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Information Technology Strategies Automotive Retailers Use to Improve Customer Retention

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Bond University, 2007

CA, Rand Afrikaans University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Business managers in the automotive retail industry face challenges in retaining customers in sales operations. Automotive business managers' failure to retain customers negatively affects sales, revenue, and sustainable business performance. Grounded in expectation-confirmation theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the IT strategies some business managers use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. The participants comprised 4 business managers from 2 automotive retail dealerships in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia, who used IT strategies to retain customers. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, interview notes, and company documents. Four themes emerged: customer engagement, e-commerce platform, change management and customer loyalty programs, and virtual showroom and customer feedback. A key recommendation includes utilizing e-commerce platforms as an IT strategy to retain customers for improved financial and business sustainability. The implications for positive social change include the potential for business managers in automotive retail dealerships to create job opportunities, provide social amenities and welfare to the local people to improve and promote the regional communities' economic development.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Mrs. Lilian Banda Tembo, for her support, guidance, and encouraging words during the down moments of my studies, her words kept me pushing to achieve this goal. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the pillar of my life, my wife Nyavili Miyanda Mulemba, for her outstanding support, my daughter Kaluba Mulemba and my son Alexious Poze Mulemba Jr, for your patience and understating during my studies. My special thanks to my nephews, Michael Lungu, Samuel Phiri and Yonas Kingster Nyirenda, for stepping in on all my construction and other projects during my studies. Words will not thank you all enough. My extended thanks to the Dubai Crew; my nephew Levy Lungu, my kid brother Albert Kondwelani Tembo and Joseph Kamanga, for your support and special doctoral Nickname you gave me during my studies; "THE BULL THAT NEVER BELONGED". Your support by checking on my progress and reminders to submit my assignments, kept me going. Thank you all, and you are such a blessing to me.

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It is because of the support and encouragement I received that I have been able to complete this doctoral study. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Gregory Uche, my committee chair for taking extra miles in supporting me. Thank you, professor, for your guidance, encouragement and believing in me. You will always be my mentor. I would also wish to extend special thanks to Dr Betsy Macht, my second committee member, and Dr Ronald Jones my URR for their support and guidance. My splendor thanks to Dr Susan Davis, my Program Director, for the encouragement and support during my doctoral studies. Thank you all, and may the Almighty God continue blessing your good work.

Table of Contents

i

List of Tables

List of Figures

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Automotive retail dealerships are operating in an increasingly challenging business environment, which requires business managers to review their business process models and strategies (Inampudi, Kramer, Maurer, & Simmons, 2019). With increasing challenges in the automotive industry, business leaders have recognized the importance of exploring strategies that would be effective for retaining customers (Komarov & Avdeeva, 2015). Automotive retail dealerships (ARDs) that find new ways to create value and promote effective customer retention will succeed in the future (Inampudi et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore how information technology (IT) strategies might help business managers in automotive retail dealerships improve customer retention.

Background of the Problem

Automotive retail dealerships are facing difficulties to retain customers and improve business performance due to the continually evolving car technologies and changes in the automotive industry (Gao, Kaas, Mohr, & Wee, 2016; Mohr, Wee, & Möller, 2016). Saudi Arabia is one of the emerging economies that have invested significantly and initiated reforms in IT systems (Badawi, Doheim, & Farag, 2019). The government of Saudi Arabia has increased IT investment by 55% as part of its "Vision 2030", encouraging companies to capitalize on IT strategies to remain competitive (Communication and Information Technology Commission, 2015). The evolution in IT has affected the automotive retail industry that business executives are exploring innovative IT initiatives to retain customers and improve sales for financial sustainability

(Bellini, Dell'Era, Frattini, & Verganti, 2017; Luftman, Lyytinen, & Zvi, 2017). Despite the increased awareness of the importance of investing in IT, some business managers have the perception that IT investments are an unnecessary cost to organizations (Campos, 2016; Luftman et al., 2017; Peppard & Ward, 2016). High customer retention is one of the essential priorities for automotive retail dealerships who aim to improve business performance (Izmocars, 2019). Researchers could assist business managers in the automotive industry gain knowledge about IT strategies for improving customer retention to enhance business performance.

Problem Statement

The automotive retail industry is facing challenges to retain customers and use IT to improve customer retention for financial sustainability (Bellini et al., 2017). Alaboudi et al. (2016) stated that despite reliable evidence on the general benefits of IT, the adoption rate of IT by chief executive officers (CEOs) is less than 75%. The general business problem was that some automotive retail dealerships are witnessing a decline in sales because they fail to retain customers. The specific business problem was that some retail automotive business managers lack IT strategies to retain customers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the IT strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. The target population for this study was four retail automotive business managers from two automotive retail dealerships who have successfully used IT strategies to retain customers in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. The results of this research study could

contribute to positive social change by improving business performance through customer retention. Improved customer retention might increase sales, create new job opportunities, provide social amenities and welfare to the local people, promote the economic development of the regional communities, and contribute positively to reducing unemployment in local communities.

Nature of the Study

Researchers use the qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods to conduct studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Zoellner & Harris, 2017). I used the qualitative method. According to Hammarbery, de Lacey, and Kirkman (2016), qualitative researchers can gain significant insights into, and understanding of, the study's main problem by using this method. Qualitative research is a social inquiry process, which focuses on the way people understand and rationalize their experiences within their surroundings (Brig, Jindal, Singh, & Pandya, 2015). The quantitative method, which involves the use of hypotheses and mathematical models to examine the relationships among variables (Dasgupta, 2015), was not appropriate for this study because the intent was not to collect and analyze empirical data for examining variables' relationships.

Researchers may combine qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis to enhance the understanding of their studies' results by using mixed methods (Bester, Moll, & Simons, 2017). But it was not suitable for this study because the purpose of this study was not to test a hypothesis or to examine the relationships among variables. The qualitative method was the most appropriate method for this study

because the objective of the study was to explore how business managers in the automotive retail industry use IT strategies to improve customer retention.

Three of the qualitative designs that researchers use are case study, phenomenology, and ethnography (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I used a multiple case study design to explore a phenomenon and focus on shared views of the research problem to gain a real-life contextual and objective meaning (Hearne, King, Geary, & Kenny, 2018). Using this approach, I explored the perceptions of business managers to understand what IT strategies might help them retain customers.

The ethnographical design was not suitable for this study because its purpose was not to understand the participants' social behaviors, beliefs, and culture within their natural settings (Canevacci, 2017; Yin, 2018). Because the intent of this research study was not to understand the personal meanings of participants lived experiences (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016; Engward & Goldspink, 2020), the phenomenological design was not appropriate. The multiple case study design was most appropriate because I sought to explore the IT strategies that business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention.

Research Question

What IT strategies do business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention?

Interview Questions

1 What IT strategies do you use in your automotive retail dealership to improve customer retention?

2   How did you determine the effectiveness of these IT strategies in improving customer retention?

3   How effective are these IT strategies in improving customer retention?

4   What key challenges have you encountered in using these IT strategies to improve customer retention?

5   How did you address the key challenges to improve customer retention in your automotive retail dealership?

6   What customer retention initiatives based on your IT strategies have you implemented in your automotive retail dealership?

7   Based on your organization's experience, how do these IT strategies help to improve customer retention and increase sales in your automotive retail dealership?

8   What other information would you like to share about the IT strategies that your organization developed and implemented to improve customer retention in your automotive retail dealership?

Conceptual Framework

The expectation–confirmation theory (ECT) was the conceptual framework for this study. Oliver developed the ECT in 1977 (Oghuma, Libaque-Saenz, Wong, & Chang, 2016). The four primary constructs of ECT are (a) expectations, (b) perceived performance, (c) disconfirmation of beliefs, and (d) satisfaction (Chen, Hsu, Chang, & Chou, 2015). The ECT reflects how customers' expectations influence both perceptions of performance and disconfirmation of beliefs, directly and indirectly, to the post

purchase or postadoption satisfaction using a mediational relationship from the disconfirmation construct (Samuel, 2018). The ECT focusses on customer expectation and customer satisfaction index (CSI) to determine if the customers' desires were satisfied (Klaus, 2015).

Perceived performance relates to individual perceptions of a product, service, or technology, while disconfirmation of beliefs relates to the judgments made in comparison to the individuals' original expectations (Chen et al., 2015). I used the ECT to understand the study's findings because the purpose of this research study was to explore the effective IT strategies business managers use to improve customer retention in ARDs in Saudi Arabia. The perceived quality of customer service in a company is essential for formulating and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for improving and maintaining customer experience and satisfaction (Komarov & Avdeeva, 2015). The ECT consists of four concepts, including customer expectations and satisfaction, which makes the ECT framework the most suitable lens for exploring the IT strategies that business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention.

Definition of Terms

Customer Relationship Management: Customer relationship management (CRM) is an activity of controlling and organizing a relationship in the form of connecting and communicating with the customer, which are either living or non-living things (Al Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019a).

Customer Retention: Customer retention is a process of managing customer experience and customer satisfaction as a concept that extends beyond the traditional

binary retain. Customer retention consists of a variety of metrics, which practitioners can use to measure and monitor customer loyalty (Ascarza et al., 2018).

Expectation–confirmation theory: The expectation-confirmation theory (ECT) is a research framework developed by Oliver in 1977 (Oghuma, Libaque-Saenz, Wong & Chang, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are aspects or concepts accepted as accurate or irrefutable facts present in a research study (Roy & Pacuit, 2013). An assumption is something that individuals accept by faith or presumption despite a lack of proof (Krause, 2019). I made four assumptions in this research study. The first assumption was that the participants would answer the questions truthfully and honestly. The second assumption was that after the confirmation and signing of the consent form, the participants would not withdraw from the study, but commit to their involvement and submit answers on time. The third assumption was that the business managers in automotive retail dealerships were subject matter experts with comprehensive knowledge of IT strategies to improve customer retention. The final assumption was that a minimum of four participants from two case organizations would provide adequate information to understand the IT strategies that business managers use in the automobile retail industry to retain customers.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are the characteristics of a methodology or design that can influence the output of the research (Greener, 2018). Research limitations may

include the constraints in the application of required practice or use of required tools to arrive at the desired finding due to unexpected challenges that may arise during the study (Price & Murnan, 2019). Most ARDs in Saudi Arabia are family-owned businesses, which might pose a limitation due to the unwillingness of participants to share information about company strategies without top management's approval. Another limitation was that participants might withdraw at any time or share limited information that might affect the study design, outcome, and research conclusion because of the sensitivity of being family-owned businesses.

Delimitations

A delimitation refers to the distinct boundaries set by the researcher to control the scope of the research study (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019). According to Yin (2016), delimitations may include the selection of the population, such as gender-specific, research questions, and variables of interests. Researchers should determine the delimitations of their study to help readers and research users to interpret the findings within the context of the study boundaries. This research study had two delimitations. The first delimitation was the exclusion of female business managers because of regional cultural sensitivity, which could require special approvals for female participants to exchange contact details with a male researcher. The second delimitation was the location of the research study, which was limited to the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. The scope of this research study did not include any of the other multiple geographical regions of Saudi Arabia.

Significance of the Study

Automotive retail dealerships are operating in an increasingly challenging business environment, creating the need for business managers to review their business process models and strategies (Inampudi et al., 2019). Because the evolution in IT has affected the automotive retail industry, business executives are exploring innovative IT initiatives to retain customers and improve sales for financial sustainability (Bellini et al., 2017). Despite the increased awareness of the importance of investing in IT, some business managers perceive that investing in IT investments is an unnecessary cost to their organizations (Peppard & Ward, 2016). In line with the objective of the Saudi Vision 2030, the government initiative to invest in IT has witnessed a significant growth in IT investments of 55%, thus encouraging companies to capitalize on IT strategies to remain competitive (Communication and Information Technology Commission, 2015). High customer retention is an essential priority for automotive retail dealerships that aim to improve business performance (Izmocars, 2019).

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings from the study could be relevant for business managers in the automotive retail industry because effective IT strategies might lead to improvements in customer retention. Automotive retailers in Saudi Arabia are witnessing a decline in sales for several reasons, including a change in customer behavior, lack of customer retention, and increased operational costs (Anderson, 2017). Business managers who choose to implement IT strategies earlier than others might enhance their business processes quicker and gain a competitive advantage. The findings from this study could improve

customer retention and increase sales in automotive retail dealerships, thereby contributing to the financial sustainability of the automotive industry. Business managers in automotive retail dealerships might use the findings of this study to implement proactive customer retention strategies to improve business performance. Using the findings of this study, business managers might also implement derivative marketing and sales-driven strategies to increase sales.

Implications for Social Change

This study c contribute to improving business performance through customer retention. By improving customer retention, automotive retail dealerships will increase sales and contribute to financial sustainability, which would enable automotive dealerships to contribute to community development as part of their corporate social responsibilities (CSR). Improved customer retention might also increase sales, create new job opportunities, and improve socioeconomic lifestyles, which could contribute positively to reducing unemployment in local communities of Saudi Arabia.

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A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

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The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the IT strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. The research question for this study was: What IT strategies do business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention? During my review of the professional literature, I explored numerous articles, peer reviews, and scholarly publications related to customer retention, which included themes like, customer

experience, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty programs, and customer relationship management (CRM).

During the literature review, I focused on the expectation–confirmation theory (ECT), which was the conceptual framework selected for this study. I included the themes of customer engagement and customer retention strategies in the literature review because of the relevance to customer retention. Additionally, I reviewed issues relating to the measurement of customer expectation using the CSI. Business leaders in the automotive retail industry could use CSI to assess (a) customer satisfaction on the experience during the purchase of a vehicle and (b) customer satisfaction on the aftersales experience during the service repair of the car and purchase of car spare parts.

To search the literature, I used the following databases: ProQuest, ABI/INFORM, EBSCOhost, Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Sage Publications. I used the following keywords: *customer satisfaction, customer expectation, customer loyalty, customer loyalty programs, customer retention, customer engagement, customer relationship management,* and *IT strategies for auto dealerships*

Table 1 is a summary of the literature review resources. The total of the references yielded 152 referenced scholarly works, of which 148 were journal articles; three were business management books, and one was a government source automotive retail industry publications. Approximately 94% (143) of the publications were published within 5 years of the expected approval date of my doctoral research study.

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Reference Type	<5 Years	>5 Years	Total
Peer-reviewed Journals and Dissertations	141	7	148
Non-peer reviewed Journals	0	0	0
Books	1	2	3
Government or Corporate Sites	1	0	1
Total	143	9	152

Expectation-Confirmation Theory

In the ECT, Oliver determined the fulfillment of customer desires by focusing on customer expectation and customer satisfaction (Klaus, 2015). Customer retention contributes to improved business performance in the automotive retail dealership through increased sales and strengthen financial sustainability (Chan, Fu, & Zhang, 2018). The ECT reflects how customer expectation influences the perceptions of the seller or service provider performance and may directly affect the customer's postpurchase satisfaction (Samuel, 2018). The ECT is also known as the expectation disconfirmation theory (EDT) (Jarvis, Sadeque, & O'Brien, 2016). EDT is a cognitive theory that reflects on how customer expectation influences perceptions of postpurchase anticipation or prediction of satisfaction that a consumer may expect from a product or service (Jarvis et al., 2016). The ECT is an ideal approach for exploring the IT strategies business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention.

The purpose of using the ECT framework for this study was to explore how customer satisfaction relates to customer retention and customer loyalty as an intermediary of the ECT and the satisfaction-loyalty theory (SLT). The ECT involves customer perception with the intent to repurchase or stop using a specific product or service (Joo & Choi, 2016). Customer expectations, customer satisfaction, and customer experience are linked to customer loyalty which directly affects customer retention (Hsiao, 2016). Researchers use SLT to explain customer loyalty to specific forms of products or services and the influence in certain geographical regions (Zephan, 2018). I selected ECT for my research study because it would help me to assess if certain automotive brands, have direct influence in customer satisfaction and retention in Saudi Arabia.

Despite the several global financial crises, the automotive retail industry had experienced strong growth for over 100 years (Buss, Berking, Helfmann, & Rebbereh, 2018). The auto industry's survival and strong recovery from world wars and economic recession illustrates the multidimensional resilience of vehicle sales and aftersales services reliability from the customers' point of view (Buss et al., 2018). The measure of success for automotive retail delealership is the overall customer satisfaction through service innovation and focus on expanding new service concepts, thereby, contributing to business performance for financial sustainability and meeting customer demand (Wang, Day, & Farid, 2019). According to Joo and Choi (2016), customers demonstrate the bias of a product or service at the earlier stage of their purchasing decision, aligning to the ECT framework. To retain customers, business managers should apply the ECT

framework to understand overall level of customer satisfaction as a basis of decision to determine customer retention.

The customer perception changes after taking delivery of a product or service because of the lived experience, resulting from the proper assessment of the product or service (Rahi, 2016). Customers who have favourable perceptions of specific products or services tend to possess a high degree of perceived value and satisfaction, making them loyal to the brand, product, or service (Campbell & Brakewood, 2017). Having purchased the product or service, customers perform a comparison between their initial expectation of the product or service and their opinion on the performance to confirm their earlier assumption before purchasing the product or service (Samuel, 2018). Customers would eventually determine if the product or service meets their expectations and satisfaction to enable them articulate future decisions of repeat purchase or to discontinue and move to another brand (Joo & Choi, 2016). Business managers should use ECT framework improve customer retention in the automotive retail industry.

The entire expectancy is associated with an entity of product, service, or technology that an organization may implement. Such anticipation might generate a direct or indirect consumer belief of the expected satisfaction as a mediational relationship from the disconfirmation construct (Duanmu, Ma, & Wang, 2018). The ECT focusses on customer expectation and CSI to determine if the customer desires were satisfactory (Klaus, 2015). According to Chen et al. (2015), the perceived performance or product satisfaction relates to individual perceptions of a product, or service. However, the disconfirmation of beliefs may influence the judgment made on a product or service

in comparison to the individual's original expectations (Chan et al., 2018). By applying the ECT, business managers in the automotive retail industry could improve customer retention.

Atapattu, Sedera, Ravichandran, and Grover (2016) stated that the ECT confirmation derives from customer expectation and perceived performance and customer satisfaction which accrue from customer expectation and confirmation. The perceived quality of customer service in a company is essential for business leaders to formulate and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for improving and maintaining customer experience and satisfaction (Komarov & Avdeeva, 2016). According to Bilgili and Ozkul (2015), a review of the literature on customer satisfaction and loyalty indicate that consumers would continue being loyal to a product or service and could recommend the product of service when they have overall satisfaction. Business managers in the automotive retail industry should understand the concept of ECT framework to improve customer retention.

Hsieh Lai, Ma, Alexander, and Lin (2016) argued that the ECT model alone does not sufficiently account for the postpurchase portion of a consumer shopping experience. The customer negative perception from consumer word of mouth directly affects customer expectation than the competitor adverts or the actual customer lived experience with the product or service (Takahashi, 2016; Wali & Nwokah, 2016). The car buyers in Saudi Arabia have a negative perception that American and European vehicles are often highly priced, their spare parts take longer waiting periods, and the cars face challenges of desert heat than Japanese and Korean cars (Expert Arrivals, 2020). The actual

experience with cars may differ from the negative perception the customers may perceive, which could have a direct impact on customer retention. Business managers should apply the ECT framework to improve customer retention in the automotive retail industry.

Another factor that could influence customer retention is the perceived trade-in value associated with the user perception because of the harsh desert conditions in Saudi Arabia. Nurcahyo (2016) stated that customer satisfaction has a unique sensorial experience related to consumer attitude. However, Hsu and Lin (2015) and Oghuma et al. (2016) preconceived perceptions of customer expectation and the linkage to attitudinal reaction is more emotional than factual. I selected the ECT model for the improvement of customer retention because the customer expectations, customer satisfaction, and customer experience are linked to customer loyalty which directly affects customer retention. The ECT is the most appropriate framework for exploring the IT strategies business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention.

Theories Related to and Contrasting with ECT

The literature search indicates other conceptual frameworks that may also apply to improving customer retention. A proper understanding of customer satisfaction is critical in consumer marketing (Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Gao, 2015). According to Hossain and Quaddus (2011), marketing researchers tend to use ECT interchangeably with expectation–confirmation model (ECM). The ECM model mainly focuses on user perception about information systems rather than just explaining the user satisfaction (Bhattacherjee & Lin, 2017). Furthermore, researchers use ECM to understand the

customer expectation and the customer pre-consumption expectation that may change because of the post-consumption expectations such as the perceived usefulness, which has a significant contribution to the theory (Zhang et al., 2015).

The information systems research is a constant of IT strategy with the intent of customer satisfaction, which may have a relationship of constructs between ECT and ECM. According to Shrestha and Bhatta (2018), there is no general agreement concerning the definition, relationship, and measurement methods of theories between ECT and ECM. However, during my literature review, I examined inclusively and methodically the literature related to expectation–confirmation to observe and ascertain the relating and contrasting theories to ECT. According to Susanto, Chang, and Ha (2016), despite the technology acceptance model (TAM) and theory of planned behaviour (TPB), customer expectation may be integrated with ECT and ECM to have a better understanding of consumer expectancy behaviour. The trend towards integrating or incorporating the associated variables and constructs from various theories to ECM is more appropriate to ECT (Susanto et al., 2016). Lin, Huang, and Hsu (2015) stated that perceived customer security significantly influences trust while perceived usefulness significantly influences user satisfaction and the intent to continuance use.

Customers in automotive industry have developed trust through the evolution of technology as an emerging research domain, which examines the dependence and trust in IT instead of trust in people (Nancy, Lankton, McKnight, Wright, & Thatcher, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore how business managers in the automotive retail industry utilize IT strategies to improve customer retention. This literature review

focused on the propositions of a dual-factor model to understand the factors driving consumer loyalty to influence customer retention. According to Klaus (2015), the ECT model alone concentrates on customer expectation and customer satisfaction to determine if the customer desires have been fulfilled. However, to understand the ECT further, I reviewed other models such as the ECM and status quo bias (SQB) theory.

According to Hong, Lin, and Hsieh (2017), both the customer dedication–constraint perspective and cognition-affect perspective, relate to customer loyalty, and has an impact to customer retention. The dedication factors of satisfaction and relative advantage of the incumbent as well as the constraint factors of inertia and changing costs has a significant influence on customer decision to rebuy or continue to use the products (Lin et al., 2015). In this literature review, I found out that both trust and expectation disconfirmation theories suggest that trust disconfirmation effects may be more complex than the depiction of the linear expectation disconfirmation model (Susanto et al., 2016). This complexity may exist under certain contextual conditions and the study findings might follow the nonlinear expectation disconfirmation theory model for customer understanding or the perceived trust of users in technology expectations and disconfirmation (Susanto et al., 2016).

Concept of Customer Retention

Managing the automotive retail dealership to keep a high rate of customer retention is one of the main priorities for business managers to guarantee sustainable business performance (Izmocars, 2019). According to Galetto (2015), customer retention refers to the activities and actions companies and organizations take to lessen the number

of customer defections. Degbey (2015) defined customer retention as securing the continued return of the existing customers over a long period. In today's turbulent business environment, customer retention presents a significant challenge to several companies and industries (Ascarza et al., 2018). Customer retention strategies hold great appeal for automotive retail dealership business managers because keeping existing customers is much cheaper than finding new ones (Izmocars, 2015). Business managers in the automotive retail industry should understand the IT strategies for improving customer retention.

The purpose of customer retention programs is to help companies retain as many customers as possible (Galetto, 2018). Companies may retain existing customers through brand loyalty initiatives that can start from the first time the customer contacts an organization for a product or service, through different communication channels and may continue the engagement throughout the customer's lifetime (Izmocars, 2019). According to Patel (2019), the probability of selling to existing customers is 60-70% of success rate while the likelihood of selling to a new prospecting customer is between 5-20%. Existing customers also spend 31% more than new leads, and when a company releases a new product, the existing and loyal customers are 50% more likely to consider the product or service for purchase (Patel, 2019). Business managers in the automotive retail industry should develop IT strategies to improve customer retention.

The information in the literature aligns with the marketing definition of customer retention, as the process of engaging existing customers to continue buying products or services in the automotive retail dealership. Patel (2019) distinguished customer retention

from customer acquisition or lead generation because a retained customer is already a converted customer. The best customer retention strategies would enable business managers to develop a long-lasting relationship with consumers, who may become loyal to the brand (Degbey, 2015). The customers may spread good word about the product or service, within their circles of influence, turning them into brand ambassadors. Business managers in the automotive retail industry should develop a long-lasting relationship with consumers to improve customer retention.

Customer Retention Strategy

Customer retention is the activities and actions companies take to reduce the number of customers defecting to competitors' brands or services (Ascarza et al., 2018). The primary object of a customer retention strategy is to build a strong customer base and to prevent buyers from drifting towards other organization for the same product or service (Komalasari & Budiman, 2018). Retention programs aim at turning the occasional customer into frequent customers because they are more likely to recommend the business to their friends and relatives (Komalasari & Budiman, 2018). According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2016), a customer retention strategy combines both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Business managers in the automotive retail industry should implement IT strategies to improve customer retention.

Customers sometimes never buy a product or a service once because their previous experience encourage them to repeatedly come back to purchase (García, Gálvez-Ruiz, Fernandez, & Velez-Colon, 2016). Repeat business results in successful customer performance, increase in revenue, and customer retention (Zeithaml & Bitner,

2016). A well-established customer retention strategy presents a cohesive framework for managing retention that leverages on emerging opportunities such as new data sources, methodologies including artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning (Ascarza et al., 2018). Business leaders should use IT strategies to distinguish between venerable customers at risk of being lost to prospecting customers who may be the target of competitors (Ascarza et al., 2018). By implementing IT strategies, business managers in the automotive retail industry could improve customer retention.

Many scholars have identified various approaches for improving customer retention. Pansari and Kumar (2017), Homburg, Jozié, and Kuehnl (2017), and Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, and Carlson (2017) studied how organizations can develop customer retention through strategic marketing and customer engagement. Companies may achieve customer retention strategy by identifying trade-offs between reactive and proactive retention programs associated to short- and long-term remedies, which may include distinct campaigns and constant processes to manage retention (García et al., 2016). Business managers in the automotive retail industry could benefit from research on IT strategies to improve customer retention for enhanced business profitability and sustainability.

Researchers and practitioners can benefit from associating the perspective of customer experience and loyalty with customer retention literature (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Patel (2019) illustrated that companies can calculate their customer retention rates in different ways, and the calculation depends on the time a business manager may analyze their customer base. However, many automotive retail dealerships use too many

variables because customer retention formula illustrates how organizations build relationships with existing customer and attract them to come back as repeat customers (Ul Hassan & Rehman, 2016). Business managers in the automotive retail industry may view customer retention form the perspective of using IT strategies to attract existing buyers to improve customer retention.

Concept of Customer Satisfaction

Business managers should understand the concept of customer satisfaction. According to Mehrish, Fanaswalla, Gore, Sing, and Jain (2016), customer satisfaction is a terminology that business practitioners use to measure how a product or service sold to consumers meets or surpasses the customers' expectations. Scholars define customer satisfaction by a rating of the number of customers or percentage of total customers who gave feedback on their customer service experience with a brand, or the company's CSI ratings exceeding specified satisfaction goals (Hill, Brierley, & MacDougall, 2017). Customer satisfaction is the need or wants individual desires in the economic market place (Mehrish et al., 2016). By understanding the concept of customer satisfaction, business managers in the automotive retail industry could implement IT strategies to improve customer retention.

The consumers' predetermined notions regarding the quality of goods and services normally drive the customers' expectations. According to Pansari and Kumar (2017), customer satisfaction is an indefinite and abstract concept, which the actual manifestation for satisfaction varies from person to person, product to product, and service to service. Customer satisfaction closely relates to consumer loyalty because the

result has a consistently positive emotional experience, and the physical attribute depends on the perceived value of experience (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The state of customer satisfaction depends on several psychological and physical variables, which aligns with satisfaction behaviours such as retain and recommend (Hill et al., 2017). Customer satisfaction play a key role in improving customer retention.

In the automotive retail industry, the level of customer satisfaction can vary depending on customers' perception of the vehicle models purchased. Some vehicle models may have a luxurious manufacturer or dealer options when compared to other brands or model types of similar nature. The concept of premium versus mass (non-premium or lower-priced) automotive brands has a significant influence on customer satisfaction. According to Izmocars (2019), customer in automotive dealerships who drive premium vehicles are likely to have higher customer satisfaction rates with higher expectation. Consequently, some American, Germany, and Japanese brands have different service receptions with premium amenities for superior model and low-cost reception for normal models (Izmocars, 2019). The ability of business managers in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention depends on implementation of appropriate IT strategies.

Customers may experience different treatments depending on the vehicle brand they are driving, hence, qualifying the predetermined notion of satisfaction linked to loyalty. However, Mehrish et al. (2016) urged that in some cases, premium or luxury brand does not guarantee higher customer satisfaction. A good example is the hospitality industry where luxury resort might receive a lower satisfaction rating than a budget hotel

or motel, notwithstanding the superior facilities and services at the resort. The level of satisfaction can vary depending on the options available to customers on the products compared to similar products or services from competing organizations. By understanding customer satisfaction, business managers in the automotive retail industry could implement IT strategies to improve customer retention.

Customer Satisfaction Strategy

In Saudi Arabia, the automotive industry market accounts for about 40% of the total vehicles sold in the Middle East (Brown, 2019). When benchmarked to international oil price recovering to an average $66 in 2019, the overall automotive industry investment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a greater opportunity to grow. The growth in automotive industry could lead to an increase in demand for cars, trucks, and buses utilized for transportation of human capital across sectors. The Kingdom's products and services extend to over 400m consumers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), an immense region where benefits of improved customer loyalty and increased sales misstatements exceeding $2.3million (Brown, 2019). Saudi Arabia's population of 31million people is comparatively prosperous in the context of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of about $24,300 (Eye of Riyadh, 2015). The six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council is comprised of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia's GDP per capita numeral shared has a projected increase of about 5-6% per annum, which compares to European and North American standards. The prospecting investors to the automotive retail industry of Saudi Arabia have an

opportunity and may benefit from the Kingdom's business-friendly initiatives. The

trading benefits to companies seeking for business in designated trade free zones (the

Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement), which permits duty-free access to 17 countries in

MENA, giving a local value addition of 40% or more (Saudi Gazette, 2019).

Additionally, the Saudi Arabian government has ambitions to support businesses to serve

larger market by taking advantage of its geographical location between Europe, Africa,

and Asia to access 2 billion consumers within an average 3-hour flight time (Brown,

2019). The Saudi Arabia automotive industry is evolving, and the knowledge of the

critical success factors may help business managers achieve an improved customer

retention.

      Importance of customer satisfaction in Saudi Arabia. To boost customer

satisfaction and deliver higher quality standards, automotive retail dealers in the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are increasingly investing time and resources in training their

personnel in specific skills, especially in the aftersales services (Eye of Riyadh, 2015). ,

Because businesses compete for customers in the automotive retail industry of Saudi

Arabia, customer satisfaction is a key differentiator and has increasingly become a crucial

element of business strategy (Eye of Riyadh, 2015). The fierce competition has forced

some Saudi automotive retail dealerships to trade exclusively as the sole distributor of

some automotive global brands, which requires constant enhancement and development

of their business strategies to increase several channels. Business managers in the

automotive retail industry should use IT strategies to improve customer retention and

surpass competition.

Because Saudi Arabian customers are always keen to receive the best services (Eye of Riyadh, 2015), the Saudi automotive retail dealerships are continuously improving their business strategy. Accordingly, the automotive retail dealerships are conducting in-depth training sessions for their personnel to effectively respond to new market trends and customer expectations, across the various department including the aftersales (Eye of Riyadh, 2015). As part of the new efforts in automotive aftersales operations, experienced team of experts conduct vehicle testing before delivering automobile to the customers after the periodic service maintenance (Anderson, 2017). The testing process ensures that the vehicles are in excellent driving condition and will address any problem the customer must have omitted, thereby, ensuring customers' satisfaction and maintaining a positive reputation to exceed customer expectations (Anderson, 2017).

Importance of customer service. Good customer service has a direct influence on the customer's preconceived perceptions of a product or service and may be established or dismissed by their actual experience (Hsieh et al., 2016). Therefore, it is essential for business managers in the automotive industry of Saudi Arabia to efficiently maintain customer satisfaction. To achieve this, automotive dealerships need reliable and representative business tool including IT systems to measure customer satisfaction. In recent years, automotive retailers in Saudi Arabia are witnessing a decline in sales due to change in customer behaviour and lack of customer retention (Anderson, 2017). Consequently, business managers who choose to implement IT strategies earlier than others may enhance their business processes quicker and gain a competitive advantage.

Measuring customer satisfaction. To measure customer satisfaction, ARDs in Saudi Arabia have a traditional call centre under CRM departments (Anderson, 2017). Call centre agents operate as functional support departments, and generally ask customers whether their product or service have met or exceeded their expectations. The process of call center agents asking customer via telephone if the product or service met customer expectations helps to identify customers with high expectations. However, the reality from the automotive retail dealership might fall short of the customer expectation, leading to disappointed customer who are likely to rate their experience to be less satisfactory.

Customer satisfaction has a direct influence on customer loyalty and customer retention because it occurs when a product or service meets specific customer expectations (Neupane, 2015). Some scholars have argued that satisfied customer may not always be loyal customers and some researchers have further argued against retaining existing customers because businesses can acquire new customers with a good marketing strategy (Young-Joong, 2015). However, acquiring new customers can be more expensive than retaining existing customers (Inampudi et al., 2019). Business managers in the automotive retail industry should implement IT strategies to improve customer retention.

Know your customers. The customer service team that spends more time with each customer may be foolish because the main objective of aftersales service is to sale hours (Izmocars, 2019). However, smart auto dealers who are customer-centric understand that effective time spent with customers could improve customer satisfaction

(Izmocars, 2019). Research studies on auto dealer indicate that customers perceive their automotive retail dealership experience is more positive if customer service agents pay attention to the customer so that they do not feel ignored or rushed (Izmocars, 2019). By understanding the ways of improving customer satisfaction, business leaders in the automotive retail industry could use IT strategies to improve customer retention.

Researchers have explored the impact of culture on customer satisfaction. The Arabic customer culture has similarities to the African culture that is more about trust and building a relationship (Badawi et al., 2019). Therefore, employees in the Saudi Arabian automotive retail dealerships should understand the cultural influence on customer satisfaction. Hence, employees who spend time trying to understand vital customer traits are more successful than others in moving the sales process forward. Saudi Arabia is one of the emerging economies that is significantly investing in the IT system (Badawi et al., 2019). Therefore, automotive retail dealerships should utilize IT systems to understand their customers, adopt preferred communication channels such as social media to connect and reach more customers, and improve customer engagement and satisfaction. Business managers in the automotive retail industry should use IT strategies to improve customer retention.

Satisfying loyal customers. The relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has demonstrated its importance in the global marketplace (Dabhade, 2016). Marketing scholars have acclaimed the advantages of satisfaction and loyalty, qualifying them as directories of the company's competitive advantage (Badawi et al.,

2019). In this subsection, I will discuss the interrelationships between customer

satisfaction and customer loyalty in the automotive retail industry of Saudi Arabia.

Customer brand loyalty is one of the most important pillars of marketing in the

automotive industry (Izmocars, 2015). Customer loyalty influences customer decision

making for repeated purchases, and literally loyal customers who purchase repeatedly are

the foundation of sustainable business growth (Dabhade, 2016). The interrelationships

between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty may provide creative concepts for

improving services to gain a competitive advantage in the automotive retail dealerships of

Saudi Arabia. Customer satisfaction is one of the serious marketing elements that

influence the competitiveness of an organization. The automotive retail dealership that

differentiates itself from competitors by providing high-quality service in both vehicle

sales and aftersales operations attract and maintain its customers (Izmocars, 2015). In the

dynamic automotive retail industry of Saudi Arabia, customer satisfaction is the essence

of success because it helps to retain a loyal customer base (Randheer, Trabulsi, Al Ajmi,

& Al Jasser, 2017). For improved customer retention, business managers in the

automotive retail industry should use IT strategies to enhance customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction and trends. Many automotive dealers assume that they

can achieve customer delight by providing exceptional service. The Saudi Arabian

business council in alignment with the Saudi Vision 2030 has acknowledged the current

trends of the automotive market and recognized the opportunities in the Saudi automobile

market (Randheer et al., 2017). The government has initiated several plans to boost the

automobile industry and assured automotive retail dealerships of investor-friendly policy

to grow their businesses. Part of government intervention is the 55% increase in ICT investment, creating a platform for Internet access to most Saudis (Communication and Information Technology Commission, 2015). Business managers use in the automotive retail industry should deploy IT strategies using the Internet to improve customer retention.

Business managers must identify the appropriate channels for implementing IT strategies to improve customer retention. Automotive retail dealerships that find new ways to create value and promote effective customer communication through other channels will trigger customer delight (Inampudi et al., 2019). Contemporary studies in automotive dealerships have highlighted improvement in customer retention and loyalty from fast resolution of problems relating to product or service repair (Izmocars, 2015). Therefore, the automotive retail dealership's customer service strategy should aim at resolving product or service repairs faster to increase customer retention rates (Izmocars, 2019). Business managers in the automotive retail industry could use IT strategies, to promptly resolve product or service repairs for improved customer retention.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a strategy that business managers implement in organizations to manage customer communication with existing and prospecting customers throughout the customer life cycle, from prospecting to purchase (Dibeesh, 2016). CRM refers to business processes, strategies, and technologies that companies utilize to manage customer touchpoints through data analysis throughout the customer lifecycle, with the aim of improving customer engagement to maximize

customer retention and profitability (Opara, 2016). The automotive retail industry is facing challenging business environment and belongs to the generation of mobility that is determined to meet customer needs (Kumar, 2016). With the advent of information technologies such as global positioning system (GPS), Telematics, radio frequency identification (RFID), and other technologies for enabling connected cars inventions, vehicle and customer connectivity through big data make possible the dissemination of information (Kumar, 2016).

Customers in the middle of 21st century have enough knowledge to distinguish between automotive brands by automakers; hence, motor manufacturers are focusing on building reliable models to survive the competitive and unstable auto market place (Kumar, 2016). The evolution in technology and increased innovation is making automakers to compete on vehicles models such as sport utility vehicles (SUV), multi-purpose utility vehicles (MUV), and crossover utility vehicles (XUV) to diversify, remain relevant, and maintain their competitiveness. In Saudi Arabia automotive market, SUV is more familiar with customers; car manufacturers and automotive retail dealerships use the term to describe larger cars with a seating capacity of 5-8 seaters and has off-roading capabilities.

According to Saudi Gazette (2019), SUVs are larger than usual family cars, while the MUVs falls into the main SUV category but different manufacturers name and slightly differentiate their cars with unique features as MUVs and SUVs. In basic automotive terminologies, MUV refers to a larger type of cars like SUVs but lacks the sports shape and off-roading capabilities because its design purpose is to work as a city

wagon. In contrast, XUV is the limited kind of vehicle, more specifically as hybrid kind of vehicles, which possess unique design and architecture that does not fall in any specific sort of usual design category. The introduction of dynamic vehicle models in the automotive industry are efforts to improve customer experience (CX) and customer satisfaction on products and services. Consumers know which brand and vehicle to purchase before visiting the showrooms, so to sweeten the purchase up, automotive retail dealerships are providing added benefit to the customer (Izmocars, 2015).

Business leaders should build good relationships with customers. Building customer relationship takes time and requires commitment and determination (Samuel, 2018). As automotive retail dealerships grapple with mounting challenges, the need for business leaders in the automotive industry to explore effective strategies for retaining customers is becoming imperative (Komarov & Avdeeva, 2016). Therefore, the use of IT to track customer trends, assess changes in consumer behaviour to determine the products to offer becomes essential and could help to formulate a successful CRM strategy. Automotive retail dealerships implement CRM as a strategic business initiative to achieve business goals and maximize profitability from existing and new customers (Opara, 2016). Social media and other channels of communication including email, internet, and traditional telephony are some of the instruments CRM team use to collect customer information through interactions to gain customer insight. Customer relationship through continuous customer engagement increases sales and profitability (Ramaj & Ismaili, 2015). Business managers in the automotive retail industry should build good relationship with customers to improve customer retention.

Strategies of Customer Service

In CRM, excellent customer service can mean a different thing for different customers. Therefore, to understand the true customer satisfaction for vehicle service delivery or maintenance, CRM department as a support function plays a significant role in finding out the actual customer perception on the product or service (Perez & Rodríguez Del Bosque, 2015). Relationship marketing has become a major marketing concern and increasingly popular with the service industry (Waari, 2018). To understand customer needs better, some automotive retail dealerships adopt information technologies such as dealer management systems (DMS) with integrated CRM modules to track the interactions with customers and their vehicles (Elva, 2019).

Business leaders should identify the ideal CRM tool for improving customer retention. Many CRM solutions are available in the marketplace, which allow CRM teams in ARDs to segment customer contact database based on vehicle information, brand, model year, and engine types. Apart from the customer and vehicle information, CRM tools help businesses to execute other marketing activities based on prospective customer interests or the vehicles they currently drive. CRM initiative in organizations, if properly implemented, can help to enhance sales and win long-term customer loyalty (Elva, 2019). Business managers in the automotive retail industry should implement appropriate CRM tools to improve customer retention.

Customer support system. By using available technologies, companies can perfect personalized service delivery based on customer sensitivities and preferences to improve customer retention and profitability (Perez & Rodríguez Del Bosque, 2015). In

addition to customer communication and understanding customer need, CRM features give companies a unique opportunity to measure the value that customers bring which can help with future marketing strategies. To understand customer needs, some ARDs in Saudi Arabia subscribe or implement loyalty programs or cards to track the frequency of customer purchases, which can later provide input for customer spend analysis in CRM system. According to Samuel (2018), companies can measure return on CRM investment using return on customer (ROC), which refers to the measure of how effective the company utilize available resources to extract value from customers. Establishing ROC measures has vital importance in ARDs to evaluate that implemented CRM strategies align to business strategy.

Researchers have explored the application of CRM in business practice. CRM has a direct link to customer experience management (CXM) because with continuous evolution of CRM, service delivery has become the driving force of customer experiences and profit maximization (Samuel, 2018). The automotive retail industry in Saudi Arabia is witnessing a decline in sales and to solve this challenge, businesses are shifting from focusing on revenue and profit maximization to being customer-centric as new business strategy (Inampudi et al., 2019). In the context of measuring CRM, assessing CXM is essential because of some limitations that make it be within the CRM domain (Arineli, 2016).

Business leaders should understand the concepts of CRM and CXM. Broadly, CRM focuses on revenue growth and profit maximization from existing customers while CXM focuses on the customer life cycle with a deep understating of their needs

throughout the customer journey (Mili et al., 2016). When properly implemented, CRM and CXM complement each other. Both CRM and CXM play a significant role in customer retention because they enhance a customer-centric culture which expediently help to deliver positive customer experiences, offer differentiation, and build brand loyalty (Grah & Tominc, 2015). By implementing CRM and CXM systems, business managers in the automotive retail industry could improve customer retention.

Conclusively, companies implement CRM systems as part of the marketing strategy to manage communication with customers and sales prospects. In automotive retail dealerships, business managers who may adopt CRM as a business strategy to communicate and keep the customer engaged may have a high customer retention rate. A good CRM system helps businesses to gather critical customer information through different channels of communication. The major communication channels include company's portal or website, social media platforms, CRM campaigns, digital marketing, emails, live chats, short messaging service (SMS), WhatsApp for business, and traditional telephone contacts. Most scholars have the perception that CRM focus on revenue and profit maximization to attain customer satisfaction. However, other scholars argue that maximizing profits without understanding customer needs or preferences may have negative customer experience. Therefore, business managers should to understand the CRM processes to successfully implement the required customer needs.

Improving Customer Experience

In the competitive automotive retail industry, business compete to personalize customer experience (Stratten, 2019). Customers purchase some items, for example,

milk, socks, handkerchiefs, and mascara, without so much thought because the products cost less, and hence can afford to live with a wrong purchase decision. A motor vehicle purchase requires a thoughtful consideration because it costs a lot of money and stays with consumers for a long time. The automotive retail industry is evolving and a recent significant trend in automotive retail is that dealerships are selling more than just a car (Stratten, 2019). Therefore, auto dealers are recognizing the importance of delivering excellent customer experience that distinguish them from other automotive retail dealerships (Izmocars, 2019). The customer experience is the customers' holistic perception of their experience with a specific business product, service, or brand (Schmidt, Sernia, & Lio, 2018). Business managers in the automotive retail industry should deliver excellent customer experience to improve customer retention.

By delivering excellent customer service, business leaders may be able to improve customer retention. About 89% of companies compete mainly because of customer experience which increased by 36% compared to 2010 (Hyken, 2018). However, 80% of companies believe that they offer "superior customer experiences," but 8% of customers agree with what businesses claim to achieve (Hyken, 2018). The gap in perceptions between customers and business managers clearly show that companies have a long way to go in getting the customer experience right. On the contrary, the gap in perceptions between customers and business managers could mean a tremendous opportunity for companies to disrupt competitors by implementing effective customer experience strategies to gain a competitive advantage and increase market share. Scholars and researchers have theorized that the concept of customer experience has two different and

distinct categories, the consumer and the organizational perspectives (Kranzbuhler, Kleijnen, Morgan, & Teerling, 2017).

      Enabling customer experience. According to Hyken (2018), customer experience is the improved outcome of strategic communication between the business and customer through all available channels of contacts. The purpose of communication is to assess whether the customer interaction during the purchasing process of the products or services was delightful to meet their expectations. Because customer touchpoints from sales executives to online interactions have an impact on customer perceptions and their decision to keep coming back or not, creating a great customer experience is vital to business success. Delivering a superior customer experience is immensely important for any business because better customer experience generates repeat business, gives a positive review about the organization, reduces customer complaints, and improves sales returns (Stratten, 2019). The benefits of delivering a great customer experience include: (a) increased customer loyalty, (b) increased customer satisfaction, and (c) better word-of-mouth marketing, positive reviews, and recommendations (Kranzbuhler et al., 2017).

      Technology as the invisible enabler for customer experience. Motor manufacturers often referred to as original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) have recently applied digital transformation, not only to enhance their product or services but also to transform their auto dealership's showrooms and sales staff (Schmidt et al., 2018). The use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies such as smart goggles and interactive touch screens are no longer substitutes to improve customer

experience in showrooms (Stratten, 2019). OEMs and their automotive retail dealerships should not see digital technology as a distraction to traditional automotive business processes but should leverage on the available technologies as enabling tools to facilitate and optimize customer experiences. In the automotive retail industry, digital technology has become the flagship of showrooms and brand experience (Schmidt et al., 2018).

With the adoption of CRM, customer communication and interactions have evolved from manual-based telephonic engagement to connected customer experience, creating new services, and blending digital with physical customer contact (Schmidt et al., 2018). The automotive retail dealerships in Saudi Arabia should blend digital with physical customer contact for outstanding customer experience (See Figure 1). Consider a shift in the customer purchasing cycle; the online automotive retail services are gaining ground. With some OEMs in coordination with their auto dealers, venturing into services such as service online for service appointment booking, parts inquiries, vehicle inquiries, and test drive booking. With AI and VR, customers can also touch and feel what they are prospecting to buy.

Technology: The "Invisible" Enabler
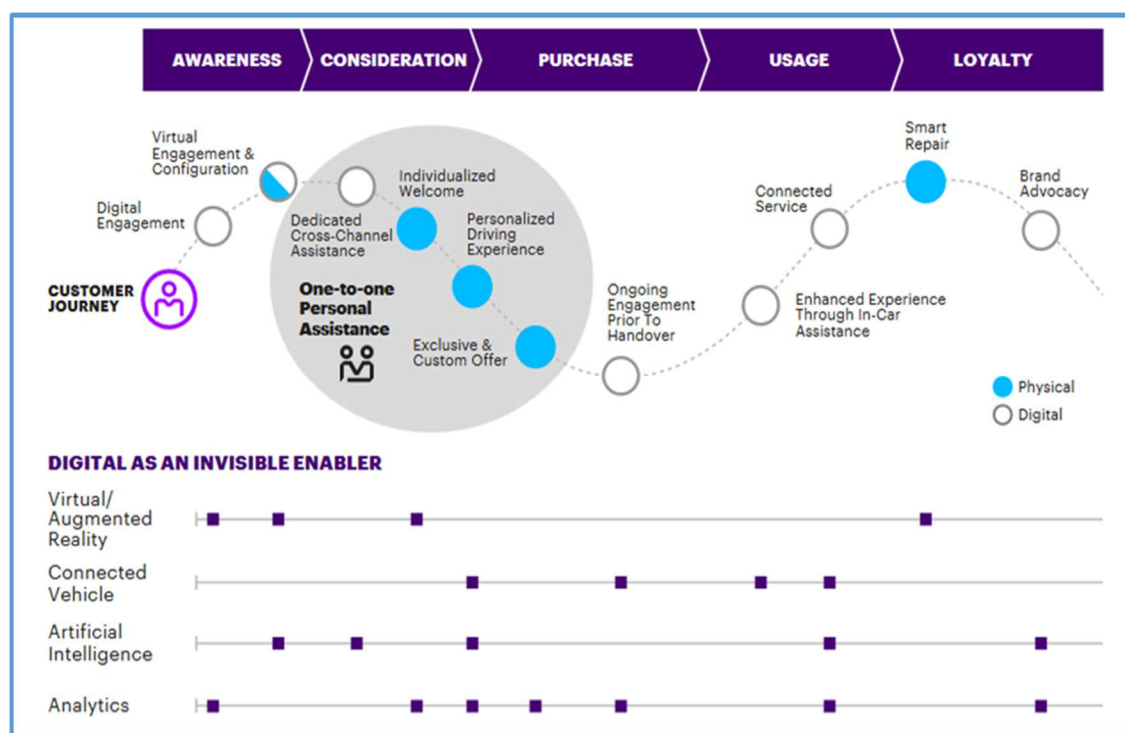
Figure 1. Enhancing the customer experience by blending the digital with the physical. (on the bases of Schmidt et al., 2018).

Digital as a catalyst for change. In the digital era, different customers like to interact with their auto dealers in different ways. The various types of customer engagement outlets range from traditional mega 3s facilities (sales, service, and spare-parts) dealerships, flagship retail showrooms to quick-service outlets (QS). However, recent data shows that car buyers spend 60% of their time researching online, and 45% of customers want online aftersales service "with online payment option" (Schmidt & Trenka, 2019). Despite the controversy on personal data privacy and issues with big data, about 92% of customers are willing to share their personal information and their vehicle data with workshops for seamless customer experience, and 47% of customers would share their data (Schmidt et al., 2018).

Customer Experience Management (CXM)

Digitalization has changed the business environment and daily customer lives (Boureanu, 2017). Information technology has changed the way customers communicate leisure and make their purchasing decisions because they use available platforms to acquire information about the product or service, which has revolutionized the automotive retail industry. According to Daimler (2016), OEMs in coordination with their automotive retail dealerships are transitioning from car manufacturers and sellers to mobility providers, with the focus on individuals as customers or employees to help transform their business performance.

Because of competition, businesses can no longer sustain through innovative technologies, the product or service quality, and the price or promotional discounts because the focus is shifting towards CXM (Elva, 2019). According to Boureanu (2017), customer experience refers to the total sum of interaction with customers from the time they identify the product or service as prospectors to the purchasing decision and use of the product. Some scholars further described customer experience as the customer touchpoints representing verbal (advertising) or nonverbal (product usage) related to an individual product or brand perceptions (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2015).

The better connectivity in life and at work has transformed products, services, and customer communications (T-Systems, 2016). In the facade of increasing expectations, customer centricity is vital for financial sustainability (Bellini et al., 2017). Application of IT strategies could play a vital role in enabling CXM in automotive retail dealerships. Business managers take things for granted that service offerings are fast, mobile, flexible,

and available anywhere and are made-to-measure the individual customer experience (McKinsey, 2016). However, this is not the case because carmakers, auto dealers, and auto repair shops are facing new challenges, forcing them to keep pace with the latest developments in a digitized world. Business managers should take a new approach to review their business process model and business strategies (Inampudi et al., 2019).

To remain competitive in the challenging market place, automotive retail dealerships in Saudi Arabia may need to revise their business processes covering customer touchpoints such as lead management, point-of-sales activities, and aftersales services tailored to meet specific customer needs. Generally, the goal for CXM is to ensure seamlessly positive customer experience with digitized customer communication for open, brand-agnostic solutions that can essentially contribute to the future of automotive vehicle sales and aftersales operations (T-Systems, 2016).

New exploration on customer experience and touchpoint components align and recommend the notion of offering multiple touchpoints as a business strategy to connect with customers in a more competitive business environment (Dahl, 2016; Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016). As part of CXM, Daimler (2016a) believed that putting customers first is an excellent strategy to becoming the market leader in customer experience. Business leaders have the idea that good customer service is a vital aspect of the customer experience journey (Daimler, 2016a). In CXM, the emphasis is on design and continuous changes to customer touchpoints with overall objectives of achieving long-term customer loyalty and sustainable growth of the company (Scherpen, Draghici, & Niemann, 2018)). Therefore, CXM involves the customers throughout the purchase cycle,

including before and after buying decision because customers have many choices, which ultimately affecting customer retention and brand loyalty (PRNewswire, 2015).

Customer Expectation

The new generation of customers with extremely different buying needs have set new standards on what they expect from modern automotive retail dealerships (Schmidt & Trenka, 2019). Inspired by their experiences in other industries and the rapid rise in new technologies, customers in recent years seek new and efficient experience in their journey of purchase in automotive sales (Aureso, 2016). The technologies available to younger customers have increasingly set new levels of customer expectations, and younger customers are easily dissatisfied with the older traditional ways of selling cars.

Because customers are familiar with services that digital giants such as Amazon or Netflix offer, they are demanding options to buy vehicles online and at transparent prices (Schmidt & Trenka, 2019). Automotive retail dealerships are exploring new ways of doing business because new disruptors in the auto market are taking advantage of the changes in customer behavior and expectations by investing time in adopting new sales strategies. Pillay (2017) stated that the digital revolution is not limited to new designs or building of cars but has reshaped the automotive industry's customer regarding their vehicle purchase behavior and aftersales service environments.

The changes in the automotive retail industry in the past few decades include the three major paradigms (Aureso, 2016). First, the old days when the main influencer in car purchase was the car brand itself. Auto dealers enjoyed this occurrence in the late 70s and 80s when most automotive retail dealerships brand position and competition was

moderate. The alliances in automotive manufacturers in the 90s-2000s led to large multi-brand dealerships in the concept of Auto Malls (Aureso, 2016). The mergers of automotive manufacturers intensified competition because automotive retail dealerships started selling the same brands within driven distances from one another. However, in Saudi Arabia, sole distributors represent most brands as a single dealer in the entire kingdom. The monopolistic exclusivity is changing because the government of Saudi Arabia is opening the market for more competition and investment in the automobile sector as part of its vision 2030 (Randheer et al., 2017). The government approach may disrupt the current customer loyalty and margins the sole retail dealership are enjoying. Therefore, the retail dealership should adjust or adopt IT strategies that will enable them to maintain their competitive advantage.

The third paradigm emerged within the last 5 years in response to digitalization, social media, smartphones, and car online portals and platforms, such as Yallamotor. With full customer visibility and increasing customer expectations, the platform offers an exceptional variety of vehicles for the customer. According to Aureso (2016), despite the increasing new connected technologies and tailored customer experience, the global automotive retail sales volume is in decline. In Saudi Arabia, the 20-30% decrease in automotive retail sales range is due to the competitive market and economic downturn (Anderson, 2017). Aureso noted that the decline in vehicle sales had forced automotive retail dealerships to explore alternative strategies to retain and attract customers through three paradigms. The three models are (a) technology-enabled availability, (b)

personalized relationship with reliable customer service, and (c) countrywide connected brand network.

Technology-enabled availability. Younger customers, particularly millennials, have no patience to wait for the availability of businesses to serve them and are willing to pay more to wait for less (Brown, 2018). According to Aureso (2016), technology supports the perception that millennial customer expectation focuses on quick delivery of service. For example, most millennials order food on their smartphone in just a few clicks, prefer online shopping with the expectation to receive the items the following day, and get immediate support 24/7 with answering services and live chats. The shift in customer expectation is also applicable in the automotive retail industry, with customers expecting to connect with manufacturers and auto dealerships in real-time (Aureso, 2016).

Customers prefer to connect with the automotive retail dealership at their convenience not only during working hours or via traditional call centers but also through online platforms. Some online platforms include corporate websites, social media pages, dedicated and customized mobile applications for vehicles and aftersales inquiries. Customers also expect continuous engagement and interaction with their auto dealers for transparency and readily available information about their products, services, and their entire sales journey. Globally, OEMs have realized the change in customer expectations forcing most brand manufacturers to continuously innovate and collaborate with their automotive retail dealerships for seamless customer experience (Aureso, 2016).

Personalized relationship with reliable customer service. Across different

business sectors and regions, business leaders are recognizing the competitive advantage

of offering superior customer experience (Bruijl, 2018). The value creation derived from

outstanding customer service does not only reside in what the automotive retail

dealerships offer but how customer service employees deliver the products and services

(Bruijl, 2018). Study findings by Mckinsey (2016) indicate that customer's expectation

has risen significantly and customers' expectations from automotive retail dealerships do

not involve digital platforms or online, but a personalized relationship built on trust and

proficiency. According to Bruijl (2018), over 40% of customers rank product expertise as

the most important component of the auto dealer consultation. The perception regarding

product expertise is also applicable in the purchase of a second-hand car (referred to as

Pre-Owned or used car). Customers prefer to get advice and consultation from a closer

professional relationship based on previous services done in the past, thus, making auto

dealers invest in transforming sales personal into trusted advisors.

Countrywide connected brand network. The swift shift in customer

expectations has reshaped the retail automotive industry, forcing dealerships and

manufacturers to become increasingly interconnected and invest more in customer focus

(Bruijl, 2018). The change in customer expectation and behaviour has also affected the

Saudi Arabian Automotive Retailers representing brands that are non-sole distributors

(not as single dealers in the kingdom). To cover the countrywide network, some

automotive retail dealerships and distributors appointed identified independent retailers

(IIR). The IIR is smaller multi-brand automotive resellers with a wide network across the

country that big restricted dealers, as a strategic business plan, engage in expanding their footprint. In a society where most customers base their purchasing decision on trust and family names, the IIR investment proves to be a successful dealer network expansion for reaching to customers countrywide.

Most customers in the automotive retail industry expect to receive similar experiences available in other industries such as banking, insurance, and telecommunications. The customers expect to walk into any brand dealership or agent for routine service maintenance or emergency repair, and the dealer can easily retrieve the vehicle service history and personal preferences (Aureso, 2016). The evolving customer expectations has created a challenge for automotive retail dealerships and OEMs, forcing them to start building connected networks and alliances to automate service appointments and offer delightful customer experience to meet customer experience. In collaboration, automotive retail dealerships can leverage their wide network to share the same database and standard of quality to gain customer loyalty and retention (Aureso, 2016).

Customer Loyalty

In the automotive retail industry, the perceived quality of service is increasingly becoming important because it drives customer satisfaction, which has a direct impact on customer loyalty and business performance (Azman & Gomiscek, 2015). With growing consumer expectations, automotive dealerships are working hard to get ahead of consumer needs by enhancing the customer experience to meet the desires of vehicle owners. According to PRNewswire (2017), there is evidence of a decrease in customer satisfaction and loyalty across different industries since 2015. Therefore, business leaders

in the automotive retail industry should review the experiences they provide to their customers and adopt innovative IT strategies to meet the changing expectations. Implementing IT strategies to meet customer expectation is particularly critical to attract or retain millennials, who are the fastest-growing generation of car buyers but are easily dissatisfied with legacy and older business processes (PRNewswire, 2017).

Automotive retail dealerships could increase customer satisfaction by developing a better understanding of customer needs and expectations (Azman & Gomiscek, 2015). Improved consumer satisfaction results in customer loyalty and retention, which is one of the biggest pillars of a successful automotive business (Famiyeh, Kwarteng, & Asante-Darko, 2018). Incomparable to other industries such as hospitality, the auto dealerships, repair shops, and other businesses in the automotive retail industry depends on customer loyalty in complement to an effective customer retention strategy for business financial sustainability and survival (Yarrow, 2015).

Roche, an automotive retail industry veteran, advised business managers in the retail dealerships to improve their customer experience to retain loyal customers because it is very costly to acquire new customers (PRNewswire, 2017). Business managers could achieve brand and customer loyalty by adopting strategic measures including business locations and a wider offering of goods and services to enhance customer experience (Alhouti, Gillespie, Chang, & Davis, 2015). Companies spend about seven times more to acquire new customers when compared to keeping existing customers because selling to existing customers is 50% easier and more likely than selling to new prospecting customers (PRNewswire, 2017).

Automotive brand loyalty. The automotive retail industry is one of the few industries that profit from both vehicle sales and selling of aftersales services. Some automakers in collaboration with their distributors or retail dealerships have developed innovative customer retention and brand loyalty initiatives, which involve selling cars with a service maintenance plan and extended warranty. According to Yarrow (2015), automotive retail dealerships that sell cars with service maintenance options have a customer retention rate of about 60%, hence, confirming the argument that offering service plans can help to create brand loyalty and improve sale. Additionally, the offer of service plans gives customers confidence and assurance regarding the inclusion of the service maintenance cost in the purchase, and they will not bear the costs for vehicle service and repairs. However, PRNewswire (2017) argued that retention strategies such as service plans have made some automotive retail dealerships complacent and compromise on improving the customer experience. Some automotive retail dealerships fail to improve customer experience because of their conviction that car buyers will visit their aftersales service centres for free service.

Researchers are finding evidence to suggest that the links between quality of services, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty might not be as straightforward as perceived. According to the study by PRNewswire (2017), although automotive retail dealership may lead competitor's in-vehicle throughputs or dealership service visits, about 70% of customers who bought or leased a vehicle from the company might not have returned for service in the past year. However, research findings have shown that more than 50% of loyal customers are willing to travel long distances and pay extra more

for enhanced customer experience (Fellen, 2018). Therefore, automotive retail dealerships should adopt new offering to improve customer experience.

Business managers must choose appropriate innovative technologies to improve customer experience. Some available innovative technologies that automotive retail dealerships could adopt to improve customer experience include customer-pay service or online bill payment, rideshare, and valet services (Agrawal, 2017). Customers should be able to access the innovative technologies on dealer platforms with a minimal click. Automotive retail dealerships should be more suggestive of potential or trending tools in the market. For example, in China, there is an increased use of technology platforms such as Autohome, which is a vertical portal for vehicle sales. At the initial stage, Autohome spent three months negotiating and contracting to integrate dealer inventory of 6,000 dealerships. Such innovative IT investments are a testimony that vertical auto websites can contribute more than 20% of leads to the dealership and tends to replace direct sales as physical showroom disruptor (Lau, 2016). When customers have positive experiences, they might help to promote the organization as brand ambassadors. Therefore, customer loyalty through advocacy may have a positive financial impact on the organization and help to improve business performance (Weinman, 2015).

Consumer trust and loyalty. A decision to purchase a car could be stressful and emotional, especially in today's automotive market environment where brand quality and service are not the only determinants to brand loyalty. Recent studies have shown that consumers have more options to purchase a car than in past decades. According to Fellen (2018), about 65% of car buyers switched to a different car brand and model because the

dealership employees conveyed trust using adverts, social media communication, or online content. Business managers in dealerships should understand customer sensitivities because some customers' oath to purchase diminish when exposed to questionable content. Researchers have predicted that about 74% of respondents may feel less favourable toward the brand (Fellen, 2018).

Considering the increase in IT investment by Saudi Arabian government and business disruption due to COVID-19 Pandemic, business managers in automotive dealerships should embrace IT strategies as a key element to improve business performance. Dealership employees must be authentic to customers because trust and trends set by an automotive retail dealership have a direct impact on customer loyalty (Fellen, 2018). Loyal customer assert price as a fair monetary value they are willing to pay when offered an outstanding customer experience to attain their expectation (Van Scheers, 2016).

Customer Loyalty Program

A customer loyalty program is a strategic marketing methodology that recognizes repeat customers by rewarding their purchase with the company or by continuously staying engaged with a brand regularly (Wollan, Davis, De Angelis, & Quiring, 2017). The automaker reward customer to boost sales and hold on to the existing customer. Automotive retail dealerships should set aside their obsession with winning new customers but rather focus on how to make their existing buyers feel more esteemed and become more valuable (Agrawal, 2017). Companies may put together a point- or bonus-based system that customer accumulates as they purchase or stay committed to the brand

and advance to higher levels of loyalty when they buy more. The rewarding incentives or special benefits that accumulate over time, influence customers to purchase more and result in being a brand promoter.

Some automotive retail dealerships in Saudi Arabia that have launched loyalty programs did it within their group of companies or partnered with other organizations for a wide range of benefits. The benefits may include free airline tickets, purchasing credits or discounts, free merchandise, rewards, coupons for electronics, or dealer perks such as free service and access to new products (Yarrow, 2015). However, automotive retailers are cautious of free extras, which attract additional operational costs and may affect their financial bottom line. The automotive industry is facing a decline in sales and low margins due to aggressive competition (Popely, 2015).

Some marketing strategies such as loyalty programs should not incur huge costs because technology and alliances with other companies might help to keep the costs down. However, in today's competitive business environment, business leaders are working hard to drive growth (Wollan et al., 2017). The psychologist, Schwarz, found that when companies spend a little more on customers, it creates a reciprocal affection between the two parties. According to Leder (2019), 95% of customers attested that trusting a company increases their loyalty.

Customer relationship marketing in the service industry has become a major marketing concern and popular among business leaders (Samuel, 2018). Scholars have attributed the emerging trend to a competitive business environment and lack of proper instruments for exchanging ideas with customers, forcing organizations to implement

loyalty programs (Hussain, 2016). The purpose of the marketing engagements is to create a continuous customer experience coupled with benefits for repeat purchases and customer retention. According to Ganiyu (2017), customer satisfaction has a direct impact on customer loyalty and is the key determinant in establishing a successful business environment. Hussain (2016) argued that customer satisfaction is the true basis for customer loyalty and acts as a process for sustainable customer relationship and organizations' competitive advantage. Hussain's statement supports the perceived understanding of a relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Loyalty programs enable organizations to improve customer retention, especially if the associated benefits have a significant impact on customer experience, thereby, maximizing the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Yarrow, 2015). The main purpose of customer loyalty programs is to create additional customer offering to existing customers to make them feel valued to enhance effective loyalty and retention of customers through loyalty membership (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). However, some researchers argue that loyalty programs may not greatly influence customer satisfaction because customer satisfaction is a post-evaluation choice customer make after making purchases (Soderlund & Colliander, 2015). Loyalty programs are not unique innovation because some automakers and Middle East dealer groups that belong to large conglomerates have launched them. Therefore, followers must have an intentional and methodical strategy to build outstanding loyalty programs that can help sustain customer experience (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015).

During my literature review, I covered CRM concentrates, which include customer retention, customer experience, customer satisfaction, customer expectations, and customer loyalty. Business managers in Saudi Arabia's automotive retail dealerships may explore the CRM concentrates on improving customer retention and increasing sales. The use of technology could help business leaders to improve customer retention. Because the new generation of millennial car buyers put customer experience at the centre of all dealership short and long-term strategies, business managers in the automotive retail dealership should understand the strategies for improving customer experience. Business managers should understand the importance of recognizing and appreciating customers who recommend the company's products or services to other persons.

Most researchers have opined that consumer adoption is the most difficult hindrance to the success of customer loyalty programs (Soderlund & Colliander, 2015). Therefore, business managers should train their employees to understand that customer delight is not by providing exceptional service. According to Sokolov-Mladenovic and Cuzovic (2015), customer retention and loyalty improved with prompt resolution of customer problems and quality of service. The automotive retail dealership should implement a customer service strategy to ensure high customer satisfaction and retention rate. Understanding customer retention for a specific automotive brand or franchise is essential because it is a major determinant of improved business performance and financial sustainability (Chan et al., 2018).

Summary and Transition

Section 1 of this qualitative multiple case study included the background of the study exploring the IT strategies automotive retailers use to improve customer retention. Section 1 also contains discussions on the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research question, and the interview questions. Other contents covered in Section 1 include narratives on the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, and the significance of the study. The large part of Section 1 contains an elaborate discussion on the various themes of the literature review including related and contrasting theories to the ECT, issues related to customer retention, customer loyalty, and customer retention strategies.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement and provide a detailed description of my role as the researcher. I also stated the role of participants, the research methods and designs, population and sampling, and ethical research. Section 2 also included the data collection instruments, data collection and organization techniques, data analysis technique, reliability and validity, and a transition and summary.

In Section 3 of the research study, I provided an overview of the study, present that the findings of the research study, and discuss the application to the professional practice. Other topics discussed in Section 3 include the implications for social change, recommendations for action and further studies, my reflections on the doctoral research, and summary and study conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I provide detailed information about the methodology of this study on the IT strategies that automotive business managers use to improve customer retention. I restate the purpose of the study, describe the role of the researcher, define the eligibility criteria for selecting the participants and protecting their rights during the study, and discuss the research method and design. Other topics include population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization and analysis techniques. Finally, I discuss the procedure for ensuring data validity and reliability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the IT strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. The target population for this research study was four retail automotive business managers from two automotive retail dealerships who have successfully used IT strategies to retain customers in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. The results of this research study could contribute to positive social change by improving business performance through customer retention. Improved customer retention might increase sales, create new job opportunities, provide social amenities and welfare to the local people, promote the economic development of the regional communities, and contribute positively to reducing unemployment in local communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection in a qualitative study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I served as the primary instrument for data collection by identifying suitable participants, contacting the participants, and conducting interviews to obtain information to accomplish the purpose of the study. Yin (2016) identified the roles of a qualitative researcher as follows: (a) data collection, (b) data organization, (c) data analysis, (d) data interpretation, (e) a literature review to gather relevant information, (f) identification of and engagement with participants, and (g) data storage and security. I followed Yin's steps systematically to collect, organize, analyze, and store data. During data collection, researchers play a vital role in evaluating, recognizing, and appreciating the participants' contribution to the study based on the lived experiences (Bashir, Sirlin, & Reeder, 2014). To achieve the principal purpose of this research study, I used the interview questions of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to collect data methodically from participants to enable me to understand the findings of the study and to analyze and interpret data correctly.

The motivation to conduct this study (on the IT strategies automotive retailers use in Saudi Arabia to improve customer retention) derived from my extensive experience in working within the auto industry. I am an IT executive officer for 20 years and have experienced the challenges that automotive retail dealerships face in customer retention. Therefore, I am very familiar conversant with the research topic and the practical dimensions of the problems associated with customer retention in the auto industry. However, I did not have any direct relationship with the participants of this study.

Lewis (2015) posited that personal beliefs and experience with the topic are crucial and at the core of any research study in terms of data collection and analysis. I applied my personal experience with automotive retail operations and customer service to conduct this research study. I did not conduct the doctoral study within the organization that I work for, but rather, I selected participants from other auto retailers to minimize the possibility of personal bias. The results of this study could help me to understand the best IT strategies automotive retailers use to improve customer retention.

The role of the researcher includes adhering to the ethical research issues outlined in the Belmont Report of 1979 (Tomkinson, 2015). The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects developed the Belmont Report, which contains ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects from abuse. Researchers, who adhere to the Belmont Report, aim to observe the following three principles: (a) respect for participants, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Institutes of Health, 2015). I adhered to the Belmont Report principles and guidelines by respecting participants' beliefs and feelings, minimizing risks, and avoiding bias in the selection of participants.

Institutions are obligated to ensure that persons involved in human subjects' research take appropriate human subjects protection training and education (Hadden, Prince, James, Holland, & Trudeau, 2018). Researchers should attend training to have knowledge and understanding of how to protect participants, informed consent process, and how to address ethical concerns of participants (Resnik, Miller, Kwok, Engel, & Sandler, 2015). Recently, most educational institutions use the Collaborative Institutional

Training Initiative (CITI) program to fulfil training requirements (Hadden et al., 2018). I familiarized myself with the CITI programs on the protection of human participants and obtained the CITI program certification before data collection. I also applied for and obtained approval from Walden's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before contacting participants (Approval Number 08-17-20-0545994).

The researcher must mitigate against personal bias during the research process. Some of the strategies qualitative researchers use to mitigate bias and avoid viewing data through a personal lens include (a) use of an interview protocol, (b) member checking, (c) construction of appropriate interview questions, (d) transcript validation, and (e) reaching data saturation (Berger, 2015; Roulston, 2016). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) as a guide to assist in collecting collect data from participants. I used the process of member checking to ensure the accuracy of data collected and validate interview data. To ensure data saturation, researchers continue to interview participants until no new information is emerging, and themes remain the same (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I ensured data saturation during the interview process to mitigate personal bias.

The researcher should use suitable instruments to collect information from the participants. Phoenix et al. (2018) posited that researchers should identify appropriate participants for the study before data collection. Participants are the most valuable instruments for data collection (Probst, 2016). Qualitative researchers use open-ended research questions to shape the desired direction of the literature research, research design, data collection for better data analysis and research results (Graue, 2015). I used open-ended research questions (see Appendix B) to collect the primary data from the

participants. By interviewing subject matter experts (SME), qualitative researchers gain

the opportunity to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon under study because

the feedback from participants derives from their current and past experiences (Khankeh,

Ranjbar, Khorasani-Zavareh, Zargham-Boroujeni, & Johansson, 2015). I interviewed

four retail automotive business managers who are SME and had successfully

implemented IT strategies to retain customers.

Qualitative researchers use the interview process to collect data to answer the

research question (Graue, 2015; Rosenthal, 2016), and to obtain useful information on the

experiences of participants (Galloway, Kapasi, & Whittam, 2015). I used the

semistructured interview to administer the open-ended questions contained in the

interview protocol (see Appendix A) to collect data from participants. According to

Kevill, Trehan, Easterby-Smith, and Higgins (2015), researchers use the interview

protocol to provide an understanding of the research phenomenon from participants'

perspectives and experiences. I used the interview protocol to obtain data from

participants to mitigate personal bias.

Participants

A significant factor in qualitative research is the ability to identify suitable

participants for the study (Yap & Webber, 2015). Yin (2018) recommended that a

minimum of three participants is enough for a case study. Qualitative researchers

establish criteria for participant eligibility to avoid ineffective data collection (Yin, 2018).

Researchers establish eligibility criteria to ensure selected participants have the

experience, knowledge, and proper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Noble

& Smith, 2015). I selected four retail automotive business managers from two automotive retail dealerships who have successfully used IT strategies to retain customers in the western region of Saudi Arabia. The criteria I used to select participants for this study are as follows: (a) the individual has worked in the auto retail dealership as a manager for at least 5 years, (b) has successfully used IT strategies to retain customers, (c) has no less than 50 employees under supervision, and (d) works directly in the customer service unit.

Researchers use several strategies to gain access to participants, including telephone calls, personal contacts, business directory, emailing, and face-to-face techniques (Hoyland, Hollund, & Olsen, 2015; Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) advised researchers to contact the gatekeepers of organizations intended for data collection to gain easy access to participants. I gained access to participants after obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB by sending out an informed consent form to all participants through the emails of the case auto retail companies selected for the data collection process. I obtained the telephone numbers of companies from public website directory to place calls to managers to provide any information they required. After receiving permission from the management of the automotive retail companies, I sent a letter of invitation to potential participants explaining the purpose of the study. I sought their voluntary agreement to participate in the study.

The researcher should develop a working relationship with participants, build rapport, and establish a trust to facilitate the data collection process (Zhang & Jiang, 2015). A researcher could create a good relationship with participants by listening

patiently to them during the interview process and reassuring the participants of their confidentiality throughout the research process (Jack, DiCenso, & Lohfeld, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To ensure a good working relationship with participants, I assured the participants of their confidentiality, explained clearly the purpose of the study, and I listened patiently to participants during the interviewing process. Participants received via email the informed consent form, clearly stated the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, duration of the interview, and steps to withdrawing from the study.

Research Method and Design

Researchers use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach in conducting research (Abutabenjeh, 2018). I used the qualitative method for this study. Some qualitative designs include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative designs (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). I used the qualitative multiple case study approach to explore the IT strategies business managers' use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. In this subsection, I will discuss the rationale for choosing the qualitative research method against other research methods and a multiple case study instead of other qualitative research designs in this study. I will also provide the narrative on how I will ensure data saturation.

Method

A qualitative researcher seeks to explore a phenomenon in a real-life situation to understand the meaning and proper context in line with the experiences of the participants (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Sutton & Austin, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers use

the qualitative method to assess the research phenomenon in the natural setting (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I used the qualitative method for this study to sought for an answer to the research question: What IT strategies do business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention? The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the intent was to explore and understand the full meaning of the phenomenon.

In a quantitative research study, researchers collect numerical data to test a hypothesis and predict a trend (Daneault, 2018; Zoellner & Harris, 2017). Quantitative researchers use close-ended questions to examine relationships among variables and to provide an account of the different ways variables interact with each other (Khaldi, 2017; Yazan, 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because the intent was not to collect numerical data and test a hypothesis. Therefore, I did not use the quantitative method for the study. Researchers use the mixed methods approach, which consists of the qualitative and quantitative methods to collect both numeric and open-ended data to answer the research question (Almeida, 2018; Molina-Azorin, 2016). The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for this study because the quantitative component will serve no useful purpose, and my intent was not to collect numeric data and test a hypothesis. Using both the qualitative and quantitative methods will be time-consuming and financially expensive.

Research Design

A qualitative researcher may use various research designs in conducting a research study, including (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, (c) ethnography, and (d)

narrative approach (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Lewis, 2015; Yin, 2018). The case study design is an experiential-based method of investigation in which qualitative researchers attempt to explore a subject matter while it is in its original context (Runfola, Perna, Baraldi, & Gregori, 2017). I used a multiple case study design for this study. Researchers use the case study design to collect rich data by exploring the research question through multiple sources such as interviews, observations, and archival data to provide a holistic, in-depth analysis of real-life situations based on the phenomenon under study (Henry & Foss, 2015; Yin, 2018). The case study was the most appropriate design for exploring the IT strategies that business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention.

Researchers may use the case study design in circumstances where evidence of the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon is unclear to accommodate the diverse settings of the phenomenon (Runfola et al., 2017). According to Yin (2018), a case study involves incorporating multiple sources of data to provide a detailed account of complex research phenomena in real-life contexts. The multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because it provided me with the opportunity to explore the IT strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry extensively to improve customer retention.

Qualitative researchers use the phenomenological design to provide an in-depth description of a phenomenon based on the lived experiences and perceptions of the individuals (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016; Nazir, 2016). Using a phenomenological research design, a qualitative researcher could generate a comprehensive picture of a

phenomenon based on the experiences of the participants (Daher, Olivares, Carré, Jaramillo, & Tomicic, 2017; Engward & Goldspink, 2020). The phenomenological research design was not appropriate for this study because the goal was not to explore the lived experiences of the participants. A researcher could use the ethnographic design to explore the cultural beliefs of participants as well as interpret patterns of beliefs and behaviors (Atkinson & Morriss, 2017). Using the ethnographic design, a researcher can collect data through in-depth interviews and prolonged observation of the participants (Ferraro & Andreatta, 2017). Ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because the purpose of the study was not to explore the cultural beliefs and behavior of participants.

Researchers use the narrative design to explore the life experiences of individuals as narrated by the individuals (Wang & Geale, 2015). The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because the intent was not to explore the life experiences of individuals or groups of individuals. I used the case study design for this study because it provided the opportunity to explore in-depth the IT strategies that business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention.

Qualitative researchers can reach data saturation through interviews, on the basis that data or information collected is enough and further data collection or analysis is unnecessary (Weller et al., 2018). Another approach of achieving data saturation is through triangulation of data using two or more methods, which may involve questionnaire survey and content analysis, before comparing and combining the output (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Data

saturation is reached when no new data or themes are emerging from the interview

process (Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, I continued to

interview the participants until no new information or themes were emerging from the

interview process.

Researchers use triangulation to merge data obtained from different sources to

promote coherence and consistency in research (Yin, 2018). I used method triangulation

to attain data saturation. Member checking is another technique that qualitative

researchers use to reach data saturation and confirm the accuracy of data (Thomas, 2017).

Furthermore, researchers could use semistructured, open-ended interview questions to

achieve data saturation (Nascimento et al., 2018). I used member checking and

semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B) to collect data from participants

until no new information and themes are emerging from the interview process.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study includes business managers in the automotive retail

industry in Saudi Arabia. I selected four retail automotive business managers from that

population for this study. A qualitative researcher could use the purposive sampling

technique to select participants and collect data from the sample population (Yin, 2018).

Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique a researcher can use to

identify participants with expert knowledge of the phenomenon under study, and select

participants based on their knowledge and experience (Yin, 2018). I selected participants

for this study based on their knowledge and experience using the purposeful sampling

approach.

Other sampling techniques a qualitative researcher could use include convenience sampling and snowballing approach. Using convenience sampling, a researcher can select predetermined criteria and include any members of the population that meet the criteria in the study sample (Yin, 2018). Snowballing is a sampling approach that researchers use to identify participants based on information from other respondents (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not use the convenience and snowballing sampling techniques because they were not suitable for this study. I used the purposeful sampling approach to select participants who are knowledgeable and possess experience in using IT strategies to retain customers in the automotive retail industry.

The four-point approach to sampling in qualitative research includes:- (a) defining the sample universe, (b) deciding on sample size, (c) selecting the sample size, and (d) identifying sample sourcing (Ames, Glenton, & Lewin, 2019). I followed the step-by-step procedure of the four-point approach during the sampling of participants for this study. Qualitative researchers use the purposeful sampling technique to select participants who can provide accurate and adequate information to answer the research question of the study (Kegler et al., 2019). I used the purposeful sampling technique to select the participants for this study because it was most appropriate to obtain information from experts who have in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon.

I selected four business managers in the automotive retail business industry for this study. The use of IT strategies in the auto retail industry should be of paramount importance to business managers, especially in terms of customer retention. In a qualitative case study, three to ten participants with in-depth knowledge of the research

problem are an adequate sample size for the study (Guetterman, 2015; Yin, 2018). The

eligibility criteria for selecting the four participants include: (a) served as manager for no

less than 5 years in the automotive retail industry, (b) worked in the customer service

section of the auto business, (c) successfully used IT strategies to retain customers, and

(d) manages at least 50 employees.

I conducted telephone interviews using semistructured interview questions (see

Appendix B) with four automotive retail managers to collect data until no new

information and themes were emerging. Because I reached data saturation using method

triangulation, I did not use email to send an electronic questionnaire to additional standby

participants as agreed with organization management. The four business managers

provided enough information to reach data saturation. Participants should determine a

suitable and convenient time to conduct telephone interviews. According to Oltmann

(2016), venues for conducting interviews with adult participants must be private and

conducive, and interview sessions must be at the convenience of the participants. In this

study, participants determined the time for the interviews in compliance with information

stipulated in the informed consent form. I continued to conduct interviews with the four

participants until no new information and themes were emerging.

Ethical Research

Protection of all research participants, adherence to the principles of the Belmont

Report of 1979, and complying with institutional ethics, are vital measures all researchers

must comply with before conducting a research study (Abramson et al., 2018; Baker et

al., 2016; Jeanes, 2017). Researchers should observe and comply with the requirements

of the Belmont Report of 1979 (Tomkinson, 2015). The three basic ethical principles of research involving human subjects, which are contained in the Belmont Report, include: (a) respect for participants, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). After receiving Walden University IRB approval, I observed the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report.

Researchers use the informed consent form to obtain the consent of prospective participants and provide protection (Dankar, F., Gergely, & Dankar, S., 2019). The informed consent form is a vital tool researchers use to establish a working relationship with participants (Constantin, 2018; Tram et al., 2015). A researcher must seek and obtain the consent of participants by providing full disclosure and creating awareness of the purpose and scope of the study (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers should provide copies of the informed consent form to participants to sign before the commencement of the research process (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the informed consent form to ensure adherence to ethical standards and protection of participants and respecting their rights (Chiumento, Khan, Rahman, & Frith, 2016). I sent informed consent form through email to the participants to sign the PDF e-signature or print, sign, and scan back, before the commencement of data collection. The informed consent form contains information on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, the withdrawal process, the disclosure on incentives, and the confidentiality and anonymity of the study.

Participation in this research study was voluntary, and participants have the freedom to accept or decline the letter of invitation I sent to them. Participants are free to withdraw from the research process at any time by reaching out to me through a phone

call, text message, verbal expression, or email to express their wish to discontinue participation in the study. No participant will suffer any penalty for withdrawing from the research process. I conducted interviews with participants at their convenient date and time, and under strict compliance with the stipulations in the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Some researchers offer incentives to participants to increase the response rate and turnout of the respondents. According to Hidi (2016), rewards could change the behavior and expectations of participants. Incentives to participants in research may be misconstrued as bribery to participants to provide inaccurate data (Guetterman, 2015). Some researchers do not give incentives to participants due to ethical concerns and financial constraints. I did not give any incentives to the participants in this study. The informed consent form contains an explanation regarding the decision of not giving incentives to the participants, which participants read and signed before the start of the data collection process.

The researcher is responsible for protecting participants from risks and possibly harmful situations that may occur during the research process (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). Furthermore, the researcher should safeguard the information participants provided during the interview and protect the privacy and confidentiality of data collected (Gomes & Duarte, 2018). I protected the participants by ensuring the confidentiality of the information they provided and keeping their identities anonymous. Researchers apply the principles of the Belmont Report on the protection of human subjects to ensure that the research participants receive maximum benefits and protection from any harm during the

research (Baker et al., 2016). I obtained the Walden University IRB approval to commence data collection and obtained the CITI certification before collecting data. The Walden University IRB approval number was 08-17-20-0545994. I applied the Belmont Report guidelines on the protection of human subjects during this research.

Using codes instead of the names of the participants is a way researchers maintain privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Yin, 2018). I used letters and numbers such as P1, P2, P3, and P4 to describe study participants on transcripts and research logs. I assured the participants in the letter of invitation and the informed consent form of their confidentiality and protection of the data they would provide for the study. The confidentiality and data protection involves the anonymity of the interview recordings, transcripts, and notes taken during the research process. I maintained the electronic data collected in a password-protected file and stored on my laptop. After 5 years, I will destroy all data by permanently deleting all raw electronic data and shredding all paper documents.

The researcher should protect the identity of case organizations. Researchers use pseudonyms to identify organizations in a case study (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019; Yin, 2018). I used pseudonyms such as MAC1 and MAC2 to identify the automotive retail companies in Saudi Arabia participating in this study to maintain anonymity and ensure protection and confidentiality of data and information the participating automotive companies provide. After obtaining the IRB approval, I selected four suitable participants from the two listed ARDs and obtained authorization from the research sites.

Data Collection

Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. Lewis (2015) explained that the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative research study is the researcher. Qualitative researchers use different techniques to collect data, including structured and semistructured interviews, observation, document search, and review of archival information (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017; Yin, 2018). I used semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B) to obtain information from participants. Also, I reviewed company documents to explore archival data. Using interviews, researchers engage participants in a conversation to gain a better understanding of the knowledge of the participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). I engage the participants in a telephone conversation to obtain information on the IT strategies that automotive retail managers use to improve customer retention.

Because of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, to adhere to social distancing, I sent the interview questions by email in a word document format to allow the participants to familiarize with the questions. By sending the interview questions in advance, I proved to the participants that the intent of the interview was for educational purposes. I spoke to each participant by telephone for clarification on specific answers to the questions to obtain information on the phenomenon regarding how automotive retail managers use IT strategies to improve customer retention. By using the semistructured interview, I allowed the participants to provide in-depth information. Researchers control the interview process by using open-ended questions, creating flexibility, and asking

clarifying questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I controlled the interviewing process by asking the participants open-ended questions and follow-up questions to ensure clarity.

Researchers use interview protocol as an instrument for data collection (Yin, 2018). Using a detailed interview protocol, qualitative researchers could enhance transparency and the quality of the research (Sarma, 2015). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) for this study. The interview protocol contains information on the process of the interview and what the participants should expect during the interview. Additionally, the interview protocol contains the interview questions and measures that the researcher should take to ensure the confidentiality of data and anonymity of the participants.

Data Collection Technique

A qualitative researcher has various ways of collecting data, including the use of field notes, observation, open-ended questions, and information from documents (Yin, 2018). The data collection techniques that qualitative researchers use to collect data include (a) face-to-face interviews, (b) focus group interviews, (c) observing participants, and (d) review of archival or documentary information (Yin, 2018). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I used phone interviews and archival documentary review techniques to collect data from four automotive retail managers. I sought and obtained approval from Walden University IRB before collecting data from participants. After IRB approval, I sent the letter of invitation to the participants through email to participate in the research study. Furthermore, I sent the informed consent form to the automotive retail managers

via email. All participants read and signed the informed consent form before commencing the interview process.

Many qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews to collect data from interviewees (Queiros, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). I used semistructured, open-ended question interviews to collect data from four automotive retail managers. I selected the participants purposefully in a noncoercive manner. An advantage of using open-ended interviews to collect data is the opportunity it offers the researcher to ask follow-up questions and obtain more in-depth information from interviewees (Yin, 2018). I used semistructured, open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) to obtain data on IT strategies that automotive retail managers use to retain customers.

In contrast, researchers using structured interviews rely on a standardized script and a list of specific questions (Evisi, 2016). Interviewers use the semistructured interview to gather more in-depth information from the participants regarding various concepts and factors related to the topic under investigation (Evisi, 2016). Using a semistructured interview technique, I asked probing questions and collected rich information from the participants.

Yin (2018) stated that researchers could gather much information using field notes from interviews, observations, or company documents. I took notes during the phone interviews with the participants. McIntosh and Morse (2015) stated that a researcher could collect much data in support of the phenomenon by using a semistructured interview process. An advantage of a semistructured interview is that the researcher can probe for additional questions and explore the participant's interpretation

as deemed necessary (Yin, 2018). One disadvantage of using a semistructured interview process is that a researcher may influence the responses of the participants (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I used a semistructured interview process to collect data from the participants.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic's protocol and emphasis on social distancing, and restriction on movement, I used email as the first step for data collection before conducting the phone interview, where necessary for follow-up and clarifications. I used a voice recorder to record the phone interview process. A voice recorded phone interview has the advantage of ensuring accurate information because the researcher could listen to the recorded interview after the data collection process (Sutton & Austin, 2015). During the interview process, I followed the steps outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

In addition to using semistructured interviews to collect data, I requested data on company documents such as customer automotive purchase records, company policies on the use of IT, and customer retention strategies. Yin (2018) stated that an advantage for using documentation in data collection includes the ability of the researcher to use methodological triangulation for crosschecking data gathered to reach saturation. A strategy some researchers use to validate data in qualitative research and to enhance trustworthiness is methodological triangulation (Hadi & Closs, 2016). A researcher can obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study by conducting documentation analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). I used methodological triangulation to

obtain in-depth information and documentary data on the IT strategies that automotive retail managers use to retain customers.

Researchers use member checking to verify data accuracy with the experiences of the participants to ensure the credibility of the study (Yin, 2018). The member checking procedure involves the researcher taking the summary of the research findings and results to the participants to confirm the accuracy of information and data they provided, and make corrections or provide additional information (Thomas, 2017). Within 48 hours of completing interviews, I provided a word-to-word transcript of the information participants provided during interviews. I shared the contents of the transcripts with participants to verify the document as an accurate representation of the information they provided. I requested the participants to review the interview transcript for accuracy during the follow-up meeting for member checking. Because of social distancing requirement of the coronavirus pandemic, I conducted member checking with participants via email. I sent each participant a confirmation email immediately after all participants completed the member checking process.

Data Organization Techniques

A researcher should use different techniques such as coding, transcribing, analyzing, and interpreting to organize data collected from participants (Yin, 2018). According to Yin, the purpose of data organization is to identify patterns, trends, and emerging themes from interview transcripts. Qualitative researchers use computer-assisted data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo to organize and keep track of data (Houghton et al., 2016). Some of the advantages of using the NVivo

software in qualitative data organization include (a) more accessible and better management of data, (b) proper arrangement of emerging themes, (c) less time-consuming, and (d) providing accurate and quick access to data records (Robins & Eisen, 2017). I used the NVivo software for data organization, storage, and analysis.

Researchers use unique codes, symbols, and numbers such as P1, P2, P3, and P4 to identify participants and maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Houghton et al., 2016). Using data coding could enable the researcher to identify themes emerging from the information the participants presented during the data collection process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). According to Javadi and Zarea (2016), researchers use data coding to simplify and organize the data collection process by comparing and identifying patterns. Using the NVivo software, I coded, organized, and simplified data obtained from interviews conducted with each participant. Researchers use case study database, electronic notes, reflective journals, catalogs, and research logs to organize and track data (Yin, 2018). I used a case study database, research logs, and reflective journal system to organize data collected from automotive retail managers on IT strategies they use to retain customers.

Furthermore, I ensured that all participants read and signed the informed consent form before data collection. I secured the interview recordings, transcripts, and notes to protect participants. Appelbaum et al. (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers should store data in a readable format for at least 5 years. I save all electronic data in files in a password-protected folder and will store them for 5 years from the expected

completion date of this study. After 5 years, I will permanently delete all electronic data from my computer.

Data Analysis Technique

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the IT strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. Qualitative data analysis involves the thematic exploration of the data the researcher collected through interviews, observation, and from the archives (Graue, 2015). The process of analyzing data begins when researchers compile relevant data collected from their various sources (Yin, 2018). According to Colorafi and Evans (2016), researchers conduct qualitative data analysis by organizing and classifying data to generate patterns and trends of related data for interpretation. I arranged and classified the data collected from participants to provide trends and patterns during data analysis.

A qualitative researcher may use the process of triangulation to collect data from different sources (Khaldi, 2017). According to Varpio et al. (2017), researchers use triangulation to present an exhaustive analysis of the subject matter and engage in data collection and analysis. Researchers use the process of triangulation to analyze data, especially in a case study (Yin, 2018). Four types of triangulation researchers could use to analyze data include: (a) method triangulation, (b) theory triangulation, (c) investigator triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation (Yin, 2018). Method triangulation involves the use of different methods in data collection, including interviews, observation, and document review (Yin, 2018). I used the method triangulation approach

to collect data from different sources through semistructured interviews and review of company archival data.

Researchers could follow a logical four-step data analysis process, including data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and presentation of findings (Graue, 2015). Yin (2018) outlined the following data analysis sequence: (a) transcribe interviews, (b) review transcript notes, (c) arrange data into themes, (d) interpret data based on related themes. After the collection of data, I followed the data analysis sequence to provide interview transcripts and arrange data into related themes. I used the thematic analysis approach to apply and give meaning to the recorded interview transcript and archival company documents.

Researchers use the NVivo software to organize, analyze, and code qualitative data and to find answers to the research question (Sutton & Austin, 2015). NVivo software is a computer software program that researchers commonly use in qualitative studies to help organize and code data. Researchers use NVivo software to harmonize data collected to identify common themes emerging from findings (Oliveira, Bitencourt, Zanardo dos Santos, & Teixeira, 2016; Whitmore, Baxter, Kaasalainen, & Ploeg, 2018). Digital coding using NVivo software enables a researcher to automatically keep track of new codes (Bengtsson, 2016). I used the NVivo software to organize, analyze, and code the data collected during interviews. During the data analysis, I uploaded the interview transcripts of participants and information obtained from company documents into the NVivo software to generate trends, patterns, research results, and findings.

In a qualitative study, the researcher should make connections between the conceptual framework, the research methodology, and the findings of the study during data analysis (Graue, 2015). Establishing connections between emerging themes in a qualitative case study and the conceptual framework of the study is essential during data analysis (Yin, 2018). The ECT was the conceptual framework of this study. Oliver (1977) proposed the ECT to explain how the customers' expectations influence both the perceptions and disconfirmation of customer beliefs concerning the satisfaction of customer desires. Using NVivo software, I identified the emerging themes during data analysis and aligned the themes with the literature review themes and the conceptual framework of the study. I analyzed data in connection with the ECT to gain a better understanding of the IT strategies business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers should evaluate the reliability and validity of a research study to ensure that instruments for data collection contain minimal errors to mitigate bias (Leung, 2015). Reliability and validity are critical elements in research required to legitimize the results of a research study and provide indicators to the rigor and acceptance of the trustworthiness of a research outcome (Dikko, 2016; Squires & Dorsen, 2018). The critical elements in establishing the reliability and validity of a qualitative case study are (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) confirmability, and (d) transferability (Noble & Smith, 2015; Patton, 2015). I established the reliability and validity of this research study

through audit trail, triangulation, provision of thick description, member checking, and reflexivity.

Reliability

Reliability is an essential yardstick for determining the quality of research design, trustworthiness, and dependability of the findings (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers establish reliability in a qualitative study to ensure the consistency of the data analysis process with the research results (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers use the term dependability to explain the process of establishing reliability in a study (Squires & Dorsen, 2018). In the next subsection, I will explain the steps I took to ensure the study reliability.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the extent to which data remains consistent over similar conditions (Yin, 2018). Researchers use dependability criteria to assess the reliability of a study by demonstrating the research findings are consistent over time among researchers (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). The strategies researchers use to determine dependability include debriefing, member checking, audit trail, and reflexivity (Connelly, 2016; Squires & Dorsen, 2018). I used member checking, audit trail, and reflexivity to address the dependability of the study.

Audit trial involves researchers establishing reliability by outlining the basis for the data collection process, data interpretation, and assessment consistently, and providing a detailed description of the decision-making process throughout the study (Shaban, Considine, Fry, & Curtis, 2017). I used the audit trail process to establish dependability. Researchers use a reflective journal strategy to achieve reflexivity (Yin,

2018). To ensure dependability, I used the reflexivity and audit trail strategies to explain in details the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I also used the data triangulation strategies, member checking, and debriefing to enhance dependability.

Validity

Researchers need to ensure the validity of a qualitative study to minimize errors, eliminate bias, establish integrity, and accuracy of data (Connelly, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). Most researchers use validity to ensure data collection instruments relate correctly to the research question, and findings reflect the participants' accurate perceptions and experience (Leung, 2015). To establish validity, qualitative researchers ensure the credibility, confirmability, and transferability of data collected and the trustworthiness of the research process (Yin, 2018). The next subsections contain the discussion on the approach I used to establish the credibility, confirmability, and transferability of this study.

Credibility. A credible research study should reflect the true nature and believable version of things (Thomas, 2017). Credibility refers to the extent to which the research process and findings are accurate (Hays et al., 2016). According to Yin (2018), the credibility of a study is the measure of correctness of the procedure the researcher used throughout the research process. The strategies qualitative researchers use to ensure credibility include: (a) reflexivity, (b) audit trail, (c) triangulation, and (d) extensive presentation of the activities conducted throughout the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Maree, Parker, Kaplan, and Oosthuizen (2016) identified the process that a researcher should use to ensure the credibility of a research study. The process of ensuring

credibility include (a) use peer scrutiny to verify data; (b) use appropriate research method in conducting research, (c) apply triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources, and (d) conduct member checking (Maree et al., 2016).

I conducted triangulation and member checking to ensure the credibility of this study. Member checking and triangulation are key strategies qualitative researchers use to establish the credibility of a study (Abalkhail, 2018; Smith & McGannon, 2018). I requested the participants to check the accuracy of the data collected. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) stated that through the process of member checking, a researcher provides participants with the opportunity to review the responses they provided for accuracy. I used triangulation to obtain data through multiple sources to ensure data are adequate to support the accuracy of findings. Yin (2018) explained that collecting data from different sources such as interviews, observation, and company documents could enable researchers to ensure data triangulation. Consequently, I used member checking and triangulation strategies to ensure the credibility of this study.

Confirmability. Establishing the confirmability of a study is an essential aspect of qualitative research. Confirmability refers to the process researchers use to ensure that data collected indeed represents the participants' responses and the study findings reflect the opinion of the participants and not the personal opinion and bias of the researcher (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017; Yin, 2018). Some strategies quantitative researcher use to ensure confirmability include (a) audit trail, (b) methodological memos, and (c) reflexivity (Bengtsson, 2016; Hays et al., 2016). The audit trail strategy involves a detailed description of the decisions the researcher made throughout the study. By using

methodological memos, researchers can provide a detailed account of the various ways of deriving conclusions from data analysis (Yin, 2018). Researchers achieve reflexivity by keeping reflective diary notes. I used the audit trail process, methodological memos, and reflexivity strategies to ensure the confirmability of this study.

Transferability. Qualitative researchers should establish the transferability of their study. Transferability refers to the ability to determine whether the results and findings of a study are applicable in other research contexts and settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The foremost strategy researchers use to determine transferability is the detailed verbatim description of the research process (Maree et al., 2016). Researchers use member checking, triangulation, and purposive sampling method to enhance transferability (Connelly, 2016; Maree et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). A qualitative researcher has the responsibility to ensure that the results and findings of the study apply to other research circumstances (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used a purposive sampling method, a detailed verbatim description of the research process, and a data triangulation strategy to establish the transferability of this study.

Data saturation. A significant aspect of qualitative research is the achievement of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information or themes are emerging from participants during the data collection process (Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Qualitative researchers use data saturation process to enhance the reliability of results obtained from a research study and to assure content validity (Yin, 2018). Researchers should strive to achieve data saturation through data triangulation, member checking, and in-depth interviewing (Hays et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). Data saturation could

lead to data adequacy and increase the rigor of a qualitative case study (Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018; Saunders et al., 2018).

The guiding principles researchers use to reach data saturation include: (a) no new information emerging, (b) stop the coding process, (c) no new themes, and (d) ability to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I continued to collect data using semistructured phone interviews and archival company documents until no new information or themes are emerging. Where data was not saturated using method triangulation, I planned to send an electronic questionnaire using email, to additional standby participants as agreed with organization management, to collect additional information to analyze and reach data saturation. I also used the member-checking process for participants to verify and confirm the answers given for the research and interview questions.

Summary and Transition

Section 2 contains a reiteration of the purpose statement and a discussion on the role of the researcher, which includes serving as the primary instrument for data collection and adhering strictly to ethical standards for protecting participants. Section 2 also contains information on the target population for this study regarding the four retail automotive retail managers in the Saudi Arabia automotive industry. Next, I discussed the selection of participants using a purposeful sampling technique. I explained in detail the research method and design for the study with a particular focus on the qualitative approach and a case study design. I included in Section 2 the narratives on data collection techniques, including the use of methodological triangulation, member checking, and search for archival data from company documents. After that, I discussed the process of

data analysis using the NVivo software to generate themes and relating the themes to the literature and conceptual framework. Finally, I discussed the measures I would take to ensure the reliability and validity of the study using a qualitative approach and achieve data saturation.

In Section 3, I will present the research findings and link the findings to the conceptual framework (ECT) and existing literature on effective business practice. Next, I will discuss the application of the results of the study to professional practice on how managers in the auto retail industry could utilize IT strategies to improve customer retention for increased business profitability and sustainability. In Section 3, I will discuss the implications of the study for positive social change and provide the recommendations for action and further studies. Finally, in Section 3, I will share my reflection on the experiences gained during the study process, provide summary, and study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this section, I provide an overview of my study. Then I present the findings on the IT strategies that business managers in the automotive retail industry use to improve customer retention. Using examples from the research participants, I link the study findings with the conceptual framework on the application of ECT in business practice. Other topics in this section include applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflection, summary, and conclusions.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the IT strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry to retain customers. The ECT was the conceptual framework, and the overarching research question was: What IT strategies do business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention? Four business managers from two automotive retail dealerships in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia, who had successfully implemented IT strategies to retain customers, participated in this study. The participants provided me with the primary data to answer the overarching research question, while interview notes and company archival documents served as sources of secondary data.

Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions and review of interview notes and company archival documents, I identified four themes: (a) customer engagement, (b) e-commerce platform, (c) change management and customer loyalty programs, and (d) virtual showroom and customer feedback. Within this study, the ECT related to the findings and provided a better understanding of the IT strategies some business managers in automotive retail dealerships use to retain customers in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. The study findings indicate that business managers in automotive retail dealerships use a combination of IT strategies to retain customers in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What IT strategies do business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention? Automotive retail

dealerships are facing difficulties to retain customers and improve business performance due to the continually evolving car technologies and changes in the automotive industry (Gao et al., 2016; Mohr et al., 2016). With the increasing challenges in the automotive industry, business leaders who explore new ways to create value and promote effective strategies for retaining customers will succeed in the future (Inampudi et al., 2019; Komarov & Avdeeva, 2015). An important priority for automotive retail dealerships who aim to improve business performance is high customer retention (Izmocars, 2019). Therefore, business executives are exploring innovative IT initiatives to retain customers and improve sales for financial sustainability (Bellini et al., 2017; Luftman et al., 2017). The four themes I identified in this study were: (a) customer engagement, (b) e-commerce platform, (c) change management and customer loyalty programs, and (d) virtual showroom and customer feedback. In the following subsections, I will present the four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions and review of supporting documents from some automotive retail dealerships archive and interview notes.

Theme 1: Customer Engagement

Researchers have studied how organizations can develop customer retention through customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017; Homburg et al., 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The first theme to emerge was customer engagement, which involved the use of IT tools to collaborate and stay connected with customers. The theme, customer engagement emerged from all the Interview Questions. All participants affirmed using

customer engagement as an IT strategy to retain customers in automotive retail dealerships.

Customer relationship through continuous customer engagement increases sales and profitability (Ramaj & Ismaili, 2015). Responding to Interview Question 1, participant P2 said, "The main strategy adopted to improve customer retention is customer engagement, an initiative put by our aftersales operations to collaborate and stay connected with our customers." Participant P2 further explained that part of their IT strategy of digital transformation is the development of the Customer Engagement Mobile Application for customers. According to participant P2, "Customers download the mobile application on their Android or IOS-Apple smart devices, giving them an opportunity to access product information, book for service or checks status of their vehicle when in the workshop." In response to Interview Question 1, P3 stated, "The automotive retail dealership is currently following the digitization strategy to increase customer engagement as an initiative to improve customer retention."

Responding to Interview Question 2, participant P2 attested, "The customer engagement initiate has improved customer experience through easier customer touchpoints and has helped service advisors to offer personalized service." In response to Interview Question 2, participant P3 affirmed, "The digitalization initiatives designed for the aftersales operation has enabled the fix it right first time (FIRFT) philosophy because better customer engagement has immensely contributed to overall customer satisfaction." The archival company documents that P2 and P3 provided validated their statements.

Responding to Interview Question 3, participant P1 posited, "The integration with external customer touchpoints like social media and online search engines empowers our retail dealership sales executives a competitive advantage to acquire new customers as they still successfully retain existing customers." In response to Interview Question 3, P2 stated, "The implementation of customer engagement initiatives has effectively contributed to our dealer operations because the service operation has significantly improved, and customer complaints have reduced." According to participant P2, "The demand and number of customers downloading mobile applications is a testimony of how the customer engagement IT strategy has been successful." Responding to Interview Question 3, participant P3 attested, "The digital customer engagement journey of introducing online and electronic customer touchpoints have increased customer convenience becoming a key success factor of improved customer retention." In response to Interview Question 3, participant P4 noted, "The dealer management system used by the automotive retail operations has enabled the customer-facing frontline employees to effectively engage with customers and offer personalized service." Responding to Interview Question 4, participant P2 commented, "The key challenges encountered during the implementation of customer engagement initiative was the inaccuracy of customer information required for effective communication."

In response to Interview Question 5, P2 stated, "Complementing the customer engagement strategy, the flexibility of the dealer management system has given customer-facing staff the ability to personalize business processes to meet our brand, legal authority requirements, and the evolving market demands." Responding to

Interview Question 6, participant P1 remarked, "A key customer retention initiative in our dealership is the Online Appointment Scheduling (OAS) which gives the customer the opportunity to have a vehicle serviced without visiting a dealership." Participant P1 added, "Mobile Service Advisor (MSA) as a collaborative and customer engagement tool is one of the initiatives implemented under the DBM IT strategy. Customer service advisors can check-in the vehicle into the service center at the convenience of the customer". In response to Interview Question 6, participant P2 noted, "The Mobile Service Advisor (MSA) as a collaborative and customer engagement tool is one of the customer engagement initiatives implemented in our dealership as an IT strategy." Participant P2 added, "The mobile service advisor also eliminates the traditional job card printing and signing, into digital e-signatures by the customer and internal use by service technicians in the workshop." Responding to Interview Question 7 participant P2 attested that, "The customer engagement initiative has enhanced availability of critical vehicle information and the customer can access every information about the dealership, and vehicle details including service history through the mobile application." In response to Interview Question 8, P2 advised on the importance of, "increased awareness about the customer engagement mobile application to all the frontline employees." Participant P2 affirmed creating "a high level of customer awareness about the customer engagement mobile application" through the placement of "adverts about the application in all our automotive retail dealerships."

The participants' responses to the interview questions aligned with Harmeling et al. (2017), Homburg et al. (2017), Pansari and Kumar (2017) statements that business

managers use customer engagement as an IT strategy to retain customers in the retail

automotive industry. The study findings demonstrated that business managers in the

automotive retail industry used customer engagement as an IT strategy to retain

customers. As applied in this study, 100% of the participants attested using customer

engagement as an IT strategy to retain customers.

Theme 2: E-commerce Platform

Despite the increased awareness of the importance of investing in IT, some

business managers have the perception that IT investments are an unnecessary cost to the

organizations (Campos, 2016; Luftman et al., 2017; Peppard & Ward, 2016). Automotive

retail dealerships implement CRM as a strategic business initiative to achieve business

goals and maximize profitability from existing and new customers (Opara, 2016). CRM

initiative in organizations, if properly implemented, can help to enhance sales and win

long-term customer loyalty (Elva, 2019). The theme e-commerce platform emerged from

Interview Questions 1-8. All participants recognized the importance of using an e-

commerce platform as an IT strategy to retain customers.

For a better understanding of customer needs, some automotive retail dealerships

adopt information technologies such as Dealer Management Systems (DMS) with

integrated CRM modules to track the interactions with customers and their vehicles

(Elva, 2019). Responding to Interview Question 1, all the participants said:

- "The SAP software system is a market leader in ERP solutions and has helped

  our organization to transform business processes. To better streamline the

  business processes, we adopted the industry-specific solution for automotive (IS-

Auto) called the Dealer Business Management (DBM). The business application software, as part of the IT strategy, has been implemented by embracing a four-step activate methodology." (P1)

- "As an IT strategy, we have implemented a DMS to help streamline the business processes. The business IT strategies succeeded because of the integration of our dealer management system and the Customer Engagement Mobile Application developed for customers, as part of the IT strategy digital transformation." (P2)

- "Once a customer decides to purchase a vehicle or request for service, the required transaction interaction can be effectively handled through an e-commerce platform. The adopted IT strategies in our automotive retail dealership centers around business automation by using information technology as part of the digitalization strategy." (P3)

- "Our automotive retail dealership uses the DMS, as an IT strategy enabler, to help improve customer retention. The DMS has helped our business operations to implement strategic business initiatives that include vehicle maintenance plan called the Premium Package." (P4)

Responding to Interview Question 2, participant P1 posited, "The implementation of the SAP DBM system as an IT strategy has benefited our vehicle distributorship and automotive retail aftersales operations in three ways that are categorized as qualitative, quantitative and strategic." In response to Interview Question 2, P3 stated, "The introduction of digital interfaces for customer self-service usage has increased customer awareness of products and services because they can easily access all the information,

which they would have struggled to get a few years back." Explaining further, participant P3 added, "Because the digital customer platforms make services and information available 24/7, the brand loyalty associated with improved customer experience has automatically helped to understand the effectiveness of the digitalization strategy." Responding to Interview Question 2, participant P4 remarked: The implementation of the Premium Package DMS system as an IT strategy, enables our automotive retail dealership to measure customer satisfaction in three categories: (a) how well the customer trusts the dealership, (b) how royal the customer is to the brand, and (c) how likely would the customer recommend the brand to a potential buyer.

In response to Interview Question 3, participant P1 noted, "The implementation of SAP DBM-IS Auto system has contributed effectively to improving customer retention." Participant P1 affirmed, "The increase in acquiring new customers and improved customer retention is a testimony to the success of our IT strategy of implementing the SAP dealer management system (DBM-IS Auto), designed for an automotive retail operation." Responding to Interview Question 3, participant P3 said, "The customer digital initiatives have improved the awareness of the importance of time-saving because most automotive retail services are being offered in the form of e-commerce." In response to Interview Question 4, participant P1 commented, "The key challenges encountered during the implementation of the SAP system range from the company organizational change management to department resistance to change." Responding to Interview Question 4, participant P4 noted, "The adoption of the DMS system by some frontline employees took longer than expected because there was little

emphasis on staff training due to the complacence that the DMS was easy to use." The company archival documents that participant P4 provided validated the statements.

In response to Interview Question 5, P1 stated, "The flexibility of the dealer management system has given our automotive retail dealership the ability to tailor business processes to meet our brand, legal authority requirements and the evolving market demands." Participate P3 added, "Once the staff realizes that, the digital IT system implemented was not to replace them but help them, as half of the work was automated leading to increased efficiency, the adoption of the new business processes improved significantly." Responding to Interview Question 5, participant P4 remarked: To overcome the challenges of the DMS implementation as a strategic IT solution, management helped frontline staff with supportive measures such as: (a) standard operating procedure document as a guide to using of the system, (b) simplified user guide manuals with screenshots and step-by-step process, (c) standby IT support staff in customer reception areas to help frontline staff on the spot, and (d) additional staff training during tea and lunch breaks."

In response to Interview Question 6, participant P1 noted, "Mobile Service Advisor (MSA) as a collaborative and customer engagement tool is one of the initiatives implemented under the DBM IT strategy." Responding to Interview Question 6, participant P4 commented, "The DBM system is the core foundation of the business transformation in the automotive retail dealerships." Participant P1 attested that implementing e-commerce platform has "helped our business users to have a 360-degree view of our customer touchpoints." Responding to Interview Question 7 participant P1

posited: The transparency driven by system DBM-IS Auto system makes sales executives meet customer demands and expectations. The seamless integration of the CRM modules and online platforms makes it easy to know the customer wish list and interests give the dealership staff the ability to offer personalized service.

In response to Interview Question 7, P2 stated, "The integration of the mobile application with our DMS helps our dealer operation to significantly engage with our customers and improve our customer retention." Participant P3 noted, "The introduction of digital services like online portals and e-commerce platforms have provided an effective mechanism for customers to calmly ponder upon their requirements." According to participant P3, "The digitalization IT strategy has also transformed the aftersales operations in our dealership." Responding to Interview Question 7, participant P4 remarked, "A DMS as part of the retail IT strategy give our dealer operation a competitive advantage compared to other automotive dealers in our region." Participant P4 noted, "The online services have been integrated into the DMS, giving customers an opportunity to book for service or inquire about products at their free and convenient time." In response to Interview Question 8, P1 opined, "ERP system like the SAP DBM-IS Auto has given our automotive retail dealership the ability to quickly adapt to the current new normal or e-commerce has driven business environment." Responding to Interview Question 8, participant P4 posited, "The DMS has helped the dealerships to adopt a system based timed operated service reminders for predictive service maintenance."

The participants' responses to the interview questions aligned with Campos (2016), Elva (2019), Luftman et al. (2017), Peppard and Ward (2016), and Opara (2016) statements that business leaders use e-commerce platform as an IT strategy to retain customers. The study findings demonstrated that business managers in the automotive retail industry used e-commerce platform as an IT strategy to retain customers. As applied in this study, 100% of the participants attested using an e-commerce platform as an IT strategy to retain customers.

Theme 3: Change Management and Loyalty Programs

Customer loyalty through advocacy may have a positive financial impact on the organization and help to improve business performance (Weinman, 2015). The primary purpose of customer loyalty programs is to create additional customer offering to existing customers to make them feel valued to enhance significant loyalty and retention of customers through loyalty membership (Kandampully et al., 2015). Most businesses use a customer loyalty program to recognize repeat customers by rewarding their purchase with the company or by continuously staying engaged with a brand regularly (Wollan et al., 2017). The theme of change management and loyalty programs emerged from Interview Questions 4-6, and Question 8. During the interviews, three participants attested using change management and loyalty programs as an IT strategy to retain customers.

Business leaders should have an intentional and methodical strategy to build outstanding loyalty programs that can help sustain customer experience (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). In response to Interview Question 4, P1 stated, "The key challenges encountered during the implementation of the SAP system range from the company

organizational change management to department resistance to change." Participant P3 agreed, "The main challenge faced during the rollout of digital platforms has been the organizational change management (OCM) associated to frontline staff like (a) Sales Executives, (b) Service Advisor, and (c) CRM Customer Contact Center Agents." In conclusion, participant P3 admitted, "The change in the role of sales employees because of IT strategy did not make employees less important as human capital workforce and IT systems go hand in hand as a strategy to improve customer retention."

Responding to Interview Question 5, participant P3 remarked, "The introduction of change agents as the champions for change on the awareness of the system benefit and the well-structured staff training was instrumental in resolving the challenge especially with the front-line staff." Participant P3 attested, "The OCM initiatives and willingness to change by employees was the success factor of the IT strategy implemented by our dealership." In response to Interview Question 5, participant P4 noted, "The automotive retail dealerships also took incentive-based corrective measures such as discounts were offered to customers who were wrongly overcharged." Explaining further, participant P4 added, "The effective communication to customers that the transformational change was to serve them better, helped to easy the Punic and made customers more understanding and led to feel that they were part of the positive change."

Some researchers argue that loyalty programs may not significantly influence customer satisfaction because customer satisfaction is a post-evaluation choice customer make after making purchases (Soderlund & Colliander, 2015). Responding to Interview

Question 6, participant P1 posited, "The key customer retention initiatives in our dealership is the Loyalty Management Program (LMP) to retain and attract new customers." According to participant P1, "The LPM is through points-based system giving customers an opportunity to accumulate points that may be redeemed for a service payment of a down payment for a new vehicle depending on the points held." In response to Interview Question 6, P4 stated, "Because of the solid structured customer base, implementation of initiatives such as Partner Based Loyalty Program, customer contact center as the single point of customer contact for product information and service appointment booking." Responding to Interview Question 8, participant P1 summarized, "The online appointment scheduling, digital payment gateways, advanced customer portal with embedded points-based initiatives like loyalty management programs give the dealership the agility and significantly contributed to customer retention."

The participants' responses to the interview questions aligned with statement of Kandampully et al. (2015), Soderlund and Colliander (2015), and Wollan et al. (2017) that business leaders could use change management and customer loyalty programs as IT strategy to retain customers. The study findings demonstrated that business managers in the retail automotive industry used change management and customer loyalty programs as an IT strategy to retain customers. As applied in this study, 75% of the participants attested using change management and customer loyalty programs as an IT strategy to retain customers.

Theme 4: Virtual Showroom and Customer Feedback

In the automotive retail industry, digital technology has become the flagship of showrooms and brand experience (Schmidt et al., 2018). The theme, virtual show room and customer feedback emerged from Interview Questions 2 and 6. Three participants affirmed using virtual showroom and customer feedback as an IT strategy to retain customers in the automotive retail dealerships.

Responding to Interview Question 2, participant P2 posited, "The effectiveness of the adopted IT strategy in our retail dealership has been measured through the Voice of a Customer as a strategic initiative to get feedback directly from the customer on their customer experience." In response to Interview Question 2, P3 stated, "The customer contact survey to assess customer satisfaction on vehicle sales or aftersales services is the determinant of the effectiveness of the digitalization strategy." Responding to Interview Question 6, participant P1 noted: "The key customer retention initiatives in our dealership is the Virtual Showroom Facility (VSF), which gives customers an opportunity to conclude a full vehicle purchase journey without visiting our showroom. Customers can via the video-enabled platform to have a view of the car with all features explained, book for a test drive and a demo vehicle is delivered home on a car carrier, for a customer to physically test drive the new vehicle. Feedback and vehicle financing can be triggered through the online virtual showroom facility."

The participants' responses to the interview questions aligned with Schmidt et al. (2018) statements that business leaders in automotive retail dealership use virtual showroom as an IT strategy to retain customers. The study findings demonstrated that

business managers in the retail automotive industry used virtual showroom and customer feedback as an IT strategy to retain customers. As applied in this study, 75% of the participants attested using virtual showroom and customer feedback as an IT strategy to retain customers.

Findings Related to ECT

The expectation–confirmation theory (ECT) was the conceptual framework for this study. Oliver developed the ECT in 1977 (Oghuma et al., 2016). The four primary constructs of ECT are: (a) expectations, (b) perceived performance, (c) disconfirmation of beliefs, and (d) satisfaction (Chen et al., 2015). According to Joo and Choi (2016), customers demonstrate the bias of a product or service at the earlier stage of their purchasing decision, aligning to the ECT framework. The study findings indicate that retail automotive business managers in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia could retain customers by implementing IT strategies based on ECT. As applied in this study, all participants attested using a combination of IT strategies to retain customers.

The ECT reflects how customer expectation influences the perceptions of the seller or service provider performance and may directly affect the customer's postpurchase satisfaction (Samuel, 2018). Customer expectations, customer satisfaction, and customer experience are linked to customer loyalty which directly affects customer retention (Hsiao, 2016). As applied in this study, retail automotive business managers used customer engagement and e-commerce platform as an IT strategy to retain customers. All participants responses echoed Hsiao's assertions on the importance of

meeting customer expectations, customer satisfaction, and customers experience to retain customers.

Atapattu et al. (2016) stated that the ECT confirmation derives from customer expectation and perceived performance and customer satisfaction which accrue from customer expectation and confirmation. Customers who have favourable perceptions of specific products or services tend to possess a high degree of perceived value and satisfaction, making them loyal to the brand, product, or service (Campbell & Brakewood, 2017). As applied in this study, retail automotive business managers should establish IT strategies to attract and retain customers. All participants confirmed the ECT regarding the use of IT strategies to improve their sales performance and retain customers.

The ECT involves customer perception with the intent to repurchase or stop using a specific product or service (Joo & Choi, 2016). The ECT focusses on customer expectation and CSI to determine if the customer desires were satisfactory (Klaus, 2015). However, Hsieh et al. (2016) argued that the ECT model alone does not sufficiently account for the postpurchase portion of a consumer shopping experience. As applied in this study, all participants' responses echoed Campos' (2016), Elva's (2019), Luftman et al.'s (2017), Peppard and Ward's (2016), and Opara's (2016) statements on the use of IT strategies to retain customers. All participants used a combination of IT strategies involving customer engagement, e-commerce platform, change management and customer loyalty programs, and virtual showroom and customer feedback to retain customers. As applied in this study, all participants applied the ECT principles regarding

the integration of customer expectations, perceived performance, disconfirmation of beliefs, and satisfaction to sales performance and retained customers.

Applications to Professional Practice

The identification of the IT strategies that retail automotive business managers use to retain customers in Saudi Arabia is crucial to improving sales performance and financial sustainability. Because the evolution in IT has affected the automotive retail industry, business executives are exploring innovative IT initiatives to retain customers and improve sales for financial sustainability (Bellini et al., 2017). High customer retention is an essential priority for automotive retail dealerships who aim to improve business performance (Izmocars, 2019). All the participants asserted using a blend of IT strategies to retain customers. The findings of this study might add value to the retail automotive business community through the dissemination of information regarding IT strategies to retain customers and provide a competitive edge to individual automotive retail dealerships. Business managers in automotive retail dealerships might use the findings of this study to implement proactive customer retention strategies to improve business performance. All participants acknowledged that customer engagement and e-commerce platform were fundamental in using IT strategy to retain customers in the Saudi Arabian automotive retail industry.

Despite the increased awareness of the importance of investing in IT, some business managers perceive that investing in IT investments is an unnecessary cost to their organizations (Peppard & Ward, 2016). The results of this study could contribute to business practice by providing business managers in automotive retail dealership with IT

strategies to retain customers and achieve business success. The findings from this study could contribute to the literature on the automotive retail industry and provide business managers with new insight regarding IT strategies to retain customers and improve sales performance. The findings from this study could improve customer retention and increase sales in the automotive retail dealerships, thereby contributing to the financial sustainability of the automotive industry. New and upcoming business managers in automotive retail dealerships may use the findings of this study to understand the IT strategies and best practices to improve customer retention and achieve financial sustainability. By utilizing the findings of this study, business managers might also implement derivative marketing and sales-driven strategies to increase sales.

Automotive retail dealerships are operating in an increasingly challenging business environment, creating the need for business managers to review their business process models and strategies (Inampudi et al., 2019). The automotive retailers in Saudi Arabia are witnessing a decline in sales due to several reasons, including a change in customer behavior, lack of customer retention, and increased operational costs (Anderson, 2017). The results of this study could contribute to information sharing, collaboration, and teamwork among automotive retail business managers who are seeking IT strategies to use to retain customers. Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to professional practice may be the provision of a practical model for business managers to develop IT strategies for retaining customers in the Saudi Arabian automotive retail industry. The practical model could serve as the basis for improving business practice in other countries' automotive retail industry. Business managers who

choose to implement IT strategies earlier than others might enhance their business

processes quicker and gain a competitive advantage.

Implications for Social Change

A significant implication for positive social change of this study includes

providing automotive retail business managers with IT strategies to retain customers.

This study might contribute to improving business performance through customer

retention. By implementing IT strategies, automotive retail business owners could retain

customers and actualize their corporate objectives. By actualizing the business objectives,

business managers will pay more tax, which the government could use to provide

infrastructures and social amenities such as roads, electricity, hospital, schools, and water

for the local citizens. By improving customer retention, automotive retail dealerships will

increase sales and contribute to financial sustainability, which would enable automotive

dealerships to contribute to community development as part of their CSR. By retaining

customers, automotive retail business managers would continue to provide job

opportunities and educational empowerment to the local citizens and promote economic

growth in the regional communities.

As illustrated in the study findings, IT strategies might assist automotive retail

business managers to retain customers and enhance business sustainability. The study

findings might contribute to positive social change by helping automotive retain business

managers to understand the challenges in the Saudi Arabia automotive retail industry and

gain adequate knowledge of IT strategies to retain the customer. By applying the findings

from this study, automotive retain business managers might enhance their customer

retention. Improved customer retention might also increase sales, create new job opportunities, and improve socioeconomic lifestyles, which could contribute positively to reducing unemployment in local communities of Saudi Arabia. The general public might learn from the IT strategies that automotive retail business managers use to retain customers.

The positive social change contribution by automotive retail business managers might involve the provision of employment for the local community. By adopting IT strategies, automotive retail business managers will retain customers and earn revenues to engage more staff, thereby providing job opportunities for the local community where the company is operating. The global communities could also gain from the available information on IT strategies for retaining customers, which could inspire positive social change in attitude towards business managers in the automotive retail dealership.

Recommendations for Action

Implementing IT strategies in the automotive retail industry to retain customers is essential to financial sustainability and business success. In Saudi Arabia, the automotive industry market accounts for about 40% of the total vehicles sold in the Middle East (Brown, 2019). The automotive retail dealerships are facing difficulties to retain customers and improve business performance because of the continually evolving car technologies and changes in the automotive industry (Gao et al., 2016; Mohr et al., 2016). In recent years, automotive retailers in Saudi Arabia are witnessing a decline in sales due to a change in customer behaviour and lack of customer retention (Anderson, 2017). I recommend that automotive retail business owners should adopt IT strategies to retain

customers for business sustainability. Therefore, automotive retail business managers should have adequate knowledge of IT strategies and identify the appropriate approach to retain customers successfully.

Automotive retail dealerships are operating in an increasingly challenging business environment, which requires business managers to review their business process models and strategies (Inampudi et al., 2019). Saudi Arabia is one of the emerging economies that have invested significantly and initiated reforms in IT systems (Badawi et al., 2019). With the adoption of CRM, customer communication and interactions have evolved from manual-based telephonic engagement to connected customer experience, creating new services, and blending digital with physical customer contact (Schmidt et al., 2018). I recommend that automotive retail business managers should adopt customer engagement and hosting of e-commerce platforms to retain customers and sustain their business.

High customer retention is one of the crucial priorities for automotive retail dealerships who aim to improve business performance (Izmocars, 2019). Because businesses compete for customers in the automotive retail industry of Saudi Arabia, customer satisfaction is a key differentiator and has increasingly become a crucial element of business strategy (Eye of Riyadh, 2015). As part of the new efforts in automotive aftersales operations, experienced team of experts conduct vehicle testing before delivering automobile to the customers after the periodic service maintenance (Anderson, 2017). I recommend that automotive retail business managers should ensure efficient infrastructure in adopting IT strategies to retain customers and achieve financial

sustainability. I will disseminate the results of this study to various stakeholders through knowledge sharing in my place of employment and social network; presentations in conferences, training, and seminars; and publications in academic and business journals.

Recommendations for Further Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the IT strategies some business owners in the automotive retail industry use to retain customers in Saudi Arabia. The study findings, recommendations, and conclusions might contribute to existing and future research, and close gaps in business practice regarding IT strategies automotive retail business managers use to retain customers for financial sustainability. Because of the constant evolution of car technologies and changes in the automotive industry, the automotive retail dealerships are facing difficulties to retain customers and improve business performance (Gao et al., 2016; Mohr et al., 2016). The study findings provided rich information that future researchers could further explore regarding the IT strategies automotive retail business managers use to retain customers. A significant limitation of this study was the small sample size of four business managers from two automotive retail dealerships in Saudi Arabia. Researchers who use larger or smaller sample size could generate different themes. I recommend that future researchers should use a more significant sample size consisting of participants with various roles and responsibilities in sales from varied industrial sectors.

This study was limited to cross-sectional, qualitative multiple case study involving four business managers in two automotive retail dealerships in Saudi Arabia. I recommend that future researchers should explore longitudinal, quantitative or mixed

methods, involving participants from different levels of employment in diverse industrial sectors at different geographical locations. Another limitation of this study was the demographic pattern, the information participants shared, and the availability of archival data. I recommend that further studies should focus on the IT strategies that generation X and Y, immigrants, millennials, minorities, native, men, or women automotive retail business managers use to retain customers for improved business performance. Most automotive retail dealerships in Saudi Arabia are family-owned businesses, which might pose a limitation due to the unwillingness of participants to share information related to company strategies without top management's approval. I recommend that future researchers should involve business leaders in publicly owned companies.

This study was limited to my accurate interpretation of the participants' responses to the interview questions because I have limited knowledge and competency in the doctoral research study. The study was also limited to my professional background as a business practitioner and personal beliefs regarding IT strategies to retain customers for improved business performance. I recommend that future study should involve research experts from related multidiscipline in e-commerce to capture details that I might have missed in this doctoral research.

Reflections

In conducting this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the IT strategies that automotive retail business managers use to retain customers in Saudi Arabia. Before commencing this study, I familiarized myself with the CITI programs on the protection of human participants and obtained the CITI program certification. To comply with the

research ethics, I obtained Walden University IRR approval before engaging with the participants, which enabled me to gain a better understanding of the requirements for using human beings in a research study. I used the purposive sampling technique to select four business managers from two automotive retail dealerships in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. The purposive sampling technique was useful in selecting four automotive retail business managers who had relevant knowledge, competence, and experience to answer the research question. The use of emails and telephone calls to contact the participants offered me the opportunity to improve my collaborative, inspirational, negotiation, and listening skills.

By using the qualitative research method, I conducted semistructured interviews and interacted with the participants, which improved my listening, communication, networking, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills. Because I interviewed the participants at their convenient time and date, they expressed themselves freely, which enabled me to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research problem. I organized and analyzed the data collected from participants to establish the themes and patterns, which enabled me to understand the research problem and establish the study findings. The doctoral study was useful in enhancing my scholarly and professional knowledge of IT strategies automotive retail business managers use to retain customers for improved business performance.

From the study findings, I obtained an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research problem from four automotive retail business managers involving the use of a similar blend of IT strategies to retain customers for financial sustainability.

Noteworthy is the knowledge that automotive retail business managers in Saudi Arabia use customer engagement, e-commerce platform, change management and customer loyalty programs, and virtual showroom and customer feedback as IT strategies to retain customers. Overall, I gained a better understanding of the research problem which positively changed my personal biases, perceptions, and preconceived ideas and values on the IT strategies automotive retail business managers use to retain customers in Saudi Arabia. My reflection on the experience within the doctoral study process indicates that I gained a better understanding of the research process, which improved my self-confidence, knowledge, experience, and problem-solving skills in conducting academic research work.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Business managers in the automotive retail industry are facing a critical challenge of utilizing IT to improve customer retention for financial sustainability. Some business managers in the automotive retail industry lack IT strategies to retain customers. This qualitative multiple case study aimed to use ECT to explore IT strategies that business managers in the automotive retail industry use to retain customers in Saudi Arabia. I administered eight open-ended questions through semistructured interviews of four business managers from two automotive retail dealerships to collect data to answer the overarching research question. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data indicating the IT strategies that business managers in the automotive retail industry use to retain customers in Saudi Arabia. The themes were (a) customer engagement, (b) e-

commerce platform, (c) change management and customer loyalty programs, and (d) virtual showroom and customer feedback.

Potential and contemporary automotive retail business managers may gain useful insights and information on IT strategies to use in retaining customers. The implementation of IT strategies to retain customers might assist automotive retail business managers to improve sales, sustain their business, and continue to provide job opportunities to the local community. The successful use of IT strategies to retain customers could result in stable income for community employees, promote economic growth within the community, and a positive lifestyle for the regional residents. The general public might learn from the IT strategies business managers in the automotive retail industry use to retain customers in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. The use of ECT as a lens for this study may fill a gap in the literature on customer retention. The study findings align with conclusions of previous scholars on the significance of using IT strategies to retain customers for improved financial sustainability.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The purpose of this interview is to answer the research question on information technology (IT) strategies business managers use in the automotive retail industry to improve customer retention.

The interview protocol will consist of the following twelve steps:

1. I will begin the interview with a brief overview of the research, the purpose, and the time duration of the interview.

2. I will thank the participant for agreeing to participate in the interview.

3. I will confirm with the participant (s) if they received copy of the informed consent form and review the contents of the form with the participant.

4. I will obtain the participant's signature on the consent form signifying an agreement to participate in the study (consent by participants responding to the email with the word**: "I Consent"**).

5. I will implement a serial coding system instead of using participants' names to identify the participants during the interview recording.

6. I will record the interview using an audio device. Audio recording will include a voice stamp of the date, time, and interview location.

7. I will explain that their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw from the interview at any time without prior notice and through a verbal or email request.

8. During the interview process, I will observe verbal cues, paraphrase interview questions as needed, and ask follow-up probing questions to get a more in-depth response.

9. I will allow all participants ample time to answer each interview question, including follow up or probing questions.

10. I will provide participants information about the member checking process that would occur following the completion of the interview, transcription, and data analysis and interpretation. Further, I will schedule a follow-up member-checking interview.

11. I will wrap up the interview and thank the participant for their time and contribution to the study.

Alexious Mulemba (Research Student)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Date of Interview: _____Code Assigned: _____

1   What information technology (IT) strategies do you use in your automotive retail

dealership to improve customer retention?

2   How did you determine the effectiveness of these IT strategies in improving

customer retention?

3   How effective are these IT strategies in improving customer retention?

4   What key challenges have you encountered in using these IT strategies to improve

customer retention?

5   How did you address the key challenges to improve customer retention in your

automotive retail dealership?

6   What customer retention initiatives based on your IT strategies have you

implemented in your automotive retail dealership?

7   Based on your organization's experience, how do these IT strategies help to

improve customer retention and increase sales in your automotive retail

dealership?

8   What other information would you like to share about the IT strategies that your

organization developed and implemented to improve customer retention in your

automotive retail dealership?