated into a balanced scale which is reliable and more valid. The study used the same approach to measure brand awareness in mobile telecommunications sector in Kenya.

Brand Association and Financial Performance

Brand association generally means anything that consumers think or relate to a given brand. This linkage is mental and many elements of the brand such as product attributes, product uses, life style, product class, its competitors and country of origin of the brand. Brand association is any mental linkage to the brand and refers to how consumers' perceptions in respect to a brand are reflected and stored in their memory. This is how individual consumers give meaning and value to brands based on individual interactions and experiences with the brand and its elements in general resulting in visual pictures and images of the brand. Interaction and experiences arise when consumers are exposed to a brand's advertising, when they buy and use the brand and when they are told by others about the brand. Aaker (1991) asserts that in situations where brand associations are not important to choosing a particular brand, they help reassure customers and minimize the motive to try other brands. In day to day brand management, the role of brand custodians is usually to try influence the brand's position in consumer's mind and key objective is to achieve a favorable position for the brand that results in positive brand association that is distinct and unique to the brand relative to competition thus enhancing improved financial performance of the firm (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Brand association can be measured and levels of association determined in terms of strength. Brand association is important because favorable brand associations are useful to the firm because they lead to repeat sales and more brand referrals. Brand association influence the processing and recall of information by consumers, it enables a brand to be differentiated and gives reason why it should be bought. Brand association just like brand loyalty further generates positive attitudes and feelings that justifies brand extension. Yoo and Donthu (2001) asserts that although brand association may be weak in brand choice, they greatly influence purchase behavior and determine consumer satisfaction and enhance firm performance.

Brand association can be identified through classes of association which are mainly brand attributes, brand benefits and brand attitudes. Attributes refers to product features that describes and distinguishes a product or service thus directly relating to a specific brand. Attributes can be distinguished according to how directly they relate to product or service performance. Further, attributes can be classified into product-related and non-product-related attributes (Keller 2003). Product related attributes includes what makes up the product, while non-product attributes are attributes associated with its purchase or consumption. Second type of brand association is brand benefits which refers to personal value and meaning that consumers assign to the product or service. This is further divided into functional benefits, experiential benefits, and symbolic benefits based on underlying motivation. The third type of brand association is brand attitudes which refers to how the overall evaluation of a brand by consumers and is more abstract compared to brand attributes and benefits. Brand association perhaps a more important aspect since it forms the basis for consumers' action and behavior towards a given brand and this has a direct impact to the financial performance of organization and brand positioning (Buil, de Chernatony & Martinez, 2008).

Brand association can vary according the extent of favorability, strength and uniqueness in the eyes of the consumer. Favorability is achieved to the extent of in which a brand attributes are perceived to be superior and leads to good performance, similarly positive brand benefits experienced all lead to favorable brand attitudes which lead to strong brand association in the memory of consumers that gives a brand an edge over its competitors (Buil, de Chernatony & Martinez, 2008). This leads strong favorable evaluated brand associations that are exclusive to the brand and can be inferred to mean brand superiority and thus strong brand equity. This is inferred to have an effect on financial performance of an organization. To bring out this variable of brand equity, the study used the dimensions of product/service attributes, customer benefits and brand attitude to measure the favorability or strength of brand association as brand equity variable.

Brand Loyalty and Financial Performance.

Brand loyalty is used to infer a favorable consumer behavior towards a given brand that leads to continued use of the same brand over a long period of time. According to Skogland and Siguaw (2004), brand loyalty refers to the ability of the brand to attract, retain and grow its customer base over a long period of time. Taylor, Celuch and Goodwin, (2004) affirms that brand loyalty particularly behavioral loyalty has an effect on brand equity. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) proposed a brand loyalty model that outlines purchase loyalty leads to more market share while attitudinal loyalty leads to higher premiums on pricing. In today's ever competitive environment, firms strive to attract, retain and grow loyal customers. It is no longer enough to satisfy customers since every competitor is able to achieve the same and therefore it is imperative to go a step further and create a customer base that is delighted and loyal to a firm's brands. This is important to brand equity since a firm can in future consider brand extensions based on strong brand loyalty. Marketing practitioners agree that exploiting strong brand loyalty help firms achieve high sales and reduce advertising investment when carrying out brand extension. Success in brand extension is determined by factors such as quality of products. High quality brands tend to succeed in brand extensions compared to brands whose quality is questionable.

Brand extensions are more acceptable for products where the customer-based brand associations are salient and relevant. Success in brand extensions leads to success in financial performance of the firm owning brands with strong brand loyalty (Knox and Walker, 2001). According to Tuominen (1999), the brand loyalty of the customer base is entrenched in the essence of a brand's equity. It determines how the likelihood of a customer will be ready to change to another brand, particularly when there are brand changes in terms of either product features or pricing. As brand loyalty grows stronger, the vulnerability of the customer base to competitive action is diminished.

Brand loyalty as a subject matter has been studied by various scholars. Based on these studies, two approaches to this concept have been developed and the first is behavioral approach while the second is cognitive (attitudinal) approach. Behavioral approach views brand loyalty as consistent purchase and use of one brand over a long period of time as a degree of brand loyalty. Critics to this approach have highlighted other factors that may be critical to consistent purchase and usage such as price, monopolistic tendencies and biased distribution channels amongst other factors. If prices were to change and cheaper alternative brands were availed in retail outlets, some consumers would be swayed to go for other brands and there it can be concluded that these factors may lead to repetitive purchase and not necessarily commitment to the brand by the consumer. This thus leads to cognitive approach to brand loyalty which underscores the importance of both behavior and commitment to determining consumer brand loyalty. This commitment is reflected in consumer attitudes where they remain steadfast to a given brand irrespective of price changes recommending others to the brand through word of mouth. This also leads to improved financial performance of an organization (Smith & Wright, 2004).

There are different types or levels of brand loyalty and for purposes of this study, only one type will be highlighted due to its effect on brand equity and it is the customer-based brand loyalty. This type of brand loyalty reflects likelihood of a customer switching brands occasioned by a change in marketing mix elements such as price, product features, distribution etc. This type of brand loyalty affirms that as brand loyalty increases in a customer base, exposure to competitive activities reduces. Matear, Osborne, Garrett and Gray (2002) asserts that there are five potential levels of loyalty and they are stylized and do not appear in the pure form. These levels provide a feeling for the variety of forms that loyalty can take and how it can affect brand equity.

Most researchers point out that brand loyalty is perhaps the most important component of brand equity. Brand loyalty is a key intangible asset to a firm and if properly managed and utilized can lead to minimal marketing costs, provides leverage in distribution and over time can help build competitive edge (Baloglu, 2002). This lends a firm a core competitive competence against its competitors in the market subsequently leading to improved financial performance. Some of the possible ways of creating brand loyalty could include innovation, level of investment in advertising and promotions, technology, trademarks or patents. Strong brand loyalty implies strong brand equity that leads to high sales, price premiums, high market share and subsequently good firm performance. Key elements used to measure brand loyalty in the study included assessing likelihood of changing brands, recommending to others, likelihood to change if there are changes in price and evaluating satisfaction levels with current brand (Baldauf, Cravens & Binder, 2003).

Brand Equity Theories

There are various theories that have been used to develop models that use different perspectives to explain and measure brand equity. This study will highlight the four most established models that include Brand Asset Valuator Model (BAV), Aaker CBBE Model, Brandz Model and Brand Resonance Model. These models are used in marketing practice and industry and are all derived from the foundations of brand equity dimensions. They were relevant to the study because they guided on how independent variables were used to determine how they influenced firm performance which was the dependent variable.

Brand Asset Valuator (BAV) Model

Young and Rubicam (Y&R) is one of the marketing practitioners in advertising industry and has developed a model on how to track brand equity value. The model known as brand asset valuator (BAV) has been developed using over 200,000 consumers across the globe. This model measures brand equity for thousands of brands across many categories. It uses four key components that measures brand equity which include brand differentiation, brand relevance, brand esteem and brand knowledge. Brand differentiation measures the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be different, relevance assesses the brand's span and appeal, brand esteem deals with how consumers regard and respect the brands while brand knowledge ascertains familiarity and intimacy of a brand with consumers (Al-Abdallah, Ghaith Mustafa, Dan Abo-Rumman & Assd, 2013).

Young & Rubicam's BAV model points out that brand's differentiation and relevance determine brands strength and are used to chart brand's future. The aspects of brand's esteem and knowledge are used to create brand stature, therefore reports on past performance. The elements of a brand's current and its future can be combined to determine the age of the brand in terms of product life cycle and assist brand custodians in developing the right marketing strategy (Sasikala, 2013).

Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model

This model was developed by Professor David Aaker and currently it is the most used model in brand equity research. The model views brand equity as a “set of five categories of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers”. Aaker’s model summarized these categories assets or liabilities as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary assets such as patents, trademarks, and channel relationships (Sasikala, 2013).

Based on Aaker’s model, the most important phase in the brand equity concept is for one to determine brand identity using what the consumers perceive in the brand. Aaker explains that brands have unique set of brand associations based on what it represents, stands for and promises to consumers. Aaker further points out that to determine brand identity, one can use its dimensions and highlights 12 dimensions that could be systematized around 4 perspectives. Brand dimensions include product scope, product attributes, quality/value, uses, users, country of origin organizational attributes, local versus global dimensions, consumer relationships, visual imagery/metaphors, symbols and brand heritage amongst many others (Fournier & Glick, 2004). Professor Aaker’s model further highlights brand identity to include core and an extended identity in terms of brand extension concept. Core identity is referred to as the central and timeless essence of the brand which remains constant, while extended identity is what is associated with new markets and newly extended products adopted for new line extensions and markets to make it suitable to the needs of consumers (Fournier & Glick, 2004).

Aaker’s model and approach to brand equity was improved by Keller in 1993 through development of seminal theory of customer-based brand equity. As a model, this is the basis of CBBE concept and is widely used by most researchers in this subject area. The research borrowed from heavily from Aaker’s model and adopted similar approach. .

Empirical review

Several empirical studies have been done in this subject area and includes Pinar, Trapp, Girard and Boyt, 2014; Jin Su, Xiao Tong, 2015; Nebojsa, 2013; Jin Su, 2016; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Pappu et al., 2005; Washburn and Plank, 2002 etc. These studies are all derived from the works of Aaker (2001) and Keller (2003).

Pinar, Trapp, Girard and Boyt (2014) carried out a study on dimensions that affect brand equity in university. They asserted that due to high competitiveness, universities and colleges like other organizations are required to develop sustainable strategies and it is imperative to use the concept of branding as a solution. Their objective was to apply brand equity concept to determine whether it could apply to the context of university and they also sought to develop core and supporting (none core) brand equity dimensions in their framework. Since there were no studies in done in similar area, they borrowed concepts of consumer-based brand equity and used it to test and measure identified core dimensions and none core supporting value-creation factors for universities and colleges. One of the key contributions from this study is the development of non-core dimensions that may be used to segregate factors that do not directly influence brand equity but are necessary for consideration when applying brand equity dimensions particularly in service-oriented sectors. The researchers adopted exploratory design and ensured that the instruments used in measurement and collection of data were pretested and retested to improve validity. Empirical results from the study suggested brand equity dimensions vary in importance based on sector or industry for instance in developing strong university brands, students' perceived quality of university's faculty is a key consideration in brand equity dimension. The study also found that correlation exists among the brand equity dimensions suggesting inter-relationship among independent variables. Although study was done for university as a brand, applications in future needs to give more holistic approach for example sampling university alumni and other stake holders such as community, parents and organizations linked with the university. This study sought to highlight some of the most important brand equity dimensions that greatly influenced financial performance of mobile firms and help them focus their marketing activities to achieve competitive edge like in the case of universities and used real consumers as respondents.

Jin Su, Xiao Tong (2015) carried out an empirical study in USA to establish the personalities of sportswear brands and their relationship to brand equity. Similarly, they also applied Aaker's methodology in the context of sportswear brands. The biggest short coming in this study was use of students to investigate brand personality instead of using real consumers. They collected data from 420 college students. Key findings from this study revealed that personality of sportswear can be categorized into seven dimensions and 53 personality attributes. Comparing this study with other studies, it can be concluded that the number of brand equity dimensions vary based on product or service. It further asserts that the most important can be summarized to four dimensions and their importance and influence on brand equity vary based on nature of study, geographic location, and product or service sector. This study therefore followed previous studies and adopted use of four brand equity dimensions. It developed variables that are relevant to mobile telecommunication sector within the four brand dimensions to determine influence of brand equity and how it influenced financial performance.

Jin Su, (2016) in a follow up study did an empirical review aimed at understanding relationship between brand equity dimensions in fashion industry. This study collected data from actual consumers and it used a sample size of 419 consumers in USA. The study investigated the inter-relationships among the various brand equity dimensions by structural equation modeling. The findings of this study highlighted that brand equity dimensions of perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand association have significant and positive effect on brand equity. One advantage this study had over others is use actual consumers as respondents and thus its findings can be applied in business set up. Some of its findings include indication of relationship between brand equity dimensions used in the study, it provided important insights on how marketing activities when implemented can lead to growth of brand equity. The same conclusions can be inferred to apply to mobile telecommunications brands in Kenya by surveying actual consumers and inferring that key brand equity dimensions in the sector will have direct effect on brand equity in business setting.

An empirical investigation of brand equity drivers and their consequences was carried out by Nebojsa (2013). The objective was to identify brand value drivers and their influence on brand equity. The main difference between this study and the previous studies is that they used a different approach, by extracting data and information from market-based data supplied by AC Nielsen. It also developed variable constructs from existing financial data bases. The study further used real data and information cutting across all three possible sources of brand equity which includes consumer based, market and financial data. The study findings indicated that investment in branding, right pricing decisions, perceived quality are highly associated with brand equity and consequently with a higher brand value in the food industry. Other positive attributes of this study on brand equity were use real market data and it also delved into fast moving consumer goods sector. It also combined consumer, financial and marketing approaches in a more practical manner.

In conclusion, various empirical studies have been done on brand equity and how it’s measured across many sectors and continents. These studies have helped develop the best approach in measuring brand equity concept, identifying key dimensions used relative to product or service in mobile telecommunications industry in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

Several brand equity models have been used in several studies revolving around brand equity concept. Based on the study and its objectives, this study used the following framework. The framework has been used in similar studies on brand equity concept by other researchers and recommended its adaptability. This model has been empirically tested and used in a number of previous studies (Yoo & Donthu 2001, Kusum, Donald & Scott 2003, Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). This study sets out to determine the influence of perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand association representing brand equity on financial performance as illustrated below in figure 2. From the hypothetical relationship shown on figure 2 the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable was tested. Brand loyalty was measured in terms of consumer's satisfaction with the product or service without switching loyalty to the firm products or services. This may lead to the consumers' recommendation of those products or services to other prospective customers. Perceived Quality measurements included; consumers' satisfaction with the product, fair product pricing and reliability of the service provider. Brand awareness was measured in terms of examining consumers' knowledge of brands either through unaided or aided mention or recall. Brand Association measurable indicators included; benefits derived by the consumer from the product or service offered, superiority and uniqueness of the product or service. Financial performance was measured in terms of increase in net operating income and total assets as used by Cai and Zhang (2006).

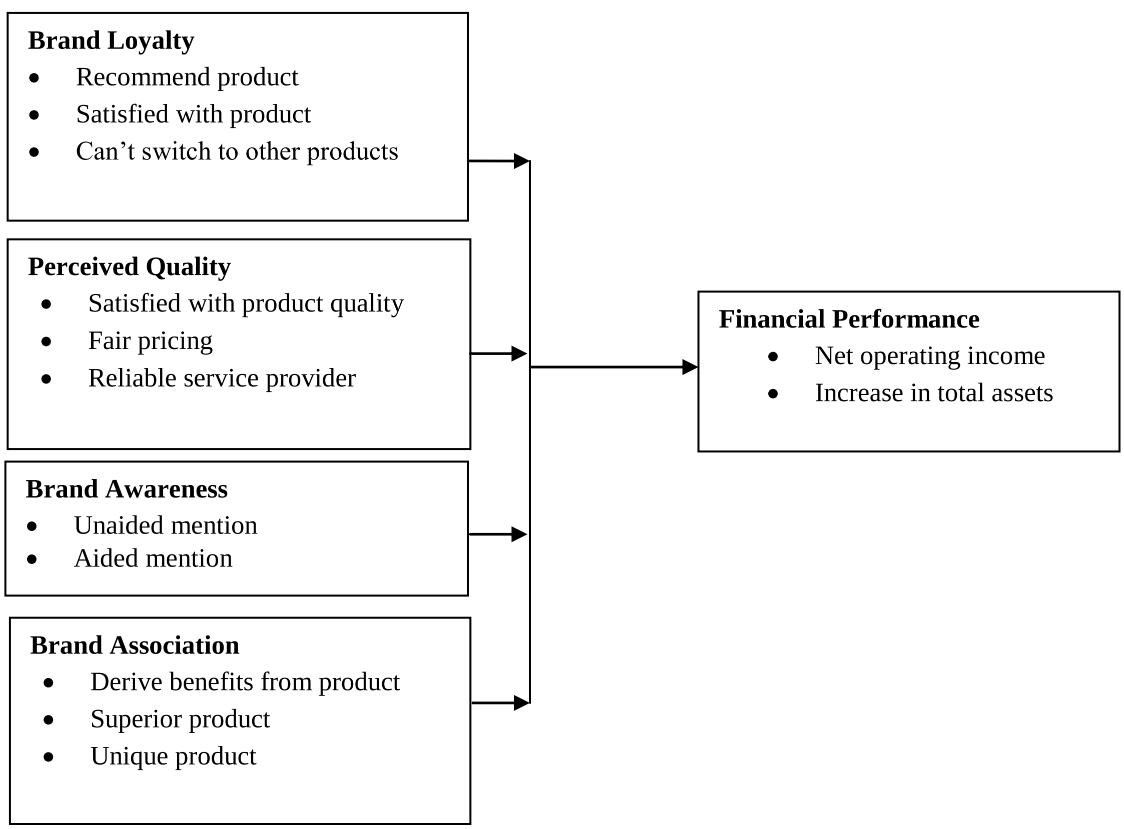

Figure 2: Influence of Brand Equity on Financial Performance of Mobile Telecommunication Firms

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Kothari (2004), the research design is the conceptual structure within which the research is conducted. It constitutes the blue-print for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. As such research design includes an outline of what the researcher will do from writing the hypothesis and its operational implications to the final analysis of data. Accordingly, in the words of Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009), research can adopt mixed method or mixed data modes of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data sets. This study adopted a mixed mode approach of quantitative analysis of secondary data and questionnaire survey data. Employing more than one research method by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches is expected to eradicate or minimize the disadvantages inherent in each individual method (Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Target Population

Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) define a population as all cases of individuals or things or elements that fit a researcher's specification. The population of the study comprised of two thousand seven hundred and fifty subscribers distributed across four major mobile telecommunication firms which has 40, 171, 427 subscribers (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2017).

Table 1: Target Population

Service Provider	No. of Subscribers	Visiting customers per day
Safaricom	29,228,896	2,000
Airtel	6,179,182	400
Telkom	2,898,511	200
Equitel	1,864,838	150
Total	**40,171,427**	**2,750**

Source: (Customer care department, 2018)

Sample and Sampling Procedures

Sampling is a selection of a few items (a sample) from a bigger group (population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group (Cooper & Schinder 2003). Sample size refers to the number of items to be selected for observations in order to obtain accurate information on the universe (Oso and Onen, 2008). Convenience sampling, stratified sampling and purposive sampling were employed in this study. Convenience sampling was employed to determine the number of subscribers who visit the customer care desk each day in the four mobile telecommucation firms. Stratified sampling was used to categorize the four firms into strata, stratified proportional sampling was employed to determine representative sample per stratum. Purposive sampling was used to determine the final respondents forming the study sample among the subscribers.

The optimum sample size (n) of the study was determined using Nassiuma (2000) formula as shown below;

$$n = \frac{Nc^2}{c^2 + (N-1)e^2}$$

Where n = optimum sample size, N = population size, c = coefficient of variation (≤ 30%), and e = error margin (≤ 5%). In this study c is taken as 30%, e to be 2% and N = 2750, therefore, fitting this into the formula:

$$n = \frac{2750*(0.3)^2}{(0.3)^2 + (2750-1)*(0.02)^2} = 207$$

Stratified proportional random sampling was used to allocate the sample size proportional to size of the strata as;

$$n_h = \left(\frac{n}{N}\right)N_h$$

Where:

- n is the strata size.
- N is the target population
- N_h is the optimum sample size

Table 2: Sample size

Stratas	Population per stratum	Sample ration per stratum
Safaricom	2,000	151
Airtel	400	30
Telkom	200	15
Equitel	150	11
Total	**2,750**	**207**

Source: (Customer care department, 2018)

The sample size of the study was 207 respondents.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

In this study, both primary and secondary data was used. Structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data. The questionnaires were self-administered to the respondents. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A gathered demographic information about the respondents and section B gathered information on respondents' perception and behavior in respect to brand equity dimensions. These constructs included their behavior, perceptions, intentions, attitudes, awareness, and motivations with respect to mobile phone service providers. Secondary data was collected using a questionnaire as a guide and collected information in respect to financial aspects of the firms such as operating revenue and total assets value. Primary data collected included independent variables while secondary data entailed the dependent variable. The questionnaires were self-designed designed.

Pilot Study

The data collection instrument was pilot tested in order to ensure its reliability and validity. A pilot test is a small scale trial run of all procedures planned for use in the main study (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2002). The data instrument was piloted in Nairobi where the firms under study are operational. The pilot test was carried out amongst staff and visitors to government offices within central business district. Pretesting helped to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire concerning question format and wording.

Validity

According to Somekh, and Cathy (2005) validity refers to whether instruments being used are valid in terms of content, what they are designed to collect and appropriateness to the target population amongst other requirements. To ensure that the survey questionnaire was valid for the intended purpose, the researcher sought the guidance and expert opinions in the field of study that will include both supervisors and lecturers in area of study at the University. The researcher also consulted marketing practitioners in the field of research and based on their feedback, the research instrument was modified and therefore enhanced its validity.

Reliability

Walliman (2001) asserts that reliability refers to whether an instrument can consistently measure what it is supposed to measure. This can be ascertained by use of test and re-test method. This was achieved by using some of the popular such as use of pre-tested survey questionnaires using pilot study of 20-30 respondents. Cronbach's alpha test was used to measure reliability of brand equity scale used to measure attributes, intentions, awareness amongst other variables. Cronbach's alpha was calculated and compared to ascertain if it passed reliability test in terms of brand equity variables to be used to measure brand equity concept. The data collection instruments returned an overall alpha coefficient value of 0.781 which indicated good internal consistency reliability. According to Cohen and Manion (2000) alpha value of 0.7 or higher indicates good reliability and internal consistency.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The questionnaires were scrutinized for completeness with incomplete questionnaires being discarded and only duly filled and completed questionnaires used for analysis. Complete questionnaires were coded and keyed into SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequency, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize data while inferential statistics such as correlation coefficient and Chi-Square were used to test the relationship between variables. Correlation coefficient was used to identify non causal relationship between brand equity and financial performance while Chi-Square was used to test the research hypotheses at 5% significance. The findings were presented in the form of statistical tables and discussions thereof.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Brand awareness

The study sought to determine the influence of brand awareness on financial performance. The responses were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

a. Brands mention

The study sought to determine respondents' brand awareness by evaluating mobile phone subscribers' different levels of brand awareness of mobile phone service providers. Respondents were initially asked what brands they remember when mobile phone service providers (category) is mentioned. The brands mentioned were recorded in order of first unaided mention, second unaided mention and other unaided mentions. In cases where a brand was not mentioned on unaided basis, respondents were prompted if they recalled them using brand cue and categorized as aided recall. The brand cue used were brand design elements (colours and logos) for recognition or recall. Brands that were not recognized at all were categorized as never heard of.

Table 3: Safaricom Brand Awareness

	Frequency	Percent
1st Unaided Mention	107	78.1
2nd Unaided Mention	20	14.6
Other Unaided Mention	10	7.3
Total	**137**	**100.0**
Mean=1.2920		
Standard deviation=0.59607		

Based on the findings on table 3, Safaricom brand awareness was highest on unaided mentions with 1st unaided mention at 78.1%, followed by 2nd unaided mention at 14.6% and other unaided mentions at 7.3%. Standard deviation of the mean value was close zero, it was evident that data was close to the mean value of the indicator signifying that there was no disparity on the responses of the respondents. All the respondents mentioned Safaricom unaided. This implied that the brand had the highest top of mind (spontaneous) awareness with a total of 100% that can be interpreted to mean that the brand was in every mobile phone subscriber's mind, the brand comes first when they think about mobile phones service providers or mobile phones category. This is in agreement with Zhuowei and Liping (2015) argument that brand awareness is said to exist when the consumer have a deep and specific image of the product in mind. This leads to spontaneous awareness that is associated to brands that are associated to their categories. The findings are in line the conviction that a brand with high awareness is the only one in product category (Kracklauer, Quinn Mills & Seifert, 2004).

Table 4: Airtel Brand Awareness

	Frequency	Percent
1st Unaided Mention	24	17.5
2nd Unaided Mention	78	56.9
Other Unaided Mention	30	21.9
Aided Recall	5	3.6
Total	**137**	**100.0**
Mean=2.1168		
Standard deviation=0.72827		

Table 4 indicate that Airtel brand ranked second in terms of brand awareness with 1st unaided mention at 17.5%, 2nd unaided mention at 56.9% and other unaided mention at 21.9%. 3.6% of the respondents recognized the brand on aided recall. Since the standard deviation of the mean value was close zero, it was evident that data was close to the mean value of the indicator signifying that there was no disparity on the responses of the respondents. Airtel's top of mind (spontaneous) awareness was 96.3% and ranked second to Safaricom. 3.6% of respondents were able to recognize the brand when prompted. The results as asserted by Keller and Lane (2003), points to importance of understanding level of investment, where to invest and effective ways of investing in marketing activities to win the mind of consumer and subsequently determine their action towards a brand in terms of sales level, market share, operating incomes and profitability.

Table 5: Telkom Brand Awareness

	Frequency	Percent
1st Unaided Mention	5	3.6
2nd Unaided Mention	36	26.3
Other Unaided Mention	66	48.2
Aided Recall	27	19.7
Never Heard	3	2.2
Total	**137**	**100.0**
Mean=2.9051		
Standard deviations=0.83034		

According to the summary of results on Table 5, Telkom brand emerged third in terms of brand awareness with 1st unaided mention at 3%, 2nd unaided mention at 26.3% and other unaided mention at 48.2%. 19.7% recognized Telkom brand on aided recall, while 2.2% have never heard of the brand. Standard deviation of the mean value was close zero, therefore signifying that data was close to the mean value of the indicator signifying that there was no disparity on the responses of the respondents. Telkom brand is ranked 3rd with top of mind awareness of 78.1%, meaning the brand's advertising, promotional and branding initiatives fall behind Safaricom and Airtel brands respectively. This augments the statement that brand awareness constitutes an important part of brand equity and the higher the level of brand awareness the higher the chances of a particular brand being preferred in respect to its competitors (Kracklauer, Quinn Mills & Seifert, 2004).

Table 6: Equitel Brand Awareness

	Frequency	Percent
1st Unaided Mention	1	0.7
2nd Unaided Mention	3	2.2
Other Unaided Mention	31	22.6
Aided Recall	89	65.0
Never Heard	13	9.5
Total	**137**	**100.0**
Mean=3.8029		
Standard deviation=0.66243		

Table 6 shows that Equitel brand awareness was the least amongst the brands in mobile telecommunication service providers. 1st unaided mention was at 0.7%, 2nd unaided mention at 2.2%, other unaided mention at 22.6%, aided recall at 65.0% while 9.5% of the respondents had never heard of the brand. Since the standard deviation of the mean value was close zero, it was evident that data was close to the mean value of the indicator signifying that there was no disparity on the responses of the respondents. Based on the results, the majority of respondents fall in prompted awareness indicating that it does not easily come on to the minds of consumers and they have to be prompted to recall the brand. Further those who do not recall 13 (9.5%) were the majority compared to the other brands meaning the brand has to work harder to get into the minds of consumers.

b. Brand usage

The study sought to determine the brand that the respondents use.

Table 7: Which brand do you use as your main line?

		Frequency	Percent
Safaricom		49	35.8
Airtel		39	28.5
Telkom		27	19.7
Equitel		17	12.4
Other		5	3.6
Total		**137**	**100.0**
Mean	**2.2059**		
Standard Deviation	**0.16185**		

On brand usage among the respondents, the results on Table 7 show that majority of the respondents 49 (35.8% indicated that they normally use Safaricom as their main telecommunication services provider, 39 (28.5%) of the respondents use Airtel, 27 (19.7%) of the respondents use Telkom, 17 (12.4%) of the respondents use Equitel, while 5 (3.6%) indicated that they use other brands such as Sema provided by Jamii Telkom. It can be implied that since the standard deviation of the mean value was close zero, it was evident that data was close to the mean value of the indicator signifying that there was no disparity on the responses of the respondents. The results points to favorable consumer behavior towards the given brands and leads to continued use of the same brand over a long period of time (Skogland and Siguaw, 2004).

c. Brand usage Period

The study sought to determine how long the respondents have used their current service provider. The responses were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean values and standard deviations.

Table 8: How long have you used your current service provider?

		Frequency	**Percent**
Less than one year		15	10.9
1-5 years		35	25.5
6-10 years		66	48.2
Over 10 years		21	15.3
Total		**137**	**100.0**
Mean	**2.6788**		
Standard Deviation	**0.86547**		

On brand usage period among the respondents, the results on Table 8 indicate that the majority of the respondents 66 (48.2%) indicated that they had used their current service provider for 6-10 years. According to 35 (25.5%) of the respondents, they have been with their current service provider for 1-5 years, 21 (15.3%) over ten years while 15 (10.9%) of the respondents indicated that they have been with their current service provider for less than one year. The standard deviation of the mean value was close zero, it was evident that data was close to the mean value of the indicator indicating that there was no disparity on the responses of the respondents. The results support findings of Taylor, Celuch and Goodwin, (2004) that brand loyalty particularly behavioral loyalty has an effect on brand equity. This is further supported by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) who argued that purchase loyalty leads to more market share while attitudinal loyalty leads to higher premiums on pricing. The longer the term of using a brand, the stronger the attitudes and usage behavior and therefore the results indicate the essence of the brand, why consumers use/buy it, how the brand should be extended and its ideal positioning in respect to competing brands. Longer usage indicate higher propensity of brand loyalty particularly for periods over 5 years. Brands with longer brand heritage will have a tendency to have majority of consumers with longer usage such as Safaricom and Airtel while Telkom and Equitel which have been in the market for a relatively shorter period will majority of respondents in less than 5 years usage period.

Perceived Quality

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with perceived quality statements. Table 9 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 9: Descriptive analysis for perceived quality

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
I am happy with the quality and performance of my current mobile phone service provider.	17 (12.4%)	22 (16.1%)	51 (37.2%)	37 (27.0%)	10 (7.3%)	3.0073	1.10810
I like the products and services of my current mobile phone service provider.	37 (27.0%)	29 (21.2%)	46 (33.6%)	16 (11.7%)	9 (6.6%)	2.4964	1.19511
My current mobile phone services network is reliable.	56 (40.9%)	39 (28.5%)	18 (13.1%)	16 (11.7%)	8 (5.8%)	2.1314	1.23561
I like the customer service levels of my current mobile service provider.	26 (19.0%)	19 (13.9%)	16 (11.7%)	67 (48.9%)	9 (6.6%)	3.1022	1.28501

Table 9...

I feel good about my current mobile phone service provider.	12 (8.8%)	15 (10.9%)	68 (49.6%)	31 (22.6%)	11 (8.0%)	3.1022	1.00209
The price I pay for my mobile phone services is far less than the benefits.	59 (43.1%)	34 (24.8%)	19 (13.9%)	16 (11.7%)	9 (6.6%)	2.1387	1.27292

On perceived quality of current mobile phone services, the results on Table 9 indicate that majority of the respondents (37.2%) held neutral opinion on whether they were happy with the quality and performance of their current mobile phone service provider brands followed by those who agree and strongly agree at 34.3%. The mean was at 3.0073 with standard deviation (SD) of 1.10810. On overall there was a tendency that majority agreed with quality and performance of their mobile phone services provider brands. These results are in line with the assertion that performance has an effect on how customers classify a product or a brand from their perspective (Aaker, Joachimsthaler, 2000). This leads to consumers earning the trust of brands perceived to be of high quality and superior performance. Brands that earn trust from customers are preferred even if prices are higher compared to its competitors (He, Wang, 2014). The findings are further in line with the statement that customers perceive the product's value based on its benefits which, in turn, is influenced by the product's performance, features, quality, warranties, packaging and labeling (Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen, 2008).

Majority of the respondents (40.9%) strongly disagree that their current mobile phone services network was reliable, while 28.5% disagree. This is a major concern for majority of mobile phone subscribers because this results indicate unfavorable aspect of perceived quality. This finding can be viewed in line with brand equity definition as that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm/or to that firm's customers (Keller, 1998). Brands that are viewed in unfavorable perspective by customers will have a lower off-take compared to its competitors. This finding further negates the postulation that strong brands with respect to perceived quality construct are able to successfully carry out brand extensions compared to weaker brands (Aaker 1991).

In respect to customer service levels, majority of subscribers 48.9% like what their service provider brands are doing. The findings are in line with Canny (2014) affirmations that professional conduct, knowledge and skills create superior customer service and this can be said to apply to mobile telecommunication brands which have invested in customer service centres and employ skilled staff amongst other initiatives to help in improving customer service. This greatly enhances the value of a brand by creating strong perceived quality of a product or service.

Majority of the respondents felt good about their current mobile phone service provider. 22.6% agree and 8% strongly agree that they felt good about their current mobile service provider. Keller (2003) advances that this finding is associated with product-related and non-product-related attributes associated with its purchase or consumption as well as personal value and meaning that consumers assign to the product or service and thus elicit emotions that build to brand's perceived quality that adds or subtracts its value.

Further, majority of the respondents (43.1%) strongly disagree on whether the price they are charged for mobile phone services was far less than the benefits. Another 24.8% just disagree. This negates the conviction that perceived value could be enhanced by increasing levels of functional and emotional benefits and reducing levels of associated costs in a brand in the eyes of consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) advocated that purchase loyalty leads to more market share while attitudinal loyalty leads to higher premiums on pricing which is not the case with this findings.

Brand Association

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with brand association statements. Table 10 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 10: Descriptive statistics for brand association

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
I get a good variety of products, services and features from my current mobile phone service provider.	32 (23.4%)	31 (22.6%)	43 (31.4%)	18 (13.1%)	13 (9.5%)	2.6277	0.24267
I get more benefits from products and services of my current mobile phone service provider.	21 (15.3%)	21 (15.3%)	71 (51.8%)	14 (10.2%)	10 (7.3%)	2.7883	0.06018

Table 10...

The products and services I get from my mobile service provider are superior.	22 (16.1%)	19 (13.9%)	16 (11.7%)	68 (49.6%)	12 (8.8%)	3.2117	0.26276
I will always buy products and services of my mobile phone service provider.	22 (16.1%)	25 (18.2%)	23 (16.8%)	46 (33.6%)	21 (15.3%)	3.1387	0.32943
Products and services of my mobile phone service provider are unique.	23 (16.8%)	26 (19.0%)	66 (48.2%)	14 (10.2%)	8 (5.8%)	2.6934	0.05414

On brand association, the results on Table 10 indicate that a fair majority of the respondents (46%) were in disagreement that they get a good variety of products, services and features while 30.6% of mobile phone subscribers disagree that they get more benefits from products and services of their current mobile phone service providers and 35.8% disagree that products and services offered by their mobile phone service provider were unique.. This results imply that the brands have a weak brand association strong brand association in respect to variety, services and features and negate Buil, de Chernatony & Martinez (2008) argues that strong favorable evaluated brand associations that are exclusive to the brand are inferred to mean brand superiority and thus strong brand equity. This is further supported by Aaker (1991) and findings of Montgomery & Lieberman (2005) that consumers' own personal opinions and evaluations forms the basis of feelings and emotional responses and reactions with respect a brand. The findings are further in line with Yoo and Donthu (2001) that although brand association may be weak in brand choice, they greatly influence purchase behavior and determine consumer satisfaction.

58.4% of the respondents agree that the products and services they get from my mobile service provider are superior and 48.9% of respondents indicated that they will always buy products and services of their mobile phone service provider. These findings are in line with Keller (1993) and Kotler, Keller (2006) that brand attitudes are important because they form basis of consumer action and behavior towards a brand. The findings are also in line with those of Chaudhuri, Holbrook (2001) Skogland, Siguaw (2004) and Taylor, Celuch, Goodwin (2004) that brand loyalty refers to the ability of the brand to attract, retain and grow its customer base, brand behavioral loyalty has an effect on brand equity and brand loyalty leads to more market share while attitudinal loyalty leads to higher premiums on pricing.

Brand Loyalty

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with brand loyalty statements. Table 11 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 11: Descriptive statistics for brand loyalty

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
I will recommend my current mobile phone service provider to relatives and friends.	15 (10.9%)	21 (15.3%)	35 (25.5%)	36 (26.3%)	30 (21.9%)	2.6715	0.27827
I will not change my current mobile phone service provider in future.	23 (16.8%)	27 (19.7%)	68 (49.6%)	10 (7.3%)	9 (6.6%)	2.6715	0.05098
I am fully satisfied by the services of my mobile phone service provider.	25 (18.2%)	26 (19.0%)	29 (21.2%)	37 (27.0%)	20 (14.6%)	3.0073	1.33668
Even if prices increase, I will not change my mobile phone service provider.	50 (36.5%)	44 (32.1%)	19 (13.9%)	13 (9.5%)	11 8.0%)	2.2044	1.25522
I am willing to try new products and services from my current mobile service provider.	14 (10.2%)	17 (12.4%)	11 (8.0%)	32 (23.4%)	63 46.0%)	3.8248	0.39272
I feel products and services from my mobile service provider are a part of my life	19 (13.9%)	22 (24.8%)	61 44.5%)	19 13.9%)	16 (11.7%)	2.9343	0.15175

On brand loyalty, the results on Table 11 indicate that majority of the respondents (58.2%) agreed that they were would recommend their current mobile phone service provider to others.

A further 51.6% agreed that they are satisfied with the services of their current mobile service provider, while 69.4% were willing to try new products from their current service provider. The findings correlate to those of Skogland and Siguaw (2004) where brand loyalty infers to the ability of the brand to attract, retain and grow its customer base over a long period of time. The findings are also in line with Taylor, Celuch and Goodwin, (2004) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) which assert that brand loyalty leads to more market share and higher premiums on pricing.

Majority of the respondents 36.5% were of the opinion that they can switch to other brands in future, while 67.6% will also switch to other brands if prices of their current service provider brand increases. 38.7% of the respondents did not feel that their current mobile service provider brands were a part of their life. These findings are in line with other findings that brand loyalty refers to the likelihood of a customer opting to switch to another brand when current brand is changed either in products features or pricing, and when brand loyalty grows stronger, the customer's vulnerability to competitive activities is diminished (Tuominen, 1999).

Financial Performance

Financial performance was the dependent variable in this study. In measuring the financial performance of mobile phone telecommunication firms, the study collected longitudinal data on operating income and total assets across a period three years which was used in computing return on assets (ROA). Adquith and Weiss (2016) assert that three up to five year period allows one to look for consistency in performance in a firm. The results presented on Table 12 indicate that across the three year period (2015-2017), the maximum annual mean operating income ranged from 48,307 million for the year 2015 and 62964.75 million for the year 2017. The mean operating income thus seems to have increased over time from year 2015 to 2017. The mean operating income had high variability across the periods as shown by standard deviation values. The variability was high in 2017 implying that the operating income was significantly higher in that year compared to others years. Mean operating income overtime shows an increasing trend over the period under study indicating consistent increase in financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

Table 12: Annual Mean Operating Income (Kshs. Millions)

Year	Obs.	Mean	Std.	Min	Max
2015	4	48,307	77,023.94	749	163,364
2016	4	57,038.5	92,679.09	1,371	195,683
2017	4	62,964.75	99,996.55	8,676	212,885

Table 13 indicate that across the three year period (2015-2017), the maximum annual mean total assets ranged from 104,043 million for the year 2015 and 111,121.5 million for the year 2017. The mean total assets thus seem to have increased over time from year 2015 to 2017. The mean total assets had high variability across the periods though out as shown by standard deviation values. The variability was high in 2017 implying that the total assets in that period were significantly higher than all others years. Mean total assets overtime shows an increasing trend over the period under study indicating persistence increase in financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms.

Table 13: Annual Mean Total Assets (Kshs. Millions)

Year	Obs	Mean	Std.	Max	Min
2015	4	104,043	141,163.7	2,061	302,500
2016	4	108,703.3	146,100.3	1,858	312,500
2017	4	111,121.5	156,866.8	1,573	335,000

Unit root test analysis

A unit root test was carried out to examine the panel nature of the data and examine the time series aspect of financial performance. A unit root is a feature of some stochastic processes that can cause problems in statistical inference involving time series models. Thus, a unit root test was conducted to determine whether the time series variable was non-stationary that is whether it possessed a unit root. The results on Table 14 shows that the LLC bias-adjusted test statistic $t * \delta = -4.033$ was statistically significant since p-value was 0.000 which is less than 0.05. The null hypothesis “a unit-root is present” was rejected by accepting the alternative hypothesis that “the panels were stationary”.

Table 14: Unit-Root Test for Panel Data Stationarity

	Statistic	P-value
Unadjusted t	-3.402	
Adjusted t*	−4.033	0.000

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was run to determine non-causal relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. These results are presented on Table 15.

Table 15: Correlations

		Brand Awareness	Perceived Quality	Brand Association	Brand Loyalty	Financial Performance
Brand Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	137				
Perceived Quality	Pearson Correlation	0.306**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
	N	137	137			
Brand Association	Pearson Correlation	0.337**	.509**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000			
	N	137	137	137		
Brand Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	0.452**	0.421**	0.642**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		
	N	137	137	137	137	
Financial Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.529**	0.638**	0.450**	0.645**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.017	0.025	0.042	0.024	
	N	12	12	12	12	12

**. Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation results in Table 15 shows a statistically significant positive correlation between brand awareness and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms ($r = 0.529$, $p < 0.05$). According to Jones, Tim, Shirley, Taylor and Harvir (2008), most used brand dimensions to measure brand awareness include brand recognition and brand recall which affects performance of organization in terms of sales volume. In mobile telecommunication sector, firms influence these dimensions

The results also show that there exists a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived quality and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms ($r = 0.638$, $p < 0.05$). Kotler and Keller 2006 asserts that due to continued competitiveness in the market, perceived value could be enhanced by increasing levels of functional and emotional benefits and reducing levels of associated costs in a brand with respect to competition and thus enhancing performance of the firm.

The correlation results also reveal that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between brand association and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms ($r = 0.450$, $p < 0.05$). Yoo and Donthu (2001) assert that although brand association may be weak in brand choice, they greatly influence purchase behavior and determine consumer satisfaction and enhance firm performance.

Further, the results show a statistically significant positive relationship between brand loyalty and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.05$). According to Baloglu (2002) brand loyalty is perhaps the most important component of brand equity. Brand loyalty is a key intangible asset to a firm and if properly managed and utilized can lead to minimal marketing costs, provides leverage in distribution and over time can help build competitive edge and financial performance an organization.

Chi-Square Tests

Test of the research hypotheses were made based on Chi-Square Tests of Association.

Brand awareness

Influence of brand awareness on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms was examined using Chi-square test ($\chi^2=96.000$, $p<0.05$) as shown on Table 16. Since the p value was less than the conventional probability value of 0.05, it was established that there is a significant association between brand awareness and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. Thus, null hypothesis (**H_{01}**) "brand awareness has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms" was rejected by concluding that brand awareness has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The results are in agreement with those of Kracklauer, Quinn Mills and Seifert (2004) who asserts that brand awareness can be said to be the catalyst for the other brand equity dimensions and financial performance of a firm. It constitutes an important part of brand equity and the higher the level of brand awareness the higher the chances of a particular brand being preferred in respect to its competitors. According to Jones and Taylor (2007), they found that brands with high brand awareness levels tends to have good packaging designs, good advertising and promotional activities resonate well with its target consumers, and the combined effects of brand awareness subsequently translates to high sales and high market share for an organization leading to improved financial performance.

Table 16: Chi-square test of association between brand awareness and financial performance

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	96.000[a]	88	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	50.273	88	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.083	1	0.079
N of Valid Cases	12		

Perceived Quality

Influence of perceived quality on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms was examined using Chi-square test (χ^2=120.000, p<0.05) as shown on Table 17. Since the p value was less than the conventional probability value of 0.05, it was established that there is a significant association between perceived quality and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. Thus, null hypothesis (**H_{02}**) "perceived quality has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms" was rejected by concluding that perceived quality has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The findings are in agreement with those of Kumar (2007) who found that brands interact with consumers through usage and experiences, advertising and promotional platforms, selling and distribution as well as through personal recommendations such as word of mouth. This forms the basis for consumers to judge a brand's quality based on their own perceptions which enhances firm financial performance.

Table 17: Chi-square test of association between perceived quality and financial performance

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	120.000[a]	110	.024
Likelihood Ratio	56.865	110	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.482	1	.034
N of Valid Cases	12		

Brand Association

Influence of brand association on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms was examined using Chi-square test (χ^2=108.000, p<0.05) as shown on Table 18. Since the p value was less than the conventional probability value of 0.05, it was established that there is a significant association between brand association and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. Thus, null hypothesis (**H_{02}**) "brand association has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms" was rejected by concluding that brand association has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The results are consistent with those of Yoo and Donthu (2001) who reported that brand's association in consumer's mind is key objective is to achieve a favorable position for the brand that results in positive brand association that is distinct and unique to the brand relative to competition thus enhancing improved financial performance of the firm. According to Buil, de Chernatony and Martinez (2008), Brand association is perhaps a more important aspect since it forms the basis for consumers' action and behavior towards a given brand and this has a direct impact to the financial performance of organization and brand positioning.

Table 18: Chi-square test of association between brand association and financial performance

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	108.000[a]	99	0.001
Likelihood Ratio	54.093	99	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.224	1	0.136
N of Valid Cases	12		

Brand Loyalty

Influence of brand loyalty on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms was examined using Chi-square test (χ^2=108.000, p<0.05) as shown on Table 19. Since the p value was less than the conventional probability value of 0.05, it was established that there is a significant association between brand loyalty and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. Thus, null hypothesis (**H_{02}**) "brand association has no significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms" was rejected by concluding that brand loyalty has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. The results are in agreement with those of Knox and Walker (2001) who asset that high quality brands tend to succeed in brand extensions compared to brands whose quality is questionable. Brand extensions are more acceptable for products where the customer-based brand associations are salient and relevant. Success in brand extensions leads to success in financial performance of the firm owning brands with strong brand loyalty. Moreover, (Smith and Wright (2004) argue that brand extension commitment is reflected in consumer attitudes where they remain steadfast to a given brand irrespective of price changes recommending others to the brand and this leads to improved financial performance of an organization.

Table 19: Chi-square test of association between brand loyalty and financial performance

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	108.000[a]	99	0.012
Likelihood Ratio	54.093	99	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.571	1	0.033
N of Valid Cases	12		

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that brand loyalty has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. There exists a significant positive correlation between brand loyalty and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Many subscribers were comfortable with their existing mobile telecommunication firms to an extent of willing to recommend their current mobile phone service provider to relatives and friends. Leading brands thus enjoy a bigger market share that translates to higher sales noted in operating income levels. However the loyalty among subscribers does not mean that they cannot contemplate switching to other brands from their current mobile phone service provider in future. Conclusions can be made that there was satisfaction among the respondents with respect to services offered by their current mobile telecommunication brands. However, pricing of mobile phone services by telecommunication firms was a point of concern among the subscribers which is an indication that the price charged was high or certain elements of products and services were not commensurate with the corresponding prices and tariffs. Most subscribers in mobile telecommunication industry had dual lines and are they are willing to try new products and services from other mobile service providers.

Perceived quality has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. There exists a significant positive correlation between perceived quality and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Preference to maintain their current mobile phone service providers is a clear indicator of satisfaction. Key element that stands out is the satisfaction by respondents with the customer service levels with the brands. It can also be concluded that consumers always expect more from mobile phone service providers as implied willingness to explore other brands and indications of perceived non reliable mobile phone service networks. The customer service in most mobile telecommunication firms was good and satisfactory as indicated by many subscribers although the prices charged mobile phone services was far less than the benefits that the subscribers get.

Based on findings, it can be concluded that brand awareness has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. There exists a significant positive correlation between brand awareness and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Safaricom ranks top in unaided mention (top of mind awareness) confirming its status as the main mobile telecommunication service provider translating to higher sales, market share and subsequently higher operating incomes. Airtel mobile service provider is in position two in terms of brand awareness and similarly it enjoys a reasonable level of financial performance interpreted in form of sales, market share and operating incomes. Other brands that follow are Telkom in the third position and Equitel in fourth position in terms of brand awareness and corresponding financial performance.

Conclusions can be that brand association has a significant influence on financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms. There exists a significant positive correlation between brand association and financial performance of mobile telecommunication firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Most respondents perceived current products and services from their respective mobile phone service providers as superior thus feeling strongly associated with their brands. Superiority of products and services offered can be inferred to mean financial success to the firms in the sector through subscribers' willingness to continue buying products and services offered by mobile phone service providers.

On brand association it is also important to note that majority of subscribers held the view that the range of products and services were limited in terms of variety. Further they view current products and services as less unique. This can be interpreted to mean that there is a risk in future for brands that won't address these concerns in terms of losing market share and subsequently having their operating incomes adversely affected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mobile telecommunication firms need to continuously invest in new product development initiatives that are meant to effectively address current and future consumer needs to build ample loyal customer bases. It is not enough to create loyalty schemes that are not sustainable in the long term since competitors will always copy. Consumer's needs and expectations are always increasing and to create strong brand loyalty there is need to anticipate such through stronger effective research and development hubs that will yield products and services to retain current customers and attract prospective customers. New products that meet the needs of subscribers will enhance customers' loyalty and minimize chances of subscribers switching from their current mobile phone service provider in future. Mobile telecommunication firms should also consider reviewing their pricing strategies charged on their products and services to enhance customers' loyalty to firms' brands.

Mobile telecommunication firms have invested in networks systems with the objective of providing reliable services, however there are concerns of perceived unreliable networks. It is recommended that mobile telecommunication firms need to re-assess the quality and levels of technology used in order to ensure that their provision of services is reliable and consistent with customer expectations. Consumers further raised concerns on pricing of mobile products and services. It is perceived that the benefits received are far less than what consumers invest in terms of cost to them. It is recommended that mobile service providers either invest in more branding to justify their pricing or reduce prices of their products and services to match consumer benefits. There is need for these firms to regularly be carrying out pricing surveys to feel the pulse of their consumers if in line with offered products and services.

Mobile telecommunication firms need to continuously invest in advertising and promotional activities to enhance brand recall and recognition. This should further be strengthened by prudence in brand management to clearly differentiate their names, designs, logos and other elements to create and improve brand association, loyalty and perceived quality of their brands. This will lead to innovative products and services to enhance their market share thus increasing their customer base and improved financial performance. It is further recommended that firms should endeavor to be consistent in branding in order to create consistency in terms of brand names and brand messages to consumers particularly when there are changes in ownership. Based on the findings, it is apparent that brand awareness activities are long term and require consistent budgetary allocation to yield desired results and have a positive effect on financial performance and it is therefore recommended that firms have to be patient and expect results from advertising and promotional activities in the longer term.

As much as majority of the respondents agree that the products and services they receive are superior, majority offered are of the opinion that the products and services offered are limited in terms of variety and therefore mobile telecommunication firms should adopt innovative measures to come up with a broad range of products through new product development and adoption of new technologies. Further, there are concerns in uniqueness of products and services offered which leads to opportunities to invest in research and development that will yield unique superior products and services to meet subscribers' needs in terms of variety and uniqueness. This will enhance consumer retention and lead to a stronger brand association. Offering a broader variety and unique products and services is potential source of competitive advantage that may lead to improved financial performance in terms of increased sales, market share and operating incomes.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some respondents were unwilling to provide primary information for fear that the information is sensitive and confidential. However, the researcher ensured proper communication was made on the purpose of the study and by assuring respondents of confidentiality on information provided. Moreover, there was unwillingness among relevant managers to give audited financial reports for fear that the information may be sensitive. However, the researcher assured the concerned parties of confidentiality of information material provided.

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