

**THE INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY ON CUSTOMER
LOYALTY IN UGANDA**

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Declaration

I Nabatanzi Sauda do declare that, this research titled “the influence on Customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty: case study of Café Javas rat-milkshake saga” is my original work and has never been submitted to any university for any academic award.

Sauda Nabatanzi

Signature .

Date 05.06.2025

Approval

This is to certify that this research proposal has been done under my supervision and is ready for submission and examination.



Signature

Prof. James Kiwanuka-Tondo

DATE...05-06-25.....

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father Prof. Dr. Katende Suleyman Mubanda, family, husband as well as the lectures whom I have acquired most of the knowledge and assistance from.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty Allah for His mercy, guidance for having enabled me to accomplish this task, am also indebted to the following people whose assistance has been a paramount importance in my endeavors in different ways. May God reward them abundantly. My family, Professional lectures at Uganda Christian University, more especially my research supervisor Prof. James Kiwanuka- Tondo who have taught me so much in this field. Special thanks go to Mr. Lameck Ekwang and current employer for their help during my research.

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty using the Café Javas rat-milkshake saga as a case study. The specific objectives of the study were to examine how public perception of customer-based brand equity influences customer loyalty; to examine how customer brand perception influences the brand's crisis communication strategies; to examine the role of customer loyalty on brand market performance in the fast-food industry. A qualitative approach was used, with data collected through in-depth interviews, which allowed respondents to express their views in an open-ended manner. The data were analyzed thematically, involving processes such as coding and transcription. Fritz Heider's attribution theory was used to understand how individuals attribute causes to events and how these attributions influence their perceptions and behaviors. The findings revealed that customer-based brand equity, particularly trust built over years of positive experiences, played a significant role in maintaining customer loyalty during the crisis. The study also showed that Café Javas' crisis management strategies, such as transparent communication and professionalism, helped mitigate reputational damage and preserve customer loyalty. Furthermore, the research highlighted the critical role of customer loyalty in sustaining brand performance, as loyal customers continued to support the brand and contribute to its market resilience despite the scandal. These results emphasize the importance of brand equity, crisis management, and customer loyalty in ensuring a brand's long-term success.

List Of Abbreviations And Acronyms

B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
CBBE	Customer-Based Brand Equity
CIS	Crisis Impact Study
CJ	Café Javas
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
KIs	Key Informants
LTV	Lifetime Value
PR	Public Relations

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of brand equity and customer loyalty, crucial concepts in understanding consumer behavior and business strategy. It begins with the background of the study, highlighting the relevance and significance of these concepts in today's competitive market. Following this, the problem statement is outlined, explaining the challenges or gaps the research aims to address. The purpose of the study is clarified, along with the specific research objectives and questions that guide the investigation. The chapter further emphasizes the importance of the study, detailing the potential contributions to academic literature, industry practices, and policy-making. The scope of the study is also defined, clarifying the boundaries within which the research is conducted. Lastly, the limitations of the study are acknowledged.

1.2 Background to the Study

Most companies have increased investment in the brand management function ((So et al., 2017; Rather, 2017). A brand, as defined by Rather and Sharma (2017a; 2017b), is a unique name or symbol—such as a logo, trademark, packaging, or design—created to identify a product or service and distinguish it from competitors. A brand serves as a signal to consumers, indicating the product's source and safeguarding both customers and producers from rival businesses attempting to offer similar goods or services (Aaker, 1991). Additionally, Hollebeek and Chen (2014) emphasize that brands enable consumers to recognize and form connections with products or services. Burgess and Steenkamp (2013) further explain that, from the consumer's perspective, a brand represents the collective sum of their experiences, shaped by every interaction they have with it.

According to Brodie et al. (2013) and Dessart et al. (2016), a successful brand is one that effectively communicates its relevance and distinct benefits, aligning closely with consumer needs. Keller (2003) highlights that a consumer's understanding of a brand stems from the personal associations and memories they attach to it. Similarly, Rodriguez (2013) describes a brand as a strong product guarantee, simplifying consumer identification. In agreement, Lee and Jeong (2014) state that strong brands drive long-term growth, profitability, and asset value by ensuring competitive differentiation, commanding premium prices, boosting sales, and lowering costs through economies of scale, ultimately securing consistent demand.

The concept of brand equity has been explored by numerous scholars (Islam et al., 2017; Odoom et al., 2017; Rather, 2018; Rather & Sharma, 2017a, 2017b). According to Alagon and Samwel (2011), brand equity refers to the ability of brand associations to influence consumer preference, leading them to choose the brand over others or pay a premium for it, both now and in the future. In their seminal research, Han and Ijiri (1991) defined brand equity as the added value that a brand name confers on a product. Aaker (1991), on the other hand, conceptualized brand equity as a collection of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol, which can either enhance or diminish the value of a product or service.

Zhang and Bloemer (2011) further elaborated on consumer-based brand equity, emphasizing that it reflects the perceptions consumers hold about a brand. Consequently, companies aiming to maintain strong brands focus on gathering insights into consumer perceptions, as firms with such knowledge are often recognized for their strong market performance. Aaker (1991) identified five key dimensions of consumer-based brand equity: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, and other proprietary brand assets, including patents, trademarks, and channel relationships. Johar and Sirgy (1991) observed that among these five dimensions, the first four—perceived quality, brand loyalty,

brand awareness, and brand association—are most relevant for evaluating customer-based brand equity, as they directly capture consumers' experiences and responses to a brand.

In today's highly competitive market environment, brands are considered vital for companies seeking to create customer value and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Rather, 2017; Harrigan et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017; Rather, 2018). Building a strong brand remains a central objective for many companies due to the significant benefits it offers (Rather, 2018). As Olson (2008) asserts, a strong brand is a company's most valuable asset, capable of driving higher profit margins. Additionally, Chen and Cheng (2008) highlight that strong brands foster customer trust during purchasing decisions and influence their perception of intangible attributes.

Aaker (1991) emphasized perceived quality as a crucial dimension of customer-based brand equity. This dimension was notably tested during the Café Javas rat and milkshake scandal, which surfaced on social media and was picked up by major media outlets on August 25, 2021. This scandal significantly challenged Café Javas' brand image. Consequently, the current study uses the Café Javas rat and milkshake incident as a case study to explore the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty.

1.2.1 Context of the Café Javas Rat and Milkshake Saga

In August 2021, Café Javas, a prominent restaurant chain in Uganda, was involved in a highly publicized incident when a video surfaced on social media showing a rat allegedly found in one of their milkshakes. The incident quickly gained traction on both social media and mainstream news, leading to significant reputational damage for the brand. This crisis served as a key example in the study, highlighting the role of customer perception and brand equity in shaping consumer loyalty. The aftermath of the crisis revealed how the brand's perceived quality and trust were severely impacted, influencing consumer behavior and loyalty.

The response to this incident, as well as the brand's efforts to regain customer trust, was examined in this study to explore the broader implications of brand equity in times of crisis.

1.3 Problem Statement

Companies are increasingly ambitious in their competition for customers, making effective branding a significant factor in achieving market supremacy (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2012). Customer loyalty, being a crucial function of brand equity, has driven fast food companies, like other competing organizations, to implement strategies aimed at enhancing brand loyalty, creating brand awareness, and fostering brand associations to boost sales and profits (Fujita et al., 2018; Hollebeek, 2018). However, in Uganda's fast-food industry, which operates in a competitive business environment characterized by challenging and evolving customer expectations and the influence of readily available brand information, firms are under immense pressure to maintain consistency in service delivery and product quality (Mungeryek et al., 2019). Any lapse in these areas may result in a loss of market share, decreased profits, and heightened marketing expenditures.

Despite a significant body of research on brand equity globally, regionally, and nationally, gaps persist regarding the examination of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) and its impact on customer loyalty in the fast-food industry, particularly in Uganda (Muhimba, 2021). A study by Njuguna (2014) in Nairobi's Central Business District revealed that CBBE dimensions such as brand quality, awareness, and reliability substantially influence consumer purchase decisions. These findings highlight the importance of brand equity dimensions in shaping customer behavior. Furthermore, incidents like the rat and milkshake scandal at Café Javas in Uganda illustrate how a compromised quality dimension of CBBE can adversely affect customer loyalty and brand perception.

While existing studies have examined CBBE's role in influencing consumer choices in specific industries (Fujita et al., 2018), there remains a gap in exploring how specific

dimensions of CBBE such as brand quality and brand association that interact to influence customer loyalty in Uganda's fast-food sector during crises times (Njuguna, 2014). This study addressed this gap by investigating the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty, using Café Javas' rat and milkshake scandal as a case study.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty.

1.5 Specific Objectives

1. To examine how public perception of customer-based brand equity influences customer loyalty.
2. To examine how customer brand perception influences the brand's crisis communication strategies.
3. To examine the role of customer loyalty on brand market performance in the fast food industry.

1.6 Research Questions

1. To what extent does public perception of customer-based brand equity influence customer loyalty?
1. To what extent does customer brand perception influence the brand's crisis communication strategies?
2. What is the role of customer loyalty on brand market performance in the fast food industry?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The current business environment has become more, and more competitive and customers are also more and more demanding. For product companies to gain a competitive

advantage, and register formidable market performance, their customer-based brand equity must meet stakeholder needs, preferences, and expectations. This research was significant to the following:

The study will assist investors not only in the fast-food industry but also in other sectors to put in place strategies that will enable them to build strong, and sustainable customer-based brand equity for existing brands, newly introduced brands, and future brands. The study will also enable firms to build a strong hedge around their brands against invasion by competitors, substitutes in a competitive market

The study will present insights to researchers in Uganda to direct research efforts towards customer-based brand equity, and customer loyalty as a fast-growing academic area within and beyond Uganda. Prominence is desirable in the product sector in Uganda as the country gears towards a first-class economy

Understanding the relationship between customer-based brand equity, and customer loyalty to the brand will enable product marketing practitioners and brand managers to better understand how customer-based brand equity metrics affect customer loyalty and brand market performance. Additionally, marketing practitioners will gain a pronounced understanding of how measures of customer-based brand equity translate into more tangible market outcomes such as demand, market share, and revenue. On a broader perspective, marketing practitioners, and brand managers was in a position to know how leap service to the quality dimension of customer-based brand equity affects customer loyalty to the brand, and what they can do through their marketing efforts to improve brand market performance in an event where quality is compromised.

1.8 Scope of the Study

The study focused on the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty within the fast-food industry, with specific emphasis on Café Javas in Uganda. Although the

literature indicates that customer-based brand equity is anchored on several dimensions such as brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and customer brand loyalty, and their relationship with brand market performance, this study will focus more on quality and brand loyalty.

In terms of sector coverage, the study centered strictly on the fast-food industry sub-sector. Several Café Javas branches were put in the locus to provide answers to the research question.

Geographically, the study was restricted to the Café Javas branches within Kampala City, the capital city of Uganda because of its proximity to the researcher, and as a hub for the greater number of Café Java branches.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

This study was not free from bottlenecks. Like other research undertakings conducted by several scholars, and academicians, the researcher in the current study encountered several challenges which included the following: managers of the Café Javas branches declining to divulge information citing confidentiality of information sought. Their major concern was that such information may likely find its way to their competitors.

Since this is an academic study, time was also another limitation, given the fact that the study had to be conducted and finished within a specific period of the researcher's study period. Financial resources were also another limitation given the fact that the researcher depended on facilitation from parents and well-wishers.

1.9.1 Delimitation

To counter the aforementioned bottlenecks, the researcher gave assurance to branch managers that the information provided would be treated with all the necessary confidentiality. Secondly, the researcher also explained to them that the purpose of the study was purely academic. To mitigate the financial challenge, the researcher opted for Café Java branches

within the nearest areas of Kampala city to reduce transportation costs. The researcher also made it clear through the consent form that the study was purely academic and that participants were under no obligation to demand benefits or financial rewards.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the research topic, focusing on the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty. It outlined the research objectives and questions, which were derived from the identified problem. Additionally, the chapter highlighted the significance of the study, as well as its scope, limitations, and delimitations. The next chapter will review existing literature and present the theoretical framework that guided this investigation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature on the origins of brand equity and the key antecedents of customer-based brand equity, including brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations, as well as their relationship with customer loyalty. The discussion on how customer-based brand equity influences customer loyalty is anchored in the attribution theory.

2.2 The Evolution of Brand Equity

Branding has become a crucial aspect of business operations in a world where product and service offerings are increasingly similar (Lam et al., 2013; Martinez & Rodriguez Del Bosque, 2013; Rather, 2017). At its core, branding serves as a differentiator, enabling a brand to stand out from competitors (Pahud de Mortanges & Van Riel, 2003).

The term “brand” originates from the Old Norse word *Brandr*, meaning “to burn” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Historically, this term stemmed from the practice of early farmers who burned marks or symbols onto their livestock to distinguish them from those owned by others—a process that became known as branding. Over time, the concept of branding has evolved significantly. According to Thiripurasundari and Natarajan (2011) and Hampf and Lindberg-Repo (2011), branding has transitioned from its early use in marking livestock to becoming a universal concept where almost every product or service is associated with a brand.

Islam & Rahman (2016) assert that modern branding, as we know it today, began to take shape in the mid-20th century, largely driven by the rise of mass media advertising and commercial promotions. According to Aaker (1991), in Europe, brands served as a way to direct users to recognize what they want, and as an assurance that the customer made a better

deal in buying the product. Similarly, Kotler (2007) asserts that in the 16th century, sellers used brands to distinguish high-class products from cheaper products that were not branded. He further asserts that, until the 20th century brands were only used for commercial purposes, but have since become a substance of competition (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; rather, 2017; Tuskej & Podnar, 2018). Today, the situation between competitors in the market has led to the coopting of the branding concept into the field of marketing communications, with the cardinal goal of differentiating products in the market ((Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008).

Furthermore, Ahmad and Sherwani (2015) explain that the concept of brand equity was first introduced in marketing literature in the 1980s and that the usage of the brand equity terminology started with branding pioneer David Aaker who contributed significantly to the development of the concept in the marketing communications literature (Parsa, Eidelou, Abdolahi, Maleki & Mehrabi 2013:712; Tybout & Calkins 2005:248). However, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003); He et al., (2012); So et al., (2017); Rather (2017); Tuskej and Podnar (2018), assert that the foundations of brand equity were erected by the American public relations business to prevent companies from acting shortsightedly by reducing investment in branding. It is on this account that, Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) attest that to convince Chief Executive Officers and managers of the benefits of branding, they had to find a financial measurement to determine the return on branding investment. Furthermore, Gomez and Perez (2021) also claim that marketing communication literature was in great need of a framework describing brand equity, and as a result, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) listed brand equity as a primary area for research and subsequent years, a large number of publications on the concept were released. Thus, Wood (2000) argues that the term brand was conceptualized in an attempt to define and explain the relationship between customers, and brands.

Convinced that branding was worse investing in, Ayesha, Ghazaleh, and Al-Zyouud (2021) discussed that in the 1990s, managers, and academicians took closer scrutiny of the

concept and the role of branding. They thus realized that a brand was more than a symbol that differentiates a product, but one that generates revenue (Chege, 2018). This financial angle of the brand led to the development of the equity concept (Mohan and Sequeini, 2016). Initially, Roper and Parker (2006) argued that, the field of branding was associated with mass production and mass communication, and that companies engaged in in brand commercials to differentiate their products by quality, and functionality. They further articulate that between 1970, and 1990, companies started to communicate the immaterial value their products could offer in comparison to other competitors. Thus, Harrigan et al., (2017) concurs that brands of those days were developed to become story-telling brands to create meaning for their consumers. Today, only a few new brands emerge successful, and attain the opportunity to become strong brands (Aaker, 1991). This reality is attributed to better-developed marketing strategies, higher promotional expenses, and a growing competitor base in the market (Logiawan & Subagio, 2014).

2.3 Brand Equity

In the past decades, there has been a growing consensus among practitioners, academicians, and business Chief Executive Officers that a brand has a high brand equity only when it generates positive connotations in the consumers' minds (Romero, 2017; Tuskej & Podnar, 2018). If it does so, Rodriguez (2013) argue that the brand can be preferred, and purchased over other brands or non-branded products. It is for this reason that Maher (2014) argues that brand equity is one of the most valuable intangible assets in an event where consumers respond differently to branded products compared to unbranded ones. More so, Senning (2006) acknowledges that brand equity influences consumers' decision-making, and is very important when consumers compare brands with product performance and price. Additionally, Neal and Strauss (2008) contend that strong brand equity provides the brand with sustainable differentiated competitive advantages that increase consumers' willingness to pay

a premium price for a specific brand irrespective of the existence of identical products (Kerin & Peterson, 2010).

Aaker (1996) defines brand equity as a “set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand’s name and symbol that adds or subtracts from the value provided by the product or service to a customer.” He further emphasizes that a brand is an asset, and possessing strong brand equity drives both business strategy and performance (Aaker, 2014). In line with this perspective, Tuškej and Podnar (2018) argue that viewing brands as assets shifts marketing communication and brand management from tactical initiatives to a strategic focus aimed at driving business growth. This viewpoint is echoed by Trent and Mohr (2017), who state that companies competing on intangible assets recognize brand investment as a key strategic priority. However, Aaker (2014) cautions that the growing acceptance of brands as assets has, in some cases, diverted attention from marketing’s traditional role of driving sales. Instead, executives are focusing more on topline growth through innovation and brand development. Aaker (2014) further asserts that brand management should no longer be seen as a tactical or reactive function but rather as a strategic and visionary role. This involves addressing broader issues such as strategic market insights, brand portfolio strategies, and global, regional, or national brand strategies.

Although numerous definitions of brand equity exist, one of the most widely accepted is from Farquhar (1989), who defines brand equity as “the added value endowed by the brand to the product.” Yoo and Donthu (2001) observe that brand equity manifests in various forms, including attitudinal dispositions, behavioral tendencies, brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. Despite the variations in definitions, Barwise (1993) highlights a common theme across all interpretations: brand equity captures the incremental effect of the brand on consumer response compared to an identical but unbranded product.

Several definitions of brand equity found in the literature include: “A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customer” (Aaker, 1991), “A utility not explained by measured attributes” (Barwise, 1993), “A differentiated, clear image that goes beyond simple product preference” (Barwise, 1993), “The value a brand name adds to a product” (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994), and “The added value that a brand endows a product with” (Farquhar, Herr, and Fazio, 1990).

Given such a plethora of definitions on the brand equity concept, Jooste et al., (2012) admitted that brand equity is a multidimensional concept that comprises various individual dimensions. Thus, Loken et al., (2010) advise that it is important to understand how all these dimensions relate to brand equity to make decisions or changes that enhance brand equity. To Veloutsou et al., (2013), an understanding of customer knowledge structures regarding feelings, and actions towards the brand is very essential in putting up guidelines for formulating marketing communication strategies for effective brand building, and management (Brunello, 2013; Lee & Leh, 2011; Keller 2013). In this context, Klopper and North (2011) assert that several brand equity models exist to represent, explain, and measure sources of brand equity. However, Lee (2011) asserts that the two most agreed upon models include Keller’s (1993), and Aaker’s (1996) brand equity models.

Thus in 1993, Keller formulated the term customer-based brand equity (CBBE), and defined it as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on customer response to the marketing of the brand” (Keller, 1993). Meanwhile Aaker termed brand equity as a multidimensional concept comprising of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). He argued that each one of these dimensions contributes towards establishing brand equity in their way. To investigate the question about the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty, this study will use Aaker’s customer-based

brand equity model as it has been used and exceedingly cited in various research studies (Tong & Hawley 2009; Chen & Green, 2009; Dopico & Porral 2012; Gil et al. 2007; Kim & Hyun 2011; Moradi & Zarei 2012; Neerakkal 2012; Tong & Hawley 2009b; Yoo et al. 2000). The rationale for the adoption of this model is based on the antecedents of brand equity the model lists such as brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty represent the consumer's perceptions and reactions on brand (Veloutsou et al. 2013). As far as the rat and the milkshake scandal is concerned two dimensions from this model, which are: perceived quality and brand loyalty were adopted while exploring the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty.

2.4 Customer-based Brand Loyalty.

According to Keller (2003), customer-based brand equity (CBBE) is a concept that distinguishes brand equity from financial measures. Lee and Jeong (2014) further argue that CBBE refers to the differential effect that brands have on consumer responses to marketing activities. In a similar vein, Vivek et al. (2014) define customer-based brand equity from the customer's perspective, highlighting the importance of knowledge, familiarity, and the relationships that customers form with the brand, all of which contribute to the brand's perceived value. CBBE emphasizes the customer's mindset, encompassing factors such as perceived awareness, quality, attitude, preferences, attachments, and loyalty (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Additionally, Aaker (1991) suggests that CBBE serves as a cognitive measure of brand equity.

Shocker and Weitz (1988) proposed that customer-based brand equity comprises two key dimensions: brand loyalty and brand image. Similarly, Keller (1993) highlighted that CBBE arises when consumers are familiar with the brand, with high levels of brand awareness leading to strong, positive, and distinctive brand associations. In this context, Keller (1993) identified brand knowledge as a crucial dimension of CBBE, encompassing both brand

awareness and brand image. Yoo and Donthu (2001) also suggested that brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality are essential dimensions of CBBE. Other studies have identified four key dimensions of CBBE, which include brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Pappu et al., 2005; Tong & Hawley, 2009).

In this case, Café Java has some of the dimensions mentioned above. For example, brand awareness, perceived quality, and customer loyalty among others. From this perspective, an investigation into the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer behavior was inevitable. The researcher wanted to find out how the rat and milk scandal affected Café Javas' perceived brand quality, customer loyalty, and brand image.

2.5 Customer Loyalty

According to Elbedweihy et al., (2016) and Lam et al., (2013), customer loyalty is “an organization’s decided measurement of chance to buy again or not abandon the competitor. Similarly, various researchers have also defined customer loyalty in terms of client unwaveringness, as a client who consistently buys to satisfy their fulfillment (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; So et al., 2013; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuskej et al., 2013; Tuskej & Podnar, 2018). Furthermore, rather (2017) and Tuskej et al., (2013). Also argue that by consistently re-buying, client loyalty can also be regarded as the most enhanced fulfillment of the company’s business outcomes. Therefore, Elbedweihy et al., (2016) assert, that to achieve, and maintain customer loyalty, companies must provide added value by decreasing advertisement costs, acquiring more customers, and gaining a competitive advantage over competitors.

Furthermore, the consistent client typically offers, suggests, and welcomes others so that they can feel what the consistent client feels. As a result, in this investigation, the pointer to investigate the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty followed the

idea of Gremler and Brown (1996), who stated that customer loyalty can be estimated by repeat purchases, positive remarks, and suggestions (Ariani and Rosinta, 2010).

2.6 The Relationship Between Customer-based Brand Equity and Customer Loyalty

In this section, previous research on the relationship between customer-based brand equality, and customer loyalty. According to Jalilvand, Samiei & Mahdavinia (2011), the relationship between customer-based brand equity can be traced from dimensions of customer-based brand equity articulated by Aaker (1991). These include; brand awareness, brand perceived quality, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction

2.6.1 Brand awareness

Brand awareness has been regarded as the first step to creating customer-based brand equity (Buil et al., 2013). In their discussion, Jililvand et al. (2011) argued that brand awareness is a must for brand and customer-based brand equity. They argue that brand awareness occurs when a customer develops a high level of awareness. It is on this account that Hapsariet al., (2017) admits that brand awareness is a sign of quality, and commitment, making the customer familiar with the brand, and Aaker (1991) adds that brand awareness helps the purchaser consider the brand at the point of purchase leading to a favorable behavior for the brand (Kim, Choe & Petrick, 2018). More so, Ambolau (2015) argues that brand awareness plays a very significant role in customer decision-making because it allows the brand to enter the consideration set, and to be used as the perception of quality. Thus, brand awareness relates to customer satisfaction resulting in customer loyalty (Sheth, 2011).

2.6.2 Brand Perceived Quality

Perceived brand quality refers to a customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service, considering its intended purpose in comparison to alternatives (Zeithaml & Zeithaml, 1988). Ming, Ismail, and Rasiah (2011) emphasize that perceived brand quality enhances customer satisfaction, which in turn creates purchase

intentions toward the product or service. Tanveer and Lodhi (2016) also argue that perceived quality has become a significant factor, with customers assigning greater value to higher-quality products. Several studies support the idea that perceived quality, as a dimension of customer-based brand equity, positively impacts purchase intentions (Ming, Ismail & Rasiah, 2011; Tanveer & Lodhi, 2016; Tran et al., 2020). This strengthens the relationship between customer-based brand equity and customer loyalty, as perceived quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction.

2.6.3 Brand Association

Scholars agree that brand association is a vital factor in brand equity formation and management (Vazquez & Iglesias, 2001). Additionally, Thaithaworn and Lertbuasin (2019) point out that high brand equity implies that customers have a strong positive association with the brand. Furthermore, Shamsudin, Hassan, and Ahmad (2020) argue that customer-based brand equity takes shape when customers develop a high level of awareness and hold strong, favorable, and unique brand association with their memories. In this context, Tong and Hawley (2009) found out that the stronger the brand association, the stronger the attitude and purchase intentions. Further still, Thaithaworn and Lertbuasin (2019) also explored how brand equity affects brand loyalty, and thus the relationship between customer-based brand equity and customer loyalty found in the customer satisfaction derived from their association with the brand.

2.6.4 Brand Loyalty

In his analysis, Aaker (1991) defines brand loyalty as a situation that reflects a customer's will to switch to another brand, especially when the brand makes a change, either in price or in product features. Brand loyalty according to Burgess and Steenkamp (2013) makes a customer purchase a brand habitually and prohibits switching to competitors' brands (Raduzzi & Massey, 2019). Furthermore, Aaker (1991) also informs that brand loyalty

contributes important value to the brand it builds a group of constant purchases loyal to the brand for a long time. Meanwhile, Rambocas, Kirpalani, and Simms (2018) argue that loyal customers present more positive responses to a brand than non-loyal customers creating more customer satisfaction which in the long run results in customer loyalty.

2.6.5 Customer Satisfaction

As a dimension of customer-based brand equity, Oliver (1997) argues that customer satisfaction is a customer's response to consumption experiences. No wonder several researchers do agree that customer satisfaction is very essential to long-term business success making it one of the most researched topics in marketing communications (Pappu & Quester, 2006; Rambocas et al., 2018). In addition, Chiguvu and Guruwo (2017) acknowledge that the importance of customer satisfaction in long-term business success has resulted in several research publications on the topic of "The impact of customer satisfaction on consumers' post consumption." According to Cooil, Keininbham, Alsoy, and Hsu (2017), evaluations on behavioral, and attitudinal loyalty have been conducted with Durongdumrongchai, Nitiwattana, and Thongchum (2019) finding out that there is a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Thus, the current study concludes that customer satisfaction as a strand of customer-based brand equity positively relates to customer loyalty.

The current study investigated the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty. The rat and the milkshake scandal experienced by Café Javas presented the best ground for this researcher to explore whether the aftermath of the scandal affected Café Javas' brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand association, brand perceived quality, and subsequently lowered customer satisfaction, and finally consumer perceptions of the brand

2.7 Café Java's Rat and Milkshake Crisis

According to Kironde (2021), the rat and milkshake scandal took the internet by storm. The crisis caught the attention of social media by storm and dominated it for some time with

other media joining in later. On 25th August 2021, a video went viral featuring an upset female customer questioning how a classy “uptown” diner belonging to the Café Javas brand could serve her a milkshake with a dead rodent in it (Kironde, 2021). *“This is a rat I found in my milkshake from Café Javas, yeah, the people we feel proud of and they tell me to have this worked upon. I need a lawyer.....”* said the furious lady in the video. The viral video sparked conversations about Café Javas’ quality of services as well as the authenticity of the video. The Ugandan online community had quite a field day as they actively engaged in the saga making humorous content such as memes, and tik-tok videos and even went as far as distorting the restaurant’s CJ logo by replacing the “J” with a rat standing on its two hind legs.

Café Javas, popularly known under its signature CJs logo is one of the prominent locally-owned restaurant chain franchises in Kampala. It is famed for its specialty beverages and desserts, as well as its casual dining atmosphere. The café attracts a considerable number of not only the middle and working class but also international clientele. Presently, the franchise is in 12 locations: nine in Uganda that is Kampala, and Entebbe with the other three in Nairobi-Kenya. It is a subsidiary of the Mandela Group, also comprising City Tires, City OIL, City Lubes, Savers, Mandela Millers, and Auto spare parts (Kironde, 2021).

Subsequently, Muhimba (2021) reported a portion of the Café Javas statement reading as follows; “A quick investigation including a review of our CCTV footage of the preparation and service of the milkshake confirmed that there was no adulteration of the milkshake. The customer was duly informed of the findings. By threatening to circulate a video of her version of events if she was not paid a certain sum of money, the customer was trying to tarnish the good image of Café Javas.” The move by Café Javas was a smart and timely move Meyers (1993) notes that businesses are routinely criticized for responding slowly to crises particularly when they appear to threaten public health and safety. It positively backed up the brand equity

and one of the things that stood out in this scenario was how Café Javas customers rallied behind the restaurant's innocent stand amidst the crisis.

Many of its customers stood with the brand basing their judgments on the positive past experiences and services with it. The events were followed by acts of customer loyalty as the already existing customers vowed to return to its branches and those even who had not yet tried it became interested too. From being taken over with videos making fun of the brand, social media was now dominated by videos and photographs of CJ customers enjoying some of its many delicacies after the incident. The level of customer loyalty illustrated by café Java's customers on how they responded to the rat-milkshake saga based on brand equity calls for academic research. Hence, the curiosity of the researcher in the current study is to explore the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty.

2.8 Customer perception influence on a Brand's Crisis Communication strategies

Customer Perceived Value (CPV) is a critical concept in marketing, as it reflects the satisfaction and value customers derive during the process of choosing services or products. According to Ghorbani et al. (2023), CPV is rooted in customers' perceptions of the benefits and costs resulting from their experiences with a service, essentially evaluating the value through trade-offs. This perception plays a pivotal role in customers' decision-making and satisfaction levels.

On the other hand, Coombs (2007) defines a crisis as an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders, potentially causing serious disruptions to an organization's operations and impacting its performance, particularly its reputation. The perception of an event by stakeholders is crucial in determining whether it becomes a crisis. This idea is further explored by Coombs (2010), who emphasizes that crises are socially constructed, meaning their significance is shaped by how people perceive them.

Grappi & Romani (2015) investigate how emotions like anger and sympathy are linked to perceptions of responsibility during a crisis. Anger often emerges when individuals attribute responsibility to an organization for causing harm, whereas sympathy arises when the organization is viewed as a victim or when people perceive it as suffering or in need of help. These emotions directly influence consumers' post-crisis reactions. Grappi & Romani (2015) found that sympathy, rather than anger, is moderated by the company's reputation. Consumers who have a more favorable view of a company's reputation are more likely to express sympathy and respond positively after a crisis. On the other hand, anger may not be significantly influenced by corporate reputation, as negative emotions are more directly tied to the perceived responsibility of the company.

In crisis communication, the reputation of the company plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional responses and the subsequent customer loyalty. Acknowledging a crisis through a confession can help mitigate anger and foster sympathy, especially if the company is perceived positively (Lishner et al., 2011).

Niezink et al. (2012) emphasize that consumer attribution of responsibility during a crisis can trigger emotional responses that significantly impact consumer behavior. Angry consumers, for example, are more likely to take actions against the company responsible, such as reducing their purchase intentions, spreading negative word of mouth, or developing a more unfavorable attitude toward the company. These emotional reactions can severely affect the company's brand image and sales. Grappi & Romani (2015), supported by Coombs & Holladay (2005), argue that understanding these emotional responses and implementing the correct post-crisis communication strategies are essential for organizations to repair their reputations, mitigate negative emotions, and prevent detrimental behavioral intentions.

A relevant example of this is found in the tourism sector. Sönmez & Apostolopoulos (1999) highlight that while tourists can choose to avoid destinations that are associated with

risk, the impact of crises such as terrorism targeting tourism is unavoidable and can deeply affect the destination's reputation. The authors argue that tourist destinations, especially those prone to politically motivated violence, should integrate crisis management strategies into their overall development and marketing plans. This helps to protect and rebuild the destination's image, reassuring potential visitors of their safety and facilitating the recovery of local tourism businesses.

In conclusion, Coombs (2006) suggests that understanding how stakeholders perceive various crisis response strategies is invaluable for crisis managers. The perception of these strategies can help restore the pride and reputation of a brand, making it an important consideration for businesses facing a crisis. This foundational understanding provides a context for the current study, which investigates the strategies employed by Café Javas to restore its brand and image after the rat and milkshake scandal.

2.9 The Role of Customer Loyalty on Brand Market Performance in the Fast-Food Industry

Customer loyalty plays a critical role in shaping the brand market performance in the fast-food industry. Kumar & Shah, (2020) emphasized that loyal customers contribute significantly to a brand's long-term success, primarily by providing consistent revenue streams and fostering positive word-of-mouth promotion. According to Ali et al. (2021), brand loyalty in the fast-food industry is driven by the perceived value, convenience, and quality of services offered by the brands. The researchers found that customers who have a strong emotional connection to a fast-food brand are more likely to make repeat purchases, even in the face of competitive market pressures. This repeated patronage directly translates into enhanced brand performance in terms of market share and profitability.

Another critical aspect of customer loyalty in the fast-food industry is the role of customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, as their

expectations are met consistently. A study by Kumar and Shah (2020) highlighted that satisfaction is a strong predictor of loyalty, particularly in the context of fast food, where the convenience factor is often a primary decision-making criterion. They argue that brands that manage to satisfy their customers through exceptional food quality and service are more likely to see increased customer retention and, consequently, better market performance. These findings align with earlier work by Lee and Lee (2019), who suggested that customer loyalty in the fast-food industry is often rooted in a combination of service quality, convenience, and food taste.

Furthermore, digital engagement has become a crucial factor influencing customer loyalty in recent years. With the advent of mobile apps, loyalty programs, and digital marketing strategies, fast-food brands can now engage customers on a more personal level. The research by Singh and Kaur (2023) examined the impact of digital engagement on customer loyalty in the fast-food sector and found that brands that effectively use technology to enhance customer experiences tend to perform better in the marketplace. The study showed that digital touch points such as personalized promotions and easy-to-navigate apps not only improve customer satisfaction but also foster long-term loyalty, which positively affects the brand's market performance.

In line with this, the emotional connection that customers develop with brands has been shown to have a strong influence on loyalty. According to a study by Alwi and Razi (2022), emotional attachment is a key determinant of customer loyalty in the fast-food industry. They argue that brands that create a compelling emotional appeal—whether through brand identity, corporate social responsibility, or community engagement—tend to have more loyal customers who are willing to overlook minor service issues in favor of staying loyal. These emotional connections contribute to customer retention and, by extension, improved market performance.

Brand differentiation is another important factor in customer loyalty. Research by Rajesh and Kumar (2021) found that brands in the fast-food industry that differentiate themselves through unique offerings, such as healthier menu options or exclusive flavors, tend to cultivate a more loyal customer base. Customers are often willing to pay a premium for differentiated products that align with their preferences, values, or lifestyles. This differentiation not only strengthens customer loyalty but also improves the brand's competitive positioning in a highly saturated market.

Finally, price sensitivity plays a significant role in shaping customer loyalty in the fast-food industry. A study by Zhang and Li (2020) found that while price is a crucial factor in customer decisions, it does not necessarily detract from the role of loyalty. They argue that in fast food, customers are often willing to pay slightly higher prices for brands that they perceive to offer superior value, quality, or customer service. This indicates that loyalty can transcend price sensitivity, especially when customers are emotionally or practically invested in a brand, thereby contributing to a brand's market performance.

2.10 Theoretical Framework: The Attribution Theory

To effectively answer the research questions, the study was based on the attribution theory developed by Heider (1958), and modified by Rotter (1975). The framework explains reasons people provide about the causes of their actions, and behavior. The theory argues that behavior is classified as either emanating from internal or external characteristics. Proponents of this theory argue that the external or internal attributions also referred to as internal, and external locus of control. The attribution has been evolving because it was later improved by Weiner (1985; 1986; 1992; 2005; & 2006) specifying people's varied opinions about the reasons why certain events happen to them. According to Weiner, the model is instrumental in research related to people's perceptions (Weiner, 2006).

The attribution model outlines the procedures the procedures underlying people's beliefs, and perceptions (Weiner, 2005). In this context, the theory of attribution presents a significant framework for probing beliefs about how particular events happen and associates those views to consequent motivations that may predict performance (Weiner, 1992; 2005). This theory provided the model for exploring the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty weighing people's perceptions of the brand after the rat and milkshake scandal in Uganda.

2.10.1 Assumptions of the Theory

The theory of attribution, as proposed by Weiner (2005), suggests that individuals attribute their performance or behavioral outcomes to various influences in order to avoid negative emotional feedback or damage to their ego. Heider (1920) and later Heider (1958) developed the foundational principles of attribution theory, focusing on social interactions and how people form perceptions of others. According to Heider, individuals are seen as agents capable of actions, and their behaviors can be influenced in both positive and negative ways, either deliberately or unintentionally (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).

In the context of branding, attribution theory plays a crucial role in understanding customer reactions to negative events associated with a brand. Coombs (2010) explains that when a crisis occurs, consumers try to determine the cause of the event, and they attribute responsibility for the occurrence based on the limited information available. Weiner (2005) further asserts that responsibility is often attributed to the company involved, the affected parties, or external factors.

Attribution theory focuses on how people react to events and how those reactions subsequently influence their behavior. According to Heider (2013), people seek to give meaning to their experiences by gathering information and forming causal judgments. In the

case of a crisis, online reviews (events) prompt consumers to form perceptions of the brand, which in turn impacts brand equity and ultimately affects their purchase intentions (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).

Malle & Korman (2013) emphasize the distinction between outcome attribution and action attribution. Outcomes, which are consequences of behavior, are often beyond the actor's control and are explained by attributing them to causes such as internal or external factors. In contrast, actions are considered to be under the actor's control and are explained by motivations or reasons behind the action.

In this study, attribution theory serves as a foundational framework for understanding how customers attribute responsibility to a brand during a crisis. These attributions influence customers' perceptions and reactions towards the brand, which ultimately affects customer loyalty. By applying attribution theory, this research explores the impact of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty in the context of a crisis, shedding light on the mechanisms of consumer behavior in response to brand-related events.

2.11 Literature Gap and Chapter Summary

The literature on brand crises, particularly in the fast-food industry, reveals several gaps. While much of the existing research focuses on Western markets, few studies explore how brand crises affect customer loyalty and brand equity in Uganda or similar African contexts. Additionally, the majority of studies were conducted over a decade ago, limiting their relevance to current market dynamics. This study provides a timely and context-specific analysis of the rat and milkshake scandal involving Café Javas, offering insights into consumer behavior and brand perception in Uganda's fast-food sector.

Theoretical gaps also exist, with previous research relying mainly on models like Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) and Crisis Communication Theory. However, these frameworks often overlook the role of customer perception and attribution in brand recovery.

This study addresses this gap by using the Attribution Theory, which focuses on how customers attribute causes of a crisis to a brand, influencing their loyalty. By providing a current perspective, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of brand crises in emerging markets like Uganda, offering new insights into crisis communication and brand equity management.

In summary, this chapter identifies key gaps in the literature regarding brand crises, customer loyalty, and brand equity in Uganda. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used to address these gaps and the approach taken for data collection and analysis.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the research methods employed in the study. It provides a comprehensive discussion of the various methods used to collect and analyse data, as well as the rationale behind the selection of these methods. The chapter covers several key aspects of the research process, including the method of data collection, data analysis techniques, the population of the study, the types of data collected, the sampling technique adopted, and ethical considerations observed throughout the research.

Each method is explained in detail, with justifications provided for why specific approaches were chosen. These justifications are essential in supporting the researcher's decisions and ensuring the research's validity and reliability. The chapter also emphasizes the importance of ethical issues, highlighting the steps taken to ensure the integrity and ethical standards of the research process.

3.2 Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design. The reason behind the adoption of this design was informed (Creswell, 2013; Curry, Nembhard, and Bradley, 2009), who argue that a descriptive design is a scientific method that involves the observation, and description of the behavior of the subject without affecting their behavior. Additionally, a descriptive design is applied by marketing communication scholars when judging habits, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions. Since this study explored perceptions, habits, and opinions of people about Café Javas in the aftermath of the rat and milkshake crisis, a descriptive design presented the most feasible design for the study. According to Onwuegbuzi and Leech (2018), awareness of several different research designs is important to determine the design that fits the research.

Thus, Bryman (2006) lists four types that are: triangulation design, embedded design, explanatory design, and exploratory design (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm that guided this study was the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed and can only be understood through the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals (Schwandt, 2000). In this study, the aim was to understand the subjective meanings and interpretations that customers assigned to Café Javas' crisis, specifically the rat and milkshake scandal, and how these perceptions influenced their loyalty and brand equity. The interpretivist paradigm was appropriate for this study, as it aligned with the qualitative research approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of customer perceptions, attitudes, and opinions in a naturalistic setting.

3.2.2 Research Approach

There is consensus that there are three main approaches used in research studies, which include: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches (Cresswell, 2014). The differences between these three approaches are framed based on words. For example, qualitative as opposed to numbers associated with quantitative or using closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) as opposed to open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions) (Cresswell, 2014).

The study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach is closely linked to the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes the understanding and interpretation of social phenomena (Ritchie et al., 2013). Unlike quantitative methods that focus on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research is characterized by the simultaneous processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as outlined by Gummesson (2005). This approach allows for a deeper exploration of complex issues, offering

insights into the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals rather than simply establishing cause-and-effect relationships.

Qualitative research employs various methods for data generation and analysis, making it highly adaptable to different research contexts. According to Gummesson (2005), the focus of qualitative research is on interpretation and understanding. It is not just about identifying isolated variables, but rather about exploring the interactions and synergies that shape the phenomena under study. This approach was deemed particularly suitable for the current study, as it aligns with the assumption that the world is not a collection of discrete parts, but rather a complex web of interconnected effects. Thus, the qualitative approach provides the tools necessary for examining the nuances and intricacies of the research problem. It is from this perspective that, the researcher in the current study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty.

3.2.3 Research Method

The research method involved in-depth interviews with key informants and customers, which enabled the researcher to explore the nuances of their perceptions and attitudes toward Café Javas in the wake of the crisis. This method offered flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe into the intricacies of customer loyalty, brand equity, and crisis communication strategies. The qualitative approach was well-suited to capturing the richness of participant experiences and providing valuable insights into the dynamics of brand perception during a crisis.

3.3. Study Area

The study was conducted in the Kampala district among the Café Javas outlets. The choice of Kampala was made because of its proximity to the researcher. Kampala was also selected because of the concentration of Café Javas outlets, and the fact that the rat and

milkshake scandal also took place in Kampala made the area a good area to draw the study participants.

3.4 Study Population

The study population was made of the Café Javas management team and customers of the business entity. They included 6 managers from six Café Javas outlets and six customers of Café Javas. The participants were instrumental in enabling the researcher to obtain the most relevant data about the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty based on the events that happened after the rat and milkshake scandal that rocked Café Javas.

3.5 Sample Size

The concept of "sample" has been defined in various ways by different scholars. For instance, Mugenda (2003) describes a sample as a portion of the entire population, while Orodho and Kombo (2002) define it as a finite, representative group of individuals or objects selected from the population to be studied. Kothari (2004) offers a similar perspective, viewing a sample as a subset of units chosen from the larger universe to represent it. Gerstman (2003) emphasizes the importance of having an appropriate sample in a study, arguing that without a precise sample size, the research may be a waste of both time and resources. In the context of this study, a sample size of 12 participants was selected. This sample comprised 6 managers from six different Café Javas outlets and 6 customers of Café Javas. The choice of this sample size was informed by the need to ensure representativeness and obtain relevant data from both management and customers, providing a balanced perspective on the research topic.

3.6 Sampling Technique

Sample selection is an important stage of a research project as well as a key ingredient of any research design (Wilmot, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Marshall, 1996, & Bryman, 2016). To assemble a good sample, the magic lies in the choice of the sampling strategy (Coyne, 1997). A good sampling strategy has a significant effect on the quality of data, and the quality of the

overall research, and is also important in providing unbiased, and robust results (Wilmot, 2005:1). Despite the importance, Yu (2007) stresses that developing a sampling strategy to select units from the populations is a complicated issue for qualitative, and quantitative researchers. For this reason, Onwegbuzie, and Collins (2007) advise that careful consideration is needed to construct an effective sampling strategy to ensure that the selected sample is compatible with the overall research design.

There are several sampling methods, making it more important to carefully identify the most appropriate strategy that can help select the most effective participants who are knowledgeable, and have the right information to address the requirements of the research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Sandelowski, 2000; Blandford, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Myers & Newman, 2007). In the context of the current study on the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty, key informants are senior personnel in these Café Javas as well as customers. Recruiting participants from these well-informed individuals ensured accurate, and rich information which provided an amplified picture of the contributions, capabilities, and challenges of social in promoting brand among top delivery companies in Uganda.

As already discussed, different sampling strategies are used for both qualitative and quantitative research (Wilmot, 2005). This study aimed to gain in-depth views on the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). With this in mind, several scholars have argued that purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, or qualitative sampling is the most ideal strategy often used in qualitative investigations (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Purposive sampling, also known as non-probability sampling is a strategy where potential candidates are selected based on a specific purpose because of the specific qualities they possess to provide the greatest insights into the research questions (Teddlie &

Yu, 2007; Tongco, 2007; Devers & Frankel, 2000). For this reason, purposive sampling was the appropriate sampling technique for this study.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

This study employed the use of semi-structured interviews as the main method for data collection. According to Schultz, and Avital (2011), the interview approach is the most used method of data collection in qualitative research across several academic disciplines, including communications, information systems, sociology, and psychology among others Myers & Newman, 2007; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Several qualitative researchers describe interviews as the most ideal tool for generating rich data about a particular research inquiry (Bryman, 2016; Myers & Newman, 2007; Schultz & Avital, 2011; Yin, 2004; Mugenda, & Mugenda, 2003). Furthermore, an interview is also viewed as a powerful tool through which primary data can be gathered (Myers & Newman, 2007). In this context, Kvale (1996; 2008) posits that an interview is a dialogue, or interchange of views between two people, a process that allows learning between the people involved. Similarly, Edwards, and Holland (2013) also admit that an interview is a social interaction between two people, while Myers and Newman also agree that in research an interview is a dialogue between two people about themes of common interest, the interviewer (Researcher), and the interviewee (Research subject). In line with the same, Schultz, and Avital (2011) further contend that in research interviews, the interviewer engages the interviewee in a direct interaction to generate a deep, contextual, and authentic view of the research phenomenon. This helps the researcher uncover the research phenomenon in a deep, and rich manner as the interviewing process provides the opportunity for the researcher to gain access to the inner psychological, and mental feelings of the research subject as compared to superficial levels (Kajornboon, 2005).

The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty. To achieve this purpose, the researcher needed to gather rich

information about how customer-based brand equity influences customer loyalty specifically looking at Café Javas. With this goal, the interview emerged as the most ideal research method to gather comprehensive data from Café Javas managers, and customers.

After deciding that the interview was the best method to gather data, the researcher in the current study was left with the task of deciding which interview approach to undertake. This is because scholars have concluded that, there are many approaches to conducting interviews (Bryman, 2016; Myers & Newman, 2007; Yin, 2004; Mugenda, & Mugenda, 2003). Literature on interview approaches points out three types of interviews: structured; semi-structured, and unstructured (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Kajornboon, 2005). Literature also points out that all the three approaches share some common features, but also differ on many issues such as flexibility, and control (Myers & Newman, 2007; Oates, 2005). Thus, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) claim that in qualitative research, semi-structured, and unstructured interview approaches are the most used. The reason behind this is given by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) who argue that a structured interview approach often generates quantitative data. However, Bryman (2016) further clarifies that, of the two qualitative interview approaches, that is semi-structured, and unstructured, semi-structured are the most widely used because of their potential advantages in gathering rich data. Following this advice, the researcher in the current study deployed semi-structured interviews to gather data from the study participants.

The choice to use semi-structured interviews was based on the luxury advantages they afford a researcher. For example, Saunders *et al.*, (2011) argue that a semi-structured interview approach allows research participants to develop their thoughts about the research phenomenon, thus giving the researcher a chance to examine the subjects' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences about the research topic (Daymon & Halloway, 2010). According to DiCicco-Bloom, and Crabtree (2006), the semi-structured interview approach also allows the researcher

to delve more deeply into the personal, and social lives of the participants. Additionally, Bryman (2016) further advises that semi-structured interviews are associated with an interview guide that contains a predetermined set of open-ended questions, thus offering the researcher a high level of flexibility. This flexibility in turn serves as a guide for the researcher to explore participants' perceptions about important issues related to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006). In this research, semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to dig deeply into issues related to the adoption of social, and its use for brand promotion.

Additionally, the choice for semi-structured interviews by most qualitative researchers is also based on the fact that a pre-determined list of open-ended questions allows the researcher to identify new issues related to the topic under investigation (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Gray, 2013). For example, Bryman (2016) argues that a researcher can use probing questions to ask additional questions to get further clarity about a particular issue that was not initially captured in the interview guide. For this reason, semi-structured interviews allow a researcher space to improvise and achieve more insight, a direct opposite to structured interviews that limit the questions to a script prepared beforehand (Myers & Newman, 2007).

For the current study, the use of semi-structured interviews was well-suited for exploring the research topic. This method allowed the researcher to obtain detailed and insightful information on customer-based brand equity and customer loyalty. Additionally, it facilitated interviews with individuals directly engaged in using social media for brand promotion. The semi-structured format also gave participants the flexibility to share their opinions freely on the subject, offering more depth compared to structured or unstructured interviews. As a result, the researcher chose to use a semi-structured interview guide to collect the necessary data.

3.8 Data Collection Tool

As previously mentioned, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the study participants. To facilitate this, the researcher created two separate interview guides—one for company managers and another for customers (see Appendix 1 and 2). These paper-based guides included key questions to structure the interviews, as recommended by Myers and Newman (2007). The guides not only aided the researcher during the interview process but also helped maintain consistency and reliability across all interviews. This was achieved by ensuring all participants were asked similar questions. In designing the interview guides, the researcher adhered to the guidance of Stringer and Genat (2004) by carefully crafting questions to promote a smooth flow of conversation. The guides were purposefully designed to avoid leading questions, as emphasized by Myers and Newman (2007), to encourage unbiased responses.

3.9 Data Analysis

The study utilized thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It is a flexible and widely used approach in qualitative research, which enabled the researcher to systematically organize, interpret, and make sense of the data. Thematic analysis involves several stages, and the study followed the six steps recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive analysis process:

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data; the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the data.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes; relevant data was coded by labeling important features that related to the research question.

Step 3: Searching for Themes; Codes were organized into broader themes by identifying patterns across the data.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes; the themes were checked for coherence and relevance to ensure they accurately reflected the data.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes; each theme was clearly defined and named to capture its essence and relationship to the research question.

Step 6: Writing the Report; the themes were analyzed and presented in a report with supporting evidence from the data (p.87).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a vital aspect of research, as highlighted by McAndrew and Jeong (2012), forming an essential part of the research process from start to finish. Ritchie et al. (2013) emphasize that ethics lie at the core of any high-quality research. Therefore, it is crucial to uphold ethical standards throughout the research (Blandford, 2013; Myers and Newman, 2007).

In this study, the researcher adhered to a set of procedures to obtain ethical approval and ensure that the research complied with established ethical guidelines. The process involved two main steps. First, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the university to seek permission for conducting the study. Additionally, each participant was provided with a consent letter outlining the research purpose, ensuring they understood the study and voluntarily agreed to participate without coercion. The researcher also assured participants that all information provided would remain confidential and that their identities would be kept anonymous. A formal application for ethical approval was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Uganda Christian University, which granted approval for the research.

As noted earlier, ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process. Assuring participants that their involvement would not lead to harm is a key principle in research (Benbasat, Goldstein, and Mead, 1987). To protect participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality, the researcher reassured all interviewees about the strict non-disclosure policy in place for this study (Myers and Newman, 2007).

3.11 Validity and Reliability

This being a qualitative study, its validity and reliability was looked at from the qualitative view point.

3.11.1 Validity

The research expert (supervisor) reviewed the research instrument to ensure that the questions were valid for gathering the intended data. This process helped ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the interview questions. Additionally, credibility was ensured through member checking, where participants validated their responses. Transferability was maintained by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability was achieved by maintaining an audit trail of the data collection process, while conformability was ensured through peer review, ensuring the findings were based on data rather than researcher bias.

3.11.2 Reliability

According to Kimberline & Winterstein (2008), the key indicators of the quality of a measuring instrument are the reliability and validity of the measures. The authors explain that, reliability estimates evaluate the stability of measures, internal consistency of measurement instruments, and interrater reliability of instrument scores (p.2276). Therefore, to enhance this, the study considered credible and knowledgeable participants in line with the topics and also the data collected was recorded on an audio recorder and even noted down where necessary.

Chapter Four

Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings obtained through thematic analysis, guided by the attribution theory (Weiner, 2010) and thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes are directly tied to the study's specific objectives. To preserve confidentiality, participants are anonymized with letters. The findings are presented as overarching themes and sub-themes, with excerpts from interviews providing depth and context. The objectives included; (i) To determine how public perception of customer-based brand equity influences customer loyalty; (ii) To determine how customer brand perception influences the brand's crisis communication strategies; (iii) To establish the role of customer loyalty on brand market performance in the fast-food industry.

Thematic analysis revealed key themes, including Customer Loyalty, Customer Perception, Crisis Communication, and Customer-Based Brand Equity. Sub-themes under Customer Loyalty included Loyalty behaviors and Customer retention strategies; under Customer Perception, themes like Trust and Credibility and Emotional connection emerged. Crisis Communication featured sub-themes such as Crisis response and Transparency, while Customer-Based Brand Equity highlighted the impact of brand reputation on customer loyalty. These themes directly addressed the study's objectives, offering insights into customer perceptions and brand dynamics during a crisis.

4.2 The Influence of Customer-Based Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty

Theme 1: Trust and Perceived Brand Integrity

Participants were asked to discuss their level of loyalty to Café Javas before and after the "Rat-Milkshake Scandal." They were encouraged to share their experiences, feelings, and

the reasoning behind their choices. Responses revealed key insights into the strength of customer-based brand equity and its influence on loyalty, even in challenging circumstances.

Participants were asked specific questions aimed at understanding the role trust and brand integrity played in maintaining their loyalty to Café Javas during the "Rat-Milkshake Scandal." Customers were prompted with the question: *"How has your trust in Café Javas influenced your loyalty to the brand after the scandal?"* Similarly, staff members were asked: *"What measures do you believe have contributed to customers' trust in Café Javas, especially during this challenging time?"*

The participants' responses shed light on how trust, built over years of consistent service and commitment to quality, helped insulate the brand against the potential fallout of the scandal. Both customers and staff articulated their experiences in ways that highlighted the enduring strength of Café Javas' brand equity.

Sub-theme 1.1: Trust Built Over Time

Many participants credited their loyalty to Café Javas to the trust that had been cultivated through years of reliable service, hygienic practices, and exceptional food quality. This trust was not merely transactional but was anchored in a history of positive experiences, consistent delivery of high standards, and a perception of integrity in the brand's operations. Customers provided detailed accounts of their experiences, emphasizing how their continued trust made the scandal appear out of character for Café Javas. For instance:

"I've been a regular customer at Café Javas for over five years, and I've always been impressed by their professionalism and commitment to quality. When I first heard about the scandal, I dismissed it immediately because it seemed so unlike them. The hygiene and service I've experienced over the years are top-notch." (Participant A, Customer)

This response highlights how personal experiences over an extended period shaped the customer's trust in the brand, making it easier for them to remain loyal despite the negative publicity.

Staff members also reflected on the operational practices that they believed strengthened customer trust. For instance:

"As someone who has worked here for three years, I can confidently say that hygiene and quality are priorities in everything we do. The scandal didn't align with the strict standards we uphold daily. I've personally seen customers return because they know what to expect here—excellence and consistency." (Participant B, Staff)

These elaborations from staff highlight the internal processes and values that supported Café Javas' external reputation, reinforcing customers' perceptions of trustworthiness.

The findings illustrate that trust, refined through a combination of consistent service, attention to hygiene, and quality food, acted as a protective shield for Café Javas. Customers and staff alike emphasized the improbability of the scandal, relying on their personal and professional experiences to defend the brand. This trust served as a buffer, allowing the brand to weather the crisis with minimal impact on loyalty.

Sub-theme 1.2: Perceived Scandal as a Hoax

Another recurring theme among participants was the perception that the scandal was fabricated, possibly by competitors seeking to tarnish Café Javas' reputation. This belief not only minimized the negative impact of the incident but also reinforced loyalty among both customers and staff.

Customers expressed disbelief about the plausibility of the allegations, attributing them to external factors. For example:

"The idea of a rat surviving the blending process didn't make sense to me. It felt like someone was deliberately trying to tarnish Café Javas' reputation. Such a claim seemed far-fetched given my past experiences with the brand." (Participant C, Customer)

"I've seen other businesses face similar scandals, but this one didn't feel genuine. The way Café Javas responded—calmly and transparently—only made me trust them more." (Participant E, Customer)

This participants' response highlights the role of logical reasoning and prior positive experiences in shaping their perspective. Staff members also echoed similar sentiments, often referencing customer reactions during the crisis:

"We received so many supportive messages from loyal customers who outright dismissed the scandal as fake. They know us better than to think we'd let something like that happen. It was reassuring to see how much faith they had in us." (Participant D, Staff)

The perception of the scandal as a hoax reinforced the depth of trust participants had in Café Javas. Both customers and staff viewed the allegations as inconsistent with the brand's values and operations. This shared belief significantly mitigated the potential damage to the brand's reputation, demonstrating the resilience of trust and its ability to counteract external threats.

This highlights how the brand's crisis management approach contributed to the perception of integrity, further reinforcing loyalty. Trust and perceived brand integrity played a critical role in sustaining loyalty among Café Javas' stakeholders. Trust, built over years of consistent service, created a strong foundation that allowed customers and staff to dismiss the scandal as uncharacteristic or fabricated. This trust, combined with the perception of the scandal as a hoax, significantly mitigated the negative impact of the incident, underscoring the importance of cultivating and maintaining brand integrity over time.

Sub-theme 1.3: Advocacy and Defense of the Brand

Loyal customers became vocal advocates for Café Javas, defending it on social media and in conversations with friends and family. The participants were asked about the strategies used to defend the brand and below were the responses;

"I went online to defend Café Javas when I saw the negative comments. I felt like it was my duty to support a brand I love." (Participant A)

"Several regular customers reached out to us, offering their support and sharing positive reviews to counter the negative publicity." (Participant F)

Brand advocacy emerged as a powerful outcome of strong customer loyalty. Participants actively defended the brand, further reinforcing its resilience during the crisis.

In general, the findings reveal that customer-based brand equity significantly influenced customer loyalty at Café Javas, even amidst the Rat-Milkshake Scandal. Trust in the brand, built over years of consistent service, and emerged as a key factor in mitigating the impact of the allegations. Participants overwhelmingly dismissed the scandal as a hoax, continued their patronage, and in some cases, increased their loyalty after observing the brand's professional handling of the situation.

Additionally, the emotional connection participants had with Café Javas fostered brand advocacy, with loyal customers and staff actively defending its reputation. These insights highlight the importance of building and maintaining strong brand equity to ensure resilience in the face of challenges. Café Javas' ability to maintain customer loyalty demonstrates the protective role of trust, quality service, and emotional engagement in sustaining business success.

4.3 Assessing the Influence of Crisis Management on Brand Reputation

To evaluate how Café Javas' crisis management strategies influenced its brand reputation, participants were asked two carefully crafted questions. Customers responded to: *"Did Café Javas' response to the rat milkshake scandal affect your perception of the brand's reputation? If so, how?"* This question aimed to gather insights into whether the brand's handling of the incident changed customer perspectives positively or negatively. Meanwhile, staff members were asked: *"What was your assessment of the crisis management strategies implemented by Café Javas? How did they impact the brand's image from your perspective?"*

The responses provided by the participants highlighted key themes related to the professionalism and transparency demonstrated during the crisis, as well as how these factors shaped the perception of the brand.

Sub-theme 2.1: Professionalism in Crisis Response

Participants recognized the quick and professional manner in which Café Javas handled the scandal as a critical factor in preserving its reputation.

Customers expressed admiration for the brand's strategic response:

"Café Javas acted so quickly to address the situation. They provided a clear explanation about their hygiene standards and emphasized their commitment to quality. This gave me confidence that they were on top of the issue." (Participant A, Customer)

Another participant elaborated on how the swift response influenced their perception:

"Their immediate response reassured me that they were serious about maintaining their reputation. It made me feel like they valued our trust as customers." (Participant C, Customer)

Staff members also provided insights into the professionalism exhibited by the management team:

"From the inside, we could see how organized the crisis management plan was. We received clear instructions on how to handle customer inquiries, and this kept everyone calm and reassured." (Participant B, Staff)

"I think what stood out was how they communicated the truth without trying to deflect blame. That honesty showed how much they cared about the brand and its reputation." (Participant D, Staff)

The participants' responses reflect how prompt action, clear communication, and a focus on professionalism contributed to preserving Café Javas' reputation during the crisis. By proactively addressing the situation, the brand demonstrated a high level of competence and concern for its customers, which reinforced trust and credibility.

Sub-theme 2.2: Restoration of Trust through Transparency

Transparency emerged as another key factor in managing the crisis. Both customers and staff emphasized that open communication about the allegations and the measures taken to investigate them helped restore trust.

Customers appreciated the detailed and transparent communication shared by Café Javas:

"They didn't hide anything. Instead, they shared videos of their kitchen and hygiene practices, which was a smart move. It showed that they had nothing to hide and were confident in their processes." (Participant E, Customer)

One participant highlighted the significance of accountability in restoring trust:

"The management took the time to explain every step they were taking to investigate the claims. That level of transparency made me feel like they respected us as customers." (Participant A, Customer)

Staff also noted how transparency reassured both employees and customers:

"The management involved external inspectors and shared the results with us and the public. It was comforting to see how far they were willing to go to prove their commitment to quality." (Participant F, Staff)

"Customers who had doubts were given direct answers and sometimes even invited to inspect the premises themselves. This openness really helped in changing perceptions." (Participant D, Staff)

Participants frequently cited specific actions taken by Café Javas to enhance transparency, including public sharing of hygiene reports, engaging third-party experts to conduct inspections, and providing regular updates on social media.

"They didn't just tell us what they were doing; they showed us. Seeing those videos and reports made all the difference." (Participant C, Customer)

The transparent approach adopted by Café Javas during the scandal helped bridge the trust gap created by the allegations. By openly addressing concerns and providing evidence of their hygiene standards, the brand strengthened its reputation and reassured both customers and employees.

In general, Café Javas' crisis management strategies, marked by professionalism and transparency, played a pivotal role in safeguarding its brand reputation. The prompt response

and open communication reassured customers and staff alike, turning a potentially damaging incident into an opportunity to reinforce trust. Participants highlighted how these efforts demonstrated the brand's commitment to quality and accountability, ensuring that its reputation remained intact despite the challenges.

4.4 The Role of Customer Loyalty on Brand Market Performance in the Fast-Food Industry

To determine how customer loyalty impacts the market performance of Café Javas and, by extension, the fast-food industry, participants were asked targeted questions. Customers responded to: *"How does your loyalty to Café Javas influence your spending and dining habits, particularly after the recent scandal?"* Meanwhile, staff members were asked: *"In your experience, how does the loyalty of customers contribute to Café Javas' market performance and competitive edge in the fast-food industry?"*

The responses from the participants revealed that customer loyalty directly supports brand sustainability through consistent patronage, positive word-of-mouth marketing, and resilience during market challenges.

Theme 1: Sustained Patronage and Revenue Stability

Participants emphasized that loyalty translated into consistent spending habits, which directly impacted the brand's revenue and market performance.

Customers expressed how their loyalty ensured regular patronage as quoted as below;

"I dine at Café Javas at least twice a week. My loyalty means I prioritize it over other restaurants, so a big portion of my dining budget goes there." (Participant A, Customer)

Another customer detailed how the brand became a preferred option and was quoted saying;

"Even during the scandal, I didn't feel the need to explore alternatives. My loyalty to Café Javas made me trust that they would handle the issue well, so I continued dining there as usual." (Participant E, Customer)

Staff members echoed these sentiments, highlighting the visible patterns of loyal customers:

"We have customers who visit daily or multiple times a week. Their consistent patronage is a significant contributor to our revenue." (Participant B, Staff)

"I believe our sales figures remained steady, even during the scandal, thanks to our loyal customers who didn't let the negative news affect their habits." (Participant D, Staff)

Loyal customers play a crucial role in stabilizing market performance by ensuring a predictable revenue stream. Their continued patronage not only safeguards the business during crises but also supports long-term growth in the competitive fast-food industry.

Theme 2: Positive Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Another key insight was the role of loyal customers in promoting Café Javas through word-of-mouth, which significantly influenced the brand's market performance.

Loyal customers shared how they advocated for the brand among their social circles:

"When friends ask for restaurant recommendations, Café Javas is always my first choice. I've even introduced colleagues and family members to the place, and most of them became regulars." (Participant C, Customer)

Another participant described how loyalty motivated them to defend the brand publicly and was quoted saying;

"When the scandal broke, I took it upon myself to share my positive experiences with others, both online and in person. I wanted people to know that the allegations didn't define the brand." (Participant A, Customer)

Staff members also noticed the impact of customer advocacy:

"We've had new customers tell us they came because a friend or relative recommended us. That's the power of loyal customers and they become our ambassadors without being asked." (Participant F, Staff)

"Our loyal customers didn't just defend us as they actively encouraged others to visit, which helped counter the negative publicity." (Participant D, Staff)

This implies that loyal customers serve as unpaid brand ambassadors, promoting the business through their personal networks. This organic marketing strategy enhances the brand's market reach and reputation, translating to increased footfall and competitive advantage in the fast-food industry.

Theme 3: Resilience during Market Challenges

Customer loyalty was identified as a critical factor in helping Café Javas weather market disruptions and maintain its competitive position.

Customers highlighted how their loyalty translated into resilience:

"For me, loyalty means standing by the brand even when times are tough. The scandal didn't stop me from supporting Café Javas because I know the quality they stand for." (Participant E, Customer)

Another customer expressed confidence in the brand's ability to recover and was quoted saying:

"I believed that my continued patronage, along with that of other loyal customers, would help Café Javas bounce back quickly. And it did." (Participant C, Customer)

Staff members observed the impact of loyalty on market stability as quoted below;

"The loyalty of our customers was evident in how quickly we returned to normal business after the scandal. Their support gave us the confidence to keep moving forward." (Participant B, Staff)

"Even during the most challenging times, our regular customers didn't waver. That loyalty was the backbone of our recovery and market performance." (Participant F, Staff)

This indicates that customer loyalty is a key determinant of resilience in the fast-food industry. It provides a foundation for recovery during crises and ensures that market performance remains strong, even in the face of challenges. The responses from participants clearly illustrate the pivotal role of customer loyalty in driving market performance in the fast-food industry. Sustained patronage ensures revenue stability, while positive word-of-mouth marketing expands the brand's reach and reputation. Furthermore, loyalty fosters resilience

during market challenges, positioning the brand for long-term success. In a highly competitive industry, the support of loyal customers is a priceless asset that directly impacts profitability and growth.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

5.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, conclusions and recommendations about the findings of the study and it is arranged according to the study objectives.

5.1 Discussion of findings

5.1.1 The Influence of Customer-Based Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty during Crisis Situations

The current study indicated that customer-based brand equity played a significant role in maintaining customer loyalty towards Café Javas during the "Rat-Milkshake Scandal." The findings revealed that trust, built over years of consistent service, hygiene, and high-quality food, allowed the brand to weather the crisis with minimal damage to its reputation. Participants consistently emphasized how their past experiences with Café Javas, which were marked by reliability and integrity, influenced their decision to dismiss the allegations as unfounded and uncharacteristic of the brand. These results align with existing literature, which suggests that a strong brand equity, especially trust, fosters customer loyalty even in challenging circumstances (Kironde, 2021; Muhimba, 2021). In the context of this study, customers' trust and loyalty were found to be resilient, confirming that a history of positive experiences can act as a protective barrier against negative crises.

The findings of the study align with the attribution theory, as customer loyalty towards Café Javas during the "Rat-Milkshake Scandal" was influenced by how customers attributed responsibility for the crisis. As per Weiner (2005), customers attributed the crisis to external factors, which mitigated its impact on their perception of the brand. This external attribution supported the idea that, despite the negative event, the brand's customer-based equity remained

intact, fostering continued loyalty. The study's findings affirm that customers' perceptions of brand responsibility during crises influence their subsequent behaviour, including their loyalty and engagement with the brand.

Furthermore, the attribution theory helped to explain the customers' reactions to the crisis and their loyalty behaviours. The theory, which emphasizes the role of perceptions in explaining behaviour (Heider, 1958), supported the finding that when customers perceive the crisis as caused by factors outside the brand's control, they are more likely to maintain their loyalty.

Moreover, the participants' response to the crisis echoed findings in prior research that emphasize the importance of brand integrity during crises. Coombs (2007) defines a crisis as a sudden and unexpected event that threatens an organization's reputation. In the case of Café Javas, while the rat-milkshake scandal initially posed a reputational threat, the brand's transparent and timely response helped reinforce its perceived integrity. This response is consistent with Coombs' (2007) suggestion that swift and transparent crisis communication can mitigate negative impacts and preserve customer loyalty. Café Javas' handling of the scandal, as highlighted by participants, aligned with Meyers' (1993) recommendation for businesses to respond quickly to crises, which can prevent long-term damage to their brand equity.

Additionally, the findings from this study confirm the significant role of customers' past experiences in shaping their perceptions during a crisis. The customers' long-standing trust in the Café Javas brand, grounded in consistent quality and service, minimized the negative impact of the scandal. As Ghorbani et al. (2023) suggest, customer perception is crucial in determining the value of a brand, and the perception of value derived from positive past experiences was evident in the responses of Café Javas' loyal customers. This supports the

notion that customers' perception of value, which stems from their ongoing interactions with the brand, can significantly influence their crisis response.

Moreover, the concept of crisis communication strategies, as discussed by Coombs (2007) and Ghorbani et al. (2023), was further illustrated in the participants' views on Café Javas' handling of the scandal. The company's quick investigation and the release of their findings helped restore customers' trust. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the importance of addressing crises with clear, honest, and empathetic communication to prevent further damage to a brand's reputation (Grappi & Romani, 2015). Café Javas' transparent crisis communication strategy played a pivotal role in maintaining customer loyalty, confirming the literature's assertion that well-executed crisis communication can alleviate negative emotional reactions and preserve brand equity.

Furthermore, the participants' dismissal of the scandal as a hoax and their continued patronage of Café Javas supports the findings of Grappi & Romani (2015), who note that consumers with a positive perception of a company's reputation are more likely to respond with sympathy during a crisis. This was evident in the current study, where many customers and staff viewed the scandal as a fabrication, which helped mitigate anger and fostered continued loyalty. This also aligns with Coombs & Holladay (2005) et al.'s work, which stresses the importance of understanding consumer emotions and reactions during a crisis. By addressing the crisis with transparency and empathy, Café Javas was able to transform potential negative emotions, such as anger, into positive sentiments, which contributed to reinforcing customer loyalty.

5.1.2 The Influence of Crisis Management Strategies on Brand Reputation

The current study indicated positive influence in understanding how Café Javas' crisis management strategies influenced its brand reputation, with participants acknowledging the

professional handling of the rat milkshake scandal. This finding aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of swift and professional responses during crises to mitigate negative effects on brand reputation. For instance, Coombs (2007) argues that effective crisis management involves prompt action, which can help restore public confidence and limit reputational damage. The current study supports this, with participants emphasizing how Café Javas' quick actions reassured them and preserved the brand's image.

The findings of the study support the attribution theory, as they reveal that the professional handling of the "Rat-Milkshake Scandal" by Café Javas influenced how customers attributed responsibility and, consequently, their perceptions of the brand. According to Weiner (2005), when customers attribute a crisis to external factors and observe effective crisis management strategies, their perceptions of the brand remain relatively positive. This external attribution helped protect Café Javas' brand reputation, as customers were more inclined to view the company's response as appropriate, aligning with the assumption that positive brand actions in response to crises can mitigate damage to brand equity and reputation (Coombs, 2010).

Moreover, the study revealed that professionalism in crisis response not only mitigated damage but also strengthened customer trust. This finding confirms earlier research by Larkin and Larkin (2016), who found that transparent and competent crisis communication can prevent long-term damage to a company's reputation. Customers and staff in the present study expressed appreciation for the company's clear and honest communication, echoing the conclusions of research by Mitroff and Pearson (1993), who highlighted that handling a crisis with transparency builds trust and preserves stakeholder relationships.

Furthermore, the participants' emphasis on the company's ability to maintain control and provide clear guidance during the crisis resonates with the work of Benoit (1997), who

stresses the importance of controlling the narrative and staying consistent with the company's values during a crisis. Café Javas' effective communication strategy, including clear instructions to staff and timely updates to customers, confirmed the relevance of such crisis management strategies in protecting brand reputation, as noted in the empirical literature.

The current study revealed that participants recognized professionalism in Café Javas' crisis response as a critical factor in preserving the brand's reputation. This finding supports the views of Fearn-Banks (2017), who suggests that professionalism during a crisis, characterized by swift action, transparency, and consistency, is essential for restoring consumer confidence. The customer and staff responses in this study echoed these elements, particularly noting how the quick and strategic response of Café Javas reassured them about the brand's commitment to quality and customer trust.

Moreover, the importance of clear communication and professionalism in shaping perceptions of the brand aligns with the findings of earlier studies by Parameswaran and Pisharodi (2015), who assert that organizations that communicate effectively during crises often see quicker recovery in terms of brand reputation. In this study, participants expressed their confidence in Café Javas' commitment to maintaining high standards, as the company's management was transparent and direct about addressing the issue, thus supporting the idea that professionalism can prevent reputational harm.

Additionally, the participants' emphasis on Café Javas' ability to stay composed under pressure conforms with the theory of crisis leadership by Boin and Hart (2003), who argue that effective leadership during a crisis is crucial in ensuring that all parties involved are well-informed and able to respond appropriately. This element of leadership and crisis management was highlighted by staff participants, who noted the calm and structured environment provided

by the management team, which further reinforced the positive outcomes of a well-handled crisis.

5.1.3 The Role of Customer Loyalty on Brand Market Performance

The current study indicated that customer loyalty plays a significant role in driving the market performance of Café Javas, with sustained patronage, positive word-of-mouth marketing, and resilience during market challenges contributing to the brand's success. This finding aligns with the work of Ali et al. (2021), who emphasized that brand loyalty is a key driver of consistent revenue streams in the fast-food industry. Customers' repeated patronage, as observed in the current study, directly enhances a brand's market share and profitability. In particular, the loyal customers who continued to visit Café Javas during the scandal, as highlighted in the study, confirm the positive influence of customer loyalty on a brand's ability to maintain steady revenue even during crises.

The study's findings align with the attribution theory, as customer loyalty can be seen as an outcome of how customers perceive the brand's actions, especially during crises. According to Weiner (2005), customers tend to evaluate a brand's actions based on their attributions of responsibility for events like the rat-milkshake scandal. If customers attribute the crisis to external factors and view the brand's response as effective, they are more likely to maintain loyalty, thereby contributing positively to brand market performance. This external attribution in the crisis context helps preserve brand equity, as customers who remain loyal due to the company's crisis management strategies will continue to contribute to brand success (Coombs, 2010).

The current study also revealed that customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in fostering loyalty, which is directly tied to market performance. This finding supports the findings of Kumar and Shah (2020), who noted that satisfaction is a strong predictor of loyalty,

particularly in the fast-food industry. The participants in the study consistently highlighted their satisfaction with Café Javas' commitment to quality, even in the wake of the scandal. Their continued loyalty, despite external challenges, mirrors the conclusions of Kumar and Shah (2020) about the strong relationship between customer satisfaction and retention, which ultimately supports brand performance.

Additionally, the study revealed that loyal customers contributed to the brand's market performance through positive word-of-mouth marketing. This resonates with the findings of Lee and Lee (2019), who argued that loyal customers often become brand advocates, influencing others to try and adopt the brand. Participants in the current study discussed how they recommended Café Javas to friends and family, even during the scandal, which helped mitigate the negative publicity. This organic marketing strategy, as described by participants, supports Lee and Lee's (2019) argument that customer loyalty leads to increased brand reach and market influence.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the resilience of Café Javas during the crisis, with loyal customers helping to stabilize the brand's performance in a challenging market environment. This aligns with the concept introduced by Rajesh and Kumar (2021), who observed that loyal customers contribute to a brand's competitive edge by ensuring stability and long-term success. As illustrated by staff responses in the current study, the loyalty of regular customers helped Café Javas quickly recover from the scandal, reaffirming the importance of customer loyalty in maintaining market position during adverse events. This confirms the critical role that loyal customers play in shielding a brand from market disruptions.

The current study also reveals that loyal customers are willing to overlook challenges or price fluctuations due to the emotional attachment they have with the brand, supporting the findings of Alwi and Razi (2022). Several customers in the study expressed an emotional

connection with Café Javas, citing their continued support despite the scandal. This emotional bond strengthens the brand's market performance, as it helps customers maintain loyalty even when service issues arise or external challenges occur. This mirrors Alwi and Razi's (2022) argument that emotional attachment is a key determinant of customer loyalty, which directly influences market performance.

Finally, the study's findings related to customer loyalty's resilience against external challenges also echo the conclusions of Zhang and Li (2020), who found that loyal customers are often willing to pay slightly higher prices for brands they trust. In the case of Café Javas, loyal customers continued their patronage, supporting the brand's market position even when it faced negative press. This suggests that customer loyalty transcends price sensitivity, as customers' loyalty to the brand, built on consistent quality and emotional attachment, helps preserve the brand's performance regardless of competitive pressures or price fluctuations, as noted by Zhang and Li (2020).

Besides, the current study revealed that positive word-of-mouth marketing plays a crucial role in Café Javas' market performance, with loyal customers actively recommending the brand to others, even during the crisis. This finding supports the conclusions of Ali et al. (2021), who found that loyal customers are key promoters of brand success through organic marketing efforts. Customers' recommendations to their peers about Café Javas, as discussed in the current study, confirm that positive word-of-mouth, especially when coming from trusted, loyal patrons, can significantly enhance brand visibility and market presence. This organic form of promotion contributes to maintaining the brand's reputation and attracting new customers, even in the face of negative publicity.

Additionally, the study's findings on word-of-mouth align with the work of Rajesh and Kumar (2021), who identified brand differentiation and customer advocacy as critical elements

in building a loyal customer base. The participants in the current study emphasized how their loyalty to Café Javas motivated them to defend the brand publicly and encourage others to visit, demonstrating that positive word-of-mouth extends beyond mere recommendations. It involves active support and defense of the brand's reputation, especially in times of crisis. This type of advocacy directly contributes to the brand's market performance by mitigating negative perceptions and reinforcing customer trust.

The impact of loyal customers on word-of-mouth marketing in the current study is further supported by the research of Lee and Lee (2019), who noted that loyal customers often serve as brand ambassadors, amplifying the brand's message within their personal networks. The customers in the current study took it upon themselves to share their positive experiences with Café Javas during the scandal, which is in line with Lee and Lee's (2019) assertion that loyal patrons help to extend a brand's reach. The advocacy shown by customers in the current study was instrumental in stabilizing Café Javas' market position, reaffirming the importance of loyal customers as active brand promoters.

The findings of the current study also conform to the results found by Singh and Kaur (2023), who highlighted the significance of digital engagement in fostering customer loyalty and, by extension, promoting the brand through word-of-mouth. While the current study did not focus specifically on digital engagement, it did highlight the role of loyal customers in communicating the brand's value to others, both online and offline. This suggests that the principles identified by Singh and Kaur (2023) regarding the importance of digital touchpoints in fostering loyalty could also apply to word-of-mouth efforts in the physical realm, as customers actively defend and promote the brand in various settings.

The current study's findings that loyal customers help spread positive word-of-mouth, even in the face of a crisis, are also consistent with the work of Alwi and Razi (2022), who

argued that emotional connections between customers and brands lead to brand advocacy. The participants' continued loyalty to Café Javas, despite the scandal, was rooted in their emotional attachment to the brand, which motivated them to share their positive experiences with others. This emotional investment is key to understanding how loyal customers can act as powerful advocates, boosting the brand's market performance even in difficult times.

Furthermore, the current study revealed that customer loyalty is a critical factor in helping Café Javas overcome market challenges, including the rat milkshake scandal, and maintain its market performance. This finding aligns with the research by Ali et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of loyal customers in providing stability during times of crisis. Loyal customers' consistent patronage, as observed in the current study, played a key role in sustaining the brand's revenue stream and supporting its recovery during and after the scandal. This confirms that customer loyalty not only helps in maintaining a brand's market position during crises but also facilitates resilience by ensuring ongoing financial support.

The study's findings on resilience also support the conclusions of Rajesh and Kumar (2021), who identified customer loyalty as a crucial determinant in helping brands withstand market disruptions. As mentioned in the current study, loyal customers continued to frequent Café Javas despite the scandal, providing a foundation for the brand's recovery. This aligns with Rajesh and Kumar's (2021) argument that loyal customers act as a buffer against external challenges, ensuring the brand remains competitive even during adverse situations.

Lastly, the current study's focus on the role of loyal customers in Café Javas' resilience also aligns with Zhang and Li's (2020) findings that price sensitivity is less important for loyal customers who are committed to a brand. Participants in the current study expressed their continued support for Café Javas despite the scandal, highlighting that their loyalty was not easily swayed by negative publicity or price concerns. This confirms Zhang and Li's (2020)

argument that loyalty can transcend price sensitivity, playing a key role in ensuring a brand's resilience and market performance.

Chapter Six

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are drawn based on the study's objectives, focusing on the influence of customer-based brand equity, crisis management strategies, and customer loyalty on brand performance during a crisis. The study's findings support the following conclusions:

6.1.1 The Influence of Customer-Based Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty during Crisis Situations

Customer-based brand equity, particularly trust, played a crucial role in ensuring customer loyalty during the "Rat-Milkshake Scandal" at Café Javas. The customers' long-term positive experiences and the brand's consistency in service quality allowed them to dismiss the allegations, reinforcing their loyalty. This finding aligns with the objective to assess the role of customer-based brand equity in fostering loyalty during crises.

6.1.2 The Influence of Crisis Management Strategies on Brand Reputation

Café Javas' swift and transparent crisis management strategies were instrumental in mitigating reputational damage. The brand's professional handling of the crisis helped preserve its reputation and maintain customer trust, which reflects the objective of examining how crisis management strategies impact brand reputation. Participants emphasized the importance of clear communication, which directly contributed to maintaining the brand's image during the crisis.

6.1.3 The Role of Customer Loyalty on Brand Market Performance

Customer loyalty, driven by satisfaction and emotional attachment, was pivotal in sustaining Café Javas' market performance during the crisis. Loyal customers not only

continued their patronage but also engaged in positive word-of-mouth marketing, contributing to the brand's resilience. This supports the study's objective to analyze the relationship between customer loyalty and market performance.

6.2 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

Café Javas should continue to prioritize swift, transparent, and empathetic communication to maintain customer trust. This involves providing timely updates and clarifications to customers, reinforcing the brand's integrity.

Café Javas should focus on building emotional connections with customers. Continuing to nurture customer loyalty through consistent quality, exceptional service, and personalized experiences foster emotional attachment to the brand. This will ensure resilience against future crises and strengthen brand advocacy.

Café Javas should strengthen brand reputation management and this can be done through developing and implementing proactive reputation management strategies that focus on reinforcing brand values and building trust, particularly during crisis events.

The Marketing Department should encourage loyal customers to actively promote the brand through word-of-mouth marketing. This can be achieved by offering incentives for referrals or creating loyalty programs that reward brand advocates, ensuring continued market growth even in times of crisis.

The industry regulators should establish Clear Guidelines for Crisis Management in the Hospitality Sector. The provision of clear guidelines and best practices for crisis management can help businesses in the hospitality sector navigate similar challenges. This will assist in safeguarding brand reputation and ensuring consistency in crisis communication.

Future studies should delve deeper into the impact of emotional connections on customer loyalty during crises, especially within the hospitality sector, to better understand how these dynamics influence brand performance and recovery.

The Crisis Communication experts should create tailored crisis management training for hospitality sector employees. This training should focus on how to handle customer relations during a crisis, maintain professionalism, and communicate effectively to protect brand reputation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Key Informants

I am Sauda Nabatanzi, a master's student at Uganda Christian University, studying Strategic Communication. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview and contribute to my research. This study aims to explore the impact of customer-based brand equity on customer loyalty, with a particular focus on the food and beverage industry. Rest assured, all information provided will be kept confidential.

A) Influence of Customer-Based Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty

1. How would you describe Café Javas as a brand and its reputation prior to the rat-milkshake saga?
2. How often did you or others use Café Javas' services before the saga?
3. What aspects of Café Javas' services or products contributed to your loyalty to the brand?

B) Crisis Management Strategies and Brand Reputation

1. How did you perceive the rat-milkshake saga and its impact on Café Javas' brand reputation?
2. How effective were Café Javas' crisis management strategies in addressing the saga? Did it influence your view of the brand?
3. In your opinion, how well did Café Javas communicate its response to the crisis?

C) Impact of Crisis on Customer Loyalty

1. Did the rat-milkshake saga affect your loyalty to Café Javas? If so, how?
2. How would you compare your perception of the brand before and after the saga?

3. In what ways have customers continued to show their loyalty to Café Javas despite the saga?

Appendix 2: Codebook

Categories	# Codes	Themes	Sub-Themes
Customer Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty behaviors • Customer retention strategies • Customer engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Loyalty and Retention • Loyalty During Crisis • Role of Customer Engagement in Loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loyalty behaviors - Customer retention strategies - Customer engagement - Loyalty during crisis - Strategies for retaining customers during crisis
Customer Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of the Brand • Trust and Credibility • Emotional connection • Trust in times of crisis • Emotional connection and Loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Perception and Brand Image • Trust and Credibility in Crisis • Emotional Connection and Loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer perception of the brand - Trust and credibility - Emotional connection - Trust in times of crisis - Emotional connection and loyalty

<p>Crisis Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis response • Communication strategies • Transparency • Effectiveness of crisis response • Transparency in crisis communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis Communication and Management • Effective Crisis Response • Role of Transparency in Crisis Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crisis response - Communication strategies during a crisis - Transparency in crisis management - Effectiveness of crisis response - Role of transparency in crisis management
<p>Customer-based Brand Equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Equity • Satisfaction and Quality • Brand Reputation • Influence of Brand Equity on Loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer-Based Brand Equity • Impact of Crisis on Brand Equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence of brand equity on customer loyalty - Role of customer perception in brand equity - Impact of crisis on brand equity - Impact of the crisis on brand equity



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DISSERTATION CORRECTION COMPLIANCE REPORT BY THE CANDIDATE (POST VIVA FORM)

Date: ...23/04/25.....

Name of Candidate:NABATANZI SAUDA..... Reg. No: ...RS21M54/023.....

Title of Dissertation:The influence of Customer Based Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty in Uganda

SN	COMMENTS BY EXTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	A small section could be introduced in chapter one to provide contextual information about the crisis (rat milkshake saga) being referred to in the study.	I did put a small section about the Rat milkshake saga in chapter one 1.2.1	Page 3/4
2			
3			
4			

SN	COMMENTS BY INTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	The candidate should provide the page numbers for quoting directly the “six steps recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006)” .	I did provide the page numbers and the refence as well in the ref. list	Page 37
2			
3			
4			
5			

SN	COMMENTS BY VIVA VOCE PANNEL	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	How is the concept of branding presented or discussed in your study?	Branding is actually discussed throughout the study right from the background of the study, literature review and in findings. Here, the study looks at branding right from its historical roots to a modern-day concept	Pages 1,2,9,10 etc.
2	Was crisis communication a central focus of your research? If not, what was the reason for including it?	Not a central focus as such but it is one of the primary topics discussed in the study. The study used the Café Java’ s rat-milkshake saga to get to its findings and since crisis communication was part of the crisis used, the study could not overlook the role it played hence its feature in the study.	N/A
3	Java’ s brand seems to resonate with a specific segment of Ugandans primarily loyal customers. Is this correct?	To some extent it is correct and not correct at the same time. According to my observation, I think it is just a matter of a certain segment frequenting its services and products more than others.	N/A

4	What was the rationale behind selecting a sample size of 6 and 6?	The choice of this sample size was informed by the need to ensure representativeness and obtain relevant data from both management and customers, providing a balanced perspective on the research topic.	Page 31
5			

Handwritten signature in blue ink.

NABATANZI SAUDA
Candidate's Name

Signature

Professor James Kiwanuka-Tondo
Supervisor's Name

.....
Signature