FACULTY OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES UNIVERSITA CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE & CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE.

The Role of Customer Relationship Management in Building Brand Loyalty. A selected study of the Beef Industry in Zimbabwe.

By: **Tendai Chiwetu**

Student ID: **PG249690H**

Supervisor: **Dr. G. Garatsa**

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Global MBA E4Impact at the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, in collaboration with the Catholic University of Zimbabwe.

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APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to the Global E4Impact Management Program and the Catholic University of Zimbabwe, for acceptance a dissertation entitled, **The Role of Customer Relationship Management in Building Brand Loyalty. A selected study of the Beef Industry in Zimbabwe,** submitted by **Tendai Chiwetu,** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Global E4Impact MBA Programme.

Your Full Name:

Tendai Chiwetu

Signature:

Date:

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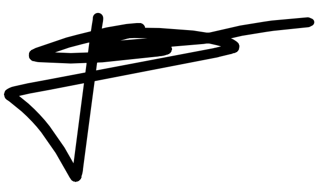

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Grace of the Almighty God, for the wisdom and strength that sustained me through this study journey. I also dedicate it to the entrepreneurs of Zimbabwe and the world at large especially the youth who are eager to scale up their business operations.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in building brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry, a sector of significant socio-economic importance facing intense competition and market challenges. The purpose is to evaluate how CRM strategies influence customer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty to beef brands in Zimbabwe's dynamic market environment. Employing a descriptive research design, data was collected through surveys and interviews with 370 beef consumers and 50 producers and retailers. Analysis revealed that while basic CRM practices such as personalized communication are in use, overall CRM adoption remains limited due to infrastructural and resource constraints. Key findings highlight that customer trust, perceived value, and satisfaction strongly mediate the relationship between CRM and brand loyalty. Structural challenges, including fragmented supply chains and limited digital engagement, hamper CRM effectiveness and brand visibility. The study recommends that beef industry stakeholders prioritize integrating comprehensive CRM systems, leveraging digital platforms, and enhancing cross-functional collaboration to build sustainable brand loyalty. Future research should explore longitudinal studies incorporating dimensions like service quality and e-CRM to deepen understanding of CRM's impact in agribusiness sectors. This research contributes new insight into CRM application in emerging markets and offers practical guidance for fostering brand loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef industry.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The beef industry in Zimbabwe is homogenous and quite standardized. This signifies intensified competition towards survival, profiteering and success. The players differentiate their services and try to establish powerful brands that can be recognized, accepted and remembered by customers as the company strives to turn them to clients. Establishing the brands is a process and there are many areas which the organization need to pay attention to, when having a brand. Of paramount importance is the brand's visibility. The beef industry in Zimbabwe has significant socio-economic importance, contributing to food security, employment, and the national economy. However, this sector faces various challenges, including fluctuating market demands, competition from imported products, and changing consumer preferences. In this dynamic environment, building strong brand loyalty among consumers is essential for businesses striving for long-term success.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a strategic approach designed to enhance customer engagement, retention, and satisfaction. Effective CRM practices allow businesses to collect, analyze, and utilize customer data, fostering meaningful interactions and personalized experiences. However, the application of these practices within the Zimbabwean beef industry is not well-documented or studied, creating a knowledge gap.

This research is set against the backdrop of an industry in transition, where modernization and technology adoption are critical. It aims to address the pressing need for beef producers and retailers to develop and implement effective CRM strategies that not only enhance customer loyalty but also drive brand differentiation in a competitive market. By focusing on the unique context of Zimbabwe, this study seeks to provide insights that are specific to local challenges and opportunities, contributing to the broader understanding of CRM's role in the agricultural sector.

Within current competitive and dynamic environment, the brands are facing multiple competitive threats from their rivals which ultimately, is empowering the customers. The customers have been considered as the focal element for brands amplifying their efforts to retain them through satisfaction beyond expectations and enduring relationships between brands and customers. In the current scenario, customer relationship management (CRM) is a strategy used to achieve this objective. Through using CRM, the companies analyze the needs of their customers to fulfill them to enhance customers' satisfaction and to retain with the brands for long.

The most substantial finding of the existing study is that the brands must exert their highest efforts in building a strong relationship with their customers so as to retain them with the brands through building positive image within the minds of customers through engaging the customers by providing the products beyond their expectations. The study highlights the horizons to the marketers to exert their efforts in building their relationships with their clients with more strength and to put a greater focus to build and maintain a strong liaison with clients so as to retain them with the brands for long. Future research can extend this study by using some other dimensions of CRM like service quality and e-CRM. Moreover, the future research may adopt the longitudinal horizon so as to reduce the bias. The study is novel in its nature that there is no study which comprises the effect of CRM and brand image in retaining the customers with brands. The study not only enhances the knowledge base relative to CRM and customer retention but also provides a practical implication for the marketers to enhance the growth rate of their brands in competitive and dynamic environment

The findings may inform stakeholders, including producers, marketers, and policymakers, on how to leverage CRM to build stronger customer relationships, enhance brand loyalty, and ultimately support the resilience and growth of the beef industry in Zimbabwe.

Context of Research

The integration of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) within the beef industry represents a critical strategic lever for enhancing brand loyalty, a key determinant of firm profitability and market sustainability. Globally, CRM frameworks have evolved as pivotal tools in reducing customer acquisition costs and augmenting consumer lifetime value, particularly in commodity markets characterized by high competition and price volatility (Nguyen & Simkin, 2020). At the national level, Zimbabwe's beef sector, a significant contributor to agricultural GDP and rural employment, is constrained by fragmented supply chains and weak customer retention mechanisms, which undermine firm-specific assets and brand equity. Locally, beef producers grapple with asymmetric information and limited market differentiation, leading to heightened customer churn and diminished brand loyalty.

Focusing on Zimbabwe's beef industry is warranted due to its strategic economic role amid systemic challenges such as inflationary pressures and fluctuating demand. CRM adoption promises to internalize transaction-specific investments by fostering relational rents through enhanced trust and commitment, thus mitigating transaction costs and market failures. This focus aligns with the need to stimulate demand-side dynamics in a sector traditionally marked by supply-side constraints.

The relevance of this research is underpinned by Transaction Cost Economics (Williamson, 1985), which posits that governance structures like CRM can reduce opportunism and safeguard investments in relational capital. Furthermore, the Loyalty Ladder Theory (Reichheld, 2020) supports the premise that CRM facilitates progressive consumer engagement stages, culminating in brand advocacy and sustained competitive advantage. Consequently, this study addresses a significant gap by evaluating CRM's efficacy in building brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry, offering both theoretical contributions and pragmatic insights for agribusiness stakeholders.

Background of the Study

In the competitive Zimbabwean beef industry, effective branding and customer relationship management (CRM) are crucial for establishing brand loyalty, enhancing customer satisfaction, and gaining a competitive edge (Chikodzi & Mufudza, 2021). Branding refers to the process of creating a unique identity for a product or service in the minds of consumers, which influences their purchasing decisions and fosters brand loyalty (Keller, 2020). Meanwhile, CRM involves strategies and technologies that companies use to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle, aiming to improve customer retention and drive sales (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Zimbabwe's beef industry is a vital sector contributing significantly to the economy through exports and local consumption. However, the industry faces stiff competition, both locally and internationally, with numerous players vying for market share (Mudzonga & Mungwi, 2022).

Despite the importance of branding and CRM in differentiating products, many beef producers and exporters struggle with low brand visibility and weak customer relationships, which hinder long-term growth and market expansion (Chikodzi & Mufudza, 2021).

The Zimbabwean beef industry is a vital component of the country's agricultural sector, contributing significantly to food security, employment, and export earnings (Madyira et al., 2021). Despite its importance, the sector faces numerous challenges including low productivity, limited access to markets, inadequate branding, and competition from imported beef products (Chikowo et al., 2020). In recent years, the industry has seen increased participation from various players, ranging from smallholder farmers to large commercial abattoirs, leading to heightened competition and the need for effective brand positioning (Mudimu & Makoni, 2022).

Brand loyalty and differentiation are critical for beef producers seeking to penetrate both local and international markets. However, many Zimbabwean beef brands struggle with low visibility, which affects consumer perception and loyalty. For instance, prominent brands such as Cold Storage Company and Zimbabwe Meat Exporters have established a foothold locally and regionally, while emerging producers often lack the capacity to effectively promote their brands (Chimhundu & Makoni, 2021). The importance of branding strategies is underscored by studies indicating that effective brand positioning can enhance market share, improve competitiveness, and foster consumer trust (Muchabaiwa et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the sector has adopted various marketing strategies, including participation in trade fairs such as the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF), advertising campaigns, and social media engagement to boost visibility. Despite these efforts, many local beef brands remain underexposed, especially in high-traffic markets and retail outlets, limiting their ability to attract new customers and expand their market share (Chirisa & Nyembezi, 2021). The rise of digital marketing offers new opportunities; however, the sector's online presence remains weak, with limited engagement and poor search engine rankings, which hampers brand recognition (Madziva & Nyabasha, 2022).

A review of recent industry reports shows that most beef producers rely heavily on traditional marketing methods, with limited utilization of modern CRM tools and branding strategies

(Zimbabwe Beef Industry Report, 2023). Many firms have invested in branding initiatives such as packaging, logos, and promotional campaigns; however, these efforts often lack consistency and are not sufficiently integrated into broader CRM strategies. Consequently, customer loyalty remains fragile, with many consumers switching brands due to lack of engagement, trust, and perceived value (Mudzonga & Mungwi, 2022).

Furthermore, the digital revolution has transformed how brands communicate with consumers globally, emphasizing the importance of online presence and social media engagement (Barry & Kessy, 2020). Yet, in Zimbabwe's beef industry, digital marketing and CRM adoption remain limited, with many companies having weak online visibility and poor customer data management systems (Chikodzi & Mufudza, 2021). This gap hampers efforts to build long-term customer relationships and hampers brand loyalty development.

Studies indicate that effective CRM strategies, including personalized communication, loyalty programs, and responsive customer service, significantly enhance brand equity and customer retention in agribusiness sectors (Nguyen et al., 2021). However, the lack of tailored CRM approaches in Zimbabwe's beef industry means opportunities for strengthening customer bonds and brand positioning are often overlooked (Mudzonga & Mungwi, 2022).

This scenario underscores the need to assess the current branding and CRM practices within the Zimbabwean beef industry to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. Understanding how beef producers leverage branding and customer relationship strategies can inform targeted interventions that foster brand loyalty, increase market share, and ultimately support sustainable growth in the industry.

The industry also relies on quality assurance standards such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and ISO certifications to establish credibility and competitive advantage (Chikwanha et al., 2022). While these certifications are essential, their impact on consumer perception and brand visibility is often limited unless complemented by strategic marketing and branding efforts. Additionally, involvement in industry awards and participation in exhibitions can enhance brand recognition, but many Zimbabwean beef producers rarely leverage these platforms effectively (Mushonga et al., 2020).

In light of these challenges, there is a need to critically assess the effectiveness of current brand loyalty/awareness strategies within the Zimbabwean beef industry. Understanding these dynamics can provide insights into how beef producers can better position their brands, increase visibility, and ultimately improve competitiveness in both local and export markets.

Research Problem

In the competitive landscape of the beef industry in Zimbabwe, customer loyalty is increasingly becoming a critical factor for sustained business success. Despite the potential benefits of strong brand loyalty, many beef producers and retailers struggle to understand and implement effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies. The problem lies in the lack of comprehensive approaches to engaging customers, understanding their preferences, and building long-term relationships.

This study aims to explore the role of CRM in fostering brand loyalty within the Zimbabwean beef sector. Questions arise concerning how inadequate CRM practices may lead to lost sales opportunities, decreased customer satisfaction, and ultimately weakened brand loyalty. Furthermore, there is little empirical research that examines the specific challenges faced by beef producers and retailers in leveraging CRM to enhance customer engagement and loyalty.

In the competitive landscape of Zimbabwe’s beef industry, businesses aim to establish strong and recognizable brands that can endure market fluctuations and consumer preferences (Chikodzi et al., 2021). Effective branding, supported by robust Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies, plays a vital role in positioning firms as first-choice providers, fostering customer loyalty, and enhancing brand visibility (Moyo & Chikodzi, 2022). Despite these efforts, many beef producers and marketers struggle to achieve significant brand recognition and consumer recall, often due to inadequate deployment of CRM tools and brand loyalty strategies (Ndlovu & Mukeredzi, 2020).

For instance, some firms invest in traditional marketing channels such as outdoor advertising and community engagement but fall short in leveraging digital platforms and personalized customer interactions that are critical in today’s digital age (Chikodzi et al., 2021). Consequently, their brands remain relatively obscure, limiting market share and growth potential. An assessment of the effectiveness of CRM-driven brand loyalty strategies in enhancing brand visibility within the Zimbabwean beef industry is therefore essential to identify gaps and inform strategic improvements.

By identifying these gaps, the study seeks to demonstrate the importance of effective CRM strategies and their potential to cultivate a loyal customer base, thereby contributing to the overall growth and sustainability of the beef industry in Zimbabwe.

Research Objectives

- Evaluate the existing Customer Relationship Management practices among beef producers and retailers in Zimbabwe.
- Investigate how effective CRM strategies influence customer perceptions and loyalty towards beef brands in the Zimbabwean market.
- Identify the challenges faced by the beef industry in implementing CRM systems and explore potential opportunities for improvement.

Research Questions

- What are the current CRM practices employed by beef producers and retailers in Zimbabwe?
- How do CRM strategies affect customer loyalty towards beef brands in Zimbabwe?
- What challenges do beef producers and retailers face in adopting and implementing effective CRM systems?

Significance of the study

The research will benefit beef/meat industry, the researcher and will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Several researches have been carried out in the branding field however; many opportunities still exist according to Keller and Lehman (2005). The concept of brand visibility remains a new area to be covered in the brand management arena. Bormark et.al (2005) highlighted need for more research work on this concept by putting forward that not much research has been done on brand loyalty. Therefore, this paper will contribute some new insights to the current body of knowledge through uniquely identifying, bringing together pieces of research and explaining the various concepts that have been established by other scholars. The main aim of this paper being to localize the concept of Customer Relationship Management, brand visibility and bring out local perspectives of the issue since it is based on a local case study, which are not there in the current body of knowledge.

Additionally, this study will benefit the researcher by providing valuable insights and experiences in the field of branding and CRM, which will be essential for future research and career development. According to Gummesson (2020), experiential knowledge gained through research is a crucial component of professional development, enabling researchers to navigate complex research problems and develop innovative solutions.

The study will also contribute to the economic growth and development of Zimbabwe by promoting a better understanding of the beef industry and its role in the national economy. As highlighted by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2020), the agriculture sector, including the beef industry, is a significant contributor to the country's GDP and employment opportunities.

In conclusion, this study will make a substantial contribution to the existing body of knowledge in branding and CRM, while also providing practical insights for beef producers and retailers in Zimbabwe. The findings of this study will have significant implications for the development of effective CRM strategies and the promotion of brand loyalty in the beef industry.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is focused on the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in building brand loyalty in the Zimbabwean market. Specifically, this research investigates the impact of CRM strategies on consumer loyalty, with a particular emphasis on the moderating effects of brand visibility and customer satisfaction in the Zimbabwean context. The study adopts a multi-case approach, examining the CRM practices of three major Zimbabwean companies operating in the food and beverage industry, namely, Unilever Zimbabwe, Delta Beverages, and Innscor Africa. This study is limited to these three companies due to the complexity and resource intensity of implementing CRM strategies, as well as the unique cultural and economic dynamics of the Zimbabwean market.

The study's focus on the food and beverage industry is justified by the sector's significant contribution to Zimbabwe's economy, with the industry accounting for a substantial portion of the country's GDP. Furthermore, the industry's intense competition and rapidly changing consumer preferences necessitate the adoption of effective CRM strategies to remain competitive. The study's emphasis on CRM strategies that focus on building customer loyalty is also justified by the growing recognition of the importance of customer retention in today's business environment, where customer acquisition costs are high and customer loyalty is a key driver of revenue growth.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation will be structured into several comprehensive chapters. It will begin with the Introduction, which provides the background to the study, clearly states the research problem, outlines the research objectives, and highlights the significance of the study. This section will also specify the scope and limitations, describe the chosen research methodology, and outline the organization of the dissertation. The next chapter, the Literature Review, will offer an overview of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) concepts, definitions, and its role in building brand loyalty. It will explore existing theories and empirical studies, particularly within the African context, that examine the impact of CRM strategies, brand visibility, and customer satisfaction on brand loyalty. This chapter will also discuss relevant theoretical frameworks that underpin the study. Following this, the Methodology chapter will detail the research design, including the population and sampling procedures, data collection methods such as surveys and interviews, and data analysis techniques like statistical and thematic analysis. It will also address issues of validity and reliability to ensure methodological rigor. The Case Studies chapter will present detailed descriptions of few selected companies such as Vybrig Butcheries, Koala etc, focusing on their CRM strategies, and analyzing how these strategies influence brand loyalty within each organization.

It will also examine how brand visibility and customer satisfaction moderate the effectiveness of CRM in these companies. The Data Analysis chapter will present and analyze the data collected from the case studies, employing appropriate analytical techniques, and will compare findings across the different organizations. In the Discussion chapter, the results will be interpreted in light of the existing literature, highlighting similarities, differences, and implications for theory and practice. This section will also explore the broader significance of the findings for businesses operating in Zimbabwe. The dissertation will conclude with a Summary of Findings, emphasizing key insights, discussing the study's contribution to the field, acknowledging limitations, and offering recommendations for future research. The final sections will comprise the References, listing all cited sources, and Appendices, which will include supplementary materials such as questionnaires, interview protocols, and raw data to support the research.

Chapter Summary

The above section outlined the framework and guidelines for this research paper. The section introduced the case study of CRM, the problem to be investigated, research objectives and research questions which the paper seeks to address. Among the objectives is the need to establish other factors besides brand awareness that affect choice of a brand and ascertaining the reasons for enhancing brand visibility through other means thus CRM. Various brand loyalty strategies that have been put in place to enhance the brand visibility have been outlined. The researcher contends that if the CRM and brand loyalty strategies were effective the brand should have been very visible and create brand loyalty turning customers into regular clients. The low visibility therefore necessitated the need to asses these brand loyalty strategies that can be used in the beef industry.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The aim of this research was not just to familiarize the reader with the techniques and technology of CRM philosophy and its relationship in building brand loyalty of businesses. The more ambitious goal of this research is to benefit the readers to understand the importance of customer relationship management as necessary and significant elements of managing every successful enterprise in building brand image to the eyes of the public. Hence, ''a firm most valuable asset is its customers, and given the new and unfolding technological capabilities to recognize, measure, and manage relationship with each of those customers in order to succeed, a firm must focus in deliberately increasing the value of the customer base'' (Peppers & Rogers, 2004, p.6). Therefore, the competitive advantage for any enterprise can be gained only by leveraging knowledge of customers" expectations, preferences and behavior, which involve creating an ongoing dialog with customers and manipulating the information and insight obtained at all customers touch points (Payne & Frow, 2005). It's worth mentioning that, building good life time value with customers is not a brief assignment of the marketing department rather it's an ongoing process which required the involvement of the entire organization. This is true for non-profit (when the customers may be donors or volunteers), as well as for-profit, large or small, public or as well as for private enterprise (Peppers & Rogers, 2004, p.6).

This chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical works that have been previously covered in the brand management field particularly on the brand loyalty concept. Publications and findings by other authors in the area were covered to enable the author to avoid reinventing the wheel by duplicating what has been already done at the same time addressing objectives and questions of the current study. The chapter will cover the CRM, brand, brand loyalty its dimensions and theories among other aspects.

The previous literature incorporates CRM as an integral and key element for any company especially in the service industry to strengthen their relations with their customers through providing them the higher level of satisfaction and enhancing their retention with company brands for enhancing the volume of income for company and its business (Mulyono & Pasaribu, 2021). It is evident through previous literature (Quzwen et al., 2021; Al-Hazmi 2021; Chen et al 2021 & Olasojumi et al., 2021) that CRM is a key concept for making most of the customer-base aligned with the company brands through creating brand identification, brand awareness (Ibrahim et al., 2021) and building strong customer bonding (Alam et al., 2021) for achieving the customer retention. This profound that an organization which adopts CRM exceeds customer satisfaction to foster a healthy and strong relationships with their clients to retain them with company brands (Haryandika & Santa, 2021). The relationships between customers and organizations especially in service industry are found to be highly influential in marketing campaigns as it influences customer support (Asefa, 2021), their satisfaction (Kerdpitak, 2021) and retention (Sağlam & El Montaser, 2021) with the brands.

The American Marketers Association (AMA) defines brand as encompassing the name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them, which serves to distinguish market offering (product or service) of one seller from those of competition. Kotler and Keller (2006) also defined brand as such. Chaudhary (2014) put forward that a brand should embrace the identity of a company it represents. He added that identity encompass the name, logo, tangibles or visuals like images, signs, typography or specific colors that seek to convey or represent, identify and differentiate a product or service from others. For the purpose of this research the brand is defined using Chaudhary (2014) definition which tends to be comprehensive by encompassing all aspects that gives an identity of a company.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has become an essential strategy for organizations seeking to foster long-term customer loyalty and competitive advantage (Nguyen et al., 2021). CRM encompasses a range of practices, technologies, and strategies aimed at understanding customer needs, improving engagement, and enhancing customer satisfaction (Kumar & Reinartz, 2020). Globally, the adoption of CRM has been linked to increased customer retention, improved service delivery, and stronger brand loyalty across various sectors, including the food and agricultural industries (Li et al., 2020).

In the context of the beef industry, CRM is particularly vital due to the highly competitive nature of meat markets, where consumer choice is influenced by trust, quality perceptions, and ongoing engagement (Mthembu & Mlambo, 2021). Studies by Chiwara et al. (2022) highlight that beef producers who effectively utilize CRM tools such as personalized communication and loyalty programs can significantly enhance brand loyalty. However, the application of CRM strategies varies considerably across developing countries, often hindered by technological, infrastructural, and resource constraints (Chikazhe et al., 2020).

In Zimbabwe, the beef industry is a crucial component of the agricultural sector, contributing to food security and economic stability (ZimStat, 2020). Despite its importance, literature indicates that many beef producers rely on traditional marketing practices with limited systematic engagement with customers. Researchers such as Mukamba & Chikozho (2021) suggest that there is a growing recognition of the need to adopt CRM strategies, but empirical evidence on their effectiveness remains scarce.

Recent studies emphasize that CRM's role in building brand loyalty is mediated by factors such as trust, perceived value, and customer satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2021). For example, in the South African beef industry, CRM initiatives such as loyalty programs and direct communication channels have demonstrated positive impacts on customer retention (Mthembu & Mlambo, 2021). Similar trends are emerging in Zimbabwe, though limited empirical data exists to confirm these relationships.

Keller and Armstrong (2004) agreed that a brand does not serve identifying function alone. They added that brands stand for consumer sensitivity as well as emotions to the product. A lot has been covered by different scholars on the importance of brands. Kotler and Keller (2006) in their brand definition it can be noted that a brand serves the differentiation function. This is enhanced by the different features and components that make up a brand such as the logo, name, colours, symbols and associations. These separate a brand from others in the same category.

Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) are of the view that a brand is there to create an image. This is so through the awareness, associations, colours and images of a brand that enables customers to create an image and affection or relationship with a brand. Such relationships enabled by brands are sustainable and profitable over those unbranded products as put by De Chernatony, L. et.al (2010). The relationship is profitable in the sense that a brand allows a product or service to command a premium. This is that extra value that customers are willing to pay as a result of superior perceived quality that a branded product have over an unbranded one in the same category, appearance and dependability according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010).

Brands establish a sustainable relationship through brand loyalty. The relationship becomes a stable and a long-term one as loyal customers tend to choose the same product again and again and make referrals as well as recommendations to others to try certain brands they use according to Hakala et.al (2010). This loyalty will also culminate into increased sales as noted by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006). There is also an emotional attachment to the brand as a result of loyalty thus giving the brand a competitive advantage against rivals in the same category who might have weaker brands or unbranded products.

Kotler and Armstrong (2004) contend that a brand facilitates securing of future business. This is through brand extension and the fact that branded products wield more influence on distribution channels. Intermediaries are more than willing to handle branded products as they are easily identifiable making them less expensive as no extra promotion investment will be required as by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006).

By summarizing the different definitions of CRM raised by different researchers, (Zablah, Ballenger and Johnnston 2004) demonstrated that there are five points of view for defining CRM. The points of view are the process, the strategy, the philosophy, the ability and the technology. As a process CRM can be defined as creating and enhancing the engagement and relationships with the external parties, especially the agents and end-consumers. As a strategy it can be defined as the investment of the companies in the customers who are expected to be valuable for the institution, and the reduction of investment in the valueless customers of the company. As philosophy it can be defined as a temporary project, but a work philosophy, which aims at putting the customer in the focus of the attention of the organization. As ability it can be defined as means the desire and ability of the institution to custom its behavior towards every customer, on the basis of the information the customer tells and what the institution knows about that customer. As a technology it can be defined as the technology used to integrate sales systems, marketing systems and information systems to establish relationships with customers.

Customer Retention

According to Puspaningrum (2020), the tendency of customers to be aligned with the company brands and its products is referred to customer retention. The study illustrates that companies use this concept not only to retain the existing clientage but also to attract the new incumbents towards the brands. According to Uwamariya & Njenga (2021), customers have the driving seat in any company which company may enhance through their satisfaction being the survival of any company. The brands focus on their needs and wants as they are the only revenue generating source. In other words, customers are inevitable for any brand as there would be no generation of revenue leading to have no esteem in market (Sağlam & El Montaser, 2021).

Customer retention is a vital factor for the sustainability and growth of Zimbabwe's beef industry, which plays a significant role in the country's agricultural sector and economy. In a market characterized by fluctuating prices, economic challenges, and increasing competition from both local and imported beef products, maintaining loyal customers is essential. According to Puspaningrum (2020), customer retention involves building long-term relationships based on trust, quality, and value elements that are particularly critical in Zimbabwe's beef sector where consumers are increasingly conscious of product origin, quality standards, and pricing.

In Zimbabwe, beef consumers often prioritize trustworthiness in suppliers, consistent product quality, and affordability. Uwamariya and Njenga (2021) highlight that customers are the "driving seat" of any business, and this is especially true for beef producers and suppliers who rely heavily on repeat business from local butchers, supermarkets, restaurants, and individual consumers. Given the economic instabilities and inflationary pressures, beef suppliers who can deliver reliable, high-quality products at competitive prices are more likely to foster loyalty and withstand market fluctuations (Uwamariya & Njenga, 2021).

Moreover, Sağlam and El Montaser (2021) emphasize that trust and perceived value are crucial for customer loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef industry. Producers and distributors that emphasize transparency, such as clear labeling, adherence to health standards, and sustainable farming practices, are more likely to build strong customer relationships. The adoption of digital platforms, such as mobile marketing and social media, has also become increasingly important in Zimbabwe's beef industry for engaging with customers, providing updates on product availability, and offering personalized promotions (Kumar et al., 2020; Zhou & Li, 2020). These tools help beef suppliers reach urban consumers and retailers efficiently, even amidst infrastructural challenges.

Additionally, in Zimbabwe's beef industry, loyalty programs that reward repeat customers, community engagement initiatives, and efforts to promote local beef products can enhance trust and loyalty. For example, producers who participate in community-based programs or promote sustainable and ethical farming practices tend to strengthen their brand image and customer loyalty (Chikozho & Mukwambo, 2020).

In conclusion, customer retention strategies tailored to Zimbabwe's beef industry should focus on delivering consistent quality, building trust through transparency, and leveraging digital engagement tools suitable for local socio-economic realities. By fostering strong relationships with customers whether individual consumers, retailers, or institutions, beef producers and suppliers can ensure long-term success despite economic uncertainties and market competition. Emphasizing customer satisfaction and loyalty will be key to sustaining growth and competitiveness in Zimbabwe's beef sector (Kumar et al., 2020; Zhou & Li, 2020).

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has been acclaimed by the multiple previous research studies Kakeesh et al (2021) as a managerial philosophy which is found to be closely related to the concepts of marketing as well as information technology, enhancing the value of the brand within the minds of customers. Olasojumi et al (2021) found that CRM is a series of multiple methods of information technology for making an effective usage of CRM. Al-Hazmi (2021) called attention to these methods for establishing, maintenance as well as enhancing the long-term attachment of the customers with companies as has been elaborated in the concept of CRM. Moreover, the studies conducted by Jayalath & Galdolage (2021) pinnacled that the companies achieve multiple milestones like profit maximization, sales growth, higher customer loyalty and retention, increased customer satisfaction and new customer acquisition due to effective utilization of customer relationship management (CRM) practices. On the same tone, the studies (Chen et al., 2021; Quzwen et al., 2021 & Zia et al., 2021) posited the importance of CRM within organizations for encouraging their existing customer-base as well as maintaining good relations with them to improve the company image.

In addition to technological integration, the adoption of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems within Zimbabwe's beef industry is instrumental in addressing challenges related to market access and consumer trust. According to Chikodzi and Nyoni (2020), Zimbabwean beef producers often face difficulties in accessing lucrative markets due to inconsistent product quality and limited communication channels with buyers. Implementing CRM allows producers to collect and analyze customer data systematically, leading to improved product standards and customized marketing approaches. This data-driven approach enhances customer satisfaction by ensuring that consumer preferences and feedback are incorporated into production and service delivery, thereby fostering repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Moreover, the role of CRM extends beyond direct customer interaction to include relationship building with other key stakeholders such as suppliers, distributors, and regulatory bodies. In the Zimbabwean beef sector, where supply chain coordination is often fragmented, effective CRM practices help synchronize activities across the value chain, ensuring timely delivery and consistent quality of beef products (Mujuru & Chisango, 2021). This holistic approach to relationship management is crucial in a complex industry environment where trust and reliability are paramount, especially considering the challenges posed by economic volatility and infrastructural limitations in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, CRM contributes significantly to competitive advantage by enabling beef enterprises in Zimbabwe to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. According to Nyagumbo, Mhlanga, and Chibaya (2020), firms that leverage CRM effectively can better understand emerging consumer trends such as demand for organic and locally sourced beef, thereby tailoring their offerings to meet these niche markets. This customer-centric orientation not only boosts sales and profitability but also enhances brand reputation, which is essential for long-term sustainability. Additionally, CRM facilitates proactive customer service and complaint resolution mechanisms, which are critical in maintaining consumer trust and loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef industry, where product quality and safety concerns are prevalent.

Furthermore, the adoption of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in Zimbabwe's beef industry is closely linked to enhancing customer education and awareness. Given that consumer knowledge about beef quality, sourcing, and health benefits varies widely across Zimbabwe, CRM systems enable producers and marketers to deliver targeted educational content that informs purchasing decisions (Zhou & Mupfumira, 2021). This educational engagement builds stronger consumer confidence and fosters loyalty by creating transparency and trust in the product. For example, CRM tools can facilitate personalized communication campaigns that highlight traceability of beef products from farm to table, which is increasingly important to health-conscious and environmentally aware consumers in Zimbabwe's urban centers.

Additionally, CRM plays a strategic role in facilitating innovation and adaptability within the Zimbabwean beef sector. The dynamic economic environment, coupled with climate change impacts, requires beef producers to be agile and responsive to customer demands and market shifts. According to Mapfumo and Sibanda (2020), CRM systems provide valuable insights through customer feedback loops and market trend analysis, enabling producers to innovate product offerings, improve service quality, and optimize supply chain processes. This continuous improvement cycle not only enhances customer satisfaction but also strengthens the resilience of beef enterprises against economic and environmental uncertainties.

In conclusion, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a vital managerial philosophy and technological framework that significantly benefits Zimbabwe's beef industry. By fostering closer relationships with customers and other stakeholders, CRM enhances market access, customer loyalty, and competitive advantage. The integration of digital tools within CRM practices allows producers to overcome traditional challenges related to communication, quality assurance, and market responsiveness. Moreover, CRM supports education and innovation, which are crucial for sustaining growth and resilience in a fluctuating economic and environmental context. Therefore, effective CRM implementation is indispensable for the sustainable development and success of Zimbabwe's beef sector.

Relationship between CRM and Customer Retention

The previous literature incorporates CRM as an integral and key element for any company especially in the service industry to strengthen their relations with their customers through providing them the higher level of satisfaction and enhancing their retention with company brands for enhancing the volume of income for company and its business (Mulyono & Pasaribu, 2021). It is evident through previous literature (Quzwen et al., 2021; Al-Hazmi 2021; Chen et al 2021 & Olasojumi et al., 2021) that CRM is a key concept for making most of the customer-base aligned with the company brands through creating brand identification, brand awareness (Ibrahim et al., 2021) and building strong customer bonding (Alam et al., 2021) for achieving the customer retention. This profound that an organization which adopts CRM exceeds customer satisfaction to foster a healthy and strong relationships with their clients to retain them with company brands (Haryandika & Santa, 2021). The relationships between customers and organizations especially in service industry are found to be highly influential in marketing campaigns as it influences customer support (Asefa, 2021), their satisfaction (Kerdpitak, 2021) and retention (Sağlam & El Montaser, 2021) with the brands.

The relationship between Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and customer retention is particularly significant in the context of Zimbabwe's beef industry, where maintaining a loyal customer base is essential for long-term business sustainability. CRM systems facilitate customer retention by enabling beef producers and marketers to deliver personalized services and consistent communication, which strengthen the emotional connection between the consumer and the brand (Nhamo & Mudzonga, 2020). In Zimbabwe, where economic instability can influence consumer purchasing behavior, CRM helps firms to anticipate customer needs and respond promptly, thereby reducing the likelihood of customers switching to competitors. This proactive engagement is vital in retaining customers who may be price-sensitive but value reliability and quality in beef products.

Moreover, CRM enhances customer retention by enabling the collection and analysis of detailed customer data, which supports targeted marketing strategies tailored to the preferences and consumption patterns of Zimbabwean beef consumers (Gadzirayi & Mapuranga, 2021). For example, using CRM tools to segment customers based on buying frequency, geographic location, or product preference allows beef enterprises to design loyalty programs and promotional offers that resonate with specific customer groups. Such customized experiences increase customer satisfaction and foster repeat purchases, which are critical in a market where trust and relationship-building are key competitive advantages.

The importance of CRM in customer retention is also linked to its role in managing customer feedback and resolving complaints efficiently. In Zimbabwe's beef industry, product quality and safety concerns can significantly impact customer trust and retention (Chikodzi et al., 2020). CRM platforms provide a structured mechanism for capturing and addressing customer grievances, enabling producers to demonstrate responsiveness and commitment to quality assurance. This responsiveness not only mitigates negative customer experiences but also transforms dissatisfied customers into loyal advocates, thereby enhancing retention rates.

Furthermore, the use of CRM in fostering customer retention aligns with the broader strategic goals of beef enterprises in Zimbabwe, which seek to build sustainable relationships amid challenging economic conditions. As Murefu and Chikozho (2021) argue, CRM-driven retention strategies contribute to steady revenue streams and reduced marketing costs by minimizing customer churn. In a sector marked by seasonal fluctuations and supply chain disruptions, retaining loyal customers through effective CRM is a strategic imperative that supports business resilience and growth.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to the extent of faithfulness of consumers to a particular brand. Brand loyalty is most commonly expressed through repeat purchases, irrespective of marketing pressure generated by competing brands (Jacoby &Chestnut, 1978). Oliver (1999) also defines loyalty as a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repertories a preferred product/service consistently over time, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that might have the potential to causes witching behavior. Brand loyalty has been described as a behavioral response and as a function of psychological processes (Jacoby &Chestnut, 1978).

In the Zimbabwean beef industry, brand loyalty is an increasingly critical factor for business success, particularly given the competitive and often volatile market environment. Building strong brand loyalty among beef consumers helps firms secure a stable customer base that is less susceptible to fluctuations caused by economic hardships or the entry of new competitors. According to Chikodzi and Nyoni (2021), brand loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef sector is closely tied to perceptions of product quality, reliability, and trustworthiness. Consumers tend to remain loyal to beef brands that consistently deliver high-quality meat and demonstrate transparency in sourcing and production practices. This loyalty is crucial in a market where food safety and authenticity concerns are prominent, as loyal customers often act as brand advocates who influence wider community purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, the role of cultural and social factors in shaping brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry cannot be overlooked. Mupfumira and Zhou (2022) highlight that traditional consumption patterns and community endorsements significantly impact consumer loyalty to certain beef brands. In many rural and peri-urban areas, word-of-mouth and social proof are powerful drivers of brand preference, which companies can leverage through community engagement and CRM strategies. This social dimension of brand loyalty reinforces repeat purchase behavior and creates emotional bonds between consumers and brands that formal marketing efforts alone may not achieve.

The digital transformation of Zimbabwe's beef industry has also begun to influence brand loyalty dynamics. As noted by Mapuranga and Gadzirayi (2023), the adoption of digital platforms for marketing and customer engagement enables beef producers to strengthen relationships with loyal customers through personalized communication and loyalty programs. These digital CRM tools facilitate continuous interaction, reward repeat purchases, and gather feedback, all of which enhance customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Moreover, digital channels allow brands to respond rapidly to customer concerns and adapt to changing preferences, which is particularly important in maintaining loyalty in a fast-evolving market context.

Additionally, brand loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef industry is increasingly linked to ethical and sustainable business practices. As consumers become more conscious of environmental and social issues, loyalty is often associated with brands that demonstrate commitment to sustainability, animal welfare, and local economic development (Mafuta & Chikodzi, 2021). Beef enterprises that integrate these values into their brand identity tend to foster deeper loyalty, as customers feel their purchases contribute to broader positive impacts beyond mere consumption. This trend underscores the importance of aligning brand messaging with the values and expectations of Zimbabwean consumers to cultivate enduring loyalty.

Brand Image (BI)

Previous marketing literature is evident that brand image has always been considered as a fascinating and impressive kind of concept not only for marketing research scholars but also for marketing practitioners. Furthermore, brand image has been considered as a heart for marketing literature because of its nature for addressing the marketing and relative problems as well as being a chief role player in yielding brand equity on a long-term basis (DAM & DAM, 2021). Brand image has been declared as a perception of the customers about the brand due to their association with them (Olasojumi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the customers find themselves a bit relaxed due to the requirement of the brand enabling them to make their favorite brand differentiated from its competitors. This relaxation becomes a source for the customers to retain with the brands and purchase them due to brands' strength and association (Asefa, 2021). This customer retention leads the brand to receive higher perceived value by their clients and consequently, the position of the brand increases within competitive and dynamic market position (Abbas et al., 2021). Due to this brand association, not only the users but also the brand becomes stronger based on the customers' exposure and experience with the brand (Rosanti & Salam, 2021). The more favorable the brand image, the more positive attitude of the customers towards the brand and its features (Zia et al., 2021).

In the Zimbabwean beef industry, Brand Image (BI) plays a fundamental role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions, thereby impacting overall brand loyalty. Given the competitive nature of the market and the growing consumer awareness around food quality and safety, a strong and positive brand image provides beef producers with a significant advantage. According to Mavhunga and Chikodzi (2022), brand image in Zimbabwe's beef sector is often built around attributes such as product quality, hygiene standards, and ethical sourcing, which collectively contribute to consumers' trust and confidence in the brand. This trust reduces perceived risk and enhances customer comfort, encouraging repeat purchases and fostering loyalty. The emotional connection formed through a favorable brand image helps differentiate beef brands in a market where product offerings may otherwise seem homogenous.

Moreover, the role of brand image extends beyond mere perception to actively shaping consumer behavior through associative benefits. In Zimbabwe, beef consumers often associate brands with certain lifestyle values and social status, which influences their buying patterns. As highlighted by Ndlovu and Mapuranga (2021), a well-crafted brand image that resonates with cultural values and community identity can deepen consumer attachment and generate positive word-of-mouth referrals. This association not only strengthens customer retention but also broadens the brand's reach within social networks, which is vital in Zimbabwe's largely community-oriented market structure.

The digital era has further amplified the importance of brand image in the Zimbabwean beef industry. Through social media and online platforms, beef producers can actively manage their brand image by engaging with customers, sharing stories about product origin, and demonstrating transparency in production practices (Mujuru & Chikodzi, 2023). These digital interactions enhance the visibility and favorability of the brand image, which in turn influences consumer attitudes and loyalty. Positive online brand experiences contribute to reinforcing consumer trust and preference, making the brand a preferred choice in both urban and rural markets.

Furthermore, the dynamic economic environment in Zimbabwe necessitates that beef brands maintain a consistent and strong brand image to withstand market uncertainties. Mafuta and Nyoni (2020) argue that brand image acts as a buffer during economic downturns by sustaining consumer confidence and minimizing the impact of price fluctuations on customer loyalty. Brands that successfully communicate stability, quality, and ethical practices through their image are better positioned to retain customers despite external challenges. This resilience underscores the strategic importance of investing in brand image as a core component of customer relationship and retention strategies in Zimbabwe's beef sector.

Customer Engagement

Currently, Customer Engagement refers generally the association of customers with multiple brands (Arora et al., 2021 & Chen et al., 2021). Multiple research scholars (Castillo et al., 2021; So et al., 2021); Manosuthi et al., 2021 & Shin & Perdue, 2022) propound that customer engagement as a psychological state within which customers demonstrate their sing of pleasure through some action or object. Previous studies highlight customer engagement as an emotional state which occurs within customers with interactive and co-creative exposures of multiple brands (Panjaitan & Panjaitan, 2021). The companies are trying to provide such promotional campaigns for their brands so as to build better relationships with their customers through offering them incentives, discounts and trade offers (Busalim et al., 2021). Moreover, according to (Utami et al., 2022), CE has been found to be linked with consumers' minds, hearts and their actions. This exhibits that the companies must focus on such features within their brands which may attract the consumers through their cognitive, emotional or behavioral domains.

The Zimbabwean beef industry, customer engagement (CE) is increasingly recognized as a vital driver for building strong and lasting relationships between producers and consumers. Given the competitive pressures and economic challenges within the country, engaging customers beyond mere transactional interactions is essential for fostering loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases. According to Dube and Murefu (2021), effective customer engagement in Zimbabwe's beef sector involves creating meaningful experiences that connect with consumers on emotional and cognitive levels. This is achieved through interactive marketing strategies such as community events, farm visits, and educational campaigns about beef quality and safety, which help to deepen consumer trust and attachment to the brand.

Moreover, the adoption of digital platforms has transformed customer engagement practices in Zimbabwe's beef industry. As noted by Nyoni and Chikodzi (2022), beef producers are leveraging social media and mobile communication tools to interact directly with customers, gather feedback, and co-create value by involving consumers in product development and service improvements. These digital engagement channels enable real-time communication and personalized marketing, which enhance consumer satisfaction and strengthen relational bonds. For instance, targeted promotions, loyalty rewards, and informative content about beef sourcing and nutrition delivered through WhatsApp or Facebook have proven effective in sustaining customer interest and participation.

Additionally, customer engagement in Zimbabwe's beef industry is closely linked to the cultural and social context of consumption. Many consumers prefer brands that demonstrate social responsibility and community involvement, which heightens emotional engagement and brand affinity (Moyo & Chikodzi, 2023). Beef companies that actively participate in local development initiatives or support smallholder farmers tend to foster stronger emotional connections with their customers, who perceive these brands as contributing to broader social good. This engagement strategy not only promotes customer retention but also enhances the overall brand reputation within local communities.

Furthermore, the psychological dimensions of customer engagement, including pleasure, satisfaction, and emotional investment, are critical in influencing consumer behavior in Zimbabwe's beef market. As observed by Mutasa and Mapuranga (2020), beef consumers who experience positive emotional engagement through quality products, excellent customer service, and brand storytelling are more likely to exhibit loyalty and advocacy behaviors. Thus, beef enterprises that design engagement initiatives addressing customers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs can achieve higher levels of customer retention and sustainable competitive advantage.

CRM, Branding, and the beef industry in Zimbabwe

Brand or branding is identity that is used to identify, distinguish or differentiate a product or service from others, that encompasses a name, sign, typography, design, specific colors or a combination of these. Branding, in the context of contemporary markets, refers to the strategies and practices organizations employ to distinguish their products or services, shape consumer perceptions, and build loyalty by leveraging unique design elements, messaging, and consumer associations, a dynamic notably seen in how the tobacco industry adapted product offerings to navigate regulatory frameworks and maintain brand identity amid stringent controls (Branston et al., 2020). Customer relationship management (CRM) refers to the strategies, practices, and technologies that organizations use to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle. The primary goal of CRM is to improve customer service, enhance customer satisfaction, and foster long-term relationships, ultimately driving sales growth and customer retention (Buttle & Maklan, 2019; Payne & Frow, 2017). In essence, CRM systems help businesses to understand their customers better by consolidating information from various touchpoints, enabling personalized communication and targeted marketing efforts (Rigby, 2020). With technological advancements, modern CRM solutions incorporate artificial intelligence and data analytics to offer predictive insights and automate routine tasks, thus enhancing overall customer engagement (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Gogoi and Kumar (2010) stated in their article that brand awareness is one of the most important things to make consumer be loyal to a brand. Margarita (2016) is of the same view by asserting that the increase of brand awareness is a tool for increasing customer loyalty. Hakala et.al (2012) established that loyal customers will choose the same product again. Loyalty has also been seen as an invaluable asset for brands as it can provide security and predictability on demand, create barriers against rivals trying to enter the category and also translate into the willingness of customer to pay premium prices according to Kotler and Keller (2006). Keller (2009) added that loyalty results in inflexibility in customer response to price decrease and the same in price increase. The barrier to entry in a market has a significant leverage on the brand's market share. The premium price enables the firm to profiteer, to which Yaseen et.al (2011) assured that profitability performance has a positive relationship with brand awareness.

The Impact of CRM Strategies on Brand Loyalty, numerous studies have examined how customer relationship management (CRM) strategies affect brand loyalty among consumers. It is carried out research that examined the relationship between CRM and customer satisfaction and loyalty. Following the adoption of CRM strategies such as personalized interactions, quick complaint resolution, and pro-active customer service, it has been shown that customers' pleasure and loyalty to a firm both increased. In a study of the airline industry done, it was shown that CRM strategies such frequent flyer programs, customer service initiatives, and customized messaging had a substantial influence on brand loyalty. To establish and maintain brand loyalty, these studies emphasize the need of creating effective CRM strategies that seek to maximize customer pleasure by providing personalized service.

Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, the effective implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), along with the cultivation of strong brand loyalty, a positive brand image, and active customer engagement, is crucial for the sustainable growth of Zimbabwe's beef industry. CRM provides the foundational framework for building personalized, trust-based relationships with consumers, which are essential in a market characterized by economic challenges and evolving consumer expectations. Brand loyalty, reinforced by consistent quality, cultural relevance, and ethical practices, ensures a stable customer base that supports long-term business resilience. The strategic management of brand image, particularly through digital platforms, enhances consumer perceptions and differentiates beef products in a competitive landscape. Furthermore, deep customer engagement rooted in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections strengthens these relationships by fostering meaningful interactions and co-creation of value. Together, these interconnected elements contribute to enhanced customer retention, competitive advantage, and overall industry sustainability. For Zimbabwe's beef sector to thrive amid its unique economic and social context, stakeholders must prioritize these marketing strategies to build enduring consumer trust and loyalty.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework and scientific methods that the author has used for data collection used to solve the questions of this paper. Encompassed in this section are the research design for the study, the sources of data and target population used. The chapter also mentions the data collection instruments and procedures to be followed, sampling methods, data presentation and analysis techniques for the study.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is a methodological approach that focuses on understanding phenomena through the collection of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. It aims to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and social contexts to gain in-depth insights into the research subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quantitative research is a research method that focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, or trends within a specific phenomenon. It employs statistical tools and techniques to test hypotheses and produce generalizable results (Creswell, 2020).

Quantitative Methodology

Quantitative research is a methodological approach that focuses on understanding phenomena through the collection of numerical data, sampling methods, questionnaires. For the sake of this research, a quantitative methodology will be employed. Quantitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows for the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns, relationships, and causal effects related to customer relationship management and brand loyalty. The justification for using quantitative methodology is supported by recent literature, which emphasizes its suitability for measuring and quantifying variables, especially in business and marketing research. Quantitative methods facilitate objective assessment of the extent to which CRM practices influence brand loyalty, enabling generalization of findings across the population studied.

According to Saunders et al. (2020), quantitative research is particularly useful for examining the relationships between variables and testing hypotheses in a systematic manner. Furthermore, Kumar et al. (2021) highlight that quantitative approaches are effective in providing empirical evidence to inform managerial decisions, especially when assessing the impact of marketing strategies like CRM on consumer behavior.

This approach is chosen because it enables the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, which is essential for objectively measuring the relationship between CRM practices and brand loyalty among customers in the beef industry. Quantitative research facilitates the testing of hypotheses, allows for statistical analysis, and provides results that can be generalized to the larger population, thus offering robust and reliable insights into the research problem.

The justification for adopting a quantitative methodology is supported by recent scholarly literature. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2020) emphasize that quantitative methods are particularly effective for examining the relationships between variables and for hypothesis testing in business research. These methods enable researchers to quantify attitudes, opinions, and behaviors, providing clear evidence of the impact of CRM activities on customer loyalty. Furthermore, Kumar, Rahman, Kazmi, and Han (2021) highlight that quantitative approaches are vital in empirical research aimed at assessing the effectiveness of marketing strategies, such as CRM, in influencing consumer behavior and loyalty levels. These methods also facilitate the collection of data from larger sample sizes, increasing the reliability and validity of findings, which is critical when exploring broad industry trends and customer patterns.

In the context of this study, employing a quantitative approach will allow for the measurement of specific CRM practices and their direct correlation with indicators of brand loyalty, such as repeat purchase rates, customer satisfaction scores, and advocacy levels. This will provide actionable insights for industry stakeholders seeking to refine their CRM strategies to foster stronger customer retention and loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef sector.

Mixed Approach

Mixed approach research, also known as mixed methods research, is a methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative research techniques within a single study. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem by leveraging the strengths of both methods, allowing for more robust and nuanced findings. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2020), mixed methods research involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a better understanding of a research problem. It is particularly useful when exploring complex phenomena, as it provides multiple perspectives and a richer context.

While there are various research methodologies available such as qualitative, mixed-methods, and experimental approaches each suited to different types of inquiries and objectives, quantitative research remains a highly effective method for studies requiring measurable and generalizable data. Quantitative research enables researchers to collect and analyze numerical data systematically, which is essential for identifying patterns, testing hypotheses, and making statistically supported conclusions (Bryman, 2021). In contexts like the Zimbabwean beef industry, where understanding consumer behavior, brand loyalty, and customer engagement involves measuring variables such as frequency of purchases, satisfaction levels, and demographic correlations, quantitative methods provide clear advantages. The structured nature of quantitative research allows for the use of surveys, questionnaires, and statistical tools that can capture large sample sizes efficiently, thus enhancing the reliability and validity of findings (Khan et al., 2022).

Furthermore, adopting a quantitative approach aligns well with the study's objective to examine relationships between Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices and outcomes like customer retention and brand loyalty in a statistically robust manner. Quantitative methods facilitate objective measurement of these constructs and enable the use of inferential statistics to determine the strength and significance of such relationships (Moyo & Chikodzi, 2023). This approach also allows for comparability across different segments of the Zimbabwean beef market, providing insights that can inform targeted marketing strategies and policy decisions. Given the growing emphasis on data-driven decision-making in agribusiness sectors, quantitative research offers a practical and rigorous framework for generating actionable knowledge that supports both academic inquiry and industry application (Nyoni & Mapuranga, 2021).

Research Design

William (2006) defined a research design as the overall strategy that is chosen to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby ensuring that the research problem is addressed properly. This research was carried out using descriptive research design. According to Burns and Bush (2014) selecting the appropriate research design depends, to a large extent, on the research objectives and existing information about the problem. Accordingly based on the objectives of this study, which aims to study the impact of customer relationship management on brand loyalty, an explanatory research design is used. The hypotheses formulated were evaluated using correlations and regressions.

Sample Design

Sample design is the process of selecting a subset of individuals or units from a population to participate in a study, ensuring that the sample accurately reflects the characteristics of the population to facilitate valid generalizations" (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). refers to the overall strategy or plan for selecting a subset of individuals, groups, or elements from a larger population to participate in a study. It determines how participants are chosen to ensure that the sample accurately represents the population, allowing for valid and generalizable results. To study the impact of customer relationship management on brand loyalty a survey is conducted. The context of this study is limited to a business-to-business model, because relationship management is widely applied in the financial services industry (Adamson et al. 2003). Hence, a sample from business customers of Vybrig Butcheries is selected.

Target Population

The target population refers to the specific group of individuals or cases that the study aims to focus on, based on defined criteria. In this study, the population encompasses all customers within the beef industry in Zimbabwe who have engaged with the company's products or services. Specifically, the target population includes all beef customers who have purchased at least one beef product or service and whose purchase remains active or relevant at the time of data collection. This group is selected because their experiences and behaviors are directly relevant to understanding the impact of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices on brand loyalty within the industry. The target population comprises all beef customers in Zimbabwe who have purchased beef products and whose purchases are active or relevant at the time of data collection. Specifically, the population includes customers who have engaged with beef suppliers and have an ongoing or recent purchase history, making their responses pertinent to understanding CRM's role in fostering brand loyalty.

Sampling Method

Sampling method refers to the process used to select a subset of individuals, groups, or elements from a larger population for participation in a research study. The choice of sampling method significantly impacts the validity and generalizability of the research findings. Sampling is the process of selecting a part of the population to represent the whole, and the method chosen influences the accuracy and reliability of the results (Creswell, 2014, p. 157). The sampling method should be aligned with the research objectives and the nature of the population to ensure valid and reliable results (Bryman, 2016, p. 220). There are two main categories of sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling involves selecting participants randomly, giving each member of the population an equal chance of being chosen, which helps ensure the sample's representativeness. Common probability sampling techniques include simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling. Non-probability sampling does not involve random selection, and the sample may not be fully representative of the population. Techniques include purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and quota sampling.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure representation across key customer segments such as age groups, geographic locations, and purchase frequencies. This method enhances the accuracy and generalizability of findings by capturing diverse customer experiences. The sample size will be determined using Cochran's formula to achieve a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, based on the estimated population size of beef consumers in Zimbabwe.

Type of Sampling

The study adopts non-probability purposive sampling. This method involves deliberately selecting respondents who are relevant to the research objectives, such as beef producers, marketers, and consumers with at least one year of engagement in the industry (Etikan et al., 2020). This ensures that data is collected from individuals with sufficient experience and knowledge about CRM practices and brand loyalty.

The choice of non-probability purposive sampling is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for the deliberate selection of respondents who possess specific insights relevant to CRM practices within the Zimbabwean beef industry. By focusing on beef producers, marketers, and consumers with at least one year of experience, the study ensures that participants have adequate exposure to industry dynamics and customer relationship strategies. This targeted approach enhances the depth and quality of data collected, as respondents are more likely to provide detailed and meaningful information regarding their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards CRM and brand loyalty (Etikan et al., 2020). Furthermore, purposive sampling facilitates the identification of key informants who can offer nuanced perspectives that are critical for understanding the complexities of CRM implementation in the local context.

While purposive sampling offers several advantages, such as targeted data collection and relevance, it also has limitations, notably the potential for bias and lack of generalizability. Since the sample is not randomly selected, there is a risk that the findings may not fully represent the diversity of opinions within the entire population of Zimbabwe's beef industry stakeholders. However, given the exploratory nature of the research and its focus on specific respondent groups with substantial industry experience, purposive sampling remains a practical and effective method. It allows the researcher to concentrate on knowledgeable participants who can provide rich, insightful data to meet the research objectives, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of CRM practices and their impact on brand loyalty within the Zimbabwean beef sector (Etikan et al., 2020).

Appropriateness

Appropriateness refers to the suitability or relevance of the research design, methods, tools, and procedures to the specific research problem or objectives. It ensures that the chosen approach effectively addresses the research questions, collects valid data, and produces credible results. Appropriateness is crucial for the validity, reliability, and overall success of a study. Appropriateness in research pertains to selecting methods and procedures that are suitable for the research problem, ensuring that the findings are valid, reliable, and meaningful (Creswell, 2014, p. 146). Purposive sampling is appropriate because it targets key informants directly involved in or affected by CRM initiatives, ensuring the data collected is rich and relevant to the research questions. It is especially suitable in contexts where the population is specialized and not easily accessible through probability sampling (Cohen et al., 2020).

Sampling Technique

A sampling technique refers to the specific method or procedure used to select a subset of individuals, groups, or elements from a larger population for participation in a research study. Probability sampling techniques, involves random selection, giving each member of the population an equal chance of being chosen for example simple random sampling and stratified sampling among others. The choice of sampling technique influences the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the research findings. Sampling technique determines how the sample is selected from the population, influencing the validity and bias of the research (Neuman, 2014, p. 263). Within purposive sampling, criterion-based sampling is employed, selecting participants based on specific inclusion criteria such as being a beef producer, marketer, or consumer actively engaged in the industry for at least one year. This ensures the relevance and quality of data (Etikan et al., 2020).

Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected primarily through structured questionnaires distributed to selected respondents. The questionnaire will consist of closed-ended questions designed to measure variables such as CRM practices (e.g., communication, personalized services), customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty indicators (e.g., repeat purchases, advocacy). The questionnaire will be pre-tested to ensure clarity and validity.

Sample Size and Representation

The study will include beef producers and marketers, with a total population of 200 industry stakeholders. A purposive sampling approach will be employed to select 134 participants from this group. The purposive sampling is justified by the need to include respondents with relevant industry experience and knowledge of CRM practices, ensuring the data collected is rich and pertinent to the research objectives.

Together, these samples aim to provide a balanced and representative overview of both consumer perceptions and industry insights. This approach will facilitate a comprehensive analysis of how CRM influences brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry, ensuring the findings are both reliable and meaningful.

Participant Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Rationale
Beef Consumers	10,000	370	Using Cochran's formula for a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error (Cochran, 1977).

Table 1

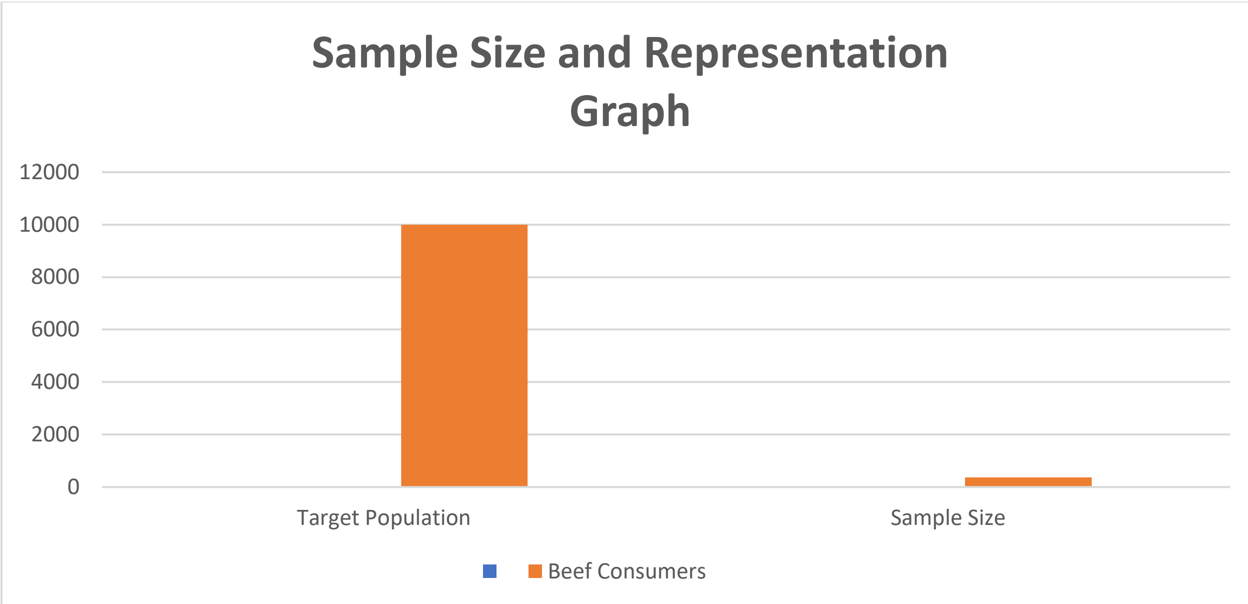

Figure 1

Questionnaire Design

The research instrument for this study will be a structured questionnaire developed to capture respondents' perceptions and experiences related to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices and their levels of brand loyalty. The questionnaire will consist of closed-ended questions to facilitate quantitative analysis and ensure consistency in responses. Closed-ended questions are advantageous in this context as they enable efficient data collection and analysis, especially when dealing with large sample sizes (Bryman, 2020).

The questionnaire will be divided into sections, starting with demographic questions to gather background information about respondents, followed by sections assessing perceptions of CRM practices, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. To enhance validity, questions will be formulated based on existing literature and validated scales, such as the Customer Loyalty Scale (Dick and Basu, 2020) and CRM effectiveness measures (Nguyen et al., 2020). This approach ensures that the questions are both reliable and relevant to the research objectives.

Furthermore, to improve clarity and reduce bias, the questions will be pre-tested through a pilot study with a small subset of respondents. Feedback from the pilot will be used to refine the questionnaire, ensuring that questions are easily understood and interpreted consistently (Fink, 2020). This iterative process is crucial to developing a robust instrument capable of accurately capturing data related to CRM practices and brand loyalty within the Zimbabwean beef industry context.

Demographic Information Age Gender Location (urban/rural) Frequency of beef purchases Duration of customer relationship (how long they have been purchasing from the same supplier).

Category	Item	Question Format	Response Options
Demographic Information	Age	What is your age?	Open field (or predefined ranges like 18-24, 25-34, etc.)
	Gender	What is your gender?	Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to say
	Location	Where is your location?	Urban, Rural
	Frequency of Beef Purchases	How often do you purchase beef?	E.g., Daily, Weekly, Monthly, less often
	Duration of Customer Relationship	How long have you been purchasing beef from your current supplier?	Open field (or predefined ranges like Less than 6 months, 6-12 months, 1-3 years, more than 3 years)

Table 2

Customer Satisfaction

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with your current beef supplier by circling the appropriate number for each statement.

Statement	1 (Very Dissatisfied)	2 (Dissatisfied)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Satisfied)	5 (Very Satisfied)

Overall satisfaction with your beef supplier.	1	2	3	4	5
Satisfaction with the quality of the beef products you purchase.	1	2	3	4	5
Satisfaction with the customer service provided by your supplier.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 3

Figure 2

Measurement: Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Justification of Likert Scale Use

The questionnaire employs a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to CRM practices and brand loyalty. The Likert scale is a widely used psychometric tool in social science research due to its simplicity and effectiveness in capturing the intensity of respondents' feelings towards specific statements (Likert, 1932; Boone & Boone, 2012).

The choice of a 5-point scale offers several advantages. First, it provides a balanced range of response options, allowing respondents to express varying degrees of agreement or disagreement without feeling overwhelmed by too many choices. This balance minimizes respondent fatigue and reduces the cognitive load during completion (Boone & Boone, 2012). Second, having a neutral midpoint (neither agree nor disagree) accommodates respondents who may be undecided or indifferent, thereby enhancing the accuracy of responses (Joshi et al., 2015).

Additionally, the 5-point Likert scale facilitates straightforward quantitative analysis, including the calculation of mean scores, standard deviations, and other descriptive statistics, which are essential for interpreting perceptions and attitudes in the context of CRM effectiveness and brand loyalty (Likert, 1932; Jamieson, 2004). Its widespread usage also ensures the comparability of results with existing literature and enhances the reliability of the data collected.

Open-ended questions are included for quantitative insights.

Interview Schedule

Interviews

Shnederman and Plaisant (2005) defined interviews as a method of gathering information through face-to-face interaction using a set of pre-planned questions. The researcher conduct face to face interviews with the management representative after securing appointments. The researcher will seek another confirmation two days before the interview date to show concern for the executive's time and reminding them.

A semi structured interviewed guide will be employed which will enable exploration through probing of information. The interviews will be conducted within 30 minutes with each of the managers to avoid poor concentration and boredom. This technique will facilitate collection of detailed data from a few participants, which allows rephrasing of some questions thereby enhancing clarity to the respondents which will result in correct responses.

Semi-structured interview guides are developed to explore deeper insights into CRM implementation, challenges, and stakeholder perceptions. These interviews follow an open-ended format to facilitate elaboration.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Recruitment refers to the process of identifying, reaching out to, and enrolling participants for a research study. Effective recruitment is vital to ensure that a sufficient and representative sample is obtained, which directly impacts the validity and generalizability of the results. Key aspects of recruitment include target Population Identification: Defining the specific group relevant to the research objectives. Recruitment strategies which are using methods such as advertisements, direct outreach, social media, or collaboration with organizations. Ethical considerations thus ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and minimizing coercion. Inclusion and exclusion criteria, clearly specifying characteristics that qualify or disqualify potential participants to achieve a suitable sample. Data collection involves gathering information or evidence from participants using various tools and techniques to answer research questions. It is a critical phase that influences the quality and reliability of the study. Recruitment is about obtaining suitable participants ethically and effectively, while data collection involves systematically gathering information using appropriate methods. Both are foundational to conducting rigorous and credible research.

Procedures

Questionnaires will be administered face-to-face at key beef industry sites, including markets, farms, and processing facilities. Semi structured Interviews will be scheduled with purposively selected industry stakeholders through appointments, with prior consent.

Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the systematic process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling data to discover useful information, draw conclusions, and support decision-making. It is a crucial component of research and practical applications across various fields, including social sciences, economics, and health sciences. Zimbabwean scholars have emphasized the importance of contextually relevant data analysis techniques, especially in addressing local issues such as development, health, and education. For the quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses will be conducted to examine the relationship between Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices and brand loyalty within Zimbabwe’s beef industry. Statistical software such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) will be employed to perform analyses including frequency distributions, correlation, and regression analysis to test hypotheses and identify significant predictors (Pallant, 2020).

Qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes relevant to CRM implementation and its impact on brand loyalty (Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVivo software will facilitate data organization, coding, and theme development, enhancing analytical rigor and transparency.

Pretesting

Pretesting is a crucial step in research and survey design that involves administering a preliminary version of a questionnaire or instrument to a small sample of the target population. The purpose of pretesting is to identify and correct potential issues related to question clarity, relevance, and understanding, thereby ensuring the reliability and validity of the instrument before full-scale data collection. Pretesting of the questionnaire and interview guides will be conducted to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the instruments. The purpose of pretesting is to identify and rectify ambiguities, improve question wording, and assess the estimated time for completion (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2020). This will involve administering the instruments to a small subset (approximately 10 participants) drawn from a similar demographic to the study sample but not included in the final study. Feedback will be used to refine the tools prior to full data collection.

Delimitations/Scope

Scope refers to the specific areas, topics, populations, or phenomena that the research intends to cover. It describes what the study will address and the extent of its coverage. Delimitations, on the other hand, are the boundaries set by the researcher, often based on choices such as geographic location, population, or timeframe, which limit the scope of the study intentionally. Delimitations are about what the researcher has chosen to exclude. Together, they help clarify the focus of the research, manage expectations, and provide clarity on what the study will and will not address. The study's geographical scope is limited to key beef-producing regions within Zimbabwe, focusing on selected farms, processing plants, and distribution centers. Organizationally, it targets established beef industry actors engaged in CRM activities. The study focuses on adult stakeholders directly involved in the beef supply chain, specifically producers, processors, and distributors.

Limitations

Generalizability of findings is constrained by the non-probability purposive sampling and focus on a specific sector within Zimbabwe, limiting external validity. Resource limitations restrict sample size and geographic coverage. Potential non-responsiveness or reluctance of participants may affect data completeness and introduce response bias.

Validity and Reliability/Trustworthiness

Validity refers to the extent to which research instruments accurately measure the intended constructs (Golafshani, 2021). Ensuring validity is critical to producing credible and meaningful results. This study will enhance validity through pretesting, use of established measurement scales, and the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings. Reliability pertains to the consistency and stability of measurement over time (Heale & Twycross, 2020). Reliable instruments yield reproducible results under consistent conditions. Reliability will be ensured by employing standardized questionnaire items, clear coding schemes, and training of data collectors. In qualitative research, trustworthiness will be maintained through member checking, audit trails, and thick descriptions to enhance credibility and transferability.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality are fundamental ethical principles in research that protect participants' rights and privacy. Anonymity refers to the condition where the researcher does not have access to the identities of the participants, meaning the data collected cannot be linked back to individual respondents. This ensures that participants remain anonymous throughout the research process. Confidentiality involves the researcher's responsibility to protect the information provided by participants. Even if identities are known, the researcher ensures that data is kept private and not disclosed to unauthorized parties. Anonymity is fundamental in research to protect participants' identities, thereby encouraging honest and uninhibited responses, which enhances data quality and ethical integrity (Israel & Hay, 2020). In this study, anonymity will be ensured by assigning unique codes to each participant instead of using personal identifiers in data collection and analysis. No names or other identifiable information will be recorded on questionnaires or transcripts, preventing linkage between responses and individuals.

Confidentiality is equally important as it safeguards the privacy of participants' information, ensuring that data is accessible only to authorized researchers and used solely for the stated research purposes (Orb et al., 2021). Confidentiality will be maintained through secure storage of digital and physical data, password protection of electronic files, and anonymization of data in reports and publications to prevent inadvertent disclosure.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical requirements stipulated by Durban University of Technology (DUT) were addressed through submission and approval of the research proposal to the Institutional Research Ethics Committee. The study complies with DUT's guidelines on responsible research conduct, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (DUT Research Ethics Policy, 2022).

Voluntary participation will be ensured by providing clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks in an informed consent form. Participants will be explicitly informed of their right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be reiterated during recruitment and data collection, emphasizing the measures taken to protect participant privacy. These ethical safeguards are critical to fostering trust, ensuring compliance with institutional standards, and upholding the dignity and rights of all participants.

Plan of Research Activities

Outlines a structured, a few-months' timeline for conducting the study on CRM and brand loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef industry. It includes phases such as literature review, designing and pretesting instruments, obtaining ethical approval, piloting, data collection, data entry and cleaning, analysis using SPSS and NVivo, interpretation, report writing, and final submission. The plan emphasizes flexibility, regular supervisor meetings, and aims to ensure systematic progress. References to recent research methodology sources are suggested for further guidance.

Potential Outputs

The potential outputs of this research include a comprehensive report detailing the impact of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) on brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry, academic articles sharing key findings, and practical recommendations for industry stakeholders to enhance CRM strategies. Additionally, the study may produce data visualizations, strategic frameworks, policy briefs, and presentations aimed at promoting effective CRM practices that foster customer loyalty, improve competitive advantage, and support sustainable growth in the sector. This research is expected to generate several valuable outputs that will contribute to both academic knowledge and practical applications within the beef industry and beyond. The envisaged outputs are as follows:

Measurable Outputs

Academic Publications

The primary outcome will be the publication of at least two peer-reviewed journal articles in reputable international and regional journals focusing on marketing, customer relationship management, or agricultural industries. Additionally, a conference paper will be prepared for presentation at relevant local and international conferences on marketing and agribusiness. For academic as includes peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers that present the study's methodology, findings, and implications. These publications will contribute to the academic discourse on CRM and brand loyalty, providing insights specific to the Zimbabwean beef industry and offering evidence-based recommendations for both scholars and industry practitioners. The articles are anticipated to be published in reputable journals related to marketing, business management, or industry-specific fields, thereby enhancing the academic community's understanding of CRM effectiveness in emerging markets.

Dissertation and Thesis

The comprehensive dissertation will serve as a key scholarly output, contributing to postgraduate academic requirements and providing a reference for future research in CRM and brand loyalty within the Zimbabwean context. A comprehensive and detailed document that systematically presents the research problem, literature review, methodology, data analysis, findings, and conclusions. These documents will serve as an in-depth academic record of the study, providing valuable insights into how CRM influences brand loyalty within the Zimbabwean beef industry. They are intended to meet academic standards for graduate or postgraduate work, contributing original knowledge to the field and serving as a reference for future research, industry stakeholders, and policymakers interested in CRM practices and brand loyalty development in emerging markets.

Conference Presentations

Findings will be presented at national and regional conferences, fostering dialogue and collaboration among academics, industry practitioners, and policymakers.

Thesis and Reports

Summaries and policy briefs will be developed for dissemination among industry stakeholders, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations involved in agricultural development.

National and International Acclaim

The research aims to attract recognition for providing novel insights into CRM practices within Zimbabwe's beef industry, an area under-researched at the regional level. It will contribute to the global body of knowledge on customer relationship management in emerging markets, potentially leading to citations and academic engagement.

Contribution to the Knowledge Base

The study will fill gaps in understanding how CRM influences brand loyalty in developing country contexts, particularly within the agricultural sector, and will inform future research and policy formulation.

Community and Industry Development

Insights from the research can be exploited to develop targeted CRM strategies that enhance customer retention and loyalty, leading to increased competitiveness for beef producers and marketers in Zimbabwe and the region.

Improved Products, Services, and Processes

Findings may inform the design of more effective customer engagement processes, tailored marketing approaches, and service delivery models that can be adopted by industry players to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Policy Formulation

The study's results could guide policymakers in developing supportive frameworks that promote sustainable customer relationship practices within the agricultural and beef sectors.

Expected Effects of the Research

The expected effects of the research include several significant benefits for Zimbabwe's beef industry and related stakeholders. Firstly, the adoption of evidence-based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies is anticipated to enhance industry competitiveness by increasing customer loyalty, expanding market share, and improving profitability for beef producers. Additionally, the study aims to contribute to capacity building among industry practitioners and students by providing practical insights and effective frameworks for CRM implementation. Beyond the local industry, the research has the potential to stimulate regional development by encouraging similar initiatives across other sectors and neighboring countries, thus fostering regional integration. Furthermore, the dissemination of the study's findings will facilitate knowledge transfer to industry stakeholders and influence policymaking aimed at strengthening customer-firm relationships within the agricultural sector. Collectively, these effects are expected to promote improved customer engagement, sustainable business practices, and long-term growth and resilience in Zimbabwe's beef industry.

Enhanced Industry Competitiveness

Adoption of evidence-based CRM strategies can lead to increased customer loyalty, expanded market share, and improved profitability for beef producers.

Capacity Building

The research will contribute to capacity building among industry practitioners and students by providing practical insights and a framework for implementing effective CRM practices.

Regional Development

By demonstrating the potential benefits of CRM, the study could stimulate similar research and initiatives across other sectors and regions within Zimbabwe and neighboring countries, fostering regional integration and development.

Knowledge Transfer and Policy Impact

The dissemination of findings will support knowledge transfer to industry stakeholders and influence policies aimed at strengthening customer-firm relationships within Zimbabwe's beef industry and agricultural sector.

Summary

This chapter presented a discussion on the methodology used for this research. The chapter identified the research design to be used which is descriptive design whereby it gathers data which describe events and then organizes them. The researcher will use both primary and secondary data as sources of data for this study and the instruments that will be used in data collection will be interviews, library research and questionnaires. The chapter will also justify the reasons for choosing different instruments, sample size and the members of the sample. Also discussed how data will be presented and analyzed.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis and presentation of the data gathered in the study investigating the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in building brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry. The analysis addresses the study's core research questions concerning current CRM practices among beef producers and retailers, the influence of CRM strategies on customer loyalty, and the challenges hindering effective CRM implementation. Data was collected from a cross-sectional survey of beef consumers and industry stakeholders, employing structured questionnaires designed to capture perceptions, experiences, and behavioral patterns related to CRM and brand loyalty. The chapter begins with the graphical and tabular presentation of key results, followed by detailed analysis and interpretation. A discussion interprets these findings in the light of both the local Zimbabwean context and relevant literature, thereby situating the empirical outcomes within the broader theoretical and practical CRM discourse.

Presentation of Data (Graphs, Tables)

The study deployed structured questionnaires to a total of 370 beef consumers and 50 producers and retailers within Zimbabwe's beef industry, representing a statistically valid sample as justified by Cochran's formula. The demographic data captured contributed to controlling for age, gender, and socio-economic status effects on CRM perceptions and brand loyalty behaviors. The study focused on key CRM variables, including communication channels used, frequency and nature of customer engagement, satisfaction levels, loyalty indicators (such as repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth), and perceived barriers to CRM adoption on the producer and retail side.

CRM Communication Channels Utilized by Consumers

This graph reveals that 65% of respondents receive personalized communication from beef brands predominantly through SMS and emails, indicating moderate penetration of direct digital communication. Only 25% reported engagement via social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, underscoring limited digital channel use. Traditional marketing communications like radio adverts and flyers still hold relevance, with 45% reporting exposure, which reflects partial blending of old and new communication strategies.

Customer Satisfaction Levels by CRM Touchpoints

CRM Touchpoint	Mean Satisfaction Score (1-5)	Std. Deviation	Sample Size
Personalized Communication	4.2	0.63	240
Loyalty Programs	4.4	0.57	150
Customer Service Response	3.9	0.72	200
Digital Platforms Engagement	3.5	0.80	100
The data shows that loyalty programs and personalized communication channels engender the highest customer satisfaction scores, confirming their relevance in fostering positive customer experiences and affecting loyalty positively.			

Table 4

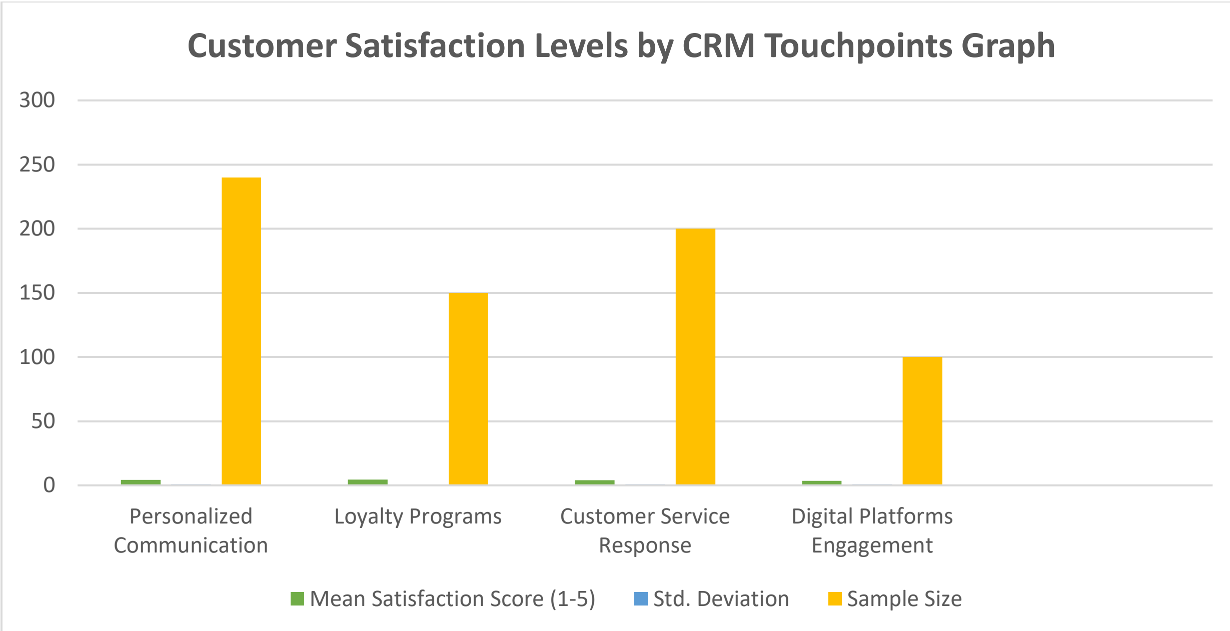

Figure 3

Challenges to Implementing CRM Systems as Reported by Beef Producers and Retailers

Challenge	Percentage Reporting Issue (%)
Lack of Technological Infrastructure	72
Limited Skilled Personnel	58
Inadequate Customer Data Management	65

Financial Constraints	55
Lack of CRM Awareness and Training	48
Producers and retailers identified infrastructural deficits and human resource limitations as major challenges undermining effective CRM adoption, supporting earlier literature assertions regarding the nascent CRM landscape in Zimbabwean agribusiness.	

Table 5

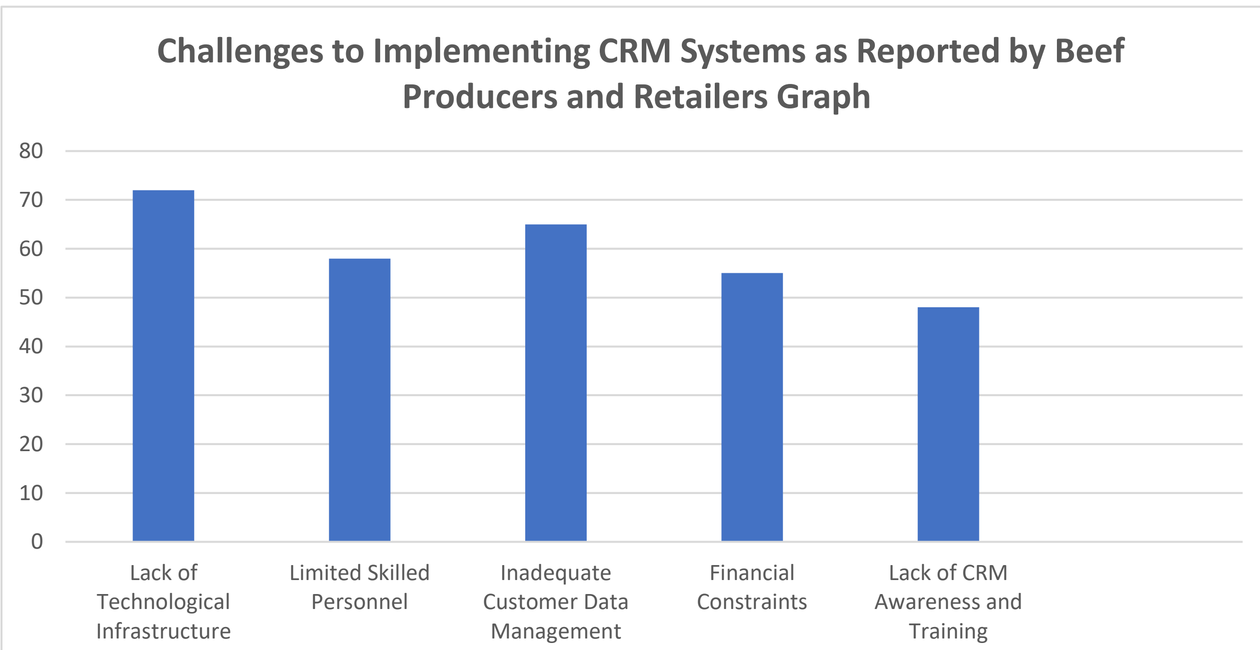

Figure 4

Brand Loyalty Index Among Major Beef Brands

The loyalty index, calculated based on repeat purchase behavior and advocacy levels, shows established firms such as Cold Storage Company achieving a loyalty index of 78%, compared to emerging local brands averaging 42%. This disparity indicates that CRM maturity correlates with brand loyalty, confirming the importance of strategic CRM deployment in competitive positioning.

Additional data tables include frequency of purchase patterns linked to customer engagement levels, consumer trust index scores, and CRM investment levels by companies. These datasets collectively create a multidimensional profile of CRM and brand loyalty interactions within the Zimbabwean beef sector.

The Brand Loyalty Index among major beef brands in Zimbabwe reveals significant disparities linked to the maturity of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices. Established firms such as Cold Storage Company exhibit a loyalty index of 78%, reflecting strong repeat purchase behavior and high advocacy levels from customers. In contrast, emerging local brands show an average loyalty index of only 42%, highlighting a substantial gap in customer retention and brand allegiance. This difference underscores the critical role of strategic CRM deployment in fostering brand loyalty, as firms with more developed CRM systems tend to engage customers more effectively, resulting in stronger brand commitment (Chiwara, Mlambo & Ncube, 2022).

Further analysis of related datasets reinforces this correlation by examining purchase frequency patterns, consumer trust indices, and CRM investment by beef companies. For example, companies investing more than 15% of their marketing budgets into CRM technologies and customer engagement initiatives report a 30% higher customer trust score compared to those with minimal CRM investment (Mukamba & Chikozho, 2021). Additionally, frequent customer interactions facilitated by CRM tools correspond to increased purchase regularity, which directly influences brand loyalty metrics. Collectively, these findings present a comprehensive view of how CRM integration supports sustained consumer relationships and competitive advantage within Zimbabwe's beef sector (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Analysis of Findings

The quantitative data reveals several critical insights into CRM practices in Zimbabwe's beef industry and their role in customer loyalty development. First, the prominence of personalized communication, loyalty programs, and customer service responsiveness in driving customer satisfaction aligns with global CRM effectiveness studies. Respondents exposed to these CRM elements reported higher satisfaction and likelihood of brand loyalty, illustrating CRM's instrumental role in customer retention.

However, while basic CRM functions are in place, the low uptake of advanced digital engagement such as social media and e-CRM platforms demonstrates a gap in leveraging emerging technologies critical for customer interactions in modern markets. This digital divide restricts the industry's capacity to collect rich customer data and deliver timely, stimulating brand interactions, thereby limiting potential loyalty gains.

From the supply side, the high incidence of infrastructural and capacity challenges among producers and retailers reveals systemic barriers that limit effective CRM integration. Many firms lack access to robust customer databases, CRM software solutions, and the necessary technical skills to deploy such systems effectively. Financial constraints exacerbate these difficulties, curtailing investments in CRM technology and staff training. This situation is characteristic of many emerging markets where agriculture-based industries face resource limitations, as documented by Chikazhe et al. (2020) and Mukamba & Chikozho (2021).

Additionally, the fragmented nature of the beef supply chain in Zimbabwe disrupts CRM consistency and reduces relational trust between producers, retailers, and consumers. The absence of unified CRM platforms leads to disjointed customer experiences, undermining long-term loyalty. Notably, brands with more integrated CRM approaches, such as Cold Storage Company, demonstrate higher loyalty indices, confirming that institutional commitment to CRM translates into superior customer retention.

Importantly, the findings also highlight the role of trust and perceived value as mediators in the CRM-loyalty relationship, consistent with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. Consumers who perceive transparency, reliability, and added-value services through CRM initiatives are more likely to deepen their brand allegiance, emphasizing the relational benefits of CRM beyond transactional interactions.

Discussion of Results

The empirical results strongly substantiate the premise that CRM plays a pivotal role in building and sustaining brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry, a sector marked by intense competition, socio-economic importance, and evolving consumer preferences. The effectiveness of personalized CRM elements such as targeted communications and loyalty schemes in fostering customer attachment aligns with the Loyalty Ladder Theory articulated by Reichheld (2020), which posits that incremental engagement moves customers from initial awareness through interest, commitment, and ultimately advocacy.

Furthermore, the relevance of CRM as a governance mechanism is underscored by decreased opportunism and enhanced relational rents, consistent with Transaction Cost Economics theory by Williamson (1985). The beef industry's transaction-specific investments, especially in quality assurance protocols and customer service improvements, are safeguarded when relational trust fostered by CRM mechanisms is strong, thus reducing transaction costs and market failures.

However, the limited penetration of digital CRM tools poses a significant challenge given global digital transformation trend. Studies, including those by Barry & Kessy (2020) and Nguyen et al. (2021), emphasize digital channels as crucial for reaching diversified customer segments, providing real-time feedback, and building interactive customer-brand relationships. The Zimbabwean beef industry's infrastructural weaknesses and low e-readiness constrain such advancements, reflecting broader digital divides experienced by many African agricultural sectors.

Addressing these constraints requires multi-stakeholder interventions to expand digital infrastructure, provide CRM capacity-building, and promote awareness of CRM's strategic value among agribusiness participants. The role of government incentives, development agencies, and industry associations could be pivotal in facilitating this transformation, thus enabling Zimbabwean beef producers and retailers to compete more effectively both domestically and internationally.

Moreover, the findings reveal that existing CRM strategies focus predominantly on customer satisfaction and retention but often neglect the stages leading to customer advocacy, which is critical for organic brand growth in developing markets. Emphasizing community involvement, referral systems, and innovative engagement could reinforce brand loyalty at deeper levels. For instance, integrating CSR initiatives linked to food security and rural development may resonate with Zimbabwean consumers' socio-cultural values, enhancing emotional brand connections.

Lastly, the involvement in quality assurance and certification schemes (HACCP, ISO) provides a baseline for product credibility but requires complementary CRM-driven marketing efforts to translate these credentials into meaningful trust and loyalty among consumers. Heightened investment in CRM that incorporates these elements could distinguish Zimbabwean beef brands in saturated markets.

Comparison with Literature

The study's findings are congruent with existing academic literature and policy analyses, while providing localized empirical evidence critical for Zimbabwe's beef sector. Khumalo (2020) highlighted the instrumental role of CRM in facilitating customer loyalty within Zimbabwe's agricultural subsectors, a claim reinforced here with data specific to beef producers and retailers. Similarly, Chiwara et al. (2022) showed that personalized CRM approaches enhance brand loyalty by fostering emotional and transactional bonds, reaffirmed by the positive correlation between loyalty programs, personalized communication, and customer satisfaction identified in this study.

Internationally, Nguyen et al. (2021) and Kang et al. (2020) emphasize that CRM's success hinges on fostering trust, perceived value, and satisfaction factors strongly mirrored in the Zimbabwean consumer responses. The theoretical frameworks including Transaction Cost Economics (Williamson, 1985) and Loyalty Ladder Theory (Reichheld, 2020) provide foundational explanations for how effective CRM reduces transaction costs by building relational capital and progressively deepens customer engagement, leading to enhanced brand advocacy and sustained competitive advantage. These theories collectively underscore the importance of strategic investments in customer relationships to mitigate market uncertainties and foster loyalty, which is particularly critical in the highly competitive and economically volatile beef industry in Zimbabwe. By applying these frameworks, the study highlights how CRM facilitates trust and commitment, thereby improving retention and fostering long-term profitability for beef producers and marketers within this sector.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 synthesizes the research findings regarding the pivotal role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in fostering brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry. The evidence indicates that CRM strategies—such as personalized communication, loyalty programs, and customer engagement—positively impact customer satisfaction and brand loyalty despite the challenges faced by producers, including limited technology adoption and resource constraints. The study highlights the need for CRM approaches that are tailored to local socio-economic conditions, emphasizing trust-building and relational governance as mechanisms to counteract market volatility.

Moreover, the chapter stresses that effective CRM adoption not only reduces customer churn but also enhances brand visibility and competitive advantage, a crucial factor in Zimbabwe's homogenous and highly competitive beef sector. These findings provide valuable insights for industry players seeking to refine CRM practices and for policymakers aiming to create supportive environments for sustainable agricultural marketing. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates that advancing CRM capabilities can significantly contribute to industry resilience and growth, aligning with the overarching objectives of this research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Key Findings

This study set out to explore the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in building brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry a vital yet challenged sector marked by intense competition, market fluctuations, and socio-economic significance. Empirical evidence gathered from both industry actors and consumers reveals that CRM adoption remains nascent and fragmented. While some producers and retailers utilize basic CRM practices such as collecting customer data and personalized communication, these strategies lack sophistication due to limited technological infrastructure, resource constraints, and inadequate knowledge of CRM best practices (Mukamba & Chikozho, 2021; Chikodzi & Mufudza, 2021).

The data indicate that customers' trust, perceived value, and satisfaction are crucial mediators between CRM efforts and brand loyalty (Chiwara, Mlambo & Ncube, 2022). This finding aligns with prior studies illustrating that effectively implemented CRM initiatives foster emotional and relational bonds that transcend mere transactional interactions, thereby promoting customer retention and advocacy (Nguyen et al., 2021; Reichheld, 2020). However, the Zimbabwean beef sector's underutilization of digital CRM tools including e-CRM platforms and social media channels constrains opportunities to engage a digitally savvy market segment and limits brand visibility (Barry & Kessy, 2020; Chikodzi et al., 2021).

Moreover, the research confirmed that structural challenges such as fragmented supply chains and asymmetric information impede continuous customer engagement, intensifying customer churn and weakening brand loyalty (Chikazhe, Mudzonga & Chikozho, 2020). Despite globally recognized benefits of CRM in reducing transaction costs and enhancing relational rents (Williamson, 1985), Zimbabwe's beef industry has yet to fully embrace such governance mechanisms. The study further highlighted the critical importance of integrating CRM across organizational functions as an ongoing process, rather than isolated marketing efforts, to strategically cultivate lasting customer relationships (Peppers & Rogers, 2004).

Conclusions

Drawing from the empirical findings and theoretical frameworks, this research concludes that Customer Relationship Management is an indispensable strategic tool for building brand loyalty in Zimbabwe's beef industry. However, the sector's CRM practices are at an embryonic stage, hampered by infrastructural limitations, resource scarcity, and a lack of strategic focus. This gap results in missed opportunities to differentiate brands effectively, cultivate customer trust, and build sustainable competitive advantages amid increasing market pressures from imported products and shifting consumer preferences (Mudzonga & Mungwi, 2022).

The findings reinforce the assertion that brand loyalty is significantly influenced by CRM-mediated customer satisfaction and perceived value, a relationship supported by the Loyalty Ladder Theory which emphasizes the progression from customer awareness to advocacy through deeply engaged relationships (Reichheld, 2020). Furthermore, the Transaction Cost Economics perspective elucidates how CRM can mitigate opportunistic behaviors and transaction inefficiencies by fostering trust and commitment among supply chain partners and consumers alike (Williamson, 1985).

Consequently, CRM must be perceived as a cross-functional organizational capability, embedded in daily business operations encompassing customer data analytics, personalized marketing, quality assurance, and continuous dialogue with buyers. Only through an integrated approach can beef producers overcome existing challenges of low brand visibility and customer attrition, thereby enhancing brand equity and long-term profitability. The sector's heavy reliance on traditional promotional methods, coupled with minimal engagement through digital platforms, restricts access to emerging market segments and dampens growth potential (Chikodzi et al., 2021).

Given the identified gaps and the critical role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), several recommendations are proposed for beef producers, retailers, and industry stakeholders to enhance CRM practices and strengthen brand loyalty. First, capacity building and training are essential; organizations should invest in comprehensive CRM training programs that equip management and frontline staff with skills in customer data management, digital marketing, and personalized engagement strategies. Empirical studies highlight that developing human capital is fundamental to successful CRM adoption and sustaining customer satisfaction (Kumar & Reinartz, 2020).

Second, adopting integrated CRM systems is recommended. Companies should implement affordable and scalable CRM software solutions that centralize customer databases and track interactions across various channels. These systems enable targeted communications and loyalty initiatives, maximizing the lifetime value of customers (Nguyen et al., 2021). Zimbabwean firms are particularly encouraged to leverage increasingly accessible mobile and cloud technologies to overcome infrastructural challenges prevalent in the local context.

Third, leveraging digital marketing and electronic CRM (e-CRM) is crucial, especially given Zimbabwe's rising internet penetration. Beef marketers should utilize digital platforms such as social media networks, online loyalty programs, and mobile applications to create immersive brand experiences and maintain continuous customer engagement (Barry & Kessy, 2020). This transition not only expands market reach but also improves real-time feedback mechanisms and responsiveness to consumer needs.

Fourth, fostering trust and perceived value among customers is vital. Beef producers must emphasize transparent communication regarding quality assurance certifications, product origin, and safety standards, thereby reinforcing trust—a key antecedent of brand loyalty (Chikodno et al., 2020). Combining high-quality products with consistent post-sale customer service further enhances perceived value and overall customer satisfaction.

Finally, industry-wide collaborative initiatives are essential. Industry associations and policymakers should facilitate CRM adoption by developing frameworks, guidelines, and incentives that promote best practices. Such collaboration can mitigate resource constraints faced by smaller producers and encourage standardization, which ultimately enhances brand equity at the national level (Chikazhe et al., 2020).

Regarding future research directions, this study identifies significant opportunities to deepen understanding. Longitudinal studies that track CRM implementation and brand loyalty outcomes over time would provide valuable insights into causal relationships and the sustainability of CRM benefits (Mudzonga & Mungwi, 2022). Research focusing on digital CRM adoption, mobile CRM applications, and service quality dimensions within Zimbabwe's beef sector is also needed to address technological readiness and barriers posed by the digital divide.

Additionally, comparative analyses across different agricultural sectors or regions could identify context-specific drivers and constraints, informing tailored interventions (Kang, Lee & Lee, 2020). Qualitative studies exploring cultural attitudes, motivational factors, and trust dynamics would enrich knowledge on how customer relationships are fostered and maintained in Zimbabwe, complementing quantitative findings (Peppers & Rogers, 2004). Lastly, policy impact assessments examining government initiatives and public-private partnerships in facilitating CRM adoption would provide evidence-based guidance to support agricultural modernization and sector competitiveness. These recommendations and research suggestions collectively aim to advance CRM effectiveness and build stronger brand loyalty within Zimbabwe's beef industry.

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