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Brand Refresh, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in The Oil Industry in Kenya.

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Abstract: Customer satisfaction is a key performance indicator in the oil industry of Kenya which is determined by branding strategies and the quality of the service. Rebranding tools to increase customer experience and loyalty have become more and more popular among oil marketing companies. This paper has specifically looked at how brand refresh strategies have influenced customer satisfaction in the oil industry within Kenya. Brand Equity theory was used as the guiding theory. The research design adopted was descriptive research design that focused on station managers of Rubis Energy, Vivo Energy, and TotalEnergies in Kenya. There were 270 station managers which were the target population and a census approach was used. The major data collection tools were structured questionnaires. Pilot study was done on 27 station managers of Ola Energy and Be Energy to determine the validity and reliability of the research tool. Findings produced Cronbachs Alpha coefficients of more than 0.80 in all constructs with brand refresh yielding 0.84 and a total reliability coefficient of 0.86 indicating high internal consistency. Two hundred and one out of the 270 questionnaires distributed were returned and completed thus giving a response rate of 78.15. Data was examined through descriptive, as well as inferential statistics with the help of SPSS version 31. Results showed that brand refresh was strongly and statistically significant related to customer satisfaction ($R = 0.624$, $9 = 0.553$, $p < 0.05$). The research found that regular brand refresh activities including new logos, professional branding images and better station surroundings can make a huge contribution to customer satisfaction. It advises that the oil marketing firms should always take initiative to create brand refresh in line with customer expectations in order to remain competitive, build loyalty and enhance customer retention. The study helps in policy formulation, managerial-decision making, and literature on branding, service quality, and customer satisfaction in the oil industry.

Keywords: Branding Strategies, brand refresh, service Quality, customer satisfactions, Oil Industry, Kenya.

I. Literature Review:

Customer satisfaction is a critical element that defines the success of a business, particularly in the competitive oil and gas retailing business. It influences customer retention, repeat sales, and brand loyalty (Kosasih et al., 2024). Strategic branding programs are being employed by oil companies in the world to enhance customer experience and satisfaction. Lim et al. (2020) found that branding strategies that combine service quality and clear pricing are associated with a high degree of customer satisfaction, and Karim et al. (2021) found that customers in the emerging African markets are becoming more interested in digital brand experiences and service speed. Poor service delivery and fluctuating fuel prices remain a thorn in the flesh of branding in Kenya despite the heavy investment in branding (Owino, 2022).

Brand refresh is a strategic action that aims to revise the image of a company to make it contemporary, appealing, and competitive without changing its values (Wheeler, 2017). This is frequently the case in the petroleum industry, where visual identity redesign, digitalization, and service station refurbishment are used to improve customer perception and interaction. An effective brand renewal can enhance customer satisfaction through the provision of a modern and recognizable brand, improved access to services, and alignment with changing consumer needs.

Several studies have confirmed that brand refresh has a positive effect. According to Putri et al. (2023), the companies that launched brand refresh initiatives reported a 30 percent rise in customer satisfaction, which was caused by the renewed brand image and enhanced online communication. A report by PwC Africa (2023) on the fuel retail sector found that positive customer reviews increased by 25 percent with rebranding and digital branding due to improved service and digital experiences. Locally, Gichuhi (2023) determined that customer satisfaction increased because of digital branding, which customers appreciated because of its convenience in payments and reward programs.

Nevertheless, gaps remain. Owino (2022) found out that despite the desire of customers to have modern and sleek fuel stations, the direct impact of brand revitalization on satisfaction may be compromised by inconsistent service quality. This implies that a brand that is attractive to the eye might not provide long-term satisfaction when the quality of service falls short. This gap underscores the necessity to investigate the moderating role of service quality on the relationship between brand refresh and customer satisfaction in emerging markets like Kenya.

These findings are supported by recent studies in other settings. In research on the oil and retail industry in Sri Lanka, Niyas and Ali (2021) discovered that customer loyalty is directly related to service quality, and customer satisfaction mediates this association. Their findings emphasize the importance of integrating service quality into branding strategies to maintain loyalty. In their study of mobile phone brands in Sri Lanka, Ali and Leninkumar (2023) revealed that customer satisfaction mediates the association

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between brand associations and perceived value. This shows that good brand associations need to be reinforced by satisfaction mechanisms to create long term value.

These insights are also highlighted by global evidence. Tran, Vo, and Dinh (2020) showed that brand authenticity and brand equity are strongly correlated with customer satisfaction in Asian markets, whereas Lim, Tuli, and Grewal (2020) highlighted that satisfaction lowers the future costs of selling, which is a long-term strategic asset. These results indicate that customer satisfaction is not a transient phenomenon but a key factor in sustainable competitiveness.

These studies confirm that brand refresh improves customer satisfaction, but its success is also dependent on the degree of service quality provided. This combined view forms the basis of the current research, which examines the direct and moderated effect of brand refresh and service quality on customer satisfaction in the oil industry in Kenya.

The following is the conceptual framework.

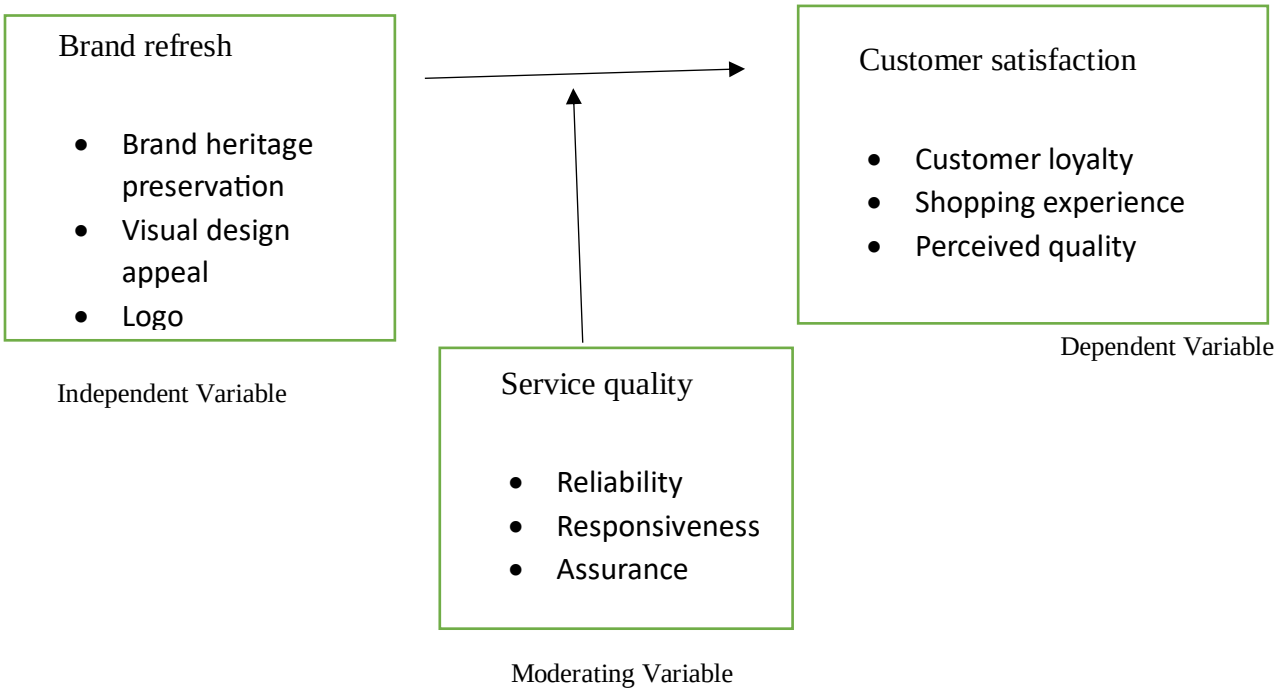

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between study variables. Brand refresh is the independent variable, which is the strategic rejuvenation of brand components, including visual identity, digitalization, and modernization of service stations. The dependent variable is customer satisfaction, which indicates the extent to which the expectations of customers are met or surpassed in the oil retail industry.

The moderating variable is service quality, which is anchored on the SERVQUAL dimensions. The framework suggests that brand refresh has a direct effect on customer satisfaction, but the intensity of this relationship is determined by the degree of service quality provided. The effect of brand refresh on customer satisfaction is enhanced when the service quality is high and reduced when service quality is low.

This framework is anchored on the Brand Equity Theory, which states that a good brand positioning leads to better customer perceptions and loyalty, and the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), which focuses on the importance of met expectations in satisfaction. It combines the findings of international and local research to give a comprehensive picture of how branding strategies, which are supplemented by service quality, lead to sustainable customer satisfaction in the oil industry in Kenya.

II. Methodology

This research was carried out in Kenya among the three biggest oil marketing firms, which are, Rubis Energy, Vivo Energy and TotalEnergies. The fact that they were present nationwide offered a perfect research environment to examine branding strategies and their effect on the level of customer satisfaction. The research design that was adopted is that of an explanatory research design to examine the effect of the brand refresh strategy on customer satisfaction, where a cross-sectional method was used.

This study was directed at the 835 station managers of the three companies as the target population. The station managers were the best respondents since they are the ones who execute the strategies of branding and quality of services. The number of respondents selected was 270, calculated by a formula of Yamane:

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$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$

$n = 835 / (1 + 835(0.05^2))$

$n = 270.45 \approx 270$ respondents

The researcher drew the sample using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure representation from each company.

Table 1: Sampling Frame

Company	Total Retail Stations	Proportional Sample Size
Vivo Energy Kenya	315	102
TotalEnergies Kenya	220	71
Rubis Energy Kenya	300	97
Total	835	270

The study tool was a self-administered structured questionnaire whose items relied on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was split into sections that revolved around respondent demographics, brand refresh, service quality and customer satisfaction. Academic supervisors and marketing experts checked the instrument to guarantee content and construct validity.

Although the research mainly used station managers as the respondents because of their direct involvement in the execution of branding and service strategies, the inclusion of customer-side data would give a balanced view of the drivers of satisfaction. First-hand experiences of service quality, pricing transparency, and brand perceptions could be obtained through customer surveys or interviews, which would provide more information than managerial reports. Such an approach is not within the scope of the current study, but it is suggested to be used in future research to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

A pilot study was conducted on 27 station managers of Ola Energy and Be Energy limited. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the instrument reliability. The total coefficient was 0.86, which means a high internal consistency and reliability.

Table 2: Reliability Test on Pilot Data

Table: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.86	15

III. Results and Discussions

The study used a descriptive and inferential analysis. Data was summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and standard deviations. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics, that is, regression analysis. The analysis of data was done on the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.0.

Respondents Response Rate

Questionnaires were given to station managers (n=270). Out of these, 211 were completed and given back; and this constituted a response rate of 78.15. This is a high rate exceeding the 60 percent standard that is acceptable when conducting research in academics, boosting reliability and generalization of the results (Richardson, 2005).

Table 3: Response Rate Summary

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Issued questionnaires	270	100%
Answered questionnaires	211	78.15%
Unanswered questionnaires	59	21.85%

Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Among the 211 people who responded, 53.1 were males and 46.9 were females. This almost even distributions means that there was equal gender representation in management positions in the sampled companies and therefore the study was able to capture the opinions of both genders. The balance contributes to the validity of data, which shows a certain level of gender inclusivity in the Kenyan oil industry.

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Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	112	53.1%
Female	99	46.9%
Total	211	100.0%

Distribution of Respondents by Years of Service

Most of the respondents (51.2 per cent) were in the bracket of 0 to 4 years hence indicating a relatively young management workforce or new promotions into such positions. A high number (41.7%) of years experience was 5 to 9 years old; this translates to the fact that there were strong presenting managers. It is only 7.1 percent that served more than 10 years. This is a distribution that implies a dynamic workforce that can fit in new branding strategies and still have enough knowledge of operations.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Years of Service

Years of Service	Frequency	Percent
0 to 4 years	108	51.2%
5 to 9 years	88	41.7%
10 to 14 years	15	7.1%
Total	211	100.0%

Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis of the brand refresh construct indicated that there was a great deal of consensus among the station managers on the positive implementation of the construct. The composite mean was 3.73 with a standard deviation of 0.75. Respondents were especially convinced that brand communication manifested the heritage of the company (Mean = 3.90) and that the existing visual design appealed to the customer (Mean = 3.72). The results show that brand refresh efforts are being well implemented and viewed in a positive manner at the station level.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Brand Refresh (N = 211)

Statement	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	SD
The rebranding retained key elements of the company's original identity.	5.2	8.1	18.5	40.3	27.9	3.85	0.92
Communication of brand image reflects the company's heritage.	4.3	7.1	17.1	42.1	29.4	3.90	0.95
The current visual design of the station attracts customer interest.	7.1	9.0	20.4	38.4	25.1	3.72	1.05
The station's branding visuals are consistent and professional.	3.3	10.0	25.1	41.2	20.4	3.68	0.88
The updated logo has improved brand recognition at the station.	8.5	11.4	22.7	35.1	22.3	3.59	1.01
The new logo has made the brand more visible in a competitive market.	6.2	10.4	23.7	37.4	22.3	3.66	0.93
Average Mean						3.73	0.96

Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. The first analysis examined the direct relationship between brand refresh and customer satisfaction.

Table 7: Regression of Brand Refresh on Customer Satisfaction

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	1.745	0.243		7.180	.000
Brand Refresh	0.553	0.043	0.624	12.799	.000
R-Square	F-statistic				
0.390	163.85				

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Table 8: Moderating Effect of Service Quality

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	1.652	0.216		7.648	.000
Brand Refresh	0.267	0.053	0.246	5.038	.000
Service Quality	0.298	0.055	0.282	5.420	.000
Brand Refresh × Service Quality	0.124	0.038	0.109	3.263	.001

The positive and statistically significant interaction (Brand Refresh x Service Quality) term was found. This observation provides a verification of the fact that service quality is a significant moderator of the relationship. Service quality is also an indicator of the beneficial effect of brand refresh on customer satisfaction. This means that the station that has a favorable outlook will attract much more satisfaction when the service is reliable, responsive and professional.

Qualitative Insights from Station Managers

The informal interviews with some of the station managers assisted in giving a sense to the quantitative results. Their answers were similar to the statistical findings with the focus on branding and service synergy.

One of the managers of a recently rebranded Rubis Energy station observed:

The new appearance saw it get a lot of new customers. They were curious. And yet our service is what makes them go back. Our staff were re-trained to be quicker and more friendly to suit the new brand. You simply cannot have an old-fashioned train with a pretty station; it does not work.

(Manager 1, Male)

Vivo Energy manager 1 mentioned a similar phrase:

We also replenished our signage and pumps last year. We have initiated a program where we are insisting on fuel and clean rest rooms at all time. It is that combination that customers discuss. The appearance attracts their attention, but the dependability makes them loyal.

(Manager 2, Female)

These findings complement the quantitative observation that although a brand refresh is an effective standalone tool, it becomes more effective in case it is accompanied by high-quality service. The expectation is generated by the new brand and a quality service meets and surpasses the expectation resulting to increased satisfaction.

IV. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The research problem addressed the effect of brand refresh on the customer satisfaction mediated by the quality of services in the oil industry in Kenya. The results have shown a significant and positive influence of brand refresh in customer satisfaction that is statistically significant ($p < .001$) and explains 39% of it. Moreover, the research proved that service quality is a positive and significant moderator in this association ($p = .001$). This shows that the success of brand refresh efforts is greatly improved when the effort is supplemented by the high service delivery criteria of reliability, responsiveness, and professionalism.

Conclusion

The empirical results of the study indicate that brand refresh positively and statistically significantly influences customer satisfaction (0.553, $p < 0.001$), which explains 39 percent of its variance. The moderating analysis established that service quality is a significant reinforcer of this relationship (interaction 0.124, $p = 0.001$). This means that renewed brand names, logos and updated station designs are more efficient with the help of credible, responsive and professional service delivery. These findings were supported by the qualitative data provided by managers who observed that although visual rebranding can attract new customers, long-term satisfaction and loyalty are based on the quality of service.

Policy wise, the findings indicate that the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA) should extend the regulatory provisions to incorporate minimum service quality provisions as part of branding approvals of oil marketing companies. By making sure that the investments in rebranding are accompanied by the visible improvements in the quality of the services, the welfare of

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the customers will be preserved, and the trust in the industry will be reinforced. Also, policymakers might promote the institutionalization of customer feedback systems (e.g., digital surveys, loyalty programs, and complaint tracking systems) by oil marketing companies that directly influence both branding and service strategies.

On the organizational level, oil companies are to implement the continuous brand refresh policy that incorporates the modern visual identity, digital technologies, and increased customer convenience, and at the same time invest in the staff training and operational stability. These dual investments guarantee that service realities are equal to brand promises, which leads to long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In conclusion, the research finds that branding strategies in the oil industry in Kenya cannot work alone. Brand refresh provides customer satisfaction benefits, which can only be maintained when service quality serves as a reinforcing loop. With this alignment entrenched in corporate practice and national policy, the oil industry in Kenya can attain sustainable competitiveness and enhanced consumer protection.

Policy Recommendations

1.Make Service Quality a Part of the Branding Plans: Oil marketing firms are encouraged to consider service quality improvement as a fundamental element of any brand re-invention effort. This will involve making investments in employee education regarding responsiveness and professionalism, the reliability of operations (e.g. the availability of fuel, the availability of working equipment) and high standards of cleanliness and convenience at every station.

2.Invest in Constant Brand Refreshing: To stay in the game, oil companies must choose to pursue a policy of continuous brand renewal. It includes constant renewal of visual objects, the use of digital technologies in payments and loyalty and the maintenance of the physical space of service stations in the modern and attractive appearance.

3.Use Customer Feedback to Strategic Alignment: It is important to have effective systems of gathering and analyzing customer feedback. Such insights are to be taken to guide not only brand refresh priorities but also service quality improvements to make sure that a strategic choice is aligned directly to customer expectations and needs.

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