Determining the fintech readiness of South African banks in promoting financial inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Financial inclusion remains a significant socio-economic challenge in South Africa, particularly among underbanked, underserved and rural communities with limited access to formal financial services. Despite advances in digital banking and financial technologies, many South Africans continue to face barriers related to affordability, accessibility, infrastructure and financial literacy. Financial technology (fintech) has emerged as a potential solution to address these challenges by expanding access to financial services through digital innovation, mobile banking platforms and alternative payment systems. The purpose of this study was to assess the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion. Specifically, the study explored whether banks consider fintech a viable solution for enhancing financial inclusion, assessed the availability of technological infrastructure and organisational readiness, and identified the key challenges affecting fintech implementation within the banking sector. The study adopted an interpretivist research philosophy and a qualitative research method. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five participants occupying senior and strategic positions within major South African banking institutions. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants directly involved in fintech implementation, digital banking and financial inclusion initiatives. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that South African banks increasingly recognise fintech as an important enabler of financial inclusion. Participants indicated that fintech improves accessibility, affordability and convenience through innovations such as mobile banking applications, USSD banking, digital onboarding, cardless transactions and digital payment solutions. The study further found that strategic partnerships between banks and fintech companies play a critical role in accelerating innovation and extending customer reach. While banks generally possess the technological infrastructure required to support fintech adoption, challenges such as legacy banking systems, cybersecurity risks, regulatory complexity, digital skills shortages and customer trust concerns continue to affect implementation. Furthermore, customer education and financial literacy were identified as critical factors influencing fintech adoption, particularly within rural and underserved communities. The study concludes that fintech has significant potential to advance financial inclusion in South Africa. However, sustainable implementation requires continued collaboration among banks, fintech firms, regulators and communities. The study recommends increased investment in digital infrastructure, customer education, cybersecurity, regulatory support and strategic fintech partnerships to enhance fintech readiness and promote inclusive financial growth.

Keywords: Fintech, financial inclusion, digital banking, South African banks, fintech readiness, digital transformation, financial technology, banking innovation.

DECLARATION

I, MM Malete, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation entitled: "Determining the Fintech Readiness of South African Banks in Promoting Financial Inclusion" Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the North-West University, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any degree or examination at any other higher education institution.

I further declare that all sources used or quoted in this study have been acknowledged and referenced appropriately in accordance with the prescribed academic referencing guidelines. This research was conducted in compliance with the ethical requirements of the North-West University, and all participants voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

I understand that plagiarism constitutes a serious academic offence and confirm that this mini-dissertation is free from any form of plagiarism.

MM Malete

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have supervised the mini-dissertation entitled: "Determining the Fintech Readiness of South African Banks in Promoting Financial Inclusion". Submitted by MM Malete in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the North-West University.

To the best of my knowledge, this work is suitable for submission for examination.

Prof Michael Antwi

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As it is written in Jeremiah 29:11: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

This scripture reminded me that God had a purpose for this journey long before it began. I also found strength in Isaiah 40:31: *"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint."*

Whenever I felt exhausted or overwhelmed, this promise renewed my determination to continue. Finally, Philippians 4:13 became my daily encouragement: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

To my beloved late parents, I dedicate this achievement. It was your dream to see me graduate one day, and although you are no longer physically present, your sacrifices, values, love and belief in education continue to guide me. This accomplishment is a testament to the foundation you laid for me, and I hope I have honoured your legacy.

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ABBREVIATION LIST

- ATM's: Automated Teller Machine
- FI: Financial Inclusion
- FICA: Financial Intelligence Centre Act
- FinTech: Financial Technology
- KYC: Know Your Customer
- SA: South Africa
- SARB: South African Reserve Bank
- SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals SMS: Short Message Service
- SMEs: Small and Medium Enterprises
- OIC: Organisation of Islamic Conference POS: Point Of Sale
- P2P: Peer to Peer
- POPIA: Protection of Personal Information Act

DETERMINING THE FINTECH READINESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN BANKS IN PROMOTING FINANCIAL INCLUSION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

Millions of people in South Africa do not have full access to traditional banking. In fact, over 19 million people are underbanked, and more than 1 million small businesses still rely solely on cash. This shows a big problem with financial inclusion in the country. It also presents a significant opportunity for businesses seeking to help these people join the digital economy (Williamson, 2023). Comprehensive financial inclusion refers to a condition in which individuals can access a broad range of high-quality financial services conveniently and affordably. Such inclusion facilitates access to diverse financial products and services, thereby promoting favourable outcomes for individuals, households, businesses of varying scales, and regional economies as a whole (Bruin, 2025). Mungai (2019) notes that ensuring the efficient and secure transfer of domestic remittances can help alleviate poverty in South Africa, particularly in rural communities. The payments segment of the financial services industry is a competitive arena dominated by established banks and retail entities. While banks maintain a larger market share, retailers are increasingly challenging this dominance by removing certain transactional barriers traditionally imposed by banks, such as the requirement to hold a bank account. Kenya is recognised as the most financially inclusive emerging market economy globally, with South Africa ranking fourth worldwide and second within the African continent. M-Pesa, the mobile money service in Kenya, is deeply integrated into the country's economic framework. By 2013, its user base exceeded 18 million, demonstrating the profound social and economic influence of technological innovation. However, the adoption of M-Pesa in South Africa was unsuccessful; despite its launch in 2010, the service was discontinued in July 2016 (Bruin, 2025).

1.1 FINTECH DEFINITION

The word “fintech” is simply a combination of the words “financial” and “technology”. It describes the use of technology to deliver financial services and products to consumers. Fintech is seen as a revolutionary solution to address the uneven distribution, scarcity, and limited access to financial services. Traditional banking remains out of reach for many South Africans. Still, the widespread use of mobile phones has opened new opportunities for countless individuals to access financial services through mobile money platforms (Banna et al. 2022). This has led to a surge in mobile money usage, even surpassing traditional bank transactions. As a result, financial inclusion has significantly expanded, benefiting millions, especially those typically excluded from the banking system, such as low-income individuals, youth, and women (Amadou, 2019). According to Boshoff (2020), while fintech is currently a popular subject, the integration of technology into finance is not a new concept. For instance, ATMs and online/mobile banking have been commonplace in banking for years, representing early forms of fintech. The rise of fintech has introduced fierce competition to South Africa's traditional banking sector, with digital-only banks emerging as significant challengers. These banks, such as Discovery, Bank Zero, and TymeBank, operate exclusively online and through mobile platforms, bypassing the need for physical branches. To enhance accessibility, they often partner with retail outlets for basic banking services and allow customers to use ATMs from other banks. This new breed of banks is reshaping the financial landscape in South Africa (Boshoff, 2020).

The potential of fintech to streamline operations and cut costs in financial services has particularly drawn the interest of lending companies in Sub-Saharan Africa. This region's limited access to banking and low competition in the financial sector make it an ideal environment for fintech innovation. For instance, Wizzit, a company specialising in microloans for unbanked individuals, has teamed up with the World Bank to deliver these loans through mobile phones. Wizzit is a prime example of the numerous businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa benefiting from financial technology (Banna et al. 2022). According to Sant'Anna (2024), fintech has emerged as a promising solution to bridge this gap and drive socioeconomic progress. However, a large portion of the global population, particularly in developing countries, still lacks access to essential financial services such as savings, investments, payments, insurance, and credit. This financial exclusion exacerbates wealth inequality, trapping millions in a cycle of poverty. Without the ability to manage their finances effectively, many low-income families struggle to build wealth and improve their lives.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Despite significant advancements in digital finance, a staggering 1.4 billion people worldwide remain excluded from formal banking systems (World Bank, 2025), hindering their financial well-being. Fintech has emerged as a promising solution to bridge this gap and drive socioeconomic progress. Research suggests that financial inclusion is vital for stimulating economic growth and reducing poverty. Studies have shown that increased access to financial services can improve the lives of low-income individuals and communities by providing resources to invest in their future, manage financial shocks, and participate fully in the economy (Kelikume, June 2020).

Most Africans, primarily employed in the informal economy, have limited access to formal financial services. Experts argue that this financial exclusion is a key factor contributing to poverty and the widening gap between the rich and poor. Transaction accounts serve as a secure means for individuals to store funds and facilitate efficient financial transactions, often representing the initial entry point into the broader spectrum of financial services. The growth of digital financial services has significantly reduced the global population of unbanked adults, with the number declining from 2.5 billion in 2011 to 1.4 billion in 2021. By 2021, approximately 76% of adults worldwide had a transaction account (World Bank, 2025).

Banks from emerging markets, comprising the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), believe that emerging markets are necessary for economic inclusion and stability, as they account for 25% of the world population (1.8 billion) and are experiencing a growing younger population that embraces financial technology. The popularity of mobile money has skyrocketed, even surpassing traditional banking in terms of debt levels. This surge in mobile money usage has significantly expanded financial access for millions of people who were previously excluded from the banking system. This includes those living in poverty, young people, and especially women (Banna et al. 2021). Traditionally, African consumers relied heavily on telecommunications companies, like Safaricom's M-Pesa, for financial services. However, African banks are now recognising the potential of fintech and are entering the market. The rapid growth and innovation in fintech, particularly from Silicon Valley and Europe, is posing a significant challenge to these banks. To remain competitive, they must adapt quickly and adopt new technologies. While many Africans now bank primarily through mobile devices, established banks, such as Barclays, have historically focused on physical branches. This has forced them to question their role in the digital age and seek expertise from those at the forefront of technological change (Amadou, 2019).

The study addresses a gap in the literature by determining the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion and assessing the efficiency and disruptiveness of fintech, particularly in the banking domain. fintech could be the critical stepping stone towards a digital economy for South Africa, and if exploited well (IFWG, 2020), it could prove to be a key to this structural transformation. Currently, the adoption of fintech is ahead in the West and in East Asia, which are seen as the top markets for the technology.

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

- ✓ South Africa is in a position to meet its fintech and digital challenges; this is feasible through proper policies in place (Amadou, 2019).
- ✓ Taking advantage of fintech is crucial for improving financial inclusion, which can reduce poverty, foster economic development, and generate employment opportunities. in South Africa (Bruin, 2025).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

South African traditional banks' approach is currently misaligned with customers' needs as technology evolves; they should develop a framework that enables them to align and be more financially inclusive. While fintech is booming in developed nations, emerging economies like South Africa are struggling to adopt these technologies. This slow adoption threatens the investments financial institutions have made in fintech. To address this challenge, financial institutions need to understand what factors are driving or hindering consumer adoption of fintech in rural areas (Cele, 2023).

Low-income earners in developing countries such as South Africa face difficulties accessing basic banking services (Kelikume, June 2020). In rural areas, traditional banks are not present (Townsend, 2021). Customer segments, comprising both consumers and businesses, may fall outside the traditional reach of financial service providers, resulting in their financial needs not being adequately met by existing financial products and services (IFWG, 2021). In underserved and marginalised communities, the problem is that traditional banks often avoid serving low-income customers. The reasons are that banking systems typically require documentation and incur maintenance fees, making them inaccessible to people with low incomes, especially in Africa, where illiteracy rates are high (Kelikume, June 2020) When customers need access to banks, they have to take a taxi or two to reach a branch, which Dieter Botha, Chief Information Officer of Tyme Bank, refers to as an expensive exercise; hence why many were unbanked (Townsend, 2021). Digital financial inclusion, particularly mobile money services like MPesa, offers a potential solution by expanding access to financial services, which could empower low-income individuals to participate in the informal economy, potentially leading to poverty reduction and improved lives across Africa (Kelikume, June 2020).

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will guide the study:

The primary research question for the study is: how ready are South African banks to use fintech to promote financial inclusion?

Secondary research questions include the following:

1. Do South African banks support/consider the use of fintech as a solution to promote financial inclusion? Particularly for the underbanked, underserved and the underprivileged who reside in rural areas and townships with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to financial services? Do they see fintech as a solution that can address the issue of inequality, poverty and access to financial services?
2. What policies, methods, technological systems and measures are required to introduce and implement fintech technology in South Africa's Agri-Food chains effectively? Are they in place? Do the Banks have modern, scalable IT systems

that position them better to adopt and deploy fintech innovations? Are the banks ready to implement fintech? What are the major challenges militating against the full implementation of fintech by the banks in the country?

3. Do the lower and middle level income earners/customers, the main actors in the South African financial services, have a positive perception about the fintech? Are the target/potential customers of fintech aware of the technology? Are they willing to use fintech? Has training been done in the communities?
4. In what ways (strategies & recommendations) can financial inclusion through fintech be effectively and sustainably promoted in the country?

1.6 AIM OF THE STUDY

This research aims to analyse the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion, and to develop informed policy decisions, recommendations, and actionable insights to encourage the use of financial technology in the sector.

1.7 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary research objective for the study is to determine the fintech readiness of South African banks in promoting financial inclusion.

The secondary objectives of the study are:

1. To explore whether South African banks consider fintech a viable solution for promoting financial inclusion.
2. To assess the organisational readiness of South African banks to implement fintech for financial inclusion.
3. To analyse and identify the major challenges affecting the implementation of fintech for financial inclusion.
4. To examine customer's awareness and willingness to use fintech services.
5. To identify strategies that can strengthen financial inclusion through fintech.

The six foundational elements of the fintech ecosystem in South Africa have been identified as follows:

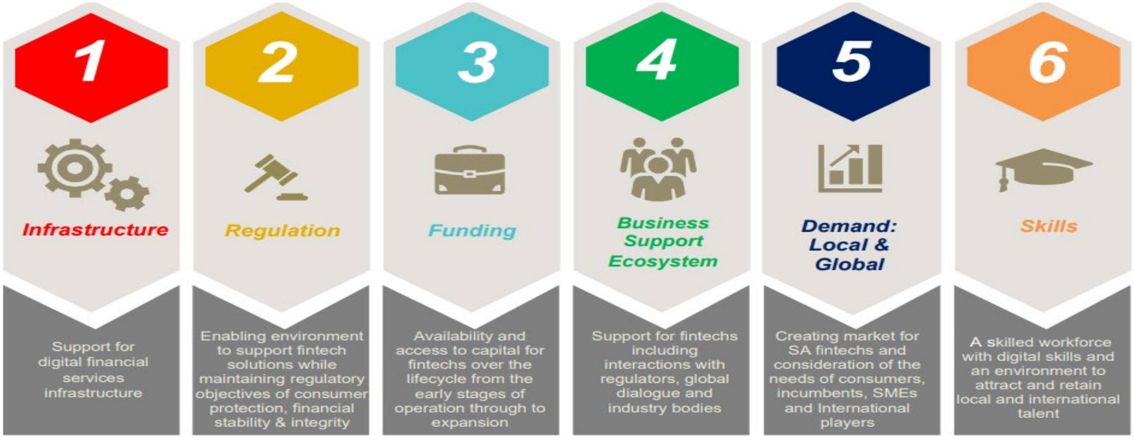

Figure 1 Source (IFWG, 2021)

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is of substantial importance, as it investigates the critical challenge of how financial institutions in South Africa can harness fintech advancements to enhance financial inclusion. International and local studies consistently demonstrate that digital finance solutions have a profound impact in extending financial access to historically marginalised groups, such as low-income individuals, women, and young people (World Bank, 2025). Like many developing nations, South Africa has ongoing inequalities in access to banking services, particularly in the outskirts and rural areas (Takundwa, 2022). fintech has become a major facilitator, making financial products and services more accessible, affordable, and convenient (Bruin, 2025). By examining local banks' willingness to adopt these innovations, this study offers insights that can guide strategic and policy decisions aimed at promoting inclusive economic growth and overcoming poverty (Mensah, 2024).

1.9 RATIONAL AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

By providing empirical data and contextual analysis on the relationship between fintech readiness and financial inclusion in South Africa's banking industry, this study adds to the body of knowledge. Few studies have examined the institutional readiness and strategic orientations of South African banks, despite prior research evaluating the effects of fintech in general (Nel, 2021). Currently, South African banks exhibit moderate levels of fintech readiness in promoting financial inclusion, shifting from closed legacy models to collaborative digital ecosystems. Some of the banks are improving required platforms, though challenges remain. The justification, significance, and necessity of this research are to address the knowledge gap regarding the readiness of SA banks' fintech to promote financial inclusion. The literature review so far indicates a lack of empirical data on the fintech implementation readiness of SA Banks. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to fill this gap in the literature on the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion in South Africa.

This study will:

1. Evaluate whether banks view fintech as a viable strategy to enhance financial inclusion for underbanked, underserved, and disadvantaged populations living in rural areas and townships characterised by limited infrastructure and restricted access to financial services (Pillay, 2024).
2. Evaluate whether the essential physical and digital infrastructure, regulatory framework, funding sources, business support networks, market demand, relevant skills, policies, implementation methods, and monitoring measures are present to facilitate the introduction and adoption of fintech solutions by banks in South Africa. This includes assessing the availability of technological infrastructure, the robustness of regulation, access to capital and business development services, workforce competencies, policy support, and the practical mechanisms that banks require to effectively launch and sustain fintech innovations—especially in diverse and potentially underserved environments (Gumede, 2024).
3. Identify and examine the primary obstacles hindering the comprehensive adoption and implementation of fintech solutions by banks within the country (Cele, 2024).
4. Examine, from the banks' perspective, the level of awareness and understanding that lower- and middle-income customers have regarding

fintech, as well as their willingness to adopt and use these financial technologies (Cele, 2023).

5. Identify and evaluate strategies and recommendations that can enable effective and sustainable financial inclusion through fintech in South Africa. This includes approaches that foster collaboration among stakeholders, leverage appropriate technology tailored for underserved populations, address regulatory and infrastructure challenges, and promote affordability, accessibility, and trust in digital financial services to create a lasting, inclusive impact (Runyowa, 2020).

1.10 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Fintech is seen as a very promising way to address problems such as inequality, poverty, and limited access to financial services in South Africa (Banna et al. 2021). The scope of the study is limited to assessing South African banks' readiness to promote financial inclusion through fintech. The target population comprises senior management, fintech integration teams, and heads of departments responsible for financial inclusion and technology within South African banks, including the major commercial banks, namely Nedbank, Standard Bank, Absa, and African Bank, as well as institutions with a strong fintech focus, such as Tyme Bank.

1.11 CHAPTER ARRANGEMENT IN THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1 will serve as the introductory section and will present the background, problem statement, aim, objectives of the study, research questions, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 will focus on the literature review for the study questions/objectives/problem statement/methodology.

Chapter 3 will present the aspects of research methodology adopted for the study.

Chapter 4 will focus on the results and discussions of the data analyses.

Chapter 5 will present the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Financial technology (fintech) has emerged as a transformative force in the financial sector, driving efficiency and expanding access to financial services (Yoganandham, 2024). This literature review provides an in-depth examination of the dual impact of fintech: enhancing the effectiveness of the financial sector and benefiting underserved market segments, with a specific focus on South Africa(Gumede, 2024). Furthermore, it delves into fintech's potential to foster economic inclusion and contribute significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mhlanga, 2023). Fundamental to this review is an analysis of South African banks' fintech readiness to promote financial inclusion, drawing on recent studies to assess their strategies, challenges, and opportunities. The literature synthesis here will address how fintech solutions can enhance financial inclusion, the categories of fintech involved, and the impact on the overall financial ecosystem. The impact of the digital economy on job creation and economic empowerment is also considered (Bongomin et al. 2020).

2.2 FINANCIAL INCLUSION DEFINITION

Financial inclusion involves broadening access to and availability of, and enhancing the use of, formal financial services across all segments of the population. This is a helpful working definition of financial inclusion (FI). Preferred definitions may differ because FI is a complex concept, but this definition briefly conveys its main ideas. Increasing people's access to and use of the financial sector is the primary component of financial inclusion, according to this definition (Adjasi, 2023).

Additionally, this should be unaffected by population segmentation, ensuring that various groups; ethnic, social, gender, geographic, age, etc. have equal access to and utilisation of financial services in developing countries. Financial exclusion refers to the inability of individuals in South Africa to access and use formal financial services due to barriers such as the lack of affordable or accessible financial products, limited financial literacy, discrimination, mistrust of financial institutions, and other socio-economic factors. Financial inclusion aims to bring these people into the financial system by removing these barriers (Runyowa, 2020).

Fintech innovations are transforming traditional financial systems by improving operational efficiency and service delivery. According to Cele and Gumede (2024), advancements such as mobile banking, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics have transformed business models, enabling faster distribution of financial services and improved access to capital. This transformative effect has been particularly noticeable in South Africa, where the adoption of online banking services by major banks like ABSA, Standard Bank, and Nedbank has significantly enhanced customer convenience and operational efficiency (Cele and Gumede, 2024). They emphasise the importance of leveraging 4IR technologies for digital transformation, underscoring the potential for banks to enhance their efficiency through technology integration. Fintech also enhances effectiveness by providing faster, more convenient services for payments, savings, and investments, thereby improving overall customer satisfaction (Mungai, 2019).

Digital banks have further disrupted traditional banking by enabling customers to conduct banking activities remotely. This shift has eradicated geographical barriers, granting users unprecedented access and convenience. Cele and Gumede (2024) highlight that these advancements have streamlined processes such as account opening and bill payments, contributing to the overall effectiveness of the financial sector. The digitalisation of financial processes has also reduced operational costs for financial institutions, allowing them to offer services at lower prices. This increased affordability can attract a broader customer base, including those previously excluded due to cost barriers (Cele, 2023). Additionally, fintech solutions have enhanced security and transparency in financial transactions, building trust and confidence among users (Adjasi, 2023).

The role of digital transformation, as highlighted by Cele (2023) and Fernandez-Vidal et al. (2022), cannot be overstated; these authors underscore how the strategic implementation of digital technologies leads to operational efficiencies and improved customer engagement. Moreover, innovative financial products such as investments and insurance plans at scale (Olaoye, 2025) can also be facilitated through digital channels. Fernandez-Vidal et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of top-level management in driving digital transformation. Their research underscores that successful digital transformation initiatives require strong leadership and a clear vision to navigate the complexities of implementation. This is particularly relevant for South African banks as they navigate the integration of fintech solutions.

FINTECH'S BENEFIT FOR UNDERSERVED MARKET SEGMENTS

Fintech has played a pivotal role in addressing financial exclusion by extending services to underserved populations. Cele and Gumede (2024) emphasise that South Africa's history of economic exclusion necessitates innovative solutions for inclusion. Mobile money services have been particularly impactful in bridging gaps between unbanked individuals and formal financial systems. By leveraging simple technologies like SMS, mobile money enables low-cost transactions over long distances, empowering rural communities. Further insights into the importance of the appropriate use of technology for economic empowerment in South Africa (Makina, 2019).

Digital banking platforms have also expanded access to financial services for individuals who were previously excluded due to infrastructure limitations. These platforms allow users to conduct banking activities without physical branches, thus democratising access (Cele and Gumede, 2024). Additionally, peer-to-peer lending platforms facilitate economic inclusion by enabling individuals who may not qualify for traditional loans to access funding directly from other users (Shen et al. 2021). Fintech innovations have also fostered entrepreneurship and small business development by providing access to credit and financial management tools. Online lending platforms offer alternative financing options for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that often struggle to secure loans from traditional banks (Mungai, 2019). Fintech has the potential to improve the economic inclusion of all South Africans (IFWG, 2021) and significantly impact several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By expanding access to financial services, fintech can help reduce poverty, hunger, and inequality. It can also boost economic growth by creating jobs and fostering innovation. Ultimately, fintech can contribute to building a more sustainable and inclusive world (Sant'Anna, 2024).

2.3 FINTECH'S CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVING FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

By utilising digital technologies, fintech offers financial services to groups that have historically been excluded from the official financial system. Fintech innovations have the potential to greatly benefit underserved market segments, such as low-income households, small businesses, and rural communities. According to Miah (2023), fintech solutions provide accessible, reasonably priced financial products suited to these groups' needs, particularly in South Africa. Fintech innovations like digital wallets, peer-to-peer lending platforms, and mobile banking have greatly lowered barriers to accessing financial services. By enabling people in underserved and remote areas to engage with the financial ecosystem, these technologies have been shown to promote economic empowerment and reduce poverty.

2.4 THE IMPACT OF FINTECH ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The researcher believes that Fintech has the potential to improve the economic inclusion of all South Africans and significantly impact several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By expanding access to financial services, fintech can help reduce poverty, hunger, and inequality, and boost economic growth by creating jobs and fostering innovation. Ultimately, fintech can contribute to building a more sustainable and inclusive world (Townsend, 2021). Cele and Gumede (2024) emphasise that policies and initiatives aimed at broadening access to financial services should leverage fintech. The integration of fintech solutions can accelerate progress towards achieving SDGs by addressing critical challenges related to financial inclusion and economic empowerment. According to N’dri and Kakinaka (2020), fintech is transforming the financial services industry by breaking down traditional barriers and challenging the dominance of banks and non-bank financial institutions that have failed to provide adequate financial services to underprivileged populations, especially in developing countries. Recent statistics show an increase in the uptake of financial services through digital platforms (AlSuwaidi and Mertzanis, 2024).

2.4.1- SDG 1: No Poverty: Fintech can play a crucial role in poverty reduction by providing access to financial services that enable individuals to save, borrow, and invest. Mobile money platforms, for example, allow low-income households to manage their finances more efficiently and build assets (Danladi et al. 2023). Microfinance institutions that leverage fintech solutions can also provide small loans to entrepreneurs, helping them start and grow their businesses. Bongomin et al. (2020) underscore the importance of fintech solutions in fostering financial inclusion to reduce poverty.

2.4.2- SDG 2: Zero Hunger: Fintech can contribute to food security by improving access to agricultural finance and markets. Digital platforms can connect farmers directly with buyers, reducing transaction costs and increasing their income. fintech solutions can also provide farmers with access to credit and insurance, enabling them to invest in better technologies and protect themselves against risks (Matsumoto and Munyegera, 2022).

2.4.3- SDG 5: Gender Equality: Fintech can empower women by providing them with access to financial services and opportunities. Mobile money platforms, for example, can enable women to control their finances and participate more fully in the economy. fintech solutions can also provide women entrepreneurs with access to credit and training, helping them to start and grow their businesses. Additional efforts are required to enhance the adoption of formal financial services among women in South Africa (Mungai, 2019).

2.4.4- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth: Fintech can boost economic growth by creating jobs and fostering innovation. The fintech industry itself is a source of employment, and fintech solutions can also help to create jobs in other sectors by improving access to finance and markets. Fintech can also foster innovation by providing a platform for new financial products and services. In developing economies, fintech offers a way to leapfrog traditional banking constraints and facilitate inclusive growth and sustainable development (Townsend, 2021).

2.4.5- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities: Fintech can help to reduce inequalities by expanding access to financial services to underserved populations. Mobile money platforms, for example, can provide access to financial services for people living in rural areas and low-income communities. Fintech solutions can also provide access to credit for people who have been excluded from the formal financial system (Takundwa, 2022).

2.5 FINTECH ON POVERTY REDUCTION, HUNGER AND INEQUALITY:

Fintech encompasses different categories, including digital banks, online lending, peer-to-peer lending, cryptocurrency, mobile payments, and computer-generated investment advice, each with distinct roles (Gumede, 2024)

- **Mobile Money:** The most used financial technology globally (de Luna et al. 2019), and it has been hailed as a solution to the challenges associated with limited access to traditional financial institutions. It has also been identified as a tool for promoting financial inclusion globally, particularly in developing countries where a significant portion of the population lacks access to conventional banking services due to inadequate infrastructure.

  Mobile money can effectively promote individual financial inclusion, particularly in rural communities (Maciko, 2022). By employing simple Short Messaging Service (SMS) technology, users can transfer money at a low cost, even over long distances. Moreover, mobile money contributes to achieving 11 of the 17 SDGs.

  The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) help to reduce inequality by empowering underserved populations and enabling households to improve their financial position (N'dri and Kakinaka, 2020). Understanding the impact of fintech in Sub-Saharan Africa is also critical (Kelikume, June, 2020).
- **Digital Banks:** These provide customers with the option of doing various banking activities, such as account opening, bill payments, and bank transfers digitally (Nel and Boshoff, 2021). This shift has eliminated the limitations of traditional banking methods and provided customers with unprecedented access and convenience.

  Digital banks have changed the way customers bank, granting them the freedom to bank at their convenience from anywhere. Furthermore, the use of technology in providing financial services promotes easier access and greater convenience for customers (Adjasi, 2023).

- **Sharing Economy (P2P Lending):** This allows groups of individuals to finance other individuals or businesses who may not qualify for bank loans (Gumede, 2024). It promotes economic democracy and inclusion among lenders and borrowers, significantly contributing to economic growth (Gumede, 2024). The sharing economy allows for the provision of funding to both individuals and businesses (Takundwa, 2022)

2.6 ADDRESSING PAYMENT, SAVINGS, AND REMITTANCE PROBLEMS

Fintech solutions are transforming how individuals manage payments, savings, and remittances, offering more efficient, accessible, and affordable options. These solutions are attractive for customers, driving the adoption of fintech (Olaoye, 2025).

Fintech innovations are expanding access to a wide range of financial products, including investments, savings, and insurance, making them available to a larger segment of the population. By offering available and attractive products, financial inclusion and well-being are significantly promoted (Gumede, 2024).

- **Payment Solutions:** Fintech companies are developing innovative payment solutions that cater to the needs of diverse populations. Mobile payment apps, for example, enable users to make transactions using their smartphones, eliminating the need for cash or credit cards. These solutions are particularly beneficial for individuals in remote areas who lack access to traditional banking services (Matsumoto and Munyegera, 2022).
- **Savings Solutions:** Fintech is also transforming the way people save money by offering digital savings accounts and micro-savings platforms. These platforms allow users to save small amounts of money regularly, helping them to build a financial safety net and achieve their savings goals (Adjasi, 2023).
- **Remittance Solutions:** Remittances play a crucial role in supporting families in developing countries. fintech companies are developing remittance solutions that are faster, cheaper, and more transparent than traditional methods. These

solutions use digital platforms to transfer money directly to recipients, reducing transaction costs and improving efficiency (Matsumoto and Munyegera, 2022).

According to Mungai (2019), from a payment standpoint, domestic remittances are recognised as reducing poverty and enhancing well-being in South Africa. The smooth transfer of funds via digital channels is one way the process may help the recipient even more. According to Simbanegavi, the payments industry in South Africa still must advance to the point where there are almost no expenses and no payment barriers. Given that the banking business is fee-based and often does not support microtransactions, this will be challenging.

2.7 FURNISHING AVAILABLE AND ATTRACTIVE MONETARY PRODUCTS ON SCALE

- **Investment Products:** Fintech platforms are granting access to investment products by offering low-cost, user-friendly investment options. Robo-advisors, for example, provide automated investment advice and portfolio management services, making it easier for individuals to invest their money (Fernandez-Vidal et al. 2022; Gumede, 2024).
- **Financial Savings Products:** Fintech companies are developing innovative financial savings products that offer attractive returns and flexible terms. Digital savings accounts, for example, offer higher interest rates than traditional savings accounts, helping users grow their wealth more quickly (Gumede, 2024).
- **Insurance Plans:** Fintech is also transforming the insurance industry by offering digital insurance plans that are more affordable and accessible. These plans use data analytics to assess risk and customise insurance coverage, making it easier for individuals to protect themselves against unforeseen events (Fernandez-Vidal et al. 2022; Gumede, 2024).

2.8 FINTECH READINESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN BANKS IN PROMOTING FINANCIAL INCLUSION

The readiness of South African banks to leverage fintech for financial inclusion is critical to achieving broader economic empowerment and sustainable development goals. Cele and Gumede (2024) suggest that understanding how financial institutions engage with digital innovation is essential. Cele and Gumede (2024) continue to highlight that major banks in South Africa have already introduced online banking options, indicating a foundational level of digital integration. In 1994, Absa became the first bank in South Africa to provide online banking, establishing a standard for digital innovation in the banking industry. Other significant banks, such as Nedbank, Standard Bank, First National Bank, and Mercantile Bank, adopted this innovative strategy (Rich, 2022). However, true readiness extends beyond mere adoption of digital channels. It involves strategically aligning banking operations with the unique needs of underserved populations. This includes developing fintech solutions that are accessible, affordable, and user-friendly for individuals with varying levels of digital literacy (Simbanegavi, 2024b; Adjasi, 2023). South African banks are increasingly exploring partnerships with fintech companies to enhance their capabilities and reach a wider customer base. Key considerations for banks promoting financial inclusion also entail cost reduction and the delivery of tailored services to their customers (Adjasi, 2023; Mungai, 2019).

Capitec Bank's success in targeting the lower end of the market demonstrates the potential for disruption and innovation within the South African banking sector (Cele and Gumede, 2024). Other banks can learn from Capitec's example by adopting similar strategies and leveraging fintech to reach underserved populations. Broadening South Africans' access to financial services will require a robust financial inclusion strategy (Boshoff, 2020).

2.8.1 SEVERAL FACTORS DETERMINE THE FINTECH READINESS OF SA BANKS

1. **Technological Infrastructure:** The existing technological infrastructure within South African banks plays a pivotal role in their ability to integrate fintech solutions effectively. Banks with modern and scalable IT systems are better positioned to adopt and deploy fintech innovations (Mensah, 2024)
2. **Regulatory Environment:** A supportive and adaptive regulatory environment is crucial for fostering fintech innovation and promoting financial inclusion.

South African regulators must strike a balance between encouraging innovation and protecting consumers, ensuring that fintech solutions are safe and reliable (Mhlanga, 2023; IFWG, 2021). Regulatory support, security, and transparency are fundamental for increased fintech adoption (Pillay, 2024).

3. **Digital Skills and Literacy:** The availability of digital skills and literacy among both bank employees and customers is essential for the successful adoption of fintech solutions. Banks must invest in training and education programs to enhance digital literacy and ensure that their employees have the skills necessary to develop and manage fintech solutions (N'dri and Kakinaka, 2020; IFWG, 2021).

4. **Customer-Centric Approach:** A customer-centric approach is vital for ensuring that fintech solutions meet the needs of underserved populations. Banks must engage with customers to understand their specific challenges and develop solutions that address their unique requirements (Gumede, 2024). Moreover, there is a need for banks to promote increased awareness and training in local communities (Simbanegavi, 2024b).

2.8.2 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite its significant contributions, fintech faces challenges such as regulatory hurdles and uneven adoption rates stemming from digital literacy gaps. Cele and Gumede (2024) argue that policies aimed at broadening financial inclusion must leverage fintech effectively while addressing these challenges. Furthermore, developing products that go beyond basic payment services can enhance people's financial well-being and contribute to sustainable development goals. Other issues include social grant payment-related problems, the digital divide in poorer communities, and end-user financial literacy levels (Shipalana, 2019).

Regulatory frameworks often struggle to keep pace with rapid Fintech innovations, leading to uncertainties and potential risks. Warikandwa (2023) highlights the need for adaptable regulatory approaches that balance innovation with consumer protection and financial stability. Additionally, cybersecurity threats and data privacy concerns pose significant challenges to the widespread adoption of fintech services (Cele, 2023). Therefore, policy uncertainty in the fintech sector can undermine economic development, job creation, and overall GDP growth (Mhlanga, 2023).

Addressing the digital divide and promoting financial literacy are crucial for ensuring equitable access to fintech benefits. Targeted education and awareness programs can empower individuals to use digital financial services effectively and responsibly (AlSuwaidi and Mertzanis, 2024). Collaboration among governments, financial institutions, and civil society organisations is essential to fostering an ecosystem conducive to fintech innovation and inclusion (IFWG, 2021; N'dri and Kakinaka, 2020). The government's role, partnerships, and supportive regulations are vital for fintech growth (Bongomin et al. 2020).

2.9 CONCLUSION

Fintech has proven instrumental in improving the financial sector's effectiveness by enhancing operational efficiency and service delivery. Its impact on underserved markets is equally profound, offering innovative solutions to bridge gaps in financial inclusion. Moreover, fintech holds immense potential to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and fostering economic growth.

Determining the fintech readiness of South African banks to embrace and implement fintech solutions is paramount to realising these benefits. While challenges remain, strategic initiatives leveraging fintech can drive inclusive economic growth and societal transformation. By addressing regulatory hurdles, promoting digital literacy, fostering collaboration, prioritising ethical considerations, and implementing readiness assessment models, South Africa can harness the full potential of fintech to create a more inclusive and prosperous society. Continued research and policy efforts are essential for ensuring that fintech benefits all segments of the population and contributes to a sustainable future. The insights from Cele and Gumede (2024) set a clear path for banks to enhance their role in driving financial inclusion through fintech.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section presents the research methodology to be used to investigate the fintech readiness of South African banks in promoting financial inclusion. The methodology presents the research philosophy, approach, strategy, time horizon, study population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection and analysis.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The philosophical foundation of this study is interpretivism, which recognises that reality is socially constructed and best understood through individuals' subjective experiences (Boshoff, 2020). Interpretivism is particularly appropriate for research exploring complex social phenomena, such as the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion, because it values the perspectives, meanings, and lived realities of stakeholders (Makina, 2019; Kelikume, June 2020). By adopting an interpretivist stance, this research acknowledges that the integration of fintech into banking is not merely a technical process, but one deeply influenced by organisational culture, regulatory environments, and the unique needs of underserved communities (Banna et al. 2021; Sant'Anna, 2024). The interpretivist paradigm thus guides the study's qualitative methodology, enabling a rich, subtle understanding of both opportunities and barriers as perceived by those directly involved.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Following the philosophy of interpretivism, this study will use inductive reasoning to address the research objectives/questions. This involves analysing patterns, themes, and contextual factors emerging from key informant interviews, and generating new ideas and theories about how fintech is used and its impact. Inductive reasoning enables the study to gain deeper, context-specific insights into the fintech readiness of South African banks to fully promote financial inclusion.

3.4 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE

This study utilised a qualitative method to assess the fintech readiness of South African banks to advance financial inclusion through fintech. The qualitative research method is well-suited to capturing the nuanced perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, enabling an in-depth exploration of organisational strategies, challenges, and opportunities (Cele, 2023; Boshoff, 2020) within South African banks. This approach is particularly relevant given the rapidly evolving fintech landscape and the socio-economic diversity of South Africa (Kelikume, June 2020). The research aims to capture the nuanced understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and attitudes towards fintech integration within the banking sector.

3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY & TIME HORIZON

Selected stakeholders were interviewed using semi-structured key informant interviews conducted during a single data-collection period. The interviews aimed to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with selected key informants from various South African banks. These interviews aimed to gain in-depth insights into stakeholders’ perspectives on banks' fintech readiness to promote financial inclusion. To ensure alignment with the research objectives, an interview guide was developed to facilitate data collection. The interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on participant engagement and the depth of discussion.

3.7 POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

The target population comprises senior management, fintech integration teams, and department heads responsible for financial inclusion and technology within South African banks. Purposive sampling was used to ensure a diversity of perspectives, including those from the major commercial banks (Nedbank, Standard Bank, Absa, Africanbank and Tymebank). Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in fintech and financial inclusion initiatives, ensuring the collection of rich, relevant data (Makina, 2019). The sample included 4 representatives from commercial banks and 1 from a fintech bank. The inclusion criteria are that participants be employees of the bank, be of legal age (18 years and older), and be directly involved in fintech and financial inclusion initiatives. Exclusion criteria are that no person outside the inclusion criteria was considered.

3.8 RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

The study was focused on senior management, fintech integration teams, heads of departments related to financial inclusion and technology, and other relevant stakeholders within South African banks. Recruitment began with formal communication with selected banks, outlining the study's purpose and significance. Senior leaders, fintech integration teams, heads of departments related to financial inclusion and technology, the invitation to participate was sent via email with an official letter attached. Upon agreement, appointments were scheduled, and participants received detailed information about the research, including assurances of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. Follow-up communication was used to confirm participation and accommodate participants' availability.

- **Selection Criteria:** Participants were selected based on their involvement in decision-making processes related to fintech adoption and financial inclusion initiatives. This ensures that the participants have the relevant knowledge and experience to provide valuable insights.
- **Initial Contact:** I contacted 5 commercial banks and 1 fintech bank via formal communication channels, such as email or letters, to introduce the study and request participation. This communication outlined the study's purpose and the expected commitment.
- **Invitation to Participate:** Upon receiving positive responses, appointments were scheduled with potential participants they were formally invited to participate in the study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the research, including assurances of confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the interview process.
- **Follow-Up procedures:** Where necessary, follow-up communications were sent to confirm participation and schedule interviews or meetings. Flexibility was maintained throughout the scheduling process to accommodate participants' availability and professional commitments.

3.9 CONSENT PROCESS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Protecting Participant Privacy:

Protecting participant privacy was a priority throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced. The consent process clearly outlined the purpose of the research, the potential risks and benefits, the confidentiality measures in place, and the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any stage with any negative consequences.

Ethical considerations were central to this research. Participants were provided with detailed information regarding the study's objectives, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point. All data collected was securely stored, encrypted and anonymised in accordance with the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) (Zou, 2024). To maintain the confidentiality of participant information, robust security measures were implemented. These measures included storing data on secure, password-protected platforms, encrypting sensitive information, and restricting access to authorised individuals only. Furthermore, strict data-handling protocols were followed to prevent the unauthorised sharing of information and to ensure the secure disposal of data when no longer required. Codes were used to identify participants during data analysis and reporting.

In summary, all participants were informed of the study's purpose, their role in the research, and the confidentiality of their responses. Written consent was obtained before conducting interviews. The identities of both participants and their respective banks were kept confidential, and any sensitive information was anonymised in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) when reporting the findings.

3.10 DATA ANALYSES

Thematic Analysis: Data collected from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders over 2 months were analysed. The analysis focused on key areas such as technological infrastructure, organisational culture, regulatory challenges, and strategic priorities. In addition, relevant organisational documents on fintech adoption and financial inclusion strategies were reviewed to triangulate findings and enrich the analysis.

Cross-Case Analysis: Following the analysis, a cross-case analysis was conducted to compare the findings across the different banks. This process helped identify broader trends, similarities, and differences, as well as factors influencing fintech readiness within the South African banking sector.

Thematic analysis involved the systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within qualitative data, gathered through semi-structured interviews. The process began with data familiarisation, where interview transcripts were read and re-read to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. Initial coding was then applied to identify significant features of the data, including recurring ideas, phrases, or concepts related to the research objectives. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes, and the data were interpreted by identifying relationships among the themes and exploring how they contributed to understanding the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion.

Six Steps of Thematic Analysis employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- **Software: NVivo 14**

- **Familiarisation with the data**
  - Reading and re-reading the data
  - Noting down initial ideas
- **Generating initial codes**
  - Coding interesting features systematically
  - Collating data relevant to each code
- **Searching for themes**
  - Collating codes into potential themes
  - Gathering data relevant to each theme
- **Reviewing themes**
  - Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset
  - Generating a thematic 'map'
- **Defining and naming themes**

    - Ongoing analysis to refine specifics of each theme
    - Naming themes clearly
- **Producing the report**
    - Final analysis and write-up
    - Including vivid, compelling examples

- **Qualitative Findings**: Include illustrative quotes for key themes, highlighting stakeholder concerns and recommendations.

3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS

For all the qualitative data and analysis in the study to be reliable, trustworthiness was ensured as presented below.

Credibility of Data

Credibility refers to the trust assumed in the truthfulness of research data (Anney, 2015). It assesses whether the findings reflect the participants' authentic views and if these views are properly understood or interpreted (Anney, 2015; Bitsch, 2005). In this qualitative research, credibility was strengthened through methods such as sampling, reflexivity, member checking, peer review, interview techniques, the researcher's authority, and structural coherence (Krefting, 1991).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing helps researchers test their insights and receive critical feedback (Guba, 1981; Anney, 2015). This process encourages scholarly guidance from other professionals, further enhancing the credibility of the research. For this study, continuous feedback from the supervisor was sought during report writing to strengthen the research's trustworthiness.

Transferability of Data

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings apply to other contexts (Anney, 2015). According to Bitsch (2005), this can be ensured by providing detailed descriptions and purposive sampling (Li, 2004), thereby allowing the research to be relevant across varying settings.

Dependability of Data

Dependability refers to the consistency of research findings over time. This study ensured dependability through peer examination, which involves discussing the research process with experienced researchers (Anney, 2015).

Peer Examination

Peer examination, linked to member checking (Patton and Cochran, 2002), allows researchers to gain insight from others in the field. In this study, continuous discussions with the supervisor helped identify gaps and refine the research, enhancing its dependability.

Authenticity of Data

Authenticity in qualitative research is achieved through multiple insights into the topic under study (Healy and Perry, 2000; Golafshani, 2003). Participants, banks offered valuable insights, thus improving data authenticity.

3.12 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This research is positioned within the broader context of South Africa's efforts to address inequality, poverty, and limited access to financial services through technological innovation (Banna et al. 2021; Kelikume, June 2020). While the qualitative approach enables rich, contextual insights, it may limit the generalisation of findings. Additionally, participant reluctance stemming from confidentiality concerns may pose a challenge.

3.13 DEFINITION LIST

Fintech: the use of innovative technology to deliver financial services and products, enhancing the efficiency, accessibility, and convenience of financial systems. This includes applications such as mobile payments, digital banking, peer-to-peer lending, and blockchain technologies, which aim to disrupt traditional financial practices by leveraging technology to meet consumer and business needs.

Financial inclusion: the process of ensuring that individuals and businesses, particularly those underserved by traditional financial institutions, have access to affordable, timely, and adequate financial products and services. These services include savings, payments, credit, insurance, and other essential financial tools, provided responsibly and sustainably. The goal of financial inclusion is to promote economic development, reduce poverty, and enhance individual financial security by integrating marginalised populations into the formal financial system.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines, examines, and discusses the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with five representatives from prominent South African banks. The study aimed to assess how prepared South African banks are to enhance financial inclusion through fintech. The results are organised according to specific research objectives and analysed using thematic analysis. The choice of thematic analysis was made because it facilitates the identification, organisation, and interpretation of recurring patterns found in qualitative data. After transcribing and becoming familiar with the data, codes were created and categorised into broader themes reflecting participants' views on fintech, financial inclusion, infrastructure preparedness, regulatory factors, and implementation obstacles. The chapter outlines six main themes that arose from the data. Each theme is illustrated with direct quotes from the participants, and the results are discussed in relation to the study objectives and existing literature.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

Five participants were selected from prominent South African banking institutions for this study based on their expertise, experience, and involvement in fintech-related projects and financial inclusion initiatives. The participants were deemed qualified to offer informed perspectives on the use of fintech in the South African banking industry because they held senior, strategic positions within their respective companies. The participants have a wealth of experience in fintech implementation, customer engagement, digital transformation, banking, and financial services. Among their duties as professionals were managing digital banking strategy, overseeing fintech collaborations, spearheading financial inclusion programs, encouraging SME growth, implementing digital payment solutions, and improving clients' access to banking services. The participants' varied and thorough perspectives on the advantages and difficulties of fintech adoption in South Africa were made possible by their selection. Their experiences provided significant qualitative insights relevant to the study's goals, as they represented both established banking perspectives and cutting-edge digital banking strategies.

4.2.1 PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

This section presents a summary of the professional profiles of the five participants, as shown in the table below. The participants were selected based on their influential roles and experience in fintech within the South African banking sector. Their insights provide a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities associated with fintech and financial inclusion, particularly within the South African banking sector. The identities of the participants and their individual banks were anonymised to ensure confidentiality and compliance with ethical research regulations. Participants were therefore identified as Participants 01 to 05, while their institutions were coded as Banks A to E.

Participants have a wealth of experience in company growth, fintech implementation, digital transformation, financial services, banking, and customer engagement. Overseeing digital banking strategies, managing fintech alliances, spearheading financial inclusion programs, assisting SME development, implementing digital payment solutions, and improving clients' access to banking services were among their professional duties.

Table 4.1: Participants' profile

Participant	Institution	Position Industry & Area of expertise	Industry	Highest Qualification	Years of experience
PARTICIPANT 01	Bank E	Senior Management: Digital banking, financial inclusion and fintech enablement	Banking	Masters	11+
PARTICIPANT 02	Bank D	Executive Management: Banking operations, fintech partnerships and township economy initiatives	Banking	Masters	20+
PARTICIPANT 03	Bank B	Senior Management: SME banking, fintech collaboration and merchant solutions	Banking	Masters	18+
PARTICIPANT 04	Bank C	Executive Management: Digital transformation, regulatory compliance and fintech strategy	Banking	MBA	20+
PARTICIPANT 05	Bank A	Executive Management: Digital banking innovation, cloud infrastructure and customer experience	Banking	Masters	20+

The participants' varied and thorough perspectives on the advantages and difficulties of fintech adoption in South Africa were made possible by their selection. Their experiences provided significant qualitative insights relevant to the study's goals, as they represented both established banking perspectives and cutting-edge digital banking strategies. The findings reported in this chapter were made more credible and relevant by the participants' combined industry knowledge and strategic involvement in fintech efforts.

Table 4.2: Summary of interviews

Participant	Date	Duration	Method	Recorded
PARTICIPANT 01	19/03/2026	0hr:54mon:36sec	Online- Teams meeting	Yes
PARTICIPANT 02	25/03/2026	1Hr:10min:03sec	Online- Teams meeting	Yes
PARTICIPANT 03	26/03/2026	1hr:51min:00sec	Online- Teams meeting	Yes
PARTICIPANT 04	01/04/2026	0:59min:43sec	Online- Teams meeting	Yes
PARTICIPANT 05	13/03/2026	1hr:16min:42sec	Online- Teams meeting	Yes

4.2.2. INTERVIEW SUMMARY

To obtain comprehensive information on the role of fintech in advancing financial inclusion within the South African banking industry, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the five participants, as detailed in the participant profile table. An organised interview schedule aligned with the study's goals served as the guide for the virtual interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. At first, each interview was supposed to run between 45 and 90 minutes. However, the length of the interviews varied slightly based on the depth of responses given and the degree of participant engagement.

Due to their thorough descriptions of fintech infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, digital transformation, and financial inclusion plans within their respective organisations, Participants 04 and 05 went beyond the allotted interview time. While Participant 05 went into detail about digital banking models, cloud infrastructure, customer onboarding, and fintech-driven innovation, Participant 04 offered in-depth discussions about cloud-based systems, artificial intelligence, cross-border regulations, and operational resilience. Additionally, Participant 03 provided thorough answers on SME financing options, fintech collaborations, and the operational constraints of legacy banking systems. In-depth practical examples and organisational perspectives regarding fintech implementation, financial inclusion, customer adoption, and regulatory challenges within the South African banking sector were made possible by the extended interview sessions, which greatly enhanced the richness of the qualitative data gathered.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF EXTRACTED THEMES

The analysis resulted in six key themes presented in Table 4.3: Theme 1*:* Fintech as an Enabler of Financial Inclusion, Theme 2: Strategic Partnerships Between Banks and fintech Companies, Theme 3: Digital Innovation and Improved Accessibility, Theme 4: Infrastructure and Organisational Readiness, Theme 5: Regulatory and Implementation Challenges and **Theme 6**: Customer Adoption, Trust and Awareness.

Table 4.3: Summary of Themes, Colour Codes and Theme Descriptions

Theme	Colour Code	Description
Theme 1: Financial Inclusion Through Fintech	Blue	This theme focuses on how fintech enables banks to expand financial services to underserved, underbanked and rural communities through digital platforms, mobile banking and alternative service channels.
Theme 2: Strategic Partnerships	Green	This theme highlights the collaboration between traditional banks and fintech companies to improve innovation, agility, customer reach and financial inclusion initiatives.
Theme 3: Digital Innovation and Accessibility	Yellow	This theme relates to the use of digital solutions such as mobile banking apps, USSD, digital onboarding, cardless

		transactions, and POS devices to improve the accessibility, convenience, and affordability of banking services.
Theme 4: Infrastructure and Readiness	Orange	This theme examines the availability of technological infrastructure, cloud systems, digital platforms, organisational capabilities and operational readiness required for successful fintech implementation.
Theme 5: Regulatory and Implementation Challenges	Red	This theme focuses on the barriers affecting fintech implementation, including banking regulations, compliance requirements, cybersecurity concerns, legacy systems and operational complexities.
Theme 6: Customer Adoption, Trust and Awareness	Purple	This theme explores customer perceptions, awareness, trust, digital adoption, financial literacy, and concerns about fraud and cybersecurity in fintech services.

Source: self-curated (2026)

Collectively, these themes answer the study's goals and shed light on how fintech is advancing financial inclusion in South Africa

- **Theme 1: Fintech as an Enabler of Financial Inclusion**

Objective Addressed:

Analyse whether banks consider fintech as a solution for promoting financial inclusion.

Participants unanimously agreed that fintech plays a significant role in extending financial services to underserved, underbanked and rural communities. The findings suggest that fintech enables banks to provide services without relying solely on traditional branch infrastructure.

Participant 01 explained:

"Fintech allows banks to decentralise how they offer financial services without needing the infrastructure necessary to reach various people. Through technology, banks can access communities where opening a branch would not make business sense."

Participant 04 similarly stated:

"Financial technology is part of our integrated strategy. It enables us to reach underserved communities through mobile channels, cardless transactions and digital payment solutions."

Participant 05 further highlighted:

"*Fintech has extended banking services to geographical areas where traditional branches would not normally exist."*

The findings indicate that banks view fintech as a strategic mechanism for addressing barriers associated with distance, accessibility and service costs. These findings align with the literature, which argues that fintech improves financial inclusion by reducing reliance on physical infrastructure and increasing accessibility through digital platforms.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings demonstrate that South African banks increasingly view fintech as a practical solution for reducing financial exclusion. Through digital technologies, banks can provide affordable and accessible services to communities previously excluded from formal financial systems.

- **Theme 2: Strategic Partnerships Between Banks and Fintech Companies**

Objective Addressed:

Examine the mechanisms banks use to promote financial inclusion through fintech.

A prominent theme emerging from the interviews was the growing importance of partnerships between banks and fintech companies.

Participant 02 stated:

"*Fintechs are definitely going to be the answer to traditional banking because they understand customer needs faster and can roll out solutions quicker.*"

Participant 03 explained:

"We bought 100% shareholding of a fintech company providing affordable card machines, mobile POS solutions and business funding to SMEs in townships."

Participant 04 added:

"We have partnered with fintech service providers for over a decade and integrated their systems into our operations."

Interpretation of Findings

The findings reveal that partnerships enable banks to overcome limitations associated with bureaucracy, legacy systems and lengthy development processes. Fintech firms provide agility, innovation and closer proximity to underserved markets, while banks contribute funding, credibility and regulatory expertise.

- **Theme 3: Digital Innovation and Improved Accessibility**

Objective Addressed:

Assess fintech solutions used to improve access to financial services.

Participants identified several fintech innovations currently supporting financial inclusion.

Examples included:

Mobile banking applications, USSD banking, Digital onboarding, Biometric verification, Mobile money transfers, Cardless ATM withdrawals, Merchant cash advances, POS-based banking solutions

Participant 05 stated:

"Customers only need an ID number and a cellphone. The bank completes the verification process digitally, enabling immediate account opening."

Participant 04 noted:

"The ability to transact without an account through cardless and cashless transactions is one of the most important innovations."

Participant 01 highlighted:

"*USSD and mobile applications allow customers to become more self-sufficient and independent."*

Interpretation of Findings

The findings suggest that fintech innovations significantly reduce barriers associated with traditional banking. Digital onboarding processes simplify customer acquisition while mobile-based solutions improve convenience and accessibility.

- **Theme 4: Infrastructure and Organisational Readiness**

Objective Addressed:

Determine whether banks possess the infrastructure and resources required to implement fintech.

Most participants indicated that their organisations possess adequate technological infrastructure to support fintech implementation.

Participant 04 stated:

"*We have spent significant time modernising our technology stack. Many systems are cloud-based and supported by strong data capabilities."*

Participant 05 added:

"Our infrastructure is cloud-based, lean and aligned with global technology benchmarks."

However, Participant 03 offered a contrasting view:

"I cannot confidently say the bank has the infrastructure to support fintech, which is why we acquired a fintech company with existing capabilities."

Interpretation of Findings

The findings indicate that while banks generally possess the technological resources required for fintech implementation, their readiness varies. Cloud computing, artificial intelligence and digital platforms have become essential components of fintech deployment.

- **Theme 5: Regulatory and Implementation Challenges**

Objective Addressed:

Identify barriers affecting fintech implementation.

Participants consistently identified regulation, compliance requirements and legacy systems as major barriers.

Participant 03 stated:

"The biggest challenge is banking regulation. Fintech companies can service customers in ways that banks cannot because of compliance requirements."

Participant 01 explained:

"There are regulatory frameworks that underpin financial services, and these must always be considered when introducing innovation."

Participant 04 added:

"*Regulation is supportive but increasingly complex, particularly regarding artificial intelligence and cross-border services."*

Legacy systems were also identified as a major challenge.

Participant 03 stated:

"Legacy systems are a hindrance because they are not built with the same agility as fintech solutions."

Interpretation of Findings

The findings suggest that while regulations protect consumers and ensure financial stability, they also slow innovation. Legacy systems further constrain banks' ability to deploy fintech solutions rapidly.

- **Theme 6: Customer Adoption, Trust and Awareness**

Objective Addressed:

Explore customer readiness and acceptance of fintech.

Participants generally believed customers have positive perceptions of fintech services.

Participant 02 stated:

"*Customers want services on time. They want quality, transparency and security."*

Participant 04 observed:

"*Our transaction volumes have increasingly shifted online, demonstrating growing customer acceptance."*However, trust remains an important concern.

Participant 03 explained:

"*The younger generation is more open to fintech solutions, while older customers often trust traditional branch-based banks more."*

Participant 01 added:

"To the extent that technology improves people's lives, trust increases."

Interpretation of Findings

The findings suggest that customer awareness and adoption continue to improve. However, concerns about fraud, cybersecurity, and trust remain significant barriers, particularly among older consumers.

4.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study identified six major themes that collectively explain the role of fintech in promoting financial inclusion in South Africa. The findings demonstrate that banks recognise fintech as a strategic enabler of financial inclusion. Fintech improves accessibility, affordability and convenience while enabling banks to reach underserved communities. Strategic partnerships, digital innovation and technological infrastructure are key drivers supporting fintech implementation. Despite these opportunities, challenges remain. Legacy systems, regulatory complexity, cybersecurity concerns and skills shortages continue to affect implementation efforts. Furthermore, customer trust and awareness influence adoption levels across different demographic groups.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The information gathered from five banking experts about fintech and financial inclusion in South Africa was presented and examined in this chapter. Fintech as an enabler of financial inclusion, strategic alliances, digital innovation, infrastructure readiness, regulatory difficulties, and customer acceptance and trust are the six main topics that emerged from the thematic analysis. According to the results, South African banks are increasingly incorporating fintech into their broader plans for financial inclusion. The importance of fintech in reaching underserved communities, cutting costs, and enhancing customer experiences was recognised by the participants. However, removing organisational, technological, and regulatory obstacles remains necessary for successful implementation.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented and analysed findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with participants at major South African banking institutions. This chapter summarises the study's main findings, draws conclusions aligned with the research objectives, and presents recommendations to improve South African banks' readiness to use fintech to promote financial inclusion. The purpose of this study was to assess the fintech readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion. The study explored how banks perceive fintech as a solution for financial inclusion, assessed the availability of infrastructure and organisational readiness, and examined the challenges affecting the implementation of fintech within the banking sector. This chapter concludes the study by discussing the overall findings and highlighting practical recommendations for banks, regulators and future researchers.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Financial exclusion continues to affect many South Africans, particularly individuals living in rural areas, townships, and underserved communities, who have limited access to formal financial services. The rapid advancement of technology within the financial services industry has introduced fintech as an important solution for improving access to affordable, convenient and accessible banking services. This study adopted a qualitative research approach and utilised semi-structured interviews to collect data from five participants employed within major South African banking institutions. The participants held strategic and senior positions and possessed extensive knowledge and experience in fintech, digital banking, and financial inclusion initiatives.

The study's findings revealed that South African banks increasingly recognise fintech as an important enabler of financial inclusion. Participants acknowledged that fintech has improved customer accessibility, reduced banking costs and enabled banks to reach underserved communities through digital platforms and alternative banking channels. However, the study also identified several challenges affecting fintech implementation, including regulatory complexity, legacy systems, cybersecurity risks, skills shortages and customer trust concerns.

5.3 MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study's findings are discussed in relation to the research objectives.

Objective 1: To analyse whether South African banks consider fintech as a solution for promoting financial inclusion.

The study found that participants strongly viewed fintech as an important tool for improving financial inclusion within South Africa. Participants explained that fintech enables banks to extend financial services beyond traditional branch networks through digital platforms, mobile banking applications, USSD services, and alternative payment solutions.

Participants highlighted that fintech has made banking more accessible, affordable and convenient, especially for individuals residing in rural areas and townships where physical bank branches are limited. Digital onboarding, mobile money transfers, cardless transactions, and point-of-sale (POS) solutions were identified as important innovations that support financial inclusion. The findings further revealed that fintech helps banks reach underserved communities more efficiently while reducing operational costs associated with physical infrastructure.

Objective 2: To ascertain whether South African banks possess the infrastructure, systems and organisational readiness required to implement fintech

The study revealed that most South African banks possess the technological infrastructure necessary to support fintech implementation. Participants highlighted investments in cloud computing, digital banking platforms, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity systems as evidence of the growing digital transformation in the banking sector. However, the findings also showed that readiness levels differ among banks. While certain institutions have advanced digital capabilities and scalable systems, others continue to face challenges associated with outdated legacy systems and integration complexities. Participants further explained that banks are increasingly investing in fintech partnerships, customer education programs and digital transformation initiatives to improve operational readiness and customer adoption. The findings also revealed that South African regulators are generally supportive of fintech innovation through initiatives such as payment modernisation programs, innovation hubs and regulatory sandboxes.

Objective 3: To identify the challenges affecting the implementation of fintech within South African banks

The study identified several challenges that hinder the full implementation of fintech in the banking sector. One of the most common challenges highlighted by participants was the existence of legacy banking systems. Participants explained that older banking systems reduce organisational agility and make it difficult to integrate modern fintech solutions quickly and effectively.

Regulatory compliance was also identified as a significant challenge. Requirements such as FICA, KYC and POPIA compliance were viewed as necessary but often slow down innovation and customer onboarding processes. In addition, cybersecurity risks, fraud concerns and customer trust issues continue to affect fintech adoption. Participants explained that while younger customers are generally more open to fintech solutions, older customers still prefer traditional branch-based banking because of trust and security concerns. Skills shortages within specialised technology fields such as cybersecurity, cloud computing and artificial intelligence were also identified as an ongoing challenge within the banking sector.

Objective 4: To analyse from the perspective of the banks, their customer approaches, the lower- and middle-income earners'/customers' awareness of and training on fintech, as well as their willingness to utilise the technology.

The findings showed that South African banks typically believe that consumers, especially those with lower and middle incomes, are becoming more open to using fintech solutions. Customers are drawn to fintech, according to participants, because of its accessibility, affordability, ease of use, and ability to provide banking services without requiring frequent branch visits. Key fintech technologies that have boosted client acceptance include digital payments, USSD banking, mobile banking apps, and digital onboarding procedures. However, the results also showed that knowledge, trust, and digital literacy continue to affect client uptake. Participants noted that younger consumers are typically more open to fintech solutions because they are more comfortable with digital technology. Still, elderly consumers are frequently sceptical due to worries about fraud, cybersecurity threats, and a preference for traditional banking channels. The results also showed that numerous banks have implemented customer education and awareness programs to enhance knowledge of digital banking platforms and promote adoption in underserved communities. These findings suggest that successful adoption goes beyond access to technology, even as consumers' desire to use fintech increases. To foster trust and confidence in fintech services, banks must keep funding customer education, digital literacy initiatives, and awareness campaigns. The findings thus show that in the South African banking industry, customer readiness remains a crucial element of overall fintech readiness.

Objective 5: To analyse and identify strategies and recommendations for effective and sustainable financial inclusion through fintech

According to the findings, participants believed that using fintech to achieve sustainable financial inclusion required teamwork, creativity, and customer-centred strategies. Participants emphasised the significance of strategic alliances between banks and fintech firms, contending that these relationships allow banks to boost innovation, expand their customer base, and provide underprivileged communities with more easily available financial products.

The study additionally determined that boosting fintech-driven financial inclusion still requires funding for digital infrastructure. To maintain the dependability, security, and accessibility of fintech services, participants emphasised the necessity of sustained investment in cloud technologies, cybersecurity systems, digital payment platforms, and scalable banking infrastructure.

The need for continuing customer education and financial literacy programs was another significant discovery. According to participants, financial inclusion cannot be achieved solely through technological advancement; consumers must also have the knowledge and confidence to use digital financial services effectively. This was seen as especially crucial in underserved and rural areas, where digital literacy may be lower. The results further highlighted the crucial role of supportive regulatory frameworks. Participants pointed out that regulators are essential to striking a balance between innovation and consumer protection, as well as to ensuring the safe and sustainable implementation of fintech solutions. Mechanisms that can promote fintech growth while controlling related risks include regulatory support, innovation centres, and regulatory sandboxes.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the study's findings, several conclusions can be drawn.

The study concludes that South African banks are increasingly ready and willing to utilise fintech as a strategic tool for promoting financial inclusion. fintech has improved the accessibility, affordability and convenience of financial services, particularly for underserved and underbanked communities. The study further concludes that fintech partnerships have become an important strategy for banks seeking to improve innovation, customer reach and service delivery. Fintech companies provide agility and customer-centred innovation, while banks contribute funding, credibility and regulatory expertise. Although banks are making significant progress in digital transformation, challenges relating to legacy systems, cybersecurity, regulatory compliance and skills shortages continue to affect the pace of fintech implementation.

The study also concludes that customer trust and digital literacy remain important factors influencing fintech adoption within South Africa. While customer acceptance of digital banking services continues to grow, banks still need to strengthen customer education and awareness programs to improve trust and confidence in fintech solutions. Overall, the study concludes that fintech has significant potential to improve financial inclusion within South Africa. However, achieving sustainable fintech implementation will require continued collaboration between banks, fintech companies, regulators and communities.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS INFORMED BY THE STUDY

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed.

5.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN BANKS

• Banks should continue investing in digital transformation initiatives such as cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity systems and artificial intelligence to improve fintech readiness and operational efficiency.

• Banks should strengthen partnerships with fintech companies to improve innovation, agility and accessibility of financial services within underserved communities.

• Financial institutions should simplify digital onboarding processes while maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements.

• Banks should expand financial literacy and customer education programs to improve awareness, trust and adoption of fintech services, particularly among rural communities and older customers.

• Banks should continue developing affordable, customer-centred fintech products designed specifically for lower-income consumers and underserved communities.

5.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGULATORS AND POLICYMAKERS

• Regulators should continue supporting fintech innovation through flexible regulatory frameworks, innovation hubs and regulatory sandboxes. Regulatory sandboxes provide banks and fintech companies with a safe environment to test new financial technologies and digital products under regulatory supervision before they are fully introduced to the market. This approach supports innovation while ensuring that customer protection and regulatory compliance are maintained

• Policymakers should support the expansion of digital infrastructure and internet connectivity within rural and underserved communities.

• Regulatory frameworks should continuously evolve to accommodate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital assets and cloud-based banking systems.

• Regulators should continue balancing consumer protection with innovation to encourage sustainable fintech growth within South Africa.

5.5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

• Future studies should explore customer perspectives regarding fintech adoption and financial inclusion.

• Further research should investigate the long-term impact of fintech on economic empowerment and poverty reduction within rural communities.

• Comparative studies between traditional banks and digital-only banks may provide deeper insight into fintech implementation strategies and customer adoption patterns.

• Future researchers may also examine the impact of artificial intelligence and emerging financial technologies on the future of financial inclusion within South Africa.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to five participants from selected South African banking institutions, and therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire banking sector. The study also focused mainly on banking professionals and did not include customers who use fintech services. However, the study employed an appropriate qualitative research method and ensured the trustworthiness of the data and analyses. The results, conclusions and recommendations from the study should be applicable especially in South Africa. In addition, the fintech industry continues to evolve rapidly, meaning that technological and regulatory developments may continue changing beyond the timeframe of this study.

5.7 FINAL CONCLUSION

This study examined the fintech readiness of South African banks in promoting financial inclusion. The findings revealed that South African banks increasingly recognise fintech as an important tool for expanding access to financial services, particularly for underserved and underbanked communities. The study showed that banks are investing significantly in digital transformation, fintech partnerships, and customer-focused innovation to improve the accessibility, affordability, and convenience of banking services. However, challenges relating to legacy systems, cybersecurity, regulation and customer trust continue to affect the pace of fintech implementation. Despite these challenges, fintech presents significant opportunities to improve financial inclusion in South Africa. Through continued collaboration among banks, fintech firms, regulators, and communities, fintech can help build a more inclusive, accessible, and digitally enabled financial system that supports the financial needs of all South Africans.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

DETERMINING THE FINTECH READINESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN BANKS IN PROMOTING FINANCIAL INCLUSION.

OBJECTIVE 1: Analyse from the banks' perspective whether they consider Fintech as a solution to promote financial inclusion by the banks for the underbanked, underserved and the underprivileged who reside in rural areas and townships with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to financial services:

Question 1: Banks' Perspective on Fintech as a Solution for Financial Inclusion in Rural Areas

- How do you see fintech helping banks reach people in rural areas and townships who don't have easy access to traditional banking?
- Can you share any examples of fintech tools your bank has tried to use to serve these underserved communities?
- What challenges or opportunities do you think fintech presents in breaking down barriers like distance or lack of infrastructure in these areas?
- Explain the bank's support/consideration of the use of Fintech as a solution to promote financial inclusion, particularly for the underbanked, underserved and the underprivileged who reside in rural areas and townships with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to financial services.

OBJECTIVE 2: Ascertain if there is the existence of physical and technological infrastructure, regulation, funding, business support ecosystems, demand, skills, policies, methods, and measures required to introduce and implement Fintech by the Banks in South Africa**.**

Questions 2: Availability of Infrastructure, Regulation, and Support for Fintech in South Africa

- Does your bank have the right technology and physical resources to support fintech services, especially in rural communities?

- Does the Bank have modern and scalable IT systems to be better positioned to adopt and deploy fintech innovations? YES/ NO.

  a. Explain your choice of response

- How supportive or challenging do you find South African regulations when it comes to launching new fintech products?

- Explain if the bank has items listed below in place to implement FinTech technology in South Africa effectively. a. policies,b. methods,c. physical and technological systems/infrastructure d. Regulations e. business support ecosystem,

OBJECTIVE 3: Identify and analyse the major challenges militating against the full implementation of Fintech by the banks in the country.

Question 3: Challenges Slowing Down Full Fintech Adoption by Banks

- What are the biggest hurdles your bank faces in fully adopting fintech solutions?

- How do existing banking systems or a lack of skilled staff affect your ability to innovate with fintech?

- Are there regulatory or security concerns that limit how far your bank can go with fintech services?

- Do the lower and middle level income earners/customers, the main actors in the South African financial services, have a positive perception about the fintech? YES/ NO.

  Explain your answer/response.

- Are the target/potential customers of fintech aware of the technology? YES/ NO. Explain your choice of response.

OBJECTIVE 4: Analyse from the perspective of the banks, the lower and middle level income earners/customers ’awareness about fintech, as well as their willingness to utilise the technology**.**

Question 4: Banks’ View of Customer Awareness and Willingness to Use fintech

- Explain if the bank sees fintech as a solution that can address the issue of inequality, poverty and access to financial services.
- How aware do you think lower- and middle-income customers are about fintech services offered by your bank?
- What does your bank do to help customers understand and feel comfortable with fintech?
- In your experience, what encourages or stops these customers from using fintech services?
- Are the target customers willing to use fintech? YES/ No.

  Give reasons for the choice of answer.
- Have trainings been done in the communities? YES/ NO. If YES, what type/s of training have been provided?

OBJECTIVE 5: Identify strategies and recommendations for effective and sustainable financial inclusion through fintech in the country.

Question 5: Strategies and recommendations for promoting financial inclusion through fintech

- What steps is your bank taking to ensure fintech helps promote real financial inclusion?
- Can you share examples of successful initiatives or partnerships that improve access to financial services through fintech?
- Is the bank ready to implement Fintech? YES/ NO.

  a. Explain your choice of response

- If the bank is already implementing fintech solutions, are they? accessible YES/ NO: Explain your response

  b. affordable, YES/ NO. Explain your response and

  c. user-friendly for individuals with varying levels of digital literacy. YES/ NO.

Explain your response

- Suggest strategies and recommendations regarding financial inclusion through fintech that can effectively and sustainably be promoted/implemented in the country.

Thank You

APPENDIX 2: ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY

NWU BUSINESS SCHOOL

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31 July 2025

NWU Business School Research Office
Joseph.Lekunze@nwu.ac.za.
Tel: +27 (0) 183892235
Date: 31st July 2021

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter serves as a confirmation that **Ms MM Malete** student number 49861867 is a registered MBA student with the NWU Business School for the academic year 2025.

The student is working on her mini dissertation titled "Determining the fintech readiness of South African Banks in promoting financial inclusion" for the completion of an MBA degree. The student will need your support for her to collect data for the finalization of her mini dissertation as part of the requirement for the completion of an MBA degree.

The student **(Ms MM Malete)** will use the collected data for research purposes only and nothing else. The Business School, therefore, requests that the student be offered help in whatever way to access data.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. JN Lekunze
Research Program Chair
NWU Business School
Joseph.Lekunze@nwu.ac.za.
Kind regards

AABS AMBA ACCREDITED SABSA

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APPENDIX 3: CONSENT LETTER

NWU®

CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Dear Participant

I am researching "Determining Fintech readiness of South African banks in promoting financial inclusion". This study will explore the readiness of South African banks to promote financial inclusion through fintech. Teams meeting interviews will be arranged with the selected participants, who will share their daily experiences. This research will follow an interpretive approach to investigate the readiness of South African banks in advancing financial inclusion through fintech.

Please familiarize yourself with the attached consent document and provide a signature if you agree with the contents. The interview will take approximately 45 - 90 minutes of your time.

Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)

The data will not include any personal identity information (for example, demographics), and in the case where personal information or identifier is divulged by a participant, the personal information will be handled in line with the rules formulated in the **Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013).** The following is important to note in line with the Act:

You are under no obligation to divulge your personal information (i.e., demographics, race, age, gender, etc).

- There will be no negative consequences to you if you decide not to provide personal information.
- You can request access to your details at any time to change any information if you wish to do so.

- Interview recording data will be securely stored in a password-protected folder for a period of two years on the researcher's laptop.
- Only the student and supervisor will have access to the data, and it will not cross the borders of South Africa.
- No conflict of interest exists between the researchers and the participants either do power relations since the researchers do not work directly in the any of the bank's fintech department.
- The data to be collected will be used solely for the purpose of the research and nothing else.

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

I hereby confirm that,

- I voluntarily *agree to participate* in this study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I c*an 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 and/or written with an open-ended questionnaire in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had *the purpose and nature of the study explained to me* and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that the interviews will be recorded, and the time will not exceed 1 hour.
- I understand that participation involves being asked questions verbally and that *the data will be used as* part of the research work of the MBA program.
- I understand that *I will not benefit directly* from participating in this research.
- 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*.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalization, *I am entitled to access the information* I have provided at any time while it is in storage.
- I understand that I am *free to contact any of the people involved in* the research to seek further clarification and information.

- By agreeing to take part in this interview by ticking the agree box, the participant has permitted the recording of this interview.

Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ (Please tick)

Signature of participant ....

Student Name

Mary Mmiki Malete

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Supervisor

Prof M Antwi

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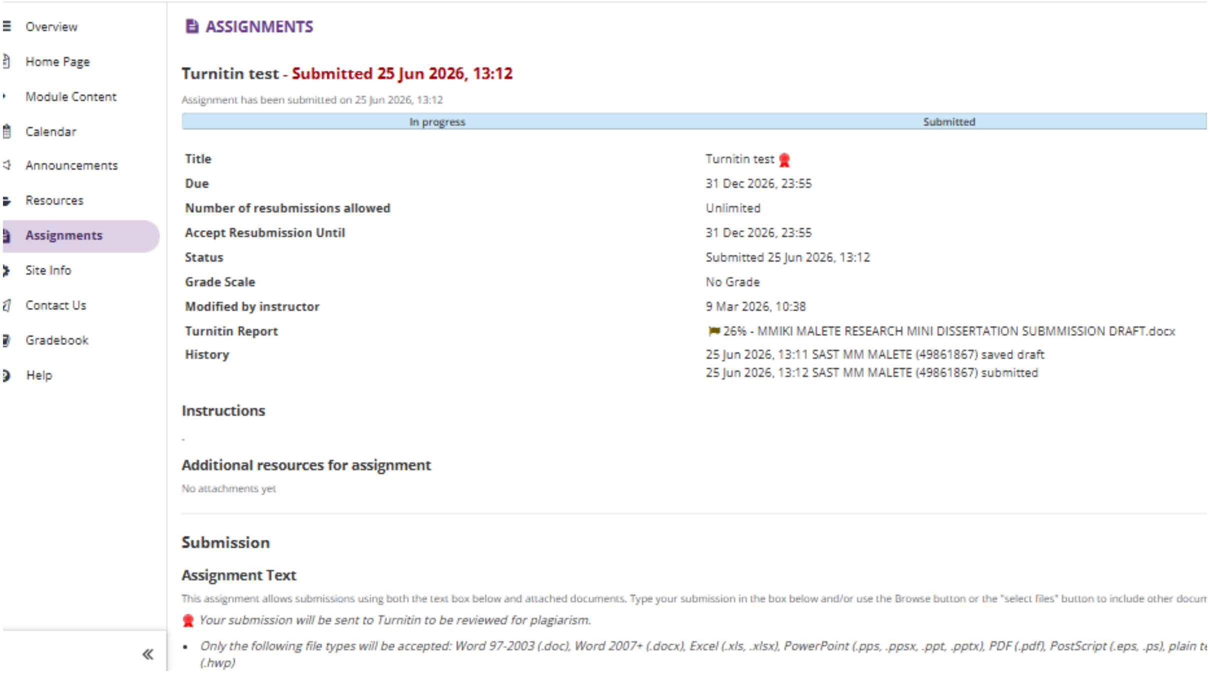
Email: mikeantwi1959@gmail.com

APPENDIX 4: TURNITIN REPORT



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ASSIGNMENTS

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Additional resources for assignment

No attachments yet

Submission

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APPENDIX 5: CERTIFICATE FROM EDITOR

ANNEXURE: CERTIFICATE FROM EDITOR

22 June 2026

RE: LANGUAGE EDITING STATEMENT

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm that I have edited a research report titled **"Determining the Fintech readiness of South African banks in promoting financial inclusion"** by M.M Malete, student number 49861867, for the Master of Business Administration at North-West University.

Yours faithfully,

Ramatshekgisa Malebo Gratitude

Associate member

Membership number: RAM006

0760 288 485

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