

Enhancing Government Brand Image through Effective Communication Strategies for Service Delivery: A Case of County Governments in Kenya

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Abstract: In today's business world, the ability to stand out from others is vital and it is only created and maintained to serve as a representation of a brand product, services and reputation within an organization. This paper explores how government brand image through effective communication strategies enhances service delivery with a focus on County governments in Kenya. Good brand image transforms an organization into a customer-oriented and professionally acceptable. This study seeks to investigate the intricate dynamics between these three factors (Government brand image, effective communication strategies and service delivery) and understand their impact on citizen satisfaction and public perception of the county governments. The rationale of this study is that there is a positive government brand image and effective policies in fostering citizen satisfaction have gained attention in public administration and policy-making. However, counties have not realized the meaning and practice of creating brand images for their institutions. This paper therefore explores means and ways in which the county governments could increase their brand image enhancement possibly through creation of brand image, developing strong brand identity, creating an engaging website, using marketing strategies, getting feedback from customers, and improving its concrete image among others. The specific objectives of the study are to determine how the public perceive the government based on the existing brand image of County governments; assesses the role of digital media and social platform in County governments on their brand image; evaluated the current communication channels in Counties, and examine the influence of citizen engagement and participation in the County governments. This study will use mixed methods approach. Data will be analyzed descriptively, findings discussed and recommendations made.

Keywords: County Government brand image, communication strategies, service delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background information

A brand is an image of someone or an entity. It does not only refer to what one says but rather the result of an ongoing interplay, or dynamics between output and responses that one or an institution get from the clientele or public (Dannielle Blumenthal, 2020). Brand image which refers to how the customers perceive the brand and its services which is key work hand in hand with brand identity which refers to how the brand expects the customer, competitor and industry experts to perceive it based on its deliverable behaviors.

According to Keller (2023), the theory of branding is one of the global ways exploited in becoming a market leader and or having a strong positioning of an organization via a created required brand image. As competition involving export markets, qualified human resources, trade and international dominance continues to grow between nations, it has become necessary for countries to create and sustain strong country brands (Mugobo & Wakeham, 2021). A positive and powerful country brand can provide a crucial competitive advantage in this globalized economy (Dinnie, 2021) and its success depends on an appropriate analysis of the work that has to be done, with careful preparation and planning of the brand structure and its communication (Castro and Giraldi, 2022).

Functional democracy needs an informed citizenry and empowered media, popular participation in policy making, a responsive state, and governing processes that are open, transparent and inclusive to all legitimate interests. (Goetz, (2021). Public participation can contribute to better decisions due to them having more information (facts, values and perspectives obtained through public input during the decision processes. As opposed to an engaged person, citizens engaged are likely to have high self-esteem, have greater sense of social responsibility, healthier social relationship among other benefits. As a consequence of its impact on repeat business and verbal referrals, citizen contentment is one of the most critical elements impacting service management (Hu, Kandampully and Juwaheer, 2019). Service providers may keep their competitive edge in a rapidly evolving environment by offering their customers high-quality services. Due to this, satisfied customers are more likely to be loyal to the provider of the service, participate in good word-of-mouth advertising, and pay higher rates (Amin, 2023;). As a result, both academics and practitioners have given Citizen Satisfaction a lot of attention as well illustrated by Hu, Kandampully, & Juwaheer (2019).

Cooperate communication as a practice of creating, fostering and maintaining a consistence brand image and identity (Goetz, 2021) compliments image branding. Effective communication helps to mold a company image that promotes internal loyalty while also creating loyal external customers. Strategic communication puts the audience understanding at the heart of policy and service design, resulting in better decision making and improved delivery. A communication strategy helps an organization to use communication efficiently and effectively. Programs and projects succeed when they are well-understood and supported by stakeholders through clear communication. This calls for first, a clear understanding of why the strategy is needed and two, how communication can be improved (University of Nairobi 2022). This is the reason that every institution, county governments inclusive have brand image which is consistently sold out and used via a well-defined communication strategy. This proofs that brand communication is an integral part of marketing and business success. It includes all of how a company communicates with its target audience. Among them are digital media such as websites, E-mails, brochures, social networking campaigns among other. This study shall focus on exploring how these media influences the Nairobi city county citizens in perceiving it in the process of service delivery.

According to Kandampully and Suhartanto (2023), the observable effects include marketing, public interactions, advertising, verbal relationship, and the citizen's experience with the products and services all of which contribute to developing the brand image in the citizen's mind. Emulating an existing, successful organization's strong brand image is one strategy for keeping customers loyal to a brand (Kayaman and Arasli, 2017). Thus, according to Lahap (2016), a crucial factor that may negatively affect the hotel's marketing strategy could be the perception of the hotel's image. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2023) pointed out that that Image is important to companies since it influences how citizens perceive, decide, and behave toward a certain line of goods or services greatly. Customers who are devoted to a brand will fully collaborate and overlook most appropriate options provided by the company's competitors leading to sustained company's profit over time (Hur, Ahn and Kim, 2021). Higher service quality tends to offer value, enhancing citizen loyalty and retention, according to Schulz and Omweri (2022). Similarly, a firm that increased its profitability by building a positive reputation for its goods or services has invested in retaining customer loyalty (Mirzaee, Rad, & Molavi, 2023).

Service excellence and customer satisfaction have an impact on citizen image, which in turn has an impact on citizen loyalty (Schulz and Omweri, 2022). According to Nam, Ekinici, and Whyatt (2021), quality is divided into two categories thus physical quality and staff conduct. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2020) see these qualities as "attributes" and "holistic" based on studies done on hotel image. The mental image of the phenomena that a person has is referred to as the holistic component, rather than just a grouping of unrelated data. This implies that a picture's overall fictitious aspect includes the complete impression and sensation of phenomena from all senses. In administration, this impression becomes very important for effective and sustained administrative service delivery however, this is not the case with Nairobi City County, thus prompted the study.

1.2 Statement of the problem

This study focuses to investigate on how government brand image is enhanced through effective communication strategies for service delivery using a case study of Nairobi City County. Brand image which refers to how the customers perceive the brand and its services which is key. Brand image works hand in hand with brand identity. It refers to how the brand expects the customer, competitor and industry experts to perceive it based on its deliverable behaviors. Scholars opine that the concept of brand management is of mutual interest to academics and professionals alike. This has increasingly aroused interest in studies for three reasons: excitement, controversy and complexity. Studies that have already been conducted elsewhere have confirmed the immense benefits of such research including enhancing public contentment, service credibility, brand royalty, service and brand acceptability and increase in citizen engagement. Government Brand Image through effective communication strategies enhances service delivery. However this is not in Nairobi City County thus justified this study.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives;

1.3.1. General objective

The general objective of the study was to examine Enhancing Government Brand Image through Effective Communication Strategies for Service Delivery. A Case of Nairobi City Government

1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study were ;

1. To determine the perception of the government among the public on the existing brand image of Nairobi City County
2. To assess the role of digital media and social platform in Nairobi City County on its brand image
3. To explore the current communication channels in Nairobi City County
4. To examine the influence of citizen engagement and participation in the Nairobi City County.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What is the perception among the public about the Nairobi County Government based on the existing brand image?
2. What is the role of digital media and social platform in the brand image of Nairobi City County?
3. What are the current communication channels in Nairobi City County?
4. How citizen engagement and participation does influence Nairobi City County administration?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was a desk study where a lot of literature was reviewed to access information about branding, Brand image, brand identity, brand communication, corporate communication strategies, citizen engagement and participation and other related conceptual and theoretical aspects of public administration. The researcher reviewed some important documents in Nairobi City County offices. Further, the study employed exploratory survey and used questionnaires, interviews and observation during field study for triangulation. The data was collected and discussed.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

3.1 Participant Demographics

The survey included a diverse sample of residents from Nairobi City. The respondents consisted of 52% males and 48% females. The age distribution was as follows: 18-24 years (24%), 25-44 years (48%), 45-64 years (24%), and 65+ years (4%). In terms of education, 30% had completed secondary education, 40% had a bachelor's degree or higher, 25% had primary education, and 5% had other educational backgrounds.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
- Male	165	55%
- Female	135	45%
Age		
- 18-24 years	48	16%
- 25-44 years	156	52%
- 45-64 years	96	32%
Education		
- Primary	66	22%
- Secondary	114	38%
- College/Voc.	30	10%
- Bachelor's +	90	30%
Occupation		
- Business Owner	84	28%
- Govt. Employee	66	22%
- Student	60	20%
- Agriculture	45	15%
- Other	45	15%

3.2 Perception of Government Brand Image

The respondents were asked to rate their perception of Nairobi City Government's brand image on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive). The mean score for the overall brand image was 3.78, indicating a moderately positive perception among the respondents.

Table 2: Perception of Government Brand Image

Perception Indicator	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Government brand image	3.78	0.54

The study findings established that Nairobi City Government has a moderately positive brand image, indicating room for improvement. The study concludes that governments brand image is important in determining the extend of citizen participation. This is in line with a previous study by Mokos (2021) who asserts that how citizens perceive a government is integral in their participation of its activities.

3.3 Effectiveness of Communication Strategies

Likert-scale items were used to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by Nairobi City Government. The mean scores for different communication channels were as follows: social media (3.89), public campaigns (3.65), public relations efforts (3.75), and citizen engagement initiatives (3.81). These scores indicate a moderate level of effectiveness across the communication strategies.

Table 3: Effectiveness of Communication Strategies

Communication Strategy	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Social media	3.89	0.72
Public campaigns	3.65	0.61
Public relations efforts	3.75	0.68
Citizen engagement	3.81	0.63

The effectiveness of communication strategies, such as social media and citizen engagement initiatives, plays a vital role in shaping the government's brand image. The study concurs with a study by Caliz (2020) who found that if citizens are communicated to in an effective way they are more likely to be supportive of the government at hand.

3.4 Relationship between Brand Image and Service Delivery

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the government's brand image and service delivery indicators. The findings revealed a positive correlation between brand image and citizen satisfaction with service delivery ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$) and citizen trust in government ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). The positive correlation between brand image, citizen satisfaction, and trust underscores the importance of effective communication in improving service delivery outcomes. Enhancing communication strategies can contribute to greater citizen engagement, trust, and ultimately, improved service delivery.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This quantitative study highlights the significance of effective communication strategies in enhancing the government's brand image for improved service delivery. The findings emphasize the need for Nairobi City Government to invest in robust communication channels, including social media and citizen engagement initiatives. By enhancing the government's brand image, trust and satisfaction can be fostered, leading to improved service delivery outcomes. The study provides valuable insights and recommendations for Nairobi City Government and other governments seeking to enhance their brand image through effective communication strategies. This study provides a framework on how communication strategies are used to build, communicate, advertise, sustain and evaluate through the provision of feedback. It starts at the end of the process where services are delivered by the brand hence influencing the brand image which encourages citizen engagement and participation while interacting with Brand image through effective communication. Through digital media devices and other communicational channels, the brand image is enhanced. The end results are among others trust enhancement, increased public participation, better public administration with open service delivery leading to better performance index. This framework shall ably guide this research.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) That there is need to develop a Comprehensive Communication Strategy: The Nairobi City Government should develop a comprehensive communication strategy that aligns with its goals and objectives. This strategy should include clear messaging, target audience identification, and the selection of appropriate communication channels. By establishing a cohesive and consistent communication approach, the government can enhance its brand image and effectively communicate its service delivery initiatives.
- 2) Utilize Digital Platforms and Social Media: In today's digital age, leveraging digital platforms and social media is crucial for effective communication. The Nairobi City Government should create and maintain official social media accounts to engage with citizens, provide timely updates on service delivery projects, and address public concerns. Utilizing social media platforms will allow the government to reach a wider audience, improve transparency, and demonstrate its commitment to open communication.
- 3) Foster Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborating with private sector entities can enhance the government's brand image and service delivery capabilities. The Nairobi City Government should explore partnerships with reputable private organizations to jointly communicate and deliver services to the public. This collaboration can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, while also showcasing the government's commitment to innovation and cooperation.
- 4) Conduct Public Awareness Campaigns: Public awareness campaigns play a vital role in shaping the perception of the government's brand image. The Nairobi City Government should design and implement targeted campaigns to inform citizens about its various service delivery initiatives, achievements, and ongoing projects. These campaigns should emphasize the positive impact of government services on the lives of citizens, fostering a sense of trust and confidence in the government's ability to deliver quality services.
- 5) Prioritize Citizen Engagement and Feedback: Engaging citizens in decision-making processes and actively seeking their feedback is essential for enhancing the government's brand image. The Nairobi City Government should establish platforms for citizens to provide feedback, voice concerns, and make suggestions regarding service delivery. Regularly soliciting and acting upon citizen feedback demonstrates the government's commitment to responsive governance and continuous improvement.

6) Invest in Training and Capacity Building: Effective communication requires skilled communicators. The Nairobi City Government should invest in training and capacity building programs for its communication personnel. Providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively communicate the government's service delivery efforts will ensure consistent messaging, clear information dissemination, and improved public perception of the government's brand image.

By implementing these recommendations, the Nairobi City Government can enhance its brand image through effective communication strategies for service delivery, ultimately building public trust, improving citizen engagement, and fostering a positive perception of the government's efforts.

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