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## **Factors Influencing Dominant Corporate Image Held by the Internal and External Publics**

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# Factors Influencing Dominant Corporate Image Held by the Internal and External Publics

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## Abstract

This study was an extensive inquiry of corporate identity in up-scaling organizational image in a leading telecommunications service provider in Kenya. Presently, competition for clients and corporate positioning among the telecommunication providers in Kenya is very intense as it is strategic. To gain a competitive advantage, an organization ought to build a set of strategies, and resources that present superior business performance over the long term. This study sought to examine the influencing factors pointing to the most dominant image held by the internal and external publics. A case study approach was preferred and purposive sampling and convenience sampling were used to sample employees and clients of the telecommunication service provider. Data were generated using interviews, observation and critical document analysis. The data were summarized and organized into relevant themes for analysis and requisite interpretation. The findings of the study revealed that for an organization to attract external publics it must be in a position to improve its internal publics in terms of communication as well as their welfare. This ensures that the employees are proud of the organization and as a result send positive feedback to the outside world hence impacting positively to the organization. Additionally, the environment in which the company operates is vital as well as its corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship, and ethical behavior and related community affairs. The study recommends that the importance of managing corporate identity for both the internal public and the external audience is undisputable. The study also recommends that CSR should be seen as a smart way of doing business in addition to encouraging innovation and partnering with the indigenous organization in order for the clients to identify with the brand.

**Keywords:** *Dominant, Image, Internal, External, public, Corporate*

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

The interaction of a customer with the organization through its products and services will help the user to shape a mental image of the products and services offered by the organization (Al Mubarak, Hamed & Al Mubarak, 2019). Agreeably, corporate identity is the method and strategy that an organization uses to differentiate itself from the rest (Gebhardt, 2020). Such strategy(s) are communicated through corporate colors and brand. It's proven that a corporate with a consistent corporate identity is trusted by its customers and investors than those that don't have a consistent corporate identity (Ditlevsen & Kastberg, 2020). As put forward by Rowden (2017) the pursuit for unique corporate identity is what makes organizations to pay attention to corporate branding. The world over, organizations are at present paying attention to advancing their standing in the global market. Many factors could be owed to these efforts, some of which include competition, globalization as well as hard economic times. By building strong and consistent images, organizations create hidden assets that give them a competitive advantage (Carlini, Grace, France & Lo Iacono, 2019). Corporate identity is the distinguishing character which makes customers to differentiate your business from the competitors in the marketplace. Gilani (2019) that a strong identity strengthens one's brand; this makes it outstanding in the eyes of the target audience and as a result a strong image is conceived by the customers.

From the above argument, it then follows that an organization needs to begin with the creation of a logo or company brand since the development of a strong and consistent identity will depend on them. The logo in this case will include the corporate colors, which present the complete corporate design. Every corporate continuously communicates intended messages to its publics just to keep the brand visible even if they do not add a new element (Leiva Ferrero & Calderón, 2016). The most important objective is for the business to constantly be seen to be active in the eyes of the public. Corporates do so through paid up adverts in the media or participating in corporate social responsibility activities as well as internal mechanisms of communicating. A strong and impressive identity is built on pillars of consistency and commitment to those values upon which the company stands (Qadri, Ghani & Sheikh, 2020). Hinged on this, it is the more reason that corporations are expected to practice corporate social responsibility and give back to the community. These range from its vision, mission, inherent philosophy, core values, and the visual effects of the name and logo of the company (Strandberg, 2017). The increasing importance of managing corporate identity is underscored in a survey conducted by Britain Market Opinion Research International in the year 1989. The research established that 77 percent of the leading corporations believed that the value their firms attached to developing and promoting corporate identity would increase in the near future.

Corporate image and corporate identity are two key important tools for any telecommunications company upon which many successes are built (De Leaniz & Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016). As Hussain, Javed and Sarmad (2019) explains, the muscle and visual nature of logos, for instance, communicate more about the company in the mind of the consumer than even the name. For instance, the American Express Company developed a Corporate Communication Strategy aimed at protecting its new identity after it developed a global credit card, banking and travel organization (Özkan, Süer, Keser & Kocakoç, 2019). This clearly depicts that the company

understood that a strong and positive global image could enhance its business for potential global business reach. The research further identified IBM, McDonald's as well as Baskin-Robbins as few examples of companies internationally that could be said to have excelled in the global market due to their strong image and global prominence. From the above examples, it is clear that organizations in the world today such as Sonny cooperation and Ben and Jerry's have been forced to alter their strategies to better compete and survive in periods of immense environmental complexity and change. It thus follows that a strong and likeable corporate identity leverages a company in the field of trade (Hassan, Shamsudin & Mustapha, 2019).

In a highly competitive and multidimensional continent that Africa is continually becoming, companies constantly position themselves to gain local customer loyalty, regional credibility and potentially global success. A company's image and identity could therefore be the single most vital superhighway for position, there is an element of fear from organizations expanding globally as well as domestically that they may portray a contrary image that may result in losses through either merger or acquisition (Chou & Kohsuwan, 2019). For instance the British based Courtaulds through its identity review allowed its operating companies to use their traditional names (Al Mubarak, Hamed, & Al Mubarak, 2019). This can be seen in some Uniliver and British Tobacco products in the Kenyan market today. Further, interest in corporate identity today can also be attributed to the society's growing expectations that organizations should be socially responsive.

On his part, Ibanga (2018) observes that social responsibility is a social contract between corporations and society, based on long term social demands and expectations. According to Nikolova and Arsić (2017) these expectations are being manifested in the way consumers today consider environmental and social image of firms in making their purchasing decisions. They give examples of global companies which have built their strategies around social responsibility include Ben and Jerry's. In addition, managing identity has proved necessary due to the vigor being witnessed in the information technology world today. It has ensured that companies with strong corporate identity such as Sony Corporation and Casio have remained relevant despite the rapidly changing technology. This can be attributed to their strong identity which adds value to their products hence reducing uncertainty in the eyes of the consumer (Swanson & Niehoff, 2017).

Kenya is currently positioning itself as an economic leader in the emerging East African Community. For this and other reasons, Kenyan companies are increasingly focusing on the East African market to grow their businesses across the border for regional reach and impact. This is evident from the number of branches that Kenyan companies are opening in the region. In a report published in the Business Daily (2015) several Kenyan companies are quoted to be positioning themselves to capture the East African market. The paper further cites the recent move by Kenya Airways to merge with an airline in Tanzania, the move by Kenya Commercial Bank to open branches in Southern Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda through mergers and acquisitions as a strategy to position themselves strongly in the regional market. Researchers have defined identity as dealing with the impression, image and personality and the manner in which an organization presents herself to all stakeholders (Foroudi, Melewar & Gupta, 2017).



Corporate image on the other hand “is the global evaluation comprising of a set of beliefs and feelings that a person has about an organization. In Kenya today, the telecommunication sector has not been left behind in re-branding, eyeing mergers while others are exiting the market. To meet changes being witnessed in the telecommunication sector in Kenya, it will be necessary for firms to expand their network, enhance quality service and features as well as operational efficiency and productivity (Mohamad, Ismail & Bidin, 2017).

In today's highly dynamic and competitive world, research has shown that corporate identity is paramount in the minds of customers, it influences a customer's decision to buy products or services of an organization. Consumers are looking for established businesses with trusted brands for the products and services they need. This has been built through corporate identity which has been utilized to create a distinguished image that differentiates their business from the competition (Younis & Hammad, 2020; Hatch & Schut 2000; Gebhardt, 2020). The impression of an organization held by the public is based on knowledge and experience, yet most organizations seem to have paid little attention to finding out the impact of organization's impression in achieving success (Wang, 2020). Telecommunications sector in Kenya seems to be keen to adapt to the changes in the global market. For instance, through the media messages it was observed that France Telecom which owns the majority of stake in Telecom Kenya launched a new image for Telecom Kenya while at the same time adding its Orange image into Telkom Kenya's green image Financial Times (2010).

The changing of name(s) can be attributed to the desire to depart from the previously poor public image and identity of the then Telecom Kenya. The merger which saw France Telecom own 51 percent in the fixed line telecommunication player was seen as a way of meeting and ensuring it repositions itself in the market. Other players in the market such as Airtel have constantly been improving their image through re-branding and mergers. The current Airtel Kenya has evolved through so many stages since it entered the Kenyan market with the name Kencell. Due to the markets demands it re-branded to Celltel, Zain and currently Airtel Financial Times (2011). The organization did indicate that they plan to keep the cost of doing business low in Kenya by sharing infrastructure with existing players and through its partnerships with service providers such as Huawei technologies and IBM Corp. This clearly demonstrates the existing economic challenges organizations in Kenya are operating in.

These examples demonstrate that organizations are trying to adapt to this change to enable them to accomplish the intended needs. Demonstrating an organization's competitive advantage through a well-managed corporate identity program has become crucial. Gustafsson, Lager and Wengblad (2020) documented that the extent to which people identify with an organization is dependent on the attractiveness of the organizational identity. The heightened branding activities being witnessed in the telecommunications sector in Kenya today can be said to be a strategy to ensure that customers are able to identify with the positive attributes of the organization. This underscores the necessity of managing identity and image as a way of building a strong brand. However, despite the importance of identification in the market place, little is known on the role it plays in image building. Adah (2020) observes that despite the subject having been discussed for more than two decades and passed its infancy stage, some researchers still consider

organization identity as an immature area. Hence the need for further research on the role of identity in organizations' image building.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Audiences tend to tie corporate identity to image, yet less effort has been aimed at service sector to show the significance of corporate identity in corporate image (Almeida & Coelho, 2019). A strong, consistent corporate visual identity disseminated through the process of communication helps to effectively articulate the company's mission, vision and culture. This in turn will create image for the organization. Functionally, management of a corporation therefore plays a key role in the building as well as in the maintenance of corporate identity. Certainly, the service sector in Kenya faces tremendous challenge of remaining relevant in the midst of growing competition from organizations offering similar services. Lu, Ren, He, Lin and Streimikis (2019) asserts that institutions may commonly assume that they only communicate when they want to, but unfortunately for many organizations, a failure to control communication results in confused image, yet audiences tend to recognize identity and image. These clearly indicate that identity and image management is important in an organization. To efficiently have an understandable representation of the image to build, it is significant to understand the role of identity in image building as a process.

Keeping a consistent image in the service sector has remained a challenge yet research has shown that such organizations depend on their image for affluence. This calls for a research to establish how corporate identity affects image and brand behavior. Image resides in the mind of audiences (Surjaatmadja & Saputra, 2020). Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus and Bilgihan (2019) pontificates that image held by employees is reflected among those they come into contact with, which in this case are the organizations' stakeholders. Those images are enduring and have to be based on facts, image plays a significant role in organizations; similarly, identity is concerned with organizations reality hence identity and image must be consistent in the sense that, the projected image and reality must coincide (Anwar, Min & Dastagir, 2019).

Researchers such as Chien and Chi (2019); Hassan and Shamsudin (2019) and Lee (2019) observe that image research has been relatively ignored in service provision institutions. In addition, little is known on the role of identity on image building (Qadri, Ghani & Sheikh, 2020). In terms of the aspects raised by the researchers and the activities being witnessed in the telecommunication sector in Kenya that has seen mergers, acquisition and heightened branding it is evident that the service sector is facing tremendous challenges of maintaining its relevance in the midst of growing competition from organizations offering similar services. Relevant examples of mergers and acquisitions include changes in the telecommunication sector such as, Zain to Airtel, Esser telecommunication to YU, differentiation of Orange and Telecom Kenya which clearly show that efforts are being directed to organizations' image and identity in the telecommunication sector in Kenya. This calls for the need to understand the image building in the service sector in the country. This study thus sought to establish to what extent and how effectively does corporate identity supports the success of a company through creation of a strong corporate image.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

What are the influencing factors that point to the most dominant image held by the internal and external publics?

## **1.5 Theoretical frame work**

Stebbins (2018) defines theories as maps of reality; to him the truth depicted by theories may be objective facts. On his part Mouzelis (2016) looks at a theory as a set of interrelated laws about some aspects of reality. A theory enables a researcher to explain, predict and discover systematic relationships between facts. A theoretical framework is a set of assumptions regarding the nature of phenomena. It attempts to clarify why things are the way they are based on theories. Miller (2005) makes clear that different schools of thought that tend to define theory in different ways as per the needs of the theory as well as beliefs on social world and the nature of knowledge.

This research has benefitted from the arguments of the interpretive school of thought. This perspective exploits theories to understand human behavior. Therefore it is significant in my research since identity and image is determined by human actions, such as believes, attitude and the nature of knowledge. This has proved relevant in some aspects of human experience. For the purpose of this research, Wilbur Schramm model of communication has been used to give an insight on how communication takes place in organizations. The interactive nature of this model has helped me in understanding communication in an organization. Since image in an organization is projected through symbolism, communication and behavior is often the way they are perceived by their stakeholders. Borrowing from Wilbur Scharmm model left some questions unanswered on how communication builds identity hence I incorporated Birkigit and Stedler model (Biaudet, 2017). This model helped me in data analysis and discussion. Equally important to note is the fact that models and theories have weakness hence to adequately address them it is important to use more than one. Details on the models used have been covered in literature review as well as in the discussion section.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Communication and Corporate Identity in Organizations**

Corporate image is a perception, according to Frandsen and Johansen (2018) and is the mental picture of an organization in the minds of the audience. Identity on the other hand has been defined as dealing with the impression, image and personality and the manner in which an organization presents herself to all stakeholders (Winkler & Wehmeier, 2017). De Leaniz and Del Bosque Rodríguez (2016) opines that image helps the organization to differentiate itself from others, while identity enables the organization to integrate itself from within. Communication is the exchange and flow of information and thoughts from one person to the other; this process involves a sender who can also function as a source transmitting ideas, information, or feeling to receiver U.S. Army, (1983) as quoted by (Chen & Wei, 2020). Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen and Foroudi (2017) identifies strategy, culture and communication as factors that contribute to identity mix. From the definitions above it is evident that aspects of identity and image are conveyed through communication. For effective

communication to occur the recipient has to understand the precise information or idea that the sender intended to convey or share the same meaning with the sender. According to Mensah (2020), communication helps create an image that conveys the company's vision and mission and reflects the interest of the organization. "The corporate image is the perception that any audience has of an organization through the accumulation of received messages" (Gürlek, Düzgün & Uygur, 2017). On the other hand corporate identity is referred to as the symbols an organization used to identify itself with people. From this definition it is evident that a relationship exists between image and identity. Corporate identity is communicated through branding and trademarks. Corporate identities were initiated by the belief of the common ownership of organizations. This is manifested in a distinct corporate culture. Forms of corporate identities include logos, trademarks, when properly designed.

Recent scholars have defined corporate identity to capture unique attributes of an organization that includes corporate strategy, history, products and services in addition to corporate identity being said to be based on corporate personality which refers to values held by staff within the organization (Michaels & Grüning, 2018; Wong & Dhanesh 2017; Tourky, Foroudi, Gupta & Shaalan, 2020). To this end it clearly shows that managing corporate identity involves understating aspects of organization such as reputation, image and personality. Managing corporate identity is necessary in ensuring that organizations' key publics have favorable disposal of the organization hence adopting the use of the organization products and services. To borrow from this definition it's clearly important to note that all the actions that an organization communicates constitute what is referred to as an identity. This means that a stakeholder can experience identity through interaction with an organization. Corporate identity is all about aspects of behavior, atmosphere, values, attitudes, dress, business practices, and beliefs in a given organization. Hence communication builds identity which results in an image.

Corporate Identity is not just about the visual effects, it also includes professionalism, good manners, and punctual responsiveness to clients' needs which all make up the environment in which customers will conduct their business (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). According to Khan, Wajidi and Alam (2020) effective communication is based on information that is dependent on different qualities or effective usage; the volume that is available, its quality, the means and media by which its transmitted and received, the use to which it is put and the level of integrity of the wider situation. All aspects of human relations in an organization are enriched through effective communications as well as sufficient information. Effective communication guarantees good relations in addition to enhancing the general quality of working life, motivation and morale. Inadequate communication on the other hand results in frustration, and augments feelings of alienation as well as lack of identity and unity. Developing a positively regarded corporate identity will enhance organizations performance in addition to managing customers, stakeholder, and employees, as well as leadership and other processes that can produce change (Djouadi & Negrouche, 2017).

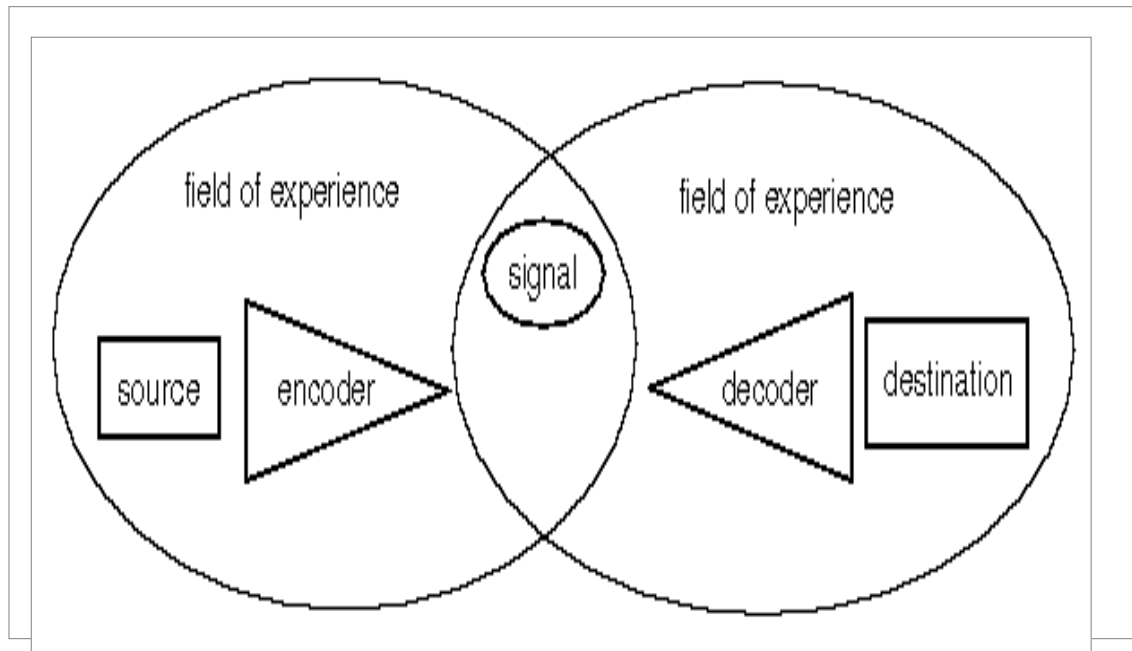
Poor communication may result in loss of millions of shillings, loss of customers and it can spoil the good image of an organization (Vaux & Kirk, 2018). It is from this argument that a clear relationship between communication and image manifest itself. It's through the communication



process that values, believes, perception and even altitudes of an organization is disseminated to the stakeholder hence building an impression that results in identity and eventually resulting in an image that is either positively perceived or negatively perceived. Customers can identify or distinguish organizations products and services from other businesses. According to Genç (2017) communication is giving, receiving or exchanging opinion or ideas by writing, speech or visual means so that the message communicated is completely understood by the recipients. To communicate, organizations use both formal and informal channels. A formal structure targets the audiences who are the official sources of information since relationships are determined by one's role, structure is views by managers as static entity which conforms to a top down configuration (Shimizu, 2017). From communication point of view, effective communication fosters positive communication with key publics. Formal channels of communication according to Kwofie, Aigbavboa and Thwala (2020) allow messages to flow in three directions: Downward, upwards and horizontal. Corporate identity merges strategy, culture, and communications to present a memorable personality to prospects and customers.

### **2.1.1 Wilbur Schramm's model of communication**

According to Schramm (1997), the process of communication requires at least three elements, the source, message and destination. Any successful communication requires the sender and receiver of information to have a common field of experience such as common language, culture and same level of knowledge. This means that if the field of experience of the sender and receiver overlap, communication can take place and become successful. At this point the field of experience according to Schramm is important. For instance, for communication to be clear, a language that can be understood by the receiver of the message and a proper channel of communication that can easily be accessed and understood when used are a necessity. After the message has been sent, it is the sole responsibility of the receiver to decode the message in a manner that makes sense to the receiver (Elleström, 2018). If the receiver understands or interprets the message in the same way that was intended by the sender, then we can conclude that successful communication has taken place.



**Figure 1.0: Diagram of Schramm's Field of Experience**

Schramm also introduces the concept of noise, that a message can be affected and even contaminated by other factors known as noise. Noise refers to barriers that interfere with effective communication (Benjamini, Kalai & Schramm, 1999). Noise can either be as a result of the use of words that may not be clearly understood by the receiver of the message, it is common in professional language known as jargon hence they cause disconnect in communication process. Jargon should be avoided in communication unless it's understood by the receiver. Example of barriers that might hinder the achievement of acceptable outcome includes hidden motives, gaps in expectation incompatible values, cultural differences mistrust or lack of credibility. According to the model physical noise is the actual noise that arises from the physical environment such as loud bang among others (Mcquail, 2008). In addition physical noise can also be distracting elements like bad smell, loud volume of music or sound of vehicles, also facial expression can be source of noise. Effective communication is fundamental in an organization. Opening the channels of communication helps communicate the true image of the organization which helps build the desired image.

When receivers require senders to provide more information or to clarify some aspects of the message, they also act as senders Alan (2008; 35). According to Alan this results in an overlap in communication roles between senders and receivers. In an exchange both sides will be provided with opportunities to record, inform, strengthen, or challenge the intent of the message. Communication in an organization between staff and management is interactive and circular

rather than linear (Tankard Jr, 1988). Once communication is received it is decoded, interpreted and feedback sent, it's at that point that the receiver becomes the sender of information and not just on the receiving end of communication. This model is important in the establishment and maintenance of organizational culture. It points out the constant exchange of information thus finding a common ground that is acceptable to both parties hence development of organizational culture. Alan (2008:36), further says that the exchange of communication through positive or negative feedback allows both sides to adjust the communication, and make necessary corrections and align their expectations.

This model is applicable in a situation aimed at improving communication thus enhancing organizational identity which impacts on the image of an organization (Breen, 2018). However, despite its applicability to communication, the model has some weaknesses. Time is wasted in constant discussions which may negatively impact on the overall performance as well as the effectiveness of the organization. This poses a challenge in the achievement of the organization's goals and objectives as well as mission. According to Elleström (2019), communication may fail to take place if the sender and the receiver do not share a common field of experience. Some organizations depend on upward to downward. This is a form of a communication that comes from the management to the employees. Communication processes, for example in a military system where orders only flow in one direction, hence presenting a challenge in the application of the Schramm's model of communication.

### **2.1.3 The Necessity of Managing a Corporate Identity**

Balmer (2017) postulate that environmental changes have created the necessity to effectively manage identity. They have identified a number of factors pointing to the need to manage corporate identity and one of the factors is the fact that corporate identity helps accelerate products life cycles. This researcher argued that organizations need to constantly reposition their products in the market, those with high visibility and reputation have a differential factor that reduces the uncertainty in the minds of the audience (Leiva, Ferrero & Calderón, 2016). This explains why organizations spend a lot of funds in ensuring visibility through the media as well as outdoor advertising. In the telecommunication sector in Kenya, a lot of money is being pumped into advertising in the media. A case in point is the production the Safaricom advert dubbed "Niko na Safaricom". Secondly, corporate identity helps an organization to compete Business Daily (2011). Due to competition, organizations are finding it challenging to differentiate them from each other. By communicating a unique corporate identity, organizations reach degree of difference to add value in the minds of the organizations publics (Fuoli, 2018).

Research has shown that organizations can differentiate themselves through product differentiation. This is by offering unique products and services as well as well equipping the employees to disseminate a unique aspect of an organization in addition to hiring and training employees better than the competitors (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic & Koporcic, 2020). Products and services are the most important representative for any brand or company. Therefore, the key to defining your corporate identity resides in how well a company communicates its visions and values through its products and services. It is prudent to always

make use of products and services to keeping the target audience involvement thus creating a perception mind. The public's image of a company is dependent on the users of the product experience, which should be supported by an effective communication system.

The organizations' products and services are the items with the most impact on how the market perceives and interprets a brand which results in an identity and eventually corporate image. The first step in building identity and image is for the organization to perceive the brand through history, philosophy, vision and mission. Similarly the ideas and attributes mentioned above need to be translated in a manner that is palatable to the consumer in form of a design, or brand language (Ushchapovska, 2017). Once a brand language is agreed upon confirms research further show, the language is then transferred to a product. In addition some organizations rely fully on their products and services in expressing their core values. Image differentiation is similarly significant. If similar companies offer the same products and services with the same features, clients will perceive their images differently (Ushchapovska, 2017).

Thirdly, a good corporate identity can help in the integration of organizations. Integrations can be done through privatizations, mergers, acquisitions, and recessions. In addition, as markets become globalized, companies have had to create a good image that can offer a competitive advantage to organizations intending to expand internationally and differentiate themselves from their competitors (Mitra & Jenamani, 2020). Corporate identity can also support the organizations in cutting the cost of communication. Research has shown that it is expensive to support large number of brands; therefore, a corporate communication campaign seems to be an economical way to embrace all the products. A strong and consistent corporate brand helps to sell all the brands of an organization. For instance deacons do not have to market individual products but can capitalize in the companies' general identity. However other organizations such as Unilever have opted to market individual brands such as Blue band, Lifebuoy and even OMO. Furthermore being well perceived makes it easy to retain and attract the best skilled employees. Besides in the current society, public expectations for corporate social responsiveness are ever increasing. Increasingly, society is more aware of the environmental problems and is demanding high levels of corporate social responsiveness from organizations. For that reason organizations need to communicate and carry out social actions to create a good image. Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen and Foroudi (2017) suggests that companies need to review their identities and how they communicate them in order to create an identity that is relevant to the corporate strategy.

#### **2.1.4 The role of Corporate Identity in an Organization**

Hussain, Javed and Sarmad (2019) suggest that corporate identity is a strategic tool and source of competitive advantage for companies. In this case, staff can understand more clearly the role and the direction their organization is taking and in so doing they will show greater support to the cause. It will also enable the staff to be aware of changing environment and less resistant to adapting to change. A strong corporate and organization identity also supports the organization to recruit high-caliber personnel which is a key resource. Focus on organization identity is pertinent in this vibrant environment and globalization. For an organization to compete in the



global market there is need for good workplace to produce quality products and services as well as, support for innovation, retain talented staff and attract new talent as well as overcome resistance to change. Greer (2020) state that if the staff and the stakeholders identify with the organization they think and act according to the organization's perspective. On their part Foroudi, Melewar and Gupta (2017) add that organizational identity deals with the impression, image and personality and the manner in which an organization present itself to all stakeholders. This clearly provides an understanding on the vital role of organizational identity in organization life.

Organization identity is important in reputation building Cheema, Afsar and Javed (2020) found that corporate identity and image improved suppliers attitudes towards organization which in the end builds on the reputation of the organization. Identity also plays an important role in attracting capable personnel to an organization. Dhir and Shukla (2019) points out that employee who identifies strongly with their organization reveal positive attitudes and behaviors towards the organization for which they work. This clearly demonstrates the significance of employees in building identity and image. When you have an admirable corporate identity it will touch on everybody in the company, from the lower staff to the top management .Several factors build corporate identity and these include logo communicating between employees and the customers how you project the firm's values on a day to day basis and how the organization manager the team in general.

### **2.1.5 Employees, Customers and corporate identity building**

Employees have a significant role in forming and disseminating image to the external stakeholders Kennedy, (1997) it encompasses even behavioral relationships of employees with the external stakeholders who in this case are the customers (Glaveli, 2020). The manners in which employees address customers and customers concerns are dependent on the identity they have of the organization. Equally, management as an important role in building the desired identity in the minds of the employees. Kennedy (1997) identifies five areas stakeholders which in this case include what the employees are concerned with when describing a single company the factors include physical concerns, work related concerns including work content and people's attitudes towards it. The management style and personality concerns, supervisors including the atmosphere between supervisors and the subordinates, as well as general concerns about the company and its products as well as the future. Communication between organizations and their employee's takes place on a day to day basis. This is important in strengthening their relationships therefore motivating them to work and communicating positive messages about an organization. Internal publics in this case are the organizations employees. External publics on the other hand are the organizations stakeholders, customers as well as investors (Tourky, Kitchen & Shaalan, 2019). For an organization to attract external publics it must be in a position to improve its internal publics in terms of communication as well as their welfare. This ensures that the employees are proud of the organization and as a result send positive feedback to the outside world hence impacting positively to the organization.

Communication is a critical tool to effectively managing employees who in this case we refer to them as internal publics (Ewing, Men & O'Neil, 2019). It is important to mention at this point that advancement in technology is becoming a challenge to control information that gets in and out of the organization, this calls for good relations between the organization and its internal public so as to develop trust. According to Cornelissen (2008), when employees strongly identify with the organization that they work for and are more satisfied in their work, they are more cooperative and demonstrate behavior that is helpful to the organization. Organizations identity is important in the sense that employees tend to identify themselves with the organization they often feel proud this identity boosts employees' self-esteem this will be passed to the customers. The consequence of this is a favorable attitude towards the organization from the outside world. Cornelissen (2008) further argues that, internal communication is most productive in the sense of eliciting employee's commitment and organizational identification if it's a two way process of communication, rather than one way flow of feedback. To this end it is clear that identity held by employees is crucial in as far as the external public is concerned. A favorable identity held by employee's results in favorable disposition towards the organization from the customers. Hence, the importance of managing corporate identity for both the internal public, and the external audience is undisputable.

## **2.2 Organizations' Corporate Image**

The corporate image is the perception that any audience has of an organization through the accumulation of received messages" (Ali Danish & Asrar-ul-Haq, 2020). This in essence means that each audience has its own image about an organization. Since image results from accumulation of received message, it then follows that any action or information from an organization that is communicated to the audience helps them create a perception about that organization. Dhir and Shukla (2019) opines that image helps the organization to differentiate itself from others, while identity enables the organization to integrate itself from within. Further, he reaffirms that a strong identity evolves into ideology that helps pull members towards the vision of their organization. This means an organization can achieve its goals and objectives by establishing a strong image. Dhir and Shukla (2019) further adds that if the image and the identity of an organization match, then the entire organization becomes externally adaptive and internally cohesive. On the other hand, when image and identity are not managed properly, asserts (Hwang & Lyu, 2020) constituents are confused, and the credibility of the organization tends to diminish. To him credibility is the heart of any organization; it determines how the stakeholders view an organization as well as its rating in the market. This clearly demonstrates the importance of managing image and identity.

Corporate image "is the global evaluation comprising of a set of beliefs and feelings a person has about an organization" (Zameer, Wang, Yasmeen, Mofrad & Waheed, 2018). Dowling adds that once these beliefs and feelings are recognized by a member of a particular public, individuals start to become familiar with an organization. To this end argues Dowling, familiarity builds image. In addition he explains that members of the public identifies with how the organization goes about doing things and eventually they develop an understanding of the company's values. It is at this point that a company is said to have developed a reputation. For instance in Kenya

today one can argue that East Africa Breweries has built a reputation in the eyes of the consumers ,and is identified with its beer such as Tusker (African Executive, 2011).

As de Leaniz and Del Bosque Rodríguez (2016) states image is synonymous with reputation; to him it's a term that implies a level of truth, whereas image carries a more superficial connotation. It is therefore important to mention the role of reputation as well as its importance in image building. Whereas image reflects the more recent beliefs about the organization, reputation is the perception of an organization built over time (Balmer, 1998). Reputation results from a reflection upon historical impacts of previously observed identity cues and transactions experiences (Melewar, 2003). This means that image may change relatively quickly while reputation calls for consistency of image for a relatively longer time.

Reputation may be seen as a standard against which decisions are evaluated according to Balmer (2017), this means that an action to be taken by an organization may be evaluated on the basis that it will help maintain or build on the organizations' reputation. From the arguments it clear that ultimately, reputation has an influence on corporate identity management programs and to some extent organizational identity. Due to globalization, competition is becoming a reality meaning that survival tactics are needed which calls for differentiation. According to Almeida and Coelho (2019) being differentiated means being perceived as a unique yet competing companies tend to be more similar hence the need to have a good image. Employees are core to any organization and this explains why competing organizations are constantly poaching staff from their competitors. This is evident in Kenya today especially in the telecommunication sector. A case in point is the mobile phone providers Safaricom and Airtel (African Executive, 2018). To attract high skilled staff, an organization needs to be seen as attractive. My research aims at establishing an understanding on the role of image and identity in as far as success in telecommunication business is concerned, specifically mobile telephony in Kenya. This research has set to establish how telecommunications provider builds its image to enable it stand out in this competitive venture. In addition, it has looked at the actions that the chosen organization has taken in as far as its products and services, behaviors and attitudes, environments and communication and the impact of the actions in the overall image held by the clients. Ab Hamid, Jusoh and Maulan (2020) asserts the importance of corporate image, according to them, a strong image gives the customers confidence in the products.

### **2.2.1 Forming image in the mind of the Customer**

Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus and Bilgihan (2019) declare: "image and perceptions are created through all senses and feelings experienced through products usage, customers' service, the commercial environment and corporate communications". According to them a corporate image is formed from four areas: Product and services: The products and services offered by an organization impacts on its image. Another area is Environment. This refers to the commercial environment yet people pay much attention to the physical environment which must be friendly. Behaviors and attitudes are also important factors: these are issues like social responsibility, corporate citizenship, ethical behaviors and community affairs as well as communication. They include advertising, personal relationships, personal communications, brochures. Park and

Nicolau (2019) declares that image is not build only by communication but intentional and unintentional messages as they get through to the audience all the time, thus undermining forms of communication. Since organizations tend to send messages from their actions the process of creating image never ends.

Sürücü et al (2019) add to the advantages of good corporate image. They state that a good corporate image can result in a competitive advantage and they identify the advantages of a good corporate image as improved sales. They state that clients prefer a well-known organization, with a good image unlike the one they don't have any information about or have a bad image. In addition they argue that clients support new product development in that, well known company will have fewer problems to launch and introduce a new product. From the beginning, customers will have confidence with the new product. Further positively communicated corporate identity will help to make the organization's presence known and as a result increase awareness, understanding and support, Aurelia, Firdiansjah and Respati (2019). Equally, effectively managed corporate identity will create a sense of belonging and common purpose within an organization. According to Aurelia *et al* (2019), the most important audience and communicators are the employees since they are in contact with the audience a positive image helps the company to attract and maintain skilled personnel while at the same time, a company with a good image enjoys a presumption of innocence during crisis.

Investing in the development of corporate image for an organization according to Cornelissen, (2008) has advantages which comprises of distinctiveness. When consistently communicated, a corporate image creates awareness, triggers recognition, and may also instill confidence among stakeholders, since they have a clear picture of the organization and raise motivation among the employees as well as morale. From the arguments above, it then follows that an organization stands out amid its competitors and this will boost its goals and objectives. This underscores the importance of investing and paying due attention to developing the image in an organization. It is important to note that the image enhances reputation. A good image provides basis for the organization to be favored by the stakeholders and this may have a positive impact on the organizations' performance (Subaebasni, Risnawaty & Wicaksono, 2019). Impact is felt when the organization meets its goals and objectives be it in terms sales, clientele, staff retention among others

### **2.2.2 Public Relations in Society**

Sriramesh, Verčič and Vercic (2020) defines public relations as complex methods and techniques concerning image management and the success of different organizations. In organizations, communication between the management and the staff form an important aspect of public relations. Research in such communication helps us to understand relations between the management and the staff. Public Relations have been defined as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and publics on whom its success or failure depends (Edwards, 2018). Though many may dismiss public relations as a term well understood in the field of communication, different scholars have defined it according to their needs and the context. For the purpose of this research it is important to give



it a definition that fits this particular context. Taylor (2018) refers to public relations as an umbrella term that covers communications, community relations, consumer affairs, employees relations, industry relations, international relations, investor relations, issues management, media relations, member relations, press a gentry, promotions, publicity, public affairs, shareholder relations as well as visitors relation.

Public relations, according to Manley and Valin (2017) are a management function that establishes effective two-way lines of communication, understanding and acceptable cooperation between the organization and its publics. This understanding ensures that the target publics have a clear picture of the organization. It is the role of the public relations to ensure that the organizations have a clear picture of the environment they are operating in and this involves the society. Corporate social responsibility programs are often aimed and creating understanding and ensuring a harmonious coexistence between the organization and the society in which it operates. A well-managed public relations exercise enhances organizational reputation (Manley & Valin, 2017).

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

This study adopted the interpretive philosophy. This study adopted the qualitative research method in attempting to understand behavior and institutions by getting to know the persons involved and their values, rituals, symbols, beliefs and emotions (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2019). The study employed a case study design and targeted employees, consumers and agents in the communication department. Non-probability sampling methods were used in this research in which extreme case sampling, purposive sampling and Convenience sampling methods were adopted. This research has used interviews, observation and document analysis. The collected qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis.

### **4.0 Data Presentation and Interpretation**

#### **4.1 Public's perception of the corporate identity and image of the organization**

The findings reveal that the telecommunication company was perceived positively in as far as its products quality, attitude of employees towards customers as well as availability of its products. The perception manifested itself on various ways which include the interest that the participants had in talking about the organization. In addition it was observed that the positive perception was shaped by popular opinion, media coverage as well as reputation. From published report of the telecommunication organization on the products and services offered by the organization to televised information on the organization, perception suggests that the audience received the message and intern influenced them. These explain why the organization continues to dominate the markets. Research has shown that positive perceived image in the mind of any audience may help companies in a lot of aspects such as improve sales, support new product development and recruit skilled personnel (Tourky, Kitchen & Shaalan, 2019).

Conversely, employees are able to influence stakeholders by projecting a certain image to them. The positive perception held by employees impacted on the clients they came in contact with. Media presence can also be attributed to positive perception of the organization since it assisted

the organization to project a consistent identity to the publics. This in turn creates uniformity as well as builds image of the organization. Through publication such as brochures, merchandise logos as well as advertisement the organizations are able to show consistency which sends a perception of being available. Most of the customers had a lot of positive feedback about the organization in general. It was apparent from the respondents interviewed that they appreciated most of the organization's products and to like these services as well.

*Because they are everywhere, network is almost everywhere in the country and because it was among the first to introduce some products in the market customers trust them and I think some people fear change or unknown, I also like the way employees handle complaint (A 3). You see when a customer comes here and they send money to a wrong number there is a number we call and they really act very fast so customers are comfortable with their products. There are challenges but they are trying, again they have helped many people they are always planting trees and conserving wild life in Lewa (E 5).*

Conducive working environment, employee training, and motivation as well as open channels of communication ensured that employees are comfortable working and being identified with the organization. From the employees interviewed it was observed that some staff members walked in the streets with their job cards on which is a sign of wanting to be identified with the organization. This positive perception that a section of stakeholders have of the organization can be attributed to efforts put in place to ensure that customers can access services. From this argument it is clear that customers need to experience product or service usage to be able to have a perception. Experience in this case include how customers interact with organization stakeholder, for instance if employees are motivated they will handle customers with enthusiasm which send a message of confidence to the customer who then develops an attitude towards the organization. However it also emerged that it's not possible to please every stakeholder with others citing network problems in the telecommunications provider as a negative aspect of the organization and one customer had this to say:

*Their network is not strong in all places due to congestion and more so it is a bit expensive compared to other networks but I am still in the network because of other services such as mobile money transfer and internet (C 6).*

#### **4.2 Communication in Building Identity and Image**

To get feedback on the role of communication in identity and image building in the organization and its effectiveness, I asked the agents and customers to explain how the organization communicated to them. The findings indicate that the organization indeed communicated to its target audience through short messages, sales representatives, and Corporate Social Responsibility actions as well as through posters, bulletins, newspapers and their website. As discussed in the literature review, communication helps create an image that conveys the company's vision and mission and reflects the interest of the organization. The findings show that the organization has internal mechanism of communicating with its staff. The respondents appreciated the responsiveness of the organization through feedback. Any form of communication can only be said to be complete if it has feedback. To build a strong identity

positive feedback is essential which agrees with what researchers have established. The responsiveness of the organization was appreciated mostly by agents who felt that the organization is caring and has their interest at heart which resulted in positive perception of the organization. The agents interviewed had this to say:

Visibility in the media through communicated messages could also be attributed to the dominant positive image held by the stakeholders of the organization. From the findings, it is clear that the organization has a corporate strategy that ensures visibility; a very important component in building corporate identity. Al Mubarak et al (2019) adds that Building a corporate identity is part of reputation management and could be controlled completely through successful corporate management and communication strategy. One of the agents was impressed with the information that they get through media and bulletins: Consequently, the organization seemed to have a good working relationship with its agents. Looking at the organization's website, it was evident that it was constantly updated thus the clients could access with ease. Researchers have documented that communication is important in a business organization. The updated information must be made available at all times for effective running of an organization and to staff members, customers and clients as well as other stakeholders. As alluded to by Alan (2008), employees deal directly with organizations external stakeholders and can be influenced by their feedback. Conversely, employees are able to influence stakeholders by projecting a certain image to them. This confirms why the organization's agents seemed to appreciate the organization since they gave the impression that they understood how the organization conducted its business.

Products and services of the organization are significant in shaping the organizations image and identity. It was observed that most customers and agents tended to identify and describe the organization based on its products and services. The availability of its products and services, cost as well as effectiveness mattered. This provides ways in which a firm can create value to its products and adds that customers will have more or less confidence depending on superior product performance, better services, and top-quality. This clearly shows that contact with the organization is important if customers are to create an image of the organization which the findings of this research support.

Corporate reputation can be influenced by communication activities. Communication programs are valuable for creating awareness of good operational practices and in enhancing the organization's relationships with stakeholders. Dialogue with stakeholders also can help shape organizational practices. Image is all about how an organization is regarded while identity is the visual image. Image and perceptions are created through all senses and feelings experienced by customers through all products usage, customers service, the commercial environment and corporate communications. Employees have a significant role in forming and dissemination image to the external stakeholders (Kennedy, 1997) it is encompassing even behavioral relationships of employees with the external stakeholders who in this case are the customers (Foroudi, Melewar & Gupta, 2017). The way employees handle customers and their concerns are dependent on the identity they have of the organization. To understand how customer relations build identity and image, I asked the agents and customers their perception in as far as their interaction with the organization was concerned. On the other hand, I asked the employees, about

the strategies they had to strengthen and build positive image both internally and externally. It was noted that building a good customer relations was part of communication strategy of the telecommunication service provider as noted by the communication department who said that they trained all their customer care staff to learn and handle customers with respect and integrity. As for the behaviors and attitudes, I asked my target audience what they thought of the organization as a whole as well as its products and services. From the data, I observed that the service provider was perceived positively by customers due to employees' attitudes towards the customers. The majority of those interviewed lauded the effectiveness of the organizations customer care services. What impressed them was the fact that whenever they contacted the customer care their issues are respondent to effectively and faster.

### **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has established that due to technological advancement and competition, it is crucial for organizations charged with service provision to make a deliberate move to manage identity and image. It has further shown that clients are attracted by what they think and how they view organization, aspect of corporate social responsibility emerged as a key exercise in building a lasting impression in the eyes of the stakeholders. This research makes the following conclusions. To begin with identity is significant in image building in an organization more so in the service sector. Identity brings about trust among the stake holders and therefore influences the purchasing power. Secondly the study concludes that products and services offered by an organization is key in image formation in addition to the effective communication as well as environment in which an organization operate. Based on this background., this study recommends that each and every organization needs to pay attention to the language that the target audience speak, this research has shown that it play's and important role in building identity. Secondly corporate social responsibility should be seen as a smart way of doing business since in the long run it builds a favorable image of the organization in the minds on its stakeholders.

In addition using indigenous names seem to send a positive message to the consumers and organization needs to take cognizance of the same. The study recommends that every organization should pay attention to the language that the target audience speaks, and that the symbols of identity need to be well thought out. Further, Corporate Social Responsibility should be seen as a smart way of doing business in addition to encouraging innovation and partnering with the indigenous organization in order for the clients to identify with the brand. Furthermore, research has shown that internal as well as external publics are important in disseminating a positive image of an organization. This calls for organizations to improve five areas of concern to both external and internal publics as alluded to by (Foroudi, Melewar & Gupta, 2017).



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