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THE INFLUENCE OF AGENCY BANKING ON CLIENT RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES: CASE STUDY OF EQUITY BANK, NAIROBI COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to address the influence of agency banking on client relationship strategies with Equity bank of Kenya as the case study. Specifically, the study sought to establish the influence of service delegation, effective decision making and reliable services on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya. The study was informed by four theories which included; agency theory, stewardship theory, resource-based theory and relationship marketing theory. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study while the target population was the employees from Equity Bank, Kenya. The study was based in Nairobi hence the target population comprised of the 33 Equity bank branches in Nairobi County. The study employed cluster sampling whereby the employees were classified into 5 clusters which were marketing managers, operations managers, ICT managers, branch managers and heads of customer service. This made in total sample size of 165 respondents. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the study which was analyzed using mixed method whereby qualitative data was analyzed by content analysis while SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data to generate percentages and frequencies. The study established that service delegation was a key aspect in promoting client relationship strategies. The study also established that branch managers delegate services to banking agents which enabled accessibility of banking services hence customer satisfaction. Through service delegation, competence and management capability have been enhanced across the branches. Banking agents have the authority to offer services that were previously offered by the bank branches which had enhanced customer satisfaction. Also customers get quick response to their queries and concerns in a better and easy way through banking agents.

Key Words: *Service Delegation, Effective Decision Making, Reliable Services, Client Relationship, Agency Banking*

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to assess the influence of agency banking on client relationship strategies with Equity bank as the case study. This chapter focuses on introducing the problem of study and outlining the weight behind the focus of the study. The chapter covers the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the study objectives and the research questions. To be included in the chapter also is the scope as well as the significance of the study.

In the modern business environment, organizations are faced with various dynamics such as technological changes, globalization, unhealthy competition, and wavering operating environment among others (Ronoh & Ntoiti, 2015). Most of these dynamics have continuously threatened the continued performance and sustainability of modern businesses especially in the developing world (Ondieki, 2015). It is upon this note that the management of many organizations across the globe is adapting various strategies such as adopting modern technology, turning to agencies, involving customers and employees as well as diversifying to new markets to ensure they cope with these challenges and steer client relationship and their performance.

Separation of ownership from the operations of the business has been a subject of great concern among many companies across the World (Muasya & Kerongo, 2015). The argument has been that without this separation, the interference of the ownership to management and to the business processes ends up affecting the entire business performance. This has led to the agency relationship whereby business owners/top management appoints representatives through contracting such that the appointed parties act on the behalf of the owners. According to (Peng , Vivian, Jennifer, Wang and Chen (2015), this compares to decentralization whereby some or all the processes in a business are transferred from the main business to other sub-divisions which are not branches but are there to act on behalf of the principal.

The main goal for organizations to appoint agencies has been to bring their services and products closer to the customers which at the end of the day enhance customer relationship (Belniak, 2015). As pointed out in the agency banking, through promoting relationship between agent and the principal, the clients are brought closer to the organization and this enhances the ability of the management to understand their customers better (Cai, Hillier, Tian & Wu, 2015). Client relationship is therefore the ability of the firm through the management to enhance its closeness with the customers and ensure that the customer needs are met out of this relationship with the sole aim of enhancing performance (Cai et al., 2015).

Agency in business dates back to 1920s but has mainly been focused on in a study by Berle and Means (1932) who aimed at pointing out the need for organized framework on how the business owners and the management should relate to avoid conflicts thus fostering firm performance. This theory is anchored on separation of ownership and management. Jensen and Meckling as cited by King'ang'ai, Kigabo, Kihonge and Kibachia (2016), define an agency relationship as a contract under which one or more persons "the principal (s)" engage another person "the agent" to perform some duty on their behalf. This involves delegation of some decision making authority to the agent. Conflicts arise when the management is perceived by the firm owners to prefer other interests other than those of the owners themselves. The main aim for any business owner to appoint agents (management) is so as to reduce the interferences of the ownership to the business operations which in most cases tend to slow the business growth and performance through diversion of revenues and lack of commitment (Hirshleifer, Hsu & Li, 2014). Bertoni and Lugo (2017) argued that the agents are the experts in a given field especially management which the principal may not have any experience in running the business thus making the relationship between the two a crucial move towards enhancing business performance.

It is important to understand how companies can gain from how they relate to their customers is key to the academia and to practitioners in the marketing field. Kiura, (2014). Client relationship strategy assists a firm to acquire critical information on their clients and use the information to tailor make the products as per the needs of the customer. Kambua (2015). Duppati, Scrimgeour and Stevenson (2016) highlight that , the measurement process is a key determinant in client relationship process. A key advantage of the measurement process is that the information obtained such as client lifetime value, acquiring and retaining behaviours Jaldesa, Muturi and Sumba (2015). The relationship between the customer and the organization is considered a key motive towards enhancing the organizational performance and sustainability. According to Zona, Gomez-Mejia and Withers (2015), bringing the clients closure to the organization means a well enhanced ground for understanding the clients thus enabling the organization to continue working towards meeting the customer needs. Ngo, Pavalkova, Phan, and Nguyen (2018) argued that customer relationship strategies such as engaging the customers and giving them feedback were the main aspects through which the organizational performance can be attained. A well embraced customer relationship entails proper communication between the customer and the company even after the transactions between the two parties have gone through which the interactions are promoted thus yielding prolonged relationship (Smolčić & Soldić, 2017). As stipulated by Gichungu and Oloko (2015), offering after-sale services and collected customer data plays a significant role in promoting the relationship between the organization and the clients.

Gibson, Pasini and Buckley (2014) consider client relationship management as a market and competitive strategy that seeks to not only attract more customers but also enable the organization to stand against the competitors. The modern business environment calls for ensuring customer satisfaction as a move towards enhancing performance and competitiveness. However, this is possible through having an understanding on the expectations and needs of the customer which on the other hand can mainly be brought about by a good relationship between the organizational management and the customers (Ferdous, Mosharrafa & Farzana, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

According to CBK (2017) bank supervision report, most of the commercial banks in Kenya lost between 5% and 10 % of their customers annually due to poor customer service leading to deteriorated relationship between the client and the business management. The Kenyan Banking sector remains one of the most vulnerable sectors with dynamics such as increased competition from other sectors like the mobile sector, globalization, unpredictable operating environment, changing legal and regulations among others proving the challenges faced by the operators in the sector (Obare, 2015). In the modern business environment, enhancing the relationship between the organization and the customers remain a critical measure towards ensuring business growth and sustainability.

According to Global Business Report (2016), over 62% of the major multinationals across the globe attributed their continued performance to the increased customer relationship. In Kenya, Mohammed, Rahid and Tahir (2014) pointed out that customer relationship significantly influenced business growth and development in many sectors across the country. However, despite the merit surrounding customer relationship, it has not been effectively embraced in the Kenyan banking sector. With strategies such as the adoption of agency banking and other forms of banking such as mobile banking, it is expected that the customer relationship in the banking sector increases since the services are brought closer to the customers but this has not been the case. The question therefore remains; are service delegation, effective decision making, service responsiveness, quality of service and reliability of services as the aspects of agency banking the missing factors in determining the enhancing client relationship through after-sale service, client data management and rewarding loyalty among commercial banks in Kenya?

Empirical studies have revealed mixed results on the relationship between agency banking and customer relationship enhancement (Mellahi & Harris, 2016). Most of these studies on the agency banking have been carried out elsewhere in developed countries while others were done in more than a decade ago. This therefore shows that there is need for a study to fill the existing gaps on the relationship between agency banking and customer relationship. It is against this background that the current study sought to unveil the influence of agency banking on client relationship strategies with reference to Equity Bank of Kenya, Nairobi County.

Study Objectives

The general objective of this study was to address the influence of agency banking on client relationship strategies with Equity bank of Kenya as the case study. The study was guided by the following specific objectives were;

- To determine the influence of service delegation on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Nairobi County.
- To examine the influence of effective decision making on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Nairobi County.
- To establish the influence of reliable services on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Nairobi County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agency Theory

Long before the discussion on agency costs and private benefits, Berle and Means (1932) had already written extensively on the separation of ownership in large public companies. Many others have since contributed to this discussion. Agency theory was however extensively publicised by Eisenhardt (1989). The theory states that the best way of making organized relationship in a firm is by forming two parties. These are principal party and agent party (Schruba, 2018). The principal party is for delegating the work to agent party which performs the work. An increase in agents leads to increase in customers (Chapin, 2015). Many agents are carried on by local stakeholders. It becomes easy to create awareness of an organization to the customers from different areas (Terjesen & Umans, 2018). Perwez and Sohail (2014) considered the process of having many agents as the economical way of expanding an organization. Customers get attracted by what they see being demonstrated in areas around them.

Increasing in production and sales as the main goal of organizations can only be attained by having a huge number of clients (Martinez, 2018). The theory of agency plays a major role in client relationship as it involves shareholders, corporate management, sellers and the market. This relationship is facilitated by having a common interest and avoidance of asymmetric information which can be misleading or reducing trust on one of the parties (Mathias, Solomon, & Madison, 2017; Invite & Invite, 2017). According to Cooren (2018), satisfaction of both big and small shareholders gives a room for expansion of organization and increase of customers. This is enhanced by offering reliable services to customers and responding to customer needs immediately when they arise (Chrisman, 2012).

The Stewardship Theory

The stewardship theory was first introduced by Donaldson and Davis (1991) and latter improved by Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson (1997). The theory stipulates that managers left on their own, will act as responsible stewards of the assets they control, and given a choice between self-serving behavior and pro-organizational behavior, a steward will place higher value on cooperation than defection and acts responsively in planning and monitoring the success of the business and do not

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act against the will of the owners but with the sole aim of steering business performance and growth (Mateo & Aghezzaf, 2013; Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997; Chavunduka, Chimunhu & Sifile, 2015; Suits, 1967).

The Stewardship theory is quite the opposite of the agency theory which suggests that the agents are trustworthy and good stewards of the resources entrusted to them under their care and thus making monitoring useless (Thomas, 1985; Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson, 1997; Dai & Chen, 2012). This theory opposes the agency theory which assumes that managers will act to satisfy their own self-interest rather than that of the organization. Donaldson and Davis (1991) argue that stewards who are the managers, executives and board of directors are satisfied and motivated when the organizational objectives are achieved (Xu, Pan & Ballot, 2013; Nash, 1951).

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) is an organizational theory that has extensively focused on how the behavior of the organization is affected by its external resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). The theory attempts to contemplate that the manager of an organization has a big role in reducing dependencies and the power of other actors to secure control over vital resources and take into account integration of the power of focal organization (Ahmed, 2017). In a more clear view, the theory states that organizations are influenced by external resources on organizational behaviour. This is based on changing environmental factors in order to acquire resources. In this case, external resources are the assets that help the employees in offering service to customers which can be desktop computers, cell phones, laptop computers and many others used for this purposes.

Westhead (2016) noted that for project to succeed there must be employment of resources, which are the personnel, materials, equipment and services. In some situations, organizations may not manage to recruit enough resources for a project to be undertaken which can be caused by bankruptcy, lack of skills and lack of enough staff. For this reason, many organizations ran for external resources like contract staff to complement the task. This strategy of outsourcing services from external resources creates a path for increasing more customers in an organization. This comes after improvement in customer service.

Relationship Marketing Theory

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) concept has its roots in the Relationship Marketing theory, which is considered one of the main areas of modern marketing development, generating a variety of topics for researchers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Often, both in academic and business literature, the terms “relationship marketing” and “customer relationship management” are used as synonyms (Simions, 2017). Relationship marketing involves building long term interactive relationships, especially with customers, which is the most important benefit for the organizations which have adopted this concept. This is underlined by Dhava (2018) who stated that the purpose of relationship marketing is to establish, maintain and enhance relationships with customers and other partners.

Lusch and Vargo (2006) pointed out that CRM is a concept used to reflect a variety of themes and perspectives. Some of these issues provide a narrow perspective on CRM. At tactical level, CRM is database marketing or electronic marketing (Achrol & Kotler, 2012). At strategic level, the goal of CRM is to create value both for customers and shareholders. Thus, CRM involves the use of information technology and focuses on individual customer relationship to design a strategy for maintaining long term relationships with customers (Perremiel, 2016). Both relationship marketing and customer relationship management focus on cooperation and collaboration between the company and its customers, and/or among other participants in the relationship. According to Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010), CRM is the result of continuous development and integration of marketing ideas, available data, technologies and organizational approaches, which is an operational platform for relationship marketing manifestation.

Empirical Review

Delegation is a process of entrusting authority with responsibility to other people. In its firmest form, the person to whom the authority is delegated is to act on behalf of a person from whom authority is delegated. In general, delegated authority gives the recipients relatively wide powers to act as they deem appropriate (Maicas & Sese, 2015). Delegation of authority is quite common in all aspects of life including business and colleges. Employees are more motivated when delegation is done to engage them effectively in managerial duties thus enhancing their commitment and productivity (Fraser, 2016). Shrinking resources and increasing demands for services heighten the need for delegating. This important concept not only impacts the organization's financial outcomes, but also has the burden of achieving desired outcomes.

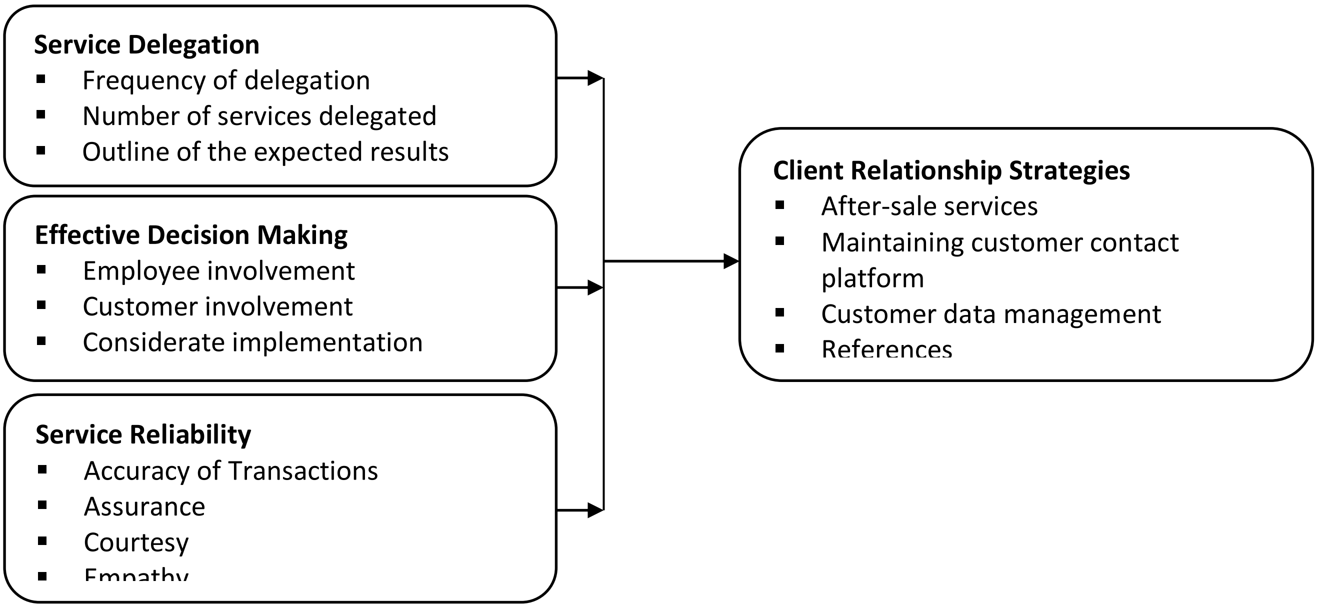
Knowledge of organizational duty, accountability, and authority is fundamental to the effective use of delegation; for without it, quality of patient care can decrease and treasured resources mismanaged (Maicas & Sese, 2015). Delegation does not appear to be uniform; however, our results show that it varies across corporate policies with the personal characteristics of the Chief Executive Officer. The capital is allocated considering personal standing of the manager running a given division. Lastly, corporate politics and corporate socialism interferes with capital allocation in European and Asian firms (Carpenter, 2017).

The Decision making is dynamic process, and there are many feedback loops in each of the phases. Feedback loops can be caused by problems of timing, politics, disagreements among managers, inability to identify an appropriate alternative or to implement the solution, turnover of managers, or the sudden appearance of a new alternative. According to Partinger (2017), decision making is the process of choosing between alternatives in an organization with the main aim of enhancing effectiveness and promoting performance. It can be regarded as an outcome of mental processes (cognitive processes: memory, thinking, evaluation) leading to the selection of a course of action among several alternatives. The essential point is that decision making is a dynamic process that has both strategic and behavioral implications for the organizations.

Recent empirical research indicates that the decision making process that involves making the right strategic choices does lead to success decisions for the organization. Scholl and Kowalski (2018) argue that the decision-making is a fundamental function in organizations and the quality of the decisions that managers make influences their effectiveness as managers, and the effectiveness of managers, in turn, affects the success or failure of the organization and also these decisions very much affect employee and the organizational performance.

One of the main aspects of ensuring customer relationship and loyalty as well as organizational performance is through ensuring customer satisfaction with the services offered by the organization. The question therefore remains; how can this satisfaction be attained? Ensuring service reliability has been recognized as a key aspect towards enhancing customer relationship (Pantouvakis & Bouranta, 2014). A reliable service according to Qu and Sit (2017) is a service that offers what is expected by the customer consistently without downfalls or dissatisfactions overtime. When a service is reliable, it mains the customer will get what he or she expected and in the way it should be and once it is improved is consistently done.

Empirical studies have outlaid different outcomes on the relationship between service reliability and customer satisfaction. For instance, Imam, Shafique and Shah (2014) carried out a study on the Mediating role of Job Satisfaction between Social Capital and service reliability. The study aimed at establishing the role played by job satisfaction in determining the relationship between social capital and service reliability and focused on banking sector in Pakistan. The scholars adopted a descriptive research design and had a sample of 219 respondents drawn from commercial banks in Pakistan. The study found that as a result of improved job satisfaction among the employees, the social capital by the organizations was put into more use thus enhancing service reliability. According to Imam *et* al. (2014), satisfied employees offer better services to the customers and this contribute to the client relationship.



Independent Variables **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design which focuses on keen explanation of a singularity, estimates of the study population that characteristics that are similar and determining the relationship that occurs amid the variables under study (Darren, 2015). The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data thus descriptive research design was most appropriate. The target respondents were employees of in the Bank's branches within Nairobi County, Kenya. There were 33 Equity bank branches in Nairobi County as of December 2018 (CBK, 2018). The bank had a workforce of 6,710 employees in the 177 branches countrywide (Equity Bank Group, 2018). In Nairobi, the bank had a total of 1,651 employees in the 33 branches. This was the target population for the study. Purposive sampling was used where only the main five categories of management in the bank as per CBK recommendations were sampled. The categories included marketing managers, operations managers, ICT managers, branch managers and heads of customer service. In every category, one manager was picked purposefully making a total of five respondents from every branch.

The study used questionnaires to collect primary data from the respondents. Mixed method of data analysis was used in the study whereby both quantitative and qualitative techniques were adopted. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. Quantitative data on the other hand was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used in the descriptive statistics. Regression model was used to analyze the statistical relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. Model summary, regression coefficients and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to explain the significance of the relationship. The model used was of the form:

$$\mathbf{Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \varepsilon.}$$

Where: **Y** = Client Relationship, β_0 = Constant, - ϵ= is an error

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β_1 - β_4 = coefficients of the study variables, X_1 = service delegation, X_2 = effective decision making, X_3 = service reliability, X_4 = service responsiveness and X_5 = service quality.

FINDINGS

The main aim of the study was to assess the influence of agency banking on the customer relationship strategies in Equity bank Kenya. The study herein presents the analysis of the major findings systematically based on the specific objectives of the study which were to examine, the influence of service delegation, effective decision making, service reliability, on the client relationship strategies. According to Creswell (2013), descriptive analysis is necessary in a study in that it helps stipulate the findings the way they are thus forming the basis for the researcher to deeply understand the phenomenon under which the research is based on.

Service Delegation

The first objective of the study was to examine the influence of service delegation on the client relationship strategies. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on specific statements on the service delegation based on a five-point Likert's scale of 1-5 where; strongly disagree (SD) =1, Disagree (D=2), neutral (N=3), Agree (A=4) and strongly Agree (SA=5). The findings are presented in table below

Table 1: Level of Agreement with Statements on Service Delegation

Statement	N	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
I frequently delegate my duties to those under me in my supervision	134	9.0	15.7	6.7	51.5	17.2
Through delegation the competence and management capability have been enhanced across the branch	134	16.4	25.4	0.0	53.0	5.2
I have services delegated to banking agents to enhance access to the banking services	134	18.7	19.4	0.0	56.7	5.2
I outline the expected results to those I delegate my the services and duties to	134	11.2	16.4	0.0	57.5	14.9
Due to delegation of services, our bank has been able to enhance customer satisfaction	134	6.7	17.2	0.0	63.4	12.7
The services delegated perform better in the market than they did when not delegated	134	9.7	17.2	0.0	63.4	9.7
Customer queries and concerns are better addressed after delegation of services to the banking agents	134	9.7	16.4	11.9	56.7	5.2
As a result of continued service delegation, the bank has recorded increased customer flow and performance	134	9.7	16.4	16.4	51.5	6.0

From the findings portrayed, majority of the respondents agreed that they frequently delegated their duties to those that they supervise as shown by a 51.5% who agreed and 17.2% who strongly agreed. Through delegation the competence and management capability had been enhanced across the branches as shown by a 53.0% who agreed and 5.2% who strongly agreed. It was further established that most of the respondents agreed that they had services delegated to banking agents to enhance access to the banking services as evidenced by a 56.7% who agreed and 5.2% who strongly agreed. According to Chen, Chen and Wei (2017), delegating services to agents who are closer to the customers enhances the access to the services among the customers and this stabilizes the ability of the organization to satisfy the customers.

Most of the respondents indicated that they outlined the expected results to those they delegated the services and duties to as shown by a 57.5% who agreed and 14.9% who strongly agreed. Due to delegation of services, the bank had been able to enhance customer satisfaction as proven by a 63.4% (agree) and 12.7% (strongly agree). The findings also show that customer queries and concerns were better addressed after delegation of services to the banking agents and this is evidenced by a 56.7% who agreed and 5.2% who strongly agreed. It was further established that the banks recorded increased customer flow as a result of continued service delegation. The findings are in line with those by Shaikh (2015) who established that through continued focus on the delegation of services, the customers are brought closer to the organization and this creates their satisfaction. Noh (2014) comes in support of this alluding that customer satisfaction should be the first priority of every modern enterprises and this can be steered by having services and products delegated closer to the customers.

Effective Decision Making

The second objective of the study was to establish the influence of effective decision making on customer relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya. The study sought to find out the respondents' level of agreement on specific statements regarding the role played by effective decision making in promoting client relationship strategies. The respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement based on a five-point Likert's scale of 1-5 where; strongly disagree (SD) =1, Disagree (D=2), neutral (N=3), Agree (A=4) and strongly Agree (SA=5). The findings were shown in table below.

Table 2: Level of agreement with statements on Effective Decision Making

Statement	N	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%	SA (%)
I effectively involve those under my command in making any decision concerning the bank	134	10.4	21.6	9.0	55.2	3.7
I always seek the opinion of the customers before making some critical decisions especially those that affect them	134	9.0	13.4	12.7	61.2	3.7
The opinions of banking agents are sought when making any decision that concerns them	134	9.7	10.4	17.2	56.7	6.0
We do not only seek opinion but also consider the given opinions when implementing the decisions.	134	12.7	10.4	12.7	60.4	3.7
Through banking agents we get closer to the customers thus making it easier to involve them in decision making	134	9.0	17.9	17.9	45.5	9.7
The agents are provided with a platform to seek opinion of the customers regarding various decisions by the bank	134	15.7	16.4	4.5	57.5	6.0
The inputs of the banking agents have made decision making easier and more effective	134	8.2	7.5	14.9	58.2	11.2
The decisions are made after consultations with the banking agents have left customers more comfortable and satisfied	134	8.2	12.7	14.9	53.7	10.4
Effective decision making contributes to the success of the bank through enhancing client relationship	134	25.4	23.1	6.7	38.1	6.7

The results revealed that majority of the respondents agreed on the statement that they effectively involved those under their command in making any decision concerning the bank as evidenced by 55.2% who agreed and 3.7% who strongly agreed. This was also the case on the statement that the managers always sought the opinion of the customers before making critical decisions especially those that affect them (customers) as shown by 61.2% who agreed and 3.7% who strongly agreed. The respondents however agreed that the opinions of banking agents were sought when making any decision that concerned them (agents) as shown by 56.7% who agreed and 6.0% who strongly agreed. Yee, Yeung and Cheng (2017) argued that decision making is an aspect of how well a company involves its stakeholders including the customers, the

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employees and shareholders by asking them of their views before the decision is made and implemented.

The findings further revealed that most of the managers did not only seek opinion but also considered the given opinions when implementing the decisions as shown by 60.4% who agreed and 3.7% who strongly agreed. The respondents agreed that through banking agents the bank's management got closer to the customers thus making it easier to involve them in decision making and this was evidenced by a 45.5% who agreed and 9.7% who strongly agreed. The respondents also indicated that the agents were provided with a platform to seek opinions from the customers regarding various decisions by the bank where 57.5% of the respondents agreed and 6.0% strongly agreed.

It was also established that the inputs by the banking agents to the bank had made decision making easier and more effective (Agree = 58.2%; strongly agree = 11.2%). The respondents indicated that effective decision making contributed to the success of the bank through enhancing client relationship. The findings are in line with those by Marketh (2014) who found out that an inclusive decision making bears the best fruits for the company by ensuring that the views of every stakeholder are considered. Obi (2016) alluded that decision making goes hand in hand with inclusivity through which the company steers its relationship with the stakeholders including the employees and the customers.

Service Reliability

The third objective of this study was to assess the influence of service reliability on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya. The respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with specific statements on the role played by service reliability in promoting client relationship strategies was sought in the study. The variable was assessed in terms of accuracy of transactions, assurance, courtesy and empathy. A 5-points Likert's scale was used where; strongly disagree (SD) =1, Disagree (D=2), neutral (N=3), Agree (A=4) and strongly Agree (SA=5). Table below shows the results.

Table 3: Level of Agreement with Statements on Service Reliability

Statement	N	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Through agency banking, the transactions have become easier and more accurate	134	23.1	23.9	7.5	41.8	3.7
Minimal mistakes are made by the agents when carrying out transactions thus promoting customer satisfaction	134	13.4	21.6	6.0	52.2	6.7
Our branch ensures continuous training of the agents to enhance the accuracy of the transactions they make	134	9.0	21.6	7.5	57.5	4.5
With the banking agents spread across the market, the customers are assured of accessing our service at any place and any time	134	11.2	16.4	10.4	54.5	7.5
The agents are aware of the need for courtesy and discharge the same to the customers	134	8.2	20.1	6.7	51.5	13.4
The branch has taken appropriate measures to ensure that the clients are assured of our services and products	134	24.6	20.1	6.7	45.5	3.0
There are clear guidelines for the our agents to have empathy when dealing with the customers	134	12.7	15.7	9.7	57.5	4.5
Through the agents, the bank has gained understanding of the customers and their needs thus serving them better to enhance reliability of the services	134	20.9	20.1	10.4	47.0	1.5
Our services are entirely reliable through the agents and in case of any downtime we let the customers know in advance	134	17.9	13.4	9.7	56.7	2.2
Through reliable services, customer satisfaction is enhanced thus promoting client relationship	134	8.2	26.9	4.5	58.2	2.2

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As the findings portray, most of the respondents agreed that through agency banking, the transactions became easier and more accurate as evidenced by a 41.8% who agreed and 3.7% who strongly agreed. The findings further revealed that most branches had agents spread across the market to ensure that the customers were assured of accessing banking services at any place and any time (agree = 54.5%; strongly agree =7.5%). Majority of the respondents agreed that there were clear guidelines for their respective agents to have empathy when dealing with the customers (strongly agree = 4.7%; agree = 57.5%).

The findings further revealed that most of the managers gained more understanding of their customers and their needs thus serving them better to enhance reliability of the services (agree = 47%; strongly agree = 1.5%). The findings also revealed that through the agents, services were entirely reliable through and easier to make it known to the customers in case of any changes or downtime. It was established that through reliable services, customer satisfaction was enhanced thus promoting client relationship and this is shown by 58.2% who agreed and 2.2% who strongly agreed. The findings compare with those by Imam, Shafique and Shah (2014) who found out that reliability of a service play a significant effect on the customer satisfaction and relationship. Irini (2015) argue that the main aspect of customer needs and meeting the customer expectations is through providing reliable services in terms of quality, timeliness and consistency.

Client Relationship in Equity Bank

The study sought to assess the client relationship at the bank by asking the respondents to indicate their levels of agreement on specific statements regarding client relationship. The findings are as shown in Table below. As per the findings, majority of the respondents fairly agreed with the first statement that after sale services were offered to the customers so as to enhance client relationship.

Table 4: Rating the Aspects of Client Relationship

Statement	N	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
After sale services have been offered to our customers an aspect that has enhanced their relationship with the organization	134	6.0	9.7	7.5	47.8	29.1
The bank has embraced customer data management and storage thus having prolonged contact and relationship with the clients	134	9.7	15.7	5.2	43.3	26.1
As a manager I emphasize on establishing proper client relationship when offering the bank services through which the bank has increased its customer base	134	13.4	17.9	1.5	41.0	26.1
Due to the services offered and the kind of client relationship that the bank has created the referrals by the satisfied customers have increased over time.	134	4.5	15.7	6.0	48.5	25.4
As a result of continued service delegation our bank has recorded increased customer flow and performance	134	6.7	14.9	5.2	44.0	29.1
Due to delegation of services our bank has been able to enhance customer satisfaction	134	11.2	17.2	8.2	44.0	19.4
The decisions that are made in the bank leaves the customers more comfortable and satisfied with our services	134	59.7	20.9	8.2	6.7	4.5
Effective decision making contributes to the success of our bank through enhancing client relationship	134	9.7	15.7	35.2	31.2	8.2
Our services are entirely reliable and in case of any downtime we let the customers know in advance	134	9.0	21.6	2.2	53.0	14.2
Through reliable services, customer satisfaction is enhanced thus promoting client relationship	134	24.6	20.9	0.7	50.7	3.0

Through effective feedback and communication with the customers the bank has increased its customer base thus promoting performance	134	61.9	14.9	4.5	11.9	6.7
Our bank has played an integral role in promoting responsiveness to the services thus satisfaction	134	18.7	19.4	8.2	52.2	1.5
We always strive to improve the quality of our services in order to promote satisfaction and client relationship	134	18.7	11.9	4.5	63.4	1.5
Through proper measures to enhance the quality of our services we have recorded increased customer flow in the recent past	134	7.5	25.4	4.5	60.4	2.2

The respondents also neutrally agreed that the bank had embraced customer data management and storage thus having prolonged contact and relationship with the clients (Agree =47.8%; Strongly agree = 29.1%), but they showed a negative reaction on the statement that they emphasized on establishing proper client relationship when offering the bank services through which the bank increased its customer base (Agree = 43.3%; Strongly agree = 26.1%). Further, the respondents disagreed that as a result of continued service delegation their bank had recorded increased customer flow and performance (Agree = 44.0%; Strongly agree = 29.1%).

It was further established that the decisions made in the bank did not satisfy the customers (Disagree = 20.9%; Strongly disagree = 59.7%). The respondents neutrally agreed that effective decision making contributed to the success of their bank through enhancing client relationship (Neutral = 35.2%; Agree = 31.2%). Majority of the respondents agreed that their services were entirely reliable and in case of any downtime the customers were informed in advance (Agree = 53%; strongly agree = 14.2%) while they disagreed that through effective feedback and communication with the customers the bank increased its customer base thus promoting performance (Strongly disagree = 61.9%; Disagree = 14.9%). On the statement that the management of the bank had always strived to improve the quality of the services in order promote satisfaction and client relationship, majority of the respondents agreed as indicated by 63.4% who agreed. The respondents also agreed with the statement that through proper measures to enhance the quality of the services the banks recorded increased customer flow.

Multicollinearity Test

This study sought to find out the collinearity among the independent variables using tolerance and variation inflation factor (VIF) statistics of the predictor constructs. Variance inflation factor (VIF) was retrieved to test the presence of Multicollinearity (Billings & Wroten, 1978). The VIF's not more than 2.0, which suggested the absence of possible threats from multicollinearity (Hair et.al. 2009). Multicollinearity among the Independent (Predictor) variables is a concern when using multiple regression analysis. Hair et.al.,(2006) recommended assessing multicollinearity by reviewing correlation matrix for the IV's further by computing tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values.

The study adopted a threshold value of variance inflation factor of 4.0 to represent high multicollinearity status. The findings as shown in table below revealed that the independent variables; service delegation, effective decision making, service reliability, service responsiveness, and service quality has a high tolerance value, which indicates that the beta values of the regression equation of the independent variables would be constant with low standard error terms. Tolerance is whereby part of the denominator in calculating the confidence limits on the partial regression coefficient. As by Porter and Gujarat (2009), the VIF of independent construct that exceed 10 as a rule of thumb is regarded as collinear. This means that there was no collinearity among the independent variables.

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Table 5: Multicollinearity Test

Model		Tolerance	VIF
1	Service Delegation	.734	1.362
	Effective Decision Making	.617	1.621
	Service Reliability	.731	1.367
	Service Responsiveness	.515	1.943
	Service Quality	.684	1.472

a. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

Inferential Analysis of the Study Model

The study adopted a regression model to help in establishing the statistical relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The model was of the form:

$Yi= \beta 0 + \beta 1X1 + \beta 2X2 + \beta 3X3 + \beta 4X4+ \beta 5X5 + \varepsilon$

Where by:

Yi = Client Relationship Strategies

X_1= Service Delegation

X_2= Effective Decision Making

X_3= Service Reliability

X_4= Service Responsiveness

X5= Service Quality

β0= constant term of the model

β_1 = co-efficient of the model

ε = error term

Correlation Results

The study performed Pearson correlations for the relationships between post clearance audits and trade facilitation.

Table 6: Correlation Matrix

		Client Relationship Strategies	Service Delegation	Effective Decision Making	Service Reliability	Service Responsiveness	Service Quality
Client Relationship Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2tailed)						
	N	134					
Service Delegation	Pearson Correlation	.605	1				
	Sig. (2tailed)	.000					
	N	134	134				
Effective Decision Making	Pearson Correlation	.742	.016	1			
	Sig. (2tailed)	.001	.886				
	N	134	134	134			
Service Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.870	.400	.568	1		
	Sig. (2tailed)	.000	.000	.001			
	N	134	134	134	134		

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

From the findings above a positive correlation was seen between agency banking and client relationship strategies. The strongest correlation was obtained between service responsiveness and client relationship strategies (r = 0.893, p<0.001), and the weakest relationship found between service delegation and client relationship strategies (r = 0.605, p<0.000). All the independent variables were found to have a statistically significant association with the dependent variable at 0.05 level of confidence. This is in line with Nair (2016) carried out a study on the impact of Service Quality on Business Performance in Hospitality Industries. The study sought to underpin the relationship between qualities of services offered by the hotels on the performance of the hotels.

Simple Regression Model Results

The simple regression analysis was done to analyse the effect of agency banking on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya. This was done by regressing the independent variables (service delegation, effective decision making, service reliability, service responsiveness, and service quality) independently against the dependent variable (client relationship strategies). The regression results are organized on the basis of the research hypotheses as follows;

Service Delegation

H_{o1}: *Service delegation does not significantly influence on client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya.*

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Table 7: Model Summary for Service Delegation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.513[a]	.263	.258	6.95243

Predictors: (Constant), Service Delegation

As the findings in Table above reveal, R square which is the coefficient of determination that tells the variation in the dependent variable due to changes in the independent variables is 0.263. This means that 26.3% variation in client relationship strategies by the Equity Bank was due to variations in service delegation, with 73.7% of variation in client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya being explained by other factors other than service delegation.

Table 8: ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Service Delegation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2280.901	1	2280.901	47.188	.000[b]
	Residual	6380.382	132	48.336		
	Total	8661.283	133			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Delegation

b. Dependent Variable: Client relationship strategies

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is about variability levels in a regression model which also gives basis for a significance tests. From the findings in Table above, the F-statistic is 47.188 at a significance value is 0.000 which is less than the standard P-value of 0.05. This implied that service delegation is statistically significant and can predict the client relationship strategies by the Equity bank, Kenya.

Table 9: Coefficient results for Service Delegation

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	26.241	1.754		14.959	.000
Service Delegation [X_1]	.813	.118	.513	6.869	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

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Based on the regression results shown on Table above, a unit increase in service delegation would lead to a 0.813 (81.3%) increase in client relationship strategies by Equity Bank, Kenya. At 5% significance level, service delegation had a P=0.000 which was less than the standard P-value of 0.05, and hence the study rejected the null hypothesis that *Service delegation does not significantly influence client relationship strategies by the Equity Bank, Kenya*.

Effective Decision Making

H_{o2}: Effective decision making does not significantly influence client relationship strategies by the Equity Bank, Kenya.

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$

On the second hypothesis of the study, model summary, ANOVA and regression coefficients were used to test for the hypothesis and exemplify the statistical relationship between effective decision making and client relationship strategies by the equity bank, Kenya. The findings were as herein shown.

Table 10: Model Summary for Effective Decision Making

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.486[a]	.236	.230	7.07911

Predictors: (Constant), Effective decision making

The model summary findings as shown in table above revealed that the R^2 for the model was 0.236. This implies that effective decision making up to 23.6% of the variation of client relationship strategies by the Equity Bank, Kenya.

The ANOVA results are as shown in table below

Table 11: ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Effective Decision Making

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2046.259	1	2046.259	40.832	.000[b]
	Residual	6615.023	132	50.114		
	Total	8661.283	133			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Effective Decision Making
b. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

The findings indicate that the model had an F-statistic of 40.832 at a significance level of 0.000<0.05. This implies that the effective decision making is statistically significant and can explain client relationship strategies by Equity Bank, Kenya.

Table 12: Coefficient results for Effective Decision Making

	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	27.784	1.648		16.859	.000
Effective Decision Making [X_2]	.767	.120	.486	6.390	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

The regression coefficients shown in table above revealed that effective decision making had a significant and positive influence on client relationship strategies by the Equity Bank, Kenya (β = 0.767 & P-value = 0.000<0.05). The findings imply that a unit change in effective decision making can

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explain up to 76.7% of client relationship strategies by the Equity Bank, Kenya. This therefore justifies the decision to reject the null hypothesis that effective decision making has no significant influence on the client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya.

Service Reliability

H_{o3}*: *Service reliability has no significant influence on client relationship strategies of the Equity bank, Kenya.

The study sought to find out the statistical relationship between service reliability and client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. The statistical relationship between the two variables was sought through regression model whereby the output was generated in terms of model summary, ANOVA and regression coefficients. The model adopted herein was of the form: $\mathbf{Y= \beta_0+\beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon}$.

Table 13: Model Summary for Service Reliability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.381[a]	.145	.139	7.48929

Predictors: (Constant), Service Reliability

The findings on the model summary as shown in table above revealed that the R^2 for the model 0.145 was an indication that the variation of client relationship strategies in Equity bank, Kenya was explained by up to 14.5% by service reliability.

Table 14: ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Service Reliability

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1257.483	1	1257.483	22.419	.000[b]
	Residual	7403.800	132	56.089		
	Total	8661.283	133			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Reliability

b. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

The ANOVA results revealed that at an F-statistics of 22.419, the model was significant at a significant level of 0.000<0.05. This implies that service reliability significantly influences client relationship strategies in Equity bank could statistically explain the variations in client relationship.

Table 15: Coefficient results for Service Reliability

	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	28.667	1.987		14.427	.000
Service Reliability [X_3]	.739	.156	.381	4.735	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

The findings revealed that at a beta coefficient of 0.739, service reliability significantly and positively influenced client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya at a significance level of 0.000. The model now becomes: $\mathbf{Y=28.667+0.739X_3} + \boldsymbol{e}$. This implied that a unit change in service reliability leads to 73.9% increase in client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. This therefore gives a go-ahead to reject the null hypothesis of the study that service reliability has no significant influence on client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya.

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Analysis of the Overall Regression Model

An overall regression model was carried out to determine the combined effect of service delegation, effective decision making, service reliability, service responsiveness, and service quality as the independent variables on the client relationship strategies as the dependent variable. The findings on model fitness (model summary) are as shown in table below.

Table 16: Model Summary (Overall Model)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.649[a]	.422	.399	6.25657

a. Predictors: (Constant), service delegation, effective decision making and service reliability

The findings revealed that all the five aspects of agency banking focused on in the study had a strong effect on client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. This is evidenced by the R^2 value of 0.422 which means that service delegation, effective decision making and service reliability explained up to 42.2% of client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya.The analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the overall model is as shown in table below.

Table 17: ANOVA Test for the Overall Model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3650.771	5	730.154	18.653	.000[b]
	Residual	5010.512	128	39.145		
	Total	8661.283	133			

a. Dependent Variable: Client relationship strategies

b. Predictors: (Constant), service delegation, effective decision making and service reliability

The results depicted that when combined, service delegation, effective decision making and service reliability had a significant influence on client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. This is evidenced by the P-value of 0.000 < 0.05 and the F-statistic of 18.653. The regression coefficients of the overall model are as shown in table below.

Table 18: Regression Coefficients for Overall Unmoderated Model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	12.604	2.939		4.289	.000
Service Delegation	.565	.167	.357	3.389	.001
Effective Decision Making	.309	.171	.196	1.804	.024
Service reliability	.572	.370	.295	1.547	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Client Relationship Strategies

The results revealed that service delegation, effective decision making and service reliability had a significant and positive influence on client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. The model now becomes:

$$Y = 12.604 + 0.565X_1 + 0.309X_2 + 0.572X_3 + 2.939$$

The model output reveals that a unit change in service delegation would lead to 56.5% increase in the client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. A unit change in effective decision making would lead to 30.9% increase in client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya. Unit change in service reliability would lead up to 57.2% client relationship strategies of Equity Bank, Kenya.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concluded that service delegation was a key aspect in promoting client relationship strategies. Branch managers delegate services to banking agents which has enabled accessibility of banking services hence customer satisfaction. Through service delegation, competence and management capability have been enhanced across the branches. Banking agents have the authority to offer services that were previously offered by the bank branches which has enhanced customer satisfaction. Also customer gets quick response to their queries and concerns in a better and easy way through banking agents.

The study further conclude that effective decision making played a significant role in promoting clients relationship strategies in Equity Bank, Kenya. This is through involving banking agents in making decision concerning the bank, listening to their opinions and providing them with platforms for seeking opinions from the customers regarding various bank decisions. Through inputs by the banking agents, decision making has been made easier and more effective. This is because banking agents are closer to the customers which make them get more opinions from them hence it helps in decision for the bank.

On service reliability, the study concluded that through agency banking, the transactions have been made easier and more accurate since agents have minimum mistakes when carrying out bank transactions and once the mistakes occur, it easy to correct them without much consultation from the bank managers. By opening many banking agents across the market, customers are assured of accessing bank services at any place and any time. Bank services are made reliable through the agents and incase of any downtime, it is easy to spread the news to the customers through banking agents.

The study recommended that the management of the bank should delegate the services to the banking agents who are closer to the customers to enable accessibility of the banking services in their local areas. Also to those that services are delegated to should observe their duties and be responsible by responding to the customer queries effectively to maintain the trust from the management.

Bank managers should involve those under their command in making decisions concerning the bank by seeking their opinions to make good and clear decisions for the bank. Customer opinions also should be considered when making decisions to improve on their needs and provide them with better services. Banking agents should always listen to the customer needs and queries to facilitate in proper decision making.

The study further recommended that the management through branch managers should open more banking agents across the market to assure the accessibility of bank services at any place and any time. Bank branches should ensure continuous training of the banking agents on transaction methods to facilitate accuracy in transactions.

The bank managers should frequently monitor the services offered by the banking agents and take action in case the service is not offered in accordance to ensure customer satisfaction. Branches should provide banking agents with the direct communication systems to enable flow of information from the customers to the bank through the agents and promote satisfaction.

Lastly, the study recommends that the top management should partner with branch managers in offering training for the banking agents to improve on the services offered to the bank customers. Banking agents should seek advice from the branch managers on the best ways of serving the customers to continually improve on the customer services.

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