

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

A WORKING MODEL TOWARDS INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DATA-DRIVEN DIGITAL MARKETING AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY

BY

LINDSAY MUSONZA

B233053A

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP, GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

NOVEMBER 2025

APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) for acceptance a Dissertation entitled **"**A WORKING MODEL TOWARDS INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DATA-DRIVEN DIGITAL MARKETING AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY**."**

by LINDSAY MUSONZA in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Leadership

Student Name: Lindsay Musonza Signature:  Date: 17/11/2025

Supervisor Name: Dr G.Kichini. Signature: …  Date: 17/08/26

Program Coordinator Name: Dr Rusike Signature:  Date: 19/08/26

External Examiner Name: …….. Signature: …… Date: ……..

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: **LINDSAY MUSONZA**

STUDENT NUMBER: **B233053A**

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: A WORKING MODEL TOWARDS INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DATA-DRIVEN DIGITAL MARKETING AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY

DEGREE: MASTER OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP DEGREE – MBL

YEAR DEGREE AWARDED: 2025

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Signature:  **Date**: 17/11/2025

Permanent Address: 50 The Chase, Mt Pleasant, Harare, Zimabwe

E-mail: lindsaymusonza99@gmail.com

Cell Number: 078 415 6496

DECLARATION

I, **Lindsay Musonza (B233053A)**, do hereby declare that this dissertation is a result of my own investigation and research, except to the extent indicated in the acknowledgments, bibliography, references, and comments included in the body of the report, and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree to any other university.

STUDENT SIGNATURE_  **DATE:_17/11/2025**

DEDICATION

To the friends met , the hardships endured, the lessons learnt, the accomplishment finally archived and those thriving to learn more.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor DR G. Kichini for his dedication, guidance and support throughout the compilation of this dissertation. His knowledge and experiences were the cornerstone of this research.

I am also grateful to the coordinator Dr Munashe Matambo for facilitating, guiding, support and understanding from the beginning to the end of the dissertation. His wisdom and insights made this academic stage easier.

I would like to express my gratitude to my classmates for being there push and support throughout the research. Also, the university staff for their hard work in facilitating and enabling flawless learning.

ABSTRACT

This study set out to develop a technology-driven working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe. Guided by three objectives exploring existing engagement strategies, evaluating the effectiveness of current models, and developing a new technology-enhanced model the research was informed by literature highlighting the global shift toward personalized, analytics-driven, multichannel engagement systems. To achieve these aims, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a concurrent triangulation design (CTD), collecting quantitative data from 173 respondents and qualitative insights from 15 participants. The findings revealed that AFC Holding Company has already embraced a modern engagement framework integrating personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel communication, reward structures, and transparent interactions, aligning well with contemporary digital marketing practices. However, despite these strengths, the effectiveness of existing models was found to be only moderate due to operational inconsistencies and uneven implementation. The study further established that the newly developed technology-driven engagement model anchored in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology had the strongest potential to enhance customer engagement, explaining 88% of the variance in engagement outcomes. The study concludes that technological innovation is the most critical driver of customer engagement at AFC and recommends the adoption of the proposed model to strengthen the company's competitive positioning within Zimbabwe's financial sector.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics and Mobile Technology, Personalization, Predictive analytics, Multichannel support, Reward systems, Transparent communication , Customer engagement

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI- Artificial Intelligence

CTB- Concurrent Triangulation Design

CE- Customer Engagement

ICT- Information And Communication Technologies

DCEP- Digital Currency Electronic Payment (DCEP)

USA - United States of America

UK- United Kingdom

TAM- Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

ML- Machine Learning (ML)

CRM- Customer Relationship Management

IT- Information Technology

CEM- Customer Experience Management

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe. In an increasingly competitive financial services sector, organizations face the challenge of maintaining meaningful interactions with customers while leveraging digital technologies effectively. Despite the growing adoption of digital marketing tools, AFC Holding Company has struggled to fully optimize customer engagement, resulting in lower customer loyalty, reduced satisfaction and missed opportunities for personalized service delivery. This research aims to address these gaps by exploring current engagement strategies, evaluating the effectiveness of existing marketing models, and proposing a technology-driven framework tailored to enhance customer interactions and organizational performance. This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, aim, research objectives, research questions, research justification, delimitations of the study, limitations of the study and definition of key terms and the dissertation outline.

1.2 Background of the study

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has redefined the dynamics of customer-brand interactions, creating new pathways for information exchange, personalized service delivery and consumer empowerment (Csikosová et al., 2023; Pansari & Kumar, 2024). In today's digital economy, customers are no longer passive recipients of services but active participants who continuously monitor offerings, compare products, provide feedback and shape brand value through engagement (Brodie et al., 2021; Bowden, 2021). This shift has elevated customer engagement (CE) from being merely a marketing tool to a critical determinant of long-term business success, influencing brand trust, loyalty, innovation and competitiveness (Verhoef et al., 2021; Harmeling et al., 2023; Kotler, 2024). Nowhere is this transformation more visible than in the banking sector, where the rise of mobile technologies, artificial intelligence and digital platforms has intensified competition while reshaping how consumers connect with financial brands (Vivek, Beatty & Morgan, 2022; Muzhingi & Mapfumo, 2020). As global and local banks adopt relationship marketing, data-driven personalization and omnichannel strategies

to deepen customer loyalty, the need to better understand the forms, drivers and impact of customer engagement have become increasingly urgent (Pansari & Kumar, 2024; Moyo & Gukurume, 2021).

Globally developed markets such as the USA, UK, France, Poland, China and Japan, banks have accelerated digital-first strategies to strengthen customer engagement, with notable progress in recent years. In the United States, Bank of America's AI-powered chatbot Erica surpassed 1.5 billion interactions by 2023, showing the growing role of conversational banking tools (Hari et al., 2022; Rohit et al., 2025). JPMorgan Chase, meanwhile, introduced predictive financial health dashboards that increased app logins by over 25% compared to pre-launch figures, showing how personalized insights can drive habitual engagement (Kumar et al., 2024). In the UK, the introduction of Open Banking regulations empowered customers to share data with fintechs, enabling personalized offers that led to a 60% increase in active digital banking users between 2024 and 2023 (Chauhan et al., 2022; Nasution et al., 2024). French banks such as BNP Paribas adopted biometric authentication and real-time fraud alerts to boost trust, which was necessary as digital adoption accelerated during the COVID-19 era (Ke & Wel, 2024; Zhengmeng et al., 2024). In Japan, government-driven policies encouraging a "cashless society" expanded digital wallet and QR-code payment adoption, while in China, mobile-first ecosystems dominated, with Alipay and WeChat Pay helping push mobile engagement to over 80% of retail customers by 2022, up from under 50% a decade earlier (Yang et al., 2024; Kowsar et al., 2025). These developments highlight the global shift toward proactive digital engagement strategies designed to create habitual financial interactions are effective in enhancing customer engagement in the banking sector.

A major trend across these economies has been the deployment of data-driven marketing and personalization tools. In the USA, banks like Wells Fargo used AI-based segmentation to improve campaign conversion rates by 22%, while Lloyds Banking Group in the UK reported a 30% increase in product uptake after implementing recommendation systems (Chauhan et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2024). Chinese banks such as ICBC integrated big data analytics into customer apps, enabling personalized financial planning that boosted cross-selling by 18% compared to pre-digitization (Ke & Wel, 2024; Zhengmeng et al., 2024). In France, omnichannel strategies that aligned app, web and branch experiences resulted in measurable increases in retention and lifetime value (Nasution et al., 2024). Japanese banks, though traditionally slower to adopt personalization,

leaned on gamification and wallet-linked loyalty programs, leading to year-on-year engagement growth exceeding 20% (Raza et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024). Despite these gains, challenges persist, particularly around privacy, security and customer trust. Customers in Europe remain sensitive to over-surveillance, while American consumers demand transparency in how data is shared, illustrating the balancing act between personalization and trust (Rohit et al., 2025; Sondinti & Reddy, 2025).

In the same breath, policy frameworks and regulatory reforms have played a decisive role in shaping these engagement efforts, sometimes accelerating innovation and at other times slowing adoption. In the UK, Open Banking regulations mandated API sharing, sparking fintech collaborations but also intensifying competition, forcing traditional banks to differentiate through superior customer experiences (Chauhan et al., 2022; Nasution et al., 2024). In the USA, growing regulatory scrutiny around data usage led banks to roll out stricter opt-in policies, initially slowing adoption but later building long-term trust (Hari et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2024). China's state-backed rollout of the Digital Currency Electronic Payment (DCEP) in 2022 integrated digital yuan into commercial bank apps, embedding state policy into daily financial transactions and further deepening customer engagement (Ke & Wel, 2024; Kowsar et al., 2025). In France, compliance with the EU's GDPR initially constrained banks' ability to hyper-personalize, but subsequent anonymization and consent-based analytics allowed them to maintain personalization while staying compliant (Zhengmeng et al., 2024). Japan, with its cultural inclination toward cash, faced early resistance to digitalization, but government-backed "cashless society" initiatives helped banks integrate payments with loyalty ecosystems, leading to measurable increases in digital adoption (Yang et al., 2024; Raza et al., 2024). Collectively, these policy-led and technology-driven strategies demonstrate that while pathways differ, data-driven marketing, fintech collaboration and regulatory compliance have consistently reshaped customer engagement in developed banking systems (Chauhan et al., 2022; Rohit et al., 2025; Sondinti & Reddy, 2025).

Regionally, in Africa, digital engagement in banking has risen rapidly, although the strategies and success rates still reveal a divide compared to developed economies. South Africa leads the continent, with Standard Bank reporting over 4.5 million digitally active retail clients in 2024, reflecting a 7% year-on-year growth and over 583 million successful digital transactions in just six months (Standard Bank, 2024). FNB also revealed that digital transactions accounted for 88.9%

of all personal banking client transactions, with private banking reaching close to 96% (MyBroadband, 2024). These numbers are supported by research showing that AI-driven innovations such as chatbots, self-service platforms and personalized financial tools have enhanced engagement and brand relationship quality in South Africa (Masilo et al., 2025; Zungu et al., 2025). However, challenges remain as Kasse-Kengne (2025) highlights that financial vulnerability still influences engagement and satisfaction levels among low-income customers. In Nigeria, data-driven banking has become central to improving service quality, with digital assistants rolled out by GTBank boosting convenience and retention (Ezechi et al., 2025; Famoti et al., 2025a). Ghana has also advanced customer engagement by introducing mobile money interoperability, positioning telecom-led financial services at the center of engagement, while Morocco has expanded biometric-enabled mobile payments to drive inclusion (Anos & Mutambara, 2023; Kowsar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, other countries illustrate both progress and limitations. In Tanzania, active mobile money accounts grew from 60.8 million in September 2024 to 63.2 million in December 2024, with a 25.2% increase in transaction values during that quarter alone (Mwale, 2024). Mobile money now represents more than 80% of financial service penetration, compared to much lower rates for traditional banking (Telecom Review Africa, 2024). Zambia has similarly expanded agency banking and mobile-first engagement strategies, but fragmentation in regulation and poor interoperability still limit success (Misango et al., 2025). Although governments have introduced policies to accelerate engagement, such as Tanzania's simplified KYC and payment interoperability reforms (UgStandard, 2024), enforcement inconsistencies weaken results compared to Europe or Asia. Moreover, while South Africa and Nigeria are pushing AI-driven personalization and data analytics (Masilo et al., 2025; Famoti et al., 2025), many African banks remain focused on trust-building and broadening financial access rather than advanced predictive personalization (Roberts-Lombard et al., 2024). This highlights a clear divide between the developed and developing countries where developed countries are advancing toward hyper-personalized omnichannel ecosystems, whereas African markets, despite successes in mobile penetration, are still consolidating foundational engagement strategies shaped by financial inclusion policies and infrastructural constraints.

Locally, in Zimbabwe, banks have increasingly adopted data-driven digital marketing, AI, mobile technology and behavioral analytics to improve customer engagement and there is evidence of measurable growth. CBZ, for example, reports over 800,000 online banking customers and more than 900,000 mobile banking users in its 2024 annual report, showing strong uptake of its digital channels (Charwe, 2023). Stanbic Bank similarly boasts that 48% of its clients are now fully digitized and that 94% of the 14.1 million transactions carried out in 2024 are conducted via digital channels (Moyo & Rushinga, 2024). In the same breath, Zimswitch, the national payments switch, indicates that over 75% of all card-based transactions in Zimbabwe are now handled through digital payments means, showing the move toward non-cash, tech-mediated interactions (Chipando, 2025). These figures align with academic findings, for instance, Moyo and Gukurume (2021) found a 35% increase in customer engagement when banks used behavioral data-analytics to segment customers, Chikodzi and Chikozho (2022) saw a 30% boost in satisfaction and retention via AI-driven chatbots and real-time mobile data analytics, Muzhingi and Mapfumo (2020) reported a 22% increase in digital banking adoption following social media sentiment-based targeted campaigns, Gwezu and Dube (2023) recorded a 28% rise in conversion rates for new products when predictive analytics were used, Sibanda (2025) observed a 40% increase in loyalty and digital engagement via gamification plus personalization and Nyoni and Makore (2021) documented around 33% more customer visits or interactions through location-based offers.

Despite this positive trajectory, several challenges persist and policy or institutional responses are evolving. To reduce friction for customers, Stanbic and other banks have introduced zero-rated digital banking platforms, meaning customers on certain mobile networks (such as Econet) can access internet banking, mobile banking apps, or QR-based payments without data costs (Gwezu & Dube, 2023). CBZ has enhanced its mobile app "CBZ Touch" with biometric login, SmartKey (keyboard overlay for making transactions via social media) and QR-code payments (CBZPay), to simplify use and deepen engagement (Charwe, 2023). NMB is pushing fintech innovation via its subsidiary, developing more mobile banking features and robo-process automation to improve responsiveness (Chikodzi & Chikozho, 2022). The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) has also come up with regulation or guidelines around cybersecurity and fraud detection (e.g., requiring real-time fraud systems, higher standards of data security) to ensure trust and protect users

interacting through digital channels. (Muzhingi & Mapfumo, 2020) On the challenges side: app install numbers remain modest in many banks; for example, estimates in 2025 put CBZ Touch installs at 100,000, Steward at 15,000 installs, POSB, NMB among others are lower still (Chipando, 2025). In the same breath, issues like cost of data, digital literacy especially outside urban centres, reliable internet connectivity and customer concerns about security/privacy hamper deeper engagement (Chari, 2024). Collectively, while Zimbabwe is not yet at the level of hyper-personalization or omnichannel integration seen in developed economies, these developments show significant strides in digital adoption, usage and policy alignment, laying groundwork for further increases in engagement and loyalty.

The rapid advancement of ICTs has transformed customer–brand interactions, positioning customer engagement (CE) as a critical driver of loyalty, trust and long-term business success mainly in the developed world with the African region showing promise toward that direction (Csikosová et al., 2023; Pansari & Kumar, 2024; Verhoef et al., 2021). However, the Zimbabwean context reflects a paucity of research on comprehensive customer engagement models, highlighting the need for studies that benchmark local strategies against both African and global trends to identify effective approaches for enhancing customer engagement and customer-centricity in the banking sector. Thus, it is behind this background that the current study was found to develop a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement in the banking sector in Zimbabwe, with a specific focus on AFC Holdings Company as a case study.

1.3 Statement of the research problem

Despite the critical role of customer engagement (CE) in driving loyalty, satisfaction and competitive advantage, the Zimbabwean banking sector continues to face substantial challenges in effectively engaging customers. Globally, studies have demonstrated that data-driven digital marketing strategies, including the use of artificial intelligence, big data analytics and mobile technologies, enhance personalized engagement and improve financial service adoption (Masilo et al., 2025; Zungu et al., 2025; Moyo & Gukurume, 2021). However, in Zimbabwe, the reality diverges sharply from this ideal. Banks, including AFC Holdings Company, continue to rely largely on traditional, generic marketing models that fail to resonate with customers' evolving expectations, leading to low engagement levels and underutilization of digital platforms. The consequences of this gap are significant. Poor customer engagement undermines brand loyalty,

reduces cross-selling opportunities and limits banks' ability to retain profitable customers, directly affecting revenue generation and competitiveness. After the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital adoption, customers now expect seamless, personalized and real-time banking experiences, yet many banks in Zimbabwe lack a comprehensive framework for leveraging customer data to inform targeted marketing strategies. If these challenges are not addressed, banks risk not only declining market share but also reputational damage, reduced customer engagement and loyalty and diminished capacity to compete with both regional and global players who are increasingly using advanced analytics and AI-driven engagement models. This study, therefore, seeks to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holdings Company, providing both theoretical and practical insights to address these pressing gaps in the Zimbabwean banking sector.

1.4 Aim and purpose of the study

1.4.1 Aim of the study

To develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe.

1.4.2 Purpose

To explore digital tools such as big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and other mobile technologies on how they can be used to enhance customer engagement, leading to customer satisfaction, and loyalty in the banking sector for it is the thread that holds the success of the banking sector. Further on provide a practical framework to improve customer engagement through personalized, data-informed marketing initiatives.

1.5 Objectives of the study

1.5.1 To explore the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

1.5.2 To evaluate the effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

1.5.3 To develop a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

1.6 Research questions

1.6.1 What are the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company?

1.6.2 How effective are the existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company?

1.6.3 Which model that leverages technology can be developed to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company?

1.7 Hypotheses

1. **H_1:** Artificial Intelligence has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.
2. **H_2:** Machine Learning has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.
3. **H_3:** Big Data Analysis has statistically significant a positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.
4. **H_4:** Mobile Technology has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

1.8 Justification of the study

This study contributes to academic knowledge, providing practical strategies to improve customer engagement. It supports Zimbabwe's Vision 2030, NDS1, and Education 5.0 that are pushing digital transformation, innovation, and financial inclusion. It also benefits customers through improved services, organizations through increased competitiveness, and policymakers through insights that support sustainable, customer-focused financial culture.

1.8.1 To the Academic Field

This study contributes to the academic field by expanding knowledge on the intersection of data-driven digital marketing and customer engagement within a developing economy context. While most existing literature emphasizes developed markets, this research provides localized insights that address the unique dynamics of Zimbabwe's financial services sector. The proposed working model will enrich academic discourse by bridging theoretical perspectives on customer engagement with practical applications of data analytics, thereby offering a foundation for further

scholarly inquiry and curriculum development in marketing, information systems, and customer relationship management.

1.8.2 To practice

Practically, the study equips AFC Holding Company and similar institutions in the banking sector with actionable strategies to harness data-driven digital marketing for improved customer engagement. The model developed will provide managers with a structured approach to analyze customer data, personalize marketing campaigns, and enhance service delivery. Through embedding digital technologies into marketing practice, the research offers a roadmap for organizations to remain competitive, strengthen customer loyalty, and improve operational efficiency in an increasingly digital marketplace.

1.8.3 To other researchers

This study provides a valuable empirical and conceptual reference point for future researchers. The working model generated can be tested, critiqued, and refined in diverse organizational and geographical contexts. Moreover, it highlights methodological pathways for studying customer engagement through data analytics, thereby inspiring further investigations that can compare outcomes across sectors, regions, and customer demographics.

1.8.4 To Vision 2030, NDS, Education 5.0

The study directly aligns with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy (NDS1) by promoting innovation, efficiency, and digital transformation in the financial sector, which are key pillars for achieving a middle-income economy. Thus, by fostering data-driven customer engagement, the study strengthens financial inclusion and supports sustainable economic growth. In addition, it resonates with the Education 5.0 philosophy by generating knowledge that is not only theoretical but also application-oriented, thereby contributing to problem-solving, innovation, and industrialization.

1.8.5 Justification for Stakeholder Benefits

This research benefits multiple stakeholders. For customers, it promises more personalized, efficient, and satisfying interactions with AFC Holding Company. For the organization, it enhances competitiveness, customer retention, and long-term profitability. Policymakers and regulators may

also benefit from insights into how data-driven strategies can improve financial inclusion and service delivery. Ultimately, the study serves as a blueprint for industry stakeholders seeking to leverage digital technologies to build sustainable, customer-centered financial ecosystems in Zimbabwe.

1.9 Assumptions of the study

The study was carried based on the following assumptions:

1.9.1 It was assumed that AFC Holding Company currently has strategies in place that are explicitly or implicitly aimed at increasing customer engagement.

1.9.2 It was assumed that the existing marketing models employed by AFC Holding Company can be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness, measurability, and impact on customer engagement.

1.9.3 It was assumed that the integration of technology and data-driven approaches has the potential to enhance customer engagement more effectively than traditional marketing models.

1.9.4 It is assumed that the findings from this study will provide sufficient empirical and conceptual insights to inform the development of a practical and context-specific model for AFC Holding Company**.**

1.10 Delimitation of the study

This study aims to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe, however it is delimitations by a number constraints that were put to help guide the research, attaint focused findings and making the research manageable.

1.10.1 Geographical Delimitation

This study is geographically delimited to AFC Holding Company, headquartered in Harare, Zimbabwe. The focus on Harare is due to its position as the administrative and commercial hub of the institution, where most strategic marketing activities and customer engagement initiatives are designed and implemented. Findings may therefore not fully capture the experiences of customers in other regions of the country, but they provide a representative picture of the institution’s central operations.

1.10.2 Conceptual Delimitation

Conceptually, the study is limited to the constructs of customer engagement and data-driven digital marketing within the financial services sector. Broader aspects of customer relationship management, general advertising practices, or non-digital engagement strategies are excluded. The study narrows its scope to exploring existing engagement strategies, evaluating current marketing models, and developing a technology-driven model tailored for AFC Holding Company.

1.10.3 Theoretical Delimitation

The study is theoretically delimited to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which provides the guiding framework for understanding how customers adopt and respond to data-driven digital marketing initiatives. While other theoretical perspectives such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) or the Diffusion of Innovation Theory could provide additional insights, this study confines itself to TAM to ensure focus and consistency in analyzing the acceptance and effectiveness of technology-enabled customer engagement.

1.10.4 Methodological Delimitation

Methodologically, the study adopted a quantitative research design, emphasizing the collection and analysis of numerical data to measure and evaluate customer engagement. The choice of quantitative methods excludes qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups, which might provide deeper contextual understanding but fall outside the scope of this study. This delimitation ensures objectivity, statistical rigor, and generalizability of findings within the target population of AFC Holding Company.

1.11 Limitations of the study

This study aims to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe, however it is limited by several constraints that may influence the interpretation and implementation of the findings.

1.11.1 Methodological Limitations

The study relies exclusively on a quantitative research design, which emphasizes statistical measurement and generalization. The use of structured questionnaires may restrict responses to predefined categories, potentially overlooking unexpected variables influencing customer engagement. While this approach ensures objectivity and reliability, it limits the ability to capture the deeper insights and perceptions that could have been obtained through qualitative methods

such as interviews or focus groups (Hall, 2022). To overcome this the semi structed interview questionnaire were incorporated, this allowed the participates to share unexpected variables affecting their customer engagement. The study is also confined to respondents from AFC Holding Company in Harare, which may reduce the external validity of the findings, as customer experiences in other branches or regions might differ.

1.11.2 Literature-based limitations

The literature review for this study is constrained by the limited availability of recent empirical studies focusing on data-driven digital marketing and customer engagement in the Zimbabwean financial services sector. Much of the existing literature is centered on developed countries, creating a contextual gap when applying such findings to emerging economies. Furthermore, the majority of studies between 2020 and 2024 emphasize broad digital transformation trends without providing specific models tailored to financial institutions in Africa. This limitation means that the study had to rely on adapting general theories and global empirical evidence to the Zimbabwean context, which may not fully capture local dynamics.

1.12 Dissertation outline

The project has 5 chapters as outlined below:

1.12.1 Chapter 1: Introduction - This chapter is the introduction and the background of the study. It provides background information on the topic explaining the research problem and outlines the objectives and research questions and also explains why the study is important and necessary.

1.12.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review - This chapter reviews literature on what other researchers have found on the objectives of this current study. It also discusses the theoretical frameworks which outlines the theories within which the current study is grounded.

1.12.3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology - This chapter explains how the research was conducted. It describes the approach used, the design of the study, where the study took place, how participants were selected, and how data was collected and analyzed. It also discusses any ethical considerations that were taken into account.

1.12.4 Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Results - This chapter presents the findings of the study. It shows the data that was collected and analyzes and presents it to answer the research questions. This chapter is mainly about presenting the results in a clear and organized way.

1.12.5 Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations - This chapter summarizes the findings and discusses what the results mean and what they imply. Therefore, it summarizes the main findings, draws conclusions based on the results, and makes recommendations for future action. This chapter helps to understand the significance of the study and how it can be used to improve things.

1.13 Chapter summary

Chapter One provided a comprehensive introduction to the study, outlining the foundational aspects necessary for understanding the research. The chapter presented the background of the study, highlighting the importance of customer engagement in the financial services sector and the growing role of data-driven digital marketing in enhancing customer engagement at a global, regional and local scale. The chapter then outlined the aim of the study, which is to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing, and specified the research objectives and research questions designed to guide the investigation. The justification of the study was presented, demonstrating its relevance to the academic field, industry practice, other researchers, national development goals such as Vision 2030, and key stakeholders. The chapter also discussed the delimitations and limitations of the study, clarifying the scope in terms of geography, concepts, theory, methodology, and practical constraints that might influence the research outcomes. This chapter set the stage for the research by establishing the context, rationale, focus, and methodological considerations that underpin the study, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent chapters. The next chapter reviews literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and reviews literature. The theoretical framework outlines the theory that underpins this study and it is through the lens of this framework that the variables of the study were understood and the objectives clarified. The empirical literature review analyses the existing literature on the research objectives to create a basis on which the results of this study were analysed and discussed.

2.1.1 Definition of key terms

This section defines terminology used in the study to ensure clarity and a common understanding of their meaning

2.1.1.1 Customer Engagement- was defined by Ezechi et al. (2025) as the process of interacting with customers in a way that appeals to their preferences which usually translates customer satisfaction and the result of this would be increase use of the organization's services both online and physically all of which translates to customer loyalty.

2.1.1.2 Data-driven digital marketing- refers to the collection and analysis of customers data to tailor marketing strategies and service delivery to each and every client's need based on their preferences in order to gain their loyalty (Kowsar et al., 2025).

2.1.1.3 Technology adoption- refers to the integration of technological advancement element in designing, implementing and evaluating business strategies and operation in order to levege the strengths of such innovation in order to meet the global trends and to boost operational efficiency (Anos & Mutambara, 2023).

2.1.1.4 Big Data Analytics- refers to the systematic processing and analysis of large amounts of data sets to extract valuable information that helps the organizations to make informed decisions based on that set of information (Simango et al., 2025).

1.11.5 Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Marketing- according to Chauhan et al. (2022), this it is a marketing strategy that employs AI concepts and models such as machine learning to achieve marketing goals.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1 The strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement in the banking sector

There are several strategies that have been in existence and have proved to work, but with the change in times there is need to merge them with modern day strategies

2.2.1.1 Personalized Experiences

Based on the existing literature, there seems to be a consensus among scholars that the banks around the globe are utilizing personalization of banking experience to enhance customer engagement (Bepe, 2022; Oyeniyi et al., 2024; Kaondera et al., 2023). A study by Ashrafuzzaman et al. (2025) confirmed this observation as they noticed that banks in the developed countries such as USA and UK are leveraging on the advancement in technology to tailor both their marketing strategies and their service delivery to offer a tailored or personalized banking experience. They brought to light that this add-on to service delivery motivates the customers more to engage with the banks' services and offerings as they are tailored to appeal to their preferences (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2025). Necessity has indeed become the mother of invention and this milestone has revolutionized how banks interact, market, engage and win the hearts of both their existing and potential customers. Kaondera et al. (2023) also supported this noting that with the advent of Artificial Intelligence powered engines it has become easier for organizations in the banking sector to tailor ways of communication, to package product recommendations and to design loyal programs that meets and exceeds the customer expectations. They went further to confirm that this personalization of services has helped organizations to transform these interactions from being only transactional to relational boosting also the customers' engagement with banks (Kaondera et al., 2023). Drawing from a review by Oyeniyi et al. (2024) it can be observed that these trends are not just mere speculation but actual milestones being recorded. They cited that the Deutsche Bank in Belgium has managed to increase its customer engagement in 2021 from around 30% email open rate in 2020 to approximately 50% in 2023 and a 12% click-through rate through targeted campaigns, all of which were more than double its records from the previous 5 years before effective implementation of personalized experiences (Oyeniyi et al., 2024).

2.2.1.2 Multichannel Support

Customers in the banking sector are demanding seamless support across multiple channels because although mobile banking in advantageous in many ways it brings with it a host of challenges that customers have to endure for example, the most documented challenges are delays in transactions, network problem and crushing mobile banking application not mentioning a breach of privacy (Campbell, 2022). Moreover, research by Kumar et al. (2024) shows that it would be suicidal for banks to assume that all customers are well versed in using these technologies without support. Therefore, they brought to light that as precautionary measure banks are now using multichannel support to help their customers navigate through the aforementioned problems and to avoid the risk of losing those customers to other banking institutions that offers adequate support (Kumar et al., 2024). Yang (2024) was consistent with this view and brought to light that this seamless multichannel support is not only paramount in enhancing customer satisfaction but it goes an extra mile to strengthening customer engagement by minimizing the friction that characterizes both the digital and physical banking interactions. As advanced by et al. (2023), this strategy managed to achieve this by allowing customers to transition effortlessly between online banking, mobile applications, social media channels and in-branch services (supported by both AI-driven chatbots and human assistance). Studied have shown that banks now combine WhatsApp banking, mobile apps, basic call centers, SMS-based alerts as add-ons to physical traditional branch services all in a an endeavor to provide to their customers a seamless multichannel support frame that has been reported by Murwira (2022), Chari (2023) and Oyeniyi et al. (2024) to be instrumental in increasing customer engagement.

2.2.1.3 Rewards and Partnerships

Personalized experience and multichannel supports have been documented to be effective in driving customer engagement within the banking sector and recent studies have also shown that they become more effective in achieving this objective when they are coupled with rewards (Hall, 2020; Khumalo, 2023; Mehta & Handriana, 2024). Rewards which are critical in establishing mutually reciprocal partnerships between the banks and their customers (Ezechi et al., 2025). The partnerships created through this way have been reported by Garatsa et al. (2025) to not just incentivize continued use of banking products and increase the engagement by customers but they have a ripple effect that extends to embedding financial services into customers' everyday consumption and practices. This strategy is not just theoretical but it has recorded success stories

and among the cited good examples are the American Express and JPMorgan Chase which offers points and cashback systems integrated into airline and hotel partnerships, and FNB's eBucks Rewards and Standard Bank's UCount program all of which have been record to have significantly enhanced customer engagement (Khumalo, 2023; Ezechi et al., 2025). The reward system is effective in enhancing customer engagement for the main reason that a behavior that is rewarded is most likely to be repeated, thus when customers are rewarded for engaging with the bank and utilizing its services, the general consensus is that they will keep doing so and they are also most likely to recommend the bank to their friends and family members (Musiiwa, 2023; Chaza, 2024).

2.2.1.4 Predictive Analytics

Predictive analytics has also emerged in literature as another valuable technology driven tool that is being used by banks to enhance customer engagement (Chibve, 2024). Its adoptions, according to Saral et al. (2024), came from the realization that also other strategies like personalized experiences through AI-algorithm recommendations are effective in keeping customers engagement, the failure by banks to attend to the frequently raised complaints from customer nullifies the impact of these efforts. The AI-drive data analytics therefore, uses Machine Learning to analyze vast amounts of customers' data (something that was nearly impossible before technology) in order to anticipate customer needs to deliver tailored and proactive solutions to the problems faced (Chen, 2022; Yang, 2024). Chibve (2024) found that when customers feel like their problems are being solved and their concerns heard and addressed they are motivated to stay loyal to a bank and they engage with the bank on it platforms airing their views and reviews with the confidence that actions will be taken. Prior to the advent of technology it was very hard for banks to analysis vast amounts of copies submitted by customers concerning their problem in service delivery however data analytic capabilities of AI and the multichannel support has managed to bridge this gap bring operational efficiency and speed all of which enhances customer engagement (Rushinga, 2024; Semwayo, 2024; Chibve, 2024; Ezechi et al., 2025).

The reviewed literature clearly demonstrates that while global, African, and Zimbabwean banks have adopted diverse strategies such as personalization, new touchpoints, customer journey mapping, multichannel support, rewards programs, digital-first initiatives, seamless transitions, data-led interventions, predictive analytics, and transparent communication, there remain significant gaps that warrant further investigation. Most empirical studies from developed markets

(Saral et al., 2024; Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2025; Kowsar, Islam, Mohiuddin & Siddiqui, 2025) emphasize sophisticated personalization, predictive modeling, and omnichannel ecosystems, while African and Zimbabwean scholarship (Kaondera et al., 2023; Garatsa et al., 2025; Semwayo, 2024) focuses more on financial inclusion, customer retention, and reactive service delivery improvements. This imbalance highlights a research gap in comparative, cross-regional analyses that can explain how infrastructural, cultural, and regulatory contexts shape the effectiveness of customer engagement strategies. Furthermore, much of the existing work remains descriptive, emphasizing adoption and service quality without adequately theorizing the mechanisms through which engagement strategies influence loyalty and financial product uptake. A critical gap therefore lies in the absence of robust conceptual or empirical models that leverage emerging technologies, such as AI, big data, blockchain, and digital ecosystems, to systematically enhance customer engagement in banking across different contexts.

2.2.2 The effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement in the banking sector

2.2.2.1 Digital Transformation Strategies

Digital transformation has been positioned as the backbone of customer engagement in the banking sector, with banks worldwide investing heavily in artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain technologies, and mobile applications to remain competitive. According to Chauhan, Akhtar and Gupta (2022), digital transformation enhances customer experience by ensuring convenience, personalization, and real-time service delivery, which makes it a highly effective engagement model in advanced markets such as the USA, UK, Germany and Japan, where customers already operate in digitally mature environments. In these contexts, digital tools are not just supplementary but are embedded in customers' everyday financial lives, increasing the effectiveness of engagement by making interactions seamless and predictive. Similarly, in China, banks such as ICBC and China Construction Bank have integrated mobile-first ecosystems with digital wallets and blockchain applications, ensuring that customers are retained within the same ecosystem for shopping, payments, and wealth management, which further demonstrates high effectiveness (Hoang, Kousi, Martinez and Kumar, 2023). In Africa, however, the effectiveness of digital transformation strategies is limited by uneven infrastructural development, unreliable internet access and high costs of digital tools, which reduce customer inclusivity (Matanhire, Vingirayi and

Manyanga, 2021). In Zimbabwe, studies by Hokonya (2024) and Mango, Nyandoro and Nyathi (2025) highlight that while banks have started embracing digital transformation through mobile banking apps, blockchain pilots, and digital onboarding, effectiveness is undermined by poor connectivity, weak investment in IT systems, and macroeconomic instability that erodes trust in digital platforms. Thus, although digital transformation is highly effective in advanced economies where technological infrastructure and trust are strong, it is only partially effective in developing contexts like Zimbabwe, where adoption remains limited (Mango et al., 2025). This disparity illustrates that the effectiveness of digital transformation as a customer engagement model is highly context-dependent, and without context-sensitive, technology-driven models, its potential cannot be fully realized.

2.2.2.2 Relationship Marketing and CRM

Relationship marketing and customer relationship management (CRM) systems have long been central to banking engagement strategies, as they enable the collection, storage, and analysis of customer data for more targeted service delivery (Hills, 2022). Kumar et al. (2022) confirm that electronic CRM (e-CRM) is effective in strengthening engagement and satisfaction when applied with integrated digital tools, particularly in environments where banks can use real-time data to create personalized loyalty programs. In developed contexts such as Europe and the USA, CRM systems are highly effective because they allow banks to move beyond transactional engagement to relational engagement, using insights to anticipate needs and build loyalty (Chauhan et al., 2022). For example, American and European banks have successfully deployed CRM-linked email campaigns, mobile push notifications, and integrated loyalty tracking to increase customer retention. However, in Africa, the effectiveness of CRM varies significantly. While South African banks have made strong progress by integrating CRM into digital banking platforms, banks in Zambia, Angola, and Zimbabwe often implement CRM only partially, which reduces its effectiveness (Battisti et al., 2021). In Zimbabwe, Simango (2021) found that banks often underutilize CRM, with fragmented customer databases, lack of integration with digital channels, and insufficient expertise in data analytics, resulting in CRM being only moderately effective in driving retention. Although relationship marketing through CRM has strong potential, its effectiveness is heavily dependent on integration with advanced digital infrastructures, which are often missing in developing contexts (Moyo, 2023). Chari (2022) argue that this makes CRM

highly effective in technologically advanced economies but only partially effective in Zimbabwe, underscoring the need for stronger technology-driven engagement frameworks that adapt to local infrastructural realities.

2.2.2.4 Loyalty and Reward Programs

Loyalty and reward programs remain a common strategy for customer retention and engagement, particularly through incentives such as cashbacks, points, and tiered benefits. These programs have proven effective in contexts such as the USA, Japan, and China, where they are digitally integrated into banking apps and linked to gamified features that sustain continuous interaction (Hoang et al., 2023). Anyaegbunam (2024) emphasizes that such personalized reward systems are effective in increasing retention and supporting sustainable operations because they move customers from transactional to relational loyalty. In Africa, however, effectiveness is less consistent. While banks in South Africa and Nigeria have experimented with rewards tied to lifestyle services, many institutions still offer generic loyalty schemes that fail to resonate with diverse customer needs which limits their effectiveness (Abo ElHamd et al., 2022). In Zimbabwe, Makudza (2021) found that loyalty programs were poorly executed, often offering irrelevant rewards or small incentives that did not motivate continued use, making them largely ineffective in fostering genuine loyalty and engagement. The lack of integration between loyalty schemes and broader digital ecosystems in Zimbabwe further reduces their effectiveness, as rewards are often detached from customer lifestyles (Murwira, 2022). This makes loyalty programs highly effective in developed contexts, moderately effective in advanced African markets, and largely ineffective in Zimbabwe, where macroeconomic instability and poor technological integration undermine their utility. Their weaknesses highlight the need for technology-driven, data-powered loyalty systems that can deliver relevant, personalized incentives aligned with customer behavior (Chibwe, 2023; Chen, 2023; Yang, 2024).

2.2.2.5 Customer Experience Management (CEM)

Customer Experience Management (CEM) has been widely adopted to enhance seamless interactions across customer touchpoints, creating consistency and satisfaction. Globally, CEM has proven highly effective, particularly in Europe and the USA, where omni-channel banking

platforms supported by AI ensure that customer interactions are consistent, frictionless, and responsive (Chauhan et al., 2022). In Japan and China, the use of journey-mapping and predictive engagement tools has strengthened CEM effectiveness by allowing banks to proactively address pain points. Abo ElHamd et al. (2022) argue that CEM provides significant value by focusing on the holistic customer journey rather than isolated transactions, which makes it an effective engagement strategy in advanced markets. In Africa, however, it effectiveness is weaker. While South African banks have experimented with integrating financial literacy education into customer onboarding to improve experience, infrastructural weaknesses, fragmented systems, and inconsistent digital channels reduce the overall effectiveness of CEM initiatives (Battisti et al., 2021). In Zimbabwe, Dangaiso et al. (2024) show that poor internet connectivity, frequent system downtimes, and service inconsistencies reduce the ability of banks to deliver seamless experiences, making CEM less effective. Despite heavy investments, banks in Zimbabwe struggle to achieve the intended effectiveness of CEM because digital ecosystems remain underdeveloped (Mhlanga, 2022). Therefore, while globally CEM is effective in enhancing engagement and loyalty, in Zimbabwe and many African markets it is only partially effective, revealing the urgent need for adaptive, technology-driven CEM models that can compensate for infrastructural deficiencies and deliver consistent value (Gumbo, 2023).

The reviewed literature shows that while current marketing models, ranging from personalization and customer journey mapping to digital-first strategies, omnichannel integration, loyalty rewards, predictive analytics, and transparent communication, have achieved measurable success in driving customer engagement, their effectiveness remains uneven across global, African, and Zimbabwean contexts (Gumbo, 2023; Chipando, 2022; Dangaiso et al., 2024). Globally, such models have demonstrated strong outcomes, with scholars such as Hoang, Kousi, Martinez and Kumar (2023) affirming that customer engagement frameworks, particularly those leveraging digital ecosystems and feedback-driven cycles, enhance customer trust and foster retention in competitive environments. Similarly, Chauhan, Akhtar and Gupta (2022) emphasize that digital-first engagement strategies improve customer experience by ensuring immediacy, convenience, and personalized interactions, particularly in mature banking markets like the USA, UK, and Japan, where robust technological infrastructures support seamless integration. These strengths demonstrate that in technologically advanced regions, the models are largely effective due to

strong digital literacy, regulatory support, and customer familiarity with technology-enhanced services (Hall, 2022). However, their weaknesses emerge in that most models remain static and descriptive, lacking adaptability to emerging disruptions like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and big data, which are increasingly reshaping consumer expectations and service ecosystems (Abo ElHamd, Shamma, Saleh & Elkhodary, 2022).

In Africa, and specifically in Zimbabwe, the effectiveness of these models has been constrained by infrastructural and economic realities. While loyalty-based engagement approaches and digital adoption strategies have produced some positive outcomes, studies show mixed effectiveness due to inconsistent technological adoption (Rushinga, 2023). Makudza (2021) highlights that while customer experience management enhances loyalty, banks in emerging economies struggle with the resource intensity required to sustain such models, thereby weakening their long-term efficiency. Similarly, Matanhire, Vingirayi and Manyanga (2021) reveal that digital marketing has transformed customer interaction in financial institutions, but its effectiveness is undermined by poor internet connectivity, financial exclusion, and limited ICT penetration in rural areas. Although some progress has been noted in Zimbabwean banks, such as digital transformation initiatives that enhanced customer satisfaction in Standard Chartered Zimbabwe (Hokonya, 2024) and blockchain-driven innovation that improved engagement in commercial banks (Mango, Nyandoro & Nyathi, 2025), the results remain fragmented, suggesting that current models are only partially effective in driving sustained engagement. A critical weakness of these models, as observed by Semwayo (2024) and Mtetwa (2023), is their inability to cope with shocks such as economic instability, COVID-19 disruptions, and high operating costs, which make customer engagement models heavily reliant on external conditions rather than adaptable internal frameworks.

Moreover, while global and regional evidence confirms that personalization and predictive analytics enhance engagement, their effectiveness in Zimbabwe remains limited. For instance, Dangaiso et al. (2024) found that internet banking service quality directly improved e-satisfaction, e-retention, and word-of-mouth communication. Yet, they caution that many banks rely on surface-level digital platforms rather than advanced predictive technologies, which reduces the effectiveness of engagement strategies in building long-term trust and retention (Dangaiso et al., 2024). Similarly, Revesai et al. (2024) demonstrated that churn analytics using machine learning

can improve customer retention, but these models have not been fully institutionalized in most banks, leaving gaps in practical application. This reflects a recurring weakness in Zimbabwean and wider African banking contexts, where innovative engagement technologies are piloted but rarely scaled, reducing the overall effectiveness of existing frameworks (Moyo, 2024). Thus, while the models are not wholly ineffective, their partial success highlights an overreliance on conventional structures and a lack of dynamic, technology-driven models that can adapt to evolving customer expectations and volatile economic environments. As Anyaegbunam (2024) and Ikenna, Onwuegbuchulem, Ezinwanne and Jude (2024) argue, sustainable engagement requires models that can go beyond static approaches and align closely with technological advancements. This demonstrates an urgent need for a technology-driven customer engagement model that integrates artificial intelligence, blockchain, predictive analytics, and omnichannel strategies, while also addressing infrastructural gaps and ensuring adaptability across contexts. Without such evolution, existing models risk becoming obsolete, particularly in emerging economies like Zimbabwe, where banking institutions need resilient, efficient, and scalable engagement strategies to remain competitive and relevant in the digital age (Ikenna et al., 2024).

The reviewed studies have shown several critical research gaps that underscore the limitations of existing marketing models in driving sustainable customer engagement within the banking sector. First, while global scholarship (Hoang et al., 2023; Chauhan et al., 2022; Abo et al., 2022) highlights the benefits of personalization, predictive analytics, and customer journey mapping, most frameworks remain descriptive and lack empirical testing across diverse banking environments, limiting their generalizability. Second, African and Zimbabwean studies (Makudza, 2021; Matanhire et al., 2021; Hokonya, 2024; Mango et al., 2025) emphasize digital transformation and customer retention but often focus on isolated case studies without integrating broader cross-country or longitudinal analyses, thereby failing to capture long-term effectiveness and scalability. Third, although innovations such as blockchain (Mango et al., 2025) and churn analytics (Revesai et al., 2024) are introduced, their adoption remains fragmented, and there is little evidence of holistic frameworks that embed these technologies into everyday banking operations. Finally, most studies do not propose comprehensive, technology-driven engagement models that combine AI, big data, and omnichannel strategies to address structural challenges like poor infrastructure, low digital literacy, and economic instability in emerging economies. This

indicates a gap in both theory and practice, where the absence of adaptive, technology-enabled models limits the effectiveness of engagement strategies, particularly in contexts like Zimbabwe where banking institutions require resilient, scalable, and innovative solutions to sustain customer trust and loyalty.

2.2.3 The models that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement in the banking sector

One of the most prominent technology-driven models for enhancing customer engagement in banking globally is the AI-powered personalization model, which uses machine learning algorithms and big data analytics to tailor financial products, communication, and experiences to individual customer needs. Banks in advanced markets such as the USA, UK, and Germany have increasingly adopted AI-based personalization engines that create hyper-targeted campaigns and anticipate customer behavior patterns in real-time (Hoang et al., 2023). For example, Bank of America's "Erica" chatbot employs natural language processing to provide personalized financial advice, while HSBC leverages predictive models to suggest savings and investment products to clients based on transaction histories (Ikanna et al., 2024). The effectiveness of this model lies in its ability to shift engagement from transactional to relational, building deeper trust and loyalty (Chauhan, Akhtar & Gupta, 2022). However, despite its strengths, the model is not without weaknesses. Over-reliance on data can raise concerns about privacy and security, while algorithmic biases risk excluding certain customer groups. Moreover, in developing contexts where digital infrastructure is underdeveloped, the scalability of such models remains limited, revealing a gap in inclusivity (Makudza, 2021).

Another widely adopted model is the Omnichannel Engagement Model, which integrates digital and physical touchpoints to provide seamless, consistent customer experiences across platforms. This model emphasizes creating unified engagement across branches, websites, mobile apps, ATMs, chatbots, and social media platforms (Abo et al., 2022). In countries such as Japan and China, this model has advanced further by embedding banking services into broader digital ecosystems. For example, WeChat Pay in China allows users to conduct financial transactions while simultaneously shopping, booking healthcare appointments, or paying utility bills. This integration makes banking invisible yet omnipresent, driving unprecedented levels of engagement

(Battisti et al., 2021). The strength of this model lies in convenience and consistency, which reduce friction in customer journeys. Nonetheless, a weakness is that building and maintaining omnichannel systems is resource-intensive, requiring strong IT governance and cybersecurity. Furthermore, customers in some markets may still prefer traditional engagement modes, highlighting that omnichannel models must balance technological innovation with customer inclusivity (Ikenna et al., 2024).

Moreover, the Gamification and Rewards-Based Engagement Model has also become increasingly significant in global banking, leveraging technology to turn financial activities into engaging and rewarding experiences. Many European and American banks now integrate gamified features into mobile banking apps, such as financial literacy quizzes, savings challenges, or digital badges for achieving milestones like timely loan repayments or consistent savings deposits. For instance, Santander UK's "Spend Tracker" incorporates gamified challenges to encourage budgeting and saving, while Standard Chartered has partnered with fitness apps to reward healthy behavior with banking incentives (Anyaegbunam, 2024). These gamification models are highly effective in attracting younger demographics, especially millennials and Gen Z, who value interactive digital experiences (Yasin et al., 2021). They also strengthen emotional connections with customers, making banking less formal and more engaging. However, their effectiveness is often short-term, as customers can lose interest if gamified elements are repetitive or lack tangible benefits. Moreover, the scalability of gamification in low-income or emerging markets may be constrained by limited smartphone penetration and lower digital literacy levels (Mveku et al., 2024).

In the same breath, a further advancement in technology-driven engagement is the Blockchain-Enabled Trust Model, which uses decentralized ledgers to enhance transparency, security, and efficiency in customer interactions. Globally, banks in countries such as Switzerland, Singapore, and the USA are experimenting with blockchain-based solutions for cross-border payments, identity verification, and smart contracts (Zouari & Abdelhedi, 2021). The effectiveness of this model is evident in its ability to reduce fraud, cut transaction costs, and build customer trust by ensuring transparency. In addition, blockchain facilitates instant and secure peer-to-peer transfers, which significantly improves the customer experience compared to traditional banking processes (Mango et al., 2025). However, weaknesses exist, particularly in terms of regulatory uncertainty, energy consumption, and the technical complexity of blockchain adoption. In many emerging

economies, the lack of regulatory frameworks and high implementation costs hinder the model's wider adoption, showing that while blockchain holds promise for customer engagement, its application in mainstream banking is still in its early stages (Semwayo, 2024).

Furthermore, the Customer Journey Analytics and Predictive Engagement Model has emerged as a powerful technology-driven framework for driving customer satisfaction and loyalty. This model relies on advanced data analytics, AI, and machine learning to map the entire customer journey, identify pain points, and proactively deliver personalized solutions at critical touchpoints (Kumar, Mokha & Pattnaik, 2022). For example, Deutsche Bank Belgium has used predictive analytics to segment customers by investment behavior and risk profiles, enabling highly targeted campaigns that improved both engagement and retention. In the USA, Wells Fargo uses customer journey mapping to anticipate service needs before customers report issues, thereby improving satisfaction and reducing churn (Dangaiso et al., 2024). The effectiveness of this model lies in its anticipatory nature, which transforms engagement from reactive to proactive. Nevertheless, its weaknesses include the heavy reliance on high-quality data and advanced IT infrastructure, which are often lacking in less developed regions. Furthermore, ethical challenges around data use and customer consent remain unresolved, pointing to the need for regulatory alignment and stronger governance structures (Mhlanga & Hassan, 2022).

In Zimbabwe, the adoption of technology-driven models for customer engagement in the banking sector remains limited and fragmented, reflecting broader structural, economic, and infrastructural challenges (Moyo, 2024). While global banks leverage advanced models such as AI-driven personalization, blockchain-enabled trust, and customer journey analytics, Zimbabwean banks rely heavily on mobile banking platforms, USSD codes, and WhatsApp banking to reach customers, with services largely restricted to basic functions such as balance inquiries, bill payments, and airtime purchases (Matanhire et al., 2024). Institutions like CBZ, Steward Bank, and EcoCash have made strides in digital transformation, yet their engagement models lack sophistication, often being reactive and transactional rather than predictive and relational (Mtetwa, 2023). For example, loyalty programs and gamified savings initiatives remain underdeveloped, blockchain applications are virtually absent, and AI-based personalization is constrained by inadequate big data infrastructure (Revesai et al., 2024). Furthermore, economic instability, high data costs, and low digital literacy continue to undermine the scalability of advanced engagement strategies. The

research gap, therefore, lies in the absence of holistic, technology-enabled models that integrate AI, predictive analytics, and blockchain into Zimbabwean banking operations to build trust, improve customer experiences, and sustain engagement. Current studies focus more on the impact of digital marketing, e-banking adoption, or financial inclusion (Makudza, 2021; Mango, Nyandoro & Nyathi, 2025), however, few studies have proposed comprehensive frameworks that show how emerging technologies can be adapted to Zimbabwe's unique socioeconomic and infrastructural realities, leaving a critical gap in both theory and practice.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Presented below the theories that guide the study and explain the relationship between data-driven digital marketing and customer engagement to better understand and interpret the research findings.

2.3.1 The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The study utililized the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as its theoretical framework. The theory was proposed and coined by Davis in 1989. It provides a strong framework ehich is mainly designed to help orgnizations understand how service users come to not only access but also use technology when introduced in delivering a service that they are primary recipients to (Cross, 2023). The theory is grounded in two main schools of thought. It posits that the adoption of technology both by the organization and their customers is contigent upon the perceived easiness of use and the perceived usefulness of the technology in question (Bells, 2022). Thus, according to the theory, technology is only adopted if it is deemed easy to use and has clear tried and tested benefits (Murwira, 2022). From the lens of this theory, it appears that when banks use personalized and data-driven marketing strategies they will be in a better position to increase the perceived usefulness of the mobile banking applications making their marketing campaigns more appealing to their customers hence enabling the adoption of such technological advancements (Venkatesh & Bala, 2020).

The utility of TAM in this study comes from the realization that the banking sector is now more digitalized more than ever. With this in mind, customer engagement has evolved over the years with the introduction of mobile banking sector and customer's experiences on mobile banking application can easily translate to loyalty or can just as easily ruin a bank's reputation through bad reviews (Shankar, 2022). There is a growing body of literature that supported the application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in similar studies (Alalwan, 2020, Hall, 2022; Thong,

2024). This current aims to develop marketing model that levelages technology to enhance customer engagement, therefore, the TAM provides a framework to show how this developed model is feasible as well as how the research can design it in a way that it is useful and easy to use or implement to be adpted in the banking sector in Zimbabwe.

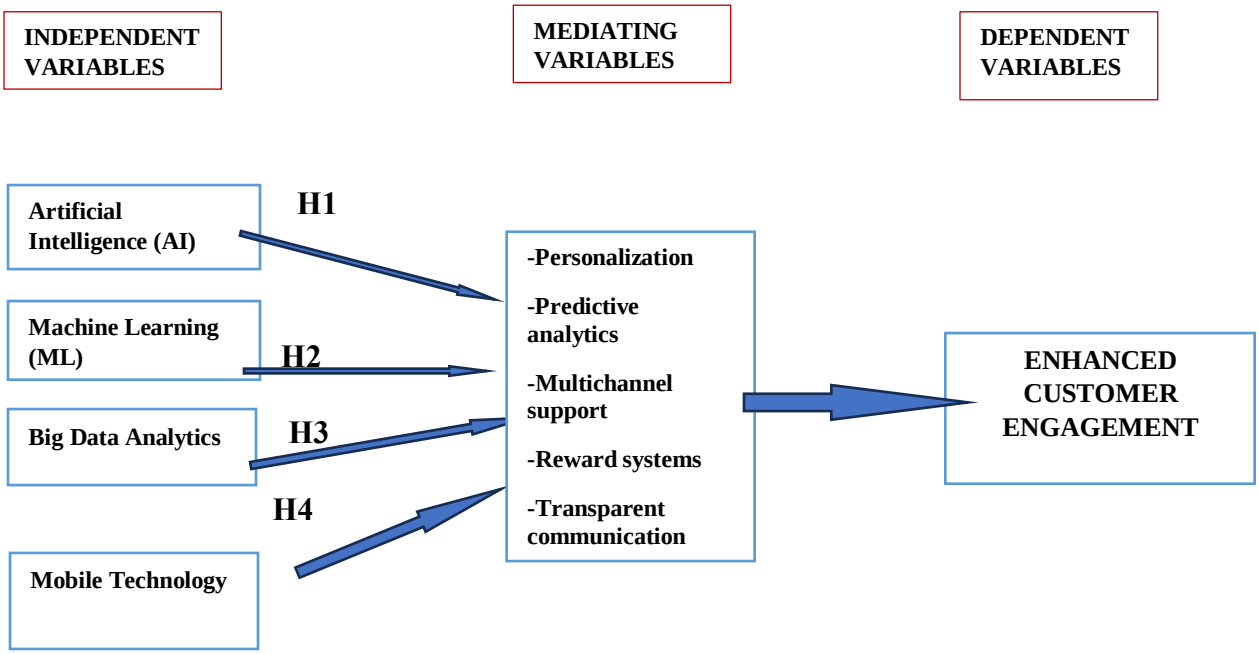
2.3.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The current study proposed conceptual model adopted from Arora and Soni (2021) and is aimed at enhancing customer engagement by leveraging technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Big Data Analysics and Mobile Technology. The model views these seemly distinct elements of technolog**y** as interlinked pillars that collectively that can be very effective in strengthening the bank-customer relationship which enhances customer engagement (Chung, 2020). According to Arora and Soni (2021), in this integrated model:

- ✓ Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are the facets responsible for establishing the analytical foundation of the model enabling personalization, the detection of fraud, and enabling real-time service delivery that appeals to customer and enhancing there engagement thereafter (Arora & Soni, 2021).
- ✓ Big data analytics becomes the source of information gathered from large archives of customer data showing usage behavior, preferences and transactional habits all of which will help banks to design marketing strategies that are evidence-based and surely so, personalized (Chen, 2021; Kiron, 2022).
- ✓ Mobile technology serves element that helps organizations to operationalize the above facets to offer customers a seamless, on-demand access to services, all of which are predictaded to have a positive impact on increasing customer engagement (Singh & Srivastava, 2023; Klaus, 2023).
- ✓ The main focus of the framework is the enhancement customer engagement using the integration of the above technologies. The belief is that these technologies will appeal to emotional, cognitive, and behavioral preferences of the customers leading them to want to engage with the brand more (Brodie, 2021; Vivek, 2021).

2.2.6 Proposal conceptual model

Figure 2.1: Developed model



Source: Author (2025)

Based on the conceptual model on figure 2.1 above the following hypotheses were proposed:

H_1: Artificial Intelligence has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

H_2: Machine Learning has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

H_4: Big Data Analysis has statistically significant a positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

H_5: Mobile Technology has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning customer engagement in the banking sector and reviewed literature across three key areas which are the current strategies aimed at fostering engagement, the effectiveness of existing marketing models, and emerging models that leverage technology to enhance customer experiences. The review established that while traditional strategies such as personalization, loyalty programs, and multichannel service delivery remain relevant in driving customer engagement, they are often limited in scalability and adaptability, particularly in rapidly changing digital environments. Existing marketing models were found to provide useful structures for understanding engagement processes, but they display weaknesses in addressing the dynamic needs of tech-savvy customers and in integrating innovative tools such as artificial intelligence, big data, and blockchain. The next chapter present the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section describes the research methodology employed in the study. In the process, the researcher suggested, explained and justified the research design, research philosophy, approach, target population, sampling techniques and sample size and data collection and analysis instruments as well as procedures. The research addressed reliability and validity for quantitative data and trustworthiness for qualitative data within the scope of the study. It was also necessary to give an outline of ethical considerations relevant to this study.

3.2 Research philosophy

The study followed a pragmatist research philosophy. Research philosophy, according to Nicolas (2024), is the belief and set of assumptions about the development of knowledge. Synonymously, a research philosophy resembles a research paradigm. In Nicolas's (2024) view, a research paradigm constitutes a philosophical framework comprising a set of ideas, beliefs, understanding, and ideologies that efficiently help researchers to structure their study, implementing different theories and practices. Thus, pragmatism enabled the researcher to combine quantitative and qualitative research techniques (Harrison et al., 2024). In this case, the quantitative component of pragmatism focused on the quantification of research variables. According to Handema (2023), a research paradigm dictates the appropriate methods and techniques to use to generate acceptable knowledge supported by philosophy. Pragmatism was suitable for the study as according to Kombo and Tromp (2022), it has always been useful for establishing the cause and effect relationship. In line with the pragmatist paradigm, the researcher adopted the effect study set to examine a working model towards increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company. The researcher studied phenomenon in its natural, social setting, physically interacting with all participants.

In the case of this research, pragmatism aimed to provide a holistic description that illuminated the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Harrison et al. (2024), pragmatic structures ensure the research is manageable, rigorous, credible and applicable. The methods used under this paradigm provided for answering research questions fully. Pragmatism was also concerned with the research meeting the three objectives. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) argued that the pragmatist paradigm focuses on whether the researcher achieves what they

want to know regardless of the data or methodology being qualitative or quantitative. The philosophy draws from positivism and interpretive epistemologies based on the criteria of fitness for purpose and applicability (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). It promoted methodologies and practices that answered research questions, as they remained the best approaches to the investigation. Moreover, the researcher chose freely when to apply quantitative or qualitative methods, when to use structured questionnaires or semi-structured interview guide for the purpose of data collection. Guided by the systems theory, the researcher adopted pragmatism bearing in mind its flexibility in triangulating qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

3.3 Research Paradigm

This mixed-method study was grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm, which was chosen for its emphasis on understanding the meaning and interpretation of experiences and phenomena from the participants' perspective. Interpretivism acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is derived from the interactions and experiences of individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 2020). This paradigm was deemed suitable for this study as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions, enabling the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon (Hall, 2022). Thus, by adopting an interpretivist approach, the study was able to uncover rich, contextual data that provided insight into the participants' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The interpretivist paradigm's focus on subjective interpretation and contextual understanding made it an ideal fit for this mixed-method study, which sought to explore phenomena in a holistic and nuanced manner.

3.4 Research approach

The mixed methods approach was adopted in this study following its consistency with pragmatism (Handema et al., 2023; Malhotra, 2024; Kombo & Tromp, 2022; Creswell & Clark, 2018). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) noted the relevance of mixed methods approach in studies in which reality is neither Qualitative nor Quantitative but rather mixed. Hence, it involved triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data and research methods including research strategies (deductive logic, inductive, and abductive reasoning). The approach aligns well with the objectives of this study given its interactive nature drawing from distinct methods, data, and analysis techniques amongst many others. Additionally, the approach remained anchored in the research’s purpose and

questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Specifically, the researcher explored the problem from both Qualitative nor Quantitative research methods. Essentially, the approach minimised the limitations of relying on either one of the two approaches. Hence, the combination maximised the researcher's understanding of the study variables.

The approach had the ability to combine data types, numerical and qualitative data, in answering research questions and allowed for the conversion of data from one data type to another (between Qualitative and Quantitative). In addition, the approach was strategic in answering the what (Quantitative) and why or how (Qualitative) research questions. This approach was of great importance since the researcher intended to understand the different explanations to the study phenomenon. The method of research was also important in that it enabled the collection, analysis and interpretation of both data in a single study (Kombo & Tromp, 2022). In support, Handema et al. (2023) submitted that the mixed-methods approach increases the breadth and depth of understanding of social phenomenon through the complementary use of both Qualitative and Quantitative methodologies in research. In congruency with other researchers (Handema et al. 2023; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Kombo & Tromp, 2022), Mumba and Alici (2021) stressed on the benefits of the mixed-methods approach which have been accommodative of different methodologies in the current study because of its interactive nature. With this understanding, the researcher comfortably examined a working model towards increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company from both subjective and objective perspectives. Thus, the researcher trusted the mixed-methods approach for the current study following its strength in providing a more practical and holistic solution to real life problems.

Triangulation of multiple research tools and techniques (systems theory) surmounts a singular Qualitative or Quantitative based study (Handema,et al., 2023). Drawing from these unique features of the mixed-methods approach, the researcher found the approach to be the best in providing more meaningful and complete results from wide consultation. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), the mixed-methods approach assumes different designs namely: sequential explanatory, sequential exploratory, sequential transformative, concurrent triangulation (parallel), concurrent nested and concurrent transformative. This study adopts the parallel mixed designs. The purpose of using concurrent triangulation (parallel) design in the mixed-methods

approach is for confirmation. In other words, the design becomes handy when the researcher wants to confirm whether the result obtained using different tools is the same or differs. It agreed with the use of interviews to confirm results obtained from questionnaire items.

Mixed methods approach was also advantageous in that it increased the accuracy of data through confirmation, provided a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study, enabled the researcher to develop the analysis and build on the original data, and even aid sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Thus, the mixed-methods approach was necessary to uncover information and perspective, increased corroboration of the data, and rendered less biased, and more accurate conclusions. Furthermore, several articles reviewed in the course of this study went through single line designs, that is, either Qualitative or Quantitative. This left, in literature, particularly in the local, a methodological gap in which the use of the mixed-methods approach remained very thin. The current study, therefore, sought to close this gap by extensively employing mixed methods approach and its related designs (Qualitative and Quantitative). Triangulation of designs agree very well with the principles of the systems theory.

3.5 Research design

The research design is a critical component of any research. In other words, it is a blueprint of the research process (Nicholas, 2024). That is, a plan and procedure for research that spans the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2024). Three components of the research design are the research paradigm, research approach, and research strategy. The research outlined each of the components in the sections that follow.

The study employed the concurrent triangulation design. The design was suitable for a mixed method research. Procedurally, the study considered triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. In other words, the approach enabled concurrently or simultaneously, collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. This approach was useful for an in-depth understanding of phenomenon under study though it presents low flexibility and learning potential regarding the results obtained by the individual execution of each one of the methodologies (Almeida, 2018). In line with Almeida's (2018) recommendation, the design enabled separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data that, however, were combined at some stage in the process. Furthermore, the design was suitable for cross-validating and confirming

findings from the single study. Additionally, Rudhumbu (2023) noted that both quantitative and, qualitative data could be integrated during data collection, analysis, interpretation, or in the combination of these strategies. Concurrent triangulation design investigated the extent to which participants gave similar or dissimilar responses on both quantitative and qualitative methods. It, however, required a shorter data treatment time since data collection and analysis could be done concurrently. Hence, the design ensured the collection of a richer pool of valid data with regards to the research objectives.

3.5.1 Research strategy

Premised by pragmatism, and hence, mixed methods approach, the study adopted the case study strategy. More specifically, the explanatory case study guided the whole research. According to Cook and Kamalodeen (2019), case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives (systems theory) of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme, or system in a real-life context. There is adequate justification of the inclusion of the strategy since the current study sought to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe. Moreover, the strategy is consistent with mixed-methods approach in that, it is research-based, inclusive of different methods.

The case study strategy also enabled the researcher to collect detailed information (on the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement, the effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement and the impact of a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company) using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2020). Significantly, the elements of case study strategy further qualifies its relevance in mixed methods research. Cook and Kamalodeen (2019) outlines the five elements as in-depth study, bounded, multiple sources and perspectives, real-life context, and uniqueness relative to other cases. All the elements were in consonants with the demands of the study which required an in-depth understanding of customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing. The case study strategy would be complete with triangulation of three approaches, embedded in it, namely deduction, induction, and abduction (Hall, 2022). The deductive approach enabled triangulation of Qualitative and Quantitaive research elements before feeding into the case study independently (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2019).

The strategy recognises that the behaviour and actions of participants is explained by individual interpretation of the environment in which they exist. Hence, the different views about customer engagement enhancement through data-driven digital marketing as expressed by the different participants following different perspectives. The strategy was therefore best for understanding the current study's research problem.

3.6 Target Population, sampling techniques and sample size

Below is the group of people targeted by the study, the methods used to select participants, and the number of participants included in the research to ensure it was appropriate the research objectives are met.

3.6.1 Target Population

The target population for this study is the banking sector in Zimbabwe, specifically AFC Holdings Company, as it allows for an in-depth examination of digital marketing strategies and their impact on customer engagement (Babbie, 2019). According to Kothari (2021), a target population is a group of individuals or organizations that are relevant to the research problem. The management and employees of AFC Holdings Company were selected as the study population due to their knowledge and experience in the company's digital marketing practices, enabling the researcher to gather rich and detailed data (Saunders et al., 2020). Thus, by focusing on this specific population, the study aims to gather valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in digital marketing in the Zimbabwean banking sector, ultimately informing the development of a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing. This approach enabled the researcher to explore the complexities of digital marketing in the banking sector and develop practical recommendations for improvement (Sekaran, 2003). The selection of the banking sector in Zimbabwe as the target population is justified by the research's objective to develop a working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing in this specific industry. The banking sector is a critical component of Zimbabwe's economy, and understanding the challenges and opportunities in this sector is essential for developing effective digital marketing strategies.

3.6.2 Sampling and sample size

According to Rudhumbu (2023), mixed methods approach sampling requires a sound understanding and acknowledgement of the sampling strategies that occur in the quantitative and

qualitative researches. These include non-probability and probability sampling techniques. Stratified purposive sampling (non-probability) method followed by simple random sampling (probability sampling) were employed in coming up with a study sample to gather qualitative data from the research participants. The qualitative sample comprised fifteen (15) participants where ten (10) managers and employees at AFC Holdings Company were primary participants and five (5) were Key Informants. Similarly, the same procedure was followed in coming up with participants for the collection of quantitative data.

Thereafter, Solvin's Formula was effected on the population to determine a sample size representative of the population. Initially, the composite sample had one hundred and seventy-three (173) units. In the view of the researcher, this number was large enough (Wlliams, 2024) a sample size to allow for generalisation of findings. Another reason for using Solvin's Formula in this study recognised its strength in accuracy (Wlliams, 2024). Furthermore, there was no prior information about any statistics for the population, a situation that agreed with the adoption of the formula. Ryan (2020) recommended the use of the formula where the researcher knows nothing about their population. However, Williams (2024) noted that the formula could be used provided the population size, N, is known beforehand, and the margin of error, e, could be estimated if it would have not been stated. Williams (2024) points out that Solvin's Formula calculates the minimum sample size needed to estimate a statistic based on an acceptable margin of error, also known as confidence interval.

Moreover, the margin of error represents the upper limit of the extent to which survey results, based on the sample size for the survey, can differ from the actual truth of the population size. In other words, a margin of error represents the confidence with which the researcher trusts their sample size for a survey to reflect the opinions of the population size. According to Williams (2024), any researcher can decide the value of e, with an acceptable range of 4% to 8% inclusive for meaningful results. The current study used $e = 0.05$. It could be argued, however, that since the margin of error is intuitively about the extent to which a survey is detailed, the higher it is allowed to be, the smaller the sample size for the survey. The population was estimated to be 300. Having understood that where the number of participants is constrained, once the margin of error increases, even with the slightest shift, the sample size reduces, the researcher therefore, kept the value of this error almost minimum. Hence, the determination of the sample size follows below.

Applying Solvin's (1960) Formula,

$\boldsymbol{n = \frac{N}{(1+Ne2)}}$, where, n = the sample size and e = 0.05, which is 5%.

Williams (2024) contends that a sample size should be representative of the target population, making sure that it is not too small. Instead of studying the entire population which is practically impossible, a sample size would be best for accurate results. Solvin's (1960) Formula therefore resulted in a sample size:

$$n = \frac{302}{(1+302*0.05*2)} = \mathbf{173}$$

According to Yelkpieri and Namale (2022), stratified random sampling method gives all respondents equal opportunity of taking part in the study. Simple random sampling resulted in the final sample units.

3.7 Data collection methods and research instruments

This study utilized primary data sources to collect original and first-hand information. Primary data refers to original, raw, and unprocessed data collected directly by the researcher from the source, using various methods such as questionnaire surveys and interviews, observations, and experiments (Kumar, 2019).

3.7.1 Data collection methods

The use of primary data provided several advantages, including high accuracy and reliability, relevance and specificity, originality and uniqueness, control over data collection, and up-to-date information (Creswell, 2019; Kumar, 2019). Through the collection of primary data, the researcher was able to obtain authentic and tailored information that addressed the research questions or objectives, ultimately contributing to the existing body of knowledge. The primary data for this study was collected through a combination of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data from a larger sample of participants, allowing for the gathering of standardized and comparable data (Creswell, 2019). The questionnaires consisted of structured questions that were designed to elicit specific information related to the research objectives. In addition to questionnaires, interviews were conducted with a smaller sample of participants to collect qualitative data. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for in-depth and open-ended discussions that provided rich and detailed insights into the research phenomenon (Patton, 2021). The interviews enabled the researcher to clarify ambiguities, and gather more information that might not have been captured through questionnaires alone. The

combination of questionnaires and interviews allowed the allowed the researcher to triangulate the data, increasing the validity and reliability of the findings (Bells, 2022).

3.7.2 Data collection instruments

3.7.2.1 Structured questionnaire

The set of self-developed structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative (Harrison, 2024) data from 173 respondents. Structured questionnaires comprised broad sections with close-ended question items respectively covered in five questions or items each. The responses on the questionnaire were on a five-points scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaires were distributed using an online link to the respondents. The first section sought to gather demographic data of the respondents regarding their gender, age, professional qualifications, period of service as a qualified personnel, period of service in their current job roles at the time of the study. The structured questionnaires collected data on the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement, the effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement and the impact of a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. Feedback from structured questionnaires was confirmed by semi-structured interviews which served as a complementary tool in the survey under concurrent triangulation design (Rudhumbu, 2023). The use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides promoted the involvement of more respondents in data collection. Furthermore, the researcher was able to triangulate the distinct primary data collected.

3.7.2.2 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide which was self-prepared by the researcher was used used as the primary data collection tool. The semi-structured interview guide was complete in three sections. Section A was structured to gather demographic data for the respondents in the following areas; gender, age, professional qualification, period of service and experience. Meanwhile, section B comprised technical information about the impact of data driven marketing on customer engagement in the banking sector. The main areas covered were the facets of data driven marketing. In this section each categories comprised three questions. Section C comprised general follow-up questions on challenges in the implementation of the data driven marketing model and the strategies to enhance its effectiveness. The interview guide questions were set to be completed within one (1) hour.

3.7.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection procedures refer to the systematic and structured methods used to gather and record data in a research study, ensuring accuracy, reliability, and relevance to the research question or objective (Creswell, 2019). These procedures involve instrument development, participant selection, data collection, data recording, and data storage, all of which are crucial for ensuring the quality and integrity of the data, ultimately affecting the validity and reliability of the research findings (Kumar, 2019).

3.7.3.1 Questionnaire Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure for the questionnaire involved several steps to ensure efficient and effective distribution. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, permission was obtained from AFC Holdings Company, the organization in which the study was conducted, as well as from the from Bindura University, the institution overseeing the research. With the necessary permissions in place, the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire was created online using Kobotoolbox, a digital data collection platform, and the link was shared with the consultants. For participants who did not have reliable internet access, the researcher utilized KoboCollect, an offline extension of Kobotoolbox, to collect data. This approach ensured that all participants had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire, regardless of their internet connectivity. Therefore, by leveraging technology the researcher was able to efficiently distribute the questionnaire and collect data from the desired population. The responses generated were automatically converted into an Excel document format and the researcher downloaded the file and used it for analysis.

3.6.3.2 Semi Structure Interviews

The procedure for data collection via semi-structured interviews involved several steps to ensure that the data was collected in a systematic and rigorous manner. The guide was designed to be flexible, allowing for follow-up questions and probing for additional information (Bells, 2022). The participants for the semi-structured interviews were selected based on their expertise and experience in the field. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a private setting and in-person. The researcher took interview notes during the interviews with the participant's consent, to ensure accuracy and facilitate transcription. During the interview, the researcher followed the semi-structured interview guide, asking open-ended questions and probing for additional information as needed. The

transcript was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, coding, and categorizing themes and patterns in the data. Therefore, by following this procedure, the researcher was able to collect rich, detailed data via semi-structured interviews, which provided valuable insights into the research problem.

3.8 Data Presentation and analysis procedures

3.8.1 Analysis of quantitative data

Data analysis is the process of systematically examining, cleaning, and decomposing data to extract meaningful insights and patterns, ultimately facilitating a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. In this study, the data collected through questionnaires was subjected to rigorous analysis using specialized software, including SPSS version 25, SPSS AMOS (Statistical Package), Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft Word. To ensure data quality and accuracy, the data will be manually cleaned to detect and correct any errors, inconsistencies, or missing values. Following data cleaning, the demographics of the study participants will be evaluated, including marital status, gender, age, and other relevant characteristics, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sample's composition. Additionally, the study's critical variables, including the impact data driven marketing on customer engagement, were thoroughly investigated using path analysis. A structural model was generated to test the research hypotheses through correlation and regression weights. These analyses enabled the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and trends in the data, ultimately providing valuable evident to answer the research questions and objectives. Furthermore, the use of SPSS AMOS facilitate the application of advanced statistical techniques, such as factor analysis and structural equation modeling, to examine the relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses. Quantitative data was presented in forms of pie charts, graphs, figures and tables.

3.4.2.2 Analysis of qualitative data

This study employed thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews, aiming to uncover underlying themes and patterns in the textual data (Marshall & Rossman, 2021). Thematic analysis involves identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns and themes within the data to derive meaningful insights (Gibson & Brown, 2019). This approach was chosen to explore the research objectives. The analysis process entailed organizing and interpreting descriptive data, coding and labeling it to identify emerging patterns and themes.

This iterative process allowed for an understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis provided a systematic and rigorous approach, enabling the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships that may not be immediately apparent (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Thus, by using this methodology, the researcher was able to move beyond surface-level descriptions and uncover deeper meanings and implications. The findings were presented in the form of themes and sub-themes, offering a rich and detailed understanding of the subject matter and contributing meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the research topic, providing valuable insights for stakeholders and policymakers. Ultimately, the thematic analysis enabled the researcher to distil the data into actionable findings, informing future research and practice.

3.9 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity tested the trustworthiness of quantitative data. Wu and Lin (2022) define reliability as the degree to which scores obtained with an instrument are consistent measures of whatever the instrument is measuring. This implies that the reliability of an instrument conform to the degree to which the collected data can be interpreted consistently across different situations. Similarly, validity of measurement procedure conform to the degree to which the measurement process measures the variable that it claims to measure (Wu & Lin, 2022). Thus, it refers to the truth of the test in relation to what it is supposed to evaluate. More specifically, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (statistical technique), in this study pointed to internal consistency reliability (Said, Badru and Shahid, 2020). It accommodated various instruments that are used to measure validity and reliability. Confirmatory Factor Analysis is a particular form of factor analysis, most commonly used in social research (Costa and Sarmento, 2024). In this study confirmed the number of factors or constructs, and the loadings of observed or indicator variables conforming to expected theory basis. Thus, to reach the confirmation and accurately perceive the representation of the constructs by the observed variables, it is indeed necessary to evaluate the reliability and validity of the scale. Hence, the computation of Cronbach's Alpha (α) that according to Costa and Sarmento (2024) refer to commonly accepted rule for describing internal consistency. The rule observes measurements from, 0 to 0.49, 0.50 to 0.59, 0.60 to 0.69, 0.70 to 0.79, 0.80 to 0.89 and 0.90 to 1.00 as unacceptable, poor, questionable, acceptable, good and excellent respectively. Internal consistency of Cronbach's Alpha (α) measures the degree to which the items in an array of data correlate.

3.10 Data trustworthiness

This study ensured the trustworthiness of qualitative data through four constructs namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2020; Van Bodegraven, 2022). To establish credibility, the researcher engaged participants in reviewing preliminary analysis, which ensured a concrete position regarding the interpretation of their experiences and established confidence in the truth of the study results from the participants' perspective (Mandukwini, 2023). Additionally, data collection continued until saturation was reached, with participants starting to report similar experiences, further increasing the credibility of the qualitative data. Prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, and checking interpretations against raw data also contributed to the credibility of the findings (Maimela, 2024). Transferability was achieved through maximum variation in participant selection, allowing for a wider range of perspectives and experiences, and providing detailed research context, enabling readers to judge the possibility of transferring results to different contexts (Mandukwini, 2022). Dependability was ensured through accurate recording of data using handwritten notes, complemented by tables summarizing and storing information from questionnaires (Maimela, 2023). Furthermore, reflexivity and audit trails were employed to improve the reliability of qualitative data, with the researcher maintaining a journal to document the research process and procedure. Objectivity was confirmed through reflexivity, involving self-reflection to identify personal biases and assumptions that could influence data interpretation, and triangulation of multiple data sources and instruments, including administrators and facilitators, interviews, and questionnaires (Maimela, 2023). Therefore, by employing these strategies, the study aimed to increase the trustworthiness and reliability of its findings.

3.11 Ethical considerations

This researcher identified confidentiality, anonymity and consent to participation as important to the success of this study. For fieldwork, ahead of data collection, ethical consideration was satisfied by obtaining permission from the AFC Holding Company and an ethics package from Bindura University. The process continued, involving the research participants.

3.11.1 Confidentiality

The researcher ensured confidentiality by keeping participants' contributions strictly for academic purposes and maintaining anonymity, as recommended by Maimela (2023). To uphold

confidentiality, the researcher did not disclose any information that could identify individual participants or enable them to be traced (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Participants provided informed consent by signing forms that outlined the study's purpose and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality (Van Bodegraven, 2023). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, only the researcher had access to confidential information, ensuring that the connection between participants and their responses remained private and not publicly known (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Thus, by taking these measures, the researcher prioritized participants' confidentiality and maintained the trust necessary for meaningful research..

3.11.2 Anonymity

The researcher ensured total and complete anonymity by making sure that questionnaires only contained pseudo names instead of real names and codes for participants' names. In addition, password-protected files served to secure data during collection, storage and analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Mandukwini, 2022). This had the effect of keeping the information on individuals separate from access to them. Furthermore, questionnaires carried the same question items for all participants to assure anonymity (Maimela, 2023).

3.11.3 Voluntary participation

Participation was on voluntary basis. Consequently, the researcher informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study and behave accordingly regardless of the stage in the process (Maimela, 2023). However, in order to promote participation, the researcher indicated to participants that they were randomly selected (Van Bodegraven, 2023) and that the success of the study would depend on their support. Furthermore, participants were advised at the start of data collection that they would not receive any benefit outside free access to findings of the study in addition to accreditation for participation. Furthermore, participants completed consent forms prior to their involvement in responding to research instruments (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

3.12 Chapter summary

The chapter focused broadly on research methodology. It was structured to cover the following elements of a research-design (concurrent triangulation); philosophy (pragmatism paradigm), approach (mixed method), population and sampling, data collection and analysis procedures, data rigour and trustworthiness, and lastly, ethical considerations. A unit sample of size 173 was deduced from a target population of 302 a using Solvin's (1960) formula. Subsequently, collection

of quantitative data from 173 facilitators relied upon structured questionnaires whilst gathering of qualitative data using a semi-structured interview guide followed. The SPSS AMOS software was trusted for the computation of correlation and multiple regression path analysis. On the other hand, thematic analysis was preferred for the analysis of qualitative data. The next chapter presents the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This section presents the analysis of the findings of this study. It presents and discusses the finding in line with the main research objectives therefore it presents the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement, the effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement and the impact of a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

4.1 Response rate analysis

14 interviews were administered at AFC Holding Company and 12 were returned giving a response rate of 87% as shown on table 4.1 below.

Table 1 Response rate Interview guide

Category	No administered	Responded	Response rate (%)
Managers	2	2	100
Consultants	2	2	100
Employees	10	8	80
Total	**14**	**12**	**87**

Source: Survey data (2025)

The response rate for the interview guide was exceptionally high, with an overall rate of 87%. A detailed breakdown of the response rates reveals that both managers who were administered the interview responded, resulting in a 100% response rate from this group. Similarly, the consultant who was administered the interview also responded, yielding a 100% response rate. Among the employees, 8 out of 10 responded, resulting in a response rate of 80%. This high level of participation suggests that the interview guide was well-received and that the participants were engaged and willing to provide their insights. The strong response rate lends credibility to the findings and suggests that the results are representative of the views and experiences of the participants.

Table 2: Questionnaire Response rate

Category	Distributed	Returned	Response rate (%)
Managers	4	4	100
Consultants	40	40	100
Employees	100	92	92
Total	**144**	**136**	**94**

Source: Survey data (2024). (n =144)

As shown on Table 4.1 above study achieved a remarkable response rate of 94%, with 75 out of 80 questionnaires returned. This high response rate was consistent across the different groups, with 100% response rate from managers (4/4), 100% from consultants (40/40), and 92% from employees (92/100). The implication of this high response rate is that it increases confidence in the results, reduces the risk of non-response bias, and enhances the generalizability of the findings. With such a high response rate, we can be more certain that the results are representative of the population, which in turn supports the validity of the findings and provides a solid foundation for drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

4.2 RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

This research was conducted among 173 respondents. In line with the argument posed by Bryman and Bell (2020) on the need to have an extensive understanding of the socio-demographic attributes among the respondents, the study considered three main demographic attributes, that is, the age of the respondents as well as their gender, level of education and experience as shown on table 3 below.

Table 3: Sample characteristics

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	95	55.0
	Female	78	45.0
	Total	**173**	**100**
Age	20-30	35	20.0
	31-40	67	40.0
	41-50	53	30.0
	Above 50	18	10.0
	Total	**173**	**100**

Level of education	Diploma in Education	44	25.0
	Degree in Education	76	45.0
	Master's Degree	35	20.0
	PhD in Education	18	10.0
	Total	**173**	**100**
Years of experience	Less than 2	9	5.0
	2 to 4 years	32	19.0
	4-6 years	35	21.0
	6 to 8 years	50	30.0
	8 to 10 years	26	15.0
	More than 10 years	18	10.0
	Total	**173**	**100**

Source: Survey data (2025) (n =173)

Table 3 above presents the gender distribution of participants in the study which provided valuable insights into the characteristics of the respondents and the potential implications to their responses. In terms of gender, the sample demonstrated a relatively balanced representation of males and females, with 55% males and 45% females. This balance suggests that the responses are likely to be representative of both male and female perspectives on the research enquiry.

The age distribution of the participants shows a significant proportion (40%) of respondents in the 31-40 age range, followed by 30% in the 41-50 age range. This suggests that the sample is comprised of experienced participants who have likely been in the profession for several years. The implications of this are that the responses may be influenced by the participants accumulated experience and perspectives.

The level of education of the participants is also noteworthy, with 45% holding a Degree in Education, 25% holding a Diploma in Education, and 20% holding a Master's degree or higher in Banking and finance. This suggests that the sample is comprised of well-educated professionals who are likely to have a better understanding of the research problem. The implications of this are that the responses may be informed by a strong foundation in educational theory and research.

Working experience is also an important demographic variable, with 30% of respondents having 6-8 years of experience, followed by 20% with 2-4 years of experience, and 20% with 4-6 years of experience. This suggests that the sample is comprised of participants with a range of experience levels, from relatively new employees to more seasoned seniors. The implications of this are that the responses may reflect a range of perspectives on the research problem.

4.2.1 Reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire as illustrated in table 1 below is the calculated reliability coefficient of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency reliability with a value >.70 considered a minimum measure of internal consistency (Narvil & Rernstem, 2023). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for this study. The questionnaire has a reliability coefficient because all values lied between (0.852–0.871). This reliability demonstrates an excellent level of internal consistence which means that the questionnaire will yield the same results repeatedly if administered under the same conditions. The results are presented on table 4 below.

Table 4: Crobach's alpha

Variable	Number of scales	Crobach's alpha
Personalized Experiences	5	0.852
Predictive Analytics	5	0.804
Multichannel Support	5	0.862
Rewards and Partnerships	5	0.871
Trust and Communication	5	0.853
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	5	0.811
Machine Learning (ML)	5	0.842
Big Data Analytics	5	0.831
Mobile Technology	5	0.827

Source: Survey data (2025)

4.3 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results computed in line with the methodology to achieve the research objectives which were to explore the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement,

to evaluate the effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement and to develop a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. This section presents findings on these objectives.

4.3.1 The current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

Objective 1 sought to identify the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. Table 5 below presents the descriptive statistics of the obtained mean scores and standard deviations.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personalized Experiences	4.11	1.291
Predictive Analytics	5.43	1.512
Multichannel Support	4.70	1.378
Rewards and Partnerships	5.27	1.785
Trust and Communication	4.92	1.245

Source: Survey data (2025) (n =173)

As shown on table 5 above the mean scores of between 4.12 and 5.43 and a small standard deviations between 1.245 and 1.785 meaning that responses were clustered around the mean, this indicates that personalized experiences, predictive analytics, multichannel support, rewards and partnerships, and trust and communication are the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. This suggests that these factors have a strong and consistent influence on enhancing customer engagement within the organization. The high mean scores reflect respondents' agreement that these strategies are effectively implemented and positively perceived by customers, while the low standard deviations imply minimal variation in opinions across participants. This suggests that AFC Holding Company has successfully aligned its customer engagement initiatives, such as personalization, predictive analytics, and trust-building measures, with client expectations, in an endeavor to foster loyalty, satisfaction, and sustained customer engagement.

These findings were supported by the qualitative results which also indicated that AFC Holding Company employs a comprehensive approach to customer engagement. The interviews showed that personalized experiences are central to this strategy, with the organization leveraging customer data and individual preferences to tailor interactions, services, and communications, ensuring that clients feel recognized and valued. Predictive analytics were reported to further enhances engagement by enabling the company to anticipate customer needs, forecast preferences, and optimize offerings based on data-driven insights. Multichannel support was reported to ensure accessibility and convenience, allowing clients to engage seamlessly through digital and physical platforms such as social media, WhatsApp, email, and in-branch services. Additionally, participants reported that rewards and strategic partnerships are employed to sustain loyalty and provide added value, reinforcing ongoing relationships and repeat interactions. Trust and communication underpin these strategies, with an emphasis on transparency, honesty, and consistent messaging that strengthens client confidence and long-term relational ties. Collectively, these strategies reflect a deliberate, customer-centered approach aimed at maximizing engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty. The results from these sub-themes are presented below:

4.3.1.1 Personalized Experiences

Findings from the study reveal that AFC Holding Company actively employs personalized experiences as a key customer engagement strategy. The responses indicate that the organization leverages customer data and individual preferences to tailor interactions, services, and communication. This personalization allows the company to address diverse customer needs in a more targeted and relational manner, reflecting an intentional approach to customer-centered engagement.

> Participant 1: *"We make an effort to tailor our communication and product offers based on the client's profile and previous interactions."*
>
> Participant 2: *"Each customer segment receives customized updates and solutions that match their specific financial needs."*
>
> Participant 3: *"Our relationship managers use customer data to personalize services, ensuring clients feel recognized and valued."*

4.3.1.2 Predictive Analytics

The data also shows that predictive analytics is being used at AFC Holding Company to enhance understanding of customer behavior and inform engagement strategies. Participants indicated that the company utilizes data-driven insights to anticipate client needs, forecast preferences, and optimize marketing initiatives. This approach allows the organization to proactively align its offerings with emerging customer trends.

> Participant 3: *"We rely on data models to anticipate customer preferences and recommend suitable financial products."*
>
> Participant 4: *"Analytics tools help us forecast client behavior, enabling us to plan targeted engagement campaigns."*
>
> Participant 5: *"Customer data is analyzed continuously to predict demand patterns and inform service improvements."*

4.3.1.3 Multichannel Support

Evidence from the findings suggests that AFC Holding Company employs multichannel support to ensure accessibility and convenience in customer interactions. The company engages clients through several touchpoints, both digital and physical, to maintain seamless communication. This multichannel approach enhances customer connectivity and ensures that engagement opportunities are not limited to one platform.

> Participant 6: *"Customers can reach us through multiple platforms such as social media, WhatsApp, email, and in-branch visits."*
>
> Participant 7: *"We have integrated our service channels to ensure seamless interaction regardless of the medium used."*
>
> Participant 8: *"Our clients have access to support through both physical and digital channels, depending on their convenience."*

4.3.1.4 Rewards and Partnerships

The findings further reveal that AFC Holding Company employs rewards and partnerships as part of its customer engagement strategies. Respondents highlighted the presence of loyalty initiatives and collaborations with other organizations, which are designed to create mutual value for

customers. These strategies are used to sustain ongoing relationships and encourage repeat interactions with the company.

Participant 9: *"We offer loyalty programs that recognize and reward consistent customer engagement."*

Participant 10: *"Strategic partnerships with other service providers allow clients to enjoy additional benefits."*

Participant 11: *"Our collaboration with various organizations brings value-added services that keep customers connected to our brand."*

4.3.1.5 Trust and Communication

Trust and communication emerged as central themes in the company's engagement strategy. The findings show that AFC Holding Company places emphasis on transparent, honest, and consistent communication with clients. This fosters long-term relationships based on reliability and credibility, reinforcing the company's image as a trustworthy financial institution.

Participant 12: *"We maintain open communication with clients through regular updates and transparent processes."*

Participant 13: *"Our policy emphasizes honesty and consistency in all customer interactions."*

Participant 14: *"Building trust with clients is central to our engagement efforts, hence we prioritize timely feedback and clear messaging."*

Table 5.1: Summary of Themes, Frequencies, and Supporting Verbatims

Theme	Frequency (No. of Participants)	Strength of Recurrence	Representative Verbatims (Summarized)
Personalized Experiences	3 participants	Strong recurrence across multiple roles; shows consistent commitment to customer-tailored interaction	• Tailoring communication based on customer profile • Customized updates for customer segments • Personalized services using customer data
Predictive Analytics	3 participants	Repeated emphasis on data-driven forecasting and behavioural insights	• Use of data models to anticipate customer preferences • Forecasting client behaviour for targeted campaigns • Predicting demand to improve services

Multichannel Support	3 participants	Consistent references to digital–physical integration and accessibility	• Access through social media, WhatsApp, email, branches • Integrated channels for seamless interaction • Customers can choose convenient support channels
Rewards and Partnerships	3 participants	Recurring emphasis on loyalty and collaborative value creation	• Loyalty programs rewarding engagement • Partnerships offering extra benefits • Value-added services through collaborations
Trust and Communication	3 participants	Clear consensus on transparency, honesty, and consistent communication as foundational	• Open communication via regular updates • Honesty and consistency emphasized in policy • Prioritizing timely feedback and clear messaging

The responses show a balanced and consistent pattern of theme recurrence, with each theme appearing three times indicating that these five strategies are widely recognized and embedded within AFC Holding Company's customer engagement framework. Themes that recur in multiple responses demonstrate shared organizational practices rather than isolated viewpoints, thus confirming their central importance to the company's engagement operations.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge to present a coherent picture: the survey's high mean scores (4.12-5.43) and low standard deviations (1.245-1.785) indicate broad agreement among respondents that AFC Holding Company is currently employing a set of interrelated digital and relational strategies, and the verbatim responses provide concrete, practice-level evidence of how those strategies are operationalized. In other words, the numbers show consensus about *what* is being done (personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel support, rewards/partnerships, trust and communication), and the interview results illustrate *how* these actions are implemented in daily operations (tailored communications, use of data models, multiple contact platforms, loyalty schemes, and regular transparent updates). This pattern aligns with recent literature linking bank digitization to deliberate engagement practices. Studies show that financial institutions now combine data-driven tools and multichannel interfaces to sustain customer contact and product adoption (Kowsar et al., 2025; Mohiuddin, Islam & Kowsar, 2025). Similarly, AI-enabled personalization helps segment customers and deliver tailored recommendations, reflecting AFC's

predictive analytics and personalization strategies (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2025; Oyeniyi, Ugochukwu & Mhlongo, 2024). The emphasis on multichannel support and digital touchpoints mirrors findings that integrated platforms and social media are key to continuous engagement (Febrianto & Maulida, 2025; Sakas, Giannakopoulos & Trivellas, 2024). Likewise, rewards, partnerships, and transparent communication resonate with studies identifying loyalty programs, collaboration, and trust as drivers of customer engagement and retention (Mehta & Handriana, 2024; Saral, Salehzadeh & Mirmehdi, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). Regional evidence from Zimbabwe also supports these findings, showing that banks integrate digital tools with relationship management to sustain client connections during digital transformation (Kaondera et al., 2023; Masinire, Dzimba & van der Poll, 2023). Overall, the mixed-methods results confirm that AFC Holding Company exemplifies the modern digitization, engagement model theorized in contemporary banking literature.

4.3.2 The effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

Regrssion analysis was run under the following hypotheses:

H_0: *There is no statistically significant relationship between the existing marketing models and the enhancement of customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.*

H_1: *The existing marketing models have a statistically significant impact on enhancing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.*

A Regression analysis was run to assess the effectiveness of the existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company (Personalization, Predictive Analytics, Multichannel Support, Trust and Communication, and Rewards and Partnerships) in line with objective 2. The regression analysis assesses how much variability in dependent variables can be explained by the independent variable. The results, presented in the tables 6, 7 and 8 below indicate the strength and significance of the association, providing evidence about the extent to which the existing marketing models increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std. of the Estimate
1	. 294[a]	0.317	0.321	0.37532

Source: Survey (2025) n=173

The R-square value of 0.317 indicates that the existing marketing models at AFC Holding Company such as Personalization, Predictive Analytics, Multichannel Support, Trust and Communication, and Rewards and Partnerships account only for 31.7% of the variation in customer engagement. The remaining 68.3% is attributed to other factors ($R^2 = 0.317$; F=2.307, **t**=5.376; $p < 0.05$). The Adjusted R-square value of 0.321 slightly reduces the explanatory power but still suggests a moderate fit. Overall, the model is reasonably robust, supporting its use for generalizing findings on the effectiveness of these variables and the study shows that the existing marketing models are moderately effective in driving customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. This implies that while the current strategies play a significant role in engaging customers, they do not fully capture all the determinants influencing engagement levels. The moderate explanatory power suggests that these models provide a solid foundation but may require enhancement through the integration of additional factors. Therefore, the results indicate that AFC Holding Company's existing marketing models are functional yet incomplete, highlighting the need for continuous refinement and incorporation of emerging engagement drivers to achieve stronger predictive accuracy and deeper customer connection.

Table 7: ANOVA Table: Goodness of Fit Results

Model		**Sum of squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	30.142	1	30.529	2.307	0.000 [b]
	Residual	42.436	171	0.468		
	Total	72.578	173			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement

b. Predictors: Personalization, Predictive Analytics, Multichannel Support, Trust and Communication, and Rewards and Partnerships

Source: Survey (2025) n=173

The obtained Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) result of F = 2.307, p < 0.05 indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant. In other words, the combined influence of the

independent variables, Personalization, Predictive Analytics, Multichannel Support, Trust and Communication, and Rewards and Partnerships, has a significant effect on the dependent variable, customer engagement. The F-value of 2.303 shows the ratio of explained variance to unexplained variance in the model, and since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (that the model has no explanatory power) is rejected. This means that, collectively, these marketing strategies meaningfully predict variations in customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. There was enough evident to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the existing marketing models have a statistically significant impact on enhancing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.However, the relatively low F-value suggests that while the model is significant, its predictive strength is moderate, implying that other unexamined factors may also contribute to customer engagement.

Table 8: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.342	0.068	—	5.376	0.001
Personalization	0.413	0.032	0.653	3.435	0.004
Predictive Analytics	0.524	0.041	0.582	2.312	0.006
Multichannel Support	0.368	0.057	0.447	2.165	0.018
Trust and Communication	0.295	0.046	0.392	2.006	0.024
Rewards and Partnerships	0.221	0.049	0.316	1.874	0.036

a. **Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement**

The regression results in Table 8 reveal that all five predictors namely Personalization, Predictive Analytics, Multichannel Support, Trust and Communication, and Rewards and Partnerships—positively influence customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. The constant value (B = 5.342, p = 0.001) indicates the baseline level of customer engagement when all predictors are held

constant. Among the predictors, Personalization ($\beta = 0.653$, $p = 0.004$) and Predictive Analytics ($\beta = 0.582$, $p = 0.006$) exhibit the strongest standardized coefficients, suggesting that personalized services and data-driven customer insights are the most significant contributors to customer engagement. This implies that tailoring customer interactions and leveraging predictive tools to anticipate customer needs are central to AFC Holding Company's engagement strategy.

Multichannel Support ($\beta = 0.447$, $p = 0.018$) also shows a significant positive relationship with customer engagement, underscoring the importance of providing customers with multiple, integrated communication platforms to enhance accessibility and convenience. Similarly, Trust and Communication ($\beta = 0.392$, $p = 0.024$) demonstrates that transparency, consistent messaging, and reliability play vital roles in maintaining long-term customer relationships. Lastly, Rewards and Partnerships ($\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.036$), though the least influential of the predictors, still contributes meaningfully to engagement by reinforcing loyalty through collaborative value propositions and incentive programs.

Overall, these findings suggest that AFC Holding Company's existing marketing models are collectively effective in promoting customer engagement, with a particularly strong impact from personalization and analytics-driven approaches. However, the moderate explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.317$) indicates that other factors beyond these strategies may also influence engagement outcomes and warrant further exploration.

Qualitative findings from participants further corroborate the quantitative results, indicating that AFC Holding Company's customer engagement strategies are generally effective but with moderate overall impact. Respondents acknowledged that personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel support, trust and communication, and rewards and partnerships have strengthened customer relationships and service delivery. However, many noted that gaps remain in the consistency, depth, and technological integration of these strategies. This aligns with the regression findings ($R^2 = 0.317$), which suggest that while the existing models significantly enhance engagement, other unaddressed factors also play a role.

> *Participant 9: "Our bank has made great progress in using data and customer profiling, but the systems are not yet fully integrated across all departments."*

Participant 11: "Personalization works well for our high-value clients, but ordinary customers sometimes get a more generic experience."

Participant 12: "We engage clients on multiple channels, but the feedback loop between digital and in-branch services still needs improvement."

Participant 13: "Trust and communication have improved a lot, yet some customers still complain about slow responses on digital platforms."

Participant 15: "The rewards and partnership programs are appreciated, but they are not frequent enough to keep all customer segments actively engaged."

These sentiments explain why the model's effectiveness is described as moderate rather than high. While the bank's strategies demonstrate measurable success in fostering engagement, the partial integration of digital tools, uneven customer experiences, and limited innovation in loyalty mechanisms reduce the overall impact. This suggests that AFC Holding Company's marketing models form a solid foundation for customer engagement but require continuous enhancement through system alignment, digital responsiveness, and broader inclusivity in order to fully optimize their effectiveness.

Table 9: Summary of emerging themes, frequencies, and supporting verbatims (Including New Data)

Theme	Frequency (No. of Participants)	Strength of Recurrence	Representative Verbatims (Summarized)
Personalization (Strengths & Gaps)	2 participants	Moderate recurrence; personalization exists but is uneven and not fully integrated	• Systems not fully integrated across departments (P9) • High-value clients receive better personalization than ordinary customers (P11)
Data & Systems Integration Challenges *(Linked to Predictive Analytics/Personalization)*	1 participant	Emerging concern; suggests a structural limitation	• Progress in data profiling but integration gaps persist (P9)
Multichannel Engagement Gaps	1 participant	Recurs as a challenge; aligns with earlier multichannel themes	• Feedback loop between digital and in-branch services needs improvement (P12)
Trust & Communication Challenges	1 participant	Reinforces earlier theme; inconsistent digital response times	• Trust improved, but some customers complain

			about slow digital responses (P13)
Rewards & Partnership Limitations	1 participant	Moderate recurrence; programs exist but lack frequency and broad appeal	• Programs appreciated but not frequent enough for all segments (P15)

The synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative findings reveals a coherent picture of customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. Quantitatively, the regression results show that Personalization, Predictive Analytics, Multichannel Support, Trust and Communication, and Rewards and Partnerships significantly contribute to engagement, with an R^2 of 0.317 indicating that these strategies explain about 31.7% of the variation in customer engagement. Qualitatively, respondents confirmed that these strategies are actively employed and positively shape customer interactions, but they also highlighted gaps such as inconsistent integration across channels, limited reach of rewards programs, and variable customer experiences. Together, these findings suggest that while AFC Holding Company's current engagement models are functional and provide a solid foundation, their overall effectiveness is moderate, reflecting both the strengths of the implemented strategies and the presence of additional unaddressed factors that also influence customer engagement outcomes.

These findings at AFC Holding Company aligns with existing literature on banking customer engagement. Personalization and predictive analytics enhance engagement by tailoring services and anticipating needs (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2025; Oyeniyi, Ugochukwu & Mhlongo, 2024), while multichannel support ensures continuous interaction across physical and digital touchpoints (Febrianto & Maulida, 2025; Sakas, Giannakopoulos & Trivellas, 2024). Trust, communication, and rewards programs further support loyalty and engagement (Saral, Salehzadeh & Mirmehdi, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024; Mehta & Handriana, 2024). Local studies in Zimbabwe confirm that digital transformation and CRM-enabled personalization improve engagement but gaps in integration and responsiveness moderate overall effectiveness (Kaondera et al., 2023; Masinire, Dzimba & van der Poll, 2023). Overall, the literature supports the study's finding that AFC Holding Company's strategies are effective yet moderately impactful.

4.3.3 The impact of the model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement AFC Holding Company

4.3.3.1 Structural Model Assessment

A structural equation model generated though AMOS was used to test the relationships between variables. A good-fitting model is accepted if the value of the CMIN/df is <5, the goodness-of-fit (GFI) indices (Hair etal, 2010); the Tucker and Lewis (1973) index (TLI); the Confirmatory fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990) is > 0.90 (Hair et al, 2010). In addition, an adequate-fitting model is accepted if the AMOs computed value of the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) <0.05, and the root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) is between 0.05 and 0.08 and a P-Close value less greater than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2010). The fit indices for the model shown in Table 4.3 below fell within the acceptable range: CMIN/df = 2.262, the goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.945, IFI = 0.881, TLI = 0.827, CFI = 0.958, SRMR = 0.04, and RMSEA = 0.06 and a P-Close = 0.503. The analysis also showed a Chi-Square Minimun (CMIN) of χ^2= 8.47 and the Degree of Freedom (df) was 5.53. these results are presented on table 10 below.

Table 10: Model Fit Measure

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
CMIN	8.467	- -	- -
DF	5.520	- -	- -
CMIN/df	2.192	<5	Excellent fit
CFI	0.945	>0.90	Excellent fit
TLI	0.827	>0.90	Acceptable fit
SRMR	0.041	<0.05	Acceptable fit
RMSEA	0.062	Between 0.05 and 0.08	Excellent fit
P-Close	0.503	>0.05	Close fit

Source: Survey Data (2025) n=173

According to the Table 9 above the structural equation model showed a good-fitting model. The model fitness results suggest that the proposed model has a good fit to the data. According to scholarly views, a good model fit indicates that the theoretical model is consistent with the empirical data, and that the relationships between the constructs are well-supported. Bells (2022)

argue that a good model fit is essential for establishing the validity of the research findings, as it suggests that the model is accurately capturing the underlying relationships between the constructs. Overall, the good model fit provides support for the proposed model and suggests that the relationships between the constructs are well-supported by the data.

Hypothesis Testing

The study was carried based on the following hypotheses:

H1: Artificial Intelligence has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

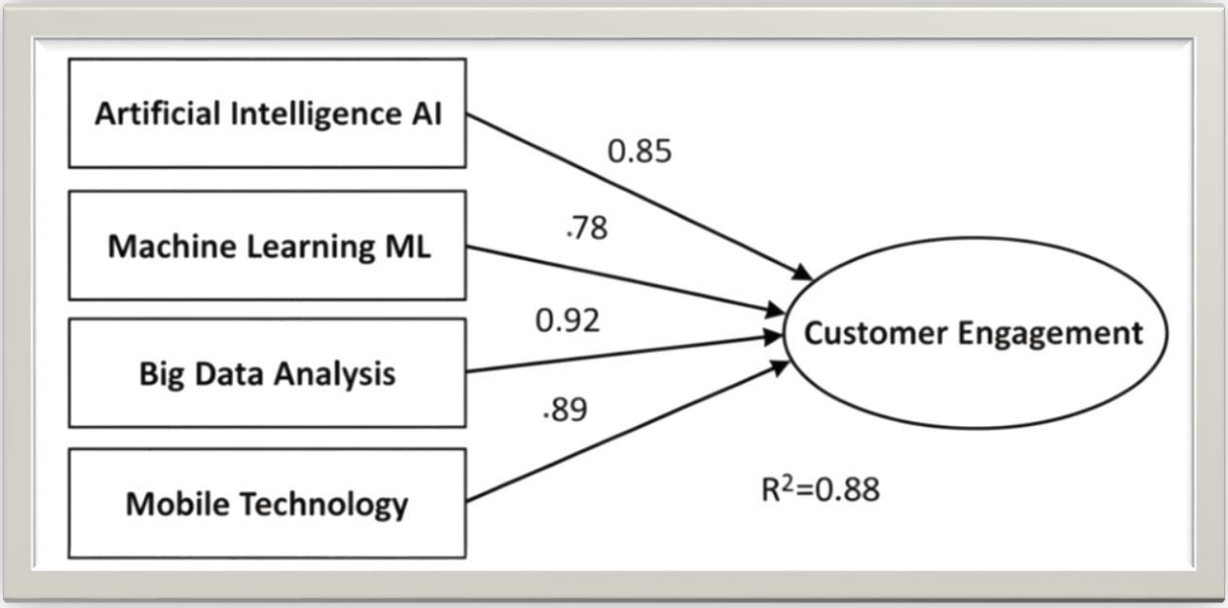
H2: Machine Learning has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

H4: Big Data Analysis has statistically significant a positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

H5: Mobile Technology has a statistically significant positive impact on increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The squared multiple correlation was 0.88 for the impact of the model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement AFC Holding Company, this shows that 88% variance or change in the customer engagement can be explained and is accounted by the adopted technology-driven marketing model including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology. SEM was chosen on the basis that it can simultaneously assess multiple relationships. The results from SEM analysis are shown in Figure 1 and Table 10 below.

Figure 4.1 Structural Model



Source: Survey Data (2025) n=173

The study examined the impact of leveraging technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology, on enhancing customer engagement in the banking sector, specifically at AFC Holding Company. The SPSS AMOS path analysis revealed that the model had a positive and statistically significant effect on customer engagement as shown on table 10 below. Artificial Intelligence demonstrated a strong positive influence (**β** = 0.851, ***t*** = 2.263, p < 0.05), confirming that AI significantly enhances customer engagement, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. Similarly, Machine Learning was found to positively affect customer engagement (**β** = 0.783, ***t*** = 2.467, *p* < 0.05), confirming Hypothesis 2. Big Data Analytics exhibited the highest impact (**β** = 0.924, ***t*** = 3.456, *p* < 0.05), indicating a substantial positive contribution to customer engagement and supporting Hypothesis 3. Mobile Technology also significantly improved customer engagement (**β** = 0.890, ***t*** = 2.542, *p* < 0.05), validating Hypothesis 4. The model now shows an overall $\mathbf{R^2}$=0.88, indicating that 88% of the variance in Customer Engagement is explained by the four technology variables. It demonstrates excellent effectiveness with strong individual paths and high overall explanatory power. These findings indicate that the integration of advanced technological tools in the banking sector plays a critical role in fostering higher levels of customer engagement, with all four technologies

demonstrating statistically significant and meaningful positive effects. Model fit indices and Hypotheses results are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Hypothesis testing: Standardized Regression Weight of the variables (Path Analysis)

Hypothesized relationship	Standardized Estimates (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	0.851	2.263	.003	Accepted
Machine Learning (ML)	0.783	2.467	.000	Accepted
Big Data Analytics	0.924	3.456	.008	Accepted
Mobile Technology	0.890	2.542	.004	Accepted
CMIN/df = 2.192, goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.945, TLI = 0.827, CFI = 0.958, SRMR = 0.04, and RMSEA = 0.06				

Source: Survey Data (2025) n=173

Similarly, the data gathered from interviews indicated that the technology-driven customer engagement model at AFC Holding Company has been highly effective, as reflected in customer experiences. Respondents consistently highlighted that Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled personalized interactions, anticipating their needs and providing timely, relevant recommendations, which enhanced the efficiency of banking transactions. Machine Learning was noted for its ability to adapt services based on individual behaviors, with notifications and offers tailored to customers' financial habits, thereby encouraging more frequent use of digital services. Big Data Analytics contributed to precise and responsive service delivery, leveraging insights from customer activity to inform relevant updates, reminders, and product suggestions. Mobile Technology further enhanced engagement by facilitating convenient, intuitive, and accessible banking from any location, supported by responsive alerts and mobile-based support. Overall, the integration of AI, Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology was perceived as highly effective, creating interactive, personalized, and adaptive experiences that strengthened customer engagement significantly. Participant 5 remarked:

> *"Since the organization introduced AI-driven services, I've noticed that the interactions have become much more personalized. The system seems to anticipate my needs before I even request anything, which makes me feel valued as a customer. The recommendations I*

receive are relevant, and the communication is timely. It's clear that Artificial Intelligence is improving the way I engage with the bank, making transactions and inquiries smoother and more efficient."

Participant 7 said:

"The implementation of Machine Learning has been impressive. Over time, I've seen how the system learns from my previous behaviors and tailors services accordingly. For example, the notifications and offers I get are specifically suited to my financial habits. This shows that the bank is using data intelligently to enhance customer engagement, and it has definitely made me more likely to use their digital services regularly."

Participant 9 added:

"Big Data Analytics has completely transformed the way I experience the bank. The insights derived from my activity and the patterns from other customers seem to inform better service delivery. I now receive updates, reminders, and product suggestions that are extremely relevant to my needs. This level of precision and responsiveness makes me feel that the bank truly understands its customers, and it keeps me engaged consistently."

Participant 11 also remarked:

"Mobile Technology has made banking incredibly convenient for me. I can perform almost every banking activity from my phone, and the system is responsive and intuitive. Alerts, transaction confirmations, and mobile-based customer support make interactions seamless. The technology has definitely improved my engagement with the bank because I can access services anytime, anywhere without having to visit a branch."

The synthesis of findings from both quantitative and qualitative data confirms that the technology-driven customer engagement model at AFC Holding Company is highly effective in enhancing customer engagement. The SPSS AMOS path analysis revealed that Artificial Intelligence ($\beta = 0.851$, $p < 0.05$), Machine Learning ($\boldsymbol{\beta} = 0.783$, $p < 0.05$), Big Data Analytics ($\beta = 0.924$, $p < 0.05$), and Mobile Technology ($\beta = 0.890$, $p < 0.05$) each had strong, statistically significant positive effects on customer engagement, explaining 88% of its variance ($\mathbf{R^2} = 0.88$). These quantitative findings were reinforced by qualitative evidence in which respondents described how AI and ML created more personalized, anticipatory, and adaptive interactions, Big Data Analytics improved relevance and service precision, and Mobile Technology provided convenience and accessibility

that deepened engagement. The results align closely with recent studies by Ashrafuzzaman et al. (2025) and Kumar et al. (2024), which found that AI and ML enhance customer satisfaction and behavioral engagement through personalization and perceived usefulness, while Ezechi et al. (2025) emphasized data analytics as a key driver of improved service quality and customer understanding. Similarly, Garatsa et al. (2025) highlighted the role of technology-driven engagement in reducing customer switching behavior in Zimbabwe's banking sector. The present study extends these findings by showing that Big Data Analytics has the most substantial impact, suggesting that robust data infrastructure and analytics capabilities are central to effective engagement. However, unlike Sakas et al. (2024), who cautioned about customer vulnerability in highly digitalized banking, this study's participants did not express privacy concerns, implying either a high level of trust or limited awareness of associated risks. Overall, the integration of AI, ML, Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology significantly enhances customer engagement through personalization, responsiveness, and accessibility, reinforcing global evidence on technology acceptance in financial services while emphasizing the need for future studies to examine mediating factors such as satisfaction, trust, and data privacy within Zimbabwe's evolving digital banking landscape.

4.4 Chapter Summary

The study found that AFC Holding Company employs a combination of digital and relational strategies to enhance customer engagement, including personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel support, rewards and partnerships, and transparent communication. Quantitative results indicated that these strategies significantly influence engagement, with technology-driven approaches, particularly Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology, explaining 88% of the variance in customer engagement. Qualitative evidence further illustrated how these strategies are operationalized through tailored communications, data-driven decision-making, multiple contact platforms, loyalty schemes, and consistent information sharing. These findings align with contemporary literature emphasizing the role of AI and predictive analytics in delivering personalized, adaptive customer experiences (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2025; Oyeniyi, Ugochukwu & Mhlongo, 2024), the importance of multichannel and digital platforms for sustained engagement (Febrianto & Maulida, 2025; Sakas, Giannakopoulos & Trivellas, 2024), and the value of rewards, partnerships, and trust in driving customer retention (Mehta &

Handriana, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). Regional evidence from Zimbabwe also supports these results, demonstrating that banks integrating digital tools with relationship management can maintain strong client connections during digital transformation (Kaondera et al., 2023; Masinire, Dzimba & van der Poll, 2023). Overall, the study confirms that AFC exemplifies a modern, technology-enhanced engagement model consistent with global and regional banking practices.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations and suggest areas of focus for future research. These were derived from findings of the study based on the research objectives which were to identify the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement, to examine the effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement and to assess the impact of a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

5.2 Summary of findings

5.2.1 The current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

Objective 1 sought to identify the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. The study was able to establish that AFC Holding Company employs both digital and customer relationship marketing strategies to enhance customer engagement. Reflected in the quantitative data were high mean scores (between 4.12 and 5.43) and low standard deviations (1.245 to1.785) and the indicated that there was a string consensus among the respondents the employs personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel support, reward systems, and transparent communication in its marketing models to enhance customer engagement. These results were validated and supported from the qualitative data gathered from the research participants via semi-structured interviews which showed how these strategies are being implemented within the organization. These results were not new to the literature on the studies done within the banking sector in different contexts and they corroborated the findings of Mehta & Handriana (2024), Kowsar et al. (2025) and Ashrafuzzaman et al. (2025). These findings also echoed the finding of the researches by Kaondera et al. (2023) and Masinire et al. (2023) who concluded that the integration of a number of approaches is of paramount significance in maintaining strong client relationships in the banking sector.

5.2.2 The effectiveness of existing marketing models being used to increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.

The study found that AFC Holding Company's current marketing models are moderately effective in driving customer engagement. This was reflected in the quantitative results which showed that the current strategies being used (such as personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel support, trust and communication, and rewards and partnerships significantly influence engagement) explain only about 31.7% of the variation in customer engagement ($R^2 = 0.317$). This was also supported by the qualitative results which revealed that although these models are actively applied and positively shaping customer engagement their effectiveness is limited by uneven integration across communication channels, limited accessibility of rewards programs, and inconsistent service quality. The qualitative explained why the moderate effectiveness of the strategies revealed by quantitative results exists at the studied organization. All in all the results suggested that the current framework is beyond and doubt practically sound and aligned with modern marketing principles but its impact is limited by operational inefficiencies and unaddressed variables that diminish its overall effectiveness.

5.2.3 The impact of the model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement AFC Holding Company

The findings demonstrate that the technology-driven customer engagement model developed in this current study is highly effective in strengthening customer engagement. Quantitative results from SPSS AMOS path analysis showed that Artificial Intelligence ($\beta = 0.851$, $p < 0.05$), Machine Learning ($\beta = 0.783$, $p < 0.05$), Big Data Analytics ($\beta = 0.924$, $p < 0.05$), and Mobile Technology ($\beta = 0.890$, $p < 0.05$) all exerted strong, positive, and statistically significant effects on customer engagement, collectively explaining 88% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.88$). Qualitative evidence corroborated these results, showing that AI and ML enabled more personalized and adaptive interactions, Big Data Analytics enhanced service relevance and decision accuracy, and Mobile Technology offered convenience and real-time accessibility. These results are consistent with recent empirical studies that link advanced technologies to improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement in the banking sector (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2025; Kumar et al., 2024; Ezechi et al., 2025; Garatsa et al., 2025).

5.3 Conclusions

The primary focus of this study was to examine and enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company, below are the conclusions:

The first phase of the study aimed to explore the current strategies aimed at increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. The empirical results reveal that the organization has effectively implement a modern data driven engagement framework. This approach successfully combines digital innovation with relational marketing strategies. By integrating personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel communication, rewards and transparent interaction, AFC Holding Company demonstrates clear alignment with contemporary global practices. This strategic positioning enhances its competitiveness within Zimbabwe financial sector.

The study next aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of existing marketing models being use to increase customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. The assessment concluded that while these existing engagement models are functionally sound and exert a significant influence on customer behavior, their overall effectiveness remains moderate. This capped performance is primarily attributed to operational inconsistencies that hinder the seamless execution of the current marketing frameworks.

To address these operational gaps and maximize impact, the final phase of the study sought to develop a model that leverages technology to enhance customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. The resulting technology -driven engagement model- which integrates Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning (ML), Big Data Analytics, and Mobile technology- proved to be the most critical contribution of this research. Statistical analysis confirmed that this developed model has the strongest impact on enhancing customer engagement within the banking sector.

Ultimately, because these specific technologies components explain 88% of the variance in customer engagement, the study concludes that technological innovation must serve as the centra driver of AFC Holding Company’s future customer engagement success.

5.4 Implications of the findings

The implications of these findings are multifaceted, highlighting both strategic opportunities and operational priorities for AFC Holding Company. The strong impact of technology-driven strategies implies that continued investment in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology can further deepen customer engagement and position the company as a digital leader in Zimbabwe's financial sector. However, the moderate overall effectiveness of current engagement models suggests that AFC must strengthen integration across channels, streamline customer experiences, and expand the reach of its rewards programs to maximize impact. Additionally, as the company continues to leverage data-driven tools, it must proactively address emerging issues related to data privacy, customer trust, and ethical use of technology. These findings also have policy and managerial implications, encouraging the financial sector to adopt a balanced approach that combines technological innovation with human-centered relationship management to sustain long-term customer loyalty and competitiveness in an increasingly digital banking environment.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the key findings of this study:

5.5.1 To AFC Holding Company Management: the study recommended that the company should strengthen the integration of its digital engagement channels by developing a unified customer relationship management (CRM) system that ensures consistency across mobile, web, and in-person interactions.

5.5.2 To the marketing and customer experience department: the study recommended that there is a need to expand and diversify the rewards and loyalty programs to reach a broader customer base, including rural and small business clients. This can be achieved by partnering with local merchants and fintech firms within the next financial year to enhance accessibility and inclusivity of engagement incentives.

5.5.3 To financial sector regulators and policymakers: the study recommended that the regulatory bodies such as the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe should develop clear guidelines on the ethical use of AI, Machine Learning, and Big Data Analytics in customer engagement. These policies should promote innovation while ensuring consumer protection and digital trust across the financial industry.

5.6 Suggestions for future study

5.6.1 Future studies should investigate how customer trust and satisfaction mediate the relationship between technology-driven strategies and engagement outcomes, providing deeper insight into the psychological mechanisms that sustain long-term loyalty.

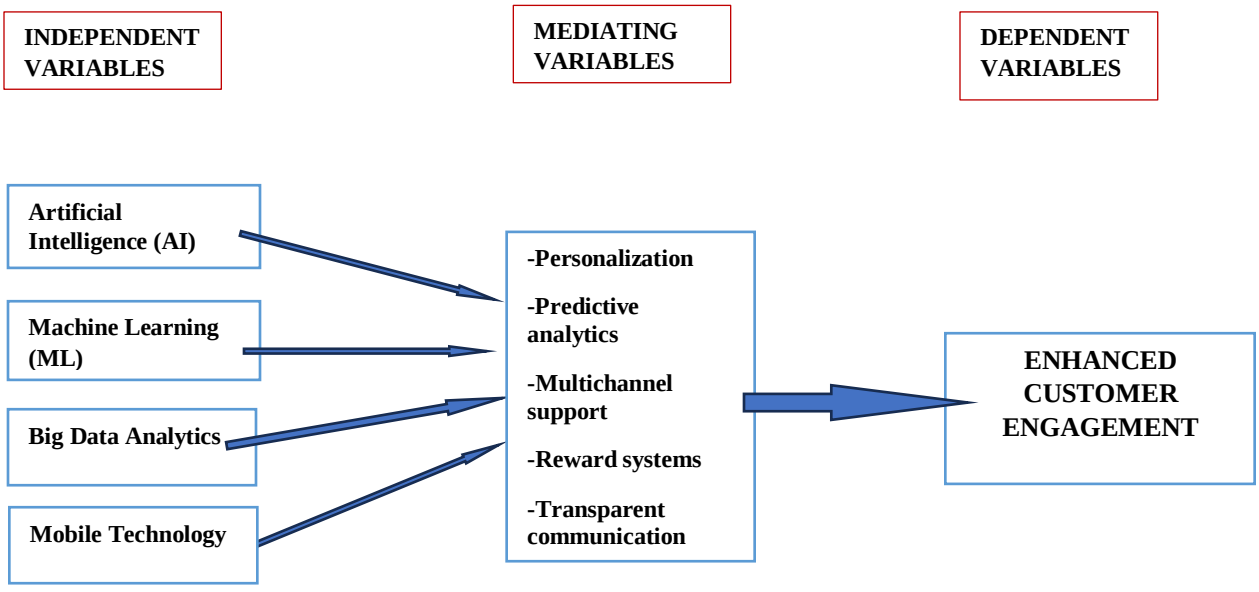
5.6.2 Further research should explore how customer awareness of data collection, storage, and usage practices influences their willingness to engage with digital banking platforms, especially in the Zimbabwean context where privacy concerns remain underexamined.

5.6.3 Scholars could conduct comparative studies between AFC Holding Company and other banks in Zimbabwe or the broader Southern African region to evaluate variations in the effectiveness of digital engagement models and identify best practices.

5.6.4 Future research should assess the potential of emerging technologies such as blockchain, chatbots, and virtual banking assistants in enhancing customer engagement, focusing on their adoption challenges, ethical implications, and return on investment in the financial sector.

5.7 The developed working model for increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company in Zimbabwe

Figure 5.1: Developed model



The developed working model for increasing customer engagement at AFC Holding Company integrates advanced digital technologies with customer-centric mediating mechanisms to create a

cohesive, data-driven engagement ecosystem. At its foundation, the model is anchored on four independent variables namely Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics, and Mobile Technology, which collectively provide the technological infrastructure required to collect, process, and apply customer insights in real time. These technologies enable AFC to move from traditional, intuition-driven marketing toward evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that every customer interaction is informed by accurate behavioural patterns, preferences, and past experiences.

These foundational technologies exert their influence through five mediating variables: personalization, predictive analytics, multichannel support, reward systems, and transparent communication. Personalization ensures that digital interactions are tailored to each customer's needs, while predictive analytics anticipates future behaviour, enabling proactive service delivery. Multichannel support enhances accessibility by allowing customers to engage seamlessly across platforms, and reward systems strengthen emotional and behavioural commitment through value-driven incentives. Transparent communication further builds trust by ensuring clarity, openness, and consistency in information flows. Together, these mediating variables translate technological capabilities into meaningful, human-centred engagement practices.

The combined effect of the independent and mediating variables ultimately contributes to the dependent variable resulting in enhanced customer engagement. The model suggests that technology alone does not drive engagement; rather, it is the strategic application of data-driven insights through personalization, proactive communication, and value-adding interactions that cultivates stronger customer relationships. As such, the framework highlights a holistic, technology-enabled pathway through which AFC Holding Company can deepen customer involvement, improve satisfaction, and strengthen loyalty in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the summary of findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations derived from the study on customer engagement strategies at AFC Holding Company. The findings revealed that AFC employs a blend of digital and relational strategies to strengthen customer

engagement. While these strategies are functional and statistically significant, their overall effectiveness is moderate due to inconsistencies in implementation. The study concluded that AFC's technology-driven engagement model has the strongest positive impact on customer engagement, explaining 88% of its variance. The implications highlight the need for AFC to continue investing in digital technologies while addressing operational inefficiencies, improving data governance, and ensuring ethical use of customer information.

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APPENDICES

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Appendix 1: INFORMED CONSENT OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant.

You are invited to participate in an academic enquiry by **Lindsay Musonza** for the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master Of Science in Business Leadership and Corporate Governance at Bindura University Of Science Education, Faculty Of Commerce. Your contribution is required for the completion of an academic research on: **A WORKING MODEL TOWARDS INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DATA-DRIVEN DIGITAL MARKETING AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.**

- Please note the following:
  - ✓ Your name will not appear on the final write-up and the answers you give will be treated as confidential.
  - ✓ Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
  - ✓ Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. This should not take more than a few minutes of your time.
  - ✓ The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. I will provide you with a summary of my findings upon request.

- **Informed Consent**

There are no known risks associated with this study, but you may experience some emotional discomfort when discussing your experiences. However, your participation may also provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your experiences and contribute to a better understanding of research problem.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You will not be asked to provide any identifying information, and your responses will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to ask. You will be given a copy of this informed consent statement to keep for your records.

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided, and you agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in this questionnaire, which is part of a study on customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather your views on the strategies the company uses to engage customers, as well as the effectiveness of these strategies. The questionnaire also seeks your opinions on the impact of advanced technologies (such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data, and Mobile Technology) when integrated into the company's marketing approach to improve customer engagement. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Please answer all questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge. Completing the questionnaire should take approximately **[45min]** minutes.

Thank you for your participation.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

What is your age?

20-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	
60 and above	

What is your gender?

Male	
Female	

What is your level of education?

Diploma	
Degree	
Masters	
PhD	

How many years have worked in the organization?

1-3years	
4-5years	
6-10 years	
Above10 years	

SECTION B: THE CURRENT STRATEGIES AIMED AT INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from ***(Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)***

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SFCE1	AFC Holding Company effectively uses customer data to provide personalized experiences that meet individual customer needs and preferences.	1	2	3	4	5
SFCE2	The company maintains open, transparent, and consistent communication that builds trust and strengthens customer relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
SFCE3	AFC Holding Company's customer engagement strategies are primarily guided by data-driven insights and a strong emphasis on digital platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
SFCE4	The company leverages predictive analytics to anticipate customer needs and provides seamless support across multiple communication channels.	1	2	3	4	5
SFCE5	AFC Holding Company enhances customer engagement through attractive rewards programs and strategic partnerships that add value to customers.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING MARKETING STRATEGIES BEING USED TO INCREASE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from **(*Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*)**

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
EFS1	Personalized marketing efforts at AFC Holding Company are effective in strengthening customer engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
EFS2	The company's communication strategies are effective in building customer trust and long-term engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
EFS3	Data-driven and digital-first marketing approaches at AFC Holding Company effectively enhance customer engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
EFS4	The use of predictive analytics and multichannel support systems effectively improves the company's ability to engage and retain customers.	1	2	3	4	5
EFS5	AFC Holding Company's reward programs and strategic partnerships effectively motivate customers to remain engaged with the brand.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D: A MODEL THAT LEVERAGES TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.

- **FACETS OF THE MODEL**

1. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from **(*Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*)**

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
AI1	The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) at AFC Holding Company has improved the personalization of services and enhanced customer engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
AI2	AI-driven communication tools, such as chatbots and automated responses, have made customer interactions more efficient and satisfactory.	1	2	3	4	5

AI3	The integration of AI technologies has enabled AFC Holding Company to better understand customer preferences and predict their needs.	1	2	3	4	5
AI4	AI applications have enhanced the company's ability to provide timely support and resolve customer queries effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
AI5	The adoption of AI has strengthened overall customer loyalty and increased the frequency of customer engagement with AFC Holding Company.	1	2	3	4	5

2. MACHINE LEARNING (ML) AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from ***(Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)***

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
ML1	The use of Machine Learning (ML) at AFC Holding Company has improved the accuracy of customer insights and enhanced engagement strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
ML2	ML algorithms effectively help the company predict customer behavior, leading to more targeted and relevant engagement efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
ML3	Machine Learning has enhanced the company's ability to deliver personalized recommendations that increase customer satisfaction and interaction.	1	2	3	4	5
ML4	The integration of ML systems has improved the efficiency of customer service and strengthened long-term engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
ML5	Machine Learning contributes significantly to the company's ability to adapt marketing strategies based on customer feedback and engagement trends.	1	2	3	4	5

3. BIG DATA ANALYSIS AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from ***(Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)***

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
BDA1	The use of Big Data Analysis at AFC Holding Company has improved the understanding of customer behavior and preferences, leading to better engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
BDA2	Big Data insights enable the company to design more targeted and effective customer engagement strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
BDA3	The integration of Big Data tools has enhanced decision-making processes that improve the overall customer experience.	1	2	3	4	5
BDA4	Big Data Analysis allows the company to identify customer needs in real time, strengthening personalized interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
BDA5	The use of Big Data has significantly increased the company's ability to retain customers through continuous and meaningful engagement.	1	2	3	4	5

4. MOBILE TECHNOLOGY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from **(*Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*)**

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
MT1	The use of mobile technology at AFC Holding Company has made it easier for customers to access services and engage with the company anytime, anywhere.	1	2	3	4	5
MT2	Mobile applications and platforms have enhanced communication between AFC Holding Company and its customers.	1	2	3	4	5
MT3	Mobile technology has improved customer satisfaction by providing faster and more convenient service delivery.	1	2	3	4	5
MT4	The company's mobile-based initiatives have strengthened customer loyalty and increased interaction frequency.	1	2	3	4	5

MT5	Mobile technology has played a significant role in promoting personalized engagement and improving the overall customer experience at AFC Holding Company.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION E: THE IMPACT OF THIS MODEL THAT LEVERAGES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MACHINE LEARNING, BIG DATA, AND MOBILE TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.

Instructions:
Please read each statement carefully and answer the question by checking the box that satisfies your answer from **(*Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*)**

Code	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
MT1	The integrated use of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data, and Mobile Technology combined in one marketing framework can effectively improved customer engagement at AFC Holding Company.	1	2	3	4	5
MT2	The model leveraging these technologies enables AFC Holding Company to deliver more personalized and customer-focused experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
MT3	The combined technological model has enhanced the company's ability to predict customer needs and respond proactively.	1	2	3	4	5
MT4	The use of this integrated model has improved communication, accessibility, and overall satisfaction among customers.	1	2	3	4	5
MT5	The technological model has proven effective in strengthening customer loyalty and fostering long-term engagement with AFC Holding Company.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Introduction:

Good [morning/afternoon], and thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to gather your insights and experiences regarding customer engagement at AFC Holding Company. Specifically, we are interested in understanding the strategies currently used by the company to engage customers, as well as the effectiveness of these strategies. Additionally, the interview will explore your perceptions of a marketing model that integrates advanced technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data, and Mobile Technology, and how this model impacts customer engagement. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality and will be used solely for research purposes. There are no right or wrong answers, and we encourage you to share your honest views and experiences. The interview should take approximately [insert estimated time] minutes.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your level of education?
4. How many years have worked in the organization?

SECTION B: THE CURRENT STRATEGIES AIMED AT INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.

1. Can you describe the approaches or initiatives currently being used by AFC Holding Company to strengthen relationships and engagement with customers?
2. In your view, how effective are the current efforts by AFC Holding Company in maintaining and improving customer engagement?
3. What challenges or opportunities have you observed in the company's efforts to enhance customer engagement?

SECTION C: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT STRATEGIES AIMED AT INCREASING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY.

1. How effective do you think the strategies you mentioned have been in improving customer engagement at AFC Holding Company?
2. In what ways have these strategies influenced customer satisfaction, loyalty, or interaction with the company?
3. What evidence or experiences make you believe that these strategies are (or are not) achieving the intended outcomes in enhancing customer engagement?

SECTION D: THE IMPACT OF A MARKETING MODEL THAT INTEGRATES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MACHINE LEARNING, BIG DATA, AND MOBILE TECHNOLOGY ON IMPROVING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AT AFC HOLDING COMPANY:

1. How do you perceive the overall impact of the integrated use of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data, and Mobile Technology on customer engagement at AFC Holding Company?
2. In what ways has this integrated technological model changed how the company interacts or builds relationships with its customers?
3. What specific improvements in customer engagement have you observed since the introduction or use of this integrated marketing framework?
4. How has this combination of technologies influenced customer satisfaction, loyalty, or responsiveness to the company's services?
5. What challenges or limitations has AFC Holding Company experienced in implementing this integrated technological model to enhance customer engagement?

P. Bag 1020
BINDURA, Zimbabwe
Tel: +2630271 – 7615
7531/2, 7622/4
Cell: +263 772 749 583
Direct Line: 0662106284
Email: jmwenje@buse.ac.zw

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
Where Great Minds Meet

10 September 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

REF: REQUEST TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH: LINDSAY MUSONZA, REG. NO. B233053A: MASTER OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP (MBL), PART 2.2 STUDENT

This letter serves to confirm that **LINDSAY MUSONZA, Reg. No. [B233053A]** is a Master of Business Leadership student in the Graduate School of Business at Bindura University of Science Education.

The student is in the final stage of study which requires her to carry out a research. Her dissertation is titled ***"A working model towards increasing customer engagement through data-driven digital marketing at AFC Holding Company***."

We would be grateful if you could give her any assistance she may require.

For more details, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

Mwenje

_____
Dr. J. Mwenje
Director, Graduate School of Business

COORDINATOR
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
FACULTY OF COMMERCE
PRIVATE BAG 1020, BINDURA
OFFICIAL

AFC Holdings
Hurudza House
14-16 Nelson Mandela
Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel: 242 774400-9

11/09/2025

Dr. J. Mwenje
Director, Graduate School of Business
Bindura University of Science Education
P. Bag 1020
Bindura, Zimbabwe

RE: APPROVAL TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH

Dear Dr. Mwenje,

We acknowledge with thanks your letter dated 10 September 2025 regarding Ms Lindsay Musonza, a Master of Business Leadership (MBL) student, who intends to conduct research as part of her dissertation titled: "A Working Model Towards Increasing Customer Engagement Through Data-Driven Digital Marketing at AFC Holdings Company."

We are pleased to confirm that AFC Holdings Company grants permission for the above-mentioned research to be carried out within our organization. Our Marketing and Corporate Communications Department will facilitate the necessary support to ensure that the study is undertaken smoothly.

We look forward to supporting Ms Lindsay Musonza in completing this important academic milestone.

Yours sincerely,

A.S. Tawodzera
Head of Marketing & Corporate Communications
AFC Holdings Limited

AFC COMMERCIAL BANK
16 SEP 2025
ADMINISTRATION REGISTRY SECTION

THANK YOU