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A meal preparation and delivery service business in Maseru

Lomile Raphuthing

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A business venture proposal submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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DECLARATION

I, Lomile Raphuthing, declare that this business venture proposal is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Lomile Raphuthing

Lomile Raphuthing
Signed at Johannesburg

On the 16th day of February 2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

- My two sons Mpho and Tumelo – dream wild dreams and pursue them.
- My parents – thank you for your love, sacrifices, and guidance.
- On-The-Go (a future-ready business concept conceived to capture the vision uncovered and investigated by this study) – take the learnings, go forth and prosper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My two sons Mpho and Tumelo, for their loving understanding when mummy could not be with them at parties, getaways, and other gatherings, and for their inclusive solution to “bring your laptop, you can work from the car” – I love you.

My family and friends who were instrumental in walking the journey with me and offering consistent support: My mother, my cousin Tsotang, my aunt MmaTsotang, my childminder Lerato, my friend Mosili, my sister-in-law Mmamoiloa, and my fellow MBA colleagues who walked the journey with me.

My supervisor Dr Mosala for his guidance, honesty, humour, encouragement, and gentle but firm push. Thabiso Kali and Angie Urban for their proof reading, editing and data analysis support.

I appreciate you all. This work would not have been possible without your contributions.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Supervisor:	Dr Thabo Mosala
Word count †:	14 689
Supplementary files:	Research Instrument
	Cover letter

† Including Executive Summary, References, etc.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to assess consumer preference for an online meal ordering and payment service in the food industry in Maseru, Lesotho. This service would offer office bound workers delivery of a variety of light meal alternatives, even catering for specific dietary preferences such as Banting and vegetarian.

Lesotho is a small landlocked country in Southern Africa, wholly encircled by South Africa, and one of 46 countries that falls into the United Nations category of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (UN, 2019).

With South Africa being a more developed country and with better facilities and services all round, Basotho people continuously import South African goods, services, and culture, including ways of eating (Rantšo, 2017).

In many areas of urban South Africa, consumers take it for granted that they can access a variety of prepared meals and have them to their door. This experience companies likes Mr. Delivery and Uber eats have made ordinary. Conversely, very few delivery services currently exist in Lesotho.

The research explored the preference of Maseru's working-class towards a new meal preparation start-up offering a menu with freshly prepared healthy eating alternatives paired with the convenience of delivery to the office in time for their lunch break.

The research question was answered by collecting data from 60 potential customers, being office bound workers, from both the private and public sectors in Maseru within the 24 to 50 year age range. Data was collected using an electronic survey and analysed using Microsoft Excel and a statistical programme called Jasp.014. Frequencies and related graphs were created in Microsoft Excel, while Jasp.014 was used for Chi-Square calculations.

Supposing the sample selected was representative of the population of the office bound working class in Maseru, Lesotho, the data indicated a readiness for a meal ordering and delivery service leveraging an online platform. This could

afford customers the opportunity to communicate the meals they would like on the menu with the product and service provider. This business venture would need to be marketed aggressively to ensure awareness in the target market. The venture would also need to dedicate resources to investigating the perceived risks the market associates with online platforms in order to remedy these. In addition, technological advancement, that is e-commerce, must be encouraged as it has the benefits of convenience, information storage, and continuing efficiencies for the business as technologies continuously develop.

Keywords:

Lesotho, Maseru, customer preference, e-commerce, least developed country, meal delivery service, personalisation, loyalty

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess consumer preference for an online meal ordering and payment service in the food industry in Maseru, Lesotho. This service would offer office bound workers delivery of a variety of light meal alternatives, even catering for specific dietary preferences such as Banting and vegetarian.

With the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, which has had the effect of limiting the movement of people, the convenience of delivery – be it clothing, medicine, household essentials, or food – has gained popularity over the past two years (Candra, Ayudina, & Arashi, 2021). Delivery of goods usually includes placing orders telephonically and effecting payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT), or using an online platform where orders can be placed and paid for, after which delivery takes place quickly and without contact. The purpose of this project was to conduct a study to assess consumer preference for a new meal ordering and delivery service in Maseru, Lesotho.

Lesotho is a small landlocked country in Southern Africa. It is one of only three enclaves in the world (wholly encircled by South Africa). It is one of 46 countries that falls into the United Nations category of Least Developed Countries (LDCs). These are “low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets” (UN, 2019, p. 1-2). Lesotho hopes to graduate beyond this category through trade development and leveraging of electronic commerce (e-commerce) (UNCTAD, 2019).

The Central Bank of Lesotho’s regulatory framework governs electronic transactions; electronic commerce is currently not widely used in Lesotho (ITA, 2021). The Financial Institution Act of 1999, Payment Systems Act of 2014, and Payment Systems (Issuance of Electronic Payments Instruments) Regulations of 2017 are some of the legal tools governing electronic transactions (International Trade Administration, 2021). A growing percentage of the

population has access to the internet. Lesotho's total population was 2.17 million in January 2022, of which 1.13 million are internet users, translating Lesotho's internet penetration rate at 51.9 per cent of the total population. However, only two per cent of the population aged 15 years and older had concluded internet purchases as of January 2022 (Kemp, 2022). In a bid to grow the use of electronic commerce in the country, the Ministry of Communications has developed proposals for e-commerce to be more widely developed (ITA, 2021). E-commerce is a way for small African nations to boost their economic performance and diversify income sources; Lesotho is no exception (UNCTAD, 2019).

Maseru is one of ten districts in Lesotho. It is also the capital city and urban economic hub of the country. A move to Maseru from rural parts of the country to seek better education and work opportunities is common (Rosenberg, 2007). At the start of 2022, 30 percent of Lesotho's population lived in urban centres, while 70 percent lived in rural areas (Kemp, 2022). The majority of public sector institutions and private sector firms are headquartered in Maseru, hence the decision to select Maseru as the ideal location for this study (Setšabi & Leduka, 2008). Being landlocked, Lesotho and its people (the Basotho), are greatly influenced by South African tastes and trends (Market Research.com, 2017). With South Africa being a more developed country with better facilities and services, together with borders being fairy easily accessible, Basotho people continuously import South African goods, services, and culture, including ways of eating, which was the subject matter of this case study (Rantšo, 2017).

Official statistics on the current structure of the food retailing industry in Maseru has proved difficult to obtain. The Bureau of Statistics in Lesotho confirmed that the collection of data on retailers in not within their purview. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, which acts as a One-Stop Business Facilitation centre, confirmed that the Ministry does not support the food service industry. The Ministry of Tourism, Environment, and Culture licences food retailers, but were not forthcoming with the provision of information on licenced food retailers in Maseru.

1.2 The Research Problem Statement

Same day online meal ordering and delivery services are non-existent in Maseru. In many areas of urban South Africa, consumers take it for granted that they can access a variety of prepared meals and have them delivered to their door. This experience, companies likes Mr. Delivery and Uber eats have made ordinary. Conversely, very few delivery services currently exist in Lesotho. Many restaurants, and all hotels, do not deliver. At best, they partner with delivery companies, thus driving up the delivery cost (Segers, 2015). Lunchbox (https://www.lunchboxls.com) is a new online platform on which restaurants and caterers can sign-up. In turn, Lunchbox advertises their menus and provides a delivery service to customers. However, this partnership increases both the meal and delivery costs. This could be overcome by openness to innovative strategies incorporating meal ordering and delivery as an offering by the same vendor (Segers, 2015).

Affordable delivery services are within fast food outlets, but not all outlets offer this service, and the outlets that do, do not offer an online ordering platform. Thus, existing services only meet the need of delivery, not of availing the convenience of online ordering with the add-on of cost-effective, healthy, and light meal options, which was the potential opportunity this study sought to explore.

The lunch alternatives for office-bound workers in Maseru are mainly fast food, or pop-up[1] street food vendors, a more recent common offering. Many vendors use a pick-up van, which they park in advantageous parking spots from which to sell their home-cooked food. These spots are usually near office blocks. The strategy is to attract office workers walking out of the buildings during lunch hour (a popular practice in Lesotho, usually one hour anytime between 12:00 and 14:00). These vendors offer what could be considered a balanced nourishing

[1] Pop-up shops are retail spaces that open for a short period. These stores are used in various industries, including retail, music, museums, food, and many more. Pop-up shops are incredibly agile and flexible, and the short-term leases mean that companies behind them do not face huge risks if something goes wrong.

meal as it often comprises a starch, a vegetable and/or salad, and a protein portion. Sometimes, using portable gas stoves, they set up some hours earlier to start cooking the food on site, differentiating themselves from other vendors as selling freshly prepared food. Other alternatives are cooked food from supermarket outlets, as well as hotel and restaurant food, all of which are uneconomical for daily consumption. Workers could also pre-prepare their own food and pack it for consumption at the office. However, this requires preparation time in the evenings, which might be a challenge for workers after a full day at the office.

Online meal ordering and delivery services that offer consumers light and healthy options, such as sandwiches, wraps, smoothies, salads, and vegetarian food are non-existent in Maseru.

Additionally, from a Lesotho perspective, little academic research is currently available to potential entrepreneurs looking to enter the online food delivery market. Prior research has been conducted on international markets, specifically India and Malaysia, and may not be wholly relevant to the Lesotho market.

1.3 The Research Scope

The COVID-19 pandemic further popularised e-commerce due to the limitation of movements to curb the spread of the Corona virus. This has rendered product delivery businesses essential (Reardon, Heiman, Lu, Nuthalapati, Vos, & Zilberman, 2021). The purpose of this study was to assess the preference for an online-based meal preparation and delivery service in the food market of Maseru, Lesotho. Targeting office bound ‘foodies’, with an appreciation for great tasting and good quality food, would offer the option of the online ordering of healthier and lighter meal alternatives, with the added convenience of delivery.

1.4 The Research Question

The question explored by the research was the preference of Maseru’s working-class towards a new online based meal preparation and delivery start-up, offering

a menu with freshly prepared healthy eating alternatives paired with the convenience of delivery to the office in time for lunch break.

This question was answered by collecting data from office bound workers to assess their preference for a business in Maseru that operates a meal preparation and delivery service and leverages online platforms for the ordering and payment functions.

1.5 Significance of the Research Study

Pertaining to Lesotho, there is little academic research currently available to potential entrepreneurs looking to enter the online food delivery market in LDCs. Similar research found relates to emerging markets. Chai and Yat (2019) researched the emergence of the online food delivery sector in Malaysia, and looked into key consumer adoption factors driving its growth. They found convenience to be the most significant driver within urban areas.

In their research, Karulkar, Pahuja, Uppal, and Sayed (2019) looked into the food industry of India and found that the convenience experienced by using online food delivery services drove turnover for these retailers.

Within the Lesotho context there is a need take a step back and identify whether there is a preference for online food delivery services considering the adoption and preference for e-commerce in the country.

The significance of this study was the market assessment contribution made to the food service market regarding the readiness and preference of Maseru's office-bound working class for online meal ordering services coupled with the convenience of delivery. A service similar to that offered by the likes of Uber eats and Mr. Delivery, in collaboration with partner restaurants, in urban parts of South Africa.

The study also made a contextual contribution by exploring the uptake of online shopping in Maseru, determining the existence of a meal preparation and delivery service, and understanding whether personalising the offering would make it more appealing and preferable to the potential market.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the academic literature on the research topic. The chapter is broken down into five sections each representing the academic theories relevant to the topic, namely, consumer preference for online shopping, online food delivery services in African cities, entrepreneurial theory, technopreneurship and e-commerce, and service dominant logic. Each section ends with the research question linked to the theory, which the study sought to answer.

Foundational to the business venture under consideration was the uptake of online shopping among the sampled working class. The preference to purchase meals online would be more likely, given an existing experience and preference for the purchase of other items on online platforms.

Also of importance to the business venture was consideration of the novelty of the offering, which placed the research within the entrepreneurship space.

Technological capabilities would be leveraged, taking advantage of the growing use of e-commerce for the sale and purchase of goods and services, which historically required physical contact between the buyer and seller; however, the advent of e-commerce has almost done away with physical contact (Reardon et al., 2021).

Furthermore, with societies' growing participation on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, consumers now have a platform to voice their product and service needs and grievances. Businesses that respond to this free publicity (good or bad) by lending an ear to the consumer and responding to their needs, have been found to increase the value of their offering to their consumers and in turn benefit from the publicity of their happy customers (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2021). These considerations have informed the theories that follow.

2.2 Consumer Preference for Online Shopping

Consumer behaviour, in particular consumer preference, has a direct influence on the demand for products and services. The individual consumer has a set of preferences influenced by culture, education, and individual tastes, among an abundance of other factors (Santarius & Soland, 2018).

The convenience of shopping without physically going to the shops, the ability to obtain any number of goods and services required at any time from far and wide, and the ease of price comparison against available retailers, are all brought by the advent of online shopping, and made appealing by the busy lifestyles of many in the working class.

There are however also disadvantages to online shopping as compared to physical store shopping. The engagement of all five senses is limited, with an absence of the opportunity to touch and feel, smell, hear, see physically and taste. Taher (2021) added that delayed delivery resulting from stock shortages is another contributing factor to physical stores being preferred over online stores. There could be elements of perceived risk and lack of trust due to the absence of physical human and product interaction. Perceived risk relates to the potential for loss considered by the consumer when deciding whether or not to conclude their purchase. The higher the perceived risk, the higher the chances consumers would prefer visiting a physical store. The lower the perceived risk, the higher the chances the consumer will purchase the product online (Gerber, Ward, & Goedhals-Gerber, 2014). According to Van Kerrebroeck, Brengman, and Willems, (2017), consumers prefer to purchase products online which do not require a physical inspection.

Food preparation in the home is declining as consumers' lives are becoming busier and more demanding. Cheng (2018) posited that millennials are increasingly having ready-made food delivered and that this could result in the 'death' of home-cooked meals.

Millennials' meal choices are also becoming more demanding in the variety of options they would like; traditionally these could have been categorised by pizza,

Asian cuisine, burgers, and the like; however, there has been a recent need for more healthy or diverse dietary options inclusive of gluten free, ketogenic, paleo, Atkins, carnivore, dukan, vegetarian, and vegan to name a few (Cheng, 2018).

Another important consideration is an understanding of what consumers value when using a food delivery service. According to Gilsenan (2018), a study conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States, a wide variety of delivery providers and food options were among the leading drivers for customer loyalty, along with responsiveness and monetary savings. Further insight into other key considerations are listed in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Key considerations for using a food delivery service

Despite this, in most developing economies, customers still prefer physical store shopping to online shopping (Akram, 2018). In developing countries, the potential of online shopping is yet to be fully explored; customer preparedness and

inclination to use the service exists and is yet to be addressed (Kwarteng & Pilik, 2016).

2.2.1 Research question

This study sought to assess the mode of shopping that customers in Maseru, Lesotho prefer; online or physical store shopping, considering Lesotho is an LDC (UN, 2019). Part of the operating model of the envisaged business venture involves online ordering and payment functions, this gave the research question relevance.

2.3 Online Food Delivery Services in African Cities

Online food delivery services offer consumers the convenience of accessing ready-made meals from the comfort of their homes and places of work, saving them time and energy spent moving around sourcing this food and at times still having to prepare it. That said, not all consumers trust online food delivery services and might perceive risks which can undermine online food delivery adoption and use (Capri, 2021).

The food delivery market has shown substantial growth globally with the online food delivery segment amounting to US$122,7 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at an annual growth rate of 7.5 per cent to US164,0-billion by 2024 (Statista, 2020.

Academic literature with reference to the food delivery in African cities is very limited. Reliance has been placed on grey literature drafted by various industry reports and papers. A study undertaken by Nielson (2018) highlighted that 34 percent of all South African consumers utilise restaurant delivery services. Business Live (2017) further asserted that the market has been moving towards take-out and delivery from traditional sit-down restaurants, a phenomenon which has been driven primarily by millennial consumers.

The South African market is dominated by three players in the new-delivery platform category. It is estimated that Mr Delivery Food and Uber Eats collectively

own between 80 and 90 per cent of the South African market share with OrderIn making up the remainder (Memeburn, 2019).

Recently there has been a rise in ‘kitchen-only’ delivery restaurants which are known as ‘dark’, ‘cloud’, ‘virtual’, and ‘ghost’ kitchens; these are essentially shared kitchen spaces which only offer delivery as a channel. Financial Times (2017) further clarified that ‘dark’ kitchens are free from consumer facing elements, such as seating facilities; and service customers via the online food delivery channel only.

Due to the lower operational costs, ‘dark’ kitchens focus on quality ingredients, premium packaging and speed of getting the order to the consumer (QSR Automations, 2021). Additionally, because their platform for customers is digital, ‘dark’ kitchens can quickly adapt their menu offerings with new trends as they happen. These dark kitchens allow quick expansion with a fraction of the start-up costs to setup (Bradshaw, 2019).

In a report conducted by Boston Consulting Group (Singhi, Mathur, Chobey, & Dasgupta, 2020) cloud kitchens are seen to be emerging for four reasons. First, higher levels of trust in freshness and quality of food; second, their ability to experiment with the menu; third, lower operational costs compared to quick service restaurants; and fourth, their ability to create multiple private label brands at a lower marketing costs.

2.3.1 Research question

This study sought to assess whether Maseru’s office-bound working class would show a preference for online food delivery services? The newness of the concepts of ghost kitchens in urban South Africa (a country which is developmentally, economically, and from a technology penetration perspective, superior to Lesotho) suggests Lesotho may or may not show preference for online food delivery, thus giving the research question relevance.

2.4 Entrepreneurial Theory

No single definition of entrepreneurship and no single over-arching theory explain entrepreneurship (Phan, 2004). Many disciplines contribute to the formation of what is considered entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is defined at macro, meso, and micro levels. Macro level entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship at the societal level, which focuses on social entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at mitigating evil problems facing society. Meso level entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship at the organisational level (intrapreneurship), also known as corporate entrepreneurship, where employees of an organisation innovate (new products and services for company clients) for the benefit of the organisation while in its employment. Corporate entrepreneurship exists in organisations that have a culture of encouraging and rewarding the entrepreneurial talent of employees. These entrepreneurial employees initiate new forms of creating value for the customer for the benefit of their employer (Ali, Kelley, & Levie, 2020).

The focus of this study was at the micro level, where the pursuit of entrepreneurship is at an individual level, with the entrepreneur being the person who creates a small enterprise. Schumpeter (2010) contributed towards defining entrepreneurship and popularised the phrase 'creative destruction'[2] to describe the entrepreneurial process; an entrepreneur is more than just a business owner. Entrepreneurs also experiment with new combinations of resources to create new products and services. Entrepreneurs discover new methods of production, new markets, and new resources, and find increasingly efficient ways to organise businesses. The innovative products and processes are key drivers of economic growth and prosperity.

Another perspective exists which distinguishes the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship from other types of business actors and commercial activities.

[2] Creative destruction describes the deliberate dismantling of established processes to make way for improved methods of production.

It identifies opportunity at the heart of entrepreneurship. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) defined entrepreneurship as the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited. The field of entrepreneurship involves the study of opportunities; the processes of their discovery, evaluation, and exploitation; and the set of individuals who discover, evaluate and exploit them. Entrepreneurship is fully located around the individual and the society in which the individual finds them self (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003).

Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) views were in agreement with Schumpeter (2010) that entrepreneurs are differentiated from small business owners based on three characteristics; they are innovative, demonstrate greater growth potential (they persist to grow their businesses beyond a certain level), and have strong strategic orientation associated with the growth of the business.

2.4.1 Research question

This research sought to identify whether the envisaged business venture illuminates entrepreneurial features within the context of existing service providers in the food service industry catering to the Maseru market. This was determined by the presence of uniqueness and novelty of the proposed offering of an online based meal ordering, preparation, and delivery service.

2.5 Technopreneurship and E-commerce

Technopreneurship is a new word describing the process where individual entrepreneurs combine technology with their entrepreneurial skill in pursuit of success in their identified entrepreneurial opportunities (Bhardwaj, 2021). Technology is used as a facilitator and growth driver for the entrepreneurial opportunity, and the technopreneur is the individual who revolutionises existing methods of goods and services production by making use of available technologies. They introduce new products and services (or new variations of existing products and services) to the market (Bhardwaj, 2021). Mashingaidze (2016, p. 67) captured the importance of technopreneurship, "It is becoming vital in the current globalization and liberalization economy, as it provides greater

opportunities and enables effective optimization of resources to attain high profit margins."

Another study concluded that technological innovation and technological opportunities significantly affect the competitiveness and operational efficiency of an organisation. Businesses that display higher business performance, and practice innovativeness and proactiveness, look out for technological opportunities (Olusegun, Akpoviroro, & Adebowale, 2019).

Huang, Dyerson, Wu, and Harindranath (2015) argued that strong market positioning can only assist an entrepreneur to attain temporary competitive advantage, and that improving their technological resource and capability position will support a sustainable competitive advantage. In a world where multiple new technologies are frequently introduced, to ignore technological advancements at the risk of the competition leveraging them is a quick and easy way to give the competition advantage (Scarlat, 2014). Furthermore, the internet plays a significant role in the day-to-day routines of many people and organisations, because of their countless and unlimited touchpoints, connect virtually with the world (Vathalulu & Ahirwar, 2021). This major internet use led to e-commerce, the radical innovation of buying and selling of goods and services over the internet (Vladimir, 1996). E-commerce has had the following impacts on markets and retailers:

- The internet enables the collection of client data. This helps to understand client needs and to identify existing gaps in the market (Fischer, Crabtree, Colley, Rodden, & Costanza, 2017).
- Online advertising is cheaper and has further reach than other methods of advertising (Liu-Thompkins, 2019).
- Increased offering choice can equate to cost saving and increased value for the customer (Kahn, 1998).
- Quality of customer service improves as customers have public platforms to voice their complaints (Agnihotri, Kulshreshtha, & Tripathi, 2020).
- Simplification of purchase processes, from order placement to product or service delivery (Lamey, Beugelmans, Vuegen, & Braak, 2021).

- Offline retailers are forced to discount their items in response to the competition that is put up by online stores, placing greater pressure on these retailers (Vathalulu & Ahirwar, 2021).

E-commerce includes the initiative by enterprises to enable their previously manual processes electronically and support their businesses in environments where e-commerce is being fuelled by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Vathalulu & Ahirwar, 2021). The advantage of this effort has been to increase customer reach and, in turn, increase sales (Devaraj, Krajewski, & Wei, 2007). Before e-commerce, buying and selling occurred physically, mainly at brick-and-mortar stores. Today buying and selling is possible from any location; for example, a person can use their enabled mobile electronic device. E-commerce has not displaced brick-and-mortar stores but has armed consumers with a price and product comparison tool to assist with informed decision making in their final purchase, be it online or in-store (Tojo & Matsubayashi, 2011).

The arrival of e-commerce has brought about a number of other advantages:

- The creation of a variety of virtual markets, for example, retail markets, auction markets, and so on (Attar, Shanmugam, & Hajli, 2021).
- Convenient access to a wide variety of goods and services with the ability to buy anything, from anywhere, at any time (Jiang, Yang, & Jun, 2012).
- Cost savings, with the ability to make purchases from any location without needing to travel to obtain goods and services (Attar, Shanmugam, & Hajli, 2021).

Globally e-commerce growth has been rapid over the past few decades with Amazon.com and Alibaba driving this growth in the United States and China respectively. In a space of 27 years, Amazon.com has grown from a website selling books to becoming one of the biggest and most successful e-commerce companies today, selling retail goods, content and media services, consumer electronics, delivery and fulfilment, groceries, cloud and web services, to name a few. Alibaba was launched by Jack Ma in 1999 (Alibaba Group, 2019) as a website with the objective of assisting Chinese businesses transact locally and

internationally and has grown into selling a multitude of services from their marketplace, through digital media and cloud computing, among other offerings.

E-commerce growth in emerging markets including South Africa has however been slow, and even slower in LDCs. The Journalist (2019) asserted that the key reasons for the slow growth could be related to a lack of a general understanding of how e-commerce works, inadequate payments options, and inadequate fulfilment and distribution capability.

One promising factor that might help to advance e-commerce in the emerging market context has been increased penetration of mobile communications. The advent and growth of both mobile communication and smartphone adoption has enabled a specific form of e-commerce, namely mobile or m-commerce. Müller-Veerse (2000) provided a simple definition of m-commerce as any e-commerce transaction conducted over mobile telecommunication networks.

Balasubramanian, Peterson, and Jarvenpaa (2002) further ascertained that m-commerce is the use of mobile devices to communicate and conduct transactions through public and private networks. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2003) asserted that m-commerce is the buying and selling of good and services, using wireless hand-held devices such as mobile telephones or personal data assistants. Gartner (2020) defined m-commerce as the delivery of e-commerce capabilities directly to mobile service users by wireless technology. Lim and Siau (2003, p. 27) argued that “m-commerce is more than a mobile and wireless extension of the web-based e-commerce. It is an entirely new sales and promotion channel and is the enabler for a whole range of new services such as buying a coke, paying for parking, buying train tickets, etc. via mobile phone.” M-commerce offers some unique features over and above e-commerce.

2.5.1 Research question

This study sought to determine whether the introduction of improved technological efficiencies to the process of meal ordering, paying, and timeous delivery, improves customer experience and enhances their preference for online shopping. The shift to online shopping for food was the focus of this study, and

this question sought to understand whether the online shopping experience for food, had a lock-in effect among those had who had experienced it.

2.6 Service Dominant Logic

In marketing, the departure from a product dominant logic to a service dominant logic has come to the fore. Marketing scholars posit that if implemented, this logic will support an organisation's sustainable competitive advantage. The historic dominant logic was that value and transactions are embedded in tangible resources (the physical products produced by firms). The new logic suggests that physical goods are not inherently valuable, but that their value is in their use, being the service that they provide (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Vargo and Lusch (2004) agreed with Gummesson (1995, p. 250):

> … customers do not buy goods or services; they buy offerings which render services which create value.... The traditional division between goods and services is long outdated. It is not a matter of redefining services and seeing them from a customer perspective; activities render services, things render services. The shift in focus to services is a shift from the means and the producer perspective to the utilization and the customer perspective.

The service dominant logic is based on the following foundational premises:

- The application of specialised skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange. People have wants and they seek satisfaction of such through service for service exchange, by exchanging knowledge and skills for knowledge and skills and together creating the satisfactions needed, or value required (Hammervoll, 2014).
- Indirect exchange masks the fundamental unit of exchange. Using the example of a manufacturing plant, where an employee working in the plant has no interaction with the end-user of the product, it becomes clear that the skill-for-skill and service-for-service exchange is hidden (Hammervoll, 2014).

- Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision; in other words, products are platforms for services and services are platforms for experience – one carries the other. Ultimately, people want to satisfy their wants; therefore, it is this satisfaction that they buy (Yoo, Choi, & Sheu, 2021).
- Knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage (Ragužˇ, Zekan, & Peronja, 2017).
- All economies are service economies. Scholars suggest that this has always been the case (Gallouj, Weber, Stare, & Rubalcaba, 2015).
- The customer is always the co-producer or co-creator of value. The customer must be engaged before any value can be created, otherwise what is created might not be of value. Value is therefore realised and created; it is not inherent in a product (Tuan, 2016).
- The enterprise can only make value propositions. Because the object does not embed value, the maker is offering something that is potentially of value to the customer. Value is only realised when the user uses the product. Therefore, the seller builds the proposition, which is only maximised when the customer is engaged in the building process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).
- A service-centred view is customer oriented and relational. Customers must be engaged to understand what they do with the offer in their context. Customer context is valuable (Tuan, 2016).

The service dominant theory says that value is always co-created. The physical product and the service constitutes an all-encompassed offering that is co-created with the customer, because when a supplier sells something to a customer, value is created and derived when the customer puts it into use (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

2.6.1 Research question

This study also considered other factors which could contribute to the success of a business venture by exploring the possible benefits of inviting potential customers of the proposed business venture to participate in the menu creation process. The purpose was to assess whether the collaboration would have the

impact of enhancing the value of the offering from the customers' perspective, and whether there could be other concomitant benefits such as the enhancement of customer loyalty.

2.7 Conclusion of the Literature Review

This study sought to assess the mode of shopping that customers in Lesotho prefer; online or physical store shopping, considering the proposed business venture would be based on an online platform.

The research also sought to assess whether the envisaged business venture illuminates entrepreneurial features of uniqueness and novelty within the context of existing service providers in the food industry catering to the Maseru market. Through the investigation of the new business venture, the study further investigated whether the introduction of improved technological efficiencies to the process of ordering and paying for meals online improves customer experience to the point of enhancing their preference for online shopping. Additionally, the study assessed the effect of inviting potential customers of the proposed venture, to participate in menu creation, observing whether this would enhance the value of the offering, and whether the perceived value could have other concomitant benefits such as enhancing customer loyalty.

The following chapter covers the research methodology.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology. The chapter covers the quantitative research approach, research strategy and design, data and information collection instrument, population, and sampling. Lastly, the study's ethical considerations together with the research limitations and threats to validity and reliability are discussed.

Quantitative research focuses on quantifying the collection and analysis of data. It promotes a research process that is objective and deductive (Bryman, 2012). Emphasis is placed on testing theories based on assumptions which are capable

of being generalised and the findings replicated (Creswell, 2013; Klob, 2008). The data is used to explain social dynamics and determine the relationship between variables of cause and effect. The key benefit of following the quantitative research approach it that it allowed for a quick process based on statistical evidence, whereby the results are independent of the researcher's perspective.

It can be contrasted with qualitative research which is more suited to research that requires an individual meaning and the importance of interpreting the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research generally takes the form of open-ended questions which allows the participants to share their respective views (Crotty, 1998). The results of the data collected is organised into various themes whereby the researcher will make interpretations of the meaning of the data collected (Creswell, 2014) and therefore the results are dependent on the researcher's interpretation of the data.

The study assessed consumer preference for a meal preparation and delivery service in the food industry of Maseru, Lesotho. This service would offer office bound workers a variety of light meal alternatives, even catering for specific dietary preferences such as Banting and vegetarian. The data collected determined the proposed venture's novelty, identified whether the offer of convenience and the use of technological capabilities enhances customer commitment, and determined the potential benefits of the application of service-dominant logic principles on the proposed venture.

The data collected showed whether businesses currently in the food service industry are offering their customers a variety of light healthy meals, and catering to different dietary requirements, during the week at lunchtime. The study obtained an understanding of the impact of convenience and use of technological capabilities on customer experience, and its effect on customer commitment. Lastly, the study captured potential customer inputs on the impact of service dominant logic principles on the proposed business venture. The data was collected using an electronic Qualtrics survey targeted at potential customers.

The research strategy and design follow.

3.1 Research Strategy and Design

Research design is defined as the framework or blueprint which includes the plan, structure and strategy used to collect and analyse data (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). Research designs include the following design types; descriptive, relational, experimental, and meta-analytical (Creswell, 2014). This study combines descriptive and relational research designs.

The most popular research strategy in the descriptive and relational design is the survey. De Leeuw (2001) asserted that surveys are the best and most used research strategy for quantitative studies. The key advantage of surveys is that they are cost effective, allow the researcher to collect primary data quickly in real time and statistically analyse the data immediately (Connolly, 2007).

This study employs a cross-sectional survey, which is defined by Bryman (2012, p. 58) as, “a research design that entails the collection of data on more than one case at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables which are then examined to detect patterns of association”. Saunders and Tosey (2013 supported this view by referring to cross-sectional design as a research design undertaken at a single point in time when data is collected on both the independent and dependent variables of the study simultaneously.

The survey was self-administered using an online questionnaire with questions having pre-determined answers. Quantitative research using surveys comes with limitations due to the prescriptive nature of pre-determined answers and therefore fails to ascertain deeper explanations and considerations. Cooper and Sun (2006) suggested that statistical studies provide a breadth of information as opposed to an in-depth understanding. Lastly, quantitative research using surveys lacks a connection between researcher and participants during the data collection phase and therefore overlooks the respondents’ experience and perspective on the topic of interest (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2018).

The research involved an assessment of consumer preferences towards a proposed online start-up business. The location was the Maseru Central

Business District. The study entailed conducting a survey and analysing the data collected.

A quantitative approach was suitable because the data needed to answer the research questions was mainly in the purview of individuals and collected from them through a survey. The method was also suitable because the purpose of the survey was to determine whether a preference existed for a service which is not yet prevalent in the market. Potential customers provided the required information which could then be analysed statistically, and conclusions drawn..

The sampling strategy for the survey is described next.

3.2 Data and Information Collection Instrument

Data was gathered from the sample using an online self-completion questionnaire with close-ended questions. This method allows for large amounts of data to be collected in order the researcher to draw conclusions (Cameron & Price, 2009; Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006). De Leeuw (2001) asserted that questionnaires are the most frequently used data collection method in quantitative behavioural research, and Sekaran and Bougie (2016) elaborated, stating that when a study is descriptive or relational in nature, questionnaires are considered the most effective instrument to gather data. A questionnaire survey cannot be deemed an easy task for the researcher as it needs to be designed in such a way that it achieves the research objectives (Bless,Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2006).

According to Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2013), a successful questionnaire survey needs to consider three standard considerations to ensure quality and design; what should be asked, reliability of questions, and validity of questions. These elements need to align with the overall research objectives, and must be clear and avoid biases.

Pre-testing was conducted to ensure the questions were easily understood and respondents could complete the survey in the shortest possible time. The questionnaire needed to have content validity which was assured through the

pre-testing process where experienced researchers were asked to comment on the questionnaire items (Bolarinwa, 2015). For face validity, leveraging the same pre-testing process, it was determined whether the questionnaire items were considered easy to understand and meaningful from the perspective of the population (Bolarinwa, 2015). Pre-testing is further described below.

Pre-testing is the assessment of the content validity of the questionnaire. Hilton (2017) suggested that pretesting is a method of validating that the questions posed would have the intended outcome and are clear and understood by participants. Pre-testing involved sending the questionnaire in electronic format to experienced researchers who were asked to review and assess the questionnaire to ascertain if it made sense and was acceptable. The researchers provided valuable recommendations, which resulted in the addition of clarifying explanations of concepts and overall shorter and succinct questions. Once all the feedback was received, inputs were incorporated.

The final questionnaire was then administered as outlined below.

There was one instrument, an electronic survey, which was targeted at potential customers. The instrument had an introductory section that described the purpose and scope of the study. It outlined the ethical considerations and invited consent to participate in the study. It described how the instrument (survey) was to be completed by the respondent and provided an indication of the amount of time expected to complete the survey (Rowley, 2014).

The substantive part of the instrument contained four sections. Section 1 contained questions about availability in the current market of the product that the proposed business venture is seeking to offer. Its purpose was to determine whether the venture is novel in nature or a replica of some already existing business structures. It contains two multiple-choice questions.

Section 2 contained questions related to customer shopping preference and demand. The purpose was to learn if potential customers had been exposed to online meal shopping, what their preferences were between online and physical store shopping, and whether the conveniences of online shopping converted

them to frequent online shoppers, specifically for meal purchases. It contained five multiple-choice questions.

Section 3 was related to the issue of customisation and personalisation and ascertained the loyalty levels of the customer base. It contained five multiple-choice questions.

Section 4 was concerned with demographics and contained two questions covering the age groups and gender identification of the participants.

The instrument ended with a message of gratitude to the respondent for their time taken in participating and confirmed the record of their response.

In terms of the execution of the instrument, three sizeable office buildings in Maseru, representative of the working class, were identified. Namely these were Lesotho National Development Corporation: a parastatal of the Government of Lesotho whose role is to promote the country as an attractive investment location for both foreign and local investors. Finance House: a government office complex housing public finance departments such as budget, debt and aid management, economic policy, internal audit, pensions, private sector development, procurement policy and advisory, support services and treasury. Vodacom Lesotho: a member of the Vodacom Group, one of the world's largest communication companies. The selection criteria were supported by the researcher's existing connections with individuals based in those buildings, who then acted as points of entry. Arrangements were made to visit and present the study, its purpose and objectives to the respective audiences who availed themselves over the last 10 minutes of their lunch hours. The presentations were followed by the surveys being emailed from designated central points of contact to the presentation attendees, and only those interested in participating opened the email and followed the link to the survey. They were further requested to share the survey email with colleagues in their offices. All survey results were stored in a single folder on a secure drive for ease of analysis, reference, and recordkeeping (Rowley, 2014).

3.3 Target Population and Selection of Sample

The population for this study comprised potential customers of the proposed business venture idea under study. The following non-random, participant recruiting sampling techniques were used to identify the sample:

- *Purposive sampling method*: respondents having similar characteristics relevant to the study (potential customers) were identified (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).
- *Snowball sampling method*: selected participants further distributed the survey to colleagues, within their offices and in other offices, who were considered relevant and valuable contributors and would enhance the study (Etikan et al., 2016).

The sample size was 60 potential customers of the proposed business venture under study. Participants were motivated to participate by making the survey electronic and mobile device enabled, the questions were short and to the point with multiple-choice selection for answers (Shannon, Johnson, Searcy, & Lott, 2002). Questions with potential for confusion or at risk of individual interpretation were clearly defined to avoid ambiguity. The survey allowed flexibility to save and continue at a later stage. The survey was easy to submit, and the software confirmed submission with the participant.

3.4 Ethical Considerations when Collecting Research Data

As the study required obtaining information from individuals, ethical considerations around matters of informed consent and voluntary participation were important (Steinke, 2004). The study did not require personal and identifying information of participants. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were therefore eliminated by not collecting names and any other potentially identifying information (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008). Considering the reliance on participation of individuals for the collection of data, the welfare of participants was protected, and it was ensured that they were not exposed to any form of harm (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.4.1 Informed consent and participant recruitment

During the research, the aim of the research was clarified, and all aspects of the research were explained to the respondents on email and telephonically beforehand. This enabled research participants to give informed consent (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The selection and recruitment of respondents was done without deception or inducement. Responses were voluntary, thus people who did not respond to the emails about the survey, were not pressured to participate (Kılınç & Fırat, 2017). Respondents were permitted to withdraw from the study at any point.

3.4.2 No harm

The data collection tool (electronic survey) was distributed via email, and responses were captured on Qualtrics, the electronic tool on which the survey was generated. No ethical issues and concerns arose. No unintended harmful consequences were noted.

3.4.3 Additional measures

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to commencement of data collection and in line with the requirements of the governing institution (Wits Business School) under which this study was conducted.

3.5 Data and Information Processing and Analysis

Quantitative data can be analysed using various methods ranging from basic analysis (univariate) to complex (multivariate) analysis such as factor analysis, cluster analysis, multiple linear regression (Babbie, 2013; Wagner, Kawulich, & Garner, 2012).

A survey was generated using an electronic data collection tool called Qualtrics. The survey was emailed to three office bound employees working in Maseru city centre for different companies, comprising both the public and private sectors. These initial three respondents shared the survey with their contacts also working in offices in the city centre. Of the 60 responses recorded, 52 were

analysable for findings. Of the 52 respondents, 35 were female and 17 were male, with their ages ranging between just under 24 years and over 50 years, the majority coming from the 35 to 39-year age group.

Once the data was captured from Qualtrics, it was cleaned to ensure data integrity. One of the common problems with surveys are that they generally result in missing data due to participants not completing all the necessary fields. De Leeuw (2001) suggested that missing data within the data collection process can be as a result of long questionnaires, time constraints, participants exercising their rights not to answer, or sensitive questions. The data was also tested for reliability ahead of analysis, an example being instances where respondents confirmed not having had a certain experience but having a point of view on it in another section of the survey.

Data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and a statistical programme called Jasp.014. Frequencies and related graphs were created in Microsoft Excel, while Jasp.014 was used for Chi-Square calculations.

3.5.1 Description of research participants

Potential customers were employees in:

- public sector;
- private sector;
- new employment;
- early career (1 to 5 years work experience);
- mid-career (5 to 15 years work experience);
- late-career (over 15 years work experience); and/or
- management.

They were selected as participants for their views pertaining to their satisfaction of the variety offered by food service retailers in Maseru, whether they would welcome a new vendor offering light and healthier alternatives, and their appetite for more offerings on e-commerce platforms.

3.5.2 Reliability and validity measures

The survey has two characteristics: it is reliable, consistently measuring the intended variables; and valid, measuring the constructs it purports to measure. The different types of validity and concomitant approaches to determining validity of the survey were taken into consideration (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Three perspectives of validity were tested: the first being construct validity which is concerned with the extent to which the survey measures the variables it claims to measure (Asadi, 2017). It considers the methodological choices made when designing the research instrument (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2012). The purpose of this study was to assess consumer preference for an online based meal preparation and delivery service in the food industry in Maseru, Lesotho. This service would offer office bound workers' a variety of light meal alternatives, even catering for specific dietary preferences such as Banting and vegetarian. The data collected addressed these aspects. The survey was designed for circulation to identified potential customers with the purpose of determining whether there would be a preference for the service on offer.

Due to the structured nature of the data, a quantitative research method approach was deemed fitting. Statistical analysis was used to analyse the data for findings. Microsoft Excel and a statistical programme called Jasp.014 were employed. Frequencies and related graphs are from Microsoft Excel, while Jasp.014 was used for Chi-Square calculations.

The research is therefore valid from a construct perspective.

Second, internal validity, a construct which is established when a research study investigates a causal relationship between two variables. It is especially important in experiments as they investigate how an independent variable affects a dependent variable (Mills et al., 2012). The internal test of validity was therefore not applicable to this study, as it was not investigating a relationship between variables.

Third, external validity, which is concerned with whether a study's research findings can be generalised to other relevant settings or groups (Asadi, 2017).

The test of general validity therefore considers the sample choice criteria, which are important because the findings of the study would be generalised to the population (Mills et al., 2012). The test of external validity was not applicable to this study as it did not seek to generalise its findings, but to answer the question of whether there could be a preference in the food service industry, particularly around online meal ordering offered to office bound workers for their lunchtime meal.

“Research reliability refers to whether the data collection techniques and analytic procedures used would produce consistent findings if they were repeated on another occasion or if they were replicated by another researcher” (Asadi, 2017, p. 50). In the event that another researcher selected the same sample of potential customers used, collected data using the same techniques used (electronically circulated survey), and used similar statistical data analysis techniques to evaluate the data, they would obtain similar findings. It was expected that the findings would be similar, thus further enhancing research reliability.

Four threats to research reliability were considered. First, participant error, which refers to factors that alter the performance of a participant (Jordan, 2018). To mitigate this error, the survey allowed respondents to save and exit the survey and continue at a later stage, should completion not be possible on first attempt.

Second, participant bias, which considers factors likely to produce a false response (Jordan, 2018). To mitigate this error all the questions at risk of individual interpretation were carefully defined to ensure all the participants are basing their answer on similar definitions.

Third, researcher error, which is concerned with factors altering the researcher’s interpretation of data collected (Galdas, 2017). The focus of mitigating this error lay in the goal of ensuring objective interpretation of the results. This was achieved by enlisting the services of an independent data analyser. Raw data was provided from the data collection tool, Qualtrics. The analysis was done on Microsoft excel and Jasp.014. Analysis reports were provided for interpretation and presentation of results in discussion form.

Fourth, researcher bias, which refers to any factors that induce bias in the researchers recording of responses (Galdas, 2017). The mitigation strategy used to manage this risk was the utilisation of the electronic data collection tool Qualtrics. This ensured that the researcher had no hands-on participation in recording responses, and that they did not need to be present when participants completed their surveys.

The mitigating initiatives addressing the two errors and two biases supported and promoted the reliability of the data collection tool.

3.5.3 Technical and administrative limitations

There were three limitations to the research. First, not every person who was approached was willing to participate in the study. Of those who agreed to participate, not every person ultimately participated. The researcher, not being based in the study location, had little power to influence or encourage responsiveness (Price & Murnan, 2004).

Second, during the data cleaning process, it was evident that some respondents might not have understood some of the questions; therefore, their responses were incoherent and unusable. For example, a respondent had never purchased a meal online before, but then also considered themselves frequent users of online meal purchasing applications. This incoherence rendered their responses not useful for analysis (Price & Murnan, 2004).

Third, the lack of availability of documented information from the study site, for example, information that can be accessed on the internet. There is generally poor record keeping in Lesotho, hence the data relied upon on the availability of the product in question, is as presented by the respondents (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the research methodology employed in this study, and outlined the research design and strategy, data and information collection method, including the research instrument, population and sample selection.

Thereafter, ethical considerations were addressed, followed by data analysis and processing for reliability and validity; it concluded with technical and administrative limitations.

The next chapter will present the study's results.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess consumer preference for an online meal ordering and payment service in the food industry in Maseru, Lesotho. This service would offer office bound workers delivery of a variety of light meal alternatives, even catering for specific dietary preferences such as Banting and vegetarian.

4.1 Availability of the Product and Service

As depicted in Figure 2, at least 76 per cent of the respondents indicated that there is no same day online meal preparation and delivery service. The other 14 per cent indicated that such a service did exist.

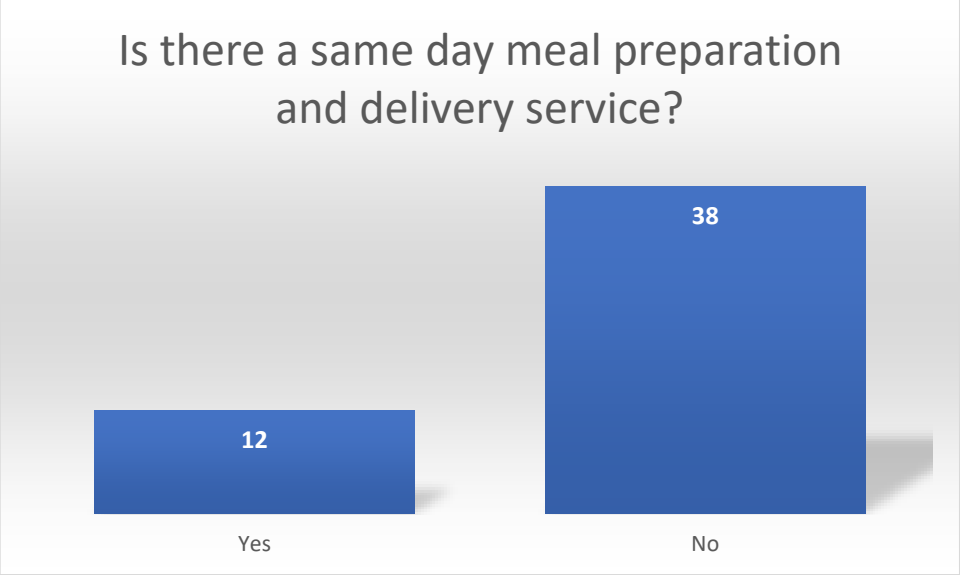


Figure 2: Product availability

The data suggests that the product and related services were available in the market, however it appears that the majority of the sample were not aware of their availability.

Figure 3 reflects that over 71 per cent of respondents recorded that their lunchtime meal suppliers did not provide healthy meal alternatives, while 29 per cent indicated that there were lunchtime suppliers who offer healthy meal alternatives. Again, the data was indicative of the service being available, but only 29 per cent of the sample was aware of it, signalling either visibility challenges, or lack of marketing initiatives by vendors already in the market.

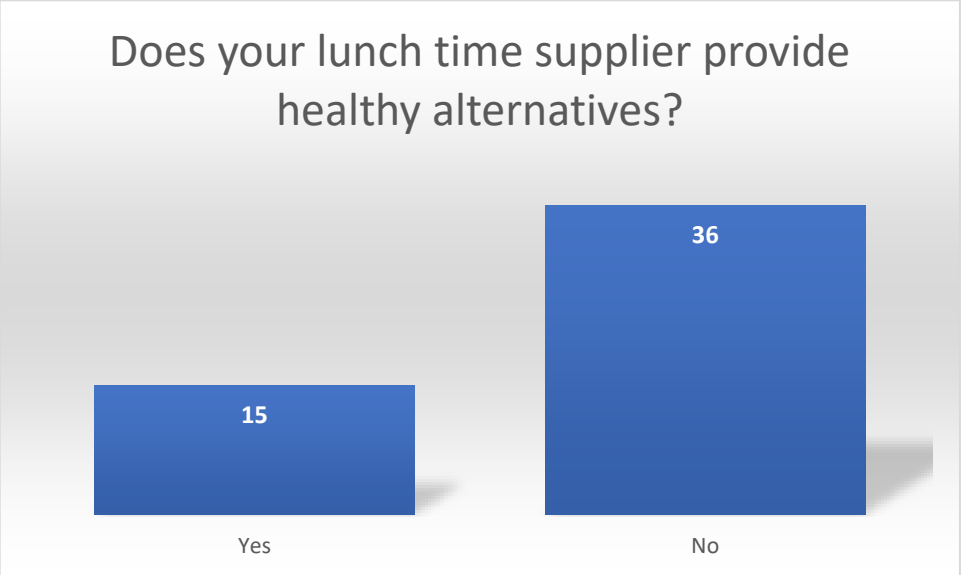


Figure 3: Healthy alternative availability

4.2 Customer Preference/Demand

Figure 4 depicts that only 30 per cent of the sample preferred online shopping in general. The market appears to be one where the majority of people still preferred physical store shopping to online shopping.



Figure 4: Preferred shopping channel

Despite the internet's colossal penetration in the world, in most developing economies e-commerce activity remains low compared to traditional channels. Customers do not prefer online shopping, notwithstanding its benefits such as convenience and variety (Akram, 2018).

According to Van Kerrebroeck, Brengman, and Willems, (2017), consumers prefer to purchase online products that do not require physical inspection. In other instances, the preference is influenced by the presence of perceived risks (Dai, 2007). Major perceived risks related to online shopping include product risk (the risk of receiving a different and inferior product to the one ordered), financial risk (the risk of internet fraud which has occurred when credit cards are used to make an online payments) and non-delivery risk (the risk of the purchased, and paid for, product not getting delivered). Secure online payment systems mitigate this risk, and security measures can be in place to enhance personal information and credit card protection.

In addition to risk, trust is also required for the success of online commerce (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003). Trust refers to the inclination of an individual or business to be susceptible to the actions of another entity based on the expectancy that the entity will fulfil a specific task (Taddeo, 2009). Thatcher, Carter, Li, and Rong (2013) highlighted four major areas of trust relevant to e-commerce: first, trust in merchants competence, benevolence and integrity;

second, trust in websites/applications technical attributes in relation to features and operational abilities to complete transactions; third, trust in IT infrastructure (the hardware and software) connecting users to the system; and fourth, trust in institutional infrastructure in the form of accreditations, seals and other compliance measures to ensure safe and successful transactions.

According to Figure 5, at least 60 per cent of respondents found online meal shopping appealing, 23 per cent were undecided, and only 17 per cent did not find it appealing.

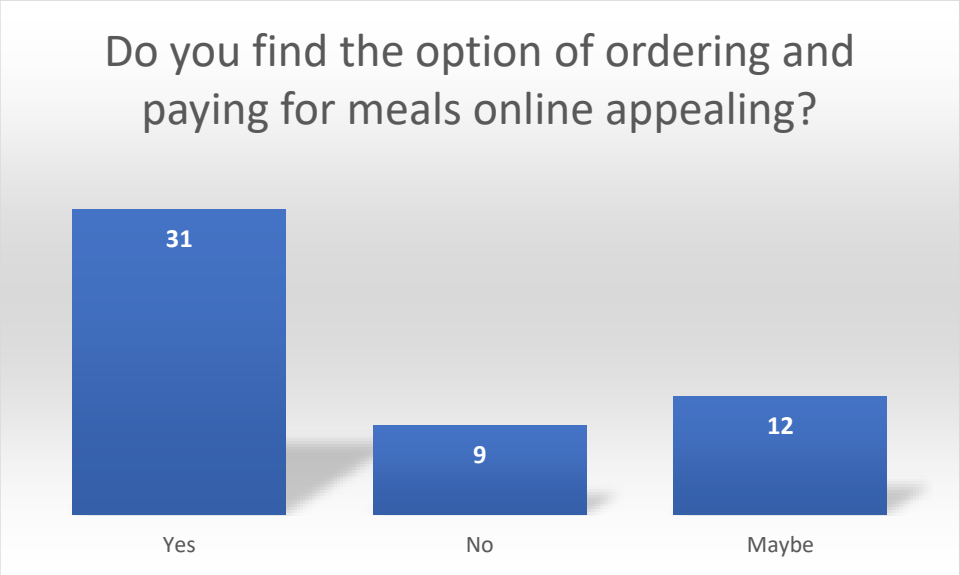


Figure 5: E-commerce appeal

The idea was appealing to 60 per cent of the population, this was indicative of an appetite in the market for meal offerings on e-commerce platforms.

Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1994) and Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2009) with their busy day-to-day schedules of pursuing career and family progression, are the key target market for online food delivery as it provides convenience, typically via their mobile phones (Hirschberg, Rajko, Schumacher, & Wrulich, 2016). Chai and Yat (2019) posited that consumers using food delivery services have increased substantially over the past decade due to the current pace of urban life together with the wide range of options consumers have available to them at any point in time. Additionally, continuous usage of services is promoted by improved convenience, transactional

convenience allowing for multiple payment options and loyalty and rewards programs (Euromonitor International, 2014). The advent of online food delivery has evolved due to key technology enablers making it possible, such as: mobile internet and smartphone adoption, multiple online payment options, location based service and artificial intelligence (Hospitality Technology, 2018).

In developing countries, the potential of online shopping is yet to be fully explored; customer preparedness and inclination to use the service exists but is yet to be addressed (Kwarteng & Pilik, 2016).

Figure 6 shows an uptake of the trend of buying meals online given that 71 per cent of participants have ordered a meal online.

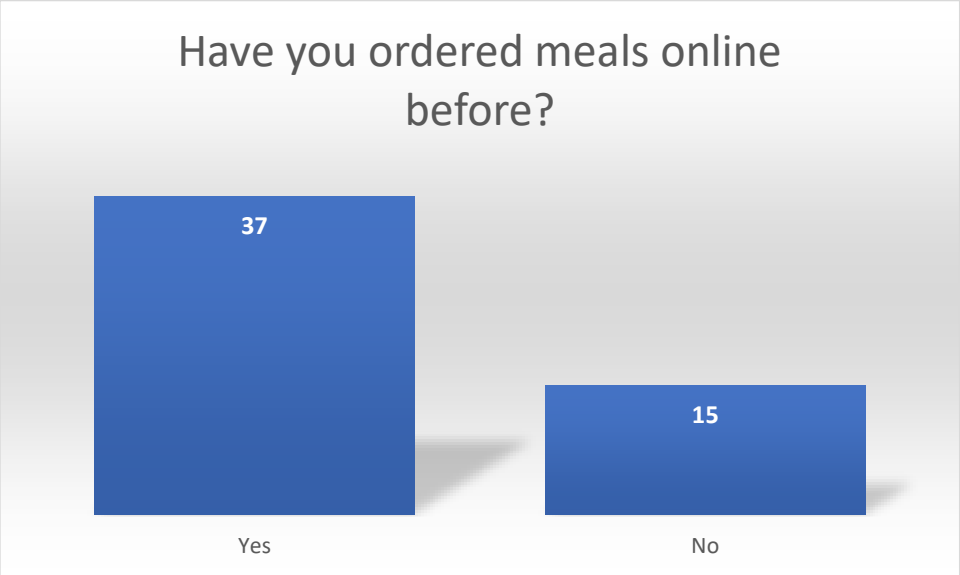


Figure 6: Online meal purchasing

Figure 7 however reflects that food vendors are not retaining customers; only 17 per cent (of the 71 per cent having purchased meals online) considered themselves frequent users of online meal purchasing applications.

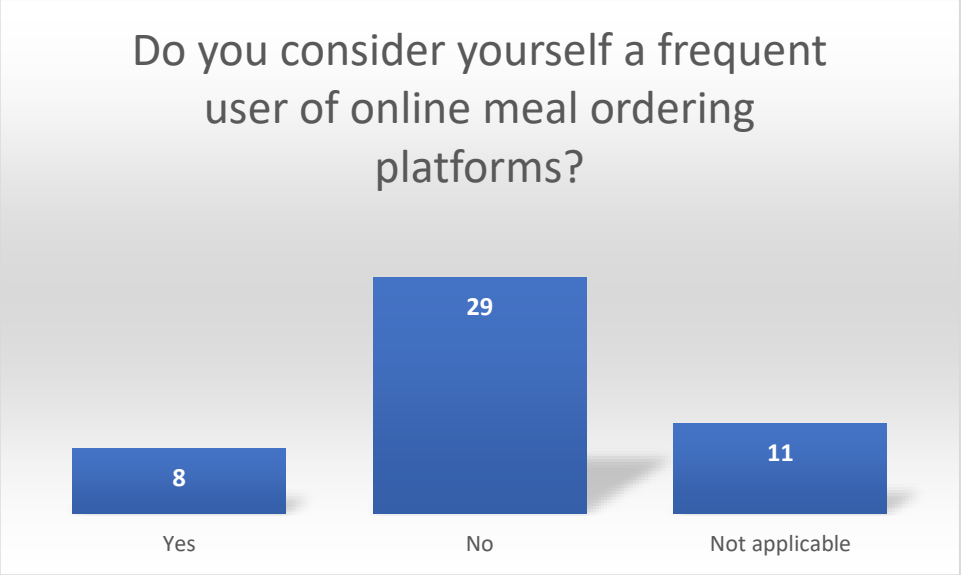


Figure 7: Frequency of online purchase of meals

Additionally, and supporting the results depicted in Figure 6, of online food vendors struggling to retain customers, Figure 8 reflects that only 10 per cent (of the 71 per cent who have purchased meals online) believed their frequency of ordering meals online was increasing.

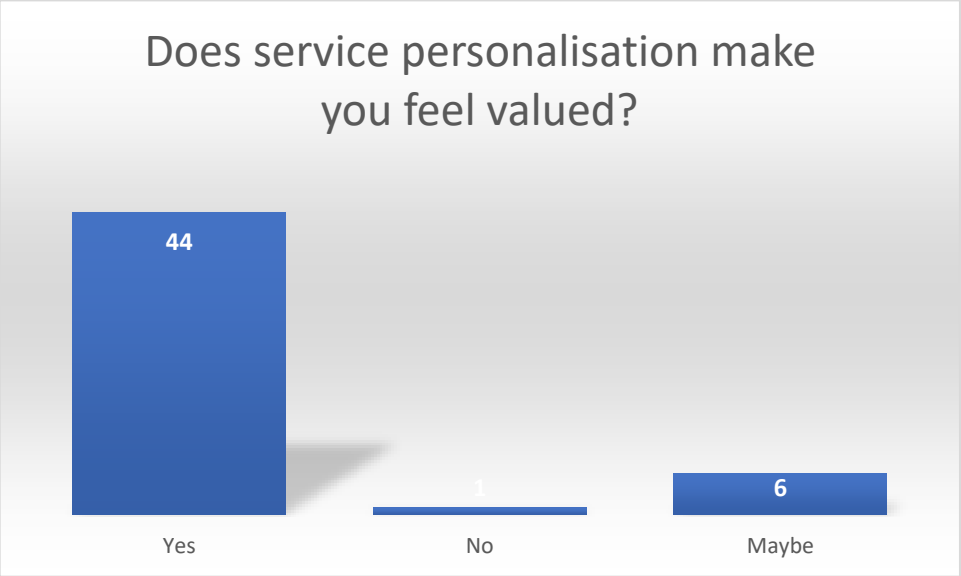


Figure 8: Frequency of online purchase of meals

The experience of ordering meals online did not translate to the frequency of ordering meals online. Previous studies have identified perceived risk as a key factor in customers' participation in e-commerce (Akram, 2018). Many e-commerce surveys reflect that although e-commerce offers some benefits to the

consumers, when compared to traditional commerce, in terms of convenience, a variety of products, greater control over their buying and entertaining experience, a large number of customers were reluctant to purchase online due to their concerns about privacy and security of their online transactions. This is especially relevant in developing countries where digital commerce is still emerging (Akram, 2018).

According to UNCTAD (2019), Basotho people do not trust the internet and e-commerce, which in turn translates to the low use of the internet for trade and discourages further uptake. UNCTAD (2019) recorded that only one-third of the Basotho people made a digital payment in 2018.

To date, the reports show that LDCs are inadequately prepared to capture the many opportunities emerging because of digitalisation (UNCTAD, 2019). According to UNCTAD (2019), Lesotho's readiness to conduct electronic trade is in its infancy.

> The country has just entered the digital era and is not yet fully prepared for it in a way that can lift two million Basotho out of poverty. Lesotho can use e-commerce to improve access to customers, markets and trade data, if it adopts a series of fundamental reforms. … these include measures to improve its telecommunications infrastructure, trade logistics, payment solutions, laws and regulations, skills development, and financing, which can accelerate e-commerce and spread the benefits throughout the economy (UNCTAD, 2019, para. 3, 5, 8).

In summary, the respondents were open to purchasing meals online. Many of them had experienced purchasing meals online even though few consider themselves regular users.

The responses pertaining to availability of online meals purchasing showed that many respondents noted that the product/service was not available. Were the product/service readily available, it might be that use would be higher.

4.3 Customisation and Personalisation

Figure 9 reflects that customisation and personalisation created a sense of value for at least 86 per cent of the respondents.

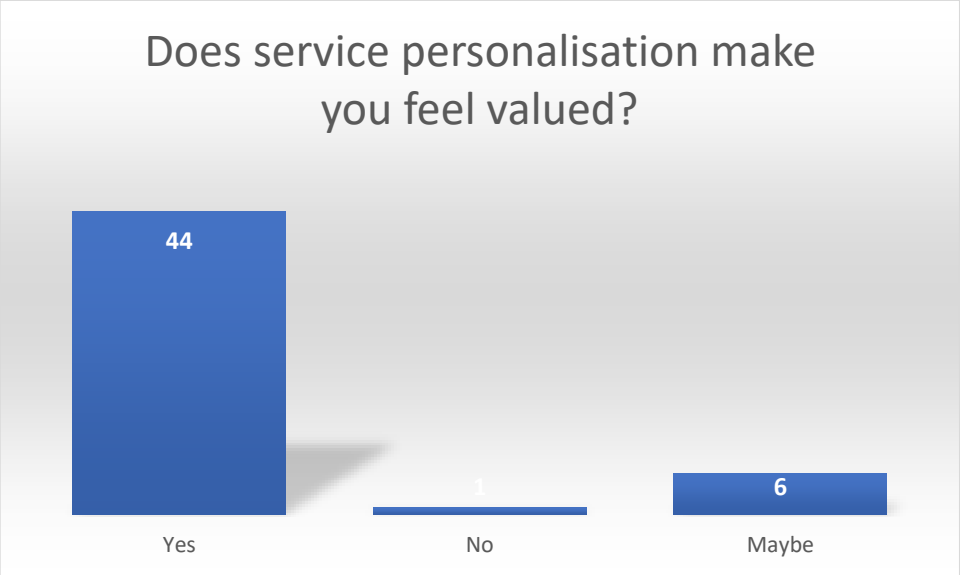


Figure 9: Impact of personalisation on customers

The positive impact of personalisation reflected in Figure 9 is extended in Figure 10 to personalised lunches having had a high positive appeal to over 88 per cent of the respondents.

In the research instrument an example given of personalisation of a meal was the inclusion of personal notes addressed to recipients by name containing well wishes for the day and enjoyment of the meal.

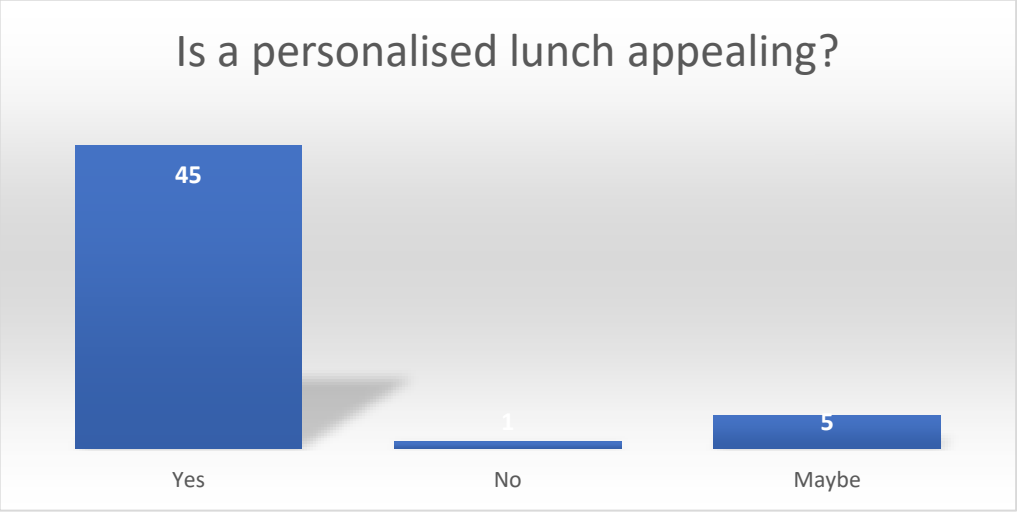


Figure 10: Appeal for personalised lunch

When asked about whether there are food service providers in the market providing personalisation with their meals, Figure 11 reflects that 82 per cent of respondents said that there was currently no service provider offering personalised meals.

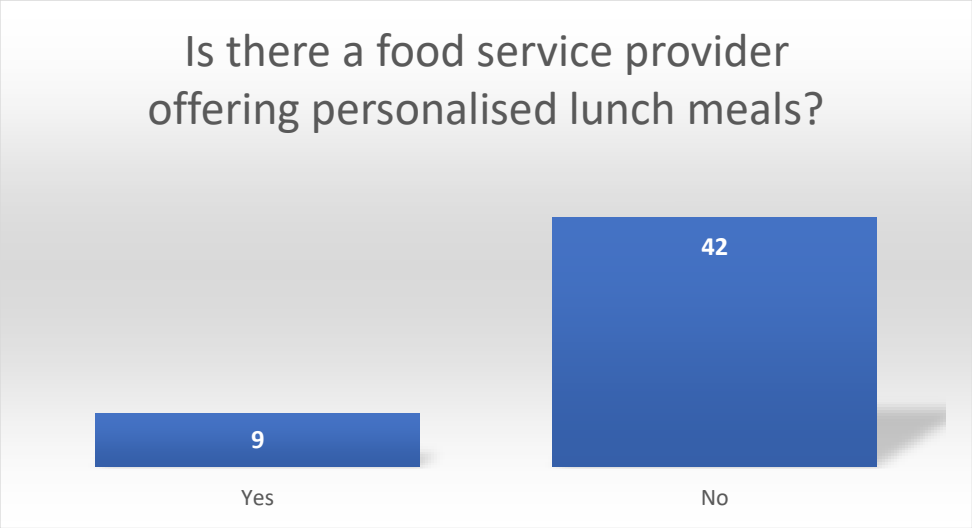


Figure 11: Availability of personalised meals

Research has found that customisation for individual customer's preferences can provide superior value (Akram, 2018). Evidently, personalisation is also appealing and makes customers feel valued as it improves the quality of their lives; service providers anticipate customers' desires and deliver products and services adjusted to customers' personal needs. Personalisation translates into an increase in customer engagement and loyalty (Pappas, Kourouthanassis, Giannakos, & Chrissikopoulos, 2017).

The findings indicated that, on one hand customised and personalised services in general, and meal offerings are rated highly by respondents. On the other hand, and also as reflected in Figure 11, only 17.6 per cent of the respondents agreed that they knew of existing customised lunch meal suppliers, indicating a possible opportunity in the market for the business venture idea under consideration.

Figure 12 reflects 60 per cent of the 17.6 per cent in Figure 11, considered themselves loyal customers: however, Figure 13 reflects that their loyalty was

not a factor of personalisation. Of the loyal respondents 50 per cent considered their loyalty as a result of the added personal touch as described; the other 50 per cent attributed their loyalty to other factors.

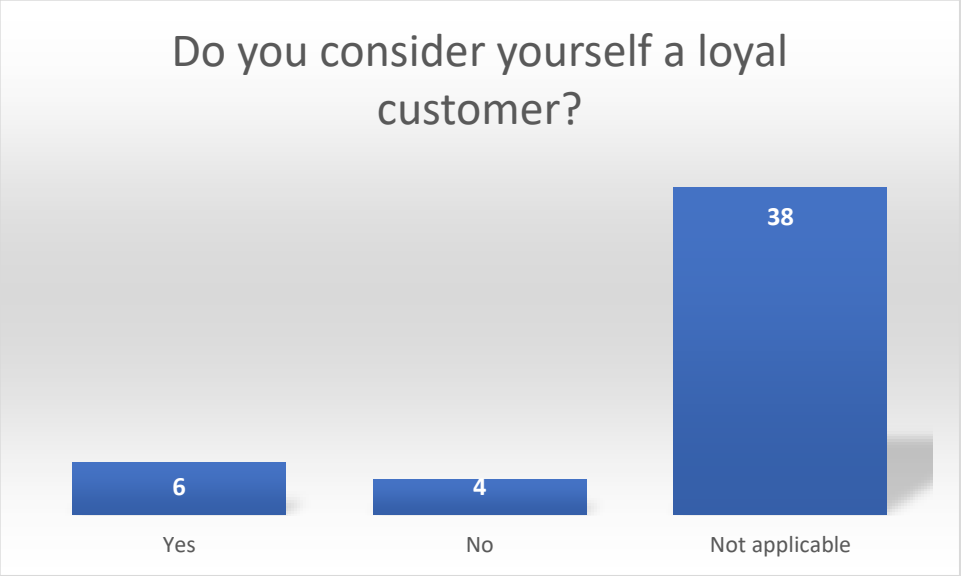


Figure 12: Customer loyalty

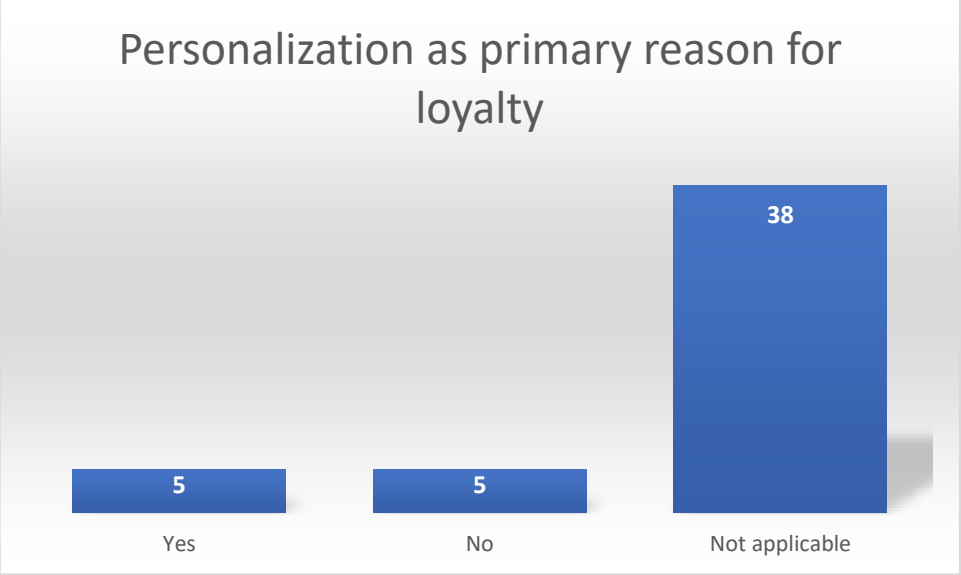


Figure 13: Customer loyalty as a factor of personalisation

Personalisation has the benefit of arousing positive emotions in some customers, which has the effect of encouraging loyalty and return sales (Pappas et al., 2017). However, considering the sample, it was not the primary reason for customer loyalty. Other factors influence customer loyalty and are considered in the section which follows.

4.4 Other Findings

4.4.1 Other factors influencing customer loyalty

While for some personalisation encouraged loyalty, Figure 14 reflects other respondents reporting factors such as product quality and variety, good customer care, and reliable service delivery as important attributes which influenced their loyalty. The envisaged business venture would benefit from incorporating the highly ranked factors when designing their product and service offering.

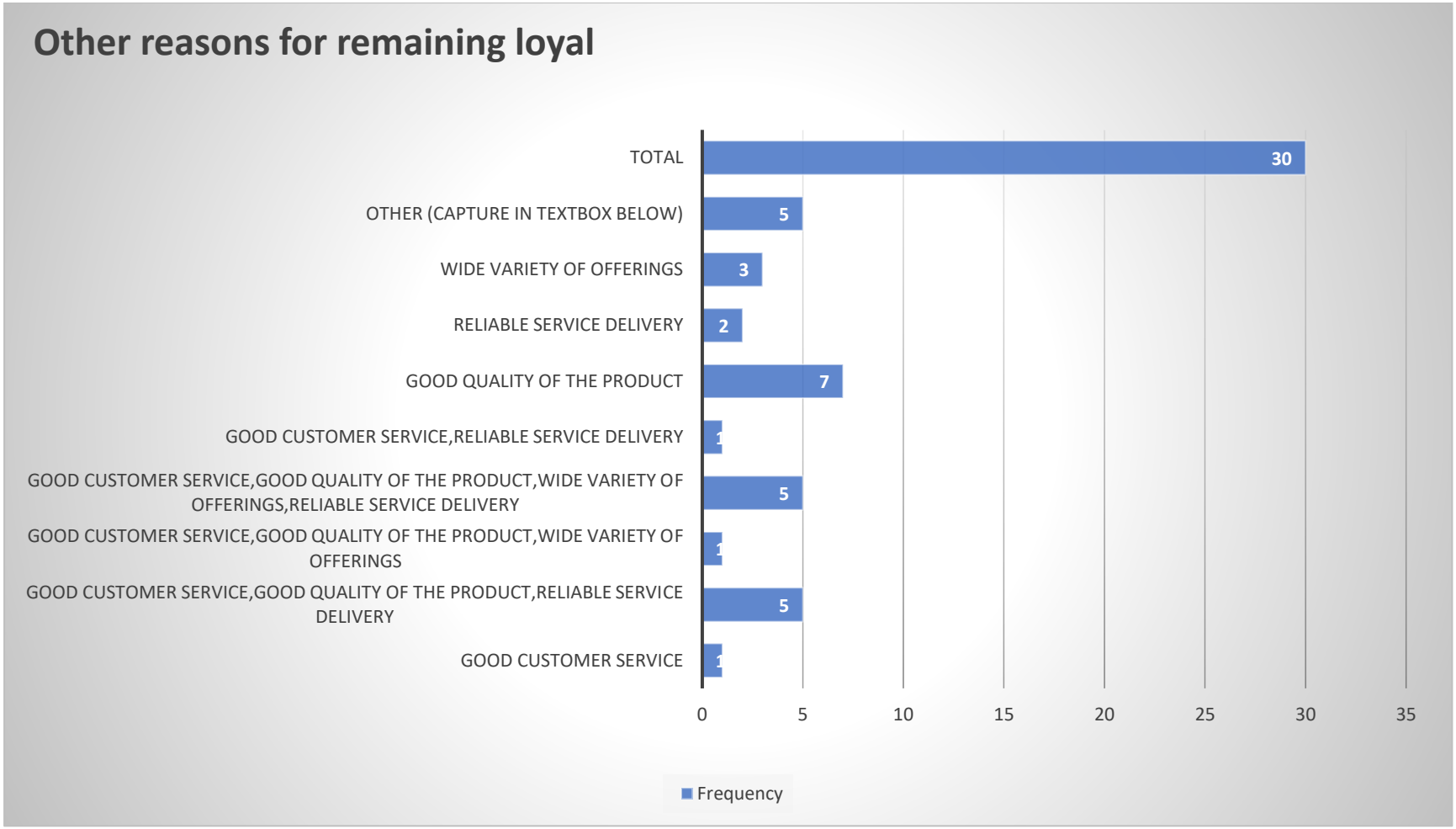


Figure 14: Other factors influencing Customer Loyalty

4.4.2 Does age influence shopping channel preference?

There was no evidence that shopping channel preference was related to age as indicated by a Chi-Square value of 8.376, Degrees of Freedom of 6, and a p-value of 0.212.

It was likely that this was due to the size of the sample, which had one person in the '24 years and under' category, and one person in the '50 years and older' category (Figure 15). In another study testing similar constructs but with a larger sample, it was proven that between the ages of 18-50 years respondents shop on the internet twice as much as those 50 years and older (Kwarteng & Pilik, 2016).



Figure 15: Shopping preferences according to age

4.4.3 Does gender influence preferences on shopping channel?

A chi-square test was used to test for independence between male and female respondents. The chi-square score was 4.4, and the p-value 0.0034. This indicated an association between gender and the preference between online shopping and physical store shopping. Proportionally, 53 per cent of the male respondents prefer online shopping as compared to only 47 per cent of the female respondents (Figure 16).

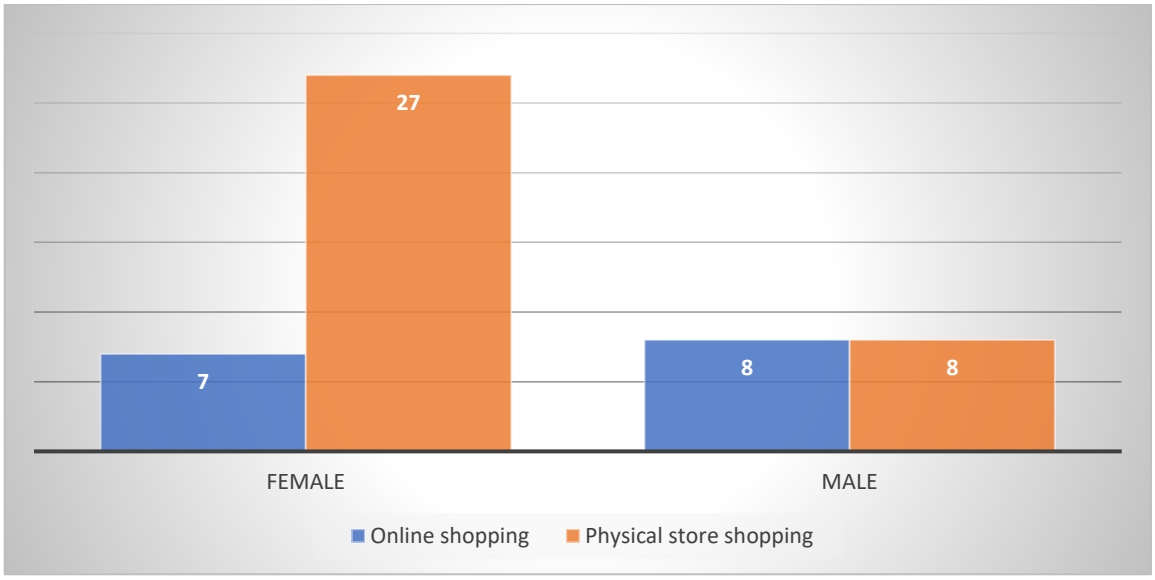


Figure 16: Shopping preferences according to gender

This finding is echoed in another study where it was found that checking availability of new products online, compared to visiting a physical store; males recorded the highest percentage (Kwarteng & Pilik, 2016). Li, Glass, and Records (2008) also found that men are more likely to adopt new technology than are women.

For the rest of the elements measured in this study, such as, the availability of an online meal ordering and delivery service, the preference for healthy eating alternatives, and the effect of personalised meals, differences between males and females could not be established.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The respondents' indications of the unavailability of online meal ordering and payment service confirmed the innovative and novel nature of the business idea. Respondent's openness to purchasing meals online speaks to growth potential of the business venture considered by this research. The business venture idea can therefore be said to exude entrepreneurial features within the context of existing service providers in the food service industry catering to the Maseru market. Strong marketing initiatives are recommended as a strategy for making the product known in the market. Online ordering and payment platforms must

be designed to be as user-friendly as possible to retain the customer-base and encourage repeat purchases and word-of-mouth referrals.

The idea of ordering and paying for lunch meals online and having them delivered to the office in time for lunch was appealing to many respondents. These data indicate that an under-served, under-exploited opportunity exists in the market.

Conversely, the data from the surveyed sample also suggested that the target market prefers physical store shopping to online shopping. The experience of ordering meals online did not translate to frequency of ordering. While there was an appetite for improved technological efficiency in the form of e-commerce platforms for meal purchasing, it was evident that barriers exist which prevented the introduction of the technological efficiency of online meal purchases from translating into enhanced customer experience with a lock-in effect on the customer; however, these barriers require further investigation.

With society having witnessed the world's economy flatten through the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the technology industry faced heightened pressure and demand for improvements to available technologies and innovation for new ones as the world's dependence on technology spiked. As the world settles after the turbulence of the pandemic, it is unlikely that technological dependence will regress; the contrary is likely as technological capabilities have been tried and tested and the effects studied and measured. In this environment, enabling and continuously improving relevant technological capabilities must be the priority of every business.

Customised, personalised office lunch offerings appealed to and created a sense of value in most of the respondents. These respondents indicated that there was no service provider offering customised and personalised meals; hence, it is evident that customisation and personalisation of office lunch meals is a strategy that can be employed to differentiate and create competitive advantage within the food service industry, particularly servicing the office bound workforce in Maseru.

Supposing the sample selected was representative of the population of the office bound working class in Maseru, Lesotho, there was a notable appeal/interest for

a meal ordering, payment, and delivery service leveraging an online platform. This could afford customers the opportunity to communicate the meals they would like on the menu with the product and service provider. This business venture would need to be marketed aggressively to ensure awareness in the target market. The venture would also need to dedicate resources to investigating the perceived risks the market associates with online platforms, with the aim of mitigating such risks. In addition, technological advancement, that is e-commerce, must be encouraged as it has the benefits of convenience, information storage, and continuing efficiencies for the business as technologies continuously develop and penetrate markets.

5.1 Areas for Further Research

Why is it that in 2022 supposedly modern and educated Basotho people working in offices in the capital city, where they are exposed to and interact with technology almost every day, physical store shopping is still preferred over the more convenient online shopping alternative? Is it awareness; are online vendors not effectively reaching their target market through marketing and advertising? Is it education, are Basotho people not yet comfortable using online applications? Or, could it be a lack of trust issue; not fully trusting that a purchase (including payment) can be concluded online and the vendor be faithful to deliver (and not disappear with both money and goods purchased). Are the challenges infrastructure related, as delivery would be difficult because of poor street markings and road conditions?

Why did 17 per cent of respondents not find ordering and paying for online meals appealing? What is it that makes a convenience unappealing? Have there been negative experiences, or is it just a rejection or fear of, or lack of trust in the unknown? For those who have not ordered meals online, why have they not ordered? Is it any of the reasons already mentioned: fear, lack of trust, marketing et cetera? The uptake frequency of online meal purchasing is low; the question is why? Those whose frequency of use is increasing; what are the reasons, therefore? These are all questions that could be addressed in further research.

Finally, the study was conducted with the consumer in mind: obtaining and understanding the consumers' preference. Further research can consider the retailers' perspective by studying the advantages and disadvantages of offering online food delivery services.

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