

BRANDING PRACTICES FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF COMMERCIAL FRAMERS IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to establish the influence of branding practices of fresh fruits and vegetables on performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County. The population of study consisted of 213 commercial farmers of FFV in Kiambu County. The study adopted stratified random sampling in which 140 farmers were sampled from the seven sub-counties in Kiambu County. The study adopted a descriptive cross sectional survey design. Data was collected using a semi structured questionnaire and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established a statistically significant relationship between branding practices and performance of commercial farmers. It was observed that majority of the farmers had not fully adopted branding practices and therefore didn't benefit from branding. The study was limited by focusing on few constructs within the variables; relying on self reported data with no collaborative evidence and gathering cross sectional data on branding practices that take time to yield results. The study recommends that farmers should engage in branding practices for their fresh produce to improve performance. The government should encourage branding of fresh fruits and vegetables as a means of adding value to the products by putting in place the requisite infrastructure and legislation. Future studies should target other fresh agricultural products; increase the variables and constructs being investigated and target other counties with differing social economic and climatic conditions. A study designed with farmer characteristics as the independent variable and branding practices as dependent variable would add new dimensions to observed interactions and unveil extra relationships. A study adopting time series design would demonstrate the effect of branding practices throughout the life cycle of the product and increase objectivity in the collected data.

Key words: Branding Practices, Commercial Farmers, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Performance of Commercial Farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancement has resulted in all sectors of the economy getting saturated in the number of products being offered. This has necessitated producers to engage in product differentiation in order to create a niche for their products (Grimm & Malschinger, 2010).

Marketers undertake differentiation through product branding. The theory of branding postulates that producers will strive to offer products with superior attributes to gain market dominance. These attributes signal the quality and characteristics of products as well as the characteristics of consumers (Meads & Sharma, 2008). Trienekens (2011) observes that for most fresh food products, there is limited differentiation and branding of the products at farm level despite the availability of numerous product differentiating attributes. The farmers therefore don't benefit from the value addition acquired through branding. However, due to increased competition, agricultural producers have started adopting branding as a value addition activity (Beverland, 2007).

Aaker (2003) notes that there is continued fragmentation of mass markets which creates multiple consumer offerings that require continuous identity clarification and modification. Consequently, suppliers engage in various branding practices (BP) by utilizing different brand elements to differentiate their products from competition (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Among the BP is the development of brand elements designed to differentiate and create a clear visual identity for the products. Kotler and Keller (2009) have identified the visual identity creating elements to include brand names, logos, symbols, taglines, colours and shapes. The visible elements help to identify and distinguish a brand in the consumers' mind. To be effective, these visual identity elements should be memorable, meaningful, likeable, adaptable and protectable.

Another category of BP consists of activities that communicate brand offerings to target customers. According to Kotler and Keller (2009) marketing communications represent the voice of the brand and assists a brand establish dialogue and build relationships with consumers. The communication elements include advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling. The choice of any specific communication element will depend on the target communication objective. The third BP involves deciding on the nature of branding elements to be applied to new and existing products. The branding options are referred to by Kotler and Keller (2009) as branding strategies and are geared towards classifying the brands. Hedning, Knudtzen and Bjerrre (2009) have identified the decisions to involve developing generic, family, individual, transnational, local, fighter, producer or private/retailer brands and whether the products should adopt descriptive, associative, or alpha-numeric brand names.

Aaker (2003) observes that it is difficult to build strong brands because of both internal and external pressures which confront a marketer. These pressures demand extra effort on the part of the producer to convince consumers of the superiority of their products over competition. This effort is even more difficult for fresh fruits and vegetables (FFV) which as noted by Cook (2013) lack year round supply of quality products and also require specialized handling due to their perishability.

The concept of firm performance relates to the manner in which a firm's resources are used to achieve its overall objectives. Kinyua-Njuguna (2013) presents it as the actual output of an organization measured against its intended outputs. Branding practices are demanding in terms of time, efforts and financial resources. Both financial and non financial parameters are used to measure firm performance arising from

BP. Product output, price premium, profitability and satisfaction were the performance measures adopted for this study since as established by Ailawadi, Lehmann and Neslin (2002), they are easy to assign and are consistent with the focus of business executives.

Statement of the Problem

The choice of branding practices will depend on whether the objective of the exercise is name development aimed at creating clear and unique brand identity; advertising aimed at promoting the brand to prospective consumers or deciding on whether to adopt individual or family branding meant to classify the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2006). To achieve the aspired increase in productivity, commercialization, and competitiveness of agricultural commodities, the strategy adopted by the Kenyan Government is to transform small holder agriculture from subsistence to an innovative, commercially oriented and modern sector. This entails engaging in such value addition activities as product processing, branding, quality certification and farm level quality improvements (Ministry of Agriculture, 2012). To supplement these initiatives by the Ministry, there is need to determine how branding practices impact the performance of farmers.

Various shortcomings were noted in the reviewed studies which render them inadequate in establishing whether there is a significant relationship between branding practices of fresh fruits and vegetables and performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County. The study in Germany by Homburg, Klarman and Schmitt (2010) was not product or performance measure specific, had a low response rate at 16%, utilized Mplus 4.2 model for data analysis (non-probability samples) and focused only on business to business firms. A study in USA by Park, Eisingerich, Pol & Park (2013) did not specify the population or the response rate and evaluated the effect of a single aspect of branding practices (brand logo) on firm performance. The cited studies in Europe and America were conducted under different social economic and regulatory conditions and were therefore location variant. They were also not related to horticultural products.

To bridge the identified gaps, the current study simultaneously considered three categories of branding practices namely: identity creating practices, promotion practices and brand classification practices and their influence on the performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County. The study addressed the following research question: what is the influence of branding practices of fresh fruits and vegetables on the performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County? The specific objective was to establish the influence of branding practices of fresh fruits and vegetables on the performance of commercial farmers. The hypothesized relationship stated that:

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between branding practices for fresh fruits and vegetables and performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County.

Review of Related Literature

Branding practices are initiatives undertaken by brand owners in an effort to develop and promote their brands. The initiatives can be grouped as identification, communication, or classification practices depending on the objective of the branding task. For identity creating practices, Kotler and Keller (2009) described branding as a means of helping consumers identify a product by giving it a name and using other brand elements that create mental structures that organize their knowledge about the product. Hess and Bitterman (2008) present brand identity as a mechanism for communicating and shaping public perception of a brand while Hedning, Knudtzen and Bjerre (2009) observe that companies build and manage brand identity to express an exact set of values, capabilities, and unique sales propositions for the product.

Brand identity builds awareness and customer loyalty. Brand identity is the face of a company or organization and is often the first connection between the brand and its target audience (Sanna, 2008). The recognition and perception of a brand is highly influenced by its visual presentation. A brand's visual identity is the overall look of its communications. Effective visual brand identity is achieved by the consistent use of particular visual elements to create distinction such as specific fonts, colors, and graphic elements. Kotler and Keller (2009) have identified three brand identity elements namely brand names, brand elements and brand slogans. The three are presented as trade marketable devices that serve to identify and differentiate a brand. These elements are further subdivided by Hess and Bitterman (2008) into visual and nominal identifiers with visual identifiers including colour, design, name, logo, typography, illustrations, trademarks and icons while nominal identifiers include collateral materials such as proprietary publications, signage, corporate promotions, graphic elements (the small details that build a branding system consisting of background texture, line style treatment, use of white space or color blocks) and slogans. Sanna (2008) contends that a good brand identity should be uniquely identifiable, simple enough to be instantly recognizable, culturally relevant and easily reproduced. Further, the identity should use shape and colour to enhance recognition and emotional response, stand the test of time and not date itself quickly, and also have a hidden element or meaning that demands attention. Visual identity as presented by Heding et al. (2009) is an effective vehicle for demonstrating the distinctiveness of the observable features of a brand.

Marketing communication practices represent the “voice” of a brand and are meant to establish dialogue and build relationships with consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Communications aid in crafting an image and establishing the brand in the memory of the consumer. Pujari (2015) identifies some possible objectives of communication for any company to include building awareness, creating interest, providing information, stimulating demand, differentiating products and reinforcing the brand. Pujari (2015) further identifies tools and elements of marketing communication that may be adopted by firms to carry on their communication activities to include advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, public relations and digital marketing.

Advertising was presented as the paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of idea, goods or services by an identified sponsor. Sales promotion refers to short term use of incentives or other promotional activities that stimulate the customer to buy the product. Pujari (2015) identified commonly used incentives to include rebates, discounts, refunds, premiums or gifts/or product combination, quantity deals, samples, contests, instant draws and assigned gifts, lucky draws, usable benefits, full finance, packaged premium and container premium.

Personal selling involves face to face interaction between a seller and buyer for the purpose of making a sale. Salient features of personal selling were given as personal interaction, two way communication, better response, improving relationship and better convincing. Public relations referred to attempts to maintain favorable public image with public in order to create goodwill with the concerned public. Public relations too were identified by Pujari (2015) to include news releases, speeches, events, written materials and public service activities. Gibson (2015) introduced a new emerging tool which he referred to as digital marketing and involves the use of company websites, social media applications such as Facebook or Twitter, Blogging, Mobile phone and promotions using technology such as Bluetooth, YouTube and E-commerce.

Firms engage in creative communication practices to improve the performance of their brands. Among these practices, merchandising can be used by firms exploiting third party brands under licensing arrangements to promote their offerings (Evans & Ellis, 2013). On his part, Mehta (2013) explains how a local Indian mobile phone brand undertook sponsorship of a cultural music festival and secured local language interface to build cultural connection that facilitated success against established global brands. Gokhale (2010) identified product placement and celebrity endorsement as communication tools that are widely used to effectively promote brands. For communication practices to have maximum effect in promoting brand performance, Kotler and Keller (2009) recommend the adoption of an integrated approach across all media and customer touch points with a consistent brand message and a standardized corporate image.

Brand classification practices are referred to by Kotler and Keller (2009) as branding strategies and are concerned with the process of deciding on the number and nature of common and distinctive brand elements to be applied to the different products sold by a firm. The practices include brand extensions, family branding, line extensions, category extensions, branded variants and licensed products. Various brand classifications arising from different branding practices have been identified. Among them is corporate branding which involves the creation of one unified brand message across functions that elevate brand management from tactical operations tasks to a strategic corporate task involving the whole organization (Heding et al., 2009).

Brands have also been classified on the basis of ownership, market area/geographic coverage, number of products and use by owners of the brand. Poudel (2012) identifies manufacturer's and distributor or middleman's brands on the basis of ownership; local, private and national brands on the bases of area/geographic coverage; family and individual brands on the bases of number of products, and primary and secondary brands on the bases of ownership. Guha (2011) classifies brands depending on the nature of their names. Descriptive brands have names that describe a key benefit or aspect associated with the products and services; person-based brands are identified by the names of owners, partners or key individuals; associative brands use fabricated words that do not normally have meaning in this context, and then uses promotion to forge them into an identity; geographic brand names use local or regional folklore to create a local feel for the product or service or use words to provide a patriotic appeal. Geographic names are used to create an exotic image while alpha-numeric brand names involve the combination of letters and numbers to describe a product. A successful classification practice strengthens a differentiation initiative.

METHODOLOGY

To establish the associations among branding practices and performance, a descriptive cross sectional survey design was adopted. This design facilitated in establishing and describing the relationships among the key study variables (Kothari, 2004). It was cross sectional since it was conducted once to pick the parameters of a phenomenon at a specific time with an aim of accurately capturing the characteristics of the population relating to what, where, how and when of a research topic (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

The population of study consisted of 213 commercial farmers of FFV in Kiambu County. The population consisted of individual farmers (male & female), women groups, resident groups, cooperatives, limited liability companies and government departments growing between one and three crops in farms ranging between 5.5 to 0.125 acres. They engaged in farming activities to generate income. This study adopted stratified random sampling which allowed for making of probability based confidence estimates of various parameters (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). The key target was the owners or managers of commercial FFV farms. From the target population, the farmers were stratified into seven sub-counties and a proportionate sample drawn relative to the size of each. To determine the sample size, a formula proposed by Israel (2009) was applied as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \quad \text{where } n \text{ is sample size, } N \text{ is the population size, and } e \text{ is the error term (0.05). Using } N = 213 \text{ in the formula, the resulting sample size (n) is 140 farmers.}$$

The data was collected using a semi structured questionnaire through the direct interrogation method (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). The questionnaire was administered directly to the respondents through the assistance of Agricultural Extension Officers (AEO) who were recruited as research assistants due to their close association with the farmers. The extension officers offer technical advice and other related services to the farmers in their normal day to day activities.

The study variables were operationalized and measured using direct measures and 4 point rating scales ranging from 1=Not important to 4=Very important; 1=Not strong to 4=Very strong; 1=Not at all to 4=Great extent. Data was analyzed using both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (chi square, linear regression and correlation analysis). Stepwise regression analyses were used to bring out the individual effects in the form: $Y_1 = a_0 + b_1X_1 + e_1$, for effect of BP on performance of commercial farmers.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Data was collected from 140 farmers spread in seven sub-counties in Kiambu County. The 140 questionnaires were successfully filled and found suitable for further analysis resulting in a response rate of 100%. This compared favourably with a similar study conducted among farmers by Bremmer et al. (2002) which had a response rate of 86.5%.

Reliability and Validity

The study sought to establish the reliability of the research instrument by computing the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient in regard to the elements in the study variables. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients indicated reliability level of the instrument at 0.7364. The level was above the acceptable minimum value of 0.50 (Cronbach, 1951) and above the recommended value of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The internal consistency of the measures used was therefore considered to have adequately measured the relevant study variables.

Branding practice undertaken by farmers included brand identification practices, brand name selection practices, and brand promotion activities. Table 1 contains a summary of the performance indicators of the activities undertaken by the farmers in furtherance of branding practices.

Table 1: Summary of Branding Practices

Branding Practices	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	CV (%)
Brand Name Selection strategies	9	2.48	1.350	54.44
Brand Identification Practices	8	3.04	0.904	29.74
Brand Promotion activities	140	1.77	0.631	35.65
Overall Average Score	-	2.43	0.612	25.19

Source: Primary data.

The branding practices summary data in Table 1 (mean score=2.43, CV=25.19) show that branding as a marketing practice had low adoption among the respondent farmers. Brand identification practices (mean score=3.04, CV=29.74) were the most common branding practices the respondent farmers engaged themselves in. Brand promotion activities (mean score=1.77, CV=35.65) was the least adopted among the branding practices.

At an individual construct level, the results indicated that the most important brand identifiers were brand name, pack design and brand colours while the most commonly applied branding strategies involved extending existing brand name and adopting a name reflecting geographic place of origin (GPO). The results further established that product attributes were not given prominence in branding practices. Of the attributes mentioned, GPO had the highest rating.

The level of adoption and usage of marketing support agencies was found to be low. Among the identified agencies, advertising agencies had the highest preference. The farmers had higher preference for non mass media promotion activities with phone communication and word of mouth communication having the highest level of usage. The results reflected low promotional expenses on branding of FFV with only 2.9% of the respondent farmers having spent more than Ksh.1million on promotional activities the previous year.

The constructs used to measure performance of commercial farmers were price, volume, profitability and satisfaction achieved by the respondent farmers. Table 2 contains a summary of the individual indicators of the achieved performance.

Table 2: Summary on Performance of Commercial Farmers

Overall summary of Performance of Farmers	N	Mean score	Standard Deviation	C.V (%)
Price premium	99	1.25	0.493	39.41
Sales Volume	126	1.59	1.089	68.62
Profitability	124	1.51	0.917	60.68
Satisfaction	140	2.72	0.619	22.77
Overall Average Score	-	1.77	0.780	44.11

The summary results in Table 2 show low overall average levels of performance of commercial farmers (mean score=1.77, CV=44.11). Farmer satisfaction recorded the highest performance (mean score=2.72, CV=22.77) implying that on average, farmers were satisfied with their undertakings. Price premium had the lowest performance (mean score=1.25, CV=39.41) which indicated that the farmers were not earning the price premiums they expected.

At an individual performance construct level, the results revealed that prices for own products were lower than those for competitor branded products from within and outside the County. Own products earned higher prices than competitor non-branded products from within and outside the county. Majority of the respondent farmers engaging in branding practices indicated that they earned a premium price. Their numbers had increased progressively over the three years.

The results further revealed that even though in the minority, there was an increasing number of both small and large

scale FFV farmers engaging in and benefiting from branding practices. There was a 10.4% increase in those earning profits between the years 2012 to 2014. Those attributing profitability to branding practices increased progressively over the three previous years. Results on the extent to which the respondent farmers were satisfied with the achieved price, volume and profitability revealed average levels of satisfaction with the three indicators. However, volume harvested and price earned had slightly higher levels of satisfaction than profitability.

In order to assess the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables, correlation analysis was conducted. Results of the analysis are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Correlation for Branding Practices and Performance of Commercial Farmers
Correlations

		Performance of commercial farmers	of Branding practices
Performance of commercial farmers	Pearson Correlation	1	.397**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	140	140
Branding practices	Pearson Correlation	.397**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	140	140

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

The results of the Pearson's product moment correlation conducted on branding practice and performance of commercial farmers presented in table 3 show that branding practice are significantly correlated with performance of commercial farmers ($r=0.397$; $p<0.01$ and sig. 2 tailed= $0.000<0.01$). The results suggested that undertaking branding practices leads to improved performance of commercial farmers.

To evaluate the influence of branding practices on performance of commercial farmers, simple regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Simple Regression: Branding Practice

	Branding Practices
R	0.397
R ²	0.158
F	25.84
Sig (p)	0.000
Constant	1.063
B	0.547
s.e.	0.108
Beta	0.397
T	5.083
Sig (p)	0.000

Where: *B* = Un-standardized coefficient; *s.e.* = Standard error; *beta*= Standardized Coefficient; *R*²=coefficient of determination; *P*=Significance of the regression, Dependent Variable: Performance of Commercial Farmers,
Independent Variables: Branding Practices

The simple regression results of branding practices produced an *R*² of 0.158 and further revealed a significant relationship between branding practices and Performance of commercial farmers (*beta*=0.397, *P*=0.000). Based on these results, we accept the hypothesized relationship at 5% significance and conclude that branding practices influenced Performance of commercial farmers. The statistically significant positive relationship between BP and Performance of commercial farmers suggest that farmers embracing BP achieved positive results.

To assess the influence of Branding Practices on Performance of commercial farmers, the research had set the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between branding practices for fresh fruits and vegetables and performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County.

Simple regression results of branding practices against each dimension of performance are presented in Tables 5.

Table 5: Significance of the Regression of Branding Practices on Performance of Commercial Farmers

Coefficients^a

i). Price					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.071	.164		6.522	.000
Branding practices	.122	.106	.117	1.158	.250
a. Dependent Variable: Price					
ii). Volume					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.135	.333		3.407	.001
Branding practices	.317	.224	.126	1.418	.159
a. Dependent Variable: Sales Volume					
iii). Profitability					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.210	.281		4.303	.000
Branding practices	.210	.187	.101	1.120	.265
a. Dependent Variable: Profitability					
iv). Satisfaction					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.354	.151		15.614	.000
Branding practices	.240	.093	.214	2.580	.011
a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction					

Source: Primary data.

The simple regression results of branding practices against each dimension of performance revealed a weak but statistically significant positive linear relationship between branding practices and satisfaction (beta 0.214, p-value=0.011). However, the results reveal a weak and statistically insignificant relationship between branding practices and price (beta 0.117, p-value=0.250); branding practices and volume (beta

0.126, p-value=0.159) and branding practices and profitability (beta=0.101, p-value=0.265). These results indicate that a unit change in branding practices has minimal contribution to the variations in the four performance constructs and accounts for 0.117 of the changes in prices, 0.126 of the changes in volume; 0.101 in profitability, and 0.214 in satisfaction. The statistically significant relationship between branding practices and satisfaction suggested that branding practices positively influenced the satisfaction of commercial farmers.

The results of the combined elements of branding practices regressed against the aggregate mean scores of performance (price, volume, profitability and satisfaction) are presented in Table 6

Table 6A: Results of Goodness-of-Fit of the Regression of Performance of Commercial Farmers on Branding Practices

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.397 ^a	.158	.152	.70328
a. Predictors: (Constant), Branding practices				
b. Dependent variable: Performance of commercial farmers				

Table 6B: Regression of Performance of Commercial Farmers on Branding Practices Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.063	.175		6.087	.000
	Branding practices	.547	.108	.397	5.083	.000
a. Independent variable: Branding practices						
b. Dependent variable: Performance of commercial farmers						

Regression of aggregate mean scores of Performance of commercial farmers against branding practices produced an R^2 of 0.158 as presented in Table 6A. This implied that branding practices explained 15.8% of the variation in scores for Performance of commercial farmers. The results in Table 6B revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between branding practices and Performance of commercial farmers (beta=0.397, p-value=0.000). Therefore, we accept the stated hypothesis at 5% and conclude that branding practices have significant influence on performance of commercial farmers. This suggests that branding practices influence the ability of farmers to achieve superior performance and that branding practices contributes significantly to the prediction of Performance of commercial farmers.

Based on the results in Table 6A and Table 6B a simple regression equation can be used to estimate performance of commercial farmers in Kiambu County as follows:

$$Y = 1.063 + 0.397BP$$

Where

Y= Performance of Commercial Farmers

BP= branding practices

The regression analysis on Performance of commercial farmers against branding practices was undertaken at the combined branding practices and individual level of the performance constructs. It was found that branding practices produced positive statistically significant influence on Performance of commercial farmers. Since the combined effect was better than the individual construct results, there should be an integrated approach to branding practices. Performance should also be considered at a combined level rather than evaluating each construct on its own. This result is supported by findings by Park et al. (2013) that branding practices results in superior performance.

Implications of the Study

The results indicate an overall low adoption of branding practices by the respondent fresh fruits and vegetable farmers. Brand communication practices were least adopted. The inadequate support of the practices resulted in weak brand differentiation and therefore low motivation for consumers to pay a premium for any specific brand. The low prices resulted in low profitability. To attract premium prices and improve on financial performance brand identification and communication practices should be enhanced to develop clearly differentiated FFV brands. The results also revealed low adoption of branding practices among the respondent FFV farmers. Since FFV branding practices were found to have significantly influenced the performance of commercial farmers, only a small only a small number of farmers benefited. The policy makers should exploit the available potential for FFV farmers to improve their performance by supporting more of them to engage in branding practices.

The results further revealed that when considered jointly, branding practices had a statistically significant effect on performance of commercial farmers. The farmers should have an integrated approach whereby identification practices receive adequate communication support. Performance evaluation should also be at an integrated level since when the performance parameters were considered jointly, they yielded statistically significant results. Considering performance at an individual performance construct level may distort the overall influence of branding practices on performance of commercial farmers. Phone and word of mouth communication were the most commonly used promotion tools. This limited the market coverage of the communication and therefore restricted the target market for FFV to the local communities. The farmers can expand the market and improve their earnings by advertising in radio, TV and newspapers with national foot print to clearly brand and differentiate their products to more consumers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to commercial farmers and the government. Foremost, the study has established that even though branding practices influence the financial performance of farmers, only a minority of the farmers engage in branding practices. It is recommended that all farmers should consider engaging in branding practices. Investing in branding practices by FFV farmers is justified by the expected improvement in financial performance.

To achieve the aspirations in Kenya's Vision 2030, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries has identified product branding among other initiatives as one of the targeted value addition initiatives. The findings of this study confirm that branding practices have statistically significant influence on the performance of commercial farmers. It is recommended that for the country to achieve the stated aspirations there should be concerted effort to promote branding practices of fresh agricultural produce as a value addition initiative. The ministry should set up the requisite infrastructure and provide the facilitation and resources required to enlighten and support farmers in their branding initiatives. Qualified personnel on branding and marketing in general should be availed to enhance farmers' branding initiatives.

Suggestions for Further Studies

This study established that branding practices of FFV influenced the performance of commercial farmers. The study focused only on FFV among all other agricultural products offered to the market in their fresh unprocessed form. This limits the generalization of the study to only a small section of the agricultural sector. To expand the scope of the study, future research should cover other fresh agricultural products. The study consisted of an independent and dependent variable. Each of the variables had a specified number of constructs. The variables and constructs were not exhaustive and it is possible to extend the number of variables and constructs to expand the study's scope and level of generalization.

The study population was limited to Kiambu County which has unique characteristics that favour the commercialization of the FFV sub-sector of the horticultural sector. While the findings of the study provide useful insight into the interrelationship among the study variables, the unique characteristics of the county may limit the extent of generalization to other counties. This calls for an extension of the study to other counties with differing social economic and climatic conditions to confirm the hypothesized relationships in the current study. The findings of the study revealed that only a small proportion of the farmers engage in brand name development among other branding practices. This limited the number of respondents who contributed to most of the branding issues. To get an in depth expose on branding practices, a study targeting only farmers undertaking branding practices would be preferred.

The current study adopted a descriptive cross sectional survey design which involved collecting data once at a specific time. The study relied on the data provided by the respondents to evaluate the contribution of different variables to performance of commercial farmers. Branding practices take time to generate results. A time series design would enable the gathering of continuous data to demonstrate the effect of the practice throughout the life cycle of the product. A study should be designed to collect collaborative secondary data to confirm the self reported data provided by the respondents. This would reduce the subjectivity in the provided data and strengthen the reliability of the study findings.

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