AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CUSTOMER RETENTION PRACTICES IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF PLATINUM MOTORS, HARARE BRANCH, ZIMBABWE

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CUSTOMER RETENTION PRACTICES IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY:
A STUDY OF PLATINUM MOTORS, HARARE BRANCH, ZIMBABWE

This Thesis by Elliot Shoniwa has been permitted by the committee members below, who endorse it to be accepted by the faculty of Unicaf University in Malawi in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Marketing Management

Thesis Committee:

Dr Lester Wills, supervisor

Dr Attridge Mwelwa Mwape, chair

Dr Shail Raina, external examiner

Dr Asad Hassan Butt, internal examiner

ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CUSTOMER RETENTION PRACTICES IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF PLATINUM MOTORS, HARARE BRANCH, ZIMBABWE

Elliot Shoniwa

Unicaf University in Malawi

This research focused on a once-profitable automobile dealership called Platinum Motors, a franchised Mazda and Nissan dealership operating a 3S business model (sales, service, and spare parts), based in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. As a franchised dealership, Platinum Motors is authorized to sell new Mazda and Nissan vehicles, provide genuine manufacturer parts, and offer factory-trained service and maintenance, which distinguishes it from independent garages and informal service providers in Zimbabwe's automotive sector. Results are not looking good as customer complaints are on the increase. As if that’s not enough service delivery is no longer that good. A case study using a mixed-methods approach was conducted to investigate the underlying reasons for this situation and the lessons to be learned. At the end of the investigation a new model is suggested as a solution to the myriad of challenges this business is facing. A case study entails a systematic investigation of a phenomena affecting an organisation or community in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to the behaviour of several variables. A mixed methods approach forms the basis of the investigation due to its rigour. In addition, this approach leads to a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This is so because the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in research leads to increased

validity, flexibility and better contextualisation of matters under investigation. The study population was comprised of seven hundred customers (N) from an existing client database provided by the business comprising government departments, quasi-government organisations commonly referred to as parastatals, from which a random sample of three hundred and two respondents (n=302) (42%) was selected. This sample size was produced using a sample size calculator at 90% confidence interval and a 10 percent margin of error. The study population, where a randomly selected sample was drawn, comprised of high-net-worth individuals, government, non-governmental organisations and corporates. Each participant had an equal opportunity of being selected to participate in the study. Probabilistic sampling was applied in the form of simple random sampling technique. The questionnaire was deployed as the data collection tool. It had eighteen open ended and close ended questions which looked at various aspects of the business. Some of these include customer satisfaction levels, customer perception matters, customer engagement strategies implemented by the business and customer journey mapping with the latter being used to track customer satisfaction levels at each touch point. Definition of key terms such as customer relationship management, Customer Retention (CR), Customer Loyalty (CL), Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) and Customer Experience Management (CX) were looked at during the course of this study. After analysing the primary data used in this research, it was discovered that 50% of customers were satisfied with the level of customer relationship management at Platinum Motors Harare Branch while the balance had issues with the service delivery processes. Using ranking technique, the average score for CRM was 5.0 on a scale of 1 to 10 suggesting that there is some degree of customer loyalty to this dealership. Various techniques are being used by the dealership for customer retention such as discounting prices

and other value adding services such as cleaning vehicles after services and customer gifting. By looking at the findings of analysis, it can be concluded that there is still room for improvement especially when one considers that only eight percent of the customers give repeat business. Using the binary logistic regression model of analysis, it was concluded that customers generally have a positive perception about Platinum Motors Harare Branch service delivery processes. The results show that customer satisfaction level significantly affects customer perception on service provision ($p = 0.001$). A 10 percent increase in the customer satisfaction has 61% probability of influencing positive perception in customers about the quality of service. This assertation is supported by the findings of the binary logistic regression model. From the findings of this research it can be concluded that 50% of customers were satisfied by the current level of service provision. The researcher used a moderated mediation model to determine that the quality of motor services provided by an organization directly affects the brand image perceived by customers. In order to maintain a positive brand image, it is important to provide good quality services and practice effective customer relationship management. These are key factors in customer retention and customer satisfaction. Application of a qualitative thematic analysis technique (sematic analysis) showed that the main emerging themes were the provision of genuine motor spares, time management and turnaround times within the organization, fair pricing of products and services, improvements of communication and the adoption of new technology. In conclusion, it can be pointed out that Platinum Motors is not entirely performing very well. Given the nature of the findings, one can conclude that there is room for improvement at this dealership so as to upscale its client retention efforts. The findings show that there is need for a holistic approach in dealing with customer pain points so as to increase the numbers of repeat

business for the dealership. To conclude the investigation, a CRM model is suggested as a possible solution to the challenges this business is facing.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research project to Lucas Taruvinga, the Managing Director of Platinum Motors (Pvt) Ltd, for allowing me to conduct the research in his organization and interact with his staff freely during the research period.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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To Jesman, my wife of thirty-five years, "Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life." (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

No	Abbreviation	Full Name
1	AMTEC	Amalgamated Motor Technologies
2	BA	British Airways
3	CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
4	CE	Customer Equity
5	CJM	Customer Journey Mapping
6	CLO	Customer Liaison Officer
7	CLP	Customer Lifetime Programs
8	CR	Customer Retention
9	CRM	Customer Relationship Management
10	CSI	Customer Satisfaction Index
11	CVR	Central Vehicle Registry
12	ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
13	FGD	Focus Group Discussions
14	IT	Information Technology
15	KII	Key Informant Interviews
16	KM	Knowledge Management
17	KPI	Key Performance Indicator
18	LCV	Lifetime Customer Value
19	MTAZ	Motor trade association of Zimbabwe
20	PIMS	Profit Impact of Market Strategy
21	ROI	Return on Investment
22	SA	Service Advisor
23	SME	Small to Medium Scale Enterprise
24	SMS	Short Message Service
25	STEM	Science Technology Engineering Mathematics
26	SUV	Sport Utility Vehicle
27	TOMA	Top of mind awareness
28	UREC	Unicaf Research Ethics Committee
29	VFM	Value for Money
30	VIC	Very Important Customer
31	VIP	Very Important Person
32	VOC	Voice of the Customer
33	VVIP	Very Very Important Person
34	WMC	Willowvale Mazda Corporation
35	WO	Warranty Officer
36	WOM	Word of Mouth
37	ZIMOCO	Zimbabwe Motor Company
38	ZIMRA	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Amid shrinking market share, increased customer complaints and reduced profitability, businesses are in a dilemma to remain operational in Zimbabwe (Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, 2025). This scenario has been worsened by the belief that the ultimate financial freedom comes when one owns a company and, thus, a surge in the number of operating firms across industries in Zimbabwe (Chamunogwa, 2021). At the same time, being ignorant of these changes in the operating environment and the change variables could be costly to businesses of this nature. Due to shrinking markets, intense competition, and the difficulty of attracting new customers, companies are finding themselves in a situation where they need to retain existing customers for long-term survival, Lombard (2009).

Faced with these challenges, business survival becomes difficult, and the creation of shareholder wealth becomes a pipe dream due to the continued loss of existing customers, while efforts to continuously look for new customers significantly hurt the business equity and its relevance (Rouse, 2020). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) argued that winning back a lost customer costs more than retaining a current one. This could be attributed to bottlenecks associated with offering customer's goods and services alone. Empirical evidence from Rouse (2020) demonstrated that aftersales support is at the core of any customer-business interface; therefore, when customers do business with a company, their genuine expectations are that their needs and wants are going to be met. Amid failure to meet customer expectations, frustrations and complaints occur.

The moment of truth for the business is when a customer comes face to face with the business's front office and other customer facing touch points of the business such as the sales and marketing departments. This moment may be a telephone interaction when the customer raises an enquiry about the product or service. Another possible encounter could be face-to-face, such as when a customer walks into a supermarket to buy groceries. These moments of truth can lead to a pleasurable experience or a pain point for the customer, depending on how the business handles the encounter through their customer-facing personnel. Because of the above, customer retention is at the core of any successful business enterprise or meticulous business operation. Interestingly, Barusman et al. (2019) and Reichheld and Sasser (1990) define customer retention as efforts made by the firm to prevent customers from going to the competition. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define customer retention as ways in which firms treat existing customers so that they continue doing business with the firm.

Customer retention is paramount to businesses as empirical evidence indicates that an increase in a customer retention rate of five per cent leads to an exponential increase in profitability by between fifty and one hundred per cent, Narayandas (1998). Nyamweya (2022) further argued that increasing customer retention offers leads to the success of the business and one of the offshoots of this intervention is an increase in customer satisfaction. The researcher further points out that satisfied customers are an asset to any business as they can directly become brand advocates, brand ambassadors or brand evangelists of the business. Advocates and brand ambassadors believe they can spread positive information concerning the business or a specific product to five potential customers within their networks (Naru & Kumar, 2020). The beauty about brand evangelists, advocates and ambassadors is that they

spread positive word of mouth messages in the absence of the brand personnel. They do so out of their own intuition. On the other hand, dissatisfied customers will spread the word to more people. From the analogy by Sewell and Brown (2009), it can be derived that long-term relationships with loyal and profitable customers are a prerequisite to any business's long-term growth and profitability (Sewell & Brown, 2009). It is important for a business to define its customer satisfaction and customer loyalty strategies as this is critical in business survival. Levy and Weitz (2007) define customer satisfaction as evaluating the degree to which customer expectations were met after purchasing and consuming the product or service.

Any business set up to make a profit is responsible for attracting and retaining customers. Platinum Motors Harare Branch finds itself in a similar situation where it has to address matters related to increasing customer complaints and poor business performance. This is shown in fig 1.3. Various reasons lead to customer complaints, which are but not limited to the following:

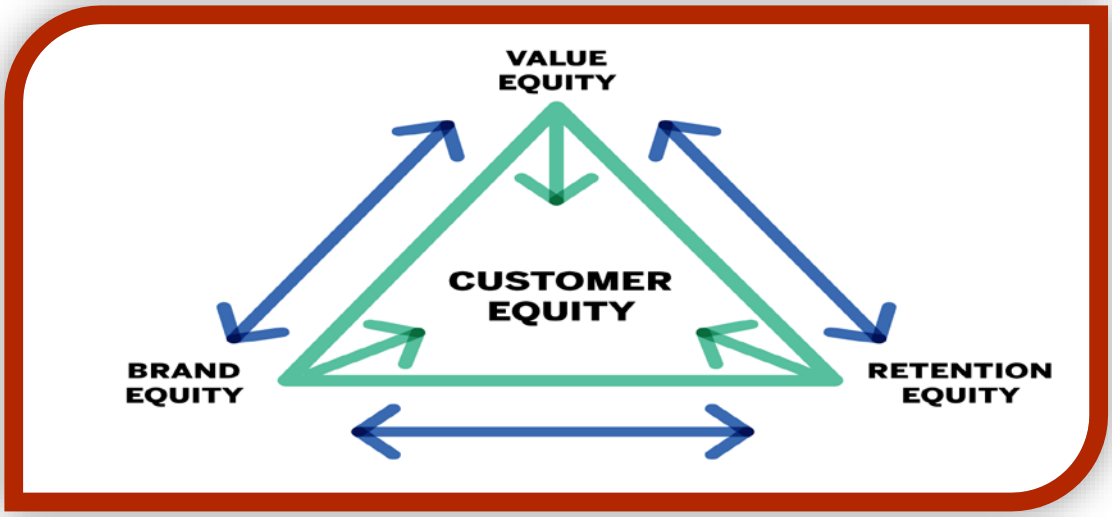
- not keeping promises by the business,
- supplying a poor-quality product or service,
- hidden costs to the customer
- poor customer interface and
- Substandard service experience.

Due to the need to retain customers, businesses find it important to measure retention as a core function (Scarff, 2017). Measuring customer retention is a critical element in calculating the lifetime customer value and customer equity. The motivation to measure customer retention is derived from the following arguments. Customer retention affects business profitability and value. Secondly, measuring retention rates over time indicates a business's going concern status (Scarff, 2017). In addition,

measuring retention is essential, according to Kotler (2012), who argued that you measure what you treasure. According to Phillip Kotler (2012), customer retention is an essential variable that cannot be left to chance. In addition, Sabbagha et al., (2016), indicated that customer equity is the total value of customers to a business and is measured by the lifetime value of its customer base. It is calculated by multiplying the total number of customers by the average value of each customer's purchases over a specific period. A lifetime customer has successive repeat business and high customer loyalty to the brand (Sciences, 2020). Lifetime customers are more likely to refer the business to their peers in their workplace and network and advertise on the business's behalf. Most lifetime customers experience the advantages of business promotions, discounts and credit facilities (Scarff, 2017).

Figure 1.1

Components of Customer Equity (Deloitte, 2023)



Customer equity is made up of three core types of equity as depicted in Fig 1.1 above. These are brand, value and retention equity. Customer equity refers to the

financial outcome of a business's relationships with its customers, while brand equity refers to the amount of influence a brand has on its customers.

Brand equity embraces trust, brand recognition, reputation, loyalty, and retention. When brand equity is high, a business can charge premium prices commensurate with the perceived brand equity as seen through the consumer's eyes. **Value equity** refers to the value customers place on the goods and services the business provides. A high-value equity attracts new customers and higher prices. Finally, ***retention equity*** refers to the strength of a business and its customers relationships in comparison to competing brands. An objective measure of a brand's success over time is seen through increased brand equity. When this happens, it demonstrates brand resilience and market appeal towards the respective brand, 2023 Global Consumer Trends Report. It is essential to mention that all three types of equity (brand/value/retention) directly impact consumer equity; as they increase, customer equity also increases.

The research is an exploratory study that looks at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, an automobile dealership in Zimbabwe, which is a pseudonym to protect the actual business. The motivation to consider the business an attractive study area is derived from the dealership's consistently declining performance over the past decade. As a result of this background, the issues around Platinum Motors Harare Branch became an exciting area of study as management seeks new and innovative ways of addressing these issues. Platinum Motors Harare Branch is a franchised Mazda and Nissan dealership established in 1963 in Zimbabwe. It has been a market leader in the motor vehicle industry for over 40 years. The franchise has been doing business with various stakeholders, including government, non-governmental organisations, stock exchange listed companies, blue chip companies, individuals with

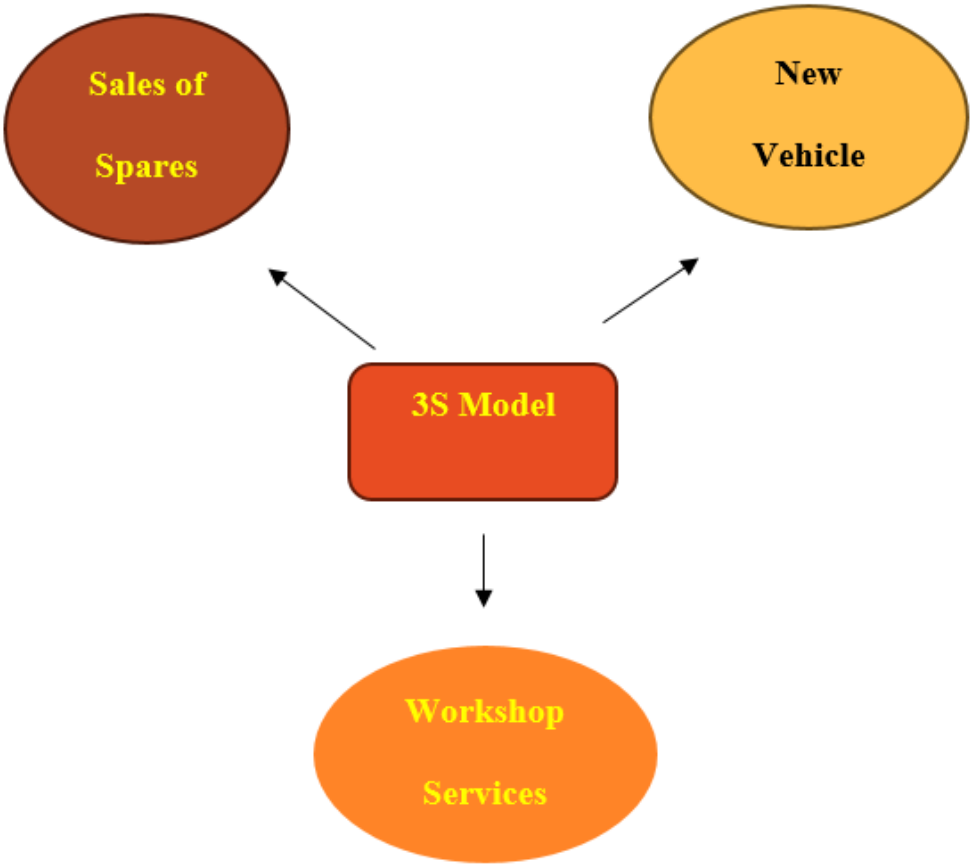
high net worth, and more prominent corporations. The customer base comprises over seven hundred clients, of which a sample of forty-two per cent (42%) or three hundred and forty-six customers were chosen to participate in the research.

Platinum Motors Harare Branch is a franchised dealership that uses the 3S business model. This approach refers to the three pillars of a franchised automotive business: new vehicle sales, parts sales and provision of workshop services (Figure 2). The basic idea behind this model is to sell new vehicles and provide after-sales support. If the model is followed correctly, no customers are expected to defect to the competition, hence achieving customer retention. This is the foundation of the research study.

Customer relationship management is presented towards the end of the research study as a possible solution to addressing the negative customer service experience issues. Customer relationship management combines practices, strategies and technologies that companies use to manage and analyse customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle (Rouse, 2020). The foundation of a sound customer relationship management strategy is in driving sales growth, improving customer relations and lastly in retaining profitable customers. According to Yadav (2017), the core components of a customer relationship management system are found in technology, process and people. Customer relationship management systems thrive on information gathering and processing through various contact points such as direct mail, call centres, live chat, websites, telephone, social media interfaces and marketing materials. Customer relationship management systems make customer information readily available to the organisation. This information may include the customer's personal information, purchase history, preferences, and concerns (Rouse, 2020).

Figure 1.2

The 3S Model for a Franchised Dealership i.e. Platinum Motors Harare



Source: Adopted from Rouse (2020).

Customer relationship management has been a hugely successful strategy in identifying customers and creating customer satisfaction (Pamsari et al., 2013). Customer relationship management technology enhances organisational capabilities to sustain profitable customer relationships through integrating and sharing information that influences efficient interactions between the organisation and its customers (Mohammad et al., 2013). In highly competitive business environments companies are required to build long term relationships with their customers as this contributes to customer satisfaction (Cheng et al., 2013).

Literature depicts an agreement trend that interest in customer relationship management initiatives took centre stage and started growing in the '90s (Ling & Yen, 2001; Xu et al., 2002). The highly competitive business landscape and the ever-changing business terrain forced companies to change their focus from customer acquisition to customer retention (Sheth, 2002). Furthermore, building strong customer relationships and adding value to goods and services became sources of competitive advantage (Lindgreen & Wynstra, 2005). Firms use various customer retention initiatives to retain their current customers so they are independent of the competition. Successful customer retention starts with the first contact an organisation makes with a customer and continues throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship, Ciotti, (2016). Customer loyalty is a crucial objective of customer relationship management and customer retention. Ciotti (2016) defines it as the willingness of any given customer to purchase the company's goods or services over competitive ones available in the marketplace.

Research by Ennew and Banks (1996) in the United Kingdom (UK) banking industry explored the connection between service quality and customer retention and showed a significant correlation between the two variables. It was discovered that when the perceived service quality is high, customers keep on doing business with their preferred bank, thus eliminating the tendency to switch from one bank to another, looking for better service. These findings show a strong, positive relationship between customer retention, customer satisfaction, and profits. Thus, managers are expected to constantly measure satisfaction levels and develop programs that help to deliver performance beyond targeted customer expectations, Winer R.S. (2003). According to Covielo et al., (2002), customer retention is the main focus in firms that practise relational marketing. Customer retention is vital as it provides benefits for the

company, chief among them being repeat business. Other authors have written on this matter. Previous studies by Reichheld (1996) and Butte (2004) concluded that as customers stay with a supplier over a longer period, purchase volumes increase, and more referrals are generated due to the lengthy business relationship. Customer retention refers to a selling organisation's activity to reduce customer defections and hold onto its more profitable clientele.

Payne (2005) define the purpose of CRM as "to efficiently and effectively increase the acquisition, growth and retention of profitable customers by selectively initiating, building and maintaining appropriate relationships with them". Goldenberg (2000) defines CRM as a system that encompasses a fully integrated technology-driven system that covers the whole organisation and maximises relationships between the business and its customers. It leverages all the cross-functional activities of an organisation, including human resources, sales, marketing, Information Technology, operations and finance, thereby leading to profitable interactions amongst the stakeholders. Furthermore, the author concludes that customer relations are a continuous process whose principal tool is communication. As a follow-up to the above synopsis, Customer relationship management is a relational marketing strategy used to establish long-term relationships with highly profitable customers for sustained business performance, Rouse (2020). Through the application of customer relationship management strategies, firms maintain relationships with crucial profitable customers by meeting and exceeding their expectations, resulting in repeat business over time.

To those organisations that are highly customer-centric, customer relationship management strategies are part of the core strategic initiatives of the organisation with organisation-wide involvement, from the highest office in the organisation to the lowest

level Kotler (2017). In these organisations, customer relationship management is practised by everyone and not just by customer-facing employees. It is a responsibility that covers the organisation’s entire hierarchy from the shop floor worker to the Chief Executive Officer. Customer relationship management is viewed as an enabler of customer retention and loyalty in these customer-centric organisations. According to Sheth (2000), Customer relationship management is based on the "relational marketing" principle and has attracted much research interest since the early 2000s.

As defined by Payne (2005) customer relationship management focues on the retention of profitable customers and then building sutainable, long term relationships with them. On the other hand, Parvatiyar and Sheth (2004) define customer relationship management as "the integration of marketing, sales, customer service, and the supply-chain functions of the organisation to achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness in delivering value". The customer-business interface is based on interactions through various touchpoints. Some touchpoints can be electronic (email, website, internet, call centre, or voice response centres), while others can be traditional (front office desk, service departments) Fickel (1999). These interactions commonly occur through the sales departments and different aftersales department platforms.

This research aims to identify the company's most profitable customers and then tailor-make service and product offerings that address their needs, thereby retaining them and attracting more customers. According to Kotler (2017), more effort is required to move a customer experience from awareness to action. Through digital marketing initiatives, the astute marketer should move the customer experience from awareness to evangelism and advocacy. This final stage differentiates traditional marketing from digital marketing (Kotler, 2017). Three critical pathways have been

identified in converting first-time buyers into advocates in the digital marketing period. These include the use of mobile applications, the application of customer relationship management techniques and the use of gamification, Kotler (2017). All three approaches improve the customer experience and engagement and trigger the right customer response. In this scenario, customer relationship management is used to stimulate conversations and provide solutions to customer concerns, as investigated at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

The customer relationship management approach tries to analyse each customer's transaction history and help improve relationships - specifically focusing on customer retention and driving sales growth (Winer, 2003). Another dimension of the customer relationship management approach is compiling information from various communication channels, including a company's website, telephone, email, live chat, marketing materials and social media (Reichheld, 2006). Customised messages are then sent to key customers and recognition of special events in their lives such as wedding anniversaries and birthdays are acknowledged. Customer loyalty is a by-product of a good customer relationship management strategy and customer retention. Ciotti (2016) defines it as the willingness of any given customer to purchase the company's goods or services over competitive ones available in the marketplace. According to Dawkins & Reichheld (1990), retaining a customer is essential, and an increase in customer retention of 5% can lead to an increase in the net present value of future purchases of between 25% and 95% amongst different business environments. Because of its efficacy, customer relationship management is viewed as an option at the disposal of Platinum Motors Harare Branch to turn things around and bring the business back to profitability, sustained growth and superior customer service experience if implemented well.

Current State of Zimbabwe's Automotive Industry (2023-2026)

According to the Motor Industry Association of Zimbabwe (MIAZ, 2025), the automotive sector continues to face significant challenges hindering its growth and development. Recent data from ZIMSTAT (2025) indicates that Zimbabwe had approximately 1.75 million registered vehicles as of the end of 2025, underlining the significance of the motor vehicle market as a store of wealth for households and businesses. New vehicle registrations increased by 15.2% in the second quarter of 2025, from 18,214 to 21,128 vehicles.The economic environment continues to present challenges, with annual inflation closing the year 2025 at 15 percent, significantly outperforming the 30 percent end-period target (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, 2025). The economy was projected to rebound strongly in 2025 with an estimated 6.6% GDP growth, outpacing many regional peers in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2025). The automotive industry in Zimbabwe is characterized by a marked structural dualism, with a shrinking regulated formal sector and an expanding unregulated informal sector. According to the 2025 Economic Census by ZimStat, 76.1% of establishments sampled were largely informal (Competition and Tariff Commission, 2025). This imbalance creates unfair competition, kills formal employment, and erodes the national tax base. The Zimbabwean vehicle market reported an overall expansion of 16.8% in 2025, led by Toyota with 30.2% market share, followed by Volkswagen (10.1%) and Chevrolet (9.9%) (Focus2move, 2025)

Demographic and Economic Context of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, located in Southern Africa, has a population of approximately 17.4 million according to 2025 estimates (Worldometer, 2025; Macrotrends, 2025). The country's demographic profile is characterised by a predominantly youthful population with a median age of 18 years, significant urban-rural disparities, and a growing

informal sector. Urbanisation stands at 40.5 per cent of the total population, with most economic activity concentrated in Harare, Bulawayo, and Mutare (ZIMSTAT, 2025a). The GDP per capita is estimated at USD 1,503 in 2025, while the purchasing-power-parity adjusted figure is around USD 7,375 (World Bank, 2025). Annual inflation in local currency (ZiG) ended 2025 at 15 per cent, outperforming the 30 per cent end-period target, and the economy was projected to rebound with a 6.6 per cent GDP growth rate, outpacing many regional peers in Sub-Saharan Africa (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

However, labour market conditions remain challenging: the official unemployment rate stood at 20.7 per cent in the second quarter of 2025, with the expanded unemployment rate at 37.1 per cent, and youth unemployment is particularly acute at 58.2 per cent for ages 15-24 and 46.1 per cent for ages 15-35 (ZIMSTAT, 2025b). In terms of vehicle ownership, about 29 per cent of the population owns a car, and although there are roughly 1.7 million registered vehicles, only about 850,000 are currently licensed (Zinara, 2025; Focus2move, 2025). These demographic and economic factors have direct implications for the automotive industry in Zimbabwe. The high urbanisation rate means that most vehicle sales and services are concentrated in urban centres, especially Harare, while economic instability, manifested in currency volatility and high informalization, directly affects consumers' purchasing power and their decisions regarding vehicle maintenance and repair. According to the Motor Industry Association of Zimbabwe (MIAZ, 2025), new vehicle registrations increased by 15.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2025, rising from 18,214 to 21,128 vehicles, indicating a recovery in formal new-vehicle demand.

Nevertheless, the market remains bifurcated: franchised dealerships cater to new-vehicle buyers and corporate fleets, while a substantial informal market supplies

used vehicles imported mainly from Japan and South Africa (Mujakachi et al., 2023). Furthermore, ZIMSTAT (2025c) reports that 76.1 per cent of establishments in the sector are largely informal, which creates unfair competition, erodes the national tax base, and constrains the formal industry's ability to invest in service quality, technology, and workforce training. Consequently, the automotive sector in Zimbabwe faces a dual challenge, meeting evolving consumer expectations in the formal segment while contending with an unregulated informal economy that undermines sustainable growth.

The Zimbabwean Automotive Industry Landscape

The automotive industry in Zimbabwe comprises a diverse range of players, from vehicle assemblers and authorized dealerships to independent importers and informal service providers (Sipho, 2016; Mujakachi et al., 2023). The sector is characterised by a marked structural dualism, with a shrinking regulated formal sector and an expanding unregulated informal sector that now accounts for a significant portion of vehicle sales and servicing (Competition and Tariff Commission, 2025). According to ZIMSTAT (2025), informal activity accounts for approximately 58% of the automotive market, with informal car imports averaging about US$500 million annually, nearly 10 per cent of all imports (The Financial Gazette, 2025).

At the formal end of the spectrum, several key players dominate the franchised dealership landscape. CFAO Mobility Zimbabwe (formerly Toyota Zimbabwe) emerged as the dominant player following the integration of Toyota Zimbabwe and CFAO Motors in 2025, commanding over 32% of the market share and selling nearly 2,000 vehicles in 2024 while servicing over 15,000 cars (NewsDay, 2025; Zimbuzz, 2025). The unified entity houses Toyota, Volkswagen, Suzuki and Hino brands under its umbrella (The Herald, 2025). Toyota remains the market leader by brand, securing

30.2% of the market, followed by Volkswagen with 10.1% market share (Focus2move, 2025). ZIMOCO is the only authorised official distributor of Mercedes-Benz vehicles in Zimbabwe, offering a range of benefits including warranties and service plans not typically available from grey import dealers (NewsDay, 2025; The Independent, 2024). The company also distributes Daimler Trucks and Buses featuring Mercedes-Benz and FUSO brands in Zimbabwe. Quest Motors holds franchises for Japanese manufacturers Mitsubishi, Toyota, and Suzuki, Chinese makes such as Foton, JMC and Chery, as well as German car maker BMW, and is one of the few remaining vehicle assembly companies in Zimbabwe (Business Daily, 2026). Croco Motors operates Ford, Mazda, UD Trucks, KIA, Eicher and Volvo franchises, and is also a dealer for Nissan, Datsun, Toyota, Higer and Yutong. Willowvale Mazda Motor Industries (WMMI), established in 1961, was once a major vehicle assembler and has recently announced plans to return to its original business model of assembling different types of cars in an effort to revive its waning fortunes (Business Daily, 2026).

Platinum Motors Harare Branch has been a significant player in the Zimbabwean automotive industry since 1953. As a franchised dealership representing Mazda and Nissan, it offers new vehicle sales as an authorised dealer, genuine spare parts that are manufacturer-approved, and factory-trained service and maintenance following the 3S model (sales, service, and spare parts). The dealership currently serves approximately 700 clients, including government departments, parastatals, corporations, and high-net-worth individuals. However, increased competition from other franchised dealers, particularly the emergence of CFAO Mobility as a dominant force, and the continued growth of the informal sector has progressively affected its market position. The informal sector's ability to offer more affordable vehicles and services through imported used cars and unregulated workshops has created

significant pricing pressure on formal dealerships like Platinum Motors (Mujakachi et al., 2023; Competition and Tariff Commission, 2025).

Statement of the Problem.

The central problem under investigation is to find reasons behind poor customer attraction and retention at an automobile dealership called Platinum Motors Harare Branch, located in Harare, Zimbabwe. Platinum Motors Harare Branch is an established dealership that has existed for more than sixty years. Over the past 40 years, it has been a market leader in the industry, enjoying repeat business from all economic segments, including government departments, non-governmental organisations, corporations, small businesses, and high-net-worth individuals. These have supported Platinum Motors Harare Branch due to their superior customer service experience and the provision of good quality service through aftersales initiatives, i.e., parts sales and the workshop department. "The central purpose of managing customer relationships is for the enterprise to focus on increasing the overall value of its customer base – and customer retention is critical to its success." (Peppers & Rogers, 2004, p.36).

Customer retention is a core aspect of managing a business. It is more effective when multiple programs are integrated with broader marketing activities, including campaigns and strategies (Springer et al., 2014). Customers feel that companies can do more in their retention efforts. Eighty-five per cent of customers feel this way (Handley, 2013). Viewed from another perspective, most top executives concur that customer retention receives the utmost attention in their organisation; however, forty-nine per cent of the executives feel that more can be done to improve customer retention efforts (Forbes Insights, 2014). Among other things, the researcher seeks to investigate core issues leading to the emergence of high customer complaints over

the last few years. In addition, the research seeks to propose customer relationship management strategies as a possible solution to address customer pain points and assist in business continuity.

Table 1.1

Platinum Motors Harare Branch, 10 Years Historical performance.

PLATINUM MOTORS HARARE BRANCH. 10 YEARS SOCI. (2007-2017).

PLATINUM MOTORS (PVT) LTD
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME OVER 10 YEARS

	Dec-07	Dec-08	Dec-09	Dec-10	Dec-11	Dec-12	Dec-13	Dec-14	Dec-15	Dec-16	Dec-17	Total
Equipment	515 235	450 112	708 972	685 756	755 893	669 854	510 994	465 237	295 998	302 132	319 876	5 659 859
Workshop parts	8 064	12 600	17 388	14 364	15 876	16 632	16 632	15 120	15 876	16 632	16 632	165 816
Workshop revenue	11 136	17 400	24 012	19 836	21 924	22 968	22 968	20 880	21 924	22 968	22 968	228 984
Parts	8 521	10 859	11 825	12 704	12 986	12 297	12 770	12 895	12 521	13 895	13 425	134 698
SALES	**542 956**	**490 971**	**762 197**	**712 660**	**806 679**	**721 551**	**563 364**	**514 132**	**346 319**	**355 627**	**372 901**	**6 189 356**
Cost of sales	**239 012**	**267 027**	**143 427**	**331 949**	**362 772**	**569 876**	**358 261**	**482 643**	**267 289**	**330 763**	**384 457**	**3 737 474**
Equipment	222 264	242 403	111 373	303 680	332 170	538 614	326 712	453 177	236 971	298 527	352 508	3 418 428
Workshop	11 520	18 000	24 840	20 520	22 680	23 760	23 760	21 600	22 680	23 760	23 760	236 880
Parts	5 198	6 624	7 213	7 749	7 921	7 501	7 790	7 866	7 638	8 476	8 189	82 168
Gross profit	**303 944**	**223 944**	**618 770**	**380 711**	**443 907**	**151 675**	**205 103**	**31 489**	**79 030**	**24 864**	**-11 556**	**2 451 882**
Other income	4 389	- 332	- 659	- 274	114	999	686	645	151	- 58	188	5 851
Dealership income	3 744	3 892	2 320	4 980	4 972	9 062	5 514	5 492	4 270	4 542	5 200	53 988
Total income	**312 078**	**227 505**	**620 431**	**385 417**	**448 993**	**161 736**	**211 303**	**37 626**	**83 451**	**29 349**	**-6 168**	**2 511 721**
Operating expenses	**60 360**	**60 440**	**60 440**	**68 125**	**68 125**	**68 125**	**69 708**	**69 712**	**69 708**	**71 450**	**71 450**	**737 642**
Profit before tax	**251 718**	**167 065**	**559 992**	**317 292**	**380 868**	**93 611**	**141 594**	**-32 087**	**13 743**	**-42 101**	**-77 618**	**1 774 079**

Source: Platinum Motors Harare Branch financial records.

Note: Financial data for 2018-2025 was not available at the time of this research due to the dealership's confidentiality policies. The researcher acknowledges this as a limitation of the study. However, qualitative evidence from customer interviews and staff focus groups (presented in Chapter 4) provides current insights into the dealership's performance challenges.

Given this background, it is essential to determine if customer relationship management strategies are being successfully implemented at the dealership. Furthermore, studies have shown that they positively impact customer retention and business continuity (Lambert, 2009). Available statistical evidence has shown that on average Fortune 500 companies lose roughly twenty per cent of their customers every

five years due to poor customer retention practices. In addition, Lambert argues that, it costs five times more to win back a lost customer as opposed to selling to an existing one (Lambert, 2009). The idea is for businesses to pay attention to customer retention and satisfaction.

Table 1.2

Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Customer Complaints Summary, 2017

No	Category	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Total
1	Poor turnaround times	15	25	20	26		86
2	Shortage of spare parts	8	15	12	15		50
3	Cost of service too high	15	13	20	25		73
4	Unfriendly frontline staff	5	10	8	35		58
5	Theft from customer vehicles	8	5	8	25		46
6	Vehicle not washed after service	19	25	35	57		136
7	Come-backs	8	15	14	20		57
8	Poor communication	9	3	11	27		50
	Total	87	111	128	230		556

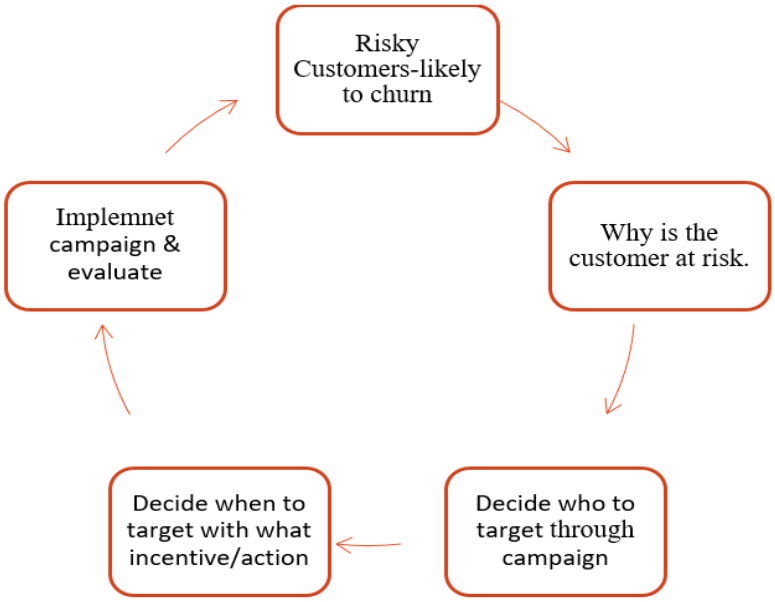
Source: Company records.

According to Lambert (2009), there has been a gradual decrease in the number of customers returning for repeat business within various organisations due to unresolved customer complaints. Rehman (2021) concluded that companies lose approximately thirty per cent of their customers every three to five years, especially in organisations that become less competitive by failing to build a more favourable business image. Customer retention needs to be looked at from a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree approach. This implies looking at long-term versus short-term initiatives and the requirement for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to be proactive in customer retention instead of reactive (Ascarza, 2017). A proactive approach takes an anticipatory approach where the organisation foresees sources of customer discomfort and tries to address them long before customers walk away or complain.

At the same time, reactive initiatives are not advisable as they entail putting measures in place after a customer has complained or walked away, which may include introducing incentives and expensive marketing campaigns (Ascarza, 2017). Generally speaking, reactive initiatives offer more challenges to the business as some customers may need help to rescue or win back (Lewis, 2005). Winning back a lost customer is generally costlier than retaining an existing one (Reichheld & Sasser, 1996). Customer retention can be viewed from a process perspective, as depicted in figure 1.3

Figure 1.3

Designing a Retention Campaign



Source: Adopted from Springer et al (2014)

Platinum Motors Harare Branch is in the motor service industry, and from research carried out in the telecoms sector, which is also a service sector, it was discovered that customer connectivity is a crucial factor in determining if a customer stays with a particular service provider or not, Benedek et al., (2014). Because of the power of association in marketing and the emergence of digital communities,

customers can seek information from their network before purchasing (Barusman et al., 2019; Ramírez-Durán et al., 2021). According to Kotler (2017), "Customers care more about the opinion of others within their network rather than relying on their own independent opinions". In doing so, customer communities paint their own picture of brands and businesses. So, when customers share information this way, the fate of the business is decided through such platforms Nitzan & Libai (2013). Used positively, customer advocacy is very reliable and, it can be valuable in getting business indirectly to a company. However if a dissatisfied customer uses this strategy to communicate their negative experience throughout their network it can be very destructive to the business (Jian & Yuantao, 2021).

In cases where word of mouth can be beneficial, an experienced marketing officer with good relationships with the customer has the opportunity to pitch a business idea or product. In turn, it can turn out to be disastrous when an inexperienced sales personnel tries to sell a product to an existing customer with whom they do not have a good relationship or pitch a new product to an entirely new customer (Kan & Nasheel, 2019; Simanjuntak et al., 2020). In a similar study by Ascarza et al., (2017) it was shown that customers are unlikely to take their business away from the competition if their network continues to use a particular service provider. The challenge for Platinum Motors Harare Branch is twofold. To segment customers and tailor-make specific value propositions that meet and or exceed their expectations. This reduces churn and enhances business sustainability.

In addition, the research suggests a continuous strategy to manage customer retention and determine if the results obtained at Platinum Motors Harare Branch can be generalised to apply to the rest of the Zimbabwean automotive industry.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to investigate circumstances leading to increased customer complaints and poor business performance at a once-thriving automobile dealership located in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. This dealership is called Platinum Motors Harare Branch, once a market leader in its industry. Things have changed for the worst as business is no longer that good. Platinum Motors Harare Branch is now struggling to retain its customers. This is a point of concern to the shareholders and senior management. A mixed methods approach used by the researcher is quite exhaustive as the investigation looks at both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research project. The main issue under investigation relates to the lack of customer retention and attraction strategies and a coherent business model to address customer pain points. These weaknesses have led to increased customer complaints, poor quality outcomes and poor customer service. The research is therefore looking for insights into these matters, coming up with recommendations for the business, and finally suggesting pathways for future research. According to Cresswell (2003), a purpose statement should be concise enough to focus on a single idea with a broader definition of the issue under discussion.

This research investigates why a once-profitable automobile dealership is no longer profitable. It seeks to investigate reasons why poor business performance has coincided with increased customer complaints. Furthermore, the research seeks insights into the nature of the complaints and what can be done to address them. Platinum Motors Harare Branch needs to listen to the voice of the customer and address customer pain points. Finally, the research uses a double-pronged approach. The first one is to recommend customer relationship management strategies as a possible solution to the challenges the business faces, while the second one is to

consider if the results from the research at Platinum Motors Harare Branch can be generalised to apply to the rest of the Zimbabwean automotive industry. According to Roberta Heale and Dorothy Forbes (2013), "combining findings from two or more rigorous approaches provides a more comprehensive picture of the results than either approach could do alone".

In triangulation, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are typically used. It has been found that the use of the mixed methods approach produces results that are invariably considered more credible than using either quantitative or qualitative approaches exclusively (John et al. Creswell, 2018). Secondly, using both methods tends to override weaknesses in one method as the strength in the other method will overshadow any weaknesses in the other method (Meena & Sahu, 2021; Patten, 2021). In addition (Nowell et al., 2017 and Omona 2013) argued that using the mixed methods approach increases the credibility of the research process. This allows more questions to be answered and more issues to be explored. Mixed methods research allows the researcher to address the many research questions by applying qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech, (2004), "the goal of mixing is to expand one's understanding". It is also called the "third wave" after qualitative and quantitative research. It looks at multiple viewpoints and perspectives in research. On the other hand, Campbell and Fiske, 1989, contend that "the essence of the triangulation logic is that the method represents independent assessments of the same phenomenon and contains offsetting kinds of bias and measurement error".

A questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions is the primary data collection tool used in the research study. A combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions was used depending on what issue was being addressed. Where a

customer's opinion is sought, the questions are open-ended. A yes or no answer was sufficient when a confirmation was required. Every second customer was chosen to participate in the study to maintain consistency during the data collection phase. This led to a sample of three hundred and forty-six customers or 48%, which was a reasonable number.

The choice of questionnaires is strategic in that they are easy to administer, and secondly, they handle sensitive issues very well as they can be administered anonymously. Questionnaire construction is relatively easy, and administration is far much easier compared to interviews, for example, as it can be done to many respondents all at once (Patten, (2017). The study is exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is undertaken to explore an area where little is known, Churchill and Iacobucci (2005). By looking from another angle, an exploratory study is carried out when there is a need to define a problem more succinctly and seek specific objectives and data requirements that can be addressed through additional research, Babbie, E (2007). One of the key advantages of this type of research is that it is highly flexible, qualitative and unstructured, Babbie, E (2007). Exploratory research also has some disadvantages. The first one is that the sample size is usually small, and as such the results cannot be generalised and accurately interpreted to a broader population. To overcome this, the researcher used a sample size greater than 250 participants (35%). This ensures that the results are typically distributed and can be applied for generalisation outside the sampled populations. Secondly, though this type of research can lead the researcher in new directions, the results are generally inconclusive (Maitrayee, 2016). In this case, the researcher thrives to find meaning in each result produced.

Consequently, this led to the use of the holistic binary logistic regression model so that facts can be ascertained to reality, and the use of thematic analysis ensures that the findings are backed by actual observations and words said by respondents. Finally, exploratory research typically produces qualitative data, which is sometimes biased during the interpretation stage (Singh, 2007). By using a mixed method approach, the researcher intends to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. The study's population comprised just over seven hundred participants, of whom a sample of forty-eight percent (48%) or three hundred and forty-six customers participated. All participants gave prior consent before taking part in the study. It also needs to be mentioned that all participants were adults and above the age of 18 as per Zimbabwean ethical regulations. Customer attraction and retention are the key focus areas of this research study. In addition, towards the end of this research study a marketing model is suggested as a possible solution to Platinum Motors Harare Branch' in its customer retention efforts.

Goldenberg (2000) defines customer relationship management as a fully integrated technology-driven system that covers the whole organisation and maximises relationships between the business and its customers. It leverages all of an organisation's cross-functional activities, including human resources, sales, marketing, Information Technology, operations and finance, thereby leading to profitable interactions among the stakeholders. Furthermore, the author concludes that customer relations are a continuous process whose principal tool is communication. Payne & Frow (2005) defined the purpose of customer relationship management as "to efficiently and effectively increase the acquisition, growth and retention of profitable customers by selectively initiating, building and maintaining appropriate relationships with them".

Aim of the Study.

This research aims to investigate reasons behind poor business performance at an automobile dealership that used to be a market leader in its industry. Results have been progressively going down over the last few years as shown in Fig 1.3 above. At the same time customer complaints for the financial year 2017 have been going up significantly as shown in Fig 1.4 above. These issues are making it difficult for the business to effectively satisfy its customers and as a consequence of this, to retain these customers. This is a matter of serious concern to management as the net result is the decline in shareholder value for this business.

The idea is to investigate all aspects of service delivery and customer care issues at this dealership, isolate customer pain points and then suggest a long-term solution to the challenges this business is facing. Among other things, this involves-:

- Investigate Platinum Motors Harare Branch customer engagements strategies and communication strategies with other stakeholders.
- Investigate the quality of workmanship and skills coming out of the service department.
- Investigate the turnaround times for all work done versus the time that will have been promised by this dealership to carry out the work and release the vehicle to the owner. This is a Service Charter matter.
- Investigate human capital and empowerment matters. Among other things the study seeks to understand whether employees are well capacitated to handle customer pain points.
- Investigate procurement processes, systems and procedures.

- Investigate the concept of customer retention from the literature review and try and understand why it is a challenge at this dealership.
- Investigate the customers' perceptions regarding service delivery processes, shortcomings, and suggestions on how to move forward for Platinum Motors Harare Branch.
- One of the key outcomes of this investigation is to suggest a CRM business model as a possible solution to challenges faced by Platinum Motors Harare Branch.
- Identify and suggest new pathways for further study and research.

Objectives of the Research

1. To examine the underlying factors contributing to the decline in business performance at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.
2. To determine reasons for poor customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare, Branch.
3. To investigate customer engagement strategies in place at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.
4. To investigate reasons for high customer complaints at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.
5. To recommend a marketing-based business model that seeks to address challenges at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

Nature of the Study.

A concurrent mixed methods approach is used in this study. This involves utilising quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques in a single project

(Halcomb & Hickman (2015). This research project is expected to contribute significantly to general marketing and customer retention initiatives at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. One of the core advantages of using this type of methodology in research is that it assists the researcher in exploring complex phenomena, Lavelle et al., (2013). This research project seeks to find out why a once profitable dealership that used to be a market leader in the automotive retail industry is no longer performing well. Profit levels have decreased, coinciding with an increase in customer complaints. So, the research involves taking a deep dive into the operations of this dealership, including interviewing customers regarding their pain points and suggestions for business improvement. Given the above synopsis, this becomes a complex process requiring a research methodology to address complex phenomena.

To address these complex issues, the researcher is called upon to identify a rigorous method that digests the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the issues at hand (Creswell & Clark, 2007). No wonder the use of mixed methods in research has gained widespread popularity and acceptance in social sciences, health and education studies (Glogowiska, 2011). Mixed methods are a comprehensive way to address complex issues pragmatically that would not be ordinarily possible if one uses qualitative or quantitative methods in isolation (Andrew & Halcomb, 2012). Integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies under a mixed methods paradigm comprehensively analyses the research problem (Maudsley, 2011). The mixed methods approach links both methods to produce a more robust and complete analysis of the problem at hand (Simons & Lathlean, 2010).

The use of mixed methods in research leverages on the strengths of both approaches, i.e., qualitative and quantitative, and minimises the weaknesses of either method, such that the results obtained are far superior and provide a fuller and

comprehensive analysis of the topic under study (Scammon et al., 2023). Results are magnified, more pronounced and above all, highly objective.

Through the use of mixed methods, the researcher is able to address research questions by applying both quantitative and qualitative techniques. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2004b), "the goal of mixing is to expand one's understanding". It is also called the "third wave" after qualitative and quantitative research. It looks at multiple viewpoints and perspectives in research. A comprehensive study is thus possible. Conversely, Campbell and Fiske (1989) contend that "the essence of the mixed methods approach is that the method represents independent assessments of the same phenomenon and contains offsetting kinds of bias and measurement error." Mixed methods research creates unlimited opportunities for opening up new areas of research, Scammon et al (2023). Whereas qualitative and quantitative approaches follow specific data collection methodologies unique to each method, mixed methods use the best of both worlds. The goal is to seek convergence and corroboration in the research process.

Johnson and Turner (2003) developed The Fundamental Principle of Mixed Research in 2003. The principle urges researchers to adopt different methods and strategies in research so that the results obtained are objective and address the issues researched. According to these researchers, "effective use of this principle is a major source of justification for mixed methods research because the product will be superior to mono-method studies." Mono-method studies refer to the exclusive use of qualitative or quantitative research methods. Using two approaches in the research process to study one phenomenon is likely to be more thorough and offers more chances of producing applicable results. This type of research approach also offers the basis for further research. For example, there is a need to include the second

branch of Platinum Motors (Pvt) Ltd that's located in the second largest city for a wider investigation and appreciation of the problem. Furthermore, there is an additional need to research on various businesses in the whole motor industry in the country so that the results are more generalisable, holistic and conclusive.

By using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the research process one of the benefits of this strategy is that the strengths of one method compensates for the weaknesses of the other method. For example, if research is being carried out using qualitative methods and an issue arises that requires the use of calculations, then applying quantitative methods will help close the gap and address the particular issue. By so doing, using the quantitative approach will help refine the research query. Equally important is that the results are more credible when using the mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, mixed methods research allows for more corroboration and convergence of findings since the researcher will use two research approaches. This means it will be easier to pick commonalities in the research findings by comparing and merging the results from the two approaches. The results produced by using a mixed methods approach give strong conclusive evidence (Ogu, 2013). It is also possible to check for similarities in the results obtained using the two methods.

It is widely accepted that the use of mixed methods allows the research process to be more elaborate and comprehensive in the analysis of the research problem since it is not confined to one method only. The result is more depth and breadth in the research process John Cresswell et al (2018). Mixed methods research allows versatility in the presentation of research findings. The findings can be presented in a multiplicity of ways. Pictures and words can be used jointly, giving more meaning to the numbers. On the other hand, numbers can be added to pictures and words so that

the final product is more straightforward to comprehend. Finally, research, by its nature, is meant to address certain phenomena. When used together, qualitative and quantitative research methods collectively produce more complete knowledge, which will be helpful in directing both theory and practice (Omona, 2013). What can also not be disputed is that in real life situations people use numbers and perceptions to understand phenomena and the world around them. To this end the use of both qualitative and quantitate approaches adds a holistic dimension to the investigation, Watkins (2018). According to Cresswell & Clark (2007) a research design involves setting up procedures which are used in data collection, interpretation and reporting of the same. It is the link between the conceptual research problems to the pertinent empirical research. Furthermore, it determines the direction of the investigation in terms of the type of data to be collected and the method of analysis Grey (2014).

The principal data collection tool used in this research study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised eighteen questions covering various aspects of the research. It is a tool used in research to extract information from respondents through fielding questions by the researcher. The underlying issue in this research study is to explore the relationship between poor customer attraction and retention and declining business performance at an automobile dealership. A mixed methods approach comprising qualitative and quantitative research methodologies is applied to data collection exercise. A mixed methods study involves the collection and analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data is collected concurrently or sequentially, given a priority and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the research process, Creswell et al., (2007). According to Creswell & Tashakkori (2007) mixed methods is a research design in

which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study.

In view of the paucity of information regarding the research problem, an exploratory research design is used. This approach is used when little is known about a phenomenon, Saunders et al (2007). Exploratory research typically does not address the problem in detail but generally looks at the problem with varying levels of depth. The idea is to tackle new problems with little or no previous knowledge due to insufficient background information on the research problem (Brown,2006). In extreme cases, the exploratory research approach can form the foundation of more conclusive future research (Singh, 2007). On the other hand, an explanatory research design could not be used as it is commonly used where some information concerning a phenomenon is available. In this case, the explanatory approach seeks to address the "why" and "how" questions (Grey, 2014). It looks for causes and reasons to support the existence of a phenomenon or prediction. For these reasons, this approach was found to be unsuitable. For an in-depth investigation both open-ended and close-ended questions were used. This allowed the participants to respond accordingly depending on the variable under investigation.

Simple random sampling was applied in a bid to maintain consistency and accuracy of the data collection process; every second customer who arrived at the service centre/dealership on the day of interviewing participated in the research process, i.e., data collection. Sampling is a technique a researcher uses during a research process to systematically select a smaller group of participants representative of the larger population to meet the research objectives (Sharma, 2017). Sampling is used in research because it is practically impossible to investigate or interview every participant in a population. Time constraints, financial considerations

and resource limitations make it difficult and costly to study an entire population (Sharma, 2017). The sample usually represents the population across different variables such as convenience, cost and time. Given the nature of the study, probability sampling was used in which each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected. Secondly, systematic sampling was applied, where each second vehicle that entered the workshop on a particular day was chosen for participation. The main advantage of this technique is that it is easier to conduct than a simple random sample, and secondly, it spreads far more easily across the total population (Sharma, 2017). Other sampling methods under the probability sampling technique were considered, but systematic sampling was found to be most appropriate for the type of research required at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

Significance of the Research.

Compelling customer attraction and retention strategies are critical for the success of any business. No business can survive by doing business with new customers alone; hence, repeat customers are required for sustainability. Given this scenario, this study is expected to offer insights into how a business can implement a well-crafted customer retention strategy. By investigating current practices at Platinum Motors Harare Branch and comparing this with what their customers are saying, this research seeks to offer suggestions to the management of this dealership on best practices regarding customer retention. This study is important because it can be used by the business to implement effective customer retention measures for better business performance. Secondly, findings from this research will be used to develop training programs to capacitate employees to become effective brand ambassadors for their businesses. Thirdly this research is vital in that it offers other players in the industry insights into shortcomings that can lead to the downfall of a successful

business if effective customer care programs are lacking. Having examined the critical issues of this research, the researcher can suggest an effective customer retention strategy. This strategy is called CRM, i.e., the customer relationship management model.

According to Covielo et al., (2002), customer retention is the main focus in firms that practise relational marketing. Reichheld (1996) and Buttle (2004) concluded that as customers stay with a supplier over a longer period, purchase volumes increase, and more referrals are generated due to the lengthy business relationship. Firms use various customer retention initiatives to hold onto their current customers so that they do not defect and carry out business with competitors. In order for customer retention to be effective a business should manage its relationship with customers from the initial moment a customer interacts with the business and this must continue throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship (Ciotti, 2016). Customer loyalty is a crucial objective of customer relationship management and customer retention. Ciotti (2016) defines it as the willingness of any given customer to purchase the company's goods or services over competitive ones available in the marketplace. According to Dawkins & Reichheld (1990), retaining a customer is important, and an increase in customer retention of 5% can lead to an increase in the net present value of future purchases of between 25% and 95% amongst different business environments. This research seeks to investigate Platinum Motors Harare Branch's customer attraction and retention strategies as its biggest challenge may be the need for effective customer retention strategies. They are also likely to need more well-defined customer communication strategies. The output of this research will add more information to the existing body of knowledge about the automotive industry in Zimbabwe by studying this dealership and creating opportunities for further research into this county's automotive industry.

Marketing practitioners generally agree that long-term business survival depends upon customer retention instead of customer acquisition Malik (2015). Truth be told no business can survive if it is continually looking for new customers. It needs to be mentioned that retained customers create opportunities for referral business and the proliferation of brand advocacy from satisfied customers. Organisations, therefore, craft marketing strategies that provide customised offerings to key accounts to retain them for future business opportunities. Under this strategy, building and sustaining long-term relationships with key customers ensures long-term corporate success. However, despite the above and due to competitive solid forces and changing consumer tastes and preferences, firms also realise that retaining key customers is becoming more difficult. Markets are becoming increasingly fragmented; customers are becoming more demanding and have complex requirements. Changing lifestyles amongst consumers also challenges businesses in general and marketers in particular in their customer relationship management initiatives. According to Nguyen (2014) there are three key trends involved in service provision and these are service, niche and information-oriented.

According to Richards and Jones (2008) the following are seven key customer relationship management Key Value Drivers-:

- Improved ability to target profitable customers.
- Integrated offerings across channels.
- Improved sales force efficiency and effectiveness.
- Improved pricing.
- Customized products and services. (Value Proposition.)

- Improved customer service efficiency and effectiveness.
- Individualized marketing messages.
- The above issues will be investigated by the research. Unpacking these areas could potentially provide new insights into this field of study.

Research Questions.

1. Why has the trading results of Platinum Motors Harare Branch deteriorated significantly over the last few years?
2. Why has the number of customer complaints gone up at Platinum Motors Harare Branch over the last few years?
3. What should management at Platinum Motors Harare Branch do to improve customer retention and ultimately business performance?
4. Is there a proper customer communication system in place at Platinum Motors Harare Branch?
5. What business model can be recommended to management at this company as a long-term solution to challenges that this business is currently facing?

Research Hypotheses.

H1: There is a significant positive association between service delivery and business performance

H2: There is a significant positive association between customer care and business performance

H3: Customer service quality has a positive impact on customer retention

H4: Communication frequency has a positive impact on customer retention

H5: After-sales service has a positive impact on customer retention

H6: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with customer retention

H7: There is a significant positive relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction

H8: Customer gender has an impact on service provision

H9: Customer age has an impact on service provision

H10: Vehicle ownership status has an impact on service provision

H11: Fleet size serviced has an impact on service provision

H12: Customer preference has an impact on service provision

Definition of Key Terms.

Customer Relationship Management-CRM

Payne and Frow (2005) define the purpose of CRM as "to efficiently and effectively increase the acquisition, growth and retention of profitable customers by selectively initiating, building and maintaining appropriate relationships with them". Goldenberg (2000) defines customer relationship management as a fully integrated technology-driven system that covers the whole organisation and maximises relationships between the business and its customers. It leverages all of an organisation's cross-functional activities, including human resources, sales, marketing, IT, operations and finance, thereby leading to profitable interactions among the stakeholders.

In the current dynamic and ever-changing market, effective customer relationship management is crucial to any business's success. A robust technological

solution such as a customer relationship management platform can provide the necessary support to achieve this. It helps businesses organize and manage their customer data and interactions, which leads to improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. A robust customer relationship management system is a useful tool in tracking customer interactions with the business's various touch points. Moreover, implementing a customer relationship management system has been proven to be highly effective in increasing the businesses' return on investment. Its ability to streamline processes, automate tasks, and provide actionable insights enables businesses to optimize their operations, reduce costs, and increase revenue.

It's no wonder that customer relationship management has become one of the fastest-growing technological solutions in the market today. Businesses that have implemented customer relationship management systems have seen significant improvements in their overall performance and profitability. As such, it has become necessary for businesses that want to stay ahead of the competition and thrive in today's marketplace to embrace the customer relationship management model. When market dynamics cause frequent changes in customer expectations, businesses must adopt a customer-centric approach to their strategies. This approach involves placing the customer at the centre of all business processes and considerations, (Díez de Castro et al., 2002). Technological tools like Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and CRM can help businesses achieve this objective (Oltra-Badenes et al., 2019). CRM in particular, is critical for businesses to establish effective channels and methods for managing customer-related information. Its main goal is to improve customer relationships and enhance commercial results for companies (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2020a).

Sharing information in a timely manner is important for decision-makers since cycle-time compression can yield significant competitive advantages in business. A robust CRM tool is therefore important in this regard, (Payne & Frow, 2005). In another study, Gil-Gomez et al. (2020) confirmed customer relationship management's importance as a critical tool for driving digital transformation in the business world. It has the potential to improve current management and develop innovation and exploration capabilities. Ngai's (2005) review of academic literature on customer relationship management from 1992 to 2002 and the work of Ngai et al. (2009), who built an academic database of literature for 2000-2006 and proposed a technique to classify these articles. Soltani and Navimipour (2016) also systematically reviewed the cutting-edge literature on customer relationship management mechanisms and offered recommendations for future research.

Customer loyalty has become increasingly crucial for business success and businesses are investing significant resources, time and effort to achieve commercial success. However, despite the importance of loyalty effective strategies are required to be put in place. Therefore, businesses have been emphasizing the importance of improving customer loyalty and have invested heavily in human resources management to achieve this goal. Numerous studies have focused on examining the factors that influence customer loyalty, such as customer engagement, product quality, customer trust, satisfaction, commitment, and others. However, despite all these efforts, the important role of customer satisfaction, company reputation and customer loyalty in crafting effective customer relationship management strategies can never be ignored. Therefore, this study aims to examine the mediating role of customer satisfaction between customer relationship management and loyalty, as well as between company reputation and loyalty in the automotive retail sector.

In summary, this study intends to investigate valuable insights into the factors that contribute to customer loyalty and to help businesses develop effective strategies to improve customer satisfaction, customer relationship management, and company reputation, ultimately leading to increased customer loyalty and customer retention. The impact of certain factors on organizational practices, product life cycles, and company reputation has been extensively discussed in developed economies. However, these factors have received limited attention in developing economies. Our study findings reflect this distinction and provide valuable insight into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by companies operating in developing economies. Despite the numerous studies conducted on customer relationship management and customer retention there has been insufficient academic attention given to the critical role of customer satisfaction in relation to business continuity. Rather et al. (2019) suggested that reputation-related factors alone are not sufficient to retain customer loyalty, as trust and commitment are also necessary. The researchers who conducted the study have identified additional factors that can impact customer satisfaction, which they have included in their tested model. Meanwhile, in another study, Menidjel et al (2019) have emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining a good relationship with customers and tourists in order to promote satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Cakici (2019) suggested that investing in the relationship and ensuring that customers are satisfied with the products or services provided can lead to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty. They further suggest that customer satisfaction is key in looking at the levels of customer retention, customer loyalty and reputation in a business. Recent research supports this idea and highlights the importance of customer satisfaction in building solid relationships with customers and promoting loyalty.

Companies have realized that integrating their customer relationship management and knowledge management (KM) efforts is crucial for the success of effective customer retention efforts. By doing so, companies can better understand and serve their customers better. This is because customer relationship management processes rely on a large amount of knowledge. In fact, knowledge management can be seen as a part of customer relationship management. To manage customer relationship management effectively, companies must develop capabilities related to customer knowledge management processes. This will enable them to respond quickly to customer needs and adapt to changing markets. From a resource-based perspective, customer knowledge is a valuable and rare asset for businesses. Therefore, companies that can effectively manage customer knowledge will have a competitive advantage. It is important to highlight that knowledge is embedded in people rather than in information technology (IT). This means that companies need to focus on building and nurturing their employees' knowledge to succeed in their customer relationship management and knowledge management efforts (Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

In their research, Swan et al. (2000) found that the primary constraints on knowledge management (KM) implementation are related to managing people, rather than IT development. They argued that the KM literature has focused excessively on IT management and that KM requires a careful balance of people, business processes, and technology. Lambe (2008) and Shi & Yip (2007) have also pointed out that while previous customer relationship management research has mostly concentrated on technological aspects, researchers are beginning to recognize the critical role of knowledge management in improving customer relationship management. The importance of managing knowledge in organizations cannot be

overstated. It helps achieve several objectives, such as increasing sales, enhancing work practices and decision-making, shortening development time, improving customer service, empowering employees, and stimulating innovation (Dotsika & Patrick, 2013). However, there is a lack of understanding about the impact of knowledge management on customer relationship management success. Bose and Sugumaran (2003) argued that true customer relationship management can only be achieved by integrating knowledge management, which leads to the improvement of business processes and enables firms to evaluate their customers' level of satisfaction, profitability, and loyalty.

In summary, effective knowledge management requires a balanced focus on people, processes, and technology. Knowledge management plays a critical role in improving customer relationship management, and organizations must recognize this fact to succeed in today's competitive business environment.On the other hand, customers' online shopping intentions have not changed in response to technological advancements, making it difficult for businesses and marketers to invent new strategies to maintain long-term relationships with customers and encourage them to repurchase despite unprecedented technological advancements worldwide. Following these issues, the current study investigated how customer relationship management, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness influenced post-purchase behaviour and how ease of use and perceived usefulness mediated the relationship between customer relationship management and post-purchase behaviour.

It is widely accepted that in business, customers play a crucial role in determining the success of a company. Therefore, it is vital to establish a solid and effective communication channel with customers to ensure their satisfaction and loyalty. It is very important for the company to know how customers feel regarding the

company’s product offerings and service delivery channels. The company's customer service team is responsible for maintaining good relationships with existing customers and nurturing new ones. However, the responsibility to look after customers rests with everyone in the organisation from the shop floor worker to the Chief Executive Officer. This special section called customer service is the frontline of the company that serves all consumer needs. The customer service team handles a range of activities, including addressing complaints, resolving issues, and delivering high levels of customer satisfaction. This approach helps to establish positive customer relationships, which are essential for the growth and success of any business. By providing excellent customer service, the company can increase customer loyalty, thereby enhancing its overall value and reputation in the market.

Customer service plays a vital role in creating customer loyalty. By providing quality service to its customers, a company can implement customer relationship management, which is the process of maintaining and building customer relationships that yield value and satisfaction to the customers. For this purpose, four activities are identified: acquire, retain, develop and communicate well with stakeholders. Good communication with stakeholders helps create a positive image of the company in customers' eyes. This image is formed based on customers' perception of the company's performance and is influenced by information obtained from various reliable sources. Without a positive image as an honest and trustworthy financial institution, consumers will not feel confident about integration. It is important to understand that the image formed will impact customer loyalty. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain a positive image to ensure that customers continue to trust and remain loyal to the company.

According to Smith's theory, customer relations can be defined as the interaction between a person or group and a company in which they utilize one or more of the company's products or services. Customer relations is an essential function that involves the most interaction with the external environment, making it a critical aspect of any organization (Smith, 2020). According to Tull and Kahle (2015), customer relations is a crucial tool that can be used to achieve corporate objectives and develop sustainable competitive advantage. By creating marketing programs that cater to the target audience, a company can establish a lasting relationship with its customers. This relationship can lead to increased sales, customer retention, and improved brand loyalty.

Customer relationship management has emerged as an effective business management strategy and a powerful technological solution that has capacity to buttress businesses in their customer retention efforts. It has proven to be particularly relevant in entrepreneurship, where it has helped drive growth and future expectations and has had excellent results in terms of return on investment wherever it has been implemented. An exhaustive review of previously published findings in a specific subject area can lead to the discovery of new lines of research. Customer relationship management can help companies establish a strong foundation for customer relations and improve their overall performance, leading to long-term success. Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in today's globalized commercial world. The customer is the key player in the value chain, and entrepreneurs have the ability to identify opportunities and discover new ways to meet customer expectations (Naeem & Abdul Sami, 2020). This digital transformation leads to a transformation of the market and the world. Due to globalization, customers have access to information and products/services across borders, which leads to constantly changing and increasing

demands. As a result, the market has become highly dynamic, and only companies that adapt to these changes succeed. Investing in innovation and development is necessary, along with an entrepreneurial spirit that is receptive to discovering and taking advantage of new opportunities. Entrepreneurship is one of the driving forces behind societal change and transformation, which explains the growing research interest in this field (Mohamad et al., 2014).

Entrepreneurship has been the subject of much research due to its crucial role in driving economic and social development. Entrepreneurship is a key enabler in driving economic growth and its effectiveness in driving the modern economy can never be over emphasised. In the past, entrepreneurship was considered merely a trade, but it has now become an academic area of study. Entrepreneurs play a transformative role in society, identifying and exploiting opportunities to create value. Entrepreneurship is the study of identifying, evaluating, developing, and exploiting opportunities and resources, which has become one of the most powerful tools for businesses to improve customer experiences.

As the customer is the engine of business success, companies must have the right tools to collect management information, meet customer needs, and mould their efforts accordingly. This makes the development of entrepreneurial businesses especially challenging. Therefore, technological solutions that can have a high impact on customer management and entrepreneurial marketing are critical. Customer relationship management has proven to have a special impact in this area.

The current business environment places a significant emphasis on the customer, especially in entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate any strategy or tool's impact on managing customer knowledge to make appropriate

decisions. This evaluation helps companies to adapt their commercial and marketing actions towards the most efficient and appropriate target.

Marketing is a crucial force that promotes economic development in society, and entrepreneurial marketing is an influential association of marketing tools and the innovative and transforming power of entrepreneurship. For most entrepreneurs, marketing is viewed as a personal and social activity, not just an organizational function. They are passionate about marketing and view it as the core function of their business, which is why many entrepreneurs are keen to achieve growth through marketing. Customer relationship management is one of the leading business strategies and management tools in the field of marketing. It is an approach that helps companies manage relationships with its most profitable customers consistently and efficiently by providing information about clients. Applied effectively customer relationship management can play a significant role in developing sales, marketing, and production planning strategies, especially in entrepreneurship, where it is essential to consider customer needs and service as a top priority.

Customer relationship management is a customer-oriented approach that considers the needs of top customers a top priority. Therefore, the appropriate sense of customer service and customer needs is essential in the overall efforts of companies. Customer relationship management is an important discipline and executing its processes and systems is a core part of running a successful business. In view of this, business organizations, such as banks, insurance companies, and other service providers, are aware of the significance of customer relationship management and its potential in helping them to capture new customers, retain existing ones, and maximize their lifetime value.

Consequently, customer satisfaction is a vital aspect that cannot be overlooked as it leads to happy customers who, in turn, promote the company through word-of-mouth. Retaining existing customers is much more manageable than finding new ones, and thus, companies are devising strategies to ensure customer retention by training their employees to be more customer-oriented and service-focused. Nowadays, companies strive not only to satisfy their customers but also to compete in the market to attain their goals in other strategic business areas of the organisation such as finance, human resources, and operations and so on. Customer satisfaction is defined as meeting customer needs, wishes, and expectations during the product/service period, leading to repurchasing and customer loyalty. It is often seen as a key determinant of customer retention. Some researchers in marketing have argued that maintaining customer loyalty and prioritizing a customer-centric approach in organizational and marketing strategies should be the primary goal of any company.

Customer Retention

Reichheld & Sasser (1990) defines customer retention as efforts made by a business to prevent customers from going to the competition. Another definition is provided by Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), who define customer retention as ways in which businesses treat existing customers so that they continue doing business with that organisation. For any business to succeed, it is important to clearly understand the fundamental conceptual issues. If the focus is on customer retention, it becomes crucial to determine what exactly the organisation is trying to retain. This can be a daunting task, given the myriad of possibilities (see Table 1). While behavioural definitions may seem more relevant, they can sometimes create blind spots for marketers, preventing them from articulating a full understanding of customer retention requirements in organisational success. For example, customers who appear

"committed" to a supplier of goods and services based on behavioural measures may exhibit such behaviour out of apathy. In contrast, others may resent buying from an organisation but are locked into the supplier for various reasons. In such cases, the reason for staying "loyal" or "committed" may be that the emotional and financial cost of switching suppliers is too high to consider. In this case high switching costs may prevent a customer from changing suppliers especially in the short run. However, if a competitor identifies this weakness and makes it easy for a customer to switch, then it is possible for previously loyal customers to switch suppliers. Some customers do not buy but feel some "loyalty" towards an organisation. Barriers such as price or access may prevent a purchase, but once these barriers are removed, the loyal customer can demonstrate loyalty or commitment in behavioural terms.

Marketers often focus on consumer behaviour when assessing customer retention. However, it is also important to consider the value of attitudinal variables. Attitudes can help predict future behaviour, so examining both behavioural and attitudinal variables is essential to understand what drives customer behaviour. Marketing research models, link brand attribute ratings to behavioural disposition rather than the behaviour itself. By focusing on attributes, these models can provide insights into customer sentiments and help uncover the underlying factors that drive consumer behaviour.

A point to note is that that the relationship between psychological and behavioural measures of retention or loyalty may not always be perfect. For example, customer satisfaction may not always translate into behavioural measures of retention or loyalty. To create a comprehensive customer behaviour model, management should consider all relevant key variables and how they influence each other. This model could be a simple qualitative description of the relationships between different

variables or a more complex quantitative model that uses statistical analysis to identify the most important drivers of customer behaviour. Ultimately, a comprehensive model that incorporates both behavioural and attitudinal variables can help businesses better understand their customers and develop more effective marketing strategies.

Customer loyalty has a bearing on a company's profitability. It refers to a customer's intent to purchase services from the same provider in the future and their willingness to recommend the retailer to others. It is widely recognized as a prerequisite for a retailer's success. Therefore, it is essential for retailers to thoroughly comprehend the concept of customer loyalty to retain their existing customers and acquire new ones at a lower cost. Customer loyalty is a two-dimensional construct, encompassing both behavioural and attitudinal aspects. Natural purchase behaviour and advocacy are suitable in some categories. Retaining customers and securing their loyalty is crucial to any enterprise, as it directly affects the firm's profitability. Customers' propensity to remain loyal to their retailer evolves. The longer a retailer fosters good customer relationships, the more significant profit it can generate due to repeat patronage.

The evolution of the digital age has brought about significant changes in many industries over the last two decades with the financial services industry has experiencing huge advances in new technology innovations and process disruptions. This has created strategic choices for businesses to secure successful business models while enhancing customer experiences and transforming services. The financial services industry has quickly adopted new technologies, including mobile banking, digital wallets, and blockchain, among others. These innovations have improved the speed and efficiency of financial transactions, reduced costs, and increased customer convenience. Additionally, financial service providers are using

artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and big data analytics to gain insights into customer needs and preferences, streamline operations, and reduce fraud.

However, these new technologies have also brought challenges, including cybersecurity risks, regulatory compliance, and data privacy concerns. Therefore, financial services providers must balance innovation with risk management to ensure that they provide their customers safe, fair, and secure services. The emergence of new technologies has significantly impacted the financial services industry. Due to advances in technology businesses must adapt to these changes to remain competitive, ensure customer satisfaction, and meet regulatory requirements. In 1990, Dawkins and Reichheld emphasised the benefits of retaining customers. They found that increasing the retention rate by 5% could lead to a 25-85% increase in the net present value of future purchases in various industries, such as credit cards, insurance brokerage, motor services, and office building management. However, customer retention did not receive much attention in strategic or marketing planning processes. For example, Grant's (1995) resource classification did not include customers as a crucial asset, and his recommended strategic planning process ignored the value of relationships with existing customers. Although an earnings-based forecast using expected income streams from existing customers has been successfully used to value companies in takeovers, empirical research in this area is still limited. Previous studies have attempted to highlight the importance of customer retention and its potential causes and effects on company’s long term sustainability. Payne and Frow (1999) reported that very few organisations have measured the economic value of their customer retention strategies, despite acknowledging the tangible financial benefits of customer retention to firms. They also suggested that existing, new, and potential customers should be treated differently.

The traditional marketing approach, suggests that companies should identify customers' needs and wants and organize them into market segments, which can then be targeted with specific products and solutions. Companies should then align their functional activities to cater to the customer segments they are targeting. Marketers believe that they can control their customers by manipulating the 4Ps (price, promotion, place, and product) and offering financial incentives such as discounts, gifts, and promotions. Customer loyalty to a brand is a primary goal of traditional marketing. There are three main aspects of traditional marketing that are worth highlighting. First, the focus is on acquiring new customers to gain a larger market share. This goal of market share dominance is promoted by the Profit Impact of Market Strategy (PIMS) research program, which provides guidelines for allocating resources to achieve a required return on investment (ROI). PIMS analysis shows that a firm's ROI is determined by 22 profit increases. Therefore, the PIMS process suggests that firms should focus on customer acquisition activities. However, an unrelenting desire to dominate the market can be counterproductive, as demonstrated by the experience of British Airways (BA).

McDonald's (1999) methodology involves a process called customer audit, which aims to identify specific customer segments that businesses can target to increase their market share. This approach is based on a forward-looking analysis of the market, which does not consider the actual profitability of past associations between businesses and their customers or their actual buying behaviours. This means that businesses may miss out on potential opportunities to maximize their profits. An example is offered in the banking industry through the use of credit cards where customers are classified into categories based on their credit-worthiness. For example, customers belonging to the AB socio-economic group are often offered a

relatively high credit limit, as banks assume they are more profitable than those in the C1 and C2 segments. However, customers in the latter group may use their credit cards more frequently and maintain larger outstanding balances, resulting in higher profits for credit card issuers. This highlights the importance of considering the actual buying behaviours of customers rather than making assumptions based on their socioeconomic status. In conclusion, while the customer audit process can be a useful tool for identifying potential customer segments to target, it is essential to also consider customers' actual buying behaviours and the profitability of past associations to maximize profits.

Many research studies have delved into the various factors contributing to successful relationship marketing. Some of these studies have highlighted the crucial role of trust, cooperation, conflict management, and appreciation in establishing and maintaining long-lasting relationships with consumers, suppliers, and other market players. Juanamasta et al. (2019) describe marketing as a strategic approach focusing on building enduring ties with customers by creating value for them. This approach places greater emphasis on the retention and satisfaction of consumers rather than individual customers. In other words, relationship marketing is geared towards building long-term customer relationships to maximise their lifetime value to the organisation.

It is generally agreed that customers are at the core of any business seeking commercial success. In view of this it is imperative for the business to acquire, retain, and expand its customer base for business continuity. This entails the business to continuously strive to create value for its customers and exceed their expectations to retain their loyalty. Furthermore, organisations must eliminate all activities that do not contribute to acquiring, retaining, and expanding customers, as a company cannot exist without them. By focusing on customer retention and satisfaction, organisations

can build a loyal customer base that provides a steady stream of revenue and helps to sustain the organisation's growth over the long term.

Customer retention is when a business manages to hold onto its current customers who offer it repeat business due to positive dealings between the business and its customers. Besides getting repeat business other indirect benefits include referrals and positive word of mouth from satisfied customersA satisfied customer has higher chances of referring their network to a particular business they buy from if they are happy. The bucket hypothesis suggests that lost customers are the result of issues in managing customer relations that directly affect retention. According to Jobber and Fahy (2004), marketing for acquisitions is six times more expensive than marketing for retention. Retention is a successful technique due to the company's ability to understand its clients and customise market targeting, as indicated by Hwang et al. (2004).

Customer relationship management is an important aspect for a business, and acquiring the right customers is the first step towards achieving business continuity. By identifying potential profitable and loyal new customers, businesses can create a strong foundation for long-term relationships. The importance of customer acquisition varies depending on the circumstances of an organization. For instance, a new market entrant will focus more on attracting customers, while an existing business will concentrate more on retaining its customers. In new product releases and company start-ups, customer acquisition is often the most important goal. Small businesses with expansion aspirations consider customer acquisition as important as customer retention. By acquiring another customer, the customer base doubles, while losing a single client may result in bankruptcy. Customer buyback is also important to offset natural attrition. It costs more to replace a lost customer than to retain an old one.

Consumer trust results from their experiences with a brand and how they interpret these interactions. Trust is essential because it motivates consumers to repeat business and gradually build loyalty over time. Consumer loyalty is strongly influenced by trust. In addition, it is one of the most significant activities that impact it. According to some research carried out in the banking sector in Ghana it was demonstrated that the relationship between trust and customer loyalty is negative and insignificant because of the sound regulatory structure in Ghana. Consumer commitment has several components in dynamic relationships. For instance, satisfaction directly affects loyalty formation through responses such as confidence, group identification, and buying behaviour. Recognition is also important in building relationships and promoting confidence and commitment. Customer participation accentuates customer understanding of the brand, confidence, and loyalty. Communication is one of the most critical aspects of relationship marketing, affecting customer success and loyalty. Conflict management is essential for building customer loyalty, as conflict in customer relations is unavoidable. Successful conflict management is the first significant contributor to customer loyalty, rather than trust. Conflict management directly influences whether a customer maintains a relationship with the company.

In conclusion, managing customer relationships is essential for any business to succeed. A business must acquire the right customers, build trust, and ensure customer commitment to achieve long-term success. By focusing on these aspects, businesses can create a sustainable customer base that will help them grow and thrive.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter encompasses the literature review of the study, which is a brief description of the main terms used in research, with a look into the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underlying the investigation. The preceding section of the study introduced the concept of customer retention as a way of understanding and attaining good customer relationship management. Within this chapter, the researcher focuses on explaining the theoretical assumption of the research, which is first described through the Theory of Change. This theory, as applied to the automotive industry in this study posits that for change to happen within the automotive industry, there is need to engage all stakeholders involved in the value chain with a growth perspective. The theory of change has been used by various researchers and applied to different fields of study (Blagojević et al., 2020; Dissanayake et al., 2022; Eisenack & Stecker, 2010; Gangloff, 2007; Sallis JF, Owen N, 2008; Y. Zhang, 2020). (Chazovachii, 2020) used the theory of change in measuring the rate at which people in communities adopt the use of climate smart technologies over time in the face of global warming. Looked at from another angle (Y. Zhang, 2020) used the same theory of change in a bid to understand the level at which respondents adopt the use of new development strategies in the construction business. Other researchers have used the theory of change in the fields of agriculture, when measuring the levels of technological adoption and the rate at which farmers adopt key technologies in the farming sector (Dissanayake et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the chapter also describes the conceptual framework through which this study is based upon. The conceptual framework described in this chapter is a creation of the author based on extensive research in the study area. In the

conceptual framework, the author intends to link real life scenarios and literature so as to derive key assumptions which can be used to guide decision making within the automotive industry. Various articles were consulted by the researcher in building the empirical studies. This process included the review of recently published materials by investigating the methods used by the authors in their research endeavours, investigating the population dynamics which their studies took place in while determining the sampling methods used. Furthermore, results from various articles were consulted and their implications on this work were reviewed by the researcher, while making comparisons with similar works done by previous researchers on the same topic or theme.

During the research process and the construction of the literature review, the researcher extensively utilized various search engines and thoroughly referenced the works of previous research articles from different journals to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. After reviewing multiple scholarly journals, the accuracy and consistency of the research findings were improved. Some of the search engines used include the use of Microsoft search engine, use of google search engines such as chrome and Firefox, while accessing sites such as google scholar for peer-reviewed journals. The researcher also used the works from various publications sites such as Mendeley, IJISRT, CARI journals, Taylor and Francis, MDPI publishers, Frontier publishers, Journal of Social Sciences, Journal of Business Management and Hospitality, Journal of Marketing Management publications from the Taylor and Francis and Stratford peer reviewed journals just to mention a few.

The next section of this dissertation presents the theoretical framework underlying this study. This will be done by firstly describing the chosen theory, further elaborating its relevance in the current research topic and its implications on the area

of focus. Consequently, the justification for the choice of the theory will be given, by citing other existing theory and giving plausible reasons why the chosen theory supersedes other theories. As the great scientist of all time and the inventor of many theories in the sciences notes: “If l have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants”, (Sir Isaac Newton, 1675). To this end, various concepts, results, theories and assumptions of previous researchers will be revisited and used as applicable to this study.

Theoretical Framework of the Study.

There are various theories underlying the issue of client relationship management and its implications on customer retention (Pringle & Thomas, 2019). However, this section looks at the various theories that can be applied to the study of customer relationship management, customer loyalty, customer care and their implications on overall customer retention capacity of the business (Yudhistira, 2019). Harvey et al., (2023) proposed that a research study's foundation is based on a theoretical framework. This idea is further supported by Johnson & Ross' works (2014). A theoretical framework is comprised of various theories written and published by experts in a particular field of study, as noted by Hollebeek et al., (2023). There are several theories that can be applied to describe the connection between customer retention and its effects on customer relationship management, as pointed out by Hu and Basiglio, (2024). The majority of these theories can be used interchangeably in the field of marketing, business management and tourism and hospitality. Some of the crucial theories which can be considered are the stakeholder mapping, the customer decision making process, the marketing mix, theory of change and the communications mix (Österlund, 2020); (Y. Zhang, 2020); (Pringle & Thomas, 2019) (Ahmad & Buttle, 2002). Amongst these, the theory of change was found to be more

pragmatic in the context of this research. Furthermore it was observed that the theory of change can be a perfect example of a theory which describes human behaviour, while trying to understand their attitudes towards a certain product or set of services from a human behaviour perspective, at the same time trying to establish critical ways in which profitability may be maximized in the automotive industry (Imenda & Mpundu, 2025; Kumar Singh & Modgil, 2023). Gao et al., (2023) further elaborates that the theory of change can also be used to understand the behaviour of various stakeholders in the marketing mix, and how they may respond to change in the way the industry does business, and their possible responsive action when the way of doing business is altered anyhow. Below is a description of the theory of change and how it applies to the field of Marketing Management.

The Theory of Change.

This is a systematic approach that outlines how specific interventions can bring about a particular development change. This is achieved through a careful analysis of the causal relationships and available evidence (Y. Zhang, 2020). As per the United Nations Development Group (2017), this theory can help to identify effective solutions that address the underlying causes and obstacles hindering progress while guiding decision-making. In this research project, the theory of change will be applied to identify the most suitable customer retention strategies available to Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Additionally, the theory will be used to determine the most efficient customer care strategies that can boost sales and to pinpoint the best strategy to manage customer relations within the automotive sector.

Researchers in the marketing industry pointed out that the theory of change may be used to recognise the underlying expectations and the risks that are vital to consider when thriving to change through an intervention or research-based

interventions (Brennan et al., 2024; Guillen et al., 2008; Hartoyo et al., 2023a; Santouridis & Tsachtani, 2015).

The theory of change can be applied to numerous disciplines under various programs (Del Vecchio et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2023). Being a useful tool that determines how data is going to be analysed and interpreted, Conway and Radford (2021) describe a theoretical framework that helps in designing and constructing working models that drives the investigation and analysis of a social phenomenon, such as marketing and human behaviour. In the developmental context the importance of a well-designed theoretical framework cannot be undermined. In accordance with the United Nations Development Group 2017 and 2021, the theory of change helps in ensuring that a sound logic that ensures change is articulated. Using the theory of change in research offers a number of benefits. Firstly, it helps to identify new learning and lessons through monitoring and evaluation of the research or intervention process. This information can then be used to refine assumptions and make informed decisions about how an approach can be adapted to deliver the desired results. (INTRAC, 2019).

The Theory of Change is increasingly being adopted and used by various scholars and development agencies. According to (Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021) this theory can be used to effectively manage and develop partnerships. In addition, Harris-Fry et al. (2020) conducted a study to develop behaviour change interventions in the Marketing, Tourism, and Hospitality industries. The study found that this theory can be applied in the early stages of business planning to foster consensus and motivate all stakeholders. By involving stakeholders in the planning process and demonstrating that their contributions will result in long-term positive impact, it can help create a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders. This

approach can lead to better outcomes and a more positive impact in the long run (Babalola et al., 2025).

The idea of a theory of change originated from theory-driven evaluation, which gained popularity in the 1990s. Instead of a basic input-output concept of evaluation, theory-driven evaluation requires that program designers clearly express their expectations of how a program should work, thereby making their implicit assumptions explicit. This helps evaluators better understand what is being implemented and why, by establishing clear links between a given intervention and its outcomes. By bringing to light the underlying rationale of an initiative, it can be analysed, evaluated, and modified systematically as it is being implemented. This approach is known as Design-Based Research and was introduced by Cobb et al. in 2003.

The concept of a "theory of change" was also popularised by Weiss through the work of the Aspen Institute and the Roundtable on Community Change. The term is often capitalised, but this can confuse scientists who do not consider a project's theory of change as a theory in the conventional sense. This commentary is aimed at discipline-based education researchers, so we have chosen to use lowercase letters. Among other things the theory of change is designed to help evaluate complex community initiatives focused on social change. It enables a team to articulate underlying assumptions from the outset and reach a consensus on them, which are then codified in a diagram or other explicit product.

This text emphasizes the importance of understanding the conditions under which a particular project or initiative works and for whom it works. It suggests that it is not enough to simply determine whether something works or not. Rather, it is essential to articulate the underlying rationale for the project in order to engage in high-

quality scholarship. This involves developing a theory of change for the project, which is essentially a set of hypotheses about how change will occur. As the project progresses and data is gathered, these hypotheses are revised and refined. Thus, ongoing projects continually re-evaluate and adjust their theory of change based on the evidence gathered along the way.

Developing a theory of change begins with understanding the context in which the change effort will take place. In the case of STEM in higher education, change occurs within a complex system and attention to various parts of the system helps change agents consider factors that may influence how a change initiative plays out. These factors can speed up, slow down, initiate, or stall change and are known as moderators of the change process. It is important to understand the conditions under which something works and how it can be adapted to new situations since every context is different. This understanding can only be achieved when a project is clear about its specific circumstances.

A guidebook on developing this theory was created by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change (Anderson, 2005; Weiss, 1995). The guidebook's terminology is considered as one of the definitive sources on the subject. As the terminology used in the literature is not consistent, we have provided clear definitions for the main terms used when discussing a theory of change. Our aim is not to present the only approach to developing a theory of change but to provide a well-established framework from the evaluation literature that can help distinguish a theory of change from change theory. In the following sections, we will discuss the meaning of each component of a theory of change and how change theory and research are related to these specific components.

A theory of change is a vital tool used to outline the specific interventions that will be taken to achieve preconditions and long-term outcomes in a project. It represents the project's concrete activities and helps teams choose interventions intentionally. The process begins by developing well-articulated outcomes and preconditions, which serve as a roadmap for the project's success. Each long-term outcome or precondition is paired with a set of indicators that describe the types of evidence required to determine whether or not the outcome has been achieved. These indicators can be measured in various ways depending on the research methodologies adopted by a project. Additionally, the researcher can articulate the assumptions behind each element and their linkages. These assumptions are based on the prior experience of the project team and the research literature. However, since our collective knowledge of how change occurs in research and higher education is incomplete, teams will still rely on some set assumptions when designing a project. Therefore, a well-developed theory of change is crucial to ensure that a project is successful and achieves its desired outcomes.

A theory of change is a comprehensive methodology that explains how a specific intervention or a set of interventions is expected to bring about a particular developmental change. It is a roadmap that outlines the cause-and-effect relationships between the intervention's inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

In order to apply the principles of the theory of change for a project, it is essential to conduct sound analyses, consult with key stakeholders, and learn from the experiences of the UN and its partners about what is applicable in different contexts. This theory should be based on a thorough understanding of the problem, the context, and the target population. It should consider the available evidence, the best practices, and the lessons learned from similar projects.

A theory of change is useful in identifying solutions that can effectively address the root causes of problems that hinder progress. It helps in making decisions about which approach to take, considering the comparative advantages, effectiveness, feasibility, and uncertainties that are part of any change process. The theory of change should be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and new evidence.

A theory of change also helps to identify the underlying assumptions and risks that will be vital to understand and revisit throughout the process to ensure that the approach contributes to the desired change. It should involve continuous monitoring, evaluation, and learning to ensure that the intervention is achieving the desired results and to make any necessary adjustments. The theory of change should be a collaborative and participatory process that involves all stakeholders, including the target population, in developing, implementing, and evaluating the intervention.

Consequently, in this study, the theory of change can be implemented by the researcher to include various stakeholders, that is customers and business staff at Platinum Motors Harare Branch so that they know and understand the most recent customer grievances and the possible ways through which business can be well delivered within the working environment. This will ensure that the customers are satisfied for the long term, while the marketing team within the organization works in harmony with management to design and implement key strategies which can be used to continuously retain customers in the long haul. This theory can be applied to this study because, in trying to satisfy the customer by giving them the best service, the basis of this theory is to understand human behaviour, in this case how the customer behaves and how they like to be handled so that they continue bringing business. The application of this theory also helps identifying the weaknesses of the organization and the possible ways through which they can improve. With the introduction of rigorous

technology and the utilization of artificial intelligence, it is important for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to keep improving and familiarise to the fluctuations in the business atmosphere in order to stay relevant, hence the theory of change.

Determinants of Customer Retention in the Automotive Industry.

Customer retention is important in different customer facing businesses as it can determine the success of a business in any industry. It's also a useful metric for assessing the sales and marketing department's effectiveness and efficiency in any organization. Client retention is concerned with a company's capacity to preserve positive client interactions. This can be done by increasing the number of interactions customers have with a business over time and by encouraging them to keep buying the company's products in the future (Huang & Rust, 2024). The quality of the delivered product or service compared to customer expectations is a key factor in determining customer retention. The business must always work to strike the ideal balance between client expectations and product quality (Gunawan, 2022). A product or service's worthiness is not determined by its own merits. It only has value and utility if it meets and or exceeds all client expectations. If the offered motor vehicle falls short of the customer's high expectations, it is apparent that the consumer won't buy that particular product again (Gao et al., 2023; Selim & Gad-El-Rab, 2024; Schirmer et al, 2018). In extreme cases the customer may share their negative experience with their network which may not be good for the business.

Getting a high-quality product at an affordable price can be referred to as value. Value is a crucial factor in determining client retention. (Dwivedi et al., 2024) indicated that there is a chance that the company will offer products of great quality at a competitive price or products of comparable quality at a reduced cost. Organizations will occasionally claim that a product of inferior quality is of higher quality in order to

command a higher price (Khalique et al, 2015). It is possible for customers to detect that a product's actual value does not meet the quality that is claimed, and that it is priced too high. According to (Deng et al., 2023), most customers prefer car brands that are unique and different. Having similar brands, designs, and logos can decrease the chances of making a sale. For instance, Toyota, BMW, and Isuzu sharing the same design and logo. According to Madiba (2025) the demand for a certain product on the international market is frequently increased by the uniqueness of motor vehicles. It is important that these specialised vehicles meet the specific requirements of a diverse customer base. This means that the products should be unique and appropriate to satisfy the varying demands of clients. By doing this, companies can retain customers more effectively. For instance, car dealers frequently import motor vehicles to build customer loyalty. Some high-end car dealers also offer membership cards with discount benefits to ensure customer loyalty. All of these marketing strategies play a significant role in retaining customers. In addition, franchised dealerships strengthen their aftersales support areas so that customer retention is enhanced.

Some of the products on the market are difficult to find for customers especially if they are not well marketed. This can be as a result of poor marketing tactics or fewer retail establishments. Retention rates can suffer as a result of this. For example, even if a consumer wants to buy a particular brand and model of automobile that is in high demand, they may not be able to do so if it's not readily available in the market or if the direct supplier or retail stores are not easily accessible to them (Del Vecchio et al., 2022; Khneyzer et al., 2024; Swoboda and Hirschmann, 2017). Therefore, readily available goods may increase their ability to sell and keep customers. Customer service is one of the ways through which a business responds to the needs and actions of its customers. It is critical to respond to these enquiries carefully because minor

misunderstandings could lead to unbecoming perceptions. It is generally accepted that in the marketing industry, the customer's perception of a brand is their reality. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain a positive brand image to ensure that customers view the brand favourably.

Understanding and comprehending customer questions, and then figuring out how to offer the best solution, are crucial for achieving success in business, as highlighted by Elebe and Imediegwu, (2024). Effective customer service is a key factor in customer retention. It helps to establish a professional and personal bond with the clients, as noted by Elebe and Imediegwu, (2024). According to Sulaiman & Musnadi's research in 2020, customer service that is able to effectively meet the needs of all customers is essential for retaining them.

Naturally, businesses which are successful in avoiding the need for the customer to look for an exit plan can keep clients. Customer retention can be enhanced through offering give-aways and discounts to those customers who make repeat purchases to the business. In addition, customised service delivery processes are also an effective retention strategy. A business can offer value added services in order to retain its core customers as stated by (Menidjel et al, 2019). Globally, social media is currently popular especially in the field of marketing. The entire globe is interconnected in one way or another. Social media is working its magic, informing users about products and services and revealing customer reviews (Morgan et al., 2022) and (Khan and Ghufran, 2018). Platinum Motors, Harare Branch needs to try and create the best impression on social media as the majority of customers prefer to research and buy automotive online (Elebe & Imediegwu, 2024). Social media is a double-edged sword as it has the capacity to build brands or to destroy them.

Customers who frequently service their vehicles at franchised dealerships are three times more likely to return to the garage to buy their next automobile (Poturak et al., 2022). The customer service division is a fantastic source of income (Herhausen et al, 2019). To remind consumers to get regular service performed on their vehicles, a business can use automated service reminders, text messaging, and email advertising (Liu et al, 2018). The business may make sure that each of their clients receives notice by automating the procedure. This will increase the quantity of frequent visits for customer service (Lappeman et al., 2022).

Customer Satisfaction in the Automotive Industry.

According to Kasiri et al. (2017), customer satisfaction is an important part of business performance. It is determined by the customer's perceived discomfort between their expectations and the actual performance of the product. When a person's thoughts about a product's performance are felt and are in line with what they want, customer satisfaction is achieved (Homburg & Tischer, 2023; O. Akaeze & Shaibu Akaeze, 2017; Rodríguez-González et al., 2022). (Kridiawan & Wang, 2023) identified instances that determine customer satisfaction. The first one is when they give repeat business and secondly when they give referral business and finally when they independently engage in brand advocacy. If the product or service meets their expectations and can refer others, they will continue to use and drive motor vehicles (Liu & Chen, 2023). Clients that are happy with a product or service can potentially recommend it to others and potentially bring in new clients for the company. This is positive word of mouth also known as brand evangelism.

The evaluation of corporate success, both internally and externally, frequently considers customer happiness. Customer satisfaction is utilized internally to evaluate performance, distribute resources, and pay staff (Abdullah et al., 2022). According to

(Liu & Chen, 2023) Customers, competitors, investors, and public policy makers are just a few of the interest groups that receive information from customer satisfaction on the outside. These parties might evaluate a company's performance, degree of vulnerability to competition, value of intangible customer assets, and contribution to overall economic welfare using customer happiness (Cheng et al, 2019).

It is widely believed that the automotive sector must overcome obstacles in order to increase vehicle quality and shorten the time it takes to produce new products (Hu & Basiglio, 2024; Konstantinidis et al., 2023). These demands create pressure on product development to increase customer happiness, boost business effectiveness, and create higher-quality goods faster and with fewer resources (Ajiva et al., 2024). Customer satisfaction is one of the quantifiable metrics used by the automobile industry to evaluate the market success of its products and establish goals for future development.

To achieve customer satisfaction, quality improvement efforts should be cascaded down to the lowest component level. The automotive industry has studied and understood the behaviour of vehicles using various qualities or metrics. JD Power and Associates use approximately 77 vehicle parameters to calculate the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI). These parameters are categorized into four satisfaction measurements: quality and reliability, vehicle appeal, dealer service satisfaction, and ownership expenses. Buyers consider these factors to be the key deciding factors in a purchase.

According to (Tshuma et al., 2025) most automakers use these or comparable characteristics to assess the degree of quality improvement required for internal rankings, competitive benchmarking, goal predictions, and settings especially in the

informal market setting. In order to create the association and translate the corporate vision and strategic targets into quality improvement targets, which must be organic to the product behaviour, a structured approach is actually required (Cheng et al, 2019). Although the design community has long defined goals for design and quality enhancement, there is no well-established method for connecting customer satisfaction goals with vehicle-level goals and then target cascading to component goals. (Kasiri et al, 2017) Present a brief overview of a web-based analytical tool that supports target setting for car attributes by integrating attribute data, best practices for target setting, and data mining methods that Ford Motor Company has developed.

Satisfied customers are more likely to tell five or six people about their positive experiences, while dissatisfied customers are more likely to tell ten people about their negative experiences, according to a number of studies on the effect of customer satisfaction on repeat business, loyalty, and retention (M. Alshurideh, 2024). It's also imperative to note that many customers won't whine, and this will vary from one industry to another. According to (Hussain et al., 2024 and Mohapatra et al., 2025) rising customer satisfaction is a result of better service quality. The word "customer satisfaction" is defined in the next section, along with a model for customer satisfaction and an explanation of how service quality and customer fulfilment interact.

The Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Retention.

Markets have grown more competitive, and several businesses are beginning to recognize how crucial it is to maintain and grow their consumer base. Today's businesses rely heavily on client retention and acquisition to grow their income and market share (Herman et al, 2020). Knowing who serves consumers has a bearing on an organization's ability to keep clients. After-sales service is crucial for retaining clients and planting a seed for future sales business of equipment and new units, and

if they are not satisfied with the assistance they receive, they won't come back for more (Bahri-Ammari and Bilgihan, 2019).

Although many scholars have established a direct correlation between customer satisfaction and customer retention, some researchers, including (Felix & Rembulan, 2023) believe this is not always the case. They advise businesses to be cautious when assuming there is a direct connection between customer satisfaction and customer retention. According to (Ghesh et al., 2024), there has been insufficient research in the tourism industry to determine the reliability of the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer retention.

Organizations that sell goods and services to the market should try and prioritize the quality of the goods and customer services provided. These organisations should consider the requirements and preferences of its clients. Customer retention benefits from customer loyalty and satisfaction. An organization must take care of its customers in order to be successful, and it must make sure to handle all elements that affect customer loyalty and satisfaction in order to keep those consumers (Cheng et al, 2019).

Every business requires customers to grow and sustain its operations. Therefore, customer satisfaction and loyalty are vital components of any organization. According to Menidjel et al. (2019), to retain and remain competitive in the market, an organization must offer excellent customer service and product quality. Failure to do so may result in the organization being unable to achieve its financial goals. Meeting consumer needs is critical to the organization's success. If customer satisfaction increases, the organization will eventually gain client loyalty. Failure to meet customer

satisfaction and loyalty will make it difficult for businesses to attract new customers and retain their existing ones (Kridiawan & Wang, 2023).

When problems with customer satisfaction and loyalty are not addressed, businesses will continue to lose clients to those that provide high levels of customer satisfaction (Herman et al, 2020). The level of customer service has a direct impact on retaining customers. Client retention and acquisition are the major contributors to revenue and market share growth (Thejasree et al., 2024).

According to (Chauhan et al., 2022 and Chi et al., 2024), academics and practitioners have different conceptual and empirical explanations of customer retention. The differences between client retention, customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are closely related. Customer loyalty is an important aspect of client retention and is directly affected by customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction alone won't guarantee customer retention, according to (Naru et al., 2024). Instead, a company should use customer satisfaction as one of the prime factors that contribute to the discovery of customer loyalty, which will raise rates of customer retention.

One of the fundamentals of business success is building customer loyalty. However, to successfully implement this strategy, a business needs to focus on understanding consumer needs and adding value to its offerings (Rîpa, 2022). Only then will customers continue to use products of the company and some of its services. Long-term assets for the business are devoted customers. This is evident from the traits it possesses, as stated by (Hollebeek et al., 2023) devoted clients have the following signs and hence make frequent purchases. This indication demonstrates brand loyalty and regular or repeat product purchases. Buying items or services outside of the product or service line. Satisfied customers who spread positive

messages about a brand on their own are valuable to any business and they indirectly contribute to the growth and success of that business.

Customer Relationship Management.

The field of marketing has drastically evolved over the years and is no longer preoccupied with the traditional 4P's mantra. The traditional 4Ps mantra stands for product, price, place and promotion (Jogaratnam, 2017; Yu et al., 2022). In fact, the traditional 4P's are now the 7 Ps with the addition of 3 new elements. These are physical evidence, people and process, Philip Kotler (2017). The creation of stronger interrelationships, regular interactions and fruitful networks are no longer just important but are now matters of survival and strategic necessity for most organisations (Kazancoglu et al., 2026). In order to improve their business profitability and continuity, companies often focus on maintaining good relationships with their valued customers. According to (Chauhan et al., 2022), it is more expensive to acquire a new customer as opposed to holding onto an existing one. According to Thomas (2007), Fortune 500 companies lose around 30% of their customers every five years due to poor service delivery, which highlights the importance of retaining customers. With increased competition in the market, customers now have more choices and will only remain loyal to a business that offers high-quality products and services, while also making them feel appreciated and cared for. This has further intensified the need for businesses to prioritize customer satisfaction. (Okeke et al., 2024; Anees et al., 2020).

Customer experience management has added significance in running a business and should be given due importance as it offers unique benefits if applied properly. It involves a combination of people, processes and technology to understand an organization's customers (Alqershi et al., 2020). According to Tirkkonen, (2025), Customer relationship management is an integrated approach to managing

relationships that focuses on customer retention and customer satisfaction. Additionally, (Salamah et al., 2022) suggests that customer relationship management can be defined both strategically and operationally, and the definitions may vary depending on the background and perspectives of the personnel trying to explain the phenomenon.

According to The Sales Educators (2006, p. 93), strategic customer relationship management is the process that involves multiple tasks and sub-themes in the field of managing customer relations. Some of its components include but are not limited to managing customer interactions across the business inter faces, market segmentation, complaints management and customer engagement. Strategic customer relationship management also involves determining how a firm will interact with its customers through various channels, messages, products, and services. Customer retention is closely related to customer relationship management and both are essential for the success of any business. Without effectively applying both principles, many businesses may fail within their first five years of establishment (Castaldo, 2024; Pereira et al., 2025).

Customer retention is important to firms as it has been proved that a rise in the customer retention rate of five per cent results in an exponential surge in profitability of between fifty and one hundred percent (Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021). Hypothetically, an increase in customer retention results in a corresponding increase in the level of customer satisfaction. According to (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021) a satisfied customer is a valuable asset to any business as they can directly become advocates to the business as they can talk positive things about the product to potential customers within their networks. While the good news is desired and spread at a relatively lower rate, on another instance, a dissatisfied client is likely to spread

the word to at least ten people, which is almost double the number of good referrals, thus arises the need to always consciously and subconsciously cultivate a good customer care culture within the place of business (Alapján- et al., 2020). From this analogy it goes without saying that long-term relationships with profitable clients are a prerequisite to the long-term growth and profitability of any business (Imenda & Mpundu, 2025).

Customer relationship management refers to the set of practices, strategies, and technologies that businesses employ to manage and analyse customer interactions and data across the entire customer lifecycle, (Soni, 2023). The main focus of a customer relationship management strategy is to drive sales growth, enhance customer relationships, and retain valuable clients over the long run. The core components of a customer relationship management system are technology, process and people (Soni, 2023). Customer relationship management systems thrive on information gathering and processing. Rouse (2020) argued that this information is gathered through various touch points such as direct mail, call centres, live chat, websites, telephone, various social media interfaces and marketing materials such as brochures and fliers. An efficient customer relationship management system makes useful customer information readily available to the organisation. This data may include personal client profiles, purchase history, buying preferences, and concerns to satisfy client's desires.

Ledro et al., (2022) proposed that customer relationship management is a highly effective strategy for identifying potential customers and developing customer satisfaction strategies. The use of CRM technology improves organizational capacity to maintain profitable customer relationships. Secondly it improves relationships between the business and its customers by integrating and sharing information that

influences efficient interactions between the organization and its customers (Rashid et al., 2013). Additionally, Tunjar, (2024) suggests that ensuring customer satisfaction and establishing long-term relationships with customers are critical for survival in competitive service industries. Companies that fail to adapt and innovate often lose customers and go out of business. These companies are likely to be replaced by new ones with innovative and self-driven teams that utilize all available customer information to their advantage.

It is generally agreed that interest in customer relationship management initiatives took centre stage and started growing in the late 90's (Ling & Yen, 2001); (Chou et al., 2002). Sheth (2002) suggests that due to the highly competitive business environment and the ever-changing landscape, companies have shifted their focus from acquiring new customers to retaining existing ones. This has been achieved by building strong relationships with current customers and by adding more value to goods and services (Tirkkonen, 2025).

According to (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021) and (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020), customer relationship management models may vary in design from one organisation to another and depending on the type of information required by the business and how they want to use it. The overarching objective is to find new customers, nurture and retain them for sustained profitability within the organization. Technology is the medium through which information is organised, automated and business systems synchronised. Various processes and interventions are involved in running an efficient customer relationship management systems (Hollebeek et al., 2023; Okeke et al., 2024). These processes may include technical support, customer service including all sales activities (Elebe & Imediegwu, 2024). Among other things, a successful customer relationship management strategy focuses on the needs of its most

profitable customers over time. This focus should be integrated into every aspect of the business, including people, strategy, innovation, and technology processes. (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021).

The Efficacy behind Implementing a Customer Relationship Management Model.

There are many reasons why in todays' business world, organizations thrive to keep a database of their clients either online or in hard copies, in a bid to satisfy the customers and enhance customer relationship management (Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021). One of the reasons businesses are set up is to ensure that the shareholders get a reasonable return for their investment (Attah et al., 2024; Cain, 2004; Pang & Ruan, 2024). In order to safeguard shareholder investments, it is crucial to establish an effective customer relationship management system that guarantees profitability. Failure to do so could result in the business going bankrupt. In this context, maintaining long-term customer loyalty has become a significant concern for businesses in general, and particularly in the service industry (Gunawan, 2022). Ensuring strong and symbiotic relationships between the business and its customers is a key ingredient in maximising the organisation's competitive position thereby maximising income accruing within the organisation (Duri, 2026). In a study conducted by (Nwabekee et al., 2024), it was found that there is a need for a shift in the way customer relationship management is viewed. The focus should be shifted from empowering organizations to empowering customers. This is because empowered customers are more valuable to businesses as they have a better understanding of their needs and expectations. When businesses interact with such customers, they can gain valuable insights about their customers which can then be used to customize their products and services for mutual benefit.

Customer relationship management aims to help businesses concentrate their attention on highly profitable customers with a view to creating long lasting business relationships. Customer relationship management also aims to ensure customer retention and profitability (Yudhistira, 2019). The ultimate goal of customer relationship management is to guarantee that the organization retains customers, attracts new clients, promotes customer advocacy, and builds customer loyalty by ensuring that all customers are satisfied with the products and services offered (Lappeman et al., 2022). Various strategies can be implemented involving both front end and back-end interventions to aid in creating sustainable long-term customer relationships. According to Rosário and Casaca, (2023) firms have realised that holding onto current customers has more advantages in the long run as compared to continuously seeking new customers within the business. Research found out that long term loyal customers are more beneficial in more ways than one as compared to walk in customers (Rîpa, 2022; Rosário & Casaca, 2023; Wong, 2014). On the one hand long term loyal customers assures the firm of repeat business as long as their needs and requirements are met. However, more importantly these repeat patrons are more probable to spread the good news about the firm's business and or its products and services to their community, and network commonly referred to as brand evangelism or advocacy. Brand evangelism obviously becomes a source of competitive advantage for the businesses who take good care of their customers (Y. Zhao et al., 2022).

Another important purpose of customer relationship management is to clearly identify who are the firms' primary customers and understand their needs and the products or services they require the most. This will help guide a company or business in selecting the best pricing and business models to maximize profits. Customer relationship management aims to create value for customers and manage complex

relationships by adapting the firm's offerings and communication strategies to meet the needs of key clients. In order to come up with an effective customer relationship management strategy, the organization must also establish transparent communication with customers. (Angeloska-dichovska, 2018).

Advantages of Having a CRM Database for the Business.

There are many reasons and advantages of maintaining a good customer relationship management database for the business. One of the advantages of having an efficient customer relationship management database is that when implemented with the right commitment, skill and zeal, customer relationship management can add significant value to the business operations. This is in accordance to Khalid (Castaldo, 2024; Grewal et al., 2022; Shanmugam et al., 2023). Amongst other benefits, an efficient and up to date customer relationship management database helps in analysing the greatest stream of customer proceeds and the cost of data in order to detect current and future high-value customers. In accordance to (Elebe & Imediegwu, 2024; Hilman & Kaliappen, 2014; Homburg & Tischer, 2023) identifying potential future customers helps the organizations plan and forecast its financial foreplay so that realistic goals and targets can be set by management. This practice will also help the organization predict the future behaviour of the market and the products that are likely to increase in demand, thereby fostering focus in sale volume and high revenue generating activities. Another important advantage of having a reliable customer relationship management database is to create and target direct marketing efforts. Understanding your customer emanates from having a customer relationship management database which is clear and easy to understand, and this in turn helps the marketing team to direct their energy towards high potential customers or customers with similar traits so as to widen the customer base. As stipulated by

(Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021) in his study of marketing efficiency, directing the efforts of the marketing team towards the clients who are most likely to buy will definitely lead to high efficiency in the operations of the marketing team, and consequently generate extra revenue.

Capturing relevant product and service behaviour is another advantage of having an efficient customer relationship management system. Using the customer relationship management system, it is easier for the organization to identify the key products and services mostly required by the majority of the customers. (Zheng et al., 2022) noted that this activity will definitely enhance the business to have the capacity to focus and be innovative on the products and services of high value to the organizations. These products and services will be offered on a frequent basis and thus the business always has to ensure they never run out of stock. A clear and efficient customer relationship management database may also assist in creating new products distribution channels. The data and information contained within the system can be used to foster decision making in terms of which products are required where and by who. This will aid business operations and expansion where the need to expand the business through opening new centres arises. Thus, the customer relationship management data base can act as a centre and source of effective market research. Using a customer relationship management database as a market research tool can enhance fast decision making, while saving the organization thousands of dollars (Neumark, 2018).

Challenges of CRM Systems within the Marketing Sector.

Customer relationship management systems entail the collection and consolidation of various information concerning customers (Hu & Basiglio, 2024; Mohamad et al., 2014; Oliva, 2022). Having a robust customer relationship

management system enables firms to create targeted marketing strategies that meet individual customer needs (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2024). Issues of privacy and confidentiality are important issues that need to be revised in line with best practice. Proper corporate governance must be exercised so that this information is kept in strict confidence and not allowed to be passed onto third parties without the customer's consent or knowledge (Chaudhry & Yousaf, 2018). The customer database contains a wealth of information regarding private consumers and or business consumers. Safeguarding these databases through different authorisation levels such as password protection and unique encryption keys are necessary steps in maintaining the confidentiality of the customer-firm relationship (Liu & Chen, 2023). Once this information falls into wrong hands then issues of concern such as business integrity and possible litigation come into play (Tuominen et al., 2023).

Tuominen et al., (2023) insinuated that other factors that the firm needs to guard against relate to unfair treatment of customers through practices such as discounting, differential pricing or running of sales promotions and campaigns. At its core, customer relationship management involves treating customers differently, depending on the individual characteristics of the person you're dealing with, state of the business and casual relationship with the customer. This is because different customers have different needs and as such they need to be treated in a different way (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020). In addition, customers' levels of purchases with businesses are situational and vary from one customer to another. This calls for differential attention from the business. Naturally some customers will be treated more favourably than others. This is the foundation of a customer relationship management ecosystem. By treating customers differently, it is easier for the firm to design individualised marketing strategies and design products specific to a given customer. Increasing share of the

wallet through upselling and product development initiatives are easier to implement where customers are clearly demarcated. However, viewed from the customer's perspective this can create negative attitudes and negative perceptions towards the business (Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021). The misinterpretation of customer relationship management processes and ambiguity surrounding good business to customer relationships have been addressed by (Naru et al., 2024).

Through the application and use of social media platforms, customers may form digital communities where they exchange content and reviews regarding certain products they use in their daily lives. These communities may be used in product validation amongst customers and this may work to the advantage or disadvantage of the business. In doing so they may unknowingly share sensitive information such as preferential pricing they might have benefited from and or the nature of certain products and services which might have satisfied them. (Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021) pointed out that if another customer who bought the same product but didn't enjoy the same special price and comes across this information, they may feel ill-treated and less valued by the business and its representatives. Cases of dissatisfaction will arise. The reaction of a customer may vary from one situation to another but the key thing is that the firm has little control over how the customer will react. In such situations word of mouth becomes very potent in spreading sensitive information (Ngo et al., 2024). A special case which can be used to unpack this situation is that of Amazon. In April 2012, Amazon ran a promotion on DVD's targeting various customers from different horizons of the planet earth. Because of the nature of the promotion some customers discovered that they were paying more while others paid less for the same product. Consequently, this did not sit well with those who paid a higher price. Resolving this matter was a huge public relations nightmare for the

company (Ajiva et al., 2024). In implementing a customer relationship management system business need to be aware that due to the way such systems are set up, issues related to customer dissatisfaction are unavoidable. However, the real challenge facing businesses is to come up with effective service recovery processes to minimise customer complaints. It's the duty of the firm to be aware of these negative perceptions beforehand and the likely consequences should problems occur. The firm should anticipate the likely reaction of the market and more importantly be in a position to manage the "oil stains" when they arise.

Another area which can negatively affect the business occurs where the customer feels that the information they have supplied is being manipulated to the disadvantage of the customer. If the relationship is no longer on an equal footing, they may withhold certain information deliberately or worse still they may terminate the relationship (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020). Unsatisfied customers may even distort data supplied or file legal or illegal motions against the firm or a brand, further hurting the firms marketing initiatives (Helmold, 2022). This places huge responsibilities on the firm to seriously consider matters of confidentiality, trust and ethics uppermost in their customer relationship management strategies. Anything short of this can be counterproductive to the firm – customer relationships (C. Y. Lee, 2019).

Although customer relationship management technology has advanced, without proper management, these systems can easily become a mere database for storing customer information, Yudhistira,(2019). (Kalaiyarasan et al., 2023) and (Ijomah et al., 2024) insisted that the customer profile data needs to be captured correctly and stored properly so that it is easily accessible. The data also needs to be stored in a format that is unique for the organization, but very easily retrievable, usable and adaptable to the employees of the organization. Integration is important so that

different data sets speak with each other so that there is seamless utilisation of the information. Challenges will arise if the customer data is stored in “silos” meaning that there is no integration between finance, sales, marketing and operations data. When implementing a customer relationship management strategy, putting all the pieces together can be a significant challenge for the firm (Rantung et al., 2023). Customers typically expect to communicate with a company through multiple channels and to have a seamless interaction across these channels. The most popular channels are typically Web chat and mobile apps. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are also increasingly being used.

Nexus between CRM, Customer Retention and Customer Loyalty.

According to Fook & Dastane (2021), companies that utilize customer relationship management technology are 90% more likely to develop customer loyalty and customer retention practices for the benefit of the business. CRM has gained attention as a result of the benefits that it can provide to both customers and businesses (Das et al., 2018).

The term customer relationship management became widely used during the late 1990s. Since then, customer relationship management practitioners and researchers have passionately exchanged ideas and experiences in both academic and corporate communities (Suteja & Juhana, 2026). There is no denying the fact that customer relationship management has been and continues to be a subject of great interest for both academics and practitioners (Das et al., 2018).

While some see customer relationship management as a management approach that manages relationships with key customers, with a particular emphasis on turning customer relationships into practical application, others see it as a

management approach that seeks to understand a company's customers (Taherdoost, 2023). This discipline is a sophisticated system of interactive procedures that seeks to strike the ideal balance between business investments and meeting customer needs in order to maximize profit (Agrawal, 2020).

In a study on this subject by Farida & Jannah, (2022) the author buttressed this position by highlighting that customer relationship management is an investment that can enhance customer loyalty and improve an organization's competitive position. Moreover, he went further and established a significant connection between customer relationship management and customer loyalty. Nethanani et al., (2024) define the primary goal of customer relationship management as gathering and organizing relevant customer data to provide efficient services. Customer relationship management is a crucial component of customer-centric marketing. According to Ivens et al., (2024), the primary objective of customer relationship management is to initiate and maintain long-term relationships with key profitable customers. Automotive customer relationship management software helps automakers with sales, marketing, and customer support (Tuominen et al., 2023). It allows dealerships to gather leads, manage multichannel sales operations, and strengthen relationships with customers. Customer relationship management is a widely used approach for managing a company's interactions with its customers.

According to Hollebeek et al., (2023), Customer relationship management involves creating, managing, and growing long-term relationships between a business and its key clients. From a marketing perspective, a business aims to improve customer behaviour and preference, which strengthens the relationship and increases the lifetime value of customers. This, in turn, boosts customer equity, retention, and marketing investment profit (Alonge et al., 2023).

Customer satisfaction can be measured by comparing product or service performance with customer expectations (Galdón-Salvador et al., 2024). Customer relationship management is often considered the key element for a business's long-term competitiveness and success (Agrawal, 2020). Therefore, researchers have studied the connection between customer relationship management, customer loyalty, and retention, with the studies conducted by Nyadzayo et al (2016) exploring the impact of customer relationship management on customer loyalty and retention.

Some studies have shown that effective customer relationship management practices can improve customer loyalty and satisfaction leading to increased purchasing behaviour. Customer retention and loyalty are considered critical customer relationship management goals, as they have a significant impact on short-term objectives like organizational profitability and performance. Research has also found that effective customer relationship management performance results in maximum customer loyalty and retention while reducing complaints. Moreover, a strong customer relationship system can influence both customer loyalty and retention.

Herhausen et al. (2019) proposed a framework model of customer loyalty, retention, and customer relationship management, which suggested that a positive attitude towards a company results in repeat business when it is subject to particular constraints and situations. Furthermore, an attitude-behaviour relationship results in even more loyalty behaviour. Customer loyalty is when a customer gives repeat business to a company and helps it in streamlining service delivery processes through regular interfaces and interactions. According to Gunawan (2022), customer loyalty is essential because it increases the frequency of purchases of current goods and services, encourages customers to buy additional goods, and makes them willing to pay more for goods because they like value-added services, lower operational costs

because they are familiar with the organization's service system, and promotes positive word-of-mouth advertising. In today's highly competitive market, companies must work harder than ever to win and maintain customer loyalty since it is no longer a given (Kurniawan et al., 2024). To retain existing customers, businesses use customer relationship management to provide high-quality after-sales services. Customers always have high expectations for the things they purchase, and businesses must live up to these expectations if they want to improve their customer service (Menidjel et al., 2019).

Customer Relationship Management and Its Implications on Customer Loyalty.

According to (Agrawal 2020), customer relationship management refers to organizational tactics, procedures, and information technologies that help a firm increase sales and meet customer requests. Therefore, customer relationship management is evaluated using a five-item scale. The current study's items for measuring customer relationship management include organizational strategies and procedures for enhancing corporate performance by satisfying customer needs (Cheng et al, 2019). Assemblers, assembly factories, dealers, and services are just a few of the numerous large and small firms that dominate Zimbabwe's complex and fiercely competitive automotive market. There are several companies operating in Zimbabwe's automotive sector, including AVM Africa, Tandem Limited, Motec Holdings, Willowvale Mazda Motor Industries, Toyota Zimbabwe, Croco Motors, AMTEC, AMC, ZIMOCO, Quest Motors, and Duly Holdings. Some other major players in this sector include Autoworld, Premier Auto, Scania the Tsapo Group, Zimplow and General Motors (USA) (Herman et al, 2020).

As non-tariff and tariff barriers have gradually been removed, both domestic and foreign markets in Zimbabwe have seen a rise in competition. In such a scenario,

it becomes essential for players in the automotive sector to understand the various components of relationship marketing that can impact their market share and overall success. As per (Tivatyi et al., 2022), the relationship that a business has with its customers is its most valuable asset.

Customers do not seem to be devoted to their neighbourhood auto dealers, and they notably want to look at vehicles online rather than going to the dealership. This is supported by researches done by (Fook & Dastane, 2021; K. W. Lee et al., 2017) which pointed out that in a customer life cycle, there is a period where a customer breaks out of the cycle and devote their loyalty to a new brand. Some researchers such as (Kan & Nasheel, 2019) found out that this is done in the automotive industry because customers are looking for a new sources of leisure, which can only be attained by a new brand. Another factor is when customers incidentally stop making repeat purchases or having their vehicles serviced has been attributed to poor service quality (Rane et al., 2024). This is because workers have moved across borders to neighbouring nations where workers are offered better pay and conducive working conditions, causing a brain drain in the automotive sector. However, while providing the same services, some vehicle dealers are having trouble keeping their devoted clientele, perhaps in part because they may not be very aware of their clients' needs and desires. According to (Alshurideh et al., 2023) businesses with effective customer relationship management systems in place will be better able to maintain their current clientele and business ties and will experience substantially fewer negative effects from the current economic crisis. The automotive sector was not exempt from the effects of the global financial crisis, particularly in Zimbabwe where buyers were choosing cheap grey imports from Japan as alternatives to the showroom's brand-new, zero-mileage car (Ibhadode, 2024). Cheap grey imports are second hand or used

vehicles that do not pass the carbon emissions regulations in Japan or have reached a certain mileage threshold and are shipped to Zimbabwe as an alternative market due to relaxed carbon laws and mileage regulations in the recipient country. Due to this, local vehicle dealers in Zimbabwe were forced to compete for a small number of the most desirable clients, who might have a higher lifetime value.

According to Khaliqe et al. (2015), a 5% improvement in customer relationship management can lead to a 25% to 75% increase in customer loyalty in the automobile industry. Additionally, Khan et al. (2020) reported that it costs over five times more to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing one. With loyal customers, companies can increase revenue, as loyal customers are less sensitive to price, and premiums for loyal customers in the personal insurance industry increase by 8% annually (Boozary et al., 2025; Abdullateef and Salleh, 2013). Loyal customers are also more likely to make frequent purchases, try the company's other products or services, and refer new customers to the company. Furthermore, customer loyalty serves as a foundation for a company's marketing strategy, its efforts to improve relationship quality, and its value creation program. Herhausen et al. (2019) introduced the concept of commitment to loyalty studies and concluded that commitment to customer relationship management is necessary to determine loyalty. The study aims to develop a conceptual framework of customer relationship management on customer commitment and loyalty in the automobile sector (Khneyzer et al., 2024).

The role of customer relationship management in the automobile industry is highly important. With the automobile sector growing exponentially, especially the four-wheeler sector, there is a huge market for maintenance of two-wheelers. Today, automobile companies have realized the significance of having authorized after-sales service networks, and they no longer consider after-sales service as a cost. However,

the unorganized segment is still favored for servicing as opposed to the company-authorized segment of the after-sales service sector. This research aims to understand the current use and role of customer relationship management in the two-wheeler industry, specifically in the sales and after-sales service area, and also aims to find the reasons why customers prefer the unorganized ones for the after-sale service of their two-wheelers. Moreover, the research has formulated and suggested customer relationship management strategies to be followed by the two-wheeler companies, which would allow the companies to capture and maintain customer loyalty for the untapped customers for after-sales service.

Customer relationship management refers to how a company communicates and interacts with its highly profitable customers. Knowledge management is essential for managing customer relationships, as it helps to improve and consistently deliver excellent services to clients (Alshurideh et al., 2023; Rîpa, 2022). To better understand customers on this concept it is pertinent to consider three key components: the customer, the relationship, and their management. Acquiring, retaining, and expanding customer base is a vital part of any business (Afroz & Moury, 2024). The automobile industry is currently focusing on quality of services provided and customer loyalty to maintain a strong relationship with customers through effective customer retention strategies (Wu, 2022).

The theory of relationship marketing suggests that building strong relationships with customers through keeping them highly satisfied is key to gaining their long-term commitment and loyalty. This level of loyalty offers the business numerous advantages to the business such as repeat business, customer referrals and brand evangelism.

Customer relationship management is an effective management strategy that helps to attract and retain customers by building strong relationships with them and with suppliers. It not only maximizes customer satisfaction but also helps to gain customer loyalty, which is an intangible resource that can give organizations a competitive advantage. According to (Castaldo, 2024), effective use of organizational resources is one of the core sources of competitive advantage.

Therefore, it can be hypothesized that customer relationship management if properly executed leads to satisfied customers who in turn lead to a loyal customer base. By effectively managing customer relationships organizations can enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction, resulting in long-term relationships between companies and their customers.

Customer Acquisition and Customer Retention as Key Pillars of Organizational Success.

Customer acquisition marks a good starting point in any customer retention strategy for the business or sales personnel to understand what experience or expectation the customer wants from the product or service (Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Jones et al., 2013). Customer acquisition is also important for the business to know which features/products/services have the high likelihood of retaining a customer and which features, services and or products tend to consistently acquire a new customer. Technically speaking customer retention and acquisition expectations differ from client to client and from organization to organizations and they need to be understood as such (Kridiawan & Wang, 2023 Hamilton et al., 2017). According to (Salamah et al., 2022), customer acquisition is the process of identifying profitable customers, while customer retention is when a business holds onto its profitable customers through meeting their expectations and turn them into long term business

partners. A successful customer retention strategy involves nurturing a profitable relationship between the customer and the organization. It is common these days for organisations to acquire customers that they can satisfy best but in a profitable manner (Naru et al., 2024). This specialized marketing strategy tends to become more effective because the sales team puts all their effort in pushing for the common agenda. Before companies add new features that may be expensive and thus increase the cost of acquiring a product it is critical that they add the right features as suggested by their customers, present and potential. Studies have shown that increasing features at times reduces customer satisfaction levels. Some added features may not be exactly what the customer wants especially added without their involvement. This is commonly referred to as “feature fatigue”, as written about by (Hamilton RM et al., 2017). In this regard it is important for the business to predict the return on investment (ROI) on any value-added features before they are included to the catalogue or business portfolio (Felix & Rembulan, 2023).

To expand on this, Hamilton et al., (2017) gave an example of a Theme Park. In his example, if new features and benefits are added by the business, (either on the menu or price list of catalogues) the choice of what to experience may be so varied that a customer may not have sufficient time to experience everything. The disadvantage is that, sometimes some products may not be required leading to failure of their uptake ad ultimately business failure. Secondly, adding new features may attract more people thereby increasing the level of traffic in a business. Sometimes this level of inflow of customers does not tally enough with the increased rate of customer acquisition, resulting in staff burnout and ultimately bad customer care. This may defeat the original objective of adding new features to the theme park.

Another example is of a hotel. The most important aspects to consider is to unveil the notion that if new amenities are added does this attract newer clients or retain more of existing customers (Barusman et al., 2019; Thejasree et al., 2024). Evidence put forward by (Felix & Rembulan, 2023) suggests that in practice this is not the case all the time. Furthermore, these researchers insinuated that it is vital for the firm to understand its core product and its key attributes and levels. Any additions must be aligned to either retain existing clients or attract new clients or better still perform both functions (Rust et al., 2019). In the absence of this intelligence adding new features becomes akin to a game of chance as stipulated by (Kazancoglu et al., 2026). The use of surveys, customer engagement platforms and conjoint analysis may address this issue and assist businesses in making the right call in their customer attraction initiatives. However, for customer retention strategies firms may need to adopt longitudinal and field studies and also use of the Net Promoter Score (Hariguna & Ruangkanjanases, 2024; Imenda & Mpundu, 2025; Thomson DV et al., 2005) to help them in making the right call.

Customer Retention as a Key Driver of Business Growth.

Customer retention is about continuity in transactions between a business and its customer base. Managing customer behaviours from a business standpoint leads to customer retention, which comes from a series of efforts to build long-term relationships with customers (Fook & Dastane, 2021; Sağlam & Montaser, 2021; Yudhistira, 2019). It would help if the organization or firm closely watch over its crucial customers' needs, take their suggestions and work on them (Dhasan & Aryupong, 2019). According to (Bathaee, 2021) building customer relationships also includes making them feel more valued, in a bid to extend the longevity of the business relationship with the core customers. Extending this analysis brings one to the

definition of customer retention proposed by (Chauhan et al., 2022; Chi et al., 2024; Tirkkonen, 2025) which outlines customer retention as, “Customer retention is the customer continuing to transact with the firm”. These transactions can be contractual for example a newspaper subscription where a customer can terminate the subscription with the firm fully aware. Alternatively, the transaction can be non-contractual where the customer just decides to take their business elsewhere without informing the company (Naru & Kumar, 2020). Another interesting definition is provided by (Gunawan, 2022; Hu & Basiglio, 2024; Saks, 2024) where they define customer retention as efforts made by the firm to prevent customers from going to the competition. Another definition is provided by (Akinbode et al., 2023 and Chauhan et al., 2022), who define customer retention as ways or strategies in which firms treat existing customers so that they continue doing business with them in the long-run. There are however multiple definitions but they all carry a common theme. What is common in these definitions is that the onus is on the business to deliberately put in place measures to prevent existing customers from going to the competition. By doing so the customer must do business with a firm over an extended period of time. This is what forms the basis of customer retention.

According to research conducted by Naru & Kumar (2020) and Tunjar, (2024), there is a strong positive correlation between customer retention, customer satisfaction, and profit maximization. This research concluded that managers need to continuously measure customer satisfaction levels and create programs to exceed customer expectations (Elebe & Imediegwu, 2024). These programs aim to improve the overall customer experience at all touchpoints of the business.

Scholars and stakeholders may be keen to ask, what is the purpose of measuring customer retention? Firstly and by far most, measuring customer retention

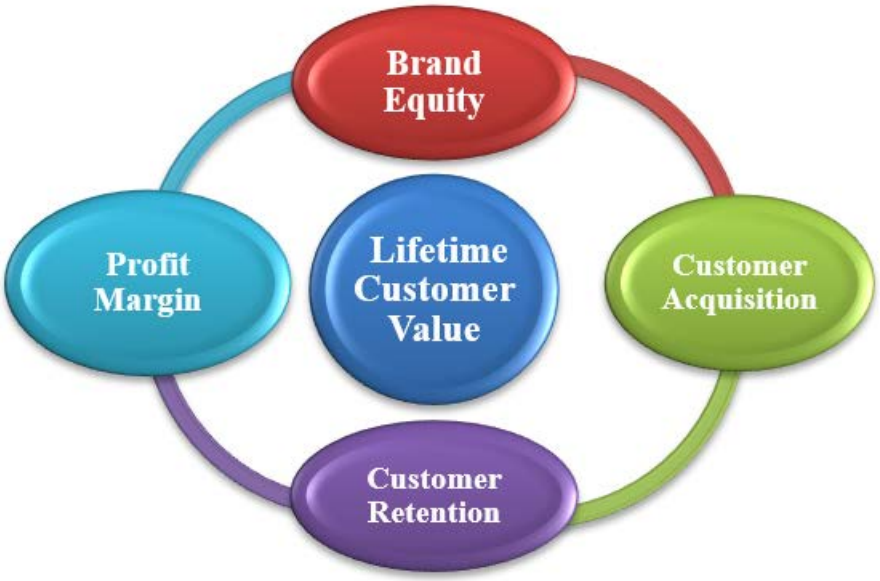
is a key element in calculating the lifetime customer value (LCV) and customer equity (CE) as depicted by (Alapján- et al., 2020). Secondly but not least, measuring customer retention is important because customer retention determines and affects business profitability and value, hence the need to closely monitor and constantly measure it. It therefore can be used to predict business growth and performance for a specified stipulated period (Poturak et al., 2022). Thirdly measuring retention rates over time is a good indicator of a business's going concern status. Finally, measuring retention is important in that as Peter Drucker (1985) said, you measure what you treasure, hence business owners and management are always keen to know the direction of the business with the desire to understand the nature of their livelihood in the next five to ten years (Kan & Nasheel, 2019). (Gunasekara et al., 2020) expressed the importance of customer retention strategies and pointed out that businesses should try by all means at all cost to avoid churn which is the opposite of retention. This occurs when a customer is unsatisfied with the products and services and when one stops transacting with the firm. Businesses should try as much as possible to reduce churn because with its existence business profits will come to halt (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020). This will in turn threaten the long-term survival and viability of the business.

According to (O. Akaeze & Shaibu Akaeze, 2019) and (Naru & Kumar, 2020) there are many strategies that can be applied to preserve customer loyalty while enhancing customer retention within the business. The researchers pointed out that some of the strategies which can be used include but are not limited to good customer care, customer feedback on new products and running of promotions on long term consistent customers. According to Castaldo, (2024), customer retention is critical to a business's success, as it is closely linked to lifetime customer value (LCV). This

study highlights that the main aspect of the LCV concept is the monetary value attributed to customers' purchases, which holds significant importance for any business. Apart from this, customer satisfaction and well-being are also key. Customer lifetime value is a measure that is driven by three factors: customer retention rates, acquisition rates, and firm profitability. According to Nyamweya (2022), lifetime customer value (LCV) is the net present value of the long-term profit contributions made by a customer to a business. LCV can help determine if a customer is worth pursuing for future business opportunities, particularly by the marketing team (Agarwal & Gupta, 2024). Alternatively, (Koch et al., 2023; Nethanani et al., 2024; Suteja & Juhana, 2026) suggest that LCV can also be used as a way to value a company.

Figure 2.1

The Customer Lifetime Value as Adopted from Stahl (2011)



Ascarza et al., (2017) suggested that most firms need to manage customer relationships so that customer equity increases as it is widely evident that most firms struggle in this area. Customer retention is a critical part of the customer lifetime value.

In accordance to Chauhan et al., (2022) and Kumar et al., (2022) it has been shown that approximately eighty-five percent of customers feel that firms can do more to retain them. Research has also found out that forty-nine percent of senior managers and top executives are not happy with their retention efforts while at the same time admitting that customer retention is a key priority in their organisations (Forbes Insights, 2014). Customer retention is crucial for businesses as studies by Gao et al., (2023) and Alshurideh, (2024) have revealed that it is more expensive to acquire a new customer compared to retaining an existing one. Retaining customers is a strategic necessity for business survival since research indicates that it costs five times more to win a new customer than it does to keep an existing one, (Shaikh et al., 2024).

Two basic conditions must be present for firms to retain customers, according to Poturak et al., (2022) and (Akıl & Ungan, 2022). These conditions are customer satisfaction and improved quality of products or services. Once these conditions are met, customers will reward the firm by giving it repeat business and in addition, referral business. However, exceeding customer expectations is usually difficult, as human needs are insatiable (Simanjuntak et al., 2020).

In the airline industry, firms use various strategies to retain customers. The most common of these strategies is the introduction of loyalty programs, such as frequent flyer programs (Naeem & Abdul Sami, 2020). Other airlines engage their customers continuously to tailor-make products and services that meet their needs (Naeem & Abdul Sami, 2020).

Customer relationship management on its own is a customer retention philosophy (Fernando et al., 2023). Through the analysis and compilation of massive amounts of data, firms get to understand their customer needs better. By so doing they

customise their service and product offerings in line with customer expectations (Chi et al., 2024). “This technique is crucial in retaining customers, as without the existence of knowledge in regards of customers, it is difficult to understand, anticipate and adapt with the customer needs and wants” (Shukla, 2013). Customer relationship management encompasses the process of creating long term relationships while moving elsewhere for an existing customer who has had a lengthy relationship with the business becomes more difficult and expensive due to high switching costs as the customer is forced to create a new relationship with a new supplier (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021).

The Efficacy of Customer Acquisition in Retaining Customers.

One of the offshoots of a successful customer acquisition and client preservation strategy is client satisfaction and customer loyalty. (Naru & Kumar, 2020) proposed that besides offering products that meet customer expectations, firms must show concern, empathy, responsiveness and competency when dealing with their customers. The presence of these qualities in customer facing personnel is an added advantage in customer retention efforts. Furthermore, and according to (Buhalis & Moldavska, 2022; Lappeman et al., 2022; Santouridis & Tsachtani, 2015) a customer gets satisfied if they feel that the price they are paying is commensurate with the performance of the product and or services. Happy customers promote positive feedback and positive word of mouth (WOM) for a firm’s products as they tell their network about their pleasant experiences leading to referral business (M. T. Alshurideh et al., 2023; Scarff, 2017). A phenomenon that is commonly referred to as brand advocacy or brand evangelism.

Another important dimension of customer retention is service recovery. Despite the use of technology and automation in most processes the presence of human

beings in these processes is undeniable (Mazikana, 2023a; Mkhize, 2024; Sharma et al., 2022). Because people are involved this creates room for human-error, while it is also possible for machines to be prone to errors in coding, settings and system upgrades (Hariguna & Ruangkanjanases, 2024). It is important for a firm to have systems in place which are followed when dealing with dissatisfied customers (Poturak et al., 2022). When a concern is raised by the customer the ability of the firm to resolve the concern amicably can turn an unhappy customer into a happy one. In today's fast-paced world, negative feedback from dissatisfied customers can spread quickly through social media, damaging a company's reputation. To prevent this, it's crucial to implement effective service recovery strategies that satisfy customers and improve their perception of the business. Positive reviews and increased business opportunities can result from successful service recovery efforts, ultimately contributing to the company's profitability in a competitive market environment. (Kotler, 2017).

The second aspect on the customer retention journey involves employees. Their training and development in customer handling are crucial. This gives them the competencies and skills necessary to resolve customer queries with confidence, should problems arise (S. Khan et al., 2025; Kumar et al., 2022). The organisation should recruit the right people and coach and mentor them so that they don’t become company liabilities when dealing with customers especially the angry ones (Amirtha & Sivakumar, 2022; Kaondera et al., 2023). Trained and competent employees are well motivated and are accurate in dealing with issues that may arise during pitching to a new client and selling to an existing customer. Their level of motivation and job satisfaction has a ripple effect on superior customer service delivery, customer

retention and organisational profitability. These employees become brand ambassadors, an invaluable tool in any business.

As pointed out by various researchers ((Zheng et al., (2022); Sağlam & El MONTASER, (2021); Akaeze & Shaibu Akaeze, (2017); Sudžius, (2007)) it is important for organizations to understand what attracts new customers and what retains existing clients. Customer needs are different and how they are treated must also be different. The concept of “one size fits all” when dealing with customers does not work these days. This will render these organizations more competitive in the market place and possible foster business continuity. In doing so a few questions can be addressed so that the correct decisions are made (Chayira, (2025) and Hamilton, (2017)). The first issue of concern is to investigate the reasons for adding new and innovative products and services within a business. In the hospitality industry, with distinctive holiday destinations in place the business may be better off focusing on customer attraction strategies (Sayin, 2019). This is because of the nature of the product where customers may need to see testimonials, new services and products that enhance more utility. Because customers visit such places and enjoy themselves and go with little chance of coming back the priority for such businesses is to offer the best possible humane services that ensure customer satisfaction, business profitability as well as creation of business referrals. Research has shown that those firms that look after their employees well are rewarded with better services to customers and hence these organizations keep clients longer (Liu & Chen, 2023) and Gupta et al., 2005).

Another issue is to understand whether your competitors offer the same features or are becoming more innovative than you in the same industry (Adusei & Tweneboah-Koduah, 2019). According to (Adusei & Tweneboah-Koduah, 2019)

offering after sales services builds customer loyalty over time. This will ensure that the organization goes beyond just serving the client when they are around, but rather shows the client that the organizations care about them and their well-being and constantly thinks about new ways of satisfying the customer (Silva-Atencio, 2025). Bench marking against the best performing companies in your industry is important for any business as they design their products and services (Homburg & Tischer, 2023). However, the marketing team of a firm must also be aware of feature fatigue as explained earlier. Competitor comparisons are important where the need is to attract customers and switching costs are relatively low such as in the airline sector, leisure and hospitality sectors, and the fast-food industry (Anees et al., 2020). For existing customers, it may not be that effective as they have already experienced your products and services and hence, they understand its advantages and disadvantages.

Business to Business Services Marketing (B2B Marketing)

Business to business marketing is when a business sells its goods and services to another business. This process is slightly different from business to consumer commonly referred to as B2C marketing where the business is selling to individuals.

B2B selling is characterised by long term professional relationships, customisation of the service delivery process, deeper person to person relationships and multi-dimensional interactions (Helmold, 2022). Normally in B2B selling both the buyer and seller do business through more than one individual. The buying organisation or buyer will have a procurement management unit (PMU) which is normally staffed by professional procurement specialists. These bring different demands and expectations onto the table. It is thus imperative that the selling organisation is up to the task and also has a professional team that looks at various aspects of the business relationship that will be enticing and exciting to the buying

organisation. A professional approach relating to product quality, performance, costings and aftersales commitments arrangements are a must. The seller's capacity to deliver is paramount (Grewal et al., 2022; Österle et al., 2024).

As diagrammatically depicted in figure 2.2, the marketing process model has three phases. These are prospecting, purchasing and consumption phase. Each phase has distinct expectations as far as the customer is concerned and this places serious obligations on the part of the seller.

In the prospecting phase the seller needs to come up with a go-to-market strategy that shows that s/he has a product offering or a solution to the market. This requires the seller to have a brand and a promise. The product or service offering must be tempting and the potential customers must see it as a solution to the challenges that they are facing. The selling organization can introduce various measures to market the product. Some of these include sales promotions, advertising, digital marketing initiatives, and product trials and so on. The AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action) is a recommended business tool that can be deployed in taking the business to the market (Rodriguez & Peterson, 2024).

Figure 2.2

Phases of the B2B Marketing Process. Adopted from Ojasalo & Ojasalo (2014).



In the purchasing phase the selling organization, in this case Platinum Motors is expected to convert interest into a tangible desire. Brand promise takes center stage as Platinum Motors needs to show that it has solutions to the buyer's challenges. Technical aspects of the product, aftersales support issues and relevance and brand equity should be clearly explained to the buying organization so that the Action part in the AIDA model as explained above is enhanced.

Last but not least in importance is the Consumption Phase. This is a phase that requires Platinum Motors Harare Branch personnel to access repurchase decisions and intentions from customers. Added onto this is the creation and consolidation of long-term relationships through delivery especially by the service provider. Kotler (2017) refers to this stage as the "moment of truth". This is the stage when the buyer starts using the product. It is important at this stage to ensure that the performance of

the product meets and or exceeds customer expectations, Rastogi et al (2023). It also needs to be reinforced that at this stage both the buyer and the seller are getting to know each other so initial impressions will create long lasting memories if handled properly. Platinum Motors Harare branch should step up at this stage as its very easy for the customer to defect if the initial interactions are not satisfactory to the customer (Hu & Basiglio, 2024; Kazancoglu et al., 2026).

The creation of mutually beneficial business relationships is key during the Consumption Phase. It is important for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to deploy various strategies to engage the customer fully. Personal selling remains critical but other than this social media and taking the customer to events such as dinners, golfing events and any other engagements that solidify the relationship will be very pertinent. In B2B marketing each customer is a separate entity with personalized needs. The “one jacket fits all” syndrome is not recommended in this type of relationship as customer needs vary (Mutinda et al., 2026).

From the foregoing it is clear that customer acquisition and retention is a demanding and thorough process that takes time, skill and initiative (Abbas et al., 2023). For an automobile dealership that follows a 3S model such as Platinum Motors Harare Branch it means that the business is literally “fighting” on three fronts i.e. Selling equipment/new vehicles, selling labour through the provision of workshop services and finally selling spares.

Points of interaction with customers are thus numerous and varied and it is imperative that customer facing personnel are well equipped to handle the demands of discerning customers. Throughout this study there is ample evidence that generally customers are not happy with the level of service delivery offered by Platinum Motors

Harare Branch. So once a customer has been acquired, customer retention requires concerted efforts to ensure repeat business and sustainable business performance. (Hajar et al., 2022) refers to the co-creation of value between the customer and the business in the interest of cementing win-win profitable long-term business relationships. Satisfied customers become brand ambassadors and brand evangelists who speak well about a business in the absence of the business's representatives, (Manyanga et al., 2022). During the customer acquisition process, prospecting is key. Berkovi (2014) came up with what he referred to as the 4P's of prospecting model as depicted below-

Figure 2.3

The 4 P's of Prospecting Model. Adopted from Berkovi (2014)



The key take-away from the 4 P's model is that it demonstrates the core elements of a successful prospecting strategy. These are Planning, Preparation, Persistence and Patience.

Planning requires one to have a way of going around getting what you want. This is tantamount to coming up with a game-plan (Kannan, 2024). During this phase

one needs to know which potential customers are to be targeted and more importantly by who in the organization. The How part is also critical. The sales executive team are expected to have carried out a background check on potential customers. They need to know in advance all customer details such as, the type of business and industry the potential client is in, who makes up the buying unit, who are the key decision-makers in the buying unit and the organization at large, turnover levels, organizational pain point and so on. The last one is key as it allows the seller to come up with a value proposition that provides a solution to the buyer. Normally this stage is undertaken after “disqualifying” other prospects who may not be ready as far as readiness to buy is concerned.

The next stage is Preparation. This is an extension of planning as more pertinent information regarding the potential client is gathered. Consulting with colleagues is important during the information gathering stage. Once the selling organization is ready an appointment is made to go and pitch for business. This may involve preparing a power point presentation and taking questions during the presentation. For clarity and competitive advantage purposes the presentation must be specific and targeted at addressing current pain points the buyer is facing, Berkovi (2014).

During the presentation stage it is critical to go to the meeting as a high-powered delegation. Where a fleet deal is being negotiated it is wise to include senior personnel such as the Chief Executive Officer and other relevant personnel such as Directors. This shows seriousness and a willingness to close all matters at a strategic level, Mujakachi (2023). This is best practice in the motor trade, Andersen Consulting, (2022).

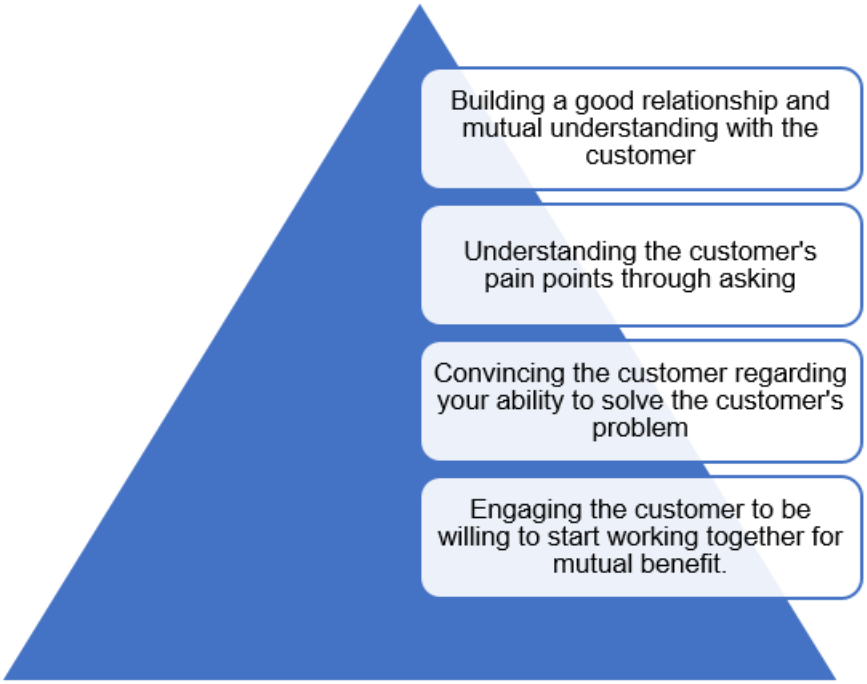
After planning and preparation, the next stage is Patience. As they say, patience is a virtue. The seller needs to know that strong and lasting relationships are built over a period of time, Berkovi (2014). The seller needs to do less talking and allow the buyer to be in control of deliberations and must not feel like being pushed into taking unfavorable positions. The buyer must also be given the opportunity to air their concerns and fears. This is important as it creates the foundation of a good relationship, Mujakachi (2023).

The final stage in the 4 P's prospecting model is Persistence. It's not always rosy. Things can turn from bad to worse at very short notice and without anyone noticing. The buyer should have a contingency plan in place that can be deployed should things not go according to plan. By way of an example, it is common practice in the motor industry to have courtesy vehicles available at any given time. These are deployed to assist clients should their vehicle fail to come out of the workshop in time due to prolonged repairs or shortage of spares and so on. A courtesy vehicle is normally allocated to a customer to minimize any inconvenience the absence of their vehicle might cause.

In addition, persistence requires all parties especially the selling organization to keep everyone interested in creating a long-term business relationship. The buyer should at every stage feel that they are benefiting from the relationship. They should feel that their pain points are at last being addressed by going into a business relationship with your organization (Brennan et al., 2024).

Figure 2.4

Core Skills and Actions Required when Selling to B2B Markets. Adopted from Ojasalo & Ojasalo (2010)



According to Shoultz & Doer (2014) a competent sales executive is good at three things, namely Connect, Convince and Collaborate with the customer. Such sales executives link or connect their goods and services with the customer's pain points, problems and challenges. In addition, they personally connect with their customers for better engagement and relationship building. They are also empathetic and, in all discussions, see things from the customer's perspective besides theirs as well. Because of this foundation they convince the customer that they have the best solution to tackle the customer's challenges. They use the mantra, we are the best, forget the rest. Finally, a good sales executive takes a long-term view in all situations. S/he realizes that collaboration is better than confrontation. As such the buyer and the

seller are essential partners for mutual long-term partnerships, Suleiman & Musnadi (2021).

Social Media as a Catalyst in Customer Acquisition.

Worldwide the use of social media has gone up significantly over the last 5 years. In the USA alone, it is estimated that its utilization since the Covid 19 era has gone up from 65% to 72.4%, Samet (2020). The use of social media has created networks in the global marketplace that are a vital source of information, Kotler (2017). It is easier to reach opinion leaders, consumers, traders and technocrats through this channel. Communication between businesses and consumers is enhanced through social media use. It is common for product validation to be carried out via social networks, Kotler (2017). Generally social media marketing is on the rise globally and in Zimbabwe internet penetration amongst the general populace is currently at 32.6% of which this figure rises to 73% for the urban population alone, Zimstats (2023). This creates fertile ground for social media marketing as the reach is ideal for information dissemination, Zimstats (2023). Social media is key in that it influences consumer buying behaviors and brand perceptions, Samet (2020).

Malik et al (2016) argued that people are attracted to social media use for various reasons. Some of these include information sharing, social influence, disclosure, affection and attention seeking. The use of social media is enhanced since consumers pass through various decision-making phases prior to making a purchase decision as illustrated in figure 2.7.

While social media is a powerful tool in today's communication channels it has its negative side has. In a study carried out in India by Kumar et al (2020) it was discovered that uncontrolled use of social media leads to anxiety, stress and social

media fatigue. Nevertheless, its advantages far outweigh its disadvantages if put to good use in responsible hands as it offers massive communication opportunities.

Figure 2.7

Consumer Decision-making Model. Adapted from Mason (2021)



The world is now in the post Covid era but fears associated with the pandemic still exist and persist. As a result, use of social media in communication and sharing information is expected to increase due to health and safety concerns and the fact that it can be used remotely, Root (2020).

These days consumers leverage on external influences in their purchase decision-making phases. They are thus likely to imitate other people and make decisions based on the interactions that happen within their networks. For an automobile dealership such as Platinum Motors Harare Branch, it is imperative to leverage on the growth and importance of social media to communicate more

effectively with its various stakeholders especially customers and employees. This will augur well for better business performance.

Social Media Marketing Implications.

As a result of the fore-going, there are various implications to marketing through the use of social media. The first one is that consumers are increasingly using social media in their purchase decisions. Social media is being extensively used in shopping and searching alternatives. One of the conclusions of a study carried out in India by Kumar et al (2020) was that social media was effective in building brand perceptions.

Secondly it can also be concluded that due to the power of societal influence there is a ripple effect once information is released by a business into the public domain, Kumar et al (2020). Information sharing and product validation are normally done on public platforms (Artha et al., 2022).

Thirdly from the study by Kumar et al (2020) it was discovered that when consumers have a problem with a product they have purchased it is common for them to seek for solutions through their social networks. Trusted sources are found on social media platforms and consumers prefer this route ahead of contacting the business first. The challenge for the business is to address such concerns with empathy. If a consumer feels that they have been short-changed they are likely to share their negative experience within their network. This may not be in the best interest of the business (Liu & Chen, 2023).

Fourthly, negative word of mouth can destroy a business if not handled properly. In real life situations it is generally accepted that bad news travels faster than good news. Businesses are therefore encouraged to handle the negative side of customer

experiences professionally, honestly and transparently (Madduma Walpola & Gunawardana, 2025). Anything else can lead to loss of business and brand erosion.

Fifthly businesses can increase brand value by putting together and sharing comments from satisfied customers on their public platforms. This enhances brand reputation and equity. Trip Advisor uses positive reviews from satisfied customers to build their brands in the hospitality and tourism sectors. This has been seen to be an effective strategy in this sector, Zheng (2022).

Social media can also be used with consumers through focus group discussions (FGD). In this case focus groups help create platforms and communities that discuss product attributes and any positive and or negative perceptions emanating from the brand. Any “oil stains” or negative feedback can be addressed this way with customers suggesting solutions. Focus group discussions can also be used to create testimonies of success stories which are shared through public platforms. This increases positive brand value, Zheng (2022).

Through social media, businesses can also build successful social network communities. This leads to highly interactive business-consumer interactions. Used properly consumers will see themselves as part of the business and for any challenges that the business faces while interfacing with customers the community will feel that they are part of the solution, Root (2020) . This minimizes tension and anxiety between the business and its core customers and leads to positive attitudinal changes amongst customers. The net result is that instead of an “us and them” mentality this changes to a ‘we’ mindset among the business’s customers. This mindset leads to the creation of credibility about the business. This can only augur well for the business going forward.

Furthermore, Sharma et al., (2022) and Emmons (2019) argues that businesses must continuously work on improving their relations with key constituencies such as customers. One way to do this is to constantly create new content and post on public platforms. This leads to more engagement and interest in the brand value. Traffic is also increased on the business's social media handles.

It is also imperative and more effective for a business to use social media to market a social purpose or cause. This refers to the business integrating its business definition to include corporate social responsibility issues. Corporate social responsibility initiatives make the business "likeable" in the community and a useful member of the community network, Kotler (2020). As mentioned elsewhere in this study it is incumbent upon businesses to minimize social media fatigue amongst its customers so that there is continuous engagement that's positive and interactive, Sulaiman (2020).

The Customer Life Cycle and the Birth of Customer Loyalty.

The main focus areas in the customer life cycle are acquisition and retention. However, in order for these two scenarios to manifest, the customers must be satisfied and secondly, they must be looked after by the business. Satisfied and happy customers give repeat business and can act as brand advocates and evangelists, advocating for the sale and maximization of the organization's services and products to their network on behalf of the organization (Mazikana, 2023b).

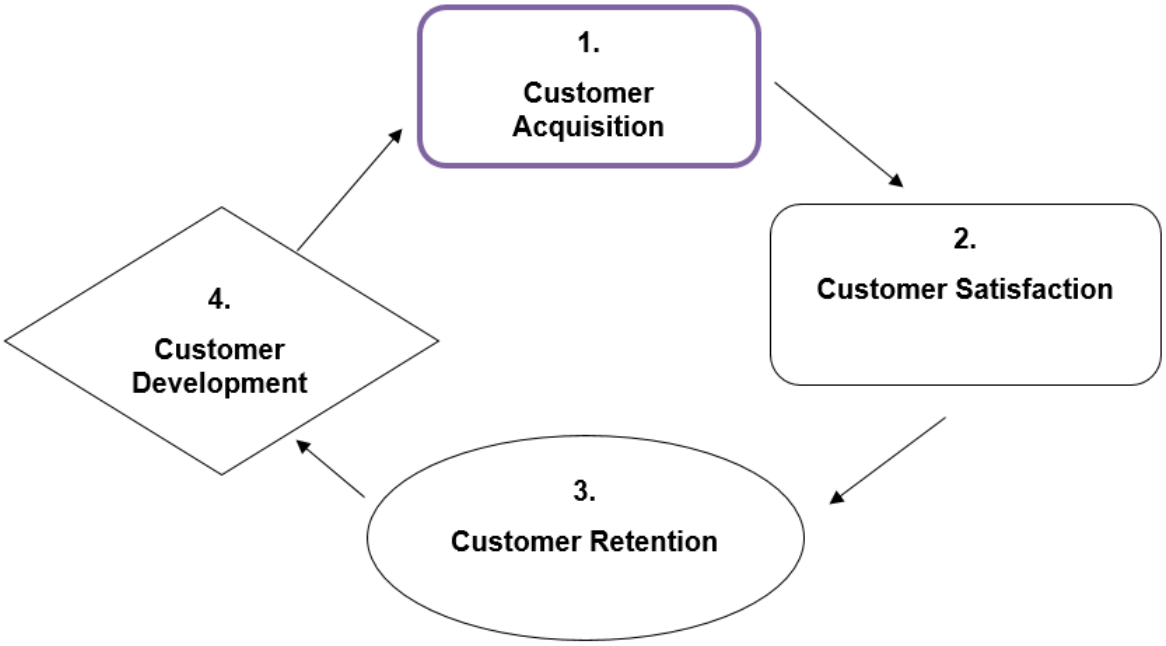
Before an organisation adds new features to a product it is important for the business to know whether the additions will attract new customers or retain existing customers. Oftentimes new features are costly to the business and if implemented without sufficient justification they may increase costs and lead to what is referred to

as feature fatigue (Ramírez-Durán et al., 2021). If implemented well customer acquisition and retention can be key pillars for organisational success.

Below is a presentation of the customer life cycle as adopted from the works of Das (2015):

Figure 2.8

The Customer Lifecycle as Adopted from the Works of Das (2015)



As depicted by the figure above, in the customer life cycle, initially the firm needs to acquire customers. This can be done either through head hunting, advertisements and or referrals from previous satisfied customers or other business development initiatives. To ensure the success of a business, it is vital to cater to the needs of its customers. This can be achieved by providing high-quality products and excellent customer service, as well as creating a pleasant work environment that offers customers a memorable experience. The nature of the business's products and services should be considered when determining the best way to satisfy customers. When these first stages are successfully finished and accomplished with maximum

effort, then a more complex level, which is the third level of customer retention comes into play. In order to retain customers some firms use binding contracts, where there is an agreement to supply the customer with products or service for a pre-determined period at an agreed price. However, not all clients seek to sign binding contracts, hence the business will have to find new strategies to bring back previous customers as well as attract new clients. Thus, at this stage this is where various organizations ought to become more aggressive in terms of their marketing, while being innovative at the same time. This is where issues of advertisements, discounts, customer gifting and running of short promotions takes precedence. Thus, as long as the organizations keeps retaining customers, the customers develop with the products and services offered over time. That is how stage four is completed. However, this process is circular and doesn't stop, as with changing times and levels of technological advancements in various sectors, organizations need to keep their customers on the loop to continue to co-exist in the corporate world (Jian & Yuantao, 2021).

Studies have highlighted the existence of attitudes and behaviours amongst customers buying motives that benefit one firm over its competitors (Alapján- et al., 2020). Businesses desire loyal customers because it is generally accepted that they give repeat business, they increase sales, they do not switch to the competition easily and finally they help promote your business through word of mouth (WOM). Customer loyalty is important for business because a satisfied customer is an asset to the business (Okeke et al., 2024). Based on the available evidence from Mkhize, (2024), there exists a correlation between customer loyalty and profitability. By catering to loyal customers, operational and marketing costs can be reduced (Gunawan, 2022). In addition, Poturak et al., (2022) suggested that loyal customers can serve as a valuable marketing tool for a business, as they can help spread the word about the brand

through word-of-mouth advertising. In addition, through regular patronage they know more about the firm's products and services and act as information sources to new customers. As a result of extensive studies (Gunawan, 2022; Hochstein et al., 2023; Inavolu, 2024; S. Khan et al., 2025) have suggested that a customer retention of five percent can lead to an increase in the firm's profitability of between twenty-five and one hundred and twenty-five percent.

Loyalty can be looked at from three angles. The attitudinal (allegiance and engagement), behavioural (consistent and repetitive purchases over a period of time), and composite which is an amalgamation of attitudinal plus behavioural plus brand preferences. The propensity to switch to a competing brand or service provider, frequency of purchase, how recent the purchase was made and finally the total amount spent per purchase and over time are all aspects of customer loyalty (Kaondera, et al., 2023). Satisfaction on its own is not enough to cause loyalty, (Shawa, 2025). For customer satisfaction to have a direct impact on loyalty, the customer must be highly satisfied. The level of satisfaction is closely related to the expectations set by the firm, which they have some control over. For example, a person who waits 20 minutes may be more satisfied than someone who only waited 10 minutes. This is because the first person was told it would take 30 minutes to be seen, while the second was told they would be seen straight away. This shows that time is an important factor in business. Setting the expectations influences the level of satisfaction. Decreased levels of satisfaction lead to a corresponding decrease in loyalty (Sachdeva et al., 2026).

Customer loyalty plays a crucial role in promoting repeat purchase behaviour and continued patronage. It has been observed that loyal customers tend to purchase additional goods from the same supplier or brand. They are less price sensitive as long as they are happy with the service level. Moreover, loyal customers indirectly

promote the business through positive word of mouth, while also expressing their dissatisfaction with the company instead of switching to a competitor. Customer loyalty is an important concept that can create stronger competitive advantages for the firm, improve its market share and revenue earning abilities, and is influenced by factors such as product/service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, value proposition, perception, and frequency of purchase.

According to (Poturak et al., 2022) and (Gladka et al., 2022) customer satisfaction is attitudinal and measures the customer's pre purchase expectations on product performance and their own subjective perceptions about performance. Fook & Dastane, (2021) and Mokha & Kumar, (2024) pointed out that satisfaction is the end result of behavioural loyalty. On the other hand, Malki et al., (2024) concluded that satisfaction has a direct relationship with loyalty. Mokha & Kumar, (2024) discovered that customer satisfaction is closely linked to reputation, and a happy customer, whose expectations are met, is more likely to recommend a product or service to others. Customer loyalty and satisfaction are mainly determined by trust. According to Sikombe, (2025), trust is the belief that those you depend on will meet your expectations. This definition is also consistent with the definition of trust in the automotive industry by Simanjuntak et al. (2020). Trust is a key factor in any buyer-seller relationship, regardless of the industry. It has a positive impact on the duration of the relationship (Majka, 2024) . Trust develops when certain conditions are met beforehand, such as partners in a relationship not exhibiting opportunistic or manipulative behaviour (Saks, 2024). Both parties must work towards a mutual win-win outcome and not take advantage of each other. Rastogi et al. (2023) and (Felix & Rembulan, 2023) concluded that the development of commitment and trust are the foundations of long-term business relationships.

Another important determinant of business growth, customer loyalty and continuity are commitments to the customers. According to (Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021) commitment arises where transacting parties continue in an enduring relationship through implicit or explicit feelings or bonding. Commitment also occurs when parties to the exchange feel that continuing with the relationship offers benefits to both parties. The continuity is grounded on emotion and conviction. Commitment leads to repurchase decisions and the desire to recommend the product or service to someone else. Researchers (Hur et al., 2010). (Munyoro & Sithole, 2023; Rachmad, 2023; Tijjang et al., 2023) noted that a strong commitment to a brand or product creates elements of resistance to change in the customer's mind. Any overtures from the competition will not sway the customer in another direction, however this is must not be taken advantage of by the organization or firm. All things held constant; a customer will continue in a relationship if they feel that switching has some obvious disadvantages. It has also been shown that where there is high commitment amongst the transacting partners there is an obligation to complain or voice displeasure when something goes wrong (Elebe & Imediegwu, 2024). This is typical where luxury goods and high-end products are involved. Walking away from the relationship is not an option (Mukutu, 2022).

Emotions play a crucial role in determining customer loyalty and purchasing behaviour in business. The impact of emotions on a customer's decision-making process is significant. When customers experience positive emotions, they tend to speak positively about their experience to others in their network, leading to a higher chance of customer loyalty. Additionally, research suggests that customers are willing to pay a higher price for a product when they experience strong positive emotions. However, negative emotions may provoke negative word-of-mouth and decrease the

likelihood of repurchasing a product. Perceptions of the customer about the firm and its corporate image and the firm's reputation have a strong bearing in creating consumer loyalty (Amirtha & Sivakumar, 2022). This tends to influence a customer's judgement about product perceptions on quality. Brand reputation has also been seen as having a strong influence on customer loyalty as stated by (Mkhize, 2024). A customer will go into a relationship with the firm if they feel that their perception of value will be valued and met. Furthermore, value is determined based on benefits to be gained and any sacrifices if any to be made. According to (Dhasan & Aryupong, 2019) value for the customer is derived if the trade-off between what the customer gives up such as money is equalled or exceeded by the benefit to be derived from the goods and services received from the firm. It has been observed that when customers perceive a high value in a product, they are more likely to make repeat purchases (Yu et al., 2022). This is because, when a customer feels that the products or services they are using provides more value than the competition, they tend to share positive feedback with their friends, family and acquaintances (Estoque et al., 2026). Nevertheless, the concept of value perception is subjective as customers are driven by various reasons and personal experiences and expectations regarding their understanding of value and things that they stand to gain (Andrade & Tumelero, 2022). It is believed that some clients purchase or pay for goods and services for different reasons. While some do it to add value to their life and livelihood activities, some do the shopping and purchases as a hobby for leisure. Whatever, the reason for purchases, it is important for firms and businesses to treat all customers as equals since they all bring business (Fook & Dastane, 2021).

An important factor in customer retention and enhancing the customer life cycle is the quality of goods and services provided by the firm. This refers to product

attributes that can satisfy implied needs. Research studies conducted by Sulaiman & Musnadi (2020), Zhang et al. (2023), and Jian & Yuantao (2021) have shown that there is a positive correlation between the quality of goods and services offered by a business and the level of customer satisfaction, as well as their perceptions of value. This is in line with the findings of (Amirtha & Sivakumar, 2022; Elebe & Imediegwu, 2024; Salamah et al., 2022). The provision of quality goods and services directly and indirectly influences current and future customer loyalty to the business, as noted by (ABEBE, 2024; Gubwe et al., 2025). Tuominen et al., (2023) concludes that customers who have a positive perception of quality are likely to have a favourable impression of the organization and continue doing business with the firm, leading to customer retention and development. High-quality goods and services also lead to positive word-of-mouth from satisfied customers, as found by Nyamweya (2022).

Customer Loyalty Programs as a Key Strategy in Customer Retention.

Customer Loyalty Programs (CLP) have been around for some time, and have been used by organizations of various backgrounds as a marketing strategy instrument in a bid to gain new customers as well as retain existing ones (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020). They are very commonly used in the airline business, banking and hospitality sectors as reported by Koch et al., (2023). Car rental companies and credit card companies are at times roped in for a more complete value proposition by most airline companies. In accordance to Suteja & Juhana, (2026) companies implement different customer loyalty programs so that they increase the customer's share of the wallet and hence business profitability. They are used to create stronger relationships with frequent customers in search of customer retention and repeat purchases which boost business. Historically, Chowdhury et al., (2024) refers to what he calls, the "best opportunity for growth" which is now referred to as the business pivotal opportunity by

(Dhasan & Aryupong, 2019). According to Abdullah et al., (2022), who divided the wallet share of the customer, this is basically the band stretching from twenty percent to eighty percent of the customers spend on goods and services in the middle band as highlighted on table 2.1:

Table 2.1

Share of Wallet Implications. From Duffy (1998)

Low	Less than 20% Share of the Customers Wallet	More effort required. Relook at value proposition. Add-ons necessary.
Medium	20% - 80% of the Customers share of the wallet.	High opportunity for growth. Customer already aware of your value proposition. Customer has some affinity for your products. They may be spreading their business to various suppliers. Opportunities for CRM initiatives to influence retention.

High	81% and more of the Customers Share of the wallet	Focus on Retention Customer has strategic considerations and may not be willing to give you 100% of their business.

Outside the middle band, it is difficult to get more business from a particular customer. Reasons are varied depending on the income level of the customer, capacity to pay, personal and business preferences as well as other stochastic variables (Ramírez-Durán et al., 2021). There is more effort required to increase business with the customer and secondly there may be other considerations within the customer's business model that the firm may have little control over. For customers giving you less than twenty percent it could be due to your value proposition and product attributes which may need alignment with customer expectations. More work needs to be done to get more business. And on the higher side the little that the customer is not buying from you may be due to the customer's strategic considerations. So, it is the middle band where opportunities to increase the customer's share of the wallet exists. It's less costly to increase share of the customer's wallet in this band. Another point to consider is that the customer already has an affinity for your products so what's required is to come up with a value proposition that meets customer expectations (Kuppelwieser et al., 2022).

Customer loyalty programs have been accepted as a motivational factor by travellers. Frequent flyer programs have been adopted by most airlines and are an integral part of the airline product value proposition (Naeem & Abdul Sami, 2020). In fact, some start-up airlines as well as automotive service providers such as taxis and

automotive trains have faced demise as a result of the power and ferocity of these frequent programs, GAO report (1996). Customer loyalty programs are more than a mere program. They are a business strategy implemented on the part of the firm. These strategies have been very effective in the travel industry but they can also be implemented outside of it. In the retail and fast-moving consumer goods industry some large retail chains have what are referred to as VIC (very important customer) or VIP cards (Kürşad Sayin & Karaman, 2020). Normally, discounts and various promotional offers are tied to these cards. The customer benefits from these offerings by purchasing through these card schemes at discounted prices or they are given freebies. However, the success of customer loyalty programs outside the travel industry have been minimal as reported by Duff (1998) and (Naru & Kumar, 2020) for various reasons but chief reason being the existence of thin margins on goods and services on offer such as the case within the retail industry.

According to the customer Loyalty Hierarchy, customer loyalty programs tend to create advocates and brand evangelists. Imenda & Mpundu, (2025) described these brand evangelists as the vast of satisfied customers who spread positive messages of your products, goods and or services to their networks. The result is enduring and stronger relationships between the firm and its customers. Due to this, customers feel obliged to do something about an unfavourable circumstance as opposed to defecting to the competition. As part of this program, they feel valued and if anything goes wrong with the service delivery, they take it upon themselves to contact the company and raise any complaints or suggestions (Fook & Dastane, 2021). Customer loyalty programs can reduce customer defections to competitors due to economic and psychological reasons (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017; OAG Frequent Flyer Magazine, 1997). Psychologically, the customer feels more connected to the brand and feels

engagement is the best way to address an annomaly, thus the customer becomes a part of the business, a partner as it were. As a result, they feel obligated to correct anything through talking to the company. Economically, the customer may feel that by defecting to the competition they will lose more due to their investment in the relationship. In short it requires effort to leave so that customer becomes a part of the solution (O. Akaeze & Shaibu Akaeze, 2017) (Rastogi et al., 2023). In conclusion, customer loyalty is a multifaceted construct with no universally accepted definition (Mashenene et al., 2019). However, the phenomenon has seven key determinants that are important in its understanding. Coming up with customer loyalty programs does not only encompass a marketing strategy but rather, a business strategy and the pursuit of customer loyalty is a journey and a process (Mokha & Kumar, 2024). Customer loyalty should be part of the firms' DNA for long term success, and in simple terms, a way of life. It should be noted that there is no one jacket fits all when it comes to coming up with an effective and efficient customer loyalty program. Each firm must analyse its circumstances and industry and then come up with a program that offers better value proposition to the customer in the desire to guarantee long term customer satisfaction.

The Customer Journey and Its Implications on Business Performance.

A customer journey covers a customer's interactions with all the firm's touchpoints as they access the firm's good and services. Tracing a customer's experiences across all these touchpoints helps a firm understand whether its service delivery processes are customer centric or not (Chiparo et al., 2022). Forester Research Inc. (2010) defined Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) as a set of documents that summarises all the processes and systems put in place by a firm to understand their relationships with customers better. These customer journey mapping

documents are also referred to as “touchpoint or moment of truth maps” by (Poturak et al., 2022). It needs to be mentioned that the more touchpoints a firm has the more complicated the customer journey becomes (Okeke et al., 2024). For example, in the automotive retail industry in which this research is based, you have the front office and then the back office. The front office looks at vehicles and equipment sales then the handover process which involves various personnel and touchpoints including installation of security systems and so on. The Sales Manager, Insurance Expert, Sales executives and the Marketing Officer are key players here. On the other hand, the back office comprises all aftersales support functions. These include the service department where the vehicle is first booked in for the first free service and while it is under the custody of the workshop various interactions take place between the service department and the customer. The Service Advisor (SA) is a key player here. Some of these include updates on whether the service is going on smoothly or not, if there are challenges what are they and then updates on when the vehicle will be ready for collection. More personnel are involved in all this. The touchpoints are thus numerous. Synchronising these for the benefit of a seamless customer experience can never be underestimated. The vehicle collection process also involves other players within the aftersales ecosystem such as the Service Advisor, Warranty Officer (WO) and ultimately the CLO (Customer Liaison Officer).

The whole reason behind understanding customer experiences is to ensure that customers are happy when interacting with a firm. Richardson (2010) further stipulates that due to the effects of customer journey mapping, all pain points are addressed and turned into pleasure points, so that as customers are happy when doing business with a firm, thus chances of getting repeat business are enhanced and positive word of mouth ensured.

In order to offer exceptional service firms are faced with a myriad of challenges. Some of these include the inability to have a clear insight into the reasons why people buy from them, having an insight into the processes and systems put in place during customer engagement and finally an understanding of the total customer experience within the customer value chain (Ghesh et al., 2024; Rane, 2023). It is unfortunate that some companies have insufficient knowledge on what happens at each touchpoint (Mutsikiwa & Makumbe, 2025). Firms use different tools as they seek to understand these experiences. Some of the tools include but are not limited to service blue prints, mobile ethnography and desktop walk through as in accordance to (Dzreke & Dzreke, 2025).

Figure 2.9

Synopsis of a Customer Journey. Adapted from Visual Paradigm Online (2021)



Customer journey mapping is a process that focuses on the customer's experience when interacting with a business. According to Khan et al., (2025) and Xu

et al., (2024), if implemented correctly and carefully, customer journey management can improve the various processes involved in delivering a positive customer experience at every touchpoint. When managing the customer journey, it is crucial to differentiate between the "planned" customer journey and the "actual" customer journey (Raeisi Ziarani et al., 2023). The planned journey refers to what the company anticipates the customer will experience during their interactions at the different touchpoints. However, contrast to the planned journey, the actual journey refers to the real experiences the customer goes through during these interactions (Duri, 2026). It is common for the planned journey to branch out into sub journeys especially where multi-channel services are concerned (Semwayo, 2024) . In this case the customer will have an option to choose amongst various options. This is where repeated purchases from the same firm can benefit the customer. The customer will find it easier to choose from an extensive range of products and services due to the customer-firm relationship.

Customer journey management is a crucial aspect for businesses as it depicts the actual experiences a customer undergoes while interacting with the company. This knowledge can be used by firms to further improve their systems and mechanisms to provide a better experience for their customers. By managing the customer journey, any service gaps or bottlenecks in the service delivery process can be identified and fixed before they affect business operations. The process of mapping the customer journey involves five steps, which include collecting internal insights, developing initial hypotheses, researching customer processes, needs, and perceptions, analysing customer research, and mapping the customer journey.

In research carried out by Forrester Research Inc. (2010) ninety percent of executives interviewed agreed that understanding and improving customer experiences is critical to their business. Of these executives' approximately 50 percent of them had measurement plans in place using a diversity of strategies and tools including CSI's and CJM. All the executives further highlighted that they feel that if they don't look after their customers well their businesses would eventually go under (Martinez, 2022). Having customer journey maps is not a panacea to customer satisfaction in an organisation. In fact, it is only the beginning of processes that require scrutiny and adjustment over time. In doing so there are some best practice considerations that need to be looked at in order to derive maximum value from CJM. The best practices in ensuring effective customer journey mapping are internal sharing, initiating action and sustaining learnings. In their study on dynamic customer journey simulation, Jian & Yuantao (2021) explained that internal sharing involves practices such as involving internal stakeholders in customer journey mapping, using the organization's native language, and bringing customer data to life to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the organization in satisfying customer needs. Taking a proactive approach requires activities such as expanding executive support, identifying broken moments of truth, prioritizing opportunities based on customer and organizational value, and using quick wins and familiar metrics to justify early business investments. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of assigning long-term owners of the customer journey map and monitoring customer feedback and organizational growth over time for sustainable learnings.

In conclusion, the customer journey management system is a crucial tool for firms to understand the stages and experiences that a customer goes through when interacting with their organization. It also helps identify potential service delivery

bottlenecks, enabling firms to improve service delivery processes and foster a great customer experience that stimulates repeat business. Firms must also be aware of the distinction between planned and actual journeys and the implications for each when enhancing their customer relationship management initiatives (Hartoyo et al., 2023).

Ways to Enhance Business Performance in the Automotive Industry.

According to (Bachtiar et al., 2025), there are several ways to improve business performance within the automotive industry. The author also highlighted that besides aiming to enhance performance by increasing sales volume and revenue, it is crucial for organizations or entrepreneurs to hire individuals who are passionate about their work. With respect to the suggestions by various researchers, it can be concluded that passion creates desire to generally improve in everything you do, and in that desire is born relativity which is a key element of business growth and continuity (Tuominen et al., 2023; Wattoo & Iqbal, 2022; Zuze & Dlamini, 2024) found out that the influence of corporate social responsibility cannot be undermined by any business despite the field of speciality. The researcher further articulates that social corporate responsibility can be used as an anchor to increase business sales and hence performance. One of the key methods will be through making the brand and its services known to the public while also providing something of value that you are always remembered by as a business.

Although contributing to corporate social responsibility is important, there are other ways for businesses to improve their performance in the market. Meena and Sahu (2021) found that one key factor for growth in modern business is persistent marketing of the brand and its products. The researcher lists various ways in which marketing can be effectively done depending on the nature of the business. Amongst these, an interesting method of business advertisements sits well with the general

characteristics of the automotive business sector. According to the researcher and literature from previous works, advertising was found as one of the key methods to reach a diverse multitude (Banmairuroy et al., 2022; Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Koch et al., 2023). Advertising can be conducted in a variety of ways. Nowadays, one of the most popular advertising techniques is through social media. To do this effectively, organizations need to create a social media handle or page where they can communicate their services to potential clients from various backgrounds and with different business potential. Although advertising may not produce immediate sales, it can be a useful tool in generating future sales (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021). Contrary to assumptions and beliefs in the past especially from finance personnel, advertising is now viewed as an investment as its usefulness and impact are more pronounced in the medium to long term if implemented properly and professionally.

Guerola-Navarro et al., (2021) suggest that companies should allocate more resources towards sales and marketing for effective brand presence. This is because increasing sales can lead to higher revenue, which can then be reinvested in the company to improve the quality of service, increase employee welfare, and invest in new technology and products. The ultimate goal is to remain competitive within the industry through implementing effective sales and marketing initiatives for better business performance.

Another key method which can be used by organizations to boost performance is rewarding workers or labour in the most satisfying way. Arguments have been raised through research that some workers cannot improve in their job performance despite having enormous benefits through salary or in kind (Amegavie et al., 2019). However, (Okeke et al., 2024; Sakyi et al., 2022; Sanodia, 2024) made great propositions that if the workers are paid a competitive salary plus performance based benefits, the

likelihood of those workers to perform better at work is very high and significantly increases above 50 percent. This is therefore the basis upon which many service providers and products marketing-based organizations provide a slightly higher salary to their marketing agents based on performance and volume sales.

Just like any field, marketing is the key driver of business progress. Without proper and effective marketing techniques, most businesses quickly become obsolete because they get run down by their competition (Rukasha et al., 2021). According to (Anees et al., 2020) and Kaas & Manger (2012), one effective way to motivate customers to remain loyal to a business and improve their satisfaction is by offering gifts to frequent and long-term customers. The researchers also found that, in addition to offering gifts, creating testimonials from satisfied customers can elevate the brand and increase awareness of the business, its products, and services (Yudhistira, 2019).

The success of any marketing strategy ultimately depends on the nature of the business and the target markets. It's the responsibility of the marketing team and management to identify and profile their clients. This way, they can create and customize products and services that better satisfy the needs of their primary clients.

Automotive Industry Key Performance Indicators.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are crucial metrics that help measure a company's progress towards achieving its goals. By comparing a company's performance against predefined targets, objectives, or industry peers, KPIs provide valuable insights into areas that require improvement and enable better decision-making. As a result, businesses that track and analyse KPIs are better equipped to make informed decisions and achieve long-term success. A critical indicator for automotive businesses is Average Downtime.

One can calculate this value as this ratio as:

Average Downtime = (downtime hours in a time period) ÷ (total time available to produce vehicles in the same time period) x 100.

It is crucial for any automotive business to minimize downtime, which can be extremely expensive. In fact, downtime is estimated to be far costlier in the automotive industry than in other manufacturing industries. According to a survey by Advanced Technology Services (2019), downtime in the automotive industry can cost up to $50,000 per minute, or about $3,000,000 per hour depending on the type of operation e.g. manufacturing vs retail automotive. Across all businesses, the average cost of downtime is huge and manufacturers typically experience about 800 hours of downtime per year. Therefore, automotive manufacturers must accurately track downtime to ensure that they can take appropriate measures to minimize it. Dealerships are expected to be alive to this potential bottleneck in its dealership modelling programs. If not managed well, downtime can be the Achilles heel in any business. A real albatross.

The utilization rate, also known as capacity utilization, is calculated by dividing actual output by potential output.

Utilization rate = (actual level of output) ÷ (maximum level of output) x 100.

The utilization rate of an automotive company is a measure of how many vehicles it can produce over a given period, compared to how many it could potentially produce with optimal use of time and labour. To determine the utilization rate, data regarding resource capacity, inventory inflows and outflows, cycle times, output capacity, actual outputs, gross production numbers, resource use, and total materials input versus output should all be collected.

It is crucial to measure this rate carefully, as it allows companies to see how efficiently they are using their time and labour. The optimal utilization rate for most companies is around 85%, according to Corporate Finance Institute. Falling below this benchmark can be very expensive for a company, especially considering the high downtime costs in the automotive industry. Safety Incidents per Employee is another important performance indicator in the automotive industry, as worker safety is always a top priority. It is crucial to continually measure safety incidents to ensure a safer workplace.

The value of this metric is given by the following calculation:

Safety incidents per employee = (number of safety incidents in a time period) ÷ (number of employees working during the time period).

It is important to note that there is overwhelming data indicating the need for tracking safety incidents in the automotive industry. According to 2018 data from the Bureau of Labour Statistics, the rate of nonfatal injuries and illnesses per 100 full-time workers in this industry is 6.3. Furthermore, studies have found that 71% of automotive manufacturing workers have suffered an injury on the job at some point (ILO, 2015) (Hussmanns, 2007).

Tracking this KPI has multiple benefits. Firstly, it helps to keep workers safe. Secondly, it is a way to detect when equipment is not functioning properly since injuries are often the result of equipment malfunctions. Thirdly, safety incidents can be costly for automotive companies. US businesses spend over $60 billion every year on compensation costs due to serious, nonfatal work injuries. Given the high number of safety incidents that occur in the automotive industry, it is likely that automotive

manufacturers account for a significant portion of the $60 billion total (Kang et al, 2016).

Throughput is a measure of the average number of units produced over a specific time period. It is calculated by dividing the total number of units produced by the time taken to produce them.

Throughput = (units produced) ÷ (time)

An important metric for measuring the effectiveness of a production line is throughput. Let's take an example of an automotive manufacturer that builds 60 cars per hour. Meeting or missing production goals and staying ahead or falling behind the competition both rely upon this metric.

Moreover, throughput can be used by automotive manufacturers to identify if there are weaknesses in the production line. If downtime is high, machines aren't running at an ideal cycle time, tools and machines aren't well maintained, or there's simply an inefficient cycle, it will result in a suboptimal throughput (Yu et al., 2022).

Measuring throughput is very pertinent in the service department. This is so because the service manager needs to know the number of vehicles that are repaired in his/her workshop per day. This statistic has a direct bearing on capacity utilisation which is directly related to the number of bays in a workshop. Ideally each bay is viewed as a profit centre and it must sweat in order for it to contribute towards the overall profit of the business. Sweating a bay means having a vehicle being repaired on the bay at any given time during normal working hours. A bay should never lie idle as this affects capacity utilisation which has a direct impact on revenue generation for the service department. Best case scenario is 100% while worst case scenario should

never be less than 75%. Should capacity utilisation fall below 75% the dealership with face overhead absorption challenges as it fails to accommodate overhead expenses.

The inventory turns KPI is calculated by the formula

Inventory Turns = (cost of goods sold) ÷ (average inventory).

For instance, suppose an automotive business has a cost of goods sold worth $2,000,000 over a year, and its inventory has an average value of $200,000 during that period. In that case, the inventory turns would be 1. In this study, we have included inventory turns to evaluate the average number of cars purchased and resold by Platinum Motors Harare Branch in one year. It is believed that a higher number of cars sold per year would result in a higher KPIs figure, leading to increased sales value and customer retention for the firm.

The Zimbabwean Automotive Sector and It's Key Players.

Key Players in the Industry.

Zimbabwe's automotive sector, though not a giant at global level, plays a vital role in the country's economy (Sagonda, 2025). (Hartoyo et al., 2023a) insinuates that this industry encompasses a diverse range of players, from vehicle assemblers and parts importers to repair shops and car dealerships. Understanding these key players is crucial for anyone interested in the present and future of transportation in Zimbabwe. The understanding of key players in the sector also helps researchers to identify gaps and key opportunities that can be exploited for the benefit of the investors. Within the manufacturing and assembling sector of the automotive industry in Zimbabwe is Willowvale Mazda Corporation (WMC). This conglomerate is one of the giants in Zimbabwe and was established in 1961, WMC was once a major player in vehicle assembly (Mujakachi et al., 2023). By initially partnering with Ford, they established a

wide base of reliable customers and later, they switched to Mazda brands. While Willowvale Motor Corporation is currently not operational in terms of assembly sector, the government of Zimbabwe has expressed interest in reviving domestic assembly, with Willowvale Mazda Corporation (WMC) potentially playing a central role within the Motor Vehicle Service and Assembly Industry. As compared to other players such as Duly's, Platinum Motors Harare Branch and Quest Motors, Willowvale Motor Corporation has been on a downsizing trend while other Brands or Dealerships have gained substantial traction within the motor vehicle service industry (Bathaee, 2021).

Another key player in the industry is Quest Motors. Quest Motors is a company that assembles vehicles from various brands, including Chinese manufacturers like Foton and JMC, as well as Japanese giants like Mitsubishi and Toyota. They also hold assembly rights for Yutong and Zhong tong buses, highlighting their contribution to commercial vehicle production. This dealer is one of the greatest rising stars within the Zimbabwean automotive sector. There are other various dealerships involved in vehicle importation and distribution of various motor vehicle brands in Zimbabwe. These authorized dealerships include but are not limited to major international brands like Nissan (Clover Leaf Motors), Mercedes-Benz (ZIMOCO), Tsapo (Chinese Dealership and Distribution of Heavy Machinery, light motor vehicles and Equipment) and other established dealerships in Zimbabwe (Adusei & Tweneboah-Koduah, 2019; Sipho, 2016). These dealerships offer new car sales, after-sales service, and access to genuine parts.

Other key players in the motor vehicle industry and value chain are independent importers who constitute a significant portion of Zimbabwe's vehicle market. Most ordinary Zimbabweans heavily rely on independent importers who source second-hand vehicles, primarily from Japan, Pakistan and South Africa (Adusei & Tweneboah-

Koduah (2019). The affordability of second hand or used motor vehicles especially those from Japan taking into consideration their mileage makes them popular choices for many Zimbabweans, Neilson (2023).

The motor vehicle service industry of Zimbabwe also constitutes branded service centers. These operate like Authorized dealerships, mentioned above, as they also operate service centers equipped with technicians trained for specific brands (Chiparo et al., 2022). These centers offer genuine parts and specialized services for the vehicles they represent and this is where Platinum Motors Harare Branch fits well, Manyanga et al (2024). Within the Industry, there are also independent workshops which particularly form the backbone of Zimbabwe's motor service industry. These workshops cater to a wider range of vehicles and offer a blend of expertise and affordability. They are usually not registered or regulated and some of them operate in household settings, public space or ‘under a tree’. They may seem disoriented but they have helped a lot of local people in terms of affordability, quick reaction as well as minor services (Malki et al, (2023); Mohamad et al (2024). The rise of local ownership in the spare parts market has benefitted these workshops by increasing parts availability and reducing maintenance costs. These are mostly informal operations that are owner managed.

Other key players in the motor service industry include the Financial Institutions. These institutions such as banks and credit providers play a crucial role in facilitating vehicle purchases through loans and financing options including asset finance (Munyoro & Madzinga-Kusena, (2024); Naru & Kumar, (2020). Their involvement influences car ownership trends and market dynamics in Zimbabwe. Insurance companies are also involved in the automotive sector of Zimbabwe as well as other regulatory authorities such as ZIMRA. Insurance is a vital part of car ownership.

Insurance companies offer various coverage options, impacting car buying decisions and influencing repair choices, C.Y Lee, (2019). The government through its regulatory hand plays a vital role by designing and prescribing policies and regulations that govern vehicle imports, standards, and environmental considerations (Chibaro et al., 2025; Manyanga et al., 2024a). The recent focus on reviving the local assembly industry is a prime example. Also, through the regulatory branch of the government, ZIMRA, the government of Zimbabwe has effectively banned the importation of light motor vehicles which were manufactured and registered 10 years and beyond in a bid to foster environmental protective measures.

Despite having numerous players, the Zimbabwean automotive sector faces several challenges. Some of the challenges that exist within the industry and the nation as a whole are related to economic instability, some import restrictions, and limited access to foreign currency which are all hindering effective growth (Ginther et al., 2020). However, there are also opportunities that exist within the same automotive sector. That being said, the government's focus on reviving domestic assembly through indigenization presents a chance for import substitution and job creation in Zimbabwe, which may in turn lead to sharp growth for organizations that fully exploit the opportunities. Additionally, the growing demand for affordable used vehicles opens doors for efficient used car import systems and thus a chance to grow incomes and improve local dwellers livelihoods (Manyati et al., 2024).

In accordance to the works of (Mujakachi et al., 2023) the future of Zimbabwe's automotive sector hinges on several factors. Such factors include economic stability and lucrative government policies will be crucial determinants. Another key step that determines the performance of the Zimbabwean automotive sector is coined around embracing technological advancements, such as electric vehicles. These

advancements could position Zimbabwe for a future-proof automotive industry. Developing the local parts manufacturing industry would further reduce reliance on imports and provide a significant boost to the sector through job creation, cutting on import duty and cheap locally sourced raw materials (Bouraghi et al., 2024). Furthermore, the Zimbabwean automotive sector is a complex ecosystem with diverse players. Understanding these key players, from assemblers to workshops provides a comprehensive understanding of the industry's current state and its potential for future growth and embedded customer relationship management skills at each level. At a macro level and working with government bodies and automotive sector bodies such as the Motor Trade Association of Zimbabwe (MTAZ) this country can come up with comprehensive measures that help to mitigate the entry of second-hand car imports from the Far East. This will help to ring-fence the local automotive industry particularly the manufacturers. By addressing challenges faced and capitalizing on opportunities, Zimbabwe can leverage its automotive sector as a vital engine for economic development.

A Comparative Analysis of the Automotive Sectors in Zimbabwe and the Sub-Region.

Southern Africa boasts a vibrant and diverse automotive landscape, with each country playing a unique role within the automotive sector. Zimbabwe, nestled in the heart of the region, possesses a unique and dynamic automotive sector, but its story unfolds differently compared to its neighbors. One of the key differentiating factors between Zimbabwe and its neighbors in Southern Africa is the fact that Zimbabwe is a landlocked country, which implies it does not have a port at sea (UNFCCC, 2011). This comparative analysis of Zimbabwe's automotive sector with its key Southern African countries, provides some highlights in the similarities, differences, and

potential avenues for collaboration to exploit all opportunities as they avail. In relation to a research by (Bathaee, 2021) one prominent similarity across the region is the dependence on imported vehicles across Southern African countries. South Africa in particular, the economic powerhouse, is a major source of used vehicles for Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia. Despite that, all these nations highly depend on imports from Japan for brand new vehicles, used vehicles, genuine spare parts and other motor vehicle accessories (Mujakachi et al., 2023). Some of the challenges faced at a regional and Southern African level include limited domestic assembly and servicing of motor vehicles. While South Africa boasts a well-established vehicle assembly industry with giants like Mercedes Benz, Toyota and Nissan setting up plants, workshops and repair houses, most other countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia lack significant domestic production capabilities (Tong et al., 2019). (Nyamweya, 2022) cites that Zimbabwe's Willowvale Mazda Corporation (WMC) is a prime example of underutilized potential within the region. Another key determinant of the Southern African automobile industry performance is the importation of pre-owned vehicles, particularly from Japan. This practice offers a cost-effective option for local people (particularly in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi) compared to brand new models (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, 2020). This affordability caters for a broader segment of the population in these countries. Despite this shared reliance on imports, significant differences exist between the Zimbabwean and South African automotive sectors with the latter having a robust domestic vehicle manufacturing sector. This industry, fueled by significant foreign investment and preferential trade agreements, positions South Africa as a regional automotive hub (Hartoyo et al., 2023a). Conversely, Zimbabwe's automotive sector leans heavily on the informal market. Independent importers in Zimbabwe play a crucial role, particularly in sourcing second-hand vehicles. While this

informality can be seen as a weakness, it also demonstrates the sector's resilience and adaptability in the face of economic challenges (*Analysing the Impact of Disruptive Events on the Performance of the Automotive Industry Sales in Gauteng , South Africa TH Mqwathi*, 2023).

There are various government policies across Southern African countries, with each State constructing policies that work best for them, while considering regional trade opportunities (Taherdoost et al., 2021). Under this regard, government policies significantly influence the automotive sector across Southern Africa and hence, countries like South Africa and Namibia implement import restrictions to protect their domestic assembly industries. The same applies for countries like Zimbabwe where the import and registration of vehicles manufactured over ten years ago in not permitted. These restrictions, often in the form of tariffs and quotas, can however inflate vehicle prices for consumers if they choose to defy them. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, has adopted a more liberalized approach as compared to other regional markets participants, by facilitating used car imports because their Motor Vehicle assembly system is not yet fully functional at a competitive level. (Kanyepe et al., 2023; Wong, 2014) posits that this affordability of imported cars for Zimbabweans is crucial for the Zimbabwean automotive market, but however, it comes at the cost of hindering domestic assembly revival efforts.

Despite the differences that exist in market characteristics, trade and vehicle manufacturing and import policies and governance, there exist exciting opportunities for collaboration between Zimbabwe and its neighbors. Creatively thinking, one may have sought the idea of regional vehicle assembly points or hubs, where every nation has access to participate in the engineering process as well as offering competitive prices to foster quick and bulk purchases. The idea of regional assembly hubs works

well in countries with established assembly lines, like South Africa, could partner with Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland to create a regional Motor Vehicle Assembly Hub. This could leverage Zimbabwe's labor force and potentially attract new international investment within the automotive sector. Also, on the other hand creating cultural diversity within the work force would create new learning opportunities in terms of brand management, customer loyalty as well as building a customer base in a completely new environment. Researchers also vouched for a standardized regulations approach as this has been done in other sectors/industries (Centre for Community Child Health, 2020; Rice et al., 2020). By harmonizing import regulations and safety standards across the region involved nations would streamline cross-border trade and facilitate the smooth movement of vehicles. This would benefit both consumers, employment seekers and businesses. Through this motion, countries may build trust over time creating a strong regional automotive sector trade route which functions efficiently within the set and agreed parameters. On the other hand, this movement or initiative would create collaboration on skills development programs which could in turn see knowledge exchange/sharing between countries with established manufacturing sectors and those with a strong informal repair industry. Successfully adopting such a mechanism would therefore enhance the overall skillset of the regional workforce (McDonald, 2023).

With rapid advancements in technology and innovation especially in areas to do with automotive engineering, solar systems and the medical fraternity, the future of the automotive industry hinges on hybrid and electric vehicles (EVs) (Malki et al., 2023). Southern African nationals face shared challenges in this regard, such that issues such as limited charging infrastructure (EV charge centers) and a lack of readily available or locally made EVs designed for African roads. However, by looking at each

country through a zoomed lens, one can insinuate that each country can leverage its unique strengths to adapt to such circumstances. Given a case of Zimbabwe, with its growing focus on renewable energy, Zimbabwe could prioritize developing a sustainable EV charging network powered by clean energy sources (Dyer, 2019). Effectively carrying out this goal, could position the country as a leader in green transportation within the region. Consequently, South Africa with its well positioned and established manufacturing base within the automotive sector could be a springboard for regional EV production, assembly and repairs. Partnering with international companies such as TESLA and Toyota could lead to the establishment of regional EV assembly plants which can potentially create new jobs, foster skills development and research while position the region strategically in the global EV market (Malki et al., 2023).

Conclusively, the automotive sector in Zimbabwe and its Southern African neighbors exhibits a picture of a region with shared challenges and unique opportunities. By fostering collaboration in areas like regional assembly hubs, standardized regulations, a shared and expanded customer base, new customer relationship management skills development and technical skills development, the Southern African region can create a more robust and competitive automotive industry. Additionally, a shared focus on embracing hybrid and electric vehicles, with each country leveraging its strengths, is crucial for a sustainable automotive future. As the engines of these economies continue to rev, collaboration can be the fuel that propels Southern Africa's automotive sector towards shared prosperity.

The Impact of the Informal Automotive Sector on Zimbabwe's Formal Automotive Sector.

Zimbabwe's automotive sector pulsates with a unique rhythm. Unlike its well-organized, manufacturing-driven neighbors in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe's story revolves around a dynamic and often overlooked number of players (Poturak et al., 2022). (Poturak et al., 2022) reports that the Zimbabwean automotive sector also comprises of the informal automotive market, and further notes that the informal market has some profound impact on the operational procedures, price volatility, brand loyalty and customer relationship management strategies used by registered motor vehicle service entities. The roots of Zimbabwe's informal automotive market lie in socio-economic hardships and policy inconsistences. Some of the noted drivers to informal vehicle service sector are currency fluctuations, rampart import restrictions, and limited access to foreign currency hampered the formal sector's ability to read market dynamics and adjust the business model accordingly (Nikolskaya et al., 2021). However, from these scenarios arose a phoenix, a network of independent importers, spare parts dealers, and mechanics who found innovative ways to keep Zimbabwe's vehicles sector moving.

The Zimbabwean automotive informal market thrives on its ability to offer affordable and reasonable solutions to a wider customer base. For instance, independent importers source second-hand vehicles, primarily from Japan, Pakistan, United Kingdom and South Africa, at a significantly lower price compared to brand new models offered by well-established dealerships such as ZIMOCO, Willowvale Motor Corporation and Platinum Motor Vehicle Dealership (Simanjuntak et al., 2020). This intrinsic characteristics to satisfy customer needs through the affordability of a variety of basic motor vehicles makes car ownership a possibility for a wider segment of the

Zimbabwean population who earn well below the regional minimum wage (Mujakachi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the informal market demonstrates remarkable adaptability to the ever changing socio-economic and political operating environment. Thus, most mechanics, often self-taught and resourceful, possess a deep understanding of a wide range of vehicle brands (Kan & Nasheel, 2019). They can source spare parts through established networks, sometimes even manufacturing replacements options locally. This ingenuity ensures that even older vehicles can still be maintained properly and kept on the road.

The informal market is a complex ecosystem with several key players such as independent importers, spare parts dealerships and mechanics. Independent Importers often operate with limited capital, travel to regional hubs or source vehicles through established networks e.g. bank repossessed vehicles from South Africa and sell them locally at a competitive price as compared to car dealerships that sell brand new vehicles such as Duly's a Ford Dealership in Zimbabwe. Their ability to navigate import regulations and identify bargains is crucial for the Zimbabwean market affordability and customer satisfaction. These importers have created a wider and loyal customer base in which they consistently provide with cheap but reliable motor vehicles as well as spares from various parts of the region making them a key player in the automotive value chain of Zimbabwe. Other key players that cannot be undermined are Spare Parts Dealers. Spare parts dealers occupy and created a vibrant network of spare parts to caters for the needs of mechanics and general customers (Adusei & Tweneboah-Koduah, 2019). These dealers source parts from various channels, including importing directly or acquiring used parts from dismantled vehicles (vehicle breaking centers). They possess a unique ability to find the correct

parts at the right price which therefore keeps mechanics operational within the automotive sector. The mechanics are the backbone of the informal market, because mechanics possess a diverse skillset. They can diagnose problems, repair vehicles using ingenuity and locally available resources, and service a wide range of car models making their expertise crucial for keeping Zimbabwe motor vehicles on the road despite the year of manufacture.

The Zimbabwean informal automotive sector also has its side of the flip coin of challenges presented to the customers' despite being their most affordable option. While the informal market offers undeniable benefits, it also faces challenges as quality concerns due to the presence of many numerous players. The over-reliance on second-hand vehicles in Zimbabwe raises concerns about quality and safety and issues related to carbon excretion. Limited access to accurate vehicle history reports and a lack of standardized quality checks can pose substantial risks to its consumers. The challenges also encompass improper vehicle disposal practices and the use of older, less fuel-efficient vehicles contribute to environmental pollution (Ford et al., 2020). Informal imports often bypass official channels, leading to a loss of tax revenue for the government its regulatory authorities. This revenue could be used to improve local roads, invest in public transportation, and implement favorable safety regulations in the automotive sector. On the other hand, the informal market's contribution to Zimbabwe's automotive sector is undeniable. However, to ensure sustainable growth and address the challenges, a path towards formalization needs to be explored by its key players. To achieve that, there is need for streamlining registration, skills development and promoting responsible parts disposal mechanisms (Maramura et al., 2020). (Wahyudi, 2021) points out that simplifying the registration process for imported vehicles could incentivize informal importers to enter the formal sector and therefore

create revenue for the formal regulatory authorities. The generated tax revenue for the government could potentially allow for the provision of basic safety checks and standardization. Consequently, providing training and certification programs for mechanics in the informal sector would enhance their skillset and potentially allow them to operate under a more formalized structure. Furthermore, Zimbabwe can introduce strict regulations in the automotive sector and create incentives for responsible disposal of used vehicles and parts which would therefore mitigate environmental damage (Canlas et al., 2022).

The future of Zimbabwe's automotive sector may lie in the potential collaboration between the formal and informal sectors. In terms of collaboration, formal dealerships and mechanics could share technical expertise with their informal counterparts. However, the sustainability of this practice may greatly be questionable regarding that the informal and formal businesses are adapted to different business acumen and practices. Despite that, this would benefit both parties and ultimately improve the quality of service available to consumers at a national level. The motor vehicle regulatory authority such as the Central Vehicle Registration (CVR) can ultimately develop some minimum quality standards for imported vehicles and spare parts, along with a certification system for mechanics, which would instill consumer confidence and create a more formalized marketplace going forward (Hartoyo et al., 2023a). Finally, the informal sector's reach and understanding of local needs can be valuable in planning and developing a nationwide network of service stations and spare parts stores, catering to both formal and informal service providers.

The Level and Intensity of Competition for Customers within the Zimbabwe Automotive Sector.

Zimbabwe's automotive landscape presents a unique dichotomy where, on one hand, Willowvale Mazda (WMC), the nation's historic vehicle assembler, currently stands dormant. On the other hand, the automotive sector also consists of ZIMOCO, a network of authorized dealerships for established brands like Mercedes-Benz and Chevrolet, which is currently thriving despite some economic hardships over the past few decades. Then there is Platinum Motors Harare Branch, a rising fish in the ocean, which has gone through the various Zimbabwean economic turmoil and proved that it is a survivor. Platinum Motors Harare Branch sells brand new Mazda and Nissan vehicles. By looking deep into the level and intensity of competition of customers between these various dealerships, the researcher can understand what needs to be done by Platinum Motors Harare Branch to survive the test of time and other economic hardships. Willowvale Motors, once a symbol of Zimbabwean automotive independence, assembled vehicles for decades has lost its glamour and competitiveness.

If revived, WMC could potentially offer a distinct and competitive customer experience. In terms of level of service, one of the distinct characteristics of WMC, if operational, is that it could potentially offer a more affordable alternative to imported vehicles. By focusing on local assembly with potentially higher volumes, WMC might achieve economies of scale, translating to lower prices for the ordinary consumers. Initially, WMC might offer a limited selection of models, focusing on vehicles suited to local conditions and assembled with readily available parts (Mazda, Nissan, Toyota and Ford). This could restrict customer choice compared to the wider variety offered by dealerships such as ZIMOCO dealerships. The level of after-sales service which

can be offered by a potentially revived WMC would depend on its dealership network and service infrastructure. Initially, the network might be limited compared to established players like ZIMOCO, Platinum Motors Harare Branch and Duly's'. However, WMC's may primarily focus on selling new vehicles, locally assembled vehicles. This could mean less emphasis on pre-owned car sales or certified pre-owned programs, areas where ZIMOCO might hold an advantage. In terms of brand loyalty, a revived WMC would need to build brand loyalty by emphasizing the benefits of local assembly, such as job creation, offering competitive prices, local and cheap service options and potential customization options.

Willowvale Motor Corporation can gain traction through patriotism and supporting local industry. Customers who value supporting local businesses and contributing to national development might be drawn to WMC through its patriotic moves on supporting local brands and local workmanship. With a potentially new assembly line and limited brand history, customers might have initial concerns about the quality and reliability of WMC vehicles compared to established brands offered by dealers such as Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Duly's, Quest and ZIMOCO.

On the contrary, ZIMOCO, a network of dealerships for renowned international brands such as Mercedes, offers a different customer experience as compared to WMC and Platinum Motors Harare Branch. One of the key strengths of ZIMOCO is its wide variety of Vehicles. Recently, ZIMOCO dealerships has adjusted its target market by offering a diverse range of vehicles, catering to various budgets and needs. This extensive selection provides customers with more options compared to a hypothetical revived WMC. This has happened as a result of the rise of informal dealerships in Zimbabwe, providing customers with vehicles of all brand and sizes (Malik, 2015). Another advantage of ZIMOCO over its competitors is that the dealerships typically

offer comprehensive after-sales service, including scheduled maintenance, genuine parts availability, and warranty repairs for brand new motor vehicles. This established infrastructure ensures improved service delivery for customers and gives the dealership repeat business from its customers. The imported vehicles and the premium service offered by ZIMOCO dealerships generally come at a higher cost compared to potentially more affordable locally assembled vehicles from a revived Willowvale Mazda Corporation.

To maintain its relevance over decades, ZIMOCO dealerships often maintain strong customer relationships through personalized service, loyalty programs, and potential test drive opportunities to qualifying customers. This focus on customer experience is a core aspect of their strategy, which further makes them a distinct and unique service provider in the automotive sector of Zimbabwe. The established brands offered by ZIMOCO dealerships such as Mercedes Benz carry a reputation for quality and reliability for generations, and thus another key competitive advantage for the established dealership. This trust factor might be initially lacking with a revived WMC and other small key players in the automotive sector. Thus, the level of intensity in the automotive sector in Zimbabwe is intense, but with Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Quest Motors, ZIMOCO and Mike Harris Auto and Toyota Zimbabwe dominating the majority of the market shares. The brand of choice by customers is therefore greatly determined by their personal income, type pf job they do, reliability and brand choice as well as their personal preferences (Fook & Dastane, 2021). Affluent Customers usually seek peace of mind which comes with Established Brands like ZIMCO, Toyota Zimbabwe and Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Customers seeking peace of mind associated with renowned brands and a proven track record are likely to gravitate towards ZIMOCO dealerships. Despite the competitive advantage, with its focus on

established models, ZIMOCO dealerships might offer limited customization options compared to a potential future scenario where WMC, Platinum Motors Harare Branch and Mike Harris Auto caters to specific local needs during procurement and assembly.

Beyond the specific offerings of Willowvale Motor Corporation-WMC and ZIMOCO, several factors influence customer decisions in Zimbabwe's automotive sector (X. Zhang et al, 2023). One of the key determinants of customer preferences is the economic climate of the nations. Economic stability and access to foreign currency significantly impact purchasing power of renowned customers. Consequently, this can affect or influence the affordability of both new and used vehicles, potentially swaying customers towards WMC's hypothetical lower-priced offerings and other cheaper dealerships (potentially unregistered vehicles sales centers).

Government policies regarding import restrictions and duty structures can influence the cost and availability of vehicles, impacting the competitiveness of WMC, ZIMOCO, Toyota Zimbabwe and other dealerships. Availability of credit from financial institutions is one of the key determinants of competitiveness in the automotive sector of Zimbabwe (Mhlanga, 2021). Access to financing options plays an important role in vehicle purchases. The availability of loans and interest rates of loans can influence whether customers opt for a new vehicle from a car dealer or a potentially more affordable option from other un-regularized dealers. For instance, AMTEC Motors, once a prominent player in Zimbabwe's automotive sector, has seen a significant decline in its customer base over the years due to the non-availability of credit options. AMTEC Motors' story began brightly, established in 1953, the company built a reputation for offering a wide variety of vehicles on installments and credit to capable individuals and companies, primarily focusing on Japanese brands like Isuzu, Mazda,

and Mitsubishi. They were primarily known for their diverse product portfolio, customer focus and established product network. In terms of product portfolio, AMTEC catered to a broad spectrum of customer needs, offering sedans, SUVs, and light commercial vehicles. This variety attracted customers seeking options beyond the limited offerings of some competitors. Through its established service network**,** AMTEC possessed a well-established network of dealerships and service centers throughout Zimbabwe. This ensured easy access to after-sales service and genuine parts for customers. Initially, AMTEC Motors prioritized customer satisfaction by offering competitive pricing, well-trained staff, and a focus on building long-term relationships with their clientele.

Despite its promising start, AMTEC Motors' customer base dwindled over time. Several factors contributed to this decline like any other dealership. One of the major drawbacks of AMTEC Motors is hinged upon economic instability. Zimbabwe's turbulent economic climate, characterized by hyperinflation and currency fluctuations/changes, significantly impacted the automotive sector. Rising vehicle import costs and limited access to foreign currency made it difficult for car dealerships and particularly AMTEC to maintain a competitive price point within the industry. This discouraged potential customers who are faced with shrinking disposable incomes. Consequently, over the past decade, the Zimbabwean automotive market witnessed a growing preference for second-hand, imported vehicles, particularly from Japan and South Africa (C. Zhang et al., 2024). These second-hand vehicles offered affordability and a wider range of options compared to the new models offered by AMTEC Motors and hence a decline in their overall competitiveness. The company's inability to reengineer its processes in line with market demands resulted in a loss of customers and revenue. As economic hardships mounted, AMTEC Motors reportedly struggled

to maintain its service infrastructure. A lack of access to genuine parts, coupled with potentially under-trained staff, led to a decline in service quality and this further eroded customer trust and loyalty (Madhani, 2021). Consequent to that, in 2009, AMTEC Motors was acquired by a new entity, Konkurrenz Motors. This shift in ownership initially offered a glimmer of hope because Konkurrenz promised to revitalize the brand and improve service standards. However, these promises largely remained unfulfilled. One of the main draw backs for this new owner was Limited Investment. Konkurrenz Motors reportedly failed to invest significantly in AMTEC's infrastructure or dealership network. This lack of investment hindered efforts to improve service quality and regain customer trust and therefore leading to further decline of a reliable and loyal customer base over time. But interestingly, over time Konkurrenz Motors introduced new Chinese automotive brands to the AMTEC's portfolio. While some customers embraced these new options, others remained hesitant due to a lack of brand recognition or established track record of reliability compared to the previously offered Japanese brands. But this effort made sure that the company didn’t go under and lose its investments. The cumulative effect of these factors led to a significant decline in AMTEC's customer base and less revenue. Through the word of mouth and online review, dissatisfied customers, experiencing poor service quality or limited parts availability, shared their negative experiences. This negativity deterred potential customers from considering AMTEC. Customers who had previously enjoyed a positive experience with AMTEC became disillusioned. They shifted their brand loyalty to competitors such as Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Paza Buster and Mike Harris Auto who offered better value, wider choices, and reliable after-sales service.

Despite the challenges, AMTEC Motors retains a glimmer of hope for revival because the AMTEC brand still holds some recognition in Zimbabwe, particularly

among older generations and old companies (like ZESA Zimbabwe) who have had some positive memories of the company's past performance. Due to shifting market dynamics, the future of the Zimbabwean automotive sector remains uncertain. If economic conditions stabilize and import restrictions ease, AMTEC could potentially regain a foothold by offering new vehicle options to its customers. For AMTEC Motors to regain its customer base, a significant turnaround strategy is quite necessary. Rebuilding trust with its customers requires a demonstrable commitment to quality service, readily available genuine parts, and well-trained staff especially with technological advancements. For this strategy to be effective and secure future success, AMTEC Motors must prioritize customer satisfaction and address past shortcomings. There is also an urgent need to adapt to market preferences. By researching and understanding the market's evolving needs, AMTEC Motors could potentially explore offering a wider range of vehicle options, which may potentially include high-demand, affordable second-hand imports alongside new models.

How Platinum Motors Harare Branch Has Weathered the Storm in The Highly Competitive Zimbabwean Automotive Sector.

Zimbabwe's automotive sector pulsates with a vibrant but precarious energy. Intense competition, economic instability, and evolving customer preferences pose constant challenges for players like Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Established in late 1953, Platinum Motors Harare Branch carved a niche by offering a diverse range of vehicles, primarily focusing on established Japanese brands such as Nissan and Mazda. The success of Platinum Motors Harare Branch stemmed from several key determining factors including product variety, customer focus and offering customized services. That being noted, Platinum Motors Harare Branch catered to a broad spectrum of needs, offering sedans, SUVs, and light commercial vehicles to a wide

array of clients from personal individual buyers to big companies and parastatals. This variety attracted customers seeking options beyond the limited offerings of some competitors like Willowvale Motor Corporation (WMC) and ZIMOCO. During its early days, Platinum Motors Harare Branch possessed a well-established network of dealerships and service centers across Zimbabwe. This characteristic ensured easy access to after-sales service and genuine parts, thereby nurturing customer loyalty (Dhasan & Aryupong, 2019; Fook & Dastane, 2021). In these early days, Platinum Motors Harare Branch, prioritized customer experience more than other aspects in the customer satisfaction spectrum. This derived them to enhance and foster a model of competitive pricing, hiring well-trained staff including rigorous staff trainings, and a focus on building long-term relationships.

At the beginning of the new millennium most players in the automotive sector in the country faced viability challenges as a result of the entry of new players into the market such as second-hand car imports ex-Japan and the marked depreciation of the local currency against major currencies. This led to some dealerships closing, such as Puzey & Payne - a renowned Peugeot and Fiat dealer while others scaled down operations such as Quest Motors, a BMW dealer.

The growth and development of any organization or dealership in Zimbabwe's is centered upon economic performance of the nation (Kaondera et al., 2023; Nyamweya, 2022; Reserve Bank of Australia, 2019). During the economic turmoil, characterized by hyperinflation and currency fluctuations, thus post ante the 2008 period, significant impacts were witnessed within the automotive sector. Some of the evident changes were characterized by rising vehicle import costs and limited access to foreign currency which made it difficult for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to remain competitive. Over the past decade, a growing preference for affordable, second-hand

imports, primarily from Japan and South Africa, disrupted the market (Kaondera et al., 2023). Primarily, Platinum Motors Harare Branch' reliance on new vehicles offered less affordability and a narrower range of options, which made them later expand to the new Chinese brands such as Foton, Zhong Tong, Shacman, HOWO and Yutong. As the competition for customers heats up, established players like ZIMOCO (Mercedes-Benz, Chevrolet) and newcomers offering other Chinese brands intensified competition, forcing Platinum Motors Harare Branch to adapt or risk losing market share.

Platinum Motors Harare Branch then started implementing various strategies to navigate these challenges, with varying degrees of success. One of the success stories of Platinum Motors Harare Branch hinges upon the partnerships made with Chinese suppliers of automotive and parts (Tsapo). This Acquisition and Rebranding which happened in 2009 by Chinese partners promising revitalization and improved service standards. The introduction of Chinese brands yielded mixed results. While some welcomed affordability, the lack of established track record compared to Japanese brands deterred other customers. On the other hand, Platinum Motors Harare Branch's failure to adapt to the second-hand import market was a missed opportunity because they could not grab that market share. Offering a wider range of high-demand, affordable pre-owned vehicles could have countered customer preference shifts and increased their revenue earnings over the past ten years (Munyoro & Madzinga-kusena, 2024).

That being said, Platinum Motors Harare Branch's journey offers valuable lessons and insights for navigating a competitive automotive sector at regional level. One of the key lessons is that customer is 'King'. Prioritizing customer satisfaction through quality service, readily available genuine parts, and well-trained staff remains

crucial for any automotive dealership to survive the test of time (Fook & Dastane, 2021). Intuitively, Platinum Motors Harare Branch must actively rebuild trust and demonstrate a commitment to exceeding customer expectations through technological adaptations and innovations that foster growth. By understanding evolving customer preferences and adapting to changing market trends, Platinum Motors Harare Branch must consider offering a more diverse portfolio, potentially including high-demand second-hand imports alongside new models and their Chinese brands. There is also need for holistic collaboration with established players in the second-hand import market and local mechanics with hands on experience on the latest models of vehicles to ensure efficient service delivery. Platinum Motors Harare Branch could leverage their expertise and networks while offering customers a wider choice of affordable vehicles at the same time increasing their earnings.

Exploring potential hidden gems for Platinum Motors Harare Branch may take the form of fostering brand recognition. While Platinum Motors Harare Branch faces challenges, there are potential hidden strengths to capitalize on which may be attained when Platinum Motors Harare Branch brands (Nissan, Mazda and SHACMAN) retain some recognition in Zimbabwe. This is particularly true among older generations and older companies who have positive memories of their past service with the firm. By leveraging on this nostalgia, the organization could attract potential new customers.

A Look at Platinum Motors Harare Branch's Strengths and Weakness in Customer Relationship Management Strategies in the Zimbabwean Automotive Sector.

In Zimbabwe's fiercely competitive automotive sector, customer loyalty is a precious commodity for business survival (Madhani, 2021). Platinum Motors Harare Branch, with its long history on reliability in terms of motor vehicle service provision,

faces the challenge of building strong customer relationships in an environment marked by rapid market dynamics, economic instability and continuously evolving consumer preferences (Mujakachi et al., 2023). Platinum Motor's foundation lies in a customer-centric approach that fostered loyalty in its early years.

In terms of its strengths, Platinum Motors Harare Branch as an established customer network, and by possessing a well-developed network of dealerships and service centers, it can ride on this to ensure long-term sustainability. This ensures easy access to after-sales service and genuine parts, a crucial advantage for building trust with customers. By providing personalized customer interactions in the past reports suggests that this practice ensured higher customer satisfaction. Through this, trained staff who understood customer needs and fostered long-term relationships contributed to positively to brand positive perception. Platinum Motors Harare Branch pricing strategy is very competitive, particularly in the early days before the hyperinflation period, which made sure that the organization stayed competitive over time. This affordability, combined with good service, attracted and retained huge sum of customers.

There are also some weaknesses embedded in the operational procedures of Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The economic downturn and changing market dynamics exposed some weaknesses in Platinum Motors Harare Branch customer relationship management strategy. As economic hardships mounted, Platinum Motors Harare Branch reportedly failed to invest adequately in its service network leading to a shrinking customer base. This has greatly led to a decline in service quality, with a lack of readily available genuine parts and under-trained staff negatively impacting customer experience. By Neglecting the Second-Hand Market, Platinum Motors Harare Branch focused on new vehicle sales, and yet the rise of the affordable second-

hand import market presented a missed opportunity. Their customer relationship management strategy failed to adapt to this shift, offering customers fewer choices and potentially losing them to their competitors which included informal car dealerships and workshops. The erosion and declining service quality and potentially limited communication regarding challenges faced by the company led to a decline in customer trust. Without a proactive approach to addressing customer concerns, loyalty waned.

To understand Platinum Motors Harare Branch's customer relationship management strengths and weaknesses in detail, as a researcher, one should examine key touchpoints along the customer journey. The customer journey comprises of the pre-sales, Sales and after sales scenarios (Amegavie et al., 2019). In this regard the pre-sales scenario is when potential customers might encounter Platinum Motors Harare Branch through advertising, online presence, or dealership interactions. When Platinum Motors Harare Branch has a strong customer relationship management strategy it would ensure clear communication about available products and services, pricing, and financing options. The pre-sales scenario is followed by the sales stage where, through pre-sales interactions, a customer decides that they want to purchase a specific product or seek a certain service from Platinum Motors Harare Branch. This, during the sales process, building rapport and addressing customer needs is crucial (Jian & Yuantao, 2021). The sales stage is particularly followed by the after sales stage, where customers provide feedback about their experiences, satisfaction of products or services rendered and useful insights for future improvements. Therefore, one can clearly articulate that customer satisfaction hinges on efficient after-sales service, such as timely feedback when clients have any questions or misunderstanding, conflict resolution and respecting the terms and

conditions of a guaranteed warranty (Mazikana, 2022; Skaf et al., 2026). Platinum Motors Harare Branch's potential weaknesses in parts availability and timely service delivery creates significant gaps on the customer journey, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction.

To regain customer trust and loyalty, Platinum Motors Harare Branch needs to implement a robust customer relationship management strategy given the ever-evolving Zimbabwean automotive market dynamic. This can be achieved by revitalizing the service network. By making investments in infrastructural upgrades, staff training, and ensuring genuine parts availability Platinum Motors Harare Branch can successfully revitalize their automotive service network. To add on to that, a focus on providing timely and efficient service will enhance customer satisfaction. Also, Platinum Motors Harare Branch could potentially explore partnerships with established second-hand vehicle import businesses. This would allow them to offer a wider range of vehicles and cater to the evolving needs of customers seeking affordability. A well-coordinated customer relationship management strategy would utilize various communication channels such as Telegram, phone calls, WhatsApp and Emailing. By creating and implementing a user-friendly website, social media presence, and responsive customer service hotlines Platinum Motors Harare Branch would enhance customer engagement and address concerns effectively. Loyalty Programs are an effective customer relationship management tool where the firm rewards loyal customers through customer gifting and appreciation social media posts which would therefore incentivize repeat business and encourage positive brand evangelism through passing positive comments on a brand within one's network (Hartoyo et al., 2023a). This could take the form of offering discounts on some products and services, extended warranties, or loyalty points redeemable for accessories.

As a strategy of dealing with the dynamic marketing environment, Platinum Motors Harare Branch can build on its past strengths and address its weaknesses to improve customer relationships (Nyamweya, 2022; Ushakov et al., 2018). (Nyamweya, 2022) reflects that one of the key strategies for improving customer relationship management in the automotive sector may involve rekindling brand nostalgia. The firm may leverage on the positive memories and experiences associated with Platinum Motors Harare Branch's past service excellence and can attract customers who value reliability and experiences. (Javed et al., 2023) reports that testimonials, historical references, and a focus on regaining past levels of service quality can evoke a sense of trust between customers and the firm. The firm may also adoption and implement a data driven customer insight strategy. By implementing a customer relationship management system that captures customer data Platinum Motors Harare Branch can get valuable insights from the data that would help them make informed decisions. Analyzing this data allows Platinum Motors Harare Branch to understand customer preferences, identify areas for improvement, and personalize marketing efforts. This would also force the firm to make investments in staff training on customer relationship management techniques that can equip personnel to handle clients meticulously.

Customer Relationship Management Techniques used by Automotive Dealers in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's automotive sector, despite its challenges, thrives on a competitive landscape where customer relationships are the fuel that propels success. To understand the various techniques applied by key players in the automotive sector of Zimbabwe, this research study starts by looking at the various components of the customer journey. Understanding the typical customer journey in Zimbabwe's

automotive sector is crucial for effective customer relationship management implementation by various dealerships. According to (Naru & Kumar, 2020) the customer journey is a pre-defined sequence of activities a client goes through before, during and after sales of a product or services provided within a specific industry. Initially, potential customers embark on their journey through research, often online or by visiting dealerships to explore options, compare features, and gather information on pricing and financing possibilities (Poturak et al., 2022). After that phase, the sales process would then involve interacting with dealership staff, negotiating deals, and finalizing the purchasing process. A positive sales experience is crucial for building trust and laying the groundwork for a long-term business-client relationship (Bathaee, 2021). (Barusman et al., 2019; Malki et al., 2023; Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021) relates that customer satisfaction hinges on efficient after-sales service. This after sales service in the automotive sector encompasses scheduled vehicle maintenance, genuine parts availability, timely warranty repairs, and any technical support needed by the customers after the purchase.

In a bid to ensure timely and flawless customer experiences, dealerships in Zimbabwe employ a variety of customer relationship management techniques at each stage of the customer journey. Some of the strategies were found to involve aspects of digital marketing, target advertising, lead generation and client-business relationship building. Digital Marketing occurs before the actual sales have been made: At this phase, a strong online presence of the organization show casing its products and services is necessary and key (Aragie et al., 2021). Established and informal motor vehicle dealerships leverage websites, social media platforms (WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram), and online marketplaces to showcase their inventory, highlight promotions, and provide easily accessible contact information to

potential customers. This raises awareness to the new and already existing customers on any new products and services provided, or any new changes in the pricing structure of the firms' catalogue. Firms in the automotive sector of Zimbabwe have also been found to be using targeted advertising. By understanding customer demographics and preferences, this allows the dealerships to utilize social media advertising and search engine optimization (SEO) to target potential customers with relevant messaging (Ajiva et al., 2024). This could involve promoting specific vehicle models, financing options, or special offers with a target audience in mind. Furthermore, dealerships capture leads through online forms, website inquiries, and social media interactions. These leads are nurtured through targeted email marketing campaigns or personalized phone calls, addressing specific interests and providing further information on the available products and services.

In accordance to (Naru & Kumar, 2020) to make long lasting sales and instant sales, the firm/dealership must invest in relationship building with its customers. In relationship building, sales staff are trained to focus on building rapport with its customers and other potential customers, understanding their needs, and offering personalized recommendations. At this stage, active listening, clear communication, and product knowledge are crucial for building trust and guiding customers towards the right products and service (vehicle). Automotive dealerships in Zimbabwe have for a long time adopted a culture of offering test drives to potential clients and practicing transparent pricing. Offering test drives allows potential customers to experience the vehicle firsthand, its speed capabilities, road handling capacity, the general feel of the vehicle which encompasses comfort and other key aspects. By allowing customers to assess comfort, performance, and suitability for their needs, the dealership has in some way ultimately influenced their purchase decisions (Zhang et al., 2023). Clear

and upfront pricing information, including the final on-road price with taxes and registration fees, builds trust and avoids surprises for customers during the sales process.

During the aftermath of the sale, dealerships utilize emails or SMS to remind customers about scheduled maintenance and appointments. This proactive approach ensures timely servicing and fosters a sense of customer care which goes a long way in building trust and loyalty between the dealership and the client. Following service appointments, dealerships might send surveys to gather feedback on customer satisfaction. These surveys allow the dealership to identify areas for improvements and address any concerns raised by the customer on a products or service offered. Some big dealerships such as ZIMOCO and Toyota Zimbabwe even go an extra mile to creating customer loyalty programs. In these customer loyalty programs, rewarding repeat business is key. Dealerships often implement loyalty programs that offer benefits like discounts on service, parts, or accessories (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020). These programs incentivize customers to return for future needs and promote brand loyalty as well as being advocates for the dealership.

In the Zimbabwe's competitive market, dealerships are exploring innovative customer relationship management techniques to stand out by integrating various communication channels like email, SMS, social media messaging, and phone calls thus, allowing dealerships to interact with customers on their preferred platforms, and fostering a seamless experience. Firms have also adopted a policy of personalized service. By leveraging on relevant customer data to personalize communication, offers goes beyond generic emails. To this end, dealerships can recommend services based on past purchases, vehicle history, or driving habits, demonstrating a deeper understanding of individual needs (Munyoro & Madzinga-kusena, 2024).

Con-currently, almost all formalized and registered dealerships are building client communities. These communities are being created through exploiting the opportunities offered by social media platforms, media groups and forums (Manyanga et al., 2024b). This allows customers to interact with each other, share experiences, and receive support from the dealership staff, fostering a sense of belonging and brand advocacy. By leveraging on technology, mobile apps can be a powerful tool in marketing and sales. Dealerships can develop apps offering features like appointment scheduling, service history tracking, or roadside assistance requests, enhancing customer convenience and engagement.

There are various circumstances of how dealerships in Zimbabwe are excelling in customer relationship management despite the harsh and turbulent economic situations. A perfect example to begin with is ZIMOCO dealership which specialize in the sale and service of Mercedes Benz and Chevrolet brands. Known for their established brands and premium service, ZIMOCO utilizes a combination of traditional and digital marketing strategies. They offer customer loyalty programs and prioritize personalized service at their dealerships. Another key example is CFAO Motors. This dealership has managed to leverage on social media platforms effectively, engaging with customers through interactive campaigns and contests. They also offer extended warranties and after-sales support programs, fostering customer confidence in their products and services.

The Rise of Japanese and Chinese Brands and their Impact on Customer Relationship Management in Zimbabwe’s Automotive Sector.

Zimbabwe's automotive sector is undergoing a significant transformation. The dominance of established European brands is being challenged by the rise of Japanese and Chinese dealerships, each with distinct approaches to customer

relationship management. By exploring this constantly evolving landscape, analyzing the implications of these new players on customer relationship management strategies and customer expectations, the researcher can build a strong understanding of the various opportunities, limitations and weaknesses of the Zimbabwean automotive sector/industry.

For decades, European brands like Land Rover and Mercedes-Benz held a prominent position in Zimbabwe. Their dealerships relied on a traditional customer relationship management approach with a limited online presence. During this age, websites were basic, with minimal information beyond contact details and showroom hours while social media presence was often non-existent. These old and prestigious dealerships focused on Brand Prestige, that is to say the emphasis was on the legacy and prestige associated with the brands. Sales staff might have relied on this brand recognition to close deals, with less focus on personalized service. Due to this structure, there was limited after-sales focus in the automotive sectors. While after-sales services were available, they might not have been as proactive in terms of customer outreach or loyalty programs as compared to the level and intensity of todays' automotive market.

On the contrary, the rise of Japanese brands like Toyota and Nissan have established a strong presence in Zimbabwe. Their dealerships offer a contrasting approach to customer relationship management. These Japanese dealerships prioritize a strong online presence with user-friendly websites showcasing vehicle features, specifications, and financing options (Muturi, 2024). According to (Khan, 2022) social media is actively used for engagement and targeted advertising. These Japanese and Chinese dealerships offer a customer-centric focus. At this juncture, sales staff are trained to prioritize customer needs. Test drives are readily offered, and

the focus is on building trust and understanding individual requirements. Japanese dealerships promote the reputation of their brands for reliability and fuel efficiency, catering to a broader customer base seeking practicality and value for their money.

On the other hand, the rise of Chinese automotive brands like Foton and JMC are rapidly gaining traction in Zimbabwe. The Chinese dealerships are adopting and using a unique customer relationship management strategy contrary to the American and Japanese brands. They use a competitive pricing model with a key selling point pinned upon affordability (Anees et al., 2020; Malki et al., 2023). Chinese dealerships leverage lower vehicle prices to attract customers seeking budget-friendly options. These Chinese dealerships in Zimbabwe initially started by building brand awareness as a market penetration strategy. This is imperative with newer brands, where dealerships prioritize on building brand awareness through targeted marketing campaigns and promotional offers. Social media plays a key role in building brand awareness and reaching a variety of customers from various backgrounds. According to Kachilala & Dumba, (2022) Chinese dealerships demonstrate a willingness to adapt to the evolving needs of the Zimbabwean market. This flexibility allows them to cater to specific customer segments, such as offering light commercial vehicles for growing businesses.

The rise of Japanese and Chinese dealerships necessitates a shift in customer relationship management strategies for all players in the Zimbabwean automotive sector (Manyanga et al., 2024b). It heightened customer focus by intensifying competition between key players. Competition necessitates a more customer-centric approach within players and competitors. All dealerships, regardless of brand, need to prioritize personalized service, understanding customer needs, and building long-term relationships. By utilizing digital transformation and a strong online presence these

Japanese and Chinese brands understand that it’s no longer a luxury, but rather it's an essential. These dealerships have also taken the liberty in developing user-friendly websites, leveraging social media effectively, and offering online appointment scheduling for excellent customer engagement (Dhasan & Aryupong, 2019). In this daily age, data-driven marketing has become paramount for firms to build an understanding of customer demographics and preferences through data analysis (Aragie et al., 2021). This allows dealerships to personalize marketing campaigns, recommend relevant vehicles, and target the right audience with the right message.

Building loyalty in a competitive market such as the Zimbabwean market where there exist numerous players with aggressive marketing strategies has become more than a necessity. With more choices available for a customer, automotive dealerships need to go beyond the basics to foster customer loyalty. To effectively achieve this, investing in aftersales services and loyalty programs has been found to be useful arsenals in this sector (Fook & Dastane, 2021; Javed et al., 2023; Munyoro & Madzinga-kusena, 2024). Investing in after-sales services has to be done in a manner that allows the firm to offer prompt, efficient, and transparent sales experience to the customers. This can be made efficient by ensuring the availability of genuine parts in the workshops, offering extended warranties, and providing regular service reminders demonstrate a commitment to customer satisfaction. To add on to that automotive dealers have also been involved in rewarding repeat business. Implementing these loyalty programs that offer discounts, free services, or special benefits incentivizes to customers has made most clients to return and fosters brand advocacy (Jian & Yuantao, 2021). Creating online communities through social media groups or forums allows customers to connect with each other and the dealership staff. This fosters a sense of belonging and brand loyalty.

A customer-centric future is undeniable due to this rise of Japanese and Chinese automotive dealerships in Zimbabwe. Their presence creates a unique opportunity for the entire sector. By prioritizing customer needs, embracing digital transformation, and implementing innovative customer relationship management strategies, dealerships can build stronger relationships, foster loyalty, and navigate the evolving landscape of Zimbabwe's automotive industry. This section has provided a foundational analysis on case studies of dealerships in Zimbabwe by explore specific examples of successful customer relationship management strategies implemented by Japanese and Chinese dealerships in Zimbabwe. The section has also incorporated insights from customer surveys and past research/literature to understand evolving customer expectations and preferences in the Zimbabwean market. The researcher has also taken a glimpse into the impact on informal markets and an analysis on how the rise of established dealerships might impact the informal automotive. It was found out that the rise informal markets in the automotive sector has not only created competition for the formal sector but rather has awaken the formal sector to engage into creative customer relationship management strategies and increase sector efficiency (Mujakachi et al., 2023). Furthermore, in the Zimbabwe's automotive sector established dealerships grapple with the rise of new players, while customers navigate an evolving landscape. In this dynamic environment, fostering good customer relationship management is the key for success. Embracing new technologies by exploring the use of mobile apps for service bookings, roadside assistance requests, or loyalty program management can enhance customer convenience and engagement within the automotive sector.

Thematic Analysis and Customer Perceptions in the Automotive Sector.

As qualitative research gains recognition and importance, it is crucial that it is carried out rigorously and systematically to produce meaningful results (Kridiawan & Wang, 2023). Qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner by recording and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible (Mutsikiwa & Makumbe, 2025). Although there are many examples of how to conduct qualitative research, there are limited sophisticated tools available to researchers for conducting a rigorous and relevant thematic analysis. This study is an example of research that attempts to carry out a case study by using a mixed methods approach that involves the deployment of both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques as well as thematic analysis. Qualitative research is a valued paradigm of inquiry, and its complexity requires rigorous and methodical methods to create useful results (Madiba, 2025). Thematic analysis is a relevant qualitative research method, yet little guidance is available to researchers on how to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023).

Qualitative research aims to generate knowledge based on human experience and has gained a distinct place in research literature. As the popularity of qualitative research increases, it becomes imperative to conduct it in a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful results. However, data analysis is often the most complex phase of qualitative research and receives the least thoughtful discussion in the literature. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct data analysis in a systematic approach that can be transparently communicated to others. Researchers need to be clear about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and include a detailed description of analysis methods to assure rigor and trustworthiness (Bruckberger et al., 2023). Each

qualitative research approach has specific techniques for conducting, documenting, and evaluating data analysis processes, but it is the individual researcher's responsibility to assure rigor and trustworthiness. Numerous qualitative researchers ((Mutsikiwa & Makumbe, 2025); (Sachdeva et al., 2026) & (Buckley et al., 2024)) can demonstrate how data analysis has been conducted through recording and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible. Despite numerous examples of how to conduct qualitative research, there are few discussions in the literature about how to conduct a rigorous and relevant thematic analysis. This research aims to capture the use of data and analyze it using the thematic analysis technique, which, when used in conjunction with other quantitative methodologies, enhances the legitimacy and dependability of research findings.

Definitional Aspects around a Thematic Study.

Thematic Analysis is a form of qualitative analysis that is used to analyze and present themes or patterns that relate to collected data. It provides a systematic approach to data analysis and is considered the most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations. Thematic Analysis allows researchers to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with one of the entire contents, which enhances the research's overall meaning and accuracy (Naeem et al., 2023). This method is especially useful in qualitative research, where researchers need to understand and collect diverse aspects of data (Christou, 2022; Squires, 2023). Thematic Analysis gives them an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely and helps to illustrate the data in great detail dealing with diverse subjects via interpretations.

Ahmed et al., (2025) and Namey et al., (2008. p. 138) outlined that, “Thematic analysis moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code congruence, or graphically displaying code relationships…” (Sanodia, 2024).

Thematic analysis is a technique widely used in qualitative research, as argued by Viera, (2023) and Nowell et al,. (2017). However, it has not been given the same level of appreciation as other qualitative methods like grounded theory, ethnography, or phenomenology. Sandhiya & Bhuvaneswari, (2025) suggested that thematic analysis should be considered as a foundational method for qualitative analysis, as it provides core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Many authors also believe that thematic analysis is a process used by many qualitative methods to assist researchers in data analysis (Braun, 2006; Ibrahim, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017; Fernando et al., 2023).

Some researchers argue that thematic analysis should be recognized as a separate research method (Braun, 2006; Ibrahim, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017; Nuseir et al., 2023). However, Suteja & Juhana, (2026) and Maramura et al. (2020) suggest that thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be applied to different epistemologies and research questions. It is a technique for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes that emerge from a data set. According to Chingombe and Musarandega (2021), thematic analysis acts as a translator between qualitative and quantitative analysis, facilitating communication between researchers who use different research methods. Thorough thematic analysis can

produce reliable and valuable findings (Kirkwood et al., 2022). While grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology have been thoroughly discussed, such a trend has not yet extended to thematic analysis. There is insufficient literature that outlines the practical processes for conducting reliable thematic investigation (Im et al., 2023; Khoa et al., 2023; Sandhiya & Bhuvaneswari, 2025).

Squires, (2023) argues that Thematic Analysis is a research method that helps the researcher identify and analyze the relationships between different concepts and compare them with the data collected. By using this method, researchers can link various concepts and opinions of learners and compare them with the data gathered in different situations and at different times during the project. This analysis allows for a wide range of interpretations Squires, (2023).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Thematic Investigation.

Thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be adapted to suit different requirements for a variety of studies. It provides a detailed and complex account of data, making it highly versatile in its use (Christou, 2024). The best part is that it does not require the researcher to have in-depth theoretical or technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches. This makes it an accessible method, especially for novice researchers who require guidance and mentorship. Thematic analysis is also easy to learn, as it has few prescriptions and procedures.

Researchers ((Grewal et al., (2022) (Chang et al., (2024); Rane et al., (2023)) can use thematic analysis to examine the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights in the research process. It is also useful for summarizing the key features of

a large dataset, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data. This helps to produce a clear and organized final report.

Despite the merits of thematic analysis as highlighted above it is worth mentioning that the method also has its downside.

In using this qualitative research method, one should consider the disadvantages of using it in comparison to other qualitative research methods (Chingombe & Musarandega, 2021). Novice researchers may feel uncertain about how to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis due to the lack of substantial literature on this method in comparison to other methods such as grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology (Naeem et al., 2023). Thematic analysis is limited in that it does not allow researchers to make claims about language use, which other methods do ((Gao et al., (2023) & Braun & Clarke, (2006)). One of the merits of thematic analysis is that it is flexible to use. However, this can act as a drawback to the method as it can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Kirkwood et al., 2022). Therefore, applying and making explicit an epistemological position that coherently underpins the study's empirical claims can promote consistency and cohesion (Nowell et al., 2017).

Some people criticize qualitative research because they believe that it lacks structure. However, although qualitative research cannot be subjected to the same criteria as quantitative approaches, it does provide methods of analysis that should be applied rigorously to the data. The issues raised in many general qualitative research assessment criteria can be more or less applied to thematic forms of analysis. As thematic analysis is a flexible method, researchers need to be clear and explicit about what they are doing. What they say they are doing needs to match up with what they

actually do. In this sense, the theory and method need to be applied rigorously. A good thematic analysis needs to ensure that the interpretations of the data are consistent with the theoretical framework. A point to note is that different research frameworks can lead to different requirements and limitations. For example, if you're working within an experiential framework, you would typically avoid making claims about the social construction of the research topic. On the other hand, if you're conducting constructionist thematic analysis, you would not treat people's talk of experience as a transparent window into their world. It's also important to note that a good and interesting analysis that fails to explain its theoretical assumptions, methodology, and purpose is lacking crucial information, as highlighted by (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022), and therefore falls short in one aspect.

The Use and Application of Thematic Analysis in Research.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that is used to identify, interpret and more importantly analyse data as suggested by several researchers (Braun, 2006; Ibrahim, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017; Chingombe & Musarandega, 2021). It is a valuable tool for professional academics, novice academics, and upcoming researchers. However, there is a lack of supporting evidence to explain why it is one of the most preferred techniques for dealing with qualitative assessments.

In this study, thematic analysis was employed to evaluate customers' perceptions regarding what should be done to keep customers satisfied and improve the reliability and quality of services provided. Thematic analysis is suitable for data interpretation, deductive and inductive approaches, analysing two-phased or differently phased data, and coding and categorizing data and themes, as noted by Organisation et al. (2021).

When interpreting data and results from a qualitative study including thematic methods, it is crucial to recognize that excellent qualitative studies must be able to draw accurate conclusions that are consistent with the collected data (Nowell et al., 2017; Poturak et al., 2022). Thematic Analysis as a method can identify and analyse factors or variables that may influence any issue generated by the participants. Therefore, the participants' interpretations are significant in providing the most appropriate explanations for their behaviours, actions, and thoughts (Taherdoost, 2022). This approach aligns with the key features involved in the process of Thematic Analysis.

Thematic Analysis plays a crucial role in research approaches that involve deductive or inductive research. Its flexibility allows it to be used in both inductive and deductive methodologies. For instance, in an inductive approach, the data that is collected starts with a specific content and then moves to broader generalizations and finally to theories. This helps to ensure that the themes are effectively linked to the data. This flexibility enables researchers to deal with the observational data collected throughout the study. In such a situation, there needs to be a variety of options to frame the analysis around precise words, such as "explanations", as different data such as observational data attempts to provide explanations for the study's entire proceedings. Furthermore, for comparing the collected data with the perceptions of the participants, other comparative methodologies such as the use of the questionnaire as a deductive approach should be employed.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be used to analyze data that is collected at different times. This method is suitable when the aim of the study is to understand the current practices of an individual and the influence of any variable that is being used by participants. It is also useful when the research seeks

to examine the impact of a particular tool or technology, such as blogs, on learners' attitudes.

For example, Naru et al., (2024) and Alhojailan (2012) adapted a questionnaire to collect data for his study during two different phases: before and after the implementation of web 2.0 tools with learners. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data collected during the research process. This magnifies the importance and flexibility, of this approach to cope with data that has to be collected at different times with varying contextual connotations.

In addition, by collecting data at two different phases, the researcher can observe the differences and similarities that take place before and after data collection. Thematic analysis is considered suitable for this type of data, as it allows the researcher to highlight the differences and similarities within the data set.

Overall, thematic analysis is a useful method for analyzing data that is collected at different times, and is particularly suitable when the aim of the study is to understand the impact of a particular tool or technology on learners' attitudes.

Thematic Analysis is a method used to code and categorize data into themes. This process can be used to identify how different issues affect the perceptions of participants. The processed data can be displayed and classified according to its similarities and differences. To achieve this, the process involves coding, categorization, and noting patterns that occur in the data set. This can help to unveil different levels of themes and to create a reasonable and logical chain of evidence. By gathering data using different instruments, such as observation or questionnaires with interviews, and in different environments, Thematic Analysis can produce and present the data more effectively and reflect the reality of the data collected.

It is important for the researcher to take time to familiarize themselves with the data before conducting Thematic Analysis. This involves understanding the concepts, theories, models and practices which may impact any conclusions that can be made from the data analysis. The deductive research approach involves identifying and extracting themes based on pre-existing perspectives.

The Process of Thematic Analysis.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that allows the researcher to have a clearer understanding of qualitative data by identifying and analyzing recurring themes within it. This process involves analyzing data to identify key ideas or concepts and grouping them together to form themes. Thematic analysis is based on the belief that all information carries meaning, and by identifying these themes, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.

One of the main advantages of thematic analysis is its flexibility and ease of use. Mishra & Dey, (2022) and Nowell et al. (2017) assert that it is a basic yet highly effective tool for querying the meaning of qualitative data. Thematic analysis can be used as a basis for more rigorous qualitative data analysis processes, such as critical discourse analysis (CDA). Ojubanire et al., (2026) and Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is a foundational method that can be applied to a wide range of research questions and data types.

Should a researcher choose to use thematic analysis, themes and classes of data can be classified using CDA to obtain more insightful outcomes. This allows for more detailed data analysis, leading to a deeper understanding of the underlying themes and concepts. In summary, thematic analysis is a powerful tool that enables

researchers to uncover the meaning behind qualitative data, providing a solid foundation for further analysis and interpretation.

Before proceeding with the mechanics of data analysis using Thematic Analysis, it is important to clarify some points that form the basis for adapting this method to a specific research project. The aim is to validate the analysis itself, which will help researchers determine how to utilize the raw data and its sequence.

Thematic Analysis combines data exploration and theory generation with its analytical element, making it particularly useful when the researcher wants to identify common themes and ideas across multiple participants. Assigning a narrative to the diverse data can help gain a clear and logical understanding of the participants' thoughts and experiences. By thoroughly examining past studies and experiences with qualitative analysis, we have outlined a practical and effective procedure for conducting Thematic Analysis that meets the trustworthiness criteria outlined by (Sandhiya & Bhuvaneswari, 2025).

Thematic analysis is a flexible method that can be conducted using various theoretical and philosophical approaches. An article by Lincoln (1985) titled "Thematic analysis: a reflexive approach" came up with four approaches. These are explained below-:

- Inductive thematic analysis involves interpreting data and developing themes that are related to the content of a dataset. This approach uses the analyzed data as a starting point to develop concepts and theories.
- On the other hand, deductive thematic analysis involves developing themes that are closely linked to existing concepts, theories, and evidence. This

approach tests the applicability of concepts and theories rather than developing them from the data.

- The realist approach to thematic analysis involves developing themes based on a pre-conceived, actual, or assumed reality.
- The constructivist approach which involves developing themes based on the subjective views in the data.

Thematic analysis is a research method that involves analyzing data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. There are different approaches to conducting thematic analysis, including the deductive approach and the constructivist approach. The deductive approach involves developing themes based on pre-existing theories or concepts.

One can argue that the results of thematic analysis can vary based on the researcher's philosophical biases. When interpreting data results analyzed using thematic analysis, it is advisable to be aware of any potential biases that might have influenced the researcher's interpretation.

To conduct a thorough thematic analysis, Clarke and Braun (2006) suggest following a five-step process, which is presented in the figure below:

Figure 2.10

The inherent Process of Conducting a Thematic Analysis (Source: Clarke & Braun, (2006)



Thematic analysis is an intricate process that comprises five essential steps, namely familiarization with the data, coding of the data, generation of themes from the data, reviewing the generated themes, and reporting the findings from the analysis of the themes. To initiate the process of thematic analysis, researchers must prioritize the step of familiarizing with the data (Lasrado et al., 2023; Nasri, 2023; Sakyi et al., 2022). This initial step is fundamental to every data analysis technique. It is noteworthy that researchers must understand the dataset as well as its context to derive meaning from the raw data before proceeding with any data manipulations. For instance, while conducting thematic analysis from a deductive angle, researchers must have a thorough understanding of the concepts, theories, models, and practice that underpin any deductions to be made from the data (Javed et al., 2023). Therefore, the identification and extraction of themes under deductive research contexts will be guided by pre-existing and pre-identified perspectives.

One of the relevant and necessary processes that come with thematic analysis is a skill to do coding. Coding can be done manually by assigning names, values or codes to variables within the dataset, or can be done using computerized software such as NVivo, SPSS, STATA and Python. According to Lee et al., (2024) and Smith (2006) thematic analysis is the foundation of coding. Coding is a crucial aspect of qualitative research that involves an iterative process of identifying, marking, and labeling pieces of text or content that hold meaning or are relevant to the research questions. This process occurs in hierarchical stages, beginning by identifying individual words and sentences and then grouping them into code groups. In thematic analysis, the starting point in coding is the identification of pieces of text, including words, partial and full sentences that aid the researcher in understanding the similarities in the themes.

The initial stage of coding involves identifying pieces of text that relate to the research questions and creating initial codes. The researcher or data analyst then reviews the initial codes and groups' similar codes together to form code groups. Each code group is given a descriptive label that summarizes the underlying content.

Once all the pieces of text have been coded, the researcher or data analyst reviews the codes and code groups to identify patterns, themes, and relationships that emerge from the data. This process of reviewing the codes is known as analytical coding and involves a more in-depth analysis of the data to identify underlying themes and relationships.

In summary, coding is a critical process in qualitative research that enables researchers to identify patterns and themes in the data. It involves identifying pieces of text that are relevant to the research questions, creating codes, grouping codes, and analyzing the data to identify underlying themes and relationships.

Qualitative research analysis involves a process of coding, which is essential in generating themes and sub-themes that help in determining research findings. The coding process can use different methods, and it helps in sorting through large amounts of data. Themes are higher-level codes that classify groups of data, while sub-themes are lower-level codes that group more specific data. By hierarchically classifying the codes, researchers can create meaningful relationships and gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Sub-themes provide insight into the theme and develop a more comprehensive idea. They can be positive, negative, or even contest the theme. Therefore, sub-themes are valuable in providing a holistic perspective of the data.

Themes can be confidently categorized as either semantic or latent based on their derivation, meaning, construct, and intended use. Semantic themes are firmly derived from codes that have explicit meanings. According to Braun & Clarke, (2024) and Clarke and Braun (2016), “the apparent and surface meanings of the data when the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written." In this regard, latent themes may not have explicit parts in the collected data. These themes can be confidently extracted by the researcher from critical assumptions made during data collection and coding, or the creation of themes (Mishra & Dey, 2022). These themes are referred to as latent themes and emanate from “the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Clarke & Braun, 2024, 2006).

Case Study Approaches to Qualitative Studies.

The classification of case studies as either a research method or a type of research has been a topic of debate among researchers from various disciplines. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity on what constitutes a case and a research subject (Grenier, 2023; Muleme, 2017). Previous studies have focused predominantly on the limitations of case studies, rather than their inherent advantages (Rebolj & Possibilities, 2014).

It is imperative for researchers to understand the nuances involved in case studies and to evaluate their suitability for the research question at hand. Despite the criticisms, case studies have the potential to offer rich and detailed insights into complex phenomena that cannot be captured by other research methods. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers carefully consider the strengths and limitations of case studies before deciding on their use.

The use of case studies in qualitative research dates back to its early development. Presently, case studies represent a significant portion of research in various fields, including psychology, history, education, economics, and medicine, among others. The body of knowledge that we possess today about the empirical world owes much to case study research. Notably, many classic works in different disciplines are based on case studies. Despite their widespread use, case study research has not received as much attention compared to other research methods in social sciences. Few texts have been written on the topic, which has led to inconsistencies and ambiguities in defining and using case studies.

Case studies are commonly considered a part of qualitative research, although they may also be classified as quantitative or as a combination of both. Qualitative research focuses on subjective experiences and the interpretations that individuals make of them, while quantitative research uses numerical data and statistical analysis. A case study can incorporate either a qualitative, quantitative, or both approaches. Regardless of the approach, the qualitative and quantitative results should complement each other to produce a meaningful and comprehensive research outcome.

In conclusion, case studies are an essential research tool that should be appropriately used with careful consideration of the research objective and purpose. Researchers should understand the strengths and limitations of case studies to use them effectively. It is crucial to avoid confusion and inconsistencies in defining and using case studies in research.

As experienced researchers and research practitioners, it is imperative to clarify some crucial research terms such as "comparative methods," "case study methods,"

and "qualitative methods." Comparative methods require comparing a small number of cases and exploring facts, relations, or processes to identify similarities or differences. On the other hand, case studies involve in-depth investigation of an individual case. Qualitative methods are closely linked to case studies and are considered by some researchers to be a part of qualitative research.

Key Definitions and Explanations Surrounding Case Studies.

As acknowledged above, there is consensus and varying definitions of case studies and what they mean and how they can be applied in research. These definitions and explanations are derived from the foundations of understanding and analysis by the research and are dependent upon the school of thought being followed Viera, (2023) has observed that defining the concept of a case study leads to some confusion among authors, as efforts to clarify the term have often resulted in misunderstanding. This is particularly true in the modern era where there has been a proliferation of researchers and publications on different research topics. It can be difficult to differentiate between the correct and incorrect definitions of a topic. Therefore, it is important to understand the subject matter thoroughly in order to assimilate the information in a much better way.

Case studies are an essential tool for understanding and analyzing individual cases and phenomena. They provide a comprehensive description and analysis of a situation with the aim of identifying the variables, structures, and interactions between participants. It is a powerful way to assess the performance of work or progress in development, and it has both theoretical and practical applications.

As Chayira, (2025) argues, case studies offer a detailed analysis of individuals, groups, institutions, problems, processes, phenomena, or events. They help us

understand the complexities of a situation and can be used as a form of descriptive or causal experimental method.

One of the key benefits of case studies is that they highlight the developmental factor. Cases are generated and evolve over time, often as a series of specific and interrelated events that occur in a particular time and place. This holistic approach to understanding a case provides a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the situation.

In conclusion, case studies are a powerful tool for understanding, analyzing, and assessing individual cases and phenomena. They offer a detailed and nuanced perspective of a situation and are essential for both theoretical and practical purposes.

Case studies are a crucial aspect of research that focus on the environment or context in which a particular project, policy, institution, program, or system exists. The boundaries of individual units within the survey determine what is considered a case and what its context becomes. A critical review of various case study definitions led (Del Vecchio et al., 2022; Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Meena & Sahu, 2021; Muleme, 2017; Selim & Gad-El-Rab, 2024; Viera, 2023) to define a case study as an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a real-life situation. Moreover, a case study is not a method in itself, but rather a design frame that may incorporate a number of methods. When using a case study, researchers should not consider it as a methodological choice, but rather a selection of what will be explored. For instance, in the study of Platinum Motors Harare Branch, a mixed methods approach was used to assess the perceptions of customers about the quality-of-service delivery at this particular automobile dealership. An individual case, such as the case of Platinum Motors Harare Branch, can be studied or assessed from different

perspectives, including qualitative and quantitative. These definitions share a commitment to the examination of complexity in a variety of real-life situations, and they do not include various methods of data acquisition, as their focus is elsewhere. Differences among the definitions can be attributed to the different epistemological bases that various researchers lean upon, such as the purpose, level, timeframe, and/or context of the research. As a researcher, one may define a case study as a detailed and intensive analysis of a particular event, organization, situation, and/or social unit.

Benefits and Focus of Using the Case Study Approach.

Each methodological approach in research offers unique benefits. Case study research, in particular, provides valuable advantages in terms of both process and outcome. The case study design allows researchers to focus on a specific case within a confined space and time, enabling them to collect different types of data such as interviews, documentation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observation, surveys, and other necessary means. This type of research provides the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of an organization, a facet of an organization, or an individual, including their inner workings and interactions (Felix & Rembulan, 2023).

If carried out properly case studies are an invaluable tool that can assist a researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of a specific unit. They help readers examine the case, learn from it, and apply the principles and lessons learned to other cases or similar situations. Such transferability is a key advantage of case studies, as it allows researchers to apply their findings to different scenarios, which is not always possible with quantitative studies.

Case studies typically concentrate on a specific entity, such as an event, individual, location, object, or organization. The most significant aspect is to ascertain the case and its boundaries. Therefore, the central query to pose is, "What constitutes the case?" Scholars assert that case studies do not represent a methodological inclination, but rather a preference for what to scrutinize (Barusman et al., 2019).

Examples of Case Studies.

Numerous researchers have conducted case studies that serve as valuable examples to help readers and academics understand what a case study entails. Each case study has a clearly defined boundary of location and time, which are the defining characteristics of case studies.

One of the examples of case studies is a research project by Militello et al. (2010), who conducted a multiple case-study to investigate the use of formative assessment systems. The process refers to the approach that learners and teachers use to adjust their learning and teaching strategies. The researchers aimed to uncover how educators seek and obtain student assessment tools. The study lasted for eighteen months and focused on three district schools. The results were centered on three key findings, which include the reasons a school district might want an assessment system, the key components and characteristics of an assessment system, and how informative assessment systems are used within the three district schools.

Another example of a case study is a research project by Scheib in 2003, which used a collective case study design to examine the role of stress among four music teachers at a high school in the Midwestern United States. The study was based on previous literature that examined causes of stress in a music teacher's life and aimed

to investigate factors leading to the emergence of stress amongst the teachers. The researcher used document reviews, individual interviews with the staff, and observations to understand the stress factors related to areas such as role conflict, role overload, resource inadequacy, and student complaints. The results showed the essential nature of triangulation in balancing all aspects of the data that were collected.

Advantages of Using a Case Study Approach.

Case studies are a research method that involves the in-depth study of a single case, such as a person, group, organization, or event. Compared to solely quantitative methods, case studies offer several advantages, as identified by Patten (2021) and (Janis, 2022).

Firstly, case studies have the potential to achieve high conceptual validity. Conceptual validity refers to the identification and measurement of indicators that best present the theoretical concepts that a researcher wants to measure (Watkins, 2018). Social science researchers often face challenges in measuring variables such as democracy and power. Case studies help researchers in this regard by carrying out a “contextualized comparison,” which searches for analytically equivalent phenomena even if they are expressed in different terms and contexts.

Secondly, case studies are useful for fostering new hypotheses. Unlike quantitative studies, case studies are suitable for serving the heuristic purpose of inductively identifying additional variables and new hypotheses. Case studies can analyze qualitatively complex events and consider numerous variables precisely because they do not require many cases or a limited number of variables. In contrast, quantitative research can be used to identify deviant cases that may lead to new

hypotheses but, in and of themselves, lack any clear means of actually identifying new hypotheses.

Thirdly, case studies are effective in examining the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases. Case studies examine the operation of causal mechanisms in individual cases in detail. Within a single case, they look at a large number of intervening variables and inductively observe any unexpected aspect of the operation of a particular causal mechanism or help identify what conditions are present in a case that activate the causal mechanism. In contrast, quantitative studies in their correlations lack such causality ((Suteja & Juhana, (2026); Santouridis & Tsachtani, (2015)).

Fourthly, case studies have the capacity for addressing causal complexity. Case studies offer much more benefits and positive outcomes that assist in handling complex scenarios (Knekta et al., 2019). This advantage is relative rather than absolute. Case studies can allow for equifinality by producing generalizations that are narrower and more contingent. Notwithstanding this advantage, others who prefer quantitative methods appreciate theories that are more general even if this means that they are vaguer and more prone to counterexamples.

Case studies also have additional advantages. The connectedness to everyday life and case studies' abundance of individual elements and details are important for researchers from two viewpoints. Firstly, a case study is important for developing different views of reality, including the awareness that human behavior cannot be understood merely as an act that is driven by a rule or a theory. Secondly, case studies assist in contributing to the professional development of a researcher, since they

provide context-dependent experience that increases their research capabilities (Harvey et al., 2023).

Empirical Evidence.

According to a studies conducted by Mazikana, (2023a) and Wang et al,. (2016), there is strong empirical evidence to suggesting that it costs significantly less to retain an existing customer than it does to acquire a new one. Furthermore, (Del Vecchio et al., 2022; Hu & Basiglio, 2024; Liu & Chen, 2023; Mansour et al., 2025; Reichheld and Sasser 2012) insinuated that despite of the industry or sector, it costs five times more to win back a lost customer as opposed to keeping an existing customer. This makes customer loyalty particularly important in times when marketing budgets are being scrutinized. The study aimed to evaluate the impact of customer relationship management benefits on customer loyalty and retention for the benefits of both the enterprise and its customers. The researchers found that several factors were key contributors to customer loyalty in the automobile industry. These included trust in the company's ability to provide on-time service delivery, prompt handling of repair work, friendliness and helpfulness of staff, the company's ability to arrange replacements, and its commitment to fulfilling its obligations to customers.

To achieve their objectives, the researchers analysed the effectiveness of customer experience management on customer satisfaction and studied its impact on customer retention in the automobile sector. The results showed that effective customer relationship management strategies can significantly improve customer satisfaction and ultimately lead to higher customer retention rates. The study highlights the importance of adopting effective customer relationship management strategies as a key business practice for companies looking to maintain strong customer relationships and improve customer loyalty.

The data for this study was collected using the questionnaire survey technique from a total of three hundred and forty-six (346) respondents. The questions were carefully chosen based on personal background, such as age, gender, employment type, student and unemployed, as well as variables used to assess automobile service performance (Ajiva et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2023; Hartoyo et al., 2023b). The collected data was analysed using SPSS, Stata and Microsoft Excel, ensuring that the findings were accurate and reliable.

The analysis of the data revealed that customer satisfaction through making promises that are kept leads to customer retention and customer loyalty, key variables in business sustainability. Therefore, the automobile sector should prioritize variables that can increase customer loyalty, as this will help them to retain their customers and enhance their reputation in the market. The study also found that some customers are satisfied with the services provided by the company, indicating that customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty and retention while others are not satisfied.

Furthermore, other studies conducted by Dwivedi et al., (2024) and Poturak et al. (2022) suggested that firms can retain customers and create customer loyalty by knowing competitor activities and being competitive. This implies that companies should keep a close eye on their competitors and develop strategies to stay ahead of the game.

Furthermore, this study provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to customer loyalty in the automobile sector by looking at a single player in this industry. The findings suggest that companies should focus on fulfilling their promises to customers, prioritizing variables that increase customer loyalty, and keeping a close watch on their competitors to stay ahead of the game.

The automotive industry, which includes motor vehicle retailers, is facing intense competition and is focusing on building and maintaining customer loyalty through various customer relationship management tactics. Customer relationship management is a set of strategies and techniques that companies use to manage their interactions with current and potential customers. As per a study by Kridiawan & Wang, (2023), there are various factors that contribute to successful customer relationship management, but this study specifically focuses on three dimensions of customer relationship management: technology adoption, trust, and complaint handling, which are essential for creating loyal customers.

The study was conducted on motor vehicle retailers in Bangladesh, with 210 respondents. The main objective of the study was to explore various customer relationship management activities initiated by these companies and to measure the impact of three exogenous variables on the endogenous variable of customer loyalty. These exogenous variables were trust, complaint handling, and technology adoption. To analyse the data, the researchers used SPSS version 16.0 for descriptive analysis and AMOS 16.0 to measure the impact of the independent variables on customer loyalty.

The study conducted on customer loyalty revealed that all three independent variables including trust, efficient handling of complaints, and adoption of new technologies had a significant impact on customer loyalty. The findings suggest that customer relationship management activities that focus on building trust among customers by maintaining a transparent relationship, providing excellent customer service and support, and making the customer feel valued, can have a significant impact on customer retention and loyalty. Similarly, effective handling of complaints and grievances by providing timely resolution and support can help to retain

customers. Additionally, adoption of new technologies and innovative customer relationship management practices can help companies to stay ahead of competitors and offer personalized experiences to their customers.

Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of factors that lead to better customer retention practices in the automotive industry and highlights the importance of building strong relationships with key customers for long-term success. By implementing effective customer engagement strategies, companies can ensure customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy, which can lead to increased revenue and profitability.

The research study has significant implications for the current understanding of customer relationship management theory by highlighting its specific contribution towards creating customer loyalty. The findings suggest that practitioners can use the study's implications to improve their managerial strategies and retain a more loyal customer base. However, it is noteworthy that Tunjar (2024) and earlier Abdullateef and Salleh (2013) pointed out that there is limited literature available on the relationships between customer satisfaction, company reputation, and customer loyalty. This implies that there is a need for more research that examines these connections and builds a coordinated model that can comprehensively study these relationships.

Furthermore, the study's findings are consistent with previous studies by Balaji (2015), which were conducted in developed economies. These studies suggest that customer relations management significantly improves customer loyalty. Additionally, Menidjel et al. (2019) have also indicated that strong management relations with customers directly affect their commitment and trust in the organization. Therefore,

based on the current findings, the researcher supports the first hypothesis and recommends that practitioners prioritize building strong customer relations to improve customer loyalty.

The study conducted by Tseng et al in 2017 investigated the beliefs of customers in Pakistan regarding company reputation and customer relationship management. The Pakistani market is known for its uncertain and turbulent nature, which presents challenges to companies operating in the region. The study collected data from registered firms in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, which was verified by the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), as noted by Wahab and Khong in 2019. Structured questionnaires were employed, and a total of 345 questionnaires were distributed among the top management, out of which 217 responses were received. The researchers excluded incomplete responses, and the remaining 181 responses were used for the final analysis.

For hypothesis testing, the researchers employed AMOS, which revealed that customer satisfaction and company reputation have a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty and retention. Furthermore, the findings suggested that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between customer relationship management, company reputation, and customer loyalty, as highlighted by Liu et al in 2018. The study recommends that management must capacitate their employees especially the customer facing ones so that they are capable of handling any customer pain points with confidence and empathy. Capacitated employees anticipate customer concerns and are more proactive in dealing with any negative feedback from customers. The researchers also suggest that various steps, such as advertising, public relations, and marketing campaigns, are significant in changing customer behaviors.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights into customer beliefs about company reputation and customer relationship management in Pakistan and suggests practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to improve customer loyalty and retention.

The impact of customer relationship management and customer retention on customer satisfaction and purchase decisions of Indonesian automotive customers was examined by Villena-Manzanares and Souto-Perez in 2016. The study collected data from 200 automotive customers through questionnaires, direct observation, and literature review (Wolter et al, 2017). The results of the study indicate that customer relationship management and customer retention have a positive effect on customer satisfaction and significantly influence purchasing decisions.

The practical implications of the study suggest that the automotive industry should prioritize managing their customer engagement strategies more effectively, as it serves as the most important factor that influences purchasing decisions and more importantly repeat business. The industry should also communicate these aspects effectively to their customers in order to build trust and loyalty.

Therefore, it is essential for the automotive industry to focus on customer relationship management and customer retention to drive customer satisfaction, build brand loyalty, and increase revenue. The study shows that the benefits are not only evident in increased customer loyalty but also in increased sales, making customer relationship management and essential investment for the automotive industry.

Insights from Literature.

The literature review section of this study delves into various interconnected subheadings that meticulously explain the insights gathered from literature. According

to the literature, it has been identified that the determinants of customer retention are centred on providing high-quality products at an affordable price range and meeting and or exceeding customer expectations. Furthermore, the literature suggests that there is a positive correlation between customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and customer retention.

Companies can leverage customer relationship management techniques to improve customer retention, loyalty, and satisfaction. Customer relationship management is a software that enables the storage of customer contact information such as names, addresses, and phone numbers, and monitors customer activity, including website visits, phone calls, emails, and more. The software also includes features like contact management, sales management, and productivity, which can vastly improve customer relationships. Customer relationship technology can help manage all of a company's relationships and interactions with customers and potential customers, processes, and improve profitability.

The literature review also highlights that there is a positive relationship between customer relationship management, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. In addition, various key performance indicators (KPIs) can be utilized to measure a company's success against a set of targets, objectives, or industry peers. Some of these key performance indicators include the utilization rate of raw materials, average downtime, and turnover. In conclusion, this chapter underscores the importance of customer relationship management, customer loyalty, and satisfaction in the growth of the automotive industry and improving customer retention. The next chapter, chapter 3, will provide insight into the research design, methodology, study area, data collection techniques used by the researcher, including the methods of data analysis employed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction.

This section describes the data collection and analysis methods and briefly describes the study area, sampling methods and sampling frame used, and the proposed research conceptual framework. In terms of the study area, the research was done in the capital city of Zimbabwe which is called Harare, as a case study of a car dealership named Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Platinum Motors Harare Branch was used as a pseudonym to protect the original firm under which the research was conducted. However, all research protocols and ethics were followed during this investigation to maintain the participants' anonymity and the research results' validity.

The research study used a concurrent mixed-methods research design applying both quantitative and qualitative participatory analytical approaches. In terms of the quantitative techniques, the researcher employed the use of a research questionnaire with both open-ended and close-ended questions to enhance the validity of the research results by allowing the participants to give their pre-determined responses to a set of questions as well as air out their thoughts through open-ended sections of the questionnaire. The researcher went on to use Kobo Collect to collect data, while printed questionnaires were used for most of the respondents. Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents, while purposive sampling was employed to choose the automotive business to focus on. Thereafter the necessary approvals were granted by both the company concerned and UNICAF through UREC to commence the research process. Furthermore, qualitative data was collected through the use of questionnaires, key informant interviews (KII) with the heads of various organizations which came to seek their services at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with the staff at Platinum Motors

Harare Branch, to better understand all the dynamics of business in the automotive industry, understanding the challenges and possible solutions to these challenges within the sector at this point in time.

With respect to data analysis, the researcher used various software such as SPSS in combination with Microsoft Excel to carry out the basic research demographics. In SPSS, the researcher carried out the analysis of ANOVA to determine the normality of the data. The normality test of the data is used to validate the results of the analysis and can be used to generalize the findings to the general population outside the sample size. SPSS was also used to carry out fundamental analyses such as variance analysis, t-tests, and basic descriptive statistics necessary for research. Furthermore, Stata was employed in the analysis, especially when running the binary regression analysis, to determine the determinants of customer perceptions about the quality of products and services offered at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The researcher used Microsoft Word to record the results of the analysis by presenting them in tables, charts and graphs, as well as qualitative expressions of respondents.

The researcher focused mainly on the current customer retention tactics which were being used by Platinum Motors Harare Branch to enhance plausible customer relationship management as a solution to boost customer retention at this business. It focused on people and the various interfacing between the business and its customers. As such, the thrust is to look at human interactions to investigate the levels of customer satisfaction at this organisation operating within the automotive industry. In this regard, a qualitative approach was adopted as it was deemed relevant to the subject matter since it is more of a social issue regarding the matter under investigation. Primary data was collected, analysed, and interpreted to make deductive

reasoning and understanding of the subject under investigation, thus helping unveil the social dynamics of the automotive business environment, its clientele, and the service delivery shortcomings of all customers. According to McCusker (2014), qualitative methods effectively measure customer experiences and attitudes towards a set of services or products they receive or assess some other qualitative life experiences.

The researcher went on to investigate the application of quantitative methods to fully understand the social dynamics of customer retention techniques employed within the automotive industry, deduce plausible statistical inferences, and, hence, make strong judgements and recommendations.

Research Philosophy.

In their research, Sağlam and El Montaser (2021) emphasized the importance of a research philosophy as a belief system that guides different protocols connected to the research. The main ones are data collection, analysis and utilization. According to Ogu (2013), research philosophies play a crucial role in shaping research problems and questions and aiding in the search for information to answer those questions. In other words, the research philosophy serves as the foundation of the research methodology by defining the researcher's approach to the study. Brodie et al. (2008) highlighted that the philosophical approach adopted in a study significantly impacts the results generated.

There are two main schools of thought in research: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is anchored on objectively measured knowledge gathered through strictly controlled methods, whereas interpretivism considers human interaction to be rich in meaning and knowledge (Wong, 2014). Positivism relies on

using statistics to uncover reality and objectivity, making it suitable for decision-making (Wong, 2014). The philosophy is free from bias since the researcher plays no part in influencing the results. Additionally, positivism is amenable to objective and scientific analysis. Positivists believe that facts validate knowledge and that numbers do not lie. They also argue that research findings can be generalized to other cases based on larger samples. Deductive reasoning is used in positivism as one of the tools to test and confirm theories, as pointed out by Eisenack and Stecker (2010) and Brodie et al. (2008). Nyamweya (2022) claimed that positivism is based on the idea that the social world exists externally, and its material goods must be measured objectively, unlike subjective methods such as reflection, sensation, or intuition.

On the other hand, interpretivism is a qualitative research approach that focuses on understanding how individuals perceive the world and see it from their perspective. It seeks to understand the social world in a more subjective and nuanced way. According to Scarff (2017), cited by Taherdoost (2022), interpretivism researchers aim to see the world from respondents' perspectives and consider diverse views of reality compared to positivists. They believe that the social world is complex and cannot be understood through objective scientific methods alone. Sulaiman and Musnadi (2020) state that interpretivism assumes that there may be numerous interpretations of reality, which vary from the scientific knowledge they are studying.

The choice of pragmatism as the research philosophy is justified because:

1. **Practicality:** This study aims to solve a real-world problem (poor customer retention at Platinum Motors), and pragmatism focuses on solving practical problems rather than adhering to rigid philosophical positions.

2. **Mixed Methods:** The research requires both quantitative data (customer satisfaction scores, demographic data, fleet sizes, and CRM scores) and qualitative data (customer perceptions, staff insights, and thematic analysis of customer grievances). Pragmatism accommodates both approaches.
3. **Eclecticism:** Pragmatism allows the researcher to use the best tools for each research question without being constrained by philosophical dogma. This flexibility is essential for addressing the complex, multifaceted nature of the research problem.
4. **Action-oriented:** The goal of this research is to produce actionable recommendations for the dealership. Pragmatism prioritizes results that are useful and applicable in real-world contexts (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In examining various customer retention practices and analyzing customer pain points in the automotive sector using the case of Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Zimbabwe, the researcher adopted a pragmatic approach. This approach combined the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. Pragmatism is a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of using methods and principles that work to solve concrete social problems. It redirects the researcher's focus on methodological rather than metaphysical concerns and involves using all available approaches to comprehend the research phenomenon, making it actionable and results-driven.

The application of mixed methods research through a pragmatic philosophy creates harmony among opposing philosophical standpoints and enhances people's

understanding of the world. Pragmatism was, therefore, the most appropriate paradigm in exploring the various customer relationship management strategies used by Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Zimbabwe, in their product and service delivery processes. By taking this approach, the researcher was able to gain a more detailed understanding of social phenomena, and the research was more informative, thorough, and insightful.

Pragmatism is the smarter approach to research, as it prioritizes answering the research question over choosing between paradigms. For instance, Price (2020) argues that in a study about customer retention practices used at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Zimbabwe, the goal was to investigate how these practices lead to customer retention, not to choose between positivism and constructivism. While methodological pluralism aims to allow all approaches to flourish, eclectic pragmatism accepts everything regardless of methodological incompatibility. Despite its limitations, pragmatism has contributed significantly to knowledge literature, and its contextual problem-centered nature makes it a critical analysis tool that enhances understanding of complex social issues. Therefore, it is considered a more critical analysis tool than other paradigms, as it transcends philosophical and metaphysical dilemmas and focuses on practicality, compromise, and prudence. This justifies its applicability in the study, which critically analyzed the effects of customer relationship management strategies on service delivery at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Zimbabwe, using a pragmatic approach.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods is often considered incompatible due to their different ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, when applied under pragmatism, these methods can complement each other, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the

phenomenon under investigation by emphasizing each method's strengths while minimizing each other's weaknesses (Dibb et al., 2014). Pragmatism offers a middle-of-the-road position both methodologically and philosophically, allowing researchers the flexibility to adopt the most appropriate approach to address research questions. This approach acknowledges that reality is complex and multi-faceted and that individuals have different interpretations of it. Therefore, it accommodates different theories and supports eclecticism, allowing for a deeper understanding of research problems and the development of comprehensive answers (Scarff, 2017).

Under pragmatism, research methods should be selected based on their ability to answer research questions and generate meaningful insights. This approach allows for the use of both subjective and objective data in reflections and analysis, respectively. This flexibility gives researchers the freedom to explore different interpretations of reality, while also maintaining a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis. Pragmatism combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a flexible, rigorous, and comprehensive approach to research. This approach generates deep insights into the phenomenon under investigation while acknowledging the complexity and diversity of reality. Researchers using pragmatism move back and forth between different perspectives, allowing for modifications to theoretical propositions, revisions to the understanding of the evidence, and exploration of new ways of understanding customer relationship management strategies.

Pragmatic approaches help guide action in real-world settings and are generally more concrete and specific than abstract theories. The methodological and epistemological pluralism inherent in pragmatism makes it the most appropriate paradigm to address research problems. In fact, pragmatism is considered an

appropriate paradigm for justifying mixed methods for better research outcomes. In the case of Platinum Motors Harare Branch in Zimbabwe's automotive industry, the pragmatism approach was found to be ideal for interrogating the impacts of various customer relationship management strategies on product and service delivery and customer retention. The research study moved back and forth between the two perspectives, allowing for modifications to theoretical propositions, revisions to the evidence, and exploration of new ways of understanding customer relationship management strategies.

In conclusion, pragmatism provides a comprehensive approach to research that combines various perspectives to increase data interpretation. It allows researchers to generate deep insights into social phenomena while acknowledging the complexity and diversity of reality. The practicality, methodological and epistemological pluralism inherent in pragmatism make it the most appropriate paradigm to address research problems, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods under pragmatism provides a flexible, rigorous, and comprehensive approach to research.

Description of the Study Area.

This study is an exploratory investigation of the customer retention techniques employed in the automotive industry, carried out by focusing on the services and products offered at a car dealership in Harare, namely Platinum Motors Harare Branch. As the pseudonym implies, Platinum Motors Harare Branch is a car dealership that focuses on the sale of brand new Mazda and Nissan vehicles, services of the same and offering of spare parts again for the same. Platinum Motors Harare Branch has been in the automotive business for more than sixty years. Good customer care and astute professional business management have been the bedrock upon which the

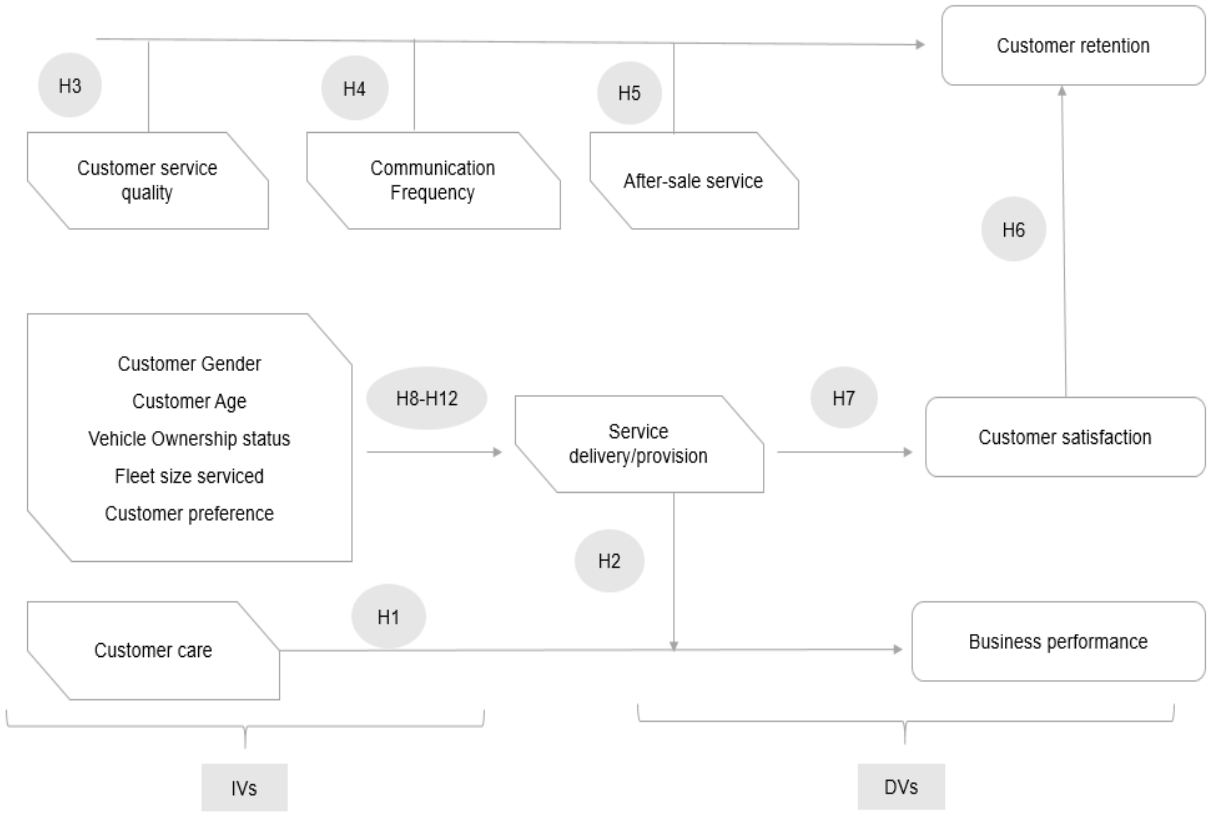
success of the business has been built, until a few years ago when customer complaints shot up. Platinum Motors Harare Branch has been a market leader in this industry championing the 3S business model in the automotive sector. It is one of the key pioneers of vehicle servicing, sales and maintenance within the spectrum of the Zimbabwean motor trade. Its workmanship has been second to none and has been a market leader of repute over the years. Platinum Motors Harare Branch is now facing stiff competition due to the advent and introduction of new smaller dealerships, some of which offer cheaper services and deliberately bypass regulatory approvals. Regarding the labour market, the organization employs more than 250 people nationwide. Its main Branch is the Harare branch which is located in Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare, where all the services such as car sales, services and maintenance take place. There is another branch that's located 800km away from the Harare branch. This second branch is located in the second largest city in the country. For purposes of clarity this research is centered at the Harare branch alone. This was largely due to the fact that the research was carried out during the Covid 19 era when intercity travel was strongly discouraged by the authorities.

Due to stiff competition, the organization viewed itself as being stuck between a rock and a hard surface to surpass the competition and ensure its lifelong existence. Faced with stiff competition due to the emergence of new players and some innovative entities, it was deemed essential for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to assess its general viability and necessity in the current market dynamics.

Conceptual Framework of the Research.

Figure 3.1

Conceptual Framework Behind the Research. Adapted from Scarf (2017).



H1: There is a significant positive association between service delivery effectiveness and customer satisfaction: Service delivery effectiveness refers to how effectively Platinum Motors Harare delivers services like maintenance, repairs, and other automotive services to its customers. Customer satisfaction is measured in terms of how happy customers are with the services provided. This hypothesis suggests that higher levels of service delivery effectiveness (timeliness, accuracy, efficiency) lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction. When Platinum Motors Harare delivers services effectively, meeting or exceeding customer expectations, customers are more likely to be satisfied with their experience.

H2: There is a significant positive association between customer care quality and business performance: Customer care quality involves all actions taken by Platinum Motors Harare to ensure customers feel valued, including empathy, responsiveness, and personalized attention. Business performance is measured in terms of customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, repeat business, and potentially increased business through referrals. This hypothesis proposes that higher levels of customer care quality are associated with better business performance. When Platinum Motors Harare focuses on providing high-quality care to its customers, it is expected to lead to improved business outcomes such as customer loyalty and positive referrals.

H3: There is a significant positive association between perceived service quality and customer retention: Perceived service quality refers to customers' subjective evaluation of the overall service experience provided by Platinum Motors Harare. Customer retention is about whether customers continue doing business with Platinum Motors Harare. This hypothesis indicates that higher perceived service quality leads to customers being more likely to stay with Platinum Motors Harare. When customers perceive that they are receiving high-quality service that addresses their needs effectively and efficiently, they are more likely to remain loyal and continue doing business with the dealership.

H4: Communication frequency has a positive impact on customer retention: Communication frequency refers to how often Platinum Motors Harare communicates with customers about services, updates, or other relevant information. This hypothesis suggests that more frequent communication leads to higher customer retention. Regular communication can keep customers informed, make them feel valued, and remind them of Platinum Motors Harare's services. When customers

receive regular updates and information, they are more likely to feel connected to the dealership and continue doing business with it.

H5: After-sales service has a positive impact on customer retention: After-sales service involves follow-up services and support Platinum Motors Harare provides after a sale or service is completed. This hypothesis proposes that better after-sales service leads to higher customer retention. Good after-sales service can ensure customers are satisfied with their purchase or service long-term, address any issues promptly, and show customers that Platinum Motors Harare cares about their experience beyond the initial sale or service. This ongoing support can be crucial for building long-term relationships and retaining customers.

H6: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with customer retention: Customer satisfaction refers to how happy customers are with Platinum Motors Harare's services. Customer retention is about whether customers continue doing business with Platinum Motors Harare. This hypothesis indicates that higher customer satisfaction is associated with higher customer retention. When customers are satisfied with the services they receive, they are more likely to return for future services and remain loyal. Satisfied customers are also more likely to recommend the dealership to others.

H7: There is a significant positive relationship between service delivery effectiveness and customer satisfaction (mediating pathway): This hypothesis examines the mediating pathway where service delivery effectiveness influences customer outcomes through customer satisfaction. While H1 examines the direct effect of service delivery on satisfaction, H7 examines how service delivery works through satisfaction to influence broader outcomes. This hypothesis suggests that the

impact of service delivery effectiveness on business outcomes operates, at least in part, through its effect on customer satisfaction. When Platinum Motors Harare delivers services effectively, customers become more satisfied, and this satisfaction then influences their loyalty, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth.

H8: Customer gender has an impact on service provision: Customer gender refers to whether customers are male or female. Service provision is how Platinum Motors Harare provides services. This hypothesis proposes that the gender of customers influences how services should be provided. Different genders might have different preferences, needs, or communication styles regarding automotive services. Understanding these differences can help the dealership tailor its services more effectively.

H9: Customer age has an impact on service provision: Customer age refers to the age of customers. This hypothesis indicates that the age of customers affects how Platinum Motors Harare should provide services. Different age groups might have varying needs, preferences, or expectations regarding automotive services. Younger customers might prefer digital communication channels, while older customers might prefer more personal interactions.

H10: Vehicle ownership status has an impact on service provision: Vehicle ownership status refers to whether a customer owns a vehicle personally or through a company. This hypothesis suggests that ownership status impacts how Platinum Motors Harare should provide services. Services might need to be tailored differently for personal versus company-owned vehicles due to differences in usage, maintenance needs, or billing processes. Fleet managers might require different service packages compared to individual vehicle owners.

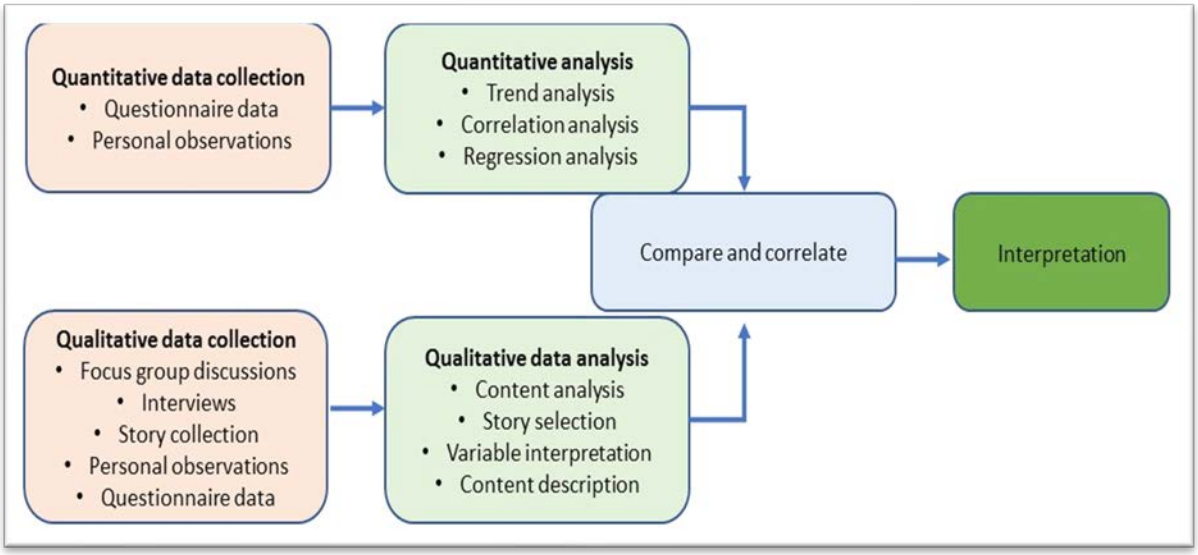
H11: Fleet size serviced has an impact on service provision: Fleet size serviced refers to the number of vehicles in a customer's fleet that Platinum Motors Harare services. This hypothesis proposes that the size of the fleet impacts service provision. Larger fleets might require more coordinated services, different pricing structures, or more complex service management compared to smaller fleets or individual vehicles. Customers with large fleets might expect priority service or dedicated account management.

H12: Customer preference has an impact on service provision: Customer preference refers to what customers prefer in terms of service from Platinum Motors Harare. This hypothesis suggests that individual customer preferences influence how services should be provided. Understanding and catering to customer preferences can help Platinum Motors Harare provide more personalized and effective services, potentially leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers might prefer specific service times, communication channels, or service packages.

Research Design and Approach.

Figure 3.2

Concurrent Mixed Methods Research Design. Adopted from Creswell (2018).



The research design presented above utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research question. The quantitative approach is based on the positivist paradigm, which assumes that knowledge can be obtained by observing and measuring phenomena objectively. On the other hand, the qualitative approach is rooted in the phenomenological philosophy, which focuses on understanding individuals' subjective experiences.

The mixed methods design was chosen because it allows for a more in-depth analysis of the research question by magnifying the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches while limiting their weaknesses. By using both methods, the researcher can gather both numerical data and qualitative insights, providing a more complete understanding of the research question.

According to John W. Creswell and David J. Creswell (2018), the mixed-method design is highly pragmatic and flexible. It allows researchers to use quantitative and qualitative techniques independently or interdependently, making it ideal for a wide range of research projects.

While quantitative methods focus on collecting facts and numerical data, qualitative methods emphasize the meanings and interpretations derived from those facts. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach helps the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the research question by combining both types of data.

The researcher employed a comprehensive methodology and approach to obtain information from Platinum Motors Harare Branch' new and long-term clients. The researcher utilized Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and a structured questionnaire

to gather data. The goal was to produce reliable results that management could use as they try and turn around the fortunes of this business.

To achieve this goal, the researcher followed a series of steps. The first step involved a thorough review of the literature through document analysis, published articles, and baseline data reviews. This involved a detailed examination of data from previous studies to understand the project indicators that could be used to measure customer satisfaction and retention in the automotive sector. The project indicators served as the foundation for all interview tools used by the researcher. This helped the researcher compare the pre-specified indicators with the final research results to test the hypothesis.

The next step involved a meticulous review of previous project documents and other circumstantial reports to determine the best methods of data collection and analysis that could be applied in this field. The researcher conducted a secondary data review of published material (including statistical data) on customer retention issues in the automotive sector. In addition, the researcher reviewed baseline study reports produced by other organizations and researchers working on the same subject matter, as well as other research publications from various researchers working in the automotive industry from different countries.

By following this rigorous methodology, the researcher was able to produce reliable and accurate results that can be used as a benchmark for measuring customer satisfaction and retention in the automotive sector. The approach used by the researcher provides a blueprint for other car dealerships to follow in their quest to improve customer satisfaction and retention.

Analytical Framework

Table 3.1

Analytical Framework Guiding the Study

Research Objective	Research Hypotheses	Variables	Method of Analysis
1. To study the reasons for poor business performance at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.	H1: There is a significant positive association between service delivery and business performance H2: There is a significant positive association between customer care and business performance	DV: Business performance in terms of satisfying customers IV: Service delivery, customer care	Descriptive analysis Fisher's Exact Test
2. To determine reasons for poor customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare, Branch.	H3: Customer service quality has a positive impact on customer retention H4: Communication frequency has a positive impact on customer retention H5: After-sales service has a positive impact on customer retention	DV: Customer retention IV: Customer service quality, Communication frequency, After-sales service	Descriptive analysis Cross tabulations. Pearson Chi2 test

3.	To investigate customer engagement strategies in place at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.	H7: There is a significant positive relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction H8: Customer gender has an impact on service provision H9: Customer age has an impact on service provision H10: Vehicle ownership status has an impact on service provision H11: Fleet size serviced has an impact on service provision H12: Customer preference has an impact on service provision	DV: Service delivery/provision IV: Customer Gender, Customer Age, Vehicle Ownership status, Customer satisfaction, Fleet size serviced, Customer preference	Probit model (Binary logistic regression model
4.	To investigate reasons for high customer complaints at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.	H6: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with customer retention	DV: Customer retention IV: Customer satisfaction (customer relations score grouped as high, moderate and poor)	CRM model: Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank test
5.	To recommend a marketing-based business model that seeks to address challenges at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.	N/A	Based on conceptual framework developed by the author	Proposed Marketing-based Business Model

Study Population.

The study population entails all the customers in the data base of Platinum Motors Harare Branch who get their services from this business. This includes long-term and short-term clients, individuals and organizations who bring their vehicles for essential checkups, service and repair. Besides these customers others bring their vehicles to purchase genuine spare parts and other motor accessories while the remainder visit the dealership to purchase brand-new Mazda and Nissan vehicle brands. Another lot bring their vehicles for repairs and maintenance.

Data Collection and Sampling.

This research study was conducted on the customer database of Platinum Motors Harare Branch, consisting of seven hundred and twenty (720) clients. The database represented a diverse group of people and institutions, such as government departments, quasi-government departments, non-governmental departments, Stock-exchange listed corporates, non-stock exchange listed blue chip companies, small to medium-scale enterprises, and medium to high-net-worth individuals.

The target population of this study was defined as the group of people that the researcher aims to investigate, as per Stone et al. (2003). Given the heterogeneous nature of the study population, comprising numerous variables of different details, a sampling frame was created to select a sample from the larger population. Sampling refers to the act of selecting a sample from a population, while a sampling frame is the list from which samples are drawn or taken from the larger population, as defined by Rahman et al. (2022).

There are two main sampling techniques: probability sampling and non-probability sampling, as per Elfil & Negida (2017). With probability sampling each

element in the population has an equal chance of being selected, Fowler (2009). This technique requires each unit in the sample to be representative of the larger population. However, it is important to note that random sampling does not necessarily mean that each sample is truly representative of the population; it only means that the sample is closer to the larger population, as per Rahman et al. (2022).

Probability sampling techniques are predominantly used for quantitative research because they allow for the generalization of findings to the larger population (Stratton, 2023). In quantitative research, the aim is often to test hypotheses, make predictions, or establish relationships between variables using statistical methods that require representative samples. Probability sampling methods, such as simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling, ensure that every member of the population has a known chance of being selected (Pace, 2021). This minimizes bias and enhances the validity of the results for generalization to the target population.

Probability sampling can be divided into the following categories -:

- Simple random sampling is a method used by researchers to ensure that every member of a population has an equal chance of being selected as a respondent. This technique is effective when the results of the research need to be generalized to a larger population. However, it is not highly effective for heterogeneous populations. This is because it cannot effectively capture the diversity of the population. Systematic random sampling involves picking the initial subject at random and then systematically selecting subsequent subjects (Acharya et al., 2013). For example, the researcher picks subject number two. After that, each multiple of two is chosen as part of the study.

- Stratified sampling—under this sampling method data is divided into multiple groups with similar characteristics such as income level, age, country of origin, schools attended, etc. Its biggest advantage is that it allows wider coverage of the population size, and the researcher has control over the selection process and criteria used (Thomas, 2020).

- Cluster sampling - this is a process that involves two steps, and the population is put into clusters. These clusters will have a common denominator, such as hotels, schools in a region, hospitals, the elderly and soon. The most considerable merit of this method is its low cost, while its biggest demerit is its propensity to be inaccurate (Etikan & Babtope, 2019).

- Multi-stage sampling, also known as multi-stage cluster sampling, is a method that involves two or more sample selection techniques in one process. The process involves dividing the population into smaller clusters with similar characteristics and selecting smaller samples of units from these clusters. This method is used to make data collection and analysis more efficient and effective. However, multi-stage sampling has some limitations. It only covers a portion of the population and may have some inaccuracies in the results.

The quantitative part of this research study centered on dealership customers, examining a sample of 302 individuals out of a total population of 720 key accounts using simple random sampling. As is typical, data was unavailable for everyone in the population (Hanlon & Larget, 2011). The sample represented 42% of the population and was selected using systematic random sampling (Guba et al., 1990). The first interviewee was the customer who visited the dealership on the first Monday of data collection, and every second customer thereafter was interviewed. If a customer was

unavailable, their organization's representative was interviewed or a phone interview was conducted. The sample consisted of customers who service their vehicles with the dealership and ranged in age from 25 to 65. As with all sample-based research, estimates about population quantities involve some level of uncertainty (Patten, 2021; Stehman, 1992).

On the other side, non-probability sampling techniques are often utilized in qualitative research where the focus is on gaining in-depth insights, understanding phenomena from the participants' perspectives, or exploring complex issues rather than generalizing findings to a larger population (Vehovar et al., 2016, p. 330). Qualitative research typically seeks rich, detailed data from a smaller, purposively selected sample. Methods like purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling are common in qualitative studies (Acharya et al., 2013, p. 331). These non-probability techniques allow researchers to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research question, enabling a deeper exploration of the topic.

The principle of saturation guides the sample size in qualitative studies, to ensure that enough data is collected to capture the breadth of themes but not so much that it becomes redundant. Busetto et al. (2020) also highlight that saturation is a key criterion for judging the adequacy of sample size in qualitative research. According to Hammarberg et al. (2016), in qualitative research, sampling continues until data saturation is reached. This means that data collection stops when no new themes or ideas emerge from the data. Pathak et al (2013) note that sample size in qualitative research is not predetermined but evolves as data collection progresses toward saturation.

Byrd (2020) similarly indicates that qualitative samples are often smaller and focused on depth, with saturation signaling sufficient data. Common sample sizes in qualitative research vary widely but often range from about 10 to 30 participants for in-depth interviews, sometimes more depending on the topic complexity and diversity of participants (Hammarberg et al., 2016). In some studies, saturation might be reached quickly with a small sample if the topic is narrow. In others, more participants might be needed. As guided by the principle of saturation, this study on Platinum Motors Harare, the actual sample size was reached when 25 respondents were included in in-depth interviews.

In this research study, probability sampling was used since it was not feasible to study the entire population for logistical, time, and financial reasons. Thus, the probability sampling technique was deemed appropriate to ensure that all aspects of the larger population were considered. By selecting a representative sample from the population, the study findings can be generalized to the entire population with a high degree of precision and accuracy.

The research used a sample size of 302 out of a 720-client database produced by the firm. A sample size of greater than 200 ensures that the data collected is typically distributed and that statistically significant inferences are made (Salisu, 2017). To ensure the scientific rigor and validity of the research findings, the sample size for this study was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size calculation (Cochran, 1977). This formula is widely recognised in social science research for determining the appropriate sample size when the population parameters are unknown. The formula is expressed as:

$$\mathbf{n_0 = (Z^2 \times p \times q) / e^2}$$

Where:

- n_0 = required sample size (without finite population correction)
- Z = Z-score at the desired confidence level (90% confidence = 1.645)
- p = estimated proportion of the population (assumed 0.5 for maximum sample size)
- q = 1 - p
- e = margin of error (10% or 0.10)

The choice of a 90% confidence level and a 10% margin of error was considered appropriate for this exploratory study, as it balances the need for statistical precision with practical considerations of time, cost, and accessibility of respondents. The assumption of p = 0.5 was used to maximise the sample size, ensuring that the sample would be adequate regardless of the true population proportion.

Sample Size Calculation:

$n_0 = (1.645^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5) / 0.10^2$

$n_0 = (2.706025 \times 0.25) / 0.01$

$n_0 = 0.6765 / 0.01$

$n_0 = 67.65$

The initial calculation yielded a sample size of approximately 68 respondents. However, because the study population was finite (N = 720), a finite population correction was applied to adjust the sample size (Israel, 1992). The corrected sample size was calculated using the following formula:

$n = n_0 / (1 + (n_0 - 1) / N)$

Where:

- n = corrected sample size
- n_0 = initial sample size (67.65)
- N = total population (720)

Finite Population Correction:

n = 67.65 / (1 + 66.65 / 720)

n = 67.65 / (1 + 0.0926)

n = 67.65 / 1.0926

n = 61.9

The finite population correction yielded a minimum required sample size of approximately 62 respondents. However, the researcher opted to collect data from 302 respondents, which represents 42% of the total population of 720 clients. This sample size was deliberately chosen to provide a higher margin of safety, enhance the statistical power of the analysis, and ensure that the findings would be robust and generalisable.

The decision to collect data from 302 respondents was further justified by the following considerations:

1. Statistical Power: A sample size of 302 is substantially larger than the minimum required sample of 62, providing sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful differences and relationships among variables (Cohen, 1988).

2. Normal Distribution: According to Salisu (2017), a sample size greater than 200 ensures that the data collected is normally distributed, which is a key assumption for many parametric statistical tests used in this study, including t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis.

3. Representativeness: A sample size of 302 (42% of the population) ensures adequate representation of the diverse client base at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, which includes government departments, parastatals, corporations, SMEs, and high-net-worth individuals.

4. Margin of Safety: The larger sample size provides a buffer against non-response, incomplete questionnaires, and other data collection challenges that could reduce the effective sample size.

Data collected was analysed using Microsoft Excel, SPSS (version 26) and Stata (version 14). All coding of the variables was done in Microsoft Excel and STATA. The data was then exported to SPSS version 26, where some fundamental descriptive analysis, such as a test for normality, was done, an analysis of ANOVA was done, and comparisons of means were made. Regression models were run on STATA, displaying the results in MS Excel. Coding and ranking of qualitative data were done in Excel and Stata. Qualitative analysis was done in the form of grouping, observation, variable interpretation, content description and content analysis of data collected through KII and the structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were done using SPSS. The probit model of analysis was run using Stata version 14 as the main software to measure the qualitative effects of customer perceptions on the level of satisfaction with the services provided by the organisation so as to determine the capacity of the

organisation to retain customers in the future. Results were presented in the form of tables, graphs, and text displayed in Microsoft Word.

Binary Logistic Regression Model.

The purpose of the study was to assess the perception of customers regarding the quality-of-service delivery at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. To accomplish this objective, the binary logistic regression model was utilized. When the dependent variable has more than one response, the probit model is the appropriate framework to use. The probit model is a type of regression analysis used to model the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Its main assumption is that the dependent variable is binary or dichotomous and follows a normal distribution (Daykin & Moffat, 2002).

The data collected for the study was analyzed using the STATA version 14 software. This software is commonly used in social science research and is known for its powerful statistical analysis tools. The probit regression model assumes maximum likelihood estimation of the regression coefficients, Fisher-information-based estimation of their standard errors, and the model misspecification. In contrast, robust standard error estimates are measured and corrected for in the model (Zhang et al., 2018).

The probit regression model is particularly useful when the dependent variable is a binary or dichotomous variable. Basically, this model assumes that the probability of the dependent variable taking a particular value is a function of the independent variables. The log-linear model is used to estimate the probability of the dependent variable taking a particular value, given the values of the independent variables. This

model is widely used in social science research, particularly in studies that involve binary or dichotomous dependent variables (Zhang et al., 2018).

Model Specification.

Customer perceptions were divided into "positive" for those who perceived the services offered by Platinum Motors Harare Branch as of high quality and satisfactory and "negative" for those who perceived these services as not of high quality and were not entirely satisfied. Therefore, the results on the dichotomous variable, which is the independent variable (customer perceptions) Yi =1 if the client has a positive perception and designated as Yi = 0 if the client has a negative perception towards the firm and its services. The model specification used in this thesis was adopted by Daykin & Moffatt (2002), who postulated that the decisions between two probabilities are the probit model's focus.

In analyzing the client's perceptions of the quality-of-service delivery, the following specified model was used by the researcher:

$$Yi=\alpha+\beta_1X_1+\beta_2X_2+\beta_3X_3+\beta_4X4+\beta_5X_5+\beta_6X_6+\beta_7X_7+\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots..\beta_nX_n+e_i$$

Note that α is the autonomous regression output given that there are no independent variables in the model; X_1 to Xn are the various explanatory variables determining the behavior of the dependent variable Y (in this case, customer perceptions). At the same time, β_1 to βn are the coefficients of the independent variables, which can either be positive or negative depending on the relationship between the various explanatory variables and the exploratory variable.

Table 3.2 explains each specific variable, code name, unit of measurement, and expected outcome, also known as Apriori expectations, to the model. The dependent variable (customer's perceptions) is explained by a set of different independent

variables specified on the table. Thus, to estimate the model, the independent variables below will be regressed against the dependent variable using STATA, and results will be tabulated.

Table 3.2

Apriori Expectations of the Probit Model

Variable	Description and Measurement	Variable type	Expected Outcome (+/-) and Assumptions
Customer Perceptions	Perception of the customer (can either be positive=1 or negative=0)	Binary/dichotomous	(-) The researcher expects customer perceptions about Platinum Motors Harare Branch to be negative because the firm is facing challenges and failing to retain clients.
Gender	Gender of the customer (1-male, 0=female	Binary	(+) The relationship between gender and perceptions is expected to be positive because we expect more males to bring vehicles for servicing as compared to their female counterparts.
Age	Customer age or age group is a continuous variable	Continuous	(+) As the customer ages, their perceptions about the firm are expected to be positive, and they are also expected to bring a slightly larger fleet. Elderly clients are more likely to be richer, hold a key position in their firm, and most likely bring more vehicles for services. They are also expected to buy their fleet from Platinum Motors Harare Branch due to their loyalty to the brand.
Vehicle Ownership Status	Personal vehicle=0 Company vehicle =1	Categorical	(+) More companies, governments, and non-governmental entities are more likely to have positive perceptions about Platinum Motors than individual clients.

Fleet size serviced	Number of vehicles serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch	Continuous	(-) the higher the fleet size, the more likely personnel make errors during service delivery, hence the negative perception. Also, large fleets take time to finish the job hence clients are most likely to complain and eventually have negative perception.
CRM score	Customer Relationship Management score, which can either be high or low depending on customer satisfaction level	Continuous	(+)"The higher the Relationship Management score, the more likely it is that the customer will have a positive perception."
Customer level of satisfaction	Customer satisfaction level on a scale of 1 to 10.	Nominal	(+/-) Due to a range of stochastic variables, the relationship between customer satisfaction level and perceptions can be positive or negative.

Thematic Analysis of the Customer Retention Strategies.

The researcher employed a variety of data collection methods to acquire qualitative data, including corded observations, focus groups, texts, documents, multimedia, public domain sources, policy manuals, and photographs. It was emphasized that qualitative data can be analyzed in several rigorous ways to produce reliable, plausible and applicable findings. To increase the credibility of the research, the researcher used triangulation method by employing different data collection techniques. Thematic analysis was used to ensure that the research findings were plausible in this mixed-methods research approach, which merged both qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection was carried out in two stages using mobile data

collection applications such as Kobo Collect, interviews, and key informant interviews (KII) with various stakeholders in the automotive sector.

It is prudent to archive all preliminary records used in the data collection so that an audit trail is established. This is important should the data need to be revisited in future (Halpren, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If the data was collected through interactive means, researchers would come to the analysis with prior knowledge of the data and possibly some initial analytic interests or thoughts. Hence, documenting these thoughts during data collection might mark the beginning of data analysis as researchers may note initial analysis thoughts, interpretations, and questions (Tuckett, 2005).

Despite the varied formats of qualitative data, including audio recordings, transcriptions, documents, and field notes, all formats of data are valuable and imperative for conducting comprehensive qualitative data analysis. Becoming immersed in the data involves actively reading and searching for meanings and patterns. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is advisable to initially go through the data set for comprehensive understanding so that better interpretation is possible once the researcher has established familiarity with the data.

In addition to the above, researchers are expected to be fully conversant with the data so that their pre-existing ideas do not cloud their judgment and interpretation of the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). A deeper analysis and understanding of the data will be required as the researcher further analyses the data and interprets the results further (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Coding Of Data in Thematic Analysis.

Various types of Coding can be used in thematic analysis during qualitative research. These types of Coding include, but are not limited to, open Coding, closed Coding, hybrid Coding, Axial Coding, and NVivo coding.

Open Coding in Thematic Analysis

With open coding, there is no need for the researcher to know exactly what one is looking for, though there can be use of a guideline that is related to the research question. The process starts with first-level codes and continues until they are built to last-level codes, which ultimately become themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

In open coding, researchers can adopt usage of short names, alphanumeric indicators or other innovative ways to label and classify data. With smaller datasets like the one used in this study, short names can work very well and be adopted for analysis of data, but as the datasets become much more complex with numerous explanatory variables, that is when the alphanumeric codes may be needed (Robitzsch, 2020).

Closed Coding in Thematic Analysis

Researchers and data analysts using closed coding start by identifying text pieces that can be categorized into themes or sub-themes to make them understandable to the recipients (Mashenene et al., 2019). Closed coding is used when:

- Working with highly objective qualitative data such as in document analysis.
- Data themes have already been established.

- The researcher needs to investigate if the data set conforms with pre-determined and or existing views

Hybrid Coding in Thematic Analysis

Hybrid Coding is a qualitative data coding technique which combines open and closed coding methods. As researchers and data analysts, the first task is to establish themes and sub-themes and then secondly to search for data that supports or contradicts them in a selected source. At the same time, it is possible to discover new themes and sub-themes that can answer the research questions. Hybrid coding is not used often enough due to its complexity. It is sometimes referred to as document research. (Mullen & Rennane, 2017).

NVivo coding

In recent years, researchers have been using a new approach to label qualitative data, known as Invivo statements. This method involves using entire words, sentences, or even parts of a sentence as a label instead of assigning alphanumeric codes (Watkins, 2018). This marking method is called in vivo coding. Its key advantage is that it is flexible and can be used with both open and closed coding. It needs to be mentioned that these codes are primarily a marking method which makes them ideal to be used directly in reports to support themes (Andy, 2007). In vivo coding is easy to use, and its main advantage is its flexibility in capturing the context and meaning of data. This approach ensures that the selected codes are directly related to the data, making it easier to justify the themes and findings in research reports (Salisu, 2017).

Axial Coding

Axial Coding is a systematic approach to analyzing data that involves identifying and establishing connections and relationships between various themes and

subthemes. This method enables researchers to explore and understand the underlying conceptual framework that shapes the data. Axial Coding involves linking themes that may not be explicitly stated in the data but can be inferred and supported through logical reasoning. This approach is particularly useful when researchers want to gain a deeper understanding of the data and uncover the underlying relationships between concepts. While Axial Coding can be used in conjunction with other types of Coding, it is typically viewed as a secondary-level method that works well after open/closed coding processes have been completed. By utilizing Axial Coding, researchers can acquire a more detailed understanding of their data. (Johnston et al., 2019).

Thematic Analysis Adopted in this Study.

In 2004, Frith and Gleeson conducted a research study to explore how men's attitudes and feelings towards their bodies influence their clothing practices. They aimed to find out how men's self-perception of their bodies affects the clothes they wear and how they present themselves. The researchers used qualitative questionnaires to gather data from participants and analyzed the responses to answer their research question.

Similarly, a researcher followed the same protocol to conduct a thematic analysis and determine what Platinum Motors Harare Branch can do to enhance customer retention and promote repeat business in Zimbabwe's automotive sector. The research study aimed to identify the factors that influence customer retention and determine the best strategies to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. The researcher collected data through focus group discussions with both male and female participants.

The researcher identified five key themes that emerged from the data analysis. The first theme is the provision of genuine parts, which is critical to ensuring that customers' cars are repaired with high-quality parts. The second theme is operations time management, which involves reducing waiting times and ensuring that customers receive prompt and efficient service. The third theme is fair pricing, which is essential to maintaining customer loyalty and satisfaction. The fourth theme is improved communication skills, which involves ensuring that customers are kept informed about the progress of their repairs and any issues that arise. The fifth and final theme is the adoption of new/improved technology, which is essential to modernizing the garage and improving the efficiency of repairs (Frith and Gleeson, 2004).

Each theme is distinct, but all are linked to the overall research question, which relates to the investigation of factors that lead to effective customer retention practices in the automobile industry through the study of a particular franchised Mazda/Nissan dealership. The researcher used a hybrid coding strategy that combined open and closed coding to analyze the data. This allowed the researcher to identify key themes in line with the research objectives and then provide a detailed analysis of each theme.

The thematic analysis provided a clear understanding of the scope and diversity of the study by combining the analyst's narrative with illustrative data extracts. The research analysis was broadened where necessary, moving from a descriptive to an interpretative level, often relating the claims to existing literature. The narrative methodology section provides broader analytic statements about the overall story and the themes that tell us about customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

Table 3.3

Case Categorization of the Participants Involved in FGDs Developed for Thematic Analysis

Participant ID	Average Age	Number of Participants	Average years in business	Mean Fleet size
Male/FGDs	40	12	5	6
Female/FGDs	37	10	3	3

In summary, the research study provides valuable insights into the factors that influence customer retention in Zimbabwe's automotive sector by looking at the case of Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The study provides a valuable resource for garage owners and managers looking to improve customer retention and promote repeat business.

Data Analysis and Presentation.

The methodology of data analysis involved the use of multiple tools, such as SPSS, STATA, and Microsoft Excel. The data was collected and entered into an Excel spreadsheet, where initial coding was performed. Following this, the data was exported to both SPSS and STATA formats for further analysis. The sample demographics were analyzed using SPSS software, where all descriptive statistics were computed. These statistics were then presented in MS Word in the form of tables, graphs and charts to provide a clear representation of the data. The binary logistic regression-probit model for dichotomous dependent variables, was run using STATA software, where simple commands were employed.

The choice of statistical tests was guided by the nature of the variables and the research questions. Different tests were applied depending on whether the analysis involved comparing two groups or three or more groups, and whether the data met the assumptions of parametric tests (Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019). The t-test was used where comparing two groups (e.g., male vs. female customers; personal vs. company vehicles; satisfied vs. dissatisfied customers). The t-test is appropriate for comparing the means of two independent groups to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between them. Where the assumptions of normality were violated, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was considered as an alternative. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used where comparing three or more groups (e.g., age categories: young, middle-aged, elderly; customer satisfaction levels: low, moderate, high; fleet size categories: small, medium, large). ANOVA extends the t-test to situations with more than two groups, allowing for comparison of means across multiple categories. The F-statistic was used to determine whether there were significant differences among group means. Fisher's Exact Test was used where comparing categorical variables in a 2x2 contingency table, particularly when expected frequencies were small. This test is more accurate than the chi-square test when sample sizes are limited or when data is sparse. In this study, Fisher's Exact Test was applied to examine the relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction, as well as between customer care and customer satisfaction. Kruskal-Wallis Test was used for non-parametric data (e.g., ranked customer satisfaction scores, ordinal data). This test is the non-parametric equivalent of one-way ANOVA and is used when the assumptions of normality are not met. It tests whether samples originate from the same distribution.

Ethical Considerations.

In a bid to obtain high-quality data, listed below are research ethical considerations and guidelines that were followed concerning the data collection and analysis process:

1. Interviews were conducted in a respectful, courteous, polite, and non-judgmental manner while adhering to local culture.
2. The interviewer always introduced himself to the respondent, explained the purpose of the visit and the objectives of the survey, and obtained the interviewee's consent to participate.
3. The selected interviewees participated voluntarily, and they were free to opt out of the survey at any time or stage of the study.
4. The information provided by the respondents has been kept private and confidential. The data was coded to avoid identification of participants by their responses. This information is being securely kept and locked in a safe for a minimum period of five years in line with Unicaf requirements.
5. At all times, the interviews were conducted in a comfortable private place where necessary.
6. The respondents were politely told that there were no products or benefits that would be withheld from him/her as a result of not participating in the survey.
7. All the questions were asked as they were in the questionnaire. If probing was to be done during data collection, the researcher was well trained on how to carry out the process within the respondent's comfort zone, and hence, the quality of the data collected was highly ensured. Thus, in cases where the answer is inconsistent

with the information earlier provided, the interviewer will try to discover the correct response by further probing.

8. Integrity of the whole data collection process was made sacrosanct so that everything was confidential, respectful and professional.

9. Informed consent forms were also filled in by the respondents prior to the commencement of the interview process.

Summary of the Chapter.

In this chapter, the focus is on the data collection techniques used by the researcher. To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher employed a concurrent mixed methods research approach to determine the sample size, data collection, and analysis techniques. This study aimed to investigate customers' perceptions of the service provision level by utilizing a probit model. In addition to that, this chapter provides a detailed description of the study area, the study population, and the methods of analysis used in the research. Furthermore, the researcher also elaborated on the research philosophy and approach followed, which led to the current study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction.

This chapter explains the results of data analysis and research findings. The researcher first explains the data's general demographics by explaining the respondents' age groups, marital status, and vehicle ownership status. On vehicle ownership, the respondents were either driving their vehicle and bringing it to Platinum Motors Harare Branch for service or driving a company vehicle and either bringing it themselves or sending the fleet manager or driver to bring vehicles for services. Some personal and company vehicles serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch were brought by clients or their organisations. The study's main objective was to investigate the impact of good customer retention practices used by Platinum Motors Harare Branch to create customer satisfaction and loyalty. By investigating these reasons an explanation is then given as to the reasons for declining sales performance over the last few years.

It can also be noted that the thrust of this research was centralised around evaluating effectiveness of customer retention and customer-relationship management strategies and their impact on customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare Branch within the automotive sector. The researcher designed a questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions to collect data that would fulfil the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. In both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis, the researcher applied statistical tools such as SPSS, MS Excel, and STATA to investigate the factors that influence the adoption of specific customer retention strategies by Platinum Motors Harare Branch within the automotive industry of Zimbabwe, while at the same time trying to evaluate the level of customer contentment by the services provided. The researcher also aimed to detect the key

areas that needed improvement at Platinum Motors Harare Branch regarding customer retention. At the same time, the respondents pointed out the grey areas and how they think they can be addressed for the sake of future business. To understand customer behaviour within the automotive sector, the research also focused on measuring and understanding customer perceptions to unpack the level of customer satisfaction with the services provided by Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Zimbabwe. The main research hypothesis guiding this research, as given in the first chapter and it outlines that the most effective customer relationship management model is one that respects the customer journey at each level and prioritizes customer satisfaction and business profitability. While that hypothesis is essential, it was also hypothesized that the main reasons behind a decline in business at Platinum Motors Harare Branch are related to poor customer care, poor service delivery and lack of investments in new technologies used in the automotive sector by their competitors. Moving forward, the researcher also mentioned that the main complaints customers raised are lack of promotion, non-existence of discounts for customers servicing medium to large fleets and more regular customers and lack of urgency in service delivery by workshop personnel. The primary customer needs at Platinum Motors Harare Branch comprise but are not partial to introducing discounts, running promotions, providing clients with gifts, as well as offering high-quality services and motor accessories such as reliable/genuine spare parts. Furthermore, regarding the research hypothesis, it was also stated that the significant customer pain points lie within the timeliness of service delivery, quality of motor spares and accessories and level of technological advancement since the recent vehicles being sold require personnel with a great deal of knowledge in new technologies. Finally, to answer the first objective, the researcher hypothesised that good customer care, offering promotions and customer gifting,

customer follow-ups, and technological advancement are the main areas that require improvements at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, Zimbabwe.

The first part of chapter four mainly centres on describing the demographics of the customers in the motor industry and their general characteristics by focusing on age, vehicle ownership status and gender dynamics. It is followed up by the reasons why clients keep coming back for services, customer perception of the quality of services offered and the levels of satisfaction of clients. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the key areas that need improvement within Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

This section focuses on the main findings of the research investigation while taking a deep dive into the reliability of data collected, trustworthiness of data and validity of the research findings. The key research questions addressed in the paper included determining the impact of client loyalty management strategies and their effect on good customer retention practices. These lead to higher customer satisfaction levels in the automotive industry and adds value to the nexus between customer relationship management and customer retention in the automotive industry by looking at this particular dealership. This was further articulated by developing a customer relationship management model, which was calculated based on the research findings along with the customer journey perspective in mind. The research questions outlined in the questionnaire included a focus on what the customer experiences and expectations on customer relationship management were, what effect customer perception has on customer retention and, consequently, customer relationship management and what new ideas and knowledge gaps could be covered and added in the prevailing body of knowledge.

The high-level results from the data analysis indicated that a greater percentage of Platinum Motors Harare Branch clients were currently not satisfied with the level of customer relationship management. On a scale of 1 to 10, the level of client satisfaction was found at 4.5, which is considered not a favorable outcome for an organization or firm in the automotive sector.

By applying the use of a binary logistic regression model to estimate customer perceptions on the efficacy of customer retention and customer relationship management strategies on customer satisfaction, the probity model revealed that, at a 95 percent confidence interval (CI=0.95 and a 5 percent margin of error), there is a generally positive perception towards the services provided by Platinum Motors Harare Branch and thus majority of customers seem to be satisfied. However, the current satisfaction level only sometimes guarantees business continuity and customer retention. Thus, the firm has to adopt a holistic approach to improving its customer retention strategies using a pre-specified standard to ensure repeat business.

Trustworthiness of Data.

Legitimacy, trustworthiness, and consistency of data are multifaceted and complex phenomena in research. These concepts can be defined differently depending on the nature of the matter under scrutiny and differences in methodologies in scholastic research, as well as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research (Lander, E. S., & PCAST Working Group. (2016)). This sets out various types of validity and how researchers can address and certify them essentially in both qualitative and quantitative research at every learning stage, from design and execution to conducting and reporting research findings (Haddad et al., 2017). Various data collection methods, such as interviews, experiments, questionnaires,

observations, tests, life histories, and case studies, may be used to ensure data reliability. The use of interviews can briefly be described as the use of a set of open-ended or close-ended questions arranged in order for the research objectives to be able to address a set of research questions. These interviews were conducted by the researcher who sought to find out how best the issues under inquiry can be assessed while at the same time following the proper ethical code of conduct pre-specified by the research board (Hair et al., 2019). According to Macdonald & Headlam (2008), the use of experiments in research is usually done in the laboratory environment but can also be done in the field where a set of pre-set steps or standards is also followed to confirm that the results are valid. Qualitative study can also be done through observations, tests, life histories and case studies. Using case studies and themes ensures that data is collected through the testimonials of the respondent about their life experience on a particular phenomenon (Poturak et al., 2022). Also, while doing research through observation, especially one that includes recording human behavior, the subject must not find out they are under investigation. Once the subjects find out that they are under investigation, it won't be easy to obtain reliable results since their behavior can be adjusted according to the requirements of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this study, the researcher primarily ensured the trustworthiness of data by using an open and close-ended questionnaire to better capture the respondents' perceptions without having to guide or lead them toward the required responses. The use of open-ended questions in the semi-structured questionnaire aims to generate and guarantee honesty and faithfulness in the customers' responses under investigation (Hartoyo et al., 2023). A considerable amount of time was also taken to actively listen to all the clients' grievances without much interruption to clearly capture

the level and the state of customer satisfaction with the services provided at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Close-ended questions ensured that the prescribed and predetermined responses were given where a specific range or array of answers was required, such as questions with Likert scales and ratings.

To ensure that the tool was ready for data collection, a pilot survey was done by the researcher where a few questionnaires were administered and further amendments were made grounding on the responses delivered during the pilot study. This pilot study was done to see if the respondents understood the questions asked in a clear manner and if they were providing clear responses to the questions. The final questionnaire was a combination of adjustments from the pilot study and the supervisors' recommendations. The researcher also ensured that the tool was appropriately designed for data collection to address the specific issues that needed to be captured by conducting a pilot survey and key informant interviews (KII) before actual data collection began; the pilot survey gave the researcher amble time to make some necessary adjustments where certain concepts were not being captured or understood as presumed in the initial stages of questionnaire design. Focus group discussions with Platinum Motors Harare branch staff and one with a set of regular customers were done with the aim of understanding how business can be improved at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. All responses from the interviews, KIIs, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were recorded to give the best results possible that reflect the real scenario on the ground.

Triangulation, which involves using a variety of data sources, including time, space, and persons in a study, was used to further assure the reliability and trustworthiness of the data. The researcher collected data on the same questionnaire at different times and places to ensure data triangulation. Data collection was also

divided into two phases, separated by two months of preliminary analysis of study findings.

Reliability and Validity of Data.

In research, it is vital to certify that data collected is effective and reliable so that it can be used to make plausible decisions after analysis. The reliability and validity of data goes beyond just mere data analysis. However, rather, it directs the way in which future research can be based while simultaneously providing the industry with good results that can be used for meaningful decision-making (Nyamweya, 2022). Besides the use in decision-making, if data is reliable, other researchers can base their secondary studies on the primary data. Validity or legitimacy of data basically refers to the scope to which a concept is precisely measured in a qualitative or quantitative study. The second measure of legitimacy in a quantitative paper is through the accuracy of the instrument used in research (Bolarinwa et al. (2015)). To confirm that the study entails validity and reliability, the scholar conducted a pilot survey with the desire to improve the accuracy of the data collection tool used, which is the designed questionnaire. Before the data was submitted via Kobo Collect, the researcher would go through the data, ensuring that nothing was left to chance and did not miss values or entry errors. If any errors were found, the responsible enumerator would have to make the necessary follow-ups and adjustments so that they could submit accurate data.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that everything was spot on in terms of data collection, analysis and interpretation to enhance the understanding of the research objectives and expected outcomes. Data collection was distributed into two segments, by the researcher but done at a different time to enhance data variability in the research (Alqershi et al., 2020). Systematic random sampling was used during

data collection, where every second person or customer was interviewed. The interviews took between 20 to 35 minutes, depending on the nature of the respondent and their understanding of the questionnaire. Using simple and systematic random sampling increased the consistency in data collection by interviewing every second person or organization to receive a service from Platinum Motors Harare Branch and thus capture respondents of various classes and backgrounds. All the interviewed respondents had provided their consent to partake in the survey. At the same time, the researchers ensured that a high level of confidentiality would be the norm to protect individuals and organizations who participated. A sample size of three hundred and two was used to ensure that the research results approximate normality and that the sample size is normally distributed, thereby becoming a true representative of the population under investigation (Haddad et al.,.2017).

In using mixed methods of data collection as well as analysis, which are qualitative and quantitative, the researcher employed several data analysis tools, such as Microsoft Excel, SPSS, and Stata, depending on the nature of the objective under investigation. Various packages show that our data can be easily manipulated to produce results intended for the research and show a high level of coherency. Qualitatively, data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). These activities ensured that the researcher gets ample feedback on the current levels of business performance, customer pain points, as well as areas of major improvement with Platinum Motors Harare Branch as an organization and the automotive industry at the national level.

General Research Findings.

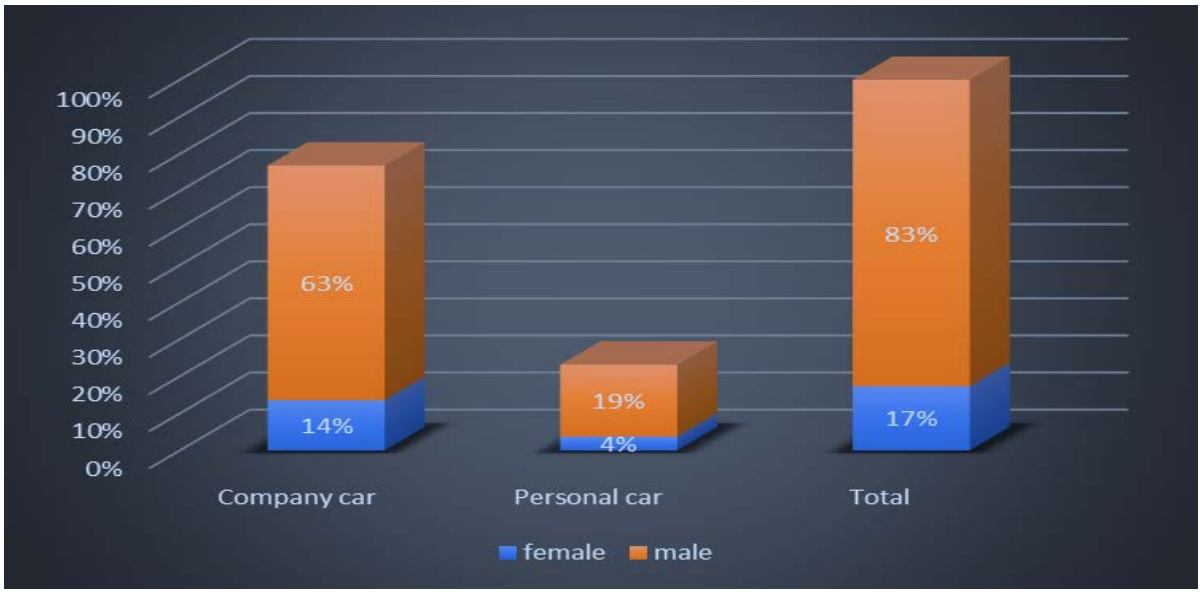
This section describes the general demographics of the population under investigation. Under this subsection, the researcher explains the clients' different

vehicle ownership statuses and the average number of vehicles serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

Gender Dynamics and Vehicle Ownership Status.

Figure 4.1

Gender Dynamics of Customers and their Vehicle Ownership Status (n=346)



The researcher managed to reach 346 respondents, including clients who drive and service personal vehicles and those who drive and seek service for company vehicles. The figure above (figure 4.1) represents the gender dynamics and vehicle ownership status of the customers interviewed at Platinum Motors Harare Branch Zimbabwe. As shown in Figure 4.1 above, it can be observed that the majority of clients, which is seventy-seven per cent (77%) or two hundred and sixty-six (266) respondents, drive company-owned vehicles and send their vehicles for service and repair at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. However, of the 77 per cent of company-owned vehicles, only 14 per cent (thirty-seven respondents) are lady-driven vehicles. This gender disparity clearly indicates that there were more male drivers and male personnel with access to company vehicles than female counterparts.

Furthermore, this inequality in terms of gender dynamics is an indication that the organisation, Platinum Motors Harare Branch, has not fully exploited its customer base since there is an opportunity to broaden the customer base to include more lady drivers and those who own personal fleets, including those from the small to medium enterprise sector (SME's). From Figure 4.1, it is evident that the majority of drivers and customers who do business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch are males by gender and drive company-owned vehicles, further indicating that these customers and or organisations offer vehicles to males more than females. This can also be used as evidence that organisations hire more male drivers as compared to their female counterparts. This may also be an indication that in the job market, there are more males in key positions than females, with reference to the customer database at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. However, the disparity may also be since some vehicles that come with males for service belong to female managers and or female personnel. However, when it comes to bringing the vehicle for service, it is a male-related activity (Alapján- et al., 2020). It is the marketing team’s objective to spread its wings and tap into the self-owned vehicles customer base.

Another key reason why there is only 23 percent of respondent drive personal owned vehicles and bring them for service at Platinum Motors Harare Branch is an issue of pricing of services by the service provider. The difference in prices with other car dealerships, may result in more companies being able to afford the services while mere individuals may not be able to reach the price range for the service. Platinum Motors Harare Branch, being a huge organisation, does not afford to deal with more personally owned vehicles due to a shortage of personnel but rather would rather maximise its sales by offering its service to more companies. While companies bring a huge fleet size for services, it can also be argued that personal vehicles are a good

source of sustainable income for the firm. Hence, the need to tap deep into the market cannot be underestimated (Naru & Kumar, 2020). According to Baran & Zerres (2010), it is important to target clients from different economic sectors, including women, to boost the organization's value proposition. Despite this, other scholars may argue that the nature of the automotive industry determines gender dynamics and variations (Ehret, M. (2004)). This can be done by marketing the business, addressing customer pain points, rebranding the service packages to accommodate a wide range of clients, reducing the service level and opening more branches or service centres so as to decentralise the services and reach more people (Mohamad et al., 2014).

Relationship between Customer, Gender, Age and Number of Years in Business.

Figure 4.2

Customer Age and Gender, Average Fleet Size Serviced, and Years in Business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch

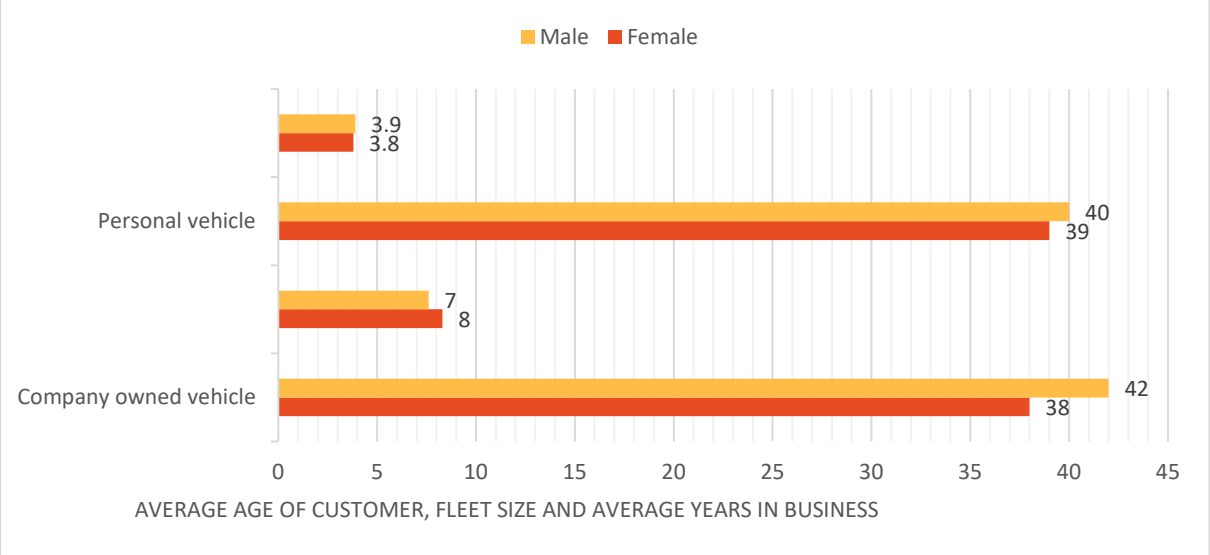


Figure 4.2 shows the relationship between the age and gender of the customer and the average number of years in business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch for both personal and company-owned vehicles. The results in Figure 4.2 above are disaggregated by customer gender, where male and female customers are

represented by the different colours on the chart. Company-owned lady-driven vehicles have been serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch for an average of 8.3 years, while company-owned male-driven vehicles show that they have been serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch for an average of 7.6 years. This illustrates that in terms of brand loyalty, female customers appear to be more loyal than male customers because female customers or drivers are more likely to offer repeat business compared to male customers. By looking at personally owned and self-driven vehicles, it can be seen that they have been getting their services from Platinum Motors Harare Branch for an average of 3.8 years, which is slightly less than the number of years where male-driven personal vehicles have been serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, which is 3.9 years. Despite these slight differences in the number of years in business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch, it can be deduced that there is good customer retention within the organisation since the number of years of doing business is moderately higher. According to Scherpen et al. (2018), female customers are generally more loyal to businesses in the automotive industry because they do not know so much about vehicle service, and yet they seek to establish a reliable bond with one service provider to prevent the rise of motor vehicle malfunctioning issues. It is also interesting that female drivers and vehicle owners are less likely to frequently change the type or brand of vehicle they drive than their male counterparts (Sipho, 2016). However, this behaviour of keeping cars for slightly longer exhibited by female drivers may not only be attached to the vehicle technicalities, but rather Fook & Dastane (2021) indicated that male drivers are more likely to have a greater level of income hence the ability and desire to change vehicles may not be primarily rooted on brand loyalty, but perhaps on the ability to purchase a new and different vehicle brand. However, company-owned/driven vehicles show a dominating pattern in their

distribution, as well as in the average age of drivers. It can be seen that the average age of a male person driving a company-owned vehicle is 42 years, while that of the female is 38 years of age. For personally-owned male-driven vehicles, the average age of the customer is 40 years, while that of female drivers is 38 years of age. This may be due to the differences in income levels between company personnel and personal vehicle owners. Generally, large firms or companies own more than one vehicle and are more likely to afford high-quality motor vehicle maintenance as compared to independent individuals or small-scale organisations (Jian & Yuantao, 2021).

Consequently, male drivers are dominating their female counterparts for both personal and company-owned in terms of getting services from Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The difference may be inferred from the general African social and cultural belief that vehicles belong to the head of the family, which are usually males, and that it is their sole responsibility to make sure that they are serviced on time even if the female drives them around every day (Meena & Sahu, 2021). There is an inter-dependency relationship between the ages of the customer, whether they drive a personal vehicle or a company vehicle and the number of years in business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch. It is generally acceptable for a young and energetic client to have a few numbers of years of getting services from the dealership. A good sales and marketing team would emphasise making sure all customers are satisfied, especially these young generation customers. Once they are satisfied, the probability of repeat business is high, and so are the business's long-term profits (Yudhistira, 2019). On the contrary, it is also understandable that older clients, who are above 30 years old, have established a good relationship with Platinum Motors Harare Branch, provided they have been getting services from the firm for quite a long period. Thus,

this category of customers is the most important part since most of the sales are generated here. Providing additional services and running discounts to retain such customers may be found to be one of the utmost active ways to ensure repeat business and referrals (Malik, 2015; Akaeze & Akaeze, 2017).

Categorization of Customers by Fleet Size at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

During the course of data analysis, customers were categorised according to the ownership status of the vehicle they drive and the vehicle they would bring for servicing at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Further categorisation was done, as shown in Table 4.1, where customers were divided according to the average number of vehicles serviced at the dealership. As shown in Table 4.1 below, it can be deduced that the average number of vehicles brought into the dealership for service by customers with large fleet sizes was 14 and 8, respectively, where companies were found to show a dominancy in the number of vehicles serviced. This is acceptable and true within the Zimbabwean automotive sector because only firms devise the capacity to own a huge number of vehicles and bringing in numerous vehicles for service all at once (Mohamad et al., 2014). A total average of 7 vehicles was found to be brought for service by companies while personal vehicles serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch averaged at 2. According to various researchers (Laplaza et al., 2017; Naeem & Abdul Sami, 2020; Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021; Stone et al., 2003) there are various reasons why organisations bring their vehicles for service in large numbers. One of the key drivers of this behaviour is that organisations usually bring in vehicles for services during weekends because they cannot afford to do so during the week since they also have their own clients to satisfy.

Furthermore, when organisations bring a large fleet, it is easier for the transport manager and the dealership to negotiate and bargain on price. This negotiation and

agreement on a fair price will consequently lead to long-term business relationships between the dealership and various reliable firms and, henceforth, profitability (Scherpen et al., 2018). On the other hand, a small number of personal vehicles are brought in because it is very rare to find clients who purchase more than three vehicles for personal use from the dealership. When customers purchase personal vehicles from Platinum Motors Harare Branch, they are likely to bring the car back when it's due for service. Thus, the relationship between most people who drive personal vehicles and the dealership was established when they purchased the vehicle through the dealership. This business relationship is basically anchored upon the relevance of the vehicle warranty, which is usually five years or equivalence of 100 000 kilometres whichever comes earlier.

Table 4.1

Average Fleet Size (Number of Vehicles) Serviced by Each Category of Clients

Fleet size	Company vehicle	Personal vehicle
Large (10+)	14	8
Medium (5-9)	5	5
Small (1-4)	2	2

Reasons for Repeat Business at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

There are numerous reasons why customers seek to do repeat business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch in the Zimbabwean automotive sector. One of the primary reasons is that Platinum Motors Harare Branch is a service provider of genuine spare parts and also a franchised dealership for Mazda and Nissan vehicle brands. Being a dealership attracts customers in need of brand-new vehicles such as non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and the government itself; their one-stop shop used to be mainly Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Another reason

for repeat business may be the long-term relationships established between the firm and various organisations and clients. These personal and business relationships act as a channel to bring in more customers while retaining the existing customer base. Table 4.2 below is a representation of reasons why customers come back to Platinum Motors Harare Branch to get services, presented in the form of a percentage of people reporting a specific reason.

As illustrated in Table 4.2 below, the two major reasons why clients keep coming back for repeat business at Platinum Motors Harare Branch is because of good quality workmanship and the availability of genuine Nissan and Mazda spares. In addition, the dealership also offers supply of brand-new vehicles which receive quality back-up service and maintenance throughout the life time of the vehicle. Some customers reported that they come back to Platinum Motors Harare Branch because they purchased their vehicles from this dealership and for warranty validity reasons they have an obligation to take them back to the dealership for service and repair. Some of the unforeseen or hidden reasons why Platinum Motors Harare Branch remains in business may be due to the fact that this organisation is a dominant player in the automotive industry principally because it is a franchised dealer for Mazda and Nissan brands which have a high appeal to the market. Because of this they tend to get more clients who drive these specific vehicle brands. Some clients reported that they come back to the dealership because of good customer care (3%), professionalism of the personnel working there (2%) and reliability of their services and parts provided (5%). Other clients reported that they are not coming back to the dealership (2%) for various reasons related to service delivery bottlenecks.

Table 4.2

Results for Fishers Exact Test on the Main Reasons for Poor Business Performance

	Customer Satisfaction			Fisher´s Exact Test (5% sig. level)
	Not Satisfied	Satisfied	Total	
Good Service Delivery	10	276	286	0.045
Poor Service Delivery	1	15	16	
Good Customer Care	10	286	296	0.020
Poor Customer Care	1	5	6	

The Fisher's exact test for the relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction yielded a p-value of 0.045 at a 5% significance level. This indicates a statistically significant association between service delivery (good vs. poor) and customer satisfaction (satisfied vs. not satisfied). In the data, out of 286 customers with good service delivery, 10 were not satisfied and 276 were satisfied. In contrast, out of 16 customers with poor service delivery, 1 was not satisfied and 15 were satisfied. Given the significant p-value, we reject the null hypothesis that service delivery has no impact on customer satisfaction. This aligns with research like Teshome et al. (2020) that highlights the importance of service delivery on customer satisfaction in public service contexts. The findings suggest that the level of service delivery can influence customer satisfaction outcomes.

For the relationship between customer care and customer satisfaction, the Fisher's Exact Test resulted in a p-value of 0.020 at a 5% significance level. This indicates a statistically significant association between customer care (good vs. poor) and customer satisfaction. Looking at the data, out of 296 customers with good customer care, 10 were not satisfied and 286 were satisfied. Among the 6 customers with poor customer care, 1 was not satisfied and 5 were satisfied. With the p-value

being significant, we reject the null hypothesis that customer care doesn't affect customer satisfaction. This supports findings in studies like Ažman and Gomišček (2015) that discuss connections between service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Good customer care is often seen as a key driver of customer satisfaction, contributing to positive outcomes like customer loyalty and retention.

Further probing was done to understand why these customers are taking their business elsewhere, and it was found that sometimes Platinum Motors Harare Branch delivers its products and services late. During key informant interviews, the issue was raised by the researcher and reports were that some of the main causes of delay in business is delayed delivery of materials, consumables and parts, which are critical for wholesalers in Japan. Therefore, in a bid to resolve the issue, it was suggested that bulk purchases and timely motor service at the dealership are the possible solutions to this business drawback.

In addition, it was found in the research that Platinum Motors Harare Branch supplies genuine parts when servicing or repairing customers' vehicles despite slightly higher prices. Hence, vehicle owners prefer to take their vehicles to this dealership, leading to a higher customer retention rate at this dealership. Because of a core of an experienced technical team of technicians and engineers, Platinum Motors Harare Branch attracts a large customer base and thus currently dominates the local automotive industry in terms of vehicle sales and provision of motor service and check-ups.

The dealership can also decide to offer courtesy vehicles to their customers during the fleet service period. Courtesy vehicles will ensure that the organisation takes as much time solving any mechanical issues on the vehicles while, at the same

time, the clients have an alternative vehicle to use. These vehicles can also be offered at a competitively lower charge than the majority of car hire companies, giving Platinum Motors Harare Branch another passive income stream. Adequately exploiting this channel may bring about more revenue for the firm in the long run (Sipho, 2016).

Table 4.3

Reasons for Repeat Business at Platinum Motors Harare Branch

Reason/Variable Description	Total no of Respondents	Percentage (%) of Respondents
Closeness to office	3	1
Fair pricing	3	1
Good customer care	10	3
Quality workmanship	215	62
Not coming back	7	2
Professionalism	7	2
Purchased car there	38	11
Reliability	17	5
Reputable Company	45	13
Total	346	100

Literature posits that to enhance customer feedback, it is important that every firm, regardless of the sector or industry, must set up an online customer engagement platform for feedback. This is a very good initiative, especially at this point in time characterised by technological advancement and information asymmetry (Poturak et al., 2022). Also, to retain more customers, firms are encouraged to keep an updated client database where the Sales and Marketing team sometimes randomly calls upon clients on the phone and tries to understand ways in which they can improve their business relationship. According to Rastogi et al. (2023), implementing a well-articulated customer relationship model will enhance business continuity, since

through these models, firms may be able to train their staff, especially the front office, on the best way to take good care of new and existing clients.

The Status Quo of CRM at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

Customer relationship management skills represent a crucial part of the business, which determines the level of customer retention as well as the business's long-term profitability (Nwokah & Owuso, 2016). The researcher first classified the customers into long-term, short-term and medium-term clients depending on the number of years they have been servicing their vehicles at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Customers who have been servicing their vehicles for four years and below were classified as short-term clients, while those who have been receiving services for 5 to 9 years fell under the medium-term clientele and clients who have been working with Platinum Motors Harare Branch for ten years and above were classified as long-term clients.

Table 4.4

Kruskal-Wallis Equality-of-Populations Rank Test

Ranked customer satisfaction level	Obs	Rank Sum
Poor	9	45
Moderate	118	8083
High	175	37625

Chi-squared = 224.471 with 2 d.f., probability = 0.0001

Chi-squared with ties = 236.369 with 2 d.f., probability = 0.0001

Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank test was conducted to test the hypothesis that state that customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with customer retention. This test compared the customer satisfaction levels, which were categorized as poor, moderate, and high, in relation to customer retention. The

results of the test yielded a chi-squared value of 224.471 (or 236.369 when adjusted for ties) with 2 degrees of freedom. The probability associated with this test is 0.0001, which indicates a highly statistically significant result. This significant result supports the hypothesis H6, suggesting that there is a substantial difference in customer retention across the different levels of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, research in the field of customer relationship management and services corroborates that customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer retention and loyalty. Specifically, studies by Malik (2015) in the automobile sector, Alshurideh et al. (2012) in the mobile market, and Frey et al. (2013) in professional services all support the notion that higher levels of customer satisfaction are associated with greater customer retention. Therefore customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with customer retention

The results represented in Figure 4.3 show that Platinum Motors Harare Branch is scoring above average in terms of good quality service and their current customer relationship management skills, which is an indication of good brand reliability and positive perception from clients. Long-term company and personal clients (8.7 and 8.6 scores out of 10, respectively) and medium-term company and personal clients (66%) are highly satisfied with the services offered by Platinum Motors Harare Branch. However, short-term customers who have been getting their services from Platinum Motors Harare Branch for a period of 1 to 4 years do not show high levels of satisfaction. Company clients and personal clients show an average score of 39 % (3.8/10) and 36 %, respectively. This may be due to the fact that they have not established a stronger relationship with the business, and so while other clients may be getting discounted services and preferential treatment, this group may be lacking such.

Figure 4.3

Average Score of Platinum Motors Harare Branch Customer Relationship Management Skills as Reported by Customers (n=346)



Despite that, intuitively, it is vital to note that a customer who has been with the business for at least three years should not be unsatisfied with the products and services provided. Hence, there is a need to make an inclusive effort to foster satisfaction across all levels and classes of customers. Hartoyo et al. (2023), in their study of the ways to boost business in the automotive sector, suggested that a higher customer relationship management score can be achieved by creating tailor-made customer packages so that there are people dedicated to making sure that every client leaves happy. By dedicating a sales team where each individual is responsible for a specific number and set of customers, making sure they get the best service possible, this score of customer relationship management may be raised (Anees et al., 2020). These findings are similar with the study done by Guerola-Navarro et al. (2021), who measured the impact of good customer care skills on customer retention in the automotive sector and concluded that brand building creates loyalty to the business

by customers and furthermore effective customer engagement ultimately leads to improvements in the general level of customer satisfaction and customer retention over time. Individual clients generally have a low customer relationship management score compared to company-owned clients' cars. This may be an indication that the service providers focus more on satisfying companies as their major clients since this is where most of their income flows from. These results are inconsistent with the findings from (Nyamweya, 2022; Simanjuntak et al., 2020), who found that clients of lower income level or lower class are equally important as affluent clients, yet service providers tend to treat them differently due to their subconscious categorizations. The researchers also reported that this categorization can also occur in areas where clients of different ethnic groups seek services from one service provider. These service providers were found to treat people from a certain group with the uttermost respect as compared to people from other ethnic groups (Akintola, 2010).

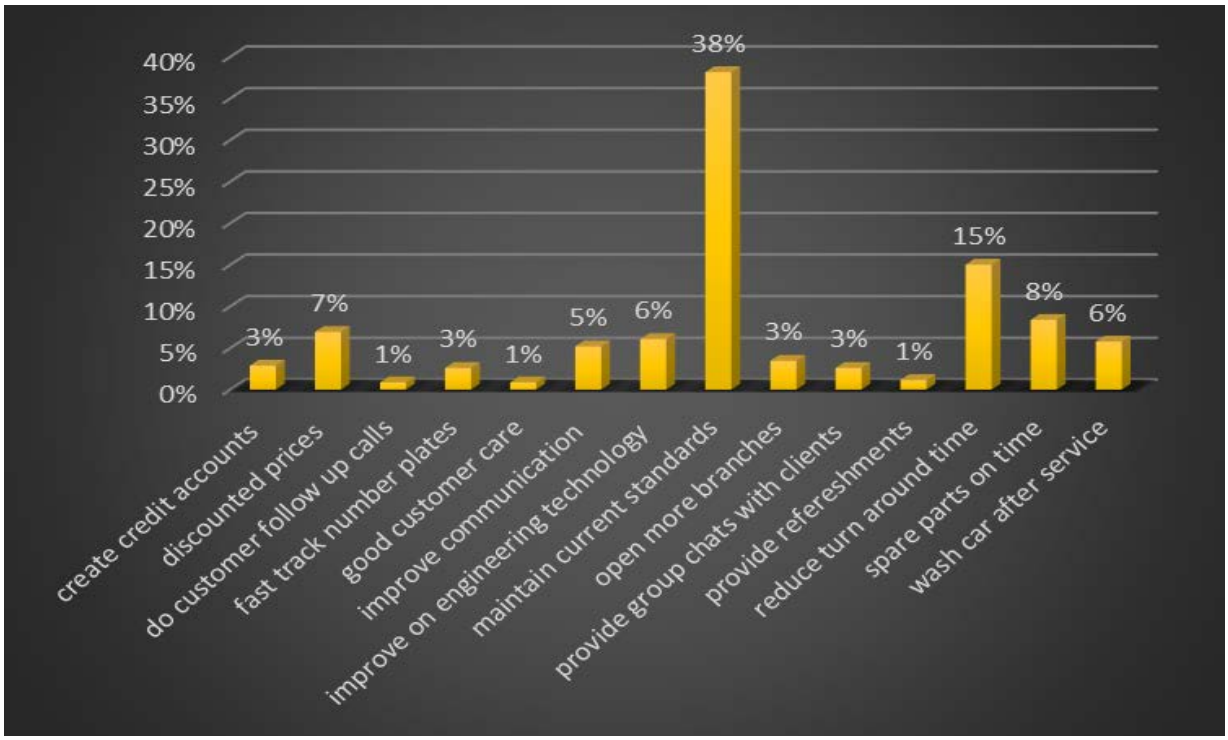
Customer Perceptions and Expectations for Continued Service Delivery with Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

Approximately seventy per cent (70%) of customers have a constructive opinion towards Platinum Motors Harare Branch's quality of service provision. Main reasons for the positive perception were found to be good customer care, provision of genuine motor spares and reliability of their services. Some of the key factors included the maintenance of up-to-date service and maintenance records for customers, employing more experienced personnel with proficient technical and motor service skills, professionalism and high reliability of the service provided. However, a small percentage (2%) reported having a negative perception of Platinum Motors Harare Branch service delivery. The underlying reasons cannot be ignored. Some of the major reasons for negative perceptions were reported to be due to primitive engineering

technology, which resulted in bad service on some of the latest vehicle models, delayed service provision time (long turnaround time), high cost of service or repair and expensive genuine parts and finally delays in processing number plates for brand new vehicles. These areas of concern are important to capture because they will allow the organisation to pause and reflect on ways through which business can be improved. To follow up, the researcher designed the questionnaire in such a way that it was possible to capture the ways through which business can be improved by assessing customer views and suggestions. This doesn't necessarily mean everything that is suggested will be followed, but rather, this feedback is crucial for the firm to make all necessary adjustments where possible. Amalia Yunia Rahmawati (2020) insinuated that good customer care is the basis of business profitability. In his research, it was also mentioned that it is important to take note of the bad words or bad feedback which comes from customers because they can become agents of bad publicity, hindering your potential to enter new markets as a business. This notion was also supported by Jian & Yuantao (2021) in their recent study, which pointed out that good brand loyalty is pivoted around good customer care and quality service delivery in the automotive sector. The researchers also specified that any bad news about the organisation or firm's product or service travels faster (like fire) as compared to good publicity. This, therefore, calls for swift action by Platinum Motors Harare Branch to solve all customer pain points so as to make sure they gain ground in the market by acquiring new leads and new customers.

Figure 4.4

Customer Expectations for Continued Business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch (n=346).



As illustrated by Figure 4.4 above, the major expectations of customers who frequently get their services from Platinum Motors Harare Branch automobile dealerships are to keep maintaining good standards. Approximately 38% of the customer base reported that Platinum Motors Harare Branch needs to maintain the current levels of business operations and service delivery. This is good feedback, and regardless of the fact that some customers may have a different views, it gives the firm some hope that they can do better in terms of service delivery and customer satisfaction. Some of the grievances raised by customers about products and service delivery are but not limited to reducing the turnaround time as mentioned by 15% of the interviewed population. Reduction in turnaround time means reducing the time each vehicle spent in the workshop to avoid wasting the clients' time. However, during focus group discussions it was observed that the time each vehicle spent in the

workshop is directly related to the work load in the workshop, number of vehicles to be serviced that day as well as the specific issue upon which the vehicle needs to be checked. Vehicles with complicated issues tend to stay longer in the garage or workshop as compared to vehicles that just came for a mere service and check-up (Sipho, 2016). Other grievances raised by customers were the need to reduce the cost of services (7%) and improvement in the technology and engineering of motor mechanics (6%). These findings are in line with the results of Adusei and Tweneboah-Koduah (2019) who concluded that to create value in the automotive industry and freight line businesses and achieve a win-win situation, customer engagement is key since the ultimate service experience is defined from the customers viewpoint. Although the majority of clients (38 %) were happy with the current state of service provision, the negative issues raised by the few customers (2%) should not be taken lightly by Platinum Motors Harare Branch. From the research there are some customer expectations which were raised by the respondents which they hoped would be met so that they continue getting their service at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. These included the need for their vehicles to be cleaned after service and the introduction of credit facilities for credit worthy customers' especially large companies who bring a pool of vehicles at one instance. Some customers also pointed out that the dealership should fast-track the provision of number plates for new vehicles purchased so that they are not inconvenienced by the police on the highway (while driving their brand-new vehicles without number plates yet) and lastly to improve on customer care through timely communication when vehicles are still under repair. Mohamad et al., (2014) produced almost similar results and mentioned that if service provision is performed quicker in the automotive sector, there is a likelihood of a ten percent increase in the customer retention rate by the organisation or dealership. Angeloska-

dichovska (2021) also stated that good customer care, provision of genuine motor spares and engaging the customer on what they need to see improved in terms of products and services are some key factors that greatly contribute to brand loyalty and hence leading to repeat patronage which will in turn positively impact business profitability.

Customer Perceptions about Service Provision at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

By applying the use of a probit model, which is a binary logistic regression model to identify the factors that impact customer views and perceptions on the quality of service provision at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, the study sought to investigate key influences on customer perception towards service provision in the motor industry with specific reference to this particular automobile dealership. The research results are displayed on table 4.3 below. The binary logistic regression model has been used by a variety of researchers, interestingly in the same manner as of this research by (Heckert et al., 2023) who carried out a study on the implications of a gender-sensitive nutrition plan in Northern Malawi. The researchers used the binary logistic regression model to assess health practitioners' perceptions on whether they support a gender-sensitive nutrition plan for disadvantaged populations or that everybody should be treated the same. Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2018) used the binary logistic regression model (K. Zhang et al., 2018) to analyse work zone crashes within the Chinese economy. In this study, by applying the principles of the binary logistic regression model, the researcher found out that at 95 percent confidence interval, 44.3 percent of the model is explained by the explanatory variables, while the results of the model are weighed at 10 percent. The results on table 4.3 show that customers' vehicle ownership status, gender of the customer and age of the customer did not affect

customers' perceptions towards Platinum Motors Harare Branch quality of service delivery. Within the probit model, a progressive coefficient means that a rise in the predictor leads to an increase in the predicted probability. Also, the negative coefficient means that a rise in the predictor leads to a decrease in the predicted probability (Johnston et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). In this case, a positive coefficient in the determinant variables means an increase in positive perceptions of the customers. In contrast, a negative coefficient of the independent variable would mean a negative customer perception.

Table 4.5

Customers' perception on service delivery by Platinum Motors Harare Branch. (n=346)

	Coefficient	Std. Err	t-value	P>t	(95% CI)	
Customer Gender	0.028	0.034	0.84	0.404	-0.04	0.10
Customer Age	-0.001	0.001	0.68	0.497	0.00	0.00
Vehicle Ownership status	-0.023	0.027	0.85	0.003*	-0.08	0.03
Fleet size serviced	0.001	0.001	0.65	0.051**	0.00	0.00
Customer preference	0.021	0.043	0.49	0.627	-0.06	0.10
CRM score	0.047	0.011	4.34	0.000*	0.03	0.68
Customer Satisfaction Level	0.216	0.061	3.52	0.001*	0.10	0.34
Constant	0.443	0.091	4.86	0.000	0.26	0.62

Levels of significance: **= 5 % sig level, *=1 % sig level and ***= 1% sig level

Source: Customer survey (2021)

The results indicate that customer satisfaction level significantly affects customer perception of service provision (p = 0.001). This implies that a 1% rise in customer satisfaction has a 21.6 % probability of influencing positive perceptions among customers about the quality of products and service provision. It can also be concluded that as the average client satisfaction score of Platinum Motors Harare

Branch on service provision increases, the probability of customers having a positive perception significantly increases by 21.6 per cent. (Satoshi, 2006) also concluded that an increase in client satisfaction tends to induce a positive perception in customers about the organisation.

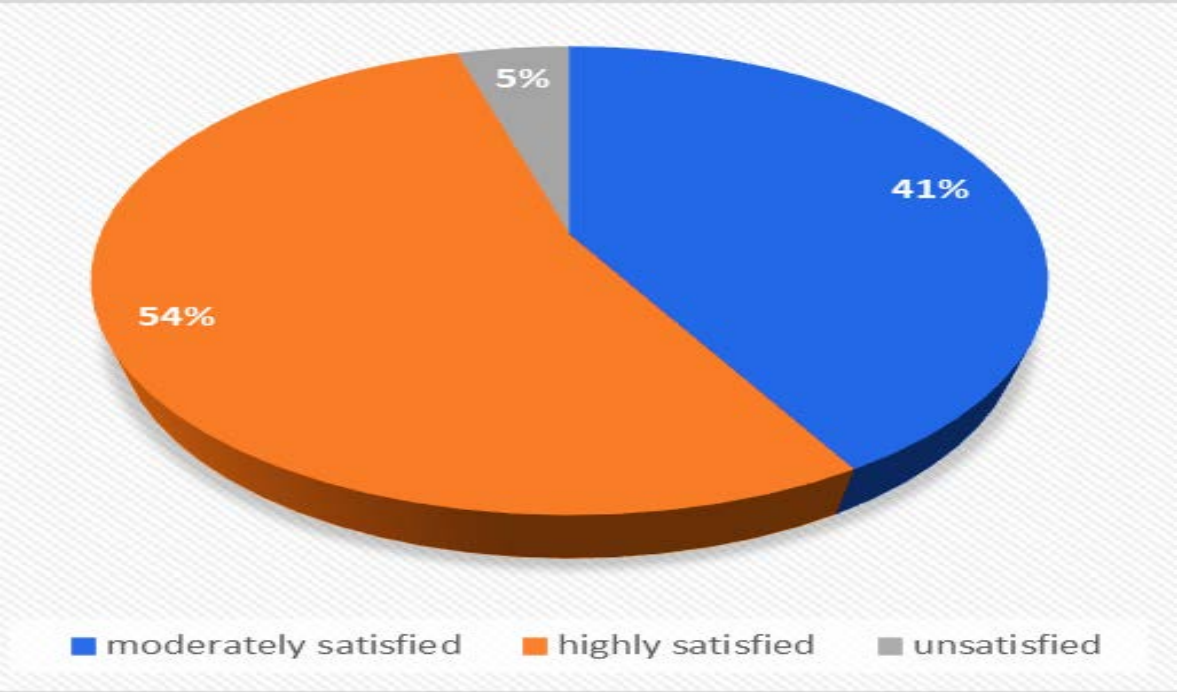
Furthermore, the customer relationship management score is significant at 1%, implying that a 1% increase in the CRM score would result in a potential increase (positive perception) in customer perception by 4.67%. Vehicle ownership status comprised personally owned vehicle (=0) and company-owned vehicle (=1). The variable vehicle ownership status is significant at 1 per cent with a negative coefficient of (0.0228316), which implies that if the person drives a personal vehicle, they are more likely to have a negative perception (2.28%) about quality-of-service delivery at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Therefore, a 1% increase in the number of personal vehicles serviced could result in a 2.28% decline in customer perception (negative perception) about the level of product and service delivery at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Lastly, a 5% increase in the fleet size serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch would result in a 0.07 marginal increase in customer perception (positive perception). Thus, the likelihood of customers having a positive perception increases by an equivalence of 0.07%.

In addition to the probit model, which anchors its analysis on probabilities and likelihood of events, the researcher did a general analysis of the percentage or proportion of the sampled population that are satisfied and/or unsatisfied as a supporting notion. In this regard, the results of the probit model showed that more than 50% of the respondents are satisfied by the services provided by Platinum Motors Harare Branch but do not show the classification or the extent of satisfaction in terms

of ranking the customers' needs and their specific raw score on service provision satisfaction.

Figure 4.5

Proportion of Satisfied and Unsatisfied Customers (n=346)



Source: Survey data (2021)

From Figure 4.5 above, the majority of the respondents (41%) are moderately satisfied with the service provision level at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. By definition, moderately satisfied customers are those customers who have mixed feelings regarding service provision by the dealership. On the one hand they are happy with certain aspects of the service delivery processes while on the other hand they have a few pain points regarding the same processes. If these pain points are addressed, then the total number of satisfied customers will exponentially rise from 54% to 95%, i.e. (54+41=95), as shown by the pie chart above. Furthermore, as indicated by the results, using ranking and generic customer classification, it can be concluded that only 5 per cent of the sampled population were unsatisfied with the services delivered by the dealership. The lack of satisfaction can be traced to delays

in service provision by the service provider, which lengthened the turnaround time or property loss and damage during vehicle services.

Key Areas of Improvement at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

The researcher carried out a survey where all customers were asked to make suggestions on which area of business Platinum Motors Harare Branch can improve to meet the basic customer needs ceteris paribus. The major areas of improvement for the dealership are issues related to the timeliness of service delivery. Clients expect their vehicles to be serviced quickly (19%), and if any delays arise, they will be notified while there is still ample time for adjustments. Another key area of improvement is the time taken to secure spare parts, especially for Mazda vehicle models. Approximately eighteen per cent (18%) of customers raised concerns that the time taken to secure spare parts is too long and went on to state that this could be avoided if the dealership provided fast-moving lines ex-stock as this is an area that affects all services since customers are willing to wait longer for repairs. For services, they are not willing to compromise, and thus, there is a need for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to find innovative ways in which they can easily secure spare parts on time. According to Adusei and Tweneboah-Koduah (2019) and Scherpen et al., (2018), some of the key methods that can be used to offer services swiftly in the automotive industry include bulk purchases of spare parts, hiring young and energetic people to work in the workshop while always thriving on provision of quality workmanship to reduce come-backs in work done.

The next suggestion was that Platinum Motors Harare Branch needed to open more branches in other centres (3%), specifically outside of the capital city of Harare. Issues related to diversifying their product packages and opening a body parts manufacturing shop within the country were also highlighted. Another key area of

concern, as shown in the table, is the need to improve good customer care by improving the communication skills of the front office (6%). Other minor issues were raised related to the need to clean cars after service (5%). Approximately 5% of the customers believe that cleaning vehicles after services will increase their chances of repeat business with the firm. This customer feedback needs to be taken seriously by Platinum Motors Harare Branch so that this concern by customers is addressed to their expectations. This will ensure that all customers get their vehicles in a clean and attractive state. However, this service can only be offered to those who bring their small vehicles for starters because large vehicles such as UD trucks may be difficult and costly to clean. Offering this service may also be exploited as a marketing technique to attract new customers, especially those who drive personal vehicles. However statistical test were done on customer service quality, communication frequency and after-sales service.

The hypothesis H3 posits that "customer service quality has a positive impact on customer retention," based on the Pearson chi-square test results, a p-value of 0.074 was obtained, indicating a relationship between customer service quality and customer retention. Using 10% significance level, the results suggest a statistically significant relationship between these variables. This implies that in the context of Platinum Motors Harare, higher levels of customer service quality are associated with greater customer retention. The analysis of this relationship underscores the importance of delivering high-quality customer service for loyalty and retain customers. Research in the field of customer service and retention supports the notion that customer service quality positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn influences customer retention (Jahanshahi et al., 2011, p. 253). Furthermore, studies in the automobile sector highlight that effective customer relationship

management, which encompasses good customer service, has a significant impact on customer loyalty and retention (Malik, 2015, p. 70).

Table 4.6

Test Statistics for the Reasons for Poor Customer Retention

Variables	Categories	Not retained	Retained	Pearson chi2
Customer service quality	Very Poor	31	5	Pr = 0.074
	Poor	40	6	
	Average	63	10	
	Good	80	15	
	Excellent	48	4	
Communication frequency	Low	68	11	Pr = 0.091
	Medium	94	13	
	High	100	16	
After-sales service	Very Poor	32	4	Pr = 0.089
	Poor	40	7	
	Average	63	10	
	Good	80	14	
	Excellent	47	5	

Communication frequency has a positive impact on customer retention as stated by hypothesis H4. Examining the relationship between communication frequency, categorized as Low, Medium, or High, and customer retention outcomes of “Not retained” or “Retained”, revealed the following distributions: for low communication frequency, there were 68 customers “Not retained” and 11 “Retained”; for medium frequency, 94 were “Not retained” and 13 were “Retained”; and for high frequency, 100 were “Not retained” and 16 were “Retained”. To assess the significance of the relationship between these variables, a Pearson chi-square test was conducted,

yielding a p-value of 0.091. The result indicates a statistically significant relationship between communication frequency and customer retention at 10% significance level. This suggests that higher levels of communication frequency are associated with greater customer retention. Previous studies support the notion that effective and regular communication with customers can positively impact customer loyalty and retention outcomes in the automobile sector (Malik, 2015). Additionally, studies like Sliż & Delinska (2021) focusing on customer retention in the European automotive sector provide further context on the importance of factors influencing customer retention in automotive businesses.

For hypothesis H5 regarding "after-sales service and customer retention," the analysis examined the relationship between the quality of after-sales service and customer retention outcomes in Platinum Motors Harare. The after-sales service was categorized into very poor, poor, average, good, and excellent levels, and the Pearson chi-square test conducted on this data yielded a p-value of 0.089. Using a threshold of $p < 0.1$ for determining statistical significance, the result indicates a statistically significant relationship between after-sales service and customer retention. This suggests that better after-sales service is associated with higher customer retention. Studies by Gupta & Raman (2022) on after-sales service experiences, Mustofa & Afewerk (2011) on the effect of after-sales services in Ethiopia's automotive industry, and Tabitha (2013) on after-sales services in Kenya's automotive industry align with the findings of this analysis on the positive impact of after-sales service on customer retention. Effective after-sales service can thus be considered a factor contributing to enhanced customer retention outcomes.

As shown in figure 4.7, a significant proportion (33%) of customers were currently satisfied with the level of product and service provision and urged the

organisation to maintain the current standards. A study by Lee et al. (2017) on managing customer life cycles found a need to address all customer pain points, no matter how small they seem. The researchers made a conclusion that customers can be effectively retained through a holistic knowledge management system as well as tracking customer relationship management performance of key personnel within the organisation (Lee et al., 2017). This is further supported by Simanjuntak et al. (2020) in their study focusing on increasing customer retention through a good customer relationship management approach in the car loan business. Findings from Simanjuntak et al., (2020) Perceived value, company reputation, and service quality all have a big impact on customer happiness, while switching barriers have a big impact on customer retention. Although customer happiness does not directly impact retention, customer trust—an indirect relationship—is important because it motivates clients to make use of the goods or services of the business when negotiating for new credit. (Nyamweya, 2022; Rastogi et al., 2023; Sağlam & El MONTASER, 2021).

Table 4.7

Keys Areas of Improvement for Platinum Motors, Harare Branch (n=346)

Key Areas of Improvement	Number of respondents	Percentage
Clean cars after service	18	5%
Introduce credit facilities.	22	6%
Improve communication skills	22	6%
Maintain standards	115	33%
Provide spare parts on time	63	18%
Reduce turnaround time	67	19%
Electronics and computer system	30	9%
Provide number plates early	9	3%

These findings have managerial implications such as categorizing customers, figuring out sales targets depending on client segments, offering products with additional benefits over opponents, providing credit packs and unique initiatives to promote favorable interest rates, as well as forming telephone sales as information channels. (Simanjuntak et al., 2020).

Findings of Thematic Analysis

Factors Determining Customer Retention at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

After running the queries on NVivo, the determinants of what people think should be done to increase repeat sales were found and documented here in the results section. The researcher used thematic analysis as a qualitative approach to a case study investigation of Platinum Motors Harare Branch and the inherent reasons that act as the basis for customer retention as well as repeat business. The advantage of using thematic analysis and a combination of other quantitative means of data analysis, such as the probit model, comparisons of means, and descriptive statistics presented in the shape of charts as well as graphs, is that the scholar enhances the reliability and plausibility of the research findings.

The four emergent themes emerging in the final report from the holistic semantic thematic analysis carried out by the researcher include poor time management by staff servicing the vehicles, unfair pricing of products and services in the form of high pricing for petty jobs, inadequate communication and feedback on the problems observed by technicians during checkups and service and reluctances in the adoption of new advanced vehicle diagnostic technology. The implications of these results are that Platinum Motors Harare Branch needs to come up with customer retention strategies and initiatives that boost sales. To this end, Platinum Motors Harare Branch needs to address all the grievances as pointed out by its customers so

that they can solve all pain points so that business flows smoothly Akaeze & Shaibu (2017). A study was conducted to cover a significant research vacuum in the automobile sector, where few studies have used qualitative methodologies in the research process. Using insights from the Theory of Reasoned Action which was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975. The main thrust of this theory is to articulate and predict human behavior with respect to two variables, which are intentional actions and decision-making. The qualitative multiple-case research sought to investigate some of the characteristics that impact customer loyalty to vehicle dealerships in the aftersales period. Data was gathered from fifty customers who had purchased or hired vehicles from an identical dealer for at least five years. Data analysis was carried out on both topic and content analysis. The three emergent topics in the final report were Customer Satisfaction, Product Quality, and Service Quality and these impacted consumer loyalty at dealerships. The results positively impacted retention programs as well as action plans for automotive business managers to prevent customer churn while mitigating the negative effects on sales. (Nowell et al., 2017).

Proposed CRM Model to Improve Customer Retention at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch.

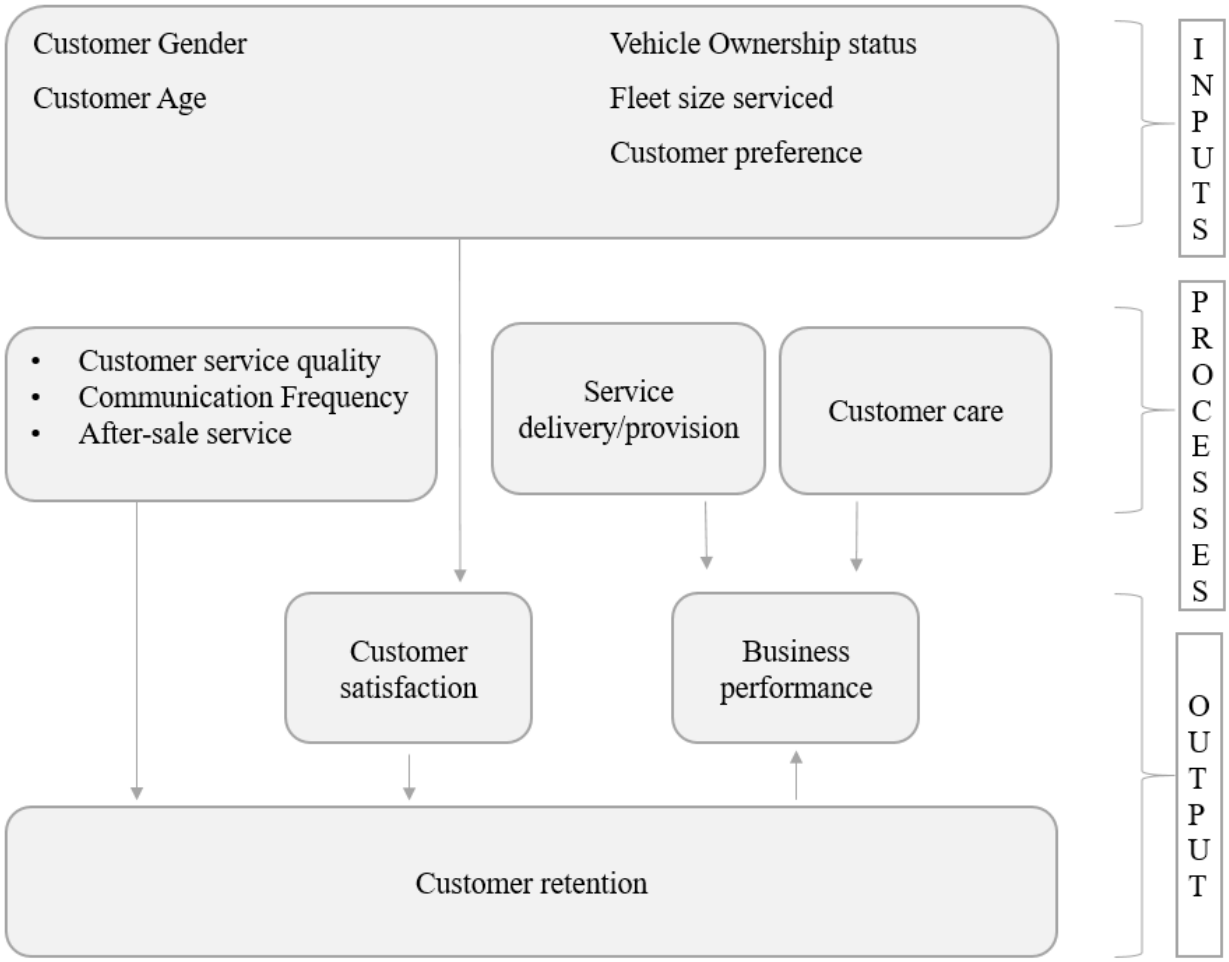
Figure 4.6 is a diagrammatic representation of the customer relationship management model proposed by the researcher for Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Based on the evidence provided by the findings of data analysis and literature, the above holistic model can lead to increased customer retention for this organization.

The model's topside represents attributes that need to be mastered to give the customers the best quality of products and services. These issues include customer gender, customer age, vehicle ownership status, fleet size serviced and customer

preference. While customer segmentation may not be advised, but in the case of Platinum Motors Harare Branch, it is a necessary evil to develop different customer categories based on vehicle ownership status, gender, number of vehicles and other special indicators that may be observed in the data. This would help the business to create product customization for clients so that customers can experience what is in line with their expectations. Grouping customers may also help in creating a customized pricing model for the goods and services offered by the firm (Galankashi et al., 2016).

Figure 4.6

Proposed Customer Relationship Management Model to Attain High Customer Retention at Platinum Motors, Harare Branch. Simanjuntak (2020)



Creating customer engagement platforms such as active Facebook pages, Instagram, Linked In and WhatsApp communities will ensure that clients get timely information on new products and services or any promotions that may arise within the firm (Jogaratnam, 2017). Other key attributes that can be used on the customer side include offering refreshments and gifts to walk-in customers and creating a relaxed customer engagement atmosphere. By recognizing its top customer(s) through awards, the dealership strengthens the firm's relationship with its clientele. These clients will, therefore, act as ambassadors for the dealership, spreading good news about the organization. All these activities, if done well, will lead to the offering of quality goods and services to their clients. Consequently, offering good products and services will ultimately result in customer satisfaction. If customers are satisfied, repeat business is highly likely, thus ensuring customer retention and business sustainability.

Evaluation of Research Findings.

This section focuses on deriving meaning from the findings of the study by linking the objectives of the research, hypotheses and the actual findings. The researcher intends to give a thorough description of the results in relation to theory while providing plausible explanations for any conflicting findings.

Customer relationship management can be an integrated approach to managing situations by focusing on customer retention and relationship development within an organisation (Sulaiman & Musnadi, 2020). The objectives of this research were firstly to assess the efficacy of customer relationship management strategies on customer retention in the Zimbabwean automotive industry by looking at a particular automobile dealership called Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Furthermore, the study intends to add new insights through how Platinum Motors Harare Branch handles customer retention matters by developing a comprehensive business model based on

customer engagement strategies in use at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Customer retention significantly impacts a company's profit margin, with a 1% increase in customer retention providing as much as a five percent positive change in a firm's financial standing (Moenardy et al., 2016). Nearly eighty percent of a company's future profits can be derived within twenty percent of existing customers (Naru & Kumar, 2020).

The results of the research reveal that the most prominent customer relationship management strategies employed by Platinum Motors Harare Branch included good customer care (65%), maintenance of high standards of service provision and maintaining a good reputation (13%) through professionalism, effective communication through timely customer feedback and information sharing (8%). On a scale of 1 to 10, the ranked customer satisfaction level were found to be 8.5 (85%) using a sample size of three hundred and forty six (346) respondents. Mohamad et al., (2014) found similar results where they found out that, within the food industry of Bangladesh, the most effective customer relationship management strategies were good customer care backed by timely service and customer feedback. This means that, approximately seventy percent (70%) of the clients were satisfied with the level of customer relationship management within the Zimbabwean automotive industry as represented by Platinum Motors Harare Branch. This percentage surpassed the researcher's expectations, considering the high competition within the Zimbabwean automotive industry, since the researcher had hypothesised that approximately fifty per cent of the respondents were satisfied by the level of customer relationship management at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. This motion primarily emanated from the rise of small informal car dealerships, some of which even operate from undesignated premises (Scarff, 2017).

In light of the research findings, customers reported that the major reasons why they kept coming back for service was because of the good reputation of the service provider and their experience in the industry (Platinum Motors Harare Branch has been in business since 1953) as shown by good quality of workmanship especially with the Mazda and Nissan franchises. Wong (2014) established that, to effectively achieve good customer retention, it is of paramount importance for the firm to listen to all the needs of customers no matter how small and irrelevant it may seem.

According to the findings of this research listening to customer needs is the first effective way of securing customer loyalty which eventually leads to customer retention, rise of new business through referrals and repeat business. It was hypothesised that the main reasons behind a decline in business at Platinum Motors Harare Branch are poor customer care, poor service delivery and lack of investment new technologies. In light of this hypothesis, the researcher fails to deny the null hypothesis as well as concluding that, surely Platinum Motors Harare Branch need to engage in the development and adoption of new and improved motor vehicle upgrade technology given the fact that at one time they were market leaders in this industry. However, in terms of customer care, it was found out that the staff at Platinum Motors Harare Branch have good customer care which had made the firm remain relevant over the past decades.

To further understand the level and quality of service provision within the Zimbabwean automotive industry, the researcher went on to measure and analyse customer perceptions towards the quality-of-service provision at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Using the probit model (binary logistic regression model), customer perceptions were divided into positive and negative (positive =1, negative =0) basing on the behaviour of various independent/deterministic variables within the model. The

model was said to be significant at 1% with a p-value of (p = 0.000) at 95 percent confidence level showing that the majority of clients (in this case 70%) have a general positive perception towards service provision by Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The researcher has indicated in their hypothesis that in the main customer needs at Platinum Motors Harare Branch includes but are not limited to introduction of discounts, running promotions, customer gifting and offering high quality services and motor accessories.

The researcher fails to deny the null hypothesis stated as well as concluding that, the introduction of credit facilities, running promotions at the firm and gifting of customers have a positive influence on the level of business performance for Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Adusei & Tweneboah-Koduah (2019) and Nzomoi et al., (2022) investigated the link between service quality and client satisfaction in the commercial banks in the town of Machakos using a descriptive survey design and simple regression model. The results revealed that the F statistic of the model was significant to one percent at 33.236 with a p value of (p=.000). This showed that the impact of quality service delivery aspect on customer retention strategies and client satisfaction was statistically numerical at 95% confidence level for (p<.05). Therefore, the model was suitable to estimate customer satisfaction amongst the five commercial banks in Machakos town. Also, the adjusted R^2 was at .648, which indicates the customer retention strategies explained 64.8% of the variations in customer satisfaction within the banking sector. Bank customer retention strategies had statistically significant influence on client satisfaction with a one-unit change leading to .384 (p=.000) change in client satisfaction (Nzomoi., *et al* 2022).

The research also highlighted that the proportion of highly satisfied customers doing business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch was fifty four percent (54%) with

forty one percent (41%) moderately satisfied leaving at least five percent (5%) unsatisfied as shown by a pie chart designed by the researcher. Insights from the moderately satisfied and unsatisfied customers pointed out that the major areas that need attention and improvement at Platinum Motors Harare Branch dealership were the quick provision of spare parts and making major improvements in the electronics and computer based diagnostic systems. A minor issue regarding timely provision of number plates was raised, but however during the key informant interviews, it was put to light that the provision of motor vehicle number plates was not entirely in their hands. This was a point of concern by some customers (6%) who participated in the research. which can temporarily be rectified by purchasing spare parts in bulk and upgrading the computer system, while liaising for cooperation from other stakeholders in the industry. The only long-lasting solution to these pain points would be to set up a motor production line within the country so that spare parts are produced locally, thus decreasing shipping costs and delays.

However, this is a massive decision that can only be taken after considering the business case for such a move, given the level of investment required and the economies of scale desired. According to Guillen et al., (2008) it is important for the organisation to monitor customer loyalty as time moves by, to avoid making the organisation and its services obsolete. Thus, these issues and areas of concern have to be solved as quickly as possible for the motor service industry to remain competitive within the Zimbabwean market.

By using semantic thematic analysis as a qualitative means of validating the results of this study, the researcher found out that the most emergent themes were centralised around the provision of genuine motors spares, timely motor vehicle and servicing, fair pricing of products and services, improvements in the relationships

between the company and its customers as well as adoption of new and improved motor vehicle and diagnostic technologies by Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

Most of the results obtained during the research were expected, although there are minor deviations from the initial hypotheses stated by the researcher. The fact that the Zimbabwean motor service industry still provides most of its services through Platinum Motors Harare Branch is not surprising, given that the service provider succeeded in creating a wider customer base earlier than their competitors. However, despite servicing most of the customer base, there are minor deviations in the cases where customer retention has been declining. This has been found to be due to some delays in service provision, possibly due to a rise in number of vehicles serviced as well as not enough increase in the workforce at the dealership.

The service provider also has some monopoly which they use to beat the competition especially with Mazda and Nissan brands. This monopoly is due to Platinum Motors Harare Branch link with various government entities and the pre-agreed contracts in which the latter has a fifty percent (50%) stake in the former's shareholding. According to Angeloska-dichovska (2020) and Amegavie et al., (2019) the longer the organisation operates within an industry, the more customers it is likely to have and the more loyal the customer base provided their expectations are met. Dibb et al., (2014) also supported this notion by outlining that there is need for the organisation to employ marketing strategies to stay competitive within an industry. These results conflict with the findings of Satoshi, (2006) who concluded that the continuity of business and number of customers within an organisation in any specified industry is greatly dependent on the intensity of competition within the industry.

In the case of the Zimbabwean automotive industry, there has not been any serious competition due to high barriers to entry until late 2010 after the dollarization of the Zimbabwean economy. Dollarization of the economy was followed by the deregulation of the motor industry which further allowed foreign direct investment to be attracted into this sector, with the advent of new small players also flowing into the sector. However, it can safely be agreed that by then Platinum Motors Harare Branch had already established a huge customer base which makes them remain competitive to date.

The results of analysis show that approximately twenty percent (20%) of the clients are complaining about the electronics and computer-based system vehicle diagnostics within the motor service industry. It can be articulated by the fact that, Africa as a whole is lagging behind in terms of technological advancements as primarily found out by Huang et al., (2018) and Tiago & Tiago (2012). The fact that Africa is a market follower in terms of automotive industry technology puts most players in this sector at a disadvantage as the diffusion of technology is slower. To solve this issue, the automotive industry can consider working with their original equipment manufacturers (OEM) and franchisors to train local personnel so as to upscale their skills.

Table 4.8

Null (H_0) Hypotheses Tests for the Study

Hypothesis (H_0)	Asymptote Significance	Decision on Hypothesis	Explanation
H1: There is no significant positive association between	0.045	REJECTED	Rejecting the null hypothesis means we conclude that service delivery effectiveness IS significantly associated with business performance (p = 0.045). The Fisher's Exact Test results (p = 0.045) confirm that good

service delivery effectiveness and business performance			service delivery leads to higher customer satisfaction, which directly impacts business performance. This supports the positive relationship between how well Platinum Motors delivers services and business outcomes.
H2: There is no significant positive association between customer care quality and business performance	0.02	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that customer care quality IS significantly associated with business performance (p = 0.020). The Fisher's Exact Test results (p = 0.020) confirm that good customer care leads to higher satisfaction, which directly impacts business performance. This supports the positive relationship between how well Platinum Motors cares for its customers and business outcomes.
H3: Perceived service quality has no positive impact on customer retention	0.074	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that perceived service quality DOES have a positive impact on customer retention at the 10% significance level. The Pearson chi-square test (p = 0.074) indicates that customers who perceive higher service quality are more likely to be retained. This confirms that higher perceived service quality leads to higher customer retention.
H4: Communication frequency has no positive impact on customer retention	0.091	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that communication frequency DOES have a positive impact on customer retention at the 10% significance level. The Pearson chi-square test (p = 0.091) indicates that customers who receive more frequent communication are more likely to remain with the dealership. This confirms that more frequent communication leads to higher customer retention.
H5: After-sales service has no positive impact on customer retention	0.089	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that after-sales service DOES have a positive impact on customer retention at the 10% significance level. The Pearson chi-square test (p = 0.089) indicates that customers who receive better after-sales service are more likely to be retained. This confirms that better after-sales service leads to higher customer retention.
H6: Customer satisfaction has no significant positive association	0.0001	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that customer satisfaction IS significantly associated with customer retention. The Kruskal-Wallis rank test (chi-squared = 224.471, p = 0.0001) confirms that higher customer satisfaction levels are associated with higher retention

with customer retention			rates. This is the strongest finding ($p < 0.001$), confirming that higher satisfaction leads to higher retention.
H7: There is no significant positive relationship between service delivery effectiveness and customer satisfaction (mediating pathway)	0.001	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that service delivery effectiveness DOES have a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction ($p = 0.001$) through the mediating pathway. The binary logistic regression results confirm that a 1% increase in customer satisfaction has a 21.6% probability of influencing positive perceptions about service delivery, confirming that better service delivery leads to higher customer satisfaction.
H8: Customer gender has no impact on service provision	0.404	FAIL TO REJECT	We cannot conclude that gender significantly impacts service provision ($p > 0.05$). The binary logistic regression results ($p = 0.404$, coefficient = 0.028) indicate that while there is a positive relationship, it is not statistically significant at conventional levels. This suggests that gender does not have a significant effect on how services are provided or perceived.
H9: Customer age has no impact on service provision	0.497	FAIL TO REJECT	We cannot conclude that age significantly impacts service provision ($p > 0.05$). The binary logistic regression results ($p = 0.497$, coefficient = -0.001) indicate that while there is a negative relationship, it is not statistically significant. This suggests that customer age does not have a significant effect on service provision or customer perceptions.
H10: Vehicle ownership status has no impact on service provision	0.004	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that vehicle ownership status DOES have a significant impact on service provision ($p = 0.004$). The binary logistic regression results (coefficient = -0.023) indicate that customers with personal vehicles are 2.28% more likely to have negative perceptions compared to those with company vehicles. This confirms that vehicle ownership status significantly affects how services are perceived and provided.
H11: Fleet size serviced has no impact on service provision	0.052	REJECTED	Rejecting the null means that fleet size serviced DOES have a significant impact on service provision at the 10% significance level. The binary logistic regression results ($p = 0.052$, coefficient = 0.001) indicate that a 5% increase in fleet size results in a 0.07% increase in positive perceptions. This

			suggests that customers with larger fleets have more positive perceptions of service provision.
H12: Customer preference has no impact on service provision	0.627	FAIL TO REJECT	We cannot conclude that customer preference significantly impacts service provision ($p > 0.05$). The binary logistic regression results ($p = 0.627$, coefficient = 0.021) indicate that while there is a positive relationship, it is not statistically significant. This suggests that customer preference does not have a significant effect on how services are provided or perceived.

As shown in Figure 4.5, 54% of customers reported being satisfied with Platinum Motors Harare Branch's services, with 41% moderately satisfied and 5% unsatisfied. These findings paint a picture of the current state of customer satisfaction at the dealership, a majority of customers are satisfied, while a minority (5%) are unsatisfied. The hypothesis tests presented in Table 4.8 confirm statistically significant relationships between key variables and customer retention:

- Customer satisfaction vs Customer retention (H6): This relationship was highly significant ($p = 0.0001$), confirming that customer satisfaction is a strong predictor of whether customers will continue doing business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch. This explains why the dealership retains approximately 98% of its customers (as shown in Table 4.3), despite some complaints. The Kruskal-Wallis rank test confirmed that higher customer satisfaction levels are significantly associated with higher retention rates.

- Service delivery effectiveness vs Customer satisfaction (H7): This relationship was also highly significant ($p = 0.001$), confirming that effective service delivery leads to higher customer satisfaction. The binary logistic regression results showed that a 1% increase in customer satisfaction has a 21.6% probability of

influencing positive perceptions about service delivery. This supports the finding that customers who receive timely, quality service are more satisfied.

- Service delivery effectiveness vs Business performance (H1): The significant relationship (p = 0.045) from the Fisher's Exact Test confirms that service delivery effectiveness directly impacts business performance through customer satisfaction. Good service delivery leads to satisfied customers, who in turn contribute to positive business outcomes such as loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repeat business.
- Customer care quality Business performance (H2): The significant relationship (p = 0.020) from the Fisher's Exact Test confirms that customer care quality directly impacts business performance. Customers who receive good care are more satisfied, which translates into better business performance through repeat business and positive referrals.
- Perceived service quality vs Customer retention (H3): The significant relationship (p = 0.074) at the 10% significance level confirms that perceived service quality positively impacts customer retention. Customers who perceive higher quality services are more likely to remain loyal to the dealership.
- Communication frequency → Customer retention (H4): The significant relationship (p = 0.091) at the 10% significance level confirms that communication frequency positively impacts customer retention. Regular communication keeps customers informed, valued, and connected to the dealership.
- After-sales service vs Customer retention (H5): The significant relationship (p = 0.089) at the 10% significance level confirms that after-sales service

positively impacts customer retention. Good after-sales service ensures customers are satisfied long-term and builds lasting relationships.

- Vehicle ownership status (H10): The significant relationship ($p = 0.004$) confirms that customers with personal vehicles are more likely to have negative perceptions (2.28%) compared to those with company vehicles. This suggests that Platinum Motors Harare Branch should consider tailoring its services differently for personal vehicle owners versus company vehicle owners.
- Fleet size serviced (H11): The significant relationship ($p = 0.052$) at the 10% significance level confirms that customers with larger fleets have more positive perceptions (0.07% increase for every 5% increase in fleet size). This suggests that larger fleet customers perceive better service value.
- Gender (H8), Age (H9), and Customer Preference (H12): These variables were not found to be statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating that they do not have a significant impact on service provision or customer perceptions in this context.

The finding that 50%+ of customers are satisfied is not contradictory to the hypothesis tests. Rather, it represents the current state of satisfaction, while the hypothesis tests confirm the drivers of that satisfaction. The two sets of findings complement each other. The hypothesis tests (Table 4.8) establish that there are statistically significant relationships between the independent variables (service delivery effectiveness, customer care quality, perceived service quality, communication frequency, after-sales service) and the dependent variables (customer satisfaction, customer retention, business performance). These are the "drivers" or "predictors" of satisfaction and retention. The significant relationships confirm that

customers who receive effective service delivery (p = 0.001) and good customer care (p = 0.020) are more likely to be satisfied and retained. The customer satisfaction findings (Figure 4.5) show the current state of satisfaction, the "outcome" of these drivers. The fact that 54% are satisfied, 41% are moderately satisfied, and 5% are unsatisfied indicates that Platinum Motors Harare Branch is performing reasonably well but has room for improvement.

The key insight is that while many customers are satisfied, the 5% who are unsatisfied represent a segment that requires attention. The significant relationships identified in the hypothesis tests explain why addressing issues such as service delivery (p = 0.001), customer care (p = 0.020), and after-sales service (p = 0.089) would help convert the unsatisfied and moderately satisfied customers into fully satisfied, loyal customers. Furthermore, the demographic findings (H10 and H11) provide additional insights: vehicle ownership status (p = 0.004) and fleet size serviced (p = 0.052) significantly impact service provision. This suggests that Platinum Motors Harare Branch should consider tailoring its services differently for personal vehicle owners versus company vehicle owners, and for customers with small fleets versus large fleets.

Insights from the Research Findings.

The significance of the research was to evaluate the level of effectiveness of customer relationship management strategies on customer retention within the automotive industry of Zimbabwe through a case study of a real dealership where the pseudonym, Platinum Motors Harare Branch was used. The research intends to add new knowledge insights into the automotive industry of Zimbabwe about issues related to customer relationship management. The research is an investigative process of the determinants of customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The link

between customer relationship management as well as customer retention was a key area of interest within this study.

From the information gathered of primary data collected during the research, it was found out that fifty percent (50%) of customers are highly satisfied with the level of customer relationship management at Platinum Motors Harare Branch automobile dealership. Using a ranking technique with a scale of 1 to 10, the average score for customer relationship management was 8.5 on a scale of 1 to 10, indicating that there is customer reliability and customer loyalty at this dealership. The main customer relationship management strategies employed by Platinum Motors Harare Branch were good customer care, quick turnaround times, customer follow-ups, professionalism, good quality workmanship and maintenance of a good reputation. About eight percent (8%) of the clients kept coming back because they had purchased their vehicles form this dealership for warranty validity and other superior service reasons.

The main expectations of clients were the need for improvement of technology adoption by Platinum Motors Harare Branch in order to cope with the technological advancement in the global automotive sector. Other expectations by clients were the creation of client credit facilities especially to companies and long-term customers, provision of fast track number plates to reduce inconveniences to customers on the road and provide spare parts on time. Approximately 38% of customers pointed out that Platinum Motors Harare Branch should maintain their current standards of service provision, although this doesn't mean there is no room for improvement. This implies that even though customers are satisfied by the level of product and service provision at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, there is still need to make some crucial adjustments in the business operations taking into consideration customer grievances.

This will ensure that customer satisfaction will remain high, consequently leading to customer retention in the long run and improved business performance.

Using the binary logistic regression model of analysis, it was discovered that customers generally have a positive perception about Platinum Motors Harare Branch service delivery processes within the Zimbabwean automotive industry. The results show that customer satisfaction level significantly affects customer perception of service provision ($p = 0.001$) at a 1 per cent significance level, given a 95 per cent confidence level. A 1-unit increase in the customer satisfaction has 6.1% probability of influencing positive perception in customers about the quality of products and service provision at Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

In summary, it can be asserted that Platinum Motors Harare Branch, representing the Zimbabwean automotive industry, is presently delivering exceptional products and services. However, there is still considerable room for improvement in order to augment customer satisfaction and loyalty. One of the primary areas that requires attention is the decentralization of motor service centres to make them more accessible and convenient for clients especially those in outlying areas. In addition, the dealership should adopt innovative and advanced technology within their products and services to create a more seamless and efficient experience for customers. Resolving these issues would enable the dealership to attract and retain a significant number of clients both presently and in the future.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction.

This section of the study gives concluding remarks on the journey of the research by providing brief insights from the literature, data analyzation, and the interpretation of the research findings. To that end, the main focus of this research was to investigate the main customer retention issues used by a franchised dealership called Platinum Motors Harare Branch within the automotive sector of Zimbabwe. Fewer studies have been done on characterising the available customer retention strategies employed within the Zimbabwean automotive industry (Meena & Sahu, 2021). Besides adding value to the body of knowledge, this research is important because it points out some major areas of concern by the customers in the automotive industry, citing the best level of product and service provision they desire, some key areas of improvement for the service providers, current level of customer satisfaction as well as the clients' willingness to refer the service provider to completely new clients. This will ensure that the researcher can determine the possibility of future customer retention and the possibility of business profitability, highlighting key things that need to be done to secure profitability. By stating the general level of customer satisfaction from the goods and services provided by Platinum Motors Harare Branch in the automotive industry, customers will aid the dealership and the industry at large to make important adjustments to their services, improve quality of service provision, customer care and this will lead to business continuity for this organisation. The research employed the use of qualitative as well as quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Questionnaires were designed and data was collected from 302 respondents for analysis using STATA version 15, SPSS version 26 and Microsoft excel. The main themes emergent from the thematic analysis are improving in time

management, provision of genuine motor spares, fair pricing, better communication between the firm and its clients as well as adoption of new technologies. These results mean that this organisation will have to introduce effective customer retention programs since business is going down. Furthermore, a deep dive is required in all the business processes and customer engagement initiatives in place to improve business performance.

Analysis of the Decline in Customer Service at Platinum Motors Harare Branch

Based on the findings of this research, several interconnected factors have contributed to the decline in customer service at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. These factors emerged from the analysis of primary data collected through customer surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions, as well as from the review of company records and operational data. The following analysis presents a comprehensive overview of the underlying causes of the service decline, categorised into operational, technological, communication, human resource, and customer expectation factors.

The primary operational issue identified is the long turnaround time for vehicle services. As reported in Chapter 4, 19% of customers identified this as a key concern that negatively impacts their satisfaction and willingness to continue doing business with the dealership. This operational inefficiency is attributed to several interconnected factors. Firstly, the dealership currently services a large number of vehicles, including both company fleets and personal vehicles; however, the number of technical staff, particularly qualified mechanics and technicians, has not kept pace with the increasing volume of work. This has resulted in backlogs, extended waiting times, and increased pressure on the existing workforce. Secondly, approximately 18% of customers expressed concerns about the time taken to secure genuine spare parts, particularly

for Mazda vehicle models. The dealership's reliance on international suppliers, combined with logistical challenges and customs clearance delays, has contributed to prolonged service times. Customers who are willing to wait longer for repairs are not willing to compromise on service turnaround times, creating a significant pain point. Thirdly, the dealership's workshop facilities, including the number of service bays, have not been expanded to accommodate the growing customer base and the increasing number of vehicles requiring service, leading to congestion, reduced efficiency, and longer waiting times. Fourthly, the research findings suggest that the dealership lacks efficient scheduling and workflow management systems, resulting in poor coordination between different departments, inefficient allocation of resources, and delays in the completion of services. As revealed during key informant interviews, delays in the delivery of materials, consumables, and parts from suppliers, particularly wholesalers in Japan, have compounded these operational challenges, making it difficult for the dealership to maintain adequate stock levels of fast-moving items.

A significant concern, raised by 9% of customers, relates to the dealership's technological capabilities. The findings suggest that the dealership has not kept pace with technological advancements in the automotive industry, creating a gap between customer expectations and the services provided. The research revealed that the dealership's diagnostic equipment is outdated and inadequate for servicing newer vehicle models, particularly those with advanced electronic systems, mechatronics, and hybrid or electric powertrains. This has resulted in inaccurate diagnostics, prolonged troubleshooting times, and, in some cases, the inability to service certain vehicles. Furthermore, while the dealership's technical staff are well-versed in mechanical aspects of vehicle servicing, there is limited expertise in electronics, mechatronics, and computer-based diagnostic systems. This skills gap has become

increasingly problematic as newer vehicle models rely heavily on electronic systems that require specialised knowledge and training. The dealership has also been slow to adopt new technologies and tools that are now standard in the automotive service industry, including advanced diagnostic software, computerised wheel alignment systems, and automated service management platforms. This reluctance to invest in new technology has placed the dealership at a competitive disadvantage compared to newer players in the market. As the automotive industry moves towards more sophisticated vehicles with complex electronic systems, the dealership's technical capabilities have become increasingly outdated, resulting in customers with newer vehicles seeking services elsewhere, particularly from independent technicians who have invested in the necessary technology and training.

Communication issues were identified by 6% of customers as a key area requiring improvement. These issues have contributed to customer dissatisfaction and a perception of poor service. Customers reported that they were not adequately informed about the status of their vehicles during the service process, expressing frustration at not receiving updates on the progress of repairs, the expected completion time, or any additional issues that were identified during the service. The dealership also lacks robust mechanisms for collecting and acting on customer feedback, with customers feeling that their complaints and suggestions were not taken seriously or that there was no follow-up to ensure that their concerns had been addressed. When delays occurred, customers were often not informed in advance or given a clear explanation of the reasons for the delay, leading to frustration and a perception that the dealership did not value their time. Additionally, customers reported that they were not given clear explanations of the services required, the associated costs, or the

reasons for particular repairs, which undermined trust and contributed to a perception that the dealership was not acting in the customer's best interest.

Human resource issues have also contributed to the decline in customer service quality, relating to both the technical and interpersonal skills of the workforce. High staff turnover, particularly among technical staff and customer-facing personnel, has affected the consistency and quality of service delivery. Experienced staff who had built relationships with customers have left the dealership, taking with them valuable institutional knowledge and customer relationships. The research findings further suggest that staff, particularly those in customer-facing roles, have not received adequate training in customer service skills, including soft skills such as communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and active listening, which are essential for building and maintaining positive customer relationships. As noted in the technological factors section, the dealership has not invested sufficiently in training technical staff on new vehicle technologies, resulting in a skills gap that limits the dealership's ability to service modern vehicles. Focus group discussions revealed that staff are often overworked and undercompensated, leading to low morale and reduced motivation. This has manifested in a lack of attention to detail, reduced effort in customer interactions, and a general lack of enthusiasm for providing high-quality service. The dealership has also struggled to retain skilled technical staff, who are often attracted to better opportunities in neighbouring countries or to independent workshops that offer more competitive remuneration, further exacerbating the shortage of qualified personnel.

The decline in customer service is also partly attributable to changing customer expectations and the competitive environment. Customers have become more demanding and expect higher standards of service than in the past, including

expectations of timely service, transparent communication, competitive pricing, and a seamless customer experience. The dealership has struggled to meet these rising expectations. The Zimbabwean automotive sector has become increasingly competitive, with the emergence of new dealerships, independent workshops, and informal service providers, giving customers more choices and making them more willing to switch providers if their expectations are not met. Customers who have experience with automotive services in other countries or regions have higher expectations of service standards, comparing the services they receive at Platinum Motors Harare Branch with those available in South Africa, Botswana, or other regional markets, often finding the local service wanting. Furthermore, customers expect value for money, which encompasses not only competitive pricing but also quality of service, reliability, and overall customer experience. The research findings suggest that some customers feel that the dealership does not provide adequate value for the prices charged.

Study Limitations.

The limitations of this research study were that it started at the peak of the Covid-19 era, and it was difficult for clients to come for service during the first days when Covid-19 restrictions were still tight. However, with time as the government announced the relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions, drivers started flowing into the dealership and interviews commenced smoothly. Another limitation is that the data used in the thematic analysis was only collected from the staff at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, and there is a possibility that they may falsify the data provided in a bid to mislead their competitors. However, careful guidelines were taken in order to ensure that the results collected were accurate and valid by using the triangulation technique. Triangulation ensures validity and accuracy of data by using various

methods to collect data so as to increase the reliability of the findings (Mwongera et al., 2017).

One other key limitation was that this research was done as a case study of Platinum Motors Harare Branch in Zimbabwe, which is one car dealership in one city of the whole country and the results of this research may not better reflect the state of motor service quality and grievances within the whole automotive value chain, but rather may reflect better the situation at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. Further studies may be required to include other various car dealerships in different parts of the country so that the state of technological advancement and the main customer pain points may be reassessed from a larger population. Some of the limitations experienced during the research included the fact that only Platinum Motors Harare Branch was used as the main service provider in the automotive industry hence results obtained may be difficult to generalise. However, this was due to the fact that other service providers did not permit the research to be done in their areas of business due to data protection and competition regulations. By allowing research at their premises other organisations feared that they may expose their weaknesses to their competitors hence reducing their long-term competitiveness within the industry. To that end, the researcher had to make some key adjustments to the type of research from an industry based to a case study of a specific dealership.

This research study was funded in whole from start to finish by the researcher using personal resources. There was no external funding from any one. Financial ability thus became a limiting factor as this limited what could be done, how and when? For example, expanding the research to cover more players in the automotive industry and also visiting other touch points outside the capital city required more financial resources. The other limitation is about time. Time is always a critical resource in most

if not all fields of human endeavour. This investigation had to be carried out within specific time frames as determined by the university so this became a limiting factor. In summary the time available impacts the size of the sample and data collection processes.

Justification for Single Case Study Selection

This study employs a single case study design focused on Platinum Motors Harare Branch. While multi-case studies offer broader generalizability, a single case study design was selected for the following reasons. A single case study allows for an in-depth, comprehensive investigation of the phenomena affecting the organisation (Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995). This depth is particularly important for exploratory research where the goal is to understand complex relationships between variables. In the context of this study, the researcher sought to investigate the multifaceted reasons for poor customer retention, including operational, technological, communication, human resource, and customer expectation factors. A single case study design enabled the researcher to dedicate sufficient time and resources to thoroughly examine each of these dimensions, uncovering the interconnected nature of the challenges facing Platinum Motors Harare Branch. As Stake (1995) notes, the primary purpose of a case study is not to generalise but to gain a deep understanding of the particular case, which is precisely the objective of this research.

The researcher was granted exceptional access to Platinum Motors Harare Branch, including full access to customer databases, permission to interview staff and customers, access to historical performance records (limited, as acknowledged), and freedom to observe operations. This level of access is rarely available in multiple case studies and was essential for the rich data collection required. The Managing Director of Platinum Motors (Pvt) Ltd, Lucas Taruvinga, granted the researcher permission to

conduct the research freely within the organisation and interact with staff without restrictions. This trust and openness would have been difficult to achieve with multiple organisations, where concerns about competitive sensitivity and confidentiality often limit access. The comprehensive nature of the data collected, including the 346 customer responses from a total population of 720 clients, was made possible by this exceptional access and would not have been feasible in a multi-case study design.

As identified in Chapter 1, this is an exploratory study. Exploratory research aims to investigate a phenomenon in depth to develop hypotheses for future research (Saunders et al., 2019). A single case study is appropriate for exploratory research because it allows for detailed understanding that can guide future, more extensive studies. The goal of this research is not to produce statistically generalisable findings but to generate rich insights that can inform management decisions at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, identify areas for further investigation, and develop hypotheses that can be tested in future multi-case studies. As Yin (2014) notes, the goal of a case study is analytical generalisation (applying findings to a theory) rather than statistical generalisation (applying findings to a population). This study serves as a foundation for understanding customer retention challenges in the Zimbabwean automotive industry, providing a starting point for future research that may employ multiple case studies to test the findings across different contexts.

The research was self-funded and conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel restrictions and financial limitations made it impractical to study multiple dealerships across Zimbabwe. The pandemic significantly constrained the researcher's ability to travel between cities, as intercity travel was strongly discouraged by authorities during the data collection period. Additionally, the logistical requirements of coordinating with multiple organisations, obtaining multiple

permissions, and collecting data across different locations would have been prohibitively expensive and time-consuming for a self-funded doctoral study. The decision to focus on a single case study was therefore a pragmatic one that allowed the researcher to conduct a thorough investigation despite these constraints. The resources that would have been spread across multiple cases were instead concentrated on a single case, enabling a more comprehensive and detailed analysis.

Competitive sensitivity in the automotive industry meant that other dealerships were unwilling to participate in the research. While this is a limitation, it also reinforces the value of the access obtained at Platinum Motors. The automotive industry is highly competitive, and dealerships are often reluctant to allow researchers access to their operations for fear of exposing weaknesses to competitors. Platinum Motors Harare Branch's willingness to participate and its openness to scrutiny reflect its commitment to understanding and addressing its challenges. This openness is itself a significant finding and suggests that the dealership is serious about improving its performance. While the researcher attempted to include other dealerships in the study, the lack of participation from competitors underscores the unique value of the data collected from Platinum Motors Harare Branch.

The researcher acknowledges that the single case study limits the generalisability of the findings. However, the goal of this study is not to produce universally applicable findings but to generate insights that can inform management decisions at Platinum Motors, further research in the Zimbabwean automotive industry, and hypotheses for testing in future multi-case studies. As Yin (2014) notes, single case studies are particularly useful for understanding the "how" and "why" questions, which are central to this research. The findings from this study should not be indiscriminately generalised to all automotive dealerships in Zimbabwe without further

research. However, they provide a valuable starting point for understanding customer retention challenges in the Zimbabwean context and offer insights that may be relevant to similar dealerships facing comparable challenges.

Implications of the Research Study.

This research study was carried out to investigate a phenomenon affecting an automobile dealership that is facing challenges of poor customer retention as a result of bad customer engagement strategies. The results of the study were analysed with respect to the initial study hypothesis and the implications to the business going forward. The study used a mixed methods approach by applying quantitative and qualitative research strategies to produce the desired results. This means the results of this study can be used as a basis or mark the birth of a new research direction within the automotive industry. Using the probit regression model and the thematic analysis (semantic analysis) in the same study, the researcher has achieved the best-sought research results ever. The analysis of primary data shows that more than 50% of cars serviced at Platinum Motors Harare Branch were company-owned vehicles, most of which were male-driven. This gender disparity in drivers and vehicle ownership may be because, in the African continent, most high-paying jobs and key positions are held by males, which gives them the capacity to purchase and own many high-value vehicles (Alqershi et al., 2020). According to (Alqershi et al., 2020*)* and (Haislip and Richardson, 2017), males are more competitive and dominant in the automotive industry than their female counterparts, giving them an upper hand in terms of vehicle ownership and bringing vehicles for services. In the case of personally owned vehicles, some husbands prefer that they take their wife's vehicles for servicing; hence, when data was collected, the husbands may have reported to be the owners of the vehicles. Given the nature of asset ownership in African and Zimbabwean norms and values,

most assets belong to the head of the family, usually the male figure in the family. Research has also proven that males take good care of their vehicles compared to females in terms of better driving and timely motor service (Meena & Sahu, 2021). This explains the large turnover of more male drivers at the dealership than female drivers. This result goes hand in hand with the initial hypothesis given by the researcher that most vehicles are male-driven and are most likely to be company-owned.

Customer level of satisfaction was measured qualitatively and quantitatively by measuring the client's perceptions towards Platinum Motors Harare Branch's level and quality of product and service provision using the probit model and by estimating the average number of customers satisfied with the services versus the average score of Platinum Motors Harare Branch in terms of customer relationship management as depicted by customers. Using the binary logistic regression model (probit), the researcher found that more than 50 % of the customers generally perceive Platinum Motors Harare Branch as a good service provider. The main reasons why customers kept coming back for service at Platinum Motors Harare Branch were because they purchased their motor vehicles (11 %) from the dealership, especially Mazda and Nissan brands, the reliability of Platinum Motors Harare Branch as a service provider (5%), good customer care (3%) and the fact that Platinum Motors Harare Branch is a reputable company (13%). Some clients reported that they were no longer returning for service at Platinum Motors Harare Branch (2%) due to various factors ranging from delayed service provision, theft of their items (car modulators) in the vehicle by some members of staff and shortage of spare parts for certain vehicle models. The unexpected result was the percentage of clients reporting that they are not coming back, which was 2 percent. This number was initially expected to be higher than 2%,

but due to the fact that Platinum Motors Harare Branch holds some long-term contracts with various entities, the level of business performance has not significantly declined despite the rise in grievances. The dealership also holds some level of monopoly in the motor industry and vehicle service sector; thus, because of this long-term establishment, there is also a minimal level of business available for the firm. Having some monopoly in the automotive sector means that when the organisation starts operating well, it may supress all the competition from new firms in the industry. As a consequence, being a monopoly may also mean that Platinum Motors Harare Branch may relax and reluctantly reduce their technological advancement, level and quality of customer care due to the benefits accompanied by the monopoly status. However, with the adoption of new technology and advancements in other areas of service provision, there is a high probability that Platinum Motors Harare Branch can surpass the current level of customer satisfaction and retention, hence business profitability.

A reduction in the number of clients means a reduction in the average earnings for the organisation, hence reduced profitability. Suppose the organisation keeps losing clients at a rate of 2 percent per annum and yet realising small numbers of new clients referred to the organisation, in the long term. In that case, the organisation will lose a larger proportion of customers. A potential solution based on the research findings, if so, states that by offering services at a discount, providing genuine spare parts on time and timely service provision to clients to reduce the turnaround time and client delays. According to Amegavie et al. (2019), good customer relationship management is not limited to good client care only, but rather, timely service provision, continued research and honesty are important tools for business continuity.

However, in terms of customer satisfaction level, Platinum Motors Harare Branch scored an average of 8.5 out of 10 basing on the ranking by actual customer

level of satisfaction and customer perceptions. This is in line with the initial expectations and hypothesis that customers at Platinum Motors Harare Branch are generally satisfied by the level of product and service provision because Platinum Motors Harare Branch has some monopoly in the motor service industry which somehow proves that they are a good service provider. The researcher went on to investigate the customer grievances and areas of major concern that need specific improvements for the customers to continue getting their services from Platinum Motors Harare Branch. One of the major concerns of clients was the delayed service provision of clients, which was due to a larger fleet size waiting for service against a limited number of motor service specialists. Due to this observation by customers, there is need to increase the labour force by hiring more motor mechanics so that vehicles may be serviced quickly. Another area leading to delays may be a lack of supervision by the superiors during working hours. The number of employees added this way will depend on the amount of work available.

Other customer grievances were that Platinum Motors Harare Branch must work on providing spares on time, washing of vehicles after service and providing discounted prices especially for long term clients and other stakeholders. This implies that for Platinum Motors Harare Branch to remain competitive in the motor service industry, it is necessary to address these grievances and thus at the same time improving their customer relationship management strategies. Despite on average, having a high customer relationship management score, Platinum Motors Harare Branch has to work on its business advertisement model and skills in a bid to capture new clients and increase its sales volume. Guerola-Navarro et al*.* (2021) postulated that discounting prices coupled with promotional service provision and good customer care have a significant effect on improving clientele base, thus retention and possibly

profitability. These findings slightly deviate from the initial expectation of the study postulated on the conceptual framework that Platinum Motors Harare Branch has a high level of customer retention. New insights were found through this research, such as the need to improve technological advancement and electronic mechanics within Platinum Motors Harare Branch so as to improve the service of recent motor vehicles. Further research on the actual level of technological advancements can be done compared to other technological advancements in similar sectors.

The implications of this research include opening gaps for further research by unveiling the main grievances of clients within the motor service industry. The findings of this paper also add a new body of knowledge and the prevailing body of literature on the main customer relationship management strategies used at Platinum Motors Harare Branch as a service provider within the motor service industry. The binary logistic regression model was used in analysing the qualitative aspects of the research study. The probit model is usually used in economic and social sciences and development economics to gauge the effect of various independent variables on the binary dependent variable. In this case, it was applied in the measure of the general perception of customers on the level of customer relationship management by Platinum Motors Harare Branch, tested at a 95% confidence interval. Thus, new methods of doing research within the business sector were pioneered. This is a sign that the researcher has some inquisitive skills when applying various techniques to measure a specific phenomenon under investigation.

Recommendations for Application

This section presents comprehensive recommendations derived from the research findings, addressing the key challenges identified at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The recommendations are structured into four categories: recommendations

specific to Platinum Motors Harare Branch, recommendations for the broader Zimbabwean automotive industry, recommendations for future research, and recommendations for policy.

Recommendations for Platinum Motors Harare Branch

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made to address the challenges identified at Platinum Motors Harare Branch:

a) Technological Advancement

A significant concern raised by 9% of customers relates to the dealership's technological capabilities. The findings suggest that the dealership has not kept pace with technological advancements in the automotive industry, creating a gap between customer expectations and the services provided. The research revealed that the dealership's diagnostic equipment is outdated and inadequate for servicing newer vehicle models, particularly those with advanced electronic systems, mechatronics, and hybrid or electric powertrains. Therefore, it is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch invest in upgrading its diagnostic equipment and computer-based diagnostic systems to effectively service newer and more technologically advanced vehicle models. The dealership should also invest in advanced diagnostic software, computerised wheel alignment systems, and automated service management platforms to improve efficiency and accuracy. Additionally, the dealership should partner with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and franchisors to gain access to the latest diagnostic tools and technical support. This investment in technology would not only improve service quality but also enhance the dealership's competitiveness in the market.

b) Customer Service Improvement

Customer care and service quality are fundamental to customer retention. The Fisher's Exact Test results confirmed that good customer care leads to higher satisfaction ($p = 0.020$), which directly impacts business performance. It is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch invest in comprehensive customer service training for all customer-facing staff, focusing on soft skills such as communication, empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution. The dealership should also implement a customer feedback system that actively seeks, monitors, and responds to customer concerns in a timely manner. This could include post-service follow-up calls, satisfaction surveys, and a dedicated complaints handling process. Furthermore, the dealership should consider introducing value-added services such as vehicle cleaning after service (requested by 5% of customers), courtesy vehicles for customers during service, and fleet delivery services. The dealership should also consider offering loyalty programs that reward repeat customers through discounts, extended warranties, or loyalty points redeemable for accessories or services.

c) Operational Efficiency

Operational issues, particularly long turnaround times (identified by 19% of customers) and delays in obtaining genuine spare parts (identified by 18% of customers), were among the most significant concerns raised by customers. To address these issues, it is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch increase its workforce, particularly qualified mechanics and technicians, to match the growing volume of vehicles serviced. The dealership should also implement efficient work scheduling and workflow management systems to improve coordination between departments and reduce service delays. Additionally, the dealership should consider bulk purchasing of fast-moving spare parts to ensure adequate stock levels and reduce reliance on international suppliers, thereby minimising delays. The dealership

should also explore partnerships with local suppliers or consider establishing a local parts manufacturing facility to reduce dependence on imports and improve service efficiency. Expanding workshop capacity by increasing the number of service bays would also help address congestion and reduce waiting times.

d) Communication Enhancement

Communication issues were identified by 6% of customers as a key area requiring improvement. Customers reported inadequate updates during service, poor feedback mechanisms, and insufficient explanation of services required. It is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch implement a proactive customer communication strategy that provides regular updates on service progress, expected completion times, and any additional issues identified during service. The dealership should also establish robust feedback mechanisms to collect and act on customer concerns. This could include post-service follow-up calls, satisfaction surveys, and a dedicated customer liaison officer to handle complaints and suggestions. The dealership should also ensure that customers are given clear explanations of the services required, associated costs, and reasons for particular repairs to build trust and transparency. Additionally, the dealership should consider investing in a customer relationship management (CRM) system to track customer interactions, preferences, and service history, enabling personalised communication and improved customer engagement.

e) Spare Parts Management

Delays in obtaining genuine spare parts were identified by 18% of customers as a significant concern affecting service turnaround times. It is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch implement a robust inventory management system

that tracks stock levels, identifies fast-moving items, and triggers automatic reordering to prevent stockouts. The dealership should also consider establishing strategic partnerships with multiple suppliers to reduce reliance on a single source and mitigate supply chain disruptions. Bulk purchasing of high-demand parts could also help reduce costs and ensure availability. The dealership should also explore opportunities for local manufacturing of certain parts to reduce dependence on imports and improve service efficiency.

f) Staff Training and Development

Human resource issues, including staff turnover, inadequate training, and demotivation, were identified as contributing factors to the decline in service quality. It is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch invest in comprehensive training programmes for all staff, covering both technical skills (particularly on new vehicle technologies) and soft skills (customer service, communication, and conflict resolution). The dealership should also implement competitive compensation and benefits packages to attract and retain skilled staff, including performance-based incentives to motivate employees and reward excellence. Career development opportunities, mentorship programmes, and a positive work environment should also be prioritised to reduce staff turnover and improve morale. The dealership should also consider implementing a structured onboarding programme for new employees to ensure they are adequately prepared to meet customer expectations.

g) Promotion and Marketing

The research findings indicated a need for improved business advertisement to capture new clients and increase sales volume. It is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy

that leverages both traditional and digital channels. The dealership should invest in social media marketing to engage with customers and potential customers, build brand awareness, and communicate promotions and new services. The dealership should also consider offering promotional packages, discounts, and special offers to attract new customers and incentivise repeat business from existing customers. Customer testimonials and success stories should be highlighted to build credibility and trust.

h) Expansion and Decentralisation

Customers expressed a need for more accessible service centres, particularly in outlying areas. It is recommended that Platinum Motors Harare Branch consider expanding its operations by opening additional branches in key cities such as Mutare and Bulawayo. This would reduce the distance travelled by customers seeking services and create opportunities to tap into new customer bases in those areas. Before making such investments, a thorough feasibility analysis should be conducted to assess the viability and potential returns of expansion.

Recommendations for the Zimbabwean Automotive Industry

Beyond the specific recommendations for Platinum Motors Harare Branch, the findings of this research have broader implications for the Zimbabwean automotive industry as a whole. The following recommendations are made for industry-wide improvement:

a) Technology Adoption

The Zimbabwean automotive industry lags behind global standards in terms of technology adoption. It is recommended that industry players, in collaboration with the Motor Industry Association of Zimbabwe (MIAZ), invest in upgrading diagnostic equipment, adopting computerised service management systems, and training staff

on new vehicle technologies. This would improve service quality, reduce turnaround times, and enhance the industry's competitiveness.

b) Customer Service Standards

The industry should establish and promote customer service standards that prioritise transparency, communication, and customer satisfaction. This could include the development of a customer service charter that outlines minimum service standards and customer rights. Dealerships should be encouraged to implement customer feedback mechanisms and loyalty programmes to improve retention.

c) Collaboration and Benchmarking

Industry players should collaborate to benchmark best practices, share knowledge, and address common challenges. The Motor Industry Association of Zimbabwe (MIAZ) could facilitate workshops, training programmes, and industry forums to promote continuous improvement and innovation.

d) Informal Sector Regulation

The growth of the informal automotive sector (estimated at 76.1% of establishments) has created unfair competition and eroded the tax base. It is recommended that the government and industry bodies work together to formalise the informal sector through simplified registration processes, training and certification programmes, and incentives for compliance with quality and safety standards.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research have identified several areas that require further investigation. The following recommendations are made for future research:

a) Multi-Case Studies

Future research should employ multi-case study designs to test the findings of this study across different dealerships, regions, and market segments. This would enhance the generalisability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer retention challenges in the Zimbabwean automotive industry.

b) Technological Advancement Studies

Research should be conducted to assess the level of technological advancement in the Zimbabwean automotive industry compared to regional and international standards. This would identify gaps and opportunities for improvement, informing investment decisions and policy development.

c) Customer Retention Strategies

Further research should explore the effectiveness of different customer retention strategies in the Zimbabwean context, including loyalty programmes, personalised service, and digital marketing. This would provide evidence-based guidance for dealerships seeking to improve customer retention.

d) Cross-Industry Comparisons

Research should be extended to other customer-facing industries such as banking, insurance, telecommunications, and hospitality to compare customer relationship management strategies and identify best practices that could be adapted to the automotive industry.

e) Longitudinal Studies

Longitudinal studies should be conducted to track changes in customer satisfaction, retention, and business performance over time. This would provide

insights into the long-term effectiveness of retention strategies and help identify emerging trends and challenges.

Recommendations for Policy

The findings of this research have implications for policy development in the Zimbabwean automotive industry. The following recommendations are made for policymakers:

a) Support for Technology Adoption

The government should provide incentives (such as tax breaks or subsidies) to encourage automotive dealerships to invest in technology upgrades. This would improve service quality, enhance competitiveness, and support economic growth.

b) Informal Sector Regulation

The government should develop and implement policies to formalise the informal automotive sector, including simplified registration processes, training and certification programmes, and incentives for compliance with quality and safety standards. This would reduce unfair competition, increase tax revenue, and improve service quality across the industry.

c) Skills Development

The government, in collaboration with the private sector, should invest in skills development programmes to address the shortage of qualified technical staff in the automotive industry. This could include partnerships with technical colleges and universities to develop relevant curricula and training programmes.

d) Import Policies

The government should review import policies to ensure a balance between protecting the local industry and ensuring affordable access to vehicles and spare parts for consumers. This could include tariff adjustments, quality standards, and incentives for local assembly and manufacturing.

Summary of Key Findings.

This section provides a structured summary of the key findings from the research, organised according to the research objectives. The findings are derived from the analysis of primary data collected through customer surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

Findings on Reasons for Poor Business Performance (Objective 1)

The research investigated the reasons for poor business performance at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The findings revealed that poor business performance is primarily attributed to operational inefficiencies, particularly long turnaround times for vehicle services (identified by 19% of customers), delays in obtaining genuine spare parts (identified by 18% of customers), and insufficient workshop capacity relative to demand. Communication issues were also identified by 6% of customers as a contributing factor, with customers reporting inadequate updates during service, poor feedback mechanisms, and insufficient explanation of services required.

The Fisher's Exact Test results confirmed that service delivery effectiveness has a significant positive association with customer satisfaction ($p = 0.045$), which directly impacts business performance. Similarly, customer care quality was found to have a significant positive association with business performance ($p = 0.020$). These

findings confirm that poor service delivery and inadequate customer care have contributed to declining business performance at the dealership. Furthermore, the binary logistic regression results showed that customer satisfaction level significantly affects customer perception of service provision ($p = 0.001$), with a 1% increase in customer satisfaction having a 21.6% probability of influencing positive perceptions. Vehicle ownership status was also found to be significant ($p = 0.004$), with customers driving personal vehicles being 2.28% more likely to have negative perceptions compared to those driving company vehicles.

Findings on Reasons for Poor Customer Retention (Objective 2)

The research investigated the reasons for poor customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The findings revealed that while 54% of customers are satisfied with the services provided, 41% are moderately satisfied, and 5% are unsatisfied. The moderately satisfied customers represent a significant opportunity for improvement, as addressing their pain points could convert them into fully satisfied, loyal customers. The Kruskal-Wallis rank test confirmed that customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with customer retention (chi-squared = 224.471, $p = 0.0001$). This was the strongest finding of the study, confirming that higher customer satisfaction leads to higher retention rates. The Pearson chi-square test results confirmed that perceived service quality ($p = 0.074$), communication frequency ($p = 0.091$), and after-sales service ($p = 0.089$) all have positive impacts on customer retention at the 10% significance level. The main reasons customers keep coming back for service were identified as: quality workmanship (62%), the reputation of the dealership (13%), the fact that they purchased their vehicle from the dealership (11%), reliability of services (5%), good customer care (3%), and professionalism (2%). However, 2% of customers reported that they were not coming back due to various reasons, including delayed

service provision, theft of items from vehicles, and shortage of spare parts for certain vehicle models.

Findings on Customer Engagement Strategies (Objective 3)

The research examined customer engagement strategies in place at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The findings revealed that the most prominent customer relationship management strategies employed by the dealership include good customer care, maintenance of high standards of service provision, maintaining a good reputation through professionalism, and effective communication through timely customer feedback and information sharing. On a scale of 1 to 10, the ranked customer satisfaction level was found to be 8.5 (85%), indicating that customers are generally satisfied with the current level of customer relationship management. The average CRM score for Platinum Motors Harare Branch was 5.0 out of 10, suggesting that while customers are generally happy with how business is conducted, there is still significant room for improvement. Thematic analysis revealed that the main customer expectations for continued business at Platinum Motors Harare Branch include: maintaining current standards of business operations and service delivery (38%), reducing turnaround time (19%), providing spare parts on time (18%), improving electronics and computer-based diagnostic systems (9%), improving communication skills (6%), introducing credit facilities (6%), and cleaning cars after service (5%).

Findings on Customer Complaints (Objective 4)

The research investigated the reasons for high customer complaints at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The findings revealed that the primary causes of customer complaints are operational and technological in nature. Thematic analysis identified five emergent themes: poor time management by staff servicing vehicles (19% of customers), delays in provision of genuine spare parts (18%), unfair pricing

of products and services (7%), inadequate communication and feedback on problems observed by technicians during checkups (6%), and reluctance in the adoption of new advanced vehicle diagnostic technology (9%).

The binary logistic regression results confirmed that customer satisfaction level significantly affects customer perception of service provision ($p = 0.001$), with a 1% increase in customer satisfaction having a 21.6% probability of influencing positive perceptions. Vehicle ownership status was found to be significant ($p = 0.004$), with customers driving personal vehicles being more likely to have negative perceptions. Fleet size serviced was also significant ($p = 0.052$), with larger fleets associated with more positive perceptions. These findings suggest that addressing operational inefficiencies, improving spare parts availability, adopting new technology, and enhancing communication would significantly reduce customer complaints and improve overall satisfaction.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

The hypothesis tests confirmed statistically significant relationships between key variables and customer retention. The following hypotheses were rejected (meaning significant relationships were found): H1 (service delivery and business performance, $p = 0.045$), H2 (customer care and business performance, $p = 0.020$), H3 (perceived service quality and customer retention, $p = 0.074$), H4 (communication frequency and customer retention, $p = 0.091$), H5 (after-sales service and customer retention, $p = 0.089$), H6 (customer satisfaction and customer retention, $p = 0.0001$), H7 (service delivery and customer satisfaction mediating pathway, $p = 0.001$), H10 (vehicle ownership status and service provision, $p = 0.004$), and H11 (fleet size serviced and service provision, $p = 0.052$). The following hypotheses were not rejected (fail to reject the null): H8 (customer gender and service provision, $p = 0.404$), H9

(customer age and service provision, p = 0.497), and H12 (customer preference and service provision, p = 0.627). These findings indicate that demographic factors such as gender, age, and customer preference do not significantly impact service provision or customer perceptions in this context.

Summary of Thematic Analysis Findings

The thematic analysis identified five key themes that emerged from customer responses regarding what should be done to improve customer retention at Platinum Motors Harare Branch:

1. **Provision of Genuine Motor Spares:** Customers expressed the need for timely availability of genuine spare parts to ensure quality repairs and service.
2. **Time Management and Turnaround Times:** Customers emphasised the importance of reducing the time each vehicle spends in the workshop to avoid inconvenience.
3. **Fair Pricing of Products and Services:** Customers expressed concerns about high pricing for petty jobs and the need for more transparent and competitive pricing.
4. **Improvement of Communication:** Customers highlighted the need for better communication between the dealership and customers, including regular updates and clear explanations of services required.
5. **Adoption of New Technology:** Customers identified the need for the dealership to upgrade its diagnostic equipment and expertise to service newer vehicle models effectively.

Recommendations for Future Research.

Various recommendations about future research are necessary and relevant in the automotive sector, especially in the Zimbabwean context. After carrying out the study and having taken a deep dive into the various customer relationship management strategies and the level of customer satisfaction, one can confidently say that Platinum Motors Harare Branch has achieved a lot of milestones in satisfying customer needs. However, this research has found that there is a need to research new customer relationship management techniques that are different from their traditional approach. New customer relationship management techniques will open the route to acquiring new clients for the dealership because of their uniqueness in the industry.

Consequent to the evidence provided by the results of the investigation, it is imperative that new researches can be done to determine the level of technological advancement in other industries, including competitors in the automotive sector. Understanding the level of technological advancement in other firms will ensure that the automotive sector makes significant steps to upgrade its technology where possible.

Research can be done on the level of internal training and in-house personnel management regarding the desired level of customer care and the techniques used to care for customers to achieve customer retention. These investigations will ensure that firms make it mandatory that their staff that work with people grasp soft skills and good interpersonal skills. Training in these skills will help ensure all parties are satisfied with the business while creating a certain level of customer loyalty. This will also ensure long-term customer retention. Conclusively, it is important to do studies on how to build

customer loyalty in the automotive sector to reach high customer retention levels and, therefore, business profitability.

More studies that use a mixed-methods approach to a case study can be adopted, and the findings of those studies can be used as a basis for comparison with this study. This would improve the reliability of research findings, create room for improvements in the research process, specifically the methodology, and consequently contribute a lot to the body of knowledge while assisting in policy prescription within the industry and beyond.

Conclusion of the Study.

This study was an exploratory investigation into the factors that cause effect to customer retention in the automotive sector of Zimbabwe, focusing on the Platinum Motors Harare Branch dealership as a research study. The main thrust of the research study was to investigate reasons for poor performance by an automobile dealership by focusing on customer retention issues.

Other objectives of the research included the need to understand the current level of customer satisfaction by the level of product and service provision at Platinum Motors Harare Branch, investigation of the current customer relationship management strategies being used by the dealership and consequently, understanding customer pain points and their general perceptions about Platinum Motors Harare Branch in the automotive sector. The collection of data was carried out through a pre-coded, open-ended and close-ended questionnaire. Post-data collection analysis was done using software and tools such as SPSS version 26, STATA version 15 and MS Excel (2016). The researcher consulted the literature to understand the various underlying assumptions behind the research and develop a thorough conceptual framework.

The investigation results indicate that approximately 70 per cent of clients are pleased with Platinum Motors Harare Branch's product and service provision. Going forward and to further understand the customer grievances, customers were asked to give a score to the level of customer relationship management score at Platinum Motors Harare Branch. The average CRM score for Platinum Motors Harare Branch was found to be at 5.0 out of 10. This signifies that customers are generally happy with how business is conducted at the dealership. Using a binary logistic regression model to assess customer perceptions, it was found that most customers have a positive perception towards Platinum Motors Harare Branch, while gender and vehicle ownership status were among the most significant variables.

The primary customer pain points were centralised around timeliness of service delivery, the level of technological advancement at the dealership was a concern and the cleaning of vehicles after service. In conclusion, it is essential to cite that there is a need for research on how automotive dealerships such as Platinum Motors Harare Branch can foster quick technological advancements while ensuring that their cost factors remain reasonable for profitability's sake. Furthermore, studies to understand ways that can be used to foster customer loyalty are necessary, given the findings of this research.

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APPENDICES.

Appendix One - Survey Questionnaire

Platinum Motors Harare Branch (Pvt) Ltd

Customer Interview Questions

1	***Name of Customer/Company***
2	Position
3	Contact No
4	Sex
5	Age
6	How long have you been doing business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch? What's the size of your fleet that goes to Platinum Motors Harare Branch workshops?
7	Why do you keep going back?
8	In your view is Platinum Motors Harare Branch a good service provider
9	Please explain?
10	Do you get preferential treatment at Platinum Motors Harare Branch? Why?
11	Does Platinum Motors Harare Branch go out of its way to look after your interests? If yes, please explain?
12	If you are to continue doing business with Platinum Motors Harare Branch, what do you expect them to do in order to retain your custom?
13	On a scale of one to ten what score would you give Platinum Motors Harare Branch for managing customer relations? With 1 being worst and 10 being best? Do you wish to explain further?
14	Are you willing to refer your network to Platinum Motors Harare Branch? If yes, why? And if no, why?
15	Do you recall having a "bad" experience with Platinum Motors Harare Branch?
16	Were you satisfied with the outcome? On a scale of one to ten what score would you allocate to the outcome against your expectations?

17	Do you recall a “wonderful” experience with Platinum Motors Harare Branch? Briefly explain?
18	Do u wish to say anything about your relationship with Platinum Motors Harare Branch?

Appendix Two - Survey Data



UNICAF PhD Data Analysis 2nd.xlsx

Appendix Three – Gate Keeper Letter

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

UU_GL - Version 2.0

Gatekeeper letter

Address: Amtec Motors PO Box 1469 Harare, Zimbabw

Date: 25-Aug-2021

Subject: Request for access to Cutomer Database

Dear Mr Taruvinga (Managing Director).

I am a doctoral student at Unicaf University Malawi Campus.

As part of my degree I am carrying out a study on The Impact of Customer Relationship Management Strategies on Customer Retention in the Automotive Industry - A Zimbabwean Experience.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to assit me in this research by sharing your customer database.

Subject to approval by Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) this study will be using Semi Structured Interviews and Online questionnaires to collect information.

As mentioned in the project title I need to interview a sample of your customers so that I share the findings with yiur Top Mnagemnet team so that you can use them to improve yiur CRM efforts/ My Supervisor is Dr Lester Wills whom you can contact on the following email address for your own information - l.wills@unicaf.org.

I hope to spend as little time as possible with your customers as I carry out the research study. I will also request a few days to come and observe some of your frontline staff who deal in customer service in action.

Thank you in advance for your time and for your consideration of this project. Kindly please let me know if you require any further information or need any further clarifications.

Yours Sincerely,

Elliot Shoniwa

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa
Student's E-mail: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com
Student's Address and Telephone: 766 Nzou Cres Old Windsor Park, Ruwa. +263773369877
Supervisor's Title and Name: Dr Lester Wills
Supervisor's Position: Supervisor
Supervisor's E-mail: l.wills@unicaf.org

Appendix 4 – Research Council of Zimbabwe Approval Letter

RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

Leadership, Innovation and Development

Cabinet Office
No 11 Stafford Road
Mt Pleasant, Harare
P.O. Box CY294, Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel. 263-242-304733, 304787, 304861
Fax: 263-242-304898
Email: secretary@rcz.ac.zw;
Website: www.rcz.ac.zw

REF SC/9 135

29 April 2024

Mr Elliot Shonhiwa
UNICAF

Dear Sir,

Request for Research Clearance to Conduct Research in Zimbabwe.

The Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ) acknowledges receipt of your communication dated 08 April 2024 regarding the subject mentioned above. As a student at UNICAF, you intend to conduct research in Zimbabwe as part of your Doctor of Philosophy Degree. Your letter seeks permission to conduct research in Zimbabwe in retrospect in fulfillment of a requirement from UNICAF.

After a thorough review of the submitted documents, RCZ notes that you are a Zimbabwean self-funding your studies at UNICAF. Consequently, you are excluded from regulations under Section 27 of the Research Act [*Chapter 10:22*]. In view of this, you can proceed with data collection. However, it is important to note that this does not exempt you from seeking permission from relevant Ministries, Departments, and Agencies and local government authorities that will authorise access to areas and persons under their jurisdiction during your research.

The Council recognizes the potential of your research in assisting both the Government and industrialists in understanding investor expectations. In this regard, you are encouraged to share the final research report with RCZ and upload a copy to the National Research Database of Zimbabwe. This step ensures that your findings are widely accessible and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in Zimbabwe.

Yours sincerely,

For the Acting Executive Director

RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE
CABINET OFFICE
29 APR 2024
TECHNICAL OFFICE
P.O. BOX CY294 CAUSEWAY,
HARARE

Appendix 5 – Informed Consent Form

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

UU_IC - Version 2.1

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's E-mail Address: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Marketing Management

Research Project Title: The Effect of Customer Relationship Management Strategies on Customer Retention in the Automotive Industry – a Zimbabwean Experience.

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation to this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name: Elliot Shoniwa

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: 27-Jul-2021

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name: N/A

Witness's Signature: _____

Date:

Appendix Six – Informed Consent Form: Debriefing of Participants

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

UU_IC - Version 2.1

Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's E-mail Address: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Marketing Management

Research Project Title: The Effect of Customer Relationship Management Strategies on Customer Retention in the Automotive Industry – a Zimbabwean Experience.

Date: 27-Jul-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

Elliot Shoniwa is a PhD student with UNICAF University. In order to meet the requiremnets of the successful completion of the degree program he is required to undertake field research on seleceted customers. These custonmers are doing business with Amtec Motors.

Your name was provided by Amtec Motors as one of their key customers so that the researcher will talk to you and get valuable feedback regarding the way Amtec Motors does business with its customers. In this regard you are being requested to answer a few questions. The responses you give will be treated as confuidential and in no way will your name be mentioned in the final report. It is hoped that your responses and those from other particiapnts will help Amtec Motors to design customer frendly processes that will make your interaction and relationship with them more exciting.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, Elliot Shoniwa **, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: _____

Appendix Seven – UREC Decision

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

UREC Desision, Version 2.0

Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee Decision

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

Program of Study: UU-PhD-MAR-900-3

Offer ID /Group ID: O27482G28410

Dissertation Stage: DS 3

Research Project Title: The Effect of CRM Strategies on Customer Retention in the Automotive Industry: A Zimbabwean Experience.

Comments: No comments

Decision*: A. Approved without revision or comments

Date: 30-Sep-2021

*Provisional approval provided at the Dissertation Stage 1, whereas the final approval is provided at the Dissertation stage 3. The student is allowed to proceed to data collection following the final approval.

Appendix 8 – Guardian Informed Consent Form. Debriefing of Participants

UU_GIC - Version 2.1

Guardian Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's E-mail Address: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: Phd in Marketing Management

Research Project Title: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CUSTOMER RETENTION PRACTICES IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY. A STUDY OF PLATINUM MOTORS, HARARE, ZIMBABWE

Date:

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

This is a study investigating circumstances surrounding poor business performance at a once profitable automobile dealership in Zimbabwe. An investigation is carried comparing historical performance with current performance and gaps are identified. The investigation focuses on the no of customer complaints and profitability over a 10 year period. Simple random sampling techniques are used and 302 participants out of a population of 700 are chosen. A mixed methodology approach is used to do data collection and interpretation. Thematic analysis is used to analyse qualitative data while SPSS is used to analyse quantitative data. The results show areas of improvement required such as turnaround times in the workshop, non-availability of spare parts, implementation of effective customer engagement strategies to boost for better business performance. The main limitation with this study is that it was carried out during the Covid 19 era so

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, Elliot Shoniwa **, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature:

Appendix 9 – Guardian Informed Consent Form Part 2: Certificate of Consent

UU_GIC - Version 2.1

Guardian Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant's legal guardian

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's E-mail Address: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: Phd in Marketing Management

Research Project Title: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CUSTOMER RETENTION PRACTICES IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY. A STUDY OF PLATINUM MOTORS, HARARE, ZIMBABWE

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that the participant is free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of the participation to this study. I understand that all data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise.

I, _____, the legal guardian of _____ allow and provide consent that _____ can willingly participate in the study.

I, _____, the legal guardian of _____ have been ensured that verbal consent given by _____ will also be taken before the study.

Appendix 10 – Research Ethics Application Form Provisional Approval

REAF_DSPA - Version 1.0

UNICAF UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM
DOCTORAL STUDIES PROVISIONAL APPROVAL

The Provisional Approval - Research Ethics Application Form (REAF) should be completed by Doctoral level candidates enrolled on Dissertation stage 1.

This form is a **provisional approval** which means that the UREC committee has accepted the initial description of the project but this is conditional as changes may have to be implemented following Dissertation Stage 2 and piloting in Dissertation Stage 3.

This is a conditional offer and acceptance of the project needs to be verified and confirmed upon completion of the Research Ethics Application Form in Dissertation Stage 3.

Important Notes:

- An electronic version of the completed form should be uploaded by the student to the relevant submission link in the VLE. Student's supervisor will then review the form and provide feedback commentary. Once supervisor's initial approval is given then the supervisor will forward this to doctoral.studies-aa@unicaf.org, for provisional approval by the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

- Please type your answers and **do not** submit paper copy scans. Only *PDF* format documents should be submitted to the committee.

- If you need to supply any supplementary material, not specifically requested by the application form, please do so in a separate file. Any additional document(s) should be clearly labelled and uploaded in the relevant VLE link.

- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to your dissertation or project supervisor.

REAF_DSPA - Version 1.0

UNICAF UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM
DOCTORAL STUDIES PROVISIONAL APPROVAL

UREC USE ONLY:
Application No:
Date Received:

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's E-mail Address: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com

Student's ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Lester Wills

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Marketing Management

Research Project Title: The Effect of CRM Strategies on Customer Retention in the Automotive Industry: A Zimbabwean Experience.

1. **Please state the timelines involved in the proposed research project:**

Estimated Start Date: June 2021 Estimated End Date: December 2021

2. **The research project**

a. Project Summary:

In this section please fully describe the purpose and underlying rationale for the proposed research project. Ensure that you pose the research questions to be examined, state the hypotheses, and discuss the expected results of your research and their potential.

It is important in your description to use plain language so it can be understood by all members of the UREC, especially those who are not necessarily experts in the particular discipline. To that effect please ensure that you fully explain / define any technical terms or discipline-specific terminology (maximum 300 words +/- 10%).

The purpose of the research is to try and unpack an interesting phenomena which looks at the effect that customer relationship management has on customer retention in the automotive industry. On the one hand the research is seeking to build on existing knowledge about this subject while on the other hand the idea is to come up with new opportunities for further research.

The CRM approach focuses on the optimisation of company processes that are related to the customer. Among other things, these include marketing, sales, service, relational management, customer loyalty and all the equity variables, which include customer equity with the later comprising brand equity, value equity and relational equity. It is the intention of this research to analyse all these processes and ultimately the value that accrues to the business and the customer as a result of these profitable interactions.

Some of the questions include-: Why do you do business with Company X? What benefits do you get out of this relationship? For how long have you been doing business with Company X? Do you have any positive experiences from this relationship? Would you tell other potential customers about your experience with this company? On a scale of one to ten what number would you allocate this company on service excellence? Why? What do you like most about this company? What do you dislike the most about this company? How does this company keep in touch with you as a customer? Is it fun to do business with this company? Tell us about your WoW moment (when you received service that was far much more than you expected) with this company?

The above are some of the questions but of course they will be refined due to further reading.

This research is going to unravel customer service excellence gaps that companies need to consider when designing their product and service offerings. The research will provide evidence of what customers feel about certain businesses. The research will give pointers into areas that businesses that seek to excel must focus on. Finally the research will

b. Significance of the Proposed Research Study and Potential Benefits:

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research (maximum 200 words).

The correct usage or purposes of research are to build and review the existing knowledge, have clear purpose, investigate a problem or a situation and provide solution, explanations for a new trend or phenomenon and so on (Greenwood et al., 1993).

The research seeks to look at the effect of Customer Relationship Management strategies on customer retention in the automotive industry in Zimbabwe. In doing so the thrust of the research will be to unpack the concept of customer retention and define it. The impact of these strategies on customer retention is then evaluated. Customer relationship management and customer retention will be clearly defined so that there is no ambiguity in the application of these terms during the course of this research.

The concept of customer experience management and customer equity and its components such as brand equity, relational equity and brand equity will be explored. Their impact on the business's bottom line and continued survival will be critically assessed.

In addition to the above the research seeks to add new knowledge to existing knowledge regarding this important topic. furthermore the research will create and open up new pathways to explore further research as new wisdom and new knowledge is generated. It is anticipated that new knowledge generated will help decision-makers at various levels in the corporate world, government, non governmental organisations and the public at large make informed

3. Project execution:

a. Type of project. The following study is an:

- [x] experimental study (primary research)
- [ ] desktop study (secondary research)
- [ ] desktop study using existing databases involving information of human/animal subjects
- [ ] Other

If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

Not Applicable

b. Methods. The following study will involve the use of:

Method	Materials / Tools
☑ Qualitative	☑ Face to Face Interviews Phone
	☑ Interviews
	☐ Face to Face Focus Groups
	☐ Online Focus Groups
	☐ Asynchronous Focus Groups
	☐ Other*
☑ Quantitative	☑ Face to Face Questionnaires
	☑ Online Questionnaires
	☐ Experiments
	☐ Tests
	☐ Other *

*If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

Not Applicable

4. Participants

a. Does the Project involve the recruitment of participants?

☑ YES **If YES, please complete all following sections.**

☐ NO **If NO, please directly proceed to Question 5.**

Note: The definition of "participation" includes active participation, such as when participants knowingly take part in an interview or complete a questionnaire.

b. Relevant Participant Details of the Proposed Research

Please state the number of participants you plan to recruit, and describe important characteristics such as: demographics (e.g. age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc). It is also important that you specify any inclusion and exclusion criteria that will be applied (e.g. eligibility criteria for participants).

Number of participants: 150 - 200

Age range: From 25 To 65

Gender: ☑ Female ☑ Male

Eligibility Criteria:

- Inclusion criteria: Participants will be drawn from existing customers of the business plus selected customer facing employees. Only repeat customers will be included with a bias towards fleet operators and key accounts.

- Exclusion criteria: Participants above 65 years old and those below 25 years old will be excluded. Secondly one time customers will not be included.

Disabilities: There will be no discrimination based on this variable. As long as they meet the inclusion criteria they will be included!

Other relevant information (maximum 100 words):

Participants with disabilities other than mental could participate in the research provided that they can provide the informed consent for themselves.

c. Recruitment Process for Human Research Participants:

Please clearly describe how the potential participants will be identified, approached and recruited (maximum 200 words).

This research will involve businesses and their customers. To begin with permission will be sought from various players in the automotive industry to participate in the research. Once the business agrees permission will be sought to identify a sample of their customers who can be contacted as part of the research process. It is anticipated that the business may choose customers to participate in the research and in turn the customer refuses to participate? In this case more customer lists will be sought from the business so that the total sample required is achieved. That is between one hundred and fifty and two hundred customers will form the sample. A sample size of customers will be chosen from a population with each customer having an equal chance of being selected. In order to eliminate bias the samples will be carefully chosen using probability sampling.

All customer contact details will be provided by the business. Customers will then be contacted in writing via email so that their consent to participate in the research is sought prior to them participating. A standard letter will be sent to each potential participant initially to thank them for agreeing to be part of the research then secondly to outline the purpose of the research and what it seeks to achieve. Their role in the research will be fully explained so that there is clarity in this area and to avoid problems as the research progresses. The next stage will be for them to sign the Consent Form.

Once the Consent Form is signed, participants will be given an option to determine how they wish to be involved, that is

d. Relationship between the principal investigator and participants:

Is there any relationship between the principal investigator (student), co-investigators(s), (supervisor) and participant(s)? For example, if you are conducting research in a school environment on students in your classroom (e.g. instructor-student).

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, please specify (maximum 100 words).

5. Further Approvals

Are there any other approvals required (in addition to ethics clearance from UREC) in order to carry out the proposed research study?

☑ YES ☐ NO

If YES, please specify (maximum 100 words).

6. Potential Risks of the Proposed Research Study

Are there any potential risks, psychological harm and/or ethical issues associated with the proposed research study, other than risks pertaining to everyday life events (such as the risk of an accident when travelling to a remote location for data collection)?

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, please specify (maximum 150 words):

7. Application Checklist

Please mark √ if the study involves any of the following:

☐ Children and young people under 18 years of age, vulnerable population such as children with special educational needs (SEN), racial or ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, pregnant women, elderly, malnourished people, and ill people.

☐ Research that foresees risks and disadvantages that would affect any participant of the study such as anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, harm risk (which is more than is expected from everyday life) or any other act that participants might believe is detrimental to their wellbeing and / or has the potential to / will infringe on their human rights / fundamental rights.

☐ Risk to the well-being and personal safety of the researcher.

☐ Administration of any substance (food / drink / chemicals / pharmaceuticals / supplements / chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants.

☐ Results that may have an adverse impact on the natural or built environment.

8. Final Declaration by Applicants:

(a) I declare that this application is submitted on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will only be used by Unicaf University and Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) for the explicit purpose of ethical review and monitoring of the conduct of the research proposed project as described in the preceding pages.

(b) I understand that this information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent, excluding use intended to satisfy reporting requirements to relevant regulatory bodies.

(c) The information in this form, together with any accompanying information, is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.

(d) I undertake to abide by the highest possible international ethical standards governing the Code of Practice for Research Involving Human Participants, as published by the UN WHO Research Ethics Review Committee (ERC) on http://www.who.int/ethics/research/en/ and to which Unicaf University aspires to.

(e) In addition to respect any and all relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines, where applicable, while in pursuit of this research project.

(f) I understand it is my responsibility to submit a full REAF application during Dissertation Stage 3 to UREC. If a REAF application is not submitted my project is not approved by UREC.

(g) I fully acknowledge that this form does not constitute approval of the proposed project but it is only a provisional approval.

☑ **I agree with all points listed under Question 8**

Student's Name:

Supervisor's Name: Lester Wills

Date of Application: 14 April 2020.

Important Note:
Please now save your completed form (we suggest you also print a copy for your records) and then submit it to your UU Dissertation/project supervisor (tutor). **In the case of student projects, the responsibility lies with the Faculty Dissertation/Project Supervisor.** If this is a student application, then it should be submitted via the relevant link in the VLE. Please submit only electronically filled in copies; **do not** hand fill and submit scanned paper copies of this application.

☑ **Before submitting your application, please tick this box to confirm that all relevant sections have been filled in and the information contained is accurate to the best of your knowledge.**

APPENDIX 11 – Research Ethics Application Form

REAF_DS - Version 3.1 AP

UNICAF UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM
DOCTORAL STUDIES

UREC USE ONLY:
Application No:

Date Received:

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Student's E-mail Address: eshoniwa2000@yahoo.com

Student's ID #: R1610D1899056

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Marketing Management

Research Project Title: The Effect of Customer Relationship Management Strategies on Customer Retention in the Automotive industry : A Zimbabwean Experience.

1. **Please state the timelines involved in the proposed research project:**

Estimated Start Date: 28-Jun-2021 Estimated End Date: 12-Dec-2021

2. **External Research Funding (if applicable):**

2.a. Do you have any external funding for your research?

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, please answer questions **2b** and **2c**.

2.b. List any external (third party) sources of funding you plan to utilise for your project. You need to include full details on the source of funds (e.g. state, private or individual sponsor), any prior / existing or future relationships between the funding body / sponsor and any of the principal investigator(s) or co-investigator(s) or student researcher(s), status and timeline of the application and any conditions attached.

2.c. If there are any perceived ethical issues or potential conflicts of interest arising from applying or and receiving external funding for the proposed research then these need to be fully disclosed below and also further elaborated on, in the relevant sections on ethical considerations later on in this form.

3. The research project

3.a. Project Summary:

In this section fully describe the purpose and underlying rationale for the proposed research project. Ensure that you pose the research questions to be examined, state the hypotheses, and discuss the expected results of your research and their potential.

It is important in your description to use plain language so it can be understood by all members of the UREC, especially those who are not necessarily experts in the particular discipline. To that effect ensure that you fully explain / define any technical terms or discipline-specific terminology (use the space provided in the box).

This research project is aimed at investigating the impact, if any, of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies on Customer Retention in the automotive industry. The underlying rationale is that Customer Retention is a key success factor in any business. As such no business can survive if it cannot retain its existing customers. CRM strategies help to identify strategic and profitable customers to the business and then come up with marketing strategies that help to retain these customers.

It is the aim of this research to unpack the connection between Customer Relationship Management and Customer Retention. The research seeks to answer the question, what is the impact of CRM on Customer Retention? At the end of the research it will be concluded if there is a positive or negative impact between these two phenomena. According to Covielo et al (2002) customer retention is the main focus in firms that practise relational marketing. Customer retention is particularly important due to the benefits that come out of it. Reichheld (1996) and Buttle (2004) concluded that as customers stay with a supplier over a longer period of time purchase volumes increase and more referrals are generated due to the lengthy business relationship.

The research has a qualitative approach with semi structured interviews and online questionnaires being used as the main tools for data collection. A sample of customers that is a suitable representative of the total population will be contacted as part of the research process. Their feedback will then be analysed using modern techniques to come to a conclusion and answer the research question.

From the Customers' side the research will seek to understand if customers feel the firm is going out of its way to retain their business and strike long term relationships. From the firm's position the research will seek to understand if they are doing anything to create long term relationships with their customers.

3.b. Significance of the Proposed Research Study and Potential Benefits:

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research (use the space provided in the box).

Payne, A & Frow, P (2005) define the purpose of CRM as " to efficiently and effectively increase the acquisition, growth and retention of profitable customers by selectively initiating, building and maintaining appropriate relationships with them ".
The research seeks to -:
1. Add new knowledge to already existing knowledge about CRM issues concerning the automotive industry in Zimbabwe.
2. Analysing the impact of CRM strategies and processes in the automotive industry.
3. Unpack the following issues that are related to the subject matter, customer equity, relationship equity, value equity, customer retention and customer loyalty.

Among other things the results of the research will improve the body of knowledge relating to this topic with respect to the automotive industry. In getting to a logical conclusion data has to be gathered, analysed and interpreted with a view to coming up with an informed understanding about the impact of CRM strategies on Customer Retention.

4. Project execution:

4.a. The following study is an:

- [x] experimental study (primary research)
- [ ] desktop study (secondary research)
- [ ] desktop study using existing databases involving information of human/animal subjects
- [ ] Other

If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

4.b. Methods. The following study will involve the use of:

Method	Materials / Tools
Qualitative:	☑ Face to Face Interviews
	☐ Phone Interviews
	☐ Face to Face Focus Groups
	☐ Online Focus Groups
	☐ Other *
Quantitative:	☐ Face to Face Questionnaires
	☑ Online Questionnaires
	☐ Experiments
	☐ Tests
	☐ Other *

*If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

5. Participants:

5 a. Does the Project involve the recruitment and participation of additional persons other than the researcher(s) themselves?

☑ YES **If YES, please complete all following sections.**

☐ NO **If NO, please directly proceed to Question 7.**

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

5 b. Relevant Details of the Participants of the Proposed Research

State the number of participants you plan to recruit, and explain in the box below how the total number was calculated.

Number of participants: 50

The total size of the customer database from Amtec Motors comprises 200 Key Accounts. From these my sample will comrise 25% of the population which equates to the 50 mentioned above.

Describe important characteristics such as: demographics (e.g. age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc). It is also important that you specify any inclusion and exclusion criteria that will be applied (e.g. eligibility criteria for participants).

Age range From 30 To 60

Gender
- ☑ Female
- ☑ Male

Eligibility Criteria:

- Inclusion criteria: Only Key Accounts will be included in the rearch business. These give repeat business to the dealership consistently and the Managing Director of Amtedc Motors feels that the Voice of the Customer from this sample will address roughly 80% of
- Exclusion criteria: Children under the age of 18 will not be included since according to the Dealership ie Amtec Motors they do not have this population segment wihin their customer database.

Disabilities: They will be included if they are part of the 25% sample selected as leaving them will be tantamount to discrimination.

Other relevant information (use the space provided in the box):

As we speak Amtec Motirs are in the process of compiling the database to be used. I hope to take possession of it within the next two weeks, according to their Managing Director.

5 c. Participation & Research setting:

Clearly describe which group of participants is completing/participating in the material(s)/ tool(s) described in 5b above (use the space provided in the box).

I will use semi-structured interviews for those that are willing to be contacted this way. However for those unwilling to have face-to-face interactions, questionnaires will be used. With the Covid 19 restrctions currently in force in Zimbabwe most of the participants wiill be contacted via questionnaires. Generally people in this country are shunning face to face interactions with strangers.

5 d. Recruitment Process for Human Research Participants:

Clearly describe how the potential participants will be identified, approached and recruited (use the space provided in the box).

Potential participants will be extracted from a database that will be provided by the dealership ie Amtec Motors. Their consent will be sought prior to me sending them questionnaires. Questionnaires will be sent by email. For the few where semi structured interviews will be used I will apply the appointment system.

5 e. Research Participants Informed Consent.

Select below which categories of participants will participate in the study. Complete the relevant Informed Consent form and submit it along with the REAF form.

Yes	No	Categories of participants	Form to be completed
☑	☐	Typically Developing population(s) above the maturity age *	Informed Consent Form
☐	☐	Typically Developing population(s) under the maturity age *	Guardian Informed Consent Form

* Maturity age is defined by national regulations in laws of the country in which the research is being conducted.

5 f. Relationship between the principal investigator and participants.

Is there any relationship between the principal investigator (student), co-investigators(s), (supervisor) and participant(s)? For example, if you are conducting research in a school environment on students in your classroom (e.g. instructor-student).

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, specify (use the space provided in the box).

6. Potential Risks of the Proposed Research Study.

6 a. i. Are there any potential risks, psychological harm and/or ethical issues associated with the proposed research study, other than risks pertaining to everyday life events (such as the risk of an accident when travelling to a remote location for data collection)?

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, specify below and answer the question 6 a.ii.

6 a.ii Provide information on what measures will be taken in order to exclude or minimise risks described in 6.a.i.

6 b. Choose the appropriate option

		Yes	No
i.	Will you obtain written informed consent form from all participants?	☑	☐
ii.	Does the research involve as participants, people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question?	☐	☑
iii.	Does this research involve participants who are children under maturity age? **If you answered YES to question iii, complete all following questions.** **If you answered NO to question iii, do not answer Questions iv, v, vi and proceed to Questions vii, viii, ix and x.**	☐	☑
iv.	Will the research tools be implemented in a professional educational setting in the presence of other adults (i.e. classroom in the presence of a teacher)?	☐	☐
v.	Will informed consent be obtained from the legal guardians (i.e. parents) of children?	☐	☐
vi.	Will verbal assent be obtained from children?	☐	☐
vii.	Will all data be treated as confidential? If NO, explain why confidentiality of the collected data is not appropriate for this proposed research project, providing details of how all participants will be informed of the fact that any data which they will provide will not be confidential.	☑	☐
viii.	Will all participants /data collected be anonymous? If NO, explain why and describe the procedures to be used to ensure the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of the collected data both during the conduct of the research and in the subsequent release of its findings. Participants details will be coded so that their personal details do not appear in the results of the research.	☐	☑

		Yes	No
ix.	Have you ensured that personal data and research data collected from participants will be securely stored for five years?	☑	☐
x.	Does this research involve the deception of participants? If YES, describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Explain how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this debrief to the participants:	☐	☑

6 c. i. Are there any other ethical issues associated with the proposed research study that are not already adequately covered in the preceding sections?

☐ Yes ☑ No

If YES, specify (maximum 150 words).

6.c.ii Provide information on what measures will be taken in order to exclude or minimise ethical issues described in 6.c.i.

The Consent Form is an integrity documnet that requires myself as tghe reseracher to stick to what will have been agreed with the participants.

6 d. Indicate the Risk Rating.

☐ High ☑ Low

7. Further Approvals

Are there any other approvals required (in addition to ethics clearance from UREC) in order to carry out the proposed research study?

☑ YES ☐ NO

If YES, specify (maximum 100 words).

The only other approcval I require is from the organisation that I will be doing research on. They will give me the customer database inclduing customer contact details. I reckon this wont be a challenge since I have alsready spoken with the CEO and in principle he agreed to assist me.

8. Application Checklist

Mark √ if the study involves any of the following:

☐ Children and young people under 18 years of age, vulnerable population such as children with special educational needs (SEN), racial or ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, pregnant women, elderly, malnourished people, and ill people.

☐ Research that foresees risks and disadvantages that would affect any participant of the study such as anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, harm risk (which is more than is expected from everyday life) or any other act that participants might believe is detrimental to their wellbeing and / or has the potential to / will infringe on their human rights / fundamental rights.

☐ Risk to the well-being and personal safety of the researcher.

☐ Administration of any substance (food / drink / chemicals / pharmaceuticals / supplements / chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants.

☐ Results that may have an adverse impact on the natural or built environment.

9. Further documents

Check that the following documents are attached to your application:

		ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
1	Recruitment advertisement (if any)	☐	☑
2	Informed Consent Form / Guardian Informed Consent Form	☑	☐
3	Research Tool(s)	☑	☐
4	Gatekeeper Letter	☑	☐
5	Any other approvals required in order to carry out the proposed research study, e.g., institutional permission (e.g. school principal or company director) or approval from a local ethics or professional regulatory body.	☑	☐

10. Final Declaration by Applicants:

(a) I declare that this application is submitted on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will only be used by Unicaf University for the explicit purpose of ethical review and monitoring of the conduct of the research proposed project as described in the preceding pages.

(b) I understand that this information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent, excluding use intended to satisfy reporting requirements to relevant regulatory bodies.

(c) The information in this form, together with any accompanying information, is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.

(d) I undertake to abide by the highest possible international ethical standards governing the Code of Practice for Research Involving Human Participants, as published by the UN WHO Research Ethics Review Committee (ERC) on http://www.who.int/ethics/research/en/ and to which Unicaf University aspires to.

(e) In addition to respect any and all relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines, where applicable, while in pursuit of this research project.

☑ **I agree with all points listed under Question 10**

Student's Name: Elliot Shoniwa

Supervisor's Name: Dr Lester Wills

Date of Application: 27-Jul-2021

Important Note:
Save your completed form (we suggest you also print a copy for your records) and then submit it to your UU Dissertation/project supervisor (tutor). **In the case of student projects, the responsibility lies with the Faculty Dissertation/Project Supervisor.** If this is a student application, then it should be submitted via the relevant link in the VLE. Please submit only electronically filled in copies; **do not** hand fill and submit scanned paper copies of this application.