



Research Article

Volume-03|Issue-03|2022

An Evaluation of Customer Touch Points on Brand Management in the Telecoms Industry: A Case of Econet Wireless in Zimbabwe

Dr David Foya*¹, & Vimbayi Ray Garikayi¹¹Department of Business Management, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe

Article History

Received: 05.03.2022

Accepted: 20.03.2022

Published: 31.03.2022

Citation

Foya, D., & Garikayi, V. R. (2022). An Evaluation of Customer Touch Points on Brand Management in the Telecoms Industry: A Case of Econet Wireless in Zimbabwe. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 68-85.

Abstract: The research sought to evaluate the effect of customer touch points on brand management in the telecoms industry of Zimbabwe. Case study of Econet Wireless in Zimbabwe was undertaken. The main objective of the study is to analyse the effect of customer touch points on brand management in the Zimbabwean telecoms sector. The research question was how the USSD (post purchase touch point) affects brand association in the telecoms sector. The study adopted a mixed methods research design in order to apply any applicable method, quantitative or qualitative in critically evaluating the touch points. The study adopted a pragmatism research philosophy in line with the chosen research design. The study population constituted the customer service staff of Econet Wireless branches found in Harare and their customers. A total population of 1218593 was considered for the study. The study established that the USSD touch-point currently has a slight positive effect on Econet's brand association in the market. Under the fifth objective, study concluded that the My Web Self Care touch-point is currently poor in the enhancement of brand awareness at Econet as customers are largely unaware of it. The concludes that Econet makes mobile messaging a two-way communication platform. Econet was also advised to improve number of customer service stores. The study recommend that Econet motivates its current customer service staff at contact centres through more pay and fringe benefits, and that it may want to consider decentralising the contact centre functions.

Keywords: Brand Management; Customer Touch-Point; Network Signal; Telecommunication.

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The telecommunications sector is made up of companies that make communication possible on a global scale, whether it is through the phone or the Internet, through airwaves or cables, through wires or wirelessly. These companies created the infrastructure that allows data in words, voice, audio or video to be sent anywhere in the world. The telecommunications sector evolved from the telegraph, the first mechanical device. It shortened communication from days to hours – much as modern mobile technology shortened the time span of sending large amounts of data from hours to seconds. These shifts are due to technology, and they changed how people live and do business. At one time, telecommunications required physical wires connecting homes and businesses. In contemporary society, technology has gone mobile; digital, wireless technology is becoming the primary form of communication.

As brand channels multiply, many companies struggle to prioritize the touch points they invest in (www.salesforce.com). If younger generations point the way to preference trends, however, social, online communities, and voice assistants are critical. Customer service is not just a reactionary cost centre; it is a core element of differentiated customer experience. To meet

current standards, service must be quick, readily available anywhere, and even proactive.

With every customer contact and whenever an organization is represented, the organization has the opportunity either to strengthen the brand or to make it lose some of its prestige and lustre. Each touch point can have a positive or negative implication on the customer as well as how the brand will be perceived. Every given interaction between the organization and the customer determines and leads to either a positive or a negative experience with the customer, leading to either a negative or positive impression about the brand. A longer than expected waiting time, an unfriendly personnel, or a slowly loading webpage can lead to a negative brand perception in as much as some of the components were satisfactory.

From the business arena, customer experience is an encompassment of all the aspects of a company's offering thus the quality of service delivery as well as advertising, packaging, product and service features, reliability and ease of use. This is the internal subjective response the customers in any given direct or indirect interaction with the organization. Touch points have been used in various instances to ensure that customers have positive brand perception and attitude, a significant relationship was found between the use of touch points and brand management which

subsequently led to enhanced organizational performance.

The Zimbabwean telecommunications industry has been going through continuous changes and innovations as a result of the present technological era. Mobile telecommunication companies have come up with various strategies to ensure there is constant interaction with customers subsequently having an effect on the brand. The mobile networks industry of Zimbabwe is dominated by Econet with a market share of 65.9%, NetOne 24.3% and Telecel 9.8% market share.

Econet as the market leader was the first to incept the prominent EcoCash mobile-wallet which has taken the centre stage in the financial services sector. The market leader continuously interacts with customers with the use of various strategies like mobile messaging; it has customer service and dealership stores nationwide, 24/7 contact centres with reliable and responsive personnel to attend to the customers, direct mail as well as the USSD which has given the subscribers privilege to do self-service. Furthermore, my-web self-care is an Econet application which gives subscribers information on their call logs, data usage, account balance and many more. This application was incepted to cater for all the customer service needs and queries of Econet subscribers (www.econet.co.zw).

NetOne, the first telecoms organization to be launched strives to ensure that subscribers get exceptional service. The organization makes use of various pre-purchase and post touch points to ensure that subscribers remain loyal to the brand. The contact center departments of the organization conduct an employee of the month scheme that culminates to the employee of the year award (www.netone.co.zw). With the call center the organization has managed to raise awareness of the One Fusion, interest the customers with the products, to ensure they desire the product, subsequently having a perception about the brand. Furthermore, NetOne also has its USSD application which caters for the customer queries and complains on a 24/7 basis.

Telecel Zimbabwe takes pride in its exceptional customer service as it has received Customer Service Awards in consecutive years. The organization interviews and carries out survey on subscribers to find out what they think about the service quality, feedback generated from the research is captured, collated, analyzed and submitted to the Customer Service management for review. With such information the personnel then ensures that the organization raises awareness of the customers towards the offerings through pre-purchase touch points like adverts, awakens the interests and desire of the customer in a bid to ensure that customers act towards the offering as well as has a pleasant service experience

subsequently leading to improve brand image (www.telecel.co.zw). Telecel also makes use of its website to cater for customer service needs as well as its social media page. The organization has in the recent years been pushing its customers to the social networking sites as well as the website for complaints.

Although the study seeks to evaluate customer touch points on brand management in the telecoms industry, focus is placed on Econet Wireless. In this regard the research will look into a brief history of Econet, its vision, mission and values.

Econet Wireless Zimbabwe is Zimbabwe's largest provider of telecommunications services, providing solutions in mobile and fixed wireless telephony, public payphones, internet access and payment solutions. Econet launched its network on the 10th of July 1998 and listed on 17th September 1998. It is one of the largest companies on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange in terms of market capitalisation. Ten years ago, less than five out of ten Zimbabweans had a cell-phone. Today, Econet Wireless, Zimbabwe's largest telecommunications provider allows 8 out of every 10 Zimbabweans to connect with loved ones, surf the internet, send and receive emails and make transactions over their phones.

The company continues to upgrade its network to carry more subscribers, and further widen its geographical coverage, which is already the most extensive in Zimbabwe. In 2009, the network became the first operator in Zimbabwe to launch data services under 3G technology. The company's key infrastructure at the start of 2010 included three switches. In 2009, Econet began building an extensive fibre optic network, and also commenced an accelerated rollout of other key network infrastructure. Key subsidiaries and associates of Econet are Liquid Telecom, the largest internet service and access provider in Zimbabwe, and Transaction Payment Solutions, a leading provider of financial transaction switching, point-of-sale and value-added support services.

In line with its Christian-based vision and mission, Econet has a broad strategy for social and community investment, run under the "Econet in the Community" banner. Through these programmes, Econet supports a diverse range of charitable causes, which include children orphaned by AIDS/HIV, religious and church organisations, as well as an annual scholarship program that provides financial assistance to the brightest students selected from schools in the country's 10 provinces under the Joshua Nkomo Scholarship Fund (JNSF).

Econet Wireless has implemented a highly advanced call centre system which will enable its contact centre operators to monitor feedback and conversations on both social network and cellular

communications platforms. The new platform will enable Econet call centre operators to respond to social media, voice telephony, fax and instant messaging service queries and complaints. The Avaya solution delivers a seamless experience for voice, email and social media, allowing customers to interact with Econet through a variety of channels to connect on their terms and choose the medium that suits their needs. Econet was the first ever mobile network provider in Zimbabwe to put in place, the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) function. This is a channel which customers can use to access information on all Econet products electronically without having to speak to an operator.

Statement of the Problem

Management perceives that customers do not want to spend their valuable time waiting in a queue in an Econet shop to get assistance or spend hours on the phone waiting for the contact centre agents to assist them. Management has therefore created self-service platforms such as my web self-care and the USSD and thus instructed employees to encourage customers to make use of the touch points where customers can solve their queries on their own. However, it seems as though management perception is wrong as customers have not yet embraced the web self-care and USSD strategy; they preferred to be assisted by customer service personnel instead. This has therefore created a customer experience gap between management perception of customers' needs and customer's expectations thus resulting in a negative image of the brand. Since no study in the context of brand management has been carried out in Zimbabwe, this study therefore seeks to investigate into the various elements of touch points and the implication they have on branding.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate the effects of customer touch points on brand management in the Zimbabwean telecoms sector.

Sub-Objectives

The subobjectives for this study are to:

- examine the effect of mobile messaging (pre-purchase touch point) on brand image in the telecoms sector.
- determine how customer service store (purchase touch point) has an impact on brand identity in the telecoms sector.
- investigate the implication the contact centre (purchase and post-purchase touch point) has on brand association in the telecoms sector.
- investigate how the USSD (post purchase touch point) affects brand association in the telecoms sector.
- evaluate the effectiveness of my web self-care (post purchase) on brand awareness in the telecoms sector.

Research Questions

The main research question of the study is to what extent do the customer touch points enhance brand management in the Zimbabwean telecoms sector?

Sub-Research Questions

- To answer the main research question of the study, the following sub-questions will be used:
- To what extent does the mobile messaging (pre-purchase touch point) has an effect on brand image in the telecoms sector?
- How does the customer service store (purchase touch point) enhance brand identity in the telecoms sector?
- How does the contact centre (purchase and post-purchase touch point) influence brand association in the telecoms sector?
- What is the impact of the USSD (post purchase touch point) on brand association in the telecoms sector?
- To what extent does my web self-care (post purchase) strategy enhances brand awareness in the telecoms sector?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer touch points

Stone *et al.* (2012) call touch points “the points at which products and services are purchased or serviced”. This is a definition that focuses on the products and/or services that a company has to offer. Mårtenson (2016) takes this definition a bit further by suggesting that touch points are every contact customers have with a company. This includes everything that brings a customer to think about the specific company: from word-of-mouth recommendation to marketing activities such as for instance a TV commercial. According to Spengler & Wirth (2009), websites, employees, call centres, recommendations from friends, products, physical stores and annual reports are all examples of touch points.

Brand Management

Aaker (1991) defined a brand as “a distinguishing name and / or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical.” In the same vein, de Chernatony (2017) defined a brand “as a cluster of values that enables a promise to be made about a unique and welcoming experience”. As can be observed, the concept of “experience” has found a place in the revised definition of a brand. Laforet & Saunders (2014) define corporate brand management as a dynamic process which involves continuous adjustment of the values, culture and image of the brand. Expanding the definition by Laforet & Saunders (2014); & Kotler & Armstrong (2011) highlighted that there are four

general branding strategies available for any company to manage their brands at different stages of the business; these are line extension, brand extension, multi brands and new brands.

Importance of Brand Management

Brand names are somewhat different than corporate names and it is imperative to note that corporate brands are more than just trade names. Following Enwalled & Will (2012), corporate branding is considered a 'systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining a favourable image and consequently a favourable reputation of the firm as a whole by sending signals to all stakeholders by managing behaviour, communication and symbolism'. Kay (2013) argues that corporate branding is the way an organization communicates its identity. Kay (2016) postulated that corporate branding is an avenue used by firms to convey their identities. Dacin & Brown (2012) further emphasised that, corporate brands are the means used to evoke positive associations from interested parties. Corporate brands are at the heart of the company with a centralised and strategic management by executives as they tend to be complex according to Hatch & Schultz (2013). The corporate brand can evoke various meanings as it is communicated to various stakeholders as highlighted by Balmer & Greyser (2012), hence the need for a holistic and integrated corporate branding strategy.

Organizations develop brands as a way to attract and keep customers by promoting value, image, prestige, and lifestyle. By using a particular brand, consumer develops positive image about the brand, according to Ginden (2013). Branding is a technique to capture consumers psychologically. Organizations are taking advantage of psychology of human beings by developing attractive brands.

Lisa (2010) explains brand management through brand description, and brand strength, which creates brand value and also it creates market power. Outcome of brand strength is not brand value but implies market share and profit as outcome. Market description is not quantifiable as it is a marketing aspect whereas brand strength is quantifiable in accounting terms. Lisa (2010), also emphasize on managing the brand equity (brand equity is related to amount of power and value in market place. A brand's equity is defined by Chu Mei Liu (2012) as loyalty, perceived quality, name awareness, strong associations, and other assets such as patents.

According to Laforet & Saunders (2014), corporate brand management is a dynamic process which involves continuous adjustment of the values, culture and image of the brand. Multiplicity of names which appear on brands have meanings that could relate to brand history, structure, acquisitions or it could be an

attempt to impress stakeholders including customers. Laforet & Saunders (2014) further argue that for customers corporate name is a name unlike any other. One more thing is that names have different associations so it is very unlikely that all corporate names have the same value. Like many corporate names are advertised more prominently than some others and some are associated with smaller players in the market.

Uncles, Cocks & Macrae (2015) suggest that many firms do not recognize the value of corporate brand. One reason they suggest for this could be that firms are afraid that their different brands may get mixed and customer may get confused by this. The presences of corporate names help products at the start up. Saunders & Guoqun (2007) state that, later in the product life cycle or product development stages dual association of corporate and brand names increases the value of the brand. One can actually deduce that Uncles *et al.* (2015); & Saunders & Guoqun (2007) agree on the importance of proper brand image management to attract customers. In all cases presence of corporate names to a brand increases the consumer's perception of the brands and preference for it.

According to Leisen & Vance (2011), the telecom sector is undergoing dramatic changes. More and more competition is emerging in the telecom sector. Leisen & Vance (2011) are of the view that service quality has become more important rather than technical aspects in the sector. Delivering quality services is an essential ingredient for establishing and maintaining loyal and profitable customer base. Service quality is "the delivery of excellent or superior services relative to customer expectations", according to Leisen & Vance (2011). Excellent service is a profitable strategy because it results in more new customers, more business with existing customers and fewer lost customers. Superior service quality can help firms become more profitable and help them sustain a competitive advantage in their served market.

Johnson & Sirkit (2012) expanded the arguments of Leisen & Vance (2011), when they argued that service quality alone without proper investment in brand management is not enough. In agreement with Johnson & Sirkit (2012); & Anisimova (2007) pointed out that organisations stress further on corporate brands in order to achieve consumer loyalty because consumers are highly considered, but there is little knowledge available to practitioners and academics about it. Corporate brand is a vital interpreter of consumer loyalty. Anisimova (2007) suggests that, when corporate brand is observed as totality, corporate values, utilitarian and symbolic by consumers, this creates loyalty in consumers

TYPES OF BRANDING

The following are the different types of branding and their characteristics

Family Branding

According to Stimpson (2011), family branding is a marketing strategy that involves selling several related products under one brand name (also known as umbrella branding). A similar definition was given by Saeed & Arshad (2015) who define family branding as a type of branding where all products/services have one brand name like corporate brand. In explaining the essence of using family brands, Surrige (2014) argued that using family branding strategy helps the organisation achieve marketing economies of scale when promoting the brand. This was supported by Kotler & Armstrong (2011) who highlighted that family brands results in marketing becomes of scale because one brand is used to promote several related products. Adding on to the benefits of this type of branding, Matanda & Gwete (2014) pointed out that family branding makes new product launches easier as the company uses an already-established brand for its new products, which therefore becomes easier to promote the new product. However, Stimpson (2011) argues that using family brand may result in one poor quality product under the brand damaging all the other products in the family.

Individual/Product Branding

According to Saeed & Arshad (2015), individual branding is when every product/service has its own brand name. A similar definition is also given by Stimpson (2011) who highlighted that product branding is when each individual product in a portfolio is given its own unique identity and brand image. Mashavira & Jubenkanda (2014) argued that the use of individual branding results in each product being perceived as its own unique and separate brand – unconnected in consumers' minds with the parent company. Jewell & Marcouse (2016) however argued that individual branding may result in the brands losing the positive image of the strong company brand.

Company or Corporate Branding

Under this type of branding, Stimpson (2011) highlights that the company name is applied to products and this becomes the brand name. In support of the definition by Stimpson (2011); & Lines (2014) defines corporate branding as the use of the company name on the company products as the products brands. Rawson *et al.* (2013) further expanded the definition when they highlighted that corporate rebranding is important especially when the company has a strong brand, such that its strong brand is used on its products. Supporting and adding on to Rawson *et al.* (2013)'s argument, Malviya & Varma (2012) argued that the company attains marketing economies of scale when promoting the brand because the products are trading using one brand. Stimpson (2011) also gave an argument in line with Malviya & Varma (2012) when he argued that using company name as product brands makes new product launches easier because the new products use an established brand.

Manufacturers' Brands

This is when the producers establish the brand image of a product or a family of products, often under the company's name, according to Delgado & Luis (2005). According to Schembri (2016) use of manufacturers' brand is advantageous in that successful branding by manufacturers establishes a unique 'personality' for the product which many consumers want to be associated with – and will often pay premium prices to purchase. However, Schembri (2016) argues that use of manufactures brand implies that the brand has to be constantly promoted and defended.

For all the above types of brands, there are four general branding strategies available for any company to manage their brands at different stages of the business, and these are line extension, brand extension, multi brands and new brands (Kotler *et al.*, 2011).

Customer Touch Points

It is not until recently that touch points and their contribution to a brand's image have been brought into the light and so far, the research within the field is limited. Due to this, the term "touch points" can mean different things to different researchers and the definitions come across during literature studies have similarities but also differences. Stone *et al.* (2012) call touch points "the points at which products and services are purchased or serviced". This is a definition that focuses on the products and/or services that a company has to offer. Mårtenson (2016) takes this definition a bit further by suggesting that touch points are every contact customers have with a company. This includes everything that brings a customer to think about the specific company: from word-of-mouth recommendation to marketing activities such as for instance a TV commercial.

Spengler & Wirth (2009) expand this definition further by including customers as well as non-customers and other stakeholders. They also talk about different touch points before, during and after a purchase. From these wide definitions, one can tell that the number of a company's touch points can be quite huge. To exemplify, mid-sized firms usually manage over one hundred touch points.

Different touch points also have different roles to fulfil and these roles may vary between different companies. Hallward (2016) argued that touch points also work in different ways in order to fulfil those roles. Mårtenson (2016) exemplifies this by stating that it is important for a company to understand these different roles and purposes in order to be able to focus on those touch points influencing the consumer behaviour the most. There are various opinions on which touch points that are the most important ones. Boatwright *et al.* (2009) state that among all available touch points, the product itself is one of the most important ones due to its potential of creating strong relationships with the

customers. Furthermore, the recent years' fusion between the on- and offline worlds has made many online activities such as for instance online-forums, become more and more important, added Spengler & Wirth (2009). About ten percent of the customers are influenced by new types of information sources, such as the Internet, e-mail, mobile phones etc., when making buying decisions. Web 2.0 and popular online communities such as Facebook and MySpace are also of bigger importance than before. Furthermore, there is also a trend going towards on-demand services such as over the mobile or digital television.

Touch Point Categorisation

A number of researchers have come up with different categorizations of touch points. Some of the researchers are: Dunn & Davis (2014) sort the touch points into three different categories based upon the customer experience:

- **Pre-purchase experience touch points** – These touch points are of great importance regardless of whether a customer will purchase the brand in question or not. These include contact points such as word-of-mouth, direct mails, the Internet and advertising.
- **Purchase experience touch points** – Touch points that make a customer purchase a brand and not just consider it. These are touch points such as customer centre contact, use of USSD messaging, and physical stores.
- **Post-purchase experience touch points** – Just as the name suggests, these touch points influence customers after their purchase. Typical examples include the product itself, warranties, customer services, use of USSD messages and customer satisfaction surveys.

To exemplify the meaning of this, word-of-mouth may trigger a purchase, but during the purchase, the sales person may be the one influencing the customer's experience, according to Dunn & Davis

(2014). Mårtenson (2016) added on to the example given by Duncan and Davis, when he highlighted that post-purchase touch points include things like billing, maintenance of products, services and so on. Thus the two sources presented complementary examples.

Mårtenson (2016) has another way of categorizing touch points. The categories are controllable, influenceable and uncontrollable. The controllable comprises all touch points that a company is able to completely control in its implementation. Influenceable entails the touch points that the company can influence but not completely control, and finally the uncontrollable comprises all touch points that cannot be controlled at all. Mårtenson also differs between outbound touch points initiated by a company and inbound touch points initiated by customers. Both types are necessary in marketing communication but there are some differences between them. As the Internet develops, more customers can find new ways of spontaneous contacts with companies. Spengler and Wirth, (2009) state that new media technologies allow the customers to actively participate and shape their own media experiences, making inbound touch points more important than they previously have been.

Spengler & Wirth (2009) also talk about touch points from a purchase-point-of-view even though they do not sort them into categories based upon this. Instead, they use four other categories: one-to-one, point of sale (POS), indirect and mass media. Examples of touch points in the four categories can be seen in Table 1. They state that around half of the consumer's subjective brand experience arises from the various touch points at the point of sale. This includes everything from shop layout to sales personnel. Around one third of customer's experience comes out of friends' recommendations and product reports from tests. Moreover, the credibility of articles and reports in print media is above average according to many customers.

Table 1. Customer Touch Points Categories

One-to-one	POS	Mass Media	Indirect
Voucher, direct mailing, loyalty cards, personal invitation events, SMS service, USSD, coupon brochure, company magazine, web shop, hotline	POS promotion, Special Offers shelves, call centre, customer service desk, sales person, showroom, advertising entrance, shop-window	Website, newspaper, TV, radio, online advertisements	Word-of-mouth, flyer, testimonial, journal reports, search engine

Source: Spengler & Wirth (2009)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is about evaluating the touch points at Econet Wireless; the researchers conducted a case study, with a mixed method research design. The reason for adopting a mixed method design was that the writers could use both methods that is qualitative and or quantitative in order to thoroughly evaluate the

telecommunications touch points. The researchers adopted a pragmatism research philosophy. This enabled researchers to employ any applicable data collection and analysis method that could critically evaluate the telecommunications touch points at Econet Wireless.

Data Collection Instruments

This study uses both the questionnaires (for non-managerial staff and customers) and interview (for marketing managerial staff) as research instruments. The questionnaires used in this research constituted both open-ended and closed questions. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to write their opinions freely, helping the researcher to have deeper understanding of issues. Closed ended questions helped the researcher, where necessary, not to have too divergent views to allow data coding and processing become much easier. Interviews were used mainly for the purposes of collecting qualitative data. Also, they were used for collection of deeper information as the respondents had no limit (unlike on questionnaires) on the amount of information they could give. To counter the problem of the inability of the interview to collect quantitative data, questionnaires were used.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Looking at the gender distribution of the respondents given above, gender was more skewed to males than it is to females. The male counterparts constituted 51% and female counterparts constituted 49%. The probable for the virtually balanced gender mix is that male and female counterparts in Zimbabwe all use cell-phones equally, as using a cell-phone or data access is not in any way either a masculine or a feminine issue. This shows that although the gender of respondents was not equally likely, both men and women were considered in the study for data collection. The implication is that the study was not gender biased because both men and women were engaged to participate in the survey thus improving the representativeness of the research findings. They are a mirror image of the minds of the two gender categories.

The gender distribution of the staff respondents is presented in the figure that follows.

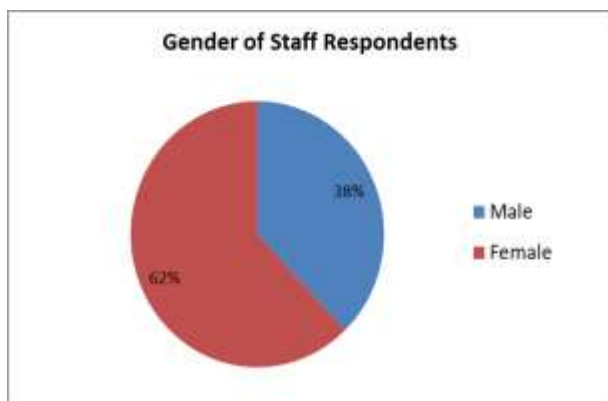


Figure 1: Gender of Staff Respondents
Source: Primary Data, 2019

Figure 1 shows that the staff respondents constituted of more females than males. Females constituted 62% and the remaining 38% were males. This shows that although the gender of staff

respondents was not equally likely, both men and women were considered in the study for data collection. The staff composition was gender biased since more women constituted the sample than men. The probable reason is that the organisation employs more women as customer service staff than men. Nevertheless, all the two gender categories were represented, hence the results were a mirror image of the minds of the two gender categories.

Age of Respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their age, which information was regarded by the researcher as important because naturally, different age groups expect have a different perspective on the effect of customer touch points on brand management. Figure 2 below presents the findings on ages of the customer respondents.

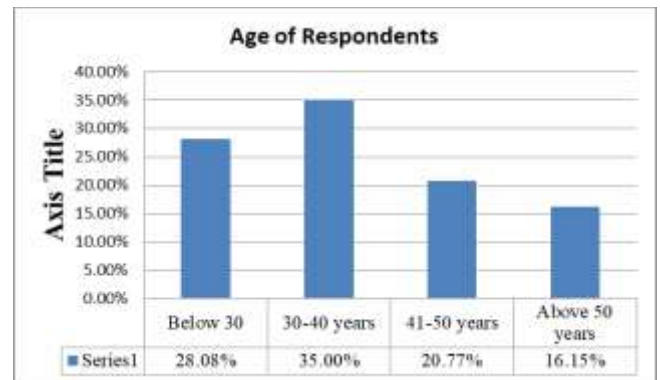


Figure 2: Age of Customer Respondents
Source: Primary Data (2019)

The general of the age distribution as shown in Figure 2 above shows that the age is roughly normally distributed, of course with a slightly or negligibly positive skewness. The modal age group is the 30-40 years age group, which constituted 35% of the total respondents. The reason may be that this age group is generally a working group, more able to afford to purchase gadgets to use for communication purposes. Respondents below the age of 30 years constituted 28.08% of the population. In addition, this age group is constituted with young and active youths who need phones for communication purposes, doing researchers online and having fun. As a result, most of them have to be customers of telecommunication companies for at least one reason. Those respondents between 41-50 years constituted 20.77%. This group had a comparatively lower proportion than the first two groups. The probable reason is that with increase in age, the entire needs by individuals when using telecommunication products reduces. Also, even the age distribution of the national population decreases with age, hence this group had a lower proportion. The customers of 50 years constituted 16.15% of the respondents, which was the least proportion of all. The probable reason is that with age, both proportion in the national population decreases and the customers' needs

from telecommunication companies reduce. In other words, customer sophistication is expected to reduce with age. All age groups were represented, which assured the researcher the views of respondents in all age groups were heard and were represented. The researcher believed that different age groups may have different expectations, hence hearing the views from all age groups was considered positive.

Level of Education

The respondents were asked to indicate their highest education qualifications, as a way to have a general view of the literacy skills they have and whether they were in positions to know what to expect with respect to the effect of customer touch points on brand management.

Level of Experience with Econet Wireless

Figure 3 below present the respondents' experience with Econet Wireless. This experience was regarded as necessary in showing whether customers and staff had any history sufficient enough for them to have a knowhow on customer touch points at the telecommunication company.

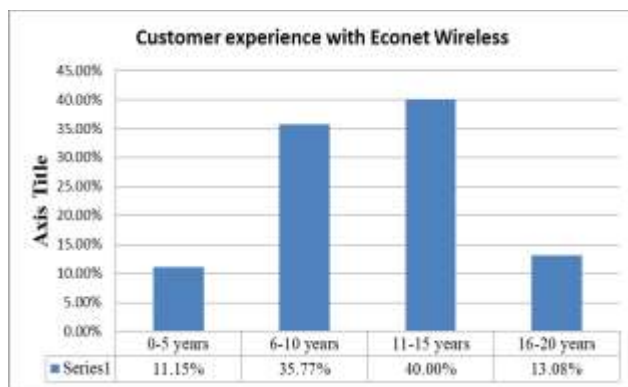


Figure 3: Customer Experience with Econet Wireless

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The research had ranges of evaluation starting from 0-5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 15 years and lastly those with 16 to 20 years. Customer respondents with 0 to 5 years of experience with Econet Wireless constituted of 11.15%. These are probably those who have recently managed to possess cell-phones and those who have switched from other mobile operators. Those with 6 to 10 years of experience constituted 35.77% of the total respondents. This is a higher percentage than the first class. This period includes the inception of the multicurrency regime in 2009 when the proliferation of mobile cell-phones improved, thereby managing residents to have the need to use Econet services. Respondents with 11 to 15 years of experience had 40.00%, which formed the modal class. This was probably because Econet has long been the leading mobile telecoms company in the country for more than a decade, hence many customers may have been loyal for so long. Lastly, those that have 16 to 20 years of

experience constituted of 13.08%. This constituted the least percentage. The probable reason is that soon after Econet started operating in 1999, it was very expensive for most individuals to purchase a SIM card. Hence the number of people with such long experience tend to be the least. It can be drawn from Figure 4.6 and the distribution of level of experience of the customers that the majority of respondents constituting of 40.00%, have 11 to 15 years of experience. This will relate to reliable results since the majority of the respondents have great experience which raises their chances of having much information about Econet, its touch points and brands. The fact that 88.85% (231/260) of the respondents have had experiences of at least 6 years with Econet Wireless; the researcher regarded that proportion as highly sufficient for the customers to have a high probability of having experienced the touch points at the company, hence are in a better position to rate this touch points fairly. As a result, the researcher found the level of experience of the customer respondents high enough for them to contribute more reliable data for the research.

The above diagram (Figure 3) illustrates the years of experience of the staff respondents of staff respondents with Econet Wireless. The 0 to 5 years constituted of 21.62%, which is lower probably because of low employment rates in Zimbabwe. The 6 to 10 years category held 37.84% which was the modal class. The probable reason is that this period is the closest to the inception of the multicurrency regime when employment levels were on a rise. The 11 to 15 years constituted 32.43%, which was the second largest class. This was probably because the company had managed to grow bigger prior to the past 15 years, hence was more able to employ more workers. Lastly the 16 to 20 years class held 8.11% of the total respondents. This was the least category, probably because during the time Econet was set up in 1999, it was too small to employ as much as it could when it had now grown bigger.

Therefore, the graphical illustration shows that the majority of the respondents hold 6 to 10 years of experience in the industry followed by those with 11 to 15 years of experience. The implication is that 78.38% of the staff respondents had levels of experience with Econet Wireless of at least 6 years. This was considered by the researcher to be a very high proportion of those with sufficiently high level of experience with Econet Wireless, hence they were in better position to justifiably value their employer's touch points.

Effect of Mobile Messaging on Brand Image – Objective One

The first objective sought to examine the effect of mobile messaging (pre-purchase touch point) on brand image in the telecoms sector. The respondents were asked to show the level of agreement or disagreement with relevant statements as presented in

Table 2, Table 3 and in the interpretation of interview results in this section.

Table 1. Effect of Mobile Messaging From the Customers' Perspective

Statement	Yes	Not Sure	No	Total
I am aware of mobile messages sent to me by Econet	92.69%	6.15%	1.16%	100%
Econet Wireless communicates with me well using mobile messages	27.69%	48.08%	24.23%	100%
By using mobile messaging to communicate with me, Econet Wireless has painted a good image in my mind.	40.38%	30.38%	29.24%	100%

Source: Primary data, 2019.

The respondents were required to answer on whether they were aware, not sure or not aware at all about the mobile messages sent to them by Econet. 92.69% respondents answered “yes”, implying they agreed that they were aware of messages that Econet uses to communicate to its customers. 6.15% of the customer respondents were not sure whether or not they have received such messages. The remaining 1.16% denied that they were aware of such messages. The results implied that a very high majority, almost all, of Econet Wireless customers are aware of the mobile messaging touch-point used by Econet.

Asked whether Econet communicates with them well using mobile messaging, 27.69% of the respondents agreed, whilst 48.08% were not sure and the remaining 24.28% disagreed. The results show that Econet communicates with its customers using the mobile messaging touch-point slightly well, because the

total customers in agreement (27.69%) slightly outweigh those in disagreement (24.24%), with the majority of the respondents being neutral with regards to wellness with which Econet uses mobile messaging touch-point for communication with its customers.

Table 2 shows that when the respondents were asked whether or not the use of mobile messaging has painted a good image in the minds of its customers, 40.38% respondents agreed, whilst 30.38% of the respondents were not sure and the remaining 29.24% of the respondents were in disagreement. The implication of this was that in general, Econet wireless customers agreed that the use of the mobile messaging touch-point by Econet has resulted in improved brand image in the minds of its customers. However, the customers view that the mobile messaging touch-point is not being used quite well by Econet Wireless.

Table 2. Staff Responses on Effect of Mobile Messaging on Brand Image

Statement	Yes	Not Sure	No	Total
Econet Wireless is effective in using mobile messaging	72.97%	24.32%	2.71%	100%
I think the company's brand is being enhanced	35.14%	37.84%	27.02%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

Table 3 shows that when staff respondents were asked to whether or not Econet Wireless is effective in using mobile messaging for communication with its customers, 72.97% respondents agreed, whilst 24.32% were not sure and the remaining 2.71% respondents disagreed. The implication was that Econet is effective in using mobile messaging because the majority of the respondents (72.97%) were in agreement.

When asked whether or not the current use of mobile messaging is enhancing the company's brand image, 35.14% of the respondents were in agreement, whilst 37.84% were not sure, and the remaining 27.02% were in disagreement. The implication of the results was that, since those in agreement (35.14%) slightly outweighed those in disagreement (27.02%), the mobile messaging touch-point is somewhat enhancing brand

image of Econet. This result concurs with the findings from customers in terms of direction of enhancement, but the result differ in the strength of brand image enhancement. Staff respondents seem to underrate the brand image enhancement of mobile messaging as compared to customers.

The results from the interviews also confirmed the results found from customers and staff. The majority of the interview (72.72%) highlighted that Econet is renowned for communicating with its customers frequently, not only on business matters, but even on social, other economic and other crucial aspects of life that the company feels its customers need to be updated with. Some of the respondents however highlighted that using mobile messaging, the customers usually have a little chance to respond; it is almost always one way communication. Where responses can be given, they are

usually at a cost. The results from interviewees generally showed that Econet’s brand has been enhanced through mobile messaging.

identity at Econet Wireless. The results from all types of respondents in that regard are presented in this section.

Customer Service Store Impact on Brand Identity – Objective Two

The second objective of the research was to look at the impact of customer service store on brand

Table 4. Customer Service Store Impact on Brand Identity from the Customers’ Views

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
The idea of Econet having shops around town is necessary	46.54%	50.00%	2.31%	0.77%	0.38%	100%
I am getting the quality of services that I expect from the Econet shops that I visit	27.69%	36.54%	22.31%	9.23%	4.23%	100%
These Econet shops have managed to gain a good position in my mind	29.62%	39.62%	15.00%	12.31%	34.62%	100%

Source: Primary data, 2019.

On the first assessment, asking the customer respondents were asked whether or not the idea of Econet having shops around town is necessary whereby of the 260 respondents, 46.54% were in strong agreement, 50.00% were in agreement, 2.31% respondents were neutral, only 0.77% respondents were in disagreement and the remaining 0.38% respondents was in strong disagreement. This resulted in a total of 96.54%, a very high majority, being in agreement that the idea of Econet having shops around town is necessary. The implication of the results is that the respondents agreed that the idea of Econet having shops around town is necessary.

(64.23%) were in agreement that they get the desired quality of services from customer service stores.

In term of whether or not the customers were getting the getting the quality of services that they expect from the Econet shops that they visit, 27.69% were in strong agreement, whilst 36.54% were in agreement, 22.31% were neutral, 9.23% were in disagreement and the remaining 4.23% respondents were in strong disagreement. The results imply that just below a two-thirds majority of the respondents

In order to determine the impact of the impact of these customer service stores on brand identity of Econet, the customer respondents were asked whether or not These Econet shops have managed to gain a good position in their minds. In response, 29.62% of the 260 respondents were in strong agreement, whilst 39.62% of the respondents were in agreement, 15.00% were neutral, 12.31% were in disagreement and the remaining 3.46% respondents were in strong disagreement. Those who were in agreement (69.23%) outweighed those who were in disagreement (15.76%), hence the results imply that in general, Econet has had its brand identity improved through the use of its customer service stores.

The results imply that Econet Wireless customers regard customer service stores to be important, and that these stores are providing expected quality levels. The finding therefore was that the customer service store touch point has resulted in improved brand identity of Econet.

Table 5. Staff Responses on Customer Service Store Impact on Brand Identity

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
This Econet shop is offering high quality services to customers	18.92%	32.43%	21.62%	21.62%	5.41%	100%
This Econet shop has managed Econet to gain a good position in the minds of the customers.	16.22%	35.14%	27.03%	18.92%	2.70%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The results in Table 5 show that when staff respondents were asked whether or not their respective customer service stores were offering high quality services to customers, 18.92% of the 37 respondents strongly agreed, whilst 32.43% of the respondents agreed, whereas 21.62% of the respondents were neutral and the other 21.62% disagreed, with the remaining

5.41% being in strong disagreement. A majority (51.35%) showed some agreement that Econet is offering high quality services to customers, as compared to the minority (27.03%) who were in disagreement. This implied that Econet Wireless staff regard the customer service stores to be offering high quality services to its customers.

The staff respondents were asked if their respective Econet shops had managed Econet to gain a good position in the minds of the customers, of which 16.22% respondents were in strong agreement, 35.14% agreed, 27.03% were neutral, 18.92% disagreed and the remaining 2.70% respondents were in strong disagreement. The results implied that the Econet staff were in agreement that the Econet shops had managed Econet to gain good positions in the minds of the customers. This result confirms the findings from the customers.

The interviewees were of the opinion that their company's brand identity has been enhanced through its customer service stores. The managers supported their

arguments citing reasons like convenience of the customer service store, convenient opening and closing hours and timetables, adequacy of customer care staff and that the staff are well trained individuals to deal with customer issues and knowledgeable about Econet and its products. These results from interviews are in tandem with the findings from both customer and staff respondents.

The Impact of Contact Centre on Brand Association – Objective Three

The third objective sought to establish the impact of customer contact centres on the brand associations of Econet. The results are presented in this section.

Table 6. Effect of Contact Centre on Brand Association from Customers' Point of View

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
I am aware of the contact numbers that I can dial if I want to communicate with Econet customer service personnel	52.31%	46.54%	1.15%	0.00%	0.00%	100%
I am getting the quality of services that I expect from Econet whenever I call	4.62%	14.23%	27.31%	31.54%	22.31%	100%
I regard Econet to be a good company when it comes to serving me whenever I call the customer service	2.69%	17.31%	15.77%	40.00%	24.23%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The first question that sought to determine whether respondents are aware of the contact numbers that they can dial if they want to communicate with Econet customer service personnel. The results in Table 6 show that 52.31% of the 260 respondents strongly agreed that they were aware of the numbers, whilst 46.54% agreed that they were aware of such numbers, and the remaining 1.15% were neutral, and none of the respondents show some element of disagreement. The results show that almost all Econet customers are aware of the numbers that they have to dial when they want to be assisted with customer care staff.

Asked whether or not the customers are getting the quality of services that they expect from Econet whenever they call, 4.62% were in strong agreement, 14.23% were in agreement, 27.31% were neutral, 31.54% disagreed and the remaining 22.31% were in

strong disagreement. The results imply that customers generally disagreed that they get the expected service qualities whenever they dial relevant numbers to speak to customer care staff.

In terms of enhancement of Econet's brand associations, the customers were asked whether or not they regard Econet to be a good company when it comes to serving them whenever they call the customer service. The results show that only 2.69% were in strong agreement, 17.31% were in agreement, 15.77% were neutral, 40.00% respondents disagreed and the remaining 24.23% respondents strongly disagreed. This resulted in more of the respondents being in disagreement than those in agreement. This implied that Econet's brand association is currently not being enhanced by customer contact centres from the point of view of its customers.

Table 7. Effect of Contact Centre on Brand Association from Staff's Perspective

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Customers are effectively made aware of customer service contact numbers	32.43%	56.76%	10.81%	0.00%	0.00%	100%
The customer service call centres are effective in delivering high quality services	2.70%	21.62%	18.92%	32.43%	24.32%	100%
The customer call centres are doing enough to have Econet brand regarded as the best	5.41%	18.92%	16.22%	40.54%	18.92%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The results in Table 7 show that when the staff respondents were asked whether or not Econet customers are effectively made aware of customer

service contact numbers they need to dial to speak to customer care staff, 32.43% of the 37 respondents strongly agreed, 56.76% agreed and the remaining

10.81% were neutral. None (0.00%) of the 37 respondents showed some element of disagreement. The results implied that Econet makes its customers aware of the customer service contact details.

When asked whether these customer service call centres are effective in delivering high quality services, 2.70% of the 37 respondents strongly agreed, whereas 21.62% of the respondents agreed, whilst 18.92% respondents were neutral, 32.43% disagreed and the remaining 24.32% were in strong disagreement. Those who showed some element of disagreement (56.76%) outweighed those in agreement, hence the results showed that from the staff's point of view, Econet's customer service call centres are currently not effective in delivering high quality services to customers. These results are in tandem with the findings from the customers.

The interview results showed more or less results. Most of the interviewees noted that currently the customer call centres is only at the headquarters, which puts pressure on the customer care staff at the headquarters. Some interviewees cited that Econet has a

larger market base, which increases the volumes of calls it receives from its customers, such that customer care staff may not be able to attend to all the calling customers at once, yet customers may be disappointed for failing to get the desired assistance. Some of the interviews, in regret, highlighted that the company has its own constraints that force it to limit the number of customer care staff, which makes the problem appear to be insurmountable. Although the majority of the respondents cited that their call centre staff are working tirelessly, the interviewees admitted that from the perspectives of their customers, the call centres are not performing satisfactorily. Thus the interview results also confirm the findings from customers and staff that currently the company's call centres are not enhancing the company's brand association.

USSD Effects on Brand Association – Fourth Objective

The fourth objective of the study sought to determine the impact that USSD customer touch-point has on the brand association of Econet Wireless. Results from both customers and Econet Wireless employees in regard to the objective are presented in this section.

Table 8. USSD Effects on Brand Association from Customers' Perspective

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
I am aware of the codes that I can dial if I want to request or purchase different services from Econet	30.00%	38.85%	13.08%	10.77%	7.31%	100%
I am getting the quality of services that I expect from Econet whenever I dial the codes	21.15%	26.15%	6.54%	25.77%	20.39%	100%
I regard Econet to be a good company when it comes to serving me whenever I dial these USSD codes	18.46%	21.92%	21.15%	22.69%	15.77%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The results in Table 8 show that when the customers were asked if they were aware of the codes that they can dial if they want to request or purchase different services from Econet, 30.00% of the 260 respondents strongly agreed, 38.85% agreed, 13.08% were neutral, 10.77% were in disagreement and 7.31% were in strong disagreement. The implication was that the majority of the respondents agreed that they were aware of such codes. The finding was that Econet customers know the codes to dial when requesting and purchasing services from Econet.

The customers were then asked if they were getting the quality of services that they expect from Econet whenever they dial the codes. The results in Table 8 show that 21.15% of the 260 respondents were in agreement, 26.15% were in agreement, 6.54% were neutral, 25.77% were in disagreement and 20.39% were in strong disagreement. The results show somewhat

agreement between the respondents. This implies that the quality of services the customer get through USSD messaging is of somewhat high quality.

Table 9 shows that when the customers were asked whether or not they regard Econet to be a good company when it comes to serving them whenever they dial these USSD codes, 18.46% respondents were in strong agreement, 21.92% respondents agreed, 21.15% respondents were neutral, 22.69% respondents disagreed and the remaining 15.77% strongly disagreed. Those who showed some element of agreement (40.38%) slightly outweighed those who showed some element of disagreement (38.46%), therefore the results imply that USSD touch-point currently has a slightly positive impact on Econet's brand association. USSD enhances Econet's brand association but to a lower extent, as far as its customers are concerned.

Table 9. USSD Touch-Point Impact on Brand Association from the Staff's View Point

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Econet communicates well to the customers on the USSD codes	35.14%	64.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100%
The USSD codes are working properly all the time	24.32%	40.54%	13.51%	13.51%	8.12%	100%
The USSD function currently works to improve the company's image in the market	32.43%	40.54%	16.22%	8.11%	2.70%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The results in Table 9 show that when the staff respondents were asked if Econet communicates well to the customers on the USSD codes, 35.14% of the 37 respondents strongly agreed, whilst 64.86% respondents agreed and 0.00% of the respondents was either neutral or was in some form of disagreement with the notion. All the staff respondents were in agreement, hence the results show that Econet Wireless communicates well to the customers on the USSD codes, from the view point of its staff employees.

When asked whether or not these USSD codes are working properly all the time, 24.32% strongly agreed, 40.54% agreed, 13.51% were neutral, 13.51% disagreed and the remaining 8.12% strongly disagreed. The results imply that generally, the staff agree that USSD codes are always working properly.

When asked whether the USSD function currently works to improve the company's image in the market, 32.43% of the 37 respondents were in strong agreement, 40.54% agreed, 16.22% were neutral, 8.11% disagreed and 2.70% strongly disagreed. Those who agreed (72.97%) highly outweighed those who disagreed (10.81%), therefore the results show that according to Econet's customer service staff, the USSD

function currently works to improve the company's image in the market. This result concurs with the findings from customers in terms of the USSD function enhancing brand association, but in terms of the strength of the impact, the staff seem to overrate the impact that USSD function has on brand association as compared to customers.

The interviewees (managers) had mixed feelings when it comes to effect of USSD messaging on brand association. However, the majority (81.82%) highlighted that although the function is usually met with challenges especially of network connectivity, it has worked towards enhancement of the company's brand. These results confirm the findings from customer and staff respondents.

Effect of My Web Self-Care on Brand Awareness – Fifth Objective

The fifth objective was to investigate the effect of My Web Self-Care on brand awareness at Econet Wireless. Data from the customer, staff and management respondents was gathered in respect of the fifth objective. The analysis, presentation and interpretation of the data is done in this section. Table 10 presents data from customer respondents.

Table 10. Effect of My Web Self-Care on Brand Awareness from Customers' Perspective

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
I am aware of the My Web Self Care platform that I can access on internet relating to my Econet account information	11.92%	14.62%	12.31%	25.77%	35.38%	100%
I can access My Web Self Care platform readily whenever I have the internet	4.23%	7.31%	63.46%	11.92%	13.08%	100%
My Web Self Care platform has enabled me to know about other services supplied by Econet	2.31%	8.08%	33.46%	31.92%	24.23%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The data presented in Table 10 shows that when the customers were asked if they were aware of the My Web Self Care platform that they can access on internet relating to their Econet account information, 11.92% of the 260 customers strongly agreed, 14.62% agreed, 12.31% were neutral, 25.77% disagreed and 35.38% strongly disagreed. Those who showed some element of disagreement (61.15%) highly outweighed those who showed some element of agreement (26.54%). This implied that Econet customers generally do not know about the My Web Self Care touch-point.

Asked if they could access the My Web Self Care platform readily whenever they have the internet, 4.23% strongly agreed, 7.31% agreed, 63.46% customer respondents were neutral, 11.92% disagreed and 13.08% strongly disagreed. The majority of the customers were neutral, which was probably because most of them were not aware about the platform as the results have shown. For those who took a specific position, 11.54% were in agreement and 25.00% were in disagreement, showing generally that the My Web

Self Care is not readily accessible for the customers who try to access it.

When it comes to the effect of the touch-point on brand awareness, the customers were asked if the My Web Self Care platform has enabled them to know about other services supplied by Econet. To this, 2.31% respondents strongly agreed, 8.08% agreed, 33.46% were neutral, 31.92% disagreed and 24.23% strongly

disagreed. The results showed that of those who took specific positions, a total of 10.38% of the 260 respondents were in agreement, and a total of 56.15% respondents were in disagreement. This implied that the My Web Self Care platform has not had a positive effect on brand awareness at Econet Wireless. The results thus have shown that the My Web Self Care touch-point is currently poor for brand management, as far as the company's customers are concerned.

Table 11. Responses from Staff on My Web Self Care Touch-Point

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Econet communicates about My Web Self Care platform to customers	29.73%	37.84%	29.73%	2.70%	0.00%	100%
Customers can access My Web Self Care platform readily	24.32%	45.95%	24.32%	5.41%	0.00%	100%
My Web Self Care platform has enabled customers to know more about other services	21.62%	24.32%	8.11%	27.03%	18.92%	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2019

It is indicated in Table 11 that when Econet staff respondents were asked if Econet communicates about My Web Self Care platform to customers, 29.73% of the 37 respondents strongly agreed, 37.84% agreed, 29.73% were neutral, 2.70% disagreed and 0.00% of the respondents strongly disagreed. The implication was that according to staff respondents, Econet communicates about My Web Self Care platform to customers. However, the data from the customer respondents has shown otherwise, the customers are generally not aware about the platform despite that the staff respondents are of the view that the customers are being communicated to about the platform.

When the staff were asked whether or not the customers can access My Web Self Care platform readily, 24.32% strongly agreed, 45.95% agreed, 24.32% were neutral, 5.41% disagreed and 0.00% of them strongly disagreed. The implication is that, as far as the Econet staff are concerned, My Web Self Care platform is readily accessible to customers. However, customers have indicated that they cannot readily access it, which conflicts with the results from Econet staff.

The staff respondents, as presented in Table 11, were the asked whether or not the My Web Self Care platform has enabled customers to know more about other services. To this, 21.62% respondents were in strong agreement, 24.32% agreed, 8.11% were neutral, 27.03% disagreed and the remaining 18.92% of the 37 respondents strongly disagreed. Those who took a position were 45.95% in some form of agreement and another 45.95% in some form of disagreement. The implication is that, the staff respondents are neutral, they are not sure whether or not the My Web Self Care platform has enabled customers to know more about other services supplied by Econet. Therefore, in the view of Econet staff, My Web Self Care platform has not affected brand awareness in any way, which imply

that it has not been a good touch-point to spruce up Econet's brands. This result more or less conforms the result from customer respondents who disagreed that My Self Web Care platform has improved brand awareness.

This result concurred with the findings from management respondents who, when asked about the most important touch-points for the company, pointed out that the My Self Web Care platform has had the least effect on the company's brands.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the findings from the previous sections, the researchers would like to draw the following conclusions:

Effect of Mobile Messaging on Brand Image in the Telecoms Sector

The researchers concluded that Econet customers are aware of mobile messages sent to them by Econet but they cannot confirm that Econet Wireless communicates with them very well using mobile messages. The customers confirm that by using mobile messaging to communicate to them, Econet Wireless has painted a good image their minds. The perceptions of the employees at Econet show that Econet Wireless is effective in using mobile messaging but confirm that the mobile messaging touch-point somewhat enhances the company's brand image. The management at Econet also confirm that mobile messaging has managed to enhance Econet's brand image to somewhat high degree as the touch-point is currently a one-way communication platform. Thus the major conclusion was that mobile messaging touch-point from the views of both the market and the company has a somewhat positive impact on Econet's brand image. Thus, there is

still a need for Econet to fully utilise mobile messaging touch-point to further improve brand identity.

Customer Service Store and Brand Identity

As far as the effect of customer service store (purchase touch point) on brand identity in the telecoms sector is concerned, the researchers concluded that it is necessary for Econet Wireless to have shops around town. The research concluded that customers are getting the quality of services that they expect from the Econet shops and Econet shops have managed to gain a good position in customers' minds. It was also concluded from the results from both staff and management respondents that Econet considers the customer service stores to be offering considerably higher quality services. The mixed feelings of both Econet employees and Econet customers regarding customer service stores was concluded to indicate that the company still has a role to play to utilise customer service store to build brand identity.

The Implication the Contact Centre on Brand Association

The researchers concluded that Econet Wireless customers are aware of the contact numbers that they can dial if they want to communicate with Econet customer service personnel but are not getting the quality of services they expect from Econet whenever they call. Econet cannot be regarded as a good company when it comes to serving customers whenever they call the contact centre. The findings from the staff respondents tallied with the customers responses that customers at Econet customers are effectively made aware of customer service contact numbers but the customer service call centres are ineffective in delivering high quality services and the customer call centres are not doing enough to have Econet brand regarded as the best. The management highlighted that although the customer service personnel at the call centres are working hard, they are too few to attend to all customer calls, which pointed out to poor service quality from the view of the market. Therefore the conclusion is that although Econet Wireless customers are aware of the contact numbers that they can dial if they want to communicate with Econet customer service personnel they are not getting the quality of services that they expect from Econet whenever they call. Therefore, customer service centres are currently poor in enhancing Econet's brand association.

The Effect of USSD on Brand Association

The researchers concluded that customers are aware of the codes they can dial if they want to request or purchase different services from Econet. It is not clear if customers get the quality of services that they expect from Econet whenever they dial the codes and Econet cannot be regarded as a good company when it comes to serving them whenever they dial the company's USSD codes. Although the findings from

the staff showed that Econet communicates well to the customers on the USSD codes, Econet's USSD codes are working properly all the time and these USSD function currently works to improve the company's image in the market, the researcher concluded that Econet as a company is not in touch with reality in the market. Econet and its employees are concluded to overrate its USSD platform in enhancement of brand association as compared to customers. The major conclusion drawn was that the USSD touch-point currently has a slight positive effect on Econet's brand association in the market. Therefore Econet still has more to do with regards to the USSD touch point in enhancement of brand association.

The Effectiveness of My Web Self-Care on Brand Awareness

The study concluded that customers of Econet are unaware of the My Web Self Care platform and that they can be served on internet when they want their account information. Econet customers also do not know whether the My Web Self Care platform is readily accessible, and they deny that the platform has enabled them to know about other services supplied by Econet. In conclusion, customers are not aware of my web self-care and how it can serve their needs. The Econet staff are concluded not to be in touch with the reality as they regard their customers to be well-informed about the platform, yet the customers are not aware of it. The staff and management respondents were concluded to concur that the platform has had little or no effect on the company's brand awareness. Hence the major conclusion drawn was that the My Web Self Care touch-point is currently poor in the enhancement of brand awareness at Econet as customers are largely unaware of it.

Recommendations

Basing on the above conclusions, the researchers, would like to make the following recommendations;

- To improve its brand identity, Econet is hereby recommended to enable the messaging platform to be a two way communication, such that, where necessary, customers can be able to reply at no cost.
- Econet Wireless should also review the volumes and importance of the messages it sends to customers. Too unimportant and too voluminous messages may annoy customers, resulting in poor brand identity. Thus the frequency of messaging to customers has to be normal and the messages have to be more important.
- Since the current customer service stores were found to be working to improve the company's brand identity, and that customers regard these stores as important, Econet Wireless should increase the number of its customer service stores for the convenience of the customers to further improve its brand identity.

- Econet's customer contact centres are currently regarded by the market to be of poor quality when it comes to attending customer needs whenever they call. The company has pointed out that it currently has constraints with regards to increasing the customer care staff at contact centres. It is a recommendation of this study that the few staff at the call centres be properly motivated to do their work properly. This can be achieved through better pay and fringe benefits.
- The other option with regard to customer contact centres is also to properly train the staff more thoroughly, such as by hiring psychologists and other consultants in the field of training phone etiquette. Having done this, the company's contact centre can help a long way to build brand association of the company. It should not be forgotten that most scholars regard brand association as capable of bringing positive influence on the performance of a brand. Lee, (2011) states that when a brand is associated with fitness for purpose, consumers tend to increase its demand. This will help Econet a long way in positively influencing its brand association.
- The other recommendation with regards to customer contact centres is to decentralise the function such that it is not only the head office that responds to customer calls. The calls can be forwarded to free customer service personnel in other branches so that customers can get the assistance they need.
- Econet also needs to ensure that it has a strong network coverage with stronger signals so as to allow platforms like USSD and the internet functioning well most of the times. This can be done through increasing the number of boosters and ensuring that these boosters have alternative sources of power rather than relying on electricity from the national grid which is terribly unreliable. This can be done through installation of solar power and generators. Adoption of technology which comes with more efficient technology can also assist Econet Wireless in delivering efficient services especially when it comes to USSD and internet connection.
- When it comes to My Web Self-Care, the researcher recommends that Econet conducts product awareness campaigns on radios and televisions. The company can also make use of social media, where impossible the company can reach out to clients. Training should be done on customers on how they can make use of the company's products. Technology is taking the world by storm, and the company should closely assist its customers to adopt and use technology.

Recommendations to Future Researchers

The sample size that was used in this study was not very large, and the researcher's suggestion is that future researches that need to analyse the effect of

customer touch points on brand management can increase the size of the sample so as to reduce sampling error. They can also consider any other industries other than the telecoms industry. A cross sectional study can also be used that can enable the researcher to have a comprehensive view of the effect of customer touch points on brand management across industries of firms. Future researches can also conduct their studies with the research topic, an analysis of the contribution of customer touch points in corporate rebranding.

REFERENCES

1. Aaker, D. (1991). *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
2. Aaker, D. A. (2016). *Building strong brands*. Simon and Schuster.com.
3. Adeleke, A., & Aminu, S. A. (2012). The Determinants of Customer Loyalty in Nigeria GSM Market. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(14), 209-222
4. Aichner, T., & Gruber, B. (2017). Managing Customer Touch-points and Customer Satisfaction in B2B Mass Customization: A Case Study. *International Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, 8. 131-140.
5. Anisimova A. T. (2007). The effects of corporate brand attributes on attitudinal and behavioural consumer loyalty. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 24(7), 395-405
6. Aseidu, M., & Sarfo, J. O. (2013). A Multi-Dimensional Service Delivery among Mobile Network Providers in Ghana: A Case of Customer Satisfaction. *European Scientific Journal*, August edition, 9(23), 86-101
7. Boatwright, P., Cagan, J., Kapur, D., & Saltiel, A. (2009). A step-by-step process to build valued brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
8. Bristow, D. N., & Schneider, K. (2005). The Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS): Application of the Marketing Concept to Higher Education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 12(2), 15-34
9. Bryan, A. (2014). *Research Methods and Organisation Studies*. London: Unwin Hyman.
10. Bughin, J., Ferruz-Agullar, P., Gomez, J.G., & Spittaels, S. (2013). *Evolve or Perish, Digital Darwinism for Telecoms companies*. Brussels.
11. Bulotaite, N. (2013). University heritage - an institutional tool for branding and marketing. *Higher Education in Europe*, 28(4), 6.
12. Bunzel, D. (2015). Universities sell their brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 16(2), 102-3
13. Chan, J. O. (2005). Toward a unified view of customer relationship management. *Journal of American Academy of Business*, 6(1), 32-38.
14. Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2014). *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation* (2nd Ed.). London: Sage.

15. Cola International Survey, (2017), available at <http://colamarket.over-blog.com/2014/11/the-impact-of-touch-points-in-the-buying-decision.html> accessed 15 May 2019
16. Crawshaw, J., & Chambers, J. (2001). *A Concise Course in Advanced Level Statistics* (4th Ed.). London: Nelson Thornes Ltd.
17. Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*. New Jersey: Upper Saddle River.
18. Curran, J., & Blackburn, R.A. (2016) *Researching the Small Enterprise*. London: Sage.
19. Dacin, P.A., Brown, T.J. (2012). The Company and the Product: Corporate Associations and Consumer Product Responses. *Journal of Marketing*, 61(1), 68-84
20. Davidson, N., & McCarty, Y. (2011). *Driving customer usage of mobile money for the unbanked*. London, UK: GSM Association (GSMA)
21. de Chernatony, L. (2017) Towards a holy grail of defining brand, *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 101-105
22. Delgado, E., & Luis, M.A.J. (2005). Does brand trust matter to brand equity? *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 187-196.
23. Dunn, M., & Davis, S.M. (2014). *Building the Brand Driven Business – Operationalize Your Brand to Drive Profitable Growth*. Jossey-Bass.
24. Einwilles S., & Will M., (2012). Towards an integrated approach to corporate branding. *An International Journal*, 7(2), 100-109
25. Fischer, R. (2015). Marketing U, Session II”. *Marketing Magazine*, 110(2), 18.
26. Gibb, F. (2016). Consumer group accuses lawyers of shoddy service. *The Times*. 5 Oct.
27. Ginden, R. (2013), *The Name game* (pp. 59-62). Cheers.
28. Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (2015). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
29. Guba, T., & Lincoln, D. (2014) *Mixed methods Research Methodologies and Data validation*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
30. Hatch, M.J., & Schultz, M. (2013). Relations between Organizational Culture, Identity, and Image. *European Journal of Marketing*, 31(5-6), 356-65.
31. Heskett, J. L., & Sasser, W. E. (2010). The service profit chain. *Handbook of Service Science*, Springer US, 19-29.
32. Hogan, S., Almquist, E., & Glynn S. E., (2005). *Brand-building: finding the touch points that count*. Journal of Business Strategy.
33. Jewell, B. R., Marcouse, I. (2016). *A Practical Approach to Business Studies Financial Times Management*. Prentice Hall. United Kingdom
34. Johnson C. W., & Sirikit A., (2012). Service Quality in the Thai Telecommunication Industry: A tool for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. *Management Decision*, 40/7, 693- 701
35. Johnston, A.D. (2013). The Brand Called “U”. *Maclean’s*, 116(22), 1-2.
36. Johnston, R. (2009). Data reliability and validity. *Educational researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
37. Kay, M.J. (2016). Strong brands and corporate brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7-8) 742-60.
38. Keller, K. L., Parameswaran, M. G., & Jacob, I. (2011). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. Pearson Education India.
39. Kersley, B., Alpin, C., Forth, J., Bryson, A., Bewley, H., Dix, G., & Oxenbridge, S. (2016). *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*. London: Routledge.
40. King, G. D. (2016). The hierarchical structure of service quality: Integration of technical and functional quality. *Manage. Serv. Quality*, 16(1), 37-50.
41. Kothari, C. (2014). *Research Methodology* 2nd Ed.). New Delhi: New Age International Ltd.
42. Kotler, P. J., & Armstrong, G. M. (2011). *Principles of marketing*. Pearson Education.
43. Laforet, S., & Saunders, J. (2014). Managing brand portfolios: how the leaders do it. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 34(5), 64-7.
44. Leisen B., & Vance C., (2011), Cross national assessment of Services Quality in Telecommunication Industry: Evidence from USA and Germany. *Managing Service Quality*, 11(5), 307-317
45. Lines, V. L. (2014). Corporate reputation in Asia: Looking beyond bottom-line performance. *Journal of Communication Management*, 8(3), 233-245.
46. Lisa, W. (2010). Brand and Brand Equity: Definition and Management. *Journal of Management Decision*, 38(9), 662-669.
47. Liu, C. M. (2012). The effects of promotional activities on brand decision in the cellular telephone industry. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 11(1), 42-51
48. Liu, L. (2016). Study of the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty in telecom enterprise. *4th International Conference on Wireless Communications, Networking and Mobile Computing*, 1-7.
49. Loo, B. P. Y. (2014). Telecommunications reforms in China: towards an analytical framework. *Telecommunication Policy*, 28(9-10), 697-714.
50. Lucas, R. W. (2015). *Customer service: building successful skills for the twenty-first century*, 3rd edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
51. Malviya, R., & Varma, V. (2012). A Value Based Approach to improve Customer Experience. *Wipro Council for Industry Research*.
52. Mårtensson, R., (2016). *Marknadskommunikation. Kunden. Varumärket. Lönsamheten*
53. Mashavira, C. B., & Jubenkanda, R. R. (2014). *Marketing Concepts*. Harare: Zimbabwe Open University.

54. Matanda, M., & Gwete, C. (2014). *Introduction to Industrial Psychology*. The Zimbabwe Open University. Harare.
55. Mauree, V., & Kohli, G. (2014). *The Mobile Money Revolution-Part 2: Financial Inclusion Enabler*. ITU-T Technology Watch Report. London.
56. McDougall, G., & Levesque, G. (2010). Determinants of customer satisfaction in retail banking, *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 14(7), 12-20.
57. Mensah, A. (2016). *Impact of Corporate Image on Customer Choice of Telecom Service Provider in Ghana*. Unpublished thesis. Kwame Nkrumah University.
58. Mintzberg, H., & Waters, J. (2018). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. In D. Asch & C. Bowman (eds.), *Readings in Strategic Management*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.
59. Morris, T., & Wood, S. (2015). Testing the survey method: continuity and change in British industrial relations. *Work Employment and Society*, 5(2), 259-82.
60. Munyanyi, W. (2013). Banking the Unbanked: Is Financial Inclusion Powered By EcoCash a Veracity in the Rural Areas? *Greener Journal of Banking and Finance*, 1(1), 2-5.
61. Nimako, S. G. (2012). Linking quality, satisfaction and behaviour intentions in Ghana's mobile telecommunication industry. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 4(7), 1- 17.
62. Nyangari, I. (2013). *Mobile Money-The Econet Story*, Harare: Econet Wireless Zimbabwe Ltd.
63. Oyeniyi, O., & Joachim, A. A. (2016). Customer service in the retention of mobile phone users in Nigeria. *African Journal of Business Management*, 2(2), 026-031.
64. Ozer, G. (2014). Customer Loyalty and Effect of Switching Costs as a Moderator Variable" *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 23(1), 89-103.
65. Peters, T., & Waterman, R. (2017). *In Search of Excellence*. New York: Harper & Row.
66. Radha, B. & Denise, S., (2006). The unbanked Hispanic community: Implications for the banking sectors. *Academy of Banking Studies Journal*, 5(1), 45.
67. Raimond, P. (2013) *Management Projects*. London: Chapman & Hall.
68. Rajasekat, S., Philominathan, P., & Chinathi, V. (2013) *Research Methodology, India*: AKGS Art.
69. Ranaweera, C., & Prabhu, J. (2013). The Influence of Satisfaction, Trust and Switching barriers on customer retention in a continuous purchasing setting. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 14(4), 374-395
70. Rawson, A., Duncan, E., & Jones, C. (2013). *The Truth about Customer Experience*. Harvard Business Review.
71. Robson, C. (2014). *Real World Research* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
72. Rosen, E., & Waller, K. (2009). *Consumer Brand Touch Points* (Unpublished Thesis). Sweden.
73. Saeed, A., & Arshad, R. (2015). *Corporate branding and customer's purchase preferences in mobile phone telecommunication*, Halmstad University.
74. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students* (5th Ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
75. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students* (6th Ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
76. Saunders, M., Philip, L., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students* (6th Ed.). London. Prentice Hall.
77. Schembri, S. (2016). Rationalizing service logic, or understanding services as experiences. *Marketing Theory*, 6(3), 381-92.
78. Sharan, S., (2017). A simulation study to investigate the use of cut-off values for assessing model fit in covariance structure models. *Journal of Business Research*, 58, 935-43.
79. Shopper Brain Conference in New York of November 2016, available on <http://www.neuromarketingretail.com/chicago/agenda/implicit-impact-of-consumer-touch-points>, accessed 15 May 2019.
80. Smith, H. (2013) *Strategies of Social Research: The Methodological Imagination* (2nd edn). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
81. Spengler, C., & Müller, J. (2016). *Marktkommunikation im Wandel*. Wlecher Marken Touchpoint zählt?
82. Spengler, C., & Wirth, W. (2009). Maximising the impact of marketing and sales activities. *Io New Management*, (3), 1-5.
83. Stimpson, P.A. (2011). *Business and Management for the IB Diploma*. Cambridge University Press. The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK
84. Stone, M., Hobbs, M., & Khaleeli, M. (2012), Multichannel Customer Management
85. Surridge, M., & Gillespie, A. (2014). *Business Management*. University of Cambridge. UK
86. Turel, O., & Serenko, A. (2016). Satisfaction with mobile services in Canada: An empirical investigation. *Telecommunication policy* 30(5-6), 314-331.
87. Ugglä H., (2016). The Corporate brand association base. *European Journal of Marketing* 40(7-8), 785-802
88. Uncles, M., Cocks, M., & Macrae, C. (2015). Brand architecture: reconfiguring organisations for effective brand management. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 3(2), 1-12
89. Xie Yu., H., & Boggs D.J. (2016). Corporate Branding versus Product Branding in emerging Markets" *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 24(4), 347-364.