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**Digital Marketing Strategy and Brand Loyalty among Customers of Airtel Network, Kenya**

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Strategy

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or internet. As digital platforms are increasingly incorporated onto marketing plans and everyday life and as people use digital devices instead of visiting physical shops, digital marketing is becoming more prevalent and efficient. According to Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK), Airtel networks Kenya ltd has had its market share increase marginally from 21.4% in 2018 to 27.2 in 2020. It is uncertain if the increase can be attributed to its digital marketing strategy thus the paper explores the effect of digital marketing strategy on brand loyalty among customers of Airtel network Kenya.

**Methodology:** Primary data was collected from a target population of 100 third year Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students from Tom Mboya University, Kenya. Study sample of 80 was extracted for the study using Yamane (1967). Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Those targeted are the ones assumed to be subscribers of airtel network ltd, Kenya. Secondary data was accessed through Airtel's network limited annual reports. The study utilized correlation research design.

**Findings:** Study findings revealed that digital marketing accounts for 41.0% significant variance in customer loyalty, ( $R^2=0.410$ ,  $F(1, 78) = 55.934$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It is also clear that digital marketing has a positive significant effect on customer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.646$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This implies that for every improvement in digital marketing, customers become more loyal. Therefore, digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on Airtel subscribers' customer loyalty.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study recommends an enhancement of the digital marketing strategies in Airtel Kenya. Emphasis should be to push most of the services into the digital platform. This will improve service delivery and further positive implication on brand loyalty of Airtel. This will also lead to positive word of mouth advertisement which will aid in introducing new customers on board. In order to encourage the subscribers carry out snow balling reference to others and so increase customer subscription.

**Keywords:** *Digital Marketing Strategy, Brand Loyalty, Customers, Airtel Network, Kenya*

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing refers to all marketing efforts that use electronic devices or the internet to promote products and services. This can include a wide range of activities, such as social media marketing, email campaigns, search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and mobile advertising. With the growth of digital platforms and devices, businesses are increasingly shifting their marketing strategies to engage customers online rather than relying solely on traditional marketing methods (Desai, 2019).

Brand loyalty, on the other hand, is the tendency of consumers to continuously purchase products or services from the same brand over time. Digital marketing plays a pivotal role in fostering brand loyalty by maintaining consistent and personalized communication with consumers. Through targeted digital campaigns, businesses can reinforce their brand message, deliver value to their customers, and strengthen emotional connections, all of which encourage repeated purchases and long-term customer retention (Mariani, 2015). Therefore, an effective digital marketing strategy can not only increase brand awareness but also significantly contribute to building and maintaining customer loyalty.

As indicated by the internet world stats (2013), in 2012 the internet was utilized by 2.4 billion individuals around the globe, and those numbers are expanding consistently in the United States of America (USA), the same numbers was 273.8 million clients and in Europe 518.5 million. The internet is gotten through workstations, as well as cellular telephones, tablets, amusement reassures and other compact gadgets, hence the new period of promoting has a computerized structure (Krill, 2013).

Nowadays customers have a plenty of opportunities to engage themselves in the digital platform. Business firms additionally have different alternatives, including growing correspondence through different digital media to create wider scopes to connect with the clients in the global village. According to retail customer experience, 2011, it has integrated different types of marketing activities through electronic devices. One of the primary types of advanced promoting approaches is known as email marketing which incorporates conveying customized messages to the target customers. Email marketing is termed to be pillar for any kind of business trying to increase sales through the internet (Retail customer experience, 2011). By this technique, it is possible to reach customers, at the same time provoke them to stick to the website (Mariani, 2015).

Social media marketing is one of the effective tools to manage the brand image through numerous social channels like facebook, linkedin, twitter among others. In broader sense, it is an incredible route for the organizations keeping in mind the main goal to fulfill the objectives regardless of building brand value, achieving new clients, giving client input that will increase the number of loyal clients (Safko et.,al. 2009).

Another type of digital marketing is viral marketing which involves dissemination of the contents element transversely through multiple channels. Some of the options may be videos on Youtube, Blogs, email marketing etc and these are used to make sure that the content grips the concentration of the market through online communities (website strategies, 2016).

Text messaging (TM) is widely used digital marketing type with rapid development of Smartphone usage throughout the world, the reliance on fast and on time dissemination of information has

increased subsequently (web strategies, 2016). Content marketing institute defined another type of digital marketing generally known as content marketing as a strategic marketing method. The main focus on this method is to create, distribution of valuable and pertinent as well as reliable content for attracting and retaining new along with loyal customers (web strategies, 2016). In addition, it's a constant procedure of communicating with clients even if they do not purchase any products. Rather organizations should focus on utilizing content advertising techniques to ensure consistent delivery of valuable information to the customers or consumers so that they can be transformed into loyal customers sooner or later (web strategies, 2016)

Digital marketing has become an essential tool for businesses worldwide, allowing them to reach a broader audience and engage with customers in more dynamic ways. As the world becomes more digitally connected, companies are increasingly turning to digital platforms to connect with customers and promote their brands. Airtel Kenya, a leading telecommunications company in Kenya, has been implementing various digital marketing strategies to strengthen its market presence and enhance customer loyalty (Makori, 2014).

Over the years, Airtel Kenya has expanded its market share through these digital efforts, yet it remains unclear whether the increase in customer loyalty can be attributed directly to these strategies. This study seeks to examine the impact of Airtel Kenya's digital marketing strategies on the loyalty of its customers, focusing on how digital marketing influences consumer behavior and brand preference.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or internet. Businesses leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email and their websites to connect with current and prospective customers (Desai, 2019). Digital marketing development since 1990s and 2000s has changed the way brands and businesses use technology for marketing. As digital platforms are increasingly incorporated into marketing plans and everyday life and as people use digital devices instead of visiting physical shops, digital marketing campaigns are becoming more prevalent and efficient (Desai, 2009)

Digital media growth was estimated at 4.5 trillion online ads served annually with digital media spend at 48% growth in 2010. An increasing portion of advertising stems from businesses employing online behavioral advertising (OBA) to tailor advertising for internal users, but OBA raises concern of consumer privacy and data protection (Desai, 2019).

Lee and Kim (2009) report that there are various digital marketing strategies that exist including social media channels such as facebook, twitter, instagram & telegram, search engine optimization(SEO), email marketing, blogs and websites and marketing products and services through online personalities and social influencers, companies can also use other digital marketing strategies such as video advertisements, sponsoring content on more popular websites and carrying out online sales such as flash sales. Businesses can utilize these advertising channels to promote their products digitally to a wider audience and increase their competitive edge. Digital marketing strategies also allow businesses to target specific customers with specific marketing strategies depending on their age, social status, preferences and financial capabilities (Ng'ang'a, 2015)

Digital marketing strategies can help companies to save on their marketing costs because it is significantly cheaper than traditional marketing channels such as Billboards, TV advertisements and print media (Lee & Kim, 2009). While digital marketing strategies are cheaper and have a wider reach, companies face new challenges of creating online content and managing these sites and online interactions with their clients, thus requires them to gain new skills and competences so as to take full advantage of digital marketing (Kithinji, 2014).

Makori (2014) carried out a study to evaluate the digital business strategies employed by equity bank in Kenya. The study was descriptive in nature and had a target population of 271 respondents. The study established that Equity bank used facebook, mobile applications and YOUTUBE as part of its digital business strategy, these digital strategies increased its turnaround time, decision making speeds and enabled it to increase the services that it offers to its clients. Additionally, the study established that the implementation of the digital strategy was faced by challenges such as cyber-crime and identity theft which led to deteriorating relationships with the affected customers. This study recommends increased IT training and further research on strategies to prevent identity theft and cyber-crime.

Cox (2012) studied the usage of social media in a small business in Indiana and using the case study method and a thorough analysis of the company's social media posts and established that businesses mainly use facebook and twitter for social media marketing. The study also revealed that the success of social media marketing was dependent on the content put out and the relationship built with the customer. It also established that social media advertising increased sales, market share, customer engagement and customer satisfaction.

Eagleman (2013) asserts that it is easier to measure marketing performance when using digital marketing strategies since SMEs can have access to the statistics on the performance of their adverts and promotional content on a daily basis and sometimes on an hourly basis; SMEs can view the number of website visitors, post readers, likes and comments, clicks on adverts and links and how long visitors were exposed to a certain advert easily. This view is supported by Wang and Chang (2013) who report that marketers who use digital marketing are able to tell the efficiency and effectiveness of their adverts, they are also empowered to fulfill the needs of their customers by observing the number of visitors and when they visit the websites; it is also much easier for marketers to carry out market surveys and polls digitally in no time and with little to no cost.

Nga'nga' (2015) studied the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the performance of commercial banks in Kenya. The study was descriptive and employed self-administered questionnaires to survey 43 banks in Kenya and established that these banks used social media, websites, display adverts, e-mail marketing and mobile applications as their digital marketing strategies. The study also established that digital marketing enabled these banks to reduce their advertising costs, communicate with their clients faster, reduce inefficiencies and track their marketing performance more easily since all the data on the marketing campaigns was easily available. Additionally, the study established that digital marketing improved the overall performance of the surveyed banks due to increased customer base, increased market share and increased profits.

Brand loyalty occurs when a person gets the same product or service repeatedly from the same source than from other suppliers. It is a consumer's commitment for using the same brand

continuously. The brand loyalty exists through relatives' attitudes towards the brand, like if you are a brand loyal fan of company X, you will buy company X product in response to company Y product regardless of whether Y product is cheaper or of high quality (Rangaswamy, Burke & Oliva, 1993).

There are certain factors influencing brand loyalty which includes awareness, quality brand association and repeat purchase behavior. Customer loyalty through their engagements is considered as a standout amongst the most compelling business measurements. For digital marketing, loyalty program is fundamental action which should be kept in mind in order to create brand recognition in the minds of consumers. Customized communications are responsible for ensuring higher retention rates. By utilizing client information, it is possible to anticipate future offers that need to be sent to their existing customers for keeping the client alive and tied up with the organization (Mariani, 2015).

Digital marketing refers to all marketing efforts that use electronic devices or the internet to promote products and services. This can include a wide range of activities, such as social media marketing, email campaigns, search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and mobile advertising. With the rise of digital platforms and devices, businesses are increasingly shifting their marketing strategies to engage customers online rather than relying solely on traditional marketing methods (Desai, 2019). These digital tools allow businesses to communicate with a global audience efficiently, tailor their messaging, and create personalized experiences that were previously impossible with traditional media.

However, digital marketing does not simply aim to attract new customers—it also plays a significant role in enhancing customer retention and fostering long-term brand loyalty. As digital platforms provide real-time data and insights into customer behavior, businesses can build personalized relationships with their existing customers. For example, targeted emails, personalized offers, and loyalty programs delivered via digital channels allow businesses to meet customer needs in a timely and relevant manner. These interactions create emotional connections, increase satisfaction, and promote repeat purchases (Mariani, 2015).

The role of digital marketing in brand loyalty is not limited to initial customer acquisition. It is the ongoing engagement and communication that strengthen the bond between the customer and the brand. By delivering consistent, relevant content and addressing customer preferences through digital channels, businesses can keep their customers engaged and satisfied, which ultimately leads to higher customer retention rates. Customers are more likely to remain loyal to a brand that they feel understands their needs and consistently delivers value.

For example, a well-executed social media marketing strategy can not only build awareness but also keep customers engaged with the brand through regular updates, promotions, and customer feedback opportunities. Additionally, digital marketing tools like loyalty programs or referral programs help in incentivizing customers to continue their relationship with the brand. Through these digital touchpoints, businesses can continuously reinforce their value proposition, keeping their brand at the top of customers' minds and ensuring long-term loyalty.

Recent studies have explored various aspects of brand loyalty within the telecommunications sector, offering insights that can be highly relevant to Airtel Kenya's strategies. A study published in December 2024 examined the influence of promotional pricing on customer brand switching and loyalty in Botswana's telecommunications market. It found that while attractive promotional offers can effectively reduce churn, their impact on fostering long-term brand loyalty was less pronounced (Marketing Expert Journals, 2024). This suggests that while promotional strategies may draw in new customers, they are less effective in building lasting loyalty, a factor that Airtel Kenya might consider when shaping its digital marketing efforts.

Additionally, a 2023 study in Ghana assessed how service innovation practices influence customer loyalty among mobile subscribers. The research highlighted that technological innovations and new service offerings significantly impacted customer loyalty, with technological advancements being the most influential (PubMed, 2023). For Airtel Kenya, continuing to innovate its service offerings could prove essential in maintaining and enhancing customer loyalty in a highly competitive market.

Service quality also plays a pivotal role in brand loyalty, as seen in a study published in 2017 that analyzed the Nigerian telecom sector. The study found that service reliability had a direct impact on customer loyalty, while service assurance did not (ResearchGate, 2017). Moreover, customer commitment was shown to positively influence loyalty, emphasizing the importance of building strong, affective relationships with customers. For Airtel Kenya, ensuring high service reliability and fostering deeper customer commitment could significantly improve customer retention rates.

Furthermore, a study in April 2024 on bundled services in telecommunications identified key drivers of customer experience, loyalty, and churn. The research found that improving the customer experience was crucial for reducing churn and boosting loyalty (SAGE Journals, 2024). Airtel Kenya could consider enhancing its bundled service offerings to create a more cohesive and rewarding experience for its customers.

Lastly, a 2021 literature review on the determinants of brand loyalty in the telecommunications industry emphasized the importance of service quality, customer satisfaction, and brand trust as key factors influencing loyalty (ResearchGate, 2021). These findings underscore the need for Airtel Kenya to continuously deliver high-quality services, ensure customer satisfaction, and build brand trust to foster long-term loyalty among its subscribers.

These studies highlight that service innovation, promotional strategies, service reliability, and customer experience are critical components that influence brand loyalty in the telecommunications industry. By focusing on these areas, Airtel Kenya can improve customer retention and develop deeper, more lasting relationships with its subscribers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The nature of this study is correlation in nature. Primary data was collected from a target population of 100 third year Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students from Tom Mboya University, Kenya. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Those targeted are the ones assumed to be subscribers of airtel network ltd, Kenya. The survey was conducted using structured questionnaires containing the 5 point likert statements.

Study sample of 80 was extracted for the study using Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+(N \times e^2)}$$

Where: N= the population; n = sample size and

e= Tolerance level of confidence or probability level of  $\alpha=0.05$

## FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented as shown in Table 1 below using means, standard deviations, frequency counts and percentages.

**Table 1: Descriptive Results**

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M(STD)
My overall experience with Airtel's digital marketing is good	0(0.0)	8(10.0)	38(47.5)	25(31.3)	9(11.3)	3.4(0.82)
I would recommend Airtel's to my friends	0(0.0)	8(10.0)	18(22.5)	42(52.5)	12(15.0)	3.7(0.84)
I would rate Airtel's digital marketing higher than other similar companies	11(13.8)	33(41.3)	25(31.3)	11(13.8)	0(0.0)	2.5(0.9)
I trust Airtel's digital marketing platform	0(0.0)	15(18.8)	28(35)	30(37.5)	7(8.8)	3.4(0.89)
I have strong confidence in Airtel's digital marketing platform	9(11.3)	9(11.3)	30(37.5)	22(27.5)	10(12.5)	3.2(1.15)
I am familiar with Airtel's digital marketing	2(2.5)	11(13.8)	14(17.5)	42(52.5)	11(13.8)	3.6(0.97)
Airtel's digital marketing is of high quality	6(7.5)	5(6.3)	50(62.5)	19(23.8)	0(0.0)	3.0(0.78)
I would likely switch brands if an alternative brand's digital marketing is better	0(0.0)	6(7.5)	15(18.8)	43(53.8)	16(20.0)	3.9(0.82)
Airtel's digital marketing is the best	6(7.5)	27(33.8)	29(36.3)	16(20.0)	2(2.5)	2.8(0.94)

The findings show that majority, 47.5 % of the Airtel's subscribers remained undecided on their overall experience with Airtel's digital marketing. However, based on the average response (M=3.4, SD=.82) the overall experience with Airtel's digital marketing is good. Majority, 42(52.5%) agreed that they would recommend Airtel's to their friends and were supported by 12(15.0%), also supported by a high means and low standard deviation (M=3.7, SD=.84). It also emerged that majority, 30(37.5%) of the respondents agreed that they trust Airtel's digital marketing platform highly (M=3.4, SD=.89) while 42(52.5%) agreed that they were familiar with Airtel's marketing, who were also supported by 11(13.8%) who strongly agreed on the same, thus giving a high rating (M=3.6, SD=.97).

On the other hand, it emerged that majority, 30(37.5%) remained neutral over their confidence in Airtel's digital marketing platform, except that their overall rating expressed a positive confidence (M=3.2, SD=1.15) while 50(62.5%) were neutral over the quality of Airtel's digital marketing which was neutral by mean and standard deviation (M=3.0, SD=.78). The findings further shows that respondents agreed that they would switch brands if an alternative brand's digital marketing is better, which is also shown by a high mean and small standard deviation (M=3.9, SD=.82). However, 29(36.3%) of the respondents were neutral on whether Airtel's digital marketing is the best and the overall rating was low (M=2.9, SD=.94).



It is however interesting to note that some subscribers were sarcastic about the company’s marketing strategy as indicated by majority, 33(41.3%) who disagreed that they would rate Airtel’s digital marketing higher than other similar companies (M=2.5, SD=.09).

In addition to these findings, a correlation was carried out using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient to establish the relationship between digital marketing and customer loyalty. The findings are presented as shown below:

**Table 2: Correlation between Digital Marketing and Customer Loyalty**

Correlation		Marketing	loyalty
Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.646**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.646**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a positive significant correlation between digital marketing and customer loyalty, ( $r=.646$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This implies that customer loyalty is positively associated with digital marketing.

The effect of digital marketing was also established as shown below using simple linear regression model.

**Table 3: Model Summary**

Model	R	Model Summary				Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	
1	.646 <sup>a</sup>	.418	.410	.40319	.418	55.934	1	78	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), marketing

  

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.683	.259		6.492	.000
	marketing	.567	.076	.646	7.479	.000

a. Dependent Variable: loyalty

The findings show that digital marketing accounts for 41.0% significant variance in customer loyalty, ( $R^2=.410$ ,  $F(1, 78) = 55.934$ ,  $p<.05$ ). It is also clear that digital marketing has a positive significant effect on customer loyalty ( $\beta=.646$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This implies that for every improvement in digital marketing, customers become more loyal. Therefore, digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on Airtel subscribers’ customer loyalty. The study findings are coherent with studies by Makori (2014) who carried out a study to evaluate the digital business strategies employed by equity bank in Kenya. The study was descriptive in nature and had a target population of 271 respondents. The study established that Equity bank used facebook, mobile applications and YOUTUBE as part of its digital business strategy, these digital strategies increased its turnaround time, decision making speeds and enabled it to increase the services that it offers to its

clients. Study findings are also coherent to studies by Nga'nga' (2015) studied the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the performance of commercial banks in Kenya. The study was descriptive and employed self-administered questionnaires to survey 43 banks in Kenya and established that these banks used social media, websites, display adverts, e-mail marketing and mobile applications as their digital marketing strategies. The study also established that digital marketing enabled these banks to reduce their advertising costs, communicate with their clients faster, reduce inefficiencies and track their marketing performance more easily since all the data on the marketing campaigns was easily available. Additionally, the study established that digital marketing improved the overall performance of the surveyed banks due to increased customer base, increased market shares and increased profits. Makori (2014) findings were slightly different from current study findings whereby his study established that the implementation of the digital strategy was faced by challenges such as cyber-crime and identity theft which led to deteriorating relationships with the affected customers. This study recommends increased IT training and further research on strategies to prevent identity theft and cyber-crime.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Airtel subscribers expressed more loyalty to the company as compared to their rating on the digital marketing strategy. It is therefore concluded that there is average performance of the digital marketing of Airtel's company based on the sampled Airtel subscribers. In addition, digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends an enhancement of the digital marketing strategies in Airtel Kenya. Emphasis should be to push most of the services into the digital platform. This will improve service delivery and further positive implication on brand loyalty of Airtel. This will also lead to positive word of mouth advertisement which will aid in introducing new customers on board. In order to encourage the subscribers carry out snow balling reference to others and so increase customer subscription.

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