



## **Beyond the Pitch: Antecedents to Customer Loyalty in South Africa's Advertising Industry**



Mini-dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership at The Independent Institute of Education, Vega School.

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the mini-dissertation submitted for the Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a degree.

Craig du Preez - October 2025

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## **Abstract**

Customer loyalty in the South African advertising industry has been conceptually underdeveloped with existing frameworks either outdated or adapted from broader service and business-to-business (B2B) contexts. These frameworks fail to consider the relational and strategic requirements of client-agency relationships. Accordingly, this study sought to identify and codify the antecedents of customer loyalty within advertising agency relationships and to propose a contextually relevant conceptual framework.

A deductive qualitative research design was adopted, guided by a directed qualitative content analysis approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from purposively sampled agency clients and advertising executives. Data were analysed using priori coding based on existing customer loyalty theory to capture the lived experiences of participants.

The analysis produced a theoretically-grounded and contextually-refined conceptual framework linking service quality, relational drivers, satisfaction, perceived value and switching costs with agency-specific antecedents.

The findings reveal that customer loyalty within the advertising industry is not transactional but relationally co-constructed, underpinned by trust, transparent communication and strategic alignment. Perceived value was the strongest antecedent of customer loyalty.

The study concludes that sustained loyalty depends on an agency's ability to remain relevant and supportive over time, particularly during periods of change or pressure. It was recommended that advertising agencies prioritise account management quality, emotional trust and proactive alignment with client goals to maintain relevance and long-term partnership value.

**Keywords:** Customer loyalty, B2B industry, service industry, advertising agency, service quality, relational drivers, perceived value.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This mini dissertation presents the research conducted in brand leadership, exploring the antecedents of customer loyalty within the South African advertising industry. The background to the research will be presented, followed by a strong rationale for why this topic requires research.

A clear and concise research problem will be stated and justified, followed by the purpose of the research and research objectives. The delimitations of the research are followed by assumptions and the potential research contribution.

The preliminary literature review provides insight into the research topic, relevant theory, and seminal authors, carefully synthesising and evaluating the academic literature. A justification for the research topic is presented, clearly establishing the research focus.

The research methodology presents the research paradigm, including the ontological and epistemological positions for the study. The research design and approach are discussed, followed by the data collection plan, including population and sampling. A discussion on the data collection tool and data analysis plan are aligned to the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the research. Study limitations are outlined, followed by the identification and discussion of potential ethical considerations, and concluding with a summary of the chapter.

### **1.2 Background to Study**

Customer loyalty is one of the oldest and most studied issues in marketing (Desveaud, 2019:2), as it constitutes an underlying objective for strategic market planning (Dick & Basu, 1994:99). The growing significance and popularity of consumer loyalty in literature is on account of the advantages and benefits it brings to businesses (Agrawal, Gaur & Narayanan, 2012:275) and marketing academics and practitioners alike generally agree that customer loyalty is essential to the success of any business (Han, Kwortnik Jr. & Wang, 2008:22).

From a business perspective customer loyalty is considered the cornerstone to developing sustainable competitive advantage, generating profits, and lasting benefits (Khowjoy, Sriplang, Kaewsrem, Phakamach, Petmee & Chayomchai 2022:16). Customer loyalty enables businesses to maintain premium pricing, ensuring greater bargaining power with distribution channels, thus reducing costs, and provides a strong barrier to potential new entrants to the market (Ishak & Ghani, 2013), results in repeat purchasing

and word-of-mouth recommendations (Khan, 2013:168), sustains business growth, reduces administration costs, increases sales and ultimately market share over competitors (Närvänen, Kuusela, Paavola & Sirola, 2020:826).

The past few years have seen rapid changes in consumer behaviour because of new technologies (Mokoena, Prinsloo, Gawlik & Pelsier, 2023:47), the rapid evolution of information technology, and the influence of social media on economic structures (Lisun, Semenova, Kudyrko, Kovalchuk & Semchuk, 2024:10).

Businesses are facing drastic changes in the external environment, customers' needs are diversifying, competition is increasing, and standardisation of the traditional services provided by businesses in the early stage are no longer suitable for market needs (Wang, Jin, Jin & Kan 2023:2396). To survive in tough competitive times businesses need to understand changes in customer behaviour as customers become more conscious and are constantly searching for higher quality alternatives, thereby discouraging customer loyalty (Savita & Jhahhra, 2020:1).

Studying customer loyalty is imperative due to its increasing significance for global companies; with marketing scholars presenting several loyalty models to enhance customer loyalty (Abu-Alhaija, Nerina, Hashim & Jaharuddin, 2018:107). In reviewing the literature, numerous definitions for customer loyalty are presented, demonstrating just how complex and multidimensional the construct of customer loyalty is (Agrwal *et al.*, 2012:276).

The core competitive advantage of businesses has changed from product competition to relationship and market resource competition, with marketing strategies gradually inclined to gain customer recognition and improve customer experience satisfaction (Wang, *et al.*, 2022:2396). This is increasingly important in the business-to-business (B2B) service sector given the complex and collaborative high-value nature of B2B customer relationships. As service businesses become increasingly customer-focused and driven by customer demands the need to meet customers' expectations and retain their loyalty becomes more critical (Shuttleworth, 2006:3).

The B2B service sector faces additional challenges due to the intangibility of its offerings, which are often tailored to individual customer needs, making them highly susceptible to variability (Geigenmüller & Bettis-Outland, 2012:428). Inherent variability in services leads to differing antecedents of customer loyalty across businesses (Zhong, Lin, Jia & Scheonherr, 2025). Additionally, due to the unique ways in which service quality and value are perceived and delivered, antecedents to customer loyalty may differ among service

businesses (Kiran & Diljit, 2011:97), requiring a tailored approach to understand and foster customer loyalty across different service-sector businesses.

The focus industry for this study is the advertising industry, with specific attention to the advertising agency as a B2B service provider. The advertising industry within South Africa has recovered since the 2020 global pandemic and is projected to see a 2,06% growth between 2024 and 2029, equating to a market volume of ZAR 44.14 billion in 2029 (Statista, 2024). When positioned against South Africa's estimated GDP of ZAR 6.77 trillion (Trading Economics, 2024), the advertising industry would account for around 0.66% of national economic output. To contextualise this further, the sector's projected size is equivalent to more than half of the 2023/2024 Department of Transport's annual budget allocation of ZAR 78.3 billion (National Treasury, 2023).

The advertising industry is comprised of advertisers, advertising agencies, and the media, with advertising agencies positioning themselves as the lucrative conduit between advertisers and the media (Sinclair, 2019:4). However, with the development of information and technology in the Internet age, these institutional arrangements are subject to challenges in the form of digital and social media advertising (Sinclair, 2019:4; Lisun, *et al.*, 2024:1; Yassin, 2022:133).

An advertising agency is a B2B service provider involved in creating, planning, and handling advertising for its clients (Dimitrova & McKay, 2017:24). The evolution of digital technologies has changed how customers procure advertising deliverables (Clary, 2024:3), allowing advertisers to buy space directly from digital platforms, bypassing the advertising agency (Sinclair, 2019:4; Yassin, 2022:134). In the wake of disintermediation, advertising agencies also face the threat of customers setting up in-house agencies and management consultancies offering advertising services to their customers (Lisun *et al.*, 2024:3; Sinclair, 2019:4; Wangui, 2024:27). As a result, many advertising agencies are changing from profit maximisation to maximising profits through customer retention and sustaining client-agency relationships (Makhubele, Oksiutycz & Lubinga, 2025:124).

Several researchers have proposed conceptual frameworks relating to key customer loyalty antecedents, however, the variables presented differ from one study to the next and cannot be applied across different sectors (Desvereaud, 2019:2). Many of these conceptual frameworks focus on developing, maintaining, or enhancing customers' loyalty in the business-to-consumer (B2C), and to a lesser degree, the B2B product sector (Dick & Basu, 1994:99; Raddats, Roper & Ashman, 2024). Additionally, the antecedents of customer loyalty proposed in service sector literature are centred around

tourism and hospitality, healthcare, banking, and the insurance industry, which, while relevant in that they provide services, do not consider the specific dynamics of the advertising industry and advertising agencies.

The study is twofold in that it is important to understand the antecedents to customer loyalty from the perspective of the advertising industry, using advertising agency executives, as well as from that of the agency customer. Much of the existing literature approaches customer loyalty from the perspective of the business, ignoring the construct on a deeper level from the customers' perspective (Närvänen, *et al.*, 2020:825). This presents a research gap in understanding customers' perspectives of customer loyalty, which may yield a more multifaceted view of customer loyalty, as well as the underlying meanings for customers themselves (Närvänen, *et al.*, 2020:827). A key research direction is to understand the antecedents of customer loyalty, including the relationships among and between these factors, from both the perspective of the agency and the customer (Abu-Alhaija, *et al.*, 2018:107).

This section has clearly outlined the significance of customer loyalty in academic literature and identified two key research gaps: first, the limited understanding of the antecedents of customer loyalty in the B2B service sector, specifically within advertising agencies; and second, the lack of research into the perspectives of advertising agency customers regarding these antecedents. Additionally, due to the lack of advertising industry customer loyalty research, there is also a need to understand the perspectives of the agency towards the antecedents of customer loyalty. This study therefore sought to understand the antecedents to customer loyalty of advertising agencies from both the agency business and agency customer perspectives. The following section presents a rationale for the study, clearly explaining why this research is both necessary and timely within the current academic and industry landscape.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The advertising industry is facing multiple challenges, such as increasing in-house utilisation, and intense competition due to the rise of specialised agencies, necessitating research into the antecedents of customer loyalty in the current context (Levin, Taichon & Quach, 2016:274; Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:47; Maurya, 2025:39). Current literature suggests that the average duration of advertising industry B2B client-agency relationships is declining, from previous estimations of seven years, now spanning less than three years (ISBA, 2013).

From the customers' perspective, switching agencies incurs significant costs, including

the time, effort, money, and psychological burden of onboarding a new agency, the relational effort involved in rebuilding trust, and the distinct risk of lost benefits or strategic misalignment during the transition period (Davies & Prince, 2011; Srivastava, Ranganarajan & Badrinarayanan, 2023:951).

These switching costs, both tangible and relational, can function as barriers to change, thereby increasing customer retention, which is foundational to customer loyalty (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2022:703; El-Manstrly, 2015:145). Strong client-agency relationships directly contribute to client retention (LinkedIn, 2024), which refers to an agency's ability to keep customers over a period, and may or may not involve loyalty or satisfaction (Radu, 2025). Client or customer retention is the foundation for customer loyalty (Patel, 2025), which is fundamental to maintaining a sustainable business model (ExactBuyer, 2025).

On the advertising agency's side the cost of acquiring a new client is also significant, with The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA, 2014; Nasir, 2015:244) estimating that the pitch process for larger agencies can amount to nearly half a million Rand and require up to 99 days of labour. This is coupled with the six months it takes the new working relationship to settle (IPA, 2014; Nasir, 2015:244). The reliance on building strong, long-standing client-agency relationships is critical to an agency's growth and long-term success (Hopwood, 2023). Therefore, customer loyalty is prioritised as the main aim of any organisation as it is the biggest asset (Vilkaitė-Vaitonė & Skačauskienė, 2020:1).

For the advertising industry, creating a strong, loyal customer base is not simply about retaining customers for an extended time, but about nurturing client relationships to drive repeat purchase behaviour and high levels of advocacy (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007:2; Abu-Alhaija, *et al.*, 2018:1062).

Customer loyalty literature is abundant, with ample focus on both the B2B and service sectors, yet there is a lack in current academic research on customer loyalty in the advertising industry and advertising agency space. Levin and Lobo (2009) proposed a conceptual framework for modelling the antecedents of customer loyalty in the advertising industry context; however, little further evidence was found for the advertising agency specifically.

This section presented the rationale for the study, clearly identifying existing research gaps in customer loyalty literature. The following section will present the research problem and problem statement.

## 1.4 Problem Statement

Customer loyalty is well documented in existing literature as a material driver of sustained competitive advantage in any business (Desveaud, 2019; Närvänen, *et al.*, 2020; Khowjoy, *et al.*, 2022; Fedotova, Kryvonuchko & Shynkarenko, 2019), with extensive literature focusing on the antecedents to customer loyalty in both product and service sector industries (Savita & Jhahhra, 2020; Khan, Williams & Naumann, 2013; Singh, Slack, Sharma, Mudaliar, Narayan, Kaur & Sharma, 2021; Lee & Wong, 2021). Despite this, there is a lack of research identifying the antecedents to customer loyalty in the advertising industry and advertising agency literature (Levin & Lobo, 2009; Levin, *et al.*, 2016).

Advertising industry and agency literature is focused on the concept of service quality (Hsu, 2009; Shuttleworth, 2006; Bachnik, Nowacki & Szopiński, 2018); customer satisfaction (Jansen van Rensburg, 2010), client retention and client-agency relationships (Koslow, Sameti, van Noort, Smit & Sasser, 2022; Bonfanati, 2024; Wang, *et al.*, 2023; Gunawan, Astuti & Bustaman, 2021; Ziegele, 2025; Oteng, 2016; Aderinkomi, 2022; Levin, Taichon, Quach & Lobo, 2017); and challenges in the advertising industry as a result of technology (Dimitrova & MacKay, 2017; Yassin, 2022; Lisun, *et al.*, 2023; Maurya, 2025).

A broader look at service sector antecedents to customer loyalty literature reveals a focus on the tourism and hospitality industry (Ali, Gardi, Othman, Ahmed, Ismael, Hamza, Aziz, Sabir, Sorguli & Anwar, 2021; Xu, 2022; Ragununan, Cant & Wiid, 2024; Kachwala, Panchal, Rego & Pai, 2020), the banking industry (Falih, Abedin, Safari & Yahyazadehfar, 2024; Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2022); the insurance industry (Tjizumaue & Atiku, 2024) and the healthcare industry (Abdelfattah, Rahman & Osman, 2015; Rinenggo, Sudiro & Hussein, 2024; Ha, Nguyen & Doan, 2023). While existing research on the B2B and service sectors' antecedents to customer loyalty is highly fragmented in terms of service type, methods or theories applied, and even geographical contexts (Bandauskaite, 2014:10).

Previous findings on the antecedents to customer loyalty in other service sectors cannot be applied to the advertising industry or advertising agency context (Vilkaitė-Vaitonė & Skačkauskienė, 2020:2; Sudiyono, Utomo & Severesia, 2022:638). This is in part due to the variability of service provision, as well as the differences in service needs across different service organisations. As a result of the services offered by advertising agencies to their business clients, customised service and price structures are required on a client-

by-client basis (Gunawan, *et al.*, 2021:237), making it impractical to assume that “service sector organisation” antecedents to customer loyalty are generalisable or transferable.

The advertising industry has shifted due to rapid changes in consumer behaviour as a result of digital evolution (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:46; Maurya, 2025:1) making previous literature on the antecedents to customer loyalty in the advertising industry and agencies (Levin & Lobo, 2009) outdated. Despite the importance of customer loyalty as a source of competitive advantage in the evolving advertising industry, there is limited current understanding of its antecedents from both the advertising agency executive and customer perspectives.

The problem statement is therefore:

*Without an understanding and codification of customer loyalty antecedents within the advertising industry in South Africa, customer loyalty cannot be considered or harnessed as a source of competitive advantage.*

This section established the research problem and provided the research problem statement, identifying the gap in existing customer loyalty literature within the advertising industry in South Africa. The following section will present the research purpose and objectives of the study.

## **1.5 Research Purpose and Objectives**

This section will present the research purpose, main objective, and further research objectives, which are aligned with the problem statement provided in the section above. The assumptions and delimitations for the study will be discussed, and the expected contribution of the study will be explained.

### **1.5.1 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research study is to understand and codify the antecedents of customer loyalty in the context of the advertising industry, specifically advertising agencies, from both the perspectives of agency executives and customers. Using existing customer loyalty literature, theories, and frameworks, as well as previous loyalty literature from the B2B and service sectors, antecedents deemed relevant to the advertising industry and advertising agencies will be identified and presented. Propositions based on these antecedents will be presented and a conceptual framework of the antecedents to customer loyalty for an advertising agency, considering both the agency executive and customer perspectives will be proposed. Due to the lack of advertising industry and agency-specific literature, the proposed framework incorporates elements deemed to be

important antecedents of customer loyalty within the B2B and service sector context, as well as agency-specific elements. By applying a deductive qualitative approach, data was collected from both advertising agency executives and agency customers by means of semi-structured interviews to enhance the understanding of existing customer loyalty theory within a specialised B2B service context.

### **1.5.2 Research Objectives**

Research objectives serve as the operational steps that guide how a study will achieve its stated aim. Hofstee (2006:86) explains that research objectives make it clear from the outset what the study intends to achieve. They help structure the study's inquiry and ensure that the problem is addressed systematically. The main research objective, along with the supporting study objectives, is outlined below.

The main objective of the research is to propose a conceptual framework of the antecedents to customer loyalty in the advertising industry, by collecting and synthesising data from semi-structured interviews with advertising agency executives and customers to be tested using Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA).

To achieve the main objective and research aim, the following objectives are proposed:

- To identify and discuss the elements of customer loyalty.
- To make propositions and propose a conceptual framework of the antecedents to customer loyalty using literature, theory, and frameworks of customer loyalty in the B2B sector, service sector, and advertising industry literature.
- To develop semi-structured interviews for agency executives and agency customers using the conceptual framework categories.
- To analyse collected interview data and test the propositions and proposed conceptual framework using a directed qualitative content analysis approach.
- To extend the current theoretical understanding of customer loyalty for the South African advertising industry.

### **1.5.3 Delimitations**

This study is delimited to the antecedents of customer loyalty within B2B service relationships in the South African advertising industry. The study population consists of agency customers who have employed the services of one medium-sized, full-service advertising agency with offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town. These blue-chip

customer participants, comprising marketing and procurement executives, represent a broad cross-section of industries. In addition, the study includes senior executives (Chief Executive Officers and Managing Directors) from advertising agencies operating in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Although there is extensive literature on antecedents to customer loyalty, this study focuses only on the common antecedents identified in B2B and service organisation contexts, explicitly excluding B2C product literature. The research is therefore delimited to B2B service relationships and excludes B2C contexts as well as other professional service sectors. These boundaries ensure a focused and contextually grounded investigation into the antecedents of customer loyalty within the South African advertising agency context.

#### ***1.5.4 Assumptions***

The term client is used per industry terminology and refers to businesses or organisations that engage the services of an advertising agency. Within this study, the term client may be used interchangeably with customer, particularly when discussing constructs such as customer loyalty, trust, satisfaction, and relationship quality. This interchangeable use is consistent with prevailing language in the B2B advertising service context.

It is further assumed that all participants, both agency customers and agency executives, will provide honest, reflective, and experience-based responses during the interview process, and that their perspectives will meaningfully contribute to understanding the antecedents of customer loyalty in advertising agencies.

#### ***1.5.5 Expected Contribution***

This study aims to advance the understanding of customer loyalty within the South African advertising industry by making customer loyalty antecedent-based propositions which will be presented in a conceptual framework. Previous frameworks considered the agency's perspective on customer loyalty, omitting the voice of the agency customer. The key contribution of this study lies in deductively testing the propositions and conceptual framework using data collected from both agency executives and agency customers.

The aim is to analyse each set of data against the proposed framework to provide the perspectives of both agency executives and agency customers. By triangulating the data through integration, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of customer loyalty antecedents. In doing so, the study contributes to the extension of customer loyalty theory within a specialised B2B service context.

The propositions, conceptual framework, and resulting findings expected to highlight potential gaps in advertising agencies' understanding of agency customer expectations and needs. By identifying these gaps, the study sought to offer practical insights into bridging these gaps thus enabling agencies to refine their service offerings to enhance customer satisfaction and foster more positive, long standing client-agency relationships.

The purpose of this section was to present the purpose of the research and the resulting research objectives. The objectives are aligned to the purpose of the research and the research problem. Assumptions and delimitations were identified and the expected contribution explained.

## **1.6 Preliminary Literature Review**

The preliminary literature review aims to provide a review of the existing literature relevant to the research problem and the aim of the study. The purpose of the review is to demonstrate the ability of the researcher to critically engage with existing literature, synthesise academic findings, present relevant theoretical concepts and clearly define the key concepts relevant to the study (Howard, 2014:101). Both current and seminal literature will be included, synthesised, and critically evaluated.

### **1.6.1 Customer Loyalty**

According to Pan, Sheng, and Xie (2012:150) customer loyalty is in fact a company's most enduring asset. Successful businesses have come to realise the immense importance of customer loyalty, resulting in substantial resources being invested in customer retention strategies and client-agency relationship management (Russo, Confente, Gligor & Autry, 2016:888).

In marketing literature there are three common approaches to defining loyalty (Fedotova, *et al.*, 2019:1). The first consideration of loyalty is as a type of consumer behaviour, expressed in long-term interactions with the company and repeat purchases (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973:3). This approach to loyalty is known as behavioural or transactional loyalty as the behavioural aspect of loyalty is closely related to economic results (Hallowel, 1996:28).

Secondly, loyalty is considered a customer's attitude or preference, formed because of the emotions or feelings the customer has about the service or service provider (Thakur, 2016:153). This type of loyalty is called attitudinal loyalty.

Finally, loyalty is determined by a combination of behavioural and attitudinal characteristics, and the combination of these characteristics is called complex loyalty

(Baldinger & Robinson, 1996:23; Dick & Basu, 1994:100). Seminal authors, Dick, and Basu (1994:111) argue that customer loyalty is an exceptionally complex phenomenon that warrants multifaceted conceptualisation. As such, loyalty cannot simply be understood through a single, one-dimensional lens such as purchasing behaviour alone, but rather as a more intricate and nuanced construct involving both behavioural and attitudinal elements (Dick & Basu, 1994:111). Tellis (1988:136) defines customer loyalty in terms of repeat purchasing rate or the volume of purchases from the same brand.

Similarly, Newman, and Werbel (1973:404) define loyal customers as those who repeatedly purchase a brand, consider only that brand, and do not actively seek other brand-related information. A preferred definition is offered by Oliver (1999:34), who views customer loyalty as a deeply rooted commitment to continue engaging with a preferred provider, even when other alternatives are readily available. Primarily, this definition highlights the attitudinal nature of loyalty, emphasising the customer's intention to repurchase despite various external influences or marketing efforts aimed at encouraging switching.

Literature reveals a multitude of antecedents to customer loyalty, with Vilkaitė-Vaitonė and Skačkauskienė (2020:1) asserting that over time, marketing scholars have derived and validated more than one hundred different determinants of customer loyalty.

However, with a strong focus on B2C and, to a lesser extent, B2B product loyalty, many of these antecedents are less relevant in the context of the B2B service sector. Service sector literature highlighting the interrelationship between customer loyalty and other antecedents, such as customer satisfaction and perceived value, is inconclusive or contradictory (So, Li & Yang, 2024:1).

Naumann, Williams, and Khan (2009:320) note that a sizable portion of the existing research on customer satisfaction has focused on its seamless connection to various customer-related outcomes, namely loyalty, behavioural intentions, favourable word-of-mouth, wallet share, and customer churn, amongst others. Yet, Naumann *et al.* (2009:321) argue that customer satisfaction alone does not predict future customer behaviour in a reliable manner. This view is also shared by Reichheld and Teal (1996:196), who identified that between 65% and 85% of customers who switched providers were satisfied, or even very satisfied with their previous service provider.

Other common factors that have been academically linked to the formation of customer loyalty include service quality, service fairness, trust and commercial friendship (Han *et al.*, 2008:24), as well as corporate image, perceived value and customisation (Hleřana,

Roberts-Lombard & Stiehler-Mulder, 2020:4). The element of client retention is often included in service sector literature on customer loyalty (Kumar & Mokha, 2021:127; Artha, Zahara. Bahri & Sari, 2022:30; Azhari, Senathirajah & Haque, 2022:39; Suriانشa, 2023:3360; Hussain, Javed, Khan & Yasir, 2024:199). Despite these two concepts being closely related, it is important to understand that client retention refers to the strategies employed by an organisation to decrease the number of customer defections and retain clients over a period of time, while customer loyalty demonstrates how content or satisfied customers are with the service experience (Radu, 2025).

Vilkaitė-Vaitonė and Skačkauskienė (2020:1) conclude that customer loyalty is not simply a key/focal marketing aim but also a core foundational asset for all businesses. Kotler (2003:26) aligns to this conclusion by highlighting that the acquisition of a new customer can cost up to five times more than the retention of an existing one. This fact boldly accentuates the financial and strategic importance of nurturing and enabling loyal, long-term customer relationships.

### **1.6.2 B2B Environment**

The relationship between customer and supplier in the B2B context is described as a close and long-term interaction with complexity (Gunawan, *et al.*, 2021:237). B2B customer loyalty is driven by relationships, long buying processes, sales cycles, and rational buying decisions based on business value (Wang, *et al.*, 2023:2396). In the realm of B2B, maintaining strong partnerships where parties decide to extend their relationship is widely noted as a considerable asset for any firm (Tedja, Musadieq, Yulianto & Kusumawati, 2024:1).

B2B relationships are typically more direct, and interactions are far more in-depth than those found in standard consumer markets. As a result, factors that lead to customer loyalty in B2B contexts differ from those in B2C environments, due to the definitive characteristics of the target audience (Ramaseshan, Rabbanee & Tan Hsin Hui, 2013:345).

While relational factors are vital in B2B settings, many managers overlook their significance by concentrating solely on the delivery and performance of core services (Ramaseshan, *et al.*, 2013:345). Developing and refining an effective business relationship involves far more than simply exchanging products or services that offer some form of functional value. It also requires the inclusion of social and emotional elements, such as shared psychological benefits and trade-offs, which tend to play a significant role in maintaining and sustaining these business relationships over an

extended period (Jeong & Oh, 2017:115).

### **1.6.3 Service Sector**

Services are fundamentally different from standard products in that they are intangible, variable, and produced in real-time between the service provider and paying client (Study.com, 2025). These specific characteristics introduce unique challenges for service providers when it comes to developing and sustaining customer loyalty (Bowen & Ford, 2002:447). Gremler and Brown (1996:173) define service loyalty as involving not only repeat purchasing, but also an ongoing positive attitude and a preference for solely engaging with the selected service provider. This highlights the deeper levels of trust and satisfaction involved in service loyalty relationships.

There is a lack of literature focusing on the B2B service sector, with much of the B2B literature focusing on manufacturing industries (Bandauskaite, 2014:10). Additionally, much of the available customer loyalty research remains predominantly B2C product-focused, with less of a focus on B2B products and noticeably few on B2B services, highlighting a clear gap in understanding the unique loyalty dynamics within B2B service contexts (Yang, 2015:117; Bandauskaite, 2014:10).

### **1.6.4 The Advertising Industry**

Researchers and advertising practitioners widely celebrate the value of healthy client-agency relationships (Bonfanti, 2024; Levin, *et al.*, 2016; Aderinkomi, 2021). According to Definition (2025), these relationships incorporate an array of aspects that are outlined in the contract, including the flow of meetings, reporting protocol, the process of conceptualising and aligning on new ideas before implementation; the degree of collaboration between parties; the actual manner in which feedback is exchanged; and the process that is followed when finalising the contract.

Within this context, customer loyalty is delivered through increased scope, contract renewal and extended or sustained partnerships across numerous creative campaigns or business cycles. Good relationships should improve an advertising agency's overall capacity to understand and align with the client's strategic objectives, thereby contributing to the delivery of outstanding ad campaigns (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385). A good quality client-agency relationship, which is characterised by mutual respect and effective collaboration, is commonly regarded as a necessary condition for delivering outstanding creative output (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385).

However, the client-agency relationship has been confronted by several meaningful

challenges of late, brought on by the digital revolution and the emergence of the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) approach (Bonfanti, 2024:2). These shifts and developments have had a material impact on the overarching expectations placed on agencies and have expanded the scope of service delivery expected. As a result, customer loyalty in the advertising sector is frequently challenged, highlighting the need for studies such as this to expand the industry’s knowledge base and to support continued success.

In the end, delivering real customer loyalty in this complex industry requires a great deal more than strategic prowess, creative competence, and technical knowledge. There is a need for a solid foundation that is built on mutual trust and respect, shared vision and success metrics, and always-on transparency.

**1.6.5 Conclusion**

This preliminary literature review highlighted the theoretical basis for customer loyalty, tracing its evolution into a multidimensional construct broadly influenced by a variety of factors such as trust, service quality, perceived value, and relationship quality.

It then explored loyalty within a service-based B2B setting, highlighting the core dynamics at play in the constantly evolving advertising industry, where strategic alignment and ongoing collaboration are critical. The research methodology for the study is presented in the following section.

**1.7 Research Context**

The focus of this section is on the research approach and design for the study, in the context of the overarching paradigm, Table 1 below provides a summary of the research context, which will be unpacked thereafter.

**Table 1.1: Research context**

|                      |                             |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ontology             | Relativist                  |
| Epistemology         | Interpretivist              |
| Research Approach    | Deductive dominant approach |
| Research Design      | Exploratory                 |
| Research Methodology | Mono-method Qualitative     |

|                        |                                              |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Time Horizon           | Cross-sectional                              |
| Sampling Method        | Non-probability, Purposive sampling          |
| Unit of Analysis       | Advertising agency executives and customers  |
| Data Collection Method | Semi-structured interviews                   |
| Data Analysis Method   | Deductive dominant directed content analysis |
| Sample Size            | 12                                           |

### **1.7.1 Ontology**

Ontology is the study of 'being' and is concerned with 'what is' the nature of existence and structure of reality as such, or what it is possible to know about the world (Al-Saadi, 2014:1). Snape and Spencer (2003:18) also define ontology as the nature of the world and what we can know about it (Al-Saadi, 2014:1). Scotland (2012:9) states that ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the assumptions we make to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating (Khatri, 2020:1436).

This study adopts a relativist ontology which suggests that reality is not a fixed entity but instead shaped by individual and collective experience (Pretorius, 2024:2698). According to Pessu (2019:40) in this view, reality is subjective and can vary from one person to another. The focus is on capturing the richness of human experience, acknowledging that multiple realities may coexist, and that reality is fluid and negotiated (Pretorius, 2024:2698).

### **1.7.2 Epistemology**

For Crotty (1998:10), epistemology is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it (Al-Saadi, 2014:2). Epistemology looks at how knowledge is construed and what is accepted as valid evidence (Trivedi, 2020). Epistemology is explained as the process by which the inquirer comes to know the truth and reality, which is relative as identified above (Kamal, 2019:1390). Following an interpretivist epistemology, varied interpretations of the world are constructed and not discovered, and the meaning of the world is generated through social interaction among people (Pretorius, 2024:2698).

## 1.8 Research Design

This section will provide insight into the research design for this study.

This study follows an Interpretivist paradigm, and the research approach will be a deductive approach with qualitative research as the methodology. The research is mono-method, making use of semi-structured interviews to collect data from advertising agency executives and agency customers on their perspectives of the antecedents to customer loyalty.

The time horizon of the study is cross-sectional. The purpose of the research is to extend the current customer loyalty theory by proposing a conceptual framework for understanding advertising industry-specific customer loyalty antecedents. Deductive reasoning is a theory testing process which begins with established theory or conceptual framework and seeks to understand if the theory applies in a specific instance (Hyde, 2000:83). Using deductive qualitative research, advancement of science is promoted by (re)-examining previous literature, resulting in greater support, refinement or refutation of the ideas being studied (Fife & Gossner, 2024:1). An inductive approach is not applicable as this approach is used when there is a lack of, or there are limited theories or research findings on the concept being explored.

Data will be gathered by means of semi-structured interviews to understand advertising agency customer loyalty antecedents, which will then be analysed using Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA). The analysis will begin by using pre-existing categories (a codebook) imposed by the theory, previous research findings, and the proposed conceptual framework, which are deductive (Armat, Assarroudi, Sharifi & Heydari, 2018:220). However, if coded segments of text do not fit the codebook, new categories will inductively emerge, resulting in the accomplishment of qualitative data analysis using both inductive and deductive approaches concurrently, but with different dominance (Armat, *et al.*, 2018:220).

The research design is exploratory which is selected because the antecedents to customer loyalty literature for the advertising industry and advertising agency specifically is not fully developed. An exploratory qualitative approach allows for the identification of new elements and concepts (Intema, *et al.*, 2022:2). A deductive qualitative approach was selected due to the process of starting with a theory or proposed conceptual framework and then subjecting this framework to tests in a deductive process (Bergdahl & Berterö, 2024:4). A qualitative approach will contribute to the development of a complete understanding of the antecedents to customer loyalty in the advertising industry

and advertising agencies. However, the study will develop and propose a conceptual framework for answering data collection questions and previous frameworks and theories will be employed to comprehend and verify their applicability to the specifications of this study (Salawu, Bolatitio & Masibo, 2023:2104).

Like quantitative research, qualitative research seeks answers to questions with a perspective to build theory or refute an existing theory; however, qualitative research is inextricably linked to subjectivity (Leung, 2015:324). To ensure rigor and robustness of the research process and results, each step of the research process must be validated systematically and for transparency (Meyrick, 2006:803).

Validity in the context of qualitative research refers to the appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data (McLoed, 2024). Qualitative researchers employ different concepts of validity, such as trustworthiness or credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:315). To ensure credibility, adequate evidence concerning data sources and data-centered inferences, as well as the procedure through which data will be collected and analysed, will be presented (Jarrahi & Newlands, 2024:11). Reliability of qualitative research aligns with the concept of dependability and consistency and is achieved through adherence to the accepted standards for the chosen research design (Jarrahi & Newlands, 2024:11).

## **1.9 Research Method**

This section includes a discussion and explanation of how the research will be conducted.

### ***1.9.1 Population and Sampling***

In this study, advertising agencies are defined as B2B service organisations that are made up of business, marketing, and creative individuals who design, produce, and place advertisements across various media types on behalf of clients seeking to promote their products or services and grow their market share (Moeran, 2015:189). The study population includes both sides of the client-agency relationship: customers from a single advertising agency with offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and senior executives from advertising agencies based in the same two cities.

This dual-sided population includes advertising agency executives, who oversee overarching operations and customer relations, as well as agency customers. The latter are senior or executive-level marketing and marketing procurement professionals who participated in the study on behalf of their businesses. They hold primary responsibility for managing agency partnerships and are therefore the most appropriate representatives to provide insight into customers' perspectives. The purpose of this dual-

sided approach is to understand the perspectives of both agency executives and agency customers in the context of antecedents to customer loyalty. Data collected from both agency executives and agency customers will be analysed and interpreted in the context of the conceptual framework. The aim is not to compare the answers of each population, but to analyse both sets of collected data and to integrate the findings.

The size of the population is estimated at 60 individuals, consisting of fifteen customer organisations (agency customers) and 10 advertising agencies. Non-probability purposive sampling will be used to sample agency customer and agency executive participants.

Purposive sampling has been selected as the most appropriate sampling method as the research aims to gain deep, specific, and relevant insights from a very specific sample, not to get conveniently accessible but possibly irrelevant data. Purposive sampling is a deliberate strategy where the researcher selects specific agency customers and agency executives based on specific characteristics, knowledge, or experience relevant to the study (Memon, Thurasamy, Ting & Cheah, 2025:3). Purposive sampling ensures that a quality sample is located to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of findings (Friday & Leah, 2024:90). The sample will consist of approximately twelve participants, of which eight (8) will be agency customers and four (4) agency executives. Further details relating to the population and sample will be discussed in Chapter 3.

### **1.9.2 Data Collection**

Data will be collected by means of semi-structured interviews, which align with the qualitative research design for answering “how” and “why” questions (Azungah, 2018:327). Semi-structured interviews are associated with the ontological and epistemological views that reality is socially constructed and interpreted in line with the worldviews of participants (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004:1021). The interview schedule will reflect customer loyalty theory and key antecedents identified in the B2B sector and service sector literature, as well as research relevant to the advertising industry, all of which culminate in propositions and a conceptual framework. This provides a theory-informed foundation consistent with a deductive approach.

Interview questions were derived using the processes and outcomes of deductive qualitative analysis proposed by Fife and Gossner (2024:3). Relevant literature will be reviewed to identify relevant constructs that have previously been examined in B2B and service sector literature. The theory will then be operationalised by generating key concepts from the guiding theory, and propositions will be developed, and a conceptual

framework will be proposed. The interview questions will be appropriately structured to address the key concepts and propositions. If participants did not mention a key concept of their own accord, the researcher had the freedom to probe whether the key concept was salient for this participant (Fife & Gossner, 2024:5).

Prior to conducting face-to-face interviews, participants known to the researcher were contacted via email, inviting them to participate in the study. The email outlined the purpose of the study, explained the voluntary nature of participation, and provided assurances related to confidentiality and data protection. Informed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews. This section is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **1.9.3 Data Analysis**

The analysis and interpretation of collected data will be guided by proposition categories and themes proposed in the conceptual framework and defined before data collection (Kibiswa, 2019:2061). DQCA will be used to analyse the data to determine which proposed antecedents to customer loyalty are relevant to advertising agency customers and executives, using participants' perspectives to describe the relevance of each antecedent.

### **1.10 Outline of chapters**

Chapter 1 provides a thorough introduction, unpacking the rationale, defining the detailed problem statement, research aim, and finally the specific research objectives. Exploring the nature of customer loyalty in the B2B service environment, with a specific focus on the advertising industry, provides an overarching context for the study.

Chapter 2 provides a preliminary literature review and places focus on customer loyalty, particularly its antecedents, and explores the numerous factors that influence client retention in B2B service relationships, with specific reference to the advertising industry context.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, grounded in an interpretivist epistemology and relativist ontology. The study adopts a deductive, exploratory qualitative approach using a mono-method design. Data collection is cross-sectional, employing purposive non-probability sampling to select a sample of twelve participants comprising clients from a single advertising agency and executives from multiple advertising agencies. Semi-structured interviews are used for data collection, with analysis conducted through deductive qualitative analysis to explore and explain customer loyalty dynamics within B2B service relationships.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed review and analysis of key findings, specifically placing a focus on the identified antecedents of customer loyalty within B2B client-agency relationships in the South African advertising industry. Various insights are extracted from directed qualitative content analysis, and inductive themes are noted and discussed.

Chapter 5 concludes the study with a detailed summary of findings, various practical takeaways for the advertising industry, and theoretical contributions to the understanding of customer loyalty within B2B service environments. Recommendations are offered to agencies to assist in the improvement of client retention and long-term loyalty.

### **1.11 Limitations**

As Hofstee (2006:117) explains, limitations reflect the gap between conducting a study according to a chosen method and achieving perfection, an ideal that is rarely, if ever, attainable. In this study, several potential limitations may arise, including:

- Time constraints - due to the structure of the module, data collection is limited in time, potentially affecting the size of the sample and depth of engagement.
- Time-bound snapshot - this study offers insight into the antecedents of customer loyalty at a single point in time and will not account for how those antecedents may evolve over time.
- Self-reporting bias - respondents may overestimate relationship strength or satisfaction or provide socially desirable answers.
- Context specific findings - the study is delimited to South African advertising agencies, limiting transferability to other service-based B2B contexts or international markets.

A detailed discussion of the research limitations and ethical considerations is presented in Chapter 3.

### **1.12 Ethical considerations**

Ethical guidelines will be strictly followed to ensure the integrity of the research. Key ethical considerations include:

- Informed consent: Participants were made aware of the study's purpose and informed that they may withdraw at any point without facing any penalty or consequence. Given that client participants have an existing professional relationship with the researcher, additional care was taken to ensure that participation was entirely voluntary and free from any perceived pressure. This was clearly communicated in the invitation email.

- Confidentiality: Participant data will be anonymised to protect their identities.
- Data security: Collected data will be stored securely and used only for academic purposes.
- Non-maleficence: Care will be taken to ensure that participants are not exposed to harm or discomfort of any nature during the study.
- Compliance with POPIA: Email addresses and contact information used for survey distribution will only be accessed through existing professional relationships and handled in strict accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).
- Ethical Approval: Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant committee before the commencement of data collection (See Appendix 4).

This structured framework ensures that the study is conducted systematically and with integrity, providing valuable insights into the antecedents of customer loyalty to advertising agencies in South Africa.

### **1.13 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this mini-dissertation explored the core antecedents of customer loyalty within South Africa's advertising industry, a complex, service-intensive B2B environment that remains underexplored in academic research. Firmly grounded in the understanding that lasting client relationships are vital for agency sustainability, the study addresses the growing pressures applied by technological change, evolving client expectations, and increased industry competition levels.

The proposed research study presented a clear and concise rationale for investigating loyalty in this sector, articulated a focused problem statement and research aim and then outlined five targeted research objectives to aid inquiry into key relational and service-related loyalty drivers.

Through a comprehensive preliminary literature review, the study critically examined foundational theories of customer loyalty, the nature of B2B relationships, and the unique characteristics of the advertising industry.

Anchored in an Interpretivist paradigm, the study adopts a qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews with both agency and client participants to uncover nuanced, experience-based insights.

Finally, the proposed research study addressed key ethical considerations, defined its

theoretical and practical contributions, and outlined the structure of the dissertation. By producing actionable findings, the study aimed to assist advertising agencies in enhancing client retention strategies that drive loyalty and sustainable growth.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to critically evaluate and then synthesise the existing academic knowledge on the engaging concept of customer loyalty within business-to-business (B2B) and service sector environments, specifically focusing on the dynamic advertising industry in South Africa.

This chapter intends to establish a strong conceptual and empirical foundation for the study. Key antecedents of customer loyalty will be presented and unique contexts shaping B2B services will be highlighted and discussed.

Based on the work of Hofstee (2006:94) and to ensure a structured and logical flow of information, the review adopts a funnel approach, beginning with a broad overview of the advertising industry, then narrowing to advertising agencies, including the distinction between client retention and customer loyalty, followed by a focus on customer loyalty theory, a discussion on customer loyalty in the B2B and service-based context, before placing focus on customer loyalty and its antecedents.

Antecedents identified in B2B and service sector literature that are relevant to the advertising industry and advertising agency are presented and discussed, and research propositions presented. The chapter then concludes by proposing a conceptual framework of the antecedents to customer loyalty to the advertising industry.

### 2.2 The Advertising Industry

The advertising industry is composed of advertising agencies that mediate between a range of advertisers' marketing practices and the media that propagate advertisements (Sinclair, 2019:4). In the past five years, the global advertising industry has undergone significant transformation, driven by digitalisation and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence, which are reshaping client-agency dynamics (The Business Research Company, 2025; Tshabalala, 2022).

According to Karels and La Hera (2021:170) the advertising industry is “*governed by a scarcity of customer attention*” because of digital media technologies. Growth in advertising spending has slowed in mature channels and 2023 saw deceleration (and even decline) in traditional media like linear television (Hsu, 2009:1; Mokoena, *et al.*, 2025:38; Wang, *et al.*, 2022:2396).

Meanwhile, digital channels have risen sharply to claim almost half of all advertising

investment on a global scale (Bizcommunity, 2025a, Tshabalala, 2022). This shift was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, compelling companies to adapt rapidly to modern technologies and digital channels to meet evolving consumer demands (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Tshabalala, 2022; Maurya, 2025:38).

According to PwC South Africa (2024) digital transformation is accelerating within South Africa's advertising industry, with digital advertising accounting for 59.1% of total advertising revenue in 2023 and projected to reach two-thirds by 2028. Traditional Above-The-Line (ATL) advertising, which focuses on brand awareness and outreach to mass audiences through traditional platforms still holds significance as South Africa is slightly above the global average in share of ATL spend, at 38% (Bizcommunity, 2025b). According to Bizcommunity, (2025b), South Africa's below-the-line activations, which adopt more targeted strategies to specific audience segments to maximise Return On Investment (ROI) and Return On Advertising Spend (ROAS), remains at 27% of spend (Bizcommunity, 2025b).

Globally, the rise of personalisation, influencer marketing and programmatic advertising has redefined how brands engage with customers, and these strategies are supported by real-time analytics, enable precise targeting, and enhanced campaign effectiveness (Maurya, 2025:39). The popularity of social networking sites allows for micro-segmentation of the advertising market, without the need for intermediaries which has led to new competitors in the advertising agency space (Wangui, 2024:5; Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:49). Most notable are management consultancies who acquired thirty-four agencies in 2021, outpacing traditional holding companies, with the aim of building end-to-end marketing service capabilities (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:49; Wang, *et al.*, 2022:2396; Aderinkomi, 2021:2). Management consulting and intense digital agency and content studio competition have long been a threat to the role of agencies (Aderinkomi, 2022:3).

This has resulted in major agency holding companies pursuing consolidation and integration strategies (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:51). A recent example is that of WPP who merged the creative agency Grey with digital network AKQA in several markets, to eliminate duplication, refocusing their attention on high-growth areas by combining their creative and media units (The&Partnership and m/Six) into a single AI-enabled, "fully integrated" offering (Agency Mania Solutions, 2024:3).

Customers have likewise become significantly more exacting (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014:589), frequently spearheaded by robust procurement teams that demand improved efficiency and strong ROI (Sriweawnetr & Chaisuwan, 2021:165). Surveys of global

marketers in 2022 showed that 68-71% rank the agency's ability to highlight measurable results and contribute to business goals as key to successful relationships (Forrester Consulting, 2022:6). Potential buyers have shifted from paid media to earned and owned media, and media agencies have been replaced by insourcing, which is diminishing the creativity in advertising and creating fierce competition for digital marketing specialists (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:49)

The rise of digital platforms has significantly impacted the way agencies operate (Kharkar, Jarad & Yadav, 2024:3989), the impact of which is most visible on agency key resources, forcing them to cut costs, reduce agency fees, and change their cost structure (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:48-49). Marketers now typically work with multiple agencies instead of exclusive client-agency relationships of the past (Jensen & Sund, 2017:286), leading to a loss of revenue for the agency (Makhubele, *et al.*, 2025:125).

Agencies that embraced integrated marketing approaches (Aderinkomi, 2021:4) and new tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Huh, Nelson & Russell, 2023:479) have regularly gained the advantage in recent pitches, whereas those agencies that are clinging to more traditional models are at risk of being left behind (Mortimer & Laurie, 2019:31).

The most quoted example of an industry in which the explosive growth of disruptive technology has disrupted established business models is that of advertising (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:47-48). Agencies are forced to rethink their business models and become more specialised (Jensen & Sund, 2017:290), and according to Sriweawnetr and Chaisuwan, (2021:167) they should consider internal factors internal that involve their resources and capabilities. Agencies must place immense focus on agility and on strategic partnerships to be seen as trusted advisors who are able to flex with the needs of their customers to deliver real growth (Jensen & Sund, 2017:286; Clary, 2024:3).

### **2.3 Advertising Agencies**

As intermediaries, advertising agencies offer creative services to their customers, who are primarily other businesses, making the advertising agency a B2B service provider. The service-intensive B2B environment in advertising is characterised by creativity and disruption, continually communicating with and influencing customers while offering solutions to organisational marketing challenges (Levin, *et al.*, 2016:7).

As such, the sustainability of the industry and agencies specifically, relies on their ability to sustain relationships with clients (customers), with much of the industry and agency literature focusing on these client-agency relationships (Makhubele, *et al.*, 2025:125). As a result, the literature on customer loyalty in the context of advertising agencies is limited,

partly due to the frequent conflation of client retention and customer loyalty as interchangeable concepts.

Advertising agencies perform a critical function within the marketing ecosystem by bridging brands and consumers through the deployment of strategic planning, creative development, and media placement to generate awareness, drive engagement and stimulate business growth (Moeran, 2015:189). This study is firmly rooted in the acceptance that long-term client-agency relationships are critical to agency success (Ziegele, 2024:1; Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385). According to Tshabalala (2022), the advertising industry in South Africa is in a state of transition as the shift towards digital channels and the rise of e-commerce present both challenges and opportunities to reach customers. Out-dated business models used by South African advertising agencies are pushing customers towards competitors in the digital space (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:46). In South Africa, agencies are not only faced with competition but are also fighting to simply survive in the declining economic conditions (Sutton, *et al.*, 2024).

Recent studies on integrated full-service agencies report an average tenure of 7.3 years, highlighting the industry's emphasis on long-term strategic partnerships (4A's & ANA, 2023:6). According to Hsu (2009:3), a total of 68% of advertising customers have changed agencies in the previous two to three years or had seriously considered it. Studies indicate the primary trigger for agency change is customer dissatisfaction, especially regarding service quality and results (Bizcommunity, 2025b). Ziegele (2025:125) states that short-lived client-agency relationships are due to dissatisfactions between both parties and divergent objectives.

This churn is noted in some significant account moves; for instance, the ten-year partnership between Nando's and M&C Saatchi Abel ended in 2025 as the client made a bold move to consolidate all marketing efforts, this despite the agencies' "multi-award-winning" work and mutual success over the decade (Bizcommunity, 2025b). Clients (customers) increasingly transfer their accounts between agencies over successive cycles, highlighting the need for agencies to continually innovate and prove their value (Aderinkomi, 2022:3).

However, the digital disruption, according to Mokoena, *et al.* (2023:48) has led to an increase in the number of advertising carriers, resulting in the fragmentation of advertising agencies' target populations. To survive in the wake of cutting operational costs and reducing agency fees (Mokoena, *et al.*, 2023:48), agencies are concentrating on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to improve agency performance and

profitability by focusing on client-agency (customer) relationships (Wang, *et al.*, 2022:2396).

Literature suggests that a good relationship between the client (customer) and agency depends on co-operative behaviour between both parties and smooth working relations for mutual benefits (Dimitrova & MacKay, 2017:24). The concept of relationship quality focuses on two capabilities, namely, it is considered across disciplines and important determinants of the permanence and intensity of the relationship with the outcomes are a feeling of closeness, satisfaction, and commitment (Zeigele, 2025: 203). The development of meaningful and consistent client-agency partnerships provides the foundation for coordinated execution and strong business results; a relationship confirmed by foundational relationship marketing theory emphasising trust and commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:22-23).

In the case of advertising, good relationships should help facilitate the agency's ability to learn about and support the client's strategy to deliver outstanding campaigns (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385). When agencies consistently demonstrate their contribution to a client's business and maintain open, proactive communication, clients are more inclined to remain loyal due to enhanced trust, commitment, and perceived value (Palmatier, Dant, Grewel & Evans, 2006:3-4; Bizcommunity, 2025a; Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:386).

However, Ziegele, (2025:288) presents the dimensions of a successful client-agency relationship as associated with several characteristics, namely, respect, personality, sympathy, appreciation, and reliability. Makhubele, *et al.*, (2025:134), argue that good client-agency relationships ensure longevity, adding that relationship quality involves the balance between expectations and perceptions of the client on the one hand and the agency on the other. Mokoena, *et al.*, (2023:49) note that the adverse effects in the client-agency relationship are due to issues related to trust deficit, budget cuts, and agencies; lack of digital capacity.

Clients increasingly demand integrated campaign work that seamlessly combines multiple marketing communication tools, including advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and digital platforms, to maximise marketing effectiveness (Kliatchko, 2008:135; Bonfanati, 2024:45).

The prevailing view is that agencies must provide integrated solutions to remain competitive, combining creativity with strategic planning, data analytics, and digital technologies (Killian & McManus, 2015:541). Nearly half of South African agencies surveyed in the recent Agency Scope global trends analysis conducted in 2024 offer fully

integrated services spanning creative, media, and digital disciplines (Bizcommunity, 2025b).

While the local advertising industry faces hurdles from economic constraints to procurement protocols, agencies will be able to navigate these by demonstrating consistent performance, agility, and cultural relevance. Customers that focus on partnership rather than price are more likely to develop long-term, loyalty-based relationships (Cannon & Perreault, 1999:441)

### **2.3.1 Client retention and customer loyalty**

Customer loyalty and client retention are essential for business growth, however these concepts, used synonymously by advertising agencies and the advertising industry, are not the same thing (Velaris, 2024; ExactBuyer, 2023). As a result, the literature focused specifically on customer loyalty in advertising agencies is sparse, as the focus of much of the literature is on retaining clients and the client-agency relationship (Ziegele, 2025; Makhubele, *et al.*, 2025; Bonfanti, 2024; Aderinkomi, 2021; Wang, *et al.*, 2022). It is important to establish the difference between these concepts in the context of the agency space and for this study specifically.

Since loyal customers are the most important assets of an organisation, in recent years many organisations have been increasingly recognising the importance of loyal customers and have been giving attention to develop customer retention and loyalty programmes (Nasir, 2015:246). Due to rising competition, specifically in the advertising industry, there is a need to seek alternative strategies that should not only be used to get new customers, but to retain customers while cutting operational costs and increasing customer loyalty (Frambo, 2019:1). The main aim of any service organization is to retain customers or reduce their switching to competitors (Savita & Jhajhra, 2020:47).

The main difference between customer loyalty and client retention is their focus on the customer relationship lifecycle (Radu, 2025). Client retention refers to the strategic efforts and activities undertaken by an agency to keep existing customers coming back (Patel, 2025; Puchalsky, 2025; Harriet, Arthur, Komunda & Mugiai, 2024:103) and is determined by the intensity with which customers use the service provided (Suriansha, 2023:3360). The term client retention is used synonymously with the term with customer retention (Patel, 2025).

Client retention is about maintaining the customer base over time (Velaris, 2024; Radu, 2025) and decreasing the number of customer defections or churn (Harriet, *et al.*, 2024:104; Patel, 2025). Much of the literature associated with client retention focuses on

creating a positive customer experience, customer satisfaction, and repeat purchases (Harriet, *et al.*, 2024:103-104; Suriansha, 2023:3360). According to Harriet, *et al.* (2024:104), an agency's retention rate is determined by dividing the total number of active customers by the proportion of remaining customers at the end of the fiscal year.

To retain current customers, some organisations develop loyalty programmes, while others learn a customer's individual interests and then tailor services to meet them (Frambo, 2019:5). There is a strong relationship between switching costs and customer retention behaviour (Artha, *et al.*, 2022:32). According to Thenya (2016:1) customer retention is the continual upholding of relationships made during commercial exchange for an extended period. Maintaining good relationships does not occur incidentally, they are developed through the consistent provision of customised offerings for customer fit and the customer relationship is the foundation of the basic building block structure for any organisation (Meena & Sahu, 2021:140). As the relationship between the organisation and customer deepens, maintenance costs decrease and profitability increases (Nasir, 2015:244-245).

Organisations implement retention marketing practices to increase customers' commitment to the organisation, and as commitment increases customers become more loyal (Nasir, 2015:250). Customer loyalty goes beyond repeat purchases (Puchalsky, 2025) and refers to the long-term relationship developed with customers who repeatedly choose the agency over competitors (Radu, 2025; Suriansha, 2023:3360) and actively recommend the service of the agency (Harriet, *et al.*, 2024:106). Customers actively "want to" use the services of the agency (Puchalsky, 2025) and are committed and attached to the agency brand and service provided (Radu, 2025; Oliver, 1999:392).

Customer loyalty reflects the trust the customer has in the agency, based on previous positive experiences or satisfaction through which a strong bond is created between the customer and the agency, resulting in customer or client-agency relationships (Radu, 2025). Customer loyalty improves market share, profit, and sales, and leads to advocacy (Kehinde, Ogunnaike, Akinbode & Aka, 2016:2). Organisations can build competitive advantage via customer loyalty (Gunawan *et al.*, 2021:238) and this is essential for the financial health of the organisation as long-term organisational success depends on its ability to cultivate loyalty (Nasir, 2015: 258).

Despite similarities in the definitions and the synonymous use of the concepts, it is important to understand the client retention is a strategic focus that is measurable and directly impacts the short-term sales of an agency, while customer loyalty builds long-

term value and organic growth (Puchalsky, 2025).

## 2.4 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is one of the oldest and most studied issues in marketing (Desveaud, 2019:2), with loyalty being widely recognised as one of the most important constructs in the marketing literature (Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007; Shirin & Puth, 2011; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:8). The concept of customer loyalty has, according to Chattertee (2018:50) evolved from the 1950's to 1970's and from the 1980's, customer loyalty (also known as balanced scorecard), became a pivotal concept due to its inclusion in many management theories found during that era. This was due to customer loyalty being considered a critical matter for organisations' profitability (Desveaud, 2019:2) and the importance of the concept derives from the benefits associated with retaining customers (Moisescu, 2014:1).

Jacoby and Kyner (1973) defined loyalty as a non-random repeat choice over a period of time, while Oliver (1997:392) initially described customer loyalty as consumers who intensely desire to rebuy a product or service and will have no other. However, Oliver (1999:34), redefined the concept to include the act of consuming, hence, loyalty is defined as *"a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronise a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour."* Baldinger and Robinson (1996:23) proposed an attitude-behaviour composite approach, where stronger attitudinal commitment would result in a strong behavioural pattern which would finally result in customer loyalty.

The development of customer loyalty from Oliver's (1999:35-36) conceptualisation onward has been viewed as a process, beginning with cognitive loyalty, based on logical and rational reasoning, shifting to affective loyalty, or emotional attachment based on previous satisfaction, to conative loyalty, associated with behaviour and action loyalty, incorporating only those customers willing to purchase from a company, regardless of barriers or competitive products (Närvänen, *et al.*, 2020:826). However, each level of customer loyalty proposed by Oliver (1999:35-36) differs, where cognitive loyalty is superficial loyalty, affective loyalty results in repeat purchase behaviour and a positive attitude, however, there is still the possibility of switching behaviour; while conative loyalty is where a positive commitment is developed and action loyalty results in repeat purchases, with no switching behaviour.

Dick and Basu (1994:111) defined customer loyalty as the strength of the relationship

between a consumer's relative attitude and repeat purchase, which incorporate both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

According to Khan (2013:169-170), there is no universally agreed upon definition for customer loyalty (Moisescu, 2014:1), however customer loyalty is popularly conceptualised in three ways in marketing literature. Firstly, attitudinal loyalty, which is related to emotions, feelings, opinions, and attachment (Khan, 2013:169; Närvänen, *et al.*, 2020:286; Fedotova, *et al.*, 2019:2). Attitudinal loyalty refers to a 'deeply held commitment to repurchase a specific product, service or brand' (Oliver, 1999:306).

Secondly, behavioural loyalty, which is indicative of repeat purchasing, purchase longevity and frequency (Khan, 2013:170; Närvänen, *et al.*, 2020:286; Fedotova, *et al.*, 2019:1). This is the most popular view of customer loyalty as it is associated with profitability (Fedotova, *et al.*, 2019:1). Szűts and Tóth (2008:359) similarly refer to customer loyalty as the demonstration of a customer's faithful adherence to an organisation, despite occasional errors or indifference in service provision.

Lastly, Khan (2013:2) proposes customer loyalty as buying moderated by the customer's characteristics, circumstances, and purchase situation, while Fedotova, *et al.* (2019:2), suggests a combination of attitudinal and behavioural characteristics, known as complex loyalty.

Ishak and Ghani (2013:190) indicate that most operational measures of customer loyalty are either behavioural or attitudinal, however the definition ascribed to customer loyalty depends on the industry and field of research. This approach is evident in Hallowell's (1996:32) study on customer loyalty for a service organisation, stating that satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability are interrelated, where satisfaction leads to loyalty, which over time leads to profitability.

Gremler and Brown (1996:279) coined the term service loyalty in their study on intangible services, defining service loyalty as the degree to which a customer exhibits repeat purchasing behaviour, has a positive attitude towards the provider and, when the need for this service arises, considers only this service provider. Özkan, Süer, Keser and Kocakoç (2020:387) state that service loyalty is based on a positive attitude and behaviour toward a business, preventing customers from switching. Repeated purchase from a specific service provider, over an extended period of time, falls within behavioural loyalty (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:2).

Customer loyalty is not only a crucial matter for an organisation's profitability but is also a precious asset in this hypercompetitive context, making it crucial to understand the

mechanisms behind loyalty formation to implement the most effective loyalty strategies (Desveaud, 2019:2).

In the case of the advertising industry, and advertising agencies specifically, the concept of customer loyalty must be approached from a B2B service perspective rather than that of a traditional product supplier.

The concept of customer loyalty was presented and theoretically defined using seminal authors. Despite the various definitions, authors agree that customer loyalty includes both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty, with behavioural loyalty resulting in repeat purchase intention. The concept of service loyalty was proposed and similarly linked to behavioural and attitudinal loyalty. The following section presents a review of customer loyalty in the context of B2B and service organisations, focusing on their unique characteristics.

#### ***2.4.1 Theories Underpinning Service Customer Loyalty Antecedents***

Several theoretical frameworks underpin the antecedents of customer loyalty in both B2B and service contexts.

Grönroos (1984:40) proposed The Service Quality Model whereby a service organisation attempts to build their image using technical and functional quality elements, however, the perceived image of a service organisation is because of a customers' expected and perceived service.

The Expectation-Disconfirmation Model (Oliver, 1999) posits that satisfaction, and consequently loyalty, results when perceived service performance exceeds prior expectations, while negative disconfirmation leads to dissatisfaction (Morley, 2004:50). This links to the concept of service quality as presented by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985).

Parasuraman, *et al.*, (1985:42), presented their Service Quality Model (Gap-Model) as a result of the difficulty in evaluating service quality based on the unique characteristics of services. The gaps in the model include the:

- (1) consumer expectation – management perception gap (knowledge gap) wherein executives' perceptions of what customers expect are not congruent with customers' actual expectations,
- (2) management perception – service quality specification gap wherein service quality specifications are based on the previous gap (knowledge gap),
- (3) service quality specifications-service delivery gap, which occurs when, despite

existing service delivery specification guidelines, the variability of services results in gaps in service delivery,

(4) service delivery-external communications gap occurs when the organisations' media advertising and other communications can affect what the customer expects, and finally, (5) expected service – perceived service wherein one or all of the previous gaps have occurred and result in a difference between what the customer expected and their perception of the service (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:44-48).

Primarily a service quality model, the collection of data from agency executives and the data collected from agency customers may be useful in determining if this model applies.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988:15) proposed their 22-item SERVQUAL (Service Quality) model, which conceptualises service quality as the customers' judgement of the overall quality of a service organisation. The final items making up each of the five SERVQUAL dimensions include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, and are used to better understand the service expectations and perceptions of customers, with the aim of improving service quality (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1988:30). These items are presented further when discussing service quality as an antecedent to customer loyalty.

The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994:21) proposes that relationship commitment is central to relationship marketing. As proposed by Parasuraman, *et al.*, (1988:12) relationships are built on the foundation of mutual commitment and the concept of loyalty and repeat purchase intention are increasingly being conceptualised in terms of commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:21). Furthermore, trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:21).

Relationship marketing theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:22) proposed the core idea of trust and commitment being the foundations of a long-lasting relationship, wherein trust builds client confidence in the agency reliability; commitment, where clients remain despite competitive alternatives; and communication and relationship quality bond the trust commitment loop. Agency loyalty should emerge from trust and commitment, but this is mediated through creative collaboration and strategic alignment.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964:193; Homans, 1958:398) proposes the core idea for relationships to survive is when they perceive benefits outweigh the costs and are linked to other antecedents such as perceived value, switching costs and satisfaction (total outcome of exchange). Loyalty in client-agency relationships reflect the ongoing cost-

benefit calculation: clients stay when they believe they are getting value provided the risks and costs of moving.

Resource Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996) states that the core idea is to sustain advantage through rare, inimitable resources which would be creativity, talents, and strategic insight from an advertising agency. Creativity and innovative output are key differentiations; account management quality has the capability to nurture relational sources and agency reputation is an intangible brand equity resource.

In Agency theory, Jensen and Meckling (1976:289) propose principal-agent relationships are fraught with informal asymmetry and goal misalignment. It links to alignment with client business goals, reduces goal conflict, supports transparency in communication, lowers information asymmetry, and relies on responsiveness and agility to minimise opportunistic behaviour. The theory proposes that loyalty arises when agencies overcome agency problems by aligning incentives and creating transparency in the relationship.

Service dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:12) where value is co-created through interactions between the provider and the client and link to antecedents such as relationship quality, collaboration, and co-creation as well as perceived value as not delivered by the agency but co-created with the client.

#### ***2.4.2 Customer loyalty in the Business-to-Business and Service Context***

Although the study of B2B marketing can be traced back to the 1890s, it has gained meaningful academic traction only in the past three decades, primarily through specialised journals such as Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, and Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2021:1).

Although B2B and B2C marketing share foundational principles, their underlying relationship dynamics, decision-making processes, and loyalty drivers diverge significantly, requiring distinct theoretical and managerial approaches (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2017:92; Jeong & Oh, 2017:115; Arthur, Agbemabiese, Amoako & Amin 2024:933). While both operate within the broader service economy, academic research overtly and disproportionately focusses on the B2C context, leaving B2B service marketing quite obviously under-explored (Morley, 2004:18; Fan, Pan, Tseng & Chao, 2023:1).

Unlike B2C markets that are transactional, customer loyalty in B2B contexts is relational,

built on long-term partnerships that prioritise trust, value creation, and ongoing collaboration as the core drivers of commitment (Fruchter & Sigué, 2005:19; Jeong & Oh, 2017:115).

Customer loyalty therefore extends beyond the transactional dimension, encapsulating the essence of the sustained commitment that transcends short-term interactions within B2B partnerships (Arthur, *et al.*, 2024:933).

From a practical perspective, B2B markets are clearly distinguished by complex, multi-person buying centres, formalised procedures and high switching costs that intertwine rational and emotional stakeholder motivations - features that are largely absent in B2C settings (Morley, 2004:21; Dimitrova & MacKay, 2017:24; Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024:1). In a B2B setting, transactions are usually of higher value, involve multiple decision-makers, and longer purchase cycles compared to B2C settings (Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024:2; Ramaseshan, *et al.*, 2013:336).

B2B places focus on the nurturing and maintenance of strategic relationships between organisations and their partner firms; relationships that are perceived as core drivers of overall performance and competitive advantage (Srivastava, *et al.*, 2024:949; Aderinkomi, 2021:15; Wang, *et al.*, 2022:2396; Hochstein, Voorhees, Pratt, Rangarajan, Nagel & Mehrotta, 2023:912).

B2B clients regularly expect to receive high service standards, consistent delivery, and a robust understanding of their overarching business needs, as service quality has been clearly linked to customer satisfaction and behavioural loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996:32; Jeong & Oh, 2017:116; Mayasari, Afiatna & Sumarsono, 2023:16; Masitenyane & Mokoena, 2024:525).

In B2B markets, retaining customers hinges on cultivating deep, trust-based partnerships rather than simply relying on repeat transactions alone (Arthur, *et al.*, 2021:933) and customer loyalty reflects enduring commitment and ongoing collaboration (Jeong & Oh, 2017:115; Srivastava, *et al.*, 2021:949). Repurchase intent, a core dimension of behavioural loyalty, directly drives profitability when customers actively choose to resist competing offers (Srivastava, *et al.*, 2021:949; Harriet, *et al.*, 2024:103-104; Suriansha, 2023:3360).

In practice, B2B loyalty is derived through deliberate behavioural facets, repeat orders, referrals, and co-development initiatives, rather than habitual purchases (Ramaseshan, *et al.*, 2013:337). Finally, while attitudinal loyalty is bolstered by both pragmatic benefits and moral legitimacy, purely cognitive judgments without an emotional or ethical

connection fail to secure true partner allegiance (Sánchez-del-Río-Vázquez, Rodríguez-Rad, Orta-Pérez & Revilla-Camacho, 2024:17).

Advertising agencies seamlessly combine creative competence with structured and disciplined project management to transform brand strategies into compelling campaigns (Grönroos, 1984:38; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:274), thereby providing professional B2B services (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014:1). Customer loyalty in B2B settings is further complicated by the nature of service offerings as services, unlike products, are distinguished by the unique characteristics of services.

Most of the literature on customer loyalty within service industry organisations focuses on the concept of service quality (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018; Yudanegara, 2023; Tjizumaue, & Atiku, 2024; Xu, 2022; Ramya, Kowsalya & Dharanipriya, 2019; Kachwala, *et al.*, 2020; Ali *et al.*, 2021; Ragunanan, *et al.*, 2024; Supriyanto, Wiyono & Burhanuddin, 2021). The basic theory of service quality was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985:44), which led to the investigation of the concept of service quality, to understand the nature of quality, services marketing, and the characteristics of services which directly affect the evaluation of service quality (Grönroos, 1988).

Service quality incorporates the concept of meeting and exceeding the expectations of the customer (Grönroos, 1984), however the distinctive characteristics of services directly impact the approach and substance of service quality. Services highlight four distinct characteristics: intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability, which distinctly differentiate services from products and shape every aspect of their delivery.

The intangibility of services means that they cannot be tested prior to purchase and are not physical products but rather a kind of experience (Hsu, 2009:22). Without physical form or ownership transfer, services are designed to generate customer satisfaction through experiences rather than objects (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:641; Morley, 2004:29-30).

The advertising industry provides creative, media, and account management services, and while customers cannot pre-test these services, agencies attempt to overcome intangibility by providing evidence of customer's satisfaction with their services through testimonials and referrals as well as a portfolio of previous creative and media services (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:642). Due to the tangible evidence of service quality being limited to physical facilities, equipment, and personnel, agencies must leverage cues such as testimonials and visible expertise to signal value and build trust (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1994:112).

The inseparable nature of services means that they are produced and consumed simultaneously (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:43). As a result, the provision of a service is transparent and it is not possible to hide mistakes or shortfalls (Shuttleworth, 2006:14; Hsu, 2009:19). Service encounters in the advertising industry are dynamic because of the evolving interaction between the agency and customer (Jansen van Rensburg, 2010:552). However, the agency has little or no direct control over the customer's service experience (Hsu, 2009:19). As a result, the customer's participation in the delivery of the service becomes important to the quality of the service performance (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:45), impacting the customers perceived service (Grönroos, 1988:11). The quality of the relational exchange during the provision of a service is an important dimension in influencing customer loyalty (Levin, *et al.*, 2016:8; Morley, 2004:31). Understanding customers' expectations is therefore important (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014:588).

How services are performed and delivered differs considerably and the variability of services means that it is difficult to reproduce consistently and exactly over time (Shuttleworth, 2006:23). Agencies have client-agency relationships with numerous customers, all of which require different levels of service at different times, making it difficult to replicate (Hsu, 2009:20). Variability arises from the requirements of each service encounter and depends on the provider, timing, and context, necessitating robust quality controls and staff training to ensure consistency (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:45; Hsu, 2009:19; Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:642).

Since the delivery of a service requires some form of contact between the customer and agency, the behaviour of the service provider affects the customer perception of quality (Grönroos, 1988:11) as it is difficult to ensure consistency and uniformity of behaviour (Shuttleworth, 2006:23). To overcome the variability of service provision, agencies require customers to provide as much information as possible in the articulation of their needs (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:642). Despite client-agency relationships, customers' needs and expectations vary for each service experience; to overcome this, agencies rely on the competence and ability of staff and the provision of key account managers (Levin, *et al.*, 2016:10).

Services are considered perishable, in that they cannot be stored for consumption at a later stage (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:45). Agencies are therefore unable to store unused service capacity, which results in lost opportunities if demand is not met (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:642). Fluctuating demand means that it will be difficult to prepare services, and it is therefore necessary for agencies to balance supply and demand through

dynamic scheduling and pricing (Morley, 2004:29-30).

The inability to have a final quality check means that the service must be performed correctly the first time, every time (Shuttleworth, 2006:24). To remain competitive, agencies are recommended to provide an appropriate range of services that are valued by clients, to manage their account teams successfully and to charge competitive rates (Jansen van Rensburg, 2010:551).

The provision of service quality in the B2B space not only depends on overcoming the characteristics of services, but on ensuring that customer expectations are met. Service quality lies at the core of customer loyalty in B2B service organisations, serving as a critical determinant of customer satisfaction, relationship quality, and long-term stability (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007:22). Consequently, agency strategies prioritise service quality and relational commitment, shifting emphasis from short-term satisfaction to long-term customer loyalty to lower overall marketing expenditures and enhance retention (Dick & Basu, 1994:108; Ha, *et al.*, 2023:3).

As organisations shift from a transactional mindset to relational engagement, they recognise that customer loyalty, driven by consistent service excellence, delivers greater lifetime value through repeat business, positive word-of-mouth, and cross-selling opportunities (Stan, Caemmerer & Cattani-Jallet, 2013:1541). When services are provided, customer experiences are inseparable from the delivery process and customer loyalty serves as a core driver of customer satisfaction, financial performance, and competitive advantage (Setia, Venkatesh & Joglekar, 2013:29).

A loyal customer base not only bolsters profitability but also acts as a formidable barrier against new competitors seeking market entry (Morley, 2004:35). When customers repeatedly choose the same provider despite available alternatives, organisations secure stable revenue streams and reduce acquisition costs (Tjizumaue & Atiku, 2024:6; Ranabhat, 2018:3).

## **2.5 Antecedents of Customer Loyalty in B2B and Service Contexts**

The literature focusing on the antecedents to customer loyalty, specifically within the advertising industry is sparse, as much of the focus is on client retention and client-agency relationships (Ziegele, 2025; Makhubele, *et al.*, 2025; Bonfanti, 2024; Aderinkomi, 2021; Wang, *et al.*, 2022). This is compounded by the fact that the advertising industry offers services within a B2B context.

Despite the abundance of literature focused on the antecedents to customer loyalty in

service organisations, much of this literature is focused on the hospitality and tourism industry (Sivapitak & Sangpikul, 2024; Xu, 2022; Ali, *et al.*, 2021; Hapsari, Hussein, Ghofar & Hanafiah, 2024; Ragunananan, *et al.*, 2024), the healthcare industry (Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024), retail banking (Nguyen, Ho & Ngo, 2024; Yudanegara, 2023, Falih, *et al.*, 2024; Supriyanto, *et al.*, 2021; Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2021; Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018), and the insurance industry (Tjizumaue & Atiku, 2024).

Other literature examined focuses on service organisation customers or service loyalty in general (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018; Vilkaitė-Vaitonė & Skačkauskienė, 2020), literature related to customer relationship management and customer loyalty (Gunawan, *et al.*, 2021; Wang, *et al.*, 2022; Tangshua & Vanichchinchai, 2024), and customer loyalty of B2B organisations (Sudiyono, *et al.*, 2022; Fan, *et al.*, 2023; Huang, Lee & Chen, 2019; Tedja, *et al.*, 2024; Kittur, Chatterjee & Upadhyay, 2021; Hochstein, *et al.*, 2023; Arthur, *et al.*, 2024; Jeong & Oh, 2017; Raddats, *et al.*, 2022).

Very few of the research articles are available that focus on the advertising industry or agencies themselves; these included the antecedents to customer loyalty within the advertising industry (Levin & Lobo, 2009), enhancing customer loyalty of advertising agencies (Levin, *et al.*, 2016), the impact of advertising creativity on customer loyalty (El Mahboul, 2012), dimensions of advertising agency client satisfaction (Jansen van Rensburg, 2010), effect of relationship marketing on client-agency relationships (Aderinkomi, 2021), development of B2B customer relationship of advertising company (Wang, *et al.*, 2022) and the role of customer loyalty on customer retention (Suriansha, 2023).

A review of the above literature presents several common antecedents to B2B service industry organisations, which will be discussed below. The following section presents a discussion on the common antecedents to customer loyalty as presented in B2B and service literature, followed by antecedents relevant to the advertising industry and advertising agencies specifically. Each of these antecedents, according to the literature, is positively linked to customer loyalty.

Like the research conducted by Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan and McDonald (2015) on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and brand identity as critical components of brand equity strategy, and van Tonder, Saunders and Farquhar's (2020) research explicating the resource integration process during self-service isolation, this study will present a conceptual framework and research propositions.

Propositions are novel statements specifying relationships between concepts, allowing

readers to distil the essence of an argument chain into a simple form (Hollebeek, Srivastava, Clark, Urbonavicius & Lim, 2024:7). Ulaga, Kleinaltenkamp, Kashyap and Eggert (2021:396) propose a four-step propositional development procedure including grounding, crafting, connecting, and simplifying. Grounding refers to the discussion and presentation of an appropriate theory and or practical foundation for a proposition (Ulaga, *et al.*, 2021:401). Crafting unpacks the motivation for and creation of propositions, including the nature and direction of the proposed conceptual associations (Ulaga, *et al.*, 2021:402). Connecting links the propositions available supporting theoretical or empirical evidence thereby motivating and explaining the integration of elements in a proposition helping to justify the contribution (Ulaga, *et al.*, 2021:403). Propositions must be empirically testable propositions, permitting operationalisation or further experimentation by empiricists in future research. Finally, simplifying offers an important check of a proposition's theoretical rigor, ensuring key elements and theoretical associations are clearly defined, explained, and signposted, minimising inconsistencies and ambiguity (Ulaga, *et al.*, 2021:402). To simplify the findings, it is recommended that an accompanying conceptual framework be used to visually depict propositions.

### **2.5.1 Service quality**

Service quality refers to the totality of features and characteristics of service that affect the ability to satisfy the needs of the customer (Gunawin, *et al.*, 2021:240). Service quality is the customers' impression of the relative superiority/inferiority of a service provider and its services (Prakash & Moharty, 2013:3).

According to Parasuraman, *et al.*, (1985:47) the specific dimensions that influence a customer's perception of service quality include, (1) reliability, wherein the service is accurately provided to the customer the first time around, (2) responsiveness of employees is their willingness and readiness to help the customer and quickly respond to their requests (3) assurance through the behaviour and knowledge of employees of the organisations' services (4) empathy and understanding of customer problems and the attempt to have the customer's best interests in mind and (5) tangibles in terms of physical cues such as the equipment and facilities used, as well as the appearance of the employees. In much of the literature focused on the general idea of customer loyalty, the concept of service quality is frequently identified as the cornerstone to customer loyalty (Gunawin, *et al.*, 2021:240), specifically in service orientated organisations. In a service organisation, such as that of an advertising agency, service quality is directly related to (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:1); improves (Nasir, 2015:247); has a positive impact (Gunawin, *et al.*, 2021:240; Kachwala, *et al.*, 2029:51); determines (Han, *et al.*,

2008:22); has a very strong positive impact (Vilkaitė-Vaitonė & Skačauskienė, 2020:15); and influences (Sitorius & Yustisia, 2018:641) customer loyalty.

Artha, *et al.*, (2022:32), suggest that service organisations should focus more on their reputation and service quality as opposed to lowering costs to retain customers. Higher levels of service quality produce higher levels of customer satisfaction that lead to increased patronage intentions and increased sales (Prakash & Mohanty, 2012:4). While price or product strategy can yield these outcomes, well executed service quality is an asset to be managed as it is more complicated to do service well than to change the price. Quality of services has two aspects: technical and functional, where the former represents the operational processes, and the latter the relationship (Bachnik, *et al.*, 2018:475). Service quality serves as a foundational pillar in driving customer satisfaction (Huang, *et al.*, 2019:1450; Tedja, *et al.*, 2024:3; Olsen, 2017:11; Thenya, 2016:17, Masitenyane & Mokoena, 2024:527; Kachwala, *et al.*, 2029:51; Sitorius & Yustisia, 2018:639). Long-term customer loyalty in service-based organisations is shaped by perceived value, which is influenced by service quality (Tedja, *et al.*, 2024:3; Kachwala, *et al.*, 2029:50; Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2021:702; Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:2; Xu, 2022:3).

Perceived value, according to Chen (2022:306) is the difference between the total customer value and total customer cost (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:3). According to Oliver (1999) empirical evidence illustrates that service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Prakash & Mohanty, 2012:5). Level of quality depends on integrity, core service satisfaction, cost management, as well as mutual commitment and communication (Bachnik, *et al.*, 2018:475). Every client of an agency will pay attention to different quality factors (Bachnik, *et al.*, 2018:246) and customers do not evaluate service quality solely on the outcome of the service, so the only criteria that count are those defined by customers (Shuttleworth, 2006:11).

Service quality positively influences trust (Han, *et al.*, 2008:26; Sitorius & Yustisia, 2018:641; Xu, 2022:5) as it develops confidence in the ability of the service provider to act in the best interest of the consumer (Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024:4). The loyalty of business customers is influenced by the quality of services as well as the extent to which consumers can trust that their interests are being supported (Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024:2).

Trust is the most crucial factor for sustainability as it is essential for overcoming uncertainty and alleviating risk when services are disrupted (Xu, 2022:2). Trust in service is essential in the service industry and guarantees the long-term loyalty of service sector

customers (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018:641). Service trust, perceived service quality, and overall satisfaction are regarded as factors affecting the forming of trust in the service organisation, which include the interaction between the customer and service provider as they are inseparable (Xu, 2022:2).

Levin, *et al.* (2017). show that service quality is a significant antecedent of relationship intentions in the advertising context and enhances customer relationship management (Wang, *et al.*, 2023:2396). Other literature proposes a positive relationship between service quality, relationship quality, and loyalty (Tanchua & Vanichchinchai, 2024:1339; Huang, *et al.*, 2019:1450; Tedja, *et al.*, 2024:3). Primary factors that ensure service companies guarantee profits are commitment and employee trust, which support and maintain the customer relationship, and are as such key influencing factors in long-term relationship formation (Xu, 2022:2)

According to Nasir (2015:258) service quality strongly enhances both purchase intentions and attitudinal loyalty. Service quality leads to improved customer behavioural patterns and repurchase intention (Masitenyane & Mokoena, 2024:524), is a determinant for competitiveness and improves loyalty (Tangchua & Vanichchinchai, 2024:1339). Due to services being intangible performances co-created with clients, firms must deeply understand individual needs and customise delivery to ensure consistent excellence (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:641; Morley, 2004:31).

Service quality is said to negatively influence switching costs (Savita & Jhajhra, 2020:53). Studies adopt relationship quality theory to build and maintain customer loyalty, with one factor identified that may influence the effectiveness of these strategies; switching costs (Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024:2). Customers tend to remain loyal to a supplier when switching to a competitor is perceived as too costly, however the switching costs impact on customer loyalty vary based on market characteristics (Rinenggo, *et al.*, 2024:2).

Therefore, the research posits the following propositions linking service quality and customer loyalty and antecedents.

**Proposition 1a:** Service Quality is positively related to Trust, Commitment, and Communication.

**Proposition 1b:** Service Quality is directly and positively related to Customer Satisfaction.

**Proposition 1c:** Service Quality is directly and positively related to Perceived Value.

### **2.5.2 Relationships**

Specifically in the advertising agency context where the agency and client work together on projects, a relationship bond is formed (Levin & Lobo, 2009:5), where value is co-created through ongoing provider–customer interaction, relationship marketing serves as a pivotal strategy to foster customer loyalty and sustain long-term partnerships (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:6). Relationships are therefore said to have an impact on perceived value and behavioural intention (Tedja, *et al.*, 2024:3).

Effective communication is critical to these partnerships, serving as a key determinant of relationship success or failure (Heo, 2010:25). Mutual value creation, trust and commitment are the foundation for relationships (Sureshchandar, 2023:135). Trust, the expectancy of a positive outcome, reduces uncertainty, and is essential in forming, sustaining, and defining the strength of a relationship (Arthur, *et al.*, 2022:936; Sureshchandar, 2023:135). Clients entrust their brands' messaging (and often large budgets) to the agency, so a solid foundation of trust is needed for the relationship to flourish long-term (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:22). Trust is the foundation for long-term relationships (Tangchua & Vanichchinchai, 2024:1341) and is the most key factor for agency sustainability, as it is essential for overcoming and alleviating the risks and uncertainty associated with service characteristics (Xu, 2022:1).

Trust is regarded as a behavioural intention and is a decisive indicator of both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:3). Trust underpins relational depth in B2B partnerships by encouraging cooperative behaviours that foster long-term relational continuity (Doney & Cannon, 1997:37). Numerous studies in relationship marketing have identified trust, often coupled with commitment, as a key predictor of loyalty and partnership longevity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Customer trust is defined as the expectation that service providers will reliably fulfil promises and arises from demonstrated competence, integrity, fairness, and benevolence (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2022:643; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:276). When parties perceive reliability, integrity, competence, fairness, and benevolence in their partner, they are more likely to extend trust and commit to sustained collaboration (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:23; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:276). This reciprocal trust, characterised by mutual obligations and consistent performance, increases the probability of forming enduring relationships and deepens relational bonds over time (Aderinkomi, 2022:11).

While trust is a necessary condition for loyalty, it must be supported by commitment, satisfaction, and value perceptions to sustain long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:22-23). Ultimately, high levels of both trust and commitment, supported by clear communication and effective conflict handling, are the strongest predictors of customer loyalty in service relationships (Supriyanto, *et al.*, 2021:2). Transparent, two-way communication is the cornerstone of successful client-agency partnerships, guiding mutual understanding, alignment, and trust (Mohr & Nevin, 1990:42).

High-quality relationships are built on foundational components such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Arthur, *et al.*, 2022:935), which together define the overall health of interorganisational ties (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2021:703). Relationship quality influences customer loyalty (Tangchua & Vanichchinchai, 2024:1339)

By enabling these significant bonds, relationship marketing enhances marketing efficiency and significantly deepens customer loyalty, reducing acquisition costs and enabling rich database development for more focused and targeted outreach (Aderinkomi, 2022:10). Relationship marketing is linked to relationship quality and behavioural outcomes, impacting satisfaction (Tedja, *et al.*, 2024:3; Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2021:702).

Perceived value and satisfaction are both precursors to the customer's intention to continue the relationship (Tedja, *et al.*, 2025:4), while trust plays a mediating role in maintaining long-term relationships (Xu, 2022:2).

According to Levin, *et al.* (2016:10) relationships are critical to all businesses. Whilst general relationship issues are cited as the most important area of client concern during agency reviews, most research on relationships focuses on the supplier side rather than the client side (Levin, *et al.*, 2016:10).

Effective relationship marketing in service environments is firmly grounded in clear, timely, and consistent communication, which, alongside trust and service quality, plays a key role in building customer loyalty (Aka, Kehinde & Ogunnaike., 2016:188).

Poor communication invariably leads to clients and agencies parting ways, undermining collaboration, and outcomes (Heo, 2010:14). Conversely, robust communication practices guide mutual understanding, align strategic objectives, and improve trust levels, thereby improving client retention and long-term loyalty (Heo, 2010:25; Aderinkomi, 2022:12).

The inherent intangibility of services makes professional service firms particularly suited to relationship marketing, as they rely on these sustained interactions rather than tangible products to deliver value (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:47).

Relationship marketing theory emphasises mutual benefits and commitments as pillars of long-term interfirm engagement; however, client-agency research has historically prioritised clients' expectations over those of the agencies, overlooking reciprocal obligations (Andaleeb, 1996; Berry, 1995; Dwyer & Oh, 1987; Frazier, Spekman & O'Neal, 1988; Heo, 2010:13).

Relational depth goes hand in hand with trust. In client-agency relationships, it reflects strong personal bonds characterised by mutual understanding, commitment, and satisfaction, which together guide long-term loyalty (Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990:70). It allows the agency to push creative boundaries in ways that win market success for the client, which in turn further cements the client's loyalty (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022).

This research study provides propositions related to relational drivers:

**Proposition 2a:** Relational drivers are positively related to customer satisfaction.

**Proposition 2b:** Relational drivers are positively related to customers' perceived value.

### **2.5.3 Customer Satisfaction**

For satisfaction to affect loyalty, frequent or cumulative satisfaction is required so that individual satisfaction episodes become aggregated or blended (Oliver, 1999:34; Xu, 2022:3). Customer satisfaction is a strong predictor of behavioural loyalty such as repurchase intention (Sureshchandar, 2023:135). Tedja, *et al.* (2024:4), state that satisfaction is a function of perceived value wherein a customer's satisfaction depends on the level of perceived value. There is a strong direct and indirect relationship – related to other factors – between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:3)

Satisfaction, which is improved by service quality (Tangchua & Vanichchinchai, 2024:1339), is core to customer loyalty (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2021:702). Satisfaction leads to high commitment and loyalty (Supriyanto, 2021:2) and is proposed to mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty (Han, *et al.*, 2008:8; Sitorius & Yustisia, 2022:641; Yudanegara, 2023:792).

The important issue of customer satisfaction has been studied since the 1970s (Deng, *et al.*, 2010; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:9). According to Durvasula, Lysonski & Mehta. (2003:61)

customer satisfaction has been regarded as the ultimate business goal (Levin, *et al.*, 2016:9).

In B2B service contexts, customer satisfaction is the cornerstone of long-term partnerships, as it not only reflects whether providers meet or exceed expectations but also mediates the impact of service quality on loyalty (Tjizumaue & Atiku, 2024:5; Supriyanto, *et al.*, 2021:7).

Satisfaction emerges when post-purchase evaluations align with prior expectations, serving as a dynamic predictor of business performance across sectors (Nguyen, *et al.*, 2024:3). Since services are in fact customised and intangible, firms must progress from broad segmentation to individualised cost-benefit analyses to effectively manage satisfaction (Cugini, Carù & Zerbini, 2007:56).

Satisfied B2B buyers are far more likely to remain committed and deliver ongoing revenue, thereby positioning satisfaction as both an antecedent of loyalty and a driver of firm profitability (Cannon & Homburg, 2001; Cugini, *et al.*, 2007:55; Wang, *et al.*, 2023:2396).

**Proposition 3a:** Customer Satisfaction is positively related to Perceived Value.

**Proposition 3b:** Customer Satisfaction is positively related to Switching Costs.

**Proposition 3c:** Customer Satisfaction is positively related to Customer loyalty.

#### **2.5.4 Perceived Value**

There are many reasons organisations enter and maintain business relationships, but it is unlikely that in a competitive marketplace, organisations would continue to use the services or products of a supplier if they did not receive value through this relationship (Shirin & Puth, 2011; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:8).

Although client firms can switch advertising agencies with relative ease, often overlooking the intangible risks involved in “divorcing” a partner, organisations can bolster loyalty by enhancing perceived value and raising exit barriers (Heo, 2010:24).

In B2B settings, customer-perceived value, rooted in careful assessments of long-term benefits versus costs, serves as a primary loyalty driver (Ramaseshan, *et al.*, 2013; Levin, *et al.*, 2016:276).

Finally, perceived value strengthens pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy, each of which exerts a powerful influence on attitudinal loyalty (Sánchez-del-Río-Vázquez, *et al.*,

2024:16).

**Proposition 4a:** Perceived Value is positively related to Customer Loyalty.

### **2.5.5 Switching Costs**

The amount of switching costs directly impacts customer loyalty (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2021:702; Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:3). Switching costs of B2B are more than those of B2C and therefore require stronger relationships and loyalty (Tangchua & Vanichchinchai, 2024:1340)

Perceived switching costs exert the strongest direct influence on loyalty, surpassing satisfaction, service quality, and corporate image by dampening price sensitivity and cementing long-term customer ties (Stan, *et al.*, 2013:1549).

Switching costs, both monetary and non-monetary, increase the cost of exit and drive continued patronage and advocacy (Stan, *et al.*, 2013:1545) and may influence B2B partners to remain in a relationship (Arthur, *et al.*, 2022:937).

These switching costs that encompass procedural, financial, and relational aspects are vital for client retention, even in the face of waning satisfaction levels (Burnham, Frels & Mahajan, 2003:110; Chen & Wang, 2009:1111; Ha *et al.*, 2023:4).

**Proposition 5a:** Switching costs are positively related to customer loyalty.

## **2.6 Antecedents of Customer Loyalty Specific to the Advertising Industry**

While the previously discussed antecedents apply broadly across B2B and service industries, the following aspects have been found to be specifically relevant in the advertising context. Drawing on advertising industry literature, the proposed antecedents to customer loyalty for an advertising agency are presented below.

### **2.6.1 Account Management Quality**

Global research shows that client service quality and results drive client-agency retention; if these deteriorate, even established relationships may not survive (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:23). In B2B services like advertising, long-term customer loyalty is supported by trust, which develops through ongoing interactions, relationship management, and mutual commitment (Doney & Cannon, 1997:37).

Account support should be an important element in relationship management as advertisers consider the “quality of people assigned to the account” as a critical attribute in the overall agency evaluation/selection process (Jansen van Rensburg, Venter &

Strydom, 2009:27).

Research provides that the quality of client-agency working relationships has a strong influence on loyalty outcomes. As an illustrative example, a formal study in Brazil found that a client's relationship quality with their account manager had a direct positive effect on the client's loyalty and perceived relationship value (Alejandro, Souza, Boles & Monteiro, 2011:1).

Interestingly, the most influential sources of account dissolution have been attributed to clients' perception of dissatisfying service quality based on either creativity or the quality of working relationships (Davies & Palihawadana, 2006).

**Proposition 6a:** Account Management Quality is positively related to Loyalty.

### ***2.6.2 Creativity and Creative Output***

Creativity is a core success factor for advertising agencies and directly affects satisfaction (Levin & Lobo 2009:4).

The creative output of an advertising agency and the strategic insight underpinning that creativity is a crucial driver of client loyalty. Creativity in service delivery has been shown to increase clients' satisfaction and their trust in the agency's capabilities (Beverland, Farrelly & Woodhatch, 2007:55; Jansen van Rensburg, 2010:36).

In the realm of creative output and strategic insight, deep client-agency relationships yield both substantial benefits and notable risks. On the positive side, long-term partnerships enable agencies to internalise client objectives and deliver campaigns that resonate strategically, leveraging familiarity and sustained collaboration to enhance relevance and effectiveness (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385).

However, this same closeness can give rise to opportunistic behaviours, what some scholars term the "dark side" of agency relations, where agencies, secure in their position, may deprioritise innovation and responsiveness to new briefs, thereby reducing campaign originality (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385).

Despite these concerns, the intrinsic motivation of well-aligned agency teams can counteract complacency, allowing firms to reap the rewards of deep collaboration in the form of high-quality creative work that balances strategic alignment with fresh innovation (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:401).

**Proposition 7a:** Creativity and Creative Output are positively related to Customer Loyalty.

### **2.6.3 Responsiveness and Agility**

In service environments, responsiveness practices such as delivery fulfillment, speed, and after-sale service contribute to customer loyalty by enhancing repurchase behaviour and satisfaction (Saad, Elgazzar & Mlaker-Kac, 2022:6).

In B2B services such as advertising, responsiveness and agility are key drivers of client (customer) loyalty, as agencies that continuously adapt processes and deliverables to meet evolving client needs strengthen trust and long-term commitment (Davies & Prince, 2005:3-4).

A recent industry survey highlighted this well: 50% of B2B marketers said they want greater execution speed and agility from their agencies (Brohan, 2024).

Service quality research has long identified responsiveness, the willingness to help a client and provide prompt service, as a key driver of client satisfaction (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1988:21).

Responsiveness, one of the five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model, reflects an organisation's willingness and ability to provide prompt service and help customers in a timely manner, thereby shaping perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985:46-48).

**Proposition 8A:** Responsiveness and Agility are positively related to Customer Loyalty.

### **2.6.4 Agency Reputation and Brand Equity**

Agency reputation reflects its position against other competitors, plays an important role in the customer's mind and has a direct impact on customer loyalty (Alkhateeb & Shivaraj, 2018:3). An agency's reputation and brand equity can strongly influence client (customer) loyalty by serving as a signal of quality, reliability, and trust in B2B relationships (Ali, 2022:35).

A strong agency reputation and corporate image serve as critical components of brand equity in the service sector, directly influencing both customer satisfaction and loyalty (Tahir, Adnan & Saeed, 2024:1669). In the context of advertising agencies, one would expect that previous experience with a particular agency or agencies in general would influence expectations (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014:3).

By reducing perceived risk and differentiating agencies in a crowded market, a positive reputation increases customer preference and leads to repeat engagements (Stan, *et al.*, 2013:1544).

**Proposition 9a:** A strong reputation relates positively to perceived risk and positively relates to enhancing loyalty.

### **2.6.5 Alignment with Client Business Goals**

Clients in the broader advertising industry tend to remain loyal to agencies that demonstrate alignment with their business goals and values, as shared understanding, commonly referred to as "value fit," has been shown to positively influence brand loyalty in B2B service environments (Quester, Thompson & Farrelly, 2006).

Clients often rely on intangible cues, such as the perceived strength of their relationship with the agency to assess service quality and alignment with their business goals (Heo, 2010:24).

When these relationships are strong and collaborative, agencies gain deeper insight into client objectives and can craft campaigns that resonate strategically, thereby enhancing both campaign effectiveness and business impact (Koslow, *et al.*, 2022:385).

**Proposition 10a:** Alignment with Client Business Goals is positively related to Customer Loyalty.

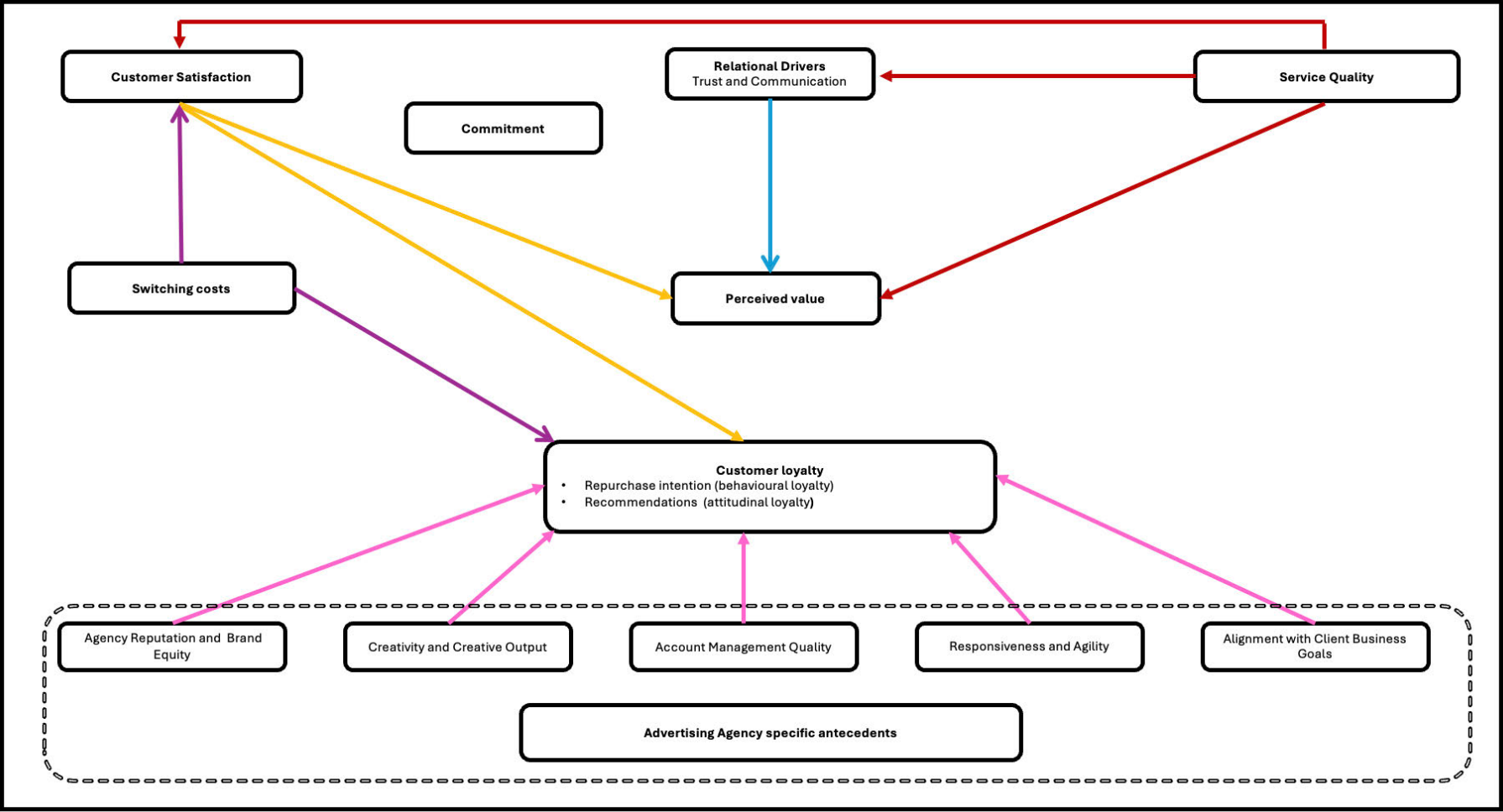
## **2.7 Proposed Conceptual Framework**

According to van der Walddt (2020:4) a conceptual framework should be regarded as both the result and focus of a literature review wherein the result (1) identifies relevant and related concepts, (2) determines the potential connections and interrelationships between concepts and (3) identifies suitable theories by which to embed the study. A conceptual framework is a series of sequences, logical propositions aimed to convince readers of the importance and rigor of the study.

Each of these connections and interrelationships is called a proposition, and deals with the connection between two existing concepts, which cannot be tested directly, instead they are tested indirectly by examining the relationship between constructs (Agrawal, Wankhede, Kumar, Luthra & Huisinsh, 2021:559; Slater, Mohr & Sengupta, 2014:556).

The framework was informed by a variety of authors and is comparable to Dick and Basu's (1994:100) theoretical model distinguishing between behavioural and attitudinal aspects of loyalty.

Figure 2.1: Proposed Conceptual Framework



To align the propositions stated above, the conceptual framework, and the underlying theory, Table 2.1 below provides an outline of the links between these elements:

**Table 2.1: Sources and outcomes of advertising agency customer loyalty antecedents.**

| Proposition & Expected relationship | Relationship                                                            | Theoretical Basis                                       | Supporting Literature                                               | Justification                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1a<br>Positive                     | Service Quality → Relational Drivers (Trust, Commitment, Communication) | SERVQUAL, Grönroos Service Model                        | Han, et al. (2008); Sitorus & Yustisia (2018); Morgan & Hunt (1994) | High service quality builds confidence, enhancing trust and commitment in agency–client relationships. |
| P1b<br>Positive                     | Service Quality → Customer Satisfaction                                 | Expectation-Disconfirmation                             | Oliver (1999); Tangchua & Vanichchinchai (2024)                     | Meeting/exceeding expectations via service quality increases satisfaction levels.                      |
| P1c<br>Positive                     | Service Quality → Perceived Value                                       | Social Exchange Theory                                  | Chen (2022); Tedja, et al. (2024)                                   | High service quality enhances perceptions of value relative to cost.                                   |
| P2a<br>Positive a                   | Relational Drivers → Customer Satisfaction                              | Commitment-Trust Theory                                 | Morgan & Hunt (1994); Supriyanto (2021)                             | Strong relational bonds foster satisfaction through trust and commitment.                              |
| P2b<br>Positive                     | Relational Drivers → Perceived Value                                    | Social Exchange Theory                                  | Sureshchandar (2023); Crosby, et al. (1990)                         | Trust and communication improve perceptions of value in the relationship.                              |
| P3a<br>Positive                     | Customer Satisfaction → Perceived Value                                 | Expectation-Disconfirmation                             | Tedja, et al. (2024); Supriyanto (2021)                             | Satisfied clients view the relationship as offering superior value.                                    |
| P3b<br>Positive                     | Customer Satisfaction → Switching Costs                                 | Expectation-Disconfirmation; Transaction Cost Economics | Stan, et al. (2013); Burnham, et al. (2003)                         | Higher satisfaction raises the perceived cost of switching due to relational investment.               |
| P3c<br>Positive                     | Customer Satisfaction → Customer Loyalty                                | Oliver's Loyalty Framework                              | Oliver (1999); Alkhateeb & Shivaraj (2018)                          | Satisfied clients are more likely to remain loyal and repurchase services.                             |

|                  |                                                               |                                              |                                                                                     |                                                                                         |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P4a<br>Positive  | Perceived Value →<br>Customer Loyalty                         | Social Exchange<br>Theory                    | Ramaseshan, <i>et al.</i> (2013);<br>Levin <i>et al.</i> (2016)                     | High perceived value drives attitudinal and<br>behavioural loyalty.                     |
| P5a<br>Positive  | Switching Costs →<br>Customer Loyalty                         | Transaction Cost<br>Economics                | Stan, <i>et al.</i> (2013); Chen &<br>Wang (2009)                                   | High switching costs lock clients into long-term<br>relationships despite alternatives. |
| P6a<br>Positive  | Account Management<br>Quality → Customer<br>Loyalty           | Relationship<br>Marketing                    | Alejandro, <i>et al.</i> (2011); Jansen<br>van Rensburg, Venter &<br>Strydom (2009) | Strong account management improves<br>relationship quality, fostering loyalty.          |
| P7a<br>Positive  | Creativity & Creative<br>Output → Customer<br>Loyalty         | Service-Dominant<br>Logic (Vargo &<br>Lusch) | Beverland, <i>et al.</i> (2007);<br>Koslow, et al. (2022)                           | Innovative creative work strengthens<br>satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.               |
| P8a<br>Positive  | Responsiveness & Agility<br>→ Customer Loyalty                | SERVQUAL<br>(Responsiveness<br>dimension)    | Parasuraman, <i>et al.</i> (1985) ;<br>Davies & Prince (2005)                       | Agencies that adapt quickly to client needs<br>increase satisfaction and retention.     |
| P9a<br>Positive  | Reputation & Brand Equity<br>→ Customer Loyalty               | Signalling Theory                            | Ali (2022); Tahir, <i>et al.</i> (2024)                                             | Strong reputation reduces perceived risk and<br>enhances loyalty.                       |
| P10a<br>Positive | Alignment with Client<br>Business Goals →<br>Customer Loyalty | Relationship<br>Marketing / Value Fit        | Quester, et al. (2006); Koslow,<br><i>et al.</i> (2022)                             | Strategic alignment fosters deep partnerships,<br>increasing loyalty.                   |

Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of the propositions related to each of the antecedents to customer loyalty as identified in the B2B and service sector literature explored, including advertising industry- and agency-related literature focused more specifically on client retention and client-agency relationships. Column two provides the directions of the proposed relationships, followed by the underlying theory for each proposition in column three found and as presented in the customer loyalty theories section above. Column four provides references to supporting literature for the propositions and finally column five provides a justification for the stated proposition. Proposition and their expected relationships are colour coded to reflect the arrows on the conceptual framework.

Based on the conceptual framework proposed in Figure 2.1 above, the research not only identifies and proposes antecedents to customer loyalty found to be relevant in both the B2B and service sector but includes various advertising agency specific antecedents.

These antecedents would be considered a new contribution to the research as, despite literature related to the creative process and creativity of advertising agencies, the client retention and client-agency relationship management tools, there was little to no evidence of the inclusion of account management quality, responsiveness and agility of the agency to not only undertake the requested brief, but to be able to be flexible and responsive when things within the micro, market, and macro environments change.

Interestingly the concept of service quality – although discussed in length in terms of previous research and the possible relationship with customer loyalty - the literature reviewed indicated that despite the importance of service quality to a service sector organisation, the concept leads to other aspects such as relational quality and perceived value, which then lead to customer loyalty.

Taken together, the literature positions customer loyalty as a multidimensional construct shaped by both relational and performance-based factors. Service quality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, perceived value, and switching costs interact with industry-specific antecedents such as creativity, agility, and strategic alignment to support long-term relationships in B2B service settings.

## **2.8 Summary of Gaps and Rationale for the Study**

Despite extensive scholarship on customer loyalty within general service and consumer markets, research focused on B2B service relationships, particularly within the advertising industry, remains underdeveloped.

While the literature identifies multiple antecedents of customer loyalty such as service quality, satisfaction, trust, commitment, perceived value, and communication, much of this work stems from broader B2B or B2C contexts with limited sector-specific validation in professional services like advertising.

In the South African context, empirical studies examining how these loyalty drivers interact within the country's unique economic, cultural, and industry dynamics are scarce. In addition, while models such as SERVQUAL, Commitment-Trust Theory, and Relationship Marketing Theory offer useful theoretical frameworks, few studies have comprehensively applied these models to advertising client-agency relationships in emerging markets.

Given South Africa's rapidly evolving advertising landscape, characterised by economic pressures, agency consolidation, growing procurement influence, and the rising importance of integrated, long-term partnerships, there is a clear need for focused

research addressing the specific antecedents of customer loyalty in this sector.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a qualitative analysis of loyalty determinants in South Africa's B2B advertising industry, offering contextually relevant insights that may inform both agency practice and academic understanding of relationship management in service-intensive B2B environments.

In summary, this literature review has critically examined the concept of customer loyalty in B2B service contexts, with particular emphasis on the advertising industry, and has identified key antecedents that influence loyalty. The proposed conceptual framework provides a foundation for investigating these factors in the study. The next chapter outlines the research design and methodology that will be employed to explore these antecedents and address the identified research gaps.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological framework used to determine the antecedents of customer loyalty within South Africa’s B2B advertising sector.

Building on the literature review presented in Chapter 2, which articulated the theoretical foundations for the study, this chapter now outlines the research context and design, which will be discussed in detail, validating the systematic process and ensuring transparency.

The chapter begins by presenting the proposed antecedents to customer loyalty for advertising agencies, clearly defining them for the codebook to structure the analysis. The research context and design will follow, detailing the scientific process of the research.

The research method, population, sampling, data collection plan, trustworthiness and data analysis plan will be described. This is followed by an explanation of the design of the research instrument, in context of the proposed customer loyalty antecedents. The chapter then concludes by outlining the study’s limitations and key ethical safeguards, including measures to manage the dual role of the researcher as both agency owner and academic investigator.

3.2 Research context and design

The research context section provides an overview of the ontology and epistemology of the research study. The research design presents the approach to the research, the type of research, the unitising of data for analysis, and the sampling units. The choice of research design will be discussed and aligned with the research problem and purpose. Lastly, the trustworthiness of the study will be addressed.

Table 3.1: Research design

|                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ontology          | Relativist                  |
| Epistemology      | Interpretivist              |
| Research Approach | Deductive dominant approach |
| Research Design   | Exploratory                 |

|                        |                                             |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Research Methodology   | Mono-method Qualitative                     |
| Time Horizon           | Cross-sectional                             |
| Sampling Method        | Non-probability, Purposive sampling         |
| Unit of Analysis       | Advertising agency executives and customers |
| Data Collection Method | Semi-structured interviews                  |
| Data Analysis Method   | Deductive qualitative analysis              |
| Sample Size            | 12                                          |

### ***3.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology***

A paradigm can be understood as an overarching framework that integrates beliefs about reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and research practices (methodology), collectively upheld by a scientific community (Ma & Ma, 2022:10).

The ontological assumption is the starting point for researchers (Pessu, 2019:29) and is concerned with the fundamental nature of reality itself, which is essential to how researchers frame and ultimately make sense of phenomena (Ma & Ma, 2022:11). Tuli (2010:101) proposes that because knowledge arises from ontological assumptions, there is a close interdependence between ontological and epistemological positions (Ma & Ma, 2022:11; Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:5).

This study adopts a relativist ontology, whereby reality is subjective, variable, and shaped through human interaction (Pretorius, 2024:2698). Guba and Lincoln (1994:39) argue that within a relativist ontology, reality is inherently subjective, shaped by each person experiencing it in their own unique way or as a collective experience. Pessu (2019:3) states that subjectivism is built on the foundation that interaction and dialogue between the researcher and participants will provide a clearer understanding and answers.

The antecedents to customer loyalty to the advertising industry are not approached as a singular fact to be discovered, but as a phenomenon experienced and made sense of in a multitude of ways and determined based on each consumer's perspective.

Epistemology and methodology are driven by ontological beliefs (Pessu, 2019:3) and epistemology looks at how knowledge is construed and what we accept as valid knowledge (Vu, 2021). Epistemology examines the relationship between the researcher

and the researched and how we come to know what we know (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). The multiple realities that exist are built between the researcher and participants and that the meaning of the world that someone experiences is generated through social interaction with people (Kamal, 2019:1391). An interpretivist epistemology is suitable for this study as it assumes that knowledge co-constructed by researchers and participants, not simply available to be objectively measured.

Emphasising subjective interpretation allows the researcher to honour the participant's personal perspective while considering the contextual environment in which the phenomenon occurs (Horsfall, Byrne-Armstrong & Higgs., 2001). According to Boswell & Babchuk, (2022:4), people are experts on their own lives, and the participant functions as the expert in the study. Ayton and Tsindos (2023) contend that in interpretivist epistemology, the researcher reveals the truth of a situation by thinking and through analysis, rather than just using sensory observation. In other words, understanding is dependent on interaction and interpretation.

In more practical terms, the researcher will listen to interviewees' narratives of B2B loyalty and selectively engage with those explanations, critically identifying and theorising different constructed versions of reality (Braun & Braun, 2013:2). Through this subjectivist lens, findings are seen as authentic understandings produced by the research encounter rather than objective facts, recognising that the researcher's co-interpretation is part of the knowledge produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013:4).

In other words, interpretivists do not seek a single objective truth; they instead explore how actors in context create and negotiate realities (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022:14). Importantly, interpretivism assumes that the researcher cannot be a detached observer. Despite this, critical reflection on the research process from the researcher, including both insider and outsider positions as when the researcher has insider status there is a shared group identity with participants (Clarke & Braun, 2013:4). Importantly, it would be astute for the researcher to take note of power dynamics through a reflective process, which is defined as searching the self in relation to others, scrutinising the positionality of the researcher (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:4). Disclosures of the researchers' position relative to the participants, data, and the research process are needed for a strong qualitative study (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:4).

Interpretivism recognises that it is impossible to remove cultural and individual influence from research and highlights the importance of recognising the diversity of human experiences (Pretorius, 2022:2705). Rather than attempting to ensure absolute

objectivity, it often embraces the researcher's positionality and the socio-cultural context as essential parts of how understanding is created, with a focus on uncovering the meanings that people attach to their experience (Pretorius, 2024:2705). Methodology is the way we acquire knowledge systematically, and the methodological approach is driven by, and aligned with, the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs (Pessu, 2019:4; Kamal, 2019:1391). Methodologically, the relativist ontological stance justifies a case-by-case approach, rather than seeking a universal measure of customer loyalty, resulting in the study determining each customer's constructed reality perspective of the antecedents of customer loyalty.

The fundamental question of methodology is how we should go about acquiring knowledge. The specific methods employed should be deliberately chosen for their appropriateness to the overall design and their ability to answer the research question (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:5). In adopting an interpretivist epistemology and relativist ontology, through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, the research will uncover how advertising agency customers and executives interpret customer loyalty based on their unique background and interactions (Pretorius, 2024:2708). The choice of paradigm shapes not only the methods that will be used but the type of knowledge that will be generated, by carefully aligning the research questions, objectives, and design to the paradigm. The researcher thus ensures that the study is coherent, ethically sound, and methodologically appropriate (Pretorius, 2024:2708).

### **3.2.2 Research Approach and Design**

Rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, this study employs a deductive qualitative approach. The research strategy will employ semi-structured interviews, and the time horizon will be cross-sectional. The purpose of the research is to understand the antecedents to customer loyalty in the advertising industry by reviewing existing customer loyalty literature and theory in the B2B and service sectors and proposing a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework presents the antecedents to customer loyalty for an advertising agency from both the perspective of the agency and customers and requires refining, testing, and further development, using a deductive qualitative approach (Assarroundi *et al.*, 2018:43; Pearse, 2021:96).

According to Srnka and Koeszegi (2007:29-30), because of a better understanding of human behaviour in complex business contexts, there is a growing need to develop relevant new theory in business and management sciences. Marketing research, according to Hyde (2000:81), traditionally prioritises deductive procedures, and

methodologies that demonstrate the progression of marketing science are those that are conducive to confirmatory rather than discovering theories. The result is that social scientists still work with quantitative methods requiring hypothesis testing and statistical analyses (Srnrka & Koeszegi, 2007:30), while qualitative research publications in business research being less prevalent (Pearse, 2019:95).

Deductive reasoning serves as a theory-testing mechanism, allowing researchers to evaluate the relevance of established ideas in particular empirical contexts (Hyde, 2000:83, Locsin & Schoenhofer, 2024:1). Within a deductive qualitative approach, researchers can combine deductive and inductive analysis to examine supporting and contradictory findings, to refine or expand evidence for the conceptual framework being studied, which results in a theory that is better suited to present the sample, accounting for increased diversity in the phenomenon being studied (Fife & Gossner, 2024:1). Proponents of the deductive qualitative approach, Bergdahl and Bertero (2022:1) state that *“knowledge development is a deductive trial-and-error process where theory creation is followed by testing.”*

According to Hyde (2000:82), deductive reasoning begins with generalisations and aims to see if these generalisations apply to a specific instance. Employing such structured deductive techniques can significantly enhance the reliability and persuasiveness of qualitative research outcomes (Hyde, 2000:83). Özden (2024:67) states that if the research aims to test a theory or proposed framework in a different situation, a deductive approach is appropriate.

A deductive qualitative approach has been implemented in previous research, such as Liu and Hei's (2021) research on Generation Z consumers' attitudes towards sustainable fashion and marketing activities regarding sustainable fashion. In this study, Lui and Hei (2021:29) developed a framework after reviewing relevant literature and proposing the combination of existing sustainable fashion theories. A deductive qualitative approach was applied by developing interview questions from the proposed framework and the evaluation of literature.

The study started with a frame of reference, namely the framework, which was then tested against reality (Liu & Hei, 2021:32). Similarly, Yu, Rahman, Marlatt and Robichaud's (2021) research into the experiential value and shopping well-being of aging consumers made use of a deductive qualitative approach, which was based on the authors' proposed analytic framework. The authors developed a category scheme relevant to the research objectives and analytic framework to analyse the data (Yu, *et al.*, 2021:172). Dimitri's

(2024) study on exploring the role of the servicescape in value creation in a digital and post-COVID society applied a deductive qualitative approach when asking interview questions related to the proposed conceptual framework exploring the servicescape as a value-creation tool (Dimitri, 2024:92). As with these studies, this research has proposed a conceptual framework, derived from customer loyalty theory and literature, requiring a deductive qualitative approach to test the framework.

In applying a deductive qualitative approach, the relevance of existing customer loyalty constructs will be tested to discover and report relationships between constructs (Boru, 2018:3). In collecting interview data to address these ‘*why*’ and ‘*how*’ questions, the study is a mono-method exploratory study.

One of the fundamental advantages of utilising qualitative research is its ability to highlight processes underpinning customer loyalty outcomes, which are areas where survey or experimental methods often fail (Azungah, 2018:385). In deductive research, inquiry starts with an existing theoretical framework/model and then proceeds from broad general principles through to specific applications (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:109).

Incorporating deductive logic into qualitative methodology brings about improved analytical clarity and strengthens the robustness of the study findings (Hyde, 2000:84). Although historically aligned with quantitative traditions, deductive approaches are now gaining traction within qualitative paradigms and enabling methodological complementarity (Hyde, 2000:85). In this context, deductive research leverages firmly established theory to explore meaning-making, interactional processes and relational dynamics (Fife & Gossner, 2024:1). Approaches of this nature are also instrumental in refining and evolving theoretical constructs (Locsin & Schoenhofer, 2024:1–2). Conducting qualitative research will prioritise rich, in-depth understanding over statistical generalisation, aiming to understand how meaning emerges through the interaction between the researcher and the participant within a specific organisational environment.

### **3.3 Research method**

This section will present and explain the systematic and transparent strategy that was used in conducting this research.

#### ***3.3.1 Population and sampling strategy***

The population refers to the complete group of individuals or cases that are relevant to a study. For this study, the population includes both sides of the client-agency relationship within South Africa’s advertising industry. Specifically, the focus is on agency executives

(CEOs and MDs) and agency customers who are senior marketing and procurement executives from the blue-chip B2B clients of a medium-sized, full-service creative agency, defined in this study as an agency operating at a national level with offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town and a defined internal team structure rather than a multi-market global network. These customers may not work exclusively with this agency and may engage with multiple other agencies depending on specialisation.

These participants represent the unit of analysis, as the study seeks to understand their personal experiences and perspectives related to customer loyalty in agency relationships. In deductive qualitative literature, there are no established criteria for the size of a unit of analysis, the number of participants to study, or the number of pages based on the informants' own written text or transcribed data (Bengtsson, 2016:10).

The total population size for the study is estimated at 60 individuals, consisting of fifteen agency customer client organisations (with approximately three respondents each) and ten advertising agencies (with one to two executives each). Given the qualitative nature of the research, the study will target a sample size of twelve participants, with approximately eight agency customers and four agency executives, or until the point of data saturation is reached.

Data saturation for qualitative research indicates the stage in the data collection when additional interviews no longer actually yield original insights or themes, representing that a thorough comprehension of the research phenomenon has been achieved (Qualtrics, 2025). However, when analysing data using DQCA, data saturation occurs when the existing coding structure is exhaustively applied and no additional data would add to the understanding of the coding categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2014:114; Assaroudi, *et al.*, 2018:49). This principle assists in ensuring that data is sufficiently rich and robust without unnecessary redundancy.

One of the initial steps involved with the deductive qualitative analysis process is to devise a sampling strategy that consists of 'key informants' (Alyaqoub, Alsharairi, Zammad & Aslam, 2024:109). Non-probability, purposive sampling was employed for this study. Non-probability sampling methods are equated with non-random sampling techniques (Muzari, *et al.*, 2022:16).

Purposive sampling is used with small samples where selected cases are particularly informative about the subject (Muzari, *et al.*, 2022:16). This method is used when the question the researcher is interested in answering is of utmost importance (Tongco, 2007:147). According to Fife and Gossner (2024:5), as is common with qualitative

research, deductive analysis relies on purposive sampling for an in-depth understanding of the topic. Boswell and Babchuk (2022:10) agree that most qualitative studies make use of purposive sampling, which is philosophically aligned with the belief that people's expertise with ordinary facets of their lives is the reason for their selection as participants. Purposive sampling is a non-representative subset of a larger population and is constructed to serve a specific need or purpose (Raj & Thapa, 2004:6).

The study will make use of a non-probability, purposive sampling method. Non-probability sampling is used when not all units or participants have a certain or fixed probability of being selected to take part in the research study (Vehovar, Toepoel & Steinmetz, 2016:327). Non-probability purposive sampling is characterised by the subjective manner in which participants are selected, all units of the population do not have a certain probability of being selected, the judgement of the researcher affects the selection of the sample participants, there is less chance of ensuring representativeness, and some units in the population have more chance of being selected in the sample than others (Shukla, 2023:1). However, purposive sampling is the most appropriate method as it ensures that both agency customers and executives are selected due to their experience and ability to provide rich, detailed descriptions required to address the research aim. This approach provides access to information-rich individuals through trusted industry networks, facilitating data collection from key stakeholders that are central to the phenomenon of interest.

Agency customers will be purposively selected to ensure they can meaningfully contribute to the study. Eligible participants must be senior or executive-level marketing and procurement professionals from blue-chip companies who currently maintain an active relationship with the focal agency. Their selection is not based on any assumption of loyalty to the agency but rather on their responsibility for managing agency partnerships and their extensive lived experience of working with multiple agencies and industry players both currently and throughout their careers. This makes them the most appropriate representatives to provide insights into the antecedents of customer loyalty.

Agency executives will also be purposively selected. Participants will be senior executives responsible for client relationships, account retention, or overall agency operations. Selection will be limited to executives with whom the researcher has an established professional rapport, ensuring access and depth of insight. Their inclusion is based on their industry knowledge and direct involvement in the factors that shape and sustain client loyalty.

The sample size will consist of approximately twelve participants in total (eight agency customers and four agency executives) or at the point at which data saturation has been reached.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection Plan**

This study collected primary data through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, a method well-suited to the explorative and interpretive nature of the research. An interview is a two-person dialogue that an interviewer initiates for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information (Muzari, *et al.*, 2022:16). Semi-structured interviews are qualitative data collection tools that follow a flexible interview guide comprising open-ended questions, allowing for both consistency and adaptability during the conversation (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016:2955, Lui & Hei, 2021:32). The interviewer has the liberty to ask the participant to further elaborate on the original answer or to follow a line of enquiry introduced by the participant (Muzari, *et al.*, 2022:17). The semi-structured format provides a balance between guided questioning and participant-led elaboration, allowing for rich and nuanced responses. This also facilitates comparison and validation across different interviews (Azungah, 2018:387).

Semi-structured interviews closely align with a qualitative approach that seeks to understand “*how*” and “*why*” questions. They are grounded in an ontological and epistemological position that assumes reality is socially constructed and interpreted through the lenses of individual worldviews (Azungah, 2018:387). Qualitative interviewing provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of the phenomenon being studied, about which the interviewee has substantial experience and insight (Roberts, 2020:3186). For qualitative researchers, reality has multiple realities, as constructed by individuals within particular social and cultural contexts (Naz, Gulab & Aslam, 2022:42).

In the context of this study on understanding the antecedents to customer loyalty within the advertising industry for the advertising agency, semi-structured interviews give voice to both agency executives and customer definitions of what fosters loyalty, as behaviour of individuals towards a particular situation is context-related, context-dependent, and context-rich (Naz, *et al.*, 2022:43).

Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher gains an understanding of the world from the participants’ point of view, unfolding the meaning of their experience. While inductive qualitative research uses open-ended questions, a deductive approach using a directed content analysis will contain initial open-ended questions followed by directed

questions related to addressing the propositions as presented in the conceptual framework (Assarroudi, Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi & Vaismoradi, 2018:36). Directed questions guide how to conduct interviews when using directed methods and ask participants direct questions for each category proposed in the conceptual framework.

Gaining multiple participants' perspectives further strengthens the study's credibility by enabling triangulation of responses (Bryman & Bell, 2015:630; Creswell, 2009:184; Azungah, 2018:389), as agency executives and agency customers may construct meaning differently (Azungah, 2018:387). Allowing participants to speak in their own words enhances the credibility and face validity of qualitative findings (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:82).

Crafting a semi-structured interview guide involves planning and structuring the questions asked during the interview, requiring both creativity and careful preparation (Roberts, 2020:3190). The interview guide aims to ensure that questions addressing specific antecedents to customer loyalty as per the proposed framework have been included; while allowing for probe questions as well as allowing for participants' experiences to unfold (Muzari, *et al.*, 2022:16). The researcher assumes that participant's interpretation of their experience can change and be altered by subsequent knowledge, including what occurs within the interview (Roberts, 2020:3187).

This aligns with the deductive approach and the analysis method selected, where participants will initially be asked to identify and discuss their perspectives on the antecedents to customer loyalty (i.e. an open-ended question), followed by targeted questions about predetermined categories as presented in the conceptual framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281). The aim is to maintain interview flexibility while narrowing down on topics that need to be asked concerning the proposed conceptual framework (Rabionet, 2011:563). Additional questions, designed to probe for information, have been included in the interview guide.

Access to participants will be facilitated through the researcher's existing professional relationships in the South African advertising industry, including executives from advertising agencies with whom the researcher has established rapport, as well as current agency customers. This enables purposive sampling of participants who possess experience working with advertising agencies, alongside knowledgeable agency executives who hold decision-making roles within the client-agency relationship. Customers are selected based on their overall experience with agencies, rather than based on loyalty.

For both agency executives and agency customers purposively selected to take part in the research, the researcher sent an invitation email using their IIE student email address. As the researcher holds the position of Managing Director at the advertising agency from which customers will be recruited, it was critical to communicate that the research was being conducted in a personal academic capacity and was not commissioned by, nor affiliated with, the agency itself, thereby mitigating any potential power dynamics or differentials (Resnik, 2016:10). This distinction was clearly and transparently outlined to avoid any perception of coercion or organisational influence, as transparency is the cornerstone of ethical research and is crucial for establishing and maintaining trust with participants (Qassimi, 2023:4). The email explained how agency customers were purposively selected to participate in the research study. The researcher clearly communicated that the study focuses on customers lived experiences with the advertising industry and their interactions with current and previous agencies, without requesting any specific identifying information.

Based on the researcher's professional position, there are potential ethical considerations regarding susceptibility to coercion or undue influence on customers who are considered vulnerable persons in the context of this study (Resnik, 2016:11). Ethical guidelines require that research includes safeguards to protect the rights and welfare of vulnerable participants and that at its core, the research commits to ensuring strategies for collecting data are responsible, always attend to a professional code of conduct and ensure the safety of all participants involved (Cacciattolo, 2015:56). It will be reiterated that agency customers were selected based on their direct experience working with agencies within the advertising industry, and that the research does not focus on their loyalty to any specific agency.

To achieve this, the ethical consideration requirements outlined in The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009) and best practices based on a thorough review of literature related to ethical considerations involving vulnerable persons (Gordon, 2020; Gaitis, 2023; Qassimi, 2023; van Wijk & Harrison, 2013; Resnik, 2016), was considered and relevant elements were included in the invitation email.

Firstly, the concept of informed consent explains the purpose of the research, ensuring customers and executives that they can make free and informed decisions regarding their

participation and that they are under no obligation to take part as there are no adverse consequences should they choose not to take part in the study (van Wijk & Harrison, 2013:12; The Belmont Report, 1979). Additionally, it was clearly stated that participation is voluntary, and that the participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any stage or refuse to answer any question (Cacciattolo, 2015:58).

The potential benefits of both customer and executive participation were explained in the context of the researcher's aim to actively contribute to the broader context of the research study, which aligns with the principle of beneficence, as the researcher goes beyond the mere absence of harm to emphasise the promotion of well-being and outcomes for research participants (Qassimi, 2023:3; The Belmont Report, 1979).

The invitation email provided a detailed explanation of the data collection process, noting that interviews would be semi-structured, including a brief outline of the types of questions that would be asked. It explicitly stated that the focus is on participants' perceptions, experiences, and expectations relevant to the study and that participants' answers would be considered private and confidentiality is ensured.

Potential participants were informed that the interview was expected to take between 60 to 90 minutes; however, the interviewer was available to conduct this over multiple sessions or scheduled at times most convenient for the participant. Interviews were conducted privately and given that the research was being undertaken in the researcher's capacity, the interview setting was determined based on what was most convenient and comfortable for the participant. Permission to record the interviews was requested, and a detailed explanation of how data would be processed and analysed exclusively for academic research purposes and stored securely on a password-protected folder on the researcher's personal computer was provided. Participants were informed that they may request access to the final data analysis by contacting the researcher directly (Shamoo & Resnik, 2011:74).

Finally, the invitation email encouraged potential participants to raise any concerns, ask questions, or identify any potential risks associated with their participation in the research.

Participants for this study are considered contextually vulnerable, as their vulnerability arises from the research setting and relational dynamics (Gordon, 2020:35). Participants may feel that they are not free to decline participation or may feel implicitly obliged to take part in the research due to their relationship with the researcher. To mitigate this risk, the researcher excluded any customers who have been with the agency for fewer than three years, as client-agency contracts are typically reviewed or renewed at three-year

intervals. This exclusion is intended to minimise the possibility that newer customers may feel coerced into participating or fear that their decision to participate could influence the renewal of their contract with the agency (Resnik, 2016:13).

An additional risk relates to potential response bias, where agency customers may feel compelled to answer questions positively due to the nature of the client-agency relationship. To mitigate this risk, the researcher communicated to participants, before the commencement of the interview, that there are no right or wrong answers. Participants were assured that the purpose of the interview was to gain a genuine understanding of their lived experiences, and that they were under no obligation to provide socially desirable or preferential responses (Resnik, 2016:14).

In summary, the data collection strategy was intentionally designed to strongly support the interpretivist emphasis on contextual meaning-making. Semi-structured interviews provide the appropriate platform for study participants to share their detailed accounts of customer loyalty in B2B and service contexts. The sampling approach ensured access to relevant and diverse voices and opinions within the South African advertising industry.

The combination of a semi-structured interview guide with the flexibility to explore emergent themes supported the study's overarching goal to uncover the socially and culturally constructed antecedents of customer loyalty in South Africa's advertising sector.

### ***3.3.3 Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness***

A qualitative study seeks nuanced, context-specific insights from a small sample and is not designed for statistical generalisation (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:4). Within this paradigm, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the research process, rather than the replication of results. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006:81-82) describe reliability in qualitative research as the extent to which data collection and analysis are conducted systematically and transparently, enabling the research process to be logically followed. The use of triangulation, through comparing data from two or more sources, supports reliability by strengthening the consistency of interpretations across datasets (Coleman, 2021:2044).

Validity, by contrast, concerns the accuracy and credibility of the findings, specifically whether the interpretations genuinely reflect participants' meanings and experiences. In qualitative research, validity can be enhanced through member checking, whereby the researcher informally confirms their interpretations with participants during data collection (Coleman, 2021:2042). Further, the use of participants' own words in the presentation of findings strengthens the credibility and face validity of the study by ensuring that

interpretations remain grounded in the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:81-82).

The most important aspect of trustworthiness is transparency (Adler, 2022:600-601). The use of a conceptual framework, tested using a deductive approach, ensures that the framework is not accepted as fact or unquestionable truth, demonstrating transparency and adding to the credibility of the research (Adler:2022:601). The highly variable nature of the qualitative research process requires complete transparency in presenting research methods (Kakar, Rasheed, Rashid & Akhter, 2023:152; Coleman, 2021:2043). The use of a conceptual framework, from which a semi-structured interview guide was compiled, the detailed transparent discussion related to how data was collected, and the discussion on data analysis, using a coding scheme ensured transparency in presenting the research methods. Rigorous, trustworthy qualitative research is systematic, organised, and iterative, and is developed and articulated through a detailed process of data analysis (Bingham, 2023:1).

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study demonstrates internal validity and confidence in the extent to which the findings are consistent with participants' perceptions of reality, experiences, and opinions (Abidin, Patah, Majid, Usman & Zulkornain, 2024:9). To ensure credibility for this study, interviews were scheduled for between 60 to 90 minutes to enable the researcher to build rapport with participants and deeply understand their perspectives (Ahmed, 2024:2; Lee, Lee, Kim, Lee & Lee., 2022:15). As the Managing Director of the advertising agency, the researcher's role must be one of constant reflexivity where personal biases and preconceptions must be consistently acknowledged (Kakar *et al.*, 2023:151).

Credibility of the research findings aligns with how well the developed categories cover the collected data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:111), however, the deductive approach and directed content analysis used ensured the coverage of categories through collected data. The triangulation of data collected from both agency executives and customers was used to cross-verify findings, further enhancing the research credibility (Adler, 2022:601). Finally, a debriefing session was held with the research supervisor, allowing the researcher to present the findings, to prevent bias and aid in the development of the study (Enworo, 2023:376).

Transferability refers to the external validity of the study and is established by providing an elaborate account of participant's responses and the researcher's interpretation (Abidin, *et al.*, 2024:9). To ensure the transferability of the research, thick descriptions, providing detailed contextual information are presented (Lee, *et al*, 2022:15; Ahmed,

2024:3), to enhance understanding and comprehension for future readers. Transferability concerns the degree to which research findings can be applied to other settings or groups (Khakar, *et al.*, 2023:152). Transferability depends on the clear articulation of the sampling process and criteria, which are presented in detail above, thereby justifying the potential of transferability of findings (Ahmed, 2022:3). Additionally, the researcher will explain how the research findings may or may not apply to other samples, applying reflexively to critique the research methods (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:6). This allows future researchers and practitioners to judge the relevance and the applicability of the findings to their unique contexts (Abidin, *et al.*, 2024:8).

Dependability signifies reliability in quantitative terms and refers to the consistency and repeatability of the research process (Ahmed, 2022:3). To ensure the dependability of the research, detailed methodological documentation of the research process and decisions made ensuring transparency is available, allowing other researchers to replicate the study or assess the dependability of the findings (Kakar, *et al.*, 2023:152; Lee, *et al.*, 2022:15). An audit trail of research decisions, changes, and data analysis processes will be kept facilitating transferability and traceability (Adler, 2022:601). The audit trail aids in establishing the dependability of the research and provides insight into potential bias (Ahmed, 2022:3).

Confirmability addresses objectivity, ensuring that the findings reflect the participants' narratives and are not influenced by the researcher's bias (Khakar, *et al.*, 2023:153). Confirmability for this study was achieved through supervisory debriefing, allowing interpretations of data to be reviewed for potential bias (Ahmed, 2022:4). Additionally, the researcher undertook reflexive journaling throughout the data analysis process, documenting personal thoughts, biases, and reflections (Adler, 2022:602). This enhanced transparency and provided insight into the researcher's subjectivity, contributing to the confirmability of the findings (Ahmed, 2022:4).

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive way by recording, systematising, and disclosing the methods of analysis, detailed enough to be considered credible by the reader (Bingham, 2023:2). By following these principles, the study ensures that the research findings are robust, ethically sound, and academically trustworthy, thus providing meaningful insights into the antecedents of customer loyalty in South Africa's advertising industry.

### **3.3.4 Data Analysis Plan**

This study applied a directed content analysis approach to validate or extend the proposed conceptual framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281). According to Özden (2024:67), this analysis is based on previous information, theories, or proposed models and frameworks and the process progresses from general to specific. The researcher made use of both deductive and inductive approaches in analysing the data, where the deductive approach used a conceptual framework comprising themes for the coding process (Azungha, 2018:391). As a research method, content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena and allows for the distilling of words into fewer concept-related categories (Fife & Gossner, 2024:2; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:107).

Sometimes existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description, requiring the qualitative researcher to use the Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281; Amat, *et al.*, 2018:210). The goal of DQCA, is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory, providing predictions about the variable of interest or about relationships among variables by applying deductive category application (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281; Jntema, *et al.*, 2021:2). Similarly, Fife and Gossner (2024:108) state the intention of DCQA is to systematically test, refine or refute theory through the integration of both deductive and inductive inquiry.

The goal is to produce a concise, yet comprehensive representation of the research phenomenon, with analysis producing results in key themes or categories that encapsulate core aspects of the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:108). This method focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278).

Content analysis is a method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context to provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical action guide (Krippendorff, 1980:130). Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1280) discuss three approaches to qualitative content analysis, based on the degree of involvement of inductive reasoning, with the first approach deriving coding categories inductively. The second approach is Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA) in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings, however during data analysis, the researcher immerses themselves in the data, allowing themes to emerge from data, and this approach is usually used to validate or extend a conceptual framework or theory

(Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1280; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009:2). The third approach is summative content analysis, which begins by counting words or manifest content, extending the analysis to include latent meanings and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1280).

This study adopts DQCA that begins by developing a coding scheme, which is a set of codes, definitions and examples used to help in the analysis of interview data and are essential because they provide a formalised operationalisation of the codes used to guide the data collection and analysis journey (Kibiswa, 2022:2061). Since DQCA is not data-driven, the coding scheme guides the researcher through data collection and analysis, determining the categories, coding rules, or definitions of themes that govern the assignment of each deductive category to a text passage that fits the theory (Kibiswa, 2022:2061).

Deductive codes can be developed as purely organisational categories, categories based on research purpose or questions, or as categories generated from literature or theory (Bingham, 2022:2). DCQA assumes that core themes or categories, aligned with the relevant literature, are likely to be presented within the data (Bradley, Curry & Devers, 2007:1763; Thomas, 2006:238).

As a result of previous research findings on the antecedents to customer loyalty in the B2B and service sector, the research began by using pre-existing categories presented in the proposed conceptual framework, imposed by the theory or previous research findings (Armat, *et al.*, 2018:210), to steer the organisation and classification of transcribed interview data (Azungah, 2018:391). There may be times when data does not align with the coding scheme, requiring new categories to be inductively created or emerged, thereby using both induction and deduction (Armat *et al.*, 2018:210). The research will then accomplish both an inductive and deductive approach concurrently.

A review of DQCA literature highlights several guidelines and processes for analysing interview data. Elo and Kyngäs (2008:111) distinguish between structured and unconstrained approaches to analysis. In a structured approach, a pre-determined coding scheme (or codebook) provides the framework for analysis, and interview transcripts are coded strictly according to these predefined categories. In contrast, an unconstrained approach allows for the development of new categories inductively from the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:111). In line with Nabavi, *et al.* (2018:36), once the coding scheme was established, the full set of interview transcripts were reviewed and systematically coded.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1281) developed two strategies for DCQA, wherein the first strategy, textual data is read, and text that, on first impression, appears to be related to predetermined codes, as per the conceptual framework, is highlighted. The highlighted texts is then coded using predetermined codes (Nabavi, *et al.*, 2018:35). The second strategy starts immediately with coding text, without initial highlighting. Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1281) recommend an iterative process to enhance the trustworthiness of findings.

Zhang and Wildermuth (2009:3-5) suggest an eight step method as follows (1) prepare data, (2) define the unit of analysis, (3) develop categories and coding scheme, (4) test the coding scheme in a text sample (5) code the whole text, (6) assess the consistency of coding (7) draw conclusions from coded data and (8) report methods and findings. It is only in the third step of this method that categories are developed; however, the connection of predetermined codes extracted from raw data with predetermined categories is not discussed (Nabavi, *et al.*, 2018:36).

Mayring (2000, 2014) suggests a seven-step method, with distinctly different approaches to inductive and deductive analysis. The steps are (1) determine the research question and theoretical framework (2) define the category system, such as main categories and subcategories as defined in theory and literature (3) define guidelines for coding, considering definitions and coding rules (4) read the whole text and determine preliminary codes (5) revise the category and coding guideline (6) rework data if needed (7) analyse and interpret based on category frequencies. It is, however, unclear if preliminary codes refer to codes that are inductively or deductively created (Nabavi, *et al.*, 2018:36).

Other researchers employed the DCQA 16-step (Assarroudi, *et al.*, 2018:48-51); eight-step (Kibwisa, 2019:2062-2066), and seven-step (Alyaqoub, *et al.*, 2024:110) methods. However, in terms of the research process, scholars do not prescribe one process to conduct either the inductive or deductive approach to qualitative content analysis (Kibwisa, 2019:2061). Krippendorff (1980:16) and Weber (1985:22), who are among the earliest theorists of content analysis, indicate that there is no universal content analysis schema; however, each researcher follows the style they deem appropriate in doing content analysis.

The approach to DQCA for this study combines Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) first strategy of highlighting text that on first impression appears to be related to predetermined codes and Zhang and Wildermuth's (2009) eight-step method. However, an adaption of the steps will be presented for this study as coding categories are only presented in step 3

of Zhang and Wildermuth's (2009) method. Based on the proposed conceptual framework for this study, categories and pre-determined codes had already been identified, as such the steps executed for this study are as follows:

**Step 1: Develop categories and a coding scheme**

Categories for antecedents to customer loyalty for an advertising agency are proposed in the conceptual framework. An initial list of coding categories (priori categories) was generated from the framework; however, the research method and initial open-ended interview questions allow for new categories to emerge inductively (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009:4).

Priori categories are organised into a codebook, clearly identifying each category, complete with clear, concrete operational definitions for how each category will be coded as this ensures the internal validity of the coding scheme (McKibben, Cade, Purgason & Wahesh, 2020:159). The credibility of research findings deals with how well the categories cover the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:108).

**Step 2: Preparing data for analysis**

To ensure the study's credibility, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, which, together with field notes, were used for data analysis (Lee, *et al.*, 2022:2299). Unitising involves identifying a specific unit of analysis, which depends on the purpose of the research (McKibben, *et al.*, 2020:159). The transcriptions of interviews are usually considered a unit of analysis when collecting data using interviews (McKibben, *et al.*, 2020:159; Alyaqoub, *et al.*, 2024:111; Kibiswa, 2022:2063). Before analysis, the researcher must decide if both manifest (transcribed interview text) and latent content (non-verbal body language and the researcher's interpretations of available text) will be analysed (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:111). For the purpose of this study, only manifest content will be analysed.

**Step 3: Getting a sense of the data**

During this stage, the researcher becomes immersed in the data, reading and reviewing the data several times (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:108-110). Implementing Hsieh and Shannon's (2005:1280) proposed first strategy, text that appears to be related to predetermined categories or codes was highlighted. The next step was to code all highlighted passages using predetermined codes and categories, while any text that could not be categorised with the initial coding scheme was coded openly and analysed using inductive content analysis (Armat, *et al.*, 2018:220; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281;

Lee, *et al.*, 2022:2299; Bingham, 2022:4).

This process should be iterative to ensure that data analysis reaches saturation, guaranteeing the rigor and trustworthiness of the data analysis process (Bingham, 2023:1; Lee *et al.*, 2022:2299). In the context of this study, data will either support or contradict the proposed priori codes and their role in the process or phenomena (Fife & Gossner, 2024:6).

#### **Step 4: Performing the analysis**

As analysis continues there will be a shift from code generation to preliminary themes, understanding supporting, contradicting, refining, and expanding evidence (Fife & Gossner, 2022:7; Kibiswa, 2019:2065). The step goes beyond the obvious by generating meaning and making inferences, going deeper than what the data suggests, involving the determination of possible new inductively developed themes (Kibiswa, 2019:2065).

At this stage, links between categories are made and the researcher directly examines the balance of evidence to determine if the framework categories are supported as originally proposed or contradicted by one or many of the cases (Fife & Gossner, 2022:7).

#### **Step 5: Applying theory and explaining findings**

At this final stage, the researcher creates and applies codes to the existing literature, theory, and conceptual framework (Bingham, 2022:8). Findings should be systematically presented, aligning raw data with the codebook (Assarroudi, *et al.*, 2018:51).

The researcher can sort the qualitative data into categories aligned to the literature, providing a foundation for understanding how the findings relate to existing research (Bingham, 2022:8). Successful content analysis requires the researcher to analyse and simplify the data and form categories that reflect the subject of study in a reliable way (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:111).

Based on the steps presented above, it is evident that deductive qualitative content analysis is particularly applicable when the objective is to re-examine known data within a different setting or context or test a conceptual framework (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:111).

In this approach, the coding categories originate from the proposed conceptual framework to develop the codebook, which is applied to the data. The purpose of this method is to assess or to refine theoretical constructs, which in this study are applied to the framework of antecedents to customer loyalty for an advertising agency. Any inductive themes to emerge from the data will be particularly valuable for uncovering novel insights

or concepts that may not have been addressed in existing literature.

### **3.4 Limitations**

While this study is designed to produce rich, contextually strong insights into the antecedents of customer loyalty within the South African advertising industry, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the research offers a time-specific snapshot of experiences and perceptions of agency executives and customers of a specific agency. Given that client-agency relationships and dynamics can shift due to market fluctuations, advancement of technology, or internal restructuring, the findings of this study reflect participants' views at a specific point in time. As a result, the findings of this study may have limited applicability to previous or future client-agency loyalty contexts.

Secondly, the study is inherently context-specific, focusing solely on the customers from one advertising agency and executives from other advertising agencies within South Africa's two major commercial hubs, namely, Johannesburg and Cape Town. While the two geographic areas allow for an understanding of customer and executives' perspectives within their geographical area, it also means that the insights generated may not be transferable to other advertising agencies in other geographic contexts with different market structures, cultural dynamics, or client-agency norms. Even though interpretivist research does not aim to generalise findings quantitatively, qualitative research may assert some generalisations about the sample, or application of the theory or conceptual framework to a research problem (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:7), which may be affected by methodological choices.

Thirdly, due to the reliance on self-reported data from both agency executives and agency customers, there is potential for response bias. This is particularly relevant for this study as the researcher holds a Managing Director position at the advertising agency, and data is being collected from agency customers. The result may be that customers may be biased in their responses and may either consciously or unconsciously frame their responses so as not to offend the researcher, or in ways that reflect favourably on their professional conduct, interpersonal relationships, or organisational practices.

Fourthly, although semi-structured interviews are designed to probe beneath surface-level responses, the subjective nature of participant responses remains a methodological consideration.

Lastly, the dual role of the researcher as both academic and agency owner introduces

the potential for researcher bias. The crucial inclusion of positionality and reflexivity is paramount in qualitative research, which will ensure best practices for the collection of qualitative research (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022:4). Steps were taken to ensure transparency, reflexivity, and audit trail documentation; however, this dual position does require some careful management to preserve the credibility and confirmability of the research findings.

By acknowledging these limitations, the study provides transparency and enables a realistic frame for interpreting its findings and conclusions.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

This study strictly adhered to recognised ethical research standards in adherence with The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Ltd (The IIE) as well as global ethical practices as provided by The Belmont Report (1979) and Singapore on Research Integrity (Shamoo & Resnik, 2011), to protect the rights, autonomy, and welfare of all participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee (REC) before the commencement of data collection, in line with institutional guidelines (The IIE Research Ethics Handbook, 2024:3).

The dual role of the researcher as both an academic and the Managing Director of the advertising agency from which customers were sampled raised specific ethical considerations. The result is that customers were considered a potentially vulnerable group in the context of this study. The researcher was therefore required to clearly communicate that the research was being conducted for the purpose of achieving an academic qualification, entirely separate from the business operations of the advertising agency. To ensure ethical integrity, customers were assured of strict confidentiality in that no identifying information was included in the analysis of the data and no stakeholders within the agency would have access to, or knowledge of, who participated in the study. Safeguards were identified in the data collection section and were employed throughout the collection and analysis process. These include:

- Informed Consent: Participants received a detailed invitation email outlining the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of the study. The details of the email are provided above and were sent from the researcher's student email address to further confirm the role of the researcher.
- Particular attention was paid to the issue of customer vulnerability (The IIE Research

Ethics Handbook, 2024:18), as the researcher holds existing professional relationships with many of the agency customers. To mitigate perceived coercion, the voluntary nature of participation was clearly and repeatedly communicated, and consent was secured in writing. Participants were informed of the right to decline to take part in the study, withdraw at any stage, or refuse to answer a question, without fear of negative consequences.

- Confidentiality was upheld throughout all stages of data collection, analysis, and reporting of data. All identifying information was removed from interview transcripts, to protect participant anonymity. These anonymised transcripts were accessed only by the researcher and academic supervisor to ensure unbiased results. Thereafter, all data is saved on a password-protected folder on the researcher's personal computer. No personal participant information will be disclosed to stakeholders within the agency. However, the final data analysis – conducted strictly for the purposes of the researcher's academic qualification – will be available upon formal request to the researcher.
- Data Protection and Security: In compliance with South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), all collected data (including email addresses and recorded interviews) will be securely stored on an encrypted, password-protected folder on the researcher's personal computer. Data will be retained only for as long as is necessary to fulfill academic requirements, after which it will be securely deleted.
- Non-maleficence and Beneficence: The research was conducted in a manner that avoided physical, psychological, or reputational harm to participants. Drawing from the Belmont Report principle of beneficence, the study is designed to maximise potential benefit (insights into loyalty in service-based B2B contexts) while minimising any form of discomfort or risk (Belmont Report, 1978:5). The researcher, throughout the data collection and analysis process, ensured that the participants were aware of their rights to withdraw or refuse to answer questions.
- Justice: Participant selection was equitable and based on relevance to the research objectives. The researcher did, however, decide to exclude customers who have been with the agency for a period of less than three years. Client-agency contract renewals take place after a three-year period, and it cannot therefore be assumed that newer customers are loyal to the agency. No group was disproportionately burdened, and the benefits of the research are shared broadly through scholarly dissemination and potential industry application (The IIE Research Ethics Handbook, 2024:4).

- **Researcher Positionality and Dual Role:** The researcher acknowledges the ethical complexity of interviewing existing agency customers. To manage this dual role of service provider and academic, all participants were assured of the role of the researcher, the rights of the customer as a research participant, and the assurance that their responses, decision to not take part in the study, the right to withdraw from the study, and the right to refuse to answer specific questions will in no way affect the business relationship between the customer and researcher, and customer and agency. The researcher set aside personal assumptions and adopted a reflexive approach throughout the course of the study.
- **Ethical Frameworks:** The study is informed by the foundational ethical principles of respect for people, beneficence, and justice, as clearly outlined in the Belmont Report (1979), and by institutional protocols as outlined in the IIE Research Ethics Handbook (2024).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter outlined the methodological framework used to investigate the antecedents of customer loyalty in South Africa's B2B advertising sector. In alignment with interpretivist principles, the study adopts a qualitative, deductive approach, employing semi-structured interviews to elicit rich, contextual insights from senior agency executives and client-side marketing professionals in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

The chapter began by establishing the philosophical assumptions that inform the research paradigm and design, followed by a detailed explanation of the chosen approach, population parameters, sampling strategy, and data collection methods. It also defined the unit of analysis and justified the proposed sample size based on the principle of data saturation.

In addition, the chapter presented a detailed discussion on the potential ethical concerns and safeguards that were put in place to ensure that customers were comfortable to take part in the study and do not feel coerced in any way. The chapter further discussed the chosen analysis method, namely DQCA as the chosen method of data analysis and interpretation, supported by strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This comprehensive methodology provides a coherent and systematic basis for exploring the nuanced drivers of loyalty within client-agency relationships and ensures the integrity and rigour of the research process.

The limitations to the study were presented and briefly discussed in the context of how the researcher aims to overcome these limitations. Finally, ethical considerations were addressed in detail, including informed consent, data confidentiality, the researcher's dual role, and, importantly, compliance with the Belmont Report (1978) and POPIA guidelines (2025).

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with agency clients and agency executives, conducted to explore the antecedents of customer loyalty within South Africa's advertising industry.

Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and a deductive qualitative approach, the chapter outlines the population and sampling strategy, data analysis process, and the presentation of findings aligned with the conceptual framework. Key insights are supported by participant quotations and linked to the relevant literature to demonstrate how the data confirms, extends, or refines the proposed relationships.

The chapter then concludes by addressing the trustworthiness of the study, outlining the specific measures that were implemented to ensure credibility, dependability, and transferability. The analysis is presented in a clear and sequential manner to facilitate understanding of the findings and their broader research context.

### **4.2 Population and Sampling**

The study used a non-probability purposive sampling method to select information-rich participants capable of providing deep insights into the antecedents of customer loyalty within South Africa's advertising industry. This approach was appropriate as participants were deliberately chosen for their expertise, relevance, and their ability to make a meaningful contribution to the research objectives (Muzari, *et al.*, 2022:16; Shukla, 2023:1).

The population included both sides of the client-agency relationship, made up of senior marketing and procurement executives from blue-chip clients of the focal agency, and agency customers in the form of senior executives from creative agencies based in Johannesburg and Cape Town. These participants represented the unit of analysis, as the study sought to explore their lived experiences and perspectives on the various factors and dynamics that influence loyalty within client-agency relationships.

Agency customers were purposively selected based on their level of seniority and their current engagement with the focal agency, while agency executives were chosen for their roles in active client management and retention. Participant access was facilitated through the researcher's existing professional rapport with them, which helped to lay a foundation of trust and ensure depth of insight during the interviews. This purposive strategy ensured balanced perspectives and generated rich, contextualised data that

aligned with the study's conceptual framework.

Although twelve participants were initially targeted (eight clients and four executives), data saturation was reached after ten interviews - six clients and four executives, when the existing coding structure was exhaustively applied and no additional data would change the understanding of the coding categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2018:114; Assarroudi, *et al.*, 2018:49). In DQCA, data saturation refers to conceptual completeness rather than thematic novelty. Due to the use of a priori codes derived from theory and prior academic literature, data saturation occurred when all priori categories were adequately represented and no new relevant data emerged that meaningfully challenged, extended or refined those categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1280; Assarroudi, *et al.*, 2018:50).

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using a Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA) approach, which combined deductive and inductive reasoning to test and refine the conceptual framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281). This approach was appropriate for the study's deductive qualitative design as it allowed theoretical propositions derived from the literature to be examined against the empirical data, while remaining open to new, emergent insights. The research propositions are presented in Table 2.1.

Following Kibiswa (2011:20609) and Elo and Kyngäs (2008:107), combining deductive and inductive reasoning allows for both theory testing and theory expansion, ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in existing literature while being sensitive to unique contextual factors emerging from participants lived experiences.

#### **4.3.1 Deductive Approach**

As defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1281) and extended by Assarroudi, *et al.* (2018:43), DQCA starts from existing theory or prior empirical findings, with the aim of validating, refining, or extending a conceptual framework. The initial phase of analysis was deductive, guided by the predetermined (priori) categories, which were derived from literature and outlined in the proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1). Each category represented one of the proposed antecedents of customer loyalty, namely service quality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, perceived value, and switching costs, as well as agency-specific antecedents including account management quality, creativity, responsiveness and agility, reputation, and alignment with client goals.

This deductive phase ensured that the analysis remained anchored in theory while allowing for a consistent, transparent coding process across all the interviews. This

approach maintained methodological rigor using pre-specified definitions and transparent category application. The step-by-step process employed during the deductive analysis phase is presented below.

**Step 1:** Develop categories and a coding scheme (priori coding framework).

Initial categories were developed deductively from the relevant theory and literature and then formalised in the conceptual framework. Each category was operationally defined using theoretical constructs (Mayring, 2000:12). All predefined categories were read openly to identify any additional subcategories or any nuances within the data.

A codebook was developed, listing each category and its definition, as well as inclusion and exclusion rules to guide coding consistency. These predefined categories formed the priori codes that directed the initial phase of analysis and ensured internal validity of the coding process.

**Step 2:** Prepare and verify the data.

All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim. The researcher verified each transcript against the original recording to ensure accuracy, completeness, and fidelity to participants' meaning. Transcripts were anonymised to protect confidentiality. For this study, only manifest content, the explicit meaning of the data, was analysed to maintain objectivity and focus.

**Step 3:** Familiarisation and coding.

The researcher repeatedly read each transcript to gain a holistic understanding of the data and to identify meaning units.

Firstly, all text related to the predetermined (priori) categories was highlighted and coded deductively, according to the established coding scheme. Segments of text that fit the predetermined categories were labelled accordingly and text that did not align with these existing codes was flagged for inductive analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1279). This ensured that theoretical frameworks were not rigidly imposed, maintaining openness to emergent meanings.

This iterative process of deductive and inductive coding continued until the coding structure was exhaustively applied and there were no additional insights, thereby signifying conceptual completeness and achieving data saturation.

To ensure rigour and trustworthiness, both the researcher and the supervisor coded the transcripts independently. Coding outputs were then compared and discussed to reach

two-coder reliability, thereby ensuring that category application was consistent and credible throughout the analysis.

**Step 4:** Theme development and proposition testing.

Following coding, data segments were organised into broader themes and subthemes. Relationships between categories were then examined to determine whether each theoretical proposition within the conceptual framework was supported, partially supported, or contradicted. Inductively generated themes were integrated, adding explanatory depth or contextual nuance to the predefined structure.

**Step 5:** Integration with literature.

Finally, the analysed data was interpreted alongside the existing literature to contextualise the findings within the broader theoretical discourse on customer loyalty. This comparison enabled the study to show where the data confirmed, extended, or challenged existing theory, ensuring that the final framework was both theoretically and contextually robust.

Through this structured yet flexible process, the analysis remained firmly anchored in theory while responsive to the lived experiences of the participants. The integration of deductive and inductive reasoning provided a comprehensive understanding of how customer loyalty is formed and sustained in the South African advertising industry, setting the foundation for the discussion of findings that follows.

### ***4.3.2 Inductive Approach***

After data was analysed deductively, inductive content analysis was applied to data that did not align with the predefined categories and initial coding scheme, such as open-ended reflections and contextual comments. This inductive approach was applied to capture additional insights that extended or refined the existing conceptual framework.

An inductive approach was applied to any uncoded data that did not align with the theoretical categories to identify new subthemes or categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008:111). New concepts were derived directly from the data using open coding and constant comparison. In qualitative content analysis, newly coded text is continuously compared with previously coded text to refine definitions of categories, ensuring internal consistency and external distinction (Mayring, 2014:54-55). Similar emergent codes were then grouped into broader themes, and the new inductive categories were integrated with the deductive framework.

## 4.4 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents and interprets the findings from the semi-structured interviews. The discussion follows the propositions outlined in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1) and integrates supporting quotations from agency customers and agency executives. The purpose is to show how the data confirms, refines, or extends the proposed framework of customer loyalty in South African B2B advertising client-agency relationships. Relevant literature is incorporated throughout to contextualise the findings, demonstrate theoretical convergence, and then to highlight those areas where empirical insights offer some new contributions.

### 4.4.1 General Perspectives on Customer Loyalty

This section explored participants' general perspectives on customer loyalty within the B2B client-agency context. The questions aimed to establish a foundational understanding of how agency clients and agency executives define customer loyalty and what factors drive customer loyalty within the broader agency context.

Agency clients were asked four open-ended questions relating to what customer loyalty meant to them in the context of the agency-client relationship, their lived experience on customer loyalty, and factors contributing to customer loyalty. Agency executives were asked five open ended questions relating to their perceptions of customer loyalty in the client-agency context, cumulative professional lived experience on the factors and behaviours contributing to customer loyalty from an agency perspective, patterns in driving customer loyalty and agency factors for retaining customers. The responses in this section were analysed inductively.

Participants reflected on their lived experiences, providing examples of loyal relationships and identifying non-negotiable elements influencing their decisions to maintain or to terminate partnerships.

Across all the interviews, customer loyalty was described as a *relational construct* underpinned by *trust*, *mutual respect*, and *consistent service delivery*. Customer loyalty was viewed not as a contractual obligation, but as an *outcome of reliability*, *shared purpose*, and *enduring collaboration* between agency and client.

#### Theme 1: Trust as the Foundation of Loyalty

Agency clients primarily described trust as *confidence in integrity*, *transparency*, and *care*, while agency executives framed trust as *reliability under pressure* and *consistent delivery*. These findings align with Morgan and Hunt (1994:22), who positioned trust as a

central antecedent of commitment and loyalty in long-term relationships, and with Arthur, *et al.*, (2024:933), who emphasised collaboration built on credibility and openness as fundamental to loyalty in B2B service partnerships.

This study refines these views by revealing that, within advertising agencies, trust operates on two distinct levels, namely, emotional reassurance wherein clients feel cared for and understood and operational dependability through consistent and reliable delivery. Agency clients valued *honesty* and *empathy*, while agency executives emphasised *accountability* and *follow-through*. This two-sided perspective echoes Dick and Basu's (1994:100) notion that attitudinal and behavioural loyalty reinforce one another, suggesting that trust functions as the link between interpersonal confidence and consistent delivery.

The findings suggest that loyalty, according to participants, is an emotional commitment and not a transactional concept or contractual outcome. Choosing to stay is a result of trust and not out of a sense of obligation. These findings extend Morgan and Hunt's (1994:23) position by demonstrating that in creative service organisations, trust is akin to emotional currency, earned as much through empathy and candour as through procedural reliability.

"Loyalty means you trust them to deliver and to tell you the truth when things go wrong."

– Client 4

"Trust is everything, if they're honest and consistent, I'll stay." – Client 5

"When quality holds under pressure, the client's confidence doesn't waver." – Executive

2

## **Theme 2: Partnership and Shared Purpose**

Agency clients saw loyalty as the result of *shared vision* and *genuine collaboration*, while agency executives viewed partnership in terms of *strategic alignment* and *sustained mutual benefit*. These views are consistent with Vargo and Lusch (2004:4), whose Service-Dominant Logic emphasises value as co-created through interaction, and with Levin, *et al.* (2016:8), who highlight that enduring collaboration delivers customer loyalty in B2B services.

This study builds on existing literature by showing that partnership and shared purpose are linked. Agency clients describe partnership and shared purpose as an *emotional connection* and *feeling understood*, whereas agency executives associated partnership and shared purpose with *clarity of direction* and *proactive contribution to growth*.

Partnership therefore represents both an interpersonal bond and a strategic alignment, advancing loyalty beyond routine delivery toward a collaborative pursuit of continued growth.

Partnership and shared purpose shift the nature of the relationship from service delivery to shared value. When clients feel that the agency works alongside them as an extension of their marketing team, loyalty becomes a two-way investment rather than an actual requirement. It extends beyond basic satisfaction and reflects mutual confidence and ownership in achieving desired results together.

“They’re not just a supplier; they become part of the team working toward the same goals.” – Executive 1

“It’s when the agency feels like part of our team, not just a vendor.” – Client 2

“Strategic alignment is the decisive differentiator over time.” – Executive 1

### **Theme 3: Consistency and Reliability**

Agency clients equated consistency with *dependability*, the *assurance* that quality and communication would *remain steady* across projects. Agency executives described reliability as *disciplined project management* and *delivery precision*. Together these views confirm that operational reliability supports relationship continuity in agency settings.

This finding is aligned with Parasuraman, *et al.* (1985:112), who identified reliability as a core dimension of service quality, and Han, *et al.* (2008:25), who found that dependable delivery builds long-term confidence in service relationships. Unlike Theme 1, which centres on interpersonal trust, this theme highlights procedural dependability, the ability to perform consistently regardless of context. Steady, predictable execution reduces uncertainty and reinforces the perception of professionalism that contributes to sustained loyalty over extended time periods.

Consistency and reliability serve as emotional stabilisers, minimising relational risk and signalling professionalism. In an industry defined by uncertainty and creative volatility, reliability translates into trustworthiness.

“It’s about showing up and delivering the same quality every single time.” – Client 3

“You can trust them when delivery is steady; that builds confidence.” – Executive 3

### **Theme 4: Relational Depth and Emotional Connection**

Agency clients described emotional connection as the point where loyalty *transcends satisfaction* to become *genuine partnership*. They valued *empathy*, *authenticity*, and

*personal support*. Agency executives defined relational depth as the *cumulative result of transparency, collaboration, and mutual respect*.

This perspective aligns with Morgan and Hunt (1994:21) and Levin, *et al.* (2016:10), who emphasise the interplay of trust and commitment in sustaining B2B relationships. In this context, loyalty is driven less by formal agreements and more by strong interpersonal connection or the sense that the agency genuinely cares about its client's success. Emotional understanding transforms everyday service engagements into relationships built on shared purpose, actually creating attachment that extends beyond contractual terms.

Loyal clients describe feeling recognised and valued as individuals and not just accounts. This emotional depth helps to shield relationships from competitive pressure and temporary dissatisfaction, thereby reinforcing affective commitment and long-term partnership stability.

"It's when there's real respect and care; you feel like they're invested in your success."

– Client 6

"Loyalty grows from genuine relationships, not just good work." – Executive 4

### **Theme 5: Adaptability and Resilience**

Agency clients viewed adaptability as *evidence of partnership strength*, praising agencies that stayed *flexible* and *solution-focused under pressure*. Agency executives associated resilience with *composure, accountability, and creative focus* during uncertainty. Both groups viewed these traits as clear evidence of commitment to continuity.

This supports Davies and Prince (2005:2), who contend that responsiveness and flexibility reinforce long-term relationships, and Parasuraman, *et al.* (1988:42), who identify responsiveness as central to perceived service quality. Adaptability in advertising services therefore reflects relational maturity, the ability to maintain momentum despite change, which reinforces relationship stability rather than simply rebuilding trust after disruption.

Agencies that are flexible and solution-oriented display relationship resilience. Adaptability signals partnership strength, confirming that responsiveness (Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1988:43) is no longer just a service quality metric, but a sign of care and commitment.

"When things get tough and they still find solutions instead of excuses, that's loyalty." –

Client 1

“True loyalty is when both sides bend, not break, during tough times.” – Client 6

“Agility supports loyalty; it shows that you care about the client’s reality.” – Executive 4

### **Theme 6: Mutual Value Exchange**

Agency clients and executives characterised loyalty as *mutual investment*. Agency clients emphasised *measurable business outcomes* and *relevance to evolving needs*; while agency executives described mutual value exchange as *shared growth* achieved through *collaboration*.

This finding supports Shirin and Puth (2011:11904) and Ramaseshan, *et al.* (2013:17), who identified perceived value as a primary driver of loyalty, and complements Vargo and Lusch (2004:10), who describe value as co-created through interaction. In agency relationships, mutual value develops over time rather than remaining static. Each side continues to contribute insight and effort to stay relevant to the other. This ongoing exchange moves the relationship beyond basic satisfaction and helps sustain loyalty over the long term.

“Loyalty only lasts if both sides are still benefitting.” – Executive 3

“When their thinking helps us solve real problems and hit targets, that’s when it feels valuable.” – Client 3

### **Theme 7: Beyond Contracts: Advocacy and Longevity**

Both agency clients and executives viewed lasting loyalty as *extending beyond formal agreements*. Agency clients associated loyalty with *advocacy*, defending the agency relationship internally, while agency executives interpreted loyalty as being *trusted for long-term strategic input*.

This theme aligns with Oliver (1999:37), who conceptualised loyalty as progressing from rational evaluation to committed action, and with Srivastava, *et al.* (2024:951), who argue that in B2B services, loyalty is demonstrated through ongoing collaboration and advocacy rather than repeated transactions. In agency partnerships, advocacy reflects a mature form of loyalty. When clients actively support or renew an agency, it shows that they recognise its ongoing relevance and trust built over time.

“Being loyal means you’d fight for them to stay on, even when others want to review.” – Client 4

“It’s not about being locked into a contract, it’s choosing to stay because they add real value.” – Executive 2

These findings indicate exactly where loyalty towards an advertising agency is built and lost. For agencies to build and maintain customer loyalty the focus should be on building trust through empathy as well as consistent delivery. In terms of client-agency relationships, there needs to be a shift from a vendor who delivers mindset to a partner who co-creates mindset, embedding strategic alignment practices and inviting clients to be part of the creative thinking process. This shift will strengthen emotional ownership. A strong focus on reliability, communication, and transparency is needed, specifically in the initial relationship stage, which will engender a feeling of safety from a client's perspective. Developing emotional relationships with clients retains clients and personal empathy from all account leads will build affective bonds. Agencies should operationalise value co-creation, involving clients throughout the creative process, which will build trust and strengthen relationship health. Finally, cultivating client advocacy intentionally through strategic cobranding of thought-leadership collaboration will yield stronger relationships and ensure client retention.

#### **4.4.2 Service Quality (P1a, P1b, P1c)**

##### **Research Focus**

This section explored participants' understanding and evaluation of service quality within the client-agency relationship and examined whether service quality was considered to influence three key constructs namely, trust, commitment, and communication (P1a); customer satisfaction (P1b); and perceived value (P1c). Agency clients were asked five open-ended questions focusing on their perceptions of service quality, how they assess it, and how it influences trust, satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty. Agency executives were asked seven open-ended questions examining how service quality is defined, assessed, and managed within agencies, and how it affects customer trust, satisfaction, and perceived value. The responses in this section were analysed deductively, using the predefined category of service quality from the conceptual framework, while remaining open to emergent insights.

##### **Findings and Interpretation**

Service quality was viewed as the *non-negotiable* foundation of loyalty. Participants defined service quality as *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *consistent delivery*, and *clarity of communication*. Agency clients emphasised the role of service quality in building *trust* and *confidence*, while agency executives stressed the operational role of service quality in *maintaining continuity during change*. This supports the foundational work of Parasuraman, *et al.* (1985:47), who identified reliability, responsiveness, assurance,

empathy, and tangibles as the key dimensions shaping customers' perceptions of service quality.

Both agency clients and executives agreed that *high service quality shapes satisfaction and perceived value*, particularly when tied to *measurable outcomes* and *ROI*. Agency clients tended to see service quality as a *hygiene factor*, while agency executives viewed service quality as a *performance differentiator*. Both agency clients and agency executives noted that service quality alone is *insufficient without relational and strategic depth*.

These findings are consistent with earlier research conducted by Han *et al.* (2008) and Sitorus and Yustisia (2018), which demonstrated that consistent delivery and responsiveness strengthen trust and improve communication by reducing uncertainty in ongoing service relationships. The connection between service quality and commitment did however appear to be less direct, overtly supporting Morgan and Hunt's (1994) view that commitment develops from trust and shared purpose rather than operational reliability alone. The results also align with Oliver (1999), who identified service quality as a fundamental driver of customer satisfaction.

In the advertising context, service quality emerged as a threshold condition - the *price of entry*. Once reliability and responsiveness are achieved, loyalty depends on higher-order relational factors. This hierarchy of needs parallels Parasuraman, *et al.* (1985:47), however participants re-prioritise the dimensions of communication, clarity, and responsiveness under pressure over tangibles. Service quality is essential for establishing trust and satisfaction but insufficient to sustain loyalty without emotional and strategic depth. As a result, service quality is considered to build structural trust, however emotional trust is built on how people handle failure.

"If they say they'll deliver, I need to know they'll actually do it every time; that's what builds trust." – Client 3

"When quality holds under pressure, the client's confidence doesn't waver." – Executive

2

"Service quality is the price of entry, not the differentiator." – Client 1

"Consistent, accountable delivery sets the agency apart and builds reliability." – Executive 1

Service quality was reframed by participants from a differentiator to a qualifier in terms of

loyalty. In advertising, service quality establishes structural trust but does not sustain emotional commitment. It is seen as the base layer of loyalty, necessary but not sufficient. Consistent service quality, that is predictable and dependable reduces perceived risk, and stabilises client-agency relationships. However, loyalty only matures when emotional trust is incorporated with service quality.

Consistent service quality creates cumulative satisfaction (Oliver, 1999:37), stabilising relationships rather than deepening commitment. The commoditisation of service quality in mature agency markets means that service quality is no longer considered a differentiating factor. Service quality however forms the basis for emotional connection and once reliability is achieved, empathy and transparency become the differentiators that convert satisfaction to loyalty. Consistent delivery builds confidence, and according to the findings the relationship between quality and loyalty is mediated by trust.

The findings suggest that emotional trust forms in times of imperfection and agency clients stated that loyalty is strengthened when agencies were transparent during mistakes. This indicates that how failure is handled matters more than whether it happens.

Aligned with Grönroos (1984) proposed Service Quality Model, the findings suggest that service quality has both technical and functional quality elements. However, as per the findings agencies that master both can transform operational excellence into relational capital, which is the true predictor of long-term loyalty.

Based on the above findings, agencies should treat service quality as the baseline offering as opposed to the differentiator. Ensuring reliable and consistent service quality will serve as the foundation for emotional and strategic engagement. Agencies should operationalise reliability, auditing internal delivery systems for bottlenecks that threaten consistency, implement quality checks, and build redundancy into account structures to ensure that the loss of key staff will not cause the collapse of service quality. It is important for agencies to build emotional resilience into service quality, ensuring transparent crisis communication, normalise service recovery, and embed empathy into quality standards. Reframing quality as relational communication, agencies should emphasise that quality is not what is delivered but how it is communicated. Clarity, frequency, and tone of communication are indicators of perceived quality and structured feedback loops can be used to reaffirm trust through open dialogue. Agency quality audits should shift from checking deliverables to checking trust signals, namely transparency, ownership and responsiveness. Finally, service quality should be integrated into value co-creation,

making the delivery process part of the value offered to clients.

#### **4.4.3 Relational Drivers of Trust, Commitment, and Communication (P2a, P2b)**

##### **Research Focus**

This section examined how trust, commitment, and communication shape satisfaction and perceived value within client-agency relationships. Agency clients were asked three open-ended questions exploring the influence of trust, commitment, and communication on their satisfaction, perceived value, and relationship quality with agencies. Agency executives were asked two open-ended questions focusing on how these relational drivers affect customer satisfaction and the ways agencies create perceived value for long-term clients. The responses in this section were analysed deductively, guided by the Relational Drivers categories outlined in the conceptual framework.

##### **Findings and Interpretation**

Trust, commitment, and communication were identified as *relational anchors of customer loyalty*. Agency clients described trust as *confidence in integrity* and *transparency*; agency executives perceived it as *reliability under pressure*. Commitment was demonstrated through *proactive behaviour* and *consistent follow-through*, while open communication *reduced friction* and *deepened satisfaction*.

Over time, strong relationships *enhanced perceived value* by *driving co-creation*, *efficiency*, and *mutual respect*. Agency clients tended to focus on *emotional trust*, while agency executives highlighted *structural trust* built through *accountability*. Both agency clients and agency executives confirmed that customer loyalty cannot exist without these relational drivers.

These findings support Morgan and Hunt (1994), who position trust and commitment as the foundation of enduring B2B relationships. They also echo Sitorus and Yustisia (2022:642) and Tangchua and Vanichchinchai (2024:1341), who found that trust mitigates uncertainty and strengthens long-term cooperation in service environments.

However, the findings extend prior research by revealing that in the advertising industry, trust is not purely structural but also largely emotional. Built through empathy, responsiveness, and shared purpose rather than procedural reliability alone. This highlights that relational depth, rather than transactional performance, anchors loyalty in creative B2B services where outcomes are co-produced and expectations continually evolve.

“You trust them when they’re honest, especially when something goes wrong.” – Client

4

“It’s about showing up and taking ownership when the stakes are high.” – Executive 3

“Clear, frequent communication stops things from festering.” – Client 2

“Proactive engagement beyond the brief is how commitment shows up.” – Executive 4

Trust, commitment, and communication operate within a relational ecosystem as opposed to as isolated constructs, each reinforcing the others. Transparent communication results in emotional trust, which increases client’s willingness to commit, and commitment leads to proactive communication. Relational drivers therefore increase both satisfaction and perceived value. However, participants added that commitment is performed through proactive behaviour, not merely stated intent, and that communication is affective maintenance as much as information flow.

As a result of the findings, agencies should focus on building emotional trust through transparency, focusing on how the agency communicates when things go wrong. Commitment should be operationalised as behaviour and not sentiment and reframe communication as a relationship strategy. Communication should be treated as a core deliverable and structured communication cadences should be put in place. Trust, communication quality and proactivity should be included in client feedback sessions as well as relationship health reviews.

#### **4.4.4 Customer Satisfaction (P3a, P3b, P3c)**

##### **Research Focus**

This section explored how customer satisfaction influences loyalty behaviours, including clients’ decisions to remain, switch, or recommend. Agency clients were asked five open-ended questions investigating the relationship between customer satisfaction, switching behaviour, and long-term loyalty. Agency executives were asked five open-ended questions examining how satisfaction is defined within agency contexts, how it influences perceived value and switching decisions, and whether satisfaction directly contributes to customer loyalty. The responses in this section were analysed deductively, using the Customer Satisfaction category from the conceptual framework.

##### **Findings and Interpretation**

Customer Satisfaction acted as a stabilising, not decisive, factor in customer loyalty. Customer Satisfaction reinforced perceptions of *value* by affirming that the client-agency partnership delivered *consistent results* with *minimal oversight* and *heightened perceived*

*switching costs* as agency clients became embedded in agency processes. Yet satisfaction alone did not guarantee loyalty. Factors such as *creative stagnation*, *leadership turnover*, or *procurement policy* could still trigger change. Agency executives noted that *external forces* like *BBBEE compliance* sometimes override strong relationships.

These findings are consistent with Oliver (1999:34), who articulates that satisfaction must be cumulative to influence loyalty meaningfully. Similarly, Alkhateeb and Shivaraj (2018:4) confirm that satisfaction and loyalty share both direct and indirect relationships, moderated by contextual factors. This supports the view that satisfaction stabilises agency relationships but cannot, on its own, secure long-term loyalty.

Tedja, *et al.* (2024:2) and Chen (2022:304) emphasise that satisfaction is closely tied to perceived value. When agencies consistently deliver measurable results, satisfaction enhances trust and commitment. Yet as Han, *et al.* (2008:23) and Sitorus and Yustisia (2022:641) found, satisfaction often mediates rather than drives loyalty, reinforcing that emotional and strategic depth are required to sustain relationships.

Within the advertising industry, this means satisfaction reflects operational reliability but remains vulnerable to shifts in creative performance, leadership, or even policy. For agencies, maintaining satisfaction is therefore necessary but insufficient. True loyalty requires continuous renewal, evolving value delivery, and relevance over extended time periods.

“When they get it right consistently, you stop worrying; that’s real satisfaction.” – Client 2

“We stayed because changing agencies is exhausting, the onboarding alone.” – Client

“Satisfaction helps, but BBBEE or procurement can still force a move.” – Executive 2

“You can be happy and still need new thinking.” – Client 1

Based on the findings, satisfaction functions as a stabiliser in that it keeps the relationship afloat, however satisfaction does not guarantee continuity or permanence of a relationship. Agency clients show satisfaction is a comfort to them and does not guarantee devotion. Satisfaction is therefore considered a mediator to loyalty, but not a direct cause of loyalty. Loyalty in the context of the advertising agency requires renewal, which redefines satisfaction not as the endpoint but rather as a maintenance condition for loyalty.

Agencies should therefore treat satisfaction as an indicator of current alignment and not a guarantee of customer loyalty. Indicators need to be established to diagnose and prevent complacency and creative teams should be periodically rotated to inject new

energy, while maintaining relationship continuity. To strengthen the link between perceived business impact and satisfaction, satisfaction should be anchored to measurable outcomes.

#### **4.4.5 Perceived Value and Switching Costs (P4a, P5a)**

##### **Research Focus**

This section investigated how clients assess perceived value and how switching costs influence commitment. Agency clients were asked four open-ended questions relating to their perceptions of value, the costs and challenges associated with switching agencies, and how these influence loyalty and retention. Agency executives were asked three open-ended questions focused on how clients' perceived value and switching costs shape loyalty decisions. The responses in this section were analysed deductively, anchored in the Perceived Value and Switching Costs categories from the conceptual framework.

##### **Findings and Interpretation**

Perceived value was one of the strongest predictors of customer loyalty. Both agency clients and agency executives viewed perceived value as multi-dimensional, combining *strategic contribution*, *creative effectiveness*, and *tangible results*. Agency clients focused on *ROI* and *problem-solving relevance*, while agency executives emphasised *foresight* and *partnership*. Switching costs were acknowledged but weighed differently. Agency clients saw switching costs as *practical deterrents*, while agency executives regarded switching costs as *stabilisers* that matter only when *trust* and *quality persist*. Customer loyalty ultimately depended on *sustained value*, *not cost of exit*.

These findings align with Levin, et al. (2016:8) and Ramaseshan, *et al.* (2013:17), who identify perceived value as a primary driver of loyalty in B2B relationships, emerging from clients' assessments of long-term benefits relative to costs.

However, these findings extend the existing theory by showcasing that in advertising, perceived value is not limited to functional or economic outcomes but includes relational and strategic dimensions such as foresight, collaboration, and creative relevance. These dimensions lead to strong emotional equity over time. While switching costs do play a stabilising role, loyalty in this sector is sustained primarily through the continual renewal of perceived value.

“When their thinking helps us solve real problems and hit targets, that’s when it feels valuable.” – Client 3

“Value is also being one step ahead for the client.” – Executive 1

“Changing agencies is like starting a new marriage; it’s draining.” – Client 3

“Switching costs stabilise the relationship until trust or quality drops.” – Executive 4

While switching costs do matter, they merely stabilise loyalty temporarily, while retention depends on ongoing value renewal. Value is constantly renegotiated through delivered outcomes and strategic foresight. Both agency clients and executives highlight that value is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of functional value, relational value and strategic value. Functional value establishes basic trust and rational satisfaction through tangible results, ROI, measurable outcomes and service reliability. Relational value builds attachment and preference through emotional reassurance, collaboration and reliable communication. Strategic value creates loyalty through ongoing relevance and co-creation.

As a result of the findings, agencies should redefine value from an output to an outcome, tying agency work directly to client business outcomes. To ensure consistent value creation agencies should build a value-renewal system making renewed relevance a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for account teams to avoid complacency. Switching costs should be used ethically and strategically as a time to innovate and not to become complacent. As a differentiator, agencies should market themselves as strategic intelligent partners and not as creative executors, building intellectual partnerships with clients.

#### ***4.4.6 Advertising Agency-Specific Antecedents (P6a to P10a)***

##### **Research Focus**

This section examined loyalty antecedents unique to the advertising industry, including account management, creativity, agility, reputation, and strategic alignment. Agency clients were asked five open-ended questions exploring the influence of account management quality, creativity, agility, reputation, and strategic alignment on their loyalty to an agency. Agency executives were asked five open-ended questions addressing how these same factors affect client satisfaction, perceived value, and retention. The responses in this section were analysed deductively, guided by the Agency-Specific Antecedents category from the conceptual framework, while allowing new insights to refine these dimensions where relevant.

##### **Account Management Quality (P6a)**

##### **Findings and Interpretation**

Account management quality emerged as a critical determinant of client continuity, often

outweighing broader agency reputation or even creative output. Clients viewed the account lead as the human embodiment of *service reliability*, *transparency*, and *trust*. Executives recognised account management as the *operational interface* that *absorbs tension*, *manages expectations*, and *restores confidence* during delivery challenges.

These findings align with Jansen van Rensburg, Venter and Strydom (2009:27), who identify the *quality of people assigned to the account* as a decisive factor in agency evaluation and retention. Similarly, Alejandro, *et al.* (2011:41) demonstrate that the quality of the client-account manager relationship directly enhances perceived value and loyalty. This relational view is consistent with Morgan and Hunt (1994:21) and Doney and Cannon (1997:35), who note that trust develops through sustained interactions and commitment, forming the behavioural basis of long-term loyalty.

However, the current findings add nuance by revealing that in advertising, account management quality functions as both a relational and operational safeguard. Account leads not only uphold reliability and transparency, but they also act as stabilisers during creative or delivery pressure, mediating between client expectations and agency performance.

“You stay because of the person who actually runs your account; they make or break it.”

– Client 2

“Great account leads keep clients even when delivery wobbles.” – Executive 5

The data indicates that account management is the personification of loyalty, clients do not stay loyal to the agency but to the person who makes them feel understood, supported and safe. Relational continuity therefore depends more on interpersonal competence than institutional reputation.

Agencies should therefore invest in account management as a core strategic capability, recruiting and training emotionally intelligent account managers as opposed to focusing only on efficiency. It is however important to embed account management in leadership succession planning as losing a good account lead is equivalent to losing a client. Account leads should be viewed as relationship architects and must be empowered to make decisions that build trust. To achieve this, account leads should be paired with strategic mentor to help them translate creative ideas into business value.

## **Creativity and Innovation (P7a)**

### **Findings and Interpretation**

Creativity was seen as both a *renewal force* and a *retention risk*. Clients associated

creativity with *relevance* and *growth*, emphasising its value when linked to *tangible results* and *business impact*. Executives described creativity as a *differentiator* that signals ongoing vitality but acknowledged that it must remain *strategically grounded* rather than *self-referential*.

These findings are consistent with Levin and Lobo (2009:4), who identify creativity as a key success factor influencing client satisfaction and retention. Similarly, Beverland, *et al.* (2007:50) confirm that creative output and strategic insight strengthen both satisfaction and trust in an agency's overall capability.

In the South African advertising context, the results suggest that creativity must display a balance between innovation and consistency. Loyalty is reinforced when creative work demonstrates strategic understanding and delivers tangible business results, rather than relying on originality alone.

“Fresh thinking keeps us excited, but it must solve the problem.” – Client 4

“Awards don't keep business; effective ideas do.” – Executive 3

The findings indicate that clients value creativity when it solves business problems and not merely when it wins awards. Agencies that consistently balance innovation with strategic insight create renewed relevance, prevent stagnation, and renew emotional energy.

## **Responsiveness and Agility (P8a)**

### **Findings and Interpretation**

Responsiveness was consistently interpreted as a signal of *respect* and *partnership quality*. Clients viewed agility as *evidence of care* and *prioritisation*, while executives acknowledged that agility reinforces *satisfaction* but cannot compensate for strategic or creative deficiencies.

These findings align with Parasuraman, *et al.* (1985:45) who position responsiveness as a core dimension of service quality, defined by an organisation's willingness and ability to provide timely, helpful service. Similarly, Saad, *et al.* (2022:13) demonstrate that responsiveness and delivery speed enhance satisfaction and loyalty through improved client experience.

These findings show that within the advertising landscape, responsiveness is seen not just as speed, but as a sign that the client is valued and prioritised. However, responsiveness alone is not enough to maintain loyalty. Agility needs to be supported by

strong strategic thinking and consistent creative quality for relationships to endure.

“When we need something and the agency acts fast, that shows respect and care.” –

Client 1

“Agility supports loyalty; it doesn’t create it.” – Executive 4

Based on the findings it is evidence that agility is an emotional signal of respect and care, demonstrating attentiveness, flexibility and willingness to prioritise client’s needs. However, agility alone cannot build loyalty, it amplifies loyalty when coupled with strategic thinking and creative competence.

The agency should establish protocols for responsiveness, focusing not only on speed but on tone, empathy, and accountability in communication. Teams should be encouraged to communicate quickly, as transparency is better than silence as an assurance of respect.

## **Reputation and Brand Equity (P9a)**

### **Findings and Interpretation**

Reputation was acknowledged as an important entry point but not a loyalty driver. Clients emphasised that reputation *sets expectations*, but sustained loyalty depends on *consistent performance* and *delivery*. Executives viewed brand equity as a *differentiator* that helps attract clients but noted that *reputational capital* erodes quickly when experience does not match promise.

These findings align with Alkhateeb and Shivaraj (2018:3), who note that agency reputation has a direct impact on customer loyalty by providing evidence of credibility and reliability in B2B service relationships. Similarly, Ali (2022:15) and Tahir, *et al.* (2024:2) propose that strong brand equity enhances satisfaction and trust, serving as a foundation for initial engagement. However, in line with the work of Turnbull and Wheeler (2014:594), this study finds that while reputation reduces perceived risk and aids acquisition, it does not guarantee retention once the realities of day-to-day performance are experienced.

The results extend existing literature by showing that in the South African advertising context, reputation functions as an initial basis for trust rather than a sustaining force. Once the relationship is established, loyalty becomes performance-driven, maintained through lived experience, responsiveness, and delivery integrity, rather than through perception alone.

“Reputation gets you in the door; performance keeps you there.” – Client 6

Reputation and brand equity were revealed as entry conditions and not loyalty drivers in that clients may be attracted by a well-known brand but that they remain because of consistency, honesty, and relational depth. Reputation may buy the first meeting, but every subsequent meeting must be earned through delivery and relational performance.

The agency should treat brand reputation as a promise that must be continuously delivered, translating reputation into client-facing behaviours, and closing the gap between brand perception and relationship reality.

### **Alignment with Client Goals (P10a)**

#### **Findings and Interpretation**

Alignment with client goals was the most decisive loyalty factor identified by both groups interviewed. Clients equated strategic alignment with *shared vision* and *proactive insight*, while executives recognised it as the foundation of *long-term relevance*. However, executives also noted that external constraints such as *procurement cycles* and *transformation mandates* sometimes override even the strongest partnerships.

These findings align with Quester, Thompson and Farrelly (2006:26), who note that shared understanding or value fit positively influences loyalty in B2B service environments.

The results add industry-specific nuance by showing that, in South African advertising agencies, strategic alignment acts as an ongoing demonstration of partnership maturity. Agencies that demonstrate proactive understanding of client objectives and translate them into relevant strategic and creative outputs are more likely to retain business over time.

“The magic is when they think like part of our team.” – Client 5

“Strategic alignment is the decisive differentiator over time.” – Executive 1

Strategic alignment is the apex of loyalty maturity and the most powerful predictor of enduring loyalty, according to the findings. Clients remain loyal when agencies demonstrate a deep understanding of their business goals, so that they are able to anticipate challenges, and take responsibility for outcomes. Strategic alignment embodies co-creation.

Agencies should conduct annual strategic alignment sessions with each client, revisit objectives, refine expectations, and realign creative direction.

## 4.5 Propositions

In Chapter 2, Section 2.5, the propositions for the study were formulated. Based on the analysis of the data, each of the study's propositions was revisited and then assessed against the empirical findings. Evidence from the interviews was used to determine whether each proposition was supported, partially supported, or supported and extended. Table 4.1 below summarises the proposition outcomes:

**Table 4.1: Integrated Proposition Testing**

| Proposition                                                                                | Cross-Case Evidence (Clients + Agency Executives)                                                                                                                                                                                | Verdict                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>P1a: Service Quality is positively related to Trust, Commitment, and Communication.</i> | Reliability builds trust, but commitment arises only when service quality is sustained during uncertainty [Section 4.4.2].                                                                                                       | <b>Partially Supported</b>    |
| <i>P1b: Service Quality is directly and positively related to Customer Satisfaction.</i>   | Consistent, accountable delivery increased satisfaction and reassurance across cases [Section 4.4.2].                                                                                                                            | <b>Supported</b>              |
| <i>P1c: Service Quality is directly and positively related to Perceived Value</i>          | Quality contributed to perceived value through reliability, ROI, and commercial credibility. Quality informs perceived professionalism, however value stems from strategic contribution beyond task excellence. [Section 4.4.2]. | <b>Partially Supported</b>    |
| <i>P2a: Relational drivers are positively related to customer satisfaction</i>             | Transparency, ownership, and proactive communication enhanced satisfaction and reduced friction [Section 4.4.3].                                                                                                                 | <b>Supported</b>              |
| <i>P2b: Relational drivers are positively related to customers' perceived value</i>        | Long-term, trust-based relationships fostered co-creation, efficiency, and mutual respect, strengthening perceived value [Section 4.4.3]. Increased perceived value.                                                             | <b>Supported and extended</b> |
| <i>P3a: Customer Satisfaction is positively</i>                                            | Satisfaction affirmed performance reliability and improved perceptions of long-term value [Section 4.4.4].                                                                                                                       | <b>Partially Supported</b>    |

|                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>related to Perceived Value</i>                                                     | Satisfaction reinforces perception that the relationship is worthwhile.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                               |
| <i>P3b: Customer Satisfaction is positively related to Switching Costs</i>            | Satisfaction increased the perceived difficulty of switching due to embedded processes and relationship familiarity [Section 4.4.4].                                                                                                                                         | <b>Partially Supported</b>    |
| <i>P3c: Customer Satisfaction is positively related to Customer loyalty</i>           | Satisfaction stabilised relationships but did not guarantee loyalty; external and creative factors still prompted change [Section 4.4.4].                                                                                                                                    | <b>Partially Supported</b>    |
| <i>P4a: Perceived Value is positively related to Customer Loyalty</i>                 | Measurable impact, strategic contribution, and foresight were the most powerful loyalty predictors [Section 4.4.5].                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Supported and extended</b> |
| <i>P5a: Switching costs are positively related to customer loyalty</i>                | Switching barriers helped sustain relationships but remained secondary to trust and perceived value [Section 4.4.5]. Switching costs appeared as contextual moderators, not primary drivers, they buy time for recovery but cannot substitute for or mitigate eroding value. | <b>Not supported</b>          |
| <i>P6a: Account Management Quality is positively related to Loyalty</i>               | Account leads were central to continuity and trust; turnover risked destabilising relationships [Section 4.4.6].                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Supported and extended</b> |
| <i>P7a: Creativity and Creative Output are positively related to Customer Loyalty</i> | Creativity reinforced loyalty when strategically relevant and commercially effective, not when purely aesthetic [Section 4.4.6].                                                                                                                                             | <b>Supported</b>              |
| <i>P8a: Responsiveness and Agility are positively related to Customer Loyalty</i>     | Agility enhanced satisfaction and trust but did not independently sustain loyalty [Section 4.4.6] Loyalty rests on responsiveness supported by substance – agility is a relational signal and not a core value proposition.                                                  | <b>Partially Supported</b>    |
| <i>P9a: A strong reputation relates positively to</i>                                 | Reputation influenced selection and reassurance, but retention depended on                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Supported</b>              |

|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                           |                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>perceived risk and positively relates to enhancing loyalty</i>                                   | lived performance experience [Section 4.4.6]. Reputation assists at relationship entry, however once engaged, loyalty becomes experiential and not reputational.                          |                           |
| <b>P10a:</b> <i>Alignment with Client Business Goals is positively related to Customer Loyalty.</i> | Strategic alignment and shared vision emerged as the strongest determinants of enduring loyalty [Section 4.4.6]. Alignment operates as the meta-driver sustaining relational longevity. . | <b>Strongly Supported</b> |

#### 4.5.1 Resultant propositions

The consequences of the proposition verdicts as indicated in Table 4.1 above delivered the following updated propositions.

##### **P1a: Revised (partially supported)**

Service Quality is directly and positively related to trust and communication, and indirectly and positively related to commitment.

##### **P1b: Supported**

Service Quality is directly and positively related to Customer Satisfaction.

##### **P1c: Revised (partially supported)**

Service Quality contributes to perceived value by ensuring reliability and trustworthiness.

##### **P2a: Supported**

Relational drivers are positively related to customer satisfaction.

##### **P2b: Supported and extended**

Relational drivers are positively related perceived value, as they co-create and strengthen it.

##### **P3a: Revised (partially supported)**

Customer satisfaction and relationship familiarity directly and positively reinforce perceived value.

##### **P3b: Revised (partially supported):**

Customer satisfaction and relationship familiarity directly and positively reinforce switching costs.

##### **P3c: Revised (partially supported):**

Customer satisfaction stabilises relationships and is positively related to customer loyalty.

##### **P4a: Supported and Extended:**

Perceived value strongly and directly predicts customer loyalty.

**P5a: Not supported:**

Switching costs directly and positively relate to customer loyalty when reinforced by trust, quality, and ongoing value creation.

**P6a: Supported and Extended:**

Account management quality directly drives customer loyalty by fostering trust, transparency, and relationship stability.

**P7a: Supported:**

Creativity and creative output are positively related to customer loyalty.

**P8a: Revised (partially supported):**

Responsiveness and agility are positively related to customer loyalty through customer satisfaction.

**P9a: Supported**

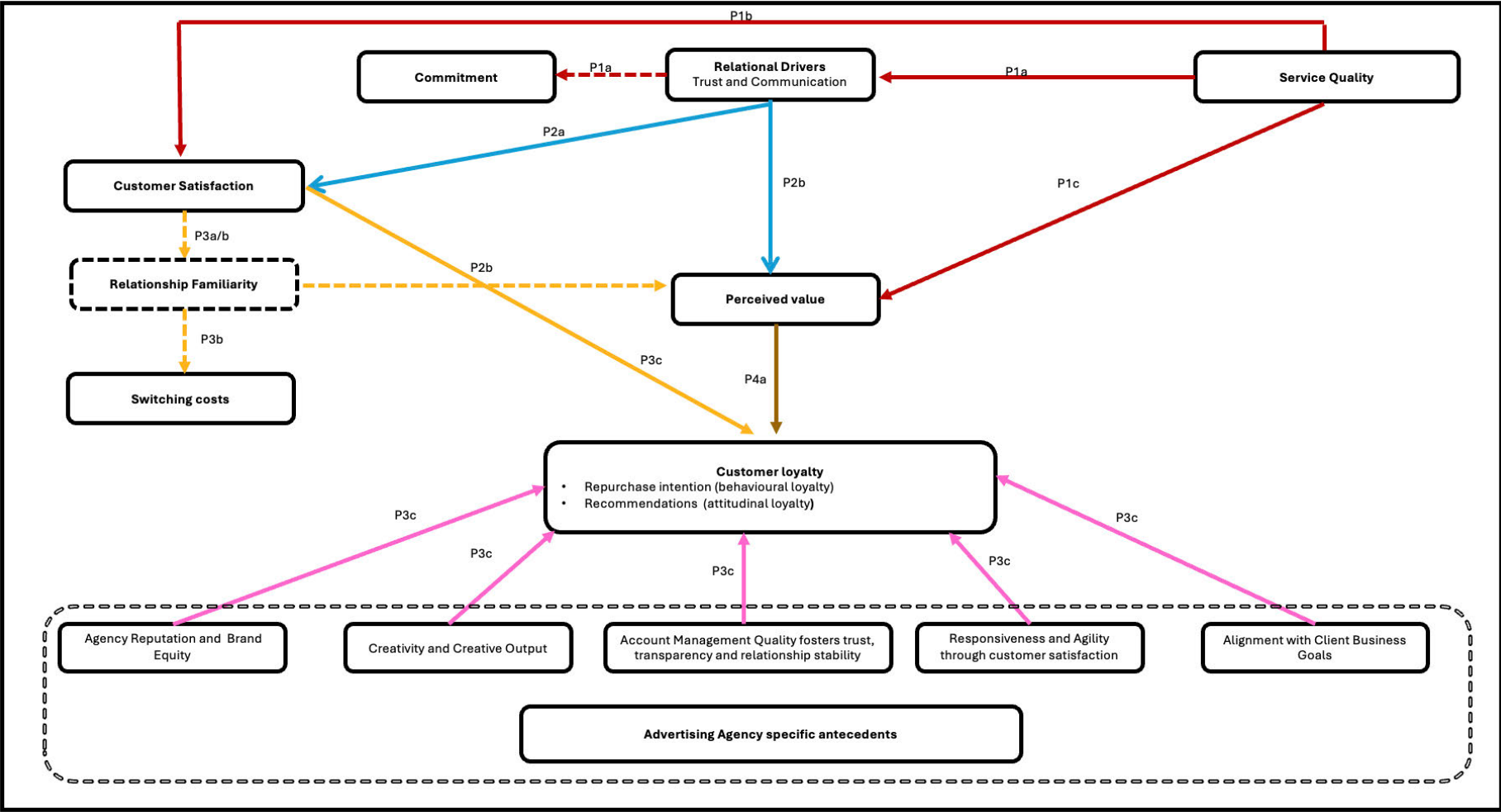
A strong reputation relates positively to perceived risk and positively relates to enhancing loyalty.

**P10a: Strongly supported**

Alignment with Client Business Goals is positively related to Customer Loyalty.

Based on the refined propositions emerging from the empirical findings, Figure 4.1 presents the revised conceptual framework developed from this study.

Figure 4.1: Revised Conceptual Framework



## **4.6 Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness encompasses the reliability and validity of the study, influencing the accuracy, transparency, and the quality of the findings (Du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.*, 2021:295). In this study, trustworthiness was strengthened through a clearly defined and transparent research process that aligned data collection, analysis, and interpretation with the interpretivist paradigm and the deductive qualitative design that was described in Chapter 3. The subsections that follow clearly outline the specific steps taken to uphold credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout the research process.

### **4.6.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings and the extent to which they reflect participants' authentic experiences (Abidin, *et al.*, 2024:9). To enhance credibility, the researcher applied the principles of prolonged engagement and triangulation (Du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.*, 2021:295; Coleman, 2021:2044).

Interviews of between 45 and 60 minutes were held with both agency executives and clients, which created space for rapport and allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences in depth. Collecting perspectives from both sides, served as a form of triangulation, thereby ensuring that insights were cross-verified, rather than relying on a single viewpoint.

Member checking was applied informally during interviews by paraphrasing and then confirming the participant responses to ensure that meanings were correctly understood. Direct quotations were included in the findings to reflect the participants' views in their own words and support authenticity.

Given the researcher's dual role as Managing Director of the focal agency, reflexive awareness was maintained throughout data collection and interpretation to recognise and to limit any personal bias (Kakar, *et al.*, 2023:151). In addition, a debriefing session with the research supervisor provided an external perspective that assisted to strengthen the credibility of the interpretations.

### **4.6.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings can be applied to other contexts. In this study, detailed descriptions of participants' roles, experiences and working environments were included, to support contextual understanding (Lee, *et al.*, 2022:15; Ahmed, 2024:3).

Clear reporting of the sampling process and participant criteria, which included senior agency executives and blue-chip clients, allows readers to judge whether the findings may be relevant to similar B2B service settings. Reflections on the study's boundaries and industry context further assist practitioners and researchers in evaluating how far the results might apply beyond this sample.

#### **4.6.3 Dependability**

Dependability parallels reliability in quantitative research and refers to the stability and consistency of the research process over time (Ahmed, 2022:3). In this study dependability was strengthened through comprehensive documentation of the research design, data collection procedures, and the analytical steps outlined in Chapter 3.

An audit trail was maintained to record methodological decisions, coding processes, and any minor adaptations made during analysis, supporting transparency and traceability. Alignment between the semi-structured interview approach and Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DCQA) contributed to methodological cohesion.

A systematic, iterative approach was applied throughout data analysis, cycling between raw data, codes, and the initial propositions to ensure internal consistency (Kakar, *et al.*, 2023:152). The consistency of interpretation across the client and executive interviews considerably reinforced the dependability of the results.

#### **4.6.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability provides the extent to which the findings are derived from participants' accounts rather than researcher assumptions or bias (Kakar, *et al.*, 2023:153). To support confirmability, the study maintained links between raw data, thematic codes, and analytical interpretations as presented in Chapter 4.

Reflexivity was applied throughout the analysis process to ensure that personal perspectives or prior experiences did not distort participants' narratives. Supervisory debriefing was also used to review interpretations and safeguard against potential bias.

By presenting clear connections between data, coding, and emergent themes, the study ensures that findings can be traced directly to participants lived experiences. This approach demonstrates confirmability through transparency and systematic documentation.

### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter restated the sampling strategy and participant selection criteria,

demonstrating their suitability for addressing the research objectives within a qualitative design. An overview of the data analysis approach then showed how DQCA was applied systematically to organise and interpret the interview data in line with the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1).

The findings were presented according to the key themes and theoretical propositions, providing insight into the factors that influence customer loyalty within South African B2B client-agency relationships. Measures to ensure trustworthiness were also outlined, addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

These results lay the foundation for the next chapter, which discusses the implications of the findings, offers practical recommendations, and presents the overall conclusions of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the study's findings by drawing together insights from both the literature and the empirical data to address the research purpose and objectives. It begins with a summary of the key findings from the literature review, followed by a synopsis of the results from the data analysis phase, which explored the perspectives of agency clients and executives within the South African advertising industry.

The chapter then outlines the limitations of the research, followed by conclusions that relate to the research purpose and objectives. Finally, the significance of the study is discussed in terms of its contributions to academic literature, future research, and the advertising industry, concluding with recommendations and directions for future study.

### **5.2 Summary of Findings**

This section summarises the key findings from both the literature review and the empirical analysis. It first outlines the main antecedents of customer loyalty identified in existing research and reflected in the conceptual framework, before presenting how these were confirmed, refined, or extended through the qualitative data collected from agency clients and advertising executives.

#### ***5.2.1 Findings from the Literature Review***

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 established a broad theoretical foundation for examining the antecedents of customer loyalty in a B2B service context. Existing research consistently positions loyalty in these settings as relational as opposed to transactional, shaped by trust, satisfaction, commitment, and mutual value creation. The review focused on a broad range of studies in order to identify the key antecedents of customer loyalty and to inform the conceptual framework that guided the empirical phase of this study.

Service quality emerged as a primary antecedent of loyalty across service-oriented organisations. In line with Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1988) SERVQUAL model, service quality is conceptualised through dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. Furthermore, the literature indicates that service quality forms the foundation of relational performance by shaping client perceptions of consistency and delivery integrity. The presence of high service quality has been shown to strengthen satisfaction, build trust, and improve perceived value, which together

significantly increase the likelihood of continued engagement.

A second category of antecedents relates to relational drivers, including trust, commitment, and communication. According to the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), trust and commitment are essential to the formation of enduring partnerships. Trust reduces uncertainty, while commitment reflects the willingness to maintain the relationship despite competing alternatives. Effective communication further supports these constructs by overtly promoting transparency and mutual understanding. Together, these relational drivers are seen as critical to establishing and maintaining long-term loyalty in B2B service exchanges.

Customer satisfaction is widely considered to be a mediating factor between service quality and loyalty. Satisfaction emerges when service performance aligns with or exceeds the expectations that are held by the customer. Continued satisfaction stabilises the relationship and firmly reinforces confidence in the service provider's capability, contributing to both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty over time.

The literature highlights perceived value as a core antecedent of loyalty. In B2B relationships, perceived value reflects the client's evaluation of the benefits that they receive from the partnership relative to the associated costs. Studies show that higher perceived value directly aligns with stronger commitment levels and reduced sensitivity to competitor offerings, providing both a rational and an emotional justification for the partnership to remain intact.

Closely related are switching costs, which include various financial, procedural, and relational elements. The literature proposes that when switching costs are high due to embedded processes, trust, and interpersonal relationships, clients are less likely to change their service provider. These costs act as stabilising forces that reinforce loyalty when perceived value and satisfaction remain strong.

Beyond these broader B2B antecedents, several loyalty drivers were identified as particularly relevant to the advertising industry. These include account management quality, which ensures consistency and continuity through strong administration and interpersonal relationships; creativity and innovation, which differentiate agencies and sustain client engagement; responsiveness and agility, reflecting the ability to adapt within fast-changing environments; agency reputation and brand equity, which signal credibility and reliability; and alignment with client business goals, which ultimately supports strategic partnership and shared success.

When viewed holistically, the literature positions customer loyalty as a complex and multidimensional construct that is shaped by both relational and performance-based factors. Service quality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, perceived value, and switching costs interact with industry-specific antecedents such as creativity, agility, and strategic alignment to support long-term relationships in B2B service settings. These theoretical insights informed the study's proposed conceptual framework and then guided the development of the propositions evaluated through empirical analysis. The following section discusses how these literature-derived antecedents appeared in, and were interpreted from, the data.

### ***5.2.2 Findings from Data Analysis***

The analysis of ten semi-structured interviews with agency clients and executives explored how the antecedents of customer loyalty identified in the literature and conceptual framework manifest within South African client-agency relationships. Using a directed qualitative content analysis approach, the findings confirmed, refined, and, in some cases even extended the theoretical relationships proposed in the study.

Overall, the key findings highlight that customer loyalty in the advertising industry develops through a combination of behaviour, trust, collaboration, and importantly, shared direction. The results aligned closely with the conceptual framework, confirming the influence of service quality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, perceived value, and switching costs, alongside industry-specific factors such as account management quality, creativity, responsiveness, agility, reputation, and alignment with client objectives.

Service quality emerged as the fundamental requirement for building loyalty and was defined by reliability, responsiveness, and consistent delivery. Clients saw dependable quality as the foundation of confidence, while agency executives viewed it as the framework that provides relationship stability. Yet, quality alone did not guarantee loyalty. It laid the foundation for deeper relational and strategic value to develop.

Relational factors also played a key role. Trust was associated with honesty and accountability, commitment with proactive effort, and communication was linked to openness and to clarity. Together, these qualities improved satisfaction and perceived value, forming the basis for long-term partnerships to flourish.

Customer satisfaction served mainly as a stabilising influence. It supported continuity by reinforcing confidence and reducing uncertainty, but it was not enough to prevent change when creative direction deteriorated, significant leadership changes occurred, or procurement cycles intervened.

Perceived value was one of the strongest contributors to loyalty, incorporating strategic insight, creative relevance, and measurable business outcomes. Switching costs were viewed as largely secondary; they helped safeguard partnerships only when trust and satisfaction were already established.

Among the agency-specific drivers, account management quality was consistently highlighted as critical to continuity. Creativity and innovation supported loyalty when tied to commercial success rather than original conceptual thinking or awards. Responsiveness and agility signalled respect and prioritisation, while reputation and brand equity played a greater role at the start of a new relationship than later on in contract cycle. Strategic alignment with client goals emerged as a critical factor in long-term loyalty, in particular when agencies demonstrated strong foresight and deep contextual understanding.

Participants also recognised various external pressures, including transformation requirements, stringent procurement processes, and organisational restructuring, which occasionally disrupted strong and established partnerships. These influences highlighted that loyalty is not only shaped by the performance of the agency, but also by broader contextual forces.

To summarise, the findings articulate that customer loyalty in the dynamic South African advertising industry is earned through consistent delivery, integrity, and ongoing strategic relevance, rather than simply being secured through contractual obligation. Service quality, relational strength, perceived value, and account management capability were the most enduring loyalty drivers, while satisfaction, agility, and switching costs helped reinforce relationships without defining them.

### **5.3 Limitations of Research**

While this study offers an array of meaningful insights into the antecedents of customer loyalty within the South African advertising industry, several methodological and contextual limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations do not in any way detract from the credibility of the research but rather outline its scope and provide some direction for future investigation.

- The conceptual framework developed in this study shows strong internal validity as the structures and relationships are grounded in detailed and context-specific qualitative data and supported by well-recognised theoretical foundations. However,

the reliability of the framework and potential for consistent repetition across other agency contexts remains limited.

- As a result of propositions being derived from semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample, their application may provide different outcomes in differing agency environments or other service B2B industry contexts. The framework is therefore theoretically valid, but contextually the model requires future empirical testing through quantitative analysis to establish construct reliability and generalisable strength of associations.
- The researcher's dual role as Group Managing Director of the focal agency introduced the potential for subjectivity and interpretive bias. Although rigorous ethical safeguards, reflexivity, and data triangulation were applied to minimise this influence, the researcher's professional background may have shaped both the interpretation of data and the framing of findings. This positionality, however, also improved the depth of understanding and access to senior participants that may not have been possible for an external researcher.
- The study's sample was sufficient to achieve data saturation within a qualitative context but was limited to a small group of agency clients from one focal agency and senior executives drawn from advertising agencies in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Although this approach allowed for rich and detailed insights, it did limit the range of perspectives across different agency sizes, market segments, and geographic regions. The findings therefore reflect a fairly narrow but deep view of loyalty dynamics rather than a sector-wide representation.
- In addition, the study used a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time. Because of the fact that customer loyalty changes as leadership, market conditions, and business priorities shift, findings represent a temporal snapshot of loyalty perceptions rather than their longitudinal progression. Future studies using quantitative methods over an extended period could provide a stronger basis for understanding how loyalty forms, stabilises, or in fact declines across diverse organisational and market settings.

## 5.4 Conclusions

The research was undertaken to address the following problem:

Without an understanding and codification of customer loyalty antecedents within the advertising industry in South Africa, customer loyalty cannot be considered or harnessed as a source of competitive advantage.

To resolve this problem, the study was guided by the following research purpose:

The purpose of this research is to understand and codify the antecedents of customer loyalty in the context of the advertising industry, specifically advertising agencies, from both the perspectives of agency executives and customers.

To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives were established and systematically addressed throughout the study:

- *Identify and discuss the elements of customer loyalty.* This objective was accomplished in Chapter 2, which reviewed literature across B2B, service, and advertising-industry contexts, identifying key antecedents such as service quality, trust, commitment, communication, satisfaction, perceived value, and switching costs, together with agency-specific factors including account management quality, creativity, agility, reputation, and strategic alignment.
- Make propositions and propose a conceptual framework of the antecedents to customer loyalty using literature, theory, and frameworks of customer loyalty in the B2B sector, service sector, and advertising industry literature. Completed in Chapter 2, this objective was met through the formulation of ten propositions and the development of a conceptual framework positioning the identified antecedents within the client-agency loyalty dynamic.
- *Develop semi-structured interviews for agency executives and agency customers using the conceptual framework categories.* Addressed in Chapter 3, interview instruments were generated directly from the framework categories, ensuring alignment between theoretical constructs and the empirical data collection process.
- Analyse collected interview data and test the propositions and proposed conceptual framework using a directed qualitative content analysis approach. This objective was achieved in Chapter 4, where the deductive analysis of ten semi-structured interviews was presented. The analysis followed a directed qualitative content analysis approach, enabling systematic testing of the proposed conceptual framework and

propositions against the empirical data.

- *Extend the current theoretical understanding of customer loyalty for the South African advertising industry.* This objective was achieved through the integration of literature and empirical findings in Chapters 4 and 5. By applying existing loyalty theories from B2B and service-sector environments to the South African client-agency context, the study refined theoretical relationships among key antecedents such as service quality, trust, satisfaction, perceived value, and switching costs. Through this process, the conceptual framework was validated and then adapted to reflect industry-specific realities, showcasing the relational and strategic dimensions that support loyalty within advertising partnerships.

All research objectives were therefore achieved, and by extension, the research purpose fulfilled. While the study was exploratory in scope, its structured deductive design effectively tested and refined the proposed conceptual framework. The study therefore offers a sound theoretical and evidence-based foundation for future quantitative research to test and refine the model across a broader population.

## **5.5 Significance of Research**

### **5.5.1 Contribution to Literature**

This study contributes to the customer loyalty literature by addressing the demonstrated gap related to the advertising industry. Although loyalty has been widely examined in general B2B and service contexts, the advertising sector has received significantly less focus, particularly in South Africa. No prior research has explored the views of both clients and agency executives within the same study. This research therefore offers a more complete picture of the client-agency relationship by capturing how each group perceives and experiences it. Using a deductive qualitative design, the study supports the relevance of well-established loyalty drivers such as service quality, trust, satisfaction, and perceived value, while also drawing attention to factors that are more common to advertising agencies, including account management capability, creativity, agility, and alignment with client goals. Taken together, these findings offer a more detailed view of customer loyalty as a multidimensional outcome that is shaped by interpersonal relationships, agency practices, and various situational influences in B2B service settings.

### **5.5.2 Contribution to and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study contributes to the understanding of customer loyalty by positioning established

loyalty constructs within the realities of the South African advertising industry. Using a deductive qualitative approach, it dissects how factors such as service quality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, perceived value, and switching costs function within the day-to-day dynamics of client-agency relationships. When considered together with factors that take on particular significance within the advertising sector, such as the quality of account management, creativity and innovation, responsiveness, brand reputation, and alignment with client business objectives, the findings offer a far more nuanced view of how loyalty is actually formed and then maintained in B2B advertising relationships. In doing this, the study addresses a distinct gap in existing research and offers a framework that reflects both relational and contextual dimensions of loyalty.

The study also demonstrates how directed qualitative content analysis can be applied to deepen theoretical understanding in a more practical, service-based setting. The resulting conceptual framework provides a solid foundation for future work. Subsequent research could extend and test this framework across a broader range of agencies and client sectors, using quantitative methods to evaluate the relative strength and interaction of key loyalty drivers, thereby improving generalisability.

As the advertising landscape continues to rapidly evolve through automation, through artificial intelligence (AI), and hybrid delivery models, future studies should also look to explore how these shifts are actually reshaping ideas of value, creativity, and partnership. Understanding how technological change affects trust, collaboration, and strategic alignment will be absolutely vital to developing a contemporary theory of loyalty that reflects the changing nature of complex agency relationships.

### ***5.5.3 Contribution to Industry***

This study contributes to the advertising industry by clarifying the relational and strategic factors that enable long-term client-agency partnerships. The findings show that loyalty develops through a balance of trust, reliability, and shared goals. It is not simply a by-product of transactions but the result of consistent delivery, mutual respect and shared intent. By showing how antecedents such as service quality, relational strength, perceived value, and strategic alignment work together in practice, the research provides a practical framework for understanding how loyalty can be developed and then preserved in a highly competitive agency environment.

Beyond its academic contribution, the study also serves as a guideline for both agencies and clients to reflect on the various dynamics that shape partnership success or provide strain. It encourages a shift away from short-term, performance-based measures toward

approaches that prioritise genuine collaboration, transparency, and all-important shared purpose. In doing so, it supports a more resilient and sustainable client-agency ecosystem within the South African advertising landscape.

## **5.6 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter summarised the key findings from the literature review and data analysis, integrating theoretical insights with the lived experiences of agency clients and advertising executives. The research limitations were acknowledged, particularly regarding sample size and the cross-sectional design, which restrict the generalisability of the results. Nonetheless, the study achieved its stated objectives and by implication, fulfilled its overarching research purpose of understanding and codifying the antecedents of customer loyalty in the South African advertising industry.

In conclusion, this study affirms that in the advertising industry, loyalty is not a given but a continual outcome of reliability, strategic alignment, and shared intent. It is earned through consistent performance, transparent collaboration, and a genuine investment in client success. Within complex and creatively driven B2B environments, the most enduring partnerships are those that move beyond transactional exchange, built instead on trust, mutual respect, and a collective pursuit of long-term growth.

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APPENDIX A

EDIT CERTIFICATION

27 October 2025  
Ref: 7102025

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that the below mini-Dissertation was edited by an English language editor on 25 - 26 October 2025.

**Title:** Beyond the Pitch: Antecedents to Customer Loyalty in South Africa's Advertising Industry

**Author:**  
Craig du Preez

**Student Number:** [REDACTED]

Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the degree: Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership at The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Ltd.

**Scope of editing:** Grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and phrasing. Neither research content nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

Sincerely  
[REDACTED]

Taryn Lee Migatchev  
Editor

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE CUSTOMERS

#### **Appendix A: Interview Schedule: Exploring the Antecedents of Customer Loyalty in South Africa's B2B Advertising Sector (Client Version)**

This study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on customer loyalty within the South African advertising agency sector. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to share detailed, personal accounts while enabling the researcher to probe for clarification and depth.

The interview schedule is built around open-ended, jargon-free questions to ensure accessibility and comfort for all participants. **Each question is linked to constructs identified in the literature as key antecedents to customer loyalty.** The aim of this research is to understand from agency customers if these antecedents are, in fact, relevant within the advertising industry context. While these questions provide structure, they also allow participants' unique narratives to emerge naturally; encouraging the discussion of experiences, examples and perceptions that might not surface in a purely structured format.

#### **Introduction:**

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research interview. I am conducting this study as part of my MCom in Brand Leadership at Vega School, under the supervision of Dr Tish Taylor. The interview forms part of my mini-dissertation, which will be submitted in November.*

*This research is independent and has not been commissioned by Promise Group. The agency is not involved in participant selection or participation and will not have access to your personal information. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. Interview transcripts will be used only for data analysis, and all identifying details — such as your name, your organisation, or any other personal information — will be removed.*

*Interview data will be stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer for five (5) years, after which it will be permanently deleted.*

*The purpose of this research is to understand the antecedents to customer loyalty within the South African advertising agency space. The reason that you have been selected to participate is, firstly, because you are a customer of Promise Group, and secondly, based on your position as [Job Title], you have extensive experience with a variety of advertising agencies and advertising industry players. Your experiences — both with this agency and with the advertising industry more broadly — will provide valuable insights.*

*The interview questions will focus on your experiences as a B2B customer, based on your cumulative interactions with advertising agencies, rather than on Promise Group specifically. These are not performance review questions, and there are no right or wrong answers — only your honest perspectives, opinions and expectations.*

*The interview is expected to take between 60-90 minutes. Because this is an extended period, you will have the option of taking breaks during the interview, segmenting the interview across multiple days, or combining both approaches (e.g., short breaks between questions and continuing on another day, if required).*

*The interview is structured into seven (7) sections, each containing a set of questions related to the section theme. At the beginning of each section, I will let you know:*

- *The number of questions included in the section, and*
- *The approximate time it may take to address them.*

*Please note that these time estimates are guidelines only. You are not expected to restrict your responses to the suggested timeframe, nor are you required to use the full time. You are encouraged to take as much or as little time as you feel necessary to answer each question.*

*At any stage during the interview, you are welcome to:*

- *Request a break, or*
- *Choose to continue the remaining questions on another day or at a time that is convenient for you.*

*I will also check in with you periodically to ask whether you would like to pause, take a break, or reschedule.*

*At the conclusion of the interview, you will have the opportunity to share any final remarks, reflections or feedback in whichever manner you prefer.*

*I acknowledge that my role as Group Managing Director of Promise Group may pose ethical concerns. To mitigate any potential risks that my position may pose, please understand that:*

- *Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you should not feel obliged to participate.*
- *You may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.*
- *You may refuse to answer any question.*
- *You are under no obligation to provide positive feedback with regards to Promise Group.*

*If at any stage you feel uncomfortable with the interview process, my role as researcher, or any question asked, you may raise your concern directly with me or with my supervisor, Dr Tish Taylor.*

*Should you wish to receive a copy of the final research findings, please email me at [REDACTED] If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact my supervisor, Dr Tish Taylor, via email at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED]*

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Before we begin the interview, please note that these questions relate to not only your current experience as a customer of Promise Group, but on your cumulative experience within the advertising industry and previous experience with other agencies. As such, each question is prefaced by — “In your experience”. If you have not previously experienced an aspect of these questions, please feel free to say so.

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**Section A1: General Perspectives on Customer Loyalty**

***[Consists of four (4) open-ended questions with an approximate time of between 5 and 10 minutes]***

- A.1.1. In your own words, what does customer loyalty mean to you in a B2B agency–client context?
- A.1.2. Based on your experience, what factors or behaviours from an agency would make you a loyal customer? If you feel comfortable to do so, could you share examples?
- A.1.3. Thinking about agencies you’ve worked with, has your organisation been loyal to any one in particular? If yes, what drove that loyalty? If not, why?

A.1.4. When deciding to continue with an agency, what elements are non-negotiable for you?  
Can you explain why?

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**Section A2: Service Quality (P1a, P1b, P1c)**

***[Consists of five (5) directed questions with an approximate time of between 10 and 15 minutes]***

- A.2.1. What does service quality mean to you in the context of working with an agency? How do you judge whether it is high or low?
- A.2.2. How does the level of service quality provided by an agency influence your level of trust or confidence in them (if at all)? If you are comfortable answering, can you think of a time when an agency’s service quality made you feel more committed? **(P1a)**
- A.2.3. In what way does the service quality provided by an agency affect your satisfaction with the agency? Which aspects of service delivery most affect your satisfaction? **(P1b)**
- A.2.4. When you think of the value you get from an agency, how much of that is shaped by the quality of service provided? **(P1c)**
- A.2.5. Do you believe that service quality alone would lead you to become loyal to an agency? If yes, why? If no, what other aspects would need to be ‘included with service quality’ to make you loyal?

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**Section A3: Relational Drivers of Trust, Commitment and Communication (P2a, P2b)**

***[Consists of three (3) directed questions with an approximate time of between 7 and 12 minutes]***

- A.3.1. Please can you elaborate on how each of the following three (3) elements affect your overall satisfaction with an agency:
- a) Trust (Why?)

- b) Commitment (Why?)
- c) Communication (Why?) **(P2a)**
- A.3.2. What are the benefits for you (the customer) in entering a strong or long agency–client relationship?
- A.3.3. Do you believe that strong or long agency–client relationships make you feel like you are getting better value for your investment? **(P2b)** Could you give an example of this?

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**Section A4: Customer Satisfaction (P3a, P3b, P3c)**

*[Consists of five (5) directed questions with an approximate time of between 8 and 13 minutes]*

- A.4.1. Have you ever been satisfied with an agency, yet switched to another agency? If you don't mind answering, can you explain why?
- A.4.2. Would satisfaction with an agency make it harder to consider alternative agencies, or would this have no effect on the decision? **(P3a)**
- A.4.3. How much does the consideration of switching costs affect the potential to be loyal to an agency? If it was just too expensive and time consuming, would you remain loyal? **(P3b)**
- A.4.4. How does being satisfied with an agency influence your willingness to stay with them long term? **(P3c)**
- A.4.5. Have you ever stayed with an agency for an extended period of time — despite being dissatisfied? Can you elaborate?

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We have reached the halfway point of the interview. Would you like to take a break before we continue with the remaining three (3) sections, which should take between 20 and 35 minutes to address, before closing remarks and feedback?

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**Section A5: Perceived Value and Switching Costs (P4a, P5a)**

***[Consists of four (4) directed questions with an approximate time of between 10 and 15 minutes]***

- A.5.1. How would you describe the concept of 'perceived value' from a customer perspective?  
What does 'perceived value' normally pertain to?
- A.5.2. How does the value you perceive from an agency's services affect your loyalty to them  
(or does it)? **(P4a)**
- A.5.3. What challenges or costs would you face if you switched agencies? Have these costs  
ever affected your decision to stay with an agency? **(P5a)** How and when did you decide  
to leave?
- A.5.4. Does the level of service quality provided by an agency (in isolation) affect whether you  
would consider switching or not?
- 

**Section A6: Advertising Agency Specific Antecedents (P6a, P7a, P8a, P9a, P10a)**

***[Consists of five (5) directed questions with an approximate time of between 10 and 15 minutes]***

- A.6.1. How important is the quality of your Account Manager or team in shaping your loyalty  
to an agency? **(P6a)** Based on the relationships developed between customers and  
Account Managers or teams, have you ever left an agency because the Account  
Manager left? How strong is that relationship?
- A.6.2. As a customer, how important is creativity and innovation to you? Would these two  
aspects make you a loyal customer? **(P7a)**
- A.6.3. In what way would creativity and innovation affect your satisfaction? And would this  
satisfaction lead you to become a loyal customer? **(P8a)**

- A.6.4. When looking for a new agency, how much of an influence does an agency’s reputation and image in the industry have on you? Would the reputation and image alone affect your decision to become a loyal customer? **(P9a)**
- A.6.5. How important (if at all) is an agency’s understanding of and alignment with your business goals? Can you explain why? Would this affect your loyalty to an agency? **(P10a)**
- -----

**Closing Question**

***[Consists of two (2) open questions with an approximate time of between 2 and 5 minutes]***

1. In the context of trying to understand what leads to customer loyalty, in an advertising agency specifically, is there anything else you believe is important to understand from a customer perspective that we have not yet discussed?
  2. In closing, I would like to offer you the opportunity to provide any feedback, observations or to make any statements or remarks.
- -----

**Closing Statement**

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview and contribute to my research study. Your insights are invaluable. **Should I have any follow-up questions for clarification, may I contact you?**

Before we finish, I’d like to remind you about how the information you’ve shared today will be handled:

- Once this data has been transcribed, I will remove any personal identifying information on both yourself and your organisation, as well as any other information identified in your answers — this is to ensure both confidentiality and anonymity of the research and data analysis.
- Thereafter, only my supervisor, Dr Tish Taylor, and I will have access to the raw interview data, which will be used solely for the analysis required for my MCom mini-dissertation.

- If you have any concerns or queries about the handling of this data, you are most welcome to contact either myself or Dr Tish Taylor.
- The final analysed data will form part of my MCom mini-dissertation submitted to Vega School.
- All raw data will be stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer for five (5) years, after which it will be permanently deleted.
- If you would like access to the findings of this research, please feel free to contact me and I will gladly share them once available.

Once again, thank you for your time and valuable input.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE EXECUTIVES

#### **Appendix B: Interview Schedule: Exploring the Antecedents of Customer Loyalty in South Africa's B2B Advertising Sector (Agency Executive's Version)**

This study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on customer loyalty within the South African advertising agency sector. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to share detailed, personal accounts while enabling the researcher to probe for clarification and depth.

The interview schedule is built around open-ended, jargon-free questions to ensure accessibility and comfort for all participants. **Each question is linked to constructs identified in the literature as key antecedents to customer loyalty.** The aim of this research is to understand from agency executives if these antecedents are, in fact, relevant within the advertising agency context. While these questions provide structure, they also allow participants' unique narratives to emerge naturally; encouraging the discussion of experiences, examples and perceptions that might not surface in a purely structured format.

#### **Introduction:**

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research interview. I am conducting this study as part of my MCom in Strategic Brand Leadership at Vega School, under the supervision of Dr Tish Taylor. The interview forms part of my mini-dissertation, which will be submitted in November.*

*This research is independent and has not been commissioned by Promise Group. The agency is not involved in participant selection or participation and will not have access to your personal information. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. Interview transcripts will be used only for data analysis, and all identifying details — such as your name, your organisation, or any other personal information — will be removed.*

*Interview data will be stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer for five (5) years, after which it will be permanently deleted.*

*The purpose of this research is to understand the antecedents to customer loyalty within the South African advertising agency space. The reason that you have been selected to participate is, firstly, because of our*

*professional relationship, and secondly, based on your position as [Job Title], you have extensive experience with customer churn and customer loyalty. Your lived experiences will provide valuable insights.*

*The interview questions will focus on your cumulative experience in the agency space, as well as your experience as an advertising agency executive. These questions are not aimed at understanding your customer loyalty strategies or obtaining any information relating to your customers themselves. The purpose is to understand what we, as executives, consider important antecedents to customer loyalty from an agency perspective.*

*The interview is expected to take between 30–45 minutes. Because this is an extended period, you will have the option of taking breaks during the interview, segmenting the interview across multiple days, or combining both approaches (e.g., short breaks between questions and continuing on another day, if required).*

*The interview is structured into seven (7) sections, each containing a set of questions related to the section theme. At the beginning of each section, I will let you know:*

- *The number of questions included in the section, and*
- *The approximate time it may take to address them.*

*Please note that these time estimates are guidelines only. You are not expected to restrict your responses to the suggested timeframe, nor are you required to use the full time. You are encouraged to take as much or as little time as you feel necessary to answer each question.*

*At any stage during the interview, you are welcome to:*

- *Request a break, or*
- *Choose to continue the remaining questions on another day or at a time that is convenient for you.*

*I will also check in with you periodically to ask whether you would like to pause, take a break, or reschedule.*

*At the conclusion of the interview, you will have the opportunity to share any final remarks, reflections or feedback in whichever manner you prefer.*

*I acknowledge that my role as Group Managing Director of Promise Group may pose ethical concerns. To mitigate any potential risks that my position may pose, please understand that:*

- *Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you should not feel obliged to participate.*
- *You may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.*
- *You may refuse to answer any question.*
- *You are under no obligation to provide any strategic information.*

*If at any stage you feel uncomfortable with the interview process, my role as researcher, or any question asked, you may raise your concern directly with me or with my supervisor, Dr Tish Taylor.*

*Should you wish to receive a copy of the final research findings, please email me at [REDACTED] If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact my supervisor, Dr Tish Taylor, via email at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED]*

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Before we begin the interview, please note that these questions relate to not only your current experience as an executive of an advertising agency, but on your cumulative experience within the advertising industry. As such, each question is prefaced by — “In your experience”. If you have not previously experienced an aspect of these questions, please feel free to say so.

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**Section B1: General Perspectives on Customer Loyalty**

***[Consists of five (5) open-ended questions with an approximate time of between 5 and 10 minutes]***

- B.1.1 Could you please state your current position and title within your agency.
- B.1.2 In your own words, what does customer loyalty mean to you in a B2B client–agency context?
- B.1.3 Based on your cumulative professional experience, what factors or behaviours from the side of an agency do you believe foster customer loyalty? If you feel comfortable to do so, could you share examples?
- B.1.4 Thinking about agencies you’ve led or worked in, have you noticed any patterns in customer loyalty? What has driven that loyalty or, if not present, why do you think it hasn’t developed?

B.1.5 When aiming to retain clients, what elements do you see as non-negotiable in an agency’s approach? Can you explain why?

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**Section B2: Service Quality (P1a, P1b, P1c)**

***[Consists of seven (7) open-ended questions with an approximate time of between 15 and 20 minutes]***

- B 2.1. What does service quality mean to you in the context of client–agency relationships? If you feel comfortable to answer this, how do you assess whether the service quality offered by your agency is high or low?
- B.2.2. In your experience, does service quality result in customer loyalty? Can you elaborate?
- B.2.3. In your experience, how does the customers’ perception of the quality of service provided by your agency influence their level of trust in you as a provider (if at all)? Could you elaborate? **(P1a)**
- B.2.4. In your experience, how does the customers’ perception of the quality of service provided by your agency influence their level of confidence in you as a provider (if at all)? Could you elaborate? **(P1a)**
- B.2.5. As we both know, service provision is both variable and heterogeneous due to the fact that people provide a service. As a result, how satisfied (in general) do you think your customers are with the quality of service delivered by your agency? **(P1b)**
- B.2.6. What aspects of service delivery do you believe most affect a customer’s satisfaction? Can you elaborate? **(P1b)**
- B.2.7. Would you say that the value a customer feels they get from your agency is, in any way, shaped by the quality of service offered? Could you elaborate? **(P1c)**

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***Section B3: Relational Drivers of Trust, Commitment and Communication (P2a, P2b)***

***[Consists of two (2) directed questions with an approximate time of between 5 and 10 minutes]***

B.3.1. This question is the same, however I would like to understand in what way you believe each of the following affects your clients' overall satisfaction with your agency (by the customer):

- a) Trust (Why?)
- b) Commitment (Why?)
- c) Communication (Why?) **(P2a)**

If any of the above three stand out more than the others, please elaborate on the reason behind this.

B.3.2. When customers have been with your agency for a long time, what do you do (if anything) to make them feel that they are receiving better value in exchange for their decision to stay? **(P2b)** If you feel comfortable to do so, could you give examples of this?

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***Section B4: Customer Satisfaction (P3a, P3b, P3c)***

***[Consists of five (5) directed questions with an approximate time of between 5 and 10 minutes]***

B.4.1. How would you define customer satisfaction in the context of agency work? What does a satisfied client look like to you?

B.4.2. In what way do you think customer satisfaction with an agency influences the value they believe they get from the partnership (if at all)? **(P3a)**

B.4.3. Do you think customer satisfaction with your agency would make it harder to consider switching to another agency? If a customer is satisfied – for what other reasons do you think they would switch? **(P3b)**

B.4.4. How do you believe customer satisfaction influences the customer's decision to stay with your agency for the long-term? **(P3c)** Could you think of any other elements that would make them more willing to stay long term?

B.4.5. Do you think customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty? If so, could you elaborate?

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We have reached the halfway point of the interview. Would you like to take a break before we continue with the remaining three (3) sections, which should take between 20 and 35 minutes to address, before closing remarks and feedback?

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**Section B5: Perceived Value and Switching Costs (P4a, P5a)**

***[Consists of three (3) directed questions with an approximate time of between 5 and 10 minutes]***

- B.5.1. How do you think a customer’s perception of the value they are receiving from an agency affects their loyalty to the agency? **(P4a)** Can you think of what ways customers perceive the value they are getting?
- B.5.2. How much do you think switching costs acts as a barrier for customers switching agencies? **(P5a)**
- B.5.3. How do you believe service quality affects switching behaviour (if at all)?
- 
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**Section B6: Advertising Agency Specific Antecedents (P6a, P7a, P8a, P9a, P10a)**

***[Consists of five (5) directed questions with an approximate time of between 10 and 20 minutes]***

- B.6.1. How important is your Account Manager or team in shaping customer loyalty to the agency? **(P6a)** If you feel comfortable answering this – do you believe that if you lost your Account Manager you would lose the loyalty of the customer too?

- B.6.2. How does your agency’s creativity or innovation affect the satisfaction of your customers? **(P7a)** Do you believe that creativity or innovation would directly affect a customer’s decision to be loyal to your agency? (Depending on how this is answered – if yes, then what part does satisfaction play? If no, then do you think adding satisfaction would result in loyalty?)
- B.6.3. Have you ever experienced a situation where your agency’s ‘speed or responsiveness’ has affected a customer’s loyalty to your agency? **(P8a)** (If yes – do you think this was the only reason for the loyalty, or do you believe there were multiple reasons?)
- B.6.4. How do you think an agency’s reputation or image in the industry affects customer loyalty levels? **(P9a)** What about the bigger name agencies – have you ever taken a client from them? If you feel comfortable, would you elaborate on this?
- B.6.5. Do you feel it is important for your agency to be aligned with the business goals of the customer/organisation? Would this influence customer loyalty? **(P10a)**

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**Closing Question**

***[Consists of two (2) open questions with an approximate time of between 2 and 5 minutes]***

1. Is there anything else you think is important with regards to understanding customer loyalty in the advertising agency context that we haven’t yet discussed?
2. In closing, I would like to offer you the opportunity to provide any feedback, observations or to make any statements or remarks.

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**Closing Statement**

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview and contribute to my research study. Your insights are invaluable. **Should I have any follow-up questions for clarification, may I contact you?**

Before we finish, I'd like to remind you about how the information you've shared today will be handled:

- When transcribing this information, ALL personal information relating to yourself and your agency will be removed from the transcription to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.
- Thereafter, only my supervisor, Dr Tish Taylor, and I will have access to the raw interview data, which will be used solely for the analysis required for my MCom mini-dissertation.
- If you have any concerns or queries about the handling of this data, you are most welcome to contact either myself or Dr Tish Taylor.
- The final analysed data will form part of my MCom mini-dissertation submitted to Vega School.
- All raw data will be stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer for five (5) years, after which it will be permanently deleted.
- If you would like access to the findings of this research, please feel free to contact me and I will gladly share them once available.

Once again, thank you for your time and valuable input.

APPENDIX D

ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Our Ref: M. 1310825  
Enquiries: [REDACTED]

06 August 2025

Outcome of Ethical Clearance for Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership.

Student name: Graig du Preez  
Student number: [REDACTED]  
Brand and campus: IIEVega

Dear Graig,

Thank you for submitting ethics clearance for the study titled: *Antecedents of Customer Loyalty in B2B Service Relationships: A Qualitative Analysis of South Africa's Advertising Industry*

We are pleased to inform you that the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee considered and granted ethics clearance, with major revision to satisfaction of the Supervisor and Head of Programme. This means you may proceed with data collection once the required changes have been addressed and approved by your supervisor and the Head of Programme.

You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research studies.

[REDACTED]

Dr Reza Hosseini

Chair: Higher Degrees Committee



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Directors: GD Whyte (UK), JDR Oesch, MD Aitken, SCD Lurie  
Group Company Secretary: CB Crouse

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## APPENDIX E

## PARTICIPATION OR RESPONDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM



## Annexure H – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

| Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>To whom it may concern,</p> <p>My name is Craig du Preez and I am a student at The IIE's Vega School. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Tish Taylor about the antecedents of customer loyalty within B2B service organisations in the South African advertising industry. This dynamic, service-intensive B2B environment remains largely under-researched from a customer loyalty perspective and study is firmly rooted in the acceptance that long-term client relationships are critical to agency success. I hope that this research will bridge the gap in customer loyalty literature, providing a B2B service industry perspective. Advertising industry specific insights will be gained from researching both the relational constructs and service-specific attributes of customer loyalty. By validating customer loyalty constructs specific within the B2B context for advertising agencies, the research will extend existing theories within creative service organisations. Practically, the findings will also assist in the development of agency specific loyalty enhancing interventions through the development of training protocols, service quality benchmarks and customer engagement frameworks aimed at reducing customer churn.</p> <p>I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.</p> |
| What will I be doing if I participate in your study?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p>I would like to invite you to participate in this research because of the valuable insights I believe you will be able to provide. If you decide to participate, I would like to interview you for a period of 45-60 min, and explore a broad cross-section of factors that contribute to the formation and sustainability of customer loyalty in a B2B service environment, specifically in the context of the advertising industry in South Africa.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about the loyalty dynamics in your industry. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Do I have to participate in the study?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;</li> <li>If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;</li> <li>Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Will my identity be protected?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Vega School will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you. |
| <b>What will happen to the information that participants provide?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>What happens if I have more questions about the study?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p>Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.</p> <p>You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.</p> <p>My contact details are as follows:<br/>         Craig du Preez<br/>         + [REDACTED]<br/>         [REDACTED]</p> <p>The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

|                                            |
|--------------------------------------------|
| Dr Tish Taylor<br>[Redacted]<br>[Redacted] |
|--------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| <b>Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |      |
| I agree to participate in the research conducted by Craig du Preez about the antecedents of customer loyalty within B2B service organisations in the South African advertising industry.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |      |
| This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.</li><li>• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential.</li><li>• My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.</li><li>• I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.</li><li>• I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.</li></ul> |      |
| Signature                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Date |

**APPENDIX F**  
**CODING SHEET**

| <b>No.</b>          | <b>Approach</b> | <b>Code</b>  | <b>Definition<br/>(from Literature)</b>                          | <b>When to Apply</b>                                                                                                               | <b>When Not to Apply</b>                                                                                     | <b>Example Quote (Client)</b>                                                                   | <b>Example Quote (Executive)</b>                                                | <b>Notes / Comments</b>                            |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Q1_IND_Trust        | Inductive       | Trust        | Participant defines loyalty in terms of trust/reliability        | Apply when participants refer to honesty, reliability, or confidence in the agency's ability to deliver, even during difficulties. | Don't apply when participants discuss satisfaction or performance without mentioning reliability or honesty. | <i>Loyalty means you trust them to deliver and to tell you the truth when things go wrong.</i>  | <i>When quality holds under pressure, the client's confidence doesn't waver</i> | trust, reliable, belief, confidence, dependability |
| Q1_IND_Relationship | Inductive       | Relationship | Participant links loyalty to emotional bond/relationship quality | Apply when participants discuss emotional connection, chemistry, or mutual respect between client and                              | Don't apply when comments are purely operational (e.g., project management , timelines).                     | <i>It's when there's real respect and care; you feel like they're invested in your success.</i> | <i>Loyalty grows from genuine relationships, not just good work.</i>            | relationship, chemistry, emotive, rapport          |

|                    |           |             |                                                          |                                                                                                 |                                                                        |                                                                                                         |                                                                                                              |                                                             |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    |           |             |                                                          | agency teams.                                                                                   |                                                                        |                                                                                                         |                                                                                                              |                                                             |
| Q1_IND_Value       | Inductive | Value       | Participant links loyalty to value/ROI/outcomes          | Apply when participants link loyalty to measurable business results, perceived worth, or ROI.   | Don't apply to discussions about creativity or delivery quality alone. | <i>When their thinking helps us solve real problems and hit targets, that's when it feels valuable.</i> | <i>Loyalty only lasts if both sides are still benefitting.</i>                                               | value, ROI, results, outcomes, worth                        |
| Q1_IND_Delivery    | Inductive | Delivery    | Participant links loyalty to consistent delivery/quality | Apply when participants refer to reliability, timeliness, consistency, or meeting expectations. | Don't apply when participants discuss adaptability or innovation.      | <i>It's about showing up and delivering the same quality every single time.</i>                         | <i>Consistency is everything - when the work stays strong under pressure, the client doesn't lose faith.</i> | consistent, delivery, quality, on time, standards           |
| Q1_IND_Partnership | Inductive | Partnership | Participant frames loyalty as partnership/alignment      | Apply when participants describe loyalty as teamwork, shared goals,                             | Don't apply when partnership is mentioned superficially without        | <i>It's when the agency feels like part of our team, not just a vendor</i>                              | <i>Real partnership happens when we're sitting on the same</i>                                               | partner, aligned, understand business goals, shared metrics |

|                                     |           |                           |                                                                                  |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                      |                                                                                         |                                                          |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     |           |                           |                                                                                  | or mutual alignment.                                                                                               | reference to collaboration or shared outcomes.                                                                      |                                                                                      | <i>side of the table, solving problems together</i>                                     |                                                          |
| Q1_IND_Switching                    | Inductive | Switching                 | Participant mentions switching barriers/habit as part of loyalty                 | Apply when participants talk about the cost, risk, or inconvenience of changing agencies.                          | Don't apply when participants discuss dissatisfaction or loyalty drivers without mention of alternatives or change. | <i>We stayed because changing agencies is exhausting - the onboarding alone.</i>     | <i>The cost of switching is high, so clients often stay even when they're restless.</i> | switch, time-consuming, onboarding, risk of change, cost |
| Q1_IND_Leadership                   | Inductive | Leadership                | Participant mentions leadership credibility/senior involvement as loyalty driver | Apply when participants mention senior involvement, guidance, or decision-making stability as influencing loyalty. | Don't apply when leadership is mentioned in passing without a clear link to trust or retention.                     | <i>When leadership is accessible and invested, you feel the relationship matters</i> | <i>Senior involvement shows clients that their business is important and valued</i>     | leadership, owners, senior involvement                   |
| Q1_INDUCTIVE_AdaptabilityResilience | Inductive | Adaptability & Resilience | The ability to maintain quality and collaboration                                | Apply when participants mention flexibility,                                                                       | Don't apply to discussions                                                                                          | <i>When things get tough and they still find solutions</i>                           | <i>True loyalty is when both sides bend, not</i>                                        | Linked to relationship maturity.                         |

|                                |           |                      |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                             |                                                                                            |                                                                                       |                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                |           |                      | under stress or change. (Inductive)                                                                                                     | problem-solving, or coping during challenges.                                                                                             | of routine reliability.                                                                     | <i>instead of excuses, that's loyalty.</i>                                                 | <i>break, during tough times.</i>                                                     |                                                                                                            |
| Q1_INDUCTIVE_AdvocacyLongevity | Inductive | Advocacy & Longevity | The client's active defence or continued endorsement of the agency beyond contractual obligation. (Inductive)                           | Apply when participants refer to renewal, referrals, or defending agency relationships.                                                   | Don't apply to general satisfaction or goodwill.                                            | <i>Being loyal means you'd fight for them to stay on, even when others want to review.</i> | <i>It's not about being locked in – it's choosing to stay because they add value.</i> | Indicates behavioural loyalty; advanced stage of trust.                                                    |
| Q2_DEDUCTIVE_ServiceQuality    | Deductive | Service Quality      | The totality of features and characteristics of a service that affect its ability to satisfy customer needs. (Parasuraman et al., 1985) | Apply when participants discuss consistency, reliability, responsiveness, communication quality, or professional delivery of agency work. | Don't apply when discussion focuses purely on relationship feelings or creative innovation. | <i>If they say they'll deliver, I need to know they'll actually do it every time.</i>      | <i>When quality holds under pressure, the client's confidence doesn't waver.</i>      | Use as umbrella code for all service performance mentions. Subcodes: reliability, responsiveness, empathy. |
| Q3_DEDUCTIVE_Trust             | Deductive | Trust                | A willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)                                          | Apply when participants refer to honesty, transparency, reliability, or confidence in                                                     | Don't apply if the statement focuses on emotional connection or shared                      | <i>Loyalty means you trust them to deliver and tell you the truth when</i>                 | <i>When quality holds under pressure, the client's confidence</i>                     | Use structural vs emotional trust as subthemes.                                                            |

|                            |           |               |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                 |                                                                                    |                                                                                     |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            |           |               |                                                                                        | the agency or client.                                                                                                         | goals – see Relational Depth.                                                                                              | <i>things go wrong.</i>                                                                         | <i>doesn't waver.</i>                                                              |                                                                                     |
| Q3_DEDUCTIVE_Commitment    | Deductive | Commitment    | An enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)            | Apply when participants describe proactive behaviours, reliability, perseverance, or long-term intent to stay in partnership. | Don't apply when it's only about satisfaction or task delivery.                                                            | <i>They show up, take ownership and make things happen – that's what commitment looks like.</i> | <i>Proactive engagement beyond the brief is how commitment shows up.</i>           | Distinguish between attitudinal and behavioural commitment.                         |
| Q3_DEDUCTIVE_Communication | Deductive | Communication | Formal and informal sharing of meaningful and timely information. (Mohr & Nevin, 1990) | Apply when participants refer to clarity, transparency, responsiveness, or feedback frequency.                                | Don't apply when mention of communication is implicit in project updates; code only when it links to relationship quality. | <i>Clear, frequent communication stops things from festering.</i>                               | <i>Consistent updates keep the relationship smooth, even when deadlines shift.</i> | Look for affective tone – communication as reassurance, not only task coordination. |

|                                   |           |                       |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                |                                                                                                |                                                                                                         |                                                                                     |                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q4_DEDUCTIVE_CustomerSatisfaction | Deductive | Customer Satisfaction | A consumer's fulfilment response, the degree to which the level of fulfilment is pleasant or unpleasant. (Oliver, 1999)                    | Apply when participants express contentment, approval, or disappointment with agency outcomes or interactions. | Don't apply when satisfaction is mentioned as an antecedent to loyalty – use Loyalty Outcomes. | <i>When they get it right consistently, you stop worrying – that's real satisfaction.</i>               | <i>We stayed because they deliver without drama – satisfaction means stability.</i> | Note mediating role – satisfaction stabilises relationships but doesn't guarantee loyalty. |
| Q5_DEDUCTIVE_PerceivedValue       | Deductive | Perceived Value       | The customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. (Zeithaml, 1988) | Apply when participants discuss value-for-money, ROI, strategic contribution, or relevance.                    | Don't apply to discussions of price alone – value must reflect a benefit-cost evaluation.      | <i>When their thinking helps us solve real problems and hit targets, that's when it feels valuable.</i> | <i>Value is being one step ahead for the client.</i>                                | Subcode functional, relational, and strategic value.                                       |
| Q5_DEDUCTIVE_SwitchingCosts       | Deductive | Switching Costs       | The perceived economic, psychological, and time costs associated with changing a supplier. (Burnham et al., 2003)                          | Apply when participants mention difficulty, risk, or disruption in changing agencies.                          | Don't apply when they refer to loyalty out of emotional trust or satisfaction.                 | <i>Changing agencies is like starting a new marriage; it's draining.</i>                                | <i>Switching costs stabilise the relationship until trust or quality drops.</i>     | Often co-occurs with trust and satisfaction. Note interplay between inertia and loyalty.   |

|                                    |           |                            |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                         |                                                                                      |                                                                     |                                                                  |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q6_DEDUCTIVE_AccountManagement     | Deductive | Account Management Quality | The quality of interpersonal and professional service provided by the account lead managing the client relationship. (Alejandro et al., 2011) | Apply when participants discuss the importance, skill, attitude, or responsiveness of account leads.        | Don't apply when discussion is about agency-wide processes or creativity.                               | <i>You stay because of the person who runs your account – they make or break it.</i> | <i>Great account leads keep clients even when delivery wobbles.</i> | Often proxy for trust and service recovery; note emotional tone. |
| Q6_DEDUCTIVE_CreativityInnovation  | Deductive | Creativity & Innovation    | The process of generating novel and useful ideas for solving client problems. (Levin & Lobo, 2009)                                            | Apply when participants refer to fresh ideas, originality, campaign quality, or innovative problem-solving. | Don't apply when creativity is described as routine or operational – must denote novelty and relevance. | <i>Fresh thinking keeps us excited, but it must solve the problem.</i>               | <i>Awards don't keep business; effective ideas do.</i>              | Subcodes: creative renewal, relevance, and risk-taking.          |
| Q6_DEDUCTIVE_ResponsivenessAgility | Deductive | Responsiveness & Agility   | The willingness and ability to help customers and provide prompt service. (Parasuraman et al., 1985)                                          | Apply when participants describe speed, flexibility, adaptability, or problem-solving under pressure.       | Don't apply when comments focus purely on consistency (code under Service Quality).                     | <i>When we need something and the agency acts fast, that shows respect and care.</i> | <i>Agility supports loyalty; it doesn't create it.</i>              | Connects to trust, empathy, and relational depth.                |

|                                   |           |                                         |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                      |                                                                                    |                                                                                                 |                                                                      |                                                               |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q6_DEDUCTIVE_AgencyEquity         | Deductive | Agency Reputation / Brand Equity        | The perception of quality and credibility that a firm holds in the minds of clients. (Ali, 2022)                                       | Apply when participants mention brand image, industry reputation, or credibility.                    | Don't apply when referring to relationship experience (use Satisfaction or Trust). | <i>Reputation gets you in the door; performance keeps you there.</i>                            | <i>A strong name helps, but consistency keeps them loyal.</i>        | Code for entry trust versus sustained trust.                  |
| Q6_DEDUCTIVE_StrategicAlignment   | Deductive | Strategic Alignment                     | The degree to which an agency's goals, strategies, and actions align with those of the client. (Quester et al., 2006)                  | Apply when participants talk about shared vision, goal congruence, or understanding client strategy. | Don't apply when referring to day-to-day coordination or delivery issues.          | <i>The magic is when they think like part of our team.</i>                                      | <i>Strategic alignment is the decisive differentiator over time.</i> | Subcodes: proactive understanding, business fit, co-creation. |
| Q6_DEDUCTIVE_RelationalConnection | Deductive | Relational Depth / Emotional Connection | The sense of empathy, respect, and mutual understanding that transforms transactional exchange into emotional partnership. (Inductive) | Apply when participants discuss feeling understood, supported, or cared for beyond deliverables.     | Don't apply when referring to structural trust or satisfaction only.               | <i>It's when there's real respect and care; you feel like they're invested in your success.</i> | <i>Loyalty grows from genuine relationships, not just good work.</i> | Emergent category tied to affective loyalty.                  |

Data Classification - Business General

| File       | ServiceQu | ServiceQu | Tust_pos | Trust_neg | Commitm | Commitm | Communic | Communic | Satisfactic | Satisfactic | Perceived | Perceived | SwitchinC | SwitchingC | AccountM | AccountM | Creativity/ | Creativity/ | Responsiv | Responsiv | Reputator | Reputator | Alignment | Alignment | BusinessGoals_neg |
|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| Research I | 37        | 1         | 29       | 0         | 10      | 0       | 13       | 1        | 31          | 0           | 19        | 0         | 28        | 0          | 37       | 2        | 33          | 0           | 11        | 0         | 18        | 1         | 7         | 1         |                   |
| Research I | 16        | 0         | 17       | 1         | 9       | 0       | 6        | 1        | 30          | 0           | 16        | 1         | 8         | 1          | 129      | 3        | 16          | 1           | 12        | 0         | 13        | 2         | 2         | 1         |                   |
| Research I | 23        | 0         | 15       | 0         | 9       | 0       | 8        | 0        | 27          | 1           | 22        | 1         | 21        | 0          | 24       | 2        | 19          | 2           | 9         | 1         | 13        | 0         | 4         | 0         |                   |
| Research I | 19        | 0         | 18       | 5         | 7       | 0       | 19       | 3        | 26          | 0           | 18        | 0         | 11        | 0          | 32       | 5        | 9           | 1           | 7         | 0         | 7         | 0         | 8         | 0         |                   |
| Research I | 9         | 1         | 4        | 0         | 10      | 1       | 4        | 0        | 3           | 0           | 6         | 4         | 1         | 0          | 3        | 2        | 2           | 0           | 2         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |                   |
| Research I | 15        | 0         | 10       | 0         | 3       | 0       | 6        | 0        | 16          | 1           | 27        | 1         | 17        | 1          | 33       | 1        | 10          | 0           | 8         | 0         | 25        | 1         | 2         | 2         |                   |
| Research I | 17        | 0         | 9        | 0         | 10      | 0       | 7        | 0        | 1           | 8           | 0         | 32        | 0         | 14         | 0        | 30       | 1           | 9           | 0         | 0         | 20        | 1         | 6         | 0         |                   |
| Research I | 15        | 0         | 12       | 0         | 7       | 0       | 11       | 1        | 24          | 2           | 15        | 0         | 12        | 0          | 51       | 1        | 15          | 1           | 3         | 0         | 35        | 0         | 7         | 0         |                   |
| Research I | 12        | 0         | 25       | 3         | 4       | 0       | 7        | 3        | 17          | 6           | 28        | 6         | 35        | 3          | 70       | 7        | 18          | 0           | 3         | 0         | 31        | 0         | 7         | 0         |                   |
| Research I | 14        | 1         | 18       | 1         | 3       | 0       | 10       | 2        | 14          | 0           | 12        | 0         | 20        | 0          | 30       | 5        | 13          | 0           | 11        | 1         | 11        | 2         | 5         | 0         |                   |