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Editorial Contemporary Themes in Business and Management Research

**Nnamdi O. Madichie &
Sebastian Lesniewski**

Nnamdi O. Madichie is Editor-in-Chief of the Bloomsbury Institute
Working Paper Series. Sebastian Lesniewski is Associate Editor.

In today's fast-evolving global business landscape, research across various domains highlights key trends and challenges that industries face. From artificial intelligence (AI) and customer experience (CX) to working capital management, entrepreneurial ecosystems, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and employee development, the underlying narratives often converge on innovation, strategic adaptability, and the pursuit of value creation.

This issue of the working papers cuts across four themes – notably The Role of AI in Enhancing Customer Experience, Learning from SME Success in Retail, CSR and Brand Loyalty, and Training and Development in the IT Sector.

The Role of AI in Enhancing Customer Experience. Olatunde Ola's exploration of AI chatbots in retail underscores the transformative potential of technology in reshaping customer experiences. This first contribution in the current issue reveals how AI-powered chatbots enhance post-sales interactions, fostering loyalty and satisfaction. Customers increasingly value personalization and are even willing to pay more for tailored experiences, with 81% of respondents affirming a positive impact of AI chatbots on their engagement. These findings point to a common theme: technology as a catalyst for better service and deeper customer relationships, a trend resonating across sectors.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Loyalty. Parminder Kaur's investigation into Apple Inc.'s CSR policies provides valuable insights into how social initiatives align with brand loyalty. The findings emphasize that consumer awareness of CSR efforts directly correlates with increased loyalty. Companies like Apple are urged to refine their strategies, ensuring alignment with global standards while transparently communicating these initiatives. This research reinforces a recurring theme: modern consumers expect businesses to act ethically, and their loyalty hinges on these values.

Learning from SME Success in Retail. Abraham Alejandro Burgos Ayala's comparative analysis of English SMEs and their Paraguayan counterparts showcases the global relevance of entrepreneurial success factors. In this third contribution, it is argued that traits like trust-building, motivation, and adaptability appear universal, and can enable bridging cultural and economic gaps. The study further suggests that by fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem and addressing specific cultural and policy challenges, Paraguay can replicate the success of English SMEs. This cross-cultural applicability reflects the interconnectedness of global business practices and the value of shared learning.

Training and Development in the IT Sector. Dinesh Kumar Namballa's study on training and development in

Mumbai's financial IT sector highlights the strategic role of human resource management (HRM) in improving employee performance. In this fourth and final contribution, it is argued that by equipping employees with the relevant skills, organizations can enhance productivity and profitability. While this may be considered a no-brainer, it is worth reiterating that training emerges as not just an operational necessity, but a competitive advantage in a knowledge-driven economy.

In this issue in the series, several overarching themes unify diverse perspectives on organisational resilience. First, whether through AI chatbots or corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, businesses must prioritise customer needs and customer experiences (CX) to maintain relevance and loyalty. Second, in terms of strategic resource management, effective handling of financial and human capital is critical for sustainable growth and operational success. Third, when it comes to global learning and adaptability, insights from different regions and industries reveal the universal applicability of strategic practices, fostering cross-border innovation. Fourth, and finally, as far as sustainability and ethical practices are concerned, consumers/ customers and other stakeholders demand accountability, making ethical practices and CSR essential for long-term success.

Overall, as businesses navigate the complexities of a competitive world, the themes covered in this issue, underscore the necessity of innovation, adaptability, and a commitment to value-driven strategies. Collectively the contributions form a roadmap for achieving excellence in a rapidly changing global economy.



The impact of AI Chatbot in Enhancing Customer Experience within the Retail Sector

Olatunde Olushola Ola

Abstract

Recent advances in technology are rapidly changing the landscape of retailing and retailers are taking advantage of these technologies especially in artificial intelligence (AI) to advance their operations and improve customer experience (CX) as this plays a critical role in modern business success and maintaining competitive edge. Therefore, this study explores the impact of AI Chatbot in enhancing post sales customer experience in the retail industry. This study tried to answer research question with a quantitative research methodology. Deductive approach with the use of exploratory data analysis and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. From a practical viewpoint, the study observes the result of the questionnaire and the findings are (i) the online channel is seen to be more convenient than the in-store channel as 37 percent of respondents preferred online channel to other channels, (ii) 74 percent of the respondents subscribed to paying more for services or products that are specific to meeting their needs, and (iii) 81% of the respondent shows that AI-Chatbot usage in post-transaction positively have impact on customer loyalty through a value perceived by the customer and satisfaction which brings about good customer experience. Hence, the outcome suggests a positive impact of AI-Chatbot in enhancing customer experience and engagement as customers are willing to pay for more personalized engagement and product options.

Keywords

- Artificial Intelligence
- Customer experience
- Customer feedback
- AI-Chatbots

Introduction

Customer experience (CX) is one of the key marketing concepts, though no common understanding exists of what customer experience entails (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), but the concept has received increasing attention in different disciplines and context (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). In marketing discipline, according to (Meyer & Schwager, 2007), it “is defined as the internal and subjective response that customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company” on the channel available to customers. Direct contact usually occurs when the customer contacts the company after the purchase of goods or services to express their experience about the products or services offered, which is usually initiated by the customer. On the flipside, the indirect contact involves the unplanned encounter with the representative of the company in any form to express their dissatisfaction by either feedback, recommendations or criticisms, advertising, or online product reviews.

Recent advancement in internet technology have led to numerous innovative smart technologies (Theeb, Ahmad Moh'd Mansour, Khaled, Syed, & Saeed, 2023), like Internet of Things (IoT) (Patel & Patel, 2016), Augmented Reality (AR) (Vaidyanathan & Henningsson, 2023) (Chylinski, et al., 2020), Virtual Reality (VR) (Flavián, Ibáñez-Sánchez, & Orús, 2019), Mixed Reality (MR) (Flavián, Ibáñez-Sánchez, & Orús, 2019), virtual assistants, chatbots (Tran, Pallant, & Johnson, 2021) and Robots (Guha & Grewal, 2022), are transforming the landscape of eCommerce especially in retail sector towards loyalty and satisfaction which represents an important part of customer experience where customers share their satisfied or dissatisfied feeling about a product or services.

However, internet penetration, new technologies and the increasing consumption rates have paved ways for the growth experienced in the e-commerce and retail world today. The market continuously generates revenue and with the rapid development of innovative technologies, customer experience is one of the main sources of retailers' sustainable competitive advantage via personalised product offering, differentiation strategy (Aisyah, 2020), and enabling platform for an exciting shopping experience and post sales customer service support (Pei, Guo, Wu, Zhou, & Yeh, 2020).

The current trend in retail business is geared towards the ease of customers shopping for products or services of interest from the comfort of their homes or at any retail outlet using the online platform, and sometimes being assisted by the virtual agent via innovative technologies to complete the purchases with a view to improve shopping experience while buying online (Solis-Quispe, Quico-Cauti, & Ugarte, 2021), which can be voice or text-based instructions that enables user to control and interact with. Also, looking at these technologies from a broader perspective of customers' journey, it is imperative to

explore the impact of these technologies at every point in the shopping journey to advance a new concept of value creation (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, & Shankar, 2022), and how these technologies can be managed alongside customer expectation for exciting experience throughout the customer journey.

The potential of retailing is increasingly gathering momentum in this era of digital age and the experience is more felt after the pandemic especially in developing world. In the developed world, AI technologies combined with data analytics, especially in retailing, are used to respond to increased expectations from customers with the view to close the gap and increase knowledge about customers' preferences and shopping patterns such that when they are deployed at key touchpoints increases the level of satisfaction (Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel, & Anand, 2021). This sector is fast transforming in terms of technology such that success is not measure by the dept and breadth of inventory, but rather creating more rewarding experience for the customer (Zierlein, 2020), and the attention for its adoption is gathering momentum due to its potential to transformational capabilities in the retail world. However, it is imperative to understand, not only how it benefits businesses and buyers alike and the more innovation from these technologies that will be expected in the future, but how technologies are changing the dynamics of retail operations that will bring about the desired and improved consumer experience.

Many firms today focus on CX enhancement to gain a sustainable advantage (Kumar, Hollebeek, Kar, & Kuk, 2023), and to remain competitive, according to (Pei, Guo, Wu, Zhou, & Yeh, 2020), “retailers need to continuously improve customer experience in different shopping situations to maintain long-term sustainable customer satisfaction and achieve sustainability”. However, this research work aims to look at the broader view of the customers perception of these technologies for post sales customer service delivery by exploring the use chatbots as a tool, typically powered by AI (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, & Shankar, 2022), for post sales customer service support to enhance customer experience.

Several products purchased or services offered basically require some sort of feedback by either recommendations or criticisms, product reviews, and advertising from the customers directly or indirectly to the company, but feedback is only provided when the customers are usually dissatisfied with the goods or services purchased and loyalty issues begin to set in, which may lead to customers turning to another competitor for same products or services. On the flip side, retailers focus on low cost, ease of purchase by consumers and with the perception of good shopping experience. The challenges today for the retail industry is the adaptation of technological advancement and the use of AI chatbots or virtual agent to provide guidance throughout the customer journey such that

good customer service is experience in the process of shopping online (Solis-Quispe, Quico-Cauti, & Ugarte, 2021). Though, personalised shopping activities using bots and interconnected devices generate huge amount of data on products offerings to facilitate intelligent interaction and engagement before and after sales.

The on-going digital transformation in retailing has introduced new trends, and the cloud connectivity and infrastructure enables communications between customers and machines or human-like system for quick and responsive decisions (Cerullo, Mazzeo, Papale, Ragucci, & Papale, 2018), such technology is used to engage customers both inside and outside the store to transmitted app messages to the consumers. These messages often use deals and customer info to entice customer for more purchases or divert attention towards some other product or services based on the history of their purchases and engage customer post sales. As a result of this, it is imperative that the use of this technology in retail environments is employed, tracked, and measured to provide holistic information to help in service improvement, product optimization, sentiment analysis and demand forecasting and recommendations to improve the customer experience and sell more products to customers.

It is no doubt that business activities driven by AI is transforming the retail landscape as well as the customer experience (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, & Shankar, 2022). Hence, this research seeks to study user experience using online platform as against store visits, service provided after sales and explore the how chatbots could be used for sales and post sales customer service within the retails sector. However, the research questions are organised to explore three main areas notably:

- How are customers perceiving online shopping with Chatbots technology providing guidance post sales customer support?
- What level of satisfaction do customers derive from the online shopping platform with this virtual agent?
- What is customer preference for shopping?

The study focused on the new trend in Chatbots and its impact on shopping experience, gather information about customers shopping experience for online purchases and in-store self-services, how chatbots can be used for more personalised products online, and then perform analysis to determine the levels of satisfaction and the impact on customer experience. The primary objective of this research is to explore the impact of these technologies in enhancing customer experience within the retail sector. To bring the proposed research methods into action, primary data collection method will be used.

Literature Review

In today's retail activities and customer's journey in online business, there has been the use of technology in several aspects of customer services as well as support roles and has assets to companies because of their communication with human and able to process large of dataset using conversational agent (AI-Tuama & Nasrawi, 2022). This is in order to meet customers' needs and fulfils their requirements, and Internet of Things which is an emerging technological platform that allows devices to communicate using sensors over the internet (Kumar, Tiwari, & Zymbler, 2019).

AI is simply referred to as "Machine Intelligence" (Deepa, Nandakumar, & Indrakumar, 2021) and could perform tasks that generally require human intelligence without human intervention. It simulates human behaviour or reasoning to solve specific problems when trained. Some retailers, like Alibaba and Amazon, today use of AI with algorithm to learn customers' needs and preferences to provide good shopping experience based on the data (Kırçova, Sağlam, & Köse, 2021). However, the customer experience in retailing and throughout the journey with the retailer can be viewed in four different aspects ; cognitive , Emotional (Bagdare, 2015), sensorial (Danziger, 2019) , (Biswas, 2019) and the social (Moore, Bulmer, & Elms, 2022) and these are playing out depending on the purchase intention of the customers. With technologies, more and more valuable insights are being generated to drive better business outcomes, foster innovation, product optimization, and create good customer experiences with AI revolution. The AI trajectory is transforming the retail landscape for competitiveness and many retailers today get wrapped in it and invest more in technologies to stay ahead of competitors.

However, the synergy between the various technologies, according to Madakam, Ramaswamy & Tripathi (2015), "represents the future of computing and communications, and its development depends on dynamic technical innovation in a number of important fields" is providing an enabling platform for retail industries to develop an improved ecosystem. Despite the robust data analysis capabilities and the and new innovation these technologies are bringing to the retail industry (Kaur, et al., 2022), it is important to recognise the challenges associated with the applications in our everyday life, shopping experience as well as the level of satisfaction (Hussein, 2019). Nevertheless, the benefits of running a technology driven retail operations and sales ranges from rebalance supply and demand (Caro & Sadr, 2019), product tracking to enable traceability purposes, fast payment processes (Hussein, 2019) to customer service support throughout the customer journey.

According to Caro & Sadr (2019), "the retail industry is highly competitive" and it requires, not only effective business operations, but efficiency and growth and innovation as well the personalised product offering and

promotion to remain in business coupled with the ability to manage customer expectation and a good shopping experience. Today's digital era has transformed the way businesses operate, how individuals and customers connect with the growing trend in more innovative technology for an improved shopping experience. AI chatbots are chatbots that simulates human conversation using a variety of AI techniques to optimise responses using natural language processing (NLP) that accurately interprets customers questions. In recent times, chatbot technology has been employed in several customer services and support roles to act as company representatives to provide solutions to customer requests or issues. However, this research work focuses on the use of AI-enabled Chatbot for more dedicated and personalised interaction and explore how the retail environment is being revolutionised by chatbot driven by AI to help improve customer experience.

Technology in Retailing: Customer experience perspective

Although, the definition of customer experience varies based on the perspective given by different scholars (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020), and the concept of experience from a cross-disciplinary analysis has defined experience based on these standpoints: philosophical, sociological, cultural, management and business (Batat, 2022). However, In the context of business and marketing, it a key marketing concept and "is defined as the internal and subjective response that customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company" on the channel available to customers (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

Retailing, in today's world, has taken a new dimension through technological transformation by recent advances in technology following the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. Retailers are making hug investment in technology with strong emphasis on e-commerce, online-shopping to meet the expectation of both digital and walk-in customers with the hope of given them strong competitive advantage in today's retails environments. According to GlobalData (2022), the Telco sector spends US\$2.2billion on Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence and related technologies, cloud services, digital & social media, Fintech and other advanced technologies across several channel or departments. Due to the investment in technology, Consumer engagement (CE), has attracted considerable attention due to the dynamism in the retail sector and the e-commerce landscape.

Recent innovations in the field of Robotics like home robots, store robots, delivery drones, shopbots (Passyn, Diriker, & Settle, 2013; Laghmari, Issa & Kbir, 2019), and warehouses robots have accelerated robots impact in retailing and the social distancing that was introduced sprang up the use of these technologies and still in the front burner of most retailers and is making a huge impact in boosting retail automation.



The fifth generation (5G) wireless technology that support triple play voice, data, video network that uses high speed internet transmission in real time in both channel (online and in-store) shopping application system including other technologies like “Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), Mixed Reality (MR), virtual assistants, chatbots, and robots, which are typically powered by AI, are dramatically transforming the customer experience” (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, & Shankar, 2022).

Marek & Woźniczka (2023) presented how the IoT can be perceived for designing and managing the customer experience and analysis how these devices can be used to increase the interactions between the customer and products to eliminate negative evaluation by the consumers. They further stated that in 2009, the number of interconnected devices was first time higher than that the number of inhabitants in the world (6.5 billion) while in 2017, it exceeded 12.5 billion and in 2020 was also 30 billion. It is estimated that estimated that smart devices accessing the internet will be close to 75

billion by 2025. These trends shows that opportunity exists to leverage on this technology to gain competitive edge by supporting customers experience management.

Daqar & Smoudy (2019) examined AI and the role it plays in customer experience using banks and telecommunication industries as case studies and the result showed a positive relation between AI and customer experience and there is a direct relationship between providing personalized customer service and after-sale customer support, and AI. In a descriptive analysis of the study, it also showed that the provision of personalised customer service through the customer journey has impact on customer experience. On the flip side, there is reduction in the customer waiting time for after-sales support. One goal of any organisation, according to (Pei, Guo, Wu, Zhou, & Yeh, 2020), is to be able to create a sustainable competitive advantage which usually comes from value creation and distribution process. This is supported by technology playing a major role in retailing with the aim to continuously improve customer experience by exploring Chatbot powered by AI (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, & Shankar, 2022) to create an exciting shopping experience for the customers. Pei et al. (2020), examined how shopping situations would influence customer experience and customer satisfaction in this era of rapid digital transformations within the retail sector using modern technology. Data collected from both in-store and online were analysed with multiple regression analysis adopted to test the hypothesis. The results showed different outcomes for different situations based on the shopping situations and environment, However, this study theoretically suggested, according to the researcher, that “relationship between customer experience and satisfaction in different shopping situations and also provided practical suggestions for retailers to form differentiated sustainable competitive advantage through customer experience management”.

Retailers are continuously working with technologies to engage customer and the advancement in technology is revolutionising the retail landscape from the introduction e-commerce to the integration of AI and robotics into retail operations and customer service, it is now becoming an indispensable force to reckon with because it is shaping the way retailers operate, handle customer service, and manage customer shopping experience. However, the integration of these technologies has not only streamlined retail operation but has reshape the overall shopping experience for consumers. Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfalt (2017) focused on the future of retailing and presented “technology and tools for fast decision making”, as one of the five key areas that are moving the fields forward, in a way that technological innovation continues to be a game changer for retailing which is beneficial to the consumers and retailers in which, for example, enables consumers to make more informed decisions, receive more targeted and beneficial offers, as well as and getting faster service.

Today modern technologies in the field of Artificial Intelligence are offering new dimensions to the way retailers enhance the retail process using the interactive technologies like AI Chatbot, VR and AR, in both physical and online retailing by offering better shopping experience. The emergence of the rapidly developing technologies used in retailing, according to (Bonetti, Warnaby, & Quinn, 2018) is to ensure customers confidence in the retailer and enhance the selling environment and shopping experience (Kumar, 2021).

AI Chatbots in Retailing

AI Chatbot is simply a program designed to simulate and process conversations with humans on digital channels like mobile Apps, SMS, messaging platforms (like Slack and WhatsApp) or social media channels like Facebook and Instagram. It uses artificial intelligence to provide answers by processing customer queries. However more researchers are trying to study the impact of this technology and the role it plays in the marketing field. It relies on language model to generate human-like responses and can be trained and improved over time to offer more accurate responses without intervention. “Chatbot is a computer program that simulates and processes human conversation (either written or spoken), allowing humans to interact with digital devices as if they were communicating with a real person” (CHATBOT | English meaning - Cambridge, 2023). It is an Artificial Intelligence program that uses natural language processing and sentiment analysis to interact with human through text or speech. (Khanna, et al., 2015). Chatbots are also known as Artificial conversation entities, interactive agents, smart bots, and digital assistants and ongoing development enhances the abilities to imitate human agent in conversation. (Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020).

The use of AI Chatbot in retail activities for customer service is beginning to increase because of the perceived benefits and reduced operational cost though with limited perception. (Tran, Pallant, & Johnson, Exploring the impact of chatbots on consumer sentiment and expectations in retail, 2021) conducted an investigated customer's understanding of this technology with online human agent, what they are making out the two across the retail sector, and how does the implementation affect the consumers' sentiments toward human agent over time. Thousands of tweets collected and analysed to measure consumer sentiments and the result of these analysis show that sentiments towards bot are less negative than human and more negative and sentiments towards online human agents become more negative after a retailer the implementation of a chatbot by the retailer. From this, it was inferred that implementation of chatbot may reduce customer experience with human agent and as such it can make it easy to find information by responding to questions and request instantaneously without the need for human intervention.

As AI is being used to support different activities in retailing, (Leung, Chan, & Ting, Retail chatbots: The challenges and opportunities of conversational commerce, 2020) investigated the use of chatbot in the retail industry following a qualitative study of commercial chatbot from retails firms found out that chatbot assisted consumers in completing general task like searching and purchasing product information to making reservation and getting feedback from customers. This addressed the issue faced by customer when making purchases and was anticipated that it would gain popularity and beneficial to the consumers with an improved feature with more prediction accuracy and better product recommendation. AI Chatbot evolving from a rule driven engine is using interactively storytelling narrative to respond to customer request or questions such that the investigation into the effectiveness of sentiment analysis on extracting CX insight from data generated via chatbot suggested that the continuous enhancement in accuracy can be achieved by improving the algorithm of the chatbot interviewer and the extraction engine such that business managers of retail organisation and academicians to gain a comprehensive understanding of customer experience as a critical determinant of a business success. This is corroborated in by (Presti, Maggiore, & Marino, 2021) while exploring the extent to which AI chatbot on the organisation's website could change the value perception of products and influence the customer purchase intention, and the role of chatbots on brand familiarity was also investigated. The article reveal that Chatbot contributed to brand awareness thus reducing the customer familiarity on purchase intension. Hence, according to (Presti, Maggiore, & Marino, 2021), “retailers should include effective chatbots while operating and designing shopping websites to stimulate the shopping intention of consumers”.

Many organisations depend on the internet to showcase their product and service as the presence of the internet is contributing to the success of any organization in this current digital age. Organisations are leveraging on the internet and the easy-to-use AI Chatbot technology in enhancing customer experience and improve service quality. According to (Misischia, Poecze, & Strauss, 2022), its implementation leaves opportunity to improve customer service throughout the customer journey (pre-sale, during sales and post sales).

The advancement of AI in retailing have generated quite a lot of research interest and the business world continues to make investment in this technology to create a positive experience for both online and in-store customers. Chatbot has form an integral part of customer service and virtually all online business and ecommerce website use chatbot to communicate with users and solve their customer problem (Nichifor, Trifan, & Nechifor, 2021). Any organisation that uses this technology is using it to its own competitive advantage, secondly, to generate the potential to achieving organisational result related to business



performance, enhance operational efficiency, and to improve customer experience, and satisfaction, and commitment to good and quality customer service (Prentice & Nguyen, 2020). On the side of the users or consumers, it is imperative to highlight the satisfaction that can be derive from the use of technology and the continuous usage of it. Ashfaq, et al. (2020) investigated what can possibly be the drivers of users' or consumers' satisfaction towards chatbot-base customer service and the outcome of the investigation revealed that satisfaction with chatbot is a strong determinant of users' continuance intension toward AI chatbots, which is guided by service continuance model fully mediated service satisfaction (Boakye, McGinnis, Prybutok, & Paswan, 2014). However, this means that "digital technologies services, such as chatbots, could be combined with human service employees to satisfy digital users" (Ashfaq, Yun, Yu, & Loureiro, 2020) for a good shopping experience.

Chatbot is virtually on every online web platform and eCommerce site and has gain recognition and become helpful as a tool for customer support, Product Personalization, customer satisfaction, retention, needs, engagement in retailing to mention few. (Daza, Robles, & Jiménez, 2023) aim to explore chatbot technology on customer needs, after a systematic review of relevant and exiting literature on this technology, the outcome is in two folds, "Solve queries or doubts" and "seek solutions to problems". Perhaps, act as mediators with the aim to react to user interactions while trying to find solutions to problems. Chatbots are usually textual and voice and the most implemented are textual chatbots for interacting with the customers.

Huong, et al. (2023) also investigate if customer experience and satisfaction can be increased in an emerging market through AI Chatbot. The author uses data from online customer to test the effect of three types of chatbot on both cognitive and affective state of the customers. The result of the study shows that "chatbot customisation", "perceived control", and "interactive speed" have effect on the former significantly while "perceived control" and "interactive speed" have no effect on the later. However, this means that component of the customer experience significantly impacted online satisfaction.

Technology Adoption

As Retailers continue to use AI chatbot on their online and ecommerce website to communicate with customer to deliver superior service that creates exciting shopping experience. The continuous usage chatbot, according to (Ashfaq, Yun, Yu, & Loureiro, 2020), is mediated by service satisfaction, and what this means is that it has been accepted by the user as a medium of communication between the company's agent and the customer throughout the customer

journey. However, (Rese, Ganster, & Baier, 2020) used the contrast of two research models, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Marangunić & Granić, 2015) and "Uses and Gratification" (U&G) theory (Ruggiero, 2009), to measure a text-based chatbot "Emma" for pre-purchase of the online retailing and integrated it into Facebook for usability study. The result, according to (Rese, Ganster, & Baier, 2020), shows that the U&G gives more insight into the acceptance of "Emma" than TAM upon which AI chatbot communication can be measured and adopted.

As Chatbot has taken the centre stage in influencing customer experience, customer satisfaction and its adoption in e-retailing, the AI revolution in retailing has redefined customer interaction with AI chatbot stirring up technology adoption using Technology acceptance model (TAM) and based on the survey conducted by (Chen, Le, & Florence, 2021), there exists good experience between the variables of intrinsic and extrinsic value of customer experience are enhanced by chatbot adoption according to (Chen, Le, & Florence, 2021), which may affects customer loyalty through perceived value, trust and satisfaction (Yaobin, Qian, Yeming, & Xiong, 2023) from the built over time, by the customer throughout the transaction journey by providing guidance in adoption of AI Chatbot (Yaobin, Qian, Yeming, & Xiong, 2023). Looking through the lens of technology adoption in general, it is important to understand customer intent to adopt AI and machine learning as a measure to safeguard the interaction quality, better customer relationship marketing and more modified product personalization using tools. Deep diving into Machine Learning and other AI tools like Recommenders, Virtual Assistance, and Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) except AI Chatbot are out of scope of this research work.

The availability of Chatbot 24 hours a day and 7 days a week with scalable technology can be accessed anytime by the customer without having to wait next in line for an available human service agent. However, being an intermediary between retailer and customer using "Use and Gratification" model to understand the pros and cons of Chatbot usage (Marjerison, Zhang, & Zheng, 2022) and to further test customers' acceptance of the information service as new online touchpoint in retailing. (Silva, Cicco, & Vlacic, 2022), so, it is important to present a useful and trustworthy conversational agent to increase operational efficiency, lower the cost of business services, and provide good customer experience for adoption. However, TAM seems to be gaining the model of choice for technology acceptance measurement as significant amount of work with TAM shows it application in many i.e. education (Andrina Granić & Marangunić, 2019), telemedicine service (Kemp, Palmer, & Strelan, 2020), e-learning (Salloum, Alhamad, Al-Emran, Monem, & Shaalan, 2019), fintech (Ridha & Maharani, 2022), health informatics (Large AI Models in Health Informatics: Applications), hospitality

, tourism, AI-based technology in construction as well as autonomous vehicle adoption in transportation technology (Yuen, Cai, Qi, & Wang, 2021).

The aim of this research is to study user experience using online platform as against store visits, explore the use of chatbots in post-sales customer service within the retails sector and examining the impact on enhancing customer experience. Despite the continuous growth in the use of chatbot technology in the business world, the academic literature regarding AI chatbots in e-commerce and online platforms, there has been any mention of AI Chatbot to support post sales activity and ensure customer confidence in their product and services are unshaken. It is expected that customers should be engaged throughout the shopping journey. From a small to large retail business, this expectation can be difficult to achieve unless there is a walk-in, into a in brick-and-mortar store, to express dissatisfaction about the product or services of which immediate attention may be given.

However, "Chatbots have brought a revolution in the business communication process as well as helped in attaining customer satisfaction at a large scale" (Paliwal, Bharti, & Mishra, 2019) and the

motivating factor for AI chatbot use as mostly report is productivity (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017). A study between the ages of 16 to 65 in the US provide basic information as to why users use AI Chatbot, uses can be assisted in a more timely and efficient manner using the U&G theory which, according to (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017), can facilitate the development of a better human-chatbot interaction experiences in the future hence eliminating customer frustration due the time it takes to get the attention of a customer care representation to assist in their queries. However, timely and effective post sales customer support builds long term relationships and drives repeated purchase in this regard.

Many retailers today having online or digital platform, especially in ecommerce space, are increasingly moving towards the use of AI Chatbot in providing 24/7 supports to assist customers with responses and assistance according to their needs and requirements (Nimbalkar & Berad, 2021). They also use it as strategy for personlization to address customers needs based on realtime analytics throughout the customer journey (Desai, 2022) as well as customer satisfaction, retention, engagement in retailing (Daza, Robles, & Jiménez, 2023).



Research Methodology

This study used quantitative method approach in conducting this research. With this method, a low level semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain information about the research from participants within the retail sector upon which the questionnaire was prepared for the larger audience to corroborate views and opinion. The primary data required for analysis is from the questionnaire that was shared with 100 participants (exploratory/inductive research) to generate some themes/hypothesis about the use of AI Chatbots, and these themes will form part of the questionnaire to be sent to the respondents to clarify some key points about them.

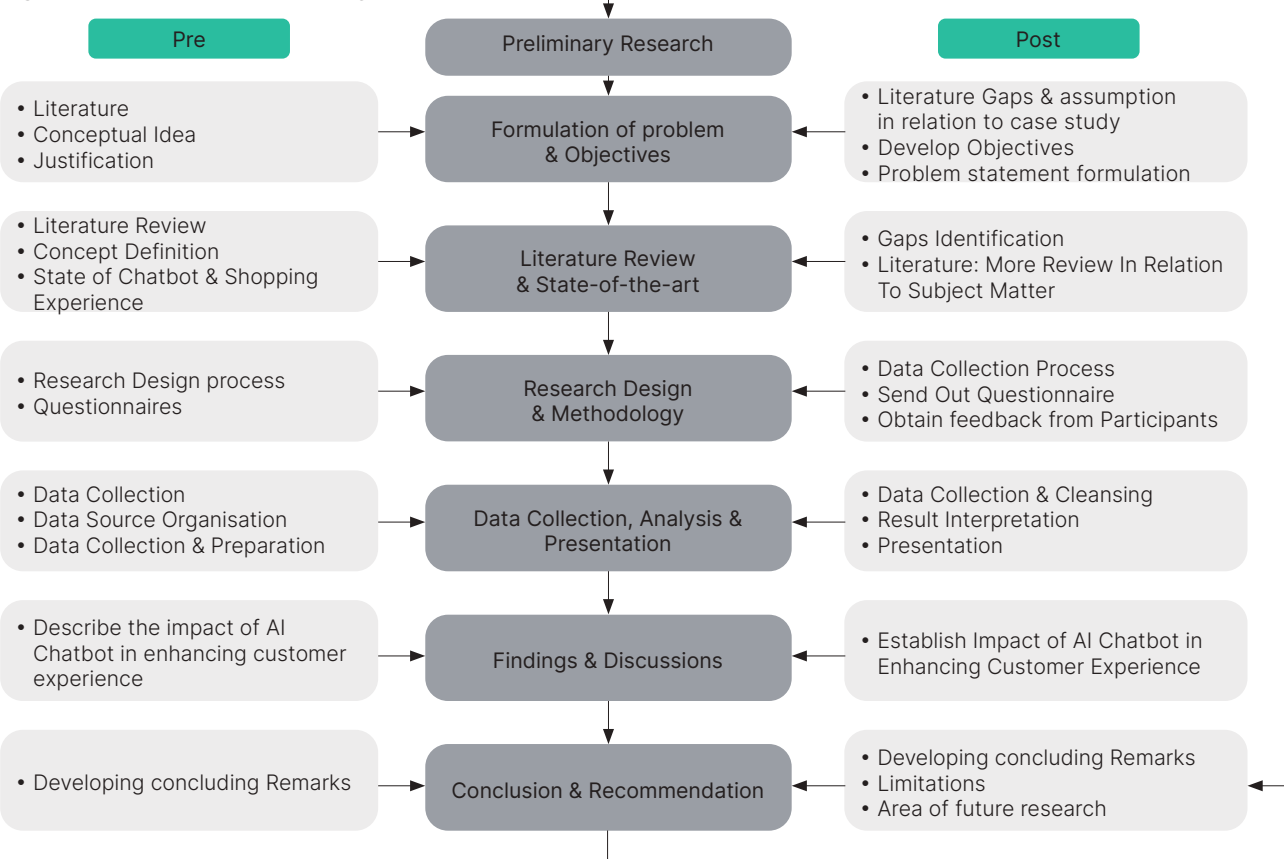
The questionnaires was designed with microsoft forms via a URL to collate data from customers on how they perceived online shopping using AI Chatbot to personalised their needs and make recommendations towards their intent, as well as their preference for shopping. The questionnaire also captured customers demograhic data and background such age range, gender, level of education and nature of work. This information are required to understand the customers better in order to relate their responses towards their demographic data

This study is carried out using the positivist philosophy. Positivism, according to (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019) , allows the use of observation and measurement to

understand the social and material world with more reliance and generaliation leading to the development of universal law and findings.

The Research design describes literature review of the topic of interest or aswering practical questions by understanding what existing research has to say on the subject matter. It also summarizes the overall review approach of the research strategy, the information sources used, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the methodology used to obtain the results. A descriptive research design will be used for this study and questionnaire related to the research questions is shared with participants to collect quantitative data. Other relevant materials was studied to enhance greater validity of the research. Quantitative research approach will be used for data collection strategy. However, the research design process that is adopted to carry out this research starting from the preliminary research, which is usually an introduction, all the way down to conclusion and recommendation is shown in the in the diagram below. This thesis has been designed as decribed in Figure 1 to address the research questions, archieve research objectives , and collect empiracal data from primary sources i.e interview from a small group and responses from survey / questionnaires sent to retail shoppers or customers. Futhrmore, this research study use a descriptive approach designed to describe and establish the impact of AI-Chatbot technology in enhancing customer experience within the retail sector.

Figure 1. Research process design



Findings/Results

The impact AI-chatbot technologies have on customer experience is more like an emerging phenomenon. Information obtained from individuals through the use of survey research questions in form of questionnaires and semi structure interviews which are primary quantitative data from source within the retails sector are analysed and presented to address or answer some key questions about the research aim. The questions are targeted to some individuals using radmon sampling methods to obtain information related to preferences, their demogragphy and opinion of advance technology in the field of AI Chatbot for online shopping experience. However, the primary purpose of the survey is to collect data for exploratory data analysis and present findings or result based on the data collected from a sample population. A good gender representation was recorded which represents world gender ratio of 4,043 million males to 4.002 billion females representing (50.25%) and 49.75% of the world population respectively and this means that the Gender Ratio in the World in 2023 is 101.016 Males per 100 Females according to (statisticstimes.com, 2022).

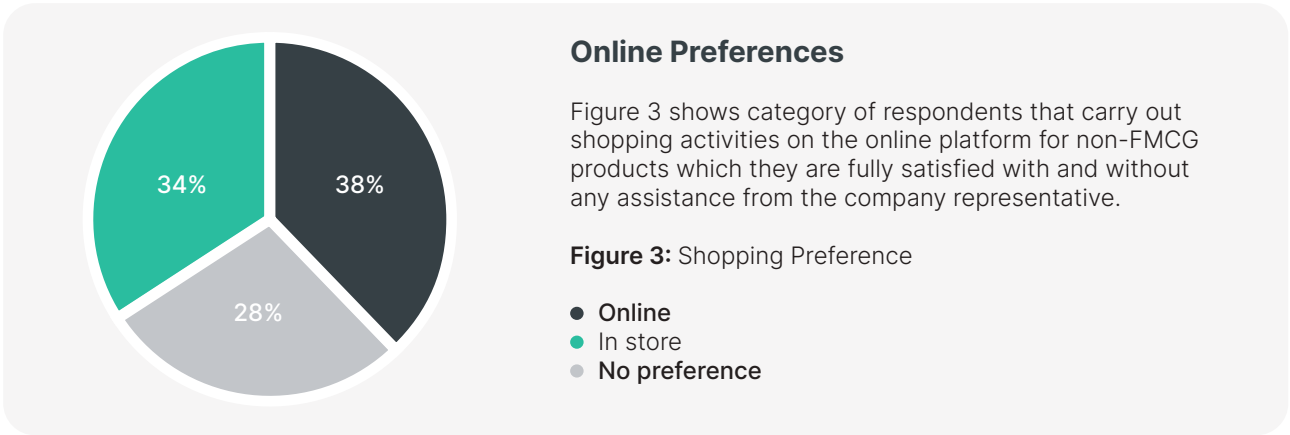
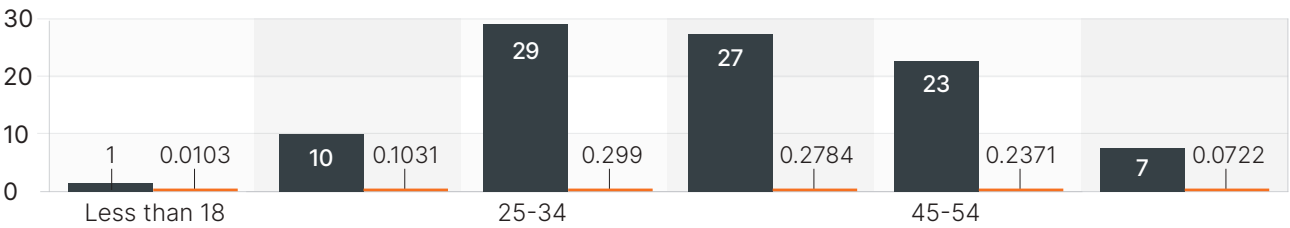
Table 1 World gender Ratio (source: statisticstimes.com)

Year	Male	Female	M per 100 F
2033	4,386,738,453	4,362,060,088	100.566
2032	4,354,329,857	4,327,762,127	100.614
2031	4,321,484,302	4,293,048,443	100.662
2030	4,288,200,901	4,257,940,425	100.711
2029	4,254,455,626	4,222,433,765	100.758
2028	4,220,269,876	4,186,558,916	100.805
2027	4,185,644,209	4,150,333,462	100.851
2026	4,150,587,873	4,113,776,637	100.895
2025	4,115,098,916	4,076,889,537	100.937
2024	4,079,164,815	4,039,671,184	100.978
2023	4,042,987,695	4,002,323,752	101.016
2022	4,008,579,598	3,966,525,558	101.060
2021	3,976,648,226	3,932,646,925	101.119
2020	3,943,612,192	3,897,340,688	101.187
2019	3,906,407,855	3,858,543,178	101.240
2018	3,866,135,266	3,817,654,563	101.270
2017	3,824,259,774	3,775,562,630	101.290
2016	3,781,091,377	3,732,382,861	101.305

The samples for this study were drawn from a customers of retail organization who have both items in-store and online from both fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and non fast-moving consumer goods (Non-FMCG) retail industries and the data were collected using questionnaire through online survey. A total of 97 respondents from customers of different retail organisations responses were obtained.

One major observation in the way the respondents respond to the questionnaire is that many of the participants called to confirm the intent of the researcher to not fall victims to some individual who hackers into people's online space to send unsolicited messages sent across for their selfish interest. Figure 2 summarises the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

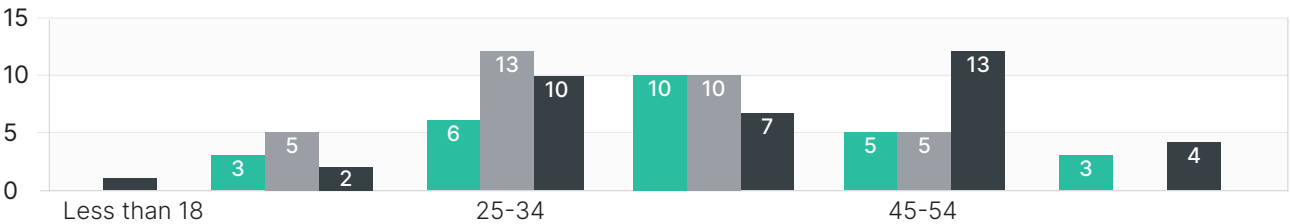
Figure 2: Sample demographics (Age Range)



Furthermore, greater percentage of the respondents feel comfortable using the online platform as their preferred point of purchase without any assistance from the agent or the company representative. Looking through the outcome of the survey and the response from the

respondent's preference for online shopping, 76% of respondents are comfortable with online shopping platform while 24% of the in-store respondents are not. This means that retail customers are comfortable and happy doing their shopping with the online platform.

Figure 4: Customer preference based on shopping experience. Shopping preference, *number of respondents*.

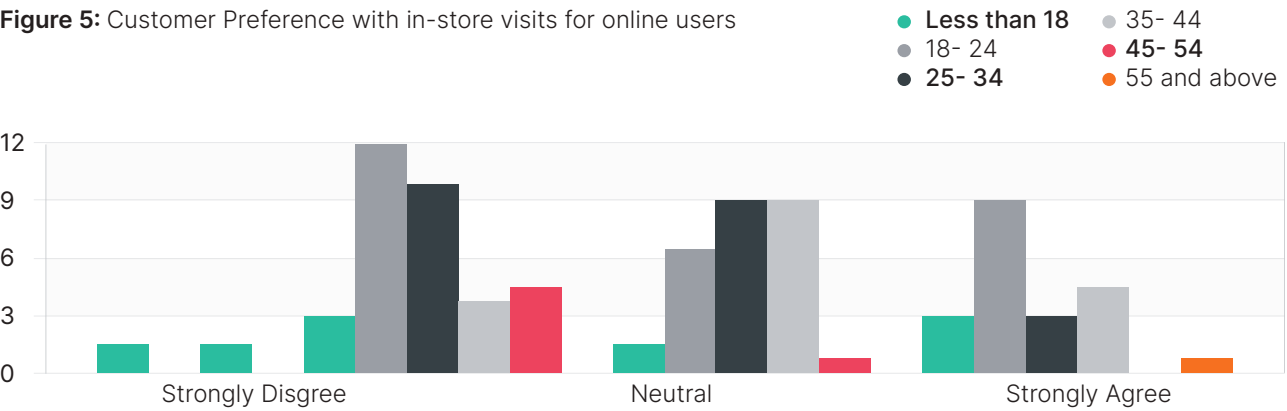


In-store Preferences

The result of the dataset shown in the figure 8 below depicts the level of customer satisfaction when shopping for an item that requires high value of travel time compared to the value of delivery time. However, this result reveals that customers of an online

shoppers get what they expect in-store depending on the type of purchase or item being bought. Many fast-moving consumer goods are better purchase in-store with complete satisfaction with the result showing 49% of the respondent prefer in-store purchase of this type of product or service while 36% remain neutral in this situation.

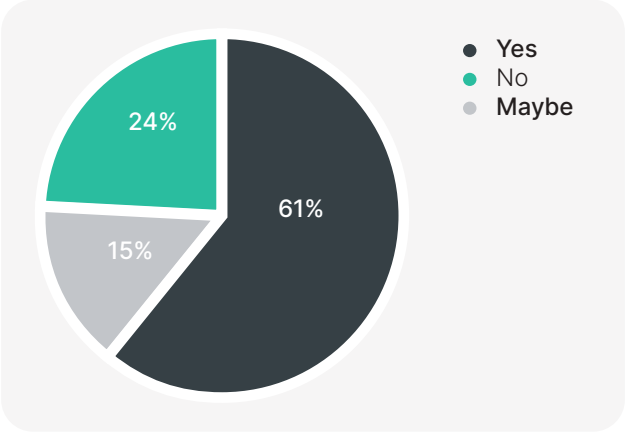
Figure 5: Customer Preference with in-store visits for online users



Customer Support

One of the key challenges for customer service or support providers is to balance efficiency and quality. It is important to understand the advantages of being supported throughout the customer journey for self-service, cost reduction, time efficiency and enhance customer experience. However, our empirical data has shown that 61% of the respondents attest to be engaged in a conversation with the company representative for feedback before, during and after sales.

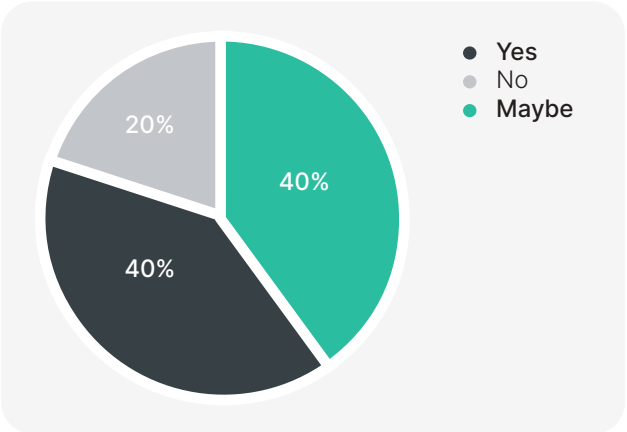
Figure 6: Customer Service Representative Engagement



Virtual Agent / Chatbot / Virtual Assistance engagement

Figure 7 shows the number of respondents that have been engaged by a virtual agent and over 40% of the respondents have been assisted by a virtual agent and the experience has been moderate based on the feedback during the interview session.

Figure 7: Virtual Assistance Engagement



Questionnaire

A Virtual Agent is computer-generated system designed to interact with users perhaps. a system for managing more effective and efficient online one-to-one customer

interactions through AI. In view of this, the outcome of the survey data and structure interview reveals that about 72% of the respondents, in Figure 8, are being engaged by virtual agent regarding their purchases and the experience has been moderate and more than average.

Use of Chatbots

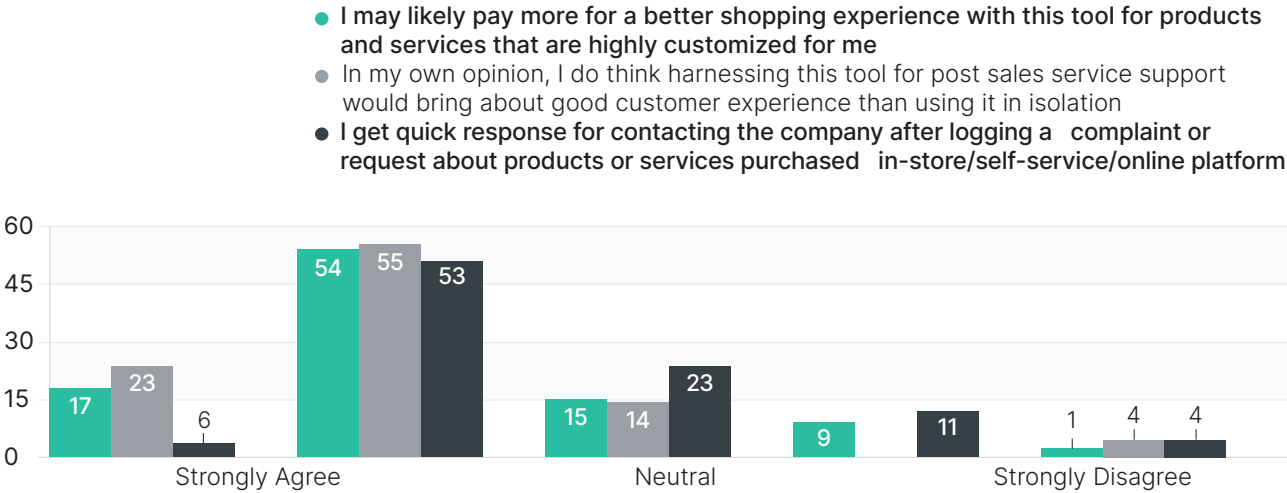
Respondents were asked in the online questionnaire if they had a quick response for contacting the company after logging a complaint or raising a ticket about product purchased irrespective of the channel and the empirical results indicate that 59 out 97 (61%) of the

respondents get quick response from the company. If the tools were to be use for post sales service support over 78 out of 97 which is 81% of the respondent believe that it would bring about good customer experience than using it in isolation and 71 out of 96 (74%) would pay more if the tools is customized for product or services for them. See results in Table 5.

Table 7: Use of Chatbot - Opinion poll BIL Working

	I may likely pay more for a better shopping experience with this tool for products and services that are highly customized for me	In my own opinion, I do think harnessing this tool for post sales service support would bring about good customer experience than using it in isolation	I get quick response for contacting the company after logging a complaint or request about products or services purchased in-store/self-service/online platform
Strongly agree	17	23	6
Agree	54	55	53
Neutral	15	14	23
Disagree	9	0	11
Strongly disagree	1	4	4
Total	96	96	97
	74%	81%	61%

Figure 12: Chatbot Engagement



Empirical data were collected using quantitative method to collect data that provide comprehensive information about a population to answer research questions. However, the empirical results shows that more than half of the responded are being engaged directly or indirectly by agent of the company to ensure that the items purchased meets their needs and are satisfied or happy with them though more respondent preferred the retail channel with both online and in-store, but the choice of the products or service determines the right channel to use. Nevertheless, online is channel is envisioned using the innovative technology more with mobile devices.

Furthermore, (Figure 8) shows the result about 61% of the respondents' opinion towards an agent following up and resolving any issues afterward very quickly, which is quite moderate and expected by 61% of the respondents (Table 5.) as of today. The assistance of the Agent (Chatbot) throughout the transaction process (customer journey) is quite helpful and has increased the level of their loyalty and satisfaction towards the company's brand and 74% would likely pay more for personalisation and 81% of the respondents believe that if this tool is harnesses for post sales service support will have positive impact on customer experience at long run.



The overall empirical result indicates the speed at which customers are being attended to after sales using the intelligent conversational agent by solving customer problems in a fast and efficient manner. Although, data privacy concerns may pose potential risks for some retailers, but the chatbot is impactful and ensuring seamless experience for customers following the outcome of the survey data. The privacy concern has not been dealt with since it is beyond the scope of this research study. However, retailers in this the era of high volume, high velocity, and high variety of data use advance technologies and techniques to capture, store, and analyse data to enhance decision making, provide insight, and support and optimize business processes and going by the current trend in retailing, these data together with innovative technologies are used for competitive advantage where Artificial Intelligence is playing a good role for personalisation and customer experience.

Discussion of Findings

This study emphasizes on how the use of AI Chatbot technology is having positive impact in retailing and customer experience. Empirical result from the survey data following a descriptive data analysis is used to describe the intention of the shoppers' reveals the shopping preference of an average customers in the retail sector and how this has help them in their purchase decision. This research study conducted a systematic review of literature aimed at answering some key questions posed in this research. The questions as follows.

RQ1: How are customers perceiving online shopping with Chatbots technology providing guidance to sales and post sales customer support.

This first question (RQ1) is aimed at understanding how chatbot fills in the gap for a human in determining the intension of the customers towards the goods or services needed as well as the purchase intension during shopping and follow up after the purchase of those items such so that issues with the product or services are quickly attended to and solutions are provided to the customers delight.

RQ2: What level of satisfaction do customers derive from the online shopping platform with this virtual agent?

This second research question (RQ2) is aimed at targeting the level of satisfaction of a customer enjoyed after being assisted by AI-Chatbot throughout the customer journey to ease his or her shopping to earn customer loyalty.

RQ3: What is customer preference for shopping?

The third research question (RQ3) is also aimed at establishing which is the shopping channel is most convenient and preferred by customers that will satisfy their needs and have a good shopping experience within the retail organisation. However, the result of the empirical dataset provided in 4.2 is meant to answer or address the research questions mentioned above to fulfil the research aims and objectives.

The shopping Channel

Shopping channel is a pathway through which customers buy their products or services. These purchases are made via these channels for reasons best known so far. It could be at the usual brick-and-mortar store, online or a mix of both channels as it deems fit. The data analysis revealed the online channel was considered more convenient than the in-store shopping as 37 per cent of respondents preferred online channel to other channels.

AI-Chatbot and customer experience

Chatbots powered by artificial intelligence is an innovative technology for retailers to meet customers'

needs at any point in time, now and in the future. The world today is on digital transformation with advanced technology and many organizations are moving their brands and businesses onto digital services driven by AI and other related technologies. One of such advancement is the AI-Chatbot that is being "used frequently in business to facilitate various processes, particularly those related to customer service and personalization" (Przegalinska, Ciechanowski, Stroz, Gloor, & Mazurek, 2019) as well as customer experience for competitive advantage. Regarding personalization, 74 per cent of the respondents subscribed to paying more for services or products that are specific to meeting their needs. It is obvious that the chatbot cannot be used in isolation, but with customers who has been through the journey of shopping and the retailer need to understand how satisfied they are with the transactions and if any help can be offered after sales. This will in turn, help the company to maintain the quality of service or improve on it if the customer(s) is/are not getting any joy in their services.

However, 81% of the respondent believes that the use of the AI-Chatbot in post-transaction will positively affects customer loyalty through perceived value and satisfaction which brings about good customer experience. Moreso, the post-sales service support with the intelligent agent is to ensure customers satisfaction, and on the side of the retail business, it provides

interaction with the service to improve operational efficiency and service performance based on the empirical result where 61 per cent of the respondent are getting quick response after making complaint about the product and service through the available channel.

Conclusions

In this study, a clear understanding of shopping experience by customers using the chatbot as shown in the empirical result shows its acceptance, and this suggests the future of chatbot will be used to further enhance other human capabilities so that humans can progress into more strategic activities than tactical activities which is being currently handled by AI supported by data analytics to keep up with customers expectation, maintain competitive edge and to ensure customer are satisfied with company in order to keep the loyalty and remain unshaken toward the company's brand.

Furthermore, around personalization, the study suggests chatbot can be made to function in many different scenarios, the choice of product and the type of products determine the choice of purchase such that customers look through the lens of their needs to make the final call. Finally, the ability of Chatbot to process large set of historical data and language skills has made it a recommender system that filter information or use data to predict purchase options as well as for product selection (Leung & Yan Chan, 2020) in order to increase engagement and satisfaction by providing customers with a list of personalised products.

For retailers to continue to improve on customer experience and remain competitive, AI-enabled tool that can process natural language to support customers' and analyse sentiments and feedback at any scale are being applied in business. The digital transformation and automation of customer service support and the provision of self-service solution with conversational AI-Chatbot enables customers satisfaction, and going by the outcome of the survey result, this has changed the landscape of retail operations and support during and after transactions such that customers queries are being responded to in a fast and efficient manner rather than waiting for feedback in a traditional customer care representative scenario. On this premise, the AI-chatbot is a must have solution in today's fast-changing business environment to help retail organisation to continue making positive impact in customer service support, and satisfaction for an exciting customer experience. The conclusions of the research present the following. First, this study establishes the shopping preference of customers based on the empirical data form the survey. Second, customers are more comfortable with Intelligent agent since they are getting quick response to their queries in an efficient manner during interaction.

Implications

Chatbots plays significant role in businesses and is becoming a viable customer service channel in online platform or ecommerce because it provides an efficient and convenient avenue to interact with customers to answer questions and support them with online purchase queries. However, this research study contributes to existing knowledge in two ways. First, we have established a shopping preference with online platform that uses an AI-enabled conversational tools, Chatbot. Results of our analysis of the survey data show an acceptable preference for shopping. second, our study reveals the positive impact of AI-enabled chatbot on customer experiences within the retail sector. Enhancing customer experience has become a practice adopted by many organizations today to achieve their business goal, ensure customers' commitment to brand loyalty, and improve online interactions with consumers. However, this research study was carried out with participants who have purchased items in the last six months. It is important to increase the sample size to reinforce the survey data with more frequent shoppers to participate in the survey to show a good reflection of the views of the larger society. Other recommendation to consider in course of future research study is the introduction of AI-Chatbot in the service workflow to enable end-to-end interactions throughout the customer journey. Finally, AI-chatbot can also be used for collecting customer feedback across every touchpoint to understand their feelings afterwards.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Every retail organisation is differentiated by the uniqueness of their product and service offerings and the they provide support service to the convenience of the customers using advanced technologies to eliminate the need to have an array of representatives to manage the growing queries of the customers. The current survey data set is limited to a small number of respondents across the different retail products to explore the impact of AI-chatbot in enhancing customer experience. Firstly, our current research focus is post sales customer service support within the retail sector. Hence, future research may explore the impact of this technology across the customer journey (pre-sales, during sales and post sales with preference to retail ecommerce. Lastly, we only focused on the impact of AI-chatbots in enhancing post sale customer experience, hence for future research studies, we may also consider using Artificial Intelligence tool, especially AI-enabled chatbot as a tool for collecting customer feedback on customer experience and level of customer satisfaction throughout customers' touchpoint.



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Analysing the Role of CSR Policies in Building Brand Loyalty: A Case Study of Apple Inc.

Parminder Kaur

Abstract

This research critically examined the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on enhancing brand loyalty, explicitly focusing on Apple Inc. It identified a significant gap in understanding how CSR efforts shape consumer loyalty, a topic of increasing relevance in modern business. The study's primary objective was to provide an empirical analysis of the impact of Apple's CSR activities on its consumers' brand loyalty. This involves examining how these initiatives align with global CSR standards and consumer expectations and what strategic implications this alignment might have. A methodological approach of surveying 250 Apple product users and employing correlational and descriptive statistical techniques was adopted to dissect the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty. The research unearthed a spectrum of consumer perceptions towards Apple's CSR efforts, ranging from neutral to moderately positive. This indicates room for Apple to enhance its CSR endeavours and communication. Aligning CSR initiatives with international standards and consumer expectations is pivotal for fostering a positive brand image and solidifying consumer loyalty. In summation, the research underscores the indispensable role of CSR in cultivating and sustaining brand loyalty. It offers a compelling argument for businesses to invest in authentic, impactful CSR strategies and to communicate these efforts transparently. Such commitment to CSR can help businesses meet their ethical obligations while securing a competitive edge in the market, earning consumer trust, and achieving sustained success.

Keywords

- Brand Loyalty
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- Effective communication,



Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a mere corporate philanthropy concept to an integral aspect of strategic management, reflecting the complex interplay between businesses and the broader social environment in which they operate (Latapí Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). The genesis of CSR can be traced back to the early 20th century, with burgeoning industrialisation prompting businesses to take on roles beyond economic generation (Carroll, 1991).

Carroll's (1999) pyramid of CSR posits that business responsibilities are layered, beginning with financial, then legal, ethical, and finally, philanthropic, culminating in a comprehensive CSR model, as shown in Figure 1. The seminal work of Bowen on the social responsibilities of business people laid the groundwork for CSR, positing that businesses had obligations to society which transcended profit maximisation (Bowen,2013). As globalisation expanded, so did the scrutiny of corporate activities, leading to the proliferation of CSR in the latter half of the 20th century (Horrikan, 2010).

The Brundtland Report published in 1987 further amplified the discourse around sustainable development, weaving environmental stewardship into the fabric of CSR (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020). The turn of the millennium saw a conceptual shift, with Porter and Kramer (2006) advocating for creating shared value, where the success of a company and the well-being of the community become mutually reinforcing.

Recent scholarly works underscore the strategic significance of CSR, with companies like Apple Inc. embedding these responsibilities into their core operations to foster innovation, competitiveness, and trust (Azim & Nahar, 2020; Mogensen,2018). The materialisation of CSR has also been bolstered by international standards and frameworks, such as the United Nations Global Compact and the ISO 26000, guiding corporate practices across diverse global contexts (Rodrigues, 2018).

The importance of CSR continues to be reaffirmed as businesses are increasingly expected to be accountable not only to shareholders but to a broader constellation of stakeholders (Beschorner, Hajduk, & Schank, 2015). The ascendancy of CSR as a critical component in corporate strategy reflects a paradigm shift wherein stakeholder interests are perceived as pivotal to a firm's long-term success (Camilleri, 2017). This transition is underpinned by the recognition that social and environmental issues can materially affect business operations and profitability (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Consequently, CSR has been increasingly integrated into strategic planning, resonating with the principles of stakeholder theory that advocate for considering all societal actors affected by corporate actions (Camilleri, 2017).

The strategic infusion of CSR is also evident in the practices of leading corporations such as Apple Inc., where CSR initiatives are aligned with core business objectives, thus becoming a driver of innovation and competitive advantage Mogensen,2018). Empirical studies have established a link between robust CSR strategies and enhanced financial performance, suggesting that CSR can contribute to value creation and risk mitigation (Harjoto & Laksmana, 2018).

Moreover, the integration of CSR into corporate strategy is often reinforced through reporting frameworks like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which facilitates transparency and accountability in writing CSR activities (Sethi, Rovenpor, & Demir, 2017). As corporations navigate a landscape marked by resource scarcity and climate change, strategic CSR initiatives, underscored by ethical supply chain management and sustainability, have become indispensable. This strategic integration of CSR transforms businesses into agents of societal change, underlining the crucial role of CSR in contemporary corporate governance (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Historically, Apple Inc. has navigated CSR with increasing dedication (Azim & Nahar, 2020). The company's CSR journey was initially marked by its focus on product innovation while facing criticism over labour practices and environmental impact

(Larbi, 2014). In response, Apple expanded its CSR efforts, emphasising the ethical dimensions of its supply chain. In contemporary times, Apple's CSR endeavours are characterised by a comprehensive approach encompassing environmental sustainability, data privacy, and social equity Mogensen,2018). The company has committed to ambitious goals, such as becoming carbon neutral across its business by 2030. Additionally, Apple maintains a Supplier Code of Conduct, reflecting its drive towards responsible sourcing and labour rights (Apple Inc., 2021).

Brand loyalty has become a central focus for companies as it represents not only repeat patronage but also an emotional connection and commitment to a brand (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016). Traditionally, brand loyalty was primarily driven by consumer satisfaction with the product's quality and performance (Lina, 2022). However, in the contemporary marketplace, consumers increasingly factor corporate ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability into their purchasing decisions (Han et al., 2020). This shift suggests a potential link between CSR and brand loyalty, where CSR initiatives may play a crucial role in fostering a loyal customer base.

The significance of examining the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty lies in its implications for strategic business practices and consumer behaviour analysis. Integrating CSR into business strategies is not merely an ethical choice but can be a lever for competitive advantage by enhancing customer loyalty and financial performance (Lu et al., 2020). Thus, understanding how CSR contributes to brand loyalty can inform more effective corporate strategies that align business objectives with societal values.

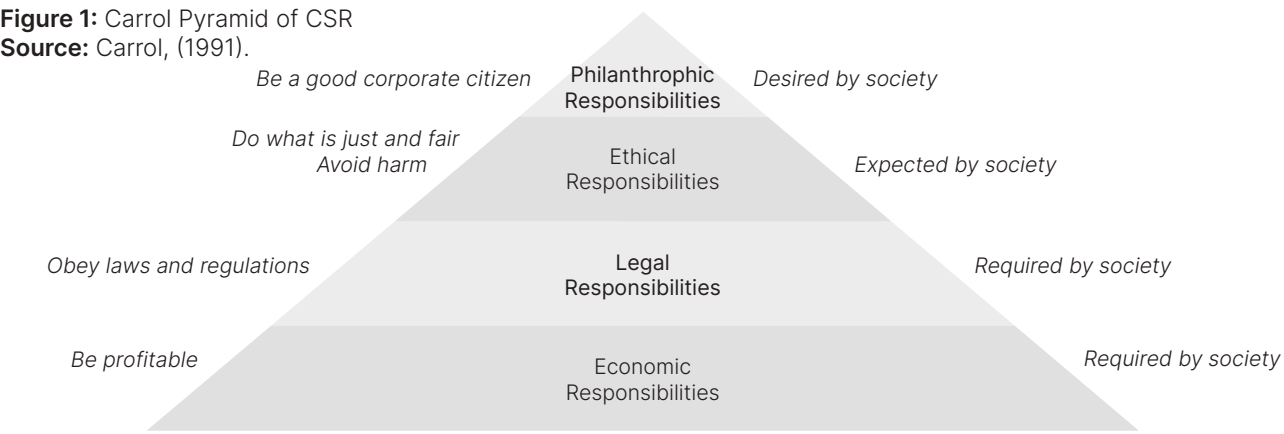
Literature reveals that CSR positively impacts brand loyalty, with consumers favouring companies they view as socially responsible, thus promoting loyalty and advocacy (Rivera, Bigne, & Curras-Perez, 2019). Yet, factors like CSR visibility and perceived authenticity affect this relationship (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Current research on CSR's role in brand loyalty within the dynamic tech sector, particularly for companies like Apple, is limited. The sector's unique consumer-brand dynamics warrant focused studies to understand CSR's influence on loyalty amidst evolving consumer expectations (Zhou et al.,2012; Chernev & Blair, 2015). This research gap highlights the importance of context-specific studies that can unpack the nuanced relationship between CSR and brand loyalty. By focusing on a case study of Apple Inc., this research aims to contribute to the literature by providing in-depth insights into how a leading player in the tech industry leverages CSR to build and maintain brand loyalty.

This study aims to investigate the influence of CSR policies on brand loyalty, focusing on Apple Inc. as a case study. This research aims to dissect and understand how CSR initiatives by a leading technology firm impact consumer allegiance (Mogensen, 2018).

This inquiry is paramount in the scholarly realm, as it seeks to fill a conspicuous gap in the existing literature that frequently neglects the intricate link between CSR activities and consumer loyalty, particularly within the high-tech sector (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019).

The significance of this study is multifaceted. From an academic standpoint, it contributes to the CSR corpus by delivering empirical insights into the interconnection between CSR and brand loyalty within a distinct corporate framework (Porter & Kramer, 2006). In practical terms, it elucidates how CSR can act as a pivotal mechanism to enhance brand loyalty, an essential element for businesses' enduring success and sustainability (Du et al., 2010). Exploring Apple Inc.'s CSR policies may illuminate pathways for other entities to refine their CSR tactics to bolster consumer engagement and advocacy (Harjoto & Laksmana, 2018).

Figure 1: Carrol Pyramid of CSR
Source: Carrol, (1991).



The scholarly contributions of this study are substantial. It intends to broaden the theoretical landscape by amalgamating consumer behaviour theories with CSR impact assessments, offering an enriched lens on CSR's strategic importance (Sethi et al., 2017). By empirically evaluating the CSR initiatives of Apple Inc., this research promises to yield detailed perspectives on the formulation and communication of strategies that strengthen consumer confidence and loyalty (Zhou et al., 2012). Furthermore, the findings are expected to yield actionable strategies for companies looking to enhance their brand loyalty by synchronising their CSR activities with the evolving expectations and values of modern consumers, thereby affirming the study's pertinence and its capacity to steer corporate conduct in a direction that is ethically sound and economically advantageous (Lu et al., 2020).

This study addresses the elusive nature of quantifying the effect of CSR on brand loyalty, particularly within the technology industry. Although there is an academic consensus that CSR initiatives can engender customer loyalty (Horrigan, 2010; Camilleri, 2017), the mechanism through which this effect is actualised remains insufficiently quantified. This presents a significant gap in both theoretical understanding and practical application (Rivera et al., 2019; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012), warranting an investigation that could substantiate the strategic value of CSR within the corporate ethos.

This challenge is magnified in the technology sector, where the rapid pace of innovation and the intensity of competition necessitate a nuanced understanding of consumer loyalty drivers. CSR activities, traditionally seen as cost centres, are increasingly being scrutinised for their potential to generate value, warranting a thorough investigation into their strategic implications for brand loyalty (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010).

Apple Inc., recognised for its comprehensive global presence and well-established reputation in CSR, provides an optimal case for this study (Mogensen, 2018). The company's extensive CSR initiatives afford a rich opportunity to investigate the full spectrum of CSR's influence on consumer loyalty. The investigation into Apple's CSR strategies can shed light on consumer perceptions and the value placed on such practices (Azim & Nahar, 2020), offering potentially generalisable insights to other entities within the tech industry and further afield. Therefore, by delving into the CSR activities of Apple Inc., this study aspires to contribute significantly to the empirical body of knowledge and provide strategic direction for harnessing CSR as an instrument to nurture brand loyalty (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016; Han et al., 2020).

This study sought to find if there exists any relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies and brand loyalty, using Apple Inc. as a representative case study. While the business world has seen a growing integration of CSR initiatives, it's imperative to understand how these policies may directly or

indirectly influence consumer behaviours, especially loyalty. To this end, the following objectives have been outlined:

- To investigate the extent and depth of Apple Inc.'s CSR initiatives and analyse their alignment with global sustainability standards.
- To evaluate consumer perceptions regarding Apple's CSR efforts and determine how these perceptions might shape purchasing decisions.
- To analyse empirical data linking CSR initiatives to brand loyalty, specifically in the context of Apple, drawing potential correlations or contrasts.
- To provide recommendations for businesses looking to bolster their brand loyalty through enhanced CSR strategies based on insights gleaned from the Apple Inc. case study.

This study aims to answer the following research questions.

1. How do consumers perceive Apple's CSR endeavours?
2. Do consumers' perceptions of Apple's CSR initiatives impact their brand loyalty towards the company?

Literature Review

In the contemporary corporate landscape, CSR has transcended its traditional guise of mere philanthropy, positioning itself as a pivotal element in the strategic schema of modern enterprises. This expansion integrates ethical practices and sustainability, elements vital for sculpting public image and steering consumer interactions in a marketplace increasingly propelled by social consciousness. This study probes the nuanced nexus between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty, with a focus on Apple Inc., a trailblazer in both technological innovation and CSR commitment. Its purpose is to demystify the effects of Apple's ethical corporate manoeuvres on cultivating customer devotion. Through an exhaustive literature review, the research presents a profound examination of the CSR-brand loyalty interplay, casting light on this dynamic facet of the current business milieu.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR has evolved remarkably, shifting from mere charity to a strategic business element. Carroll (1991) observed that initial CSR efforts were mainly philanthropic with companies contributing to social welfare more out of kindness than as a core business strategy. This period, characterized by charitable contributions and community support, laid the foundational groundwork

for the subsequent expansion and intensification of CSR practices. As the business world evolved, so did the perception and implementation of CSR. Porter and Kramer's (2006) concept of 'creating shared value' marked a turning point in the role of CSR within corporate strategies. This groundbreaking idea highlighted the synergy between societal good and economic gains, suggesting the most impactful CSR initiatives are those where a company's social and economic goals align. CSR thus progressed beyond simple charity to become a key factor in shaping business strategies and gaining competitive edges. This fusion of CSR into core business functions signified a crucial juncture, acknowledging that corporate prosperity and societal advancement are mutually dependent. This shift towards strategic CSR mirrors an increasing recognition in the corporate world that addressing social challenges is not just an ethical obligation but a central component of sustainable business practices.

In the realm of CSR, various policies are employed by companies to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and ethical practices. A focal point is environmental sustainability, where businesses endeavour to minimize their ecological footprint and incorporate environmentally friendly practices. For instance, many companies have embraced green energy and sustainable production methods to lessen environmental impact (Han et al., 2019). This move towards ecological responsibility not only addresses environmental concerns but also bolsters corporate reputation and strengthens stakeholder trust.

Ethical labour practises are another part of CSR. Companies are beginning to understand the value of fair labour standards, which include providing safe working conditions, fair salaries, and respecting workers' rights. As highlighted by Hopkins (2007), such practices are integral in maintaining a sustainable supply chain and fostering a positive workplace environment. For example, tech giants like Apple Inc. have been scrutinizing their supply chains more rigorously to ensure ethical labour practices are upheld (Locke, 2013).

Community engagement is also a pivotal element of CSR. Companies engage in community development projects, educational initiatives, or healthcare programs to give back to the societies in which they operate. According to Kotler and Lee (2005), these initiatives not only contribute to societal welfare but also strengthen the company's social license to operate. A notable example is Starbucks' Community Store Program, which aims to support local economic development in underrepresented neighbourhoods (Starbucks Corporation, 2020). These diverse CSR policies reflect the multifaceted approach companies are taking to fulfil their social and environmental responsibilities while simultaneously advancing their business objectives.



Contemporary developments in CSR are characterized by a notable shift, emphasizing the incorporation of digital approaches, alignment with worldwide sustainability objectives, and a deepened engagement with stakeholders. The rise of digital CSR is noteworthy, utilizing technology as a tool to bolster social impact while promoting greater transparency. Companies are increasingly turning to social media as a platform to connect with stakeholders, using these channels to share updates about their CSR activities. This practice allows for immediate communication and fosters dynamic, interactive exchanges. Such a digital strategy not only elevates the visibility of CSR initiatives but also invites more active participation from stakeholders (Maignan and Ralston, 2002).

The CSR initiatives of many firms now centre on global sustainability goals, especially the SDGs set forth by the United Nations. Companies are coordinating their corporate social responsibility initiatives with these aims in order to combat global issues including inequality, poverty, and climate change (Scheyvens et al., 2016). Business models that include SDGs allow enterprises to pursue economic interests while also contributing to greater societal objectives. Modern CSR approaches have transformed to embrace inclusivity and participation, engaging a variety of stakeholders like local communities, customers, employees, and NGOs. This collaboration helps in shaping CSR initiatives that are both impactful and pertinent, ensuring they meet stakeholder needs and expectations more effectively. This strategy amplifies the impact and relevance of CSR activities (Greenwood, 2007).

Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty, a complex yet essential element in understanding consumer dynamics and business success, encompasses more than just habitual purchasing. Keller (2001) describes brand loyalty as a consumer's dedication to repurchase or persist in using a brand, marked by a favourable attitude. This notion extends beyond mere repeat buying to include psychological allegiance and preference for a brand over its competitors. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) add nuance to this concept by identifying two key aspects: attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is about emotional attachment and perceived value, while behavioural loyalty is seen through consistent buying behaviours.

Product quality emerges as a critical factor in fostering brand loyalty. Aaker (1991) notes that superior quality products not only fulfil but often surpass customer expectations, building trust and encouraging repeat patronage. Quality is seen as a reflection of a brand's values and capabilities, significantly shaping consumer perception and loyalty. Customer service is another pillar in cultivating brand loyalty. Exceptional customer service, as highlighted by

Tran (2020), generates positive experiences, leading to heightened satisfaction and loyalty. Effective customer service involves understanding and addressing customer needs promptly and pleasantly, creating an emotional bond with the brand that bolsters loyalty.

Brand image, the consumer's perception of a brand, wields significant influence. Keller (1993) posits that a strong, positive brand image can evoke pride and a sense of community among customers, thereby nurturing loyalty. This image is shaped by a confluence of factors: the quality of products or services, the company's values, marketing initiatives, and CSR endeavours. Arghashi et al., (2021) emphasize that CSR's integration into business strategies can profoundly affect brand loyalty. Brands perceived as socially responsible often foster deeper consumer attachment. CSR activities not only polish a brand's image but also forge trust and create emotional bonds with consumers, contributing to their loyalty. In the digital era, brand-consumer interactions have been revolutionized. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) underscore the critical role of social media and online communities in maintaining customer relationships and loyalty. These digital platforms offer unique avenues for customer engagement, feedback, and a heightened sense of connection, all vital in cultivating loyalty.

CSR and Brand Loyalty

CSR has ascended to a crucial role in fostering brand loyalty, a trend increasingly evident in modern business analysis. CSR's evolution from mere compliance or philanthropy to a strategic business approach has markedly influenced consumer behaviour and loyalty. Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) pinpointed a tangible link between CSR endeavours and consumer loyalty, highlighting consumers' gravitation towards brands exemplifying ethical and responsible practices. Subsequent research has probed deeper into this linkage, exploring CSR's impact on brand loyalty beyond basic commercial interactions. Studies, like the one by Fatma, Rahman, and Khan (2015), uncovered that eco-friendly initiatives and social welfare activities by companies cultivate a positive brand image among consumers. This positive perception establishes an emotional bond and loyalty, as consumers resonate with and take pride in a brand's ethical standards and commitments.

Incorporating CSR into a brand's core strategy has proven pivotal in boosting customer trust and loyalty. Glavas and Kelley (2014) discovered that brands actively participating in CSR are deemed more trustworthy, leading to enhanced customer retention. This trust originates from the belief that socially responsible companies are genuinely invested in their customers' and society's wellbeing, reaffirming their commitment beyond profit motives. New momentum is being generated by CSR initiatives in the digital

era. Companies are bringing their customers into CSR initiatives through internet platforms. According to research by Hildebrand, Sen, and Bhattacharya (2011), digital CSR initiatives that align with a company's principles and character significantly increase consumer involvement and devotion. By connecting with a brand's CSR programmes directly through these digital channels, customers may have a more personalised and meaningful experience.

CSR is progressively recognized as a critical determinant in moulding consumer perceptions and interactions with brands. This evolution stems from an escalating consumer demand for more than just high-quality products or services; they aspire to associate with brands that resonate with their personal ethical and social principles. Contemporary research highlights the significant impact of CSR on consumer brand perception. For example, the study by Ashraf et al., (2018) reveals that CSR efforts enhance a brand's image, portraying it as empathetic and accountable. Such an elevated reputation fosters stronger emotional connections with the brand, swaying consumer behaviour towards the company. A brand that is perceived as socially responsible not only earns trust and loyalty from its consumers but often reaps the rewards of favourable word-of-mouth endorsements, a testament to its positive social footprint.

The nature of CSR initiatives plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions. In their 2006 study, Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill found that cause-related marketing, where companies donate profits to social causes, significantly bolsters a brand's image as socially responsible. More than awareness, such strategies position brands as dynamic forces in societal advancement. There has been a heightened impact due to the proliferation of digital CSR initiatives. A study conducted by Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) found that online communities, particularly social media, are a powerful tool for corporations to propagate their CSR activities and engage their consumers in two-way exchanges. Transparency, trust, and a stronger connection to the brand are all improved through this digital engagement.

Empirical studies have significantly contributed to understanding the role of CSR in enhancing brand loyalty. A plethora of research has delved into this relationship, offering valuable insights into how CSR initiatives influence consumer behaviour and perceptions. Lu et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive study to evaluate the impact of a firm's CSR initiatives on brand loyalty and brand image. Their research, involving 364 luxury goods consumers, employed structural equation modelling to analyse the data. The authors in this study utilised survey questionnaire method. The survey population was recruited online through convenience sampling. After collection of data, Smart PLS 3.0 software was used for data analysis. The findings were clear: CSR initiatives positively and significantly influenced brand loyalty and

brand image. This study underscores the importance of CSR in differentiating a brand from its competitors, thereby enhancing its competitive edge in the market.

In a similar vein, Cha, Yi, and Bagozzi (2016) explored how CSR activities influence brand loyalty through the lens of CSR-brand fit. The sample size of this study was 237 customers of brand coffee shop. The authors used survey questionnaire method for data collection. Their study in the coffee shop industry demonstrated that CSR initiatives aligned with a brand's core values strengthen both personal and social brand identification, subsequently enhancing service brand loyalty. The study also revealed that customer participation in CSR activities could further bolster this loyalty.

Khan and Fatma (2019) extended the CSR literature by investigating the mediating role of brand experience and brand trust in the CSR-brand loyalty linkage. For this research authors relied on survey questionnaire method to collect primary data. For this study, a survey was undertaken in the vicinity of retail complexes in Delhi, the capital of India, targeting consumers of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). A total of 354 respondents participated in the survey. Their study, conducted among consumers of fast-moving consumer goods in India, found that CSR indirectly influences brand loyalty through brand experience and brand trust, with the former having a stronger effect. He and Lai (2014) focused on the indirect effects of CSR on brand loyalty, particularly through brand image. Methodologically, they employed a shopping centre intercept approach to gather data from 280 participants. This involved intercepting shoppers in four bustling Hong Kong areas, screening for eligibility, and conducting immediate surveys. The data collection was executed by four marketing-major graduate students, trained in the research objectives and intercept technique. They collected data during varied days and times to ensure a representative sample. Their study highlighted that different dimensions of CSR, like legal and ethical responsibilities, enhance brand loyalty by improving the brand's functional and symbolic images. This finding suggests that companies should focus on key CSR dimensions that resonate with their target consumers.

Pratihari and Uzma (2018) examined the impact of CSR on corporate branding and brand loyalty in the Indian banking industry. The researchers used a quantitative approach to conduct their study. They created a structured questionnaire with a seven-point Likert scale to get responses from 430 savings bank customers. The participants were selected through stratified random sampling. This cross-sectional study introduced a new scale to measure corporate branding as a unified construct, which reflects the many different aspects of branding. Their findings indicated that CSR components significantly affect corporate branding, which in turn enhances customer brand

loyalty. This study offers insights into the integrated effect of CSR and corporate branding on loyalty. Rivera, Bigne, and Curras-Perez (2019) analysed the influence of CSR associations on brand loyalty in the sportswear sector. In this study researcher employed an online questionnaire distributed across Spain's autonomous regions to 351 participants, analysing data using covariance structure analysis with to assess CSR's impact on brand loyalty in the sportswear sector. Their study revealed that CSR associations directly and positively influence loyalty and indirectly through brand awareness and consumer satisfaction.

The collective findings from the studies highlight a robust link between CSR and brand loyalty, underscoring CSR's pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. These studies converge on the idea that CSR initiatives significantly influence brand image and loyalty, but they also reveal the nuanced mechanisms of this influence. A critical implication of these findings is the importance of CSR alignment with brand values and consumer expectations. Studies by Lu et al. (2020) and Pratihari and Uzma (2018) emphasize that CSR initiatives resonating with a brand's core values are more effective in enhancing brand loyalty. This alignment is crucial in creating a perception of authenticity, which Khan and Fatma (2019) identified as a key mediator in the CSR-brand loyalty relationship. Yet, these investigations come with their own set of restrictions. A significant limitation lies in the dependence on self-reported data, which may carry inherent biases. Moreover, most of these studies adopt a cross-sectional approach, constraining the capacity to establish causality. In-depth, longitudinal research could offer more profound insights into how the influence of CSR on brand loyalty evolves over time. Additionally, the diverse settings of these studies, spanning industries from banking to coffee shops, imply that CSR's effect on brand loyalty could vary across different sectors. This diversity underscores the need for more tailored research, delving into the specific dynamics within various industries to better understand the nuanced impact of CSR in each context.

Case Study – Apple Inc.

Apple Inc. stands as a paragon in the technology industry for its expansive CSR endeavours. Articulated through its sustainability reports and dedicated CSR web pages, Apple's activities span a broad spectrum, encompassing environmental sustainability, user privacy, and inclusivity. A notable example of its dedication is the company's vow to reach carbon neutrality across its product lifecycle by 2030, underscoring its deep-rooted commitment to environmental preservation. Furthermore, Apple's emphasis on protecting user privacy and promoting diversity and inclusion within its team reflects a well-rounded and thorough approach to CSR.

The influence of Apple's CSR efforts on brand loyalty is noteworthy. Iglesias et al. (2020) and Markovic et al. (2018) point out that Apple's CSR strategies resonate with the growing trend of ethical consumerism, which is increasingly shaping corporate branding. Recently, Apple has shifted towards more participatory efforts, such as soliciting feedback on product design and sustainability, embracing a co-creation approach that could further strengthen the link between CSR and brand loyalty. This indicates Apple's recognition of the value in involving customers in CSR practices to enhance their loyalty.

Furthermore, Apple's transparent communication regarding its environmental and social initiatives is crucial in establishing perceived authenticity in its CSR endeavours. Safeer & Liu (2023) emphasize that authenticity in business practices is highly valued by consumers. Apple's forthright sharing of its CSR successes and objectives potentially fosters trust and authenticity, reinforcing consumer loyalty. This transparent method is in line with the increasing consumer demand for sincere and responsible business behaviour, likely boosting Apple's brand loyalty. This demonstrates the pivotal role of transparency and genuine engagement in enhancing consumer relationships in the contemporary market landscape.

The theoretical framework connecting CSR and brand loyalty is deeply rooted in stakeholder theory and brand equity theory. Stakeholder theory, introduced by Freeman (1984), asserts that a company's obligations extend beyond its shareholders, including a diverse group of stakeholders like customers, employees, suppliers, and the broader community. This perspective emphasizes the significance of catering to the interests and welfare of all stakeholders, positing that CSR initiatives are essential in meeting these responsibilities. By adopting responsible practices, businesses can cultivate trust and loyalty among their stakeholders, especially consumers.

Brand equity theory, explored by Aaker (1991), offers an additional perspective on CSR's influence on brand loyalty. This theory views brand equity as the value accruing from consumer perceptions of a brand, encompassing factors like brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. CSR initiatives can markedly boost brand equity by positively influencing consumer views of a brand's social and ethical commitments. Thus, CSR activities can be regarded as an investment in the brand itself, fostering a favourable reputation that leads to enhanced consumer loyalty.

Collectively, these theories provide a robust framework for comprehending the complex effects of CSR on brand loyalty. They underscore the necessity of considering the wider social and ethical dimensions of business activities and their potential to shape consumer perceptions and behaviours. The literature review concludes that CSR significantly shapes brand loyalty. It highlights the criticality of CSR in aligning with consumer expectations in today's market. However, it identifies a gap in understanding the sustained influence of CSR on customer loyalty in technology industry, suggesting a need for further exploration in this evolving field. This gap was pinpointed by studies like Iglesias et al. (2020) and Safeer & Liu (2023), who pointed out the need for more in-depth analysis in this rapidly evolving industry. Therefore the present study aims to fill the research gap by investigating Apple's CSR initiative in building brand loyalty.

Methodology

By adopting a positivist philosophy, the research emphasizes empirical observation and the quantitative assessment of human behaviour. This quantitative and deductive approach is geared towards testing established hypotheses in the realms of CSR and brand loyalty. Central to this study is the use of a survey technique, aptly fitting the quantitative paradigm by enabling structured and measurable data collection. Opting for a cross-sectional design, the survey is adept at obtaining data at a specific point in time, thereby assisting in the analysis of current consumer views on Apple Inc.'s CSR practices.

Positivism, a philosophy grounded in the natural sciences, is particularly pertinent to this study. Positivism posits that reality is independent of human thought and can be objectively measured and understood (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.44). This view aligns seamlessly with the nature of this research, which aims to analyse the role of CSR policies in building brand loyalty through a quantitative lens. Central to positivism is the idea that knowledge stems from empirical observations and experiences that can be quantified and analysed statistically. By adopting a positivist approach, this research adheres to a structured methodology, relying on empirical data gathered through surveys to conclude (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.44). This approach is particularly well-suited to large-scale studies, such as the proposed survey targeting 250 participants, where the aim is to gather precise, objective data that can be quantitatively analysed (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.50).

Adhering to the principles of positivism, the chosen research approach for this study is quantitative and deductive, which enables the development and testing of a hypothesis, which in this case, is predicated on the theory that robust CSR policies significantly influence brand loyalty. The methodology involves formulating a hypothesis grounded in existing theory, followed by designing a research strategy to empirically test this hypothesis (Blaxter et al., 2010, pp.65–66). The hypothesis for this study suggests a positive correlation between effective CSR policies and brand loyalty. The goal is to rigorously test this relationship using quantitative methods, particularly through structured surveys aimed at consumers. The deductive nature of this approach is fitting for the research objectives as it facilitates the measurement of the interrelation between CSR initiatives and consumer loyalty systematically and objectively. In analysing the data, statistical tools as recommended by Field (2018) are utilized to validate or challenge the initial hypothesis. The preference for a quantitative deductive approach over a qualitative one is influenced by various considerations. While qualitative research provides in-depth, contextual insights, it falls short in hypothesis testing and quantifying specific variable relationships (Denscombe, 2014, p.308). The primary aim of this study is to quantitatively evaluate the impact of CSR on

brand loyalty, a goal that necessitates precise, empirical data, which qualitative methods, focusing more on exploring meanings and experiences, cannot adequately supply. Additionally, the substantial sample size of 250 participants further endorses the quantitative approach. Conversely, qualitative methods are typically more effective with smaller sample sizes and do not lend themselves as effectively to broad generalizations.

Research Strategy

In this quantitative research, the survey method is employed as the primary means of data collection. In quantitative research, surveys are commonly acknowledged as an essential method for collecting data on public behaviour or opinion (Dillman et al., 2014). The employment of surveys in this research is primarily due to their efficacy in gathering extensive data from a wide demographic efficiently. Surveys are notably versatile and practical, particularly beneficial when dealing with a substantial sample size, such as the 250 participants in this study. They facilitate the uniform collection of data, ensuring that responses are consistent across the participant spectrum. Such standardization is vital in quantitative research, where statistical analysis is pivotal for identifying trends and correlations within the data (Bryman, 2016).

One major benefit of surveys is the anonymity they allow, which can encourage people to be more honest and forthright when answering questions on sensitive or potentially biased issues (Fink, 2017). This is particularly important to keep in mind while researching customer perceptions and brand loyalty, as people's feelings and opinions towards the brand might differ greatly. Furthermore, the choice of surveys over other methodologies, such as case studies or experiments, is dictated by the research goals. While case studies offer a detailed examination of specific scenarios and experiments control variable manipulation, surveys are optimal for assessing widespread patterns and tendencies within a larger population (Creswell, 2014).

The data collection process for this study on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand loyalty, specifically focusing on Apple Inc., is executed systematically, aligning with the quantitative, positivist philosophy guiding the research. This process encompasses the development of a survey, the selection of participants through purposive sampling, and the distribution of the survey via suitable channels. The survey was developed with the intent to collect data on consumer perceptions of Apple Inc.'s CSR initiatives and their impact on brand loyalty. It features Likert-scale questions, developed from insights in these studies, to assess consumer perceptions of Apple's CSR initiatives. (Carroll, 2021; Safeer & Liu, 2023). The questionnaire, structured around the insights from Carroll (2021) and Safeer & Liu (2023), features Likert-scale items specifically designed to evaluate consumer perceptions of Apple's CSR initiatives. The questionnaire carefully evaluates

aspects associated with Apple Inc.'s corporate social responsibility initiatives. Questions 1-6 and 18 measure the level of awareness and opinions about Apple's environmental initiatives and ethical practices. Meanwhile, items 7-12 and 20-23 directly assess the influence of these initiatives on consumer brand loyalty and purchasing decisions.

For participant recruitment in this study, we employed a targeted approach, focusing exclusively on consumers of Apple products. This was clearly stated in the survey questionnaire, where it was advised that only individuals who use Apple products should participate. Participants were recruited through online platforms frequented by Apple users, such as social media groups dedicated to Apple products. Personalized messages were sent to group members detailing the study's purpose and emphasizing the importance of their participation. The messages invited them to participate in the survey focused on CSR policies and brand loyalty. This method ensures that all respondents have direct experience with Apple, making them relevant for the study's focus on brand loyalty and CSR perceptions. This approach ensures the inclusion of a diverse range of Apple consumers, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of the findings.

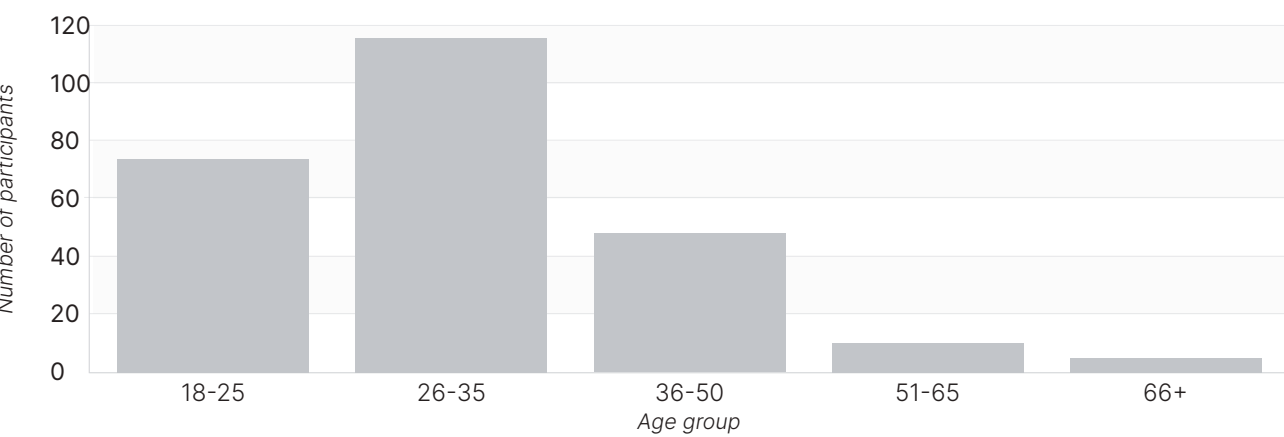
The survey is disseminated through online platforms i.e. Microsoft Forms utilizing the extensive reach and accessibility of digital tools (Tojiyeva & Abdullayev, 2021; Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013). This method facilitates the efficient collection of data from a geographically diverse group of participants. The survey is shared across social media, professional networks, and email lists, and particular efforts are made to engage Apple Inc. users. This strategy ensures the inclusion of participants likely to have an interest or background knowledge in these areas. To ensure a diverse sample, the survey is disseminated through Microsoft Forms targeting a wide range of Apple product consumers. This includes posting on Apple-related forums like MacRumors and the Apple subreddit and leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook groups and Twitter hashtags dedicated to Apple enthusiasts. The search was conducted on Facebook and other social media platforms to access various Apple Inc. communities. This was done through direct messaging or by posting comments on the community page. The purpose of this process was to gather information for market research or to gain feedback on the company's products or services.

To delve further into participants' opinions on Apple's CSR practices, the survey included several critical questions. Participants' opinions on Apple's dedication to moral business practises and a diverse workforce were solicited, along with assessments of their knowledge of the company's environmental initiatives. Responses to these questions are pivotal in determining the degree to which consumers perceive Apple's CSR initiatives as authentic and how these perceptions influence their loyalty to the brand.

Findings

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire distributed online to Apple product users. This research included 250 participants. In terms of respondents' gender, out of the total 250 participants, 139 were male, 109 were female, and 2 preferred not to disclose their gender. Among them were 76 participants aged between eighteen and twenty-five years and 118 aged between twenty-six and thirty-five years. There were also 45 participants from the thirty-six to fifty years age bracket, 10 over fifty to sixty-five, and one above sixty-six.

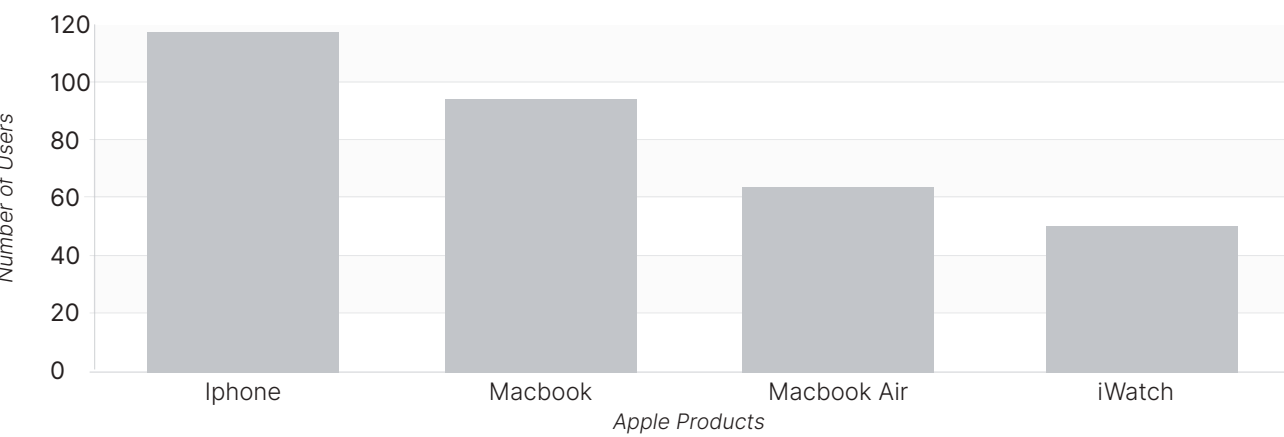
Figure 2: Age Distribution of survey participants



Apple Product Usage:

Of the 250 participants, 119 use iPhone, 94 use MacBook, 63 use MacBook Air, and 52 use iWatch. This indicates that the iPhone has the highest usage among Apple products, followed by MacBook and MacBook Air. Furthermore, all 250 participants are Apple product users, which provides a focused perspective from consumers who are already engaged with Apple's ecosystem.

Figure 3: Commonly used Apple products by Participants



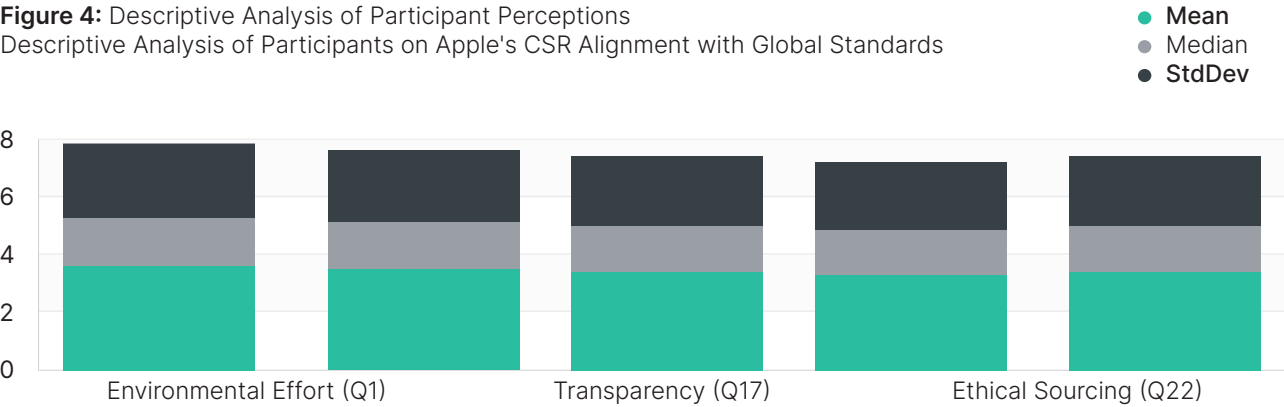
Investigation of Apple's CSR Alignment with Global Standards:

The survey measured participant perceptions across variables like Environmental Effort, Ethical Practices, and Transparency to discover how Apple's CSR aligns with global standards. The process involved analysing answers according to mean and standard deviation to get a general idea of sentiment and its dispersion. The results of the descriptive analysis are shown in Table 1.

• Environmental_Effort (Q1):		
Mean: 3.398 suggests that Apple's effort to reduce its environmental impact is making progress towards global standards.		StdDev: A moderate range of opinions is suggested by the standard deviation of 1.409.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical_Practices (Q2): Mean: 3.064: This is a neutral to slightly positive rating about how Apple's CSR activities stack up against the global standard for corporate ethics. 	StdDev: Respondents' perceptions differ to some degree. A slightly higher standard deviation of 1.448 indicates so.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency (Q17): Mean 3.045, reflecting a neutral stance on Apple's transparency about sourcing and manufacturing. This suggests room for improvement in clearly communicating efforts. 	StdDev: A standard deviation 1.260 indicates varied opinions but slightly less dispersion than Q1 and Q2.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental_Initiatives (Q21): Mean 3.039, indicating a neutral to slightly positive perception of Apple's environmental initiatives' impact on brand loyalty. This suggests that while some see the value in these efforts, there's potential to strengthen the impression they make. 	StdDev: 1.166, showing a somewhat consistent range of responses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical_Sourcing (Q22): Mean 3.085, showing a slightly positive view of Apple's ethical sourcing and its contribution to ongoing loyalty. This suggests that ethical sourcing is recognised but may not be a decisive factor for all customers. 	StdDev: 1.231, indicating a moderate range of perceptions.

The results suggest that while there is a general acknowledgement of Apple's efforts in areas like environmental impact, ethical practices, and transparency, the perception tends to hover around neutral to slightly positive. This indicates room for improvement and more robust communication of CSR initiatives to align more closely with global standards and positively influence consumer perceptions.



Evaluation of Consumer Perceptions of Apples CSR

The study measured the correlation between awareness of Apple's sustainability, ethical practices, and philanthropic activities with brand perception and loyalty to evaluate consumer perceptions of Apple's CSR. The correlation coefficients as shown in Table 2 are all very high, close to 1, indicating strong positive relationships between the awareness/perceived genuineness of Apple's CSR efforts and consumer perceptions of brand loyalty and endorsement.

• **Awareness of Sustainability Efforts (Q5):** Shows a very strong positive correlation with all three brand perception and loyalty variables (Q7, Q8, Q11). This suggests that as awareness of Apple's sustainability efforts increases, perceptions of brand improvement and loyalty

also increase.

• **Commitment to Ethical Practices (Q6):** Also demonstrates a strong positive correlation, indicating that perceived commitment to ethical practices is closely associated with improved brand perception and loyalty.

• **Awareness of Philanthropic Activities (Q18):** Has the highest correlations, especially with CSR making individuals more brand loyal (Q11), suggesting a particularly strong relationship between awareness of philanthropy and brand loyalty.

The findings suggest that greater CSR awareness is significantly linked to improved brand perception and increased loyalty.

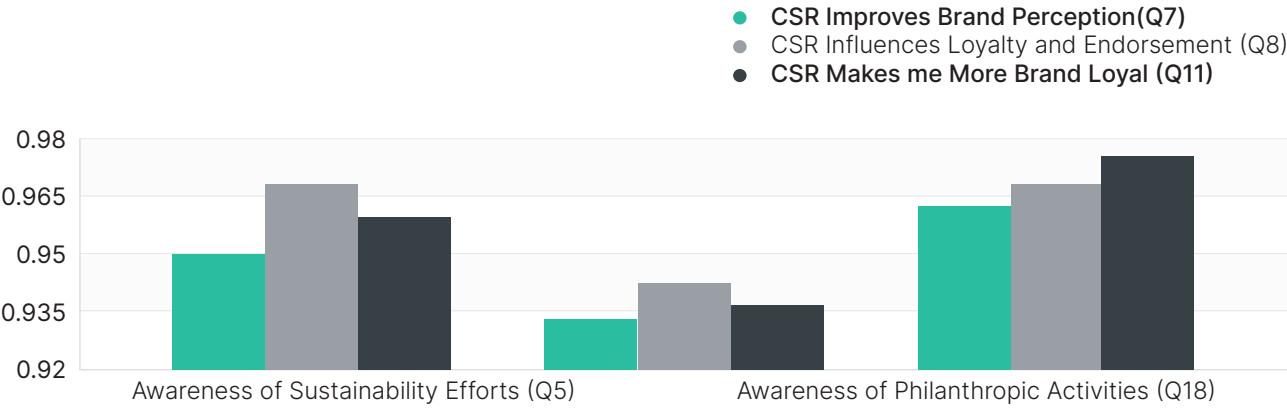


Figure 6: Correlational Analysis of Consumer Perception on Apple's CSR

Empirical Link between CSR Initiatives and Brand Loyalty:

To determine the empirical link between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty, the study examined correlations among variables related to loyalty, continued purchase, recommendation, preference over competitors, and the influence of diversity and inclusion. Table 3 contains the results of the correlational analysis. All correlation coefficients are very high (close to 1), indicating strong positive relationships between the measures of brand loyalty and the impact of CSR initiatives.

- **CSR Influences Loyalty (Q8):** Shows a particularly strong relationship with continued purchase intentions (Q9) and likelihood to recommend (Q10). This suggests that when consumers perceive Apple's CSR positively, they are more likely to continue purchasing and recommending Apple products.
- **Preference Over Competitors (Q12):** While also highly correlated with the other variables, its slightly lower coefficients suggest that while CSR initiatives are influential, other factors may also play a significant role in the preference over competitors.
- **Continued Purchase (Q9) and Recommend Apple (Q10):** These two also show a very strong correlation with each other, indicating that those who are willing to continue purchasing even if prices increase are

interact with the brand in terms of loyalty and purchasing decisions.

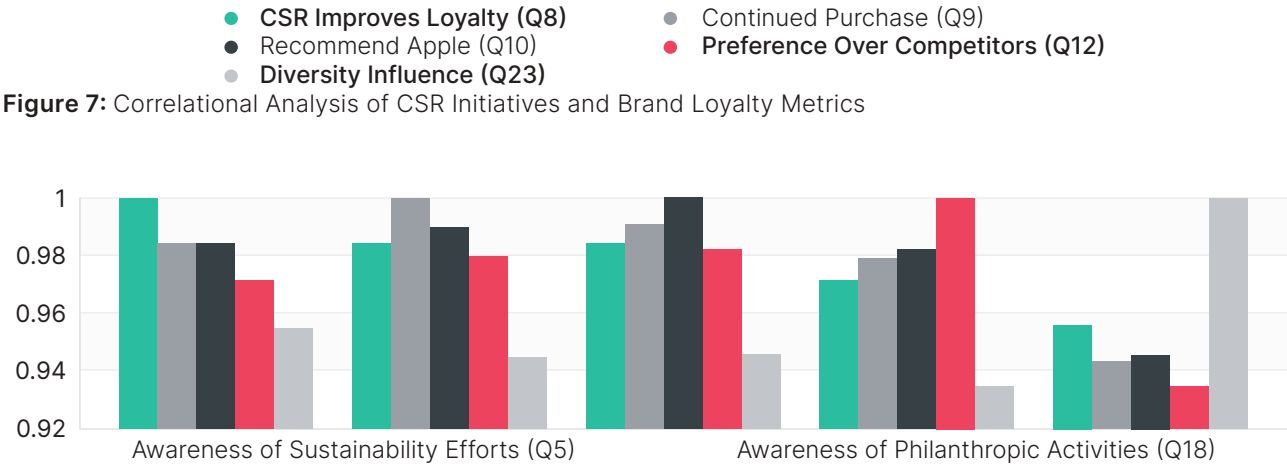


Figure 7: Correlational Analysis of CSR Initiatives and Brand Loyalty Metrics

Correlational Analysis of CSR Initiatives and Brand Loyalty Metrics

Strategic Recommendations for Enhanced CSR:

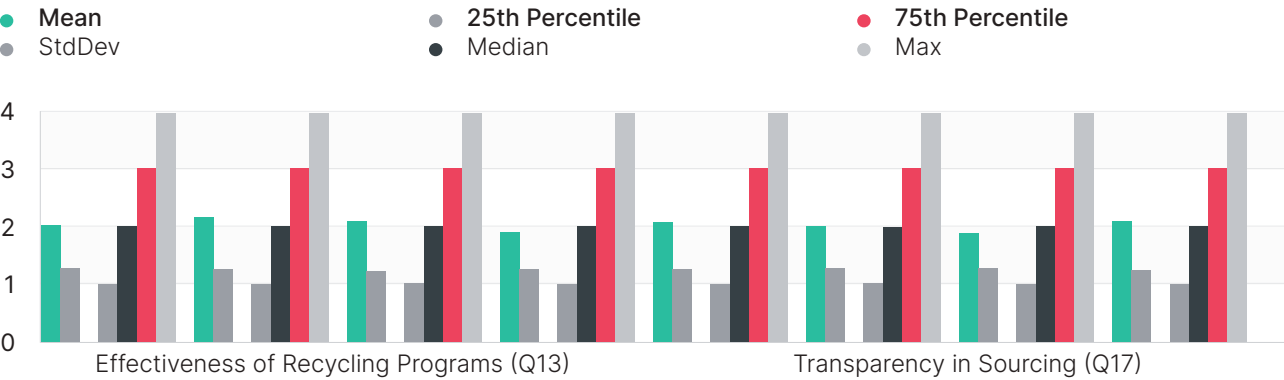
To provide recommendations for enhanced CSR strategies based on insights from the survey a detailed analysis of these questions Q13 through Q20 provided with understanding of the effectiveness of specific CSR activities and general perceptions. Descriptive statistics were applied to understand the central tendencies and variabilities, and correlational analysis was also used to understand the relationships

and differences between the various aspects of CSR activities. Table 4 shows that most questions have a mean score of around 2, indicating a general tendency towards "Disagree" or "Neutral" on the effectiveness and perception of CSR activities. The standard deviations are close to 1.25 for most questions, indicating a moderate spread of responses around the mean.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for CSR Strategy

Question Variables	Mean	StdDev	Min	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile	Max
Effectiveness of Recycling Programs (Q13)	1.960	1.283	0	1	2	3	4
Efforts to Reduce Carbon Emissions (Q14)	2.180	1.253	0	1	2	3	4
Impact on Local Communities (Q15)	2.092	1.237	0	1	2	3	4
Quality and Durability of Products (Q16)	1.912	1.264	0	1	2	3	4
Transparency in Sourcing (Q17)	2.052	1.255	0	1	2	3	4
Awareness of Philanthropic Activities (Q18)	1.972	1.286	0	1	2	3	4
Customer Service Efficiency (Q19)	1.896	1.276	0	1	2	3	4
Industry Leader in CSR (Q20)	2.068	1.257	0	1	2	3	4

Figure 8: Descriptive Statistics for CSR Strategy Effectiveness



All pairs of questions exhibit a strong positive correlation, indicating that positive perceptions in one aspect of CSR are associated with positive perceptions in other aspects. This is illustrated in Table 5.

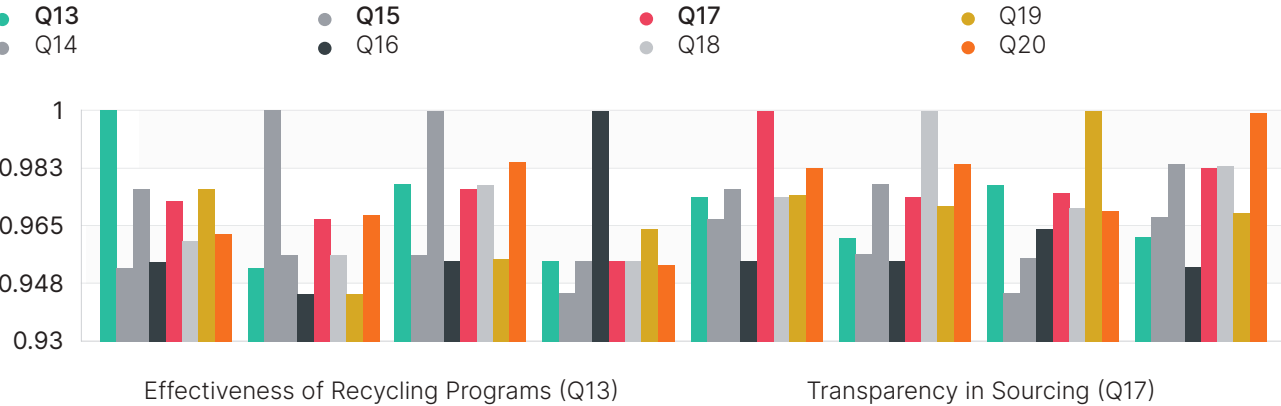
Impact on Local Communities (Q15) & Industry Leader in CSR (Q20): The highest correlation (0.984) suggests a strong link between the perception of Apple's impact on local communities and its reputation as an industry leader in CSR.

Recycling Programs, Transparency, and Customer Service: These aspects are highly correlated with each other, indicating that they might be key areas where improvements or emphasis could significantly enhance overall CSR perception.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of CSR Activities and Their Perceived Impact

Question Variables	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20
Effectiveness of Recycling Programs (Q13)	1.000	0.952	0.977	0.954	0.973	0.961	0.977	0.963
Efforts to Reduce Carbon Emissions (Q14)	0.952	1.000	0.956	0.944	0.967	0.956	0.944	0.968
Impact on Local Communities (Q15)	0.977	0.956	1.000	0.954	0.976	0.977	0.955	0.984
Quality and Durability of Products (Q16)	0.954	0.944	0.954	1.000	0.954	0.954	0.964	0.953
Transparency in Sourcing (Q17)	0.973	0.967	0.976	0.954	1.000	0.973	0.974	0.982
Awareness of Philanthropic Activities (Q18)	0.961	0.956	0.977	0.954	0.973	1.000	0.970	0.983
Customer Service Efficiency (Q19)	0.977	0.944	0.955	0.964	0.974	0.970	1.000	0.969
Industry Leader in CSR (Q20)	0.963	0.968	0.984	0.953	0.982	0.983	0.969	1.000

Figure 9: Correlation Analysis of CSR Activities and Their Perceived Impact



Overall this section revealed the results of Apple's CSR impact on brand loyalty. Participants generally perceived Apple's CSR efforts as moderately positive, particularly in environmental and ethical domains. High correlation coefficients between CSR awareness and brand loyalty indicate a strong positive relationship, emphasizing the significance of CSR in shaping consumer behaviour. Strategic recommendations focus on enhancing CSR communication and addressing areas like transparency and ethical sourcing to further strengthen brand loyalty.

is hoped to be created by comparing the results with well-established studies and theories. This chapter discusses the data and links it to existing research on CSR and brand loyalty to have a constructive conversation with the academic community.

Apple's CSR Alignment with Global Standards

The survey's insights into Apple Inc.'s alignment with global CSR standards reveal an interesting landscape of moderate to slightly positive perceptions among participants regarding the company's environmental efforts, ethical practices, and transparency. Specifically, the mean scores for environmental effort (3.398), ethical practices (3.064), transparency (3.045), environmental initiatives (3.039), and ethical sourcing (3.085) reflect a spectrum of acknowledgement from neutral to somewhat positive stances, with standard deviations indicat-

Discussion of Findings

This discussion is intended to bring the data into its proper relationship with existing literature and theoretical frameworks. A comprehensive analysis of how CSR influences consumer behaviour and brand loyalty

ing a moderate range of opinions. The overall sentiment towards Apple's environmental efforts suggests a recognition of progress towards global standards. However, the varied responses, as indicated by the standard deviation of 1.409, imply differing levels of satisfaction and expectation among consumers. This is crucial, considering the increasing emphasis on environmental sustainability in CSR, where global benchmarks are ever-evolving and consumer awareness is intensifying (Carroll, 1991; Scheyvens et al., 2016). The data mirrors a growing consumer expectation for not just compliance but proactive leadership in environmental stewardship.

The perception of Apple's ethical practices and transparency presents a slightly positive yet cautious picture. The nuanced views captured by the standard deviations (1.448 for ethical practices and 1.260 for transparency) underscore a discerning consumer base that is attentive to the authenticity and depth of corporate ethical commitments. This aligns with the literature emphasizing the importance of ethical operations in securing consumer trust and loyalty (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). The call for greater transparency is particularly resonant in an era where information is readily available and consumers are more empowered to seek out and scrutinize corporate practices (Maignan & Ralston, 2002).

The findings concerning environmental initiatives and ethical sourcing further reinforce the narrative of cautious consumer optimism. While there is an acknowledgement of Apple's efforts, the neutral to slightly positive perceptions suggest that consumers are looking for more impactful actions and clearer communication of outcomes. This reflects the critical nature of aligning CSR initiatives with consumer values and expectations, a concept central to Porter and Kramer's (2006) shared value framework, which posits that the most impactful CSR strategies are those that align company success with social progress. According to Carroll's pyramid of CSR, it appears that Apple is proficient in fulfilling its economic and legal responsibilities. However, the company may not be as strong in terms of ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. This suggests that there is an opportunity for Apple to expand its CSR activities and present them more compellingly to consumers through a cohesive narrative (Carroll, 1991).

These results carry great significance. They indicate that communication strategies need to be improved to clarify the subtleties and consequences of Apple's CSR activities more clearly. Under the concept of shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2006), Apple would be wise to weave CSR more consistently into its business strategy, not as an isolated supplement but at the core of its thinking. It must become central in terms of how Apple innovates and operates and how consumers experience Apple products and services. Moreover, these moderate to mildly positive perceptions indicate the need for robust and

innovative CSR strategies to go beyond the ordinary. For instance, according to the literature, consumers can be included in CSR activities through digital media or participatory programs, and this helps increase the perceived authenticity and impact of their involvement (Hildebrand et al., 2011; Iglesias et al., 2020). If Apple continues investing in more open, active, and consumer-friendly CSR strategies, its alignment with international standards and consumer loyalty can be substantially strengthened.

Consumer Perceptions of Apple's CSR

The study's correlative analysis between Apple's CSR awareness and brand loyalty reveals a compelling narrative. High correlation coefficients near 1, particularly for awareness of sustainability efforts (Q5), commitment to ethical practices (Q6), and awareness of philanthropic activities (Q18), underscore a robust positive relationship between CSR awareness and enhanced brand loyalty (Table 2). This pattern resonates with the broader discourse in CSR literature, emphasizing the pivotal role of consumer awareness in fostering brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006).

The strong correlation between awareness of Apple's sustainability efforts and brand loyalty mirrors the findings of Luo and Bhattacharya (2006), who highlighted a tangible link between CSR initiatives and consumer loyalty. The heightened awareness of Apple's commitment to sustainability likely enhances the brand's image as responsible and forward-thinking, which, according to Keller (1993), can evoke pride and a sense of community among customers, thereby nurturing loyalty. The implication is profound: as consumers become more cognizant of a brand's sustainability efforts, their attachment and loyalty to the brand intensify.

Similarly, the positive correlation between commitment to ethical practices and brand loyalty echoes the sentiments expressed by Khan and Fatma (2019). Their research suggested that CSR indirectly influences brand loyalty through brand experience and brand trust, with ethical practices likely contributing to this pathway. Consumers increasingly scrutinize corporate behaviour, and a brand's ethical stance can significantly sway their loyalty (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). For Apple, this means that its commitment to ethical practices is not just a moral imperative but a strategic asset that can cultivate deeper brand allegiance.

The strongest correlation noted in the study pertains to the awareness of philanthropic activities and its relation to making individuals more brand loyal (Q11). This aligns with the findings of Fatma, Rahman, and Khan (2015), who observed that social welfare activities by companies foster a positive brand image and emotional bond, driving loyalty. Philanthropy, when communicated

effectively and aligned with a brand's values, can significantly impact consumer perceptions, as suggested by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006). Apple's involvement in philanthropic endeavours likely enhances its reputation as a benevolent and socially responsible brand, deepening consumer attachment and loyalty.

Sustainability, ethical behaviour, and social responsibility cannot be overrated in their influence on consumer attitudes. As Keller (2001) points out, brand loyalty is not merely habitual purchasing but also psychological allegiance. In this context, CSR efforts' perceived sincerity and effectiveness are essential. Consumers are not only demanding products with better quality, but they also want brands that reflect their values in terms of ethics and social responsibility (Ashraf et al., 2018). Apple's high scores in CSR awareness could be seen as evidence of its corporate strategy being well communicated and implemented. The increasing importance of ethical consumerism is also expanding corporate branding into another dimension (Iglesias et al., 2020; Safeer & Liu, 2023).

Although the correlations are strong, they raise questions about the genuineness of these perceptions. Maignan and Ralston (2002) state that transparency and engagement are at the heart of CSR communications. For Apple, it could mean promoting CSR and engaging consumers in a significant way so that CSR initiatives are no longer just visible from the outside but reflect deeply held consumer values and expectations. The study findings linking CSR awareness to brand loyalty highlight the necessity for firms like Apple to keep improving their CSR communications and strategy. The correlations imply that the higher people perceive CSR efforts, and the

more aware they are of corporate responsibility, the larger their sense of brand loyalty will be. This broadly reflects widely held literature that considers CSR a strategic asset rather than just an ethical obligation. For Apple, and indeed for any brand looking to bolster loyalty in a competitive market, the message is clear: Not only are such robust, authentic, and communicated CSR efforts not a simple matter of ethics, they are suitable for business.

Empirical Link Between CSR Initiatives and Brand Loyalty

In the study under discussion, the empirical link between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty was examined, revealing strong positive relationships between various CSR components and brand loyalty metrics. Specifically, CSR's influence on loyalty, continued purchase intentions, the likelihood to recommend, preference over competitors, and the impact of diversity and inclusion efforts were all highlighted with notably high correlation coefficients. This analysis revealed a robust correlation between perceived positive CSR and likelihood to continue buying or recommending Apple products (CSR Influence on Loyalty (Q8) – 1.00). This finding points in the direction that Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) found: CSR endeavours do indeed have a connection with consumer loyalty. Continued Purchase (Q9) and Recommend Apple (Q10) correlations (0.9848 and 0.9901 respectively) suggest that commitment to a brand increases when consumers believe the brand is committed to responsible practices. This is supported by Khan and Fatma (2019), who found CSR indirectly influences brand loyalty through brand experience and brand trust, with a notable emphasis on the latter.

However, preference over competitors (Q12) showed slightly lower coefficients (0.9714), indicating that while CSR initiatives are influential, other factors may also play a significant role in defining preference over competitors. This nuance is supported by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006), who suggest that while CSR impacts consumer behaviour, its influence might vary depending on other brand-specific factors. A significant revelation from the study is the strong correlations with Diversity and Inclusion Influence (Q23) across all other variables, emphasizing that diversity and inclusion efforts are not peripheral but central to how consumers perceive and interact with a brand in terms of loyalty and purchasing decisions. This finding resonates with the work of Aguinis and Glavas (2012), who highlighted the increasing importance of integrating social and environmental concerns in business strategies.

The study's findings also concur with the empirical evidence presented in the literature review. For instance, Lu et al. (2020) found that CSR initiatives positively and significantly influenced brand loyalty and brand image, suggesting CSR is an integral part of a brand's competitive edge in the market. Similarly, the



research by Rivera, Bigne, and Curras-Perez (2019) in the sportswear sector showed direct positive influences of CSR on loyalty, reinforced through brand awareness and consumer satisfaction. Moreover, the critical role of diversity and inclusion in CSR strategies is not just a moral imperative but a strategic one as well. As underlined by Safeer & Liu (2023), authenticity in CSR practices is highly valued by consumers, and inclusivity initiatives are a significant part of that perceived authenticity. Apple's commitment to diversity and inclusion as part of its CSR strategy likely contributes to the strong brand loyalty observed in the study.

The high correlation coefficients between CSR programs and various brand loyalty measures highlight the business strategy importance of CSR in promoting consumer loyalty. The conclusions drawn by this research tie together with and expand the large corpus of existing literature. It appears that although CSR impacts consumer actions and brand identity strength (i.e., loyalty), its role is complex rather than directly positive or negative; conditioning factors such as diversity and inclusion are at least equally important to a company's social responsibility image. With growing consumer awareness and expectations, big or small companies can now ill afford to ignore the link between CSR programs and brand loyalty (Markovic et al., 2018).

Strategic Implications and Recommendations

Analysing Apple Inc.'s CSR initiatives and their impact on brand loyalty reveals a landscape ripe for strategic enhancement. While the company's current CSR activities are recognized, there's a call for more robust and impactful strategies. The mean scores around 2 for various CSR activities, as indicated in Table 4, suggest a general trend toward neutrality or disagreement on the effectiveness of current strategies.

Key CSR dimensions that resonate with consumers and fit global standards are critical. The most highly correlated relationship was between the way Apple is perceived to affect local communities (Question 15) and whether or not it is recognized as an industry leader in CSR (Question 20), with a correlation of 0.984, meaning that impacts can be especially felt here. This is consistent with Carroll's pyramid of CSR and Porter and Kramer's shared value concept, where the nature of CSR responsibilities is multifaceted. Carroll (1991) argues for a layered conception of CSR, which integrates economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic commitments. Therefore, Apple should emphasize activities that conform to legal qualifications and score well with its stakeholders regarding ethics and humanities.

Another important recommendation is integrating digital CSR strategies. The age of digital media presents unprecedented opportunities for involvement and openness. Maignan and Ralston (2002) point out that digital platforms are widely used today for CSR communications, making it possible to expand the impact of CSR efforts greatly. Apple, which has an innovative edge, can use digital tools to engage consumers more deeply in CSR. This would create a sense of joint responsibility and involvement. Another strategic imperative is alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Aimed at addressing the most urgent environmental and social concerns, these global targets guide companies worldwide to reconcile business strategy with CSR strategy (Scheyvens et al., 2016). While Apple's pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, including other SDGs in its CSR platform will further enhance its position as a corporate citizen.

The study by Pratihari and Uzma (2018) indicates that CSR and corporate branding have an integrated effect on promoter loyalty. This is a lesson Apple can use to fortify customer fidelity further. Rivera, Bigne, and Curras-Perez (2019) have shown that CSR associations not only directly impact brand loyalty in the sportswear sector. Apple could use similar tactics, making its CSR effort not only visible but also integrated in an authentic way into its brand image. In addition, diversity and inclusion are now crucial to CSR strategies. These strong correlations with Diversity and Inclusion Influence (Q23) also imply that these factors exert tremendous power over consumers regarding brand evaluation and ultimate purchasing decisions. It turns out that companies that practice diversity and inclusiveness in their CSR projects tend to get a more enthusiastic, positive response from the public (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Apple's present CSR activities are recognized, but there is much ground for improvement. Focusing efforts on those key CSR dimensions, deploying digital strategies at an unprecedented level, aligning with global sustainability objectives, and emphasizing diversity and inclusiveness can make its CSR function more effective and greatly enhance consumer loyalty. Based on empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, these strategic recommendations will guide Apple in its efforts to hold the mantle of technological innovation and corporate social responsibility.

CSR in the Technology Sector

The technology industry, a symbol of frantic innovation and vicious competition, is a challenging territory to contemplate implementation or effect. As a leader in this field, Apple Inc. is at an essential crossroads--where technological innovation meets rising expectations of corporate responsibility. The technology sector is all about competition and change. Companies such as Apple are constantly testing the limits of innovation. This is a particularly

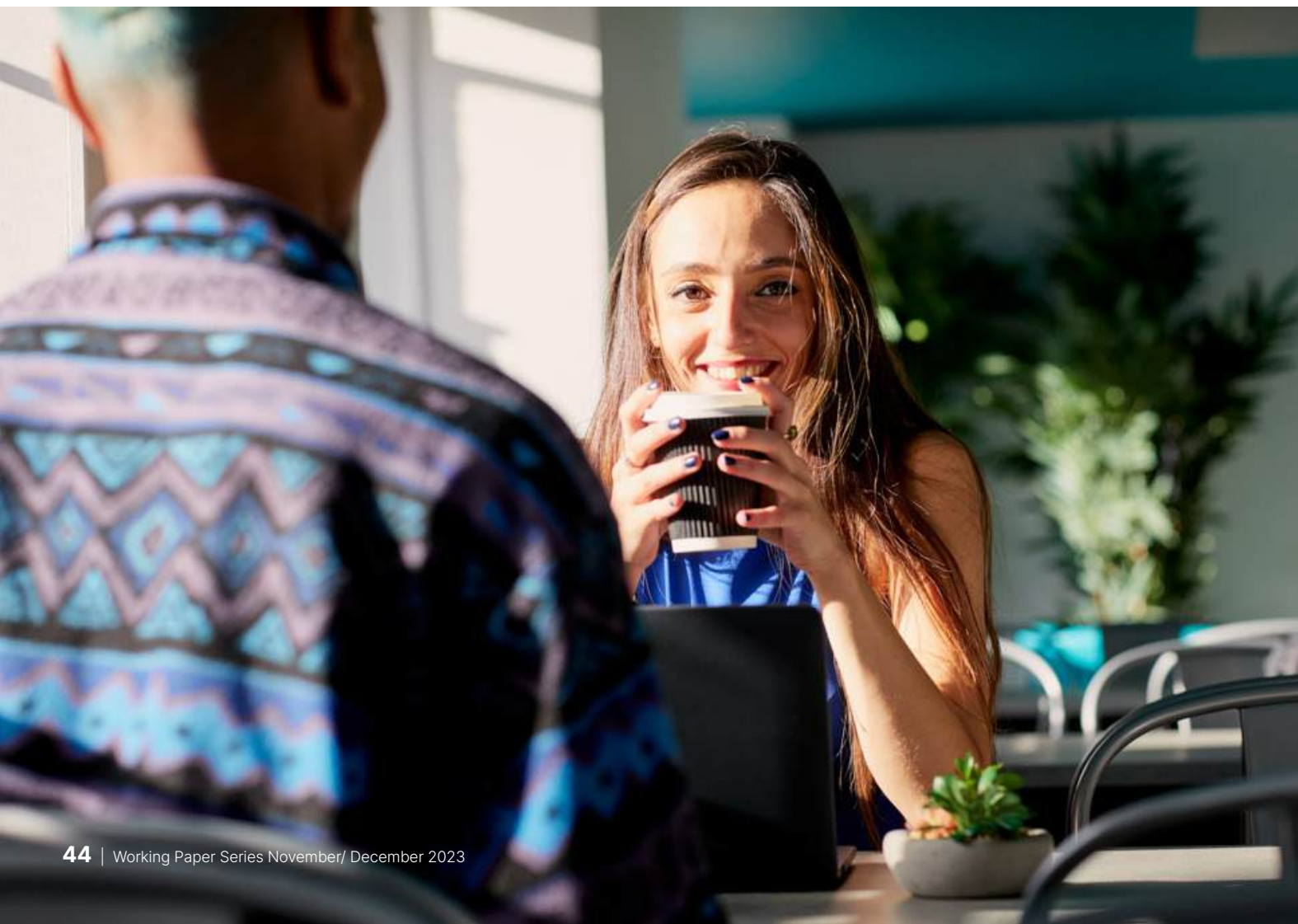
unique challenge for CSR, which needs initiatives to respond in kind according to current standards and be forward-thinking enough to anticipate future ethical dilemmas and environmental pressures. Here, creating shared value (Porter and Kramer, 2006) is especially appropriate. It implies that firms can start a competitive edge by defining and dealing with social issues overlapping their business. For tech companies, this might mean creating sustainable technologies or bridging the digital divide.

Another area for improvement for the sector is maintaining transparency and clean business in a complicated, often murky supply chain. This short product cycle and intense pressure to innovate sometimes result in low labour standards and environmental neglect. For example, Apple has been criticized for its supply chain's labour practices. But it has also made numerous strides to overcome these problems, showing some of the prospects for tech companies that covert challenges seen as CSR into brand-building opportunities. According to Carroll (1991), ethical responsibilities are an essential layer of corporate duty. So, not only should tech companies live up to their ethical responsibilities, but they can also make themselves a favourite brand for consumers by practising ethics in labour and supply chain management. (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006).

There are new opportunities for CSR in the digital world. Social media, blogs, and other online resources can be valuable conduits through which companies report their CSR activities transparently. Not only should you engage with stakeholders, but some are even bringing customers into sharing the process of making responsible decisions (Maignan & Ralston 2002). With a worldwide customer base and a tech-savvy market niche for Apple, digital CSR is the chance to attach its brand more firmly in consumers' minds by creating it out of shared values.

But rapid technological change also carries the threat of obsolescence, as products and CSR programs can stay caught up in an environment moving at such a high speed. As Aguinis and Glavas (2012) propose, CSR activities must be adaptive and inventive--a massive undertaking within the stereotyped culture of telecommunications operators. For Apple and its peers, this means keeping their CSR strategies in flux as they address environmental risks and questions of fairness for stakeholders, large and small--national societies included. From a broader theoretical perspective, Freeman (1984) suggests that stakeholder theory has such importance: We need to consider all the various interests of all the parties involved--not just those favoured by shareholders. In the technology sector in which products and practices affect others long after they leave customers' homes or hands, a stakeholder approach to CSR can prove a powerful aid for brand development by providing thorough consideration of environmental factors.

CSR in the technology industry, particularly in



companies like Apple, showcases how rapid innovation can be combined with ethical supplier relationships. Digital stakeholders also play a significant role in this. Moreover, the potential benefits are enormous - from improving transparency to preparing for future ethical dilemmas. If tech firms can adopt flexible, creative, and stakeholder-driven CSR methods, they not only satisfy the moral demands of consumers but also improve their competitive bargaining position in a constantly changing environment.

Conclusion

CSR is an essential element in creating brand loyalty, especially in the case of the technology industry. The findings demonstrate a significant correlation between Apple Inc.'s CSR efforts and customer perceptions of the brand. These efforts, when aligned with global standards and communicated effectively, can lead to a more positive brand image and stronger customer loyalty. The discussions also revealed that while customers appreciate environmental and ethical initiatives, there's a growing demand for transparency and direct involvement in CSR activities. Additionally, the role of digital platforms in amplifying CSR efforts and the importance of integrating CSR into the core business strategy for sustainable competitive advantage were highlighted.

Overall, the discussions provide strategic insights for Apple and similar companies to enhance their CSR initiatives, thereby deepening brand loyalty and driving long-term success. This research investigated how Apple Inc.'s CSR policies have affected brand loyalty, delving into whether and how consumers see the tech company's ethical, environmental, and philanthropic efforts. The research has uncovered valuable insights and patterns, forming the basis for strategic recommendations and conclusions. These findings summarize the study and suggest actionable steps for companies like Apple to strengthen their CSR impact and cultivate brand loyalty.

Examining the sophisticated connections between Apple Inc.'s CSR activities and brand loyalty, this research has clearly shown a substantial impact. Apple's attempt to conform with global CSR standards (Carroll, 1991; Porter & Kramer, 2006) received a middle-to-positive acknowledgement from the survey results. While Apple can be proud of its efforts, there is still much room for improvement and more effective communication strategy plans to keep up with the global references (Carroll, 1991).

The results show a close relationship between consumers' awareness of Apple's commitment to sustainability, ethical business practices, philanthropy, and brand loyalty (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004). This accords with stakeholder theory, which holds that a company must take all its stakeholders, including consumers, into account to be profitable (Freeman, 1984). By applying its CSR strategies from theory, Apple adds value to its brand image and creates loyal customers who actively support the ethics of responsible business (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006).

Moreover, the causal connection between different CSR activities and brand loyalty measures meets the expectations of brand equity theory (Aaker, 1991). According to this theory, CSR is a moral obligation and an asset to add value to the brand and create something unique in the marketplace. Apple's CSR work, especially in areas such as diversity and inclusion, fits very naturally with global sustainability objectives and anticipates consumer trends emphasizing social responsibility (Scheyvens et al., 2016).

Main Contributions

Overall, this research provides several contributions to understanding CSR in the technology industry and its impact on brand loyalty. Secondly, it provides empirical evidence that Apple's CSR efforts positively relate to brand loyalty and examines how contemporary consumers react to ethical business behaviour and sustainable development (Keller, 2001; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). With the rapid growth of the technology sector, this research fills a significant gap in existing industry-specific literature (Safeer & Liu, 2023; Iglesias et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this research broadens the theoretical basis using stakeholder and brand-equity theories regarding technology and CSR (Freeman, 1984; Aaker, 1991). Thus, it provides a real-world example of how the ideas are lived, bringing much richness to the theoretical explanation of how CSR can serve the management and marketing of the brand and influence consumers' perceptions. The study's findings also add powerful new vantage points to the concept of strategic value in CSR, backing up the moral obligation and CSR as an indispensable component of brand equity and a source of competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

For businesses and policymakers, this research has important practical implications. This describes precisely why CSR should be a part of business strategies to win brand loyalty and competitive advantages, especially for high-tech firms. For policymakers, this shows that systems and incentives are necessary to encourage ethics and sustainability in business. This study offers a reference for both sides: business operations must be in line with ethical standards and social needs (Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Scheyvens et al., 2016).

Based on its conclusions, Apple Inc. can improve its CSR initiative with several specific strategies. However, to make itself more compatible with international standards, Apple needs to strengthen its commitment to sustainability, such as carbon neutrality and ethical sourcing (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Apple Inc., 2021). This could include taking more aggressive environmental targets and making progress more visible. It is essential to communicate CSR efforts effectively. An excellent example for Apple is to use digital media to tell its CSR story, to make it exciting and accessible to the audience (Hildebrand, Sen, & Bhattacharya, 2011). This approach should focus on recording what actions were taken and how they affected consumers, fostering a sense of authenticity and trust among consumers (Safeer & Liu, 2023). To make CSR more linked to brand loyalty, Apple might introduce participatory CSR, inviting customers to participate in sustainability projects or ethical campaigns (Iglesias et al., 2020). Such involvement strengthens the brand experience and builds brand loyalty (Khan & Fatma, 2019).

In terms of the tech industry, the focus should be on ethics and sustainability. To demonstrate commitment to social and environmental responsibility, firms should invest in sustainable technologies and ethical supply chains (Han et al., 2019; Locke, 2013). Furthermore, participating in CSR-oriented activities and open dialogue with customers also allows one to develop a stable customer following that regards more than the technical aspects of a product (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Keller, 2001). These recommendations not only foster a positive brand image but also contribute to the long-term sustainability of businesses in the technology sector, aligning corporate success with societal well-being (Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2006).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The present study, while comprehensive, is not without limitations. The scope was confined to Apple Inc. and a specific participant demographic, which may not fully represent the global consumer base's diverse perspectives. The methodology, primarily based on self-reported data, could introduce biases affecting the findings' reliability (Lu et al., 2020). Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the survey limits the ability to capture the long-term impact of CSR initiatives on brand loyalty.

In academic research, acknowledging limitations is crucial for comprehending the study's scope and implications. This investigation, examining the influence of CSR policies on brand loyalty with a focus on Apple Inc., is similarly constrained. A primary limitation is its dependence on survey-based self-reported data. Although surveys facilitate data collection from extensive samples, the responses may be influenced by biases like social desirability or personal interpretation, potentially distorting the actual attitudes towards CSR and brand loyalty (Fink, 2017). Furthermore, the research's cross-sectional design, while useful for observing consumer perceptions at a specific moment, fails to consider temporal changes. In contrast, longitudinal studies offer a more nuanced view of evolving perceptions, thereby enriching the understanding of CSR's impact (Bryman, 2016).

The study's specific focus on Apple Inc. also limits the generalizability of its findings, as consumer perceptions and behaviours regarding Apple's CSR initiatives might not mirror those related to other companies or industries. Thus, extrapolating these results to different contexts should be approached with caution (Saunders et al., 2009). Future research should consider a broader, more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how CSR influences brand loyalty over time. Exploring other technology companies and industries would offer comparative perspectives, enriching the understanding of CSR's role in various contexts. Employing mixed methodologies, including qualitative approaches, could uncover nuanced consumer attitudes and motivations behind loyalty (He & Lai, 2014; Pratihari & Uzma, 2018). These future endeavours would significantly contribute to the evolving discourse on CSR and brand loyalty.

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Key Success Factors for English SMEs in the Retail Sector and Their Applicability to SME Growth in Paraguay's Context.

Abrahan Alejandro Burgos Ayala

Abstract

SMEs in Paraguay are crucial for the economic development of many families. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2020), micro and small enterprises in Paraguay represent 77% of employment. However, when it comes to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, the landscape is considerably underdeveloped compared to other countries in the region. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that have contributed to the success of SMEs entrepreneurs in England in the retail sector and to determine which of these factors could be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help entrepreneurs succeed. The research problem is: What are the key factors that help English SMEs to succeed in the retail sector? The researcher chose the qualitative methodology with a philosophical approach of interpretivism and critical realism. The researcher collected the data through a semi-open survey where entrepreneurs from Paraguay and the UK responded to the 27 questions. The researcher constructed the definition of a "successful entrepreneur" applicable to the context of the Paraguayan and British entrepreneurs and highlighted the key factors to succeed in 5 dimensions: Traits of entrepreneurs, education in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, motivation – key for success, cultural factor, building trust environment, change of paradigm and finally challenges and strategies. These factors encompass the main findings of the researcher. SMEs can use this paper as a roadmap. However, future research may explore long-term sustainability, sources of support available for entrepreneurs and mental well-being's role in entrepreneurial success. Moreover, an in-depth review of the Paraguayan public policies could offer recommendations to understand the entrepreneurial landscape better and enhance the chance for success.

Keywords:

- PakistanSMEs
- Successful Entrepreneurs
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
- Paraguay

Introduction

Starting a new business implies many skills, although entrepreneurs commonly start their startups when they have the idea. In my hometown in Paraguay, some old entrepreneurs agreed that launching a startup was easier in the past. However, considering the market's competitiveness, nowadays, the "know-how" for a business is not enough to carry on with entrepreneurial activities. As a qualified accountant and in my experience working with Paraguayan entrepreneurs, I have observed how entrepreneurs need different skills such as financial, marketing, customer service, and others to be cost-competitive to offer their products or services at a reasonable price compared to big companies or industries. The UK has a long history of entrepreneurship with many successful entrepreneurs, of which in the private sector; by the end of 2022, there were around 5.5 million private sector businesses, most of them in London, with 1.0 million businesses (Hutto, 2022, 4-5).

This means that SMEs account for 99.9% of the business population. If we look at these numbers, we can assume that even though the market in the UK is quite competitive and demanding, we can assume that doing business in the UK can be feasible. On the other hand, although Paraguay, as a developing country, has some competitive advantages and according to the official website of the International Trade Administration for US Businesses (2022), Paraguay's open economy has been growing steadily for the past ten years, with an average annual GDP growth rate of 4%. This growth has been mainly due to the agriculture, retail, and construction sectors, as well as manufacturing and services. The retail sector has been experiencing significant growth in recent years, and government investment in infrastructure projects has boosted the construction industry.

Official Government reports show how the environment for business in Paraguay is favourable. For instance, the UK Government on overseas business risk in Paraguay (2022) reported that Paraguay possesses the potential to emerge as a leading global supplier of agricultural produce. Despite having a population of 7 million, it manages to feed 70 million people through its agricultural output. This number is likely to increase further as the country adopts new technologies and implements best practices to enhance productivity. As mentioned before, according to the UK Government report, Paraguay maintained an average growth rate of 4% and was projected to achieve a growth rate of 3.7% in 2022. Moreover, the Paraguayan currency, the Guarani, has remained remarkably stable over its 70-year history, displaying minimal fluctuation. This stability positions it as one of the most reliable currencies in the region. In contrast, the lack of education in

many sectors and the corruption, broadly spread in all Paraguay institutions, directly affect the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Paraguay. According to Statista (2022), Paraguay is among the most corrupt nations in Latin America and the Caribbean, behind Venezuela, Haiti, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala.

As one of the direct consequences of the institutions at all levels being corrupted, small and medium enterprises in Paraguay struggle a lot to start a business. This is most of the time due to the bureaucracy to accomplish all the requirements in the regulations, and this is why, in most cases, entrepreneurs choose to run a business empirically without all the legal requirements. This brings consequences to the entrepreneurs that can affect the good development of their business. For example, when entrepreneurs need capital to finance their start-up or capital to buy stocks, they request a loan from a bank or some financial institutions that offer loans at a very low-interest, entrepreneurs are not eligible for this kind of loans because of the lack of documents (informal businesses) and therefore they end up financing their businesses from other informal institutions that offer loans without much bureaucracy but at a very high cost. Moreover, according to Charting Economy (2022, pp. 48.52), obtaining credit in Paraguay can be difficult as the legal rights concept is almost non-existent. This institution also reports that starting a business in Paraguay can be lengthy and costly, taking more than a month. Finally, the Charting Economy (2022, p. 19) stated that although the situation has improved, Paraguay is still one of the hardest places in the world to do business.

According to The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor – GEM (2020, p.5), Paraguay, classified as an upper-middle income country, has a GDP per capita of USD 5821. However, it faces significant income inequality, as evidenced by a GINI index of 48.8 in 2018 based on reports of the World Bank 2020. The country's economy is primarily driven by commerce, which surpasses services and industry in terms of the number of companies, employment opportunities, and revenue generation. Like many other economies, Paraguay relies on large numbers of micro and small-sized enterprises, totalling 216,288 businesses with up to 10 employees. These enterprises comprise 98% of all companies and account for 63% of the country's employment. In the commerce sector, micro and small-sized enterprises constitute 99% of all companies and contribute to 77% of the sector's employment. However, despite their dominance in numbers and employment, this group only generates 24% of the total revenues in the private sector.

The Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Paraguay

When it comes to the Entrepreneurial ecosystem in Paraguay, in its report, The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2020, 9-10) stated that Paraguay's entrepreneurial landscape is considerably underdeveloped compared to other countries, as evidenced by its low ranking of 125 out of 160 countries in the World Bank's Doing Business study. To gain a better understanding of the environment in which entrepreneurs operate. GEM suggests that the dynamics of entrepreneurship can be influenced by conditions that either facilitate or hinder new business creation. It identifies twelve factors, known as the Entrepreneurial Framework Condition, which are believed to impact entrepreneurship significantly. These conditions encompass the essential components of the entrepreneurship ecosystem and provide the necessary resources, incentives, markets, and supportive institutions to establish and grow new firms. The Entrepreneurial Framework Condition aids in understanding the creation, growth, and dynamics of businesses while also influencing the presence of entrepreneurial opportunities, capacity, and preferences within a particular context.

Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Sanchez, Sanabria, and Paredes (2021, pp.7-8), in their research for the Nacional University of Asuncion (UNA), they reported that the impact of COVID-19 regarding employment, in 2020, 47.5% of small and medium-sized enterprises experienced a decrease in employment compared to 2019, while 34% maintained the same level, and 17.7% increased their employment. Among the different types of enterprises, medium-sized, small, and micro-enterprises had the most negative employment trends, with balances of -38.8%, -35.8%, and -25.30%, respectively. Moreover, some companies faced an unfavourable employment trend and did not receive support or subsidies from the government. Among these companies, 50.6% reduced their employment in 2020. Additionally, service companies exhibited a negative employment balance of -36.1% in 2020.

The report also stated that sales have been severely affected by the pandemic as well, directly impacting the income of many SMEs in Paraguay. Around 70% of companies reported a decrease in sales in 2020, while 14.6% were able to maintain their sales, and 15.4% experienced an increase. On average, sales declined by 12.4%. The most heavily affected by the drop in sales were the SMEs enterprises, which experienced an average sales reduction of 70%. Additionally, companies that did not have access to any support or subsidy saw their sales decrease by 72%. However, according to Sanchez, Sanabria, and Paredes, sales expectations for the second half of





2021 show a positive outlook compared to the first half. Medium-sized companies, young companies, and those in the manufacturing industries sector have the most optimistic sales expectations for 2021. We mention these two principal components (employment and sales) of entrepreneurial activities since these two factors have a direct, decisive impact on the success or failure of the entrepreneurs in most cases.

In Paraguay, it is very difficult to get access to what people usually call "Formal jobs," which is when you have social insurance and, in most cases, work for the government institutions, where corruption is very high; therefore, one of the main (or only) alternative left to people to generate income is thorough entrepreneurial activities. According to Statista (2023), by 2021, 64.75% of the Paraguayan population are of working age, between 15 to 64 years old. This is one of its main strengths and competitive advantage as a country. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2020), in Paraguay, micro and small enterprises represent 77% of employment in the country. This study aims to identify the factors that have contributed to the success of SMEs entrepreneurs in England in the retail sector and to determine which of these factors could be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help entrepreneurs succeed. Paraguay's mainly young population needs the tools to enhance the possibilities to succeed in their entrepreneurial activities; that lies the importance of this research project since it aims to hear from SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector in England, the tools, the challenges they face and how they overcome these challenges as well as the support they get as entrepreneurs and their level of education in the entrepreneurial field, and thus learn from their counterparts. With this research, we also aim to find other alternatives available in Paraguay that can be the critical element in the success of entrepreneurs.

Despite the importance of entrepreneurship in Paraguay, especially for job creation and economic growth, Paraguay faces a range of challenges and obstacles that hinder the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. These challenges include high bureaucracy, problems with access to capital, business training and education, and corruption. In

contrast, what is visible from the simple observation is that SMEs entrepreneurial activity in the UK, specifically in London, the entrepreneurial activity is more flourishing, with good infrastructure, innovation, commitment, and honesty are very important in the culture, and that leads to a low level of corruption and the customers' attention system works very well. By addressing these problems and identifying factors to help entrepreneurs, the impact on the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Paraguay can change significantly.

The main Research Question is what are the key factors that help English SMEs to succeed in the retail sector? Sub-questions include – Which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector succeed? How can SMEs in Paraguay overcome the main challenges based on the experiences of their English counterparts? What strategies can be used in Paraguay as an alternative to support SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed? These questions bring about the following Research Objectives i.e., to identify key factors that have contributed to the success of English SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector and which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector to succeed, implement or replicate these factors to help Paraguayan SMEs entrepreneurs in retail sectors to succeed, and finally, suggest strategies that can be used in Paraguay as an alternative to support SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed.

Literature Review

In this section, for the Literature Review, the study used the thematic analysis, which allowed the organising of the vast amount of information available in the literature by organising the themes or topics, making it easier for the readers to understand the overall context and identify key findings in the literature. This approach also highlighted common patterns, trends, and viewpoints across the multiple sources used to try to make us understand and have a broader insight into entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial activity, challenges and opportunities, skills, key and basic definitions, etc.

The Oxford Dictionary defines Entrepreneurship as “The activity of making money by starting or making money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks; the ability to do this” and defines Entrepreneur as “A person who makes money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks” (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). Furthermore, the magazine The Economist (2009) digs a bit deeper and defines entrepreneurship as a distinct set of abilities held by an entrepreneur. These abilities encompass a willingness to undertake risks beyond the ordinary and a drive to generate wealth. For the BBC (2023), an entrepreneur is a person who starts their own business venture. They possess the vision and knowledge to bring together the several factors of production that lead to profitability. Finally, for the British Library (2023), an entrepreneur is a person who demonstrates foresight, determination, and ambition by taking calculated risks to address business or consumer challenges. Having seen all these various sources for the same concept, we can assure you that these concepts share some common elements about entrepreneurs:

- Profit Generations.
- Financial risks.
- Business Start-up.
- Distinct Set of Abilities.
- Overcoming Challenges.
- Vision and Knowledge.
- Foresight and ambition.

It is very important to highlight that when we talk about entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, all concepts have a fundamental denominator in common: "Taking Risks." This is an important fact; we cannot deny it. However, the idea that best describes an entrepreneur is the one by the British Library because it points out that entrepreneurs are individuals who take “Calculated Risks.” Entrepreneurs nowadays have all the tools and the knowledge available to calculate the risks they will be able to face when starting a new business, thus knowing when to stop or continue. This point is highly relevant; according to the Harvard Business Review (2021), the thin line between when an entrepreneur should stop or continue trying with a startup can make the difference in failing or succeeding.

It is relevant to highlight the different kinds of entrepreneurs because their opportunities, challenges, and issues vary. Forbes Business (2023) highlighted that the First Republic Bank identifies several main types of entrepreneurship: small businesses, scalable startups, large companies, innovation, and social entrepreneurship. Small business entrepreneurs are individuals who concentrate on operating their own businesses, like local retail stores and restaurants. On the other hand, the Centre for Entrepreneurship at the University of Michigan categorises large company entrepreneurs alongside intrapreneurs or corporate entrepreneurs who establish businesses within the organisations they work for. Scalable startup entrepreneurs aim to fill gaps in specific industries. Innovation entrepreneurs seek to create new products. Finally, Social entrepreneurs focus on providing solutions to environmental or societal issues.

Characteristics Associated with Entrepreneurial Mindset

Kuratko (2017, pp.29-30), in his book “Entrepreneurship: Theory, process, practice,” highlighted that a literature review focusing on entrepreneurial traits indicates the presence of numerous factors that can be condensed into a smaller set of profile dimensions. Howard Stevenson and David Gumpert have outlined characteristics of entrepreneurial organisations, highlighting attributes like imagination, flexibility, and willingness to take risks. Gartner's analysis uncovered a wide range of reported traits. Hornaday, after examining various research sources, compiled a list of 42 characteristics commonly associated with entrepreneurs.

Table 1: Characteristics Attributed to Entrepreneurs
Source: Kuratko (2017, pp.29-30), John A. Hornaday, "Research about Living Entrepreneurs," in Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurship, ed. Calvin Kent, Donald Sexton, and Karl Vesper (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982), 26-27. Adapted by permission of Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

1. Confidence	15. Intelligence	29. Pleasant personality
2. Perseverance, determination	16. Orientation to clear goals	30. Egotism
3. Energy, diligence	17. Positive response to challenges	31. Courage
4. Resourcefulness	18. Independence	32. Imagination
5. Ability to take calculated risks	19. Responsiveness to suggestions and criticism	33. Perceptiveness
6. Dynamism, leadership	20. Time competence, efficiency	34. Toleration for ambiguity
7. Optimism	21. Ability to make decisions quickly	35. Aggressiveness
8. Need to achieve	22. Responsibility	36. Capacity for enjoyment
9. Versatility; knowledge of product, market, machinery, technology	23. Foresight	37. Efficacy
10. Creativity	24. Accuracy, thoroughness	38. Commitment
11. Ability to influence others	25. Cooperativeness	39. Ability to trust workers
12. Ability to get along well with people	26. Profit orientation	40. Sensitivity to others
13. Initiative	27. Ability to learn from mistakes	41. Honesty, integrity
14. Flexibility	28. Sense of power	42. Maturity, balance

What is to be a successful entrepreneur?

“Successfulness” can have a relatively broad, subjective, and multi-faced meaning in the entrepreneurial eco-system. It is usually related to the aims or the objectives set by each entrepreneur, and the meaning can vary. In searching for concepts of a successful entrepreneur, the literature has gaps because we only find traits or characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. For instance, the Harvard Business School (2020) listed ten characteristics of a successful entrepreneur: curiosity, structured experimentation, adaptability, decisiveness, team building, risk tolerance, comfort with failure, persistence, innovation, and long-term focus. Forbes (2022) also listed eight traits that make a successful entrepreneur: determination, risk-taking, optimism, curiosity, problem-solving, confidence, adaptability to change, and persistence. In most cases, these traits and characteristics should lead an entrepreneur to success.

How to become a successful entrepreneur.
The Business & IP Centre (2023) highlighted seven characteristics of an entrepreneur, and they are as follows:

- **Don’t take “no” for an answer.**
According to this statement, It does not matter how many knock-backs and refusals successful entrepreneurs receive; they are always prepared to find an alternative route to the summit.
- **Learn from the best.**
This states that even the best entrepreneurs work with other experts in their industry before going alone. Therefore, finding a suitable mentor is a great way to learn.
- **Stay hungry and ambitious.**
Enhance and provide superior products or services to their clients, which fuels their ambition and hunger for success. Entrepreneurs risk becoming complacent When they lose their drive to acquire new knowledge, making it easier for their competitors to outpace and surpass them.

- **Never stand still; evolve with the times.**
According to this, to succeed in entrepreneurship, one must possess business agility and be capable of learning and adjusting to new techniques, procedures, or technology that can enhance the strength and efficiency of their enterprise.
- **Nurture long-term business relationships.**
Building and maintaining business relationships is crucial. Cultivating enduring partnerships with fellow entrepreneurs. This relationship also includes access to finance—nurture relationships with possible partners, investors, venture capital, and others.
- **Inspire those around you.**
Regardless of how successful and experienced entrepreneurs may be, they cannot excel in every aspect of their business.
- **Trust your gut instinct, not just your spreadsheet:**
These last characteristics estates that entrepreneurs may occasionally become overly reliant on their spreadsheets and data analysis. Nonetheless, the reality of the business world is rarely as straightforward as a number on a page.

Similarly, McKinsey & Company (2020) highlights that the statistics indicate that the chances of a start-up's success are daunting. However, companies prioritising talent, customer satisfaction, and fundamental values are most likely to prosper. McKinsey believes that most start-ups tend to fail, but the few that overcome the odds and thrive typically possess certain characteristics. From the beginning, they (entrepreneurs) exhibit intense dedication and operate with exceptional speed to acquire initial customers, exceptional personnel, and additional funding. After establishing a foothold, successful start-ups maintain their pace, promptly adjust to market fluctuations, and concentrate on achieving results and delivering value to their customers. Following this pattern, McKinsey points out that successful entrepreneur prioritises results and customer satisfaction.

Secondly, scaling a start-up requires quick action on stakeholders, feedback, fearless creativity, and constant awareness of core values. Finally, to ensure everyone embraces the company's unique culture, management should demonstrate the entrepreneurial mindset they want to see in their employees and make sure everyone is dedicated to it.

According to Harvard Business Review (2021), serial entrepreneur Jim Markham stated that successful entrepreneurs draw a lesson from a wide range of experiences and mention that the ingredients for long-lasting success are mostly well-known tourism of the business, self-help, motivation world like “dare to be different,” “keep your emotions in check,” and “Learn from the Best.” These theories are clear examples that most agree that certain common factors make an entrepreneur successful.

Why do entrepreneurs fail?

Contrary to what has been highlighted before, the Harvard Business Review (2021) stated some important points about why start-ups normally fail. According to this article, the first reason for the failure of startups is "Good Idea but bad fellows". Venture capitalists look for start-up founders with the "right stuff," resilience, passion, experience leading start-up teams, and so on. Still, even when such rare talent captains a new venture, there are other parties whose contributions are crucial to it. A broad set of stakeholders, including employees, strategic partners, and investors, can all play a role in a venture's downfall.

The second is "False start"; according to this, many entrepreneurs who stated that they follow the lean start-up principles only implement some of them. They introduce minimum viable products (MVPs) and refine them based on customer feedback. The purpose of releasing an MVP and gauging customer reaction is to prevent wasting resources on developing and promoting a product without demand. However, when entrepreneurs fail to investigate customer requirements before beginning the development process, they often squander important resources and time on MVPs that are likely to fail. These are False Starts.

Finally, there are some behaviours that conventional wisdom holds that make great entrepreneurs can paradoxically increase the risk of encountering these two failure patterns. Amazingly, some advice given to first-time founders should be avoided: Number 1: “Just do it!” entrepreneurs make things happen. Still, the bias for action can tempt entrepreneurs to truncate exploration and leap too soon into building and selling a product.

Number 2 “Be persistent.” Although authentic entrepreneurs can persevere, when persistence transforms into stubbornness, they may face difficulties distinguishing a false start from a genuine opportunity. Number 4 “Bring Passion” This can blind entrepreneurs to the fact that their product is not meeting customers' needs. Last, Number 5, "Grow fast," can put heavy demands on team members and partners.

This last theory shows us that some factors are generally believed to be effective in helping entrepreneurs to succeed; nonetheless, these must be carefully analysed and put into the right context, culture, and business environment to be effective and not just follow them blindly. Another important factor is Education. Education can provide entrepreneurs with essential skills to boost their possibility of success. Finally, government and private institutions' support is extremely important to help the developed entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Findings

According to the UK’s Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (2022), Small to medium-sized enterprises (SME) are defined as any organisation that employs fewer than 250 people and has an annual turnover of fewer than 50 million euros or a balance sheet total of fewer than 43 million euros, as shown in Table 5. In Paraguay, SMEs are classified as follows, according to Decree N` 3,698 that modifies the law N` 4,467/2012 for SMEs in Paraguay, “Ley para las Micro, Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas – MIPYMES” SMEs are Micro enterprises those organisations that employ less than ten people and with an annual sale up to Guaranies 646,045,491 (around 82,000 euros).

Table 5: Defining an SME.
Source: UK’s Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (2022)

Turnover or balance sheet total	Headcount	Business size
Less than or equal to €50 million or €43 million	Less than 250	Medium sized
Less than or equal to €10 million or €10 million	Less than 50	Small
Less than or equal to €2 million or €2 million	Less than 10	Micro

Small enterprises are those organisations that employ up to 30 people and have an annual sale of up to Guaranies 3,230,227,453 (around 409,000 euros). Finally, Medium enterprises are those organisations that employ up to 50 people and with an annual sale of up to Guaranies 7,752,545,886 (around 982,000 euros).

Although in both countries (UK and Paraguay), the number of sales and employees in each category varies significantly, however, it is essential to highlight that in both cases, SMEs are limited and classified by the number of employees and the amount of turnover and annual sales. This is very important

because regulations and facilities for SMEs should be focused on and addressed in different ways than big enterprises. The government can implement policies to give a customised answer to entrepreneurs' needs. This section will mainly refer to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) to see some of their key findings in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Paraguay and the UK. This institution oversees monitoring and researching all related to entrepreneurship in many countries.

In the UK, According to the latest report of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2022, p.187), The UK received a score of 5.1 for its Entrepreneurial Finance condition, which ranks 12th among GEM Level A economies. Its score for Ease of Access to Entrepreneurial Finance was 4.4, placing 17th among this group. Policymakers can encourage new businesses, particularly in the innovative sector, by offering tax breaks and incentives that allow them to invest in necessary resources and talent and providing incentives to financial institutions that lend to entrepreneurs. Despite this, experts have evaluated the UK's internal market conditions more positively, indicating a strong foundation for entrepreneurs to sell their products and services domestically to an accepting consumer base.

Challenges faced by Paraguayan SMEs entrepreneurs.

According to the last report of GEM, Report on Paraguay (2020), entrepreneurs face a series of challenges in Paraguay. Entrepreneurs indicate that they understand their business field and know how to sell. However, registering a business properly can take more than 45 days, representing one of the region's highest times and most expensive processes. Furthermore, entrepreneurs consider bureaucracy to get permits and register as one of the main barriers to coping with starting or managing a venture in Paraguay.

Entrepreneurs have mentioned that they lack certain skills and abilities necessary to begin a business venture, such as general entrepreneurial knowledge and skills and specific knowledge of areas like human resources management, finance, administration, and fiscal and legal regulations. Additionally, they have noted a lack of financial education. Furthermore, insufficient financial resources are a significant obstacle to initiating and overseeing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Less than 50% of the companies have access to official financial institutions, and nearly one-third have no access to formal or informal funding sources, which directly constrains their ability to expand.



Figure 1: Key obstacles to doing business for Entrepreneurs and MSMEs in Paraguay

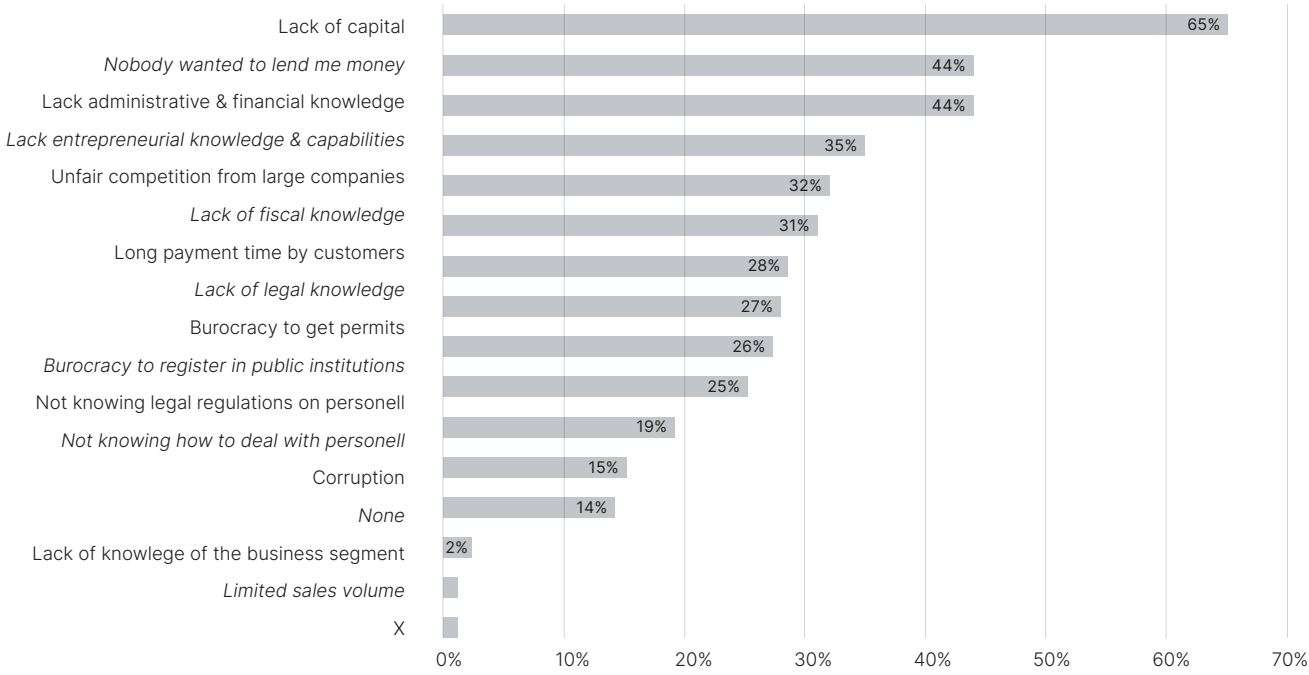
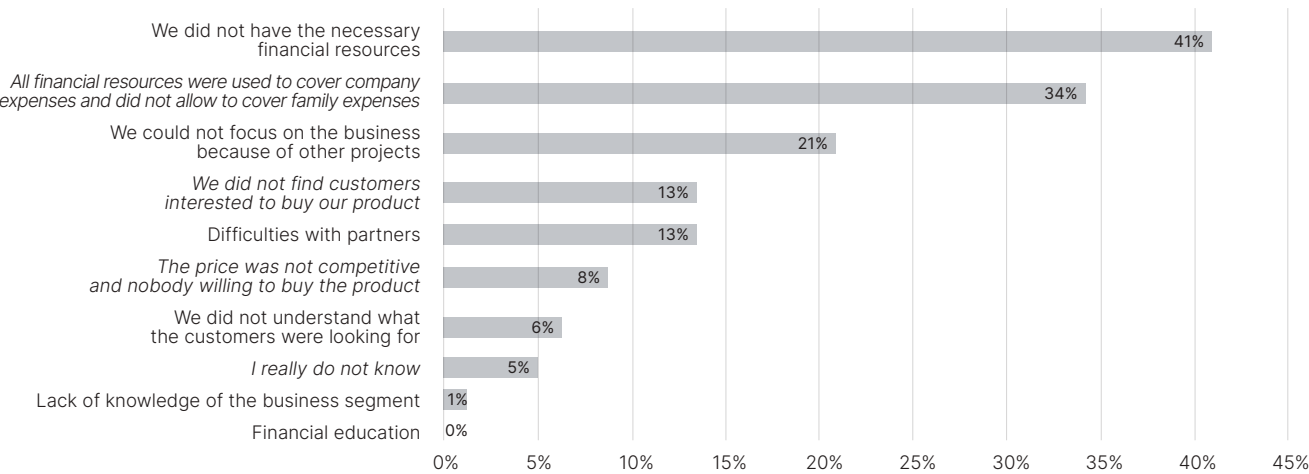


Figure 3: Key motives that made my business not to prosper



(Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2020)

Another report by the World Bank Group (2020) ranked Paraguay on "Doing Business" topics as follows:

160 – Starting a Business. 143 – Protecting Minority Investors. 105 – Resolving insolvency.
132 – Getting Credit. 128 – Trading across borders.

As it is illustrated, we can see how Paraguay is far behind in some of the most relevant topics for a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Challenges faced by British SMEs entrepreneurs

According to Gordon (2023), Managing Director of Lloyds Banking Group, in 2022, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK encountered numerous challenges. The rising cost of living led to reduced consumer spending on the High Street as people grappled with higher fuel expenses and surging household bills. Additionally, the invasion of Ukraine and soaring inflation caused market volatility, resulting in slower growth than anticipated, particularly affecting the agriculture sector due to increased fuel, feed, and fertiliser input costs. The economic, political, and social uncertainty that impacted the previous year seems likely to persist. Despite these challenges, SMEs have demonstrated resilience, as reflected in the latest Barometer figures from January. Business confidence currently stands at 22%, showing significant gains for the second consecutive month, with economic optimism at 47%. In 2023, entrepreneurs should be cautious of the impact of the cost of living and the importance of striving for carbon neutrality. The TMF Group (2021) highlights some challenges businesses face, such as Brexit, starting a business, resourcing, construction permits and registering properties, getting electricity, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, enforcing contracts, resolving insolvency, and cultural barriers.

Potential Gaps have been highlighted in the literature review:

Cultural Context.

The literature review does not extensively discuss the cultural context in which entrepreneurship occurs. Cultural factors can significantly influence entrepreneurs' mindsets, behaviour, and success opportunities.

Support for SMEs.

Challenges are mentioned in the literature review; however, there is a lack of information on specific types of support or policies that could address these challenges effectively. Identifying this support weather, whether they are governmental or non-governmental, will help us to identify factors for entrepreneurs to succeed.

Entrepreneurial Education.

Education in this sector from a very early stage can be crucial for developing entrepreneurial activity and the ecosystem.

Long-term Sustainability.

Examining how successfully they maintain their businesses over the long and address issues like succession planning, continuous innovation, and



adapting to changing market conditions would be relevant to identify factors for the success of entrepreneurs.

Mental Health and Well-being.

Entrepreneurs can be mentally and emotionally challenging. Examining entrepreneurs' mental health and well-being and understanding how stress, burnout, and other factors affect their performance and decision-making could be an important area to explore to determine to which extent this affects their success.

This literature review section adopted the “Thematic Approach” to explore the topic. Various types of entrepreneurs are discussed, ranging from small business owners to social entrepreneurs and the associated characteristics of an entrepreneurial mindset.

The definition and classification of SMEs in the UK and Paraguay are provided, with the challenges entrepreneurs face in each country. Through this literature review gaps have been identified and mentioned to use this gap to conduct further research to identify the factors that help entrepreneurs to Succeed in the UK and find the way or the feasibility to implement them in Paraguay.

Research Methodology

What are the key factors that help English SMEs succeed in the retail sector?

And the sub-questions are: Which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector to succeed? How can SMEs in Paraguay overcome the main challenges based on the experiences of their English counterparts? What strategies can be used in Paraguay as an alternative to support SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed?

By combining elements of interpretivism, and critical realism, we aimed to understand the factors that contribute to SMEs' success in the retail sector in England and see how entrepreneurs in Paraguay learn from these factors. Interpretivism was involved in collecting qualitative data through surveys to understand the experiences and perspectives of SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector in England and Paraguay, how different factors contribute to their success, and to explore the meaning and motivations behind different entrepreneurial activities across different contexts and cultures. Furthermore, realism because the qualitative data was collected to identify factors that contribute to the success of SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector and understand how these factors interact with each other and with the broader economy and social structure to shape opportunities and challenges faced by SMEs entrepreneurs.

For this research topic, a qualitative approach was used. According to Walia A. and Chetty (2020), The qualitative research strategy is typically utilised to gain insight into the underlying reasons or opinions of the individual concerning a particular issue or problem without relying on numerical data. It aids in achieving research objectives by providing insight into the research problem. It can be employed in various methods such as interviews, observations, open-ended surveys, focus group discussions, questionnaires, and secondary sources. The primary focus of this strategy is on determining when, where, what, and how frequently a particular phenomenon occurs, hence, to accomplish our research's main objective established, which is to Identify factors that have contributed to the success of English's SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector and find ways to implement or replicate these factors in Paraguay in the entrepreneurial activity.

This qualitative method was applied because the quantitative data is already available for all done by the Government of each country and with one of the most important institutions in charge of monitoring entrepreneurs around the world, which is The Glob Entrepreneur Monitor - GEM, as it was shown in the Literature Review. The qualitative data was collected through the surveys, providing in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of SMEs entrepreneurs in

the retail sector in England and helping identify specific factors that contribute to their success as well as challenges and strategies. This qualitative information was compared with the data available and cited in the literature review since this helped us to go deeper to the root to identify successfully, compare and analyse the factor that affects the success of entrepreneurs in the retail sector as well as to see if the challenges faced by the entrepreneurs are up to date and are real as well as the strategies. By using this approach, we were able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector and how these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay.

This study was designed using the “Exploratory Design.” The Sacred Heart University (2020) stated that an exploratory research design is implemented when there are limited or no prior studies available to refer to regarding a research problem. The emphasis is on gaining insights and familiarity with the issue to inform later investigation or when the problem is in its initial stages of inquiry. In the case of the problem for this research, there are some studies about general factors that help entrepreneurs to succeed. Still, this topic focuses specifically on factors that impact English entrepreneurs and try to replicate them or implement them in Paraguayan entrepreneurs, which not much study has been done.

The samples considered for this research consisted of 20 SMEs entrepreneurs from the UK and Paraguay in the retail sector. A size of 20 entrepreneurs for a qualitative survey was appropriate for qualitative research. Ten entrepreneurs who completed the survey were from the UK, and ten were from Paraguay. Even though the main purpose of this research is to learn from the experiences of the British entrepreneurs, it was necessary to include the Paraguayan entrepreneurs in the survey, mainly to see the challenges they face and from the experience of the British entrepreneurs and highlight strategies or action that can be implemented to face those challenges successfully and thus help the SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed. The survey for the entrepreneurs in Paraguay was addressed in Spanish since most of the SMEs entrepreneurs do not speak English. However, those surveys were translated into English to collect the data and proceed with the data analysis. The 27 survey questions on Google Forms were designed to find the most accurate answer to our research questions and thus accomplish our main objective. The survey was conducted over a period of two weeks and was sent by email and WhatsApp to the entrepreneurs.

Together with the data collection, the data analysis is crucial for this and any other research. This section outlines the findings through the qualitative method. The qualitative data analysis involved an in-depth exploration of the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector. To make the most out of the qualitative design, the data was integrated to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth

understanding of the research problem. Using different data analysis techniques, in this case, the “qualitative method,” to analyse the data collected through the interview, it was possible to provide more robust and nuanced findings. The qualitative data was used to describe situations, events, observed behaviours, and a direct quotation from entrepreneurs about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. The data collected from the British and Paraguayan entrepreneurs gave us a broad insight to address the questions proposed for this dissertation.

In summary, this study aimed to identify the key factors that have contributed to the success of SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector in England and to determine which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the same sector to succeed. To do so, firstly, a qualitative research strategy was chosen, and the research philosophy was a mix of interpretivism and realism with an inductive research approach. The research focused on an explorative design with various techniques to collect qualitative data. All the research was carried out considering the ethical considerations and within the limitations explained in the methodology section.

Findings

In this section, we introduce the key findings we reached through the survey that was conducted. The survey included 27 questions and was designed to find answers to our main research question: What are the key factors that help English SMEs succeed in the retail sector? And sub-questions: Which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector to succeed? How can SMEs in Paraguay overcome the main challenges based on the experiences of their English counterparts? What strategies can be used in Paraguay as an alternative to support SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed? The data shown in this section was collected through primary data collection. From the survey, 55% were male and 45% female. We did not have participants who identify with another kind of gender. In terms of the age group, the highlight is that all groups were covered, where most of The respondents, 35%, are between 30-39, 20% are 18-29 and 40-49, 15% between 60 or more and 10% between 50-59 years old (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

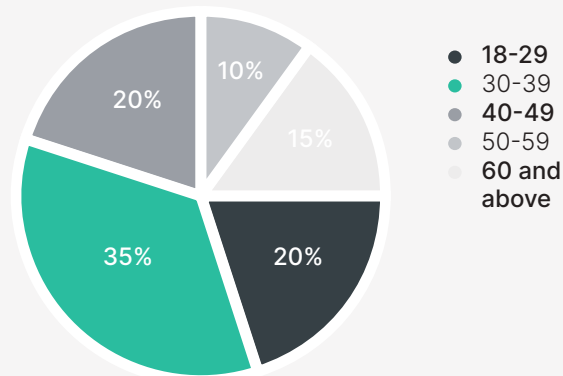


Figure 2: Nationality

The respondents were equally divided; 50% were UK residents, and 50% Paraguayan residents.

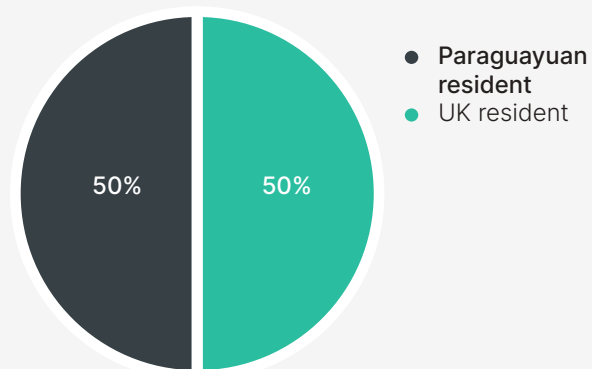


Figure 3 Motivations

The survey highlighted that one of the strongest reasons the respondents reported for pursuing an entrepreneurial journey was the desire for new career challenges, followed by the lack of job opportunities and financial necessity.

4. What motivated you to become an entrepreneur? 20 Responses

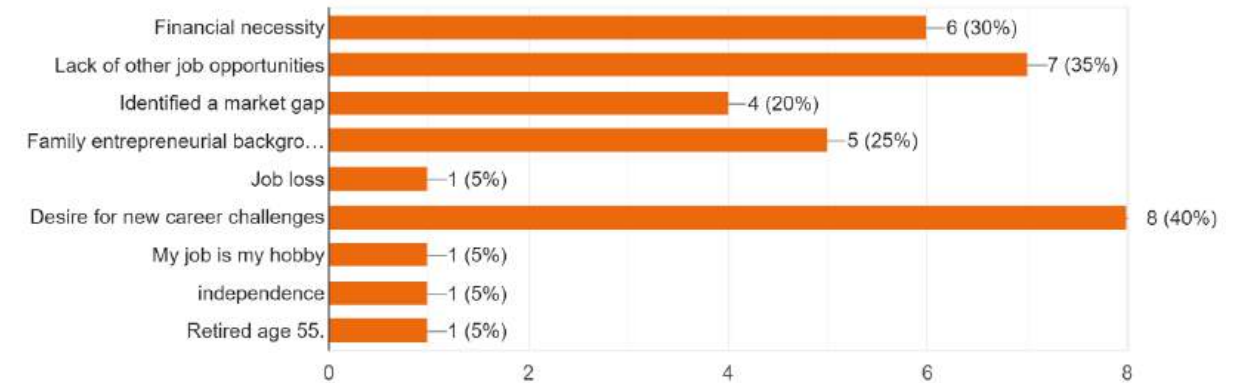


Figure 4 Startup Motivation

The survey revealed that 50% of entrepreneurs created a complete business plan when they started. However, a considerable percentage of respondents, 35%, only had the idea of business in mind when they began their entrepreneurial journey. Others also estimated a revenue/profit analysis, conducted a market analysis, and calculated potential risks.

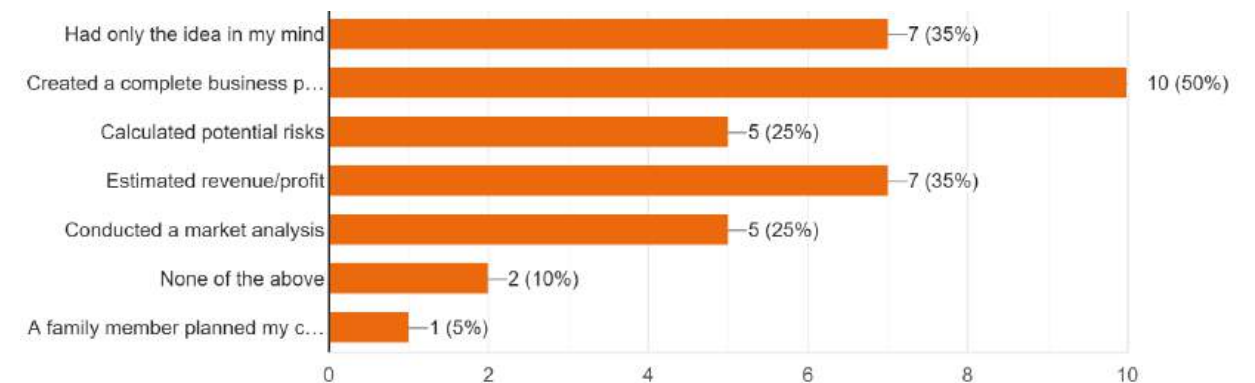


Figure 6: Prior Preparation/ Training

The findings in this survey show that the majority did management training, 30% did marketing training, 20% did financial training, and another small percentage did leadership and tax training. 40% of the participants selected none of the options given.

6. Did you receive any specific training before starting your business? 20 Responses

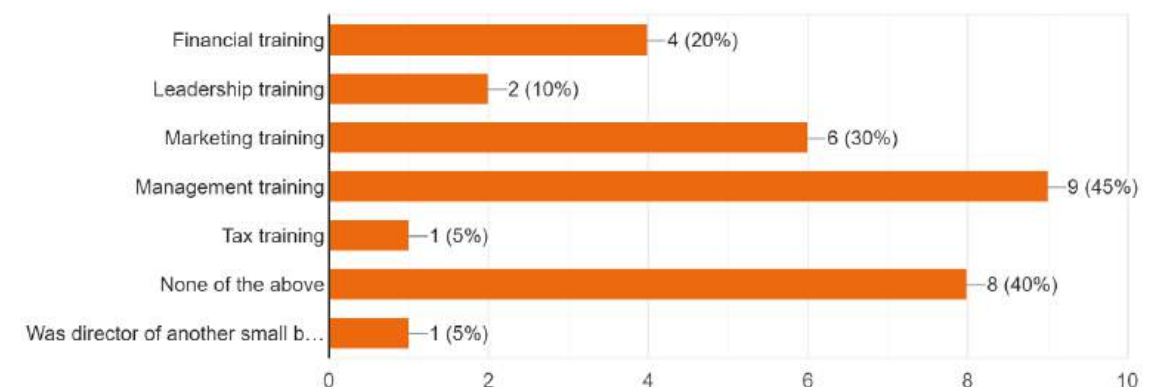


Figure 10: Question 7:

Most said they are happy being an entrepreneur; however, 35% of the respondents enjoy entrepreneurship, although they would consider exploring other jobs. A small 5% would instead pursue a different career given the chance.

In the previous question. 5% of the respondents would instead pursue a different career, such as a teacher, cardiologist, or paediatrician.

Figure 11: Question 9:

The vast majority either totally agree or agree to be a successful entrepreneur, 20% partially agree, and 15% neither agree nor disagree. None disagree.

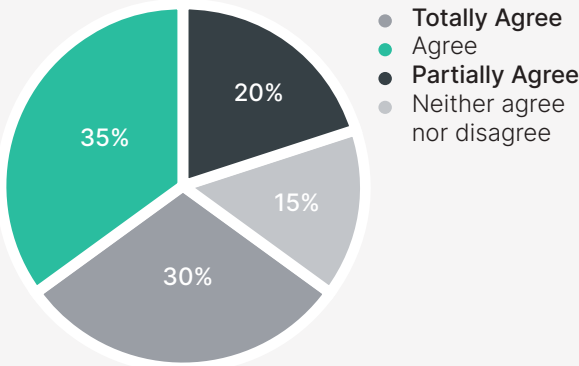


Table 8: Question 11: Mention a male or female who is a successful entrepreneur for you and why you admire them?

Participant 1	Mark and Spencer - Because there's always a buyer for their goods for every flavour.
Participant 2	Kris Jenner-Started from nothing and now has a billion \$ business.
Participant 3	The past Steve Jobs. He made his employees part of the business.
Participant 4	Non
Participant 5	Elon Musk - because he makes something useful. (not make money by selling information)
Participant 6	Michael Dell. Admire him of his success in the IT industry and his humility.
Participant 7	Anita Roddick - Built a great ethical business and donated to environmental causes.
Participant 8	Elon Musk - because he creates value for society.
Participant 9	The owner of a store called "Artemera" has managed to use Paraguayan crafts in beautiful clothing design. He started from scratch and now has a chain of stores nationwide.
Participant 10	Elon Musk, I admire him because I create a lot of successful businesses from scratch.
Participant 11	My sister, Jennifer. She started her own business and was able to finance her children's education.
Participant 12	Mark Zuckerberg because he has determination and a vision of the future.
Participant 13	Madame CJ Walker. The first black woman in the USA who started creating handmade cosmetics until she created an entire empire. I admire her for her visionary mentality and her perseverance in not giving up despite her age and fighting in a time when black women did not vote and belonged to a lower class.
Participant 14	Elon Musk is an icon of innovation.
Participant 15	Nilsa Altamirano. She is an entrepreneur whom I admire due to her perseverance, her discipline, and her people skills. She is a woman who knew how to overcome obstacles and keeps growing more and more in her business.
Participant 16	Fernando Vazquez. He was a man who created a good personal economy and who started from personal and work sacrifices from his childhood, even being an orphan.
Participant 17	María Presser, photographer and mentor at Sony. She knew how to differentiate herself in the medium with his own way of being, capturing the attention of important brands such as Sony.
Participant 18	Richard Branson/Anita Roddick.
Participant 19	My father, who started his business from scratch.
Participant 20	Elon Musk, for his vision and innovation.

Some widely renowned names, such as Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg, were mentioned. However, the respondents also said unfamous family members' names whose determination and vision were key to building their small businesses.

Table 7: Question 10: In your words, how do you define a successful entrepreneur?

Participant 1	Always go forward and look to the future
Participant 2	Making sure the company has a great and compatible team
Participant 3	Totally confident in his/ her ability to problem solving
Participant 4	High capacity, profitable and have social moral
Participant 5	Ability to change quickly, adapt and move on
Participant 6	Someone willing and happy to help people to learn and succeed
Participant 7	Someone who can make enough money for his/her needs and enjoys the work.
Participant 8	To create a sustainable business.
Participant 9	Someone who has made their product to be a necessity for their consumer.
Participant 10	Someone who can make a profitable autonomous business
Participant 11	Someone who can start the business and be his/her own manager
Participant 12	Someone with projection, a clear vision, and achieves financial goals and stability.
Participant 13	Someone that undertakes with a purpose more than just chasing money, chases a dream, and positively impacts people's lives through their idea, solution, or talent, leaving a legacy that financial capacity could not erase in the lives of those people.
Participant 14	Someone that leads other entrepreneurs to success. Love and value each stroke to achieve has a team of goals, confidence, discipline, and much effort.
Participant 15	Someone who adapts to the market and its changes overcomes obstacles, and always improves.
Participant 16	Someone who makes a profit and uses it for his economic well-being.
Participant 17	Someone with the freedom to choose which jobs to do and which not to do, with enough time to focus on working on personal projects and training.
Participant 18	Someone who makes money by developing a product or idea to fill a previously unexploited market niche.
Participant 19	Someone that can manage his own time and have the mindset to focus on innovation and sustainability.
Participant 20	Someone that achieves the balance between work and own time and good profit.

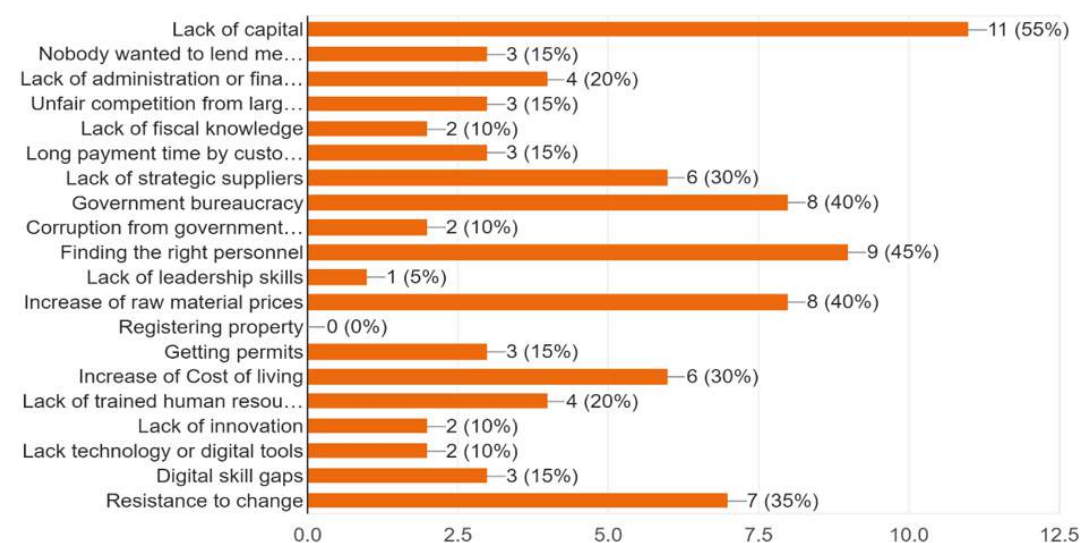
Key words highlighted in the answers were: Strong team, problem-solving confidence, adaptability, helping others to succeed, profitability, sustainability, vision, innovation, financial well-being, autonomy, leadership, and balance.

Table 9: Question 12: Please list the challenges you have faced (or face) as an entrepreneur.

Participant 1	Some goods don't always find a buyer, or some people find it expensive.
Participant 2	Extremely rude customers.
Participant 3	No rest engaged 24/7. I needed to learn how to manage the stress.
Participant 4	Financial stability.
Participant 5	Finding bank support.
Participant 6	Loneliness, Capital, Problems with Google Advertisements, Marketing.
Participant 7	Problems with government regulation related to employing staff - sick pay, holiday pay, maternity leave, paternity leave, disciplinary procedures, risk of unfair dismissal litigation, etc. Better not to recruit.
Participant 8	Keeping a motivated team, Cost of living.
Participant 9	Lack of knowledge of digital marketing, financing, and a very small market for my product.
Participant 10	Increase sales, maintain customer loyalty, and find the right personnel.
Participant 11	Financial strain, competition from other entrepreneurs, not making enough profit /break-even point
Participant 12	Limited financial capacity and lack of government support.
Participant 13	Financial challenges.
Participant 14	Self-confidence, and weak leadership.
Participant 15	A market in constant change after covid, with little cash flow, high costs of raw materials, a lot of competition, lack of qualified and responsible workers.
Participant 16	Having enough money to pay suppliers, lack of customer payments, lack of capitalization, and lack of personnel to help at work permanently.
Participant 17	Innovation, the market is getting more demanding, competitiveness.
Participant 18	Obtaining finance/overcoming bureaucracy/working around a lack of relevant infrastructure
Participant 19	Fulfil the market demand, which is continuously getting more demanding.
Participant 20	Lack of trained personnel, long working hours, Inflation.

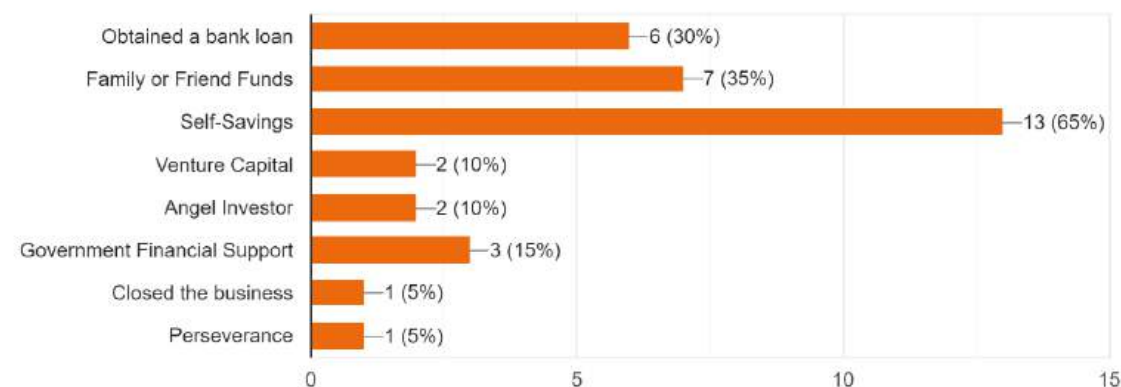
Some recurrent factors can be identified: challenges related to the staff, lack of government support, competition, inflation, cost of living, rude customers, and financial challenges.

Figure 12: Question 13: According to the previous question, select the challenges you face(ed) as an entrepreneur? 20 responses



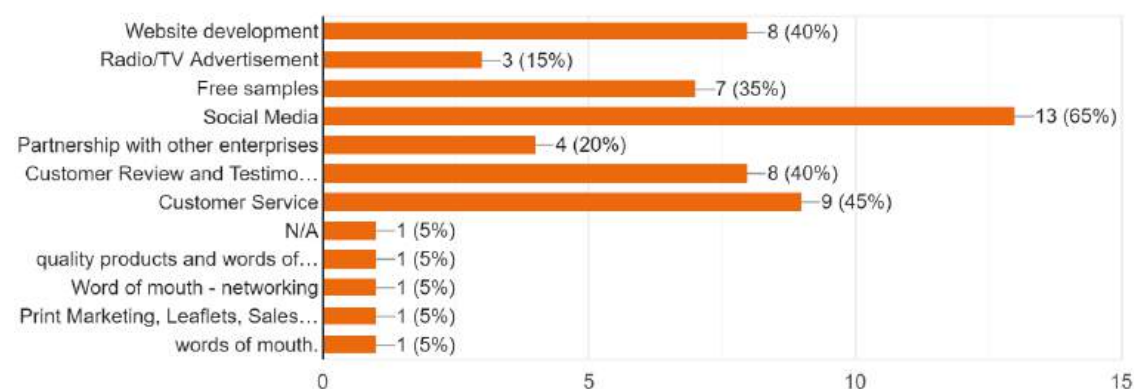
As shown in the graph above, the main challenge is the lack of capital, followed by finding the right personnel government bureaucracy, and the least one is registering a property.

Figure 13: Question 14: What financial action(s) have you taken to overcome these challenges? 20 responses



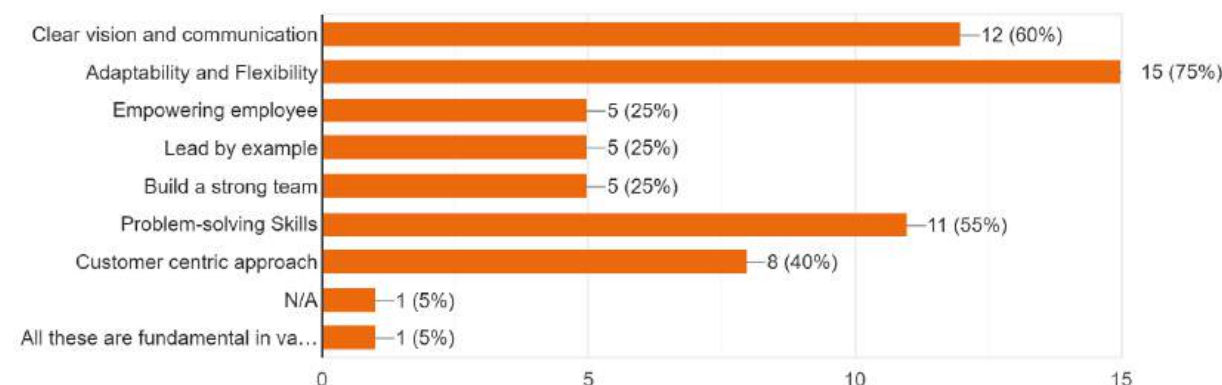
The main strategy to overcome financial challenges is using self-savings; in second place is family or friends' funds. In the extreme case, respondent closed their businesses.

Figure 14: Question 15: What marketing action(s) have you taken to overcome these challenges? 20 responses



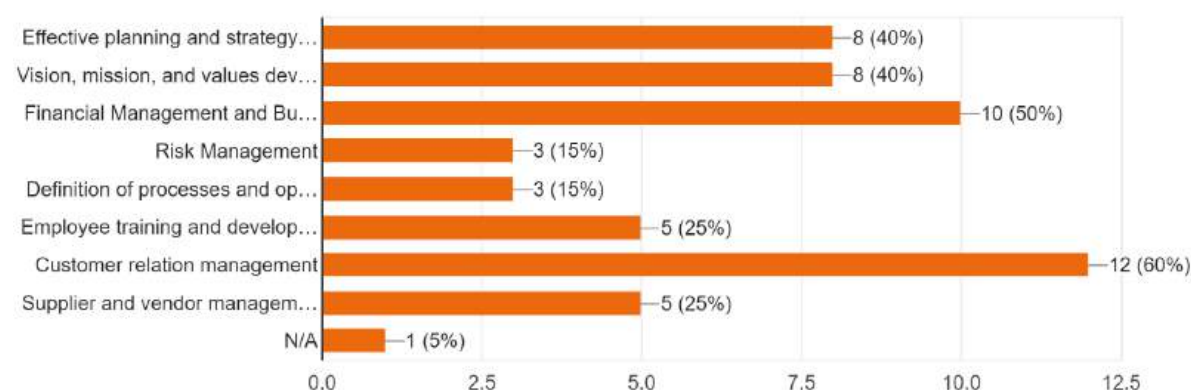
With 65%, Social Media is the main marketing strategy, followed by customer service at 45% and website development at 40%.

Figure 15: Question 16: What leadership action(s) have you taken to overcome these challenges? 20 responses



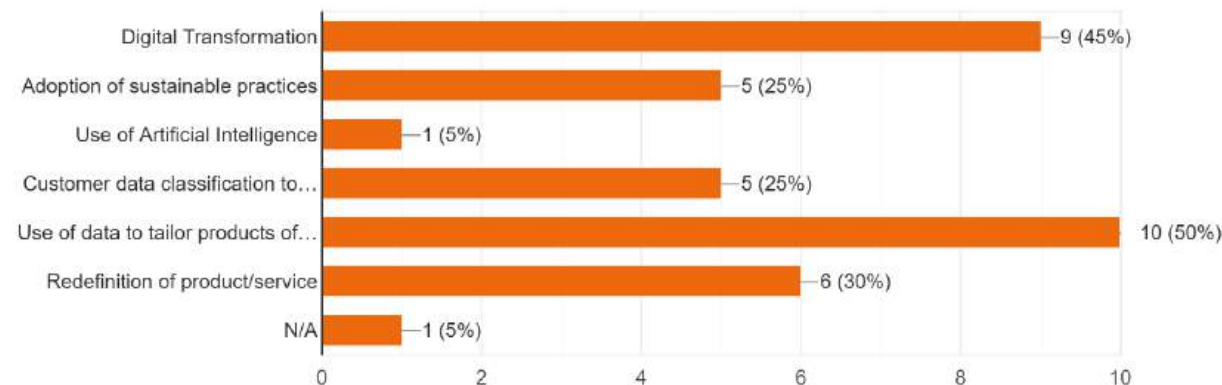
Respondents stated Adaptability and Flexibility (75%) as the main strategy when referring to Leadership. This is followed by Clear vision and communication (60%) and problem-solving skills (55%).

Figure 16: Question 17: What management action(s) have you taken to overcome these challenges? 20 responses



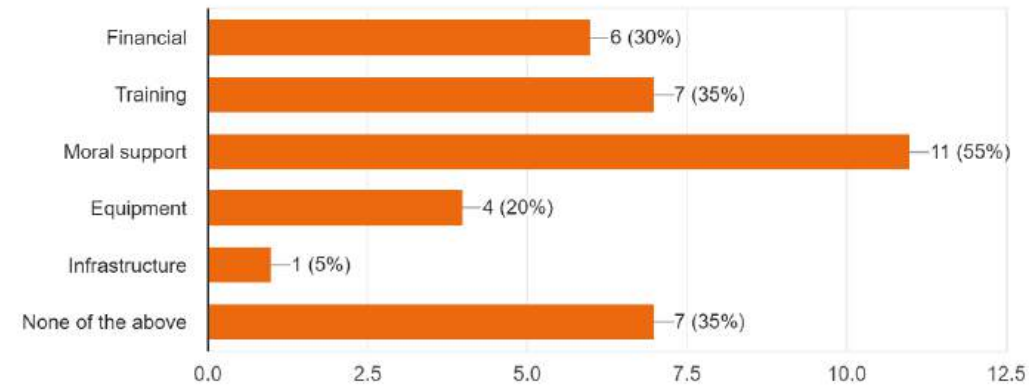
60% of respondents chose customer relation management, 50% financial management, and budgeting as the main management strategy to overcome challenges.

Figure 17: Question 18: What innovation action(s) have you taken to overcome these challenges? 20 responses



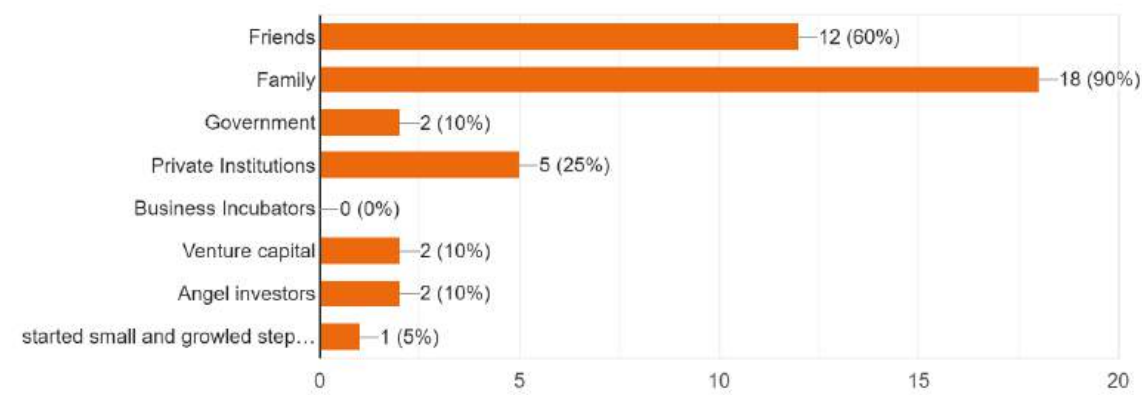
In terms of innovation, 55% of the respondents used data to tailor their products or services according to customers' needs, and only 5% used artificial intelligence. Most of the respondents have received some support in their entrepreneurial journey. However, a high percentage (45%) have not.

Figure 19: Question 20: What type of support have you received?
20 responses



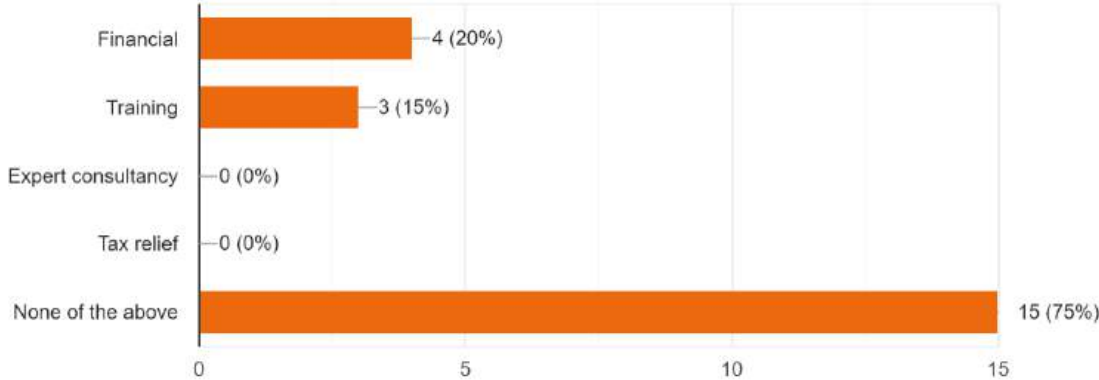
Respondents received mainly moral support followed by training, and a high 35% received none of the support listed.

Figure 20: Question 21: Who has been your main source of support?
20 responses



90% of the respondents received support from family, 60% from friends, and 25% from private institutions, only 10% from others like government, venture capital, or angel investors.

Figure 22: Question 23: What kind of support have you received from the government?
20 responses



75% of the participants did not receive any support from the government, whereas the rest received either financial support or training.

Figure 23: Question 24: Are you part of an entrepreneurial network?
20 responses

Only 15% of the respondents said they belong to a group of entrepreneurs networking. However, another 85% are not.

- Yes
- No

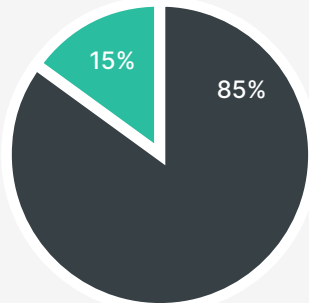


Table 10: Question 25: If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, how do you utilise this entrepreneurial network?

Participant 1	Connecting with new markets and new suppliers, sharing other experiences. Learn from other experts.
Participant 2	To make strong alliances and networking that lead me to possible strong clients.
Participant 3	Learn from their experiences, find strategic customers, strong alliances.

The participants that are connected to networking use this as a means of connecting new markets and suppliers, creating alliances, or learning from their experiences and finding customers.

About 80% of the respondents use Artificial Intelligence to benefit their business, whereas 20% said they do not explore this possibility.

Table 11: Question 27: If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, mention how you use AI in your daily business life.

Participant 1	Advertising, replying to emails, tailoring marketing offers, and getting ideas of possible strategies to be implemented.
Participant 2	For email writing, advertising, preparing draft.
Participant 3	Virtual assistant for daily administrative activities.
Participant 4	Mainly GPT-Chat as query support.

The respondents who use AI use it for administrative tasks, to get fresh ideas, or to support customer queries. These questions covered the challenges entrepreneurs faced, the opportunities they encountered, the support they relied upon, their strategies to navigate obstacles, and their pre-existing knowledge or skills about entrepreneurship. In this section, the data collected from these respondents has been visually represented through graphs and tables, enabling a comprehensive analysis. The ensuing section will delve into a detailed discussion of the results obtained from this dataset.

Discussion of Findings

This section delves into a comprehensive analysis to answer our research question: What are the key factors that help English SMEs succeed in the retail sector? and similarly, our sub-questions: Which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector to succeed? How can SMEs in Paraguay overcome the main challenges based on the experiences of their English counterparts? What strategies can be used in Paraguay as an alternative to support SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed? The previous section systematically explored the data collected through a survey, data that will be discussed and analysed in depth in this section. To better understand the elements underpinning these businesses’ success, shedding light on their strategies, practices, and approaches. As we shift our focus from exploration to interpretation, this section engages with the pivotal sub-questions illuminating potential pathways for SMEs entrepreneurs in the Paraguayan retail sector to succeed.

The research question and sub-questions served as the guiding beacons, directing our exploration toward pragmatic implications and actionable insights. By investigating the adaptability of the identified success factors within the distinct business landscape of Paraguay, we bridge the gap between theory and practice, which will enable us to offer tangible recommendations for entrepreneurs seeking to grow and succeed in the retail sector. Additionally, we explore the strategies that can serve as potent

alternatives tailored to the unique challenges faced by SMEs in Paraguay. By drawing parallels and divergences between the experiences of English SMEs and their Paraguayan counterparts, this discussion section seeks to unravel a tapestry of knowledge that will contribute to empowering small and medium business practitioners. Through a rigorous examination of our research findings and their contextual implications, this section celebrates the nuances of success within the retail sector and aspires to ignite a meaningful exchange of ideas and strategies between two diverse yet interconnected economies.

Constructing the Concept of “To be a successful entrepreneur”

To accomplish the main aim of this research, “Identify factors that have contributed to the success of English SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector and find ways to implement or replicate these factors in Paraguay in the entrepreneurial activity,” It will be impossible to draw a conclusion if we do not have a clear definition for what to consider a “Successful entrepreneur” As we highlighted in the literature review, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to defining what being a successful entrepreneur is. This concept can be interpreted and have different aspects and meanings that can differ according to what each entrepreneur aims for with their business. As we looked for the literature, we do not find a clear definition; we rather find traits of a Successful entrepreneur. We will build our concept after profoundly analysing the participant's responses:

Table 12: Respondents’ definition of “Successful Entrepreneur.”(Source: Primary data collection, 2023)

If we analyse this answer given by the Paraguayan and British participants, we can say that a Successful entrepreneur is:

For the Paraguayan participants:
A “successful entrepreneur” is Someone who has a projection, a clear vision, and the ability to create an autonomous and profitable business to achieve its financial goals and use it for its well-being. Furthermore, to use the business to lead other entrepreneurs to succeed, creating a business with a purpose rather than just chasing money, impacting people’s lives positively. More importantly, they adapt to the market and its challenges and find the perfect balance to manage their own time and focus on personal projects and training.

Similarly, for the British Participants:
A “successful entrepreneur” is someone who can create a great compatible team, go forward, and look at the future with confidence in problem-solving and high social morals, and is willing to help people to learn and succeed while creating a sustainable business developing a product or idea to exploit a niche, adapt to changes quickly and move on.

Mixing both definitions, we have three crucial elements in common:

- Profitable business
- Help people to learn and succeed.
- Adapt the market and change quickly.
- Social impact.

In summary, for the aim of this research, based on the participants’ view, we can deduce that A successful entrepreneur is someone with the ability and capability to create a profitable business, adapt to the market and change quickly, helping other people (entrepreneurs) to learn and succeed and have a positive social impact.

Another important observation is that female respondents were more inclined towards the social side of the entrepreneur’s “social entrepreneurship,” and the male participants were more concerned about the profitability and the financial side. These observations are significant because business owners' strategies should be closely aligned with their business core to enhance their success possibility. Having said that and with a definition of a “Successful entrepreneur,” we can use this insight to list several traits that make or help an entrepreneur succeed. We can compare and enrich these traits with the ones listed in the literature review. As mentioned in the literature review, different sources list factors that successful entrepreneurs should embrace: To these listed factors, we believe that from our primary data collection, we can add a couple of traits or factors that a successful entrepreneur should consider helping them to achieve success. These factors are considered more aligned with the culture and business landscape.

Figure 25: Traits of successful entrepreneurs according to various sources. (Source: McKinsey and Co 202, Harvard Business School 2020, Forbes 2022, HBR 2021)

According to McKinsey and Co.	Harvard Business Review.
Prioritise talent and customer satisfaction. Intense dedication. Exceptional personnel. Have additional funding. Adjust to market fluctuations. Concentrate on achieving goals. Delivering value to their customers. Feedback, fearless creativity. Embraces the company's culture.	Draw a lesson from a wide range of experiences. Self-help. Motivation - words like "dare to be different." Learn from the Best.
Harvard Business School	Forbes
Curiosity. Structured experimentation. Adaptability. Decisiveness. Team building. Risk tolerance. Comfort with failure. Persistence. Innovation. Long-term focus.	Determination. Risk-taking. Optimism. Curiosity. Problem-solving. Confidence. Adaptability to change. Persistence.

Figure 26: Traits of successful entrepreneurs according to primary data collection.

According to Primary Data collection.
Build a strong and compatible Team. Problem-Solving confidence. Adaptability and Agility. Helping others succeed. Balancing profitability and morality. Focus on sustainability. Clear vision and projection. Innovation and necessity. Financial Well-being. Time management. Focus on positive Impact - Social entrepreneurship. Leadership and Empowerment. Balance and well-being.

(Source: Primary data collection, 2023)
These factors can be learned through proper training or experience. With the right combination of skills, this could positively impact entrepreneurs’ performance.

Education in the Entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Education in the entrepreneurial ecosystem undoubtedly has many edges. Some fields of study, such as finance, marketing, management, planning, and many more, can help people prepare to embark on the entrepreneurial journey. Logic may lead us to think that people who have received such training may be more likely to succeed. This may be true. However, evidence collected through the survey clearly shows that this is not always the case. As it has been mentioned in the literature review, according to the British Library (2023) concept, an entrepreneur is an individual willing to take “calculated risk,” thus knowing when to stop or when/how to continue, which, according to Harvard Business Review (2021) this is a thin line that can make the difference in the failing or succeeding of the entrepreneur.

When referring to Figure 11 (Question 9), in the previous section, the findings show that 30% totally agree with being a successful entrepreneur, 35% agree, and 20% partially agree. This indicates that 85% of the participants are successful entrepreneurs, and only a small percentage did not say they are not successful but just neither agree nor disagree. Evidence showed in the previous section, Figure 8 (Question 5) that a high 50% of respondents said that when they started their business, they created a completed business plan, 35% estimated revenue and profit, 25% conducted a market analysis and calculated potential risks, and 5% had a family member who had planned the business.

As a matter of fact, these educational factors can crucially drive success. However, it is important to consider that with all these skills, entrepreneurs will not fail. On the contrary, lacking these skills does not mean an entrepreneur will not succeed. As shown in Figure 8 (Question 5), 35% of the respondents only had the idea of their business when starting their business and the “know-how,” but they are still successful entrepreneurs. While starting a business with the skill needed can drive you to a successful pathway, it is also valuable to start the business when you have the idea and identify a need in the market with the commitment of continuous training through the journey. In Figure 9 (Question 6), we can appreciate the kind of training people had for their business, as follows (in order as mentioned by the respondents):



Figure 27: The Educational Matrix. (Source: Self-source, 2023)

This matrix has been designed after the experiences of the kind of training participants mentioned they received in their entrepreneurial journey, and it can be used as a model to be replicated or used to create training programmes for entrepreneurs. However, this training should always be shaped and tailored to the needs of the entrepreneurs. For instance, considering the evidence of the data collected, we can see how British training needs are slightly different from what Paraguayan needs. Or for example, among the respondents’ female participants were inclined more toward marketing and male participants more toward management training.

Table 14: Training done by gender.

(Source: Primary data collection, 2023)

Gender	Training
Female	Financial training, Marketing training , Management training.
Female	Management training.
Female	Management training.
Female	Financial training, Leadership training, Marketing training , and Management training.
Female	Marketing training.
Female	Marketing training , Tax training.
Male	Management training.
Male	Financial training, Marketing training, Management training.
Male	Financial training, Leadership training, Marketing training, Management training.
Male	Management training.
Male	Management training.
Male	Previous work experience

Motivation – key for success.

When you ask entrepreneurs in an early stage of their entrepreneurial journey if they are happy being an entrepreneur or would instead pursue a different career, it is quite a high probability that people would say they would do something different. However, when entrepreneurs have been through the process of starting a business from scratch, learning, getting experience, overcoming challenges, and achieving their objectives, they will feel more motivated to stay in the entrepreneurial environment. We can justify this with the data collected through our survey. In Figure 10 (Question 7), we can highlight the fact that 60% of the respondents are happy being an entrepreneur, and 35% enjoy it but would like to have experiences in other jobs. Only a tiny 5% would instead pursue a different career if given the chance. When talking about motivation, it is crucial to understand what motivated people to become an entrepreneur, for this will be a determining factor to push entrepreneurs to

seek success in the entrepreneurial environment and not to give up that easily. Similarly, participants were asked about their motivation to be an entrepreneur. Information collected in Figure 8 (Question 5) listed entrepreneurs’ motivation in the following order:

- Desire for new challenges.
- Lack of other job opportunities.
- Financial Necessity.
- Family Entrepreneurial Background.
- Identification of a gap in the market.
- Independency: This is like a hobby, retired age.

Whatever the reason for being an entrepreneur, they are strong driving forces to succeed. Motivation can be internal or external; in some cases, the motivation can come after dire circumstances, such as a lack of other job opportunities or financial necessity. It is vital that the government implement policies to motivate people to be entrepreneurs.

Cultural Factor as a success driver.

The cultural factor plays a crucial role in entrepreneurship's failure or success. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2020, pp.9-10) identifies twelve factors, known as the Entrepreneurial Framework Condition, which are believed to impact entrepreneurship significantly; one of the factors highlighted for this institution is the “Social and cultural norms,” which stated that these are the extent to which social and cultural norms encourages or allow actions leading to new business methods or activities that can potentially increase personal wealth and income. Ideally, an environment where people feel safe to share their business ideas with families, friends, and their counterparts would dramatically increase their chance to succeed since this will allow them to get feedback, share strategies, help people to connect with strategic partners, learn other's experiences and so the business can flourish in a co-working environment. In countries like Paraguay, where corruption is rooted in all the institutions at all levels, the society is not trust-based, so it becomes more difficult to share ideas, especially when people fear their ideas to get stolen rather than getting support or feedback. Successful entrepreneurs have learned through their journey to work to trust and share their ideas. Data collected and presented in the previous section, (Question 22), 90% of the respondents affirmed that they share their ideas to get feedback from their social circle.

Similarly, to create an environment of trustfulness, entrepreneurs should be encouraged to practice networking to get multiple benefits. However, according to the data collected, even though people feel happy to share their ideas with others, this practice is still weak when it comes to working together. For instance, on Question 24, only 15% of the respondents affirmed belonging to entrepreneurial networking. We can take this gap as a thing to

improve or to encourage entrepreneurs to implement. What we can learn from those 15% who said that they belong to an entrepreneurial network is that they use it for the following benefits: Connecting with new markets and suppliers, sharing other experiences, learning from experts, making solid and strategic alliances, connecting with possible strong clients and cooperate.

Building Trust Environment.

When we talk about cultural factors, one thing Paraguayan entrepreneurs should learn from British entrepreneurs is how to create an environment of trust between the customer and the entrepreneur. This can be built when the customer gets a product or service, and they can be sure that if they are not happy, they will have the chance to change it, or if they experience an issue, they can trust that they will get the service to get it fixed. Another essential strategy British entrepreneurs use is the customer review after customers get their product/service. There are many ways to do these thanks to the benefits of technology and in a straightforward way, Google Forms, for example. This will enable entrepreneurs to improve, learn from the customer experiences, improve the service, and learn customer likes or habits to offer more personalised products/services. Consequently, customers build trust and earn their loyalty. Entrepreneurs need to pay greater attention to post-sales service and customer follow-up. Furthermore, to be aware that the relationship with the customer does not finish with the completion of the sales; this is only the first more critical stage.

Challenges and Strategies.

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic journey that embodies risks, uncertainty, innovation, creativity, determination, and many other factors we could mention. What is true and undeniable is the fact that while the prospect of building a successful business can be exhilarating, it is also accompanied by multiple challenges that entrepreneurs must navigate. These challenges are not only inevitable but also essential for personal and business growth. In this section, we will explore the challenges mentioned by both British and Paraguayan entrepreneurs, and we will make a parallelism to understand the challenges faced in both cultures. But the main point of this is not to get stuck in the challenges but to explore the strategies that can be implemented to overcome these challenges. In the literature review, we have navigated a couple of common challenges. Still, for the SMEs entrepreneurs in Paraguay and the UK, this information is valid; however, through our data collection tool, we have collected the challenges and strategies from primary sources, and this will enable us to have a more accurate and broader insight and use them as a model for future entrepreneurs.

Challenges

1 Challenges in the Financial Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection.
Access to official financial institutions.	Financial stability.
Getting credit.	Financing.
Lack of financial sources.	Finding bank support.
No one wants to lend me money.	Lack of capital.
Paying taxes.	
Protecting investors.	

2 Challenges in the Governmental Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
Bureaucracy to get permits and register.	Corruption. Cost of living.
Bureaucracy to get permits.	Government Bureaucracy.
Bureaucracy to register in public institutions.	Government regulation related to staff.
Corruption.	Inflation.
Economic, political, and social uncertainty.	Lack of government support.
Higher fuel expenses and surging household bills.	Overcoming bureaucracy.
Registering a business properly.	
The rising cost of living.	

3 Challenges in the Human Resources Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
	Weak leadership.
	Fining the right personnel
	Lack of competitive and responsible workers.
	Lack of trained personnel.
	Stress of employees.

4 Challenges in the Social-Political Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
International Conflicts	

5 Challenges in the Governmental Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
Could not focus on the business.	Cash flow.
Difficulties with partners.	Keep a motivated team.
The price is not competitive.	Lack of customer payment.
Lack certain skills and abilities necessary to begin a business venture.	Lack of engagement.
	Lack of leadership skills.
	Lack of relevant infrastructure.
	Lack of strategic suppliers.
	Not making enough profit.
	Resistance to change.
	Self Confidence.
	To increase sales.
	Maintain customer loyalty.
	Marketing.

6 Challenges in the Market Dynamic Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
Cultural barriers.	Competition.
Customers were not interested in the product.	Extremely rude customers.
Limited sales volume.	Fulfil market demand.
Unfair competition from large companies.	High cost of raw material.
Lack of knowledge of the business segment.	Lack of buyers.
	Market in constant change.
	Small Market.

7 Challenges in the Market Dynamic Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
	Digital skill gaps.
	Lack of digital tools.
	Lack of innovation.
	Problem with google advertisements.

8 Challenges in the Market Dynamic Dimension	
According to the Literature Review in Chapter II.	According to Primary Data Collection
Lack general entrepreneurial knowledge and skills.	Lack of fiscal knowledge.
Lack of administration and financial knowledge.	Lack of knowledge of Digital Marketing.
Lack of financial education.	Lack of knowledge in Management.
Lack of legal knowledge.	
Not knowing legal regulation on personnel.	

Table 15: Challenges by section.
(Source: Primary data collection, 2023)

By engaging in a comprehensive and meticulous examination of the challenges outlined in the literature review and aligning them with the insights derived from the collected data, we can construct a significantly more precise roadmap of strategies to

help entrepreneurs overcome these challenges by learning from the experience of their counterparts. These successful entrepreneurs have navigated these issues and moved on. By customising these identified challenges to fit seamlessly within the specific context, we empower ourselves to create strategies that are not only finely attuned but also exceptionally impactful. This deliberate alignment ensures that our proposed strategy will be helpful for those searching for ways to face these challenges.

Strategies.

Financial Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Angel Investors.Venture Capital.Operative Capital - Bank Loan.Use of self-savings.Family or Friends Funds - Associates.Credit Union.	Marketing Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Customer reviews and testimonials.Customer service.Post-sales service.Free Samples.Partnership.Social MediaRadio/TV advertisementNetworking	Leadership Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Adaptability and Flexibility.Build a Strong Team.Clear Vision and Communication.Empowering Employees.Customer Centric Approach.Problem-solving skills.
Management Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Mission - Vision - Values.Planning and Strategy Development Employee training.Financial Management.Budgeting.Definition of process and Operations.	Innovation Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Digital Adaptation and Transformation.Redefinition of Products/ ServicesUse of customer data to offer personalised products. Services.Use of Artificial Intelligence.	Governmental Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reduction/Tailor of Taxes According to Business Nature.Create Spaces for Networking.Create Funds for Entrepreneurs.Offer Trainings in Different skills.

Figure 28: Strategies.
(Source: Primary data collection, 2023)

These strategies have been derived directly from the extensive data collected from our primary sources: individuals who have, in the majority, considered themselves successful entrepreneurs. As a result, entrepreneurs can confidently believe that these strategies have been conceptualised and actively employed in real-world scenarios, underpinning their potential to serve as potent catalysts of success.

Role-model:

Finally, the role model is another critical factor that can drive SMEs entrepreneurs to success. We have often been presented with the notion that successful entrepreneurs are individuals like Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and many other famous figures. Entrepreneurs can undoubtedly learn valuable lessons from them. However, it is essential to recognise that successful entrepreneurs within our families, communities, and those who started from scratch against adversity have equally valuable insights to offer. We can glean a lot from their experiences. In the survey, entrepreneurs were asked about their sources of admiration. The responses included family members, neighbours, friends, and even “ordinary individuals.” Government and institutions should provide more visibility to these lesser-known entrepreneurs, who can serve as role models within the same context and reality as small and medium entrepreneurs. To determine the applicability of these factors to Paraguayan entrepreneurs, we conducted the survey in both Paraguay and the UK. Surveying in both countries, we aimed to identify whether there is a significant gap in practices, perceptions, challenges, and knowledge held by entrepreneurs in the two countries. Upon analysing the collected responses, it was observed that there were no significant variations between the two regions. As a result, it can be inferred that the identified factors, challenges, and strategies are indeed applicable to both contexts.

Conclusions

Despite the distinct cultural contexts of the two countries, our data analysis has revealed a notable similarity in the experiences, practices, challenges, and strategies encountered by SME entrepreneurs in both regions throughout their entrepreneurial journeys. Nevertheless, a notable divergence emerges in the trust dynamics between entrepreneurs and customers. The role of entrepreneurs and customer engagement post-sales is of particular significance, emerging as a critical success factor within this context.

What are the key factors that help English SMEs succeed in the retail sector?

The comprehensive analysis of the collected data has enabled the identification of key success factors for entrepreneurs. These encompass a range of elements, including entrepreneurial traits, educational background, motivation factors, cultural influences, the establishment of a trust-driven environment, challenges and strategies implemented to overcome challenges.

Factor 1: Traits of entrepreneurs:

These traits were underscored after analysing the responses. We deem them applicable to entrepreneurs within the Paraguayan and British contexts, aligning with insights from the literature review. Embracing these acquirable attributes is poised to amplify the prospects of success.

Factor 2: Education:

To enable entrepreneurs to mitigate the risks of failure, a foundational skill set crucial for entrepreneurs has been delineated through the application of an “Educational Matrix” in the primary knowledge needed based on the experience of the respondents, such as management, marketing, finance, leadership, and taxes. These skills will act as catalysts for success.

Factor 3: Motivation:

Fostering this motivation involves acquiring skills to conquer challenges and build confidence in goal attainment. It is crucial to extend motivation beyond the leader, involving all stakeholders. Shifting perspectives to recognise successful entrepreneurs as role models within their circles (family, communities) further inspires aspiring entrepreneurs to believe in attainable success.

Factor 4: Cultural factor:

Entrepreneurs need to find safe spaces and feel free to share their ideas with their counterparts, families, and friends because sharing ideas is vital to getting feedback, connecting with the right people, making solid alliances, and finding potential customers.

Factor 5: Built trust environment:

One thing entrepreneurs in Paraguay need to pay special attention to is the trust environment built between entrepreneurs and customers. This can be achieved by offering a safe space to customers where they feel free to share their insights, experiences, and suggestions.

Factor 6: Challenges and Strategies:

Participants provided valuable insights into challenges and strategies, which were collected for analysis. The challenges were categorised to facilitate the identification of critical obstacles, while the strategies adopted by entrepreneurs are also listed in different sections. Through this structured approach, entrepreneurs can access an indispensable roadmap that aids in tackling challenges and increasing their prospects for success.

Which of these factors can be implemented or replicated in Paraguay to help SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector to succeed?

The primary Data collection took place in Paraguay and the UK. Surveying in both countries, we aimed to identify whether there is a significant gap in practices, perceptions, challenges, and knowledge held by entrepreneurs in the two countries. Upon analysing the collected responses, it was observed that there were no significant variations between the two regions. As a result, it can be inferred that the identified factors, challenges, and strategies are indeed applicable to both contexts.

What strategies can be used in Paraguay as an alternative to support SMEs entrepreneurs to succeed?

These strategies have been derived directly from the extensive data collected from our primary sources: individuals who have, in the majority, considered themselves successful entrepreneurs.

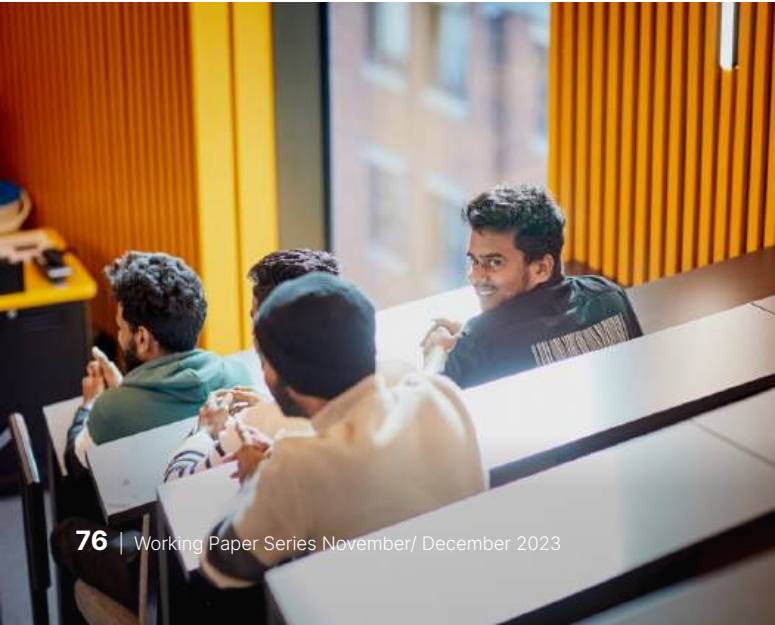
How can SMEs in Paraguay overcome the main challenges based on the experiences of their English counterparts?

This research project can serve as a roadmap for entrepreneurs embarking on their entrepreneurial journey or seeking to learn from their peers. Valuable insights can be taken from this paper to assist entrepreneurs in navigating and overcoming challenges and achieving success. To identify factors that can help entrepreneurs to succeed, it was primordial first to build a concept for “What is a successful entrepreneur” because this concept can be very versatile. Therefore, we proceed

to create a concept applicable to the purpose of this research and suitable in the context of the individual subject of this study. Another significant contribution was the design of a matrix of fundamental knowledge needed for entrepreneurs to embark on their entrepreneurial journey. Strategies to overcome challenges were identified and proposed to SME entrepreneurs to navigate challenges. It was highlighted the need for a change of paradigm. This will help other successful entrepreneurs within the community to be visible to others, and their experiences can be a roadmap to inspire others. Finally, factors such as Motivation, education, culture, challenges and trust environment were navigated to contribute to the success of the entrepreneurs.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Regardless of the study’s quality and rigour, every research endeavour possesses limitations. It remains conceivable that future research endeavours might question the validity of hypotheses or conclusions from the current study. For instance, limited access to specific individuals within an organisation, certain documents, or restricted data availability are examples of such limitations. However, it is important to acknowledge that subsequent studies have the potential to address and overcome these limitations, expanding the understanding and knowledge in the field. This study was limited to studying the factors that help to succeed SMEs entrepreneurs in the retail sector; considering the population and the difficulty of covering a broader sector, this helped to get more accurate information and results that can then be used for a specific purpose. The researcher was focused on England and Paraguay, and the samples were taken among SMEs in the retail sector from the UK and Paraguay. Language Barriers were also a limitation since Paraguayan entrepreneurs did not speak English; for that reason, surveys with the Paraguayan entrepreneurs were carried out in Spanish and then translated into English. Another significant limitation of this research was to find a bigger sample to conduct the survey since it was challenging to get the entrepreneurs in England to complete the surveys. In addition to this, the amount of time and resources available for the study was limited. Finally, another essential limitation to understanding the factors that help SMEs entrepreneurs succeed in England and trying to find a way to replicate these factors in Paraguay is a high possibility of cultural limitations as well. Considering that data collection was done mainly using primary data collected through surveys with entrepreneurs, their availability, willingness to do the surveys, and time, was also considerable limitation.



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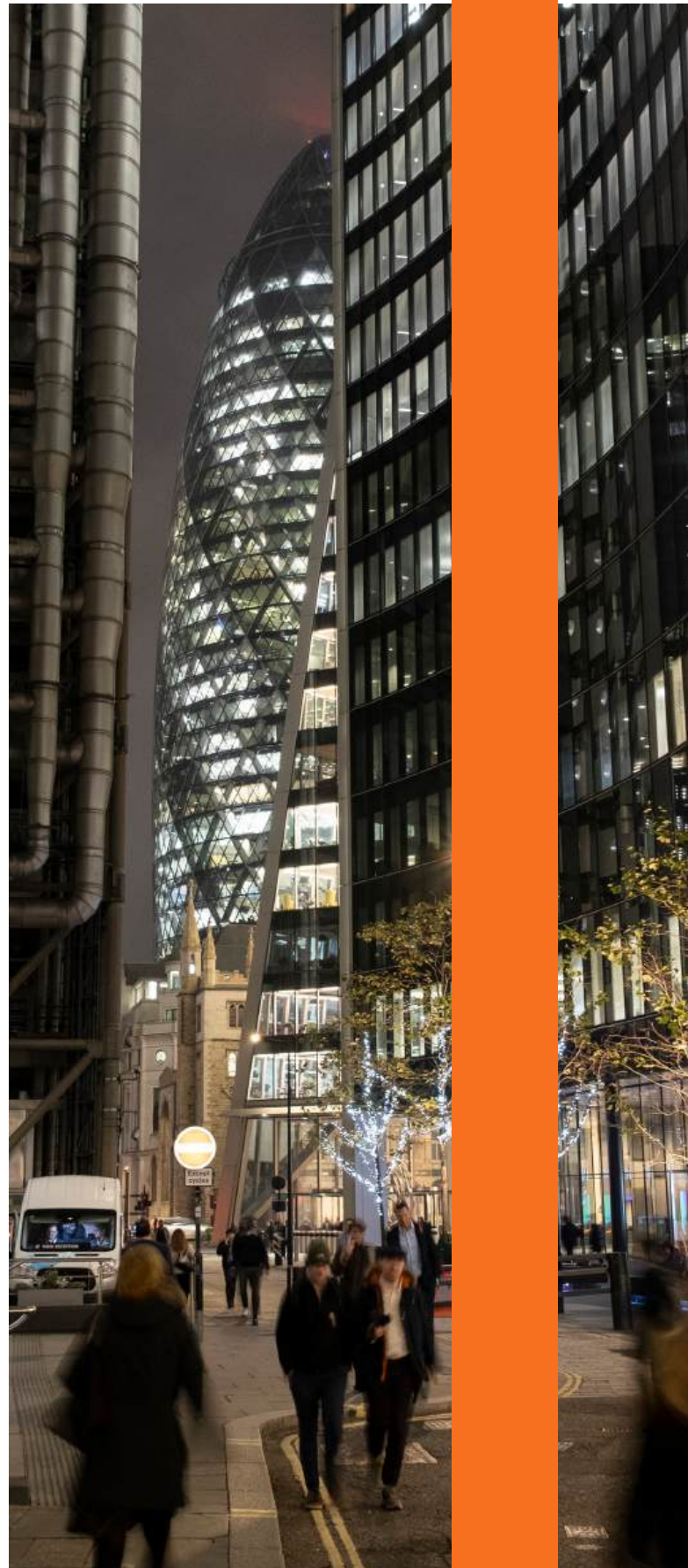
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The Impact of Training & Development on Employee IT Performance in Indian Financial Services.

Dinesh Kumar Namballa

Abstract

This research has critically analysed impact of training and development on employee performance of IT in the financial sector, Mumbai India. This research has provided a broad scope on the benefits that can be perceived by the company with "training and development. The key issues and challenges also have been discussed in the research. Different types of IT training that are required in financial operations were captured. Some challenges that can be faced by the HRM during the time of training and development, those have also been discussed in this research study. Employees are a crucial component of any successful business. Human resource management (HRM) is crucial in this situation. The HRM division of a business has continued to be responsible for ensuring a strong relationship between employees and hierarchies. The organization's most crucial strategic mechanisms have been determined to be training and development. By fostering and supplying workers with job-beneficial skills and connections, it has positively impacted improving worker performance. The process and processes of training have been viewed as the key pillar for specifically predicting employee performance, including their innate faculties, capabilities, and capacity for commendation for their job and responsibilities. Data for the study was collected through surveys and analysed with the help of SPSS, complemented by supplementary secondary data sources.

Keywords:

- Training and development
- Employee performance
- IT in Financial services
- Mumbai India

Introduction

The financial sector of India, specifically, Mumbai needs to focus on providing training facilities and programs to the employees of the IT division to improve their performances. As per the views of Arwab et al. (2022), it is very important for employees to improve their skill set and gain knowledge in their respective fields so that they can work and perform well. In addition to this, the main purpose of providing training to the employees is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the employee in the IT department. The financial companies would also achieve greater productivity and higher growth rate. Besides that, Training and development are also required in the financial sector to set clear goals and objectives. This is mainly because the IT employees are lacking in their skills and knowledge which is required to use technological tools. As observed from the ideas of Parry et al. (2022), the advancement of technology also has led to several key issues and challenges for the employees of the IT departments of the “financial sector”. Figure 1 provides a broad scope on the market revenue of the leading banks of the country such as “State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Bank of Baroda and Axis Bank From the above figure, it has been found that the market revenue of “State Bank

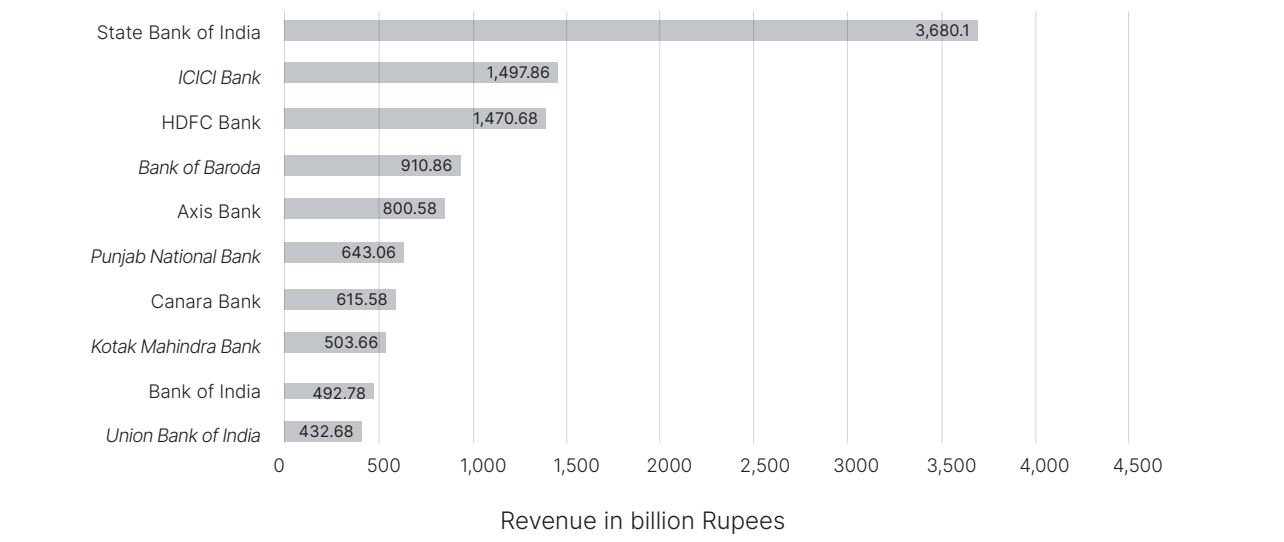
of India” has been estimated to be “3,680.1 US Billion Dollars”. Furthermore, the market revenue of ICICI Bank and HDFC bank also has been accounted to be “1,497.85 US billions of dollars' ' and “1,470.68 US billions of Dollars (Statista, 2023a).

The study of Othayman et al. (2022) has also suggested that there has been a significant increase in the use of advanced technological tools and modern software across various sectors including the “financial sector” of India. Henceforth, the need for IT professionals has been very significant for the financial companies of Mumbai to align with the technological changes in the aspects of knowledge and skills. In such a scenario of the global competitive financial market, skills development has been the first and foremost step for the financial sector of India. According to Whitehead (2022), “training” has been identified as one of the most key effective ways of increasing the knowledge of employees and developing their skills which are required for performing their “job roles and responsibilities. In contrast to it, the financial sector of Mumbai also has been well developed with advanced technology due to a lack of “IT infrastructures. Furthermore, “lack of knowledge and technical skills also has been identified as a major setback for the performance and growth of the financial sector of India.

On the other hand, by providing the employees can also be prepared for higher roles and responsibilities. However, increased efficiency and effectiveness of employees also would lead to a positive impact on the growth and performance of the financial sector. According to the reviews of Othaymanet al. (2022), Mumbai also has been recognized as the financial capital of India as there are a few Internal financial institutions which are operating their business in Mumbai. For example, “The Reserve Bank of India,

the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), the National Stock Exchange of India (NSE), and the SEBI”. Moreover, the other entities or corporations which belong to the “financial sector” of Mumbai, India are “commercial banks, insurance companies, mutual funds, non-banking financial companies, mutual funds, cooperatives and so on”. As per the views of Olanipekun and Olanipekun (2022), since the adoption of technologies has been increasing, companies are also reliant on the technical skills of their employees.

Figure 1: Market Revenue of leading banks of India



As a result, various sectors as well as financial institutions of India are also determined to provide consistent and relevant training to the employees. As per the views of Hassett (2022), the impact of training is not only limited to the development and growth of the employees, rather, it would also help the companies to increase the overall productivity of the individual employees and teams. In the same context, the “financial industry” of Mumbai also needs to provide training to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of the IT division. Figure 2 provides some insight. In addition to

this, the corporate training market of India has been found at the growth stage which would take many more years to establish across various sectors of the country. As argued in the study of Stuart and Cochrane-Snyman (2022), technical training also needs to be provided to the employees before and during their professional journey. Besides that, the negative effects of Covid-19 in 2020 also have led to a dramatic shift in business operations to work from home. As a result, the need for technical training has also become even more important for the financial sector of the country.

Figure 2: Earning Revenue of leading financial Institutions of India

Leading AMC's in India (as of June 2021)	
Top 5 AMC's in India	AUM (US\$ billion)
SBI Mutual Fund	70.23
HDFC Mutual Fund	55.97
ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund	55.93
Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund	36.97
Kotak Mahindra Mutual Fund	33.10

There is a wide range of key challenges and issues which have been faced by the employees due to a lack of skill set and the growing need for computer and technical skills in the market. As per the views of Rykleif and Tengeh (2022), the “business organizations" also need to have proper planning and implementation of their training and development programs. However, lack of “awareness, resources and funds' has been identified as one of the major challenges which have been affecting the effectiveness of development programs. Moreover, training of employees is also required to keep up with the continuous and rapid development of technology in industries across the world. On the other hand, the financial sector also needs to focus on training to adapt to these changes and developments of the external environment which directly leads to a positive impact on the overall performance and productivity of the IT divisions.

the employees of the IT division which would literally address the key issues and skill gaps of the employees.

Moreover, it has been found that the financial sector of Mumbai also needs to develop effective leaders for the IT divisions so that they provide training to the employees and help them reach their goals. As contradicted by the reviews of Wajidi et al. (2022), there are different types of training which can be provided to the employees, such as “management training, onboarding, technical, diversity, soft skills, sales, in-house training, blended, a mentoring scheme and personnel training. However, organizations need to determine the right and most appropriate approaches and methods of training for the employees of IT in the financial sector, in India.

The study has further argued that “kill development” of the employees would also play a huge role in implementing better and improved solutions to solve the problems of the financial sector. As training would not also increase the knowledge of the employees which would help them to generate “creative and innovative” solutions for the organizations. In addition to this, “training and development” also leads to other internal benefits as well such as “employee motivation”. As suggested by the reviews of Stuart and Cochrane-Snyman(2022), workforce resistance has been considered one of the potential challenges of India which has been largely faced in the IT divisions of various sectors. This is mainly because the employees are resistant to new or different job responsibilities, work environments and the use of advanced technologies. However, the financial sector also needs to design effective training programs for



Figure 3: “Total growth of private sector banks of India from FY 2017 to 2021”

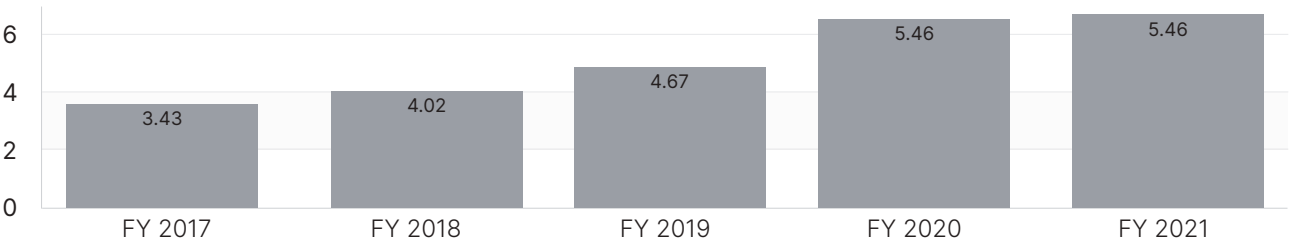
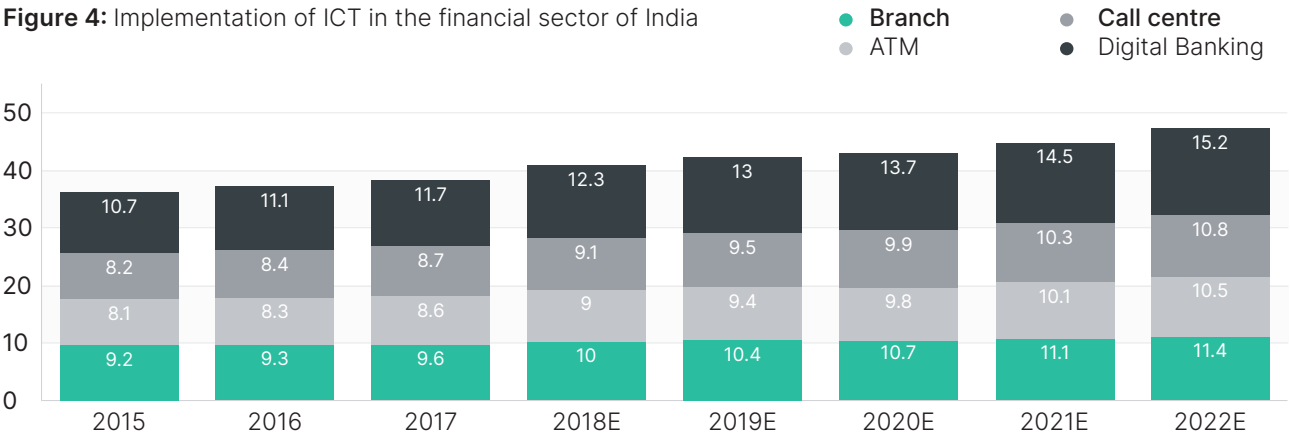


Figure 4: Implementation of ICT in the financial sector of India



Henceforth, training would also help IT employees to make effective use of technology, and software and solve technological problems. On the contrary, the employees of the IT division also need to be trained for developing better and improved technical solutions such as cyber security. The study of Olanipekun and Olanipekun(2022) has also stated that training and development is also beneficial to engage the employees with their job roles and responsibilities in order to meet their basic needs and requirements. On the contrary, engaged and motivated employees also have been found to be more “efficient and productive”. As a result, highly motivated and productive employees of IT lead to major contributions to the improved performance and growth of the finance sector of Mumbai. Currently, the financial sector of Mumbai is evolving with the growing needs and demands of technological advancements” such as “Blockchain technologies, Neo Banks, Cloud Banking, Artificial Intelligence, RegTech, Big Data Analytics, Robotics finance Automation and Embedded Finances. As per the ideas of Wajidi et al (2022), to operate these “advanced technological tools and modern software”, the employees of IT divisions in the financial service sector need to be trained so that the employees can make effective use of technologies.

In contrast, many “business organizations” across the world have been laying off their employees due to a lack of skills and technical knowledge. However, training and

development in the financial sector would also enforce to the creation of a wide range of job opportunities for the employees of India. In the same context, developing specific skills and gaining knowledge also would lower their “employee turnover rate” The hypothesis of Arwab et al. (2022) has reflected that employees also prefer to work in those organizations or industries which more opportunities for growth and career development. However, training facilities and development programs are the keys for the financial sector of Mumbai to attract and retain their employees irrespective of the continuous changes.

The purpose of this study is to identify the key issues and challenges which have been faced by the IT divisions of the finance of Mumbai. This research has also examined and investigated the scope of providing training for the development and growth of employees. This research also has been determined to provide a set of recommendations in order to eliminate the challenges of employees of the IT divisions. Moreover, the role and effectiveness of training and development facilities also have been discussed. This research has focused on the key aspects and addressed the limitations that have been observed from the previous studies and existing literature reviews. The aim of this research is to develop a better understanding of the impact of on the satisfaction level of employees in the IT division of the financial sector of Mumbai, India (see Table 1 for the research questions and objectives).

Table 1. Research Questions/ Objectives

Research Questions	Research Objectives
Q1: What are the different types of "training facilities and development" initiatives that can be adopted by organizations?	To critically analyses the different types of "training facilities and development" initiatives that can be adopted by organizations.
Q2: What are the benefits that can be perceived by the company by designing effective training and development?	To provide a broad scope on the benefits that can be perceived by the company with "training and development".
Q3: What are the challenges faced by the HRM in order to provide "Training and development programs"?	To shed light on the challenges faced by the HRM in order to provide "Training and development programs".
Q4: What is the impact of Training and development on employee performance of IT in the financial sector, in Mumbai India?	To focus on the impact of Training and development on employee performance of IT in the financial sector, Mumbai India
Q5: What are the primary research methods appropriate for the data collection process and use of SPSS for the analysis of quantitative data?	To conduct primary research methods for the data collection process and use SPSS for the analysis of quantitative data
Q6: What are the recommended strategies required to eliminate the challenges faced by the HRM in order to provide "Training and development programs"?	To recommend strategies to eliminate the challenges faced by the HRM in order to provide "Training and development programs"

Literature Review

Nowadays, financial companies are all built on giving clients a speedier, more effective service that focuses on more mobile-based, expedient alternatives. Information technology is highly important since cloud-based technologies are utilized so frequently. IT in financial organizations refers to the application of contemporary instruments for the translation of economic information that is required to make wise financial decisions. Clients may easily execute online transactions attributable to the influence of information technology on financial services. This can improve the effectiveness of the financial system and enables the advancement of the IT department. Several types of training and development, benefits, and challenges are going to be enlightened in this chapter of the research study.

Information security management

According to Mosteanu and Faccia (2020), it is one of the most vital trainings for the employees of financial organizations based on the basic concepts and principles of information security. This training purpose also includes various kinds of approaches for safeguarding several digital networks and assets. It ensures the ultimate protection of maintaining confidentiality, availability, and integrity of economic assets accessed through digital means.

Web-based development

According to Zhang and Kim (2020), the training that is related to a web-based application of financial sectors is important as it can give a crucial opportunity to access any kind of business information. This accessibility can be obtained at any time and from anywhere throughout the entire world. This training also helps to save money, and time and it improves the interaction process with other business partners and customers.

Financial Technology (FinTech)

In accordance with Suryono et al. (2020), it refers to financial technology and can describe innovative technologies that have the aim of enhancing and automating the delivery process and usage of several financial services and products.

Big Data and Machine Learning

According to Pejić Bach et al. (2019), Big Data refers to extremely vast and challenging ways to protect and manage data, which may or may not be organized. Conversely, machine learning is an aspect of technology that the system admires to adjust, learn, and advance by utilizing the records that are now accessible.

Training for Social Engineering and Phishing

According to Pethers and Bello (2023), it can be stated that social engineering refers to the concept of one of the simplest ways to hack all kinds of confidential data. In this segment, if the financial employees are not perfectly trained regarding how to identify and combat it, then it might be very risky and the financial organizations may not maintain security at all. According to Tambe Ebot (2019), in order to mitigate this big issue, employees must be trained to recognize the basic factors of cybercrime and the probable risks of information security. This hacking process is also named phishing, and the employees are required to be trained in the process of rotating passwords on a regular basis to avoid the risk. Additionally, the employees are also required to be trained in safeguarding the computers of financial organizations. Crucial information needs to be backed up daily.

Capability for the adoption of several new technologies and methods

According to the trend of the modern era of business, all types of business industries are highly involved in the utilization of technologies and digital processes. Therefore, it can be a great advantage if the employees obtain proper training and development regarding IT operations. In accordance with Schuetz and Venkatesh (2020), proper training and development can help organizations retain their employees upskilled and the consistency of the workforce can be retained. This training helps the employees to make crucial and effective financial decisions and, in this way, the organizations can achieve customer satisfaction. To be trained about new technologies and methods, the employees can be able to protect confidential data of their own and their clients, this helps in maintaining social relationships.

Security awareness can be increased

According to Demirkan et al. (2020), in order to train employees about recognizing the tendency of phishing, social engineering as well as hacking, they can gain knowledge about the process of rotating passwords, protecting data, keeping backups, and protecting their computers and other important devices. These trainings help the employees to gather knowledge about the purpose of security measures and processes. They can be aware of how to identify and react to several potential threats. Businesses of financial sectors may lower their chance of being attacked by hackers, safeguarding confidential data. Finally, they can guarantee the safety of their IT infrastructure by undergoing training on security awareness.

Capabilities of risk management can be developed

The employees can help their organizations by acquiring knowledge of risk assessment through IT training. Technology has already opened several new methodologies of risk assessment in the financial sector. Through IT training and development, the employees can develop a system of credit scores by utilizing the big data system. This process is highly effective in assessing the risks before the loans are issued. The IT training also helps the employees in automating administration, documenting, and model evaluation for risk management. According to Saeidi et al. (2019), supplying insightful information and analytical tools, particularly investigating other parties that consolidate information also. It is highly necessary to automate monitoring of the situation and adherence to activity management and validation to save the organizations from potential risks and hacking.

Benefits in analytics and reporting

According to Saeidi et al. (2019), the information technology revolution is mostly driven by data science and analytics. Especially in the insurance sector, where managing risk is essential, the capacity of financial services to analyse enormous amounts of data and generate insightful conclusions. In this section, using data analytics is having a significant influence. Financial institutions can establish a person's credit history with the use of analytics.

Acquiring competitive advantages

The employees who obtain training in IT operations can provide the best financial services to the customers. Employees can help customers by providing them the easy opportunities for online transactions. The speed and security also can be improved according to the customer's convenience.

Cost saving

In accordance with Li et al. (2021), through the benefits of information technology, some software is able to allow organizations to recognize the sections from which the companies' expenses can be raised. The proper IT training enables them to look for several alternatives which are able to decrease their costs. The training and development also support changing various executive processes as well as searching for essential new inputs. Besides all the above-mentioned benefits of training and development, the HRM department can also face some obstacles. Such as Change management. According to Mahmood et al. (2019), it can be frequently seen that whenever organizations try to introduce new software, tools, or any other technology, employees can react

in different ways. Such as, either the employees enjoy and appreciate the innovation and make themselves ready to adjust to it and learn, or they can reject the innovations by feeling overstressed. It is really a big challenge that is often faced by the HRM department and the organizations are required to promptly address the problem.

Lack of employee involvement

The HRM department often faces the challenge regarding the lack of employee involvement in the training sessions. Some vital reasons are there behind this scenario, such as poor leadership in the workplace, unhealthy communication among colleagues, unclear job roles and unclear organizational goals, and others. According to Knight et al. (2019), employees who suffer from a lack of interest in their jobs and they become inattentive and unresponsive in their training sessions. Financial organizations face the result of increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, and customer service which also affects the employees' performance.

Presence of different generations in the same organization

According to Rahim and Katz (2020), typical conflict can be created between workers of different generations in the same workplace. Employees who believe in traditional or manual business operations, may not allow the implementation of new technologies. It is critical to include all generations whenever creating training programmes. Major learning approaches can be challenging to comprehend, and teaching methods have changed drastically over the past decade. Some personnel could have trouble adapting to the new technologies.

Challenges of language barriers

Sometimes in a training session, multiple languages among the employees can make barriers and that leads to unfortunate conflict and miscommunication. The barriers of language damage the capability of the employees to obtain training from their workplace environments due to the lack of ability to communicate and understand. This can decrease the enthusiasm of the employees as they cannot share their personal opinions and issues properly during the training sessions.

Impact of Training and Development on IT Employee Performance in the Financial Sector

Workers are an essential part of every successful company. In that case, human resource management (HRM) is essential. In an organization, the HRM department has maintained its responsibilities for maintaining a solid connection between workers and hierarchies.

According to Evseeva et al. (2022), HRM has the duty of providing the appropriate training to employees and preparing them to be productive. In the IT sector, employees have faced many challenges due to a lack of knowledge of their roles and an absence of ideas on enhancing the project's qualities. Conversely, the studies of Dachner et al. (2021) found that employees strongly benefited from the training and development concept because it enhanced their soft skills and capacities, guided them to know the system, and increased their job performance and working environment.

Figure 6: IT services market size and forecast, 2015- 2024 (US\$ Billion) (Source: Statista, 2023b)

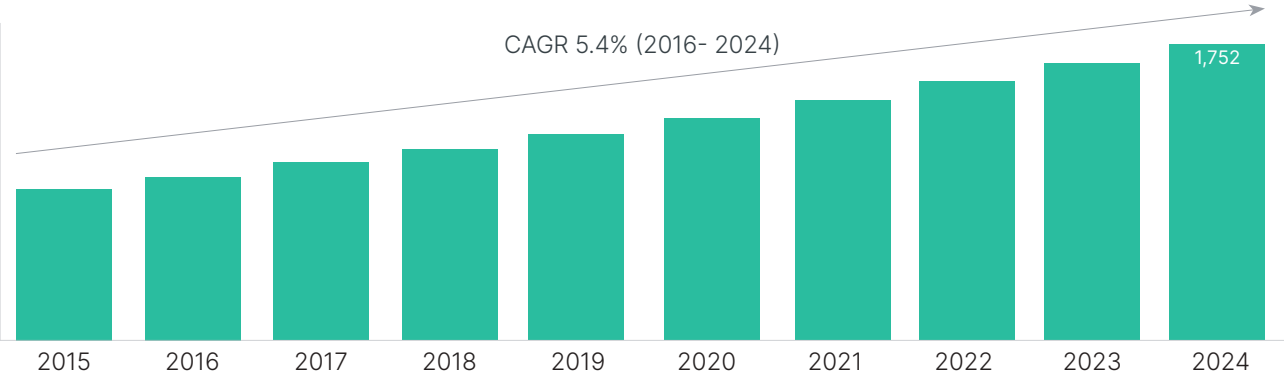


Figure 6 above represents the growth of the size of the IT services market, which is predicted to reach a peak within 2024. Every year, the IT market has maintained its optimistic development. In this aspect, it has been stated that training has been provided by the department of HRM to employees to handle the critical condition of the financial department. The training methods allowed employees to enhance their basic knowledge of how to develop finance-based

strategies to reach their targeted goals. Liboniet al. (2019) studies have found that implementing training in the organization has a significant positive connection with worker routine. The methods of training are defined as a basic enhancement tool in the organization that increases the capabilities of employees, builds a new aura of improvement regarding employee performance, and helps the organization reach out to its target region.

Figure 7: Position of the IT sector in India
(Source: Statista, 2022)

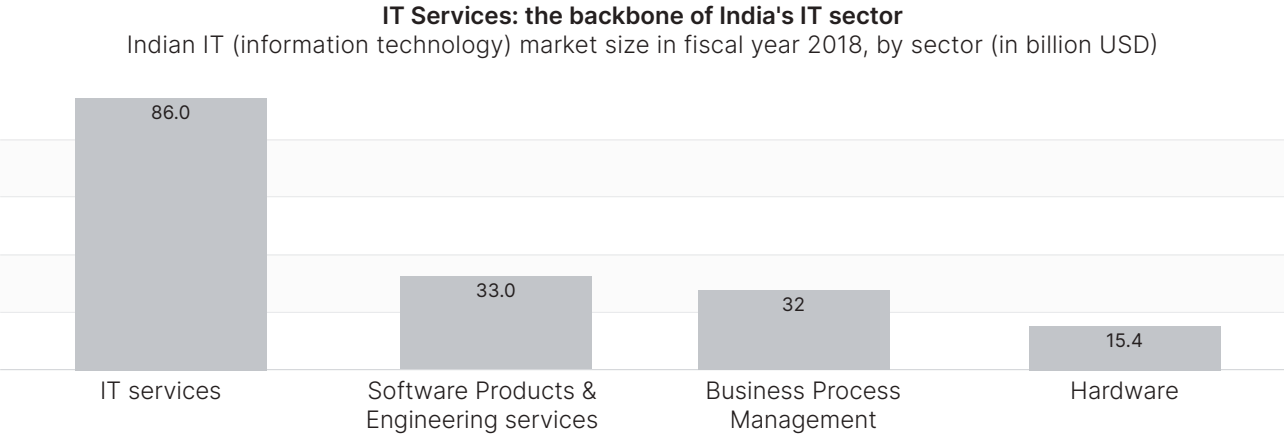


Figure 7 represents the condition of IT sectors in India in 2018. The figure shows how much revenue has been generated by each IT segment, with 86 billion generated by IT services and 33 billion generated by the software and other engineering services. In that aspect, Aust et al. (2020) have stated that the IT sector is the backbone of India, and it has only been possible because of the hard work and effective financial strategies of diligent and capable employees. As cited in Maity (2019), training and development have been identified as the most significant strategic mechanisms of the organization. It has had a positive impact on enhancing worker performance by developing and provisioning workers with job-advantageous aptitudes and acquaintances. The method and steps of training have been considered the main pillar that is particularly forecasting the performance of employees, including their inner faculties, abilities, and competencies, and enhancing their praise for their work and duties.

Challenges Encountered by Organizations during Training and Development

According to Hudáková and Petrů, (2021), training and development methods that aimed to enhance the performance level of employees and boost employee pleasure and productivity. The development of workers is one of the most significant parts of operations management. The training included the lifelong maturation and productivity of employees, which has enhanced

their basic ideas, increased their professionalism ideas, and employability aptitudes. According to Siddiqui, and Sahar, (2019) with the help of training methods, the HRM department has planned employee development strategies that enhance employer capabilities for managing hazardous conditions in any sector of the organization, including improved relationships between employees.

Difficulties in understanding software

To improve performance in the information technology sector, most organizations used software-based programming tools and developed difficulties for employees. According to Kwon, (2019), many employees have faced difficulties in using new software-based technologies, and that has pulled them from doing their duties. It has been shown that high-quality software has different types of complexities to manage. It has been shown that most of the time, employees cannot navigate unknown interfaces and do not understand the language of different programming labels. On the other side, the studies of Harrison et al. (2020) found that a maximum number of employees have not been capable of managing digital software due to inadequate training and aptitudes. 74.1% of employees have faced problems managing digital technologies. 43.6% of employees failed to understand the concept of computers and could not communicate with the computers, and 34.2% of people faced the issue of inappropriate training procedures.

Providing compatible training

According to Göker, (2021), when an organization has distributed globally it has been quite difficult for them to arrange a constant training procedure. In this aspect, the study has explained how the geographic establishment developed barriers to the training, including expanded funding, deficiency of inclusivity, absence of estimating instruments like ROI, and virtual training requirements. All these situations also have been assumed as conceivable threats that require to be concentrated to deliver appropriate apprenticeship aptitudes.

Following Skills Application

According to Balwant et al. (2022), supervising a training procedure is quite difficult, and maintaining constant sustainability is also harder for the organization. In that aspect, the study also suggested that it is the responsibility of the L&D professionals to find out the best paths and strategies, implement them in an effective work atmosphere, and guide employees to increase business productivity; otherwise, it becomes the route of creating challenges.

Engaging IT learners in different works

The studies of Ilyukhinaet al. (2019) stated that L&D must articulate the significance of the Department and Learning. It has been revealed that when a pressing task appears to take precedence, the training procedure is removed from the priority list and halted. It developed gaps and barriers in learning. The study explained that at that time, the employees had worked with half of their learning in the financial segment, working on the ongoing development report. At the time, this factor had become the source of the problem.

Acclimating Apprenticeship to Various Audiences

The studies of Khan, and Abdullah, (2019) explained that training included the concept of diversification to obtain lifelong and effective results. The IT sector is a wide segment and has many departments and procedures that must be adopted by the employees to strengthen their financial knowledge and increase their soft aptitudes for better care. Conversely, Boerlijst, (2020) said that the learner must adapt knowledge and guidance from different audiences to understand each step and to increase their knowledge of every service. Many points are determined to have developed challenges in the training of an employee. However, HR management must manage all activities in a

manner that enhances the employee's skills and improves the organization's working environment to deal with obstacles and barriers and achieve success in the future.

Advanced Strategies for Training and Development

According to Onigbinde et al. (2021), the methods of "training and development experienced challenges and trouble that created barriers in the learning journey and caused delays in reaching the target goal. Ineffective and traditional training techniques have been counted as one of the crucial threats for HRM to obtain accurate consequences. It has been demonstrated that companies have attempted to remain stable in a competitive and volatile market by increasing the emphasis of their organization based on capital. though there are other determinants also presented that have a strong impact on the development of organizational value, such as the presence of productive workers.

Define transparent SOPs for their profession

According to Damuri, et al. (2021), employees must be updated on "standard operating procedures (SOPs)" for their profession. It can help the organization find a replaceable employee if someone moves on or resigns from their job rank.

E-learning methods

According to Moreno-Guerrero et al. (2020), eLearning is commonly known as online training for employees. E-learning allows employees to continue their training process from any location without any kind of disruption. It allows employees to feel comfortable while they are in training. The learning management system provides enough information to the learner, allowing the L&D team to capitalize on the success of various development programs. Meyer et al. (2019) contended that it required high-quality internet services and created a schism with installers because it does not permit face-to-face communication.

Video training

Conversely, the studies by Piergiovanni et al. (2020) explained that is identified as one of the most effective training techniques because it reduced the barriers in the training process. It gathers employees and provides adequate knowledge at minimal charges compared to the traditional learning method." Creating training videos for workers permits them to gather knowledge in an effective manner and gives them the opportunity to increase their understanding of the financial sector as well. (Van Wee et al. 2019) argued that it does not allow the instigator to be active physically and hinders the bearers from getting new information quickly.

Theoretical Framework

Behavioural Learning Theory
According to Jeong et al. (2021), The "Behavioural learning theory" can be implemented in the organization to follow the concept of developing a positive and impactful environment for understanding new components. This theory defines the process of how to motivate employees and guide them to reach their targeted goals. Osband et al. (2019), argued that Employees are the inactive participants in this theory, in which trainers provide the employees with accurate and perfect information as an element and wait to see how the employees react to certain stimuli. In this case, the organization can implement this theory and, to motivate them, provide rewards that can work as positive stimuli provided by the HRM department or leader of the organization to improve the employee's performance.

Conversely, Locke, and Latham, (2019) stated that "goal-setting theory" explains how work pressure, constraints, and obstacles in goals encourage employees to increase their capabilities and guide them to work efficiently, which can help them increase and measure their performance. It sets specific and clear goals for employees and provides a specific time to reach those goals. It motivates employees to be more productive by working on their skills to achieve goals as soon as possible. On the contrary, Cahapay, (2021), the "Kirkpatrick model," an important element of training, explains that in order to improve the condition of economic organizations in India, one must concentrate on four steps: "reaction, learning, behaviour, and results". The level of reaction explains why employees find that the training is beneficial for them to understand their job roles and responsibilities and increase their abilities. Learning level helps employees plan how to increase their knowledge of financial subjects, boost confidence, and develop skills. The behaviour level explains how employees use and gather knowledge and how they can behave in their job roles. The resulting level explains the result of employees' skill growth, including how employees have helped the organization reach its overall aim.

Through obtaining IT training, the employees can provide several facilities to their customers. Better security, speed, easy accessibility, and improved customer services can be handled by IT in the financial sector. In this way, the topic is undoubtedly justified according to modern society, and the common people are also required to be aware of these facilities. This research topic can also be helpful for financial organizations as they can know about several types of training that are required to improve IT practices in their business operations. This research topic is also able to raise awareness of IT applications among such employees who are mostly dependent on traditional financial practices.

It has been demonstrated that the maximum number of research studies explained the training and development of other sectors rather than the importance of training in the IT sector of the financial department. The knowledge gap that has been faced by the researcher in completing this research paper has not been explained properly in terms of the challenges faced by employees in the IT sector while working in the financial department. Employees around the world, including India, have encountered numerous issues during the training period and have not completed their training courses and computer programming courses. That has influenced the employee's skills and capabilities. The researcher observed that many studies have not explained the reason for the absence of training facilities in Mumbai which enhances the level of lack of knowledge among employees, and reduces the productive growth of the organization as well as the employee productivity. The information has been gathered from several existing journals and articles to build this research study which has the main objective is to find the significance of IT training and development in financial organizations. To continue with this research study, the main focused area has been mentioned which is- Mumbai, India. Therefore, in this study, the IT implementation of financial sectors in regional or rural places has not been discussed. Secondly, as much the purpose, advantages, and challenges of training and development have been analysed, the mitigation strategies of the challenges have not been addressed properly. Another reason for the literature gaps is the lack of time and lack of accessibility of some journals and articles in the secondary data collection process. The analysis of employee performance throughout this industry following the implementation of training and development programmes has also revealed a gap.

Methodology

Positivism is a research philosophy that emphasizes the importance of empirical evidence and scientific methods in the pursuit of knowledge. This philosophy assumes that reality is objective and can be understood through observation and experimentation (Hammersley, 2019). It also emphasizes the use of quantitative methods to analyse data and generate insights. Positivism holds that the world is composed of objective, measurable facts, and that knowledge can be acquired through the scientific method (Marsonet, 2019). This research philosophy is also based on the notion that the researcher should remain objective and neutral when studying a phenomenon. This research philosophy will be used in this study, as it allows for the collection of data that can be objectively analysed and interpreted.

Positivism is a research ideology that believes human actions can be examined objectively using scientific techniques, to comprehend the reasons and effects

of such behaviour (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The philosophy acknowledges the presence of reality that's independent of human understanding and advocates that empirical observation and experimentation are the keys to discovering the truth. Given that this study is centered on exploring how IT training and development affects employee performance in the financial sector of Mumbai, India, using empirical evidence, positivism is an appropriate approach.

This study utilizes the deductive approach because it offers a methodical means of evaluating existing literature and formulating research questions. This approach facilitates the identification of gaps in the literature and establishes a coherent framework for the research (Hall et al. 2022). Additionally, it enables the generation of hypotheses for the study, grounded on the available literature. Moreover, the deductive approach supports drawing inferences from the collected data and generating specific recommendations. It also allows for hypothesis testing and verification of research outcomes. Hence, the deductive approach is the most suitable research method for this study as it permits a thorough analysis of existing literature and identifies research gaps. It also provides a rational progression towards establishing research questions and hypotheses

The research strategy for this report will centre on the positivism philosophy and a descriptive research design. Both primary and secondary data collection methods will be employed to gather data for the research. The positivism philosophy prioritizes the use of objective and empirical data in research (Clark and Causer, 2020). This approach necessitates the use of numerical data that can be analysed quantitatively to establish patterns and correlations. Meanwhile, the descriptive research design aims to describe phenomena under study, making it an ideal choice for this research. Primary data collection methods such as surveys and interviews will be conducted to acquire original data, while secondary data from relevant sources like academic journals and reports will supplement the study.

To achieve the research objectives and address the research questions, a descriptive research design has been adopted in this report. Descriptive research is an approach that focuses on describing events and phenomena. It involves gathering data from the target population to gain a better understanding of them (Siedlecki, 2020). The data collected in this type of research is typically both qualitative and quantitative. This research design has been utilized to explore the effects of training and development on the job performance of IT employees in the financial sector in Mumbai, India. The descriptive research design allows the researcher to examine the research subject in detail and provide a comprehensive description of the variables being studied (Sileyew, 2019). By gathering information from the relevant population, this research design provides a better understanding of the research subject, enabling the researcher to develop



an appropriate conclusion. Therefore, the descriptive research design is the most appropriate approach for this research study.

This study has opted for a descriptive research design since it effectively portrays events and phenomena (Hunter et al. 2019). The objective is to scrutinize the influence of employee training and development on performance within Mumbai's IT sector. This approach is fitting for the investigation because it facilitates comprehensive exploration of the issues. The data collected will primarily comprise qualitative and quantitative data. The design will aid in comprehending how training and development affect employee performance, and it will enable the researcher to evaluate the collected data with precision, leading to logical deductions. This descriptive research design is instrumental in assessing the impact of training and development on employee performance in Mumbai's IT sector while ensuring accurate data analysis and meaningful conclusions.

To gather primary data, a survey will be conducted, which will comprise questions pertaining to "Training and Development" programs, their influence on IT employee performance, and the obstacles faced by HR professionals in providing such programs. The survey will be administered using Google Forms and sent to HR professionals, IT employees, and other relevant individuals. The survey will feature open-ended questions to elicit detailed and comprehensive information about the subject. As English is the predominant language used in Mumbai's financial sector, the survey will be conducted in this language. Various sources, including books, journals, online articles, and reports, will be utilized to obtain secondary data. This data will aid in comprehending the "Training and Development" programs in Mumbai's financial sector and their advantages for both employees and the company. Additionally, secondary data will provide valuable insight into the obstacles encountered by HR professionals while providing such programs, as well as the strategies employed to surmount them. The data collected from multiple sources will be analysed and utilized to draw conclusions. This will facilitate comprehension of the correlation between "Training and Development" programs and the job performance of IT employees in Mumbai's financial sector.

The utilization of data analysis is crucial to determine the influence of Training and Development programs on employee performance within the financial sector of India's IT industry. The gathered quantitative data will be processed through SPSS, which will generate statistical representations such as correlation and regression ANOVA analysis for the variables at hand. This will aid in gaining insight into the impact of Training and Development on employee performance.

Findings

The researcher has selected primary data sources through survey methods and designed some questions based on training and development of employee performance. The researcher has included open-ended questions, utilized Google Forms, and sent them to 20 people from the backgrounds of human resource professionals, IT employees, and related IT sectors. Most people voted moderately important and highly important; in that case, the mean value of their voting score is 3.1, which also indicates that there is a significant impact on training employees and that it can easily help the organization increase its business efficiencies. The maximum number of people who voted for their organization agree that it has provided them with training to improve their abilities and increase the organization's standing. However, six participants wanted to be neutral. According to their feedback, the average theme of their responses is 4.05, which is defined as the timing and development of the present day, with every priority providing the same priority.

The researcher has found that the maximum number of participants voted to agree and strongly agree with the statement that the organization has provided options and better training for enhancing skills. On the other side, some participants wanted to remain neutral. The mean score of this feedback was 4 which stated that the organizations believe that training, development, and skill orientation are significant and have a better effect on the business workforce. The researcher has found that most participants believed the training and development course when offered by the working organization, has had a greater impact on their perception. Participants voted to agree and strongly agree, and the mean value of this feedback was 4.25.

Figure 4. Graphical representation of the survey

The researcher has found that some participants think that formal training is better for enhancing employee performance, but some of them are not sure about the impact of formal training. The mean score for the mean value of this question was 4.1. That is the maximum number of people who have benefited from formal training and have improved their skills and abilities. Going by the collected data, it has been found that training and development, while offered by the organization, have not improved the satisfaction of the ongoing jobs. The provided training does not increase the satisfaction of employees with their jobs. The mean score of this statement was 2.65, which defines the unsatisfactory impression regarding the job. The researcher has demonstrated that some participants supported agreeing, which defines that some participants were motivated after they completed training and development courses. On the other side, many participants voted neutral or disagreed. The mean value of this question was 3.15, which defines the neutral outcome of training as not inversely affecting the motivation of employees.

Regression 1-Job satisfaction

In this research study, question 6 was the dependent variable, and others were determined as independent variables or predictors. With the help of this, the researcher got the outcome of whether the provided training and development course have had any impact on employees' performances or increased job satisfaction or not. It has been shown that in the ANOVA, the regression of job satisfaction and the residual sum of squares was 10.550. The total DF value was 19 (see Figure 5). The mean square of the regression is 1.086, and the mean square of the residual is 0.414. In that case, it has been found that the significant value stands out at 0.077b.

In the regression of 1-job satisfaction, the significant value of question 2 was 0.020, which stated that question 6 and question 2 are statistically significant and that both questions are related to each other. However, it has been found that the significant values of questions 3, 4, and 5 were 0.87, 0.735, and 0.51, respectively. The range of the significant value is 0.05.

In this analysis, the researcher has found that questions 3, 4, and 5 were not interlinked with question 6, and all of these were statistically insignificant when compared to their significant values with the standard significant score.

Regression 2 – Employee motivation

In regression 2, which defines employee motivation, the sum of squares was 4.824 and the residual sum

of squares was 9.726; the total score of both was 14.550. The DF values of regression and residual were 4 and 15. The mean squares of regression and residual were 1.260 and 0.648, respectively. The significant value of regression 2 was 0.170. In this regression, question 7 was the dependent variable, and other questions were determined as predictors.

It has been found that the significant values of questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 were greater than the standard significant value of 0.05. 0.379 significant value for question 2, 0.203 significant value for question 3, 0.972 significant value for question 4, and question 5, the significant value was 0.287. All these significant scores were greater than 0.05. That means these predictors are not connected to dependent variables and are statistically insignificant.

Training and development is the course that helps an employee understand their job duties. It has been found that the maximum number of participants voted to agree and strongly agree to support the statement of their organization, which knows the importance of planning before working in the mainstream and from the beginning.

On the other hand, regression 1, which defines job satisfaction, shows that if the organization has provided effective training and development courses, that can easily influence job satisfaction. It shows that both variables are interconnected with each other and are statistically significant as well.

Figure 5: Regression 1, **Source:** Self-created

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	4.621	.991		4.663	.000		
Q2. Do you think that your organization provides effective training and development programs?	1.010	.388	1.119	2.604	.020	2.509 .183	6.734 1.836
Q3. Does your organization provide opportunities for employees to gain new skills?	-.819	.448	-.797	-1.829	.087	-1.773	.135
Q4. Do you think that the training and development programs offered by your organization has had an impact on your performance?	.094	.272	.107	.345	.735	-.485	.673
Q5. Do you think formal training is beneficial for employee development?	-.777	.367	.668	-2.116	.051	-1.559	.006
a. Dependent Variable: Q6. Do you think that the training and development programs offered by your organization has had an impact on your job satisfaction?							

Figure 6: Regression 2

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	4.621	.991		4.663	.000		
Q2. Do you think that your organization provides effective training and development programs?	1.010	.388	1.119	2.604	.020	2.509 .183	6.734 1.836
Q3. Does your organization provide opportunities for employees to gain new skills?	-.819	.448	-.797	-1.829	.087	-1.773	.135
Q4. Do you think that the training and development programs offered by your organization has had an impact on your performance?	.094	.272	.107	.345	.735	-.485	.673
Q5. Do you think formal training is beneficial for employee development?	-.777	.367	.668	-2.116	.051	-1.559	.006
a. Dependent Variable: Q7. Do you think that the training and development programs offered by your organization has had an impact on employee motivation?							

Discussion of Findings

The regression analysis helped the researcher understand the connection between variables and determine how one variable affects the rest of them. With the help of regression analysis, the researcher has built a correlation between the impact of training and development courses on employee performance. It has been found that there are two types of regression. The first is job satisfaction, and the second is employee motivation. In the first regression, the researcher found that there was one variable and four predictors. According to the researcher's findings, knowing that there is a correlation between the impact of training and development delivered by organizations and increasing job satisfaction, in order to know this answer, the researcher has correlated this statement with different predictors.

In the ANOVA model, the significant value was 0.077, which is greater than the normal significant range of 0.05. In that case, while compared with other predictors, the dependent variable of the impact of training and development courses offered by organizations has had an impact on job satisfaction, the researcher has not found any correlation between them. It defines that the maximum number of participants voted to strongly disagree and disagree with supporting the statement that training and development are not promoting and increasing job satisfaction among them. For them, training and development programs offered by their organization helped them increase their knowledge for

their upcoming projects. It helps people to know their job responsibilities as well as their job roles rather than focusing on and improving their satisfaction with the job.

With the help of training and skill orientation, an employee can increase their understanding of what they might have to do in the future to achieve success. The researcher discovered a link between the concept of training and development courses with job satisfaction. In that case, the organization has provided effective training and skill orientation and development, allowing employees to understand their job activities according to their roles. It has been found that employees are inspired to overcome their fear of their job activities when they feel that their superior employers and organizations are guiding them to increase their job knowledge, aptitudes, and perspectives. It helps enhance their job dignity and enthusiasm.

It was also found that the organization has focused on the training and development section because it can help them increase their business efficiencies and guide them to increase their future productivity and revenue growth. With the help of proper and effective training, employees have increased their inner capacities, improved their understanding, gathered new information regarding their ongoing work, clarified their basic concepts, and improved their professional behaviours. The researcher has found that during the proper training and development section, the training has enhanced their skills, which can help them increase

their efforts and understanding. Training is a significant activity in the workplace that helps an organization achieve success and improve its reputation. Below are some of the findings based on the main research objectives of the study.

“To focus on the impact of Training and development on employee performance of IT in the financial sector, Mumbai India”

The researchers discovered that the Indian financial sector, particularly the Mumbai region, has faced various issues in the IT sector, and as a result, they needed to analyse and focus on improving employee experiences in the IT division to achieve an effective and impactful outcome. According to Arwab et al. (2022), in the IT sector, one of the significant issues faced by employees was the handling of new technologies, a lack of understanding of software, and hardware malfunctions. All these factors make employment difficult and reduce the organization's growth. In that case, the researcher has found that participants believe that training has a greater impact on employees and helps them to update themselves. The studies of Parry et al. (2022) stated that training and development are essential for every employee to enhance their aptitudes and increase their knowledge level according to their job fields. It can help them to improve their careers and performances, as well as increase the productivity of their organization.

It was also found that most people supported training and development courses are important for the organization's improvement. Some participants voted against remaining neutral. As Göker, (2021) pointed out, when an organization is distributed globally, they are more focused on its production management system rather than contributing time to training and development. It specifies that, due to busyness and heavy work pressure, the organization does not prioritize training and development, and that the geographic distribution makes it difficult for the organization to manage skill-oriented activities. Mahmood et al. (2019), satiated that In the financial sectors, like the banking sector of India, it has been found that many new tools have been used. According to the study, it has been found that there are few employees who are inspired and motivated after seeing new gadgets on their desks, and there are many employees who are starting to feel overwhelmed due to the introduction of new technology mechanisms. This situation occurred due to a lack of knowledge about real-time software and digital tools.

It was discovered that the organisation provided effective training to their employees, allowing them to gain new skills and overcome stagnation in their jobs. The studies of Mosteanu and Faccia (2020) found that training and skill development are vital and have a significant impact on increasing employees skills. Employees in financial departments have less knowledge of handling sensitive information and

less knowledge of security and privacy information. Organisation has implemented different types of digital tools that allow employees to make their work easier and reduce unwanted work stress. However, the proliferation of digital technology is increasing security concerns among customers. In that case, an employee requires professional training to help them understand how to use new technologies safely while doing their work. Zhang and Kim (2020) said that proper training allows employees to use web-based applications that help them learn more about business. With the help of this application, employees can save their organization's time and expenses, easily connect with business partners, and communicate with customers. With the help of training and development courses, employees can easily achieve success, develop their skills, and improve their professional behaviours.

“To shed light on the challenges faced by the HRM in order to provide "Training and development programs.”

The majority of those who responded to the survey agreed that there are numerous facilities related to training and development that are also beneficial for organizational growth. It has been found that the training and development programs offered by the organization have had a positive impact on employee performance, enhance the organization's growth, and help employees improve their skills, ideas, and use of technologies. The business concept has changed from earlier, and organizations are now implementing digital innovation to raise their productivity growth and build a new era of business. In that case, the organization has provided training to their employees so they know how all of these technologies work and how they can increase their business profits. Schuetz and Venkatesh (2020) also stated that appropriate training and orientation can assist an organization in increasing their employees' skills and maintaining a sustainable profit level in the competitive market area. Through training, employees of the financial sector can easily solve problems and make effective decisions for better improvement. On this path, organizations can also increase their followers and their customer base by providing the best facilities and satisfying them through the best services.

“To critically analyse the different types of "training facilities and development" initiatives that can be adopted by organizations.”

In the next step, the maximum number of participants voted to agree and strongly agree to support the statement of their organization, which knows the importance of training before working in the mainstream from the very beginning. The customer has numerous demands from their favourite organization. Customers always demand the best quality and services, and as a result, their priorities and favourite organizations change. Due to the dynamic and unpredictable moods of customers, organizations have tried to change themselves, improve themselves, and provide the best possible facilities to their customers.

The performance of an organization's employees determines its success. An employee has enough strength and capabilities to drive the organization's value to the top. In that case, organizations in the present day provided the best facilities and added importance to the process of training and development. The studies of Demirhan et al. (2020) said that employees have to know about every aspect of their job role, and for that reason, training is important to help them make a clear picture of their job role and responsibilities in the future. The process of training and development allows an employee to increase their abilities and knowledge on changing passwords if required, protecting data from being hacked, taking backups of all previous and present data, protecting applications from being stolen, and ensuring that all important software and hardware are safe from being hacked. With the help of training, employees can understand the significance of security, the intention of security, and what they need to do to increase the overall safety of the financial department. Training and development courses are organized to enhance job skills, learn new things, and increase the understanding of job roles and responsibilities.

"To provide a broad scope on the benefits that can be perceived by the company with "training and development."

From a graphical perspective, it was found that employees agreeing to formal training has a greater impact on improving their performances, and that can also benefit the organizational working culture and help to achieve success soon. Formal training is a well-structured and methodical technological process that

assists an employee in understanding their strengths and weaknesses. This training helps an employee deal with their skill gaps by guiding them toward a solution. Evseeva et al. (2022), the studies said that the organization and human resources departments have the responsibility of delivering well-planned and disciplined training to improve the employer's preferences and professional behaviours. This can help an employee interact with customers, business partners, and other guides to deal with any critical business situation.

The process of training helps employees increase their organizational productivity while pushing their growth toward success. Based on their capabilities, the financial structure of the country has been built. Due to the high value of organizations, they have introduced employees to the value of digitalization technologies and their impact on their work and working environment. For that reason, the organization has been providing them with opportunities for training and development. Dachner et al. (2021) stated that the financial segment of India is larger, and their IT employees have huge responsibilities. This method helped them understand how to use monetary machines, data protector machines, documentation, the impact and process of AI and machine learning, and more. The learning and development process guides employees to unearth the very advantages of digital innovation and every single drawback behind its creation.

"To conduct primary research methods for the data collection process and use SPSS for the analysis of quantitative data."

The researcher found that the maximum number of participants who agreed to support the statement of training and development had a greater impact on their performance and helped them to gather more skills and reduce their skill gaps. In addition to this, participants also believed that the process of training did not raise their motivation. One of the most important skills for an employee is satisfaction. Job satisfaction in the financial sectors of an IT employees helps them to perform better, improve their participation in work activities, encourage them to oversee crises, reduce turnover, reduce the heavy pressure of financial work, and increase their productivity.

Before joining the mainstream of work, the organization has provided employees with training and development courses for increasing their understanding and building a perspective regarding their job fields and job roles in the financial sector. During this time, employees become aware of new activities, new job paths, innovative ideas, new methods, and the introduction of new technologies. Senior employees have been provided with knowledge of almost all these activities and inspired to work hard to build a strong career and to help the organization improve. All these efforts satisfy an employee, please them for working hard, and enhance emotion among them, making them realize that they also have a significant role in their organization's development.

On the other side, the researcher has found that people who were supported in their training and development had a greater impact on their performance development, and some participants believed that training had no greater involvement in motivation. Motivational skills include not only pushing a single employee but also convincing their team to work with high energy and together for better results. Employee motivation contributes to an organization's goodwill. An enthusiastic employee can easily interact with employees and know what their requirements are from the job description. However, training and development have not motivated employees to work with joy or show their creativity.

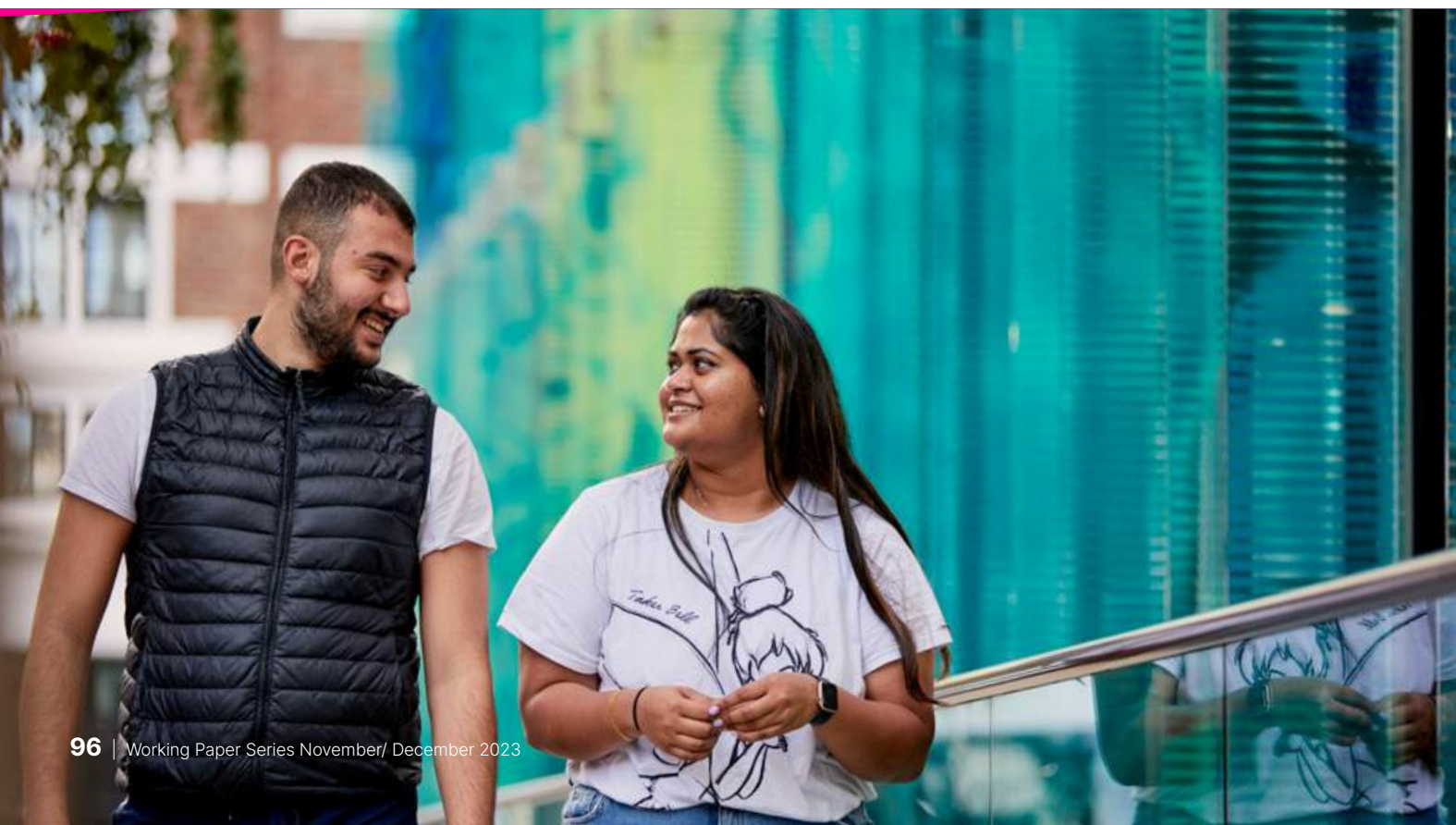
"To recommend strategies to eliminate the challenges faced by the HRM in order to provide "Training and development programs"

The financial sector is regulated by the government. In that case, there is less scope for an employee to show their innovation and creativity. An IT employee in this sector has a daily routine of work and activities, as well as dealing with customer needs. Employees felt demotivated during the training because of their job duties and responsibilities. In that case In order to mitigate this issue and increase motivation in the workplace, organizations can implement an effective theoretical framework. The studies of Jeong et al. (2021) on "behavioural learning theory" stated that this theory helps employees build a habit in their minds and build a positive region in their mind about

new components. This theory helps an organization during the start-up phase with its training methods, which can motivate employees and help them reach their set goals. On the other hand, the institution can implement the "goal-setting theory," which is explained by Locke and Latham (2019). According to this theory, the general work pressure and conflicts that arise in the working environment motivate employees. It makes a challenging mentality in the employee's mind and encourages them to work harder and believes they can do it. The studies of Cahapay (2021) stated that the "Kirkpatrick model" can be beneficial for the country India in improving their financial sector condition. The model includes four divergent phases that define the training and development plan of an employee. Every single step of this model helps an employee understand their capabilities and knowledge gaps. The last step of this model helps an employee be a responsible employee with active work activities.

Conclusions

From the discussions across the previous sections of this study, it can be concluded that effective training and development have had a positive impact on employees' skills development. Proper training allows an employee to improve their abilities while also providing an opportunity to improve their weaknesses. During this time, an employee will polish their previous knowledge, capture new information, determine what their job role will be, how they should work in the new working environment, and more. Every day, the digital world advances towards rapid growth, with new applications and technologies being invented yearly. Employees gathered new skills and gained information, which could easily help the organization enhance its performance. Most participants believe that organizations have provided effective training that helps them improve their work behaviours and overall performance. It has also been found that participants agreed that, due to their effective training, employees also have a positive impact on their job satisfaction. It has also been proven that effective training and development processes and job satisfaction are interconnected, statistically significant, and can improve overall performance. On the other hand, some participants believed that training and development are effective for improving employee performance, but there is no such effect on employee motivation. Due to heavy work pressure in the IT department of the financial sector, many employees became demotivated and lost their enthusiasm for their jobs. In these sentences, the researcher has not found any affective interconnection and stated that employees can improve their performance and learn new skills and knowledge through training and development, but they are not supported in that training and development, increasing their inner motivation to work. It has been concluded that both training and development courses have not had such an impact on employee motivation, and they are statistically insignificant too.



Implications

To limit the challenges and barriers in the training and development process, organizations can include some interesting and effective training methods that motivate employees. The organization can invest in innovative technologies and applications that can reduce their work pressure and improve their work and efficiencies. Organizations should understand the requirements of employees so they can arrange training and development programs as per their needs, motivating them to reduce their knowledge and skill gaps. Every organization should focus on its training and skill-orientation activities to improve employee performance as well as increase organizational growth. In this highly competitive market, as training and development help an employee to increase their knowledge, refine their skills, and improve themselves more, finance-related organizations must focus more on IT employees to adopt new technologies, invent new ideas, enhance their career stamina, as well as the organization's culture. This comprehensive study assists financial sectors in improving their employees' performance, particularly by enhancing IT employees' performance skills and understanding what the requirements are for enhancing employees' skills and capabilities. With the help of this research study, organizations can better understand how to remove challenges during training through the implementation of a theoretical framework, elaborate on the scope for employees to improve their performance, and develop new benchmarks for competitors.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The most obvious limitation of this study is the small sample size, which hampers its ability to be generalised. Furthermore, while the study has critically analysed impact of training and development on employee performance of IT in the financial sector in Mumbai, that city alone cannot be considered representative of India as a whole. Indeed, cities such as Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata etc., have been suggested as beacons of development. Hence, a comparative analysis with some of these other cities might have been useful. Finally, there are also limitations around further developing the theoretical underpinning of the study as well as disaggregating IT and finance functions within organisations. Some research have documented the imperative for interfunctional integration within organisations (for example, Perks & Riihela, 2004).

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