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Managing Brand Value for Increased Patronage

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MBA, Obafemi Awolowo University, 2012

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Abstract

Information technology service providers (ITSPs) with low customer patronage may not remain competitive and could fail. Business leaders of ITSPs need to implement successful brand marketing strategies to gain consumers’ confidence and increase patronage for their organizations’ long-term sustainability. Grounded in the brand equity model, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore brand marketing strategies ITSPs implement to increase patronage. The participants included nine business leaders from three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, who successfully implemented brand marketing strategies to increase patronage. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, reflective notes, and review of public documents obtained from the company websites. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data: strong brand development, target marketing, customer engagement, and customer advocacy. A key recommendation is that business leaders engage customers by leveraging social media and other innovative online methods to get feedback and ensure the co-creation of value that benefits both consumers and the business organization. Social change implications include the potential for improved professionalism in increasing patronage through branding, potential growth resulting in job creation, and increased taxable revenue to benefit local communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study firstly to God, whose grace, strength, and faithfulness endured for me throughout this study: I owe him my all. Second, to my darling wife, who endured my grumpy moments and the toll of all resources and time spent completing this study. I am forever grateful to you for standing by me. Third, my daughter, as an inspiration for you to aim high and defy all odds with the assurance that all things are possible with God. Thank you for being the sharp second set of eyes picking out my referencing errors. Lastly, my mother and siblings, giving their love, care, prayers, and financial support throughout my doctoral study journey. God bless you all.

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I acknowledge the faculty at Walden University for the support I enjoyed throughout my doctoral study. I am grateful to my chair, Dr. Timothy Malone, and other committee members who guided me through the doctoral study process. A shout out goes to my study friends and colleagues, especially Nicholas Ferguson, Sean Murphy, and Dr. Ranelli Williams: You were all tremendous motivation as we walked the doctoral study journey. I thank everyone else who impacted me positively. God bless you all.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Outsourced service providers (OSPs) are organizations engaged by client companies to manage internal processes not related to the core business focus (Ho & Wei, 2016; Rose & Frio, 2017). Though outsourcing may not be beneficial for every business, the decision to outsource contributes to the profitability of some organizations (Agburu et al., 2017). Information technology drives business survival (Chege et al., 2019) while an outsourcing decision functions as a strategy to overcome the challenge of limited internal resources and preserve the competitive business advantage. A study into improving customer patronage may be beneficial to companies in the information technology outsourcing business.

Background of the Problem

Rapid technological change has become an integral part of the modern world, affecting communication, finance, and governance (Holt & Bossler, 2013). Organizations that are not proactive with innovative strategies may not survive the heightened competition in the business environment occasioned by the fast pace of technological changes (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2016). Information technology (N. Su et al., 2016) and service innovation (Wu, 2014) enables achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. Outsourcing internal applications to external providers may result in a competitive advantage for an organization (Doval, 2016) and create business opportunities for companies providing information technology services over the internet (Hrynko, 2020).

Information technology service providers (ITSPs) will compete to gain the patronage and loyalty of their service brand by client companies. Therefore, businesses require brand-oriented behavior to strengthen the company’s brand performance (Hirvonen & Laukkanen, 2014) and gain the needed competitive edge for long-term organizational survival. However, the inability to preserve a competitive advantage may result in business failure (Goode et al., 2014). Managers of outsourcing companies, especially ITSPs, may benefit from this study into brand-marketing strategies for improving patronage.

Problem Statement

Business services outsourcing arrangements have several benefits but often fail (Eggert et al., 2017). In Kenya, 67% of outsourcing arrangements in the telecommunication industry failed (Mburu & Rotich, 2017). The general business problem was that some business managers do not understand how to gain consumers’ confidence and increase patronage for long-term business sustainability. The specific business problem was that some leaders of ITSPs lack brand marketing strategies to increase patronage.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage. The targeted population consisted of leaders in three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, who had adopted successful brand marketing strategies for increased patronage. I selected three participants from each of the three research partner organizations for this study, making a manageable total sample of nine interviewees. The targeted population was appropriate because of the companies’ location in a state that serves as the business hub of commercial and corporate activities in Nigeria. Lagos State accounts for more than 50% of Nigeria's industrial capacity (Olasanmi, 2016). The implications for positive social change include the potential for growth of ITSPs that could result in employment for young unemployed graduates in Nigeria.

Nature of the Study

Three broad approaches to carrying out research studies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2019). The mixed-methods approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods (Saunders et al., 2019). The qualitative method serves as a platform for exploratory inquiry and understanding of real-life experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The qualitative approach was suitable to understand how brand marketing strategies may increase patronage in business settings. The quantitative method involves hypothesis testing of numeric data or measurements to identify a cause or determine the relationship between or among variables (Matta, 2019). Given that the objective of the current study was neither to test hypotheses nor to determine relationships between or among variables, the quantitative method was not appropriate. The mixed-methods approach results in better inferences than can be obtained using qualitative and quantitative methods individually (Guetterman et al., 2019). However, the purpose of the current study did not require a combination of statistical analysis and qualitative inquiry. Also, time and other constraints precluded undertaking a study that included both approaches.

I considered ethnography, phenomenology, and case study designs for this research. Ethnography, phenomenology, and case study designs are examples of qualitative research designs (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). Ethnography is an exploration of cultural practices through close observation of events and daily lived experiences of groups of people, devoid of the control and prediction of behaviors (Von Koskull et al., 2016). Phenomenological research involves exploring and describing the meaning given to a phenomenon by people with shared lived experiences (Bilgili & Çiltaş, 2019). The qualitative case study entails gaining an in-depth understanding of how or why a social phenomenon operates (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study involves exploring more than one source of information (Yin, 2018). Only the case study design aligned with the purpose of the current study, which did not involve studying cultural patterns of groups of people (ethnography) or describing meaning given to individuals' shared lived experiences (phenomenology). Using the multiple case study design has the advantage of a stronger analytical conclusion over a single case study (Yin, 2018). The qualitative, multiple case study design best aligned with exploring what brand marketing strategies leaders of ITSPs located in Lagos, Nigeria, implement to increase patronage.

Research Question

What brand marketing strategies do leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage?

Interview Questions

1. How do you define brand marketing strategies?
2. What brand marketing strategies have been most effective at increasing patronage?

3. What challenges had to be overcome to implement brand marketing strategies that increased patronage?
4. What marketing strategies uniquely increased brand loyalty and patronage?
5. What factors did management consider determining brand marketing strategies you adopted?
6. How has your branding increased patronage?
7. What internal strategies have you used to improve both your service quality and marketing capabilities to increase patronage?
8. What traditional marketing strategies you know (if any) have proven to increase patronage?
9. What digital and social media strategies (smartphone applications, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) have successfully increased brand patronage?
10. How have digital or media strategies (smartphone applications, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) increased brand patronage?
11. What other knowledge would you offer about brand marketing strategies that increase brand patronage?

Conceptual Framework

Aaker's (1991) brand equity model was the conceptual lens for this study. In this model, Aaker described brand equity as the combination of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets that add value to a firm's product or service. The strength of brand equity to increase patronage depends on its capability to affect customers' positive perceptions of a brand through enhanced knowledge about the brand, assurance of superior service quality, reliability, and association with personal values through experience with the brand (Aaker, 1991). Incorporating the other proprietary brand assets in Aaker's model could strengthen the protection against competitors.

Aaker (1991) depicted in this model that brand equity creates value (a win-win situation) for both the customers and the organization. Customers gain more confidence about their purchasing decisions, and the management of brand equity for the organization transcends short-term performance outcomes and extends to profit strategies in the long term. Aaker's brand equity model was relevant to the current study because it depicts interrelated constructs that targeted marketing strategies could improve, resulting in better patronage and competitive advantage. For instance, marketing strategies to raise brand awareness could attract customers not already loyal to a brand. Improving the reliability of services could enhance the consumers' experience and effect associations that differentiate the ITSP brand. Concurrently, a focus on the perceived quality through marketing efforts could result in increased patronage.

Operational Definitions

Brand attachment: Brand attachment is the emotional assurance that a consumer derives from associating with the brand (Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2014).

Brand promise: A brand promise embodies the guaranteed experience from consuming a brand conveyed to the customer, with nonfulfillment resulting in betrayal of a word of honor (Russell-Bennett & Baron, 2016).

Competitive differentiation: Competitive differentiation is an organization's strategy to distinguish its products or services from similar offerings by competitors (Oyza & Edwin, 2016).

Market replication: Market replication is the mass production of an innovation by a business and the product's saturation into the market (Abdrakhmanova et al., 2014).

Premium price: A premium price is the higher amount charged on a product in comparison to the average price of similar products in the same industry and market (Davcik & Sharma, 2015).

Segmentation marketing: Segmentation marketing is a strategy for catering to the needs of subdivisions of the market existing as smaller groups of customers with similar purchasing characteristics and requirements (Chiang, 2013).

Switching costs: Switching costs are costs (financial and nonfinancial) that a consumer bears for changing from an existing supplier or brand to another (Blut et al., 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations refer to statements assumed to be true, potential weaknesses of the study, and the planned scope of the study. Identifying the risks and boundaries of the study ensures clarity as to the context of the inquiry. The following sections address the current study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Assumptions

The conduct of research requires making assumptions. Assumptions are underlying notions or premises that a researcher uses in an inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first assumption for this study was that participants would be sincere about communicating the successful brand marketing strategies adopted to improve customer patronage. Another assumption was that the interviewees would be knowledgeable in their responses to the interview questions so that data obtained would be relevant to satisfying the purpose of the study. The final assumption was that the qualitative case study design would be appropriate for collecting data and exploring the business problem in real-life settings.

Limitations

Limitations are conditions or issues that can affect the internal and external validity and generalizability of the research (O'Leary, 2018). Limitations to the current study included selecting cases only from Lagos, Nigeria. Olasanmi (2016) pointed out that Lagos accounts for more than 50% of Nigeria's industrial capacity. Therefore, the findings could exclude conditions peculiar to businesses in other areas of the country. The research focus on ITSPs could produce results different from exploring small businesses in other industries. Therefore, there may be a need for caution in generalizing results from the study.

A researcher using multiple sources bears an increased burden because of cost and limited time (Yin, 2018). In the current study, limited time and financial resources did not allow for 100% coverage of the Nigerian small business population to obtain rich data that could support generalizable results. Furthermore, biased descriptions and inaccurate articulation of points by interviewees may have affected the validity of the findings from the study. Other limitations may have included the participants' reluctance to fully disclose business decisions for fear of revealing secrets of their corporate competitive edge.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that define the boundaries of research and the context of the contribution to existing knowledge (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Marketing strategies seem fundamental to leveraging brand equity to increase customer patronage. Therefore, the focus of this study was on brand marketing strategies implemented by ITSPs in Nigeria for increased patronage. One of the delimitations of this study was that participants had relevant knowledge of the information technology service business and were involved in the organization's brand positioning. The exclusion of participants without marketing experience prevented the collection of irrelevant data. Another delimitation was that the interviewees were from three case firms chosen for this study. Finally, the selection of cases and participants for this study was from ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

Considering that both customers and the organization derive value from the brand (Aaker, 1991), the findings of the current study could contribute to business practice and social change. Understanding how leaders of ITSPs use brand marketing strategies to increase patronage could be of value to managers of businesses and contribute to becoming more competitive and sustainable. Organizations with improved competitiveness and profit performance could benefit society through more job creation and enhanced capacity for corporate responsibility.

Contribution to Business Practice

Findings, conclusions, and recommendations from this study may contribute to effective business practices by managers of ITSPs who lack brand marketing strategies to increase patronage. From a business perspective, understanding the design and implementation of marketing strategies for improving brand value is essential for better brand positioning (Cai & He, 2014), market expansion through increased patronage, and organizational profitability (Sallam, 2016). This study may benefit managers in accessing strategies for positioning their brand and prioritizing internal marketing capabilities to enhance customer patronage.

Furthermore, business leaders and marketing professionals in ITSPs and other small-scale enterprises could gain new insights into constructs in Aaker’s 1991 brand equity model. These leaders and professionals could learn about how enhancing interrelated constructs with marketing strategies could increase patronage. Also, managers may gain insight into barriers that impede strategies for improving brand equity and ways of overcoming the barriers. The study findings could contribute to effective information technology service provision by providing guidance for understanding and implementing relevant successful brand marketing strategies for organizational competitiveness and increased patronage. Small businesses in Nigeria could benefit from improved brand equity by achieving better brand loyalty, increased patronage, improved profit performance, and business expansion. The findings could contribute to the financial well-being of the business, the owner, and their family.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study could contribute to positive social change through the improved professionalism of marketing managers who become capable of increasing patronage through branding and their enhanced self-image and self-worth. The potential growth from the improved brand equity of ITSPs could result in job creation, increased taxable business profits, with concomitant implications for increased tax revenue for the local community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

OSPs manage internal activities not related to client companies' core business focus (Ho & Wei, 2016). These client companies, leveraging the OSPs and relieved of noncore business activities, achieve increased efficiencies (Rose & Frio, 2017). Outsourcing decisions can contribute to business profitability (Agburu et al., 2017). Organizations, recognizing the importance of employees as the face of the company's brand, require brand-oriented behavior to strengthen the company's brand performance (Hirvonen & Laukkanen, 2014). Business leaders desirous of gaining recognition as the OSP of choice could benefit from this study on brand marketing strategies for increased patronage. To gain an in-depth understanding of the literature related to brand marketing strategies managers of companies offering information technology services implement for increased patronage, I used seminal books and scholarly peer-reviewed articles in relevant journals.

Organization of the Review

The review of scholarly sources under various subtopics related to constructs associated with the guiding conceptual model, the central research question, and the research topic. The review includes the following: (a) discussion of ITSPs, (b) the conceptual model, (c) the interrelationship of brand equity dimensions, (d) brand equity and competitive advantage, (e) customer relationship and experience management, (f) brand marketing strategies for increasing patronage, and (g) views related to previous research and findings.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I relied on scholarly books and peer-reviewed journals accessed through Google Scholar and other research databases that included ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCO Host, and ProQuest. I used the individual and combinations of the following search terms: *application service provider*, *information technology service*, *application software provider*, *outsourced service provider*, *cloud computing services*, *application services and Nigeria*, *brand equity*, *brand value*, *brand improvement*, *service branding*, *marketing*, *marketing mix*, *marketing strategies*, *brand marketing*, *online marketing*, *Internet marketing*, *social media marketing*, *word-of-mouth*, *customer engagement*, *customer relationship*, and *customer experience management*. This study included 206 supporting references and 189 (92%) peer-reviewed sources. I analyzed and synthesized 116 sources in the literature review, including 109 (94%) peer-reviewed articles.

Information Technology Service Providers and Nigeria

Information technology service provision came into existence in the 1990s, with companies offering computer application solutions and services over the internet (Adigun et al., 2014). Initial ITSP offerings using point-to-point data circuits did not gain popularity until the era of cloud computing involving virtual access to computer applications (Adigun et al., 2014). Early ITSPs failed because of the uncertainties inherent in not controlling the application infrastructures (Lee & Kwon, 2014). However, with technological advancement, organizational leaders needing to concentrate on core aspects of business embraced outsourcing their information technology requirements to ITSPs.

With ITSPs, client firms experience reduced information systems investment risks (Lee & Kwon, 2014). The reason was that ITSPs invest in various resources, network infrastructures, data processing and storage management, and a platform for providing services to clients (J. Kim et al., 2014). Client firms pay only for the consumption of services created by the ITSPs' information systems investment.

In Nigeria, like other developing countries in Africa seeking to close the gap in technology advancement with developed nations, many organizations have embraced emerging technologies to achieve business operational efficiencies. However, the country has a long way to go in bridging the wide gap as intended. Nigeria has not overcome challenges such as poor internet quality, hackers' nefarious activities, and epileptic power supply (Muhammed et al., 2015). Notwithstanding the technological challenges evident in Nigeria, organizations operating as ITSPs continue to invest in infrastructures to enhance service delivery, deployment of technical skills, and awareness to ensure patronage.

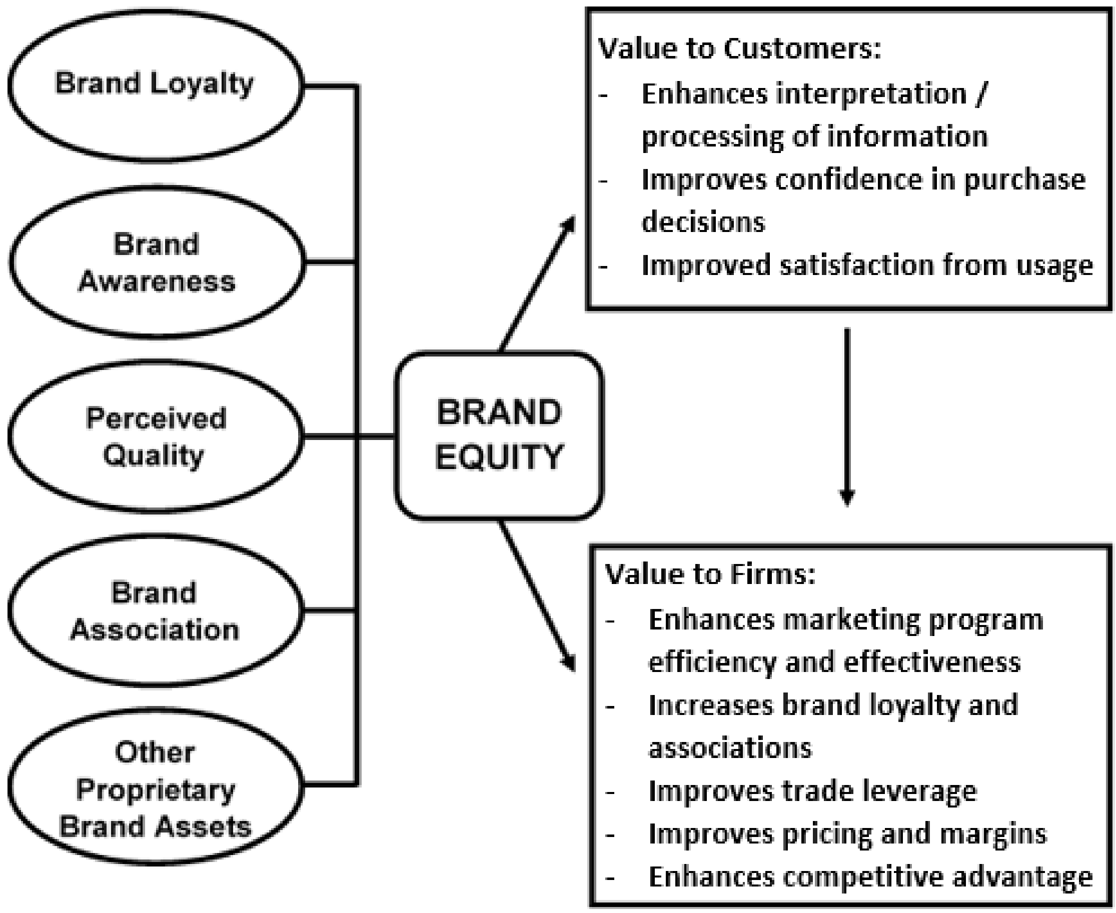
ITSPs have not enjoyed widespread acceptance in Nigeria because of the lack of confidence in the privacy of business records and sensitive data (Muhammed et al., 2015). Major Nigerian sectors with ITSP deployment include education, banking, health care, and information and communications technology (Oluigbo et al., 2016). Lagos, the research area of the current study, accounts for more than 50% of Nigeria's industrial capacity (Olasanmi, 2016) and presents as a location with business opportunities for ITSPs because of the population density and concentration of serviceable organizations. ITSPs, particularly in Nigeria, may benefit from research into winning customers' confidence to increase consumers' patronage beyond a limited geographical area.

Conceptual Model of Brand Equity

Aaker's (1991) brand equity model served as the conceptual foundation for this study. Brand equity derives from a set of brand assets and liabilities, such as the brand name and symbols that affect the value of an organization's product or service (Aaker, 1991). Aaker conceptualized a model for understanding brand equity, dimensions, and management to create value. Recognizing the potential of brand equity for achieving competitive advantage and future profitable earnings, Aaker sought to provide business managers with an understanding of managing brands strategically. Aaker also pointed out that the most critical assets of any business are intangible. Aaker's model involves exploiting and improving five intangible assets that combine to create value. These are brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, perceived quality, and other proprietary brand assets, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Brand Equity Model



Note. Adapted from *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on The Value of a Brand Name* (p.10), by D. A. Aaker, 1991, New York, NY: Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc. Copyright 1991 by David A. Aaker. Adapted with permission.

Using Aaker's 1991 model for further research, Keller (1993) decided that a better approach to defining brand equity was to consider the knowledge effect of marketing a brand to customers. Keller developed his customer-based brand equity model to include the differing judgmental and emotional feelings of consumers. Keller's viewpoint was that brand equity results from the enhancement of what customers know about the brand. Keller advocated improving four essential factors: (a) awareness and understanding about the superiority of the brand compared to others, (b) information about the relevance of the brand to customers' needs, (c) emotions and judgment of consumers about the brand, and (d) lasting relationship with the brand. Both models emphasize the components of awareness and association, but loyalty is apparent as an outcome of brand equity in Keller's work and is a determinant in Aaker's. Moreover, Aaker considered loyalty as the focus of branding policies used to address different consumer behaviors that could affect the competitive advantage. However, the underlying principle behind Keller's model aligns with Aaker's advocacy to increase brand equity by managing its components.

Feldwick (1996) had an opposing notion that brand equity is an imprecise concept for consideration as a strategy for improving business performance. Feldwick did not support the view of Aaker (1991) that brand equity comprises five intangible assets. Instead, brand equity, depending on varying professional viewpoints, is a term defining the strength of (a) the brand, (b) the customer-brand relationship, or (c) the brand's ability to command high market price (Feldwick, 1996). Aaker (1996b) reinforced the 1991 position by breaking down some of the five brand assets into smaller measurable components and addressed notions that the concept of brand equity was imprecise and not applicable to business environments. Aaker (1996b) broke down loyalty into price premium and satisfaction; leadership became a subset of perceived quality, and brand association branched into brand personality, perceived value, and organizational association. Given Aaker's (1996b) explanation, brand personality connotes the image associated with the brand. Expounding on other proprietary assets, Aaker (1996b) indicated market share and distribution indices, both connoting response to the market. As a result, Aaker's (1991) brand equity model became more relevant to different markets.

Aaker (1991) illustrated that both the firm and customers derive value from brand equity. The value to customers is an improved understanding of brand information that leads to increased confidence and customers' level of satisfaction about their purchasing decisions (Aaker, 1991). The brand assets create value for organizations regarding efficiency and effectiveness of marketing decisions and activities, improved trade leverage, better patronage beyond the short term unimpaired by pricing decisions, and better profit strategies in the long term (Aaker, 1991). Effective management of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, perceived quality, and other brand assets could result in a win-win situation for both the customers and the organization. From Aaker's perspective, brand equity's strength to increase patronage depends on its capability to affect consumers' perception of a brand through enhanced knowledge about the brand, assurance of superior service quality, reliability, and association with personal values from experience with other brands.

Over the years since the initial 1991 model, Aaker continued to research brand equity and the development of the marketing field. In 2014, Aaker proposed strengthening the brand through ideas to engage, involve, excite, and innovate for engendering customer purchase intentions and retention. Aaker’s (2014) notion aligned with Schreuer’s (2000) that a brand loses its strength in a market environment devoid of newer technologies and distribution channels. Such creative ideas included introducing online social media as a market distribution channel relevant in the 21st century (Aaker, 2014). Social media becomes pertinent to the consideration of Iglesias et al. (2013) that brand equity components require continuous interaction with customers and other stakeholders to create the desired value. A platform becomes convenient for the constant interaction between the brand, customers, and other stakeholders. Beyond a consumer-based evaluation within a sector, brand equity also extends to multinational and multisector contexts (Christodoulides et al., 2015), and innovative measures remain relevant across industries. The creation of value by a business that operates in markets across national borders results in an international brand with a customer base spanning the globe (Christodoulides et al., 2015).

Using Aaker’s (1991) brand equity model as a lens, Asamoah (2014) carried out a multisector quantitative study into how brand equity relates to and affects the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Asamoah deduced from the analysis of data collected from customers, managers, and owners of SMEs in the trading, agriculture, and small manufacturing sectors that a strong relationship existed between brand equity and SMEs’ performance. From the critical analysis of Aaker’s assertion on the derivation of brand equity, the state of an organization’s brand assets directly impacts the extent of value created. Aaker advocated nurturing and maintaining the brand equity to get the desired result. Notwithstanding a commercial target group spanning infants to adults (Aktaş Arnas et al., 2016; Sahin & Ergin, 2016), improvements to brand equity dimensions result in an enhanced value that appeals to customers and leads to increased patronage. The following discussions address the dimensions of brand equity identified by Aaker and justify the model for answering the research question in the current study.

Brand Awareness

The popularity of a brand among the consuming public depends on brand awareness (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness is the strength of the consumer's recognition of a brand and creates a sense of familiarity (Aaker, 1996a). Aaker (1996a) pointed out that liking a brand stems from familiarity, which Grobert et al. (2016) established affects brand attachment. Without recognizing the signal of commitment to a promise embodied in brand awareness, consumers lack visibility providing the basis for association with the brand and disseminating information about it (Aaker, 1991). Huang and Sarigöllü (2014) found that the consumers' experience with the brand positively affected brand awareness, impacting market outcomes.

Brand awareness stimulates the market visibility about a brand experience that creates knowledge about the brand and affects consumers' decision-making (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2014). Business leaders create brand awareness by deliberate marketing strategies for pushing products and services to customers (Makrides et al., 2019) who may fall into targetable categories. Regardless of commercial target groups being infants and preschoolers (Aktaş Arnas et al., 2016), children of elementary school age (Haryanto et al., 2016), young and adult consumers (Sahin & Ergin, 2016; Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015) or business entities, brand awareness positively affects brand equity. Brand awareness influences customers' knowledge about the brand essential for purchase decisions that affect sales levels, profitability, and competitive advantage.

Brand Loyalty

Customers' unwavering preference for a company's product despite offerings by competing brands indicates loyalty to the brand. Aaker (1991) explained loyalty as a display of resolute indifference toward either the offerings of competitions or price changes of the preferred brand. Aaker explained that before customers become loyal and committed, they exist as any of four categories: (a) switchers - customers not loyal to the brand and buying any they stumble on; (b) habitual buyers whose purchase behaviors stem only from habits; (c) buyers motivated by switching costs, and (d) enthusiasts who like the brand because of emotional benefits. Targeted marketing strategies ensure gaining a high market share of brand loyalists (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1999). Acquiring a high market share becomes possible by managing the variability of customers' loyalty toward different brand categories (Assael, 1998). Aaker considered customer loyalty as a strategic asset that affects purchase intentions.

C. G. Ding and Tseng (2015), using the experiential view of consumption, and the authors - Lacap and Tungcab (2020), relying on the reasoned action viewing lens, concluded that loyalty draws its influence from the brand experience. The consumers' brand experience interacts with the communicated brand promise to create hedonic emotions (C. G. Ding & Tseng, 2015). The hedonic emotions then connect the brand experience to brand loyalty. Tabaku and Kushi (2013) distinguished service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction as brand loyalty drivers. Relying on correlation and regression analyses in a quantitative study, Rizwan et al. (2014) extended Tabaku and Kushi's conclusion. Rizwan et al. offered that customer satisfaction, brand credibility, brand commitment, brand trust, and perceived quality contribute to building brand loyalty and its impact on brand equity. The level of brand equity and business performance increases with brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Asamoah, 2014). Brand loyalty positively affects brand equity (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015) and reflects the reduction in the need to incur marketing costs (Aaker, 1991). Other benefits of brand loyalty include newer patronage stemming from the awareness and reassurance created by existing customers, steady revenue for trade advantage, and more time to address competitive threats (Aaker, 1991).

Perceived Quality

Aaker (1991) explained perceived quality as consumers' perception of product or service brand quality compared to the competition. Regardless of contexts, perceived quality affects the customers' buying intentions or justification for purchasing (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality summarizes the consumers' conclusion about the brand's capability to meet expectations (Rizwan et al., 2014). Effective marketing strategies focused on enhancing perceived quality affect purchase decisions and make charging premium prices possible (Aaker, 1991). How customers perceive a brand's quality affects its differentiation and positioning compared to other alternatives or substitutes (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, perceived quality is an essential factor for brand loyalty and customers' repurchase intentions (Esmaeilpour, 2015; L. Su et al., 2016). Esmaeilpour (2015) considered the effects of perceived quality and symbolic brand associations on attitude and brand loyalty toward luxury fashion brands. Results from data analysis indicated that perceived quality better predicts brand attitude and brand loyalty. Dharmesti et al. (2019) suggested that identifying and leveraging attitudes of target markets influence their purchase intentions.

Focusing on the tourism industry, L. Su et al. (2016) linked perceived service quality to repurchase intentions, with customers' overall satisfaction as the mediating factor. Therefore, ensuring the quality of products or services that result in customer satisfaction presents as a strategy for achieving competitive differentiation (L. Su et al., 2016). Indicators of a brand's perceived quality reflect its price, differentiation from competing substitutes, extensions applied, and sales channel-wide availability (Aaker, 1991). To enhance the perception of quality, Aaker (1991) suggested improving the capability to deliver quality products or services. For customers, the marketing message of high quality promised must match the product or service experience. Every organization should develop and maintain a commitment to quality reflecting in their culture (Aaker, 1991).

Brand Association

A lasting impression of a brand in the consumer's mind triggers a positive attitude toward the product and affects repurchase intentions (Aaker, 1991). Brand association implies this lasting impression (Aaker, 1991). While Aaker pointed out the need to create a lasting impression, Keller (1993) conceptualized brand image as an avenue for achieving associations that give a lasting impression. Shen et al. (2014) related brand association to customers' feelings, assessments, or experiences affecting the memory about the products or service offerings. In effect, a brand's linkage with a positive outcome or event creates a perpetual positive attribute in the mind and future memory recall of its users.

Esmaeilpour (2015) considered that given the consumer-based nature of brand equity, the brand construct exists in consumers' minds as a perceived understanding, implying that the ownership of the brand and control of its value creation resides with the customer. Therefore, the brand's strength draws from favorable associations entrenched in the customers' mindset (Keller, 2003). As with the perceived quality component, brand association reflects the potential to differentiate from competing brands and create extensions in the market.

Other Proprietary Brand Assets

Aaker (1991) explained other proprietary assets, such as patents and trade relations, as components that influence the brand's competitive advantage. Other proprietary brand assets create an inhibition to competitors and prevent eroding the loyal customer base (Aaker, 1991). Aaker also explained that the inhibition serves as the backing that the government gives brand owners. Most research gloss over this fifth dimension of Aaker's model and do not provide the level of detail that links other brand equity components to consumer behavior. Indeed, even Aaker did not allude to other proprietary assets as influencing customers' purchasing behavior in the 1991 and 1996b works. Brodie et al. (2006) offered that some forms (such as patents and intellectual property) relate more to service-oriented concepts. However, combining this fifth dimension with other brand assets creates value for both customers and organizations (Aaker, 1991).

From a marketing perspective, Katona (2014) discussed that specialized knowledge results in intellectual property – a proprietary asset contributing to increased business efficiency. Intellectual properties in the form of innovations tend to be prone to copycat competition (Gwon, 2015). In the absence of fear and risk averseness, which precludes innovative methods (Katona, 2014), patents exist to guarantee the protection of intellectual property (such as new inventions) against copycat competitions for a particular period and allows for the monopoly of the markets (Gwon, 2015).

Meihami et al. (2014) examined how innovation, resulting from intellectual capital (IC), translated into value for business organizations. Meihami et al. (2014) adopted the modified value-added intellectual coefficient (MVAIC) method to analyze the relationship that IC components bear to companies' capital employed in creating value. The rationale for adopting the MVAIC was to overcome the imperfection of traditional accounting methods in measuring intangible assets. The results indicated that IC has a significant positive association with the companies' product value and competitive advantage. Invariably, intellectual capital relates positively to brand value.

In a dual quantitative study of three global consumer electronics brands anchored on the signaling theory framework, Pappu and Quester (2016) argued that brand innovativeness positively triggers consumers' perception of brand quality. The perceived brand quality transfers the effect of brand innovativeness to brand loyalty necessary for competitive advantage (Pappu & Quester, 2016). The conclusion from the study indicated that customer perception mediates between brand innovativeness and brand loyalty. Thus, other proprietary assets are relevant to consumer behavior and brand loyalty. Hence, without protecting the rights to innovations and intellectual properties, the competitive advantage from brand innovativeness is enjoyable for as long as it takes copycat competitors to achieve market replication.

Selection of Brand and Aaker's Brand Equity Model

From a finance perspective, the brand is an intangible asset essential to business performance (competitiveness) and the overall corporate value (profitability). Beyond the identifiable marketing components, branding is crucial to sustaining a firm's economic and social value system (Popoli, 2015). The value of brand equity exists in the conversational space between such organizations, the customers, and other stakeholders (Iglesias et al., 2013). A strong brand embodies the trust customers have about a company's commitment to fulfilling its promises (Bonab, 2017; Sarin, 2014). Brand strategy is a long-term developmental plan (D. B. Hess & Bitterman, 2016). Therefore, the lack of focus on brand strategy for competitive advantage may be detrimental to long-term business survival.

In providing goods and services, business organizations communicate brand promises to consumers and expect benefits (Timmerman & Shields, 2014). Customers are relevant to creating brand value, the achievement of organizational profitability, and competitive advantage (Hollebeek, 2013). The failure to align the brand message with consumer expectations could result in the disengagement of customers from the brand (Timmerman & Shields, 2014). From a differentiation perspective, brand equity arises from a business's capability to win customers' confidence and command a premium pricing strategy advantage on its goods and services over similar products of the competition (Davcik & Sharma, 2015; Keller, 2003). In the absence of the differentiating factor underlining the brand's value, price becomes a criterion for selecting from multiple common options available to customers. Hence, the focus of this research is on winning the confidence of consumers.

Shen et al. (2014) considered that Aaker's model was relevant to managing brand equity in various industries and fields to enjoy increased patronage. However, Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin (2014) questioned the adequacy of Aaker's 1991 brand equity model for private labels because store image was a vital consumer guarantee in the absence of manufacturers' information. The authors argued that the market positioning and patronage of private labels depend on the store's image. Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin conceptualized a private label brand equity model that they compared with Aaker's model to indicate the difference between the two. The only difference between the models by Aaker (1991) and Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin is the incorporation of store image as an antecedent of the private label brand equity. Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin concluded that the private label brand equity model was a better fit for creating and building retailers' brand equity. Apart from the study being peculiar to Spain and not generalizable to other cultural settings, Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin's model had its foundation based on Aaker's brand equity model. The introduction of a new component only improved on Aaker's model to the peculiar business scenario.

The position of Das (2014) on the applicability of Aaker's brand equity model in the retail sector (which could include private label brands) remained consistent with the conclusion of Shen et al. (2014). Aaker's brand equity model is relevant and applicable to different industry contexts or business scenarios (Shen et al., 2014). Das explored the direct and indirect impact of components of Aaker's brand equity model on purchase intentions in a retail sector context. The data analysis results indicated that brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty had positive and significant direct and indirect impact on purchase intentions. Understanding the dimensions of brand equity could foster businesses' prioritization of factors for improving brand value (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015) and consequently achieve a competitive advantage. Given the limited number of brand equity research into ITSPs in the last 6 years, this study is an original contribution to the body of knowledge. Aaker's brand equity model adopted served as the foundation for exploring the marketing strategies that leaders in ITSPs implement to improve brand value.

Interrelationship of Brand Equity Dimensions

Dimensions of the brand equity model interrelate (Aaker, 1991). The other brand assets enhance loyalty that protects against innovations by competitors (Aaker, 1991). Aaker also pointed out that awareness, association, and loyalty affect perceived quality. With a focus on investigating the influence of brand equity on consumers' responses, Buil et al. (2013) proposed and tested a better model to understand the brand equity construct. To heighten their quantitative study's validity, Buil et al. assessed data collected by using multi-group confirmatory factor analysis. The result of the investigation established that the elements of brand equity inter-relate. Brand awareness stimulates perceived quality and brand associations; brand associations affect brand loyalty, while perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations drive the overall brand equity (Buil et al., 2013).

However, Shen et al. (2014) observed that the effects of Aaker’s brand equity dimensions differ in specific applications. In an investigation into the brand equity structure of economy hotels in China, using Aaker’s brand equity model, Shen et al. found that brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations had positive effects on the brand equity of economy hotels. Brand associations had the most significant positive effect (Shen et al., 2014). While the conclusions by Shen et al. indicated that brand associations have the most potential for differentiating the brand and motivating consumers’ positive emotions, outcomes in the study by Rodrigues and Martins (2016) pointed to perceived quality and a component of brand association - brand personality. The distinction between brand association and perceived quality exists in the description that the earlier involves a lasting impression from experience with the brand, while the latter connotes sight appeal (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality does not imply an existing relationship between the brand and the customer, but the brand association does.

Rodrigues and Martins (2016), regarding antecedents and determinants of brand equity, considered that the value created from brand equity arises from consumers’ perceptions and attitudes. The conclusion from the analysis of data collected from 544 participants, answering questionnaires with a 5-point Likert scale structure, indicated perceived quality as one of the critical determinants of brand equity. Moreover, Rodrigues and Martins identified loyalty and a positive disposition to premium price as the outcomes of brand equity. Rodrigues and Martins applied Aaker’s brand equity dimensions to existing and already known brands, which accounted for the insignificance of the effect of brand awareness variable in the test result. Seric et al. (2014) confirmed, in a quantitative study, that a positive relationship exists between perceived quality and brand loyalty because brand loyalty derives from the positive outcome of customers’ evaluations about the brand. By implication, although awareness serves as an anchor for attaching any form of associations with the brand (Aaker, 1991), a personal conviction about the quality is essential to developing loyalty.

The difference in weights allocated to the dimensions of brand equity depends on the constructs’ contextual application. Where Shen et al. (2014) examined the structure of brand equity of economy hotels, Seric et al. (2014) focused on high-quality hotels, while Rodrigues and Martins (2016) approached from the clothing fashion perspective. Despite two studies from the same hotel industry, the distinction between the economy and high-quality status possibly accounted for the difference in outcomes, which could serve as a basis for future inquiries. Regardless of perceptions about the prominence of each brand equity dimension, they all contribute to the creation of brand value and essential to market outcomes: profitability and competitive advantage. Therefore, focusing on marketing strategies to enhance brand equity dimensions could improve corporate brand value.

Brand Equity and Competitive Advantage

Intense competition exists in every industry and affects the financial performance of businesses (Jannesari et al., 2014). Brand equity exists as an essential and powerful tool for achieving competitive advantage (Ryan & Silvanto, 2013). Ryan and Silvanto (2013) evaluated the possibility of companies leveraging their brand strength to fight off intense competition. Ensuring strong brand equity makes charging premium prices on products and services possible and serves as protection against market place assaults from competitors (Ryan & Silvanto, 2013). Data analysis by Ryan and Silvanto indicated that brand equity draws its strength from brand familiarity, quality of products, expertise, trustworthiness, business associations, and existing relationships. These factors influence the perception of customers about the brand and their decision to establish a relationship.

Creating a tradition of a business relationship that binds both the seller and the buyer is also of paramount importance to building corporate brand value for competitive advantage (Ryan & Silvanto, 2013). Relationships that anchors on meeting the expectations about a company’s goods and services strengthen a brand’s credibility, builds trust, and results in a higher possibility of customer patronage and advocacy (Abu Zayyad et al., 2020). Hence, a brand marketing strategy focused on building business relationships between a service provider and its customers would be relevant to increasing patronage.

On the issue of relationships, organizations require stakeholders’ approval of business activities in both internal and external environments to achieve set mission and objectives (Vallaster et al., 2012). Therefore, in a qualitative multiple case study to develop strategies for leveraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate branding for profitability and sustainability, findings by Vallaster et al. (2012) reinforced the importance of meeting stakeholders' expectations about the brand to gain a competitive advantage. The authors advocated that giving preference to corporate social responsibility (CSR), which contributes to the company's higher-order brand objectives, could differentiate corporate brands from their competitors. These undertakings serve as the company's constructive and productive contribution to community development and concurrent market positioning, leading to improved sales performance (Fagerstrøm et al., 2015).

Taking up CSRs draws stakeholders' attention to the communicated commitment and results in either positive or negative responses from the public (Vallaster et al., 2012). However, with effective management of a CSR-brand strategy and consistency in delivering the brand promise, a company can achieve the desired competitive advantage (Vallaster et al., 2012). Popoli (2015) also offered a viewpoint of gaining a competitive advantage through engaging in CSR. Given the far-reaching effect of globalization, Popoli suggested that firms maintain an equal level multidimensional and multi-stakeholder CSR approach to improving brand image. CSR strategy reinforces brand image, which translates into a competitive advantage (Popoli, 2015).

Beyond corporate social responsibility, Kao and Lin (2016) investigated the effects of trust, satisfaction, and loyalty on building brand equity. In the context of electronic service (e-service) in banking, Kao and Lin offered that achieving a high level of perceived quality of the brand promise was a primary precursor of competitive advantage. Given the high risks associated with brand offerings, particularly in the banking e-service, trust was essential to gaining customer loyalty (Kao & Lin, 2016). Loyalty drives brand equity to result in competitive advantage (Kao & Lin, 2016). The conclusions from the study indicated that perceived quality positively affects customer trust and satisfaction.

Moreover, customer trust and satisfaction influence loyalty and brand equity. In developing countries like Nigeria, with epileptic power supply and suboptimal network connectivity, technological hiccups would impair the high perceived quality (of service) required to earn the trust and satisfaction proposed by Kao and Lin. Hence, the impact of perceived quality on customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty may differ in different service or cultural contexts but, if well managed, could enhance brand value and result in competitive advantage.

Customer Relationship and Experience Management

Given the importance of customers to brand equity development, managing consumer's experience, according to Grønholdt et al. (2015), could result in more profitable business performance. In the quantitative study into the effect of customer experience management (CEM) on a business performance involving 484 companies, Grønholdt et al. (2015) found that CEM drives differentiation, market performance, and financial results. Grønholdt et al. concluded that companies could enjoy immense financial success by building excellent customer experience into their products and service. CEM, thus, presents as a crucial factor in successful customer-brand relationships. Quality dialogue (relationship) between consumers and the company is essential for improved customer experience (Grønholdt et al., 2015). The context of conclusions by Grønholdt et al. is relevant to improving Aaker's brand association component of 1991.

Customer-Brand Relationship

Francisco-Maffezzolli et al. (2014) presented brand relationship quality (BRQ) as a mediator in the linkage between consumer experience and loyalty. Francisco-Maffezzolli et al. (2014) hypothesized that (a) brand experience has a positive but no direct effect on brand loyalty, (b) brand experience has a positive impact on BRQ, and (c) BRQ is a mediator between brand experience and brand loyalty. Francisco-Maffezzolli et al. carried out a quantitative survey and analyzed data by chi-square, correlation, and second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results indicated that no direct relationship exists between brand experience and brand loyalty. Experience only influences loyalty indirectly through BRQ. Hence, investing in a quality relationship can convert experience into loyalty (Francisco-Maffezzolli et al., 2014). Maintaining positive feelings through a lasting relationship anchored on quality service and product delivery wins customers over (Francisco-Maffezzolli et al., 2014).

McColl-Kennedy et al. (2015) considered customer experience research from a multiple-actor viewpoint. As individuals, consumers unknowingly co-create customer experience through interactions with other people (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). Feedback from customers also serves as data for analysis to produce a more meaningful customer experience (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). The organization and the consumers, thus, become co-actors in the customer-experience creation process. McColl-

Kennedy et al. advanced three perspectives for managing the customer experience process: (a) broadening the role of consumers, (b) adopting a practice-based approach, and (c) recognizing the holistic, dynamic nature of customer experience.

To extend the experience co-creation, particularly in the service dimensions, McColl-Kennedy et al. (2015) suggested identifying and understanding categories of skills, capabilities, and resources that consumers possess. As firms, service providers also exist as customers in the experience co-creation process (Jaakkola & Hakanen, 2013). The interaction of service providers and consumers integrating their resources result in value co-creation (Jaakkola & Hakanen, 2013). Other relevant information for extending consumers' role includes knowing the brand experience that requires optimization, what motivates customers, possible costs and barriers to consumers' participation, and innovations that the organization must introduce to achieve the required objective (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015).

In a qualitative multiple case study involving 14 firms of nine suppliers and five consumers, Jaakkola and Hakanen (2013) surmised that the value co-creation process occurs at three levels in support of the customer brand experience. The three value co-creation levels are: (a) performing activities for an exchange of resources, (b) interactions and collaboration among the participants in the co-creation process, and (c) integration of resources from the network of actors into a larger pool. The interrelationship of the participants in the co-creation process shifts the focus away from the brand to improving capabilities, eliminating barriers in the network that impede the quality of customer experiences resulting in brand value (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). Therefore, the continued process of co-creating customer experience leads to further development of brand equity.

Chiang (2013) carried out a qualitative case study in customer relationship management (CRM), a strategy for understanding and influencing customer behavior through effective communications. Chiang focused on how to leverage CRM for creating customer and business value. Through superior service offering, CRM contributes to market leadership by creating an avenue of staying ahead of competitors (Chiang, 2013). Triangulation of data from structured field interviews, observations, and historical records assured the reliability of analytic and interpretive conclusions drawn from the case study. Chiang concluded that there were seven critical factors associated with successful CRM usage. These factors included leveraging consumer psychology, offering quality merchandise, quick response to situations, effective segmentation marketing, customer focus, a customer-oriented service culture, and the integration of real marketing and digital data. CRM communicates customer experience because one of the approaches is to attract clients and then stimulate their consumption (Chiang, 2013).

Customer Brand Experience

Brand experience is an essential predictor of consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Esmaeilpour, 2015; L. Su et al., 2016). The peculiar intangibility of service brands heightens the importance of brand experience to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nysveen et al., 2013). Tafesse (2016) offered that brand experience results from customers' complex interaction with the brand through four connected processes: (a) multisensory stimulation, (b) physical performance, (c) social interaction, and (d) learning. Tafesse’s viewpoint depended on the notion that customers subjectively construct brand experience within the same environment in different ways. Brand experience occurs in either the reaction or indifference of consumers to a brand (Brakus et al., 2009) and may affect satisfaction positively or negatively (Nysveen et al., 2013).

Brakus et al. (2009) and Walter et al. (2013) identified customers’ brand experience under four broad dimensions, which are: (a) sensory, (b) affective, (c) intellectual, and (d) behavioral. The stimuli trigger these dimensions within the brand products or services and the promise communicated to stakeholders (Brakus et al., 2009). Results from the two studies indicated that brand experience has a positive effect on consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Aksoy (2013) argued that satisfaction was not an absolute indication of loyalty because the experience of dissatisfaction may not impair customers’ affective brand commitment. However, going by Aaker’s (1991) analysis, customer satisfaction exists as one of the brand loyalty factors for appraising brand equity. Without addressing customers’ dissatisfaction leading to brand disengagements, the brand loses its value and market performance (Aaker, 1991). Brakus et al. (2009) offered that satisfaction exists as a motivational factor for a repeated positive experience. Hence, satisfaction indicates the alignment between the brand message and consumer expectations suggested by Timmerman and Shields (2014) for fostering a customer-brand relationship.

In later research by Larivière et al. (2016), customer satisfaction was an essential factor for enhancing business performance to increase shareholders’ value. Larivière et al. explained that satisfaction, at a firm level, had a minimal effect on shareholders’ value for businesses with short horizon durable products or services. Otherwise, satisfaction affects shareholders' value indirectly in service firms through loyalty intentions, while direct and indirect linkages exist in product businesses (Larivière et al., 2016). The mediating role of loyalty in the relationship between satisfaction and shareholders' value (Larivière et al., 2016) aligns with Brakus et al. (2009) that satisfaction motivates repurchase intentions and results in brand loyalty. Hence, managing brand value to enrich customers' experience is critical to enhancing satisfaction and gaining brand loyalty to achieve a competitive advantage.

Ong et al. (2018) examined relationships between brand experience components and customers' true brand loyalties to gain further insight into how brand experience affects organizational competitiveness and sustainability. Ong et al. concluded from the quantitative analysis of data collected by an intercept survey of 228 restaurants that customer loyalty directly affects business performance through purchase behavior driven by customers' attitudes toward the brand. Attitudinal loyalty is the repurchase intentions developed from attachment or psychological bonding that a customer feels toward a brand and its selection as the preferred choice (Lacap & Tungcab, 2020; Massoudi, 2020). Behavioral loyalty is the frequency of customers' repeated purchase of a particular brand (Lacap & Tungcab, 2020).

Managing Customer Experience

Customers' dissatisfaction with the quality of service may result in the termination of consumption and future relationships (Chiang, 2013). Paying attention to brand attachment is critical to managing both consumer experience and relationship with the brand because of its direct effect on brand attitude and loyalty (Japutra, Ekinci, Simkin, & Nguyen, 2014). Brand attachment embodies a consumer's emotional and cognitive bonding with the brand (Allison et al., 2016) and influences attitudinal loyalty (Feng et al., 2015). Notwithstanding its positive effects on customer behavior, a brand attachment can stimulate negative responses (Japutra, Ekinci, Simkin, & Nguyen, 2014).

The inability to address customer dissatisfaction could strain the customer-brand relationship and result in negative responses (Zarantonello et al., 2016). These reactions could be brand hate (Zarantonello et al., 2016), anti-brand actions (Japutra, Ekinci, Simkin, & Nguyen, 2014; Zarantonello et al., 2016), or oppositional brand loyalty (Japutra, Ekinci, Simkin, & Nguyen, 2014). Brand hate encompasses all customers' strong negative emotions toward the brand manifesting as complaints, negative word of mouth (WOM), protests, avoidance, or outright stoppage of patronage (Zarantonello et al., 2016). Therefore, front-end employees of the company require the skill to handle the emotional attachment of customers for the brand's success (Allison et al., 2016).

Managing consumers' brand experience and disseminating information in social circles can strengthen brand value (Francisco-Maffezzolli et al., 2014). Efficient customer experience management enhances brand value and positively affects satisfaction, with a concurrent market advantage in a competitive environment (Brakus et al., 2009). Understanding and managing consumers' brand experience is essential to adopting successful marketing strategies for improving brand value because of its positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009).

Brand Marketing Strategies and Improving Patronage

Marketing is vital to communicating and delivering the brand promise to consumers (Vazifehdust & Kia, 2017). Moreover, understanding marketing strategy dynamics and the brand effect can stimulate investments in brand improvement efforts that could result in positive financial performance outcomes (Mizik, 2014). Therefore, delivering on the brand promise made to consumers and leveraging the relay of positive customer experience among the brand community creates opportunities for organizations to increase patronage and improve brand equity.

Aaker (1991) considered brand assets as intangibles, an organization's most essential resources for profitable earnings and competitive advantage. Improving a company's marketing capabilities enhances brand assets (Jannesari et al., 2014). Applying marketing competencies with customer-based brand equity positively affects financial performance outcomes, although the results vary with organizations (Mizik, 2014). Where the effect could be instantaneous in some organizations, other businesses could experience future benefits or a combination of outcomes (Mizik, 2014). A plethora of marketing options, which exist for various purposes, is available to organizational leaders for developing successful strategies. Some of the marketing strategies available to business managers include word-of-mouth marketing (Fu et al., 2015), digital marketing (Joanta & Bezzaouia, 2016), social media marketing (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014), and viral marketing (Grifoni et al., 2013). Other strategies include celebrity endorsements (Jin & Phua, 2014), event marketing, and promotion (Vila-López & Rodríguez-Molina, 2013); cause marketing (Kull & Heath, 2016), and integrated marketing mix (Mongkol, 2014). However, Jannesari et al. (2014) offered that some business managers cannot apply marketing concepts to promote brand performance.

Gaining knowledge about how a market strategy affects brand equity dimensions could influence selecting the appropriate combination to achieve the desired outcomes and avoid wasting resources on nonproductive strategies. Moreover, from the synthesis of the studies by Aaker (1991) and Jannesari et al. (2014), the inability to leverage on the strength of marketing strategies precludes the improvement of the most critical organizational assets maximizing wealth and achieving competitive advantage. Thus, managers must identify, select, and combine marketing strategies relevant to improving brand awareness, perceived quality, association, loyalty, and other proprietary assets.

Digital Marketing

Leveraging information communication technology continues to be of importance in various professional strategy development. Digital technologies, such as the use of applications on smartphones, short message services (SMS), otherwise called text-messaging, and multimedia messaging services (MMS), exist as marketing strategies for building brands (Joanta & Bezzaouia, 2016). Applications for smartphones serve as a platform for marketing communications and engaging customers through unique brand experiences (E. Kim et al., 2013). As with using mobile applications in the gaming environment, customers’ ability to interact and control certain features (of an automobile brand, for example) promotes engagement with the brand (E. Kim et al., 2013). With other applications, consumers may access bill payments, navigations, and information about the brand through their mobile phones (E. Kim et al., 2013). Mobile applications, therefore, promote improved consumers' voluntary interaction and engagement with the brand in virtual environments (E. Kim et al., 2013).

With the proliferation of mobile phone technology, SMS and MMS serve as mediums for brand advertisements and promotions because of the broad access to target markets (Aslam et al., 2016). Conversely, Luna-Cortés and Royo-Vela (2013) identified that unsolicited SMS advertisement results in privacy infringement concerns for customers. In another study into consumers' attitudes toward SMS advertisements, Aslam et al. (2016) identified factors such as irritation, product involvement, customers' consent, and monetary reward. The conclusion by Aslam et al. (2016), consistent with the findings of Luna-Cortés and Royo-Vela (2013), indicated that the high frequency of advertisements without customers' prior consent triggers a feeling of irritation and results in a negative attitude toward SMS advertising. Managing the frequency of ads and increasing the appeal to consumers through entertainment, product involvement, and promotional monetary rewards could result in a positive attitude toward SMS advertisements (Aslam et al., 2016). However, Joanta and Bezzaouia (2016) considered that mobile Apps was more relevant to improving brands because of its non-intrusive characteristics.

Word-of-Mouth Marketing

In a study involving 144 participants, Murtiasih et al. (2013) evaluated word-of-mouth marketing (WOM) communication's effect on brand equity. The research variables examined included WOM, brand awareness, association, loyalty, perceived quality, and brand equity. Murtiasih et al. concluded that WOM, either in its positive or negative form, significantly influences brand equity and its dimensions, shapes customer attitudes, and purchase intentions. Hence, while a positive WOM can improve brand equity value, its negative form can dilute high brand equity (Murtiasih et al., 2013). Although the study lacked cross-cultural samples that could improve the generalization of the findings, the result of the analysis indicated that harnessing the strength of WOM's results in a stronger brand value outcome. The implication for business managers is the insight into WOM's influence on brand equity to manage the adverse dilution effects and maximize the positive benefits for improved value.

Virvilaite et al. (2015) provided an insight into how word-of-mouth communication affected brand equity. From the critical analysis and synthesis of existing literature, Virvilaite et al. established that WOM marketing's uniqueness as a strategy exists in its message vividness and usefulness characteristics. The usefulness trait derives from the message content and the persuasiveness in the language of communication, while vividness relates to empathy and the determination in the tone of message delivery (Virvilaite et al., 2015). In the data analysis by Virvilaite et al., results indicated a positive correlation between the vividness and usefulness characteristics of WOM message, and the brand awareness, association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty dimensions of brand equity. Virvilaite et al. concluded that WOM marketing affects brand equity because of its vividness and usefulness characteristics.

Fu et al. (2015) supported that WOM, regardless of its valence, is a relevant factor in shaping consumer behavior. Customers communicating either positive or negative brand experience with other stakeholders in the online brand community use electronic word of mouth (eWOM) through social media platforms (Fu et al., 2015). Fu et al. focused on the motivations of customers' participation in eWOM communications and found different antecedents. Attitudinal factors drive positive eWOM intentions, while social pressure stimulates negative eWOM communications (Fu et al., 2015). Social pressure entails a customer's desire to warn other consumers and exert justice for the poor quality of product or service brand experiences (Fu et al., 2015). The vividness of the message in WOM communications (Virvilaite et al., 2015) enhances the account of a consumer's negative or positive brand experience, influencing the prospective customer's purchase intention (Murtiasih et al., 2013). Managing the brand experience and taking prompt actions to remedy inadequate service quality ensures WOM motivations in its traditional or electronic form do not tend toward the negative. Thus, harnessing the strength of word-of-mouth communication of positive experiences, through its characteristics of vividness and usefulness, could improve a brand's value for competitive advantage.

Social Media Marketing

With the advancement in information communication technology and the increasing socialization on the internet without geographical borders, social media platforms facilitate the exchange of emotions about various subject matters (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Social media strategies extend conversations on the customer-brand relationship in terms of communication and interactions. Harrigan et al. (2017) explained customer engagement as the interaction between a business entity and its existing or potential customers regarding its brand, possibly resulting in consumer satisfaction or loyalty. Rohm et al. (2013) identified five primary motivations for social media-driven brand-consumer interactions. These motivations included (a) entertainment, (b) brand engagement, (c) timeliness of information and service responses, (d) product information, and (e) incentives and promotions. However, Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) offered that companies rely on social media for enhanced relationships and interaction with customers, brand awareness and engagement, and customer acquisition. The interactive and noninteractive social media features make it possible for customers to learn from other consumers' experiences with the brand, either by reading comments or by one-on-one conversations (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014).

Researchers (Laroche et al., 2013; Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013) presented social media marketing to improve brand value through enhanced stakeholders' relationship, engagement, and communication. Based on an organic view of the brand, Iglesias et al. (2013) surmised that the continued process of interactions between individual customers and other stakeholders in the brand community is critical to brand value development. The active involvement of consumers in brand value creation through brand referrals results in brand loyalty, and consequently, increased sales and profitability (Hollebeek, 2013). While consumers draw confidence from brand values when making purchase decisions, businesses experience improved efficiencies, marketing competencies, extensions, and competitive advantage (Drewniak & Karaszewski, 2016; Jannesari et al., 2014). Therefore, an organization's failure to engage customers in creating brand value could result in the loss of benefits associated with sustaining a healthy customer-brand relationship.

Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2013) carried out a study on consumer involvement in brand-equity building through social media communication. The results confirmed that business leaders using social media as a marketing focus allow customers to contribute to brand equity building and brand representation (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Through social media, consumers can decide how to interpret a brand, and business executives can expand brand awareness (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013). The view of Laroche et al. (2013) anchors on the relationship that building a brand community bears to brand trust and brand loyalty. Brand trust wholly mediates the conversion of the effects of enhanced relationships in the brand community to brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013). Trust is an essential factor for developing a strong brand (Bonab, 2017; Sarin, 2014). Improved relationship connotes consumers' bonding with the company, brand, product or service, and other customers (Laroche et al., 2013).

Chang et al. (2015) examined persuasive messages in social media marketing for information dissemination during customer engagement. Elements of a persuasive message include argument quality, content popularity, and attractiveness (Chang et al., 2015). Argument quality, post popularity, and post attractiveness are important to message diffusion behavior in social network groups (Chang et al., 2015). Thus, marketing managers could use quality and attractive messages in a social media environment to enhance brand popularity. Persuasive messages could further influence the dissemination of information about the brand, resulting in cost savings on advertisements.

Although entrepreneurs go on social media because of the broad customer reach and its benefits to their brand, the platform can enable the circulation of negative WOM about the business. Unlike in traditional brand management process where firms alone originate brand experience stories, social media empowers consumers to initiate and share experience among themselves (Gensler et al., 2013). Therefore, a negative aspect of social media is that viral comments of unsatisfactory experience or video uploads of altercations between an employee of a company and a customer could result in an unmanageable spread of consumer complaints.

Moreover, managing a disgruntled customer promptly to prevent the spread of information about an adverse experience is easier with the traditional brick and mortar shopping experience, unlike with social media. Consumers' freedom to determine the direction of experience messages may pose challenges to achieving successful brand management within the social media environment. Gensler et al. (2013) advocated that business managers should follow and pay attention to consumer-generated brand stories to leverage social media interactions in ensuring the delivery of the brand promise. The resultant brand awareness could contribute to the improvement in the value and success of the brand.

Viral Marketing

In a study into the use of marketing tools for creating product and service brand awareness, Grifoni et al. (2013) focused on online viral marketing. From the synthesis and critical analysis of literature, Grifoni et al. presented online viral marketing as a marketing technique thriving on social networks for increased brand awareness. Online viral marketing thrives on the principle of self-replication in word-of-mouth dissemination of explicit messages (Grifoni et al., 2013). The conclusion derived from the study established that there are essential elements and factors required for planning successful online viral marketing campaigns. The factors include an analysis of the business context, the definition of brand-building marketing objectives, message creation, and the implementation of the online viral marketing campaigns (Grifoni et al., 2013).

Considering the crucial role of the internet to corporate brand development, Lekhanya (2014) carried out mixed method research into the impact of viral marketing on corporate brand reputation. With a focus on the role of viral marketing in building brand reputation, Lekhanya collected data with a five-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to participants selected from 75 companies using a stratified sampling method. Lekhanya emphasized understanding the viral marketing strategies for building a corporate brand reputation and damage control. However, findings and conclusions indicated that viral marketing methods such as buzz, word-of-mouth, and guerrilla marketing have no impact on building a strong relationship with target customers and improving brand reputation. Lekhanya, however, cautioned against the generalization of the conclusions made because of the small sample used for the quantitative study. In a 2015 research by Dehghani and Tumer, the analysis indicated a strong correlation between the viral exchange of information on Facebook as a social media and consumer engagement. Dehghani and Tumer (2015) concluded that WOM and viral marketing on

Facebook could enhance brand value and positively affect customers' purchase intentions.

Celebrity Endorsements

Jin and Phua (2014) viewed the effect of celebrity-based social media (Twitter) WOM communications on consumer behavior. Conclusions indicated that WOM messages that have celebrity endorsement positively influence brand engagement and purchase intentions. The effect of the celebrity's endorsement increases with a high number of followers (Jin & Phua, 2014). In the study by Dwivedi et al. (2015), the leveraging of celebrity endorsement presented as a marketing strategy affecting brand equity. Dwivedi et al. (2015) examined the credibility of a celebrity endorser, self-brand connections, and endorsed brand equity's moderating role. Dwivedi et al. proposed a model of endorser credibility and self-brand connections. Dwivedi et al. concluded that endorsing a celebrity's credibility directly and positively affects the endorsed brand equity moderated by the consumers' self-association with the endorsed brand. By implication, a negative association with the celebrity's personality could transfer and erode the brand's value. Therefore, managers must be current with information about celebrities' credibility to optimize the benefit of endorsements of the brand.

Event Marketing and Promotion

Vila-López and Rodríguez-Molina (2013) carried out quantitative research into how promoting an event to create customer experience affects the brand. Vila-López and Rodríguez-Molina used a musical event promoted and organized by an entertainment service brand to provide experiential marketing insights. The researchers focused on the antecedents of emotional event experience - surprise, participation, and immersion - and the outcomes of brand experience, personality, and reputation. The data analysis results indicated that the event experience positively affects brand personality, which affects the brand reputation.

From an event theory perspective, in a study into the effect of event marketing on brand equity, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) identified brand attitude and brand experience as two mediating marketing constructs. Both brand experience and attitude mediate the relationship between brand equity before and after the event sponsorship (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). While brand experience mediates the relationship in all types of events, brand attitude mediates only in specific cases – trade shows and street events (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). Therefore, the effectiveness of expenditure on event marketing reflects increased purchase intentions and loyalty, which are indicators of improvement in brand value.

Cause-Related Marketing

Kobal (2014) investigated the behaviors and views of business organizations and customers on cause marketing (CM) activities. Kobal offered that companies engage in CM and donate to social causes for increased brand loyalty, brand awareness, and improved brand image. A success factor in CM by companies is the assurance of the donation's utilization for the exact purpose (Kobal, 2014). Another critical variable is the CM activities' effectiveness to reach the target market (Kobal, 2014). The ease of making donations and consumers' feedback are also relevant to CM's effectiveness in building brand value (Kobal, 2014). Thus, CM is a means for assuring business owners and key decision-making managers, particularly marketing managers, of improved brand awareness and brand loyalty (Kobal, 2014).

Kull and Heath (2016) explored CM for improving consumer-brand relationships. The CM focus was on the effect of digitally co-created corporate social responsibility (CSR), with priority given to the customer's choice. Using relationship-marketing theory as the viewing lens, the authors created a conceptual framework tested in three quantitative sub-studies. Kull and Heath concluded that giving consumers the right to choose co-created CRS enhances brand attachments, brand attitude, and purchase intentions. An assumption in the study was that customers have a charitable cause in mind, which they could choose for the company to donate funds. However, if customers do not have any inclination toward a charitable cause, adopting CM in the co-creation of CSR has no significance for improving the consumer-brand relationship.

Integrated Marketing Mix

Aghaei et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between services marketing mix (price, product, place, advertising, physical evidence, process, and people) and brand equity dimensions of perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand association. Statistical tests indicated a significant positive relationship between the services marketing mix and the brand equity dimensions examined. Aghaei et al. (2014) concluded that a positive change in perceived quality, brand loyalty, association, and awareness results in improved brand equity. Likewise, an improvement in the services marketing mix of price, product, advertising, place, physical evidence, process, and people increases brand equity. Aghaei et al. established the combination of marketing mix and brand equity dimensions to increasing brand value. Hosseini and Moezzi (2015) carried out a quantitative study to investigate the marketing mix's effect on brand equity. The marketing mix components considered were price, firm image, distribution intensity, promotion, and propaganda. The dimensions of brand equity examined were perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness or association. Results indicated that quality, loyalty, and awareness positively affected brand equity, with brand loyalty having the strongest effect (Hosseini & Moezzi, 2015).

Mongkol (2014) examined the relationship between integrated marketing communication (IMC) and brand equity. IMC involves delivering a consistent brand message across various methods, each serving as reinforcement for the others (Mongkol, 2014). Adopting a quantitative methodology, Mongkol collected data from 400 participants and focused investigations on a combination of marketing strategies that could increase brand equity and result in a competitive advantage for a Thai beverage company. Mongkol evaluated advertising, promotion, public relations, event marketing, personal selling, direct marketing, word of mouth marketing, and interactive marketing as IMC strategies. The findings indicated an overall direct correlation existing between integrated marketing communication and brand equity. However, Mongkol observed that advertising had no significant effect on brand equity despite the huge financial expenditure. Customers' ability to make informed decisions from social interactions without depending on seeming propaganda accounted for the indifference to advertising efforts (Mongkol, 2014). Mongkol concluded that selecting an appropriate IMC mix could improve brand equity and result in a competitive advantage.

Anabila (2020) conducted quantitative research into IMC's role and its effect on brand performance. Anabila found that IMC had a significant positive direct relationship with brand experience and indirectly with brand performance. Results indicated that brand experience mediated the positive relationship between IMC and brand performance. By implication, IMC directly affected marketing campaign effectiveness but indirectly affected the financial and market brand-performance outcomes. Therefore, a firm's market campaign effectiveness increases with growth in its IMC capability, resulting in improved brand value. The IMC capability exists in the marketing resources that an organization can draw on to enhance its performance and gain an advantage (Anabila, 2020). However, Anabila did not consider that external factors beyond the organization's control, such as changes in competitors' strategy, could limit IMC's effect on brand performance.

Views Related to Previous Research and Findings

Lacap and Tungcab (2020) used a quantitative methodology to investigate brand experience influence on brand loyalty and the mediating effects of brand satisfaction and brand trust. Unlike with Lacap and Tungcap, the qualitative method was more appropriate in this study for exploring the brand marketing strategies that leaders of

ITSPs implement to increase patronage. In qualitative case studies, asking open-ended questions in a face-to-face interview further explores identified themes possible (Brewer et al., 2018). Lacap and Tungcap, however, asked closed-ended questions in questionnaires filled by 500 participants. The relationship between variables became evident from the statistical analysis without any consideration for data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) offered that data saturation occurs when the data collection process yields no new information, themes, or coding, and this is achievable with a manageable sample size. Unlike Lacap and Tungcap, a minimum of nine participants provided data in this study by answering open-ended questions in virtual face-to-face interviews. Thus, the data collection method used for this qualitative multiple case study was more appropriate than the closed-ended questionnaires used by Lacap and Tungcap.

As in the research by Drabjerdi et al. (2016), I used Aaker's (1991) brand equity model as the viewing lens of this study. In contrast to this qualitative study, Drabjerdi et al. (2016) used Aaker's model as a quantitative viewing lens for investigating dimensions of brand equity and the effect of marketing mix variables on brand equity. This study has a service focus, but Drabjerdi et al. focused on Tehran dairy products. The transferability of findings depends on the context of the readers' peculiar circumstances (Houghton et al., 2013).

The views of Gong et al. (2020) indicated that the implementation of brand marketing strategies results in competitive advantage, increased customer loyalty, and, consequently, high profitability. The purpose of this study is to explore the successful brand marketing strategies that increase customer patronage. Therefore, a similarity exists in the notion that brand marketing strategies are relevant to increasing patronage.

Transition

In Section 1, discussions included the background to managing brand value for increased patronage, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study. I justified the qualitative method, exploratory multiple case study design, and conceptual model guiding the study with peer-reviewed sources. In the literature review, I articulated the importance of managing customer brand experience and its relevance to improving brand value for competitive advantage through critical analysis and synthesis of various sources.

In Section 2, I provided a restatement of the research purpose, a description of the researcher’s role in the data collection process, eligibility criteria and details of gaining access to participants, and a more detailed explanation of the research method and design adopted for the study. Other aspects comprise population and sampling criteria, ethical research considerations, data collection and analysis, and ensuring reliability and validity. In Section 3, I presented my findings, the applicability to professional business practice, and my recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

This section contains a description of the research components for satisfying the purpose of this study. Sections include the researcher’s role, the methodology and design adopted for the study, the population, data collection procedures, and data analysis. I also provide a context for ensuring the validity and reliability of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage. The targeted population consisted of leaders in three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, who had adopted successful brand marketing strategies for increased patronage. I selected three participants from each of the three research partner organizations for this study, making a manageable total sample of nine interviewees. The targeted population was appropriate because of the companies’ location in a state that serves as the business hub of commercial and corporate activities in Nigeria. Lagos State accounts for more than 50% of Nigeria’s industrial capacity (Olasanmi, 2016). The implications for positive social change include the potential for growth of ITSPs that could result in employment for young unemployed graduates in Nigeria.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative case study, a researcher has the role of ensuring data-backed facts instead of working with naïve intuitions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Data are available for collection from multiple sources, such as face-to-face interviews, observation, documents, and archival records (Yin, 2018). I collected data-backed facts by taking advantage of rapport development, which Sy et al. (2020) explained arises during the face-to-face interview method. I also analyzed reflective notes taken during the interviews.

Another role I had was related to ethics and ensuring compliance with the Belmont Report Protocol. A part of my role was obtaining the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#07-01-20-0557951) before proceeding with data collection. When recruiting participants, I ensured compliance with the regulation protecting human subjects from the 1979 Belmont Protocol Report of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The report's underlying principles are respect for persons, beneficence (mitigating injury to human subjects), and justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). In compliance with the principle of respect for persons, I asked interviewees to read and sign the informed consent document as evidence of their willingness to participate in the study before commencing data collection. For beneficence, interviews took place virtually via Zoom, with participants freely expressing opinions from their homes and offices. In compliance with the justice principle, the participants' selection was objective based on the research selection criteria.

Although my practical experience as a chartered accountant was not with any ITSPs or marketing organizations, I had brand equity measurement knowledge. To mitigate biases related to my experience as a finance and accounts professional regarding the composition and measurement of brand equity, I was mindful that memory recall from previous career experiences should not influence the study. Memory recall of a subject matter may result in biased judgments (Thurstan et al., 2016). I researched with an open mind and took care not to preempt the study's outcome. However, theoretical knowledge gained while obtaining my qualifications and additional insights acquired during the literature review proved helpful to understand this research topic better.

Colleagues with professional experience in brand marketing provided a list of ITSPs within the Lagos State area. Because I had no prior contact with any of the recommended companies and their employees, there was no biased relationship that influenced the study. To further minimize researcher bias, I interacted with the participants without any familiarity or personal involvement that could have compromised objective findings and conclusions. Participants' responses to the predetermined interview questions constituted part of the study's data, and follow-up questions aided in clarifying ambiguous answers. The interview sessions were audio-recorded, and member checking followed to prevent misrepresentation of interviewees' responses.

Adherence to the interview protocol developed before data collection enabled a consistent data collection process during the interviews. The use of a semistructured interview protocol, including open-ended questions, allowed for further exploration of possible themes (see Brewer et al., 2018). An interview protocol contains a statement of the research purpose, open-ended questions, and follow-up questions (Yeong et al., 2018). The interview protocol used for the current study included pertinent information such as the purpose of the study, participants' rights, the researcher's obligation of confidentiality, and open-ended interview questions. Consistent with Yin's (2018) suggestion, my report of conclusions from the research process was without any falsification of information, and participants received a summarized result of the study.

Participants

A criterion for participating in a qualitative case study is for the interviewees to have the requisite experience relevant to solving the business problem (Yin, 2018). The business problem in this current study was that some business managers of ITSPs lack brand marketing strategies for increasing patronage. Eligible participants were business leaders from three ITSPs who adopted brand marketing strategies for increased patronage. Interviewees met the criteria of having relevant knowledge of the information technology service business and were involved in their organizations' brand positioning decisions.

Offering justification for a decision on sample size is essential for ensuring quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Vasileiou et al., 2018). With replication in mind and following Farrugia's (2019) suggestion that small sample sizes enable in-depth inquiry, I recruited three individuals from each of three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, to participate in the study. Nine business leaders took part in the interviews during data collection.

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval, I requested a list of employees who met the participant selection criteria and their contact details from each organization's authorized personnel. Then, each selected individual got an invitation via email, with follow-up calls. After introductions, I explained the research purpose, and some of these employees agreed to participate, while others declined because of their busy schedules. When the number of volunteers became complete, participants sent informed consent via email to confirm voluntary participation. I established working relationships with participants by ensuring the confidentiality of information that would become available during the interviews and communicated that participation would not involve monetary incentives. Participants had a prior understanding of their free will to withdraw by phone or email from the virtual face-to-face interview.

Participants chose their interview time and communicated it via email. Each interviewee later got a unique interview link before the scheduled day. At the request of certain participants, there was some rescheduling of interview dates and time. The interview sessions started as scheduled on the eventual date and time agreed to with each participant. The interviews took place on Zoom, an online video conferencing platform. Each participant ensured their privacy from their respective locations, and there was no breach of confidentiality.

The audio recording of proceedings, with participants' permission, enhanced the accurate documentation of responses. In line with Fusch and Ness (2015), I followed the interview protocol and asked probing questions. No new information became apparent by the end of interviews with the final participant from each partner organization, indicating data saturation.

Research Method and Design

Three broad approaches to carrying out research studies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2019). The mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Saunders et al., 2019). Yin (2018) pointed out that three conditions that determine the appropriateness of a research method and design are (a) the degree of the focus on events, (b) the form of the research question, and (c) the extent of control over behavioral events. Avoiding a misfit of methodology was essential to achieving the research objective.

Research Method

The consideration of conditions for determining the appropriateness of a research approach informed the choice of the qualitative methodology for this study. The qualitative research method serves as a platform for exploratory inquiry and understanding of real-life experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Olubiyi et al., 2019). Using the qualitative method for the current study presented the opportunity for gaining insights into the marketing strategies relevant for improving brand patronage.

Unlike in qualitative research, a quantitative study typically involves reducing a business problem to numerical constructs and applying mathematical operations to ascertain possible cause-and-effect relationships (Matta, 2019). Testing hypotheses and analyzing numeric data aids in explaining relationships between variables and making reliable conclusions in quantitative research (Hjalmarson & Moskal, 2018; Matta, 2019). Given that this study's objective was not to test hypotheses, the quantitative method was not an appropriate choice.

The mixed-methods approach involves combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study (Guetterman et al., 2019; Schoonenboom, 2018). McKim (2017) pointed out that the mixed-methods approach favors inquiries to gain in-depth insight into a phenomenon rather than individual qualitative and quantitative approaches, but takes a longer time to complete. The purpose of the current study did not require a combination of methods to answer the research question. Therefore, the qualitative method was the appropriate approach to address the phenomenon in this study.

Research Design

The selection of an appropriate design requires explicit knowledge of the research purpose (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). Having selected the qualitative method, I needed to identify the best design to understand the business problem and answer the research question. The research question is a determinant of the appropriateness of the design (Yin, 2018). Given the research question in the current study, the design options were ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. By an elimination approach, the case study design became the best option.

The ethnographic design did not align with the business problem in this study. Ethnography involves gaining insights into human behavior and cultural practices through close observation of individuals' daily lived experiences (Turhan, 2019; Von Koskull et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was not to explore the cultural practices of participants. In addition, the study purpose did not require prolonged immersion in a culture using the ethnographic design. Therefore, ethnography was not chosen.

Researchers adopting the phenomenological design generate in-depth descriptions of a phenomenon from the reality of the narratives or observations of individuals' personal experiences and meaning given to them (Bilgili & Çiltaş, 2019; Turhan, 2019). In a phenomenological study, a participant reflects on everyday experiences retrospectively and not while the phenomenon is occurring (Patton, 2015). Participants may have different encounters during an event, but there will be a shared lived experience about the phenomenon meaningful to the research. Given that phenomenology did not align with identifying how marketing strategies could increase patronage, the design was not appropriate for this study.

The qualitative case study design involves the in-depth exploration of the perceptions of individuals or groups of people about a contemporary phenomenon within real-life settings (Pihlajamaa et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) posited that a case study allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how or why a social phenomenon operates. Therefore, the case study design was relevant to a study of how and why brand marketing strategies can improve patronage.

To achieve data saturation, I selected a manageable sample size from multiple cases and explored other data sources such as document review and reflective notes in addition to member-checked synthesis of participants' responses to interview questions. Achieving data saturation in a study requires an adequate sample size related to the research objective (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The initial sample size for this study was adequate to reach saturation. Therefore, I did not have to invite more participants when data became repetitive.

Population and Sampling

The targeted population of this qualitative multiple case study consisted of leaders from three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, who adopted successful brand marketing strategies to increase patronage. I used the purposive sampling method to select study participants with common characteristics. The purposive sampling method involves selecting a sample of individuals with similar characteristics from a target population (Etikan et al., 2016). A researcher must have predetermined conditions or research criteria in mind to select interviewees (Barratt et al., 2015). In the current study, only individuals with insights relevant to answering the research question about brand marketing strategies for increasing patronage qualified as participants.

A manageable sample size contributes to reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurs when the data collection process yields no new information, themes, or codes (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Yin (2018) pointed out that the superiority of exploring multiple cases over single cases includes better research outcomes and the potential of achieving direct replication. Therefore, I selected three participants from each of three case firms, making a manageable sample size of nine interviewees. With in-depth interviewing of each participant, I achieved saturation with ease. The participants' eligibility depended on meeting the following criteria: (a) having relevant knowledge about the information technology service business, (b) involved with the brand positioning of the organization, and (c) being a leader in the company that used brand marketing strategies to increase patronage.

Ethical Research

Obtaining Walden's IRB approval was the initial step to complying with the *Belmont Report's* ethical principles of preserving participants' well-being. The IRB functions to enforce compliance with federal, institutional, and ethical research guidelines in ensuring the safety of human subjects (McEvenue et al., 2016; Shetty & Saiyed, 2014).

After receiving IRB approval, I followed the informed consent process, which Kawar et al. (2016) explained as the continuous efficient communication between a researcher and the study participants. Each of the participants received an explanation of the nature of this study before signing the informed consent form. The essence of the explanation was to encourage voluntary participation of eligible persons for the study. Vanclay et al. (2013) pointed out that researchers cannot demand individuals' involvement in a study, but must abide by the ethical practice of convincing voluntary participation. In the current study, all participants gave informed consent as an indication of voluntary participation.

Contents of the informed consent form included a clear statement that participation in the study was 100% voluntary and not attracting any remuneration, compensation, or incentives. Only individuals above 18 years could participate in the study. Participants had the freewill to withdraw from the study, either by a phone call or email, at any time, without any penalty or obligation to the research. Another content of the form was an expression of nondisclosure of participants' identity. The use of alphanumeric code to represent participants' identities and their organizations ensured confidentiality in the study. Kawar et al. (2016) emphasized that a researcher has the crucial responsibility of guaranteeing the participants' protection. Data collected are in an external hard drive and secured in a restricted location until deletion 5 years after completing this study. The final doctoral study contains the Walden IRB approval number. The informed consent form and letter conveying organizational permission to research the case firms show as listings in the table of contents and as samples in the appendix section.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative researchers qualify as a data collection instrument (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; McDonald & Flint, 2015). To support this qualitative multiple case study with credible facts, I was the primary instrument for data collection from the relevant sources. The sources available for data collection in qualitative research include interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, and archival records (Boblin et al., 2013; Yin, 2018). Review of public documents and semistructured, virtual face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions were data collection sources in the study. As the primary data collection instrument, I was the sole interviewer during face-to-face semistructured interviews to obtain information relevant to answering the research question.

Using the interview as a source of data helps develop the rapport needed to get access to pertinent information not readily divulged by participants in an ordinary course of discussion (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Sy et al., 2020). Each participant signed the informed consent form and agreed to the duration of the semistructured interview session. They did not object to audio recording of the interview session. Participants answered open-ended questions contained in the interview protocol. A semistructured interview protocol of asking open-ended questions from participants lead to further exploration of identified themes (Brewer et al., 2018). In an interview protocol, pertinent information includes the research purpose, interviewees' rights, researcher's obligation of confidentiality, open-ended questions, and follow-up questions (Yeong et al., 2018). The interview protocol used aided in building rapport with participants and obtaining opinions on successful brand marketing strategies for increased patronage.

Data collected from documents and reflective notes of participants' body language complemented information from the interview process. Observations may overcome the challenge of participants' miscommunication during responses to interview questions (Teusner, 2016). The review of public documents made available helped identify newer data or strengthening themes apparent from interviews and the reflective note of observations.

I enhanced the reliability and validity of data by following the research protocol, conducting member checking of the synthesis of participants' responses during the interview. Triangulation of data from member checked synthesis of interview responses, public document review, and reflective notes further enhanced the reliability and validity of data. Appendix A contains a sample of the interview protocol listed as an item in the table of contents. Hudson et al. (2014) considered that member checking is relevant to verifying research data accuracy. Thus, each of the participants reviewed my synthesis of their responses to interview questions. Necessary amendments ensured accuracy.

Data Collection Technique

In answering the central research question about marketing strategies that managers of ITSPs implement to increase patronage, using the most appropriate data collection technique was essential to achieve the research objectives. Leedy and Ormrod (2019) expressed the importance of choosing the most effective method of obtaining data for research regardless of the field of study. Yang and Chiu (2014) used interviews as one of the multiple data collection techniques in a qualitative case study into servitization strategies to satisfy customers' needs, improve brand performance, and achieve competitive advantages. In another qualitative case study into customer relationship management, Chiang (2013) triangulated data using multiple data collection techniques, including interviewing and observations.

I used virtual face-to-face semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (Appendix A) to collect primary data. Other data collection techniques were by document review and reflective notes. After obtaining Walden IRB approval, there was no pilot study, but there was a road test of my interview protocol with friends. Before applying for IRB approval, I met with each partner organization’s authorized personnel to obtain signed letters of cooperation (see Appendix B) expressing authorization to gain access to employees. After IRB approval, I requested that the authorized personnel introduce me to the eligible employees before the research interviews. Contacting selected eligible employees was by email and some follow up calls inviting them to participate in the study at a public place (secured room in a library) and time of their choosing if different from the location provided by the company’s arrangement. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and a stay at home order by the Nigerian government, all participants opted to have a virtual face-to-face interview.

Once the required number of consenting participants was complete, the actual interview commenced as scheduled, and I followed the predesigned interview protocol. All the proceedings were with due regard for all ethical considerations explained earlier. The interview started with introductions, and after that, explanations of the research purpose, the informed consent, rights of participants, and obligations of the researcher followed. Participants received responses to questions they had and then signed the informed consent forms. With permission obtained to audio record, the interview session commenced and did not exceed 60 minutes.

The face-to-face interview has the advantage of establishing easy rapport with participants (Sy et al., 2020). Interviewing enables eliciting in-depth information relevant to research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Sy et al., 2020) but is costly and time-consuming (Solmaz et al., 2017). With the review of documents, the advantage of evidencing business activities exists (Williams & Gemperle, 2017), with the disadvantage of possible selective data made available for research purposes (Yin, 2018). Collecting data by observation is prone to biases (Yin, 2018) but has the benefit of overcoming possible misrepresentation of interviewees' responses (Teusner, 2016).

I synthesized responses recorded during the interview sessions and used member checking to validate my interpretations. Member checking increases the quality (Fisher et al., 2016) and accuracy of interpretation of participants' responses obtained during the interview (Green, 2015; Kamal et al., 2015). The member checking process was a strain on the time resource. However, achieving the objective of producing a quality study was worth the time spent in the process.

Data Organization Technique

In research, no universal approach exists for managing data of varying nature and size (Buys & Shaw, 2015). To keep data obtained from the various techniques adopted in the study, I created three sets of files, with different color coding distinguishing one case firm from the other. The files included physical documents about the firms and each participant, such as the approved letter of cooperation, brochures, informed consent form, written synthesis of the interviews, and reflective notes. The use of alphanumeric codes or identifiers (P1, P2, B1, B2) ensured the protection of partner organizations and participants' identities. Coding also aids the organization of research data for exploring a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Pierre & Jackson, 2014). I captured data relevant to answering the central research question.

The review of public documents such as the firms' brochures, website archives, and other marketing materials collected additional primary data. I took reflective notes of details relevant to the research study. Microsoft Word was a veritable tool to enter my research logs and reflective notes on data collected during the interviews. Similar to Kuhlmann and Ardichvili (2015), I used an Excel spreadsheet to organize and track data captured.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of research data (Yin, 2018) earns participants' trust and confidence (Corti et al., 2014). I ensured that a self-generated password restricts access to all electronic research data in my computer system. The backup on an external hard drive and physical documents remain in a secured combination safe at my house. Five years after completing this study, I will destroy all physical documents and electronic data.

Data Analysis

For this qualitative multiple case study, I ensured the completeness of data for analysis by methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves using various qualitative data collection sources to assure the completeness of data and robust conclusions (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Data were from multiple sources, such as semistructured interviews, reflective notes of participants' body language observed, and public documents review. Researchers triangulate when concluding from multiple sources (Cope, 2014; Heale & Forbes, 2013) to arrive at a point of saturation when the process yields no new theme, coding, or information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of multiple sources for collecting data in this study contributed to achieving data saturation.

The data analysis was by Yin's (2018) 5-step process of (a) compilation, (b) disassembly, (c) reassembly, (d) interpretation, and (e) concluding. I created a file coding system for all the interviewees and other data collection sources. Transcription and summarizing the recorded interview sessions and observation notes on Microsoft Word took place. Afterward, participants member checked the synthesis of each of their comments and validated my summary of the interview session. Next, data grouping by evaluation questions occurred, followed by the loading of details into the data analysis software – NVivo - to identify unique themes. The unique codes applied made possible (a) differentiating data collected during the interview process from other sources, (b) distinguishing data of a case firm from another, and (c) identifying each participant's response from the others'.

Analysis of data obtained from the document review started with sorting items relevant to interview questions asked. To ensure usability and understand these documents' context, I discussed with personnel that had relevant insights. I compared records containing similar information to ensure consistency and the accuracy of all data obtained. I wrote out the summary of information obtained from the document review process and encoded emerging themes. Microsoft Excel was useful in capturing participants’ codes and corresponding responses for data import into NVivo. Researchers using computer software in data analysis enjoy benefits such as (a) the ease of working with extensive data, (b) achieving rigor, and (c) better chance of substantiating conclusions (Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Odena, 2013; Vicary et al., 2016). The analysis of coded data and themes with NVivo continued until trends and linkages became evident. I summarized and disseminated findings to participants via email.

The purpose of this study was to explore the marketing strategies that managers of ITSPs implement to increase patronage. I triangulated and cross-referenced the data analysis outcome with themes apparent in the literature review to enhance credibility. Description and explanation of possible conflicts between cross-referenced data are in the presentation of findings. I updated the final study to include new research relevant to answering the central research question, published since obtaining approval for the study.

Reliability and Validity

The two essential criteria for establishing quality in qualitative studies are reliability and validity (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014; Prion & Adamson, 2014). In qualitative research, reliability and validity comprise four components: dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Further discussions on dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability are under the reliability and validity headings below.

Reliability

Reliability implies the consistency in the measures adopted for conducting a study (Yin, 2018). However, El Hussein et al. (2015) maintained that the degree of reliability in the quality of both data and the entire research hinges on the assessment of dependability and confirmability criteria. Yin (2018) and J. T. Hess et al. (2014) pointed out that ensuring consistency during the data collection process enhances reliability. Maintaining a dependable quality in the data collection process was, therefore, relevant to ensuring reliability.

Dependability relates to ascertaining the consistency of methods adopted over a period (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2015). Three strategies for ensuring reliability are: (a) the use of a case study protocol, (b) adopting transparent data collection techniques, and (c) developing a case study database to track and organize data (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). I maintained and preserved the research process documentation to guide independent researchers' verification of the consistency of methods applied. Transparency in research reflects rigor (Houghton et al., 2013). The adoption of member checking to confirm the interpretation of interview responses was to reflect transparency in the research process and enhance the dependability of conclusions.

Validity

A study must reflect *validity* throughout the phases of research design, data collection, and analysis (Yin, 2018). A researcher addresses credibility by adopting a qualitative design that ensures a clear linkage from data to findings (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). The conviction about the linkage arises because of the deeper understanding that triangulating from multiple sources of data affords (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013) instead of deficiencies inherent in using a single source strategy (Cronin, 2014).

Credibility in research means ensuring truth in the findings (Forman et al., 2017). Noble and Smith (2015) offered that attaining credibility involves adopting methodological strategies, preserving a logical trail of the data analysis process, avoiding biases in comparing varying perspectives, and maintaining objectivity in interpreting results. Both Cronin (2014) and Houghton et al. (2013) used the multiple case study design to ensure research credibility. Therefore, the use of the multiple case study design, methodological triangulation, and secured record of data collected was to enhance this study's credibility. Avoiding bias in my interpretation of interview data by using member checking further enhanced the credibility of my conclusions.

Transferability relates to providing evidence for users to apply the study's relevance to different contexts of their inquiry (Cook et al., 2016; Parker & Northcott, 2016). Therefore, I addressed transferability by describing this study's context and discussed conclusions about similar themes and findings in the literature review. While some readers focus on case-specific relevance, others assessed the general applicability (Copes et al., 2016). Hence, I expounded on both case-specific and general relevance of the study to aid readers' decision on the transferability of findings to the context of their circumstances.

Confirmability relates to maintaining a systematic record of all data, procedures for data collection, analysis, decisions, and implementations as an audit trail of the research process (Achema & Ncama, 2016; El Hussein et al., 2015). I addressed confirmability by providing a detailed description of the research process. There was a clear flow from establishing the business problem, explaining the conceptual model, articulating the interview protocol, data collection techniques, organization, and analysis, which connected with making conclusions.

Finally, creating a database of the documentation of each stage of data collection, coding, analysis, and interpretation ensured confirmability and the overall reliability of the study. The database was also relevant for sorting, identifying, and retrieving data or information to guide research replication. The transparency of the study reflected rigor and enhanced overall research quality. Data saturation occurs when the data collection process yields no new information, themes, or coding (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I interviewed all participants, reviewed documents, and probed newer themes from nine interviews across three case firms to achieve data saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 contained a detailed explanation of the people within the research scope, justification of participant selection within ethical standards, and the purpose statement. A succinct description of the data collection and analysis included the instruments, technique, and the sequential process adopted for carrying out the study. Discussions on steps taken to ensure dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability clarified reliability and validity. Scholarly peer-reviewed sources and seminal works supporting each decision evidenced the rigor of this qualitative multiple case study on managing brand value for increased patronage.

Section 3 includes the presentation of data analysis, findings, and interpretation of apparent themes. I explain the application of findings to professional practice and the beneficial social change implications. Section 3 also includes recommendations for actions, areas for further research, and reflections of the research process.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

This section includes a summary of the research, presentation of findings, the application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Other aspects covered include recommendations for actions and further research. The section ends with reflections on the doctoral study process and a conclusion. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage. The conceptual framework was the brand equity model by Aaker (1991).

Participants, who were leaders selected from three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, answered open-ended semistructured interview questions via Zoom. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) after obtaining informed consent, with due regard for other ethical considerations. Member-checked data underwent the 5-step analysis of compilation, disassembly, reassembly, interpretation, and conclusion advocated by Yin (2018). Four main themes became evident: (a) strong brand development, (b) target marketing, (c) customer engagement, and (d) customer advocacy.

Presentation of the Findings

This study's overarching research question was the following: What brand marketing strategies do leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage? Data were analyzed to identify themes from interview synthesis, reflective notes, available public documents, and relevant literature review. All participants mentioned that their organizations operated mainly the business to business (B2B) model. However, participants from one of the research partner organizations mentioned the occasional provision of services to some high net worth individuals. The four central themes that emerged after the analysis of data coded with NVivo 11 were (a) strong brand development, (b) target marketing, (c) customer engagement, and (d) customer advocacy. These themes aligned with the conceptual model used for the study.

Theme 1: Strong Brand Development

There was a consensus by all participants that ensuring a strong brand development is critical to reaching a level of increased customer patronage. All nine ITSP business leaders interviewed reported that an organization has no successful business and increased patronage without having a strong brand. P1 noted that investing in brand marketing strategies may be worthwhile only if there is a unique brand. P2 stated that "creating quality services that customers will want to connect with is the first thing to address before considering awareness creation." P3, P5, and P7 noted that attracting patronage depends on the brand's strength to win customer advocacy. P5 stated that "in this industry, successful businesses focus on first building a strong brand that can stand the aggressiveness of our market competition." In the words of P4, "having a strong brand is not negotiable and is among the requirements for trying to earn customer loyalty." P6 mentioned that brand marketing strategy starts with developing a successful brand tailored to meet customers' needs and emotions.

P8 also mentioned that businesses should have "long-term plans and activities directed toward developing a successful brand." When asked to explain what brand marketing strategy meant, P9's response was "talking about what brand strategies mean implies the existence of a strong brand to be projected to the target market." P9 also stated the following:

> In my opinion, brand marketing strategies are really those strategies for effectively communicating the features of the business's strong brand to the target market, and these encompass the brand message, communication medium, and internal processes. You need to pay attention to your values because they link to your brand. You need to create trust by living the brand and making customers see that you are more secure than they are. Earn their trust and display consistent integrity. When you undermine your values, you invariably undermine the strength of your brand.

Theme 1 also extends the assertion of Sarin (2014) that having a strong brand influences target customers' purchase decision. From the perspective of service brands, Sarin pointed out that customers mostly choose to use strong brands. On the continuum of risk (low and high) and customers' status (uninformed and well informed), strong brands play an important role in influencing customers' decisions (Sarin, 2014). A strong brand wins the confidence of customers and results in increased patronage. Sarin noted that the strength of a brand is not relevant to low-risk decisions of well-informed customers. However, uninformed customers would consider a strong brand when masking either low- or high-risk purchase decisions. Likewise, well-informed customers will consider strong brands in their high-risk purchase decisions. According to Aaker's (1991) brand equity model used in this study, the viewpoint of Sarin translates to stating that the ability of a brand to influence continued customer patronage depends on the combination and strength of brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, associations, and other proprietary brand assets. The concept of a strong brand affecting customers' trust also reflects in the assertions of Bonab (2017). A strong brand embodies the trust customers have about a company's commitment to fulfilling its promises (Bonab, 2017) and serves as protection against marketplace assaults from competitors (Ryan & Silvanto, 2013). Brand trust or credibility positively influences purchase intentions (Abu Zayyad et al., 2020), and customers can develop confidence when they obtain the brand promise. Findings from the first theme extend the existing pool of knowledge on brand marketing strategies for increased patronage in Nigeria.

Theme 2: Target Marketing

The second theme, target marketing, emerged from the analysis of coded data. All nine participants mentioned the peculiarity of target marketing for organizations offering B2B services. All nine ITSP business leaders emphasized that focusing on a targeted market as a brand marketing strategy results in increased patronage for organizations offering services, particularly to businesses rather than individual human consumers. Reflective notes taken during data gathering indicated that all of the research partner companies had a key account management system for service provision to existing customers. Target marketing featured at different points of participants' responses to most of the questions they answered. P1 mentioned that having the appropriate budget in terms of cost and identifying the right target market was one of the challenges they had to overcome when implementing brand marketing strategies.

Similarly, P7 stated that identifying the target audience was a challenge when implementing some brand marketing strategies. P7 observed that identifying the target market helps avoid servicing a market not intended and wasting resources. P1 and P7 mentioned target marketing as a strategy adopted for achieving improved awareness about the business. P1 listed target markets as part of the factors that management considered to determine brand marketing strategies implemented, but P4, P5, and P6 used the phrase “target audience” in response to the same question. However, P5 further stated that a successful brand strategy for increased patronage is to thoroughly know the customers and customize services to their specific needs.

P2 mentioned that assessing marketing strategies’ success depends on the target market’s context, whether the business is a B2B or business to customer (B2C). In response to what marketing strategies uniquely increased band loyalty and patronage, P3 mentioned “focused marketing” to ensure brand awareness of the targeted market:

> We are currently a known brand preferred in the Nigerian market, and because of the target marketing strategy, we enjoy a significant conversion of B2B leads to actual patronage. We have expanded our target customer coverage from the telecommunication industry to the financial service industries, the public sector, manufacturing, hospitality, oil and gas, education, among others.

P8 and P9 addressed target marketing in their definition of what brand marketing strategies connote. P8 considered brand marketing strategies as all activities focused on the target market, business goals, vision, and mission of the organization encapsulated in the product and service offerings. P9 mentioned strategies of effectively communicating a business's strong brand feature to the target market or audience. P8 also stated

> Factors management consider before crafting brand marketing strategies include understanding the market and identifying the target audience. Another factor was to identify brand marketing strategies that align with the characteristics of the target market. Other factors include location, culture, and optics – about how to be perceived.

The second theme aligned with the scholarly works discussed in the literature review. Consumers' characteristics vary based on demographics, personal factors, or sociocultural psychologies influencing their purchase intentions (Dharmesti et al., 2019). Target marketing strategies enable identifying the attitude, characteristics, and unique motivations of market segments to influence their purchase intentions (Dharmesti et al., 2019; Won & Kim, 2020). Business leaders require deliberate marketing strategies to push products and services to customers who may fall into targetable categories and create awareness that motivates purchase intentions (Makrides et al., 2019). Inaccurate profiling of the intended market segment may result in ineffective marketing strategies for motivating customers' purchase intention (Mostafa & Arnaout, 2019). Therefore, business leaders are responsible for identifying and understanding the right market characteristics for their business before crafting brand awareness strategies to influence purchase intentions. Findings from the second theme extend the body of knowledge on brand strategies implemented to increase customer patronage in Nigeria.

Theme 3: Customer Engagement

All participants alluded to the third theme of customer engagement. The participants emphasized the importance of engaging customers to understand consumer expectations, identify knowledge gaps, obtain feedback, and ensure continuous communication to achieve sustained satisfaction with the brand. Some participants pointed out the need for consumer education about service offerings, whether as B2B or B2C. From the reflective notes taken during the interviews, customer engagement was a focal point of drives to connect the customers with the brands' intrinsic value. Points about customer engagement featured most often in responses to what brand marketing strategies have been most effective at increasing patronage. P1 stated that "we often interact with customers to understand their requirements and expectations. These interactions even throw up information about encounters with our competitors in terms of product quality, price, and other aspects related to our brand." P2 mentioned that

> One of the successful brand marketing strategies that worked and still working for us is direct customer engagement. It helped tailor solutions that met their specific needs. The continued interaction enabled us to educate them in aspects where there were obvious knowledge gaps. If I were to advise business leaders, I would tell them to actively engage customers and make them happy to commit to the brand.

P3 mentioned communicating the company's values and brand personality to the customers to attract and retain patronage. P3 included the point of putting in place a customer engagement/feedback system. P3 also said "our strategies include meeting various stakeholders, getting feedback on the business's strong and weak points from a customer's perspective, and incorporating the feedback to improve service quality."

P4 mentioned the consideration given to environmental factors when deciding the channels of customer engagement. P4 said "another consideration we made was for environmental factors. For example, the pandemic requiring remote channels of customer engagement." In response to how digital or media strategies (e.g., smartphone applications, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) have increased brand patronage, P4 and P5 mentioned having recorded more engagement in followers and business deals. P6 explained that as a result of engagement with customers, "we have had opportunities to educate our consumers and undertake content marketing even in the process. We get the right insight into customer needs and offer tailor-made services." P7 explained the strategy of creating awareness to be the top priority in social media, seminars, events, and other online engagement of targeted customers. P7 also mentioned building one-on-one relationships and continually gathering market intelligence.

P8 explained that digital or media strategies have been invaluable for customer engagement at a global reach, resulting in cost savings and arresting negative press or feedback. P9 mentioned that engagement with consumers allows for customer education about service offerings. P9 stated that with consumer engagement, there is an increase in the business reach, seamless delivery of some of the services, more insight into customer reviews, and increased patronage and business engagements. Public information on website archives of companies where participants work corroborates claims about customer engagement via online mediums. Customers and other stakeholders can independently access information about the company online and interact with representatives tasked with addressing issues and managing feedback.

The third theme aligned with scholarly sources discussed in the literature review. Harrigan et al. (2017) explained customer engagement as the interaction between a business entity and its existing or potential customers regarding its brand, possibly resulting in consumer satisfaction or loyalty. An increase in loyal customers may result in a concurrent increase in patronage. Customer engagement also involves strengthening customers' involvement in organizational activities to influence their behavioral disposition toward brand offerings (Munjal et al., 2019). Quality brand offerings of business organizations always ensure customers' satisfaction (Ozbal et al., 2020). X. Ding et al. (2019) explained that satisfaction motivates customers' enthusiasm, participation, and social interaction, three dimensions of customer engagement. However, Thakur (2019) concluded that a higher level of customer engagement ensures customer satisfaction resulting in continued consumption intentions. Therefore, customer engagement contributes to ensuring consumer satisfaction and may result in increased brand patronage. Findings on the third theme extend the body of knowledge on brand marketing strategies for increasing patronage.

Theme 4: Customer Advocacy

Customer advocacy emerged as the fourth theme from the data findings. Participants reported that customers who have positive brand experiences develop an affinity, which coupled with trust arising from continuous delivery of the brand promise results in advocacy and increased patronage. P1 mentioned the need to give customers experiences to remember by putting in place a customer appreciation/reward system, offering quality services, and implementing the right pricing structure. Therefore, customers are confident to refer the brand to others. P2 and P3 indicated motivating customer positive word-of-mouth communication with others by ensuring improved brand association riding on the image of known partners with high-quality brands. P5 had a similar position with P2 and P3 but used the phrase collaboration with known brands to strengthen customers' trust and motivate their advocacy.

P4 indicated the effort of ensuring that the service delivers on the brand promise and value, giving customers the best experience that makes them want to come back. P4 also mentioned motivating satisfied customers to give word-of-mouth references. P6 indicated giving discounts, offering points on customer referrals, and giving free trials of services to attract patronage and make satisfied customers spread the word. P7 listed ensuring delivery of quality products and services, excellent customer service, and ensuring authentic messages that included testimonials through social media and other mediums. P8 and P9 shared that management strive for customers to have lasting experiences that make them want to come back or advocate for the brand. P8 stated

> To achieve this feat, we did the following: (a) ensuring high quality of services, (b) focusing on the reliability of the brand, (c) ensuring authenticity, (d) driving leadership of the brand, (e) motivating passion for excellence in the service delivery, (f) maintaining a culture of ethical standards that can increase patronage, and (g) creating an atmosphere of respect that leaves a lasting feeling of brand association.

The fourth theme aligned with findings in scholarly sources discussed in the literature review. Sarin (2014) made a case that brand experience influencing customer patronage rests on two foundational pillars of behavior and performance. Sarin identified the performance foundation to include hard variables such as quality, delivery, price, and service. He broke down the behavior foundation as soft variables of attitude, relationship, integrity, abiding by promises, and responsiveness. Advanced technologies make for more effortless engagement with customers and results in broader business reach (Raza et al., 2020). Businesses must ensure superior service quality and engage in continuous customer engagement – answering questions and resolving issues, which improves loyalty and builds relationships (Raza et al., 2020). Ensuring superior service quality improves the degree of user satisfaction (Raza et al., 2020). Efficient customer satisfaction results in customer retention (Okonkwo et al., 2020) and increased patronage.

Alignment to the Conceptual Model

The four themes that emerged from the data analysis align with the fundamentals of Aaker’s (1991) brand equity model used as the viewing lens for this study. The participants’ opinions about the necessity to develop a strong brand are consistent with Aaker’s (1996a) ideals. Aaker (1996a) advocated developing corporate brands by leveraging four core brand equity dimensions: Brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. These components are part of the brand assets in Aaker’s (1991) brand equity model used as the viewing lens for this study, indicating alignment with Theme 1. Aaker (1996a) regarded developing a strong brand as an essential foundation for successful business strategies.

The second theme, target marketing, seemingly peculiar to B2B service offerings, aligns with Aaker's (1991) conceptual model depicting that brand equity adds value to the customer. The combined effect of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets allows customers to enjoy enhanced interpretation and processing of information to make informed purchase decisions (Aaker, 1991). Profiling of target markets that result in tailored service (Mostafa & Arnaout, 2019) enables an effective match between brand offerings and customer needs.

The third theme, customer engagement, aligns with the brand equity model. Customer engagement creates an avenue for consumer education. An effective brand awareness strategy enables educating customers about the brand in the context of market segmentation (Makrides et al., 2019). Brand awareness stimulates perceived quality and brand associations; brand associations affect brand loyalty, while the combination of perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations drives the overall brand equity (Buil et al., 2013). Therefore, customer engagement reflects perceived quality, loyalty, and awareness by addressing the brand value co-creation by the customers and the company, which forms an outcome of brand equity in this study's guiding conceptual model.

The conceptual model depicts that new customers draw reassurance from existing brand loyalty; awareness about the brand builds familiarity, and perceived quality establishes brand differentiation, reinforcing purchase intention. The fourth theme underscores the conceptual model's brand association component and linkages with other brand equity components. Brand experience influences customer patronage (Sarin, 2014). Therefore, customer advocacy derives from the experience of satisfaction with the brand.

Applications to Professional Practice

The business implication of successful brand marketing strategies for increased patronage is numerous. This qualitative multiple case study was an exploration of successful brand marketing strategies that business leaders of ITSPs implement for increased patronage. Data collected from interviews, public documents, reflective journals, and extant literature review provided insight into some relevant successful brand marketing strategies. Applications of this study to professional practice include the following (a) providing insights to managers of ITSPs who lack brand marketing on strategies for increasing patronage, (b) identifying strategies for positioning brands and prioritizing the development of internal marketing capabilities to strengthen the brand and enhance customer patronage, and (c) insights into the interrelated constructs in Aaker’s (1991) brand equity model and how infusing these into marketing strategies could increase patronage.

The business problem of this study is that some leaders of ITSPs lack brand marketing strategies to increase patronage. From a business perspective, understanding the design and implementation of marketing strategies is essential for improving brand value proposition to gain better brand positioning and competitive advantage (Guenther & Guenther, 2019). Findings from this study may enable leaders of ITSPs to gain insight into various strategies for enhancing and leveraging the brand for increased patronage. Specifically, findings could contribute to improved information technology service provision by providing guidance for improving brand equity and consequently experiencing business expansion. Organizations experience business expansion through increased patronage and organizational profitability (Sallam, 2016).

Second, business leaders may gain insight into better brand positioning and how to strengthen internal capabilities. With a better knowledge of the relevance of a strong brand to organizational success, business leaders can develop internal marketing capabilities to give customers memorable brand experiences and ensures satisfaction. Efficient customer satisfaction results in customer retention (Okonkwo et al., 2020). Therefore, ITSP leaders gaining insight into achieving customer satisfaction may encourage repeated purchase intentions and even motivate customer advocacy resulting in increased patronage.

Business leaders and marketing professionals in ITSPs and other small-scale enterprises could gain new insights into constructs in Aaker’s 1991 brand equity model. These leaders and professionals could learn about how enhancing interrelated constructs with marketing strategies could increase patronage. A focus on each of the five constructs of the brand equity model could unlock a plethora of approaches to gaining a competitive advantage in the organization’s operating space. Findings from this study, anchoring on Aaker’s brand equity model, offers a profound strength to an ITSP’s ability to increase patronage and competitive stamina. Business organizations have the business objective of generating wealth for the business owner or shareholders (Narteh, 2018). Therefore, this study extends the existing pool of brand equity literature with associated insight into increasing the shareholders’ wealth.

Implications for Social Change

In solving the business problem of business leaders lacking brand marketing strategies for increasing patronage, ITSPs can increase revenue, profitability, and market expansion. The implication for social change in this study is that marketing managers experience (a) improved professionalism and capability in increasing patronage through branding, (b) enhanced self-image, and (c) increased self-worth. Another implication of social change in this study is that the potential growth from the improved brand equity of ITSPs could result in job creation and increased taxable business profit. Profitable businesses assure job security for employees and create opportunities for the unemployed (Mokhber et al., 2017). Also, tax revenues generated from these businesses may improve the economy of the local communities. Therefore, thriving businesses contribute to enhancing the standard of living and infrastructure improvement within the local community.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this study was to explore brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs use to increase patronage. Drawing from on the findings, three recommendations for action for ITSP leaders, with no restriction to marketing professionals, are (a) develop a strong brand that guarantees a competitive advantage, (b) ensure brand alignment with the target market, and (c) establish and improve on an authentic relationship between the customers and the brand. This study provides evidence that developing a strong brand aid leaders in ITSPs to increase customer patronage. In line with the observation of Rajavi et al. (2019), a strong brand reinforces customers' belief that it delivers on its promises. Findings in this study indicates the strategies used to develop and improve the brand strength to attract and retain new and existing customers, respectively. Leaders of ITSPs who desire increasing customer patronage should improve on internal capabilities, ensure authentic service delivery, and deliver promises made to consumers.

The second recommendation is to ensure the alignment of the brand with expectations of the target market. Findings from this study provides evidence that a mismatch between the brand offering and the intended market's expectation may result in a decline in customer patronage, suboptimal achievement of corporate objectives, or business failure in the long run. Therefore, from findings in this study, ITSP leaders that align the brand in terms of quality, authenticity, and promise with customers' expectations create favorable experiences of satisfaction and motivate customer advocacy, resulting in increased patronage.

The third recommendation is for ITSP leaders to establish, maintain, and preserve an authentic relationship between the customers and the brand. With advancements in technology, business leaders should leverage social media and innovative methods for engaging customers to get feedback and ensure the co-creation of value that benefits both the customers and the business organization. Findings from this study indicate that online communication ensures customers can share their opinion about the brand and enables the business to leverage the feedback to improve on brand offerings. Also, continuous online customer education eliminates possible knowledge gaps about the brand and enhances customers' confidence to give WOM references about the brand. ITSPs leaders should explore user-friendly online digital solutions that give customers a sense of independence in their data operations and other service offerings, with a robust support structure. Dedicated customer service support with technical competence should be accessible for prompt issue resolution and adverse press prevention.

This study is majorly relevant to business leaders in ITSPs. However, other targeted audience includes (a) the participants (b) employees aspiring to become leaders of ITSPs, (c) investors and other stakeholders in IT industry, (d) business leaders across industries, (e) researchers on brand equity and ITSPs, and (f) academia. Findings may supplement existing insights that readers of this study have on brand marketing strategies for increasing customer patronage. Therefore, to disseminate the findings of this study, I will share the summary of results with participants. Also, I will use several avenues such as (a) presentation at local business seminars and conferences in Lagos, Nigeria, (b) presentation at business focus groups, (c) publication of the summary and findings in peer-reviewed professional brand marketing journals for broader access to business leaders in various industries across the world.

Recommendations for Further Research

I used a qualitative multiple case study to explore brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage. The targeted population of this qualitative multiple case study consisted of leaders of three ITSPs in Lagos, Nigeria, that adopted successful brand marketing strategies to increase patronage. A sample size of nine business leaders emerged, and as participants, they answered open-ended questions during semistructured virtual interviews. Other data collection instruments were reflective journals, review of relevant literature, and brand marketing materials obtained from the three participating organizations' websites. Limitations of this study are as follows: (a) limited geographical location, (b) industry-specific participants, (c) sample size of participants, and (d) research design.

The first recommendation is that future researchers should consider the inclusion of broader geographical coverage. The selection of cases only from Lagos, Nigeria, precluded the inclusion of conditions peculiar to businesses in other areas of the country. Future research into a broader geographical coverage may address the limitation of the transferability of results to other ITSPs across Nigeria. The second recommendation is that future researchers include business leaders of other industries apart from ITSPs to address the limitation of non-generalizability of findings to other business contexts. Also, a more comprehensive range of strategies may become apparent from using a broader research coverage area.

Similarly, I recommend that future researchers sample more organizations to discover additional brand marketing strategies that increase patronage. Such future research may result in more generalizability of findings. Although the small sample size in this study was sufficient for reaching data saturation, participants selection was from three partner organizations. Collecting data from participants selected from more partner companies could yield interesting outcomes. Future research may also focus on B2C organizations to establish whether the strategies used for B2B companies are generally applicable.

Finally, I recommend using a different methodology in future research, such as quantitative or mixed methods, to gain new insights from a different perspective. Using the quantitative approach of reducing the business problem to numerical constructs and applying mathematical operations may help ascertain possible cause and effect relationships (Matta, 2019). The mixed-methods approach may provide in-depth insight into the business problem rather than individual qualitative and quantitative approaches (McKim, 2017).

Reflections

My experience from the Walden University Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) study process has both been challenging and rewarding at the same time. I recall the excitement at the beginning of this program, having overcome all odds. I progressed quickly in the coursework and had the drive to complete the study in record time. Unfortunately, I fell into a financial crisis within 8 months of commencing, and the dream to complete the program gradually fell apart as I ran out of reserved resources. By the end of the mentoring class, I could not continue because of the inability to pay tuition. Between that point and when I had the financial ability to complete this study, 5 years went by. I did not give up throughout the challenging time but kept up hope that all would be well.

As a finance professional, my passion for identifying positive result-oriented ways of carrying on business was why I chose to explore successful brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs use for increasing customer patronage. From my experience, marketing professionals always wanted to expend financial resources on branding. Rather than spending limited resources on ineffective and wasteful strategies, I needed to identify successful strategies worth the financial investment. Therefore, I researched into leveraging brand equity for increased patronage and concurrent business expansion. I found the marketing field quite interesting and inexhaustible.

With the ease of completing the coursework, I underestimated the tediousness of doctoral study writing. Data collection and getting the cooperation of participants was exhausting, and I relearned patience and resilience. However, the eventual interview sessions were rewarding. Although the drive of participants from partner companies was different, most of the strategies used were similar. I gained new insights during the data collection process and made new important contacts that expanded my professional network. The findings of this study confirmed my proposition that using successful brand marketing strategies could improve customer patronage. I believe that business leaders should understand the strategy that works best in contexts peculiar to them to preserve business profitability. Overall, the DBA process has helped me to improve my research skills, and the learning process has enhanced my perception across all spheres.

Conclusion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs implement to increase patronage. The findings of this study revealed that leaders of successful ITSPs know how to increase patronage with strategies that attracted corporate customers and ensured business competitiveness. Four themes that emerged from this study are (a) strong brand development, (b) target marketing, (c) customer engagement, and (d) customer advocacy. Essentially, an alignment of the brand marketing strategies that leaders of ITSPs use with the target market can significantly influence the effectiveness of increasing customer patronage and business profitability. A misalignment could result in serving the wrong market and suboptimal achievement of the business objective. Given the limited number of brand equity research into ITSPs in the last 6 years, this study is an original contribution to the body of knowledge.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Initial Interview

i. Introductions to get participants settled and acquainted with the purpose of the interview.
ii. A review of the informed consent process with participants and offer assurance of my obligation to preserve confidentiality of response to questions.
iii. Obtain participant's signature on the consent form before proceeding with the interview.
iv. Obtain participant's consent before turning on the device for recording the interview proceedings.
v. Write the pseudonym assigned to the participant, the date, and time of the interview.
vi. Request that the participant reconfirm understanding of the consent form read in its entirety, and the willingness to continue with the interview.
vii. Continue the session by asking the participant the interview questions in sequential order, with follow up probing questions as appropriate.
viii. Conclude the interview session by thanking participant.
ix. Schedule a follow-up interview for member checking.

The interview questions are:

1. How do you define brand marketing strategies?
2. What brand marketing strategies have been most effective at increasing patronage in your organization?
3. What challenges had to be overcome to implement brand marketing strategies that increased patronage in your organization?
4. What marketing strategies uniquely increase brand loyalty and patronage?
5. What factors did management consider determining brand marketing strategies you adopted?
6. How has your branding increased patronage?

7. What internal strategies have you used to improve both your service quality and marketing capabilities to increase patronage?
8. What traditional marketing strategies you know (if any) have proven to increase patronage?
9. What digital and social media strategies (smartphone applications, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) have successfully increased brand patronage?
10. How have the digital or media strategies (smartphone applications, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) increased brand patronage?
11. What other knowledge would you offer about brand marketing strategies that increase brand patronage

Follow-Up Member Checking Interview

i. Acquaint participant with the member checking process.
ii. Give participant a copy of the document containing the synthesis of the interpretation of response to each of the initial interview questions.
iii. Ask related probing questions only.
iv. After the review of the synthesis of each question, confirm from the participant whether nothing was missing.
v. Thank the participant after the review of all the questions.

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Application service provider "X"
Contact Information

Date

Dear Victor T. Olufemi,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled **Managing Brand Value for Increased Patronage**. Providers to Increase Patronage within "information technology service provider X". As part of this study, I authorize you to carry out face-to-face interviews and member checking sessions with business managers having responsibilities for the market positioning and brand value development of this organization. The authorization also covers your on-site result dissemination activities. However, individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing the details of eligible managers that meet the selection criteria you will make available, the interview room, and access to public documents. We will disseminate the notice of your selection decision to volunteer participants. However, none of our personnel will supervise any of the interview sessions. We also understand that you will conduct member checking sessions to confirm with participants your interpretation of the data collected during the initial interview session. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official
Email: xxxxxx.xxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.com

Appendix C: National Institutes of Health Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Victor Olufemi** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 09/12/2015

Certification Number: 1849824

Appendix D: Permission to Use Copyright Material

SIMON & SCHUSTER

Christine J. Lee
Permissions Supervisor

1230 Ave of the Americas, 14th Fl
New York, NY 10020
Christine.Lee@simonandschuster.com

VIA EMAIL

February 9, 2017

Victor Tiwalola Olufemi
Walden University
Business Administration
Victor.olufemi@waldenu.edu

Dear Victor Tiwalola Olufemi:

You have our permission to include adaptations of figures 1-3 and 11-2 from our book, MANAGING BRAND EQUITY: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name by David A. Aaker, in your doctoral dissertation entitled "Managing brand value for competitive advantage."

The following acknowledgment is to be reprinted in all copies of your dissertation:

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Sincerely,

Christine J. Lee

Christine J. Lee

AGREED TO AND ACCEPTED

Victor Tiwalola Olufemi