Exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province

R Martin

orcid.org/0000-0002-1637-1127

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Supervisor: Prof MJ Botha

Co-supervisor: Mr LP du Preez

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ABSTRACT

The fast-food industry is a highly competitive industry that is continuously expanding. It is important to implement effective customer retention strategies to ensure that the business has a competitive edge in the industry. Customer retention is a key element in the success of fast-food restaurants. Managers of fast-food restaurants need to understand the importance of customer retention as well as customer retention strategies, as this will lead to an increase in the profitability and sustainability of the restaurants that they manage, especially considering the devastating economical effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on businesses. As a result of the devastating effect that COVID-19 had on fast-food restaurants, it is crucial for managers of fast-food restaurants to differentiate themselves from competitors through customer retention strategies. Keeping existing customers (through customer retention strategies) is more time and cost effective than acquiring new customers in this competitive industry. Existing literature is limited in providing strategies to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry in South Africa, and no studies have been conducted on strategies to enhance customer retention from a manager's perspective in the North West province of South Africa.

The primary objective of this study was to explore the strategies that managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa. This objective was fulfilled through an in-depth literature review and empirical investigation into customer retention in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa. This study employed an exploratory research design and used a qualitative research approach to collect the data. A combination of convenience and judgemental non-probability sampling methods were used to select participants – managers of established fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa. The sample size consisted of 13 participants. The collected data were analysed by the use of the Morse and Field approach, and the ATLAS.ti (version 22) software programme was used to code the data as well as conduct categorical and thematic analysis. Through the analysis, four themes emerged with nine subcategories.

The results from the empirical investigation suggested that participants regard customer retention as an important element in their business, which will enhance the growth of their business. The results also indicated that the participants made use of software systems to monitor customer visits to their restaurant and also agreed that returning customers generate more income than new customers. Participants also stated that they have daily meetings with their employees to highlight the importance of customer retention and they also evaluate their employees through various methods to establish where they fall short in terms of understanding customer retention. The main challenges that participants identified with retaining customers can be attributed to a combination of poor product and service quality, as well as the limited financial capacity of customers to buy products from fast-food restaurants on a frequent basis. Participants further stated that they focus on enhancing product and service quality to retain more customers. Furthermore, participants used methods such as aggressive marketing and value-added products as well as loyalty programs to retain more customers. Concerning strategies that participants implemented to retain more customers during and after COVID-19, it was identified that they made use of food delivery services – a differentiation strategy.

It is recommended that managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that they use high-quality ingredients when producing products, as well as set up intensive customer service training schools for employees. It is further recommended that aggressive marketing such as social media sites should be used, where the restaurant includes its health and sanitary protocols. Managers should further focus on producing more products that are budget-friendly but still high quality. To enhance customer retention, managers should also invest in generators or solar power to allow them to operate during power outages. It is also recommended that managers of fast-food restaurants should try to convince the majority of their customers to register on the respective loyalty programme of the restaurant – as this will allow them to offer customers benefits and track their spending behaviour. Lastly, managers should invest in their own delivery services, since third-party delivery services are expensive and customers are more price sensitive.

Future research studies can make use of a quantitative research approach, or a larger target population and an extension of the geographical area could also be considered. Research can also be conducted on employees' views of customer retention, and customer retention strategies in other industries can be investigated and compared to this study.

LIST OF KEYWORDS AND DEFINITIONS

- **Management**

  Management can be defined as different strategies that are used by a business to achieve pre-determined goals set by and for the business. Management also includes the effective resolution of any matters which could affect the business (Kaehler & Grundei, 2018:10).

- **Customer retention**

  Customer retention refers to the decision of an existing customer to return to a business and to continue to make use of its products and/or services. Customer retention is seen as one of the key elements for a business to be sustainable (Nitzan & Libai, 2011:25). According to Parawansa (2018:54), customer retention will be achieved when customers have a positive relationship with a business.

- **Fast-food industry**

  The fast-food industry is defined as a chain of restaurants that capitalise on their fast-paced service delivery of processed foods that are mainly in the form of takeaway meals (Ghobadi *et al.*, 2018:25).

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

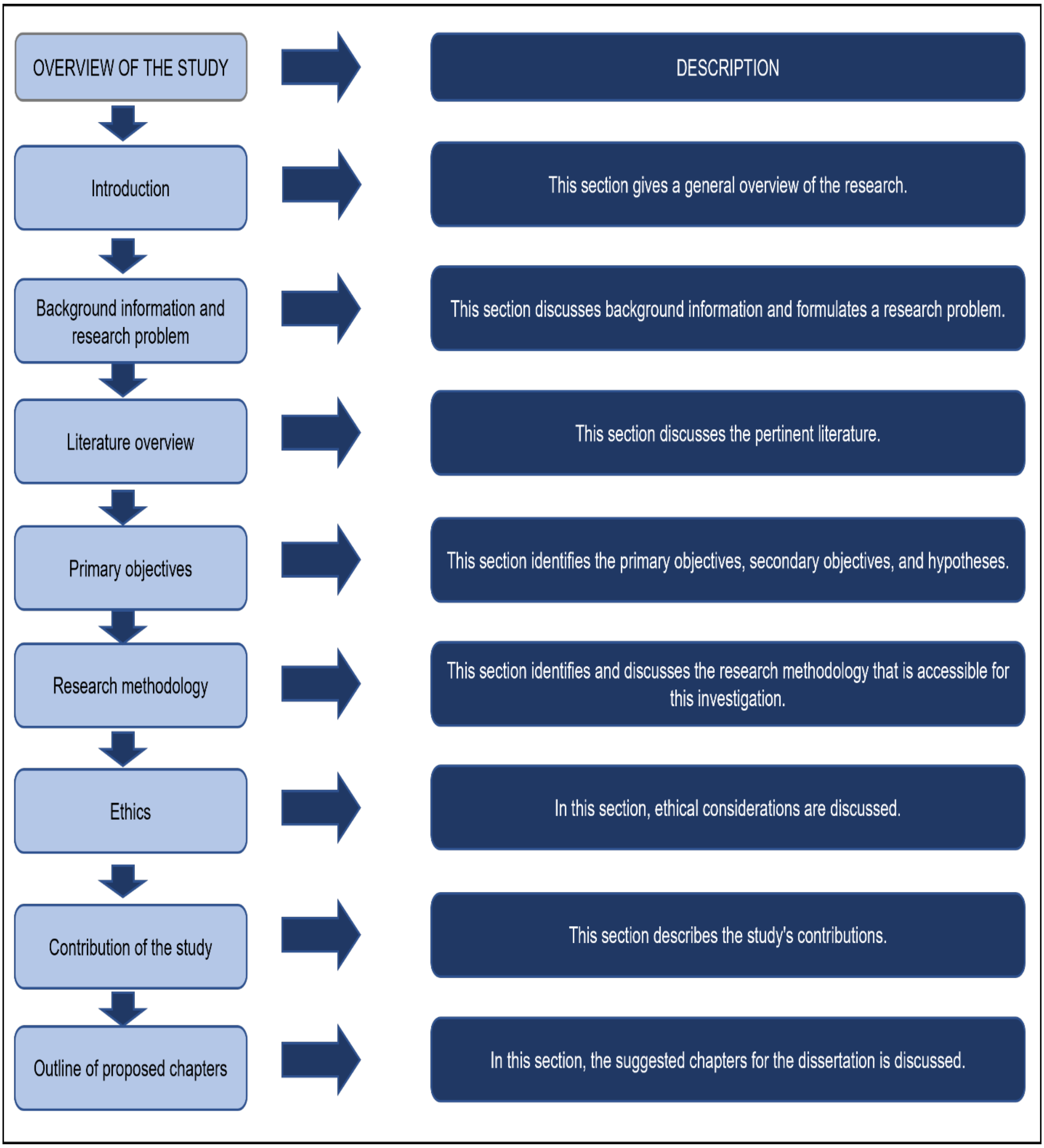
Before the global onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the global fast-food industry was a well-established economy that generated a revenue of $875,26 billion in 2019, with an average annual growth of $20,36 billion between 2011 and 2019. The industry was expected to grow to $885,07 billion in 2021 (Statista, 2020). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decrease in the revenue generated by the fast-food industry to $736,1 billion in 2020, but increased again to $797,68 billion in 2021 and was expected to grow to $826,89 billion in 2022 (Statista, 2022). However, with subsequent lockdown regulations in almost all countries, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the fast-food industry. In the United States of America alone, sales decreased by 27% in 2020 (Felix *et al.*, 2020:3). Despite predictions that the South African fast-food industry will grow from $2,7 billion in 2018 to $4,9 billion in 2026 (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019), total income decreased by 69% in the three months ending May 2020 when compared to the same period the previous year (StatsSA, 2020).

With the easing of lockdown restrictions by the South African government in the last quarter of 2021, sales in the fast-food industry started to gain momentum. However, managers must still devise strategies to retain their customers and persuade them to make repeat purchases (Alkitbi *et al.*, 2020:657). Managing customer retention is critical for the sustainability and growth of businesses, since returning customers will generate more income and are also more likely to spread a positive word about a business, resulting in new (and newly returning) customers (Kumar *et al.*, 2017:93).

This study will, therefore, explore the strategies managers implement in the North West province of South Africa's fast-food industry to retain their customers and ultimately enhance their sustainability, within the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chapter focuses on providing background information relevant to the conceptualisation of the research problem. Subsequently, a literature overview is provided to ensure enough knowledge is available regarding the specific discipline, constructs, and industry that is being investigated. This is followed by the research objectives as well as the research methodology of the study. Furthermore, the contribution and ethical considerations of the study are highlighted and the chapter concludes with an outline of the remaining chapters. Consequently, Figure 1-1 provides an illustration of this chapter's structure.

Figure 1-1: Structure of Chapter 1



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to BusinessTech (2019), the most notable fast-food restaurants in South Africa include Kentucky Fried Chicken, Steers, Debonairs, Wimpy, and Nando's, while the most popular form of fast-food in South Africa is processed chicken (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). Competition between fast-food chains is fierce, and the retention of customers is seen as one of the main aspects needed to achieve success within the industry (Ascarza *et al.*, 2018:67). Moreover, Anifowose *et al.* (2021:90) affirm that customer retention should be part of a business' core strategy in order to gain a competitive advantage. Zhong and Moon (2020:1) assert that new and improved strategies should be implemented to stay competitive within the fast-food industry.

Ghosh (2020:646) also recognises that the fast-food industry has changed extensively throughout the years – and to stay competitive within the industry – the trend moved towards online food ordering and delivery. According to Cummins *et al.* (2020:2-3), the industry experienced an increase in the implementation of drive-through and delivery services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although several studies were conducted regarding customer retention within the fast-food industry (Dastane & Fazlin, 2017; Heiens *et al.*, 2019; Hidayat *et al.*, 2019; Sunaryo, 2019), few studies have been conducted on the strategies managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry in South Africa (Roberts-Lombard, 2009; Terblanche, 2007). Moreover, no studies have approached customer retention strategies from a manager's perspective in the fast-food industry of South Africa in the North West province under COVID-19 regulations. Consequently, this study aims to close the knowledge gap by focussing on customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa under COVID-19 regulations.

1.3 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Based on the above discussion regarding the South African fast-food industry and the research problem, the focus is on management to devise strategies that will ensure customer retention. The literature overview will commence with a discussion on management, then move towards the various business environments, and finally, customer retention.

1.3.1 Management

Management is defined as a set of operations aimed at a business' resources in order to achieve objectives cost-effectively and equitably (Griffin, 2021:3). Management has been practised for millennia, and the earliest records of management date back to at least 3 000 years before Christ, to Middle Eastern clerics (Lloyd & Aho, 2020:28). As a result of several developments, the first industrial revolution ushered a significant shift in management. Since the focus was mainly on mass production, workers developed a need for leadership and structure (Lloyd & Aho, 2020:29).

As the need for managers developed, so did all aspects pertaining to management effectiveness. In this regard, it was later recorded that business managers have many roles they need to fulfil, which are referred to as a collection of ordered behaviours (Alexander, 1979). Alexander (1979) highlights 10 managerial roles as described by Mintzberg (1973), which are divided into three groups, namely: interpersonal roles, informational roles, and decisional roles. These roles are an essential part of any manager's management function (Tovmasyan, 2017).

1.3.2 Interpersonal roles

- Leader: The manager is responsible for the team's direction, organisation, as well as the performance and obligations of others in the business (Altamony & Gharaibeh, 2017:922).
- Figurehead: The managers of a business inspire the employees who work for them, and the workers look up to them as a leader and a figurehead (Saah *et al.*, 2020:626).
- Liaison: Managers are in charge of communicating with both external and internal contacts (Devasia, 2020:5).

1.3.3 Informational roles

- Monitor: Managers search for information about the business on a regular basis, focusing on changes in the external and internal environments the business operates in. Managers should also stay updated on the team's efficiency as well as their general well-being (Diskienė *et al.*, 2018:55).
- Disseminator: The management of a business should notify their co-workers and team about potential relevant data that is available regarding internal and external aspects of the business in order to make appropriate decisions (Dandalt, 2021:155).
- Spokesperson: The management of a business represents and communicates on behalf of the business to the outside world by articulating relevant knowledge regarding the business (Karim & Afnan, 2020:80).

1.3.4 Decisional roles

- *Entrepreneur*: Management is in charge of implementing changes within the business by identifying answers to current problems, developing new concepts, and bringing them into action (Andreassen *et al.*, 2018:4).

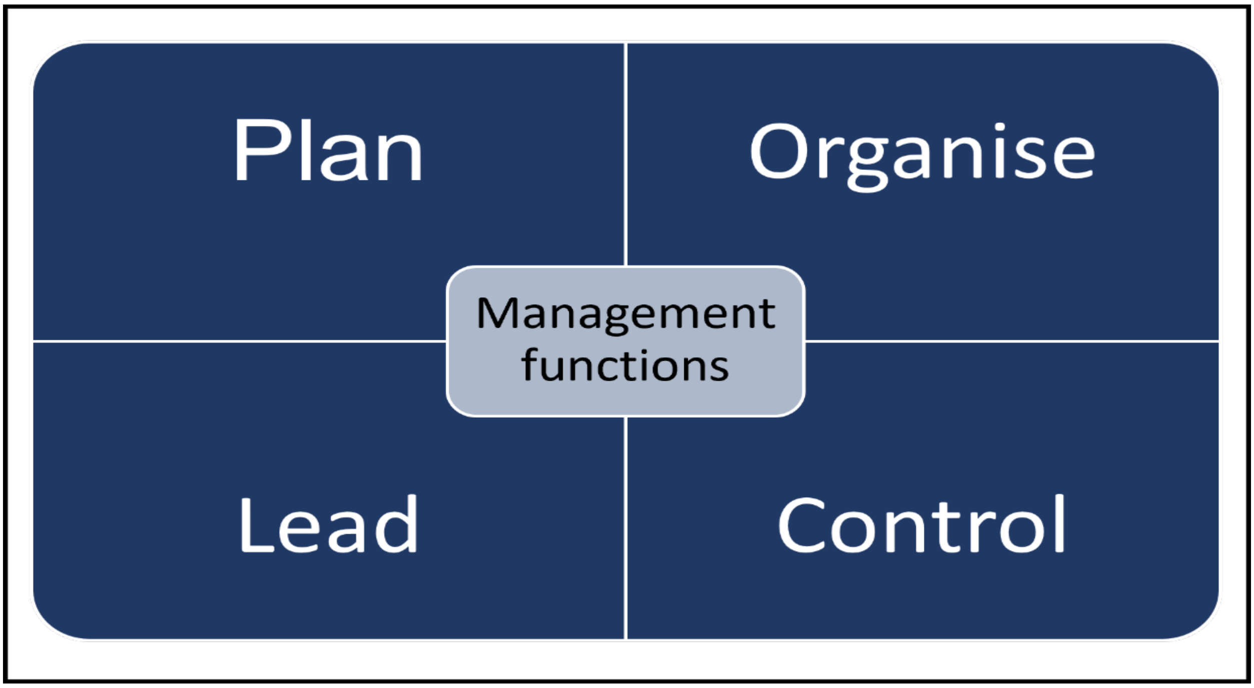
- *Disturbance handler*: Managers are accountable for taking control of the situation if any unforeseen events develop (Durowoju & Tijani, 2021:56).

- *Resource allocator*: Managers must decide how resources are allocated, which includes allocating finances and delegating workers and other resources inside the business (Hidayat, 2020:126).

- *Negotiator*: Managers are responsible for ensuring that negotiations inside the team, department, or business are guided (Matsuo, 2019:306).

Tovmasyan (2017:21) upholds that these roles are the foundation for managerial functioning within the business. To ensure that a manager effectively performs these roles, managers must be aware of the four core management functions, namely: planning, organising, leading, and controlling, as presented in Figure 1-2 (Alonso-Vazquez *et al.*, 2018:154).

Figure 1-2: Four core management functions



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

- *Planning*: The planning function consists of two major components to set goals and delegate activities within the business. Firstly, managers must assess both their internal and external environments for opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses. Second, managers should use this analysis to determine the business' goals, objectives, and activities (Lloyd & Aho, 2020:11).

- *Organising*: Organising is the process of putting together a list of actions and allocating the resources needed to carry them out. The resources should be used to their full potential, and not be wasted (Gunawan & Aungsuroch, 2017:4).

- *Leading*: The manner in which managers encourage employees to achieve goals and exceed their obligations is referred to as leading (Dler & Tawfeq, 2021:959).

- *Controlling*: Controlling is the process where management plans to assist members of a business to achieve their objectives. Control also refers to how managers adjust the plan to adapt to changing circumstances (Lloyd & Aho, 2020:14).

In addition to the functions managers need to execute, several business processes need to be implemented within any business to remain sustainable. Five of the core processes are identified by (Brown, 2008:53):

- *Procurement, logistics, and distribution*: Management must deal with tasks such as the transportation of finished items as well as the acquisition and storage of raw materials during this process (Gunasekara *et al.*, 2021).

- *Operations*: All activities that are implemented to turn inputs into final outputs such as commodities or services are referred to as this process (Erasmus *et al.*, 2020:2).

- *Product and service development*: The focus of this process is on efforts aimed at bringing new, enhanced, or updated products or services to market (Geissdoerfer *et al.*, 2018:167).

- *Marketing, sales, and customer accounts*: This process focuses on efforts that are used to keep consumers informed about business changes and to preserve a long-term relationship with them (Kaoud, 2017:18).

- *Customer and aftersales services*: This process focuses on the services that a business delivers to its consumers throughout the product's life cycle, such as call centre services, guarantees, and warranties (Balinado *et al.*, 2021:1).

The effective execution of management functions and processes could have a favourable influence on a business' sustainability. Therefore, understanding the functions and processes will assist management to better analyse the business environments in which they operate (Hans, 2018:70).

1.4 BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS

A business environment can be defined as all the components that have a direct or indirect effect on the functionality of a business (Xu, 2011:310-311). A business environment is divided into two main categories including the external and internal environments. The internal environment alludes to components within the business that the business has full control over, while the external environment refers to elements that can influence the business but are beyond its control (Chung *et al.*, 2019).

1.4.1 Internal business environment

The internal business environment can be defined as the environment within a business that has clear and specific repercussions for the business (Butarbutar & Lisdayanti, 2020:387). According to Rizal *et al.* (2017:50), the internal environment comprises of factors that are within the control of the business and can have an influence on the performance of the business. Rizal *et al.* (2017:50) further state that the internal environment is known as the micro-environment and is based on three important categories that include structures, cultures, and resources. The structure of a business can be defined as the manner in which a business is ordered concerning the interaction, control, and workflow between employees as well as customers (Lee, 2017:487). The culture that a business comprises of can be categorised into formal and informal cultures. Formal cultures refer to the rules, mission statements, thought processes, and orientation plans, whereas informal cultures are factors such as behaviour, beliefs and principles (Craft, 2018:129-130). Resources within the business include assets that are required to run the business, which include raw materials that are put through a production process to form a final product or service that the business offers its customers (Osotimehin, 2019:181).

1.4.2 External business environment

This environment is categorised into two headings, including the market environment and the macro-environment (Vlados & Chatzinikolaou, 2019:28). Managing the factors comprising of the external environment is important to ensure they do not negatively influence the business (Ghicajanu, 2019:2-3). According to Vrbka (2020:264-265), it is important for management to do thorough research on external environmental factors, as these elements could have an influence on the level of competitive advantage that a business has in the industry it functions in.

1.4.2.1 Market environment

The market environment within a business is also known as the marketing environment (Paurova & Gregova, 2020:721). This environment falls between the micro- and the macro-environment, and the management of a business will not have full control over the factors in this environment, but can influence them to benefit the business (Paurova & Gregova, 2020:721). The market environment offers a business multiple opportunities and threats that management should investigate to ensure the best options are taken concerning the available choices (Camilleri, 2018:52-53). The factors that form part of this environment include the threat of new entrants, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, threat of substitute products, and rivalry amongst existing competitors – also known as Porter's five forces (Bruijl, 2018:4; Porter, 1980).

- The threat of new entrants relates to new businesses entering the same industry as a running business. This force is likely to influence the profitability and market share of a business without innovative adaptions from management structures (Pervan *et al.*, 2018:2).

- The bargaining power of buyers refers to the customers' choice to choose which business to purchase from. According to Baburaj and Narayanan (2016:3), customers persevere in purchases where a business portrays products of high quality at an affordable price.

- The bargaining power of suppliers addresses their ability to put pressure on buyers by changing prices, quality, and availability of products they have to offer. It is important that companies have a degree of control over this by identifying substitute products or suppliers within their industry (Cho *et al.*, 2019:2).

- The threat of substitute products refers to the ability of consumers to find different products in the same industry that a business offers. Substitute products satisfy the same need that the customer has when buying from a certain business, which will threaten the profitability of companies (Ortiz-Paniagua, 2018:207).

- The rivalry amongst existing competitors deals with the degree of competition within a specific industry and the amount of pressure that businesses put on each other to influence one another's profitability. The most damaging form of competitive rivalry is price wars where companies continuously cut their prices below that of competitors' (Hofmann & Osterwalder, 2017:6).

Each of these elements should be considered by a business's management team to ensure that they have a competitive advantage in the industry and that their customers are satisfied (Berisha Qehaja *et al.*, 2017:586).

1.4.2.2 Macro-environment

The macro-environment is defined as the factors that are outside the control of the business and its management, but still influence the business and its structures extensively (Kowo *et al.*, 2018:31-32). The macro-environment of a business has evolved from a domestic to a global aspect, and businesses should effectively respond to the macro-environment variables to ensure a competitive advantage over other businesses within their industry (Anyanwu & Gabriel, 2020:30). According to Xuhua *et al.* (2016:49), the macro-environmental factors are easier for large businesses to control as they have a financial advantage over smaller businesses. Smaller businesses mostly rely on innovation strategies to adapt to the changing macro-environment.

Christodoulou and Cullinane (2019:10) further affirm that six main factors form part of the macro-environment, including political, economic, social, technological, legal, and ecological factors. These are known as the PESTLE factors and are discussed below:

- The political environment includes the influence that government policies have on a country, on a fiscal and monetary basis. Businesses in the modern era do not only take into consideration local politics but also worldwide politics (Nandonde, 2019:56). According to Phan (2021:39), the political factors in a country are not only decided by the government – but also by public views and consumer support groups. When analysing a business, the political and legal environments function in tandem. For example, labour regulations, tax rates, and restaurant hygiene are examples of issues that influence the political and legal environment (Gurung, 2018:15).

- The economic environment consists of factors such as inflation, economical changes, interest rates, and exchange rates (Dalirazar & Sabzi, 2020:2). Elements such as economic upturns and downturns in a country are examples of factors in the economic environment that influence fast-food establishments. Customers will more likely be unable to afford fast-food meals during downturns, whereas consumers will prefer to eat at higher-quality restaurants during upturns (Janssen *et al*., 2018:20).

- The social environment variables consist of factors such as corporate social responsibility, public consciousness, health, education, cultural expectations and tendencies, as well as ethics (Widya Yudha *et al*., 2018:2). In the fast-food sector, elements such as the time it takes to make a meal are examples of social environmental factors. Some consumers are pressed for time and require a quick meal. Furthermore, cultural factors such as religious beliefs influence whether or not people buy from a fast-food establishment (Hamzeh & Bataineh, 2019:1054).

- The technological environment is a fast-changing environment that can benefit a business, if they choose to adopt and integrate new innovative systems into its operations (Colovic & Lamotte, 2015). Examples of changing technologies in the fast-food industry include new machinery that allows outlets to cook the food faster or allow it to stay fresher for longer.

- The legal environment refers to different types of laws that are set in place within a country and include factors such as employment laws, consumer protection acts, regulatory bodies, industry-specific regulations, and environmental regulations (Khalid & Rahman, 2019:247-248).

- The factors of the ecological environment include several components regarding the surrounding environment, including climate, weather, pollution, recycling, and ecology. These components are important in industries where environmental issues are a concern (Ulubeyli & Kazanci, 2018:199). Fast-food restaurants that make use of recycled materials like food packaging are examples of ecological environmental factors. Customers have become more environmentally conscious in the past decade, thus using biodegradable materials is critical (Samnani, 2014:38).

The PESTLE analysis could be utilised by managers to assess the external environment in which their businesses operate. Using the PESTLE analysis will ensure that all macro-environmental aspects are thoroughly assessed, allowing a strategic management framework to be put in place that controls threats and capitalises on opportunities (Christodoulou & Cullinane, 2019:4). Employing the PESTLE analysis could allow management to identify several areas in the business where they can improve, which could enable the business to identify new tactics to promote customer retention (Pandey *et al.*, 2021:54). Understanding and analysing each business environment is critical for managers, since it will influence how they identify new and improved techniques to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry (Curras-Perez *et al.*, 2017:133).

1.5 CUSTOMER RETENTION

According to Simanjuntak *et al.* (2020:6), customer retention is defined as the way in which a business builds and conserves a relationship with the customer in an attempt to convince them to continue making use of its services or buying its products. Previous studies have done thorough research on customer retention within different industries (Anees *et al.*, 2020; Anifowose *et al.*, 2021; Fungai, 2017). Customer retention is seen as a key element to gain a competitive advantage within all businesses – and to achieve the desired customer retention – the quality of service that a firm offers its customers needs to convince them to make repeat purchases (Hanaysha, 2018:1-2). According to Mahmoud *et al.* (2018:259), customer retention is achieved mainly through the confidence and loyalty that customers have towards a business, as well as the degree to which a business can resolve customer disputes.

1.5.1 Drivers of customer retention

- **Service quality**: To understand the degree of service quality that customers perceive, managers must review and quantify the level of service that a business provides to clients, and maintaining good service quality in order to keep consumers satisfied will lead to more returning customers (Nugroho *et al.*, 2020:4).

- **Customer satisfaction**: The level of customer satisfaction with a business has a direct impact on repeat purchases, and satisfied clients are more likely to do business with the same business again (Díaz, 2017:76).

- **Switching costs**: Customers prefer to conduct business with a business they can trust, and one of the main reasons a customer avoids changing over from their current business is that they are concerned about the monetary and non-monetary costs of moving to a rival business (Moenardy *et al.*, 2016:51).

- **Perceived value**: Management should ensure that their products or services are seen as high-quality items in comparison to their competitors, since this will lead to increased customer satisfaction, repeat purchases, and increased profit margins (Hanaysha, 2018:4).

- **Commitment**: Customers are more committed to a business when they believe they are important, and management should ensure that customers remain committed to the business, which will result in increased repeat purchases (Sari *et al.*, 2018:594).

1.5.2 The importance of customer retention

Customer retention is an essential part of a business's success and cannot only be achieved by keeping customers happy, but also by striving to exceed the expectations of customers to ensure retention and repeat purchases (Mahmoud, 2019:274). The author argues that strategies implemented to manage customer disputes effectively and efficiently will build trust between customers and the business, which could enhance customer retention (Mahmoud, 2019:275). According to Kumar *et al.* (2017:93-94), customer retention is not only important because returning customers are the main form of income for a business, but also because these customers spread a positive word about the business that will in return lead to new customers, and potentially more returning customers.

Taking cognisance of the current COVID-19 pandemic and decreasing market shares in the fast-food industry, it is essential for a business to retain its customers in order to remain sustainable (Chanda & Kumar, 2021:6680). Managing staff communication, quality cuisine, competitive prices, and a vast selection of menu items to satisfy each customer's demands, are key methods utilised to retain customers (Chanda & Kumar, 2021:6680).

From the preceding discussion, the management of customer retention could be regarded as a driver toward business sustainability. To obtain a better understanding of customer retention, the following section discusses various drivers that could lead to higher customer retention rates.

1.5.3 Benefits of customer retention

- **Economic benefits**: Customer retention has six important economic benefits for a business, including decreased costs for acquiring new customers, the growth of existing customers which leads to increased spending, returning customers who are likely to have a minimum budget to spend per period, lower operating costs, free word-of-mouth marketing to potential new customers, and price premiums as existing customers are likely to spend without waiting for promotions (Alshurideh, 2016:384).

- **Customer behaviour**: An important factor when considering customer behaviour is positive word-of-mouth communications. Loyal customers are more likely to convey a positive picture of a business, resulting in an increased number of new and returning customers (Bell & Mgbemena, 2018:196).

- **Human resource management benefits**: For a business to establish positive customer interactions, human resource management cannot be overlooked. Trained employees will work well with customers, establishing loyalty and leading to returning clients, as they will not easily switch to competitors where the bond can possibly not be replicated (Gonçalves, 2019:105)

From the discussion on the drivers and benefits of customer retention, it is evident that important factors in retaining consumers include quality service, which contributes to satisfied customers and repeat purchases (Saputro *et al.*, 2020:473).

1.6 SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality within any business is closely related to the degree of satisfaction that customers perceive from the business (Padlee *et al.*, 2019:3). Service quality can be defined as the degree to which a business delivers a service to a customer, and how the customer responds by comparing the performance of the business to the performance they were expecting (Pakurár *et al.*, 2019).

The most used and trusted measurement of service quality is known as the SERVQUAL framework. This framework consists of five (5) categories that are each investigated to evaluate the degree of service quality that a business offers its customers. These categories include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, (Shokouhyar *et al.*, 2020:2) where:

- *Tangibles* refer to the equipment, staff, and physical facilities that the business consists of (Hamzah *et al.*, 2017:784);
- *Reliability* is the degree to which a business delivers consistent and professional service to its customers (Shafiq *et al.*, 2019:64);
- *Responsiveness* is the ability of the business to offer its customers timely and precise assistance when it is needed (Prentkovskis *et al.*, 2018:9);
- *Assurance* refers to the propensity of personnel to build trust and confidence with customers by utilising their knowledge (Behdioğlu *et al.*, 2019:303); and
- *Empathy* refers to the business' ability to understand and care about each customer on a personal level (Al-Neyadi *et al.*, 2018:99).

Service quality is determined at the end of the service, but also by the evaluation of factors that occur during delivering the service. Managers of fast-food restaurants must carefully examine the service quality they provide, because if a customer has a higher expectation than the performance a business provides, the perceived quality will be lower (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018:1209). Ultimately, service quality will create satisfied customers, which will lead to customer retention and repeat purchases.

1.7 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

According to Rita *et al.* (2019:7), customer satisfaction is seen as the positive or negative experience with the service quality a business offers when the customer engages in a buying procedure. Customer satisfaction is defined as the viewpoint, evaluation, and affection that customers have with their post-buying process (Leninkumar, 2017:452).

Many studies agree that the degree of satisfaction that customers experience is closely related to the intensity that a specific product or service surpasses the prediction of the customer post-purchase (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2019:15; Lin *et al.*, 2020:1971; Lucini *et al.*, 2020:1). Vasić *et al.* (2019:71) argue that customer satisfaction is not only related to the post-purchase experience of the customer, but also during various phases of the purchase.

According to Yelkur (2000:108), it is important for a business to effectively manage the different elements of the marketing mix to ensure that customer satisfaction is positively influenced between the customer and the business. The marketing mix elements play an important role in any business setting, and Sudari *et al.* (2019:1387) agree that it is necessary to manage the elements to ensure that customers become emotionally bound through the excellent services that a business offers them. Service quality is closely related to the degree of customer satisfaction that a firm achieves. According to Pakurár *et al.* (2019:4), businesses must ensure that their service quality is of a high standard, as this could influence a customer's image of a business.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the fast-food industry, and fast-food management teams must ensure that their clients are satisfied during the pandemic. Customers' main concerns while purchasing fast-food meals have been discovered to be dissatisfaction with the rules in place, and they want to be allowed to enjoy the eateries as they did before the pandemic (Chen *et al.*, 2021:9). To restrict the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, fast-food restaurant management must ensure that they project a favourable image to their consumers about the health precautions they have in place, such as social distancing measures, cleaning of all surfaces and proper hygiene standards by staff members. As a result, the restaurant is more likely to develop customer loyalty (Nuryanto & Farida, 2020:213).

Ensuring customer satisfaction within a business could persuade customers to utilise its services rather than those of its competitors', since retaining existing clients is easier than acquiring new customers (Darzi & Bhat, 2018:429).

1.8 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following primary and secondary research objectives were formulated for this study.

1.8.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of this study was to explore the strategies that managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa.

1.8.2 Secondary objectives

- To provide an overview of the main constructs of this study, namely the fast-food industry, management, and customer retention.
- To conceptualise the current generic strategies that managers implement in the fast-food industry to retain customers.

- To explore managers' view of customer retention in the fast-food industry.
- To determine managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry.
- To identify challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers.
- To identify strategies which managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research approach

According to Goundar (2012), there are three types of research approaches, namely (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed-method research. Qualitative research is described as the collection and analysis of data in a natural situation using subjective, inductive, and interpretive methods (Lanka *et al.*, 2020:2). Qualitative research is ideal for exploring the participants' awareness – and without reducing data to numerical statistics – this method collects, interprets, and analyses the data (Aspers & Corte, 2019). **For the purpose of this study**, a qualitative research approach will be used. This study is exploratory in nature, with the goal of exploring how management can implement strategies to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry.

Because of the study's qualitative nature, it's critical to define and describe a unified paradigm from which the research will emerge (Creamer, 2018:54). **For the purpose of this study**, an inductive interpretive approach was utilised, as this study was qualitative in nature. The inductive interpretive approach allowed the researcher to asses patterns that emerged from collected data through an in-depth investigation with small samples (Malhotra, 2017:172; Saunders *et al.*, 2019:144).

1.9.2 Research method

The study's research methodologies will be reviewed, with a focus on the literature review, sampling plan, data collection method, and data analysis.

1.9.2.1 Literature investigation

The literature review includes information that will be used to support the study's theoretical underpinning. Various scientific publications, research documents, relevant books, scholarly articles, and websites such as business tech, STATISTA and research methodology sites will be used to gather relevant and vital information. The following databases will be used:

- SA ePublications: South African journals.
- SACat: National catalogue of books and journals in South Africa.
- Emerald Insight: International journals.
- ScienceDirect: International journals.
- EBSCOhost: International journals on Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and EconLit.
- Internet and online scientific search engines: Google Scholar, various websites and online communities.
- Textbooks.

1.9.2.2 Research design

The research design refers to the framework and overall strategy that will be used to gather, analyse and discuss relevant data for a specific research study (Sileyew, 2019). Babin and Zikmund (2018:67) further articulate that a research design refers to the methods and procedures that are used to collect and analyse data for a specific type of research.

For the purpose of this study, exploratory research was conducted by means of in-depth interviews with managers in the fast-food industry in order to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies used to enhance customer retention.

1.9.2.3 Target population

The overall set of customers being investigated in order to fulfil the research objectives is referred to as the target population (Bairagi & Munot, 2019:90). The demographic elements about which inferences are to be made make up a target population (Malhotra, 2019:340). **For the purpose of this study**, the target population comprised managers of established fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa. The intention of this study was to explore strategies implemented by managers to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry as a whole, and not for the respective restaurants or franchises named above.

1.9.2.4 Sampling

The practice of selecting a smaller subgroup from a larger population to serve as the foundation for estimating the prevalence of an unknown piece of information is known as sampling (Kumar, 2011:193). It is necessary to select a sample, since it is not always possible to test the complete population, and it is also utilised to reduce cost, time, and inconvenience (Sharma, 2017:749).

1.9.2.5 Sampling frame

A sampling frame is a collection of population elements from which a sample can be selected. (Babin & Zikmund, 2018:342). Due to the privacy rights set out within POPIA (2013), this study did not make use of a sampling frame.

1.9.2.6 Sampling method

According to Taherdoost (2016:20), sampling methods are grouped into two main categories, namely probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling occurs when participants are chosen in such a way that everyone has an equal probability of being selected for the study, which includes simple random samples, systematic random samples, stratified random samples, and cluster samples (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:431). When samples are obtained using a method that does not provide all members of a population an equal chance of being chosen for the study, it is known as non-probability sampling, which includes quota sampling, convenience sampling, and judgemental sampling (Etikan & Bala, 2017:1).

For the purpose of this study, a combination of non-probability sampling methods were used, namely convenience and judgement sampling. In the convenience sampling method, the researcher gathers the necessary criteria from the target population that is in close proximity and easily accessible (Etikan *et al.*, 2016b:2). Judgement sampling is a form of convenience sampling where the researcher uses his or her judgment to select participants that they feel will add value to the research (Hair *et al.*, 2020:193). It was required that participants must be 18 years or older and managers of fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa.

Convenience sampling was used when the researcher – who resides in Potchefstroom – walked into fast-food restaurants in Potchefstroom and asked whether an interview could be conducted with the respective managers of the fast-food restaurants. Judgement sampling was used where the researcher used his knowledge of what the study entails to identify participants that will be valuable to the study. Upon receiving a participant's confirmation of the interview, the prospective participant's email address was requested and the consent to take part in the study was forwarded via email, to be signed by the participant prior to the commencement of the interview. The interview guide was also shared via e-mail with the prospective participant beforehand, to provide a better understanding for the participant of what the interview entailed.

1.9.2.7 Sample size

The number of participants who take part in a study is referred to as the sample size (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018:3). According to Baker and Edwards (2012:10), a sample size for interviews should consist of 12 to 20 participants. Ritchie *et al.* (2013:118) suggest that the sample size for interviews should not exceed 50 participants to ensure the quality of the collected data and analysis thereof is sufficient. **For the purpose of this study**, the researcher interviewed 13 participants. It should be noted that the number of interviews could be less once the researcher has reached saturation and no new evidence is gathered. Participants were not pre-identified and the researcher visited fast-food restaurants to obtain permission from managers of fast-food restaurants to conduct interviews. Table 1-1 summarises the sampling plan for the study.

Table 1-1: Sampling plan for the study

Design elements	Application
Population	
Sampling elements	All managers of established fast-food restaurants in North West.
Sampling units	Fast-food restaurants in North West.
Extent	Within the North West province of South-Africa.
Timeframe	1 September 2022 to 30 October 2022.
Sampling method	Non-probability; convenience and judgement sampling.
Sampling size	13 participants.

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

1.9.2.8 Interview guide

To guide the discussions, the researcher used an interview guide that included a variety of open-ended questions. The following sections were included in the interview guide, which was harmonised to ensure a uniform flow:

Section A: Introduction to the study

Prior to the interview, the participants were thanked for participating and were informed about what to expect during the interview. During the introduction, the researcher read a disclaimer to remind participants that their participation is completely voluntary and that the interview is audio recorded. The participants were also informed that he/she can withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Section B: Perspective on customer retention

This section of the interview guide focused on managers' perspectives on customer retention in the fast-food industry. Questions were asked about how essential retention is to them, as well as how they understand retention and its importance in the fast-food industry.

Section C: Awareness of customer retention

This section directed attention to managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry. Questions were asked concerning the value of returning customers, how well the manager communicates the value of customer retention to employees, as well as the influence he/she has experienced regarding the retention of customers in the fast-food industry.

Section D: Challenges

Section D focused on the concerns and challenges managers encountered when it comes to customer retention. In this section, the researcher gained a better understanding of the correspondence between the challenges that different fast-food restaurant managers encountered with regard to retaining customers in the fast-food industry.

Section E: Strategies

Section E explored strategies and tactics that managers used to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry. This section of the interviewer's guide is important, as it allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of managers of various fast-food restaurants to compare different strategies that they implemented to gain more customer retention.

Section F: Closure

The participants were thanked for their time and effort to conduct the interview. Lastly, they were asked for any closing remarks or questions to contribute to the objectives of the study.

1.9.2.9 Data collection

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data for this study. Semi-structured interviews consist of a list of organised open-ended questions that the researcher asks all the participants in the same manner (McIntosh & Morse, 2015:2).
- The interviewer's guide was used by the researcher to collect primary data for the study by conducting in-depth interviews. The researcher conducted each interview face-to-face, which lasted approximately 40 minutes. All COVID-19 protocols were adhered to when the interviews were conducted.

- The participants were given the assurance that complete anonymity will be upheld, since they were not required to submit any personal data. A code was assigned to each participant to ensure that no personal information of the participant or the restaurant they are involved with was revealed in this study.

- After completion of the study, all data collected from the interviews were saved on a password-protected USB storage device and stored at the supervisor's office for a period of two years, where only the supervisor has access to the USB storage device. The data on the USB storage device will be erased after two years.

- Audio recordings were made of the interview sessions, and *Language Matters*, a reputed translation and transcribing services business situated on the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus, transcribed the audio recordings that were gathered during the interviews.

- *Language Matters* signed a confidentiality agreement with the researcher and supervisor and only had access to the codes of participants without having any knowledge of personally identifiable information about the participant or the fast-food restaurant they are involved with.

1.9.2.10 Data analysis

The application of computation, summarisation, and reasoning to interpret acquired data is referred to as data analysis (Babin & Zikmund, 2018:70). After the primary data had been collected, the results must be evaluated in order to be valuable and contribute to the study’s conclusion (Gilliland, 2014:104). The subsequent sections will discuss the approach to analysing data for the study.

1.9.2.11 Data preparation

When performing qualitative research, large datasets must be transcribed and processed for further study (Grbich, 2013:20). A digital audio and video transcription service provider, *Language Matters*, which is based in Potchefstroom, South Africa, transcribed the acquired data for this study. After the data was transcribed, the ATLAS.ti (version 22) computer program for qualitative data analysis was used to complete further analysis in terms of coding, classification, and thematic analysis.

1.9.2.12 Method of data analysis: Morse and Field approach

For the purpose of this study, the Morse and Field approach was utilised to analyse data, as it is extensively used in the management field. The Morse and Field approach consists of four steps, namely comprehend, synthesise, theorise, and recontextualise (Morse & Field, 1996:103).

Step 1: Comprehend

In order to understand what a study comprises, trustworthy information is essential. Hence it is critical to understand the topic at hand and analyse the acquired data (Morse, 1991:27). **For the purpose of this study**, after each interview session, transcripts and manual notes were reviewed to ensure that the acquired primary data was understood. As a result, a summary was compiled of the interpretations and outcomes.

Step 2: Synthesise

Synthesising is the process of combining various stories, events, or incidents in order to describe a common, composite pattern of behaviour or response, thus, it can be referred to as the decontextualization of data to be compared across different cases (Morse, 1991:30). **For the purpose of this study**, the ATLAS.ti (version 22) software was used to assist in the synthesis and coding of data acquired from the interview sessions.

Step 3: Theorise

Theorising is defined as the process of structuring all of the acquired data in a logical manner to ensure that the study can be linked to the larger body of knowledge (Morse, 1991:32). **For the purpose of this study**, the researcher used the literature review and all the acquired data to theorise about the strategies that were implemented to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry.

Step 4: Re-contextualise

The construction of a theory, including the outcomes and conclusions, that will allow the study to be applied to future research projects and studies is referred to as recontextualization (Morse, 1991:34). **For the purpose of this study**, the data collected from interviews, as well as the information from the literature review, were combined and incorporated to recontextualize the study.

After completion of the four steps, it is important to note that a study must be trustworthy to ensure that it can be used for future research purposes. The trustworthiness of a study is described in the following section.

1.9.2.13 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a study refers to the accurate, consistent, and exhaustive collection and interpretation of data, and the trustworthiness thereof can be measured through validity and reliability (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). The suitability of the research instrument employed, the protocols followed during the study, and the quality of the data collected refer to the validity of the study (Leung, 2015:325). According to Leung (2015:325), the consistency of findings, as well as the fact that the study's findings cannot be duplicated, are defined as reliability. According to Guba (1981), there are four criteria that qualitative researchers should evaluate to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the four criteria is defined as follows:

- **Credibility** relates to a researcher's belief in the findings of a study (Rose & Johnson, 2020:435). **For the purpose of this study**, the credibility was defended by the recording of interviews, continuous observation, and peer debriefing.

- **Transferability** refers to the degree to which other researchers find the work relevant and applicable to their research or study (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). **For the purpose of this study**, in order to achieve transferability, this study used background data to define the study's context and a clear description of the phenomena in question to allow comparisons.

- **Dependability** refers to the quality of the integrated processes of data gathering, data analysis, and theory creation (Rolfe, 2006:305). **For the purpose of this study**, an in-depth methodological description was provided to allow the study to be repeated.

- **Confirmability** refers to the consistency of findings throughout the study and the degree to which it can be repeated (Morse, 2015:1213). **For the purpose of this study**, confirmability was attained through acknowledging the researcher's ideas and assumptions, as well as recognising flaws in the study's procedures and their potential consequences. Detailed methodological descriptions has been applied to ensure the integrity of research findings, as well as the usage of diagrams to provide an audit trail.

1.10 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The knowledge gathered from this study contributed to the literature on business management, customer retention, and the fast-food industry in South Africa. To the best knowledge of the researcher, this study was the first to explore customer retention from a manager’s perspective in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa. Moreover, the results of this study could possibly be compared to studies in marketing management on customer retention from the customer's point of view. This could assist managers to identify possible differences between a manager's and customers' perspectives. Exploring the strategies to enhance customer retention could provide valuable information to owners to manage and improve their business's retention strategies. Ultimately, implementing the correct strategies to retain customers could result in increased sales and profits – contributing to a more sustainable business.

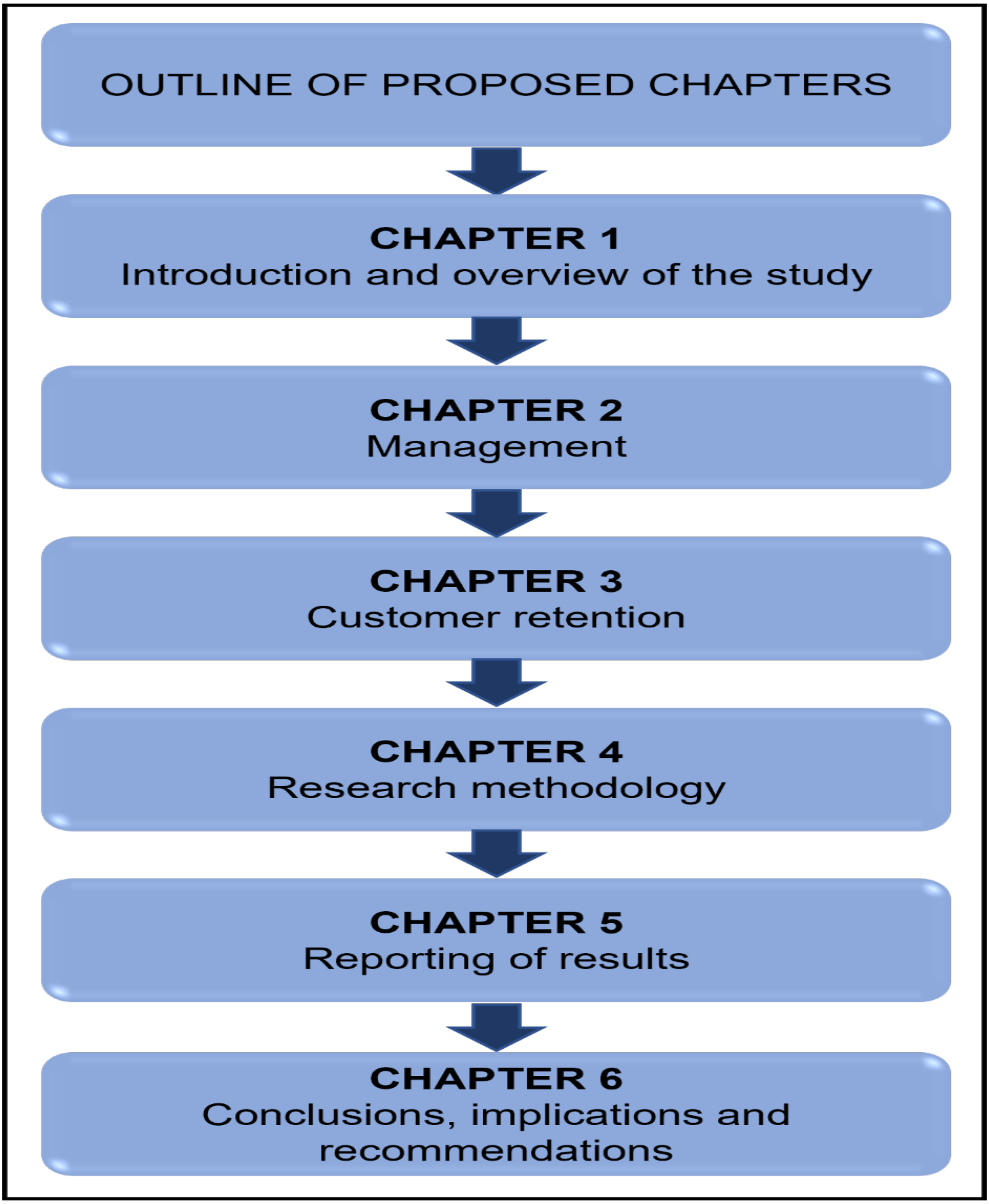
1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that this study is done ethically, ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. The target population for this study consisted of managers of fast-food restaurants that are 18 years or older. No permission was required from participants' parents or guardians as only participants 18 years or older were invited to part take in the interviews. An ethics number was subsequently issued for this study: NWU – 00600 – 22 – A4. In addition, all participants were required to sign an informed consent form (Appendix D) to partake in the interview sessions. Participation of participants in this study was completely voluntary and anonymous. No participant's name, identity or the fast-food restaurant they are involved with were associated with their response. Participants were allocated a participant number to preserve anonymity in circumstances when their replies were quoted directly as supporting evidence in an article or conference paper.

1.12 OUTLINE OF PROPOSED CHAPTERS

A brief outline of the proposed chapters is presented in Figure 1-3.

Figure 1-3: Outline of proposed chapters



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

- **Chapter 1** contains an introduction to the planned study, which includes a summary of the research topic, as well as background information. The research problem is identified after the introduction, as well as a brief literature review of the identified constructs. The primary and secondary objectives are included in the first chapter. The research methodology is discussed at the end of the chapter.

- **Chapter 2** discussed management, including the history of business management. It also comprises of the three levels of management, managerial functions, business functions, roles of managers, as well as the different business environments. This discussion includes characteristics from existing literature.

- **Chapter 3** discussed the constructs that were identified in the literature overview of the study. In terms of their definitions and extant literature, the chapter focused on customer retention and the influences thereof, i.e., customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty.

- **Chapter 4** covered the study's research methodology. The methodologies and procedures utilised to undertake the literature investigation, data collection, and data analysis are discussed in this chapter. The research design, target population, and sample plan are also covered in this chapter.

- **Chapter 5** presents all the empirical results and outcomes on customer satisfaction and customer retention. All of the results are presented, as well as the statistical approaches that were utilised to evaluate the data.

- **Chapter 6** concludes the study with managerial implications and recommendations for the South African fast-food industry based on empirical results and findings. This chapter also explored the study's limitations before concluding with research suggestions for the future.

CHAPTER 2

MANAGEMENT IN THE FAST-FOOD INDUSTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The intent of this chapter is to address the first secondary objective as set in Chapter 1 (Section 1.8.2). This chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study on the managerial perspectives in the fast-food restaurant industry. This chapter commences with an introduction (Section 2.1), followed by the conceptualisation of business management (Section 2.2). The history of business management is discussed in the next section (Section 2.3). Subsequently, business management within the context of this study will be discussed (Section 2.4). The chapter proceeds with relevant managerial features, such as management levels (Section 2.5), managerial functions (Section 2.6), and business functions (Section 2.7). As the different business environments have an influence on the management strategies used to improve customer retention, the three business environments will be discussed in the following section (Section 2.9). Figure 2-1 provides an outline of the sections discussed in this chapter.

Figure 2-1: Layout of Chapter 2

Chapter 2	Description
Introduction	This section provides an introduction on the contents of this chapter
Conceptualising business management	This section defines the concept of business management
History of business management	This section describes the history of business management through different eras
Business management in the context of the study	This section describes the different elements of business management that form part of this study
Management levels	This section describes the three management levels
Managerial functions	This section describes the four functions of management
Business functions	This section describes the eight business functions that functional managers need to understand
Roles of managers	This section describes the three roles that business managers need to understand and incorporate in organisation's
Business environments	This section describes the three business environments that organisation's operate in
Summary	This section consists of a short summary of the chapter

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Business management has been studied for decades in order to better understand what it involves and how it can be improved. To comprehend the notion of business management in this study, the terms "business" and "management" are discussed separately.

In the past, a business was solely thought of as a place that sold goods or services to consumers to earn a profit, but it has developed into a setting that builds multigenerational relationships with its employees, customers, and suppliers while providing products and services to make a profit (Sheth, 2020:262). A business can be online or a physical store, and any type of business requires customers to ensure that they generate an income to earn a profit (Ilyas & Nayan, 2020:1). The location of a business is considered one of the most significant aspects of long-term sustainability, since it allows it to attract more customers, especially in the fast-food restaurant business (Yang *et al.*, 2017:33). Managers and leaders must inspire their staff in order to run a successful business, as inspired people are seen to be more productive and goal-oriented (Fiaz *et al.*, 2017:144). According to Skudiene *et al.* (2021:203), a business will have a significant competitive edge if it has good relationships with its customers, because the decision remains with the customer whether or not to acquire the items or services that are supplied to them. Furthermore, strong relationships with suppliers will allow a business to receive higher-quality products at lower prices – resulting in a competitive advantage over other businesses in the industry (Cho *et al.*, 2018:1527). The overall long-term profitability and sustainability of any business – including that of a fast-food restaurant – depends on excellent relationships with customers, employees, and also suppliers (Skudiene *et al.*, 2021:199).

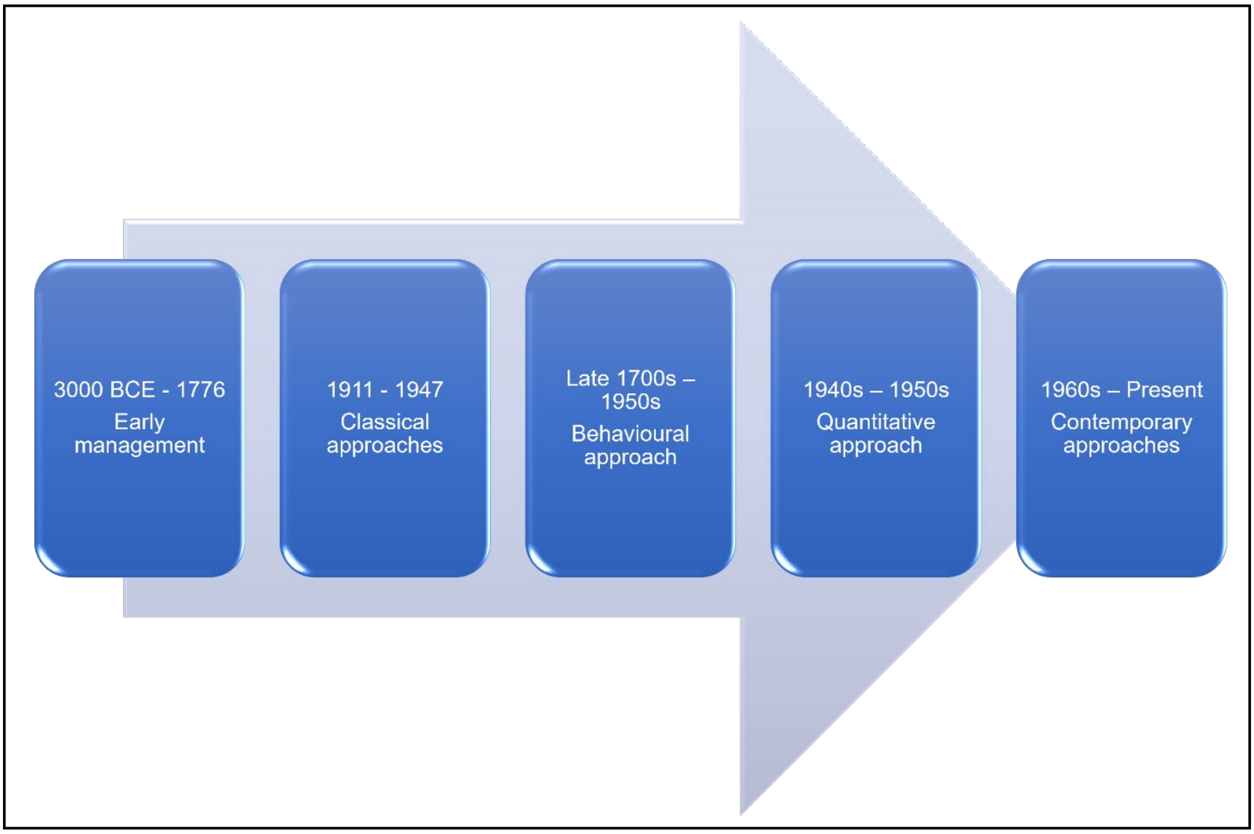
Management can be defined as a universal leadership process in a business that employs both human and material resources to achieve predetermined objectives (Das & Mishra, 2019:8). The basic objectives of management include: (1) to increase a business' profitability, (2) to ensure that it has a competitive edge in the industry, (3) adapt to external conditions that may affect the business, and (4) to maintain excellent relationships with customers, stakeholders, and staff (Akramovich & Muratovna, 2019:43). Management is viewed as a power and control mechanism that consists of four core functions, namely planning, organising, leading, and controlling (Blok, 2020:176). To ensure the efficient use of resources in a business, management teams must properly combine each of the four management functions into the everyday operations that are set out inside the business (Mukwakungu *et al.*, 2019a). Management can be regarded as one of the most important components of a business, because it represents the individuals or teams who will ensure that the operations of the business are executed effectively, allowing for optimal performance and efficiency leading to profitability (Knezević *et al.*, 2021:150). In order to understand business management, it is important to investigate the history of business management.

2.3 THE HISTORY OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Management has existed for decades, and any manager needs to understand the history of management as well as the current management eras to successfully incorporate it into their business's culture, as this will help with achieving desired business goals (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:54). According to Amat and Amat (2019:2), evidence of management accounting systems used to assess government operations that date back to 1122 – 256 BC was discovered in China. Furthermore, evidence of management can be encountered in the 15th century in Venice, where production lines were formed in the construction of ships (Sridhar, 2017). In 1589, the word '*manager*' was first written in an official document, referring to a person that was in charge of land (Witzel, 2010).

It is clear that management has been used for centuries to oversee operations and achieve objectives. Although the abovementioned management history might not closely relate to business management, it is evident that it was the foundation for business management as we know it today. According to Coulter *et al.* (2020:55), there are five main approaches wherein business management has developed. These approaches include the early management approach, the classical approach, the behavioural approach, the quantitative approach, and the contemporary approach. Figure 2-2 illustrates the historical approaches of business management.

Figure 2-2: Historical developments of business management



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.3.1 Early management

The early management approach refers to a time when corporate personnel faced difficult working conditions, and it was during this time that management was studied as a discipline for the first time (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:54). There were few large businesses in this era, and the owner of a business was also the manager of the entire business and all of its functions, deciding on all of the business operations and rules (Ayhan & Oztemel, 2014:156). According to Singh (2015:7), there were no defined management roles in this era and managers' practices were considered as not being socially cultured in the way they made people work.

2.3.2 Classical approach

Scientific management theories were established throughout the classical approach era of management, such as Henry Fayol's theory, which comprises four managerial functions: planning, organising, leading, and controlling (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:55). The classical approach era of management emerged during the industrial revolution to better manage manufacturing processes, people, and businesses (Chukwuemeka & Onuoha, 2018:82). Furthermore, during this period, Fredric Taylor established scientific management with the purpose of increasing factory efficiency through cash rewards to urge personnel to work harder (Singh, 2015:7). In this period, business competition increased, necessitating the development of methods to develop effective production. As a result, competent managers were required to manage personnel and the work environment within businesses (Porter *et al.*, 2008:1).

2.3.3 Behavioural approach

The behavioural approach era of management refers to the time when it was realised that excellent human resource management would lead to more successful output, and it encompassed variables such as better working conditions, staff selection, and general corporate oversight (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:57). Researchers believed that human resources were neglected in the classical approach era, hence there was a greater emphasis on human capital within businesses during this period (Chukwuemeka & Onuoha, 2018:83). Furthermore, the behavioural approach era is remembered as a time when attention was devoted to how managers led their businesses by analysing how they treated their personnel (Mheiri, 2022:43).

2.3.4 Qualitative approach

Human nature was assessed in the workplace in the qualitative approach era to design techniques that will positively influence them to achieve more productivity and happier employees (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:58). Douglas McGregor designed two theories in the qualitative approach era, Theory X (where he believed that managers were cynical towards employees) and Theory Y (where he believed that managers should see employees as a valuable part of their business to succeed), with Theory Y being seen as a crucial point in business management in all businesses up to the present (Singh, 2015:7). The qualitative approach era of management has supplied managers with options for ensuring the optimal efficiency of their businesses without jeopardising the employees' work environment (Mishra, 2022:90).

2.3.5 Contemporary approach

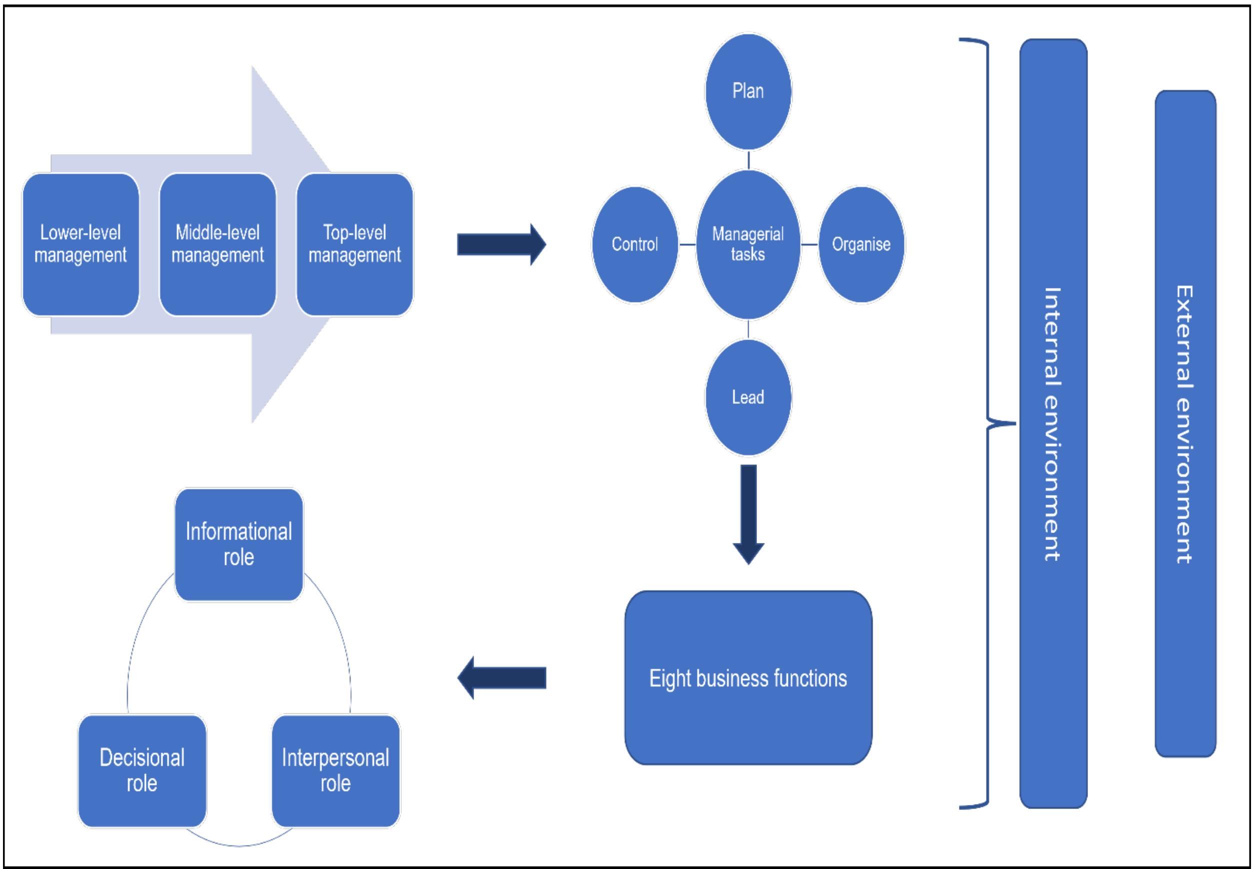
The contemporary approach era refers to the period when it became clear that each functional area of a business needed to be managed effectively using managerial procedures and managerial capabilities to analyse both the internal and external environment of the business (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:59). According to Singh (2015:10), globalisation, total quality management, and the just-in-time inventory management systems are three noteworthy aspects that stand out in the contemporary approach era. In management, globalisation refers to the ability of managers to do business beyond national borders in terms of product flows, investments, and operations, which leads to more competition between businesses (Jahan *et al.*, 2021:666). Furthermore, globalisation is defined as the integration of global economies with the goal of lowering trade barriers between nations (Emmanuel, 2017:368). Total quality management is a management framework that refers to the business ensuring that all aspects of the business, from front-line workers to owners, are focused on improving the quality of the business in order to ensure customer satisfaction and gain a competitive advantage in the industry they operate in (Bajaj *et al.*, 2018:128). Managers should adopt total quality management across all functional areas of the business to ensure that the quality of products and services continues to improve with the end goal of satisfied customers – resulting in more returning customers (Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman, 2019:2). Just-in-time inventory management is paired with total quality management, as this method of inventory management ensures that products do not get stockpiled or go to waste (Mukwakungu *et al.*, 2019b:1272). For this component to perform successfully in the contemporary approach era of business management, it is vital that managers in a business ensure that they have dependable suppliers as well as the ability to adapt production operations to customer demands, as this will lead to satisfied customers (Stojkanović *et al.*, 2021:194).

Following the eras of business management, the following section will focus on the business management as it forms part of the contemporary approach era.

2.4 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Effective management of a fast-food business is important for its long-term success and sustainability, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic that took the world by storm (Bansal *et al.*, 2021:603). Figure 2-3 illustrates the concepts that will be discussed under the term business management within the context of this study. The concepts will then be discussed individually in Sections 2.5 to 2.9.

Figure 2-3: Concepts in business management within the context of the study



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

The multiple levels of management should be considered as the first aspect of business management. The three levels of management are crucial because each level will handle distinct activities inside the business, and the performance of one level will affect the performance of the others (Tappura *et al.*, 2017:1148). Managers are also considered leaders, and in order to be good leaders, they must be able to change their management techniques at all three levels of management (Anzengruber *et al.*, 2017:136). According to Shum *et al.* (2018:59), the higher a manager's position, the more abilities they require as more complicated challenges necessitate inventive solutions. While small firms may only have one level of management, large businesses may have three levels. The three levels of management in a business are top-management, which is in charge of the business's long-term planning; middle management, which is in charge of putting top-management strategies into action; and lower management, which is responsible for daily operations and the execution of middle-management plans (Brevis & Vrba, 2014:37).

The managerial functions are the second aspect of business management that must be evaluated (Albrecht *et al.*, 2019:75). There are four managerial tasks within a business, which include planning, organising, leading, and controlling, as is discussed below (Long & Dong, 2017:31):

- Planning requires managers to set long-term objectives for the business as well as forecast the future and create strategic plans for when problems arise (Coulter *et al.*, 2020).
- Organising requires managers to make efficient use of human and other resources (Fazal *et al.*, 2021:41).
- Leading requires managers to use their interpersonal skills to motivate employees (Albrecht *et al.*, 2019:162).
- Controlling requires managers to ensure that their employees and business performance meet the requirements (Wilson, 2017:213).

The eight business functions are the third crucial component of business management. A business function is a grouping of activities that are similar in nature and performed by certain individuals, such as marketing, finances, public relations, operations, human resources, administration, logistics, and information technology (De Lange, 2017:42).

The three vital roles of managers are the second last aspect of business management that will be covered in the context of this study. These three roles, which comprise informational, interpersonal, and decisional roles, are essential for the proper execution of all other aspects of the business (Sheng, 2020:53).

The final business element, known as the business environment, combines all of the previously listed factors. According to Lawrence (2020:48), there are three key business environments to consider in a business of any size: the micro-, market, and macro-environments.

Each business element has a direct impact on a fast-food restaurant's operations, and the elements listed below will be thoroughly explored in this chapter.

2.5 MANAGEMENT LEVELS

When considering the management of a fast-food restaurant, all levels of management are important – each having its functions and responsibilities (Harrington, 2018:48). There are three different levels of management in any business, including lower-level management, middle-level management, and top-level management (Nickels *et al.*, 2019:177).

2.5.1 Lower-level management

Lower-level management is also known as first-line management, and these individuals or teams are in charge of managing employees who are not in a managerial position (Jones & George, 2019:11). In fast-food restaurants, first-line managers must have a strong understanding of three skills, namely technical, human relations, and conceptual skills to ensure that they can accommodate all tasks set out in the business (Nickels *et al.*, 2019:178). According to Ahmetoglu *et al.* (2017:301), lower-level managers should be able to put new ideas to the test, adapt to difficulties as they arise, and follow higher-level management's directives. First-line managers' communication skills are vital, since they will be dealing with clients and suppliers of the business (Bagheri *et al.*, 2021:462). In a fast-food restaurant, these managers will be in charge of resolving customer complaints and arranging orders with their suppliers. According to Ellström and Ellström (2018:546), first-line managers require strong human resources abilities, since they must be able to teach and monitor personnel in order to ensure that the business is running at maximum potential. Another reason for first-line managers to have effective communication skills is that they are accountable for reporting any incidents to middle-level managers to ensure that any problems that arise are dealt with immediately (Varayonpinit *et al.*, 2020:58). First-line managers are also required to adapt according to situations that may arise concerning problems that employees face in the workplace. For example, these managers are required to attend to the emotional well-being of the employees that work in the fast-food restaurant, with regard to mental health, prejudice, and employee behaviour, to name a few (D'Annunzio-Green & Teare, 2018:128).

2.5.2 Middle-level management

Middle-level managers are considered a link between top and lower management, between employees and top management, and also, as a link to carry out the strategies laid out by a business's top executives (Livijn, 2019:2). These managers should be able to put the top managers' innovative ideas and solutions into action (Schubert & Tavassoli, 2020:273). Fast-food restaurant middle managers are also responsible for the business of human and other resources in order to improve productivity and customer service inside the business (Jones & George, 2019:12). A fast-food restaurant's middle management will focus on one goal at a time to guarantee that it is met in accordance with the top management's standards (Larson & Gray, 2018:143). Fast-food restaurant middle managers are accountable for the business's optimal performance, ensuring that the implemented duties are completed efficiently through good strategies (Friebel *et al.*, 2022:211). Middle managers play a crucial role in strategy implementation, because strategies are necessary for daily operations, such as problem-solving and maintaining customer satisfaction, intending to lead to customer retention (Jääskeläinen & Luukkanen, 2017:480). In a fast-food restaurant, middle managers are seen as the major link between employees and top management, since they report all of the underlying circumstances that first-line managers communicate to them (Hirte, 2018:31). Although there are various middle-level managers for each of the business functions as stated in Section 2.7, Gjerde and Alvesson (2020:125) agree that middle managers create a link between the core and top management inside a business. Finally, middle managers are the most common initiators of innovative ideas within a business, leading to the belief that these managers are required in a fast-food restaurant to attract and retain customers (Chen *et al.*, 2017:701).

2.5.3 Top-level management

The top-level management of a business is vital in overseeing the successful development of policies, rules and operating procedures, and a diverse top management team promotes the business's performance greatly (Coulter *et al.*, 2020:77; Hassan *et al.*, 2017:2). The top-level managers are the senior executives within the fast-food restaurant who oversee tasks and play a significant role in making crucial business decisions (Widelska & Krot, 2021:166). Conceptual skills are one of the most important skills required by top managers. These abilities will enable the fast-food restaurant's top management to comprehend difficult problems and devise innovative remedies (Northouse, 2019:103). The ability to think like an entrepreneur, analyse data, and excellent planning abilities are the three primary parts of conceptual skills that top-level managers should possess, as this will allow them to see and understand the business as a whole (Ikupolati *et al.*, 2017:2). According to Kimaru *et al.* (2022:2), top managers with high conceptual skills will have a positive impact on a business's long-term sustainability through maximising resource use. Furthermore, a business's top management is the level of management that determines the business's stakeholder orientation (Kujala *et al.*, 2017:120). The stakeholders in a fast-food restaurant comprise of employees, suppliers, customers, and investors, and the top-level managers are responsible to successfully communicate with them, ensuring that the operating structures are set up correctly and functioning efficiently (Harrison *et al.*, 2017:539).

Each level of management is significant in its own way, and for each of the three levels to work well, the managers of each level of management in a fast-food restaurant should combine various managerial functions (Andrade & Zeigner, 2021:41).

2.6 MANAGERIAL FUNCTIONS

Planning, organising, leading, and controlling are four managerial functions outlined by Henry Fayol over a century ago which must be carried out to a high degree to ensure that a business's goals are met (Fayol, 1916). Fast-food restaurant managers must guarantee that they grasp each unique responsibility in order to collaborate toward a common goal and achieve success (Dyck *et al.*, 2017:7).

2.6.1 Planning

Planning is regarded as the initial step in management, in which objectives are established and concepts are formulated that will lead to the achievement of goals. It is critical for fast-food restaurant owners and managers to be able to foresee future business situations (Robbins *et al.*, 2019:58). According to Schermerhorn and Bachrach (2017:84), there are five important steps to follow when implementing the planning process:

- Step 1: The restaurant's goals and objectives, as well as the desired outcomes, should be assessed. According to Rajnoha *et al.* (2019:46), the objectives set forth by managers within a fast-food restaurant will serve as a guide to achieving the set goals. For example, managers in the restaurant should set a goal for the business to provide exceptional service to its customers, by setting an objective of reducing the time it takes to serve a customer by two minutes.

- Step 2: The restaurant's managers should assess their current situation in relation to their goals. COVID-19 had a significant impact on the hospitality industry, and keeping customers and staff safe is a crucial aim for all businesses. With this in mind, managers of fast-food restaurants should examine all precautionary steps to achieve this goal and overcome the current situation (Gursoy & Chi, 2020:527).

- Step 3: In this sense, managers should assess future conditions that may obstruct their ability to achieve desired goals. Managers should be able to create scenarios that are likely to occur and have a positive impact on the business (such as the expansion of urban areas, creating a larger market for a fast-food restaurant (FAO, 2017:15). Managers should consider a scenario that could harm the business (such as another pandemic that forces a halt in business operations) and compare their current operational strategies to those future scenarios (Quenum *et al.*, 2021:871).

- Step 4: Managers must set out a plan of action that will help them achieve their goals. Managers in the fast-food restaurant should ensure that they have the capabilities and resources to achieve a goal through their plan of action. For example, if the short-term goal is to satisfy all customers until closing time, managers must ensure that the business has enough stock to provide customers with any product they desire until operations are completed (Li & Hovy, 2017:41).

- Step 5: The restaurant's managers should put their plan into action, analyse the results, and make any necessary changes to their plan. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fast-food restaurant goals, managers should put strategies in place to ensure the safety of their staff and customers, such as ensuring that each employee and customer who enters the business disinfect their hands and does not have a fever (Hu *et al.*, 2021:5).

For managers in the fast-food industry, thorough planning is essential, as this managerial function will lay out tactics that will ultimately determine whether the business goals will be met or not (George & Jones, 2022:6). Meeting the goals that are set out in the restaurant will lead to customers being satisfied, resulting in more returning customers (Jain *et al.*, 2019:483). Customer retention will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

2.6.2 Organise

The next managerial task after planning is the matter of business structures, and within this task, managers of a business build-out work structures for productive work interactions between personnel (George & Jones, 2022:7). Within the fast-food industry, the business process entails establishing the necessary structures within the firm, including the optimal allocation of human resources to activities, which will ultimately lead to the achievement of objectives at the highest rate possible (Robbins *et al.*, 2019:126). The business process refers not only to the formal structures that managers establish, but also to the informal structures that exist between personnel. It is also said that managers must analyse these informal structures within the business to ensure that they do not harm the workplace and its common goals (Schermerhorn & Bachrach, 2017:139). The fast-food restaurant's management is in charge of the business's design, which entails aligning all human resources with the business's strategies in a manner that allows the restaurant to meet its goals (Lemus-Aguilar *et al.*, 2019:2). Auernhammer and Leifer (2019:1207) explain that the design of a business is a very difficult structure to organise, as the behaviour, attitudes, and views of human resources are everchanging. In order to successfully execute organising as a managerial function in a fast-food restaurant, management must ensure that all human resources in the business are systematically combined to fulfil the goals that were set out in the goal-planning process (Fjeldstad & Snow, 2018:36).

2.6.3 Lead

A manager should be a good leader who keeps long-term goals in mind, ensures that staff are engaged and motivated, and does not succumb to pressure when issues emerge but rather focuses on a fast and effective solution (Schermerhorn & Bachrach, 2017:199). A manager's excellent leadership abilities will inspire staff in a fast-food restaurant to be more goal-oriented, and managerial leadership should be more sociable and casual to engage with employees on an emotional level (Robbins *et al.*, 2019:216). Managers should utilise good communication, power, and persuasion to create a clear vision that motivates employees to be goal-oriented and focused on the business objectives (George & Jones, 2022:7). One of the managers' most important responsibilities in this function is to motivate employees, resulting in increased production and being satisfied with the job they have been assigned in the business (Setiawan *et al.*, 2019:996).

Employees in fast-food restaurants were affected mentally and emotionally during the COVID-19 pandemic, since it was unsure whether they would lose their employment. As leaders, managers were forced to work on measures to support their employees during these uncertain times (Shukla *et al.*, 2022:3). Effective leadership could ensure that all employees in the business feel like they are important and valued. For example, managers in a fast-food restaurant can arrange annual events for all the employees in the business to socialise and learn more about what is expected of them concerning the operations that managers have planned (Zanda, 2018:132).

Managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that their employees are satisfied at work, since this will drive them to work harder, allowing the business goals to be met more effectively. This will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, and lead to customer retention that will be further discussed in Chapter 3 (Daskin, 2019:63).

2.6.4 Control

Controlling is viewed as the most straightforward task which involves ensuring that the anticipated results are not only attained but also exceed expectations, and if they are not, effective steps should be adopted to maintain the goals of the business (Schermerhorn & Bachrach, 2017:102). Managers monitor the performance of all components of the business in the controlling function to guarantee that they can precisely identify the areas of the business that require improvement, as well as the areas that are most effective (George & Jones, 2022:8).

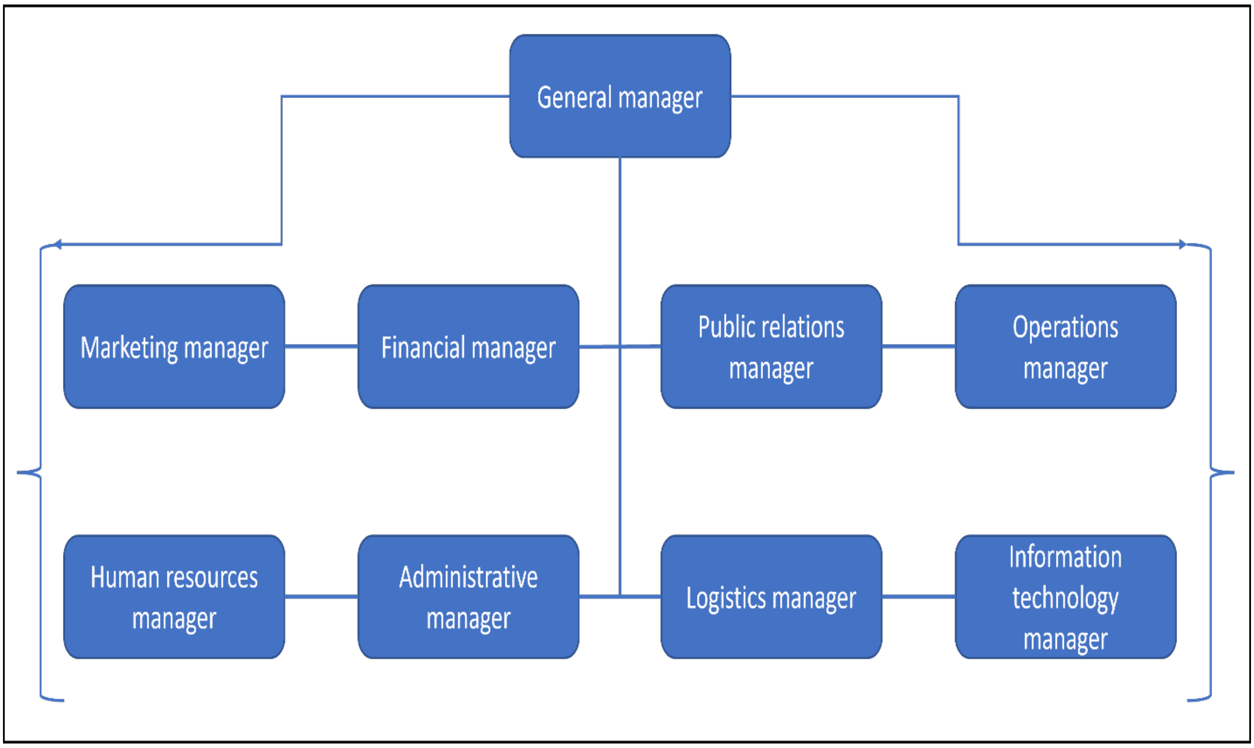
Managers must ensure that the fast-food restaurant's standards are not compromised. To prevent this, managers should assess their performance against established goals and take remedial action as needed (Robbins *et al.*, 2019:302). Financial statistics, sales records, and customer satisfaction can all be used to analyse and manage the control function in a fast-food restaurant (Knezević *et al.*, 2021:152). Managers in fast-food restaurants should make sure that all of the business' resources are being used effectively so that goals are met. For example, managers must ensure the stock ordered from suppliers is sufficient to meet the demand for products, but not in excess so as to lead to perishable goods being spoiled (Misun, 2017:206).

To ensure that the activities of a fast-food restaurant are running properly and goals are met, each of the four managerial functions must be incorporated into the business management functions (Holubčík *et al.*, 2021:287).

2.7 BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

Functional managers handle the many business functions of a fast-food restaurant and form part of the middle-level management in a business. Each functional manager is in charge of the activities that fall within their functional domain (Cui, 2017:969). Figure 2-4 illustrates the different functions in a business.

Figure 2-4: Business functions within a business



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.7.1 Marketing management

In a fast-food restaurant, a marketing manager is in charge of performing market research, developing a marketing strategy, marketing planning and organisation, implementing the marketing strategy, and overseeing the marketing strategy (Pasquier & Villeneuve, 2018:49). The restaurant's marketing manager should be able to establish methods that will allow the restaurant to meet the needs, wants, and demands of current and potential customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018:30). Marketers should ensure that the expectations they offer to customers are high enough that they will choose the products that the restaurant offers, but not higher than they can accomplish, hence ensuring optimal customer satisfaction that will lead to retention (Armstrong *et al.*, 2017:9).

2.7.2 Financial management

Investment decisions, financial decisions, and dividend decisions are the three key financial management decisions at a fast-food restaurant (Grozdanovska *et al.*, 2017). A fast-food restaurant's financial management team is in charge of making decisions on asset acquisition, financing, asset management, and acquiring financial resources that are in the restaurant's best interests in order to optimise profit potential (Al Breiki & Nobanee, 2019:3). In a fast-food restaurant, financial management is the action of acquiring finances with the goal of minimising costs and effectively allocating the funds that have been sourced (Awaluddin *et al.*, 2020:10951). Because a fast-food restaurant uses a lot of machinery in its production, financial managers should search for assets that will improve production. Automated burger patty cooking machines, for example, will allow the restaurant to be more time and quality efficient than a person who cooks – resulting in a competitive advantage in the industry (Lima *et al.*, 2021:2). When considering investing in financial assets, financial managers in a firm must take calculated risks in order to secure business growth (Mihajlović *et al.*, 2020:502).

2.7.3 Public relations management

Within a fast-food restaurant, public relations management is regarded as an art form, to establish long-term relationships and a positive public image (Aji P & Andriyani, 2020:1). Public relations should be used as an instrument to communicate with various public groups who will be interested in the restaurant's offerings, resulting in truthful public recognition (Gimaliev *et al.*, 2020:1327). Public relations communications have grown into digital communication formats, and managers must understand how to best employ this technology to guarantee that the audience is not misled by any ambiguity in the message (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018:60). Public relations management's social media presence has expanded dramatically, and public relations managers should understand and use social media to spread a positive public image of a fast-food restaurant (McKie & Sriramesh, 2017:2).

Because public groups are becoming more culturally varied and require different communication approaches, a restaurant's public relations management team should examine all public groups accordingly (Yue, 2019:502). Managers of public relations should be aware of their target market and ensure that public communication is not discriminatory in any way. For example, managers should examine different religious aspects in the area they operate to ensure that they cater for the entire community (such as halal meals for the Muslim community) (Theaker, 2020:194).

2.7.4 Operations management

Operations management refers to the complete process of developing products to fulfil the demands and desires of customers, and it is as important for fast-food restaurants as it is for any other business (Manikas *et al.*, 2020:1443). Operations management at a fast-food restaurant is the process of converting inputs (for example, raw meat, raw potatoes, and bread) into outputs (for example, a burger and chips) by effectively and efficiently managing the resources required to achieve optimal profitability (PMI, 2017:16). According to Felsberger and Reiner (2020:13), a restaurant's operations management focuses on the restaurant's resources, activities, and expertise to create overall value for the business. Suppliers, raw materials, capital, labour, equipment, and knowledge are some of the resources, activities, and expertise that operation managers should consider when turning inputs into outputs within a fast-food restaurant (Tazkia *et al.*, 2017:131). The daily activities of operational managers are related to the required number of products that must be produced in response to customer demands. For example, in a fast-food restaurant, operations managers should consider whether there will be a higher demand for food on weekends or during lunch hours, and devise strategies to meet these goals (Dodrajka, 2017:35).

2.7.5 Human resources management

The human resources management function is defined as the entire employment lifecycle, from recruitment to dismissal or retirement of employees in a business with the goal of achieving business objectives through managing the employees in an effective manner (Pham, 2020:721). Because the success of a fast-food restaurant is largely determined by the people who work there, human resource management policies, methods, and systems are critical to the business's future (Haak-Saheem & Festing, 2020:1863). Attracting and developing human resources, as well as maintaining and motivating human resources, are two fundamental aspects of human resource management (Katou, 2017:803). Human resources managers in fast-food restaurants should make the business's work opportunities as appealing as possible, as this will allow them to recruit a large number of employees and select the employees with the best skill sets for available positions (Klepić, 2019:16). Human resources managers should guarantee that the business has good relations with its employees and that employees are treated with respect in a safe working environment without discrimination, which will result in a positive public image, and attract more customers (Stoyanova & Stoyanov, 2019:2). According to Obedgiu (2017:987), these managers are also in charge of motivating people in the workplace by rewarding high-performing staff (for example, bonuses) and managing disciplinary issues if necessary (for example, disciplinary hearings for employees that do not perform effectively, thereby leading to a decrease in productivity of the business).

2.7.6 Administrative management

Administrative management is regarded as the initial stage in defining a fast-food restaurant's norms and procedures (Brevis & Vrba, 2014:8). According to Schermerhorn and Bachrach (2017:32), the administrative management team's role is to plan and direct staff’s work. In a fast-food restaurant, administrative management can be simply defined as the strategic use of resources to achieve desired results while maximising profits (Abah, 2017:9). Administrative managers will use business data they collect and analyse, such as the volume of sales of a given product, to develop plans to sell more of the products (Ghosh & Klueter, 2021:11).

2.7.7 Logistics management

Logistics management is based on the effective planning and timely delivery of products to customers while minimising expenses (Bagshaw, 2017:2). Within a fast-food restaurant, logistics management can be defined as the movement of all materials from manufacturing to the point where the products are received by consumers in order to meet their needs, at a profit to the restaurant (Kain & Verma, 2018:3812). Inventory management refers to material handling, supply and demand planning, warehousing, and order fulfilment – all aspects that form part of logistics management within a fast-food restaurant (Ghoumrassi & Ţigu, 2017:293). Logistics managers work closely with operations managers to ensure that the materials required for daily operations are procured from suppliers in the most cost-effective manner (Oluwaseyi *et al.*, 2017:1). Inventory control is important within the fast-food restaurant business, as too much inventory on hand can lead to higher storage costs or spoiled products resulting in a loss of profit (Wild, 2017:9). Logistics managers should understand how much time is required from placing an order with suppliers to receiving supplies at the restaurant to ensure that they have enough stock to meet demand and ensure customer satisfaction, resulting in customer retention (Ristovska *et al.*, 2017:247).

2.7.8 Information technology management

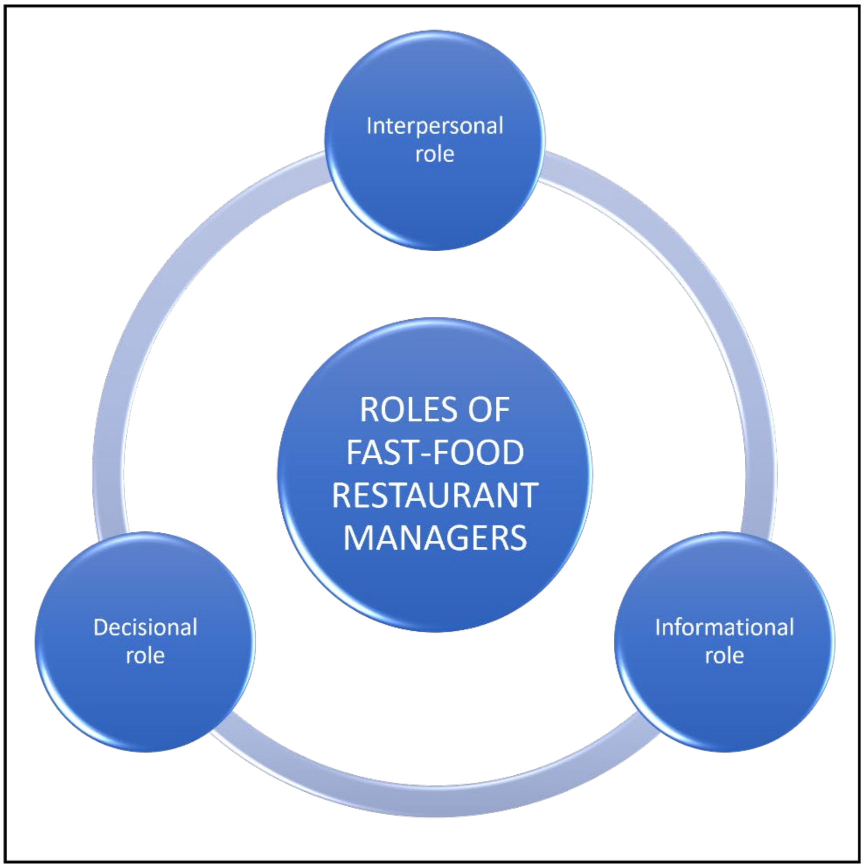
Within a fast-food restaurant, information technology refers to all of the equipment that is used to store and process data (Khuntia *et al.*, 2018:757). Without suitable information technology management systems in place, a restaurant may not be able to reach its performance goals (Sanaei & Sobhani, 2018:185). Fast-food restaurants will be able to identify market shifts using information technology, and with this information they will be able to react to new trends, giving them a competitive advantage which will ultimately lead to a larger profit (Tarigan *et al.*, 2021:48). Information technology improvements could provide a restaurant with a significant competitive advantage if they stay up to date with the latest technical advancements (Yeniyurt *et al.*, 2019:47). Remaining up to date with technological advancements could improve customer interaction. For example, restaurant managers should invest in self-ordering systems, which allow customers to order their meals using an interactive screen, resulting in shorter waiting times and lower labour costs, leading to higher customer satisfaction and retention (Ishak *et al.*, 2021:1136).

To ensure each of the business functions are managed properly, managers need to fulfil three roles, regardless of the business function. Fulfilling these roles will assist managers to complete the tasks set out with the end aim of excellent business performance (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017:51).

2.8 ROLES OF MANAGERS

There are three main roles that managers within fast-food restaurants should fulfil to ensure optimal business performance. These include: interpersonal roles, informational roles, and decisional roles (Zulfakar *et al.*, 2021:50). Figure 2-5 illustrates the three roles of managers.

Figure 2-5: Roles of managers



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.8.1 Informational role

The first role of a manager is known as the informational role. The manager should be able to execute three crucial responsibilities in this role, namely: monitoring, disseminating and acting as a spokesperson (Dunn, 2021:10). A fast-food restaurant manager is first and foremost responsible for monitoring internal information and potential problems, as well as reserving and controlling them (Altamony & Gharaibeh, 2017). As a monitor, the manager is responsible for inspecting changes in the restaurant's business environment. For example, a fast-food restaurant manager must analyse the team of employees and, if the team is underperforming, suggest methods to improve employee performance (Altamony & Gharaibeh, 2017:922).

As a disseminator, the restaurant manager is also responsible for reviewing and compiling key business information that is easy to grasp and that can be presented to shareholders within and outside of the business (Oberer & Erkollar, 2018:406). As a disseminator, a fast-food restaurant manager is responsible for sharing business information such as total sales with internal stakeholders, who will design strategies to improve the information as it is transmitted by the managers (Dandalt, 2021:155).

The information gathered by management about the restaurant must be conveyed to people outside the business, such as the general public, and this role is known as being a spokesperson (Aphisamacharayothin, 2020:14). Managers at fast-food restaurants are responsible for informing the public about decisions and goals, as well as information about the business. Spokespersons for fast-food restaurants will inform the public about problems and the steps they are taking to resolve them, such as COVID-19 regulations and how they adhere to them (Darkazanli, 2021:5).

2.8.2 Interpersonal role

The interpersonal role in a business is the second role of a manager. A manager in this role must perform three key functions: being a figurehead, a leader, and a liaison (Dunn, 2021:11). As a figurehead, a restaurant manager must inspire staff, with their primary responsibilities being able to perform ceremonial, social and legal obligations on behalf of the business (Scholtenhuis *et al.*, 2021:7). The restaurant manager should not only motivate the staff, but also lead them and ensure that they are guided by defining appropriate goals, guiding them to achieve these goals, and rewarding them both intrinsically and extrinsically. For example, managers should let employees feel wanted in the business by showing them respect (intrinsically) and giving bonuses for the best employee of the month (extrinsically) (Solanki, 2019:24). The third responsibility that a fast-food restaurant manager should be capable of is maintaining good communication with both internal and external business contacts, as well as being an effective networker for the restaurant (Henegama, 2021:308).

2.8.3 Decisional role

The decisional role is the third role of a manager. According to Dunn (2021:11), an entrepreneur, a disturbance handler, a resource allocator, and a negotiator are four tasks that a manager should perform in this role.

A fast-food restaurant manager should be able to come up with unique ideas that will lead to the development of new prospects which will benefit the restaurant in an entrepreneurial manner (Wulandari *et al.*, 2020:6). Unique concepts will help the fast-food restaurant attract more customers by providing products or services that are not accessible at other fast-food restaurants, such as interactive self-ordering systems (Dandalt, 2021:155).

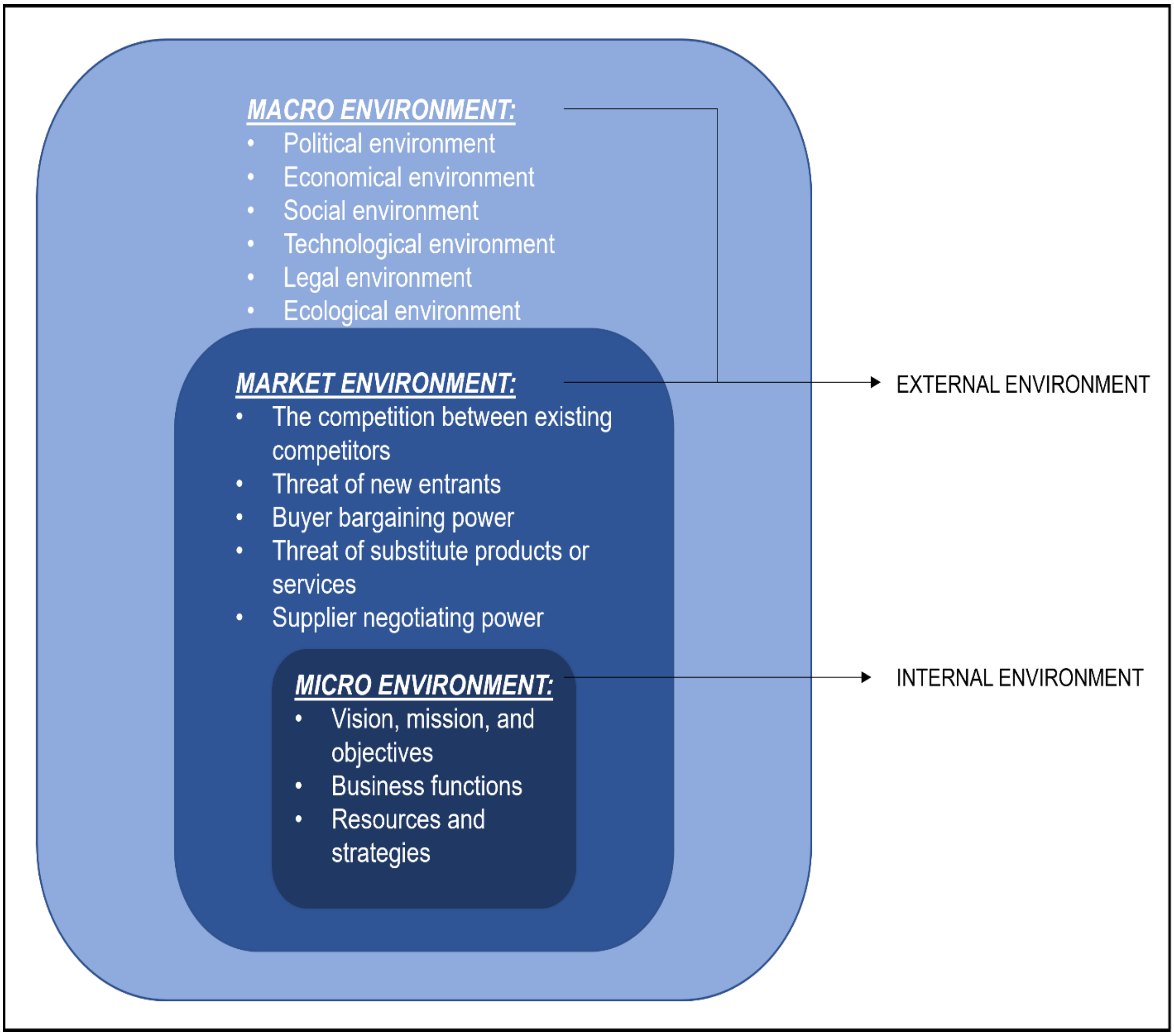
As a disturbance handler, a manager is responsible for taking corrective action when the restaurant has unexpected challenges, as well as ensuring that the business environment remains calm during these instances (Altamony & Gharaibeh, 2017:921). Managers must allocate the proper resources, including materials, capital, and human resources, to specific tasks in order to ensure that the task is accomplished efficiently and without wasting any resources. This is referred to as resource allocation (Altamony & Gharaibeh, 2017:921). As negotiators, managers are responsible for resolving conflicts and making deals with individuals and other businesses (Scholtenhuis *et al.*, 2021:6).

The three business environments, which include the micro-, market, and macro-environment, encompass all of the previously described management levels, management tasks, business functions, as well as managerial roles, as all of the above-mentioned sections fall into the business environments that will be discussed in the following section (Qin, 2020:272).

2.9 BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS

Managers must conduct thorough analyses of the three business environments in order to ensure that the fast-food restaurant's objectives are realised. Figure 2-6 illustrates the three different business environments within a business.

Figure 2-6: Business environments



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.9.1 Micro-environment

The micro-environment refers to components within the fast-food restaurant that managers have control over, including the vision, mission, and objectives of the restaurant, the business functions, as well as the resources and strategies of the restaurant (Erasmus *et al.*, 2019:126).

2.9.1.1 Vision, mission and objectives

A fast-food restaurant's vision statement indicates the business's long-term aspirations and is seen as an essential strategic instrument to understand how the business needs to change for its future needs (Bora *et al.*, 2017:4). In a fast-food restaurant, the vision statement is vital for inspiring and motivating all employees to work toward a common goal, as well as informing other stakeholders about the business's future direction (Allison, 2017:3). A vision statement in a fast food restaurant will inform customers where you are heading as a business, and it should provide customers with a positive impression of the restaurant's future, which will encourage them to return and buy more products (Kirkpatrick, 2017:7).

A restaurant's mission statement should provide an answer to the question of why it exists. The fast-food restaurant should concentrate on its competitive advantage in the industry, as well as its basic ethical ideals (Bowen, 2018:3). The restaurant's mission statement should provide managers with a roadmap for the major aim they want to achieve in the short term, and it allows managers to devise inventive tactics to attain the statement (Mohamed & Ahmad Murad, 2021:47). Managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that the mission statement defines the activities that the business intends to take to serve customers, and if the mission statement creates a favourable picture of the business in the minds of customers, it will lead to increased customer satisfaction and retention (Nwachukwu & Žufan, 2017:1032).

The objectives stated by a fast-food restaurant's management team allude to the overall aims they want to reach in a certain amount of time, and these are mirrored in the business' mission and vision statements (Jabbar & Hussein, 2017:103). To ensure that they keep in line with the restaurant's vision and mission, fast-food restaurant managers must clearly outline the business's objectives and ensure that they have the required resources to achieve these objectives (Eze *et al.*, 2020:29). A fast-food restaurant should have a vision and mission statement, as this is one of the first steps in determining the business' strategic direction. This will help the restaurant maintain solid control over its business functions (Bora *et al.*, 2017:2).

2.9.1.2 Business functions

The business functions, as portrayed in Section 2.7, are individually evaluated and implemented according to the strengths and weaknesses in each functional area within a fast-food restaurant (Erasmus *et al.*, 2019:126). Management has full control over these functions and should analyse each area according to the specific needs of the business (Erasmus *et al.*, 2019:126). A fast-food restaurant will be able to compare successful operations with unsuccessful operations by evaluating strengths and weaknesses within each function, allowing management to build plans to enhance areas where they are needed (Mallak *et al.*, 2018:6). Business managers must have knowledge of internal factors that have a positive and negative impact on the fast-food restaurant, so that they may design strategies to improve the strengths while limiting or eliminating the weaknesses. Doing so will help the business reach its goals and improve customer satisfaction, which will increase retention (Vlados, 2019:348).

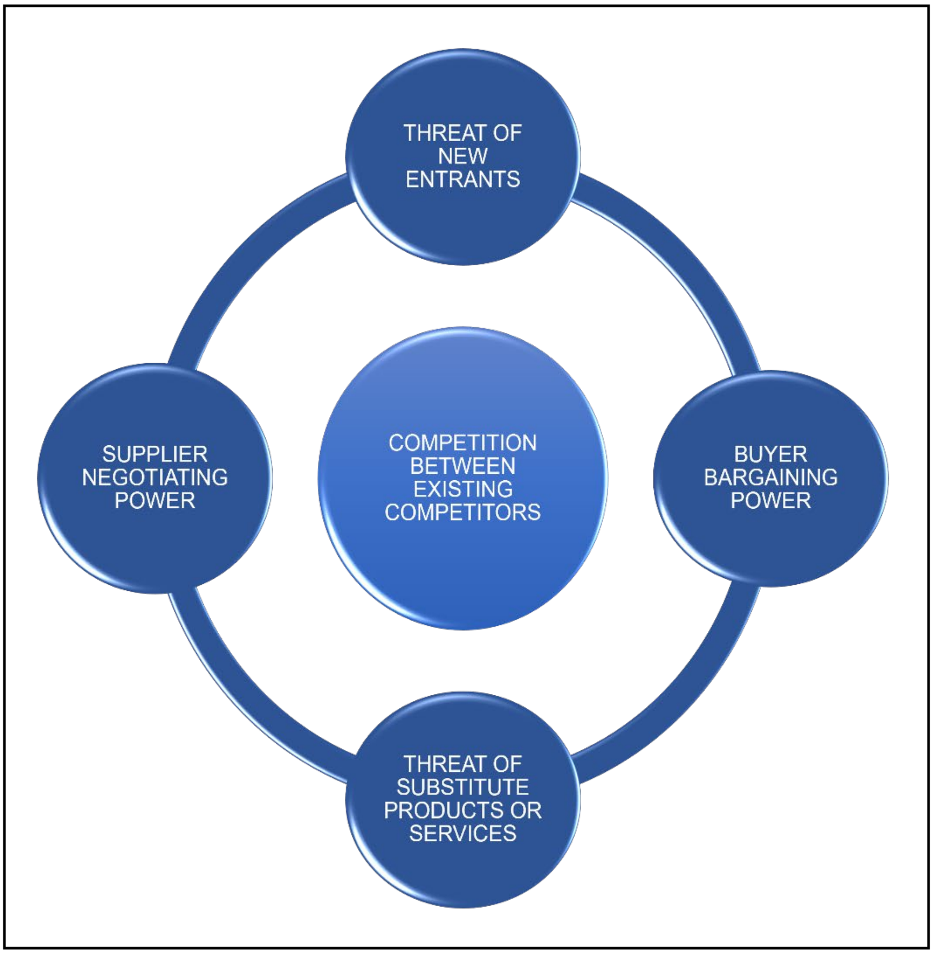
2.9.1.3 Resources and strategies

Material, financial, social, network and intangible resources are all present in a fast-food restaurant and each of these resources must be put to excellent use to acquire a competitive advantage in the business (Alberti *et al.*, 2018:169). Management in a fast-food restaurant needs to make effective use of the available resources in the business and develop strategies that will allow the restaurant to achieve its objectives and create a competitive advantage. For example, managers could develop a strategy by using financial resources and investing them in new technological resources that will lead to a higher output of food by limiting expenses (Hagen *et al.*, 2019:275). Furthermore, Namin (2017:78) has discovered that fast-food restaurants should provide customers with a variety of tasty healthy products. Management should also put the business's resources to good use and devise strategies to implement this finding, which will lead to higher customer satisfaction and retention.

2.9.2 Market environment

The market environment refers to the factors that management of the fast-food restaurant has some control over, including the customers, competitors, labour markets and labour unions, intermediaries, and suppliers (Erasmus *et al.*, 2019:127). Because customers are fundamental to this study, business managers should focus on the market environment and ensure that they have a strong relationship with their customers – as customers could determine whether or not a business will survive (Camilleri, 2018:11). Porter's five forces model can be used to assess the market environment within a fast-food restaurant, which includes competition among existing competitors, the threat of new entrants, buyer bargaining power, the threat of substitute products or services, and supplier negotiating power, as illustrated in Figure 2-7 (Sofyan & Fantini, 2021:123).

Figure 2-7: Porter's five forces



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.9.2.1 Competition between existing competitors

Competition between existing competitors within an industry is known as competitive rivalry and refers to businesses that provide customers with substitute products (Camilleri, 2018:53). The competitive rivalry among fast-food restaurants is a risk that managers should be aware of, as competing businesses may acquire a larger market share if they provide customers with superior products or services at lower prices than their competitors (Bruijl, 2018:2). Competitive rivalry can take many forms, including reduced prices, the introduction of new items, new marketing initiatives, and improved customer service (Mugo, 2020:33). According to Olasiuk (2017:187), competitive rivalry is heavily reliant on marketing operations to attract new customers and also to retain existing customers, as this is a key performance measure. In the fast-food restaurant industry, managers should ensure that they retain existing customers to ascertain business success (Yi *et al.*, 2018:200). This will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

2.9.2.2 The threat of new entrants

Businesses that enter an industry with the intent of competing with existing businesses in a specific industry, refer to the threat of new entrants (Getaneh, 2019:14). New entries into the fast-food restaurant industry will reduce the profitability of established restaurants, which is viewed as a threat (Indrarathne *et al.*, 2020:187). Low-entry barrier industries are those in which competitors can easily enter the market in which the industry operates (Lindblad, 2019:188). The threat of new entrants is strong in industries with low barriers to entry, and because the founding of a fast-food restaurant has relatively low entry barriers, the threat of new entrants is significant. It is critical for existing restaurants to create high barriers of entry to prevent new entrants (Njuguna, 2020:2).

2.9.2.3 The bargaining power of buyers

The ability of buyers to drive down prices, compare similar enterprises against one another, and demand better services, resulting in a loss of profit for the restaurant, is referred to as buyer bargaining power (Mugo, 2020:33). Customers are the bargaining power of buyers in fast-food restaurants, and are not often loyal to a product when better prices and/or quality are provided at competing restaurants (Garcia, 2021:233). When customers desire higher quality products, buyer bargaining power is seen as high, which means more expenses for the restaurant. Lower buyer bargaining power is more appealing because products might be of lower quality, resulting in higher profit margins for the business (Gitonga, 2019:24).

2.9.2.4 The threat of substitute products or services

The threat of substitute products refers to the ease with which items that meet the same need as other products on the market can be obtained (Njuguna, 2020:2). Substitute products accessible in the fast-food restaurant business will primarily pose a threat in terms of the price of closely related products and services available at rival restaurants (Jankalová, 2021:62). Fast-food restaurant managers must carefully examine the market for substitute products and devise strategies to maintain their market share, as these products can result in a decline in sales (Grafova *et al.*, 2017:285). Fast-food restaurants can employ focus strategies by devoting more resources to communicating with loyal customers and ensuring great service quality, resulting in increased customer satisfaction and retention (Rachmi & Poernamawati, 2020:58).

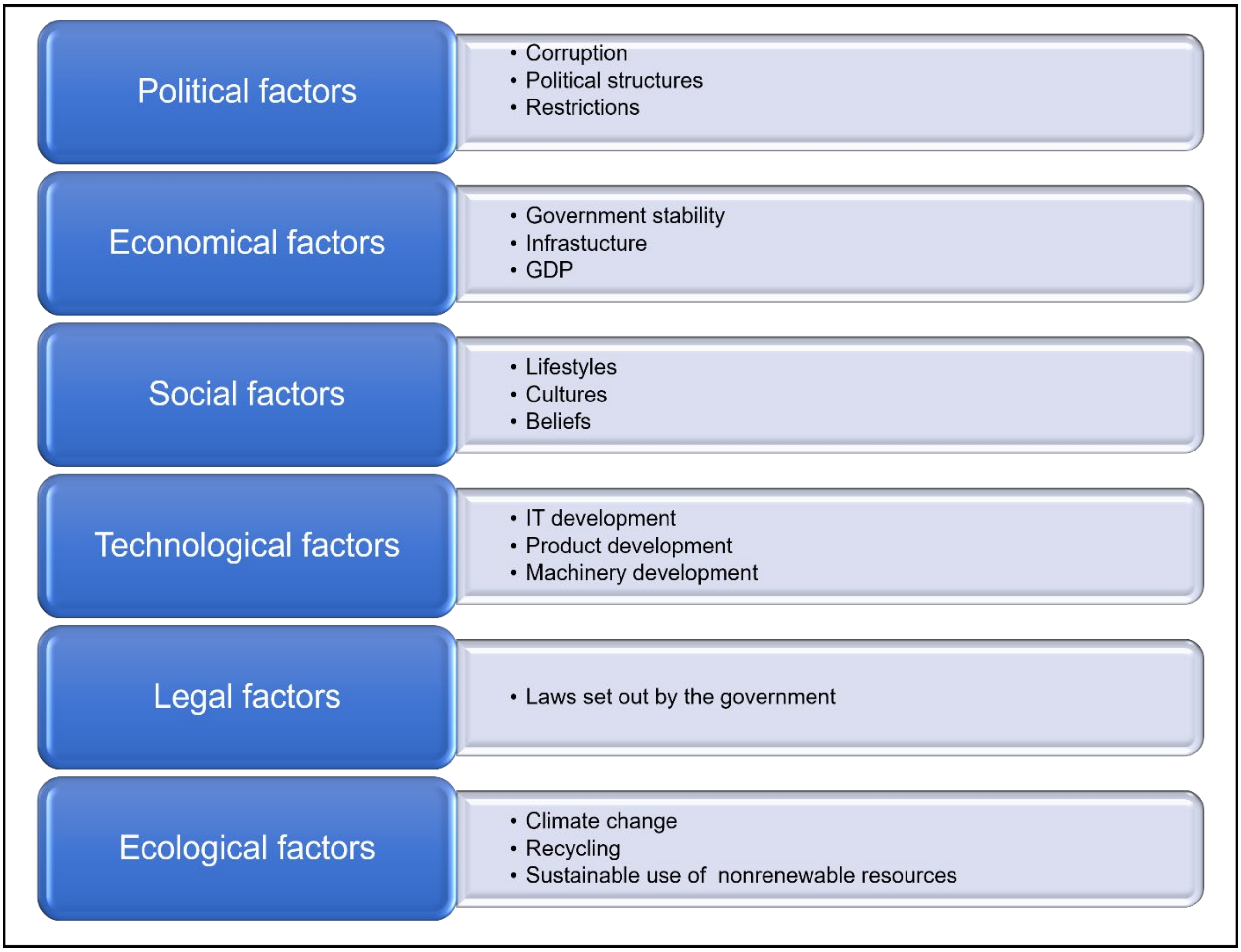
2.9.2.5 The negotiating power of suppliers

Supplier power refers to the pressure that suppliers can exert on firms by raising the costs of their products, decreasing product accessibility, or lowering the quality of the products they have to offer (Getaneh, 2019:11). Suppliers have control over the pricing at which they sell their products to buyers, and they can raise or lower their prices to recoup losses or increase profits (Garcia, 2021:233). Suppliers will increase the price of their products when raw material costs increase to ensure that they still operate at a profit (Ferdinand & Tresyanto, 2020:47). Furthermore, the negotiating power of suppliers is at its highest when there are only a few substitute suppliers available, when it is expensive to switch from one supplier to another, as well as forward integration opportunities (Mugo, 2020:33). Supplier power can have a significant impact on a fast-food restaurant, as problems with a supplier, an increase in their prices or a decrease in their product quality could force the restaurant to find a new supplier, resulting in the loss of important resources and a reduction in profit margins (Balan *et al.*, 2021:5).

2.9.3 Macro-environment

The macro-environment of a business refers to factors that fast-food restaurant managers have no control over, including the political (Section 2.9.3.1), economic (Section 2.9.3.2), social (Section 2.9.3.3), technological (Section 2.9.3.4), legal (Section 2.9.3.5), and ecological factors (Section 2.9.3.6), also known as the PESTLE environment (Erasmus *et al.*, 2019). A PESTLE analysis is a strategic tool used by different businesses to evaluate the macro-environmental factors (Abdoh *et al.*, 2020:20). Figure 2-8 is a summary of the PESTLE factors that form part of the macro-environment.

Figure 2-8: The PESTLE environment



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

2.9.3.1 Political factors

The political environment, which includes levels of corruption, trade prohibitions, political structures, and other government policies, is regarded as the most unstable macro-environmental factor (Mir & Mir, 2019:67). Political reasons, according to Precoma (2021:31), have had a favourable impact on fast-food restaurant advertising campaigns. For example, women have been able to participate in more advertising campaigns with fast-food restaurants as a result of political developments where women are more empowered, which has a favourable impact on the restaurants' sales. Conflicts between political parties can produce instability in the political environment, which can lead to a country's economy collapsing, causing fast-food restaurants to fail as investors may withdraw from the country and businesses therein (Yusop, 2018:35).

2.9.3.2 Economical factors

Economic factors that a business must consider include factors such as inflation, interest rate fluctuations, a country's gross domestic product, government stability, and diverse earnings (Abdoh *et al.*, 2020:21). According to Matović (2020:97), road, port, airport, and railway infrastructure has a substantial influence on the economic factor, since these infrastructures lead to the activities of any business, such as receiving raw materials, selling finished products, or attracting customers to the business site. Managers should closely monitor economic changes because this will indicate how businesses might adapt present strategies to attract and retain customers if economic stability is disrupted (Barabas, 2018:193). An increase in inflation rates has a big impact on the purchasing power of customers and is seen as the main enemy of customers' purchasing power as products become more expensive at fast-food restaurants (Hady *et al.*, 2021:3). According to Masama (2018:24), managers in South African small, medium, and micro fast-food businesses lack the necessary expertise on how to manage economic aspects that affect their businesses, resulting in a high number of failures. Furthermore, it has been found that countries that have a low to middle average household income, tend to buy more fast-food, as this saves time rather than cooking at home (Janssen *et al.*, 2018:20).

2.9.3.3 Social factors

Demographic influences, distinct cultural groups, and values are all social factors in the macro-environment (Kara, 2018:599). Consumers' lifestyles, cultural diversity, religion, and family affairs are examples of social trends that fast-food restaurant management should consider, and use to develop strategic plans to attract customers from various social groups (Lim, 2020:97). The healthy living movement is currently a key social factor in the food business, with consumers preferring low-calorie meals to high-calorie meals, creating an opportunity for fast-food restaurant management to design strategies and capitalise on this trend (Alava *et al.*, 2018:87). For example, some fast-food restaurants offer customers low-carbohydrate meals, as well as display the total energy contained within the meals (Alava *et al.*, 2018:87).

2.9.3.4 Technological factors

New and improved information technology systems that the business uses, as well as new and improved technology such as new machinery to enhance cooking times or energy usage within a fast-food restaurant, are significant technological factors (Kara, 2018:599). Fast-food restaurants will benefit from technological developments, since it will improve the transformation of raw materials into finished goods, resulting in a competitive advantage over other restaurants that do not have the improved appliances (Susilo, 2018:67). For example, the use of energy-efficient appliances will lead to less electricity consumption, leading to a larger profit margin for the business as electricity prices rise. Furthermore, technological improvements enable fast-food restaurants to design distinctive packaging that not only enhances the appearance of their products, but also allows for new and enhanced environmentally friendly packaging that contributes to ecological factors (Alava *et al.*, 2018:87).

2.9.3.5 Legal factors

Legal factors that fast-food restaurant managers should consider include features that have a direct legal impact on the business, such as consumer protection laws, employment regulations, and discrimination laws (Abdoh *et al.*, 2020:21). If restaurants do not follow the legal requirements set forth by the government, they risk facing legal concerns that could result in penalties or closure (Barabas, 2018:197). Managers of fast-food restaurants must keep up with existing and anticipated legal developments in order to adapt their strategies to all regulations and avoid becoming mired in legal conflicts (Lim, 2020:98).

2.9.3.6 Ecological factors

Pollution, a scarcity of raw resources, global warming, recycling, and the use of energy-efficient machinery are just some of the ecological factors that business managers should consider (Yusop, 2018:37). When evaluating the ecological component, the most significant elements for fast-food restaurant managers to consider are ensuring that the business reduces pollution of air, soil, and water, as well as the business's ethical values about environmental assets (Matović, 2020:97). According to Park *et al.* (2020:10), fast-food restaurant operations should be environmentally sensitive, as this can have an impact on customers' perceptions of the business. Being more environmentally conscious will lead to higher customer satisfaction and more repeat business.

2.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided in-depth discussions of the literature that applies to managers in fast-food restaurants. The chapter commenced with an introduction (Section 2.1) and was followed by the conceptualisation of business management (Section 2.2). The following section provided an overview of the history of business management and where it started (Section 2.3), and thereafter business management was discussed in the context of this study (Section 2.4).

The different management levels (Section 2.5), managerial functions (Section 2.6), business functions (Section 2.7), and roles of managers (Section 2.8) that are applicable in fast-food restaurants were discussed.

Lastly, the different business environments (Section 2.9), including the micro-, market, and macro-environments, were discussed briefly to ensure that it is understood how these factors have an impact on a business, and the chapter ended with a summary (Section 2.10).

The following chapter will provide a literature investigation of all factors and elements leading to the retention of customers in fast-food restaurants to understand what strategies can be derived by managers to improve customer retention.

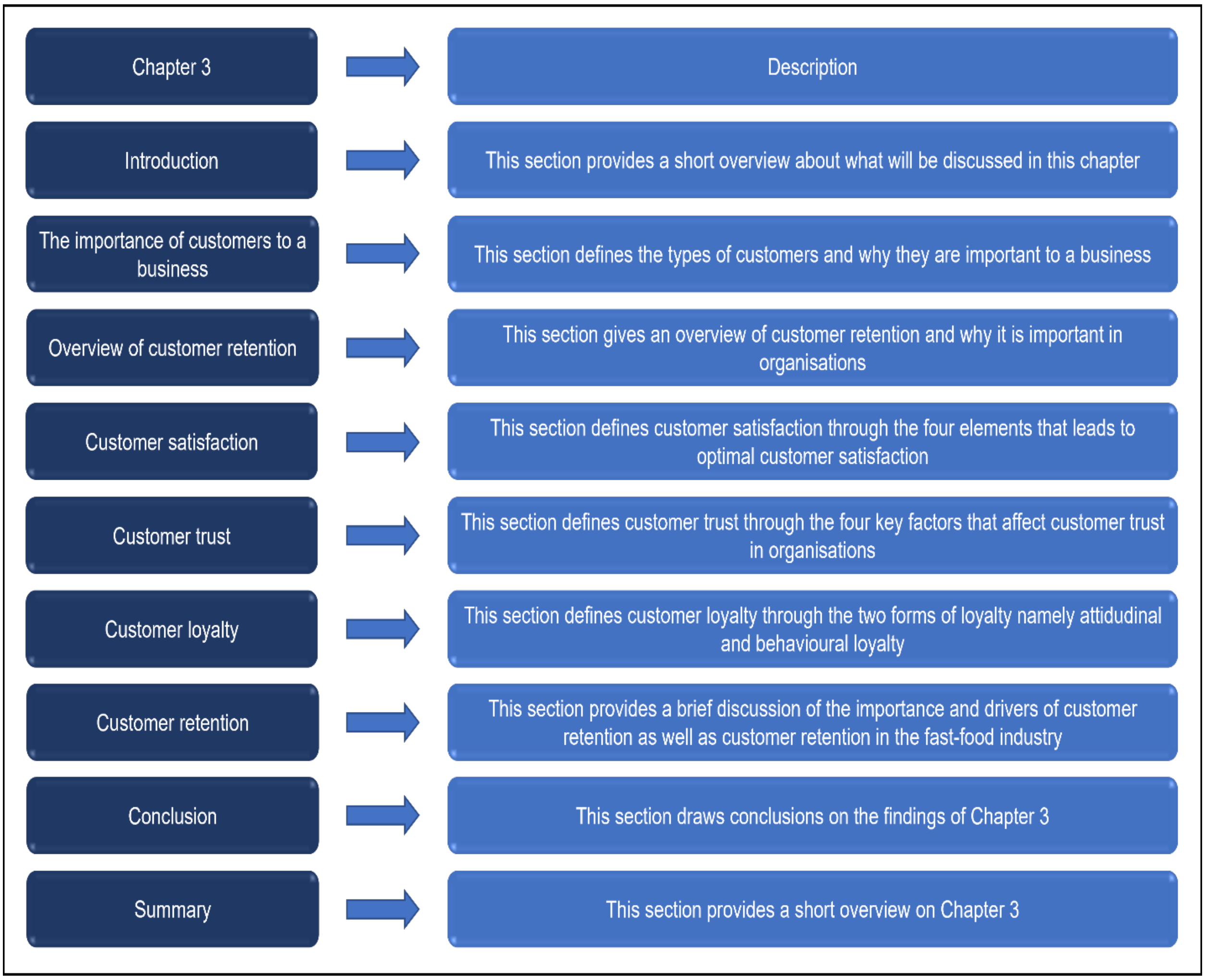
CHAPTER 3

CUSTOMER RETENTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to discuss the different aspects that have an impact on the retention of customers in the fast-food industry. It commences with an introduction (Section 3.1) and is followed by a detailed discussion of the importance that customers are to a business as well as the different types of customers (Section 3.2). The different business model strategies (Section 3.3) will then be considered, where Section 3.4 will provide an overview of customer retention, which will subsequently be followed by the three building blocks that lead to customer retention, including customer satisfaction (Section 3.5), customer trust (Section 3.6), and customer loyalty (Section 3.7). After the three building blocks of customer retention are extrapolated, customer retention will be explored (Section 3.8). The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter (Section 3.9). Figure 3-1 below is a depiction of the layout of Chapter 3.

Figure 3-1: Layout of Chapter 3



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMERS TO A BUSINESS

A customer is an individual who exchanges money for products or services, resulting in an increase in revenue for a business (Sharma *et al.*, 2021:1696). Customer attraction is paramount for any business, and managers should understand who their customers are and what they require (Sherkar, 2018:19). Fast-food restaurant managers must recognise that factors that attract new customers differ from those that retain them – which is why it is essential to analyse customers and their purchasing habits (Hamilton *et al.*, 2017:80). As customers are viewed as one of the major elements that build businesses, attracting customers is essential to remain competitive within an industry (Ohrabi *et al.*, 2017:422). According to Florea and Duica (2017:48), customers can be divided into four sub-categories, including buyers, consumers, relative non-consumers, and prospective consumers.

- **Buyers:** Customers who purchase products or services from the business are referred to as buyers (Mou *et al.*, 2020:168). The buyers of a business are customers that purchase the final products that are offered by a business (Wu & Chamnisampan, 2021:4). Buyers are customers that will usually recommend the product that they bought to other people and can also be consumers (Florea & Duica, 2017:48). In the fast-food industry, the buyers refer to people that exchange money for a product such as a hamburger and fries, with the intention of either re-selling the product or consuming it.

- **Consumers:** Consumers are referred to as people who buy a product with the intention of utilising its benefits and not reselling the product (Sharma & Jain, 2018:31). The consumer will first identify a need or want and then purchase a product to fulfil the need or want (Mishra, 2020:2251). In the fast-food industry, consumers refer to people that exchange money for a product, such as a hamburger and fries, and also consume the product that they have purchased.

- **Relative non-consumers:** Relative non-consumers are consumers that are not interested in the products that are offered by a business, but will occasionally make a purchase from the business (Florea & Duica, 2017:48). In the fast-food industry, relative non-consumers are individuals who occasionally visit the restaurant, such as people who prefer cooking for themselves, but either fancy a change in their cuisine now and again, or are in a rush somewhere and do not have time to prepare their own food.

- **Prospective consumers:** These consumers only buy products in certain cases, but will not stay loyal to the business and can also be referred to as potential consumers (Florea & Duica, 2017:48). The potential consumers are individuals or groups that form part of the target market of a business with the end goal of turning them into consumers (Rudskaia & Eremenko, 2019:3). People who are interested in purchasing items from a fast-food restaurant and are not sure whether they should or should not are referred to as prospective customers.

In order for a business to have customers, the business's management team must ensure that the consumers' demands are addressed, which will result in customer satisfaction leading to customer retention (Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020:1). The following section will provide an overview on business model strategies in order to understand the necessity of this construct in any business.

3.3 BUSINESS MODEL STRATEGIES

There are four business model strategies that need to be considered in a business, and they consist of four approaches known as Porter’s generic strategies. It includes cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus and focused differentiation (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8).

(a) Cost leadership: Cost leadership is a strategy that businesses use where they strive to maximise performance by producing goods at the lowest cost possible to stand out from competitors (Omsa *et al.*, 2017:10). Businesses who employ this strategy have an edge in the market since they may sell goods at or below market prices and still turn a profit. They can also cut their prices during price wars and still make profits (Gure & Karugu, 2018:9).

(b) Differentiation: The differentiation strategy focuses on the development of different products or services that are offered by other businesses and that are seen as unique in the eyes of the customer (Firoz Suleman *et al.*, 2019:168). Businesses that effectively adopt this strategy will have an advantage over competitors, since innovation will allow them to attract and retain more customers by offering a unique product or service that competitors do not offer (Gure & Karugu, 2018:9).

(c) Cost focus: The cost focus strategy is linked to the cost leadership strategy, and in this case, the business serves a limited buyer segment at lower rates than competitors (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8).

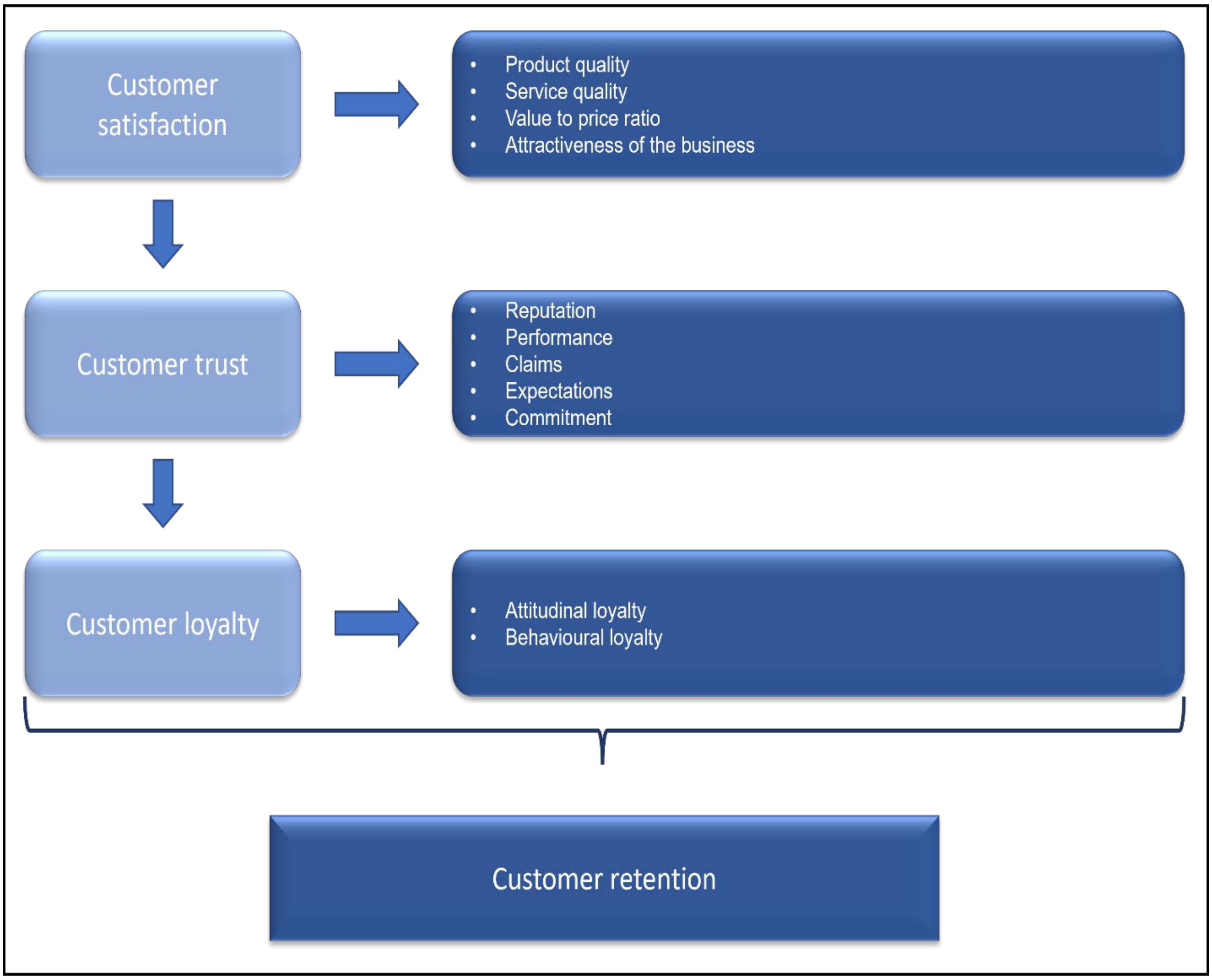
(d) Focused differentiation: The focused differentiation strategy is related to the differentiation strategy in which businesses offer unique products or services to a specific buyer segment that are of higher value than products or services offered by competitors (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8).

These strategies should be utilised by businesses in order to retain more customers. The following section will provide an overview of customer retention in order to understand the necessity of this construct in any business.

3.4 OVERVIEW OF CUSTOMER RETENTION

Customer retention management is the term for all the measures taken by a business to keep its current customers returning and making purchases (Sabbeh, 2018:273). Customer retention is the long-term commitment of a customer to purchase from the same business repeatedly, and it is accomplished by following a process to gain the customer's loyalty (Cambra-Fierro *et al.*, 2021:3; Darzi & Bhat, 2018:665; Hanaysha, 2018:4). Reichheld and Sasser (1990:104) introduced the concept of customer retention, and they discovered that by simply raising customer retention by 5%, a business's profitability may rise by nearly 100% (Nwokah & Ngirika, 2017:179). Ascarza *et al.* (2018:66) assert that while 49% of businesses are dissatisfied with their established retention goals, 85% of consumers who utilise a business's products or services believe the business should do more to convince them to repeat their purchases. Continuous customer retention will result in improved profit margins, higher revenue, and more sales, all of which will help a business develop and become more financially stable (Parawansa, 2018:54). If a business wishes to retain a customer, it must accomplish the objective that the customer had in mind when making the purchase. If the objective is not met to the customer's expectations, the possibility of repeat purchases is low (Torkzadeh *et al.*, 2022:1810). Before customer retention is discussed in more detail – especially in the fast-food industry – the three building blocks that lead to customer retention must be addressed.

Figure 3-2: Building blocks leading to customer retention



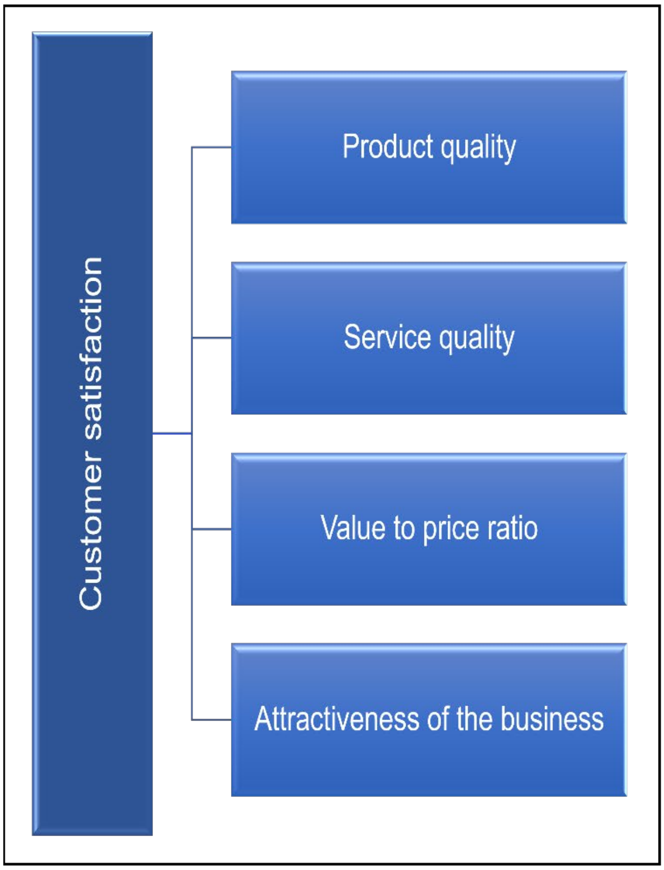
Source: Researcher's own compilation.

For a customer to be retained, managers of a business should ensure that the three elements as presented in Figure 3-2, namely customer satisfaction (Section 3.4), customer trust (Section 3.5), and customer loyalty (Section 3.6), are evaluated and understood, as these are the three building blocks for customer retention (Islam *et al.*, 2021:126). The following section will provide an overview of customer satisfaction and why managers of fast-food restaurants must ensure that they satisfy the needs of their customers.

3.5 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction relates to how well a customer's needs are met, as well as whether or not they had a favourable or negative experience with the business, product, or service they purchased (Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020:2). Customer satisfaction will result in a fast-food restaurant's financial growth, which will then create a sustainable business and additional successes (Wantara & Tambrin, 2019:3). Customer satisfaction is seen as the main factor leading to customer retention, as satisfied customers will build trust in the business (Section 3.4), and will in return lead to loyal customers (Section 3.5), resulting in more returning customers (Section 3.6) (Nashwan & Hassan, 2017:101). Figure 3-3 represents four important elements of customer satisfaction in this study.

Figure 3-3: Customer satisfaction elements



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

The product and service quality of the fast-food restaurant will influence whether or not the customers' expectations are met, which is why managers should ensure that the business's product and service quality is of high standards – as this will result in customer satisfaction (Sitanggang *et al.*, 2019:28). Other important areas of customer satisfaction that managers in fast-food restaurants should consider include the value-to-price-ratio of products and the attractiveness of the business (Ghoumrassi & Ţigu, 2017:295).

3.5.1 Product quality

The quality of products that fast-food restaurants offer refers to the level of performance that customers experience when using the products, with the aim of meeting or exceeding the expectations of the customers (Mappesona *et al.*, 2020). When a business offers its customers products that are of higher quality than competing businesses with similar products, customers will rather choose the higher quality option (Syafarudin, 2021:74). For example, customers in the fast-food restaurant industry place a high value on food freshness and consider it to be a significant indicator of high product quality (Waluya *et al.*, 2019:182). According to Susanti and Jasmani (2019:76), increased product quality leads to satisfied customers, since quality goods encourage long-term relationships between customers and fast-food restaurants. With increased competition for customers, a business's product quality more often serves to demonstrate its suitability to compete in a given industry rather than to give it a significant competitive advantage over its rivals (Hoe & Mansori, 2018:23). Product quality also refers to the features that make a product worth manufacturing such as its performance in the mind of the customers, for example, different shapes of food for toddlers or improved packaging (Sitanggang *et al.*, 2019:27). Good service quality is strongly related to product quality, since customers will perceive more value when the two are combined, which will result in increased customer satisfaction levels (Susanti & Jasmani, 2019:75).

3.5.2 Service quality

Because the fast-food industry is becoming more competitive, managers should guarantee that the quality of the services they provide their customers is superior to their competition, as this will provide added value on top of high-quality products (Al-Omari *et al.*, 2020:843). The quality of service offered by a business will be related to the overall experience that a customer receives, and a positive customer experience will build trust in the business (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018:420). Customers who receive excellent service will be pleased with the level of service provided by the fast-food restaurant as a result of their satisfaction (Arora & Narula, 2018:32). If customers do not perceive value in the service quality of a business – especially in a fast-food restaurant – there are numerous other options they can choose from (Al-Omari *et al.*, 2020:843). Additionally, managers should ensure that the employees are well-trained and presentable when working with customers, which is an important aspect to ensure exceptional service quality (Kurdi *et al.*, 2020:3567).

3.5.3 Value-to-price ratio

For a product or service to meet or exceed customer expectations, managers must ensure that the utility and enjoyment of the product or service are greater than the price at which it is offered (Hossain *et al.*, 2018:4). The term "up-selling" relates to raising the price of a product, and its opposite "down-selling," which involves lowering the price of a product, can be used to explain the value-to-price-ratio (Norvell *et al.*, 2018:217). According to a study conducted by Norvell *et al.* (2018:224) in ten different restaurants in the United States of America, down-selling of products led to more repeat purchases from customers, while maintaining short-term revenue, as opposed to upselling, which produced higher short-term revenues but lower customer satisfaction leading to fewer repeat purchases. Hence, a key element in attracting more customers to fast-food restaurants is the value-to-price-ratio of the food items, which is also related to the restaurant's attractiveness (Dwaikat *et al.*, 2019:724).

3.5.4 Attractiveness of the business

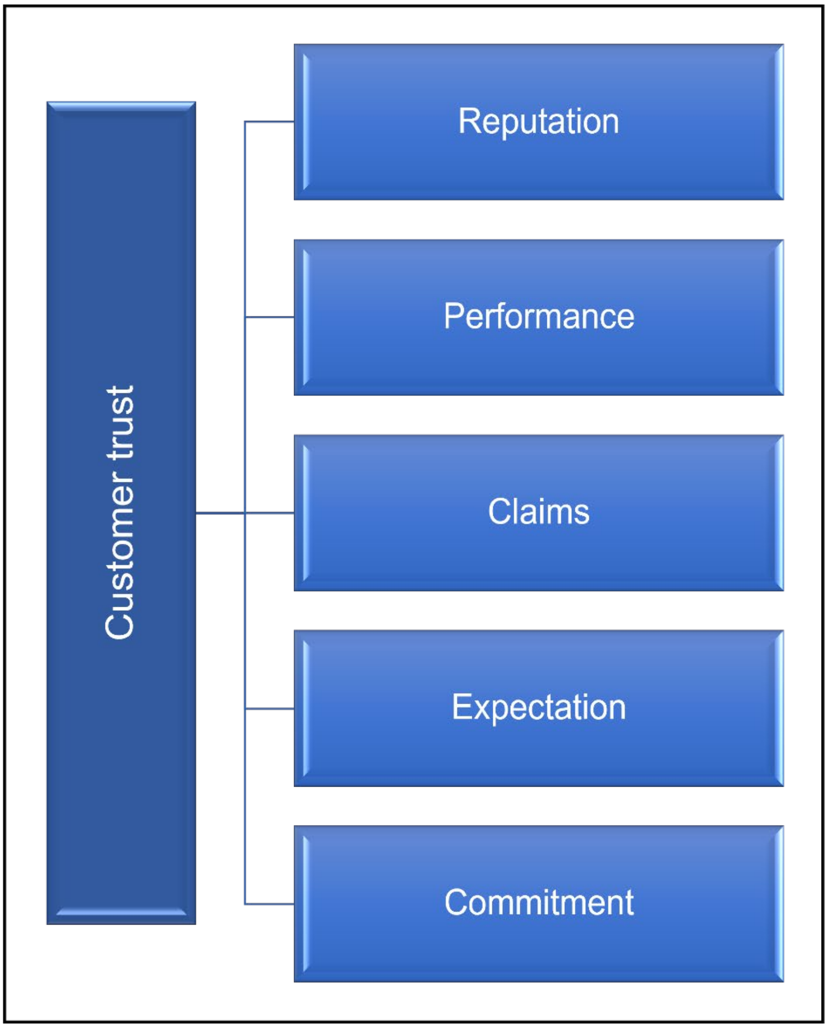
The physical design of a fast-food restaurant is what is considered to be the first factor to attract customers to the establishment with the purpose of making a purchase (Wu *et al.*, 2021:2). It has been discovered that customers evaluate the physical quality of a fast-food restaurant while engaging with the business (Dwaikat *et al.*, 2019:724). In order for a fast-food restaurant to physically attract customers, management must ensure that the establishment is clean, all of its facilities are in good condition, and the interior designs are appealing (Liew *et al.*, 2021:6). Businesses with a high-quality physical environment will attract new customers and help retain both current and past customers (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020:3). Additionally, fast-food restaurants view the way their food is packaged as a crucial component of their physical attractiveness, as customers prefer attractive, ecologically friendly packaging that keeps food fresher for longer (Müller & Schmid, 2019:1). Managers should also ensure that the packaging of their products is visually appealing to their customers, which will assist other potential customers to easily identify the business (Müller & Schmid, 2019:2).

It has been found that customer trust is directly influenced by customer satisfaction, and in return, the trust of the customer will lead to more repeat purchases (Trini & Salim, 2018:112). The following section will discuss the importance of customer trust and how it should be managed.

3.6 CUSTOMER TRUST

In business, the term "customer trust" refers to the feelings that customers have towards a business, and is described as a person's (the customer's) reliance on another's word about the business (Leninkumar, 2017:451). Customer satisfaction is the foundation upon which a customer's trust in a business is formed as they do several transactions with the business over time (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018:643). Business managers must ensure that customers always have a great experience when doing business with them, since customer engagement with a business has a favourable impact on customer trust (Li *et al.*, 2020:185). Marakanon and Panjakajornsak (2017:25) assert that when customers develop trust in a business, they consider five key factors: the business's reputation, performance, claims, expectations, and commitment. Figure 3-4 illustrates the five key factors affecting customer trust in a business.

Figure 3-4: Five key factors affecting customer trust



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

Customers' trust in fast-food restaurants will have a significant impact on the financial sustainability of the business, therefore managers need to make sure that all relevant elements are thoroughly assessed to ensure the highest level of customer trust (Dehghanpouri *et al.*, 2020:1833).

3.6.1 Reputation

Because of the business' reputation, customers will be quick to form their opinion of the business, and the more consistently excellent service and operations are provided, the better the business's reputation will become (Islam *et al.*, 2021:125). Customers, stakeholders, and investors' levels of trust will be impacted by a business's reputation, which will either increase or decrease trust (Jalilvand *et al.*, 2017:5). To win customers' trust, a business utilises its reputation as a strategic instrument (Islam *et al.*, 2021:125). A fast-food restaurant's reputation can be characterised by the behaviour, principles, background, and operations of the business, and managers must assess these components to comprehend what their reputation consists of (Astono, 2021:93). A business’s reputation develops over time, but a good reputation will provide it with a more significant competitive edge as well as increase its cash flow as well as higher profits (Song *et al.*, 2019:3). Fast-food restaurant managers need to ensure that their reputation is of the highest calibre and that it is not damaged, as reputation is a key factor in establishing customer trust, which leads to increased repeat business (Ali *et al.*, 2017:223). Additionally, maintaining a commitment to what is expected of the customers is considered another component of a business's reputation, which helps to increase customer trust (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2019:3). For instance, many fast-food restaurants in Malaysia, such as Burger King and KFC, have applied for Halal certification as the locals there consider Halal-certified eateries to be of top quality, and having Halal certification will help fast-food restaurants improve their reputation and increase customer trust as well as boost the performance of the restaurants (Quoquab *et al.*, 2019:1369).

3.6.2 Performance

Customers are viewed as the primary stakeholders in a business, and they assess its performance from both an economic and an ethical standpoint. Managers must ensure that the performance from these two views present the business in a favourable light to the customers (Islam *et al.*, 2021:125). Businesses must set both business and sustainability goals to guarantee that their operations are financially viable, but they must also take into account customer demands from an environmental standpoint because doing so will improve how customers perceive the performance of the business (Ashraf *et al.*, 2017:1363). The corporate social responsibility of the business can be equated with the environmental performance standpoint, and customers use corporate social responsibility as a critical performance indicator when evaluating the performance of businesses (Widyastuti *et al.*, 2019:87). It is essential for business managers to communicate the social obligations that the business upholds, because doing so will increase customer trust (Iglesias *et al.*, 2020:154). The corporate social responsibility of businesses has been tested during the COVID-19 pandemic where many businesses helped to contain the spread of the virus by implementing safety measures, which resulted in higher customer trust (García-Sánchez & García-Sánchez, 2020:4). In the fast-food industry, several fast-food restaurants started offering delivery services for goods from supermarkets in addition to food during the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave their consumers a positive impression of their social responsibility and ultimately increased customer trust (He & Harris, 2020:179). Customers' expectations and how fast-food restaurants perform in terms of their social responsibility are strongly related (Jalilvand *et al.*, 2017:2).

3.6.3 Expectations

Customers' expectations pertain to what they think they will receive from a business in exchange for the goods or services the business provides (Cheng *et al.*, 2017:398). Customers will have specific expectations from their purchases when they do business with a venture, and if these expectations are met, the customers' trust in the business will grow (Petzer & Van Tonder, 2019:605). Customers' high expectations for the quality of service in a fast-food restaurant are one of the key elements for customers, and therefore management must ensure that the service meets the standards they have set (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019:1471). The quality of the food is the second vital aspect of what customers expect when they visit a fast-food restaurant; when diners' expectations are achieved, they are more likely to trust the business (Singh *et al.*, 2021:1754). The management of fast-food restaurants needs to ensure that customers' expectations are satisfied because if they are not, customers' trust in the business will decline, which will lead to poorer customer satisfaction and a greater likelihood that they will not make repeat purchases (Liu *et al.*, 2017:147). For example, when customers visit fast-food restaurants, they demand relatively fast service but prefer decent meals; therefore, managers should make sure that the meal is prepared thoroughly as soon as possible to suit the needs of the customer, which will in turn foster trust in the business (Carranza *et al.*, 2018:393).

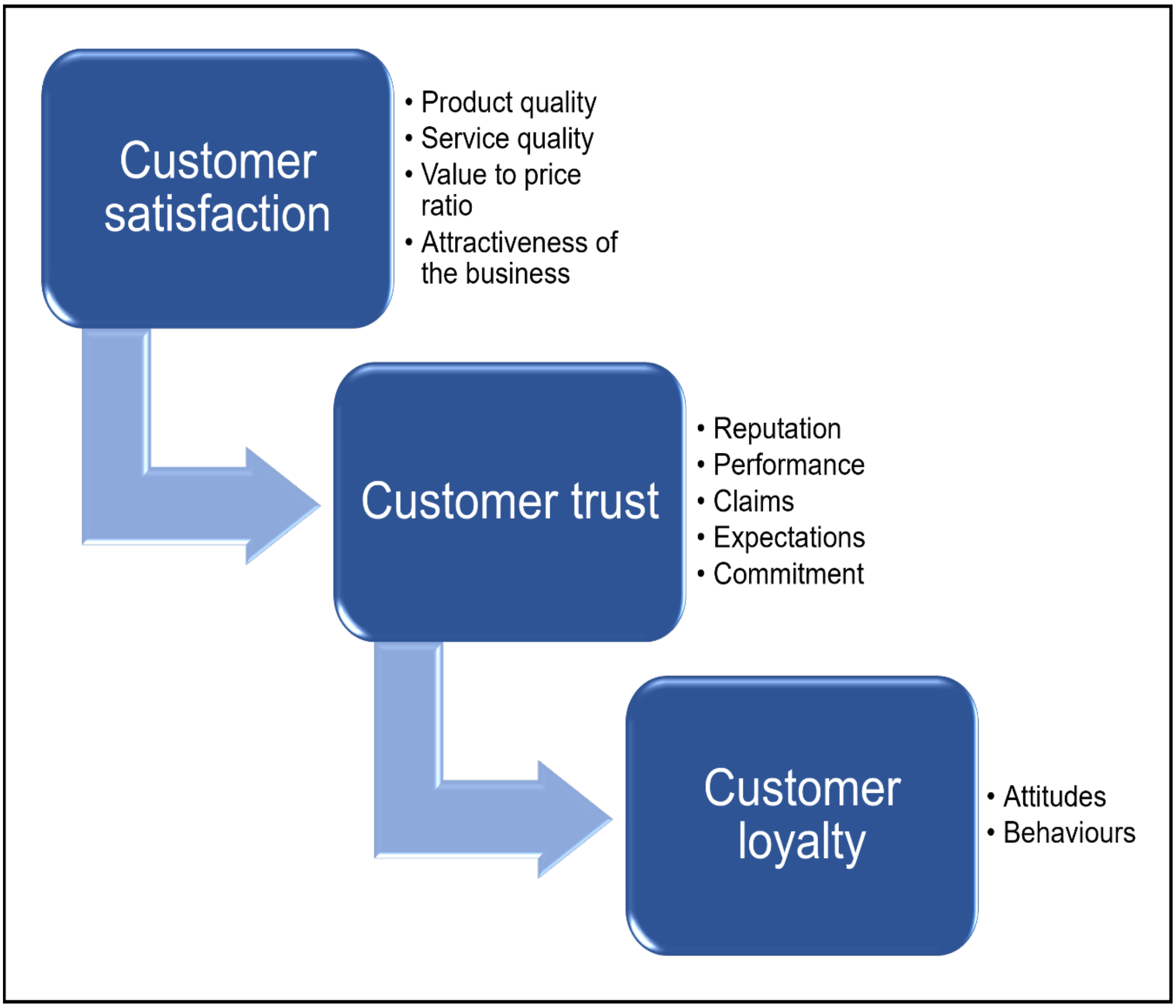
3.6.4 Commitment

The psychological bond that customers develop to keep doing business with a venture as a result of their trust in the business can be described as their commitment to that business (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2018:260). Managers must take all necessary steps to ensure that consumers remain committed to their business, making them loyal. Customers' commitment has a significant impact on the loyalty that customers have toward a business (Kalia *et al.*, 2021:380). When customers are committed to a business, the trust that they form with the business will increase – which will lead to more word-of-mouth advertising and an increase in customers (Tabrani *et al.*, 2018:824). Word-of-mouth advertising is a form of advertising that encourages more people to use a business's goods or services as a result of personal experiences or beliefs (Gildin, 2022:94). Fast-food restaurant managers should capitalise on word-of-mouth advertising, which is a good free method of promotion that increases both product adoption and the number of new consumers, resulting in more committed customers (Chu & Kim, 2018:2).

3.7 CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Customer loyalty is earned via consistent customer satisfaction and trust, and loyal customers will continue to use or buy products or services from the same business (Sitanggang *et al.*, 2019:29). Although all customers may be satisfied and trust the business, not all of them will remain loyal to the business, hence customer loyalty is crucial to fast-food restaurant managers as this is the final link to customer retention (Wolter *et al.*, 2017:458). Customer behaviour and attitude are the two major building blocks of customer loyalty (Leninkumar, 2017:451). The key elements of customer loyalty are presented in Figure 3-5.

Figure 3-5: The key elements leading to customer loyalty



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

Managers of fast-food restaurants need to assess and comprehend the two aspects of customer loyalty, referred to as attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, as these two dimensions are linked to the retention of customers in the business (Zhang *et al.*, 2019:34).

3.7.1 Attitudinal loyalty of customers

The intention of customers to utilise a business in the future as well as their intention to promote the firm is referred to as their attitude of loyalty (Zhang *et al.*, 2019:34). According to Saini and Singh (2020:207), attitudinal loyalty is the emotional connection that customers have with a business, and businesses must set themselves apart from rivals to ensure that consumers can differentiate between one business and another. In order to better understand how they might increase the level of attitude loyalty that customers have toward the business, managers must first analyse the current attitudes of their customers toward the business by understanding the level of satisfaction and trust customers have in the business (Kuchinka *et al.*, 2018:2). Customers' attitudes about a business are based on their trust and satisfaction, hence fast-food restaurant managers must see to it that these two components are effectively managed in order to foster the right attitudes in their customers (Wolter *et al.*, 2017:459). As these customers are more likely to make purchases that are not part of promotions and are therefore less price sensitive, attitudinal loyalty is a crucial loyalty dimension in the fast-food restaurant industry, and managers of fast-food restaurants should take advantage of this since it will result in higher profit margins (Shammout, 2020:224). Kwiatek *et al.* (2020:1647) claim that word-of-mouth marketing, which is a free kind of marketing in which current customers inform potential customers about a business in order for them to make a purchase from the business, is one of the key benefits that attitudinal loyalty provides to a business. Managers of fast-food restaurants need to ensure that the attitudinal loyalty of their customers provides a positive word-of-mouth marketing strategy, as this will lead to a larger loyal customer base, and in return lead to higher profits in the business (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019:2). Additionally, fast-food restaurant managers must make sure that their staff members are qualified and professional in order to ensure that customers receive excellent customer service, since this will also increase consumers' attitudinal loyalty to the business (Agyeiwaah & Dayour, 2021:352). Because a customer is more inclined to purchase from a business when they are emotionally attached to it, behavioural loyalty benefits from the existence of attitudinal loyalty (Soedarto *et al.*, 2019:2).

3.7.2 Behavioural loyalty of customers

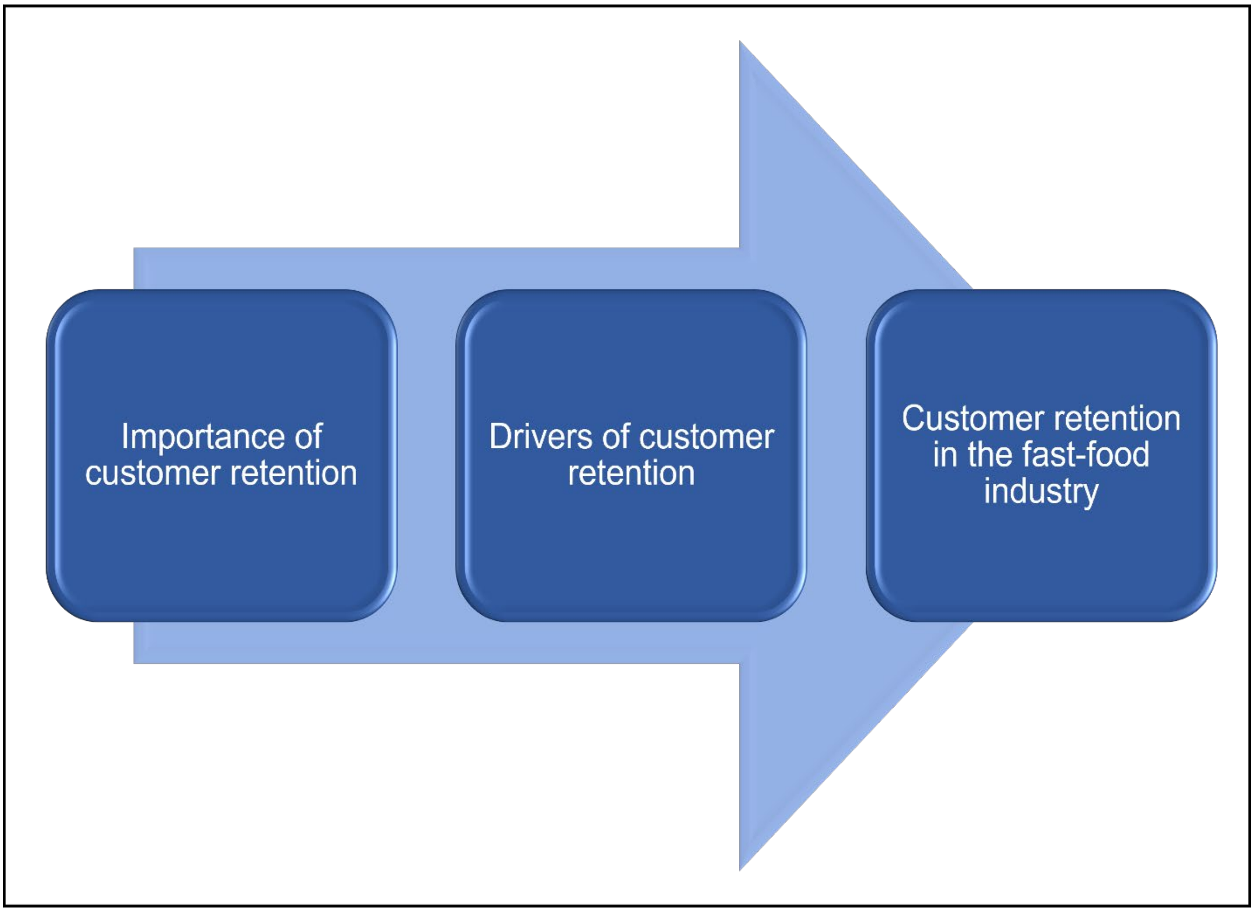
The frequency with which a customer uses a business's goods or services is referred to as behavioural loyalty of customers (Zhang *et al.*, 2019:34). The foundation of behavioural loyalty is attitude loyalty, since customers who have positive sentiments toward a business will make more frequent purchases (Wolter *et al.*, 2017:459). Managers of fast-food restaurants must assess the level of behavioural loyalty among their customers as this aspect of loyalty can directly affect the profitability of the business (Inoue *et al.*, 2017:46). Numerous reasons, such as customers who dislike change or customers who frequently visit fast-food restaurants as a result of ongoing promotions, contribute to behavioural loyalty (Saini & Singh, 2020:207). Furthermore, social factors, such as influences from friends and family, have a significant impact on the behavioural loyalty of consumers (Izquierdo-Yusta *et al.*, 2022:3). In a study conducted by Dikcius *et al.* (2019:97), it was discovered that attitudinal loyalty, customer satisfaction, and customer trust are the primary factors impacting the behavioural loyalty of customers. As the last component that results in customer retention, managers of fast-food restaurants must evaluate the behavioural loyalty of their customers to identify where improvements may be made to the frequency at which customers make purchases (Lin *et al.*, 2018:3).

To ensure that a business retains its customers, it is important that all of the above-mentioned sections are incorporated into the management strategies that fast-food restaurant managers use in their business. Firstly, customers need to be satisfied by the business through product quality, service quality, the value-to-price-ratio, and the attractiveness of the business (Section 3.4). Secondly, managers need to ensure that they build the trust of the customers through their reputation, performance, expectations, and commitment, as this will lead to loyal customers (Section 3.5). Lastly, managers should ensure that they build the loyalty of their customers towards the business through the attitudinal and behavioural loyalty aspects (Section 3.6). In return, effective management of the above-mentioned sections will lead to the retention of customers.

3.8 CUSTOMER RETENTION

Customer retention refers to a successful relationship between a customer and a business in which the customer is content with the business and its products, which in turn encourages them to trust the business and continue using its goods and/or services (Alkitbi *et al.*, 2020:656).

Figure 3-6: Customer retention



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

Figure 3-6 depicts the three focal points that will be discussed concerning customer retention within Section 3.7.

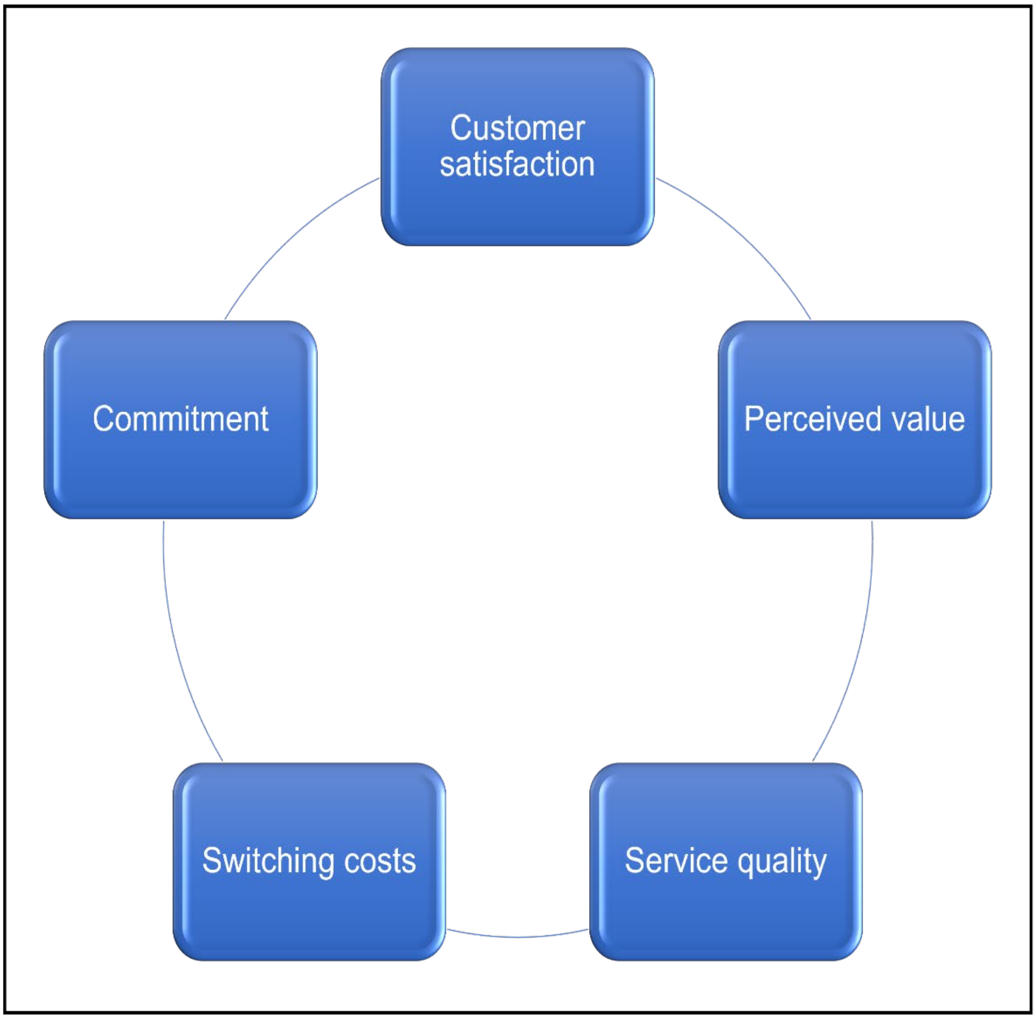
3.8.1 Importance of customer retention

Customer retention is an essential element of all businesses, and effective retention strategies should be implemented by managers since they increase the business's sustainability and profitability (Almohaimmeed, 2019:426). Due to the intense rivalry among businesses today, customer retention should be a top priority for all businesses, as it is more time and money effective to keep existing customers than to acquire new customers (Yu *et al.*, 2021:3). Customer retention will always affect a business's profitability since it will increase revenue, which will, in turn, have a favourable effect on the business’s profitability (Hossain *et al.*, 2017:928). Additionally, managers must be aware that referrals from customers' connections, friends, or family will increase customer retention rates; as a result, managers must make sure that retention strategies are reviewed for each customer (Ascarza *et al.*, 2018:71). All businesses need to manage customer retention well since doing so will provide them with a competitive edge in their industry, enable them to operate at their peak efficiency and profitability, and ultimately result in business success (Othman *et al.*, 2021:11). To manage customer retention efficiently, the drivers of customer retention will be discussed in the following section.

3.8.2 Drivers of customer retention

Figure 3-7 depicts the five elements that form part of the drivers of customer retention.

Figure 3-7: Drivers of customer retention



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

- **Customer satisfaction:** Customer satisfaction, as discussed in Section 3.4, refers to how well customer's needs are met in accordance with their expectations that they had of the products or services offered by a business (Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020:2). Customer satisfaction not only forms part of the drivers of customer retention, but also as the first building block that leads to customer retention (Section 3.4). Optimal customer satisfaction will lead to more trust in the business, resulting in more loyal customers and finally leading to the retention of customers (Nashwan & Hassan, 2017:101).

- **Perceived value:** Customers' comparisons of a product's price and quality provided by a business are known as perceived value (Hanaysha, 2018:4). In a research of the Jordanian hotel industry, it was discovered that perceived value has a mediating effect on both customer satisfaction and loyalty, which directly affects customer retention rates (Al-Gharaibah, 2020:3951). The quality that customers feel they will receive from a business in exchange for their time, money, and effort to obtain the good or service is referred to as the perceived value (Ali & Bhasin, 2019:146). Customers' perceptions of a business’s value are one of the major determinants of whether or not they will continue to return for repeat purchases (Hanaysha, 2018:3).

- **Service quality:** According to a study conducted by Alkitbi *et al.* (2020:665), one of the key drivers influencing a business's ability to retain consumers is the quality of its service. Businesses must ensure that the level of service that customers perceive is excellent since satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal to a business, which will increase customer retention rates (Parawansa, 2018:54). Customers are more inclined to continue doing business with a venture if the quality of the service is strong (Nugroho *et al.*, 2020:2). A business's profitability and competitiveness will both benefit from providing high-quality services, which will increase customer satisfaction and customer retention (Ramya *et al.*, 2019:38).

- **Switching costs:** When a customer chooses to stop engaging with one business and begins to engage with another business, they may incur switching costs (Hadi *et al.*, 2019:4). The costs associated with migrating from one business to another are referred to as switching costs and might include money, time, or effort (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020:398). The psychological cost that customers may incur while switching from one business to another, such as losing their emotional ties to the business, is also known as switching costs, hence managers of businesses should ensure that they connect on an emotional level with customers to ensure higher customer retention (Kaur & Soch, 2018:364).

- **Commitment:** Customers that choose to consistently use a business's goods or services are said to be committed to the business since they have a meaningful relationship with it (Sari *et al.*, 2018:594). Customers will remain loyal to a business if they believe it is committed to providing them with high-quality goods or services, thus managers should ensure that the business fosters a sense of belonging in its customers to retain them (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2018:260). The commitment of customers should be influenced by business managers so that the customer feels compelled to make more purchases from the business (Keiningham *et al.*, 2017:152).

3.8.3 Customer retention in the fast-food industry

Even though customer tastes and preferences have changed concerning food, the fast-food industry has still experienced outstanding growth over the past few years (Farooqui & Alwi, 2019:57). Fast-food restaurant managers must work to retain as many customers as they can in order to maintain their businesses's competitiveness in the highly competitive world of today (Adiele & Kenneth-Adiele, 2017:36).

In the fast-food industry, high levels of customer satisfaction will lead to customer trust and customer loyalty, and in return lead to the retention of customers. For the focus of this section, we will be investigating the satisfaction rates of customers in fast-food restaurants throughout the world as this is a good indication of the level of retention that might occur (Zhong & Moon, 2020:4).

In a study conducted by Zhong and Moon (2020:14) in China, it was found that one of the most important factors that lead to the satisfaction of customers is the price of the food offered. Zhong and Moon (2020:14) further found that the price of the food has a direct impact on the satisfaction of customers, and that the price should correlate to the level of quality that the restaurant offers in aspects such as the service, taste, and physical environment of the restaurant. According to a study done by Dastane and Fazlin (2017:394) in the Malaysian fast-food industry, it was found that the most important factor leading to customer satisfaction resulting in customer retention, is the condition of the fast-food restaurant's facilities. Clean facilities that are kept in a good condition have been found to emotionally satisfy customers resulting in retention, hence managers of fast-food restaurants should always ensure that the restaurant is kept clean and tidy (Dastane & Fazlin, 2017:394). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Anees *et al.* (2020:127) on fast-food chains in Pakistan, it has been found that a high level of service quality as well as customer-focused marketing, had a positive impact on the satisfaction of customers leading to higher retention rates. Through these findings, managers of fast-food restaurants must ensure that their level of customer service and marketing initiatives are of high quality to ensure more repeat purchases (Anees *et al.*, 2020:127). The meal quality, food costs, and the service quality that the customers experienced were determined to be the three key factors leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, resulting in higher customer retention, according to a study done by Uddin (2019:2803) on the fast-food industry in Bangladesh. Therefore, managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that these three elements are managed to high standards. Finally, in a study conducted by Al-Tit (2015:135) in the fast-food industry in South Africa, it was also found that good service and food quality had a positive impact on customer satisfaction that will result in customer retention. As has been seen throughout this entire chapter, a variety of factors contribute to good customer retention, which is a key aspect of the sustainability and profitability of the fast-food industry (Almohaimmeed, 2019:426). Fast-food restaurant managers should make sure that appropriate customer retention strategies are put into practice, as this will allow their business a greater competitive advantage (Hanaysha, 2018:2).

3.9 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion on customers as well as the different elements that lead to the retention of customers in a business. Through the discussions in this chapter, secondary objective 2 (Section 1.8.2) was achieved, which focused on the current generic strategies that managers use to retain customers. The three building blocks of customer retention are evident strategies that managers use to build a higher customer retention rate in the fast-food industry.

This chapter commenced with an introduction (Section 3.1) that was followed by a discussion on the importance of customers in a business, through analysation of different types of customers (Section 3.2). The following section (Section 3.3) discussed the different business model strategies, whereafter an overview of customer retention and its importance was provided (Section 3.4). The three building blocks of customer retention, namely customer satisfaction (Section 3.5), customer trust (Section 3.6), and customer loyalty (Section 3.7) were discussed in the subsequent sections to form an understanding of how managers should build strategies to retain more customers. The following section (Section 3.8) elaborated on customer retention, followed by a summary of the chapter (Section 3.9).

With this chapter, it is evident that customer satisfaction (Section 3.5) is built on product quality (Section 3.5.1), service quality (Section 3.5.2), value-to-price-ratio (Section 3.5.3), as well as the attractiveness of the business (Section 3.5.4). By satisfying customers, a business builds the trust of its customers (Section 3.6) through its reputation (Section 3.6.1), performance (Section 3.6.2), expectations (Section 3.6.3), and commitment (Section 3.6.4). Finally, customers who trust a business will become loyal to the business (Section 3.7) and loyal customers will result in retained customers (Section 3.8). This chapter's main concern was customer retention in the fast-food industry, since it results in greater profitability and more resilience which will serve as a source for a competitive advantage in the industry. The following chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the research methodology concerning this study.

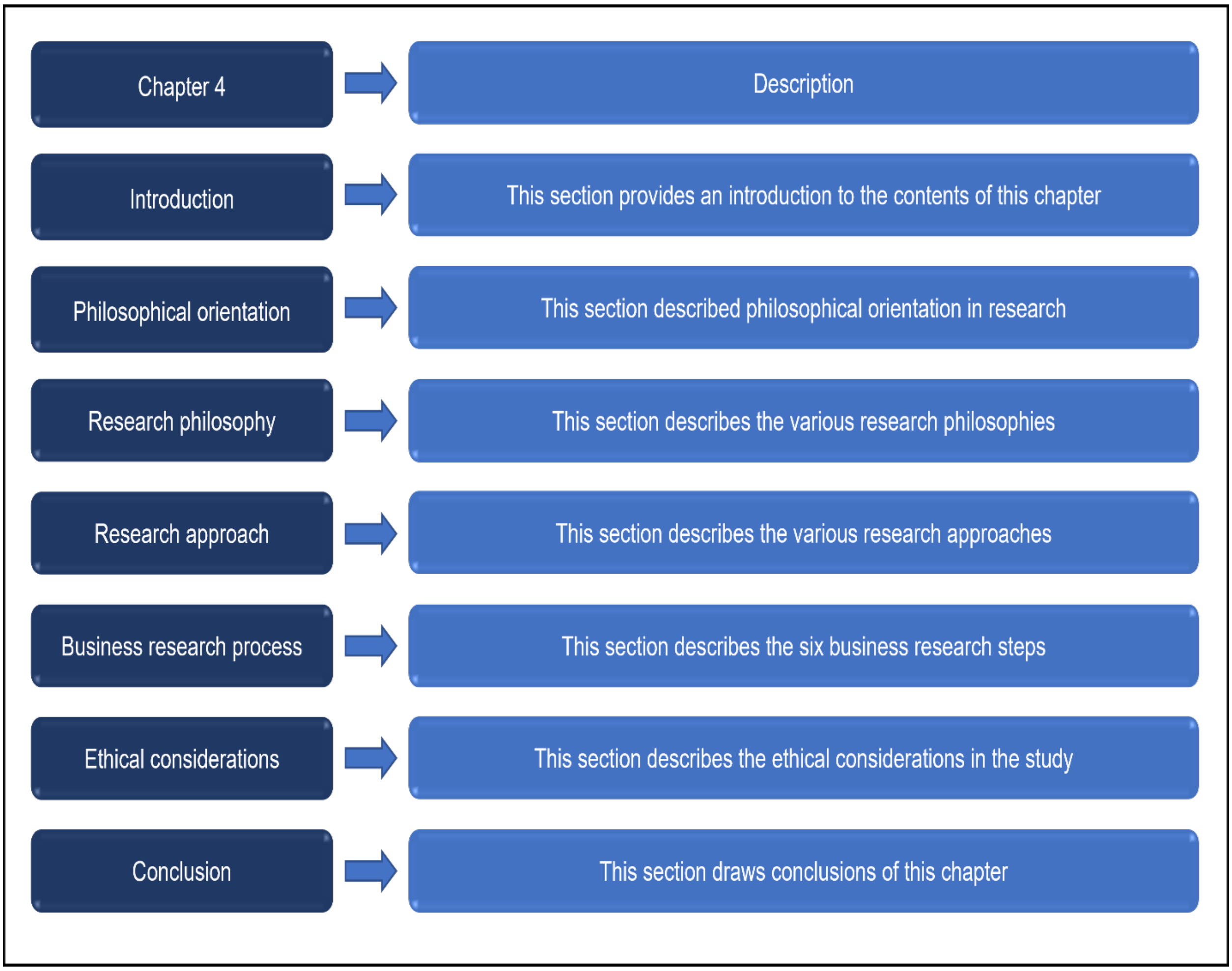
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter intends to describe the available research methodologies and discuss the chosen research methodology implemented in this study. The chapter commences with an introduction (Section 4.1). The second section will provide an overview of the philosophical orientation of research studies (Section 4.2) and will be followed by the research philosophies that form part of this study (Section 4.3). The subsequent section will describe the different research approaches that form part of the research methodology (Section 4.4). Thereafter, the business research process will be discussed, as well as the six stages that form part of it (Section 4.5). The second last section will discuss the ethical considerations present in this study (Section 4.6) and the chapter will end with a conclusion of the chapter (Section 4.7). Figure 4-1 depicts the layout of Chapter 4.

Figure 4-1: Layout of Chapter 4



Source: Researcher's own compilation.

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION

Research refers to the process of identifying solutions to research problems and getting answers to research questions (Kumar, 2014:7). Research methodology refers to the methods that are used to guide the research process to solving the research problems and research questions that have been identified (Ragab & Arisha, 2018:2). There are three philosophical paradigms in research that need to be considered to ensure that the research done is understood, namely ontology, epistemology and axiology (Maarouf, 2019:2).

4.2.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the "nature of reality in research" (Al-Ababneh, 2020:82). To make ontological assumptions, a researcher must comprehend how things truly are and how they function (Scotland, 2012:12).

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the "acceptable knowledge in research" (Al-Ababneh, 2020:82). The creation, acquisition, and transmission of knowledge are referred to as epistemological assumptions (Scotland, 2012:12).

4.2.3 Axiology

Axiology refers to the "role of values in research" (Al-Ababneh, 2020:82). Axiological assumptions are formed by evaluating the value and worth of the research (Varpio & MacLeod, 2020:688).

4.3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:144), research philosophy is comprised of five schools of thought: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism. It is a set of assumptions and beliefs regarding the formation of knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:130).

- **Positivism:** The research philosophy of positivism places a rigorous emphasis on facts and pure data, and holds that the limits of what can be examined should not be crossed (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:41).

- **Critical realism:** Critical realism research philosophy is formed by what a researcher sees and experiences through structures or events that are not notable in the social world (Schiller, 2016:88).

- **Interpretivism:** The interpretive research philosophy, which rejects positivism, enables researchers to examine social reality through studies that they are interested in (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:42).

- **Postmodernism:** The postmodernism research philosophy emphasises the function of language and the power of relationships in an effort to challenge conventional wisdom and give voice to underrepresented viewpoints (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:149).

- **Pragmatism:** According to the pragmatic research philosophy, theories are assessed according to how well they can be applied in real-world situations (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019:2).

Table 4-1 represents a comparison of ontology, epistemology and axiology to the five research philosophies.

Table 4-1: Comparison of ontology, epistemology and axiology to the five research philosophies

Research philosophy	Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Typical methods
Positivism	Universal, real, external, organised.	Numbers, statistical generalisations, and custodial justification as a contribution.	The researcher is impartial, unbiased, and unrelated to the subject being studied. The researcher keeps an objective viewpoint.	Most analyses are quantitative, usually deductive, highly structured, involve large samples, and may be performed on a variety of data.
Critical realism	The empirical, the actual and the real. The structures are objective. Casual mechanisms are used.	Epistemological relativism. The knowledge is temporary and historically situated. Facts are a product of society. A contribution from a historical casual explanation.	Value-laden research. The bias of worldviews, cultural experiences, and upbringing is acknowledged by research. The research is as unbiased as it can be.	An extensive historical investigation of existing structures and new agency that is retroactive and located. A variety of methods and data types are employed, depending on the issue.
Interpretivism	Language and culture both play a role in social structure. Rich and complex. There are various realities, interpretations, and meanings. A flux of procedures, occasions, and methods.	Concepts and theories that are too simple. Pay attention to stories, perceptions, and interpretations. New perspectives and understandings as a contribution.	The research is value bound. Researchers participate in the research process. Researchers' analyses are essential to their contribution. Reflexive research.	Research is inductive. Small samples, thorough research, and qualitative analysis techniques are used; however, a variety of data can be interpreted.

Table 4-1: Comparison of ontology, epistemology and axiology to the five research philosophies (continued)

Postmodernism	Social structure based on power dynamics. Research is complex, nominal and rich. Certain perceptions, realities, and meanings are suppressed and dominated by others. Processes, experiences, and practices are in flux.	What constitutes knowledge and truth is determined by prevailing ideologies. Pay attention to omissions, silences, and oppressed meanings. Power relations are being shown and dominant ideas are being contested as a contribution.	The research is constituted by values. A researcher and research that is entangled with power dynamics. At the expense of other research narratives, some are suppressed and silenced. Fundamentally reflective research.	Deconstructive research. Studies into abnormalities, silences, and absences in great detail. A variety of data kinds, generally using qualitative analysis methods.
Pragmatism	Complex, rich and external. Reality is the result of thoughts in real life. Processes, experiences, and practices are in flux.	Practice applying knowledge's meaning in particular situations. The only real theories and knowledge are those that lead to effective action. Concentrate on issues, procedures, and relevance. As a contribution, problem-solving and future practice that is informed.	The research is value-driven. Researchers start and maintain research, doubts and beliefs. Reflexive form of research.	Following the research problem and research question. Various approaches, including action research, mixed methods, multiple approaches, qualitative methods, and more. Emphasis on useful solutions and results.

Source: Adapted from (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:144).

For the purpose of this study the interpretive research philosophy was adopted, as this study is based on a qualitative research approach. The interpretive approach allows the researcher to use smaller samples and evaluate them in-depth to identify patterns that emerge between the different participants of the study. In this study, interviews with open-ended questions are used to perform qualitative research, which is guided by the ontological philosophical paradigm, letting respondents engage with their actual perceptions of the situation. Epistemology is evident in this study, as the primary data is collected from a variety of fast-food restaurant managers after which it is analysed and discussed. As described in Section 4.5.5.3, the researcher has been axiologically transparent with the data obtained, analysed, and evaluated. The study is still based on the researcher's interpretation of the data even though they have taken all the required precautions to avoid bias.

4.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The three research approaches, namely inductive, deductive and abductive approaches, are used in order to understand the relationship between the research that is being conducted and the theory thereof (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:152). The following sections will investigate the three different research approaches that form part of the research methodology.

4.4.1 Inductive approach

The research approach known as inductive analysis uses extensive raw data to create concepts and themes (Azungah, 2018:391). Observations of specific events are made while utilising an inductive approach in order to create a generalised view between the events and the patterns that emerge (Malhotra, 2017:172). A deeper comprehension of the research problem is a focus of an inductive approach, and data validity is high (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:219).

4.4.2 Deductive approach

A deductive approach is the opposite of an inductive approach where the researcher sets logical premises to form conclusions and continues to vigorously test the premises through observations (Malhotra, 2017:173). The premises are deduced by using existing theories in order to evaluate whether the premises are true or false by use of empirical data (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:220). With a deductive approach, the researcher does not assume any premise to be true but does test in order to evaluate if the set conclusion is true or false (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:152).

4.4.3 Abductive approach

Abductive research approaches are seen as a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches (Hurley *et al.*, 2021:67). An abductive research approach identifies a “surprising fact” in the form of a conclusion and collects data to generate a new theory or modify an existing theory (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). An abductive research approach enables a researcher to be creative in developing a new theory that is not reliant on an existing theory (Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2022:176).

For the purpose of this study an inductive research approach was used where the researcher will use raw data to create themes, as the study is qualitative in nature. By means of utilising an inductive approach, the researcher was able to do an in-depth investigation with relatively small samples.

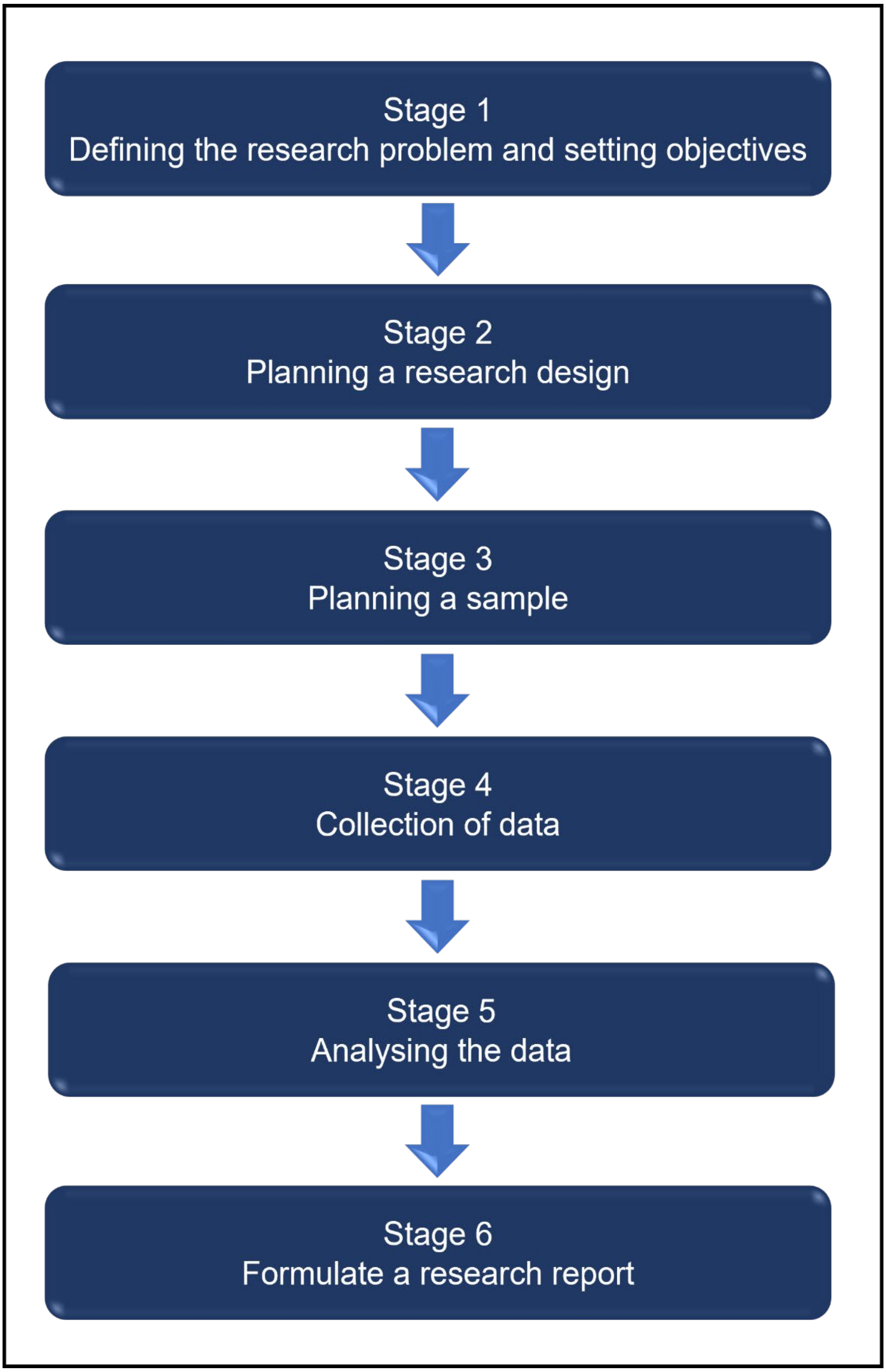
The section that follows will discuss the business research process that is required to do research. The business research process is a guide to understanding the processes that must be followed when conducting research (Hair *et al.*, 2020:30).

4.5 THE BUSINESS RESEARCH PROCESS

By identifying management issues and opportunities, understanding the research process, and evaluating results, business research refers to the scientific pursuit of the truth about business and the management thereof (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:5). Business research is a process that is used to gather relevant information to solve complex problems present within a business's environment (Burns *et al.*, 2017).

The business research process consists of six sequential steps that are used to gather information necessary to address scientific problems. The business research process used in this study is presented in Figure 4-2 (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:61).

Figure 4-2: The business research process



Source: Adapted from Babin and Zikmund (2016:61).

4.5.1 Stage 1: Defining the research problem and setting objectives

Identifying the research problem is crucial, but it can be quite challenging and managers should first identify the cause of the problem, such as declining sales, to further study it in the business (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:12). The first stage of the business research process is designed to help managers pinpoint the primary issue and set objectives for addressing or resolving it (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:62). The activities involved in this stage are subsequently discussed.

4.5.1.1 Formulating the research problem

Defining a research problem is necessary for identifying a research gap in a specific field (Malhotra *et al.*, 1996:8). Researchers need to identify the available information and evaluate it to determine what additional information is needed to solve the problem (Zikmund *et al.*, 2014:18). Although there has been extensive research on customer retention in the fast-food industry (Dastane & Fazlin, 2017; Heiens *et al.*, 2019; Hidayat *et al.*, 2019; Sunaryo, 2019), little research has been conducted on customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry in South Africa (Section 1.2). No studies have been conducted on customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa from a manager's perspective during COVID-19 regulations, leading to the research problem as addressed in Section 1.2. After formulating the research problem, research objectives need to be developed (Burns *et al.*, 2017:71).

4.5.1.2 Setting research objectives

Research objectives are the desired outcomes for the study, containing the overall purpose of addressing the identified research problem (Zikmund *et al.*, 2014:21). It is important that research objectives are clearly formulated and unambiguous. These objectives are further categorised into primary and secondary objectives (Burns *et al.*, 2017:80).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the strategies that managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa. The following secondary objectives have been formulated in order to support the primary objective:

1. To provide an overview of the main constructs of this study, namely the fast-food industry, management, and customer retention.

2. To conceptualise the current generic strategies that managers implement in the fast-food industry to retain customers.

3. To explore managers' view of customer retention in the fast-food industry.

4. To determine managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry.

5. To identify challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers.

6. To identify strategies that managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry.

After all the research objectives have been formulated, the researcher can move on to the second stage of the business research process which is referred to as the planning of a research design.

4.5.2 Stage 2: Planning a research design

The second stage in the research process is the planning of a research design and evaluation of data collection methods. A research design is a comprehensive strategy that establishes the foundation for the techniques to be used in gathering and analysing the study's data (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013:64). The research design aids the researcher in collecting the most data possible in a systematic manner with the least amount of time, money, and effort (Akhtar, 2016:71). There are three main forms of research designs, including descriptive research, explanatory research and exploratory research (Rahi, 2017:2). Table 4-2 represents the different research designs.

Table 4-2: Three forms of research designs

Research design	
Descriptive research	Descriptive research examines the variations in a population's characteristics by examining one or more variables in relation to their natural state (Siedlecki, 2020:8). A descriptive research design's primary objective is to describe a specific occurrence by gathering data using techniques such as interviews or observations, comparing the data with one another, and responding to the questions of what, where, and how rather than why (Atmowardoyo, 2018:198).
Explanatory research	Explanatory research is used to discover new knowledge about phenomena or events that have not yet been studied or to expand on earlier research that has not yet been thoroughly examined (Rahi, 2017:2). Explanatory research is concerned with answering the question "why," and does not compare different phenomena in any way, but rather focuses on gathering new information on phenomena or occurrences (Akhtar, 2016).

Table 4-2: Three forms of research designs (continued)

Exploratory research	With the aim of creating precise hypotheses through the exploration of issues, exploratory research is used to seek new information on phenomena where little or no research has been done (Akhtar, 2016:73). Instead of fully resolving a problem, this research design seeks to learn more about the existing problem (Zikmund *et al*., 2013). When a researcher does not have enough information on a phenomenon or occurrence, exploratory research is employed because it enables the researcher to look into the elements that they believe are important to investigate for the study (Burns *et al*., 2017:95). Exploratory research, which uses techniques including interviews, focus groups, surveys, case studies, and secondary data to obtain knowledge on the issue at hand, can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method research (Burns *et al*., 2017:96; Jain, 2021:544).

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

For the purpose of this study exploratory research was conducted by means of interviews. It has allowed the researcher to explore fast-food restaurant managers' views on customer retention within the fast-food industry, as well as different strategies that lead to better customer retention within the industry. This study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding customer retention strategies from managers' perceptions in the fast-food industry, as limited studies have been done on this topic in South Africa. A research approach is further referred to as being quantitative or qualitative in nature (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:173). Table 4-3 describes the quantitative and qualitative methods in research.

Table 4-3: Quantitative and qualitative research

Research method	Description
Quantitative	The term "quantitative research" refers to research methods that produce numerical data (Quick & Hall, 2015:192). In quantitative research, the data analysis will only occur at the end of the data collection (Cobb & Forbes, 2002:198). The data collection methods used to collect primary quantitative data include tests or questionnaires, structured interviews, and closed-ended observational protocols (Gelo *et al.*, 2008:274). Secondary data collection methods of the quantitative approach include official documents (Gelo *et al.*, 2008:274). Quantitative data is described as being positivist, as numbers are used in the research (Salvador, 2016:108).
Qualitative	Qualitative research refers to a data collection technique that makes use of non-numerical data (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:175). In qualitative research, the data is analysed during the entire process of the study (Cobb & Forbes, 2002:198). Primary data collection methods for the qualitative research approach include focus groups, naturalistic observations and open-ended interviews (Gelo *et al.*, 2008:274). Secondary data collection methods for the qualitative research approach include official and personal documents (Gelo *et al.*, 2008:274). Qualitative data is seen as being inductive where a social phenomenon is studied through human experiences (Salvador, 2016:108).

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

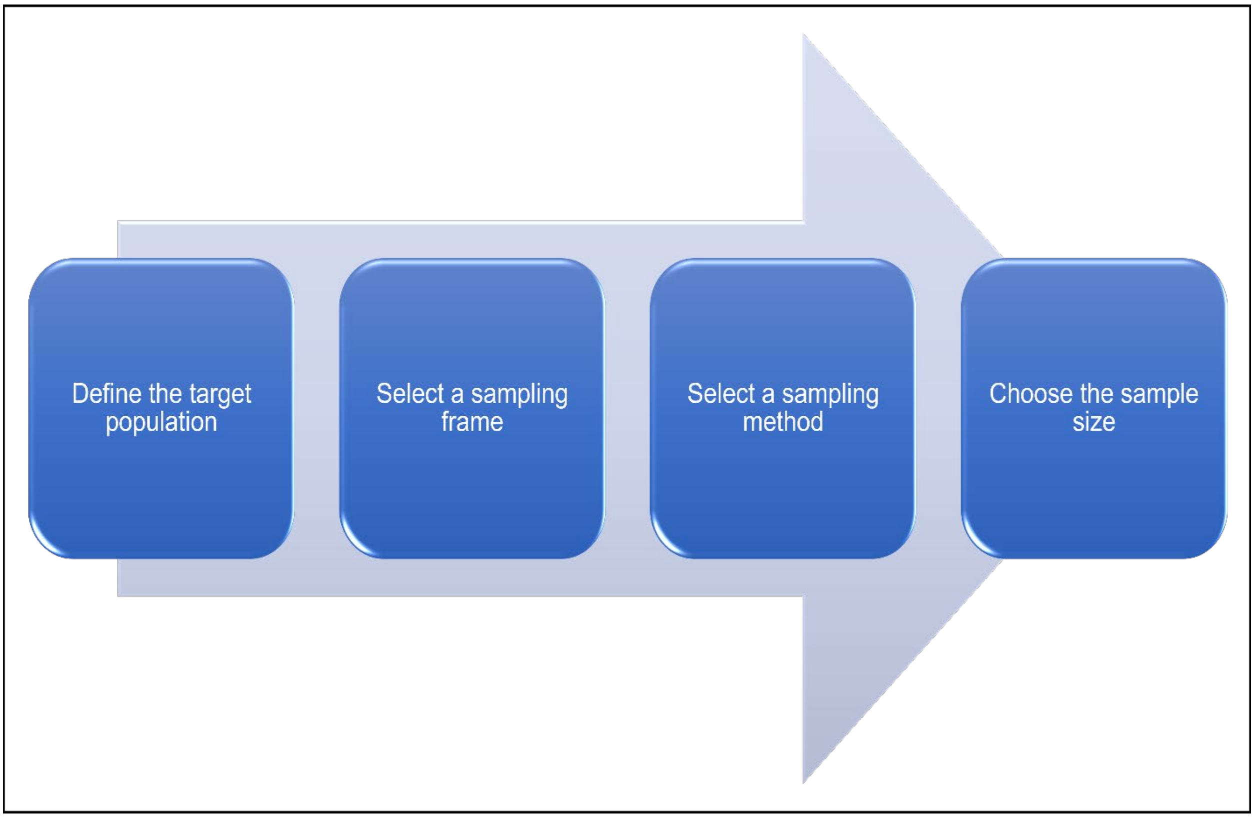
For the purpose of this study a qualitative research approach was used, since the primary objective of the study is to explore strategies that managers of fast-food restaurants implement in order to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry. This approach was deemed suitable, as it allowed the researcher to gain more knowledge of the phenomena (i.e., customer retention) at hand through human (managerial) experiences. The data was analysed throughout the duration of the study in the form of secondary and primary data collection methods.

The following section will discuss the third step in the business research process which entails the planning of a sample.

4.5.3 Stage 3: Planning a sample

Stage three of the sampling process entails the planning of a sample. When planning a sample, a researcher utilises a process to examine a subset of the complete population in order to draw conclusions about the measurements that were taken (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:69). The use of a sample is necessitated, as limited resources are available and the entire population of a country cannot be evaluated, hence, a sampling process needs to be followed. The sampling process used in this study is depicted in Figure 4-3.

Figure 4-3: Sampling process



Source: Adopted from Hair *et al.* (2020:181).

4.5.3.1 Step1: Define the target population

The group of individuals with similar traits that the researcher plans to study and make conclusions about is referred to as the target population (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:340). It is essential to define the target population accurately, because if the wrong population is chosen the study will not produce appropriate results (Zikmund *et al.*, 2014:27). To ensure that the correct individuals are identified for participation in the study, it is required to select a target population from the overall population (Asiamah *et al.*, 2017:1612).

According to Malhotra *et al.* (2013:368), the target population is defined in terms of the following elements:

- **Sampling elements:** The item from which the study's information is wanted is referred to as the sampling element. The participants who will be interviewed are the elements of this study.
- **Sampling units:** The unit containing the element that is a part of the study is referred to as a sampling unit.
- **Extent:** The study's geographical boundaries serve as its definition of extent.
- **Timeframe:** The timeframe refers to the time in which the study will be done.

For the purpose of this study, the target population comprises managers of established fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa.

4.5.3.2 Step 2: Select a sampling frame

The term ‘sample frame’ refers to the list that contains the details of all the individuals from the study's target population that can be regarded as potential respondents (Martínez-Mesa *et al.*, 2016:327). POPIA (2013) prohibits the access to and dissemination of personal information of fast-food managers in the North West province of South Africa. Therefore, no sampling frame was used in this study.

4.5.3.3 Step 3: Select a sampling method

The following step in the sampling process is choosing a sampling method. There are two categories of sampling methods including probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Taherdoost, 2016:20). The following sections will discuss the different types of sampling methods.

4.5.3.3.1 Probability sampling

With probability sampling techniques, each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the study's sample (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:43). When using probability sampling, researchers frequently fail to obtain a truly random sample due to resource constraints (Etikan *et al.*, 2016a:1). The different techniques of probability sampling include random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling (Burns *et al.*, 2017:242). Table 4-4 presents the different types of probability sampling.

Table 4-4: Probability sampling techniques

Probability sampling	
Random sampling	Every element of the population has an equal chance of being selected.
Systematic sampling	The element of the population is randomly put in order and numbered whereafter each n^{th} unit is chosen.
Stratified sampling	The population is divided into homogeneous groups, whereafter random samples of each group are chosen.
Cluster sampling	The population is divided into heterogeneous groups and random samples are chosen from one or more, but not all, of the groups.

Source: Adapted from Mooi *et al.* (2018:44).

4.5.3.3.2 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique in which the likelihood that an element will be selected is unknown (Burns *et al.*, 2017:241). Non-probability sampling relies on the researcher's discretion to select the sample (Berndt, 2020:224). With this sampling method, there is not an equal chance for elements of the population to be chosen and the method of sampling is not random (Stratton, 2021:373). The different techniques used under non-probability sampling include convenience, judgement, quota and snowball sampling (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:45). Table 4-5 provides a description of the different non-probability sampling techniques.

Table 4-5: Non-probability sampling methods

Non-probability sampling	
Convenience sampling	A sample is taken from a group based on their availability to partake in the study, or if it offers a cost benefit to the researcher.
Judgement sampling	With judgement sampling, the researcher will take a literate assumption of which units will form part of the sample.
Quota sampling	Samples are taken from a population according to specific traits that they have by using both judgement and convenience sampling.
Snowball sampling	Snowball sampling is used to identify more units for the sample through units/respondents that refer other units to the researcher. Snowball sampling is also referred to as referral sampling.

Source: Adapted from Babin and Zikmund (2016:348-351).

For this study a combination of non-probability methods was used, namely convenience sampling and judgement sampling. Convenience sampling was used to easily gain access to samples in the area where the researcher resides, and judgement sampling was further used to identify participants that added value to the study through the knowledge of the researcher. The following section will provide a discussion of the fourth step in the sampling process.

4.5.3.4 Step 4: Choose the sample size

The final step in the sampling process is referred to as choosing the sample size. The size of a sample refers to the minimum number of respondents needed by a study to ensure that the research objectives of the study are met (Burns *et al.*, 2017:265). The sample size in this study will refer to the number of interviews conducted by managers of fast-food restaurants. Qualitative research sample sizes have been criticised in the past, but it has been found that even small sample sizes can contribute to a large body of knowledge in a research field (Boddy, 2016:430). When making use of a qualitative study, there are no specific rules for the size that the samples must be, however, it is required that the research process is transparent and that data saturation is achieved (van Rijnsoever, 2017:2). Data saturation refers to the point where no new information is acquired when conducting research, in other words, the data is repeating the same informative process (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020:3).

For the purpose of this study the researcher intended to interview 15 respondents by using convenience sampling as well as judgement sampling to choose participants based on the researcher's perception of participants that will add value to the study. Data saturation occurred before 15 participants were interviewed, and ultimately the realised sample for this study consists of 13 participants. The recommended number of interviews differ, but Baker and Edwards (2012:10) explain that between 12 – 16 interviews are sufficient in qualitative research, or until saturation occurs. The following section will provide a discussion of step five of the sampling process. Utilising interviews in this study will help the researcher to gain more information on the types of strategies that managers in the fast-food industry use to increase customer retention. When conducting interviews, the researcher will be able to use follow-up questions on the answers of respondents to gain a better understanding of the topic at hand, which is a great advantage (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:91).

4.5.4 Stage 4: Collection of data

Data collection entails the collection of material, facts and information that is reliable during the research process (Aini *et al.*, 2018:97). When conducting research, a researcher can obtain data through both secondary and primary sources (Igwenagu, 2016:41).

4.5.4.1 Secondary data

Secondary data refers to data that was collected by a previous study (Burns *et al.*, 2017:116). According to Babin and Zikmund (2016:153), there are two types of secondary data including internal and external secondary data. According to Mooi *et al.* (2018:53), internal secondary data refers to data compiled by businesses for the reporting of aspects such as sales reports and existing studies, whereas external secondary data refers to data published outside of a business, such as market research reports, the internet and literature databases.

For the purpose of this study both internal and external secondary data were used to gain data. Secondary data was used to provide a literature review in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 on customer retention in the fast-food industry, as well as strategies that managers use to improve customer retention in their businesses.

The following databases were used to explore the existing literature on the study topic at hand:

- SA ePublications: South African journals.
- SACat: National catalogue of books and journals in South Africa.
- Emerald Insight: International journals.
- ScienceDirect: International journals.
- EBSCOhost: International journals on Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and EconLit.
- Internet and online scientific search engines: Google Scholar, various websites and online communities.
- Textbooks.

4.5.4.2 Primary data

Primary data refers to first-hand data that is gathered by the researcher to address a specific research topic and can be quantitative as well as qualitative (Burns *et al.*, 2017:53). With primary data collection, it is the responsibility of the researcher to decide how, where and when the data will be gathered (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:144). In this study, the primary data was collected through the utilisation of interviews.

For the purpose of this study data was gathered by the researcher through means of inviting managers in the fast-food industry to participate in the study by conducting interviews with them. Upon agreement from the manager that they will participate in the study, their e-mail address was obtained, whereafter a consent letter (see Appendix D) were sent to the manager. The purpose of the consent letter was to provide the manager with the necessary information pertaining to the interview, such as their right to withdraw from the interview at any time, how their data will be used, and how their confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the process. After the consent letter was signed and received by the researcher, an interview session was arranged. An interview session lasted approximately 40 minutes to ensure all the questions in the interview guide were thoroughly discussed.

4.5.5 Stage 5: Analyse the data

Data analysis is the process of structuring unstructured data – by making it valuable – so that it may be used to draw inferences and conclusions (Islam, 2020:10). According to Mooi *et al.* (2018:23), data analysis requires technical expertise when conducting research. When qualitative research data is analysed, it is typically transcribed into text which may concentrate on all of the data collected or it can focus on particular portions of the data (Noble & Smith, 2014).

4.5.5.1 Data preparation

When data is gathered for qualitative research, the data will be transcribed either manually or automatically by using software programmes to locate a pattern that appears throughout all of the data so that inferences can be made (Hair *et al.*, 2020:307). As audio recordings may be listened to repeatedly, transcribed data from audio-recorded interviews will enable the researcher to thoroughly study the data. Through doing so, the researcher will be able to compare the findings of each interview and determine whether a particular pattern exists (Widodo, 2014:102).

For the purpose of this study in-person interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and the identity of the participants remained anonymous. After the interviews were conducted, the audio recording was put through a software programme known as ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti is a software program that analyses audio, video, image, and text files, and identifies developing trends that help researchers to understand and draw conclusions from the data (Paulus & Lester, 2016:409). The audio recordings were put through ATLAS.ti by *Language Matters,* a professional transcribing and translation business, that is situated in Potchefstroom, North West, South Africa.

The following section will describe the data analysis method used in this study, known as the Morse and Field approach.

4.5.5.2 Data analysis: Morse and Field approach

For the purpose of this study, the Morse and Field (1996) approach was used in order to analyse the data that the researcher has gathered. The four steps of the Morse and Field (1996) approach to data analysis are: comprehend, synthesise, theorise, and recontextualise. The Morse and Field (1996) approach enabled the researcher to completely comprehend the data by going through each step in turn (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2016:12).

4.5.5.2.1 Step 1: Comprehend

The first step in the Morse and Field approach is known as comprehending. The process of continuously evaluating the transcribed data is known as "comprehending data," and it allows the researcher to better understand what the data means as well as identify any patterns that might be present (Azam & Qureshi, 2021:6). The data is transcribed and coded in order for the researcher to better understand the data that has been collected (Morse & Field, 1996:104). Once the researcher has enough information to produce a thorough analysis of the topic at hand with no new emerging patterns, the first step of the approach is completed (Morse & Field, 1996:104; Sanford *et al.*, 2011:48).

For the purpose of this study the researcher did an extensive literature review in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 to gain a better understanding of existing theories regarding customer retention strategies in the field of management. The literature provides the researcher with a large body of knowledge to better comprehend the topic that is being dealt with in this study. The primary data gathered during the interviews with fast-food restaurant managers in this study were transcribed and coded to understand the meaning of the data, as described by Morse and Field (1996:104).

4.5.5.2.2 Step 2: Synthesise

The second step in the Morse and Field approach is referred to as the synthesising step. Synthesising is the process through which a researcher can explain how study participants behave and the trends that appear between them (Morse & Field, 1996:105). With the intention of collecting information to identify the phenomena that develop during the synthesising process, data is sorted into certain patterns that appear (Turale *et al.*, 2010:204). Morse and Field (1996:105) identified two forms of data analysis in qualitative research when synthesising data, which include:

- **Interparticipant analysis:** The researcher compares the data between participants present in the study to identify similarities.
- **Category analysis:** The researcher compiles categories from the data that was gathered from participants.

For the purpose of this study data synthesis was accomplished by interparticipant analysis. The researcher compared the data between several participants present in the study in order to identify the phenomenon that presented during the interview stage. The interparticipant analysis allowed the researcher to identify the patterns among managers in the fast-food industry, as well as which strategies they incorporate to improve customer retention in their restaurants.

4.5.5.2.3 Step 3: Theorise

A crucial step in the research process, theorising data involves comparing different data models to the data that was obtained. This gives the study structure and a purpose (Morse & Field, 1996:105). The main purpose of theorising is to compare the coded data to existing data for it to be understood (Azam & Qureshi, 2021:7).

For the purpose of this study the theorising of data was accomplished by means of comparing the coded data with the literature that was obtained during the extensive literature review in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The data was used to explore strategies that managers of fast-food restaurants implement in order to gain more customer retention.

4.5.5.2.4 Step 4: Recontextualise

The goal of recontextualising is to develop a theory that applies to other fields of study, and the development of a suitable theory is the most important factor in qualitative research (Morse & Field, 1996). Therefore, this final step of the Morse and Field’s approach focuses on identifying the situations to which the theories are applicable. The results obtained from the interviews with fast-food managers and the extant literature review will contribute to the recontextualization of the study’s findings.

For this study’s purpose the theories generated in step three were elaborated on to determine the strategies that managers in the fast-food industry implement, as well as to discover the strategies that should be implemented to effectively retain customers.

4.5.5.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a study refers to the validity and reliability of the data. The reliability of a study relates to the consistency of the analytical procedures employed, whereas the validity of a study refers to the integrity and application of the methodologies utilised, as well as the level of accuracy with which the findings reflect the facts (Noble & Smith, 2015:34). The trustworthiness of a qualitative study should be evaluated according to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study (Maree, 2019:144).

4.5.5.3.1 Credibility

A study is considered credible if the descriptions are instantly recognised by others who have had the same experience. Credibility pertains to the truth of the data or the respondents' perspectives, as well as how the researcher has interpreted and represented them (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020:42). To ensure credibility in a qualitative study, the following strategies are proposed by Korstjens and Moser (2018:121), as described in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6: Credibility in this study

Criteria	Strategy	For the purpose of this study
Credibility	Prolonged engagement	The prolonged engagement was achieved by staying in the field for more than one year. The study was conducted over a period of two years, where the researcher started off by critically evaluating secondary resources in relation to the study, and then commenced with fieldwork to gather primary data about the topic at hand. Various fast-food restaurant managers were interviewed in order to gain an understanding of the strategies that they implement to increase customer retention in the fast-food industry.
	Persistent observation	The persistent observation was achieved by critically analysing the audio recordings of the interviews that were conducted with fast-food restaurant managers to identify the data that was most crucial to the research problem and objectives of this study.
	Triangulation	Triangulation was achieved by making use of different data sources, such as primary and secondary data. Interviews were conducted with participants at different times and on different dates. Furthermore, the data obtained was transcribed by an external transcribing service that ensured accurate results of the data.
	Member check	Member checks were achieved by carefully evaluating the data and giving feedback to all the participants who took part in the study.

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

4.5.5.3.2 Transferability

A study's transferability entails the application of results to other situations unrelated to the study, and transferability is achieved when those who were not involved in the study may correlate the results with their own experiences (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020:46). According to Maree (2019:144) and Amankwaa (2016:122), transferability in qualitative research can be achieved by the following strategies, as discussed in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7: Transferability in this study

Criteria	Strategy	For the purpose of this study
Transferability	Thick description	The thick description was achieved by transcribing and explaining all the findings of the data that was collected throughout the study. This allowed the researcher to explore strategies that managers in the fast-food industry implement to improve customer retention, and it allows future research to explore more.
	Purposive sampling	Purposive sampling was achieved by doing interviews with fast-food restaurant managers. The managers form a core part of the study, as it relates to the managers and their methods of improving customer retention.

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

4.5.5.3.3 Dependability

Research's dependability refers to the consistency of data over similar conditions, and is accomplished when the study's findings are repeated with similar participants under similar conditions (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020:44). To achieve dependability in a study, Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) and Connelly (2016:435) suggest that the following strategies need to be met, as explained in Table 4-8.

Table 4-8: Dependability in this study

Criteria	Strategy	For the purpose of this study
Dependability	Peer debriefing	Peer debriefing for this study was achieved by submitting the result of the interviews to professional researchers, including the supervisor and co-supervisor of this study, to verify the analysis and the coding of the data.
	Audit trail	An audit trial was conducted by presenting a problem statement, addressing the choice of research participants, collecting data, discussing the analysis of the data, presenting the findings of the study, and evaluating the study's trustworthiness.

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

4.5.5.3.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to show that the data acquired reflects the opinions of the participants and not their own, and is achieved when the researcher can explain how the outcomes are directly related to the data obtained (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020:46). To achieve confirmability in the study, Connelly (2016:435), Korstjens and Moser (2018:121), as well as Maree (2019:145) suggest that the following strategies need to be implemented, as discussed in Table 4-9.

Table 4-9: Confirmability in this study

Criteria	Strategy	For the purpose of this study
Confirmability	Audit trail	The audit trail was achieved in this study as discussed in Table 4-8. When considering confirmability, the audit trail allows readers to understand that the researcher was not biased during his or her investigation, because all data is documented and addressed.
	Triangulation	Triangulation was achieved as discussed in Table 4-6. As previously stated, triangulation in confirmability is a solid approach for ensuring that the researcher is not biased, because different data sources are employed throughout the study.

Source: Researcher's own compilation.

Following the fifth stage of the business research process is the sixth and final stage. The final stage of the business research process, known as the preparation of the research report will be discussed in the following section.

4.5.6 Stage 6: Prepare a research report

The final stage of the business research process is the preparation of a research report. In this stage, the results, implications and limitations of the data collected by the researcher will be discussed. The results of the study will be discussed in Chapter 5, and the implications and limitations thereof will be discussed in Chapter 6.

During the final stage of the business research process, it is also necessary to evaluate the ethical considerations that form part of the study to ensure that no ethical dilemmas occur. The following section will discuss the ethical considerations that were taken into account during this study.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because human participants are involved in business and management research, ethical considerations are almost always present (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:232). **While conducting research for this study,** the following ethical implications were taken into consideration:

- Ethical clearance had to be obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (see Appendix G). Upon approval, the following ethics number was issued for this study: **NWU – 00600 – 22 – A4**.

- Participants of the study were all managers of fast-food restaurants and were over the age of 18. Thus, no parental or guardian permission was necessary.

- All participants were obligated to sign a consent form (Appendix D) to take part in the study.

- All participants were assigned a participant number to ensure anonymity of them and the fast-food restaurant that they manage.

- Participation in this study was completely voluntary.

4.7 SUMMARY

Throughout this chapter, the research approach has been thoroughly discussed. To comprehend what research is, the philosophical orientation, research philosophy, and various research methodologies were thoroughly examined to ensure that the methods of research are understood in this study. Furthermore, the business research process was discussed to understand the stages required to do business research, as this will affect how valuable this study is. Finally, the study's ethical considerations were examined to guarantee that no ethical difficulties arose throughout the study. The chapter concluded with a summary of what was accomplished throughout the chapter. Based on the categories established in Chapter 4, the research findings will be reported in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

REPORTING OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Within this chapter, the empirical results and findings of this study will be reported. The results were obtained through the implementation of the chosen research methodology, as set out in the previous chapter. This was done by interviewing managers of fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa. This chapter starts with an overview of the interview questions and then proceeds to describe the categories and themes that were identified during the execution of stage two of the Morse and Field approach for qualitative data analysis (see Section 4.5.5.2). The results discovered in each of the categories are then discussed in-depth and the chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings discovered in the identified themes.

5.2 RESEARCH RESULTS

This section describes the results of the study by explaining the purpose of the interview questions. To do so, each of the interview questions is linked to the relevant literature chapter, the objectives of the study, and the respective categories and themes discovered.

5.2.1 Purpose of interview questions and relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

Tables 5-1 to 5-4 present the links between the interview questions, research objectives (Section 1.8), the literature chapters in the study (Chapters 2 and 3), as well as the categories and themes identified (by making use of the business research process in Section 4.5).

Table 5-1: Purpose of the interview questions of section B and relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

Interview question: **B1.** How do you understand customer retention within the context of your business?			
Purpose	To establish whether the participant understands the concept of customer retention within the business that they manage.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 2		
Literature	Chapter 3		
Theme	1	Category	(A)
Interview question: **B2**. Why do you regard customer retention as an important factor in your business?			
Purpose	To identify the manner in which the participant would see the importance of customer retention through their own experience in the fast-food restaurant that they manage.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 3		
Literature	Chapter 3		
Theme	1	Category	(B)
Interview question: **B3.** What effect do you consider customer retention to have in the fast-food industry?			
Purpose	To establish whether the participant knows the overall importance of customer retention in the fast-food industry as a whole.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 3		
Literature	Chapter 3		
Theme	1	Category	(B)
Interview question: **B4.** What effect did the COVID-19 pandemic have on retaining customers in your business?			
Purpose	To establish whether the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on retaining customers in the fast-food industry.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 6		
Literature	Chapter 2 and Chapter 3		
Theme	4	Category	(B)

The following table (Table 5-2) presents the purpose of the interview questions of Section C and the relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories.

Table 5-2: Purpose of the interview questions of Section C and relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

Interview question: **C1.** How do you keep record of customer retention rates in your business?			
Purpose	To identify the different tactics that participants use to keep record of the returning customers in their business.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 4		
Literature	Chapter 2		
Theme	2	Category	(A)
Interview question: **C2**. How important would you regard returning customers to be in comparison with new customers with regard to revenue?			
Purpose	To establish if the participant feels that there is a difference in importance between returning customers and new customers with regard to revenue in the business.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 3		
Literature	Chapter 3		
Theme	2	Category	(B)
Interview question: **C3.** How do you communicate the importance of customer retention to your employees?			
Purpose	To establish the strategies that participants use in order to inform their employees of the importance of customer retention.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 4		
Literature	Chapter 2 and Chapter 3		
Theme	2	Category	(C)
Interview question: **C4.** How do you evaluate your employees to ensure that they understand the importance of customer retention?			
Purpose	To identify tactics that participants employ to ensure that their employees understand the importance of customer retention in the business.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 4		
Literature	Chapter 2 and Chapter 3		
Theme	2	Category	(C)

The following table (Table 5-3) exhibits the purpose of the interview questions of Section D and the relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories.

Table 5-3: Purpose of the interview questions of Section D and relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

Interview question: **D1.** What are some of the reasons that you have experienced for customers not returning to your business?			
Purpose	To establish why customers do not return for repeat business at the fast-food restaurant.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 5		
Literature	Chapter 3		
Theme	3	Category	(A)
Interview question: **D2.** How does a decrease in returning customers impact your business?			
Purpose	To establish the participant's view on the impact that a decrease in returning customers has on the fast-food restaurant that they manage.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 4		
Literature	Chapter 2 and Chapter 3		
Theme	3	Category	(B)
Interview question: **D3.** What are the challenges you experience to retain customers in your business?			
Purpose	To identify the challenges that participants face with the retention of customers in the fast-food restaurants that they manage in order to compare results from different participants that form part of the study.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 5		
Literature	Chapter 2		
Theme	3	Category	(A)

The following table (Table 5-4) presents the purpose of the interview questions of Section E and the relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories.

Table 5-4: Purpose of the interview questions of Section E and relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

Interview question: **E1.** What strategies do you implement to enhance customer retention to gain a competitive advantage in your business?			
Purpose	To identify the strategies that participants use to attract more returning customers with the goal of taking a bigger market share.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 6		
Literature	Chapter 3		
Theme	4	Category	(A)
Interview question: **E2.** How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the strategies you implement in your business to retain customers?			
Purpose	To establish whether the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the strategies that participants implemented to retain customers.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 6		
Literature	Chapter 2 and Chapter 3		
Theme	4	Category	(B)
Interview question: **E3.** How did you adjust your strategies to retain more customers during the COVID-19 pandemic?			
Purpose	To establish how participants modified their strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to convince more customers to return and support their business.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 6		
Literature	Chapter 2 and Chapter 3		
Theme	4	Category	(B)
Interview question: **E4.** What impact did the strategies that you implemented have on the number of customers retained during COVID-19 pandemic?			
Purpose	To establish whether or not the strategies that the participants implemented had an impact on the number of customers retained during the pandemic.		
Research objective	Secondary objective 6		
Literature	Chapter 2		
Theme	4	Category	(B)

The rest of this section is organised in accordance with the themes and categories identified through the use of ATLAS.ti (version 22) and the Morse and Field approach for qualitative data analysis (see Section 4.5.5.2). The categorical and empirical framework of the research results are presented in Table 5-5, and acts as a prelude to the results discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 5-5: The thematic and categorical framework for empirical research results

	Category (A)	Category (B)	Category (C)
Theme 1: *Perception* of customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Interpretation	Importance	
Theme 2: *Awareness* of customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Record	Revenue	Employees
Theme 3: *Challenges* regarding customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Churn	Impact	
Theme 4: Customer retention *strategies* in the fast-food industry.	Enhancement	COVID-19	

5.2.2 Theme 1: Perception of customer retention in the fast-food industry

This section provides a discussion of how customer retention is perceived by managers within the fast-food industry of the North West province of South Africa. Accordingly, the results of the two categories that emanated from this theme (see Table 5-2) are presented next.

5.2.2.1 Category 1(A): Interpretation

This category indicates how the participants understood and interpreted the concept of customer retention. The participants (i.e., managers) were asked how they understand customer retention within the context of the businesses they are employed at.

The majority of participants regard customer retention as a very important success factor in their business. Some of the participants' interpretation of customer retention aligns with the drivers of customer retention in the literature (see Section 3.8.2). For instance, the participants maintain that satisfied customers will be loyal customers, which in turn will lead to customer retention (Nashwan & Hassan, 2017:101). In addition, most of the participants understand that customer retention involves retaining loyal customers through the encouragement of repeat purchases at their restaurant and also discouraging them to purchase from other restaurants (i.e., competitors).

A few participants also affirm that by ensuring customers are satisfied, more of them will return to the restaurant. Furthermore, the majority of participants regard above-average quality and service as key elements in the retention of customers at the fast-food restaurants that they manage. Conversely, a minority of the participants are of the opinion that customer loyalty is decreasing since customers are more price sensitive, and that the only way to ensure retention of these customers is to provide them with a unique (i.e., differentiated) offering. The research results of Category 1(A) are depicted in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1: Category 1(A) research results – Theme 1

Perception of customer retention in the fast-food industry: Interpretation

Explanation of the category:
This category identified the manner in which the participants in the study understand customer retention within the business that they operate. It was established that participants perceive customer retention to be an important success factor in their fast-food business. To retain customers, the business should deliver above-average quality products and services, ensure that customers are satisfied as well as incentivise loyalty.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"very important"

Participant 1

"it is very, very important"

Participant 4

"a happy customer is a customer that will always be coming back to your store"

Participant 1

"I think keeping the customer happy, would be retaining the customers"

Participant 6

"we need them to be loyal"

Participant 11

"your service should be good enough, your food should be good enough for them to come back and invite other people with them to come back"

Participant 5

The next section focuses on presenting the results of the second category (i.e., Category B) of Theme 1 which highlights the importance of customer retention within the fast-food industry of the North West province of South Africa.

5.2.2.2 Category 1(B): Importance

Category 1(B) relates to the reason why participants consider customer retention as an important factor in the fast-food business they represent/manage. Furthermore, this category also considers the influence or role that customer retention plays within the fast-food industry.

The majority of participants regard customer retention as an important factor in their business, as it relates to the way in which they expand their business. According to the results of this study, a few participants are of the opinion that loyal customers support the business during difficult or more challenging times, as they are willing to purchase more regularly from the business. Moreover, a minority of participants stated that customers are vital to the longevity of their business since without them the business will be forced to cease operations. With this in mind, some of the participants emphasised the importance of satisfied customers, since they are more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth about the business which will result in an increase in both new and returning customers. However, should businesses fail to keep their customers satisfied, it could result in negative word-of-mouth, which could lead to a decrease in customer retention. Furthermore, a minority of participants stated that although they increased the prices of their products, customers still returned to their business. Some participants stated that this can be attributed to the superior quality of their restaurant’s food and service which increased satisfaction among customers. These findings concur with that of Zhang *et al.* (2019:34) that attitudinal loyalty (i.e., where customers experience good customer service) will lead to more repeat purchases as well as increased promotion for the business through word-of-mouth marketing.

The majority of respondents stated that customer retention plays an imperative role in the success of the fast-food industry. Some participants said that customer retention, in the long term, will lead to an increase in turnover as returning customers are willing to spend more money. This finding is in congruence with the literature as found by Inoue *et al.* (2017:46), where it is indicated that a high level of behavioural customer loyalty will lead to an increase in purchases which results in an increase in profit for the business. For this reason, a few participants stated that they will go the extra mile in ensuring that their customers are satisfied and that they are retained. The research results of Category 1(B) are depicted in Figure 5-2.

Figure 5-2: Category 1(B) research results – Theme 1

Perception of customer retention in the fast-food industry: Importance

Explanation of the category:

This category identified the manner in which the participants consider customer retention to be an important factor in the business they represent as well as the effect that the participants see customer retention to have in the fast-food industry.

It is clear to identify that the participants see customer retention as a very important element to ensure growth in their business. The participants mainly focused on customers being loyal to them as well as spreading a positive image of the business through word of mouth. Furthermore, participants stated that it is of utmost importance to keep their customers happy to ensure that they do not move to competitors.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"you want to build brand loyalty because the loyal customers are the ones that carry you through tough times"

Participant 3

"its future sales, you need to keep them happy to keep the business going"

Participant 5

"it is the way to grow your business"

Participant 10

"it is the turnover of my business. So, keeping them happy each and every time is of utmost importance"

Participant 12

"they are the ones that usually spend more per head that is increasing turnover"

Participant 3

"you want to try and keep your current customer base buying from you and not your competitor"

Participant 6

"word of mouth, advertising, its worth its weight in gold"

Participant 9

With regards to Categories 1(A) and 1(B), it is evident that the major theme for these two categories relates to:

- Theme 1: Perception of customer retention in the fast-food industry (see Table 5-5).

The next section presents the results of the respective categories pertaining to Theme 2, which highlights how participants keep record of customer retention rates in their business.

5.2.3 Theme 2: Awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry

This section provides a discussion of the awareness that managers have pertaining to customer retention in the fast-food industry and presents the results of the identified categories (see Table 5-5).

5.2.3.1 Category 2(A): Record

This category provides a detailed discussion of how participants monitor and record customer retention rates in the fast-food business that they represent.

The majority of participants make use of database systems which include loyalty cards, application (App) orders, phone orders and online orders to keep track of the customers, how much they spend and the frequency of their orders from the business. Most of the participants stated that they do not monitor counter orders or restaurant orders as doing so is difficult, since customers do not always provide their personal information when visiting the store. Some of the participants that offer loyalty cards and rewards systems at their businesses are able to keep a record of customer retention rates through these systems. The minority of participants stated that they do not make use of any systems to track customer retention rates, but they do focus on building stronger relationships with their customers so that customer retention can be increased through personal relationships. The research results of Category 2(A) are depicted in Figure 5-3.

Figure 5-3: Category 2(A) research results – Theme 2

Awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry: Record

Explanation of the category:

This category identified the manner in which the participants keep track of customer retention rates in their business.

It is clearly identified that the majority of participants make use of complex database systems as well as loyalty programs that keep record of the customers through their personal information such as phone numbers, addresses and names. The majority of participants have software systems in place that track the customer's spending at the business as well as the frequency of visits. The minority of respondents do not have any database that keeps track of customer retention but rather managers that personally interact with regular customers.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"our system is set up in such a way that if a customer phones in or places an order for a collect it actually measures how many customers come into the store and how frequently they come in"

Participant 1

"my managers know their customers so there is no physical record that we keep"

Participant 2

"I spend a lot of time in the shop, so I see my regular customers"

Participant 5

"we've also got a loyalty card"

Participant 9

"we have the POS system, the power POS that has all the data of the customers that come in, so he gives us his cell phone number the address and we've got all that. We can see it's a repeat customer and it shows the total amount of purchases that they've made in the past"

Participant 11

Participants customer retention track records:

The next section focuses on presenting the results of the second category (i.e., Category B) of Theme 2, which highlights the importance that participants attach to revenue generated by returning customers in comparison with new customers.

5.2.3.2 Category 2(B): Revenue

This category provides a discussion with regard to the importance that the participants attach to the revenue generated by returning customers in comparison to that generated by new customers.

The majority of participants hold the view that returning customers that are loyal to the business are more important for revenue. These participants agree that a regular and loyal customer will be willing to spend more money. This information agrees with the literature on customer retention where it was shown that continuous customer retention will lead to more sales, resulting in more profits (Parawansa, 2018:54). They are also of the opinion that returning customers are aware of the quality of products that they will receive and they are easier to satisfy if and when any problems arise. The majority of participants also attribute word-of-mouth and sales, resulting in retained customers.

The minority of the participants suggest that retained customers and new customers are equally as important for revenue generation. These participants propose that new customers will also become regular (and retained) customers, as long as they receive above-average quality products and services. Furthermore, few participants hold the view that any sale is important whether it is from a new or retained customer, since new sales can be converted into recurring sales. The research results of Category 2(B) are depicted in Figure 5-4.

Figure 5-4: Category 2(B) research results – Theme 2

Awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry : Revenue

Explanation of the category:
This category identified the importance that participants attach to returning customers in comparison to new customers with regard to revenue.
It was clearly identified that the majority of the participants believe that returning customers have a much larger impact on the revenue of the business than new customers. The minority of the participants believe that both returning customers and new customers are equally as important when considering revenue in the business.

Supporting verbatim quotes:
"It is very important because it is much easier to satisfy a retaining customer than what it would be to a new customer because as retaining customer knows exactly what he wants he knows the quality that he is going to get he knows the pricing he is going to pay where if you have to go and acquire a new customer it takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of effort so if a new customer walks in and has a bad first experience the chances of him coming back is very seldom"

Participant 1

"they are the ones that usually spend more per head that is increasing turnover"

Participant 3

"I think your returning customers will spend a lot more money in your restaurant where your new customers will I think try a few things out first"

Participant 5

"I think returning is more important with regards to revenue definitely"

Participant 6

"They spread the word you know, they the guys that tell others, the new customers to come so they're almost more important to me than the new ones"

Participant 6

"They are both important"

Participant 7

"I think they're equally important in my view"

Participant 11

The next section focuses on presenting the results of the third category (i.e., Category C) of Theme 2, which highlights how participants communicate the importance of retained customers to their employees and also how they evaluate their employees with regard to understanding the importance of customer retention.

5.2.3.3 Category 2(C): Employees

This category serves the purpose of providing a discussion pertaining to the manner in which the participants communicate the benefits of customer retention to their employees. Furthermore, this category indicates how the employees are evaluated with regard to their understanding of customer retention and the importance thereof.

The majority of the participants indicated that they have daily meetings with their employees, where they communicate the importance of providing good quality products and excellent customer service to customers so that they can be retained. With this in mind, most of the participants feel that it is essential to provide customer service training to their employees so that customers can be retained. The literature also accentuates the importance of training employees so that they can provide excellent customer service to customers, which will ensure that customers are retained (Kurdi *et al.*, 2020:3567). One major factor that employees should understand relates to the popular mantra ‘the customer is always right’, which signifies the importance of providing above-average quality products and excellent customer service, as customers will hold employees accountable for a lack thereof. The minority of participants only occasionally have employee meetings to ensure that employees understand the importance of good customer service and how it affects the retention of customers for the business.

The participants identified a wide variety of methods that they use to evaluate their employees with regard to their understanding of customer retention in the business. The majority of participants indicated that they have regular meetings with their employees concerning the ambience within the restaurant as well as to discuss the manner in which they have been engaging with customers. Moreover, these meetings also provide managers with the opportunity to ask employees questions related to customer retention to gauge their understanding thereof and identify areas of improvement. The customer care lines are also used by managers, whereby they intercept and evaluate interactions between customers and employees. Some of the managers mentioned that they make anonymous calls to the restaurant and pose as difficult customers to evaluate how well employees can handle conflict with customers. A few participants also indicated that they have visits from their business’s head office where employees are directly evaluated as they engage with customers. The research results of Category 2(C) are depicted in Figure 5-5.

Figure 5-5: Category 2(C) research results – Theme 2

Awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry: Employees

Explanation of the category:
This category identified the manner in which participants communicate the importance of customer retention to their employees, as well as the methods used to evaluate their employees' understanding of customer retention in the business. It is clearly identified that the majority of participants have daily meetings with their employees to communicate the importance of returning customers as well as vibe meetings (meetings held to improve the work atmosphere and employees' emotional state) to evaluate the way in which employees implement these discussions in the meetings. Alternatively, employees are evaluated by mystery shoppers and direct evaluation by managers from head office.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"You have to do it on a frequent basis "

Participant 1

"Speaking to them daily"

Participant 6

"Before every shift we have vibe meetings"

Participant 10

"we have a meeting every once in a while"

Participant 11

"my managers are always on duty there to check how the customers are being treated"

Participant 2

"Questions. We frequently ask questions"

Participant 6

"Every day we will have, in our vibe meetings, we'll have a training session and during the day the managers will then evaluate the waiters and see if they are doing the training that we have done in the vibe meetings"

Participant 10

"We keep record of customer complaints and we have meetings to iron these issues out until resolved and to ensure that it is not repeated. This is done until everyone understands the importance of retaining customers"

Participant 11

With regards to Categories 2(A), 2(B) and 2(C), it is evident that the major theme for these three categories concerns:

- Theme 2: Awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry (see Table 5-5).

The next section presents the results of the respective categories pertaining to Theme 3, which highlights the challenges experienced to retain customers.

5.2.4 Theme 3: Challenges regarding customer retention in the fast-food industry

This section reports on the challenges that participants face with regard to customer retention within the fast-food industry and presents the results of the identified categories (see Table 5-5).

5.2.4.1 Category 3(A): Churn

This category relates to the inability of a business to retain customers and provides a discussion on the reasons why customers choose not to return to the fast-food business represented by the participants (i.e., managers of the fast-food restaurants), the challenges identified or experienced by the participants concerning retaining customers, and additional challenges identified or experienced by the participants that might have a more indirect influence on customer retention.

The majority of participants agree that the main reason for customers not returning to their business is a combination of average product quality and poor customer service. This finding agrees with the literature where it was found that both product and customer service quality directly influence the loyalty of customers towards a business in retaining or not retaining customers (Al-Gharaibah, 2020:3951; Parawansa, 2018:54). With below-average product quality, participants refer to food items not being up to standard to the customer's expectation. With poor customer service quality, the participants referred to products on the menu being unavailable, as well as long waiting times between placing an order and receiving their meal. The minority of participants indicated that the reason for unretained customers can be attributed to unreasonable requests or complaints from customers, or customers not enjoying the ambience provided by the restaurant. Some of the participants have also indicated that their restaurant's prices are too high, which results in the inability to retain customers since they will rather go to a competitor.

The main challenge that the majority of participants face with regard to retaining customers is from a financial point of view. These participants maintain that customers do not have the financial capacity to spend their money at the business as their food prices are too high. The minority of participants hold the view that their main challenge relates to keeping customers satisfied (i.e., providing above-average quality products and excellent customer service). Few participants have stated that they do not have any challenges with retaining customers at their fast-food businesses.

Additional challenges faced by the participants include fierce competition in the fast-food industry, not having the kitchen capacity for a wide variety of meals to be prepared, not understanding the needs of the customers, and the electricity crisis (i.e., load shedding) that the country is facing. The research results of Category 3(A) are depicted in Figure 5-6.

Figure 5-6: Category 3(A) research results – Theme 3

Challenges regarding customer retention in the fast-food industry: Churn

Explanation of the category:
This category identified the challenges that participants face with regard to customer retention within the fast-food industry. The majority of participants stated that the main challenges that they face with retaining customers are a combination between product quality and service quality. A minority of participants believe that unnecessary complaints lead to customers not returning. Furthermore, many participants believe that customers do not have the financial capacity to spend money at fast-food restaurants. Few participants stated that they have no challenges retaining customers. Additional challenges that participants face with retaining customers include load shedding, not understanding the needs of customers and not having the kitchen capacity to prepare a wide variety of meals.

Supporting verbatim quotes:
"Pricing is a big problem"

Participant 1

"Quality of the product"

Participant 2

"the food might be a bit slow so it takes sometimes too long"

Participant 5

"the guy doesn't feel comfortable in the environment"

Participant 9

"either they don't have the financial means, the economy has got a influence you know there is a price increase in the next two weeks we see it immediately in our business "

Participant 1

"there is not actually any challenges"

Participant 2

"availability of products"

Participant 10

"our food cost is extremely high due to the fact that we have very expensive products"

Participant 13

"the fast-food industry it is so competitive, it is massively competitive"

Participant 1

"load shedding"

Participant 10

The next section presents the results of the second category (i.e., Category B) of Theme 3, which highlights the impact that a decrease in retained customers has on the business.

5.2.4.2 Category 3(B): Impact

This category discusses the impact that a decrease in customer retention rates has on the fast-food business represented by the participants.

The majority of participants agree that the inability to retain customers has a massive impact on their business. The majority of participants stated that losing returning customers will lead to a large decrease in revenue and cash flow – which in return leads to a decrease in profits. Some of the participants stated that a decrease in retained customers results in the business being unable to pay their rent and employees' salaries. The minority of participants stated that a decrease in retained customers does not have a large effect on them as they are still small businesses, but they agreed that if they were a larger business, they anticipate that a decrease in returning customers will have a large impact on the profitability of their business.

The research results of Category 3(B) are depicted in Figure 5-7.

Figure 5-7: Category 3(B) research results – Theme 3

Challenges regarding customer retention in the fast-food industry: Impact

Explanation of the category:
This category identified the impact of a decrease in customer retention rates on the fast-food business that the participants represent. It is clearly identified that the majority of participants agree that it has a massive effect on their business as they experience decreased profits. The minority of participants feel that it does not yet have an impact as they are still a small business and do not feel the effect of losing regular customers.

Supporting verbatim quotes:
“if your regular customers don't come back you can actually see a drop in your turnovers”

Participant 1

“we do feel a pinch if it is a particular customer but not on whole, it is the brand is quality we can stick to so yes if you have maybe a dip maybe something if there was a problem maybe with one or two customers we do have that. But generally we do not experience a problem”

Participant 2

“If we don't have returning customers you don't get that money back that they used to spend here”

Participant 3

“impacts on every bit of the store”

Participant 4

“In a big way”

Participant 6

“If we were stabilised business I think the impact would have been more visible”

Participant 7

“sales are lost, which equals to profit lost”

Participant 11

With regards to Categories 3(A) and 3(B), it is evident that the major theme for these two categories relates to:

- Theme 3: Challenges regarding customer retention in the fast-food industry (see Table 5-5).

The next section presents the results of the respective categories pertaining to Theme 4, which highlights the methods used by participants to enhance customer retention in their fast-food businesses.

5.2.5 Theme 4: Customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry

This section relates to customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry and presents the results of the identified categories (see Table 5-5).

5.2.5.1 Category 4(A): Enhancement

This category provides a discussion of some of the methods that are used by the participants in the fast-food business that they represent to improve customer retention rates.

The majority of the participants stated that their main method of improving customer retention is through the provision of excellent quality products and customer service. The participants stated that by ensuring that customers receive good quality and presentable products, customer retention will be improved. Furthermore, the participants also stated that excellent customer service in their businesses assists in improving customer retention, as the customer feels appreciated at the business. The majority of participants stated that they give their customers value-added products through different methods. Some of the methods mentioned included that they give their customers free products such as coffee or ice cream if they are new to the business, if it is their birthday, or when the waiting time for food is longer than expected. The majority of participants also stated that they have loyalty programmes in place whereby customers build up loyalty points, and if they have enough points, they will receive a voucher for a certain amount to spend at the restaurant. Furthermore, the majority of participants stated that they aggressively market their business, and – through different marketing campaigns – they are able to retain more customers. Most of the participants also indicated that by having regular promotions and specials, they are able to retain more customers. The minority of participants said that their ability to retain more customers is due to the fact that they are operational during load shedding. Lastly, a few participants stated that they are involved in the community and thereby building strong relationships with retained and potential customers, promoting loyalty and allowing them to retain more customers. The research results of Category 4(A) are depicted in Figure 5-8.

Figure 5-8: Category 4(A) research results – Theme 4

Customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry: Enhancement

Explanation of the category:
This category discussed the methods that participants use to improve customer retention rates in their businesses. The majority of participants agreed that excellent quality products and services lead to increased customer retention. Furthermore, the majority of participants stated that specials, value-added products, loyalty programs and aggressive marketing lead to increased customer retention. A few participants stated that being involved in community projects and being open during load shedding assists them to retain more customers.

Supporting verbatim quotes:
"we can always offer a free milkshake or we can offer a free ice cream to a new customer"
Participant 1
"make sure the quality is better"
Participant 1
"I think also a big influence is advertising"
Participant 1
"the quality of your product"
Participant 2
"specials is a big thing for me because the shop is still quite new"
Participant 5
"we do specials something that we definitely look at and also what type of specials work in our area for students for example we have a Monday special where the student can where the rest of the town does not get that"
Participant 6
"I have specials on certain days"
Participant 7
"we've also got a loyalty card"
Participant 9
"service and quality of food is what it is all about"
Participant 9
"we are open during load shedding"
Participant 10

The next section focuses on presenting the results of the second category (i.e., Category B) of Theme 4, which highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the customer retention rates in the fast-food businesses that the participants operate in.

5.2.5.2 Category 4(B): COVID-19

This category provides a discussion on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected customer retention rates at the fast-food businesses, how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the customer retention strategies implemented at the fast-food businesses, how the fast-food businesses adjusted their customer retention strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the strategies implemented by the fast-food businesses affected the customer retention rate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of participants mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had a massive (and mostly negative) effect on the customer retention rates in their businesses. Most of the participants stated the main reason customers could not be retained once the COVID-19 restrictions were eased, is that they were timid that the restaurant did not effectively employ safety measures. A few participants stated that they had to cease operations and restructure their business model after the COVID-19 pandemic in order to return to full functionality. Some of the participants declared that they lost a lot of their customers after the pandemic as some customers incurred financial losses and grew accustomed to eating at their homes. The minority of customers stated that they were merely impacted at the beginning of the pandemic when their businesses had to cease operations, but that after the COVID-19 restrictions were alleviated, they were able to retain all of their customers. Some of the participants stated that they had to aberrate from the rules of the restrictions to ensure that they would retain their customers.

The majority of participants stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a massive effect on the strategies that they used for customer retention in their businesses. There is a wide variety of results in this section. Some of the participants mentioned that they had to reduce the number of products on their menus, since they were unable to source the relevant ingredients to prepare those products. Few participants said that they made use of meal delivery apps, as well as requested employees to use their personal vehicles to perform deliveries. Providing a delivery option enabled some fast-food restaurants to retain more customers. Some of the participants stated that they had to adapt their marketing activities from a physical nature to an online setting in order to retain customers. A few participants also said that they had to reduce certain promotions during the pandemic in order to break even financially. Some suggested that they incurred a loss, but were positive that since customers were aware of the dire times, they will continue to support the business.

The majority of participants indicated that they mainly focused on deliveries, specials, and safety protocols when adjusting their strategies to retain more customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, most of the participants stated that they started with delivery services during the pandemic as customers were not able to, or were fearful to visit the business. A few participants mentioned that they had to employ new employees to conduct deliveries and also invested in more delivery vehicles. Some of the participants stated that they implemented a lot of new specials as well as more comfort food (i.e., pasta, roasted meat and vegetables, etc.) on their menu which resulted in an increase in sales. A few participants stated that they made calls or sent an SMS to the customers on their database to inform them about current promotions, as well as to ask them how they are handling the difficult time during the pandemic and the struggles of being at home the entire time. Some of the participants said that they adjusted their safety measures to continuously use personal protection equipment (PPE) in order to keep their customers and employees safe. Some also stated that they regularly sanitised the restaurant.

The majority of participants identified that the strategies that they implemented to retain customers during the COVID-19 pandemic not only helped them to retain customers, but also to attract new customers that became loyal customers. The majority of the participants said that their main focus during the pandemic was to show the customer that they care about them to ensure that all the customers return after the pandemic. The research results of Category 4(B) are depicted in Figure 5-9.

Figure 5-9: Category 4(B) research results – Theme 4

Customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry: COVID-19

Explanation of the category:
This category identified the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on fast-food businesses, retention strategies implemented by participants during the pandemic, how customer retention strategies were adjusted during the pandemic as well as how implemented strategies affected the customer retention rates during the pandemic.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"Massive, it was massive"

Participant 1

"to be closed for a long time is a big big problem"

Participant 1

"very difficult"

Participant 3

"we closed down just after COVID-19 on our previous premises that we were and then we redesigned the whole business and the whole concept and we opened again"

Participant 6

"the financial impact is huge "

Participant 7

"we couldn't do business as usual "

Participant 13

"value options was very very important"

Participant 1

"regulation did not impact that much"

Participant 3

"deliveries was quite big to make sure that if they don't come into the shop and obviously you only had to be 50% in the shop but then you can do deliveries to make sure you retain them"

Participant 5

"we did deliveries"

Participant 8

"by doing deliveries on our own"

Participant 10

"Those strategies helped to keep us afloat during that difficult time"

Participant 11

Pertaining to Categories 4(A) and 4(B), it is evident that the major theme for these two categories relates to:

- Theme 4: Customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry (see Table 5-5).

5.3 SUMMARY

Table 5-6 provides a summary of the categories and themes that were identified, as well as the main findings pertaining to each theme.

Table 5-6: Summary of empirical results

Theme 1: Perception of customer retention in the fast-food industry			
Categories	1(A) Interpretation	1(B) Importance	
Main finding 5.1	According to the responses of the participants, it has been identified that the managers view customer retention as very important. Managers interpret customer retention as providing good quality products and services, leading to customers being satisfied and increasing the loyalty that the customer has towards the business. Participants see customer retention as an important element to ensure growth in their business. Furthermore, the participants stated that it is important for customers to remain loyal to their business and not move to competitors, as well as spreading a positive image of the business to other potential customers.		
Theme 2: Awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry			
Categories	2(A)	2(B)	2(C)
Main finding 5.2	The majority of participants make use of software databases to track returning customers at their businesses. Few participants do not track returning customers at all, but rather try to build personal relationships with customers. Furthermore, participants stated that returning customers spend more money compared to new customers. It was identified that the majority of participants have daily meetings with their employees to highlight the importance of customer retention to them, as well as evaluate their employees by means of various evaluation methods.		
Theme 3: Challenges regarding customer retention in the fast-food industry			
Categories	3(A)	3(B)	
Main finding 5.3	It was clearly identified that the main challenges faced by participants were a combination of product and service quality issues. It was also identified that customers do not have the financial capacity to spend money at fast-food restaurants. The majority of participants mentioned that a decrease in customer retention results in a decrease in profits at the fast-food restaurants. Furthermore, few participants mentioned that a decrease in returning customers had no impact on their business.		
Theme 4: Customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry			
Categories	4(A)	4(B)	
Main finding 5.4	Firstly, participants stated that they focus on enhancing their product and service quality to retain more customers. Furthermore, participants stated that they make use of value-added products, aggressive marketing, and also loyalty programmes to retain more customers. It was clearly identified that the COVID-19 pandemic had a massive effect on the businesses as well as the strategies that they implemented to retain customers. The majority of participants used new strategies to retain more customers during the pandemic, such as making use of delivery systems. These strategies not only assisted in the retention of customers but also attracted new customers to the business.		

This chapter presented the empirical results that were obtained by interviewing multiple managers of fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa. The methods used to obtain the results include the Morse and Field approach as well as the utilisation of the ATLAS.ti (version 22) software to analyse the data. The chapter commenced with an introduction of what the chapter will discuss (Section 5.1), followed by the research results obtained from the study (Section 5.2), and concluded with a summary of the findings of the research results (Section 5.3). Chapter 6 presents the conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study and provides guidelines for future research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to address the research objectives that have been formulated for this study. The chapter commences with a brief overview of the study, followed by conclusions and recommendations for each of the objectives of the study. The chapter then discusses the link between the literature review and the empirical results. Finally, the chapter describes the limitations of the study and provides suggestions for future research.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Competition is fierce in the fast-food industry and it is important to devise effective customer retention strategies in order to gain a competitive advantage in the industry (Ascarza *et al.*, 2018:67). This study aimed at closing the knowledge gap with regard to customer retention strategies that managers of fast-food restaurants implement in the North West province of South Africa while considering the COVID-19 pandemic that the world faced.

Considering the above, the results (Chapter 5), implications and the recommendations proffered, this study could potentially be useful to managers in fast-food restaurants by enhancing their understanding of customer retention and enabling them to devise strategies to retain customers.

Hence, the primary objective of this study (see Section 1.8.1) was to explore the strategies that managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa. By doing so, the researcher gained valuable insights pertaining to participants' (managers) perception of customer retention, their awareness of the concept, the different challenges they face, and the strategies that they implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry.

In support of addressing the primary objective, the following secondary objectives (see Section 1.8.2) were formulated for this study:

- To provide an overview of the main constructs of this study, namely the fast-food industry, management, and customer retention.
- To conceptualise the current generic strategies that managers implement in the fast-food industry to retain customers.

- To explore managers' view of customer retention in the fast-food industry.
- To determine managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry.
- To identify challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers.
- To identify strategies that managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry.

The aim of Chapter 2 was to provide a literature review pertaining to management in the fast-food industry to ultimately understand what it entails. The reviewed literature from this chapter highlighted the history of business management to provide an overview of what management is. This was followed by a discussion of business management in the context of this study. Next the different levels of management were discussed, followed by the four managerial functions that are used in a day-to-day business. In Chapter 2 the different business functions have also conversed to outline what activities managers in a fast-food restaurant oversee. Subsequently, a discussion followed pertaining to the three roles that managers of a business should fulfil. Chapter 2 ended with a discussion on the business environments, as managers of a business should understand the different environments to ensure that objectives are met.

Chapter 3 of the study focused on customer retention. The chapter commenced with a discussion of the importance of customers to a business and was followed by considering the different business model strategies that should be utilised to retain more customers in a business. Next, an overview of customer retention was discussed which was followed by the building blocks of customer retention, which include customer satisfaction, customer trust and customer loyalty. Lastly, customer retention was deliberated on in more detail. The importance of customer retention, the drivers of customer retention, and customer retention in the fast-food industry were individually discussed to conclude Chapter 3. The key concepts of each literature chapter are presented in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1: Key aspects of each literature chapter

Key aspects		Reference(s)
Chapter 2: Management in the fast-food industry	The term 'business management' was discussed to provide an understanding of what business management entails.	Section 2.2
	The historical developments of business management were discussed, including the pre-scientific era, classical era, behavioural era, modern era and emerging era.	Section 2.3; Figure 2-2
	Business management within the context of the study was extrapolated.	Section 2.4; Figure 2-3
	The different levels of management were debated, including lower-level management, middle-level management, as well as top-level management.	Section 2.5
	The managerial functions in a business were discussed, which include planning, organising, leading and controlling.	Section 2.6
	The eight different business functions that form part of any business were addressed, which include marketing management, financial management, public relations management, operations management, human resource management, administrative management, logistics management, and information technology management.	Section 2.7; Figure 2-4
	The three different roles of managers were defined and discussed, including the informational role, interpersonal role, and the decisional role.	Section 2.8; Figure 2-5
	The three business environments were defined and discussed, which include the micro-environment, market environment and macro-environment.	Section 2.9; Figure 2-6, 2-7, 2-8
Chapter 3: Customer retention	The importance of customers was explained by defining a customer and discussing the various types of customers including buyers, consumers, relative non-consumers and prospective consumers.	Section 3.2
	The four different business model strategies were discussed that include cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus and focus differentiation strategy.	Section 3.3
	An overview of customer retention was provided followed by the three pillars of customer retention which include customer satisfaction, customer trust and customer loyalty.	Sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7; Figure 3-2, 3-3, 3-4, 3-5
	Customer retention was defined followed by a discussion on the three focal points of customer retention including the importance of customer retention, the drivers of customer retention and customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Section 3.8; Figure 3-6, 3-7,

Chapter 4 presented the research methodology of this study and discussed how the business research process was applied to this study. An exploratory research design was used and primary data was collected by means of a qualitative research approach. Moreover, the primary data was collected by conducting individual interviews with 13 participants, which included managers of the fast-food industry who were selected via convenience and judgement non-probability sampling.

Chapter 5 presented the results obtained from the primary data analysis. The Morse and Field approach was used to analyse the gathered data. Furthermore, the ATLAS.ti (version 22) was used to code the data. The results discovered in each of the categories as well as the findings emanating from the identified themes were discussed in detail.

6.3 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the literature review (Chapters 1 to 3) and the empirical results (Chapter 5) are presented in relation to the secondary objectives of this study. Before each of the research objectives are addressed, a summary of the links between the research objectives, the literature review, and the empirical study is provided in Table 6-2.

Table 6-2: Summary of the links between the research objectives, literature review and the empirical study

Research objectives	Literature review	Empirical study
Primary objective		
To explore the strategies that managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Chapters 2 & 3	Interview questions: B1-4; C1-4; D1-3; E1-4
Secondary objectives		
1) To provide an overview of the main constructs of this study, namely the fast-food industry, management, and customer retention.	Chapters 2 & 3	
2) To conceptualise the current generic strategies that managers implement in the fast-food industry to retain customers.	Chapters 2 & 3	Interview question: B1
3) To explore managers' view of customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Chapter 3	Interview questions: B2; B3; C2
4) To determine managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry.	Chapters 2 & 3	Interview questions: C1; C3; C4; D2
5) To identify challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers.	Chapters 2 & 3	Interview questions: D1; D3
6) To identify strategies that managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry.	Chapters 2 & 3	Interview questions: B4; E1-E4

The following section will provide the conclusions and recommendations with regard to each of the secondary objectives based on the empirical research results presented in Chapter 5, as well as the literature review presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

6.3.1 Secondary objective 1

Secondary objective 1 was to provide an overview of the main constructs of this study, namely the fast-food industry, management and customer retention. Table 6-3 presents findings from the literature, conclusions and recommendations concerning Secondary objective 1.

Table 6-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1
The fast-food industry is seen as a well-established economy that generated a revenue of \$875,26 billion in 2019 with an average annual growth of \$20,36 billion between 2011 and 2019 (Statista, 2020). It is predicted that the fast-food industry in South Africa will grow from \$2,7 billion in 2018 to \$4,9 billion in 2026 (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). Competition in the fast-food industry is fierce and retention of customers is seen as the main aspect needed to achieve success within the industry (Ascarza *et al.*, 2018:67). The fast-food industry has changed extensively throughout the years and to stay competitive within the industry the trend moved towards online food ordering and delivery (Ghosh, 2020:646).
Management is viewed as a power and control mechanism that consists of four functions, namely planning, organising, leading and controlling, and it is important to combine these four functions to ensure the efficient use of resources in a business (Blok, 2020:176; Mukwakungu *et al.*, 2019a). Furthermore, there are three important levels of management in a business, each with its own activities in the business. These levels include lower-level management, middle-level management, and top-level management (Tappura *et al.*, 2017:1148) (see Section 2.5). There are eight different business functions that the management of a business should manage to ensure the successful execution of business goals, and these eight functions include marketing management, financial management, public relations management, operations management, human resources management, administrative management, logistics management, and information technology management (De Lange, 2017:42) (see Section 2.7). Finally, the management of any business should conduct a thorough analysis of the three business environments which include the micro-environment, market environment and macro-environment to ensure that all operations of the business run smoothly (Lawrence, 2020:48) (see Section 2.9).

Table 6-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1
Customer retention refers to the decision of an existing customer to return to a business and continue making use of its products and/or services. Customer retention is seen as one of the key elements for a business to be sustainable (Nitzan & Libai, 2011:25). According to Parawansa (2018:54), customer retention will be achieved when customers have a positive relationship with a business. Customer retention is the long-term commitment of a customer to purchase from the same business repeatedly, and it is accomplished by following a process to gain the customer's loyalty (Cambra-Fierro *et al.*, 2021:3; Darzi & Bhat, 2018:665; Hanaysha, 2018:4). Firstly, it is important for a business to understand what a customer is, and it is defined by Sharma *et al.* (2021:1696) as an individual who exchanges money for products or services, resulting in increased revenue for a business. Customers can be divided into four subcategories including buyers, consumers, relative non-consumers, and prospective consumers (Florea & Duica, 2017:48) (see Section 3.2). In order for the business to have customers, the management team must ensure that the consumers' demands are addressed, which will result in customer satisfaction leading to customer retention (Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020:1). There are four business model strategies that should be considered in any business which will lead to increased customer retention rates if incorporated efficiently, including cost-leadership, differentiation, cost focus, and focused differentiation strategies (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8) (see Section 3.3). To build customer retention, there are three building blocks that should be considered, including customer satisfaction, customer trust, and customer loyalty (Islam *et al.*, 2021:126). Customer satisfaction refers to how well the needs of customers are met, and whether or not they had a favourable experience with the business, product, or service. It is seen as the main factor leading to customer retention as satisfied customers will build trust in the business resulting in customers becoming loyal to the business and finally leading to returning customers (Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020:2; Nashwan & Hassan, 2017:101). Customer trust refers to the feelings that customers have towards a business and is built by the reputation, performance, claims and expectations of the business (Leninkumar, 2017:451; Marakanon & Panjakajornsak, 2017:25) (see Section 3.6). The final building block of customer retention, customer loyalty, refers to customers that will continue using the same business for their purchases and consist of two types of loyalty, including attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty (Leninkumar, 2017:451; Sitanggang *et al.*, 2019:29) (see Section 3.7). Customer retention is crucial in a business, and effective retention strategies should be devised to ensure more customers return to the business as this will lead to an increase in the business’s profitability and sustainability (Almohaimmeed, 2019:426).

6.3.2 Secondary objective 2

The aim of Secondary objective 2 is to conceptualise the current generic strategies that managers implement in the fast-food industry to retain customers. Table 6-4 presents the conclusions and recommendations of Secondary objective 2.

Table 6-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2

Literature findings: Secondary objective 2
There are four business model strategies that need to be considered in a business to enhance customer retention, and are known as Porter's generic strategies. These strategies include cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus, and focused differentiation (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8). The cost leadership strategy is used by businesses to maximise their performance by producing goods at the lowest possible cost, and businesses that employ this strategy has an edge in the market as they can sell goods at market price or below market price and still turn a profit (Gure & Karugu, 2018:9; Omsa *et al.*, 2017:10). With the differentiation strategy, businesses focus on developing different products or services that are offered by other businesses and are seen as unique by customers (Firoz Suleman *et al.*, 2019:168). Successful adoption of this strategy will allow businesses to have an advantage over competitors, as innovation will allow the business to attract and retain more customers by offering a unique product or service that competitors do not offer (Gure & Karugu, 2018:9). The cost focus strategy is linked to the cost leadership strategy, and with this strategy, the business serves a limited buyer segment at lower rates than that of competitors (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8). The final strategy, known as the focused differentiation strategy is linked to the differentiation strategy, in which businesses offer unique products or services to a specific buyer segment that are of higher value than products or services offered by competitors (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8). These four strategies are used in any fast-food business to retain more customers if implemented effectively. Furthermore, it is important that managers communicate the importance of these strategies to their employees in order to retain more customers effectively.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 2
Conclusion 2.1: As evident from the results of Category 1(A), participants mentioned that they differentiated their products or services from those of competitors to retain customers.

Table 6-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2 (continued)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 2
Recommendations 2.1: Managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that their products or services are different, unique, or add more value in comparison to competitors' offerings. Managers can do so by offering specials on products to their customers and training employees to communicate the specials to customers before they order their meals. Furthermore, managers can offer coupons to customers that spend more than a certain amount of money at their business. This will improve the chances of the customers returning to the business to exchange their coupon for a product. Managers can also implement a loyalty programme from which a customer can earn rewards (e.g., vouchers, discounts, free meals every *n*th visit, etc.) that will incentivise them to visit the restaurant again.

6.3.3 Secondary objective 3

The third secondary objective is focused on exploring managers' views of customer retention in the fast-food industry. Table 6-5 presents the conclusions and recommendations of Secondary objective 3.

Table 6-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3

Literature findings: Secondary objective 3
Customer retention is important in the fast-food industry, as there is intense rivalry amongst competitors in the industry (Yu *et al.*, 2021:3). Managing customer retention in a fast-food business is essential, as it will provide the business with a competitive edge in the industry resulting in higher profits and ultimately a successful business (Othman *et al.*, 2021:11).
Data pertaining to managers' views of customer retention in the fast-food industry was collected by means of interviews with participants (managers of fast-food restaurants). Secondary objective 3 was addressed in main findings 5.2.2.2 & 5.2.3.2. Conclusions and recommendations pertaining to managers' views on customer retention are provided below.

Table 6-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3 (continued)

Conclusions: Secondary objective 3
Conclusion 3.1: The majority of participants regard customer retention as an important factor in their business, as it relates to the way in which they expand their business. Furthermore, some participants stated that they need to keep their customers happy in order for them to not move to competitors. **Conclusion 3.2:** Some participants stated that it is important to keep customers satisfied as it results in positive word-of-mouth marketing, leading to an increase in new and returning customers. **Conclusion 3.3:** A few participants stated that loyal customers will continue purchasing from the business during difficult times and also make more purchases. **Conclusion 3.4:** The majority of participants hold the view that returning customers that are loyal to the business are more important for revenue compared to new customers.
Recommendations: Secondary objective 3
Recommendation 3.1: Managers of fast-food restaurants should primarily focus on customer retention within the lower levels of management (such as floor managers), as they are responsible for the most interaction with customers and ensuring that they are satisfied. By adopting a focus on customer retention as a main element of success, fast-food restaurants could experience increased profits and sustainability. **Recommendation 3.2:** Managers of fast-food restaurants should strive to keep their customers satisfied in order to establish a positive image of the business. Any negative experiences should be dealt with as soon as possible to prevent negativity about the business to spread. **Recommendation 3.3:** Managers of fast-food restaurants should invest time and capital into building the loyalty of their customers. This can be done by understanding the current attitude of the customers towards the business and focusing on building their trust and satisfaction in the business. It is important that the fast-food restaurant has friendly and competent staff, as this will lead to an emotional bond that will be established between the customer and the business.

6.3.4 Secondary objective 4

Secondary objective 4 is to determine managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry. Table 6-6 presents the conclusions and recommendations of Secondary objective 4.

Table 6-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4

Literature findings: Secondary objective 4
Customer retention, as explained in Section 3.8.1, is an important element to consider when managing a business. Understanding customer retention is important for a business's profitability and sustainability (Almohaimmeed, 2019:426). Therefore, in understanding customer retention, managers are able to devise strategies so that the business's profitability and sustainability can be improved (Ascarza *et al.*, 2018:7). In a study conducted by Nwokah and Ngirika (2017:179), it was found that increasing customer retention rates by 5% can lead to an increase of a business's profitability by nearly 100%.
Data pertaining to managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry was collected by means of interviews with participants. Secondary objective 4 was addressed in findings 5.2.3.1, 5.2.3.3 & 5.2.4.2. Conclusions and recommendations pertaining to managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry are provided below.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 4
Conclusion 4.1: The majority of participants identified the above-average quality of products and services as key elements in the retention of customers at the fast-food restaurants they manage. **Conclusion 4.2:** The majority of participants make use of database systems which include loyalty cards, application (App) orders, phone orders and online orders to keep track of the customers, how much money they spend, and the frequency of their orders from the business. Few participants stated that they do not track the retention rates but rather build strong relationships with their customers to promote retention. **Conclusion 4.3:** Few participants stated that they are still small businesses and customer retention does not have a significant effect on their business.

Table 6-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4 (continued)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 4
Recommendation 4.1: Managers of fast-food businesses should invest a large amount of time, capital and effort in the quality of the products that they offer their customers. By providing products that are freshly prepared with high-quality ingredients, customers will experience a higher level of satisfaction, which will lead to an increase in retention.
Recommendation 4.2: Managers should ensure that the employees of the business are well-trained and well-presented to provide professional service to the customers. Furthermore, it is important to also build personal relationships with regular customers, and this should be done through competent staff members. As the fast-food industry experiences fierce competition, it is important that managers of fast-food restaurants ensure that customers receive superior services in comparison to competitors' services.
Recommendation 4.3: Managers of fast-food businesses should invest capital in tracking systems to establish how often their customers make purchases. This can be done by offering customers a loyalty programme with a loyalty card or through their mobile numbers, and offering incentives for signing up such as discount coupons.
Recommendation 4.4: The managers of fast-food businesses should focus on customer retention even though they are small businesses. This is important because as they grow, they will have a large customer base that will trust them and be loyal to them.

6.3.5 Secondary objective 5

Secondary objective 5 is to identify challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers. Table 6-7 presents the conclusions and recommendations of Secondary objective 5.

Table 6-7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5

Literature findings: Secondary objective 5
Challenges that arise in businesses need innovative solutions, and the higher the positions that a manager is in, the more abilities they require to solve these challenges (Shum *et al.*, 2018:59). By considering the different roles that managers have, it is important to advise the managers of fast-food restaurants in the decisional role when challenges arise. A manager has a decisional role in the business where they are seen as an entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator (Dunn, 2021:11).

Table 6 7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 5
When challenges arise, managers need to act as disturbance handlers. In this role, it is important that managers take corrective action when unexpected challenges arise (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), and they should ensure that the business environment remains calm in these instances (Altamony & Gharaibeh, 2017:921).
Data pertaining to the challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers was collected by means of interviews with participants. Secondary objective 5 was addressed in Finding 5.2.4.1. Conclusions and recommendations pertaining to challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers are provided below.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 5
Conclusion 5.1: The majority of participants stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on customer retention rates, and that they lost a lot of their customers as they were timid that the restaurant did not implement the safety measures effectively. **Conclusion 5.2:** From a financial perspective, the majority of participants stated that customers do not have the financial capacity to spend money at their businesses. **Conclusion 5.3:** Other challenges include not having the kitchen capacity for a wide variety of meals to be prepared, fierce competition in the industry, and the electricity crisis the country is facing.
Recommendations: Secondary objective 5
Recommendation 5.1: Managers of fast-food restaurants should continuously employ safety measures and also market their business according to that, not only when problems arise. This includes sanitising surfaces every few hours, and deep-cleaning the store after every shift. While employing these safety protocols, managers could take pictures and post them on social media as a marketing method to make customers realise that health and safety are of utmost importance to the business. **Recommendation 5.2**: Managers of fast-food restaurants should invest more time and capital into market research to identify products that customers will purchase that cost less to produce, but are still of high quality. Furthermore, managers should identify value meal options where more products are offered at a discounted price. Managers of fast-food restaurants can make use of specials for every day of the week. By doing this they will attract and retain more customers, as they will perceive the value-to-price-ratio as superior within the industry.

Table 6 7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5 (continued)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 5
Recommendation 5.3: Not having a large kitchen capacity can be curbed by offering customers different products on a weekly basis for a certain period of time. By doing so, managers can identify the products that are sold the most and build a menu consisting of the most popular items. This will also reduce the inventory levels of the restaurant which will reduce costs.
Recommendation 5.4: Fierce competition in the industry can be dealt with by implementing a cost focus strategy where managers should identify specific segments of customers and offer them special prices on the product. A prime example is offering pensioners a discounted price every day of the week. Managers can also implement a focused differentiation strategy, where a specific market segment is targeted and provided with unique dishes that are only valid for a limited time. By consistently implementing such a strategy, a fast-food restaurant could charge a higher premium for the unique/differentiated products, which will serve as their competitive advantage.
Recommendation 5.5: To overcome the electricity crises that the country is facing, fast-food restaurants should invest capital in a generator or solar power. The restaurant should be marketed aggressively by concentrating on the fact that they do not have any power outages.

6.3.6 Secondary objective 6

The sixth secondary objective is to identify strategies that managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry. Table 6-8 presents the conclusions and recommendations of secondary objective 6.

Table 6-8: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 6

Literature findings: Secondary objective 6
It is important to develop unique strategies when working on customer retention in the fast-food industry. Customer retention strategies can be derived from the different business model strategies (see Section 3.3) and incorporate elements from customer satisfaction (see Section 3.5), customer trust (see Section 3.6), and customer loyalty (see Section 3.7). The three business model strategies include cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus, and focused differentiation (Hales & Mclarney, 2017:8). All the different strategies should be paired up with the elements of customer satisfaction, customer trust and customer loyalty in order to develop unique customer retention strategies within the fast-food industry.

Table 6 8: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 6 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 6
Data pertaining to the strategies that managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry was collected by means of interviews with participants. Secondary objective 6 was addressed in Findings 5.2.5.1 & 5.2.5.2. Conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the strategies that managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry are provided below.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 6
Conclusion 6.1: The majority of participants have daily meetings with their employees to communicate the importance of good quality products and services to ensure that customers are retained. Most of the participants feel it is important to train employees on customer service in order for customers to be retained. **Conclusion 6.2:** The majority of employees focus on the mantra 'the customer is always right' when training their employees. **Conclusion 6.3:** Employees are evaluated through mystery shoppers and direct evaluations by head office. **Conclusion 6.4:** Participants make use of database systems to track the frequency with which customers visit restaurants and how much they spend. **Conclusion 6.5:** The majority of participants focus on good quality products and services, as well as value-added products, aggressive marketing, loyalty programmes, and being open during load-shedding to retain more customers. **Conclusion 6.6:** A few participants stated that they form part of community projects to show the customers that they care. **Conclusion 6.7:** The majority of participants stated that they made use of delivery systems, special offerings and safety protocols during the pandemic to retain more customers. **Conclusion 6.8:** The majority of participants stated that they simply gave their customers emotional support by calling them or sending out SMSs to ask their customers if they are coping with the pandemic.

Table 6 8: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 6 (continued)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 6
Recommendation 6.1: Managers of fast-food restaurants should set up intensive training schools for employees to assist them in providing the best customer service and products to customers. Employees should be continuously evaluated for the quality of their service and should be able to identify products that do not meet the standards of the restaurant. This will ensure that customer complaints are minimised, since fierce competition in the industry presents customers with a variety of options to choose from if they are not satisfied with the customer service. **Recommendation 6.2:** The managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that the employees understand the mantra of 'the customer is always right'. Intensive training will allow the employees to understand the importance of this mantra, and managers should frequently send in mystery shoppers to identify employees that do not follow this mantra. Employees who do not follow this mantra should face disciplinary action and be requested to attend further training. **Recommendation 6.3:** Managers of fast-food restaurants should monitor customer spending. This could be implemented through a differentiation strategy. Each customer that visits the store should be tracked, and an easy way of doing this is by providing them with loyalty cards and giving them a value-added product immediately as compensation for forming part of the loyalty programme. For example, the restaurant can offer the customer a loyalty card with a R50 voucher pre-loaded and give them a 5% discount on each future sale. **Recommendation 6.4:** When forming part of community projects, managers of fast-food restaurants should market their businesses according to the community projects they were involved with. This will inform customers that they are not only in business for financial gain but also to contribute to the community. This could lead to the establishment of an emotional connection with the customers, which will promote retention. **Recommendation 6.5:** As customers have become used to being at home during the pandemic, food delivery services have become imperative. Managers of fast-food restaurants should ensure that they offer customers meal delivery. Fast-food restaurants could establish their own delivery services, since third-party delivery services are more expensive and the financial capacity of consumers (as seen in Conclusion 5.3) is limited.

Table 6 8: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 6 (continued)

Recommendation 6.6: The managers of fast-food restaurants need to employ strategies that differentiate them from their competitors in order to retain more customers. Firstly, managers should stay in contact with their customers by regularly informing them about the business's operating times and special or limited-time offers. They can keep customers informed through social media sites, websites and mobile marketing. By keeping in contact with customers, an emotional bond will form between the customer and the fast-food restaurants, which will promote customer retention.

6.4 LINKING ALL ASPECTS OF THE STUDY: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS, MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 6-9 provides a summary of the links of all the aspects of the study, including the secondary objectives, questions, main findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Table 6-9: Links between research objectives, questions, main findings, conclusions and recommendations

Questions	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Secondary objective 1: To provide an overview of the main constructs of this study, namely the fast-food industry, management, and customer retention.			
Chapters 2 and 3			
Secondary objective 2: To conceptualise the current generic strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry to retain customers.			
Section B: Question 1	5.2.2.1	2.1	2.2
Secondary objective 3: To explore managers' views of customer retention in the fast-food industry.			
Section B: Question 2 & 3 Section C: Question 2	5.2.2.2 and 5.2.3.2	3.1 – 3.4	3.1 – 3.3
Secondary objective 4: To determine managers' awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry.			
Section C: Question 1, 3 & 4 Section D: Question 2	5.2.3.1; 5.2.3.3 and 5.2.4.2	4.1 – 4.3	4.1 – 4.4
Secondary objective 5: To identify challenges experienced by managers in the fast-food industry to retain customers.			
Section D: Question 1 & 3	5.2.4.1	5.1 – 5.3	5.1 – 5.5
Secondary objective 6: To identify strategies managers implement to retain customers in the fast-food industry.			
Section B: Question 4 Section E: Questions 1-4	5.2.5.1 and 5.2.5.2	6.1 – 6.8	6.1 – 6.6

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Burns and Veeck (2020:489-490) mention that no research is without limitations and that each study is affected by certain theoretical as well as empirical limitations. Therefore, although this study was planned and executed in an efficient manner with the guidance of the business research process, a few limitations were evident in the study. Thus, this section provides the theoretical and empirical limitations of this study.

6.5.1 Theoretical limitations:

- Limited research was available on customer retention strategies implemented in the fast-food industry in South Africa. With this in mind, the researcher consulted and used a variety of literature sources from international studies on customer retention strategies.
- To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study was conducted on customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa. As a result, international literature was used for the theoretical underpinning of customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry.
- Since customer retention is widely regarded as a marketing concept – and this study was conducted from a managerial perspective – literature was sought from several business-related fields.
- Since this study also investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic affected customer retention during the time of the pandemic, limited literature pertaining to the pandemic existed, and resulted in most of the sources being used as pre-COVID sources.

6.5.2 Empirical limitations:

- Considering POPIA (2013), no sampling frame could be used in this study to identify managers of fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa. This also resulted in the use of convenience and judgment sampling methods, which allowed for bias in the selection of participants.
- This study was only conducted in the North West province of South Africa, which means that the conclusions and recommendations proposed by this study might not be applicable to other provinces as it is not representative of the entire country, and cannot be generalised.
- Given the qualitative nature of this study, the sample consisted of a small number of participants.
- The qualitative approach also resulted in some jargon being used by managers. This is also evident from the verbatim quotes posited in Chapter 5.

- The qualitative approach of this study also meant that the results were subjectively interpreted by the researcher. This is further evident in the main findings, conclusions and recommendations posited in this chapter.
- Cost constraints prevented this study from conducting follow-up interviews with participants to gain further insight into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cost constraints also led to a smaller sample size being used.
- Time constraints prohibited the use of probing questions to gain more insight from managers on their responses. Since all the participants were also managers at fast-food restaurants, they had limited time to be interviewed. This had the effect that the interview guide needed to be within a certain time limit.

6.6 Future research suggestions

The following suggestions have been identified for future research studies:

- A larger sample size could be used in the future to provide a more accurate representation of the target population.
- Future studies can focus on a larger geographical area, as this study only focused on managers of fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa.
- Future research can be conducted with employees of fast-food restaurants rather than managers in order to understand their views on customer retention.
- Prospective studies can investigate customer retention strategies after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Future studies can also develop a quantitative questionnaire to assess customer retention within the fast-food industry on a larger sample.
- Customer retention strategies used within other industries can also be investigated and compared to the results of this study.
- Future studies can also focus on comparing the customer retention strategies used in different countries.

6.7 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The contribution of the study is explained and divided into theoretical contributions and practical contributions.

6.7.1 Theoretical contributions

The study contributes towards existing literature in the business management field by providing information on theoretical aspects, including management, the fast-food industry, and customer retention strategies. The interview guide that was developed and used in this study can be applied and refined in future studies on customer retention. To the researcher's best knowledge, this was the first study to explore customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry in the North West province of South Africa considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the categorical and thematic analysis of the empirical findings, the four themes and nine subcategories identified extends existing knowledge on customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry.

6.7.2 Practical contributions

The results, conclusions and recommendations that were made during this study can be used by managers of fast-food restaurants to enhance customer retention within their businesses in order to enhance their profitability as well as sustainability within the fast-food industry. The study identified that managers of fast-food restaurants need to enhance their product and service quality, which will result in more retained customers. It is prevalent throughout the study that managers of fast-food restaurants could consider implementing a differentiation strategy where they focus on providing a unique product or service. For instance, fast-food restaurants can provide a unique product by acquiring high-quality ingredients from dependable suppliers. In the same vein, managers can provide intensive training to employees to provide a unique service. Furthermore, this study identified that managers could focus on establishing loyalty programmes for their customers, as this will monitor customer retention rates. Lastly, it was identified that fast-food restaurants should focus on alternative power supply options, as the electricity crisis in South Africa is leading to a decrease in customer retention in fast-food restaurants where there are no backup power utilities.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter commenced with an overview of the study, followed by addressing each of the secondary objectives through conclusions and recommendations. This was followed by limitations and future research suggestions. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the contribution that this study has offered. From the literature and empirical findings, it was evident that customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry were considered a key element contributing towards the success of fast-food restaurants. By ensuring customers are retained, managers will realise an increase in the profitability and sustainability of the fast-food restaurant that they manage. Through the theoretical and practical results that were obtained in this study, it is clear that the management of customer retention strategies will enhance the profitability and sustainability of fast-food restaurants in the North West province of South Africa, hence, the primary objective of the study was achieved.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

To guide the discussions, the researcher will use an interview guide that includes a variety of open-ended questions. The following sections will be included in the interview guide, which will be harmonised to ensure a uniform flow.

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

Thank the participant for his/her time and describe the topic for the study. This study aims to explore the strategies that managers of fast-food restaurants implement to enhance the retention of customers. The interview will commence by determining your view on customer retention as well as your awareness of customer retention in the industry, then we will discuss challenges that you face with retaining customers at your restaurant, strategies that you implement to enhance customer retention, and lastly, you will be given the opportunity to make any last comments on customer retention in the fast-food industry.

We are going to commence the interview with two screening questions to assure that you qualify to partake in the study.

SQ1: Please confirm that you are 18 years or older and that you have read and signed the consent form to take part in the study.

SQ2: Please confirm that you are a manager of a fast-food restaurant.

SECTION B: VIEW ON CUSTOMER RETENTION

This section of the interview guide will focus on the manager's perspectives on customer retention in the fast-food industry. Questions will be asked about how essential retention is to them, as well as how they understand retention and its importance in the fast-food industry.

B1: How do you understand customer retention within the context of your business?

B2: Why do you regard customer retention as an important factor in your business?

B3: What effect do you consider customer retention to have in the fast-food industry?

B4: What effect did the COVID-19 pandemic have on retaining customers in your business?

SECTION C: AWARENESS OF CUSTOMER RETENTION

This section will direct attention to the manager's awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry. Questions will be asked concerning the value of returning customers, how well the manager communicates the value of customer retention to employees, as well as the influence they have experienced regarding the retention of customers at their restaurant.

C1: How do you keep record of customer retention rates in your business?

C2: How important would you regard returning customers to be in comparison with new customers with regards to revenue?

C3: How do you communicate the importance of customer retention to your employees?

C4: How do you evaluate your employees to ensure that they understand the importance of *customer retention*?

SECTION D: CHALLENGES

Section D will focus on the concerns and challenges managers encounter with regard to customer retention. In this section, the researcher will gain a better understanding of the correspondence between the challenges that different fast-food restaurant managers encounter regarding retaining customers.

D1: What are some of the reasons that you have experienced for customers not returning to your business?

D2: How does a decrease in *returning customers* impact your business?

D3: What are the challenges you experience to retain customers in your business?

SECTION E: STRATEGIES

Section E will explore strategies and tactics that managers use to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry. This section of the interviewer's guide is important, as it allows the researcher to gain a better understanding from managers of various fast-food restaurants to compare different strategies implemented to enhance customer retention.

E1: What strategies do you implement to enhance customer retention to gain a competitive advantage in your business?

E2: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the strategies you implement in your business to retain customers?

E3: How did you adjust your strategies to retain more customers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

E4: What impact did the strategies that you implemented have on the number of customers retained during COVID-19 pandemic?

SECTION F: CLOSURE

The participants will be thanked for their time and effort to conduct the interview. Lastly, they will be asked for any closing remarks or questions to contribute to the objectives of the study.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Please follow the link below to gain access to the complete transcripts of the interviews:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cj8oX6mEM_nNio-KdNM0YiIH0XOl0wz0?usp=sharing

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INVITATION

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY ®
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

1 September 2022

Dear (NAME OF PARTICIPANT)

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY BASED ON EXPLORING STRATEGIES THAT MANAGERS IMPLEMENT IN THE FAST-FOOD INDUSTRY TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER RETENTION

I am currently conducting a research study in Business Management at the North-West University, with a specific focus on *exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province.* I friendly request your participation in my study by attending an interview that will not take more than 40 minutes of your time.

Research objective:

The primary objective of this study is to explore strategies that managers implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry. In brief, the data gathered will be used to provide effective management techniques to managers in the fast-food industry to improve customer retention. Furthermore, the knowledge gathered from this research will aid managers and fast-food restaurants in making the best resource allocation decisions to improve customer retention and, as a result, increase sales and profitability.

Sample and methodology:

The researcher aims to conduct interviews with managers of fast-food restaurants that are 18 years and older. The interview will be face-to-face, and all COVID-19 related protocols will be adhered to. Each interview will last approximately 40 minutes. Questions will be asked regarding participants' views on customer retention, their awareness of customer retention in the fast-food industry, challenges that they face regarding customer retention, and lastly, strategies that participants implement to enhance customer retention in the fast-food industry.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Complete anonymity of each participant and restaurant they are involved with will be ensured. Prior to the start of the interview, participants will be required to sign a consent form. A code will be assigned to each participant, and upon conclusion of this study, all research participants are invited to obtain results.

Participation:

The interview session will commence on the_________of________at_________. The interview session will take place at the participant's choice of location and all COVID-19 protocols will be followed.

Please confirm attendance for the interview session no later than five working days after receiving this invitation to indicate your willingness to participate in the study. You will be automatically removed from the study if you do not confirm or decline participation in writing within this deadline.

A confidentiality agreement will be emailed to you once your participation in the study has been confirmed, and it must be completed and returned before the date of the interview session.

You are thanked in advance for your time and effort to take part in this research study. Your input will be highly appreciated.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, should you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Mr. R. Martin

Student / Researcher

Email: ruan.martin98@gmail.com

Prof. M.J. Botha

Supervisor

Email: martin.botha@nwu.ac.za

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTAKE IN RESEARCH

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY ®
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

CONSENT TO PARTAKE IN RESEARCH

Exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I agree that the researcher can contact and remind me of the interview date.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit *directly* from participating in this research.
- I agree with my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and assigning a code disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity, the identity of the restaurant I am involved with, or the people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in dissertations, conference presentations, and published papers.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years and will be safely stored on a USB storage device in the office of the study supervisor.

- I understand that only the study supervisor will have access to the USB storage device and that all information on the device will be erased after two years.

- I understand that the external transcription party will not have access to any personal information and will sign a confidentiality agreement form with the researcher and supervisor to ensure anonymity of participants and the restaurant they are involved with.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

……………………….. ………………………..

Research participant Date

I believe that the research participants are providing informed consent to participate in this study.

……………………….. ………………………..

Ruan Martin Date

Researcher

APPENDIX E

CODEBOOK

Please follow the link below to gain access to the codebook:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vKpCO31ysIfPounLrcKykztK3Qxp_gBP?usp=share_link

APPENDIX F

PEER REVIEW CONFIRMATION

Prof Roland Goldberg

Mr Ruan Martin
Master's Student
North-West University
Potchefstroom
South Africa

10 December 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

PEER REVIEW OF RUAN MARTIN'S QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This letter verifies that I, Roland Goldberg, meticulously reviewed the qualitative analysis of the transcribed data of Mr Martin's dissertation entitled "Exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province". Moreover, I reviewed Mr Martin's use of the Morse and Field approach towards analysing qualitative data. Conclusively, this letter confirms that Mr Martin's data has been rigorously analysed and verifies that the themes identified reflect both confirmability and dependability.

Yours faithfully

Prof RH Goldberg

072 906 6237 GOLD33BERG@GMAIL.COM 018 285 2207

APPENDIX G

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za

30 August 2022

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)** on 26/08/2022, the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in North West
Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr MJ Botha – MCom in Business Management
Student: Martin, R (28504372)

N	W	U	-	0	0	6	0	0	-	2	2	-	A	4

Institution Study Number Year Status

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type:
Commencement date: 30/08/2022 **Risk:** **Low**
Expiry date: 30/08/2023
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

-

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
  n the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:

- *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
- *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
- *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
  - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
  - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
  - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
  - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
- *Please note that the ethics approval of this application is subject to the Covid-19 protocols.*

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Rathbone

Digitally signed by Mark Rathbone
DN: cn=Mark Rathbone, o=North-West University, ou=Business management, email=mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za, c=ZA
Date: 2022.09.09 10:34:02 +02'00'

Prof Mark Rathbone
Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

2

APPENDIX H

CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

This certificate declares that the dissertation with the title,

Exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province

by **Ruan Martin,** was edited by:

Ann-Lize Grewar

BA in Language and Literature Studies

BA Hons in Translation Studies

SATI-membership number: 1002647

SATI Accreditation: APSInterp Afr-Eng

Chairperson of SATI North-West Chapter

Professional Editor's Guild membership number BOS008

Language Director at Language Matters PTY(Ltd)

annlizeboshoff@gmail.com / 072 758 5797

Signed on 12/05/2023

Ann-Lize Grewar
Language Practitioner
B.A. Language and Literature Studies
B.A. Hons. Translation Studies

Contact us:
info@languagematters.co.za
www.languagematters.co.za

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Ann-Lize Grewar
Taalpraktisyn
B.A. Taal- en Literatuurstudies
B.A. Hons. Vertaalkunde

Kontak ons:
info@languagematters.co.za
www.languagematters.co.za

Disclaimer: The editor cannot take responsibility for any changes made after the signed date on this certificate. It remains the responsibility of the client to incorporate all reasonable changes and/or comments as suggested by the editor. The editor can only take responsibility for quality work within reasonable request with regards to timeous delivery of the manuscript from the client, i.e., at least five (5) working days for a manuscript length of 80 pages.

Date of receipt: 19/04/2023

Date of delivery: 12/05/2023

APPENDIX I

DECLARATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING

LEON DU PREEZ

TECHNICAL EDITING

Leon du Preez
Lecturer
North-West University
Potchefstroom
2531

15 May 2023

To whom it may concern:

DECLARATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING

This letter verifies that I, Leon du Preez, did the technical editing of Mr R Martin's dissertation entitled: *"Exploring customer retention strategies managers implement in the fast-food industry in the North West province"* for the degree Master of Commerce in Business Management at the North-West University. The document has been edited (formatted) in accordance with the technical requirements of the North-West University as set out in the Manual for Higher Degrees Studies and Referencing Guide (NWU Harvard 2020). Notwithstanding, the editor's revisions are recommendations and as such the implementation thereof remains the responsibility of the author. Therefore, the editor will not be responsible for any changes made after the date of issue.

Sincerely,

Mr Leon du Preez