



EMPLOYER BRANDING, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, GENDER AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION: EXPERIENCE FROM TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

We examined the relationship among employer branding, work-life balance and employee retention within the telecommunications sector in Kenya as observed through employee engagement, job satisfaction, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment by conducting a cross-sectional survey of 131 engineers from telecommunications firms in Kenya. The study further examined the moderating effect of employer branding and work-life balance on the relationship between Generational differences and retention of engineers within telecommunications firms in Kenya. We found that employer branding significantly influences employee retention. Further, we established that the influence of work life balance on retention was positive but weak. We further examined the relationship between gender and other study variables and found that employee retention and perception of employer branding are significantly different across gender; while, work-life balance is perceived equally across male and female employee. It was concluded that, to retain employees, telecommunications firms in Kenya should focus more on employer branding and improvement of job satisfaction which was found to be unequal between male and female engineers.

Key words: Employee Retention, Employer Branding, Work Life Balance, Gender, Telecommunication Firms, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st century, competition among companies has intensified and labour market has become tight thereby contributing to high unemployment rate and skills shortage (CIPD, 2010). This has created the need to retain the best talent to ensure survival of organizations in the market. Since employees are the most important resource in an organization, organizations of all types need to put in place mechanisms of retaining their staff. Such retention however may depend on a number of factors unique to organizations. In this study, we examined employer branding and work life balance as factors that may influence retention of employees with specific focus on engineers in telecommunication firms in Kenya.

The concept of branding is widely used in marketing but has gained a wider attention in the field of Human Resource Management. Originally, the concept of branding has been used to distinguish tangible products but over the years its application has been extended to differentiate people, places and firms (Peters, 1999). Employer branding as a concept was introduced in the field of human resource management in the 1990s when organizations started experiencing increased challenge for talent retention (Mosley, 2007). With increased competition for talents, employer branding concept gained a wider acceptability among many organizations and became associated with “winning talent war” for talent retention.

Employer branding is a concept commonly used in the marketing field, having been adopted from products branding and corporate branding. It refers to the application of branding principles to Human Resource Management (Bachaus & Tikoo, 2004). It encompasses the packaging of functional, economic and psychological satisfaction associated with employment and which is identical with the company (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). It is further seen as the feelings, impressions and attitudes employees have

towards a given company (Hsieh, et al, 2004). Thus a strong employer branding has the potential not only to attract but also retain the caliber of employees needed by the organization.

In the recent decades, organizations have experienced dramatic shift in the composition of the workforce. The workplace has experienced an increase in the number of women in the workforce as part of dual-earning couple. To respond to this new trend, many organizations have moved into a new era of human resource management which involves helping employees to cope with the demands of work and those of non-work activities. This move has made several organizations to implement work-life balance programs and policies that are aimed at helping their employees to cope with multiple roles and to ensure that employees have time for work and to attend to other roles. This will enhance the organization effort to motivate and retain best employees (Capelli, 2000; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Similarly, Jyothi and Jyothi (2012) have considered work-life balance to be those practices in organizations aimed at supporting employees to balance their roles, both family and work related. In addition, Smith (2010) explained work-life balance as the time spent by employees at work and with the family. Work-life balance initiatives by organizations creates an environment for members to attend to personal matters as they have time for work.

Long term success of an organization is increasingly being linked employee retention. When organizations retain their best employees, the end results are employee satisfaction, well implemented succession plan, improved corporate image and having an organization which is embedded in organizational knowledge and learning (Mathimaran & Kumar, 2017). Employer retention contributes to customer satisfaction as employees are able to attend to customers on a continuous basis and offer consistent services. Retaining talents also helps organizations to achieve succession planning.

Gaan (2011) has observed a trend of increase in employee turnover among Information Technology personnel. It has been a concern that Information Technology personnel have a higher tendency to change jobs and work for competing firms. Retention has now become a key challenge facing many telecommunications firms in Kenya. As organizations face intense competition with almost all strategies being easily replicated by competitors, they are increasingly recognizing that people are the greatest differentiator which can enable them to achieve competitive advantage. (Bell, 2005). Thus retaining key talents is essential for organizations to remain competitive in their respective industries or sectors. It is imperative that organizations should aim to retain their best talent.

Statement of the Problem

The aging of the workforce and the upcoming exit of retiring Traditionalists and Baby Boomers, has serious implications not only for businesses facing potential labour shortage, but also for the economy, governments and society as a whole (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). It is getting more difficult to retain employees, as the pool of talent is becoming more and more tapped-out. A good employer should know how to attract and retain his employees (Qadria Alkandari, 2009).

In an era where skills and knowledge of employees are amongst the main competitive enablers, organizations cannot ignore the significance of retaining talented people (Minchington, 2010; Walker, 2001). It is the responsibility of the employer to think of ways of retaining their best employees, if not the organization will lose its star performers (skilled employees) (Gurumani, 2010).

According to Gaan (2011), employee turnover has been a major issue pertaining to Information Technology personnel. It has been noted frequently that Information Technology personnel have a stronger than average tendency to leave their current employer to work for another. A key challenge facing

organizations today is employee retention. Organizations face intense competition with almost all strategies being easily replicated by competitors. They are increasingly realizing that people are perhaps the only real differentiator that can help them gain competitive advantage (Bell, 2005). Thus retaining key talents makes organizations competitive.

Courtlier, Felusiak, Hill, and Perberton-Jones (2015) found that the main reasons for low retention rates are the lack of opportunities for professional growth, unfair treatment, poor work and life balance, and low wages. Leaders are failing to recognize diversity in the workplace, thereby adversely affecting production and retention rates among multigenerational workers. Dwyer (2016) acknowledge that it will be difficult for business to retain a competitive advantage if they are unable to recruit and retain talented workers. As the newer generation of workers entering the workplace is different from the older generations leaving the workforce due to retirement, leadership needs to focus on retaining workers of all generations for organizations to remain successful in the future. Studies by Delloite (2013) further established that retaining skilled staff in a competitive environment is the biggest challenge facing human resource managers in Kenya today. The survey of the Kenyan corporate established that 80% of respondents indicated employee retention was their number one priority in terms of human capital management. However, most of the companies that is 52% admitted that they were not ready to cope with the challenge of retention. In this war for highly skilled staff, Kenyan companies may be the ones that are losing out (Ernst & Young, 2013).

In the telecommunications sector in Kenya, there is a critical shortage of engineers. In addition, many of such firms are grappling with the problem of retaining the few engineers in their employment as there is constant poaching among companies (Ernst and Young, 2013). Although research conducted in the

field of employer branding, work-life balance and gender on employee retention and retention is abundant in the developed world, there is a paucity of research on employer branding, work-life balance and gender and employee retention in Kenya. To this end, this study sought to answer the following research question; Does employer branding and work-life balance influence employee retention?

Study Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of employer branding, work-life balance and gender on employee retention: Experience from Telecommunication firms in Kenya. The specific objectives were:-

- To determine the relationship between employer branding and employee retention in Telecommunications firms in Kenya
- To assess the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention in Telecommunications firms in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The underlying theoretical perspective of employer branding appears to be informed by human capital theory and resource-based view of the firm. Employees are a key resource to the organization required to implement organizational functions and to compete effectively in a given industry. Attracting and retaining skilled people (human resources) is equally important as acquiring the equipment or technological resources that are required to build competitive advantage (Backhaus & Tikko, 2004). Attracting and retaining the 'right sort' of people with the required skills mix is thus a combination of the branding proposition and a range of recruitment, selection, retention and performance management strategies.

Brand equity theory

This is another perspective of branding theory. From human resource management perspective, positive regard for employer encourages potential applicants to apply and current employees to stay and this constitute employer brand equity (Wilden et al. 2010).

Signaling theory

Signaling is also linked to employer branding. It explores how certain types of information influence applicants and current employees' perceptions of an organization. Celani and Singh (2011) have discussed the central role of signaling theory. Potential and existing employees see the information put out by a company and its organizational characteristics as a signal about the company. Positive signals attract and retain employees to the organization. The greater the attraction of the company through brand signals and reputation, the greater the quality and quantity of applicants and the higher the acceptance and retention rate.

Needs Theory

This theory has been used to explain theoretical foundation of employer branding. Employees have certain need which attracts them to a certain source. A study by Milkovich and Newman (2008) posit that employees are attracted and retained in organizations with benefit offers that are attractive and fulfills their needs. Employees seek different needs in employment and will be attracted and retained in organizations that provide conditions of employment which match their needs. This theory justifies employee retention as it explains the relationship between needs which employees consider to be important to them and that which will influence their intention to stay. Similarly, research findings by the Corporate Leadership Council (2002) established a link between employer value propositions and the needs of employees which constitute an offer fit. They identified employee or target group needs as economic and psychological

preferences (Michington, 2010; Moroko & Sartain 2006). These findings are supported by Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs that claims that a person's motivation is shaped by the needs which attracts and retains them to a source that fulfill the said needs (McClelland, 1961). Thus employees will seek to work for and stick to organizations which meet their needs.

Roles theory

This theory considers roles performed by employee as key in explaining work-life balance initiatives by organizations. Roles theory traces the origins of work-life balance to the studies conducted on women performing multiple roles. In modern work setups, working women undertake multiple roles as wife and a mother. Barnett and Baruch (1985) in their studies which investigated the psychological distress working women go through as they try to balance their family and work-lives. They established that work-life balance initiatives are more rewarding to women as they are able to undertake multiple roles and reduce their level of anxiety associated with role overload and role conflict.

Empirical Review

Employee Retention

Studies by Delloitte (2013) found that retaining skilled staff in a competitive environment is the biggest challenge facing human resource managers in Kenya today. A survey of Kenyan corporates by Delloitte (2013) established that 80% of managers who were surveyed indicated employee that retention was their key priority in management of human capital. Most of the companies, that is 52%, admitted that they were not ready to cope with the challenge of employee retention. This shows the magnitude of retention problem in Kenya. In this war for highly skilled staff, Kenyan companies may be the ones that are losing out. The need for employee retention has further been identified by Kenyan companies as a result of

poaching of employees from competing companies (Ernst & Young, 2013).

Towers Perrin (2005) in their international study of 86,000 full-time employees from 16 countries and four continents identified critical factors for employee recruitment and retention. Such factors include: competitive base pay, work-life balance, career advancement opportunities, competitive benefits, challenging work, salary increases linked to individual performance, learning and development opportunities, competitive retirement benefits, and caliber of co-workers and reputation of the organization as a good employer. Interestingly this same study established that while there were some similarities, differences were identified between those factors that were important for attracting workers and those that were critical for keeping them once they had been hired. This implies that things that bring people in the organizations are not the one that keeps them.

Employer Branding and Employee Retention

Studies by Cascio (2014) asserts that from a talent perspective, most successful organizations today are those that succeed in employee retention by developing positive employer brands. Similarly, Raj and Jyotti (2011) found that the customer experience delivered by internal employees to external customers improves employee retention. Thus, an internal branding perspective helps employees develop congruent and compatible brand oriented behaviors such that they accommodate feelings of commitment to the brand throughout their daily activities and this influences their retention (Ozcelik & Findikli, 2014). Further, studies by Ahmad et al. (2014) established that employee engagements and retention can be enhanced by internal branding efforts that encourage employees to live the brand before placing it in front of customers and that helps to provide a positive customer experience. This increases employee commitment and retention.

Work-life Balance and Employee Retention

Work-life balance as reflected in work flexibility (such as flextime) are implemented in firms with the hope that they will appeal to and satisfy skilled workers. Satisfied members of an organization are most likely to remain with the organization. Work-life balance as a way of retaining employees at the workplace has gained a lot of attention by human resource professionals and academicians. They share the belief that employee engagement and retention can be made stronger when organizations are sensitive to the fluid nature of the labour markets in which they operate. In addition, studies by Memon and Kolachi (2012) found that many employees today have developed positive view of work-life balance as a key factor in employment and which can make them move from one organization to another when their desires are not satisfied by the organization they work for. Similarly, work-life balance initiatives have been found by human resource professionals to be

critical in retaining their employees and in promoting organizational effectiveness (Shankar & Bhatnagar, 2010). In many organizations today, human resource professionals are increasingly acknowledging that organizational effectiveness can be attributed to employee retention.

METHODOLOGY

This study used both cross-sectional and descriptive survey research design to derive data from two or more sources while allowing collaborative patterns of convergence to develop data for good interpretation. The study population consisted of all the 314 firms operating in the telecommunications sector in Kenya. For purposes of market segmentation and licensing, the firms were divided in three categories, namely Network Facilities Providers (NFP), Application Service Providers (ASP) and Content Service Providers (CSP). Hypotheses were formulated to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables summarized as below:-

Table 1: Summary of research objectives, hypothesis and data analysis methods

Objective(s)	Hypotheses	Data Analysis Methods
To determine the relationship between employer branding and employee retention in telecommunications firms in Kenya	H ₁ : There is no significant relationship between employer branding and employee retention in telecommunications firms in Kenya.	Employee retention = f (employer branding), ANOVA and Linear regression
To assess the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention in telecommunications firms in Kenya	H ₂ : There is no significant relationship between work-life balance and employee retention in telecommunications firms in Kenya	Employee retention = f (work-life balance, ε.), ANOVA and Linear regression

RESULTS

Relationship between Employer Branding and Employee Retention

The first objective of the study was to establish the relationship between Employer branding and

employee retention. This objective was used to generate the research hypothesis given below:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Employer branding and employee retention in telecommunications firms in Kenya.

To test this hypothesis, two steps were used. The first step tested whether employer branding accounted for significant differences in engineers retention across the three generational cohorts (H_{01a}) while in the second step, the influence of employer branding on employee retention (H_{01b}) was examined. Analysis

of variance ANOVA was used to test H_{01a} . Employer branding in the telecommunications firms does not lead to significant differences in employee retention across the generational cohorts. The result of this analysis was presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Employer Branding and Employee Retention Across Generational Cohorts

Employee retention	Sum Square	d.f.	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	2.545	2	1.273	3.363	.038
Within Groups	48.441	128	.378		
Total	50.987	130			

Table 2 showed the employee retention across the three generational cohorts in response to employer branding. According to these results, Employer branding significantly ($p\text{-value} = 0.038 < 0.05$) explains the differences in employee retention in telecommunications firms $df(2,128) = 3.363$. This finding showed that application of Employer branding significantly ($p < 0.05$) explains the variation in the employee retention. The implication was that employer branding accounts for significant

differences in retention of generational cohorts and that the cohorts respond differently to it (the ANOVA regression) on the differences in retention between pairs of cohorts. The individual statistical significance was further tested using t- test and linear regression with dummy variables on the relationship between generational differences and employee retention. Table 3 showed the results of independent t-test on engineers' retention when Employer branding was applied.

Table 3: Independent t- test for Employer Branding and Employee Retention

Case	Generational cohort	Mean	Std	Se	p-value
1	Boomers (1947 - 1964)	3.2700	0.28207	.07539	0.017
	X-ers (1965 - 1979)	3.7779	0.71634	.15632	
2	Boomers (1947 - 1964)	3.2700	0.28207	.07539	0.284
	Y-ers (1980 - 2000)	3.4532	0.62529	.06382	
3	X-ers(1965 - 1979)	3.7779	0.71634	.15632	0.038
	Y's (1980 - 2000)	3.4532	0.62529	.06382	

Table 3 presented the results to ascertain differences on employee retention among generational cohorts with respect to employer branding when independent t-test was undertaken. The p-value was $0.017 < 0.05$ showed that the retention of the two

cohorts (Boomers (1946 - 1964) and X-ers (1965 - 1979)) was significantly ($p < 0.05$) different in response to Employer Branding (EB). However, the employee retention was not significantly different ($p = 0.284 > 0.05$) between Boomers (1946 - 1964) and

Generation Y (1980 - 2000) in response to Employer Branding (EB). The ($p= 0.038<0.05$) for the two cohorts (X-ers (1965 - 1979) and Y-ers (1980 - 2000) indicated a significant difference in retention of employees between the X-ers and Y-ers.

Besides testing for the effect of Employer Branding explained the difference in retention among the three cohorts (Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y), the regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of Employer Branding on employee retention. The following hypothesis H_{01b} was tested.

H_{01b} Employer branding has no significant influence on employee retention in telecommunications firms in Kenya.

The regression results on the influence of employer branding on employee retention were as follows:

$$ER = 2.00 (\pm 0.104) + 1.35 (\pm 0.09)$$

* *EB; all coefficients significant at $p < 0.001$*

The regression results showed that employer branding very significantly ($p<0.001$) influences employee retention in telecommunication firms in Kenya. The results of this study that employer branding strongly influences employee retention was supported by (Ozcelik & Findikli, 2014). Further studies by Memon and Kolachi, (2012) on internal employer branding established that internal marketing targets the firm's employees and as such

involves not only the function of marketing but also the processes of HR. This makes employees to have a more positive attitude to the brand (Employer) and are more likely to incorporate this image in their work activities. This improves their commitment and retention. These findings further supports the results of this study that employer branding strongly and significantly improves employee retention. The findings of the study are also supported by the findings by (Raj & Jyotti, 2011) that by applying employer branding perspectives through implementation of human resources processes and strategies, employees are able to develop positive attitudes towards their brand values which influence their retention.

Relationship between Work-life Balance and Engineers Retention

The second objective of the study was to establish the relationship between Work life balance and e retention. This objective was used to generate the research hypothesis (H_{02}) as follows:

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between Work-life balance and employee retention.

To test this hypothesis, analysis of variance was used. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA for work-life balance and employee retention

Employee retention	Sum Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.574	2	1.787	7.054	.001
Within Groups	32.421	128	.253		
Total	35.994	130			

The findings in Table 4 indicated that application of work-life balance significantly ($p<0.05$) explains the variation $F(2,128) = 7.054$ in the employee retention. This further showed that there was significant

relationship between work-life balance and generation differences on retention of engineers. The hypothesis was further tested using Independent t-test when work- life balance is applied in Table 5.

Table 5: Work- life balance and employee retention

Case	Generational cohort	Mean	Std. Dev.	Se	p-value
1	Boomers (1947 - 1964)	.8850	.27590	.07374	0.027
	X-ers (1965 - 1979)	1.3517	.71521	.15607	
2	Boomers (1947 - 1964)	.8850	.27590	.07374	0.885
	Y-ers (1980 – 2000)	.9042	.47240	.04821	
3	X-ers (1965 - 1979)	1.3517	.71521	.15607	0.001
	Y-ers (1980 - 2000)	.9042	.47240	.04821	

Table 5 showed the differences on employee retention among generational cohorts with respect to work-life balance when independent t-test was applied.

Work-life balance significantly ($p=0.027<0.05$) accounts for differences in employee retention and that there is a significant difference in the retention between the two generational cohorts (Boomers (1946 - 1964) and X-ers (1965 - 1979) and between X-ers and Y-ers ($p<0.001$). However, there is no significant difference ($p=0.885>0.05$) between the retention of Boomers and Y-ers by implementing Work-life balance. The $p= 0.001<0.05$ shows that the two cohorts (X-ers (1965 - 1979) and Y-ers (1980 - 2000) have significant differences in terms of employee retention when work-life balance was applied. Apart from the ANOVA test, multiple linear regression with dummies with boomers as the reference/ base category yielded the following result:

$$ER = 0.885 + 0.467X + 0.157Y$$

$$(\pm 0.07374) (\pm 0.15607) (\pm 0.04821)$$

$$p = 0.027 \quad 0.885$$

The results showed that there was no significant difference ($\beta = 0.157, p=0.885>0.05$) in the retention of Baby Boomers and Y-ers by implementing work-life balance. The difference was most significant between X-ers and Y-ers ($\beta = 0.4475, p= 0.001<0.05$). The results showed that work-life balance (WLB) had more retention effect on Generation X, followed by Generation Y and lastly Boomers. So WLB program

should mostly target Generation X. It should also be noted that the difference retention of Generation Y and Generation X was not significant upon application of WLB programs. The findings of Memon and Kolachi (2012) that employees have developed different views on Work-life balance supports the results of this study that the influence of work life balance on retention across different generations at the work place varies significantly. Similarly, studies by Maxwell (2005) found that the implementation of work-life balance policies through introduction of flexible working hours and better work support contributes to improved employee retention. Additionally, (Richman, Shannon, Brennan, Civilian, & Hill, 2008) found that flexibility and supportive work-balance policies is positively related to employee engagement and retention which is supported by the findings in this study.

Further, bivariate linear regression analysis was carried out to establish the influence of work life balance on employee retention. The model was found to be significant $F(1,129) = 11.871, p=0.001 (p<0.05)$ with a model fit statistic, $R^2 = 0.084$ which implied that work-life balance individually and significantly explained 8.4% (about 10%) variation in employee retention in telecommunication firms in Kenya. The coefficient of regression associated with work-life balance is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Coefficient of regression

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.922	0.161		18.198	.000
	Work life balance (WLB)	0.251	0.073	0.290	3.445	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Employee retention

The regression equation then becomes, $ER = 2.922 + 0.251 * WLB$; with all coefficients being significant at $p < 0.05$. This finding implied that work-life balance significantly influences retention of employees which corroborated the findings by Richman et al. (2008) who also found that flexibility as being positively related to employee engagement and retention. The finding of this study was further supported by research study by (Muhammad Umer et. al, 2011) conducted in a Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) industry in Pakistan which found that work-life balance had a significant correlation with employee retention. Further, the study by (Mathimaran & Kumar, 2017) found positive relationship between flexible working hours and employee retention. This finding supported the finding of this study that there is strong and positive relationship between work-life balance and employee retention within telecommunication firms in Kenya.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study found that there exist a strong and significant relationship between employer branding and employee retention. Organizations which have strong corporate image and brand identity will experience more retention of their

employees. For policy implications, organizations should aim to retain their employees by implementing strong employer branding initiatives. The human resource policies for employer branding should aim to make the organization a good place to work and should appeal to all employees of the organization. All categories of generational cohorts were found to have positive and strong association with employer branding. It was therefore concluded that more emphasis should be put on employer branding in order to retain employees. The study further concluded that there exists positive relationship between work life balance and employee retention. This finding was supported by studies conducted in the developed countries which also identified positive relationship between work-Life balance and employee retention. In telecommunications firms in Kenya, there is low level of work-life balance practice ($M=2.14$; representing disagreement on its practice because 2=disagreement) which could explain the insignificant moderating role of his variable on the generational differences – engineers retention relationship. Within the telecommunications firms in Kenya, there is however low level of work-life balance practices as was shown by the low mean of the respondents. This also explained the insignificant moderating role of this variable on the relationship between generational differences and employee retention.

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