



## PERCEPTION OF QUALITY AND FAMILIARITY IN THE RETAIL SERVICE ENVIRONMENT, AND ITS IMPACT ON PATRONAGE INTENTION

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective of the study** - The aim of this study is to investigate the mediating role of perceived quality and service satisfaction on the relationship between brand familiarity and patronage intention towards retail stores.

**Methodology/approach** - Through a survey of 400 respondents, this study employed structural equation modeling and mediation tests to test the direct and conditional hypotheses.

**Findings**- Perceived service quality acts as an important mediator in the link between familiarity and patronage intention. Satisfaction is also a mediator, but perceived quality is more important. In addition, consumer response to patronage intention is stronger when influenced by satisfaction than directly by perceived quality

**Theoretical/methodological contributions** - The study advances knowledge about quality in services, as a mediating mechanism for familiarity and impacts on favorable consumer responses.

**Relevance/originality** - The study is a pioneer in proposing the relationship between familiarity and quality in services.

**Keywords:** Patronage intention, Services quality, Consumer behavior, Retailing, Satisfaction

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every day, retail companies are competing in a new and changing market, which is constantly growing. In the hope of attracting more customers, retail organizations are trying to improve their services, including service quality. It is valuable for companies to gain knowledge about consumer behavior, satisfaction levels, situational influences and service quality, as this significantly affects consumer preference (Haming et al., 2019, Ahmed et al., 2023).

The city of Caraguatatuba is constantly growing in urban, social and economic terms, standing out among the cities on the São Paulo coast (de Oliveira Arouca, 2021). As it is a tourist city, its retail market is always hot, providing natural competition between companies, where the quality of the service offered becomes a valuable differentiator for customer satisfaction, and its favorable response to the retailer, known as Patronage intention (Lin, 2022). In this sense, the context of economic growth, combined with the tourist character of the city, makes the provision of quality services a fundamental strategy for retail success. At the same time, the relationship between the customer and the retailer in this context varies according to the level of familiarity between the consumer and the suppliers, as the consumer in coastal retail is not always a resident of the region. Consumer familiarity has been studied as an antecedent mechanism or facilitator of consumer relationship processes with brands (Coates et. al, 2006, Junior Ladeira et al., 2022), and with organizations and the provision of services (Xue et al., 2022). However, studies involving the relationship between service quality levels, familiarity and intention patronage are still insufficient and fragmented in the existing literature.

This research aims to analyze the influence of familiarity on the perception of the quality of the services offered, consumer satisfaction, and their responses in terms of Patronage intention in a retail shoe store environment. This retail sector was chosen because it has an intense relationship with consumers and is growing rapidly (Abicalçados, 2023). In this sector, there is a large number of stores in the city center, as well as the similarity of the products found between the stores, which means that the difference comes in the form of relationships and services.

This study aims to contribute to evaluating the role of familiarity in the service environment, its relationship with perceived quality, and consumer responses in terms of satisfaction and Patronage intention, aspects that have been little studied but are of great relevance to practitioners. The results suggest that perceived quality in services plays a relevant mediating role in the relationship between familiarity and Patronage intention. Satisfaction was also identified as a mediating variable in this relationship, but perceived quality was more significant. It was also observed that the consumer's response in terms of Patronage intention is greater when mediated by satisfaction than when directly influenced by perceived quality.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Consumer satisfaction

Consumers use services to fulfill their desires and reach conclusions based on what they expected to receive as promises from companies and based on their previous experiences as well. Services and satisfaction without services are a relationship with great impact on society, requiring studies that meet the demands of organizations (Donthu et al., 2022). Lovelock and Wright (2001) also point out that suppliers must be aware of consumer expectations and customer reaction to the service provided in order to establish consumer satisfaction. Satisfaction is made up of the consumer's perception and enjoyment of the purchase or frustration when compared to other previous experiences or perceptions in relation to their expectations (Paul, 2020). Consumer satisfaction and services continues to be an aspect of great interest to researchers, and even more so in services, largely due to the reach of services in the economy and in

people's habits. Perceptions of previous purchases directly affect the expected level of satisfaction. The process of shaping the level of customer satisfaction is made up of a number of aspects such as needs and desires, past experiences, word of mouth, external communication and price (Corrêa, 2011). In the retail scene in a small tourist town, it is extremely important to measure, monitor and provide service that fully satisfies the needs of customers, just as it is in larger towns, but in smaller towns, personal contact is even more pronounced.

In customer service, companies must develop this sensitivity to continuous improvement in order to achieve customer satisfaction, from a perspective in which value is a shared perception between the consumer and the organization's staff (Woratschek, 2020). As Hoffman and Bateson (2003) point out, waiting for complaints to point out the flaws in the service delivery framework or measuring the company's progress with regard to customer satisfaction based on the number of complaints received is still a fairly incipient action in terms of consumer satisfaction. The company must measure and use this data to its advantage, generating concrete actions, whether in terms of management development or optimizing its processes that have the most direct impact on consumer perception.

There are companies where, in many situations, the customer doesn't have access to the product on the shelf and needs a link to the sales and service team. This is one of the examples of front-line activities. Front-line actions are actions that are in direct contact with the customer. The degree of service satisfaction gives an idea of how well the company meets the customer's expectations. As Corrêa (2011) states, service managers must constantly pay attention to the development of frontline activities, as these actions play a considerable role in provoking expectations and perceptions about customers (Lee & Hur, 2019).

Satisfying customers is indispensable, given that dissatisfaction is one of the main factors for consumers to adopt behaviors that are not favorable to the organization, such as poor evaluation of the brand, services, negative word-of-mouth and choosing the competition (Marcos & Coelho, 2022). The totally dissatisfied customer, as Corrêa (2011, p.92) states, "[...] tends to become, depending on the level of dissatisfaction, a potential 'terrorist' customer, openly opposing the company, publishing their dissatisfaction in newspapers, magazines, websites and other media, [...]".

Lovelock and Wright (2001, p.4) point out that dissatisfaction is present in everyday life, but what differs is how it is dealt with by companies, that is, the practical measures adopted that impact the consumer and the attempt to minimize and avoid failures, because customers have many ways of expressing their complaints and there are several factors that cause dissatisfaction: "[...] customers are not always satisfied with the quality and value of the services they receive. People complain about late deliveries, rude or incompetent staff, inconvenient opening hours, poor performance, unnecessary complicated procedures and an arsenal of other problems. They complain about the difficulty of finding salespeople to help them in retail stores, [...]".

Dissatisfied customers will not recommend the company to their friends and other people in their relationship, and will spread negative information much more quickly than others will about their opinion. The relationship between service quality and loyalty is of great relevance to organizations (Ahmed et al., 2023). In an attempt to recover from service failures and consequently win back customers, companies must first become more familiar with the customer, for example, on social media pages and contact us and other points of contact with the consumer, always responding to requests (Corrêa, 2011).

As for the high-contact employee who deals directly with the customer, there should be training and empowerment to resolve and recover dissatisfied customers on the spot. A well-known example of this is the Disney company, which instructs its employees to spend as much as they need to recover the customer if something has failed because of the company (Corrêa, 2011).

To measure satisfaction, the questions related to the theory were all adapted for shoe stores. For the satisfaction theory, the following statements were used, taken from the article by Machleit et al (1994): "I get pleasure from shopping in this store", "I get satisfaction from shopping in this store", "Given a choice,

I would probably return to this store", "I would recommend this store to other people". All the questions were anchored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

## 2.2 Patronage intention

The term Patronage intention is associated with repurchase or is related to consumer favorable behavior to the store, and has been widely used, even with the digital transformation, as a construct that represents the consumer's reaction to the service (Lin, 2022). Some efforts have been made to analyze what makes consumers repeat purchases. The intention to repurchase is directly related to full satisfaction, which depends on psychological factors. The satisfied customer is more likely to be loyal to the supplier company, and will most likely buy again, as well as showing favourable attitudes towards the organization.

Pan and Zinkhan (2006) carried out a study with a meta-analytical approach which provided some relevant aspects on Patronage intention. They found that what most influences store choice is service, followed by quality, store environment, low price, location, quick check-out, opening hours, ease of finding salespeople and, lastly, parking (Pan & Zinkhan, 2006). Providing quality service with consumer retention and loyalty in mind can be considered an important marketing strategy and tool that empowers the consumer, with potential effects on favorable consumer responses (Mishra et al., 2022). To measure Patronage intention, we used statements taken from the work of Mehta et al. (2012): "I would visit that store in the future", "I would buy more in that store in the future", "I would buy products in that store in the future", "I would spend more money in that store in the future".

## 2.2 Information control and familiarity

According to Dion (2004), informational control and familiarity with the retail environment can influence consumer behavior in retail environments. If the consumer is used to going there and is a regular customer of the company, they will develop more tolerance for the retail environment than other people who don't know it. This is particularly important in service environments where variability and the difficulty of comparison are intrinsic characteristics that can lead to failures in service provision (Song et al., 2022).

Familiarity has a strong influence on the consumer (Xue et al., 2022). With regard to brands, for example, familiarity is preponderant in establishing strong, favorable and unique associations in the consumer's memory (Keller, 1993, Junior Ladeira et al., 2022). These associations will be retrieved by the consumer when a judgment or decision is required.

Similarly, less familiar brands will be preferred by the consumer. There is evidence that previous familiarity with the brand or implicit memory (unintentional, non-conscious retrieval of previously acquired information) influences both the formation of the range of brands to be considered in the consumer's purchasing process and the final purchasing decision itself, even in situations where a lesser-known brand is exposed (Coates, Butler & Berry, 2006).

Zajonc (1980) states that mere exposure to a stimulus is already capable of generating positive affective evaluations in relation to an object by establishing familiarity. The greater the familiarity, the greater the chances of a positive attitude towards the object of analysis, without much cognitive effort, which facilitates a series of processes that influence consumer behavior, such as the search for information, the selection of alternatives and the final choice. In short, consumers prefer what is familiar to them.

Familiarity increases the consumer's perception of control over their environment (Dion, 2004), so they are able to make decisions without pressure, and reduces the effect of negative emotions generated by very dense environments of people and objects. The statements used to measure informational control and familiarity with the store were taken from Dion's work (2004): "I feel familiarity with this store", "I feel familiarity with this shopping situation".

### 2.3 Service quality perception - SERVQUAL

When buying goods and services, customers have an expectation of the quality they will receive, whether based on their needs, previous experiences, recommendations or advertisements (Lovelock & Wright, 2001). If their shopping experience is pleasant and their expectations are met, they will have good perceptions and will be satisfied (Parente, Chamie and Ikeda, 2012), even if different stores use different approaches to creating a service atmosphere. The SERVQUAL model is a pioneer in understanding quality in services, and has been gaining prominence (Haming et al., 2019), and being applied in various sectors (Jonkisz et al., 2021, Shafiq et al., 2019).

Each customer perceives service quality in a different way, as Hoffman and Bateson (2003, p. 186) point out "[...] buyers' perceptions of value represent a balance between the perceived benefits of the service to be purchased and the perceived sacrifice in terms of the costs to be paid", because if the customer perceives that the quality involved does not cover the value spent on the products and services or their effort in general, this price charged will be rejected, which may cause a dissonance and the customer will not make the purchase. On the other hand, if the opposite happens and the consumer perceives a good cost-benefit ratio, they will significantly increase their preference for the service.

Customers' perceptions of the company's quality are not always in line with their expectations, so the company will always have to deal with this impasse of meeting its customers' expectations versus the limitations inherent in managing demand for the service (Hoffman & Bateson, 2003). The desired service represents what the customer actually expects to receive in relation to the expected service. Customers usually have higher expectations than the expected service, and when comparing their expectations with the service received, the customer may or may not perceive a superiority in value. Adequate service is the minimum that the customer could expect in terms of the quality involved (Hoffman & Bateson, 2003) and this minimum refers to the level of comparison each time the consumer uses the service. This perception generates customer satisfaction or not with each interaction with the service company.

Given the difficulty in verifying the perceived quality of the service offered, researchers Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988, 1991, 1994, 1994b) developed and improved the SERVQUAL scale - service quality. According to the authors, it is possible to measure the perceived quality of the service offered by taking into account certain dimensions, such as positive, positive, satisfaction, security and tangibility. These dimensions are made up of 44 items. Initially in their research, they stated that it needed to be measured in two stages: the expectation of the service received and the perception of the service used. However, after some research, the authors realized that there was no need for two measures; one may be enough to measure the perceived quality of the service used, depending on the research objective (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1994, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1994b).

In this study, the tangibility dimension, measuring the tangible aspects of the company, in terms of the appearance of the store's facilities, whether the salespeople are presentable and the equipment, was adapted from the scale items in the research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994); Hoffman and Bateson (2003). "The store has modern and up-to-date equipment", "The physical facilities of the store look good", "The physical space of the store is sufficient, bright and airy", "The appearance of the facilities is suitable for customer service", "You are satisfied with the cleaning service of the store", "There is a variety and quality in the products sold in the store", "The employees are well dressed and look good". The positive dimension, i.e. the extent of the store's commitment to the customer, whether it provides the

same service from the first service, whether it fulfills what was promised, was adapted from the scale items in the research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994); Hoffman and Bateson (2003). "The services offered by the store are carried out in the expected time", "The store carries out the service well from the first service", "When you have a problem, the staff show an interest in solving it", "The store takes care to offer products from new collections", "In your perception, the salespeople and attendants are well trained to serve you". The service dimension, which covers various questions about the service provided, such as expectations about the salesperson's behavior, whether they answer your questions, whether they understand your needs, such as the salesperson's level of education, adapted items from the scale of research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994); Hoffman and Bateson (2003). "The salespeople are willing to help you if you have problems or questions", "The employees solve my problems", "The store employees are never too busy to deal with my requests", "The company employees bring you exactly the product you asked for". The dimension of security, which conveys security to the customer, assesses whether the salespeople are courteous and are instructed to be so, and whether a purchase does not have unpleasant occasions. The scale items were adapted from the research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994); Hoffman and Bateson (2003). "Store employees demonstrate security and mastery", "The services offered by the store are reliable", "Employees show courtesy", "Employees are prepared to answer my questions", "The store you store at offers quality service". This is the positive dimension which measures the customer's perception of their needs being met, the company's way of thinking about the customer, adapted from the scale items in the research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994); Hoffman and Bateson (2003). "The store has employees who give you personal attention", "The store has convenient opening hours for everyone", "The store is committed to the interests I express", "The store employees understand my specific needs". The following is the theoretical model proposed in this study and the hypotheses that were tested.

## 2.4 Theoretical model and development of hypotheses

Familiarity means that consumers will develop a greater preference for what is most recognizable to them, and will even adopt somewhat more automatic attitudes when evaluating these objects (Zajonc, 1980), which may be reflected in their behavior, even in situations of greater stress (Dion, 2004). The first hypothesis of this study was thus established:

H1: Familiarity will have a positive and significant relationship with Patronage intention;

When the consumer's expectations are met or exceeded in the provision of the service, satisfaction is established, and the return of the purchase and favorable behaviors towards the store will occur more frequently. These positive evaluations generated through familiarity are associated with the positive rewards that consumers receive when they are satisfied with the service experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1994). Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are established:

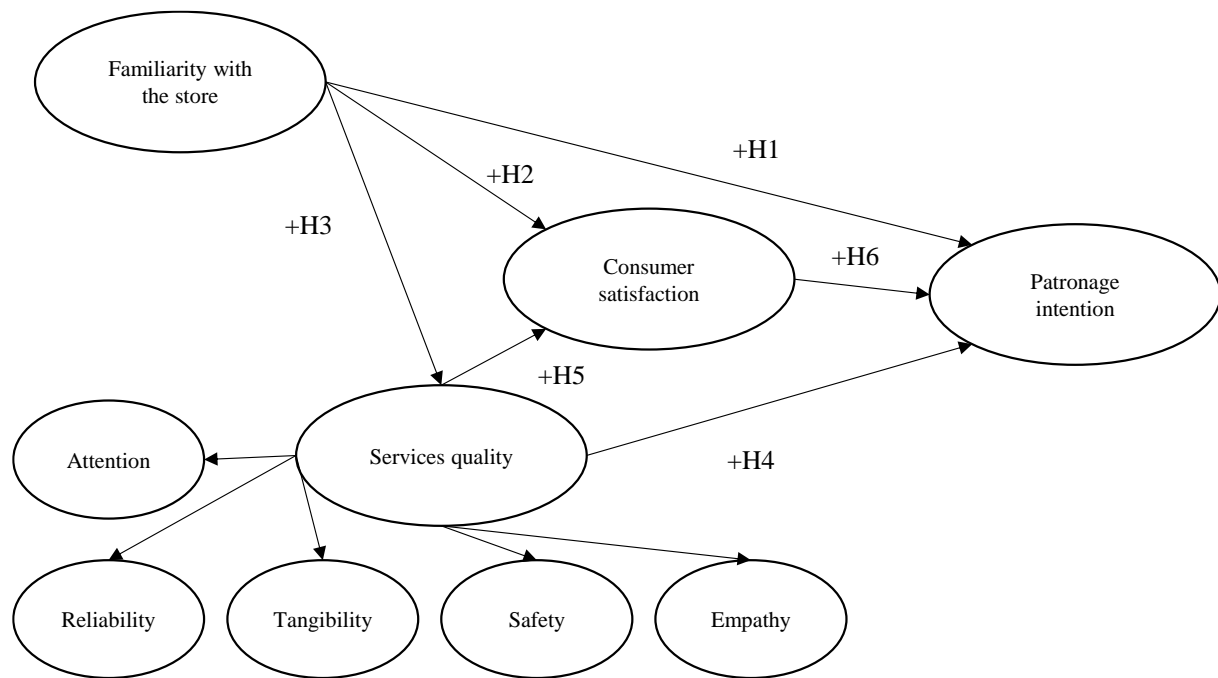
H2: Familiarity will have a positive relationship with satisfaction;

H3: Familiarity will have a positive relationship with Patronage intention;

To the extent that consumers perceive quality in services, they will seek the same experience as the previous purchase (Hoffman & Bateson, 2003), which leads to the fourth and fifth hypotheses of this study. According to Machleit et al (1994) satisfaction is an antecedent of repurchase in retail environments. This is how we formulated the last hypothesis of this study. Figure 1 shows the theoretical model proposed in this work

- H4: Perceived quality in services has a positive relationship with Patronage intention;  
 H5: Service quality will have a positive relationship with satisfaction;  
 H6: Satisfaction will have a positive relationship with Patronage intention.

**Figure 1 - Proposed theoretical model**



Source: The authors

### 3. METHOD

This research is characterized as a quantitative and descriptive study, since descriptive studies presuppose a wide range of knowledge about the phenomenon. In a way, it is also exploratory in that it aims to observe the relationships between variables that have not yet been related in previous studies, such as familiarity, both by pointing out how they work and by establishing cause and effect relationships (Malhotra, 2012).

We opted for a cross-sectional study, as the aim is not to compare samples over time, but rather to observe retail consumer behavior at the present time. Exploratory studies aim to increase the researcher's knowledge of the phenomenon under study so that more definitive research can subsequently be carried out (Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook, 1987).

#### 3.1 Data analysis criteria

SPSS software was used to analyze and explore the data. The SmartPLS2.0M3 software (Ringle & Wende, 2010) was used for structural equation modeling, which is better suited to small samples and non-parametric data distribution. The model analysis criteria can be seen in Table 1:

**Table 1** - Structural model analysis criteria

Indicator	Index	Observation	Reference
GoF (goodness of fit)	Greater than 0,36	Analyzes the quality of the model's fit	Tenenhaus et al 2005
AVE – average variance extracted	Greater than 0,5	Analyzes convergent validity	Henseler, Ringle, Sinkovics, 2009
Crossloadings	Greater than the correlation with other constructs	Analyzes discriminant validity	Chin 1998
AVE's square root	Square root of the construct's AVE greater than its correlation with other constructs	Analyzes discriminant validity	Fornell e Lacker, 1981
Cronbach's Alpha and Composite reliability	Greater than 0,70	Analyzes the positive of the model	Ringle, Silva & Bido, 2014
Student's t test	Greater than 1,96	Analyzes the significance of structural relationships	Ringle, Silva & Bido, 2014
R <sup>2</sup> Coefficient of determination	2% low, 13% medium and 26% high	Analyzes how much the model explains of the endogenous variables	Ringle, Silva & Bido, 2014
Q <sup>2</sup> Stone-Geiser indicator	Predictive validity - must be greater than zero	Evaluates the accuracy of the model	Ringle, Silva & Bido, 2014
f <sup>2</sup> Cohen's ratio	0.02 is low, 0.15 is medium and 0.35 is high	Analyzes the usefulness of the construct for the model	Ringle, Silva & Bido, 2014
Path coefficient	Greater than 0,708	Analyzes structural relationships	Ringle, Silva & Bido, 2014

Source: The authors, based on Ringle, Silva e Bido (2014)

Once the parameters of the research plan had been established, data was collected by means of a survey. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data, as this analysis technique uses a wide range of statistical tests to represent the relationships between various variables. The results of the study and their analysis are presented in the following sections. Mediating effects were tested based on Sobel test due to its simplicity (Abu-Bader & Jones, 2021). Mediating effects are those mechanisms of influence of variable X on a variable Y, through a variable M, that carries some effect of X on Y.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Presentation of the sample's descriptive data

The sample is characterized as simple random probabilistic with 400 valid questionnaires, via the Internet, with the link to answer the survey sent by e-mail to students at a public university, using the "snowball" method as a complementary method of collection to reach a greater number of respondents and a closer approximation of the profile of the city's residents through personal relationships.

The collection universe was in the city of Caraguatatuba, a municipality located on the north coast of the state of São Paulo in Brazil. It had a population of 109,678 inhabitants in 2013 and a land



area of 485.097 km<sup>2</sup> (IBGE). The demographic data of the sample was analyzed according to the ABEP economic classification criteria and in the analysis of the purchasing power of the respondents who frequent the shoe stores in downtown Caraguatatuba, the class that achieved the highest percentage was class B2 with 38% of respondents, followed by class B1 with 21%, class C1 with 20%, class A2 with 10%, class C2 with 8%, class D with 3% and finally class A1 with 0.3% represented by one respondent. Analyzing the data by adding up the respective social classes, it can be seen that the majority of respondents belong to class B with 59%, followed by class C with 28%, then class A with 10.3% and finally class D with 3%. Class E had no respondents. Social classes B and C spend the most on footwear.

## 4.2 Model fitting and hypothesis testing

Data were first explored to its adjustment to certain conditions for further analysis. First we observed the absence of multivariate outliers, missing data, multicollinearity, (Hair et al., 2019), and also common method bias through the Harman's single factor analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003). None of these conditions were violated. We also confirmed the non linearity of data. After the initial exploration of the data with the elimination of items that did not meet the analysis criteria, the proposed theoretical model was studied using structural equation modeling. Table 2 shows the convergent validity and internal consistency values of the scales.

**Table 2** - Convergent and discriminant validity and positive of the scales

Construct	AVE	Composite positive	R <sup>2</sup>	Cronbah's Alpha	Comunality	Redundancy
Attention	0.768	0.869	0.683	0.701	0.768	0.518
Positive	0.819	0.948	0.885	0.926	0.819	0.725
Positive	0.739	0.850	0.788	0.647	0.739	0.582
Familiarity	0.867	0.929		0.846	0.867	
Patronage intention	0.891	0.942	0.737	0.878	0.891	0.117
Satisfaction	0.858	0.960	0.803	0.945	0.858	0.373
Safety	0.782	0.915	0.853	0.861	0.782	0.666
Tangibility	0.761	0.950	0.868	0.937	0.761	0.660

Source: The authors

Table 3 shows the indicators of discriminant validity.

**Table 3** - Discriminant validity

Construct	Attention	Positive	Positive	Familiarity	Patronage intention	Satisfaction	Safety	Tangibility
Attention	0.876*							
Positive	0.758	0.905*						
Positive	0.740	0.809	0.860*					
Familiarity	0.660	0.834	0.727	0.931*				
Patronage intention	0.723	0.760	0.735	0.763	0.944*			
Satisfaction	0.721	0.871	0.750	0.834	0.836	0.980*		
Safety	0.761	0.866	0.797	0.802	0.802	0.814	0.884*	
Tangibility	0.682	0.806	0.789	0.755	0.747	0.796	0.791	0.873*

Source: The authors

\*AVE's square root

Crossloading indicators that corroborate the discriminant validity of the model tested was also confirmed. The indicators of the final structural model can be seen in Table 4.

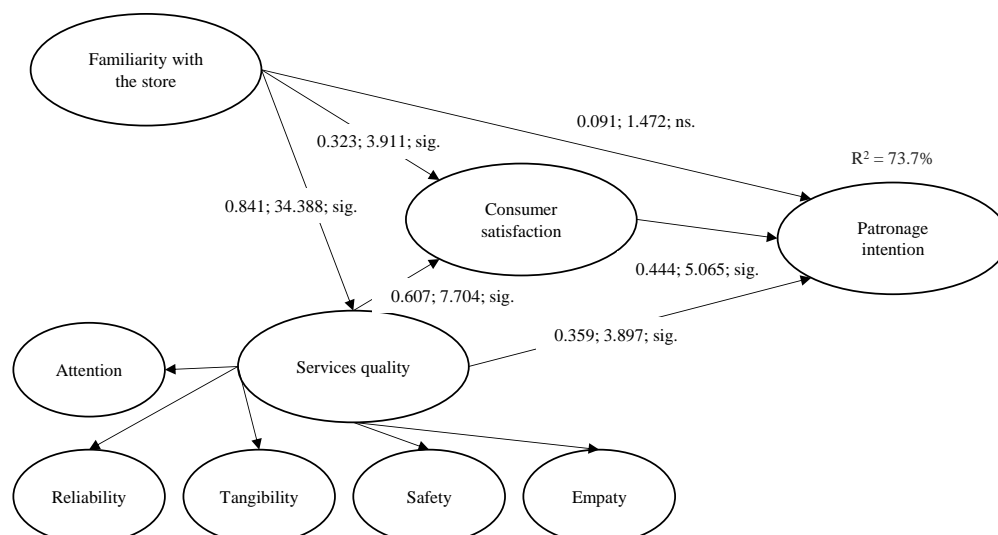
**Table 4** - Structural relationships and hypotheses

Hypothesis	Signal	Relationship	Coefficient	Mean of subsamples	SD	t test	p-value	Status
H1	positive	Familiarity → Patronage intention	0.091	0.093	0.062	1.472	0.141	Not Supported
H2	positive	Familiarity → Satisfaction	0.323	0.324	0.083	3.911	0.000	Supported
H3	positive	Familiarity → Quality	0.841	0.841	0.024	34.388	0.000	Supported
H4	positive	Quality → Patronage intention	0.359	0.361	0.092	3.897	0.000	Supported
H5	positive	Quality → Satisfaction	0.607	0.605	0.079	7.704	0.000	Supported
H6	positive	Satisfaction → Patronage intention	0.444	0.445	0.088	5.065	0.000	Supported
Dimensions of Quality	-	Quality → Attention	0.826	0.828	0.017	47.880	0.000	-
	-	Quality → Positive	0.941	0.941	0.006	154.970	0.000	-
	-	Quality → Empatia	0.888	0.887	0.012	71.999	0.000	-
	-	Quality → Safety	0.923	0.923	0.011	83.050	0.000	-
	-	Quality → Tangibilidade	0.932	0.931	0.009	105.689	0.000	-

Source: The authors

Otherwise, these results can be seen in figure 2.

**Figure 2** - Final structural model



Source: The authors

## 4.4 Analysis of results

The final structural model proved to be adequate, with significant relationships, except for the relationship between familiarity and Patronage intention. All the dimensions of perceived quality in services were explained, Attention,  $R^2=68.3\%$ , ( $\Gamma = 0.826$ ;  $t_{(399)}=47.880$ ; 0.001), Positive  $R^2=88.5\%$ , ( $\Gamma = 0.941$ ;  $t_{(399)}=154.970$ ; 0.001), Empathy  $R^2=78.8\%$ , ( $\Gamma = 0.888$ ;  $t_{(399)}=71.999$ ; 0.001), Safety  $R^2=85.3\%$ , ( $\Gamma = 0.923$ ;  $t_{(399)}=83.050$ ; 0.001) and Tangibility  $R^2=86.8\%$ , ( $\Gamma = 0.932$ ;  $t_{(399)}=105.689$ ; 0.001). In this sample, Positive ( $Q^2=0.728$ ) and Tangibility ( $Q^2=0.66$ ) were more closely related to perceived quality in services. It was also observed that perceived quality in services has more predictive relevance ( $f^2=0.605$ ) for Satisfaction and Patronage intention than familiarity ( $f^2=0.497$ ).

Another important result of this study was that when assessing the impact on Patronage intention specifically, Satisfaction proved to be more relevant than the previous constructs ( $f^2=0.737$ ). When analyzing the causal relationships, the relationship between familiarity and Patronage intention was not significant ( $\Gamma = 0.091$ ;  $t_{(399)}=1.472$ ; ns). This seems to be due to the fact that consumers don't consider familiarity to be enough to repeat favorable behaviors in relation to the retail shoe store, such as buying, for example. A favorable attitude does not necessarily imply favorable behavior (Bagozzi, 1981). However, the relationship between Familiarity and Satisfaction proved to be significant ( $\Gamma = 0.323$ ;  $t_{(399)}=3.911$ ; 0.0001).

Familiarity is mediated more by perceived quality (Sobel test=3.75, p-value=0.001) than by satisfaction in relation to patronage intention (Sobel test=3.081, p-value<0.002). On the other hand, the quality of the service is preponderant in the return of favorable behavior towards the store, even if there is familiarity. Shoppers will develop familiarity to the extent that their experiences of contact with the store are repeated even if they don't make a purchase, and so they will be satisfied with this relationship. However, the quality perceived in the service makes satisfaction greater as the consumer starts to experience the service more. Familiarity has a significant relationship with perceived service quality ( $\Gamma = 0.841$ ;  $t_{(399)}=34.388$ ; 0.001). This shows that knowing the service environment leads to a better assessment of service quality. Service is very much characterized by intangibility and people, making it very difficult to evaluate. Familiarity therefore contributes greatly to a better assessment of the intangible nature of the service experience.

Perceived quality in services has a positive and significant relationship with Patronage intention ( $\Gamma = 0.359$ ;  $t_{(399)}=3.897$ ; 0.001) and satisfaction ( $\Gamma = 0.607$ ;  $t_{(399)}=7.704$ ; 0.001). This shows that perceived quality is indeed an important antecedent of consumer responses to the service provided by the store. Satisfaction also has a positive and more significant relationship with Patronage intention ( $\Gamma = 0.444$ ;  $t_{(399)}=5.065$ ; 0.001). This result also demonstrates the importance of constantly measuring satisfaction in retail. Services tend to vary a lot, and these fluctuations are reflected in consumer satisfaction.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

For the first time, this study linked perceived Quality in services with Patronage intention, taking into account Familiarity with the retail store. When it is observed that familiarity has a positive effect on perceived Quality, but does not have a significant relationship with Patronage intention, a line of studies is proposed to evaluate the causes of this phenomenon, to the extent that even if the

consumer is familiar with the service environment, they are satisfied and only then adopt favorable responses to the store. This result reinforces the importance of building customer-focused value in the service sector, as pointed out in other studies (Woratschek et al., 2020), but broadens the understanding of patronage intention in services by establishing the mediation of perceived quality.

The interaction between consumers and services is an aspect of interest to researchers and practitioners because of its complexity, largely due to the high level of humanization and intangibility that services possess, where various factors intertwine to shape consumer decisions and attitudes. In this context, perceived quality in services acts as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between consumer familiarity with a brand or service and their Patronage Intention. Familiarity with a brand establishes an initial level of trust and knowledge, impacting on how consumers perceive the services offered. However, it is perceived quality that serves as the intermediate link in this relationship. When consumers perceive high quality in a service, this reinforces the pre-existing familiarity, generating a sense of safety and satisfaction. Thus, perceived quality acts as a lens through which familiarity is reinterpreted, influencing Patronage Intention.

In this scenario, satisfaction also acts as a preponderant aspect, as an additional mediator, but with a different influence. While both perceived quality and satisfaction are rooted in positive consumer perception, perceived quality plays a more significant role. This suggests that consumers may consider the overall quality of the service to be a more crucial factor in shaping their attitudes and intentions. Furthermore, the intermediation of satisfaction in the relationship between familiarity and Patronage Intention highlights that perceived quality is not just a point of contact, but also influences the consumer's experience over time. Satisfaction acts as a continuous link between perceived quality and the intention to continue choosing a service. It is worth noting that although perceived quality plays a prominent mediating role, when it comes to directly measuring the influence of perceived quality versus satisfaction-mediated influence on Patronage Intention, the results suggest that satisfaction may have a more pronounced impact.

This study offers a broader understanding of the relationship between familiarity and perceived quality in services, and in particular the role of quality in services as an enabler of patronage intention, corroborating studies that have observed mechanisms in this regard (Lin, 2019). By examining this connection, the research contributes to a deeper insight into how consumers evaluate services in relation to their familiarity with a brand and in services. This is essential for marketers and managers, allowing them to adapt strategies to better position their brands in the market. In this sense, the results of this study are in line with studies showing that consumers value service contexts in which they are closer to controlling actions or being at the center of the organization's strategy (Mishra et al., 2022).

In addition, the study identifies perceived quality as a key mediator in this link. By revealing that perceived quality influences the relationship between familiarity and intention to continue using a service, the research sheds light on the underlying mechanisms of this process. The study expands existing knowledge on how familiarity and perceived quality are related in services. This contribution enriches the field of service marketing by providing valuable insights to better understand consumers' decisions and adjust strategies to meet their needs.

## 5.2 Suggested future studies

Further studies could be carried out looking at the relationship between Familiarity and other antecedent variables of Patronage intention, in order to expand knowledge about the relationship between this variable and other constructs. Continued research in the field of consumer psychology can shed light on the mechanisms underlying individuals' purchasing decisions and preferences in the

field of services. In the context of the relationship between familiarity and patronage intention, exploring this connection in conjunction with other antecedent variables can provide a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of consumer behavior. By examining the relationship between familiarity and variables such as trust, perceived value and post-purchase experience, we can uncover more complex patterns and deeper insights into consumer motivations. Understanding how familiarity influences trust can reveal the importance of building solid relationships with customers over time. In addition, investigating how familiarity interacts with perceived value can provide a more accurate view of how consumers weigh benefits against costs.

New studies could also explore how familiarity affects post-purchase interactions, such as customer service and the resolution of problems or service failures. Familiarity can shape consumers' expectations and reactions in these situations, influencing their decision to continue doing business with the brand. By broadening the scope of the research to include these antecedent variables, researchers can create a more complete picture of the complex relationships between familiarity, perceived quality and patronage intention. This will not only enrich our theoretical knowledge, but also offer practical insights for companies looking to build more effective and personalized marketing strategies and customer experiences.

### 5.3 Managerial implications

Understanding store familiarity has a marked influence on the strategic decisions of service organizations. Building a physical and relational environment that resonates with consumers, evoking familiarity and identification, is imperative. However, these elements, although crucial, do not guarantee tangible results in terms of consumer return. The effectiveness of this process is mediated by additional management factors, notably the perceived quality of the services offered and the management of customer satisfaction. A synergy between these elements is essential to optimize the customer experience and, consequently, boost organizational results.

Understanding familiarity guides the configuration of a favorable environment, but it is the perception of service quality that amplifies ongoing customer attraction. Careful management of customer satisfaction complements this equation, creating a relationship of trust and loyalty. In short, creating a familiar environment is the starting point, but the perceived quality of services and the management of customer satisfaction shape the overall trajectory of organizational success, resulting in lasting growth and stability.

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