CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE E-TAILING WEBSITES FOR
SMMEs IN THE CAPE METROPOLE

by

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# DECLARATION

I, Anushka Benjamin, declare that everything in this dissertation is my own work, that I did it without help, and that this dissertation has never been turned in for a grade or a degree before. Also, it shows my own thoughts and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

**Signed**                                    **Date**    5 October 2023

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# ABSTRACT

The retail sector in South Africa is changing as e-tailing becomes a more successful form of business. Although e-tailing has not taken off as much as it has in developed economies, it is still an industry that is expanding and has ample room for new competitors to succeed. However, only a few e-tailers have so far been able to control the sector. Therefore, it is important to investigate the critical success factors (CSFs) that contribute to the success of e-tailing websites to identify how the customer conversion rate and overall user experience can be improved. In a volatile economy such as South Africa, it is vital for researchers to identify CSFs for effective e-tailing websites.

The objective of this study was to fill a knowledge gap by researching and identifying how to develop and maintain an effective e-tailing website to help current and future small, medium, and micro-enterprise (SMME) e-tailers drive economic growth and employment, enhance their current e-tailing website strategy, gain a competitive edge, and drive more traffic to the e-tailing website. To find the CSFs for successful e-tailing websites in Cape Metropole, this study explored the importance of e-tailers in the South African economy, the challenges faced by South African online shoppers, and the successful strategies used by owners of successful e-tailing websites.

This study adopted an interpretive philosophy to generate qualitative data. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 e-tailing website owners. The CSFs found in this study can help newcomers understand what it takes for an online store to perform well. The study revealed that knowledge and finance are the most fundamental CSFs that contribute to an e-tailer's success. Overall, the study identified the main problems faced by e-tailers and proposed ways to deal with the identified problems to enhance effective growth and development. This information can be used as a guide for both current and future e-tailing.

**Keywords:** E-tailing, e-tailers, critical success factors, SMMEs, e-tailing websites

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| B2C | Business-to-consumer |
| CSFs | Critical success factors |
| EPI | Economic Performance Indicators |
| SMMEs | Small, medium, and micro enterprises |

# GLOSSARY

**Conversion rate:** The share of visitors to a website that completes a desired goal (conversion) out of the total number of visitors (Grimsgaard, 2023).

**E-tailer:** Retailer selling goods via electronic transactions on the Internet (Graf & Schneider, 2016).

**User experience (UX):** All aspects of the end user's experience with a website (Ritter & Winterbottom, 2017).

**Website traffic:** Web users who visit a website (Morgan, 2019).

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction to study

The objective of this study was to identify the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites for small, medium, or micro enterprises (SMMEs) in the Cape Metropole. An e-tailing website is a virtual store that is ever-changing in the developing world of e-commerce. An e-tailing website can also be considered a sales platform used by e-tailers to sell goods and services over the Internet (Dixit & Sinha, 2016). According to Lilly and Jaculin (2020), both the structure and use of an e-tailing website can change the viability of an SMME's venture into e-commerce. Therefore, identifying and understanding the factors that customers use to assess the nature of an e-tailing website can serve as a benchmark for conceptualising and improving their e-tailing website.

Victor et al. (2018) posit that online trust, perceived usefulness, perceived product risk, and perceived financial risk are some of the factors that influence the acceptance of e-tailing among urban consumers. Similarly, Syed and Khan (2019) explain that convenience, customer service, trust, privacy and security, the web store environment, and web shopping enjoyment have an influence on e-tailing customers. In addition, Saxena and McDonagh (2017) argue that price, website design, inventory, logistics, accessibility, usage, information technology, fast delivery, security, customer service, and customer satisfaction are CSFs that affect the performance of e-tailing websites.

Saxena et al. (2018) suggest that developing trust, website personalisation, product variety, consistent reliable quality, competitive pricing, promotions, utilising available resources, offering various payment methods, applying economies of scale, targeting niche markets, focusing on margin-rich products, and engaging with customers are all CSFs contributing to the overall success of an effective e-tailing website. Therefore, the research on CSFs for effective e-tailing websites was based on the needs of SMMEs for functional purposes and online customers for practicality purposes, as both groups cater to the goal of an effective e-tailing website, which is to convert visitors into customers, increase profitability, and drive customer loyalty.

It is evident from literature that there is no distinct framework for the critical success factors for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. This study fills the knowledge gap in research on successful e-tailing tactics for Cape Metropole SMMEs, who face various challenges including poor negotiating power, cash flow issues, a lack of skilled workers, and onerous regulatory environments. Notwithstanding the potential cost-saving and sustainability benefits of e-tailing, Cape Metropole e-tailers face challenges due to a lack of information, subpar payment alternatives, and ineffective engagement distribution procedures. Therefore,

the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole were identified, and a framework was developed to direct SMMEs towards economic growth and employment. Given the limited research in this area, the study fills an important gap in the field.

## 1.2  Background to study

Internet technology has a rich history that dates back to the 1950s. However, it was not until the 1990s when the Internet became commercially available for business use that Personal Computers (PCs) began to improve, and e-commerce started to take off. Fast forward to today, Euromonitor International (2017), a global market researcher, published an article discussing the rise of online sales in South Africa. According to the report, online retail sales surged by an impressive 23% in 2016 alone, reaching a total of R8.1 billion. This massive growth can be attributed mainly to three factors: reliable upgrades, falling prices for Internet subscriptions, and consistent improvements in Internet infrastructure, which have led to an increase in the number of Internet users throughout South Africa.

These key components have been driving rapid development in Internet retailing across the country and forcing existing retailers to reconsider their business strategies. According to Syed and Khan (2019), this increase in e-tailing has created a new virtual format for retailers who must adapt or risk falling behind rivals who fully embrace this model. Thus, it is crucial for businesses operating within South Africa's dynamic marketplace to adapt their operations and leverage digital channels if they hope to succeed amidst fierce competition from virtual retailers carving out new niches within the rapidly evolving e-tailing industry.

E-tailing refers to the process of selling retail goods and services over the Internet. This term has been around since 1995, and it has been successful for more than two decades. The success of e-tailing can be traced back to 1997 when Dell Computers reported a massive increase in orders taken through its website. Since then, more retailers have embraced this model, thanks to the immense success of Amazon.com. Nowadays, various companies all over the world are adopting e-tailing models on their websites.

The City of Cape Town's Economic Performance Indicators Report (EPIC) was issued in 2016 and highlighted exceptional growth in e-commerce start-ups and online sales within South Africa's Cape Metropole region, making it an e-commerce hub nationally. Another report issued by the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) in 2019 indicated a year-on-year increase of about 13.6% from 2.25 million small businesses in Q3 of 2017 to about 2.56 million in Q3 of 2018 countrywide, thus, a prevalent growth both informally and formally across sectors (Shoba, 2019).

The purpose of the research was to investigate the state of SMMEs in the Western Cape. The Western Cape accounts for a significant 260,439 SMMEs in South Africa. Unfortunately, there is very little literature available on SMMEs, so the researcher had to seek guidance from an

official at one of South Africa's development agencies. The official revealed that there is a rapidly growing demand for e-tailing website development amongst SMMEs in the Cape Metropole region. This highlights an excellent opportunity for these businesses to succeed if they receive adequate guidance and support.

The key to unlocking this potential lies in identifying CSFs for effective e-tailing websites within the Cape Metropole. If these CSFs can be determined, it could lead to significant growth opportunities for South Africa's economy by boosting employment rates and encouraging innovation. However, despite its many benefits such as cost savings and sustainability initiatives, e-tailers in South Africa still face unique challenges due to their weak negotiating power and cash flow issues. Additionally, regulatory environments can make it difficult for e-tailers to succeed as they struggle with subpar payment options and ineffective distribution strategies.

To address these issues and ultimately promote economic growth and employment within South African SMMEs, it requires a thorough understanding of practical e-tailing techniques that work specifically within this context. Identifying CSFs will provide valuable insights into creating successful e-tailing strategies tailored towards meeting local market needs while overcoming unique challenges currently experienced by SMMEs operating within this region.

## 1.3 Problem statement

The alarming trend of high failure rates among SMMEs in South Africa poses a significant challenge to the country's economic landscape (Wessels, 2018). Former trade and industry minister Rob Davies stated that more than 70% of enterprises fail within their first two years of operation (Davies, 2013). This troubling pattern is attributed to multiple critical factors, including the disadvantaged bargaining position of South African businesses, persistent cash flow issues, acute shortages of essential skills and knowledge, and navigating a heavily regulated business environment (Chimucheka, 2013).

To address these obstacles and enhance their prospects of success, SMMEs must embrace contemporary technologies, including e-commerce websites. Such platforms can streamline operations, reduce costs, and improve sustainability. Effective digital strategies can help SMMEs differentiate themselves, expand their online reach, and provide customers with seamless purchasing experiences that foster brand loyalty. Thus, it is imperative for business owners to harness the potential benefits offered by e-commerce technology.

However, online consumers have high expectations when it comes to e-tailing websites, and poorly designed platforms can erode trust and drive customers away (Roy et al., 2022).

South African e-tailers face challenges related to limited e-commerce knowledge, inadequate payment options, and a lack of competence in distribution processes. Many business owners

struggle to comprehend the value of their e-tailing websites and lack the knowledge to integrate internet strategies into their traditional retail models (The Journalist, 2019).

Research indicates that there is a knowledge gap in this neglected area of study. Identifying the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites is crucial to support the survival of SMMEs in South Africa. To achieve this objective, it is essential to establish a framework that outlines key CSFs capable of assisting SMMEs in creating appealing e-tailing websites that yield positive outcomes. This framework aims to attract more visitors, enhance customer engagement, and ultimately drive business results. Given the significance of this matter, it is crucial to conduct research on CSFs for effective e-tailing websites among SMMEs in the Cape Metropole region. By identifying these CSFs, SMMEs can equip themselves to thrive in an increasingly digital competitive landscape and leverage their online presence to grow their businesses.

## 1.4    Rationale and significance of the study

The research conducted in this study holds significant relevance for small and medium-sized enterprise (SMME) e-tailers operating in the Cape Metropole region and contributes to the broader understanding of e-commerce dynamics in South Africa.

Enhancing E-tailing Website Strategies: The primary goal of this research is to empower SMME e-tailers in the Cape Metropole to enhance their e-tailing websites. By identifying and implementing Critical Success Factors (CSFs) based on empirical findings, e-tailers can develop more effective website strategies. In a rapidly evolving retail landscape, these strategies are crucial for attracting and retaining customers, driving sales, and achieving long-term sustainability.

Adapting to a Changing Retail Sector: The retail sector in South Africa is undergoing a transformation, with e-tailing gaining prominence as a viable and successful business model. While the e-tailing industry in South Africa may not have reached the levels observed in developed economies, it is expanding, offering ample opportunities for new entrants to thrive. However, the sector has thus far been dominated by a few established players. Therefore, understanding the CSFs that have contributed to their success is vital for new and existing e-tailers looking to improve customer conversion rates and overall user experiences.

Navigating Economic Volatility: South Africa's economy is characterised by volatility and uncertainty. In such an environment, it is imperative to identify and implement strategies that can bolster the resilience and growth of SMMEs. Effective e-tailing websites can serve as a valuable tool for economic growth and job creation. By providing SMME e-tailers with the knowledge and tools to optimise their online presence, this research contributes to economic stability and employment opportunities in the region.

Academic Contribution: This study addresses a significant knowledge gap in the field of e-commerce and e-tailing in South Africa, offering insights into the factors that drive success in this context. Academic institutions, particularly the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences and the Department of Retail Business Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, can benefit from this research. It can serve as a foundation for developing curriculum and short courses that prepare aspiring entrepreneurs and students for effective e-tail business management.

Personal and Professional Growth: The completion of this study is also personally significant for the researcher, as it represents a critical milestone in achieving a master's degree in Retail Business Management. Through this research, the researcher not only contributes to the academic discourse but also gains valuable insights and expertise that can be applied to real-world business challenges.

In conclusion, this research study addresses pressing issues in the evolving landscape of South African e-tailing, providing practical guidance for SMME e-tailers, contributing to economic development, and serving as an academic resource for future entrepreneurs and researchers in the field. It is a timely and relevant endeavour with the potential to drive positive change in the local business community and academia.

## 1.5 Objectives of the study

### 1.5.1 Main objective

The main objective of the research study was to identify the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole.

### 1.5.2 Secondary objectives

The following sub-objectives were formulated to accomplish the main objective of the study:

- To establish the challenges faced by SMME e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole.
- To investigate the strategies that SMMEs should implement to improve the effectiveness of their e-tailing websites.

### 1.5.3 Main question

The main question of this study was formulated as follows: What are the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole?

### 1.5.4 Secondary questions

The following secondary questions were derived from the main research question:

- What are the challenges SMME e-tailing websites face in the Cape Metropole?
- What strategies should SMME e-tailers implement to improve the effectiveness of their websites?

## 1.6    Structure of the dissertation



**Figure 1.1: Structure of the dissertation**
**(Author's own creation)**

## 1.7    Chapter summary

This chapter serves as an introduction, providing context for the research study as well as empirical evidence to back up the issue. The research problem, which guided 'the direction of the study and helped current and prospective e-tailers improve their website strategies and give them the competitive edge they need to take calculated risks to increase their customer conversion rate and earn more money. The research problem was presented after the background of the study.

The primary goal of the study is to identify CSFs that can make e-tailing websites effective for SMMEs in this region, while sub-questions aim to determine challenges faced by these websites and strategies to enhance their efficacy. The results of this study will be significant for the Cape Peninsula University of Technology's Faculty of Business and Management Sciences and Department of Retail Business Management as they can serve as motivation for aspiring entrepreneurs and may aid in the creation of short courses for SMMEs. The theoretical framework and literature review will be provided in the next chapter to give background information for this research investigation.

# CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction to the literature review

The 'foundation of the research was set in the preceding chapter, which included an overview of the subject, an introduction, background knowledge, and a problem statement. To help readers understand what to anticipate from the study, the research questions and objectives were also stated. This chapter elaborates on related literature sourced from academic journals, newspaper articles, books and periodicals. The literature focuses on case studies designed to clarify the topic under investigation. By reading and evaluating this literature, a better understanding of the significance of conducting this study is gained.

Chapter 2 first examines what constitutes critical success factors (CSFs). Next, e-tailing is defined, and the benefits of online shopping are explored before the CSFs for e-tailing websites are outlined. Lastly, some challenges associated with managing e-tailing websites, particularly in relation to those that operate in the Cape Metropole area, are discussed.

## 2.2 What are critical success factors?

CSFs are the most important elements that determine whether a business will succeed or fail. According to Raravi et al. (2013), these factors can affect performance in either a positive or negative way and therefore must be executed correctly for the business to succeed. The first time the idea of CSFs was written about was in 1979, when Rockart wrote about the information needs of CEOs. Critical success factors are thus, for any business, the limited number of areas in which results, if satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organisation. They represent the key areas where things must go right for the business to flourish. If results in these areas are not adequate, the organisation's efforts for the period will be less than desired.

The concept has been accepted and cited by other scholars (El-Abidi et al., 2019; Raravi et al., 2013) describe CFSs as elements that must be done to guarantee the success of a company. In reference to e-tailing, CSFs would describe the features of the website that make the business standout amid competition. However, CSFs should not be mistaken for competitive advantage, as only a small number of players in a given market may accomplish it. Customers select an e-commerce website that adheres to the criteria they find most appealing. This implies that customers have a significant influence over what an e-tailing website should emphasise. Regardless of the type of context on which CSFs rely, considering customers' preferences is of great importance. Customers are the ones that generate most of the profit for companies, as their opinions may influence the purchasing potential of other online customers (Xu, 2019).

A CSF can also be defined as a goal of growth: to achieve and maintain critical mass size and collectively help a business be more favourable in a competitive market (Naveed et al., 2017). The researchers further emphasised that CSFs need to be limited in number and should be measurable and controllable. Naveed et al. (2017) also note that CSFs should be regarded as a model and framework for strategic planning to help direct stakeholders toward establishing the aspects that should be given priority to facilitate the attainment of business goals. El-Abidi et al. (2019) highlights the need for e-tailing businesses paying close attention to the process of identifying CSFs, as it influences the business' operating activities and future prosperity. CSFs are essential for strategy planning, as e-tailing businesses cannot achieve success without effectively adopting them (Blokdijk, 2019).

The CSF approach is widely accepted in various fields of study. However, no standard rules for identifying CSFs have been developed. Therefore, the CSF approach can be adopted for effective e-tailing websites as the decision-making is not always centralised and intuitive (El-Abidi et al., 2019). Raravi et al. (2013) conclude that the concept of CSFs therefore implies theories of business activities that must be performed well to succeed and secure competitive performance, no matter the type of business.

## 2.3    What is e-tailing?

E-tailing, also known as online retail, is a way for retailers to sell goods and services over the web. The term was first used in the 1990s and its use in retail has since grown. E-tailing is synonymous with the business-to-consumer (B2C) transaction model of e-commerce (Baskaran & Keloth, 2018). E-tailing allows retailers to conduct business online and bypass various intermediaries, thereby shortening the distribution channel (Goga et al., 2019). Hybrid retailers have adopted the Internet as an additional channel to sell their goods, creating a cross-channel experience involving both physical and online shopping (Nagula & Lui, 2020). This model helps retailers gain a competitive edge over a significant share of the market and reduces supply chain costs. E-tailing is thought to be a rapidly growing segment, and retailers need to find ways to sell their goods online to secure the biggest market share.

In agreement, Min (2021) asserts that e-tailing significantly reduces costs and increases demand. Saxena et al. (2018) also posit that e-tailers gain a competitive advantage over other retail businesses with the help of marketing management techniques that result in positive impacts on the success of e-tailing. Banerjee and Seetharaman (2022) describe e-tailing as the selling of goods and services to a market of end consumers through the Internet. The selection and ordering of goods are conducted online, and the e-tailing company dispatches the goods to the customers' doorstep. Therefore, e-tailing is a mix of both technology and supply chain innovation (Banerjee & Seetharaman, 2022). Due to the rapid growth of e-commerce, people are shifting from shopping in brick-and-mortar stores to shopping online.

This has changed traditional retail into online retail. With the improvements and advancements in technology, retailers have also started selling their merchandise online (BusinessTech, 2022).

However, e-tailing is no longer merely about buying and selling goods and services. It is also about the exchange of information, which is also prominent nowadays (Liu et al., 2021). In support, Liu et al. (2017) explained that the marriage of electronic media and business makes it easy for businesses to share information with their supply chain partners, customers, and other business partners. Information technology helps buyers, suppliers, distributors, and manufacturers meet online for trade. Information flow is an integral part of e-tailing. The e-Information system provides two-way information: forward (information about the business required by customers) and backward (information about the customer needed by business firms). Customers now require more product information when buying online, which helps them decide whether to buy a product through physical stores or online. It also helps them in deciding which e-tailer they choose by comparing factors like reliability, price, timeliness, and customer service.

E-tailing is considered the future of retail in South Africa, with many e-commerce giants entering the South African market. Additionally, many South African vendors are utilising the Internet to sell goods and services through their individual websites.

## 2.4   The purpose of e-tailing websites

E-tailing websites make online trade easy between businesses and consumers (Saxena et al., 2018). An e-tailing website should be able to take orders, accept payments, handle shipping and logistics, and provide customer service. These websites provide an extensive scope of online sales and transactions in a safe and convenient way. The primary goals of an e-tailing website are to engage visitors, encourage visitors to spend time viewing and interacting with the content, and facilitate commerce. E-tailing websites facilitate the sharing of information, enabling businesses to respond effectively to customer demands, thus resulting in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty as well as long-term financial performance (Min, 2021). E-tailing websites add value through the availability of current information regarding orders shared with suppliers, enabling the coordination of inbound logistics processes, resulting in reduced inventory levels and increased profitability, as highlighted by Razak and Vattikoti (2018).

Razak and Vattikoti (2018) further explain that e-tailing businesses have simplified their websites and mobile apps so that customers could quickly and easily place orders. Prepaid wallets and hassle-free payment systems are two other features that might help win back loyal customers. One of the main reasons for the success of e-commerce businesses is the introduction of payment methods such as *Cash on Delivery* and *Card on Delivery*.

Customisation of business models is possible in e-tailing as sellers can alter the product designs, prices, and marketing tactics. The Internet retailing platform enables sellers to predict consumer demand by tracking clicks on a particular product page.

E-tailing significantly reduces costs and increases demand. Therefore, to meet the rising demand, e-tailing businesses should plan to increase their expenditures in logistics, supply chain management, and technology. Warehouses equipped with cutting-edge technology and greater automation ought to be the top priority (Razak & Vattikoti, 2018) to guarantee timely product deliveries. Its goal is to provide shoppers with goods across a broad price spectrum. The e-commerce sector is diversifying its supply chain by forming partnerships with several domestic and foreign suppliers and other businesses. E-tailing businesses should also focus on improving their technology. For example, if an e-tailer's goal is to get consumers to purchase products from the e-tailer's website, then the e-tailer could provide an in-depth, interactive website featuring information about their products so that consumers know which item to purchase. Furthermore, the information accessed is useful in crafting a global competitive advantage. For example, in Italy, small businesses that used e-tailing websites were able to improve customer service, grow their markets, and find new target markets. Similarly, in other countries, using e-tailing websites made businesses more efficient and helped them make more money (Min 2021). Saxena et al. (2018) explain that businesses that are better suited to adopting e-tailing gain more from it compared to those that are a poor fit. E-tailing websites improve productivity, reduce costs, and enhance flexibility in businesses (Kumar et al., 2020).

Luangsakdapich and Posri (2022) found that although several costs are associated with setting up the e-tailing websites, the benefits accrued are significant. Hicks (2018) explains that online retailing presents an opportunity for SMMEs to remain competitive in a fast-paced, technologically oriented market. The researchers noted that marketing and running e-tailing websites has a significant effect on how well a business does. This is because customers can find stores through search engines or social media, which cuts down on advertising and marketing costs. E-tailing is a rapidly growing segment and harnessing an effective e-tailing website could not only reduce costs but also help improve sustainability. The rapid development and success of e-tailing websites represent a significant economic opportunity for modern retailers, and they promote rapid industrial growth. Hicks (2018) suggests that e-tailing could provide SMMEs with a sustainable competitive advantage in today's business environment.

## 2.5    The benefits of e-tailing websites

E-tailing is seen as a new way for retailers to do business as it allows them to sell more products and services over the Internet and connects customers and suppliers in the value

chain (Oberoi et al., 2017). The Internet is used by a lot of people, which has created a competitive environment where retailers can improve how they do business. Attaran and Woods (2019) noted that using Internet-based software allows small businesses to facilitate communication between customers, suppliers, and distributors, thus enhancing the efficiency of business operations. E-tailing websites are the catalyst for stimulating business transformations that trigger considerable changes in business processes and performance outcomes. Retailers worldwide have started using the e-tailing model, which has helped them in many ways.

Progress in communication technology has encouraged the adoption and growth of online shopping (Moslehpour et al., 2018). For example, Chinese mobile phone giant Xiomi claims to have sold 75,000 of its smart-phone models Mi3 through exclusive online flash sales on Flipkart in eight seconds. Customers can visit the store virtually and compare the prices of various offerings at their own convenience. The introduction of mobile applications has further pushed up the business of e-tailing in emerging markets. Wireless Internet via mobile phones is another factor driving change in the daily activities of the modern world.

Online shopping offers many advantages. Convenience is one of the most obvious advantages for both consumers and online businesses. Customers no longer have to physically go to a store if the store offers e-shopping. They can simply make use of a computer or mobile phone to do their shopping in the comfort of their home or workplace (Phong et al., 2018). In a research study conducted by Deloitte, it was found that South Africans cited convenience as one of the biggest advantages of shopping online (ITWeb, 2022).

Taher (2021) posits that in recent decades, e-commerce has grown to become an integral part of the global economy. It enables companies to reach a larger client base and gives consumers more flexibility in when and where they purchase. The convenience of online shopping is rapidly overtaking traditional retail (May & Sundberg, 2013). The COVID-19 health epidemic has also aided the growth of e-commerce. Customers have flocked to the Internet market as more individuals choose to forego interaction in favour of social isolation, quarantine, or just avoiding public locations and busy regions. Consequently, the total number of clients, both regular and new, has increased (Taher, 2021).

The various convenience factors that can increase the frequency of online purchases are summarised as follows:

- Availability of item: Online retailers have the convenience of making a wide selection of products reflecting the newest styles and trends available without investing in physical infrastructure (Pham et al., 2020).
- Anytime shopping: E-tailers have an advantage over traditional stores due to the convenience of anytime shopping that is still untapped (Pham et al., 2020).

- Convenience of anywhere shopping is essentially non-existent in the context of traditional stores. Customers can place online orders from any location, including a moving car. This promotes online sales and saves consumers time (Arora & Aggarwal, 2018).
- Ease of Payment option: Having a simple way to pay increases consumers' propensity for online shopping, especially when it allows them to skip lengthy lines (Arora & Aggarwal, 2018).
- Anytime Service and Return Policy: For online purchases, having an easy service and a smooth return policy is important.

The steps to make shopping easier in the ways listed above boost the business growth of e-tailers. By taking care of consumers' expectations, companies engaged in e-tailing business are able to attract and retain customers (Narang & Trivedi, 2016). Online shopping provides customers with relatively cheap prices in comparison to traditional brick-and-mortar stores. This is due to bulk purchases made directly from the producers result in lower product costs for the e-sellers. Furthermore, lower levels in the distribution network reduce distribution costs (Huyghe et al., 2017). In addition, e-tailers' operating costs tend to be lower due to their minimal labour force and the lack of a need to pay rent on showrooms. These cost advantages can be transferred to customers in the form of lower prices. Online shopping allows customers to compare prices across different websites and choose the one with the lowest price, rather than buying a product at a high price from a store nearby (Aw, 2019).

Online shopping is convenient, and customers can make purchases anytime and from anywhere (Arora & Aggarwal, 2018). This makes e-purchasing an effortless exercise, as customers do not have to travel through heavy traffic, find parking spots, wait in checkout queues, or get stuck in crowded stores. In addition, e-tailers do not have to worry about running out of shelf space because customers can see the products virtually. Visual options on the website make it easier to compare different products without having to move from one place to another and pay for transportation (Serra, 2019). E-tailing websites offer a display of different varieties and an assortment of products, which gives customers the opportunity to compare different products and their costs. The websites also facilitate customers' searches by reducing the search cost for product features and price-related information (Kautish & Sharma, 2019).

Companies that adopt e-tailing websites as a complementary channel have an edge over their store counterparts in terms of reach and convenience. Geographic areas that were neglected earlier because of resource limitations can now be served (Kumar et al., 2012).

Through proper logistics, e-tailers can take advantage of an untapped market spread over a large geographical area (Marwah & Saxena, 2019). For example, a store like Game can only serve customers in its immediate area, but an online store can take orders from customers

worldwide. E-tailing is ideal for niche products as it can reach its target market directly. For instance, Dell computers began operations in South Africa by only serving customers online. The Internet offers e-tailers a massive opportunity to communicate about their products at a low cost. Customers who are happy with online delivery and services can help e-tailers grow by turning more and more prospects into customers. The advantage of reaching out to more buyers can, in turn, help them to reap economies of scale (Narang & Trivedi, 2016).

Effective e-tailing websites enable businesses to effectively respond to customer demands, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and brand loyalty as well as long-term financial performance (Tzavlopoulos et al., 2019). It is important to investigate the significant touchpoints influencing decision-making in online shopping on e-tailing websites. Customers play a critical role in the success of a business, as without customers and transactions, the business would cease to exist. Catering to customers' demands is an essential part of an e-tailer's sales funnel. Therefore, understanding the process that customers undergo when purchasing is a vital part of the process of identifying the CSFs for e-tailing websites (Prisync, 2018).

## 2.6   Critical success factors for effective e-tailing websites

Information system (IS) success has been extensively studied, but the traditional IS success model is based on in-house systems. This study focuses on the identification of the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites. Researchers may need to devise new constructs and linkages that are specific to the e-commerce context, and, in this case, the IS field needs to be made aware of the possibility of IS success models that differentiate. In the e-commerce context, "e-tailing systems" are defined as the entire system that is used to accomplish online retailing functions. An effective e-tailing website refers to its ability to create an attractive presence and a positive user experience that meets the objectives of the business (Barker, 2016). The most fundamental factor for sales revenue is customer satisfaction. Since the fulfilment of sales involves not only the website but also the back-end services, an e-tailing system is no longer an IT-only system but a combination of IT and other retailing components. An e-tailing website refers to the part of an e-tailing system that is visible to the customer online (Banerjee & Seetharaman, 2022).

Past research findings demonstrate that prior online shopping experiences have a direct impact on Internet shopping intentions (Wu et al., 2017). Customer trust and satisfaction are the key antecedents of continued purchases (Rita et al., 2019). Customer satisfaction is of extreme importance in establishing long-term relationships with customers online. It has been found that a satisfied customer has positive purchase intentions, such as a repurchase, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty in the long term. Researchers have developed various models to depict the factors influencing customer satisfaction. The first model is the Kano

Model of Customer Satisfaction, which classifies product attributes based on their perception by customers and the effect this has on customer satisfaction (Rotar & Kozar, 2017). The second model is the SERVQUAL model, developed to assess customer perceptions of service quality and measure the gap between customers' expectations of the service they would receive versus their perceptions of the actual service delivered (Fan et al., 2017). However, these models primarily focus on traditional retail stores and may not always be applicable to online customer satisfaction.

Erdil and Arani (2018) conducted a study to investigate the usefulness of quality improvement in translating customer needs into design requirements to ensure that the output (whether a product or process) meets these needs. The researchers conducted an extensive literature review that demonstrated that Quality Function Deployment (QFD) is effective in enhancing the quality of process and product outcomes. In another study, Liu et al. (2019) noted that the QFD model is effective in identifying suitable suppliers for e-commerce platforms.

Liao et al. (2017) adopted the expectancy confirmation theory and the regret theory to evaluate how consumers' search efforts affect their pleasure and regret, as well as the impact that external reference points have on their propensity to repurchase. 268 actual online shoppers were used to test the model. Using a partial least squares approach, Liao et al. (2017) found that the predictors of regret are the degree to which expectations were confirmed, the amount of time spent searching, and the attractiveness of alternatives. Moreover, the degree to which expectations were confirmed and the amount of time spent searching had significant positive effects on satisfaction and repurchase intention. Additionally, customer loyalty acts as a moderator between contentment and the propensity to buy. In another similar study, Vasić et al. (2019) found that security, information availability, shipping, quality, time, and pricing influenced customer satisfaction. Al Halbusi et al. (2022) identified the following technological factors that influence online shoppers' satisfaction: security, usability, website design, and privacy; shopping factors, which include convenience, trustworthiness, and delivery; and product factors, which consist of merchandising, product value, and product customisation.

Online shopping features can be either consumers' perceptions of functional and utilitarian dimensions like ease of use and usefulness or their perceptions of emotional and hedonistic dimensions like "enjoyment" (Dospinescu et al., 2021). In addition to these relevant online shopping features, other factors in this context are consumer traits, product characteristics, previous online shopping experiences, and trust in online shopping.

Consumers' decisions about whether to shop online are also influenced by the type of product or service under consideration. The lack of physical contact and assistance in shopping on the Internet is one factor that influences this suitability (Seifert et al., 2021). Another factor is the need to feel, touch, smell, or being able to try the product, which is not possible when shopping

online. Clothing, electronics, furnishings, groceries, household goods, and medicine have the highest potential to be considered when shopping (Deloitte, 2021) on the Internet, especially since quality uncertainty in such products is virtually absent and no physical assistance or trial is needed.

Personal care products such as perfume and lotions, as well as products that require personal knowledge or experience, like computers and cars, are less likely to be considered while shopping online. However, 90% of consumers opine that user reviews or customer-generated reviews hold more influence over their buying decisions than promotional emails or even search engine results (TurnTo Networks, 2017). Therefore, in the case of standard and familiar goods or certain sensitive products that require a level of privacy and anonymity, consumers' intention to shop on the Internet is high, and product type might not affect the overall effectiveness and success of the e-tailing website, but user-generated reviews do (TurnTo Networks, 2017).

Lack of trust is one of the most frequently cited reasons for consumers' not shopping online. Security and privacy have an impact on consumer trust in shopping on the Internet (Malapane, 2019). The apprehensions of customers regarding the security of online transactions and the authenticity of goods are curtailing the success of the e-tailing model. Many consumers do not want to shop online due to fear of fraud or theft with credit card purchases, the fear of hackers, and buying from dishonest sellers (Farhana et al., 2017). Although there is a potential for growth in online shopping in South Africa, some consumers still have concerns regarding security and privacy (BusinessTech, 2018). However, an increasing number of online shoppers who know what they want would rather pay more to e-tailers who offer good service. To encourage consumers to engage in trust-related Internet behaviour like online shopping, the e-vendor must make trust-building interventions such as posting a privacy policy, using a third-party seal, interacting with customers, advertising its good reputation, linking to other reputable websites, or offering guarantees.

Researchers have discovered that 71% of South African shoppers have abandoned a purchase or an online transaction, and 99.7% confirmed they would share a negative experience with friends and family. Some of the critical factors negatively affecting the sale of a product or service and causing an unsatisfied shopping experience include lack of immediate on-site support, slow page loading, lack of information about a product or service, and an unwillingness to share credit card details (Rogerwilco, 2019). The average attention span of a website visitor has dropped from twelve seconds in 2008 to eight seconds in 2017. E-tailing websites have a small window of opportunity to capture the attention of visitors and convince them to stay and explore the website further. Studies have shown that if a web page takes more than three seconds to load, it may cost the website half its visitors, and a second delay

reduces the conversion rate by 7% (Irawan, 2020). Search engines penalise websites that load slowly, and users stop visiting or just do not buy anything at all.

According to Patel (2012), web pages should only take a second or two to load. Damania (2018) reports that almost 80% of online shoppers who have experienced slow-loading websites stated that they would not visit the website again, and almost 50% said they would share their bad experiences with friends and family. According to Deloitte (2021), poor security of online payments and personal data, high delivery fees, unfair return policies, and unreliable delivery times are key concerns for online shoppers when choosing an online shopping provider.

It is important for e-tailers to make their websites simple, clear, and efficient (Díaz et al., 2017). According to Oliveira et al. (2017), the way a company shares information, how fair its policies are, how many products it offers, and how easy it seems to use are some of the most important web design elements that affect the two most important CSFs: trust and perceived usability. Usability considerations should be given prime importance in the web design of e-tailing websites. One challenge with e-commerce websites is that they need to be set up quickly before competitors set up their own site. This results in too little attention being paid to human factors that affect whether a website can be used easily, accurately, and without losing user interest. Website characteristics such as search functions, download speed, and navigation also play a role in shaping the ease of use of the website (Singh et al., 2016), thus affecting its success. Several website-specific factors, including navigation, interface, security, accessibility, social presence, and online shopping aid, have been widely investigated in these prior studies (Katta & Patro, 2021).

Web design plays a critical role as a well-designed website conveys to visitors that the company behind the screen is reliable and trustworthy. The layout of a website for online shopping should be the same as the layout of a store. Prashar et al. (2017) explain that e-customers prefer online stores that provide them with a robust web atmosphere that comprises interesting layouts and designs, as well as eye-catching graphics. A well-designed e-tailing website will leave a lasting impression on visitors demonstrating professionalism, credibility, and trustworthiness. On the other hand, a poorly designed website can put visitors off, making them click away, and may never return. A visually appealing website is meant to bring in new visitors and make them want to stay and check out what you have to offer (Serra, 2019). A website for online shopping that works well and looks good will help visitors build a solid foundation for a great user experience (Collinge, 2017).

The navigational structure of an e-tailing website has a huge impact on conversions, sales, and bounce rates. When a visitor lands on the e-tailing website, they expect to find a clear path to get to their desired destination. If a visitor cannot figure out what to do when landing on the

home page, they will exit and find a different site to peruse (Miller, 2018). The best way to make a website easy to use is to make the navigation menu and related links fit the needs and wants of visitors. According to Tandon et al. (2017), the layout and navigation of a website create the physical atmosphere of an online commerce website, which prompts online purchases. Effective navigation makes it easy for visitors to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. The goal of website navigation is to make it easier for visitors to move around, get involved, and become customers. For e-tailing websites, ensuring easy navigation is vital, as visitors must be able to locate products in order to make purchases. Failing to adhere to common navigational design practices could cost e-tailers money. The visibility of options is critical, as is associated linking, for example, by suggesting related products where appropriate.

General feedback on the website design, competitive product price, merchandise availability, merchandise condition, on-time delivery, merchandise return policy, customer support, email confirmation of customer order and promotion activities are factors that affect e-satisfaction and contribute to the overall success of an e-tailing website (Cao et al., 2018b).

An e-tailer's set-up requires extensive sourcing capabilities, warehousing capacity, and a robust and efficient logistical backend. The level of e-satisfaction is also determined by the quality of e-services, the price level, and the purchase process (Bhaskar & Kumar, 2016). Furthermore, Internet retailers must ensure that consumers have a positive shopping experience each time they visit the online store (Keen et al., 2004). Swiegers (2018) found that 70% of South African smartphone users use their smartphones to shop online from home and the office, and 94% of mobile consumers in South Africa use their smartphones to do research on products, while 62% use their smartphones to check product prices. In a study conducted by Smith (2021), it was found that 84% of users experienced difficulty completing a mobile transaction, and, as a result, 40% went to the competitor after a bad mobile experience. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that e-tailing websites are mobile responsive and primed for mobile viewing as Internet traffic for shopping continues to increase.

Customer service is an important aspect of online shopping. Evidence from Cao et al. (2018b) demonstrates that post-purchase services associated with shipping and tracking play an important role in online shipping and tracking for online shoppers. The researchers noted that customer service is the most significant factor for online shoppers as it has the most significant influence on customer satisfaction compared to other antecedents. Similarly, Singh (2019) remarks that customer service had a significant influence on customers' decisions to stick with or switch retailers. By providing reliable customer services, retailers demonstrate their expertise in catering to customer needs, which influences their behavioural responses in

reference to repurchase decisions, recommendations to friends and family, and switching to another retailer.

## 2.7   The challenges of managing e-tailing websites

Limited Knowledge of E-commerce: South African e-tailers face a significant challenge in the form of limited knowledge about e-commerce. Many of these businesses lack a deep understanding of the intricacies of online retail, which includes aspects like website management, online marketing, and customer engagement (The Journalist, 2019). This knowledge gap hinders their ability to make informed decisions about technology investments and digital marketing strategies. Moreover, it can lead to ineffective website design and functionality, reducing the overall user experience.

Inadequate Payment Options: Another challenge is the inadequacy of payment options available to South African e-tailers. This limitation can hinder their ability to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of customers who may have varying payment methods and preferences (The Journalist, 2019). Limited payment options not only reduce customer convenience but also potentially result in lost sales opportunities. It is essential for e-tailers to offer a variety of secure and user-friendly payment methods to ensure customer satisfaction and increased conversion rates.

Incompetence in the Distribution Process: The distribution process is a critical aspect of e-commerce success, and many South African e-tailers struggle with incompetence in this area. Efficient order fulfilment, timely deliveries, and effective logistics management are essential for customer satisfaction and retention (The Journalist, 2019). Incompetence in the distribution process can lead to delayed deliveries, damaged goods, and increased operational costs. Addressing this challenge requires investment in logistics infrastructure, employee training, and robust supply chain management practices.

Integration of Internet Strategies: South African e-tailers often face challenges when trying to integrate internet strategies into their existing traditional retail models. Adapting to the digital landscape and effectively leveraging online platforms can be a complex process for businesses rooted in traditional retail (The Journalist, 2019). Overcoming this challenge requires a strategic shift in business operations, including investments in technology, digital marketing, and employee training. It also involves aligning the online and offline aspects of the business to provide a seamless customer experience.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Challenges: Aruleba and Jere (2022) have identified broader ICT challenges in South Africa that impact e-tailing businesses. These challenges include a lack of education on ICT use, poverty, marginalisation, and inequality. These factors can affect not only the readiness of businesses to adopt e-commerce but also the accessibility of digital resources and infrastructure for both businesses and consumers.

Bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to ICT resources is crucial for the growth of e-tailing in South Africa.

Security Concerns: Consumers in South Africa, like elsewhere, are concerned about the security of their online transactions and personal information (Emami-Naeini et al., 2019). Ensuring secure payment processing and safeguarding customer data are critical challenges for e-tailers. Any data breaches can lead to a loss of trust and reputation (Qalati et al., 2021) To address security concerns, e-tailers must invest in robust cybersecurity measures, encryption technologies, and compliance with data protection regulations to instil confidence in their customers (Rita et al. (2019).

Quality Assessment and Branding: Customers making online purchases often face challenges in assessing product quality since they cannot physically examine the products. This limitation underscores the importance of effective branding and building trust through brand equity (Syed & Khan, 2019). Brand names play a vital role in influencing purchasing decisions and can help mitigate concerns related to product quality. E-tailers must focus on building strong brands, providing detailed product information, and leveraging customer reviews and ratings to enhance the perceived quality of their offerings.

## 2.8   E-tailing websites in the Western Cape

Statista (2019), a company that studies markets around the world, reported that in 2018, a total of 1.8 billion consumers purchased goods online. During that year, e-commerce sales added up to $2.8 trillion, with anticipated development of up to $4.8 trillion by 2021, while the revenue in the South African e-commerce showcase adds up to US$3,804 million and is projected to show a yearly development pace of 6.7% (CAGR 2020-2024) with a market volume of US$4,930 million by 2024. South African user penetration is at 54.9% and is expected to hit 62.7% by 2024 (Statista, 2019). According to the Western Cape Government (2021), the most recognised examples of successful e-tailing businesses in the Cape Metropole are Takealot and OneDayOnly. MyBroadband (2020) confirms this in a survey that identified the most popular online stores in South Africa, as indicated in Figure 2.1 below.

**Figure 2.1: Most popular online stores in South Africa**
**(Source: MyBroadband, 2020)**

Takealot.com is the largest e-tailing business in South Africa. Kim Reid, with investment from Tiger Global Management, officially launched Takealot.com in 2011. Similar to Amazon.com, Takealot.com's aim was to become the largest, simplest, and most customer-centric online shopping destination in Africa (Takealot.com, 2022). Since inception, transactions on Takealot.com have grown at an incredible rate of 90% per annum, and gross merchandise revenue grew by over 100% (Klein, 2017). The revenue of Takealot Group in 2021 amounted to $606 million, and they were able to process over 2.9 million transactions from millions of customers during the pandemic (Stats SA, 2022; MyBroadband, 2017).

OneDayOnly Offers is South Africa's largest daily deal e-tailer (OneDayOnly, 2020; Forbes, 2019). Chris Oberhofer and Maurits Vermeulen started the online shopping site OneDayOnly.co.za in 2009 with the goal of providing consumers with the best deals for 24 hours. The initial business model was to sell overruns at hugely discounted rates, which resulted in OneDayOnly.co.za selling out certain products halfway through the day. OneDayOnly.co.za was able to give shoppers instant gratification, which created a sense of urgency and a fear of missing out (Chiothamisi, 2021).

The South African e-commerce market is expected to exceed US$ 25 billion by 2028, growing at a CAGR of more than 14% between 2021 and 2028 (Research and Markets, 2022). Effective Measure (2017) reported that 84.3% of South African consumers purchase mostly from South African websites, while 27.1% purchase from US websites, and only 14.6% purchase from

websites in Europe. According to BusinessTech (2017), the Foschini Group e-commerce division, reported year-on-year growth of over 40%. This growth was due to new developments on their e-tailing website, and while Fin24 (2018) reported that Mr. Price observed strong online sales growth during the first four months of the financial year ending March 30, 2019, increasing by 28.1% to R83.2m. Additionally, Woolworths (2018) reported a 34% development in online sales in June 2018.

The retail landscape in Cape Town has undergone significant transformations with the emergence of small business e-tailing platforms (Alexander & Mason, 2017). These platforms have empowered small businesses to offer customised products and services that were previously inaccessible due to resource constraints. Consequently, major retailers have also integrated digital strategies into their operations, enabling direct interactions with customers and bypassing intermediaries or physical stores (Reinartz et al., 2019). The growing demand for timely deliveries beyond regular business hours has further fueled the popularity of online marketplaces (Singh, 2018).

Despite the intense competition in the e-commerce sector, small online retailers in Cape Town have achieved remarkable success by focusing on unique offerings and personalised customer care (Goga et al., 2019). Their emphasis on building strong customer relationships through responsive communication channels and tailored solutions sets them apart from larger businesses that often prioritise quantity over quality.

However, the rapidly changing digital landscape requires ongoing innovation for small companies in Cape Town and beyond to not only compete but also thrive (Johnson and Iyamu, 2019). Innovation opens new avenues for success in the online sphere, especially in a world where people's attention spans are shrinking due to constant exposure to content across multiple devices (Jung & Kowalski, 2021). This underscores the importance of incorporating innovative sales tactics to capture and retain customers' interest.

It is essential to acknowledge that many Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) continue to face barriers that limit their market access, potentially hindering their expansion opportunities (Chuang et al., 2007). These challenges signify a critical gap in the existing literature and emphasise the need for further research to explore strategies that can help SMMEs overcome market access constraints and thrive in the digital economy. This research aims to address this gap by examining innovative approaches that small businesses in Cape Town and similar contexts can leverage to enhance their market reach and competitiveness.

## 2.9 Strategies to improve e-tailing websites effectiveness

E-commerce has transformed the way businesses operate in the digital age. To succeed in this highly competitive landscape, e-tailing websites must employ strategies to attract and retain customers (Nasir, 2017).

E-tailers can harness the power of digital marketing to broaden their reach and attract new customers (Desai, 2019). Strategies may include effectively communicating competitive advantages, offering enticing discounts on first purchases (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016), and promoting new product launches through social media platforms and newsletters (Christina et al., 2019). Advertising through social media platforms is effective in reaching potential customers (Rosário & Dias, 2023). Utilising targeted ads and engaging content can help e-tailers connect with their target audience and encourage them to explore their offerings. To establish trust, it is essential that SSL certificates are both up to date and visible. This not only validates the legitimacy of the website but also assures customers of secure data transmission during online transactions (Beatty et al. 2011). Adding a comprehensive privacy policy that clearly outlines how customer data is handled and protected can boost customer confidence. Transparent data practices contribute to the perception of a trustworthy e-tailer (Desai et al., 2012). Due to the increase in mobile device usage (WiScicka-Fernando, 2021), optimising the website for mobile platforms is crucial. A seamless mobile user experience can foster trust and encourage users to complete transactions (Sardjono et al. 2021). Providing a range of secure payment options, including credit cards, digital wallets, and trusted online payment gateways (Hassan et. al., 2020), reinforces customer trust and encourages successful transactions.

A good customer service experience leads to positive online reviews (Li & Shimizu, 2018). Responding promptly to inquiries and addressing customer concerns builds trust and fosters loyalty (Xiao, 2020). Loyalty programs, offering rewards and incentives for repeat purchases, can significantly contribute to customer retention. These programs encourage customers to return to the e-tailer for future transactions (Sriyakula et al., 2019).

A user-friendly and easy-to-navigate website layout ensures that customers can find what they need quickly and easily (Haron et al., 2017). An intuitive design minimises frustration and enhances the overall shopping experience. Following the first purchase, sending post-purchase discounts or exclusive offers can incentivize customers to return for additional transactions. This tactic helps e-tailers retain their customer base (Lv et al., 2020).

E-tailing websites must adopt strategies to improve their e-tailing website which will attract, build trust with, and retain customers. By combining these tactics, e-tailers can create a thriving digital presence, establish trust, and foster long-term customer relationships.

## 2.10  Conceptual framework

The extensive literature review suggests that no previous South African-centric study has been conducted to ascertain the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites in relation to the attitudes of the e-tailers in the Cape Metropole. Therefore, the researcher has developed a conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2.2 below) for the CSFs for e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the

Cape Metropole, named the EEW (effective e-tailing website) model based on the literature review on the online shopper's decision to purchase.

**A. CSFs for website design**

As indicated in Figure 2.2, the website's design is the first determinant of the consumer's decision to make a purchase'. It refers to the website's attractive presence that meets customers' expectations, which includes ease of use, visual appeal, and mobile responsiveness (Zeithaml et al., 2002; Kubilus, 2000; Byambaa & Chang, 2012; Menon & Kahn 2002); and visual appeal (Serra 2019).

**B. CSFs for website trust**

The second determinant of the consumer's decision to make a purchase is website trust. It refers to the website's ability to provide a good experience that meets customers' expectations, which includes security, privacy, and service delivery (Belanger et al., 2002).

**C. CSFs for website product pages**

The third determinant of the consumer's decision to make a purchase is the website's product pages. It refers to the website's providing relevant information that meets customers' expectations, including product information, product availability, product pricing, delivery fees, and brand reputation. The CSFs proposed to act as significant determinants for effective e-tailing websites are product information, product availability, product price, delivery fee, and brand reputation. Provide evidence from the literature.
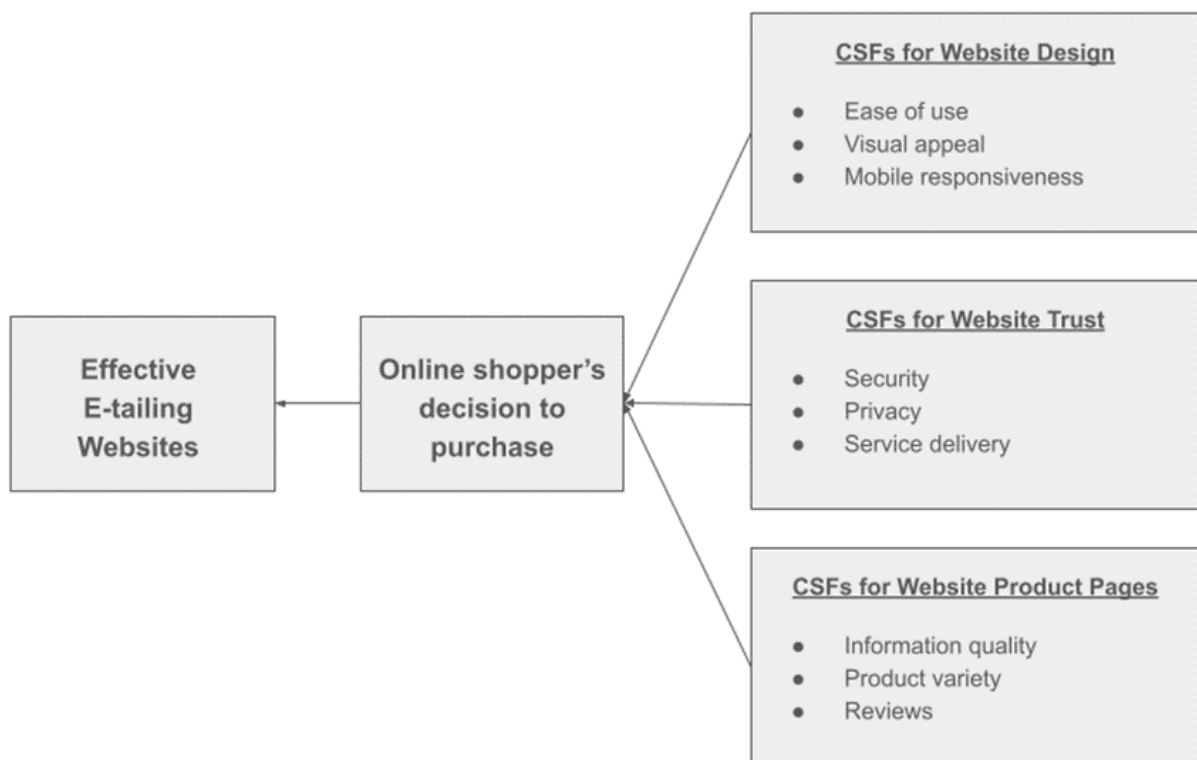


**Figure 2.2: Effective e-tailing website model**

## 2.11  Chapter summary

The gap in the literature regarding the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole becomes more evident when considering the following:

Limited Local Research: The chapter highlights that many of the studies used in this research are sourced from outside of South Africa. This observation underscores the lack of locally conducted research on CSFs for e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole. The absence of studies specifically focused on the South African context suggests that there is a gap in understanding how factors impacting e-tailing success may differ in this unique market.

Relevance to South African Companies: While the existing research cited in the chapter provides valuable insights into CSFs for e-tailing websites, it is crucial to assess their applicability to South African companies. Factors affecting e-tailers' success can vary significantly depending on the local economic, cultural, and regulatory environment. Therefore, there is a need to bridge this gap by conducting research that directly addresses the specific challenges and opportunities faced by e-tailers operating in the Cape Metropole.

Framework Proposal: The researcher's proposal to develop a framework tailored to the Cape Metropole region emphasises the recognition of this research gap. The framework is designed to guide investigations that consider the unique factors and dynamics of the local e-tailing landscape. This initiative acknowledges the importance of conducting research that is contextually relevant and directly addresses the needs of South African e-tailers.

In summary, the gap in the literature regarding CSFs for effective e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole is characterised by a scarcity of locally conducted research, the potential variation in factors affecting e-tailing success in the South African context, and the need for a framework that can better inform e-tailers in this region. Closing this gap involves conducting empirical studies that explore and validate the CSFs specific to the Cape Metropole, thereby contributing valuable insights to the local e-commerce industry.

The next chapter will look at the research methodology and design used in this study.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction to research

An overview of the critical success factors (CSFs) and their significance in predicting a business's success or failure was clearly depicted in the preceding chapter. Additionally, the chapter has also demonstrated how these factors can impact the performance of e-tailing websites of small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in either a positive or negative manner. Therefore, it is important for these factors to be implemented correctly for retailers to succeed. Furthermore, the previous chapter has given elaboration on e-tailing, including its purposes, benefits, and challenges affecting the online small-scale franchise in the Cape Metropole.

This chapter highlights the research methodology employed to reach the findings of this research study. Research methodology is described as a discipline that evaluates and describes the reasoning behind suitable research techniques and methods for a particular research study (Welman et al., 2005).

## 3.2 Research area

The Cape Metropolitan Area is located on the southern peninsula of the Western Cape Province and has a population of over 3.7 million people (Stats SA, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the South African government enforced social distancing measures, and as a result, all interviews for this study were conducted via Zoom.

## 3.3 Research paradigm

To provide structure to the research process, the research onion of Saunders et al. (2019) (Figure 3.1) was adopted to carry out the research study and fulfil the research objectives. The research study aimed to identify the critical success factors for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole area.

Johnson and Christensen (2019) describe the research paradigm as a viewpoint held by a network of scientists based on shared assumptions, ideas, beliefs, and practices about how research problems should be understood and addressed. Moreover, Collins (2017) states that despite the assorted variety and cover between the scope of beliefs that could characterise ideal models, differentiation could be made between current philosophies dependent on the physical sciences, for example, the positivist paradigm, and alternatively describe the research paradigm, such as critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism.
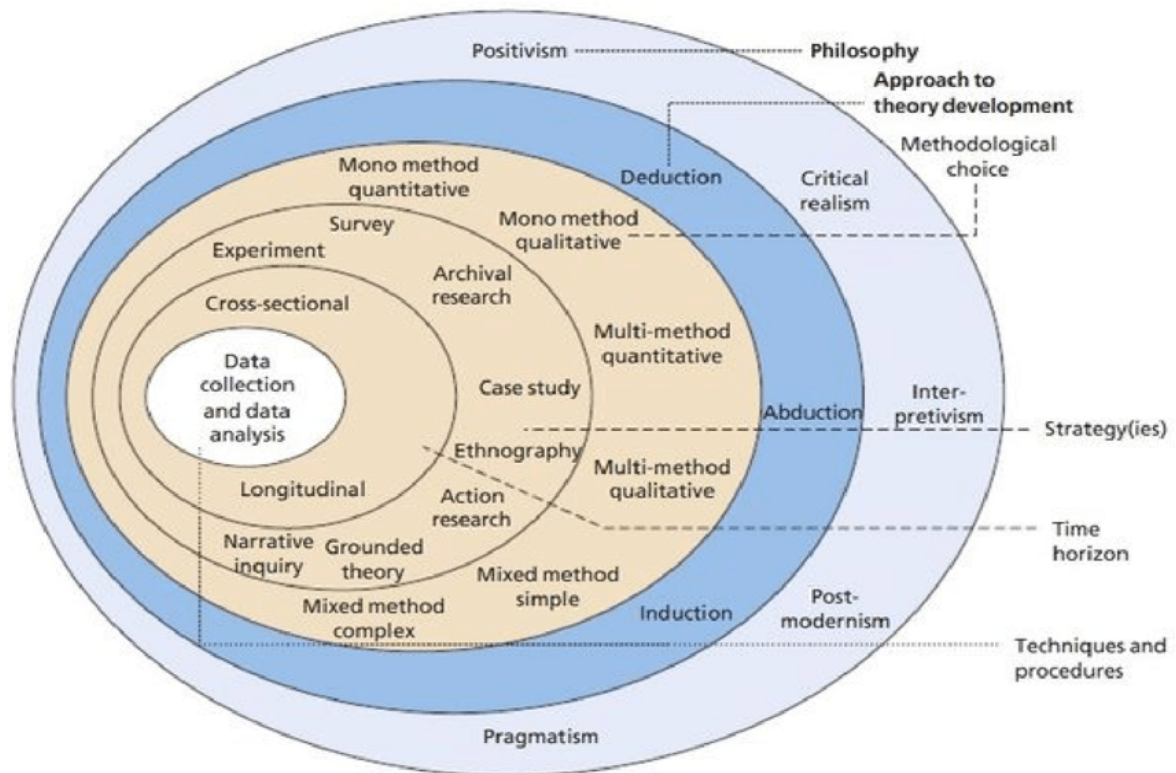
**Figure 3.1: The Research Onion**
**(Source: Saunders et al., 2019)**

Burrell and Morgan (2017) state that at each phase in the research, the researcher will make various kinds of assumptions. These assumptions incorporate, but are not limited to, the researcher's experience (ontological assumptions), human information (epistemological assumptions), and the researcher's own beliefs will impact the process of the researcher (axiological assumptions). Goddard and Melville (2004) opine that these ways of thinking are diverse for accomplishing various objectives and how these objectives will be accomplished.

### 3.3.1 Research philosophy

According to Kirongo and Otieno (2020), "Research philosophy is the foundation for any research study, shaping the way researchers approach their inquiry and interpret their findings". The choice of research philosophy depends on various factors, such as the nature of the problem under investigation and personal beliefs about knowledge acquisition.

To determine the best-suited research philosophy for this research, the decision was based on the research questions and objectives. Therefore, four possible philosophies that could have been adopted for this research are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism.

The positivist philosophy depends on observational phenomena to supply factual and credible information based on an objective viewpoint while zeroing in on causality and law-like

generalisations to reduce the phenomena to its simplest form (Oliver, 2015). On the other hand, critical realism centres around explaining within a specific context, separated from the existence of an objective, independent human thought, belief or knowledge (Wahyuni, 2012). Both positivism and critical realism philosophies use quantitative methods for data analysis (Saunders et al., 2009).

Interpretivism is based on the belief and meaning that a simple phenomenon is appropriate for every research issue, as the real essence of reality cannot be known. Interpretivist-oriented philosophy focuses on constructivism and interpretivism; that is, reality is constructed or interpreted through perception (Iofrida et al., 2018). On the other hand, pragmatism contends that there are no predetermined frameworks or theories that shape truth or knowledge. It is not committed to any one system or reality or philosophy (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Saunders et al., 2009).

The researcher believed that the research problem could be solved through interaction with different people. Wong (2014) states that this type of research intends to interpret the world through human interaction. Hence, the researcher adopted a social approach by choosing to conduct Zoom interviews. The interpretive activity of the researcher played a pivotal role in understanding the phenomenon.

The interpretive research paradigm enables the researcher to see how all the components, functions, and parties within an organisation form part of a larger entity. Retailers are viewed as systems in which seemingly unconnected issues can be incorporated to make insightful conclusions in broader contexts. Systems theory is a practical framework that permits the researcher to use her own subjectivity logically (Porter & Córdoba, 2009). Ponelis (2015) utilised this paradigm in a study relating to organisational technology, while Khan and Rahman (2015) used an interpretive approach to analyse brand experience in the retail environment.

The data collected should be interpreted and analysed with rigour (Ryan et al., 2016). Antwi and Hamza (2015) note that the authenticity and prevention of bias in an interpretivist paradigm can be dealt with by carefully defining and explaining meanings and reasons for subjective decisions. The researcher used interpretivist research theory as the foundation for this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), this research approach focuses on comprehending and construing the significance people attach to their experiences and behaviours. Through this approach, the researcher intended to gain extensive insight into the key success criteria that are pivotal for e-tailing websites catering to SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. This was achieved through contemplating the perspectives of influential stakeholders. Furthermore, this approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute towards achieving success in e-tailing websites designed specifically for SMMEs.

The interpretivist philosophy emphasises the significance of comprehending individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations, which is a crucial aspect that qualitative research strives to achieve. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), attaining an understanding of people's point of view can provide valuable insights into various aspects of human behaviour. In the context of investigating e-tailing websites, conducting in-depth interviews was deemed a suitable method for gathering qualitative data from stakeholders who are associated with SMMEs situated in the Cape Metropole. This method made it possible to collect rich and detailed information about their experiences and opinions on e-tail websites. Therefore, this study aimed to explore different perspectives on e-commerce platforms by examining SMME views of stakeholders through qualitative interviews, as they have unique insights into the subject matter that can be attributed to their involvement with such businesses.

In this light, the study has opted for a phenomenological research strategy aligning with interpretivist philosophy. The reason behind this decision was to gain a deeper understanding of the fundamental aspects of human experience. According to Moustakas (1994), the primary objective of conducting phenomenological research is to comprehend how individuals interpret their experiences. With this goal in mind, the study aimed to identify and highlight vital elements that contribute to the success of e-tailing websites from the diverse viewpoints of stakeholders involved in such businesses. Through this comprehensive approach, the study endeavoured to unveil new insights into the world of online retailing and provide valuable information for those seeking success in this domain.

By adopting an interpretivist perspective through qualitative research and implementing a phenomenological design, the study gained a more comprehensive understanding of the key success factors necessary for the effective operation of e-commerce websites catering specifically to SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. This approach enabled the researcher to delve deeper into the experiences and perceptions of both consumers and business owners within this specific context. By prioritising qualitative research methods that focus on subjective experiences rather than solely quantitative data analysis, the study could better identify the critical factors contributing to efficient SMME e-tailing websites. Ultimately, this approach promises to provide valuable insights for businesses looking to establish an effective online presence in this specific market niche.

### 3.3.2  Research approach

Comprehensive research was conducted using qualitative techniques to properly identify essential components leading to the success of e-commerce websites for SMMEs situated in the Cape Metropole region. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the CSFs that are vital for SMMEs operating in this niche to establish their digital presence and thrive in the highly competitive e-tailing market. This approach allowed for an in-depth investigation of various

factors contributing to the success of these e-tailing websites, ensuring that no stone was left unturned during this research process.

To commence the study on CSFs in e-tailing, a comprehensive analysis of previous research on the subject was conducted. The purpose of this analysis was to gain a robust understanding of the primary characteristics that are associated with prosperous e-commerce websites. By delving into the existing literature, an extensive body of knowledge on this topic was established, serving as the basis for identifying common themes and patterns associated with successful online retail businesses. This initial phase provided a solid foundation upon which further research could be built, and thereby enabled the study to draw more accurate conclusions about e-tailing CSFs and their implications for businesses in this industry.

To gather more comprehensive and valuable data, the subsequent action taken was to conduct interviews using a qualitative approach to extract insights from stakeholders and experts in the industry. Through these interviews, it became possible to pinpoint potential critical success factors that are pertinent to the region as well as highlight specific obstacles and possibilities that SMMEs encountered within the Cape Metropole. By adopting a qualitative methodology during these primary research efforts, the study was able to gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by SMMEs in this area.

During the research phase, a fieldwork component was incorporated to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The researcher visited SMMEs located within the Cape Metropole area to observe and assess their e-commerce processes and platforms, providing valuable observations about the specific challenges encountered by these small businesses. Through this approach, notable limitations were identified, such as inadequacies in website design, logistics management, and marketing strategies that were hindering their overall business growth. However, the study gained useful insights into the problems that are unique to SMMEs operating in this region.

By employing a  qualitative research approach, the study was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges and prospects faced by SMMEs in the Cape Metropole concerning e-tailing websites. The research identified specific factors that contribute to the success of e-tailing sites for SMME companies. Allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of key CSFs. Overall, the findings shed light on the various elements that play a crucial role in developing efficient e-commerce websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole region.

To commence with the study's strategy, an extensive analysis of previous research on e-tailing CSFs was carried out. This comprehensive review served as the groundwork for obtaining information about the common attributes that are associated with successful e-tailing websites. By exploring literature in this area, a more in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to effective online retailing was gained. The purpose of this initial stage was to gather as much

relevant data as possible and to examine key findings that have emerged from prior research conducted in this field. Therefore, it provided the study with a strong foundation upon which they could build their subsequent investigations into e-tailing CSFs.

To gather more comprehensive and detailed information, the researcher proceeded to conduct interviews with various stakeholders and industry experts. Through a qualitative approach, valuable insights on the subject matter were obtained. The primary objective of these interviews was to determine the CSFs that are vital for the region's economic growth, as well as to identify any potential challenges or opportunities facing SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. These extensive interviews allowed for a more profound analysis of the situation, providing a more complete understanding of the issues faced by SMMEs in this particular area.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the e-commerce landscape for SMMEs within the Cape Metropole, the research methodology incorporated a fieldwork component. This entailed physically visiting SMMEs on their premises to conduct an in-depth analysis of their e-commerce procedures and platforms. Through this process, valuable insights were gathered into the unique challenges that SMMEs face in this region when it comes to operating successful online retail channels. These challenges included issues surrounding website design, logistics, and marketing, all of which play a critical role in enabling SMMEs to compete effectively within the digital marketplace. By taking a hands-on approach and immersing ourselves in the day-to-day operations of these businesses, the researcher was able to develop a more nuanced understanding of their specific pain points and identify areas where targeted support could be provided to help them grow and thrive.

To bolster the performance of SMMEs in the e-tailing market of the Cape Metropole, a pilot study was conducted. The study aimed to validate the CSFs identified previously by testing them on a sample group of SMMEs. Specific interventions such as website redesign or marketing activities were then implemented with the goal of increasing e-tailing performance among these businesses. Subsequently, the findings from this pilot project were assessed thoroughly to further refine and modify the CSFs. These results have also guided wider policy and business support activities aimed at boosting SMME performance in the Cape Metropole's e-tailing market and similar regions.

The qualitative research approach employed in this study has provided an understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by SMMEs in the Cape Metropole concerning e-tailing websites. This approach has allowed for a detailed exploration of the factors that contribute to the success of e-tail websites in this region. This newfound insight equips SMMEs with CSFs that can guide them in establishing effective e-tailing websites.

By delving into the experiences and perspectives of SMMEs operating in the e-commerce sector, this qualitative approach has uncovered valuable insights. These insights not only shed

light on the challenges these businesses encounter but also highlight the potential pathways to success. Researchers can leverage this understanding to formulate strategies aimed at enhancing the online presence of SMMEs and increasing their prospects of thriving in today's digital business landscape.

### 3.3.3  Research strategy

An in-depth exploration of the subject matter was conducted through a qualitative research study. The researcher utilised grounded theory as the primary method of data collection and analysis, which enabled development of theories based on the information gathered from participants. In this approach, the researcher employed an inductive methodology that allowed for flexibility and openness to unanticipated findings, ensuring accurate results. By comparing and contrasting the collected data, the grounded theory approach facilitated the identification of differences and similarities, leading to the development of concepts or models with a high degree of accuracy.

### 3.4  Data collection

The researcher utilised semi-structured interviews as the main technique to gather data for the study. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and effective operating practices encountered by e-commerce websites, as it encouraged participants to provide detailed and personalised responses. The individuals selected to participate in this research were experienced small-scale e-tailers, regarded as an indispensable source of insight into the complexities associated with managing supply chains in this industry. Their contributions proved invaluable in creating strategies aimed at enhancing efficiency and financial stability within the sector.

Through a combination of grounded theory approach and semi-structured interviews, the identification of critical success factors for e-tailing websites among SMMEs in the Cape Metropole was made possible. This research strategy provided an in-depth understanding of the obstacles faced by these businesses and offered valuable insights into effective supply chain management that promotes economic sustainability. As the e-commerce industry continues to expand at an unprecedented rate, there is a need for further research using grounded theory methodology to develop targeted strategies for SMMEs across various regions. Ultimately, this will not only foster economic growth but also create more job opportunities.

### 3.4.1  Sample method/technique and sample size

For the researcher to gain insight and understand the knowledge and experience of customers, the decision on which sampling method to select was based on the objectives of this study, which was to identify the CSFs of effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. The researcher specifically focused on examining the experiences and

perspectives of 15 e-tailing website owners residing in the Cape Metropole. The age range of these individuals were from 25 to 54 years, providing a broad range of viewpoints from different stages in life, professional development, and varying levels of technological know-how. This diverse age range allowed for a more thorough and comprehensive analysis of the key elements that contribute to creating successful e-tailing websites.

By incorporating such a variety of opinions and insights, the researcher gained valuable knowledge about how these entrepreneurs approach their businesses, what challenges they face, the strategies they employ for success and growth, and how they stay current with emerging trends in technology and marketing. Overall, this research endeavoured to shed light on all aspects of e-commerce business ownership within the context of this specific demographic group, providing helpful insights for others looking to start or improve their own e-tailing ventures. Therefore, a purposive sample (non-probability) was used. Sample size in qualitative studies is determined at the saturation point (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Saturation describes the criterion for discontinuing data collection or analysis, as at this point new data becomes redundant to that already collected. Since this study made use of purposive sampling, the selected sample was homogenous because of the criteria required to participate. Hence, saturation was reached with 15 participants. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is a non-probability planned approach that entails choosing how, with whom, and where the researcher decides to conduct research. This type of sampling is a non-random approach.

When undertaking research, it is essential to acknowledge and refer to previous studies that utilised similar methods. This serves as a defence for the methodological choices made in the current investigation. In this study, which aimed to identify the CSFs of e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole, a purposive sample strategy was employed. By focusing on the experiences and perspectives of e-tailing site owners, valuable insights were gained into what makes these sites successful for SMMEs. To support this sampling choice, numerous prior studies that had also successfully implemented purposive sampling were cited as evidence. Thus, by drawing on existing research and using rigorous methodology, this investigation was able to shed light on an important aspect of e-tailing websites that can benefit SMMEs in the Cape Metropole.

Saturation is an important aspect of qualitative research as it indicates the point at which no new information can be obtained from further data collection. Hennink and Kaiser (2021) emphasised the importance of saturation in their research and found that purposive sampling was an effective technique to achieve it. By selecting a specific, homogeneous group based on predetermined criteria, they were able to efficiently reach saturation without gathering unnecessary or redundant data. This approach allowed them to focus their efforts on collecting

rich, meaningful information from a targeted population rather than casting a wide net and potentially missing important insights. Overall, Hennink and Kaiser's study highlights the advantages of purposive sampling for achieving saturation in qualitative research.

In research methodology, purposive sampling has been highlighted as a particularly beneficial technique (Campbell et al., 2020). This method involves selecting study participants based on specific characteristics that are relevant to the objectives of the investigation, instead of using random or probability-based selection techniques. The benefits associated with this approach are numerous and have been observed across various domains such as healthcare, education, and social sciences.

By utilising purposive sampling, researchers can delve deeper into experiences and opinions of certain groups or communities that may have otherwise been overlooked in more traditional sampling methods. This targeted approach allows for more accurate data collection and analysis that can be used to inform decision-making processes in a variety of settings. As such, purposive sampling has proven to be an invaluable tool for researchers looking to gain insight into specific populations and their unique perspectives on issues that impact their lives.

In a research study conducted by Etikan et al. (2016), the effectiveness of probability and non-probability sampling methods was evaluated and compared. Their findings revealed that purposive sampling method, which involves handpicking participants based on certain characteristics, proved to be the most effective when in-depth insights are sought from particular demographic groups. The researchers emphasised that this approach offered better opportunities to focus on the individuals who have more relevance and significance to the study, thereby improving the quality of data collected. The selection method allows researchers to carefully consider their sampling criteria, ensuring that they select participants who can provide valuable insights into their research questions. Consequently, it is suitable for studies seeking detailed information about specific minority groups or those using qualitative research methods where nuances in participant responses are essential to uncovering deeper meaning in their responses.

The illustrations demonstrate the widespread utilisation of purposive sampling in previous studies, which resulted in desirable outcomes. The current study also aimed to utilise this technique with the expectation of gaining a profound comprehension of the perspectives and encounters of Cape Metropole e-tailing website proprietors. This approach aided in uncovering CSFs for SMME e-tailing websites. By investigating these CSFs, the study discovered new insights into how businesses can achieve success in the competitive world of online retailing. Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for research participants were set to focus on the most relevant and informative individuals. By establishing these criteria, the researcher aimed to ensure a targeted and efficient data collection process that would yield meaningful insights.

**Inclusion criteria:**

    i)    Participants must be owners of e-tailing websites catering to SMMEs.

    ii)   Participants must be based in the Cape Metropole region.

    iii)  Participants should be aged between 25 and 54 years, allowing for diverse perspectives from different stages of life, professional development, and technological know-how.

**Exclusion criteria:**

    i)    Individuals who are not directly involved in owning or managing e-tailing websites.

    ii)   E-tailing website owners based outside the Cape Metropole region.

    iii)  Participants younger than 25 years or older than 54 years, as they may not represent

    iv)  the targeted demographic for this study.

By adhering to these criteria, the researcher was able to obtain a purposive sample of 15 e-tailing website owners who provided valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. By maintaining a clear focus on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study ensured the relevance and representativeness of the chosen participants and the quality of the data collected.

### 3.4.2   Data collection instruments

Interviews were selected as the most suitable data collection tool for the study. Alhassan et al. (2019) suggest that interviews are the most suitable form of data collection if one needs to gather rich circumstantial data from industry specialists. The researcher aligned the interview questions with the study's objectives, guided in their construction by Ezeife (2017). The researcher selected a semi-structured interview method, which meant that fundamental, predetermined questions could be asked, and the participants were free to respond openly. Additional or elaborated answers made a useful contribution to the study, so a semi-structured interview method was most appropriate. Since the CSFs for apparel e-tailing in South Africa were unknown, it was imperative for the data collection instrument to remain flexible. Maseko et al. (2018) found that semi-structured interviews were most effective in their study on the CSFs for team coaching in the workplace.

### 3.4.3   Data collection/fieldwork

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher was obliged to incorporate additional data collection methods. As the supervisor of the researcher suggested, in-depth phone interviews were conducted over Zoom so that she could keep working on the study and finish it on time. Adhabi and Anozie (2017) posit that telephone interviews are equally significant and capable of achieving the same purpose as face-to-face interviews in qualitative data collection. One of the main advantages of telephonic interviews is that no travel is required. Travel and

time costs are reduced, and this allows for sample diversity for busy individuals who work according to schedules (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018). The researcher was able to conduct 15 telephone Zoom interviews. This method of data collection was preferred given the participants' busy schedule. Barzilay (2019) believes telephone interviews are a valuable alternative to face-to-face interviews.

A variety of data collecting and fieldwork approaches, including pilot research, were used to identify the key CSFs for efficient e-tailing websites for SMME companies in the Cape Metropole. The process of gathering data commenced with a thorough review of prior research on e-tailing CSFs, which made it possible to pinpoint common characteristics of successful e-tailing websites, such as user-friendly website design, secure payment options, quick and dependable delivery, and successful marketing tactics.

Interviews with stakeholders and industry leaders offered additional insights into the possibilities and difficulties encountered by SMMEs in the Cape Metropole, as well as prospective CSFs that may be special to the area. Additionally, interview questions were sent to SMMEs in the Cape Metropole to learn more about their e-tailing habits and experiences as well as pinpoint any possible problem areas.

The study's fieldwork component involved visiting SMMEs in the Cape Metropole to examine and evaluate their e-commerce platforms and workflows. This gave important insights into the difficulties SMMEs in the area experience, such as problems with website design, logistics, and marketing.

A pilot study was conducted with a sample group of SMMEs in the Cape Metropole to test and validate the discovered CSFs. The goal of the pilot project was to increase e-tailing performance among SMMEs by applying interventions such as website redesign and marketing activities. The pilot study's findings were then assessed to improve and modify the CSFs, as well as to guide wider policy and business support activities to boost SMME performance in the region's e-tailing market.

Overall, the combination of data collection and fieldwork techniques, including the pilot study, provided a thorough understanding of the CSFs for successful e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. These findings informed growth and success strategies for them in this increasingly significant business sector.

## 3.5   Data coding and analysis

Archer (2018) states that data analysis is fixated on explaining and analysing large amounts of data, which is the basis of qualitative data analysis as it points out common themes or patterns. This study's data were analysed using content analysis. According to Kleinheksel et al. (2020), content analysis is a data analysis method that is used for written text. This method works well because there are no rules for how to conduct the analysis. Archer (2018) also

observes that the analysis of qualitative data involves pointing out common themes or patterns in the collected data. Turning raw qualitative data into communicative qualitative data relies on utilising an important tool called coding.

Once the data collection process was complete, the voice-recorded interviews were transcribed. With the help of Atlas.ti v8 software, the data were stored and analysed in an organised manner, enabling the researcher to maintain rigour. Atlas.ti v8 is a non-numeric qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) programme used to analyse the data according to the requirements loaded onto the software by the user (Friese, 2019a). Atlas.ti v8 was used for this study to analyse the data in a structured format, identify patterns and relationships, and generate codes based on the data collected from the participants (Friese, 2019b).

To choose an appropriate methodology for this study, various previous studies were examined to see what methods they utilised. It was discovered that a number of these studies employed similar techniques, such as content analysis and the use of Atlas.ti v8 software for the purpose of data analysis. Based on this observation, it was concluded that these methods were justifiable and suitable for the present study. Examples of these earlier research works include Creswell and Poth (2018), who embarked on a research project that delved into the experiences of caregivers in the realm of mental health. Creswell and Poth employed a content analysis approach to scrutinise and identify prevalent themes from the qualitative data obtained via semi-structured interviews conducted with the study participants. To aid in processing and interpreting the collected data, Atlas.ti v8 software was utilised to code and analyse the data. This analytical tool enabled Creswell and Poth (2018) to detect patterns and correlations across different themes, which ultimately provided them with insightful findings regarding the lived experiences of caregivers in their study context.

A research study conducted by Smith et al. (2020) delved into the influence of social media on the body image and self-esteem of young people. The researchers adopted a content analysis approach to scrutinise the themes that emerged from participants' feedback gathered via comprehensive interviews. To make sense of the voluminous data generated, they used a sophisticated software tool called Atlas.ti v8, which helped them manage and analyse the data effectively. Furthermore, this tool enabled them to spot patterns and connections between various themes and sub-themes.

Johnson and Christensen (2019) delved into the experiences of female entrepreneurs in industries dominated by men. The researchers used content analysis as their research methodology to systematically examine all the data that was gathered from semi-structured interviews. To manage, categorise, and analyse the qualitative data, Atlas.ti v8 software was utilised. This platform proved to be an invaluable tool for identifying recurring patterns and thematic elements throughout the collected responses. By employing these methods, the

researchers were able to gain a richer understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that these women faced as they navigated through male-dominated industries.

Gray et al.'s (2019) study evaluated the various elements that have a significant impact on consumers' widespread adoption of electric vehicles. The researchers adopted an analytical approach and utilised content analysis to scrutinise the data collected from both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. To facilitate effective management and analysis of the data, Atlas.ti v8 was employed, which allowed for pinpointing crucial themes and patterns associated with consumers' attitudes and perceptions about electric vehicles. By using this methodology, Gray et al. sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of how potential buyers conceptualise electric cars, what motivates them to purchase one over a conventional vehicle, as well as any barriers they might face when considering making such a purchase. This research is particularly valuable because consumer preferences play an increasingly important role in driving demand for sustainable transportation alternatives in today's world, where environmental concerns are more pressing than ever before.

In this regard, the effectiveness of content analysis and the use of Atlas.ti v8 for data analysis has been established as highly effective in previous qualitative research. These methods have been widely acknowledged and implemented across various research contexts with remarkable success. Thus, given the well-established success rates of these techniques, their utilisation as a methodological choice in this present study is reinforced by previous accomplishments in similar academic works. This substantiates the validity and robustness of these research methodologies, ensuring that reliable and useful results can be anticipated from their continued use in this study.

Important quotations were distinguished in line with the themes and then turned into codes. With Atlas.ti (2018), codes categorise large amounts of data by creating small pieces of important text, audio, or graphical data. To pinpoint the different types of codes, "code groups" were created to draw connections among elements of the data. Bengtsson (2016) states that content analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used for any written text. The researcher used the Atlas.ti tool to ensure that the qualitative data was carefully analysed.

Thematic analysis is a valuable qualitative research method that uncovers recurring themes in data by systematically categorising and coding it. In this study, researchers used thematic analysis to identify CSFs for effective e-tailing websites among SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. The research involved collecting qualitative data through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, which was then analysed in a series of steps to reveal significant themes. Four group codes emerged from the data analysis, representing the primary themes related to the study's objectives. These themes included user experience and website design, trust and security, product and service offerings, and marketing and customer engagement. By utilising

thematic analysis, the researchers were able to gain valuable insights into the factors that contribute to successful e-tailing websites, ultimately benefiting the field of electronic retailing.

## 3.6 Time horizon

Kumar (2014) defines cross-sectional research as a type of study that provides a snapshot of a specific situation at a particular moment without altering any variables. This methodology is useful for investigating the frequency of certain illnesses or causes and revealing relationships between different variables. By analysing data from a sample population at one time point, cross-sectional studies can uncover valuable patterns and trends that could be indicative of larger issues and their potential causes. Despite some limitations, such as its inability to determine causality or changes over time, cross-sectional research remains an effective way to gain insight into various fields like health, sociology, psychology, and education.

In this study, focusing on the Cape Metropole e-tailing ecosystem, the researcher gathered crucial data about the sector's operational procedures by contacting participants only once. The data were then compared with established ideas and conventions in the field to identify successful tactics and areas in need of improvement. Since this investigation employed a cross-sectional design, the researcher was able to contrast the findings with existing theories on e-tailing without having to compare data over two different time periods.

The study was conducted ethically and involved feedback from multiple stakeholders, including small-scale merchants and non-e-tailers. Unlike longitudinal studies that analyse changes over time at different intervals to arrive at conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships within the data set, in this context, such studies are not suitable because they do not offer instant application opportunities for organisations that require quick solutions or insights.

Overall, although there are some limitations associated with using cross-sectional research as an investigative technique, it has proven to be a versatile tool across disciplines, especially when it can produce useful findings rapidly that have practical applications in real-life scenarios.

## 3.7 Ethical considerations

Research ethics focuses on the right and wrong ways of conducting research. The researcher must protect the rights of the study participants and the reputation of the discipline. This study was conducted ethically, and the key ethical issues considered were informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, plagiarism, and institutional ethical clearance.

## 3.8 Delimitations of study

   i)   Subject area delimitations: The researcher investigated effective e-tailing websites with a specific focus on identifying the CSFs of SMMEs in the e This study focused on specific factors enabling e-tailers to become more profitable in the online environment.

The study did not focus on any other aspects of an e-tailing website, except the CSFs, which were the main drivers of effectiveness.

ii) Methodological delimitations: The research study followed an interpretive contextual analysis plan to obtain the results, thus, the findings were intrinsically subjective. The answers given by the participants in the interviews were interpreted by the researcher and might have been rendered biased.

iii) Geographical delimitations: The research study was limited to South African SMMEs with e-tailing websites residing in the Cape Metropole. The researcher limited the scope of the research to identify the CSFs of effective e-tailing websites of SMMEs in the Cape Metropole.

## 3.9 Limitations of study

i) Subject-area restrictions: The study's emphasis on the CSFs of SMMEs in the Cape Metropole may have omitted other important aspects that boost the effectiveness of e-commerce websites in various situations. The study may offer a limited perspective by only focusing on certain elements (CSFs) affecting e-tailing enterprises' overall performance.

ii) Methodological restrictions: Interpretative contextual analysis was conducted as the main research method; therefore, the study's conclusions may exhibit some subjectivity. Personal biases of the researcher while interpreting participant replies may have compromised the reliability and impartiality of the study. The could have benefited more from using a variety of research techniques to strengthen the reliability of the results.

iii) Geographical restrictions: Due to the study's specific emphasis on SMMEs with e-commerce websites in the Cape Metropole, the findings cannot be generalised to other geographic areas or settings. The results might not fully represent the experiences and difficulties of e-tailers and customers in other areas or nations.

iv) Sample restrictions: Because the research was restricted to SMMEs and online consumers in the Cape Metropole, the results might not accurately reflect the experiences and viewpoints of bigger companies or customers in other areas. The study's findings might not be applicable to e-tailing websites run by big businesses or multinational firms since their success and difficulties might be very different from those of SMMEs.

## 3.10 Chapter summary

The methodology used in this study has been explained thoroughly in Chapter 3. The introduction of qualitative research as the chosen approach for this study followed an explanation of various research philosophies. To support the research strategy of this study,

grounded theory was introduced and reinforced through in-depth, semi-structured and cross-sectional interviews.

Ethical considerations played a significant role in shaping this chapter, with a detailed account of processes related to informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and participant protection during data collection processes. Furthermore, this chapter comprehensively discussed reliability and validity, along with sampling considerations, limitations, and delimitations of the research study.

An overview of the data-analysis process was provided. Additional information on data analysis can be found in the next chapter, which will provide a detailed analysis of the collected data.

# CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction to research results

Systematic procedures of data collection, management, analysis, and presentation of results were outlined in the preceding chapter. The study followed a qualitative approach to investigate the main objective, namely, to identify the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites and to present findings of the current e-tailing website strategies followed by some SMMEs in the Cape Metropole. Consequently, a qualitative data collection technique was applied. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants, who were selected through convenience sampling, and from which detailed responses were generated in alignment with various objectives of the study.

Focusing on the study's purpose and research questions, data were collected on the participants' views of the critical factors associated with the effectiveness of e-tailing websites, the challenges faced by e-tailing website owners, the strategies employed towards promoting the effectiveness of electronic retailing in the study area, and lastly, their recommendations for future SMME e-tailing website owners. The data were collected based on how the context was changing (in terms of methodology), and then it was categorised into several group codes and themes based on the aim of the study.

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from the interviews and discusses the findings derived from analysing and interpreting the data in line with the study objectives. The presentation of the participants' responses is structured to answer all three objectives. This is be done by identifying the most relevant and recurring themes and theories.

## 4.2 Data interpretation process and findings

The data collection process comprised 15 interviews, all conducted with owners of SMME e-tailing websites in various categories based in the Cape Metropole. The researcher developed in-depth interview questions, and all participants were asked the same questions. The interview started with a short explanation of the research study, and then the consent form was signed. The researcher developed a set of detailed questions that relate to the three objectives of this study.

Details of the sample group are presented in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Information about the sample group**
**(Source: Author's own compilation)**

| Participant Number | Type of E-tailing Website | Position of Participant | Company Location |
|---|---|---|---|

| Participant 1 | Gaming Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 2 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 3 | Electronics Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 4 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 5 | Accessories Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 6 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 7 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 8 | Wellness Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 9 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 10 | Jewellery Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 11 | Beauty Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 12 | Decor Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 13 | Bath Bomb Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 14 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |
| Participant 15 | Apparel Website | Owner | Cape Metropole |

The data analysis was done after the data collection process. During the data analysis process, the empirical data were examined by utilising a coding process intended to simplify the complexity of the collected data and reach a conclusion based on reasoning. The collected data were analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) called Atlas.ti offering systematic tools for the transcribed data (ATLAS.ti, 2018). The qualitative data could not be analysed using statistical approaches.

The coding process enabled the simplification of large segments of transcribed data so that a link and a common thread could be identified and assessed (Belotto, 2018). Practically, coding is the process of allocating categories or concepts to segmented transcriptions that are linked to the research objectives, while "code groups" are a cluster of codes used as filters (ATLAS.ti, 2018). Additionally, sub-codes were allocated to threads or themes that recurred within the codes. Finally, from the 15 participants, a total of three code groups, twenty codes, and nine sub-codes emerged. The data interpretation process assigns meanings to the data collected from the multiple participants (Lebied, 2018). This section aims to report the findings of this research study based on the research questions and objectives, which are arranged as code groups.

## 4.3 Appropriate themes and underlying thematic analysis

This section focuses on the systematic techniques used to analyse the gathered qualitative data, as well as the significant findings and themes that were extracted as part of the study. This study involved interviewing 15 participants, resulting in an equal number of interview records obtained, featuring information about the participants' ideas regarding the study questions (as specified in section 4.1 above).

The qualitative data from the interviews (individual records) were checked for inconsistencies and then transcribed. Using the Atlas.ti v8 qualitative analysis software, the qualitative data and transcripts from the interviews were imported and coded. This process involved the use of the Atlas.ti v8 coding and labelling facilities to disassemble the imported data into fragments to unearth patterns and frameworks. Similar and relevant statements or references were grouped into a code, and these codes were further categorised into group codes.

To achieve the research objectives, an extensive analysis was carried out, resulting in the creation of twenty distinct codes. These codes were identified through a comprehensive review process closely scrutinising all relevant data and information. Subsequently, the codes were further categorised into three broad group codes based on their similarities and differences. This approach enabled researchers to gain a better understanding of the various patterns and themes that emerged from the study, providing valuable insights into the overall research question at hand. The interview schedule, codebook, and interview transcripts were all analysed to determine the main themes of this study. Each theme was subjected to thematic analysis to assess the significance of the study's objectives. Based on the objectives of this study, four themes were identified: (1) Critical success factors for effective e-tailing websites; (2) Effective e-tailing website strategies; (3) Challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites; and (4) Recommendations for future SMME e-tailing website owners. These themes served as the main concepts that contained similar codes.

### 4.3.1 Objective 1: CSFs for effective e-tailing websites

The network diagramme of the family/group code and sub/children code for objective 1: *CSFs for effective e-tailing websites,* is shown in Figure 4.1 below. The network diagramme, referred to as Group Code 1, showed that various factors, including ease of use, information security, mobile responsiveness, product variety, service delivery, and visual appeal, are key dominant success factors that feature predominantly in the opinions of participants in this study.

With relevance to the participants' remarks, the first objective of the study has led to the formation of six separate codes, which are further categorised under a group code (Group Code 1).

The first code, *Ease of Use*, emphasises how the ease of operation of the e-tailing website contributes to the effectiveness of the exchange of retail goods on the Internet.

The second code, *Information Security*, generated as part of Group Code 1, explores how the availability and accessibility of adequate and reliable information by e-tailing website users contribute significantly to the effectiveness of electronic retailing.

Similarly, a third code, *Mobile Responsiveness*, was generated in line with the objective. Since accessibility to appropriate information is imperative for effective e-tailing, ensuring an adequate and proper response to the user's request is also crucial. Thus, the third code examines the contribution of mobile responsiveness to promoting the effectiveness of electronic retailing.

The fourth code, *Product Variety,* explores the comments of the participants on the contribution of product variety to the success of electronic retailing, that is, how access to a variety of products promotes users' engagement and preference for electronic retailing.

The fifth code, *Service Delivery*, examines how crucial and effective is service delivery towards promoting effectiveness of e-tailing for SMMEs in the Cape Metropolis.

Finally, the sixth code, *Visual Appeals*, explores the retailers' visual perception towards goods or commodities influencing their adoption and preference for e-tailing in the study area. A total of six codes and no sub-codes emerged from this code group, illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.



**Figure 4.1: Code Group 1: CSFs for effective e-tailing websites**
**(Source: Author's own conceptualisation)**

In the context of this study, e-tailing, which is the short form for electronic retailing, is the selling of retail goods on the Internet. The term is an inevitable addition to email, e-business, and e-commerce. It is synonymous with business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions. In this study, several success factors were identified based on the opinions expressed by participants. Ease of use, information security, mobile responsiveness, product variety, service delivery, and visual appeal are key dominant success factors forming the basis of the analysis of this theme.

### 4.3.1.1 Code 1.1: Ease of Use

*Ease of Use* is one of the critical success factors highlighted by participants in this study. All the participants interviewed emphasised the importance of website simplicity, stating its numerous advantages. P1 recounted their company's efforts to ensure seamless operation by users. The code further explains that users can be impatient and, most of the time, unwilling to wait when websites take a long time to load. This is highlighted by the quotes below.

> *If you clicked on games, then they would have said there's nothing. You need to drop down to PlayStation games drop down again to PlayStation two games before you're able to see something. And actually, that cost me a few sales. So, I'm busy working on that to improve the dropdowns because people, yeah, not everybody do all the dropdowns; they just want to click on a category and see the products* (P1).

> *No one likes to sit and wait and wait and wait. We know our website speed is pretty good. We call it the "wheel of death". You don't want that on your page for four minutes at a time. You know you want to scroll things; you want to see things, you want it to be a good pace, good paced website* (P2).

Similarly, P3 and P4 noted the need for users to have easy access to the various components that make up a website, such as a search bar, enabling smooth access to information particular to their needs.

> *Making sure that our sites, you know, running smoothly, there's no bugs or glitches in it. And that it's an easy process for them to add to cart checkout. Yeah, we always start making sure that that process is simple and clean as possible. When users come through to the site, if there isn't a search bar, majority of the time, are they clicking on an ad, there's intent there. But even more so when they are searching for something in Google that's 100% intent based and they looking for specific products. So, we as the retailer or online retailer to make sure that the customer can navigate in the fastest way possible to that specific product. Without clutter or obstacles in the way* (P3).

> *The website is easy to navigate so that people get to the payment, the payment part of the transaction, as painlessly and as quickly and as simply as possible* (P4).

Moreover, it is also pertinent for websites to be built an easy understandable way devoid of distractions and confusion, so as not to discourage users from leaving their website. P7 below captured this as follows:

> *It must be easy to understand, because at the beginning, they were struggling with how they select the delivery option. They were confused. If you want to buy more than one item, how do you add things and we had to make it really easy to understand. So as soon as a client has to think for 10 seconds longer on how to actually order the product they just give up* (P7).

Furthermore, the points made above were buttressed by P11 and P15, as highlighted in the quotes below.

*People today like instant gratification. They want to click, click and pay with the minimum clicks possible* (P11).

*Good product at a good price with a good user experience* (P15).

### 4.3.1.2 Code 1.2: Quality of Information

As highlighted in the previous sub-theme (section 4.3.1.1), ensuring users access to information when they visit websites for shopping is essential. The information provided should be reliable, convincing, precise, clear, and sufficient to answer questions that users may have about specific products. The quotes below represent participants' opinions on the need for website owners to have quality information on their websites to ensure effective e-tailing.

*And then the prices need to be on the website. Also, if you don't add prices to your website people, yeah, they very discouraged about with that. People want to see the quality of the product. If you can show that to them, then failure. They hesitate to purchase and then you're going to lose sales* (P1).

*Keeping on trend and growing with how the market grows, keeping things fresh, adding new product, making sure that you know people understand it's a proudly South African brand and that we support local and tell people your story* (P2).

*If people are going to buy something physically, they want to see what they need to see what they're going to get for the money. And that, again, is like a motivating factor to buy something* (P13).

*If the customer wants it, they'll buy it, but you need to make sure that they're comfortable enough in order for them to give that information* (P10).

As revealed in the quotes above by P1, P2, P13, and P10, the information website owners feature on their sites is what motivates users to order products online. Specific details of the products, such as price and description of the quality of the product, are key success factors. This suggests that users want to be totally sure of the products they are purchasing, especially with the predominant trend of Internet scams, as well as customers getting totally different products compared to what they had ordered online. Hence, the need for e-tailers to build trust with the design and the products they display online. Moreover, keeping and growing with reigning market trends and the addition of new looks to products were also considered important factors. The point highlighted above by the four participants was buttressed by P14, who gave a practical example of concerns that users may have when they visit an e-tailing website. This is contained in the quote below.

*Relevant size guide, good product descriptions, product descriptions are really key size guide, which is actually something that we yet to perfect, but that's pretty much the main*

*question you are going to get online is "hey, does this fit?" or "Hey, I'm a 32, Zara jeans?"*
*or "Will I be able to fit in your products?" (P14).*

Similarly, the point made above was also reiterated by P15, as highlighted in the quote below.

*Good description of what it is that they're buying, because selling clothes online is quite*
*difficult. People want to touch and feel and try. So, I have to make sure that I have quite*
*a detailed description. Which is where also video comes into play on social media,*
*because people want to see it. And yeah, I'll just offer good prices. I think that the pricing*
*strategy has a lot to do with it* (P15).

### 4.3.1.3  Code 1.3: Mobile Responsiveness

As was mentioned in the last sub-theme (section 4.3.1.2), it is important that users can get
information when they visit websites. However, users browse websites using different
electronic devices. The quotes below highlight the need for websites to be mobile-friendly,
considering that most users access these sites using their mobile devices.

*I do post the URL everywhere on all my posts on Facebook Marketplace, Gumtree,*
*everywhere. So, if people are struggling to get a hold of your website, then eventually*
*they're gonna go with the competition if they're gonna pop up first. There's a feature that*
*shows you from where the visits are coming. 70% of 75% of the clients are actually*
*viewing the website from their mobile phones. And the rest is doing it on a computer. So,*
*I think the mobile is actually more important these days than the computer* (P1).

*Everything has to be mobile-friendly. mobile-friendly, especially in South Africa. Most of*
*our customers are, well, I'd say like, 70% of the customers on mobile* (P10).

*When we look at our stats, we can see that 85% of the people that visit our website is*
*doing so from their phones. So, if 85% is being from the phones, that means Yeah, if*
*you're getting 10 sales, eight people are using their phones and only two are using the*
*desktop or tablet. So, it means, you know, must appeal more to mobile users* (P5).

The above quotes show that all the participants agreed that mobile responsiveness is a CSF.
P5 above illustrated the need to appeal to mobile users since most companies' sales will be
done by them. Also, P13 talked about their experiences with websites that were challenging to
use on mobile devices, as shown in the quote below.

*My website is obviously friendly on all devices. It fits in on your device, you there's no*
*issues of like having to zoom out zoom in situation. There's a lot of e-commerce websites*
*that I've come across, in doing my research as well, they don't have mobile accessibility*
*so you do need either a tablet, a larger tablet or a laptop to work off of and then it's not*
*convenient. You can't shop on the go or get information that way* (P13).

Accordingly, the opinions expressed by P1, P10, and P5 above were reinforced by P14, who
also noted the need for balance irrespective of the device used to access a site.

*5 to 10% of your users will only be using desktop. So pretty much everything is done via mobile phone or through Instagram. It has to look good on mobile. You have to be coded for both worst case scenario, someone does go on mobile, it looks cool. And then it goes on desktop, and it looks like a mess. You've already lost credibility* (P14).

#### 4.3.1.4 Code 1.4: Product Variety

Another factor identified by participants in this study is product variety. This is highlighted below by P1 and P2.

*Because I'm a gaming store mostly, I try to have more variety of products than the other online gaming shops. And then, because we also do second hand games, most other websites don't provide you a photo of the exact product, they'll just copy a photo off Google. And then you never know what the quality of the product is that you're buying. So, what I do is I take a photo of each and every single product so that I can see the quality of it, and lots of people told me that they would rather buy from me because they can see the product before they purchase it* (P1).

*A lot of people try to keep things quite simple. Whereas we have a number of different designs for clients to choose from. Next week, we'll be launching a whole new line again and there, there are at least 15 new items that are going to be placed upon the website, you know, and I think if you keep if you keep evolving and keep, keep it fresh, keep it new, and it keeps people then coming back to the sites* (P2).

In the quotes above, P1 and P2 shared their approach and how they update different products. This suggests that the availability of different products and designs is necessary as it offers buyers different options, allowing them to choose among available products and designs. Similarly, P10 stated:

*We're constantly updating the styles; we don't do repeats so the styles are never stagnant. There's always something new to look at* (P10).

In addition, P4 noted their introduction of new brands and the production of different products for famous musicians, thereby encouraging value creation.

*We've introduced new brands to our platform. We don't only produce products for our in within any producer in house product, we produce products for musicians like Majozi, and we produce for brands that Majozi and for Jethro Tait whose another musician. So, we've tried to add trust vectors like that to answer your previous question a little bit more. We are constantly trying to create new value for the consumer that's visiting our site by helping other brands to create products as well* (P4).

#### 4.3.1.5 Code 1.5: Service Delivery

Effective service delivery is essential for businesses, especially for SMMEs. To deliver effective service, customer service is vital. Participants expressed the need for companies to

always promote a positive, helpful, and friendly environment to ensure that customers leave with a great impression. This will lead to referrals, as most people want their friends and relatives to benefit from a good service. Moreover, participants in this study also mentioned the importance of responding quickly to inquiries.

Given the intense competition, business owners do not want to be slow in responding, as this may prompt potential customers to reach out to other competitors. This has the potential to affect businesses when it lingers. Thus, it is advised for companies to have active social media channels where their products and designs are displayed and managed by a social media manager available to reply to inquiries 24/7. Furthermore, it is pertinent to keep in touch with customers via email notifications, especially during celebrations such as birthdays regularly. However, it is expected that deliveries do not take too long, with the products delivered being of the highest quality. These are critical in website e-tailing, as contained in the quotes by participants indicated below:

> *We live in a world where everything is pretty fast-paced, and people expect immediate replies. So, if you've got someone handling your social feeds, you need to make sure that they're on top of things that people aren't kept waiting. In any type of retail or in sales environment, you need to strike while the iron is hot. So, if you've got someone that's interested, don't keep them waiting, don't let them have time to think about something else. You need to be there, you need to respond, and you need to close the deal, basically* (P2).

> *Consumer journeys, quite a big one and making sure that you've got recurring customers. So, we have a few strategies that we put in place for that. One is obviously you know, staying in touch with our customers in terms of the email notifications that go out. So once a customer places an order, we have a four-step communication process to communicate to the client how for the parcel is their payment process that's been approved. Their shipment has been dispatched as well as them receiving their goods. So, keep the communication like that. Another way is we've got a live chat bot on the site that's available 24/7 with one of our customer support team members that will be available to answer any questions. And our DMs, we are very active on social media as well in terms of replying to any private messages, any concerns, any questions, as well as comment section certain social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google* (P3).

> *Making sure that we deliver we say 10 to 15 days, we just want to make sure we that our production time doesn't go over that and also maintaining the quality, the high quality for products* (P5).

*I do my very best to give them the best customer service that they won't find anywhere else. And then I also make sure that the products that they're buying is reliable and good quality so that hopefully they will come back for those games* (P1).

### 4.3.1.6 Code 1.6: Visual Appeal

Humans are often attracted to what they see, suggesting that an enticing visualisation has the potential to sustain interest and motivate purchase. In this study, 11 of the 15 participants emphasised the need for websites to be visually appealing. This is further highlighted by P1 and P2 in the quotes below.

*Recently, our website underwent a design and look makeover and we have been receiving a lot of positive feedback on it. The current market demands a visually appealing and modern website as people are becoming increasingly particular about the visual representation of companies. A company that lacks a modern website design may be perceived as outdated which could potentially harm their business prospects. This is because people nowadays place significant emphasis on the visual appeal of a brand when they come across its logo or branding and are more likely to remember it while searching for products later on. Thus, stocking up on well-known products from big brands like Sony, PlayStation, Microsoft, etc., can help build consumer trust in smaller off-market brands that they may not be aware of* (P1).

*If you've got something that looks a bit vanilla, we like to keep it slightly basic, though there's nothing worse than going on to a website and you don't know where to go. So, you keep it simple, but you keep it, you know, a lot of good imagery. We've got a photographer who does a lot of our shoots with our products. And I think that is part of the brand's success, you know, is that it's fresh, it's local. It's honest, it's true. It's pure and it's simple* (P2).

P1 expressed their concern over the high demand for a visually appealing website and their efforts to improve the design of their websites. Both P1 and P2 also noted the relevance of good branding to a company's visibility. Moreover, building a recognisable company brand creates conviction and endears customers, as seen in the sales won by brands such as Sony and Microsoft. This is akin to the point made by P2 above, which emphasised the need for websites to look presentable. The two participants mentioned that they always hire a professional photographer to create visual content for them, which has contributed significantly to the success of their brand. Similarly, users are becoming more visually savvy, especially with the advent of more innovative ways of design, such as UX and UI. The modern dispensation is attracted by innovative designs, hence the need to keep up with the new trends, as stated by P3 below.

*A lot of the consumers are getting up to date in terms of what industry standards are, what international standard are, and what's the local standard. So, if you have your finger on the pulse in terms of design, design elements, UX and UI, I do think that goes a long way, especially with the younger generation, Gen Z. They're looking for innovative designs. Even if it's just your email pop up, your newsletter pop-up on top of the website. They are looking for the next best fresh thing. So, staying up to date with trends, even if it's on a social media presence, is definitely something that we take into consideration* (P3).

### 4.3.2 Objective 2: Strategies for effective e-tailing website strategies

The network diagramme presented in Figure 4.2 below depicts a visual representation of the strategies important for promoting effective e-tailing. In line with the study's objective 2: *exploring effective e-tailing website strategies*, the participants' ideas about various strategies significant towards promoting their preference and engagement in e-tailing were examined. Complementary to the ideas excerpted from the participants' reports, Figure 4.2 reveals that various strategies, including conversion rate optimisation, digital marketing, fair usage policies, discount offers, offering a reliable payment option, and requesting online reviews, are reflected in the opinion of the participants' cruciality on this point. The remarks from various participants reflect the aforementioned six strategies, and consequently, six codes were generated, which were further categorised into a group code (Group Code 2).

Several effective e-tailing website strategies have been highlighted in this study as critical to enticing customers and visitors to make a purchase. These ideas (strategies) are examined in the sub-sections below to understand their underlying efficacy in endearing visitors to e-tailing websites as expressed by participants.
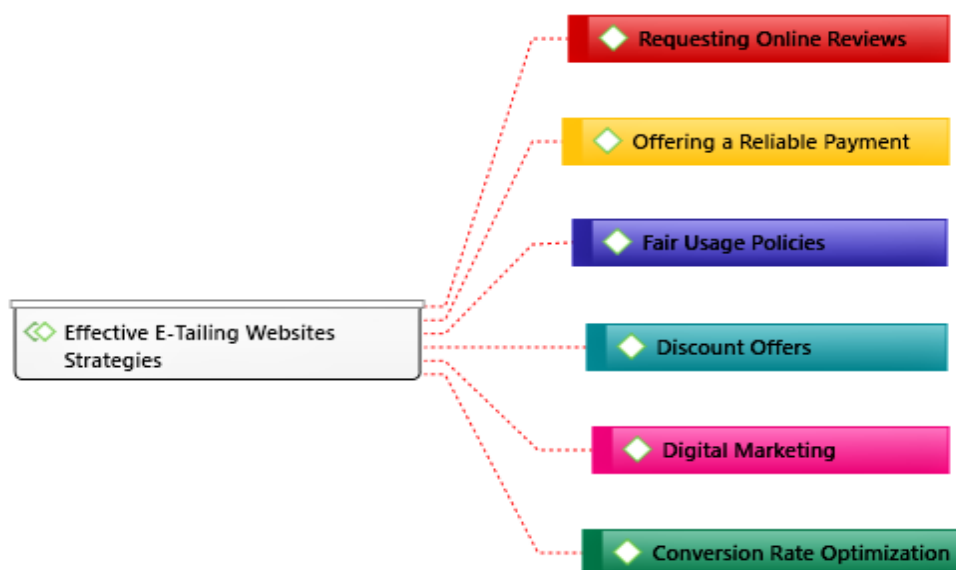


**Figure 4.2: Code Group 2: Strategies for effective e-tailing website strategies**
**(Source: Author's own conceptualisation)**

#### 4.3.2.1   Code 2.1: Conversion Rate Optimisation

Increasing the percentage of conversions from a website is an essential e-tailing strategy, as highlighted by participants. It involves generating ideas for elements on websites that can be improved and then validating those hypotheses through multivariate testing. This process applies statistical hypothesis testing to multivariable systems, which typically involves consumers on websites. However, nine (9) of the 15 participants shared several factors that led to conversion. According to P4, trust, website simplicity, an easy payment medium, and making the process of receiving goods easy can facilitate conversion, thereby leading to a purchase.

> *So, the key factors are making sure that they trust you; making sure that they have a great experience on the website; making sure that it's simple and making sure that it's easy to pay; and that it's easy to receive your goods* (P4).

Accordingly, P10 also highlighted the importance of trust as a key factor that leads to conversion, and noted the importance of visualisation.

> *They need to feel trust, they need to feel comfortable in your space – that speaks to the website as a whole. It's not just checkboxes, it's the words that you use, it's the visuals you use, it's the colours you use, it's the process, it's how you talk about your products* (P10).

This implies that customers might feel a sense of trust not only when websites are visually appealing but also if the website meets the necessary requirements that a customer might have. In addition, it is also important to get people to purchase within a few clicks, as highlighted by P12 and P14 below.

> *Making sure that there's not a lot of clicks from when a customer looks at the product to when they can actually buy it so that there isn't time for them to change their mind or become confused* (P12).

> *If you were to look at a website, what would you look at in terms of what would make your purchasing decision easier for you? Getting people to purchase in a few clicks to checkout. So, as few clicks as possible from the moment they get in the website until they get to your checkout page should not be more than five clicks. So, five clicks are a lot actually* (P14).

The above suggests that customers can be restless when they are about to make purchases online, suggesting the need to optimise e-tailing websites in a way that is appealing to their needs and expectations without any form of stress.

Furthermore, P14 highlighted the metrics they use in measuring their conversion rate success. They also provided statistics analysis of their progress as a company in endearing customers to accessing their websites. This is captured in the comment below.

*So, it's a bunch of conversion rates, what you spend for what you get back in revenue. So, what you spend on ads versus what you get back in revenue? And another conversion rate would be the number of consumers on your number of users on your website versus how many of them have made an actual purchase. So yeah, I mean, we had a conversion rate. We've had a really good week. Last week, we had a conversion rate of 8.8%, which is really good for ecommerce. They say a decent store starts at around 2% and a really good store is at about 4. So eight was a really, really good week for us. That's the major metric that we use for tracking our success; how many users have been on the website versus how many users made a purchase?* (P14).

### 4.3.2.2  Code 2.2: Digital Marketing

As highlighted by participants in this study, digital marketing is a critical component of effective e-tailing websites. Digital marketing uses online-based digital technologies and media platforms to promote products and services online. With the advent of diverse types of technologies and given that most people spend their time on the Internet, it has become pertinent for businesses to advertise their products online for wider reach. All the participants highlighted digital marketing as an effective e-tailing website strategy.

The quotes below represent the strategies adopted by participants in marketing their products using different digital platforms.

*I advertise on Gumtree and so on you, you can't advertise everything that you have on Gumtree. So, when people contact me through Gumtree, then I tell them, you can view everything on the website and then when they go there, then they do the purchase* (P1).

*Being quite active on Instagram, all our social media, Facebook, LinkedIn. We try and push marketing as much as we can... Marketing channels. We will let customers know that we've got new product, and that it's available online* (P2).

*The importance of Google reviews, as well as other factors such as social proof and the online presence of company managers or directors, cannot be overstated when it comes to convincing consumers that a platform is trustworthy and secure. This can involve participating in professional forums like LinkedIn, generating media coverage through various PR articles and channels, and more. All of these efforts contribute to building credibility with potential users* (P3).

*To achieve this level of trustworthiness, data plays an essential role. By analysing large sets of data (as one might do with Facebook's or Meta's advertising platforms), companies can more effectively target their messaging to specific audiences. Overall, building a solid reputation through strategic use of data-driven tactics goes a long way in demonstrating legitimacy to consumers* (P3).

As highlighted in the quotes above, participants advertise using different social media channels. P1 noted their use of Gumtree, a British-based online classified advertisement and community website that allows for free and paid classified ads depending on product category. Moreover, social media serves as a valuable tool for online marketing, allowing business owners to inform customers about new products, according to P2. Company managers speaking about their products on professional social media platforms such as LinkedIn, through media channels and PR articles, is also an effective strategy that indicates credibility about the company's product, as highlighted by P3 above. Furthermore, P4 highlighted their strategy of recruiting digital marketing experts and using processes such as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to drive traffic to their websites.

> *So, we work with an advertising agency at the moment, we used to do all of our own Facebook marketing. But now what we've decided to do is hand it over to an expert who can assist us with driving traffic to our site, not just like any traffic, but the right traffic… So, we spend money on marketing. I mentioned previously that we use an advertising agency, marketing agency that we provide advertising budget to, they then drive traffic to our site, we also try and organically gain traffic, we do this through an x this, on the back end of our website, we like to use a process called SEO search engine optimization. So, everything on our website is written in such a way that when somebody searches on Google, for something like ours, they're going to find us first. So, we use SEO, we use Facebook, marketing, which is paid advertising. And we also use our Google platforms to load photographs to our locations. And that also seems to get a little bit of traction for us* (P4).

Similarly, the point made above was buttressed by P12 and P13, as highlighted below:

> *Facebook ads and Instagram, just pushing stories and posts. I've now had to employ someone who's doing search engine optimization. We're actually looking at targeting keywords on the website as well as Google ads* (P12).

> *From the above quotes in this sub-theme, it suggests that social media advertisement is an essential medium of advertisement in the 21st century and when used effectively has the potential to aid the growth and visibility of the product of an e-tailing company. This is expressed in the quotes below by* (P13)*.*

> *Instagram. Facebook is the main thing with e-commerce. Social media marketing is your strongest kind of vantage point to enter the market. There's really no other way of getting people to your website* (P13).

### 4.3.2.3   Code 2.3: Fair Usage Policies

This is another effective e-tailing website strategy as expressed by 10 of the 15 participants in the study. As highlighted in the quotes below, P2 emphasised the need of having a fair policy, pointing out that it is an important factor that customers look at before patronage.

> *It is important for companies to have policies that are transparent and fair for their customers. Some companies with questionable practices may have unclear terms and conditions that do not benefit the customer. As a result, it is crucial for customers to review a company's policies before engaging in business with them. Ultimately, maintaining a positive relationship between the brand and the customer requires both parties to prioritise fairness in their policies. Therefore, having clear and fair policies should be considered an essential aspect of any business* (P2).

Moreover, free returns are a recurrent fair usage policy that emerged from this study, as expressed by 10 participants. Since online stores do not have means where customers can test the products they order, they would appreciate an option that allows them to return or exchange. This will build trust and buyer-customer relationship, thereby leading to more future patronage, as highlighted in the quotes below.

> *So, we normally see return customers once they've bought from us once. What we also do is we offer free returns. So, some of the trust issues around e-commerce are still that it's not going to fit me and it's going to be an exercise to return it. And we try to make that processes as easy as possible. So, if customer orders are large, and they are [sic] actually an extra-large, we try and make that process as easy as possible to get them the size that fits them. And then, once we do that in an effective manner, then they tend to order from us consistently going forward* (P4).

> *Protecting your consumers' rights. If they've purchased something and it's the wrong size, or they've purchased something and the person doesn't like that shirt, but they want to know that they can swap it for another shirt. You can't be too strict on those kinds of things. If people know they have the comfort of knowing that they can get a refund, exchange their goods and it would be done in a timeless manner. People will keep coming back and supporting you* (P2).

> *The warranty and the guarantee return factor. If people give out money to purchase something, and it's not what they've ordered, or it's not working, then they want the right to get their money back. So, you need to provide them with that* (P1)*.*

The above quotes suggest that people fear being scammed, especially witnessing cases of "I ordered versus what I received" on social media. Hence, they want to be cautious and make extra sure of the quality of the product before purchasing. Adding a return option is an effective strategy that appeases some of the customers' fears.

The point made above is further buttressed by P14, who noted that adding the return option not only gives customers peace of mind after purchasing a product, but also offers them the opportunity to examine the product they have purchased to make sure if it is their exact fit.

> *Free first return is very important. That really puts the customer's mind at ease. Doesn't feel like they're making a one stop purchase that rather they are then essentially in the store, and they get the opportunity to try on a product and get the opportunity exchanged. If it's too big* (P14).

### 4.3.2.4  Code 2.4: Discount Offers

Discounts act as incentives that motivate people to make a purchase. Apart from the money people are paying, they want to see the extra benefits attached to a product online. Six participants in this study highlighted some discount strategies and how this has worked effectively in getting people to sign into their websites, as contained in the quotes below.

> *Please sign in, and then you get 20% discount on your first purchase* (P5).
>
> *We've done everything from coupon drops - If someone comes across us in the street, we have a business card that says, use this code and you'll get 10% off your first order* (P10).
>
> *I do run promo codes at the moment. I have a winter sale going. So, I have a promo code winter22, where they get 20% off everything on the website. I do flash sales every now and then. And I've just launched mystery bombs and mystery boxes, which I have seen a lot of positive feedback on that* (P13).
>
> *In order to access the discount platform, you have to supply your email address, and that's been very successful* (P15).

The quotes above highlight the several discounting offers given by participants to endear people to their website, with maximum success, as noted by P15 above.

### 4.3.2.5  Code 2.5: Offering a Reliable Payment Option

Offering a reliable payment option is a critical e-tailing website strategy, based on the opinions expressed by participants in this study. Among the 15 participants sampled, ten expressed the insistent request of customers wanting to be sure of the safety of the transfer medium. It was revealed that most customers prefer the PayFast payment option for local transfers, given that it is reliable, credible, and one of the most prominent payment options in South Africa, owned by an international company. On the other hand, participants are sceptical about making a transfer/payment using the electronic funds transfer system (EFT). Equally, they fear inputting their financial details for fear of being scammed.

Moreover, PayPal was also mentioned in the study as a reliable medium for making international transfers/payments, suggesting the need for website owners to feature payment options such as PayPal and PayFast for international and local transactions, respectively.

Participants shared their strategy of using diverse payment mediums and partnering with recognised and trusted financial institutions for people to be more secure when making payments. This is emphasised in the quotes from the participants below.

*Okay, so with the credit card details, we haven't yet added feature to allow you to pay with credit cards, so people are currently only paying with EFTs. I am busy adding pay fast to the website. But they're only paying EFTs at the moment. But still yes, sometimes people feel unsafe. giving their information and doing EFTs to companies that don't know* (P1).

*We've outsourced to a partner called PayFast. And they doing a lot of the trust work for us. So, when a customer provides their details, particularly those details, they want to know that they're dealing with the trusted partner. So PayFast is one of the largest payment platforms in South Africa. They're owned by the DPO group, which is an international company that just been bought out, and the likes of Takealot, Superbalist, the biggest sort of e to e-commerce, businesses in South Africa, trust them to manage all of their payments. So, we hope that then the customer, you know, trusts that platform. And that's, that's how we get them to provide their details. It's outsourced to PayFast. But you don't really know it's a seamless process. It says you being redirected to secure payment platform PayFast. And I think they started to get known in the industry or in part of consumer now as a trusted platform for making payments* (P4).

*Partnering with established and reputable credit card companies and service providers such as PayFast can help customers feel more secure when providing their credit card information. While they may not be comfortable giving their details directly to an individual, they are willing to trust the credibility of these partner companies, which are well-known and trusted within the industry. Similarly, partnering with other prominent companies like Pay Just Now further helps to establish credibility and build trust with customers* (P5).

*We have secure payment methods. We use PayFast so it's a trusted website. I don't think people feel comfortable to pay money into your account via EFT, or anything like that. I think PayFast and PayPal, that's basically the most trusted. People feel comfortable doing it that way… People are a lot more comfortable paying through a PayFast or a SnapScan, or whatever the case might be Masterpass than EFTing money into someone's account that they don't know* (P13).

*You won't even be able to get away with anything without a secured payment gateway. PayPal. PayFast. Paygates [sic]. PayFast is better for local, PayPal is obviously international. Fees are a little bit higher. I recommend PayGate for payment terms. P14*

#### 4.3.2.6  Code 2.6: Requesting Online Reviews

In the previous themes, emphasis was placed on credibility. One of the ways of building online credibility is through reviews. Reviews serve as digital proof and footprints that speak to the credibility of a product being sold. It represents customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a product or service rendered online. In this study, P4, P10, and P1 highlighted their strategies of further asking for online reviews to boost their online credibility, as seen in the comments below.

> *I've put a lot of effort into the reviews that I've asked people to place for me so if people place a review on your, on your Gumtree or on your Google or your Facebook, then I need to go search for your company again to be able to place a review so typing in your company's name again, that puts the brand the logo the brand or whatever again in their in their head so next time they want to purchase they remember your company first because they've Googled it now a couple of times* (P1).

> *And then we also ask for Google reviews from our existing customers. So that if somebody goes and Google's us, then they'll be able to see that we've got four- or five-star reviews at the moment. And that they're not buying from you know, somebody who's who doesn't have their best interests at heart. So, I guess that's how we try to do it. We also have reviews on our website and underneath certain products. So, they can see that other customers have enjoyed buying them* (P4).

> *We push for reviews, as much as possible. We do have a flow system. And we ask all of our customers for reviews* (P10).

The quotes above suggest that reviews are essential in endearing customers online, as it helps to dispel any doubts people may have about a product or service being rendered. This implies that asking for customer reviews online is an effective e-tailing website strategy.

#### 4.3.3  Objective 3: Challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites

Figure 4.3 below represents the network diagramme of the code group *challenges associated with electronic retailing websites*. Code group 3 explored various challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites in the study area (Cape Metropole). Five challenges were identified, and as a result, five codes were developed. As revealed in Figure 4.3, various constraints, such as abandoned carts, cost of hiring a professional and website marketing, driving traffic to the website, high shipping cost, and lack of knowledge, are reflected in the opinions of the study participants as problematic towards effective SMME electronic retailing websites.
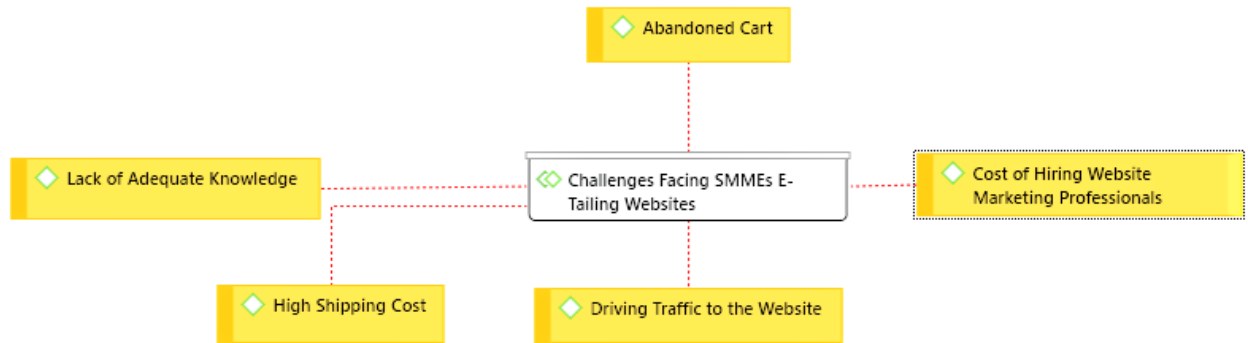
**Figure 4.3: Code Group 3: Challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites**
**(Source: Author's own conceptualisation)**

Objective 2 of the study highlights strategies for effective e-tailing websites. However, the successful implementation of these strategies also comes with challenges. Abandoned carts, cost of hiring a professional and marketing, driving traffic to the website, slow page loading, high shipping costs, and lack of knowledge are some of the challenges facing effective e-tailing websites. These challenges constitute the components of this objective and are critically examined below.

### 4.3.3.1  Code 3.1: Abandoned Carts

It was highlighted in the study that users often add products to the online shopping carts of e-tailing sites but do not proceed to checkout and complete the purchase. This is given that companies do not practice drop shipping and charge an exorbitant delivery fee. However, it was revealed that more sales were recorded upon the reduction of a delivery fee, which is highlighted in the quotes below by P13.

> *People are very unwilling; especially if your company doesn't do drop shipping and stuff like that. Being based in Cape Town people abandon their cart for the courier fee…the delivery fee, you pack your cart for things and you get to checkout and it's like 100 bucks' delivery then they just abandon their carts. I've seen a lot more sales since we introduced the lower delivery fee, or the other option of delivery. I would say rather, we've seen an increase in sales. Definitely. So, I think the delivery fee, and then yeah also just having the budget available for stuff that they don't need to survive… People abandon that cart quicker than you can say please buy from me if that fee is too high* (P13).

### 4.3.3.2  Code 3.2: Cost of Hiring a Professional and Website Marketing

Digital marketing was highlighted in the previous theme (section 4.2.2) as a key strategy for effective e-tailing websites. However, this can be expensive, especially when hiring professionals capable of effectively executing the task. Moreover, it was revealed in the study that marketing on most social media platforms is expensive as it also requires paying social media providers for ads and conducting several research projects, given the challenging nature

of social media platforms to understand the target market audience. This points to the importance of online advertising with the advent of technology, which is highlighted in the quotes below by P5, P10 and P11.

*You can't outsource it anymore because there's just no money to do that. Also, the people that do the work, they need to make a living. So you can't pay them nothing and expect something. Creating content, paying the social media providers to actually make sure that your content is out there and you're pushing the right messages out there* (P10).

*So, marketing costs a lot of money. So, then you try and test different types of marketing. You do Facebook marketing, Google Marketing, and its ad and in the process, you wasted a lot of money* (P5).

*So this technology is quite challenging. It took a lot of research, a lot of money out of the pocket as well, just to be able to determine who and what our target market is* (P11).

Similarly, P5 expressed their efforts in searching for skilled professionals, as well as their dissatisfaction over the recurring recruitment of experts to execute their marketing strategies, suggesting that thorough work might not have been done in the first instance.

*We've tried finding skilled people, people with experience of dealing with marketing, different marketing strategies. So you know, that's an ongoing process because sometimes it works. And then sometimes it works for a short time, and then it stops working. Then you have to find another expert, again, to deal with a new problem. So the problems keep coming; they don't stop* (P5).

To buttress the point made above, P14 noted cases where they have recruited the wrong individuals in the past. They further emphasised the need to bring on board people and partners that are committed and are the right fit for the job.

*We brought on the wrong people; we paid them an exorbitant fee. Getting the right, the right people involved and the right partners from the beginning, is really important. And actually, getting someone who's going to stick with you and keep your website up to date is crucial* (P14).

### 4.3.3.3  Code 3.3: Driving Traffic to the Website

This is another challenge facing SMME e-tailing websites identified in the study. As highlighted above, the cost of hiring a skilled professional is enormous. Often there is insufficient traffic despite the money spent. Six (6) of the 15 participants mentioned driving traffic to their websites as a challenge they are facing. The quotes below represent some of these challenges as expressed by participants.

*The main challenge that we face is obviously driving significant traffic to our site. Enough that converts into sales. So what we are trying to do at the moment is drive more traffic*

*to our website trying to convince more local people to purchase local rather than from overseas. So yeah, those are the challenges that we have at the moment* (P4).

*The changes in how you gain traffic and actually find customers. It's not the same as it used to be. You have to pay to play. You have to spend money to advertise on social media platforms* (P10).

*Directing traffic there. Trying to direct traffic to the website* (P7).

*Not enough traffic* (P8).

These quotes indicate the need to recruit the right group of marketing professionals. It furthermore suggests that e-tailing website owners should invest in their personal and staff capacity building to have the knowledge to drive traffic to their website efficiently.

### 4.3.3.4 Code 3.4: High Shipping Cost

In a bid to purchase products online, customers often become discouraged over high shipping costs, which forms the basis of the analysis of this sub-theme, as captured in the opinions expressed by four (4) of the 15 participants sampled in this study.

*Overseas shipping is costing an absolute arm and a leg at the moment, and how do we, you know, different areas of someone purchases in the United Kingdom (UK), we know that sending four t-shirts to the UK can cost almost R1200 in shipping fees. So there have been challenges when it comes to things like that. And it's just about making sure you're on top of things. You stay on top of things* (P2).

*When it comes to logistics, the biggest issue and I'm sure every single company in South Africa is facing is the price of couriers. We offer a "from our door to your door" solution. The price is just getting insane* (P10).

*People abandon that cart quicker than you can say please buy from me. If that fee is too high* (P13).

The quotes above highlight the outrageous nature of shipping costs and how they affect sales. According to the statement above by P2, it was further revealed that international shipping costs are higher when goods are shipped from South Africa to countries like the UK. This indicates the currency exchange rate and value discrepancy, which is a disadvantage for South African e-tailing website business owners. Additionally, offering an in-home delivery fee is equally expensive, as mentioned by P10, and this is one of the main reasons people forgo their carts, as observed by P13.

Accordingly, the points made above by P2, P10 and P13 were further buttressed by P14.

*High shipping costs for international orders, a lot of the time international orders could range from about R500 to R800, which is actually pretty much the similar price of the product. It might encourage them from our side to buy more products. A lot of them we were not seeing as many sales as we should internationally, because if someone does*

*just want to buy one product, they paying the same amount for shipping. So that's a*
*major barrier* (P14).

This was also reiterated by P10, emphasising the gross impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on shipping and transport fees.

*Our biggest challenge is the cost of getting the stuff to the customer and brings in stuff*
*from overseas. COVID-19 absolutely murdered us on transport fees. So, the margins are*
*really, really being pushed* (P1).

### 4.3.3.5  Code 3.5: Lack of Knowledge

The lack of technical know-how in the use of technologies and the working of websites was identified as a further challenge faced by SMMEs. According to P1 and P2,

*Internally, definitely the lack of skills. I run the website by myself so I feel that I don't have*
*all the skills that I need to grow the website to its fullest. And then also regular updates*
*from the modules and everything that sometimes breaks the website. I've made friends*
*with a few people that can help me to make the website better, where I lack the skills to*
*do so* (P1).

*I've tried to use WordPress, but then that's all. Because I'm not very tech savvy, I build*
*my own website. And I don't understand the coding at the back. And I didn't have time*
*to understand that. And then I tried to engage some people. And then when you use*
*WordPress and you're not tech savvy, it means you must always engage with the person*
*that built your website to be chopping and changing things. And I didn't want that. I want*
*to own it. I want to be chipping in changes when I want total ownership of it. So, Shopify*
*provided that for me* (P5).

As highlighted above, P1 expressed their motive to expand their websites but noted the constraints they face given the necessary skills. Moreover, they have built personal relationships over time with people who have the know-how to help them improve their website. The comment by P1 is also akin to the opinion expressed by P5, who highlighted their difficulty in understanding the build-up of their website at the backend. These participants also noted their efforts in engaging individuals that can handle website building, although they would prefer to be more familiar with it themselves to be able to optimise their websites to their taste. The points made above were reinforced by P11, who added that intense research and money are required to be able to reach the target audience.

*So, these technologies are quite challenging. It took a lot of research, a lot of money out*
*of the pocket as well, just to be able to determine who and what our target market is*
(P11).

This was further reiterated by P12 as highlighted in the quote below.

*Research, we had to research ways to maintain it myself and find smaller companies that are willing to build your website for you lies directly with you* (P12).

From the opinions expressed by participants in this sub-theme, it indicates a need for SMME e-tailing website owners to acquaint themselves with the requisite skills to be able to efficiently manage tech-related issues that may arise in their business.

### 4.3.4  Objective 4: Recommendations for future e-tailers

Consequent to various barriers identified by the study participants as limitations towards the effectiveness of SMME electronic retailing websites, various recommendations were proposed to mitigate such problems for future SMME e-tailing website owners. These recommendations, as identified by the participants, are depicted in Figure 4.4 below.

The figure represents the network diagramme of the code of recommendations for future SMME e-tailing website owners. The diagramme reveals that the code encapsulates the participants' suggestions into seven categories, including setting up a convenient and affordable pricing, tracking of consumer's visits and preferences, exploring the possibilities and opportunities inherent in Web3, regular review and update of website features, excellent customers services, identification and targeting of potential audience, and promotion of positive reviews towards websites. These ideas are reflected in the opinions of the participants below.
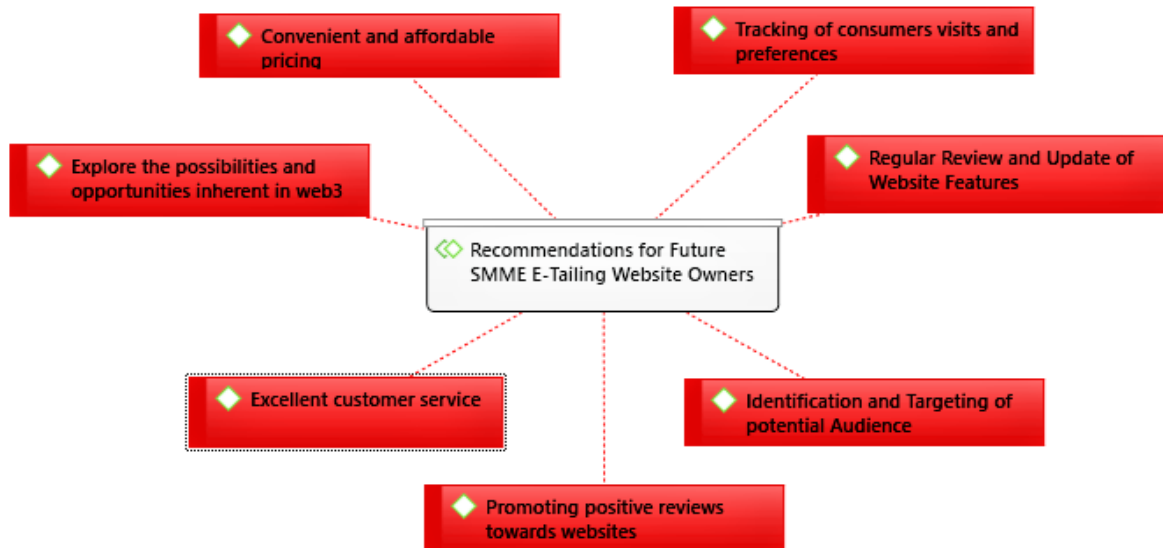


**Figure 4.4: Code Group 4: Recommendations for future SMME e-tailing website owners**
**(Source: Author's own conceptualisation)**

Participants in theme three expressed several challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites. However, they also provided some recommendations and solutions for future SMME e-tailing website owners, especially considering the growing competition and gross popularity of e-commerce, which will lead to higher demand. P1 advised the need for e-tailing website owners

to regularly update and review their websites with the latest and most modern features. They also suggested keeping their prices reasonable to keep up with the competition. This is emphasised in the quote below.

*With online e-commerce becoming more, more of a thing, the people's demands are also going to become higher. So their standards are going to rise. So you need to have your website with the latest features looking very modern, keeping it fresh and updating products, keeping your price. Like, competitive. I told my friend the other day, like I don't even buy from people who don't have a website because it's, for me, so important that you have a website because it says a lot about your company. And if your website looks like you worked on it 20 years ago, I'm also not going to be interested so your website needs to look fresh. Give people something to look forward to when they go on there. And that's just going to become tougher and tougher to do because the competition is growing* (P1).

Accordingly, P3 advised the need for e-tailing website owners to gear up and explore the possibilities and opportunities inherent in Web3, given that it has huge potential to transform the e-commerce space. They further gave a practical example of how this could affect customers' patronage, suggesting the need for website owners to be on the alert.

*I think they need to prepare themselves for the Web. Web3, I see a lot of brands aren't prepared yet in terms of the Web3 domain, their setup their integration. Yeah, there's a whole big market sitting there that's just waiting to be tapped into. And I think that's going to happen. As soon as you know, consumers wake up, and they see that they've got an automatic wallet in their actual banking apps, which will allow them to transfer the funds into crypto, which will allow them to buy with crypto online as well. So I see that happening in the next three to six months. As soon as we have regular regularity, regulation and clarity on the regulation from the EU that will then be bottled on through to South Africa as well. So I think that's a big thing, that they're not looking at the moment, which we see a lot of international brands stepping into that space quite heavily* (P3).

The point made above was backed up by P4, who recommended that SMME e-tailing website owners understand and study their target audience to be able to provide them with the necessary service. They equally advised that they should be wary of the financial know-how of South Africans and emphasised the need for hard work to successfully navigate the burgeoning and dynamic nature of the e-commerce space. This is highlighted in the comment below.

*With the increasing activity of people on e-commerce platforms, Africa has been slow to adopt this trend. However, a boom can be expected, leading to more individuals establishing their own e-commerce websites. It is important for them to recognize that*

*South African pockets are tight, and therefore spending habits are becoming increasingly important. It takes considerable effort and comprehension to maintain an e-commerce platform successfully, as we have discussed earlier. Thus, they should prepare themselves to work very hard and understand their consumers' lifestyles and spending capabilities while creating something useful for South Africans* (P4).

P11 reiterated the need for hard work as well as an effective and reliable medium for tracking customers' website visits, their geography, and the brand they represent, to be able to know the appropriate strategy to adopt for the desired result. According to them, it is hard work but essential to sustaining businesses in a highly competitive space such as e-commerce.

*To prepare themselves for running an online business. Yes, hard work, the more hours you put in, the more results you get out. You cannot just assume that your website is out there on the worldwide web and expect it to make money on its own. It's like any other business. When it starts up. It takes some time to grow it. And also to know your audience and also know who your target customers are. To make sure that your delivery time to customers is a short period of 3 to 5 days maximum. Yes, and to constantly watch your trends that's the most important for me is watching the trends of who's clicking who's buying, where they're clicking from, where they're buying from. And it is hard work. It's like starting any other business. This is not a quick get rich quick scheme. It's not going to happen. Before I actually bought the stores, I did some research and reviews, and a lot of people were negative about it. But what I found was, like I said earlier, the more hours you put in, the more you get out, you have to know who you're selling to and where you're selling to* (P11).

Excellent customer service and mapping out a convenient pricing would help in sustaining e-tailing websites and aggregate more sales despite the competition, as advised by P5 below:

*Um, I think this game to be, you know, to up the quality and customer service, that's going to be the differentiator, because almost everyone will be going online and then some of the products will be similar. So the most important thing is to be able to be competitive and pricing as well as customer sales* (P5).

Furthermore, P13 advised the need for trust building as a good strategy to endearing dear customers, and, as captured in this study, one of the ways to build trust is by asking and earning customer reviews (section 4.2.6).

*Getting people to trust your brand enough to buy. Because if you're an online company, there's no physical location where they can go complain, there's no physical location where they can go physically, if you take something off of a shelf, and know that they have their product. So it's all about that trust factor that they're going to have to work on to show* (P13).

Lastly, P15 recommended having a support infrastructure. Those are physical assets necessary for the business to operate. They also advised the need to conduct extensive competitor research to understand if the product they are offering customers is competitive and fit for the market.

> *To make sure that they have a support infrastructure in place, And, you know, I think make, do a lot of competitor research, research the product, and make sure that what you're offering is competitive and that there's a market for it* (P15).

## 4.4    Chapter summary

This part of the study's report provided the underlying thematic analysis of the qualitative statements/data of the participants generated on the study's interest to explore and identify the CSFs for effective e-tailing websites to answer the research question: What strategies should SMME e-tailers implement to improve the effectiveness of their websites? The purpose of the study led to the creation of four group codes aligned to the study's objectives, all of which are associated with sub-codes.

With relevance to the factors contributing to the effectiveness of e-tailing websites among the SMMEs in the Cape metropole, various factors, including website features (simplicity, responsiveness, and visual appeal/design), the delivery structure and pattern (service delivery), product availability and variety, and quality of information, contribute significantly to the effectiveness of e-tailing websites in the opinion of the participants. This idea is captured in the first group code (identified as Group Code 1) in the study.

In addition, the second group code (Group Code 2) of the report affirmed that successful electronic retailing websites are often associated with strategies capable of promoting website effectiveness. As revealed by the code, strategies, including conversion rate optimisation, digital marketing, fair usage policies, discount offers, offering a reliable payment option and requesting online reviews, are employed by the SMMEs in the Cape metropole towards promoting effectiveness in their e-tailing websites.

Code group 3 as used in this study described the challenges associated with SMMEs' e-tailing websites in the study area. Five major challenges, including abandoned cart, cost of hiring a professional and website marketing, driving traffic to the website, high shipping costs, and lack of adequate knowledge of website management, are faced by the SMMEs' e-tailing website owners in the study area.

Finally, the last code generated in the study report revealed various recommendations necessary for promoting the effectiveness of SMME e-tailing websites in the Cape metropole. In line with this, product price regulation, exploring consumer preferences, exploring the possibilities and opportunities inherent in Web3, regular review and update of website features,

excellent customer service, identification and targeting of potential audiences, and promotion of positive reviews towards websites were suggested as important feedback of the participants. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion within the context of the research objectives and findings to substantiate the claims.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

## 5.1 Introduction

To support the research strategy of this study, grounded theory was introduced and reinforced through in-depth, semi-structured and cross-sectional interviews as depicted in the previous chapter. It is important to note that informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and participant protection during the data collection process played a significant role in shaping the previous chapter, with a detailed account of related processes.

In this chapter, ethical, theoretical, and literature considerations are discussed, and the results and findings obtained in the research study are thoroughly explained in correlation with the outlined theoretical framework. The chapter aims to relate the findings from the interviews to the theoretical framework provided in earlier chapters for a closer understanding of the critical success factors involved in overseeing e-tailing success among SMMEs in the Cape Metropole.

## 5.2 Objective 1 (Code Group 1): Identifying the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole

The main question of this study, in alignment with objective 1, was to identify the significant factors (critical success factors) for successful e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole.

The main question was supported by two sub-questions:

- What are the challenges SMME e-tailing websites face in the Cape Metropole?
- What strategies should SMME e-tailers implement to improve the effectiveness of their websites?

### 5.2.1 Code 1.1: Ease of Use

Ease of use stands as a CSF for e-tailing websites (Haron et al., 2017). In this digital era, where consumers have countless options at their fingertips, the presence of a user-friendly and intuitive interface can influence the outcome of an online transaction, differentiating between a successful interaction and a dissatisfied customer (Jongmans et al., 2022).

The research participants stressed the significance of smooth website navigation and fast loading times, as users can be impatient and unwilling to wait. An e-commerce website should prioritise simplicity in its design, ensuring that visitors can easily navigate through product catalogues, find what they're looking for, and complete their purchases with minimal effort (Flavian et al., 2009).

A good website design should include easy access to search bars, uncluttered navigation to targeted products, and a simple checkout process. Furthermore, it is crucial for e-tailing websites to be clear and easy to understand, avoiding distractions that may dissuade users

from finishing their purchases. Fast loading times and responsive design are also essential components of ease of use, as users are often impatient and expect swift interactions (Stadnik & Nowak, 2018). Moreover, providing clear and straightforward information, coupled with a distraction-free layout, can significantly enhance the user experience, instil trust, and encourage repeat business (Brilliant & Achyar, 2021).

Overall, the study highlights the importance of prioritising user experience by providing quality products at competitive prices with minimal clicks required to complete transactions. The study's results align with literature on e-commerce sites, which stresses the importance of simplicity and usability as key success factors. Previous studies have consistently emphasised the need for easy website navigation, speedy loading times, and user-friendly design features such as accessible search bars and streamlined product navigation. Additionally, the literature highlights the value of a clear and straightforward website layout that avoids distractions and encourages users to complete their purchases. Ultimately, both the current study and previous research underscore how crucial it is to prioritise user experience by providing quality products at competitive prices while minimising click requirements to finalise transactions in e-commerce.

### 5.2.2   Code 1.2: Quality of Information

The study's findings emphasise the importance of providing reliable, convincing, precise, clear, and sufficient information on e-tailing websites to ensure effective e-tailing. Key success factors identified by participants include displaying specific product details such as price and quality, staying up-to-date with market trends, and adding new products. These factors were found to be essential for building trust with online customers, given the prevalence of Internet scams and the risk of receiving different products than ordered. Moreover, providing a relevant size guide, accurate product descriptions, and utilising video on social media were highlighted as critical aspects of successful e-tailing. Lastly, a competitive pricing strategy was identified as an essential component to attract customers and ensure the success of e-tailing websites. The outcomes of the research are aligned with previous studies on e-tailing that highlight the significance of delivering precise and all-encompassing details on e-tailing websites to improve user satisfaction and encourage purchases. The vital elements for success recognised by respondents, such as presenting extensive product information, keeping up to date with market patterns, and introducing new items, correspond with the literature on e-commerce and e-tailing (Seifert et al., 2021).

Fostering trust between e-tailers and their online customers is a significant aspect emphasised in e-tailing literature given the increasing occurrence of Internet fraud and the possibility of receiving dissimilar products from what was ordered, as concluded by Aw (2019). Nagula and

Lui (2020) emphasise that e-tailers can cultivate transparency and provide precise product descriptions to help build customer trust.

A relevant size guide and accurate product descriptions, along with the use of video on social media, are essential for a better online shopping experience and decreasing product returns. E-tailing literature recognises their significance in achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty. These aspects enable customers to make informed decisions while shopping on the Internet. A crucial factor for the success of e-tail websites is a competitive pricing strategy, as revealed by this study. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasises the significance of pricing in online retailing by Saxena et al. (2018). A competitive pricing approach not only allures price-sensitive customers but also demonstrates worth to potential buyers, thereby enhancing the overall triumph of e-tail websites.

### 5.2.3 Code 1.3: Mobile Responsiveness

Because so many consumers choose to access e-tailing websites through their smartphones and tablets, the study's findings amply illustrate the significance of these websites being optimised for mobile devices (Lee et al., 2019; Patel et al., 2015). A significant number of online customers prefer utilising their mobile devices for browsing and making purchases, according to the study's participants' insightful response. Hence, if companies want to stay competitive in the market and attract more clients, they must have mobile-responsive websites (Jameel et al., 2018). This highlights the need of meeting the demands and preferences of mobile users to increase income and sales (Zimmermann et al., 2019).

The results of various studies covered in the literature review on e-tailing serve as a reminder of how crucial it is to have a mobile-friendly website in the modern-day. With mobile devices now widely available and being used more often to visit e-tailing websites, it demonstrates the necessity for companies to optimise their websites to be usable and accessible on a variety of gadgets, including smartphones and tablets (Arora et al., 2021).

For clients accessing websites via their mobile phones or other portable electronic devices, a responsive website design is essential towards ensuring a seamless browsing experience (Almeida & Monteiro, 2017). Users may become irritated with a badly designed website and leave it in favour of one run by a competitor (Rasli et al., 2018). Moreover, while building their e-commerce websites, organisations should consider accessibility, navigation, and visual attractiveness (Sauer et al., 2020). When users are drawn by visually appealing websites, they should also be able to discover what they are seeking for fast using easy navigation buttons (Horak et al. 2021). These elements dramatically improve user engagement, contentment, and overall user experience, which ultimately boosts revenue (Jameel et al., 2018).

To stay ahead of rivals in this constantly changing digital environment, it is crucial for companies doing business in the digital market sector today to devote time, energy, and resources to creating a web presence in a mobile-friendly way (Almeida & Monteiro, 2017).

The findings of this study are consistent with earlier literature evaluations on e-tailing. It emphasises how critical it is to have mobile-responsive e-commerce websites in the ferociously competitive online economy of today. A mobile-friendly website may be a crucial element in determining whether an online business succeeds or fails (Lee et al., 2019). Businesses must progressively optimise their websites for mobile viewing as more and more individuals access the Internet through their smartphones (Patel et al., 2015). By doing this, businesses may draw in and interact with a larger consumer base, build stronger relationships of trust and dependability with their audience, and ultimately increase their likelihood of making more money and achieving long-term, sustainable development (Zimmermann et al., 2019). To differentiate themselves in the digital marketplace, e-tailers must emphasise providing seamless user experiences across all devices (Cazanas and Parra, 2017).

### 5.2.4   Code 1.4: Product Variety

According to the research findings, it appears that having a diverse range of products is crucial for e-tailers to be successful. The study participants highlighted the significance of offering an extensive selection of products and designs while also frequently updating their inventory with new items. Additionally, they stressed the importance of depicting accurate photos and providing detailed descriptions to guarantee customer satisfaction. By providing a variety of options, customers can make well-informed decisions when selecting products that meet their requirements and preferences. Therefore, product variety could be seen as a major differentiating factor in online shopping, as consumers are likely to opt for retailers who cater to their diverse needs and preferences.

The current discovery is consistent with the existing literature on e-tailing, which underscores the importance of offering a diverse range of products in online retailing. In fact, previous research conducted by Mofokeng (2021) has revealed that having a broad assortment of products was an indispensable factor when it came to satisfying customers and earning their loyalty in online markets. Likewise, Arora and Aggarwal (2018) attest to the fact that product variety and assortment directly influenced the level of satisfaction derived from online shopping experiences while also increasing the chances of repeat purchases. Therefore, as far as online retailing is concerned, it seems apparent that providing customers with plentiful options is pivotal for achieving customer satisfaction and building brand loyalty.

One way for e-tailers to keep their customers coming back is by continually refreshing their product offerings. This can be achieved by regularly updating styles, introducing new brands into their inventory, and even partnering with well-known musicians to create exclusive

products. Through these tactics, e-tailers can offer something unique and exciting to their customers that they cannot find elsewhere. Additionally, keeping an extensive variety of products available for purchase helps ensure that there is always something of interest for every customer. In this way, the need for maintaining product variety becomes crucial for e-tailing websites to remain competitive and successful in the long run.

## 5.2.5   Code 1.5: Service Delivery

The study's findings underscore the paramount importance of delivering exceptional customer service, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) striving to establish their market presence. Respondents emphasised the value of creating a welcoming and customer-centric environment characterised by warmth, approachability, enthusiasm, and friendliness. Such an atmosphere not only leaves a lasting impression on customers but also often results in recommendations and reviews. Furthermore, it was evident that key strategies for retaining customers and outperforming competitors include providing swift responses to inquiries and actively managing social media platforms. Therefore, upholding a high standard of service delivery is imperative for organisations seeking not only to survive but also to thrive.

A crucial aspect of delivering outstanding customer service involves keeping customers well-informed about their orders and maintaining continuous communication through email notifications. Timely delivery and seamless order processing are equally vital to ensuring customer satisfaction. Additionally, e-commerce companies must offer round-the-clock support through chat bots or other tools to assist customers with any issues they may encounter during the purchase process. Furthermore, the provision of high-quality products is a fundamental component in fostering consumer confidence and trust. The cumulative impact of these factors significantly influences customer satisfaction and ultimately determines the success or failure of an online business.

The study's findings align with existing literature on e-tailing, reinforcing the pivotal role of engagement and customer service in online shopping, as corroborated by numerous scholars, including Naveed et al. (2017) and Raman (2019). Effective customer service, timely delivery, and a robust social media presence have been identified in previous research as critical drivers of both customer happiness and loyalty in e-tailing. Furthermore, successful e-tailing websites consistently rely on efficient customer service, swift delivery turnaround times, and the delivery of high-quality products to earn and maintain customers' trust. As such, e-tailers must prioritise these factors when formulating their long-term success strategies.

## 5.2.6   Code 1.6: Visual Appeals

According to the study's findings, having visually attractive websites is extremely important for businesses as it plays a critical role in both attracting and retaining customers. Of the 15 participants who took part in the interviews, 11 specifically highlighted the significance of

having visually appealing websites. This suggests that businesses should invest more resources into creating visually stunning experiences for their customers.

Moreover, quality branding and design are believed to be key factors in building consumer trust and increasing a company's visibility. As stated by P1, well-known brands like Sony and Microsoft have managed to establish themselves as trusted players in their respective industries through strong branding strategies. Smaller businesses can learn from the examples set by these established brands and take proactive steps towards improving their own branding efforts.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of businesses focusing on creating visually appealing websites and investing time and money into effective branding strategies. By doing so, companies can increase their chances of attracting more customers while simultaneously building trust with them.

The individuals participating in the study emphasised the significance of keeping abreast of design trends, such as user experience (UX) and user interface (UI). This is particularly true if one intends to attract younger generations like Gen Z, who are drawn towards modern and innovative designs. One participant, referred to as P2, highlighted how allocating resources towards professional photography can help create visually captivating content that enhances a brand's success. Another participant, referred to as P3, stressed how important it is to remain current with design trends across all platforms, including social media presence. Such endeavours can positively impact a company's reputation and help keep its target audience interested in their products or services.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research by Huang and Oppewal (2006) on e-commerce, who posit that the visual appeal plays a crucial role in enhancing online shopping experiences. An aesthetically pleasing website can make a positive impression on customers and foster trust, eventually leading to better sales (Wells et al., 2011). It is therefore imperative for businesses to make visual appeal a top priority when designing their websites and keep up with the latest design trends to ensure continued success in the e-commerce space. By doing so, they can establish themselves as leaders in their respective industries and attract more customers who appreciate well-designed websites.

## 5.3   Objective 2 (Code Group 2): Effective e-tailing website strategies

This study explored effective e-tailing website strategies, examining participants' views on strategies that promote preference and engagement in e-tailing. Six main strategies were identified: conversion rate optimisation, digital marketing, fair usage policies, discount offers, reliable payment options, and requesting online reviews. These strategies, highlighted by the participants, were considered crucial for successful e-tailing experiences, and were categorised into a group code.

### 5.3.1 Code 2.1: Conversion Rate Optimisation

The results from the study have brought to light the pressing need for businesses to enhance their conversion rates on e-commerce websites, as this has been identified as a crucial strategy. It was observed that certain factors such as developing a sense of trust with potential customers, ensuring a straightforward website interface, providing uncomplicated payment options, and speeding up delivery times, were cited by participants as key elements that drive successful conversions.

Moreover, the research participants emphasised how crucial website design, language, aesthetics, and colours are in establishing credibility with prospective clients. This emerged as a recurring theme throughout their responses. The importance of creating an aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly web page cannot be overstated when it comes to turning potential leads into paying customers. Therefore, companies must give due consideration to these elements when designing their e-commerce websites if they aspire to increase conversions and ultimately grow their business.

According to the findings of the study, enhancing conversion rates is directly linked to reducing the amount of clicks necessary for a consumer to complete a purchase. The research participants stressed upon the significance of minimising the number of clicks to just five, from initial website visit until they arrive at the checkout page. This implies that simplifying and streamlining the purchasing process must be given paramount importance to positively impact conversion rates on ecommerce websites. In other words, reducing customer effort by simplifying navigation can lead to increased sales and revenue generation for online businesses.

The findings of this study coincide with the research conducted by Narang and Trivedi (2016). Their research emphasised the critical role of trust, usability, and user experience in influencing customer behaviour and conversion rates in e-commerce. Furthermore, Katta and Patro (2021) propose that optimising website design for easy navigation and minimising any unnecessary steps involved in making a purchase are equally significant factors that can enhance conversion rates. Both studies highlight the importance of building a user-friendly interface that instils confidence in customers and simplifies their online shopping experience. By incorporating these strategies into their e-commerce websites, businesses can optimise their conversion rates and attract more loyal customers in the long run.

During the interview, a participant recounted their positive encounter wherein they were able to achieve a conversion rate of 8.8%, which is significantly higher compared to the standard in the industry. The research also provided valuable information regarding how e-tailers measure their conversion rate's effectiveness. In line with this discovery, Chandon et al. (2005) stressed the importance of keeping an eye on key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics as a

means of evaluating the efficiency of e-commerce operations. Such findings highlight the significance of monitoring and analysing vital data to enhance the overall performance and success of online businesses.

### 5.3.2 Code 2.2: Digital Marketing

According to the findings of this research, it appears that digital marketing plays a crucial role in the success of online retail websites. The interviewees specifically noted that they relied on various digital platforms such as Gumtree, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn to promote their products effectively. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of building trust with potential customers by providing social evidence through Internet activity and reviews. It seems that for e-tailers to stand out from competitors and attract consumers, they must have a strong presence across multiple digital channels and prioritise establishing credibility through positive customer feedback.

Participants highlighted the importance of enlisting the services of proficient digital marketing experts to gain visibility in the online marketplace. They pointed out that just relying on social media marketing is not enough and suggested incorporating search engine optimisation (SEO) techniques to draw relevant traffic to their websites. The attendees emphasised that it is crucial to adopt data-driven approaches for devising effective marketing strategies. For instance, they stressed upon using Google AdWords and target audience-specific keywords to establish credibility in their niche area and attract prospective customers. By leveraging such proven tactics, businesses can enhance their brand recognition and build trust with potential clients.

The findings presented in this section are firmly backed up by the extensive research conducted on e-tailing. Huang and Benyoucef (2013) meticulously examined literature on e-tailing, and their findings emphasised how digital marketing strategies and adept usage of online platforms are integral to triumph in e-tailing. Similarly, Liu et al. (2017) advocated that digital marketing is a vital factor in enhancing the overall performance of e-tail businesses as well as augmenting the Internet-based customer experience. They highlighted the importance of synergising data analytics with digital marketing techniques to facilitate personalised marketing campaigns and enhance customer engagement levels.

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be inferred that the results of this study align with what has already been established in prior research on e-tailing. It highlights the importance of utilising digital marketing techniques and building trust among consumers to establish a successful online business. Moreover, data-driven strategies play a crucial role in ensuring that e-tailing websites thrive in the modern-day digital landscape, where competition is at its peak. Therefore, it can be concluded that businesses must prioritise implementing these methods to survive and succeed in the world of e-commerce.

### 5.3.3  Code 2.3: Fair Usage Policies

This study found that effective e-commerce websites require clear and impartial policies. Most participants, who agreed that clear, fair, and open policies are essential to raising customer satisfaction, emphasised this. Participants specifically emphasised the importance of enabling customers to return or exchange items because it has been demonstrated that doing so would help build trust and forge long-lasting connections with customers. By providing these alternatives, online retailers may improve consumer loyalty and build a solid reputation for their brand, both of which can eventually result in higher sales.

Given that so many people have fallen victim to scammers or received items that fall short of their expectations, the problem of customer confidence while purchasing online is one that warrants attention. Online sellers can provide a return option to allay this concern as it can inspire customers to make purchases and establish trust in them. Several customer testimonials stress the need of straightforward, effective return procedures that put the needs of the client first. To ensure that customers feel comfortable while making an online purchase, it is critical to create policies that take their requirements and preferences into account.

Free return policies are essential since buyers sometimes cannot physically inspect things before making an online purchase. Online shopping always carries a certain amount of risk because you can't physically touch, feel, or try on the things. Free return policies come into play in this situation because they provide customers confidence and peace of mind regarding their purchases. One may shop with confidence and make well-informed selections about what they're buying when they know that they can simply return or exchange an item if it does not live up to their expectations. Gratis returns allow customers to test out various shapes, hues, and fashions without worrying about losing money if the item is not suitable for their requirements. Ultimately, offering free return policies benefits both the client and the business by fostering consumer loyalty and trust.

The findings of this study are consistent with other studies on e-tailing that have long identified fair and transparent practices as crucial elements in winning customers' confidence and maintaining their loyalty. These similar aspects have previously been emphasised in earlier works by Narang and Trivedi (2016) and Kautish and Sharma (2019). Also, offering return or exchange alternatives demonstrates openness, which is a crucial component of consumer happiness. Also, it has been discovered that providing free returns has a beneficial influence on a customer's choice to make a purchase from an e-commerce website or not. According to research by Shankar et al. (2003), such rules can boost total sales. Incorporating these tactics into e-commerce websites might greatly improve their efficacy and success in growing their consumer base and profitability.

### 5.3.4 Code 2.4: Discount Offers

The study found that offering incentives and discounts on online retailing platforms greatly influenced users' decisions to purchase goods. Participants in the study discussed a variety of efficient discounting tactics, such as delivering first-time buyer discounts, disseminating coupons for exclusive offers, developing specific promotional codes, and supplying surprise boxes. All these strategies have been proven to be effective in drawing customers' attention and boosting activity on e-commerce websites. By applying such discount techniques on their digital platforms, firms may leverage these insights to increase consumer engagement and increase sales.

To foster client loyalty and retention in e-commerce, promotional activities like discounts, coupons, and special offers are essential, according to the available e-tailing literature. The research of Taher (2021) gives proof for this assertion. Additionally, Arora and Aggarwal (2018) demonstrate how price reductions and promotional offers are essential for boosting online sales. Customers are compelled to buy because of these promotions' feeling of urgency. To ensure business development and client pleasure, Internet merchants must thus include such tactics in their marketing efforts. Offering reduced pricing or appealing bargains through coupons or special offers not only draws in new clients, but also keeps current ones by cultivating a clientele that returns time and time again to the same business for additional goods and services.

The findings of this study are aligned with the body of e-tailing literature already in existence, which emphasises the significance of discounting strategies in attracting clients and boosting the profitability of e-tailing platforms. The new study sheds light on how discount tactics affect consumer behaviour and purchase choices. Businesses can encourage customers to make purchases they otherwise wouldn't have bought at full price by giving discounts. This not only aids in increasing sales but also builds a favourable reputation for the online retailer, encouraging more consumer loyalty and word-of-mouth advertising. Effective pricing may also result in greater traffic to an e-tail website and improved user engagement rates when paired with other promotional activities like targeted advertising campaigns or social media outreach programs. Hence, to promote development and optimise profits, organisations involved in the online retail industry must implement discount methods into their overall marketing strategy.

### 5.3.5 Code 2.5: Offering a Reliable Payment Option

According to the results of the study, it is crucial for e-commerce websites to offer secure payment choices to enhance their performance. Of the 15 participants who were part of the study, 10 emphasised on the importance of ensuring reliable and secure payment methods. In South Africa, PayFast has gained popularity and customers prefer it as a safe method for making local purchases due to its strong reputation. On an international level, PayPal has been

identified as a trustworthy option for transactions. The participants also suggested that to enhance clients' trust while making payments, utilising different payment options, and collaborating with well-established financial institutions could be beneficial. Therefore, by offering diverse secure payment choices through credible channels in e-commerce platforms can help build customer confidence and result in better performance outcomes.

Trust plays a crucial role in online transactions, according to Gefen et al. (2003), which is highlighted in e-tailing literature. The level of trust a customer has heavily influences their willingness to disclose their financial information and complete online transactions. In fact, the study's findings are consistent with this body of literature as participants emphasised the importance of collaborating with reputable payment processors like PayFast and PayPal to establish credibility and build client confidence. To increase customer trust and encourage them to complete transactions, e-tailers can enhance their customers' sense of security by working with well-established systems that ensure safe supply of credit card information. By doing so, customers will be more confident about making purchases through these channels, which is likely to result in higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty for the e-tailer.

### 5.3.6 Code 2.6: Requesting Online Reviews

As per the research results, building trust on the Internet is crucial for booming e-commerce, and one effective way to achieve it is by obtaining customer feedback. The individuals who took part in the interviews highlighted the importance of proactively seeking out evaluations from clients, as they serve as virtual validation of a product or service's quality and customer satisfaction. These assessments can help eradicate any doubts that potential customers may have and instil a sense of trust and assurance in them towards the seller or business. It is therefore imperative for online retailers to prioritise client feedback collection to establish credibility among their target audience.

A thorough analysis of e-tailing research creates a strong foundation for these conclusions. In the study conducted by Naveed et al. (2017), it was discovered that online customer reviews have a significant impact on both trust and purchasing intentions. Reviews serve as a critical component in determining the credibility of online vendors, as well as the quality of their products, according to the researchers. Similarly, Park et al. (2019) found that customer assessments of product quality and purchasing behaviour are positively affected by Internet reviews. Their research supports the notion that reviews play an essential role in influencing consumers' decisions when making purchases online.

The outcomes of the research lend support to the idea that customer reviews play a pivotal role in building trust and authenticity for e-commerce businesses, which was also voiced by the study's participants. Therefore, it can be considered a potent strategy for online retailers to proactively seek out and highlight customer appraisals as it contributes to their success.

This demonstrates that consumers value authentic feedback from others who have experienced the products or services offered by these platforms. It is vital for e-commerce sites to leverage this customer-generated content and use it to persuade potential buyers into making informed purchase decisions. By doing so, they create an environment of transparency and credibility that fosters goodwill among customers, leading to improved sales figures and sustained business growth over time.

## 5.4  Objective 3: (Code Group 3): Challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites

Code Group 3 delved into the difficulties that small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) encounter when operating e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole region. Their research brought to light five primary challenges faced by these SMMEs, leading to the formation of five codes. These obstacles include abandoned carts, exorbitant expenses incurred in hiring professionals and conducting website marketing, attracting traffic to the website, high shipping costs as well as a deficiency of knowledge. As per the views expressed by participants of this study group, these hindrances impose substantial barriers for SMMEs aiming to efficiently function via electronic retailing websites.

### 5.4.1  Code 3.1: Abandoned Carts

According to the study's findings, online shoppers tend to put items in their virtual shopping carts but then abandon them before completing the purchase. The major cause of this trend is attributed to high delivery fees. P13 reported that reducing delivery fees or offering alternative delivery options can lead to a significant increase in sales. This finding is consistent with existing literature on e-tailing, which emphasises affordable and flexible delivery options as crucial factors for decreasing cart abandonment rates and boosting overall sales, as outlined by Hassan (2014). By effectively dealing with the issue of expensive delivery charges, e-commerce businesses can motivate customers to complete their purchases and enhance their overall online shopping experience.

### 5.4.2  Code 3.2: Cost of Hiring a Professional and Website Marketing

The research further supports the significance of the previously mentioned subject of digital marketing for e-commerce websites. Nevertheless, converting digital marketing tactics into practice may be expensive, particularly when it includes paying for social media advertising and employing specialised staff. The panel's experts stressed the difficulties in determining the target demographic for these ads and the necessity of ongoing study and spending to stay relevant in this constantly changing environment.

The effectiveness of e-tailers' use of digital marketing strategies is a key factor in determining their success. Even though it may greatly boost a company's income, getting the best outcomes necessitates a considerable investment. This investment generally consists of hiring

qualified personnel who are familiar with current trends in digital marketing and creating extensive marketing campaigns across numerous social media platforms.

Experts discussed some of the typical challenges connected with putting these techniques into practice during the panel discussion. Accurately determining the target market audience is one of these difficulties. Your efforts might not be successful if you 'do not have a good knowledge of your target consumer profile.

Also, keeping ahead in this cutthroat market necessitates continual research projects that support the creation of fresh advertising concepts or revisions to current ones. Such insight generation is a continuous process that needs financial resources.

In conclusion, while there is no denying the significance of digital marketing in the current e-commerce environment, firms must also consider aspects like cost effectiveness and staying current with new trends to maximise the return on these expenditures.

The claim that marketing expenditures may be incredibly expensive has been made by those with the classifications P10 and P5. These expenditures include the cost of creating marketing-related material as well as fees made for adverts displayed on well-known websites like Facebook and Google. P11 also presented a topic for debate on the challenges associated with using technology in marketing, in addition to the substantial expense associated with performing extensive market research to determine their desired target demographic.

In terms of finding qualified people for their marketing campaigns, the study's participants encountered a variety of difficulties. Finding capable partners and committed employees who could ensure that their websites were constantly current with the newest trends and technology was a concern they stated. One participant, P14, stressed the need of teaming up with specialists who have the essential abilities and information to maintain their online presence as current and interesting for their audience. On the other hand, P5 discussed their experience of routinely hiring experts to deal with fresh marketing challenges. This demonstrates the difficulty of keep up with new marketing trends and how staff always need to grow and develop to stay on top of things. In the end, all participants found it difficult to locate competent people to assist their marketing efforts, which emphasises the significance of investing in human resources and talent acquisition methods for effective business outcomes.

In their research, Liu et al. (2017) highlighted the critical importance of using digital marketing techniques for e-tailers having success in today's extremely competitive online industry. To substantiate their findings, Liu et al. thoroughly reviewed the body of e-tailing literature already in existence. To obtain an advantage over competitors, they promote the adoption of efficient digital marketing strategies including content marketing, social media marketing, and search engine optimisation (SEO). Nevertheless, they also agree that e-tailers may find it difficult to participate in these efforts due to a lack of funding and the challenge of locating and targeting

the right client groups. To exploit the advantages of digital marketing for long-term sustainable growth and profitability of e-tailers, these issues must be appropriately handled.

The findings of the study are consistent with existing literature on electronic retailing, which highlights the significance of digital marketing for the success and expansion of online retail firms. Nevertheless, it also emphasises that overcoming these constraints, which include high costs, quickly advancing technology, and a lack of skilled workers, can be difficult. To be competitive and keep ahead of the competition in the market, e-tailers must get over these obstacles. According to the interviews, e-tailing businesses may benefit from investing in digital marketing techniques while keeping an eye on cost-effective solutions and training staff to swiftly adopt new technology.

### 5.4.3   Code 3.3: Driving Traffic to the Website

According to the findings, SMMEs encounter several significant obstacles with their e-commerce websites. Driving customers to their online businesses is one of the most frequent challenges. Six (6) of the 15 participants listed this difficulty as a significant problem when managing their Internet company. These six participants emphasised that one of the primary challenges in driving customers to their e-commerce website is expensive qualified experts able to develop marketing tactics. They also pointed out that paying for advertising on social media networks is expensive.

Owners of e-commerce websites should endeavour to hire and keep skilled marketers with a track record of creating winning marketing plans to address this pressing issue. Programmes for staff capacity building and personal development must also be prioritised to assist employees in acquiring the skills required for effective traffic creation. SMMEs will surely increase their chances of success with their online enterprises by making investments in these areas, as well as increase their exposure across multiple digital platforms.

Andonov et al. (2021) reviewed the literature, exploring several variables that affect e-tailing performance. To affect consumer happiness and boost online sales, the study emphasises the significance of efficient online marketing techniques and user-friendly websites. Andonov et al. advise e-tailers to use social media platforms, improve their SEO, and use targeted advertising to draw more potential clients to their websites.

Offering a flawless user experience is also essential for fostering consumer confidence and raising conversion rates. This can be achieved by giving customers clear information about the products, making it simple for them to browse the website, and assuring safe payment options when they check out.

Ultimately, a successful e-commerce business relies on several interrelated aspects that interact to provide happy customers. Businesses may enhance their online presence, draw in

more clients, boost sales, and create enduring relationships with their audience by successfully applying these techniques.

What has been established in the e-tailing literature has been supported by the study's findings. SMMEs operating online storefronts must concentrate on boosting website traffic. This may be accomplished by hiring competent marketers who can use efficient web marketing techniques. The effectiveness of SMME e-tailing websites' digital marketing is a key factor in determining their success. Hence, SMMEs wishing to flourish in the e-commerce sector may find it advantageous to invest in a team of seasoned marketers.

### 5.4.4  Code 3.4: High Shipping Cost

Customers frequently experience dissatisfaction throughout the online shopping process because of the excessive delivery costs imposed by merchants. This specific topic has been picked as a key component of the study's sub-theme for analysis. Four (4) of the 15 respondents who offered their insightful perspectives on this sub-theme formed the foundation of the investigation. The researcher explored the factors making expensive delivery prices a deterrent for customers doing online purchases and considered potential fixes. The intent was to acquire knowledge on how e-commerce businesses may change their tactics and practices to increase consumer loyalty and happiness through this sub-theme.

The statements below highlight how outrageous and absurd shipping costs are, as well as how they have a major effect on sales.

> *Potential consumers frequently depart their shopping carts quickly, making it unlikely that one will have the opportunity to politely urge them to complete their purchase. This high desertion rate could be caused by several factors, such as the price or perceived worth of the supplied item or service. Customers frequently consider their purchasing alternatives and may decide against making a purchase if they believe the price for such goods or services is too high, as shown in many marketplaces. To prevent losing potential sales owing to high expenses, organisations must evaluate market trends and modify their pricing strategy accordingly* (P13).

It was found that international shipping costs increase even more when goods are transferred from South Africa to nations like the UK, as indicated above by P2. This issue, which places South African-based e-commerce companies at a disadvantage, is a result of the disparity in currency conversion rates. Additionally, paying for home delivery services is extremely expensive (as P10 points out), and this aspect has a significant impact as one of the reasons why customers decide not to complete their order (identified as P13).

P10 emphasised the significant effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on shipping and transportation expenses, supporting what has already been discussed.

*Our company's main challenge right now is the outrageous cost of transporting items to clients and importing things from other countries. Our transportation rates have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, which has caused them to soar and significantly reduce our profit margins. To be sustainable and competitive in the market, we are under tremendous pressure to maximise our operating efficiency and reduce expenses wherever feasible. This difficulty necessitates careful evaluation of several aspects, including optimising logistics, renegotiating contracts with suppliers, and investigating potential more cost-effective shipping options* (P10).

It is clear that the pandemic negatively impacted these sectors, resulting in huge financial losses for companies around the globe. Due to the extraordinary disruptions in the global supply chain, there have been delays in shipments and increased costs for some commodities. Governments and corporations have undertaken a variety of attempts to lessen these consequences, but the situation remains difficult. The focus on this issue by P10 merely serves to highlight how serious the current situation is.

### 5.4.5   Code 3.5: Lack of Knowledge

The findings of the study revealed that SMMEs engaged in e-tailing had to confront significant obstacles due to their limited technical know-how in utilising advanced technologies and managing websites. The participants expressed a strong desire to expand their online presence and enhance their websites' functionality. However, their lack of expertise posed a major hindrance in achieving this goal. As a result, they had to resort to building personal connections or soliciting help from individuals with the necessary skills for website development. A few respondents reported difficulties understanding the backend of their websites and expended considerable time and money on research aimed at identifying their target audience as well as maintaining the site's performance. In essence, it was evident that technical incompetence represented an immense challenge for SMMEs operating in e-tailing. The findings of this study align with the existing literature on e-tailing, which asserts that it can be difficult for small companies to effectively manage their online presence from a technological standpoint. This is supported by research conducted by Mazzarol (2015) and Oliveira and Martins (2011). To succeed in e-tailing, it is imperative for entrepreneurs to possess an extensive knowledge of website development and upkeep, as well as digital marketing strategies and audience segmentation techniques. Consequently, owners of SMME e-tail websites must hone their tech-related skills if they hope to overcome challenges and thrive amidst fierce competition within the online marketplace.

### 5.5   Objective 4: Recommendations for future e-tailers

Several recommendations weeeeeeeeeeeeeeeere made by the study for individuals who plan to launch their own SMME website in the future. These suggestions are aimed at helping

overcome any obstacles and enhancing the efficiency of such websites. One important suggestion is to establish clear, direct pricing that should be affordable and user-friendly. Additionally, it is essential to monitor customer visits and preferences as this helps with identifying areas that need improvement. Another recommendation is to explore Web3 opportunities, as these can provide many advantages over traditional platforms. It is also recommended that website owners regularly review and update the features on their websites to ensure they stay relevant and optimally functional. Providing excellent customer service will not only enhance customer satisfaction but also assist with building a good reputation for the business. Identifying target audiences and focusing on specifically catering to them is crucial for increased success rates. Lastly, encouraging positive reviews from customers can greatly improve user trust and overall engagement with the website's products or services offered.

When examining these recommendations, it is important to consider their alignment with established best practices that have been identified in earlier research within the field of e-tailing. This means recognising that certain factors, such as maintaining competitive pricing and understanding the needs and preferences of target consumers, are critical to achieving success in e-commerce, as highlighted by Molla and Licker (2005). Additionally, the effectiveness of e-tailing also hinges on delivering exceptional customer service and utilising user feedback to build trust with customers, a point emphasised by Pantano and Priporas (2016). Finally, keeping up-to-date with technological developments such as Web3 and continuously improving website functionality is crucial for staying ahead of competitors in a rapidly evolving digital landscape, as noted by Katta and Patro (2021).

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, an extensive and detailed discussion of the outcomes of the conducted research was presented. To provide a comprehensive overview of the entire research endeavour, this chapter provides the conclusions and recommendations that emerged from analysing and interpreting the obtained data. These conclusions and recommendations are based on the results obtained, and from various inputs provided by the study's participants. The insights gained from their experiences were integrated into informed decisions, drawing conclusions, and making well-informed recommendations for future actions. Henceforth, it is hoped that a more refined understanding of the subject matter can be achieved, providing value and direction for future endeavours in this field.

## 6.2 Overview of study

The study's aim was to identify the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites. Specifically, the research endeavoured to determine the strategies for ensuring the effectiveness of e-tailing websites and the challenges facing SMME e-tailing websites, and lastly, to examine the possible recommendations for future SMME e-tailing website owners. The study adopted qualitative research, with 15 participants selected to take part in the interview process. The data were collected through recorded interviews, whereafter it was analysed using Atlas.ti v8 software, and relevant themes were created. These themes were developed to answer the formulated research questions.

## 6.3 Answering the main question of the research with recommendations

The study's main research question was: What are the critical success factors (CSFs) for effective e-tailing websites for SMMEs in the Cape Metropole?

Considering the findings of this research, it can be inferred that in the field of marketing, the appeal of products displayed on websites plays a significant role in attracting potential customers. Hence, the importance of website design and development cannot be underestimated. Moreover, this study's conclusions align with existing literature on e-commerce, which emphasises certain critical components that are essential for creating a successful online store. Various previous studies have identified several vital factors for the realisation of e-commerce success, such as user-friendly interface, uncomplicated navigation, diverse product range availability, secured payment options and information confidentiality protocols, mobile-friendly platform accessibility, efficient delivery services, and visually appealing web pages to keep customers engaged.

Research conducted by Cyr (2008) suggests that the design of a website has a profound effect on customer satisfaction and trust. Elements such as visual appeal and user-friendliness can

have a significant impact on how visitors perceive a website. Similarly, Cao et al. (2018a) conducted research which revealed the growing importance of mobile responsiveness in e-commerce. As more customers use their mobile devices for online shopping, it is crucial for websites to be optimised for these platforms to provide an optimal user experience. Both studies highlight the critical role that website design plays in shaping customer perceptions and behaviours towards online businesses.

The significance of offering an extensive range of products to customers has been emphasised by Bhatnagar et al. (2000). They suggest that having more options available caters to a wider array of budget and taste preferences among consumers. This not only ensures customer satisfaction but also enhances their shopping experience. On the other hand, in the realm of e-commerce, Kim and Kim (2017) focus on the importance of data security. According to their research findings, online businesses can gain customers' trust and confidence by reassuring them that personal information provided during transactional exchanges is safeguarded with adequate security measures. Therefore, ensuring data protection must be a top priority for all online businesses seeking to establish themselves as reliable and trustworthy to potential consumers.

This study adds to the existing body of literature on e-commerce by emphasising that there are several critical elements contributing to the success of an online store. For example, optimising website design, ensuring fast page load times, providing detailed product descriptions, offering competitive prices, and having a user-friendly checkout process can all enhance customer satisfaction and retention rates. By prioritising these factors, companies can create highly efficient e-commerce platforms that deliver an exceptional online shopping experience. Ultimately this will lead to happier and more loyal customers who are more likely to return in the future.

## 6.4   Answering the sub-questions of the research with recommendations

The study's second sub-question concerns the strategies essential for ensuring effective e-tailing websites.

While answering the sub-questions, the study identified numerous challenges faced by SMME e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole. These challenges include the abandonment of carted goods, the high cost of hiring a website marketing professional, the website response rate (slow page loading), the high shipping cost, and the lack of adequate knowledge of website management. Generally, the challenges identified in this study adversely contribute to the effectiveness of the electronic retailing website in the study area. For instance, the high shipping cost constrains distance purchases, especially international demand. The high cost of shipping the product discourages many buyers from proceeding with their demand after considering the cost, especially when the product or substitute can be easily purchased in a

store close by with little to no additional cost. As a result, many users often abandon carted products due to their inability to affect demand in the presence of high costs associated with the commodity.

In addition, the lack of technical know-how needed for effective website management by many users, coupled with the high cost of hiring website marketing professionals, constitutes the challenges faced by many website owners. This idea prevents appropriate and adequate actions such as an adequate response rate, driving traffic to the website, etc., and the result of this is a decline in user engagement, as well as in the effectiveness of the website.

Based on the e-tailing challenges identified, several possible recommendations can be put forth to enhance the effectiveness of the websites:

i)    E-tailing websites should consider providing convenient and affordable pricing for different products.

ii)   E-tailing websites should be reviewed regularly and updated accordingly.

iii)  E-tailing websites should provide excellent customer services and ensure tracking of customer visits and preferences.

iv)   It is essential for e-tailing website owners to explore the possibilities and opportunities to improve the efficiency of e-tailing websites.

v)    E-tailing websites should focus on identifying their target audience and encourage positive website reviews from customers.

In the view of the participants, these suggestions counterbalance various challenges associated with the effectiveness of their e-tailing websites and the consequent promotion of their websites. According to some of the study participants, price variance significantly influences the decision of many consumers to purchase certain commodities. Most consumers examine and compare prices across various platforms before making purchases. Therefore, it is recommended that an appropriate and affordable product price should be set as this is important for promoting the effectiveness of future e-tailing websites among website owners in the Cape Metropole. Further to this, participants recommended the identification and targeting of potential audiences and the tracking of their visits, their geography, and the products they represent, as these actions allow for in-depth information about a particular consumer. This information enables the provision of consumers with adequate product recommendations and ensure excellent quality service delivery for such users. This idea will promote users' satisfaction, engagement, and the efficacy of the website.

Additionally, regular review and updating of website features were also suggested by some of the participants. They further recommended the promotion of positive reviews on websites. One of the participants revealed that users often consider the reviews about a website and product before actual purchases are made, especially when they have no prior knowledge of,

or engagement with the product and website. Promoting positive reviews of existing users will promote the goodwill of the website, build the trust of users, and, as a result, maintain the continuity and effectiveness of the website.

## 6.5 Answering the main research question with a conclusion

Various strategies have been identified in the study for creating a thriving e-commerce website, backed up by numerous relevant studies in literature. Some of the essential tactics include using coupon codes to entice customers and boost sales, optimising conversion rates to enhance user experience and increase profits, leveraging digital marketing techniques to reach out to potential customers and create brand awareness, implementing fair usage guidelines to ensure transparency and trustworthiness in business dealings, providing secure payment methods for safeguarding sensitive customer data, and encouraging online testimonials from satisfied customers as social proof or evidence of credibility. These tactics have proven effective time and again in achieving success in the e-commerce arena.

Research in e-commerce suggests that certain strategies can effectively boost the performance of online retail websites. For instance, offering promotional discounts and adopting competitive pricing have proven to be effective techniques that influence consumer purchasing behaviour positively. This was demonstrated in a study conducted by Kacen et al. (2012). Additionally, optimising website functionality and features through conversion rate optimisation is another powerful tool to enhance user experiences and ultimately drive more sales. According to Clay (2018), this approach has been shown to produce significant increases in website traffic and customer engagement. Essentially, these tactics are based on the idea that providing users with better value or improving their experience can help attract new customers while also retaining existing ones.

In today's world where online shopping has become the norm, digital marketing has become critical for the success of e-commerce websites. It is essential to bring in website traffic and increase brand recognition, which ultimately leads to revenue growth (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). To promote customer satisfaction and trust while making online purchases, fair use laws are put in place. These laws aim to maintain a balance between customers' requirements and those of online retailers, as stated by Goga and Paelo (2019). The foundation of any successful business is its ability to establish a sense of trust with its clients. This can be achieved by providing reliable payment methods and offering favourable online evaluations as cited by Pantano and Priporas (2016). These factors play a crucial role in building client trust and promoting repeat business. Therefore, it is important for e-commerce businesses to pay attention to these details as they can make or break the overall success of their company.

In the Cape Metropole, SMME e-commerce websites are facing several challenges that hamper their growth and profitability. Among the obstacles encountered by these SMMEs are issues related to cart abandonment, where potential customers add items to their online shopping carts but fail to complete the purchase process. Another major hindrance is the exorbitant cost of hiring marketing professionals who can help boost visibility and promote their brands. Additionally, low response rates from customers on their websites prove to be a challenge in generating revenue. To make matters worse, shipping costs remain a huge expense for these businesses. Despite all these challenges, there are tactics that may help address these hurdles and improve website effectiveness. For instance, implementing strategies such as offering free shipping or providing discounts may encourage customers to complete transactions and reduce cart abandonment rates. SMMEs could also consider investing in training staff members who can effectively handle marketing tasks without having to incur high costs associated with hiring external experts. Optimising website performance through regular updates to improve customer interaction can enhance overall response rates over time.

To conclude, while it is true that the Cape Metropole's small e-tailing businesses face an uphill struggle due to several barriers, such as those highlighted above, they have the ability to take necessary measures such as implementing effective tactics that might surmount those difficulties and elevate business success online.

## 6.6 Answering the sub-questions of the research with a conclusion

The research sub-questions aimed to explore the challenges faced by SMME e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole and the strategies needed by e-tailing websites to improve their effectiveness. In conclusion, SMMEs' e-tailing websites face the following challenges: abandonment of carted goods, high cost of hiring a website marketing professional, slow website response rate, high shipping cost, and lack of adequate knowledge of website management.

Concerning the second sub-question, several strategies were proposed for e-tailers to enhance the effectiveness of their websites. E-tailing websites should improve conversion by enhancing customers' trust, website simplicity, an accessible payment medium, and ensuring that the process of receiving goods is easy and facilitated. E-tailing websites should embrace digital marketing, use of fair pricing policies, provide discounts to customers, offer reliable payment options, and request online reviews. The study concludes that these practices will improve the effectiveness of e-tailing websites.

## 6.7 Answering the sub-questions of the research with a conclusion

Based on the study's findings, the following list of recommendations are proposed for e-tailing websites to address emerging challenges and improve their efficiency:

i)      Provide a wide range of products.

ii)     Ensure customers have access to accessible, safe, and reliable payment methods.

iii)    Ensure that the e-tailing website is visually appealing.

iv)     Ensure that the e-tailing website provides high-quality information.

v)      Provide customers with lucrative discounts on products.

vi)     E-tailing websites should embrace digital marketing platforms to reach a broader range of customers.

vii)    Request online reviews from customers to identify areas that need to be improved.

## 6.8    Conclusion of the study

The study's overall aim was to determine the critical success factors for e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole. The study adopted a qualitative research method where respondents participated in recorded interviews. Based on the participants' responses, the study concluded that the effectiveness of e-tailing could be improved by strategies such as improving digital marketing techniques, using fair policies, providing customers with offers and discounts, and ensuring that the payment system is reliable for use. The study provided several recommendations on how e-tailing websites can be improved to offer better services to customers.

## 6.9    Research study contribution

The study filled an existing research gap on maintaining an e-tailing website effectively. This knowledge will help current and future SMME e-tailers enhance their profit margins. The growth and profitability of e-tailing websites will contribute to enhancing economic growth and creating employment opportunities. Furthermore, the recommendations provided will help e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole develop a strong competitive edge by driving more traffic to their e-tailing websites. The study also contributed significantly by providing valuable insights on addressing common challenges facing e-tailing websites in the Cape Metropole. With this knowledge, organisations that use e-tailing can take calculated risks.

## 6.10  Reflection

Although the research process has not been smooth, the researcher was fortunate to receive guidance from peers and faculty members. The research conducted on e-tailing is of great significance, as it aligns well with today's trends regarding the challenges facing e-tailing. The researcher is glad that her research has provided insightful evidence for addressing these concerns. She appreciated the independence of the study, and the data collection process using interviews allowed her to gain a deeper understanding of participants' opinions than she would have obtained from evaluating related articles or relying on surveys.

The most challenging and time-consuming part of the research process was organising and transcribing all the participants' responses. The demanding part was selecting which data were

relevant for use and combining it in an appropriate, engaging, and easy understandable manner. As the researcher conducted the interviews, she developed a theoretical structure and reflected on her observations, which enabled her to develop confidence in interpreting behaviours and events in a way that is easy to understand. During the interview process, the researcher did not find it difficult to talk to people. However, her main concern was warming up the participants for the interview to ensure they were comfortable enough to provide honest responses. In addition, since the researcher had to transcribe all the interviews, the main challenge was ensuring that the interviews remained brief without sacrificing rapport. The conclusions from this research cannot be generalised universally, as the study's focus was the Cape Metropole area.

In general, conducting this research has been an interesting journey, as it has allowed the researcher to gain new colleagues, partners, and business associates. Feedback from peers and the supervisor has been invaluable in helping the researcher understand the areas of the dissertation still lacking. Looking back, the researcher realises that this experience has contributed to her academic and professional growth. Research and writing skills are crucial in the academic setting and valuable in the marketing sector.

## 6.11  Directions for further research

The study focused only on the Cape Metropole area. Future studies can be conducted using a larger sample size that covers a wider geographical region to improve the generalisability of the findings. Future studies can also use quantitative methods to evaluate the critical success factors that influence e-tailing and facilitate measurements of the issues discussed.

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# APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

**Faculty of Business & Management Sciences**

Graduate Centre for Management

4th Floor, Engineering Building

Cape Town Campus, Cape Town

021 460 3833

*CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH*

I (**Participant/ Interviewee**), am over the age of 18 years and hereby consent to participate as requested in the research study titled:

***"Critical Success Factors for Effective e-Tailing Websites for SMMEs In the Cape Metropole"***

I recognize that:

1.  I have read the information provided to me as a participant.
2.  Procedures and the risk involved have been adequately explained to my understanding.
3.  I shall retain a copy of the Consent Form for future reference.
4.  I may not directly nor indirectly benefit from partaking in this research.
5.  I am able to withdraw from the project at any time and bypass particular questions.
6.  While the information gained in this study will be published, I will not be identified and individual information will remain confidential.
7.  Whether I participate, withdraw or abstain after participating, the study will have no effect on my work within the organisation that I work for.
8.  Whether I participate, withdraw or abstain after participating, I will not have any preconceived notions toward Cape Peninsula University of Technology and my own employer.

**Participant's Signature:** _____    **Date:** _____

**Researcher's Declaration:** I confirm that I have explained the study to the participant and that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to cooperating.

**Researcher's name:** Anushka Benjamin    **Contact:** 060 971 0743

**Researcher's Signature:**    **Date:** 19.10.2022

# APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the main challenges your e-tailing website is facing?

2. What strategies have you put in place to overcome these challenges?

3. How do you convince customers to provide their personal information on your e-tailing website?

4. There are many e-tailing websites in South Africa similar to yours. How do you provide the competitive edge to the customers, so they choose to buy from you?

5. How do you drive traffic to your e-tailing website?

6. How do you get customers to return to your e-tailing website?

7. How do you get customers to buy products on your e-tailing website?

8. What is the success of your e-tailing website measured on?

9. What are the critical success factors of your e-tailing website?

10. What strategies have you put in place to ensure continued success of your e-tailing website?

11. What should future e-tailers operating in the South African market prepare themselves for?

# APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

P.O. Box 1906 ● Bellville 7535 South Africa ●Tel: +27 21 4603291 ● Email: fbmsethics@cput.ac.za
Symphony Road Bellville 7535

| Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee | FACULTY: BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES |
|---|---|

The Faculty's Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on **9 June 2020**, ethics **Approval** was granted to **Anushka Benjamin (210145854)** for a research activity for **Master of Retail Business** at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

| Title of dissertation/thesis/project: | **Critical Success Factors for effective e-Tailing websites for SMME's in the Cape Metropole**<br><br>Lead Supervisor (s): Dr V Mugobo |
|---|---|

**Comments:**

**Decision: Approved**

| | **6 August 2020** |
|---|---|
| Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee | Date |

Clearance Certificate No | 2020FOBREC778

# APPENDIX D: CERTIFICATE FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

11 August 2023

**ANUSHKA BENJAMIN**
Faculty of Business and Management Sciences
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Cape Town, South Africa

**CERTIFICATE: EDITING OF MASTER'S DISSERTATION**

I, the undersigned, herewith confirm that the editing of the Master's dissertation of **Anushka Benjamin**, *"CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE E-TAILING WEBSITES FOR SMMEs IN THE CAPE METROPOLE"* has been conducted and concluded.

The finalised dissertation was submitted to Anuskha on 12 August 2023.

**Sincerely**

**Professor Annelie Jordaan**
DTech: Information Technology
Ph: 065990 3713

**Member: SATI 1003347**