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Brand Architecture and Performance of Water Bottling Firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

The broad objective of the study was to establish the effect of brand architecture on performance of water bottling firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The specific objectives were to determine the influence of brand architecture on firm performance. Testable hypothesis was derived from extant literature and tested through regression analysis. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey with primary data gathered from 209 major water bottling firms in Nairobi, using a semi-structured questionnaire. The study achieved a response rate of 67.9%. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research results revealed a statistically significant relationship between brand architecture and non-financial firm performance (R^2 =0.704, F= 333.64, p-value<0.05); financial firm performance (R^2 = 0.692, F= 314.904, p-value <0.05). These results are consistent with those of previous study findings on the relationship between brand architecture and firm performance. The study results will facilitate policy makers in the enactment of policies that will facilitate access to resources that promote investment in the brand development process linked to brand architecture. In practice, the findings will support managers in obtaining approval for additional resources required for brand architecture. The study underscores the significance of brand architecture in enhancing performance. The results of the study have contributed to theory, policy, and practice. The study outcomes enhance the existing brand architecture and firm performance body of knowledge, by empirically testing the hypotheses in the Kenyan context.

Keywords: *Brand Architecture, Firm Performance, Water Bottling Industry, Nairobi City County, Kenya*

1.1 Introduction

Majority of firms worldwide operate in dynamic environments that compel them to continuously develop relevant strategies that can guarantee their performance and offer a competitive advantage. Consumers have been relegated to purchase products based on packaging designs that sometimes drives them towards impulse buying. Strong brands create competitive advantage and increase the opportunities for superior organizational performance in competitive markets (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). Brand architecture is a fundamental aspect of marketing strategy adopted by firms today to assist them in blocking internal competition, and achievement of synergies, while leveraging brands across markets and segments to realize a stronger competitive advantage that is inimitable. Kapferer (2012) and Hsu *et al.* (2016) acknowledge that brand architecture can have a significant impact on firm performance through provision of efficient and effective ways of managing marketing resources. Brand architecture provides the framework for developing a strong branding strategy. This scenario warrants further scrutiny of additional comprehensive brand architecture strategies. The water bottling industry in Kenya typifies the influence of branding in a highly commoditized market, through conversion of products into evocative aspects of life.

Brand Architecture

Brexendorf and Keller (2017) describe brand architecture as the hierarchical structure that defines how a firm's products and services are branded. Gabrielli and Baghi (2016) define brand architecture as the firm's organization of brand portfolio that outlines naming and product positioning in the market. Rajagopal and Sanchez (2003) defined brand architecture as an integrated process of brand building by setting up brand relationships among branding choices in the competitive environment. Branding strategies denotes the technique employed by firms to blend their brand name and their products (Laforet & Saunders, 1994). Brand architecture is a recent development from the brand concept. Brand architecture is used synonymously with the terms 'branding strategy' or 'brand structure' (Laforet & Saunders, 2007). Brand architecture strategy determines the brand elements such as symbols, logos, and names, which a firm can employ across both new and existing products and services (Keller, 2014). Brand architecture entails the brand components a firm should engage in among its new and existing product and service portfolio, simplifying the similarities and dissimilarities between the entities involved (Keller, 2014; Strebinger, 2014).

Existing body of literature views brand architecture as a classification system for various kinds of portfolios typified by different relationships among brands that are members of the same family (Aaker, 2004). The firm's brand architecture largely represents an inheritance of past management choices and the competitive realities the firm encounters in the marketplace. Rao et al. (2004) argue that brand architecture describes the way in which a brand signs a product, and whether it does so autonomously. Brand architecture is influenced by product and market factors. Three product-market concerns that play central roles in brand architecture include the nature and range of target market; the degree to which the product is culturally embedded; and the competitive market structure.

Literature identifies between 3 and 11 distinct branding strategies built around branded house strategy or house of brands (Olins, 1989; Laforet and Saunders, 2007; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) proposed four brand architecture strategies comprising house of brands, endorsed brands,

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sub-brands, and branded house. However, the three dominant patterns of brand architecture strategy include monolithic/corporate dominant, product dominant and endorsed or hybrid/mixed structures (Olins, 1989; Douglas, Craig & Nijssen, 2001). Monolithic are corporate brands with single name for all the products (Saunders, 1994). Corporate dominant architecture also known as branded house is common among firms carrying limited range of products. Within the branded house strategy, the master brand is dominant while the other brands play a descriptive role (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Product dominant is commonly known as house of brands where every product is identified by a specific brand. The house of brand architecture is prevalent among firms with multiple national or local brands that have a wide international market scope and wherein each brand presents a targeted value proposition. Endorsed brands relate to hybrid branding wherein two brands are associated with one product. Although the endorser brand often plays a minor role, it adds credibility and perceived value to consumers. The mixed architecture is the most common and comprises a blend of corporate and product level brands or a combination of different structures for the different product decisions. The sub-brands strategy is a situation where the master brand plays the major driving role, but its brand associations are modified by the sub-brands. The current study adopted the branding strategies measures by Laforet & Saunders (1994), namely corporate branding, house of brands and mixed brands owing to its ability to blend the firm name and its products.

Firms have an opportunity to pursue several branding strategies in the management of their brands (Rao et al., 2004; Brexendorf & Keller, 2017). Successful branding strategies augment a product's positioning, creating a powerful bargaining platform with key stakeholders, in effect facilitating a competitive advantage (Ochoo et al., 2018). Doyle and Stern (2006) posit that branding strategies play an integral role in facilitating firms to participate effectively in the market competition. Effective branding strategies support market segmentation offering a distinctive image for launching a market position and source for value distinction (Sinclair & Seward, 2008). A firm's brand image is boosted by successful brand architectural strategies evoking strong emotions, responses, and favorable opinions that leads to product patronage, which enhances firm performance.

Firm Performance

Organizational performance is a key concern for stakeholders in the firm because it influences decisions, returns and reactions from investors, customers, and employees. However, there is a lack of concurrence on the explicit definition of performance (Richard et al. 2009; Silvestro, 2014; Vij & Bedi, 2016). Performance management is deemed as a fundamental aspect in articulating a firm's plan and possible results (Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Silvestro, 2014; Vij & Bedi, 2016). Business performance depicts a critical pointer of a company's aptitude to pacify stakeholders, quantified in financial and operational measures, leveraging primary data to determine subjective performance and secondary data to gauge objective business performance or both. These circumstances compel firms to create practicable strategies and metrics for the monitoring of these strategies for competitive advantage.

Different scholars embrace dissimilar judgments regarding the important variables in the performance metrics of a firm. Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) observed a well-built connection between objective business performance and subjective business performance resolving that no one of the two outperforms the other. Kaplan and Norton (1992) initiated the

Balance Score Card (BSC) centered on its capability to transform vision and strategy streamlining a firm's process to institute Key performance indicators (KPI's). The balance score card configures performance in four key dimensions comprising financial view, customer view, internal business methods and organizational learning and innovation. Similarly, Elkington (1998) established the Triple Bottom line (TBL) which provides a practical solution to address conflicts among stakeholders regarding sustainability through recognition of the critical role of the financial bottom line, and social and environmental concerns at the heart of sustainability. This study will adopt the BSC model as a measure of firm performance, based on its ability to comprehensively review the performance of water bottling firms, through financial and operational measures, and metrics with a linkage to the long-term growth and success of the firm.

Water Bottling Firms in Nairobi

Nairobi county is among the 47 counties in Kenya, apart from being the main city, comprising 17 constituencies, and an estimated annual population growth rate of 4 percent. Nairobi County receives its water supply from various institutions including local authorities serving both rural and urban areas, alongside publicly owned bodies such as Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company. Increasing urbanization, shifts in climatic conditions and the growth of informal settlements has contributed to the perennial water shortages within Nairobi County, depriving a significant portion of the current population access to clean drinking water. This has encouraged the emergence of informal water vendors. The demand for clean drinking water in Nairobi County has caused the drilling of boreholes, and the establishment of numerous water bottling firms to mitigate the situation.

There were 209 major water bottling firms registered with KEBS based in Nairobi County in Kenya as of November 2021. The ubiquitous and dull nature of water as a product engenders profound branding challenges for players in the industry, driving differentiation through labelling and packaging. Majority of the firms within the water bottling industry have an annual capacity of more than 10,000 liters. Although customer loyalty can benefit a firm positively, achievement of loyalty remains elusive in the water bottling industry. As such, the importance of brand architecture as a marketing tool amidst the rising demand for bottled water, cannot be overemphasized. Furthermore, uncertainty prevails over the customer loyalty and firm performance relationship, despite the widespread adoption of branding strategies by water bottling firms. The motivation for this study was drawn from the linkage of water to the country's socio-economic development goals exemplified in Vision 2030 and Kenya's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Research Problem

Studies have shown that there is a relationship between brand architecture and firm performance. However, the studies have been insufficient in addressing the relative importance of brand architecture on firm performance. Extant studies linked to brand architecture and firm performance predominantly investigated the direct relationships of the variables while considering different contexts other than the water bottling industry. Yeboah (2016) did a study on product branding (trademark cost and cost of advertising) and sales revenue at Unilever, Ghana. The study considered all the 400 product categories within the firm and established a positive outcome. However, the study did not consider the mediating effect of customer loyalty and the moderating effect of competitive intensity on the relationship between brand architecture and firm performance. Matarid et al. (2014) undertook a study on brand extension strategy (similarity, reputation of brand, familiarity) and brand equity as independent and dependent variables among FMCG's in Egypt, and randomly sampled 415 consumers in one hypermarket, with a positive outcome.

The water bottling industry contributes significantly to Kenya's GDP with progressive off-trade sales estimate of 31.7 billion Kenya Shillings in 2018, 33.3 billion Kenya Shillings in 2019, and an estimated volume growth of 7.1 percent between 2017 and 2022 (Euromonitor, 2018). The industry is essential to the country's socio-economic development goals, with its advent credited to both deregulation and globalization, lack of access to clean water in both the urban and rural areas, and a high dependency on bottled water among affluent urban residents. The water bottling industry is a highly competitive market characterized by brand proliferation, many sellers, and ease of market entry and exit. In such intense competition industries, brand architecture holds a special place in marketing success. For most water bottling firms, branding has not been applied as a marketing strategy, but only for product identification however, majority of these firms leverage on branding to some extent in a bid to differentiate their products in the market. This trend can be attributed to the fact that branding initiatives are considered as long-term strategies which require sufficient resources that may not be easily accessible to majority of water bottling firmsExisting studies contend that greater performance is only achievable through alignment of brand architecture strategy with the environmental trends (Porter, 1985; Ansoff & Sullivan, 1993). Although brand architecture is perceived as integral in facilitating firms to engage in market competition, the foregoing controversies prompt the need for further research.

Existing studies investigating the direct link between brand architecture and firm performance revealed several inconsistencies related to the conceptualization and dimension of the variables, with some examining the link between branding strategies and firm performance whereas others examined the varying constructs of branding strategies. Zyglidopoulos et al. (2006) did a study in USA on the influence of branding strategy on performance, and measured branding strategy using brand identity, advertising, patent, and legal protection of the firm's brands. The study measured performance of corporate branding using Return on Assets for three years and established a positive outcome. Furthermore, Homburg et al. (2009) studied the effect of brand awareness (recall, recognition, brand knowledge, top mind) on firm performance among 300 B2B firms in Germany, and established a positive outcome, though the study did not consider the mediating and moderating effect of customer loyalty and competitive intensity respectively. Rahman et al. (2019) studied the relationship between brand equity and firm performance and a moderating effect of corporate social responsibility strategy, on 62 USA based firms using longitudinal data, and established a positive influence of brand equity on firm performance. Noteworthy is the fact that this study did not consider the relationship between brand architecture and firm performance, nor did it consider the mediating and moderating effect of customer loyalty and competitive intensity respectively on the relationship between brand architecture and firm performance. The study measured financial performance using Tobin's q, while market-based performance was measured based on market share.

Whereas the above studies provide prima facie evidence on the link between branding strategy and performance, the operationalization of branding strategy was a mix of both brand equity and architecture, making it difficult to isolate the influence of brand architecture on performance. A section of scholars assert that branding strategies indisputably contribute to enhanced performance

(Zyglidopoulos et al., 2006; Rubera & Droge, 2013; Homburg et al., 2009; Rahman et al. 2019), while other scholars (Rao et al. 2004; Shahri, 2011; Hong & Diep, 2016) refute this claim. Furthermore, some studies contend that branding strategies can only impact firm performance through customer loyalty (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Kim et al., 2007). Additionally, a study by Shahri (2011) concluded that corporate brand strategy can result in losses if not well managed. While Hong and Diep (2016) suggest that broad brands can potentially expose firms to high risk.

Ochoo et al. (2018) undertook a study among 122 staff within two multinational corporations in Kenya and focused on the effect of brand element, brand name, brand identity and brand personality on performance. The study used census survey, and data was gathered using a structured questionnaire. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that the implementation of branding strategies had a positive impact on firm performance. Nkari (2015) studied the impact of branding practices on performance among commercial farmers in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study considered the moderating effect of farmer's characteristics and the operating environment respectively. The study focused on a population of 213 farmers out of which a sample of 140 farmers was derived, and data collected using semi-structured questionnaires, while analysis was undertaken through descriptive and inferential statistics. The outcome of the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between branding practices and performance of commercial farmers. However, the study established that while the moderating effect of farmer's characteristics had a statistically significant effect on the relationship between branding practices and performance of commercial farmers, the moderating effect of the operating environment on the direct relationship was not statistically significant.

The foregoing analysis highlights conceptual, empirical, contextual, and methodological gaps to be addressed by the current study. Extant literature suggests a positive outcome on the link between brand architecture and firm performance. However, the indirect relationships display conspicuous gaps on the relationships between the variables as conceptualized in the current study. Hence, the current study sought to answer the question 'What is the influence of brand architecture on performance of water bottling firms in Nairobi City County?

1.2 Research Objectives

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of brand architecture on the performance of water bottling firms in Nairobi City County in Kenya.

2.1 Literature Review

The study was anchored on relationship marketing theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The postulations of the theory provides the foundation upon which the conceptual relationships among the variables are based. Therefore, the theory provides a more comprehensive clarification on the relationship between brand architecture and firm performance.

Relationship marketing has gained credence in the domain of marketing knowledge. Being a relatively new concept in the marketing discipline, relationship marketing has attracted definitions from different perspectives. Berry (1983) defined relationship marketing as a strategy concerned with attracting, maintaining, and enhancing the relationships between the organization and its customers. Gronroos (1996) describes relationship marketing as a mutually beneficial process that involves identifying, establishing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships with customers and key stakeholders at a profit through mutual exchange involving the delivery of brand promise by the marketing firm. Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined relationship marketing as ‘all activities directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges.’ Relationship marketing theory attempts to explain relationship marketing and predict relationship antecedents, maintainers, and outcomes. Relationship marketing theory holds that both customers and firms have expectations and seek to benefit from the relationship they enter. The theory argues that customers enter a relationship with firms when the perceived gain is greater than the costs incurred by customers in the relationship. According to the theory, customers desire to engage with firms they trust because it reduces the risks of relationship exchanges particularly where firms are reliable, of high integrity and competent. In addition, the theory argues that customers ascribe to relationships with organizations whose values are congruent to those of the customers.

The theory explains that firms enter relationships with customers if such relationships enable them to compete better in the market. In addition, the theory also holds that a well-maintained relationship with customers delivers competitive advantage that in turn leads to superior financial performance to the firm (Gummesson, 2002; Hunt & Derozier, 2004). Brand architecture is a strategy used by the organization to connect with the customers, build trust and ultimately create a relationship based on mutual exchange and gain. Brands connect with customers and create relationship by making promises that are relevant and valued by customers. The ability of a brand to satisfy customers builds trust, communicates integrity and competence that strengthen bonds between the brand and customers. Customer loyalty is the immediate outcome of the brand’s ability to deliver superior value by matching the offer to customer expectations. When perceived benefits delivered by the brand exceed costs both in monetary and non-monetary terms, loyalty is created. Increased loyalty is a strong driver to the firm’s long-term financial performance (Alrubaiee & Al-Nazer, 2010). Although the theory explains how brand architecture is indirectly associated with firm performance through customer loyalty, it is silent on the influence of competitive intensity on the firm’s loyalty building efforts. The theory assumes a stable market where competitors do not aggressively respond to the firm’s branding strategies. Furthermore, the theory assumes rational behaviour on the part of consumers where benefits override costs to enter a relationship. This is sometimes not the case as purchase could be driven by other factors such as brand sympathy.

2.2 Brand Architecture and Firm Performance

Branding assumes a significant role among several firms worldwide, based on the perceived contribution in terms of profitability, differentiation, customer loyalty and competitive advantage (Keller et al., 2020). Extant literature discloses that research on branding strategies has received growing attention (Aaker, 2004; Alessandri and Alessandri, 2004; Olins, 1990; Asberg, 2018). Noteworthy is the fact that majority of scholars predominantly focus on the role of the brand’s strength to firm performance, whereas others focus on brand building methods (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2001; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005; Odoom, 2016). Several firms competing in consumer markets either possess or market various brands, while driving corporate strategic decisions associated with their portfolio of brands (Laforet & Saunders, 1994; Aaker, 2004). Scholars and practitioners alike are gradually shifting their focus on resources organized for the growth of marketing assets with the financial performance of the firm (Rust et al., 2004).

Existing literature emphasizes the effect of brand architecture on firm performance (Olins, 1990; Zyglidopoulos et al., 2006; Rubera & Droge, 2013; Rahman & Serrano, 2019). The achievement of competitive advantage demands brand architecture that develops strong brands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Sinclair & Seward 2008). Nevertheless, the existing literature reveals diverse arguments relating to the benefits of branding strategies, with several studies focusing on the direct impact of branding strategies on firm performance, while neglecting the indirect relationship, justifying further research to validate or refute these findings. Research investigating the direct association between branding strategies on the firm's performance can be categorized into two, with some studies investigating branding strategies and its influence on firm performance, and others investigating the specific constructs of branding strategies and their association with firm performance. Previous studies demonstrate that brand architecture has a strong impact on various dimensions of firm performance including market share, marketing efficiency, profitability, and shareholder value (Rao et al., 2004; Morgan & Rego, 2009; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2012).

Zyglidopoulos et al. (2006) studied the effect of brand architecture on firm performance and established that branding strategies measures have a significant impact on firm performance. Rahman and Serrano (2019) studied the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance moderated by corporate social responsibility and established a positive impact on performance. Hong and Diep (2016) studied the relationship between brand management (brand orientation, brand identity development and internal branding) and financial performance and concluded that brand management constructs have an impact on firm performance although broad brands can expose the firm to risk. Moreover, Shahri (2011) studied the impact of corporate brand strategy on performance and established no financial gain. The foregoing findings reveal that branding strategies constructs have different effects on firm performance necessitating the establishment of constructs with a significant impact on firm performance.

Furthermore, research supporting a positive outcome on the link between branding strategies and firm performance suggests that a robust attitudinal devotion towards a brand must feature to experience real loyalty (Reichheld, 2003; Turner & Wilson, 2006). Previous studies established contradictory findings pertaining to the association between brand architecture and the firm's performance, signifying that exposure of broad brands by firms is a high risk (Rubera & Droge, 2013; Castaldi & Giarratana, 2018). Larger brand portfolios have been found to be inefficient because they negatively impact manufacturing and distribution economies (Hill, Ettenson & Tyson, 2005) and force firms to spread thin the marketing expenditure (Kumar, 2003). Other scholars (Shahri, 2011; Rao et al., 2004) claim that attainment of a positive outcome between brand architecture and firm performance, is only sustainable if well managed. The foregoing reviews reveal inconsistencies of studies regarding the relationship between brand architecture and performance. Hence, further investigation is necessary in competitive industries where the value of brands is paramount.

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2.3 Conceptual Framework

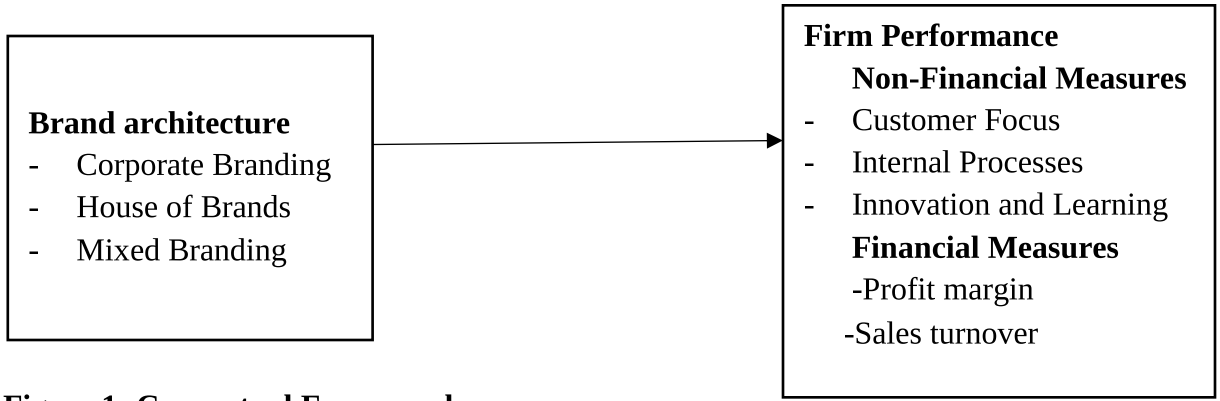

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Null Hypotheses

The following conceptual hypotheses were derived from the relevant literature based on the relationship illustrated within the conceptual model in Figure 1.

H_0: There is no influence of brand architecture on firm performance.

3.1 Research Methodology

The study adopted positivism paradigm of epistemology as the ideal philosophy since it was preceded by theory which the researcher used to develop hypotheses and research questions and objectives. The hypotheses were subsequently tested to support the articulation of laws studied in the literature and the same was reviewed in alignment with the findings of the study. The positivist paradigm uses quantitative approach of research causing the researcher to be directed by objectivity hence hindering manipulation of the outcome of the study.

The research design provides the blueprint which directs the various stages of the study, specifically the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Cooper & Schindler, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2007). The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design since data was gathered at a single point in time based on multiple study variables. Descriptive cross-sectional survey design leverages on investigations aimed at describing the phenomena that is under inquiry by establishing the characteristics associated with the subject population.

Studies that align with descriptive cross-sectional survey are deemed useful in instances where the researcher intends to verify the direction and strengths of the relationship between or among the variables. The proposed design was considered suitable for this study since it purposed to describe the association among the study variables namely brand architecture and firm performance through the gathering of a large amount of data from a specific population of interest. The research design is considered appropriate due to its initiation from the researcher's reflections on the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the study, alongside the methodological approaches. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2008), cross sectional surveys are embraced in studies whose general objective is to establish the presence or not of significant associations amongst the study variables at some point. Several scholars namely (Cooper and Schindler, 2011; Creswell, 2012) posit that

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numerous studies in business and marketing research adapt descriptive cross-sectional survey method. The census technique is proposed by diverse scholars as suitable in dealing with a population that is undersized, easily accessible, and essential (Guo & Sheffield, 2008; Saunders et al., 2003). Studies linked to cross sectional survey have previously been engaged to gather quantitative data (Ndubai, 2016 & Ogaga, 2017).

The study targeted a population comprising water bottling firms registered with Kenya Bureau of standards as at, November 2021. A total of 209 major water bottling firms within Nairobi City County registered by KEBS as at, November 2021 was considered. Hence, the study focused on water bottling firms that were legally registered, undertaking bottling of water in Nairobi City County and have KEBS standardization mark of quality.

The selection of the water bottling industry was planned for this study owing to the fusion of firms with varying characteristics, the ubiquitous and dull nature of water even as the commoditized nature of the industry drives firms to embrace branding strategies to differentiate their products in the market. The data gathered was applied in the explanation of the effect of brand architecture, customer loyalty and competitive intensity on firm performance. The unit of analysis for the current study comprised of water bottling firms, whereas managers within the chosen firms were considered as the respondents, and their views were sought. The financial performance of firms within the water bottling industry is deemed important due to its linkage to one of the SDG goals targeted to achieve Vision 2030.

This study adopted a census research method and focused on 209 major water bottling companies in Nairobi City County, registered by KEBS. The employees considered as targets for this study were either marketing managers, operations managers, and chief executive officers (CEO) who were specifically picked, because of their custodian role of relevant information relating to the study variables. This study assumed a confidence level of 95% since majority of companies and social science research leverage on alpha level of 0.05 (Israel, 2009).

3.2 Data Collection

This study leveraged only primary data which was gathered through administration of structured questionnaires. Quantitative data was gathered using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, targeted at managers of the water bottling firms in Nairobi County. The data constituted financial and non-financial indicators. Previous studies that have adopted structured questionnaires include Owino (2014) and Adede (2017).

The decision to target three managers was driven by their roles within the sampled organizations that expressly grants them custody of the relevant information associated with brand architecture, and firm performance. This is consistent with Campbell (1995) who posits that crucial informants ought to be knowledgeable about the matters being studied and exhibit a willingness to communicate the information. The questionnaires targeted at the managers were handled via the drop and pick approach, to allow the respondents ample time to respond for enhancement of the accuracy of responses and response rate.

The response rate was enhanced by the research assistant through seeking contact with the respondents to solicit for appointments prior to actual visits to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire captured a blend of questions including a few open-ended questions as well as close ended questions. The closed ended questions were guided by a five-point Likert scale ranging from not at all to a very large extent. Similar studies leveraging on Likert scales include Nkari (2015) and Adede (2017).

The study employed descriptive statistics to investigate the varied features of the respondents based on measures of distribution, frequencies, and deviations, while linear regression was used to determine the relationship between brand architecture and firm performance. The study utilized SPSS version 25 for data analysis.

4.1 Data Analysis and Research Findings

Response Rate

The managers within the water bottling firms were considered as the unit of observation while the unit of analysis was the water bottling firms. A total of 209 questionnaires were sent out to major water bottling firms within Nairobi County registered by KEBS, however, out of this, 142 responded, realizing a 67.9 percent response rate which is deemed adequate as it compares well with Babbie (2004), who suggested that a response rate of more than 80 percent is excellent, 60 percent to 80 percent is considered good while 50 percent to 60 percent is moderate. Other studies which got similar response rates comprise 66 percent for (Gichuru, 2018), 69.5 percent for Ombaka (2014), 67.7 percent for (Kinoti, 2012), thus, a response rate of 67.9 was considered good. The study targeted a single respondent who was either the CEO, operations manager, or marketing manager. Single respondents are deemed more reliable and valid (Lin & Schaeffer, 1995; Narver & Slatter, 2000).

Reliability Test

Reliability measures the point to which an instrument generates consistent outcomes or data following continual trials under varied conditions (Saunders et al., 2016). The study used Cronbach alpha (α) to measure reliability. Several scholars concur that Cronbach value from 0.5 is adequate and good for reliability test (Asikhia, 2009, Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). The study construed alpha coefficient of 0.5 and above as suitable and acceptable reliability. The study adopted a value of 0.7 and above as reliable (Nunally, 1978). The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability

Variables	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Comment
Brand Architecture	11	.862	Reliable
Performance	29	.768	Reliable
Overall	**40**	**.783**	**Reliable**

Source: Primary data, 2022

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the questionnaire was overall reliable, that is Cronbach alpha equal 0.783>0.7. This justified the reliability of the data applied to draw assumptions from the theoretical concepts. Specifically, each study variable was reliable; brand architecture had the highest Cronbach alpha of 0.862, followed by performance with a Cronbach alpha of 0.768.

Validity Test

Validity defines the ability of the research instrument to gauge what it is meant to measure in terms of precision and significance (Saunders, 2016). Face validity was assessed through discussions on the questionnaire with both scholars and practitioners in marketing. Construct validity was determined using factor analysis which facilitated the reduction of data through factor loading consequently disclosing statements which had the greatest impact on the variables. Sampling adequacy tests that demonstrate the suitability of items for further analysis was also undertaken using both Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test with a synopsis of the outcome presented in Table .2.

Table 2: Kaiser -Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test

Factors	KMO Test	Bartlett's test of Sphericity		
		Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Brand Architecture	0.577	79.964	45	0.003
Firm performance	0.571	143.362	142	0.008

Source: Primary data, 2022

The outcome of the test presented in Table 2, reveals that the scales had KMO values ranging from 0.5 to values greater than 0.7 as suggested by Williams et al. (2012) who endorses values starting from 0.5 and above as appropriate for sampling adequacy. KMO >0.5 means that the sample is adequate. P-value<0.05 for Bartlett's test of sphericity signifies that factor analysis is valid, revealing that the variables are highly correlated and could be decreased into less factors.

The sampling adequacy for brand architecture was significant (KMO = 0.577>0.5, P-value = 0.003< 0.05) hence factor analysis was considered valid. Organizational performance was significant at (KMO = 0.571>0.5, P-value = 0.008< 0.05) supporting factor analysis. This trend confirms that the statements in each study variable were correlated hence justifying reduction into factors. Bartletts test of sphericity which verifies whether the samples emanate from populations with identical variances also produced PV < 0.05 revealing a satisfactory degree of sampling adequacy.

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses were based on the specific objective of the study and the conceptual framework of the study. Employing the two study variables and objectives, the following hypotheses was formulated and tested; there is no influence of brand architecture on performance of water bottling firms. Hypothesis one for the direct relationship was tested using simple linear regression analysis.

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Brand Architecture and Performance of Water Bottling Firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

The objective of the study was to determine the association link between brand architecture and performance of water bottling firms. The variable comprised corporate branding, house of brands and mixed brands. The participants in the survey were required to declare their level of agreement with specific statements on the way brand architecture was handled in their respective firms. To evaluate the direct link between brand architecture and performance of water bottling firms, the following hypothesis was formulated and tested.

H_0: There is no influence between brand architecture and firm performance.

The results are presented in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

Table 3: Brand Architecture and Performance (Non-financial)

		Model Summary			
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**	
1	.839a	0.704	0.702	0.67638	
		ANOVA[a]			
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	152.638	1	152.638	333.645	.000b
Residual	64.048	140	0.457		
Total	216.686	141			
		Coefficients[a]			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.448	0.152		2.95	0.004
Brand Architecture	0.772	0.042	0.839	18.266	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2022

The results in Table 3 shows that brand architecture had a strong positive relationship on performance (R= 83.9). This implies that the goodness of fit model (R^2=0.704). The outcome signified that brand architecture accounts for 70.04% of the variation in non-financial performance of water bottling firms. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to evaluate the significance of the regression analysis model. The results were found to be overall significant (F = 333.645, P-value <0.05), which reflected the significance of the model at 95% confidence level. The beta coefficients outcome reveals that a unit change in brand architecture impacts performance of water bottling firms by 0.839 and the change is significant (p-value <.05). Brand architecture was individually significant (β = 0.772, t = 18.266, p-value <0.05). Performance of firm would be 0.448 (y intercept) when brand architecture is at zero.

Based on the above outcome, there exists enough evidence to reject the hypothesis, that there is no influence between brand architecture and performance (non-financial) of water bottling firms. **H_0**; There is no influence between brand architecture and firm performance, is rejected. The outcome of the coefficient of brand architecture shows that for every unit increase in brand architecture, performance (non-financial) increases by 0.839 units other factors held constant.

Table 4: Brand Architecture and Performance (Financial)

			Model Summary			
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.832a	0.692	0.69	0.68178		
			ANOVA[a]			
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	146.374	1	146.374	314.904	.000b
	Residual	65.075	140	0.465		
	Total	211.449	141			
			Coefficients[a]			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	0.515	0.153			3.368	0.001
Brand Architecture	0.756	0.043	0.832		17.746	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2022

The findings in Table 4 show that, goodness of fit of the model (R^2) equal 0.692. This shows that brand architecture accounted for 69.2% of the variation in financial performance of water bottling firms. This implies that brand architecture according to managers in water bottling firms represents 69.2% variation in financial performance of the firm beside other factors not reflected in this model explaining 30.8%. The F-value was 314.904 and p-value < 0.05 threshold signifying that there is a significant relationship between brand architecture and firm performance (financial) according to managers in water bottling firms. Brand architecture was individually significant ($\beta = 0.756$, $t = 17.746$, p-value <0.05). This provided enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, that there is no influence between brand architecture and performance (financial) of water bottling firms. The coefficient outcome of brand architecture shows that for each one unit increase in brand architecture, firm performance (financial) increases by 0.832 units other factors held constant. This implies that as a firm employs brand architecture its performance is likely to increase by 0.832 units.

4.3 Discussion of the Findings

This section presents the discussion of the study findings as directed by the study objectives alongside the conceptual hypotheses. The results are discussed and compared with the previous studies findings. The main objective of this study was to determine the effect of brand architecture on the performance of water bottling firms in Nairobi County, in Kenya. The study adopted a null hypothesis to achieve the objective of the study, which was tested using linear regression analysis and the findings were presented. The outcomes revealed a significant relationship between brand architecture and the overall performance of water bottling firms in Nairobi County, Kenya. This allowed for presentation of the outcomes which either corroborated with or negated findings from previous studies. The discussions on the findings are presented below.

The objective sought to determine the effect of brand architecture on performance of water bottling firms. It is theoretically held that brand architecture can enhance firm performance. The results showed a positive association between brand architecture and firm performance. Firm performance was gauged by both financial and non-financial measures. Brand architecture was based on corporate branding, house of brands and mixed brands, while firm performance was guided by the balanced score card (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). The balanced scorecard measures included financial perspective, customer perspective, internal process, innovation, and learning. The findings of the study showed a positive relationship between brand architecture and non-financial performance indicators ($R = 0.839$, $R^2 = 0.704$, p value<0.05) and financial performance indicators ($R=0.832$, $R^2 = 0.692$, p value<0.05). The study findings revealed that as firms adopt brand architecture, they can realize an increase in the number of customers and hence performance. This suggests that a firm's engagement with its customers can be augmented through the adoption of branding strategies with a general reduction on marketing costs.

The outcome of the study revealed that brand architecture accounted for 70.4% of non-financial performance in water bottling firms, while brand architecture accounted for 69.2% of the variation in financial performance in water bottling firms. The findings led to the rejection of hypotheses 1, **H_0**: There is no influence between brand architecture and firm performance. The results revealed that brand architecture significantly influences overall performance (financial and non-financial) in water bottling firms.

The results conform to those of (Rao et al., 2004; Morgan and Rego, 2009) who demonstrated that brand architecture has a strong impact on various dimensions of firm performance including market share, marketing efficiency, profitability, and shareholder value. The outcomes also corroborate those held by Zyglidopoulos et al. (2006) who studied the effect of brand architecture on firm performance and established that branding strategies measures have a significant impact on firm performance. Additionally, the findings also conform to those of Diep (2016) who studied the relationship between brand management (brand orientation, brand identity development and internal branding) and financial performance concluding that brand management constructs have an impact on firm performance. The findings however contradict those of Hill, Ettenson and Tyson, (2005), who established that larger brand portfolios are inefficient because they negatively impact manufacturing and distribution economies. Findings by Shahri, (2011) also contradict the positive findings through assertions that attainment of a positive outcome between brand architecture and firm performance is only sustainable if well managed.

Despite the conflicting views articulated in the above studies, the empirical evidence presented in the previous studies coupled with the present study suggest that brand architecture cannot be overlooked by firms that seek to enhance their performance both from a financial and non-financial viewpoint. Firms have established that the adoption of brand architecture is beneficial to them through the enhancement of market share, profitability shareholder value and marketing efficiency. This justifies why majority of firms have adopted brand architecture as a significant marketing strategy, to boost their overall performance.

5.1 Conclusions

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of brand architecture on firm performance. The study leveraged on a corresponding null hypothesis that stated that brand architecture does not influence firm performance. The study findings revealed that brand architecture significantly and positively influenced firm performance. The test outcomes provided ample confirmation that rejected the null hypothesis that brand architecture does not influence firm performance and accepted the hypothesis that brand architecture influences firm performance.

The regression value R for non -financial performance 0.839 and financial performance at 0.832 revealed the strength of brand architecture on firm performance was statistically significant. The coefficient of determination R^2 for financial and non-financial performance revealed that about 83.2% and 83.9% change in firm performance respectively was attributed to brand architecture. The outcome of the study implied that the objective of the study positively determined that brand architecture influences firm performance. The findings of the study suggested that the null hypothesis that asserted that brand architecture does not influence firm performance was rejected and instead an alternative hypothesis that brand architecture influences firm performance was accepted. The findings of the study supported the relationship marketing theory postulation that a well-maintained relationship with customers delivers competitive advantage that in turn leads to superior financial performance to the firm (Gummesson, 2002; Hunt & Derozier, 2004). Brand architecture is a strategy used by the organization to connect with the customers, build trust and ultimately create a relationship based on mutual exchange and gain.

6.1 Recommendations

The findings of the study showed a positive relationship between brand architecture and non-financial performance indicators ($R = 0.839$, $R^2 = 0.704$, p value<0.05) and financial performance indicators ($R = 0.832$, $R^2 = 0.692$, p value<0.05). The outcome of the study revealed that brand architecture accounted for 70.4% of non-financial performance in water bottling firms, while brand architecture accounted for 69.2% of the variation in financial performance in water bottling firms. The study findings revealed that as firms adopt brand architecture, they can realize an increase in firm performance. This suggests that a firm's engagement with its customers can be augmented through the adoption of branding strategies with a general reduction on marketing costs. The study recommended that a similar study should be undertaken to determine gaps in both financial and non-financial performance to improve the comprehension of the influence of brand architecture on firm performance. The current study used cross sectional survey design which gathered data from a single point in time. Future studies should consider longitudinal research designs to determine dynamic relationships among the study variables. At the same time, similar studies should also be conducted in other sectors to determine whether the same results can be generalized. These limitations should not compromise the overall quality of the study.

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