



## Research Article

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# Relationship Marketing: Its Relevancy and Efficacy to Business Organizations: A Focus of Supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya

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**Abstract:** Relationship marketing has gained significance among supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya as a strategy to enhance customer loyalty and gain a competitive advantage. This study examined the relevance and efficacy of relationship marketing practices in improving business performance in Kisii's unique sociocultural context. A descriptive research design was employed, with data collected from 30 supermarket managers and 300 customers using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that personalized communication and customer engagement strategies were effectively utilized, with multichannel approaches and cultural alignment fostering trust and satisfaction among customers. Loyalty programs were well-structured and positively perceived by customers, although regression analysis suggested the need for refinement to better suit local consumer behavior patterns. Customized marketing strategies reflected Kisii's cultural values and community preferences; however, their impact on competitive performance was limited, indicating potential implementation gaps in the study area. Challenges such as weak customer engagement, infrastructural limitations, and resource constraints were identified as barriers affecting customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior. Recommendations emphasize enhancing personalized communication, optimizing loyalty programs, deepening community involvement, and integrating digital initiatives while considering local constraints. This study confirms the crucial role of relationship marketing, particularly personalized communication, in driving supermarket competitiveness in Kisii Township. However, it also underscores the need for continuous adaptation and improvement of loyalty programs and customization efforts to align with local market dynamics and overcome operational challenges. These insights provide a framework for supermarkets to strengthen their relationship marketing approaches, fostering long-term customer loyalty and sustainable business success in Kisii's retail environment.

**Keywords:** Relationship marketing, Customer loyalty, Competitive advantage, Personalized communication, Customer engagement, Loyalty programs, Community involvement, Cultural alignment, Digital initiatives, Customer retention

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## INTRODUCTION

The global significance of relationship marketing is evident through its varied applications across Europe, America, and India, where businesses prioritize long-term customer relationships to enhance loyalty and competitive advantage. In Europe, companies emphasize personalized experiences and sustainability as core relationship-marketing strategies (Magatef *et al.*, 2023). European retailers invest in loyalty programs, communications, and social responsibility initiatives that appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, cultivate brand trust, and improve their customer retention. In the United States, relationship marketing utilizes data analytics and digital platforms to customize interactions (Das *et al.*, 2024). Businesses employ CRM systems, targeted promotions, and omnichannel strategies to maintain customer communications. American retailers use loyalty cards and mobile applications to reward purchases and collect insights to personalize their offers (Dewnarain *et al.*, 2018). In India, relationship marketing adapts to a diverse and evolving market through trust, community engagement, and personalized services (Sofi *et al.* 2020).

Indian businesses integrate traditional interpersonal approaches with digital tools, using community promotions and mobile technology to connect with urban and rural customers (Mokha and Kumar, 2021). These examples show how relationship marketing aligns with local cultural values and technological contexts while maintaining personalized customer engagement.

Relationship Marketing in Africa is highly relevant and effective for business organizations, given the continent's unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics. African markets often prioritize interpersonal trust, community ties, and long-term engagement, making Relationship Marketing a strategic approach to fostering customer loyalty and sustainable business growth (Agu *et al.*, 2024). Businesses that focus on personalized communication, customer retention, and mutual value creation are better equipped to navigate challenges such as market fragmentation, limited infrastructure, and diverse consumer preferences (Ijomah *et al.* 2024). Furthermore, Relationship Marketing helps local businesses establish competitive advantages by building strong networks and enhancing brand reputation in a context where word-of-mouth and social connections

are highly influential. Consequently, adopting Relationship Marketing strategies allows African organizations to deepen customer relationships, improve service quality, and achieve long-term profitability in a rapidly evolving business environment (Gazi *et al.*, 2024).

In Kenya, relationship marketing has gained increasing significance as businesses acknowledge the necessity of fostering long-term, trust-based relationships with customers to enhance loyalty and secure competitive advantage (Omol *et al.*, 2024). This strategy is particularly effective in Kenya's dynamic and culturally diverse market, where customizing offerings to align with local consumer needs and expectations promotes customer retention and encourages positive word-of-mouth. The impact of relationship marketing is especially evident in sectors such as banking, telecommunications, retail, and supermarkets, where personalized communication, attentive after-sales service, and active customer engagement contribute to heightened satisfaction and repeat patronage (Akinyi *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the widespread adoption of digital platforms and mobile technology in Kenya has broadened the scope of relationship marketing, facilitating continuous interactive dialogue with customers that enhances responsiveness and strengthens brand affinity (Ooko 2023). For supermarkets in Kisii Township and beyond, employing these strategies is essential for differentiation, building customer loyalty and sustaining growth amid intense competition.

### Statement of the Problem

Relationship marketing is characterized by a business's emphasis on long-term customer engagement rather than short-term sales, focusing on cultivating trust, loyalty, and personalized interaction. This approach is particularly pertinent to business organizations because it promotes deeper connections with customers, resulting in increased customer retention, positive word-of-mouth, and enhanced brand equity. The effectiveness of relationship marketing is rooted in its capacity to facilitate mutually beneficial exchanges, wherein businesses acquire valuable customer insights and repeat business, and customers benefit from tailored experiences and consistent value. By investing in sustained relationships, organizations can distinguish themselves in competitive markets, reduce marketing costs, and achieve sustainable growth.

Relationship marketing in supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya, faces significant challenges that impede its effectiveness. A key issue is weak customer engagement, as many supermarkets lack consistent communication with their customers. According to a 2023 survey by the Kisii Retail Association, over 60% of customers reported infrequent communication from supermarkets, which negatively impacted customer loyalty. Loyalty programs are poorly implemented; only 25% of supermarkets have formal loyalty schemes, with

participation rates of less than 15%. Supermarkets fail to tailor their marketing strategies to Kisii consumers, who prioritize community trust and personalized service. A 2022 study showed that 70% of Kisii shoppers value interpersonal interactions over generic promotions; however, supermarkets rely on non-customized advertising. This results in low customer satisfaction, with only 40% of customers expressing satisfaction with their shopping experience. Consequently, supermarkets experience diminished customer retention, with a repeat purchase rate of 35%, which is lower than the national average of 50%. Addressing these issues requires the development of relationship marketing strategies that emphasize personalized communication, relevant loyalty programs, and community engagement tailored to the Kisii retail environment.

Despite the significance of relationship marketing in promoting customer loyalty and competitive advantage, there remains a gap in understanding its application in supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya. Magatef *et al.* (2023) investigated electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) strategies' impact on customer loyalty. Their findings contribute to understanding the relationship between e-CRM strategies and customer loyalty in Jordan, showing the mediating role of customer relationship quality in the telecommunications sector. Sofi *et al.* (2020) examined customer relationship management (CRM) dimensions' effect on hotel customer satisfaction in Kashmir. The results showed a significant relationship between CRM dimensions (customer orientation, knowledge management, and CRM organization) and customer satisfaction. Ooko (2023) explored relationship marketing and brand loyalty among mobile telecom providers in Nairobi County, Kenya, finding a positive relationship with relationship marketing accounting for 60.1% of brand loyalty variance. Akinyi *et al.* (2024) studied relationship marketing and customer loyalty among deposit-taking SACCOs in Western Kenya. The findings suggest that SACCOs should develop user-friendly digital platforms, utilize data analytics for targeted marketing, and prioritize personalized services while considering regulatory changes. The existing literature mainly addresses relationship marketing in broader market settings, neglecting Kisii's retail environment dynamics. This gap limits organizations' ability to leverage strategies for their unique conditions. Examining the efficacy of relationship marketing in this setting is crucial for developing approaches to enhance the performance of supermarkets in Kisii Township.

### Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relevance and effectiveness of relationship marketing in improving business performance, fostering customer loyalty, and securing a competitive advantage among supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya. Specifically, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To evaluate the scope and efficacy of personalized communication and customer engagement strategies utilized by supermarkets in Kisii Township.
- To assess the implementation and impact of loyalty programs on customer retention within Kisii supermarkets.
- To examine how supermarkets in Kisii customize their relationship marketing strategies to align with local consumer preferences and community values.
- To identify the challenges confronting relationship marketing practices in Kisii supermarkets and their effects on customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior.
- To propose strategic recommendations for enhancing relationship marketing approaches to promote sustainable growth and competitive advantage in Kisii's supermarket sector.

#### Research questions for the study

- What is the scope and effectiveness of the personalized communication and customer engagement strategies employed by supermarkets in Kisii Township?
- How are loyalty programs implemented in Kisii supermarkets, and what impact do they have on customer retention in Kisii supermarkets?
- In what ways do supermarkets in Kisii customize their relationship marketing strategies to reflect local consumer preferences and community values?
- What challenges do supermarkets in Kisii face in applying relationship marketing practices, and how do these challenges affect customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behaviors?
- What strategic recommendations can enhance relationship marketing approaches to foster sustainable growth and competitive advantage in Kisii's supermarket sector?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

#### Relationship Marketing Theory

Relationship Marketing Theory advocates emphasize cultivating enduring relationships between organizations and customers rather than focusing solely on transactions. They argue that building trust, commitment, and customer satisfaction leads to increased loyalty, repeat business, and favorable word-of-mouth, contributing to competitive advantage (Ramasamy *et al.*, 2024). These proponents stress that relationship marketing shifts the focus from short-term sales to continuous engagement, emphasizing personalized communication, customer retention, and value creation (Gazi *et al.*, 2024). This approach aligns marketing with organizational objectives by fostering emotional and social connections with customers and enhancing their business performance.

Relationship Marketing Theory assumes that enduring relationships between businesses and their

customers generate sustained value beyond individual transactions. Trust, commitment, communication, and mutual benefits are essential for the development and maintenance of these relationships (Al Karim *et al.*, 2023). The theory suggests that customers favor ongoing interactions with firms that comprehend and address their evolving needs, thereby fostering loyalty and retention. Within the context of business organizations, Relationship Marketing is pertinent and effective as it shifts the focus from short-term sales to long-term engagement, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (Thanyawatpornkul, 2024). By cultivating strong relational bonds, businesses can reduce marketing costs, increase repeat business, and stimulate positive word-of-mouth, ultimately improving overall organizational performance.

Critiques of Relationship Marketing Theory often highlight its idealistic assumptions about customer behavior and organizational capabilities. Critics argue that the theory overemphasizes long-term, trust-based relationships, neglecting scenarios in which transactional exchanges are more practical (Ijomah *et al.*, 2024; Khan *et al.*, 2020). The theory assumes that all customers value personalized communication and mutual commitment equally, which may not apply across diverse markets or cultural contexts, such as the varied consumer preferences in Kisii Township, Kenya. Concerns exist regarding the resource-intensive nature of implementing relationship marketing strategies, which challenge smaller businesses with limited capacities (Arora *et al.*, 2021). The theory may understate power dynamics and competition in markets where external factors, such as infrastructure limitations or fragmented markets, affect relationship-building efforts (Anjorin *et al.* 2024). These criticisms suggest the need for contextual adaptation to address practical constraints and varying consumer expectations in different business environments.

Relationship Marketing Theory is employed to examine supermarkets in Kisii Township, emphasizing the importance of long-term, trust-based customer relationships to enhance loyalty and competitive advantage. The theory's focus on personalized communication, customer retention, and mutual value creation aligns with the assessment of how supermarkets engage customers through strategies that reflect local community value. By adopting relationship marketing principles, Kisii supermarkets can shift from transactional interactions to sustained engagement, fostering emotional and social connections that enhance customer satisfaction and encourage repeat purchase. The theory's emphasis on trust, commitment, and dialogue supports the exploration of challenges such as weak customer engagement and poor loyalty programs, highlighting the need for adaptations to address Kisii's unique sociocultural environment. Thus, Relationship Marketing Theory provides a framework for analyzing relationship marketing practices in Kisii's supermarket sector.

## Empirical Studies Review

Agu *et al.* (2024) present a review connecting sustainable business practices with brand loyalty, highlighting sustainability's environmental, social, and economic dimensions and its impact on consumer trust. Their analysis emphasizes the importance of transparency and ethical engagement in fostering consumer relationships that promote brand loyalty. This focus on sustainability aligns with trends toward socially conscious markets, where responsible corporate citizenship provides competitive advantages. Supermarkets' trust-building efforts through personalized communication and community engagement can be enhanced by incorporating sustainable practices that align with consumer values. Given Kisii's emphasis on interpersonal trust, integrating sustainability can strengthen relationships and competitively distinguish supermarkets. However, Agu *et al.*'s framework requires careful adaptation for application in Kisii, Kenya. The identified infrastructural limitations may restrict smaller supermarkets' ability to implement sustainability initiatives. While Agu *et al.* emphasized transparency, operationalizing these principles remains challenging in markets with communication gaps and weak loyalty programs.

Ijomah *et al.* (2024) analyze Big Data Analytics' role in Customer Relationship Management (CRM), highlighting its impact on customer engagement and retention. Their research shows how Big Data enables personalized customer experiences through predictive analytics and real-time data analysis. This aligns with relationship marketing principles, emphasizing personalized communication and customer engagement for loyalty, particularly in Kisii Township supermarkets. This study examines sentiment analysis for engagement strategies and predictive models to prevent customer churn, addressing key challenges in relationship-based marketing in Kisii supermarkets. Through data-driven insights, this study provides a framework for enhancing loyalty programs and offering solutions to overcome generic promotions in supermarkets in Kisii. However, the focus on advanced tools such as machine learning raises concerns regarding their contextual applicability. Infrastructural constraints in African retail contexts may hinder the adoption of Big Data solutions, particularly for smaller supermarkets facing financial and technical limitations. While the study considers ethical aspects, it inadequately addresses sociocultural factors affecting relationship marketing in Kisii, such as interpersonal trust and preferences. The integration of Big Data Analytics with these cultural elements requires further exploration.

Magatef *et al.* (2023) analyze electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) in Jordanian telecommunications, examining functional and personal dimensions' influence on customer loyalty, with perceived customer relationship (CR) quality as mediator. Using structural equation modeling from 301

online shoppers, the study reveals that the functional dimension enhances customer loyalty directly, while the personal dimension has a negative direct effect on customer loyalty. Both dimensions improve perceived CR quality, which positively influences loyalty, thereby confirming the mediating role of CR quality. This study provides insights into e-CRM dynamics and offers recommendations for telecommunications firms. However, several limitations emerge regarding relationship marketing in Kisii Township supermarkets. The Jordanian telecommunications context differs significantly from Kisii's retail environment in terms of sector characteristics and socio-cultural dynamics. Kisii emphasizes interpersonal trust and face-to-face interactions, elements that are not fully addressed by e-CRM strategies. The negative effect of the personal dimension suggests that personalization may not be universally successful. Kisii supermarkets face weak customer engagement, inadequate loyalty programs, and a preference for community-based trust. These factors indicate that strategies effective in technologically advanced sectors require modification to address Kisii's infrastructural constraints and cultural preferences. While Magatef *et al.*'s study enhances the understanding of e-CRM's role, its applicability to Kisii supermarkets requires contextual adaptation. Relationship marketing in Kisii should emphasize personalized, community-focused engagement beyond electronic channels to build customer loyalty and accommodate local sociocultural realities.

Thanyawatpornkul (2024) examined AI-driven Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems in Thailand's retail sector, focusing on customer experience enhancement through chatbots, predictive analytics, and personalized marketing. This study analyzed customer transaction records, CRM logs, and sales metrics to demonstrate improvements in efficiency and loyalty. The findings demonstrate reduced response times through chatbots, better customer retention via predictive identification, and a 30% increase in sales from personalized marketing methods. This study shows a correlation between AI-CRM adoption and business performance in digital retail. Evaluating the relevance of relationship marketing in Kisii Township supermarkets reveals both insights and limitations of the study. The AI-driven CRM approach aligns with personalized communication principles central to loyalty building, addressing weak customer engagement in Kisii's retail environment. However, Thailand's advanced digital infrastructure differs from that of Kisii Township, where infrastructure constraints and community trust play key roles. The Kisii setting requires strategies that balance technology with face-to-face interactions and community values. The resource requirements of AI-CRM systems may challenge smaller supermarkets. While Thanyawatpornkul's quantitative approach measures operational outcomes, it may not fully capture the trust and social connections crucial in Kisii's

customer relationships, where interpersonal trust and word-of-mouth remain significant factors.

Gazi *et al.* (2024) analyzed the relationships between organizational commitment (OC), knowledge management (KM), and customer relationship management (CRM) in telecommunications and examined their impact on customer profitability (CP) and loyalty (CL). Using structural equation modeling on data from 100 Bangladeshi telecom consumers, the study reveals that KM and OC enhance CRM performance, driving CP and CL through customer satisfaction (CS) mediation, with brand image as a moderator. This framework demonstrates CRM's impact of CRM depends on organizational capabilities and brand perceptions. However, applying these findings to supermarkets in Kisii Township is challenging. The telecommunications focus in Bangladesh differs from Kisii's retail environment, where sociocultural dynamics and infrastructural limitations emphasize interpersonal trust over technological solutions. The small sample size and mixed survey method limit generalizability in contexts such as Kisii, which has varying digital adoption. While brand image moderation is relevant in competitive markets, community reputation may be more significant in Kisii, Kenya. Although Gazi *et al.*'s emphasis on organizational factors provides valuable insights, their study does not address specific challenges, such as weak customer engagement and poor loyalty program implementation in Kisii supermarkets.

Sofi *et al.* (2020) investigate four Customer Relationship Management (CRM) dimensions—customer orientation, CRM organization, knowledge management, and CRM-based technology—on customer satisfaction in Kashmir's hospitality industry. Their empirical study revealed significant positive correlations between most CRM dimensions and customer satisfaction, with customer orientation, knowledge management, and CRM organization being key satisfaction determinants. However, CRM-based technology has a weak impact on satisfaction, indicating its underutilization as a passive repository rather than an analytical tool for customer experience. This highlights a common CRM challenge: overreliance on technology without maximizing its potential. Applying these findings to Kisii Township supermarkets reveals both the parallels and limitations. The emphasis on customer orientation and knowledge management aligns with Kisii supermarkets' need for personalized communication and community engagement, which are vital for building trust and loyalty. While an effective CRM organization can address customer engagement deficiencies in Kisii supermarkets, the context differs from Kashmir's hospitality sector in terms of technological infrastructure and consumer behavior. The weak technological impact in Kashmir serves as a warning for Kisii supermarkets, where infrastructure constraints may further limit CRM technology adoption in Kisii supermarkets. Additionally, Kisii's community-based trust dynamics may require

CRM approaches that combine personal interaction with technology.

Alam *et al.* (2021) analyzed how customer trust moderates the relationship between CRM components and customer loyalty in Bangladesh's banking sector. Their research shows that customer orientation, advocacy, and knowledge positively affect loyalty, whereas customer engagement does so not. Customer trust moderates only the relationship between customer knowledge and loyalty, revealing the complex dynamics of CRM effectiveness in the banking sector. Examining this study within relationship marketing in Kisii Township supermarkets shows both similarities and differences. Both contexts emphasize trust and personalized customer interactions to ensure loyalty. However, Alam *et al.*'s findings from an advanced banking sector differ from those of Kisii supermarkets, where infrastructure limitations and community-based trust dominate. Kisii supermarkets face weak customer engagement and poor loyalty programs compared to those in the banking sector. Alam *et al.*'s finding that trust moderates only between customer knowledge and loyalty suggests knowledge dissemination is crucial, aligning with Kisii's emphasis on personalized communication. However, the limited moderating effect of trust in their study may not reflect the Kisii retail market, where trust influences multiple aspects of relationship marketing. The formal CRM systems in banking differ from Kisii supermarkets' informal practices, indicating that Alam *et al.*'s findings require contextual adaptation. Kisii requires strategies that incorporate face-to-face interactions and community trust-building beyond the moderation observed in this study.

Arora *et al.* (2021) examined Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) as an advancement of traditional CRM, highlighting the role of social media in customer engagement (CE). Their study used self-administered questionnaires and statistical analysis to show that effective SCRM enhances CE and positively impacts customer loyalty (CL), retention (CR), and satisfaction (CS). However, several challenges have emerged in the context of Kisii Township's supermarkets. The region faces infrastructural limitations, low digital adoption, and an emphasis on interpersonal trust and community interaction. These factors limit the applicability of SCRM strategies, which assume high levels of digital engagement. Kisii supermarkets face weak customer engagement and poor loyalty programs, with customers preferring face-to-face communication to digital promotion. The resource demands for implementing SCRM systems, noted in the African context, further restrict supermarkets in Kisii. While Arora *et al.*'s core finding—that customer engagement drives loyalty, retention, and satisfaction—remains relevant, Kisii supermarkets must adapt SCRM to blend community trust and interpersonal

communication with feasible digital initiatives to remain competitive.

Nanhe and Nanhe (2024) present an overview of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), emphasizing customer satisfaction as a key metric of how supplier responses meet customer needs. Their framework aligns with relationship marketing principles, wherein satisfaction drives strong customer-supplier relationships. This study links high customer satisfaction to business success, positioning satisfaction as the key to customer loyalty, which is the inclination to maintain supplier engagement and repeat purchases. In examining relationship marketing for Kisii Township supermarkets, Nanhe and Nanhe's concepts align with the literature's focus on personalized communication and trust. Their emphasis on satisfaction driving loyalty relates to the challenges Kisii supermarkets face in terms of customer retention and weak loyalty programs. Focusing on satisfaction as a loyalty mediator supports the need for Kisii supermarkets to develop tailored, community-sensitive strategies rather than generic promotions. However, Nanhe and Nanhe's overview lacks specificity regarding Kisii's unique sociocultural and infrastructural constraints. Unlike the selected literature emphasizing locally adapted marketing strategies, their study overlooks resource limitations and community engagement, which are crucial for African markets. While they identified satisfaction as vital for loyalty, they did not explore how satisfaction is achieved in complex markets such as Kisii, Kenya. The literature suggests integrating personalized communication and community involvement to improve satisfaction and retention rates - operational insights that would enhance Nanhe and Nanhe's framework.

Khan *et al.* (2020) analyzed the connections between customer relationship management (CRM), corporate reputation, and customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction as a mediating variable in Pakistani SMEs. This study demonstrates that CRM and corporate reputation positively influence customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction partially mediating these effects. While the findings emphasize trust-building and strategic marketing initiatives, their applicability to Kisii Township supermarkets is limited. The socio-economic conditions and consumer behavior in Kisii differ significantly from those in Pakistan's urban environment. Kisii's retail sector emphasizes community ties and interpersonal trust, which are less prominent in Khan *et al.*'s framework. The study's focus on formal organizational structures may not suit the personalized nature of relationship marketing in Kisii supermarkets, where face-to-face communication is crucial for building customer loyalty. Khan *et al.* did not address the resource constraints faced by businesses in markets such as Kisii, which negatively affect CRM implementation. While the study supports CRM's role in fostering loyalty, it lacks adaptation to the Kisii retail environment. The challenges faced by Kisii supermarkets, including weak customer

engagement and a preference for community-based interactions, require a more nuanced approach than the formal strategies proposed by Khan *et al.* Success requires integrating these insights with localized strategies that prioritize interpersonal trust and community values.

Ooko's (2023) study on relationship marketing and brand loyalty among mobile telecommunication providers in Nairobi County, Kenya, provides insights into cultivating customer loyalty in competitive markets. Using relationship marketing theory and a descriptive research design, this study evaluated the influence of relationship marketing on brand loyalty in a sample of 443 participants. The analysis revealed that relationship marketing accounts for 60.1% of the variance in brand loyalty, highlighting its importance as a strategic tool for telecommunications firms. Despite this positive relationship, challenges persist in achieving the desired loyalty levels, as shown by the increased churn rates among providers, such as Safaricom and Airtel. This study recommends enhanced human interaction, employee empowerment, and value co-creation to deepen customer engagement. In the context of Kisii Township's supermarkets, similar competitive environments exist where relationship marketing aims to build trust and loyalty among customers. Ooko's findings emphasize personalized communication and customer-centric approaches, which Kisii supermarkets currently underutilize. While telecommunication firms leverage digital platforms for relationship marketing, Kisii supermarkets face infrastructure limitations and rely more on interpersonal trust than on digital platforms. This study affirms the effectiveness of relationship marketing while highlighting the need for contextual adaptation in Kisii supermarkets' marketing strategies.

Bouhtati *et al.* (2023) contribute to the discourse on integrating Big Data Analytics within Customer Relationship Management (CRM), emphasizing customer knowledge as a strategic asset. Their methodology employs a hierarchical model using fuzzy logic to evaluate the impact of big data marketing indicators on CRM, providing a framework for understanding how big data enhances CRM. This aligns with the scholarly consensus that data-driven insights improve personalized communication and customer engagement in relationship marketing. However, the study's focus on big data in CRM remains largely conceptual. The identification of key challenges, including data storage constraints, quality issues, processing complexities, and high costs, reflects barriers that align with the findings from Kisii Township supermarkets, where infrastructural limitations impede the adoption of advanced technology. These limitations highlight the challenges of applying big data-driven CRM strategies to enterprises that lack sophisticated analytical capabilities. While Bouhtati *et al.* proposed that big data-enhanced CRM could support various managerial dimensions, their model did not address

crucial sociocultural factors in Kisii's retail environment. The literature on relationship marketing in Kisii emphasizes interpersonal trust and community engagement rooted in local values—elements that big data analytics cannot fully replace. This highlights the need for contextual adaptation by integrating technology with culturally sensitive marketing.

Akinyi *et al.* (2024) analyze relationship marketing (RM) within deposit-taking SACCOs in Western Kenya, examining digital platforms' moderating role on customer loyalty. This study addresses the competitive pressures and declining customer bases faced by SACCOs, reflecting the challenges in other sectors, such as Kisii Township supermarkets. The theoretical foundation combines Relationship Commitment, Social Exchange, and Commitment Trust theories, emphasizing trust and commitment in customer relationships. Methodologically, the study employs a quantitative design with 396 respondents from 23 SACCOs, using systematic sampling and statistical techniques (Pearson's correlation and regression analyses). The high response rate (87.63%) strengthens the data quality. The finding that digital platforms significantly moderate the RM-customer loyalty relationship aligns with studies by Dewnarain *et al.* (2018) and Ooko (2023), showing the potential of technology to enhance customer experience through continuous dialogue and tailored communication. However, the SACCO-specific focus limits the transferability of the findings to Kisii supermarkets, where infrastructural constraints and a preference for face-to-face interactions are prevalent. Unlike SACCOs, Kisii supermarkets face weak customer engagement and low loyalty program participation due to limited digital platform adoption. While the study recommends investing in user-friendly digital platforms and data analytics, regulatory considerations highlight contextual factors often overlooked in the retail sector, such as Kisii's supermarkets, where informal practices complicate implementation.

Oduor and Maende (2023) analyzed relationship marketing strategies and customer retention at the Postal Corporation of Kenya in Nairobi, Kenya. This study examines the influence of marketing practices on retention within the public sector context using commitment-trust theory, transactional cost theory, customer engagement marketing theory, and customer service theory. This study employed a descriptive design that targeted 300 managers across departments. A pilot study and reliability testing (Cronbach's  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ ) validated the data collection instruments. Simple random sampling yielded 90 managers (30% of the population), although this sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. Data analysis used descriptive and inferential statistics, and the results are presented in tables. The findings show that preferential treatment, customer rewards, relationship commitment, and customer orientation positively influence customer

retention, thereby supporting the principles of relationship marketing theory. However, the study's focus on a single formal institution limits its applicability to the retail supermarket sector of Kisii Township, where different socio-cultural dynamics and consumer preferences exist. Kisii supermarkets face challenges in customer engagement and loyalty programs and rely more on interpersonal trust than other supermarkets. While recommendations for preferential treatment and rewards remain relevant, they must be adapted to Kisii consumer behavior. The study's advocacy for relationship marketing strategies does not adequately address the operational challenges faced by smaller retail businesses in Kisii, and its policy recommendations may be more suited to regulated sectors than to fragmented supermarket markets.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive research design was employed to investigate relationship marketing strategies in supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya. This approach captures information on personalized communication, loyalty programs, customer engagement, and the challenges encountered by supermarkets. This enables the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate practices and their impact on customer loyalty and performance. The research was conducted in Kisii Township, southwestern Kenya, which has a dynamic retail environment with diverse consumer preferences based on community ties and trust. The township's supermarkets of varying sizes provide a representative context to explore relationship marketing in a semi-urban African retail setting. The target population included supermarket managers and customers, with managers providing insights into strategy implementation and customers providing perspectives on engagement and loyalty. Stratified random sampling ensured the representation of large-, medium-, and small-scale supermarkets.

The sample comprised 30 supermarket managers selected through purposive sampling from the principal supermarkets in Kisii Township. For customers, a sample of 300 was determined using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error based on the estimated customer base. Primary data collection employed structured, closed-ended questionnaires administered in person at supermarket premises over four weeks to maximize the response rates. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression analyses) to examine the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer retention indicators. To ensure content validity, the questionnaires were reviewed by experts in marketing and retail management fields. A pilot test was conducted with a small sample of

supermarket managers and customers outside the primary study area to refine clarity and relevance. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 for internal consistency.

After gathering the data, a comprehensive analysis was conducted to transform the raw information into meaningful insights. This critical step ensured that the collected data were comprehensible and valuable to the readers. The choice of data analysis tool was based on the specific characteristics of the dataset. Given the quantitative nature of this research, multiple regression models were employed to investigate the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. This statistical method allows for the examination of how several independent variables collectively impact a dependent variable, providing in-depth insights into the underlying patterns and relationships in the data. The regression model used in this study is represented by the following equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + e$$

Where Y represents relationship marketing in supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya, and  $X_1$  through  $X_4$  represent various factors influencing relationship marketing. These factors include personalized communication, loyalty programs, customized marketing strategies, and the marketing challenges faced by supermarkets in the region. The regression coefficients ( $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ ,  $\beta_3$ , and  $\beta_4$ ) indicate the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable, while  $\beta_0$  represents the constant factor and e accounts for the error term.

This study acknowledges potential limitations, such as response bias due to self-reporting and infrastructural constraints that impact data collection. Efforts to mitigate these limitations included triangulation of data sources, and careful sampling.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Evaluating the Scope and Efficacy of Personalized Communication and Customer Engagement Strategies Utilized by Supermarkets in Kisii Township.

The survey results indicate that supermarkets in Kisii Township demonstrate robust, personalized communication and customer engagement. Key findings include the following: Regular communication through personalized messages tailored to customer preferences (M = 4.4723, SD = 0.61326); communication strategies that effectively address the specific needs and concerns of Kisii customers (M = 4.1402, SD = 0.74702); active engagement across multiple channels, including face-to-face, phone, social media, and SMS (M = 4.2731, SD = 0.68257); personalized communication significantly enhancing customer trust in the brand (M = 4.5277, SD = 0.58228); encouragement of customer feedback and prompt response to inquiries and complaints (M =

4.2657, SD = 0.64081); customer engagement activities such as events and promotions effectively fostering a sense of community and loyalty (M = 4.3875, SD = 0.72090); effective use of customer data to customize relevant offers and promotions (M = 4.3247, SD = 0.73390); sufficient frequency of communication to keep customers informed and engaged (M = 4.3690, SD = 0.65856); efforts to understand and incorporate local cultural values into customer interactions (M = 4.5092, SD = 0.64901); and an overall positive influence of personalized communication and engagement strategies on shopping experience and loyalty (M = 4.4170, SD = 0.62622). The aggregate mean score of 4.3686 (SD = 0.35882) suggests a generally high level of agreement among respondents that these personalized communication and engagement strategies are effective and positively impact on customer loyalty and satisfaction.

### Loyalty program implementation on customer retention in Kisii supermarkets.

The data presented reveal that the loyalty programs in supermarkets in Kisii Township are well-structured, effectively communicated, and highly valued by customers. The key findings include: clear communication of loyalty programs to customers (M = 4.3764, SD = 0.73437); high active participation rates in loyalty programs (M = 4.3616, SD = 0.66266); rewards and benefits that motivate increased shopping frequency (M = 4.3542, SD = 0.67218); tailoring of loyalty programs to meet local customer preferences and needs (M = 4.3985, SD = 0.66377); regular updates to maintain the attractiveness and relevance of loyalty programs (M = 4.4945, SD = 0.71942); positive influence of loyalty program participation on customers' decisions to continue shopping at the same supermarket (M = 4.3506, SD = 0.61973); simplicity and convenience in enrolling and redeeming rewards (M = 4.5609, SD = 0.64620); encouragement to recommend supermarkets to family and friends through loyalty programs (M = 4.3985, SD = 0.62349); effective use of customer data from loyalty programs to offer personalized promotions and discounts (M = 4.4576, SD = 0.62439); and overall improvement in customer satisfaction and increased likelihood of repeat purchases due to loyalty programs (M = 4.4649, SD = 0.66505). The aggregate mean score of 4.4218 (SD = 0.34802) reflects a strong positive perception of loyalty programs among customers, underscoring their significant role in enhancing customer retention and satisfaction at supermarkets in Kisii, Kenya.

### Customization of Relationship Marketing Strategies by Supermarkets in Kisii Township

The data presented indicate that supermarkets in Kisii Township adeptly tailor their relationship marketing strategies to align with local consumer preferences and community values, as demonstrated by the high mean scores across the various dimensions (aggregate M = 4.3805, SD = 0.33381). Key elements include tailoring communication to reflect Kisii's

cultural values and traditions ( $M = 4.3100$ ), which fosters trust and resonates with local customers; designing marketing promotions that address the specific needs and preferences of the local consumer base ( $M = 4.3432$ ), ensuring relevance and appeal; actively engaging with community leaders and groups ( $M = 4.3100$ ), which facilitates a deeper understanding of consumer expectations and fosters community trust; providing personalized services aligned with the social and interpersonal trust valued by customers ( $M = 4.3100$ ), thereby reinforcing relational bonds; utilizing local languages or dialects in marketing communication ( $M = 4.6716$ ), which significantly enhances customer connection and trust; emphasizing community involvement and social responsibility within marketing strategies ( $M = 4.3137$ ), thereby strengthening brand reputation and loyalty; adapting loyalty programs to reflect communal and relational preferences ( $M = 4.4539$ ), making rewards more meaningful and culturally appropriate; and regularly seeking customer feedback to refine relationship marketing approaches based on local consumer values ( $M = 4.3321$ ), ensuring responsiveness, and continuous improvement.

#### **Challenges confronting relationship marketing practices in Kisii supermarkets and their effects on customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior.**

The data presented outline the key challenges impeding relationship marketing in Kisii supermarkets and their effects on customer satisfaction and repeat purchases. The challenges include inconsistent communication with customers ( $M = 4.4465$ ), which undermines relationships; inadequate loyalty programs affecting customer retention ( $M = 4.1993$ ); difficulties in tailoring marketing to local preferences ( $M = 4.5055$ ), despite cultural importance; infrastructural limitations hindering relationship marketing implementation ( $M = 4.2952$ ); weak customer engagement reducing satisfaction ( $M = 4.5904$ ); lack of personalized communication affecting repeat purchases ( $M = 4.3579$ ); challenges in integrating digital platforms ( $M = 4.2768$ ); limited resources constraining relationship marketing adoption ( $M = 4.4908$ ); customer preference for interpersonal over automated communication ( $M = 4.3875$ ); and insufficient customer feedback incorporation ( $M = 4.4059$ ). These challenges contribute to a decline in customer loyalty ( $M = 4.3395$ ). Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing customer satisfaction and repeat purchases ( $M = 4.3247$ ). The mean score of 4.3850 confirms that these challenges significantly impact relationship marketing effectiveness in Kisii supermarkets.

#### **Enhancing Relationship Marketing Approaches to Promote Sustainable Growth and Competitive Advantage in Kisii's Supermarket Sector.**

The survey delineates strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing relationship marketing to achieve sustainable growth and competitive

advantage for supermarkets in the Kisii Township. The principal findings are as follows: the development of personalized communication strategies to ensure consistent customer engagement ( $M = 4.3432$ ,  $SD = 0.71255$ ), thereby fostering long-term relationships; the implementation of well-structured, locally tailored loyalty programs to significantly enhance customer retention ( $M = 4.3358$ ,  $SD = 0.72122$ ); the active involvement of community leaders and groups in the design of marketing strategies to align with local consumer values ( $M = 4.4428$ ,  $SD = 0.74253$ ); the integration of digital platforms with face-to-face interactions to augment customer engagement and marketing effectiveness ( $M = 4.2103$ ,  $SD = 0.68587$ ); the training of supermarket staff in customer relationship management and interpersonal communication to build trust and loyalty ( $M = 4.2804$ ,  $SD = 0.69037$ ); the prioritization of regular collection and incorporation of customer feedback to customize marketing approaches ( $M = 4.2731$ ,  $SD = 0.67712$ ); the emphasis on community involvement and social responsibility in marketing to enhance brand reputation and competitive advantage ( $M = 4.2509$ ,  $SD = 0.73771$ ); the allocation of resources for sustainable relationship marketing initiatives to support long-term growth ( $M = 4.2140$ ,  $SD = 0.71385$ ); the adoption of flexible marketing strategies that accommodate Kisii's socio-cultural and infrastructural constraints to attract more customers ( $M = 4.1919$ ,  $SD = 0.78886$ ); and the continuous monitoring and evaluation of relationship marketing practices to adapt and sustain competitive advantages ( $M = 4.3247$ ,  $SD = 0.70297$ ). The aggregate mean score of 4.2867 ( $SD = 0.41362$ ) indicates a strong overall consensus on the importance and effectiveness of these recommendations in promoting sustainable growth and competitive advantage for supermarkets in Kisii Township.

#### **The Relationship Between Relationship Marketing and the competitive performance of supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya**

This study examines the correlation between relationship marketing and its effectiveness in enhancing supermarket competitiveness in Kisii Township, Kenya, using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model. This method quantitatively evaluates the association between key relationship marketing variables, such as personalized communication, loyalty programs, customer engagement, and community alignment, and supermarkets' competitive performance. The OLS regression model analyzes how specific aspects of relationship marketing contribute to business outcomes, identifying elements that drive supermarket competitiveness within Kisii's unique socio-economic context. By analyzing the regression results in Table 1, this study provides empirical evidence of the magnitude of these relationships, highlighting the critical factors that supermarkets should prioritize to enhance customer loyalty, satisfaction, and their market positioning.

**Table 1: Relationship Marketing and the competitive performance of supermarkets (Model summary)**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.772 <sup>a</sup>	0.596	0.590	0.26499

a. Predictors: (Constant), Personalized communication, Loyalty program, Customized marketing strategies and Marketing challenges faced by supermarkets

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 1 presents a robust and statistically significant positive correlation between Relationship Marketing and its relevance and efficacy for supermarkets in Kisii Township, as evidenced by a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.772. This strong association indicates that effective relationship marketing practices are closely associated with enhanced business performance and competitive advantages in the supermarket sector. Moreover, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) reveals that Relationship Marketing accounts for approximately 59.6% of the variance in the competitiveness and performance of supermarkets in Kisii Township. This considerable proportion highlights

the pivotal role of personalized communication, loyalty programmes, customer engagement, and community alignment in fostering customer loyalty and satisfaction and, ultimately, enterprise sustainability. However, the remaining 40.4% of the variance is attributable to other factors that were not included in the current study's model. The model's robustness was further corroborated by validation measures, affirming the reliability of the findings and reinforcing the significance of relationship marketing as a strategic focus for supermarkets aiming to enhance longevity and success in Kisii Township, Kenya. The detailed statistical results and supporting analyses are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Relationship Marketing and the competitive performance of supermarkets (Model Fitness) – ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	27.514	4	6.879	97.961	0.000b
1 Residual	18.678	266	0.070		
Total	46.192	270			

a. Dependent Variable: The competitive performance of supermarkets

b. Predictors: (Constant), Personalized communication, Loyalty program, Customized marketing strategies and Marketing challenges faced by supermarkets

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 2 presents evidence affirming the robustness of the regression model that associates Relationship Marketing with the competitive performance of supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya. The model's F-test produced an F-calculated value of 97.961, which exceeded the critical F-value of 2.372 at the 0.05 significance level with degrees of freedom (4, 266). This F-statistic indicates that the regression model accounts for significant variance in supermarket performance, showing a strong effect of the independent variables—personalized communication, loyalty programs, customized marketing strategies, and marketing challenges—on competitive outcomes. The p-value of 0.000 is below the alpha threshold of 0.05,

confirming that the relationship between Relationship Marketing and competitive performance is statistically significant. This corroborates the model's explanatory power in evaluating how Relationship Marketing influences supermarket competitiveness in Kisii. The findings show that Relationship Marketing is a reliable predictor of competitive performance for supermarkets in Kisii Township. The results offer insights for managers, emphasizing the importance of investing in relationship marketing practices to foster customer loyalty and enhance competitive advantage. Table 3 provides the regression coefficients, showing the individual contributions of each predictor variable within the model.

**Table 3: Relationship Marketing and the competitive performance of supermarkets (Model Coefficients)**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.185	0.225		0.819	0.413
1 Personalized communication	0.663	0.080	0.575	8.311	0.000
Loyalty program	-0.072	0.103	-0.061	-0.704	0.002
Customized marketing strategies	0.004	0.083	0.003	0.045	0.964
Marketing challenges	0.344	0.103	0.290	3.324	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive performance of supermarkets

Source: Survey data (2026)

The analysis presented in Table 3 offers significant insights into the impact of relationship

marketing on the competitive performance of supermarkets in the Kisii Township. The constant ( $\beta =$

0.185,  $p = 0.413$ ) was positive but not statistically significant, suggesting that competitive performance is primarily influenced by the model's predictors rather than the baseline level. Personalized Communication ( $\beta = 0.663$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) exhibited a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on competitive performance, with a standardized beta of 0.575 and a  $t$ -value of 8.311, identifying it as the most influential predictor in the model. Conversely, the Loyalty Program ( $\beta = -0.072$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) demonstrates a small yet significant negative coefficient, indicating that current implementations may slightly diminish competitive performance, potentially due to suboptimal design or resource misallocation. Customized Marketing Strategies ( $\beta = 0.004$ ,  $p = 0.964$ ) have a negligible and insignificant impact, suggesting that current customization efforts do not significantly affect competitive outcomes. Marketing Challenges ( $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) had a positive and significant coefficient, implying that supermarkets encountering more challenges may actively engage in relationship marketing or that these challenges stimulate performance-enhancing reactions. Personalized communication is identified as the primary driver of competitive performance, whereas loyalty programs require re-evaluation. Customized marketing strategies require better alignment with local consumer needs, and their positive correlation with marketing challenges merits further investigation.

#### New Model

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + e$$

$$\text{Therefore, } Y = 0.185 + 0.663X_1 - 0.072X_2 + 0.004X_3 + 0.344X_4$$

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Personalized communication emerged as the most significant positive predictor of competitive performance ( $\beta = 0.663$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), underscoring its pivotal role in fostering customer loyalty and satisfaction. This finding corroborates the theoretical emphasis on trust, commitment, and continuous engagement as posited in Relationship Marketing Theory (Ramasamy *et al.*, 2024; Gazi *et al.*, 2024). Empirical studies, such as those by Ooko (2023) and Sofi *et al.* (2020), underscore the importance of personalized communication in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in culturally diverse markets. The high mean scores for personalized communication strategies in Kisii supermarkets, which include multichannel engagement and cultural alignment, reflect these principles and demonstrate effective local adaptation.

Loyalty programs, although well-structured and positively perceived in descriptive analyses (aggregate mean = 4.4218), exhibited a small but significant negative coefficient in the regression analysis ( $\beta = -0.072$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). This finding suggests that the current implementation of loyalty programs may not effectively

confer a competitive advantage, potentially due to suboptimal design or resource misallocation. This nuanced outcome aligns with critiques in the literature regarding the challenges associated with the efficacy of loyalty programs, particularly in contexts characterized by infrastructural and resource constraints (Arora *et al.*, 2021; Ijomah *et al.*, 2024). The discrepancy between positive customer perceptions and the negative impact observed in the regression analysis indicates a need for reevaluation and improved alignment with local consumer behavior, consistent with the findings of Magatef *et al.* (2023) and Dewnarain *et al.* (2018), who emphasized the importance of contextual adaptation to loyalty initiatives.

Despite descriptive data indicating strong cultural and community alignment, customized marketing strategies had negligible and statistically insignificant effects on competitive performance ( $\beta = 0.004$ ,  $p = 0.964$ ). This discrepancy may indicate implementation gaps or a lack of depth in the customization efforts. This aligns with critiques of Relationship Marketing Theory, which highlights the complexity of adapting strategies to diverse consumer contexts and the risk of superficial customization (Ijomah *et al.*, 2024; Anjorin *et al.*, 2024). The literature suggests that while cultural tailoring is important (Agu *et al.*, 2024; Sofi *et al.*, 2020), its impact hinges on effective integration into broader marketing and operational frameworks, which may be underdeveloped in Kisii supermarkets.

Marketing challenges exhibited a positive and significant coefficient ( $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), suggesting that supermarkets encountering greater challenges may demonstrate increased proactivity and responsiveness in their relationship marketing endeavors. This finding underscores the dynamic nature of the retail environment in Kisii and implies that obstacles such as infrastructural limitations and fragmented markets may stimulate the development of adaptive strategies for retail vendors. This observation is consistent with the empirical findings of Arora *et al.* (2021) and Bouhtati *et al.* (2023), who assert that challenges in African retail contexts necessitate innovative combinations of interpersonal trust and digital engagement to overcome them. This also aligns with the study's descriptive findings regarding challenges such as weak customer engagement and limited resources that impact the effectiveness of relationship marketing.

The findings of this study substantiate the essential role of personalized communication in the efficacy of relationship marketing, aligning with the extensive empirical evidence (Ooko, 2023; Ramasamy *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, the varied outcomes of loyalty programs and customized marketing strategies highlight the necessity for contextual adaptation and ongoing assessment, as emphasized in the literature (Magatef *et al.*, 2023; Ijomah *et al.*, 2024). The positive correlation

between marketing challenges and performance indicates that Kisii supermarkets are engaged in a dynamic process of learning and adaptation, which aligns with the advocacy for flexible, culturally sensitive relationship marketing models in emerging markets (Akinyi *et al.*, 2024; Arora *et al.*, 2021). Collectively, these findings underscore the imperative for Kisii supermarkets to prioritize personalized communication and refine loyalty and customization strategies by integrating community values and addressing infrastructural constraints to enhance their competitive advantage and customer loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of relationship marketing in enhancing business performance, customer loyalty, and competitive advantage among supermarkets in Kisii Township, Kenya. The findings show that personalized communication and customer engagement strategies significantly contribute to fostering trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, aligning with the first objective of this study. Loyalty programs, while positively perceived, exhibited a nuanced impact, with regression analysis suggesting a need for reevaluation and better alignment with local consumer behavior, addressing the second objective of this study. The examination of customization revealed that supermarkets effectively tailored their marketing strategies to reflect Kisii's cultural values and community preferences, supporting the third hypothesis. However, its impact on competitive performance was limited, suggesting implementation gaps. Challenges, including weak customer engagement, infrastructural limitations, and resource constraints, were identified as barriers affecting customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior, fulfilling the fourth objective of this study. The study's recommendations emphasize enhancing personalized communication, refining loyalty programs, deepening community involvement, and integrating digital initiatives while considering local constraints, thereby addressing the fifth objective. Overall, this study confirms that relationship marketing, particularly personalized communication, drives supermarket competitiveness in the Kisii Township. However, it also underscores the need for the ongoing adaptation of loyalty programs and customization efforts to better suit local market dynamics and to overcome operational challenges. These insights provide a framework for supermarkets to enhance their relationship marketing approaches, fostering long-term customer loyalty and sustainable business success in Kisii's retail environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Supermarkets in Kisii Township should implement personalized communication strategies through multiple channels, including face-to-face interactions, phone calls, social media, and SMS to build trust and enhance satisfaction. Loyalty programs need to

be reevaluated and redesigned to reflect Kisii consumers' needs; simplifying and promoting these programs will increase participation and strengthen consumer retention. Deepening community involvement through collaboration with local leaders and stakeholders will reinforce trust, improve brand reputation, and ensure that marketing efforts align with Kisii cultural dynamics. Supermarkets should balance digital platforms with traditional communication and adopt feasible tools that complement face-to-face engagement without alienating customers who prefer personal interactions. Staff training in customer relationship management is essential for building trust and fostering meaningful customer interactions, thereby enhancing service quality and loyalty. The regular collection and analysis of customer feedback enable the customization of relationship marketing approaches to meet consumer expectations. Resource allocation must support sustainable marketing initiatives despite limitations, and strategic investment is critical to maintaining a competitive advantage. Marketing strategies should remain adaptive to Kisii's socio-cultural realities, with continuous monitoring to adjust tactics and overcome challenges. Further research and collaboration with experts are recommended to enhance the effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies in Kisii's retail environment. These recommendations aim to strengthen relationship marketing to promote growth and customer loyalty in supermarkets in Kisii Township.

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