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Corporate brand equity and firm performance: a case study of Mwananchi Communications Limited in Tanzania

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CORPORATE BRAND EQUITY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE. A CASE STUDY OF MWANANCHI COMMUNICATIONS LIMITED IN TANZANIA

By

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation

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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation

Members of the Capstone Project Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the project of BAKARI S. MACHUMU-559188, find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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DECLARATION

CORPORATE BRAND EQUITY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE. A CASE STUDY OF MWANANCHI COMMUNICATIONS LIMITED IN TANZANIA

I, **BAKARI S. MACHUMU-559188,** declare that this capstone project does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my capstone project, which is the product of my research endeavours.

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this Capstone Project to my late parents, Stephen and Leokadia Machumu, my wife and daughter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Almighty God for his protection and for keeping me healthy as I pursued my studies at the Aga Khan University-Graduate School of Media and Communication, Nairobi Campus, Kenya. I deeply acknowledge the help and guidance offered by my supervisors, Prof. Nancy Booker and Prof. Bitange Ndemo. I am grateful to Paul Kimweli of Aga Khan University, Kenya, for his professional guidance in academic research, organisation, and presentation of my study findings. I express great appreciation to my wife, Nengai, for her support and endurance during the many hours I spent on my studies and working on this project, my daughter and friend, Hope, for wishing me success and keeping me going, my parents, Mr. Stephen B. Machumu and Mrs. Leokadia B. Machumu, for my upbringing, my sisters, Mwendi, Mwima, Esther, Elinah and brothers Paul and Malima, my nieces and nephews for their encouragement and wishing me well. Special thanks to my friend and fellow student at EMMLI Cohort 1, Frank Sanga, for encouraging me to apply for the course and later on for the enlightening discussions and encouragement to soldier on during the programme and more so during the capstone study. I am ever grateful for the facilitation, tolerance, and support availed by the senior management team of Mwananchi Communications Limited (MCL) and Nation Media Group (NMG) – led by the Group CEO, Mr. Stephen Gitagama. Special thanks to all key informants from MCL, outside MCL and past senior managers knowledgeable about the company's journey whose insights made this study relevant. The MCL Executive Committee (ExCom) and staff for keeping up with the good work despite my limited availability when I was required to focus on my studies, specifically when finalising this project. In a special way, I am thankful for the support, concern and assistance I received from Edna Minja and Elibariki Mmasi at MCL and

Mr. Wangethi Mwangi. This accomplishment would not have been possible without you all. Asanteni Sana.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance, a case study of Mwananchi Communications Limited (MCL). The general objective was to establish the effects of corporate brand equity in accelerating MCL's business performance. The study was guided by three specific objectives: To assess factors influencing the corporate brand equity of MCL in Tanzania, to determine the relationship between corporate brand equity and the performance of MCL and to develop a functional business model that will capitalise on the firm's corporate brand equity to establish other businesses. Different studies and reports in Tanzania have demonstrated that brand equity has helped companies to perform better than their competitors who place less focus on brand equity. Makusi (2020) established a relationship between the placement of online adverts and brand awareness of the Vodacom brand and its services. This study adopted a qualitative research approach to collect data at MCL. It was done within Tanzania and within MCL. The researcher used key-informants interviews aided by an interview guide to collect data. The researcher also used the document analysis method to collect secondary data. Thematic data analysis technique was used to analyse data from 13 key informants. The study revealed that MCL has benefited from its corporate brand equity through brand extension, where it has successfully launched courier business and new events like Rising Woman Initiative (RWI) and Mwananchi Thought Leadership Forum (MTLF), among others. However, the study also established that MCL had not invested enough in increasing its brand equity. The study recommends that MCL focuses on increasing its brand awareness and perceived quality to strengthen its brand equity. MCL also needs to increase its marketing budget. Radio, television and digital advertising need to be a major component of its media mix. MCL stands to benefit more through optimal utilisation of its popularity and has the potential to strengthen further its brand equity.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACP:	Assistant Commissioner of Police
ATE:	Association of Tanzania Employers
BRELA:	Business Registrations and Licensing Agency
CCM:	Chama Cha Mapinduzi
CEO:	Chief Executive Editor
CRDB:	CRDB Bank Plc.
CSOs:	Civil Society Organisations
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
DNA:	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DPP:	Director of Public Prosecution
Egazeti:	Electronic Gazeti application
EMMLI:	Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation
EXCOM:	Executive Committee
FMCG:	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
GSMC:	Graduate School of Media Communications
LHRC:	Legal and Human Rights Centre
MBA:	Masters in Business Administration
MCL:	Mwananchi Communications Limited
MCT:	Media Council of Tanzania
MTLF:	Mwananchi Thought Leadership Forum
NBC:	NBC Bank Plc.
NiE:	Newspapers in Education
NMB:	NMB Bank Plc.

NMG: Nation Media Group

PLC: Public Listed Company

PR: Public Relations

R&D: Research and Development

RBV: Resource Based View

RWI: Rising Women Initiative

SJMC: School of Journalism and Mass Communication

tNPS: Transactional Net Promoter Score

UDSM: University of Dar es Salaam

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

US: United States

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Brand Equity: Brand equity is the financial value that a firm derives from customer response to the marketing of a brand (Anderson, 2007). In this study, this concept will be used to relate activities or initiatives used to arrive at brand equity, and how where attained, it helps the company grow its business/ revenue. It will also be used in assessing and highlighting possible initiatives MCL needs to take to strengthen its brand awareness and perceived quality and thus get more financial value from it.

Corporate Brand Equity: Corporate brand equity refers to the relationship between corporate brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty, whereas effort done to create brand identity, what it stands for and what value it uniquely offers, create a positive perception on quality of the products and services offered by the organisation in question which leads to everlasting trust from customers which in turn increases sales and market share (Researcher, 2022). In this study, the concept is understood to mean the image organisations set to build in the eyes, ears and tastes of its consumers through delivering on their promise(s), that is, products and services. It will be used to assess the risks and opportunities presented when the company focuses on or ignores factors necessary to strengthen its brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

Brand Awareness: Brand awareness refers to how aware customers and potential customers are of your business and its products (Gustafson & Chabot 2007). This concept will be key in highlighting the importance of sequencing towards the ultimate goal of increasing brand equity. Being the initiator of the entire brand equity chain, the concept will be used to demonstrate what is important for an organisation to be known or identified with in the market as well as techniques or plans that lead to a brand to be established, known from the value if offers, a key first step towards a decision to buy.

Brand Association: Brand association refers to substantive image, positive associations, and favourable attitudes formed through experienced memories (Farquhar, 1989) as cited in (Phong et al., 2020). The study will make reference to this concept to demonstrate how consumers are influenced by a successful brand with good repute. It will gauge the impact of consumers having tested, tried and tasted a certain product or service to their satisfaction and how it influences their willingness to be part of it or future decision making in consuming other or new products or services from the same organisation.

Perceived Quality: This refers to the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives (Aaker, 2009). The concept is used to demonstrate how delivering on quality promises consistently shapes consumers' view of a product or service. It will also be used to explain the relationship among brand awareness, brand association and its influence towards the next level where the company builds loyalty.

Brand Loyalty: Brand loyalty is an element of brand equity that refers to the certainty and trust of stakeholders for the organisation and its brand. Stakeholders are loyal to a corporate brand when they have an ongoing relationship with the brand. (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004) as cited in (Ali, 2014). This concept will be used to demonstrate the importance of companies or organisations having consumers reach this level. Since the study is looking at the relationship between brand equity and the firm performance, loyal customers guarantee market share of the organisation's product or service.

Firm performance: Firm performance refers to various and different notions such as growth, profitability, return, productivity, efficiency and competitiveness, (Colase, 2009) and Bartoli & Blatrix, 2015) as cited in (Taouab & Issor, 2019). This is an important concept in this study as it will highlight the ultimate goal of focusing on building elements of brand equity, especially brand awareness and perceived quality. It will be used to measure impact or achievement as a way of explaining the causative effects starting from brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty which, together, lead to brand equity. It will be used to prove or disapprove an argument that brandy equity influences firm's performance.

Aaker's brand equity model: Brand equity is the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand – its name and symbols – that add value to, or subtract value from, a product or service. These assets include brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association (Aaker, 2009). In this study, this model will be used in assessing the above assets, their effects and impact on building brand equity, and determining what can be picked for use in the implementable project.

Keller's brand equity model: Keller's brand equity model, also referred to as a customer-based brand equity model, provides a unique perspective on what brand equity is and how it should best be built, measured and managed. This model provides guidance in building a strong brand to include proper brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses and brand relations. Some of the components of this concept will be used in creating fusion of the two models.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the background of MCL and literature review of previous studies by explaining the relationship between brand equity and business performance. It also assesses the theories used in previous studies. Finally, it explains the context of the research problem, objectives, research questions, the study's scope, its rationale and the methodology of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

MCL, as it is known today, began as a communications and public relations company under the name Media Communications Limited in 1999. The company was jointly established by Ambassador Ferdinand Ruhinda and Tanzanian businessman Rostam Aziz. It launched its flagship Swahili daily newspaper, *Mwananchi*, on May 27, 2000, followed by a sports newspaper, *Mwanaspoti*, on February 12, 2001. The company was later transformed, transferring the publishing business to the newly incorporated MCL, in April 24, 2001. The Media Communication Limited became an agency that focused on advertising and public relations functions. At the end of 2002, the Nairobi-based Nation Media Group bought a 60% stake in MCL, becoming the majority shareholder. MCL launched its third newspaper, an English daily, *The Citizen*, on September 16, 2004. Later, the two local shareholders sold their stake, giving NMG 99% ownership, with Linus Gitahi owning 1% of the company (MCL, 2022).

MCL has since diversified its business portfolio to include contract printing, courier services, online and digital products/solutions (media incubation hub) and events journalism (thought leadership fora), which include the following events: Top 100 Mid-Sized Companies, MTLF/ MCL Symposium, *The Citizen* (RWI), Farm Clinic and Run for Education Marathon – Newspapers in Education (MCL, 2022).

While MCL has benefited from its association with NMG, the largest media house in East and Central Africa – with a presence in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda – it has not done much to strengthen its brand equity in the context described by Anderson, (2007). He views brand equity in four folds – as a financial value; a firm's asset; accounts for the costs that the firm incurs to market the brand and it incorporates customer response to the brand's marketing mix; and acknowledging that customers' evaluations of brand associations impact brand equity. By identifying the gaps and addressing the four areas above, strategically and consistently, MCL stands a chance of strengthening further its corporate brand equity to help it to better diversify for optimal firm performance.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

This study will contribute knowledge to policy makers, media practitioners, academicians, would-be investors in the media sector in Tanzania and East Africa, and, in particular MCL. It will further develop what should be considered in developing a functional business model for MCL and other media organisations in Tanzania and beyond. Academicians and researchers may use the findings of this study as a reference in their future researches related to this study.

1.4 Current Literature Review

Corporate brand equity has a significant positive impact on two key performance measures: market performance and financial performance (Rodríguez-Serrano & Lambkin, 2019). In their study, Wang and Sengupta, (2016) further demonstrated that brand equity is a catalyst between stakeholders' relationships, leading to company performance. Further literature indicates that companies with high corporate brand equity are more likely to have new products or services performing better than those with low brand equity (Sinurat & Dirgantara, 2021). This is because new products or services produced/ offered by firms with high brand equity can be associated with quality signals that can promote new product trials by reducing the risk of adoption by consumers (Sinurat & Dirgantara, 2021). Thus, the increase in brand equity allows the new product launched by the company to be well received by consumers (Yalcinkaya & Aktekin, 2015) as cited in (Sinurat & Dirgantara, 2021). In addition, as stated by O'Reilly (2017), increasing brand equity allows new products launched by companies to be well received by consumers. Molinillo et al. (2019) in their study argued that highly performing products or services can also lead to a broader market share and higher customer loyalty, which can lead to high performance.

Brand Equity and Competitiveness

Referring to the Resource Based View (RBV) principle, Stahl et al. (2012); Wang and Sengupta, (2016), as cited in Kumar et al. (2020), stressed that brand equity is one of the main competitive assets of a company. This simply means that organisations use significant capital and energies to create successful corporate brands, and this outlay is based on evidence that corporate brands with strong market value can help them gain a competitive edge by providing a positive effect on success. Closer home, in East Africa, in a study done in Kenya in the pharmaceutical industry, Ali (2014) concluded that good brand management creates clear differentiation between products, ensures consumer loyalty and preferences, and may lead to a greater market share. Studying the case of the Azam brand in Tanzania, Burhan et al. (2018) concluded that consumer satisfaction has a significant relationship with brand loyalty and perceived quality. Thus, as a brand, Azam depends very much on how consumers perceive the quality of its products and the brand's loyalty to consumers.

Components of Corporate Brand Equity

In his paper, Anderson (2007) presents key components in creating corporate brand equity. These are financial value, a firm's asset, which accounts for the costs that the firm incurs to market the brand and it incorporates customer responses to the brand's marketing mix, acknowledging that customers' evaluations of brand associations impact brand equity. Furthermore, in their study, which aimed at contributing to measurements of consumer-based brand equity in Australia, Ravi et al. (2005) identified brand awareness and brand associations as (the) two distinct dimensions of brand equity. In addition to what Ravi et al. (2005) established as the two dimensions of brand equity, further literature review identifies other key components of corporate brand equity, on how they influence it and how they can be used as measurement tools. Rahman et al. (2019) established that corporate brand equity has a significant positive impact on market and financial performance, concluding that brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty can be used to measure brand equity.

Different scholars have demonstrated why it is important to put significant efforts in ensuring high levels of brand awareness, brand association due to high quality products and services that may transform users to loyal customers. To ensure maximum causative effect, specific techniques must be applied consistently. For instance, in order for a company to create and enjoy top of mind brand awareness, it must have a good brand awareness plan. Gustafson and Chabot (2007) argue that brand awareness refers to how aware customers and potential customers are of your business and its products. They further established that a good brand awareness plan needs five key elements. These are, identification and understanding of your target customers; creation of a company name, logo, and slogans; value addition through packaging, location, service, and special events, among others; advertising and after-sale follow-up and customer relations management. Furthermore, other scholars provide evidence of the impact of having high brand awareness. For example, Makusi (2020) established that through online advertising, Vodacom Tanzania PLC raised its brand awareness which, in the end, increased the brand’s revenue. Phong et al. (2020) further indicated that, Apple Inc. had been successful in releasing new products due to aggressive advertising and news reports which raised iPhone brand awareness. Within a week after its introduction, surveys found that, more than 90% of US consumers had heard about the iPhone, making it exceptionally high brand awareness. Achieving successful brand awareness means that your brand is well known and easily recognisable. Thus, brand awareness is crucial in differentiating your product from other similar products and competitors (Phong et al., 2020). Equally, scholars have established how fulfilment of brand promise leads to positive association and favourable attitudes as a result of good or experienced memories. This creates brand association. According to Farquhar (1989) as cited in Phong et al. (2020) a strong brand is a result of a substantive image, positive associations, and favourable attitudes formed through experienced memories. One of the examples of brand association and its impact on performance can be traced to Vodacom Group’s strategy on how they value their brand and the number of strategies they employ to strengthen it. Vodacom aspires to be a brand that customers love by earning their trust and providing positive experiences. The brand value and reputation are embedded in everything the company does to ensure customers identify with their strategy and purpose (Vodacom, 2021).

The company tracks its brand awareness, reputation and levels of trust by its stakeholders through, among others, quality of customers' experience (tNPS) and independent research. According to the report, the company measures Reputation Index against five metrics: overall impressions, trust, favourability, quality of products and services, and economic/ financial success. Literature further suggests that a combination of brand awareness and brand association leads to perceived quality. According to Aaker (2009), the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, influences his or her choices over other alternatives.

Scholars have established this causative journey. Where stakeholders have an ongoing relationship with brand, it breeds loyalists, with customers having tested, tried and trusted the brand. At this point, argue Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004) as cited in Ali (2014), stakeholders are loyal to the organisation and its brand for keeping its corporate brand promise repeatedly. Phong (2020) further established that, customer loyalty is attributed to brand association, and that brand awareness is of cardinal importance to customer loyalty and brand association produces remarkable impacts on customers' willingness to pay. In addition, Phong et al. (2019) as cited in Keller (2008) further describe the power of branding as key in supporting an organisation to become an outstanding leader among the competitors in the same product category, thus increasing the profit margin – because customers are willing to pay a premium.

Relationship between Corporate Brand and Firm Performance

Generally, various literature indicates that, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty lead to a strong corporate brand equity. This in the end tends to impact firm performance, which is a key goal in any organisation. From the literature review, there is no universal definition of firm performance. In their study, Taouab and Issor, (2019), traced the various definitions from the 1950s to the last decade of the 20^{th} century. Citing the latest definitions in the 20^{th} century, from Colase (2009) and Bartoli and Blatrix (2015), they point out that firm performance covers various and different notions such as growth, profitability, return, productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. By measuring progress towards the goal, companies know whether they are on cause to attain their goals. Gimbert et al. (2010) as cited in Taouab and Issor (2019) argue that performance measurement system is a concise and defined set of measures, on either financial or non-financial, that supports the decision-making process of an organisation by collecting, processing, and analysing quantified data of performance information. The most common measurement tool in recent times is the balanced scorecard. It assesses the firm's performance by looking at four key indicators: financial, customer, innovation and learning, and internal processes.

Literature shows how various scholars have proved the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance. Studies have varied from country to country, sector to sector to methodology and techniques that can be used to strengthen brand equity, and how it is measured, and related theories. Ali (2014) conducted a study to assess the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance in the pharmaceutical industry in Kenya. His study also intended to establish factors influencing corporate brand equity. The study used a descriptive cross-sectional design, targeting registered pharmaceutical companies as of 2014. He used both primary and secondary data, whereas primary data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire which produced both qualitative and quantitative data. Secondary data was obtained through websites, magazines, newspapers and other publicly available sources. In analysing data, the researcher employed descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. The researcher further used Pearson correlation analysis to establish the companies' corporate brand equity valuation and effectiveness. The researcher used two main theories, namely, building theory and classical test theory. According to the researcher, building theory refers to a state where a brand goes beyond physical constituents and what stands for it has the same attribute, which although may be intangible, are still important to consumer consideration (Ali, 2014). Chernatomy and MacDonald (2003) as cited in Ali (2014) explained classical test theory attachment to value addition, describing brand as an identifiable product, service, person or place augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant the unique added value which matches their needs most closely. In the end, the study established that respondents strongly agreed that corporate reputation, firm's competition, firm's value chain activity and firm's resources allocation influence the performance of the company. In her study on the influence of online advertising in enhancing brand equity: A case of Vodacom Tanzania, Makusi (2020) set out to examine the influence of online advertising in creating brand awareness, brand preference and, eventually, the brand's revenue. Using casual research design, the researcher employed simple random techniques and purposive methods sampling to arrive at 170 respondents. She used both questionnaires and interviews in data collection. Also, the study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research used two theories: market share theory and hierarchy of effects theory. Explaining the hierarchy of effects theory, Chen (2019) as cited in Makusi (2020) held that there are six steps to be followed for a consumer to reach a buying decision in favour of the marketer. These are awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and eventually purchasing. The research established a relationship between the placement of online adverts and brand awareness of the Vodacom brand and its services. Similarly, the same was the case regarding customers' preferences, positive perception and loyalty.

Evidence of Impact of Corporate Brand Equity to Firm Performance

Further studies have looked at other key factors that bring a positive impact between corporate brand equity and firm performance. In their study, Kumar et al. (2020) researched the relationship between brand equity and organisation performance as harmonised by corporate social responsibility in commercial banks in India. The researchers used the resource-based view (RBV) and instrumental stakeholder theory which state that firms that use their resources to create brand equity gain a competitive advantage over their peers in the same sector/ industry. Moreover, they argued that engaging in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) tends to enlighten self-interest. Wang and Sengupta (2016) as cited in Kumar et al, (2020), hold that overly, the brand equity is considered an important strategic asset and one of the most important determinants of organisational performance. The study used descriptive research. The researchers used direct personal interviews to collect primary data, using structured survey instruments. The study established that banks that were active in CSR had a better performance resulting from a positive relationship between brand equity and CSR. The researchers recommended that banks needed to deliberately select and match CSR activities with the desires of different categories of target beneficiaries to achieve optimal performance. In Tanzania, Burhan et al. (2018) conducted a study exploring the dimensions of customer-based brand equity on brand firm performance: A case study of Azam brand set out to establish the validity and reliability model of Tanzania brand equity by assessing dimensions of brand equity and its constructs, that is, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty. The researchers concluded that the four independent variables are the factors that determine brand performance. They further established that consumer satisfaction has a significant relationship with brand loyalty and perceived quality. In Indonesia, a study done by Sinurat and Dirgantara (2021) on the effects of brand equity, price, and brand proliferation on new product performance through product trial, sought to establish ways companies can create new marketing strategies towards broadening market share in an increasingly competitive and growing Fast Moving Consumer Goods industry (FMCG). The study concluded that, among others, there is a significant mediation effect of brand equity variables on new product performance. From the literature review above, it is evident that corporate brand equity impacts firms' performance when organisations put efforts in addressing the four key components of brand equity. That is, focusing on creating brand awareness, brand association, quality delivery of products and services so as to secure and expand the company market base through brand loyalty. This MCL study looked at whether this will be the case in the Tanzanian media industry and at MCL in particular. The project aimed to establish if there are similarities with the previous studies done within and without Tanzania. Further, the study aimed to establish whether there is a relationship between corporate brand equity and business performance in the media sector. Specifically for the Tanzanian market, the literature review did not show much evidence of such studies relating to the media sector. While MCL's achievements have generally been expressed from personal experience, there was no evidence of scientific research findings to establish the extent to which the company was focussed on strengthening its brand equity as a catalyst for its business performance. The findings of this study will thus contribute knowledge to the MCL leadership, the media sector in Tanzania and the East African region.

1.4.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by the RBV theory, which can be traced to Edith Tilton Penrose's (1959) book titled: *The theory of the growth of the firm*, in which she proposed a model on the effective management of firms' resources, diversification strategy, and productive opportunities. Papagiannidis (2022) argued that Penrose was the first to propose conceptualising a firm as a coordinated bundle of resources to address and tackle how it can achieve its goals and strategic behaviour. The theory was adopted for this project because it has proved effective in establishing relationships between competitive advantage and performance outcomes. According to Kozlenkova et al. (2014), the theory usage had increased by 500% in the decade when they published their article in 2014, signifying how increasingly important it had become. Wang and Sengupta (2016) demonstrate why they used RBV to link a company's relationships with multiple stakeholders to drive corporate brand equity, which then led to firm performance. Their study concluded that brand equity mediates the link between stakeholder relations and firm performance. Furthermore Holdford (2019) expounded on the importance of the resource-based theory of competitive advantage as a framework for describing, understanding, and predicting the adoption and dissemination, in this case, of pharmacy service innovations into routine practice. In reviewing the theory, Wang and Sengupta (2016) noted that the sustainability of any business innovation is based upon the internal resources of the firm offering it; the firm's capabilities in using those resources; the competitive advantage to the firm of its resources and capabilities; the attractiveness of the market in which it competes; and the innovation's contribution to the financial performance of the firm. In the context of this study, the theory was adopted to look at how MCL can create and utilise corporate brand equity to accelerate its business performance.

1.5 Problem Statement

Different studies and reports in Tanzania and beyond have demonstrated that brand equity has helped companies to excel in their respective sectors. Makusi (2020) and Burhan et al. (2018) established how Vodacom and Azam, respectively, excelled. Makusi (2020) established a relationship between the placement of online adverts and brand awareness of the Vodacom brand and its services. The same was the case regarding customers' preferences, positive perception and loyalty. Likewise, Burhan et al. (2018) concluded that four independent variables, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty, are the factors that determine brand performance. They further established that consumer satisfaction has a significant relationship with brand loyalty and perceived quality. MCL has been in existence for 23 years.

However, as a communication company, MCL has not done a similar scientific study save for having its success spoken about based on individual experience. This denies the company clarity on where its success comes from so as to align its priorities and allocate more resources to areas likely to have more impact on its performance. As argued by different scholars above, when done to companies, corporate brand equity has proved to be significant in driving organisations' success. This is the gap that this study set out to investigate to ascertain the impact of corporate brand equity in the performance of MCL, whether the principles established in the literature review apply to MCL and Tanzania, and to what extent MCL makes deliberate efforts to optimise its brand equity as well as establishing whether the organisation uses significant capital and energies to create a strong corporate brand as one of its main competitive assets towards success.

1.6 Objectives

1.6.1 Main Objective

The overarching objective is to establish the effects of corporate brand equity in accelerating MCL's business performance.

1.6.2 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the factors influencing the corporate brand equity of Mwananchi Communications Limited in Tanzania.
2. To determine the relationship between corporate brand equity and the performance of Mwananchi Communications Limited in its 23 years of existence in Tanzania.
3. To develop a functional business model that will capitalise on the firm's corporate brand equity for diversity.

1.6.3 Research Questions

1. What factors have influenced MCL's corporate brand equity in Tanzania?
2. Is there a relationship between corporate brand equity and the performance of MCL?

3. What factors should be incorporated into developing a functional business model that will optimally create and capitalise on MCL corporate brand equity to diversify its business?

1.7 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to gather data at MCL, excluding other media houses. It was done within Tanzania and within MCL. The targeted population for this study was MCL stakeholders. This population comprised both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders referred to staff who worked at senior leadership level or are still with the company. External stakeholders included business partners who have or have had business relationships with MCL.

As the researcher, I drew my sample size from this demographic of the MCL population. The sample size for this study was 20 key informants of which 13 were successfully interviewed. The 20 key informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. In their article on the comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling, Etican et al. (2016) described purposive sampling technique as the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. This technique was chosen due to time limitation and the need to identify key informants who are privy to MCL's journey over the past 23 years as they have either worked, or partnered with or are still working with the company.

The researcher adopted a case study method to investigate a corporate brand equity and MCL performance. According to Merrian-Webster's dictionary (2009), a case study is defined as an intensive analysis of an individual unit, as a person or community, stressing development factors in relation to environment. The method was adopted due to the topic which looks at the relationship between corporate brand equity and the firm’s performance. As such it needed to look at the relationship between decision making of the organisation to put in context what to prioritise and where it is likely to get more impact. The researcher used key-informants interviews aided by an interview guide (*See Appendix A*) to collect data.

The validity of interview guide was achieved through sharing the draft with the supervisors and a fellow student at the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications (AKU-GSMC) as a way of testing it. Data was analysed using thematic analysis technique. “This is a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes, which are the ultimate purpose” (Braun & Clarke, 2021: 4).

1.7.1Ethical considerations

The researcher was licensed by the AKU-GSMC through a letter that authorised him to collect data (*See Appendix B*). The researcher did not force key informants to take part in the study. For the purpose of confidentiality, the researcher guaranteed the respondents anonymity unless they wanted to reveal their identity. This was done through a general description that did not associate them. Equally, the researcher sought permission from the NMG Group Chief Executive Officer to access and make use of the company’s documents to collect secondary data (*See Appendix C*). The researcher was granted permission for the same (*See Appendix* D).

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study

1.8.1 Scope

This study focussed on the impact of corporate brand equity in the performance of MCL, whereby the qualitative approach was applied. MCL was chosen because its brand products are popular Ipsos (2020) and it is one of the leading media organisations in Tanzania. The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

1.8.2 Limitation

The study faced some limitations, mainly being time and financial constraints. However, these two constraints did not affect the outcome of the study. The researcher used document analyses, interviews with key informants through telephone and one on one.

1.9 Structure of the Document

This Capstone Document commences with preliminary pages, which include the title page, copyright, approval, declaration, dedication, acknowledgements pages … and operational definition of terms. It is further structured in three chapters. Chapter 1 covers the background of MCL, literature review, and an assessment of theories used in previous studies. It also covers the research problem, objectives, research questions, the study's scope, its rationale and methodology. Chapter 2 presents the findings of the study and discussion. Chapter 3 presents the conclusion and recommendations from the study findings. The final part presents the project document covering issues to be implemented as derived from the study recommendations. It concludes with a list of references and appendices.

1.10 Summary

Based on background, literature and empirical review, this chapter established a strong relationship between corporate brand equity and a firm's business performance. It further established that companies putting into practice the resource-based theory by investing in their brand equity, and then diversifying products and services alongside the corporate brand, tend to have easier acceptance in the market than products and services from companies with weaker brand equity. More analysis will be done in the next chapter to establish whether the same will be applicable to MCL.

CHAPTER TWO

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study from data collected through both primary and secondary data. It also discusses the findings, highlighting areas for improvement and possible areas for further research.

2.2 Findings

The study was "Corporate Brand Equity and Firm Performance. A Case Study of Mwananchi Communications Limited in Tanzania."

2.2.1 Factors that have influenced the corporate brand equity of MCL in Tanzania.

Most of the key informants perceived independent journalism as having influenced the company's brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty leading to the company's good corporate brand equity in Tanzania. Overly, they associated MCL with editorial independence, objectivity and quality derived from its 23 years of ethical and analytical journalism geared towards serving the public interest. The study further established that the perceived objectivity and quality reporting has directly influenced purchasing decisions and brand loyalty of its products, especially when a reader is not motivated or able to conduct a detailed analysis. In addition, they observed that the underlying value of the MCL brand is magnified by the associations linked to it.

> Independent journalism has helped MCL build trust with the public, and makes its publications more believable (an MCL senior manager 1).

> MCL is a subsidiary of the Nation Media Group, the largest Media conglomerate in East Africa with operations in print, broadcasting and digital media, which attract and serve unparalleled audiences in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. Associations with organisations like Bill & Melinda Gates, CRDB Bank Plc., NMB Bank Plc., NBC Bank Plc. and Vodacom Tanzania Plc. on different projects like Mwananchi Thought Leadership Forum, The Citizen Rising Woman, Top 100 Mid-Sized Companies, have created a positive attitude or feeling that the brand is linked with big local and international brands. People often buy MCL products because they are familiar and comfortable with the brand. The MCL brand is reliable, trusted, in business to stay, and of reasonable quality. MCL brand awareness enables the readers and advertisers to always select it first in the consideration set (an MCL senior manager 2).

Respondents were also of the opinion that editorial independence offered the company a competitive advantage because it creates the impression of incorruptibility. The study further established that the purpose of establishing the company based on upholding professionalism had remained the same since it established its first newspaper, *Mwananchi*, in May 27, 2002, and even more so when it was acquired by NMG in 2002.

> The purpose of the owners, Mr. Rostam Aziz and Ambassador Ferdinand Ruhinda, - though they were well connected to the country's political establishment – was clear to me, they assured me, it was going to be a business-driven product and not a political instrument (an MCL former senior official 1).
>
> This allowed me to run the newspaper guided by neutrality and the truth. It is these qualities that attracted NMG to buy a controlling stake of 60% in 2002, and since the philosophy of the local shareholders and the strategic investor matched, MCL kept the professionalism and kept in telling the truth which increased its popularity (former MCL senior official 1).
>
> Editorial independence plays an important role in offering brand promise which is key in creating brand perception and the whole image of MCL (An MCL senior manager 3).
>
> Readers feel they are getting the truth, unfiltered, and advertisers feel there are no hidden agenda. That builds public trust, and makes it more likely that audiences will believe what we publish (MCL senior manager 1).

Key informants also pointed out that independent ownership that guarantees objectivity and impartiality in MCL products/ news offering, coupled with diverse content that includes local and international news, segmentation of news to meet audience preferences, have contributed in creating the company's brand awareness which impacts brand equity.

> Independent ownership of a media house ensures that the editorial policy dictates content that is free from bias and influence, is balanced, credible and accurate, while segmenting content ensures every reader's/ viewer's interest is catered for to keep them engaged which they look forward to. Overtime the brand has become trustworthy in the eyes of consumers to become their go to source for news or fact checking (a former finance manager).

In addition, some respondents said MCL resources and financial muscle had helped the company to build an enhanced reach, wide distribution network, manpower, and quality of its products.

> Investment in a wide network ensured a robust distribution platform to avail content to the targeted audience. Quality content that is not available as and when needed is useless (a former finance manager).

Other techniques used to increase MCL corporate brand equity

Respondents pointed out awareness campaigns and events that speak to target consumer and/or values of particular products such as RWI, for *The Citizen* newspaper, MTLF, for *Mwananchi* and associations with big brands through partnerships, sponsorships and media partnership of big national events, like the Association of Tanzania Employers (ATE), Consumer Choice Awards Africa (CCAA) etc., as some of the techniques MCL is using to increase its brand equity. This and quality journalism explained above, drive customers' engagement that drive consideration sets, loyalties and excellence. The company and its journalists have been recognised by independent organisations. For instance, in 2021/22, seventeen journalists won both local and international journalism awards. In addition, the company won two national awards, one as Best Employer of the Year Award in Gender Equality & Equity by ATE and Best Event Marketing of the Year (2021), issued by the Tanzania Marketing Association.

However, it was revealed that MCL lacked a clear Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme.

What attracts external stakeholders to work with MCL

Six key informants, from various sectors, who have had either engagements or business with MCL were interviewed. They related the company with openness, trust, credibility, inclusivity, innovativeness with well-organised governance levels.

> As a media researcher and consultant, what attracts me to working with MCL is the organisational culture of openness, positive reception towards professional feedback and readiness to implement ideas worth trying. MCL has exhibited high professionalism in these three areas, unlike many media houses. The company's readiness to establish a Readers' Forum whose interest is to receive readers' comments on MCL's products is a clear manifestation of a company that values feedback and is ready to take up challenges that will lead to growth (a media researcher and consultant).
>
> The best attraction to work with MCL is the proper and effective organisation structures that ensure best performance among employees (a lecturer, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam).
>
> As a media house, MCL is very innovative and uses non-traditional approaches to reach a wide range of audiences and instigate constructive public debate. MCL has a rare cutting-edge philosophy that sets it aside ranging from design of its programmes and messages through marketing to feedback (Geita Gold Mine Limited senior official).
>
> I am attracted by MCL because it embraces and believes in young talents, mentors them to become professional journalists. I am a vivid example of this, I was appointed to be the first News Editor of a newspaper when I was very young, and I had not assumed such a post before. The trust that was showed to me made me push myself to

deliver, and in doing so, I was able to unleash my potential in leadership and career at large (A Communication Specialist).

I view MCL as the trusted brand and our business is the business of trust. Therefore, you will always like to work with like-minded brands (A Public Relations Manager banking sector Tanzania).

The company's products are perceived to be credible and it has trustworthy newspapers, neutral, non-partisan and not biased (A Civil Society Organisation senior official).

Perception to MCL brand by external stakeholders

Six key informants said they perceive MCL as a strong brand and that they can easily recommend it to someone else. However, one respondent was of the view that MCL's growth is hindered by lack of strong or stronger brands in its market category.

Again, I have never experienced MCL's negative brand message as a reader. However, as a media researcher, I strongly feel the strength of MCL's brand is a result of MCL operating in a market with weak competitor brands. Without strong competitor brands, MCL's brand can hardly grow or may take time to grow as the market does not offer a fertile ground for such growth through competition (a media researcher and consultant).

MCL is a cross-generational brand, one that appeals to all classes of audiences but remain reasonably unwavered by storms of time such as political censorship (Geita Gold Mine Limited senior official).

MCL is a powerful, reliable, independent, trusted and innovative brand that embraces change and strive to deliver in all circumstances. Despite political and economic challenges that the media industry has gone through, still MCL has maintained its position as leading print media house and continue to deliver quality and objective news and always coming up with new products that enhance its newspapers credibility and meet readers expectations (a communication specialist).

MCL is innovative, trustworthy and progressive (a public relations manager in the banking sector).

Simply put, it is a super brand when it comes to print media (a civil society organisation senior official).

What differentiates MCL brand and other players in its industry

The study also established that at an upper level, MCL offers a number of significant differences compared to other players in the industry. These include fairly quality reportage, engagement of audiences through social media/ space discussion, industry leader in innovation and experimentation.

> I presume MCL is the only brand in the print media category that has ventured into the Twitter space, showing the readiness to try to change, thus making a difference to its audiences, local and international through improved engagement (Media Researcher and Consultant).
>
> Among others, it is all about trust. The trust of MCL as a brand is higher than other similar brands in the country. Other contributors include content. The content of MCL brands particulary that of sports and Mwananchi newspaper is well written and investigated. Internal training to workers is unique compared to other brands. Monthly payments to workers is consistent compared to other brands. Moreover, its organisation structure allows the MCL brand to remain trusted and grow further (Lecturer, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam).
>
> Jukwaa la Fikra (MTLF), weekly sector-based pullouts and its digital platforms are among things that differentiate MCL from other brands. Also embracing mentorship programme, in-house trainings and believing in young, upcoming journalists, sets it apart (a communication specialist).
>
> There are a number of things that differentiate MCL, "but they can all be summarised in one word, which is professionalism (a public relations manager banking sector Tanzania).
>
> Mwananchi and The Citizen come first compared to other newspapers. The way the newspapers look (typesetting) is appealing compared to others. The Citizen is handy with lots of informative information compared to other English language newspapers (a civil society organisation senior official).

However, two respondents highlighted two areas they felt ought to be subjected to some "serious searching" to raise their product quality and service. Equally, they highlighted the need to find a better way to engage with news sources.

> The MCL's product brand, Mwananchi, seems to have been playing a brand booster role (a media researcher and consultant).

> As sources we are being interviewed on Sundays and public holidays. Even if you tell the reporter that you are in church or resting, she/ he will still insist you talk to him/ her. MCL also needs to increase the number and frequency of features and investigative stories (a civil society organisation senior official).

2.2.2 Corporate brand equity and performance of MCL

Respondents believe MCL's brand equity has helped the company's business performance. The study established that relatively new business sections like courier and contract printing that are subsidiary to the main business did very well (in 2021-22) because of the confidence the clients had in MCL in delivering on its core business promise. Equally, another company's new business line that had benefitted from brand equity was events. It was further established that being on top of mind of consumers helps MCL products to be picked over the competition. This has helped the company increase its business performance.

> Vodacom Tanzania Plc. partnered with MCL on the basis that MCL has platforms that are accessible by so many people and that gave them confidence in sponsoring an event where MCL generated about 5% of the total revenue (MCL senior manager 4).

> Advertisers target media house with a wider reach in their communication to attract the highest response. Advertising thus leverages on circulation, eyeballs, clicks or listenership and therefore, in the arenas where MCL has the widest reach, it is a front runner in being the advertising platform of choice. Be it job opportunities, tenders, product launches, public notices advertisers will always seek wider participation from the local and international community (a former finance manager).

> MCL has leveraged its brand superiority for additional volume of sales generated compared to other competitor brands. It has helped the company in selling advertising space, increasing sales, promote the brand, have a higher market share, be the dominant player in the market for all its product. Internal data indicates that the company commands 49% of market share in advertising and for circulation it

> has averaged 58% Mwananchi, 47% Mwanaspoti and 24% for The Citizen between 2018 and 2022 (MCL senior manager 2).

An independent survey by Ipsos (2020) supports the MCL internal data market dominance. The survey on national readership Top 20 newspapers, rated *Mwananchi* newspaper as (remains) Tanzania's most-read newspaper in 2020, followed by *Mwanaspoti* and *Nipashe* at 55%, 47% and 36% respectively. *The Citizen*, at 11% rating, came eighth, behind other English language dailies *The Guardian* and *Daily News* with 15% and 13% respectively.

Key informants further established that brand equity has helped the company in selling advertising space and solutions, saying there are things that customers consider before advertising. They mentioned them as including the reach of the company's products, awareness of the product, the nature of customers and their age, customer loyalty, among others, observing that all these reflect brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand association, which are important elements of brand equity.

> For example, SportPesa adverts are being advertised in Mwananchi and Mwanaspoti newspapers because these newspapers reflect the right age group of betting lovers (18 – 45) years, and mostly they are working either in different organisations or are small entrepreneurs (MCL senior manager 3).

> I believe corporate entities seek to partner with MCL in their publicity campaigns because they believe readers trust "our reporting", and get upset when Tanzania's most read newspapers don't publish their PR stories. That has created the opportunity for MCL's new revenue opportunities in areas such as sponsored content, where our brand reputation is deployed to tell corporate/ paid-for stories in journalism format. That would not have been possible if our brand equity was weak (MCL senior manager 1).

> MCL being the leading media house in the country attracts the attention of so many boardroom discussions. Companies that have good repute and are strong in the market will always want to place their adverts with MCL. It is mandatory that banks publish their financials every quarter of the year. Many banks always reach out to get the adverts/ financial published in MCL papers (MCL senior manager 4).

> Media houses are commercial enterprises seeking to maximise value through meeting and exceeding consumer taste and preferences. Editorial independence is thus pivotal to any commercial media house's business model for the audience to resonate and pay for the content (a former finance manager MCL).

Brand equity has helped MCL launch new products and services

Respondents were of the view that MCL brand equity had helped the company launch new products or services, with relative ease. Some of the respondents shared their personal experience as they had overseen the launch of some of the products and services like courier service, MTLF, RWI and Egazeti.

> For instance, a strong corporate brand provided a smooth launch pad for new products like Egazeti (an e-paper application) and The Citizen Rising Woman Initiative by taking a ride on a strong brand foundation. In the two initiatives, the company leveraged from the existing partnerships and loyalty to solicit sponsorships and subscriptions (MCL senior manager 2).

> Whenever MCL do something, the public trust it. As such it had been easy to go to other services like MTLF and courier and they picked very fast as the business community/ partners, government, CSOs and international organisation were willing to join us. When someone trust you, they will come closer to you. You can do everything. It is important to keep that integrity (an MCL senior official 2).

However, one respondent observed that while it was relatively easy to start new products like events, it was challenging to run them consistently due to having too many initiatives at the same time (MCL senior manager 3).

2.2.3 Creating a functional business model that will capitalise on the firm's corporate brand equity for effective brand extensions.

While respondents were of the view that corporate brand equity gives MCL a competitive advantage, they noted that it was not utilising it to its fullest potential. While the findings suggest that brand equity is one of MCL's brand competitive assets, it was evident that the company did not utilise its brand equity to the fullest. Five key informants who were asked whether the company was optimising its brand equity, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, four of them ranked it at 3, and one respondent placed it at 2. That means, there still exist 40% that need to be exploited. The key informants suggested factors that should be incorporated into developing a functional business model that will optimally create and capitalise on MCL's corporate brand equity to diversify its business better.

> Strategic partnerships with different organisations with which we share the same audiences such as Clouds (Ndondo Cup), setting aside reasonable marketing budget, proper involvement of MCL staff at different levels and resources, infrastructure and tools availability will help address our challenges (MCL senior manager 3).

However, some respondents were of the opinion that MCL was not using enough energy or allocating enough resources to increase its corporate brand equity. Asked whether the company was doing enough to grow its brand awareness and brand equity further, one of the key informants said: "I don't think so". They also noted that the company lacked a well-established CSR programme, an important technique in creating corporate brand equity. And where the company had engaged in CSR, they described it as generally being unfocused and inconsistent.

> Besides the credibility and relevance of the content produced, more visibility of the brands will ensure optimisation of the brand equity. Partnering with main events organisers could go a long way in addition to below the line and above the line initiatives. More resource allocation to cater for brand management activities would be useful (MCL senior manager 3).

> Resource availability is key. Many companies experienced depressed revenues for the last three years due to the Covid-19 pandemic and thereafter the Russia-Ukraine war. It would be key to determine the amounts of resources available for brand awareness and diversification (MCL senior manager 4).

The making of a brand

From document analysis, MCL's brand awareness can be traced to its quest for professionalism and editorial independence. One of the major stories that demonstrate its daring approach was when it single-handedly investigated and reported the story of the killing of three gemstone dealers from Mahenge and a Dar es Salaam taxi driver on January 14th, 2006, by the police, accused of having been involved in a separate incident of 'a cash-in-transit robbery in a Bidco car'.

Mwananchi newspaper started reporting the story on January 18th, 2006, to counter the police narrative. The newspaper's persistence in unearthing the truth forced the government of President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete to set up a commission of inquiry, which concluded that the four persons were killed in a police plot to swindle their money and minerals. (*Mwananchi*, 2006). Twelve police officers were charged, including Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Abdallah Zombe, but they were all set free by the High Court of Tanzania on September 17th, 2009 on the ground that the prosecution did not prove a case against them (IPPmedia, 2016). The Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) appealed against the ruling. Later on, as the hearing proceeded, the DPP dropped the case against nine police officers. In the end, one police officer was sentenced to death by hanging as his two co-accused were set free on September 15th, 2016. This is one of the stories that put *Mwananchi* newspaper, the company's flagship, on the national map. More stories followed for *Mwananchi* and its sister paper, *The Citizen*, as *Mwanaspoti* proved dominant with a number of scoops for new signing of players and team managers over the years.

> Examples of Mwanaspoti exclusive/ scoops have been evident during transfer seasons. That DNA continues todate. At one time the newspaper circulation reached record 100,000 copies per edition. We were able to get scoops over the competition because we had built strong work relationship with our sources as well as trust and credibility from our audiences, which in the end raised the popularity

> of the newspapers amongst sports lovers (a former editor of Mwanaspoti).

Other notable stories likely to have created brand awareness for MCL products include the coverage of general elections and the entire electoral process. MCL has been guided by well-constructed Election Guidelines, which are reviewed and refreshed during every election cycle. The guidelines state the dos and don’ts for both editorial and commercial stakeholders internally and externally. Upon approval by the Editorial Board Committee/ Board, the document is widely publicised and shared with all political parties participating in the election for them to hold the organisation to account in case it violates its public promise. In the 2010 General Election, the CCM-led Government accused MCL of biased election coverage in favour the opposition. MCL took the accusation seriously and asked the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) to conduct an independent investigation. MCT formed a special committee of three eminent people. Led by the MCT’s President, Mr. Justice (rtd.) Robert Kisanga, the committee released its report to the public in Dar es Salaam, concluding in favour of MCL.

> Government accusations against Mwananchi newspaper were political. The newspaper had exercised the highest degree of professionalism compared to other newspapers during election campaigns (Media Council of Tanzania, 2011).

This outcome elevated MCL corporate brand respect, as well as brand awareness. MCL also boasts of having strong and active governance bodies, with an independent board of directors which distances the principal shareholder, His Highness the Aga Khan, away from the company’s management and operations. For example, in the 2000 elections, Salim A Salim, one of the candidates vying for presidential nomination from his party CCM, logged a complaint on *Mwananchi* newspaper’s portrayal of him as being part of the Hizbu Party, an accusation that would discredit him from being a 'candidate with the Zanzibaris agenda at heart'. The Board's investigation later concluded that indeed some senior editors allowed the publication of a doctored photograph. The Board ordered their immediate termination (MCL, 2005).

While appreciating that mistakes will happen, what matters is what action one takes. The board's action sent a strong message on what the company stood for. Another rare but notable example was when then Director of Information Service and Chief Government Spokesperson, Assa Mwambene, in October 20th, 2015, singled out MCL newspapers – *Mwananchi* and *The Citizen* – and *Daily News* (Government newspaper) as containing the most impartial and balanced coverage of the election campaigns in the 2015 General Election. He was speaking at a meeting of Tanzanian editors and a team of international election observers from SADC countries. "We have a number of newspapers in Tanzania, but let me be clear here… the three newspapers have demonstrated a high level of professionalism… and two of them are actually privately owned (*Mwananchi* and *The Citizen*). The same sentiments had been shared by the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) in its 4th Election Coverage report when it praised MCL newspapers professionalism, unbiased reporting and providing wananchi with an opportunity to engage parties' candidates. (MCT, 2015).

Various stakeholders, including Government, have praised MCL for its professionalism. For instance, on August 21st, 2017, the Minister for Information, Culture, Arts and Sports Dr Harrison Mwakyembe, commended deliberate efforts by MCL in upholding professionalism in informing and educating the Tanzanian society. "I truly commend MCL as you have been in the forefront in upholding professionalism in your reporting. Keep it up. Keep abiding by the ethical requirements that this profession demand in doing your work. I have not seen you cut corners. You have built credibility amongst your peers (Mazengo360, 2017)".

Over the past 16 years, the company has enjoyed a range of over 32 per cent in market share for its two Swahili papers, *Mwananchi* and *Mwanaspoti*, making it the home of leading newspapers in terms of market share. Internal data show that *Mwananchi* has grown from 32 per cent in 2007 to 62 per cent in market share in 2022. During the same period, *Mwanaspoti* and *The Citizen* grew from 31 per cent and 16 per cent to 59 per cent and 38 per cent in market share respectively. This internal data is supported by Ipsos survey findings which assessed national readership of newspapers in 2020 and rated *Mwananchi* as number one, scoring 55%, *Mwanaspoti* (47%) and *Nipashe* (36%) as leaders in the Top 20 most-read Tanzanian newspapers, with *The Citizen* (11%) at eighth place, completing the list of titles within Top 10 most read newspapers. Similarly on the advertising side the company has enjoyed a growth from 24 per cent in 2005 to 49 per cent in market share in 2022 for *Mwananchi* and *The Citizen* moving from 10 per cent to 30 per cent during the same period (MCL records).

Reliability

The review of external documents, secondary data and interviewing of nine external informants out of 13 are part of efforts by the researcher to minimise bias on account of his status as a senior employee of MCL.

2.3 Summary

This chapter presented key findings of the study from data collected through both primary and secondary data. Respondents and documents analysed demonstrated how MCL developed its corporate brand equity over the years, riding on editorial independence and professionalism in its undertakings.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covers two main areas, that is, conclusion and recommendations from the study findings discussed in chapter one. It offers nine recommendations to be applied by MCL to ensure optimal utilisation of its brand equity as well as increasing its brand equity further.

3.2 Conclusions

Since its inception, MCL, has been credited as one of the few media companies in Tanzania to have weathered storms, ranging from perceived political incorrectness (anti-establishment accusations), digital disruption and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. The various storms above and beyond have left MCL struggling with a perennial challenge of dwindling revenues year on year from 2015, which had seen its annual turnover cut by half, within six years, as of 2020. This study traced and tried to document MCL's historical journey, looking at what has worked well in creating its reputation and establishing what the company should do to adopt better ways of capitalising on its corporate brand equity for improved monetisation through existing products/ services, brand extensions as well as digital assets. Although the company has done relatively well in its industry, this study established that there is still room for improvement, by first optimising its corporate brand equity but also strengthening it further. To do so, the company needs to appreciate the fact that brand affinity depends on fulfilment of promises. MCL, especially from NMG's point of view, has been consistent in delivering against its promises by being reliable, factual, fair and balanced.

However, that does not mean there have been no problems. Prior to 2015 external interferences were minimal, which helped the organisation to build a strong image, trust, love and predictability from readers. As put by Nanai (2023), this comes from culture and the strength of NMG, the group, it has become part of MCL DNA, giving it an upper hand against competition. Thus, MCL should leverage further from its brand association with NMG by using new techniques/ initiatives to not only optimise but also increase its brand equity.

3.3 Recommendations

3.3.1 MCL should leverage more on NMG brand association

As much as MCL is an independent entity, it remains associated with NMG as a brand. Setting up of some products and services have a bearing on “what” happens at the group level. However, MCL should focus more on the execution, the “how”, that is how to do it differently. To do it differently, MCL needs to understand the habit of its customers in Tanzania, scan its environment politically, socially and economically, to have an upper hand about consumers’ challenges and offer them the right solutions.

3.3.2 MCL needs to embrace research

Research is an important component for the business to remain relevant. MCL should regularly conduct research/ surveys to determine consumer behaviour, technological trends and usage/ application, and related challenges. Since research can be expensive due to budgetary constraints and other factors, MCL should consider setting up an R&D unit to constantly collect insights from within and in the market. Where possible, MCL should strive to get the right research companies to work with as the quality of some local companies leaves a lot to be desired.

3.3.3 Invest in people, attract, develop and retain talent

Brand equity is built by people. So, MCL needs to have a pool of the right people, of high integrity. It should constantly do gap analyses, where there are gaps, it should develop them, measure performance, engage them in developing and sharpening company strategy to get their buy in. Where necessary, MCL should recruit the best people, develop, and retain them. They should be digital and tech savvy.

3.3.4 MCL should develop a purposeful CSR programme

CSR is a marketing initiative. It needs money/resources. It is a very critical initiative for any corporate organisation to have. That is where organisations get their licence to operate from. You serve, make money through people/ communities. It helps in top-of-mind awareness of the brand as caring and having a higher purpose other than maximising profitability. You need to give back to earn their heart. In the past MCL did few low scope initiatives whose impact was minimal, and were inconsistent. Thus, CSR is crucial as part of MCL's strategy to increase brand equity, but it must be done authentically in areas of genuine interest to the company and its clients, preferably one or two focus areas. It should never be window-dressing - potential customers are turned off by insincere CSR, and if they feel you're not real, they will start asking what is MCL hiding. By properly mapping its stakeholders vis-a-vis their needs, and focus on them based on an expanded scope, done consistently with the right visibility, MCL can strengthen its brand equity business performance.

3.3.5 Promote specialisation

MCL should put more focus in creating and developing/ encouraging specialisation amongst its journalists as readers consumption patterns – those willing to pay - changes towards analysis, contextualisation and depth.

3.3.6 Expedite partnerships

Where MCL lacks competency, it should consider partnerships with different organisations with which it shares the same audiences or are like minded. This includes bartering with other media partners where possible and expand affiliation with desirable corporate entities (e.g., with telcos like Vodacom).

3.3.7 Increase marketing reach/ resource availability

It takes time to attain Top of mind status amongst your customers. For years MCL has focused on promoting its products through its own platforms. In the absence of radio and TV, the company is missing out on opportunities to spread its good news given the fact that radio and TV are the most preferred media compared to print. MCL needs to explore partnerships and barter agreements with broadcasters and outdoor advertising companies. MCL also needs to invest more in self-promotion, with an active media budget outside its own network to talk about its values as a company, its ethos and to brag about its successes. Radio, television & digital advertising need to be a major component of its media mix. Also, consider influencer endorsement (e.g., from corporate or political leaders).

3.3.8 Keep innovating/ up the quality of other MCL brands

Much as MCL is open to try new things and products like *Jukwaa la Fikra*, and others which ride on *Mwananchi* newspaper's supremacy, the company needs to do "serious soul searching"/ products audit to up the quality of other brands.

3.3.9 Benchmark with regional/ international brands

There is a "strong feeling" that the strength of MCL's brand is a result of MCL operating in a market with weak competitor brands. Without strong competitor brands, MCL's brand can hardly grow or may take time to grow as the market does not offer a fertile ground for such growth through competition. MCL should aim to benchmark itself with other regional and international players in terms of quality delivery.

PROJECT DOCUMENT

Introduction

Since its inception, MCL, has been credited as one of the few media companies in Tanzania to have weathered storms, ranging from perceived political incorrectness (anti-establishment accusations) and digital disruption to, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. The various storms above and beyond have left MCL struggling with a perennial challenge of dwindling revenues year on year from 2015, which had seen its annual turnover cut by half, within six years, as of 2020. This study traced and tried to document MCL's historical journey, looking at what has worked well in creating its image and establishing what the company should do to adopt better ways of capitalising on its corporate brand equity for improved monetisation through existing products/ services, brand extensions as well as digital assets. Although the company has done relatively well in its industry, this study established that there is still room for improvement, by first optimising its corporate brand equity but also strengthening it further. According to the findings of the study, MCL lacks a number of key elements necessary to knowing its customers and increasing its brand equity. These include the absence of a robust customer relations management system; until recently, it lacked corporate slogan; in most cases the company does not advertise outside its ecosystem (note: a predominantly print and digital company, MCL misses out to radio and TV audiences which account for over 80% of audiences against print's 17% preference). Equally, the company does very little in using outdoor advertising. On the other hand, the study findings established that MCL does not have an elaborate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, a key component in winning the hearts and minds of communities/ society the company operates in. There was no evidence of impact from

CSR as respondents described the company's involvement in CSR to be non-focused and inconsistent. For instance, five key informants who were asked whether the company was optimising its brand equity, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, four of them ranked it at 3, and one respondent placed it at 2.

Thus, this Project Document aims to propose a functional business model that will capitalise on the firm's corporate brand image for diversity, by identifying some of the key techniques or initiatives MCL should use to not only optimise but also increase its brand equity. This programme will use elements from both Aaker's brand equity model, which focuses on brand assets, and Keller's brand equity model, which is customer focused. These will include brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality/ brand response, brand loyalty/ brand resource, brand identity and brand meaning. From the findings above, the following is the implementation plan.

Programme to Optimise and Strengthen MCL Corporate Brand Equity

Rationale of the Programme

As established by different scholars cited in the literature review, companies that put more focus and allocate enough resources to growing their corporate brand equity find it easier to do brand extensions that end up being accepted by the market compared to those who don't focus on the same. There was further evidence that companies that focused on creating their brand awareness benefited from brand association based on awareness and perceived quality, hence playing as a key competitive asset against its competitors in the same market category. MCL being a content company in a highly competitive industry has not done this strategically to drive the organisation's success. Clearly, there is an opportunity here for MCL to be even more successful. Thus, this programme is important as it will enable the company to become more effective and profitable, financially stable, address its cashflow challenges to be able to execute its business plan, business expansion and set aside resources to do experimentation and R&D for the future. In addition, this programme will rescue the company from its reliance on two legacy revenue pillars contributing nearly 90% of the company's revenue by diversifying revenue drivers to include meaningful contribution from timeless initiatives like events and emerging digital solutions.

Implementation and ownership

MCL's biggest challenge to execute its plans is cash flow. Thus, the company finds itself in a situation where it must utilise the Three Box Solution concept, to run parallel three things to ensure its survival today and a better tomorrow. That is, protecting the present, strategically forget the past (habits that hinder future possibilities) to enable it to create the future. That means, MCL should focus on (aggressively) growing the topline (revenue), optimise cost while creating its future around evolving business models. Until that time when it is financially and consistently stable, it needs to utilise its popularity /brand strength and business relationships to get the values and solutions it wants through among others, the following two main areas; optimizing existing brand equity and strategy to grow brand awareness.

Optimise existing brand equity

Even without an aggressive campaign to create brand awareness, MCL stands out amongst its peers. This presents low hanging fruits which should enable the company to benefit more within a short to medium time. To do so, MCL should implement the following:

i) First establish or determine the strength of its corporate brand equity by conducting a survey that will give it further insights into its perceived value and what is expected from it.
ii) Set out to create or acquire tools that will enable it to collect customers' feedback for all its products and services to be incorporated in its decision making in production and delivery of various services, by living one of its values: Customer focus.
iii) In the medium term the company should set aside resources to create an R&D unit that will constantly check the market's pulse and anticipate risks and opportunities. The R&D unit should enable the company to understand what problems exists, get a better understanding of the problems we are solving in the market before responding with targeted products and service development.
iv) Conduct regular product audits to review existing value and products/ services offering and drop those with a low impact, while focusing on few key ones requiring relatively low efforts but with high impact (80/20 rule).
v) Solicit grants (philanthropy) to create content that addresses key global topics that don't always get space on media platforms.

Grow the brand awareness

The company's absence in electronic media forces it to rely on its own platforms. Following years of poor business performance, budget allocations to cater for advertising media spend on radio and TV have remained very minimal or non-existing. To revise the trend, MCL should do the following:

i) Double up efforts in creating strategic partnerships and collaborations with broadcasting and outdoor advertising companies through barter arrangements to allow the company to access media platforms beyond its ecosystem.
ii) Create a CSR policy and strategy that should be well mapped to address societal needs. Once identified, it must be done consistently.
iii) Focus on building a corporate image: Give the company more visibility through visuals (including proper branding of company premises across the country, vans and its staff – including creating and branding MCL media personalities.
iv) Increase sponsorship of events organized by like-minded companies.
v) Increase participation as media partners in national matters/ corporate matters.
vi) Address brand identity and brand meaning.
vii) Increase marketing budget: Management to engage the MCL Board on the need and benefits of allocating appropriate resources for long-term success.

Since the project presents a strategic shift for the organisation, the CEO should take a keen interest in driving it, by aligning with both the board and management. This will include creating awareness on the need to embrace the project amid meager resources to get senior management Board buy-in. Upon attaining the envisaged alignment, the management through the Corporate Affairs and Marketing Manager, should assume the lead role, starting with key stakeholders mapping, from which the team will be picked to develop the programme. These will include Managing Director, Corporate Affairs and Marketing Manager, Finance Manager and other Heads of Department as per emerging requirements. The programme will be implemented in phases, that is short-term, medium and long-term. In the long run, the programme will become an on-going feature that will be incorporated in future business plans and annual budgets, starting with 2024.

Resources

Both monetary and human resources will be key in the implementation of this programme. The management should take two approaches. One, use partnerships as much as possible to create content or materials necessary for advertising and promotion through third parties. Equally, do the same through barter agreements with radio, TV and outdoor advertising companies. On the other hand, the management should create the necessary functions within its organo-chart on a need and impact basis. This will be in line with the need to increase the marketing budget for branding.

Time plan

This is expected to be an ongoing thing, the way of doing things. Thus, it will be categorised through short-term, medium and long-term strategies.

i) Short-term (3 – 6 months)

To start off, the management should focus on establishing or expanding partnerships and barter agreements with well positioned broadcasting and outdoor advertising agencies. This will go in line with repurposing marketing initiatives currently in the business plan and budget 2023.

ii) Medium to Long-term (6 – 12 months, onwards)

Monitor and evaluate progress; continue opening up more strategic partnerships, incorporate in budget 2024 plan from September to November 2023.

Monitoring and evaluation

This programme will adopt a tracking and implementation tool called OKR – Objective Key Results. The tool is used to bring together cross functional teams to run projects in cycles of 90 days, built around a stretched objective (O) with key results

(KR) areas. Each key stakeholder is given a key result area to work on towards a common goal. Thus, the programme OKR will be:

Objective: MCL corporate brand identity is ranked among Top 10 Top of Mind corporates in Tanzania.

KR 1: Profitability growth at 50% of annual budget 2024.

KR 2: Contribution of events and courier businesses to overall company profitability doubled by 2024.

KR 3: Reduced reliance on one revenue source to a maximum of 35% contribution by 2025.

KR 4: MCL products have a commanding market share in all sub sectors its products and services operate in by 2024.

KR 5: Customers satisfaction above 80% Net Product Score by 2024.

In addition, the following financial metrics will be used to measure sales performance. These will include a comparison of MCL rate card with the competition (price premium), rate of sustained growth, cost value – which means an analysis of advertising, regulatory costs, market value when compared to similar services or products in the market place, as well as income value, which is return on investments or savings as a result of increasing brand equity. As for brand awareness, the following metrics will be used to capture the perception or feelings of customers. This will include assessing customers' readiness to buy in the future; their feedback through consumer satisfaction surveys; how long have customers known the brand, purchase history, sales data and audience direct website searches.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide

MCL Internal Key Informants

1. What factors have influenced Mwananchi Communications Limited's corporate brand equity in Tanzania?

   i) What are the three key factors that have influenced MCL's popularity?

   ii) Explain how the above three factors had an influence, if any, to MCL brand equity?

   iii) As a media house to what extent do you consider editorial independence as competitive advantage to the company? What impact has it had in creating MCL brand equity?

   vi) What techniques is MCL using to increase its brand equity?

   v. Does MCL have a clear Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program?

2. Is there a relationship between corporate brand equity and the performance of Mwananchi Communications Limited?

   i) Do you believe MCL brand equity has helped the company's business performance?

   ii) Does MCL brand equity help in selling advertising space, solutions? How? Give specific examples.

   iii) Do you believe MCL brand equity has helped the company launch new products or services? / How?

   iv) How difficult or ease was it for consumers/ clients to adopt new products or services? Please give specific examples on whether it was easy or difficult to start new products like events - Mwananchi Thought Leadership; The Citizen Rising Woman Initiative, Farm Clinic and Courier.

   v) Has MCL benefited from its involvement in giving back to the community through CSR?

3. What factors should be incorporated into developing a functional business model that will optimally create and capitalise on Mwananchi Communications Limited corporate brand equity to diversify its business?

   i) Would you say brand equity is one of MCL's brand competitive assets?

   ii) In a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, would you say MCL is utilising its brand equity to the fullest?

   iii) If not, what should it do to achieve its fullest potential?

iv) Is MCL using enough energy to increase its corporate brand equity? If yes, how/ If no, why? What should be done?

v) Do you perceive CSR as an important undertaking the company should engage in to raise its brand equity?

MCL External Key Informants

i) What attracts you in working with MCL?
ii) How do you perceive MCL as a brand?
iii) What difference, if any, does MCL as a brand, offer compared to other players in its industry?

Appendix B: Introductory Letter from AKU

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

22 November 2022

To Whom It May Concern

This letter is to confirm that Bakari Machumu is a final year Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation student at the Aga Khan University in Nairobi. He is currently doing his project research as part of fulfilling the requirements for award of the aforementioned degree.

Please accord him the assistance he requires to enable him complete the research and the degree programme.

Please contact via email (george.nyabuga@aku.edu) or phone (+254(0)709 931807) if you have any questions.

Yours faithfully,

GNyabuga

Prof. George Nyabuga
Coordinator
Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation

Graduate School of Media & Communications
4th Floor, University Centre, 3rd Parklands Avenue,
P.O. Box 30270 - 00100, GPO, Nairobi, Kenya
www.aku.edu/gsmc

Appendix C: Request for Permission Letter from the Researcher

Group CEO,
Nation Media Group,
P.O. Box 49010 G.P.O.
Nairobi 00100,
Kenya.

Dear Sir,

<u>Re: Permission to Conduct a Study on Mwananchi Communications Ltd as a Partial Fulfillment of my Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation at the Aga Khan University, Nairobi campus.</u>

The heading above refers. As you might be aware, I am at the tail end of my two-year studies at the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media & Communications. I am required to conduct a capstone project to fulfill my studies' requirements.

I intent to do a study at Mwananchi Communications Ltd., a subsidiary of Nation Media Group on the following topic: The role of brand equity in the performance of Mwananchi Communications Ltd - a case study.

This is to request for your acceptance letter as a commitment to allow me access available documents and any relevant information for the study.

Looking forward for a favorable consideration,
I remain,

Bakari S. Machumu,
EMMLI Student, Reg. No. 559188,
Aga Khan University.
26.10.2022.

Appendix D: Approval Letter from the Group CEO, NMG

Nation Media Group PLC

Nation Centre,
Kimathi Street,
P.O Box 49010 G.P.O
Nairobi 00100
Kenya
Telephone: +254 20 3288000/1/2/3
Mobile: +254 719038000/ +254 732138000
Email: customercare@ke.nationmedia.com
Website: https://www.nationmedia.com

27th October, 2022

The Aga Khan University,
Graduate School of Media & Communications,
P.O. Box 30270-00100. Nairobi, Kenya. +254 709 931 800
info.gsmc@aku.edu.

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: CONFIRMATION OF BAKARI MACHUMU'S PROJECT

This is to confirm that Nation Media Group (NMG), the parent company of Mwananchi Communications Ltd. (MCL), has allowed your student Bakari S. Machumu (559188), to conduct his capstone project at our subsidiary company, MCL, as part of fulfillment of his Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation (EMMLI) course at your institution, from October to December 2022.

Sincerely,

Stephen Gitagama,
Group Chief Executive Officer,
Nation Media Group,
P.O. Box 49010 G.P.O.
Nairobi 00100, Kenya.

Group Divisions: Nation Newspapers, Nation Broadcasting, Nation Carriers, Nation Digital.