

Analysis of the Impact of Branding and Unique Selling Proposition on the Growth, Profitability and Competitive Advantage of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya

Dr. Michael Steven Juma DBA¹, MBA, MSc, Pauline Awino Owino, MSc.², Parkin Hiley Juma, MBA³, Ashley Verleen Juma, BSc.⁴ and Johnson Olatunde Olaniyan Ph.D.¹

¹UNICAF University

²Salford University

³Swiss School of Management-Italy

⁴Semmelweis University-Hungary

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*Corresponding author: Dr. Michael Steven Juma, DBA, MBA, MSc in Dev

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies on the growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya. The study was guided by key theories, including Brand Equity Theory, Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasize the role of intangible resources, differentiation, and strategic positioning in sustaining organizational success.

A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through surveys of 86 senior staff members, while qualitative insights were obtained through 40 in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and thematic analysis to provide both numerical trends and contextual depth.

The findings revealed that branding significantly enhances customer loyalty, market visibility, and profitability. Similarly, USP strategies—such as product differentiation, innovation, superior service quality (QRSV), adoption of technology, and financial inclusion—were found to contribute directly to the Cooperative Bank's sustainable growth and competitive edge. Respondents emphasized that the synergy between branding and USP enables the bank to strengthen its market positioning, respond to globalization, and remain resilient in Kenya's highly competitive financial sector.

The study concludes that effective integration of branding and USP strategies is central to achieving long-term profitability and competitive advantage. It recommends that the Cooperative Bank further enhance its digital branding initiatives, continuously innovate customer-focused products, deepen financial inclusion in underserved regions, and foster strategic partnerships to extend its market reach.

Finally, the study suggests that future research could undertake comparative studies across other banks, adopt a longitudinal approach, or explore customer-centric perspectives to complement staff insights. Research into technology-driven branding and regulatory influences on competitive strategies in emerging markets is also recommended.

Overall, the study affirms that in the modern financial landscape, sustainable competitive advantage depends not only on financial resources, but also on intangible assets such as brand equity, innovation, Unique Selling Proposition, and customer trust.

Keywords: Branding, Unique Selling Proposition (USP), Growth, Profitability, Competitive Advantage, Cooperative Bank of Kenya.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Co-operative Bank of Kenya (Co-op Bank) leverages its branding to build trust, customer loyalty, and market awareness, with its Unique Selling Proposition

(USP) rooted in its cooperative-model heritage and its focus on delivering innovative financial solutions. By adopting a blended strategy of digital innovation and traditional multi-channel delivery, the bank has achieved

sustained market share, profitability, and customer equity. These efforts have enabled the bank to establish a strong brand meaning and customer-focused identity while differentiating itself within Kenya's competitive banking landscape.

In today's financial sector, branding has emerged as a critical determinant of organizational performance and competitive survival. Effective branding not only communicates identity and reputation but also builds credibility, fosters loyalty, and drives long-term profitability. For banks, where services are largely intangible and consumer choice is wide, branding acts as a strategic differentiator that enhances customer confidence and facilitates market penetration. In emerging economies such as Kenya, where financial services are rapidly expanding amid rising digital adoption and increasing demand for inclusive financial solutions, branding becomes even more vital in shaping competitive advantage.

Co-op Bank provides a unique case in this regard. Founded on a cooperative ethos, the bank has successfully leveraged its identity to appeal to diverse customer segments while remaining faithful to its community-centered service model. The Cooperative Bank of Kenya (Co-op Bank) utilizes strong branding and a clear unique selling proposition (USP) to drive its growth, customer perception, and competitiveness. Its branding initiatives have been strategically designed to:

- **Enhance Brand Awareness and Meaning:** Branding efforts have significantly contributed to Co-op Bank's overall performance by strengthening its presence and recognition in the market.
- **Foster Customer Trust and Loyalty:** Strong branding in the banking sector is crucial for building trust, customer loyalty, and credibility, especially when handling financial assets.
- **Strengthen Market Penetration and Growth:** Effective branding, including strategic marketing and positioning, supports market segmentation, niche marketing, and ultimately drives increased sales, market share, and profitability.
- **Spur Differentiation:** Branding helps differentiate the bank's products and services, making them more recognizable. It fosters differentiation by aligning branding with the cooperative model and value proposition.
- **Foster Performance Sustainability:** Strategic rebranding, focusing on brand identity and personality, positively influences the bank's performance sustainability (Juma, 2025).

Equally, its USP reflects a deliberate strategy to sustain competitiveness. Anchored in cooperative principles, innovative financial solutions, and a customer-first approach, the USP has enabled the bank to differentiate itself while strengthening brand equity and profitability.

The Co-op Bank's competitive advantage is built on several key elements:

- **Cooperative Model:** Its foundation as the largest cooperative bank in Africa, serving 15 million members, provides a unique model and strong customer base.
- **Market Positioning:** The bank has effectively positioned itself as the preferred financial institution for low-income individuals and progressive farmers, leveraging its cooperative foundation.
- **Focus on Low-Income and Farmers:** The bank has strategically positioned itself as the preferred bank for low-income individuals and progressive farmers.
- **Digital Transformation:** Embracing digitalization of services, including high adoption of alternative channels, enhances operational efficiency and customer experience.
- **Product and Service Differentiation:** Emphasizing unique product offerings is a key pillar of its competitive strategy.
- **Customer Relationship Management:** Adoption of effective CRM approaches focusing on satisfaction, retention, and loyalty, combined with tailored strategies based on customer needs, strengthens brand meaning, trust, and credibility.
- **Universal Banking Model:** The successful universal banking model caters to various client segments, including retail, business, corporate, and institutional clients, supporting the bank's market dominance and growth initiatives.

Branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) have significantly contributed to the growth of Cooperative Bank of Kenya (Co-op Bank) by enhancing its strategic position and significance in the competitive market.

1.1 Problem Statement

In the contemporary financial services sector, branding has evolved into a strategic imperative for survival and growth. Unlike tangible products, banking services are largely intangible, making customer trust, credibility, and perception the cornerstone of sustained competitiveness. In Kenya, the rapid evolution of the banking industry—driven by digital transformation, regulatory reforms, and heightened competition from both traditional banks and fintech institutions—has intensified the need for strong branding and a clearly defined Unique Selling Proposition (USP).

The Co-operative Bank of Kenya, with its cooperative heritage and distinctive customer-centered model, provides a compelling case for examining the role of branding and USP in driving profitability and long-term competitiveness. Despite its demonstrated success, significant questions remain unanswered regarding the

specific mechanisms through which branding strategies translate into growth, customer loyalty, and competitive positioning. Moreover, while existing studies on branding predominantly focus on developed economies, there is limited empirical evidence on how branding and USP affect financial performance and customer perception within emerging markets such as Kenya.

This lack of empirical evidence creates a critical gap in both theory and practice. Without a deeper understanding of how branding and USP strategies influence profitability, market penetration, and customer retention, banks in Kenya and other emerging economies risk underleveraging these tools in their strategic growth agendas. This study addresses this gap by systematically examining how branding and USP contribute to the Co-operative Bank of Kenya's performance, with a view to generating insights applicable to similar financial institutions operating in dynamic and competitive environments.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine the impact of branding on growth, profitability, and competitive positioning of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya.
2. To analyze how the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) enhances brand awareness and strengthens competitive advantage within the Kenyan banking sector.
3. To investigate the relationship between branding strategies and customer trust, loyalty, and retention.
4. To assess how Co-op Bank's cooperative heritage and multi-channel strategies shape its brand equity and customer experience.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does branding influence growth, profitability, and competitive positioning of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya?
2. In what ways does the bank's Unique Selling Proposition (USP) create brand awareness and enhance competitive advantage?
3. What is the relationship between branding strategies and customer trust, loyalty, and retention at Co-operative Bank?
4. How do the bank's cooperative heritage and multi-channel strategies contribute to brand equity and customer experience?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives and research questions, the study tests the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Branding has a significant positive impact on the growth and profitability of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya.
- **H2:** The Unique Selling Proposition (USP) significantly enhances brand awareness and strengthens the competitive advantage of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya.
- **H3:** There is a positive relationship between branding strategies and customer trust, loyalty, and retention.
- **H4:** Co-op Bank's cooperative heritage and multi-channel strategies significantly contribute to brand equity and customer experience.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Conceptual Framework on the Impact of Branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) on Growth, Profitability, and Competitive Advantage of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya

Branding and unique selling propositions (USP) are strategic tools that shape customer perceptions, trust, loyalty, and overall organizational performance. In the banking sector, where services are largely intangible and customer trust is paramount, strong branding and a compelling USP become crucial in securing market share, ensuring profitability, and sustaining competitive advantage. This study adopts an integrated conceptual framework informed by established branding and strategic management theories.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Framework

Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model – Keller (1993, 2013): Keller's model emphasizes that brand salience, meaning, responses, and resonance are critical in building strong customer-based brand equity. Strong branding enhances customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, which drive profitability and long-term growth (Keller, 2013).

Aaker's Brand Equity Model (1991): Aaker identifies brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty as the foundation of financial performance. Co-op Bank's branding initiatives foster recognition and loyalty, thereby improving profitability (Aaker, 1991).

Unique Selling Proposition (USP) Theory – Reeves (1961): Reeves' USP theory asserts that differentiation through a unique promise attracts and retains customers. Co-op Bank's cooperative heritage and innovative financial solutions embody a compelling USP, setting it apart in Kenya's financial services market (Reeves, 1961).

Resource-Based View (RBV) – Barney (1991): RBV suggests that firms achieve sustainable competitive

advantage by leveraging valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. Co-op Bank's cooperative model, brand reputation, and digital innovations serve as VRIN resources that underpin long-term profitability (Barney, 1991).

Signaling Theory – Spence (1973): This theory explains how firms send credible signals to reduce uncertainty and build trust among stakeholders. Branding and USP serve as trust signals in financial services, reassuring customers of security and value (Spence, 1973).

Relationship Marketing Theory – Berry (1983): Relationship marketing highlights the importance of building long-term relationships based on trust and loyalty. Co-op Bank's branding and USP foster enduring relationships, enhancing retention and sustainable growth (Berry, 1983).

Conceptual Framework (Narrative Integration)

Drawing from these theories, this study conceptualizes that:

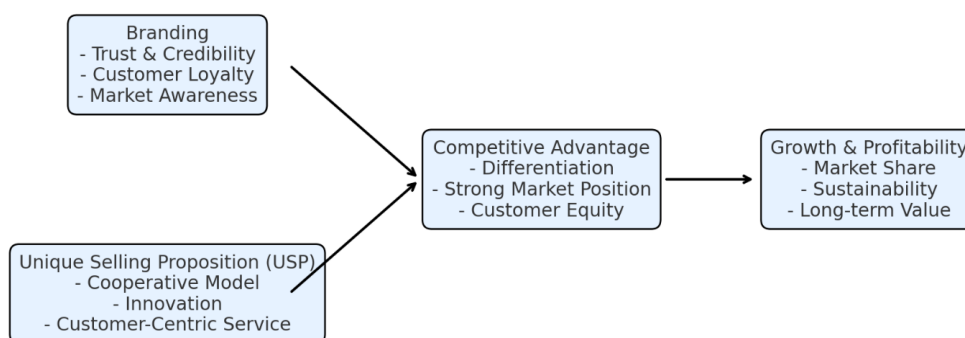
Branding (brand awareness, trust, loyalty, and differentiation) enhances customer-based brand equity,

which translates into increased growth, profitability, and sustainable performance (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1991).

- USP (cooperative heritage, innovative financial solutions, and customer-centric service) strengthens competitive advantage by differentiating the bank in the marketplace (Reeves, 1961; Barney, 1991).
- Brand equity mediates the relationship between branding/USP and profitability.
- Competitive advantage results from branding and USP strategies when aligned with VRIN resources (Barney, 1991).
- Trust and customer loyalty—explained by signaling theory and relationship marketing—reinforce long-term profitability and sustainable growth (Spence, 1973; Berry, 1983).

This study integrates multiple theories to explain how branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) influence the growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya. Overall, the framework suggests that branding and USP positively influence growth and profitability, with brand equity and competitive advantage acting as mediators, as reflected in the below diagram.

Conceptual Framework: Impact of Branding and USP on Growth & Profitability



4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) on the growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya. The quantitative component utilizes structured surveys to

collect measurable data from bank employees on their perceptions of branding, customer loyalty, and organizational performance. This allows for the testing of hypotheses and statistical validation of relationships among variables.

The qualitative component complements this by drawing on interviews with selected senior managers and focus group discussions with key staff. These methods provide deeper insights into how branding and USP are perceived and implemented in practice, as well as the contextual

challenges and opportunities faced in Kenya's banking sector.

The choice of a mixed-methods design is informed by the need to capture both the breadth (through quantitative data) and depth (through qualitative insights) of the research problem. This design enables triangulation of findings, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4.2 Population and Sampling

The study population comprises 150 senior staff members of the Co-operative Bank of Kenya. These individuals are directly involved in strategy formulation, branding, customer relationship management, and performance monitoring, making them an ideal population for the study.

Using purposive sampling, a sample size of 90 participants (representing 60% of the population) was selected. This includes 50 males and 40 females, ensuring both gender representation and sufficient coverage of diverse roles within the bank. This sample size is considered adequate for capturing reliable insights while remaining manageable for detailed analysis.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Two primary data collection methods were employed:

1. Quantitative Data Collection – A structured questionnaire was administered to the 90 selected participants and only 86 research participants responded. The instrument contained both closed-ended questions (using a 5-point Likert scale) and a few open-ended questions, designed to capture perceptions of branding effectiveness, USP, customer loyalty, and profitability.
2. Qualitative Data Collection – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of 10 senior managers to provide nuanced insights into strategic branding decisions and organizational priorities. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with small groups of staff to explore collective perceptions and experiences related to branding and customer engagement.

4.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) to test the relationships between branding, USP, growth, and profitability. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS software.

Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, to identify key themes and patterns emerging from interviews

and focus groups. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through triangulation, ensuring that the results are both statistically valid and contextually rich.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the research findings, both validity and reliability were carefully addressed. These measures enhanced the credibility, legitimacy and reliability of the instruments and reduced the risk of measurement errors.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was upheld throughout the study in compliance with standard research protocols by ensuring strict compliance with the principles of Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Anonymity, Right to Withdraw and Non-Maleficence. Research Approval: Necessary approvals were sought from the University's Research Ethics Committee and from the Co-operative Bank's management prior to data collection. By adhering to these principles, the study ensured that it met both academic and professional ethical standards while safeguarding the rights and dignity of all participants (Juma, 2025).

5.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The analysis is guided by the study objectives and research questions, and it is organized into sections covering the demographic characteristics of respondents and the perceptions regarding the impact of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) on the Cooperative Bank of Kenya. Both descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and interpretative narratives are employed to highlight patterns and insights. Both quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed in order to capture a holistic view of the research problem.

The chapter is structured as follows:

- A presentation of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.
- Quantitative data analysis based on descriptive and inferential statistics.
- Qualitative data analysis derived from interview responses, open-ended questionnaires, or focus group discussions (as applicable)
- Integration of findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study variables; and
- A summary highlighting the key findings in relation to the research objectives and hypotheses.

Through this analysis, the chapter aims to establish

meaningful patterns, relationships, and insights that will

inform the discussion in Chapter Six.

5.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Respondents' Level of Education

Level of Education	Number	Percentage (%)
Diploma	–	–
Bachelor's degree	28	33
Master's degree	54	63
PhD and above	4	5
Total	86	100

Interpretation

Table 8 shows that the majority of respondents (63%) hold a master's degree, while 33% have a bachelor's degree. Only 5% possess a PhD or higher qualification,

and none reported holding a diploma. This indicates that the respondents are highly educated, which enhances the reliability of their contributions as they are well-informed and professionally competent to evaluate the subject under study.

5.2 Perceptions on Branding and its impact on growth of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya

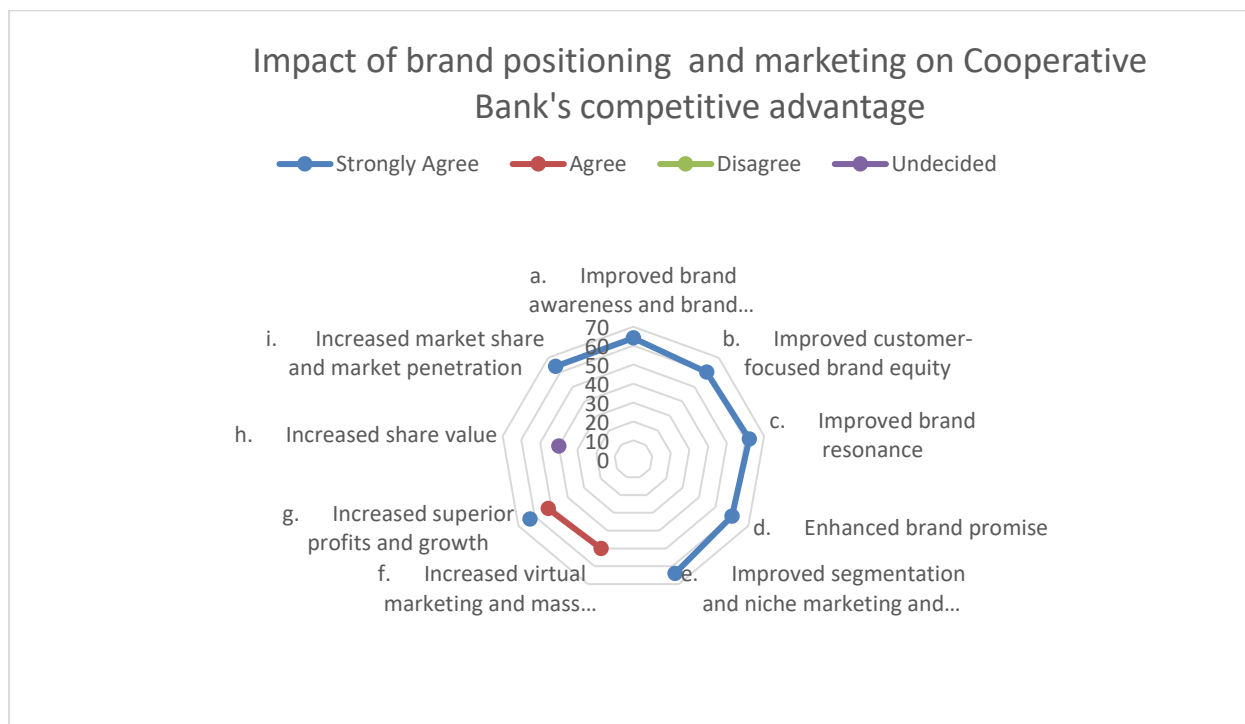
Table 2: Respondents' Views on the Impact of Branding on Cooperative Bank of Kenya

Responses	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Strongly-Agree	64	74
Agree-	16	19
Undecided-	6	7
Strongly Disagree-	–	–
Disagree-	–	–
Total	86	100

Interpretation

As shown in Table 9, a vast majority of respondents (74% strongly agree and 19% agree) affirmed that branding has a significant positive impact on the

Cooperative Bank of Kenya. Only 7% were undecided, and no respondent expressed disagreement. This implies that branding is widely perceived as a powerful strategic tool that contributes to the bank's growth, profitability, and competitive advantage.



Interpretation

Figure 1 illustrates respondents' perceptions of how brand positioning and marketing strategies have contributed to the Cooperative Bank's competitive advantage. The radar chart shows that a high proportion of respondents strongly agreed that brand positioning positively influences several key performance indicators:

- Improved brand awareness and brand meaning
- Enhanced customer-focused brand equity
- Improved brand resonance and brand promise

- Effective segmentation and niche marketing
- Increased virtual marketing and mass outreach
- Superior profits, share value, and market penetration

Overall, the data suggests that respondents perceive brand positioning and marketing as powerful strategic levers that strengthen the Cooperative Bank's market presence, profitability, and customer loyalty. The dominance of "Strongly Agree" responses indicates a strong consensus on the significance of branding and marketing as major contributors to sustained competitive advantage.

5.3 Perceptions on Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

Table-3: Respondents' Views on Whether USP Enhances Customer Retention and Loyalty

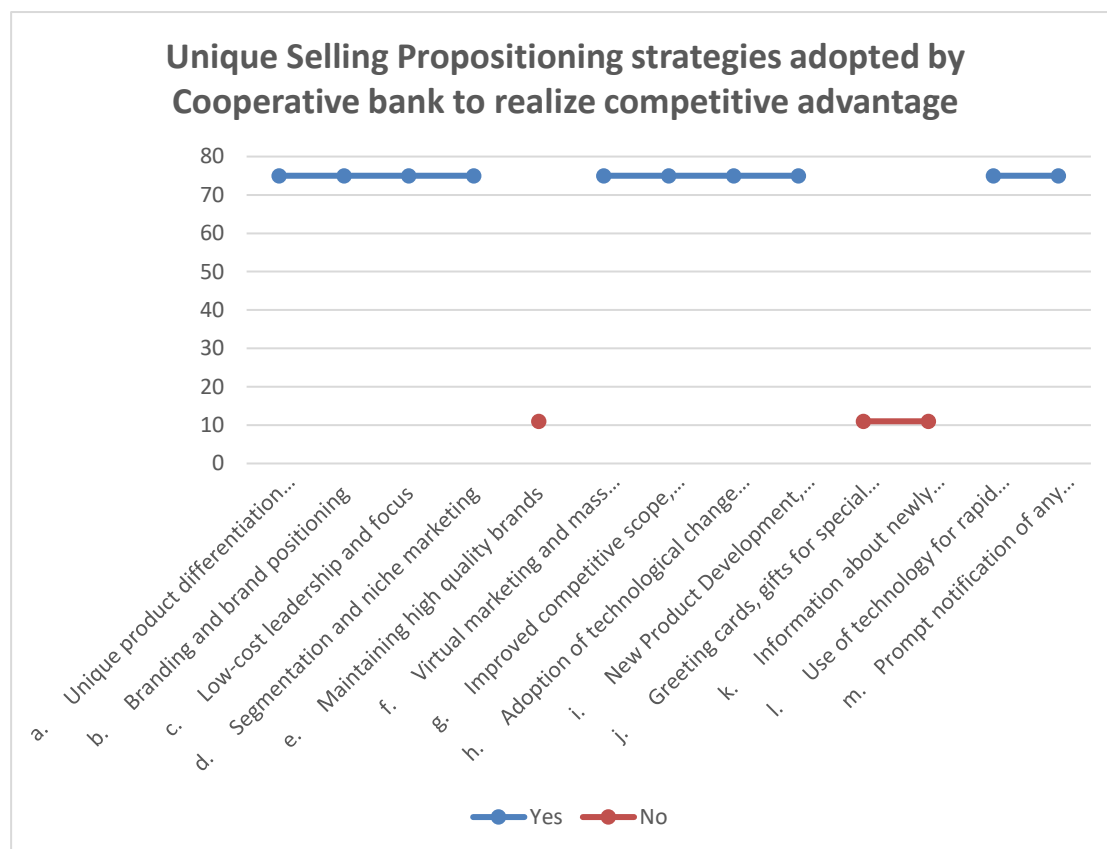
Responses	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes-	75	87
No-	11	13
Total-	86	100

Source: Adopted from Field Survey (2020)

Interpretation

As shown in Table-3, 87% of respondents agreed that the bank's Unique Selling Proposition enhances customer retention and loyalty, while only 13% disagreed. This high level of agreement indicates that a strong USP not only attracts new customers but also builds long-term relationships, reinforcing the Cooperative Bank's strategic

goal of maintaining a loyal customer base through innovative, value-driven financial solutions. It's also evidently clear that the Cooperative Bank's Unique Selling Proposition (USP)—such as customer-centered innovation, distinctive service delivery, and tailored financial solutions—plays a critical role in achieving competitive advantage

Figure-2: Unique Selling Proposition Strategies adopted by the bank

Interpretation

Figure 2 illustrates the range of Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies adopted by the Cooperative Bank to strengthen its competitive advantage. The findings show that a majority of respondents (above 70%) affirmed that the bank employs multiple USP-driven strategies, including:

- Unique product offerings tailored to specific market segments
- Branding and brand equity enhancement
- Segmentation and niche marketing approaches
- Maintaining high-quality service delivery
- Virtual marketing and mass outreach campaigns

- Adoption of technological innovations
- Prompt customer communication and service notifications

A small proportion of respondents (around 10–15%) disagreed with the effectiveness of some strategies such as low-cost leadership and non-core promotional activities, suggesting that these may not be as central to the bank's USP model.

Overall, the data indicates that the Cooperative Bank's USP strategy is multi-dimensional, integrating innovation, technology, and customer-centric differentiation. This reinforces the earlier findings that USP significantly contributes to customer loyalty, profitability, and sustained competitive advantage.

5.4 Qualitative Analysis

Questions	Theme Category	Frequency of the times when the themes are mentioned
Q3a. Can you attribute the competitive success of your bank to Unique Selling Proposition and product differentiation?	Due to Unique Selling proposition (USPs) of banking services Due to product differentiation & Diversification of services Due to efficient branding and brand positioning of the products Due to adoption of diverse marketing strategies and segmentation Due to improved value chain systems Due to adoption of technology Due to globalization of its services Due to improved QRSV	Due to Unique Selling proposition (USPs) of the services (35 times out of 40 interviews) Due to product differentiation & diversification of services (35 times out of 40 interviews) Due to efficient branding and brand positioning of the products (35 times out of 40 interviews) Due to adoption of diverse marketing strategies (35 times out of 40 interviews) Due to improved value chain system (30 times out of 40 interviews) Due to adoption of technology change (35 times out of 40 interviews) Due to globalization of its banking services (10 times out of 40 interviews) Due to QRSV (11 times out of 40 interviews)
Q4b. How has brand positioning contributed to the competitive success of your bank?	technological change improved competitive scope improved brand recognition and brand positioning foster new product development and diversification Enhanced Unique Selling Proposition (USPs) of banking services Improve marketing strategies enhanced reverse and break-away innovations towards new product development and diversification Deepened financial inclusion in remote areas Fostered Quality & Reliability of Services and correlating Value for Money (QRSV) Strengthened market leadership in the international competitive banking market.	Strengthened technological change (35 times out of 40 interviews), Increased competitive scope and reinforced its market penetration strategies (34 times out of 40 interviews) Strengthened brand recognition and brand positioning (33 times out of 40 interviews) Spurred new product development, unique differentiation, and diversification (34 times out of 40 interviews) Significantly enhanced its Unique Selling Proposition (USPs) (34 times out of 40 interviews) Fostered competitive marketing (33 times out of 40 interviews) Spurred reverse and break-away innovations towards new product development and globalization (34 times out of 40 interviews) Deepened financial inclusion in remote areas (35 times out of 40 interviews) Enhanced QRSV (18 times out of 40 interviews) Strengthened market leadership in the international competitive banking market (13 times out of 40 interviews)

5.4 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data, drawn from 40 in-depth interviews with senior staff of the Cooperative Bank, was analyzed thematically to explore perceptions of branding, product differentiation, and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies in driving the bank's competitive success. The responses were coded into recurring themes, and the frequency of mentions was recorded to indicate the level of emphasis respondents placed on each factor.

Q3a. Can you attribute the competitive success of your bank to Unique Selling Proposition and product differentiation?

The responses revealed several key themes that underpin the Cooperative Bank's competitive success:

- Unique Selling Proposition (USPs) of services – mentioned 35 times, respondents emphasized that USPs such as personalized financial solutions and distinct service packages were central to differentiating the bank in a competitive market.
- Product differentiation and diversification – also cited 35 times, this reflects the bank's strategy of offering varied financial products to meet the diverse needs of its customer base.
- Efficient branding and brand positioning – mentioned 35 times, indicating that branding remains a crucial driver of customer trust, recognition, and loyalty.
- Diverse marketing strategies and segmentation – highlighted 35 times, suggesting that tailored

marketing campaigns and customer-focused segmentation strategies enhance the bank's outreach and appeal.

- Improved value chain systems – mentioned 30 times, underscoring the importance of operational efficiency in creating value and supporting service delivery.
- Adoption of technological change – mentioned 35 times, technology was seen as a catalyst for innovation, efficiency, and enhanced customer experiences.
- Globalization of services – cited 10 times, some respondents noted the role of cross-border banking services in boosting the bank's international competitiveness.
- Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV) – mentioned 11 times, respondents associated service quality and reliability with customer satisfaction and retention.

Interpretation:

The findings suggest that competitive success is largely attributed to USPs, product diversification, branding, marketing strategies, and technological adoption, with globalization and QRSV playing secondary but supportive roles. These results strongly align with the Resource-Based View (RBV), where internal strengths such as brand positioning, innovation, and efficient systems provide sustainable competitive advantage.

Q4b. How has brand positioning contributed to the competitive success of your bank?

The responses highlighted how effective brand positioning drives market leadership:

- Technological change – mentioned 35 times, showing that technology adoption is closely tied to brand positioning and modern banking identity.
- Improved competitive scope and market penetration – cited 34 times, indicating that brand positioning enables the bank to access broader market segments.
- Brand recognition and positioning – mentioned 33 times, reinforcing the importance of visibility and a strong corporate image.
- New product development and diversification – cited 34 times, showing brand positioning encourages innovation and supports diversified offerings.
- Enhanced USPs – mentioned 34 times, linking branding directly to the strengthening of the bank's unique differentiators.
- Competitive marketing strategies – cited 33 times, demonstrating that strong branding reinforces marketing effectiveness.

- Reverse and break-away innovations – mentioned 34 times, suggesting that branding also supports disruptive innovation and global competitiveness.
- Financial inclusion in remote areas – cited 35 times, highlighting the role of brand positioning in expanding banking services to underserved regions.
- Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV) – mentioned 18 times, indicating that brand positioning correlates with perceived service quality.
- Market leadership in international banking – mentioned 13 times, showing that branding strengthens global competitiveness.

Interpretation:

The findings confirm that brand positioning is a strategic driver of innovation, market expansion, financial inclusion, and international competitiveness. By aligning with Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), the Cooperative Bank demonstrates how brand recognition enhances customer trust, supports product diversification, and strengthens its market leadership.

5.5 Integration of Analysis of both Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies on the growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya. The findings from both quantitative survey results and qualitative interviews are discussed together to provide a holistic perspective. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data reveal a strong and positive relationship between these strategic elements and the bank's overall performance.

Branding and Competitive Advantage

From the quantitative findings, a majority of respondents (93%) strongly agreed or agreed that branding significantly contributes to the Cooperative Bank's competitive advantage. Branding was reported to enhance customer awareness, loyalty, and trust, which are key indicators of long-term profitability.

The qualitative analysis reinforces these results. Interview responses emphasized that efficient branding and brand positioning (mentioned 35 times) directly shape the bank's market image and strengthen its identity in a competitive financial sector. Branding was also linked to market expansion, financial inclusion, and international recognition, which indicates that a strong brand is not only a domestic asset but also a global competitive tool.

From the branding perspective, the findings indicated that a significant majority of respondents (93%) either strongly agreed or agreed that **branding plays a crucial role in enhancing the bank's image, customer loyalty, and market visibility**. Branding was perceived as a vital

strategic tool that differentiates the bank from competitors by building strong emotional connections with customers, increasing brand resonance, and enhancing customer-focused brand equity.

The study also found that **brand positioning and marketing strategies**—such as improved brand awareness, segmentation, virtual marketing, and technological adoption—have led to measurable outcomes including **increased profitability, higher market share, and enhanced competitive advantage**.

Together, these findings confirm that branding plays a strategic role in differentiation, market leadership, and customer retention, consistent with Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and Differentiation

Quantitative analysis revealed that 87% of respondents affirmed that USP strategies contribute significantly to the bank's success, highlighting aspects such as product uniqueness, customer-centric services, and technological innovation.

The qualitative responses further validated this. Interviewees strongly associated competitive success with USPs of services (35 mentions), product differentiation and diversification (35 mentions), and adoption of technology (35 mentions). USP was also linked to enhanced innovation, tailored marketing, and improved value chain systems, all of which create a distinct market position for the Cooperative Bank.

Similarly, the analysis of **Unique Selling Proposition (USP)** revealed that **90% of respondents** strongly believed that USP initiatives—such as innovative financial solutions, superior customer service, and value-based differentiation—have contributed significantly to the bank's success. Moreover, **87% confirmed** that USP strategies directly **enhance customer retention and loyalty**, demonstrating that innovation and differentiation are key pillars of the bank's sustainable growth.

The radar and line chart analyses further illustrated that the Cooperative Bank's USP strategy encompasses multiple dimensions, including **unique product offerings, brand strengthening, segmentation, high service quality, technological innovation, and proactive customer communication**. These combined strategies position the bank competitively within Kenya's financial sector by ensuring consistent customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and superior financial performance.

These findings align with Porter's (1985) Competitive Advantage Theory, which emphasizes differentiation as a pathway to sustainable market advantage.

Technology and Innovation as Enablers

Both data sets highlighted technology as a recurring theme. Quantitatively, technology adoption was rated highly as part of branding and USP strategies.

Qualitatively, technological change was mentioned 35 times as central to brand positioning and market leadership. Respondents viewed innovation not only as a tool for service efficiency but also as a strategic enabler of reverse and break-away innovations, leading to product diversification and deeper financial inclusion.

This observation supports the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which stresses the importance of unique, valuable, and inimitable resources — such as advanced technology and innovative capabilities — in sustaining competitive advantage.

Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV)

The findings also revealed that Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV) are strongly associated with both branding and USP strategies. While only 11 mentions were recorded in Q3a, and 18 mentions in Q4b, respondents still linked QRSV to customer satisfaction, brand trust, and long-term loyalty. This suggests that beyond differentiation, service quality is critical in sustaining growth and profitability.

Integrated Contribution to Growth, Profitability, and Competitive Advantage

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative results demonstrates that branding and USP strategies are interdependent and mutually reinforcing:

1. Branding builds recognition, customer loyalty, and market leadership.
2. USP ensures product uniqueness, innovation, and service differentiation.
3. Technology and QRSV serve as enablers that sustain these strategies.

Together, they contribute to:

- Sustained Growth – by attracting and retaining a diverse customer base, expanding financial inclusion, and driving market penetration.
- Improved Profitability – by improving customer loyalty, enabling product diversification, and ensuring efficiency in service delivery.
- Enhanced Competitive Advantage – by creating strong differentiation, leveraging technology, and building global recognition.

Overall, the Cooperative Bank of Kenya's success can be attributed to its strategic integration of branding, marketing, and USP initiatives, which collectively strengthen its position as a leading and customer-centric financial institution in Kenya.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature. The analysis focuses on how branding and

Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies contribute to growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya. The results are interpreted through the lens of **Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993)**, **Competitive Advantage Theory (Porter, 1985)**, and the **Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991)**.

6.1 Branding and Competitive Advantage

The **Brand Equity Theory** developed by Aaker (1991) and further refined by Keller (1993) posits that a strong brand creates value by generating customer loyalty, trust, and emotional attachment. Brand equity stems from brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty — all of which contribute to a firm's overall value.

The findings revealed that branding significantly influences the Cooperative Bank's performance. Quantitative data indicated that **93% of respondents** strongly agreed or agreed that branding enhances customer trust, loyalty, and profitability. Qualitative interviews reinforced this, with **35 mentions** linking competitive success to **efficient branding and brand positioning**. The radar chart results show improved **brand awareness, brand meaning, and customer-focused equity** reflect Aaker's (1991) model, which identifies these components as central to positive brand equity.

These results align with **Brand Equity Theory**, which emphasizes that strong brands create value through customer awareness, loyalty, and associations (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). By consistently reinforcing its identity through **segmentation, marketing strategies, and customer engagement**, the Cooperative Bank has built a reputable image that translates into **market leadership**.

Additionally, the Cooperative Bank's emphasis on **consistent brand communication, digital marketing, and customer engagement** aligns with Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity model, which stresses the creation of favorable brand knowledge structures in consumers' minds. By building a strong brand identity and emotional resonance, the Cooperative Bank has successfully converted brand strength into financial performance and sustained growth.

Thus, the study confirms that **branding contributes to competitive advantage by enhancing brand equity**, which in turn drives customer retention and organizational profitability. This finding is consistent with empirical studies such as Kotler & Keller (2016), which stress that brand equity not only enhances financial returns but also strengthens long-term relationships with customers.

6.2 Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and Differentiation

The study also established that USP plays a pivotal role in the bank's competitive success. Quantitatively, **87% of respondents** confirmed that USP contributes to growth and profitability. Qualitatively,

themes such as **product differentiation (35 mentions)**, **diversification of services (35 mentions)**, and **adoption of technology (35 mentions)** emerged strongly.

These findings align with **Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory (1985)**, which identifies **differentiation** as a source of sustainable advantage. By offering **unique financial solutions, personalized customer experiences, and diversified products**, the Cooperative Bank is able to stand out in a highly competitive industry.

The findings also support **Rosser Reeves' USP concept**, which asserts that firms gain a competitive edge by offering distinctive and persuasive propositions to customers. In the case of the Cooperative Bank, its USP strategies—ranging from **financial inclusion in remote areas** to **technological-driven innovations**—have reinforced its competitive advantage.

6.3 Technology, Innovation, and the Resource-Based View

A dominant theme from both data sets was the **adoption of technological change**. In qualitative findings, technology was mentioned **35 times** as a driver of brand positioning, innovation, and market expansion. Quantitatively, technology adoption was highly rated as part of both branding and USP strategies.

This aligns with the **Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991)**, posits that sustainable competitive advantage arises when a firm possesses resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). These resources can be tangible (technology, capital) or intangible (brand reputation, knowledge, innovation capacity). By leveraging mobile banking, digital platforms, and customer-centered technologies, the Cooperative Bank has created an operational edge that rivals cannot easily replicate.

Consistent with Prahalad & Hamel's (1990) theory of core competencies, technology-driven services have become one of the bank's strategic assets, enabling not only efficiency but also **reverse and break-away innovations** that diversify products and expand customer reach.

The findings of this study corroborate the RBV framework. The Cooperative Bank's **brand reputation, human capital expertise, customer service quality, and technological innovation** represent strategic resources that are difficult for competitors to imitate. The strong agreement among respondents (87%) that USP strategies enhance customer loyalty and retention demonstrates how the bank's unique internal resources translate into sustainable performance outcomes (Juma, 2025).

This aligns with Barney's (1991) argument that firms must leverage internal capabilities strategically to maintain a long-term competitive advantage. The Cooperative Bank's use of **innovation, customer-centricity, and technological adoption** therefore exemplifies RBV's principles in practice.

Hence, the RBV provides a robust explanation of *why* the

bank's USP and branding initiatives lead to superior growth and profitability; these initiatives are rooted in rare and valuable internal competencies.

6.4 Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV)

Although mentioned less frequently in the qualitative data (11–18 mentions), **Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV)** emerged as an important dimension of competitive success. Respondents emphasized that delivering reliable and value-driven services fosters **customer trust, repeat patronage, and loyalty**.

This finding resonates with **Aaker's Brand Equity Model**, where perceived quality is a critical driver of customer preference. It also aligns with **Porter's differentiation strategy**, as superior service quality creates intangible value that distinguishes the bank in the market.

6.5 Discussion Based on Competitive Advantage Theory

The **Competitive Advantage Theory** proposed by Porter (1985) emphasizes that firms can outperform competitors through **cost leadership, differentiation, or focus** strategies. Differentiation—offering unique products or services perceived as superior—is particularly effective in dynamic service industries like banking.

The study's findings show that the Cooperative Bank of Kenya primarily applies a **differentiation strategy** supported by strong branding and USP initiatives. Respondents affirmed that strategies such as **unique financial products, high service quality, technological innovations, and personalized customer engagement** have strengthened the bank's market position.

These results align with Porter's (1985) assertion that differentiation creates customer loyalty and reduces price competition, leading to increased profitability. Furthermore, the emphasis on brand-driven value creation reflects Porter's view that firms must develop unique offerings that are difficult for competitors to replicate.

Consequently, the Cooperative Bank's competitive advantage is rooted not in cost reduction, but in its ability to **differentiate through brand equity, innovation, and customer experience** — key drivers of growth and profitability in the Kenyan banking industry.

6.6 Integrated Contribution to Growth, Profitability, and Competitive Advantage

Integrating insights from the three theoretical perspectives, the study demonstrates that branding and USP are **complementary strategic assets** that collectively enhance performance.

- **Brand Equity Theory** explains *how* branding builds customer loyalty, satisfaction, and trust, translating into financial value.

- **Resource-Based View (RBV)** explains *why* internal competencies such as innovation, service excellence, and brand reputation sustain long-term advantage.
- **Competitive Advantage Theory** explains *how* these resources are strategically utilized through differentiation and customer-focused strategies to outperform competitors.

Together, these theories confirm that **the Cooperative Bank's growth, profitability, and competitiveness are outcomes of its effective integration of internal resources, strong branding, and well-defined USP strategies**. The synergy between these factors enables the bank to achieve sustainable market leadership and adapt successfully to an evolving financial environment.

The combined quantitative and qualitative results confirm that branding and USP strategies are **mutually reinforcing**. Together, they:

1. **Drive Growth** – through customer acquisition, financial inclusion, and deeper market penetration.
2. **Improve Profitability** – by increasing loyalty, ensuring repeat patronage, and diversifying revenue streams.
3. **Enhance Competitive Advantage** – by differentiating products, strengthening brand equity, and leveraging technology as a strategic resource.

These findings demonstrate how branding and USP strategies, supported by technology and service quality, collectively enhance the Cooperative Bank's market leadership.

6.6 Summary

The findings discussed in this chapter highlight the theoretical underpinnings of branding and USP strategies in driving organizational success. **Brand Equity Theory** explains the role of branding in enhancing recognition and loyalty; **Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory** underscores the importance of differentiation; while the **Resource-Based View** illustrates how technology and innovation serve as strategic resources.

In conclusion, the Cooperative Bank's growth, profitability, and competitive advantage can be attributed to its integrated approach to **branding, USP, innovation, and service quality**. These factors jointly position the bank as a market leader and provide a framework for sustained success in the competitive Kenyan banking sector.

7.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis of the study findings, conclusions drawn from the analysis, and

recommendations for enhancing the Cooperative Bank of Kenya's growth, profitability, and competitive advantage through branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies.

The discussion links the empirical results with the theoretical framework adopted, specifically Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), Porter's (1985) Competitive Advantage Theory, and the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991). The discussion reflects how the study's objectives were achieved and connects them to relevant theories and practical implications for management and future research.

7.1 Summary of the Study

The study investigated the impact of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) on the growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya. It sought to determine how branding initiatives and USP strategies influence customer loyalty, profitability, and market leadership within the competitive banking sector.

A mixed-method approach was employed, involving 86 respondents from the Cooperative Bank, including senior staff. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to establish relationships between branding, USP, and organizational performance. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

- **Branding:** Quantitative analysis showed that **93% of respondents** agreed branding enhances customer loyalty, awareness, and profitability. Qualitative data confirmed branding strengthens **market recognition, financial inclusion, and international competitiveness**. This aligns with **Brand Equity Theory**, which emphasizes the role of brand loyalty and recognition in long-term firm success.
- **Unique Selling Proposition (USP):** Survey findings revealed **87% of respondents** affirmed that USP strategies — such as **product differentiation, diversification, and superior service delivery** — contribute significantly to the bank's competitive advantage. Interviews highlighted USPs of services, adoption of technology, and marketing strategies as central to the bank's success. These results align with **Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory**, which stresses differentiation as a sustainable strategy (Juma, 2025).
- **Technology and Innovation:** Both quantitative and qualitative findings emphasized technology adoption as a critical driver of branding and USP success. This reflects the **Resource-Based View**, as technology is a unique, rare, and inimitable resource sustaining competitive advantage.
- **Quality, Reliability, and Service Value (QRSV):** While less frequently mentioned, QRSV emerged as a driver of customer trust, repeat patronage, and

loyalty. This complements **Aaker's (1991) perceived quality dimension** in the Brand Equity Model.

- **Growth, Profitability, and Competitive Advantage:** Branding and USP strategies, supported by technology and QRSV, were found to be **mutually reinforcing**. Together, they drive customer acquisition, retention, innovation, and financial performance.
- **Sustainable Competitive Advantage:** The Cooperative Bank's differentiation strategy — built on innovative service delivery, strong brand equity, and technological advancement — has positioned it favorably in the financial market.

7.2 Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the integration of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies plays a pivotal role in enhancing the growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya. By drawing on Brand Equity Theory, Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory, and the Resource-Based View, the findings establish that strong branding enhances customer loyalty and recognition, while USP strategies anchored in differentiation and innovation secure long-term market leadership. Moreover, the adoption of technology and emphasis on service quality reinforce these strategies, enabling the Cooperative Bank to remain resilient and competitive in a dynamic financial environment.

In essence, the synergy between branding and USP strategies confirms that sustainable banking success in Kenya is no longer determined solely by financial capital, but also by intangible assets such as **brand equity, innovation, and customer trust**. The Cooperative Bank's experience provides valuable insights not only for financial institutions in Kenya, but also for organizations across emerging economies seeking to strengthen their market position through integrated strategic approaches.

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

- **Branding as a Strategic Asset:** Branding significantly contributes to the Cooperative Bank's growth and profitability by enhancing **customer loyalty, recognition, and trust**. This validates the **Brand Equity Theory**, where brand strength creates long-term value.
- **Leveraging USP as a Differentiation Strategy:** The Cooperative Bank's competitive success is largely attributable to its **USP-driven initiatives**, including product diversification, technological innovation, and market segmentation. This confirms **Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory**, where differentiation is a key source of market leadership.
- **Leveraging Technology as a Resource for Achieving Sustainable Competitive Advantage:**

Technological innovations, such as mobile banking and digital platforms, act as strategic assets consistent with the **Resource-Based View**. These innovations provide efficiency, scalability, and differentiation that are difficult for competitors to replicate.

- **Service Quality and Market Leadership:** The emphasis on QRSV highlights that **service quality and reliability** remain vital for sustaining customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability. This is essential for maintaining the bank's leadership position in both domestic and international markets.
- **Foster Synergistic Effect:** Branding and USP strategies jointly enhance growth and profitability by improving brand recognition, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency. Their integration ensures the Cooperative Bank's long-term sustainability and leadership in the banking industry. The integration of branding and USP strategies creates a **synergistic effect** that reinforces growth, improves profitability, and secures competitive advantage in the highly dynamic Kenyan banking sector.

7.3 Recommendations

7.3.1 Recommendations to Management

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the Cooperative Bank of Kenya's growth, profitability, and competitive advantage

- **Strengthen Brand Equity:** The Cooperative Bank should continue investing in **brand communication, digital engagement, and CSR activities** to enhance its corporate image and customer loyalty. The bank should invest in consistent and innovative brand communication campaigns that reinforce the bank's identity, values, and customer trust. Leverage digital platforms and social media to strengthen brand visibility, especially among younger and tech-savvy customers
- **Strengthen Unique Selling Proposition (USP) Strategies:** The bank should **continuously innovate** in financial product offerings, improve service differentiation, and ensure customer-centric approaches to remain competitive. Continuously innovate banking products and services to ensure they remain distinctive and aligned with evolving customer needs. Emphasize value-added services such as financial literacy, customer advisory, and tailored financial solutions as part of the USP.
- **Leverage Technology for Market Expansion:** By adopting **AI-driven services, big data analytics, and fintech collaborations**, the Cooperative Bank can enhance efficiency and expand its market reach, especially in underserved areas. Strengthen

cybersecurity systems to build trust and protect customer data in a digital-first economy.

- **Improve Service Quality and Value for Money (QRSV):** Train staff continuously on customer relationship management, empathy, and professionalism to foster loyalty and long-term client relationships. Develop clear service standards and regularly measure customer satisfaction to identify and close service gaps. Ensuring high service quality and reliability should remain a top priority to foster customer trust and encourage repeat patronage.
- **Strengthen Capacity Building and Employee Involvement:** Continuous staff training on brand management and innovation is essential to strengthen organizational culture and sustain brand integrity.
- **Deepen Market Segmentation and Financial Inclusion:** Expand banking services to underserved regions and rural markets, positioning the bank as a leader in financial inclusion. Develop tailored products for SMEs, youth, and women entrepreneurs to capture untapped market segments.
- **Foster Strategic Partnerships and Global Expansion:** Collaborate with fintech firms, international partners, and development organizations to drive innovation and extend the bank's market reach. Explore regional and global opportunities to position the Cooperative Bank as a competitive international financial institution.
- **Foster Customer-Centric Strategy:**

The bank should prioritize customer feedback mechanisms to refine its services and sustain customer satisfaction, which directly supports profitability and brand growth.

7.3.2 Recommendations for Policy

- Regulators should support **innovation-friendly banking policies**, enabling Cooperative Bank and others to adopt emerging technologies without excessive regulatory constraints.
- Policies should encourage **fair competition and consumer protection**, ensuring that USP-driven strategies do not compromise customer trust.

7.3.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study has provided valuable insights into the impact of branding and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategies on the Cooperative Bank of Kenya's growth, profitability, and competitive advantage, certain areas warrant further exploration:

- **Comparative Studies across Banks:** Future research could compare Cooperative Bank's branding and USP strategies with those of other

commercial banks in Kenya or across East Africa to establish sector-wide best practices.

- **Longitudinal Research:** A longitudinal study tracking the bank's branding and USP strategies over time would provide deeper insights into how these initiatives evolve and sustain competitive advantage in dynamic financial environments.
- **Customer-Centric Perspectives:** This study primarily engaged senior staff; further research should incorporate a larger sample of customers to understand how they perceive branding and USP strategies and how these perceptions influence loyalty and satisfaction.
- **Technology-Driven Branding and USP:** Given the growing role of digital banking, mobile platforms, and fintech innovations, future research could examine how technology redefines branding, service delivery, and value creation in the banking sector.
- **Cross-Sectoral Research:** Extending the study to other industries such as insurance, telecommunications, or retail could reveal whether branding and USP strategies have similar impacts on competitiveness outside the banking industry.
- **Impact of Globalization and Regulation:** Future studies could explore how international banking standards, globalization, and regulatory frameworks affect the effectiveness of branding and USP strategies in emerging economies.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing literature and practice by:

1. Demonstrating the empirical relationship between **branding, USP, and firm performance** in the Kenyan banking context.

2. Integrating Brand Equity Theory, Competitive Advantage Theory, and Resource-Based View to explain how banks achieve sustainable advantage.
3. Providing a practical framework for banks to adopt integrated branding and USP strategies to ensure growth, profitability, and competitiveness.

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