

**BRANDING STRATEGIES BY COUNTY GOVERNMENTS ON SERVICE
DELIVERY AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN
BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration of Murang'a University of
Technology**

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DECLARATION

Student Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and to the best of my knowledge has not been presented for a degree in this or any other University. I understand what plagiarism is and I am aware of the University policy in this regard. I understand that any false claim in respect of this work shall result in disciplinary action in accordance with the University Anti-Plagiarism Policy.

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Supervisors' Approval

The undersigned certify that they have read and hereby recommended for acceptance of Murang'a University of Technology thesis entitled **“Branding Strategies by County Governments on Service Delivery Among Small and Medium Enterprises in Bungoma County, Kenya”**.

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DEDICATION

This research thesis is lovingly dedicated to my loving family for their unreserved support and invaluable contribution towards the successful completion of this work. Above all, I sincerely thank you for believing in me and, more importantly, for nurturing in me the confidence to believe in myself. I especially dedicate this work to my beautiful wife, Mrs Dorothy Jepkurui Barasa, my daughters Daisy Nekesa, Chelsea Naliaka and my sons Dunford Masalule and Trevor Baraka Sankara, whose encouragement, patience, and unwavering support inspired me throughout this journey.

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ABSTRACT

A decade after the introduction of devolution in Kenya, county governments continue to face challenges in delivering efficient and satisfactory services to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Despite the adoption of county government branding strategies such as transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government systems, SMEs in Bungoma County still report concerns regarding service reliability, responsiveness, and trust. This study therefore examined the influence of county government branding strategies on service delivery among SMEs in Bungoma County, Kenya, while testing the moderating effect of political influence. The study was anchored on New Public Management Theory, Public Value Theory, and Institutional Theory, and adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and key informant interviews from 372 respondents drawn from SMEs and county government officials whose job description concerns SMEs. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings established that government transparency branding, accountability branding, communication branding, and e-government branding all had a positive and statistically significant effect on SME service delivery, where the overall level of service delivery was unsatisfactory. The study further found that political influence had a significant moderating effect that weakened the positive relationship between branding strategies and SME satisfaction. The study concludes that effective county government branding strategies enhance SME satisfaction by improving trust, accessibility, responsiveness, and confidence in public services. The study recommends that Bungoma County Government should strengthen transparency mechanisms, improve accountability systems, invest in responsive communication channels, expand digital service platforms, and manage political interference to enhance service delivery outcomes for SMEs.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Central Business District
CBEM	County Business Environment for MSEs
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
KAM	Kenya Association of Manufacturers
KIE	Kenya Industrial Estates
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KIRDI	Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MSE	Micro and Small Enterprise
MSEA	Micro and Small Enterprises Authority
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
OGD	Open Government Data
R	Respondents
SE	Standard Error
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises

DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

Branding	Branding in service delivery is the process of developing a distinct and distinctive identity for a service-based organization. Branding elements include service experience, brand promise, differentiation, brand identity, employee consistency across touch points.
Government transparency	refers to holding public officials accountable for their operations. Transparency ensures accountability, openness, and communication between the public and government.
Government accountability	means that public officials elected and un-elected have an obligation to explain their decisions and actions to the citizens.
Government communication	is a systematic two-way process between government agencies and citizens during a public policy process, including the stages mentioned above: agenda setting, decision making, policy implementation and monitoring and feedback.
Government technological innovation	Refers to the implementation by a public sector organization of new or significantly improved. Process, methods or services aimed at improving. Public sector innovation involves significant improvements in the services that government has a responsibility to provide, including those delivered by third parties.
Political influence	the ability to influence the behavior of people and valued resources to influence the policies, functions and culture of a society.
SMEs satisfaction	measurement that determines how happy SMEs are with Government's products, services, and capabilities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

In the contemporary world, the role of government and the process of governance remain among the most critical concerns in public administration (Beshi & Kaur, 2020). Citizens increasingly expect governments to act responsibly, uphold accountability, and prioritize public interests (Farazmand & Carter, 2017). Consequently, the traditional role of the state has evolved, with democratic governments placing greater emphasis on serving the interests of the majority (Grimmelikhuijsen, Porumbescu, Hong, & Im, 2023). Public trust is therefore essential for the success of democratic systems, compelling governments to enhance trust through effective policy implementation and strategic governance practices (Houston & Harding, 2020).

Globally, inefficiencies in public sector service delivery continue to pose significant challenges, negatively affecting citizens' welfare and overall national development (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017). In response, there is increasing pressure on governments to improve transparency, accountability, and service quality. Countries such as the United States, New Zealand, Canada, and Singapore have demonstrated improvements in service delivery through the adoption of structured administrative strategies and modern managerial tools (He & Ma, 2021; Msenge & Nzewi, 2021).

Comparative evidence from developed and emerging economies highlights diverse approaches to improving public service delivery. For instance, the United Kingdom and Malaysia have extensively leveraged e-government strategies and multichannel service portals to enhance accessibility, efficiency, transparency, and reliability of public services. Similarly, South Africa's Department of Public Service and Administration emphasizes managerial recognition, employee support, and internal communication as mechanisms for improving institutional performance (DPSA, 2020). However, countries such as Nigeria and Tanzania continue to face persistent challenges in achieving efficient, accountable, and citizen-centered service delivery despite ongoing reform efforts (Oyedele, 2024; Lufunyo, 2023).

Public sector branding has emerged as a strategic approach to addressing service

delivery challenges. It encompasses initiatives such as transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government systems, which collectively shape citizens' perceptions of government effectiveness, trustworthiness, and responsiveness (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022; Shareef, Kumar, Kumar & Dwivedi, 2021). These branding strategies function as signalling mechanisms that influence expectations regarding service quality and institutional credibility. Empirical evidence indicates that when governments implement consistent branding strategies, including clear communication channels, performance visibility, and interactive digital platforms, both citizens and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) perceive public services as more reliable, timely, and responsive, thereby enhancing satisfaction levels (Manaf et al., 2023).

Further empirical studies show that public sector agencies adopting deliberate branding practices, such as performance contracting, e-government platforms, and systematic information dissemination, report higher levels of user satisfaction (Shuriye et al., 2020). Additionally, digital and social media-based branding strategies enhance service delivery by promoting accessibility, transparency, and real-time interaction between governments and service users (Lee, Gim & Yoo, 2019; Laing, 2019; Stuart, 2024). As a result, countries across the globe continue to adopt public branding strategies to improve service visibility and strengthen citizen engagement.

Globally, countries such as Greece have advanced digital governance reforms by adopting e-government branding strategies, including blockchain technologies and social media platforms, to promote transparency and citizen participation (Xanthopoulou, Antoniadis & Saprikis, 2024). Similarly, Canada has adopted centralized government communication strategies aimed at strengthening public sector identity and reinforcing government messaging (Marland, Lewis & Flanagan, 2017). In the Netherlands, local governments have implemented transparency branding through place branding initiatives such as the Rotterdam Makers District, promoting stakeholder engagement and co-production (Stevens, Klijn & Warsen, 2021). Comparable trends are observed in Australia and South Korea, where governments integrate transparency, accountability, and digital communication platforms to enhance service delivery and public trust (O'Regan, King & Smith, 2022; Sung & Park, 2021).

In Africa, countries such as Ghana and South Africa have implemented branding strategies aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability in public service delivery. Ghana's adoption of accountability branding through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative has strengthened data disclosure and community engagement in the mining sector (Dashwood, Idemudia, Puplampu & Webb, 2022). In South Africa, the use of integrated reporting frameworks and social media platforms has improved transparency, accountability, and stakeholder communication (Masiya & Lubinga, 2023).

Within East Africa, governments are increasingly leveraging digital governance tools to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. Tanzania, for instance, has implemented accountability branding through the adoption of accrual-based International Public Sector Accounting Standards, improving financial transparency and performance in the public sector (Lyezia & Kapaya, 2024).

In Kenya, significant efforts have been made to improve governance, transparency, and service delivery through legislative reforms and public financial management systems (Amin, 2024). The government has also recognized the critical role of SMEs in economic development and has introduced policies to support their growth, including the Micro and Small Enterprises Act of 2012 and the devolved governance framework. These initiatives aim to enhance regulatory efficiency, promote public-private partnerships, and improve service delivery at both national and county levels (KIPPRA, 2019; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Additionally, ongoing investments in information and communication technology infrastructure and innovation have been identified as key drivers of SME performance (Chege, Wang & Sunttu, 2020).

Furthermore, the Kenyan government and its agencies are increasingly adopting technology-driven public branding strategies, including social media platforms, digital portals, and mobile applications, to enhance communication, transparency, and service accessibility. While these strategies are recognized as important in strengthening digital governance and public sector image, their direct influence on SME service delivery outcomes remains underexplored (Kogo, 2025). Despite these policy efforts, SMEs continue to face challenges related to transparency, accountability, and access to information, particularly at the county level (Ong'olo & Odhiambo, 2013).

Additionally, although public governance mechanisms are intended to enhance service delivery, some government interventions have been perceived as ineffective or counterproductive, contributing to distrust among SMEs (Pasquali & De Marchi, 2022). Given the growing emphasis on public sector branding and its potential to improve service delivery, there remains limited empirical evidence on its influence on SME satisfaction at the county level. This study therefore sought to address this gap by providing empirical evidence to support evidence-based decision-making.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From year to year, public sector service delivery has been described as lethargic with many challenges (Ndubai, 2016). Unlike in the past, the public sector today is under strong pressure to improve their service delivery (Awino, 2016), given the growing public interest and scrutiny. With the onset of devolution, the scrutiny on public service delivery is largely shifting to county governments which have been tasked with decentralizing most public sector functions. However, a decade after devolution started, a joint World Bank and Government of Kenya survey dubbed Making Devolution Work for Service Delivery (MDWSD) conducted in the year 2020, still faults county governments for poor service delivery in various sectors.

Public branding initiatives including strategies such as transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government systems have been empirically linked to enhanced perceptions of government effectiveness, trust, and citizen engagement by serving as a signaling mechanism that shapes expectations of service quality and organizational credibility (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022; Shareef et al., 2011). Evidence suggests that when public institutions implement consistent branding strategies, including clear communication channels, performance visibility, and interactive digital platforms, citizens and SMEs perceive services as more reliable, timely, and responsive, resulting in higher satisfaction levels (Manaf et al., 2023; Lee, Gim & Yoo, 2019; Laing, 2019; Stuart, 2024).

In Kenya, specific policy frameworks and institutional reforms such as legislative instruments, including the Micro and Small Enterprises Act 2012 and devolved governance mechanisms (KIPPRA, 2019; Pasquali & De Marchi 2022) as well as adopted technology-driven branding strategies social media, online platforms, and mobile

applications to enhance visibility, communication, and digital governance frameworks (Chege, Wang & Sunttu, 2020; Kogo, 2025). Despite these efforts, empirical gaps remain, particularly regarding the relationship between public sector branding strategies and SME perceptions of service delivery satisfaction. SMEs continue to report challenges in transparency, accountability, and access to information at the county level, while some interventions are perceived as counterproductive, fueling distrust (Pasquali & De Marchi, 2022). These gaps highlight the need for empirical investigation to generate evidence that can guide policy, improve branding strategies, and ultimately enhance service delivery satisfaction for SMEs in the Kenyan context, hence a need for this study focusing on Bungoma County.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The main goal of the study was to examine the branding strategies by county Governments on service delivery among small and medium enterprises in Bungoma county, Kenya

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To establish the effect of Government transparency branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya
- ii. To determine the effect of Government accountability branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya
- iii. To examine the effect of Government communication branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya
- iv. To establish the effect of e-government branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the effect of Government transparency branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County,

Kenya?

- ii. What is the effect of Government accountability branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya?
- iii. What is the effect of Government communication branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya?
- iv. What is the effect of e-government branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Government transparency branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

H₀₂: Government accountability branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

H₀₃: Government communication and information branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

H₀₄: E-government branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 Academic Justification

This study contributes to the scholarly work on public administration, governance, and business government relations by empirically examining the role of Government branding strategies in shaping Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) satisfaction. The study can complement existing empirical studies on New Public Management (NPM), Public Value Theory, and Service Quality models by showing how branding

functions not only as a communication tool but also as a governance mechanism that influences legitimacy and trust at the county level.

Unlike prior studies that often focus on marketing or corporate branding in the private sector, this research situates branding within public sector reforms and service delivery outcomes, thus bridging a gap between public administration theory and practice. Moreover, the findings may contradict earlier assumptions that branding is peripheral to public administration by demonstrating that branding strategies directly influence SME satisfaction, investor confidence, and service delivery efficiency.

1.6.2 Policy Justification

Policymakers at both the national and county levels benefit from this study through actionable insights on how government branding strategies can enhance SME satisfaction with government services. This directly aligns with Kenya Vision 2030 and the Kenya Communication Policy (2023), which emphasize citizen-centered public service reforms as key enablers of socio-economic transformation. Specifically, the findings guide the County Government of Bungoma and other counties in developing evidence-based reputation, image as well as communication strategies and refining service delivery branding to address challenges affecting SMEs. The results also inform policies on transparency, accountability, and digital government, helping build trust between SMEs and county governments. The study hence supports the development of effective frameworks that encourage compliance, boost responsiveness, and strengthen government legitimacy at the devolved level.

1.6.3 SMEs and the Business Community

The study highlights how satisfaction with county government branding enhances supportive business environment, reduces bureaucratic barriers, and increases opportunities for collaboration through public private partnerships. This creates conditions for entrepreneurship growth, business expansion, and compliance with county regulations.

1.6.4 Local and International and Investors

By demonstrating the link between branding, satisfaction, and legitimacy, the study underscores how effective government branding builds investor confidence, encouraging capital inflows, infrastructure development, and job creation.

1.6.5 Citizens

The study findings further provide a framework for monitoring county governance, enhancing accountability, and advocating for inclusive participation of SMEs in governance processes. Improved branding and service delivery not only benefit SMEs but also contribute to broader social harmony, inclusivity, and public trust, which strengthen the overall social fabric and legitimacy of county governance.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The conceptual focus of the study was an investigation of the relationship between public sector branding strategies on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study specifically established the effect of government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding and e-government branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. Additionally, the moderating effect of political influence on the relationship between county government branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction was established.

The contextual scope of this study was Small and Medium Enterprises operating in Bungoma county cutting across the rural and urban setups. The study focused on all the nine sub-counties namely Bumula, Kabuchai, Kanduyi, Kimilili, Mt. Elgon, Sirisia, Tongaren, Webuye East, and Webuye West. The methodological scope of the study was a focus on SMEs as well as County government officers from the Divisions of Trade, Industry, Finance, Economic Planning and Information Communication Technology (ICT). Thus, a study conducted in a specific locale can yield findings applicable to other contexts, as research aims to contribute to broader knowledge, and through external validity, generalizability, and transferability, findings can be extended to similar populations and settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

1.8 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study relied heavily on self-reported responses from SME owners/managers and county officials. This may introduce response bias, including social desirability (respondents overstating satisfaction) or recall bias (inaccurate recollection of service

delivery experiences). To minimize this, mixed-method research was adopted whereby questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were conducted to ensure triangulation and enhance the depth of the findings.

The study also faces limitations regarding context-specific findings. The focus on Bungoma County, while justified due to its economic and governance significance, may limit the generalizability of results to other counties with different socio-economic, political, or administrative contexts. Therefore, future generalizations of the study findings to other contexts should be carefully considered.

Another expected limitation in the study was non-response bias whereby SMEs or officials decline participation. To minimize this, proper introductions were made and consent sought from the respondents before engagement. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to enhance participation in the study. Furthermore, given that county branding often involves political leaders' visibility and image, respondents' views may be influenced by political affiliations, which can skew perceptions of satisfaction and service delivery. To mitigate this, the respondents were encouraged to be objective, considering that this study was for academic purposes only and hence their objectivity was key.

Geographically, the study was delimited to Bungoma County. While findings may provide insights applicable to other counties in Kenya, the focus is intentionally restricted to this county to allow for in-depth analysis of its branding strategies and service delivery context. Contextually, the study deliberately focuses on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as well as county officers as the primary respondents, given their critical role in local economic development and their frequent interaction with county services such as licensing, permits, taxation, and business support programs.

Conceptually, the study was delimited to four branding strategies namely government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding as well as e-government branding and the moderating effect of political influence. Therefore, other potential branding aspects such as inter-county branding collaborations were not considered in the study scope. Furthermore, the study focuses on county-level services that directly affect SMEs for instance licensing,

permits, compliance, taxation support and training programs. Broader public services such as health, education, and social protection were not considered in the study.

Theoretically, the study was delimited to public administration and governance theories that is the New Public Management, Public Value Theory, Institutional Theory and Service Quality model (SERVQUAL). Alternative business-oriented branding theories were not emphasized, in order to align the study firmly within the public administration discipline.

1.9 Assumptions of the study

This study was guided by several assumptions that informed the research design, data collection, and interpretation of findings. First, it was assumed that respondents, including small and medium enterprise (SME) operators and key informants, would provide honest, accurate, and reliable information regarding their experiences with county government branding strategies and service delivery.

Second, the study assumed that the selected sample was representative of the broader population of SMEs in Bungoma County, and therefore the findings could reasonably reflect the prevailing conditions within the study area.

Third, it was assumed that the instruments used for data collection, including questionnaires and interview guides, were valid and reliable in capturing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of branding strategies and service delivery.

Fourth, the study assumed that county government branding strategies are implemented in a manner that is observable and measurable, allowing respondents to meaningfully assess their influence on service delivery.

Fifth, consistent with the pragmatism research philosophy underpinning this study, it was assumed that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem than relying on a single method.

Finally, the study assumed that external factors such as political, economic, and institutional dynamics remained relatively stable during the period of data collection

and did not significantly distort the responses provided by participants.

1.10 Contribution of the thesis

This study makes theoretical, methodological, empirical, and practical contributions to knowledge in public administration and county governance in Kenya.

Theoretically, the study is anchored on New Public Management Theory, Public Value Theory, and Institutional Theory, and it contributes to knowledge by applying these three theories jointly to explain how government branding strategies, namely government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, and e government branding, influence SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery, with political influence introduced as a moderating variable. Where prior studies have applied these theories separately to explain public sector efficiency, value creation, or institutional legitimacy, this thesis integrates them into a single conceptual framework that positions branding as a governance mechanism rather than merely a communication tool, thereby extending the applicability of these theories to devolved government contexts in Kenya.

Methodologically, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design informed by the pragmatism research philosophy, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction among SMEs in Bungoma County. The validated data collection instruments, the reliability and validity procedures applied during the pilot study, and the moderated regression approach used to test the influence of political influence on the relationship between branding strategies and SMEs' satisfaction, together provide a replicable methodological framework that can be adapted by future researchers examining public sector branding in other counties in Kenya or in comparable devolved governance systems.

Empirically, the study established that government transparency branding, accountability branding, communication branding, and e government branding all have a positive and statistically significant effect on SME service delivery satisfaction, while political influence significantly moderates this relationship. These findings generate context specific evidence on a segment of the economy, SMEs, that has

received limited attention in existing empirical literature on public sector branding, which has largely focused on citizen satisfaction or private sector corporate branding. The study therefore extends the empirical literature by demonstrating how branding strategies operate within the specific interactions between SMEs and county governments, including taxation, procurement, licensing, and regulatory processes.

Practically, the study contributes an evidence-based understanding of the specific branding gaps affecting SME service delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County, offering county governments and policymakers a basis for developing targeted, evidence informed interventions in transparency, accountability, communication, and e government branding, rather than relying on general or symbolic branding gestures.

Taken together, these contributions extend theory, provide a replicable methodology, generate new empirical evidence, and inform policy and practice on county government branding strategies and SME service delivery satisfaction in Kenya.

1.11 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction, comprising the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, significance of the study, scope of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, assumptions of the study, and the contribution of the thesis.

Chapter Two presents the literature review. It begins with the theoretical framework, anchored on New Public Management Theory, Public Value Theory, and Institutional Theory, followed by the empirical literature review organized around government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding strategy, e government strategy, political influence, and satisfaction with public service delivery. The chapter also presents the research gaps identified from the reviewed literature, the conceptual framework guiding the study, and a chapter summary.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology. It outlines the research philosophy, research methodology, research design, study area, target population, sample size and

sampling design, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, and pilot study, including the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments. The chapter further presents the approach to data analysis and presentation, the diagnostic tests conducted, the procedure for hypotheses testing, and the ethical considerations observed during the study.

Chapter Four presents the results and discussion. It reports the response rate, demographic results, descriptive analysis of government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e government strategy branding, political influence, and SMEs' service delivery satisfaction. The chapter also presents the correlation analysis, diagnostic tests, regression analysis for each objective, the multiple regression analysis, the moderating effect of political influence, and a discussion of the key findings in relation to the study objectives.

Chapter Five presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study. It summarizes the key findings in line with the specific objectives, discusses the implications of the study, draws conclusions based on the findings, and provides recommendations for government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e government branding, and the moderating effect of political influence. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further study.

The thesis closes with the list of references cited throughout the study and the appendices, which contain the supporting research instruments and related materials.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature on theories that inform the variables in this study, particularly those related to the work environment within the context of public administration and service delivery. It discusses how the identified theories connect to the study variables and their relevance in explaining the relationship between government branding strategies and service delivery among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The review begins with the theoretical framework that highlights key perspectives from established scholars and shows how the theories apply to the study objectives.

The chapter also presents an empirical review of studies related to each variable, including government transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government branding strategies. It further examines the moderating effect of political influence on these relationships. The reviewed literature provides an understanding of what has already been studied, identifies existing gaps, and justifies the need for the current research. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that links the variables and forms the basis for the study hypotheses.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the blueprint or guide for research (Dodds & Hess, 2020). The study is hinged on the New Public Management (NPM) theory, Public Value theory, and Institutional theory. The use of these three theories is justified by the multifaceted nature of government branding and service delivery, which cannot be adequately explained by a single theoretical perspective. The New Public Management theory explains efficiency, performance, and results-oriented service delivery; Public Value theory focuses on citizen satisfaction, trust, and inclusiveness; while Institutional theory explains conformity to established norms, legitimacy, and regulatory frameworks. The integration of these theories therefore provides a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of how government branding strategies influence service delivery and SME satisfaction.

2.2.1 New Public Management Theory

New Public Management (NPM) emerged in the 1980s as a response to widespread concerns about inefficiency, rigidity, and bureaucracy in public administration systems. It was primarily influenced by neoliberal reforms in countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, where governments sought to modernize the public sector through market-oriented principles and private-sector management practices. Proponents such as Christopher Hood (1991) and Osborne and Gaebler (1992) popularized the concept by arguing that governments should adopt business-like approaches that emphasize efficiency, performance, and customer satisfaction rather than purely administrative compliance. The NPM movement was further strengthened by global economic pressures, fiscal austerity, and increasing citizen demands for transparency and accountability in government operations.

The central idea of NPM is the transformation of citizens into “customers” whose satisfaction determines the effectiveness of government performance. It promotes decentralization, performance-based management, competition within public agencies, and output-oriented evaluation mechanisms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In this view, public officials are expected to be innovative managers who deliver value to the public through efficient use of resources and responsive service delivery. Within the devolved governance framework in Kenya, these principles are reflected in county-level reforms that emphasize performance contracts, citizen charters, and digital platforms designed to enhance service efficiency. Branding strategies such as transparency, accountability, and communication are consistent with NPM ideals because they signal a professional, responsive, and citizen-centered administration.

Contemporary scholars continue to expand the relevance of NPM in light of digital transformation, citizen co-production, and adaptive governance. Drechsler and Kattel (2020) observe that the rise of data analytics, e-participation tools, and artificial intelligence supports the NPM goal of improving efficiency and performance monitoring. Similarly, Trondal (2023) emphasizes that the integration of digital technologies has transformed public institutions into data-driven entities capable of responding quickly to citizen needs. These developments demonstrate that NPM continues to evolve as governments balance efficiency with innovation. However, critics such as Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) caution that overemphasis on managerial

principles may erode democratic values, inclusivity, and participatory governance. In developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the successful implementation of NPM principles is often constrained by limited resources, weak institutional capacity, and political interference that compromise transparency and accountability (Mwita, 2021).

In the Kenyan context, NPM reforms are visible in public sector modernization efforts such as the Performance Contracting Framework, the Rapid Results Initiative, and the introduction of Huduma Centres to streamline service delivery. These initiatives demonstrate how customer-oriented approaches can improve government responsiveness and efficiency. Nonetheless, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor coordination across departments, and entrenched bureaucratic cultures have slowed progress. The Kenyan counties, including Bungoma, have adopted elements of NPM by promoting results-based management, citizen engagement forums, and open data systems to enhance accountability and service satisfaction.

For this study, NPM provides a foundational theoretical framework that explains why county governments adopt branding strategies to enhance service delivery satisfaction among SMEs. Transparency branding promotes openness and predictability in administrative processes, accountability branding reinforces responsibility and performance oversight, and e-government branding demonstrates the adoption of technology to achieve efficiency and responsiveness. These practices reflect the NPM principle that public institutions must operate with the same rigor and customer orientation found in competitive private enterprises. By aligning public services with customer expectations and performance outcomes, NPM supports a paradigm where SMEs are viewed as valued clients whose satisfaction directly reflects the effectiveness of county governance. Although political influence and institutional inertia may limit full realization of these ideals, NPM remains central in understanding branding as a performance-driven governance approach that seeks to modernize county service delivery and increase SME satisfaction.

2.2.2 Public Value Theory

Public Value Theory was pioneered by Mark Moore (1995), who proposed that the central purpose of public management is to create value that citizens recognize and appreciate. This theory emerged as a corrective to the limitations of the New Public

Management (NPM) model, which focused heavily on efficiency and market-driven performance. Unlike NPM's market orientation, Public Value Theory emphasizes legitimacy, trust, citizen engagement, and responsiveness to social needs. It posits that government organizations should not only deliver services efficiently but also ensure that these services have meaning and impact for the public they serve. Over time, the theory has evolved into an influential paradigm for understanding the broader purpose of governance, balancing managerial efficiency with democratic accountability and inclusiveness.

At its core, Public Value Theory suggests that government actions are valuable when they are legitimate, politically sustainable, and operationally effective (Bryson et al., 2014). It centers on the relationship between public institutions and citizens, where responsiveness, inclusiveness, and trust are viewed as the foundation of effective governance. According to Benington and Moore (2011), the public sector must continuously negotiate between competing interests, moral values, and institutional constraints to create outcomes that enhance social welfare. In the context of county governments, branding strategies such as transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government can be seen as practical mechanisms for creating and communicating public value. These branding practices help align government performance with citizen expectations, thereby improving satisfaction among SMEs that rely on government services for their growth and sustainability.

Recent studies have expanded the application of Public Value Theory to digital governance, participatory budgeting, and open government initiatives. O'Flynn (2020) and Nabatchi (2023) emphasize that in the digital era, the creation of public value depends on collaborative processes, inclusive dialogue, and transparent communication between governments and stakeholders. This collaboration enables co-production, where citizens and enterprises actively participate in shaping policies and evaluating outcomes. In this regard, transparency and e-government branding promote accessibility and responsiveness, while accountability and communication branding strengthen legitimacy and public confidence. The integration of these elements in county governance contributes to enhanced satisfaction, particularly among SMEs that depend on predictable and fair service delivery systems.

Nevertheless, Public Value Theory has faced criticism for being conceptually broad

and challenging to operationalize. Talbot (2009) notes that the concept of “value” is inherently subjective and varies depending on societal priorities and stakeholder perspectives. Similarly, Meynhardt and Bozeman (2022) argue that public value creation can be undermined by political interference, bureaucratic rigidity, and resource constraints that distort intended outcomes. Measuring public value therefore requires multidimensional indicators that capture both tangible and intangible aspects such as trust, fairness, efficiency, and citizen satisfaction.

In Kenya’s devolved governance framework, Public Value Theory provides a useful foundation for understanding how county governments can enhance legitimacy and trust among citizens and SMEs. Through transparent decision-making, inclusive communication, and digital service innovations, counties can build stronger relationships with their stakeholders and foster satisfaction with service delivery. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) emphasizes accountability, participation, and equitable resource distribution, all of which align with the tenets of Public Value Theory. When county governments adopt branding strategies that reflect these principles, they not only enhance service delivery but also strengthen institutional credibility and citizen engagement.

In this study, Public Value Theory supports the argument that branding strategies are not merely administrative tools but instruments for creating value through legitimacy, trust, and inclusiveness. SME satisfaction therefore becomes a key indicator of how effectively counties generate and sustain public value through their branding and service delivery strategies. By integrating ethical governance, responsiveness, and open communication, county governments can transform public administration into a vehicle for social cohesion, accountability, and sustained economic growth.

2.2.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory, first advanced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and later expanded by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), provides a valuable lens for understanding how organizations behave within broader social and cultural environments. The theory asserts that organizational actions are shaped not only by technical and economic considerations but also by the norms, values, and expectations of the society in which they operate. According to this perspective, organizations seek legitimacy and survival by aligning their practices with accepted institutional rules and conventions. This

orientation toward legitimacy often leads organizations to imitate structures, policies, and processes that are widely viewed as appropriate, even when those practices may not necessarily enhance efficiency. In public administration, this explains why many government institutions adopt reforms or management models that mirror global best practices, as conformity signals professionalism, credibility, and good governance.

Institutional Theory identifies three dominant mechanisms that explain this process of organizational conformity. The first, coercive isomorphism, arises from formal pressures such as laws, regulations, and political directives that compel organizations to align with external expectations. For example, county governments in Kenya are required by national legislation, such as the Public Finance Management Act (2012) and the Access to Information Act (2016), to implement transparent budgeting and reporting practices. These legal frameworks act as coercive forces that push counties to adopt branding strategies emphasizing transparency and accountability. The second mechanism, normative isomorphism, emerges from professional norms, standards, and training that shape what is considered appropriate within a given field. Public administrators often internalize shared values of integrity, performance, and public service ethics, leading to consistent branding patterns across counties. The third, mimetic isomorphism, occurs when organizations imitate successful peers, particularly under conditions of uncertainty. Counties may replicate branding strategies or digital systems adopted by more advanced or high-performing counties, not necessarily because of evidence of effectiveness, but because such imitation conveys legitimacy and competence to the public and oversight agencies.

Recent scholarship highlights that institutional conformity is particularly evident in developing countries, where external actors such as donors, development agencies, and international organizations influence reform agendas (Christensen et al., 2021; Scott, 2014). In Kenya, international development partners such as the World Bank, UNDP, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) often promote institutional reforms that emphasize open governance, e-government, and citizen accountability. Consequently, many counties implement branding initiatives that align with these global governance norms, even when local conditions limit full operationalization. Such dynamics often lead to ceremonial adoption, where counties symbolically display branding efforts such as transparency portals, public dashboards,

or citizen charters to meet legitimacy requirements without fully integrating them into everyday administrative practice.

While Institutional Theory provides valuable insight into the diffusion of administrative practices, it has also faced significant critique. Scholars such as Greenwood et al. (2017) and Lawrence and Suddaby (2021) argue that the theory tends to overemphasize compliance and understate the role of agency, innovation, and contextual adaptation. In practice, organizations and leaders are not passive recipients of institutional pressures; they interpret and reshape these pressures to suit their political, social, and operational realities. In the Kenyan county governance context, political leaders and administrators often selectively adopt branding elements that enhance their visibility or align with prevailing political narratives. This selective institutionalization results in uneven implementation across counties, where some branding strategies are prioritized while others remain symbolic or underdeveloped. Furthermore, institutional theorists note that excessive conformity can stifle innovation and responsiveness. When counties adopt branding practices primarily for external validation rather than for genuine performance improvement, they risk decoupling, a situation where formal structures and policies exist but their practical execution is weak or inconsistent. Decoupling undermines the transformative potential of public sector branding, as it limits its ability to enhance service delivery or build trust with SMEs and citizens. Empirical research in Kenya and other African countries suggests that such gaps are often exacerbated by limited resources, bureaucratic inertia, and politicization of administrative processes (Otenyo, 2023; Kihara, 2022).

Despite these challenges, Institutional Theory remains highly relevant for explaining how and why county governments in Kenya, such as Bungoma County, adopt branding strategies related to transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government. These initiatives reflect broader institutional expectations of modernization and reform within devolved governance. Counties implement branding to demonstrate alignment with constitutional values of openness and citizen participation, to satisfy oversight institutions such as the Office of the Auditor General and the Controller of Budget, and to project an image of credibility to citizens, investors, and development partners. Political leaders also play a pivotal role by shaping which branding strategies receive visibility and resources, thus reinforcing the

theory's recognition of institutional power and legitimacy.

In the context of this study, Institutional Theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the symbolic and functional dimensions of government branding. It shows that branding is not only a managerial or communication exercise but also an institutional behavior aimed at demonstrating legitimacy, compliance, and alignment with accepted norms of governance. The theory helps explain why counties pursue similar branding strategies despite differences in resources, capacities, or outcomes, and how these efforts are moderated by political influence. Therefore, Institutional Theory enriches the conceptual foundation of this study by linking the adoption of branding practices to the pursuit of legitimacy, trust, and social acceptance within Kenya's devolved system of government.

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of research studies that relate to the subject under investigation. It examines findings from prior studies to identify key trends, relationships, and patterns among variables relevant to government branding strategies and service delivery. This section also evaluates areas of consensus and debate among scholars, highlighting how different studies have approached similar research questions from varying theoretical and methodological perspectives. By synthesizing these findings, the review establishes what is already known about the link between branding strategies and public service outcomes, while identifying where gaps in evidence remain. In doing so, it positions the current research within the broader academic discourse and provides justification for exploring the topic within Kenya's devolved governance system.

The review also assesses the practical application of theories such as the New Public Management Theory, Public Value Theory, and Institutional Theory in previous empirical work. It analyzes how elements such as transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government branding influence service delivery performance, particularly in relation to satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Furthermore, the review acknowledges the moderating role of political influence, which often determines the success or sustainability of these initiatives. By evaluating the design, methodology, and findings of past studies, this section identifies key limitations that this research seeks to address. Overall, the empirical review provides the evidence base that informs the conceptual framework and strengthens the rationale

for investigating how government branding strategies can enhance service quality, legitimacy, and citizen trust within devolved governance in Kenya.

2.3.1 Government Transparency Branding and Service Delivery

Government transparency has been widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of effective governance and a key driver of improved service delivery. It enables citizens to access information on public resource use, decision-making processes, and service performance, which in turn strengthens accountability and public confidence. Alessandro et al. (2021) conducted an empirical study that emphasizes the role of transparency in promoting accountability and citizen involvement by making government actions and expenditures visible to the public. Their findings indicate that transparency operates as both a democratic principle and a managerial strategy that enhances efficiency, integrity, and responsiveness in service delivery. When citizens can monitor government activities and track public spending, they are more likely to engage constructively with institutions and demand better outcomes. This process builds trust, which is critical for sustaining a positive relationship between citizens and the state.

From a branding perspective, transparency is not only an ethical requirement but also a strategic communication tool that shapes public perception of government reliability and integrity. Mahmud et al. (2021) demonstrate that transparency initiatives strengthen a government's brand by reinforcing its identity and commitment to openness. Their empirical research found that governments which consistently communicate clear and accessible information are perceived as more trustworthy and credible. Slogans and campaigns such as "Open Government, Open Future" or "Huduma Bora kwa Wote" exemplify the effort to translate transparency values into tangible brand messages. When these messages are supported by consistent government actions such as open data portals, participatory budgeting, and public expenditure reports, they help align citizen expectations with real service delivery outcomes. As a result, transparency branding contributes directly to improved satisfaction and reinforces the perception that government services are equitable and dependable.

Recent empirical work has expanded the understanding of transparency beyond the publication of information to include the creation of participatory mechanisms and

interactive platforms. Timofeyev et al. (2023) found that effective service delivery depends heavily on transparent processes that inform citizens about service options, eligibility criteria, and grievance redress mechanisms. Their analysis revealed that when citizens have easy access to information, they are better positioned to hold public officials accountable and contribute to monitoring service quality. Transparency also enables governments to identify inefficiencies and improve performance through continuous feedback and data analysis. This aligns with the growing use of digital dashboards and open data systems that track key performance indicators in real time, allowing both citizens and administrators to assess progress objectively.

Recent developments in digital governance further emphasize the transformative power of transparency. Studies by Alarcon and Cinar (2022) show that integrating digital technologies such as mobile applications, social media, and e-portals into public administration enhances transparency by facilitating two-way communication and real-time access to data. This digital shift has allowed governments to publish performance reports, budget data, and procurement information instantly, thus reducing opportunities for corruption and improving service efficiency. In Kenya, the eCitizen platform and County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) have been instrumental in making government operations more transparent and accessible to both citizens and enterprises. However, the success of these platforms depends on consistent updates, user-friendly designs, and citizen awareness, which remain areas requiring improvement.

Despite progress, empirical studies continue to highlight barriers that prevent the full realization of transparency objectives. Mbaya et al. (2018) provide evidence that corruption, political interference, and weak institutional capacities remain persistent obstacles to transparent governance in Kenya. Their study revealed that despite the adoption of open government frameworks, the persistence of opaque procurement practices and selective disclosure continues to erode citizen trust. Public dissatisfaction with corruption and service inefficiency remains high, leading to skepticism toward transparency initiatives. This finding underscores that transparency branding alone is insufficient if not accompanied by institutional reforms, ethical leadership, and enforcement of accountability mechanisms.

More recent studies in Kenya, such as Otenyo (2022) and Kiptoo and Chepkemoi

(2023), suggest that county governments have made progress in publishing budget documents, performance reports, and procurement data online, yet public awareness and utilization of such information remain low. Many citizens and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) still lack access to digital platforms or the capacity to interpret technical government data. This situation limits the impact of transparency branding on service delivery outcomes, particularly at the county level where engagement with SMEs is crucial for local economic development. County governments such as Bungoma have initiated open budget forums and participatory planning sessions, but inconsistent implementation and resource constraints have hampered their effectiveness.

Comparative evidence from other countries provides useful lessons. In Indonesia, Handayani and Wibowo (2021) found that public access to digital transparency platforms significantly improved local government performance and reduced administrative corruption. In Ghana, Aboagye and Mensah (2022) observed that participatory transparency initiatives, such as community scorecards and citizen budget hearings, fostered trust and enhanced accountability. These experiences highlight that transparency branding must go beyond information disclosure to include civic engagement and performance monitoring to generate meaningful improvements in service satisfaction.

Despite these efforts, there remains a clear gap in the empirical literature regarding how transparency and government branding affect SME engagement with county-level services. Few studies have examined how open governance practices influence SMEs' access to financing, business support programs, and administrative services. Understanding this relationship is important because SMEs depend heavily on transparent regulations, predictable processes, and fair competition to thrive. Enhanced transparency can reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption that disproportionately affect smaller enterprises. Therefore, studying how transparency branding contributes to SME satisfaction and performance in counties such as Bungoma can provide valuable insights into how governance reforms can be tailored to local economic realities.

In conclusion, empirical evidence consistently supports the view that transparency enhances service delivery, accountability, and public trust. Nevertheless, its practical

application remains uneven, and its implications for SMEs are underexplored. The need to empirically assess how transparency branding affects SME satisfaction and service delivery at the county level is both timely and important. Addressing this research gap can contribute to the design of more inclusive governance strategies that strengthen local economic growth, foster citizen trust, and improve the visibility and credibility of county governments in Kenya's devolved system.

2.3.2 Government Accountability Branding and Service Delivery

Accountability in governance has been empirically recognized as one of the most important determinants of transparency, efficiency, and public trust in service delivery. It ensures that public officials and institutions are held responsible for their actions and decisions, thereby fostering integrity and responsiveness. According to Ndungu (2024), accountability operates as both a managerial and ethical construct that links decision-making to measurable outcomes and public expectations. His empirical findings demonstrate that top management commitment and strong policy implementation mechanisms are fundamental in achieving effective accountability. The study further notes that organizations with clear accountability frameworks and enforcement procedures tend to perform better in service delivery, as responsibilities are well-defined and oversight mechanisms are functional. The Institute of Economic Affairs (2020) similarly argues that accountability encompasses two main dimensions: answerability, which involves providing explanations for decisions and actions, and enforceability, which entails sanctions or corrective measures for misconduct. Weak enforcement mechanisms, therefore, diminish the effectiveness of accountability and limit its contribution to improving service delivery outcomes.

Empirical research from multiple contexts supports this argument. Marvel and Girth (2020), Piatak et al. (2017), and Groenendyk (2022) examined the relationship between accountability, citizen satisfaction, and public perceptions of government performance. Their findings show that when citizens perceive that public institutions operate transparently and are held accountable for results, they express higher satisfaction levels and greater trust in governance systems. Similarly, Boyne et al. (2019); James and John (2017) highlighted how satisfaction with municipal services influences political behavior, including voting decisions and public approval of leadership. These studies suggest that accountability not only affects the quality of

public services but also shapes citizens' perceptions of government legitimacy. Marvel and Girth (2020) further observed that accountability mechanisms reduce the tendency for blame-shifting and enhance clarity about who is responsible for policy success or failure. Groenendyk (2022) added that political biases and partisanship often mediate how accountability is perceived, as citizens' judgments may depend on their political affiliations or trust in particular institutions.

The recent work of Rees and Hondeghe (2022) expands this discussion by emphasizing that accountability must be adaptive and citizen-centered to remain effective in dynamic governance systems. They argue that traditional hierarchical accountability is being replaced by network-based models, where governments must answer not only to superior authorities but also to citizens, civil society, and digital audiences. This shift aligns with branding strategies that emphasize openness, transparency, and dialogue as tools for demonstrating responsibility. By communicating performance outcomes and acknowledging public concerns, governments strengthen their credibility and brand identity as responsive institutions.

In the Kenyan context, several studies have explored how accountability functions as both a governance principle and a branding mechanism that influences public trust. Mutua (2019) examined the branding of the "Huduma Namba" initiative and found that the government's efforts to communicate accountability, efficiency, and technological modernization significantly improved public awareness and trust. The study showed that the clarity and visibility of branding messages increased citizens' perception that the government was delivering services more efficiently. Similarly, Oloo and Ndegwa (2021) investigated the role of branding in advancing Kenya's "Big Four Agenda," focusing on manufacturing, housing, healthcare, and food security. Their findings indicated that well-structured government branding campaigns that emphasize accountability in project implementation increased public understanding and support. These studies affirm that accountability-based branding can positively shape perceptions of government performance and reinforce citizens' sense of inclusion in development initiatives.

Beyond Kenya, African studies also reinforce the significance of accountability in strengthening public sector credibility. Boamah (2018) examined government branding during Ghana's Ebola response and found that clear communication and

accountability in resource management enhanced citizen confidence and compliance with health guidelines. This demonstrates that accountability-driven branding not only improves service delivery but also builds resilience in times of crisis. Crook (2018) provided evidence that decentralization in Kenya has further strengthened accountability by bringing decision-making closer to the people. By transferring authority and financial resources to county governments, decentralization has created opportunities for citizen monitoring and feedback. This finding is consistent with the World Bank (2022), which showed empirically that decentralization enhances service delivery through local participation, transparency, and answerability.

However, more recent evaluations suggest that while decentralization has improved local responsiveness, gaps in accountability persist. Studies by Mwangi (2022) and Kibicho (2023) show that weak oversight institutions, limited fiscal discipline, and political patronage continue to undermine accountability mechanisms in several counties. County assemblies, which are tasked with oversight, often face political interference or lack the capacity to enforce sanctions. As a result, branding strategies that emphasize accountability risk being perceived as symbolic rather than substantive if they are not supported by institutional integrity and enforcement structures.

Despite the growing body of empirical literature on accountability in governance, significant research gaps remain. Much of the existing work has focused on political and administrative accountability within national government institutions or large public agencies. There is limited empirical evidence on how accountability operates as a branding strategy that influences service delivery among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This is particularly relevant in devolved contexts such as Bungoma County, where SMEs form a crucial part of the local economy and depend on predictable and transparent government interactions. Examining how accountability branding influences service delivery to SMEs can provide valuable insights into how counties can strengthen their image and credibility while fostering business confidence.

In this regard, the current study extends the accountability discourse by focusing on its role as a branding strategy that not only enhances service delivery but also reinforces the government's reputation and legitimacy. Through clear reporting, feedback systems, and open communication, accountability branding can create a

perception of responsibility and reliability among SMEs and other stakeholders. Counties that regularly publish performance reports, invite citizen feedback, and take corrective action in response to identified gaps demonstrate a commitment to integrity and service excellence. This focus fills a critical empirical gap by linking accountability with service delivery at the county level and positioning it within the broader framework of government branding. The study therefore contributes to understanding how accountability branding can support efficient public service delivery and sustainable economic growth in devolved governance systems such as that of Bungoma County.

2.3.3 Government Communication Branding Strategy and Service Delivery

Government communication strategies are pivotal in enhancing transparency, trust, and effective service delivery. Clear and timely communication allows governments to build legitimacy and credibility while ensuring that citizens understand their rights, obligations, and available services. According to Roman et al. (2019) and Lee (2021), effective communication enhances transparency by making information accessible and comprehensible, fostering public confidence in governance institutions. Similarly, Hyland et al. (2021) and Munoz (2019) emphasize that when government agencies provide accurate and timely information, they empower citizens to participate more effectively in decision-making processes. These studies collectively suggest that well-structured communication is a prerequisite for efficient service delivery and sustainable trust between governments and their stakeholders. However, the majority of this research has focused on large national institutions or ministries, leaving a gap in understanding how government communication influences service delivery at local levels, especially among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in counties such as Bungoma.

From a branding perspective, communication serves as the central vehicle through which a government articulates its values, identity, and performance commitments. A strong communication brand helps create a recognizable and credible government image that resonates with citizens and businesses alike. Research by Lin and Wang (2018) and Eshghi et al. (2017) demonstrates that, in corporate settings, clear and consistent communication builds customer loyalty, reinforces trust, and enhances the perceived value of services. Translating these insights to the public sector, consistent

government communication can similarly foster loyalty among citizens and SMEs by aligning expectations with performance. Chiou (2022) supports this view, arguing that a strong public image cultivated through communication strengthens citizens' attachment to government programs. These parallels indicate that governments, like private entities, can leverage communication branding to reinforce public satisfaction, particularly when communication is open, relatable, and sustained.

Empirical evidence from African contexts underscores this relationship between strategic communication and effective service delivery. Adeyemi and Ojo (2020) examined Nigeria's anti-corruption branding campaign and found that symbolic messaging and consistent communication significantly improved citizens' perceptions of government integrity and effectiveness. Likewise, Teodoro and An (2018) observed that symbolic communication strategies enhance citizens' sense of connection to government institutions by making public policies more understandable and emotionally resonant. In Kenya, Mutua (2019); Oloo and Ndegwa (2021) found that the government's branding and communication around the "Huduma Namba" and "Big Four Agenda" initiatives increased citizen awareness and trust in public programs. These studies affirm that effective communication branding can strengthen public confidence, reinforce legitimacy, and enhance satisfaction with government services.

Recent studies further reveal that communication branding influences not only trust but also behavioral outcomes among citizens and SMEs. Wanjohi (2023) found that timely dissemination of policy updates and digital notices by county governments improved compliance with business registration and licensing requirements. Similarly, Mwaura and Oduor (2022) demonstrated that when county governments actively communicate regulatory procedures and support programs, SMEs report fewer administrative delays and greater satisfaction with service delivery. These findings suggest that communication branding functions as both a relational and operational strategy, bridging the gap between government intentions and citizen perceptions.

Further, studies by Widanti (2022) and Nisbet (2019) highlight that communication strategies contribute significantly to simplifying complex administrative information. When governments provide clear instructions about eligibility criteria, service

processes, and application requirements, citizens and businesses experience less bureaucratic frustration and greater satisfaction with service outcomes. Kim (2019) and Hanna (2018) add that participatory communication, which encourages dialogue between citizens and officials, enhances co-creation of services and nurtures a sense of ownership. Such two-way communication mechanisms not only strengthen transparency but also help governments tailor services to the real needs of their clients, including SMEs.

The rise of digital governance has expanded the scope and reach of government communication. Open Government Data (OGD) initiatives, reviewed by Alexopoulos et al. (2024) and Bertot et al. (2024), demonstrate that sharing public data promotes accountability, innovation, and informed decision-making. Through open data portals and interactive websites, governments can enhance service accessibility for businesses, enabling SMEs to make evidence-based operational decisions. However, despite the growing adoption of OGD frameworks in national agencies, there remains limited empirical research on their effectiveness at the county level in Kenya. Many SMEs in rural counties, such as Bungoma, still face barriers to accessing digital platforms or lack the capacity to interpret technical data. This digital divide weakens the impact of communication branding efforts and highlights the need for localized, user-friendly communication strategies.

Continuous evaluation is another critical dimension of effective communication branding. Staniszewska et al. (2018) emphasize that government communication must be routinely assessed and refined to remain relevant and responsive to citizen needs. Feedback mechanisms, such as satisfaction surveys, public consultations, and social media engagement, enable governments to track perceptions and adjust their communication strategies accordingly. Counties such as Makueni and Kisumu have begun integrating digital citizen feedback dashboards that measure satisfaction and service uptake in real time (GOK, 2023). However, there is still limited empirical research evaluating whether such adaptive communication approaches improve service delivery outcomes across specific sectors, particularly among SMEs. This gap suggests a need for context-specific analysis of how communication branding strategies influence satisfaction, loyalty, and perceptions of service quality in devolved units.

Overall, the reviewed literature shows that communication branding plays a fundamental role in strengthening the relationship between governments and citizens. Effective communication builds credibility, supports accountability, and helps manage public expectations by linking government actions with stated policies and commitments. Nevertheless, most existing studies focus on the general population or national-level institutions, overlooking localized economic actors such as SMEs. The current study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how county government communication branding strategies influence service delivery outcomes among SMEs in Bungoma County. It examines how communication practices affect awareness, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, and how these relationships contribute to a positive county brand image. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of more inclusive, transparent, and citizen-centered communication systems that enhance service delivery and strengthen devolved governance in Kenya.

2.3.4 E-Government Strategy and Service Delivery

Globally, governments are increasingly adopting digital technologies to enhance public service delivery, improve accountability, and strengthen citizen participation. The evolution of e-government has transformed how states interact with citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders. Janowski (2018) and Sigwejo (2020) highlight that the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, big data analytics, and the Internet of Things (IoT) has the potential to revolutionize governance systems by reducing inefficiencies and improving service quality. Their studies reveal that digital platforms facilitate faster access to information, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and improve transparency in decision-making processes. Amesho et al. (2022) and Sørensen (2017) further demonstrate through empirical evidence that e-government systems enhance operational efficiency and citizen satisfaction by simplifying administrative procedures and minimizing face-to-face interactions that often create opportunities for corruption. However, these studies also acknowledge persistent challenges, including limited infrastructure, inadequate digital literacy, and high failure rates of ICT projects despite significant public investments (Ondego & Moturi, 2020; Zeebaree, 2021).

Ellerup (2018) adds a branding dimension to this discussion by arguing that digital transformation initiatives are most effective when integrated into a coherent

government branding strategy. In this context, branding extends beyond visual identity and slogans to encompass the values and vision communicated through technology-driven services. Effective e-government branding signals competence, reliability, and innovation, thereby enhancing the credibility of public institutions. Ellerup's empirical findings show that governments that maintain consistent online communication and digital engagement foster stronger citizen trust and legitimacy. Furthermore, scholars such as Dada and Manda (2023) emphasize that governments that present a unified digital identity across all service platforms project a more professional and responsive image, strengthening both administrative efficiency and citizen satisfaction. Nevertheless, there remains limited empirical understanding of how these branding efforts influence local economic development and smaller business ecosystems, particularly among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which are critical actors in regional economies.

Olnes (2017) emphasizes that the success of e-government lies in its ability to remain citizen-centric. Digital transformation should prioritize inclusivity and accessibility, ensuring that technology serves diverse social and economic groups. Brunetti et al. (2020) reinforce this argument by demonstrating that the internal capacity of public institutions is essential to sustaining technological reforms. Their study highlights that government employees must possess adequate digital literacy and that institutions must restructure processes to optimize technology use. Without sufficient human capacity, even well-funded digital initiatives risk underperformance. Despite these findings, empirical studies rarely explore how digital capacity building and e-government implementation affect SMEs, especially those operating in rural and semi-urban areas such as Bungoma County. County-specific research is needed to determine how the digital divide and limited ICT capacity shape the satisfaction of SMEs that rely on government services for registration, compliance, and taxation.

Collaboration across sectors is another critical success factor in e-government development. Gray (2018) argues that partnerships between government, the private sector, academia, and civil society foster innovation and ensure the sustainability of digital programs. Through public-private partnerships (PPPs), governments can leverage technological expertise and financial resources from the private sector while maintaining public accountability. Empirical evidence from Gray's study

demonstrates that such collaborations enhance innovation and improve service delivery, particularly in national-scale initiatives. However, the extent to which PPPs contribute to SME-focused service delivery in local contexts remains underexplored. Counties in Kenya, for instance, have adopted technology-based reforms such as e-licensing and digital tax payment systems, but the outcomes for SME accessibility and satisfaction vary widely depending on resource allocation and local capacity.

The Kenyan government's Huduma Centre initiative illustrates the transformative potential of integrated service delivery models supported by technology. Oyugi (2024) and Psck (2024) provide empirical evidence showing that Huduma Centres have enhanced accessibility, reduced waiting times, and improved efficiency in the delivery of essential services such as identification, licensing, and business registration. By consolidating multiple services under one digital and physical roof, the Huduma Centres represent a successful branding of government as citizen-oriented, efficient, and modern. Yet, despite these achievements, the literature reveals a lack of research on how such digital platforms affect SMEs specifically. Understanding the experiences of small businesses within these e-government frameworks is important because SMEs are among the most frequent users of licensing, taxation, and regulatory services, and their satisfaction is central to local economic performance.

Empirical evidence also underscores that the benefits of e-government are not evenly distributed across regions. Studies such as Ndung'u (2022) and Wamuyu (2023) report that while urban counties in Kenya have achieved higher digital adoption rates, rural counties like Bungoma face structural and infrastructural challenges that limit the full realization of e-government potential. Factors such as inadequate broadband coverage, limited ICT skills among entrepreneurs, and inconsistent power supply constrain the ability of SMEs to benefit from digital service platforms. A survey by the Communications Authority of Kenya (2023) further indicates that over 40 percent of SMEs in rural areas still rely on manual administrative systems, which slows business processes and increases costs. This imbalance points to the need for localized and inclusive digital strategies that accommodate regional disparities and promote equitable access to public services.

The convergence of e-government and branding presents new opportunities for county governments to project competence and build trust among citizens and businesses. By

effectively integrating technology into service delivery, counties can enhance their reputation as transparent, responsive, and innovation-driven institutions. Branding efforts that highlight digital efficiency, citizen engagement, and accountability can strengthen the overall image of government while improving service quality. Moreover, e-government branding can serve as a signaling mechanism, demonstrating to external stakeholders including investors and development partners that a county is well-managed and technologically progressive. However, the literature indicates a gap in empirical evidence linking e-government branding to SME satisfaction and performance in local economies. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by assessing how digital platforms, branding strategies, and technological innovations influence service delivery among SMEs in Bungoma County.

In conclusion, e-government represents a transformative approach to public service delivery, combining technology, branding, and citizen-centered governance. Existing studies demonstrate clear benefits of digitalization in promoting efficiency, transparency, and accountability, yet they also highlight substantial disparities in access and utilization, particularly for SMEs in rural regions. The present study aims to extend this body of knowledge by examining how e-government branding strategies can strengthen service delivery, enhance trust, and support economic development within the SME sector in Bungoma County. The findings will be vital in shaping policy interventions that align digital transformation efforts with the realities of devolved governance, ensuring that technological advancements translate into tangible service delivery outcomes for all citizens and enterprises.

2.3.5 Political Influence

Political influence plays a critical role in shaping governance outcomes, particularly within devolved systems where political and administrative boundaries often intersect. The concept of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as drivers of innovation and employment has long been recognized, gaining momentum since the late 1940s. Empirical research across the globe has explored various aspects of SME development, emphasizing the role of government policies, institutional frameworks, and political stability in enabling business growth. While existing studies provide substantial insights into government intervention and service delivery, limited empirical work directly examines how political factors influence the effectiveness of

service delivery to SMEs, particularly in localized contexts such as Bungoma County.

In governance literature, political influence is conceptualized as a moderating variable that can either enhance or undermine administrative performance. According to Kromidha (2024), the politicization of public administration affects how citizens and businesses perceive transparency, accountability, and fairness in government processes. When political actors intervene to favor particular constituencies or interests, administrative decisions and branding initiatives may lose credibility, as citizens begin to view them as partisan instruments rather than genuine efforts to improve governance. This politicization can distort the intended outcomes of branding strategies such as transparency messaging, accountability mechanisms, or e-government platforms, which depend heavily on perceived impartiality and professionalism. Conversely, where political leadership demonstrates commitment to ethical governance and inclusivity, it can amplify the positive effects of branding and enhance citizen satisfaction. Political goodwill can also facilitate resource mobilization, strengthen institutional performance, and improve coordination between national and county governments.

Empirical studies from African contexts provide evidence for this dual role of political influence. Kaguru et al. (2023) observed that political patronage and interference in administrative processes often lead to uneven implementation of policies and poor service outcomes. The study found that when appointments, tenders, and resource allocations are influenced by political loyalty rather than merit, the credibility of public institutions diminishes. Similarly, Resce (2022) highlights that political meddling can result in “decoupling,” a situation where reforms such as e-government systems or accountability frameworks are formally adopted but poorly implemented. This phenomenon weakens citizens’ trust, as public commitments to reform fail to translate into tangible improvements in service delivery. The persistence of these practices in devolved governments across Africa demonstrates how political influence continues to shape administrative behavior and citizen perceptions.

In Kenya, political influence has been found to permeate multiple levels of service delivery. Studies by Oyugi (2020) and Wamuyu (2022) indicate that county governments often operate under strong political control, which affects budgeting, staffing, and project prioritization. Projects linked to politically influential figures tend

to receive more attention and resources than those based on technical or community needs. This results in uneven service delivery and contributes to regional disparities in development. Moreover, frequent political interference undermines professional autonomy among county officials, limiting their ability to implement accountability and branding initiatives objectively. The prevalence of short-term political agendas over long-term policy planning further disrupts the consistency required to build and maintain credible government brands.

Scholars such as Marvel and Girth (2020), Piatak et al. (2017), and Groenendyk (2022) have provided valuable insights into how political accountability shapes citizen satisfaction. Their findings indicate that when citizens associate improved service delivery with specific political leaders, satisfaction tends to translate into political support. Conversely, when service failures occur, citizens direct blame toward political figures, influencing electoral outcomes. Boyne et al. (2019); James and John (2017) similarly observed that satisfaction with municipal services is closely linked to political perceptions, reinforcing the importance of credibility and consistency in service delivery. Groenendyk (2022) adds that partisan biases further complicate these relationships, as citizens' evaluations of government performance are often filtered through political affiliations rather than objective assessments.

Despite the rich empirical literature on political influence and public service delivery, there remains a notable gap concerning how these dynamics affect SMEs. In counties such as Bungoma, where SMEs form the backbone of local economies, political favoritism and interference can have direct implications for access to services, procurement opportunities, and fair competition. Kaguru et al. (2023) identify three key dimensions of political influence that are relevant to service delivery outcomes: perceived favoritism in access to services, frequency of political interference, and visibility of political actors in public programs. These factors collectively shape SME experiences with government services, influencing their satisfaction and trust. However, empirical evidence examining these linkages remains limited.

Political stability and good governance are fundamental to a conducive business environment for SMEs. Studies such as Mwaura and Njuguna (2021) and Kihara (2022) show that unpredictable political environments discourage investment and disrupt service delivery, particularly in devolved units that rely on coordinated policies

and consistent leadership. Frequent political conflicts, leadership turnover, and politicized decision-making hinder the continuity of development programs and reduce confidence among entrepreneurs. When governance processes are influenced by political motives, SMEs may experience delays in service provision, discriminatory treatment, or unclear regulatory frameworks, which hinder growth and sustainability. Conversely, stable and inclusive political leadership can attract investment, strengthen institutional trust, and promote efficient service delivery.

Comparative studies from Asia and Latin America provide further context for understanding the political dimensions of SME performance. For instance, Wong (2021) found that in Malaysia, counties with strong political stability and professionalized bureaucracies recorded higher SME growth rates, largely due to predictable regulatory environments and transparent procurement systems. Similarly, Gonzalez and Pereira (2020) showed that in Brazil, local governments that institutionalized anti-patronage mechanisms and citizen oversight frameworks achieved better service outcomes and stronger SME participation in local markets. These comparative insights reinforce the importance of political integrity and institutional independence in fostering sustainable local economic ecosystems.

In summary, political influence acts as a critical contextual factor that shapes the relationship between government branding and SME satisfaction with service delivery. While positive political leadership can reinforce transparency, accountability, and digital innovation, excessive politicization weakens credibility and deters trust. The reviewed literature indicates a strong need for empirical studies that analyze the intersection of politics, branding, and SME development at the county level. This study therefore seeks to bridge this gap by examining how political influence moderates the impact of public branding strategies on service delivery outcomes for SMEs in Bungoma County. The findings were expected to provide valuable insights into how counties can balance political realities with professional governance to enhance service efficiency, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and support inclusive economic growth.

2.3.6 Satisfaction with Public Service Delivery

Customer satisfaction is widely recognized as an attitudinal outcome derived from individuals' or organizations' cumulative experiences with a service provider. In the

public sector, this satisfaction reflects citizens' or enterprises' perceptions of how effectively government institutions deliver on their mandates. The concept has gained prominence under the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, which emphasizes citizen-centered governance, performance measurement, and efficiency in public service delivery (Van de Walle, 2018). According to this perspective, governments, like private organizations, must evaluate performance through the lens of their clients' experiences and expectations. In the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), satisfaction represents a critical measure of how well public institutions facilitate business operations through efficient, transparent, and predictable service delivery.

Service delivery satisfaction has been widely examined through the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), which conceptualizes service quality as a multidimensional construct encompassing reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Reliability refers to the government's ability to deliver services consistently and accurately; responsiveness denotes the willingness and timeliness of assistance to clients; assurance captures the competence, courtesy, and trustworthiness of public officials; empathy involves personalized attention and understanding of client needs; and tangibles represent the physical facilities, technology, and communication tools that shape users' experiences. When applied to public institutions, these dimensions provide a robust framework for evaluating how government agencies meet the expectations of citizens and businesses. Satisfaction occurs when the perceived quality of service exceeds or matches expectations, while dissatisfaction arises when experiences fall short of expectations (Christopher, Bruce & Tansu, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Empirical research has validated the relevance of the SERVQUAL model in assessing satisfaction within the public sector. Beshi and Kaur (2020) found that responsiveness and reliability are among the most significant determinants of citizen and business satisfaction with local government performance. Delays in licensing, permit approvals, and bureaucratic procedures were identified as primary sources of dissatisfaction, particularly among small businesses that rely on predictable service timelines. Similarly, Njeru and Kibera (2019) examined SMEs' perceptions of county service delivery in Kenya and observed that satisfaction was strongly influenced by

the clarity of communication, fairness in administrative processes, and transparency in decision-making. These findings align with the assurance and empathy dimensions of SERVQUAL, highlighting that SMEs value professionalism, procedural justice, and accessibility as much as efficiency.

Other studies in developing economies have reinforced these insights. According to Osman and Basir (2021), satisfaction with public services depends on a combination of tangible and intangible elements, including digital accessibility, staff courtesy, and the perceived integrity of government systems. In Nigeria, Adeyemi and Ojo (2020) found that digital transformation initiatives and clear communication channels improved satisfaction among business owners by reducing the time and costs associated with accessing government services. These studies underscore the importance of combining administrative competence with strong government branding and communication strategies to enhance perceived service quality. Recent research by Ferreira and Almeida (2022) adds that user satisfaction in digital service environments depends on the reliability of online platforms, the simplicity of processes, and the consistency between advertised government commitments and actual service performance. This indicates that branding and communication strategies play a significant role in shaping expectations and, by extension, satisfaction outcomes.

In Kenya, recent efforts such as the Huduma Centre initiative and e-Citizen platforms have further demonstrated the link between service innovation and satisfaction. Oyugi (2024) and Mutua (2019) observed that centralized and digitized service delivery points have significantly improved accessibility and convenience for citizens. For SMEs, these initiatives translate into tangible benefits such as reduced operational delays, improved access to information, and greater confidence in government systems. However, challenges persist at the county level, where disparities in capacity, resources, and leadership affect the consistency of service delivery. Studies by Wamuyu (2023) and Kihara (2022) reveal that counties with weak administrative structures or politicized service channels often record lower satisfaction levels among SMEs, as services are perceived as inconsistent or biased.

Satisfaction with public service delivery also functions as a key indicator of public trust and legitimacy. Van de Walle and Bouckaert (2017) note that consistent positive

service experiences foster greater trust in government institutions, leading to improved cooperation, compliance, and citizen engagement. Conversely, dissatisfaction can result in apathy, complaints, or reduced participation in government programs. For SMEs, satisfaction is closely tied to operational efficiency and competitiveness, as delays or inconsistencies in government services can directly increase business costs. Therefore, enhancing satisfaction is not only a governance imperative but also an economic necessity for promoting local enterprise growth. Comparative studies such as Sanchez and Lopez (2020) in Chile and Rahman (2022) in Malaysia found that citizen satisfaction is significantly correlated with digital readiness and institutional responsiveness, showing that countries with higher digital adoption tend to achieve higher satisfaction rates. These cross-country findings reinforce the value of technology-driven, transparent, and citizen-focused governance.

In the context of Bungoma County, SMEs' satisfaction with public service delivery can be conceptualized through their perceptions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Reliability may reflect consistent licensing and tax administration processes, while responsiveness captures the timeliness of government support and problem resolution. Assurance reflects the competence and professionalism of county officers, empathy relates to the consideration of SME needs in policy design and implementation, and tangibles encompass visible indicators such as branding materials, physical infrastructure, and ICT-enabled platforms. Since SMEs depend heavily on efficient and supportive government services, these factors provide a practical framework for evaluating how branding strategies influence their satisfaction.

Overall, the literature confirms that satisfaction with public service delivery is both a measure of governance effectiveness and a reflection of sustained branding, communication, and institutional performance. However, limited empirical evidence exists on how SMEs in devolved contexts experience satisfaction and how specific branding strategies shape these perceptions. This study seeks to address that gap by examining SME satisfaction with service delivery in Bungoma County and evaluating how branding initiatives through transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government influence perceptions of government performance. By understanding these dynamics, county governments can design evidence-based strategies that not

only improve service quality but also foster enduring trust, loyalty, and legitimacy among the business community.

2.4 Research Gaps

The review of empirical studies has led to identification of research gaps categorized mainly as methodological, conceptual, theoretical and contextual as summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Summary of Research Gaps

Author	Study Title	Findings	Research Gaps
Alessandro et al. (2021)	Role of transparency in promoting accountability and citizen involvement	Transparency is not just a democratic principle but also a strategic tool for building public confidence and improving service effectiveness	The study emphasized general citizen involvement but did not explore how transparency branding specifically influences SMEs' satisfaction in decentralized contexts such as county governments in Kenya. This is a conceptual research gap.
Timofeyev et al. (2023)	Effect of Transparent Processes in Citizen's Satisfaction with Public Service Delivery	Effective service delivery depends on transparent processes that inform citizens about service options, eligibility criteria, and feedback mechanisms.	The focus was on transparency in general service delivery but did not analyze branding strategies as deliberate tools or their effect on SMEs in local government. This is a conceptual research gap.
Mutua (2019)	Effect of Strategic Government Branding of Kenyan government initiatives on Citizen Satisfaction:	Strategic government communication and branding significantly influenced citizen	The study concentrated on a single initiative at the national level; there is limited understanding of how branding strategies operate at the county level to affect

Author	Study Title	Findings	Research Gaps
	A case of "Huduma Namba" registration Campaign	fulfillments and trust in government processes	SMEs' service delivery satisfaction. This is a contextual research gap.
Oloo and Ndegwa (2021)	The role of government branding in promoting Kenya's "Big Four Agenda	Effective branding enhanced public awareness and support for these initiatives, thereby bolstering the government's overall image	The analysis was confined to macro-level development agendas; the effect of branding on everyday service delivery satisfaction among SMEs at the county level remains unexplored. This is a contextual research gap.
Adeyemi and Ojo (2020)	Nigeria's anti-corruption branding efforts and Public Attitude	Symbolic branding and strategic communication positively influenced public attitudes towards anti-corruption initiatives, boosting perceived government effectiveness and legitimacy.	The study focused on symbolic anti-corruption branding in Nigeria; cross-sectoral and SME-focused branding impacts within devolved governance contexts were not addressed. This presents both conceptual and contextual research gaps.
Widanti (2022) and Nisbet (2019)	Role of communication strategies in service delivery	When government communication is accessible, it leads to more efficient and equitable service delivery.	These studies addressed general service efficiency but did not examine branding as a structured communication approach or its specific impact on SMEs' perceptions of service delivery. This presents a conceptual research gap.
Amesho et al. (2022)	Role of E-government Strategy on	Practical implementation of e-government	The study addressed e-government broadly but did not investigate how e-

Author	Study Title	Findings	Research Gaps
	Effective service delivery	strategy significantly improves operational efficiency and service delivery	government branding as a perception-building tool shapes SMEs' satisfaction in devolved settings. This is a conceptual research gap.
Kaguru, Njoroge and Gichure (2023).	Political interference and public service delivery in devolved systems: Evidence from Kenyan counties	Patronage and political interference are associated with uneven implementation of policies and poorer service outcomes when appointments and resource flows reflect political expediency rather than merit	The focus of the study was not on the moderating role of political interference in the nexus between public branding and service delivery satisfaction hence providing a methodological research gap.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a foundational structure or model that outlines the key concepts, variables, relationships, and assumptions that underlie a specific study, research project, theory, or field of inquiry (Kothari & Garg, 2020). Figure 2.1 is the diagrammatical representation of the relationship between the study variables.

Independent Variables

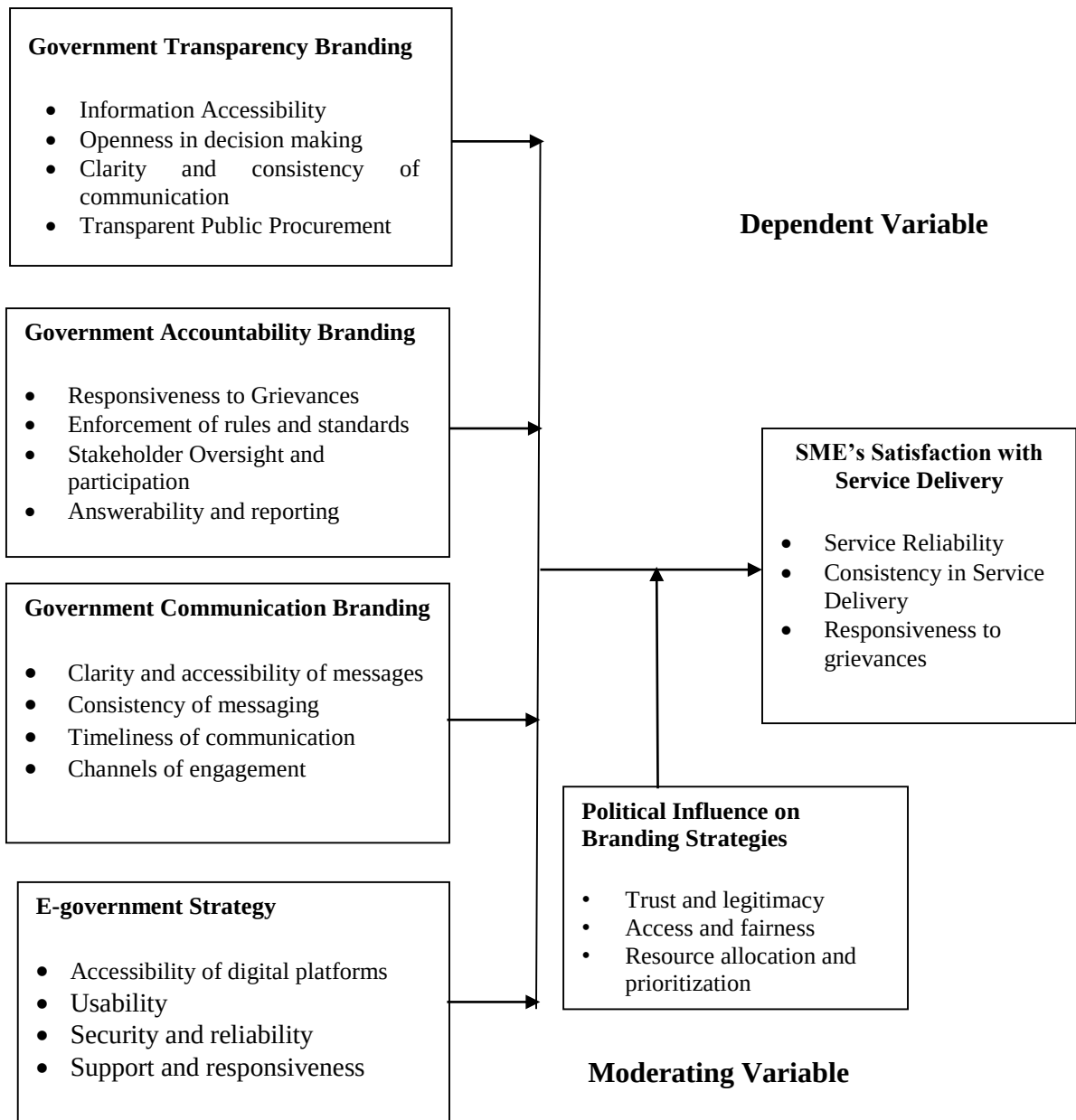


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between the study variables and provides a logical foundation for understanding how government branding strategies influence satisfaction with public service delivery among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County. It draws from the New Public Management Theory, the Public Value Theory, and the Institutional Theory. These theories help explain how transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government branding interact to improve trust and service satisfaction, while political influence

serves as a moderating factor.

Transparency branding represents openness, clarity, and accessibility in government operations (Cucciniello, Porumbescu & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2017). For SMEs that interact with county systems for licensing, permits, and taxation, transparent branding increases confidence that procedures are fair and consistently applied. When county governments publish budgets, service charters, and project outcomes, SMEs perceive reduced risks of corruption and favoritism, which strengthens trust in government institutions. Bauhr and Grimes (2014) found that transparent communication improves satisfaction by helping citizens make informed decisions and reducing uncertainty. In Bungoma County, transparency branding is expected to increase SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery by assuring them that government actions are predictable and fair.

Accountability branding complements transparency by focusing on answerability and responsibility in government performance. It assures SMEs that county officials are not only open about their work but are also held responsible for the outcomes they produce (Christopher, Bruce, and Tansu (2022)). Accountability branding involves establishing clear feedback channels, complaint handling systems, and performance evaluation mechanisms. When these systems function effectively, they project an image of reliability and responsiveness. Manaf, Mohamed, and Harvey (2023) found that accountability mechanisms build public confidence and increase compliance, since they demonstrate that officials can be held to account for their actions. For SMEs, accountability branding signals that the county government is committed to fair treatment and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Communication branding focuses on how governments share information about their policies, programs, and services. It ensures that government requirements and opportunities are communicated clearly and consistently across different media (Lee, Gim & Yoo, 2019). For SMEs, clear and timely information on taxes, licensing procedures, and available support programs reduces uncertainty and operational costs. County governments that use multiple communication channels such as community meetings, local radio, websites, and social media create a stronger sense of inclusion and trust. De Matteis, Striani, and Greco (2023) found that effective communication enhances public confidence and engagement. In this study, communication branding

is viewed as a critical element that promotes inclusivity and satisfaction among SMEs by improving awareness and understanding of government services.

E-government branding reflects a government's commitment to modern, efficient, and technology-driven service delivery. It involves using digital platforms to simplify procedures such as licensing, payments, and service tracking. These platforms increase accessibility and reduce bureaucratic delays for SMEs that often face time and resource constraints. Anwer, Esichaikul, Rehman, and Anjum (2016) observed that e-government systems promote efficiency and transparency by limiting unnecessary interactions and reducing corruption opportunities. Similarly, Chege, Wang, and Suntu (2020) found that digital government services enhance satisfaction by improving convenience and accountability. In Bungoma County, e-government branding has the potential to improve perceptions of efficiency and professionalism while strengthening the county's reputation as an innovation-oriented administration.

Political influence acts as a moderating factor that can strengthen or weaken the impact of branding strategies on service delivery satisfaction. When political leadership supports inclusivity, transparency, and fairness, branding strategies are more effective in improving satisfaction and trust (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022). On the other hand, when political interference leads to favoritism or weakens institutional independence, branding strategies lose credibility and fail to achieve their intended results. Institutional Theory explains that political dynamics shape how administrative actions are interpreted and legitimized by stakeholders. Therefore, recognizing the role of politics is essential to understanding how branding strategies affect service delivery outcomes in devolved governments such as Bungoma County.

Overall, the conceptual framework demonstrates that transparency, accountability, communication, and e-government branding jointly determine SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery. Political influence moderates these relationships by either strengthening or weakening their effects. The framework provides a foundation for testing the study's hypotheses and understanding how effective government branding can enhance service delivery, trust, and satisfaction within county governance systems.

2.5.1 Government Transparency Strategy

Transparency in governance is widely recognized as one of the fundamental pillars of

good public administration and accountability. For governments to achieve meaningful transparency, it is not sufficient merely to release information; they must also ensure that such information is accessible, timely, understandable, and usable by all citizens (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2020). Transparency enables citizens, businesses, and civil society to monitor how governments make decisions, allocate resources, and deliver services. It promotes openness in governance and strengthens public confidence by allowing citizens to verify that public officials act in the collective interest. The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC, 2020) stresses that public sector entities must disclose their decisions, actions, plans, resource utilization, and performance outcomes to maintain public trust and demonstrate accountability. A formal policy on information openness is therefore essential to institutionalize transparency within governance systems.

In modern governance, transparency serves multiple purposes. It acts as a preventive measure against corruption, promotes fiscal responsibility, and facilitates civic participation in decision-making. Transparency in public policy formulation requires that relevant information be made available and accessible to all stakeholders. This includes policy documents, budget data, project implementation reports, and audit outcomes. Open access to such information allows citizens and enterprises to understand government priorities and hold leaders accountable for their actions. For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), transparency is particularly valuable because it ensures predictability in business environments, minimizes administrative uncertainty, and promotes fair competition in government procurement and service access.

Despite its recognized importance, achieving comprehensive transparency remains a significant challenge in many public institutions. One of the major gaps lies in equitable access to information. Although governments increasingly publish data and reports, not all citizens or enterprises have equal capacity to access, interpret, or use the information effectively. Disparities in digital literacy, internet access, and language barriers often exclude marginalized groups from participating in transparency initiatives. As a result, the benefits of openness are not uniformly experienced, particularly in developing contexts where infrastructure and awareness remain limited.

The implementation of open government initiatives such as participatory budgeting and public consultations has shown promise in enhancing accountability and citizen engagement. In Kenya, for example, county-level participatory budgeting exercises have allowed communities to influence resource allocation and project prioritization. However, these initiatives are not uniformly applied across counties, and participation levels vary widely. The absence of standardized processes for citizen input and feedback undermines the potential of such mechanisms to enhance transparency. Many counties still lack structured frameworks to institutionalize public participation beyond token consultations, resulting in inconsistent outcomes.

Another gap concerns the lack of formalized and enforceable policies on information disclosure. While some public agencies voluntarily share information, others remain opaque, particularly in sensitive areas such as procurement, contracting, and financial reporting. Without legal and procedural mandates to disclose information, transparency efforts rely heavily on political goodwill, which can be inconsistent. In addition, measuring the effectiveness of transparency in reducing corruption or improving trust remains difficult. Although greater information availability and public acknowledgment of official actions represent progress, the direct correlation between these efforts and measurable governance improvements is often unclear.

Technological disparities further widen the transparency gap. Digital governance platforms have the potential to transform access to information, yet many developing regions still rely on manual, paper-based systems that limit public scrutiny. Advanced digital economies can integrate real-time data visualization, open data portals, and automated reporting to strengthen transparency. In contrast, countries and counties with weak digital infrastructure struggle to collect, process, and disseminate information effectively. This uneven progress results in a global and local divide where some jurisdictions benefit from modern transparency tools while others lag behind.

The rapid adoption of digital systems also introduces new challenges. While digitalization enables near real-time monitoring of government activities (Dashwood et al. (2022)), it can also create new vulnerabilities such as data manipulation, cybersecurity risks, and misuse of digital platforms for illicit purposes. Without proper oversight and technical safeguards, transparency initiatives can inadvertently become

channels for data breaches or manipulation. Furthermore, maintaining and operating digital transparency systems requires substantial financial investment, skilled personnel, and consistent capacity building. Many counties and government agencies in developing economies, including those in Kenya, face significant resource constraints that hinder the development and sustainability of such systems.

Effective transparency strategies therefore require a holistic approach that combines legal, institutional, technological, and human resource components. Governments must establish clear frameworks for information disclosure, strengthen digital capacity, and ensure inclusivity in access to information. Training public servants on transparency practices, developing user-friendly digital platforms, and engaging civil society in monitoring and evaluation are key steps toward sustained openness. For SMEs, transparent governance reduces transaction costs, enhances predictability, and promotes fair competition, which collectively contribute to improved satisfaction with public service delivery (Chege, Wang, and Suntu 2020)

In summary, government transparency strategies are essential for building public trust, improving accountability, and enhancing service delivery outcomes. However, significant gaps persist in implementation, accessibility, and impact measurement. Addressing disparities in digital capacity, institutionalizing formal information disclosure policies, and fostering active citizen engagement will be critical for realizing the full benefits of transparency. For counties such as Bungoma, developing inclusive and technology-supported transparency strategies will be a vital step toward strengthening governance and improving satisfaction among SMEs that rely on predictable and credible public services.

2.5.2 Government Accountability Strategy

Accountability is one of the most important principles of good governance and a critical factor in maintaining public trust in government institutions. It refers to the duty of public sector entities to explain and justify their decisions, actions, and performance, especially in relation to the use of public resources and the delivery of services to citizens (International Federation of Accountants [IFAC], 2020). Public officials are expected to be answerable for their conduct and to ensure that their actions align with the principles of transparency, integrity, and efficiency. According to Claasen and Alpín-Lardiés (2020), social accountability involves how citizens

demand and enforce responsibility from those in positions of authority. Accountability therefore includes both answerability, which involves providing explanations and information, and enforceability, which involves applying consequences when misconduct or poor performance occurs.

In the policy-making process, accountability can be observed through the establishment of clear performance standards, expenditure control mechanisms, and avenues for public oversight. These mechanisms help ensure that government actions are guided by well-defined objectives and that public resources are used effectively. Indicators of accountability include the performance of public servants, the management of budgetary expenditures, and the responsiveness of institutions to citizen concerns. When citizens have the ability to evaluate government performance using measurable criteria, they become more empowered to demand quality service delivery and ethical conduct from public officials. This link between performance and public trust is central to effective governance and sustainable service delivery.

Empirical studies have shown that social accountability mechanisms play an important role in improving governance outcomes. Instruments such as social audits, citizen report cards, and public expenditure tracking systems have proven useful in monitoring government performance and reducing corruption. The World Bank (2020) notes that these mechanisms are most effective when they are designed to engage citizens, address their interests, and are supported by strong institutional frameworks. When citizens have access to accurate and relevant information about government budgets, procurement processes, and performance indicators, they are better positioned to identify irregularities and hold officials responsible. As a result, accountability becomes a shared responsibility between public officials and the communities they serve.

Effective accountability systems depend on several enabling factors. These include access to information, appropriate legislation, an independent media, and strong oversight institutions that are capable of monitoring and enforcing compliance. The existence of credible sanctions for unethical behavior or poor performance is equally important. Furthermore, collaboration among key actors such as civil society organizations, community groups, and the private sector strengthens accountability by creating networks of collective oversight. The World Bank (2020) emphasizes that

coalitions among multiple actors create mutual pressure that compels institutions to operate responsibly and transparently. Recent global research by OECD (2023) shows that countries with multi-stakeholder accountability systems record higher efficiency and citizen satisfaction, as government actions are subjected to continuous monitoring from diverse interest groups.

In Kenya, accountability is anchored in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which establishes public participation, openness, and integrity as guiding principles of public administration. The Public Finance Management Act (2012) also promotes accountability by requiring detailed reporting of revenues, expenditures, and outcomes. County governments are expected to publish budget information, facilitate citizen participation, and act on audit recommendations. However, the extent of implementation varies across counties. In some cases, political interference, weak institutional capacity, and limited internal controls hinder full compliance. Reports from the Office of the Auditor-General continue to highlight cases of financial mismanagement, delayed project completion, and non-adherence to procurement procedures, indicating that accountability mechanisms are not yet fully institutionalized.

Social accountability initiatives at the county level have created new opportunities for citizen engagement. Tools such as participatory budgeting, citizen scorecards, and public forums have enabled residents to monitor service delivery and influence decision-making. These initiatives have improved transparency and responsiveness in several counties, although participation remains uneven. In many areas, marginalized groups, including small business operators, are underrepresented in these processes. Sustained efforts are needed to ensure that engagement mechanisms are inclusive and that citizen feedback leads to tangible improvements in service delivery. According to Omolo (2022), inclusive accountability forums that integrate youth, women, and business associations result in higher-quality policy outcomes and better alignment of local development programs with public priorities.

Technological advances are providing new platforms for accountability. The introduction of e-governance systems and digital feedback tools allows citizens and businesses to track expenditures, report corruption, and evaluate service quality. Mobile applications and online portals have made it easier to collect data and

communicate directly with government agencies. However, digital accountability systems also require strong institutional support, technical capacity, and security safeguards. In areas with low digital literacy or poor internet access, the effectiveness of these systems is limited, which highlights the need for targeted capacity building. Studies such as Wamuyu (2023) emphasize that counties adopting mobile-based feedback mechanisms report higher satisfaction and fewer administrative bottlenecks, indicating the growing potential of technology to enhance accountability at the grassroots level.

A comprehensive accountability strategy must therefore combine institutional and social approaches. Institutional accountability relies on laws, regulations, and formal reporting structures, while social accountability depends on active citizen involvement and civic monitoring. When both approaches operate together, they create a culture of openness and responsibility. For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), strong accountability frameworks provide assurance that local governments are managing resources fairly and providing services in an efficient and predictable manner. This assurance enhances trust and satisfaction among businesses that depend on county services. Effective accountability branding, in this context, communicates the government's commitment to fairness, performance, and ethical stewardship of public resources.

In summary, accountability strategies form the backbone of responsible governance and effective service delivery. They ensure that power is exercised prudently, resources are used efficiently, and the interests of citizens and businesses safeguarded. Despite notable progress, challenges such as political interference, limited institutional capacity, and inconsistent enforcement continue to weaken accountability efforts. Strengthening oversight institutions, expanding citizen participation, and enhancing transparency in decision-making are essential steps toward building more accountable and credible governance systems in devolved units such as Bungoma County. Embedding accountability into the culture of governance through branding and technology-driven communication can transform how citizens and SMEs perceive their governments, reinforcing long-term trust and sustainable local development.

2.5.3 Government Communication Strategy

Government communication is a central element of effective governance and a critical pillar of government branding. It determines how public institutions share information, build trust, and engage with citizens and enterprises. Communication allows governments to translate policies and programs into messages that are understandable and relatable to the public. According to Lee, Gim, and Yoo (2019), communication serves as the bridge between government intentions and public perceptions, shaping how citizens evaluate the credibility, competence, and transparency of institutions. In this context, communication branding refers to the deliberate use of language, tone, and channels to project a government's image as open, responsive, and citizen-oriented.

An effective communication strategy helps governments ensure that information about their policies, decisions, and services is accurate, accessible, and timely. It also promotes participation by making it easier for citizens and businesses to understand their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities within the governance framework. For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), communication from county governments is particularly important because it provides guidance on licensing, taxation, regulatory compliance, and available business support programs. Hyland et al. (2021) and Munoz (2019) emphasize that clear, consistent, and timely communication reduces uncertainty, improves compliance, and enhances satisfaction with service delivery. Counties that use multiple communication platforms such as local radio, community forums, official websites, and social media can reach a wider audience and promote inclusivity among their residents.

The connection between branding and communication is based on how information shapes perceptions. A well-communicated government brand reinforces reliability and professionalism. When citizens perceive consistency between what a government communicates and what it delivers, trust is strengthened. Teodoro and An (2018) note that symbolic communication, including public statements, slogans, and visual identity, plays a vital role in influencing how citizens view government integrity and performance. Conversely, when government messages are inconsistent or unclear, credibility declines, which can negatively affect public satisfaction and participation. Effective communication branding therefore depends on honesty, coherence, and

responsiveness.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that government communication strongly influences satisfaction with public services. Widanti (2022) and Nisbet (2019) found that citizens who receive timely and understandable information are more likely to rate public institutions positively. Similarly, Kim (2019) and Hanna (2018) observed that communication is most effective when it is two-way, allowing for feedback and dialogue between government officials and the public. Through mechanisms such as public consultations, suggestion boxes, and online surveys, governments can collect valuable feedback that helps them adjust their policies and services. For SMEs, these feedback channels provide opportunities to express concerns about regulatory barriers, delays, or inconsistencies in service delivery.

In Kenya, the devolved system of government has increased the need for structured and proactive communication strategies. County governments have adopted various communication tools to inform and engage citizens, including press briefings, social media updates, and public barazas. Digital platforms such as the e-Citizen portal and county websites have made it easier for businesses to access government information and services. However, communication capacity remains uneven across counties. Some lack trained communication personnel, while others face challenges related to limited technological infrastructure and inadequate funding. As a result, communication efforts are often inconsistent, which weakens public awareness and limits participation, especially among SMEs that depend on accurate and timely information for their operations.

The effectiveness of communication strategies also depends on credibility and inclusiveness. Roman et al. (2019) argue that communication should not only disseminate information but also build relationships through trust and responsiveness. Governments that establish reliable feedback mechanisms and respond to citizens' concerns demonstrate openness and respect for public input. In contrast, one-way communication that ignores citizen feedback leads to disengagement and skepticism. In Bungoma County, improving communication with SMEs would require the establishment of regular information sessions, accessible digital portals, and dedicated liaison officers to provide updates on business-related programs.

The rise of digital communication has transformed how governments interact with their stakeholders. Open Government Data initiatives, highlighted by Alexopoulos et al. (2024) and Bertot et al. (2024), have enabled easier access to public information and fostered innovation by allowing citizens and enterprises to use government data for decision-making. Nevertheless, digital divides remain a challenge, as limited internet connectivity and digital literacy restrict access for many rural businesses. To overcome this, counties must adopt blended communication approaches that combine digital tools with traditional outreach methods such as community meetings and printed materials.

A comprehensive government communication strategy should be built on three principles: clarity, inclusivity, and consistency. Clarity ensures that government messages are easy to understand and free from technical jargon. Inclusivity guarantees that communication reaches diverse groups, including rural entrepreneurs, women, and youth. Consistency ensures that the information shared aligns with government actions and service outcomes. When these principles are upheld, communication becomes a driver of trust and satisfaction, reinforcing the government's brand as credible and responsive.

In conclusion, communication strategies are essential for strengthening the relationship between governments and their stakeholders. They influence how citizens and businesses perceive transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in public service delivery. For SMEs, effective communication promotes awareness, confidence, and cooperation in dealing with government institutions. Counties such as Bungoma can improve their service delivery outcomes by investing in structured communication systems, expanding digital access, and fostering continuous dialogue with citizens and enterprises.

2.5.4 E-Government Strategy

E-government refers to the strategic use of information and communication technologies by public institutions to enhance the efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of government services. It encompasses digital tools and systems that simplify administrative processes, improve service delivery, and strengthen citizen engagement. According to the World Bank (2020), effective e-government strategies involve more than technology deployment; they integrate policy, institutional reform,

and capacity building to create sustainable and inclusive public service systems. By digitizing key operations, governments can reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, minimize corruption opportunities, and promote accountability through real-time information access and feedback.

In Kenya, e-government has become a central pillar of public sector transformation and modernization. The Kenyan government recognizes digital innovation as an essential driver of Vision 2030, which seeks to position the country as a globally competitive and knowledge-based economy. The development of the National ICT Policy, the Digital Economy Blueprint, and the National Broadband Strategy demonstrates the country's commitment to integrating technology into governance. These policies aim to promote inclusive access to information, enhance citizen participation, and streamline government operations across all sectors. Kenya's efforts have placed it among the leading digital adopters in Sub-Saharan Africa, ranking third in regional innovation and eighty-sixth globally in the Global Innovation Index (World Bank, 2020).

E-government strategies in Kenya are designed to promote creativity, collaboration, and innovation within public institutions. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology recognized as early as 2015 the need for a national innovation framework that supports multidisciplinary research and practical applications. This framework emphasizes collaboration between government, academia, and the private sector to foster innovation that directly supports governance and service delivery. The strategy seeks to break down technological silos and promote integrated digital systems across ministries, departments, and county governments. By aligning digital efforts across different sectors, the government aims to eliminate duplication, enhance interoperability, and strengthen policy coherence.

The implementation of e-government has led to notable progress in public service delivery. Platforms such as the e-Citizen portal have centralized multiple government services, enabling citizens and businesses to apply for licenses, pay taxes, and access official information through a single digital interface. Similarly, the Huduma Centre initiative has expanded access to essential services by integrating digital platforms with physical one-stop centers across the country. These systems have improved service efficiency, reduced waiting times, and enhanced citizen satisfaction by

promoting convenience and reliability. Studies by Ondego and Moturi (2020) and Zeebaree (2021) confirm that digital governance systems improve resource management and accountability while reducing the administrative burden on both government officials and service users.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain in ensuring that e-government initiatives are inclusive and sustainable. Technological disparities between urban and rural areas, limited digital literacy, and inconsistent internet connectivity hinder the equitable use of online platforms. Counties such as Bungoma face additional challenges related to infrastructure, funding, and human capacity. Without targeted interventions to address these barriers, the benefits of e-government risk being concentrated among urban populations and larger enterprises. For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), these challenges translate into difficulties in accessing online registration systems, renewing licenses, or receiving timely support from government agencies.

The success of e-government strategies also depends on the integration of analog support systems. The World Bank (2020) notes that for digital transformation to succeed, traditional administrative processes must evolve alongside technological innovations. This requires adequate policy support, workforce training, and institutional reforms that align digital operations with existing legal and regulatory frameworks. In Kenya, continuous investment in digital skills development and public awareness campaigns is necessary to ensure that citizens and businesses fully utilize e-government platforms.

Furthermore, e-government branding plays a vital role in reinforcing citizens' trust in digital services. According to Shareef et al. (2011), governments that effectively communicate their commitment to technology-driven service delivery build stronger public confidence. Clear messaging about data privacy, service efficiency, and accountability enhances the perceived reliability of digital platforms. For SMEs, a strong e-government brand provides reassurance that digital systems are transparent, secure, and designed to support business growth. This perception encourages higher adoption rates and sustained engagement with digital platforms.

E-government also promotes transparency and public value creation by enabling open

data and digital participation. Open Government Data (OGD) initiatives, as discussed by Alexopoulos et al. (2024) and Bertot et al. (2024), allow citizens and enterprises to access public information freely, leading to better decision-making and innovation. By making government data publicly available, counties can attract partnerships, support research, and stimulate local entrepreneurship. For Bungoma County, leveraging OGD and digital service platforms could improve interactions with SMEs by providing accurate, real-time information on procurement, business opportunities, and county programs.

In conclusion, e-government strategy is a critical component of modern governance and public sector branding. It enhances service delivery, promotes transparency, and fosters innovation across institutions. Kenya has made commendable progress in developing digital systems that improve citizen engagement and administrative efficiency. However, disparities in infrastructure, capacity, and awareness continue to constrain full realization of these benefits. Strengthening digital literacy, expanding internet connectivity, and ensuring inclusivity in e-government initiatives are essential steps toward achieving equitable and sustainable service delivery. For counties such as Bungoma, integrating e-government strategies with branding and communication efforts will help build trust, improve efficiency, and enhance satisfaction among SMEs that depend on reliable and transparent public services.

2.5.5 Political Influence

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) play a central role in driving economic growth, innovation, and employment in both developed and developing countries. However, their success is significantly shaped by political factors, which influence the business environment through policy formulation, regulatory enforcement, and institutional stability. Political influence encompasses the broader macroeconomic and governance conditions under which businesses operate. These include government intervention in markets, fiscal and monetary policies, public expenditure priorities, and the nature of political accountability. When these policies are inconsistently implemented or captured by rent-seeking interests, they can distort fair competition and hinder SME growth.

Political factors affecting SME survival extend to diverse areas such as exchange rate stabilization, subsidy allocation, intellectual property protection, transparency

initiatives, and anti-corruption measures. Supportive government policies, such as fair taxation, accessible financing, and reduced bureaucratic barriers, can foster SME resilience. Conversely, policies that are politically motivated or applied selectively may create uncertainty and discourage investment. Weak enforcement of the rule of law, lack of institutional independence, and political interference in market processes further undermine the stability of the business environment. In addition, when political elites capture state resources or regulatory decisions, smaller enterprises face disadvantages in accessing markets, licenses, and public procurement opportunities.

Governments exert considerable influence on businesses through legislative and regulatory instruments, including trade laws, taxation policies, and import-export controls. Changes in these areas directly affect access to raw materials, pricing structures, and competitiveness. For instance, politically motivated shifts in taxation or tariffs can alter cost structures and profit margins for SMEs. Moreover, unstable political environments characterized by frequent policy changes or weak enforcement mechanisms discourage entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly among small firms with limited capacity to absorb external shocks.

Corporate political activity is another dimension of political influence that affects both large and small enterprises. According to Hillman et al. (2020) and Hadani (2022), corporate political activeness includes lobbying, campaign contributions, and collaboration with policymakers to influence legislation and regulation. While such engagement can promote favorable business conditions, it often benefits large corporations with greater financial and political leverage. One of the most notable manifestations of corporate political engagement is political connectedness, which occurs when current or former politicians are directly involved in a firm's governance structure (Faccio, 2020). Political connectedness can grant firms preferential access to government resources, contracts, and regulatory exemptions, thereby giving them a competitive edge over non-connected firms.

Niessen and Ruenzi (2020) observe that politically connected firms tend to enjoy smoother access to credit, favorable tax treatment, and reduced scrutiny from regulatory bodies. However, these advantages create an uneven playing field that disadvantages smaller, unconnected enterprises. Such disparities can distort competition, reduce market efficiency, and discourage entrepreneurship. Furthermore,

the perception of favoritism or corruption in public procurement and licensing processes undermines public trust in government institutions.

In the context of Kenya, political influence has a direct impact on SME development and service delivery. Patronage networks, political interference in public administration, and uneven allocation of resources often shape how government programs are implemented at both national and county levels. Counties such as Bungoma may experience challenges in achieving equitable service delivery when political actors prioritize their constituencies or interests over objective criteria. As a result, branding strategies related to transparency, accountability, and e-government may lose credibility if they are perceived as politically manipulated rather than citizen-centered.

Understanding the nature of political influence is therefore essential for assessing how governance structures affect SME satisfaction with public service delivery. Stable political environments characterized by fairness, inclusivity, and accountability promote business confidence and foster economic growth. In contrast, politicized decision-making, rent-seeking behavior, and weak institutional checks create uncertainty that undermines service delivery and SME development. Strengthening institutional independence, enforcing anti-corruption frameworks, and promoting transparent policy implementation are key steps toward mitigating the negative effects of political influence on SMEs and enhancing their contribution to sustainable economic development.

2.5.6 SMEs satisfaction with Service Delivery

Two dominant theoretical perspectives explain citizen satisfaction with public services at different levels of government. Reform theory suggests that citizens derive higher satisfaction from larger government units due to economies of scale and efficiency in service delivery. In contrast, political economy theory argues that smaller, localized governments generate greater satisfaction because citizens' voices are more likely to be heard and their needs better addressed. Empirical findings on these theories have been mixed, leading to the emergence of a third perspective that proposes satisfaction varies depending on the specific service received (Christopher, Bruce and Tansu, 2022). These theoretical insights underscore the complexity of satisfaction as a multidimensional concept shaped by context, service type, and governance structure.

According to Endeki and Minja (2021), the New Public Management (NPM) theory redefines citizens as customers of public services rather than passive recipients. This perspective places emphasis on efficiency, responsiveness, and citizen satisfaction as key indicators of public sector performance. Van de Walle (2018) differentiates between two forms of satisfaction: subjective satisfaction, which reflects citizens' personal experiences and expectations, and objective satisfaction, which relates to measurable service outcomes. Together, these dimensions form a holistic understanding of how satisfaction is generated and sustained within public service systems. For SMEs, satisfaction arises when government agencies provide predictable, transparent, and efficient services that enable business continuity and growth.

The Third Medium-Term Plan (2018–2022) under Kenya's Vision 2030 outlines several initiatives targeting the SME sector (GOK, 2018). The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Development Program aims to enhance support through skills development, provision of worksites, incubation, innovation, technology transfer, financing, and market access. Other initiatives focus on strengthening Kenya's industrial base by establishing model SME factories, promoting entrepreneurship, improving competitiveness, and upgrading SME infrastructure. Countries such as India and Japan have successfully built their industrial foundations around SMEs supported by clear policies and institutional frameworks. For Kenya, a structured framework for monitoring and evaluating these initiatives is critical to ensuring their effective implementation and long-term sustainability.

The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, 2019) highlights that Kenya's ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index has improved significantly, moving from position 92 in 2017 to 61 in 2019. This progress reflects ongoing efforts to simplify business regulations and promote private sector growth. However, the World Bank's sub-national assessment, covering only 11 counties, reveals disparities in business environments across regions. Many counties, including Bungoma, remain underrepresented in such assessments, leaving gaps in understanding the specific challenges faced by SMEs at the local level. KIPPRA emphasizes the need for a comprehensive framework to evaluate the business

environment at the county level, extending beyond regulation to encompass infrastructure, governance, and institutional capacity. Such a framework would support evidence-based policy interventions and enable continuous monitoring of SME performance across counties.

Despite notable reforms, SMEs continue to face significant operational challenges. KIPPRA (2019) reports that many SMEs operate in informal or unauthorized locations, exposing them to evictions and disruptions. Inadequate infrastructure, limited access to utilities such as electricity and water, and poor waste management systems further constrain productivity. Safety concerns, high connection costs, and unreliable power supply also increase operational expenses. To mitigate these challenges, collaboration between national agencies such as the Micro and Small Enterprises Authority (MSEA), the Kenya Industrial Estates (KIE), and county governments is essential. Such partnerships can facilitate the establishment of properly equipped and accessible worksites, improving business stability and reducing production costs.

KIPPRA (2018) also identifies corruption, weak governance, and security issues as major deterrents to SME growth. These factors increase operational costs and undermine confidence in public institutions. Many SMEs struggle to survive beyond their third year due to systemic inefficiencies and inconsistent policy enforcement. However, recent initiatives such as the Huduma Centres have improved the accessibility and efficiency of public service delivery by streamlining licensing and permit issuance. To build on these gains, counties should enhance transparency by digitizing revenue collection systems and reducing bureaucratic hurdles. Harmonizing licensing processes and eliminating redundant fees would further simplify compliance for SMEs, thereby improving satisfaction with public service delivery.

In summary, the satisfaction of SMEs with service delivery depends on a combination of efficient administrative processes, transparent governance, accessible infrastructure, and supportive policy frameworks. Sustained collaboration between national and county governments, coupled with technological innovations and anti-corruption measures, can create a more enabling environment for SMEs. By addressing these systemic challenges, Kenya can unlock the full potential of SMEs as engines of inclusive economic growth and social development.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive review of the literature related to the theories and empirical studies underpinning this research. It has examined both theoretical and empirical perspectives to establish a strong conceptual foundation for analyzing the relationship between government branding strategies and Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) satisfaction with service delivery. The discussion was organized around three key theories that inform the study, namely the New Public Management (NPM) Theory, the Institutional Theory, and the Public Value Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of how county governments employ branding strategies to enhance performance, legitimacy, and citizen trust.

The NPM Theory emphasizes efficiency, customer orientation, and performance-driven service delivery. It explains how county governments adopt branding approaches such as transparency, accountability, and e-government to improve responsiveness and enhance SME satisfaction. Institutional Theory adds another dimension by focusing on legitimacy and the influence of societal norms, highlighting how public institutions implement branding not only for operational efficiency but also to project credibility and align with accepted governance standards. Public Value Theory complements these perspectives by emphasizing inclusiveness, trust, and shared societal benefits, framing government branding as a means of generating tangible and perceived value for SMEs through fairness, communication, and accountability.

In addition to the theoretical foundations, the chapter has reviewed empirical literature that explored the practical application of these branding strategies and their impact on service delivery. It has examined studies on transparency, accountability, communication, e-government, and political influence, identifying trends, gaps, and challenges in their implementation. The chapter also presented the conceptual framework that links these variables and outlines how they interact to influence SME satisfaction with public service delivery. Overall, this literature review provides the intellectual and empirical basis for the study, setting the stage for the methodology presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covers research design, target population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments and techniques. It also presents the data analysis and presentation procedures together with the necessary diagnostic tests. Finally, ethical considerations are presented.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study adopted pragmatism as the guiding research paradigm. Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes understanding the world and addressing real-life problems through the integration of both subjective and objective forms of inquiry. It is grounded in the view that knowledge is generated through action, experience, and interaction with the real world, thereby enabling researchers to draw on multiple methods and perspectives to address complex research problems. Pragmatist researchers are inherently flexible and solution-oriented, prioritizing practical outcomes and the usefulness of knowledge in addressing the phenomenon under investigation (Foster, 2024). This orientation makes pragmatism particularly suitable for studies that seek to bridge theory and practice while generating contextually relevant solutions.

A central tenet of pragmatism is its support for methodological pluralism, particularly the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches within mixed methods research. Pragmatists acknowledge the value of both the objective, measurable aspects of reality typically associated with quantitative research and the subjective, lived experiences emphasized in qualitative inquiry. This dual orientation enables a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of research problems within their specific contexts (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Consequently, pragmatism facilitates the use of diverse data sources and analytical strategies, allowing researchers to explore complex phenomena from multiple perspectives and triangulate findings for greater validity and depth.

The choice of pragmatism in this study was further justified by the nature of the

research problem, which required both empirical measurement of relationships among study variables and exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. Since the study sought to examine the influence of county government branding strategies on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, both quantitative and qualitative evidence were necessary. Quantitative data helped establish patterns, trends, and statistical relationships, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into the meanings, experiences, and contextual realities surrounding service delivery and SME satisfaction. In this regard, pragmatism provided an appropriate philosophical foundation for combining explanation with understanding (Liu, 2022).

Furthermore, pragmatism recognizes that knowledge is both socially constructed through human experience and grounded in observable realities. It therefore offers a balanced epistemological stance that is well suited to mixed methods inquiry. The paradigm emphasizes that the purpose of research is not only to understand a phenomenon but also to generate practical and actionable knowledge that can inform decision-making and address real-world challenges (Turyahikayo, 2021; Dube et al., 2024). In the context of this study, this was important because the findings are expected to inform county policy and managerial decisions on how branding strategies can improve service delivery outcomes for SMEs.

The philosophy also supports methodological flexibility by allowing the researcher to employ structured questionnaires for quantitative data collection and key informant interviews for qualitative inquiry, followed by statistical and thematic analysis respectively. This flexibility enabled the researcher to integrate findings from both strands in a coherent and meaningful manner, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the study phenomenon.

By adopting pragmatism, the study was able to draw on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods, thereby enhancing the rigor, validity, reliability, and practical relevance of the findings.

3.3 Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach, which involves the systematic

integration of both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This approach enabled the researcher to draw on the strengths of quantitative methods such as measurement, generalization, and statistical analysis while also capturing the depth, context, and meaning derived from qualitative data. By combining these complementary forms of evidence, mixed methods research facilitates a richer and more nuanced interpretation of findings, particularly for complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2023), mixed methods research is grounded in the integration of diverse data sources, with the primary focus placed on the research problem and the use of multiple approaches to generate robust and actionable insights.

Given the cross-sectional survey design employed in this study, a mixed methods approach was particularly appropriate as it allows for the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research problem comprehensively. While the structured questionnaires provide measurable quantitative data on SMEs' perceptions and satisfaction with county branding strategies, the Key Informant Interviews capture the nuanced experiences, insights, and contextual explanations behind these perceptions. This combination not only enhanced the robustness and validity of the findings but also ensured that both the breadth and depth of the phenomenon under study are explored. As emphasized by Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, mixed methods research was particularly suitable because research questions required both empirical measurement and an understanding of lived experiences, and when the goal is to generate actionable knowledge that can inform policy and practice. By employing this approach, the study is able to triangulate findings, providing a more nuanced understanding of how county government branding strategies influence SME service delivery satisfaction.

3.4 Research Design

Research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims at combining relevance of the research purpose with affordability of the research process (Mohajan, 2018). This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. Pandey and Pandey (2021) recommended the use of

this research design when there is a need to analyze data of variables collected at one given point in time across a sample population or a pre-defined subset. Cross-sectional surveys support the use of structured questionnaires together with Key Informant Interviews allowing the collection of both quantitative measures (such as ratings of satisfaction and service frequency) and qualitative perspectives (such as views on branding effectiveness). This dual approach improves the robustness and validity of the findings (Collins, 2020).

In the context of this study, the design made it possible to gather information from a broad pool of SMEs as well as County government officers from the Divisions of Trade, Industry, Finance, Economic Planning and Information Communication Technology (ICT) at one point in time, thus offering a clear picture of their perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction with county branding strategies. The design was also appropriate as it allowed for analysis of associations between variables specifically, the influence of county government branding strategies (independent variables) on SME service delivery satisfaction (dependent variable)—rather than to monitor changes across a time span.

Cross-sectional designs are widely utilized in public administration and governance studies, particularly those concerned with assessing citizen satisfaction, trust in institutions, and quality of service delivery at a given point. Within this research, the design supports generalization to SMEs in Bungoma County, while producing results that are not only academically valuable but also directly relevant to county-level policy and service delivery reforms. This study design has similarly been adopted in related studies by Whelan, Davies, Walsh and Bourke (2010) on public sector corporate branding and customer orientation, Eid, Al Zaabi, Alzahmi and Elsantil (2019) on integrating internal branding antecedents, customer and job satisfaction in the public sector as well as Tao, Makarchev, Le, Yao, Chinh and Xiao (2025) on citizen satisfaction with public services across multi-provinces in Vietnam.

3.5 Study Area

The contextual focus of the study was Bungoma County. This county is in the former Western Province of Kenya with its capital in Bungoma town. It has a population of 1,670,570 (812,146 are males and 858,389 females) (Kenya National Bureau of

Statistics, 2019). The study focused on all the nine sub-counties that is Bumula, Kabuchai, Kanduyi, Kimilili, Mt. Elgon, Sirisia, Tongaren, Webuye East and Webuye West.

Bungoma presents a vibrant and compelling context for studying public administration branding strategies and SME satisfaction because it is a growing county with significant demographic momentum. Economically, its reliance on agriculture (sugarcane, maize, dairy) is complemented by a diverse SME sector (County Integrated Development Plan, CIDP, 2022/27). The focus on Bungoma County was also motivated by its efforts in infrastructural development whereby its expanding infrastructure and institutional performance present an attractive environment for investment. A positive county brand, reinforced by strong satisfaction levels, can enhance investor confidence and attract capital into agribusiness, industry, and service sectors.

3.6. Target Population

Population is the total collection of all the elements about which the study wishes to make some inference. It is the entire set of relevant units of analysis (Dzwigol and Dzwigol-Barosz, 2018). The target population for this study were the SMEs as well as County government officers from the Divisions of Trade, Industry, Finance, Economic Planning and Information Communication Technology (ICT). According to the county government of Bungoma's Trade department as well as Micro and Small Enterprise Authority (MSEA) survey 2024, Bungoma county has a total of 1,186 small and 52 medium licensed enterprises.

These formed the unit of analysis of this study whereby the owners or managers were the target unit of observation. Additionally, the study targeted 5 management-level officers from the Division of Trade, 5 from the division of Industry, 5 from the division of Finance, 5 from the division of Economic Planning and 5 from the division of Information Communication Technology (ICT) as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Target Population

Stratum	Target Population	Proportion
Bumula	71	6%
Kabuchai	99	8%
Kanduyi	277	22%
Kimilili	135	11%
Mt. Elgon	74	6%
Sirisia	92	7%
Tongaren	129	10%
Webuye East	179	14%
Webuye West	182	14%
County Government Officials	25	2%
Total	1,263	100%

Source: Bungoma County Trade Department (2024); Micro and Small Enterprise Authority (MSEA) (2024)

3.7 Sample Size and Sampling Design

A sampling technique involves a procedure used to obtain a portion of the population from the target population which is believed to have the characteristics of the population (Zangirolami-Raimundo, Echeimberg & Leone, 2018). Sampling is important in research because it enables the researcher to minimize the cost since only a portion of the population is involved. Sampling is the procedure a researcher uses to identify people, places or things to study (Safsten & Gustavsson, 2020).

It is the process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population such that the selected group contains elements representative of characteristics found in the entire group. A sample is a smaller group of individuals selected from the population (Snyder, 2019). Since the target population for this study (SMEs) is greater than 200 units, a smaller sample size for the SMEs was determined using a formula as suggested by Mohajan (2018), Pandey and Pandey (2021) and Snyder (2019). Mohajan (2018) suggested that if the target population is finite, Yamane (1967) formula is suitable for adoption. The formula for calculating sample size was given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(\epsilon)^2}$$

Where:

N = Target Population of SMEs (1,238)

n = Sample Size

ϵ = Sampling error set at 5% as recommended by Mohajan (2018), Pandey and Pandey (2021) and Snyder (2019). Therefore, replacing the values in the formula gives a sample size of 302. Therefore, the study targeted 302 SMEs who were distributed through stratified proportionate random sampling procedures across the nine Sub-Counties as shown in Table 3.2.

The sampling process involved a systematic multi-stage procedure. First, the SMEs were stratified according to the nine Sub-Counties to ensure adequate geographical representation. Second, proportionate allocation was applied to determine the number of SMEs to be selected from each stratum based on their respective population sizes. Third, simple random sampling was used within each stratum to select individual SMEs, ensuring that each unit had an equal chance of being included in the study. On the other hand, all the targeted county officers were purposively sampled based on their roles, expertise, and involvement in county government operations.

Table 3.2: Stratification of the Sample Size

Stratum	Target Population	Sample Size	Proportion
Bumula	71	17	6%
Kabuchai	99	24	8%
Kanduyi	277	69	22%
Kimilili	135	33	11%
Mt. Elgon	74	18	6%
Sirisia	92	22	7%
Tongaren	129	31	10%
Webuye East	179	43	14%
Webuye West	182	45	14%
County Officials	25	25	2%
Total	1,263	327	100%

Source: Author Computation

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

Rinjit (2020) defines a research instrument as a tool used to collect data. An instrument is a tool designed to measure knowledge, attitude and skills. The study used quantitative primary and secondary data. The primary data collection instrument in this study was a semi-structured questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions. For quantitative data, a Five-point Likert scale which is an interval scale that specifically uses five anchors of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree, was adopted.

The Likert measures the level of agreement or disagreement. This type of questionnaires was more appropriate because it enables consistency in questions asked and data yielded can statistically be analyzed. Likert scales are good in measuring perception, attitude, values and behavior (Mishra & Alok, 2022). A questionnaire was more appropriate for this study as enabled the researcher to collect first-hand information over a short period of time.

The study further adopted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with county government officials because they provide in-depth, contextual insights into the design, implementation, and challenges of public sector branding strategies that cannot be fully captured through surveys with SMEs. County officials from the divisions of Trade, Industry, Finance, Economic Planning and ICT were directly responsible for policy formulation, service delivery processes, and branding initiatives; therefore, they hold privileged knowledge about the rationale, objectives, and effectiveness of these strategies. Their perspectives help to validate and triangulate findings from SMEs, ensuring a balanced understanding of both service users' experiences and service providers' intentions. Moreover, KIIs enable exploration of sensitive governance issues such as transparency, accountability, and resource allocation in a more candid manner, offering deep evidence to strengthen the study's recommendations for policy and practice.

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection procedure started by obtaining an introduction letter and ethical approval from the university's school of post graduate studies. After getting these

letters, the researcher applied for a NACOSTI permit. The three documents were attached as the researcher sought for approval from the relevant offices of the County government. Primary data was collected through research assistants from randomly sampled SME owners or managers across the nine sub counties. In addition, key informant interviews were held with the county officials from the divisions of Trade, Industry, Finance, Economic Planning and ICT. A total of 302 questionnaires were distributed to SMEs while 25 interviews were scheduled with county officials. A duration of one month was allocated to the process so as to enhance the response rate.

3.10 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the questionnaire before it was used for the actual data collection procedure. Pre-testing of the questionnaire is important in order to identify and correct potential shortcomings before full administration. Pandey and Pandey (2021) argue that pre-testing is a screening method that allows the researcher to administer a questionnaire to a smaller group of respondents prior to the main exercise in order to obtain feedback and make necessary corrections. This approach helps the researcher to minimize wrong responses that may arise from misinterpretation of questions or failure to respond due to lack of clarity.

Further, the pilot test was used to assess the validity and reliability of the data collection instrument. The sample size for a pilot study, as presented by Safsten and Gustavsson (2020), should range between 1% and 10% of the target sample size. In this study, a sample size of 10%, equivalent to 30 respondents, was used for the pilot study based on the recommendation by Safsten and Gustavsson (2020). The pilot test was conducted among 30 SMEs from Bungoma County who possessed similar characteristics to the target population, and these respondents were not included in the main survey.

3.10.1 Reliability of the Research Instrument

According to Bairagi and Munot (2019), reliability refers to the consistency of measurement. Reliability is increased by including many similar items on a measure, by testing a diverse sample of individuals and by using uniform testing procedures. Nayak and Singh (2021) asserts that the positivists' approach insists on strict criteria for judging the quality or trustworthiness of the research findings objectivity and that

one must show evidence that the findings are consistent with occurrences in the real world.

In this study, reliability was measured using Cronbach alpha. Cronbach alpha is a test of internal consistency frequently used to calculate the correlation values among answers on an assessment tool (Patel & Patel, 2019). Cronbach's Alpha (α) indicates the extent to which a set of measurement items could be treated as measuring a single latent variable (Ngozwana, 2018). Cronbach Alpha can be written as a function of the number of test items and the average inter-correlation among the items. It can be calculated using the formula:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N - 1)\bar{c}}$$

Where;

N = the number of component (items)

$\bar{c}$ = the average inter-item covariance among the items (That is Average Pearson correlation coefficients between the components)

$\bar{v}$ = the average variance

According to Dodds and Hess (2020), reliability is the proportion of variance attributable to the true measurement of a variable and consistency of such measurement over time. It is concerned with the internal properties of a measure and the random error in the data and ranges from nil (0) to perfection (1). Patel and Patel (2019) noted that a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of 0.7 and above was acceptable because random error always exist regardless of the procedure used in the study. Ngozwana (2018) noted that the threshold for Cronbach's Alpha varies among disciplines and the nature of the study. They argued that a value above 0.7 is generally accepted while a value of 0.6 is normally accepted for completely new instruments.

The measurement scale for reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for every independent variable and for an alpha (α) of 0.7 and above the instrument is interpreted as reliable (Cronbach, 1951). A high reliability estimate should be as close to 1 as possible. The study adopted a Cronbach alpha of 0.7 which is accepted for

instruments that are not completely new. The reliability test results indicated that the measurement scales used in the study are both reliable and internally consistent. The high Cronbach's Alpha values across all constructs imply that the data collected yielded valid insights into the relationships between the study variables. Reliability test results are as shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Reliability Test Results

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Government Transparency Strategy	10	0.884	Reliable
Government Accountability Strategy	14	0.888	Reliable
Government Communication Strategy	14	0.885	Reliable
E-government Strategy	11	0.891	Reliable
Political Influence	17	0.889	Reliable
SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery	31	0.847	Reliable

The reliability test results indicated in Table 3.3. shows that all study constructs achieved high internal consistency, as reflected in Cronbach's Alpha values well above the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nayak & Singh, 2021). The Government Transparency Strategy scale, with 10 items, yielded an alpha of 0.884, showing that the items consistently measure perceptions of transparency in county branding. Similarly, the Government Accountability Strategy (14 items; $\alpha = 0.888$) and the Government Communication Strategy (14 items; $\alpha = 0.885$) both demonstrated high reliability, suggesting that their respective items are highly correlated and suitable for further analysis.

The E-Government Strategy construct recorded the highest internal consistency (11 items; $\alpha = 0.891$), confirming the robustness of the instrument in capturing how digital branding shapes perceptions of service delivery. The Political Influence construct (17 items; $\alpha = 0.889$) also showed strong reliability, validating its use as a moderating variable in the analysis. Finally, the dependent variable, SMEs' Satisfaction with Service Delivery, comprising 31 items, attained an alpha of 0.847, which exceeds the minimum standard of reliability, confirming that the scale adequately reflects SMEs'

satisfaction with county services. The questionnaire was hence reliable as a measure of the study variables.

3.10.2 Validity of Data Collection Instruments

Validity in research refers to how accurately a study answers the study question or the strength of the study conclusions (Mohajan, 2018). In testing for validity, we need to ask whether the questions posed adequately address the objectives of the study. This should include whether or not the manner in which answers are recorded is appropriate (Dodds & Hess, 2020).

There are different forms of research validity and main ones are specified by Patel and Patel (2019) as content validity, criterion-related validity, construct validity and face validity. This study tested for all these types of validity to ensure that the final questionnaire was valid. Content validity was undertaken to ascertain whether the content of the questionnaire was appropriate and relevant to the study purpose. Content validity indicates whether the content reflects a complete range of the attributes under study and is usually undertaken by seven or more experts (Nayak & Singh, 2021). For content validity, the questionnaire was tested to ensure that there were no errors both typographical or form through expert opinions. Pilot testing helped to detect some, if not all the errors.

The pilot respondents were allowed to ask questions relating to clarity of the questions which helped the researcher know the validity of questions framed. The feedback from the pilot test formed a basis for reviewing the questionnaire before final administration. The supervisors assessed the questionnaire to ensure that it was not vague or offensive. Using their knowledge in the subject matter, they interpreted the questions and statements in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was therefore revised based on the feedback from the pilot test to eliminate ambiguities and inadequate wording in data collection tool.

Face validity indicates whether the questionnaire appears to be appropriate to the study purpose and content area. It is the easiest validation process to undertake but it is the weakest form of validity (Bairagi & Munot, 2019). It evaluates the appearance of the questionnaire in terms of feasibility, readability, consistency of style and formatting, and the clarity of the language used. Thus, face validity is a form of usability rather

than reliability. To determine the face validity of the questionnaire, this study developed an evaluation form to help assess each question in terms of: the clarity of the wording, the likelihood that the target audience would be able to answer the questions and the layout and style. After a review against this evaluation, the questionnaire was revised.

To ensure criterion validity, the researcher critically examined each question against study objectives and how they would be answered by the respondents and then make the necessary adjustments. The Instruments developed for other similar studies was also used for comparison purposes. Snyder (2019) argues that the constructs of a study can be established based on the existing studies so as to enhance criterion validity. Furthermore, the researcher had a clearly defined conceptual framework by undertaking a thorough literature review and seeking expert opinion. Once the conceptual framework is established, chosen experts in the area of study will be asked to review the draft questionnaire.

Construct validity refers to the degree to which the items on an instrument relate to the relevant theoretical construct (Safsten & Gustavsson, 2020). Construct validity is a quantitative value rather than a qualitative distinction between ‘valid’ and ‘invalid’. It refers to the degree to which the intended independent variable (construct) relates to the proxy independent variable (indicator) (Safsten & Gustavsson, 2020). When an indicator consists of multiple items, factor analysis is used to determine construct validity. The study adopted Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to test for construct validity. Factor analysis acts as a gauge of the substantive importance of a given statement to the variable and it is used to identify and remove statements or variable items that do not meet the objectives of the study and which may not be apparent from direct analysis (Mishra & Alok, 2022).

Communalities obtained from Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software were used to indicate the substantive importance of variable factors where a factor loading value of 40% was adopted as a rule of thumb to confirm construct validity. Dzwigol and Dzwigol-Barosz (2018) argued that a factor loading of 40% and above was satisfactory and hence such a variable is not dropped in such a case. EFA was used to test construct validity which is the extent to which the items in a scale measure the abstract or theoretical construct. The threshold for a good construct validity is 0.4

as suggested by Mugenda and Mugenda (2009). The study adopted this threshold of 0.4 and the results are presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Exploratory Factor Loadings

Variable	Number of items	Initial	Factor Loadings
Government Transparency Strategy	10	1.000	0.769
Government Accountability Strategy	14	1.000	0.812
Government Communication Strategy	14	1.000	0.847
E-government Strategy	11	1.000	0.829
Political Influence	17	1.000	0.838
SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery	31	1.000	0.886

The results for exploratory factor loadings as shown in table 3.3. demonstrates that the factor loadings were above the threshold of 0.4 for construct validity and hence no question was eliminated or revised. It was hence implied that the questionnaire was construct valid.

3.11 Data Analysis and Presentation

Newman and Gough (2020) define data analysis as a systematic manipulation, processing, arrangement and organization of data in order to produce meaningful information. Qualitative data gathered using the open-ended questions in the questionnaires as well as KII guide was analyzed thematically through content analysis and presented in a summary Table. On the other hand, the quantitative data gathered through structured questionnaire was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. SPSS version 24 which generates both descriptive and inferential statistics was employed.

Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation was used to capture the characteristics of the variables under study. Descriptive analysis is defined by Pawelski (2016) as statistical procedures that are used to describe the population one is studying and that descriptive statistics use graphical and numerical summaries to give a picture of a data set. Inferential statistics were also used in the study. Inferential

statistics are methods of establishing relationships between variables (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

3.11.1 Public Sector Branding Strategies and Service Delivery Satisfaction

To determine the effect of public sector branding strategies on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya, inferential statistics, that is, correlation and multiple regression modeling were adopted. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to indicate the percentage of variability of the dependent variable accounted for by the independent variable.

This was followed by determination of standardization beta coefficient (β) which indicated the direction (+ or -) and the magnitude of the effect as well as comparing the relative contribution of each independent variable on the dependent variable (Safsten & Gustavsson, 2020). The composite of each variable was established from its sub constructs before being used to run the inferential statistics. To derive the composite index for the variables under study, the harmonic mean formula was used (Safsten & Gustavsson, 2020).

$$C_i = \sum f_i w_i \div \sum f_i$$

Where:

C_i = Composite index for Variable

f = Total Number of Respondents

W_i = The Relative weight given to each component in a particular variable.

The following multiple regression model was then used in determination of coefficients of the independent variables in relation to the dependent variable:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Service Delivery Satisfaction by SME's

X_1 = Government Transparency Branding

X_2 = Government Accountability Branding

X_3 = Government Communication Branding

X_4 = E-government Strategy

ε = Error term

β_0 = the constant term

$\beta_{i(1-4)}$ = Beta Coefficients

3.11.2 Moderating Effect of Political Influence

The moderating effect of political influence on the relationship was tested through the Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) analysis, recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). In the model, there is a significant moderating effect of political influence if the interaction term is significant (P-Value < 0.05) at 5% level of significance. The following regression model was adopted.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 Z + \beta_3 X.Z + \varepsilon$$

Where;

Y = Service Delivery Satisfaction by SME's

X = Public Sector Branding

Z = Political Influence

X.Z = Interaction Term

ε = Error term

β_0 = the constant term

β_i = Beta coefficients

3.12 Diagnostic Tests

The study conducted diagnostic tests to ensure that the assumptions of Ordinary Least Square (OLS) are satisfied before conducting a multiple linear regression analysis and testing the hypothesis. The tests were as follows; normality test, multicollinearity test, autocorrelation and homoscedasticity test.

3.12.1 Normality Test

A normal distribution is not skewed and is defined to have a coefficient of kurtosis of three or less. In order to assess likelihood that the data set is normally distributed, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test was performed. According to Mishra and Alok (2022), K-S test is the most commonly used normality test possibly because of disadvantages of other tests and that it can easily be examined using SPSS.

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (KS) was conducted to test the normality of the dependent variable. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is a non-parametric procedure that determines whether a sample of data comes from a specific distribution, such as normal, uniform, Poisson, or exponential distribution. The null and alternative hypotheses are stated below as follows:

Ho: The data is normally distributed (Not different from a normal distribution)

Ha: The data is not normally distributed (Different from a normal distribution)

The rule is that if the p-value is greater than 0.05 (Not significant), H_0 is not rejected and H_1 is rejected, if the p-value is less than 0.05 (Significant), H_0 is rejected and H_1 is not rejected.

3.12.2 Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity refers to large correlation of the predictor variables. When correlation is excessive ($r > 0.80$) as suggested by Snyder (2019), standard errors and beta coefficients become large, making it difficult or impossible to assess the relative importance of the predictor variables. Multicollinearity is less important where the research purpose is sheer prediction since the predicted values of the dependent remain stable, but Multicollinearity is a severe problem when the research purpose includes causal modeling. The study used Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) applied using the threshold of 10 for severe multicollinearity. In general, the typical acceptable values are VIF less than 5 and tolerance values ($1 / VIF$) values greater than 0.2.

3.12.3 Homoscedasticity Test

Homoscedasticity describes a situation in which the error term (that is, the “noise” or random disturbance in the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable) is the constant across all values of independent variables. Homoscedasticity suggests that the dependent variable has an equal level of variability for each of the values of the independent variables (Dodds & Hess, 2020). A test for homoscedasticity is made to test for variance in residuals in the regression model used. Lack of an equal level of variability for each value of the independent variables is known as Heteroskedasticity. Breusch Pagan test was used to test for Homoscedasticity.

Ho: The variance in the error term is constant (Homoscedasticity)

Ha: The variance in the error term is not constant (Heteroscedasticity)

3.12.4 Autocorrelation Test

Autocorrelation describes a situation in which the error terms (that is, the “noise” or random disturbance in the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable) are correlated across the independent variables. Its problem leads

to inflation of the standard errors hence leading to spurious findings. Durbin Watson test was used to test for autocorrelation whereby a DW value between 1.5 and 2.0 reflects absence of autocorrelation.

3.12.5. Linearity Tests

The importance of testing for linearity lies in the fact that many statistical methods require an assumption of linearity of data (the data was sampled from a population that relates the variables of interest in a linear fashion). To ensure linearity, outliers ought to be identified and removed from the data since linearity can be fixed by removing outliers. Assumption of linearity which is consistent relationship between the independent and dependent variables makes regression easy. The linear relationship of the independent variables to the dependent variables was tested by plotting a Q-Q plot.

3.13 Hypotheses Testing

Multiple regression analysis in the form of analytical model was applied to test whether or not the null hypotheses stipulated in this study were true. Mohajan (2018) advocate that multiple regression helps to decide whether the individual hypothesis is statistically supported or not. The significance of the dependent variable on the influence of the independent variables at 5% level of significance was established by comparing the P-value against 0.05. Null hypothesis was rejected when computed P Value was less than significance value of 0.05 and retained when it exceeded 0.05. A summary of the criterion is presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

	Objective	Hypothesis	Rule
1.	To assess how government transparency branding strategy affects SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	H ₀₁ : Government transparency branding strategy has no effect on SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	Reject H ₀₁ if p value for all government transparency branding strategy items are $p < .05$
2.	To determine the effect of government accountability branding strategy on SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	H ₀₂ : Government accountability branding strategy has no effect on SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	Reject H ₀₂ if p value for all reusing items are $p < .05$
3.	To examine the how government communication branding strategy affects SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	H ₀₃ : Government communication branding strategy has no effect on SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	Reject H ₀₃ if p value for all Government communication branding strategy items are $p < .05$
4.	To determine the effect of Government Technological Innovation branding strategy on SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	H ₀₄ : Government technological innovation branding strategy has no effect on SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	Reject H ₀₄ if p value for all remanufacturing items are $p < .05$
5.	To assess the moderating effect of political influence on the relationship between Government Branding strategies and SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	H ₀₅ : Political influence has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between government branding strategies and SME's delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County	Reject H ₀₅ if p value for all remanufacturing items are $p < .05$

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with moral values which guides one's behavior (Mugenda and Mugenda (2020). Research should therefore take note of following: That the researcher did not refer another person's work as his/her own without acknowledging the author or give false research methodology and results. The researcher is an integral person who did not undertake research for self-gain or the research to have a negative impact on other people's lives. The researcher did not use the collected data to victimize or stigmatize any person. The researcher shall not disclose names of managers of the SMEs who gave the information to County Government authorities and prior to the interviews; respondents was informed of the purpose of study and seek consent from them. The respondents were assured that the study findings were not used for any other purpose apart from what the researcher has indicated (Chowdhury, 2018).

The researcher adhered to the ethical requirements of research, including obtaining the requisite research permit from NACOSTI, as well as the ethics approval to ensure that the research adheres to ethical standards, building trust and confidentiality among the target population, providing the respondents an opportunity to give prior informed consent before each interview and protecting their data pursuant to the Data Protection Act, 2019. To ensure anonymity of the information, respondents were not required to indicate their names anywhere in data collection tool; there was an exemption of a code that was used by the analysis when coding the data and entering it into SPSS software for analysis.

The researcher complied with the ethical standards of research, which include securing the necessary research permit from NACOSTI, fostering trust and confidentiality within the intended audience, giving respondents the chance to provide informed consent prior to each interview, and safeguarding their information in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 2019. Respondents were not asked to provide their identities anywhere in the data collecting tool in order to maintain the anonymity of the data; instead, a code that was utilized for analysis was excluded when coding the data and importing it into SPSS software.

3.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the research methodology adopted for the study. It began by outlining the research philosophy, showing how pragmatism guided the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in examining government branding strategies and SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery. The chapter then presented the research methodology and research design, justifying the adoption of a cross sectional survey design suited to capturing data on branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction at a single point in time.

The chapter also described the study area, Bungoma County, and outlined the target population, sample size, and sampling design used to select respondents from SMEs and county government officials. This was followed by a presentation of the data collection instruments, comprising questionnaires and key informant interview guides, and the procedures followed in administering them. The pilot study was discussed in detail, including the reliability of the research instrument and the validity of the data collection instruments, both of which confirmed the suitability of the instruments for the main study.

Further, the chapter presented the approach adopted for data analysis and presentation, covering both the descriptive and inferential techniques used to examine public sector branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction, as well as the procedure for testing the moderating effect of political influence. The diagnostic tests, namely normality, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, autocorrelation, and linearity, were presented to confirm that the data satisfied the assumptions underlying the regression models used. The procedure for hypotheses testing was also outlined, together with the ethical considerations observed throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of respondents.

Overall, this chapter has provided the methodological foundation upon which the results presented and discussed in Chapter Four are based.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides research findings based on the study objectives. The chapter has presented the findings per objective starting from the response rate, demographic findings, descriptive findings and inferential findings. Hypotheses have also been tested in the last section of the chapter. Other than presentation and interpretation of the findings, there is discussion of the findings.

4.2 Response Rate

A total of 302 SMEs and 25 county officials were targeted in the study. Out of this number, 242 SMEs and 20 county officials responded to the study giving an overall response rate of 80%. as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

	SMEs		County Officials		Overall	
	n	f	N	F	n	f
Response	242	80%	21	84%	263	80%
Non-Response	60	20%	4	16%	64	20%
Total	302	100%	25	100%	327	100%

As indicated in Table 4.1, the study achieved an overall response rate of 80%, with 80% participation among SMEs (242 out of 302) and 84% among county officials (21 out of 25). This response rate is considered high and acceptable for survey research, as it surpasses the minimum benchmark of 60% recommended by Fincham (2019) for adequate analysis and exceeds the 70% threshold suggested by Mohajan (2018) for surveys that seek to generalize findings. High participation levels in both respondent categories indicate a strong willingness to provide data and suggest that the findings are representative of the target population. Some of the contributory factors to the non-response was busy schedules of SMEs and county officials as well reluctance to disclose information on governance and service delivery. The strong response rate among county officials (84%) further enhances the reliability of insights drawn from key informants, while the high SME participation (80%) provides a robust foundation for examining perceptions of branding strategies and satisfaction with service delivery.

4.3 Demographics Results

The subsection presents results on the demographic profile namely the business owner's (managers) highest level of education as well as the SMEs operational period. Table 4.2 gives a summary of the results.

Table 4.2: Demographics Results

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Level of Education	Certificate	2	1%
	Diploma	36	15%
	Undergraduate	166	69%
	Post Graduate	38	16%
Duration of Operation	A year and below	32	13%
	Two Years	44	18%
	Three Years	110	45%
	Fours and more	56	23%

The results indicated that majority of the SME respondents hold undergraduate degrees (69%), with an additional 16% having postgraduate qualifications, while only a small fraction have diplomas (15%) or certificates (1%). This indicates that SME owners and managers in Bungoma County are generally highly educated, aligning with recent findings that education enhances entrepreneurs' ability to navigate regulatory systems, adopt innovations, and engage effectively with government services (Robson & Jack, 2020). The dominance of degree holders implies that SMEs are run by individuals with the cognitive and technical capacity to evaluate government branding strategies critically, which could heighten their expectations of transparency, accountability, and service quality. For the county, this means branding must not be superficial but backed by genuine efficiency and consistency, as highly educated entrepreneurs are better positioned to detect discrepancies between rhetoric and practice (Mutua, 2019).

It was further established that 45% of SMEs have operated for three years, followed by 23% for four years or more, while 18% have operated for two years and 13% for one year or less. This distribution suggests that most respondents represent relatively established enterprises that have sustained operations beyond the critical early stages

of SME mortality at least 3 years (World Bank, 2020). The predominance of SMEs with three or more years of operation implies that these firms have accumulated significant interaction with county government services such as licensing, permits, and compliance monitoring. Consequently, their responses provide credible insights into how government branding strategies influence satisfaction with service delivery over time. Newer SMEs (below two years), though fewer, reflect emerging businesses whose perceptions may reveal the accessibility and inclusivity of county branding and service processes for start-ups.

4.4 Descriptive Analysis

This section presents the major findings of descriptive statistics results. Mean and standard deviation for each objective element is presented in forms of tables then discussed.

4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Government Transparency Branding

The first objective of the study was to establish the effect of government transparency branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. Respondents rated statements on government transparency branding on a five-point Likert scale (5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3= Undecided, 2=Disagree (D), 1=Strongly Disagree (SD) as well as additional open-ended question. This section presents the descriptive statistics of the responses as presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics of Government Transparency Branding

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std Dev
The county government supports transparent public procurement of high-quality local products, which improves the reliability of opportunities available to SMEs.	5%	9%	42%	28%	16%	2.85	1.12
There are clear procedures for prequalification into AGPO, including time taken and official costs, ensuring consistency in how SMEs access procurement opportunities.	2%	7%	26%	45%	20%	2.33	1.13
There are clear procedures for payments, timelines, and total tax rates for firms to comply with regulations, which enhances fairness and reduces administrative burdens for SMEs.	2%	5%	15%	52%	26%	2.1	1.1
There are clear procedures on time and cost to get connected to the electrical grid, as well as reliability of supply and consumption costs, improving the reliability of utility service delivery for SMEs.	4%	8%	24%	36%	28%	2.53	1.15
There are clear procedures followed to register into an association, including the average time taken and costs involved, which improves the timeliness and accessibility of administrative services to SMEs.	5%	9%	32%	32%	22%	2.61	1.14
There are clear procedures on time and cost to resolve commercial disputes and the quality of judicial processes, which strengthens the	3%	6%	22%	48%	22%	2.36	1.16

responsiveness and fairness of legal services for SMEs.							
Government plans and programs are implemented transparently, which enhances the consistency and predictability of county service delivery to SMEs.	7%	12%	35%	28%	18%	2.77	1.13
The entire process of the county government is transparently disclosed, which improves SMEs' trust in the fairness and openness of service delivery.	4%	8%	38%	36%	14%	2.68	1.11
As SMEs we can clearly see the progress and situations of the government administration, which enhances the timeliness and reliability of information for business planning.	4%	7%	31%	48%	10%	2.38	1.08
The county government discloses sufficient information to SMEs about its performance, which improves responsiveness and accountability in service delivery.	5%	9%	33%	41%	12%	2.53	1.1
Average						2.51	1.22

Key: 5= Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3= Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The descriptive statistics show how SMEs perceive the alignment between transparency branding practices and service delivery at the county level. The average mean score of 2.51 (SD = 1.22) suggests that SMEs' satisfaction with transparency-linked service delivery lies between "neutral" and "somewhat dissatisfied." This indicates that while there are efforts toward transparent branding, many SMEs feel that transparency has not yet translated into fully reliable, consistent, and predictable services.

For individual items, procedures for tax compliance and payments (Mean = 2.1) scored lowest, suggesting that SMEs face significant difficulties with timelines, clarity, and fairness of payment systems—an area prone to inefficiency and perceived corruption. Conversely, procurement and AGPO prequalification (Mean = 2.33–2.85), though still low, reflect slightly better satisfaction levels, indicating that structured frameworks like AGPO are beginning to enhance service reliability, albeit inconsistently. Similarly, utilities access (Mean = 2.53) and association registration processes (Mean = 2.61) are areas where SMEs acknowledge some gains in procedural clarity, though timeliness and cost burdens remain.

Transparency in program implementation and disclosure of government processes (Mean = 2.68–2.77) shows moderate satisfaction. This indicates that while SMEs can see progress in government communication, it is not always sufficient or accessible for effective business planning. Notably, seeing progress in government administration (Mean = 2.38) and receiving adequate performance information (Mean = 2.53) suggest a gap between transparency rhetoric and practical responsiveness.

The findings demonstrate relatively low satisfaction with financial transparency (taxes, payments) implying a need for counties to simplify procedures, improve timelines, and adopt more predictable digital systems to reduce administrative burdens. This is supported by a study conducted by Li, Wang and Qu (2025) who established that perceived transparency has a positive impact on perceived value and citizen satisfaction. The findings also imply that transparency in public procurement and AGPO access remains critical and improving clarity in prequalification and reducing perceived favoritism could build trust among SMEs.

Furthermore, transparency in utility service delivery and dispute resolution suggests that SMEs require more reliable infrastructure and accessible legal processes to support stable operations. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Nguyen *et al.* (2021) on the roles of perception, transparency, trust and perceived social equity in enhancing citizen satisfaction in the public sector which established that transparency in the public sector enhances citizen satisfaction. The overall moderate average scores reflect that transparency branding has yet to translate fully into SME satisfaction with service delivery meaning that while disclosure and communication mechanisms exist, they must be strengthened with actionable responsiveness and timely feedback loops.

These findings were reflected in the open-ended question where the respondents provided their views on perceived areas of improvement in regard to transparency. As summarized in Table 4.4, the respondents highlighted the importance of simplifying processes by providing clearer, less bureaucratic steps in procurement, taxation, licensing, and access to services. Specifically, they emphasized the need to strengthen procurement transparency by adopting e-procurement platforms, publishing bid evaluations, and improving fairness and openness in AGPO-related processes. In addition, financial transparency was underscored, with calls for the county to publish financial reports, enforce predictable payment timelines, and digitize revenue collection to reduce inefficiencies and hidden costs.

The open-ended responses further illustrated these concerns. One SME respondent noted: *R1 “The county should make tender and AGPO information easier to access through online portals and SMS alerts because many of us miss opportunities due to delayed communication.”* Another respondent added: *“Revenue collection and payment systems need to be fully digital because unclear timelines and manual follow-ups create unnecessary delays and hidden costs.”*

SMEs also stressed the need for more effective grievance and feedback mechanisms, suggesting the establishment of hotlines, SMS systems, complaint desks, and online portals to allow for timely redress of concerns. Alongside this, respondents recommended more training opportunities through regular workshops, barazas, and sensitization forums tailored to SMEs, aimed at improving awareness of county processes, rights, and available opportunities. Finally, there was a strong push for greater digitization of services by expanding mobile platforms, online licensing, and digital procurement and payment systems. Such measures, they argued, would minimize human discretion, enhance openness, and ultimately build greater trust between the county government and SMEs.

Table 4.4: Summary of Qualitative Responses on Government Transparency Branding

Question	Summary of the main themes from the responses
Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve transparency when serving you	• SMEs highlighted a need for clearer, less bureaucratic steps in procurement, taxation, licensing, and service access. • The respondents emphasized a need to adopt e-procurement platforms, publish bid evaluations, and increase AGPO transparency. • They further emphasized a need to publish financial reports and enforce predictable payment timelines as well as digitize revenue collection. • SMEs requested for more effective channels to voice grievances and receive redress. They recommended a need to establish hotlines, SMS systems, complaint desks, and online portals for feedback. • SMEs recommended for more trainings through regular workshops, <i>barazas</i>, and SME-focused sensitization forums in order to understand county processes, rights, and opportunities. • There was also a recommendation for more digitization of services through expansion of mobile platforms, online licensing, and digital procurement/payment systems so as to minimize human discretion and enhance openness.

4.4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Government Accountability Branding

The second objective of the study was to establish the effect of government accountability branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. Respondents rated statements on government accountability branding on a five-point Likert scale (5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3= Undecided, 2=Disagree (D), 1=Strongly Disagree (SD) as well as additional open-ended question. This section presents the descriptive statistics of the responses as presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of Government Accountability Branding

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
The county government regularly shares information with the public on projects affecting SMEs, which improves the reliability of service delivery updates.	7%	15%	29%	35%	14%	2.85	1.22
As SMEs, we can access information on the level of service delivery by our county government, which enhances transparency and consistency in monitoring service performance.	4%	9%	33%	41%	13%	2.73	1.18
The county government has provided various complaint methods (e.g., complaint boxes, hotlines), which strengthens responsiveness in addressing SME concerns.	5%	12%	23%	39%	21%	2.63	1.25
SME opinion leaders closely follow up on service implementation to ensure resources are properly utilized, which improves fairness and accountability in county service delivery.	3%	7%	26%	43%	20%	2.49	1.2
The county government occasionally organizes public hearings for SMEs to articulate preferences and disappointments, which enhances inclusiveness and responsiveness in service delivery.	6%	11%	34%	32%	17%	2.82	1.21
The county government has demonstrated accountability to SMEs over the last two years, which improves trust and satisfaction with county services.	6%	12%	27%	36%	18%	2.75	1.18
The county government is sensitive to SMEs' opinions, which increases fairness and empathy in service delivery.	5%	8%	29%	37%	21%	2.61	1.22
The county government responds quickly to SMEs' requests, which enhances	4%	9%	32%	43%	12%	2.66	1.17

timeliness and reliability in service delivery.							
The county government makes sincere efforts to support SMEs in need, which improves the perceived responsiveness and equity of service delivery.	5%	12 %	31 %	38 %	14 %	2.72	1.19
SME appeals to the county government are addressed properly within a reasonable period, which strengthens timeliness and fairness in service delivery.	5%	12 %	34 %	41 %	9%	2.69	1.15
The county government has a regular reporting system on the achievements and results of SME programs, which enhances consistency and accountability in service delivery.	6%	10 %	29 %	41 %	14 %	2.72	1.18
The government recognizes its responsibility towards SMEs, which improves trustworthiness and reliability in service delivery.	8%	16 %	27 %	33 %	15 %	2.76	1.18
The county government follows treasury rules and regulations in all circumstances, which assures SMEs of fairness and financial accountability in service delivery.	4%	10 %	28 %	41 %	17 %	2.6	1.21
The government ensures proper usage of its budget in an authorized manner, which enhances confidence in the reliability and efficiency of service delivery.	5%	12 %	29 %	41 %	12 %	2.69	1.18
Average						2.96	1.19

Key: 5= Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3= Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

As shown in Table 4.5, it was established that SMEs rated the average satisfaction with accountability branding in service delivery at Mean = 2.96, which sits closer to neutral but leaning toward dissatisfaction. This suggests that while accountability mechanisms exist within the county, SMEs perceive them as inconsistently applied or insufficiently effective in enhancing service delivery.

Specifically, the highest mean scores were recorded for information sharing on projects (Mean = 2.85) and public hearings for SMEs (Mean = 2.82), implying that SMEs recognize some efforts in making service delivery processes more transparent and participatory. However, this remains below the midpoint of the scale, reflecting dissatisfaction with the adequacy and regularity of such initiatives.

Relatively moderate ratings were given to county government responsiveness to SME requests (Mean = 2.66) and proper handling of appeals (Mean = 2.69), pointing to concerns over timeliness and fairness in addressing SME needs. Similarly, financial accountability indicators—such as following treasury rules (Mean = 2.60) and ensuring proper usage of budgets (Mean = 2.69), were viewed critically, showing skepticism about prudent use of resources. Furthermore, accountability to SMEs over the last two years (Mean = 2.75) also scored below neutral, suggesting a perceived gap between policy commitments and actual delivery.

Overall, the results imply that accountability branding remains underdeveloped in Bungoma County (Overall Mean = 2.96; SD = 1.18). This implies that for SMEs to experience satisfaction in service delivery, accountability must go beyond symbolic gestures (like occasional hearings) to practical, systematic processes that ensure fairness, efficiency, and trustworthiness in service delivery. Strengthening reporting systems, expanding citizen oversight, and improving budget transparency could substantially increase SME satisfaction while aligning with broader governance reforms.

These findings imply that weak accountability mechanisms reduce SMEs' confidence in county service delivery, undermining trust and legitimacy of devolved governance. This may discourage SMEs from participating fully in county programs, procurement processes, or public-private partnerships. In their study, Manaf, Mohamed and Harvey (2023) similarly established low satisfaction with government service delivery as a result of three accountability concerns namely the inadequacy of citizens' participation in programs, actions in relation to complaints and the slow response to repair dilapidated basic infrastructure.

The findings further imply that limited responsiveness and delayed grievance handling suggest that county governments need to institutionalize structured, time-bound

redress systems that SMEs can rely on. These findings are consistent with the findings established in a study by Lamsal and Gupta (2022) who established that compliance with the rule, responsiveness, prompt service delivery, receiving service own self, and hassle-free service have a positive effect on citizen satisfaction, hence, cautious intervention in these factors is pivotal to ensure higher citizen satisfaction with public service.

In addition, from the open-ended responses, a recurring theme was the call for greater openness in how county budgets, taxes, and SME-related funds are allocated and spent. Respondents noted that irregular or missing reports weaken accountability for service delivery outcomes, underscoring the need for the county to establish consistent reporting schedules that keep SMEs informed. Alongside this, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of tighter oversight of projects and county staff to curb misuse of resources and ensure that service delivery reflects proper utilization of public funds.

Moreover, SMEs stressed the need for more effective grievance handling systems that they can trust. They suggested the introduction of structured feedback systems with clear timelines and digital complaint tracking mechanisms to ensure their concerns are addressed in a timely and transparent manner. The role of inclusivity also featured prominently, with respondents highlighting that accountability requires SME participation in decisions that directly affect them. As such, they recommended the holding of regular SME barazas to strengthen engagement. Also, SMEs pointed out limited awareness of accountability rights and processes among business operators, recommending targeted training on oversight roles, access to information rights, and whistleblowing protections. Lastly, concerns were raised about favoritism and politically motivated allocation of opportunities, with respondents stressing that such practices undermine fairness and weaken trust in county governance.

These accountability concerns were strongly reflected in the voices of SMEs. One respondent stated: *R14 “The county rarely explains how SME funds and taxes are spent, and this makes it difficult for us to trust whether the programs truly benefit businesses.”* Another SME explained: *“Complaints should be tracked digitally with timelines because many grievances disappear once they are submitted physically.”* A summary of the main themes from the qualitative responses has been provided in

Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Summary of Qualitative Responses on Government Accountability Branding

Question	Summary of the main themes from the responses
Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve accountability when serving you	• SMEs called for greater openness on how county budgets, taxes, and SME-related funds are allocated and spent. SMEs noted that irregular or missing reports reduce accountability for service delivery outcomes hence a need to establish consistent reporting schedules. • Respondents emphasized the need for tighter oversight of projects and county staff to reduce misuse of resources. • Calls were also made for faster, more effective grievance handling systems that SMEs can trust through an introduction of a structured feedback system with timelines and digital complaint tracking. • Some respondents stressed that accountability requires SME participation in county decisions that affect them hence a need to hold regular SME <i>barazas</i>. • SMEs pointed out limited awareness of accountability rights and processes thus recommending a need for training of SMEs on oversight roles, access to information rights, and whistleblowing protections. • Concerns were raised about favoritism and politically motivated allocation of opportunities.

4.4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Government Communication Branding Strategy

The third objective of the study was to establish the effect of government communication branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. Respondents rated statements on government communication branding on a five-point Likert scale (5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3= Undecided, 2=Disagree (D), 1=Strongly Disagree (SD) as well as additional open-ended question. This section presents the descriptive statistics of the responses as presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics of Government Communication Branding

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
The county government has a website or internet portal accessible to citizens and the business community, which improves accessibility and reliability of service delivery information for SMEs.	9%	24%	33%	23%	11%	2.97	1.17
The county government website allows searching databases and downloading/printing forms, policies, and documents, which enhances consistency and efficiency in service delivery to SMEs.	7%	19%	31%	33%	10%	2.84	1.18
We can contact government services via e-mail, complete forms online, or upload completed forms through the e-government portal, which improves responsiveness and convenience in service delivery for SMEs.	8%	17%	35%	30%	10%	2.84	1.2
The county government website provides a secure online payment solution for invoices, which enhances timeliness and reliability of financial service delivery for SMEs.	5%	12%	29%	39%	14%	2.59	1.22
We can access government services anytime (24/7) through the government website, which strengthens the reliability and responsiveness of service delivery for SMEs.	6%	16%	31%	35%	12%	2.71	1.18
The county government website has online poll/survey capabilities, which increases inclusiveness and responsiveness in service delivery by capturing SMEs' views.	4%	9%	23%	41%	23%	2.48	1.22
The county government website provides a formal online consultation facility with officials, which enhances fairness and accessibility in service delivery to SMEs.	3%	8%	25%	39%	24%	2.47	1.2

The county government's social media pages (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) provide sufficient news and information, which improves SMEs' understanding and satisfaction with service delivery.	6%	12%	30%	33%	20%	2.65	1.23
The county government's social media pages provide accurate information, which enhances trust and reliability in communication and service delivery for SMEs.	7%	13%	27%	35%	18%	2.73	1.22
The county government's social media pages provide diverse and varied information, which improves inclusiveness and accessibility in service delivery communication to SMEs.	5%	12%	29%	37%	17%	2.62	1.21
The county government's social media pages provide news and information in a timely manner, which improves the responsiveness and efficiency of service delivery to SMEs.	6%	16%	25%	35%	19%	2.68	1.23
The county government's social media pages provide access to other information sources (e.g., links to useful government websites), which improves connectivity and consistency in service delivery for SMEs.	7%	10%	23%	39%	20%	2.64	1.22
The county government's social media pages provide access to other communication channels (e.g., county website, contact details), which strengthens accessibility and responsiveness in service delivery for SMEs.	8%	12%	25%	35%	20%	2.62	1.21
The county government's social media pages provide appropriate information, which improves reliability and	6%	12%	27%	35%	19%	2.62	1.21

trustworthiness in service delivery for SMEs.							
Average						2.68	1.21

Key: 5= Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3= Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The study findings indicated that SMEs rated the county government's communication branding at an overall mean of 2.68 (SD = 1.21), which reflects a position closer to neutral but leaning toward dissatisfaction. This suggests that while communication platforms such as websites and social media are in place, SMEs perceive them as only moderately effective in improving service delivery.

Website-related indicators generally scored higher than social media ones, with the website's accessibility (Mean = 2.97) and its ability to provide downloadable forms and documents (Mean = 2.84) reflecting modest satisfaction among SMEs. These findings suggest that websites are valued for enhancing consistency and efficiency in accessing service delivery information. However, features like secure online payment solutions (Mean = 2.59) and 24/7 service accessibility (Mean = 2.71) remain weak spots, pointing to gaps in digital service functionality and reliability.

Social media indicators recorded relatively lower scores, with timely provision of news (Mean = 2.68) and provision of accurate information (Mean = 2.73) showing SMEs appreciate these platforms as tools for quick updates and communication. Still, other aspects such as formal online consultation with officials (Mean = 2.47) and online survey/poll capabilities (Mean = 2.48) received some of the lowest ratings, highlighting SMEs' dissatisfaction with inclusiveness and interactive engagement mechanisms.

The findings imply that while Bungoma County has adopted multiple communication tools, they remain underutilized in strengthening service delivery satisfaction for SMEs. The relatively low scores on interactive features (consultations, surveys) suggest that communication remains largely one-way, limiting opportunities for SMEs to co-create or influence decision-making. Similarly, the low satisfaction with secure online payments and 24/7 access suggests that digital communication tools are not yet fully integrated with functional service delivery systems, reducing convenience and

reliability for SMEs. These findings are consistent with that of a study by Alkraihi and Ameen (2022) which emphasized on the role of effective communication channels in enhancing trust in government thus elevating citizen satisfaction and loyalty to its e-government services.

The findings point to the need for a more strategic communication branding approach, focusing on both transparency and engagement. Enhancing interactive features, ensuring timely and consistent updates, and expanding reliable online service functionalities would not only strengthen trust but also make communication branding a driver of improved service delivery. If effectively implemented, communication branding could shift from being symbolic to becoming a practical enabler of SME satisfaction in county-level governance. This is consistent with the findings of a study by De Matteis, Striani and Greco (2023) which established that interpersonal communication and organizational communication positively influence the level of satisfaction of users of local public services (citizens' satisfaction), also countering the negative perception of certain sectors (e.g. taxes and local taxation, traffic police).

From the open-ended responses, SMEs provided several recommendations on how the County Government of Bungoma could improve its communication when serving them. A recurring theme was the need for timely and consistent updates, with many respondents stressing that delays in communicating information on tenders, taxes, training opportunities, and changes in service delivery hinder business planning and reduce trust in government processes. Alongside this, SMEs emphasized the importance of simplified and accessible information, noting that much of the county's communication is either too technical or not widely disseminated. They recommended that information be simplified, translated into local languages, and distributed through diverse channels such as radio, SMS, and social media to reach a broader audience.

Respondents from the open-ended question further reflected these views. The respondents emphasized the need for interactive communication channels, pointing out that communication should not be one-way but should instead include structured feedback systems. Suggestions included the introduction of online surveys, polls, and consultation forums that would allow SMEs to share their views and influence policy and service improvements.

Furthermore, SMEs highlighted the importance of better integration of digital platforms, recommending that county websites, portals, and social media accounts be made more functional, user-friendly, and directly connected to service delivery processes such as online payments and licensing. Finally, there was a strong call for direct engagement with SMEs through barazas, training sessions, and business forums. Such face-to-face engagements would provide an opportunity for county officials to explain policies, address concerns, and build stronger trust-based relationships with the SME community.

The SMEs' voices further reinforced the communication challenges. One respondent observed: *R5 "Most information reaches us late, especially on tenders and tax deadlines, so by the time we know, the opportunity has already passed."* Another added: *"The county should use SMS and radio more because not all SMEs constantly check social media or the website."* The summary of the thematic responses is presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Summary of the Qualitative Responses on Government Communication Branding

Question	Summary of the main themes from the responses
Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve its communication when serving you	• SMEs emphasized the need for the county to provide regular and up-to-date information on tenders, taxes, training opportunities, and service delivery changes. • Respondents highlighted challenges in accessing and interpreting county information, recommending that communication be simplified, translated into local languages, and made available across multiple channels (radio, SMS, and social media). • SMEs expressed a desire for two-way communication, including structured feedback mechanisms such as online surveys, polls, and consultation forums, where their views can influence policy and service improvements. • Participants called for the county to expand and integrate digital communication tools, ensuring that websites, portals, and social media pages are functional, user-friendly, and linked to service delivery systems such as online payments

	and e-licensing. Respondents stressed the importance of direct engagement through SME-focused barazas, training sessions, and business forums, where county officials can explain policies, address concerns, and build trust through face-to-face communication.
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4.4.4 Descriptive Statistics on E-Government Strategy Branding

The fourth objective of the study was to determine the effect of e-government strategy branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. Respondents rated statements on government communication branding on a five-point Likert scale (5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3= Undecided, 2=Disagree (D), 1=Strongly Disagree (SD) as well as additional open-ended question. This section presents the descriptive statistics of the responses as presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics of E-government Strategy

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
The government has developed coordinated strategies and programs to spur innovation, which improves the reliability and efficiency of service delivery for SMEs.	12%	29%	33%	17%	9%	3.02	1.01
The government has implemented coordinated strategies and programs to spur innovation, which enhances consistency and predictability in service delivery to SMEs.	12%	27%	37%	16%	8%	3.05	0.99
The government creates an innovation culture among citizens, institutions, companies, and departments, which improves responsiveness and inclusiveness in service delivery for SMEs.	9%	21%	35%	23%	12%	2.88	1.03

The government promotes academia-industry and industry-industry collaboration, which strengthens fairness and accessibility in service delivery for SMEs through broader partnerships.	11%	25%	29%	23%	13%	2.93	1.05
The government provides a framework to measure economic goals and the social impacts of innovation, which improves accountability and transparency in service delivery to SMEs.	13%	28%	31%	19%	9%	3.07	1
The government enables identification and correction of overlaps and contradictions among strategies, which enhances the efficiency and reliability of service delivery for SMEs.	10%	23%	33%	25%	9%	2.91	1.04
The government enables identification of gaps that can be filled through new targeted strategies and programs, which improves responsiveness and timeliness of service delivery to SMEs.	12%	26%	35%	19%	8%	3.02	1.02
Government innovation policy is treated as a living document that is regularly reviewed, which improves adaptability and consistency in service delivery for SMEs.	12%	24%	32%	21%	11%	2.89	1.07
The government provides incentives to promote value addition and diversification of Kenyan products, which enhances fairness and equity in service delivery to SMEs.	14%	29%	31%	17%	9%	3.08	1.01
The government provides product standards and certification, which	14%	26%	29%	21%	10%	2.93	1.03

increases the reliability and trustworthiness of services supporting SMEs in the local market.							
The government aims to enhance consumer confidence in Kenyan products and their competitiveness in export markets, which improves efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to SMEs.	12%	26%	32%	19%	11%	2.97	1.04
Average						2.98	1.03

Key: 5= Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3= Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The results show that SMEs rated the county government's e-government strategy branding at an overall mean of 2.98 (SD = 1.03), which is slightly below neutral, indicating moderate dissatisfaction with how innovation-oriented strategies are improving service delivery. The results indicate that e-government branding in Bungoma County is underdeveloped in terms of inclusivity, consistency, and responsiveness whereby although there are coordinated strategies and programs in place, their practical impact on SMEs remains limited.

The relatively higher ratings were recorded for government frameworks to measure economic and social impacts of innovation (Mean = 3.07) and provision of incentives for value addition and diversification (Mean = 3.08). These results suggest that SMEs recognize some positive efforts in aligning innovation with broader development goals and in promoting competitiveness, particularly in product quality and diversification. Similarly, statements relating to coordinated strategies (Mean = 3.02–3.05) indicate acknowledgment of policy initiatives, though their perceived consistency and predictability are still lacking.

On the other hand, lower satisfaction levels were seen in aspects of innovation culture creation (Mean = 2.88) and treatment of innovation policy as a living document (Mean = 2.89). These findings highlight SMEs' concerns that innovation strategies are not being sufficiently mainstreamed into day-to-day governance or updated to reflect local needs. Likewise, academia-industry collaboration (Mean = 2.93) and product

certification (Mean = 2.93) received moderate scores, pointing to gaps in partnerships and in ensuring reliable quality assurance for SMEs.

The findings imply that while innovation-oriented policies exist, SMEs perceive weak implementation and limited impact, which may hinder their confidence in the county's ability to provide reliable and effective services. This highlights the need for greater translation of e-government strategies into tangible outcomes, such as simplified processes, digitized systems, and improved standards. Pramuditha, Muhafidin, Sumaryana and Susanti (2024) established that e-government service quality has a significant positive impact on citizen satisfaction, with information quality emerging and simplified processes as the most crucial indicator. Citizen satisfaction, in turn, positively influences citizen trust.

Findings also imply that relatively higher scores for incentive structures and measurement frameworks suggest that SMEs value policies that have direct, measurable impacts on their competitiveness and growth. Expanding these initiatives could lead to greater satisfaction and encourage SME participation in county-led innovation programs. However, the low ratings on innovation culture and policy adaptability imply that without continuous updates and stakeholder engagement, county innovation efforts risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. This agrees with the findings by Riany (2021) who revealed that implementation of e-government strategy leads to a significant improvement in the public service delivery of state agencies in Kenya and that can result to citizen satisfaction if citizens are involved.

These findings were strongly collaborated with the responses from the open-ended questions which established that the expansion of digital service platforms, with respondents noting that many county services such as licensing, tax compliance, procurement, and business registration are still heavily reliant on manual processes. The respondents suggested that digitizing a broader range of services would reduce bureaucratic delays and enhance efficiency. Alongside this, SMEs highlighted the need for improving system reliability and accessibility, pointing out that existing platforms are often difficult to use or not consistently available. They recommended making county e-platforms more user-friendly, mobile-compatible, and accessible 24/7 to maximize convenience.

Another important recommendation was the strengthening of data security and trust in county digital systems. Respondents expressed concerns about the safety of sensitive business information and online transactions, underscoring the need for stronger cybersecurity measures and clear assurances of data protection. SMEs also emphasized the importance of capacity building and digital literacy, noting that many business operators still lack the skills to use e-services effectively. They called for county-led training programs and awareness campaigns to empower SMEs to take full advantage of digital platforms.

The open-ended responses gave more practical insight into these digital gaps. One SME respondent noted: *R10“Licensing, tax payments, and registration should all be online because manual systems still waste too much time and increase movement to offices.”* Another respondent emphasized: *R12“The systems should also be mobile-friendly because many small businesses rely on phones rather than computers.”* A summary of the responses is provided in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Summary of Qualitative Responses on E-government Strategy

Question	Summary of the main themes from the responses
Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve e-strategy when serving you	• SMEs recommended that the county expand its online service platforms to cover a wider range of services such as licensing, tax compliance, procurement, and business registrations, thereby reducing reliance on physical offices. • Respondents highlighted the need for more reliable and user-friendly digital systems, with platforms that are accessible on mobile devices and operational 24/7 to enhance convenience for SMEs. • Concerns were raised about the safety of digital transactions and records, with calls for stronger security features and assurances that sensitive business data will be protected from misuse. • SMEs emphasized that many business operators lack adequate digital skills, recommending county-led training and awareness programs to help them adopt e-services effectively.

4.4.5 Descriptive Statistics on Political Influence

The fifth objective of the study was to establish the moderating effect of political influence on the relationship between public sector branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. Respondents rated statements on political influence on a five-point Likert scale (5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3= Undecided, 2=Disagree (D), 1=Strongly Disagree (SD) as well as additional open-ended question. This section presents the descriptive statistics of the responses as presented in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Descriptive Statistics of Political Influence

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std Dev
Politicians in the County Government of Bungoma influence the delivery of services to your SME business	8%	23%	33%	23%	13%	2.86	1.09
The county assembly has the power to pass laws relating to county governance	12%	29%	35%	17%	7%	3.03	1.03
The county government respects civil liberties and human rights	10%	25%	35%	21%	9%	2.89	1.02
The county government has effective input in national policy-making processes on devolution	12%	23%	37%	19%	10%	2.91	1.03
The county government has full autonomy to formulate local policies	9%	21%	33%	25%	12%	2.84	1.05
The county government has sufficient power to decide on how to raise revenue	8%	23%	35%	23%	11%	2.88	1.01
The county government has the authority to set the rates and charges for devolved services	12%	25%	33%	19%	11%	2.95	1.04

Your county government is responsible for the economic empowerment of the residents	14%	29%	31%	17%	9%	3.09	1.01
Policies regarding resource distribution affect the availability of funds for SME support programs	12%	27%	35%	19%	7%	2.94	1
Political policies shape the operating environment for SMEs, influencing licensing, taxation, and compliance requirements.	12%	25%	35%	19%	10%	2.91	1.02
Political policies aimed at promoting economic development, job creation, or entrepreneurship directly impact the availability and effectiveness of support programs for SMEs.	10%	29%	35%	21%	5%	2.9	0.95
Policies that encourage investment, infrastructure development, and business-friendly environments positively influence the overall climate for SMEs.	12%	27%	35%	19%	7%	2.94	0.98
Favorable policies that promote fair competition and inclusion of SMEs in procurement processes can enhance opportunities for these businesses.	13%	29%	33%	17%	8%	3.01	1
Policies that promote dialogue, consultation, and partnership between the government and the SME sector can contribute to more effective services delivery.	10%	25%	35%	21%	8%	2.92	1.01
Political advocacy can lead to the development of policies and	8%	23%	35%	25%	12%	2.79	1.03

programs tailored to address the challenges faced by SMEs							
Frequent changes in policies due to political shifts can create uncertainty for SMEs, affecting their ability to plan and invest in the long term.	10%	29%	35%	21%	10%	2.94	1.01
A transparent and accountable government is more likely to deliver services efficiently and fairly, benefitting SMEs.	14%	31%	33%	17%	6%	3.03	0.95
Average						2.93	1.01

Key: 5= Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3= Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The results show that SMEs rated the overall influence of politics on service delivery and business environment at an average mean of 2.93 (SD = 1.01), which falls just below neutral, suggesting that SMEs perceive political influence as moderately present but with mixed implications for service delivery.

The highest ratings were observed for items such as county assembly's power to pass laws (M = 3.03), favorable policies promoting SME inclusion in procurement (Mean = 3.01), and transparent and accountable government leading to fairer service delivery (Mean = 3.03). These findings suggest that SMEs acknowledge the formal authority of political institutions and see potential benefits in political structures that foster inclusivity, accountability, and supportive procurement policies.

Moderate satisfaction was expressed regarding county government's economic empowerment role (Mean = 3.09) and policies encouraging investment and infrastructure (Mean = 2.94). These results show that SMEs recognize the county's political mandate to create a conducive business environment, though perceptions of actual impact remain mixed. On the other hand, relatively lower ratings were noted for political advocacy shaping SME policies (Mean = 2.79) and political influence on SME service delivery (Mean = 2.86), indicating that SMEs may feel excluded from policy formulation or view political influence as inconsistent or biased. Additionally,

the perception that frequent policy shifts create uncertainty (Mean = 2.94) highlights concerns about instability and unpredictability in the SME operating environment.

These findings imply the perception that political institutions hold strong influence over service delivery suggesting that accountability mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure political decisions consistently translate into tangible benefits for SMEs. Policies on procurement, taxation, and licensing should be shielded from undue political patronage to create fair competition and a predictable business environment.

The findings further imply that the mixed satisfaction scores on economic empowerment and policy advocacy highlight a gap between political commitments and SMEs' lived realities. To improve service delivery satisfaction, county governments should institutionalize structured consultation processes such as SME forums and policy dialogues ensuring that SMEs' voices shape policy design and implementation. The findings are consistent with that of a study by Msenge and Nzewi (2021) who established that meaningful citizen participation is a precondition for the establishment of trust between communities and public administrators.

This concern was echoed by one SME respondent who stated: R2 *"Sometimes opportunities depend more on political connections than on clear procedures, which discourages many genuine business owners."* Another respondent remarked: *"Frequent changes in county priorities after political shifts make it hard for SMEs to plan long-term investments."*

The concern over frequent policy changes due to political shifts emphasize the need for policy stability. Long-term, consistent frameworks are essential to build investor confidence, reduce business risks, and encourage SME growth. Transparent, accountable, and participatory governance can ensure that the county is able mitigate the negative aspects of political influence while leveraging its positive role in creating an enabling environment for SMEs. He and Ma (2021) similarly linked limited political patronage to citizen satisfaction and trust in public health service delivery.

4.4.6 Descriptive Statistics on SMEs' Service Delivery Satisfaction

Respondents rated statements on service delivery satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 4

= Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied). This section presents the descriptive statistics of the responses as presented in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Descriptive Statistics of Service Delivery Satisfaction

Satisfaction Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Access to a worksite (an area or location set aside for SMEs' operations)	40.50%	35.10%	14.90%	6.20%	3.30%	4.04	0.98
Access to electricity connection at your worksite	42.10%	36.40%	12.40%	6.20%	2.90%	4.09	0.93
Access to water connections at your worksite	37.20%	38.80%	14.50%	7.00%	2.50%	4.02	0.95
Waste management services you receive	35.10%	38.00%	16.50%	8.30%	2.10%	3.95	0.96
Access to government procurement opportunities (e.g., tenders, AGPO)	32.20%	36.40%	20.70%	7.90%	2.90%	3.88	1.00
Training and capacity-building opportunities provided for SMEs	39.30%	37.20%	14.50%	6.20%	2.90%	4.04	0.96
Access to digital finance and financial innovations such as M-Pesa	45.50%	36.00%	11.60%	4.10%	2.90%	4.17	0.91
Ability to cope with technology, innovation, and patenting requirements	38.00%	36.80%	16.50%	6.60%	2.10%	4.02	0.95
Costs, acquisition, and renewal processes, as well as the time taken for these processes	36.40%	38.80%	14.50%	7.40%	2.90%	3.99	0.97
Overall administration of your county government	34.30%	40.50%	16.50%	6.20%	2.50%	3.97	0.95

Government is working for the benefit of SMEs	35.10%	39.30%	15.30%	7.40%	2.90%	3.96	0.98
Critical work the government has done for SMEs	37.20%	38.00%	14.50%	7.90%	2.50%	3.99	0.96
Way public sector departments are working to support SMEs	33.10%	41.30%	16.50%	7.00%	2.10%	3.96	0.94
Quality of administration in your county government	36.00%	39.30%	15.70%	6.20%	2.90%	3.99	0.95
Administration work of your county government overall	36.40%	40.10%	14.50%	6.20%	2.90%	4.01	0.96
Improvements in government administration over time	39.30%	36.80%	15.70%	5.80%	2.50%	4.04	0.94
Overall functioning of government administration	37.20%	38.00%	15.30%	7.00%	2.50%	3.99	0.95
Quality of government services, and do you feel service quality needs improvement	47.50%	35.10%	10.30%	4.10%	2.90%	4.2	0.9
Way new government strategies are designed to enhance citizen and SME satisfaction	34.70%	40.50%	16.50%	6.20%	2.10%	3.97	0.94
Differences and improvements introduced by new strategies compared to existing ones	41.30%	37.20%	14.50%	5.00%	2.10%	4.1	0.92
Government's facilitation of SME engagement with new strategies	39.30%	36.00%	16.50%	5.80%	2.50%	4.02	0.95
Government's consideration of citizens'	40.50%	36.40%	15.70%	5.00%	2.50%	4.08	0.93

and SMEs' feedback in designing new strategies							
Policy implementation and its benefits to the public and SMEs	37.20%	39.30%	14.50%	6.20%	2.90%	4	0.96
Government's responsibility and commitment to service improvement	38.40%	36.80%	15.70%	7.00%	2.10%	4.02	0.95
Government's rapid actions in responding to SME needs	40.50%	35.10%	16.50%	5.00%	2.90%	4.05	0.95
Government's responsiveness, and do you feel it should be improved	36.40%	38.00%	15.30%	7.00%	3.30%	3.98	0.97
Strategic efforts of government to meet citizen and SME needs	49.60%	33.90%	10.30%	3.30%	2.90%	4.23	0.89
Quality of most county roads	39.30%	36.80%	15.70%	6.20%	2.10%	4.05	0.94
Quality of water supply in your county	36.40%	40.10%	14.50%	6.20%	2.90%	4.01	0.96
Access to a worksite (an area or location set aside for SMEs' operations)	38.00%	37.20%	15.30%	7.00%	2.50%	4.01	0.95
Average						4.03	0.95

Key: 5= Very Satisfied, 4 = Satisfied, 3= Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 1 = Very Dissatisfied

The results show that overall satisfaction among SMEs with county government services is moderately high, with an average mean of 4.03 (SD = 0.95) on a 5-point scale. This suggests that SMEs are generally satisfied, though not overwhelmingly so. The highest satisfaction scores were observed in areas such as strategic efforts of government to meet SME needs (M = 4.23, SD = 0.89) and quality of government

services with a need for improvement ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.90$). Similarly, access to digital finance innovations such as M-Pesa ($M = 4.17$) and differences introduced by new strategies ($M = 4.10$) recorded strong ratings. By contrast, relatively lower scores were noted in access to procurement opportunities ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.00$) and general responsiveness of government ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.97$). The distribution indicates that SMEs are moderately content with infrastructural, administrative, and policy-related services, but there remain areas where expectations are unmet, particularly regarding inclusiveness in economic opportunities and timeliness of responsiveness.

The consistently high mean scores above 4.0 suggest that SMEs perceive county governments as making progress in service delivery, administration, and infrastructural support. The positive ratings on new strategies, consideration of feedback, and policy implementation indicate that SMEs recognize visible reforms and inclusive approaches. However, lower satisfaction in procurement opportunities and responsiveness reflects concerns around bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited accessibility to county tenders, and possible political patronage in service allocation a challenge highlighted by Kaguru, Njoroge and Gichure (2023), who noted political interference in devolved systems undermines equity in service delivery. The standard deviations ranging between 0.90 and 1.00 reflect some variability in satisfaction, implying unequal service experiences across SMEs, possibly tied to sub-county disparities in infrastructure and administrative effectiveness.

These findings carry significant implications for county-level governance and SME development. First, the high satisfaction in strategic planning and innovation-related services implies that counties can leverage branding strategies (transparency, communication, accountability, and digital tools) to deepen SME confidence and participation. However, the lower satisfaction with procurement opportunities signals the need for counties to enhance transparency in AGPO and tendering processes, ensuring SMEs feel included in county economic opportunities. Moreover, the mixed perceptions of responsiveness and rapid action suggest that counties should strengthen feedback mechanisms, reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, and ensure timeliness of service delivery. From a broader perspective, these results imply that while SMEs in Bungoma county acknowledge improvements, sustained legitimacy of county governments depends on closing the remaining gaps between SME expectations and

actual service delivery (Widanti, 2022; Kromidha, 2024).

The overall findings are consistent with the thematic responses from the county officials who participated in the interview. As presented in Table 4.14, the county government officials pointed out that branding has been adopted selectively, with greater emphasis on visible elements such as county logos and social media presence, while more process-oriented strategies like accountability reporting and full digitization of services have not been fully institutionalized. As a result, branding has improved the visibility and recognition of county programs but has only partially succeeded in enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of services, particularly for SMEs who demand more consistency and reliability in service delivery.

The key informants further indicated that branding initiatives have had a positive influence on service delivery and SME satisfaction, particularly in areas like licensing, permits, and access to information. The use of digital communication platforms and public forums has improved accessibility and efficiency, helping SMEs engage more easily with county services. However, satisfaction remains conditional whereby while branding has raised awareness and strengthened perceptions of openness, SMEs continue to experience challenges with delays, bureaucratic hurdles, and uneven responsiveness. This means that branding alone cannot guarantee satisfaction unless it is coupled with tangible improvements in the quality, timeliness, and inclusiveness of services delivered.

It was also established that limited resources, political interference, weak institutional capacity, and gaps in digital infrastructure present significant obstacles to fully embedding branding in county governance. On the other hand, they identified opportunities in expanding digital platforms, creating participatory forums for SMEs, and strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms as pathways to make branding more meaningful.

These perspectives were clearly captured in the voices of the county officials. One key informant explained: R7“*Branding has improved the visibility of county services, especially licensing and permit processes, but SMEs still judge us more by how fast and fairly services are delivered.*” Another county official added: R16“*The biggest challenge is that our digital and accountability systems are not yet fully integrated, so*

branding raises expectations that service systems do not always meet.”

Table 4.13: Summary of Qualitative Responses from the County Officials

Questions	Summary of the main themes from the responses	Illustrative Verbatim
• Describe the extent to which Bungoma County government has adopted and implemented specific public branding strategies in enhancing service delivery • From your perspective, how effective have these public branding strategies been in improving the visibility, trustworthiness, and credibility of county services, particularly for the SME sector? • In what ways have public branding initiatives	• The key informants generally noted that public branding strategies have been adopted selectively, with stronger emphasis on visible elements such as signage and social media platforms, but weaker adoption in process-oriented areas like accountability reporting and digital service delivery. While branding has improved visibility and recognition of county programs, its effectiveness in building trust and credibility remains mixed, especially where implementation gaps exist. • Most of the informants noted that branding initiatives have positively influenced the accessibility and efficiency of services such as licensing, permits, and information	• “We have made efforts to make processes like licensing more transparent so that SMEs can clearly understand the requirements and avoid unnecessary delays.” (KII 4) • “Departments are now expected to account for their performance, and this has helped improve how services are delivered to SMEs.” (KII 9) • “We use forums and digital platforms to communicate with SMEs, but sometimes the feedback we receive from them is still limited.” (KII 2) • “Most of the systems are not fully implemented, so SMEs still have to come physically to follow up on services.” (KII 11) • “There is still a need for more training because not all staff are fully equipped to use the

influenced the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of county service delivery (e.g., licensing, taxation, permits, business support services)? • Based on your engagement with the business community, how do SMEs perceive county service delivery, and to what extent do you think their satisfaction is influenced by the county's branding efforts? • What key challenges does the county face in implementing public branding strategies effectively, and	dissemination. However, the extent of SME satisfaction is moderated by service quality and consistency, meaning that branding alone cannot offset structural challenges like bureaucratic delays, resource constraints, and uneven responsiveness. Officials observed that SMEs appreciate greater openness and outreach efforts, but still demand more reliability and inclusiveness in county service delivery. • The key informants highlighted challenges such as limited resources, political interference, inadequate capacity, and digital infrastructure gaps, which constrain the effective implementation of branding strategies. At the same time, they identified opportunities in leveraging digital platforms, expanding participatory forums with SMEs, and institutionalizing transparency mechanisms to strengthen branding	digital systems effectively.” (KII 15) • “Political factors sometimes influence how services are prioritized, which can affect consistency in how SMEs are served.” (KII 6)
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what opportunities do you see for strengthening branding to better support SME growth and satisfaction?	outcomes. The overall perspective was that public branding holds significant potential for enhancing SME trust and satisfaction, provided that it is linked more deliberately with accountability, transparency, and service quality improvements.	
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4.5 Correlation Analysis

The study used Pearson Correlation Analysis to establish the relationship between the variables under investigation. Pearson correlation was adopted to establish the association between the study variables as shown in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Y	X₁	X₂	X₃	X₄	M
SME satisfaction with Service Delivery (Y)	1					
Government Transparency Branding (X₁)	0.641**	1				
Government Accountability Branding (X₂)	0.716**	0.741**	1			
Government Communication Branding (X₃)	0.751**	0.637**	0.656**	1		
E-government Branding Strategy (X₄)	0.772**	0.535**	0.625**	0.760**	1	
Political Influence (M)	0.522**	0.513**	0.518**	0.883**	0.590**	1
N	242	242	242	242	242	242

Key: ** Significance at 1%; * Significance at 5%

The correlation results demonstrate that transparency branding shows a strong positive

and significant correlation with SME satisfaction ($r = 0.641$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that when county governments provide clear and open procedures in procurement, licensing, taxation, and payments, SMEs experience greater satisfaction with service delivery. Transparency enhances trust and reduces uncertainty, which is particularly crucial for SMEs that often face resource constraints. This is supported by a study conducted by Li, Wang and Qu (2025) who established that perceived transparency has a positive impact on perceived value and citizen satisfaction.

The results further indicated that accountability branding has a strong and significant association with SME satisfaction ($r = 0.716$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that when counties put in place oversight mechanisms, grievance redress systems, and consistent reporting, SMEs perceive service delivery as fair and reliable. Accountability ensures that resources are used as intended and services are delivered equitably, which directly enhances satisfaction. The findings are consistent with that of a study by Manaf, Mohamed and Harvey (2023) who linked satisfaction with government service delivery if three accountability concerns namely adequacy of citizens' participation in programs, actions in relation to complaints and the response to repair dilapidated basic infrastructure are addressed.

It was also established that communication branding correlates very strongly and significantly with SME satisfaction ($r = 0.751$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that timely, accurate, and accessible communication through websites, portals, and social media significantly boosts SMEs' trust and satisfaction with services. Clear communication reduces information asymmetry, allows SMEs to plan effectively, and ensures they feel included in governance processes. The findings agree with the findings of a study by Alkrajji and Ameen (2022) which emphasized on the role of effective communication channels in enhancing trust in government thus elevating citizen satisfaction and loyalty to its e-government services.

The findings also established that e-government branding shows the strongest and most significant correlation with SME satisfaction ($r = 0.772$, $p < 0.01$). This means that digital platforms for licensing, payments, procurement, and service tracking are the most influential factor in shaping how SMEs experience county services. Digitization reduces human discretion, enhances timeliness, and improves efficiency, directly contributing to higher satisfaction levels. This finding suggests that investing

in e-government systems may yield the most immediate and significant improvements in SME perceptions of service delivery. Pramuditha, Muhafidin, Sumaryana and Susanti (2024) similarly established that e-government service quality has a significant positive impact on citizen satisfaction, with information quality emerging and simplified processes as the most crucial indicator.

On political influence, the results showed a moderate but significant association with SME satisfaction with service delivery ($r = 0.522$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that political leadership remains an important enabler or barrier whereby supportive policies can accelerate reforms, while political interference may undermine predictability and fairness. The findings are consistent with that of a study by He and Ma (2021) who similarly linked limited political patronage to citizen satisfaction and trust in public health service delivery.

4.6 Diagnostic Tests

Before running the ordinary least square multiple regression models, the study conducted diagnostic tests to establish whether the assumptions of linear regressions were violated. The study established the multicollinearity tests, Homoscedasticity Test, Autocorrelation and normality tests. The findings are discussed in the subsections.

4.6.1 Normality Test

In order to make inferences from an analysis, assumption of normally distributed variables is important. These tests on normality were conducted using both Kolmogorov-Smirnova normality tests. The results are presented in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery	.506	242	.071	.447	242	.101
Government Transparency Branding	.214	242	.069	.865	242	.099
Government Accountability Branding	.115	242	.102	.942	242	.650
Government Communication Branding	.275	242	.980	.859	242	.080
E-government Branding Strategy	.160	242	.300	.931	242	.330
Political Influence	.224	242	.075	.901	242	.077
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The results indicated that all the study variables had insignificant Shapiro Wilk values and Kolmogorov Smirnov values (Greater than 0.05) implying that the null hypothesis (data is normally distributed) is not rejected. Therefore, it was concluded that the variables were normally distributed as stated by Anwar and Abdullah, (2021). Since the data set was normally distributed, it was hence suitable to conduct an ordinary least square multiple regression analysis since there were no violations of the assumptions of classical linear regression.

4.6.2 Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity test was essential in establishing whether the independent variables were highly correlated or not. Presence of multicollinearity inflates the standard errors of a regression model thus giving spurious results. To establish whether there was a problem of multicollinearity among the independent variables, the study adopted the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) method where a value above 10 is an indication of presence of multicollinearity (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). The results are as indicated

in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16: Variance Inflation Factor Test of Multi-Collinearity

Variables	Collinearity	
	Tolerance	VIF
Government Transparency Branding	0.103	9.729
Government Accountability Branding	0.102	9.825
Government Communication Branding	0.325	3.081
E-government Branding Strategy	0.365	2.739

The results in Table 4.16 indicated that there was no problem of multicollinearity since all the independent variables had a VIF value less than 10. Based on that, it was suitable to use the same data to run regression analysis.

4.6.3 Linearity Tests

The importance of testing for linearity lies in the fact that many statistical methods require an assumption of linearity of data (the data was sampled from a population that relates the variables of interest in a linear fashion). To ensure linearity, outliers ought to be identified and removed from the data since linearity can be fixed by removing outliers. Assumption of linearity which is consistent relationship between the independent and dependent variables makes regression easy. The linear relationship of the independent variables to the dependent variables was tested by plotting a Q-Q plot as shown in Figure 4.1.

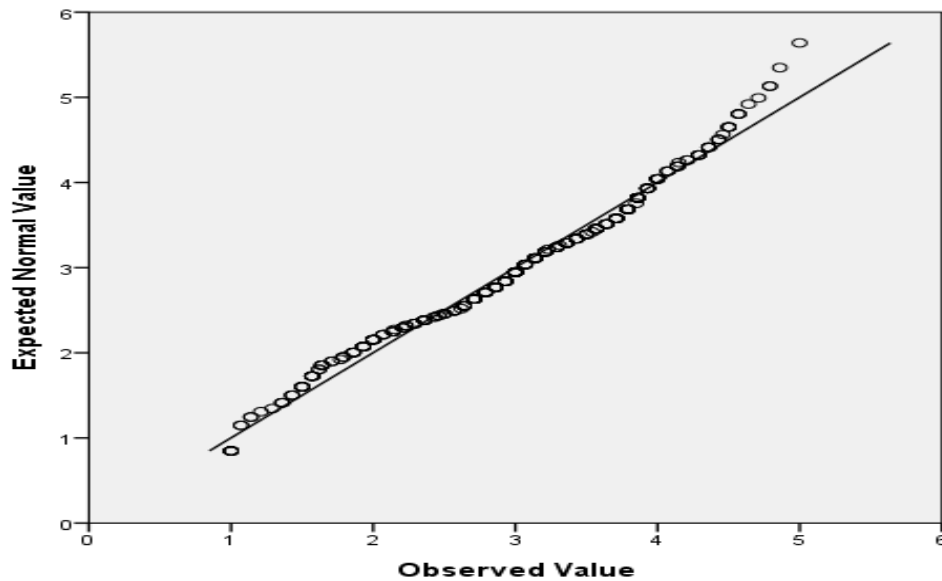


Figure 4.1: Linearity Test

The scatter plot results in Figure 4.1 indicates that the data has concentrated into an upward slopping line to demonstrate that there exists a linear relationship between the study variable (SME's satisfaction with service delivery and public branding strategies). This assumption was hence not violated.

4.6.4 Homoscedasticity

Homoscedasticity suggests that the dependent variable has an equal level of variability for each of the values of the independent variables (Sajid, Chouinard, & Carino, 2022). A test for homoscedasticity was made to test for variance in residuals in the regression model used. Homoscedasticity test was conducted on the error term after running the regression model. If there exist equal variance of the error term, then it is said that there is a normal distribution. Lack of an equal level of variability for each value of the independent variables is known as Heteroskedasticity, The Breusch-Pagan test developed by Breusch and Pagan (1979) was used to test for homogeneity in a linear regression model. The test states that the probability value should be greater than .05 meet the homoscedasticity assumption and indicates non-violations of the classical linear assumptions. The results are presented in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17: Breusch-Pagan Test of Homoscedasticity

Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for Homoscedasticity	
Ho: Constant Variance	
Chi²(3)	= 0.268
Prob > Chi²	= 0.094

The results indicated in Table 4.17 indicated an insignificant p-value (greater than 0.05) at 5% level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis of constant variance is not rejected as indicated by Breusch and Pagan (1979). This shows presence of homogeneity in the error term and hence the assumption of classical linear regression on homogeneity was not violated.

4.6.5 Autocorrelation Test

Autocorrelation describes a situation in which the error terms (that is, the “noise” or random disturbance in the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable) are correlated across the independent variables. Its problem leads to inflation of the standard errors hence leading to spurious findings. Durbin Watson test was used to test for autocorrelation and the results are presented in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18: Durbin-Watson Test of Autocorrelation

Durbin-Watson
2.010

The Durbin Watson statistic for the multiple linear regression analysis for the variables under study was 2.01. Essentially, this value falls within the acceptable range of 1.5 to - 2.0 range as suggested by Turner (2020) indicating that there was no significant autocorrelation in the residual. Consequently, the assumption of serial correlation was affirmed thereby supporting the validity of an OLS regression model.

4.7 Regression Analysis

To establish the effect of public branding strategy on SME’s satisfaction with service delivery, as well as test the study hypotheses, a bivariate and multiple regression analysis were established. The criterion adopted was the significance of the beta coefficients. This section presents the regression findings namely model summary, ANOVA and model

coefficients for each variable as well as for the multiple regression model.

4.7.1 Effect of Government Transparency Branding on SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery

The first objective examined the effect of government transparency branding on SME's satisfaction with service delivery. To determine the magnitude and significance of the relationship between the variables, a univariate regression model was established. The model summary, ANOVA and Model coefficients results are presented in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19: Regression Results for Government Transparency Branding and SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery

Model Summary						
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
	.641 ^a	.411	.409		.28636	
ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	13.718	1	13.718	167.378	.000
	Residual	19.671	240	.082		
	Total	33.388	241			
Model Coefficients						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	.514	.231		2.225	.027
	Government Transparency	.698	.056	.619	12.464	.000
Dependent Variable: SME’s Service delivery Satisfaction						
Predictors: (Constant), Government Transparency Branding						

The regression results demonstrated that government transparency branding account for up to 41.1% of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery (R-square = 0.411). This shows that transparency branding explains a significant proportion of

the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery. Regarding model fitness, ANOVA findings indicated that the regression model was significant and a good fit ($\text{Sig} < 0.05$). This therefore implies that the model was a good predictor of SME's satisfaction with service delivery.

The model coefficients results indicated that government transparency branding positively and significantly affect SME's satisfaction with service delivery ($\beta = 0.698$; $\text{P-value} < 0.05$). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in transparency branding (e.g., clearer procedures, open access to procurement, transparent reporting), SME satisfaction with service delivery increases by approximately 0.70 units. The findings imply that enhancing transparency in county governance through publishing timely financial reports, simplifying licensing procedures, clarifying tax obligations, and openly communicating procurement processes can greatly improve SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Nguyen *et al.* (2021) on the roles of perception, transparency, trust and perceived social equity in enhancing citizen satisfaction in the public sector which established that transparency in the public sector enhances citizen satisfaction.

4.7.2 Effect of Government Accountability Branding on SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery

The second objective of the study was to establish the effect of government accountability branding on SME's satisfaction with service delivery. To determine the magnitude and significance of the relationship between the variables, a univariate regression model was established. The model summary, ANOVA and Model coefficients results are presented in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20: Regression Results for Government Accountability Branding Strategy on Service Delivery Satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.716 ^a	.513	.511	.26232		
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.372	1	17.372	252.452	.000 ^b
	Residual	16.515	240	.069		
	Total	33.888	241			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.637	.109		5.844	.000
	Government Accountability Branding	1.126	.069	.707	16.318	.000
Dependent Variable: SME's Service delivery Satisfaction						
Predictors: (Constant), Government Accountability Branding						

The regression results demonstrated that government accountability branding account for up to 51.3% of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery (R-square = 0.513). This shows that accountability branding explains a significant proportion of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery. Regarding model fitness, ANOVA findings indicated that the regression model was significant and a good fit (Sig < 0.05). This therefore implies that the model was a good predictor of SME's satisfaction with service delivery.

The model coefficients results indicated that government accountability branding positively and significantly affect SME's satisfaction with service delivery ($\beta = 1.126$;

P-value < 0.05). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in accountability branding (e.g., clearer procedures, open access to procurement, transparent reporting), SME satisfaction with service delivery increases by approximately 1.126 units. The findings imply that enhancing government accountability branding can meaningfully improve the targeted outcome, highlighting the importance of transparent, consistent, and trustworthy branding strategies in influencing stakeholder perceptions and engagement. These findings are consistent with the findings established in a study by Lamsal and Gupta (2022) who established that compliance with the rule, responsiveness, prompt service delivery, receiving service own self, and hassle-free service have a positive effect on citizen satisfaction, hence, cautious intervention in these factors is pivotal to ensure higher citizen satisfaction with public service.

4.7.3 Effect of Government Communication Branding on Service Delivery among Small and Medium Enterprises.

The third objective determined the effect of government communication branding on SME's satisfaction with service delivery. To determine the magnitude and significance of the relationship between the variables, a univariate regression model was established. The model summary, ANOVA and Model coefficients results are presented in Table 4.21.

Table 4.21: Regression Results for Government Communication Branding on service delivery satisfaction among small and medium enterprises

Model Summary						
		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
		.751 ^a	.564	.562	.24645	
ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.812	1	18.812	309.727	.000 ^b
	Residual	14.577	240	.061		
	Total	33.388	241			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
	(Constant)	.813	.191		4.252	.000
	Government communication Branding	.765	.043	.751	17.599	.000
Dependent Variable: SME’s Service delivery Satisfaction						
Predictors: (Constant), Government Communication Branding						

The regression results demonstrated that government communication branding account for up to 56.4% of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery (R-square = 0.564). This shows that communication branding explains a significant proportion of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery. Regarding model fitness, ANOVA findings indicated that the regression model was significant and a good fit (Sig < 0.05). This therefore implies that the model was a good predictor of SME's satisfaction with service delivery.

The model coefficients results indicated that government communication branding positively and significantly affect SME's satisfaction with service delivery ($\beta = 0.765$; $P\text{-value} < 0.05$). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in communication branding, SME satisfaction with service delivery increases by approximately 0.765 units. These findings imply that strengthening government communication branding through clear, consistent, and transparent messaging can significantly improve the targeted outcome, emphasizing its importance as a key strategy for enhancing stakeholder engagement and perceptions. This is consistent with the findings of a study by De Matteis, Striani and Greco (2023) which established that interpersonal communication and organizational communication positively influence the level of satisfaction of users of local public services (citizens' satisfaction), also countering the negative perception of certain sectors (e.g. taxes and local taxation, traffic police).

4.7.4 Effect of E-government Branding on SME's Service delivery Satisfaction

The fourth objective of the study was to establish the effect of e-government branding on SME's satisfaction with service delivery. To determine the magnitude and significance of the relationship between the variables, a univariate regression model was established. The model summary, ANOVA and Model coefficients results are presented in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22: Regression Results for E-government Branding and SME's Service delivery Satisfaction.

Model Summary						
Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1		.772 ^a	.596	.594	.23664	
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.899	1	19.899	354.055	.000 ^b
	Residual	13.489	240	.056		
	Total	33.388	241			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.998	.102		9.784	.000
	E-Government Branding	1.736	.084	.782	20.667	.000
Dependent Variable: SME's Service delivery Satisfaction						
Predictors: (Constant), E-Government Branding						

The regression results demonstrated that e-government branding account for up to 59.6% of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery (R-square = 0.596). This shows that e-government branding explains a significant proportion of the variation in SME's satisfaction with service delivery. Regarding model fitness, ANOVA findings indicated that the regression model was significant and a good fit (Sig < 0.05). This therefore implies that the model was a good predictor of SME's satisfaction with service delivery.

The model coefficients results indicated that e-government branding positively and

significantly affect SME's satisfaction with service delivery ($\beta = 1.736$; P-value < 0.05). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in e-government branding, SME satisfaction with service delivery increases by approximately 1.736 units. These findings imply that government efforts to adopt and implement technological innovations such as digital services, automation, and innovative platforms—can substantially improve the targeted outcome. Practically, this emphasizes the importance of investing in technology-driven solutions to enhance efficiency, service delivery, and stakeholder engagement. This agrees with the findings by Riany (2021) who revealed that implementation of e-government strategy leads to a significant improvement in the public service delivery of state agencies in Kenya and that can result to citizen satisfaction if citizens are involved.

4.7.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

To test the hypothesis, the study used a multiple regression analysis where the criterion was that a significance value less than 0.05, tested at 5% level of significance, led to rejection of the null hypothesis. A significance value greater than 0.05 led to failure to reject the null hypothesis. The overall multiple regression model adopted to test the study hypothesis was presented as;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y = Service Delivery Satisfaction by SME's, X_1 = Government Transparency Branding, X_2 = Government Accountability Branding, X_3 = Government Communication Branding, X_4 = E-government Strategy, ε = Error term, β_0 = the constant term and $\beta_{i(1-4)}$ = Beta Coefficients. The model summary, ANOVA and Model coefficients results are presented in Table 4.23.

Table 4.23: Multiple Regression Model Results for Public Branding and SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery

Model Summary							
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate		
	.835 ^a	.697	.693		.20736		
ANOVA							
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	23.279	4	5.820	136.447	.000 ^b	
	Residual	10.109	237	.043			
	Total	33.388	241				
Coefficients							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)		0.932	.214		4.355	.000
	Government transparency		.197	.084	.104	2.345	.000
	Government accountability		.634	.156	.414	4.064	.000
	Government communication		.269	.071	.231	3.789	.000
	E-Government Branding		.596	.112	.393	5.321	.000
Dependent Variable: Dependent Variable: SME’s Service delivery Satisfaction							
Predictors: (Constant), Government Transparency Branding, Government Accountability Branding, Government Communication Branding, E-Government Branding							

The findings presented in Table 4.14 indicate that public branding strategies (government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e-government branding) account for up to 69.7% of the variations in SME's Service delivery Satisfaction. This emphasize the importance of pubic branding in enhancing SME's Service delivery Satisfaction.

The regression model fitness findings indicated that the multiple regression model linking public branding strategies (government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e-government branding) to SME's Service delivery Satisfaction was significant (Sig < 0.05). This therefore implies that the regression model was significant and suitable to be adopted in making statistical inferences.

The regression model coefficients were used to test the research hypotheses.

H₀₁: Government transparency branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

The regression model results indicated that government transparency branding has a positive and significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya ($\beta = .197$; Sig < 0.05). This led to failure to reject the null hypothesis implying that increases in transparency modestly improve SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery. When government processes, decisions, and information are made more open and accessible, SMEs perceive services as fairer and more reliable. Therefore, enhancing transparency such as through open reporting, public dashboards, and access to information can meaningfully improve SME satisfaction, contributing to trust in government services (Alessandro et al. 2021; Timofeyev et al. 2023).

H₀₂: Government accountability branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

The regression model results indicated that government accountability branding has a positive and significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya ($\beta = .634$; Sig < 0.05). This led to failure to reject the null hypothesis implying that accountable government actions strongly improve SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery. When government agencies take responsibility for their actions, respond to stakeholder concerns, and

uphold commitments, SMEs experience higher service satisfaction. Therefore, efforts to institutionalize accountability mechanisms—such as feedback loops, reporting systems, and measurable performance standards—should be prioritized as they have a substantial impact on SME perceptions and engagement (Ndungu, 2024; Marvel & Girth, 2020).

H₀₃: Government communication and information branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

It was also established that government communication branding has a positive and significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya ($\beta = .269$; Sig < 0.05). This led to failure to reject the null hypothesis implying that clear, consistent, and timely messaging about policies, services, and procedures positively influences SMEs' experiences. This therefore means that government agencies should invest in communication strategies, including digital platforms and stakeholder engagement forums, to ensure SMEs are well-informed and confident in the services provided (Roman et al. 2019; Lee, 2021).

H₀₄: E-government branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

The regression results further showed that e-government branding has a positive and significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya ($\beta = .596$; Sig < 0.05). This led to failure to reject the null hypothesis implying digital services, e-government platforms, and innovative solutions facilitate faster, more efficient, and more convenient access to government services. The findings demonstrate that expanding the use of technology in service delivery such as online portals, mobile apps, and automated processes can greatly enhance SMEs' satisfaction, making government services more responsive and user-friendly (Janowski, 2018; Sigwejo, 2020).

4.7.6 Moderating Effect of Political Influence on the Relationship between Government Branding Strategies and Service Delivery on SME's Satisfaction

The fifth objective of the study was to establish the moderating effect of political influence on the relationship between public sector branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) analysis, recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was adopted and the results presented in Table 4.25. The following MMR model was used:

$$Y = a + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 Z + \beta_3 X*Z + \varepsilon$$

Y = Service Delivery Satisfaction by SME's, X = Public Sector Branding, Z = Political Influence, X.Z = Interaction Term, ε = Error term, β_0 = the constant term and β_i = Beta coefficients.

Table 4.24: Moderating Regression Results for Political Influence

Model Summary					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.638a	0.407	0.370	0.431		
ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	8.305	3	2.768	54.42	.000
Residual	12.106	238	0.051		
Total	20.411	241			
Regression Model Coefficients					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.806	0.39		2.065	0.043
Public Branding Strategies	0.137	0.068	0.211	2.014	0.048
Political Influence	-0.182	0.082	-0.275	- 2.231	0.029
Interaction Term	-0.287	0.091	-0.380	- 3.158	0.002
Dependent Variable: SME's Service delivery Satisfaction					
Predictors: (Constant), Public Branding Strategies, Political Influence, Interaction Term					

The results indicated that public branding strategies have a positive and statistically significant effect on SME satisfaction ($\beta = 0.137$, Beta = 0.211, $p = 0.048$). This implies that, in general, improvements in public branding—such as transparency, communication, accountability, and innovation—positively influence how SMEs perceive government service delivery. It was also established that political influence, has a negative and significant effect ($\beta = -0.182$, Beta = -0.275, $p = 0.029$), suggesting that higher levels of political interference or manipulation tend to reduce SME satisfaction with service delivery. This implies that even strong public branding strategies may be undermined when political interests interfere with consistent and fair service delivery.

H₀₅: Political influence has no statistically significant moderating effect on the relationship between public sector branding and service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya

The interaction term between public branding strategies and political influence was negative and highly significant ($\beta = -0.287$, $p = 0.002$). This led to failure to reject the null hypothesis hence demonstrating existence of a significant moderating effect. These findings imply that political influence weakens the positive relationship between public branding strategies and SME satisfaction. Effectiveness of public branding strategies in enhancing SME satisfaction diminishes as political influence increases. The findings are consistent with that of a study by He and Ma (2021) who linked limited political patronage to low citizen satisfaction and trust in public service delivery. A summary of hypotheses testing based on the regression results in Table 4.23 and 4.24 is presented in Table 4.25.

Table 4.25: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Criteria and Method	P-Value	Reference Table	Conclusion
H₀₁: Government transparency branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya	Multiple regression model Reject H ₀ if P. Value < 0.05 or t-statistic > 1.96	0.000	Table 4.24	Null hypothesis rejected
H₀₂: Government accountability branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya	Multivariate Multiple regression model Reject H ₀ if P. Value < 0.05 or t-statistic > 1.96	0.000	Table 4.24	Null hypothesis rejected
H₀₃: Government communication and information branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya	Multiple regression model Reject H ₀ if P. Value < 0.05 or t-statistic > 1.96	0.000	Table 4.24	Null hypothesis rejected
H₀₄: E-government branding has no statistically significant effect on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium	Multiple regression model Reject H ₀ if P. Value < 0.05 or t-statistic > 1.96	0.000	Table 4.24	Null hypothesis rejected

Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya				
H₀₅: Political influence has no statistically significant moderating effect on the relationship between public sector branding and service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya	Multiple regression model Reject H ₀ if P. Value < 0.05 or t-statistic > 1.96	0.002	Table 4.25	Null hypothesis rejected

4.8 Discussion of Key Findings

4.8.1 Government Transparency Branding

The study explored how the government transparency branding strategy influences Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) Service delivery satisfaction in Bungoma County, Kenya. Findings reveal that transparency efforts, such as publicizing procurement opportunities and financial records, are associated with higher SME satisfaction, though many SMEs remain uncertain or dissatisfied due to unclear processes and limited access to information. Government officials acknowledged transparency as a priority but noted challenges in making information understandable and accessible. SMEs appreciated initiatives like open financial disclosures but highlighted barriers, including complex bidding procedures, technical financial reports, lack of consultation in decision-making, and unreliable infrastructure like electricity. These findings suggest that while transparency initiatives foster trust and satisfaction among some SMEs, their effectiveness is hindered by practical and systemic obstacles.

The mixed perceptions among SMEs can be attributed to several factors. First, the complexity of financial and procurement information, often presented in technical formats, limits its usability for small businesses with limited resources or expertise. This aligns with Open Government Theory, which posits that transparency requires

not just information disclosure but also accessibility to foster trust (Alessandro et al., 2021). Second, the lack of SME involvement in decision-making processes, such as project planning, reduces their sense of inclusion, undermining the public value created by transparent governance (Mahmud et al., 2021). Third, infrastructure challenges, like power outages, exacerbate dissatisfaction, as SMEs perceive transparency efforts as disconnected from tangible service improvements. These barriers reflect institutional gaps in formalizing and implementing transparency policies, as noted by the International Federation of Accountants (2013), which emphasizes the need for standardized openness policies to legitimize government actions.

Comparing these findings with prior research highlights both consistencies and unique insights. Alessandro et al. (2021) found that transparency in government actions enhances public trust and service effectiveness, supporting this study's observation that transparent procurement and financial disclosures are linked to SME satisfaction. However, unlike their focus on general citizen engagement, this study reveals SME-specific challenges, such as navigating technical reports. Mahmud et al. (2021) demonstrated that transparency reinforces government branding, aligning with Bungoma County's efforts to publicize opportunities, yet SMEs' dissatisfaction with unclear processes suggests weaker brand alignment than anticipated. Timofeyev et al. (2023) emphasized that transparent processes encourage participation and accountability, but this study's findings indicate that limited consultation hinders SME participation. Mbaya et al. (2018) highlighted corruption as a barrier to transparency in Kenya, which may explain SMEs' skepticism about procurement fairness in Bungoma, where unclear bidding processes fuel perceptions of favoritism.

The implications of these findings are significant for SMEs and Bungoma County's governance. For SMEs, improved transparency could enhance access to government contracts and services, fostering economic growth by leveling the playing field. For the county government, addressing barriers like technical complexity and consultation gaps could strengthen its brand as a trustworthy service provider, aligning with Public Value Theory's emphasis on meeting stakeholder needs (Mahmud et al., 2021). Nationally, these findings underscore the need for standardized transparency policies, as recommended by IFAC (2020), to ensure equitable access across regions. The

persistent infrastructure challenges also highlight a broader need for integrated governance strategies that pair transparency with reliable service delivery.

In conclusion, the association between government transparency and SME satisfaction in Bungoma County is shaped by the interplay of open initiatives and practical barriers. While transparency fosters trust and engagement, its impact is limited by inaccessible information, exclusion from decision-making, and infrastructure gaps. These findings extend prior research by highlighting SME-specific transparency challenges, suggesting that effective governance requires not only openness but also accessibility and inclusivity to enhance satisfaction and support local economic development.

4.8.2 Government Accountability Branding

This study investigated how the government accountability branding strategy influences Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) satisfaction with service delivery in Bungoma County. The findings indicate that accountability efforts, such as sharing project information and providing complaint channels, are associated with increased SME satisfaction, yet many SMEs remain dissatisfied due to inconsistent accountability practices, limited engagement opportunities, and inadequate follow-up on reported issues. Government officials recognized accountability as essential for building trust but admitted challenges in consistent enforcement, timely responses, and effective public engagement. SMEs expressed frustration over inaccessible information, unresponsive complaint systems, infrequent public hearings, and perceived mismanagement of budgets, suggesting that accountability initiatives fall short of fostering widespread satisfaction.

Several factors explain these mixed findings. First, the inconsistent application of accountability mechanisms, such as irregular reporting or slow responses to complaints, undermines SMEs' trust in the county government. This aligns with Accountability Theory, which emphasizes that both answerability (providing explanations) and enforceability (acting on feedback) are necessary for effective governance (Bovens, 2020). Second, limited opportunities for SME participation in public forums or decision-making processes reduce their ability to hold officials accountable, reflecting a gap in social accountability mechanisms like citizen report cards or grievance systems (Claasen & Alpín-Lardiés, 2020). Third, resource

constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies, such as understaffed complaint offices or poorly managed budgets, hinder the county's ability to deliver on accountability promises. These challenges are compounded by SMEs' operational constraints, as small businesses often lack the time or expertise to engage with complex government processes, further limiting their influence over service delivery outcomes.

Comparing these findings with prior research provides deeper insights into their significance. Ndungu (2024) found that top management commitment to accountability policies enhances service delivery, supporting this study's observation that government efforts to share project information are linked to some SME satisfaction. However, unlike Ndungu's focus on administrative accountability, this study highlights SME-specific challenges, such as inaccessible complaint channels, which suggest weaker policy implementation at the county level. Crook (2018) demonstrated that decentralization in Kenya improves responsiveness, yet this study's findings indicate that Bungoma County's decentralized structures have not fully translated into effective accountability for SMEs, possibly due to inconsistent enforcement. Bovens (2020) emphasized that accountability requires enforceable sanctions, but SMEs' reports of unaddressed complaints suggest a lack of such mechanisms, contrasting with Bovens' ideal framework. Fox (2020) advocated for strategic accountability through robust citizen engagement, which aligns with SMEs' desire for more public hearings but contrasts with their experience of limited and ineffective engagement opportunities.

The implications of these findings are profound for SMEs, Bungoma County, and broader governance practices. For SMEs, stronger accountability mechanisms could improve access to reliable services, such as timely project information or fair budget allocations, fostering a more supportive business environment and driving economic growth. For Bungoma County, addressing accountability gaps—such as enhancing complaint systems or regularizing public forums—could strengthen its reputation as a responsive government, aligning with Decentralization Theory's premise that local governance enhances citizen-state relationships (World Bank, 2020). Nationally, these findings highlight the need for standardized accountability frameworks, as recommended by the Institute of Economic Affairs (2020), to ensure consistent enforcement across counties. The persistent dissatisfaction among SMEs also

underscores the importance of social accountability mechanisms, such as citizen-driven audits, to empower businesses and reduce perceptions of mismanagement or favoritism.

The findings reflect deeper systemic issues in local governance. The county government's efforts to brand itself as accountable through information sharing and complaint systems are steps toward building trust, but their limited impact suggests a disconnect between policy intent and execution. SMEs' frustration with unresponsive systems and infrequent engagement opportunities points to a need for more inclusive governance models that prioritize stakeholder input, as advocated by the Social Accountability Framework (Claasen & Alpín-Lardiés, 2020). Moreover, the perception of budget mismanagement among SMEs may stem from a lack of transparent financial reporting, which erodes confidence in the government's commitment to equitable service delivery. These challenges are not unique to Bungoma but reflect broader issues in devolved governance systems, where decentralization has increased expectations for accountability without always providing the resources or structures to meet them.

In conclusion, the association between government accountability and SME satisfaction in Bungoma County is shaped by the tension between accountability initiatives and their inconsistent implementation. While efforts to share information and provide complaint channels foster some satisfaction, barriers like poor follow-up, limited engagement, and perceived financial mismanagement hinder their effectiveness. These findings extend prior research by highlighting SME-specific accountability challenges, suggesting that effective governance requires robust, inclusive, and enforceable accountability mechanisms to enhance satisfaction and support local economic development.

4.8.3 Government Communication Branding

This study explored how the government communication branding strategy influences Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) satisfaction with service delivery in Bungoma County. The findings indicate that effective communication channels, such as websites and social media, are associated with greater SME satisfaction when they provide clear, timely, and accessible information. However, many SMEs expressed dissatisfaction due to difficulties navigating digital platforms, inconsistent messaging

across government departments, slow response times, and limited interactive tools like online polls or consultation facilities. Government officials recognized communication as a cornerstone of their branding strategy but highlighted challenges in ensuring platform usability and departmental coordination. These results suggest that while communication initiatives can enhance SME trust and engagement, their effectiveness is hindered by practical barriers in accessibility, responsiveness, and consistency.

The dissatisfaction among SMEs can be attributed to several underlying factors. First, the complexity and outdated nature of digital platforms, such as the county's website, make it challenging for SMEs to access critical information about services like procurement or tax compliance. This aligns with Public Sector Communication Theory, which posits that clear and accessible communication is essential for building trust and facilitating stakeholder engagement (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Second, slow or absent responses to SME inquiries create a perception of governmental unresponsiveness, undermining the stakeholder relationships emphasized by Stakeholder Theory (Garnett & James, 2021). Third, inconsistent messaging between departments confuses SMEs, weakening the county's brand as a reliable service provider. This reflects a lack of strategic communication coordination, which is critical for public sector branding (Wæraas & Maor, 2020). Additionally, the absence of interactive tools, such as online surveys, limits SMEs' ability to provide feedback, hindering co-creation of services as advocated by the Open Government Framework (Alexopoulos et al., 2024).

Comparing these findings with prior research provides deeper insights into their significance. Roman et al. (2019) found that effective communication enhances transparency and trust, supporting this study's observation that clear communication, when present, fosters SME satisfaction. However, unlike their focus on general citizen trust, this study highlights SME-specific challenges, such as navigating digital platforms for business purposes. Widanti (2022) emphasized that accessible communication simplifies service access, aligning with the positive perceptions of SMEs who found some digital tools helpful, but the dissatisfaction with website functionality suggests Bungoma County falls short of this ideal. Canel and Luoma-aho (2019) argued that consistent communication strengthens public sector branding,

yet this study's findings of inter-departmental inconsistencies indicate a branding gap that reduces SME confidence. Garnett and James (2021) highlighted strategic communication's role in aligning services with stakeholder needs, but the lack of interactive tools in Bungoma limits such alignment, particularly for SMEs needing tailored information.

The implications of these findings are significant for SMEs, Bungoma County, and broader governance practices. For SMEs, improved communication could enhance access to government services, such as clear procurement guidelines or responsive support, fostering operational efficiency and economic growth. For Bungoma County, strengthening digital platforms, response times, and inter-departmental coordination could enhance its reputation as a supportive governance entity, aligning with Stakeholder Theory's focus on meeting stakeholder needs (Garnett & James, 2021). Nationally, these findings underscore the need for robust communication strategies, as advocated by Alexopoulos et al. (2024), to leverage Open Government Data initiatives for SME empowerment. The dissatisfaction with digital accessibility also highlights the importance of addressing technological disparities in rural areas, ensuring equitable service delivery.

The findings address a critical gap in the literature by focusing on SME-specific communication challenges in a rural context. While prior studies emphasize general citizen engagement (Roman et al., 2019; Widanti, 2022), this study reveals how SMEs, as economic stakeholders, require tailored communication to navigate government services effectively. This extends Canel and Luoma-aho's (2019) work on public sector branding by showing that inconsistent communication undermines SME trust in local governance. Similarly, while Garnett and James (2021) advocate for strategic communication, this study suggests that rural SMEs face unique barriers, such as limited digital literacy or infrastructure, requiring targeted interventions. The lack of interactive tools also aligns with Staniszewska et al.'s (2018) call for continuous improvement, suggesting that Bungoma County must invest in feedback mechanisms to enhance communication effectiveness.

In conclusion, the association between government communication and SME satisfaction in Bungoma County is shaped by the potential of communication initiatives and their practical limitations. Effective communication fosters trust and

engagement, but challenges in platform accessibility, responsiveness, and consistency limit its impact. These findings extend prior research by highlighting SME-specific communication barriers, emphasizing the need for clear, coordinated, and inclusive strategies to enhance satisfaction and support local economic development through effective governance.

4.8.4 E-Government Branding

This study investigated how the government technological innovation branding strategy influences Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) satisfaction with service delivery in Bungoma County. The findings reveal that technological innovations, such as digital platforms and integrated service centers, are associated with higher SME satisfaction when they enhance accessibility and efficiency. SMEs expressed appreciation for initiatives like strategic innovation programs, implementation efforts, and incentives for value addition, perceiving them as supportive of their operational needs. However, dissatisfaction persists due to unreliable digital infrastructure, limited digital literacy among SME owners, bureaucratic delays in adopting innovations, and inconsistent policy alignment. Government officials acknowledged the importance of technological innovation for modern governance but highlighted challenges in resource availability and inter-agency coordination. These results suggest that while innovation initiatives foster SME confidence and engagement, their impact is constrained by practical and systemic barriers.

The mixed perceptions among SMEs can be attributed to several factors. First, unreliable infrastructure, such as inconsistent internet connectivity and power outages, limits access to digital platforms, hindering SMEs' ability to utilize services like online procurement or licensing. This aligns with Digital-Era Governance Theory, which emphasizes that technological advancements must be supported by robust infrastructure to transform service delivery (Dunleavy et al., 2020). Second, limited digital literacy among SME owners complicates engagement with digital tools, reducing the public value created by innovation initiatives (Ellerup, 2018, citing Moore, 2020). Third, bureaucratic delays and poor coordination between government agencies create perceptions of inefficiency, undermining the cohesive innovation framework advocated by Innovation Systems Theory (Borrás & Edquist, 2020). Additionally, skepticism about policy adaptability reflects concerns that innovations

are not responsive to SMEs' evolving needs, particularly in rural contexts like Bungoma County.

Comparing these findings with prior research provides deeper insights into their implications. Janowski (2018) demonstrated that technologies like AI and IoT streamline government operations, supporting this study's observation that digital platforms, when accessible, enhance SME satisfaction. However, unlike Janowski's focus on large-scale applications, this study highlights rural SMEs' unique challenges, such as infrastructure limitations. Ellerup (2018) emphasized that branding innovation strengthens public trust, aligning with SMEs' positive perceptions of innovation strategies, but the dissatisfaction with implementation suggests a branding gap in Bungoma County. Mazzucato (2018) argued that mission-oriented innovation requires coordinated government efforts, yet this study's findings of inter-agency misalignment indicate coordination failures that reduce SME confidence. Borrás and Edquist (2020) stressed the need for adaptive innovation policies, and the skepticism about policy adaptability in Bungoma suggests that current policies are not sufficiently responsive to local SME needs.

The implications of these findings are significant for SMEs, Bungoma County, and broader governance practices. For SMEs, improved technological innovation could enhance access to efficient services, such as streamlined licensing or digital procurement, fostering operational stability and economic growth. For Bungoma County, addressing infrastructure gaps, enhancing digital literacy, and improving coordination could strengthen its reputation as an innovative governance entity, aligning with Public Value Theory's focus on meeting stakeholder needs (Ellerup, 2018). Nationally, these findings underscore the need for integrated innovation policies, as advocated by Kenya's Vision 2030 (World Bank, 2020), to support SMEs in rural areas. The dissatisfaction with infrastructure also highlights the importance of analog supports, such as training programs, to complement digital initiatives, as noted by Sigwejo (2020).

The findings address a critical gap in the literature by focusing on SME-specific impacts of technological innovation in a rural context. While prior studies emphasize general service delivery improvements (Janowski, 2018; Oyugi, 2024), this study reveals how SMEs face unique barriers, such as digital literacy and infrastructure

challenges, extending Ellerup's (2018) work on innovation branding. Similarly, while Mazzucato (2018) advocates for mission-oriented innovation, this study suggests that rural SMEs require localized strategies to benefit fully. The skepticism about policy adaptability aligns with Borrás and Edquist's (2020) call for flexible policies, indicating that Bungoma County must tailor innovations to SME needs, such as simplified digital interfaces or SME-focused training.

In conclusion, the association between government technological innovation and SME satisfaction in Bungoma County is shaped by the potential of digital initiatives and their practical limitations. Effective innovations enhance trust and efficiency, but challenges in infrastructure, literacy, and coordination limit their impact. These findings extend prior research by highlighting SME-specific innovation barriers, emphasizing the need for accessible, coordinated, and adaptive strategies to enhance satisfaction and support local economic development through innovative governance.

4.8.5 Political Influence

This study explored how political influence moderates the relationship between government branding strategies and Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) satisfaction with service delivery in Bungoma County. The findings reveal that political influence is associated with SME satisfaction, with many SMEs acknowledging that political factors shape access to government contracts, funding, and support programs. However, dissatisfaction is widespread due to perceived favoritism, where businesses with political connections appear to receive preferential treatment, and frequent policy changes create uncertainty. Government officials recognized the challenge of political pressures, noting that while they strive for merit-based decision-making, political dynamics often skew resource allocation and service delivery. SMEs expressed a desire for fairer, more stable governance to enhance their trust and engagement with county services. These results suggest that political influence plays a complex role, both enabling and hindering SME satisfaction depending on its application.

The mixed perceptions among SMEs stem from several interconnected factors. First, favoritism in procurement and funding processes creates an uneven playing field, where SMEs without political ties struggle to access opportunities. This aligns with Institutional Theory, which posits that governance structures shape stakeholder trust

through equitable practices (North, 2020). Second, frequent policy shifts, often tied to electoral cycles, disrupt SMEs' ability to plan and operate, undermining the stability needed for economic growth. This reflects the Political Economy Framework, which highlights how political decisions influence resource distribution and economic outcomes (Rodrik, 2020). Third, limited SME involvement in policy formulation reduces their sense of agency, as decisions appear driven by political agendas rather than business needs. This disconnect weakens the public value created by governance, as SMEs feel excluded from processes that affect them (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020). These factors are particularly pronounced in rural contexts like Bungoma County, where SMEs rely heavily on government services to navigate operational challenges.

Comparing these findings with prior research provides deeper insights into their significance. Marvel and Girth (2020) found that citizen satisfaction with municipal services influences political behavior, supporting this study's observation that SMEs' satisfaction is tied to perceptions of fair governance. However, unlike their focus on general citizens, this study highlights SMEs' unique vulnerability to political favoritism, as access to contracts is critical for their survival. Groenendyk (2022) noted that partisan reasoning affects evaluations of public sector performance, which aligns with SMEs' skepticism about politically motivated resource allocation in Bungoma. Yet, this study extends Groenendyk's work by showing how such dynamics directly impact SME operations, not just political attitudes. Rodrik (2020) emphasized that political policies shape economic environments, and this study's findings of policy instability echo his argument, but they also reveal SME-specific impacts, such as disrupted planning. Faccio (2020) highlighted that political connectedness grants firms advantages, such as easier access to contracts, which corroborates SMEs' concerns about favoritism but underscores the rural context's amplified effects due to limited resources.

The implications of these findings are profound for SMEs, Bungoma County, and broader governance practices. For SMEs, reducing political favoritism and stabilizing policies could enhance access to equitable services, fostering operational confidence and economic growth. For Bungoma County, adopting merit-based decision-making and transparent resource allocation could strengthen its governance brand, aligning with Institutional Theory's emphasis on legitimacy (North, 2020). Nationally, these

findings highlight the need for policies that mitigate political interference in devolved governance, as advocated by Acemoglu and Robinson (2020), to support Kenya's SME-driven economic goals. The dissatisfaction with policy instability also underscores the importance of consistent governance frameworks, as noted by the World Bank (2020), to build trust across rural regions.

The findings address a critical gap in the literature by focusing on SME-specific impacts of political influence in a rural context. While prior studies emphasize general citizen satisfaction or political behavior (Marvel & Girth, 2020; Groenendyk, 2022), this study reveals how SMEs, as economic stakeholders, experience political influence through unequal access and policy disruptions. This extends Rodrik's (2020) work on political economy by showing that SMEs face heightened risks in politically volatile environments. Similarly, while Faccio (2020) discusses corporate political connectedness, this study highlights its detrimental effects on smaller, less-connected SMEs in rural settings, where resources are scarce. The call for merit-based policies aligns with North's (2020) institutional perspective, suggesting that Bungoma County must prioritize fairness to enhance SME trust and satisfaction.

In conclusion, the association between political influence and SME satisfaction in Bungoma County is shaped by the interplay of governance opportunities and political barriers. Fair and stable political practices foster SME trust and engagement, but favoritism and policy instability limit their impact. These findings extend prior research by highlighting SME-specific challenges in rural governance, emphasizing the need for transparent, merit-based, and stable policies to enhance satisfaction and support local economic development through equitable service delivery.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed the research findings in line with the study objectives. It began with the response rate, which stood at 80 percent, followed by the demographic results of the SMEs and county government officials who participated in the study. The chapter then presented descriptive statistics for government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e government strategy branding, political influence, and SMEs' service delivery satisfaction, supported by a summary of the qualitative

responses obtained from SMEs and county officials on each construct.

The chapter further presented the correlation analysis, which established the relationships between the branding strategies and SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery, and the diagnostic tests, namely normality, multicollinearity, linearity, homoscedasticity, and autocorrelation, which confirmed that the data met the assumptions required for regression analysis. This was followed by the regression analysis conducted for each specific objective, the multiple regression analysis examining the combined effect of the branding strategies, and the moderating regression analysis testing the effect of political influence on the relationship between branding strategies and SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery. The results of hypotheses testing were summarized accordingly.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the key findings on government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e government branding, and political influence, situating the results within the context of existing empirical and theoretical literature. Overall, the findings established that government transparency branding, accountability branding, communication branding, and e government branding each have a positive and statistically significant effect on SMEs' satisfaction with service delivery, and that political influence significantly moderates this relationship. These findings provide the empirical basis for the summary, conclusions, and recommendations presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 Government Transparency Branding Strategy

The first objective of the study was to establish the effect of government transparency branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The findings indicated that SMEs perceive the alignment between transparency branding and service delivery at the county level as only moderately effective. While efforts toward transparent practices exist, many SMEs feel that these have not fully translated into reliable, consistent, and predictable services.

Areas such as tax compliance and payments are seen as particularly challenging, with SMEs experiencing difficulties in timelines, clarity, and fairness, which contributes to inefficiencies and perceptions of unfair treatment. In contrast, structured programs like procurement and AGPO prequalification show slightly better satisfaction, suggesting that formal frameworks can enhance service reliability, though their impact remains inconsistent. Access to utilities and association registration processes also reflect modest improvements, indicating some gains in procedural clarity, albeit with ongoing concerns about timeliness and costs.

It was also established that SMEs report moderate satisfaction with the transparency of program implementation and disclosure of government processes. While progress in government communication is noticeable, it is often insufficient for effective business planning. Gaps remain between transparency rhetoric and practical responsiveness, as SMEs continue to face challenges in receiving timely performance information and seeing tangible results in administration. Financial transparency, particularly in taxation and payments, is identified as an area requiring significant improvement. The findings suggest that counties need to simplify procedures, adopt more predictable and digitized systems, and enhance fairness in procurement to build trust and strengthen SMEs' confidence in public service delivery.

The study findings further established that SMEs emphasize simplifying bureaucratic

processes across procurement, licensing, and taxation, adopting digital platforms for procurement and payments, and improving fairness in AGPO-related processes. They also call for more effective grievance and feedback mechanisms, including hotlines, online portals, and complaint desks, alongside increased training and sensitization to improve awareness of county processes and opportunities. Greater digitization of services is viewed as critical to reducing human discretion, enhancing openness, and fostering trust.

5.1.2 Government Accountability Branding

The second objective of the study was to establish the effect of government accountability branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The findings indicate that SMEs perceive accountability branding in service delivery within Bungoma County as only moderately effective, with overall satisfaction leaning toward dissatisfaction. While mechanisms such as information sharing on projects and public hearings exist, these efforts are viewed as insufficient, inconsistent, or irregular, failing to fully meet SME expectations. County responsiveness to requests, handling of appeals, and adherence to financial procedures are also perceived critically, highlighting gaps between policy intentions and actual delivery. Overall, accountability branding appears underdeveloped, suggesting that symbolic gestures alone are inadequate to enhance SME satisfaction.

The findings further revealed that weak accountability mechanisms undermine SMEs' confidence and trust in county governance. Inconsistent oversight, delayed grievance handling, and perceived misuse of resources discourage SMEs from fully participating in county programs, procurement, and public-private partnerships. There was emphasis on the need for practical, systematic processes, including structured reporting schedules, tighter project and staff oversight, and transparent financial practices. SMEs also highlighted the importance of participation in decision-making, noting that inclusivity in budget allocation, service planning, and grievance processes strengthens accountability and enhances trust.

To improve SME satisfaction, the findings established that counties must institutionalize effective oversight and grievance redress systems, provide timely and transparent reporting, and ensure fairness in service delivery. Training and

sensitization on accountability rights, access to information, and whistleblowing protections were also recommended to enhance awareness and engagement. Addressing favoritism and politically motivated allocation of opportunities is critical for building credibility. Overall, the strong association between accountability branding and SME satisfaction provided evidence that systematic, transparent, and participatory accountability practices are essential for reliable, equitable, and trusted service delivery.

5.1.3. Government Communications Branding

The third objective of the study was to establish the effect of government communication branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The findings indicated that SMEs perceive the county government's communication branding as only moderately effective, with overall satisfaction leaning toward neutral but slightly dissatisfied. While the county has established various communication platforms, including websites and social media, SMEs feel that these tools have not fully enhanced service delivery. Website-related features such as accessibility and availability of downloadable forms were rated more positively, suggesting that websites support consistency and efficiency in accessing service information. However, aspects like secure online payments and 24/7 access remain weak, reflecting gaps in digital service functionality and reliability. Social media platforms, though valued for timely news and updates, scored lower on interactive features such as online consultations and surveys, highlighting limitations in inclusivity and two-way engagement.

The findings suggested that communication in Bungoma County remains largely one-way, with insufficient integration of digital platforms into functional service delivery systems. SMEs report that delays, technical complexity, and limited dissemination reduce the effectiveness of communication in supporting business planning and engagement. There was emphasis on timely, consistent, and simplified information, including translation into local languages and dissemination through multiple channels like radio, SMS, and social media. Interactive channels such as surveys, polls, and consultation forums were recommended to allow SMEs to provide feedback and influence policies, indicating a strong desire for participatory communication mechanisms that go beyond symbolic updates. The strong correlation between

communication branding and SME satisfaction underscores that effective, transparent, and inclusive communication is critical for improving service delivery, enhancing trust, and promoting meaningful SME engagement in county governance.

5.1.4. E-Government Branding

The fourth objective of the study was to determine the effect of e-government strategy branding on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The findings indicated that SMEs perceive the county government's e-government strategy branding as moderately effective, with overall satisfaction slightly below neutral. While coordinated strategies and innovation-oriented programs exist, their practical impact on service delivery is limited, and SMEs feel that these initiatives have not yet translated into consistent, inclusive, and responsive outcomes. This suggests that e-government branding in Bungoma County remains underdeveloped, particularly in areas where digital platforms and innovation-driven processes are expected to enhance efficiency and accessibility.

Some positive aspects of e-government branding were noted, particularly the county's frameworks for measuring economic and social impacts of innovation and the provision of incentives for value addition and diversification. SMEs acknowledged these efforts as supportive of competitiveness, product quality, and diversification, indicating appreciation for policies with tangible benefits. Coordinated strategies and policy initiatives were also recognized, though their predictability and practical consistency remain a concern. Conversely, aspects such as fostering an innovation culture, treating policies as living documents, academic-industry collaboration, and product certification received moderate ratings, highlighting gaps in implementation, stakeholder engagement, and integration of innovation into everyday governance.

The findings also demonstrated that for e-government branding to meaningfully enhance SME satisfaction, digital service platforms must be expanded, user-friendly, reliable, and accessible 24/7. SMEs emphasized the need for digitizing licensing, tax compliance, procurement, and registration processes, along with strengthening cybersecurity and data protection. Capacity building and digital literacy were also highlighted as crucial for enabling SMEs to effectively use e-services. The strong correlation between e-government branding and SME satisfaction underscores that

digitization is the most influential factor in improving perceptions of service delivery, reducing human discretion, enhancing timeliness, and fostering trust.

5.1.5. Moderating effect of political influence on branding strategies

The fifth objective of the study was to establish the moderating effect of political influence on the relationship between public sector branding strategies and service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bungoma County, Kenya. The findings indicated that SMEs perceive political influence on service delivery and the business environment as moderately present, with mixed implications for satisfaction. While political institutions, such as the county assembly, are recognized for their formal authority and the potential to foster inclusivity, accountability, and supportive procurement policies, SMEs' overall satisfaction remains just below neutral. This suggests that, although political structures have the capacity to create a favorable business environment, their practical impact is inconsistent, and SMEs experience both benefits and challenges in navigating politically influenced processes.

SMEs acknowledged certain positive aspects of political engagement, including the county's role in economic empowerment, investment promotion, and infrastructure development. However, perceptions were less favorable regarding political advocacy shaping SME policies and direct influence on service delivery, indicating that SMEs may feel excluded from policy formulation or perceive political decisions as biased or inconsistent. Frequent policy shifts further contribute to uncertainty, underscoring concerns about stability and predictability in the operating environment. These results highlight a gap between political commitments and the lived realities of SMEs, suggesting that intentions alone are insufficient without systematic implementation and oversight.

5.2. Conclusion

The study concludes that while county governments have made efforts to promote transparency through branding and formalized procedures, SMEs' Service delivery approval rating remains moderate, highlighting gaps between transparency initiatives and practical outcomes. Challenges in areas such as taxation, payments, and timely access to services, as well as the need for clearer communication and more effective

grievance mechanisms, indicate that transparency alone is insufficient. Strengthening digitization, simplifying processes, ensuring fairness, and providing timely feedback are critical steps to translate transparency branding into tangible improvements, build trust, and enhance SMEs' overall satisfaction with government services.

The study also concludes that while some accountability mechanisms exist, SMEs perceive them as inconsistently applied and insufficient, undermining trust and satisfaction with county service delivery. Strengthening transparent reporting, effective grievance systems, inclusive decision-making, and fair resource management is essential to enhance SME confidence, ensure equitable service delivery, and build stronger trust in county governance.

It was also concluded that while Bungoma County has established multiple communication platforms, SMEs perceive them as only moderately effective, with limited interactivity and integration into service delivery. Enhancing timely updates, user-friendly digital tools, participatory channels, and direct engagement would strengthen trust, inclusiveness, and satisfaction, making communication branding a practical driver of improved service delivery. There was no established feedback mechanisms and complaints are often ignored with no feedback given and or action taken.

In regard to e-government strategy, the study concluded that Bungoma County has made strides in e-government strategy and innovation branding, SMEs perceive these efforts as only moderately effective. Expanding and improving digital platforms, ensuring reliability and accessibility, strengthening data security, and building digital capacity are critical for translating e-government initiatives into tangible service improvements that enhance SME satisfaction and trust.

Lastly it was concluded that political institutions have the potential to support SMEs through inclusive and accountable policies, inconsistent implementation, frequent policy changes, and political interference limit their positive impact. Strengthening accountability, promoting policy stability, and ensuring participatory decision-making are essential to create a predictable and fair business environment that enhances SME satisfaction with county service delivery.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for policy and decision-makers in the County Government of Bungoma. While the study focused on SME satisfaction, the insights and proposals can be generalized to improve service delivery for all citizens who interact with county services.

5.3.1. Recommendation for Communication Branding Strategy

To strengthen public-sector communication, the County Government of Bungoma should adopt targeted and inclusive communication strategies that promote active engagement with citizens. This entails publishing timely information on services, budgets, and programs, and providing clear guidance on how residents can access these services.

The county should move beyond one-way information dissemination by establishing two-way communication channels that allow for dialogue between the government and citizens on policies and programs. It should also develop feedback systems that continuously collect, analyse, and act on citizen input regarding public service delivery. Investing in localized media campaigns and community forums will help raise awareness, enhance transparency, and build public trust.

5.3.2. Recommendation for Public Sector Accountability Branding Strategy

To enhance accountability within the public sector, the County Government of Bungoma should prioritize transparency and citizen oversight. This can be achieved by ensuring the availability and accessibility of public data, strengthening internal audit systems, and empowering oversight committees to operate independently.

The county should also embrace open-data practices, conduct regular independent audits, and create performance metrics that hold officers responsible for service delivery outcomes. Public accountability should be institutionalized through clear policies and included as part of employee appraisal systems, informing promotions, salary increments, and recognition awards.

Further, citizen participation should be deepened by creating structured platforms for the public to monitor government programs, assess performance, and provide

feedback that informs continuous improvement and responsiveness to community needs.

5.3.3. Recommendation for Technological Branding strategy

To advance e-government and digital transformation, the County Government of Bungoma should formulate a comprehensive e-government strategy with clearly defined goals and leadership responsibility. A senior official should be designated to oversee innovation and implementation.

Expanding internet connectivity, particularly in remote areas such as Mt. Elgon, and establishing digital service centres at sub-county level will improve citizen access. The county should invest in foundational digital systems for revenue collection, treasury management, e-procurement, and health information management.

It should also promote telemedicine solutions to mitigate the shortage of doctors by enabling remote diagnosis and consultation. Training public officers and citizens to effectively use these technologies will enhance efficiency, transparency, and satisfaction with public services.

5.3.4. Recommendation for Public Moderating Factors Branding Strategy

The County Government of Bungoma should institute administrative reforms that clearly delineate political and executive roles to uphold the principle of separation of powers. Policies and bylaws must define the working relationship between political leaders and administrators to ensure professionalism, lawful conduct, and adherence to approved development plans and budgets.

Transparency and service delivery can further be improved by integrating open-data practices and digital technology to minimize human interference in county processes. The county should also encourage public participation in decision-making and maintain internal accountability across all departments.

Government expenditure and procurement processes should be made easily accessible to the public through online portals and mobile applications. These platforms should allow citizens and civil society groups to track progress, submit feedback, and access information on ongoing projects.

5.3.5. Recommendation for Transparency Branding Strategy

To foster a culture of transparency, the County Government of Bungoma should adopt open-data and e-procurement systems that make budgets, expenditures, and procurement records publicly available. Digitization of financial management will help reduce corruption and inefficiencies while strengthening civic oversight.

The county should also establish simple online feedback portals where residents can track the progress of public projects and share their satisfaction levels. Participatory budgeting should be institutionalized to ensure project ownership by the people.

Transparent behavior should form part of staff appraisal and reward systems. Moreover, the county should develop measurable indicators to assess compliance with service charters and use the results to drive continuous improvement.

Finally, the Department of Public Service and Administration should put in place accessible and secure grievance-handling mechanisms that enable citizens to raise service-delivery concerns and receive timely feedback without fear of reprisal.

5.4 Contribution of the study to Policy

The findings of this study have important theoretical, policy, and practical implications for county governments, SMEs, and the broader field of public administration. First, the positive and statistically significant effects of government transparency branding, accountability branding, communication branding, and e-government branding imply that county governments can enhance SME satisfaction through deliberate public sector branding strategies. These findings reinforce the argument that branding in the public sector is not merely symbolic, but a functional governance mechanism that strengthens trust, legitimacy, responsiveness, and accessibility of public services.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings validate the relevance of New Public Management Theory, Public Value Theory, and Institutional Theory in explaining how county governments can improve service delivery through strategic governance practices. The results imply that transparency and accountability mechanisms support performance-oriented governance, while communication and digital platforms

strengthen citizen-centered value creation and institutional legitimacy.

From a policy and managerial perspective, the findings imply that political influence can act as both an enabler and a barrier to SME satisfaction. To maximize positive outcomes, county governments should strengthen accountability mechanisms, institutionalize structured consultations with SMEs, and ensure procurement, taxation, and licensing processes are insulated from undue political interference. Policy stability, transparent governance, and participatory decision-making are therefore crucial for reducing risks, building investor confidence, and fostering a predictable and equitable business environment.

Practically, the study implies that county governments should invest in stronger digital service platforms, responsive communication systems, and transparent reporting structures that simplify SMEs' interactions with devolved units. Such improvements can reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, enhance compliance, and promote a supportive business ecosystem necessary for local economic growth and sustainable enterprise development.

5.5. Areas for Further Study

Based on the multiple regression findings that public branding strategies (government transparency branding, government accountability branding, government communication branding, e-government branding) account for up to 69.7% of the variations in SME's Service delivery satisfaction, the study recommends other studies to establish the other contributory factors accounting for the remaining 30.3%.

Future research could delve deeper into several key areas to build on the current understanding of government branding and its impact on SMEs satisfaction with service delivery. One important avenue is to investigate how shifts in government policies or changes in the political climate influence SME satisfaction and service delivery. Examining the interaction between policy dynamics and branding strategies would provide a more nuanced understanding of how external political and regulatory factors shape SMEs' experiences and perceptions of government services.

Another valuable area for exploration is conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of government branding strategies on SME satisfaction and service delivery. By tracking SMEs over time, researchers could identify trends, observe changes in perceptions, and evaluate whether sustained branding efforts lead to lasting improvements in trust, engagement, and service quality. This approach would also help distinguish between short-term impacts and enduring outcomes of branding initiatives. Comparative studies across multiple counties could further enrich the research by highlighting regional variations in the design and effectiveness of branding strategies. Such studies would allow for the identification of best practices, contextual challenges, and factors that contribute to successful branding outcomes in different local governance settings.

Additionally, exploring the role of digital branding and social media strategies presents a critical area for future research. Investigating how online presence, digital engagement, and interactive platforms influence SMEs' perceptions and satisfaction can provide insights into the effectiveness of modern, technology-driven branding approaches and inform strategies to enhance accessibility, responsiveness, and trust in county-level service delivery.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Statement

You are kindly invited to participate in a research study being conducted as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Murang'a University of Technology. The study is titled *“Effects of Branding Strategies by County Governments on service delivery among Small and Medium Enterprises Satisfaction in Bungoma, Kenya.”* The purpose of this study is to explore how branding strategies employed by the County Government influence the satisfaction and engagement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within the region. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

You have been selected because your experience and insights as an SME operator or representative in Bungoma County are considered valuable for understanding the relationship between public service branding and enterprise satisfaction. By agreeing to take part in this research, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. The questionnaire consists of both closed and open-ended questions designed to capture your honest perspectives on the subject. Please be assured that all responses you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. You are not required to provide your name or any personally identifiable information. The data collected will be used strictly for academic purposes and will be presented in aggregate form to ensure anonymity. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study, and while you may not benefit directly, your feedback will help generate important insights that could improve service delivery and engagement with SMEs in Bungoma County.

Participation is voluntary, and you may choose to decline to answer specific questions or withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. There is no monetary compensation for your participation, but your contribution is deeply appreciated. By proceeding to complete the questionnaire, you are providing your informed consent to participate in this study, acknowledging that you have read and understood the nature of the research, its purpose, and your rights as a participant. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you are encouraged to contact the researcher using the information provided below.

Researcher:

Wekesa Barasa Didmus

PhD Student

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Small and Medium Enterprises

REF: Request for Your Participation

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for participating in this important research on "Effects of Branding Strategies on Service Delivery among Small and Medium Enterprises in Bungoma County, Kenya" Your insights are valuable and will contribute significantly to the understanding of how public service branding impacts the satisfaction of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in this context.

Please take a moment to carefully read and follow the instructions below:

Yours sincerely,

Didmus Wekesa Barasa

PhD Student

Murang'a University of Technology

Instructions

This questionnaire is divided into seven parts. Part one requires general information while the other parts seek information on the research variables. Please respond to questions by ticking (✓) against the appropriate information and writing appropriate answer in blank spaces.

Section A: Background Information

1. How long has the business been in operation?

One Year and Below []

Two Years []

Three Years []

Four Years and Above []

2. Indicate the level of education

Certificate []

Diploma []

Degree []

Post- Graduate []

Section B: Government Transparency Branding

3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on Bungoma County Government Transparency. Use a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The county government supports transparent public procurement of high-quality local products, which improves the reliability of opportunities available to SMEs.					
There are clear procedures for prequalification into AGPO, including time taken and official costs, ensuring consistency in how SMEs access procurement opportunities.					
There are clear procedures for payments, timelines, and total tax rates for firms to comply with regulations, which enhances fairness and reduces administrative burdens for SMEs.					
There are clear					

procedures on time and cost to get connected to the electrical grid, as well as reliability of supply and consumption costs, improving the reliability of utility service delivery for SMEs.					
There are clear procedures followed to register into an association, including the average time taken and costs involved, which improves the timeliness and accessibility of administrative services to SMEs.					
There are clear procedures on time and cost to resolve commercial disputes and the quality of judicial processes, which strengthens the responsiveness and fairness of legal services for SMEs.					
Government plans and programs are implemented					

transparently, which enhances the consistency and predictability of county service delivery to SMEs.					
The entire process of the county government is transparently disclosed, which improves SMEs' trust in the fairness and openness of service delivery.					
As SMEs we can clearly see the progress and situations of the government administration, which enhances the timeliness and reliability of information for business planning.					
The county government discloses sufficient information to SMEs about its performance, which improves responsiveness and accountability in service delivery.					

4. Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve transparency when serving you

.....

Section C: Government Accountability Branding

5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on Bungoma County Government Accountability. Use a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The county government regularly shares information with the public on projects affecting SMEs, which improves the reliability of service delivery updates.					
As SMEs, we can access information on the level of service delivery by our county government, which enhances transparency and consistency in monitoring service performance.					
The county government has provided various complaint methods (e.g., complaint boxes, hotlines), which strengthens responsiveness in addressing SME concerns.					
SME opinion leaders closely follow up on					

service implementation to ensure resources are properly utilized, which improves fairness and accountability in county service delivery.					
The county government occasionally organizes public hearings for SMEs to articulate preferences and disappointments, which enhances inclusiveness and responsiveness in service delivery.					
The county government has demonstrated accountability to SMEs over the last two years, which improves trust and satisfaction with county services.					
The county government is sensitive to SMEs' opinions, which increases fairness and empathy in service delivery.					
The county government responds quickly to SMEs' requests, which enhances timeliness and reliability in service					

delivery.					
The county government makes sincere efforts to support SMEs in need, which improves the perceived responsiveness and equity of service delivery.					
SME appeals to the county government are addressed properly within a reasonable period, which strengthens timeliness and fairness in service delivery.					
The county government has a regular reporting system on the achievements and results of SME programs, which enhances consistency and accountability in service delivery.					
The government recognizes its responsibility towards SMEs, which improves trustworthiness and reliability in service delivery.					
The county government					

follows treasury rules and regulations in all circumstances, which assures SMEs of fairness and financial accountability in service delivery.					
The government ensures proper usage of its budget in an authorized manner, which enhances confidence in the reliability and efficiency of service delivery.					

6. Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve accountability when serving you

.....

Section D: Government Communication Branding

7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on Government Communication. Use a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The county government has a website or internet portal accessible to citizens and the business community, which improves accessibility and reliability of service delivery information for SMEs.					
The county government					

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
website allows searching databases and downloading/printing forms, policies, and documents, which enhances consistency and efficiency in service delivery to SMEs.					
We can contact government services via e-mail, complete forms online, or upload completed forms through the e-government portal, which improves responsiveness and convenience in service delivery for SMEs.					
The county government website provides a secure online payment solution for invoices, which enhances timeliness and reliability of financial service delivery for SMEs.					
We can access government services anytime (24/7) through the government website, which strengthens the					

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
reliability and responsiveness of service delivery for SMEs.					
The county government website has online poll/survey capabilities, which increases inclusiveness and responsiveness in service delivery by capturing SMEs' views.					
The county government website provides a formal online consultation facility with officials, which enhances fairness and accessibility in service delivery to SMEs.					
The county government's social media pages (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) provide sufficient news and information, which improves SMEs' understanding and satisfaction with service delivery.					

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The county government's social media pages provide accurate information, which enhances trust and reliability in communication and service delivery for SMEs.					
The county government's social media pages provide diverse and varied information, which improves inclusiveness and accessibility in service delivery communication to SMEs.					
The county government's social media pages provide news and information in a timely manner, which improves the responsiveness and efficiency of service delivery to SMEs.					
The county government's social media pages provide					

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
access to other information sources (e.g., links to useful government websites), which improves connectivity and consistency in service delivery for SMEs.					
The county government's social media pages provide access to other communication channels (e.g., county website, contact details), which strengthens accessibility and responsiveness in service delivery for SMEs.					
The county government's social media pages provide appropriate information, which improves reliability and trustworthiness in service delivery for SMEs.					

8. Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve its communication when serving you

Section E: E-Government Strategy

9. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on e-government strategy. Use a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The government has developed coordinated strategies and programs to spur innovation, which improves the reliability and efficiency of service delivery for SMEs.					
The government has implemented coordinated strategies and programs to spur innovation, which enhances consistency and predictability in service delivery to SMEs.					
The government creates an innovation culture among citizens, institutions, companies, and departments, which improves responsiveness and inclusiveness in service delivery for SMEs.					
The government promotes academia-					

industry and industry-industry collaboration, which strengthens fairness and accessibility in service delivery for SMEs through broader partnerships.					
The government provides a framework to measure economic goals and the social impacts of innovation, which improves accountability and transparency in service delivery to SMEs.					
The government enables identification and correction of overlaps and contradictions among strategies, which enhances the efficiency and reliability of service delivery for SMEs.					
The government enables identification of gaps that can be filled through new targeted strategies and programs, which improves responsiveness and timeliness of service delivery to SMEs.					
Government innovation					

policy is treated as a living document that is regularly reviewed, which improves adaptability and consistency in service delivery for SMEs.					
The government provides incentives to promote value addition and diversification of Kenyan products, which enhances fairness and equity in service delivery to SMEs.					
The government provides product standards and certification, which increases the reliability and trustworthiness of services supporting SMEs in the local market.					
The government aims to enhance consumer confidence in Kenyan products and their competitiveness in export markets, which improves efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to SMEs.					

10. Please, give any other recommendation on how the County Government of Bungoma can improve e-strategy when serving you

.....

Section F: Political Influence

11. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on political interference in Bungoma County Government. Use a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
P1	To what extent do you believe politicians in the County Government of Bungoma influence the delivery of services to your SME business?					
P2	The county assembly has power to pass laws relating to county governance					
P3	The county government respects civil liberties and human rights					
P4	The county government has effective input in national policy					

	making processes on devolution					
P5	The county government has full autonomy to formulate local policies					
P6	The county government has sufficient power to decide on how to raise revenue					
P7	The county government has the authority to set the rates and charges for devolved services					
P8	Your county government is responsible for economic empowerment of the residents					
P9	Policies regarding resource distribution affect the availability of funds for SME support programs					
P10	Political policies shape the operating					

	environment for SMEs, influencing licensing, taxation, and compliance requirements.					
P11	Political Policies aimed at promoting economic development, job creation, or entrepreneurship directly impact the availability and effectiveness of support programs for SMEs.					
P12	Policies that encourage investment, infrastructure development, and business-friendly environments positively influence the overall climate for SMEs.					
P13	Favorable policies that promote fair competition and inclusion of SMEs in procurement					

	processes can enhance opportunities for these businesses.					
P14	Policies that promote dialogue, consultation, and partnership between the government and the SME sector can contribute to more effective services delivery.					
P15	Political advocacy can lead to the development of policies and programs tailored to address the challenges faced by SMEs in Nairobi.					
P16	Frequent changes in policies due to political shifts can create uncertainty for SMEs, affecting their ability to plan and invest in the long term.					
P17	A transparent and					

	accountable government is more likely to deliver services efficiently and fairly, benefitting SMEs.					
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12. Please, give any other recommendation on how politicians can support County Government of Bungoma can improve its service delivery to you

Section G: SME's Satisfaction with Service Delivery

13. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following services from the county government of Bungoma. Use a scale of 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied.

Statements	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Access to a worksite (an area or location set aside for SMEs' operations)					
Access to electricity connection at your worksite					
Access to water connections at your worksite					
Waste management services you receive					

Access to government procurement opportunities (e.g., tenders, AGPO)					
Training and capacity-building opportunities provided for SMEs					
Access to digital finance and financial innovations such as M-Pesa					
Ability to cope with technology, innovation, and patenting requirements					
Costs, acquisition, and renewal processes, as well as the time taken for these processes					
Overall administration of your county government					
Government is working for the					

benefit of SMEs					
Critical work the government has done for SMEs					
Way public sector departments are working to support SMEs					
Quality of administration in your county government					
Administration work of your county government overall					
Improvements in government administration over time					
Overall functioning of government administration					
Quality of government services, and do you feel service quality needs improvement					
Way new government					

strategies are designed to enhance citizen and SME satisfaction					
Differences and improvements introduced by new strategies compared to existing ones					
Government's facilitation of SME engagement with new strategies					
Government's consideration of citizens' and SMEs' feedback in designing new strategies					
Policy implementation and its benefits to the public and SMEs					
Government's responsibility and commitment to service improvement					
Government's					

rapid actions in responding to SME needs					
Government's responsiveness, and do you feel it should be improved					
Strategic efforts of government to meet citizen and SME needs					
Quality of most county roads					
Quality of water supply in your county					
Access to a worksite (an area or location set aside for SMEs' operations)					

13. Please, explain how the county government can change to offer your SME business good services

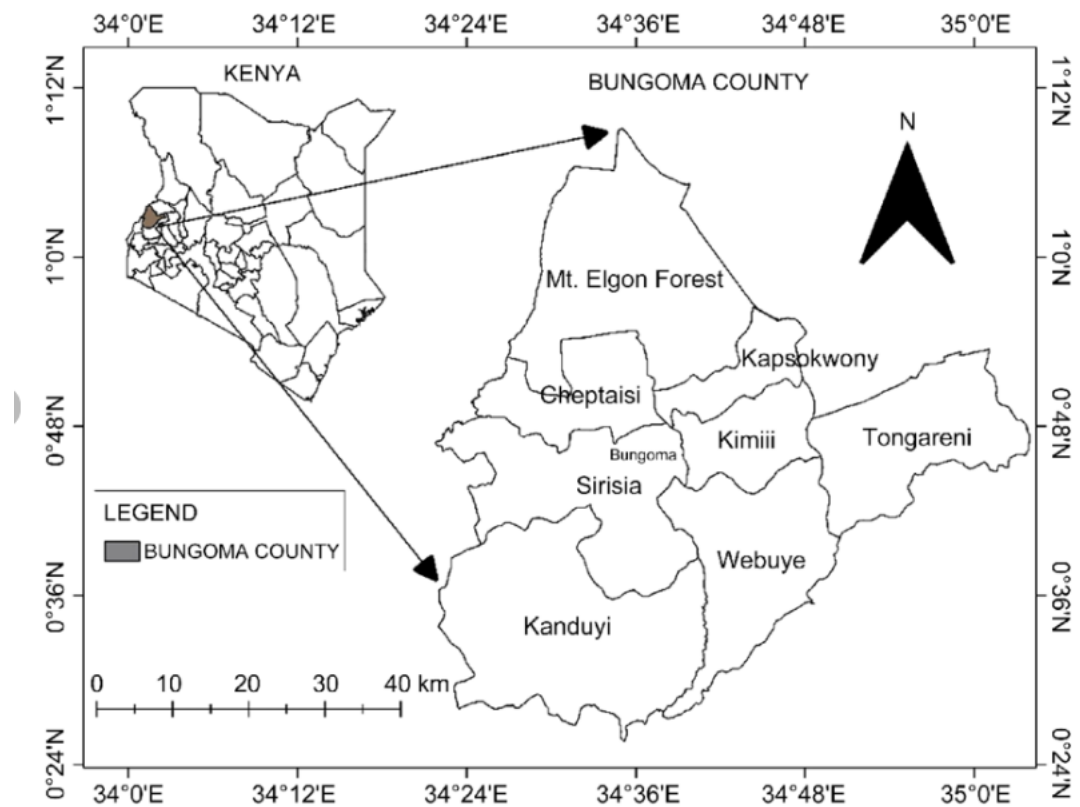
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THANK YOU

Appendix 3: Key Informant Interview Guide for County Officials

1. Describe the extent to which Bungoma County government has adopted and implemented specific public branding strategies in enhancing service delivery
2. From your perspective, how effective have these public branding strategies been in improving the visibility, trustworthiness, and credibility of county services, particularly for the SME sector?
3. In what ways have public branding initiatives influenced the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of county service delivery (e.g., licensing, taxation, permits, business support services)?
4. Based on your engagement with the business community, how do SMEs perceive county service delivery, and to what extent do you think their satisfaction is influenced by the county's branding efforts?
5. What key challenges does the county face in implementing public branding strategies effectively, and what opportunities do you see for strengthening branding to better support SME growth and satisfaction?

Appendix 4: Map of Bungoma County



Appendix 5: MUT Research Authorization Letter



MURANG'A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Office of the Director, Postgraduate Studies

E-mail: bps@mut.ac.ke

Website: www.mut.ac.ke

P.O. Box 75-10200

Murang'a, Kenya

Ref: MUT/ARP/PGS/19/2020 /VOL.1

Date: 4th December, 2024

Mr. Didmus Wekesa Barasa
School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Murang'a University of Technology,
P.O. Box 75-10,200
Murang'a.

Dear Mr. Barasa

RE: APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND SUPERVISORS.

I am pleased to inform you that the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies on November, 2024 considered and approved your Doctoral research proposal entitled ***"Effects of Branding Strategies by County Government on service delivery satisfaction among small and medium enterprises in Bungoma County."*** and appointed the following as supervisors:

1. Dr. Nancy Githaiga - Murang'a University of Technology
2. Dr. Alice Omariba - Murang'a University of Technology

You may now proceed with your data collection subject to obtaining research permit from NACOSTI, if required. You should also begin consulting your supervisors and submit through them quarterly progress reports to the Director Postgraduate Studies through your CoD and School Dean. Progress Reports forms can be accessed in the Student Portal.

It is the policy and regulations of the University that you observe deadlines. The guidelines on Postgraduate supervision can be accessed in the post graduate Handbook.

Your responsibilities as a student will include, among others;

- i. Maintain regular consultation with your supervisor(s), at least once a month
- ii. Submit quarterly reports on time, through your supervisors, CoD, Dean and to the Director of Postgraduate Studies;

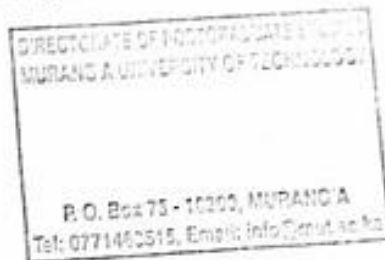
- iii. Ensure quality work all through;
- iv. Present your research findings at 2-3 seminars/conferences prior to thesis examination.
- v. Publish two articles from your research findings in a refereed journal prior to thesis examination.

For any further clarification please contact the undersigned.

Yours Sincerely,



Prof. Geoffrey Muchiri, PhD
Director, Postgraduate Studies
GM/MMK



Copy to:

1. Registrar, Academics, Research and Students Affairs
2. Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Appendix 6: NACOSTI Research License

 REPUBLIC OF KENYA Ref No: 398836	 NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION Date of Issue: 10/December/2024
RESEARCH LICENSE	
	
This is to Certify that Mr. Didmus Wekesa Barasa of Murang'a University of Technology, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in on the topic: Effects of Branding Strategies by County Governments on service delivery satisfaction among Small and Medium enterprises in Bungoma, for the period ending : 10/December/2025.	
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See overleaf for conditions	

Appendix 7: Publications

This thesis has produced the following journal articles:

- Barasa, D. W.,** Muthoni, N., & Omariba, A. (2025). Government accountability branding strategy and SME service delivery satisfaction in Bungoma, Kenya. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13, 505–522. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.1310029>
- Barasa, D. W.,** Muthoni, N., & Omariba, A. (2025). Effects of county government transparency branding strategy on small and medium enterprises satisfaction in Bungoma County, Kenya. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 15, 1415–1429. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajibm.2025.1510074>
- Barasa, D. W.,** & Omariba, A. (2024). Impediments to effective leadership in public service: A case of administrative and political challenges in county governments in Kenya. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 548–560. <https://doi.org/10.37284>