

The Role of Branding on Customer Loyalty in the Pharmaceutical Retail Sector of Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Pharmacies in Marondera

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ABSTRACT

This study was based on the role of branding on customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical retail sector of Zimbabwe because branding and customer loyalty have become popular subjects in recent years since it is believed that customers are the life blood of any business. Accordingly, the study made use of self-administered questionnaires in collecting data from customers and employees of retail pharmacies in Marondera, Mash East province and the respondents were selected through stratified random sampling. Consequently, the data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS). Therefore, the research findings show that branding exists in the pharmaceutical retail sector of Zimbabwe and the majority of respondents agreed that branding plays a role in shaping customer loyalty as well as customer retention. The study also shows that the attributes of branding include familiarity with brand, relevance of pharmacy brand, differentiation of pharmacy brand, perceived quality of a brand, reliability and esteem of a brand are positive influencers of customer loyalty.

Keywords: Service Branding, Customer Loyalty, pharmacy brand, pharmaceutical retail sector.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The global private retail pharmacy market is estimated to be generating over \$683 billion in revenue with \$280 billion of that in markets outside Europe, Japan and the United States (World Bank, 2020). Thus, the retail pharmacy sector in the modern world is the most important sector in the world and hence, the world's biggest economies are making use of the retail pharmacy sector as an important instrument for growth (Munyoro and Dewhurst, 2010; Hameli, 2018). Thus, the shows that retail pharmacies also known as community pharmacies are playing an important role in healthcare delivery (Schumacher, 2016). In fact, these health care institutions are providing health services such as provision of drug information, medication review, treatment of minor ailments, clinical interventions, health screening, counselling on lifestyle changes, provision of both non-pharmacological and pharmacological treatments plus documentation and prevention of drug interactions or adverse drug interactions to the public

(Okai et al, 2019). Hence, retail pharmacies in some economies are widely spread in many communities, with elongated trading hours and serving walk in customers without prior booking of an appointment (Wiedenmayer et al, 2006; Brooks et al, 2008). Thus, making them more reachable compared to other health care facilities and in the process immensely contributing to the health care delivery system of the world (Wiedenmayer et al, 2006). As a result, without doubt this then makes the retail pharmacy sector the most important sector in the world including Zimbabwe. According to a report by Mordor Intelligence, the Zimbabwe pharmaceutical market was valued at USD 542.4 million in 2020 and was expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 9.2 percent from 2021 to 2026 (www.mordorintelligence.com).

However, despite being an important industrial sector in the world, retail pharmaceutical industry is facing a range of challenges among them adaption to the digital landscape, maintenance and building of patient bases, reduced cash flow, embracing change for a positive future, securing collaborative practice agreements, growing competition and consolidation of retail pharmacy chains, socio-economic problems a situation that has resulted in low quality services, inaccurate diagnosis, medication errors, inappropriate or unnecessary treatment, inadequate or unsafe clinical facilities or practices, lack of adequate training and expertise, travel long distances to access health care in clinics and hospitals despite constitutional provisions compelling governments to provide this basic right to its citizens, critical shortages of drugs and manpower like doctors and nurses (www.who.int; www.picomto.com; www.mordorintelligence.com). In addition, the sector faces a variety challenge such as over-regulation, government interference, policy inconsistency, currency instability, inflation, low consumer purchasing power and competition from informal traders and these factors affect the profitability and sustainability of retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe (www2.deloitte.com; www.mckinsey.com; <https://irglobal.com/>). The list is endless, and all these challenges have a knock-on effect on the performance of the retail pharmaceutical industry in the world including Zimbabwe especially the mushrooming of unregistered retail pharmacies, holding back progress on improving health in countries at all income levels, according to a new joint report by the OECD, World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

In Zimbabwe, the most worrying challenges facing retail pharmacies apart from the above-mentioned encounters are the growing competition and consolidation of retail pharmacy such as Greenwood and QV chains making it difficult for independent pharmacies who currently struggling with their cash flow, with profit margins decreasing year on year (www.sundaymail.co.zw). In addition, the independent pharmacies are also increasingly going digital, and with this development, independent pharmacies are having to find a new way of operating in the process calling for more investment in order to stay competitive with the big names in the pharmaceutical industry such as Greenwood and QV chain (www.theindependent.co.zw). Although, remaining up to date with the latest digital changes is essential for independent retail pharmacies but the challenge is implementing new offerings and technologies on a lower budget and this is difficult to deal with as at the end of the day more money is needed because patients in now days are looking for a frictionless and simple pharmacy experience as well as services that will make their lives easier (www.onshelf.co.za). Unfortunately, this has resulted in low cash flow with profit margins decreasing year on year (www.sundaymail.co.zw; www.theindependent.co.zw).

Yet, none has researched on how Zimbabwean retail pharmacies can survive in such environment except Simba and Nyandoro (2016), who researched on how these Zimbabwean retail pharmacies can use strategic management to survive as a result of a myriad of intractable macro-economic conditions including over-regulation, government interference, inept policy implementations and intensive competition. Thus, in their study they recommended that retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe become strategic in their approach to business management in order to diminish the impact of macro-economic conditions conspiring to influence their performance in the market resulting in the study developing a nuanced strategic management model that can be applied in managing retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world. It is worth noting that this study was in response to an upsurge of retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe which has resulted in locking horns for market share in a country whose buying power has been oxidized by a malfunctioning economy (www.news24.com; www.aljazeera.com; www.worlddata.info) and black indigenization policy which presented an opportunity for state owned and private retail pharmacies skyrocket (Shumba, 2014). Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the role of branding on customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical retail sector of Zimbabwe focusing on retail pharmacies in Marondera because the assumption here is that retail pharmacies should strive to differentiate themselves from competitors through branding as argued by Dall’Olmo, et al (2016) and Munyoro and Gorejena (2020). In addition, the study aims to establish the existence of branding in the retail pharmaceutical industrial sector in Zimbabwe as well as to determine the impact of branding on customer loyalty in the retail pharmaceutical industrial sector in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Pharmacy?

Pharmacy is the science and practice of discovering, producing, preparing, dispensing, reviewing and monitoring medications, aiming to ensure the safe, effective, and affordable use of medicines (Thomas, 2018). It is a miscellaneous science as it links health sciences with pharmaceutical sciences and natural sciences and the name pharmacy was derived from the Greek word “Pharmakon” which means medicine (Thomas, 2018; Sharif, 2018). In short, the pharmacy profession is thus mainly concerned with the knowledge of medicine and astuteness of their uses (Sharif, 2018). Whilst the pharmaceutical practice involves everything to do with medicine availability, access and proper use at population and individual level and it encompasses research, development, distribution, access and use of medicines (Scahill et al, 2017). It is interesting to note that many people assume that the pharmacy profession only involves counting pills however medicines are not the only domain of pharmacy and even consumers are also unaware of the pharmacist’s diverse roles (Govo et al, 2008). Therefore, there is need for the non-pharmacy disciplines to get a deeper understanding of what really constitutes the pharmacy sector thus make it easier to integrate and fit policy by the clinician and stakeholders such as policy makers. Thus, the scope of pharmacy practice includes more traditional roles such as compounding and dispensing medications on the orders of physicians, and it also includes more modern services related to patient care, including clinical services, reviewing medications for safety and efficacy, and providing drug information (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; medlineplus.gov/genetics). Pharmacists, therefore, are experts on drug therapy and are the primary health professionals who optimize medication use to provide patients with positive health outcomes (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; medlineplus.gov/genetics). In fact, there are numerous types of pharmacy practices such as hospital pharmacy, industrial pharmacy, wholesale pharmacy, retail pharmacy, clinical

pharmacy, regulatory pharmacy, teaching and research. In addition, pharmacy also has a social and administrative side which deals with pharmacoepidemiology, pharmacoconomics, pharmaceutical policy, organizational behaviour and pharmacist practices (Scahill et al, 2017). Accordingly, this study focuses on the retail pharmacy sector and in Zimbabwe retail pharmacies are private owned while the government operates hospital pharmacies.

Furthermore, pharmacy can generally be divided into three primary disciplines namely pharmaceuticals and pharmacokinetics, medicinal chemistry and pharmacognosy and pharmacy practice. It is worth noting that the boundaries between these disciplines with other sciences such as biochemistry are not always a clear cut and often collaboratives teams from various disciplines (pharmacists and other scientists) work together toward the introduction of new therapeutics and methods for patient care (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk). However, pharmacy is not a basic or biomedical science in its typical form and in addition, medicinal chemistry is also a distinct branch of synthetic chemistry combining pharmacology, organic chemistry, and chemical biology (Thomas, 2018; Sharif, 2018). In this case, pharmacology is sometimes considered the fourth discipline of pharmacy (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk). It worth noting that although pharmacology is essential to the study of pharmacy, it is not specific to pharmacy and both disciplines are distinct (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; Thomas, 2018). Thus, those who wish to practice both pharmacy (patient-oriented) and pharmacology (a biomedical science requiring the scientific method) receive separate training and degrees unique to either discipline (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; Thomas, 2018). Therefore, it is usually considered to be a field of the broader sciences. Furthermore, pharmacoinformatics is considered another new discipline, for systematic drug discovery and development with efficiency and safety (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; medlineplus.gov/genetics). Additionally, pharmacogenomics is the study of genetic-linked variants that effect patient clinical responses, allergies, and metabolism of drugs (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; medlineplus.gov/genetics). Likewise, it is also important to note that there are various specialties of pharmacy practice and thus, specialization in pharmacy practice is typically based on the place of practice or practice roles including community, hospital, clinical pharmacy, consultant, locum, drug information, regulatory affairs, industry, and academia (www.pharmacy.cuhk.edu.hk; medlineplus.gov/genetics). Similarly, other specializations in pharmacy practice recognized by the Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties include cardiovascular, infectious disease, oncology, pharmacotherapy, nuclear, nutrition, and psychiatry. That said, this study is focusing on pharmaceutical retail sector and this is discussed in detail below.

What is the Pharmaceutical Retail Sector?

Retail pharmacy is both a business and facilitator of societal health delivery (Khoza, 2016). It is also worth noting that the term pharmacy is more common in the United States, whilst a more common term of pharmacy in Great Britain is chemists (Thomas, 2018). Whereas the term pharmacy which is used in Canada and even in USA is drugstores (knowleswellness.com; ell.stackexchange.com; Thomas, 2018). Thus, drugstores in this case refers to the stores which sell medicines and miscellaneous items such as confectionery, cosmetics, office supplies, toys, hair care products and magazines and occasionally refreshments and groceries (Thomas, 2018).

That said, in developing countries, retail pharmacies are among the most important providers of pharmaceutical advice due to the availability of medicine, ease of access, convenient operating times, no waiting and cheaper products in their shops (Goel et al, 1996). In low- and medium-income countries like Zimbabwe, pharmacies are normally the first port of call within the health care system, and they are also the favoured agents for buying medicine (Miller and Goodman, 2016). However, the legal framework in Zimbabwe prohibits dispensing of prescription medication to members of the public in the absence of a prescription and this is a hindrance when it comes to profitability of the pharmacy sector (Khoza, 2016). For example, Ramos et al (2017) suggests that the flow of cash, flexible working hours, community engagement in the business and guaranteed customers are among the reasons why pharmacists engage in retail pharmacy businesses of their own and that the ever-changing business environment is a great threat to retail pharmacy business survival. In addition, international public health communities and governments have actually ignored the role played by the private sector in the provision of medicine and related health services while it has been established that in the majority of low- and middle-income countries, private pharmacies are the community's first means to access the health care system and retail pharmacies are the leading source of health care for the poor in developing countries (Miller and Goodman, 2016). In addition, Perepelkin and Zhang (2011) explain how the retail pharmacy sector has become a competitive sector with acceleration and this has been precipitated by the need for a piece of the market share and thus independent pharmacies lock horns with multinational and national chains. As a result, the small independent retail pharmacies are finding it difficult to survive in the highly competitive pharmacy industry (www2.deloitte.com; www.digitalpharmacist.com). Furthermore, pharmacists are very good at giving therapeutic advice and serving the role of health care professionals but on the downside, they tend to be reactive, inward looking and have a short-term approach to business (Jameson et al, 1991; Mohiuddin, 2020). Correspondingly, there has also been increasing controversy surrounding pharmaceutical marketing and equally, there have been accusations and findings of influence on doctors and other health professionals through drug representatives favouring certain drugs and pharmacies over others especially upcoming pharmacies (Kaufman, 2005; Goldacre, 2014; Kollwe, 2014; Lipton and Thomas, 2017). It was also noted that this is prevalent in health-related journals lobbying physicians to favour certain pharmacies than others especially upcoming ones (Moynihan, 2003; Lipton and Thomas, 2017). At the same, although many people prefer to buy medicines from pharmacies as it is perceived that the pharmacy medicine is safer than medicine purchased from drug peddlers and vendors but the competition in the pharmaceutical retail sector is still stiff as the diversity of products sold in all pharmacies is very analogous (Gavaza et al, 2009; Marume et al, 2018). Likewise, Pereira et al (2021) also supports that in retail pharmacy, customer loyalty is a huge challenge mainly because of the similar products and the presence of large retail chains and hence, the prices and price ranges are also almost the same.

Thus, in order to win over the competition, there are some suggestions in the literature that the pharmacies should be able to show the advantages of buying from them compared to other pharmacies. Additionally, some of the issues considered by customers when choosing pharmacy to buy from include price affordability, location of the pharmacy, service quality of the pharmacy and the general perception of the various pharmacies (Noor, 2020). Furthermore, other factors influencing the decision-making process of customer include availability of easy parking, convenient location and low price (Pereira et al, 2021). Consequently, none of the

studies has focused on branding as a means of returning customers and thus this study will focus on branding in the retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe.

Nature of Pharmacy Products and Services in Zimbabwe

Retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe have a wide range of services and products although medicines are the main domain (Brooks et al, 2008; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). Accordingly, medicines are classified in different categories namely household remedies (HR), pharmacy medicines (P), pharmacist-initiated medicines (PIM), prescription preparation (PP), narcotics (N) or dangerous drugs (DD), specially restricted preparations (SR) and veterinary medicines (V) (MASCA, 1991; www.drugs.com). In addition, medical devices, home or personal care products, herbal supplements as well as pharmaceutical grade supplements, vitamins and homeopathic medicines are also found in pharmacies (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov; Sanjoy and Yogeshwer, 2002). In addition, retail pharmacies also offer a variety of services and examples of such services include consultation on wellness strategies and medication management, patient education on medicines proper use, drug interactions, and alternative treatment options (www.africanadvice.com). In addition, pharmacies also offer services for the disposal of medication that is no longer in use (<https://pharmacysolutionsonline.com>). For example, recently the Covid 19 pandemic opened doors for pharmacies in Zimbabwe to offer vaccination services.

Regulations Governing Retail Pharmacies in Zimbabwe

The pharmaceutical retail sector of Zimbabwe is mainly guided by the Medicines and allied substances (MASCA) Statutory Instrument 150 of 1991 where allied substances are controlled, prohibited or restricted substances (www.mordorintelligence.com). Thus, MASCA stipulates the different categories of medicines stated earlier (Chitemerere, 2011; www.mordorintelligence.com). Accordingly, the minimum requirements for licencing a premise are spelled out by MASCA and it also clearly states the kind of person allowed to be a custodian of medicines and that these people should pass the forensic exams set by the authority to ensure familiarity with regulations relating to the dispensing and custody of medicines (www.mcaz.co.zw; zimlii.org). Thus, the Dangerous Drugs Act (DDA) (1975) (Chapter 15:02) and its amendments are also responsible for laying out standards for handling dangerous drugs (www.mcaz.co.zw; zimlii.org). These acts are enforced by the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe (MCAZ) and MCAZ formerly called the Drug Control Council was conceived by the MASCA and it opened its doors in 1997 (www.law.co.zw; zimlii.org). Consequently, MCAZ is responsible for ensuring availability of safe, effective, good quality medicines and medical devices in Zimbabwe and it controls the manufacture, storage, distribution and sale of medicine (www.law.co.zw). In addition, MCAZ administers the Dangerous drugs act on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MoHCW) (www.law.co.zw; www.mcaz.co.zw). Furthermore, other players in the regulation of retail pharmacies and pharmacists include the Pharmacists Council of Zimbabwe (PCZ) and Health Professions Authority through the Health Professions Act of 2000 (Chapter 27:19) (www.law.co.zw; www.mcaz.co.zw)

In light of the pharmaceutical regulatory environment discussed earlier, the Zimbabwean government intrusion in both the pharmaceutical manufacturing and retail markets pre-eminently and the economic environment generally have a significant influence on business performance and management, (Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). Thus, economic setbacks in

Zimbabwe have been fuelled by an amalgam of confutable policies, poor governance and shock in the world economy. In the past, inflation escalated, real earnings fell, and de-industrialization increased causing rapid and far-reaching national impecuniousness (ILO, 2018). Consequently, today the nation still faces the same challenge being rated number one in the world in terms of inflation rate (www.aljazeera.com; bulawayo24.com; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016) and the pharmaceutical retail sector of Zimbabwe is marred by hyper-competition resulting from most pharmacists opening their own practices (www.mic.gov.zw; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). Accordingly, extensive regulation of the market, inapt policy implementation and government interference are typical elements of emerging economies like Zimbabwe and these factors are a major hurdle for the success of retail pharmacy businesses in Zimbabwe (Chitemerere, 2011; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). Hence, business Management and operation of businesses in developing economy demands aggressive strategic management competence and marketing proficiency (Chitemerere, 2011; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). In this case, many retail pharmacy owners are unable to come up with such strategies as well as exploiting marketing opportunities for their own good (Chitemerere, 2011; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). In short, today's businesses are losing customers at an accelerated rate as a result of the highly competitive business environment (Chitemerere, 2011; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016; Romachandran and Balasubramanion, 2020). In fact, retail pharmacies like many other businesses have not been spared from the lack of loyalty of customers (Brooks et al, 2008; Chitemerere, 2011; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016).

What is Branding?

The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (Keller and Kevin, 1993; Ranchhod, 2004; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Whereas a brand can be defined as a symbol, name or logo that is used to identify as well as differentiate products and services in the market (Wheeler, 1946; Aaker. 1991; Ghodeswar, 2008; Haigh, 2014; Fahy and Jobber, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, branding is key to marketing as it creates a perception of added value linked to the brand image thus steering a continuous competitive advantage (Davis, 2007; Haigh, 2014; Fahy and Jobber, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, marketers invest huge amounts of capital, research and development to come up with the perfect components to construct their brand as an unmatched benchmark thus leading to marketing (Haigh, 2014; Fahy and Jobber, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). In fact, marketing is the assisting apparatus that helps companies to create an unequalled brand strategy for their brand (Haigh, 2014; Fahy and Jobber, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Consequently, branding is the first spot of creating a brand's self-identity however, marketing in the form of print or electronic media promotions among other traditional media promotions assists in successfully interpret a brand's branding (Dare and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023).

In other words, brand is a promise of consistency, quality and fulfilment of customer expectations and needs (Alemu, 2019; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Whilst Perepelkon and Zhang (2011) and, Munyoro and Gorejena (2020) simplifies the term brand to mean a symbol that summarizes the association made with that name. Simply put, branding becomes the process that creates the distinguishing elements of a brand (Dar and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, today branding is recognised as the key to success in business by providing

value to consumers via the buying process hence assumes value to the firm through customer attraction and loyalty stimulation (Akpan 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, the basic feature of a brand is that it generates loyal customers, and the most crucial feature of a strong brand is having a mass of loyal customers (Kron, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). In fact, brands are now an indispensable asset on the economic landscape therefore, developing countries can learn from developed countries as the principles of developing a strong resilient brand are the same across different cultures (Haigh, 2014; Fahy and Jobber, 2015; Cayla and Arnould, 2008; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, Akpan (2018) and, Munyoro and Hodzi (2023) suggest that branding points to customer satisfaction by saving decision making time, providing peace of mind, creating differentiation, value addition, providing safety and the chance to express who we are thus giving the customer a reason to share with other potential customers. Apart from other approaches, branding can help capture and further build goodwill and reputation associated with the business thus enhancing trade revenue and strengthening competitive position on the market (Alemu, 2019; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023).

It is key to note that successful brands will only exist if the product or service offering is of good quality (Dar and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). This is so because brands are those priceless intangible assets that allow a number of benefits to the firm and its customers hence need to be carefully managed as businesses prosper by acquiring, keeping and growing their customer base (Seturi, 2017; Alemu, 2019; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In short, a brand has two important dimensions which are the psychological and physiological dimensions (Akpan 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023) and the customer's perception is a cognitive relationship of the product and consumer while the perception and image give value (Dar and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Consequently, customers' perception may be shaped by emotional and functional experiences therefore most favoured recognition occupies the correct corner in the mind of the customer and it becomes a brand (Seturi, 2017; Alemu, 2019; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Contrastingly, the physiological dimension of the brand is its symbol or logo which helps to build a long-lasting impression in the customer's mind (Dar and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). The most important goal of a business is to build a very strong brand which yields long term revenue and fruitfulness (Shahid et al, 2017; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). In a hypercompetitive business environment brands are not only identifiers or symbols but also have economic function and thus, the value of a brand is its capacity to create an absolute, prominent and positive meaning in the customer's mind (Dar and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). It is key to note that a brand has the power to build a long-lasting belief on the customers which results in brand loyalty and draws loyal customers to the organisation (Ishak and Ghani, 2013; Shahid et al, 2017; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Accordingly, there are many different aspects and types of branding, some of which are discussed in the next section.

Aspects of Branding

Corporate Branding:

It is becoming progressively important for small enterprise such as small retail pharmacies to attract attention in the current marketplace hence branding by small enterprises is an expanding area of academic interest (Mitchell et al, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, retailers should be more innovative and creative when developing store brands to ensure that they attract more customers as well as differentiate their services or products from those of competitors (Abdullah et al, 2012; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023) because effective business

performance in the present world market and the dynamics of customers requires skills and knowledge in marketing and branding (Chepchumba, 2020; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). In short, most contemporary retailers are highly likely to develop a store brand as it has a high potential of obtaining loyal customers (Abdullah et.al, 2012; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023) and strong brands seem to be a guarantee of consistency, quality and superior service delivery (Chepchumba, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, the lack of literature on service branding is partially due to the presumption of relating goods and brand name with the connection between services and brand names (Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Accordingly, despite the linguistic difference service organisation names are their brand names (Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, recently services are starting to take up branding terminology and allowing their strategies to be shaped by branding research (Davis, 2017; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020).

In addition, corporate branding can be defined as the process of maintaining and continuously creating a positive corporate association and reputation leveraging on the power of a brand (Kotler, 2009; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In other words, it is a systematically planned and executed process aimed at creating and maintaining a positive image and good reputation for the organisation as a whole and hence a corporate brand serves as a representation of customers' mind-set, their encounters, experiences and perceptions of the company (Kotler, 2009; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Ajike et al, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Consequently, Kotler (2009) and Pereira et al (2021) define corporate brand as the verbal, visual and behavioural articulation of the company's distinctive business model and they further explain that the corporate brand symbolizes the link between the company, its suppliers, customers and all other stake holders. Similarly, corporate branding has the strength to align a company's resources to the development of strategic competitive advantage (Kotler, 2009; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, the significance of corporate branding can be viewed as two dimensional. Firstly, a unique and sustainable differential advantage can be formed through successfully nurtured corporate identity and secondly, a strong corporate brand motivates, enables and harmonises employees around the corporate brand hence result in consistent customer service interactions (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Hence, today's companies are unable to control what is said about them thus necessitating corporate brand reputation management (Pereira et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023).

Furthermore, corporate brands are more significant in the service context where employees can either break or build the brand when interacting with customers thus corporate brands that intend to deliver outstanding customer experiences have to carefully manage employee-customer interactions through addressing customer expectations and needs (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, companies intending to nurse long term, enduring relationships with their customers should build strong corporate brands (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Markovic et al, 2018). Hence, Kotler (2009) and Perepelkon and Zhang (2011) highlight that there is a relationship between consumer perceived corporate brand, the attitude and loyalty of the customer since a corporate brand mirrors the actions and valued of the business. Consequently, brands are becoming progressively competitive hence keeping and growing relationships depends on the ability to convey a customer experience bespoke to ever changing customer needs and values coherent with the brand's promise (Akpan, 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Hence, Kotler

(2009) and Methaq (2016) argue that unlike product branding which is often dealt with by marketers, corporate branding processes require organisation wide practices which play a part in developing corporate identity. In this case, corporate branding encompasses intangible components which are not directly related with the product, such as employee relations, social responsibility and corporate trust (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). In this case, it targets all stake holders for example employees, suppliers, customers, regulators, shareholders and the community thus a corporate brand is not specific to one product but brings together the company's services and products benefits, social values, relationships and corporate credibility (Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020).

Product Branding:

While product brands and corporate brands are identified as different entities, in fact they are occasionally considered to be equivalent since they both share the objective of bringing about differentiation from competitors (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). In fact, the level of synergism between the product brand and corporate brand depends on the brand engineering (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2009; Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Likewise, potent corporate branding can gear up any new service or product with instant value and credibility that cannot be imitated by any other product /service focused marketing campaign (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2009; Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Therefore, it is very important for businesses that intend to build and protect a resilient company to embrace corporate branding since corporate brands give out facts about the organisation and communicate the quality and attributes of services or products offered by the organisation (Ajike et al, 2015; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023).

Service Branding:

The service sector deals with provision of end products that cannot be felt or seen directly (Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Examples of ventures in the service sector include computer services, health, education, hotels, recreation, real estate, social work, banking, media, electricity, communication as well as retail sector (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka 2019). Thus, in the service sector buyers begin with the area of feeling, then move to the actual purchase and finally advance their knowledge of the service (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, services are very affective experiences despite the level of involvement for instance, frustration and anger can unfold while waiting in a queue to fill prescriptions or in the casualty department of a hospital thus, the intangible facet of services are important as customers have a tendency to forecast the emotional result of the service beforehand (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, as part of the process of pre-evaluation when searching for information, customers have shown an interest in the emotional influence the service had on other customers (Bennet, 2001; Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Consequently, in service branding there is no ready-made uniform product to use as a starting point to be building a brand relationship (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Rather, the service process will be the centre of the branding process, and this is accomplished by logically planning and managing the service (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023).

Accordingly, failure of the service process to create a brand image in the mind of the customer cannot be recompensed by planned marketing communication (Khadka and Maharjan, 2017; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, the starting point for a managed brand process is the analysis of brand image since the organisation wants its stakeholders to have a brand identity (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriaty, 2015; Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Secondly, brand awareness is created through planned marketing, and this ensures that customers are alerted of the existence of the service. In addition, marketing communications efforts supports these experiences (Bennet, 2001; Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriaty, 2015; Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, experienced customers feel the brand fulfilment which leads to perceived brand image supported by planned marketing communication (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Khadka and Maharjan, 2017; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Since this study focuses on the pharmaceutical retail sector, branding in retail pharmacy is elucidated below.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness thus refers to the extent to which customers recognize or recall a brand (Akpan, 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In short, customers are cajoled by what they feel, see, touch or hear and hence Deloitte Digital report states that 60 percent of loyal consumers use the same type of emotional language they would use for family, friends and pets when speaking of their favourite brands like love, happy and adore because emotions are the force and function behind consumerism and a keyway customers connect with brands. Similarly, Abbas et al (2021) and Munyoro and Sithole (2023) adds that customers that have heard about a brand are aware of the brand and therefore, brand awareness aids the customers in decision making thus making the buying decision easily. Likewise, brand awareness is promoted by internet (social media), newspaper, radio and other information media (Akpan, 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Correspondingly, in order to succeed in the marketplace, awareness levels of the brand should be managed throughout the whole product life cycle (Akpan 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, the major ingredient to brand success is creating a positive image and making it recognizable as well as build brand awareness (Akpan, 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023) and the awareness of a brand appears when the customer is able to recognize it and the customer's ability to remember past relationships with the brand (Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). It is key to note that brand awareness is affected by the following variables, Name, Advertising, Promotions and sales as well as first mover advantage (Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Generally, customers prefer to purchase the brand they know very well thus in order to keep customers aware of the brand and to sustain their customers, companies need to keep triggering the brand by advertising more and more to grow the number of people who know of the brand (Shahid et al, 2017; Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023).

Brand Image:

The brand image is a set of attitudes or opinions for that particular brand and it elucidates the purpose of the business thus attracting customers and potent brand image assists in keeping the company in the mind of potential customers (Abbas et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Furthermore, a confident, social and special brand image has a positive effect on customer intentions therefore a good corporate brand image is built when evidence of the service is retained in the mind of the customer (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Hence, Methaq (2016) and Munyoro and Gorejena (2020) suggest that the customer's feelings and thoughts about a brand constitutes the brand image. Hence, Methaq (2016) defined brand

image as a brand brought to the customer's mind through brand association. Moreover, she agrees with Olajide and Otori (2020) that brand image affects customers' behaviour towards the brand as well as their perception of value and quality of the product or service. In addition, a strong brand image enhances the superiority of a brand over its rivals (Methaq, 2016; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023).

Hence, customer satisfaction coupled with brand image play a major role in influencing loyalty intentions and customer loyalty is among the major factor of an organisation that is strongly tied to brand image and the customer service offered to the customer (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In fact, previous studies demonstrated that the link between customer loyalty and brand image is strong (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Abbas et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). This is also supported by Napasri and Witthaya (2020) who suggest that brand image and perception of a pharmacy has shown the strongest link with buyer behaviour and satisfaction. Whilst Abbas et al (2021) and Munyoro and Hodzi (2023) claim that satisfaction and awareness of the service or product increases the brand's overall image. Therefore, brand image is a treasure to any organisation (Abbas et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Furthermore, it is also a function of experiences and expectations and has an impact of employees and customers (Khadka and Maharjan, 2017; Abbas et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, establishing a good brand image serves as a long-term marketing strategy (Chao et al, 2015; Abbas et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Therefore, the value of brand cannot be ignored as far as branding is concerned and hence brand trust is discussed below in detail.

Brand Trust:

The feeling of security held by a customer in his or her interactions with the brand that is based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the welfare of the customer describes customers' brand trust (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, this trust enables brands to create strong relationships and positively impact brand loyalty (Kron, 2015; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Therefore, customer satisfaction on its own is not enough to retain customers as evidenced by a high rate of promiscuity among satisfied customers, coupled with customer satisfaction, customer trust is an important apparatus for building long lasting relationships; therefore, there is a strong relationship between customer loyalty and customer trust (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In fact, in retail pharmacy, credibility and competencies have high explanatory power as precursors of customer trust that input purchase intentions, word of mouth behaviours and value chain relationships, consequently a pharmacy perceived to have a competence personality gains high level of customer trust (Perepelkon and Zhang, 2011; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, trust can be differentiated into two classes, personal trust and organisational trust (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Perepelkon and Zhang, 2011; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). In this case, commitment and trust are mediating variables in the organization's relationship with customers (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Perepelkon and Zhang, 2011). Similarly, a number of factors among them brand, commitment, trust and satisfaction have an effect on loyalty (Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriarty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). The main dimension of organisational trust is belief (Setyawan and Imronudin, 2015).

Brand Service Quality:

In retailing, brands play a number of significant functions since they bring about customer interest and loyalty to a specific store. Service quality of retailers can also be linked to the brand (Pereira et al, 2021; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). As a result, service quality has grown to be an important concept of service research due to the nature of today's competitive global business environment (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Frazen and Moriaty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Therefore, brand service quality can be defined as the quality of service provided by a specific brand which exceeds or meets customers' expectations (Chinomona, 2013; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Similarly, Adebisi and Luwal (2017) and Munyoro and Gorejena (2020) define service quality as the overall assessment of a specific service organisation resulting from a comparison of the organisation's performance with the general expectations of customers. Whilst Hussain and Hussain (2011) Munyoro and Hodzi (2023) say it is the overall assessment of service performance without comparing the service with other providers in the same industry. Whereas Iddrisu et al (2015) simplifies service quality as the gap between customers' perceptions and expectations of service aimed at building a competitive advantage.

Therefore, numerous researchers have suggested and provided evidence that there is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction but the study by Chinomona (2013) proposes that customers develop positive attitudes towards certain brands based on the perceived brand service quality. Consequently, service quality has been shown to have a significant influence on business performance (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, Hossain and Hossain (2011), support that service quality is among the key factors determining the failure or success of any service provider and moreover, Iddrisu et al (2015) points out that brand service quality is among the frequently examined determinants of customer loyalty. Furthermore, service quality leads to customer satisfaction thus affecting customer loyalty conversely, customer satisfaction seems to have an effect on service quality (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Frazen and Moriaty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Equally, Chinomona (2013) also adds that a number of authors have argued that brand service quality is strongly related to brand loyalty despite the relationship being unclear but it is clear that service quality is a significant success factor to gaining a competitive advantage on the market (Adebisi and Luwal, 2017; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Likewise, Fida et al (2020) adds that brand service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are significantly related.

That said, service quality is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept whose meaning may appear different from one person to another (Hossain and Hossain, 2011; Iddrisu et al, 2015; Frazen and Moriaty, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, the commonly used model was first developed by Parasuraman et al (1988) and is called the SERVQUAL model and it was first used in the service industry specifically restaurants (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, the SERVQUAL model makes use of five quality dimensions which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy and these have since been redefined and modified by other authors (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Fida et al, 2020; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Accordingly, the SERVQUAL model gives a theoretical background to the positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Chao et al, 2015; Iddrisu et al, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Therefore, when an organisation delivers quality service, they are consistently conforming to the expectations of customers and this could be investigated through enquiring whether the perceived service delivery fails to meet, meets or exceeds customer expectations (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Furthermore, the

relationship between an organisation and its customers can come to an end due to natural causes for example customer demand extinction or artificial causes such as low service quality or inadequate product specification (Adebisi and Luwal, 2017; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Therefore, to increase customer loyalty the firm should work towards extinguishing both artificial and natural customer exit reasons (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Adebisi and Luwal, 2017; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Hence, the businesses that intend to be market leaders must pay constant attention to customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and service quality as the customers determine service quality themselves when a firm offers services that meet the needs of the customer, resulting from competition among retail pharmacies especially in large cities and towns, retail pharmacies need to plan strategies that differentiate them from each other (Chao et al, 2015; Adebisi and Luwal, 2017; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, this can be accomplished by delivering efficient health service quality (Adebisi and Luwal, 2017; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Having said this, therefore, there is need to understand that branding on itself is not enough hence the need for it to be backed by customer satisfaction as suggested earlier on (Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023).

Customer Satisfaction

A customer is said to be satisfied when services or goods fulfil the demands and needs of customers at utmost levels (Iddrisu et al, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Therefore, service attributes give satisfaction and pleasure to the buyer (Abbas et. al, 2021; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023) and therefore, businesses can accelerate their competitive advantage over competitors through spawning higher customer satisfaction (Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, customers pleased with service rendered are likely to inform other people about their encounter, likewise displeased customers will also communicate the same to others hence one unsatisfied customer can spoil five other satisfied customers (Kron, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Consequently, achieving high customer satisfaction is thus one of the major business objectives aimed at sustaining long favourable customer relationships (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, customers are the soul of each, and every healthy business so should be kept happy at all times (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). In brief, branding can lead to customer satisfaction (Akpan2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Consequently, customer satisfaction is a strong predictor of customer retention; loyalty and service repurchase (Kron, 2015; Shahid et al, 2017; Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In addition, customer satisfaction is seen as a necessary condition to generate loyal customers and for a company to have long survival (Akpan, 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Interestingly, customer satisfaction on its own may not translate to customer retention or loyalty because satisfaction is a reactive engagement while loyalty is a proactive or active link with the customer (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Therefore, it is clear that customer satisfaction is indispensable for the continuing success of a company as lack of customer satisfaction has negative impact on a business (Shahid et al, 2017; Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Correspondingly, for a business to stay financially sound adequate collection and analysis of customer satisfaction information should be top priority (Shahid et al, 2017; Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023) and this information should also be measured based upon what customers deem important (Illieska, 2013; Shahid et al, 2017; Seturi, 2017; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). As mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction may result in customer loyalty as discussed in detail below.

Customer Loyalty

There are different concepts to customer loyalty hence there is no one scholar who has given the proper definition. Consequently, to start with customer loyalty is defined by Dickson (2015) as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred service or product consistently in the future thus choosing a repetitive brand despite situational influences and marketing effects having the potential to cause switching behaviour. Similarly, Olajide and Otori (2020) defined customer loyalty as the proof of customers' frequent repeat purchases thus building a continuous relationship with the company. Whereas Abbas (2021) defines customer loyalty as the purchase behaviour of customers in which they buy the same product or service again and again in future regardless of competitor or rival efforts. For the purpose of this study customer loyalty refers to the behaviour of customers who buy from the same retail pharmacy from time to time and spread good word about the pharmacy despite having many other options available.

That said, it is worth noting that the current environment has seen an increase in global competition coupled with rapid market entry of innovative services and products while the duty of managing customer loyalty has been seen as a central management challenge (Dick and Basu, 1994; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In this case, Abdullah et al (2012) and Munyoro and Gorejena (2020) agree that today's market is very competitive and aggressive, stimulating many businesses to realise the importance of retaining existing clientele and come up with various activities aimed at building loyalty in their customers. Thus, the fundamental force behind marketing activities of an organisation is generally viewed in terms of development, enhancement or maintenance of customer loyalty towards the organisation's services or products (Dick and Basu, 1994; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). As a result, in today's era, all industries including pharmaceutical sector are trying to come up with better services, quality products and additional features that give their product or services more weight on the market (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Therefore, customer loyalty has hauled significant attention of marketing practitioners and scholars for decades now (Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In fact, the business epitome in marketing is drifting from customer acquisition to customer loyalty with the aim of creating long lasting relationships with customers (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Accordingly, attracting new customers tends to be expensive due to start up operating expenses, sales cost and advertising procedure (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In fact, the cost of attracting new customers is about six times that of retaining old customers (Farhat and Khan, 2011; Kron, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, Romachandran and Balasubramanion (2020) and Munyoro and Gorejena (2020) agree that it generally costs a couple of times more to attain new customers than to retain current customers and that loyal customers tend to spend more than new customers.

In fact, recent studies have shown that businesses are losing loyal customers faster today than before due to competition as a result of the highly crowded marketplace intending to snatch the attention of promiscuous customers through multitudes of less differentiated product or service offerings (Romachandran and Balasubramanion, 2020; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, having a large pool of loyal customer is an added advantage to the business because loyal customers are less price sensitive hence businesses can deal with higher profit shares (Kron, 2015; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Olajide and Otori (2020) and Munyoro and

Sithole (2023) add that companies benefit from loyal customers through their willingness to frequently purchase, spend more money on services and goods and recommend services or products to potential customers as well as sincerely suggesting for others to purchase the same service or product something important to retail pharmacies.

Although loyalty and customer satisfaction are independent of each other since loyalty is attributed by what people do while satisfaction by what people say about the service or product, the customer becomes loyal when satisfied by the services or products of the brand (Kron, 2015; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, it is crucial to note that loyal customers are valuable in the sustainability of a business as the organisation makes profit from loyal customers when they make repeated purchases and recommend others to purchase the same products and services (Kron, 2015; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Abbas et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In fact, many scholars seem to agree that loyal customers are the lifeblood of any business including brand image and customer satisfaction (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Thus, a rise in customer loyalty results in low marketing costs as well as effective trading leverage and a larger customer base (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In addition, Pereira et al (2021) and Munyoro and Hodzi (2023) suggests that customer loyalty increases as the brand reputation increases.

Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty:

It is worth noting that there are two main reasons why customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are the two most vital features of a modern business and the first is that customers are a scant resource, furthermore it is much easier to derive purchases from existing customers than from new customers (Khadka and Maharjan, 2017; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Secondly customer satisfaction and customer loyalty positively affect the revenue and profitability of the business (Khadka and Maharjan, 2017; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Furthermore, Khadka and Maharjan (2017) and Munyoro and Gorejena (2020) suggest that customer satisfaction is both relative and dynamic as it is capable of evolving over time. Therefore, a customer-centric approach can assist companies to upgrade customer satisfaction and truly keep customers (Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). On the other hand, if competitors up their customer satisfaction levels then the company may lose customers (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In fact, service and product quality also have a positive effect on customer satisfaction levels (Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Another equally important factor is employee satisfaction because employees have a positive influence on customer satisfaction levels as they will work towards achieving high customer satisfaction levels (Khadka and Marjan, 2017; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023).

The theory of Loyalty started appeared in marketing literature in the 1940's and it was considered unidimensional however, today different multidimensional models exist for example one writer suggests that brand loyalty can be divided into action loyalty and affective loyalty while another suggests that loyalty can be subdivided into true loyalty, spurious loyalty, latent loyalty and no loyalty (Odoom, 2016; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Thus, questions on the probability to buy a company's services or products at different price points can be used to measure customer loyalty (Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka,

2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). In addition, customer satisfaction has a beneficial effect on customer loyalty however, the extent of the effect differs from industry to industry or from company to company (Illeiska, 2013; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020).

The Importance of Customers

It is key to note that businesses today are facing a lot of competitive pressure, regulatory changes, micro and macro-economic conditions, e-business, acquisitions and mergers among other things (www.weforum.org). Thus, all businesses bank on the customer hence customers deserve to be treated as kings because product and profit decrease or increase depending on customer demands (Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020).

Literature Based Framework for Retail Pharmacies

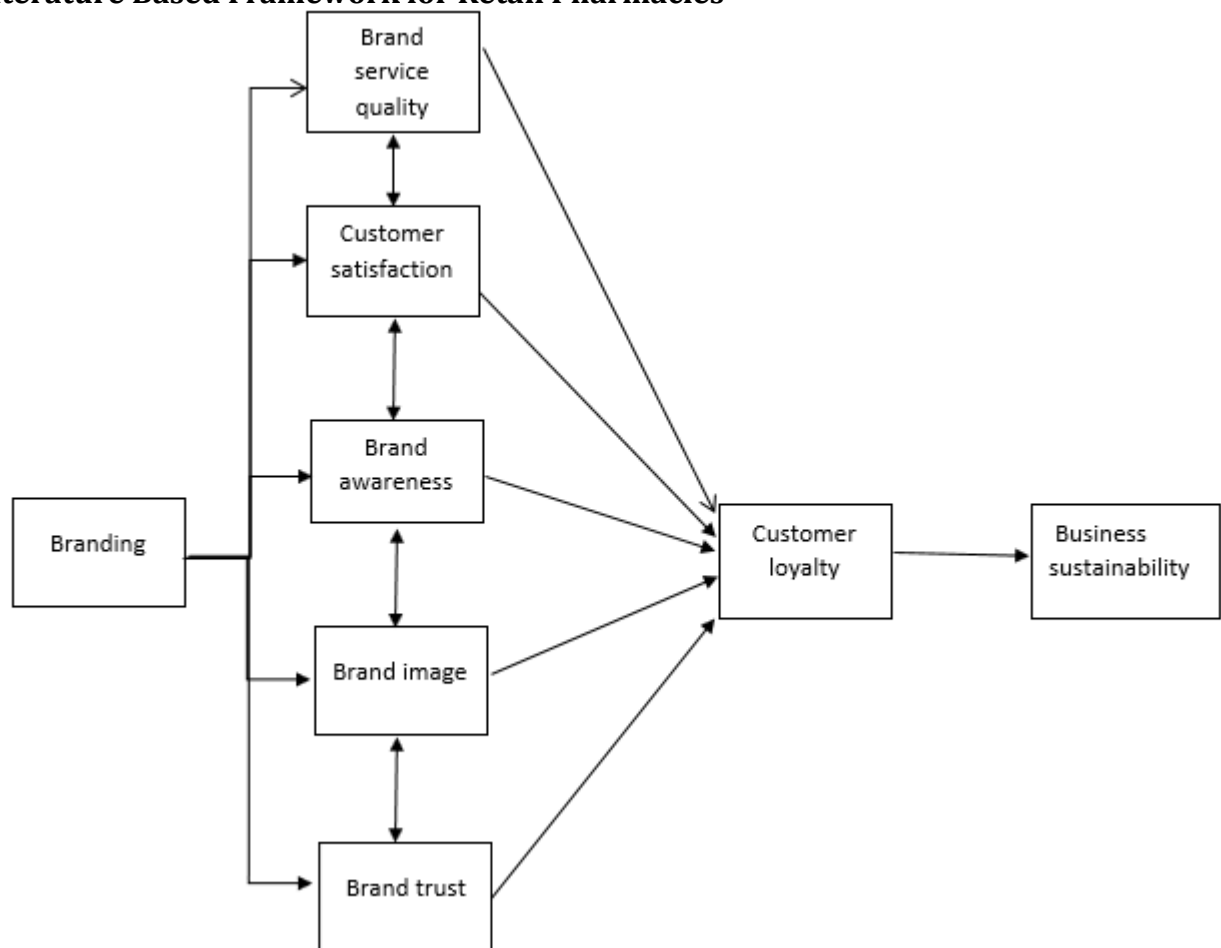


Figure 5: The conceptual Framework

Consequently, previous research has shown that ninety-nine percent of customers who are not happy with service or product offerings of the company will not rebuy the service or product again (Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020; Ali et al, 2021). In addition, customers are important because, they pose as a link to develop new products and services (Khadka and Marjan, 2017; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Ali et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). They also enable collection and analysis of data for consumer behaviour and

market (Khadka and Marjan, 2017; Olajide and Otori, 2020; Ali et al, 2021; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Furthermore, the availability of customers helps to improve brand loyalty of the company (Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020; Ali et al, 2021). Additionally, customers help build company reputation through customer services and contribute to economic growth by encouraging business sustainability (Musumali, 2019; Munyoro and Nyereyemhuka, 2019; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Moreover, according to Ali et al (2021) the ability to leverage on customer satisfaction helps businesses lower the number of unsatisfied customers thus increases their profits. All these reasons are also beneficial to the service sector which is the next subject.

With the support of past literature, this suggested framework elucidates how the success of the branding process heavily relies on other aspects like brand service quality, customer satisfaction, brand awareness, brand image and brand trust. Thus, the five components in the framework also affect each other as indicated by the double arrows. Consequently, all five components are reported to have a positive effect on customer loyalty which in turn affects business success and sustainability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

The research adopted a positivist research philosophy which enabled to clearly determine the impact of branding on customer loyalty in the retail pharmaceutical industry (Craig, 1996; Honderich, 2005; Miller, 2019). Since, quantitative research was adopted in this study, it meant that the study focused on quantifying the collection and analysis of data and was formed from a deductive approach where emphasis was placed on the testing of theory, shaped by empiricist and positivist philosophies (Babbie, 2010; Bryman, 2012). Thus, this research made use of the deductive research approach, and this was mainly because the subjects of branding and customer loyalty have been studied for several decades now, to the extent that there is a vast body of literature about the relationship between the two variables (Johnson-Laird, 2009; Schechter, 2013). In the same vein, the deductive approach fitted well with the positivist research philosophy upon which the study was based on (Norris, 1975; Vorobej, 1992; Evans, 2005; Wilbanks, 2010; McKeon, 2021). It is also key noting that in this research, an explanatory research design was adopted because it enabled the researchers to precisely and objectively measure the effect of branding on customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical industry (Robson, 1993; Muaz, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Tobi and Kampen, 2018; Asenahabi, 2019; Claybaugh, 2020; Thakur, 2021). It is worth noting that this research used a survey of the retail pharmaceutical industry in Marondera in collecting and analysing data for the study and this allowed the collection of large quantities of quantitative data that was easily analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Smith and Davis, 2003; Denscombe, 2010; Jackson, 2011; Geray, 2014; Gurbuz, 2017; Saunders et al, 2019; Dangal, 2021). Thus, this facilitated the employment of econometric analysis in determining the precise direction and magnitude of effect of branding on customer loyalty in the retail pharmaceutical sector (Owens, 2002; Stanila et al, 2014; Bhattarai, 2016; Dangal, 2021). Above that, survey research ensured that the findings of the study would be generalisable across all pharmacies in Marondera and beyond (Mathiyazhagan and Nandan, 2010; Ponto, 2010; Showkat and Parveen, 2017; Saunders et al, 2019).

In all types of research, it would be outstanding to use the entire population however in most cases it is impossible to involve every subject when the population is large (Etikan et al, 2016;

Saunders et al, 2019). Thus, in this study stratified random and systematic sampling methods were used to make sure that every pharmacy was represented. In addition, systematic sampling was used because it enabled the researchers to come up with an unbiased sample in the absence of a sampling frame. That said, the population for Marondera urban district was made up of 66203 (Casteel and Bridler, 2021; MCAZ, 2022). At the same time this study utilized Cochran 's formula to calculate the sample size for customers (Cochran, 1977). This formula was chosen because the population of Marondera was known to be large.

$$n_o = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

n_o = sample size

p = estimated proportion of the population which has the attribute in question

z = z value on Z table

$q = (1-p)$

e = margin of error (desired level of precision)

For the purpose of this study $p = 0.5$, at 95% confidence interval $Z = 1.96$ and $\pm 5\%$ margin of error therefore sample size was:

$$n_o = \frac{1.95^2(0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^2} = 385$$

In this study, the data was collected using a questionnaire which was self-administered by the researchers to pharmacy employees and customers (Abawi, 2013; Saunders et al, 2019). In this case, pharmacy employees were allowed to fill in the questionnaire at their own time while customers were asked to complete the questionnaire while waiting to be served. Whereas the data was analysed using quantitative data analysis techniques. In this case, the data was first scanned for errors and coded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Goodnight, 2010; Sherman, 2014; Spie, 2014). Then the software was used to come up with graphs and tables to present the study findings and these were used because of their ability to illustrate these quantitative research findings (Brackett, 1989). In fact, the data was analysed using percentages, mean score, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and regression as well as correlation analysis and percentages and mean scores were very instrumental in summarising the study findings, showing points of convergence and divergence among respondents (Goodnight, 2010; Schutt & O'Neil, 2013; Spie, 2014; Smandar, 2017). In the process, ANOVA was used because it helped test the significance of the mean score results (Goodnight, 2010; Schutt & O'Neil, 2013; Spie, 2014; Smandar, 2017). At the same time regression analysis was the main method used to analyse the causative effect of branding on customer loyalty Five (Nwabueze, 2008; Conway, 2012). Similarly, correlation analysis helped in the testing of the strength of relationships between branding attributes and customer loyalty. Likewise, the research principles of confidentiality were key to these studies and informed consent was used throughout the research. Consequently, in any research that needs credibility, then reliability and validity are of highest standing (Polit and Hungler, 1993; Saunders et al, 2019) and hence, validity of an instrument was vital as this is the degree to which the instrument measures that which it is intended (Polit and Hungler, 1993; Saunders et al, 2019). At the same time, reliability was

significant as it is the precision and accuracy of an instrument that is used to ensure validity and reliability in a study (Polit and Hungler, 1993; De Vos, 2001; Saunders et al, 2019).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Response Rate

The research collected data from customers and employees of pharmacies in Marondera and the response rate from customers was 75.6% while that from employees was 72.7% and this was a very high response rate which gave credence to the reliability of the study findings. In addition, the findings show that 59.6% of the customers were female while 40.1% were male. Furthermore, the results in general indicate that 10% of the customers were 20 years old and below, whilst 27.1% were aged 20-30 years, whereas 34.4% were aged 30-40 years, however 19.2% were aged 40-50 years and 9.2% were 50 and above years. Thus, this indicates that the majority of the customers were at least 30-50 years old. In relation to the educational level, 21.3% had Ordinary level (O Level) and below, whereas 35.4% had Advanced level (A level), whilst 29.2% had diplomas, where 8.9% had degrees and 5.2% had postgraduate degrees. Thus, a sizeable percentage of the customers had Advanced level, followed by those who had diplomas as their highest educational qualifications.

The results also show that 59.4% of the employees who took part in the study were female while 40.6% were male. The results therefore indicated that the majority of the employees were female. In addition, the results also show that 6.3% of the employees were aged 20 years and below, 31.3% were 20-30 years old, 40.6% were 30-40 years old, 9.4% were 40-50 years old and 12.4% were 50 and above years old. Thus, this indicates that the majority of the employees were at least 30-50 years old. In terms of education, 3.1% had O level and below, 15.6% had A level, whilst 40.6% had diplomas, whereas 31.3% had degrees and 9.4% had postgraduate degrees. Consequently, this shows that the bulk of the employees had diplomas, followed by those who had undergraduate degrees as their highest educational qualifications. Furthermore, the shows that 18.8% had a 0–2-year tenure of employment, whereas 28.1% had 2-5 years, whilst 37.5% for 5-7 years and 15.5% for more than 7 years. Accordingly, the findings showed that the majority of the employees had been working in the pharmacy businesses for at least 5 years and thus had treasured information concerning marketing related issues in the retail pharmaceutical industry.

Existence of Branding in Pharmacies in Zimbabwe

The research first sought to establish the existence of branding in pharmacies in Zimbabwe and hence the customers and employees who took part in the study were asked several questions to determine the extent which pharmacies in their locality were undertaking branding. Firstly, the respondents were expected to indicate whether or not their pharmacies had brand names and logos displayed in and around the store. The results are indicated in Figure 4.1 below.

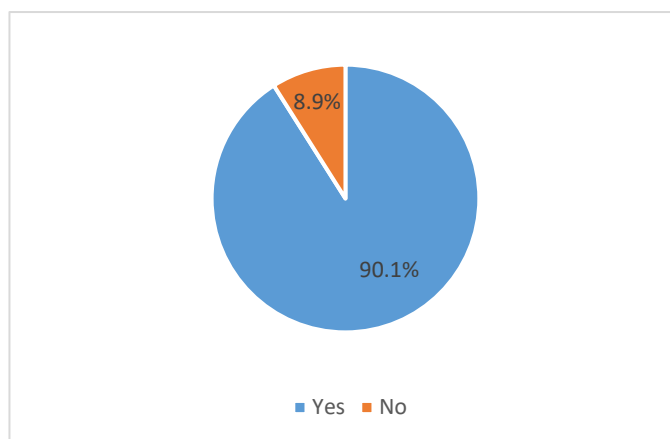


Figure 4.1: Whether or not pharmacies have brand names and logos

Thus, Fig 4.1 indicates that 90.1% of the respondents answered yes while 8.9% answered no to the question of whether or not their pharmacies had brand names and logos displayed around the store. Consequently, these results indicate that the majority of the respondents agreed that their pharmacies had brand names and logos displayed around the store.

Then, the respondents were asked how frequently pharmacies were advertising and promoting their brand names using printed and electronic media. Thus, the question was based on a Likert scale from 1= never to 5= always and the responses were analysed using mean scores and ANOVA p values at 5% significance level. So mean scores above 2.5 meant that the rate of advertising and promotion of brands was frequent while that below 2.5 meant that it was infrequent. Therefore, Table 4.4 below indicates the results.

Table 4.4: How frequently pharmacies advertise and promote their brands.

	N	Mean	P value
Frequency of brand advertising	323	3.47	.52
Frequency of brand promotion	323	2.43	.34
Valid N (listwise)	323		

Table 4.4 above shows that the mean score on the frequency of advertising brands using print and electronic media was found to be 3.47 with a p value of 0.52. Thus, these results indicated that the majority of the survey respondents agreed that the pharmacies frequently advertise their brand using print and electronic media. Hence, the p value was more than 0.05 which indicated that the results were significant at 5% significance level. Furthermore, the Table 4.4 also indicates that the mean score on the frequency of promoting brands was found to be 2.43 with a p value of 0.34 and this showed that most of the respondents were of the impression that the pharmacies infrequently promoted their brands. In this case, the value was above 0.05 showing that the results were significant at the 5% level of significance. Therefore, these findings are in support of Homburg et al (2010) whose study in Germany revealed that most businesses pursue branding as a key marketing objective.

Another point to note is that the research then sought to measure the existence of various attributes of branding in the pharmacies and in this case, the respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements about branding at their pharmacies.

In this instance, the questions were based on a Likert scale from 1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree and the findings were analysed in terms of mean scores and ANOVA p values at 5% significance level. Thus, mean scores above 2.5 meant that the majority of the respondents were in agreement while that below 2.5 meant that they were in disagreement, and this is supported by Table 4.5 below which shows that the mean scores and p values.

Table 4.5: Attributes of branding in pharmacies in Marondera

	N	Mean	P value
Familiarity with brand	323	2.72	.17
Relevancy of pharmacy brands	323	3.11	.29
Perceived quality of brands	323	2.89	.15
Reliability of pharmacy	323	2.36	.41
Esteem of pharmacy	323	2.07	.32
Differentiation of pharmacy brands	323	3.24	.19
Valid N (listwise)	323		

Thus, the findings in Table 4.5 indicate that the mean score on the familiarity of customers with the brand was found to be 2.72 with a p value of 0.17 and these results showed that most of the respondents agreed that they are familiar with pharmacy brands in their area. In this instance, the p value was more than 0.05 thus, indicating the result was significant at 5% significance level. Whilst the mean score on the relevancy of pharmacy brands was found to be 3.11 with a p value of 0.29. Thus, this indicated that the majority of the study respondents were in agreement with the notion that pharmacies in their area provide products that are relevant to their needs. In addition, the p value was above 0.05 showing that the result was significant at 5% level of significance. Whilst the mean score on the agreement level of respondents concerning the perceived quality of brands was found to be 2.89 with a p value of 0.15. Therefore, these results indicated that the bulk of the respondents agreed that the pharmacies provide products and services of high quality. Furthermore, the result was significant at 5% level as seen by the p value that was above 0.05.

Table 4.5 also indicate that the mean score on the reliability of pharmacies was found to be 2.36 with a p value of 0.41 and these findings showed that the majority of the survey respondents disagreed that the pharmacies provided reliable services to customers. This finding was judged to be significant at 5% significance level by the ANOVA p value that was more than 0.05. The mean score on the esteem of pharmacy brands was found to be 2.07 with a p value of 0.32. Thus, this showed that most of the respondents disagreed that the pharmacies provided products and services of higher esteem than others in the area. Hence, the p value was more than 0.05 hence indicating the result was significant at 5% significance level. Whilst the mean score on differentiation of pharmacy brands was found to be 3.24 with a p value of 0.19. Consequently, this indicated that the majority of the study respondents were in agreement with the notion that pharmacies in their area have successfully differentiated their brands from competitors. Likewise, the p value was above 0.05 showing that the result was significant at 5% level of significance. Accordingly, these findings thus indicated that the majority of the pharmacies which participated in the study are branded and are actively pursuing branding strategies. This is in agreement with King et al (2010) who indicated that most businesses are now branding in order to create awareness and differentiate themselves from others offering the same products and services. Accordingly, the findings in this case are also in support of findings by Lassar

(2013) which also indicated that Mexican convenience stores have actively pursued branding as a key marketing strategy.

Role of Branding in Shaping Customer Loyalty in Pharmacies

The pharmacy customers and employees who participated in the study were asked a series of questions about the role of branding in shaping customer loyalty in pharmacies. Thus, the first question asked respondents about whether or not they agreed that having a brand that is well known and respected affect the extent to which customers will continue buying from a pharmacy. Thus, Figure 4.2 illustrate their responses.

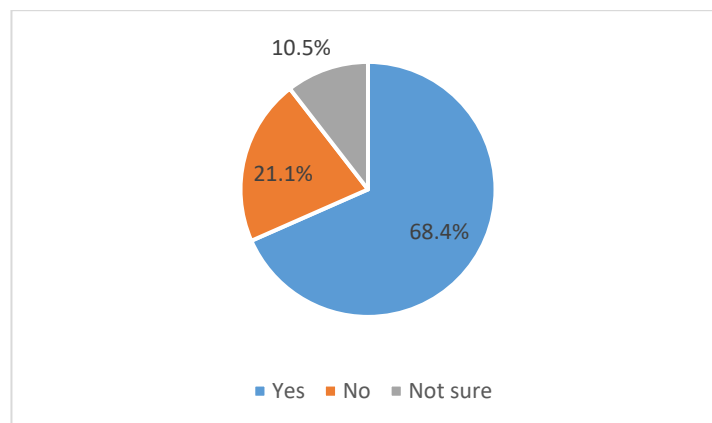


Figure 4.2: Whether or not branding affect customer loyalty

Fig 4.2 above shows that 68.4% said yes, 21.1% said no and 10.5% said not sure to the question of whether or not having a brand that is well known and respected affect the extent to which customers will continue buying from a pharmacy. Thus, this indicates that the majority of the survey respondents agreed that branding affects customer loyalty among pharmacies.

Respondents were then asked which pharmacies customers would prefer buying from between, one with a displayed and well-known name or one without a displayed and well-known name. Table 4.6 indicates the distribution of their responses.

Table 4.6: Whether or not customers prefer buying from a branded pharmacy.

	Frequency	Percent
One with a displayed and well-known name	251	77.7%
One without a displayed and well-known name	15	4.6%
They do not care	57	17.7%
Total	323	100%

Table 4.6 shows that 77.7% said they would prefer buying from one with a displayed and well-known name, 4.6% said one without a displayed and well-known name and 17.7% said they did not care. These findings indicate that the majority of the respondents said that they would prefer buying from well-branded pharmacies than unbranded ones. The results of the study are in line with Kotler and Keller (2014) who have asserted the positive role played by branding in fostering customer loyalty.

The respondents were also asked about how far they agreed to a number of statements concerning the role of branding in ensuring that customers are loyal to the same pharmacy. The responses were computed in the form of mean score and tested for significance using ANOVA at 5% significance levels. Table 4.7 indicates the mean score and standard deviations.

Table 4.7: The role of branding in influencing customer loyalty in pharmacies

	N	Mean	P value
A pharmacy that is well branded store gives the impression that its products and services are of high quality	323	3.89	.22
Customers get more satisfaction from buying from a pharmacy that has a good brand	323	3.43	.32
Customers prefer buying from a pharmacy with a brand that they know	323	3.67	.54
Customers are more likely to continue buying from a pharmacy with a good brand	323	4.21	.46
Customers are willing to pay a little more for the same product if they are buying from a pharmacy with an attractive brand	323	2.63	.37
Customers are more likely to recommend others to buy from a pharmacy if it has a good brand	323	4.07	.26
Valid N (listwise)	323		

Table 4.7 shows that the mean score on the statement that a pharmacy that is well branded store gives the impression that its products and services are of high quality was 3.89 with a p value of 0.22. Thus, these findings indicated that the majority of the customers and employees who took part in the study agreed that pharmacy that is well branded store gives the impression that its products and services are of high quality. Consequently, these findings were significant at 5% level as shown by the p value that was above 0.05. Accordingly, this concurs with Kotler and Keller (2014) who stated that branding is important in improving perceived quality among customers. Whilst the mean score on the statement that customers get more satisfaction from buying from a pharmacy that has a good brand was found to be 3.43 with a p value 0.32. Thus, the bulk of the questionnaire respondents were in agreement with the notion that customers get more satisfaction from buying from a pharmacy that has a good brand. Whilst the p value was above 0.05 hence showing that the mean score result was significant at 5% significance level. Therefore, these findings are in support of Sammut-Bonnoci (2015) who explained that branding of products and services improves customer satisfaction.

The statement that customers prefer buying from a pharmacy with a brand that they know had a mean score of 3.67 with a p value of 0.54. Accordingly, this indicated that the majority of the survey participants agreed that customers prefer buying from a pharmacy with a brand that they know. Therefore, the result was significant judging from the p value which was more than 0.05. Consequently, these results agree with Lassar (2013) whose study indicated that retailers in Mexico have benefited immensely from brand familiarity in terms of both customer acquisition and retention. In addition, the findings in Table 4.7 show that the mean score on the notion that customers are more likely to continue buying from a pharmacy with a good brand was found to be 4.21 with a p value of 0.46. Thus, this showed that the bulk of the respondents ascended to the notion that customers are more likely to continue buying from a pharmacy with a good brand. Hence, the p value was above 0.05 showing that these findings were significant at the 5% level of significant. Therefore, the findings of the study support earlier findings by

Sen (2010) whose study found a positive relationship between brand preference and loyalty among convenient stores in Canada.

Thus, the notion that customers are willing to pay a little more for the same product if they are buying from a pharmacy with an attractive brand had a mean score of 2.63 with a p value of 0.37. Accordingly, these results confirmed that most of the questionnaire respondents were in agreement with the notion that customers are willing to pay a little more for the same product if they are buying from a pharmacy with an attractive brand. Thus, judging from the p value that was more than 0.05, this finding was significant at 5% significant level, and this is supported by several scholars who have alluded to this, including Sammut-Bonnoci (2015) underscoring the importance of branding in increasing price elasticity and improving profitability and competitiveness in business organisations. Hence, the mean score on the statement that customers are more likely to recommend others to buy from a pharmacy if it has a good brand was found to be 4.07 with a p value 0.26. Thus, the bulk of the questionnaire respondents were in agreement with the notion that customers are more likely to recommend others to buy from a pharmacy if it has a good brand. In this case, the p value was above 0.05, thus showing that the mean score result was significant at 5% significance level. Therefore, these results were also in concurrence with literature, including Kotler and Keller (2014) who highlight the importance of branding knowledge in ensuring positive word of mouth and referrals by customers.

Effect of Branding on Customer Loyalty in The Pharmaceutical Retail Sector

The research further sought to assess the impact of branding on customer loyalty in the retail pharmaceutical industry in Marondera. Hence the researcher averaged the attributes of branding so as to come up with a single measure of branding in pharmacies in Marondera and this data was combined with measures of customer loyalty obtained from the questionnaire data in order to compute the regression model on the effect of branding on customer loyalty. Thus, the results in Table 4.8 indicate the F test results on the significance of the regression model.

Table 4.8: F test results on the significance of the regression model

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.25	1	1.25	7.62	.014
Residual	2.61	117	.16		
Total	3.86	323			

Thus, the findings in Table 4.8 indicate that the F test had a p value 0.014. Whilst this p value was less than 0.05, consequently indicating that the regression model tested significant at 5% significance level. Accordingly, this means that the regression model was fit for use in analysing the effect of branding on customer loyalty among the pharmacies. Thus, the regression results are shown in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9: Regression results

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.55	.91	.00	1.71	.105
Branding	.98	.21	.97	2.76	.014

Table 4.9 shows that the constant coefficient was found to be 1.55 with a t test p value of 0.105. Whilst the p value was more than 0.05, meaning that the constant was tested insignificant at 5% significance level. Thus, the constant was not useful for further use in the study. However, the findings indicate that branding had a beta coefficient of 0.98 with a p value of 0.014. The beta coefficient was positive meaning that branding was found to have a positive effect on customer loyalty. Thus, an improvement in branding by one unit would cause an increase in customer loyalty by 0.98 units. Whilst the p value was less than 0.04, thus showing that the beta coefficient for branding was found to be significant at 5% significance level and hence being considered important deriving further conclusions in the study. In this case, the results of the study are in line with Kotler and Keller (2014) who have asserted that there is a positive role played by branding in fostering customer loyalty. In this instance, the researchers went further to compute the coefficient of determination (R-squared) of the regression model and this is shown in Table 4.10 below which indicates the R-squared results.

Table 4.10: R-square

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.57	.32	.28	.40

Source: Questionnaire data

Thus, Table 4.10 indicates that the R-squared of the regression model was found to be 0.32. This shows that the independent variable branding helped to explain 32% of the changes in the dependent variable customer loyalty.

Table 4.11: Correlation analysis results

		Customer Loyalty
Customer Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	323
Familiarity with brand	Pearson Correlation	.517
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030
	N	118
Relevancy of pharmacy brands	Pearson Correlation	.724
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
	N	323
Perceived quality of brand	Pearson Correlation	.735
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	323
Reliability of pharmacy	Pearson Correlation	.652
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040
	N	118
Esteem of pharmacy	Pearson Correlation	.481
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043
	N	323
Differentiation of pharmacy brands	Pearson Correlation	.528
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047
	N	323

Accordingly, these findings further buttressed the influence of branding on customer loyalty among the pharmacies in Marondera. Hence, these findings are in support of several studies which have been done in the past such as King et al (2010) which was carried out in Italy which showed that better-quality branding enhances customer purchase intention and also ensures that customers dedicate themselves to purchasing from the business in the future.

After regression analysis, the study confirmed the causative effect of branding on customer loyalty in pharmacies in Marondera. In fact, the research went on to analyse the relationship between various branding attributes on customer loyalty and these branding attributes that were used in the study included familiarity with brand, relevancy of pharmacy brands, perceived quality of brands, esteem of pharmacy and differentiation of pharmacy brands. In this instance, the analysis was carried out using correlation analysis. Thus, Table 4.11 below presents the correlation analysis results.

Thus, the Table 4.11 above indicates that the correlation coefficient between customer loyalty and familiarity with brand was found to be 0.517 with a p value of 0.03. In this case, the correlation coefficient was above 0.5 which indicated that there is a strong positive correlation between customer loyalty and familiarity with the brand. Thus, the p value was less than 0.05 meaning that this relationship was found to be significant at 5% significance level. Accordingly, this is in agreement with Kahn (2012) who found out that brand familiarity positively influence customer retention in Pakistan. Hence, the correlation coefficient between customer loyalty and relevancy of pharmacy brands was found to be 0.724 with a p value of 0.04. In this case, the correlation coefficient was more than 0.7 showing that a very strong positive relationship was found to be between customer loyalty and relevancy of pharmacy brands. This is supported by Kotler and Keller (2014) who showed that there is a positive relationship between the ability to provide relevant products and services and customer loyalty. Hence, the table also indicate that the correlation coefficient between customer loyalty and perceived quality of brand was found to be .0735 with a p value of 0.000. Thus, the research found a very strong positive correlation between customer loyalty and perceived quality of brand. In this case, the p value was less than 0.05 which indicated that the result was significant at 5% significance level. Thus, these findings are in support of previous studies, among them Sen (2010) who found out that there is a positive correlation between perceived quality and customer loyalty.

In addition, the correlation coefficient between customer loyalty and reliability of pharmacy was found to be 0.652 with a p value of 0.04. Thus, this indicated that the existence of a strong positive correlation between the two variables is significant, and reverence of pharmacy and customer loyalty had a correlation coefficient of 0.481 with a p value of 0.043. In this case, the results indicated that there is medium strength and positive relationship between reverence of a pharmacy and customer loyalty. So, the p value in this case was less than 0.05 and this indicated that the relationship was found to be significant at 5% significance level. In this case, reliability and reverence have been nominated among the major antecedents of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sammut-Bonnoci, 2015). That said, the results further indicated that the correlation coefficient between customer loyalty and differentiation of pharmacy brands was found to be 0.528 with a p value of 0.047. Consequently, this indicated that there is a strong positive correlation between customer retention and differentiation of store brand and these findings were significant at 5% level as judged by the p value that was less than 0.05. In this

case, the results also concur with Kotler and Keller (2014) who started brand differentiation with the aim of creating brand awareness and at the same time improving customer loyalty.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

The research show that that branding exist in pharmacies in Zimbabwe and that branding enhances customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical retail industrial sector in Zimbabwe even though it is not visible, and the reason could be that branding is expansive in nature as noted by Schmitt (2012). Yet, branding is a fact of everyday life and an omnipresent reality for consumers because it works progressively to bring success to a business and is key in modern business to understand how consumers respond to branding and what they think and feel about branding (Keller and Kevin, 1993; Ranchhod, 2004; Dar and Tariq, 2020; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). It is also key to note that it is becoming progressively important for small enterprise such as small retail pharmacies to attract attention in the current marketplace (Mitchell et al, 2015; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023). Thus, retailers such as small retail pharmacies should be more innovative and creative when developing store brands to ensure that they attract more customers as well as differentiate their services or products from those of competitors (Abdullah et al, 2012; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023) because effective business performance in the present world market and the dynamics of customers requires skills and knowledge in marketing and branding (Chepchumba, 2020; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020).

Likewise, the pharmacies in Zimbabwe advertise their brands using traditional and social media. Similarly, customers in the pharmaceutical retail sector in Zimbabwe are familiar with most pharmacy brands as well as perceiving the brands to be of higher quality and are clearly differentiated from each other and this is not surprising because most modern-day retailers are highly likely to develop a store brand as it has a high potential of obtaining loyal customers (Abdullah et.al, 2012; Munyoro and Hodzi, 2023) and strong brands seem to be a guarantee of consistency, quality and superior service delivery something that small retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe must invest in (Chepchumba, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023).

Equally, the research also shows that branding plays an important role in the retention of customers among the pharmacy stores as well as improving buying behaviour, perceived quality and customer satisfaction among other issues (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). In fact, branding has a unique and sustainable differential advantage that is formed through successfully nurtured corporate identity and a strong corporate brand motivates, enables, and harmonises employees around the corporate brand hence result in consistent customer service interactions (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Furthermore, branding is more significant in the service context where employees can either break or build the brand when interacting with customers thus corporate brands that intend to deliver outstanding customer experiences have to carefully manage employee-customer interactions through addressing customer expectations and needs (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020). Hence, companies intending to nurse long term, enduring relationships with their customers should build strong corporate brands (Kotler, 2009; Jones, 2010; Frazen and Moriatty, 2015; Markovic et al, 2018). Hence, Kotler (2009) and Perepelkon and Zhang (2011) highlight that there is a relationship between consumer perceived corporate

brand, the attitude and loyalty of the customer since a corporate brand mirrors the actions and valued of the business.

At the same time, branding enables the pharmacies to charge premium prices which customers are readily willing to accept for them to enjoy the products and services offered by the pharmacies. In fact, branding is becoming progressively competitive hence keeping and growing relationships depends on the ability to convey a customer experience personalised to ever changing customer needs and values coherent with the brand's promise (Akpan, 2018; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Above all, a good brand influences customers to refer their friends, acquaintances, and family to buy medical drugs from the pharmacies (Kotler, 2009; Methaq, 2016). However, the reverence of local brands is considered of less importance, and this is supported by the results which showed that local pharmacy brands such as Booties, Med Orange, Medix, Diamond, Kenlink and the famous Greenwood pharmacy are not being promoted and this is regrettable given that local pharmacy brands also help in the enhancement of brand awareness and image building of pharmacies in Zimbabwe. Yet, branding brings together the company's services and products benefits, social values, relationships and corporate credibility (Methaq, 2016; Munyoro and Gorejena, 2020).

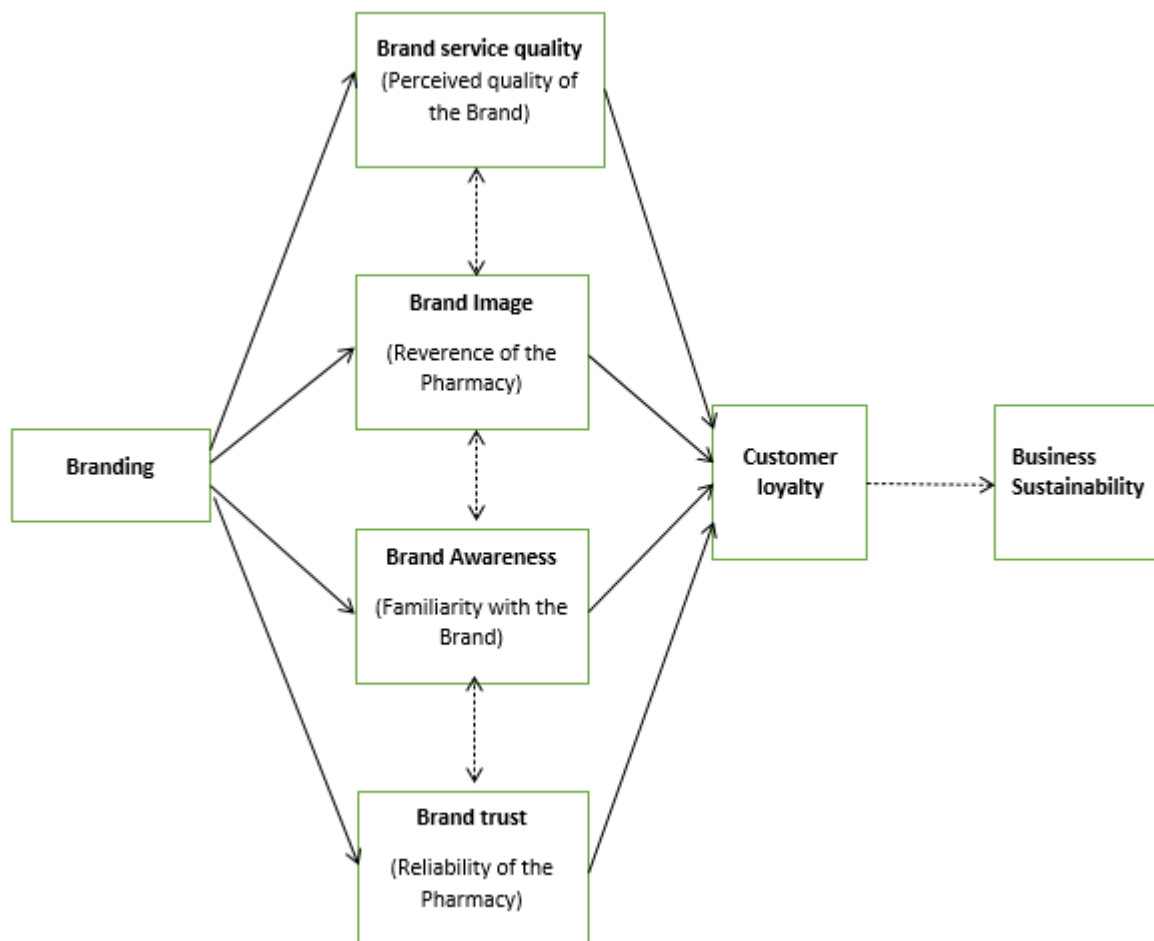


Figure 5.1: The Research based Branding and Customer loyalty Model.

Source: Authors

It is also vital to note that the research was based on a number of theories including the Customer Loyalty Model and the Service Branding Model. Thus, by investigating the existence of branding in pharmacies based in Zimbabwe, thus the research was significant to test these models. Thus, it was found out that Service Branding Model is used in the services industry in Zimbabwe by pharmaceutical firms in addition to Customer Loyalty Model. This was found to be vital in the redesigning of existing branding and customer loyalty theories to reflect the Zimbabwe situation. Besides, the research further demonstrated how branding and customer loyalty lead to higher profitability and competitiveness, and this is demonstrated in the diagram below which shows how branding in the pharmaceutical retail industry enhance customer loyalty and business performance and sustainability as shown in figure 5.1 below.

Thus, this model illustrates how branding and its aspects of brand service quality, brand image, brand awareness and brand trust work together to augment service quality. Consequently, the effect of customer loyalty on business sustainability was not part of the research hence the dotted line although the literature-based model which suggests that customer loyalty results in business sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested that pharmacies in Zimbabwe and other developing countries should establish unique organizational norms and values that distinguish them from others because strategizing is an essential part of strategic management capability and a panacea for solving challenges facing Zimbabwean pharmaceutical industrial sector as this have an impact on survival, economic prosperity, and better performance (Prahalad and Hamel, 1989; Hamel, 2000; Mason, 2007; Johnson et al, 2008; Simba and Nyandoro, 2016). In addition, they should use their own theme, colours and logos that distinguish themselves from others as is the case with pharmacies in developed countries like United Kingdom among others. As noted by DeWit and Meyer (2014), Kuratko (2014) and, Simba and Nyandoro (2016), there is an agreement in the strategic management field that managers should develop strategies that are suitable to the specific macro-economic conditions facing their firms and thus, the importance of being entrepreneurial among strategic managers is widely recognised as the driving force behind creating new markets and establishing new positions in existing markets as well as creating new order from the old. Furthermore, retail pharmacies in Zimbabwe should offer unique services that are more attractive to customers and that others find difficult to imitate as is the case with developed world. Hence, operating and managing a business such retail pharmacy in a developing or emerging economy demands dynamic and high-level strategic management capabilities as argued by by DeWit and Meyer (2014) and, Simba and Nyandoro (2016).

Similarly, pharmacies in Zimbabwe should strive to recruit professional marketing consultants to assist them with their branding strategies so as to ensure that it is crafted and implemented according to best practices in the industry. Thus, they should be active in pursuing brand awareness strategies so as to make sure that their brands are known and remembered by customers (Chepchumba, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). In addition, they should also intensify in-store advertising to ensure that those who visit their pharmaceutical stores will be left with a lasting and memorable impression of the pharmacy. In fact, in-store advertising guides purchasing decisions and helps customers decide what to buy and at the same time informing customers, reminding customers as well as in encouraging impulse buying. Likewise, retail pharmacies should also engage in promotional activities like money off coupons,

competitions, draws and monthly sales promotions as is the case with advanced world such as USA. Equally, pharmaceutical retailers in Zimbabwe should actively advertise on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Whatsapp groups and inform customers on latest offerings and promotions of their stores as suggested by Weber and Randall (2018).

Additionally, pharmaceutical retailers in Zimbabwe should undertake marketing research in order to establish the expectations of customers and the kind of convenient brands that are likely to have the most effect on customer acquisition and retention (Chepchumba, 2020; Munyoro and Sithole, 2023). Furthermore, pharmaceutical retailers in Zimbabwe should enhance the reliability since they are perceived to be less reliable by customers and this is a serious problem in Zimbabwe and other developing countries, yet trust is key to business growth. Thus, the pharmacies should make sure that they have stocks of all the medical drugs and accessories that are usually demanded by customers. In these instances, retail pharmacies should carry out research to identify the products and services that are most demanded is key so as to be able to order stock on time before they get exhausted (Craig and Malek, 1995; Brooks et al, 2008). Whereas, hiring employees trained and experienced in customer service is noteworthy in order to ensure that the experience of customers is properly managed to foster service quality and higher satisfaction (Eliyahu, 2020). In conclusion, pharmaceutical retailers in Zimbabwe should implement strategies that improve employee satisfaction so as to ensure very low employee turnover as this would ensure that customer get consistent service, which is always served by people, they are familiar with.

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