The Role of Technology-Based Branding Strategies in Enhancing and Promoting Brand Loyalty in Kenya's Public Sector

Kogo Kiptum
St. Paul's University

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of technology-based branding strategies in enhancing and promoting brand loyalty in Kenya's public sector. With the rapidly growing technological advancement, technology-driven branding is increasingly being leveraged in private and public sectors. For the former, the profit motive and market share considerations guide the scope of digital tools used in enhancing brand equity. Currently, various government Ministries, Commissions, and state corporations use social media, online service platforms, websites, and mobile applications in their portfolio of communication channels. However, the outcomes of the public sector's adoption of technology-driven branding have not been sufficiently studied, with much of the literature being centered on the private sector. Therefore, this paper provided a focused analysis that would generate insights into the nature and scale of technological impact in public sector branding. The study employed mixed-method research to address research questions that include the role of technology-driven branding in citizen engagement, service delivery, brand loyalty, and public perception. Regarding the primary data, the study relied on survey instruments administered to authoritative respondents from the sampled institutions. A sample of 181 respondents was utilized from a population of 330 with respect to the 21 ministries, 248 state corporations, 14 Commissions, and 47 county governments in the Republic of Kenya. Specifically, data collection involved the use of closed and structured questionnaires administered online through Qualtrics and analysed using statistical software and online analytic solutions. Additionally, the research reviewed literature on digital branding between the years 2010 and 2020 with variables relevant to both the private and public sectors. Key findings underscored the fact that technology-driven branding strategy and citizen behaviour have not been linked in the public sector. The findings were particularly important to policymakers in the formulation of communication policy, development of digital governance frameworks, and brand visibility.

***Key Words**: Technology, Branding, Brand Loyalty, Public Centre*

1.0 Introduction

Technology has birthed revolutionary developments such as social media, a utility that has enhanced the spread of user-generated information. Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace were among the pioneer platforms that allowed individuals to connect at the social level, and share texts, pictures, audio, and video content indiscriminately (Dhingra, & Mudgal, 2019). Across the globe, digital platforms and social media have achieved unprecedented absorption given the expansion in the internet infrastructure and connectivity. Currently, other social media of a professional

nature such as LinkedIn allow various organizations to publish their services, declare their organizational capacity, mission, and vision, and broadcast their career opportunities. While social media has a wider reach, it also poses serious risks to brands, especially with its capacity to spread misinformation and hurt the reputation of an organization.

Still, technology has accelerated brand recognition, albeit with some weaknesses such as social media vulnerabilities to misuse. In the current dispensation, it is now possible to communicate promptly with customers and receive and act on feedback with a click of a button or icon (Plotnick, 2024). The extensive integration of communication technologies with digital tools enables organizations to gather data and perform analytics for every technology-driven strategy that they implement.

The African continent has also experienced technology absorption courtesy of expanding global connectivity through satellite and undersea internet cable and affordable handheld devices. Even though the supporting infrastructure such as electricity is not sufficiently developed, the adoption of digital technologies has significantly expanded. Mwangi (2024) reports that East Africa has comparatively high mobile penetration per capita at 199.7 million subscribers. These developments mean that individuals and organizations are now more connected with technology. The hype about digital connectivity has caused significant interest in integrating these tools for organizational branding because of the consumer response. According to Epsilon (2018), 80% of product consumers have a higher preference for brands that can guarantee a digital experience.

In Kenya, several public and private sector organizations have integrated technology-driven branding to take advantage of the shift in digital product consumption culture. In the public sector, the Kenyan government has notable developments such as the eCitizen online platform that allows citizens to access and navigate public services within one website (Riany, 2018). Another significant online service is the iTax KRA portal which allows the Kenyan citizens to execute tax compliance without necessarily visiting tax offices and other services.

Many organizations have engaged financial resources and established institutional frameworks for accommodating communication technologies and personnel. Among these organizations are public institutions that have gone ahead to establish offices for Information and Communication support, public relations, and corporate communication. These institutions also spend funds to

procure servers, computers, and mobile devices. Some have also created portals and invested in chatbots to automate communications with the public.

What is not clear is the extent to which Government Ministries, State corporations, independent commissions, County Governments, and other state agencies have boosted their brand equity through technology. These organizations are the collective creations of the people of Kenya under social contract and must be seen to sustain public trust and interest in their activities. The public expenditure on technology-driven branding must be matched with strengthening brand equity.

2.0 Literature Review

The role of technology-driven branding in enhancing brand loyalty in the public sector connects with three important theories in psychology. They include the Technology Acceptance Model, service-dominant logic, and social Identity Model.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was introduced by Fred Davis in the year 1986. The theory explains that individuals accept a given technology based on how they perceive it to be useful and easy to use. This theory provides the basis for understanding the variations in the level of public engagement with public brands in the context of specific technologies used in branding. TAM places two conditions for positive outcomes in technology-driven branding. On one hand, the choice of technology must be perceived to improve access to public services and, user friendly on the other hand.

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)

The service-dominant logic is a theory proposed by Stephen Vargo and Robert Lusch in the year 2024 explains that the value of a brand depends on the contribution of the organizations, their clients and stakeholders in a process called co-creation. According to Mostafa and Kasamani (2021), the interactions and experiences that take place between clients and organizations determine how the brand performs in its various indicators of brand loyalty. In the Kenyan Public sector, SDL can explain the role of citizens in improving the perception of government entities simply through their willingness to respond to the technology-based value propositions in the public sector.

2.1.3 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was born out of the works of Henri Tajfel in the 1970s while trying to explain how individuals identify themselves with specific groups. The theory recognizes that individuals build emotional connections with the entities that they perceive to share their values. In the context of the public sector, SIT's postulates can be explored to understand how the citizens relate to government entities, given the reputation of these organizations. The relevance of this theory is pegged on the assumption that the citizens have a specific and identifiable set of

Technology-Driven Branding and Clients' Engagement

The level of citizen engagement reflects the level of public trust and therefore is an important aspect of study in the era of technology-driven branding in the public. Much of the literature considers two aspects of citizen engagement with the government in the context of technology-driven branding; one-way and dialogic. According to Milakovich (2021), public sector organizations still rely on websites, Blogs, and other technology-based channels to communicate their services and often lack the utilities that can gather feedback from the citizens. Chatfield et al. (2013) explored citizen engagement in the context of the Indonesian Tsunami in the year 2012. They find that the two-way or dialogic engagement through social media improved the collaboration between the Indonesian government and the citizens to deliver early warning signs.

Citizen engagement as a product of public sector technology-driven branding suffers uniquely in Africa. According to Ochara and Mawela (2015), e-participation is the ultimate panacea to the challenges in governance especially with the growth in mobile technology. However, the authors note that e-participation may spur exclusion instead of inclusion given the existing literature on e-governance.

Technology-Driven Branding and Service Delivery

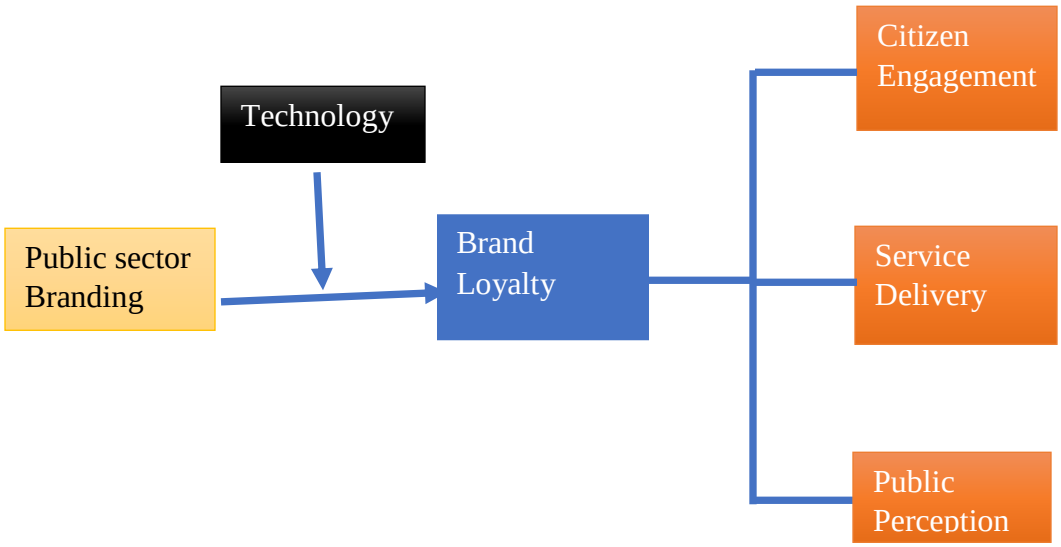
The automation of public services has both positive and negative ramifications for service delivery. Jiang et al (2021) explored the use of WeChat in China and proved that the Chinese government and its agencies have integrated services into the leading social media. On the flip side, according to Trischler et al. (2022), the requirements for automated technology deployment can exclude some citizens in a country violate the tenets of the Technology Acceptance Model, and risk the entities' brand equity. Researchers in Kenya explored e-government and suggested that ICT branding

should be preceded by sufficient public training, change management, and stakeholder and strategy (Ongengo, 2016; Riany, 2021).

Technology-Driven Branding and Public Perception

Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015) found that US citizens perceive the police service to be more legitimate when they engage with the public over social media. The key contribution of the technology to the police brand equity is the increase in the sense of transparency and accountability as a result of the department's visibility on social media. Oyibo et al. (2018) and Martínez-González, and Álvarez-Albelo (2021)also examined the difference in the perception of the credibility of websites and found that websites that offer simple, orderly interfaces are regarded as more credible compared to those that use novel features and special effects. Regarding specific technology such as social media, Zavattaro et al. (2015) found that social media can positively impact the public perception of the government administrations provided the branding utilizes participatory tones.

Conceptual Framework



3.0 Methodology

The study employed a survey research design to address research questions that included the role of technology-driven branding in citizen engagement, service delivery, brand loyalty, and public perception. A survey research design is suitable for scientific inquiries that draw conclusions by aggregating the perceptions of the subject of study (Nardi, 2018). Technology-driven branding is born out of extensive consumption of technology products which makes it possible to gather both secondary and primary data, quantitative and also qualitative data. This means that a significant part of the study population had sufficient exposure to support plausible perceptions of technology-driven branding. In this study, primary data was collected and processed to generate quantitative data. The researcher hoped to leverage the many advantages of quantitative research espoused by Mahajan (2020). Key among them is that quantitative research facilitates comparison and can be repeated and verified by subsequent researchers.

The target population for primary data collection included the public officers in four categories of government entities namely the 21 ministries, 248 state corporations, 47 county governments, and 14 Commissions in the Republic of Kenya. However, for practical reasons, the total population was taken to be the aggregate number of these brands which adds up to 330. Each brand was expected to be the unit of observation and was represented by one respondent.

Sampling is the process of selecting a representative set of a population for research purposes. In this study, the entire population of 330 public brands were not be used but a representative set was obtained through simple random sampling. According to Rahman et al. (2022), cluster sampling involves the selection of research participants such that each member of a population has an equal chance of being picked. The final sample shall constitute participants who will represent their organizations.

This study made use of an optimal sample to ensure that the sampling error was minimized. A sample of 181 respondents wasutilized and calculated using the sampling formulae proposed by Yamane (1967). Yamane proposed the following formula for determining the sample size for a finite population:

$$\boldsymbol{n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}}$$

Where ‘n’ is the sample size

N is the population size and

‘e’ is the level of significance (0.05)

4..0 Results and Discussions

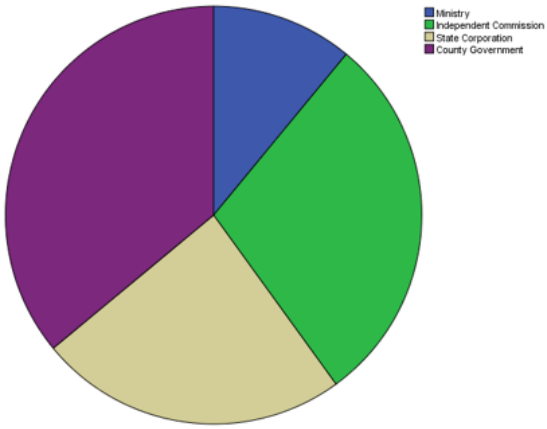
Participation and Response Rate

A total of 181 individuals received the questionnaire and the study gathered 101 responses representing a response rate of 55.8% and valid responses of 100. The responses from the Ministries, Independent Commissions, State corporations, and County government constituted 11%, 30%, 25%, and 35% respectively.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ministry	11	11.0	11.0	11.0
	Independent Commission	29	29.0	29.0	40.0
	State Corporation	24	24.0	24.0	64.0
	County Government	36	36.0	36.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From the data, the responses from technical staff were a majority at 50% followed by staff at managerial and technical levels at 33% and 17% respectively. In terms of the number of years with the brand, a majority of the respondents, 42%, have been in their current position in the between 2 and 5 years.

Categories of respondents



Citizen Engagement Indicators

The following hypotheses guided this section of the analysis

H_1 Technology-driven branding influences citizen engagement in the public sector

H_0 Technology-driven branding has no influence on citizen engagement in the public sector

A majority of the respondents generally disagreed that technology-driven branding has improved their engagement with the citizens regarding their services with those strongly disagreeing at 45% and those disagreeing to some extent at 43%. At a mean of 1.78, the respondents also disagreed that that their brand collected feedback from the citizens through technology-based utilities. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media had sparingly/ barely contributed to an active communication between the brands and the citizens with 57% and 35% of the respondents strongly disagreeing and disagreeing respectively. From the descriptive data analysis, the research failed to reject the null hypothesis.

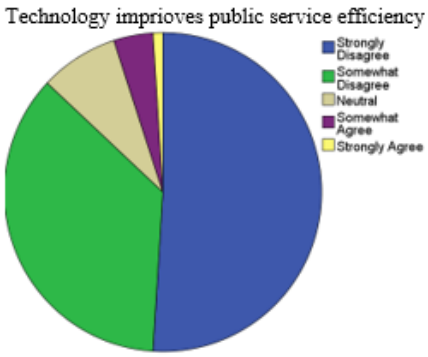
Service Delivery Indicators

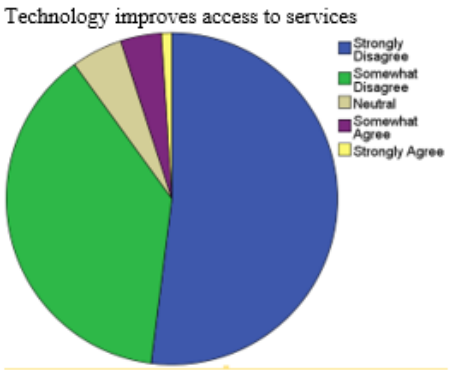
The following sections sought to test the following hypotheses

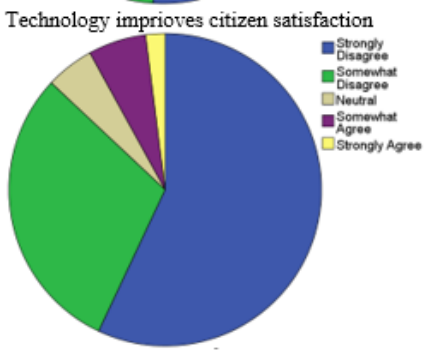
H_2 Technology-driven branding strategies influence public service delivery in Kenya

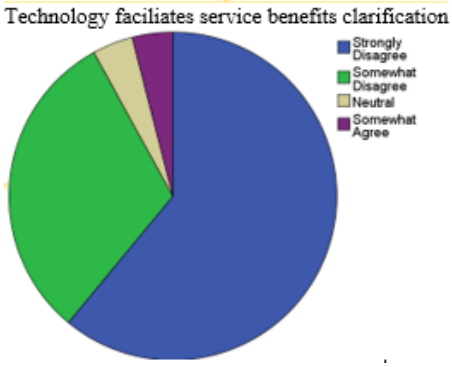
H_0 Technology-driven branding strategies have no influence on public service delivery in Kenya

The analysis of the responses showed that currently, technology has not been harnessed to play leading roles in in the conveyance of information about the brands' services with 50% strongly disagreeing and 39%disagreeing. In terms of the returns for utilizing technology, 50% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 37% disagreed that technology improved their efficiency in service delivery. At a mean of 1.64, the respondents disagreed that their services were more accessible due to technology The data also showed that a majority of the respondents did not believe that the citizens were more satisfied with their services with 56% strongly disagreeing and 31% disagreeing respectively. The respondents were generally positive that technology allowed them to clarify their services to the citizens with 60% strongly agreeing and 32% t agreeing respectively. A majority of the brands, 56%, also strongly agreed that their technology systems allowed for active citizen feedback on services provided and another 38% agreed with reservations. With the adoption of technology, there was a positive change in the client base with a majority of the respondents 49% agreeing and another 42% strongly agreeing.



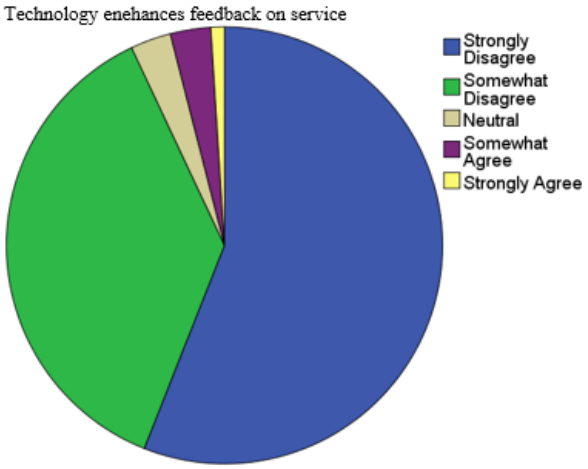


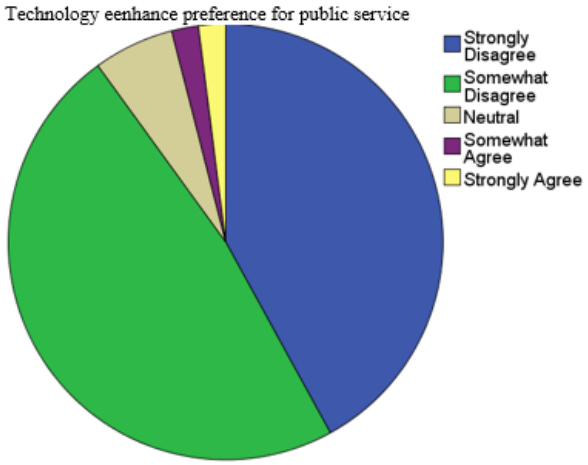




A majority of the brands, 56%, also strongly disagreed that their technology systems allowed for active citizen feedback on services and another 38% disagreed with reservations. With the

adoption of technology, there was no significantly positive change in the client base in the public brands given the results from the analysis where a mean of 1.74 was recorded.





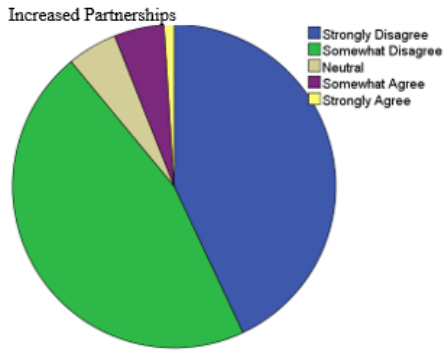
From the descriptive data analysis, the null hypothesis was rejected.

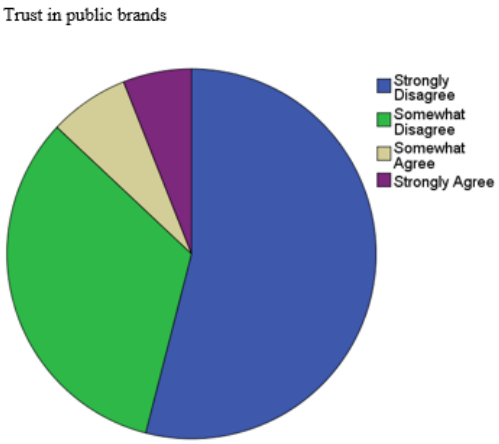
Public Perception Indicators

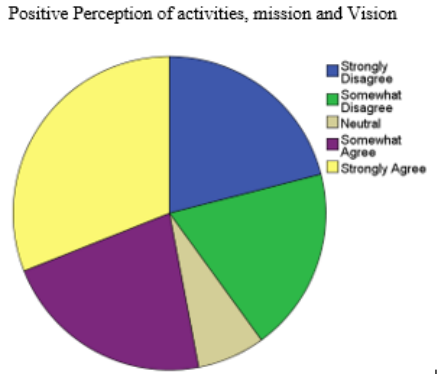
The analysis in this section sought to test the following hypotheses

> H_3 Technology-driven branding strategies influence public perception of government institutions in Kenya
>
> H_0 Technology-driven branding strategies have no influence on public perception of government institutions in Kenya

The research measured public perception using 5 indicators. The data showed that 53% of the respondent brands strongly disagreed and 34% disagreed that technology had improved the public trust in their services. The capacity to attract partnership was also used as a measure of public perception and the data showed that 43% and 46% of the respondent strongly do not believe and somewhat do not believe that technology was responsible for their additional partnerships. At a mean of 3.23, the respondents were unsure whether technology improved the general public perception of the organization.



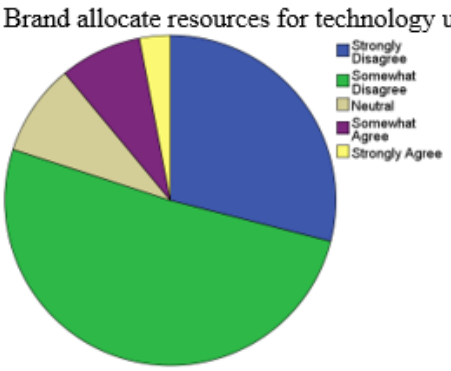


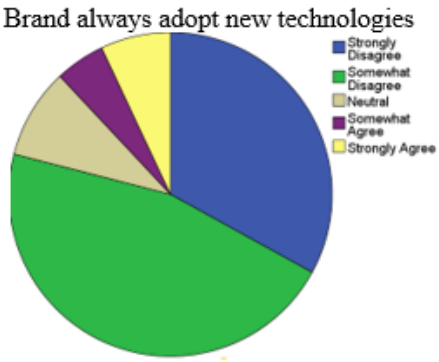


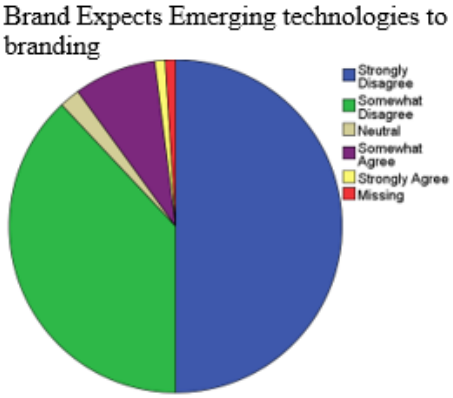
From the descriptive data analysis, the null hypothesis was rejected.

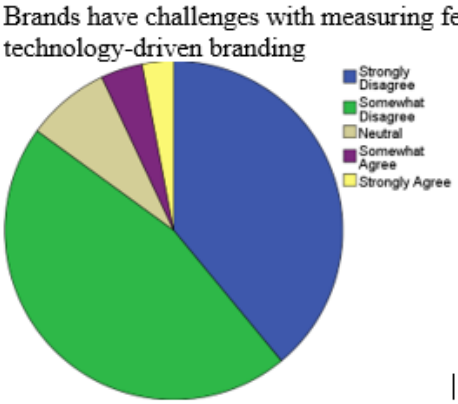
Implementing Technology-Driven Branding

The respondents were not convinced that further adoption of technology would improve their loyalty base with 50% strongly disagreeing and 42% disagreeing. The data also showed that 63% of the brands strongly disagreed and 34% disagreed that their organizations were justified to expand investments in technologies. The study sought to determine whether the technology-driven branding creates an incentive to invest more in technology. From the data, 29% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 51% disagreed that their brands allocated sufficient resources for ICT. The study also showed that a majority of the respondents, 49%, believed that their organizations did not have stable metrics for determining the impacts of specific technologies compared to 31% that strongly agreed. Regarding the challenges in technology-driven branding, a cumulative 67% believed that there were none with the rest disagreeing. Different public brands did not anticipate that emerging technologies would play a role in bridging the branding efforts with 51% of the respondents strongly disagreeing and 38% disagreeing.









Discussion

The results from the analysis presented a solid ground for assessing the credibility of the primary data. The first part of the analysis showed that the responses met the thresholds for an acceptable response rate. According to Wu et al. (2022), an acceptable response rate for survey research is between 10 to 35% even though any value above 50% is considered excellent. Additionally, the sampling frame specifically targeted government officers from critical offices that deal with large numbers of citizens.

Citizen engagement has been used in this study to represent brand loyalty on the assumption that it is a continuous and priority activity among the clients. This means that given the presence of other alternatives, the citizens would always choose to deal with the offices. A cumulative portion of the respondents confirmed, as the majority, that their adoption of technology had not significantly influenced a high level of engagement. The confirmed level of engagement demonstrated that the applied technologies had not sufficiently encouraged an exchange between the organization and the citizens. From the Technology Acceptance Model, the aspect of ease of use validated technology-driven branding by the government brands/institutions as being significantly easy for the citizens to relate to. This also confirmed what the literature review had

demonstrated about social media usage as an outreach tool in various jurisdictions across the world. When there is a change in the level of exchange between the public brands and the citizen, it means that the latter is loyal enough to spend time interacting with the brand.

The second indicator of brand loyalty is the level of satisfaction with service delivery among public brands. This research underscored the source of loyalty as the recognition of the importance that the brands play in the lives of the citizens. A majority of the respondents were indifferent and somewhat negative about the contribution of technology in their ability to deliver services to the citizens pegging it on public loyalty. This general disaffirmation is contemplated in the Technology Acceptance Model whereby the users of technology must find some utility in the choices of service providers. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that for as long as the public continues to access benefits from technology-based branding, the strategy may guarantee brand loyalty.

Public perception of the public brands was also used in the study as a proxy for brand loyalty. In this research, various aspects of public perception such as public trust, credibility, and partnerships received negative affirmations from the respondents. This general disaffirmation of the role of technology-driven branding aligns with the tenets of the Social Identity Theory where it is postulated that individuals identify with entities that share in their values. This also means that technology-driven branding exposes sufficient information for the public to form an opinion about the organizations and decide if they want to associate.

The research sought a baseline for the implementation of technology-driven branding. A majority of the respondents denied that their organizations always anticipated new technologies that could enhance their brands. Additionally, there was no general tendency for the management to set aside resources for the purpose. In terms of brand equity, public organizations have not recognized the important role of technology in enhancing their brands and as a potential tool for rebranding.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The public sector needs a solid and growing base of loyal clients that can contribute to their efficiency in executing their mandate. This research recognizes citizen engagement, service delivery, and public perception as indicators of brand loyalty for government organizations. In terms of citizen engagement, technology has not been proven to increase the dispatch of information to the citizens, citizens' ability to give feedback and value co-creation. Technology-driven branding has also not been shown to contribute to efficiency in service delivery, being a

factor that can draw the citizens to the public brands. Public perception has also not been shown to increase with the use of technology-driven branding with sources of brand loyalty being significant trust in the public brand, transparency and credibility, and attractiveness for partnerships. The research did not find public sector organizations readiness to expand resource expenditures to make it possible to build their brands using technology.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in light of the outcomes of this study to enable future implementation of technology-driven strategies.

1. The public sector should maintain its digital platforms and enhance user experience through two-way communication utilities.
2. Establish dedicated units in human resources and train the personnel to merge the citizen needs to the architecture of digital branding and communication strategy.
3. Perform baselines to understand the citizen's values for possible integration into the branding strategy.
4. Set aside resources for infrastructure development and innovations around internet connectivity and smart devices.
5. Routinely assess the applied technologies to ascertain the level of citizen engagement, efficiency in service delivery, and trends in public perception.
6. Scan and shop for new technologies such as chatbots, Artificial intelligence, and big data to improve relevance to the citizen's needs.

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