

**RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRACTICES, SWITCHING COST AND CUSTOMER  
SATISFACTION AMONG TIER ONE SUPERMARKETS IN NAIROBI COUNTY,  
KENYA.**

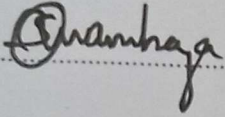
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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
AND MANAGEMENT (MARKETING OPTION), DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION, KENYA METHODIST UNIVERSITY.**

**AUGUST 2021**

## DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree or any other award in any other Universities.

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## **DEDICATION**

TO my parents, Omar Abdallah Chesula and Aisha Nanyama Omar.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding relationship marketing practices and their enhancement of customer satisfaction from consumers' point of view was the area of interest for this study. Grounded on practice theory, Rahim organizational conflict inventory model, Social exchange theory and Expectation disconfirmation theory, the study sought to examine the effect of relationship marketing dimensions: Information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity, on customer satisfaction moderated by switching cost. A positivist paradigm research philosophy guided the study with deductive research approach employed in order to allow for the development of hypotheses by use of existing theories. Quantitative research techniques were employed to analyze data. The study data was attained from a sample size of 384 customers derived from a target population of 1,055,298 tier one supermarket customers within Nairobi county, Kenya. A response rate of 85.68% was attained translating to 329 valid questionnaires. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize data and show meaningful patterns while inferential statistics which included regression and correlation analysis employed to test the study hypotheses. The study models were deemed fit due to significant F statistics at 0.05 level of significance attained for each. From the attained significant beta coefficients, the results revealed that each independent variable was significant in affecting customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi, Kenya since all the null hypothesis,  $H_{01}$ ,  $H_{02}$ ,  $H_{03}$  and  $H_{04}$  were rejected. The study also recorded positive changes in coefficient of determinations for each variable after incorporating the moderating variable 'switching cost' in each respective model. This proved that the moderating variable had a significant positive moderating effect on each independent variable's relationship with customer satisfaction. A moderated multiple regression model with all the study variables acting together also recorded a positive change in coefficient of determination against the non-moderated multiple regression model which led to alternative hypothesis,  $H_{a5}$  being adopted. In addition, the moderated model recorded insignificant betas for information sharing and conflict handling meaning that switching cost had no moderating effect in them in the model. The correlation analysis at 0.01 level of significance revealed information sharing and product customization had a low positive correlation with customer satisfaction while conflict handling and reciprocity had a moderate positive correlation with customer satisfaction. The study therefore concludes that application of relationship marketing practices significantly improve customer satisfaction while presence of switching cost has a positive moderation the relationship. The study therefore recommends that supermarket management should focus on enhancing relationship marketing practices through training of staff as a means of sustaining customer satisfaction with more emphasis on reciprocity. The study filled a knowledge gap concerning relationship marketing practices by theorizing relationship marketing practices based on practice theory in addition to contributing to existing literature by including switching cost as a moderating variable in the model. The study findings shall also be used to improve customer management policy decisions by retail organizations and marketing practitioners. The findings and recommendations can be used to form future research decisions by scholars and researchers even in other sectors of the economy.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
AMA	American Marketing Association
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
B2B	Business-to-business/industrial marketing
B2C	Business-to-consumer marketing or consumer marketing
C2C	Customer to Customer
CEB	Customer Engagement Behaviour
CFO	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CIT	critical incident technique
CL	Customer loyalty
CRM	Customer relationship management
CR	Customer retention
CS	Customer satisfaction
EDT	Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
FMCG	Fast-moving consumer goods
FPC	Finite Population Correction
GDP	Gross domestic product
IM	Internal marketing
IMP	Industrial Marketing and Purchasing
IT	Information technology
MANOVA	Multiple Analysis of Variance
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MB	Mixed bundling strategy
MC	Mass Customization
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
PB	Pure bundling strategy
PC	Pure component strategy
PLS-PM	Partial least squares path modeling



PLS-SEM	Partial least squares structural equation modeling
RM	Relationship marketing
RMO	Relationship marketing orientation
ROCI II	Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory model ii
RQ	Relationship Quality
SBM	Scenario based experiments
SC	Switching cost
SCRM	Social customer relationship management
SEM	Structural Equation Model
STD DV	Standard deviation
S-M-C-R	Source, Message, Channel, and Receiver.
SMS	Short message service
SQRT AVE	Square root of Average Variance Extracted
TQM	Total Quality Management
VIF	Variance-inflating factor

ZOT      Zone of Tolerance

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the study

Retailing is one of the largest industry in the world and the biggest sources of employment in many countries (Sivanesan & Green, 2019). Supermarkets are just one of the many forms of retailing. As seen from the early-1990s, retail stores and, supermarkets have been rapidly increasing market shares in many developing countries. Good relationship between the industry players and their customers is very vital in ensuring customer satisfaction and repeat business that can guarantee continuous growth (Antonio, 2017). It is vital for supermarkets to retain customers while at the same time continuously attract new ones. This requires adequate understanding of their needs, wants and service expectations.

The last decades global financial instability coupled by the current Covid 19 pandemic which necessitated restrictive measures to customer movements has pushed supermarkets to reexamine their operating assumptions (Wyman, 2020). Companies are a live to the fact that new customer acquisition rates are slower than ever before and attention has now shifted to ensuring that the existing customers are satisfied and enhance switching barriers. The change in focus to customer satisfaction has also necessitated the need to relook into competitive advantage models that are sustainable like relationship marketing (Mahmoud et al., 2018). This has led to the adoption of relationship marketing by supermarkets.

Kenyan GDP growth is also dependent majorly on supermarkets among other drivers and therefore the supermarkets aid in the transformation of the country towards realization of vision 2030 (Onyango, 2014). According to Kithae et al. (2012) Kenya's vision 2030 objective is to help the transformation of the country into a middle income and well industrialized country with better citizenry living standards by the year 2030.

In addition, Kiriinya and Kirimi (2015) noted that Kenya's vision 2030 also is set to push the growth rate of the country's GDP by approximately 10% average value. This they assert that it will need a committed governance system that is able to not only promote development of new companies but also protecting the ones already in existence. This can also be achieved through alleviation of any current impediments that can hinder growth. Removal of unfair competition and marketing and competitive practices. Marketing has emerged as one of the services that acts as a catalyst in ensuring that industries and sectors of the economy thrive. The success of supermarkets in Kenya is therefore a big contribution towards the attainment of vision 2030 and healthy competition in the sector is good for the customers as the product and service delivery will greatly improve.

### **1.1.1 The concept of customer satisfaction**

Satisfaction can be defined as the post purchase evaluation of the overall service or product experience by consumers where the needs and expectations have been met or exceeded (Solate, 2018). In addition, Vesel and Zabkar (2010) defines customer satisfaction a minds emotional state that a customer attains when his or her expectations are met. Oliver (2014) looks at

customer satisfaction in terms of how an experience generates positive feelings. Furthermore, Kotler and Keller (2016) looked at customer satisfaction as the level of happiness attained from a product's performance in comparison to his/her expectations. This therefore means that there will be a satisfaction continuum where at the highest level will be above expectation which leads to a very satisfied customer, as per expectation leads to a satisfied customer while below expectation leads to a dissatisfied customer.

Based on the work of Suchánek and Králová (2019) customer satisfaction can be classified into either transactional customer satisfaction or cumulative customer satisfaction. Transactional customer satisfaction is based on evaluation of specific individual purchases after their implementation. They are also considered short term in nature. On the other hand, cumulative customer satisfaction also referred to as general satisfaction, is the overall experience of a purchase, thus the product and the service including an evaluation of the service provider. Unlike transactional customer satisfaction, cumulative customer satisfaction is long term and wider in scope.

Marketing research has had the concept of customer satisfaction analyzed extensively (Koklic et al., 2017). A research paper by Suhaniya and Thusyanthy (2016) noted that more than 500 studies on the subject were conducted in the 1970s. The expectation disconfirmation theory helps to understand several elements of satisfaction (Au & Tse, 2019; Richard et al., 2018). Through the work of Moraru and Duhnea (2018) we observe that some marketing researchers view customer satisfaction as a process while others consider it an outcome. The shift in attention to

relationship marketing from the yester years transactional marketing has also seen customer satisfaction gain more attention (Hoppner et al., 2015).

In retailing, it's believed that the success of an organization or business entity like a supermarket is pegged on customer satisfaction (Al-Ali et al., 2015). Store atmosphere, store accessibility, product and service quality, relationship with customers, pricing policy, convenience and brand image have been identified from previous research as the main determinants of customer satisfaction in supermarkets (Al-Ali et al., 2015; Wenwei & Tongtong, 2010). Satisfied customers have a lot of contribution to the profitability of a company as they engage in re-purchases as well as offering positive reviews and recommendations that end up attracting new purchasers (Muturi, 2018). Customer satisfaction is also a measure of relationship quality (Ndubisi & Natarraajan, 2018).

### **1.1.2 The concept of relationship marketing**

Sheth et al. (2012) noted that by the 1980s and 1990s, relationship marketing had emerged as a distinct branch of marketing. Some literature indicates that the concept was originally mentioned by Berry Leonard in 1983, through his service marketing conference paper. Scholars contend that the concept of RM has brought about a shift in marketing thinking by moving the focus from the old "4Ps model" which is more transactional (Berry, 2016; Islam, 2018).

The RM concept has been acknowledged as a new marketing concept and even attributed as the current marketing era by scholars like Kotler (2018) but yet to be fully supported in marketing literature and empirical studies. There are different definitions of RM. According to O'Malley

(2018), it is a set of interactions and networks. Other scholars have noted that the term relationship marketing is reflects different perspectives and marketing themes (broad and narrow) and also somewhat paradigmatic in their approach and orientation (Hibbard, 2015). One of the narrow perspectives of relationship marketing is to consider it only as a customer retention tool to support after sales marketing. With a lot of Information technology application in relationship marketing, tools like Customer Relationship Management (CRM) which puts a lot of emphasis on customer one-to-one or individual relationship and also integrates some database knowledge with organizations growth strategy and long term customer retention has also been developed which also provides a narrow view of relationship marketing (Sheth et al., 2015).

Those scholars holding a broader view of RM perceive it as a strategic tool for an organization (Adrian & Pennie, 2017). The strategic view of RM holds the customer always comes first and no more manipulation of them by any marketing activity be it telling or selling and there is honest communicating with customers and also sharing the knowledge with the customers (customer involvement) (Sheth et al., 2012). According to Berry (2016) RM is a practice involving the process of attracting customers, maintaining them and finally ensuring enhancement of those relationships especially in multi-service organizations. Berry's notion resembles that of service marketing by scholars like Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) who perceived RM as a marketing strategy that establishes, endeavors to keep, and also improve the relationships at a profit, the aim being, meeting the objectives of every party. This is guaranteed through nurturing exchanges that are beneficial to all parties and ensuring that all promises are fulfilled (Gummesson, 2017).

Based on the work of Hunt (2017) some scholars have taken a process view of relationship marketing. This view currently prevails in most literature. The relationship marketing process has distinct stages among them; planned communication and core interaction that can provide a means for proper dialog with customers, and in it enhance creation of customer value (Grönroos, 2017). To add on, Malarvizhi et al. (2018) in their article indicated that relationship marketing is a process aimed at attracting stakeholders and ensuring that the established relationship is maintained, but if need be the same relationship can be ended at a profit, in order to ensure that each parties objectives are achieved through the enhanced mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises.

There are several factors that scholars believe initiated the rise and growth of relationship marketing; to start with, most organizations globally were struggling to be service oriented which requires high level of relationship building (Gaurav, 2014; Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014; Mulki & Stock, 2003). Secondly, developments attributed to information technology is another factor to consider, for example it is now easier to create social media networks due to Information technology linkages (Berné et al., 2015). In addition, most organizations are striving to be strategic in nature thus, competitive, global, have a niche and also harness on information especially now that the world is embracing knowledge economy. This assumptions have been supported by the works of (Hansen et al., 2017). In order to have a better performance through competitive advantage, firms are advised to embrace relationship portfolios through relationship marketing which can help firms in identifying suitable partners with the requisite capabilities and expectations that can enhance fulfilment of mutual goals. It further helps in evaluating



relationship marketing performance through comparison of set objectives against achieved results (Brodie, 2017; Grönroos, 2017).

According to Baker and Saren (2016) the emergence of relationship marketing as an important school of marketing was influenced by several interconnected marketing research streams developed since 1970. There are a number of distinct schools of thought that can help people to understand the developments of relationship marketing theory and practice. Palmer et al. (2005) looked at three distinct schools. Thus the Nordic School of thought, the IMG group, and the third being the Anglo-Australian approach. Söilen (2013) on the other hand, discussed two distinct approaches. Thus, the instrumental approach and the Anglo-Saxon school of thought as the first approaches and the relational approach, associated to the Nordic school of thought as the second approach (Karlsson & Le, 2018).

Below, we review the schools of thought identified by Palmer et al. (2005) in their study. To start with, the Nordic School of thought has been described as a relational approach to relationship marketing that emerged around 1980. The advocates of the school focused on integrative service marketing which was now challenging the conventional marketing techniques which were seen as only focusing on the 4Ps (Product, Price, Placement and Promotion (Gummerus et al., 2017; Gummesson & Grönroos, 2012). The Nordic Schools also identified the interaction, dialogue and value processes as being the three core processes in building relationship marketing (Gummerus, 2015).

Another important school in understanding relationship marketing practices is the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group approach. This approach looks at relationship marketing as an interaction between parties majorly in B2B markets context (Palmer et al., 2005). The approach also stresses the fact that transactions in business are not isolated processes but rather are part of a continuous stream of events. In addition, parties with time will form part of a network of business relationships to enhance their business positions (Sheth et al., 2012).

The Anglo-Australian school is also another noble stream of relationship marketing approach whose context was mainly on B2C and B2B relationships (Brito, 2011). The perspective perceives traditional marketing as being improved in terms of service and quality eventually generating a comprehensive approach that enhances value levels to customers as they endure relationships with the company (Brito, 2011). The contributors of this school of thought were individuals who studied at Cranfield School of Management. They include Francis Buttle and Adrian Payne, Christopher Martin and Ballantyne David. The work of Buttle is recognized for its contribution in areas concerning customer relationship values and analysis of customer (Rahimi, 2017). On the other hand the other authors Payne, Christopher, and David, are acknowledged for their contribution in the field of relations with their “Model of 6 Markets” (Badi et al., 2017). The model acts as a company’s relationship management tool with its markets, thus: Supplier and alliance market, customer market, referral market, internal market, influence market, and recruitment market (Brito, 2011).

Despite of the schools of thought identified and discussed above, scholars have given varied total number of the RM schools of thought an observation also supported by the work of Ranjan

(2017). For example, Shirshendu et al. (2009) and Brodie et al. (1997) each group of researchers identified six schools of thought. Thus, (Nordic School, Relational exchange school, Superior customer value school, IMP Group school, Customer advocacy school, and Corporate strategy school) and (Channel efficiency & effectiveness school, Nordic school, Interaction relationship school, Network school, Role of value within chain school and Impact of IT on relationship school) respectively. Ballantyne (1994) identifies five schools of thought (Nordic School, Anglo-Australian Perspective, IMP Group, Chinese business relationship perspective, and American Service orientation); Grönroos (1997) documented four schools (Nordic school, North American Perspective School, IMP Group School, and Anglo-Australian Perspective School).

### **1.1.3 Global supermarket retailing**

Niculae (2008) noted that global trends of competition between supermarkets is increasingly fierce and that one of the biggest problems is that more than 75% of customers say that all retail stores look alike; while a third of the customers feel that there is no difference between products and services. The aim of any retail marketing strategy in the last few years was and it still has to be repeat purchase and greater commitment from the customer hence reducing the risk of customer defections (Ascarza et al., 2018; Niculae, 2008).

According to Andersson et al. (2015), some scholars concur that the expansion of supermarkets can be classified into three distinctive waves with the first wave taking place in Southern Africa, South American countries and East Asian countries where it was observed that the market share of supermarkets increased from about 10% of retail sales in 1990, to about 60% in the mid-

2000s. Countries in central America, southeast Asia and even Mexico, experienced the second wave where it was observed that there was an increase from about 5%–10% to 30%–50% of market share by mid-2000s. The last wave was experienced in Asian countries of India, China and Vietnam as from late 1990s where there was a steady annual sales growth rate which by mid-2000s, had risen to between 30% and 50%. In their contribution, Reardon et al. (2008) recognize an additional wave, which they term as the fourth wave which took off in sub-Saharan countries including Kenya. In this region, the organized supermarket shares are small but significantly growing.

The world retail industry is experiencing radical changes owing to the rapid evolution of consumer needs (Kasemsap, 2018). Many supermarkets are now contending that going global is now a competitive necessity irrespective of the retailers size, this is in order to ensure that they access larger markets for their survival just like SMEs (Dutot et al., 2014; Hosseini et al., 2019). Emerging economy retail firm's internationalization process is involving moving from exports to direct investment in foreign lands and this is measured through both exporting and foreign purchasing (Gaur et al., 2014; Kasemsap, 2018). Despite of the above trends, implementation of retail marketing globally or locally has had little consideration.

Saturation of markets also occasioned by internationalization have increased competition in global fashion retailing. Organizations now have to utilize RM to create stable relationships with their clients (Santini et al., 2018; Thompson, 2012). The brand success as well as keeping in touch with customers through both marketing mix adaptation and standardization strategies of Zara a Spanish clothing and accessories retailer by utilizing relationship marketing is a typical

example of what relationship marketing can help companies achieve in retailing (Thompson, 2012; Hahn, 2020).

Walmart one of the worlds largest supermarket chains in its product recommendation system applies one of the relationship marketing practices “personalization” which helps them match their product offerings to the individual customer needs (Xu et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2016). Same strategy is executed by Nikes, whose retailing strategy involves probing customer needs through personal questions whose answers are eventually used to tailor shoes for those customers and deliver to local store (Balasubramanian et al., 2017; Feng & Qian, 2014).

SPAR group a leading retailer in South Africa and presumed one of the leading supermarket chains in Africa has created advocacy-oriented programs to enable customers recommend the supermarket to other consumers who are non-shoppers of the retailer. Targeted couponing is one method that they are using in order to ensure current customers are retained and are able to spread the good word to potential customers (Duggal & Verma, 2019; Shailesh & Reddy, 2016).

#### **1.1.4 The supermarket sector in Kenya**

Supermarket sector in Kenya falls under the larger Kenyan retail sector. It is worth noting that the major distributors of household goods in Kenya are the retail outlets. Kenya’s retain industry or market is considered one of the most developed in Africa, only second to South Africa as reported by the Oxford Business Group. Their report also observed that the growth of the retail sector is also the fastest within the continent. Within the country, Kenyan firms are the most dominant with about 25 key retail firms and thought to be controlling 98.1% share of the

approximate \$7 billion market while only 1.79% is controlled by foreign multinationals (Kanoga et al., 2015; Muturi, 2018; Tanui, 2018).

Kenya's retail sector structure is a replica of trends reported from world's major economies (Chesula & Nkobe, 2018). Analysts at financial advisory firm Strat Link noted that with an increase in middle class and additional disposable incomes, the sector has maintained a steady expansion rate of 30% putting it the list of the most sort after long term investment in sub-Saharan Africa despite some cash flow problems that have collapsed some giants in the sector. In addition, Reardon et al. (2008) attribute the increase in supermarkets in Kenya and their growth to many factors, among them; urbanization; lifestyle changes, market liberalization and a growing middle class, all these having an increased competitive effect in the sector. The concept of supermarkets is not new in Kenya with reports indicating that by the 1960s the country had the initial stores (Imbambi & Kinoti, 2017; Ochieng, 2017).

In Kenya, the sector has undergone a lot of changes as many locals venture into it in addition to foreigners through supermarkets (Demmler et al., 2017; Njoroge, 2015). In recent years international supermarkets like Carrefour, Choppies, Massmart, Shoprite and Game have been entering the Kenyan market imposing new competitive pressures in the industry's companies, which in turn has created the necessity for competitiveness to acquire and retain customers and market share (Muturi, 2018). Proctor and Gamble survey in 2017 valued the sector as a ksh 1.8 trillion and also projected it annual growth at about 10% over the next 10-15 years (Kimotho, 2017). However, with Kenyas reported low GDP growth rate and a 35% retail penetration rate especially from 2017, some retail leaders have struggled to stay afloat a situation worsened by

loss of market share to foreign firms like Game, Shoprite, Choppies, and Carrefour, with others like Wal-Mart contemplating a return to the market (Joyce et al., 2017; Kariuki & Ngugi, 2018).

The mid '90s experienced the highest growth of supermarkets in the country as the total number increased from about 5 known stores to over 300 stores (Kiruga, 2013). The dominant players over the past six years included Nakumatt which had 66 branches though most branches are now closed or bound to be closed (Some, 2017). Nakumatt was a privately owned retail chain valued at over Kenya shillings 50 billion at its operational peak (Herbling, 2013; Wiersinga & De Jager, 2009). Tuskys supermarket chain and Uchumi supermarket chains are the other oldest and major chain in the country (Mwangi, 2018). The sector attributes the concept of having hypermarkets to Uchumi. Other key retail chains are Chandarana, Naivas, Ukwala, and Eastmatt.

According to data from Nielsen emerging market Insight (2015), 30% of Kenyans conduct their shopping in formal retail outlets. Formal retail outlets in Kenya are represented by major supermarkets which have branches/outlets in major urban areas across the country. Nairobi and its environs have the highest number of supermarket outlets (Herbling, 2013). The major supermarkets in Nairobi County are; Tuskys, Naivas, Eastmatt, The Game Store, Choppies, Carrefour Hypermarket, Tumaini/ Quick mart, Nakumatt, Food plus Chandarana, Clean shelf, Mathai and Uchumi. For purposes of this study, the four five tier one supermarkets in terms of number of retail outlets in Nairobi were used. These are Tuskys, Naivas, Carrefour, Tumaini/Quick mart.

### **1.1.5 Tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County**

The supermarket sector in Kenya consists of three tiers (Makori et al., 2016). The third tier represents independent (single-store) supermarkets and small chains. Those in the second tier consist of supermarkets competing for purchases by low-income consumers in urban areas as well as the middle-income urban consumers. Lastly, tier one supermarkets are large multilane supermarkets that offer a variety of high-quality goods and services sourced mainly directly from producers or manufacturers. Some of them target high end consumers while others target consumers from all socio-economic classes (Josphat, 2019; Njenga, 2012; Solarmart, 2012). Among the big tier one supermarket in Nairobi which are of interest for this study include, Tuskys, Naivas, Carrefour and Tumaini/Quick mart.

Tuskys supermarket which has its head office in Nairobi along Mombasa road at Gami Properties Complex, is a Kenyan privately owned company that started as a small retail store in Nakuru in 1990. It was formerly known as tusker mattresses (Kimani, 2012). In April 2013, the supermarket entered a private deal with one of its competitors Ukwala in order to buy six Ukwala stores in Nairobi area. Some of the stores were successfully acquired but others were cancelled by the Competition Authority of Kenya (CAK) (Mutegi, 2014). Tuskys supermarket is currently the leading supermarket in Kenya in terms of market share and retail outlets. The now regional retailer has 55 branches in Kenya and 7 branches in Uganda. In Nairobi it has 29 retail outlets (Odhiambo, 2018).



Naivas Limited is also fully owned Kenyan Company which was registered on 24 July 1990. It started trading in Nakuru within an estate called Rongai under the name Rongai Self Service Stores Limited. The supermarket later changed its name to Naivasha Self Service Stores Limited, before re-branding to the current Naivas Limited, in 2007. The supermarkets headquarters are housed at Sameer Business Park in Nairobi. It maintains outlets in major urban centres. The chain is now the second largest only behind Tuskys (Odhiambo, 2018). The company has no stores outside Kenya but has an ambitious expansion plan. This includes increasing retail outlets within the country. At the moment, the company maintains 47 stores within the country and 25 in Nairobi (Mwakio, 2018; Otieno, 2018).

Carrefour retail chains consider themselves the third largest retail chain in Kenya. The retail chain is owned by the Majid Al Futtaim retail which was established in 1992 and growing to become a leading retail, shopping mall and leisure pioneer across North Africa and Middle East. The retail chain company entered the Kenyan market in 2016 and has since opened 8 supermarkets in Nairobi County. Outlets in malls vacated by former retail giants Uchumi and Nakumatt have been taken over by Carrefour (Herbling, 2013; Miriri, 2019; Wainainah, 2019).

Sokoni Retail Kenya Limited boasts of operating a total of 9 retail outlets within Nairobi county under the brand names of Tumaini supermarket and Quickmart supermarket. The retailer intends to merge the two supermarkets into a single giant retailer having secured approval from the competition authority of Kenya in 2019 (Ciuri, 2019). Both Tumaini supermarket and Quickmart supermarket were established in Kenya in 2006. Quickmart now boasts of a total of 10 supermarkets within the country, 4 of them being within Nairobi county. Tumaini supermarket

under Tumaini self-service limited had its main ambition to offer fast moving consumer goods to Nairobi residents living in Eastland areas of Embakasi, Pipeline, Outering, Donholm among other areas. The supermarket now boasts of 12 retail outlets in Kenya with 8 in Nairobi and its environs (Otieno, 2019). It has also expanded to other cities like Kisumu where it has a supermarket store in Kondele. Sokoni Retail Kenya Limited was incorporated and specially used by a private equity firm, Adenia Partners, to invest in Tumaini Self Service Limited in December 2018. The supermarket now owns 6 retail outlets in Nairobi County (Gichane, 2019; Kamau, 2016; Odhiambo, 2018).

There is increased competition the supermarket sector in different countries. At the same time, attaining customer satisfaction is paramount for any business that needs to maintain long term profitability. The application of relationship marketing in various fields including the supermarket sector is presumed to provide several advantages. According to Yeh et al. (2018), relationship marketing is treated as a strategic tool and is expected to bring stability to the company by increasing barriers to entry and enhancement of suppliers and customer retention. On the other hand, with relationship marketing, customers enjoy long term and closer relationships expected to yield the following three major benefits: Economic benefits which can be visible when discounts and other monetary benefits are extended to them; social benefits which looks at issues like friendship, familiarity and information-sharing; and lastly product or service customization (O'Malley, 2018). It would be beneficial to test whether these benefits hold in the Kenyan supermarket context and hence the selection of tier one supermarket customers for the study.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Increased competition and less product and service differentiation experienced in the retail industries across the world including leading economies like America, India and China, the players are experiencing more challenges of preventing customers from switching. The same trend has been experienced in Africa where foreign companies have been increasing their footprint through foreign direct investments, mergers, and acquisitions (Catherine et al., 2019). Research firm Deloitte in their African powers of retailing report of 2015 indicate that East Africa's shopping environment is also undergoing an evolution as private equity firms are investing big on the regions retail sector by venturing in multibillion malls and centers which supermarkets are scrambling to occupy thereby increasing competition (Muturi, 2018). Consequently, this has necessitated the adoption of relationship marketing strategies for service differentiation.

There are several challenges facing marketers as far as relationship marketing and customer satisfaction are concerned which need to be fully understood so that they can be efficiently addressed. Bojei and Abu (2014) indicated that the use of single dimension or at most three dimensions in majority of the relationship marketing studies to measure relationship marketing practices oversimplify the study especially since very few attempts have been made to develop a universal valid measure for relationship marketing and the gap is even more especially when the measurement is from customers or consumers point of view. Furthermore, researchers like (Datta, 2018; Hoppner et al., 2015; Ryu & Lee, 2017), noted that the influence of some of the relationship marketing practices such as information sharing, product customization, conflict

handling, and reciprocity, on customer satisfaction has not yet been clarified. Therefore, it was not obvious which one if any is dominant in influencing customer satisfaction.

Relationship marketing literature also has limited proof of scholarly work on practice theory in guiding the determination and development of relationship marketing practices. It's the researcher's opinion that no proof existed in relationship marketing literature concerning its practices in the context of practice theory. In addition, switching cost as a valid moderating variable in relationship marketing models is also not clear and scholars like Hadi et al. (2019) recommended further research on the subject. Bergel and Brock (2018) opines that there still existed much ambiguity in relationship marketing literature concerning the influence of switching cost on customer purchase decisions. Its role as a moderator on the relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction relationship has not been clarified (Bergel & Brock, 2018; Ngo & Pavelková, 2017). At the theoretical level this study therefore, was an opportunity to improve the existing understanding of the complex relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction.

The competitive rivalry in Kenya as observed by Muturi (2018) has also been enhanced by an increase in number of new supermarket entrants in the sector both local and foreign. Catherine et al. (2019) noted that the enormous increases in supermarkets have also led to customers supermarket outlet freedom of choice. As a result, the increased number of supermarkets is forced to pursue very few new customers. On the basis of those circumstances, supermarkets are left with no choice but to commit their resources to retaining present customers by ensuring they are loyal and keep returning an assumption supported by Singh and Khan (2012); Chinomona

and Dubihlela (2014). Empirical review suggests that studies with similar scope have largely been confined to developed economies where large multinationals like Wal-Mart and SPAR group are the primary focus in many cases (Duggal & Verma, 2019; Hoque et al., 2017; Mandal, 2020; Ranjan, 2017; Hahn, 2020; Xu et al., 2019). Consequently, this study is among the first studies on relationship marketing within the Kenyan supermarket sector and customer satisfaction. It is in this view that the study sought to investigate the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya as moderated by switching cost, by use of four relationship marketing constructs mainly anchored on practice theory.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to establish the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya as moderated by switching cost.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

Objectives that the study sought to address are outlined in this section.

#### **1.4.1 General Objective**

To examine the effect of relationship marketing practices and switching cost on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To determine the effect of information sharing on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya;
- ii. To establish the effect of product customization on customer satisfaction among tier one Supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya;
- iii. To examine the effect of conflict handling on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya;
- iv. To establish the effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya;
- v. To examine the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

### **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

The study sought to address the following pertinent research hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: Information sharing has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

H<sub>02</sub>: Product customization has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

H<sub>03</sub>: Conflict handling has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

H<sub>04</sub>: Reciprocity has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

H<sub>05</sub>: Switching cost does not significantly moderate the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

### **1.6 Justification of the study**

Creswell and Creswell (2017) observed that justification of a study explains the importance of the study. The study aimed to benefit several stakeholders in the marketing and management system among them; Supermarket management, marketing and management practitioners, government policy makers and finally it was also meant to benefit scholars and academicians in marketing and management field.

To start with, by enhancing supermarket management understanding of information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity in relational business, the study aimed at improving their marketing practice especially in enhancing CRM. The importance of the study relationship marketing practice variables is intended to also enhanced their understanding of relationship marketing in the overall marketing toolbox and some empirical reviews captured in the study even suggest that RM importance in creating customer value is sufficient for the

variables to be considered new marketing mix tools that should be adequately utilized in enhancing customer satisfaction. This in general means that the study will be very influential in improving relationship marketing strategies by supermarket management and related business managers.

Secondly, the study intends to benefit marketing and management practitioners in several ways. To start with, a lot of theoretical discussions on relationship marketing indicate that its main aim is to guarantee mutual benefit for each party by enhancing marketing productivity. This is done by increasing marketing effectiveness and improving marketing efficiencies (Sheth et al., 2012). RM redefines an organizations competitiveness by actualizing strategic marketing goals like product customization thereby improving marketing effectiveness. Likewise, RM practices help in realizing operational goals, such as reduction in customer acquisition costs achieved by having satisfied customers who will enhance loyalty, positive word of mouth, referrals, and recommendations, this translates to achievement of better marketing efficiency.

The conceptual and theoretical knowledge of RM in this study intends to helps marketing and management practitioners shape such strategies. Furthermore, it is only after relationship marketing school of thoughts emerged that marketing has experienced a shift from the tangible goods exchange thought which was the dominant marketing logic towards the new logic of exchanging intangible, (processes, knowledge, and specialized skills). This is important because marketing and management practitioners point of differentiation and competition shifts to the new concept which is enhanced by this study.



The government being one of the key stakeholders in retail business in Kenya which is one of the sectors that need to grow to attain vision 2030, the study is expected to benefit them especially the policy makers in promoting the growth of the sector through understanding relational factors that touch on business environment in the supermarket sector. Government policy makers can also use information from the study to develop industry improvement policies that will benefit both existing as well as potential investors with an aim of growing the economy at large.

The study is also intended to benefit scholars and academicians especially in marketing and other management fields. In enhancing the marketing body of knowledge, the study as tried to align relationship marketing practices with the practice theory a new concept in relationship marketing literature. In addition, the introduction of switching cost as a moderating variable in the study model will go a long way in helping scholars understand its moderating effect and perhaps do more studies to proof or disproof its effect even in other study scopes. The incorporation of relationship marketing constructs with few empirical literatures meant that more insight for the benefit of knowledge could be attained for the benefit of scholars and academicians. The limitation of the study in terms of scope and time means that it also opens channels for further research and academic discussion on RM practices and customer satisfaction in relation to the supermarket sector in Kenya as well as other sectors and regions.

### **1.7 Scope of the study**

The study was conducted in Kenya's supermarket sector with a focus on Nairobi County's tier one supermarkets RM practices and their effect on CS as moderated by switching cost. The study

was conducted in selected supermarkets within Nairobi County as outlined in appendix ii and table 3.3 respectively. The study also relied only on the primary information that was derived from supermarket shoppers (customers). The study worked within the academic timelines as well as the timeline provided by the acquired license from the research licensing government agency, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) hence necessitating the study to be undertaken between October 2019 and March 2020.

### **1.8 Assumptions of the study**

The study was conducted under the assumption that participants and intended respondents would cooperate and provide information as sought by the researcher. It was also expected that the tight schedule of participants and respondents would leave no time for them to adequately participate or answer to the research questions. To ensure possibility of this assumption, the researcher made prior arrangement with participants and respondents through research assistants.

Secondly the study was also conducted under the assumption that the respondents were conversant with those relationship marketing practices carried out by supermarkets and switching costs in supermarkets and their effect on customer satisfaction. The researcher used customers within individual supermarkets as respondents in order to ensure possibility of the assumption.

### **1.9 Limitations of the study**

This study just like most research had limitations that are important to note since some of the limitations can also form decisions on future research. To start with, even though the choice of

tier one supermarkets was meant to enhance the distribution of respondents across Nairobi County with highly recognized supermarket brands most respondents with greater insight might have been left out owing to the spatial distribution of the tier one supermarkets in their locality. Additionally, Nairobi being the capital city of Kenya, the supermarket business dynamics might be different because of the cosmopolitan and relatively affluent nature of the residents, the sample might not be good for generalization to the entire Kenyan population of supermarket shoppers.

Secondly, despite the questionnaires being acceptable, there is always the fear of sample bias which the researcher acknowledges could have been caused by the need to balance respondents from different constituencies within Nairobi county, the need to have respondents with varied income levels among other considerations. None the less all data collection procedures were held consisted among all the sample respondents. Lastly, the researcher had strict timelines and hence performed the study between October 2019 and March 2020. To counter this limitation, the study employed and trained research assistants to aid in data collection stage.

### **1.10 Operational definition of terms**

**Information sharing:** In the study context, information sharing signifies the exchange of true information between parties accurately and in a timely manner (Hidayat et al., 2019). This might include product or service information, production, and supply capacities information.

**Product customization:** Occurs when a product or service is rendered with variations on existing configurations to suite different sets of customers (Bleier et al., 2018; Fogliatto et al.,

2012; Gomes & Pavan, 2018). For example, difference in price due to difference in purchasing power, difference in package design in order to break bulk and repackaging to suite personal consumption.

**Conflict handling:** The service providers ability in minimization of the negative consequences of a conflict which can either be the just manifested ones or even the potential ones. It entails resolution or the process of solving a conflict (Constantinescu, 2017; Rahim, 2017).

**Customer satisfaction:** Is an individual's pleasure feeling attained through comparison of a products real performance or service with the customers' expectations. (Ali & Raza, 2017). It is also the affective state of the customer towards a service provider examined over time based on the entire period of their exchange relationship (Otto et al., 2019).

**Covid 19:** Also referred to as Corona Virus is an infectious disease that primarily spreads through infectious person sneezing and coughing producing small droplets (Xu & Chraibi, 2020).

**Reciprocity:** It can also be understood as the expectation that sellers and buyers or customers will positively respond to each other by repaying favourable benefits to favourable benefits (Hoppner et al., 2015).

**Switching costs:** Switching costs arise from all impacts that a substitute can have on the buyer's value chain, including any linkages with the supplier's value chain. Consumers are faced with this costs when they want to change between substitutes (Avgeropoulos & Sammut-Bonnici, 2015; Richards & Liaukonyte, 2018).

**Supermarket:** Self service retail stores (Renaud & Victoria-Feser, 2010). They can also be defined as large self-service shops that offer a variety of products such as groceries, households, furniture and foodstuffs among others with a centralized check out facilities (Mahajar & Yunus, 2010).

**Tier one supermarkets:** Large multilane supermarkets that offer a variety of high-quality goods and services sourced mainly directly from producers or manufacturers in addition to having wide branch network and operations (Neven et al., 2006; Nzuve, 2018).

**Yellow Pages:** Is an advertising agency that operates both digitally and manually offering a complete and comprehensive listings of businesses, their contact details including email addresses for email marketing, social media and also contain data feed portals that are personalized for each business to be able to send their information to the largest online web directories (Yellow pages directory inc, nd).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives a review of literature pertaining to relationship marketing. It starts by reviewing theories supporting the study constructs then build on by giving an overview of the conceptual framework and literature on study variable. The chapter also delves into analysis of preceding studies which have been done in the study area through empirical review section. Finally, the chapter ends by critiquing existing literature, establishing study gaps and a summary of the entire chapter.

#### **2.2 Theoretical review**

The objective of theoretical review was to position the study within the existing theories by describing relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction with related theories and how they were to be used in explain the objectives of the study. The study relied more on the below theories to explain the research objectives.

##### **2.2.1 Practice Theory**

Practice theory as propagated by Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) states that human beings are social beings with different intentions and motives which helps them to make and transform the world which they live in and in doing so, they develop actions which if linked together form an agglomeration of practices. These practices according to Fligstein and McAdam (2015) may

be linked together to constitute domains, fields or systems. Relationship marketing as a distinct domain in the marketing field can therefore have a shared understanding on what to do and say in order to satisfy consumers and these shall be referred to as RM practices.

To understand practice theory perspective in relation to relationship marketing, we start by looking at the definition of a social practice as provided by different scholars and even though, there is no precise agreement among scholars on this issue, most of them contribute to a general definition where they content that practices persist as recognizable sets of actions (Ryfe, 2018). Examples include everything from shopping, teaching, and of course, relationship marketing. Practices are also routine doings and sayings undertaken by individuals who are knowledgeable about the actions and capable. These can be professionals like marketers who are carriers of the practice (Lamers et al., 2017).

Looking at the work of Schatzki (2016) we can deduce that the existence of practices doesn't depend on an individuals actions but rather they pre-exist those individual actions in the form of shared considerations of what is done and said (Ryfe, 2018). The idea that also promoted differentiation and specialization comes from the notion of having a shared understanding within a specific field (Durkheim, 2014). For example, when one specializes in relationship marketing, then he or she only practices what relationship marketing holds which is unique and different from other fields. And differentiation of practices even within a field shall revolve around a shared or common purpose. At such a situation the common purpose becomes the unifying factor that gives order and stability (Luhmann, 1982). This study looked at the differentiated relationship marketing practices but still retained the common goal of customer satisfaction.

There is limited proof on the application of practice theories in the area of relationship marketing. In this section we discuss how practice theory can be beneficial to relationship marketing relationship marketing studies and more importantly this study. Even though not as a fields next paradigm but rather as a theory that can offer RM new ways of addressing pertinent issues central to the field, such as relationship marketing in everyday retailing life, practices that consumers can easily recognize and which they perceive important. Despite of the expected contributions, the theory is not expected to answer all questions and hence other models shall also be used. For example, practice theory is not expected to answer the question concerning the moderating role of switching cost. In relationship marketing just like other study areas, practices comprise both actions and what is said, signifying that analysis must be focused on both real activity and its illustrations. Practices also relate to the performance. Thus, the implementation of practices, or the execution of the actions and what is said which objectifies and sustains practices (Schatzki, 2016; Warde, 2005).

Based on the work of Hui et al. (2016) who drew dissimilarity between dispersed practices and the integrative ones. They explained that dispersed practices are the ones that appear in parts of our social life, giving examples of abiding by the rules, visualisation, and elucidation. Integrative practices are 'complex practices found in and constitutional of certain areas of social life (Schatzki, 2016). Instances in marketing, includes relationship marketing practices. These comprise, occasionally in particular forms, dispersed practices (Ameer & Halinen, 2019; Bueger & Gadinger, 2018). These are the ones which were of interest to this study and include; information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity.



Notwithstanding the contributions of the theory, some researchers have criticized practice theorists for their thinking on practices does not in itself present means to analyse practices and their organizations (Lammi, 2018). According to Warde (2014) the idea of diversity of practices means that there exist numerous practices in any particular field and individuals are free to choose which ones to engage in. relationship marketing as a field follows the same assumptions and therefore practitioners are free to choose. Based on the foundation of the practice theory, this study looked at the effect of some of the relationship marketing practices (information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity) that have attracted little scholarly attention as also suggested by Su et al. (2016) on customer satisfaction specific to the retail sector in Nairobi, Kenya.

### **2.2.2 Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory model**

The model was developed by Rahim (1983) and looks at various styles of handling interpersonal conflicts. The same was expanded by Rahim (1985) when he developed strategies for managing conflicts in complex organizations. The model's uniqueness and importance is brought about by its emphasis on individual predispositions, the use of communication explicitly as a set of tactics for equalizing any amount of business to customer conflict and its belief in maintaining a balance in the amount of conflict between the organizational staff and customers, and its effectiveness in managing conflict (Weide' Hatfield, 1988). The conflict handling styles propagated by the model include; Integrating, dominating, obliging, compromising and avoiding, (Chen et al., 2016; Rahim, 2017). The model also enhances the conflict handling resolutions propagated by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) as shown in figure 2.1. The model is very vital in helping to develop

understanding on each conflict handling sub variable. Thus, resolving manifest conflict before they make complications and open discussion of resolutions once conflicting issues arise associated with accommodation and compromise.

ROCI II as posited by Rahim (2017) explains the following five styles of conflict handling: To start with, integrating which focuses on problem-solving in a collaborative fashion. In a supermarket set up it means that when the organization and its customers are at loggerheads, it is possible for both parties to come out with mutual understanding. It requires supermarket employees and even management to have skills of resolving conflicts that are anchored on mutual respect, a willingness to serve the customers and be creative in sourcing for solutions.

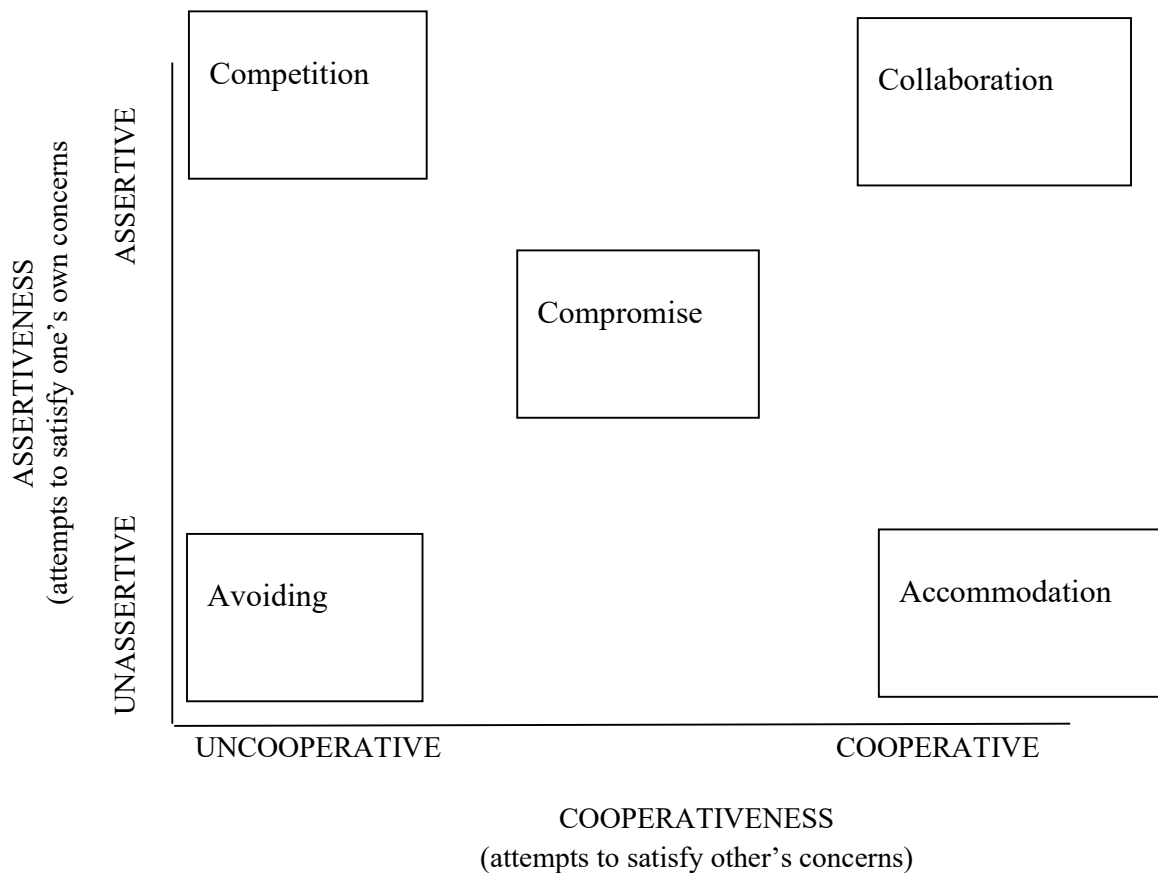
The second one is obliging, also referred to as accommodating which involves putting other parties concerns first and low concern for oneself. The accommodating option also means you take a wholly unassertive and co-operative approach. For supermarkets, this might be giving in to the customers orders when you would desire not to, or yielding to their point of view, in any case “the customer is always right”, a notion advocated by relationship marketing scholars. The third one is dominating or competing which highlights high concern for oneself and low for worry for opposing party. Competing in a supermarket set up means that they employ a culture of being assertive and unco-operative towards customers in any conflicting situation. In relationship marketing this might be viewed as going against the spirit of relationship building but if faced with situation where one conflicts with a client who is not understanding and escalates the conflict, the supermarket has a right to defend its position which it believes is the right position. The fourth style is compromising which means moderate concern for self and

other party. Supermarkets in such a situation would be working to ensure that both sides get something but not everything. It might also mean seeking a rapid solution in the medium ground (Senasu, 2012).

The final style is avoiding which means inaction, postponement or withdrawal or even ignoring the conflict all together (Khalid et al., 2016; Maged et al., 2019). The Avoiding option means that the supermarkets take an unassertive and uncooperative approach to the conflict. They might do this by strategically withdrawing from a threatening situation (Senasu, 2012). The model has been widely used since it has been extensively tested for validity and reliability producing better results than other available instruments. In addition unlike the other instruments, the improved ROCI-II model is relatively free from social desirability response distortion (Rahim, 2011). The conflict handling modes are shown in figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1:**

***Conflict handling modes***



Source: (Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974).

**2.2.3 Social Exchange Theory**

The theory as propagated by Homans (1958) states that the relationships among human beings are designed on the basis of cost-benefit analysis and their comparisons of alternatives (Homans, 1958; Karimi, 2014). The theory can be traced back to at least the 1920s (Lévi-Strauss, 2013). Over time, a number of views concerning the theory have emerged. Theorists like Emerson

(1976) and Cook et al. (2013) agree that social exchange entails a number of interactions which generate individual obligations towards other people. In addition, those interactions appear to be interdependent and reactions subject to the other parties actions (Blau, 1968; Sierra & McQuitty, 2005). The theory has been attributed for bringing new thinking in analysing and understanding relational behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The theory derives a lot of scholarly contribution from different disciplines, among them anthropology, for example Firth (2013), Sahlins and Graeber (2017) work. Contributions from social psychology includes Homans (1958) and Gouldner (1960) research work. Sociologists like Blau (2017) also contributed to the theory.

In trying to understand the concept of information sharing, product customization, reciprocity and the moderating variable switching cost, we look at the social exchange theory as initiated by Homans (1958) who wanted to understand from an economic point of view humans social behaviour. According to Karimi (2014) individuals on the basis of social exchange theory are only ready to entertain and prolong a relationship only if there is clear expectation that in so doing will be rewarding, for example for customers the information they receive is accurate, true and trustworthy or for supermarkets, the relationship leads to development of unique customized products that will be more appealing to consumers driving up sales and customer satisfaction. Against this background, it is apparent that the relationship between an organization like a retail organization and its customers is a social process with the expectation that if employees are respectful and able to build a close and harmonious relationship with clients or customers, then

those clients of customers will interpret that as being interactional fairness, that is expected to generate quality relationship and ultimate satisfaction (Huang, 2015).

In addition, the existing customers will be more loyal if they perceive fairness in the process or the service outcome from encounter with the organization (Adrian & Pennie, 2017; García de Leaniz & Rodríguez Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2015). Good gestures such as equivalence and immediacy are often reciprocated by customers demonstrating favourable relationship quality perceptions that in many cases will result to greater commitment if not increased loyalty (Luu et al., 2018). The opposite also holds and may lead to greater possibility of switching an indication of dissatisfaction (Ndubisi & Ali, 2015).

Social exchange theory provides insightful points upon which important aspects of relationship marketing can be viewed as enhanced by information sharing, product customization, reciprocity and the moderating variable switching costs since customers can define them depending on the service encounters according to Akaka and Vargo (2015). Service providers interaction with clients is a critical component when determining satisfaction and also in considering any long term relationship (Benoit et al., 2016). Despite of its contributions towards understanding relational exchanges, the theory has however received some criticisms from scholars like Cropanzano et al. (2017) who observed that it's not as precise as it should be and hence ends up having limited utility.

#### **2.2.4 Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT)**

The theory was developed by Oliver (1977) and looks at post purchase behaviour or the post adoption behaviour as determined by a customers' expectations, the performance perceived by them, and also the beliefs disconfirmation. In addition, from the explanation by Oliver (1980) in his article on antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions cognitive model, it is clear that consumer satisfaction is treated as a function of expectations and the expectancy disconfirmations (Yi & Natarajan, 2018). The theory also defines satisfaction from two time periods. First, the period before the actual purchase where the customer models his/her service or product performance expectations. Secondly, the period after one has actually purchased a product or service and hence has personally experienced the related service and product performance (Au & Tse, 2019). Disconfirmation of expectations is the difference between the desired and actual service experience and can either be positive or negative (Murray, 2018). If the experience translates to better performance than what was expected then that's a positive disconfirmation of expectation or desire and when one judges the experience to be worse than their expectations then a negative disconfirmation has occurred (Gillison & Reynolds, 2018). Positive disconfirmation is associated with a client's satisfaction since their expectations have been met or even surpassed while negative disconfirmation means they aren't satisfied for example with the outcome of the service and their expectations were never met (Sharma & Srivastava, 2018).

Previous literature identifies different factors and variables regarding customer satisfaction within supermarkets. Based on the expectation disconfirmation theory, one can classify customer

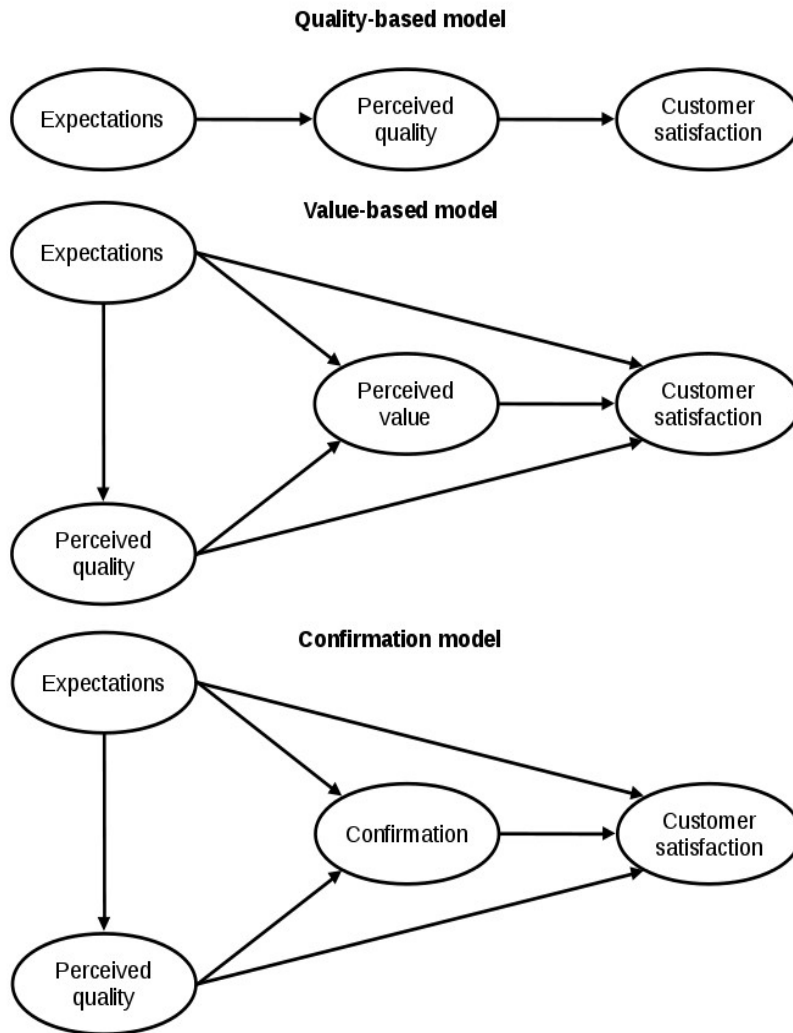
satisfaction in supermarkets as a factor of; perceived quality, perceived value, or confirmation of expectation. On the basis of this, tailoring satisfaction constructs from relationship marketing literature can be best understood using the proposed structures of satisfaction models developed by Biesok and Wyród-Wróbel (2018) as shown in figure 2.2. The study employs all the three models in developing its customer satisfaction measurement constructs. The theory has been commended for its simplicity, for example it allows for subjective judgement of the degree of difference between performance and standards (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012). Despite of its contributions and simplicity of use, some critics like Spreng and Page Jr (2003) have observed that some of the theory's methods of disconfirmation measurement models like Difference score model (DIFF) and direct effects model DEM suffer from low reliability and always assume that pre use expectations are the same as retrieved expectations.

From figure 2.2, this study follows the confirmation model as it supports the development of customer satisfaction variables on the basis of confirmation of a service outcome or experience from previous service encounter.



**Figure 2.2:**

*Customer satisfaction models in supermarkets*



Source: (Jones et al., 2002).

### 2.3 Empirical Review

This section looked at relevant empirical literature on the study variables from different contexts, thus information sharing relationship with CS, product customization and CS, conflict handling

and CS, reciprocity and customer satisfaction and also the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between the independent variables and customer satisfaction.

### **2.3.1 Information sharing and customer satisfaction**

Namagembe et al. (2012) researched on the relationship between information sharing, an organizations inventory management and CS where they used a sample size of five hundred and twenty three respondents consisting of distributors and retailers registered in Kampala Uganda and collected data using survey questionnaires. With a 69% rate of response, their study ascertained that 47.1 % CS variation is attributed explicitly to information sharing. Within the same study they also observed that information sharing had more implication to customer satisfaction than even inventory management which influences stock levels even though most manufacturing firms are not willing to share vital information with chain partners downstream. The study used perception of chain members that are downstream to evaluate CS with sub variables, commitment and trust.

An empirical study undertaken by Khan et al. (2015) on perceived factors affecting CS in China's on line stores and customer intentions to to re-purchase suggests that among the variables that were significant with customer satisfaction was product information. The study obtained data by use of questionnaire survey where 302 usable data was acquired and subjected to multiple regression whose results were used to make a determination of the study hypotheses. Among the study's conclusion was that quality information strongly affects those customers that

regard the process to be having too much risk because through the shared information customer fears are reduced allowing them to have a better opinion of the service providers.

In another study undertaken by Sivesan (2018) who examined the nature of customer RM by using Commercial bank-Sri Lanka in his case study. He used a sample of five hundred and two respondents. Quantitative research technique was employed with the study relying on both secondary sources of data and primary sources of data. In addition, the study methodology included EFA. KMO and Bartlett Test of sphericity were used as the main data suitability test. The study revealed that among information sharing was among the four extracted factors from the analysis and which cumulatively constituted 54.89% of the total variance. On the conclusion regarding information sharing, they noted that sharing what is considered proper information while also ensuring the information delivered is accurate and also credible had loadings ranging from 0.788 to 0.600 a clear indication that they are valid construct for relationship building that also lead to CS.

### **2.3.2 Product customization and customer satisfaction**

Su et al. (2016) undertook a study titled “Explore the concepts of relationship marketing within Taiwan coffee market” to understand the shops performance and the implementation of relationship marketing, the study model included relationship marketing concepts of customer lifetime values, interaction, customization, and emotional contents. They employed in depth interviews (16) to gather information from café operators within Taipei area. Results suggested that advancement of products complying with the needs and preferences of the coffee customers

were created on the basis of involving customers on the shops plan in addition to taking into account their thoughts and factual behaviours. This actions thus support product customization in relationship marketing. The study also concluded that interaction between the coffee shop employees and customers led to positive consumer experiences which eventually strongly enhanced the customer relationship.

Kasiri et al. (2017) through their analysis of impacts of standardization as well as customization on CS and CL through service quality, developed their measurement indicators from Grönroos' model of service quality. They then used questionnaire based survey to collected data from a sample of 315 customers from the education sector, healthcaresector and the hospitality industry. PLS-SEM was used to analysed the data. From the study findings, they concluded that when services offerings are created through integration of the concepts of customization and standardization, service quality improvements are guaranteed which intern enhances customer satisfaction.

Another study that also looked at the relationship between product customization and CS was done by Marinkovic and Kalinic (2017) in Serbia. Their model explored the moderating effect of customization as well as analyzing the CS significant antecedents in mobile commerce. Their research methodology included deriving data from a sample of 224 respondents and in testing the model validity employed CFA method . The interaction effects were determined by application of a moderated regression analysis. The results indicated that customization was statistically significant in moderating positively, trust's influence and mobility's influence on CS.

Coelho and Henseler (2012) looked at the effect of customization on customer satisfaction as one of their objectives. They developed their cross sectional study model aimed at understanding service customizations effect on customer relationship in service industries by drawing from RM and exchange theory, their study approach considered application of PLS-PM to test the study model. They also employed the European Customer Satisfaction Index framework in data collection. Their findings informed the conclusion that the service quality of service provider perceived by customers is increased by application of customization which also enhances trust, and eventually leads to CL. In addition, customization has a lot of influence as its significant directly and as a mediator on CL and also interacts with the effects of CS and trust of the customer on loyalty.

### **2.3.3 Conflict handling and customer satisfaction**

Kyei and Narteh (2016) undertook a study aimed at examining the impact of RM practices on CS in Ghana's banking sector where conflict handling was one of the main construct's for relationship marketing practices. The variable was operationalized by three sub variables; the banks ability to avoid potential conflicts, their potential to solve manifest conflicts before they create problems with customers and their resolve to discuss solutions openly when problems arise. Questionnaires were the only data collection tools. A sample of two hundred and fifty respondents was used. SPSS package was used to run the reliability analysis as well as the regressions. The results revealed that relationship marketing practices where conflict handling is included were significant in determining customer satisfaction with individual contribution placing conflict handling as the least driver in a model with eight other independent variables

namely, empathy, shared value, trust, communication, competence, social connections, commitment and reciprocity .

Tufa and Teshu (2015) in their study titled “The Impact of CRM on Customer Satisfaction” of which they did a case study on commercial banks selected in Ethiopia, used conflict handling as one of their five explanatory variables and regressed against customer satisfaction. Questionnaire and unstructured interviews were used to get data from customers and customer service managers. The major study discoveries indicated that trust, communication, commitment, and competency in customer relationship marketing contributed positively to customer satisfaction while conflict handling was identified as a one constraint for customer satisfaction. The study recommended the banks to design and provide continuous training sessions that put a lot of emphasis on customer service handling (customer relationship marketing) for employees to develop skill, attitude, and abilities necessary to fill customer handling gaps identified under their study.

Roberts-Lombard and Du Plessis (2012), in their CRM exploratory study undertaken in the service environment of South Africa, specifically in the life insurance sector, they examined the effect of conflict handling, trust, commitment, mutual communication on CL through CRM as an intervening factor considering a sample of two hundred and fifty four customers from 4 major towns in South Africa. They statistically discovered that customer relationship marketing operationalized by sub variables conflict handling, communication and understanding positively influenced customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Nyameino (2016) undertook a study on the effect of RM practice elements which included conflict handling as one of the elements, others being commitment, the quality of service and communication on CS with ICT as a moderator. Their unit of analysis being customers drawn from Nairobi's classified star hotels. The research was based on the social exchange theory and the EDT theory. Both predictive research design and descriptive research were used. 375 customers from the categorized star hotels within Nairobi was the sample size. The outcomes showed that conflict handling was not significant in affecting customer satisfaction. ICT was also found not to moderate the association. The study recommended additional research to ascertain the implication of RM practices on customer satisfaction in other industries.

#### **2.3.4 Reciprocity and customer satisfaction**

Khandabi et al. (2014) undertook a descriptive survey on the effect of RM on CS of Melli bank by using a case study of Bandar-anzali township in Iran. The research included reciprocity as one of the relationship marketing dimensions with the other being bonding, trust, communication, empathy and shared values. Each dimensions impact and extend of the impact to customer satisfaction was examined. The study's statistical population were all customers from all branches of Melli Bank in Bandar-anzali. Non probability and convenience sampling methods were employed, with 630 questionnaires being used for data collection. 472 questionnaires were returned. Based on the regression results, reciprocity had a significantly positive effect on CS with a coefficient of determination of 63% a significant beta of 0.799.

Hau and Ngo (2012) undertook a study titled “Relationship Marketing in Vietnam: An empirical review”, whose main purpose was to find out whether relationship marketing orientation have an impact on customer satisfaction and whether the individual components of RMO (bonding, trust, communication, reciprocity, empathy and shared value) have the same impact on customer satisfaction. A sample of 174 responses derived from B2B firms in Vietnam was used to provide primary data with questions answered in the context of an emerging economy. The study also incorporated cross sectional data. The findings indicated that reciprocity was among the constructs that positively influenced customer satisfaction.

Kyei and Narteh (2016) in their research also used reciprocity as one of the relationship marketing practices in ascertaining CS within Ghana’s banks. The study concluded that reciprocity was one of the main RM practices which had a significant contribution towards enhancing CS based on 250 respondents who answered questionnaires. The study similarly discovered that reciprocity, was one of the main determining factors of customer satisfaction.

### **2.3.5 Moderating effect of switching cost**

Switching cost as a moderating variable in relationship marketing studies has been used majorly in the satisfaction and loyalty models. For example Machado and Pinheiro (2013) in their hierarchical analysis of moderating effect of switching cost where it was weighted in terms of pre-switching searching and valuation costs though in the B2B context were revealed to moderate the relationships between perceived quality, technical services and customer loyalty. In another study, Ngo and Pavelková (2017) also analyzed the switching cost’s mediating and



moderating effects on the relationship between customer satisfaction, service value and CL in the Vietnams retail banking where the effect was found to be statistically significant.

Naderian and Baharun (2013) undertook a research aimed at ascertaining the effect of RM on CS and CL with the models moderated by switching cost, which was undertaken in the Malaysian hospitality industry. The data was collected through self administrated questionnaires from 200 hotel customers with the selection criteria being the condition that they must have been served at least once at the in-house restaurant of those hotels in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya states of Malaysia under study. Validity and reliability analysis was undertaken using SEM. Their results led to the conclusion that the satisfaction relationship with CL weakens as the switching costs increase hence affirming that switching cost has a significant moderating effect in the association model.

Bergel and Brock (2018) studied switching costs impact on customer complaints behavior and service recovery evaluation by using it three dimensions. The study employed survey based measure, SBE and CIT as their methodology. Their findings concluded that different switching cost classes or dimensions result to varying outcomes of dissatisfaction responses by customers. In addition, they also concluded that the association of customer perceived recovery justice and the services recovery satisfaction has the different classes of switching cost offering differential moderation effect.

Hadi et al. (2019) in their research also looked at the moderating effect of switching cost by testing the null hypothesis, “switching cost does not moderate the link between CS and CL. A

sample of 250 cellphone users in Islamabad and Rawalpindi cities in Pakistan was used. 213 valid responses were analyzed via SPSS) version 21. Switching cost operationalization was guided by Burnham et al. (2003) typology i.e. procedural switching costs, financial switching costs, and relational switching costs. The model was significant with an R<sup>2</sup> of 55.6%, while the t statistic produced a beta of -0.0343, and a p-value of 0.730, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis and concluding that switching cost moderates the link between CS and customer loyalty CL.

**Table 2.1:**

*Summary of empirical review on relationship marketing and customer satisfaction*

<b>Source</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Sample/study description</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Observation</b>
Datta, P. R. (2018). <i>Relationship Marketing and Customer Retention in Bangladesh's Food Retailing Sector</i> . Doctoral Dissertation, University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.	Understand effect of RM practices on customer retention in food retailing	202 groceries. Descriptive research only questionnaires used in data collection.	Service quality, trust, bond and customer satisfactions are vital for creating positive customer loyalty which in turn creates customer retention	No change in RM practices as used by other researchers.
Su, Y. Y., Kuo, Y. K., & Chang, B. L. (2016). <i>Explore the Concepts of</i>	Applying the concepts of RM, thus; interaction, emotional contents,	16 interviews with café operators.	The development of products meeting the coffee consumers' needs and	Poor research methodology. Choice of exploratory research for

Relationship Marketing customer lifetime values Exploratory research preference based on a true the study might not have  
 Within Taiwan Coffee and customization in understanding of the thoughts been well informed  
 Market. Paper presented at order to have better and behaviours and even results might not reflect  
 the Managing Innovation understanding the luring the customers with the the true picture.  
 and Diversity in Taiwan café shops design of the shops are the major issues influencing  
 Knowledge Society performance. performance.  
 Through Turbulent Time: Deductive research  
 Proceedings of the  
 MakeLearn and TIIM Joint  
 International Conference  
 2016.

Sivanandamoorthy, S., & Find out if RM practices 150 questionnaires RM contributes significantly The study also found out  
 Achchuthan, S. (2012). (trust, communication, administered. 102 to customer loyalty and that commitment and  
 How' Relationship commitment, and returned. predicts thirty percent of the conflict handling do not  
 Marketing'Contributes to conflict handling) Deductive research contribute significantly  
 Gaining Customer Loyalty contribute to gaining approach commitment and conflict to customer loyalty  
 to Banking Industry in Sri customer loyalty. handling do not contribute which is one of the  
 Lanka? Asian Journal of significantly to customer indicators of customer

Multidimensional  
Research, 1(3).

loyalty. They also found out satisfaction. These, that there is a significant contradicts other mean difference in customer scholarly findings and loyalty among different age therefore require further groups research to prove or disapprove.

Nyameino, B. C. (2016). To test the relationship  
Effect of Relationship between RM practices  
Marketing Practices and dimensions-  
Information commitment,  
Communication communication, conflict  
Technology on Customer handling and service  
Satisfaction Among quality, IT and customer  
Classified Star Hotels in satisfaction  
Nairobi-Kenya. Doctoral  
Dissertation, Moi  
university, Eldoret - Kenya.

375 customers from  
classified star hotels in  
Nairobi.  
Descriptive and  
predictive research  
designs.

Commitment strategy and  
service quality were  
significant in affecting  
customer satisfaction while  
communication strategy and  
conflict handling were not  
significant in affecting  
customer satisfaction. IT had  
a moderating effect on the  
relationship between  
commitment service quality  
and customer satisfaction.

Study was designed with  
an aim of being  
applicable only in the  
hotel industry and  
therefore other industry  
might not rely on the  
results.  
The study used service  
quality as an  
independent variable  
and IT as a moderating  
variable unlike this

However, IT did not study which used moderate the relationship switching cost as a between communication and moderating variable conflict handling. since it can influence the outcome of other variables.

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Source: (Author, 2020)

### **2.3.6 Critique of existing literature relevant to the study**

Considerable literature in marketing research has delved on the issue of relationship marketing and its role in enhancing organizational performance. In addition, relationship marketing literature also reveals that most scholars of past studies have been focusing on relationship marketing elements of trust and commitment. However, as pointed out by Ashley et al. (2011) relationship marketing is multifaceted and involves different types of relationships and processes and hence can be conceptualized as such. This means that additional relationship marketing constructs exist and should equally be given much attention for the depth of knowledge and understanding of the marketing field.

Literature review also reveals that scholars haven't been addressing vital relationship marketing processes touching on relationship creation, development, Maintenance and customers satisfaction within the supermarket set up. The concentration on customer loyalty as the main outcome of relationship marketing skips a very important measure of marketing performance in the name of customer satisfaction. In terms of information sharing construct, literature reveals that as an element of communication its contribution towards relationship building is un questioned. However, the literature failed to address a situation where the huge number of customers makes it difficult to have a proper feedback system like in supermarkets. The literature has dwelled more on information from the supermarkets to the customers without considering the issue of information asymmetry that might exist. Customers might have private information about their demand which they are not at liberty to share whereas the supermarkets must always share information concerning their products and services to the customers.

Customization as a strategic competitive tool has increased in importance as a marketing instrument. Its consideration as a relationship marketing construct has not been given much attention in empirical literature. Organizational performance depends on the acceptance of its product and service offerings by consumers or customers. It is assumed that acceptance of a product or service offering is an indication of customer satisfaction. Literature also reveals that marketing strategies that are tailored in the form of personalization or and customization can enhance the engagement of customers along the customer lifecycle (Bleier et al., 2018). Failure of literature to substantially address the unique nature of retailing where firms like supermarkets are stocking products from different manufactures poses a challenge in product customization as a relationship marketing construct. For example, customer product proliferation might even require a change in design which might bring in the issue of costs in an industry where low differentiation exists and hence consumers are price sensitive. How to address such concerns would be great contribution to the body of knowledge.

Conflict handling has had a lot of contributors especially on its role in relational channel management with models that are either inter organizational or interpersonal in nature. Salient literature also revealed that enhanced conflict handling strategies especially along accommodation, compromise and collaboration would greatly improve customer satisfaction in any retail set up. The negative aspects of conflict management in relationship marketing have also gained considerable attention in literature with the most noticeable indication being, unresolved conflicts threaten customer satisfaction and may lead to contract termination and poor organizational performance. Despite of this, scholars documentations that appear to be more



focused on negative aspects of conflict handling and its impact on both economic and non-economic relational aspects that affect satisfaction has ended up ignoring the fact that conflict handling strategies can be used to mitigate negative aspects and produce positive results.

The contribution of scholars about reciprocity has indeed increased in different business management fields over the years making considerable contributions and as Malmendier et al. (2014) observed, its application appears to affect different classes of market interactions and features among them promotion and pricing strategies. This has called for businesses to put measures that will enable them anticipate and have timely response especially to consumers who exhibit nonstandard behavior but always want to be recognized. Despite the scholarly developments and contributions about reciprocity, marketers and economists alike are grappling with the issue of the most appropriate model to measure it and a model that can unearth the underlying motives towards reciprocal behaviour.

Literature reveals that scholars of past studies have been focusing on same relationship marketing elements of trust and commitment. However, as pointed out by Morgan and Hunt (1994) relationship marketing is multifaceted and involves different types of relationships and processes and hence can be conceptualized as such. This means that additional relationship marketing constructs exist and should equally be given much attention for the depth of knowledge and understanding of the marketing field. Literature review also revealed that scholars haven't been addressing vital relationship marketing processes touching on relationship creation, development, Maintenance, and customers satisfaction within the supermarket set up.

The concentration on customer loyalty as the main outcome of relationship marketing skips a very important measure of marketing performance in the name of customer satisfaction.

### **2.3.7 Research Gaps**

From empirical studies analysed there are several gaps that the study would address. To start with, it is evident that many past studies and research were focusing on relationship marketing and customer loyalty (Gaurav, 2014; Hoppner et al., 2015; Tabrani et al. 2018). This means that studies on RM and customer satisfaction has not received much attention a trend that is also visible in Kenya.

Secondly, the salient literature review concerning information sharing has revealed several gaps. To start with, the metrics of information sharing as conceptual constructs such as accurate information, timely information and trustworthy information were not given much consideration in previous studies. Rather information sharing was considered as a single variable (Watabaji et al., 2016).

In addition, relationship marketing has different elements such as conflict handling, trust, commitment, service quality as noted by (Fartash & Gharechedaghi, 2012; Roberts et al., 2012). However basing on the assumptions of Lo (2012) that marketing can be conceptualized as involving different types of relationships and associated meanings in the relationship process, then it only means that applying different relationship marketing practices might result to different outcomes. The study therefore tries to incorporate in the study model RM antecedents that have not received much scholarly attention and their influence on customer satisfaction

would be a big contribution to academic literature. This includes Information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity. Scholars further indicate that the concept of relationship marketing Practice still lacks clarification (Brodie, 2017; Grönroos, 2017; Gummesson, 2017). The study therefore builds on previous attempts to clarify various aspects of relationship marketing Practice in the marketing literature to address both the richness and completeness of the phenomenon. Furthermore, with no empirical evidence on switching cost as a moderating variable between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction has been documented, investigating its effect will be important for marketers and business policy and decision makers in different fields.

Concentration of customer loyalty as the sole satisfaction measure has also been proven to be wrong in several industries. For example, an investigation of more than 390 companies in 40 industries by Chinese Enterprise Research Centre of Tsinghua University, found out that satisfied customers are not always loyal ones. Rahim et al. (2012) in their research found out that indeed there exists a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, a loyal customer base cannot be achieved by customer satisfaction alone, they further go ahead and conclude that repeat patronage is not guaranteed by achieving customer satisfaction. A shift should therefore be made for researchers in relationship marketing to concentrate more on customer satisfaction than to customer loyalty.

Lastly, whilst we understand that there are many opportunities provided by relationship marketing in connection to customer satisfaction as supported by Adikaram and Khatibi (2016), in the researcher's opinion, there is still much ambiguity as to its practices in Kenya especially in

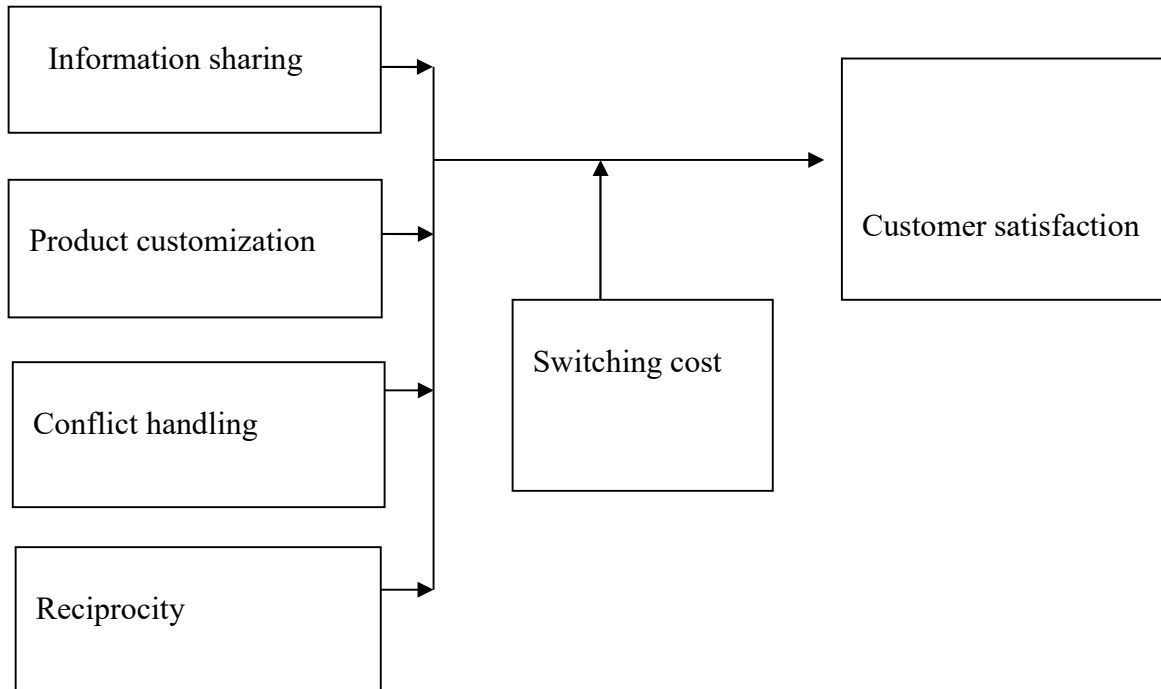
the retail sector. A lot of studies on the same have been concentrated in other countries especially in Asia and the developed economies like America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Datta, 2018). This is the core of the study. There is need for conceptualization and undertake statistical findings to address relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction within supermarkets in Kenya.

## **2.4 Conceptual framework**

Miles et al. (2014) describe a conceptual framework as a graphic or on paper creation that outlines either graphically or in narrative arrangement, the core elements under study and their presumed relationships. Conceptualization model in figure 2.3 shows the relationship marketing practices which constitute the independent variables of the study: Information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity as well as the dependent variable customer satisfaction and the moderating variable, switching cost.

**Figure 2.4:**

*Conceptual framework*



Source: (Author, 2020).

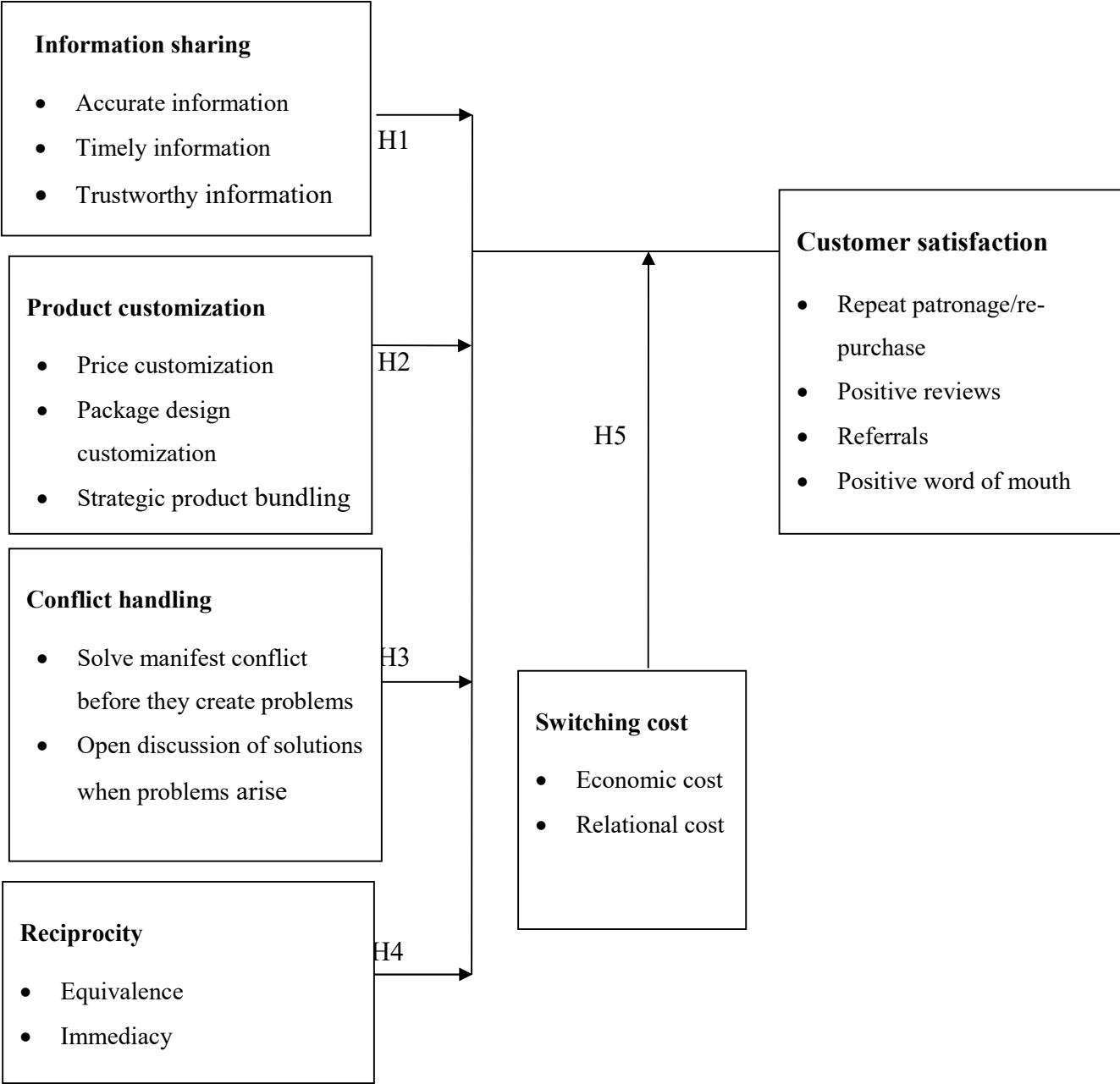
**2.4.1 Operationalization framework**

Operationalization framework is a diagrammatic presentation of the study variables that is used to show the connection between the predictor variables under study, controlling variable if any and the predicted variable including their sub variables (Waiganjo, 2014). The operationalization model shows the variables and their measurement sub variables. The relationship marketing practices which constitute the independent variables of the study: Information sharing has operational variables: accurate information, timely information and trustworthy information. Product customization has: Price customization, package design customization and strategic

product bundling. Conflict handling has operational variables: Solve manifest conflict before they create problems, open discussion of solutions when problems arise, Reciprocity has: Equivalence and immediacy. The moderating variable, switching cost has: Economic cost and relational cost. Lastly, the independent variable, Customer satisfaction has: Repeat patronage/repurchase, positive reviews, referrals and positive word of mouth. This is illustrated in figure 2.4.

**Figure 2.4:**

*Operationalization framework*



Source: (Author, 2020).

The indicators of the study variables as presented in the conceptual and operationalization frameworks in figures 2.3 and 2.4 respectively are discussed below.

### **Information sharing**

According to Lotfi et al. (2013) Information sharing means distributing useful information for systems, people or organizational units. Additionally, information sharing can be defined as the sharing and exchange of essential and exclusive information through interactive activities between companies and their customers (Mosavi & Ghaedi, 2012). Information sharing is an element of communication and is conceptualized in this study as the willingness of supermarkets to provide timely, accurate and trustworthy information to customers. Information sharing in relationship marketing implies being in communication with esteemed customers, giving them appropriate and truthful information on service and service changes, and communicating in advance if a conveyance complication occurs (Finne & Grönroos, 2013). Marketers have to build awareness during initial phases, progress customer predilection by encouraging value, performance and other factors, persuade involved buyers, and encourage them to make the buying decision (Hidayat et al., 2019).

Information sharing as well tells displeased customers what the organization is doing to correct the reasons of dissatisfaction. If there exists effective communication between a company and its clienteles, a better association will result and clienteles will be more loyal due to the trust and commitment build (Egan, 2011).



Even though information sharing is among the relationship marketing constructs that have hardly been dealt with, there exist several studies on the subject though in different contexts. For example the works by Watabaji et al. (2016), Savolainen (2019) and Wu et al. (2014). Information sharing is an act of informing which means the ability to provide reliable and timely information (Nauroozi & Moghadam, 2015). For example, it tells the unsatisfied customer the steps the organization is undertaking in attempting to resolve the customers dissatisfaction.

Information sharing as a way of communication between the organization and its customers takes place in different stages of the business relationship, thus, in the pre-selling, selling, consuming and post-consuming stages (Roberts-Lombard, 2011). In an association, one can only say information sharing has taken place if the information provided is trustworthy, information is provided immediately a problems occurs and promises are fulfilled (Ndubisi & Kok, 2005). The measurement constructs of information sharing for this study are; accurate information, timely information, and trustworthy information.

In terms of accurate information, information sharing on consumer demand improves order fulfilment performance if the consumer has received enough accurate information in order to be comfortable to place and complete an order (Watabaji et al., 2016). Having information which is also correct in context is presumed to increase customer trust in that information.

In terms of timely information, information shared on time will improves a customer's knowledge and also reduces search costs (Wu et al., 2014). In addition, it is advantageous for timely information especially when it concerns new products and services because that will

enable the service firm to actualize on-time deliveries for the required products and services. If information is not produced at the desired time, its usefulness is lost to the marketing manager.

Lastly, abuse of information by a partner will probably lead to loss of trust between the partners. Trustworthy information is a pillar of maintaining relationships (Namagembe et al., 2012). An association between the organization and its clientele is therefore important in considering the maintenance of trust. This can be done by valuing communication, developing an art of listening, enhancing honesty, and learning from other people's observations. In addition, perceived risks by customers occasioned by interacting with a specific organization are lowered if that organization is conducting its business in a manner viewed as enhancing the customer trust (Roberts-Lombard & Du Plessis, 2012).

### **Product customization**

Product customization is a very important component of relationship marketing (Richard et al., 2018). According to Pallant et al. (2020) customization is focusing on the customer in developing products and services. Through customization is believed to have emanated from the manufacturing sector, it is a shift from manufacturing principles mass production and also standardization (Fogliatto et al., 2012). Most organizations in the current business world aim at retaining as many customers as possible especially now that there are different consumer segments with fragmented demands which require customized offerings (Moraru & Duhnea, 2018).

Product customization can also be viewed as a value creating strategy that supports the relationship marketing research stream of offering superior customer value by incorporation of service marketing and quality management techniques (Weinstein, 2016). The most recent element of customization is mass customization (MC) a competitive advantage business tool (Dukhan et al., 2017). The concept of MC was introduced by Kotler (1989) from a marketing management viewpoint. MC refers to the provision of customized products while striving to maintain the efficiencies of mass-production (Kiriinya, 2015).

The RM practice despite of its advantages it has its own challenges. For example due to the peculiar nature of customers with diverse needs, it become untenable for global companies to use customization as it adds cost and it is complex to implement operationally (Adikaram & Khatibi, 2016). Companies around the world are now embracing MC to avoid those challenges. Supported by information technology and flexible work processes marketers are able to customize goods or services for individual customers in high volumes at low cost (Ashley et al., 2011).

Product customization vary dramatically across industries, or even within the same firm (Xiao & Zhang, 2018). The variable is operationalized by price customization, package design customization and strategic product bundling. The idea of customizing prices is very appealing and also a common marketing practice in spatially differentiated product markets (Bleier et al., 2018). Manufacturers as well as retail stores use price customization as an element of customer segmentation where products of different quality grades are priced differently and customers

with different purchasing power will choose the price range that suites them (Gomes & Pavan, 2018; Hupperich et al. 2018; Mandal, 2020).

Package design customization can be in relation to product or service. Product design in relation to production and retailing of consumer products looks at breaking bulk and repackaging to cater for different customers with different purchasing power and intentions. For example, due to health-conscious customers especially in developed world, Coca Cola has introduced smaller portion sizes of their traditional drinks and this has helped them retain those customers. In addition, big supermarkets like Wal-Mart would dictate the packaging they want from suppliers as a way of satisfying their specific customers (Huggs, 2016). Repacking the consumer goods in small quantities makes it well-situated for customers to buy the precise quantities for their personal consumption (Das, 2014; Mandal, 2020). From the scholarly work of Coelho and Jörg (2012) we find that customized product or service offers are prospective to fulfilling a clientele more than standardized offers would, since they enable a actual match between customer and product.

Another element that signals package design customization is the products refund policy. According to Xiao and Zhang (2018) firms may decide to tailor their offerings and allow cancellations alongside some refunds and this is due to the fact that some customers often exhibiting considerable uncertainty in their service valuations. Customers have different reasons as to why they may seek a refund, for example due to product quality, opportunistic reasons, product mismatch, among other factors (Hsiao & Chen, 2012; Janakiraman et al., 2016; Shang et al., 2017).

A company can cluster customers for example based on purchase volumes or repurchase rates in order to offer different products refund policy hence prioritizing loyal customers with better terms. For example, in airlines, Air Canada, for instance, the economy-class customers are offered different peripheral services, in addition to a seat on the airplane, at different rates and sometimes drastically different refund terms (Xiao & Zhang, 2018).

Strategic product bundling has also been used as a customization tool in retailing. Bundling refers to the sale of at least two distinct products in a package or the practice of selling two or more products jointly, usually at a discount (Guiltinan, 1987; Rao et al., 2018). Another definition was given by Duvvuri and Gruca (2010) who stated the definition a bundle to comprising a group of products with qualities that cooperatively contribute to consumer utility for desired global qualities. The research in bundling practice is presumed to have been started by Stigler (1963) by analysing block booking which was the practice of compelling movie theatres to buying a specified package of movies instead of just the singles they desired to exhibit. Rao et al. (2018) indicates that the bundling evolution started with only economic justifications for bundling then moved to marketing and finally psychology-based rationales which stress the interaction of both organisations and clienteles in the bundling decision.

Relationship marketers take a keen note on the psychological perspective in developing product bundling. From several scholarly articles on product bundling, it's clear that most customers notice the worth of a bundle based on the products contained in the bundle and the spreading of attribute values across those products. But at the same time some of the articles also indicate that customers also contemplate how the bundle compares to other bundles available elsewhere in

making decisions (Bhargava, 2012; Mehta & Ma, 2012). Marketers are therefore challenged to give a better value bundle compared to competitors to avoid for example supermarket brand switching. One way to achieve this is to implement a bundling system based on recommendations from customers themselves (Ge et al., 2017).

Strategic bundling looks at the different types of bundling strategies and the target customers. There are basically three types of strategic bundling classifications according to the work of Rao et al. (2018) and Prasad et al. (2017). To start with, we have a pure component strategy (PC), where the goods are offered disjointedly. Secondly, we have pure bundling strategy (PB), where only the bundle of the products is offered and lastly, mixed bundling strategy (MB), where the bundle and the separate products are offered at the same time. The mixed bundle strategy is used due to its effectiveness in implementation of second-degree price discrimination. In a dual-product setting, the bundle under mixed bundle targets the conventional market that cares for both products and targets the premium priced specific products at segments that care mainly for one product a situation that is very vital for building and maintaining relationships.

All the above strategies are more effective through database management implementation. A database refers to the collection of comprehensive information about customers and prospects such as demographic and psychographic profiles, products and services they buy, and purchase volumes arranged in a manner that is available for easy access and retrieval (Sakyi, 2020). The data is typically organized to model relevant aspects of reality in a way that supports decision processes requiring this information. Today company organize their information in data bases such as customer databases, product data bases, sales person data bases and combine data from

different databases. Databases allow marketers access to an abundance of information, often through a computer system such as sales reports, news articles, company news releases, and economic reports from government and private agencies, which can be useful in making various marketing decisions and in most cases customizing products and services (Mihartescu, et al., 2017; Zahay, 2021).

### **Conflict handling**

Conflict, recognized as an inevitable everyday phenomenon, has recently become one of the main areas of research interest for the organizational sciences (Abdullah, 2018; Choudhary, 2018). The occurrence of conflict in business relationships is considered un avoidable and natural by many researchers due to the interdependence among business parties and the complexities of such existing relationships (Bojei & Abu, 2014).

In addition, at different levels, its impact may have positive and negative consequences, associated either with increased improved relationships between the actors involved, or with disrupted cooperation among individuals, groups or organizations and reduced effectiveness (Naseer & Fazal, 2019). According to De Wit et al. (2012) relationship conflict tends to be associated with negative effects. Concerning conflict management strategies in relationship marketing and the circumstances that lead to their differentiated use, there are many dispositional and situational variables considered relevant (De Wit et al., 2012; Naseer & Fazal, 2019).

Conflict handling has been taken into consideration for this study as one of the underlying practices or dimensions of relationship marketing because of several reasons. To start with, the

selection is justified by its appearance to several business studies and relationship marketing studies, for example the work of Ndubisi (2011), Narteh et al. (2013) and Chakiso (2015) a clear indication that it is a valid measure of relationship marketing. Secondly its utilization by several scholars in understanding service marketing, for example the work of Chang and Gotcher (2010) and Husnain and Akhtar (2016) means that it can effectively measure relationship marketing in a retail service set up like a supermarket which is the context of this study.

Roberts-Lombard (2011) while analysing the work of Phillip Kotler and Kevin Keller noted that the importance of conflict handling emanates from the fact that only about 5% of all unsatisfied customers complain. In addition, only about 50% of those who raise complains will eventually report a satisfactory problem resolution. Furthermore, he also observed that approximately thirty four percent of customers who registered a key complaint and the same resolved satisfactorily will continue purchasing from the company. Finally, he concluded by acknowledging that organizations that have put in place a system that encourages dissatisfied customers to raise complains and at the same time empower their employees to try and remedy the situation as soon as possible have a higher probability of registering higher revenues and posting greater profits. To highlight the importance of conflict handling especially in retailing, Karadeniz and Cdr (2010) indicated that it lies at the highest level of relationship building by offering structural solutions to problems encountered by customer in the transaction process.

This study looked at two relationship marketing conflict handling strategies explained by Ndubisi (2011) in his article on relationship marketing practices. Thus, resolving manifest conflict before they develop into problems and open discussion of possible solutions when



problems come up. The suitability of the various strategies of conflict handling depends on the type of conflict and the situation (De Wit et al., 2012; Suhaniya & Thusyanthy, 2016).

Solve manifest conflict before they create problems looks at conflict resolution. This sub variable was derived from the work of Sweeney and Morrison (2004) who posited that conflict handling is the capability of every supplier to minimalize the harmful consequences of manifest and possible conflicts. Termination of a conflicting issue is not enough. A conflict is completely eliminated if the probable sources are identified and removed (Väyrynen, 2018). Settling a conflict, therefore, frequently involves altering attitudes of vengeance and hatred by excusing and pardoning the other party (Burton, 1987; Popov, 2018; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

El Hinnawi (2011) asserted that conflict handling also involves the ability to discuss the solutions openly when a problem arises. He also noted that conflict handling requires cooperative behaviour from exchange partners. Open discussion of solutions when problems arise, acts based on compromise as a conflict handling strategy. Compromise is a proportionally controlled type of conflict handling, where all parties constrain their claims and demands to some extent, so that common agreement between the claims can be arrived and conflictual deed can end (Courtain & Glowacz, 2019; Wallensteen, 2018).

## **Reciprocity**

Reciprocity, is considered a custom of human societal behaviour which holds that individuals owe each other duties because of their preceding actions (Hoppner et al., 2015). Very few scholarly papers on reciprocity have been published in recent years. A lot of literature on the

subject is attributed to the period (1930-1965) and mostly done by anthropologists like Smith and Malinowski (2018). Reciprocity as found in most of relationship marketing literature exist at the general level. Thus, theorising reciprocity as a one-dimensional construct (Hoppner et al., 2015). At this level reciprocity can be defined to including the common exchange of special treatment or the making of kind responses for one's exchange partner, in reply for same kind of favours or allowances to be received later. Reciprocity borrows a lot from the relationship marketing research stream that looks at relationship marketing as relational exchange. According to this school of thought, the emphasis is on partnering relationships. The thought of interpersonal exchanges emphasizes on continuous long-standing relationships between several parties (Zhang et al., 2016).

Reciprocity can also be understood as the expectation that individuals will act in responding favourably to one another by returning benefits for benefits (Hoque et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2014; Lou & Koh, 2018). From this general level, it's clear that reciprocity in relationship marketing context has had very little research (Geiger & Germelmann, 2015; Hoppner et al., 2015; Kwan & Carlson, 2017; Pervan et al., 2011).

At the heart of reciprocity is also the concept of customer advocacy which has been popularized by scholars like Roy and Chakraborti (2015) and Urban (2006) who have discussed the topic and its influence on several marketing relationships. The school of thought emphasizes taking the best interest of the customer at heart. The argument is that if firms advocate for their clienteles, clienteles will return the favor by advocating for the firm by not only purchasing the goods but

also referring other prospective clienteles as well as helping in producing better products and services (Moliner et al., 2018; Urban, 2006).

As a relationship marketing construct the importance of reciprocity is built on the following three assumptions. Firstly, that marketing activities exist in the realms of exchange. Secondly, that all people are basically motivated by self-interest where without a custom of reciprocity nobody would exchange. Finally, that people desire to attain excellence in ethical behaviour and are consequently motivated to develop and uphold exchange where a custom of reciprocity is maintained (Pervan et al., 2011). Reciprocity as outlined in several literatures should be universally applicable. However scholars like Alejandro et al. (2011) and Gouldner (1960) acknowledged that despite of its application in all national cultures, the uniqueness of time and place means that it might function differently across different cultures or by large it will function differently in different regions and organizations.

The study based the assumptions of reciprocity on the work of Mitchell et al. (2012) who examined reciprocity as an interdependent exchange where something has to be given by one party and in response something returned by the other party. This study focuses on two important aspects of reciprocity, thus equivalence and immediacy as advocated by (Hoppner et al. 2015).

Equivalence which is the first operationalization dimension for reciprocity proposes what should be exchanged. Reciprocity specifies that partners should pay back any benefit received and that repayment should be almost equal to what has been received (Hoppner et al., 2015; Steven et al.,

2018). What actions a party takes to be roughly equal will determine the form of equivalence dimension one will take (Ruby et al., 2012).

There is divided opinion on the kind of equivalence that firms and businesses should perform. Some researchers are of the opinion that the reciprocal action should be equal to the action the firm received (homeomorphic equivalence) while other researchers are of the contrary opinion. They posit that a reciprocal action undertaken by a firm can be different in form from the action that was received (heteromorphic equivalence) (Hoppner & Griffith, 2011). The capability to evaluate people's agendas advances the effectiveness of equivalence reciprocity (Pervan et al., 2011). For example, an industrial customer who receives a free sample from a potential retailer could return with a gift of their own. Nevertheless, through an understanding of the objective or agenda of the retailer, an additional suitable return would be the scheduling of a meeting with the top sales officer.

Immediacy is the second extent of reciprocity for the study and it proposes at what time the exchanges should occur or when the return action should occur (Samina et al., 2018; Zhiyong et al., 2018). According to Hoppner et al. (2015) the immediacy form that the immediacy dimension takes will control what exchange partners will view as the proper time frame in which to alleviate their indebtedness. The paying back may be made in the short term (immediately or after a short period) or long term (after some time lag) (Hoppner et al., 2011). Technology has helped many companies to solve the crisis of immediacy. For example, Amazon with the help of a video chat solution called mayday, was able to have an average customer care representative response time of 9.75 percent. (Parise et al., 2016).

## **Switching cost**

switching cost is considered to be the cost which customers will have to incur on their decision to switch to another product or service provider and would not have been accrued to them had they remained loyal to their existing product or service provider (Hadi et al., 2019). According to Babu and Sundar (2019) when consumers attempt to change a brand, switching costs arise as specific costs incurred to replace or to reacquire products. Switching cost can also be referred to as the perceived cost customers would bare once they change their service provider (Naderian & Baharun, 2015). This variable is used as a moderating variable for measuring the influence of independent variables (information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity) on the dependent variable (customer satisfaction). Switching cost is assumed to be an important factor due to its power to trigger loyalty and maintain the firms' stability during constant changes of service quality especially in short time (Ngo & Pavelková, 2017).

Switching costs can be in different forms among them, financial switching costs and relational switching costs (Bergel & Brock, 2018; Blut et al., 2015; El-Manstrly, 2016; Matzler et al., 2015). Switching costs are both monetary and non-monetary as already observed and also as explained by El-Manstrly (2016) and Czajkowski and Sobolewski (2016) in their articles respectively. From the work of scholars like Michael porter and Jackson Barbara, it is evident that in addition to the monetary and financial costs one incurs when switching service providers, the effort and time consumers spent in order to secure a better deal also constitute switching costs (Hino & Levy, 2016).

According to an emerging body of theoretical literature, supermarkets do understand that the customers they have are forward looking, and also face substantial costs of switching loyalty to a different store (Richards & Liaukonyte, 2018). In the study, the variable was operationalized by looking at sub variables; economic switching costs and relational switching costs. In the retail sector, economic switching costs relate to the financial costs like price increase as well as effort and time spent to secure a better retail outlet. Relational switching costs are artificial switching costs or programs such as repeat purchase coupons that are meant to reward customers for repeat purchase in the retail store and so penalize brand switchers (Clement & Karthikeyan, 2012).

The first sub variable, economic cost is borrowed from Fornell (1992) typology which indicated that switching costs include economic costs and psychological costs. Economic costs include, all financial costs which are financial expenses incurred in trying to change supplier or price difference between current supplier and new supplier. Supermarket stores use lower prices compared to competitors as an incentive or a compensatory mechanism to switching consumers (Arie & Grieco, 2014). This also means that shoppers loyal to a home supermarket store for example expect to be charged lower prices for similar product and services in that supermarket store relative to another supermarket store (Richards & Liaukonyte, 2018).

Economic costs also include search costs or procedural switching costs. These costs are considerably meaningful in retail sector even though little evidence exists on the extent of consumer search costs in retail settings in which consumers purchase multiple products at once (De los Santos et al., 2013; Richards et al., 2017).

Search costs or procedural switching costs are those costs based on the time and energy spent searching for alternative sources of supply that will optimize the benefits of receiving lower prices for the entire basket, or perhaps a preferred mix of items and service attributes (Blut et al., 2015; De los Santos et al., 2012). For example searching through published articles, newspapers and even moving around through estates of Nairobi surveying for an alternative supermarket. Company websites go some way to reducing these costs but can never be seen to be wholly comprehensive. Learning costs are based on the time and energy expended learning how to deal effectively and efficiently with a new supplier for example learning the layout of a supermarket you have never used before or working with a new distribution system (Bergel & Brock, 2018; Richards & Liaukonyte, 2018).

The second sub variable relational costs are the costs a customer faces due to break-up of personal relationships and identification with a certain brand and employees (Blut et al., 2015). This may mean financial penalties, for example the costs of losing rewards or status gained through relationship longevity. Relationships over an extended period can create emotional ties with an organization or the personnel of that organization. Relational costs as the emotional discomfort caused by the loss of individual or brand relationships (Blut et al., 2015).

Emotional bonds create switching barriers due to their difficulty in emulating and are important in the current customer-centric era where competition is now on emotional aspects of value other than physical attributes (Chuah et al., 2014). One of the relational switching costs which has always been underestimated is called inertial cost which refers to efforts involved in breaking habitual behaviour, this is also associated with the concept of the zone of tolerance. The ZOT is seen as

that range of service performance where small increases or decreases in performance quality do not lead to any (positive or negative) action (Wu, 2011). However, poor performance, price rises or recognition of better value elsewhere can soon break through this inertia.

Another cost here can be social cost. The existing supplier may, in some way, contribute to the social life of the customer. An exaggerated example might be the existence of ‘singles shopping nights’ in some supermarkets. A more commonplace example may be the opportunity to socialize with other customers and staff at a company organized event (e.g. preview evenings). This has become more prevalent with the development of Internet-mediated brand communities where companies such as Saab, Jeep and Davidson organize weekend events for avid fans of the product (Sivanandamoorthy & Achchuthan, 2012).

All classes of costs pose a certain degree of risk to the consumer who wants to switch or who is contemplating switching supermarkets. Even where the risk is not immediately apparent there is still a general preference to stay with an existing supplier rather than risk a move to another of whom you have no experience. At times even with poor service delivery or relationship with one’s supermarket, people will still decide not to switch to avoid uncertainty. That form of loyalty where unsatisfied customers are also loyal due to attachment and commitment with the supplier is referred to as false loyalty since it also stops a customer from switching or choosing another supplier (Sivanandamoorthy & Achchuthan, 2012). The table below summarizes the switching cost dimensions that guided the study variable.



**Table 2.4:*****Dimensions of switching cost and marketing correlates***

Dimension	Description	Marketing correlates
1. Pre-switching search and evaluation costs	Consumption of lots of time and effort in gathering and evaluating necessary information before switching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue of geographic dispersion</li> <li>• Customers repurchase intentions</li> <li>• Issue of low brand awareness</li> <li>• The intangibility nature of service</li> <li>• Issues of having limited or few alternatives</li> </ul>
2. Lost performance costs	The likelihood of losing the privileges and benefits occasioned by switching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues of interpersonal relational bonds</li> <li>• Issues of the quality of services</li> <li>• Customers intentions to repurchase</li> </ul>
3. Sunk costs	Looks at the likelihood of losing already incurred relational investments and costs in establishing and maintaining relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judged by the length support/patronage</li> <li>• Looks at already established interpersonal relational bonds</li> <li>• Characterized by high customer involvement</li> <li>• Affects repurchase decisions and behaviour</li> </ul>
4. Setup costs	Looks at the likelihood of spending a lot of time, effort, and money in communicating needs to providers after switching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characterised by high customization</li> <li>• Tedious procedures of gathering information</li> <li>• Affects repurchase intentions</li> </ul>
5. Post-switching behavioural and cognitive costs	Looks at the time and effort that is expected to be used in learning and adjusting to new service routines after switching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue of high customer involvement</li> <li>• Requires a detailed service plan</li> <li>• High customer involvement</li> <li>• Calls for high product and service customization</li> <li>• Repurchase intentions</li> </ul>
6. Uncertainty costs	The possibility of experiencing lower performance after switching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of homogeneity in service delivery</li> <li>• Issues of services being Intangible</li> <li>• Affects repeat buying intentions</li> </ul>

Source: (Jones et al., 2002).

## **Customer satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction is a dimension of multiple items evaluated as satisfaction measurement, which can vary from business to business (Adikaram & Khatibi, 2016). Business success and profitability is also determined by improving customer satisfaction (Eklof et al., 2018; Golovkova et al., 2019). Satisfied customers will most likely re-purchase the product or service, engage in positive referrals and above all enhance brand loyalty (Shakil & Shahbaz, 2018; Tomas et al., 2018). Despite the effort to give constructs that can truly measure customer satisfaction, it should be noted that there is also a problem with how questions are asked. Different results can be achieved with the same satisfaction survey dependent on how it was operationalized.

There are several customer satisfaction indices that are used to measure customer satisfaction (Banwari, 2016). The indices used in this study were derived from Shakil and Shahbaz (2018) and Tomas et al. (2018). The choices reflect a shift from the traditional constructs which scholars like Linda and Judith (2015) criticized for reporting overly positive results. In the study, the researcher operationalized customer satisfaction by looking at its four facets. Thus; repeat patronage or product repurchases, positive reviews, referrals, and positive word of mouth.

To start with, repeat patronage and repurchase decisions are synonymous when it comes to supermarkets and other businesses. Factors determining repeat patronage have been a concern for many organizations since they eventually affect the performance of a business in terms of sales and profits (Omo-Diagi et al., 2015). In another study, Nataraj and Rajendran (2018)

posited that if customers feel positive about their transaction with the organization, they would be willing to extend their relationship with the organization. This was also reiterated by Alshurideh (2016) when he asserted that perceived excellence in quality of service and trust in the organization will lead to repurchase intentions. A customer may express his/her satisfaction to service quality by exhibiting behavioural intentions like expressing preference for an organization over other organizations, by continuing to purchase from it or by increasing its business in the future. Overall, extent research shows that when customers are satisfied with a company, the more likely they are to repurchase from it (Söderlund & Colliander, 2015; Stathopoulou & Balabanis, 2016; Walsh & Bartikowski, 2013).

Secondly, positive reviews as an indicator of customer satisfaction can be understood from customer to customer (C2C) interaction research stream which has gained a lot of attention from different scholars. Reviews are very important tools for customers expressing their opinion about a product or service (Grierson & Brennan, 2017; Libai et al., 2010). C2C interaction is the transfer of information from one customer or group of customers of a certain brand or store to another customer or group of customers in a way that can change their preferred choices or buying behaviour (Kasabov, 2016; Libai et al., 2010).

Positive reviews are undertaken by satisfied customers and this information is mainly public information that can be accessed by even potential customers who will base on the review ratings to make store purchase decisions or choices. Negative reviews are disadvantageous to the organization since such information might lead to current customers switching or the organization risking not to attract new customers. The concept of customer engagement

behaviour (CEB) proposed by Van Doorn et al. (2010) looks at post purchase behaviour exhibited by customers among them are blogging and writing reviews with an aim of helping other consumers or customers make informed choices.

Among the non-economic benefits that a firm can gain by having satisfied customers is soliciting customer feedback to improve business operations and customer retention. Most organizations have review websites (Sparks & Browning, 2011). As an example, in the hotel and tourism industry, approximately 20 million people visit TripAdvisor to read other travellers' reviews every month and recommendations provided by other consumers based on their tourism and hotel experiences in various locations are suggested to be not only the most preferred sources of travel information, but also the most influential sources for travel decision-making (Berezina et al., 2016).

Satisfied customers are also expected to undertake referrals which is an act of existing customers and in this case satisfied customers referring potential customers who are mainly close associates to the firm or the firm's products and service (Hada et al., 2010). The referral act that highlights satisfaction is voluntary referral to friends, family, colleagues and other close associates or groups. Researchers like, Lujun et al. (2016), Mende et al. (2014) and Koklic et al. (2017) have found out consistently that the higher the customer is satisfied with a product or a service, the greater the likelihood that they will provide positive referrals for the supplying organization.

From an advertising research survey done by Nielsen Global Trust in advertising (2015), they reported that out of thirty thousand online respondents from sixty countries, consumers across

the globe still value and find recommendations by close associates very credible. In the report's further findings, they indicated that 83% or eight in ten respondents somewhat trust or completely trust those recommendations from close acquaintances (friends and family members). Voluntary referrals in measurement of satisfaction is emphasized because many organizations are paying existing customers to do or for doing referrals through adoption of consumer referral policies where people are rewarded for referring others (Arbatskaya & Konishi, 2016). For example, Embu College a middle level college in Embu County rewards students (main customers) who do successful referrals with Kenya shillings 1000.

With increased information channels especially due to advancement of technology, consumer forums have increased and customers can exploit such forums in enhancing referrals. For example, social media groups, blogs among other channels. The greater the amount of evaluations the trendier a product is and the levels of customer delight. The higher the number of positive referrals compared to the number of negative referrals in the same platform will probably shape positive opinion and vice versa (Luu & Muhamad, 2016; Arbatskaya & Konishi, 2014).

Furthermore, it is also expected that satisfied customers will spread positive word of mouth which is also regarded as a proxy for attitudinal loyalty. Positive word of mouth can be defined as a conversation, unilateral advice or suggestions about products, brands and services between people excluding company advertisements who have no benefit or very low benefit to persuade others to use that product, brand or service (Maisam & Mahsa, 2016; Sivadas & Jindal, 2017). In this case, a supermarket customer persuading other buyer from different supermarket brands to

purchase from their supermarket store. Word of mouth by customers through can be traced back to the work of Arndt (1967) and Dichter (1966) it has been instrumental in marketing in recent years especially in service industry (Özdemir et al., 2016).

According to Maisam and Mahsa (2016) consumer brand love and consumer brand commitment leads to positive word of mouth. The opposite also holds if the service delivery and relationship wasn't good leading to no brand love or no consumer brand commitment which eventually is a recipe for brand switching. (Özdemir et al., 2016). Some researchers also indicate that dissatisfied customers engage more in negative word of mouth (Koklic et al., 2017). Different classifications of word of mouth have been coined. To start with, the main classification is looking at it on the basis of volume and valence being the most researched classification (Sivadas & Jindal, 2017). Volume Word of mouth measures or looks at the total number of interactions between the customer and another person while valence on the other hand captures the nature of word of mouth which can either be positive or negative (East et al., 2008). This study based on this classification shall concentrate on valence word of mouth.

Secondly, from the work of Lampert and Rosenberg (1975) we find that word-of-mouth communication can also be classified into two dimensions (Özdemir et al., 2016). The first dimension being active word of mouth communication which refers to conveying ideas about certain supermarkets, brands, goods and services, management among other elements while the second dimension is passive word of mouth communication which basically highlights the act of consumers, friends, family members gathering of information before engaging in the purchase of certain goods and services from for example the supermarket.

In further support on the influence of word of mouth, Kiriinya (2015) observes that there is quicker damaging effect of bad word of mouth to consumer attitudes about a company's reputation and its products and travels faster and even farther as compare to good word of mouth. Supermarkets can't therefore afford to have a negative word of mouth from customers. Further review of literature reveals several determinants of customer satisfaction within supermarket set up that can be related to relationship marketing. A summary of the determinants is given in table 2.3.

**Table 2.4:**

*Determinants of customer satisfaction within supermarket set up*

Motivating factors	Excitement factors	Confirmation factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overall brand image</li> <li>• service quality</li> <li>• convenient location, brand variety and shopping convenience</li> <li>• services and physical appearance</li> <li>• reviews about the store</li> <li>• marketing stimuli, advertisement, availability of parking space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• store atmosphere</li> <li>• stimulation of senses</li> <li>• presentation of goods</li> <li>• consumer relationship proneness</li> <li>• trust and commitment</li> <li>• personal interaction and convenience</li> <li>• product, procedures, the moments of contact with personnel and the core offer of the retailer</li> <li>• customer's perception regarding the performance of salespeople</li> <li>• services and physical appearance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• store loyalty</li> <li>• product quality</li> <li>• positive emotions,</li> <li>• quality of communication and company's image</li> <li>• interfacing with a client after the purchase</li> <li>• perception of purchased product's quality, intention to repurchase</li> </ul>

Source: (Jones et al., 2002).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the philosophy and paradigm of the study. It also looks at the methodology used in data collection, analysis and presentation. It elaborates the study's research design, the target population, the sample and sampling design, the data and data collection procedure, the pilot test, the validity and reliability testing proposal, data analysis and presentation and finally a description on ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 Research philosophy**

According to Schwandt (2014), the shared world views representing beliefs and values used to direct problem solving in a discipline is called a paradigm. Patton (2015) defined a paradigm as a worldview informed by philosophical assumptions. The assumptions are about three things; first is the ontology i.e. the nature of social reality which answers the question on what do people believe about that nature of reality; the second assumption is epistemology which refers to the ways of knowing, thus answering the question on how people know what they know; and lastly the axiology which refers to the value systems and sometimes ethics which helps answer the question on what do people believe is true.

A paradigm guides the researchers thinking, beliefs, and assumptions about society themselves, and they constitute views about truth and knowledge and guide how problems are solved



(Schwandt, 2014). From the ontology, epistemology and axiology constructs, appropriate inquiry questions and methodology are derived (Patton, 2015). Research in social sciences requires a stand in specific paradigms and their subjective ontology as well as the epistemology since they determine how the study shall be carried out and whether there shall be coherence in the study (Garner et al., 2016; Potter, 2014). Consistent with the position of Gray (2013) who asserts that different results for the same phenomenon under study can be derived by applying different philosophical perspectives.

The study shall follow a Positivists or the scientific paradigm or philosophy which views reality as being objective and knowable (Mack, 2010). It therefore means that the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County is knowable. The influence of switching costs on such a relationship is also knowable. In this paradigm, proving a hypothesis or disapproving it is the main purpose of research (Aliyu et al., 2014; Mack, 2010). The study was therefore undertaken to prove or disapprove several hypotheses as outlined in chapter one section 1.5.

According to Crotty (1998) there is overlapping of the ontological and epistemological assumptions in this paradigm and as he puts it, talking of meaning construction is basically taking of meaningful reality construction. In terms of its axiology, the philosophy is also appropriate for this study unlike the other philosophies because it supports research that is value free and based on precise observation and verifiable measurement. The methodology of the natural sciences was also employed in order to study the social reality or truth through deductive research method ( Mack, 2010; Su, 2017).

## **Study ontological assumptions**

Ontology is the study of being. The assumptions look at the reality of things. In these regards, it is prudent for any researcher to have a perceptual stand on reality of issues and how things work. Ontology also looks at the scenario where an issue can have verifiable unilateral reality or in other cases existence of multiple or many realities which are socially constructed (Patton, 2015). Ontology is viewed as a starting point which will likely lead to one's own theoretical framework (Mack, 2010). Another scholar, Grix (2010) looks at ontology as claims and also assumptions of any study that define what researchers mean when they say something exists.

The concept describes researchers views on the nature of reality which can either be subjective or objective thus, reality that is a manifestation of one's mind and the reality that indeed exists respectively (Bahari, 2010). Building on positivist philosophy, this study ontological assumption was that there exists objective reality on effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. At the same time there also existed objective reality on the moderating effect of switching costs on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The researcher believes that the results attained about the stated relationships can be generalized for all the supermarkets in Nairobi County making positivism the correct assumption. These assumptions were proved or disapproved objectively through a scientific research process outlined in this chapter.

## **Study epistemological stand**

Cohen et al., (2017) noted that a researcher stand on the nature of knowledge and its forms is what we call epistemological stand. Its assumptions look into the reliability of the source which will define whether the knowledge has truth in it and also the forms of knowledge with main concern being the acquisition method and process and how the same knowledge is passed or communicated from the source to the receiver is the main concern for epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The researchers' epistemological assumption was that knowledge comes from the application of theory to practice making it possible for law-like generalization as well as achieving the important search for regularities and causal relationships among basic components under study as posited by positivist paradigm (Shah & Corley, 2006). The key issues of this study were understanding the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County as well as understanding the switching costs effect as a moderator on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction.

The research philosophy supports deductive approach in acquiring knowledge which the study performed since it allowed the development of hypotheses by using existing theories. The methodology was based on quantitative approaches since the researcher was also to rely on empirical data and deductive reasoning to explain phenomena (Baldwin, 2018). Truth can be attained because knowledge rests on a set of firm, unquestionable, indisputable truths from

which our beliefs may be deduced, knowledge is generated deductively from a theory or hypothesis and Knowledge is objective ( Mack, 2010; Su, 2017).

### **3.3 Research Design**

The collection and analysis of data should be arranged in a way that there is a combination of economy in the research procedure and relevance to the study objective and in doing so, one would be creating or defining the research design (Kothari & Garg, 2019). As such, the design guides the researcher on among other things; the aim of the study, type of data required and how it is to be collected and analysed, the sample design as well as the presentation of results.

There are three main categories of research designs; the first category being exploratory or formulative research designs whose main purpose is problem formulation for investigations with more precision or coming up with a hypothesis with special importance given to discovering new ideas or insights. The studies are usually flexible in order to consider different aspects of a problem under study. The second category is experimental or hypothesis-testing research design where the investigators test the hypothesis of casual relationships between variables under study. The design is based on three principles enumerated by Professor Fisher: Principle of replication, principle of randomization and principle of local control (Fisher, 1960). The third category is descriptive and diagnostic research designs where description of a groups' characteristics or individual characteristics and determination of the frequency of occurrence of something or the association of the same with another thing respectively is the main concern for the design. The design in both studies (descriptive and diagnostic) according to Kothari and Garg (2019) must be

rigid and not flexible and must focus on; formulating study objectives, developing methods of collecting data, sample selection, undertaking actual collection of data, undertake data processing and finally reporting findings.

The research design adopted by this study was descriptive research design because of its description of things, as well as the description of the character and the description of state of affairs existing at a certain point in time (Dawson, 2019). Cooper and Schindler (2014) on their part postulated that descriptive researchs main concern to ascertain the who, the what, also where and when and finally how much or how often is the problem situation. The study also employed a survey research strategy since it supports descriptive research design as it allows the researcher to collect quantitative data, using questionnaires that can then be analysed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics (Saunders et al., 2019).

Descriptive survey was also appropriate for the study since it helps one work on problems as well as the research's clearly intended objectives. Furthermore, the method was also appropriate as it advocates for large sample sizes which in this case was advantageous as it ensured the attained results are more representative. Lastly, the employment of descriptive survey was also informed by the fact that it allows for variable relationships and the probable causes of such relationships to be supported by suggestions and facts (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). Quantitative approach which is based on the positivist research philosophy was also appropriate for this study because the observer is separate from the entities that are subject to observation. In addition, it allowed the research to maintain objectivity (reliable and unbiased) (Su, 2017).

### 3.4 Target Population

Target population as defined by Saunders and Lewis (2017) are all members of a hypothetical or real group of objects or people on whom results of an investigation are intended to be generated from. The target population of the study are tier one supermarket customers in Nairobi county. Nairobi county was chosen because most tier one supermarkets have enough branches spread across the county. The county is also important because of its cosmopolitan nature with approximately 6.5million people day population and 4,397,073 million people resident population according to the 2019 Kenya population and housing census.

Proctor and Gamble report of 2017 on Kenyans retail spending indicated that 30% of Kenyans purchase their household consumables from formal retail outlets (Brian, 2017). This is also supported by findings of Nielsen emerging market Insight (2015) on Africa's retail distribution. Again, based on the 2019 Kenya population and housing census results that put the Nairobi County resident population at 4,397,073 million people, we project the target population to be 30% of 4,397,073 million residents of Nairobi County. This gives approximately 1,319,122 presumed supermarket customers. In addition, market insight reports by Asoko Insight (2019) indicates that tier one supermarkets constitute 80% of the market share in Nairobi county led by Tuskys and Naivas. This in terms of customers means that they constitute 80% of total shoppers from formal retail outlets in Nairobi County. This gives approximately  $(1,319,122 * 0.8) = 1,055,298$  tier one supermarket customers.

This is then spread to the tier one supermarkets as shown in table 3.2 based on tier one supermarket number of outlets. Information derived from company sources, Kenya business directory (2019) and the yellow pages directory inc (nd) helped the researcher to determine the total number of tier one supermarket outlets as presented in appendix ii which shows that the tier one supermarkets as at September 2019 had a total of 72 retail outlets in Nairobi county.

**Table 3.4:**

*Nairobi county population distribution and tier one supermarket customers*

Nairobi county total population as per KNBS 2019 census report	Supermarket shoppers (30% of total population)	Tier one supermarket customers (80% of total supermarket shoppers)
4,397,073	1,319,122	1,055,298

Source: (KNBS, 2019; Nielsen emerging market Insight, 2015); (Asoko Insight, 2019)

**Table 3.4:**

*Nairobi County customer population distribution per tier one supermarkets*

Supermarkets (strata)	Number of outlets within Nairobi county (market share)	Estimated total (population) customers based on percentage of market share	Percentage of market share
Tuskeys	29	424,969	40.27%
Naivas	25	366,399	34.72%
Tumaini/Quick Mart	10	146,686	13.90%
Carrefour	8	117,244	11.11%
Total	72	1,055,298	100%

Source: (Author, 2020; Kenya business directory, 2019); Yellow pages directory inc, nd)

### **3.5 Sampling procedure**

#### **Sampling Frame**

A sampling frame is also a working population since it provides a list that can be worked with operationally, thus, a researcher draws study samples from the list (Zikmund et al., 2013). This study 's sampling frame constitutes of approximately 1,055,298 tier one supermarket customers in Nairobi County as per table 3.1. Nairobi County was chosen because of its cosmopolitan nature and the fact that all tier one supermarkets have well distributed outlets within the county and hence becomes the most appropriate for generalization. In addition, the county is viewed as a business and service center for the government and many private businesses hence the crowd convergence found there which makes it more convenient and ease the burden of respondent approachability.

#### **Sample and Sampling techniques**

According to Bell et al. (2018) a populations subset that is selected for research and it consists of selected members from the population as a representation of it is called a sample. A researcher can therefore draw conclusion regarding the population from the sample (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The sample size in terms of tier one supermarket customers was attained by applying the formula as proposed by Daniel and Cross (2018) for attaining sample sizes from large population sizes.



Formula

$$n = \frac{N * X}{(X + N - 1)},$$

Where,

n = Tier one supermarket customers sample size

N = total customer population size (1,055,298)

$X = Z_{\alpha/2}^2 * p * (1-p) / MOE^2$ , where

$Z_{\alpha/2}$  = Normal distributions critical value at  $\alpha/2$  (this study's confidence level of 95%, the  $\alpha$  is 0.05 and from the Z table, the critical value is 1.96),

MOE = Margin of error, (5%)

p = Proportion of sample (50%).

Note: The formula applies a Finite Population Correction (FPC) to the sample size.

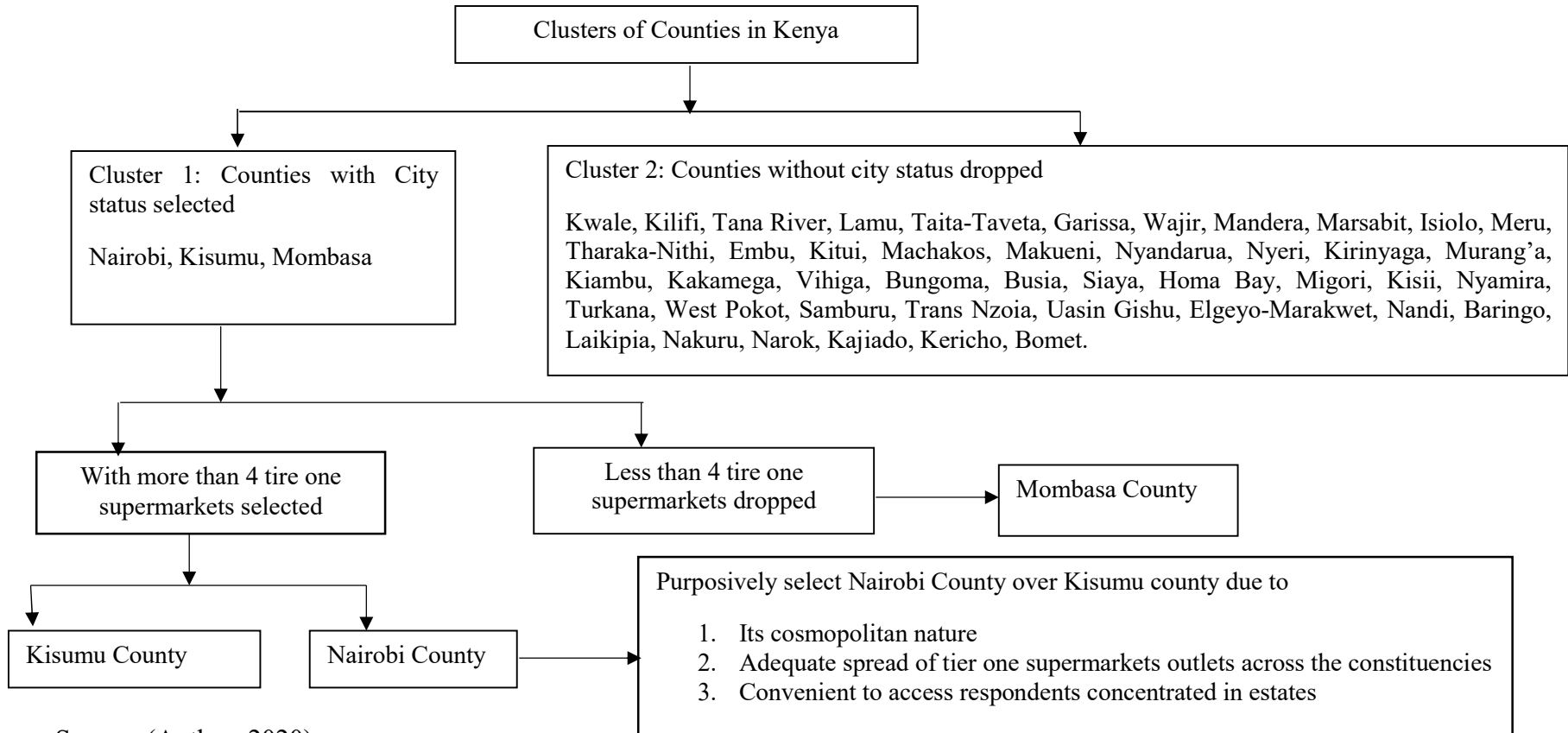
By use of a computer calculator for the above formula, the researcher attained a sample size of 384 respondents.

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques (mixed sampling design) were used in the study at different stages. The first step involved cluster sampling of counties in Kenya as shown in figure 3.1 which led the researcher to purposively select Nairobi County to be studied.

Nairobi county was purposively chosen because all tier one supermarkets in Kenya operate in the county and have enough branches spread across the county as well as its cosmopolitan nature with approximately 4,397,073 million people resident population according to the 2019 Kenya population and housing census concentrated in estates making it convenient to access respondents.

**Figure 3.1:**

*Counties Cluster sampling*



Source: (Author, 2020).

The second stage involved proportionate stratified sampling method based on each tier one supermarket's total retail outlets in Nairobi County in order to optimally allocate the tier one customer population and determine the percentage of each tier one supermarket percentage market share as presented in table 3.2 above. The proportionate stratified sampling method is where the researcher is allowed to divide a finite population into stratum or subpopulations. There is proper representation of each stratum in this sampling method since the share or proportion of a stratum in the total population determines the size of the sample i.e. proportionate allocation of sample size (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

The third stage also involved the application of proportionate stratified sampling technique in determination and allocation of sample size of the tier one supermarket customers. Based on the attained market share proportions in table 3.2, the sample size of 384 people was then proportionately allocated to the tier one supermarkets as shown in table 3.3. This method was appropriate and advantageous for this study because as still observed by Cooper and Schindler (2014) it facilitates self-weighting sample rendering weighing of responses irrelevant since the mean of the population can be established through calculation of the mean of all sample cases.

Lastly purposive sampling method was used to ensure that questionnaires were distributed to each constituency that the respective supermarkets had outlets. The distribution of outlets and sample allocation based on geographic location is presented in table 3.4.

**Table 3.5:**

***Distribution of sample size to each supermarket***

Supermarkets (strata)	Number of outlets within Nairobi county	Customer Sample size based on % of market share	Percentage of total customer sample size
Tuskys	(N1) 29	155	40.27%
Naivas	(N2) 25	133	34.72%
Tumaini/Quickmart	(N4) 10	53	13.90%
Carrefour	(N3) 8	43	11.11%
Total	72	n = 384	100%

Source: (Author, 2020)

**Table 3.4:*****Nairobi County supermarket outlets and sample distribution per geographic location***

Geographic Location		Name of supermarket and distribution of sample				Total
		Tuskys	Naivas	Carrefour	Tumaini/ Quickmart	
Western constituencies (Westlands, Dagoretti North, Dagoretti South)	Outlets Count	5	6	4	2	17
	Samples Count	27	32	22	11	92
Eastern constituencies (Kasarani, Embakasi East, Embakasi Central, Embakasi West)	Outlets Count	4	7	1	6	18
	Samples Count	21	37	5	32	95
Southern constituencies (Langata, Kibra, Embakasi South)	Outlets Count	5	5	2	1	13
	Samples Count	27	27	11	5	70
Northern constituencies (Roysambu, Ruaraka, Mathare, Embakasi North)	Outlets Count	0	2	0	1	3
	Samples Count	0	11	0	5	16
Central constituencies (Starehe, Kamukunji, Makadara)	Outlets Count	15	5	1	0	21
	Samples Count	80	27	5	0	112
Totals	Outlet count	29	25	8	10	72
	Samples Count	155	134	43	53	384

Source: (Author, 2020)

**3.6 Instrumentation**

Kothari and Garg (2019) assert that data collection activity commences immediately after the research problems' definition and establishment of the research design. Data collection is a means by which the researcher obtains information from subjects under investigation (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study employed primary data which is data that has been collected for the first time. Most social science studies employ questionnaires, interview schedules, standardized tests and observational forms as data collection instruments (Saunders et al., 2019).

This study used questionnaires to collect primary data. Kiriinya (2015) observed that in obtaining important information about a population, most researchers use questionnaires since they allow for development of items within the questionnaire that will be used to address specific study objective, question, or hypothesis. There are two main classification of questionnaires; structured or closed-ended and unstructured or open-ended. A structured questionnaire has fixed set of choices for respondents, also referred to as closed questions.

Collection of primary data was done by the use of structured questionnaires. The choice of structured questionnaires was because it allows researchers to contact larger number of people quickly, easily and efficiently (Thorsteinson, 2018). In order to attain better understanding and lucidity of presentation, Likert scale rankings were adopted for the questionnaires since answers are in the format of present or absent (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). The questionnaires had two major parts with the first section entailing respondents background information as well as information on their supermarkets while the other section contained study objectives related questions .

The admission to sample size members was done through hand delivery and then they were allowed to answer in the absence of the researcher or the research assistants (Nachmias et al., 2014). The choice of questionnaires was informed by the fact that privacy of respondents is assured (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). One week was given as the maximum response time, thereafter collection of answered questionnaires was undertaken.

### **3.7 Operational definition of variables**

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) operational definition or measurement of variables is a critical in research since different results can be attained due to differences in operationalization of variables even if the studies are similar. The study used statements of Likert type to established a correlation between real objects or processes and the abstract concepts of theory developed under the study. The statements were mainly derived from empirical literature in order to benefit from the depth of scholarly work that has already been documented. The operationalization framework in table 3.5 indicates the main constructs for each variable. Each construct was then broken down into Likert type statements that were to make it easier for the respondents to understand and answer.

For the independent variables, the aim was to establish from the customers whether tier one supermarkets were applying each of the independent variables as a relationship marketing practice and whether customers considered each of them as an important element in determination of their satisfaction. A Likert scale with five points (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = Always) was used for each statement corresponding to each relationship marketing practice construct.

To start with, the researcher operationalized customer satisfaction the dependent variable by looking at its four indices derived from Shakil and Shahbaz (2018) and Tomas et al. (2018) in their studies. Thus; repeat patronage or product repurchases, positive reviews, referrals, and positive word of mouth. Just like all the independent variables, the format of the five point Likert



scale was used for each statement corresponding to each customer satisfaction construct. The study tailored some of the Westbrook and Oliver (1981) statements of consumers measure of their degree of satisfaction to suite this study.

Information sharing the first independent variable had its operationalization constructs borrowed from the work of Ndubisi and Kok (2005) who explained that in a relationship, one can only say information sharing has taken place if the information provided is trustworthy, information is provided immediately a problem occurs and promises are fulfilled. The Likert item questions were also considered from Anderson et al. (1987) who established ten item semantic differential scale that was used to measure communication as an important element in a channel relationship.

Product customization variable was operationalized by price customization, design customization and strategic product bundling. Furthermore, in measuring the third independent variable, conflict handling, the study looked at two strategies explained by Ndubisi (2007), which included; the strategy of organizations making sure they solve the manifest conflicts way in advance before they end up creating problems, the second strategy being open discussions of solutions, thus the possible ones when any problems affecting the organization and the customers relationship arise. In addition, the study borrowed measurement constructs and scale reliability and validity from the work of (Bruner et al., 2005).

The last independent variable, reciprocity was operationalized by two important dimensions proposed by Hoppner et al. (2015) thus equivalence and immediacy. Finally, in operationalizing the moderating variable switching cost, the study developed sub variables by benchmarking on

Jones et al. (2002) academic work, while Weide' Hatfield (1988) article helped coin questionnaire question statements. In addition, some Likert scale statements were also developed based on the recommendation of Bruner et al. (2005) for customers to indicate if they affect their consideration of alternatives in supermarkets.

**Table 3.7:**

***Operationalization framework for questionnaire Likert questions***

Variable name/Type of variable	Operationalizing indicators of variables	Likert Questions
Information sharing (independent variable 1)	An element of communication which implies keeping in touch with valued customers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accurate information</li><li>• Timely information</li><li>• Trustworthy information</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• My supermarket communicates with me frequently</li><li>• My supermarket has a feedback system</li><li>• The information shared by my supermarket has always turned out to be accurate over time</li><li>• My supermarket provides timely information</li><li>• My supermarket provides information about new products and services</li></ul>
Product customization (independent variable 2)	Focusing on the customer in developing products and services of marketing programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Price customization</li><li>• Package design customization</li><li>• Strategic product bundling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• My supermarket always offers reasonable packaged products</li><li>• My supermarket always offers reasonable prices</li><li>• The supermarket involves me before coming up with new product offerings or services</li><li>• My supermarket offers me targeted couponing</li><li>• My supermarket is flexible for me even if its offerings</li></ul>

Conflict handling (independent variable 3) Focusing on minimization of adversarial problem-solving outcomes

- Solve manifest conflict before they create problems
- Open discussion of solutions when problems arise

have changed

- My supermarket tries to minimize potential conflicts
- My supermarket tries to resolve manifest conflict before they can create problems
- My supermarket employees have the knowledge and ability to openly discuss solutions when problems arise
- My supermarket resolves product return problems
- My supermarket resolves any conflict within a reasonable period
- Every complain is handled by my supermarket in a positive and active manner
- My supermarket avoids the same problem from happening again

Reciprocity (independent variable 4) An interdependent exchange between the customer and the supermarket.

- Equivalence
- Immediacy

Switching cost (moderating variable) Monetary and non-monetary elements that prevent customers from moving (adapted to determine whether the consumer looks for additional choices)

- Economic cost
- Relational cost

- My supermarket works to return any assistance I accord them in kind
- My supermarket works to return any favours extended to them by me as quickly as possible
- My supermarket believes that any favours I extend to them shall even out over time eventually
- My supermarket makes effort to strengthen my loyalty
- My supermarket always sees things from the customers view
- My supermarket makes time and effort to maintain our relationship
- The supermarket makes and constantly tries to fulfill promises
- Parking area availability is important in choosing a supermarket
- Loyalty incentives by supermarkets affect my store choices
- Prices by supermarkets affect my store choices
- Branch coverage greatly affect the choice of

Customer satisfaction (dependent variable)	Post purchase evaluation of the overall service or product experience	<p>supermarket</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter service by supermarket can affect my store choices</li> <li>• Variety of products in the supermarket affect my store choices</li> <li>• Distance between a supermarket and my home is important in determining store choice</li> <li>• Customer support by supermarket can affect the choice of store I make</li> <li>• Location affects my supermarket store choice</li> <li>• My supermarket stimulates me to buy repeatedly</li> <li>• I give advice about this brand to other people</li> <li>• My experience with the supermarket has always been good</li> <li>• I comfortably share my personal experiences about the supermarket to others</li> <li>• I would recommend the supermarket to my family and friends</li> <li>• I would recommend the supermarket to colleagues</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat patronage/re-purchase</li> <li>• Positive reviews</li> <li>• Referrals</li> </ul> <p>Positive word of mouth</p>	

- I talk positively about the services of my supermarket to my friends and relatives
- I do not have a strong intention to switch to other supermarkets even if I face a small problem with my current supermarket
- I intend to remain with the same supermarket even if there is an increase in price or charges.

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Source: (Author, 2020)

### **3.8 Consideration of research ethics**

Resnik and Elliot (2015), posits that people think of ethics as constituting rules of distinguishing right and wrong and gave one example as professional codes of conduct i.e a discipline set of standards which help members streamline their activities which in return is expected to instill public trust. The study considered their definition which states that ethics are norms of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour. Likewise research ethics is aimed at enhancing research goals such as truth, knowledge, and avoidance of error. Ethical requirements in research are rigorous leading to the research final report to be an accurate product to the best of the knowledge and ability of the investigator (King'oriah, 2014).

To enhance research ethics in this study, the researcher acquired a research permit from the government research agency, NACOSTI to show that the study is legal. Additional permits were sought from relevant offices in the county government of Nairobi and directors of education within the county. In addition, the researcher ensured that all questionnaires are accompanied by a copy of the formal university research permission and introductory letter.

As a further enhancement of ethical standards in the study, a written assurance of confidentiality formed part of the questionnaires. In addition, their design promoted anonymity. All formulated study questions were framed sensitively to avoid any stress or discomfort to the respondents. All respondents were encouraged to participate voluntarily hence no forms of incentives or rewards were used to encourage participation. The researcher never engaged in coercion or pressurizing any individual into participating in the study.



### **3.9 Pilot testing**

Having received permission to embark on the process of collecting data from the University office of director research development and postgraduate studies on 14th October 2019 and subsequently acquired a research license from the NACOSTI on 17th October 2019, the researcher proceeded to undertake a pilot study with an aim of pretesting the questionnaire. A pilot test was conducted within the same month of October 2019 in order to determine whether the questionnaire was suitable in terms of the question structure, format and content used. Convenience sampling was applied to select 26 respondents who were supermarket shoppers within the study scope area, Kajiado County in order to ensure that pilot study respondents are different from the main study respondents.

The purpose of a pilot survey was to refine the instruments so that the respondents do not have a problem in answering the questions and provide for easy recording and analysis of data (Saunders et al., 2019). During a pilot study, pretesting of research tool also referred to as trying out a research tool is used with a sole purpose of making sure the questionnaire meets the researchers presupposition concerning the information to be acquired (Tlapana, 2009).

Pilot study or testing also helps in the evaluation of the instruments validity as well as reliability of the data that is collected (Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015). By use of English designed questionnaires and administered in front of selected supermarkets, the study undertook a pilot study within the month of October 2019 using participants from select supermarkets within Kajiado County. The specific respondents and supermarket outlets were purposely selected to ensure that the study

doesn't fall into a repeat bias trap. A sample size of 26 respondents was used which is in line with Blumberg et al., (2011) assertion that any number from 5-100 subjects gives an acceptable size for a good pilot group but this also is subject to the intended method to be subjected to the test. They also explained that the respondents in this part of the study do not have to be selected statistically hence justifying application of purposive sampling for this exercise by the researcher.

During the pilot testing process, validity and reliability analysis were undertaken. Ranjan (2017) highlighted the importance of undertaking an analysis of reliability and validity of the constructs under the study before research hypotheses testing in the conceptual model. It's important to undertake both reliability and validity tests to avoid situations where a measure is found to be reliable, thus has some consistency yet when it comes to validity, it fails the test, thus it's not accurate (Wilson, 2014). Therefore, it was essential that both analyses were adopted by this study in order to guarantee the validity and also the reliability of the constructs as this will ensure attainment of quality research findings and conclusions. Training for research assistants was undertaken as per the schedule presented in appendix vii before they could participate in the pilot study.

### **3.9.1 Validity analysis**

The extend of accuracy with which data collection instrument is able to undertake planned measurement is what is referred to as validity (Nachmias et al., 2014). Taherdoost (2016) in his study describes validity as the level with which a problem under study is represented by the

analyzed data results. Three major data validity forms exist. Thus; construct, the second being content and the third being criterion validities (predictive validity and concurrent validity) (Cronbach, 1990; Daniel & Sam, 2015). The study employed all the three validity measures as discussed below.

Construct validity measure is used to determine the level with which the intended data which is supposed to be collected from the instrument of data collection selected for the study reflects accurately the research's theoretical concept (Daniel & Sam, 2015). In addition it is also concerned with whether the measurement items actually measure the construct they are supposed to measure (Saunders et al., 2019). Convergent construct validity which according to Bell et al. (2018) looks at the extent to which a construct measure in the study converges with other same construct measures. For this study, this was measured using average variance extracted (AVE) criteria based on Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommendations (Ab Hamid et al., 2017).

Discriminant construct validity which according to Ab Hamid et al. (2017) assesses whether measures of dissimilar constructs diverge, in that they show no obvious relationship, hence prevents multi-collinearity. In this study, it was measured using the square root of a construct's AVE and compared to the constructs' correlations with the other constructs where the latter must be less than the former (Henseler et al., 2015; Voorhees et al., 2016).

Content validity looks at the adequacy and level of coverage of study questions by the measurement instrument (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Salkind, 2010). This type of validity is also based on face validity and is also a systematic scale assessment that is subjective in nature

(Malhotra, 2015; Zikmund et al., 2013). Face validity looks at the extent with which a measurement instrument appears from external appearance or on its face to measure the construct under study (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). The contents should not out rightly appear to be inappropriate or irrelevant. Scholars have pointed out that face validity is not adequate as it only operates at facial level hence only important in supporting content validity.

Experts were used to analyse the two types of validity as recommended by Donald and Pamela (2014) who also asserted that the experts should be composed of professionals from the relevant industry as well as academicians within the same field of study. Ranjan (2017) in his work notes that previously most items were subjected to an expert panel made up of mainly 3 academicians and at least 2 experts in management, with some specialization in customer relationship management preferably in the retail marketing sector and an average work experience of about fifteen years in their respected fields. He further asserts that the approach is now being viewed as a standard process when one wants to validate, refine the questionnaire items and the process can therefore be adopted by other researchers. This study assessed content validity at the pilot study stage by adopting a similar mechanism discussed by Ranjan (2017), thus the draft questionnaire was subjected to a panel of 6 experts composed of 3 marketing lecturers and 3 management experts within the field of marketing and who were also certified members of the Marketing Society of Kenya with adequate working experience. The final questionnaire was then refined by the researcher's two supervisors.

In this study, criterion validity was also undertaken. This validity measures the extent to which a variable or construct correlates with other variables or constructs under measured that the

researcher on the basis of different reasons expects them to have a correlation with (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). These other variables are referred to as criteria. When criterion is measured concurrently with construct, then we refer to such criterion validity as concurrent validity (Cronbach, 1990). Cronbach also posits that concurrent validity is studied when one test is proposed as an alternative or substitute for another.

Additionally, when the criterion measurement is undertaken in future, thus sometime after one undertakes construct measurement, then predictive validity will be the name of the criterion since a future outcome has been predicted by the measurement scores. Criterion validity also includes convergent validity which is the determination of whether a criterion includes other measures of the same construct. (Clark, 1983; Cozby, 2001; Thomas et al., 2012). For this study, the researcher's undertaking of a pilot study as a pretest for its variables and measuring instruments satisfied the predictive criterion validity.

Construct validity was carried out to determine the level with which the intended data from the questionnaires accurately reflects the study theoretical concept (Daniel & Sam, 2015). This was achieved through carrying out convergent construct validity and discriminant construct validity as outline in tables 3.6 and 3.7 respectively and explained below.

**Table 3.6:*****Convergent Validity***

Constructs	AVE	SQRT AVE
Information sharing	0.711105	0.84327
Product customization	0.507549	0.712424
Conflict handling	0.659306	0.811977
Reciprocity	0.592005	0.769419
Switching cost	0.670491	0.818835
Customer satisfaction	0.57431	0.757833

Source: Author, 2020

Convergent construct validity which according to Bell et al. (2018) looks at the extend of a measures' convergence with the other measures within the same variable or construct was measured using average variance extracted (AVE) criteria as recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and Ab Hamid et al. (2017). The accepted value of AVE is 0.5. However, a value closer to 0.7 and more is considered very good (Alarcón et al., 2015). This is supported by Dukhan et al. (2017) that a value of average variance extracted should be at least 0.5. In the table 3.6, the AVE for each of the variable is greater than 0.5 indicating that the measurement question statements can better mirror the characteristics of each study variable in the model.

**Table 3.7:*****Discriminant Validity***

Variable	AVE	Information sharing	Product customization	Conflict handling	Reciprocity	Switching cost	Customer satisfaction
Information sharing	0.711	<b>0.844</b>					
Product customization	0.508	0.601	<b>0.712</b>				
Conflict handling	0.659	0.070	0.343	<b>0.812</b>			
Reciprocity	0.592	0.339	0.600	0.485	<b>0.769</b>		
Switching cost	0.670	0.165	0.021	0.035	-0.009	<b>0.819</b>	
Customer satisfaction	0.574	0.268	0.306	0.315	0.679	0.131	<b>0.758</b>
	N	26	26	26	26	26	26

Source: Author, 2020

Discriminant construct validity which according to Ab Hamid et al. (2017) assesses whether measures of dissimilar constructs diverge, in that they show no obvious relationship. Discriminant construct validity in this study has been measured using the constructs AVE square root. To add on, AVE square root value that is acceptable has to be greater than the correlation figures attained between the construct and the other constructs under study (Henseler et al., 2015; Voorhees et al., 2016).

When the  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$  of each variable is greater than the correlation coefficient between a variable and other variable, it indicates that there is a strong discriminant coefficient between the

variables, that is, the difference between each measurement variable is better (Dukhan et al., 2017).

The table 3.7 shows the correlations between the variables, AVE and  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ . The bold number is the  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ . Since the correlation coefficient between a variable and itself is known to be 1, the diagonal with entries as 1 was replaced with bold numbers which represent the respective variables'  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ s for easier comparisons. The off-diagonal elements are the correlations among the variables except the first column which displays the AVE.

In ascertaining the discriminant validity for this study, off diagonal elements in reference to the table 3.7 should be smaller than the diagonal elements. For instances when considering correlation between information sharing and other variables, the highest correlation coefficient is between information sharing and product customization (0.601) and the lowest correlation coefficient is between information sharing and conflict handling (0.070) with the AVE square root as 0.844327. For product customization the highest correlation coefficient is exhibited between product customization and reciprocity (0.600) and the lowest coefficient is between product customization and switching cost (0.021) and 0.712424 as product customization AV square root.

Considering conflict handling, its highest correlation coefficient is between conflict handling and reciprocity has an AV square root of 0.81197. Reciprocity is highly correlated with customer satisfaction (0.6790) than any other variable whiles its square root of AVE is 0.769419. Switching cost displays its highest correlation coefficient (0.165) with information sharing while



its AVE square root is 0.818835. Finally, customer satisfaction is highly correlated to reciprocity (0.679) with AVE's square root being 0.757833. It is clear from the table that for all variables, each of them has an AVE square root higher than the correlation coefficient it exhibits with other variables. Therefore, there is a strong discriminant coefficient between the variables, that is, the difference between each measurement variable is better.

### **3.9.2 Reliability analysis**

Testing the scale of reliability is important in order for a researcher to understand the internal consistency of the variables. Bhattacharjee (2012) defined it as how dependable or consistent a construct measuring item is. Reliability therefore looks at level at which an instrument is free from error, making it appropriate in yielding consistent results (Goodman et al., 2016). Reliability implies consistency, but not accuracy (Chakiso, 2015). From the above literature, we find that the term errors in research are perceived to be related terms and when one attains a larger reliability of the constructs then errors will be smaller. Due to that, minimization of errors as well as bias is the main reason for testing reliability by any researcher (Yin, 1994). Literature indicates that one can undertake a reliability test by using either of the following two dimensions; first, internal consistency or second Repeatability.

The study employed the internal consistency dimension using Cronbach alpha coefficient also frequently referred to as the alpha coefficient because its advantage in ensuring that measurement at the interval level one can use multiple item scales (Ranjan, 2017). Furthermore, its use is also justified because it only requires single administration in addition to it ensuring

that internal consistency of a scale is quantitatively estimated with a unique estimate (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The following rules of thumb were developed by George and Mallery (2019) concerning Cronbach alpha coefficients: Greater than 0.9 its perceived to be excellent, greater than 0.8 its good, greater than 0.7 it's acceptable, greater than 0.6 it becomes questionable, greater than 0.5 its perceived to be poor, while less than 0.5 is out rightly not acceptable.

Scholars indicate that Pearson (r) correlation coefficient can be measured using the alpha from the same scale which is between 0 and 1. High internal consistency is concluded when the results report an alpha which is too close to 1 but to have an acceptable variable or a number of variables, any value of Cronbach's alpha between 0.7 and 0.8 is considered reliable and appropriate (Field, 2017).

The pilot study was used to measure the internal consistency by applying Cronbach's coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for each variable and the overall questionnaire. Using George and Mallery (2019) rule of thumb, each of the constructs was supposed to have  $\alpha > 0.7$  as a firm prove of constructs being consistent and reliable for the study and warranted no adjustments. They further posited that for an excellent construct,  $\alpha$  is  $> 0.9$ , while an  $\alpha > 0.8$  is considered good, an acceptable  $\alpha$  as explained above will be  $> 0.7$ ,  $\alpha$  figures which are  $> 0.6$  are considered as questionable, while an  $\alpha > 0.5$  is viewed as being poor, and finally any  $\alpha$  figure  $< 0.5$  is interpreted as being unacceptable. If not, some adjustments must be made by either restructuring questions that respondents had difficulty comprehending or dropping some questions altogether if the overall alpha of the entire questionnaire was below 0.7.

The alpha figures attained justified why the questionnaire constructs were all retained for the main study. This was supported by the overall questionnaire reliability test that yielded an  $\alpha$  of 0.871, and since the figure was  $> 0.8$  hence interpreted as being good and hence the whole questionnaire was reliable and suitable for data collection of the main study. Variables product customization and customer satisfaction which yielded Cronbach Alpha of 0.634 and 0.697 respectively which can be interpreted as questionable were still retained for the main study with some questions restructured for the main study with the help of the researcher's supervisors and a panel of experts. The results are presented in table 3.8 below.

**Table 3.8:**

*Pilot study reliability test*

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Information sharing	0.810	7
Product customization	0.634	7
Conflict handling	0.781	7
Reciprocity	0.751	7
Switching cost	0.787	9
Customer satisfaction	0.697	9
Overall questionnaire	0.871	46

Source: Author, 2020

### 3.9.3 Main study reliability results

Just like in the pilot study reliability test, the scale constructs for the main study were tested with an aim of retaining only meaningful variables even though some scholars have advised against removing any variable since the study might lose important information rendering the outcome not to reflect the true picture. The rule of thumb as proposed by George and Mallery (2019), was still adopted with each of the constructs supposed to have Cronbach's Alpha  $> 0.7$  in order to be unquestionable and highly reliable. The results as summarized in the table 3.9 and indicate that all the study variables were highly reliable since the respective Cronbach Alpha were greater than 0.7.

**Table 3.9:**

***Main Study reliability results (Cronbach's Alpha)***

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Information sharing	0.873	7
Product customization	0.801	7
Conflict handling	0.864	7
Reciprocity	0.859	7
Switching cost	0.869	9
Customer satisfaction	0.874	9
Overall questionnaire	0.936	46

Source: Author, 2020

### **3.10 Methods of data processing and analysis**

According to Kiriinya (2015) data that is collected from the field also referred to as raw data is supposed to be transformed into information that would be meaningful in answering the research questions. The pre analysis stage for this study involved questionnaire checking for completeness, data cleaning for treatment of missing values, data editing for errors and omissions and finally data coding as recommended by Donald and Pamela (2014) on data preparation process.

Data analysis was undertaken immediately after data processing. According to Zikmund et al. (2013) it is a procedure that includes the process of packaging and having the main components of information systematically structured and for efficient and effective communication of findings.

The study used SPSS and Microsoft excel software to facilitate data Analysis. The researcher found it prudent to employ both descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics for the study. King'oriah (2004) described descriptive statistics also referred to as inductive statistics as the facts and figures sifted and arranged in a manner that enables the researcher to understand the nature of the population while inferential statistics also referred to as deductive statistics as statistics used to deduce certain facts about the main population from which the data being researched has been sampled.

According to Tlapana (2009) descriptive statistics provides the sample and the respective measures in a simplified summery form. Research information requires to be sifted and arranged

to a point where the researcher or the investigator can see the pattern of trends and what is in it. This might mean summarizing or arranging the data in a comprehensive manner. Descriptive statistics was presented in different forms, thus; frequency distributions, skewness and kurtosis, cross tabulations, means and standard deviation were used by the researcher in the study in order to highlight key findings. In addition, inferential statistics in the form of t statistics, F statistics, chi-square statistics, ANOVA, regression statistics as well as correlation statistics were employed in order to establish and help explain the respective variable relationships.

### **3.10.1 Quantitative data analysis**

The study used correlation coefficients by employing correlation analysis and multiple correlation analysis to quantify the association between a relationship marketing practice (dependent variable) and customer satisfaction (independent variable) as well as the association between all the independent variables and the dependent variable under study respectively. ANOVA was applied in order to analyse the significant variable relationships. In addition, linear relationships between the regressors and the regressand were evaluated by regression analysis (partial and multiple). The regression results and ANOVA statistics in the form of t and F statistics were also used to finally test study hypotheses. Kothari and Garg (2019) assert that testing hypothesis is to determine on the basis of statistical results whether the hypothesis is valid or not.

The study follows a two-stage linear regression model where the independent variables are introduced in the first stage then the moderator and interaction terms in the second stage. The

independent and dependent variables were analysed by the use of univariate linear regression models based on the below four regression equations with the test models being adopted from Greene (2018), Sobel (1982), Baron and Kenny (1986) and Aiken et al. (1991).

1.  $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + e$

2.  $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_2 V_2 + e$

3.  $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_3 V_3 + e$

4.  $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_4 V_4 + e$

5.  $(\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4 + e)$

Where

$\gamma$  = Customer satisfaction

$\alpha$  =Constant

$\beta_i$  = variable coefficients

$V_1$  = Information sharing

$V_2$  = Conflict handling

$V_3$  = product customization

$V_4$  = Reciprocity

e = Error term

Several tests were performed for the purpose of estimating “switching cost” the moderating variables effect on the study model. Multiple linear regression models were used to test significance of the betas attained in order to ascertain whether there exists moderating effect or not and if yes, also help in determination of the extend of the moderation. Test models by Greene (2018), Sobel (1982), Baron and Kenny (1986) and Aiken et al. (1991) were still adopted.

The effect of the moderating variable was examined through model 2 by comparing the outcome with results of model 1 below respectively. Model 1 lacks the moderating variable while model 2 has incorporated the moderating variable.

$$\text{Model 1. } (\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4 + \beta_5 M + e)$$

$$\text{Model 2. } (\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4 + \beta_5 M + M(\beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4) + e)$$

Where

$\gamma$  = Customer satisfaction

$\alpha$  =Constant

$\beta_i$  = variable coefficients

$V_1$  = Information sharing

$V_2$  = Conflict handling



$V_3$  = product customization

$V_4$  = Reciprocity

$M$  = Moderating variable (Switching cost)

$e$  = Error term

Likert-type scaling was also used for all the data that needed to be subjected to statistical processes through content analysis. Krosnick and Presser (2010) posited that its prudent for researchers to specify Likert scale points (number) during design stage. Likert scale uses 5 points with 1 used to describe the least case scenario and 5 describing the best-case scenario (Likert, 1932). It should however be noted that when it comes to the required number of points in a scale, no universal standard exists, for example, Thurstone (1928) equal appearing interval method suggests 11 points scale, while (Osgood et al., 1957) measurement of meanings indicates 7 point scale.

The researcher employed a five point scale with inclusion of word labels. Krosnick and Presser (2010) observed that inclusion of word labels is a necessity since it helps respondents understand the scale points clearly making question answering better hence increasing reliability of the scales. Numerical and verbal definition of the adopted Likert scale is shown in the table 3.10 below.

**Table 3.10:**

*Operationalization of relationship marketing practice question statement scores*

Scale 5	Scale 4	Scale 3	Scale2	Scale 1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral (somehow agree)	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never

Source: Author, 2020

The range gives weight of responses. The Actual rating scale for the means was 1 = SD (strongly disagree between 1 – 1.5), 2 = D (disagree >1.5 – 2.5), 3 = N (somehow agree >2.5 – 3.5), 4 = AG (agree >3.5 – 4.5) and 5 = SA (strongly agree >4.5).

**3.10.2 Sample adequacy and sphericity test**

According to researchers have been advised that before they embark on performing further analysis on the data, they should undertake a data suitability test in the form of data adequacy and sphericity tests. These tests are undertaken using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic for sample adequacy and Bartlett’s statistical measure for sampling sphericity which means that samples are uncorrelated (Peri, 2012).

**Table 3.11:*****KMO and Bartlett's statistics results***

Variables	Number of Items	KMO	Bartlett's	
			Sig	Chi-Square
Information sharing	7	0.863	0.000	1080.094
Product customization	7	0.842	0.000	597.132
Conflict handling	7	0.865	0.000	937.167
Reciprocity	7	0.853	0.000	953.916
Switching cost	9	0.871	0.000	1185.926
Customer satisfaction	9	0.894	0.000	1392.369

Source: Author, 2020

Both sample adequacy and sphericity tests for each study variable were found to be significant as shown in the table 3.11. The interpretation of significance is based on the work of Moradi and Zandieh (2013) who asserted that a value of above 0.6 for Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test is good for further analysis. In Bartlett test Ouma (2018) notes that a high chi-square and low P value of less than the significance value of 0.05 signifies existence of adequate relationship between items an indication that the suitability of the study data for further analysis has been met. The study results in table above indicate a high chi square for each variable and a low p value of 0.000 for each variable hence there is a significant relationship between items.

**3.10.3 Tests on assumption of classical linear regression model**

In order to determine whether the study variables meet the assumptions of classical linear regression model. Several diagnostic tests were undertaken for the multiple regression model

among them; normality test, linearity test, multicollinearity test and heteroscedasticity test as discussed below respectively.

### **Normality test**

Normality assumption holds if all the error terms are normally distributed around zero (Ernst & Albers, 2017). According to Hickey et al. (2018) if the sample size is large, then normality assumption is not critical. This study had a sample size of 384 people which is considered large, in spite of that, a normality test for each independent variable was undertaken. Variables are considered to be normally distributed if the cases deviate from the diagonal or 45° line from origin (Tranmer & Elliot, 2016). Normality was tested using normal P-P plots as well as using skewness and kurtosis. From the normal P-P plots presented in appendix iii, all the variables were normally distributed. This was also proven from the skewness and kurtosis results presented in table 3.12. Kothari and Garg (2019) postulates that data analysis proceeds if Kurtosis and Skewness values lie between +3 and -3. This however is a rule of thumb and no figure is universally settled on. It can be deduced from these study findings that the data set was a normal distribution since all the values lied within the range for normality assumptions.

**Table 3.12:*****Skewness and Kurtosis normality test***

	N	Mean	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Information sharing	329	23.6049	-.409	.134	-.215	.268
Product customization	329	23.6292	-.039	.134	-.498	.268
Conflict handling	329	26.0638	-.917	.134	2.301	.268
Reciprocity	329	24.3313	-.491	.134	.663	.268
Switching costs	329	35.7538	-1.045	.134	2.002	.268
Customer satisfaction	329	33.6109	-.477	.134	.755	.268
Valid N (listwise)	329					

Source: Author, 2020

**Linearity test**

In case of more than one regressors, it is required that the number of scatter plots made should be equal to the total number of explanatory variables. The individual relationship between the regressand and each regressor maybe linear although the overall relationship between regressand and regressors may not be linear. Hence separate scatter plots even though recommended may not always help in getting the idea of overall relationship (Kothari & Garg, 2019). The researcher started by testing linearity using scatter plots with individual predicted values as shown in appendix iv. The results indicated that all the study regressor variables data had a linear relationship with the regressand variable data.

In further analysis, so as to confirm linear relationship with all the explanatory variables, we plot a scatter plot of residuals with predicted values (Kothari & Garg, 2019). Residual plots showing the unstandardized residuals versus the predicted values spots violations of linearity, if linearity is spotted, then no regular pattern should be detected. At some points, the association between regressand and regressors may be non-linear though such points cannot be ignored since disregarding them leads to biased parameter (Hickey et al., 2018). A scatterplot alone is unsuitable for checking linearity and normality and therefore a residual plot is a better approach (Ernst & Albers, 2017). From the figures in appendix iv when plotting the regressand against total number of explanatory variables, other than two outliers, all other data-points fulfilled the linearity assumption.

### **Multicollinearity test**

Multicollinearity is case where in a regression model with many predictors, one of those predictor variables with quite a good degree of accuracy can be linearly predicted from the other explanatory set of variable. Presence of multicollinear causes inflated standard errors and absurd estimates. The problem of multicollinearity was tested using VIF, where a values that is  $<10$  is an indication of no multicollinearity (Hickey et al., 2018). However, in absence of multicollinear, values of VIF less than 5 are considered to be more accurate (Kothari & Garg, 2019). Furthermore, if the coefficient of multiple determination ( $R^2$ ) exceeds 0.8, then there is presence of multicollinearity (Gujarati, 2009). The researcher presented multicollinearity test results summary in table 3.13 below. From the table, the highest VIF was 2.423 with lowest VIF being 1.030. These values lie in the range of optimum condition of no multicollinearity that is the VIF

values are less than 5. Also, the test results found the value of  $R^2$  being 0.469 which is less than 0.8 hence we can conclude that the data set had no multicollinearity.

**Table 3.13:**

***Collinearity statistics (VIF and Tolerance)***

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		
Information sharing	.513	1.949
Product customization	.518	1.932
Conflict handling	.491	2.035
Reciprocity	.413	2.423
Switching costs	.971	1.030

Source: Author, 2020

**Heteroscedasticity test**

Heteroscedasticity is a case where the error term between explanatory and explained variables is not the same across all values of explanatory variables. Regression analysis is not optimal when heteroskedasticity is present because it gives equal weight to all observations when, in fact, observations with larger disturbance variance contain less information than observations with smaller disturbance variance(King'oriah, 2004).

It is perceived that when the residuals are not scattered around the ( $y=0$ ) horizontal line then there is presence of heteroscedasticity (Osborne & Waters, 2002). If homoscedasticity is met, at that time a scatterplot of residuals against fitted values should not specify any pattern (Hickey et

al., 2018). As indicated in appendix v figures the data points are scattered with no clearly established pattern. This shows that variables were not correlated. This further shows that the data set had no heteroscedasticity but had homoscedasticity, which is desirable for modelling of regression equation.

### **3.11 Results presentation**

The study's analysed data was presented by both types of statistics, thus descriptive/inductive and inferential/deductive. The result summaries were then presented through figures and frequency table. This aided the discussion of results which followed and in order to make sure there is easier understanding of the results, all the presentations were arranged systematically following the order of study variables and considering the questionnaire and the outline of the respective variable questions therein.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the study findings and discussions supported by empirical findings. The specific objectives informed the flow of investigations. The study sought to answer the general objective of the study which sought to examine the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The study also sought to test five null hypothesis which were stated as; Information sharing has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya, product customization has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya conflict handling has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya, Reciprocity has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya and switching cost does not significantly moderate the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Results were presented with the aid of tabular presentations and figures in chronological order based on study objectives. First descriptive data on respondents was presented followed by descriptive data on study variables in order of study objectives followed by univariate regression analysis results and finally multiple regression analysis, test of hypothesis and discussion of

findings in the same chronological order. The chapter concludes by discussing the correlation analysis of study variables.

## **4.2 Response rate**

The study sought to collect data from 384 respondents and managed to collect 336 questionnaires. After the process of editing and cleaning data, 329 were deemed good for further analysis since all questions were completely answered, this translated to a response rate of 85.68%. It has always been assumed by many researchers that high response rate safeguards the achievement of unbiased estimates. This notion is supported by Fosnacht et al. (2017) in their article, “How important are high response rates for college surveys”. In another related study, Massey and Tourangeau (2013) held that high non response rate increases potential for biased estimates even though they also observed that it does not necessarily bias an estimate.

Regrettably, in business and management studies, different response rates have been recorded and justified clearly indicating that there is no consensus on the acceptable standard rate of response (Mellahi & Harris, 2016). Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) makes it clear that in business research a response rate of 50% can be considered to be adequate for further analysis, 60% should be taken as being good while a 70% rate or above is considered very good. Wright (2015) has made it clear that researchers should not base the entire quality of their study on the rate of response.

Ogungbade (2015) in his study done on the Telecommunication industry in Nigeria where he explored the relationship between relationship marketing, relationship quality and customer

loyalty he attained 81% of response rate which was described as excellent. Nyameino (2016) on studying the effect of relationship marketing practices and ICT on customer satisfaction whose unit of analysis were classified star hotels in Nairobi, attained a 75% response rate which amounted to 281 validly returned questionnaires. In another related study, Datta et al. (2018) who investigated superstore customer relationship marketing and its relationship with CR in the Bangladesh retail sector only attained 338% rate of response which was still considered valid for analysis to proceed. It's considering the observed empirical benchmarks and rules of thumb that this study's achieved response rate of 85.68% was considered excellent and enough for subsequent data analysis. Distribution of the respondents is shown in the table below.

**Table 4.2:**

***Response rate***

Supermarket	Distributed Questionnaires	Correctly Completed Questionnaires	% of total valid questionnaires	Share % of valid total returned questionnaires
Tuskys	155	137	88.39	41.64
Naivas	133	128	96.24	38.91
Tumaini/Quickmart	53	33	62.26	10.03
Carrefour	43	31	72.09	9.42
Totals	384	329	85.68	100.0

Source: Author, 2020

As presented in table 4.1, Naivas had the highest response rate at 96.24% relative to the total questionnaires distributed to its customers. Tuskys followed with 88.39%, Carrefour at third place with 72.09% and finally Tumaini/Quickmart at 62.26%. cumulatively this translated to a

total response rate of 85.68%. on the second level of analysis on response rate, the researcher looked at the share percentage of each supermarket on the validly returned questionnaires. Tusksys attained higher percentage at 41.64%, Naivas followed at 38.91%, Tumaini/Quickmart at 10.03% and Carrefour at 9.42%. The trend mirrors the percentage distribution of questionnaires to respondents based on total number of supermarket outlets in Nairobi county (market share).

### **4.3 Data Preparation**

Kothari and Garg (2019) observes that data after collection, must be properly prepared for analysis in order to guarantee reliability of the results. The research employed the recommendations of Malhotra (2015) concerning the process of data preparation that involved questionnaire checking, data editing, data coding, data transcription and data cleaning. Data coding, sorting and analysis was done by the use of statistical package SPSS version 25 as had been proposed in chapter three. All data entry errors were corrected in addition to verification and determination of treatment of missing data before ascertaining the final number of valid questionnaires. Outliers occasioned by mistakes in data entry were also corrected.

### **4.4 Results of Demographic Characteristics**

In order to understand the sample characteristics and their effect on the study variables, the researcher captured some demographic characteristics in relation to gender of respondents, age distribution, level of education, monthly net income of respondents, years of shopping and supermarket preference according to regional location.

#### 4.4.1 Gender of respondents

The total number of male respondents who participated in the study was 187 which translated to 56.8% of total respondents while the female respondents were 142 which translated to 43.2% of the total respondents recorded. The results are shown in table 4.2 below. This was considered a good distribution to avoid biasness.

**Table 4.2:**

##### *Gender of respondents*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	187	56.8
Female	142	43.2
Total	329	100.0

Source: Author, 2020

#### 4.4.2 Age distribution of respondents

As summarized in the table 4.3 below, respondents within 18-30 years age bracket were the majority which was 58.9% of total respondents. The second group of respondents came from 31-43 years age bracket translating to 34.4% of total respondents. These two age brackets can therefore be referred to as active shopping age brackets. This is a true reflection of population distribution according to the KNBS 2019 report that indicate youths are the majority in Nairobi County followed by mid-forties age group which might also reflect their purchasing trend. The other age brackets attracted less percentage with age bracket 44-55 years constituting a 4.6% of respondents while the least number of respondents at 1.2% came from respondents above 56

years of age. Even the first age bracket constitutes the teens who might not have a lot of purchasing power, majority are students and rely on parents to do the purchasing apart from a few purchases out of pocket money (Kiriinya, 2015). Those aged above 56 years it is expected that they do not shop a lot because they might be retired or might be relying on children in the lower age groups to do the shopping on their behalf.

**Table 4.4:**

*Age of respondents*

Age brackets	Frequency	Percent
18 - 30 Years	197	58.9
31 - 43 Years	113	34.3
44 - 56 years	15	4.6
Above 56 Years	4	1.2
	329	100.0

Source: Author, 2020

#### **4.4.3 Level of Education**

Majority of the respondents had attained post-secondary education with 47.7% and 36.8% having university and college level of education respectively. 13.7% of the respondents had reached secondary level while a small group of the respondents (1.8%) had only managed primary level. With these figures it can be deduced that most of the respondents were in a good state to clearly read and interpret the questions by themselves hence reducing the chances of the researcher and

research assistant's interpretation that might lead to giving out guiding answers which enhance research biasness.

**Table 4.4:**

***Respondents level of Education***

Level of Education	Frequency	Percent
Primary	6	1.8
Secondary	45	13.7
College	121	36.8
University	157	47.7
Total	329	100.0

Source: Author, 2020

**4.4.4 Monthly net Income bracket of respondents**

As summarized in table 4.5 below, majority of the respondents at 65.3% indicated that they had a monthly net income of Kenya shillings 49,999 and below. This was followed by 24.9% of respondents with an income of Kenya shillings 50,000-99,999. 3.6% of respondents had a net income of 100,000-149,999 while those who had a net income of Kenya Shillings 150,000 and above constituted 6.1%.

The crosstabulation results between monthly net income bracket and name of supermarket, indicate that majority of Tusky's, Naivas and Tumaini customers at 58%, 74.2% and 81.8% respectively which are all above 50% earn Kenya shillings 49,999 and below. This might be because they have well distributed outlets in the lower income and middleclass estates of Nairobi county especially in the Northern and Eastern constituencies. Carrefour being a supermarket that

has outlets major shopping malls presumed to target the high-income earners had majority of respondents at 41.9%, Kenya shillings 49,999 and below followed closely with those earning between 50,000-99,999 at 35.5%. further summary is presented in the table 4.5 below.

**Table 4.5:**

***Percentage of monthly net income bracket per supermarket***

		Tuskeys	Naivas	Carrefour	Tumaini/ Quickmart	Total
	Count	80	95	13	27	215
49,999 and below	% within name of supermarket	58.4%	74.2%	41.9%	81.8%	65.3%
	Count	37	28	11	6	82
50,000-99,999	% within name of supermarket	27.0%	21.9%	35.5%	18.2%	24.9%
	Count	6	2	4	0	12
100,000-149,999	% within name of supermarket	4.4%	1.6%	12.9%	0.0%	3.6%
	Count	14	3	3	0	20
150,000 and above	% within name of supermarket	10.2%	2.3%	9.7%	0.0%	6.1%
	Count	137	128	31	33	329
Totals	% within name of supermarket	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Author, 2020



#### **4.4.5 Respondents distribution according to geographic location**

The results from table 4.6 below reveals that Eastern constituencies comprising of Kasarani, Embakasi East and Embakasi Central had the highest number of respondents with 102 people out of 329 which constituted 31% of total respondents. This is because the region has the highest number of people in Nairobi County and had the researcher purposively allocate more questionnaires in the region compared to the other regions.

Despite of this, Carrefour had no respondent from the region because the supermarket has no outlet in the region. Southern constituencies comprising of Langata, Kibra and Embakasi South was second with 21% of respondents, followed by Western constituencies of Westlands, Dagoretti North, and Dagoretti South with 19.1% of respondents. Northern constituencies comprising of Roysambu, Ruaraka, Mathare and Embakasi North had 13.1% of respondents while Central constituencies comprising of Starehe, Kamukunji, Embakasi West and Makadara had 15.8% of respondents. Tumaini/Quickmart had no respondent from any of the central constituencies because it doesn't have any outlet in the region. The distribution of respondents as further summarized in the table below is a true reflection of a combination of population and number of outlets in the region.

**Table 4.6:*****Response rate according to geographic location of respondents***

	Tuskys	Naivas	Carrefour	Tumaini/ Quickmart	Totals	Percentage of total respondents
Western Constituencies (Westlands, Dagoretti North, Dagoretti South)	21	19	15	8	63	19.1%
Eastern Constituencies (Kasarani, Embakasi East, Embakasi Central)	41	47	0	14	102	31.0%
Southern Constituencies (Langata, Kibra, Embakasi South)	31	24	8	6	69	21.0%
Northern Constituencies (Roysambu, Ruaraka, Mathare, Embakasi North)	17	14	7	5	43	13.1%
Central Constituencies (Starehe, Kamukunji, Embakasi West, Makadara)	27	24	1	0	52	15.8%
Totals	137	128	31	33	329	100%

Source: Author, 2020

**4.4.6 Duration of time respondents have shopped in respective supermarkets outlets**

From the table 4.7 below, majority of the respondents had stayed with the respective supermarket outlet for a period of about 5 years and below. Those who had stayed with the supermarket for about 2 years and below constituted 40.7% of the total respondents while those who had stayed with the outlet for a period of between 3 to 5 years constituted 40.1%. Those who indicated that they had stayed with the supermarket outlet for about 6-8 years constituted 10.9% and finally

those who had stayed with the same supermarket outlet for 9 years and above constituted 8.2%. The trend is a true reflection of the population as it is documented that Nairobi county has high labour mobility that makes households shift locations from time to time for convenience of movement to different work places. Carrefour did not indicate any respondent in time brackets 6 to 8 years and 9 years and above because the retailer only entered the Kenyan market in the year 2016.

**Table 4.7:**

*Duration of time respondents have shopped in respective supermarket outlets*

	Tuskys	Naivas	Carrefour	Tumaini/ Quickmart	Total	Percentage of total respondents
0-2 years	53	43	17	21	134	40.7%
3-5 years	51	60	14	7	132	40.1%
6-8 years	15	17	0	4	36	10.9%
>=9 years	18	8	0	1	27	8.2%
Totals	137	128	31	33	329	100.0%

Source: Author, 2020

## 4.5 Study variables

### 4.5.1 Information sharing

The study sought to know which communication media is mostly used by the respective supermarkets in communicating directly to the customers. The results were cross tabulated and summarized in the table 4.8 below. Results in the crosstabulation indicate that majority of the supermarkets use SMS as the main communication media accounting for 48% of total

respondents. Facebook was the most used social media between the two researched but in the overall media used it came in second with 8.5%. Three supermarkets, Tuskys, Naivas and Carrefour had WhatsApp as the least used media followed by phone call while Tumaini/Quickmart had phone call as the least used media followed by WhatsApp. Despite of this, 33.7% of the total respondents indicated that none of the medias are used by their supermarkets for communication. Due to the rapid development in communication technology, mobile marketing has emerged as a platform that enables supermarkets to use communication media like, SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook, emails, and phone calls. The choice of media is very critical as it will dictate whether a supermarket shall have effective communication or not. Borrowing from Berlo's S-M-C-R model, the channels will dictate the type of message to be sent and if the receiver will be able to understand (Narula, 2011).

The choice of SMS by the tier one supermarkets might be strategic in the sense that the customer will not incur any cost to access the message unlike for example WhatsApp where data bundle costs will be required. Secondly, the media does not fall into message distortion trap associated with phone calls by different customer care personnel which is affected by among other things, attitude of the sender, in addition it's cheaper to reach a wide audience than phone calls and finally the most important strategic reason might be to cushion the supermarkets against fake news attributed to online media like Facebook since SMS is a trackable platform. Bruce et al. (2018) in their North American communication report noted that about 80% of fake news concerning products and services is transmitted through social media such as Facebook, SMS becomes very vital for supermarkets to manage the message they want to send by themselves.

They also observed in their report that the 1,200 communication professionals surveyed indicated that fake news had negatively impacted their company reputations.

The trend of supermarkets employing SMS more than any other media including emails has also been discussed by Bonnie (2019) whose successful text campaign article indicated that SMS marketing has the best engagement rate of any marketing medium. He noted that while emails can go unread for several days, approximately ninety percent of SMS texts are opened by customers within the first 3 minutes of receiving them. It's also observed that Bulk SMS strategies are the most cost effective media for supermarkets to reach out to their interested and passionate customers who are also given an opt in and opt out feature that gives them power to decide on whether to engage or not (Intergo Telecom Ltd, 2019). The opt in and out option is very important because not every consumer will be satisfied with marketing SMS messages, and make purchase decisions by considering them. There will be customers who will feel offended to receive promotional or informational SMSs frequently and might raise complains to the supermarkets (Isiklar et al., 2017).

None the less, Facebook being the most preferred online social media platform by supermarkets has also been supported by Narayanan et al. (2012) in his report on Facebook for business where he reported Facebook as, the most popular social media platform to be exploited by businesses across the globe. Magrath and McCormick (2013) in analyzing mobile fashion retailing, also observed that several supermarkets are now embracing Facebook and other social networks to directly communicate with their customers. The importance of Facebook in supermarkets has also been observed by Bolton (2011) who asserted that retail marketers are more concerned with

the behaviours portrayed by engaging customers that usually goes further than the mere transactions. For example, a customer helping another customer, writing positive reviews, positive word-of-mouth, and recommendations. He also observed that these discussions by supermarkets are driven using engaging content with intended to increasing the level of customer commitment and satisfaction to the retail outlets. Despite of the online social media use, its minimal use by supermarkets has been explained by Schultz and Peltier (2013) who reported that majority of supermarkets are only using social media for short term promotional sales opportunities.

**Table 4.8:*****Media used by the supermarkets to communicate directly to customers***

		Tuskys	Naivas	Carrefour	Tumaini/ Quickmart	Totals	% within all media researched
SMS	Count	81	52	15	10	158	48.0%
	% within name of supermarket	59.1%	40.6%	48.4%	30.3%		
Email	Count	7	9	2	2	20	6.1%
	% within name of supermarket	5.1%	7.0%	6.5%	6.1%		
WhatsApp	Count	1	1	0	2	4	1.2%
	% within name of supermarket	0.7%	0.8%	0.0%	6.1%		
Facebook	Count	11	9	4	4	28	8.5%
	% within name of supermarket	8.0%	7.0%	12.9%	12.1%		
Phone call	Count	3	4	1	0	8	2.4%
	% within name of supermarket	2.2%	3.1%	3.2%	0.0%		
None	Count	34	53	9	15	111	33.7%
	% within name of supermarket	24.8%	41.4%	29.0%	45.5%		
Totals	Count	137	128	31	33	329	100.0%
	% within name of supermarket	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Source: Author, 2020

From the study results of the Likert scale questions concerning information sharing presented in table 4.9 below. It is shown that out of the total respondents, a higher percentage somehow agreed to the question statement that their supermarkets communicate with them frequently this is represented by a mean of 3.0365 and a std dev of 1.33385. The results correspond to Hassan (2012) who also observed that supermarkets have to communicate any changes to their product offering to the customers since those changes might alter the perceived value the customer derives from the supermarket. Informing customers of any changes is also a clear indication of openness and accountability on the part of the supermarket. Such attributes go a long way in enhancing customer trust.

On supermarkets' feedback system, a mean of 3.1945 and std dev of 1.20410 clearly indicates that a higher number of respondents somehow agree that their supermarket has a feedback system. The results are in line with Wu (2016) who by using Lianhua supermarket in China as an example, observed that supermarkets have a customer feedback system usually as part of customer relationship management system in order to record vital customer information and also to resolve customer complaint. Additionally, they maintain feedback systems to be used strategically to build emotional value with customers if the respective staff maintain a good communication attitude (Barlow & Møller, 2008). Above all the main function of customer feedback system is to approach customers and further explore their expectations (Wu, 2016).

The statement, "information shared always turns out to be accurate" had a mean of 3.4286 and a std dev of 1.06292 indicating that a higher percentage of the respondents (30.4%) agreed with the statement while the response on whether the supermarket always provides timely information



had a mean of 3.3131 and a std dv of 1.07742 indicating that majority of respondents somehow agree with the statement. These responses were in concurrence with Mathu (2019) who noted that in any supply chain, information shared on time and if ascertained to be accurate can propel an organization like a supermarket to improve its performance significantly and this will also be the case of its value chain members like customers. For appropriate purchasing decision, consumers do need timely information since any wrong decision might lead to post purchase dissonance or a state of dissatisfaction which might lead to negative rating of the supermarket. Its therefore in the best interest for supermarkets to provide not only timely but also accurate information.

Concerning provision of information about new products and services, a higher percentage of respondents agreed (142 respondents = 43.20%) than the rest of the opinions having a mean of 3.5684 and std dv of 1.16178. The results correspond to Bakos (2001) who observed that supermarkets do their best to provide information about product and services since by doing that it also reduces consumer price sensitivity. Concerning supermarkets routinely follow-up on customer inquiries or complaints raised, giving a mean of 3.1185 and std dv of 1.18473, it implies that majority somehow agree with the statement. In ensuring customer satisfaction through follow up on customer inquiries and complaint handling, supermarkets maintain customer feedback systems as observed by (Mathu, 2019; Wu, 2016).

The response on the statement on shelf prices being truly reflected on the sales receipts produced a mean of 3.9453 and a std dv of 1.03449 translating to majority agreeing with the statement. Observed that having difference in shelf and receipt prices can be treated as having misleading

information intended to defraud the customer and hence can lead to a lot loss of trust, negative publicity in addition to loss of business (Goodstein & Escalas, 1995; Romani, 2006). Supermarkets can't afford this and that's why most of them have resorted to harness the power of technology, for example by using computerized scanner systems integrated to the store inventory management systems that can be able to generate shelf price tags which will be truly reflected on the receipts (Goodstein & Escalas, 1995).

**Table 4.9:**

*Descriptive statistics from the Likert scale questions on information sharing*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std dv
My supermarket communicates with me frequently	54	76	51	100	48	3.04	1.33
My supermarket has a feedback system	36	64	69	120	40	3.19	1.20
Information shared always turns out to be accurate	18	43	96	124	48	3.43	1.06
My supermarket always provides timely information	23	51	90	130	35	3.31	1.07
My supermarket provides information about new products and services	25	39	56	142	67	3.57	1.16
My supermarket routinely follows-up with me on any inquiries or complaints I raised	37	62	95	95	40	3.12	1.18
My supermarkets shelf prices are truly reflected on the sales receipts	9	29	44	136	111	3.95	1.03

Source: Author, 2020

#### **4.5.2 Product customization**

The study sought to know whether the supermarkets engage customers in market research. The results were cross tabulated and summarized in the figure 4.1 below. Results indicate that majority of the supermarkets do not engage their customers in market research. 77% of the respondents indicated that their respective supermarkets do not engage them in market research while 23% of the respondents confirmed they are engaged. The trend of supermarkets not engaging many customers in market research has received a lot of expert discussion in current retailing online platforms. An example is the retail wire online discussion in 2018 where their online research by using grocery stores revealed that ordinary supermarkets are somewhat ineffective or ineffective in engaging customers inside and outside the store.

It was also observed that the idea of self-service “sell yourself” which revolutionized retailing more than 100 years ago has had an impact on supermarket customer engagement in research thinking. One explanation given was that since most supermarkets are run by merchant warehousemen who rent, lease or build massive buildings and put in them many tens of thousands of items which are again targeting tens of thousands of customers, they end up having a hard time keeping up with the management of that and hence embrace the idea of “Pile it high, and let it fly”, its more about the more you stock the more you sell and not about the customer input (Waldron, 2018).

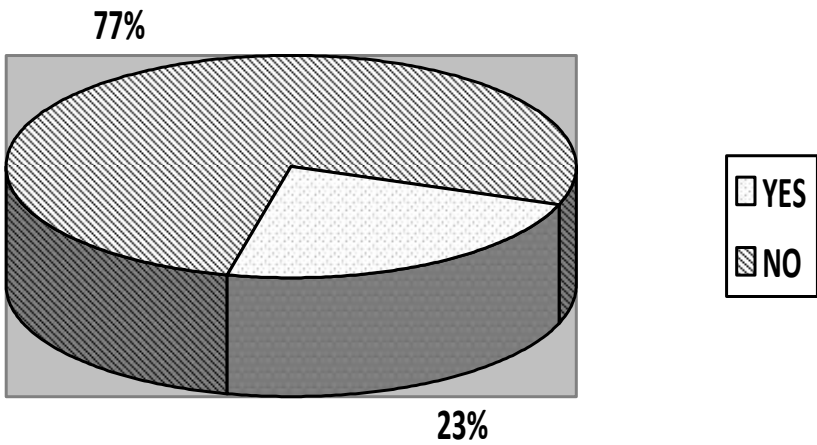
With emergence of mobile money payment systems, credit and debit cards and loyalty cards, supermarkets now have several means of getting customer information and generate profiles

based on shopping patterns, habits and preferences without even the consent of customers (Ferguson, 2013). Selection of customer data by supermarkets especially through loyalty cards is now routine by supermarkets who use them to their advantage. A good example is the global retail giant Tesco supermarket which in collaboration with customer science company Dunnhumby, launched their customer data mining for accurate customer profiling scheme in 1995. This improved targeting strategies and Tesco's sales increased by 50% within the first five years (Agarwal, 2014; McColl, 2018).

It is therefore evident that data mining would unearth more customer information and behavioral insight without necessarily seeking the consent or involving the customer. Such information such as browsing routes, search history, products viewed, location information, purchase records can easily be retrieved (Davenport, 2006). Some supermarkets also use in-store advanced video software's and cameras that can be able to record movements of customers and also their facial expressions aimed at improving in store layouts and arrangement of products (Agarwal, 2014). Online product searches and preferences have also been tracked using traditional cookies and smartphone mobile data (Arnott & Pervan, 2008).

**Figure 4.1:**

*Supermarket engagement of customers in market research*



Source: Author, 2020

Likert scale statement descriptive statistics concerning product customization were presented in table 4.10 below. From the study results presented, it shows that majority of the respondents agreed that their supermarkets always offer reasonable packaged products (A (193 respondents) = 58.70%) with an overall mean of 4.0304 and 0.73189 standard deviation. These results are in concurrence with Das (2014) and Mandal (2020) who observed that supermarkets in an effort to satisfy different segments of customers, they engage in repackaging the consumer goods in different quantities which makes it well-situated for customers to buy the precise quantities that suit them. It's also noted that packaged products are customized products or service offers that are better in enhancing customer satisfaction than offers which are standardized, because they ensure that organizations are able to match customer requirements and the product or service offering (Pedro et al., 2012).

Concerning reasonable prices offered by the supermarkets, a higher percentage of respondents also agreed (A= (185 respondents) 56.20%) with an overall mean of 3.9119 and 0.74171 std dv. Offering reasonable prices affect customer purchase experience and as observed by Rana et al. (2014) in their research on customer satisfaction in retain chain stores, it is the most important customer experience influencing factor. Borrowing from social exchange theory where typically consumers are economic in nature and always assess their relationships on a cost benefit analysis and comparison of alternatives as brought out by Homans (1958), consequently customers are paying a lot of attention on price as far as their repurchase intentions are concerned. Supermarkets therefore have no choice but to offer reasonable prices.

On the statement, “My supermarket involves me before coming up with new products offerings or services”, the attained mean of 2.5015 and std dv of 1.15591 meant that respondents disagree with the statement and hence supermarkets seldom involve customers before coming up with new product offerings and services. This was expected since most respondents had also a firm belief that supermarkets do not engage them in market research. In trying to understand this, we look at the work of Waldron (2018) who observed that in supermarkets its more about the more they stock the more they sell and not about the customer input. However, they still have other means of determining customer requirements and preferences like store surveillance systems that don't require customer consent or input (Agarwal, 2014; McColl, 2018).

Respondents somewhat agree that their respective supermarkets offer them targeted discounts the response generated a mean of 3.3100 and a std dv of 1.02168). The importance of targeted discounts has been highlighted by Lal and Bell (2003) who noted that the use of coupons has

been proven to reduce price competition over time hence aiding the firms to gain more profit occasioned by an increase in loyalty. Ndubisi (2007) also noted the importance of targeted vouchers by asserting that extra ordinary discounts can be tailored to different customers just like any other custom made good based on client's needs.

With an attained mean of 3.2280 and a std dv of 1.06768, majority of respondents somewhat agreed with the statement on supermarkets being flexible on customers even if there are changes in product offerings. Flexibility is essential for supermarkets since it keeps them ready all the time to adjust to customer preferences. For example reconfiguration of company equipment to suit newly diversified product offerings should be considered by supermarkets as a step towards fulfilling the new preferences of consumers (Sandofsky, 2014). Flexibility of supermarkets also looks at time saving initiatives in serving the customer. A good example being adjusting closing and opening time, harnessing on technology so that one does not necessarily have to move to the customer location in order to sort any customer service issues (Panasonic System Communications, 2019).

For the supermarkets having targeted vouchers, majority of respondents also somewhat agreed due to the attained mean of 3.0851 and std dv of 1.09547. The results are in concurrence with Kamau (2017) who observed that supermarkets like the former Nakumatt always used targeted gift vouchers which had the effect of quickening what he termed as life cycle of the loyal clients. This he observed that targeted vouchers empower most recent clients to behave like grateful clients with more than ten years purchasing experience with the supermarket. In addition, Yoo

(2011) observed that a well outline prize program can be executed to target and draw in profitable client fragments.

Finally, reliability in offering unique services by supermarkets had majority of the respondents indicating that they agree (A = 140 respondents (42.60%)), with an overall mean of 3.5623 and a std dv of 0.96742. Samli et al. (1998) asserted that supermarkets offering unique services at all times and also at a very high competitive level to respective customers is now not an option, since the modern consumers are now better informed and sophisticated than before.

Venter and Dhurup (2005) in their study of South Africa's supermarkets demonstrated that customers in determining uniqueness of services towards them or service quality attach great importance to policies of the retailer (e.g., store patronage), unique atmospheric variables or physical aspects and the reliability of the supermarket. On the other hand, it's also observed by retail scholars that unique services are dependent on supermarkets staff attitude, knowledge and customer care skills especially in complaint handling (Rahman et al., 2019).

In conclusion, it's clear that a higher percentage of respondents agreed with almost all the statement questions which means that they do understand the product customization strategies and a good number of the customers have experienced the service. However, the minority descending opinions that somewhat disagreed or completely disagreed with the statements can also be justified owing to the nature of supermarkets whereby the large number of with different tastes and preferences can make it cumbersome and to initiate and implement tailored services for each individual client. Accordingly it is expected that they will categorize customers



according to distinct variables like purchasing patterns and develop customized services for the groups (Malagueño et al. 2019).

**Table 4.10:**

*Descriptive statistics from the Likert scale questions on product customization*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std dv
My supermarket always offers reasonable packaged products	2	8	47	193	79	4.03	0.73
My supermarket always offers reasonable prices	0	13	67	185	64	3.91	0.74
My supermarket involves me before coming up with new products offerings or services	71	112	73	56	17	2.50	1.16
My supermarket offers me targeted discounts	16	53	108	117	35	3.31	1.02
My supermarket is flexible for me even if its product offerings have changed	21	61	103	110	34	3.23	1.07
My supermarket offers me targeted vouchers	26	75	104	93	31	3.09	1.10
My supermarket is reliable in offering unique services	8	39	92	140	50	3.56	0.97

Source: Author, 2020

### 4.5.3 Conflict handling

The study sought to know whether each respective supermarket staff are well equipped with customer care skills. The results were cross tabulated and summarized in the figure 4.2 below with the results indicating that most respondents from each supermarket agreed that the supermarket staff are well equipped with customer care skills, this represented 87% of total respondents while 13% of the respondents felt that the staff of their respective supermarkets are not well equipped with customer care skills. Customer care is a very important component in

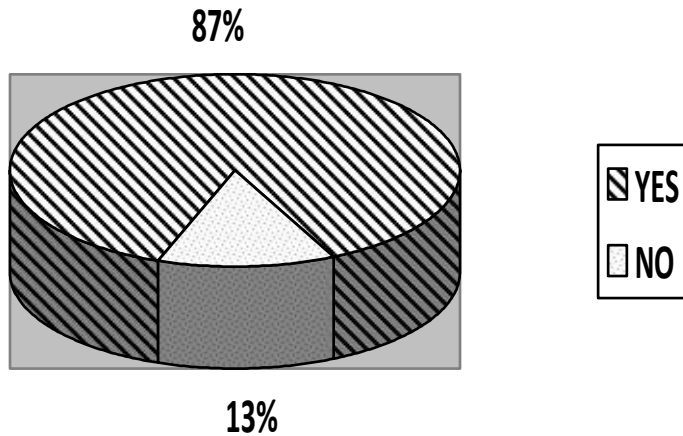
relationship building especially in determination of conflict handling since it can either enhance or suppress interpersonal relationships (Stauss & Seidel, 2019).

By having all the supermarkets having employees well equipped with customer care skills, gives the retailers requisite tools to enhance relationship marketing more so through conflict handling. This is also supported by the work of Herington, Johnson, and Scott (2006) who concluded in their study that customer experiences were considered in the context of how customers were treated by employees.

A study by Rahman et al. (2019) on factors influencing customer experience in Bangladesh supermarkets, they reported that staff assistance and responsiveness which are indicators of good customer care skills were considered highly influential in determining customer experience and satisfaction. This means that supermarkets will always employ good customer care skilled staff or will endeavor to train them on the skills. Sales personnel competence was identified as one of the important determinants of customer satisfaction in Polish supermarkets (Biesok & Wyród-Wróbel, 2018). This was also the case in a study undertaken in the supermarket and other retail set ups in Delhi and Gurugram regions of India (Kumar, 2017).

**Figure 4.2:**

*Customer care skills of supermarket staff*



Source: Author, 2020

Likert statement descriptive results in relation to conflict handling were summarized and presented in table 4.11 below. From the study results, it is shown that more than half of the respondents either agreed (184 respondents) or strongly agreed (70 respondents) with the statement (A=55.90% and SA=21.30%) generating a mean of 3.921 and a std dv of 0.80385 indicating that supermarkets often try to avoid potential conflicts. Since the supermarket can't predict the outcome of a conflict if it were to occur, it's in their best interest to try and avoid any potential conflict this is in concurrence with Abdullah (2018) who observed that relationship conflicts tend to be associated with negative effects.

The results also indicate that supermarkets often try to resolve manifest conflict before they can create problems. the statements responses generated a mean of 3.7447 and a std dv of 0.81628.

the question statement acknowledges that conflicts do exist and as observed by Bojei and Abu (2014) in their article on the RM dimensions, the occurrence of conflict in business relationships is considered un avoidable and natural due to the interdependence among parties. It is advantageous to the supermarkets to resolve manifest conflicts since studies have indicated that major customer complaints are usually registered by approximately 34% of them and if the same complains are resolved satisfactorily will continue purchasing from the company (Roberts-Lombard (2011).

The statement on the knowledge and ability of supermarket employees to openly discuss solutions when problems arise had respondents who were more than half indicating that they agree with it (A=167 respondents). The mean generated of 3.7508 and standard deviation of 0.86172 implies that the supermarket employees often have the requisite ability and the required knowledge to discuss conflicting issues and also offer solutions through discussions with customers. Chanaka et al. (2014) in their assessment of retail service quality in Sri Lanka noted that customers positive experience and satisfaction is determined by how knowledgeable employees are, their behaviour and individual attitudes, prompt service and complaint handling. These factors are key to any conflict handling by the supermarkets.

In addition, Tjosvold et al. (2016) noted that conflicts are means through which problems are acknowledged and solved. They also observed that the best way to resolve a conflict is through mediation and also observed that not all conflicts are harmful and if managed well can improve relations. Supermarkets will therefore endeavor to discuss solutions with customers in order to resolve any conflict between them as a way of improving their relationship.

On the statement concerning the supermarkets resolving product return problems was found to have majority agreeing (157 respondents). The results generated a 3.6292 mean and 0.9052 std dv. Response on the statement concerning conflict resolution within a reasonable period by supermarket generated 3.5836 as the mean and a 0.87295 std dv implying that majority agree that their respective supermarkets often try to resolve conflicts within a reasonable period.

The positive and active manner of handling conflict by supermarkets had a higher rate of respondents agreeing (A= (158 respondents) 48.00%) with a 3.6839 mean and a 0.91252 std dv implying that indeed the respective supermarkets often handle conflicts in a positive and active manner. The perception of the supermarket will be judged by how they react to a conflict. The supermarkets must be mindful of the conflicting situation in order to yield important ideas that can resolve the conflict in a positive and active manner (Valentine et al., 2010). It's expected that to enhance good relationship for repeat business, supermarkets will enhance the speed at which initial conflicts are resolved.

In determining whether supermarkets try to avoid the same problem from happening again, a higher percentage of respondents agreed with the results also giving a higher 3.7508 mean and a small 0.8827 std dv implying that indeed the respective supermarkets often put mechanisms in place to avoid the same problems from re occurring. This is important because consumers tend to develop complain behaviour that is triggered by perceived dissatisfaction which is neither psychologically accepted nor quickly forgotten with consumption of a product or service (Daly et al., 2009). A repeat of the same problem will increase complain behaviour which might lead to other factors such as the spread of negative word of mouth. In addition the degree to which the

different parties in a conflict (supermarket or its representatives and customers) engage in the process of handling the conflict, largely depend is based on their preexisting relationship experience and the level of satisfaction and also if the magnitude of the relationship investment is good (Roberts-Lombard et al., 2013).

In conclusion, Karadeniz and Cdr (2010) highlighted the importance of conflict handling in retailing, by indicating that it lies at the highest level of relationship building by offering structural solutions to problems encountered by customer in the transaction process. With majority of the respondents acknowledging that most of the conflict handling indicator questions are often applied by supermarkets, it means that indeed supermarkets have put in place conflict handling strategies.

**Table 4.11:*****Descriptive statistics from the Likert scale questions on conflict handling***

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std dv
My supermarket tries to avoid potential conflicts	3	15	57	184	70	3.92	0.80
My supermarket tries to resolve manifest conflict before they can create problems	2	18	96	159	54	3.74	0.82
My supermarket employees have knowledge and ability to openly discuss solutions when problems arise	3	26	77	167	56	3.75	0.86
My supermarket resolves product return problems	8	26	92	157	46	3.63	0.91
My supermarket resolves any conflict within a reasonable period	7	24	108	150	40	3.58	0.87
Every complain is handled by my supermarket in a positive and active manner	9	21	88	158	53	3.68	0.91
My supermarket avoids the same problem from happening again	7	15	92	154	61	3.75	0.88

Source: Author, 2020

**4.5.4 Reciprocity**

The study sought to know whether the supermarket recognizes any efforts customers do to support it. The results were presented in the figure 4.3 below. Results indicate that each supermarket had slightly above half of the respondents indicating that they do not really believe that their respective supermarkets recognize any efforts they undertake to support it (53%). From these results, it can be concluded that supermarkets though appear to recognize effort customers

do to support them, the effect is not felt by all the customers as more than half of the respondent's dispute. The results can be explained through the social exchange theory proposition of value. Value is very critical in a reciprocal relationship, if people in this case customers do not find enough value in a reciprocal activity, they might rate the exchange as unsatisfactory or not being there like in the case of majority of the respondents (Pervan & Johnson, 2002).

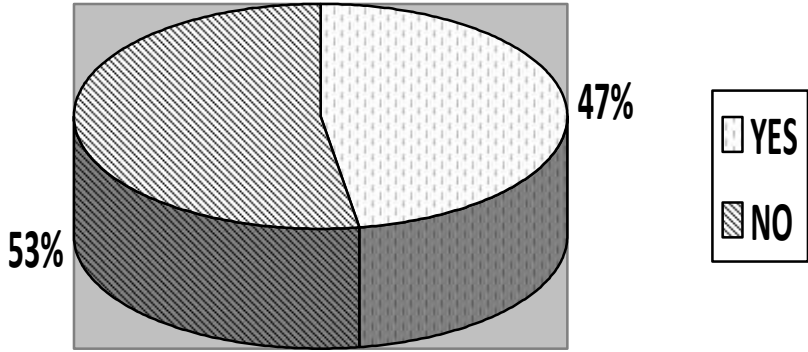
The measure of customer effort recognition by supermarkets is a controversial topic that most researchers have overlooked. In a reciprocal relationship it's expected that it must be a win-win situation between the service provider and the customer without overlooking the issue of costs and the benefits that a service provider must analyze (Karimi, 2014). As an example, Salls (2004) in her interview with a senior professor of retailing observed that supermarkets use loyalty shopping cards to reward shoppers with discounts (reward customer effort in supporting the supermarket by buying their products) but this becomes disadvantageous and expensive to them if the shoppers are only picking one or two items. She also observes that due to the inadequate purchases by customers, set quantity discounts and reward schemes have been introduced by many retailers among them Best Buy and Talbots, and one can only qualify if they meet the set minimum quantity.

Some shoppers might not meet this threshold and would feel their efforts are un recognized. In addition, with a large volume of customers, modern supermarkets always have two pools of customers; those customers that do their purchasing off the card and one that does their purchase on the card. Those off the card are always the majority and constitutes a pool of customers you



don't know much about and without enough data, their treatment might not be to the expected level had you had the data ending up having them feeling their efforts are un recognized as the case might be with some Kenyan supermarket customers. A supermarkets initial first task and energy should be to try and get the right data and the right numbers.

**Figure 4.3:**  
*Supermarkets recognition of customers effort to support it*



Source: Author, 2020

A descriptive analysis was also undertaken to interpret the results of the Likert scale statement concerning Reciprocity. The summary of results was presented in table 4.12 below.

From the study outcomes, it is revealed that most respondents somewhat agreed with the statement that their supermarkets work to return any assistance they accord the supermarket in kind, this due to the 3.4286 mean and standard deviation of 0.98861 attained. This is in

concurrence with Cropanzano et al. (2017) who in understanding relational justice and customer-firm reciprocal behaviour drew from the social exchange theory where they observed reciprocity shapes the exchange process as good and or bad deeds are repaid in kind. In addition, firms that tend to repay a good customer initiative with their own positive initiative such as justice and support have always experienced a development of trust on the part of the consumer unlike negative initiatives e.g. bullying and power abuse that breed conflict (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Reimann & Ketchen Jr, 2017).

The uppermost proportion of response concerning the statement on supermarkets working to return any favours customers extended to them as quickly as possible was neutral (N =113) followed by agree (A =124) generating a 3.2036 mean and 0.94572 std dv implying that supermarkets somewhat work to return any favours customers extend to them as quickly as possible. This statement relates to the reciprocal dimension-immediacy that stipulates when the return action should occur or the time frame (Hoppner et al., 2015). Postponement of reciprocal actions by supermarkets may have both negative and positive effect. For example, as a negative effect, customers can react by withholding further purchases or express their dissatisfaction by giving negative reviews raising the issue of fairness and retaliation (Gaechter & Fehr, 2003).

However, as a strategic move that yields positive effect, some supermarkets have had a tendency for example of delaying discounts to deserving customers in order to entice future spending with some research indicating that customers will repeat purchasing in the same outlet with the hope of cashing in on the postponed discount (Vana et al., 2018). To solve the problem of ensuring the

supermarkets return customer favours quickly, they are employing technology just like other retailers including online retailers (Parise et al., 2016).

Concerning the statement “My supermarket believes that any favour I extend to them shall even out over time eventually”, the response generated a 3.2067 mean and a 0.98145 std dv, which implies that the supermarkets somewhat believe that the customer favours extended to them will even out eventually. The largest proportion of respondents gave their answer as neutral at N=140 followed by agree at 96.

This relates to both dimensions of reciprocity, thus the immediacy dimension, and the equivalence dimension which can be interpreted as stipulating that supermarkets must pay back received actions from customers and the repayment if quantified should roughly be almost or equivalent to the initial received action. This means that the reciprocal actions can be the same (Robert, 2006), or can be different but what they agree is that the actions must be of equal value (Griffith et al., 2006). Furthermore, the statement also acknowledges that the time period for a reciprocal action might not be defined, can be within a short time period or even after a long time period as long as the indebtedness has been repaid (Hoppner et al., 2015; Pervan et al., 2011).

In terms of supermarkets making effort to strengthen the loyalty of their customers, almost half of the respondents indicated that they agree (160 respondents) 48.60%, this helped to generate a 3.6322 mean and a 0.92146 std dv implying that the supermarkets often makes effort to strengthen the loyalty of their customers. To start with, customer loyalty has been associated with different relationship marketing underpinnings among them reciprocity (Taleghani et al.,

2011). As a customer loyalty predictor, reciprocity has been reported to be very significant (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019). Reciprocity being a dimension of business relationships that allows a party to the relationship to provide a favour and allowances for counter favours later on (Chattananon & Trimetsoontorn, 2009), supermarkets are using relationship enhancing measures in form of coupons, loyalty points, special vouchers with the hope that the customers will reciprocate by being loyal (Kamau, 2017).

Most of the respondents agreed that their supermarkets often see things from customers' point of view generating a 3.6292 mean and a 1.00723 std dv. The results are in line with Roy and Chakraborti (2015) who observed that customer advocacy is at the heart of reciprocity. Customer advocacy can be defined a special customer service form of customer service whereby organizations put more effort on what is presumed to be the best for the customer (Suchen, 2017; Thomas, 2016). The proponents believe that if companies in this case supermarkets offer customers unquestionable support (advocate), the customers get touched in that case decide to reciprocate by also becoming the supermarkets advocates through actions such as more purchases from the supermarket, participating in service and product improvement initiatives in addition to referring other prospective consumers (Moliner et al., 2018; Urban, 2006).

From the response results concerning supermarkets making time and effort to maintain their relationship with respective customers a 3.6565 mean and a 0.96618 std dv were attained implying that, the supermarkets often make time and effort to maintain their relationship with customers. Sugandini and Wendry (2017) asserted that relationship marketing is an effort to attract customers and improve customer relationships by understanding their needs and desires so

that the company can meet them. This means that retailers like supermarkets must take time to understand their customers in order to serve them satisfactorily in addition to taking time to understand individual loyal customers so that they can be appreciated in a way that they will easily know that the retailer is grateful for their purchases (Nicasio, 2019).

Finally, a higher percentage of the respondents also indicated that their supermarkets often make and constantly try to fulfill promises (A = (139 respondents) 42.20%) with a 3.6565 mean and a 0.96618 std dv. This is a question of supermarket commitment to the relationship and trust. According to Mamusung et al., (2019) in retailing, relationship marketing involves developing bonds with customers which is done by meeting their needs and honouring commitments.

Fulfilling promises builds customer trust in the relationship and acts as an indicator of relational quality (Sugandini & Wendry, 2017). This means that any relationship that doesn't have trust is likely to be judged as being of low quality. Furthermore, the importance of maintaining trust has been emphasized by Muafi (2016) who noted that trust is very difficult to nature and can easily be shaken and if indeed its shaken, it is very difficult for the parties to rebuild it.

**Table 4.12:*****Descriptive statistics from the Likert scale questions on reciprocity***

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std dv
My supermarket works to return any assistance I accord them in kind	14	37	113	124	41	3.43	0.99
My supermarket works to return any favours I extended to them as quickly as possible	12	59	133	100	25	3.20	0.95
My supermarket believes that any favour I extend to them shall even out over time eventually	19	46	140	96	28	3.21	0.98
My supermarket makes effort to strengthen my loyalty	8	30	84	160	47	3.63	0.92
My supermarket always sees things from the customers view	14	29	79	150	57	3.61	1.01
My supermarket makes time and effort to maintain our relationship	12	26	79	158	54	3.66	0.97
My supermarket makes and constantly tries to fulfill promises	16	24	97	139	53	3.57	1.00

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Source: Author, 2020

**4.5.5 Switching costs**

The study sought to establish whether the respective supermarkets charge parking space. The results were tabulated and summarized in the figure 4.4 below. Results indicate that the greater number of respondents (72% of total respondents) reported that their respective supermarkets do not charge parking. This is represented by 65.7% of the Tuskys supermarket respondents, 82% of Naivas supermarket respondents, 51.6% of Carrefour supermarket respondents and 78.8% of

Tumaini/Quickmart respondents. Despite of this 28% of the respondents indicated that they do incur parking charges from their respective supermarkets.

A huge percentage of this respondents came from Carrefour supermarket respondents which had the highest number of respondents (48.4%) indicating that they have always incurred parking charges while visiting the supermarket outlets for shopping. To start with parking space is a source of convenience especially for clients who go shopping with vehicles (Reimers & Chao, 2014; Van Ommeren et al., 2012). This therefore means that one would even contemplate switching if a better convenient store is available courtesy of parking space availability. Rinawati (2018) in his study on value proposition in supermarkets identified free parking as one of the main sources of satisfaction for supermarket customers. He also noted that any slight change in the value that has been created courtesy of such factors like free parking can cause customers to shift to other supermarkets.

A study by Bhatti et al. (2015) sought to determine the relationship between availability of parking space and store choice among its hypotheses, the results indicated that the purchaser's store decision has a strong association with the store's parking area availability. In another study undertaken in the United Kingdom, Dennis et al. (2002) identifies availability of car parking space, security of shopping center as among the factors that define the attractiveness of stores and determine consumer choice of shopping destination. In addition to this, another pertinent issue that determines customer convenience, satisfaction and switching intentions is the issue of free parking not just availability of parking. The study reported that 72% of the respondents haven't experienced their supermarkets charging parking. This might be due to several reasons.

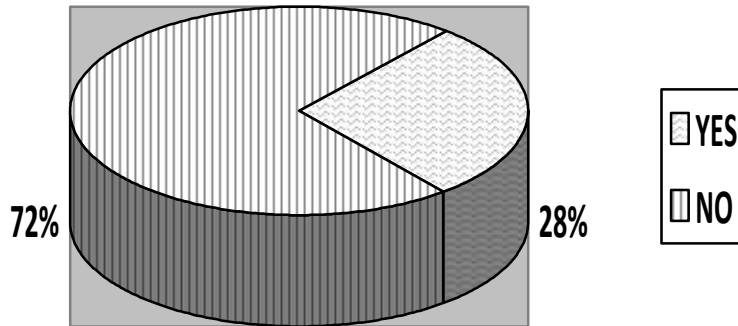
To start with, by law, supermarkets in Kenya are not supposed to charge parking unless the parked vehicle has overstayed and in this case it's supposed to be clamped (Consumer Federation of Kenya, 2013; Njoroge, 2013). However, the most important reason for free parking by supermarkets is in order for them to gain competitive advantage and create switching barriers as observed by several studies (Rinawati, 2018). Additional studies have also proven a tradeoff between offering free parking and rate of shopping by customers (Hasker & Inci, 2014).

Despite of the reasons for free parking by service providers, it also has its own downside. For example, in some instances supermarket shoppers despite being offered free parking at the expense of other needy shoppers, they do not necessarily find what they want ending up not benefiting the supermarket store. Other people misuse the parking space i.e. they just want to ride on free parking with no intention of shopping. Some supermarkets cushion themselves against these by either raising the prices for goods or introducing some parking fee (Hasker & Inci, 2014).



**Figure 4.4:**

***Supermarkets parking charges response***



Source: Author, 2020

The study also sought to know from the respondents which is the most convenient store location for them since empirical studies have revealed that store convenience can increase or decrease switching cost. The results summary were presented in table 4.13 below.

The results indicate that based on total count of respondent's majority of the respondents at 54.7% especially from Tuskys, Naivas and Tumaini/Quickmart favour their supermarket outlets located within their neighborhoods followed by 36.2% who favour shopping malls. Despite of this, majority of Carrefour respondents gave a deviating outcome as 58.1% of the supermarket's respondents indicated that they prefer shopping malls. From these findings, it can also be concluded that main bus stops are not convenient locations for supermarket shoppers since a mere 9.1% of respondents preferred the location. Store location is one of the important value

propositions by supermarkets and can be used to deter customers from switching to other supermarkets (Rinawati, 2018).

The issue of convenience of store location when it comes to the choice of supermarkets has been discussed by scholars like Throng (2016) in the Vietnamese supermarket sector where he observed that store locations within neighborhoods (near homes) are rated as most appropriate since they reduce transaction costs e.g. transport costs and time associated with the shopping. Despite of this a good number of respondents at 36.2% felt that shopping malls were the most convenient locations for their shopping. This has been supported by Catherine and Magesh (2016) who observed that in retailing there are a good number of shoppers who despite residing in far locations are still looking for large supermarkets mainly in big shopping malls as long as they offer more goods and service differentiation than those supermarket stores that are located within the customers' own vicinity but offering less goods and services.

**Table 4.13:*****Most convenient supermarket location***

		Shopping mall	Neighbourhood	Main Bus stage	Total
Tuskys	Count	55	66	16	137
	% within name of supermarket	40.1%	48.2%	11.7%	100.0%
Naivas	Count	39	78	11	128
	% within name of supermarket	30.5%	60.9%	8.6%	100.0%
Carrefour	Count	18	12	1	31
	% within name of supermarket	58.1%	38.7%	3.2%	100.0%
Tumaini/ Quickmart	Count	7	24	2	33
	% within name of supermarket	21.2%	72.7%	6.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	119	180	30	329
	% within name of supermarket	36.2%	54.7%	9.1%	100.0%

Source: Author, 2020

To understand the effect of switching cost, a summary of total responses to Likert scale statements concerning was presented in table 4.14 below. A higher percentage of customer respondents strongly agreed (152 respondents) that parking area availability was important in choosing a supermarket (SA= 46.20%). Those who simply agreed constituted 43.50% (143 respondents), this translated to a mean of 4.3252 and 0.76549 std dv which implies that

customers often perceive parking availability an important determinant of supermarket choice. As observed earlier, Rinawati (2018) in his study on value proposition in supermarkets identified free parking as one of the main sources of satisfaction for supermarket customers. Other scholars have also observed that parking space is a source of convenience especially for clients who go shopping with vehicles (Reimers & Chao, 2014; Van Ommeren et al., 2012). This therefore means that one would even contemplate switching if a better convenient store is available courtesy of parking space availability.

On loyalty incentives by supermarkets affecting customers store choices, (150 respondents) 45.60% agreed and it was followed by (86 respondents) 26.10% who strongly agreed. The response generated a mean of 3.8723 and a std dv of 0.93482 implying that customers often hold loyalty incentives as a determinant in supermarket selection or store switching decision. Kamau (2017) observed that supermarkets in Kenya are enhancing relationships and gaining reciprocal loyalty from customers by using loyalty incentives such as discounting goods (special), smart cards, system of purchase points, gift vouchers among others.

Karim and Ali (2011) in his research noted that loyalty programs in the UK supermarkets helped achieve and enhance customer loyalty. An important contribution of loyalty programs in the supermarkets is that it raises switching costs for consumers and alleviate the lack of commitment thereby reducing customer defections. This occurs because those programs calculate rewards for the clients based on total sum of goods one has purchased hence, consumers would focus their purchases in one supermarket to maximize the benefits they receive (Kamau, 2017; Karim & Ali,

2011). This might be the reason why customers prefer stores with loyalty programs since they do stand a chance of benefiting from rewards attributed to their purchases.

Response rate for the statement on supermarkets' price affect customer store choices indicated that 46.50% of the respondents (153) agreed while (109) 33.10% strongly agreed generating a 4.003 mean and a 0.98308 std dv implying that customers often consider prices a strong determinant of their store choices. This is in concurrence with Mittal et al. (1998) who indicated that customers are paying a lot of attention on price as far as their repurchase intentions are concerned. In addition, Findlay and Sparks (2008) asserted that customers consider lower prices as one of the most important factors for selecting their main shopping store. Furthermore, Rana et al. (2014) observed that price is the biggest influencer of customer satisfaction in retain chain stores.

To understand this and its effect on switching intentions, we look at social exchange theory assumptions where consumers are viewed as being economic in nature and always assess their relationship with service providers on a cost benefit analysis and comparison of alternatives (Homans, 1958). This therefore means that customers will be willing to switch to an alternative supermarket if in their judgement the alternative supermarket has better prices.

Branch coverage greatly affect customer store choices had a 46.80% and 24.00% of respondents (154 and 79 respondents respectively) indicating that they agree and strongly agree respectively with the overall response generating a 3.7994 mean while the std dv was 0.99811 implying that customers often perceive branch coverage as a great determinant of store choice. This is because

the high number of branches and their availability in multiple locations can guarantee closeness of the stores to customers increasing purchase convenience (Muturi, 2018). More branch coverage also saves on customer travel time and cost and therefore supermarkets with many retail outlets fairly spread across estates will always be favoured (Kibugi, 2015). Due to this, there has been an increasing trend in Kenyan supermarkets opening new branches to ensure that they are visible in almost all the regions and close to the target population as well with the industry having an expansion rate of about 30% (Chesula & Nkobe, 2018; Financial Fortune, 2019).

On the issue counter services by supermarkets affecting customer store choices, the trend was also visible with the highest percentage of respondents agreeing (132) followed by another substantive percentage of respondents strongly agreeing (96), generating a 3.8176 mean and a 1.0227 std dv, implying that the supermarket customers often perceive the quality of counter service as a valid determinant of their store choices. This is in concurrence with Hansen and Solgaard (2006) who asserted that consumers choice of preferred store is based on the perceived utility derived from the store and will therefore direct his/her resource consumption towards a store that offers the greatest service output.

One of the issues that consumers raise concerning counter service is waiting time (Kakava & Erasmus, 2012). Though the determinant of the most appropriate period is subjective and based on customers' expectations, when they wait for long periods than expected they become bored resulting to negative emotions especially when its determined that the long waiting time is as a result of the front desk employees being incompetent and slow or the process itself is too slow

(Hartley & Ward, 2006; Van Riel et al., 2012). This can lead to consumers switching supermarket stores with the hope of getting better counter service.

On the statement concerning variety of products in the supermarket affecting customer store choices, almost an equal number of respondents who constituted a higher majority indicated that they agree and strongly agree generating a 3.8267 mean and a std dev of 1.16232 implying that respective supermarket customers often consider product variety as a determinant of store choice and can hence influence their supermarket switching decisions. This agrees with Wel et al. (2012) who observed that consumers in Malaysian supermarkets indicated that product variety and quality offered by a store were strong determinants of their store choices. The same conclusion was made by Gabriel and Bonuke (2017) who observed that as one of the determinants of store perceived quality, customers in Kenyan supermarkets consider availability of variety of product assortments of major brands to be among major factors that directly influence store choices.

Product variety gives a retailer advantage over competitors as it increases customer satisfaction (positive experience) and loyalty hence can act as a switching barrier (Rahman et al., 2019). In addition to this, it should also be noted that some consumers are variety seekers and won't hesitate to switch when they realize that their current store lacks a variety of products (Argouslidis et al., 2018; Ribeiro, 2010).

The distance between supermarket and customers' home being important in determining store choices was approved by majority of the respondents because 138 of them agreed while 136 of

them strongly agreed. The statement response generated a 4.1459 mean and a 0.95157 std dv. This question raises the elusive topic of shopping convenience that has been discussed by scholars such as (Betancourt, 2005; Thuong, 2016). In the Vietnamese supermarket sector, it was observed that store locations within neighborhoods (near homes) are rated as most appropriate since they reduce some shopping costs like transport costs and the time associated with the shopping.

In other studies, some scholars have offered alternative opinion by arguing that even though distance between store location and customers home as a determinant of store choice cannot be challenged, convenience however might not be the main reason as other shoppers still prefer out of town shopping experience with a good example being fun shopping for leisure (Marjanen, 2000). All these scenarios have time one is willing to shop as a determinant. Those who prefer short distance would want to save time while those who prefer shopping for leisure in out of town stores or in a more appealing faraway store hence long distance don't mind spending a lot of time. However each would contemplate switching based on their experience and shopping environment they are looking for (Gijbrecchts et al., 2008).

Customer support by supermarket can affect customers' store choice statement also had a majority of respondents agreeing (A= (145) 44.10%) followed by those who strongly agreed (SA= (102) 31.00%). This generated a mean of 3.9271 mean and a std dv of 1.00038 implying that customers often consider customer support a valid factor in determining store choice. To understand this we look at the work of Goffin (1999) who highlighted the importance of providing customer support irrespective of the product type. He also defined customer support as



the assistance accorded to customers for them to attain the highest value from their shopping. In addition, Viswanathan (2019) observed that customer service in retailing is about providing seamless experiences to the customers that tell them that you not only care about making the sale but you care about satisfying them. This means any time they need support, be it before or after the sale, they must get it and must be easy, efficient, and without a lot of hassle.

Rahman et al. (2019) reported that majority of the Bangladesh supermarket customers indicated that they consider staff assistance and responsiveness to be high influencers of their store experience and satisfaction. Customer switching is a big threat to supermarkets especially since they are among business entities that offer continuous service (Wells & Foxall, 2012), and any slight mistake in customer service like poor customer support might lead to customers switching to competitor stores in order to avoid further problems. Already several supermarkets are putting measures to enhance customer support.

Finally, the statement 'location of the supermarket affects my store choices' also had many respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing generating a mean figure of 4.0365 and a standard deviation of 0.99628. From the findings, it is evident that customers consider location of the supermarket important in determining whether they will stay with the supermarket for long or they will switch if a more convenient location is available. This supports the results of Bhatti et al. (2015) who reported that location significantly influences consumer store choice, a notion also supported by Jaravaza and Chitando (2013) who observed that to customers store location is important for convenient shopping. He also observed that most people prefer store locations closest to them. On the other hand, Rinawati (2018) observed that store location is one of the important value

propositions by supermarkets and can be used to deter customers from switching to other supermarkets.

**Table 4.14:**

*Descriptive statistics from the Likert scale questions on switching cost*

Descriptive	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mea n	Std Dev
Parking area availability is important in choosing a supermarket	4	3	27	143	152	4.33	0.77
Loyalty incentives by supermarkets affect my store choices	4	27	62	150	86	3.87	0.93
Prices by supermarkets affect my store choices	9	23	35	153	109	4.00	0.98
Branch coverage greatly affect my store choices	9	31	56	154	79	3.80	0.99
Counter service by supermarket can affect my store choices	8	31	66	132	92	3.82	1.02
Variety of products in the supermarket affect my store choices	17	37	42	123	110	3.83	1.16
Distance between my supermarket and my home is important in determining store choices	7	19	29	138	136	4.15	0.95
Customer support by supermarket can affect my store choice	7	30	45	145	102	3.93	1.00
Location of the supermarket affects my store choice	10	21	34	146	118	4.04	0.99

Source: Author, 2020

#### **4.5.6 Customer satisfaction**

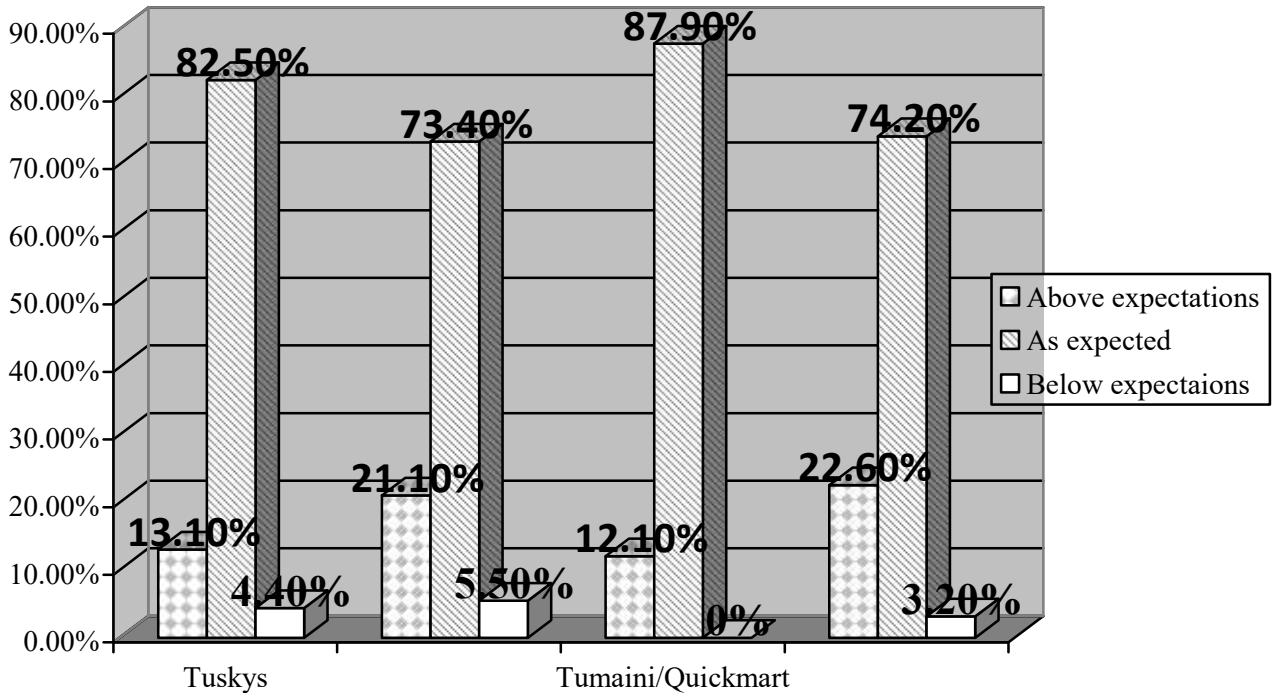
The study sought to establish the rating of the level of supermarket service by respective customers (below expectation, as expected and above expectation). The results were cross tabulated and summarized in the table 4.15 below. The deducted results show that most respondents at 78.7% rate their supermarket services as within their expectation. A very low percentage, 4.3% of respondents felt that the services they receive are below their expectations. The rest at 17% felt their supermarket service delivery continuum was above expectation. Satisfaction. The results concur with good customer care skills that majority of the respondents rated supermarket staff.

On analyzing supermarket service expectation per individual supermarket, the results indicated that Tumaini/Quickmart customers were highly satisfied with the rate of service especially since no respondent felt that the services, they receive are below expectation. The results are a good indication that customers within the study scope have met their expectations as far as supermarket service and product delivery is concerned. Measuring customer expectations is very crucial in determining satisfaction level as observed by Pilelienė and Grigaliūnaitė (2013) who used the measure as a latent variable in measuring satisfaction of supermarket customers in Lithuania. They concluded that the expectation of customers always influences perceived value directly as well as customer satisfaction with further analysis revealing that the satisfaction in supermarket customers is average since the level of expectation was as expected.

In further understanding the expectation levels of supermarket customers, we look at the work of Zeithaml et al. (2018) who defined the expectation of customers as those beliefs concerning an organizations delivery of service that act as standards against which one can judge its performance. The authors also argued that different customers hold different types of expectations. It is important to know the expectations of a customer as a way of gaining competitive advantage. It is also important since failure to manage expectation levels can also lead to lose of customers by them switching to competitor supermarkets. It is therefore in order to say that customer satisfaction also depends on meeting consumer expectation (Pawlasová & Klézl, 2017).

**Figure 4.5:**

*Level of respective supermarket service*



Source: Author, 2020

In analyzing the Likert scale statements, the study results from the table 4.15 below reveal that the respondents who agreed that their experience with their supermarket has always been good were more than half generating a 3.9027 mean figure and a std dv of 0.78649. According to Thao et al. (2019) the quality of experience that a customer perceives is one of the important factors that he/she shall use to evaluate their satisfaction. It should be noted that both intangible as well as tangible supermarkets service components are offered to the supermarket customers (Marx & Erasmus, 2006). Positive experience is derived from all the tangible components like the variety of products in store and availability of trolleys, in addition to intangible components like the

lighting system, smell, good handling of complains and even employees knowledge (Biesok & Wyród-Wróbel, 2018; Chanaka et al., 2014; Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009). According to Roberts-Lombard et al. (2013) the customers will use past experience concerning a specific service offered by the service provider to judge the organization and hence organizations should strive to treat customers well.

The response concerning whether the supermarkets stimulate customers for them to buy directly had most of the respondents indicating that they agree. The responses generated a 3.8815 mean and a 0.8702 std dv which was enough to justify the outcome. Satisfied customers are always stimulated to want to participate in the repeat purchases by themselves in order to experience and benefit from the same level of service. This was observed by Rajagopal (2008) who noted that the retail stores which are usually self service like supermarkets have mastered the art of employing promotional activities done at the point of sales as a way of stimulating buying and in the long run counters competitors despite the price differences offered by such competitors or channel alternatives.

A higher percentage of customers agreed to give advice about their brand supermarket to other people with a 3.6778 mean and a std dv of 0.91373. According to Maisam and Mahsa (2016) consumer brand love and consumer brand commitment leads to positive advice. When consumers give advice to other consumers concerning their purchasing, it can be interpreted as word of mouth (East et al., 2007). The researchers further assert that the advice usually happens to consumers who don't have prior experience with a service provider like a supermarket. For satisfied customers, the advice is expected to be positive with the intent of convincing

prospective customers to purchase from your supplier or store (Kasabov, 2016; Libai et al., 2010). It has also been suggested that conversation, e.g., positive word of mouth, should be unilateral advice or suggestions about products, brands and services between people who have no benefit or very low benefit to persuade others to use that product, brand or service (Maisam & Mahsa, 2016; Sivadas & Jindal, 2017).

Slightly more than half of the total respondent agreed that they comfortably share their personal experiences about their supermarkets with others. The results generated a 3.845 mean and a 0.88534 std dev. To understand this we look at customer to customer (C2C) interaction relationship marketing research stream which posits that there is always transfer of information (positive and, or negative) from one customer or group of customers of a certain brand or store to another in ways that can change their preferred choices or buying behaviour (Kasabov, 2016; Libai et al., 2010). It is however expected that satisfied customers will channel positive information for example through positive reviews and blogging (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

The statement about customers recommending the supermarket to their families and friends also had many respondents indicating that they would do that with a 3.9757 mean and a 0.83703 std dev. In addition, those who indicated that they can recommend the supermarket to their colleagues had the same trend as those recommending the supermarket to friends and families generating a strong mean of 4.0091 and a derived std dev of 0.78665. Empirical literature on the work of researchers like Lujun et al. (2016), Mende et al. (2014) and Koklic et al. (2017) points to the fact that when at the highest level of satisfaction, customers are voluntarily willing to

recommend the supermarket and also offer positive referrals to close associates like family, friends and colleagues.

This also support the study results where a larger proportion of the study participants agreed (A=161) to talking positively about their supermarkets to their friends and relatives with a 3.8602 mean and a 0.87228 std dv. Researchers have also observed that among satisfaction construct predictors, positive word-of-mouth features there (Nataraj & Rajendran, 2018). Such a case was observed in the Indian retail sector where it was reported by Kumar (2017) that positive word of mouth was being pushed more by satisfied supermarket customers especially to their relatives and close associates.

On the statement concerning switching intentions, collectively, about half the number of the customers engaged in the study represented by N=106, A=119, and SA=49 indicated that they don't strongly see the need to switch to other supermarkets even if they face small problems currently, this generate a 3.4438 mean and a 1.03772 std dv. The results are in line with Valarie et al. (1996), who observed that a customer may express his/her satisfaction to service quality by exhibiting behavioural intentions like expressing preference for an organization over other organizations, though continuous buying or expanding future business engagements with it. In addition, the results concur with other studies in the retail settings where customer satisfaction has been linked to several outcomes among them customer retention and loyalty which hinder switching to competitors as is the case in Sri Lankan supermarkets (Weerasiri, 2015).



Lastly, a higher percentage of respondents rated as neutral (N=88) the statement about them intending to remain with the same supermarket even if prices or charges are increased. The spread of response also indicates that there was no clear majority of opinion. However, the results generated 3.0152 mean and 1.24808 std dv implying that customers somehow agree that they do stick to the supermarket even though the charged prices increase. This is also a case of customer retention and loyalty as observed by (Weerasiri, 2015). In addition it is also a question of repurchase intentions in the wake of price changes.

Nataraj and Rajendran (2018) noted that prior satisfaction experience creates a possibility of a customer enduring changes e.g., the price changes and continues to purchase from the supermarket. This however is short term for price sensitive customers and might explain the weak mean due to a good number of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree. In addition, a study in polish supermarket set up observed that satisfied consumers always return to repurchase products (Biesok & Wyród-Wróbel, 2018).

**Table 4.15:*****Descriptive statistics on the Likert scale questions on Customer satisfaction***

Descriptive	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dv
My experience with the supermarket has always been good	1	15	68	176	69	3.90	0.79
My supermarket stimulates me to buy directly	3	20	68	160	78	3.88	0.87
I give advice about this supermarket brand to other people	7	29	78	164	51	3.68	0.91
I comfortably share my personal experiences about the supermarket to others	3	26	62	166	72	3.85	0.89
I would recommend the supermarket to my family and friends	5	13	50	178	83	3.98	0.84
I would recommend the supermarket to colleagues	2	12	52	178	85	4.01	0.79
I talk positively about my supermarket to my friends and relatives	5	16	73	161	74	3.86	0.87
I do not have strong intention to switch to other supermarkets even if I face a small problem with my current supermarket	16	39	106	119	49	3.44	1.04
I intend to remain with the same supermarket even if there is an increase in prices or charges	45	73	88	78	45	3.02	1.25

Source: Author, 2020

**4.6 Regression analysis**

Using univariate regression analysis, the researcher was able to test the linear relationships between each of the predictors and the dependent variable. The study looked at non moderated

multiple regression model in order to test hypothesis 1 to 4 and then employed moderated multiple regression models to determine hypothesis 5. The  $R^2$  (coefficient of determinations) which is the percentage of the variance in the dependent variable explained by the predictor variable was adopted in explaining goodness of model fit (Kothari & Garg, 2019). The use of  $R^2$  is supported by Zhang (2017) who observed that in a model that has an intercept term, the coefficient of determination is used to measure the proportion of variation in the responses explained by the available predictors and also used in practice as the underlying models goodness-of-fit measure.

To determine the appropriate range of  $R^2$ , we borrow from the work of Barrett (1974) who observed that generally, a higher  $R^2$  value indicates an increase in predictive precision for a regression equation while low  $R^2$  figures are bad signs for predictive models, though not always the case as  $R^2$  is not sufficient by itself. Despite of this, for large samples like in the case of this study, since the coefficient of determination cannot determine if the prediction is biased, the appropriate range of  $R^2$  to be adopted is judgmental (Cornell & Berger, 1987). In light of this, the study adopts the work of Renaud and Victoria-Feser (2010) who observed that a robust  $R^2 = 0.16$  is substantial while a robust  $R^2 = 0.47$  is good.

ANOVA technique using F test was employed to determine the accuracy of the measurement in addition to determining the significance of the model and the data, i.e. if the observations have been drawn from the same population (King'oriah, 2004). This also helps in determining how significant a relationship is between the predictors and the dependent variable. Further statistical

tests using t statistics were used to test and help interpret the study models and hypothesis as recommended by (Hill et al., 2018).

#### 4.6.1 Information sharing regression

Model:  $(\gamma = \alpha + \beta 1V1 + e)$

Regression one testing was aimed at determining the relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The index of information sharing was regressed against customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The attained results are presented and interpreted below.

**Table 4.16:**

***Model Summary for Information sharing regression***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.476 <sup>a</sup>	.226	.224	.57598

a. Predictors: (Constant), Information sharing

Source: Author, 2020

The model had the R<sup>2</sup> of 0.226 as presented in table 4.16 which suggested that 22.6% of the variations on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county are explained by information sharing. The R<sup>2</sup> attained is sufficient as a measure of goodness of fit and hence can be used for future forecasts. The results support the argument of Namagembe et al. (2012) who indicated that information sharing is an important determinant of customer satisfaction.

Machado and Pinheiro (2013) also illustrated that sharing information improves relationships by enhancing commitment and trust between the supermarket and individual customers which eventually enhances customer satisfaction.

**Table 4.17:**

*ANOVA table for Information sharing regression model*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.717	1	31.717	95.606	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	108.483	327	.332		
	Total	140.200	328			

Source: Author, 2020

In addition, the study used ANOVA technique to test significance of the model. The findings are tabulated in table 4.17. The F test of overall significance was carried out with its interpretation based on the overall significance which should be less than the significance level (0.05).

From the ANOVA statistics, it was established that the regression model had a significance level of 0.000 (p-value) which was less than 5%. This is an indication that the model provided a better fit than the intercept only model and hence the data was considered suitable for making conclusions on the population parameters. Thus, the model was significant. In addition, the calculated F value was greater than the critical value ( $95.606 > 3.8415$ ) an inference is therefore made that information sharing and its predictors are significantly influential in predicting customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The results collaborate the outcome reached by Kyei and Narteh (2016) that information sharing variables of timely

information, trust worthy information and accurate information concerning services and product offerings will determine customer satisfaction. Customers are meant to benefit from such initiatives which will reduce among other things, such costs in terms of time, travel, computer fee and other associated expenditure concerning price and product features (Bakos, 2001).

**Table 4.18:**

*Coefficients of regression for information sharing*

		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.530	.127		19.895	.000
	Information sharing	.357	.037	.476	9.778	.000

Source: Author, 2020.

In further analysis, the study used the coefficient table to determine the first study model as discussed in section 3.10, ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + e$ ). The findings are presented in the Table 4.18 above.

The resultant regression model was as follows:

$$Y = 2.53 + 0.357V_1 + e$$

The interpretation of the model output ( $Y = 2.53 + 0.357V_1 + e$ ) shows that a unit increase in information sharing while holding the other factors constant at zero, customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county would be increased by a factor of 0.357. The findings are in concurrence with the observation of Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015) that information sharing and communication in general helps to relay reliable and timely information that ensures

customer satisfaction. Furthermore, according to Agnihotri et al. (2016) information sharing which is basically information communication by the respective selling person or organization is a key contributor to customers positive experience.

#### 4.6.2 Product customization regression

Model:  $(\gamma = \alpha + \beta_2 V_2 + e)$

Test regression two was undertaken to determine the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. To test the second regression, the index of product customization was regressed against customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The attained results are presented and interpreted below.

**Table 4.19:**

***Model Summary for Product customization regression***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.442 <sup>a</sup>	.195	.193	.58742

Predictors: (Constant), Product customization

Source: Author, 2020

From the model summary table 4.19, the model had an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.195 implying that 19.5% of the variations on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county are explained uniquely by product customization. The R<sup>2</sup> attained was considered sufficient as a goodness of fit

measure and hence can be used for future forecasts. The results agree with several empirical findings of previous studies that supported a relationship between customizing products and services and satisfaction of customers (Coelho & Henseler, 2012). They also observed a real match between what customers want and the products being offered by the company is attained more through customization of offers other than standardization hence the former is better than the latter in satisfying customers. In addition, Uma and Chandramowleeswaran (2015) reported that high customization through discovery of latent needs and provision of tailored solutions enhances customer satisfaction.

**Table 4.20:**

*ANOVA table for Product customization regression model*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.363	1	27.363	79.299	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	112.837	327	.345		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Product customization

Source: Author, 2020

The researcher used ANOVA to test the significance of the model with findings presented in the table 4.20. The F test of overall significance was carried out with its interpretation based on the overall significance which should be less than the significance level (0.05). From the ANOVA statistics, the study established the regression model had a significance level of 0.000 which was



less than 0.05. This is an indication that the model provided a better fit than the intercept only model and one can use the data to make conclusions on the population. Thus, the model was significant. In addition, the calculated F value 79.299 was greater than 3.8415 the critical value and hence an inference was therefore made to accept the null hypothesis that product customization and its predictors are significantly influential in predicting customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county.

The results concur with the work of Fels et al. (2017) who concluded that customized products increase customer satisfaction. According to Du et al. (2005) product customization is an effective means of meeting customer individual needs through coordinated efforts of product marketing and design engineering to develop the product family architecture that eventually enables the convergence of customers' needs to product offerings of the company thereby increasing customer satisfaction.

**Table 4.21:**

***Coefficients of regression for Product customization***

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.264	.168		13.450	.000
	Product customization	.436	.049	.442	8.905	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction  
Source: Author, 2020

The study used the coefficient table 4.21 to determine the study model ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_2 V_2 + \epsilon$ ). The resultant regression model is as follows:

$$Y = 2.264 + 0.436V_2 + e$$

From the above model results, a unit increase in product customization while holding the other factors constant at zero, customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county would be increased by a factor of 0.436. The findings agree with the results attained by Gunjan (2018) that indicated customization does increase customer satisfaction. Simonson (2005) asserted that customized offers may provide superior value and the marketer or selling organization will be rewarded with customer satisfaction that eventually lead to customer loyalty.

#### **4.6.3 Conflict handling regression**

Model: ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_3 V_3 + \epsilon$ )

The focus of test regression three was to determine relationship between conflict handling on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. To test the regression, the index of conflict handling was regressed against customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The attained results presented and interpreted below.

**Table 4.22:**

***Model Summary for Conflict handling Regression***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.569 <sup>a</sup>	.324	.321	.53856

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict handling

Source: Author, 2020

From the model summary table 4.22, the model had a  $R^2$  of 0.324 indicating that 32.4% of the variations on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya are explained by conflict handling. The  $R^2$  attained is sufficient goodness of fit measure and hence can be used for future forecasts. The results concur with the findings of Ndubisi and Wah (2005) who observed that effective conflict handling in retailing increases customer satisfaction. Kyei and Narteh (2016) in their study also observed that there was enough evidence indicating that variations in customer satisfaction are also generated by conflict handling strategies employed.

**Table 4.23:**

***ANOVA table for Conflict handling regression model***

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.356	1	45.356	156.376	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	94.844	327	.290		
	Total	140.200	328			

Source: Author, 2020

By use of the ANOVA technique, the researcher went ahead to test the model significance with results tabulated below. The F test of overall significance was carried out with its interpretation based on the overall significance which should be less than the significance level (0.05). From the ANOVA statistics as presented in table 4.23, the study established the regression model had a significance level of 0.000 a value that was less than the value of significance (p-value) of 5%. This is an indication that the model fit and significant and the data was ideal for making a conclusion on the population parameters.

Furthermore, the calculated F value was greater than the critical value ( $156.376 > 3.8415$ ) hence we reject the null hypothesis and infer that conflict handling has a significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The results prove the findings attained by Senasu (2012) who reported that conflict handling have positive effect to customer satisfaction. In addition, Mahmoud et al. (2018) also observed that conflict handling had a direct significant effect on customer satisfaction and recommended that for effective customer satisfaction and retention, managers should strive to resolve customer complaints.

**Table 4.6:**

***Coefficients of regression for Conflict handling***

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.580	.175		9.038	.000
	Conflict handling	.579	.046	.569	12.505	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

The study used the coefficient of regression table to determine the study model ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_3V_3 + e$ ). The findings are presented in the Table 4.24 above with the resultant regression model as follows:

$$Y = 1.58 + 0.579V_3 + e$$

From the attained regression coefficients model above, it shows that, an increase in one unit of conflict handling while retaining other factors at zero constant, customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county would be increased by a factor of 0.579. Similar results in the telecommunication industry were attained by Mahmoud et al. (2018) who had a conclusion of customer satisfaction substantially being influenced by conflict handling. In addition, he also obtained a strong positive effect. The results are also in concurrence with Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015) who observed that that if a supplier has the ability to avoiding

potential conflicts, resolving actual conflicts even before they become a problem, and also finding solutions when a problem arises shall lead to customer satisfaction.

#### 4.6.4 Reciprocity regression

Model:  $(\gamma = \alpha + \beta_4 V_4 + e)$

Regression four test was aimed at determine the relationship between reciprocity the fourth predictor variable on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The researcher regressed reciprocity index against customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county and resultant model summary and other regression tables presented and interpreted below.

**Table 4.25:**

#### *Model Summary for Reciprocity Regression*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.652 <sup>a</sup>	.425	.423	.49671

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reciprocity

Source: Author, 2020

From the model summary table 4.25 above, the model had a 0.425 R<sup>2</sup> meaning that approximately 42.5% customer satisfaction variations among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county are explained by reciprocity. The R<sup>2</sup> attained is sufficient as a goodness of fit measure and hence can be used for future forecasts. The results agree with the findings of Kyei and

Narteh (2016) who also attained an appropriate  $R^2$  in addition to other statistical measures concluded that reciprocity directly influences customer satisfaction. In addition, Friedman and Rahman (2011) in their study observed that retail outlets reciprocal actions among them gifts and verbal appreciatory comments proved to increase consumer spending and satisfaction.

**Table 4.26:**

*ANOVA table for Reciprocity regression model*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	59.523	1	59.523	241.257	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	80.677	327	.247		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Reciprocity

Source: Author, 2020

With the employment of ANOVA, the model significance was ascertained with the resultant outcome presented in the table 4.26. The model had a 0.000 level of significance as shown in the ANOVA statistical table, clearly indicating that the value is smaller than the 5 percent level of statistical significance. This is strong evidence that the model fit and significant and inferences on population can be made from the data since its ideal. Furthermore, the F value calculated (241.257) was  $>$  the critical value (3.8415) hence the study rejects the  $H_0$  and infer that reciprocity's effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county is statistically significant.

The attained results mirror the work of who reported that customer satisfaction in supermarkets is predicted primarily by supermarkets reciprocal actions. Khandabi et al. (2014) also observed that reciprocity has a strong effect on customer satisfaction though not as strong as trust which was another construct in his study. They also noted that reciprocity advocates for customers to be treated in a way that they feel special which in turn will lead to a happy customer who shall enhance his/her repurchase intentions. Personalized notes have been used to address selected customers which has also proven to make them happy (Shamsudin et al., 2019). It should be noted that one of the indicators of customer satisfaction in different industries is when the customer feels happy (Bordalo et al., 2016).

**Table 4.27:**

*Coefficients of regression for Reciprocity*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
1	(Constant)	1.668	.136		12.276	.000
	Reciprocity	.595	.038	.652	15.532	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

The study further used the coefficient table to determine the study model ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_4V_4 + e$ ). The findings are presented in the table 4.27. With the resultant regression model as follows:

$$Y = 1.668 + 0.595V_4 + e$$



From the coefficients of reciprocity regression resultant model, increasing a unit of reciprocity while other factors are held at zero constant, customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county would be increased by a factor of 0.595. The outcome (positive beta) supports Hoppner et al. (2015) observation that reciprocity dimensions of immediacy and equivalence enhance relationship quality which in turn enhances customer satisfaction. The higher beta value is proof enough that reciprocity plays a bigger role in relationships especially since it goes both ways as per the social exchange theory assumption, i.e. the customers and the supermarkets have to create mutual benefits as propagated by the behavioral school of relationship marketing (Ranjan, 2017).

#### **4.6.5 Test of study hypotheses using multiple regression analysis on relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction**

The focus of this multiple regression model ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1V_1 + \beta_2V_2 + \beta_3V_3 + \beta_4V_4 + \epsilon$ ) was to determine the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya without the influence of moderating variable. The hypotheses were tested by looking at the significance of the respective betas at 0.05 level of significance.

**Table 4.28:**

*Model summary for multiple regression between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.678 <sup>a</sup>	.460	.454	.48327	.006	69.074	4	324	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), reciprocity, information sharing, product customization, conflict handling  
Source: Author, 2020

The model fit for this multiple regression analysis was evaluated by the coefficient of multiple determination and the results presented in the table 4.28 above. The R Square from the table above, also called the coefficient of multiple determination in multiple regression is the percentage of the variance in customer satisfaction explained uniquely by relationship marketing practices of information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity. The model had a coefficient of multiple determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.460 which implied that 46% of the variations on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya are explained explicitly by the variables; information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity.

**Table 4.29:**

***MANOVA for relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction***

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	64.529	4	16.132	69.074	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	75.671	324	.234		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), reciprocity, information sharing, product customization, conflict handling

Source: Author, 2020

The study further tested the significance of the model by use of MANOVA technique. The findings were tabulated in table 4.29 and it was established that the regression model had a significance level of 0.000 which is an indication that the data was ideal for making a conclusions on the population parameters as the value of significance (p-value) was less than 5%.

The calculated value for F statistics was greater than the critical value (69.074 > 3.8415) an indication that, there exists a significant linear relationship between relationship marketing practices (Information sharing, Product customization, Conflict handling and reciprocity) and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya. The results support the outputs by Nyameino (2016) and Datta et al. (2018) on the existence of a significant linear relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction.

**Table 4.30:**

*Coefficients for multiple regression between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.241	.174		7.125	.000
	information sharing	.138	.043	.104	2.835	.017
	product customization	.112	.056	.026	2.452	.031
	conflict handling	.199	.059	.196	3.369	.001
	reciprocity	.403	.058	.442	6.984	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), reciprocity, information sharing, product customization, conflict handling

Source: Author, 2020

The study used the coefficient table 4.30 to determine the study model ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1V_1 + \beta_2V_2 + \beta_3V_3 + \beta_4V_4 + e$ ) and test hypotheses. The resultant outcome presented in the table gives the following output:

$$\gamma = 1.241 + 0.138V_1 + 0.112V_2 + 0.199V_3 + 0.403V_4 + e$$

From the coefficients of regression model obtained above, a unit increase in information sharing while holding the other factors constant at zero, customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county would be increased by a factor of 0.138. The findings are in concurrence with the observation of Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015) that information sharing and communication in general helps to relay reliable and timely information that ensures

customer satisfaction. Furthermore, according to Agnihotri et al. (2016) information sharing which is basically information communication by the respective selling person or organization is a key contributor to customers positive experience.

Secondly, as for the effect of product customization, from the coefficients of regression model obtained in table 4.30, a unit change in product customization while holding other factors constant at zero would enhance customer satisfaction by a factor of 0.112. The findings agree with the results attained by Gunjan (2018) that indicated customization does increase customer satisfaction. Simonson (2005) asserted that customized offers may provide superior value and the marketer or selling organization will be rewarded with customer satisfaction that eventually lead to customer loyalty. However, the small contribution of 11.2% might mean that product customization in the supermarket set up might just be a hygiene factor which majority of customers do not recognize it readily but supermarkets must use it anyway because its absence might have a negative consequence.

The results of conflict handling beta coefficient in table 4.30 reveal that a unit increase in conflict handling while holding other factors constant at zero would increase customer satisfaction by a factor 0.199. This is in concurrence with Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015) that if a supplier has the ability to resolve actual conflicts even before they become a problem, and also finding solutions when a problem arises shall lead to customer satisfaction. The results however, dispute the findings by Nyameino (2016) who attained a  $\beta$  of -0.013 indicating that a unit change of conflict handling holding other factors constant at zero would reduce instead of increasing customer satisfaction.

Finally, Results from the coefficients table show that a unit change in reciprocity while holding the other factors constant at zero would positively change customer satisfaction by a factor of 0.403. The outcome supports Hoppner et al. (2015) observation that reciprocity dimensions of immediacy and equivalence enhance relationship quality which in turn enhances customer satisfaction. The higher beta value is proof enough that reciprocity plays a bigger role in relationships especially since it is both ways i.e. the customers and the supermarkets have to create mutual benefits as propagated by the behavioral school of relationship marketing (Ranjan, 2017).

### **Test of study hypothesis one**

H<sub>01</sub>: Information sharing has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

From the results of the t statistics in table 4.30, and comparing with the t critical from the t distribution table at  $\alpha = 5\%$ , the obtained statistics are used to test the first hypothesis of the study.

The calculated t value of 2.835 is higher than the t-critical (1.96) and therefore the study rejects the null hypothesis that Information sharing has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The results are in line with the findings of other authors on the same. To start with, Namagembe et al. (2012) in a case of manufacturing firms in Kampala, they attained a significant t value of 5.198, hence concluded that information sharing has a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The same results were attained by Kyei and

Narteh (2016) in the Ghanaian banking sector where having indicated that communication in relationship marketing is the ability to provide trustworthy and timely information, they went ahead and run a t test attaining a t value of 2.552 and a p value of 0.011. This implied that they accept the alternative hypothesis that Communication (information sharing) has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

### **Discussion of findings on the relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction**

Based on the results obtained from the study, there exists a linear relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The study also revealed information sharing has a significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. The  $R^2$  of 22.6% obtained from the univariate model as presented in table 4.16 clearly indicates that supermarkets cannot ignore the importance of information sharing. In addition, the significant t value which led to the study to accept the alternative hypothesis one meant that the results re affirm outcomes obtained by other authors like Namagembe et al. (2012) in a case of manufacturing firms in Kampala, they attained a significant t value of 5.198, hence concluded that information sharing had a significantly great effect on customer satisfaction.

The same results were attained by Kyei and Narteh (2016) in the Ghanaian banking sector where having indicated that communication in relationship marketing which was defined by the operationalization variables i.e., provision ability of information in a timely manner and also the

information being considered trustworthy, they went ahead and run a t test attaining a t statistic value of 2.552 and a p value of 0.011. This implied that they accept the alternative hypothesis that Communication (information sharing) has a significantly great effect on customer satisfaction. The outcome can mean that information sharing in Kenya's supermarket sector just like in other study scopes is taken with greater emphasis by the respective customers in their satisfaction continuum.

Furthermore, with a significant 13.8% beta from the multiple regression model as presented in table 4.30, its importance to the supermarkets cannot be ignored since scholars like Singh and Srivastava (2008) after analysing several scholarly work concluded that relationship marketing advocates for relationships that are profitable and long term among different stakeholders, information sharing is a strong pillar in the interaction process thereby also supporting the assumptions of social exchange theory.

### **Test of study hypothesis two**

H<sub>02</sub>: Product customization has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

The results of the t statistics from the coefficient of regression as presented in table above were compared with the t critical from the t distribution table at  $\alpha = 5\%$  in order to test the second set of hypothesis of the study. Based on results presented in table 4.30, the calculated t value of 2.452 is also greater than the t-critical (1.96) with a p value of 0.031 indicating that the product customization beta from the multiple regression model is significant, the study hence rejects the



null hypothesis that Product customization has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. If we borrow from Kasiri et al. (2017) product customization allows consumers to specify what products will suite their desires, supermarkets that implement this practice are bound to have a significant positive customer rating. According to Coelho and Henseler (2012) ideally product customization is always expected to create some switching cost and increase the attractiveness of the existing exchange relationship as compared to the alternatives.

### **Discussion of findings on the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction**

The study found out that product customization has a statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county based on the results presented in table 4.30 concerning the significance of the respective beta. This outcome is consistent with the reasoning of Uma and Chandramowleeswaran (2015), who noted that customization improves the probability of meeting customers' specific needs thereby enhancing customer satisfaction through positive experience.

Results from the Likert questions on product customization ascertained that supermarkets always strive to offer customized products and services. For example, by use of reasonable prices and reasonable packaged products. The results are also in agreement with the work of Thirumalai and Sinha (2011) who observed there are two customization processes in retailing which are all associated positively with customer satisfaction. Thus, transactional (process customization) and

product personalization. Despite of this, the study also established that majority of the respondents indicated that their respective supermarkets were not engaging them in market research and establishment of new offers.

The study also revealed that the influence of product customization on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya is small as presented by  $R^2$  of 19.5% obtained from the univariate regression model results in table 4.19 and therefore other factors beyond product customization must be incorporated in order to attain a higher customer satisfaction. The low coefficient of determination might also be because of simultaneous pursuit of customization which may result in unquestionable service and product quality that may compromise a customers evaluation of satisfaction (Uma & Chandramowleeswaran, 2015).

None the less, the degree of product customization has become higher in recent years as indicated by majority of respondents in each supermarket agreeing that they are experiencing customized services and products. The low  $R^2$  as compared to what other relationship marketing variables obtained reflects the complexity of product customization in a supermarket set up. Kasiri et al. (2017) noted that product customization allows consumers to specify what products will suite their desires, but in a supermarket set up where one has thousands of customers and many product assortments, attempts to meet specific needs of individual customers might be cumbersome but necessary.

The significant t test which led to accepting the alternative hypothesis that product customization has a significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county,

Kenya might therefore mean that within the Kenyan supermarket set up, customers have experienced substantive product customization to consider it an important element in determining customer satisfaction. According to Coelho and Henseler (2012) ideally product customization is always expected to create some switching cost and increase the attractiveness of the existing exchange relationship as compared to the alternatives. This therefore requires each party to invest in the relational exchange mutually where by customers are expected to channel some time and effort relaying their wishes and needs; companies on their parts are expected to analyze those customer desires and needs and probably provide tailored products.

Due to complexity of achieving product customization in supermarket set up, some supermarkets are partnering with multinationals that produce multiple products like Bidco, Unilever and Pwani oil in Kenya to actualize ideas like product bundling that have necessitated cross buying (the purchase of products from multiple categories) which have proven to have a positive impact on increasing customer lifetime value and satisfaction (Venkatesan & Kumar, 2004). Lastly, even though many past studies have confirmed existence of a positive relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction, few scholars like Surprenant and Solomon (1987), have reported exceptional descending outcomes. Hence product customization alone might not be ideal in attaining higher customer satisfaction.

### **Test of study hypothesis three**

H<sub>03</sub>: Conflict handling has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

To test the third hypothesis of the study, the significance of conflict handling beta from the multiple regression coefficient of regression as presented in table 4.30 was tested.

The conflict handling beta of 0.199 was attained with the calculated t value of 3.369 which is greater than the t-critical (1.96) at 0.001 p-value which is less than the 0.05 level of significance and therefore the study concludes that the beta is significant hence rejected the null hypothesis that conflict handling has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. The alternative hypothesis which a firm that conflict handling had a significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county was adopted. Similar results in the telecommunication industry were attained by Mahmoud et al. (2018) whose alternative hypothesis concluded that conflict handling has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

### **Discussion of findings on the relationship between conflict handling and customer satisfaction**

The study established that conflict handling has a statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya based on the significance of the beta from the coefficient of multiple regression results as presented in table 4.30. in addition, the 32.4% coefficient of determination as shown in table 4.22 implying that 32.4% of variation in customer satisfaction within the study scope is as a result of application of effective conflict handling strategies. With a 19.9 beta coefficient, implies that if other factors are held constant at zero, a unit increase in implementation of conflict handling strategy as a relationship marketing

practice by tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya would result in a 19.9% increase in customer satisfaction.

This results clearly reflect the importance of conflict handling in determining customer satisfaction. Roberts-Lombard (2011) observe that about 50% of customers who raise complains will eventually report a satisfactory problem resolution which will influence other customer or consumer decisions. In addition, he also observed that approximately thirty four percent of the total clients who raise serious complaints with the same resolved satisfactorily will continue purchasing from the company a clear indicator of customer satisfaction. Conflict handling is viewed as special actions when interacting with customers and hence the things that have the potential to influence the outcome like employees or service providers being courteous, polite, have considerate and caring attitude matter (Trenggana & Cahyani, 2019).

Since conflict handling is highly related with interpersonal relationships, the study also established that the tier one supermarkets had employed staff who had good customer care skills as 87% of respondents affirmed. In addition, majority of respondents also indicated that the respective staff had the necessary knowledge and ability as a prerequisite for ensuring that they can comfortably discuss solutions openly with customers when problems arise. These attributes of effectively handling conflicts were among the main ones highlighted by scholars like Chanaka et al. (2014). The link between conflict handling and customer satisfaction can also be explained through its relationship with loyalty behaviour.

The perceived process of receiving and managing complaints can create an effective response (satisfaction), which impacts on the capacity of people to shop again at the same store (Vieira & Damacena, 2007). Social exchange theory also observes that parties involved in an exchange have the interaction generating some obligation to repay the benefits and treatments obtained from such an exchange (Cook et al., 2013). Consequently, past positive conflict handling experiences and perceived justice as observed by Goodwin and Ross (1992) may have a direct and positive effect on the cognitive assessment of the supermarket which may lead to repurchase intentions increasing.

Despite of these results other studies in different settings have provided a descending output. For example, a research by Beneke et al. (2012), even though they noted that enough evidence exists to show that customers always have a positive or favorable perception of supermarkets or retail stores that have put in place problem solving processes that are effective (prevent dissatisfaction, detect and solve problems), their own study with a value of 0.19 and a less than ten percent level of significance p value, rejected the study's alternative hypothesis that problem solving has a direct effect on customer satisfaction within the supermarket sector in South Africa. Nyameino (2016) on the other hand, attained a  $\beta$  of -0.013 indicating that a unit change of conflict handling holding other factors constant at zero would reduce instead of increasing customer satisfaction. The difference might have been attributed to difference in study scope and setting.

### **Test of study hypothesis four**

H<sub>04</sub>: Reciprocity has no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Finally, the results of the t statistics from the coefficient of regression as presented in table 4.30 with respect to the significance of reciprocity beta were compared with the t critical from the t distribution table at  $\alpha = 5\%$  in order to test the fourth hypotheses of the study.

The calculated t value of 6.984 with a p value of 0.00 is greater than the t-critical (1.96) signifying that the reciprocity beta of 0.403 is significant and therefore the study rejected the null hypothesis and adopts the alternative hypothesis that reciprocity has a significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. In a similar study but in the banking sector, Kyei and Narteh (2016) attained a t value of 2.519 and a p value of 0.012 clearly indicating that reciprocity had a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

Hoppner et al. (2015) in their study, tried to address the universality of reciprocity, with a cross cultural examination of the effect of reciprocity dimensions of equivalence and immediacy on relationship quality and satisfaction with performance, their results indicated that the effect of equivalence on relationship quality is similar cross cultures while the effect of immediacy on relationship quality varies across cultures. This might explain why results from different studies in different cultural set ups or regions and industry still report a significant effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction. The only difference might be the strength of the relationship owing to difference in immediacy and other un explained factors.

### **Discussion of findings on the relationship between reciprocity and customer satisfaction**

The study attained a coefficient of determination of 42.5% from the univariate regression model as presented in table 4.35 indicating that reciprocity highly influences customer satisfaction. The results were statistically significant as represented by the appropriate F statistics in table 4.26. In addition, the significance of reciprocity beta coefficient from the multiple regression model presented in table 4.30 meant that the study adopts the alternative hypothesis that reciprocity has a statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The importance of reciprocity was also reflected by some Likert scale statement responses which indicated that majority of respondents have experienced reciprocal actions from the part of supermarkets and believe that their respective supermarkets make time and effort to maintain their relationship.

The study also revealed that tier one supermarkets often make and constantly try to fulfill promises. These results concur with propositions made by Mamusung et al. (2019) who asserted that relationship marketing in retailing involves developing bonds with customers which is done by meeting their needs and honouring commitments. The high effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction attained as presented by a high  $R^2$  of 42.5% as presented in table 4.25 as well as the high beta of 0.403 from the multiple regression model presented in table 4.30 might be attributed to customer advocacy as proposed by Urban (2006), where through immediacy and equivalence constructs customer relationship will be at the top of the pyramid.



Hoppner et al. (2015) in their study, tried to address the universality of reciprocity, where they actually ascertained that immediacy can vary in different cultural set ups but equivalence appeared to be the same in all cultures explaining why results from different studies in different cultural set ups or regions and industry still report a significant effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction. The only difference might be the strength of the relationship owing to difference in immediacy and other un explained factors. The fact that reciprocity borrows a lot from business to business relationship marketing research stream which advocates for symbiotic marketing as explained by Arndt (1979) and Sheth et al. (2015) where key stakeholders long term mutual relationships are emphasized, might also explain the significance of reciprocity in enhancing customer satisfaction. In addition, the reciprocal actions between the customers and the supermarkets supports the assumptions of the social exchange theory whereby people view relationships economically by considering the costs and benefits and are willing to reciprocate if benefits out way costs.

Despite of overwhelming evidence indicating that reciprocity highly influences customer satisfaction, scholars like Lee et al. (2014) observed that the causal relationship between satisfaction and reciprocity is only limited thus cannot be 100%. This they attribute to the fact that satisfaction is a wide spectrum or a broad state of construct and hence its role in predicting reciprocal behaviour might not be complete. Therefore, some percentage (coefficient of non-determination) in this case  $100\% - 42.5\% = 57.5\%$ , cannot be explained by reciprocity and hence other factors like conflict handling strategies, information sharing, product customization among others also explain customer satisfaction.

### **Test of study hypothesis five**

H<sub>05</sub>: Switching cost does not significantly moderate the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

The study adopted multiple moderation models that treat switching cost as a pure moderator in order to test if it has moderating effect on relationship between each predictor variable, i.e., information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity respectively and customer satisfaction. A pure moderator is assumed to affect the regressand through an interaction with the predictor variable as shown in the models 1,2,3, and 4 below (Kiriinya, 2015). The below models 1,2, 3 and 4 were used with the results as presented in regression tables in appendix vi compared with results of the simple regression models in section 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3 and 4.6.4 respectively.

Model 1. ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + M(\beta_1 V_1)$ )

Model 2. ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_2 V_2 + M(\beta_2 V_2)$ )

Model 3. ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_3 V_3 + M(\beta_3 V_3)$ )

Model 4. ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_4 V_4 + M(\beta_4 V_4)$ )

All the models were statistically fit as their respective F statistics were significant in their respective p values. The above models yielded R<sup>2</sup>s of 0.255, 0.234, 0.339 and 0.432 respectively which were different from the ones obtained in simple linear regression models without

moderating variable in section 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3 and 4.6.4 respectively. i.e.,  $R^2$  of 0.226, 0.195, 0.324 and 0.425 for information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity respectively. Since there were different  $R^2$  values observed between the compared models, the changes in the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) attained therefore imply that switching cost moderate's information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity respectively and their effect on customer satisfaction.

In addition, to ascertain the overall effect of switching cost (moderating variable) on relationship between RM practices (information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity) when they act together and customer satisfaction, two multiple linear regression models were compared. Thus, the multiple regression model without the moderating variable and the moderated multiple regression model (with the moderating variable) as illustrated below respectively.

$$\text{Model 1. } (\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4 + e)$$

$$\text{Model 2. } (\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4 + \beta_5 M + M(\beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4) + e)$$

Note that the none moderated multiple regression model results have already been presented in tables 4.28 for the model summery, table 4.29 for the MANOVA analysis and table 4.30 for the t statistics coefficients of multiple regression.

The regression results for the moderated multiple regression, model 2 ( $\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1V_1 + \beta_2V_2 + \beta_3V_3 + \beta_4V_4 + \beta_5M + M(\beta_1V_1 + \beta_2V_2 + \beta_3V_3 + \beta_4V_4) + e$ ) are presented below with the focus being to test hypothesis five.

**Table 4.31:**

***Multiple Regression Model Summary (model 2, moderated)***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
2	.703 <sup>b</sup>	.494	.480	.47164	.034	4.235	5	319	.001

b. Predictors: (Constant), reciprocity, information sharing, product customization, conflict handling, switching cost, Product customization\* Switching cost, Reciprocity\*Switching cost, Information Sharing\*Switching cost, Conflict handling\*Switching cost

Source: Author, 2020

From the model summary table 4.31, there is significant difference with the results of the none moderated model 1 (table 4.28). Model 2 which included switching cost and also the interaction terms accounted for significantly more variance than just the respective relationship marketing practices by themselves,  $R^2$  change = 0.034,  $p = 0.001$ , indicating that potentially significant moderation on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county exists.

**Table 4.32:**

***MANOVA table for multiple regression models***

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
2	Regression	69.239	9	7.693	34.585	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	70.961	319	.222		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), reciprocity, information sharing, product customization, conflict handling, switch cost, Product customization\*Switching cost, Reciprocity\*Switching cost, Information Sharing\*Switching cost, Conflict handling\*Switching cost

Source: Author, 2020

From the F statistics results attained in the MANOVA table 4.32 above it is clear that both models F statistics; model 1 (table 4.29) (without the effect of moderating variable) and model 2 (with the effect of moderating variable) are both significant at their respective P values. Model 1 had 69.074 F statistic value and a 0.00 P value which was  $< 0.01$ , whereas model 2 had 34.585 F statistic value and a 0.000 P value which was also  $< 0.01$ . The models are therefore significant and results can be used to make research conclusions.

**Table 4.33:**

*Coefficients of regression for multiple regression models*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
2	(Constant)	1.196	.843		1.419	.157
	information sharing	.046	.222	.061	.205	.837
	product customization	-.650	.260	-.660	-2.501	.013
	conflict handling	.231	.393	.228	.589	.556
	reciprocity	1.009	.333	1.106	3.030	.003
	switch cost	.027	.213	.028	.126	.900
	Information Sharing*Switching cost	.012	.056	.083	.219	.827
	Product customization*Switching cost	.179	.065	1.007	2.729	.007
	Conflict handling*Switching cost	-.014	.098	-.083	-.144	.885
	Reciprocity*Switching cost	-.162	.082	-.977	-1.970	.050

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

The study used the coefficient of multiple regression table to determine the study models 2 and test the fifth hypothesis of the study. From the results in the table 4.33 above, the resultant outcome becomes:

$$\text{Model 2: } (\gamma = \alpha + \beta_1 V_1 + \beta_2 V_2 + \beta_3 V_3 + \beta_4 V_4 + \beta_5 M + M(\beta_6 V_1 + \beta_7 V_2 + \beta_8 V_3 + \beta_9 V_4) + e)$$

$$\gamma = 1.196 + 0.046V_1 - 0.65V_2 + 0.231V_3 + 1.009V_4 + 0.027M + M(0.012V_1 + 0.179V_2 - 0.014V_3 - 0.162V_4) + e$$

With all the variables and data in hand and analysed, this section helped the researcher to determine if the moderator (switching cost) is moderating the relationship between RM practices and customer satisfaction, a test of hypothesis five. As explained by Aiken et al. (1991), the researcher started by determine whether there exists moderating effect of switching cost on the respective individual RM practices relationship with customer satisfaction, and the extend of moderation if it indeed exists. This is done by testing the significance of each beta using the respective t statistics from model 2 table 4.33. Further analysis to determine whether the moderating effect is a full or partial moderation was also undertaken as a way of getting more insight.

1. The Information sharing - Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_1$ )
2. The Product customization - Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_2$ )
3. The Conflict handling - Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_3$ )
4. The Reciprocity - Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_4$ )
5. The Switching cost - Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_5$ )
6. The Information sharing x Switching cost – Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_6$ )
7. The Product customization x Switching cost – Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_7$ )
8. The Conflict handling x Switching cost – Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for  $\beta_8$ )

#### 9. The Reciprocity x Switching cost – Customer satisfaction relationship (testing for $\beta_9$ )

The decision rules as postulated by Dwyer et al. (1987) is that by using the model with interaction variables (in this case model 2 from the coefficients table 4.33 above) the moderation effects of moderator variable (in this case switching cost) in the model occurs if the beta for the interacted variable is significant (in this case  $\beta_6$ ,  $\beta_7$ ,  $\beta_8$  or  $\beta_9$ ) and the beta for the moderating variable (in this case  $\beta_5$ ) is not significant. In case it is established that there exists the effect of moderation in the model, the extend of the moderation is determined as below;

1. If the regressor and the moderator are determined not to be significant in a model having the interaction term, then complete moderation has occurred.
2. If the regressor and moderator are determined to be significant in a model with the interaction term, then it is concluded that there is occurrence of moderation, however the main effects are also significant.
3. If the predictor variable is significant and the moderator is not significant then partial moderation has occurred.

#### **Discussion of findings on the moderating effect of switching cost**

In discussing the findings on the moderating effect of switching cost, we start with the outcome of moderated multiple regression models as presented in appendix vi, the changes in coefficient of determination after introduction of switching cost and the interaction term means that



switching cost has some moderating effect on each of the independent variables in models that the variables act as individual predictors.

In addition, based on the coefficients of regression for multiple regression models results in table 4.33 we ascertain the moderating effect of switching cost in models that contain all the study predictor variables.

### **Moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction**

In determining the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. Looking at the significance of the beta ( $\beta_6$ ) for the interaction variable, Information sharing x Switching cost from the model 2 in table 4.33 above, we find that the t value is 0.205 which is lower than the critical t hence  $\beta_6$  is not significant. On the other hand, the significance of  $\beta_5$  which is the beta for the moderating variable switching cost has a 0.126 t value, a figure that is lower than the t critical hence also not significant.

We can therefore conclude that switching cost has no moderating effect on information sharing relationship with customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya. This therefore means that testing the significance of  $\beta_1$  will not be required as the extend of moderation effect cannot be attained. Since switching cost draws special attention to ways in which companies create barriers to strategically prevent customer defections which directly and significantly affects performance, in retail set up switching cost and customer satisfaction must

be viewed in terms of service quality and service value which are basically antecedents to customer satisfaction (Ngo & Pavelková, 2017). This implies that relationship marketing practices that significantly enhance service quality and service value will have their relationship with customer satisfaction moderated by switching cost.

### **Moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction**

In ascertaining the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between Product customization and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, the beta for the interactive variable, Product customization x Switching cost ( $\beta_7$ ) was tested. From model 2 table 4.33, it has a t value of 2.729 a figure  $>$  critical t hence is considered significant. Since the significance of  $\beta_5$  for switching cost has already been determined as not being significant, we conclude that switching cost has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction.

Significant results attained meant that we proceed to test the extend of the moderation. We determine the significance of  $\beta_2$  and compare with the significance of  $\beta_5$ . From the t statistics in the table 4.33 above, the absolute t value for  $\beta_2$  is 2.501 which is more than t critical in a two-tail t distribution table meaning that the beta is significant.  $\beta_5$  has already been determined not to be significant. It therefore means that the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya is partial. In trying to understand the partial moderation effect, the

research borrows from Chen et al. (2014) who indicated how strategic consumers are wary of being baited by a low price only to be locked-in later by high switching costs.

Supermarkets having low differentiation also means low switching cost and therefore only a small fraction of the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction will be moderated by switching cost. Customized products are an element of differentiated products and therefore firms in this case supermarkets can analyze switching costs in terms of their effects on the customized product incentives of the firms as measured by customer satisfaction (Cabral, 2009).

### **Moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between conflict handling and customer satisfaction**

The moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between conflict handling and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county is determined by examining significance of beta 8 and beta 5 from model 2 in the multiple regression analysis presented in table 4.33. Interactive variable, Conflict handling x Switching cost has a beta ( $\beta_8$ ) from the regression model 2. From the t statistics in the table 4.33 above,  $\beta_8$  has a -0.144 t value, a figure lower than the -1.96 t critical value implying that it is not significant. Since both betas ( $\beta_8$  and  $\beta_5$ ) are not significant, it can therefore be concluded that switching cost has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between conflict handling and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

On the basis of that conclusion, it will therefore be inconsequential to test the significance of  $\beta_4$ . This conclusion may be because of several factors. For example Roberts-Lombard (2011) having analyzed Phillip Kotlers' and Kevin Kellers' work observed that only 5% of all unsatisfied customers complain. If the supermarket doesn't get any complain and yet customers are still not switching, it can conclude that their services are good and the customer is satisfied. The supermarket might also conclude that they have developed high switching cost which might not be the case.

Looking at the conclusion on hypothesis three of the study where it was ascertained that conflict handling had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya, Vieira and Damacena (2007) noted that consumers look beyond past complaint handling and perceived justice in measuring satisfaction. Lee et al. (2001) and Allaway et al. (2011) in their respective studies have all indicated that despite the supermarket industry having numerous choices and also low differentiation, switching costs have been statistically proven to be low.

This therefore implies that some relationship marketing practices like conflict handling and their effect on satisfaction might not be affected by the said low switching cost. In further analyzing the work of Allaway et al. (2011) notes that an already attained state of loyalty might also render moderating effect of switching cost insignificant. Despite of this, practical implication of switching cost on the relationship cannot be ignored.

### **Moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between reciprocity and customer satisfaction**

Finally, in testing for the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between reciprocity and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya, significance of  $\beta_9$  for Switching cost x Reciprocity, an interactive variable, were analysed. The t value in model 2 as presented in table 4.33 indicated that  $\beta_9$  has a significant t value of -1.970 which is slightly higher than the critical t, the study hence concludes that  $\beta_9$  is also significant. On the other hand, since  $\beta_5$  as already been determined not to be significant, we conclude that switching cost significantly moderates the relationship between reciprocity and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Checking for significance of  $\beta_4$  which we can ascertain the level of moderation. With a t value of 3.030 read from the table above model 2, which is higher than the critical t,  $\beta_4$  is statistically significant. It can therefore be concluded that the level of moderation in the reciprocity and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county model is a partial one since  $\beta_5$  (the moderator coefficient) is not significant as already determined. In an industry that has already been confirmed in past literature to have low customer switching costs but with intense competition as explained by Allaway et al. (2011), reciprocity will definitely enhance brand equity in customers mind.

The memory based brand association is difficult to erase as the brand existing in the customers mind (Keller et al., 2011). However, the low switching cost exhibited by the industry players

means that despite the reciprocity strategies currently being experience, customers will still be swayed by incentives offered by competing supermarket brands attributed to among other things convenience, better prices, new product offerings. Supermarkets can therefore not ignore switching cost's effects despite the high significant influence of reciprocity on customer satisfaction.

In conclusion, since two variables in the model 2 as presented in table 4.33 had significant t values (values more than t-critical (1.96)), thus product customization and reciprocity including their interaction terms, they make the overall moderated model 2 to be significant and hence we accept the alternative hypothesis five of the study that switching cost has a significant moderating effected on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. This is also supported by the changes in beta coefficients between model 1 and model 2. For example, information sharing had a beta coefficient of 0.138 in model 1 table 4.30 and after introducing switching cost in model 2 the beta coefficient changes to 0.046 as presented in table 4.33.

In addition, the changes in coefficient of multiple determination between model 2 and model 1 as presented in tables 4.31 and 4.28 respectively shows that the inclusion of switching cost in the model positively changes the coefficient of multiple determination. The two moderated variable in the model i.e reciprocity and product customization were found to be partially moderated while the other two variables were found not to be significantly moderated by switching cost.

## 4.7 Correlation analysis

Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of linear association between study variables was employed where the P value was compared to the appropriate level of significance (0.01). The correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is used to compare relationship between two pairs of variables mostly the regressor and the regressand as well as the moderator and the regressand. Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) takes the values in (-1, +1). The closer a value is to -1 or +1 indicates a strong negative or positive relationship among the variables respectively (Kothari & Garg, 2019). Most statisticians have come up with rules of thumb to help interpret the strength of linear relationship when using Pearson correlation coefficients. This study adopted the work of Mukaka (2012) who recommended interpretations as presented in table 4.34 below.

**Table 4.34:**

***Correlation coefficients interpretation***

Correlation size	Correlation Interpretation
-0.90 to -1.00 or 0.90 to 1.00	Very negative/Very positive
-0.70 to -0.90 or 0.70 to 0.90	High negative/High positive
-0.50 to -0.70 or 0.50 to 0.70	Moderate negative/Moderate positive
-0.30 to -0.50 or 0.50 to 0.50	Low negative/ Low positive
-0.00 to -0.30 or 0.00 to 0.30	Negligible or None

Source: (Mukaka, 2012).

Pearson correlation test results between the regressand (customer satisfaction) and the regressors (information sharing, product customization, conflict handling, reciprocity) as well as the

correlation test results between customer satisfaction and the moderating variable switching cost is presented in the table 4.35 below.

**Table 4.35:**

***Correlation coefficients of study variables***

		Y	V1	V2	V3	V4	M
Customer Satisfaction (Y)	Pearson Correlation	1					
Information sharing (V1)	Pearson Correlation	.476**	1				
Product customization (V2)	Pearson Correlation	.442**	.633**	1			
Conflict handling (V3)	Pearson Correlation	.569**	.534**	.452**	1		
Reciprocity (V4)	Pearson Correlation	.652**	.567**	.592**	.692**	1	
Switching cost (M)	Pearson Correlation	.202**	.115*	.077	.129*	.162**	1

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

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

Source: Author, 2020.

Based on Mukaka (2012) interpretations, the findings on the correlation analysis between information sharing and customer satisfaction revealed a low positive correlation due to the attained r of 0.476 which was significant as the p value of  $0.000 < 0.01$ . The low positive correlation attained between information sharing an element of communication and customer satisfaction is consistent with what Nyameino (2016) who in his study on relationship marketing and ICT and customer satisfaction on Nairobi's classified star hotels attained similar conclusion though his r was 0.341.



The study results also indicated that a low positive correlation exists between product customization and customer satisfaction as shown by correlation coefficient of 0.442 which was statistically significant from the table above. This was consistent with what Gunjan (2018) attained when he examined the relationship that exists between customization and customer satisfaction with the two studies revealing that irrespective of the industry, it's expected that customization will have a positive linear relationship with satisfaction.

The results of correlation test analysis between the customer satisfaction and conflict handling revealed that the association was a moderately positive correlation as indicated by a statistically significant  $r$  of 0.569. the results were however slightly different from a lower correlation coefficient of 0.226 that Nyameino (2016) attained implying that the relationship was negligible. In another related study attained by Kyei and Narteh (2016), the results were found to be consistent with this study findings even though their scope was in the Ghanaian banking sector. None the less most of the studies have reported a positive Pearson correlation between conflict handling and the regressand of the study customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, with a significant  $r$  of 0.652 based on the 0.000  $p$  value that was  $< 0.01$ , a conclusion was made that a moderately positive correlation exists between the last regressor reciprocity and the regressand customer satisfaction as shown by correlation factor of 0.652. This outcome was consistent with results attained by Kyei and Narteh (2016) in their Ghanaian Banking sector research on RM practices and their effect customer satisfaction.

Finally, in terms of the correlation between switching cost, the moderator and customer satisfaction, was found to have a negligible correlation with customer satisfaction due to a 0.202 correlation coefficient attained. This was in agreement with what Yang and Peterson (2004) reported where they noted that switching costs' moderating effect on the regressand customer satisfaction is only significant when the prevised value or customer satisfaction is higher than the average. This therefore implies that in the absence of such condition the correlation will be small even though the results are dependent on the industry under study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter was the final one for the study. It gives a summary of major findings concerning the research hypotheses; it gives major recommendations based on the findings of the research; identifies areas of limitation within the research and during the research period and finally lays out proposals on future research directions.

#### **5.2 Summary of study findings**

The study sought to examine the effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya as well as the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship and even though a number of studies delved into the different relationship marketing practices and their influence on customer satisfaction, this study further developed a conceptual model based on current knowledge and tested out within the chosen sample in order to examine how the results would turn out in reality further more, on study theories, in light of practice theory where every practice has several constructs and it's the prerogative of the researcher to define the most appropriate ones to use, this study employed relationship marketing practices of information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity as independent variables with switching cost as the study's moderator variable while customer satisfaction was the dependent variable.

Secondly, the study applied guiding insights from social exchange theory to develop guiding literature on information sharing, reciprocity, and product customization variables. Conflict handling variable was guided by Rahim organizational conflict inventory model and finally the expectation disconfirmation theory was also used to guide the development of customer satisfaction variable. From the current literature it was clear that relationship marketing has different schools of thought which also guided the proposition of several antecedents with those majorly used being commitment and trust and therefore in trying to contribute to relationship marketing body of knowledge, the researcher picked those constructs not researched a lot within the Kenyan supermarket context and this could be the major theoretical contribution of this study.

From the regression analysis performed, the study revealed significant linear relationship between RM practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The moderating variable switching cost was also confirmed to have significant moderating effect to the overall model.

### **5.2.1 Effect of information sharing on customer satisfaction**

In line with the first objective, which sought to determine the effect of information sharing on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, the study through descriptive statistics established that majority of the supermarkets use short message services (SMS) in communicating with customers while the least used medium was emails. Within the social media platforms asked, the study revealed that WhatsApp was more used than Facebook

across all the supermarkets. In terms of the contribution of information sharing to the study model, in reference to the Likert scale questions, in a scale of 5 majority agreed (4) with the information sharing constructs indicating that the supermarkets were to a large extent applying information sharing as a relationship marketing tool. The study through inferential statistics examined the correlation between the two variables (information sharing and customer satisfaction). The results revealed a low positive correlation between information sharing and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. It was established from the non-moderated multiple regression model that if other factors are held constant at zero, a unit change in information sharing would increase customer satisfaction by a factor of 13.8%. In testing the hypothesis using t statistics, the  $H_{01}$ , information sharing had no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County was rejected.

### **5.2.2 Effect of product customization on customer satisfaction**

The intention of the second objective was to establish the effect of product customization on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. Since product customization requires customer input, the study sought to know whether supermarkets were engaging customers when doing their market research. It was unfortunate that most respondents in each supermarket pointed out that they were not being engaged in market research. The trend of response was also seen when respondents through Likert scale questions affirmed that the supermarkets don't involve them in coming up with new product offerings or services. There was divided opinion on whether supermarkets offer targeted vouchers and discounts. Through regression analysis aided by inferential statistics, the study established that if other factors were

held constant at zero, a unit change in product customization would increase customer satisfaction by a factor of 11.2%. The significant t statistics finally led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that product customization had no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. Finally, a low positive correlation between product customization and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya was revealed by the study.

### **5.2.3 Effect of conflict handling on customer satisfaction**

The aim of the third objective was to examine the effect of conflict handling on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. Descriptive statistics of the study ascertained from majority of respondents (average of 87.6%) in all the supermarkets that supermarket staff are well equipped with customer care skills which is a very important component of relationship marketing. The Likert scale answers by supermarket customers revealed that all the supermarkets are applying conflict handling measures like handling every conflict in a positive and active manner, ensuring that their employees are knowledgeable and can discuss solutions when problems arise. The study through regression analysis and inferential statistics reported that if other factors were held constant at zero, a unit change in conflict handling would increase customer satisfaction by a factor of 19.9%. In testing the hypothesis using t statistics, the study accepted the alternative hypothesis that conflict handling had a significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. The study results also revealed a moderate positive correlation between conflict handling and CS among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County.

#### **5.2.4 Effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction**

In line with the fourth objective, which sought to establish the effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, the study through descriptive statistics established that all supermarkets try to recognize customer efforts in supporting them. However almost half of the customer population if inferred from the sample results don't experience this recognition. Most of the reciprocity constructs received a 4 in a Likert scale of 5 clearly indicating that supermarkets were applying reciprocity in their relationship marketing programs. The correlation between reciprocity and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County was also revealed to be a moderately positive correlation. It was established that if other factors were held constant at zero, a unit change in information sharing would increase customer satisfaction by a factor of 40.3% which was the highest among all the independent variables. In testing the hypothesis using t statistics, the  $H_{04}$  that reciprocity had no significant effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County was rejected.

#### **5.2.5 Moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction**

The last objective sought to examine the moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. To start with, in understanding some of the factors that may increase or reduce switching costs, respondents were required to indicate whether their respective

supermarkets charged parking. In overall 72% of total respondents indicated that the supermarkets were offering free parking. However, in analyzing individual supermarkets, it was revealed that almost half of Carrefour supermarket outlets charged parking which was the highest percentage. Naivas on the other hand recorded the least percentage with the study revealing that only 18% of its retail outlets charge parking. Furthermore, the study sought to establish the most convenient supermarket location. Study results revealed that majority of the supermarket customers prefer neighborhood located supermarkets (54.7%) followed by shopping malls at 36.2%. those that prefer bus stops constituted 9.1%. despite of this, majority of Carrefour customers (58.1%) indicated that shopping malls were more convenient for them. Most of the switching cost constructs received a 4 in a Likert scale of 5 clearly indicating that switching cost can influence customers supermarket shopping decision.

Moderated multiple regression models containing each one of the predictor variables at a time revealed that switching cost has significant moderating effect on each of the dependent variables based on the changes in coefficient of determination attained against those respective simple regression models coefficient of determination results. In additional analysis, a moderated multiple regression model was run and it was established that when all the independent variables act together, the moderator switching cost has no effect in the relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya as well as the relationship between conflict handling and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county, Kenya. Further analysis also established a partial moderating effect on the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction among tier



one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya as well as a partial significant moderating effect on the relationship between reciprocity and CS among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. Based on these results, the study concluded by accepting the fifth alternative hypothesis of the study that the moderator switching cost has a significant effect on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County, Kenya. Finally, the correlation between switching cost and customer satisfaction was revealed to be a negligible correlation.

### **5.2.6 Customer satisfaction**

Empirical study reveals that customer satisfaction remains one of the most used performance indicators in marketing and business at large. Achieving satisfaction is important since empirical literatures always reveal existence of a positive link between satisfaction of customers and business profitability (Biesok & Wyród-Wróbel, 2018b; Mohan, 2013). Satisfied customers are expected to alter their behaviour and actions in ways that favour the service providers. In supermarkets, satisfied customers are expected to either, undertake repeat patronage/re-purchase, engage in positive reviews, referrals, and positive word of mouth. Based on expectation-disconfirmation model in analyzing satisfaction, respondents were asked to assess their satisfaction by stating whether it was per their expectations or not. Overall majority of customers for each supermarket in Nairobi County indicated that the services they were getting from their supermarkets were as per their expectations representing 78.7% followed by those who felt the services were above expectations at 17% while the rest felt the services were below expectations. Majority of the respondents in all the supermarkets also felt that their respective supermarkets

stimulate them to buy directly. The satisfied customers also felt that they can give supermarket referrals and recommendations to others. Lastly, on the question of switching intentions, majority of the customers who indicated that they are satisfied also indicated that they do not have intentions of switching when faced with small problems in their relationship with their current supermarkets.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

This section presents the conclusions deduced from the main finding of the study and arranged in sections which are in line with the study objectives and variables.

#### **5.3.1 Effect of information sharing on customer satisfaction**

With a confirmed positive linear relationship between information sharing and customer satisfaction as well as a coefficient of determination of 22.6%, there is no doubt that information sharing is an important relationship marketing component in determining customer satisfaction. Supermarkets therefore must endeavor to increase attention given to information sharing as a way of enhancing customer satisfaction. The question construct which were meant to determine whether customers receive timely, accurate, and trustworthy information had above average answers in a scale of 5 clearly indicating that indeed supermarkets were trying to provide the same thereby enhancing satisfaction.

The significance of information sharing in enhancing customer satisfaction have also been highlighted in other studies as well as under different scopes. For example, it was also found to be significant in the banking industry in Ghana using the two similar measurement constructs of

trustworthy and timely information (Ndubisi & Natarajan, 2018). Despite of the results, the use of a limited number of media, in this case majority were only receiving information through SMS, is a clear indication that supermarkets have not invested enough in expanding the information sharing space as it ought to be.

Apisit and Jirasek (2009) asserted that information exchange ought to be on the forefront of relationship building and determination of customer satisfaction. All communications whether intentional or unintentional will always have some effect on the customer. Being an element of communication, we can only say that there was effective information sharing if the information sharing produces the desired effect. Effective information sharing can also guarantee that message misrepresentation does not take place during the communication process. Hence the supermarkets should have timely, accurate, and trustworthy information, with the objective of informing, creating understanding or engender action.

### **5.3.2 Effect of product customization on customer satisfaction**

In this study product customization also demonstrated a significant relationship with customer satisfaction even though it had the lowest contribution to customer satisfaction as compared to the other relationship marketing construct in terms of their coefficients of determination. Several factors might account for that outcome. For example, since the supermarket industry in Nairobi County and Kenya at large is regulated by several multi agencies like the Kenya bureau of standards, anti-counterfeit agency among others, an element of product customization like breaking bulk and repackaging has been met with a lot of legal resistance since it encourages the

sale of contraband and counterfeited goods which will be difficult to detect and control (Uma & Chandramowleeswaran, 2015).

The huge number of customers as well as the high number of product assortments sold within supermarkets might also inform the low positive correlation between product customization and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county. Such a condition would favour standardization and supermarkets would only apply product customized on a small scale hence the effect might not be felt by many customers. Finne and Grönroos (2009) asserted that customization requires intense communication between the organization and customers as a way of understanding their unique needs, due to this, in a situation where customers have already indicated that they are barely engaged in market research, then the significance of customization will be reduced as majority of customers will not understand any tailored products accorded to them.

Non the less with the study accepted the 2<sup>nd</sup> alternative hypothesis of the study in relation to product customization and customer satisfaction. Its contribution cannot be ignored and supermarkets should strive to continue developing product customization strategies but at the same time, make customers aware of such strategies targeting them for them to highly factor them in future satisfaction determination. Supermarkets should also borrow from the value literature which dictates that the focus especially on unique customization should be on resource integration and value in use which are some of the differentiating factors associated with relationship marketing and competition (Eggert et al., 2018).

### **5.3.3 Effect of conflict handling on customer satisfaction**

This study reported that conflict handling and CS relationship was significant a clear indication of its importance especially in the study context of supermarkets in Nairobi County. In addition, with a 32.4% of the variations on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county explained by conflict handling as indicated in the respective univariate model summary, this puts its importance only second to reciprocity in this study's relationship marketing constructs. Any transaction or exchange process is expected to have conflicts attributed to human negligence or to factors beyond the human control.

Today's business world is full of informed consumers who are aware of their rights and always demand the best from product and service providers and therefore any situation that goes contrary to their expectations is a recipe for conflict. Supermarkets through conflict handling mechanisms outlined in relationship marketing literatures, should always strive to effectively minimize or handle conflicts. There is no best way to handle conflicts and hence contingency strategy is the best in the sense that different strategies apply to different situations and circumstances (Dwan, 2017).

Borrowing from conflict handling constructs in the study that have also been supported by Roberts-Lombard et al. (2013) supermarkets just like all organizations should have the capability of solving manifested conflicts before they create problems and if the issue escalates then be in a position to discuss solutions when problems arise. In so doing customers will feel a sense of concern on the part of supermarkets and hence increase their satisfaction. Supermarkets should

therefore continue investing on conflict handling relationship marketing strategies as a way of enhancing customer satisfaction.

#### **5.3.4 Effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction**

In this study reciprocity demonstrated the highest significant positive effect on customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi County. Several factors might have contributed to this and from the descriptive statistics it is apparent that a substantive number of respondents confirmed that their respective supermarkets were reciprocating the efforts they make to help the supermarkets. Supermarkets intending to enhance customer satisfaction should invest heavily on reciprocity.

According to Hoppner et al. (2015) reciprocity constructs of immediacy (repayment made in the near future or after a long time) and equivalence (identical in form) support the social norms of many cultures, Kenya notwithstanding, where every good gesture is reciprocated with the only question being when and how. Gouldner (1960) asserted that a social unit or group will most likely want to contribute to another that provides it with more benefits than to the one which doesn't. That is a typical reciprocal behaviour that can also be exhibited by supermarket customers in Nairobi County.

Measures that supermarkets put in place like the supermarkets working to return any assistance accorded to them in kind, returning any favour customers extend to them as quickly as possible, supermarket making effort to strengthen customer loyalty, supermarket always trying to see things from the customers point of view and constantly trying to fulfill promises go a long way

in enhancing relationships that eventually enhance customer satisfaction. The strength of reciprocity in enhancing customer satisfaction has also been experienced in other industries like banking industry. This clearly implies that reciprocity in creating a mutual exchange process enhances a sense of entitlement and if fulfilled customers feel satisfied. The findings also confirm the assumptions of the study's social exchange theory that the analysis of costs and benefit and comparing of alternatives before making decisions inform relationships of human beings (Homans, 1958; Karimi, 2014).

### **5.3.5 Moderating effect of switching cost on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction**

Since all moderated models containing one predictor variable has proven that switching cost significantly moderates the relationship between each of the variables; information sharing, product customization and conflict handling against customer satisfaction, in addition to the results of the overall moderated model containing all the predictor variables which indicated that switching cost significantly moderates the relationship between the variables; reciprocity, and product customization in the model, this meant that the study accepts the alternative fifth hypothesis which stated that switching cost has significant moderating effect on the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets in Nairobi county.

Despite of these results, the nature of the effect would generally vary depending on the industry and environment (Lai et al., 2011). Scholars have also observed that satisfied customers have

more chance of staying than the unsatisfied ones when the switching costs are perceived to be lower but when higher those customers who are not satisfied prefer to retain the current supermarkets providing the service. Switching cost increases the sensitivity of customers and therefore supermarkets must consider them when developing relationship marketing strategies.

From the study it's also quite clear that the impact of switching cost on different relationship marketing strategies is different. Supermarkets might want to pay more attention on its impact on the reciprocity relationship with customer satisfaction since a unit increase in switching cost would decrease the effect of reciprocity on customer satisfaction by a higher margin than the other variables as shown in the coefficients table (switching cost\*reciprocity beta).

Based on the results of the overall moderated multiple regression model, the insignificant moderating effect of switching cost on the relationships between variables; information sharing and conflict handling could be explained by the overall negligible correlation between switching cost and customer satisfaction. This would also mean that if faced with the two relationship marketing practices, supermarket customers even with very low levels of switching cost will still tolerate dissatisfaction. This is in line with the assumptions made by Yang and Peterson (2004) which suggested that significance of switching costs effect as a moderator on customer satisfaction model is dependent on the expected value or only significant if the value of customer satisfaction is higher than the average. This means that consumers might disregard switching cost in their purchase decisions if they are getting enough accurate, timely, and trustworthy information that enhances their relationship with the supermarkets and thereby increase their satisfaction creating supermarket shifting barriers.



On the other hand, with little differentiation among supermarket products and less knowledge of customized products among customers in an industry with low switching cost, customers might not find any justification to switch and therefore the relationship between product customization and customer satisfaction among tier one supermarkets will not be moderated by switching cost. However, with a reduction in betas due to addition of switching cost in the model, the overall effect of it on customer satisfaction cannot be ignored.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

### **5.4.1 Marketing practice**

Based on the study findings the researcher recommends that supermarket managers should develop high levels of effective information sharing, product customization, conflict handling and reciprocity relationship marketing strategies as they have been found to be significant in building strong relationships with customers in the industry and thereby enhancing customer satisfaction.

In reference to information sharing, the management needs to ensure that adequate resources are provided to train the employees on the importance of enhancing facilitation of accurate and trust worthy information. In addition, supermarkets should take initiatives to ensure informational displays on the shelves truly reflect what's captured at the point of sales.

Product customization though difficult in a supermarket set up where there are so many customers, supermarkets are encouraged to plan for strategies like mass customization, continue breaking bulk and introduce customer oriented pricing policies to make it affordable for different

customer classes and also make the most important customers feel appreciated with special product and pricing programs for them. There is need for supermarkets to device adequate processes to ensure that customers recognize any customized efforts directed to them.

Training of staff members on conflict handling by supermarkets would go a long way in improving the respective supermarkets relationship with customers as the staff members will acquire necessary skills that will enable them relate well with customers and be able to handle any complains that may arise. Staff investments in customer care, communication skills and training on product and service offerings is encouraged to ensure staff are well equipped to respond appropriately and with informed information to aggrieved customer queries and conflicts. This goes hand in and with supermarkets ensuring that they provide customers with accurate information through counter displays and advertisements as well as timely information to ensure that customers can make informed choices. This is so because according to empirical results bread trust and creates a good business relationship that guarantees the exchange process. A plat form for feedback system should also be set up by the supermarkets as a way of harvesting views and opinions from the larger customer groups.

On reciprocity, more resources towards reciprocal efforts should be encouraged with more emphasize on reduction of time taken to reciprocate a customer's good act. Initiatives like customer recognition and loyalty rewards are highly recommended since they appear to be most effective in enhancing emotional attachment and social exchange which can be translated to more purchases and loyalty. Lastly on switching cost, individual supermarkets should generate

more policies that enhance economic benefits as well as relational benefits to customers that will create barriers to customer exit.

#### **5.4.2 Management policy**

The study recommends that supermarket managers, the government and other industry stakeholders utilize the study data related with each relationship marketing practice construct as well as switching cost to formulate appropriate policies that will be used to continue enhancing customer satisfaction objective in the industry. This is majorly because the study revealed that some satisfaction driving factors are not solely out of supermarket contribution but also other environmental conditions like ample parking that can tilt competition in the industry yet they are majorly provided and managed by the government.

The study also recommends that before establishing relationship marketing policies, policy makers and relevant stake holders should prioritize certain variables to suite the unique nature of supermarkets since different levels of customer satisfaction are attained upon application of different relationship marketing practices. For example, the study revealed that reciprocity contributed more towards customer satisfaction while product customization had the least contribution.

#### **5.4.3 Knowledge and theory**

The study recommends that scholars and researchers consider the study data as a source of new insight in relationship marketing field. Some of the arears of interest would be the understanding of relationship marketing constructs in the context of practice theory as well as the consideration

of switching cost as a quasi-moderator in relationship marketing models in future research. The study has contributed a lot in the concept of practice theory in relationship marketing as well as affirming the support of human beings being economic in nature when developing and maintaining relationships as analyzed in study's social exchange theory, this can also support future studies in the field of marketing.

### **5.5 Areas of further research**

This study was limited to the effect of RM practices and switching cost on CS among tier one supermarkets within Nairobi county, Kenya and its findings have added meaningful contribution to knowledge, practice and theory in management and marketing. However due to the unique nature of supermarkets, future studies on cottage industry and the manufacturing sector should be considered.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix i: Questionnaire

This study is being undertaken by a Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration and management student at Kenya Methodist University (KEMU) on the topic **“EFFECT OF RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRACTICES AND SWITCHING COST ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG TIER ONE SUPERMARKETS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA”**. It is an academic research and all information collected from respondents shall be treated with strict confidentiality.

#### SECTION A: GENERAL QUESTIONS

Kindly please tick in the space where appropriate

**1. Gender:**

- i. Male                       ii. Female

**2. Age:**

- i. 18 - 30 years                       ii. 31 – 43 years   
iii. 44 - 56 years                       iv. Above 56 years

**3. Level of education:**

- i. Primary                       ii. Secondary   
iii. College                       iv. University

**4. Monthly net income**

- i. 49,999 and below                       ii. 50,000 – 99,999   
iii. 100,000 – 149,999                       iv. 150,000 and above

**5. Location of supermarket (constituency)**

- i. Western constituencies (Westlands, Dagoreti North, Dagoreti South)

- ii. Eastern constituencies (Kasarani, Embakasi East, Embakasi Central) [ ]
- iii. Southern constituencies (Kibra, Langata, Embakasi South) [ ]
- iv. Northern constituencies (Roysambu, Ruaraka, Mathare, Embakasi North) [ ]
- v. Central Constituencies (Makadara, Starehe, Kamukunji, Embakasi West) [ ]

**6. Name of supermarket**

- i. Tuskys [ ]
- ii. Naivas [ ]
- iii. Carrefour [ ]
- iv. Tumaini [ ]

**7. How long have you shopped in the supermarket above?**

- i. 2 years and below [ ]
- ii. 3-5 years [ ]
- iii. 6-8 years [ ]
- iv. 9 years and above [ ]

**SECTION B: SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON STUDY VARIABLES**

**PART A: INFORMATION SHARING**

**1. Which is the main media that the supermarket uses to communicate to you?**

- i. SMS [ ]
- ii. EMAIL [ ]
- iii. WATSAPP [ ]
- iv. FACEBOOK [ ]
- v. PHONE CALL [ ]
- vi. NONE [ ]

Please tick the box that most corresponds to your opinion towards the questions asked. Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

<b>QUESTION STATEMENTS</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Neutral (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>
My supermarket communicates with me frequently					
My supermarket has a feedback system					
The information shared by my supermarket has always turned out to be accurate over time					
My supermarket provides timely information					
My supermarket provides information about new products and services					
My supermarket routinely follows-up with me on any inquiries or complaints I raised					
My supermarkets shelf prices are a truly reflected on the sales receipts					

**PART B: PRODUCT CUSTOMIZATION**

**1. Does the supermarket engage customers in market research?**

- i. YES
- ii. NO

Please tick the box that most corresponds to your opinion towards the questions asked. Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

<b>QUESTIONS STATEMENTS</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Neutral (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>
My supermarket always offers reasonable packaged products					



My supermarket always offers reasonable prices					
The supermarket involves me before coming up with new product offerings or services					
My supermarket offers me targeted discounts					
My supermarket is flexible for me even if its offerings have changed					
My supermarket offers me targeted vouchers					
My supermarket is reliable in offering unique services					

**PART C: CONFLICT HANDLING**

**1. Are the supermarket staff well equipped with customer care skills?**

- i. YES [ ]
- ii. NO [ ]

Please tick the box that most corresponds to your opinion towards the questions asked. Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

<b>QUESTIONS STATEMENTS</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Neutral (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>
My supermarket tries to minimize conflicts					
My supermarket tries to resolve manifest conflict before they can create problems					
My supermarket employees have the knowledge and ability to openly discuss solutions when problems arise					
My supermarket resolves product return problems					
My supermarket resolves any conflict within a reasonable period					
Every complain is handled by my supermarket in a positive and active manner					

My supermarket avoids the same problem from happening again					
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**PART D: RECIPROCITY**

**1. Does the supermarket recognize any effort customers do to support it?**

- i. YES [ ]
- ii. NO [ ]

Please tick the box that most corresponds to your opinion towards the questions asked. Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

QUESTIONS STATEMENTS	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
My supermarket works to return any assistance I accord them in kind					
My supermarket works to return any favours extended to them by me as quickly as possible					
My supermarket believes that any favours I extend to them shall even out over time eventually					
My supermarket makes effort to strengthen my loyalty					
My supermarket always sees things from the customer's view					
My supermarket makes time and effort to maintain our relationship					
The supermarket makes and constantly tries to fulfill promises					

**PART E: SWITCHING COSTS**

**1. Does your supermarket charge parking?**

- i. YES [ ]
- ii. NO [ ]

**2. Which supermarket location is more convenient?**

- i. Shopping mall [ ]
- ii. Neighborhood [ ]
- iii. Main bus stop [ ]

Please tick the box that most corresponds to your opinion towards the questions asked. Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

QUESTIONS STATEMENTS	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
Parking area availability is important in choosing a supermarket					
Loyalty incentives by supermarkets affect my store choices					
Prices by supermarkets affect my store choices					
Branch coverage greatly affect the choice of supermarket					
Counter service by supermarket can affect my store choices					
Supermarket having variety of products affects my store choices					
Distance between a supermarket and my home is important in determining store choice					
Customer support by supermarket can affect the choice of store I make					
Location affects my supermarket store choice					

**PART F: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.**

**1. How is the level of supermarket service?**

- i. Above expectation [ ]
- ii. As expected [ ]
- iii. Below expectation [ ]

Please tick the box that most corresponds to your opinion towards the questions asked. Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree

<b>QUESTIONS STATEMENTS</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Neutral (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>
My experience with the supermarket has always been good					
My supermarket stimulates me to buy repeatedly					
I give advice about this supermarket brand to other people					
I comfortably share my personal experiences about the supermarket to others					
I would recommend the supermarket to my family and friends					
I would recommend the supermarket to colleagues					
I talk positively about the services of my supermarket to my friends and relatives					
I do not have a strong intention to switch to other supermarkets even if I face a small problem with my current supermarket					
I intend to remain with the same supermarket even if there is an increase in price or charges.					

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT BY TAKING TIME TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Appendix ii: List of target supermarket outlets

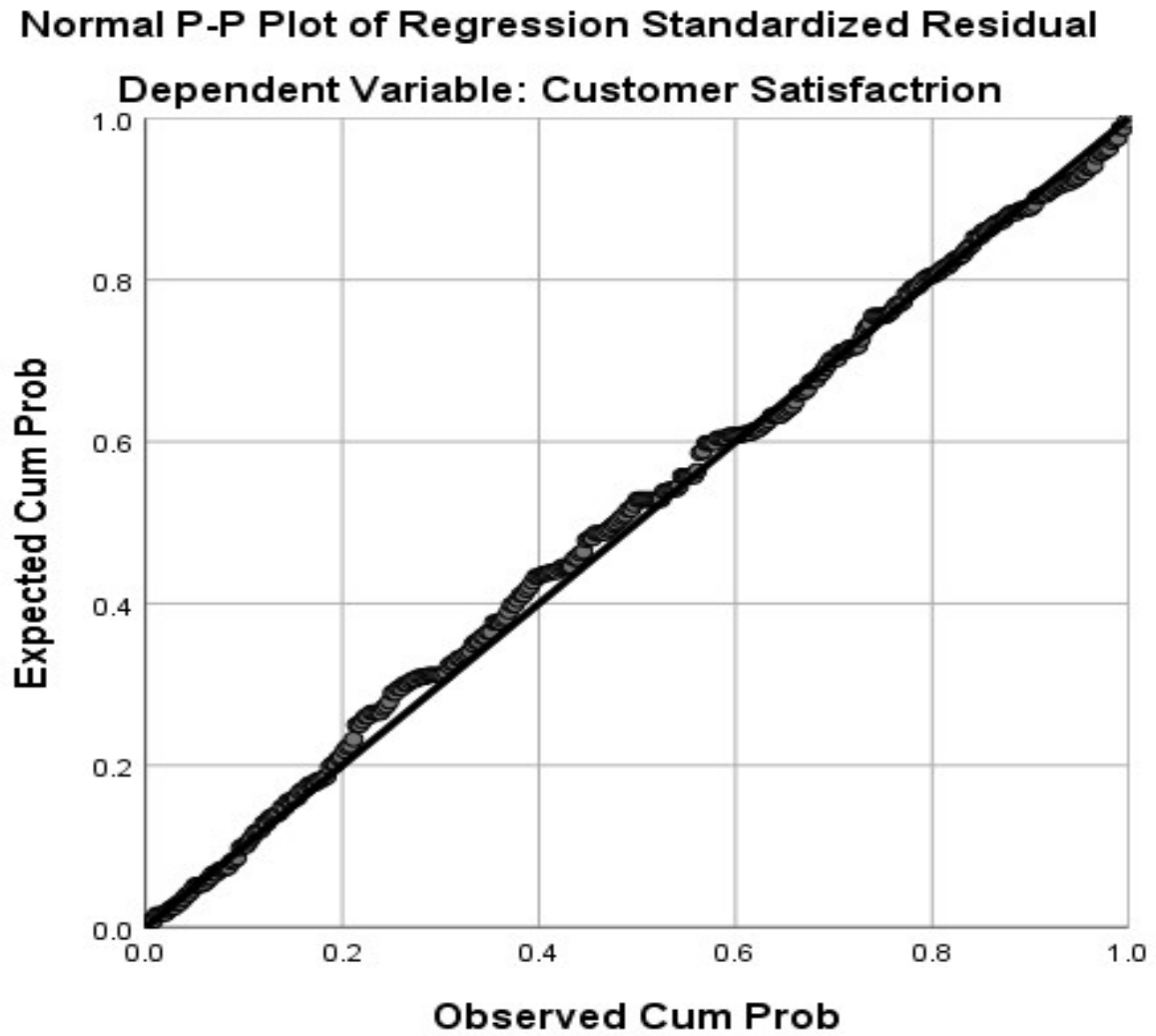
Tuskeys	Naivas	Carrefour	Tumaini/Quick mart
1. Cross roads-Karen	1. New Ronald	1. Village Market	1. Tumaini -
2. Adams –Ngong road	Ngala	2. Galleria Mall	Utawala,
3. Beba beba-CBD	2. Komarock	3. Sarit Centre	2. Tumaini -
4. Chap chap-Muindi	3. Eastgate	4. Junction Mall	Fedha,
Mbingu street, CBD	4. Kasarani	5. Thika Road Mall	3. Tumaini -
5. City stadium	5. Hazina	6. Two Rivers Mall	Donholm,
6. Diamond plaza 2 -	6. Ruaraka	7. Hub Mall	4. Tumaini -
Parklands	7. Utawala	8. Nairobi Mega-	Outering,
7. Eastleigh – 1 <sup>st</sup>	8. Capital centre	Uhuru highway	5. Tumaini -
Avenue	9. Umoja		Pipeline
8. Embakasi-Embakasi	10. Westlands		6. Quickmart-
road	11. Greenhouse		Eastern
9. Eastlands -	12. Gate way mall		Bypass
Buruburu	13. Development		7. Quick mart-
10. Express – Sheikh	house-Moi		Ruai
Karume road, CBD	avenue		8. Quickmart –
11. Greenspan -	14. Donholm		Waithaka
Dolhom	15. Buruburu		9. Quickmart –
12. Hakati – Hakati	16. South C		Lavington
road, CBD	17. Kenyatta/moi		10. Tumaini –
13. Haile Selassie	avenue junction		Kahawa west
14. Imara – Accra road,	18. Kawangware		
CBD	19. Langata		
15. Daima – Tom	20. Kangemi		
Mboya street, CBD	shopping centre		

- 
- |                                       |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 16. Jirani - Ruai                     | 21. Kayole                        |
| 17. Karasha – Kenyatta<br>avenue, CBD | 22. Prestige plaza                |
| 18. Libra – Mombasa<br>road           | 23. Mountain mall –<br>Thika road |
| 19. Lunga lunga                       | 24. Ciata mall -<br>Kiambu road   |
| 20. OTC – Ladhies road                | 25. Lavington mall                |
| 21. Pioneer – Moi<br>avenue           |                                   |
| 22. Road A                            |                                   |
| 23. Magic - Ronald<br>Ngala, CBD      |                                   |
| 24. Thigiri – Ridge road              |                                   |
| 25. Tom Mboya                         |                                   |
| 26. T mall                            |                                   |
| 27. Southfield mall                   |                                   |
| 28. Waiyaki way                       |                                   |
| 29. Westlands Square -<br>Westlands   |                                   |
-

**Appendix iii: Normality Test P-P Plots**

**Figure A.1:**

*Normality P-P plots for Information sharing*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.2:

*Normality P-P plots for Product customization*

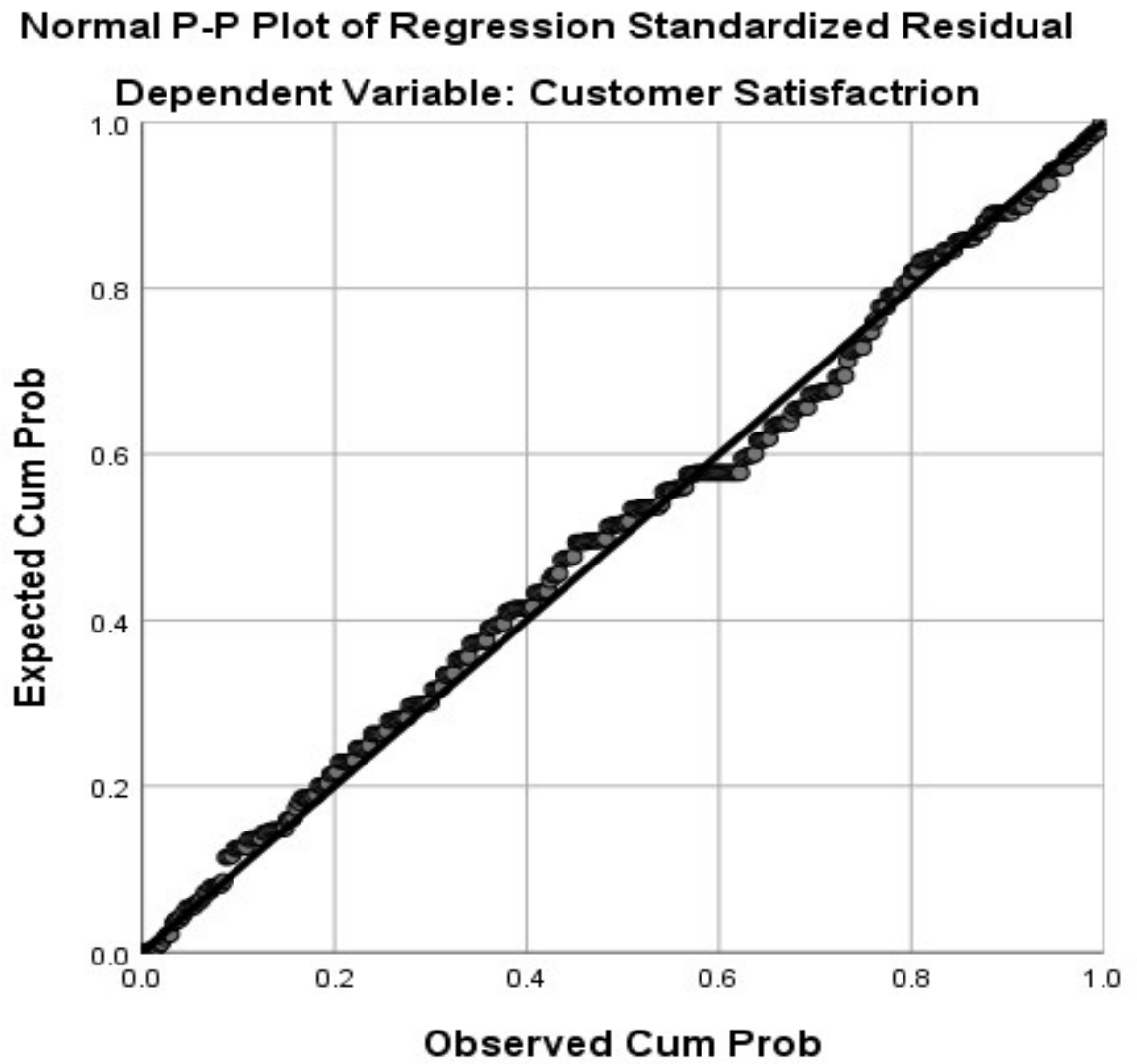


Source: Source: Author, 2020



Figure A.3:

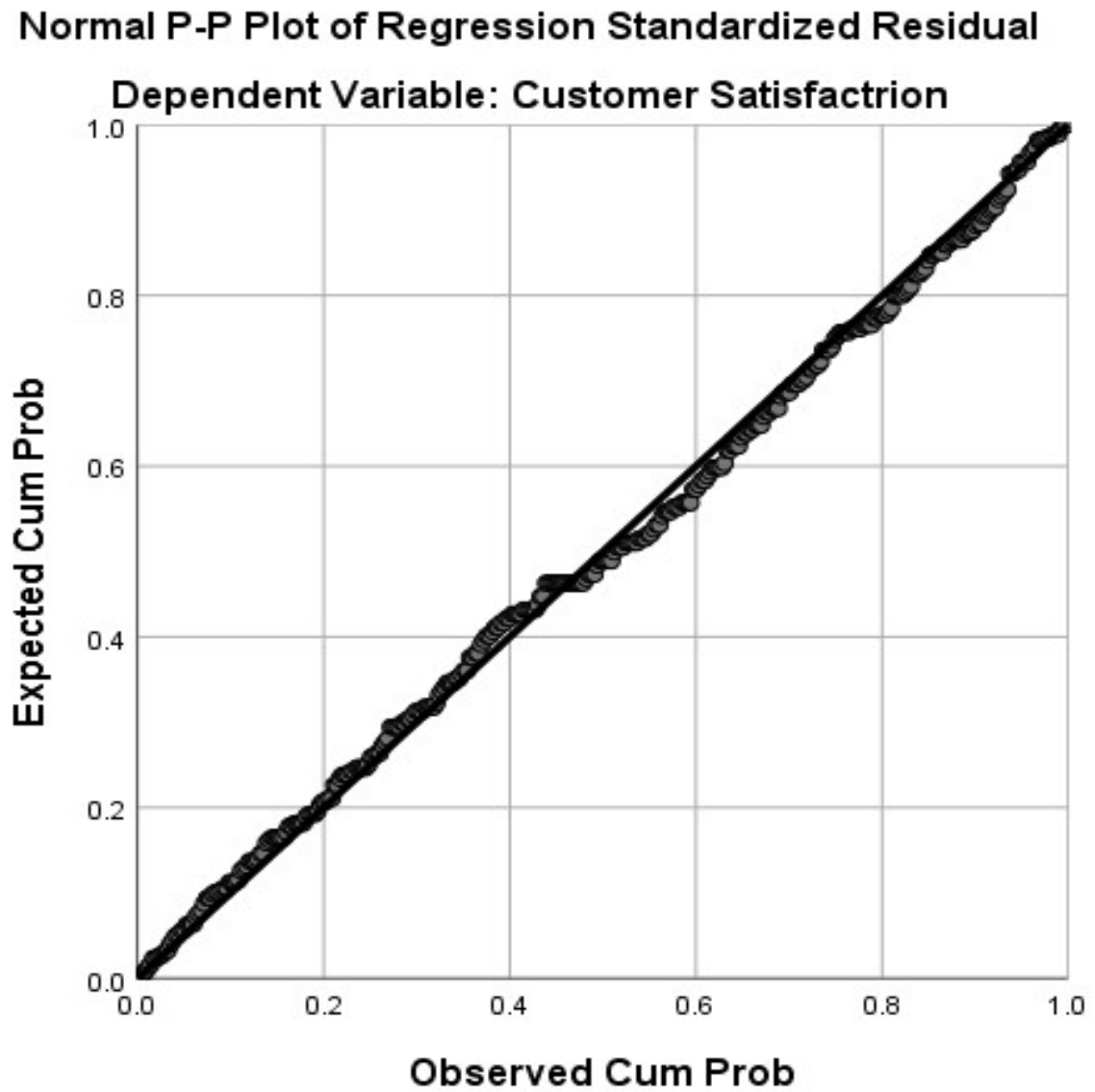
*Normality P-P plots for Conflict handling*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.4:

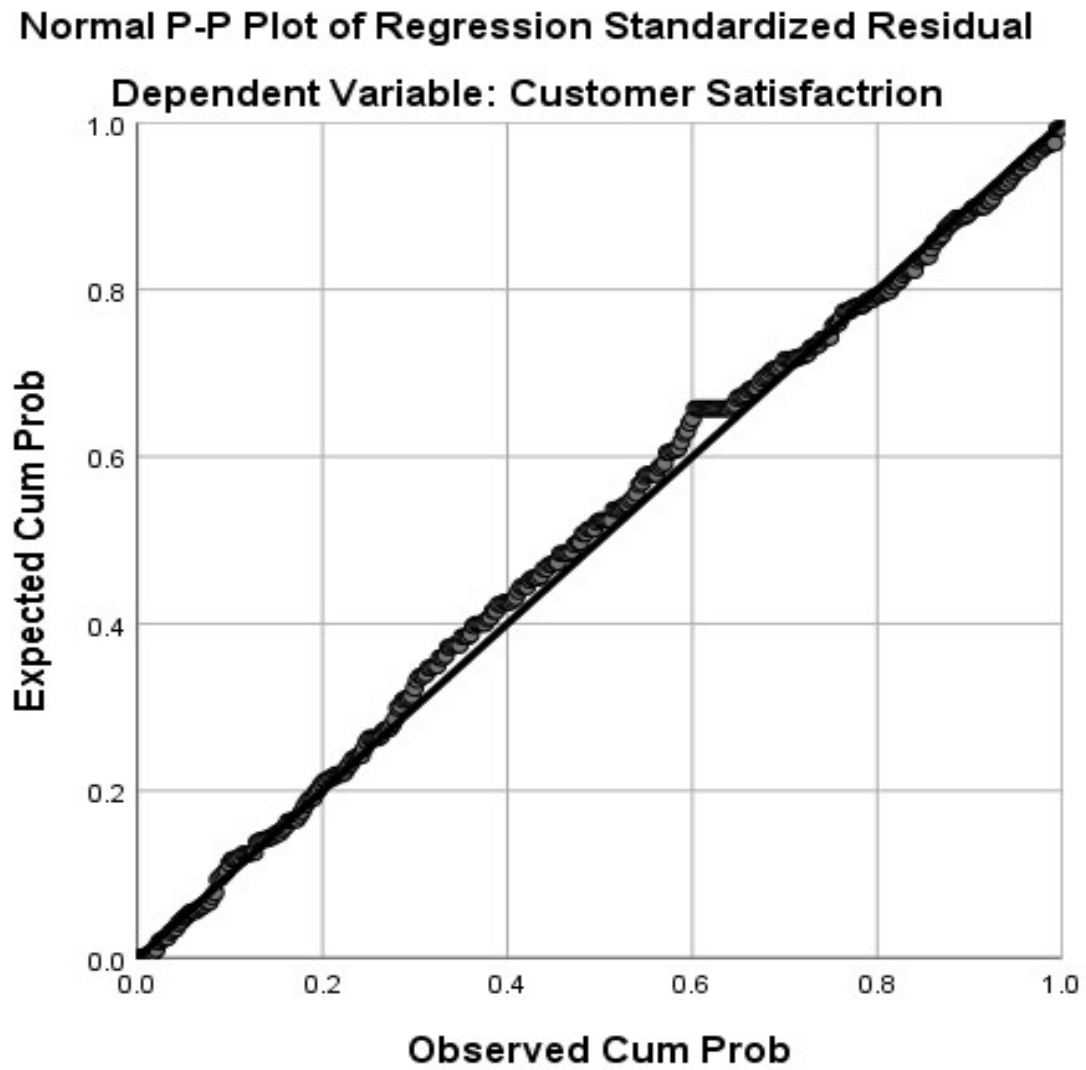
*Normality P-P plots for Reciprocity*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.5:

*Normality P-P plots for Switching cost*

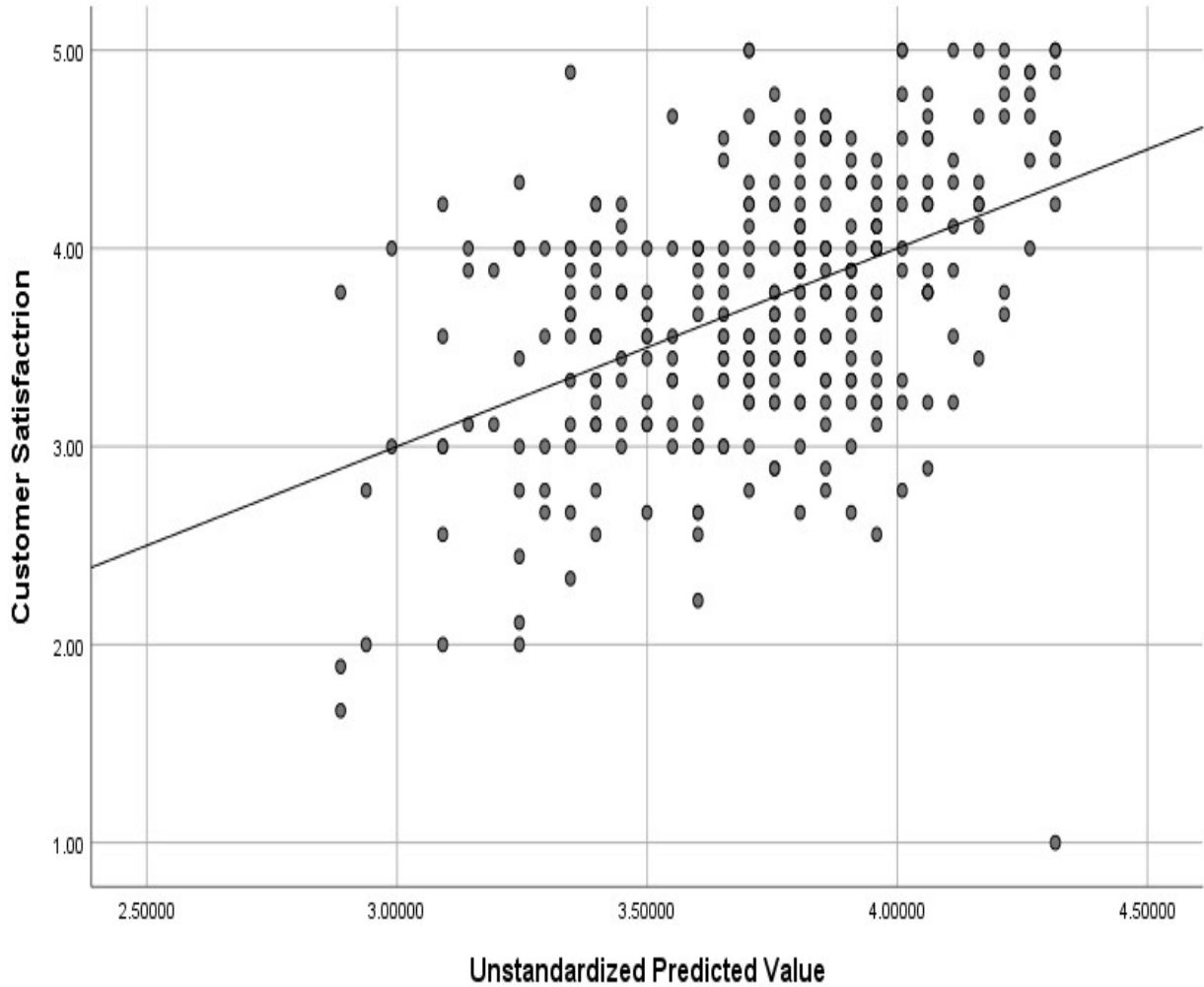


Source: Author, 2020

Appendix iv: Linearity test scatter plots

Figure A.6:

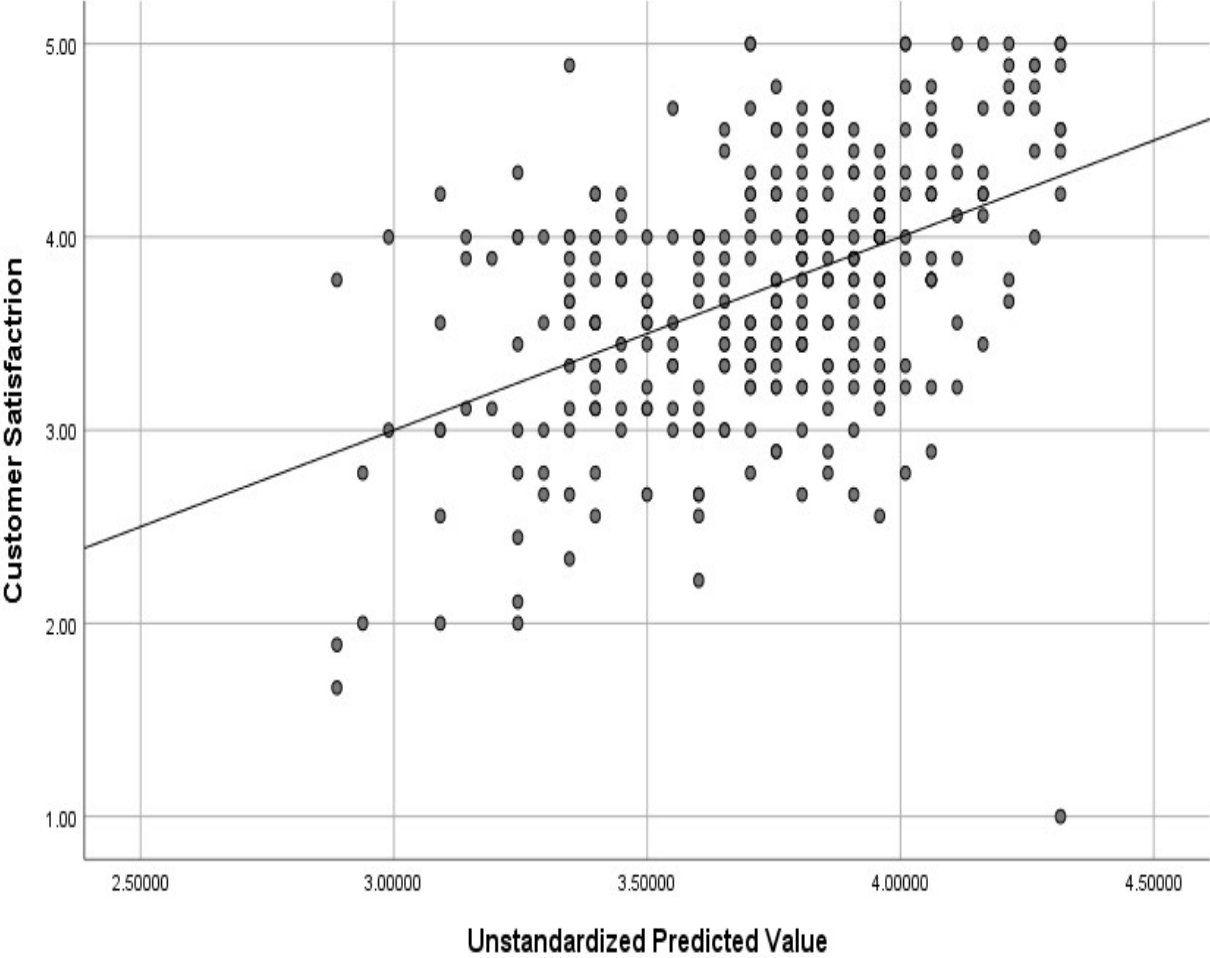
*Linearity scatter plot for Information sharing Vs Customer satisfaction*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.7:

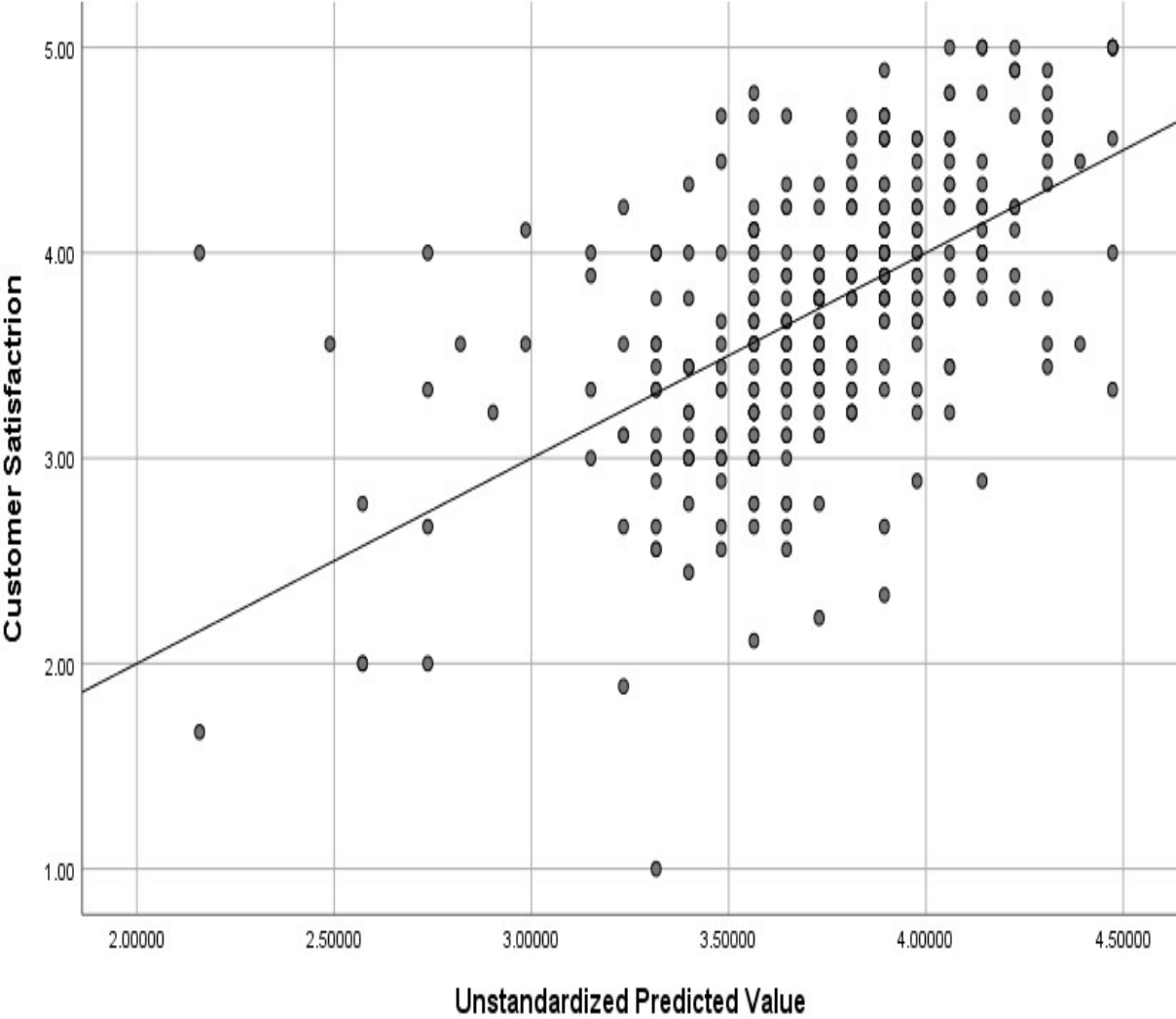
*Linearity scatter plot for Product customization Vs Customer satisfaction*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.8:

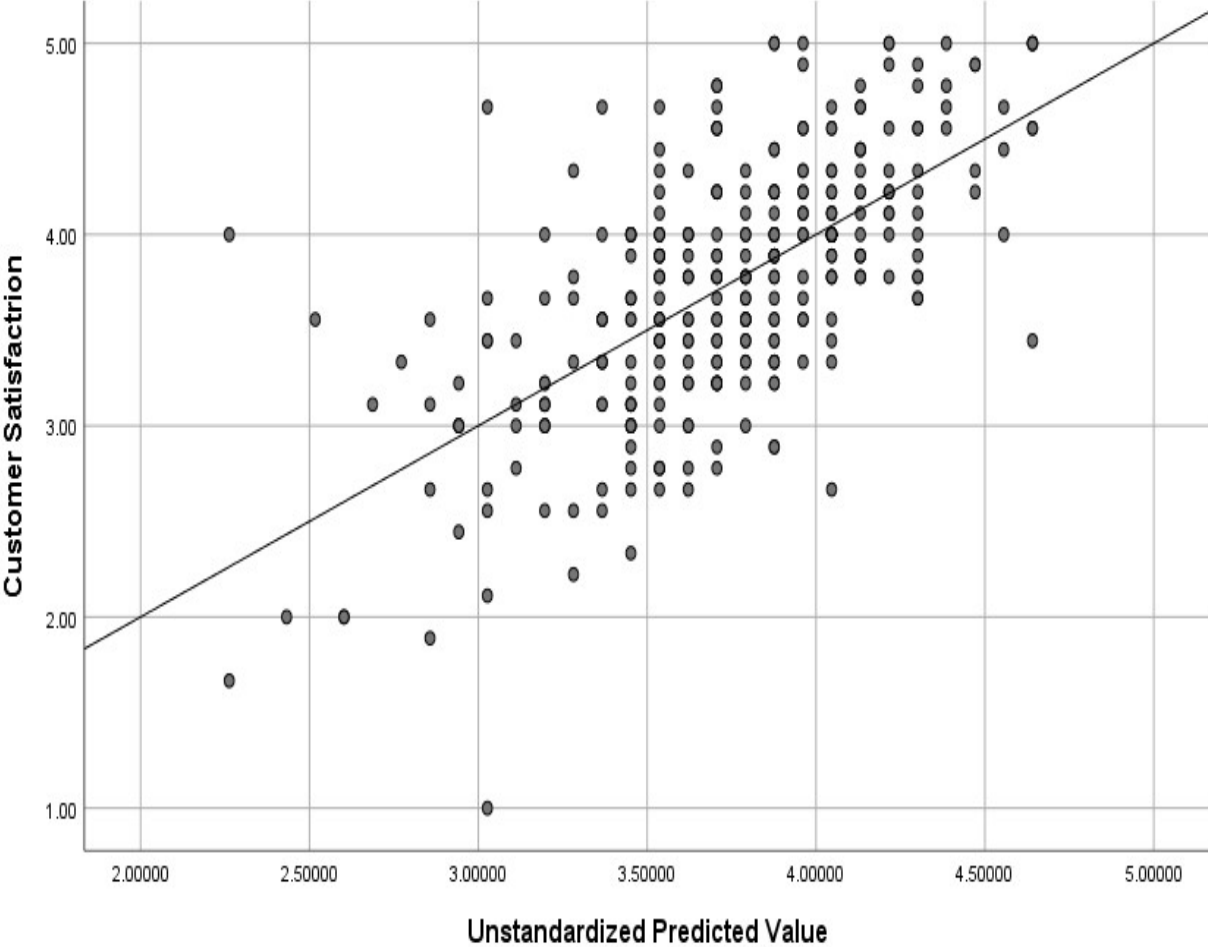
*Linearity scatter plots for Conflict handling Vs customer satisfaction*



Source: Author, 2020

**Figure A.9:**

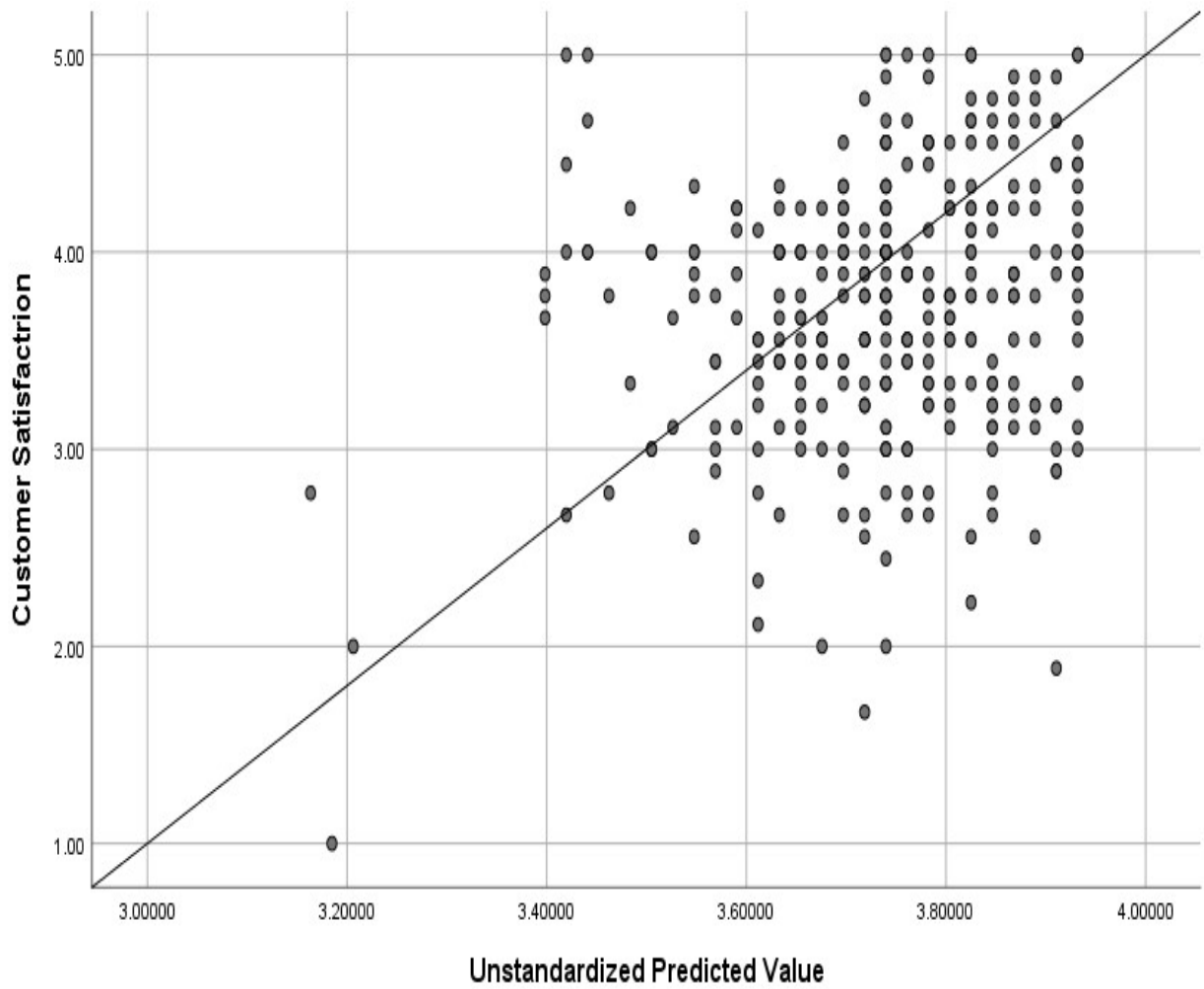
*Linearity scatter plots for Reciprocity Vs Customer satisfaction*



Source: Author, 2020

**Figure A.10:**

*Linearity scatter plots for Switching cost Vs Customer satisfaction*

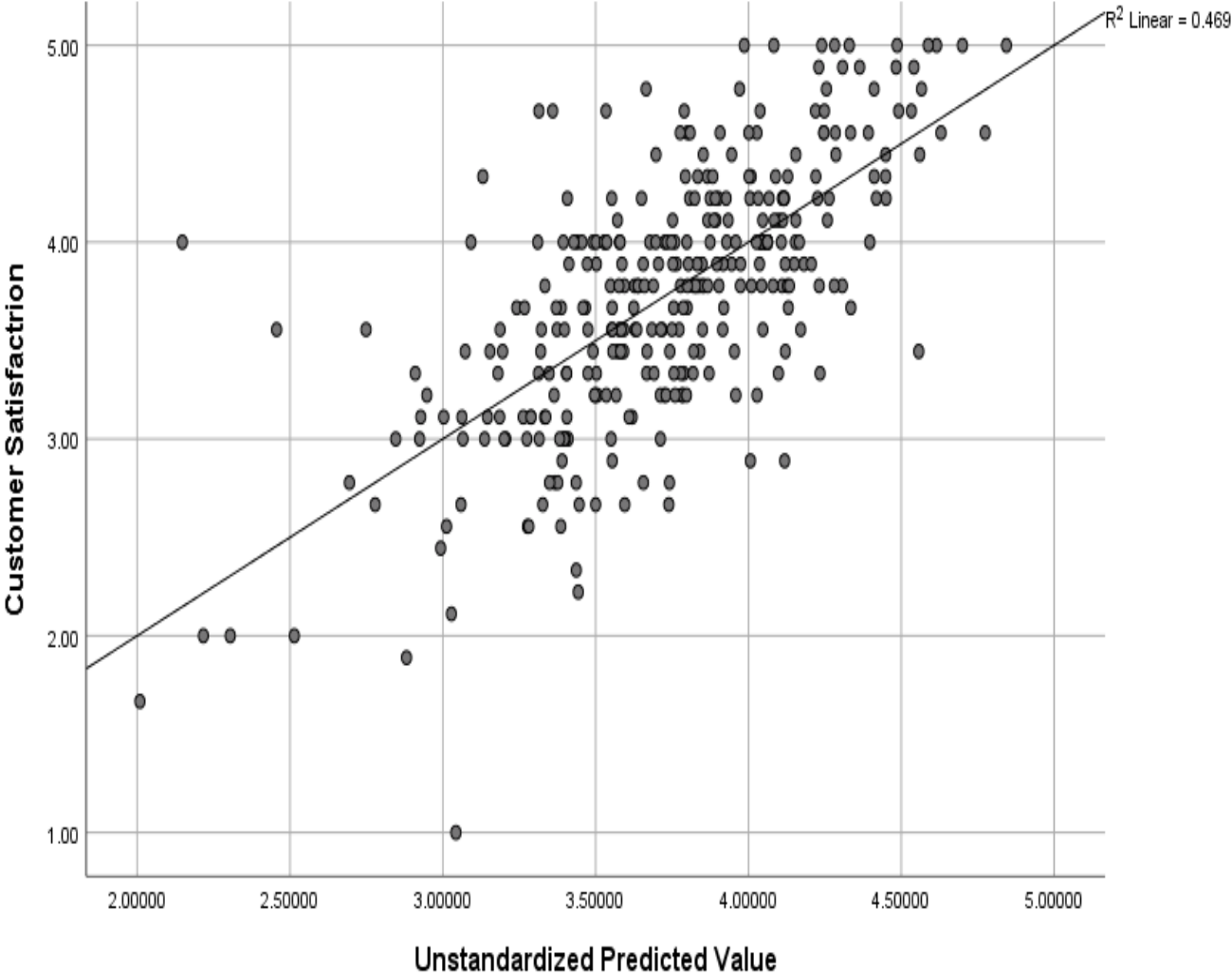


Source: Author, 2020



Figure A.11:

*Linearity scatter plot with all the predictor variables*

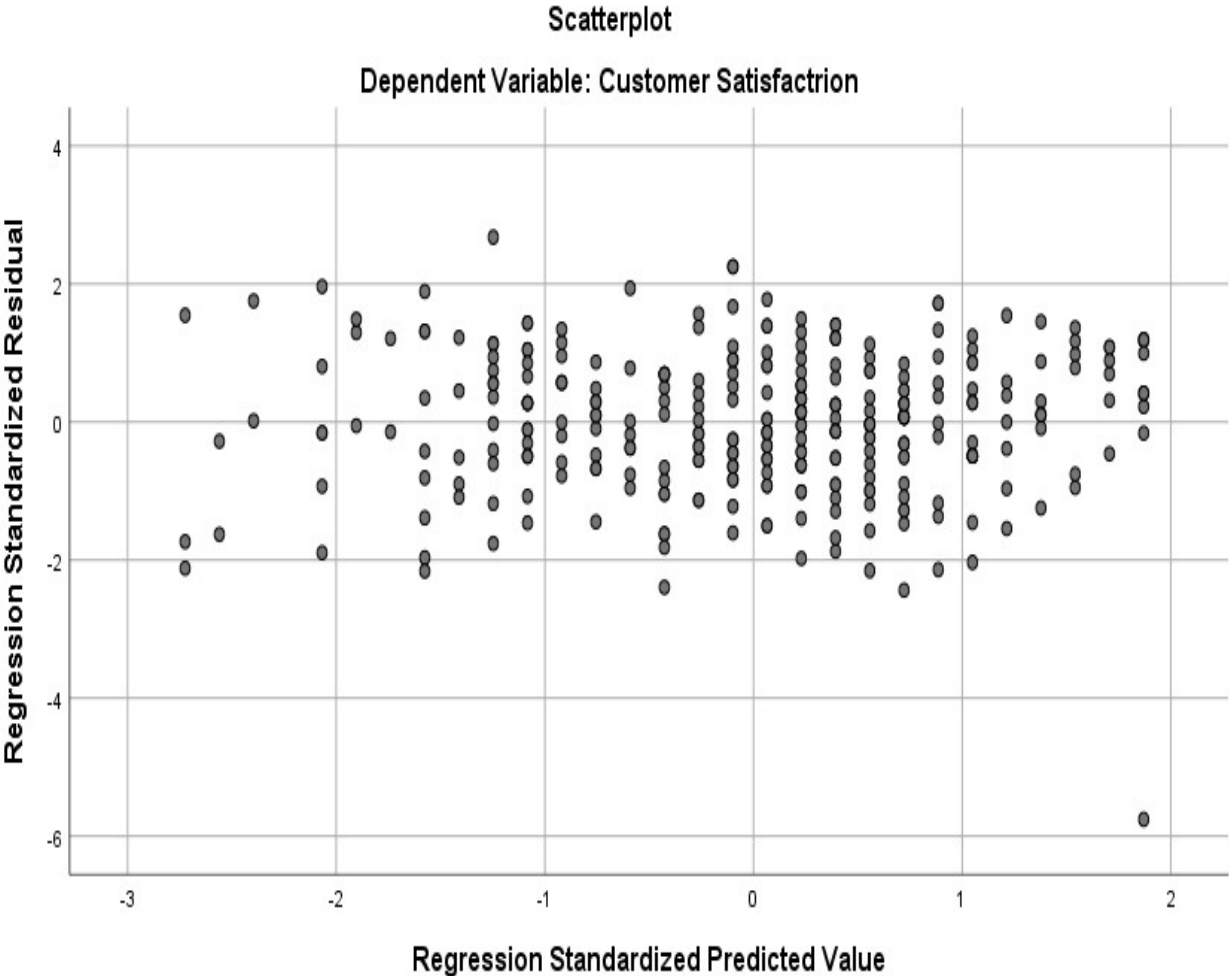


Source: Author, 2020

**Appendix v: Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots**

**Figure A.12:**

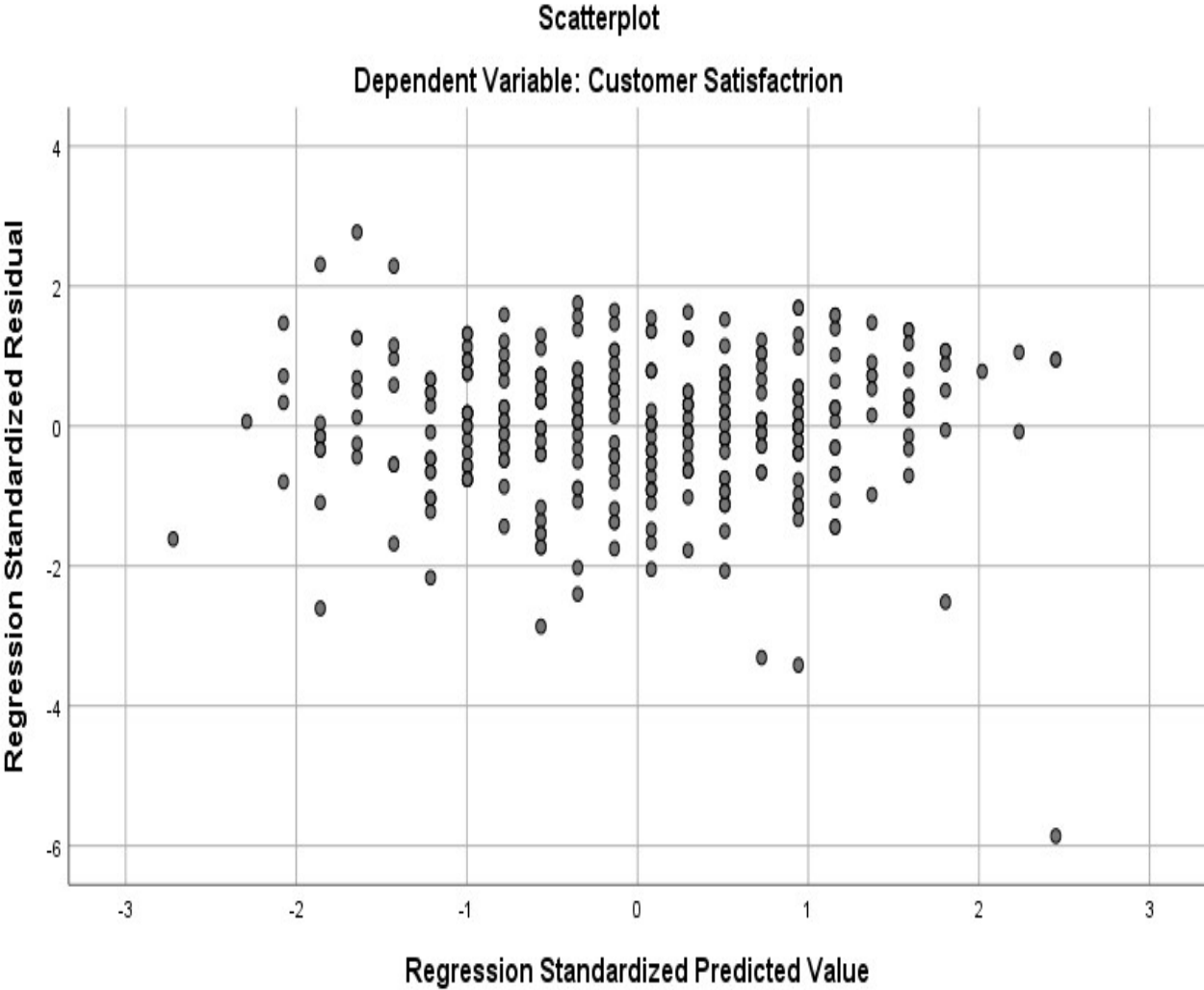
*Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots for Information sharing*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.13:

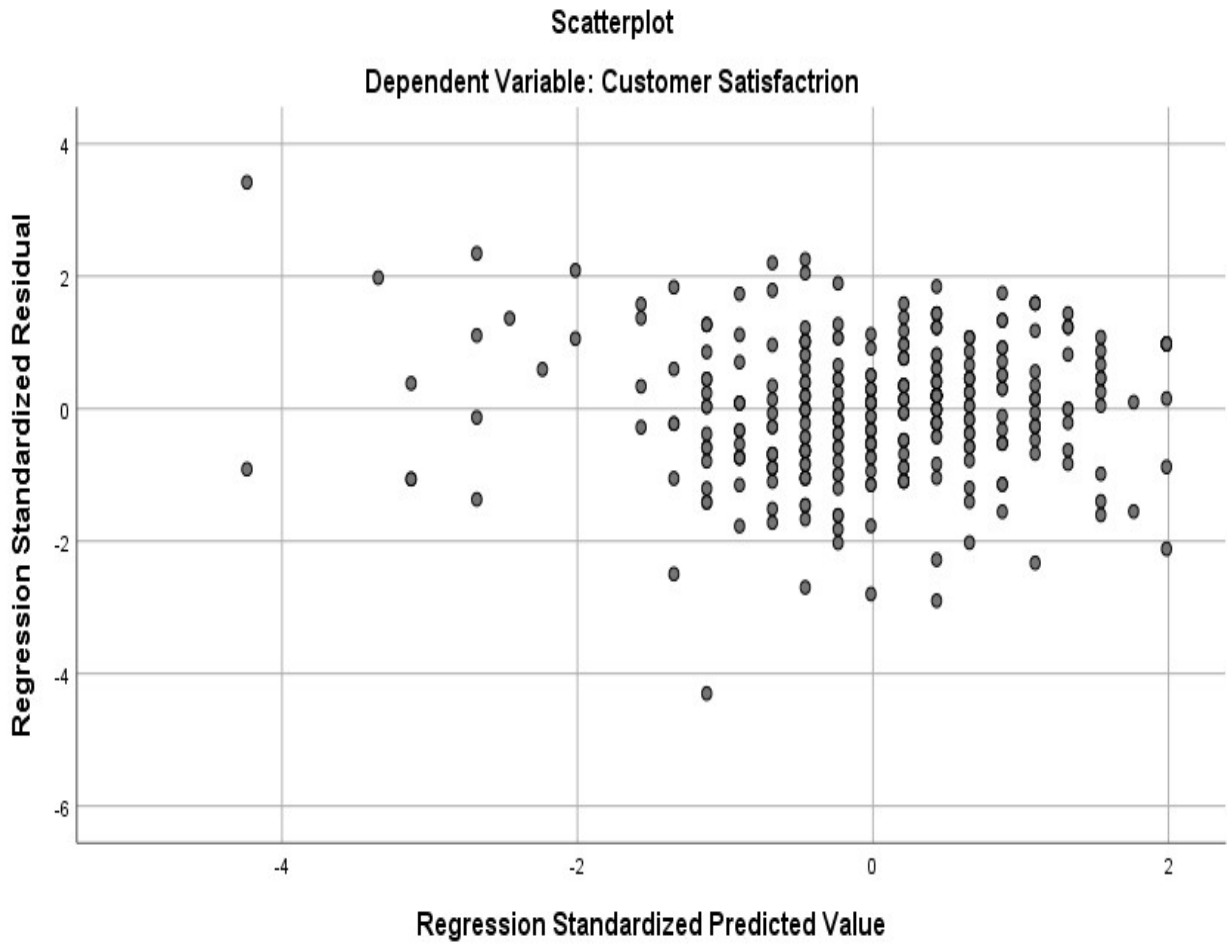
*Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots for Product customization*



Source: Author, 2020

**FigureA.14:**

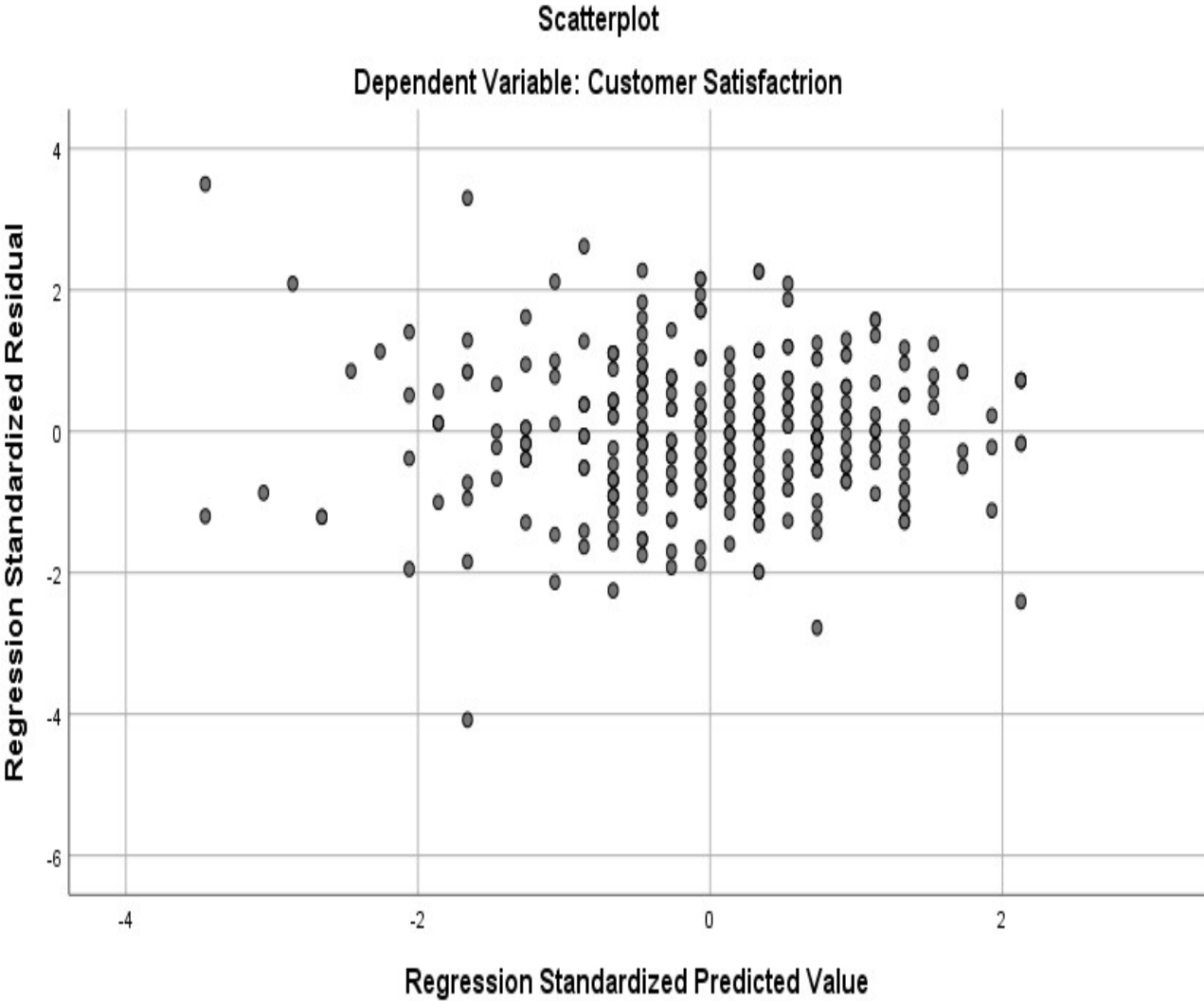
*Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots for Conflict handling*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.15:

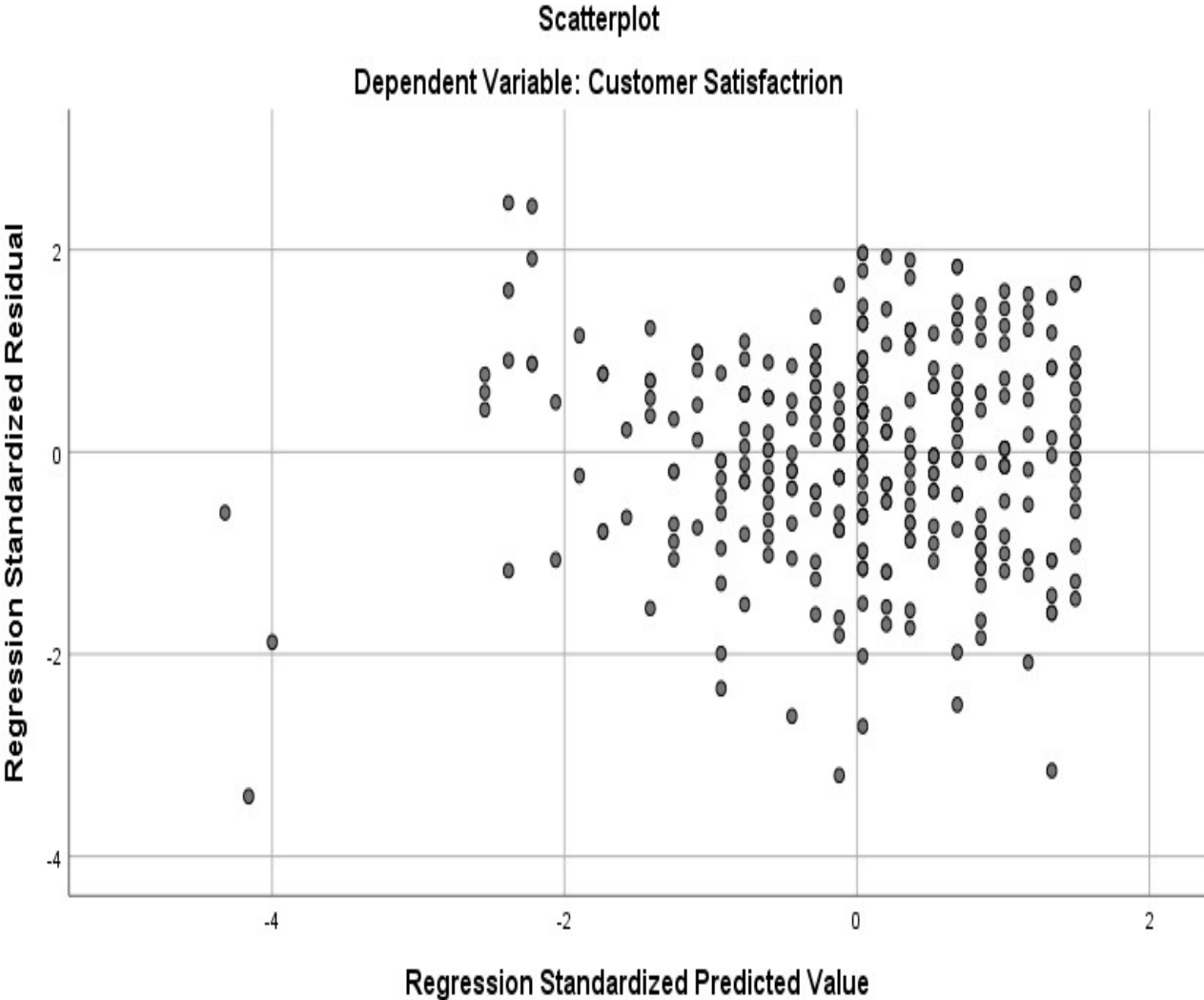
*Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots for Reciprocity*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.16:

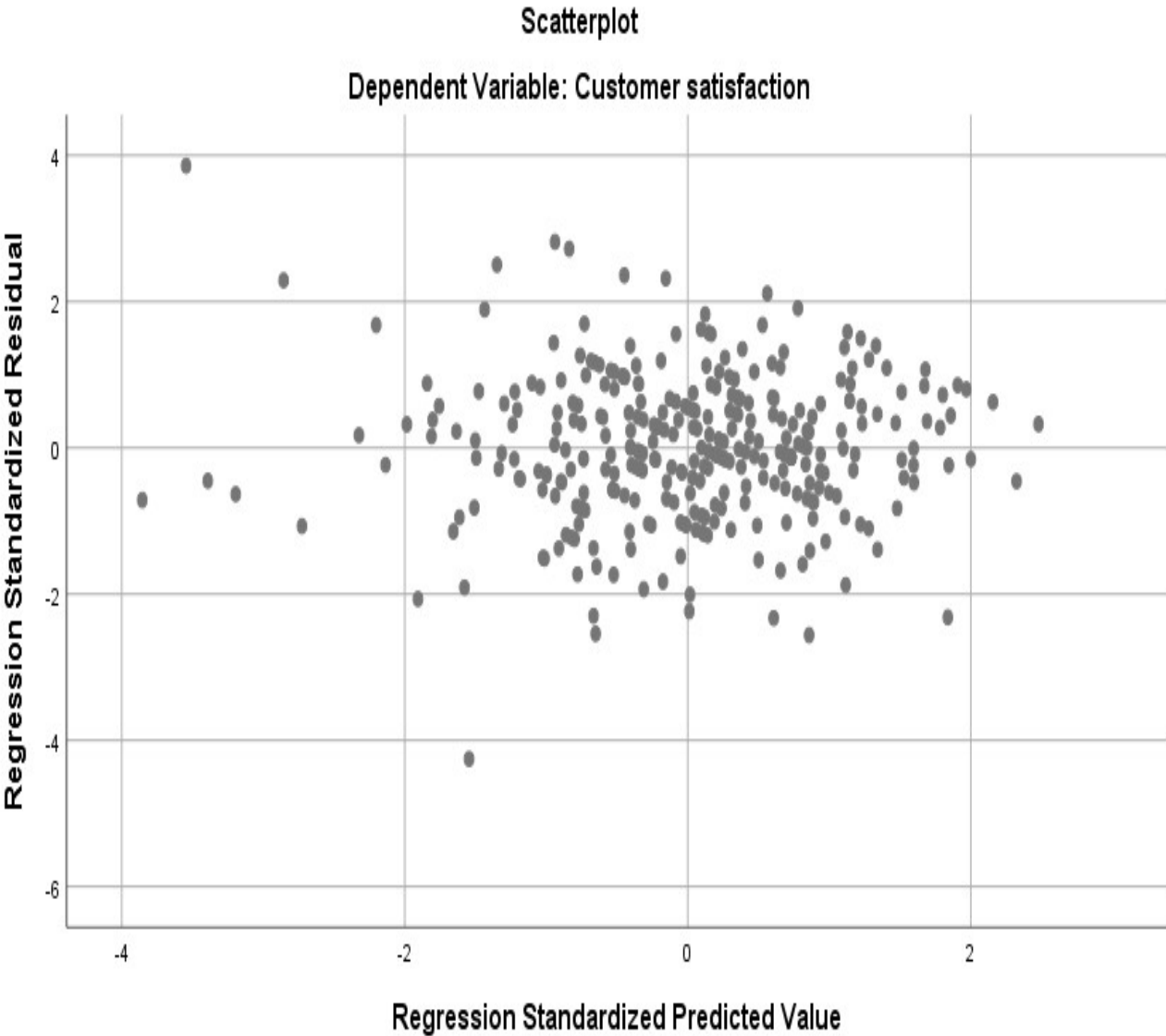
*Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots for Switching cost*



Source: Author, 2020

Figure A.17:

*Heteroscedasticity test scatter plots with all the predictor variables*



Source: Author, 2020

**Appendix iii: Moderated multiple regression models**

**Table A.1:**

*Model Summary for Moderated Information sharing regression*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.505 <sup>a</sup>	.255	.251	.56589	.255	55.906	2	326	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Information Sharing\*Switching cost, information sharing

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.2:**

*MANOVA table for moderated information sharing model*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.805	2	17.903	55.906	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	104.395	326	.320		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Information Sharing\*Switching cost, information sharing

Source: Author, 2020



**Table A.3:***Coefficients of regression for moderated information sharing*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.569	.125		20.482	.000
	information sharing	.163	.065	.217	2.496	.013
	Information Sharing*Switching cost	.046	.013	.310	3.573	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.4:***Model Summary for Moderated Product customization regression*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.483 <sup>a</sup>	.234	.229	.57411	.234	49.677	2	326	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Product customization\*Switching cost, product customization

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.5:*****MANOVA table for moderated product customization regression model***

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	32.748	2	16.374	49.677	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	107.452	326	.330		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Product customization\*Switching cost, product customization  
Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.6:*****Coefficients of regression for moderated product customization***

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.295	.165		13.939	.000
	product customization	.217	.072	.220	3.013	.003
	Product customization*Switching cost	.052	.013	.296	4.042	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.7:**

*Model summary for moderated conflict handling regression*

Model	R	Change Statistics							
		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.582 <sup>a</sup>	.339	.334	.53335	.339	83.428	2	326	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict handling\*Switching cost, conflict handling  
Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.8:**

*MANOVA table for moderated conflict handling regression model*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	47.464	2	23.732	83.428	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	92.736	326	.284		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict handling\*Switching cost, conflict handling  
Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.9:***Coefficients of regression for moderated conflict handling*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.628	.174		9.353	.000
	conflict handling	.441	.068	.433	6.456	.000
	Conflict handling*Switching cost	.031	.012	.183	2.723	.007

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.10:***Model summary for moderated reciprocity regression*

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
					F Change	df1	df2	
1	.657 <sup>a</sup>	.432	.49445	.432	123.734	2	326	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reciprocity\*Switching cost, reciprocity

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.11:***MANOVA table for moderated reciprocity regression model*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	60.500	2	30.250	123.734	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	79.700	326	.244		
	Total	140.200	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Reciprocity\*Switching cost, reciprocity

Source: Author, 2020

**Table A.12:***Coefficients of regression for moderated reciprocity*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.704	.136		12.488	.000
	reciprocity	.491	.064	.538	7.618	.000
	Reciprocity*Switching cost	.023	.012	.141	2.000	.046

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Source: Author, 2020

## Appendix vii: Training schedule for research assistants

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ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DAY
ROLES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Understand their collaboration in collection of data and preparation for analysis</li><li>2. Understand their involvement in clerical works</li><li>3. Record keeping</li></ol>	DAY 1
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Understand issues of confidentiality</li><li>2. Honesty</li></ol>	DAY 1
TIME MANAGEMENT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Importance of adhering to prepared timelines</li><li>2. Data collection dates</li></ol>	DAY 1
FIELD WORK/DATA COLLECTION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Appropriate communication</li><li>2. Safe storage of questionnaires</li><li>3. Understand areas of operation</li><li>4. Approach and consent seeking</li><li>5. How to handle emergencies while in the field</li></ol>	DAY 1
PREPARATION FOR DATA ANALYSIS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. SPSS software training</li><li>2. Submission of returned questionnaires</li><li>3. Cording</li></ol>	DAY 2
FACILITATORS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Osman Wechuli Chesula</li><li>2. Omar Abdallah Chesula</li></ol>	

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Source: Author, 2020

**Appendix ivi: University research approval letter**



**KENYA METHODIST UNIVERSITY**

P. O. Box 267 Meru - 60200, Kenya  
Tel: 254-064-30301/31229/30367/31171

Fax: 254-64-30162  
Email: info@kemu.ac.ke

Our ref: NAC/PHD/1/2019/7

14<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2019

Commission Secretary,  
National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovations,  
P.O. Box 30623-00100,  
**NAIROBI.**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

**RE: OSMAN WECHULI CHESULA ( BUS-4-2285-3/2017)**

This is to confirm that the above named is a bona fide student of Kenya Methodist University undertaking a PhD in **BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**. He is conducting a research titled **RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRACTICES, SWITCHING COSTS AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG TIER ONE SUPERMARKETS IN NAIROBI COUNTY.**

We confirm that his thesis proposal has been defended and approved by the university.

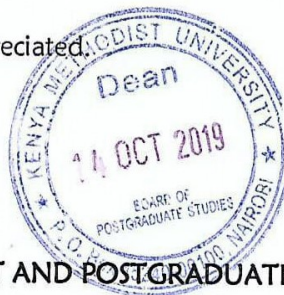
In this regard, we are requesting your office to issue a permit to enable him collect data for his Ph.D. dissertation.

Any assistance accorded to him will be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

**DR. Evangeline Gichunge PhD.**

**ASS DIRECTOR RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**



Encl.

**Appendix ix: NACOSTI research license**

  
**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

  
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Ref No: **874423** Date of Issue: **17/October/2019**

**RESEARCH LICENSE**



**This is to Certify that Mr.. OSMAN CHESULA of Kenya Methodist University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi on the topic: RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRACTICES, SWITCHING COST AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG TIER ONE SUPERMARKETS IN NAIROBI COUNTY for the period ending : 17/October/2020.**

License No: **NACOSTI/P/19/2293**

**874423**  
Applicant Identification Number

  
Director General  
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &  
INNOVATION**

Verification QR Code



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