



Investigating factors influencing demand trends in corporate retailers at university retail brand stores

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the mini dissertation titled Investigating factors influencing demand trends in corporate retailers at university retail brand stores, submitted herewith to the North-West University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, is my own original work. It has been text-edited in accordance with professional communication standards and has not been previously submitted to any other institution for evaluation purposes.

Tshepiso Mokalake

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors that influence customer satisfaction and demand trends at the North-West University Brand Stores. Using a qualitative study method the approach was to gather and interpret data by means of a semi-structured interview that includes participants from the University. A manual thematic analysis showed that there may be a difference in how participants experience customer experience, however this as summarised in emerged themes.

In addition, the findings revealed that while the merchandise sold is of good quality material that is durable and the brand is exception, this contributes to the satisfaction of customers. The pricing strategy currently used does show a barrier that may prevent students from being able to afford the products, as they are perceived by many as too pricey and unaffordable, and not student budget friendly. Observing this it further shows that majority of the students who are customers are alienated as a target market especially those that are on financial aid.

What is more is that their customer service shows that the stores are experiencing challenges there as there are frequent operational closures due to stocktaking and the design style is not that appealing to student customers as they are generic without modernisation of style. This is because these elements show an insufficient service to customers and student customers struggle due to missed sales opportunities which weakens their overall impression. And their customers do consider the institution as innovative and has a strong identity.

Because of this the study concludes that to enhance customer satisfaction among students and increase sales, the NWU Brand Stores are advised to implement a strategy that moves towards having affordable pricing by introducing student discounts, modernising merchandise and show a communal collaboration with students, have and a relook at the operational hours in order to enhance their internal customer service operations and improve their digital marketing so that they can attract student customers.

KEYWORDS/KEY TERMS

Customer satisfaction, NWU Brand Store(s), North-West University, Population, Merchandise, Quality, variety of products, Service, Customer Experience, Brand, Students, Price

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

NWU:	North-West University
AI:	Artificial Intelligence
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility

CHAPTER 1: NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The university brand stores are essential elements in shaping and strengthening a university's identity, extending beyond the traditional role of retail outlets. The multi-campus structure makes the merchandise offered at the University brand stores, from clothing to corporate gifts, a tangible representation of the institution's character and value. The branded items play an active role in influencing how external and internal stakeholders perceive the university. This view is supported by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), who argue that the customer's experience throughout the purchasing journey significantly shapes their overall satisfaction and perception of the brand. This insight is crucial for the university, where brand consistency and a good customer shopping experience are vital for fostering a unified brand across all campuses. Moreover, Bansal (2023) states that a business that focuses on customer journeys may create a more integrated and fulfilling experience, thereby increasing customer loyalty and profitability.

North-West University (NWU) brand stores in South Africa potentially face challenges in meeting customer expectations, particularly if they do not fully comprehend the factors that contribute to customer satisfaction. Ladhari (2020) states that product quality, variety, pricing, and customer service are critical determinants of customer satisfaction in retail environments. Customer satisfaction is a crucial factor in the success of retail outlets, particularly those linked to institutions such as universities. It is therefore imperative to investigate factors that influence demand trends in the clothing and corporate gifts, sold at NWU Brand Stores, in order to identify areas of improvement and enhance the shopping experience. This aligns with Grewal *et al.* (2017) who hypothesised that understanding customer satisfaction is crucial for retaining customers and fostering loyalty in an increasingly competitive retail environment. Similarly, Lovelock and Patterson (2019) emphasised that customer satisfaction is a key determinant to repeat purchases and brand loyalty.

This study addresses a crucial gap in the literature by exploring the unique determinants of customer satisfaction within the NWU Brand Store environment. The university's brand stores help build a sense of pride and belonging on campus, while also giving students, staff, and visitors an easy way to access and enjoy the university's branded merchandise. Crucially, gaining a clear sense of how well these stores meet customer expectations is important for ensuring they continue to serve their communities effectively and reinforce the university's brand image. However, despite the critical role that NWU Brand Stores play in promoting the university's identity, there is a limited understanding of the specific factors that influence customer satisfaction in this context.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reflects a condensed literature review, focusing on factors that might contribute to customer satisfaction in a retail environment.

1.2.1 Customer Satisfaction in Retail Settings

Recent studies show that customer satisfaction in retail environments is driven by various factors such as product quality, service quality, and the overall shopping experience. Lovelock and Patterson (2019) suggest that customer satisfaction is a complex idea that involves more than just the products and services a brand provides; it also includes the emotional connection that customers develop with that brand. In the case of NWU Brand Stores, this emotional connection fosters a sense of belonging, nostalgia, and pride in the institution. In this study, satisfaction is recognised as a key driver of demand, with demand trends understood as a physical reflection of high satisfaction levels. Furthermore, Lovelock and Patterson (2019) emphasised that in retail settings, particularly in specialised stores like NWU Brand Stores, aligning product offerings with customer expectations is crucial for enhancing satisfaction. This illustrates how effectively a firm provides products and services to customers while meeting or exceeding client expectations (Ray *et al.*, 2022). In a related study, Omar *et al.* (2019) found that customer satisfaction in fashion retail

environments is closely associated with perceived value. Their research on retail service quality in Malaysia indicated that customers feel more satisfied when they perceive that the benefits of a product or service outweigh the costs. This finding is relevant for university brand stores, where pricing and perceived value significantly influence customer satisfaction (Quareshi, 2019). As a result, the various factors in customer satisfaction are not measured by how customers of the NWU Brand Stores feel, but by how their emotions fluctuate regarding clothing and corporate gifts.

1.2.2 The Role of Customer Experience in Satisfaction

Customer experience refers to a customer's internal and subjective response to direct or indirect company contact (Homburg *et al.*, 2017). In the context of NWU Brand Stores, direct contact often involves interactions with staff when visiting the stores, and indirect contact includes unplanned encounters with brand representations, such as word-of-mouth or advertising. Customer experience can therefore be seen as the total of every touchpoint between the customer and the brand, which is crucial for driving satisfaction and loyalty. Each touchpoint contributes to the overall experience, and the consistency and quality of these interactions are critical for building customer satisfaction. Positive experiences at multiple touchpoints lead to higher satisfaction levels, fostering customer loyalty and advocacy (Kranzbühler *et al.*, 2018).

Customer experience management has become increasingly important in retail, as Lemon and Verhoef (2018) note, with businesses placing greater emphasis on creating smooth, engaging, and enjoyable experiences across all channels. Furthermore, Lemon and Verhoef (2018) emphasise that in-store experiences significantly impact customer satisfaction, including the ambience, staff interactions, and ease of finding products. In the case of NWU Brand Stores, this is relevant and important. Moreover, Gentile *et al.* (2007) suggest that institutions that prioritise a holistic approach to customer experience are better positioned to differentiate themselves from competitors in a competitive market. Tlapana (2021), also argue that customer satisfaction is linked to how people choose, buy, and use products to meet their personal needs and desires. This indicates that having customer satisfaction with services influences their perception of the retail brand, store experience, and how well

the supplier delivers on their brand promise (Bolton *et al.*, 2022). This process necessitates that when university brands understand customers' wants, needs, and expectations, they ensure the brand delivers on its promises and builds a strong relationship with their stakeholders and improves its reputation and competitiveness (AIContentfy, 2025; O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2024). To support this Gentile *et al.* (2007) propose, companies must focus on creating meaningful and positive experiences at all customer touchpoints, as these experiences shape customers' emotional responses and long-term engagement with the brand. In addition, the AIContentfy (2025) indicated that where customers have many options, creating positive experiences has become more critically important. Universities can enhance their brand loyalty among students by building emotional engagement by celebrating achievements, sharing success stories and fostering a sense of community through events (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2024). This importance can help break down various factors that affect customer experience. To do this, the institution can create and maintain complete customer profiles, personalise customer interactions, and get the correct information to the right place (Wereda & Grzyboska, 2016). A study by Moslehpour *et al.* (2020) on customer experience in retail stores in Taiwan supports this view, showing that a positive in-store experience enhances customer satisfaction and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases. Wereda and Grzyboska (2016) further highlight that the more organisations know about their current and prospective customers, the more relevant their offers become, and loyalty and retention are the driving metrics due to positive customer experience. For university brand stores, this suggests that focusing on the overall customer experience, including the layout of the store and the behaviour of the staff, can significantly improve satisfaction levels and contribute to a positive brand image. Tlapana (2021) explained that the store layout establishes the retail functions.

1.2.3 Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction in University Brand Stores

Recent scholarships consistently show that university brand stores serve a unique customer base that usually includes students, faculty, staff, and alumni, each with distinct expectations. Students might prioritise affordability and trendy designs, while alumni may be more interested in classic items that induce longing. Faculty and staff

might value quality and professional attire suitable for campus events. Research by Perinotto *et al.* (2020) on consumer behaviour in university settings found that brand loyalty and customer satisfaction are influenced by the perceived relevance of products to the customer's identity with the institution. For instance, at Sephora stores, when customers enter the store, they buy a product that was suggested by their friends, and they shop with freedom (Tariq, 2021). In the context of NWU Brand Stores, offering merchandise that resonates with the university community and reflects the institution's values can enhance satisfaction. This can be achieved by selling merchandise that includes faculty-based artwork, incorporating elements of the university's history in designs, or collaborating with local artisans to create unique, handcrafted items.

Recent studies also emphasise the importance of service quality in university retail value chain. Kang and Namkung (2019) explored the role of service quality in university dining services and found that service quality directly impacts student satisfaction and loyalty. While their study focused on dining services, the findings can be extrapolated to university-brand stores, where the quality of customer service, including staff knowledge and friendliness, is likely to influence satisfaction. This can further be expanded into an online commerce store for personalised recommendations.

NWU Brand Stores should maintain a competitive strategy while promoting the value of its merchandise. This can be achieved by blending exclusivity, university heritage, and backing local production (Dion, 2021). Through such a pricing strategy, the institution is bound to increase customer satisfaction, build loyalty, and deepen the connection to the university brand.

Another important factor is helping customers feel confident in the merchandise by listening to their feedback and building genuine relationships with them (Bishop, 2024), which can be strengthened through thorough employee training to ensure staff have the skills they need to perform well (Samaai, 2024). This factor ensures that competitors will have difficulty replicating the uniqueness of the business (Dion, 2021). The institution can offer comfortable, long-lasting items and ensure that the stores are welcoming in a way that reflects the brand identity. This will help the stores leverage

their brand heritage (Dion, 2021). Having a good colour scheme, typography and designs elements should reflect the university's values and heritage (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2024). Revamping or upgrading the stores and offering apparel suitable for events and gift can enhance the institution's appeal and image to customers (Tlapana, 2021). Revamping will require maintaining continuous, simultaneous stock availability (Samaai, 2024) to ensure that the institution is a multi-purpose destination that cares for the consumer needs and experiences (Samaai, 2024).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the significant role that university brand stores play in cultivating institutional spirit and providing convenient access to branded merchandise, the limited understanding of customer satisfaction and their behaviour is really what makes it impossible to manage the purchasing patterns and demand trends at North-West University (NWU). This is exceptionally concerning given NWU's multi-campus structure, where there may be differences in customer needs, and first choice across campuses may lead to distinct customer needs and preferences. However, there is a lack of in-depth scholarship insights into the reasons that impede customer satisfaction (Grewal *et al.*, 2017; Lovelock & Patterson, 2019). This lack of insight poses a significant challenge for NWU brand stores, as it hinders their ability to effectively meet customer needs, improve their offerings, and improve the overall shopping experience. This knowledge gap can lead to missed opportunities for increasing customer loyalty and boosting sales (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Ladhari, 2020). For the NWU Brand Stores, the missed opportunities include the inability to forecast which merchandise will be in high demand resulting in missed opportunities. Bridging this gap will strengthen the university's brand identity in a world where universities compete for students and brand equity. NWU needs to make sure its brand stores offer a great experience. It is not just about selling t-shirts and mugs; it is about connecting with the university community. The problem being investigated is the potential for missed opportunities to understand key factors influencing demand trends for branded merchandise within the North-West University retail brand stores.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question that the research seeks to address is that.

- What factors influence customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the merchandise offered by NWU Brand stores?

Secondary research questions

- What are customers' perceptions of the variety of merchandise at NWU Brand Stores?
- How do customers perceive the value for money of products sold at the brand stores?
- What are customers' experiences regarding the customer service provided by the store staff?
- How can NWU Brand Stores improve overall customer satisfaction?

1.5 AIM

The research explores factors influencing the levels of customer satisfaction experienced by NWU students and alumni when they visit and purchase from the university's brand stores. By understanding these factors, effective strategies can be developed to enhance satisfaction levels, contributing to the brand image and ultimately helping to improve service delivery to customers.

1.6 PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Explore factors that contribute to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with merchandise offered by NWU Brand stores.

1.7 SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- To investigate customers' perceptions and experiences regarding the quality and variety of clothing and corporate gifts available at NWU Brand Stores.

- To assess how customers perceive the pricing and value for money of the items sold.
- To assess the effectiveness of customer service.
- To assess, key areas of improvement and propose solutions to improve levels of customer satisfaction.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 Interpretive Research Paradigm

Research is rooted in the interpretive paradigm, which has its roots in anthropology. Here, the researcher was immersed in a social setting during the interview session so that they were able to understand the behaviour, language, and perspective of the participants. Central to interpretivism is the belief that there is no objective truth. Instead, truth and knowledge are viewed as subjective, shaped by an individual's cultural background and personal history. Knowledge is derived from one's lived experiences and interpretation of those experiences. Researchers cannot entirely separate their values and beliefs from their research, which means their perspectives inevitably influence the research process (Saunders *et al.*, 2018).

Goldkuhl (2012) suggests that interpretivism should not be seen as a single, homogeneous research philosophy but as comprising various strands such as constructivist, critical, and deconstructionist approaches. The interpretive approach is particularly favoured by many researchers, such as Weber, Dilthey, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Berger, and Simmel, among others (EBSCO, 2025). Interpretivists adopt a relativist ontology, believing that a phenomenon has multiple interpretations rather than a single interpretation. This means there is no single truth but rather various truths and perspectives. A phenomenon that is studied using the interpretivist paradigm is not quantifiable. According to interpretivists, to understand a phenomenon's complexity, it should be studied in its natural context. Methods such as grounded theory can be employed, and the results of such research cannot be generalised (Creswell, 2007). The primary advantage of the interpretive approach is that it allows

for a detailed study of a phenomenon within its social setting. This allows the researchers to interpret what they see, hear, and understand (Creswell, 2007).

1.8.2 Qualitative Research Approach and Design

The interpretive paradigm naturally aligns with qualitative research and Mohajan (2018), posits that it is inherently inductive, aiming to uncover meanings and insights relevant to specific situations. Consequently, it employs non-probability sampling methods, such as snowball and purposive sampling, and data collection techniques like observations and semi-structured and open-ended interviews (Renjith *et al.*, 2021). This approach focuses on gathering participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviour to gain insights into social interactions (Tenny *et al.*, 2022). At the centre, it searches for themes and patterns that are challenging to compute. This is to allow respondents the autonomy to give unanticipated responses (Doctoral Journey, 2023). Much like in this research study, the questionnaire presented questions that enabled the participants to provide comprehensive answers.

Zohrabi (2013) asserts that qualitative research focuses on how individuals derive meaning and understand their lived experiences, aiming to grasp the social reality of the participants. This exploratory approach is particularly suited to addressing “how” and “why” questions about a phenomenon. Qualitative research employs methods such as interviews, diaries, journals, direct observation, immersion, and open-ended questionnaires to elicit respondents' perspectives, producing rich descriptions that generate new insights into the topic under study (McLeod, 2023). As the plausibility of the phenomenon remains uncertain, the primary aim is to develop understanding rather than produce statistical findings, an approach that is also practical given its accessibility for examining broad populations (McCombes, 2023). Key methods include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, each suited to specific scenarios. For instance, participant observation is ideal for on-site data collection, in-depth interviews are suitable for gathering historical, opinion-based, and experiential data, and focus groups help explore the cultural aspects of specific groups and obtain general insights on issues (Ospina, 2004).

The primary advantages of qualitative research include:

- The ability to explore unforeseen issues that may emerge during the research process.
- Consideration of the context in which the research occurs.
- The capacity to examine figurative dimensions and social meanings.
- Enhanced opportunities for generating evidence-based ideas and theories, facilitated by longitudinal research and in-depth interviews (Kielmann *et al.*, 2012; Ospina, 2004).

This study used a case study approach, which provides a detailed examination of a specific situation rather than a broad statistical analysis. The analysis included collecting, presenting, analysing, interpreting, presenting, and discussion of findings (Islam, 2020). A case study allows for narrowing down a vast field of research into a manageable topic (Yin, 2014). The study focused on the three brand stores on each of NWU's campuses as a case study for this analysis. The case study approach was chosen because it enables the examination of phenomena within their real-life contexts, which is crucial for understanding the phenomena and considering contextual variables, such as social, political, economic, and organisational factors. It also allowed for rigorous investigation, offering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the phenomena (Harrison *et al.*, 2017). Through this the researcher derived different conclusions from the same data (Islam, 2020).

1.8.3 Population

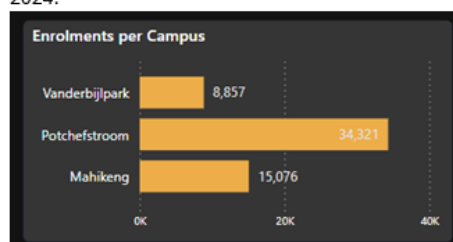
Shukla (2020) describes a population as a group or collection of all the units to which the research findings are applicable. Thacker (2020) concurs, noting that the population must have a specific distinguishing characteristic. For this study, the population comprised of all the North-West University students who have purchased at the stores, are diverse, and have access to the stores. They are geographically dispersed, with campuses located in the Potchefstroom and Mahikeng areas, both in the North West province, and the Vanderbijlpark area in the Gauteng province. The sole focus was not to be placed on the 2025 first-year students during this study. The

participants were full-time students with no income except being funded by a bursary, loan, or self-paying through a guardian or parent. They were particularly interested in university-branded fashion or clothing.

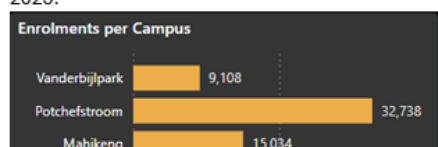
Based on the university's Quick Stats 2024/2025 Website page, the university had an estimated total number of 56,958 enrolled students, including undergraduate and postgraduate students. It is worth noting that undergraduate students make up most of the enrolled target. However, of the total, 46,468 were contact students, and 9,490 were distance students, but the numbers are not final as per the report. From these estimations, we can say that approximately 47,000 students have access to all three NWU Brand Stores. Stidworthy (2025), the director of NWU Marketing and Student Recruitment, also highlighted that enrolment targets per campus for 2024/2025 are reflected in Table A1. The population of this specific study is from their second year of study onwards, mixed gender and mixed race, and will not be faculty specific. Of the gender population, females amounted to 64.76% of the population, and males amounted to 35.17% of the population (NWU Corporate Profile 2024|2025). This is interesting, as Natalie Cowling reported that in South Africa in 2024, men made more online purchases at 14.1%, higher than women at 13.7% (Cowling, 2024). Unexpectedly, male-headed households' expenditure on clothing and footwear is more than that of female-headed households (Brand South Africa, 2021; Stats SA, 2017). The institution's news update indicated that only 11,717 could be accommodated for the 2024 intake (news@nwu, 2024). This study is interesting, as it gave the participants a well-rounded view of their preferences. However, for the 2025 intake, the institution can only accommodate 11,754 applicants (news@nwu, 2024). The corporate profile further indicates that in 2024, there were 354 international postgraduate students on the three campuses (NWU Corporate Profile 2024|2025).

Table A1: Enrolment Target Per Campus 2024/2025

Here is the student registration figures for 2024/2025 across all three campuses:
2024:



2025:



*This is the figures as at 22-03-2025 (take note that it includes distance learning students at Potchefstroom).

Also a reminder that PG qualification registrations only close at the end of March.

Source: Stidworthy, 2025

1.8.4 SAMPLING

This qualitative study used convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method described as involving non-randomised techniques for selecting samples. This is because the process is practical and convenient, especially with time and resources being limited (Subedi, 2023). It allows the researcher to recruit participants without spending time and resources (SĀGO, 2024). For this study, the researcher approached registered students from the university who had no relation to the researcher for an approximation of the truth. Non-probability sampling typically relied on the researcher's selection, whereas quota sampling may also be considered. Participants were selected because they were easily accessible to the researcher and were willing to participate in the research (Etikan, 2023; Vehovar *et al.*, 2016). This includes targeting participants who provided relevance to the study due to their willingness to participate. Moreover, they were from diverse backgrounds with different experiences and are likely to take part. Even though selection bias and study replication may present a challenge (SĀGO, 2024), for this study, the researcher ensured that sampling is drawn from a diverse population range.

The main criterion for determining the sample size was to ensure the collection of diverse opinions and perspectives. The aim is to have a range of 8–20 participants to

allow flexibility in gathering as much data as possible and observing patterns of interest from participants. Semi-structured interviews continued there was no additional information emerges from the interview. This is to say that the data collection followed the principle of saturation. Saturation occurs when the researcher repeatedly encounters the same insights and concludes that additional data collection would not yield additional information (Dovetail, 2023; Saunders *et al.*, 2018). This allows the researcher to give the participants ample time to speak openly until no new perspective is received. The aim is to obtain as much data as possible from the participants. During the interview, close attention was paid to repetitive answers from participants. This is where participants mention the same issues on the quality of clothing, corporate gifts, and the ideas they bring. When more data was required, a second interview was arranged between participants about customer satisfaction at the stores. However, no new insight was given on the +1 interview once saturation is reached.

1.8.5 Recruitment Strategy

To help recruit participants for this study, the researcher used a multi-faceted approach that includes a diverse set of individuals from North-West University. To gain access to the participants, the researcher has physically visited all three stores during high-traffic times and ask registered students who walk into the shops if they would be willing to answer questions based on the semi-structured interview guide. During this process, no student was forced or pressured to participate in the interview. Should the students agree, an online meeting was scheduled, should they not be available to answer the questions at a designated time. The researcher arranged a quieter and more peaceful room so that the recording was not interrupted by loud noise or unforeseen circumstances. This recruitment time zone is not limited to student centres and libraries outside the brand stores. To ensure that only the right people to study are communicated to, everyone interested was asked if they are currently registered or studying at NWU. Participants were supposed to be over 18 years old and South African and should have previously purchased an item from one of the brand stores. Gender participation in this study was not specific, which means that any gender willing to participate for rich insights was welcome to participate. In addition, the researcher

made sure to approach and agree with participants with no work relations for the benefit of the accuracy of data collection.

Participants who were not registered with the university and were not in their second year of study yet, were excluded from the study. This study also excluded distance learning students, occasional students, part-time students, and staff members studying part-time within the university. The marital status of the students is not an inclusion criterion for this research; they can either be married, single, divorced or any other marital status. This recruitment proficiency gave access to a broader range of students. Registered students who are not available at the given time, due to scheduling, were directed by the researcher to schedule the interview.

1.8.6 Data Processing and Analysis

To initiate the processing and analysis of this data, the researcher revisited a storyline related to the research question to familiarise themselves with what the data conveys in general terms (Alsaawi, 2024; Stuckey, 2015). For this study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences and perceptions of customer satisfaction with the products and services offered by NWU Brand Stores. This process allowed the participants to explain using open-ended questions (Alsaawi, 2024). Qualitative data obtained from these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). Because this was a qualitative research study, words, sounds, feelings, and colours were considered in the data processing phase (Islam, 2020). This process also used a recording device to help transcribe words from each participant in each interview session. In cases where participants were not be available for a physical recorded session, an online Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams tool was considered. This method involves familiarising with the data, generating the initial codes, identifying and analysing/generating themes, interpreting patterns/reviewing patterns within the data (Creswell, 2014; Stapleton, 2025), and then defining and naming the themes (Oberoi, 2024). However, Elizabeth adds the sixth step to create a write-up on the findings (Yardley, 2024). The process will begin with:

- (Step 1) Transcribing and familiarising the data, where the researcher converted the audio recording into text by thoroughly reviewing the interview transcripts to become acquainted with the data (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). This was performed by noting ideas and patterns within the data (Delve, 2020) and notes from the interview to proofread (Ningi, 2022). During this phase, data collected from the interviews was stored in a computer program for transcribing for immediate content patterns. Following the data transcription, the data was organised in folders for the different interviews conducted. Each folder had a specific, unique identifier with the collection date.
- (Step 2) Data was manually colour-coded by grouping similar responses under specific codes that represent recurring ideas, terms, visual patterns, or concepts. This can include concepts, features the researcher observed during the interview, and code labelling (Delve, 2020). This is to make sense of the transcribed data (Ningi, 2022).
- (Step 3) These coloured codes were then manually grouped into broader patterns that capture the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions. This was to reduce the considerable amount of data anonymity.
- Once the patterns were identified and organised (Step 4), the data were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately represent the data and contribute to answering the research questions. This iterative process allowed the researcher to find insignificant information that could lead to interesting points or further research (Alisaawi, 2014).
- The final step was to document the analysis findings in a report. This included interpreting the patterns concerning the research objectives and providing insights into the factors influencing customer satisfaction at NWU Brand Stores. The findings were presented in a narrative format, supported by direct quotes from the participants to illustrate the key points. Once complete, the findings must be validated for accuracy by peer review and fact-checking (Ningi, 2022). This validation will use reporting on the processed data (Ningi, 2022).

1.8.7 Data Rigour (Trustworthiness)

Ensuring rigour in qualitative research is essential for establishing trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability in findings. In investigating factors influencing demand trends in corporate retailers in university retail brand stores, employing strategies that enhance validity and reliability is key to producing meaningful insights. Validity ensures accuracy and authenticity, while reliability ensures consistency and dependability of research outcomes (Noble & Smith, 2020). By integrating systematic data collection and verification processes, this study ensured that its findings were robust and transferable.

1.8.8 VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Validity in qualitative research refers to how well the study captures and represents reality (Nowell *et al.*, 2021). Several strategies were implemented to enhance the validity of this research. Firstly, triangulation was used because it involves multiple data sources and collection methods. The study will use in-depth interviews and document analysis to cross-verify the findings and improve credibility (Cypress, 2022). This multi-method approach reduces bias and ensures a nuanced understanding of demand trends in university retail stores. To ensure validity, member checking was used, and it involved participants being invited to review interview transcripts and preliminary findings to confirm the accuracy of interpretations (Birt *et al.*, 2020). This ensures that the findings authentically reflect participants' experiences and reduce misrepresentation. The thick description provided detailed contextual descriptions of participants' experiences and perspectives, as this allowed for transferability, meaning that the findings of this research could be applied to similar settings (Nowell *et al.*, 2021). This enhances the applicability of the research outcomes in situations and contexts that are different from the context of this study. The researcher will continuously self-reflect to identify and mitigate potential biases that may influence data collection and analysis (Berger, 2021). This ensured that findings are derived from data rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency and dependability of findings over time (Noble & Smith, 2020). To ensure reliability in this study, a systematic record of research decisions, manual colour coding processes, and data analysis steps-maintained transparency and verification (Nowell *et al.*, 2021). This enables future researchers to trace and validate how conclusions were drawn.

During data analysis, thematic analysis involved multiple coders independently reviewing and categorising data, ensuring consistency in coding and minimising subjectivity (Cypress, 2022). To ensure consistency in data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure uniformity in the questions asked, allowing for comparability across participants (Birt *et al.*, 2020). Lastly, the research process undertook external scrutiny by an independent researcher, who reviewed methodology, data collection, and interpretation to ensure credibility (Berger, 2021).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are an essential aspect of any research, particularly in studies involving human participants, as ethics enable research to be conducted with integrity and respect for participants' rights. This section outlines the key ethical principles guiding this study on customer satisfaction with clothing and corporate gifts sold in Brand Stores at North-West University (NWU). Informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement in research involving human participants. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, the procedures involved, and any potential risks or benefits associated with their participation (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018; UK Research and Innovation, 2023). This were achieved by providing them with an information sheet summarising the research project (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). All participants received an informed consent form that outlines these details, clearly stating that participation is voluntary and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The consent form explained the purpose and role of the participants in clear, non-technical language and allowed participants to ask questions before consenting. Additionally, participants were informed that their insights into this study will contribute to knowledge by sharing their experiences and perceptions, specifically regarding clothing and corporate gifts.

Maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is another critical ethical obligation. In this study, all personal information collected during interviews were kept confidential, and participants will remain anonymous in any reports or publications resulting from the research. To ensure this, pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' real names, and any identifying details were removed from the data. During the interview, the purpose of the study and confidentiality measures was explained to the participant. Data was securely stored on password-protected devices; only the researcher can access the raw data. No unauthorised user are able to access the identity of the participants. Once the study was completed, the data was retained for a period consistent with university guidelines and then securely deleted (UK Research and Innovation, 2023).

Ethical research must ensure that participants are not exposed to harm, whether physical, psychological, or emotional (Creswell & Poth, 2018; UK Research & Innovation, 2023). In this study, the nature of the questions asked in the interviews were not expected to cause any harm to participants. However, the researcher was sensitive to any discomfort expressed by participants during the interviews and will offer to terminate the interview or omit specific questions if necessary. Additionally, the researcher will ensure that participants are not pressured into providing answers and feel comfortable throughout the interview process.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. This principle is essential for ensuring that participants do not feel coerced into participating or continuing their participation in the research (Loughborough University, 2023; Saunders *et al.*, 2018). If a participant chooses to withdraw, their data was excluded from the final analysis, and any records of their participation were securely deleted. This is to ensure that extreme care is taken to promote the participants' well-being while promoting non-corruption and kindness throughout.

Before data collection begins, the study was submitted for ethical review and approval by the relevant ethics committee at North-West University. This process ensures that the study meets all ethical standards and provides an additional layer of oversight to

protect participants' rights and well-being (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; UK Research & Innovation, 2023). The researcher will also obtain permission from the university to conduct interviews in the NWU Brand Stores and will adhere to any additional ethical guidelines set by the institution.

1.10 SCHEDULING

PHASES	DATES	ACTIVITY
Planning	March 2025	Finalise the research proposal and ethical approval.
	March 2025	Organise research questionnaires.
	April 2025	Revise access to participants and finalise the sampling strategy to recruit participants.
	May 2025	Conduct a comprehensive literature review. • Customer satisfaction • Brand image/management • NWU Brand Stores
Data Collection and Analysis	June 2025	• Conduct data collection by conducting interviews and distributing questionnaires to participants. • Monitor challenges and progress.
	July 2025	Transcribe interviews and perform statistical analysis.
Drafting Report	August-2025	• Interpret the findings and make recommendations for NWU Brand Stores. • Review the report based on feedback.
	October–November 2025	Finalise the report for the final submission after language editing.

1.11. CHAPTERS OUTLINE

The research will have five chapters, with the first chapter focusing on situating the research and spelling out the research problem, objectives, and questions. Chapter 2 will focus on the literature that has been written about customer satisfaction and the theories that have been propounded about customer satisfaction. Chapter 3 delineates the research methodology that was used for this study. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the results of the study. Chapter 5 will focus on the research summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

1.12. CONCLUSION

This chapter outlines a comprehensive study aimed at investigating factors influencing demand trends in corporate retailers at university retail brand stores. Despite the significant role these stores play in promoting the university's brand and fostering its spirit, there is a limited understanding of how well they meet customer expectations. By employing a qualitative research approach, this study seeks to unravel the specific elements contributing to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, focusing on product quality, variety, pricing, and customer service.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter segment will provide a comprehensive review of the literature on the determinants of customer satisfaction in a retail context. Key factors, including product quality, service excellence, and the overall shopping experience, significantly influence customer satisfaction in the retail sector.

2.2 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The concept of the customer has evolved considerably, now referring not only to individuals who directly use a product or service but also to internal stakeholders and intermediary partners, such as car dealerships and end consumers (American Society for Quality, 2025). The American Society for Quality (2025), define a customer as any individual or entity to whom a business provides its products or services (Kenton, 2025), and the absence of such customers can lead to substantial revenue declines that may ultimately threaten the viability of business operations (Salesforce, Inc., 2025). In support Taghizadeh *et al.* (2013) suggest that satisfaction is an evaluative judgement showing that the experience met or exceeded expectations. Makassy and Meng (2020) state that customer satisfaction assesses whether a product or service meets or surpasses customer expectations. This can also be quantified by the percentage of customers who report that their experiences with a firm, its products, or services exceed their satisfaction expectations (Nippatlapalli, 2013; Makassy & Meng, 2020). Thus, it is critical to customer experience (Prudence, 2023). However, the term "student satisfaction" generally refers to students' level of well-being when their academic experience and needs are met (Vigaray *et al.*, 2024).

The multifaceted nature of customer satisfaction encompasses a sense of fulfilment, providing customers with memorable experiences that resonate emotionally and foster brand advocacy. It is about the general feelings towards products and services (Laisak *et al.*, 2021). Customer satisfaction is employed in marketing to assess how products and services meet or exceed expectations (Nippatlapalli, 2013). It is essential to incorporate this into strategic planning (Basari & Shamsuhin, 2020). This is crucial, as

it has yielded positive outcomes, including customer satisfaction. Delivering high-quality service enhances customer satisfaction, making the product or service recognisable to the target audience. This aspect is vital for revenue growth and profitability, an essential element of business strategy. Companies can enhance customer satisfaction through various means, including understanding customer perspectives by implementing the right customer experience strategies (Franklin, 2025). This involves deploying relevant artificial intelligence tools tailored to the customer base.

Customers are satisfied when the business adequately addresses their needs and wants (Basari & Shamsuhin, 2020). For instance, college students, Gen Z, value authenticity and are loyal to companies that share their personal values (Freedman, 2025). Satisfied customers are more likely to speak positively about the company (Rane *et al.*, 2023), influencing customer retention and loyalty. The service provided before, during, and after a purchase significantly affects consumer purchase intentions and loyalty (Nippatlapalli, 2020). Customers will share the experience with friends, family, and online communities (Vance, 2025). A satisfied customer is more inclined to make repeat purchases and contribute to long-term profitability, enabling the business to adapt to evolving market demands (Basari & Shamsuhin, 2020). Satisfied customers tend to be less price-sensitive due to positive recommendations and reviews (Franklin, 2025). Loyal students are likely to continue their education and recommend it to others. Also, reducing complaints from staff interacting directly with customers allows resources to be allocated towards improving products and services (Borishade *et al.*, 2021). This satisfaction represents an active assessment by which customers perceive a product or service because of a positive experience derived from consumption. Companies must focus on retaining current customers and targeting new ones (Samantaray, 2015). Customer satisfaction is one of the keys to a successful business (Laisak *et al.*, 2021). For instance, students in higher education should be regarded as paying customers, and as such, institutions should endeavour to satisfy their customers, who are the students (Qureshi *et al.*, 2021). They are the guarantors of the institutions' survival, and their satisfaction is vital to the educational experience (Vigaray *et al.*, 2024).

Conversely, when customers are dissatisfied, businesses are likely to experience a decline in returns, as anticipated in their projections. This is evident when customers express grievances on social media, which can reach a broader audience than positive feedback (Basari & Shamsuhin, 2020). Such complaints may result in customers discontinuing the use of the product or service, thereby reducing anticipated future revenue. In a competitive landscape, dissatisfied customers may support competitors' offerings. Therefore, customer satisfaction is crucial for brand perception (Rane *et al.*, 2023).

To achieve positive outcomes, businesses must be receptive to customer feedback. This approach uncovers new opportunities and facilitates more informed decision-making (Franklin, 2025). Rather than adopting a product-centric approach, where companies prioritise product improvement and quality (Renard, 2025), businesses can opt for a customer-centric approach to prioritise customers by placing them at the core of every strategic decision making (Francis, 2025; Userpilot Team, 2024). This approach continuously seeks to create solutions that fulfil customer needs and increase retention using surveys, public roadmaps, improving and enhancing current pricing strategies, and launching beta testing to see if the product works. It enables customers to participate in brand messaging for engagement and experiences. This can help businesses tailor their product offerings and build sustainable growth (Francis, 2025). Additionally, having a sustainable brand attracts environmentally conscious customers and improves the brand reputation. This approach involves measuring valuable insights into customer needs, wants, and pain points to develop solutions that address these requirements (Simon-Kucher.com, 2023). Being customer-centric enables companies to focus on what their customers desire. Companies must adapt their products and services as customer preferences evolve (Renard, 2025). By doing this they can deliver a seamless and personalised experience regardless of the channel used. A product-centric approach may yield high-quality products that lack innovation. In contrast, a customer-centric approach aligns operations with customer experiences, enhancing customer value, satisfaction, and loyalty. This strategy fosters a culture of continuous improvement, driving innovation to create lifetime customer value (Tidick, 2023).

However, this approach is not without challenges, mainly because established customer-centric companies can resist disrupting the status quo, as their decision-making often hinges on return on investment. These companies may lack the necessary technology (such as artificial intelligence tools and channel switching) to integrate customer centricity into their operations. For instance, this integration requires utilising social media platforms to engage with customers and streamline processes.

In an increasingly competitive environment with abundant customer choices, customer satisfaction is a powerful differentiator that enables businesses to distinguish themselves and build a sustainable competitive advantage (Pramaswari *et al.*, 2021). This competitive edge can be achieved by analysing customer feedback and planning to eliminate factors that create customer strain. Such efforts will help businesses stand out from their competitors (Franklin, 2025). This section comprehensively analyses the key factors that impact customer satisfaction.

2.2.1 DRIVERS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

2.2.1.1 *Product or Service Quality*

High product quality is a fundamental determinant of customer satisfaction. For instance, there needs to be a competitive advantage based on the quality of education, especially with the rise of private higher education institutions that contribute to student satisfaction. (Qureshi *et al.*, 2021). Consumers anticipate that products will meet or exceed their durability, reliability, and performance expectations. Research indicates that when customers perceive product quality as high, their likelihood of repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth significantly increases.

In contemporary markets, customers expect premium service to improve their customer journey, and businesses that deliver this at every interaction are likely to attract new customers (Franklin, 2025). Basari and Shamsudin (2020) argue that customer satisfaction is achieved when customers are pleased with product quality and the overall experience during their interaction. This highlights the idea that

customer expectations greatly influence their loyalty. Products characterised by high performance, durability, and dependability tend to receive positive client feedback (Salesforce, Inc., 2025). When customers are involved in the development of products and services, businesses are more likely to create offerings that meet customer expectations (Simon-Kucher.com, 2023). This reflects a customer-centric philosophy. Customers demonstrate loyalty through repeat purchases and referrals (Rane *et al.*, 2023). This form of loyalty is measured by the ongoing relationship between customers, brands, and companies (Wang & Nuangjamnong, 2023). However, when a product is of low quality, customers are unlikely to return (Peek, 2024). Businesses can improve customer satisfaction measurement by reviewing their customer service quality assurance plans, which include regular monitoring of satisfaction levels (Franklin, 2025). For this next step in the customer satisfaction process, conducting customer surveys and using quality assurance scorecards can help audit consistency and collect feedback on specific interactions. Additionally, establishing high-quality standards that are sustainable, regularly updating products based on customer feedback, and conducting quality control to prevent recurring issues (Vance, 2025).

Service quality plays a central role in shaping the customer's shopping experience. Research consistently highlights the importance of staff knowledge, responsiveness, and attentiveness, noting that positive interactions with friendly and well-informed employees can significantly enhance perceptions of the retail brand and overall satisfaction. Service quality is commonly defined as the gap between what customers expect and what they actually receive (Gebremichael & Singh, 2019). Addressing this gap often involves improving convenience, such as offering a 24-hour online store accessible through customers' preferred platforms. Such technologies also allow quicker responses through intelligent routing systems and other artificial intelligence tools (Franklin, 2025). It is shaped by the interaction of both internal and external stakeholders (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2024). Enhancing service quality in this way can help reduce promotional, procedural, behavioural, and understanding gaps that frequently contribute to customer dissatisfaction (Shridhar, 2022).

While service quality can be assessed by examining how effectively goods and services are delivered, it is equally important to evaluate it from the customer's perspective (Laisak *et al.*, 2021). Models such as SERVQUAL, which considers

convenience, service scope, and ease of use, provide valuable frameworks for understanding how customers perceive service performance (Laisak *et al.*, 2021). In addition, follow-up surveys can offer ongoing insight into customer experiences over time and support continuous improvement efforts (Medallia, 2022).

Although the definition of quality can be subjective and vary by product type, a product deemed high quality by one customer may be perceived as lower quality by another (Caramela, 2025). Product quality is a powerful asset for a business's bottom line, particularly when personalising customer offerings. This personalisation strategy involves providing recommendations, content, and interactions tailored to meet customer needs. Implementing this approach will lead to customers feeling valued and establish trust in the process (Franklin, 2025). The artificial intelligence agents/tools will require customer information for these enhancements, necessitating a data-driven approach that involves daily data input for practical training.

2.2.1.2 *Price and Value Strategies*

Pricing is crucial in retail as it influences demand therefore price-to-value, or value-based pricing strategies can be adopted in a business to determine the highest prices customers will pay for a product and focuses on customer perception (Shopify Staff 2023). Just in South Africa and Nigeria, footwear accounts for over 30% of the total market, with womenswear being 24% and menswear being 20% (Bizcommunity, 2024). Managing price changes effectively can boost sales, profit margins, and customer loyalty (Salesforce, 2024). A great strategy considers market trends, customer preferences, business costs, and company goals (Keenan, 2025). If customers express dissatisfaction with the lowest price offerings, businesses may encounter challenges. Lowering prices does not guarantee that customers' expectations are met for what the brand represents. When it comes to value, customers prioritise value in purchasing decisions, and their actions significantly influence income forecasts. As a result, emphasis has been placed on assessing the value and issues related to students' perceptions and experiences, as universities can differentiate themselves by better satisfying their customers (Vigaray, 2024). The evolving marketplace dynamics drive a preference for quality-driven products. A

customer-focused approach is important for finding the right balance between price and value, especially since investments in quality, convenience, and personalised experiences help explain why higher prices may be justified. In universities, where students are now often viewed as customers, steps have been taken to ensure they feel they are getting real value for their money (Qureshi *et al.*, 2021).

This strategy makes it possible for businesses to set higher prices for unique products, which tends to work especially well in areas like fashion, collectables, and luxury goods (Keenan, 2025). In retail and e-commerce, it can also be applied through bundle deals that offer small discounts to encourage customers to buy more at once. When customers develop loyalty to a brand, companies can use these pricing strategies more confidently because loyal customers are often willing to pay a bit more. A practical example is Barnes & Noble College, which chose brand partners based on their ability to offer modern, relevant, and affordable items that appeal to Gen Z shoppers (Barnes & Noble College, 2023).

In retail settings, customer loyalty often becomes visible through everyday actions such as adding extra items to a shopping cart, upgrading to premium options, or returning to make repeat purchases (Vance, 2025). Researchers note that retailers frequently encourage these behaviours by offering loyalty perks like exclusive discounts, free shipping, or reward points that accumulate over time. Studies focusing on college students highlight that, because they generally work within tight budgets, they are more likely to return when products and services are priced in a way that feels affordable and fair (Freedman, 2025). The literature also shows that loyalty programmes tend to be more successful when they incorporate personalisation, co-branding efforts, and thoughtful use of customer data, all of which contribute to stronger engagement and better overall outcomes for retailers (Wilson, 2024). In addition, targeted email and SMS campaigns have been shown to help drive repeat visits (Schneider, 2024). As Freedman (2024) points out, email remains a particularly effective channel for reaching students, as most check their inboxes at least once a day.

2.2.1.3 Convenience

Convenience has increasingly become a key element of customer satisfaction, especially as more shopping takes place online. Research shows that customers expect digital platforms to be simple to navigate so they can find and purchase items without unnecessary effort (Peek, 2024). Convenience is often described as anything that helps customers save time and reduce the amount of work involved in the buying process (de Souza *et al.*, 2023), and studies consistently highlight that customers judge their overall experience partly on how much time and effort they feel has been saved (Warni *et al.*, 2025). Loyalty features, such as earning points, receiving cash-back rewards, or accessing exclusive promotions, can add further convenience by offering extra value with little effort on the customer's part (Bouchirika, 2025).

As customers today have many shopping options, businesses must pay close attention to what different groups need and prefer. For example, in Nigeria's difficult economic climate, many consumers choose cheaper alternatives such as second-hand goods or items from local cottage industries (Bizcommunity, 2024). Stores that provide a smooth, comfortable, and stress-free shopping experience are more likely to attract and retain customers (Warni *et al.*, 2025). Shoprite's expansion of its Sixty60 delivery service and the Xtra Savings programme illustrates how convenience-focused innovations can support strong financial performance (Minnaar, 2025). In university settings, features such as smart-locker pickup options provide students with flexible collection times that fit their busy schedules (The Douglas Stewart Co., 2025).

Convenience also extends to practical aspects of access and availability. A Trade Intelligence report shows that 68% of informal shoppers value nearby stores, while 67% prefer retailers that open early and close late. Among older customers, many of whom rely on social grants, proximity remains the most important convenience factor (Paul, 2023). For university students, convenience can be strengthened by offering extended store hours, on-campus events, and delivery options to dormitories, even during early hours (Zolotorofe, 2019). The literature further explains that convenience includes decision-making, access, search, transaction, and post-purchase elements, all of which contribute to customer loyalty and retention (Pham *et al.*, 2017). For

students, offering a wide range of product, such as self-care items, fun gifts, or quirky accessories, can help meet multiple needs in one visit, ultimately saving time and effort (Richter, 2024).

2.2.2 Competitive Pricing Methods for Measuring

The subsequent section of this chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis of the key metrics used for assessing satisfaction, along with optimal strategies for their implementation to ensure a holistic understanding of best practices.

Nippatlapalli (2013) explains that, as customer satisfaction is measured along various dimensions, customers can be asked to rate the service at a front desk and/or at a checkpoint service in the room. Basari & Shamsuhin (2020) state that customer satisfaction is crucial to the business's performance, as this indicates how successful a company is in delivering its products and services. This customer satisfaction information from surveys and ratings often helps a business determine how to improve its products and services in the best way possible (American Society for Quality, 2025). Ultimately, measuring customer satisfaction should encompass the general satisfaction, customer perception, loyalty, and the likelihood to recommend (Prudence, 2023). Successful customer satisfaction will correct assumptions and show hidden risks. This is beneficial for strengthening the competitive advantage and the share market while identifying the value to support sales and marketing efforts.

2.2.2.1 *SERVQUAL Model*

This model was initially designed to enhance customer satisfaction in the retail and service sectors (Haliva, 2025). It is used to collect information about customer expectations and perceptions, helping businesses better understand what people expect of them (Medallia, 2022). Amokao *et al.* (2023) emphasised that the model has been. Service quality in this competitive higher education is important as it impacts student level of satisfaction, loyalty, and academic success (Wider *et al.*, 2024). Private higher education maintains service quality for sustained growth and to enhance their image with diverse student needs. Smith and Salty (2024) posit that it

is used in some research to investigate an institution's image, as perceived by students, about the organisation's products or services. This is because the institution's image is crucial in attracting new students (Smith and Salty, 2024). The model assesses service quality by identifying gaps between customers' expectations and actual service delivery, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Wider *et al.*, 2024). It achieves this by collecting client feedback, assessing their perceptions of the service based on the five dimensions, and calculating the resulting gap. The ideal way to measure this is by using a SERQUAL questionnaire that measures both customer loyalty and satisfaction (Medallia, 2022). Identifying gaps is crucial for understanding where to improve service delivery. After calculating gaps, the next step is to evaluate and interpret the data to determine if expectations are met. Then, develop plans to close those gaps, monitor progress, and provide feedback.

The model encompasses five dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy that influence student satisfaction (Laisak *et al.*, 2021; Amoako *et al.*, 2023). Although it is adaptable to accommodate unique factors and distinctions that accompany service delivery, it can be modified to focus more on measuring expectations or perceptions independently (Smith & Salty, 2024).

- Tangibility relates to personnel, physical facilities, equipment, and materials that a customer perceives. In a university, this would include an on-campus gym, dining facilities, or parking (Smith & Salty, 2024). This refers to the appearance of the business, including how employees present themselves and communicate (Medallia, 2022). The university store can evaluate tangibility by looking at the open space, how clean and neat the space is, and if the store is inviting (Follett Higher Education, 2025).
- Reliability refers to the promises made to the customer (Haliva, 2025). In the context of a university's library, all the services and resources offered, such as printers, books, journals, references, and Wi-Fi, are things that a student can expect. In the context of educational institutions, reliability and responsiveness can enhance the profile and ensure a positive student experience (Smith & Salty, 2024). The company must perform the service accurately, on time, consistently, and error-free. (Haliva, 2025). It shows how dependably and accurately products

or services perform (Medallia, 2022). A university store can evaluate reliability by being able to access electronic shelf labels to gain information on the product, such as having stock and having the correct pricing as advertised (The Douglas Stewart Co., 2025).

- Responsiveness involves attentively assisting customers, providing accurate information, and responding promptly to their needs. In the context of educational institutions, reliability and responsiveness can improve the profile and ensure a positive student experience (Smith & Salty, 2024). A university store can implement responsiveness by having staff ready to assist and engage with customers and actively helping them find what they are looking for (Follett Higher Education, 2025).
- Assurance involves the knowledge and politeness of employees, along with the ability to foster trust and confidence (Haliva, 2025). In the context of an educational institution, it can be said that assurance encompasses security, credibility, courtesy, and competency (Amoako, 2023). A university retail store can train and equip employees with the knowledge and skills so that they are able to engage with their customers (Buehler, 2024).
- Empathy focuses on assessing and actively trying to understand customer needs. Here, employees show the right amount of empathy (Haliva, 2025). A university retail store can deliver personalised recommendations and attend to their care by actively listening to each customer to recognise their behavioural style (Buehler, 2024).

2.2.2.2 *Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT)*

The element of general customer satisfaction is measured using this metric (Prudence, 2023). CSAT is a versatile metric that is used to calculate the rate of customer satisfaction on a Likert scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) or 1 to 10 (Bishop, 2025; Salesforce Inc., 2025). This tool is helpful for a business where discovering the central influences for dissatisfaction is important to gain additional feedback to enhance strategies (Prudence, 2023). The university retail store can use the metric to pinpoint areas that need to be reviewed for improvement so that the student has a seamless shopping journey. Once the company knows what

dissatisfactions are, it can take steps to address these concerns to improve the quality of its products and services (Garstezzi *et al.*, 2024).

It is important to note that CSAT uses two formulas to calculate satisfaction; the first is via surveys, and the second is through a numerical representation. The CSAT score measures customer loyalty (Muse, 2025). Since the score is customer-centric, the business can send survey questions to customers via emails, social media monitoring, live chats, and short message services (SMS) to rate customers effectively (Renard, 2025). This survey can be sent after the student completes a purchase. Universities can utilise a CSAT survey to gauge student satisfaction with their purchases and assess the overall availability of lifestyle products in the store. The scale selection is determined by the business's specific needs to convert subjective impressions into a more measurable metric (Majka, 2024). These interactions vary from a physical encounter after a sales journey or purchase, post-help service centre, or once a customer has completed the onboarding process. Surveys have effectively gathered customer opinions, preferences, and experiences (Prudence, 2023). The surveys are concise, encouraging valuable feedback, and include a high response rate and quick clicks on multiple-choice questions. The score increases with time, allowing the company to set a benchmark for tracking progress.

The calculation formula is calculated by identifying the total number of survey respondents, determining the number of satisfied customers, and then dividing the number of satisfied customers by the total number of customers who responded (Medallia, 2024; Muse, 2025). Once the division is complete, the last step is multiplying the results by one hundred to convert them to a percentage. The formula collects responses and then uses a calculation formula to obtain the average score (Bishop, 2025).

However, the score is not without challenges. Businesses implementing this must be aware of the possibility of having limited data. Not all customers will fill in the surveys, and the numerical results may not explain the detailed context of what the customers mean by their choice. Nonetheless, there are ways to use it to encourage customers to provide feedback, improve public perceptions, and encourage repeat purchases. These ways include offering customers incentives and showing that their opinions

matter by publishing them on social media as testimonials, like the Maties Shops that offer items that are not linked to Stellenbosch University but also to the public (Nombewu & Engel, 2018). This way, they promote the tourism market and promote Stellenbosch and the town itself.

2.2.2.3 *Net Promoter Score (NPS)*

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is widely used to assess how loyal and satisfied customers are, particularly by measuring how likely they are to recommend a business to others (Prudence, 2023). The metric is based on a simple question rated on a scale from 0 to 10, asking customers to indicate the likelihood that they would recommend the organisation's products or services (Gastezzi *et al.*, 2024; Salesforce, Inc., 2025). Companies use NPS to gauge how engaged their customers are and to understand whether those customers are willing to speak positively about the brand (Prudence, 2023). Because it is inexpensive and easy to implement, NPS is accessible to a wide range of organisations and can be integrated into both customer analysis and employee involvement efforts (Henry, 2024).

NPS can be calculated manually or through automated systems. The manual calculation subtracts the percentage of detractors—customers who report low satisfaction—from the percentage of promoters, who are highly satisfied and likely to recommend the brand. This approach groups respondents into promoters, passives, and detractors, providing a clear picture of how customers feel about their experience (Gastezzi *et al.*, 2024). As a practical tool, NPS helps organisations identify where customers are satisfied, where they may be struggling, and how business strategies might be adjusted to improve loyalty and retention (Alig, 2025). When the score falls below zero, it signals that unhappy customers outnumber those who would recommend the brand, suggesting that the business needs to rethink its customer experience (Walker, 2025).

In a university setting, the same 0–10 scale can be used to understand how likely students are to recommend the campus store and its merchandise to friends and peers, offering valuable insight into student satisfaction and loyalty. The store can also

categorise students into three sets of promoters, passives, and detractors. With this perspective, the company may recognise that its customer experience requires attention (Henry, 2024). To address this, the business can reward its promoters by inviting them to events, offering specific incentives, and providing them with a referral bonus when they recruit others (Walker, 2025). For college students, student leadership can suggest student media channels, attending events where sponsorship opportunities are available, and offering students discount cards or programmes (Freedman, 2025). Conversely, the NPS reflects good service when the score rating is above 0. The higher the NPS ratings, the more likely customers are to promote the company but not repeat their purchases (Henry, 2024). These customers tend to endorse the brand on social media and through word of mouth. This indicates that there are more promoters than detractors. In this instance, students showing a high NPS will reflect dissatisfaction but will likely advocate for the store to their peers and share their experiences with them. This is a valuable way to attract new customers to enhance the store's reputation across the institution.

To successfully implement an NPS, a business must choose between two approaches within this score metric: transactional NPS or relational NPS. Transactional NPS measures customer satisfaction and loyalty based on specific interactions once a customer completes a transaction (Henry, 2024). For instance, a customer receives this type of survey immediately after making an online purchase. Relational NPS measures customer satisfaction and loyalty with the company over an extended period to assess the customer's broader relationship with the business and to help understand their position in the market. For example, a customer may receive this type of survey from a company once a year.

2.2.2.4 *Customer Effort Score (CES)*

The CES metric is used to measure how customers use the product or service on a scale of "straightforward" to "very difficult" (Salesforce, Inc., 2025) through surveys. It measures customers' willingness to interact with the company, product, and/or service (Gastezzi *et al.*, 2024). The time they spend resolving issues by identifying conflict areas helps the company close customer experience differences and generate a more

positive loyalty base. In the context of university retail stores, the metric can be used to assess which students interact with the store's products more. This can include finding a specific item in the store, the ease of purchasing it with financial aid, or the simplicity of returning an item that has never been worn. CES calculates the ratings by taking the total sum of customer effort ratings and dividing them by the total number of respondents (Bishop, 2024). Utilising surveys, one can collect responses to help identify areas where products and services can be improved. When conflict issues are minimal, the brand will have a positive perception, creating long-term benefits.

The retail sector serves as a fundamental pillar of numerous economies, significantly influenced by technological advancements that enhance the dynamic nature of customer experiences and behaviours. Consequently, the subsequent section of this chapter will present an in-depth literature review on retail, focusing on its impact within the South African market, including the educational sector.

2.3 RETAIL INDUSTRY

The retail sector encompasses all operations related to a company's direct sale of goods or services to consumers for personal or family use (Righini, 2023). In short, Hitchcock (2024) defines it as the activity of selling goods or services directly to consumers for personal use. This sector is categorised into three main segments which are food items, consumer goods, and durable consumer goods. This category comprises concierge services that create a bespoke shopping experience and personalised services that leverage customer data to make unique offers and tailored experiences (Thrive, 2025). For instance, the clothing industry is characterised by fast fashion trends that are diverse in market segments, technology innovation, addressing environmental sustainability, and their continuous quest for differentiation in a highly competitive marketplace (Jahromi & Ghazinoory, 2025). Fashion is the style or styles of clothing and accessories worn at any given time by groups of people (Majo & Steele, 2025). For instance, in the consumer goods sector alone, Shoprite is recognised as the largest retailer and employer, outperforming competitors such as Pick 'n Pay, Spar, and Woolworths combined (Labour Research Target, 2023). This leadership is attributed to Shoprite's emphasis on centralised distribution and its adoption of technological advancements. The company's market capitalisation stands at R175

billion in the sector. Moreover, in the apparel sector, Foschini showed the most significant increase in revenue, with a 29.7% increase compared to Mr. Price at 23 per cent and Truworths at 10%. The retail sector in South Africa faces intense competition. (Minnar, 2025).

South African apparel is growing exceptionally, with a revenue of \$6.03 billion projected to grow at 5.04% between 2025 and 2025 (Statista, 2025). However, with growth, women's apparel is the largest segment, accounting for approximately \$2.063 billion in 2025. Nevertheless, some companies like Aerie and Allen Edmonds offer students discounts at low prices when they make a particular purchase (Bouchirika, 2025). The retail industry ranks as the third-largest contributor to South Africa's economy, with trade accounting for approximately 15.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (KPMG, 2025; South African Market Insights, 2015). Data from Statistics South Africa indicates that retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear, and leather goods contributed the second highest, with a share of about 9.9% between January and March 2024 (constant 2019 prices), resulting in a contribution of 1.5 percentage points (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2025). In 2021, 67% of South Africans resided in urban areas, which accounts for the country's success in this sector (INONAFRICA, 2024).

However, the sector is experiencing considerable growth across Africa, with retailers striving to expand their operations. Shoprite alone has 160,000 employees at its stores and a network of distribution centres across Africa (Greyling, 2024). The retail sector underwent a significant transformation in 2024, with sales projected to grow 7.05% from 2024 to 2028 in West Africa's fashion market revenue (Admin, 2025). As of 2023 and 2024, China, the United States of America, and Germany are South Africa's primary international trading partners. Even though China reported a drop in trade among the top five trading partners, one of them being South Africa (South China Morning Post, 2024). These partnerships are crucial for the import and export of goods, influencing product availability, pricing, and variety within the South African retail market. Knowing this, expanding a university brand to international markets while maintaining its core values and identity can influence reputation and its academic excellence (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, in 2022, the global fashion industry generated more than \$1.5 trillion in revenues, with most manufacturing and production across Asia (Sampson, 2023). In 2024, the market was valued at \$1.8 trillion with an estimated growth of over 3.3% from 2025 to 2034 (Singh, A. & Singh, S., 2024).

2.3.1 Customer Satisfaction in Retail

Customer satisfaction is generally understood as the degree to which a retailer's products, services, and overall experience meet or exceed what customers expect. When people enter a store or make an online purchase, they usually bring certain expectations with them, and if these expectations are not met, dissatisfaction is likely to occur (Peek, 2024). Research shows that strong customer satisfaction offers many benefits to a business, while low satisfaction can have serious negative consequences. For educational institutions, student satisfaction is achieved when the service provided meets or exceeds their expectations (Borishade *et al.*, 2021). Industry examples illustrate this clearly as Bizcommunity (2019) reports that Pep Stores achieved the highest score in the South African Customer Satisfaction Index (SA-csi) with 79.8 percent, followed by Truworths and Ackermans. These results highlight the importance customers place on quality, reasonable pricing, and a shopping experience that is both smooth and convenient.

2.3.2 Value Chain in Retail

The value chain in industries such as fashion is more complex; it employs a multi-stage process that brings clothing and accessories from the concept to the customer (Sampson, 2023). Transparent communication is essential throughout each stage to reduce lead times, enhance quality, and ensure timely delivery to retailers and customers.

The value chain begins with planning, research, and development phases that enhance products or processes and carry out market and consumer research, followed by a design and prototyping phase that improves product performance, thereby minimising production costs to establish a competitive advantage in the market (Jahromi & Ghazinoory, 2025). Designers draw inspiration from film and

television costumes, street styles, and active sportswear as manufacturers produce moderately priced or budget apparel (Major & Steele 2025).

The purchasing phase coordinates the transportation of products, technology, and equipment for the supply chain, which can extend domestic and international operations. Followed by the production phase which involves manufacturing clothes, encompasses ready-to-wear and custom clothing, either by contractors or in-house. Major and Steele (2025) indicate that this phase also includes leather and fur. The designs are converted to a pattern in assorted sizes through technological innovations. Subsequently, the distribution phase oversees the movement and sale of manufactured cloth, adding value beyond the production phase. The products are packaged, transported, and networked (Sampson, 2023).

The marketing phase focuses on pricing, selling, and product distribution, including branding and advertising, often without physically altering the products, reaching consumers through retail channels. During this phase, retailers can purchase the clothing three to six months before the customer can buy it in-store (Major & Steele, 2025). The success of this phase depends on how well the customers' desires are understood and how they respond with suitable products. This includes tracking data for sales, checking the media coverage, identifying focus groups, and getting feedback about the type and quantity of goods produced. Fashion shows, catalogues, and promotional activities aimed at brand recognition and reputation for quality, low price, and trendiness are used to advertise and promote the products. For college students, advertising inexpensively and effectively, such as through college newspapers, student-run TV stations, magazines, and flyers on campus bulletin boards, could be effective. (Freedman, 2025).

Finally, the services phase includes activities provided to suppliers, customers, or employees designed to differentiate a firm within the market, such as consulting on international textile business or fashion trends. The customer service team answers questions about deliveries and products and ensures customer satisfaction with purchases and returns (Sampson, 2023). Training teams empowers them to resolve issues quickly and empathetically by offering multichannel support and working to reduce response times for enquiries and complaints (Vance, 2025). This is what

customers expect to be met with; it helps them understand the brand better and shows a strong sense of loyalty to it (Peek, 2024).

2.3.3 Retail Segmentation

In retail, the segmentation process is crucial for success, requiring an understanding of market groups to target customers more effectively in a way that aligns with your products and services (Marketing, 2025). However, these requirements encompass numerous characteristics that help to better grasp the needs and preferences of customer segments (Petraškienė, 2024). In the context of South Africa, the demographic landscape is multifaceted, comprising over sixty-four million diverse people that exhibit variations in race, culture, preferences, and income streams across nine provinces and eleven languages (Worldometer, 2025). Of this population, only about 66.6% reside in urban areas. Consequently, this knowledge establishes a solid foundation for modernised trends. This insight enables a better understanding of enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Marketing, 2025). For example, Starbucks has strategically placed its locations within walking distance at Towson University, as it is trendy among many colleges (Zolotorofe, 2019). Artificial intelligence (AI) has vast amounts of data that can be analysed from shopping history, demographic information, social media engagement, browsing history, and more to personalise the customer experience (Thorne, 2025). Freedman (2025) add that college students spend hours online, whether studying, browsing the web or socialising. This market segment is aware of the media ecosystems, censorship, misinformation, fact-checking, and content monetisation.

The clothing industry's segments are so vast that they include high-end luxury fashion, mass-market retail, sportswear, casual wear, etc., each with its own target market and pricing strategy (Jahromi & Ghazinoory, 2025). In South Africa, consumers are driven to acquire branded items on credit or buy-now-pay-later schemes because of brand loyalty and prestige (Bizcommunity, 2024). Likewise, offering branded products keeps students coming back at the start of a new semester because they tell a story (Richter, 2024).

Additionally, the women's market holds almost 52% of the total market share in the global market. This shows a demand for soft fabric that gives comfort and style in one garment (Singh, A. & Singh, S., 2024).

2.3.4 Target Audience in Retail

Understanding the target market is an important part of effective retail strategy, especially in contexts where demographic trends shape buying behaviour. In South Africa, people between twenty-five and thirty-five years old make up a large share of the taxpayer base, which suggests that millennials are a key customer group for many retailers and marketers (Msosa, 2023). Students also represent a significant segment of consumers. Although they tend to be careful with their spending, they collectively spend around 417 billion dollars each year, making them an influential group in the retail market (Bouchirika, 2025). This generation, born between 1989 and 1999, is increasingly active in the workforce and therefore better able to spend their own income (Msosa, 2023). In higher education settings, understanding the needs and expectations of this group is especially important, as universities and related organisations must ensure that their services and offerings align with what these students value (Amoako *et al.*, 2023). Using various ways to target customers can help personalise content for each channel (Kaushik, 2025). For college students, it is important to know which platforms they use (Freedman, 2025). For example, Melissa Bernstein, co-founder of Melissa & Doug Toys, stated that college students are dear to her and that sharing wellness-focused content, along with offering tangible tools and products, can help the entire campus community feel calmer, more content, and joyful (Barnes & Noble College, 2023). This requires them to understand their individual preferences and tailor products, services, and interactions using customer data, as well as offer tailored discounts or loyalty rewards and create personalised communication touchpoints (Vance, 2025). South Africa, where internet access is not available to everyone for online shopping, relies solely on some AI tools that can introduce behavioural bias. If a tool learns from an unrepresentative sample, its insights may not accurately reflect the broader population's behaviours and preferences (Tembloedza, 2025). As a result, tools such as sending SMSes, emails, or push notifications can help craft personalised messages while defining customer segmentation through an omnichannel marketing strategy (Kaushik, 2025).

2.3.5 Challenges in Retail

Retailers can be both target and institutional (Righini, 2023). In recent years, retailers have faced several challenges in this industry, including empowered consumers. For instance, due to the rise in e-commerce, many shops have been experiencing a decline in physical shoppers and difficulties in keeping employees. This is attributed to the strict regulations of the importing countries, which impose quotas and tariffs (Major & Steel, 2025). INONAFRICA (2024) showed that when the economies decline, people save money, and when they improve, people spend, which results in increased revenue for stores. South Africa's reliance on imported material causes supply chain disruptions and exchange rate instability (Business Wire, Inc., 2025). A report from Euromonitor International's Voice of the Customer: Lifestyle Style Survey indicates that over 20% of South Africans plan to reduce their spending on clothing and footwear due to high inflation and economic challenges (Bizcommunity, 2024).

The clothing industry faces a number of significant challenges, many of which relate to environmental impact and growing market pressures. Globally, the industry accounts for about six percent of world trade and produces a substantial amount of waste, putting considerable strain on natural resources and energy use (Jahromi and Ghazinoory, 2025). The fashion sector, in particular, is responsible for roughly ten per cent of global carbon emissions and generates high levels of textile waste. This is largely due to its heavy reliance on water, as well as the dyes and chemicals used in production, which contribute to air and water pollution (Kelleher, 2025). These environmental concerns are compounded by competitive pressures in the global market. Many foreign textile producers are able to manufacture clothing at lower costs and at much larger scales, leaving smaller local businesses struggling to compete with major international brands (Staff Writer, 2024). Technological advancements have also encouraged manufacturers to keep production costs as low as possible, often leading them to move operations to regions where wages are minimal (Major & Steele, 2025) Workers are exploited for production, as labourers have few protections against long hours and unfair wages and face retaliation (Kelleher, 2025). That is why North

American and European customers demand that retailers adhere to fair labour and environmental practices (Sampson, 2023).

In the context of educational institutions, using outdated systems can leave students frustrated, leading to communication barriers (Hurter, 2025).

2.3.6 Solutions/Opportunities in Retail

However, retailers can still succeed in this industry only if they can constantly adapt and innovate to meet the needs of their customers (Thorne, 2025). These can be achieved by:

- employing trends such as artificial intelligence (AI) tools, omnichannel retail, and modernised systems that support AI and omnichannel retail. Employing AI tools can help predict future buying trends and eliminate inefficiencies (Tembedza, 2025). As retail moves towards AI tools, the physical customer services at the brand stores are used for benchmarking.
- Moving production to local manufacturing can create jobs, have manufacturers cut lead times, and introduce short production cycles, which could also help (Business Wire, Inc., 2024).
- Improve the supply chain, which results in faster turnaround times, lower costs, and improved customer experience, allowing producers and retailers to make profits (Sampson, 2023).
- Also, take advantage of the online platforms, physical stores, and traditional markets that the young population is using and the evolving fashion trends that they are interested in (Admin, 2025). For instance, the Maties Shop stocks a variety of innovative designs from Stellenbosch University students and other designers (Nombewu & Engel, 2018). Wilson (2024) justified that enhancing the in-store experience was a top-cited growth opportunity for driving growth in 2024.
- Implementing a product assortment of merchandise mix, where a variety of items are offered that encompass both the width (breadth) and the length (depth). Offering students discounts on accessories and clothing can boost the market and create a niche in student shoppers (Bouchirika, 2025). Product assortment

improves customer experience, drives sales, and boosts profits (Hand, 2025). For instance, the Maties Shop sells Stellenbosch University-branded merchandise, including clothing, gifts, wine, plants, and baby clothing (Nombewu & Engel, 2018). In addition, these stores offer homemade products, such as Maties Milk, wine, and jewellery, to give the community a taste of Stellenbosch. Other opportunities may include showcasing students' work in stores like the Maties Shop. This approach allows the retail store to offer new products, lifestyle items, and trending products that students can afford, which can be beneficial (Richter, 2024).

- INONAFRICA (2024) found that because 42% of South African consumers follow a vegetarian lifestyle, companies can respond by using biodegradable packaging and reduced product sourcing that avoids child labour and malpractices.
- Shifting to more environmentally friendly solutions can help manage the reduction of waste creation in the clothing industry (Jahromi & Ghazinoory, 2025). This is something Industry 5.0 introduces by focusing on sharing, leasing, reusing, and repairing clothing products for as long as possible, while being more human-centric to solve the problem.
- Practise “slow fashion,” which involves buying fewer and higher-quality clothes. This will allow for donating the product once the consumer finds no use for it (Kelleher, 2025).

2.3.7 Competitive Pricing in Retail

Determining which pricing strategy is most suitable for a business object requires an understanding of products, product categories, and the brand's positioning (Graham, 2022). Moreover, the unpredictability of demand and consumer preferences means that pricing influences the perceived value of the offering's sales, and retailers must adjust their strategies to find the optimal price point for their products (Flipkart Commerce Cloud, 2025). That is why strategic pricing is a powerful tool for attracting and retaining customers (Palazzolo, 2023).

The Everyday Low Price (EDLP) strategy has been credited with saving costs, as well as reducing warehouse and transportation expenses. Companies like Walmart

achieve this by improving supply chain processes and holding suppliers accountable through on-time-in-full complete delivery, as well as the implementation of a supplier quality excellence program (8th & Walton, 2021). This enables retailers to maintain sufficient stock to meet customers' needs (Geurrero, 2022). Adopted by retailers such as Walmart and Costco, the strategy has influenced supermarkets in their advertising of everyday prices (Park *et al.*, 2020). By using this strategy, consumers' decision-making is simplified, as they do not have to consider when the next sale will be, and products are always set at fair prices (Alvarado, 2024). Walmart customers are empowered to trust the retailer by buying more and achieving high consumer satisfaction levels (Graham, 2022). This helps increase sales volume, as customers will buy more from different categories (Geurrero, 2022). Universities align well with this strategy as they are areas where affordability and convenience are key priorities as fees rise to address the value for money (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2024). It is about promising customers price consistency and may require businesses to switch between similar products from time to time, rather than releasing sales events (Alvarado, 2024; Graham, 2022). This way, the same products can be bought at a discounted price (Alvarado, 2024). Trader Joe's sells its private-label products and uses the strategy to sell inexpensive in-house products (Graham, 2022). This approach can foster brand loyalty, encouraging consumers to keep purchasing from the same retailer or brand (Alvarado, 2024). It is most effective for retailers that prioritise customer loyalty, establish trust, and offer stable pricing.

However, the strategy fails only when the product is compromised to ensure a lower price (8th Walton, 2021). For instance, when costs increase unexpectedly, it can be difficult to maintain low prices without sacrificing profits (Alvarado, 2024). Additionally, some consumers may perceive low prices as an indication of low quality, which can harm the brand's reputation (Alvarado, 2024). When a new item is launched, it needs to be marketed at lower price points to draw customers away from the competition (8th & Walton, 2022).

Subsequently, the High-Low Pricing (HLP) strategy has also been employed in retail, where most products are priced above the market price, and discounted products attract customers with lower prices (Park *et al.*, 2020). For instance, students are offered discounts from time to time when they purchase, which in turn helps

companies increase their margins (Bouchirika, 2025). Because lower prices attract customers, the original price of the product is restored once the promotion period ends (Flipkart Commerce Cloud, 2025). Unlike an everyday low pricing strategy, where prices are consistently low, this strategy is characterised by periodic promotions and discounts (Palazzolo, 2023). Since consumers become excited about discounts, this approach can lead to increased customer retention, higher sales volumes, and boosted revenue (Palazzolo, 2023). This strategy is used to attract traffic to cross-sell other items in-store that may have a higher profit margin (Graham, 2022). However, it is worth noting that, when used regularly, customers will expect prices to drop before making a purchase (8th & Walton, 2022). It is best suited for retailers seeking to attract a broader range of bargain-hunting customers (Alvarado, 2024). For instance, South Africa has a rich history of producing high-quality fibres, including mohair, wool, and cotton, and is now the world's leading producer of mohair (DHL, 2024). Thus, making the strategy effective for exporting to global markets. It attracted both new and existing customers, promoting customer loyalty (Palazzolo, 2023). Typically, the discount period coincides with peak seasons or end-of-season sales, as demand is high during these times (Flipkart Commerce Cloud, 2025). For instance, Macy's uses this strategy during Christmas and Black Friday to quickly clear out inventory and make room for new stock. By doing this, customers take advantage of the limited-time deals, while businesses need to strategically manage the frequency and timing of these discounts to mitigate risk (Flipkart Commerce Cloud, 2025). Around this time, products that have high demand can increase traffic at a low price point (8th & Walton, 2022).

However, regular discounts can diminish the perceived value of the brand, making it challenging to cultivate long-term customer loyalty (Palazzolo, 2023). This is because many customers will wait for prices to fall before making a purchase, resulting in a loss of profit (8th & Walton, 2022). However, when businesses locate themselves on university campuses, a 10% student discount would not hurt if they were presenting their student ID when making a purchase (Zolotorofe, 2019).

2.3.8 Approaches used in Retail

2.3.8.1 *Omnichannel Approach*

Omnichannel integration has become increasingly important for organisational growth and competitiveness, as it enables retailers to provide a consistent and seamless shopping experience across online platforms, physical stores, and mobile applications (Thorne, 2025). Utilising channels supporting artificial intelligence and omnichannel strategies ensures data accuracy and effectively enhances customer trust. This customer-centric approach has effectively expanded customer satisfaction and retention (Kaushik, 2024). It integrates physical and digital channels to create a seamless shopping experience (Jones, 2024). Likewise, it helps create the brand's presence across various channels, including the website, app, social media, email, SMS, WhatsApp, and offline channels such as retail stores, events, and call centres (Kaushik, 2025). This strategy facilitates cross-communication; when brands personalise messages, they can connect more effectively with customers. According to Kaushik (2024), integrating cross-communication allows customers to be reached at the most convenient times by minimising unnecessary clicks and directing them to the appropriate channels. This approach works best in customer retail segmentation that supports technology (Jones, 2024). Through customer segmentation, brands can develop customer personas based on interactions, ensuring that messaging and channels are tailored to meet the diverse needs of specific customer segments and cohorts, aligning with their perspectives. This is evident in Roy Bagattini's leadership at Woolworths, where his e-commerce expansion and omnichannel growth contributed to a global revenue increase and turnover (Minnaar, 2025). The rise of this approach has led buyers to demand enhancements in their shopping experience (Cotarelo *et al.*, 2021). Customers must perceive that their purchase process is seamless and ongoing. By doing so, customers can browse, purchase, and receive products, thereby fostering brand loyalty (Kaushik, 2025).

2.3.8.2 *Multichannel Approach*

Another relevant concept is the multichannel approach, which provides customers with multiple, independently operating channels through which they can interact with a brand, including websites, email communication, and mobile applications (Jones,

2024). For instance, when a customer wants to purchase the app, they will be redirected to the website to log in and shop, and the email will ask them to log in to the website and proceed with the purchase. This process unifies the purchasing process while incorporating multidimensional channels for efficiency, forming part of the customer retention and giving them that shopping experience. The positive thing about this approach is that customers are not subjected to sharing data between channels. The disadvantage here is that there is a lack of cohesiveness and transparency, leading to competition among them and an inconsistent customer experience. (Kaushik, 2025).

2.3.8.3 *Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Retail*

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force across various industries, and its impact on retail operations is profound and far-reaching (Wilson *et al.*, 2024). By enhancing supply chains and customer service (Tembedza, 2025), AI technologies foster innovation and efficiency in operations. This includes being competitive in the digital marketplace and personalising customer experience in innovative ways. For instance, DHL's innovative technology in South Africa helps streamline processes and provides real-time shipment tracking (DHL, 2024). Moreover, for South Africa, where the population comprises diverse social, ethnic, and racial groups, retailers need to ensure that the data used for analytics is free from bias, errors, and inaccuracies (Tembedza, 2021). This can be achieved by offering self-service tools that include video tutorials, frequently asked questions, and knowledge bases, which reduce costs while enhancing customer satisfaction (Vance, 2025). Also, this data needs to be “clean”. Retailers leveraging AI to identify and address individual customer preferences can significantly enhance engagement, loyalty, and sales (Rousan, 2024). AI is revolutionising retail by delivering customised shopping experiences, optimising processes, and shaping strategic decision-making. For instance, KNAPP supports Woolworths with two Pick-it-Easy robots with artificial intelligence to enhance their efficiency and accuracy. (Editorial, 2025). These robots improve performance, provide quick lead times, and cover temperature zones, while enabling 50% more online orders with faster and more adaptable processing. This solution allows same-day deliveries to enhance the customer shopping experience.

AI technologies use AI-powered chatbots to manage customer enquiries 24/7 and give immediate and accurate responses. This enables retailers to engage directly with customers (Tembedza, 2025). These chatbots and virtual assistants are what Capitec Bank implemented in South Africa to enhance customer service (Spenco, 2025). It also analyses market conditions, optimises supply chain routes, and reduces delivery times effectively. This ensures accurate spelling and grammar, which is vital for effective communication. It guarantees that your message is conveyed clearly and taken seriously. Always conduct thorough proofreading of your work prior to dissemination. Tembedza (2025) suggests that doing a risk assessment prior to implementation can help manage risks that may arise.

However, the tool is not without challenges in retail, such as privacy and security (Wilson *et al.*, 2024). Retailers need to navigate through complex regulations to ensure customer privacy and transparency on how their data is managed. Retailers need to pay attention to data breaches, implement robust data security measures, and ensure that employees do not lose their jobs due to automation. That is why Nedbank started a Risk Intelligence Centre, an AI-powered hub to detect fraud and money laundering (Spenco, 2025). Similarly, if data on AI is outdated; the tool will produce inconsistencies or inaccurate data, and to resolve this, retailers need to clean their data before deploying AI tools (Tembedza, 2025).

2.3.8.4 *Corporate Retail*

A concept employed by businesses operating multiple outlets under the same brand name is central to the corporate entity. They operate through multiple branches to ensure that prices and services are standardised (Verma, 2025). They use a centralised management system that operates, markets, and oversees strategies across all stores. This enables buyers to purchase products in bulk, saving them costs. For instance, with Shoprite, attracting customers to the stores for bargains increased their market share by 1.4%. (Reuters, 2023). They can streamline processes efficiently by building strong brand recognition through numerous operational locations. For students, the location of the retail store can affect where they want to go to school

(Zolotorofe, 2019). However, corporate retail faces challenges from intense competition with independent retailers, and the necessity for quick adaptation to respond to changing market conditions complicates matters further. To address this, they can incorporate omnichannel strategies to meet customer demands.

2.3.8.5 *Informal Retail Sector*

This concept involves trade conducted by unregistered or unlicensed retailers, who are typically not reported to tax authorities (News Team, 2022). These are street hawkers, open market stalls, or informal shops that are common in rural areas. By 2022, around 1.1 million people were shopping regularly at around 150 000 stores in the sector, making up 33% of the total FMCG market in the country (Rajgopaul, 2024). Trade intelligence has started to recognise the importance of informal trading as Pick 'n Pay and Shoprite Cash and Carry stores offer bulk deals to informal retailers. In South Africa, this includes spazas as well (Rajgopaul, 2024). Spaza shops are the vital backbone of South Africa's townships, providing essential goods and services to millions through formal retail channels. (Modise, 2025). They offer affordable products in smaller quantities, along with flexible credit options. Recently, the government has been making efforts to regulate them to improve food safety and formalise the informal economy, despite some challenges.

Despite rising competition and harsher conditions, informal retailers adapt and innovate, vigorously maintaining their position in South Africa's distinctive economy. Other benefits of the sector include the use of mobile and digital payments, as well as purchasing and point-of-sale systems, which help boost the sector by reducing security concerns (Paul, 2023). This creates more payment options for customers. University students can also be allowed to pay using financial aid payment options, as financial constraints associated with them restrict their ability to purchase whatever they like. (The Douglas Stewart Co., 2025) The sector is motivated by the search for value, the importance of wellness, the need for convenience, the desire for a pleasant and engaging shopping experience, and the appreciation of the retailer's social or environmental impact.

2.3.9 Categories in Retail

2.3.9.1 *Non-store Retailers: Online/e-Commerce Retailers*

Retailers in this category have access to massive volumes of data, and AI can only provide insights when trained on accurate, relevant, and structured data (Tembedza, 2025). They offer 24/7 availability, easy checkout processes and easy-to-search inventories, as well as price comparisons with other sites (Sen *et al.*, 2022). For instance, online sales grew for Pick n Pay Asap and the Mr D app, reporting a growth of 48.7% year-on-year (Illidge, 2025). Since the update of Pick n Pay Asa, there are new features for customers. Using retail segmentation, they will create algorithms to recommend products to customers based on previous purchases, provide tailored content, and alter pricing based on demand and customer profiles. This is known as an omnichannel system (Cotarelo *et al.*, 2021). College students can use online retail to pick up products at a convenient location upon ordering online (Zolotorofe, 2019).

Nevertheless, with 30% of South Africans without internet access, it presents a challenge for retailers to make accurate assessments of purchasing patterns (Tembezda, 2021). In 2024, the advent of SHEIN and Temu e-commerce platforms offered clients low-cost products (INONAFRICA, 2024), influencing the sales strategies and offerings of local e-commerce platforms. Shein's growth in South Africa is due to its competitive pricing and appealing free shipping deals. (Bizcommunity, 2024). As retail evolves, the distinction between physical stores and online stores is blurring, allowing for an omnichannel approach (Cotarelo *et al.*, 2021). For instance, KNAPP's e-grocery innovation solution boosted its online capacity by 50%, handling 60,000 orders per week. (Editorial, 2025). In South Africa, Spar Group has introduced SPAR Mobile, which enhances customer experience and efficiency by allowing customers to earn free data through regular in-store shopping and purchasing promotional products. This innovation operates through their network (Supermarket Retailer, 2025). This optimises the customer journey, enabling convenient shopping and personalised recommendations. (Kaushik, 2025).

Social media trends and the expansion of e-commerce contribute to the growth of this apparel industry through the internet and smartphone devices (Singh & Singh, 2024). For instance, in the US, millennials and Gen Z influence the industry, and companies like Amazon compete to improve customer service online and increase selection. China's Alibaba e-commerce platforms surpassed Singles Day shopping extravaganza sales on discounted goods (Das, 2020). Since Gen Z frequently uses apps and other online platforms for messaging where they see various ads, social media marketing can be particularly effective for college students (Freedman, 2025). Furthermore, in South Africa, one can create an online marketplace for other fashion SMEs to showcase their products, manage sales, reach customers, and utilise social media platforms to build brand awareness, engage with customers, and run targeted marketing campaigns. (DHL, 2024). Without physical stores, e-commerce platforms helped automate customer onboarding, transaction monitoring, and fraud prevention, such as the system used by TymeBank (Spenco, 2025). E-commerce sites can also use AI chatbots to give personalised shopping experiences. These chatbots can be used in e-commerce to provide answers on return policies, product details, and shipping, thereby streamlining the online shopping experience (Schneider, 2024).

2.3.9.2 *Physical Store Retailers*

Africa's retail industry has become increasingly diverse, giving consumers a wider range of options than in the past. Recent reports show that international retailers are growing their presence across the continent, including opening physical stores in countries such as Nigeria (Bizcommunity, 2024). The sector now includes a mix of store formats: medium- to large-sized supermarkets, even larger hypermarkets, smaller convenience stores, as well as formal independent retailers and discount stores that often focus on private-label products (Bonfrer *et al.*, 2022). The expansion of these formats has not only broadened grocery shopping choices for consumers but has also contributed to shifts in traditional retail structures (Bonfrer *et al.*, 2022). Retailers also commonly use product images in their stores, which research shows can influence how customers perceive the quality of the items being offered (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015).

These retailers utilise merchandising to influence customer behaviour, sales, and brand experience, thereby attracting customers, increasing customer retention, and encouraging impulse buying (Planohero, 2025). Merchandising also helps them stand out from the competition and boost product sales and profit (Lecomte, 2023). Merchandising involves the presentation and promotion of goods available for both wholesale and retail stores (Hayes, 2022). Furthermore, Lecomte (2023) explains that it is an optimisation strategy that boosts sales and enhances the in-store customer experience through the presentation, layout, and promotion of products in-store or online. For instance, the Maties Shops are classy yet feature a fresh, modern design with a flexible layout (Nombewu & Engel, 2018). Retailers persuade this by carefully managing product assortment to meet customer demand, refining pricing strategies to increase sales, and optimising store layouts to enhance exposure. They also focus on visual merchandising to create engaging shopping experiences, as well as seasonal and promotional merchandising. This type of retail merchandising applies to both physical and online stores (Planohero, 2025). University retail stores can rotate their offerings by introducing elevated impulse items and using displays and shelving, thereby increasing traffic, and allowing students to shop and explore the inventory (Richter, 2024). Merchandising remains vital for retailers seeking to strengthen their brand and enhance the customer experience. (Hayes, 2022). Effective retail merchandising leads to more sales, improves customer satisfaction, helps customers find products more easily, and allows new customers to visually see appealing new window displays (Indeed Editorial Team, 2025). For instance, at the University of South Florida, the campus store arranges products in a way that encourages multi-item purchasing so that it is easier for students to explore and discover products they prefer (Follett Higher Education, 2025).

Supermarkets sell consumer goods and food, whereas discount stores sell goods at lower prices (INONAFRICA, 2024). Supermarkets are very popular near university campuses with restaurants and pharmacies so that students' needs can be met quickly (Zolororofe, 2019). In the context of Africa as a continent, South Africa has the most significant food retail market, comprising giants such as Shoprite as the leader, Pick n Pay, Massmart Holdings, and Woolworths Holding Limited (Olodo, 2024). Companies can capitalise on having their supermarkets directly on the university campus to assist

carless students with groceries (Zolotorofe, 2019). Shoprite operates numerous stores in the country, including convenience stores, hypermarkets, and supermarkets. Pick 'n Pay has hypermarkets, supermarkets, and discount stores. For supermarkets, well-optimised merchandising can boost sales by 20% through enhanced product visibility. (Plantohero, 2025). They employ application techniques implemented separately by distributors or producers to increase point-of-sale profitability and product sales (Lecomte, 2023).

Convenient shopping is now at petrol station forecourt stores, and the big supermarket chains recognise the increasing demand for convenience (Paul, 2023). They offer home deliveries and smaller-format neighbourhood stores. In South Africa, consumers trust conventional stores and report feeling more in control of their purchases when they shop there (Msosa, 2023). Convenience stores have been facing challenges long before the pandemic, despite being labelled as essential during COVID-19 (Gibson *et al.*, 2022). This is because they face competition from app-based retailers and innovative retail concepts, which are gaining increased support. Convenience and time-saving benefits are no longer advantages for these stores. However, these stores (which include Food Lover's Market: FreshStop, Pick n Pay Express, SPAR Express, OK Express, and Woolworths Food Stop) are one of the fastest-growing channels behind online shopping (Paul, 2023). For college students who prioritise speed, restaurants have allowed students to obtain requirements at a quicker service rate, selling needs tailored to them (Zolotorofe, 2019). Personalised promotions, loyalty programmes, and new technologies have become important as the space becomes competitive.

In discount stores, merchandising helps identify what products customers want and involves placing products in specific areas to attract customers' attention, designing in-store displays or window exhibits to highlight new products, planning the store layout, offering free samples, organising products, and creating a visually appealing and tidy store (Indeed Editorial Team, 2025). Offering college students free trials, referral programmes, discounts, and samples is a great way to attract college students (Freedman, 2025). A report by Affinity Solutions suggests that discount retailers are leading the way in an inflation-bitten consumer environment (Wilson, 2024) and their expenditure increased by 26% in 2023.

2.3.9.3 *Fixed-location Retail*

These types of shops operate from permanent establishments and cater to a larger customer base (Verma, 2025). These establishments are typically markets, shopping complexes, or standalone locations where they can maintain a steady customer base (Monga, 2025). For instance, Chipotle and Starbucks offer student employees work-study programmes and tuition assistance (Zolotorofe, 2019). The intention is to stay longer at the designated location to provide stability and trustworthiness (Homebase Team, 2023; Verma, 2025). For colleges, student shops need to have a positive experience that will keep them coming back (The Douglas Steward Co., 2025). All are shops and stores that sell products, located in isolated rural areas or along the outskirts of large airport malls (INONAFRICA, 2024). They can be seen as a street-side rented or owned business where customers browse and make a purchase in person (Homebase Team, 2023). The location of the store is significant to sales, customer traffic, and overall success (Giffen, 2024). These types of retailers pay taxes and acquire licences, making them essential to both rural and urban markets as they offer an assortment of products and services to make them easily accessible to customers (Monday, unknown). Not only does it build legitimacy with customers, which online shopping also fails to do, but it also allows new customers to discover the business (Homebase Team, 2023). For instance, the shopping centre space market continues to grow, with 208 centres expected by 2024, particularly in provinces such as Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape (PropertyWheel, 2024). While Prinsloo (2024), in his report for Urban Studies in Association with Nedbank, highlights that the annual growth rate of the 208 shopping centre spaces is about 6% in the listed provinces, with the majority in Gauteng, with a 44% increase in 2024 due to urbanisation and middle-market expansion, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Nevertheless, the Western Cape has seen a 14% decrease in the share. The figures also show that there are about 156 rural centres and 250 townships. All this growth and future development are dependent on the area and demographic profile of the target market, among other factors, allowing for creative window displays and promotions when pedestrian traffic increases (Giffune, 2024). Because customers want to see, touch, try on, and experience the product in person,

they are not dependent on market conditions; they have fixed business hours (Homebase Team, 2023; Monga, 2025).

However, this type of retailing is not without challenges. There are higher overhead costs and less flexibility (Homebase Team, 2023). Changes in demographics, without upgrades, can create future challenges; however, these can be addressed when the focus is on competition, having tenants, and understanding the urban environment. (Prinsloo, 2024; PropertyWheel, 2024). By doing this, retailers can prevent urban decay, as they will be able to adapt to the changes in customer needs to stay relevant. This understanding can help retailers choose the best location in the neighbourhood for their store (Giffune, 2024). By 2030, retail growth is expected, especially in undersaturated areas and community-focused centres with diverse tenants, to focus more on smaller accessible locations in local communities (Prinsloo, 2024; PropertyWheel, 2024). This will open opportunities for convenience with diverse tenant product offerings, which will boost impulse purchases and return visits while staying relevant to the retail setting (Giffune, 2024; Prinsloo, 2024). Townships and rural regions have the potential to offer smaller hubs with strong food anchors, affordable clothing, and services. Consequently, they require infrastructure and investment in inventory to support their diverse range of products and services. (Verma, 2025). To stay relevant, shopping centres must innovate with omnichannel strategies, continuous upgrades, and high service standards, with support from industry bodies like the South African Council of Shopping Centres (PropertyWheel, 2024). This includes building connections with the surrounding community to resonate with local culture and values (Giffune, 2024).

In conclusion, retailers continue to navigate the challenges posed by the decline of physical stores, the rise of online shopping, staff retention issues, and supply chain disruptions. All these cause extreme economic pressures and decrease consumer spending on non-essential products. Meanwhile, the apparel industry is under examination for its environmental impact, while local businesses are struggling against international competition. As a result, solutions can be found in adapting strategies and being creative, with retailers utilising artificial intelligence to enhance efficiency and provide a seamless customer experience for the future sustainability of their businesses.

In the next part, the chapter will discuss the understanding of what makes customers satisfied within an educational institutional setting. This is because stores in these serve a diverse group of audiences, but it is worth noting that the study only focuses on students as the primary target audience.

2.4 GENERAL SERVICE INFLUENCING WITHIN A UNIVERSITY RETAIL STORE

Customer satisfaction at an educational institution can be complex, as it extends beyond transactional contentment to include student success. For example, public and private higher education institutions are becoming more customer- and service-orientated (Qureshi *et al.*, 2021). While institutions do not operate as traditional businesses, they do employ customer service principles that can foster positive relationships, enhance the admissions experience, and increase enrolment (Hurter, 2025). Freedman (2025) suggests that companies should focus on building relationships with students and not just sell stuff to them. Therefore, this part of the chapter will work to identify the key factors that influence student satisfaction as customers. The identifiable factors will help navigate the intricate landscape, enabling more practical recommendations to enhance the overall university retail experience and foster student loyalty.

Customer satisfaction is not only about selling products but also about offering a unique campus experience that contributes to the success of its students. This explanation can be seen from how the University of New Mexico has decided to open a bookshop to gather feedback from the campus community on services, product offerings, and overall experience (UNM, 2025). This information gathering is specifically linked to the university's efforts to support student success and enhance campus experience. Since students frequently interact with various departments within the university, it is crucial to provide them with a positive customer experience (Hurter, 2025). Another example is the University of Arizona's campus store, which offers a unique campus experience. With every purchase, a contribution is made to the student employment opportunities, nurturing athletic endeavours and fostering alum connections while supporting other critical university programmes and initiatives (Tucson Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 2025). As students become more financially

independent, they deserve high-quality service from everyone they encounter on the premises (Barnes & Noble College, 2019). Within the university context, it can be viewed that customers encompass students, faculty, staff, and visitors, further expanding the concept of the term 'customer'. Thus, expanding the definition of customer satisfaction from a university perspective. Qureshi *et al.* (2021) stated that the UK higher education system has placed a great degree of emphasis on student satisfaction due to policy changes.

2.4.1 Factors of influence

To help achieve successful customer satisfaction, some areas for exploration include prioritising students' needs at every interaction. Retailers at these institutions create a hub to enhance students' sense of belonging as the demand for high-quality services grows (Barnes & Noble College, 2019). A customer-centric approach can assist with this, where clear guidance is designed to enhance their experience (Hurter, 2025). This will make you feel more welcome on campus and equipped to balance university demands and work. By doing this, a multichannel system that provides 24/7 support ensures students can access help whenever needed, which is a good way to keep them engaged (Hurter, 2025). This forms part of the overall experience. Personalising communication and resources using artificial intelligence-powered interactions, such as BoltAI, can help deliver customised personal experiences at scale with students (Barnes & Noble College, 2025). Institutions can also implement digitalised CRM systems to help streamline processes and automate repetitive tasks (Hurter, 2025). This will help improve operational efficiency. This way, the institutions will be able to improve their customer service using feedback from students, much like the University of New Mexico's bookshop.

2.4.2 Customer demographics and purchasing behaviours of university students

The university student demographic represents a remarkably stable market segment that has great spending power. However, their purchasing habits and needs are incredibly diverse and vary significantly based on:

- Location: Students living on campus require different strategies from those who are contact students. For instance, decorate the campus with a message to create an eye-catching advert that is sure to catch the eyes of receptive students. (Freedman, 2025)
- The academic year and school type, as Magas mentioned, influence students' needs and purchasing habits (Freedman, 2025). Fourth-year students have different priorities from second-year students. First-year students tend to spend on social experiences as they gain independence, while seniors focus on professional attire, technology, and job search tools. Meanwhile, second-year students prefer buying more practical items.
- Preference: Students prefer interactive campaigns and two-way engagement like polls, user-generated content, and exclusive digital deals (Freedman, 2025). Between the ages of 18 and 24, they set trends and influence others, even if they are unlikely to make a purchase. At the University of South Florida, the store is strategically placed according to season and current trends to attract customers (Follett Higher Education, 2025).
- Price and Quality: Many students rely on financial aid to cover their expenses, and when they can save money at the store, it turns them into recurrent customers. This indicates that the retailer recognises their financial situation and will strive to make the store affordable (The Douglas Stewart Co., 2025).

2.4.3 Unique challenges and opportunities for a university retail store

University retail stores have some great opportunities and several challenges that necessitate strategic innovation to ensure long-term customer satisfaction, for instance:

- Companies that offer university students special discounts or services can easily claim their cash by initiating free marketing as students use word of mouth (Freedman, 2025). For instance, Temple University partnered with Chick-fil-A to offer students discounts on their meal plan (Zolotorofe, 2019).
- Even though some students prefer physical stores, they often operate at very low profit margins despite mark-up because of inflation and labour pressures (BibliU,

2023). This leads students to often scour the internet for the lowest prices, which can lead to a negative impact on retention.

- Providing a variety of products should adapt to seasons and be around what is trendy and in a way that fits the students' lifestyle (Follett Higher Education, 2025). The store layout should be designed to sustain the product flow.
- Retailers need to be careful when integrating hybrid/e-commerce, as the process can be inefficient if it becomes time-consuming for students who want to acquire goods online (BibliU, 2023).

2.5 CONCLUSION

The retail industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by technological advancements that reshape customer experiences, and the South African retail sector is a significant economic contributor to this factor. The apparel industry is experiencing exceptional growth. However, this growth faces several challenges, from growing competitors, a decline in physical store traffic due to the rise of e-commerce, difficulties in retaining employees, supply chain disruptions on imports, decreased consumer spending due to economic pressures, and environmental concerns related to waste and carbon emissions.

Retailers need to be innovative in how they navigate around identified challenges. AI tools have enabled them to predict current and future buying trends, allowing them to stock up on inventory on time. Also, the implementation strategies are seamless for customers who wish to experience an omnichannel environment and embrace modernised systems. Retailers can also consider localising the production of most apparel goods, making the supply and delivery of goods more effective within a shorter timeframe. Moreover, retailers must leverage both online and physical platforms to cater to evolving consumer trends and embrace eco-friendly practices like "slow fashion". Strategic pricing, whether through Everyday Low Price (EDLP) or High-Low Pricing (HLP), is also essential for attracting and retaining customers.

Within the specific context of university retail stores, customer satisfaction is a complex issue that extends beyond mere transactions to include student success and a sense

of belonging. Public and private higher education institutions are increasingly adopting customer-centric approaches to foster positive relationships and enhance the overall campus experience. The student demographic is a stable market with significant spending power, but their purchasing habits are diverse and influenced by factors such as location, academic year, and personal preferences. Many students are price-conscious and rely on financial aid, making affordability a key factor in their purchasing decisions. Retailers at these institutions have unique opportunities to cater to this market by offering special discounts and services, creating a welcoming environment, and providing a variety of products that align with student lifestyles and current trends. However, they must also contend with challenges like low profit margins and competition from students who seek lower prices online. Ultimately, a well-designed, customer-centric approach that integrates physical and digital channels is vital for university retail stores to meet customer needs, enhance student satisfaction, and build a competitive advantage in the dynamic retail landscape.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this study, which focused on examining the factors influencing demand trends in corporate retailers at NWU retail brand stores. The research design was premised on exploring how product quality, pricing, variety, and customer service influence customer satisfaction and purchasing behaviour at the NWU brand stores. The research is undergirded by the interpretivist paradigm, which helped to capture the subjective experiences and perceptions of customers within their natural shopping environment. The interpretivist paradigm recognises that meaning and sense are socially constructed and context dependent, as is the case with customer satisfaction and purchasing behaviour (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Owing to the choice of the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach was then chosen to allow the researcher to explore in depth the participant perspectives and to uncover insights that would otherwise not have emerged had quantitative methods been chosen.

A multiple-case-study strategy was utilised, with each of NWU's three campuses, namely Potchefstroom, Mahikeng, and Vanderbijlpark, being viewed as distinct case studies. This multiple case study design facilitated both an in-depth understanding of each context and cross-case comparisons, enhancing the richness of the findings (Yin, 2018). The chapter outlines the philosophical stance underpinning the study, the research approach and design, the population and sampling strategy, the data collection and analysis methods, measures to ensure trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the methodological limitations encountered.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is embedded in the interpretivist research paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and that knowledge is created from the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Interpretivists argue that there are multiple realities shaped by social, cultural, and

personal contexts and therefore reject the notion that there exists a single, objective truth (Goldkuhl, 2012). The perspective that there are multiple realities tallies with the aim of the study, which was to understand the subjective factors influencing demand trends and customer satisfaction in the North-West University (NWU) Brand Stores.

Ontologically, interpretivists adopt a relativist stance, which says that there are multiple realities which are context dependent. In this research, there was an understanding that the "reality" of customer satisfaction varied between students, alumni, and staff, as well as across the three NWU campuses. The researcher was therefore aware of the subjective nature of value, quality, and satisfaction and that understanding of the same would be different for each participant. Their personal and social circumstances influenced the knowledge that participants had (Thanh & Thanh, 2021).

Interpretivism follows a subjectivist epistemological position, which suggests that knowledge is not viewed as an objective reality that is waiting to be discovered but rather as something that is co-created through social interaction between the researcher and participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This position is premised on the notion that reality is shaped by individual experiences, cultural norms, and contextual factors, and that during research, the function of the researcher is to engage with participants in ways that allow these subjective meanings to emerge (Thanh & Thanh, 2021). Knowledge generation, therefore, is seen as a cooperative process that is based on dialogue and shared interpretation instead of being detached observation as advocated by the positivist paradigm (Bleakley *et al.*, 2022).

To co-create this knowledge, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to create space for participants to voice their perceptions, feelings, and experiences in their own words. This was done to encourage open conversations, making it possible for the researcher to probe deeper into issues such as product quality, variety, pricing, and customer service. The insights from the interviews were then interpreted by the researcher within the broader institutional and retail context, being cognisant that each participant's responses were influenced by their prior shopping experiences, campus culture, and personal expectations. This interactive process meant that the final understanding of demand trends reflected both the participants lived experiences and

the researcher's interpretive lens, in line with the subjectivist stance of the interpretivist paradigm (McLeod, 2024).

The axiological position of interpretivism is that the researcher plays a significant role in shaping the research process and outcomes. Reflexivity was therefore central to this study, with the researcher consciously reflecting on their assumptions and potential biases, particularly given the possibility of preconceived notions about retail experiences in a university setting (Berger, 2021). The need for reflexivity was also occasioned by the fact that the researcher is employed by NWU, which meant that the researcher could have inadvertently brought preconceived biases into the research. This ensured that the interpretation of data was transparent and grounded in participant accounts rather than researcher preconceptions.

The paradigm is also informed by phenomenology, a philosophical approach that focuses on exploring lived experiences to understand their meaning (Smith *et al.*, 2022). Phenomenology underpinned the practical design of this study, as the aim was to capture and interpret the lived experiences of customers interacting with NWU Brand Stores. Through in-depth engagement, the research sought to reveal how customers perceived product variety, pricing, service quality, and the overall brand experience. The interpretivist paradigm provides both a theoretical foundation and a practical lens for examining the complex, subjective, and context-bound nature of retail experiences within the NWU environment. This ensured that the findings reflect the richness of customer perspectives and can therefore possibly inform strategies for improving satisfaction and demand trends in university brand stores.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is in conformity with the interpretivist paradigm and is suitable for exploring the nuanced, context-bound nature of customer satisfaction and demand trends (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). A qualitative approach was chosen because the research sought to understand customer satisfaction and demand trends phenomena from the perspective of participants by capturing their lived experiences, beliefs, and values

through rich, descriptive data rather than numerical measurements (Hammarberg *et al.*, 2021). What made qualitative research appropriate was that the study sought to generate deep insights into how and why phenomena occur, rather than to test predetermined hypotheses (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Qualitative research is characterised by inductive reasoning, which allows patterns and themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing a rigid analytical framework at the outset (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Inductive reasoning builds a theory by moving from the specific to the general, whereas deductive reasoning focuses on testing a hypothesis. Inductive reasoning is characteristically exploratory, which makes it particularly valuable in contexts where there is limited prior research or when the aim is to generate new theoretical insights rather than test existing ones (Thomas, 2016).

The inductive reasoning process is fundamentally flexible and iterative, with data analysis often co-occurring with data, making it possible to use emergent findings to guide subsequent stages of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This adaptability allows the researcher to refine questions, adjust focus, and follow leads that arise from the data itself. Inductive reasoning is strongly associated with qualitative research traditions such as grounded theory, case studies, and ethnography, as these approaches prioritise the co-construction of meaning and the contextual richness of data (Bryman, 2016). By moving from the specific to the general, inductive reasoning supports the development of nuanced, contextually relevant explanations that may be unnoticed when a more rigid research design is used. This approach enabled the researcher to capture the varied and subjective insights of NWU Brand Store customers about product quality, variety, pricing, and service. The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated open dialogue, giving participants the freedom to elaborate on issues they deemed necessary, while also allowing the researcher to probe for detail and clarification.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it can produce rich, detailed accounts that capture the complexity of retail experiences, which would have been difficult to achieve if quantitative measures had been employed (Hammarberg *et al.*, 2021; Bryman, 2016). Qualitative research allowed the researcher to have flexibility during the interview process, as questions could be adapted in tandem with participants'

responses. The researcher was also able to explore unexpected insights as they emerged (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Additionally, qualitative research is well-suited to the exploratory nature of this study, which has focused on an area that has not been widely researched. The result was that the research could generate context-specific recommendations arising directly from the data provided by the customers, and the insights can be used to guide strategic improvements in the NWU retail environment (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research adopted a multiple-case study design, which is consistent with the qualitative and interpretivist orientation of the study. A case study is an in-depth, contextually rich investigation of a bounded system, such as an organisation, event, or phenomenon, to gain a complete understanding (Yin, 2018). The case study approach was chosen because the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are unclear, allowing the researcher to examine real-life settings without manipulating the variables under investigation (Stake, 2020; Harrison *et al.*, 2021). In this study, each of the three North-West University (NWU) campuses, namely, Potchefstroom, Mahikeng, and Vanderbijlpark, was treated as a separate case. This multiple-case approach was chosen because the depth and robustness of the findings could be enhanced through cross-case comparisons. The multi-case study process strengthens the validity of qualitative research through replication logic (Yin, 2018). The design allowed the researcher to identify both common patterns and unique differences in customer satisfaction drivers across campuses, while considering variations in customer demographics, product offerings, and retail layouts.

The multiple-case study design offered several advantages for this research, chief among which was the provision of contextual depth, which allowed each campus store to be studied within its unique operational and demographic setting (Stake, 2020). The second advantage was that the multiple case study approach improved comparative insights, which made it possible to identify patterns that were consistent across sites as well as those that were location-specific, which was crucial for formulating targeted recommendations (Harrison *et al.*, 2021). Studying more than one case improved

analytical generalisation, which strengthened the credibility and transferability of the findings to other university retail environments (Yin, 2018). Finally, the design facilitated methodological rigour, as data collection and analysis followed a consistent protocol across cases, ensuring comparability while preserving site-specific nuances (Yin, 2018; Harrison *et al.*, 2021).

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

'Population' refers to the entire group of individuals or units that share common characteristics relevant to the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). For this study, the population comprised registered North-West University (NWU) students who had previously purchased items from the NWU Brand Stores. This included students from the Potchefstroom, Mahikeng, and Vanderbijlpark campuses, representing a diverse demographic in terms of gender, age, and cultural background. The focus was placed on students from their second year of study onwards, as these individuals were more likely to have had repeated interactions with the brand stores and could therefore provide more informed feedback.

Through the targeted population, the study was able to capture perspectives from customers with direct purchasing experience, ensuring that responses were grounded in actual retail interactions rather than hypothetical scenarios. The multi-campus structure also enabled the inclusion of participants from different geographic and socio-economic contexts, reflecting the diversity of NWU's student body and ensuring the findings had broader internal applicability.

The study employed non-probability purposive sampling, in which participants were deliberately selected based on their relevance to the research objectives (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Palinkas *et al.*, 2021). This approach is commonly used in qualitative research when the goal is to obtain rich, detailed insights from individuals who are most knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied. In this case, purposive sampling ensured that all participants had firsthand experience as customers of the NWU Brand Stores.

A maximum sample size of approximately 8-20 participants per campus was targeted, with the final number determined by the principle of data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews (Guest *et al.*, 2020). This flexible approach allowed the researcher to capture the depth of experiences necessary for thematic analysis while avoiding unnecessary redundancy in data collection. Participants were selected because they are easily accessible to the researcher and are willing to participate in the research (Etikan, 2023; Vehovar *et al.*, 2016). This includes targeting participants who will provide relevance to the study due to their willingness to participate. Moreover, they are from diverse backgrounds with different experiences and are likely to take part. Even though selection bias and study replication may present a challenge (SĀGO, 2024), for this study, the researcher will ensure that sampling is drawn from a diverse population range.

The purposive sampling strategy offered several advantages for this study by ensuring relevance through placing focus solely on participants with direct shopping experience, which increases the validity of the findings (Palinkas *et al.*, 2021). The second advantage of purposive sampling was that it allowed for in-depth insights, due to participants providing detailed and context-specific accounts of their retail experiences (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Thirdly, the flexibility of the method enabled the researcher to adjust the sample size in response to emerging patterns, supporting a more responsive and iterative research process (Guest *et al.*, 2020). Finally, the use of purposive sampling, combined with the multi-campus design, strengthened the transferability of the findings within the NWU context, as the sample reflected a range of customer experiences across different retail settings (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were collected using semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method that combines predetermined guiding questions with the flexibility to explore emerging topics in depth (Bryman, 2016; Kallio *et al.*, 2021). Semi-structured interviews are well-suited to interpretivist research because they facilitate an open exchange between researcher and participant, allowing meanings and perspectives to be explored in the participant's own words (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This format also

provides a balance between consistencies across interviews, which is necessary for cross-case comparison, as well as adaptability to individual responses (Adams, 2020).

The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' views on four key dimensions of the retail experience: product quality, variety, pricing, and customer service. Open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed responses, while follow-up questions and probing allowed the researcher to clarify meanings and explore examples provided by participants. Interviews were conducted in person where possible, typically in quiet locations close to the NWU Brand Stores, and online for participants who could not attend face-to-face. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual factors.

The use of semi-structured interviews offered several advantages for this study. Firstly, they facilitated rich, descriptive data collection, capturing the nuances of customer perceptions and behaviours that may not emerge in structured surveys (Kallio *et al.*, 2021). Secondly, they provided flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore unanticipated themes while still covering core research topics (Adams, 2020). Thirdly, the format supported rapport building, which is essential in eliciting candid responses about personal experiences and opinions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Finally, by applying the same interview guide across all three cases, the method ensured comparability of data while respecting the unique retail context of each campus store (Bryman, 2016).

3.7 RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

To help recruit participants for this study, the researcher used a multi-faceted approach that included a diverse set of individuals from North-West University (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). To gain access to the participants, the researcher physically visited all three stores during high-traffic times and asked registered students who walked into the shops if they were willing to answer questions based on the semi-structured interview guide (Adams, 2020; Bryman, 2016). During this process, no student was forced or pressured to participate in the interview. Where students agreed

but were not available to answer the questions at that time, an online meeting was scheduled for a later date. The researcher arranged a quieter and more peaceful room on the designated campuses so that the recording was not interrupted by loud noise or unforeseen circumstances. This recruitment process was not limited to student centres and libraries outside the brand stores. To ensure that only the correct participants were approached, all interested individuals were asked if they were currently registered or studying at NWU. Participants were required to be over 18 years old, South African, and to have previously purchased an item from one of the brand stores (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Palinkas *et al.*, 2021). Gender participation in this study was not specific, meaning any gender willing to participate for rich insights was welcome. In addition, the researcher ensured that participants had no work relations with the researcher to safeguard the accuracy of data collection.

Participants who were not registered with the university and were not in their second year of study were excluded from the study. The study also excluded distant students, occasional students, part-time students, and staff members studying part-time within the university. The marital status of the students was not relevant; they could be married, single, divorced, or otherwise. This recruitment strategy ensured access to a broad range of students. Registered students who were not available at the given time due to scheduling conflicts were offered an alternative interview time arranged by the researcher.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected in this study were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis is grounded in the principles of pattern recognition and meaning-making, aiming to move beyond surface-level description to interpret and explain the significance of themes about the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It is a theoretically flexible method, meaning it can be applied within different epistemological and ontological positions. However, in this study, it was guided by an interpretivist stance that emphasised the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant (Terry *et al.*, 2021).

The process allows for both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) coding, enabling the researcher to remain open to new insights while also being informed by existing literature. Thematic analysis was chosen because it provides a clear, systematic framework for managing qualitative data while preserving the richness and complexity of participants' accounts. The process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six-phase framework, as summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Braun and Clarke’s Six Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description (Theory)	Application in This Study
1. Familiarisation with the data	Immersing in the data by reading and rereading transcripts, noting down initial ideas (Braun Clarke, 2006).	All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher read each transcript multiple times and made margin notes on emerging ideas related to product quality, variety, pricing, and customer service.
2. Generating initial codes	Systematically coding interesting features across the dataset and collating relevant data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2021).	Manual coding was used to identify recurring ideas, assigning codes such as “affordable pricing”, “limited stock”, or “staff friendliness”.
3. Searching for themes	Grouping codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Codes were grouped into broader themes like “Value for Money”, “Product Range Satisfaction”, and “Customer Service Experience”.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if themes work with coded extracts and the overall dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2021).	Themes were refined by comparing them with the original data, ensuring they accurately represented participant accounts across all campuses.
5. Defining and naming themes	Refining specifics of each theme, developing clear names and definitions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Themes were defined in detail – for example, “Value for Money” was described as perceptions of pricing fairness about product quality and uniqueness.
6. Producing the report	Selecting vivid, compelling extracts and linking them to research questions and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2021).	The final themes were written up with direct participant quotes, connected to the literature review and research questions for interpretation.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, after which manual colour coding was carried out. The manual method was employed to assist in pattern recognition and organisation of codes, while the researcher had oversight to ensure that coding remained consistent with the interpretivist stance (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Terry *et al.*, 2021). Cross-case comparisons were then conducted to identify similarities and differences between the three campus stores, allowing for both individual case insights and collective conclusions (Yin, 2018).

Thematic analysis was chosen as the preferred data analysis method because it provided flexibility in identifying and interpreting patterns without being tied to a pre-existing theoretical framework, making it suitable for an exploratory study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Secondly, it allowed for depth of understanding by making it possible for the researcher to examine both the prevalence and meaning of themes within and across cases (Terry *et al.*, 2021). The method also facilitated transparency, as each step in the analysis was documented, improving the credibility of the findings (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Finally, the manual coding by colour enhanced efficiency and accuracy, ensuring that no significant patterns were overlooked while maintaining the interpretive integrity of the process.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential to establish the credibility, dependability, and overall quality of the findings. This study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, which remains a seminal standard in qualitative research, alongside more recent methodological recommendations (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Shenton, 2021). The framework consists of four interrelated criteria, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, all of which were addressed in the design and implementation of the study.

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants during semi-structured interviews, which facilitated rapport-building and encouraged authentic responses. Triangulation of data across the three NWU campuses allowed

for comparison and validation of emerging patterns (Flick, 2022), while member checking invited participants to review their interview transcripts and preliminary thematic summaries to confirm the accuracy of interpretations (Birt *et al.*, 2020). Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the research setting, participant demographics, and the NWU Brand Stores' operational context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other university retail environments (Shenton, 2021). The inclusion of participants from multiple campuses further enhanced the range of perspectives, increasing the potential for applicability within the broader higher education retail sector.

Dependability was ensured through a clear audit trail documenting all methodological decisions, from sampling strategy to data analysis. The use of a consistent semi-structured interview guide across all cases supported reliability, while peer debriefing with academic supervisors helped validate the coding process and thematic development (Flick, 2022). Confirmability was promoted through reflexive journaling, in which the researcher recorded personal assumptions and reflections throughout the research process (Berger, 2021). Additionally, raw data, coded transcripts, and theme development records were securely stored for independent verification if required. Lincoln and Guba's framework provided a structured approach to ensuring quality in qualitative findings (Nowell *et al.*, 2017), which enhanced methodological transparency and improved confidence in the findings for both academic and practical applications. Moreover, it aligned with ethical best practices by prioritising participant validation and safeguarding the integrity of their contributions (Birt *et al.*, 2020).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS (NWU-00660-25-A4)

Ethical considerations are an essential aspect of any research, particularly in studies involving human participants, as ethics enable research to be conducted with integrity and respect for participants' rights. This section outlines the key ethical principles that guided this study on customer satisfaction with clothing and corporate gifts sold in Brand Stores at North-West University (NWU). Informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement in research involving human participants. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, the procedures involved, and any potential risks

or benefits associated with their participation (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018; UK Research and Innovation, 2023). This was achieved by providing them with an information sheet summarising the research project (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). All participants received an informed consent form that outlined these details, clearly stating that participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The consent form explained the purpose and role of the participants in clear, non-technical language and allowed participants to ask questions before consenting. Furthermore, participants were informed that their insights into this study would contribute to knowledge by sharing their experiences and perceptions, specifically regarding clothing and corporate gifts.

Maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was another critical ethical obligation. In this study, all personal information collected during interviews was kept confidential, and participants remained anonymous in any reports or publications resulting from the research. To ensure this, pseudonyms were used instead of participants' real names, and any identifying details were removed from the data. During the interview, the purpose of the study and confidentiality measures were explained to each participant. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices, and only the researcher had access to the raw data. No unauthorised user could access the identity of the participants. Once the study was completed, data were retained for a period consistent with university guidelines and then securely deleted (UK Research and Innovation, 2023).

Ethical research must ensure that participants are not exposed to harm, whether physical, psychological, or emotional (Creswell & Poth, 2018; UK Research and Innovation, 2023). In this study, the nature of the questions asked in the interviews was not expected to cause any harm to participants. However, the researcher remained sensitive to any discomfort expressed by participants during the interviews and offered to terminate the interview or omit specific questions if necessary. Additionally, the researcher ensured that participants were not pressured into providing answers and felt comfortable throughout the interview process.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative

consequences. This principle was essential for ensuring that participants did not feel coerced into participating or continuing their involvement in the research (Loughborough University, 2023; Saunders *et al.*, 2018). If a participant chose to withdraw, their data were excluded from the final analysis, and any records of their participation were securely deleted. This ensured that extreme care was taken to promote the participants' well-being while upholding ethical integrity.

Before data collection began, the study was submitted for ethical review and approval by the relevant ethics committee at North-West University. This process ensured that the study met all ethical standards and provided an additional layer of oversight to protect participants' rights and well-being (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; UK Research and Innovation, 2023). The researcher also obtained permission from the university to conduct interviews in the NWU Brand Stores and adhered to any additional ethical guidelines set by the institution.

3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

While the chosen methodology was well-suited to exploring the factors influencing demand trends in NWU Brand Stores, certain limitations were inherent in the research design and approach. The first limitation was the use of non-probability purposive sampling, which, although appropriate for qualitative inquiry, limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader university population (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Palinkas *et al.*, 2021). The aim of the study was not statistical generalisation but rather the development of in-depth, context-specific insights, which means that the results can only be interpreted within the specific institutional and cultural context of NWU (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

A second limitation relates to sample size and self-selection bias. Participation was voluntary, which may have attracted individuals with particularly positive or negative experiences of the brand stores (Bryman, 2016). While the principle of data saturation was applied to determine the final sample size (Guest *et al.*, 2020), it is possible that alternative perspectives were under-represented. Efforts were made to mitigate this

by recruiting across three campuses and ensuring diversity in participant demographics.

Thirdly, the reliance on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews was another limitation of the study. Participants' accounts may have been influenced by memory recall issues or social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993), potentially shaping how they described their experiences. This was mitigated by building rapport during interviews, framing questions neutrally, and using probes to elicit specific examples rather than general statements (Adams, 2020).

Finally, as with all qualitative case study research, the findings are context-bound and reflect the unique operational, demographic, and cultural characteristics of NWU Brand Stores (Yin, 2018). While rich descriptions have been provided to aid transferability (Shenton, 2021), the applicability of the results to other university retail contexts should be considered with caution.

3.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework adopted to investigate the factors influencing demand trends in NWU Brand Stores. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach, the study employed a multiple-case study design across three campuses, with purposive sampling used to recruit participants who had direct shopping experience. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Rigorous measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, alongside strict adherence to ethical protocols in line with POPIA, UKRI guidelines, and NWU policy. While limitations such as purposive sampling, self-selection bias, and reliance on self-reported data were acknowledged, mitigation strategies were applied to strengthen the reliability and integrity of the findings.

The next chapter presents the analysis of the collected data, outlining the themes and sub-themes that emerged and linking them to the research objectives and relevant literature.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Given that the North-West University Brand Stores, known as the NWU Brand Stores, possess exceptionally high-quality merchandise and have significant brand equity among their students, it is also clear that the brand also experiences some pricing issues that are not student friendly. In this part of the study, the analysis and interpretation of the findings of semi-structured interviews conducted will be discussed. This aligns with investigating the factors that influence demand trends in corporate retailers' university retail brand stores.

The primary objective of this study is to

- Explore factors that contribute to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the merchandise offered by NWU Brand stores.

Based on the study objective above, the interview was sectioned into the Customer Satisfaction and or Dissatisfaction subsection with the below supporting questions:

Question 1: *What are your overall impressions of the NWU Brand Store/s?*

- Prompt question based on Q1: *What do you appreciate the most when shopping at the NWU Brand Store/s?*
- Prompt question based on Q1: *What do you least appreciate the most when shopping at the stores?*

These three abovementioned questions focus on understanding the participants' overall impressions of the NWU Brand Store/s. Here, all nine participants shared their experiences, detailing their impressions of product prices, branding, the quality of the clothing, the variety of products offered, and the service they received at the brand store/s.

The secondary objectives was then to:

- To explore customers' perceptions and experiences regarding the quality and variety of clothing and corporate gifts available at NWU Brand Stores.
- To analyse how customers perceive the pricing and value for money of the items sold.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of customer service.
- To assess, key areas of improvement and propose solutions to improve levels of customer satisfaction.

Based on the study objectives above, the interview was sectioned into the three other subsections (Questions about Clothing subsection, Questions about Corporate Gifts subsection and General Questions subsection) with the following supporting questions as shown in the Annexures section of the study document:

However, the analysis is based on the experiences and perceptions of the nine current student participants regarding customer satisfaction with products and services offered by NWU brand stores, which were explored using semi-structured interview guidelines. Data from the signed consent forms and participant interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants were multiracial, multi-gendered and from different ethnic backgrounds on the three campuses. Their financial background (whether self-paying, bursary-funded, or loan-funded) was not considered, and students did not confirm their funding status. In addition, their cultural background was not considered, as the focus was solely on current NWU students who have purchased or visited the store. All nine participants are equally divided among the three campuses, are not first-year students, and have either purchased from or visited the brand store/s. This feedback also reveals that, while the stores and products are of excellent quality and durable, they alienate the student demographic, especially those who depend on financial aid programmes, who would like to purchase from the store/s.

4.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

To further analyse the transcribed data from the recorded interviews, the manual thematic analysis colour coding revealed several recurring ideas and perceptions from the participants' responses. This is to enable analytical categorisation of themes, patterns, and trends into documented data (Medelyan, 2025). To manually perform this, multiple readings of the transcripts were performed, during which all repeated information or text was highlighted using different colour coding, as shown in Tables 1.1–1.3 under the Answers column. On these readings, recurring words and phrases reflect categories in each response (Medelyan, 2025). For each interview question, a set of tables was designed to organise the data into manageable categories, as shown in tables 1.1–1.3 and listed below to facilitate pattern identification. These categories highlighted plausible findings, further emphasising and summarising the commonalities identified by selecting phrases, sentences, or paragraphs related to the question.

List of categories: Variety of options, Satisfactory of services, Pricing, Overall impression, Quality products, Branding, Advertising, Customer reception, General layout, and Customer reception

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND OR DISSATISFACTION

Question 1: What are your overall impressions of the NWU Brand Store/s?

Table 1.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 1

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Okay, I feel like there's a variety of, like, options that you can choose from, like the merchandise and how the clothes seek to represent the brand of the school, I guess. Even with regard to, like, the services there, I think it's satisfactory . Okay. So yeah, that's what I can say about the overall impression.	Variety of options Satisfactory of services
2	I like the store as a whole. I like the way it's structured. Like, it's not cluttered; they organise things properly. But I don't like the prices. I feel like they're too pricey for students.	Pricing Overall impression
3	My overall impression is quite good. I feel like for the money you're spending to get the product, you do get the quality. Yeah, the quality is good. It's durable; I have very good impressions.	Overall impression Quality products
4	I've only been to one. Like the variety of the products that they have, the clothing, mostly the T-shirts, they look nice. Also, the accessories—what else? The bottles. They look nice as well. Yeah, those are the things that I like about it, and the branding as well. Correlates with the designs. Their placement, like, I joined a particular committee here on campus where I'm letting time. So, with the way they put the NWU logo on the shirts and on the accessories. On the water bottles and so forth, they place it very nicely. It's like you. It's nice the way they place them; it's very nice.	Variety of options Branding
5	OK. My overall impression about the brand store is that I'm impressed with OK; only I can say only the shirts and the service. OK, yeah. The service in the Mahikeng campus. It's very nice. And the employees there and the staff members they are very welcoming. I know that, and again, what else? I feel like their prices range. Yeah, there are some prices that I feel like they are way too much, but some of the other stuffs are affordable.	Overall impression Pricing
6	That's it; it's expensive. Umm. But I think. Otherwise, it's fine. I think the designs of the different items that are there are quite impressive and nice—the stationery. Yeah, I think so. Also, the store itself looks OK. So yeah, it's just that the staff on our campus is a little bit rude. But yeah, in terms of the store itself, I think everything is fine. It's just that the prices are too high. I just it's not student budget friendly.	Pricing Satisfactory of services Branding Overall impression
7	Generally, as a former brand ambassador of NWU. I feel like there is still a lot of work required, but generally, I'm impressed. I'm satisfied, and all those stuffs are expensive. I generally love the servers. Their merch is very nice. There's always like new things, so they're kind of innovative. So yeah.	Overall impression
8	In terms of, like, marketing, it's not really giving, but the shop on its own is OK. They don't like the market. Like, it would be nice to, like, have maybe, like, an Instagram page or something whereby we can see when there's new merchandise instead of always having to go to the store. So yeah, that's just about it. But the store on its own it's OK.	Branding Overall impression Advertising

9	They're expensive. I like everything I love in the NWU brand, but I've never been able to afford it, so I feel like the first impression that I have about it is that it's expensive. I've never taken my money to go and buy something there. I think the only time I've gotten something from the brand store was when I was part of the student leaders, so maybe they would buy us T-shirts just to thank us for something, or I would receive a gift because of that. I was an adjudicator somewhere. I was attending something, and then I received a gift from a brand store. But hee. Yeah, like that's when anyone old says they own a T-shirt, and they will be like, 'Oh, did you get it from the brand store? They are like, 'Yeah, you have money.'	Pricing Branding
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Prompt Question 1.1 based on Question 1: What do you appreciate the most when shopping at the NWU Brand Store/s?

Table 1.2: Transcripts to categories based on Question 1's prompt question.

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	There's a sense of welcoming. If, like, you go to the brand stores and you tend to enquire about, like, merchandise, let us say that you buy a t-shirt, and then you will have an opportunity to obviously enquire from them that is this size is available because all of us, we have different sizes, right? So, there's a sense of welcoming when you enquire based on that, and they will help you. So that's my impression about it.	Customer reception Overall impression
2	I just like how there's an open space, like I said, but the other question is that you can walk in between the clothes and see the variety of the clothes they have in the store.	General layout
3	What do I appreciate the most? I like the fact that there's a lot of, there's variety. Like, it's not just hoodies or, you know, a top—you can get hoodies, caps. I think you can get, I don't know what it's called, but it's those jackets that are like raincoat material. Yeah, that like it has a lot of different options that you can choose from.	Variety of options
4	About shopping there, as being part of an NWU student, having to have a symbol on me to be sure that this is what I represent is actually a good initiative that they put towards the whole branding of clothes. I think it's a good thing. I get to put on me, like, say I am an NWU student, then I can showcase it with maybe a shirt, a bottle bag, a hat, and things like that.	Overall impression
5	What? What? I appreciate the most when shopping at the brand store is the service that they gave there. Like. What about the service that I enjoy is that I enjoy? But how can I? How can I say this? OK, what I enjoy about this service is that they are very welcoming, and yeah, they can also help you with, maybe if you are uncertain on other stuff, show you which quality is good and what can you go for and which products have specials, and yeah, that's I don't help you.	Quality products Satisfactory of services
6	OK. Yeah. Then I get to have, like, a variety of interview regalia and designs. I think we have options. You know, I think that's what I posted. They have different items and different fields for every item, and yeah, and it's. It's quite different, you know; it's not your usual, you know, especially the bottles that they make. It's quite unique and nice, and I just think I just like the brand itself, so it works on the designs that they have for everything in there.	Variety of options Branding
7	Yeah. It's kind of inspiring because you feel a part of the university in essence, so that it actually lives up to the NWU values in essence. And what I love most is how friendly and welcoming the people are at the store that I work at the store. So that's what I love, yeah.	Satisfactory of services

8	I appreciate that I get a lot of beautiful merchandise to actually prove that I'm a student here. OK, it's quality. The stock in general. Yeah. The stock in general that they sell.	
9	OK, I feel like the staff at Vanderbijlpark Park is always nice. I mean, for the most part, I visit there to shoot content for the school whenever they have a new merge, and sometimes I'll just walk in to see if there's no sale in Yana. You know, so that I can brag and say I have something from the brand store. So, when I come there, they're always nice. They allow you to go through things, to look at whatever you want to look at. And when you ask them questions, they're always just nice people. So yeah.	Satisfactory of services

Prompt Question 1.2 based on Question 1: What do you least appreciate the most when shopping at the stores?

Table 1.3: Transcripts to categories based on the prompt question of Question 1.

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Things are expensive, they are. But I understand, but sometimes you will not have some sort of income that will help you to support buying, like, one of the merchandises there. So yeah, a t-shirt can be like approximately R300, between R300 and R400, and that's a bit expensive; that's a bit hefty. So yeah, maybe if they can lower the prices for students, I don't know, they can help. And maybe a lot of people can be able to buy the merchandise from them.	Pricing
2	The prices and also my experience there – every time I would be there, the cashier would just be there. Or there wouldn't be someone to assist. Come ask me if I need help with something. Yeah, I would just be looking, trying to find things by myself.	Pricing Satisfactory of services
3	It's a bit expensive. So, yeah. Yeah, the clothing is expensive.	Pricing
4	Yeah. What? They close a lot. I don't know whether it's due to stock-outs, a shortage of stock, or something else, but they usually close a lot, especially on purpose. They close a lot. I don't know because I would try. Let's just say in a week they could open three times, and not for the longest of durations; they could open for like 2 hours or 3 hours or 4 hours, not the whole day. I don't understand whether they will be having problems in there.	Overall impression
5	What I least appreciate about the brand store is that. I feel it's too small. There's not a lot of variety of products. It's like the same old stuff that we used to. It's not. Different variety of things that you can choose from. It's always hoodies and T-shirts and all that. There's not maybe like designer shirts that you can go for and all that.	Variety of options General layout
6	The staff. They are like they – they are a bit, I don't know, but they just are not welcoming. They just don't create that environment that you know, and yeah, they're just not friendly.	Customer reception
7	Everything is so pricey; even if when it's on sale, it's so expensive, yeah.	Pricing
8	I think with the one on our campus, it's always on stocktaking. I think that's one thing I don't appreciate, and sometimes sizes run out fast, and they'd have to, like, wait for, like, a long period before they get another size.	Overall impression
9	I think it goes to the first one to see. I wish it were more affordable because, I mean, it's for students, man, and most of us are living from NSFAS, and you walk in there and you want to buy something from the store? You don't just walk into a brand store because it's part of	Pricing

	a mall. The reason you go directly to it is that you want something there, and they have really nice things. And it's sad that. Like, their prices are not student-friendly; people who work at NWU can easily afford those things. People who walk somewhere can easily afford those things, but I'm receiving R1500 for R1700 from NSFAS. I'm not going to take R350 to buy a T-shirt written 'NWU', like I want it. But yoh. That's a lot.	
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1. Then, after transcribing the nine participants' answers from the semi-structured interviews and forming categories, four themes emerged, and coding was introduced, which was further sorted for easier explanation. The next step in the process was to list all categories in a new table, as shown in Table 1.4 below, and examine the relationships across the data. This was done by linking or grouping listings within categories and identifying emerging categories as potential themes to provide a clearer understanding of the intended meaning. From these categories, themes emerged to give meaning and accurately interpreted findings in customer language (Medelyan, 2025).

List of emerging themes: General Services, Merchandising, Competitive Pricing and Marketing Communication.

Table 1.4: Categories to Emerged Themes

CATEGORIES	EMERGED THEMES
Variety of options	General Service theme explains the staff interaction, customer reception, the store/s physical attributes and the operations thereof as perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: "I think with the one on our campus, it's always on stocktaking. ... sometimes sizes run out fast, and they'd have to, like, wait for, like, a long period before they get another size." Customer citing: "The staff. They are like they – they are a bit, I don't know, but they just are not welcoming. They just don't create that environment that you know, and yeah, they're just not friendly." Customer citing: "The brand store is that. I feel it's too small." Customer citing: "Services there, I think it's satisfactory." Customer citing: "Having to have a symbol on me to be sure that this is what I represent is actually a good initiative that they put towards the whole branding of clothes. I think it's a good thing. I get to put on me, like, say I am an NWU student, then I can showcase it with maybe a shirt, a bottle bag, a hat, and things like that." Customer citing: "I don't know whether it's due to stock-outs, a shortage of stock, or something else, but they usually close a lot, especially on purpose. They close a lot. I don't know because I would try. Let's just say in a week they could open three times, and not for the longest of durations; they could open for like 2 hours or 3 hours or 4 hours, not the whole day. I don't understand whether they will be having problems in there." Customer citing: "There wouldn't be someone to assist. Come ask me if I need help with something. Yeah, I would just be looking, trying to find things by myself." Customer citing: "I just like how there's an open space, like I said, but the other question is that you can walk in between the clothes and see the variety of the clothes they have in the store."
Satisfactory of services	
Pricing	
Overall impression	
Overall impression	
Quality products	
Variety of options	
Branding	
Overall impression	
Pricing	
Pricing	
Satisfactory of services	
Branding	
Overall impression	
Overall impression	
Branding	
Overall impression	
Advertising	

Pricing	Customer citing: "What I love most is how friendly and welcoming the people are at the store."
Branding	Customer citing: "OK, I feel like the staff at Vanderbijlpark Park is always nice. I mean, for the most part, I visit there to shoot content for the school whenever they have a new merge, and sometimes I'll just walk in to see if there's no sale in Yana. You know, so that I can brag and say I have something from the brand store. So, when I come there, they're always nice. They allow you to go through things, to look at whatever you want to look at. And when you ask them questions, they're always just nice people. So yeah."
Customer reception	Customer citing: "What I appreciate the most when shopping at the brand store is the service that they gave there."
Overall impression	Customer citing: "There's a sense of welcoming. If, like, you go to the brand stores and you tend to enquire about, like, merchandise, let us say that you buy a t-shirt, and then you will have an opportunity to obviously enquire from them that is this size is available because all of us, we have different sizes, right? So, there's a sense of welcoming when you enquire based on that, and they will help you. So that's my impression about it."
General layout	Customer citing: ", but the shop on its own is OK. ... But the store on its own it's OK."
Variety of options	Customer citing: "I feel like there is still a lot of work required, but generally, I'm impressed. I'm satisfied, and all those stuffs are expensive. I generally love the servers. Their merch is very nice. There's always like new things, so they're kind of innovative. So yeah."
Overall impression	Customer citing: "Also, the store itself looks <u>OK</u> ... it's just that the staff on our campus is a little bit rude. But yeah, in terms of the store itself, I think everything is fine."
Quality products	Customer citing: "OK. My overall impression about the brand store is that I'm impressed with OK; only I can say only the shirts and the service. OK, yeah. The service in the Mahikeng campus. It's very nice. And the employees there and the staff members they are very welcoming. I know that, and again, what else?"
Satisfactory of services	Customer citing: "My overall impression is quite good. ... I have very good impressions."
Variety of options	Customer citing: "I like the store as a whole. I like the way it's structured. Like, it's not cluttered; they organise things properly."
Branding	Merchandising theme explains that the quality, durability, and various types of products are perceived by the student customers.
Satisfactory of services	Customer citing: "There's not a lot of variety of products. It's like the same old stuff that we used to. It's not. Different variety of things that you can choose from. It's always hoodies and T-shirts and all that."
Pricing	Customer citing: "variety of, like, options."
Pricing	Customer citing: "What I enjoy about this service is that they are very welcoming, and yeah, they can also help you with maybe if you are uncertain on other stuff, show you which quality is good and what can you go for and which products have specials, and yeah, that's I don't help you."
Overall impression	Customer citing: "I think you can get, ... those jackets that are like raincoat material. Yeah, that like it has a lot of different options that you can choose from."
Pricing	Customer citing: "Like the variety of the products that they have, the clothing, mostly the T-shirts, they look nice. Also, the accessories—what else? The bottles. They look nice as well."
	Customer citing: "I like the fact that there's a lot of, there's variety. Like, it's not just hoodies or, you know, a top—you can get hoodies, caps. I think you can get, ... those jackets that are like raincoat material. Yeah, that like it has a lot of different options that you can choose from."
	Customer citing: "I feel like for the money you're spending to get the product, you do get the quality. Yeah, the quality is good. It's durable."

Competitive Pricing theme explains the perception that products sold at the store/s are too expensive and unaffordable for most students.

Customer citing: "Like, their prices are not student-friendly.

Customer citing: "Everything is so pricey; even if when it's on sale, it's so expensive, yeah."

Customer citing: "The clothing is expensive."

Customer citing: "Things are expensive, they are. But I understand, but sometimes you will not have some sort of income that will help you to support buying, like, one of the merchandises there. So yeah, a t-shirt can be like approximately R300, between R300 and R400, and that's a bit expensive; that's a bit hefty. So yeah, maybe if they can lower the prices for students,"

Customer citing: "I feel like their prices range. Yeah, there are some prices that I feel like they are way too much, but some of the other stuffs are affordable."

Customer citing: "The prices and also my experience there – every time I would be there, the cashier would just be there."

Customer citing: "But I don't like the prices. I feel like they're too pricey for students."

Customer citing: "That's it; it's expensive. It's just that the prices are too high. I just it's not student budget friendly."

Customer citing: "They're expensive ... but I've never been able to afford it, so I feel like the first impression that I have about it is that it's expensive. I've never taken my money to go and buy something there."

Marketing Communication explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers.

Customer citing: "Yeah, those are the things that I like about it, and the branding as well. Correlates with the designs.

Customer citing: "So, with the way they put the NWU logo on the shirts and on the accessories. On the water bottles and so forth, they place it very nicely. It's like you. It's nice the way they place them; it's very nice.

Customer citing: "I like everything I love in the NWU brand,

Customer citing: "I think the designs of the different items that are there are quite impressive and nice—the stationery. Yeah, I think so.

Customer citing: "In terms of, like, marketing, it's not really giving.

Customer citing: "The bottles that they make. It's quite unique and nice, and I just think I just like the brand itself, so it works on the designs that they have for everything in there."

Customer citing: "They don't like the market. Like, it would be nice to, like, have maybe, like, an Instagram page or something whereby we can see when there's new merchandise instead of always having to go to the store."

Customer citing: "Yeah, those are the things that I like about it, and the branding as well. Correlates with the designs ... So, with the way they put the NWU logo on the shirts and on the accessories. On the water bottles and so forth, they place it very nicely. It's like you. It's nice the way they place them; it's very nice."

- **Emerg**ed Theme 1: **General Service**

This analysis is based on the satisfaction with service, general layout, customer reception, and overall impressions categories. Some participants felt that the service experience varies between campuses. For instance, participant 1 in Table 1.1, citing *“services there, I think it's satisfactory.”* Participant 1 in Table 1.2, citing, *“There's a sense of welcoming. If, like, you go to the brand stores and you tend to enquire about, like, merchandise, let us say that you buy a t-shirt, and then you will have an opportunity to obviously enquire from them that is this size is available because all of us, we have different sizes, right? So, there's a sense of welcoming when you enquire based on that, and they will help you”*, participant 5 in Table 1.1, citing *“OK. My overall impression about the brand store is that I'm impressed with OK; only I can say only the shirts and the service. OK, yeah. The service in the Mahikeng campus. It's very nice. And the employees there and the staff members they are very welcoming. I know that, and again, what else?”* participant 7 in Table 1.2, citing *“What I love most is how friendly and welcoming the people are at the store”* and participant 9 in Table 1.2, citing *“OK, I feel like the staff at Vanderbijlpark Park is always nice. I mean, for the most part, I visit there to shoot content for the school whenever they have a new merge, and sometimes I'll just walk in to see if there's no sale in Yana. You know, so that I can brag and say I have something from the brand store. So, when I come there, they're always nice. They allow you to go through things, to look at whatever you want to look at. And when you ask them questions, they're always just nice people. So yeah”*, Participants do applaud the staff members at the Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark campuses, describing them as friendly and very welcoming; they are also helpful in helping with size enquiries and showing store specials available. According to Bob Phibbs (2024), staff should demonstrate friendly and welcoming behaviour towards customers. This enables them to deliver a good customer experience and sales, even participant 5 in Table 1.2 cited that *“I appreciate the most when shopping at the brand store is the service that they give there”*. Rastegar-Panah (2025) suggested that customers value courteous, warm, and approachable interactions, and this fosters a positive shopping experience and supports repeat business for them. Taking time to assist customers and addressing their needs is a way of providing personalised attention perceived as being hospitable (Pijls et al., 2021).

Some participants, on the other hand, expressed that the staff were a bit rude and completely absent, so far away that they do not offer client assistance when at the store, as indicated by participant 6, in Table 1.3, citing that *"The staff. They are like they – they are a bit, I don't know, but they just are not welcoming. They just don't create that environment that you know, and yeah, they're just not friendly."* Participant 6 in Table 1.1, citing *"the store itself looks OK. ...it's just that the staff on our campus is a little bit rude. But yeah, in terms of the store itself, I think everything is fine."*, Participant 2 in Table 1.3, citing *"there wouldn't be someone to assist. Come ask me if I need help with something. Yeah, I would just be looking, trying to find things by myself."* This is a concern, as when staff members engage in a friendly conversation with the customer, it creates a welcoming atmosphere that builds satisfaction (Rastegar-Panah, 2024). It can be suggested that the NWU Brand Stores management team conduct staff training across all three campuses to standardise customer services, as Phibbs (2024) argues that training programmes should include techniques for engaging customers and turning them into buyers. This teaches that to have exceptional customer service, staff must make customers feel valued and appreciated. Staff members at the NWU Brand Store/s should offer a hospitable service towards customers so that they can value and attract them in competitive markets (Pijls *et al.*, 2021). Phibbs (2024) further explains that when staff training is enjoyable and has a relaxed environment, employees can be themselves, which translates to better customer interaction.

However, Participant 8 in Table 1.3 shows a slightly different impression of the store, citing, *"I think with the one on our campus, it's always on stocktaking. I think that's one thing I don't appreciate, and sometimes sizes run out fast, and they'd have to, like, wait for, like, a long period before they get another size."* Having no stock has a negative impact on the retailer's credibility and harms their reputation, as they can lose sales, and customers do not trust the retailer, reflecting a decrease in customer satisfaction (Ranjan & Puri, 2012). Participant 4 in Table 1.3 states, *"I don't know whether it's due to stock-outs, a shortage of stock, or something else, but they usually close a lot, especially on purpose. They close a lot. I don't know because I would try. Let's just say in a week they could open three times, and not for the longest of durations; they could open for like 2 hours or 3 hours or 4 hours, not the whole day. I don't understand whether they will be having problems in there."* This expresses that

the frequency of store closures due to stocktaking is too high. These operational disruptions are inconvenient for cash-paying students who miss out on sales in the store. According to the Food and Beverage Stocktaking (2015), businesses can minimise stocktaking errors by scheduling stocktaking to minimise business operations and continuously improving stocktaking processes to enhance accuracy and efficiency. Such disruptions also slow down the operations that lead to the warehouse being overly stocked (Tong, 2025). They continue by stating that having stock out affects store loyalty, reduces customer value and satisfaction. This could be one of the reasons why the customers are having a challenge with the service they get at the brand stores. The brand store needs to improve inventory management controls by implementing retail inventory models and enhancing logistical matters.

In addition, Participant 2 in Table1.1 cited that *"I like the store as a whole. I like the way it's structured. Like, it's not cluttered; they organise things properly."* participant 3 in Table1.1 citing *"My overall impression is quite good. ...I have very good impressions."*, Participant 7 in Table1.1, citing *"I feel like there is still a lot of work required, but generally, I'm impressed. I'm satisfied, and all those stuffs are expensive. I generally love the servers. Their merch is very nice. There are, always new things, so they're kind of innovative. So yeah."*, Participant 8 in Table1.1, citing *"but the shop on its own is OK ... But the store on its own it's OK."*, Participant 2 in Table1.2 citing *"I just like how there's an open space, like I said, but the other question is that you can walk in between the clothes and see the variety of the clothes they have in the store."*, Participant 4 in Table1.2 citing *"having to have a symbol on me to be sure that this is what I represent is actually a good initiative that they put towards the whole branding of clothes. I think it's a good thing. I get to put on me, like, say I am an NWU student, then I can showcase it with maybe a shirt, a bottle bag, a hat, and things like that."*. This shows that the stores have a strong physical environment that shows the brand, and they generate a high level of customer satisfaction despite the pricing issues. Stores with a strong physical environment can showcase their appeal and enhance customer satisfaction (Kim & Yang, 2025). They also highlight that state-of-the-art facilities, interior design, and comfort contribute to customers' ratings of service quality and product assortment.

- **Emerged Theme 2: Merchandising**

This part of the analysis is based on the quality of products and the variety of option categories. Product variety refers to the number of different products, such as t-shirts, shirts, and dress shirts, that shirts that a business can offer in its inventory (The Oboloo Team, 2023). Although some of the participants have only visited the stores without purchasing any items, most felt that the stores offer a wide range of good-quality merchandise as seen from participants like participant 1 in Table1.1 citing “*variety of, like, options*”, Participant 4 in Table1.1 citing “*Like the variety of the products that they have, the clothing, mostly the T-shirts, they look nice. Also, the accessories—what else? The bottles. They look nice as well.*”, Participant 4 in Table1.1 citing “*Like the variety of the products that they have, the clothing, mostly the T-shirts, they look nice. Also, the accessories—what else? The bottles. They look nice as well.*”, Participant 6 in Table 1.2, citing “*a variety of interview regalia and designs. I think we have options. You know, I think that's what I posted. They have different items and different fields for every item*”, Participant 3 in Table1.2 citing “*I like the fact that there's a lot of, there's variety. Like, it's not just hoodies or, you know, a top—you can get hoodies, caps. I think you can get those jackets that are like raincoat material. Yeah, that like it has a lot of different options that you can choose from*”. Offering a wide range of product variety is essential for the success of the business to provide customers with choices, as customers are discerning and demand more (The Oboloo Team, 2023). Quality is essential for meeting customer satisfaction (Kim & Yang, 2025).

Other participants like participants described the merchandise as very good and durable in quality from Participant 3 in Table1.1, citing that “*I feel like for the money you're spending to get the product, you do get the quality. Yeah, the quality is good. It's durable*” and Participant 5 in Table1.2 citing “*I enjoy about this service is that they are very welcoming, and yeah, they can also help you with, maybe if you are uncertain on other stuff, show you which quality is good and what can you go for and which products have specials, and yeah, that's I don't help you.*” perceiving that the materials or fabrics used does inspire confidence on participants. This is because customers are likely to make more purchases when they have a wide range of options (The Oboloo Team, 2023). A combination of textures and colour can enhance emotion in

customers (Sveg Admin, 2024). Svegea also proved that their textile durability and quality provide the desired emotion.

However, Participant 5 in Table 1.3, citing *“There’s not a lot of variety of products. It’s like the same old stuff that we used to. It’s not. Different variety of things that you can choose from. It’s always hoodies and T-shirts and all that,”* showing that the merchandise is a bit static, as it does not incorporate modern fashion trends. The clothing is as attractive as it is because of the brand it represents, but it does not impress the students, who call it generic due to the lack of fashion sense and creativity in the clothing. The gap can be closed by introducing tracksuits, cargo pants, joggers, and other more feminine items, such as crop tops, skirts, and sports leggings. Educational institutions like Columbia University, Purdue University and The Cornell Store introduced feminine clothing in their stores (The Columbia University, 2025; The Cornell Store, 2025).

Emerged Theme 3: Competitive Pricing

This part of the analysis is based on the pricing. As much as the participants valued the quality of the items at the stores and the variety of products offered, the affordability of those items was somewhat too much for them. This is because fashion products with lower price sensitivity will yield higher profits when customers do not prioritise quality, design, and brand image over price (Lu & Yan, 2024). Almost all the participants felt that the items were too pricey for students. But with promotional pricing strategies, the stores can make products more affordable and attract price-sensitive customers (Relex, 2024), citing that they are not budget-friendly and are unaffordable to them, as seen by Participant 3 in Table 1.3 citing *“the clothing is expensive.”*, Participant 2 in Table 1.1 citing *“But I don’t like the prices. I feel like they’re too pricey for students.”* Participant 2 in Table 1.3 citing *“The prices and also my experience there – every time I would be there, the cashier would just be there.”* Participant 6 in Table 1.1 citing *“That’s it; it’s expensive. It’s just that the prices are too high. I just it’s not student budget friendly.”* Participant 1 in Table 1.3, citing, *“Things are expensive, they are. But I understand, but sometimes you will not have some sort of income that will help you to support buying, like, one of the merchandises there. So yeah, a t-shirt can be around R300, between R300 and R400, and that’s a bit expensive; it’s a bit hefty.”*

So yeah, maybe if they can lower the prices for students,” For instance, this T-shirt for an NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Scheme) funded student is unaffordable, as their monthly income/stipend is R1500-R1700. Customers tend to view expensive products with a higher perception of monetary sacrifice, leading to a financial burden when purchasing the product (Niu *et al.*, 2024). Based on this observation, products are unaffordable for participants because spending R350 is unreasonable for them, as they have to prioritise food over this. From this perspective of participants, it is clear that the economic barrier drives customer dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, some participants highlighted that clothing items from older seasons are priced similarly to the newly released items, and this shows that the pricing strategy used at the brand stores needs to be revised to help them clear inventory to make way for new stock and improve it so that students who are interested in purchasing at the stores. A promotional price strategy can be an option for clearing out old stock and making room for new products, using data analytics and AI to optimise these strategies for efficiency (Relex, 2024). Participants such as Participant 9 in Table 1.1 cited that *“They’re expensive, but I’ve never been able to afford it, so I feel like the first impression that I have about it is that it’s expensive. I’ve never taken my money to go and buy something there.”*, Participant 5 in Table 1.1 citing *“I feel like their prices range. Yeah, there are some prices that I feel like they are way too much, but some of the other stuffs are affordable.”*, Participant 9 in Table 1.3 citing *“Like, their prices are not student-friendly;”* Participant 7 in Table 1.3 citing *“Everything is so pricey; even if when it’s on sale, it’s so expensive, yeah.”* This shows that the current prices prevent students from making a purchase, leading them to view the store as expensive. This lack creates an economic barrier for other students, as it limits brand visibility among the majority. The apparel industry is facing inventory management challenges due to fashion trends that are seasonal (Lu & Yan, 2024). They suggest that brands like Zara use a dynamic price strategy to reduce inventory and increase profits. A participant in this study even recommended that the store use its inventory for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Here, the pricing strategy needs to align with the economic status of the students. Initiating a customer-oriented CSR approach often creates a positive brand image, and customers can be loyal to it (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). From this perspective, we can see that there is a need to revise the pricing strategy and enhance the brand’s image by working with the student communities.

- **Emerged Theme 4: Marketing Communication**

The analysis is based on the branding and advertising categories. Based on the feedback of participants, it shows that the brand, its appealing designs and how the logo is executed are highly appreciated by participants, as seen from participants like Participant 4 in Table 1.1, citing that *“Yeah, those are the things that I like about it, and the branding as well. Correlates with the designs. ... So, with the way they put the NWU logo on the shirts and on the accessories. On the water bottles and so forth, they place them very nicely. It's like you. It's nice the way they place them; it's very nice.”*, Participant 6, in Table 1.1, citing that *“I think the designs of the different items that are there are quite impressive and nice—the stationery. Yeah, I think so.”*, participant 9 in Table 1.1, citing *“I like everything I love in the NWU brand”* and Participant 6 in Table 1.2, citing *“the bottles that they make. It's quite unique and nice, and I just think I just like the brand itself, so it works on the designs that they have for everything in there”*. However, the current marketing strategies need to be revised to enhance communication and likeness of the product advertisements, as Participant 8 in Table 1.1, cites that *“In terms of, like, marketing, it's not really giving ... They don't like the market. Like, it would be nice to, like, have maybe, like, an Instagram page or something whereby we can see when there's new merchandise instead of always having to go to the store”*. This shows that the stores have a strong identity, and how the products are designed is appreciated by participants, but the marketing needs to be revamped. When they craft promotional pricing well, they can reinforce brand loyalty and even attract new customers by aligning it with seasons (Tilbury & Willgert, 2024). When businesses invest in innovative product design, it enhances brand recognition while leveraging digital technology to boost product appeal (Lu & Yan, 2024). By doing this, the store can improve its brand visibility through promotion and other marketing activities.

QUESTIONS ABOUT CLOTHING

Question 2: What types of clothing do you normally purchase there?

This question aims to identify specific types of clothing and merchandise they would typically purchase at the NWU Brand Stores. The participants gave a detailed description of the branded apparel for the university's pride and various items that are most commonly purchased. Streamline (2023) highlighted that university-branded merchandise serves as a tangible representation of students' pride and belonging. They appreciated the different designs and colour mixing that represent the NWU brand. The completed manual thematic data analysis using colour coding for this question is included in Annexure Table 2.1-2.2.

- **Emerged Theme 1: Merchandising Variety**

Based on the feedback of participant 1 citing *"t-shirts, stationery, as well as cup holders ... headphones"*, Participant 2 citing *"hoodies"*, participant 3 citing *"top. Or a jacket,"* Participant 4 citing *"The T-shirts. They look nice. Like I said, especially the rugby ones. I like them, and the ones in the bottles ... key holder, like an Eagi key holder"*, participant 5 citing *"the varsity football or varsity cup shirts. Ans ... With regards to stationery, I would say I only buy pens"*, participant 6 citing *"I've bought a bucket hat."*, participant 7 citing *"your long sleeves ... These, these Eagi badges. Eagi, Pukki, Mafika and Vuvu badges ... my blazer... the radio and the Eagi Mannequin. Or what do you call it? That little stuffed animal ... dictionaries (notebooks). ... like the caps, the caps are one of my faves as well. So yeah, and the spotty. So, the bucket hat. Yeah"*, participant 8 citing *"notebooks"*, and participant 9 citing *"the sports, the sports T-shirts, like the sports gear that they have – they usually sell rugby T-shirts or soccer T-shirts ... 'It's very nice to see somebody wearing that T-shirt, and it's what I'd want to have.' Also, their sweaters and their hoodies and sweaters are nice ... those green and black ones that had Northwest University written in white. ... When there's a rugby tournament or rugby competition, those are nice. I'm not really a fan of hats or beanies. So, yeah, T-shirts, sweaters, or hoodies"* on the Annexure shows that some of the items students normally purchase show that the NWU Brand Stores offer a diverse

range of items that meet numerous student requirements, ranging from apparel, accessories, stationery, and novelty items. The production of fashion items and clothing accessories can play a vital role in economic revitalisation when businesses adopt innovative strategies and diversify their product range (Akinwale, 2024). In the instance of the NWU Brand Stores, this approach helps them expand their reach and enhance customer satisfaction. This diversification caters to student needs in areas of going to classes, social on- and off-campus events, and other leisure activities. This approach by the NWU Brand Stores shows that providing a wide range of items caters to different customers' needs and demographics varying in lifestyle that suit them individually (Lindecrantz *et al.*, 2020). Khubwani (2023) also highlights that when offering a diverse range of products, businesses should add things like inclusivity, transparency, and customisation to their marketing campaigns.

- **EmergEd Theme 2: Brand Designs**

Based on the feedback of participant 9 of Table 2.1 of the Annexure, citing “*they know how to mix colours.*” It shows that the design of the merchandise contributes to the NWU brand image and customer perception. Akinwale (2024) indicates that the design of fashion items plays a significant role in shaping customer perception and brand image. When executed well, it is difficult for competitors to imitate (Lindecrantz *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, to build a strong brand image for the stores and enhance customer perception, the brand and marketing strategies should include locally manufactured items. Customers expect brands to offer appealing designs that align with current trends (Khubwani, 2023).

Question 3: What do you think about the quality of clothing being sold there? Please elaborate. Prompt answer:

This question is aimed at understanding what the participant’s overall impression is about the quality of clothing apparel sold at the NWU Brand Stores. Information provided on the brand name and product influences the quality of clothing (Salerno-Kochan & Turek, 2020). Here, participants gave their perception of the quality of clothing sold at the stores. The completed manual thematic data analysis using colour coding for this question is included in Annexure Table 3.1–3.2.

- **Emerged Theme 1: Quality merchandising**

Based on the feedback of Participant 1 citing *"Even if you touch the fabric, it doesn't feel like it's fake, you know. It has that sense of authority. It has that sense of expensiveness that comes with it. So, yeah"*, Participant 2 citing *"I think the quality is very good. They do last. I bought mine like 2 years ago, and it's still in good condition."*, Participant 3 citing *"Okay, the quality is very good. ... I think the material composition, most of it is cotton, which, I mean, yeah, that's quality."*, Participant 4 citing *"They're worth the quality, even if you wash them. They don't, you know, fade away. The fabric is actually similar to this fabric. It's actually nice. Yeah. Painted detail from the collar. Without the collar here, the way they put the branding, it doesn't wear off from the outside."*, Participant 5, citing *"I feel like the quality goes with the price. The lesser the price, the low the quality it is, and then the higher the price, the good quality it is. ... The most expensive thing I saw there was like a jacket. There was something like R650, but it's good quality. Do you see that it's strong ... durability, yes, it's there— but"*, participant 6 citing *"the clothes that I have. I've washed them multiple times, and they're still in good condition. So, I think that quality is fine. It works for me."*, Participant 7 citing *"Generally, I think the quality is like top-notch quality in terms of like fabric-wise colour coding, ... I feel like the quality is good considering the fact that I still have a shirt, and it still looks good, not washed out – a black shirt that I bought like 2-3 years ago – and it's still in good condition to start, like washing multiple times. Including the rest of my other T-shirts, like, the fabric is good. It's cool, depending on, like, the season, be winter. You are warm, you are covered. If you have like much from NWU. And then the jackets are the best. They keep you warm regardless of the weather type. You are sorted, even if you have, like, a light thing beneath it and it's really cold. So yeah, in terms of quality, I love it."*, participant 8 citing *"it doesn't like drain out of colour as you wash, so that I really appreciate it. It doesn't stretch or like shrink. That's why it makes it good quality."* and participant 9 citing *"So, the tower hoodie – the quality is always nice. Yeah, their quality is not bad. It's not bad."* shows that the NWU Brand stores have high-quality merchandise that students perceive as long-lasting and worthy of the price, although some items vary with the different price points. Quality control checks on fabric are important during the production process of the clothing items, as this shows that the products meet the customers' expectations (Akinwale,

2024). This insightful perception shows that their quality is the major benefactor that contributes to the store's customers' satisfaction. However, the brand store's management can clearly communicate why certain items are priced higher so that students can understand the value behind the price, as this is very challenging from almost any perspective for shoppers (Lindecrantz *et al.*, 2020). This is because customers expect businesses to offer products that are fairly priced while maintaining quality (Khubwani, 2023).

- **Emerged Theme 2: Price quality relationship**

Based on the feedback of Participant 4, citing *"They're pricey. Very pricey, but they're worth the price. ...Actually, it's actually good. It's worth the price. It's costly, ... ' I know it's the T-shirt from two years ago, and it's still with the prices of T-shirts that are now like they were just released, maybe this year or recently. Like that. Yeah. The price range is it's, it's, it's, it's not, it's. Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah. They look good, though I'm not. Yeah, the pricing – it's similar. It's not like with an iPhone, whereby it drops like the iPhone 11 and iPhone 14. If an iPhone 11 now, it's less compared to how it used to be in its time. It's more. Affordable. So, it's out of the market for now. Yeah. The prize must say, 'OK, there's someone who's created this one,' but their prices are."*, participant 5 citing *"Good quality and a bit expensive"*, participant 6 citing *"The quality versus the price for me – they need to step it up a bit in terms of that, but what I'm trying to say is the price that they charge for the quality of the clothes. It's it. It just doesn't correspond, you know. I mean, having it at a lesser price."*, and participant 9 citing *"There are just these, but I guess it's because of the price. ... So, I think quality goes with the price."* shows that the NWU Brand Stores have a multifaceted value that is vibrant, implying that the sound quality on items they have is viewed as being suitable for the high price. Here, Akinwale (2024) indicated that quality control checks show that the final products meet the high standards expected at higher price points. It is thus essential to communicate the effectiveness of the quality control process with suppliers with the aim of giving the customer a transparent experience (Lindecrantz *et al.*, 2020). Khubwani (2023) further illustrates that customers want high-quality products that are both stylish and durable.

Question 4: Are you satisfied with the range of clothing styles they have? Prompt
Question based on Q4:

This question is aimed at comprehending whether the participants are satisfied with the variety of clothing styles they have at the NWU Brand Stores. Fabric, style, or design are some of the key factors that influence quality (Salerno-Kochan & Turek, 2020). Here, participants gave their perception of the variation of styles at the stores. The completed manual thematic data analysis using colour coding for this question is included in Annexure Table 4.1–4.2.

- **Emerged Theme 1: Product range width**

Based on the findings of participant 5 citing *"I feel like I don't know if the place is small so they can put in more stock, or they just haven't brought in the latest and newest stock into the shop."*, Participant 7 citing *"But general satisfaction. I'm satisfied with what I've got this far."* shows that students are generally satisfied with the purchases they have made thus far even though they the store has limited stock available. According to the article by Lindecrantz et al. (2020), providing good customer service and a personalised experience helps maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty. By having limited stock, exclusivity or rarity enhances the NWU brand's perceived value of the branded merchandise (Khubwani, 2023).

Based on the findings of Participant 1, citing *"I haven't seen trousers. I have not seen trousers. Maybe if they can introduce a wider range of trousers with like an NWU brand in it, because most of the trousers that are there are like representing one of the services that the NWU has, like, maybe, let's say there's a, there's an SEC thing, right? ... maybe if like they can introduce like trousers meant for students, and then they're not branded on behalf of like a service like the SEC or on behalf of, for example"*, Participant 2 citing *"I think I'm satisfied. No, partially, I think they do have like a range of clothes, but they could add some girly things. Yeah, maybe skirts"*, Participant 3 citing *"they have pants and skirts. Yeah. Maybe something like that?"* Participant 4 citing *"But I know they do have a variety; I just don't know. Maybe it differs with the stores. With that, I wouldn't comment."*, Participant 5 citing *"not a lot of range of tops"*, Participant 6 citing *"expect this new-age fashion with NWU branding,"* Participant 9

citing, *"But I feel like. They are always generic. I understand it's an institutional brand store, but. I mean, we're students, I feel like their fashion sense is not quite impressive because, as I said, we can not only be impressed by sports clothing but also casual things. I feel like their fashion sense is not quite impressive because, as I said, we can not only be impressed by sports clothing but also casual things."* This shows that the NWU Brand Stores do offer a variety of options, even though there can be adjustments made in modernising apparel for the students' interest, and not keeping them generic and basic. This is because customers want to pick products and services that fit their diverse experiences (Khubwani, 2023). What is more is that Khubwani highlights that they can blend the latest trends with the designs to stay relevant. Like Nike, the NWU Brand Stores can allow students to personalise some apparel with their colours or text so that they make them feel unique and connected to the brand (Lindecrantz *et al.*, 2020).

- **Emerged Theme 2: Relative pricing**

Based on the findings of Participant 9 citing, *"Am I just buying it because it's written NWU price, or yeah, is it not fair that the price?"* it shows that there is a concern on the perceived value of the products relative to their cost. Addressing this concern is recommended for maintaining loyalty and trust from customers (Khubwani, 2023). She further indicates that businesses need to have a clear pricing strategy that highlights material, ethical sourcing, and unique production features. When customers feel the price paid is too high relative to its value, they will feel dissatisfied or view the product as overpriced (Qureshi, 2019). Streamline (2023) also confirms that there is an emotional connection, as students have joy and pride when purchasing and wearing university-branded merchandise.

- **Emerged Theme 3: Branding**

Based on the findings of Participant 6, *"So, I think they have everything that caters for students, you know, and different that are also suitable for an institutional brand."*, Participant 7 citing *"the NWU brand store is always so innovative."*, Participant 8 citing *"we could do with like a little colour change, but everything has to be purple."* and Participant 9 citing *"you know that we would buy because we want to flex, not*

something that would like staff members are wearing and students are also wearing ... They're not that fancy. It's like when it comes to casual clothing, they just care about their logo. Yeah, like. For me, the way I see it, it's like when they look at it, it's like, as long as our logo is there," which shows that as much as there is a wide range of merchandise, the variety of options are perceived as generic and not modernised to align with those of student trends or interests. According to Salerno-Kochan and Turek (2020), they indicate that women aged 19-25 are the significant group that follow trends, make more recurrent clothing purchases and value acceptance. Plus, in the case of the NWU Brand Stores, this age group seems to be within their target market.

Question 5: Do you think the clothing prices at the NWU Brand Stores are fair and reasonable? Prompt question based on Q5:

This question is aimed at knowing how the participants perceive the prices at the stores. Higher prices do not directly translate to higher quality of the product (Salerno-Kochan & Turek, 2020). Customers perceive prices as part of what they “get” in return to what they “give” (Misra, Pedada & Sinha, 2022). This can mean product quality, customer experience, consistency, and brand notoriety (Lanla, 2024). Here, participants gave their perception of the fairness and how reasonable the prices are. The completed manual thematic data analysis using colour coding for this question is included in Annexure Table 5.1–5.2.

- **EmergEd Theme 1: Quality price relationship**

Based on the findings from Participant 3, citing “for the quality that you're getting, it is fair and reasonable,” and Participant 4, citing, “*for the brand they represent—the quality of the fabric—yes, I think they're reasonable. For those two attributes, the quality is. "It's actually nice."*”, shows that there is a recognition that high prices are perceived by the quality and the substantial brand value they have built. A significantly strong brand value and higher prices are often associated with quality (Salerno-Kochan & Turek, 2020). Price serves as a signal of product quality and reinforces brand image, and can enhance the benefits of the product (Misra, Pedada & Sinha, 2022). This is because people are willing to pay more for something they trust (lanla, 2024).

- **Emerged Theme 2: Affordable pricing**

Based on the findings from Participant 1, who stated, *“So, if they want more support for their NWU brand, I think that they should lower the prices. Yeah.”*, participant 2 citing *“but also with students, the pricing there, I don’t think all of us can afford to buy clothing of such prices.”*, Participant 3 citing *“They are expensive,”*, participant 5 citing *“So, I feel like the prices is fair. ... All the specials on all the brands they have in the brand store, so some of the other stuff remains, like with the normal price, which in most cases is the nice stuff, which costs a bit more.”*, Participant 6 *“It’s really rare because the prices are regarded as too high for them. I think the prices can go down a bit, you know”*, Participant 7 citing *“So, it’s kind of little pricey if we consider student life and student expectations. So generally, that is an expense. So not everyone can afford to buy,”* and Participant 8 citing, *“The store is very expensive. A lot of people usually have to like a budget before they can buy a rugby shirt or the Dragon’s shirt. It’s not really affordable for students, so no.”* shows that the high prices are seen as a barrier to having students purchase at the stores. This is because increasing acquisition costs for customers can make it difficult, but marketing can help mitigate prices of rivals (Misra, Pedada & Sinha, 2022).

- **Emerged Theme 3: Brand equity**

Based on the findings from Participant 6 citing *“I’m OK with spending that amount of money because I feel like more than buying the item, I’m buying the brand, you know?”*, shows that there are customers who are, however, driven by the emotional and symbolic value the brand represents and are willing to spend so much money for it. They are loyal to the brand. Salerno-Kochan & Turek (2020) highlighted in their article that many customers tend to make decisions based on emotion, as it’s their way of expressing their material and social status. For university students, this connection serves as a representation of their achievements and allows them to have a sense of belonging (Streamline, 2023).

Question 6: Is there anything different you would like to see being sold at the stores?

This question is aimed at what other items or products they would like to see at the stores. Part of effective merchandising is displaying preferences that customers desire the most for instant gratification (Chatterjee & Latinovic, 2024). A pleasing customer shopping experience can lead to customer loyalty and increase sales volume (Ndengane *et al.*, 2021). Here, participants shared their interest in what apparel they find interesting to purchase and sell at the stores. The completed manual thematic data analysis using colour coding for this question is included in Annexure Table 6.1–6.2.

- **Emergent Theme 1: Diversification**

Based on the findings from Participant 5, citing, *“What I would like to see is them selling in the brand stores are shirts. Normally, you would see students in structures or part of communities wearing shirts that are. You can see that they by a graphic designer, who designed an idea and a shirt. Then they went through and printed it. I feel like, also as students, we could get something like that and not only shirts that are clean. And then it's just the NWU logo, and then that's it. I feel like they can design clothes that have like patterns and all that. I'm not sure if I am understandable. Yes, yes, not that they should have creativity. They have creativity. It shows that the creativity is not there in the brand store. There's the creativity is there within the student structures, the staff members and all that with the materials that they give them.”* and participant 9 citing *“when student leaders buy their formal uniform, they will get their black blazers from the brand store. But when it comes to it, they normally buy casual uniforms like they would. They have T-shirts written with their names and their portfolio, and they never go to the brand store. They go to NWU service providers, and I'm like, 'If NWU could look at what we go and look for outside.' They could save a lot of money, because now we're no longer taking the school's budget outside to buy from outsiders. We can buy these from the brand store because. Hey, I specifically don't think I can mention what they should have”* shows that there is a difference between trendy merchandise and the generic apparel the NWU Brand Stores provide, often because of this, there is a loss on sales as customers go to external service providers for assistance. Trendy

merchandise is associated with fashion and desire, like USB chargers and headphones (Modern Marketing, 2024).

Participant 1 citing *“if they can introduce trousers, pants, more pants that are not meant for an event, right? Unisex. That are not meant for a specific event, then that can help”*, Participant 2 citing *“Yes, maybe crop tops and just girly things. And maybe a variety of colours, not just grey and purple. Yeah.”*, Participant 3 citing *“more pants, shorts, skirts”*, Participant 4 citing *“pouches for the phone like they usually have stickers that you could put at the end of your couch. ... So, I think they could have a pouch, but I think that's gonna be a problem, cause for which product or device would they have more? Maybe laptops could do. Yeah, like pouches. Oh. Oh, the. Yes. Or, like I said, speaking from my course, they could take, they could open like a session whereby you can place an order and say, 'I have an iPhone 13; can I get this design for an iPhone 13?' and then they place the order for you, and then you get it. I think that could also help them. Yeah, like if I want an iPhone 13 pouch with the design, and then they have a variety of designs, I pick one, and then I tell them it's for this phone. Then they place the order, and then I get it. I pay for think that also. Them from having to buy so many pouches for different phones, only for them not to be bought. Waiting period. It depends on who's designing. It depends on your outsourcing. If you guys are outsourcing the duration, the time for supplies is different”*, Participated 6, citing *“Maybe a tracksuit. Yeah. Yeah, I don't think I've been setting a trick. So yeah, that would be nice, actually. You know, a check. Like, maybe leggings, sports leggings? You know, for ladies,”* Participant 7 citing *“Eagi socks. But what about Eagi shoes? So, I know that's a big one, but maybe like Eagi costumes. That would be nice. Something extraordinary. Yeah, but yes, more sportswear. I haven't seen a lot of sportswear. At the NWU, considering that the NWU is also a sporty type of varsity, like sports, where's a bit of a limit?”*, Participant 8 citing *“new pants or like shorts, so maybe that could be like a nice new addition.”* and participant 9 citing, *“They don't have pants. Yes, cargo pants at NWU—they don't have those. Whenever we want cargo pants, you must find a service provider, and you must ask the school for the logo, and oh,”* show that there is a strong sense of the brand that the public wants and can expand by having a mixture of other product offerings that do not limit product offerings. This can be achieved by enabling real-time communication so that they can address customer concerns (Wallis, 2023). Customers want a cohesive experience when

shopping, and reducing waiting periods is essential, as when businesses do not handle this, it can lead to customer frustration and lost sales (Chatterjee & Latinovic, 2024).

- **Emerged Theme 2: Market alignment**

Participant 4, citing *“the production as well, like you said, maybe it's like, for maybe for a customer, it could be two to three, two to three max. Yeah, no days, Max, could be seven days. People don't like to wait. Yeah. Like for a. Yeah, seven days. But for a customised one, you can actually wait. About the 7 days. Yes. Oh. Does it? You can customise and put your picture on the pouch. That could also use that type of system. They could do a dry run or a demo and shoot it, take maybe ten customers or just ten participants to see. We're trying to start the initiative to customise phone covers or laptop covers. You could maybe do a petition or ask around if people want that, like I could. Pouch. That says 'NWU' on my phone. I can only put the ones in the back. They don't actually sit well because they're uncomfortable when you have to hold the phone. Yeah,”* and Participant 9, citing *“like whenever student leaders want a uniform, they never go to a brand store. I ask myself, doesn't the university see that we need to accommodate? ... Maybe if they take the store to the students and ask the students what they want or look at what we wear that has NWU written on it, because we normally just ask them for the logo and we go and design whatever we want outside when we come back and we take photos of shoes and whatnot, they should just.”* show that the stores are able to enhance their product offerings and customer experience by having various options available and include trends that students like. They can consider using customer data analytics to understand student preferences and use technologies that offer seamless interaction across physical stores, online, mobile, and social media platforms (Wallis, 2023). Stores can align their merchandise with the interests of younger generations, which is relevant to their experience (Chatterjee & Latinovic, 2024). The NWU Brand Store environment also needs to be engaging and inviting to students, even though many of them are currently experiencing some scarcity in sales that fit their budgets. For instance, in a boutique, window displays show their high-end niche (Phibbs, 2023). This is because when such high quality is present in product offerings, the environment contributes to the strong NWU brand reputation the institution has built over the years. This is because a well-maintained

store gives the customer the impression that the quality and service provided are high (Phibbs, 2023).

QUESTIONS ABOUT CORPORATE GIFTS

Question 7: Have you ever bought corporate gifts there? If so, what was your experience like?

This question is aimed at understanding what the participants' experience was and is when they purchase items at the brand stores. This experience encompasses not only the product or service but also the ease of making a purchase (Wallis, 2023). Here, participants shared their knowledge on the corporate gifts and what their experience was like. The completed manual thematic data analysis, using colour coding, for this question is included in Annexure Tables 7.1–7.2. Corporate gifts should be tailored to customers' preferences and used as a cost-effective way to build brand loyalty over time (Smith, 2024). Customers appreciate an excellent quality gift that reflects the image and values of the company (Dumollard, 2025).

- **Emerged Theme 1: Positive reflection**

Based on the findings of Participant 4, citing *"There was only one person in the store, so I could understand that having to move around, deal with me and handle other customers was actually a struggle. So, I wouldn't say the waiting time was a problem. I understood that he's working alone; the whole processing, the purchasing, and the transferring were not a problem; it wasn't a big farce. It's like, usually it's the usual experience if you just get the stores."*, participant 7 citing *"It's eco-friendly. It was an eco-friendly one. So, in terms of that, it's kind of nice that it considers like. Why do you call this? I don't have the word. The word is not coming to me that it actually considers environmental aspects."* and Participant 9, citing *"actually have two files. There's a black file that I have. It's written in the NWU. I love it so much that I use it to put in all my important documents"* this shows that students perceive customer experience by quality and the effectiveness of the product. This is because a gift that is unique, useful, and elegant will leave an impression on the customer's mind (Dumollard,

2025). At the same time, staff hampers the purchase process. Wallis (2023), supports that, how employees treat customers affects the customer's perception of the store, which forms throughout the customer journey from the point of entry to leaving the store. The stores can maintain adequate employees to help with service delivery to reduce waiting periods and provide a sufficient shopping experience to customers (Chatterjee & Latinovic, 2024). Also, the business can gift its employees to show appreciation for their commitment and boost their motivation (Dumollard, 2025).

- **Emerged Theme 2: Professional quality merchandise**

Based on the findings of Participant 1, citing *"Yes, I have bought a book and a pen as well as a cup. Well, it was good. I mean, like, even the look of the material—it's quality. It gives a sense of professionalism. So, the quality was good. The impression was good."*, Participant 5, citing *"There was this other radio that they used to sell, but they don't do it anymore, which it was a nice thing to buy and to get, you know. Yes. Yeah, it's a. It's a small radio branded in NWU, and then you don't need to connect your phone through, maybe like Bluetooth or what. There was a slot where you set your phone, and you play music. And then, yeah, the speaker automatically works. I don't know how they work about it."* and participant 9 citing, *"they're very durable; they're very nice and stylish. My experience with them is that they're pretty good items to have."* shows that students perceive corporate gifts as good when they are of good quality, show durability and are unique. These types of gifts enhance the relationship between the business and its employees (XCO Group, 2018). Introducing music in the store can affect the customer's mood and influence their purchasing power and duration in the store (Ndengane et al., 2021).

- **Emerged Theme 3: Price elasticity**

Based on the findings of Participant 6 citing, *"They always complain about not being able to afford things there. ... But it's just affordability for them."*, Participant 7 citing *"in terms of prices. I wouldn't generally walk into the store and buy those items,"* and Participant 9 citing *"I don't know their prices because they were gifts"* shows that students appreciate corporate gifts, and they acquire them mainly by other means such as joining university student leadership committee or procuring them as gifts

showing the barrier caused by being unable to afford them. In most cases, these types of gifts are used as a way to expand the customer base by building relationships through showing appreciation and increasing brand exposure (Smith, 2025). This can be distributed on special occasions as part of a marketing strategy. Companies often give corporate gifts to reward employees' loyalty, and choosing eco-friendly options further boosts the brand's reputation. Since corporate gifts are seen as incentives for the achievement of some activity (XCO Group, 2018), participants received them as part of being linked to a university student societal project, maybe through faculties or departments. In this case, Dumollard (2025) ties corporate gifts to a special occasion such as a successful collaboration and company anniversary.

Question 8: If you have not, what are your reasons?

This question is aimed at understanding what experiences the participants had when they saw corporate items at the stores, if they had not purchased any, and why they did not purchase any. Businesses give them to win prospective customers, employees and business partners while retaining existing customers so that they can boost sales (Smith, 2025). The completed manual thematic data analysis, using colour coding, for this question is included in Annexure Tables 8.1–8.2. Based on the findings of this study, 33.3% of the participants have not purchased any corporate gifts from the brand stores and did not provide a reason.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Question 9: What do you think are the best things about the NWU Brand Stores?

- **Emerged Theme 1: Comfortability**

Based on the findings of Participant 1, citing, *"The brand store is clean... there's also privacy there. If you want to change clothes, there's a private section that you can use to check whether your clothes fit you or not. The service there is good. We have not been in a situation whereby we complain a lot based on their services. And there's a sense of warmth there."*, Participant 2 citing *"they're like Cotton On, Woollies, how*

they're structured inside. ... just the environment of the shop. Yeah. It's clean, and yeah, it's not cluttered.', Participant 3 citing "The vibe is very chilled. It's like a normal store, ... the best thing about the stores. I'd say the products, yeah. I think that's what makes the actual store, you know, what they sell, you know, the quality of the products that they sell at the store. ... the store in general is also very chilli when you get inside. The employees are very friendly, welcoming, and willing to offer help. "So yeah," Participant 7 citing, "accessibility is nice." ... it makes you feel a part of the university when you have the merch, and you're able to buy the merch, you step in the store. It does like a whole new environment because you feel like, OK, no, I'm shopping that I'm shopping specifically to NWU, so that makes it. ... You feel like, OK, no, I'm representing, I'm really a part of the university." and participant 8 citing "the brand stores is that all brand stores around the campuses – they all sell the same merchandise, making it very – I don't know if I should say inclusive ... it's nice that we can all buy the same things around all three campuses" shows that the stores do have a high level of customer satisfaction throughout the store environment, is more organised and has a sense of a welcoming atmosphere. Sunil and Agrawal (2024) highlight that when retailers focus on organising the store environment and creating a welcoming environment, and when staff are helpful, customer experience does increase. A clean and well-organised store positively impacts the customer's mood, and customers are likely to spend time, buy and return (Ndengane *et al.*, 2021). The store's atmosphere is crucial for determining the store's business, and businesses should enhance the store's atmosphere with store design, music, colour, scent, and decorations (Kwenda, 2021). But a store that is cluttered and disorganised can deter a customer, leading to loss of sales, and creating an exceptional visual experience for customers reduces stress and anxiety, in turn making visiting the store enjoyable (Phibbs, 2023).

- **Emergent Theme 2: Diverse quality merchandise**

Based on the findings of Participant 1 citing, "The brand store, as I said, there's a variety of things that are there. The quality of the clothes is good.", participant 4 citing "actually the brand itself, NWU, the colour coding, the different colours that we have tech-wise – purple, grey, white, the whole colour – the way they coat them on the clothes on the items, every single thing, the small details, like I said—trying to pursue

graphics on the side. The details they put on the graphics are actually nice.”, Participant 4, citing *“Not entertaining. It’s not like when you go there. They play sound, or there’s a screen—the best things. I love the brand ... I once bought a speaker. More on the black one. It was beautiful from the looks of the design, but when I had to play it. Hey, the sound was, I wouldn’t say, whispering.”*, Participant 5, citing *“The caps that they sell, I feel like they are nice, and they change from time to time. It has different designs. ... with Eagi logos”*, participant 6 citing *“Other things like earphones as well, and umbrellas, and you know, so I think that’s the best part about it, that you’re not forced to stick to, like, a small range of options. You have different things to buy in the brand store. Think that’s what’s nice about it, and the fact that they update, upgrade or update. ... they are always updating the different things that are in the store.”* and Participant 7, citing, *“I love the products. I really love the products, like those little badges. I really love them—the lanyards, the pencils. It’s the fact that they’re so broad. If you need something and you can’t get it. Or you can’t get off campus. They like easy access. You need a pen. You need a pen. So, they are on the go. They ready for you? You need a USB. You can just go to the store and get one,”*. This shows that the stores have high-quality, trustworthy clothing and offer customers a variety of merchandise, as students perceive the environment as easy to access and products that are symbolic of the brand’s identity. Customers, including students in this case, do perceive a store with separated departments as accessible, as it makes the location of products easy. Such depths fade the dullness students experience in the store (Kwenda, 2021). When stores create an ambience and offer space that enhances the shopping experience, the dullness reduces. The store’s atmosphere is crucial for determining the store’s business, and businesses should enhance the store’s atmosphere with store design, music, colour, scent, and decorations (Kwenda, 2021).

Question 10: Is there anything else that you would suggest for the betterment of the NWU Brand Stores?

- **Emerged Theme 1: Consistency**

Based on the findings of Participant 5, citing *“better or improved stock counting system, because normally they would close for like a few days because they are doing stocktaking or still counting, so I don’t know how they would maybe try to reduce the*

lead time. ... they end up using the money cause maybe the brand store is closed for those days.", Participant 6, citing *"The stuff in the shop is clean; everything is placed well. Everything is. Where you can see it, you know."*, Participant 7 citing *"maybe they can just like make bigger stores"*, Participant 8 citing *"like I said on my campus, it should be open more, with less stocktaking times. Yes, always on stocktaking. The branch was adequate in terms of, like, the thing they have"* shows that as much as students appreciate the layout of the stores and the cleanliness they display. A clean and organised store display increases sales, customer satisfaction and brand image and prioritising this is vital for conversions (Display Technology International, 2025). However, there are certain areas of operations that do limit the possible opportunities that can come from not closing for long hours.

- **Emerged Theme 2: Diverse variety of merchandise**

Based on the reflections of Participant 5, citing *"having a variety of clothes, that it's, yeah, like your colour clothes, not necessarily colour clothes, but yeah, those like designer shirts, I would say. ... This other dolls? It's not really a doll, but yeah, it's like a key holder ring that they should. I feel like they should sell Eagi. ... Also like the small key holder one and the big one that they also only always contain"*, participant 7 citing *"improve on even more variety of merch, yeah"*, participant 8 citing *"Maybe add, like, exclusive merchandise like Vanderbijlpark, Campus, Potch and Mahikeng – something that screams something"* to show that there is a great demand for the stores to expand their merchandise in adding more apparel options and have campus specific items and other novelty options. By doing this, the stores need to ensure that products that meet customer expectations are available without incurring inventory costs (Sunil & Agrawal, 2024).

- **Emerged Theme 3: Sales promotions**

Based on the findings of Participant 1, citing *"the fact that the merchandise that's there, like, everything that is offered there, is expensive, including the umbrellas. Because umbrellas, they are quite expensive. ... I think they need to lower down the prices as well as introduce more discounts, I think. And because of discounts, at least this can be an introduction to like lower the prices, maybe at a lower rate. ... to bring us as*

students to benefit from the discounts ... can have more giveaways, ... for CSR, social responsibility. ... make some donations ... introduce CSR initiatives. Maybe we can see a difference and as well as lower the prices. So yeah.", Participant 2 citing *"Maybe they could have some sales."*, Participant 6 citing *"the prices may be going down a bit"* and participant 9 citing *"the brand store is open during an event ... at least they give us a discount."* show that for the betterment of the stores, there needs to be immediate attention on amending current pricing strategy so that items are affordable for students and introduce ways that engages local community initiatives. They can do this by adopting a value-based pricing strategy, perhaps as it requires the understanding of customer needs and the price is based on the perceived value of the products (Novkovic, 2023). Another way is to engage with the student community to understand their dynamics and set prices so low that they attract price-sensitive customers, or implement premium pricing strategies. Here, the penetration pricing strategy is also an option as it is used to set the prices so low in order to attract new customers and increase market share (Faiqoh et al., 2024).

- **EmergEd Theme 4: Visual market communication**

Based on the findings of Participant 3 citing *"marketing. Like, I feel like most people don't actually know a lot about the product and what they actually sell. So, it's not really marketed a lot around campus as much as other things."*, participant 2 citing *"have some sales. And then let us know about it. Maybe the marketing here?"*, participant 4 citing *"if you're in a store and you know that people have to wait, play a sound, have a screen like that. If you go to a Sports Scene, you see there's a screen there; it shows you the products and the way they market them. If they shot, like ...' If it's in the store, I think if they do that, they show the products that are on screen, and you're like, 'Oh.' OK, with proper advertising, people can buy a product even if they don't want it. But I learnt, I think. I think that could be enjoy it if I could; I wouldn't. That's how I buy things. I look at the video, and I'm like, 'OK, proper marketing. OK, using bold is promoting it.' Let me try it. Like entertainment in the store, maybe a video, screen, or music for me to enjoy my staying there, because it's just for my welcome."* and Participant 9 citing *"find students to design your outfits, your T-shirts, and your pants. Like, let students decide what they want in the store ... try to be friendly with prices. Oh, like your prices, they are painful. ... have outsiders sell to outsiders at normal prices, but let NWU*

students have, like, a specified discount, to say, you know, because you are a student here. ... Every student who has been close to them wants to buy stuff from the brand store. But when they think of the prices," shows that there is a great challenge in pricing strategies and that the stores need to have more products visible. To address these pricing strategies, the store management team can introduce the Price2Spy online service to monitor prices and identify analytical trends (Novkovic, 2023; Faiqoh *et al.*, 2024). This strategy is vital for increasing sales, optimising product visibility, and enhancing customer engagement, given its appeal (Faiqoh *et al.*, 2024). However, from this implementation, Faiqoh *et al.* (2024) further highlight that the use of data analytics in pricing strategy can help support the identification of consumer preferences and market trends.

4.3 CONCLUSION

From the above consolidated findings, it is clear that the NWU Brand Stores have durable, perceived high-quality products for students across their three campuses. Knowing this, it can be said that NWU sports gear is appealing to students and that their environment has a welcoming atmosphere. However, the analysis also reveals that high product prices and lack of affordability by customers who are students create a possible challenge for the store/s from a customer satisfaction perspective. A potential way to help the stores retain these customers and draw new customers is they offer students discounts dedicated to them, sales marketed for students to students and pricing strategies that are flexible towards student affordability. Also, the older stock can benefit from the new flexible pricing strategies implemented. They can also introduce new clothing styles, such as different textures and pant styles and trendier designs of clothing that Generation Z is into. This aims to do a store once a year to see which possible clothing items they can stock for the next season. They do not need to have a lot of these clothing items as stock; a limited edition would help immensely. By doing this, it can help improve the current marketing strategies the management is using. This will help when they must consider introducing operational hours and have fewer stocktaking closures. The store will also benefit significantly from social media marketing and updating the website for audience attraction.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research's primary and secondary objectives. It presents findings from the literature review, along with conclusions and recommendations for future research and practice. It incorporates the data analysed in Chapter 4, based on nine participants from the semi-structured interviews, to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. The chapter also offers suggestions for future research that could help improve customer satisfaction at NWU Brand Stores and encourage student purchases. These participants are considered customers of the NWU Brand Store(s) and are crucial for assessing their satisfaction with the products sold. Their feedback highlights the successes and challenges facing the brand stores.

The limitations in this section highlight the challenges and constraints observed by the researcher; however, these restrictions are not clearly defined within the scope of the study, which could provide suggestions for future research. The researcher assessed how the research adheres to the initial research objectives to clarify the correlation between theory and practical results and to evaluate the success of the research objectives. These results were compared to predictions made in Chapter 2, which highlight the trends or possible gaps that may suggest future reasons for research.

Once the limitations are addressed, the next step is to present possible recommendations based on chapter 2's literature and empirical findings, chapter 3's research methodology, and chapter 4's empirical findings. These suggestions give practical information that is leaning towards the industry and educational research, while the recommendations and suggestions for future research will give implications and encourage future researchers to explore this topic further.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

The study found challenges that give clarity to concerns, for instance:

Despite the simplicity of using non-probability (convenience) sampling, where costs and accessibility are considered, the methodology does not capture the entire range of consumer behaviour. If the population and sample were cross-sectional, the results may have shown a different outcome.

The study reflects nine participants who are cross-campus, multicultural, all registered full-time with the institution, are above 18 years of age and have either purchased or visited the stores. They give some understanding of the brand stores' consumer decision-making.

Since the study does not include distant or contact studies, first-year students, and staff members (permanent or contract), it has limited the popularity of the findings to the entire institution's customer base. Also, the study does not focus solely on students who are either self-paying or financially aided by a bursary or loan; had that been the case, findings would possibly be slightly different. This is the notion that self-paying students' observation on the prices would be relatively distinct from those who are financially aided. The researcher did not want to know if the participants were self-paying or not. That is unknown to the researcher.

The study does not specifically highlight the social background or financial background of the students who participated in this study. If that had this been the case, perhaps the student's emphasis on chapters 1 and 4 would have produced different answers. Since the population focus of this study is only on the three campuses of the North-West University, where their students reside, the results do not show the broader geographical customer experience, as this could have given more understanding of customer behaviour across the different regions of South Africa. For instance, adding another university brand store to the study.

Having noticed this, the research gives context to the conclusions mentioned in chapter 1 and those learned during the process. These limitations highlight areas that need to be researched in the future so that they can be overcome, and customer behaviour in retail can be explored.

The next part of this section is to examine whether the findings match the primary and secondary objectives that were initially established in the study.

5.3 OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED

The primary objective of the study was to explore factors that contribute to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with merchandise offered by NWU Brand stores. This was successfully achieved because in chapter 4, the customer satisfaction, good quality merchandise, and the strong brand image contributed to the primary factor. However, customer dissatisfaction, generic design, changing service and high prices make it too expensive for customers to make purchases.

The first secondary objective of the study was to explore customers' perceptions and experiences regarding the quality and variety of clothing and corporate gifts available at NWU Brand Stores. This was also successfully achieved because the participants perceived the items as good and durable, even suggesting that the clothing retains its quality after multiple washes. However, even though the participants drew a likeness in that the store offers a variety of options on merchandise, they are not really modernised and stylish, even suggesting they are generic.

The second secondary objective of the study was to understand how customers perceive the pricing and value for money of the items sold. This was successfully achieved because the participants perceived the high prices as a barrier that made purchasing too expensive for them, especially when a student is on financial aid. However, even though the quality of items is perceived as good by participants who are customers, high prices exceed the student budget.

The third secondary objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of customer service. This was moderately achieved because the customer satisfaction service was inconsistent. For instance, the stores were clean and welcoming, and the staff members were very friendly and willing to assist, but there were instances where some participants experienced unfriendliness from the staff, citing them as rude. The operational hours of the stores were inconsistent as the stores are closed most of the time due to stocktaking.

The fourth secondary objective of the study was to identify key areas of improvement and propose solutions to improve levels of customer satisfaction. This was successfully achieved because the participants suggested that the brand stores lower prices for students, price old stock differently from new stock, introduce modern and stylish clothing, and improve current marketing strategies on social media.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and objectives achieved, the best recommendations for the NWU Brand Stores are as follows:

- The NWU Brand Store management team needs to have a look at the possibility of lowering prices specifically for students by introducing student discount programmes and sales of more old stock. Examples of this can be “Show your student card and get 10-20% discounts”.
- Provide a different price range for new stock.
- Introduce a music screen to make the store shopping experience entertaining for customers.
- Introduce an online system that allows customers to select the correct phone pouch or laptop of their design choice from a selection of view design options.
- The store/s can introduce new products like cargo pants, tracksuits, shirts, skirts, sports leggings for the ladies and crop tops. Clothing that students are comfortable wearing, something that would align with the Generation Z fashion interest.

- Train staff on etiquette, as maybe working there for a long time has probably made them too comfortable with the environment.
- Emphasise the value that the students are getting for their money, such as eco-friendliness and warranty purposes.
- Highlight the longevity of the products through marketing and product descriptions.
- Have fewer hours for stocktaking or select days when students are not likely to have money because stocking at the end of the month is like driving customers elsewhere.
- Collaborate with student designers to help come up with trendy, ready-to-wear clothing for more appeal.
- Management can try to link the university values with the store/s by introducing programmes that make donations to the disadvantaged students.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

Judging from the understanding gained from this study, the research can be expanded in future research projects by:

- Determine the changes in socio-economic trends are among the students' customer base. This will help us know and understand how customer behaviour changes at universities.
- Evaluate the influence of changing traditional customer service with online services that offer student discounts for profit increases.
- Evaluate what the general motivation is by comparing the North-West University with another South African university, other universities in South Africa or international universities. This will help investigate the ethnic environment among students as customers.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Based on all the information gathered in this study, it is worth noting that the elements that influence NWU brand store customers have been identified. This is because of the substantial merit that has been placed on the good quality merchandise offering, the pricing, the strong brand loyalty the stores have built, the variety of options available that expand beyond clothing items and the store environment. These elements helped shape the customers of the NWU Brand Stores. In addition, the problem statement that was initially identified and the objectives set have been successfully and moderately achieved, giving supervision something to ponder on to assist the retail stores to remain competitive and understand their clientele better. However, because there is a difference in online shopping and physical store shopping experience, recommendations for such insights have been addressed. These findings give retail outlets practical ideas on how to improve customer experience and create an exciting customer marketplace.

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ANNEXURE

QUESTIONS ABOUT CLOTHING

Question 2: What types of clothing do you normally purchase there?

Table 2.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 2

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Like I said, I normally purchase t-shirts, stationery, as well as cup holders. Is it a cup holder? Is there a cupholder there? I think so. And, yeah, stationery T-shirts as well as cups. And I also got headphones.	Variety of options
2	Hoodies, mostly.	Variety of options
3	I would normally purchase something that I could wear, like on top, like a hoodie or a top. Or a jacket.	Variety of options
4	The T-shirts. They look nice. Like I said, especially the rugby ones. I like them, and the ones in the bottles are actually cute and actually nice. And yeah, the keyholder. They used to have a key holder, like an Eagi key holder that I used. I saw that it was like, yeah. Yes, I have items, and yes, they are also NWU-based.	Variety of options
5	Normally, I would buy hoodies and the varsity football or varsity cup shirts. And lanyards, and it is I like the shirts. They're nice—especially a varsity football and varsity club shirts. With regards to stationery, I would say I only buy pens, and yeah, that's all.	Variety of options
6	I usually work for the mascot committee, right? And basically, I buy anything and everything for myself. So, for myself, I've bought a bucket hat. I've bought a shirt. Umm. A hoodie as well. So, yeah, just explore different items. The ones that I just find that they fit best into what I would wear. So yeah, what's a piece of everything in the store before?	Variety of options
7	Well, NWU merch like your long sleeves; that one like stands out for me. The long white sleeve. And this, what do you call it? I don't know what you call it. These badges, these Eagi badges. Eagi, Pukki, Mafika and Vuvu badges. That's like the most that I bought because I had to like to accessorise my blazer. So, whenever I lose one, I'd wanna replace it instantly. So that's what I love buying at the store: lanyards and T-shirts. I love the T-shirts. What else do I like? OK, a blazer is a must-have. As a student leader, so that's one of the things that doesn't stay out of the radio, the radio and the Eagi Mannequin. Or what do you call it? That little stuffed animal. So that's what I enjoy buying. Also, I'm stationary like your dictionaries (notebooks). The dictionaries. I really love them. I actually got one here. Yeah. So, this one. This is my favourite one. It stood out for me apart from the grey one, but I also noticed, like the caps, the caps are one of my faves as well. So yeah, and the spotty. So, the bucket hat. Yeah.	Variety of options
8	I recently got the. I don't know what is it the two-star rugby shirt is. Yeah, that's what I usually go for. And then maybe like lanyards and notebooks. That's what I usually buy.	Variety of options
9	I think the sports, the sports T-shirts, like the sports gear that they have – they usually sell rugby T-shirts or soccer T-shirts. Those are nice. They go for, like, 'It's very nice to see somebody wearing that T-shirt, and it's what I'd want to have.' Also, their	Branding Variety of options

	sweaters and their hoodies and sweaters are nice. Oh, they know how to mix colours . Oh, especially those green and black ones that had Northwest University written in white. I remember I was crying. I wanted that thing, and I couldn't have it. But yeah, there are hoodies there. There are T-shirts, and there are rugby T-shirts. When there's a rugby tournament or rugby competition , those are nice. I'm not really a fan of hats or beanies. So, yeah, T-shirts, sweaters, or hoodies.	
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Table 2.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Variety of options	Merchandising variety theme explains that the quality, durability and various types of products are perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: "t-shirts, stationery, as well as cup holders ... headphones." Customer citing: "Hoodies" Customer citing: "top. Or a jacket." Customer citing: "your long sleeves ... These badges, these Eagi badges. Eagi, Pukki, Mafika and Vuvu badges ... my blazer... the radio and the Eagi Mannequin. Or what do you call it? That little stuffed animal ... dictionaries (notebooks). ... like the caps, the caps are one of my faves as well. So yeah, and the spotty. So, the bucket hat. Yeah." Customer citing: "the sports, the sports T-shirts, like the sports gear that they have – they usually sell rugby T-shirts or soccer T-shirts, ... 'It's very nice to see somebody wearing that T-shirt, and it's what I'd want to have.' Also, their sweaters and their hoodies and sweaters are nice ... those green and black ones that had Northwest University written in white. ... When there's a rugby tournament or rugby competition, those are nice. I'm not really a fan of hats or beanies. So, yeah, T-shirts, sweaters, or hoodies." Customer citing: "notebooks" Customer citing: "The T-shirts. They look nice. Like I said, especially the rugby ones. I like them, and the ones in the bottles ... key holder, like an Eagi key holder." Customer citing: "the varsity football or varsity cup shirts. And lanyards ... With regards to stationery, I would say I only buy pens. I've bought a bucket hat." Brand designs explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: "They know how to mix colours."
Variety of options	
Variety of options	
Variety of options	
Variety of options	
Variety of options	
Variety of options	
Variety of options	
Branding	
Variety of options	

Question 3: What do you think about the quality of clothing being sold there? Please elaborate. Prompt answer:

Table 3.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 3

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Very good. Even if you touch the fabric, it doesn't feel like it's fake, you know. It has that sense of authority. It has that sense of expensiveness that comes with it. So, yeah.	Quality products
2	I think the quality is very good. They do last. I bought mine like 2 years ago, and it's still in good condition.	Quality products
3	Okay, the quality is very good. If I'm not mistaken, I think the material composition, most of it is cotton, which, I mean, yeah, that's quality.	Quality products
4	They quiet. They're pricey. Very pricey, but they're worth the price. They're worth the quality, even if you wash them. They don't, you know, fade away. The fabric is actually similar to this fabric. It's actually nice. Yeah. Painted detail from the collar. Without the collar here, the way they put the branding, it doesn't wear off from the outside. Actually, it's actually good. It's worth the price. It's costly, but it. Let's just say—the T-shirt. Let's just put on a T-shirt, for example, right? The T-shirt, for example, is an old one, like maybe from a previous season. Like, they used to have the 20-year anniversary T-shirt, right? But let's say it's out of season. They have new ones. Just drop it a bit, like maybe. Twenty percent off, like 20% off. Yeah, I think more students will buy more because students go there and view what they like. But when it's time to pay. You get it. You're like, 'When was the T-shirt like?' I know it's the T-shirt from two years ago, and it's still with the prices of T-shirts that are now like they were just released, maybe this year or recently. Like that. Yeah. The price range is it's, it's, it's, it's not, it's. Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah. They look good, though I'm not. Yeah, the pricing – it's similar. It's not like with an iPhone, whereby it drops like the iPhone 11 and iPhone 14. If an iPhone 11 now, it's less compared to how it used to be in its time. It's more. Affordable. So, it's out of the market for now. Yeah. The prize must say, 'OK, there's someone who's created this one,' but their prices are.	Pricing Quality products
5	I feel like the quality goes with the price. The lesser the price, the low the quality it is, and then the higher the price, the good quality it is. So, there are some stuffs that you'll find out there. Good quality and a bit expensive. Yes, but. The most expensive thing I saw there was like a jacket. There was something like R650, but it's good quality. Do you see that it's strong, and yeah, it looks good? Not that they are low quality, but you can see that maybe the material is too light. You will see that, okay—the durability, yes, it's there—but in the long run, maybe they should lose colour, or what? And yeah.	Pricing Quality products
6	The quality versus the price for me – they need to step it up a bit in terms of that, but what I'm trying to say is the price that they charge for the quality of the clothes. It's it. It just doesn't correspond, you know. I mean, having it at a lesser price. But then again, it depends on the reason behind the items. You know, like, for instance, the regular shirts—they do range around R130, which I think is reasonable—but then you get. I think it's a soccer shirt, but not the one for the Varsity football for the Varsity Cup. That one was like R500 and something for the show. It was not so good quality. But I think because of. It's what it symbolises. That's what	Pricing Quality products

	made it so much more like expensive, but for the clothes that I have. I've washed them multiple times, and they're still in good condition. So, I think that quality is fine. It works for me.	
7	Generally, I think the quality is like top-notch quality in terms of like fabric-wise colour coding, also that it's in sync with the NWU's colouring and stuff. So generally, I feel like the quality is good considering the fact that I still have a shirt, and it still looks good, not washed out – a black shirt that I bought like 2-3 years ago – and it's still in good condition to start, like washing multiple times. Including the rest of my other T-shirts, like, the fabric is good. It's cool, depending on, like, the season, be winter. You are warm, you are covered. If you have like much from NWU. And then the jackets are the best. They keep you warm regardless of the weather type. You are sorted, even if you have, like, a light thing beneath it and it's really cold. So yeah, in terms of quality, I love it.	Quality products
8	Well, it doesn't like drain out of colour as you wash, so that I really appreciate it. It doesn't stretch or like shrink. That's why it makes it good quality.	Quality products
9	It varies because sometimes when they try to make very cheap and affordable T-shirts, you understand why they're cheap. Their hoodies are always of good quality. The rugby T-shirts that I mentioned are always good quality. There are just these, but I guess it's because of the price. Yeah, but the overall quality, if you want a good-looking T-shirt, is good-looking. So, the tower hoodie – the quality is always nice. Yeah, their quality is not bad. It's not bad. I wish they maintained it throughout all their clothing items. Hey, but then, that's what even stores are doing. Like if you buy something cheap, you expect it to be cheap, and then if you buy something expensive. So, I think quality goes with the price. So, if it's cheap, you know the quality isn't that good. Nice, because I once received a long-sleeve shirt? That thing stretched. It's now a nightdress. But the ones that are sports gear, the ones they sell, are always nice; you can even see when people are wearing that thing or you. So, I feel like their quality is based on pricing, which is fair.	Pricing Quality products

Table 3.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Quality products	Quality merchandising theme explains that the quality, durability and various types of products are perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “Even if you touch the fabric, it doesn't feel like it's fake, you know. It has that sense of authority. It has that sense of expensiveness that comes with it. So, yeah.” Customer citing: “I think the quality is very good. They do last. I bought mine like 2 years ago, and it's still in good condition.” Customer citing: “Okay, the quality is very good. ... I think the material composition – most of it is cotton, which, I mean, yeah, that's quality.” Customer citing: “They're worth the quality, even if you wash them. They don't, you know, fade away. The fabric is actually similar to this fabric. It's actually nice. Yeah. Painted detail from the collar. Without the collar here, the way they put the branding, it doesn't wear off from the outside.” Customer citing: “I feel like the quality goes with the price. The lesser the price, the low the quality it is, and then the higher the price, the good quality it is. ... The most expensive thing I saw there was like a jacket. There was something like R650, but it's good quality. Do you see that it's strong, ... durability, yes, it's there—but”
Quality products	
Quality products	
Price	
Quality products	
Price	
Quality products	
Price	
Quality products	

Quality products	Customer citing: “The clothes that I have. I've washed them multiple times, and they're still in good condition. So, I think that quality is fine. It works for me.”
Pricing	
Quality products	Customer citing: “It doesn't like drain out of colour as you wash, so that I really appreciate it. It doesn't stretch or like shrink. That's why it makes it good quality.”
	Customer citing: “Generally, I think the quality is like top-notch quality in terms of like fabric-wise colour coding, ... So generally, I feel like the quality is good considering the fact that I still have a shirt, and it still looks good, not washed out – a black shirt that I bought like 2-3 years ago – and it's still in good condition to start, like washing multiple times. Including the rest of my other T-shirts, like, the fabric is good. It's cool, depending on, like, the season, be winter. You are warm, you are covered. If you have like much from NWU. And then the jackets are the best. They keep you warm regardless of the weather type. You are sorted, even if you have, like, a light thing beneath it and it's really cold. So yeah, in terms of quality, I love it.” Customer citing: “So, the tower hoodie – the quality is always nice. Yeah, their quality is not bad. It's not bad. ... But the ones that are sports gear, the ones they sell, are always nice; you can even see when people are wearing that thing or you. So, I feel like their quality is based on pricing, which is fair.”
	Price quality relationship theme explains the perception that products sold at the store/s are too expensive and unaffordable for most students. Customer citing: “They're pricey. Very pricey, but they're worth the price. ... Actually, it's actually good. It's worth the price. It's costly, ... ' I know it's the T-shirt from two years ago, and it's still with the prices of T-shirts that are now like they were just released, maybe this year or recently. Like that. Yeah. The price range is it's, it's, it's, it's not, it's. Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah. They look good, though I'm not. Yeah, the pricing – it's similar. It's not like with an iPhone, whereby it drops like the iPhone 11 and iPhone 14. If an iPhone 11 now, it's less compared to how it used to be in its time. It's more. Affordable. So, it's out of the market for now. Yeah. The prize must say, 'OK, there's someone who's created this one,' but their prices are.” Customer citing: Good quality and a bit expensive.” Customer citing: “The quality versus the price for me – they need to step it up a bit in terms of that, but what I'm trying to say is the price that they charge for the quality of the clothes. It's it. It just doesn't correspond, you know. I mean, having it at a lesser price.” Customer citing: “There are just these, but I guess it's because of the price. ... So, I think quality goes with the price.”

Question 4: Are you satisfied with the range of clothing styles they have? Prompt Question based on Q4:

Table 4.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 4

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	I mean, like, the t-shirts are there, the hats are there. There's legit everything that the brand store can offer. Maybe if they can introduce, I don't know, but I haven't seen trousers. I have not seen trousers. Maybe if they can introduce a wider range of trousers with like an NWU brand in it, because most of the trousers that are there are like representing one of the services that the NWU has, like, maybe, let's say there's a, there's an SEC thing, right? Then it seeks to represent the SEC. So maybe if like they can introduce like trousers meant for students and then they're not branded on behalf of like a service like the SEC or on behalf of, for example, Adobe. I don't know if like there's a trouser for Adobe and then with the NWU students in it. I don't know if you understand me. So yeah, I think that needs to be introduced.	Variety of options
2	Yeah, I think I'm satisfied. No, partially, I think they do have like a range of clothes, but they could add some girly things. Yeah, maybe skirts. I haven't seen them yet.	Variety of options
3	I feel like they could have a bit more. Just a little bit more. Like, I know they have tops, caps. I'm not too sure if they have pants and skirts. Yeah. Maybe something like that?	Variety of options
4	None. Like I said, I've only been to one store; maybe they have different varieties, maybe at like Vanderbijl, but here they mostly have soccer ones, soccer T-shirts, or they have less rugby ones. But I know they do have a variety; I just don't know. Maybe it differs with the stores. With that, I wouldn't comment. Yes, yes, I am. I like them. Yes. Mm-hmm. Like this side, let's just say, since I do logistics, I think it's more of a demand and supply, and in the location here, more people have soccer than rugby. I think the demand for soccer T-shirts is more than in Vanderbijl, where they have rugby and a variety of sports. I think they all. Yeah. Also, it's. I think it's part of their stockkeeping to have a particular amount of inventory due to the amount of demand that it has around in its surroundings. I think that with the inventory. Yeah. No, I'm not saying it must. I'm assuming from most of the T-shirts' stay. I'm. I'm a. Yeah, I am. Mm-hmm. Yes.	Variety of options
5	Not really, because there's not a lot of range of tops that they sell, I feel like it's limited because like most of most of the time, it's the same stuff even now. When I go to the brand store, I know it's what I'm going to find because there's not been an update on different kinds of stuff that they sell. So, I feel like I don't know if the place is small so they can put in more stock, or they just haven't brought in the latest and newest stock into the shop.	Variety of options Overall impression
6	Yeah. Yes, I am, cause I saw that they even have dresses. I didn't even know about that, you know. So, I think they have everything that caters for students, you know, and different that are also suitable for an institutional brand. You know, cause really because. And expect this new-age fashion with NWU branding. So, I think, for it being an institutional branding and also the type of clothes that they have, I think they're good for me. I love them.	Branding Variety of options

7	Not entirely. I feel like the NWU brand store is always so innovative . There's always something new coming up, or there's always something that they can improve on. There's always room for improvement. But general satisfaction. I'm satisfied with what I've got this far . Yes.	Branding Satisfactory of service
8	I think maybe we could do with like a little colour change, but everything has to be purple . I take the foot. I'm going, for instance.	Branding
9	None. So far at Vanderbijl. Umm. They, they, they. They would have nice hoodies, like I said, and then the only T-shirts that would trend are the ones that I mentioned, like rugby T-shirts or sports T-shirts, and then they sell their formal shirts and their blazers. But I feel like. They are always generic. I understand it's an institutional brand store, but. I mean, we're students . Men may ask us to design something, you know, ask us to ask us something that we might want to buy, like, maybe every year, there's a first-year's hoodie, you know, that people can buy. I mean, just buy five. To display, and then first is that is wanted; you can come and get it, and then we have seniors; you know that we would buy because we want to flex, not something that would like staff members are wearing and students are also wearing . I understand. So, I feel like their fashion sense is not quite impressive because, as I said, we can not only be impressed by sports clothing but also casual things. They're not that fancy. It's like when it comes to casual clothing, they just care about their logo. Yeah, like. For me, the way I see it, it's like when they look at it, it's like, as long as our logo is there , how it looks doesn't really seem to matter to them. But when it comes to the sporting codes, T-shirts, and all that, they make sure. So, I'm like. What if I'm not a sports person and I want an NWU shirt? Am I just buying it because it's written NWU price, or yeah, is it not fair that the price?	Pricing Variety of options Branding

Table 4.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Overall impression Branding Variety of options Branding Satisfactory of service Branding Pricing	Product range width theme explains staff interaction, customer reception, store attributes, and operations as perceived by student customers, including quality and product durability. Customer citing: "I feel like I don't know if the place is small, so they can put in more stock, or they just haven't brought in the latest and newest stock into the shop." Customer citing: "But general satisfaction. I'm satisfied with what I've got this far." Customer citing: "I think I'm satisfied. No, partially, I think they do have like a range of clothes, but they could add some girly things. Yeah, maybe skirts." Customer citing: "They have pants and skirts. Yeah. Maybe something like that?" Customer citing: "Expect this new-age fashion with NWU branding." Customer citing: "But I feel like. They are always generic. I understand it's an institutional brand store, but. I mean, we're students. ... I feel like their fashion sense is not quite impressive because, as I said, we can not only be impressed by sports clothing but also casual things." Customer citing: "But I know they do have a variety; I just don't know. Maybe it differs with the stores. With that, I wouldn't comment."

Variety of options Branding	not a lot of range of tops” Customer citing: “I haven't seen trousers. I have not seen trousers. Maybe if they can introduce a wider range of trousers with like an NWU brand in it, because most of the trousers that are there are like representing one of the services that the NWU has, like, maybe, let's say there's a, there's an SEC thing, right? ... maybe if like they can introduce like trousers meant for students, and then they're not branded on behalf of like a service like the SEC or on behalf of, for example,
	Relative pricing theme explains the perception that products sold at the store/s are too expensive and unaffordable for most students. Customer citing: “Am I just buying it because it's written NWU price, or yeah, is it not fair that the price?”
	Branding explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “So, I think they have everything that caters for students, you know, and different that are also suitable for an institutional brand.”
	Customer citing: “The NWU brand store is always so innovative.” Customer citing: “We could do with like a little colour change, but everything has to be purple.” Customer citing: “you know that we would buy because we want to flex, not something that would like staff members are wearing and students are also wearing. ... They're not that fancy. It's like when it comes to casual clothing, they just care about their logo. Yeah, like. For me, the way I see it, it's like when they look at it, it's like, as long as our logo is there,”

Question 5: Do you think the clothing prices at the NWU Brand Stores are fair and reasonable? Prompt question based on Q5:

Table 5.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 5

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Maybe that's a fair price. You know, because we still have to remember that there are students that come from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, if they want more support for their NWU brand, I think that they should lower the prices. Yeah.	Pricing
2	Yes and no, fair because, I mean, they have good quality, but also with students, the pricing there, I don't think all of us can afford to buy clothing of such prices.	Pricing
3	They are expensive, but I mean, for the quality that you're getting, it is fair and reasonable. Okay.	Pricing Quality products
4	Like I said, they're costly. But for the brand they represent—the quality of the fabric—yes, I think they're reasonable. For those two attributes, the quality is. It's actually nice. Nice. Mm-hmm.	Quality products

5	Yes, but with regards to, let's say, the hoodies and the shirts, yes, it's fair, and they also do regular specials. Like last month, they had a special where you buy two hoodies for like R250, then it's like basically buy one, get one free, and then now for September, they have 50% off special. So, I feel like the prices is fair. It's just that, obviously, we can't expect them to put the pricing in. All the specials on all the brands they have in the brand store, so some of the other stuff remains, like with the normal price, which in most cases is the nice stuff, which costs a bit more.	Pricing
6	Yeah. No. No. I do feel like they could be cheaper, you know, for me personally, they do work, like I can. I'm OK with spending that amount of money because I feel like more than buying the item, I'm buying the brand, you know? So, but then, for students in general, it doesn't. They claim that it doesn't work for them, you know, and you won't usually just find students randomly buying at the shop. It's really rare because the prices are regarded as too high for them. You know, they'd like to spend around maybe R80, perhaps for a shirt. Rather than spending R150 for just one shirt, you know, and when they have this. Yeah. When they have it this way, they have two hoodies for, I don't know, R200 or R300. That's when you will see students coming in because now, they find it reasonable. You know that it's OK; I can spend money on this. I can buy, you know. I think the prices can go down a bit, you know. That can be done in terms of that. So, they're not so fair.	Pricing Branding
7	In terms of quality, like we just spoke, it is kind of fair for the quality, but if we think like, Yes, students, we are not employed. So, it's kind of little pricey if we consider student life and student expectations. So generally, that is an expense. So not everyone can afford to buy. So that kind of limits us to what we. Can buy when we can buy, yes.	Pricing
8	No brand store is expensive in terms of like the shirts' brand. The store is very expensive. A lot of people usually have to like a budget before they can buy a rugby shirt or the Dragon's shirt. It's not really affordable for students, so no.	Pricing
9	No big deal, no, no big no, no. Like if I were working, sure. But OK, if I were working, if I came from a stable home where I received a monthly allowance from my parents. But if I'm just surviving on a bursary allowance — especially NSFAS, for that matter — and I have to buy food, I have to maintain my hair. I mean that sometimes buy Tekkie, I saved for 10 months, like.	

Table 5.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Pricing Pricing Pricing Quality products Quality products Pricing Pricing Branding Pricing	Quality price relationship theme explains that the quality, durability and various types of products are perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “For the quality that you're getting, it is fair and reasonable.” Customer citing: “for the brand they represent—the quality of the fabric—yes, I think they're reasonable. For those two attributes, the quality is. It's actually nice.” Affordable pricing theme explains the perception that products sold at the store/s are too expensive and unaffordable for most students. Customer citing: “So, if they want more support for their NWU brand, I think that they should lower the prices. Yeah.” Customer citing: “They are expensive.” Customer citing: “It's really rare because the prices are regarded as too high for them. ... I think the prices can go down a bit, you know. ”

Participant	Customer citing: "So, I feel like the prices is fair. ... All the specials on all the brands they have in the brand store, so some of the other stuff remains, like with the normal price, which in most cases is the nice stuff, which costs a bit more." Customer citing: "So, it's kind of little pricey if we consider student life and student expectations. So generally, that is an expense. So not everyone can afford to buy. " Customer citing: "I think the prices can go down a bit, you know." Customer citing: "The store is very expensive. A lot of people usually have to like a budget before they can buy a rugby shirt, or the Customer citing: "Dragon's shirt. It's not really affordable for students, so no." Customer citing: "but also with students, the pricing there, I don't think all of us can afford to buy clothing of such prices." Brand equity explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: "I'm OK with spending that amount of money because I feel like more than buying the item, I'm buying the brand, you know? "
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Question 6: Is there anything different you would like to see being sold at the stores?

Table 6.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 6

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Not necessarily. Yeah, I don't think, like I said, let's go back to what I said, if they can introduce trousers, pants, more pants that are not meant for an event, right? Unisex. That are not meant for a specific event, then that can help.	Variety of options
2	Yes, maybe crop tops and just girly things. And maybe a variety of colours, not just grey and purple. Yeah.	Variety of options
3	I think I would like to see, but I'm not sure what, though, but like I said, more pants, shorts, skirts.	Variety of options
4	I think I do. They have laptop cases. I haven't seen laptop cases and pouches for the phone like they usually have stickers that you could put at the end of your couch. They usually have. You know, there are stickers they put at the end of your couch you could put, like, yours. Yeah. Like you could put your card and stuff. I think it. Yeah, basically yes. So, I think they could have a pouch, but I think that's gonna be a problem, cause for which product or device would they have more? Maybe laptops could do. Yeah, like pouches. Oh. Oh, the. Yes. Or, like I said, speaking from my course, they could take, they could open like a session whereby you can place an order and say, 'I have an iPhone 13; can I get this design for an iPhone 13?' and then they place the order for you, and then you get it. I think that could also help them. Yeah, like if I want an iPhone 13 pouch with the design, and then they have a variety of designs, I pick one, and then I tell them it's for this phone. Then they place the order, and then I get it. I pay for think that also. Them from having to buy so many pouches for different phones, only for them not to be bought. Waiting period. It depends on who's designing. It depends on your outsourcing. If you guys are outsourcing the duration, the time for supplies is different. OK. OK, with our T-shirts, these T-shirts, it took, I think, we'd send a design like last	Variety of options Branding

	year, and then we got these T-shirts around July or August. So, I think it was six months. Maybe it's because it was a design for the whole committee. Maybe four. Yeah. For you know, the production as well, like you said, maybe it's like, for maybe for a customer, it could be two to three, two to three max. Yeah, no days, Max, could be seven days. People don't like to wait. Yeah. Like for a. Yeah, seven days. But for a customised one, you can actually wait. About the 7 days. Yes. Oh. Does it? You can customise and put your picture on the pouch. That could also use that type of system. They could do a dry run or a demo and shoot it, take maybe ten customers or just ten participants to see. We're trying to start the initiative to customise phone covers or laptop covers. You could maybe do a petition or ask around if people want that, like I could. Pouch. That says 'NWU' on my phone. I can only put the ones in the back. They don't actually sit well because they're uncomfortable when you have to hold the phone. Yeah.	
5	What I would like to see is them selling in the brain stores are shirts. Normally, you would see students in structures or part of communities wearing shirts that are. You can see that they by a graphic designer, who designed an idea and a shirt. Then they went through and printed it. I feel like, also as students, we could get something like that and not only shirts that are clean. And then it's just the NWU logo, and then that's it. I feel like they can design clothes that have like patterns and all that. I'm not sure if I am understandable. Yes, yes, not that they should have creativity. They have creativity. It shows that the creativity is not there in the brand store. There's the creativity is there within the student structures, the staff members and all that with the materials that they give them.	Overall impression
6	I don't think of anything. I think it sells everything. There are earphones, there are books, there are pens, there are rulers, and there are shirts. Maybe a tracksuit. Yeah. Yeah, I don't think I've been setting a trick. So yeah, that would be nice, actually. You know, a check. Like, maybe leggings, sports leggings? You know, for ladies, you see how you'd see for Adidas, for Nike? That. Yeah, I think that also would work.	Variety of options
7	Something unique I've never actually seen like this. Eagi socks. But what about Eagi shoes? So, I know that's a big one, but maybe like Eagi costumes. That would be nice. Something extraordinary. Yeah, but yes, more sportswear. I haven't seen a lot of sportswear. At the NWU, considering that the NWU is also a sporty type of varsity, like sports, where's a bit of a limit? Yeah. Yes, that's it.	Variety of options
8	Hmm. I don't know. Maybe like. What can they sell cause? It's usually like just socks, shirts, and stationery. I don't know. I really don't. Cause I have like almost everything, I think the only thing I don't have is like in the new pants or like shorts, so maybe that could be like a nice new addition.	Variety of options
9	It is. Hmm. OK. Like I said, more casual clothes, like. Golfers, I wish they had more golfers and more golf T-shirts. Hmm. I think I saw them once, and I don't even remember how. Do you know what I don't like about NWU? So, I made it clear. Stores like they see how student leaders almost designed them. Attires that they want to wear – like whenever student leaders want a uniform, they never go to a brand store. I ask myself, doesn't the university see that we need to accommodate? OK, so the example I wanted to give is that normally when student leaders buy their formal uniform, they will get their black blazers from the brand store. But when it comes to it, they normally buy casual uniforms like they would. They have T-shirts written with their	Branding Overall impression Variety of options

	names and their portfolio, and they never go to the brand store. They go to NWU service providers, and I'm like, 'If NWU could look at what we go and look for outside.' They could save a lot of money, because now we're no longer taking the school's budget outside to buy from outsiders. We can buy these from the brand store because. Hey, I specifically don't think I can mention what they should have. Maybe if they take the store to the students and ask the students what they want or look at what we wear that has NWU written on it, because we normally just ask them for the logo and we go and design whatever we want outside when we come back and we take photos of shoes and whatnot, they should just. Look at what student leaders are wearing, or if they like these kinds of things. They don't have pants. Yes, cargo pants at NWU—they don't have those. Whenever we want cargo pants, you must find a service provider, and you must ask the school for the logo and oh.	
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Table 6.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Branding Overall impression Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Branding Overall impression Variety of options	Diversification theme describes how student customers perceive staff interaction, customer reception, the store's physical attributes, and its operations. It also explains that students perceive the quality, durability, and various types of products. Customer citing: "When student leaders buy their formal uniform, they will get their black blazers from the brand store. But when it comes to it, they normally buy casual uniforms like they would. They have T-shirts written with their names and their portfolio, and they never go to the brand store. They go to NWU service providers, and I'm like, 'If NWU could look at what we go and look for outside.' They could save a lot of money, because now we're no longer taking the school's budget outside to buy from outsiders. We can buy these from the brand store because. Hey, I specifically don't think I can mention what they should have." Customer citing: "new pants or like shorts, so maybe that could be like a nice new addition." Customer citing: "If they can introduce trousers, pants, more pants that are not meant for an event, right? Unisex. That are not meant for a specific event, then that can help." Customer citing: "Yes, maybe crop tops and just girly things. And maybe a variety of colours, not just grey and purple. Yeah." Customer citing: "more pants, shorts, skirts." Customer citing: "Maybe a tracksuit. Yeah. Yeah, I don't think I've been setting a trick. So yeah, that would be nice, actually. You know, a check. Like, maybe leggings, sports leggings? You know, for ladies" Customer citing: "Maybe a tracksuit. Yeah. Yeah, I don't think I've been setting a trick. So yeah, that would be nice, actually. You know, a check. Like, maybe leggings, sports leggings? You know, for ladies" Customer citing: "Eagi socks. But what about Eagi shoes? So, I know that's a big one, but maybe like Eagi costumes. That would be nice. Something extraordinary. Yeah, but yes, more sportswear. I haven't seen a lot of sportswear. At the NWU, considering that the NWU is also a sporty type of varsity, like sports, where's a bit of a limit?" Market alignment explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers.

	Customer citing: “Like, whenever student leaders want a uniform, they never go to a brand store. I ask myself, doesn't the university see that we need to accommodate? ... Maybe if they take the store to the students and ask the students what they want or look at what we wear that has NWU written on it, because we normally just ask them for the logo and we go and design whatever we want outside when we come back and we take photos of shoes and whatnot, they should just” Customer citing: “the production as well, like you said, maybe it's like, for maybe for a customer, it could be two to three, two to three max. Yeah, no days, Max, could be seven days. People don't like to wait. Yeah. Like for a. Yeah, seven days. But for a customised one, you can actually wait. About the 7 days. Yes. Oh. Does it? You can customise and put your picture on the pouch. That could also use that type of system. They could do a dry run or a demo and shoot it, take maybe ten customers or just ten participants to see. We're trying to start the initiative to customise phone covers or laptop covers. You could maybe do a petition or ask around if people want that, like I could. Pouch. That says 'NWU' on my phone. I can only put the ones in the back. They don't actually sit well because they're uncomfortable when you have to hold the phone. Yeah.”
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QUESTIONS ABOUT CORPORATE GIFTS

Question 7: Have you ever bought corporate gifts there? If so, what was your experience like?

Table 7.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 7

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	Yes, I have bought a book and a pen as well as a cup. Well, it was good. I mean, like, even the look of the material—it's quality. It gives a sense of professionalism. So, the quality was good. The impression was good. And that's all I can say.	Quality products
4	Corporate gifts like a book, a pen, a mug, things like that. Yes, I have. You want the before and the after. OK, purchase in there. There was only one person in the store, so I could understand that having to move around, deal with me and handle other customers was actually a struggle. So, I wouldn't say the waiting time was a problem. I understood that he's working alone; the whole processing, the purchasing, and the transferring were not a problem; it wasn't a big farce. It's like, usually it's the usual experience if you just get the stores. That was OK also. The products same as say mandate. I wouldn't say I would put more emphasis on a book. Books are books, and is it? So, I wouldn't put too much emphasis on 'hmm'. Maybe it's an NWU book; maybe it's different. It's just a book.	Overall impression
5	None. No. Yes, wait a couple. No, it was nice cause the last time I bought the corporate gift, I think I was buying. There was this other radio that they used to sell, but they don't do it anymore, which it was a nice thing to buy and to get, you know. Yes. Yeah, it's a. It's a small radio branded in NWU, and then you don't need to connect your phone through, maybe like Bluetooth or what. There was a slot where you set your phone, and you play music. And then, yeah, the speaker automatically works. I don't know how they work about it.	Variety of options

6	Yes. It was OK with a corporate gift. It was OK. I think I got it. Nice items. I've got a notebook. I got a nice pen that comes with the book. We also managed to get the bottle. We also got multiple things for it, in terms of that. There's also this block. Think you put things in it in the office. I don't know what a dock station type of thing also had. So yeah, I think it was really in terms of buying gifts. I think it's the best place to go to buy gifts. You know, I really do things. So, I get excited for it all the time, especially if we're doing gifts for students because. Like I said, they always do. They always complain about not being able to afford things there. So, when we are able to buy it for them from the Mascot Committee, we're able to pick things that they would like, and they always get happy for them because I think they do want to get items from there. But it's just affordability for them. So, the corporate gift. Yeah, we always buy gifts. There are three for, like, the DVC. If a staff member has a birthday celebration or something, we take gifts to them. So, we always buy them different items from those, which brings a tie, for instance. Sometimes. So yeah.	Pricing
7	Yes. Thank you. My experience was generally satisfied, but not so 'wow', you reckon, but in terms of the cups, there was like this one cup I received and. It's like a mug, so I didn't really like the mug per se, but it's unique. It's eco-friendly. It was an eco-friendly one. So, in terms of that, it's kind of nice that it considers like. Why do you call this? I don't have the word. The word is not coming to me that it actually considers environmental aspects. So, with regard to that, it's really out there. But general satisfaction – it's kind of basic, but nice gifts in terms of prices. I wouldn't generally walk into the store and buy those items, so as a gift, it's a very nice gift, and the gift I also got is one of the radios, and I'm still using the radios, and it was like, 'Wow,' to me, considering the fact that it's. Not like a Bluetooth type of thing. You just take your phone, and you put it in the middle. You charge it; it's cool. So that's what stood out, and the gift items are nice. I like it. Unisex	Pricing Overall impression
9	Oh. I do actually have two files. There's a black file that I have. It's written in the NWU. I love it so much that I use it to put in all my important documents. I remember when I went for my job interview last year, I had that thing with my documents and everything inside. It's nice. They and I also received another one this year. Was it this year or last year? I'm not sure if this one was not leather, but they are nice. I feel like they're very durable; they're very nice and stylish. My experience with them is that they're pretty good items to have. I don't know their prices because they were gifts.	Pricing Quality of products Overall impression

Table 7.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Quality products	Positive reflection theme explains the staff interaction, customer reception, the store/s physical attributes and the operations thereof as perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “. It's eco-friendly. It was an eco-friendly one. So, in terms of that, it's kind of nice that it considers like. Why do you call this? I don't have the word. The word is not coming to me that it actually considers environmental aspects.” Customer citing: “actually have two files. There's a black file that I have. It's written in the NWU. I love it so much that I use it to put in all my important documents” Customer citing: “There was only one person in the store, so I could understand that having to move around, deal with me and handle other customers was actually a struggle. So, I wouldn't say the waiting time was a problem. I understood that he's working alone; the whole processing, the purchasing, and the transferring were not a problem; it wasn't a big farce. It's like, usually it's the usual experience if you just get the stores.” Professional quality merchandise theme explains that the quality, durability, and various types of products are perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “They're very durable; they're very nice and stylish. My experience with them is that they're pretty good items to have.” Customer citing: “There was this other radio that they used to sell, but they don't do it anymore, which it was a nice thing to buy and to get, you know. Yes. Yeah, it's a. It's a small radio branded in NWU, and then you don't need to connect your phone through, maybe like Bluetooth or what. There was a slot where you set your phone, and you play music. And then, yeah, the speaker automatically works. I don't know how they work about it.” Customer citing: “Yes, I have bought a book and a pen as well as a cup. Well, it was good. I mean, like, even the look of the material—it's quality. It gives a sense of professionalism. So, the quality was good. The impression was good.” Price elasticity theme explains the perception that products sold at the store/s are too expensive and unaffordable for most students. Customer citing: “I don't know their prices because they were gifts.” Customer citing: “in terms of prices. I wouldn't generally walk into the store and buy those items.” Customer citing: “They always complain about not being able to afford things there ... But it's just affordability for them.”
Overall impression	
Variety of options	
Pricing	
Phone	
Overall impression	
Phone	
Quality of products	
Overall impression	

Question 8: If you have not, what are your reasons?

Table 8.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 8

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
2	No, I haven't. I also didn't know that they have them being in the store.	Have not bought anything at any of the brand stores
3	I haven't bought from the... I didn't actually know about it.	Have not bought anything at any of the brand stores
8	No, I haven't. I've never bought any gifts there for anyone. I usually get some majority of like the end of the vendor things via procurement. So, I think that's kind of like why.	Have not bought anything at any of the brand stores

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

Question 9: What do you think are the best things about the NWU Brand Stores?

Table 9.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 9

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	The brand store, as I said, there's a variety of things that are there. The quality of the clothes is good. The brand store is clean, right? There's also, I don't know, but there's also privacy there. If you want to change clothes, there's a private section that you can use to check whether your clothes fit you or not. The service there is good. We have not been in a situation whereby we complain a lot based on their services. And there's a sense of warmth there. The clothes are there. All the merchandise is there. So, yeah.	Variety of options Quality products Overall impression Satisfactory of services
2	I feel like they're not giving cheap shops. Like they're like Cotton On, Woollies, how they're structured inside. I just like that. But yeah, that's all I like. Basically, how they look, how it looks, how it's organised inside. Yeah. The best things. Yeah. I like the hoodies as well. I like the hoodies and just the environment of the shop. Yeah. It's clean, and yeah, it's not cluttered.	Overall impression
3	Best things, as in like the products, or? Okay. Yeah. The vibe is very chilled. It's like a normal store, but like, I don't know how to explain it. Okay, the best thing about the stores. I'd say the products, yeah. I think that's what makes the actual store, you know, what they sell, you know, the quality of the products that they sell at the store. And, you know, the store in general is also very chilli when you get inside. The employees are very friendly, welcoming, and willing to offer help. So yeah.	General layout Overall impression Satisfactory of services
4	The best things. Hmm. What are the best things about this, though? Not entertaining. It's not like when you go there. They play sound, or there's a screen—the best things. I love the brand. I love the brand. So, if it's the best, I love it. Hmm. It's actually the	Advertising Branding

	brand itself, NWU, the colour coding, the different colours that we have tech-wise – purple, grey, white, the whole colour – the way they coat them on the clothes on the items, every single thing, the small details, like I said—trying to pursue graphics on the side. The details they put on the graphics are actually nice. Actually nice. Although I'm now talking about the items, I once bought a speaker. More on the black one. It was beautiful from the looks of the design, but when I had to play it. Hey, the sound was, I wouldn't say, whispering. It was whispering off. Yeah, I think with the way it is designed and with the brand outside, I'm expecting quality already. In the product, having to use it, and then it drops. It's for me, as the users say it's supposed to be. It's supposed to represent what it is. That was. That's the only thing that I didn't like. When what the speaker said, small like that, was a great thing.	Variety of options
5	4. Yes, that's true. What do I think are the best things but about the brand store? I think the best thing about the brand store is. There are caps. I saw they have very nice caps that they always sell. And yeah, the only. Yeah. The caps that they sell, I feel like they are nice, and they change from time to time. It has different designs. You'll find some that look checked, like a jean. You'll find some with Eagi logos and yeah. So, with regard to the variety, all the caps—now they are doing their own part, and I like it, yes.	Variety of options
6	Ahh. I think variety. Like I said, I had previously mentioned that you can you find a lot of things, you know, you find a lot of things at the brand store, and not just clothes, but. Other things like earphones as well, and umbrellas, and you know, so I think that's the best part about it, that you're not forced to stick to, like, a small range of options. You have different things to buy in the brand store. Think that's what's nice about it, and the fact that they update, upgrade or update. You know, they don't just stick to one thing the whole year. You go next time; you find something new. You go the next time; you find a different thing. You know the bucket hats change the bottles; they change. Maybe you'll find glass bottles next time. These aluminium or steel vacuum flasks? Yeah. So, I think that's the fact that they are always updating the different things that are in the store.	Variety of options
7	The best, like the store itself or the item. Hello. I love the products. I really love the products, like those little badges. I really love them—the lanyards, the pencils. It's the fact that they're so broad. If you need something and you can't get it. Or you can't get off campus. They like easy access. You need a pen. You need a pen. So, they are on the go. They ready for you? You need a USB. You can just go to the store and get one. So, accessibility is nice. Also, it makes you feel a part of the university when you have the merch, and you're able to buy the merch, you step in the store. It does like a whole new environment because you feel like, OK, no, I'm shopping that I'm shopping specifically to NWU, so that makes it. Extraordinary, and also as a learner from school, you always have a uniform to present. At the brand store, you kinda when you're wearing the merge, you feel like, OK, no, I'm representing, I'm really a part of the university. So that's what really stands out for me with regards to the brand store, yeah.	Variety of options Overall impression General layout
8	Yeah. One thing I like about the brand stores is that all brand stores around the campuses, they all sell the same merchandise, making it very – I don't know if I should say inclusive or fair – but it's nice that we can all buy the same things around all three campuses. So, I think, yeah, I think that's about it.	Overall impression
9	Hmm. Yeah, no. The best. I can't. I can't. I can't mention any. I want you to be nice, but.	

Table 9.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Variety of options Quality products Overall impression Satisfactory of services Overall impression General layout Overall impression Satisfactory of services Advertising Branding Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Variety of options Overall impression General layout Overall impression	Comfortability theme explains the staff interaction, customer reception, the store/s physical attributes and the operations thereof as perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “the brand stores is that all brand stores around the campuses, they all sell the same merchandise, making it very – I don't know if I should say inclusive ... it's nice that we can all buy the same things around all three campuses.” Customer citing: “accessibility is nice. ... it makes you feel a part of the university when you have the merch, and you're able to buy the merch, you step in the store. ... you feel like, OK, no, I'm representing, I'm really a part of the university.” Customer citing: “The brand store, as I said, there's a variety of things that are there” Customer citing: “. The brand store is clean ... there's also privacy there. If you want to change clothes, there's a private section that you can use to check whether your clothes fit you or not. The service there is good. We have not been in a situation whereby we complain a lot based on their services. And there's a sense of warmth there.” Customer citing: “they're like Cotton On, Woollies, how they're structured inside. ... just the environment of the shop. Yeah. It's clean, and yeah, it's not cluttered.” Customer citing: “The vibe is very chilled. It's like a normal store, ... the best thing about the stores. I'd say the products, yeah. I think that's what makes the actual store, you know, what they sell, you know, the quality of the products that they sell at the store. ... the store in general is also very chilli when you get inside. The employees are very friendly, welcoming, and willing to offer help. So yeah.” Customer citing: “The caps that they sell, I feel like they are nice, and they change from time to time. It has different designs. ... with Eagi logos” Customer citing: “Other things like earphones as well, and umbrellas, and you know, so I think that's the best part about it, that you're not forced to stick to, like, a small range of options. You have different things to buy in the brand store. Think that's what's nice about it, and the fact that they update, upgrade or update. ... they are always updating the different things that are in the store.” Merchandising theme explains that the quality, durability, and various types of products are perceived by the student customers. Customer citing: “I love the products. I really love the products, like those little badges. I really love them—the lanyards, the pencils. It's the fact that they're so broad. If you need something and you can't get it. Or you can't get off campus. They like easy access. You need a pen. You need a pen. So, they are on the go. They ready for you? You need a USB. You can just go to the store and get one.” Customer citing: “The caps that they sell, I feel like they are nice, and they change from time to time. It has different designs.” Customer citing: “The quality of the clothes is good.” Customer citing: “I once bought a speaker. More on the black one. It was beautiful from the looks of the design, but when I had to play it. Hey, the sound was, I wouldn't say, whispering. ” Diverse quality merchandise explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers.

	Customer citing: “Not entertaining. It's not like when you go there. They play sound, or there's a screen—the ... actually the brand itself, NWU, the colour coding, the different colours that we have tech-wise – purple, grey, white, the whole colour – the way they coat them on the clothes on the items, every single thing, the small details, like I said—trying to pursue graphics on the side. The details they put on the graphics are actually nice.”
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Question 10: Is there anything else that you would suggest for the betterment of the NWU Brand Stores? Prompt answers:

Table 10.1: Transcripts of categories based on Question 10

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWER	CATEGORIES
1	I think we need to, like, I need to emphasise on the fact that the merchandise that's there, like, everything that is offered there, is expensive, including the umbrellas. Because umbrellas, they are quite expensive. I think the last time I checked, it was between R150 to R250. That's #1. I think they need to lower down the prices as well as introduce more discounts, I think. And because of discounts, at least this can be an introduction to like lower the prices, maybe at a lower term. to bring more customers, to bring us as students to benefit from the discounts that are there. Maybe if they can have more giveaways because I don't know, I've never seen giveaways that much meant for CSR, social responsibility. I feel like they also need to make some donations to, I don't know, external—what is this? External prospective students who like want to become part of the institution, maybe they can donate to them. And yeah, the three factors that I've mentioned, the three inputs that I've mentioned, I think they can be able to like to enhance the brand store. Not necessarily. Yes, I understand that they are strived to like bring income, but I like if they introduce CSR initiatives. Maybe we can see a difference and as well as lower the prices. So yeah.	Pricing
2	Maybe they could have some sales. I don't know if they have them. Maybe they could have some sales. And then let us know about it. Maybe the marketing here?	Pricing Advertising
3	Okay, betterment, okay. I think it does need a little bit more, I don't know, marketing. Like, I feel like most people don't actually know a lot about the product and what they actually sell. So, it's not really marketed a lot around campus as much as other things. Yeah. Okay.	Advertising
4	If, sort of, if you're in a store and you know that people have to wait, play a sound, have a screen like that. If you go to a Sports Scene, you see there's a screen there; it shows you the products and the way they market them. If they shot, like, a reason trying to promote Puma or Adidas, or Nike, they put a video, and then this place is like, 'Oh, let me check the product.' If it's in the store, I think if they do that, they show the products that are on screen, and you're like, 'Oh.' OK, with proper advertising, people can buy a product even if they don't want it. But I learnt, I think. I think that could be enjoy it if I could; I wouldn't. That's how I buy things. I look at the video, and I'm like, 'OK, proper marketing. OK, using bold is promoting it.' Let me try it. Like entertainment in the store, maybe a video, screen, or music for me to enjoy my staying there, because it's just for my welcome. What do you want, Bye? Thank you.	Advertising

5	What I would like to suggest about the betterment of the brand store is for them to have, I don't know, a better or improved stock counting system, because normally they would close for like a few days because they are doing stocktaking or still counting, so I don't know how they would maybe try to reduce the lead time. It doesn't really cause a problem, but maybe you'll find that in some instances they are closed down where some students have money, and then yeah, they end up using the money cause maybe the brand store is closed for those days. And yeah, that's. How I think it would, it impacts all shifts away from the students. Yes, that's the no, not really. But also, that one that I mentioned of having a variety of clothes, that it's, yeah, like your colour clothes, not necessarily colour clothes, but yeah, those like designer shirts, I would say. What else would I like to see at the place? Oh yeah, there's also. This other dolls? It's not really a doll, but yeah, it's like a key holder ring that they should. I feel like they should sell Eagi. Yes, the Eagi one. Also like the small key holder one and the big one that they also only always contain. Yes. No, they should sell it cause. They don't sell it in the brand stores. It's, I think. I don't know if it's like for corporate gifts or what, but I'm not sure, cause they don't? They don't sell them at all.	Overall impression Variety of options
6	But yeah, I think the only thing I'm uncomfortable with at the store is just the stuff, but everything else for me just works. The stuff in the shop is clean; everything is placed well. Everything is. Where you can see it, you know. So yeah, I think, besides, the stuff and the prices may be going down a bit. There's not really much that I can say cause they're pretty much doing. They're coming up right with the store.	General layout Pricing
7	None. Anything, anything. I haven't actually considered what they can do. Umm. I don't know. Like I said, maybe they can just like make bigger stores, improve on even more variety of merge, yeah. So, expend on their much, yes.	Variety of options General layout
8	Mm-hmm. Hmm. I think, like I said on my campus, it should be open more, with less stocktaking times. Yes, always on stocktaking. What else? I don't know. Yeah, I think that's about it. The branch was adequate in terms of, like, the thing they have. So, I think that's just about it. Maybe add, like, exclusive merchandise like Vanderbijl Park, Campus, Potch and Mahikeng – something that screams something about that campus.	Overall impression Variety of options
9	Like I said, find students to design your outfits, your T-shirts, and your pants. Like, let students decide what they want in the store. If you want students to buy more. But if you are selling for the public, like people who are working, who don't really care much about fashion sense and all that, then. Keep the brand store the same way as it is and then try to be friendly with prices. Oh, like your prices, they are painful. Like, I feel like maybe if, let's say, the brand store is open during an event and we have outsiders sell to outsiders at normal prices, but let NWU students have, like, a specified discount, to say, you know, because you are a student here. Yes, at least they give us a discount. Nyana, when it comes to your things, we want to buy those things. I would. That's one thing I can tell you. Every student who has been close to them wants to buy stuff from the brand store. But when they think of the prices.	Branding Advertising Pricing

Table 10.2: Categories to Emerged Themes

Categories	Emerged Themes
Consistency Pricing Advertising Advertising Advertising Overall impression Variety of options General layout Variety of options General layout Overall impression Variety of options Branding Advertising Pricing	Consistency theme explains the staff interaction, customer reception, the store/s physical attributes and the operations thereof as perceived by the student customers. Customer Citing: “Maybe they can just like make bigger stores.” Customer Citing: “Like I said on my campus, it should be open more, with less stock-taking times. Yes, always on stocktaking. ... The branch was adequate in terms of, like, the thing they have.” Customer Citing: “The stuff in the shop is clean; everything is placed well. Everything is. Where you can see it, you know.” Customer Citing: “better or improved stock counting system, because normally they would close for like a few days because they are doing stocktaking or still counting, so I don't know how they would maybe try to reduce the lead time. ... they end up using the money cause maybe the brand store is closed for those days.” Diverse variety merchandise theme explains that the quality, durability, and various types of products are perceived by the student customers. Customer Citing: “Maybe add, like, exclusive merchandise like Vanderbijl Park, Campus, Potch and Mahikeng – something that screams something” Customer Citing: “Find students to design your outfits, your T-shirts, and your pants. Like, let students decide what they want in the store.” Customer Citing: “, improve on even more variety of merge, yeah.” Customer Citing: “having a variety of clothes, that it's, yeah, like your colour clothes, not necessarily colour clothes, but yeah, those like designer shirts, I would say. ... other dolls? It's not really a doll, but yeah, it's like a key holder ring that they should. I feel like they should sell Eagi. Also like the small key holder one and the big one that they also only always contain.” Sales promotions theme explains the perception that products sold at the store/s are too expensive and unaffordable for most students. Customer Citing: “The brand store is open during an event ... at least they give us a discount.” Customer Citing: “The prices may be going down a bit.” Customer Citing: “The fact that the merchandise that's there, like, everything that is offered there, is expensive, including the umbrellas. Because umbrellas, they are quite expensive. ... I think they need to lower down the prices as well as introduce more discounts, I think. And because of discounts, at least this can be an introduction to like lower the prices, maybe at a lower term. ... to bring us as students to benefit from the discounts ... can have more giveaways, ... for CSR, social responsibility. ... make some donations ... introduce CSR initiatives. Maybe we can see a difference and as well as lower the prices. So yeah.” Customer Citing: “Maybe they could have some sales.” Visual market communication explains the visibility of the store/s, including its branding and advertising efforts that align with the products as perceived by the student customers.

	Customer Citing: "Try to be friendly with prices. Oh, like your prices, they are painfu. ... have outsiders sell to outsiders at normal prices, but let NWU students have, like, a specified discount, to say, you know, because you are a student here. ... Every student who has been close to them wants to buy stuff from the brand store. But when they think of the prices." Customer Citing: "Have some sales. And then let us know about it. Maybe the marketing here?" Customer Citing: "marketing. Like, I feel like most people don't actually know a lot about the product and what they actually sell. So, it's not really marketed a lot around campus as much as other things." Customer Citing: "If you're in a store and you know that people have to wait, play a sound, have a screen like that. If you go to a Sports Scene, you see there's a screen there; it shows you the products and the way they market them. If they shot, like, ... If it's in the store, I think if they do that, they show the products that are on screen, and you're like, 'Oh.' OK, with proper advertising, people can buy a product even if they don't want it. But I learnt, I think. I think that could be enjoy it if I could; I wouldn't. That's how I buy things. I look at the video, and I'm like, 'OK, proper marketing. OK, using bold is promoting it.' Let me try it. Like entertainment in the store, maybe a video, screen, or music for me to enjoy my staying there, because it's just for my welcome."
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