

# **The Retention of Customer Loyalty in the Meal Kit Market**

Independent Dissertation

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research Background

The global food landscape has undergone a seismic shift over the last decade, driven by the convergence of digital technology and a heightened consumer demand for convenience. Central to this transformation is the **meal kit delivery market**, a sector that bridges the gap between traditional grocery shopping and restaurant dining. Pioneered by firms such as **HelloFresh** and Blue Apron, meal kits have evolved from a niche novelty into a dominant force in the global food-tech industry. By early 2026, the global meal kit services market reached a valuation of approximately **\$39.53 billion**, with projections suggesting it will climb to over **\$78 billion by 2034** (Fortune Business Insights, 2026).

This growth was significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a catalyst for a permanent behavioural shift toward home dining and e-commerce. In the United Kingdom, which remains one of the most mature markets for this service, the adoption of meal kits like Gousto and HelloFresh has transitioned from a convenience "fad" to a staple household behaviour (Clusters, 2025). However, as the industry enters a more mature phase in 2026, the primary challenge has shifted. Companies are no longer just fighting for new sign-ups; they are fighting for **customer longevity**. For a professional operating within the supply chain at HelloFresh as a Material Planner, this shift from "acquisition" to "retention" has direct implications for demand forecasting, inventory management, and the reduction of operational waste.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the industry's rapid expansion, the meal kit business model is notoriously plagued by high **churn rates**. Research indicates that while customers are initially attracted by aggressive introductory discounts and the novelty of a "chef-at-home" experience, a significant percentage cancel their subscriptions within the first three to six months. This "acquire-and-churn" treadmill is economically unsustainable, as the high cost of customer acquisition (CAC) often outweighs the profit generated from short-term users (Niti, 2025).

The central problem lies in the "satisfaction paradox." While many consumers report high levels of initial satisfaction with the quality and convenience of the product, this does not always translate into long-term **loyalty**. In the subscription economy, loyalty is not just a psychological state but a behavioural requirement: the customer must actively choose *not* to cancel every week. Current industry data suggests that "recipe fatigue," perceived price-to-value ratios after the discount period ends, and a lack of deep personalization are the leading causes of churn (SkyQuest, 2025).

Furthermore, from a supply chain perspective, high churn rates create a "Bullwhip Effect" where unpredictable customer behaviour leads to inefficiencies in material planning. If the factors driving loyalty are not clearly understood and managed, the resulting volatility in order volumes leads to food waste and increased logistics costs, further squeezing the profit margins of meal kit providers.

### 1.3 Research Aim and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate the strategic drivers of customer loyalty within the meal kit market, identifying how satisfaction and personalization act as levers for retention. By analysing secondary data, this study seeks to provide a framework for meal kit providers to build more "sticky" relationships with their user base.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following **Research Questions (RQs)**:

1. **RQ1:** What factors drive customer loyalty in the meal kit market?
2. **RQ2:** How does customer satisfaction influence repeat purchases?
3. **RQ3:** Does personalization increase customer retention?

### 1.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify the core drivers of consumer loyalty in the meal kit sector through an analysis of recent industry reports (2024–2026).
2. To examine the correlation between service quality (delivery, ease of use) and food quality (freshness, taste) in fostering repeat purchase intentions.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of AI-driven personalization and menu variety (e.g., the HelloFresh "Refresh" strategy) in reducing churn rates.
4. To synthesize these findings into recommendations for supply chain and marketing professionals to enhance long-term customer lifetime value (CLV).

### 1.5 Significance of the Research

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Academically, it contributes to the body of knowledge on **Relationship Marketing** and the **Subscription Economy**, applying established theories like the *Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory* to a modern, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) context.

Practically, this research is uniquely relevant to my role as a Material Planner. In the meal kit industry, the supply chain is the "backbone" of the customer experience. If a planner fails to secure the correct variety of ingredients for a personalized menu, the customer's satisfaction drops, leading to immediate churn. By identifying that "variety" and "customization" are key loyalty drivers, supply chain professionals can better justify investments in flexible sourcing and warehouse automation.

## 1.6 Research Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research is focused primarily on the United Kingdom and North American markets, as these regions represent the most mature and commercially developed segments of the global meal kit industry. Leading companies such as HelloFresh and Blue Apron have established strong operational infrastructures and customer bases within these markets, making them ideal contexts for analysing customer loyalty and retention strategies. Furthermore, these regions offer the most comprehensive and accessible secondary data, including detailed market reports, financial disclosures, and consumer feedback, which are essential for conducting a robust qualitative analysis (Statista, 2025).

The temporal scope of the study is limited to the period between 2023 and 2026. This timeframe is particularly significant as it reflects the “post-pandemic” phase of consumer behaviour, during which the rapid growth experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic has stabilised into more sustainable consumption patterns. By focusing on this period, the research captures the transition from rapid customer acquisition to the current industry challenge of long-term retention. Additionally, this timeframe incorporates recent economic pressures, such as inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, which have significantly influenced consumer price sensitivity and purchasing decisions within the meal kit market (Mintel, 2024).

Despite these strengths, several limitations must be acknowledged. The most prominent limitation is the reliance on secondary data sources. The research draws extensively on industry reports from organisations such as Mintel, Statista, and Grand View Research, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature. While these sources provide valuable macro-level insights and broad market trends, they may not fully capture the nuanced, real-time psychological motivations of individual consumers. Unlike primary research methods such as interviews or surveys, secondary data does not allow the researcher to probe deeper into specific behavioural drivers or clarify ambiguous responses (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Another limitation relates to potential bias within the data sources. Industry reports may reflect the strategic interests of the organisations that commission them, while consumer reviews, particularly those sourced from online platforms—are often skewed towards extreme experiences, either highly positive or negative. This can lead to an overrepresentation of dissatisfaction or exceptional satisfaction, potentially distorting the overall perception of customer sentiment (Bell and Waters, 2018). Additionally, the lack of control over demographic variables in secondary data restricts the ability to conduct detailed segmentation analysis based on factors such as age, income level, or household composition (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Furthermore, the focus on developed markets such as the UK and North America limits the generalisability of the findings to emerging markets. Consumer behaviour in less mature markets may differ significantly due to variations in cultural norms, economic conditions, and technological adoption. As a result, the conclusions drawn from this study may not be directly applicable to regions where the meal kit industry is still in its early stages of development (Grand View Research, 2025).

However, despite these limitations, the use of recent and credible secondary data ensures that the research remains relevant and grounded in current industry practices. The inclusion of up-to-date corporate performance data, such as recent financial reports from HelloFresh, enhances the practical applicability of the findings and strengthens the overall validity of the research (HelloFresh Group, 2025). Overall, while the study may lack the depth of primary qualitative insights, it compensates with breadth, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of customer loyalty trends within the contemporary meal kit market.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

This chapter critically examines existing academic and industry literature relevant to customer loyalty within the meal kit market, with the aim of establishing a theoretical and conceptual foundation for the study. As the meal kit industry continues to expand within the broader digital food and e-commerce landscape, understanding the factors that influence customer retention has become increasingly important for both scholars and practitioners.

The literature review begins by exploring key behavioural theories, particularly the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which provides a structured framework for understanding how consumer attitudes, social influences, and perceived control shape purchasing decisions and long-term subscription behaviour. Building upon this theoretical base, the chapter then investigates the multidimensional nature of e-loyalty, highlighting the distinction between behavioural and attitudinal loyalty and their combined role in sustaining customer relationships.

Furthermore, the review analyses the primary drivers of customer satisfaction in an e-commerce context, including product quality, service quality, trust, and digital user experience. Special attention is given to the unique characteristics of the meal kit model, where both physical product attributes (such as freshness and nutrition) and digital service elements (such as app usability and delivery reliability) interact to shape overall satisfaction.

The chapter also explores key barriers to retention, particularly those related to

perceived behavioural control, such as price sensitivity, convenience, and switching costs. Emerging themes within contemporary research—such as sustainability, ethical consumption, and personalisation—are examined to understand their growing influence on modern consumer behaviour. In addition, cultural factors are considered to highlight how different social contexts shape perceptions of value, convenience, and loyalty.

Overall, this literature review synthesises a wide range of perspectives to identify the critical factors influencing customer loyalty in the meal kit market, thereby providing a foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion presented in later chapters.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Planned Behaviour

To comprehend consumer purchasing intentions and long-term retention within the food-tech industry, academic researchers frequently rely on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), an evolution of the Theory of Reasoned Action originally developed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975 (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023). The TPB posits that human behaviour is guided by three core considerations: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs, which respectively produce a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the behaviour, a subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023).

In the domain of consumer behaviour, *Attitudes* refer to the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a specific behaviour, such as subscribing to a meal kit. These attitudes are heavily shaped by the consumer's perception of the product's attributes, including its healthiness, taste, and the overall enjoyment or burden of the cooking process. *Subjective Norms* encompass the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour, heavily influenced by reference groups such as family, friends, and industry experts. While some historical studies suggest subjective norms are the weaker predictor of intentions, in the modern digital era, online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth operate as powerful normative influences (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

Crucially, the TPB introduced the dimension of *Perceived Behavioural Control* (PBC) to account for situations where individuals lack complete volitional control over their actions due to external constraints. In the context of meal kits, PBC is primarily dictated by the scarcity of resources—specifically, money and time. Research indicates that price perception and the level of convenience are the two most sensitive control factors governing food purchasing decisions (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023). Therefore, understanding customer loyalty in the meal kit market requires a deep analysis of how these PBC constraints interact with consumer attitudes to either facilitate or hinder long-term subscriptions.

## 2.3 The Multidimensional Nature of E-Loyalty and Customer Retention

In both traditional and digital marketplaces, customer loyalty is a vital determinant of a company's financial longevity. According to the Pareto rule, approximately 80% of a company's profits are generated by the top 20% of its core, loyal consumers (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016). Retaining an existing customer base is substantially more cost-effective than acquiring new consumers, making the reduction of defection rates a primary corporate objective.

In the online environment, this concept is termed "e-loyalty," defined as the perceived loyalty of customers towards a website or application and their intention to repeatedly visit and purchase from that platform (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016). Loyalty itself is a multidimensional construct comprising both behavioural and attitudinal elements (Leingpibul et al., 2009). *Behavioural loyalty* is observed through repeat purchasing frequency and the continued renewal of a meal kit subscription. However, true loyalty extends beyond mere repetition; *attitudinal loyalty* reflects a deep psychological commitment, positive brand perception, and an emotional attachment that prevents consumers from switching to competitors even when offered discounts. Research suggests that these attitudinal and behavioural components facilitate one another, and focusing on one component alone is insufficient for understanding retention (Leingpibul et al., 2009).

A critical dynamic in customer retention is the phenomenon of "feature fatigue" (Hamilton, Rust and Dev, 2017). While companies frequently add new features and amenities to attract customers, having too many features can actually decrease customer satisfaction and subsequent retention. Consumers are initially attracted to products with a high number of features, but these complex products often leave them less satisfied than simpler alternatives. Therefore, meal kit brands must be cautious: while offering extensive recipe customization might attract initial users, if it complicates the cooking or selection process, it may harm long-term retention. Features that drive acquisition often differ fundamentally from the features that drive long-term retention.

## 2.4 Drivers of Customer Satisfaction in E-Commerce

Customer satisfaction is universally acknowledged as the prerequisite and primary driver of customer loyalty (Juliawan, 2023). Satisfaction is an effective response to a purchase situation; when a product's performance meets or exceeds expectations, satisfaction is achieved, leading to a higher likelihood of repurchase (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

### 2.4.1 Product Quality, Health, and Nutrition

In the meal kit industry, satisfaction is inherently tied to product quality (Juliawan, 2023). Product quality encompasses the nutritional value, hygiene, freshness of ingredients, and taste of the meals provided. Research proposes that the nutritional components of a meal kit have a highly positive effect on both consumer satisfaction

and repurchase intention, alongside taste and ingredient safety (Cha and Seo, 2019). Delivering balanced, highly nutritious meals is paramount for retaining the modern subscriber.

#### 2.4.2 Service Quality, Web Design, and Trust

Because meal kits operate as an e-commerce service, the quality of the digital interface and the trustworthiness of the provider are paramount. In e-commerce, trust is the confidence in the quality and credibility of the goods and services. When customers trust e-retailers, they engage in future buying behaviour and are more likely to exhibit conative e-loyalty, which contains a deep commitment to the intention to repurchase (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

Trust is closely linked to Word-of-Mouth (WOM), which is one of the strongest predictors of consumer loyalty. Satisfied and trusting customers engage in positive WOM by sharing their experiences with friends, family, and via online social networks. In the virtual world, e-WOM spreads quickly and acts as a resourceful tool to influence new customer acquisition while reinforcing the loyalty of existing users.

### 2.5 The Role of Perceived Behavioural Control: Price, Convenience, and Switching Costs

While high product quality and brand trust build a positive attitude, the actual behaviour of maintaining a meal kit subscription is heavily dictated by Perceived Behavioural Control factors, specifically convenience, price perception, and switching costs.

#### 2.5.1 The Convenience Paradox and Time Constraints

The fundamental value proposition of a meal kit is convenience—saving consumers time and mental energy by eliminating the need for meal planning and grocery shopping. However, literature reveals a "convenience paradox" within the industry. While meal kits remove the shopping element, they still require significant time and physical effort to prepare, cook, and clean up.

For specific demographics, such as college students or individuals with highly erratic schedules, this required effort acts as a significant deterrent (DeVivo et al., 2022). Primary research indicates that when under time pressure, these consumers often perceive meal kits as lacking true convenience, leading them to abandon their subscriptions in favour of fast-food delivery services (e.g., DoorDash) that provide immediate, ready-to-eat gratification without any preparation. Furthermore, a lack of access to full-service kitchens physically limits the ability to utilize raw meal kits for many college students living in dormitories. To combat this, companies must critically assess the preparation time required for their recipes, as the perception of convenience is directly tied to the consumer's willingness to remain loyal to the service.

### 2.5.2 Price Perception, Sign-up Bonuses, and Tenure

Price perception is the most frequently cited barrier to long-term meal kit loyalty. Evaluation of price contains a high element of subjectivity, depending on the socio-economic capabilities of the consumer and the perceived value of the product (Arregui Llorit and Paukštytė, 2023). Consumers constantly weigh the cost of a meal kit against alternative dining options. For younger demographics, the standard, non-discounted cost of a meal kit is often viewed as prohibitively expensive, leading to high cancellation rates once promotional periods end (DeVivo et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the industry struggles with low switching costs in a highly saturated market, effectively erasing financial barriers to switching brands. However, relationship breadth (the number of products a customer uses from a provider) and customer tenure (the length of the relationship) heavily moderate price sensitivity (Dawes, 2009).

Research demonstrates that longer relationship tenure with a service provider is associated with reduced sensitivity to price increases. Conversely, relationship breadth can actually heighten price sensitivity, as consumers with broader relationships develop more finely attuned reference prices and expect greater reciprocity from the firm. Therefore, marketers must be particularly cautious when managing prices and retention strategies for customers holding multiple product subscriptions versus those who are simply long-term users.

### 2.6 Emerging Influences: Sustainability, Altruism, and the "Warm Glow" Effect

As the meal kit industry matures, modern consumer behaviour is increasingly dictated by ethical and environmental concerns. While meal kits successfully reduce pre-consumption food waste, they generate a massive amount of packaging waste. The heavy environmental footprint actively deters environmentally conscious consumers, creating a barrier to attitudinal loyalty.

In response, consumers now demand that brands exhibit a genuine commitment to environmental responsibility. When meal kit companies implement visible sustainable practices—such as utilizing recyclable shipping boxes and eco-friendly packaging—it significantly enhances the consumer's perception of the brand's sustainability (Jang, 2025).

To understand how sustainability translates to customer loyalty, literature points to the psychological concept of the "warm glow". Pure altruism suggests individuals act solely for the benefit of the environment. However, the "warm glow" theory posits a form of *impure altruism*, where consumers engage in pro-environmental purchasing behaviour because it provides them with intrinsic moral satisfaction; it makes them feel an emotional reward for their actions.

Recent empirical research confirms that the warm glow effect, alongside altruistic values, significantly moderates the relationship between a brand's perceived

sustainability and a consumer's continuance intention (Jang, 2025). When a consumer feels an emotional reward from purchasing a sustainable meal kit, their attitudinal loyalty deepens, making them much more likely to continue their subscription. Interestingly, however, research indicates that while this warm glow drives continuance intention, it does not necessarily blind consumers to price; ethical feelings do not significantly moderate a consumer's perception of price fairness. Consumers still evaluate perceived economic value and competitive pricing. Therefore, while sustainability is a powerful tool for building emotional loyalty, meal kit providers must still offer a product that competes practically on price and convenience.

## 2.7 Cultural Influences on Consumer Behaviour

Finally, purchasing intentions and attitudes are highly constructed and embedded into the cultural values of the individual (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023). The Individualism versus Collectivism dimension plays a defining role in shaping how consumers weigh TPB factors. In highly individualistic cultures, consumers place a significant premium on time-saving and convenience, viewing the "lack of effort" required to cook as a primary benefit, and they frequently trust industry experts regarding product quality. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, food choices are more heavily influenced by subjective norms, social obligations, and word-of-mouth from close family networks. Consequently, to retain loyalty across diverse global markets, meal kit companies must adapt their marketing and product offerings to align with the dominant cultural values regarding convenience, price, and social influence.

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

The literature establishes that retaining customer loyalty in the digital food-tech space is a highly complex challenge. The Theory of Planned Behaviour demonstrates that consumer intentions are shaped by attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control. To build true e-loyalty, meal kit brands must move beyond initial promotional features, avoiding "feature fatigue" by delivering core value. They must deliver high product quality and consistent service to build trust. Furthermore, they must balance the practical constraints of price and convenience, understanding that customer tenure and cultural background alter how consumers react to price and social influence. Finally, implementing sustainable practices can trigger an emotional "warm glow," tapping into consumers' altruistic values to foster deep-rooted attitudinal loyalty.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter outlines the systematic process and strategies employed to conduct this research, ensuring that the methods align with the overarching aim of exploring the factors that drive customer loyalty in the meal kit market. This chapter details the chosen research philosophy, approach, and design, justifying the use of a qualitative secondary research strategy. Furthermore, it explains the data collection methods, sampling strategy, data analysis techniques, and the ethical considerations and limitations inherent in the study.

### 3.2 Research

**Philosophy and Approach** Research philosophy refers to the underlying beliefs and assumptions regarding the development of knowledge. This study adopts an Interpretivist research paradigm. Unlike positivism, which seeks measurable, objective realities, interpretivism recognizes that reality is socially constructed and focuses on understanding subjective meanings and behaviours in real-life business contexts (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Because customer loyalty, brand trust, and perceived value are highly subjective emotional and psychological constructs, an interpretivist philosophy is essential for uncovering the underlying motivations behind a consumer's decision to remain subscribed to a meal kit service or abandon it.

In alignment with this philosophy, the research utilizes an inductive approach. Rather than testing a strictly predefined hypothesis (deductive), an inductive approach begins with the observation of data to identify patterns, themes, and sentiments, which are then used to build a broader understanding of the phenomena (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). By observing real-world consumer feedback and corporate data, this study will generate theoretical insights into what currently drives e-loyalty and prevents "discount-hopping" in the food-tech sector.

### 3.3 Research Design

To effectively answer the research questions, this dissertation employs a Qualitative Secondary Research design. Quantitative research is typically utilized to answer "what" questions through numerical measurement; however, qualitative methodology is inherently linked to "why" questions and is more widely used in research areas related to deep-rooted motivations (Barnham, 2015). Qualitative research provides researchers with the ability to explore deeper layers of human behaviour through interrogative strategies, making it the most appropriate tool for examining the context in which consumer attitudes and actual purchasing behaviours diverge (Belk, Devinney and Eckhardt, 2005; Barnham, 2015).

A secondary research design was selected because the meal kit market is a fast-moving, digital-first e-commerce environment. In such markets, vast amounts of rich,

organic data already exist in the public domain. Utilizing secondary data—such as user-generated content and corporate financial reports—allows the researcher to observe real-world customer sentiment and actual corporate retention strategies without the constraints and potential biases of small-scale primary surveys or interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

### 3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To gain a comprehensive, multi-faceted understanding of the meal kit market, qualitative secondary data will be gathered from three primary avenues:

**Academic Literature and Journals:** Peer-reviewed academic journals accessed via databases such as Google Scholar and EBSCO will be heavily utilized to establish a strong theoretical foundation. Literature regarding the broader subscription economy, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and consumer behaviour in e-commerce will be collected to help explain the psychological drivers of brand loyalty (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

**Corporate Reports and Case Studies:** To understand the business perspective of customer retention, data will be collected from the "Investor Relations" sections and annual reports of major industry players, such as HelloFresh (e.g., HelloFresh Annual Report 2020/2022). These documents provide invaluable, publicly available data on Customer Acquisition Costs (CAC), market share, and the specific retention and personalization strategies these companies are currently implementing to mitigate churn (HelloFresh group, 2023).

**Public Consumer Feedback Platforms (Trustpilot & App Store):** User-generated content will serve as the primary source for "real-world" consumer sentiment. Because meal kits operate via digital platforms, reviews left on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store will be analysed to see how service quality, web design, and app usability impact retention. Furthermore, long-form reviews on consumer advocacy sites like Trustpilot will be collected to identify specific pain points, complaints, or praise regarding delivery reliability, ingredient freshness, and price perception.

### 3.5 Sampling Strategy

Since the pool of secondary data available online is exceptionally large, a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy will be applied to select the data for analysis (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to use their judgement to select cases that will best answer the research questions and meet the study's objectives.

For the consumer feedback data, the sample will be restricted to reviews from the last 12 to 18 months. This specific timeframe is vital for capturing post-pandemic consumer behaviour, ensuring the data reflects the current market realities regarding the rising cost of living and the return to normal working routines. The sample will purposely target

reviews concerning the dominant market leaders (such as HelloFresh, Gousto, and Blue Apron) to ensure the findings are reflective of the broader industry standard.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the literature, corporate reports, and consumer reviews will be analysed using Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis is a highly effective method for identifying, analysing, and reporting recurring patterns (themes) within a qualitative data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The analysis will follow the widely recognized six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher will first familiarize themselves with the data by thoroughly reading the consumer reviews and reports. Following this, initial open codes will be generated to label key features of the data (such as mentions of "too expensive," "convenient for busy days," or "damaged packaging"). These codes will then be collated into broader, overarching themes related to the research questions, such as Price Perception, The Convenience Paradox, Product Quality, and Trust/Reliability. By systematically reviewing these themes against the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review, the researcher will be able to draw robust conclusions regarding what specifically drives or hinders customer loyalty.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Although this research relies entirely on secondary data and does not involve direct interaction with human participants (such as interviews or surveys), ethical norms and academic integrity remain paramount. The research utilizes data strictly available in the public domain. However, to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ensure ethical data management, the anonymity of the online consumers who authored the Trustpilot and App Store reviews will be strictly maintained. No identifiable personal information, usernames, or exact profile details will be published in the final dissertation; quotes will be anonymized to protect the privacy of the original authors (Bell and Waters, 2018). Furthermore, all corporate and academic sources will be accurately cited and referenced to avoid plagiarism and acknowledge the intellectual property of the original authors (Pears and Shields, 2019).

### 3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

It is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this research design. The primary limitation of relying on secondary data, specifically online consumer reviews, is the potential for skewed sentiment. Consumers are often more motivated to leave a public review following a highly negative experience rather than a satisfactory one, which may disproportionately highlight service failures over routine successes (Bell and Waters, 2018). Furthermore, because the data is extracted from public forums, the researcher lacks control over the demographic variables of the reviewers; it is impossible to verify the exact age, income, or background of the individuals leaving the feedback, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to specific, narrow

demographics (such as college students specifically) (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Despite these limitations, the wealth of organic, unsolicited feedback available provides a highly authentic view of consumer priorities that offsets the risk of sample bias.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings derived from the systematic review of secondary qualitative and quantitative data, and to critically discuss these findings in relation to the conceptual frameworks established in the literature review. The analysis aims to directly answer the three primary research questions guiding this dissertation: understanding the factors that drive customer loyalty, evaluating the influence of customer satisfaction on repeat purchases, and assessing the impact of personalization and sustainability on customer retention within the meal kit market. By synthesizing consumer feedback, corporate reports, and empirical academic studies, this chapter uncovers the complex, multidimensional practical and psychological triggers that dictate consumer behaviour. The discussion is structured around the core themes of price perception, the convenience paradox, product and service quality, feature fatigue, and the emerging role of ethical consumption through the "warm glow" effect.

### 4.2 Factors Driving Customer Loyalty in the Meal Kit Market (RQ1)

#### 4.2.1 Price Perception, Price Increases, and "Discount Hopping"

The findings overwhelmingly indicate that the financial cost of meal kit delivery services is the primary limiting factor determining customer retention and long-term loyalty. Secondary survey data targeting college-aged consumers and young professionals revealed that 36.2% of respondents cited the "Cost of Service" as their greatest barrier to maintaining a meal kit subscription, followed closely by the restrictive nature of the "Subscription Model" itself at 13.2% (DeVivo et al., 2022). Consumers consistently exhibit a high degree of price sensitivity, frequently comparing the cost of a meal kit to the cost of purchasing raw ingredients at a local supermarket, which they often perceive to be significantly cheaper (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023).

This acute price sensitivity has given rise to the industry-wide phenomenon of "discount-hopping." The data shows that consumers are heavily drawn to aggressive introductory offers, such as sign-up bonuses offering multiple free meals, but their behavioural loyalty dissipates almost immediately once these promotions expire (DeVivo et al., 2022). Consumers frequently rotate between competing brands—such as HelloFresh, Blue Apron, and Home Chef—utilizing trial discounts without ever committing to a full-price subscription (DeVivo et al., 2022). Consequently, meal kit

companies face high customer acquisition costs but struggle with rapid defection rates. Furthermore, the impact of actual service price increases on customer retention is highly nuanced and depends heavily on the consumer's relationship with the brand. Research into service price increases demonstrates that customer tenure (the length of time a consumer has been subscribed) significantly moderates price sensitivity; long-tenure customers are substantially less sensitive to price increases than newer customers, making them less likely to lapse when prices rise (Dawes, 2009). Conversely, relationship breadth—defined as the number of different products or add-ons a customer purchases from the same provider—actually heightens their sensitivity to price increases (Dawes, 2009). Consumers with broader relationships develop more finely attuned reference prices and higher expectations of reciprocity from the firm (Dawes, 2009). Therefore, while cross-selling additional items (like premium proteins or wine pairings) may boost short-term revenue, it makes those specific customers highly vulnerable to churn if the baseline subscription price is raised.

#### 4.2.2 The Convenience Paradox vs. Fast-Food Delivery

While meal kits market themselves primarily on the premise of convenience, the results expose a "convenience paradox" that actively drives consumers away from meal kits and towards on-demand fast-food delivery services like DoorDash or UberEATS. Although meal kits successfully eliminate the burden of grocery shopping and meal planning, they still require a significant investment of time and physical effort to prepare, cook, and clean up (DeVivo et al., 2022). Testing of standard meal kit recipes indicates that preparation and cooking frequently take between 25 and 30 minutes, which can stretch up to 1.5 hours for inexperienced cooks unfamiliar with the ingredients (Yang, 2017).

For demographics with highly erratic schedules, such as college students and young professionals, this required effort represents a severe lack of convenience. Interview data highlights that when consumers are pressed for time, they view meal kits as a "hassle" and prefer the immediate gratification of fast-food delivery, which requires zero preparation or clean-up (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023). As one consumer noted, after a long day of work, the last thing they want to do is spend 30 minutes chopping vegetables and following a recipe (DeVivo et al., 2022). Furthermore, physical limitations, such as living in college dormitories without access to full kitchens or necessary appliances (e.g., ovens), make raw meal kits entirely impractical for certain segments, cementing fast-food delivery as the superior option for immediate needs (DeVivo et al., 2022).

#### 4.2.3 Cultural Influences on Perceived Behavioural Control

The evaluation of price and convenience is not uniform; it is heavily moderated by the cultural background of the consumer. Cross-cultural thematic analysis reveals a stark contrast between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in their purchasing

intentions. In highly individualistic cultures, such as Denmark, consumers place a significant premium on time-saving and are willing to pay a higher financial cost to achieve convenience (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023).

Danish consumers frequently view the "lack of effort" associated with pre-portioned meal kits as a primary benefit that justifies a premium price point (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023).

Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, such as Spain, food choices are deeply embedded in social norms and family obligations. Spanish consumers view cooking from scratch as a vital social activity and a demonstration of care for their family (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023). Because they enjoy the process of cooking and view it as a communal event, the "convenience" offered by meal kits holds far less value to them (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023). As a result, Spanish consumers are highly price-sensitive and frequently reject meal kits because the cost is not justified by the time saved, which they did not view as a burden in the first place (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023). This indicates that global meal kit brands cannot use a one-size-fits-all marketing strategy; they must adapt their value propositions—emphasizing pure convenience in individualistic markets and focusing on competitive pricing and family-style meals in collectivistic markets.

## 4.3 The Influence of Customer Satisfaction on Repeat Purchases (RQ2)

### 4.3.1 Product Quality, Hygiene, and Nutritional Value

Customer satisfaction is universally established as the prerequisite for behavioural and attitudinal loyalty (Leingpibul et al., 2009). In the context of meal kits, satisfaction is intrinsically tied to the physical product's quality. Statistical analysis of consumer selection attributes confirms that Product Quality and Service Quality have a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction, which in turn directly drives Consumer Loyalty and repeat purchases (Juliawan, 2023).

When dissecting the specific attributes of product quality within food-tech, the data reveals a shift in modern consumer priorities. Among various attributes—including taste, hygiene, price, and ingredients—nutritional components exhibit the strongest positive effect on both consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Cha and Seo, 2019, cited in Read 1).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers have become increasingly health-conscious, seeking meals that offer balanced nutrition rather than just indulgence (DeVivo et al., 2022). Interestingly, basic food ingredients no longer significantly dictate satisfaction, as consumers have reached a baseline expectation that major brands will provide safe, standard ingredients; however, exceptional nutritional value and stringent hygiene standards (e.g., fresh, unspoiled produce upon delivery) remain critical

differentiators that justify the premium price and secure repeat purchases (Cha and Seo, 2019, cited in Read 1).

#### 4.3.2 Service Quality, Web Design, and Trust in E-Commerce

Because meal kits are fundamentally e-commerce platforms, technical service quality is just as vital as the food itself. Customer e-loyalty is highly dependent on the trustworthiness of the vendor and the quality of the digital interface (Othman et al., 2019). Trustworthiness in e-commerce encompasses the vendor's ability to securely handle personal data, their benevolence, and their integrity in fulfilling delivery promises on time (Othman et al., 2019). If a meal kit arrives late or with damaged packaging, the breach of trust immediately negatively impacts attitudinal loyalty (DeVivo et al., 2022). Furthermore, Web Design plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction. A well-organized, aesthetically pleasing, and user-friendly mobile application reduces friction during the weekly recipe selection process, enhancing the overall service experience (Othman et al., 2019). When consumers are satisfied with the web interface and trust the provider, they frequently engage in positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM) (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016). The results show that WOM is an exceptionally powerful normative influence in the digital era; peer recommendations and online reviews on platforms like Trustpilot or social media carry significantly more weight than traditional advertising in convincing hesitant consumers to commit to a full-price subscription (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

#### 4.3.3 The Danger of "Feature Fatigue" in Customer Retention

A critical finding regarding customer satisfaction is the distinction between features that attract consumers and features that retain them. Meal kit companies frequently attempt to innovate by adding complex features—such as highly granular recipe customization, extensive add-on marketplaces, or gamified loyalty apps—to entice new sign-ups. However, research demonstrates that adding too many features can actively decrease post-purchase customer satisfaction, a phenomenon known as "feature fatigue" (Hamilton, Rust, and Dev, 2017).

While consumers are initially drawn to products boasting numerous features, the complexity and effort required to utilize these features often overwhelm them in practice, leading to frustration and subsequent subscription cancellation (Hamilton, Rust, and Dev, 2017). For example, in the hospitality sector, free internet acts as a powerful acquisition tool, but simple, tangible amenities like bottled water drive actual retention (Hamilton, Rust, and Dev, 2017). Translated to the meal kit industry, while introductory discounts or vast menus attract users, the core, simple execution of the product—delivering fresh, tasty, easy-to-cook meals reliably—is what generates the intrinsic satisfaction required for long-term retention. Overcomplicating the subscription management process actively harms e-loyalty.

## 4.4 The Impact of Personalisation and Sustainability on Customer Retention (RQ3)

### 4.4.1 The "Warm Glow" Effect and Perceived Brand Sustainability

As the meal kit industry matures, modern consumer behaviour is increasingly dictated by ethical and environmental concerns. Meal kits generate a massive amount of packaging waste—including single-use plastics, cardboard, and non-biodegradable ice packs—which actively deters environmentally conscious consumers (Jang, 2025).

To combat this, brands have begun implementing and marketing sustainable practices, such as fully recyclable shipping boxes and carbon-offset initiatives.

The empirical results confirm that when a meal kit brand utilizes visible sustainable practices, it significantly enhances the consumer's perception of the brand's sustainability (Jang, 2025).

More importantly, this perception triggers a powerful psychological response known as the "warm glow" effect (Jang, 2025). The warm glow theory posits a form of impure altruism, where consumers engage in pro-environmental purchasing behaviour not solely to help the earth, but because doing so provides them with an intrinsic emotional reward and moral satisfaction (Jang, 2025).

Regression analysis demonstrates that the presence of this warm glow, combined with a consumer's altruistic values, significantly moderates and amplifies their continuance intention (Jang, 2025). When consumers feel good about themselves for choosing an eco-friendly brand, their attitudinal loyalty deepens, making them much more likely to maintain their subscription (Jang, 2025). However, a crucial caveat emerged from the data: the warm glow effect does not significantly moderate consumers' perceptions of price fairness (Jang, 2025). Even highly altruistic consumers evaluating a highly sustainable brand still rely on objective economic value and competitive pricing when deciding if the service is "worth it" (Jang, 2025). This means that while sustainability is an excellent tool for building emotional loyalty, it cannot be used as a substitute for competitive pricing; brands cannot simply charge a massive premium for green packaging and expect retention (Jang, 2025).

### 4.4.2 Customization, Personalization, and Serving Sizes

Personalization is a critical factor for retaining specific market segments, particularly college students and single-person households. Standard meal kit subscriptions typically offer plans designed for two or four people (DeVivo et al., 2022).

Interview data reveals that for individuals living alone, this rigid serving structure is highly impractical and cost-prohibitive, leading to unused ingredients and frustration (DeVivo et al., 2022).

Consumers increasingly demand the ability to heavily customize their orders to fit their

specific lifestyles. This includes the ability to order single-serving meals, swap specific ingredients to accommodate dietary restrictions (e.g., vegan, gluten-free), and select meals based on exact preparation times (DeVivo et al., 2022).

When consumers feel that the service cannot adapt to their specific portion needs or taste preferences, they abandon the platform for fast-food delivery, which offers ultimate customization on a per-meal basis (DeVivo et al., 2022).

Therefore, integrating sophisticated personalization algorithms that tailor weekly menus to the individual's exact household size and dietary profile is essential for preventing churn.

#### 4.4.3 Coping with Food Waste

Closely linked to both sustainability and portion sizes is the consumer's attitude toward food waste. Thematic analysis indicates that consumers harbour a strong psychological aversion to throwing away food (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023).

When traditional grocery shopping leads to spoiled produce, consumers feel guilty. Meal kits inherently solve this problem by providing exact, pre-portioned ingredients, ensuring that nothing goes to waste during the cooking process (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023).

Many consumers cited the reduction of personal food waste as a primary driver for maintaining their meal kit subscriptions (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023).

By removing the mental burden of managing a refrigerator full of expiring ingredients, meal kits offer a unique form of psychological convenience. Brands that effectively highlight this reduction in food waste in their marketing can tap into the consumer's desire for efficient, guilt-free consumption, thereby strengthening behavioural loyalty.

#### 4.5 Chapter Summary

The results of this study highlight that retaining customer loyalty in the meal kit market requires a delicate balancing act. While introductory discounts successfully acquire users, the high cost of the standard subscription combined with the physical effort required to cook the meals frequently drives consumers to cancel their plans or switch to fast-food delivery alternatives. To establish true e-loyalty, brands must deliver exceptional nutritional quality and reliable service to build trust and positive word-of-mouth. Furthermore, they must offer deep personalization to accommodate single users and diverse dietary needs, while avoiding the trap of "feature fatigue" by keeping the core service simple. Finally, the implementation of sustainable packaging is a powerful strategy; it triggers a psychological "warm glow" that significantly boosts a consumer's intention to remain subscribed, provided the brand remains economically competitive.

## CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

### 5.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this dissertation was to explore the complex factors that drive and retain customer loyalty in the highly competitive meal kit market. While the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for unprecedented customer acquisition, the industry is currently plagued by high churn rates and a widespread consumer behaviour known as "discount-hopping" (DeVivo et al., 2022). By synthesizing the principles of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, e-loyalty multidimensionality, and modern consumer psychology, this research has systematically unpacked the practical, financial, and emotional triggers that dictate whether a consumer remains a loyal subscriber or abandons the service. This final chapter will present the overarching conclusions drawn from the research findings, offer actionable and evidence-based strategic recommendations for meal kit providers, outline the limitations encountered during the study, and suggest avenues for future academic research.

### 5.2 Conclusion: Key Findings on Customer Loyalty

The findings of this research establish that transitioning a meal kit user from a trial customer to a long-term brand advocate requires a delicate balancing act that goes far beyond initial promotional discounts. The conclusions are structured around the core research questions guiding this study.

#### 5.2.1 The Convenience Paradox, Price Perception, and Competitor Threats

The most significant barrier to long-term customer loyalty in the meal kit sector is the perceived high cost of the standard subscription combined with the physical effort required to utilize the product (DeVivo et al., 2022). Consumers, particularly those in younger demographics such as college students, exhibit acute price sensitivity and constantly weigh the cost of a meal kit against the cost of purchasing raw ingredients at a local supermarket (DeVivo et al., 2022; Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023). Once introductory sign-up bonuses expire, the standard price is frequently viewed as prohibitive, leading to immediate subscription cancellation.

Furthermore, the industry suffers from a "convenience paradox". While meal kits successfully eliminate the mental burden of meal planning and grocery shopping, they still demand a substantial investment of time (often 30 to 45 minutes) and physical effort to prepare, cook, and clean up (DeVivo et al., 2022; Yang, 2017). For time-pressed consumers or those lacking full kitchen facilities, this effort negates the promised convenience. Consequently, consumers frequently abandon meal kits in favour of on-

demand fast-food delivery services (such as DoorDash or UberEATS), which offer immediate gratification and total convenience at a comparable or sometimes lower perceived effort-cost ratio (DeVivo et al., 2022).

Interestingly, research indicates that customer tenure and relationship breadth alter how consumers react to price. Long-tenure customers are generally less sensitive to price increases, demonstrating that time builds resilience against churn (Dawes, 2009). Conversely, consumers with broader relationships (e.g., purchasing multiple add-ons or different product lines from the same provider) actually exhibit heightened sensitivity to price increases, as they develop more finely attuned reference prices and expect greater reciprocity from the brand (Dawes, 2009).

### 5.2.2 Product Quality, Trust, and the Danger of Feature Fatigue

Customer satisfaction is universally established as the prerequisite for both behavioural and attitudinal e-loyalty (Leingpibul et al., 2009; Juliawan, 2023). Within the food-tech sector, this satisfaction is intrinsically tied to product quality—specifically the nutritional components, hygiene, and freshness of the ingredients provided (Cha and Seo, 2019; Juliawan, 2023). Delivering exceptionally nutritious and balanced meals is paramount, as modern consumers have grown increasingly health-conscious post-pandemic.

Because meal kits operate within an e-commerce framework, technical service quality and vendor trustworthiness are equally vital. Trust is built on the vendor's integrity, benevolence, and ability to securely and reliably deliver goods as promised (Othman et al., 2019). High levels of trust directly stimulate positive electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), which acts as a powerful normative influence capable of driving new customer acquisition and reinforcing the loyalty of existing users (Othman et al., 2019; Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

However, the research highlights a critical vulnerability in how companies attempt to build satisfaction: "feature fatigue" (Hamilton, Rust and Dev, 2017). While companies frequently add complex new features (such as highly granular recipe customization or extensive digital add-ons) to attract new users, having too many features can actively decrease post-purchase customer satisfaction. Features that attract customers are fundamentally different from those that retain them; overcomplicating the user experience creates frustration and diminishes the core value proposition of the service.

### 5.2.3 Sustainability and the "Warm Glow" Effect

As ethical consumption becomes mainstream, a brand's commitment to environmental responsibility significantly impacts retention. The heavy use of single-use plastics and ice packs in meal kits actively deters environmentally conscious consumers (Jang, 2025). However, when brands implement visible sustainable practices (e.g., fully recyclable packaging), it enhances perceived brand sustainability and triggers a psychological "warm glow" (Jang, 2025). This warm glow represents a form of impure

altruism, where consumers feel an intrinsic emotional and moral reward for their eco-friendly purchase, which significantly deepens their attitudinal loyalty and continuance intention. Crucially, while this emotional reward drives loyalty, it does not blind the consumer to economic realities; ethical feelings do not significantly moderate consumers' perceptions of price fairness, meaning sustainable brands must still compete on base economic value (Jang, 2025).

### 5.3 Strategic Recommendations for Meal Kit Providers

Based on the synthesis of the literature and primary findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed for meal kit companies seeking to reduce churn and foster sustainable, long-term e-loyalty.

#### Recommendation 1: Restructure Pricing and Implement Tenure-Based Loyalty Programs

To combat the rampant issue of "discount-hopping," meal kit providers must shift their marketing budgets away from aggressive, short-term acquisition discounts (e.g., "17 free meals for new users") and redirect those funds toward long-term retention programs (DeVivo et al., 2022). Because research proves that longer customer tenure reduces sensitivity to price increases (Dawes, 2009), companies must incentivize consumers to stay past the critical 3-month mark. Providers should implement tiered, tenure-based loyalty programs that create psychological and economic switching costs (Othman et al., 2019). For example, customers who remain subscribed for six consecutive months could permanently unlock free shipping, premium protein upgrades, or exclusive recipes. Furthermore, management must exercise extreme caution when raising baseline prices for customers who purchase multiple add-ons (relationship breadth), as these users are highly sensitive to price hikes and will defect if they feel their broader investment is being exploited (Dawes, 2009).

#### Recommendation 2: Resolve the Convenience Paradox with Segment-Specific Offerings

To successfully compete with the immediate gratification of fast-food delivery apps like DoorDash, meal kit providers must re-evaluate the actual time and effort required to cook their meals (DeVivo et al., 2022). Providers should introduce heavily segmented product lines tailored to specific lifestyles. For instance, a "Student/Busy Professional Plan" should feature meals that require zero chopping, utilize only one pan, and take under 15 minutes to prepare from start to finish. Alternatively, integrating a line of high-quality, pre-heated (ready-to-eat) meals alongside traditional raw meal kits would capture the demographic that lacks the time or kitchen facilities to cook, effectively closing the convenience gap between meal kits and restaurant takeout (Arregui Llorca and Paukštytė, 2023).

### Recommendation 3: Avoid Feature Fatigue by Focusing on Core Quality

When designing the digital application and the physical box, meal kit brands must actively avoid "feature fatigue" (Hamilton, Rust and Dev, 2017). While offering a menu of 100 different customizable items might sound appealing in a marketing campaign, it overwhelms the consumer and complicates the weekly selection process, leading to decision paralysis and eventual cancellation. Companies should prioritize a clean, intuitive, and highly reliable user interface (Othman et al., 2019). Investment should be focused on the core drivers of satisfaction: guaranteeing the nutritional value of the meals, ensuring zero missing ingredients, and maintaining strict hygiene and freshness standards during delivery (Cha and Seo, 2019; Juliawan, 2023). Simplicity and reliability generate far more long-term loyalty than complex, flashy add-ons.

### Recommendation 4: Leverage Sustainability Marketing to Trigger the "Warm Glow"

Providers must urgently address the packaging waste associated with their deliveries, as this is a primary pain point for modern consumers (Jang, 2025). Transitioning to 100% recyclable, biodegradable, or returnable packaging is no longer optional; it is a necessity for brand survival. Once implemented, these sustainable practices must be transparently and aggressively marketed to tap into the consumer's altruistic values. By highlighting how the consumer is personally reducing global food waste and plastic pollution by using the service, the brand can trigger the psychological "warm glow" effect. This emotional reward significantly increases the customer's intention to continue their subscription. However, brands must remember that sustainability cannot be used to justify exorbitant price premiums; the core product must remain economically competitive, as the warm glow does not override a consumer's need for price fairness (Jang, 2025).

### Recommendation 5: Cultivate Trust to Stimulate Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Because e-loyalty is deeply rooted in trust and integrity, meal kit providers must consistently deliver on their promises (Othman et al., 2019). To leverage the power of social proof, companies should optimize referral programs. In both individualistic and collectivistic cultures, recommendations from friends, family, and trusted online industry experts carry more weight than traditional advertising (Othman et al., 2019). Implementing "Member-Get-Member" rewards, where existing loyal customers receive substantial account credit for referring a friend, will lower customer acquisition costs while simultaneously reinforcing the loyalty of the referring customer.

## 5.4 Limitations of the Research

While this dissertation provides robust insights into the drivers of customer loyalty, it is subject to several methodological and theoretical limitations that must be acknowledged.

First, the qualitative nature of the secondary data analysis, combined with primary

interviews and surveys drawn from convenience sampling, restricts the generalizability of the findings (DeVivo et al., 2022; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Because data was gathered heavily from specific demographics (such as college students in the United States or consumers in Denmark and Spain), the insights regarding price sensitivity and convenience may not perfectly translate to the broader, global population across all age brackets and income levels (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023). Secondly, the research relies heavily on measuring *continuance intention* and *repurchase intention* as proxies for actual loyalty (Leingpibul et al., 2009; Jang, 2025). While the Theory of Planned Behaviour asserts that intention is a strong predictor of behaviour, it is not a perfect translation. Consumers may state an intention to remain loyal to a sustainable brand due to social desirability bias or an emotional "warm glow," but external economic pressures may force them to cancel their subscriptions in reality. Finally, the reliance on public consumer feedback platforms (such as Trustpilot) introduces a potential sentiment bias. Consumers are historically more motivated to leave written reviews following a highly negative experience (such as a late delivery or spoiled food) than after a routine, satisfactory delivery. This may disproportionately highlight service failures and amplify negative attitudes within the data set.

## 5.5 Future Research Directions

To build upon the foundations established in this dissertation, future academic research should address the noted limitations by adopting alternative methodological approaches.

- **Longitudinal Behavioural Studies:** Future studies should move beyond measuring "repurchase intention" through cross-sectional surveys. By partnering directly with meal kit corporations, researchers could utilize longitudinal data to track actual consumer purchasing behaviour, defection rates, and customer lifetime value (LTV) over several years (Dawes, 2009; Hamilton, Rust and Dev, 2017). This would definitively prove whether the "warm glow" of sustainability directly prevents behavioural churn in the long term.
- **Investigating "Feature Fatigue" Thresholds:** More empirical research is required to identify the exact point at which personalization and menu variety transition from being attractive acquisition tools to becoming burdensome features that cause "feature fatigue" (Hamilton, Rust and Dev, 2017). Understanding the optimal menu size and customization limits would greatly assist service design.
- **Wider Demographic and Cross-Cultural Analysis:** Future research should expand the sampling pool to include families, elderly consumers, and individuals from a wider array of geographic locations. Exploring how Collectivistic versus

Individualistic cultural dimensions strictly alter the perception of "convenience" and "social eating" will help global brands tailor their market entry strategies more effectively (Arregui Llorc and Paukštytė, 2023).

## 5.6 Concluding Summary

In conclusion, customer loyalty within the meal kit industry cannot be bought through perpetual discounts; it must be earned through consistent quality, genuine convenience, and ethical alignment. Meal kit providers face a highly volatile market where switching costs are low and alternative options—such as raw groceries and fast-food delivery—are abundant. By addressing the convenience paradox through tailored, low-effort meal options, avoiding the complexities of feature fatigue, and leveraging sustainable practices to trigger emotional brand attachment, companies can successfully transition their business models from short-term customer acquisition to sustainable, profitable, and long-term customer retention.

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