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Personalized Adaptive Learning Technologies Based on Machine Learning Techniques to Identify Learning Styles: A Systematic Literature Review

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MARKETING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Empirical Appraisal of Electronic Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions within Online Shopping in South Africa

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Abstract: Over the years, service quality has been a topic that has continued to garner a lot of interest. This study sought to appraise electronic service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in online shopping in South Africa. A unique conceptual model was developed to investigate the factors that led to customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and ultimately repurchase intention toward goods online. This study aims to determine the influence of e-service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in online shopping in South Africa. Non-probability sampling was used to select the participants. A structured questionnaire, based on the conceptual model, was developed and distributed online. A total of 307 usable response questionnaires were collected, and descriptive and regression analyses were conducted using SPSS 27. The major findings indicate that customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth are closely associated. The implication is that marketing practitioners should pay more attention to customer behavior after receiving services.

Keywords: behavior, customers, online, purchases, service

JEL Classification: E21, L67, P42



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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The research conducted in this study holds significant relevance and importance for both consumers and the e-commerce industry in South Africa. In an era where online shopping is becoming increasingly prevalent and integral to people's lives, understanding the factors that influence customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions is of paramount importance. This research was designed with the broader public interest in mind, aiming to enhance the overall online shopping experience for South African consumers and contribute to the development of a thriving e-commerce sector in the country.

By conducting this research, the aspiration to offer practical recommendations and insights for online retailers in South Africa, enabling them to improve their e-service quality, enhance customer satisfaction, and ultimately foster customer loyalty. Furthermore, as the e-commerce landscape continues to evolve, the study's contribution to the existing literature serves as a steppingstone for future research and a foundation for ongoing efforts to enhance the online shopping experience for consumers in South Africa and beyond.

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1. Introduction

What can be considered very important to any business is its customers, and understanding customers is one way to ensure a business's success. The present research is particularly important in that it makes an attempt to explain how electronic service quality results in customer satisfaction and ultimately repurchase intention, customer loyalty and positive word of mouth. This is done through a unique model not tested in previous studies. Customer satisfaction depends on the e-service quality. Kaya et al. (2019) claim that e-service quality ensures that a website provides efficient and functional purchasing and supplying of goods and services. Numerous researchers use different dimensions to assess e-service quality, but in this study, the researchers use the seven dimensions according to the works of Parasuraman et al. (2005) as efficiency, fulfilment, system availability, privacy, responsiveness, compensation, and contact. Customer satisfaction forms the foundation of brand loyalty. It results in positive word-of-mouth and encourages customers to repurchase (Blut et al., 2015). On the other hand, customer dissatisfaction results in unfavorable word-of-mouth, discourages customers from repurchasing, and leads to a lack of brand loyalty. Customer satisfaction depends on the e-service quality. This study appraises electronic service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in online shopping in South Africa.

Therefore, it is important to have a better understanding of online shopping customers. The call for understanding online shopping behavior has been made by Behera et al. (2022); Costa et al. (2023); Kaye et al. (2022) who have all stressed the importance of online customers. This study presents a novel approach to the study of SERVQUAL in that traditional SERVQUAL models in the literature (AlOmari, 2021); Gavahi et al. (2023); Jonkisz et al. (2021); Oli and Dhanasekaran (2023) are purely based on dimensions adopted from the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, namely reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. This study thus adds to the SERVQUAL model by measuring the relationships between online customer satisfaction and three possible outcomes from that satisfaction, namely, customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repurchase intentions.

Online shopping is rapidly improving, allowing people to make purchases through social media platforms, such as Instagram. This trend is already popular in countries such as France and Germany, and South Africa is also beginning to embrace it. The internet has transformed into a global marketplace for buying and selling goods and services in a short period of time (Javadi et al., 2012). Online shopping has experienced significant growth worldwide, with total sales increasing from $1.4 trillion in 2014 to $4.2 trillion in 2020 (Anon, 2021). This growth is expected to continue, with estimates suggesting that global sales will reach $6.5 trillion by 2023. South Africa has also seen a significant increase in online shopping since the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 40% monthly increase in online transactions before and after the lockdown (West, 2020). Online stores such as one-day only and Takealot have experienced a boost in revenue, and the e-commerce sector is projected to grow by 150% and be valued at R225 billion in the next five years. As a result, providing excellent e-service quality is crucial for online stores to meet consumer demand. The main objective of this study was to establish whether the e-service framework could be used to measure customer satisfaction from online shopping. The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of service quality dimensions on online customer satisfaction and, ultimately, customer loyalty, positive word of mouth, and repurchase intentions.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 The SERVQUAL Model

The present study is grounded in the SERVQUAL model to understand whether electronic service quality influences customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) was used to evaluate service quality based on customer perceptions. SERVQUAL is an abbreviation for service quality (Wang et al., 2015). It compares customer expectations and needs with the actual performance of the service. The present study investigates an electronic version of service quality, referred to as E-SERVQUAL. E-SERVQUAL, is a scale used to measure customer satisfaction based on online services (Saefullah, 2023). The model consists of five dimensions: tangibles, dependability, responsiveness, certainty, and empathy (Sari et al., 2018). Customers are evaluated on the basis of the overall excellence of services in terms of service quality (Ghotbabadi et al., 2015). Ali and Raza (2017) suggested that service quality can improve a company's performance and, when done correctly, enhance customer satisfaction. According to Soares et al. (2017), service customers assess the overall service quality of an organization by considering the differences between expectations and perceptions in relation to the current performance of the organization that provides the service. In this study, e-service quality is measured using seven dimensions: efficiency, fulfilment, system availability, privacy, responsiveness, compensation, and contact. The SERVQUAL model is founded on five gaps, as follows:

Gap 1: Lack of knowledge of customer expectations, also referred to as the listening gap (Wilson et al., 2016).

Gap 2: The difference between an organization’s understanding of customer expectations and the selection of the right service quality designs and standards, known as the service design and standards gap (Zeithaml et al., 2017).

Gap 3: Failure to deliver the service according to service quality design and standards is referred to as the service performance gap (Soares et al., 2017).

Gap 4: The difference between the actual service performance and service promises made to consumers, known as the communication gap (Wolniak & Skotnicka-Zasadzien, 2012).

Gap 5: The difference between consumers' expectations of service and their perception of service is referred to as the customer gap (Zeithaml et al., 2017). Figure 1 shows the SERVQUAL Model.

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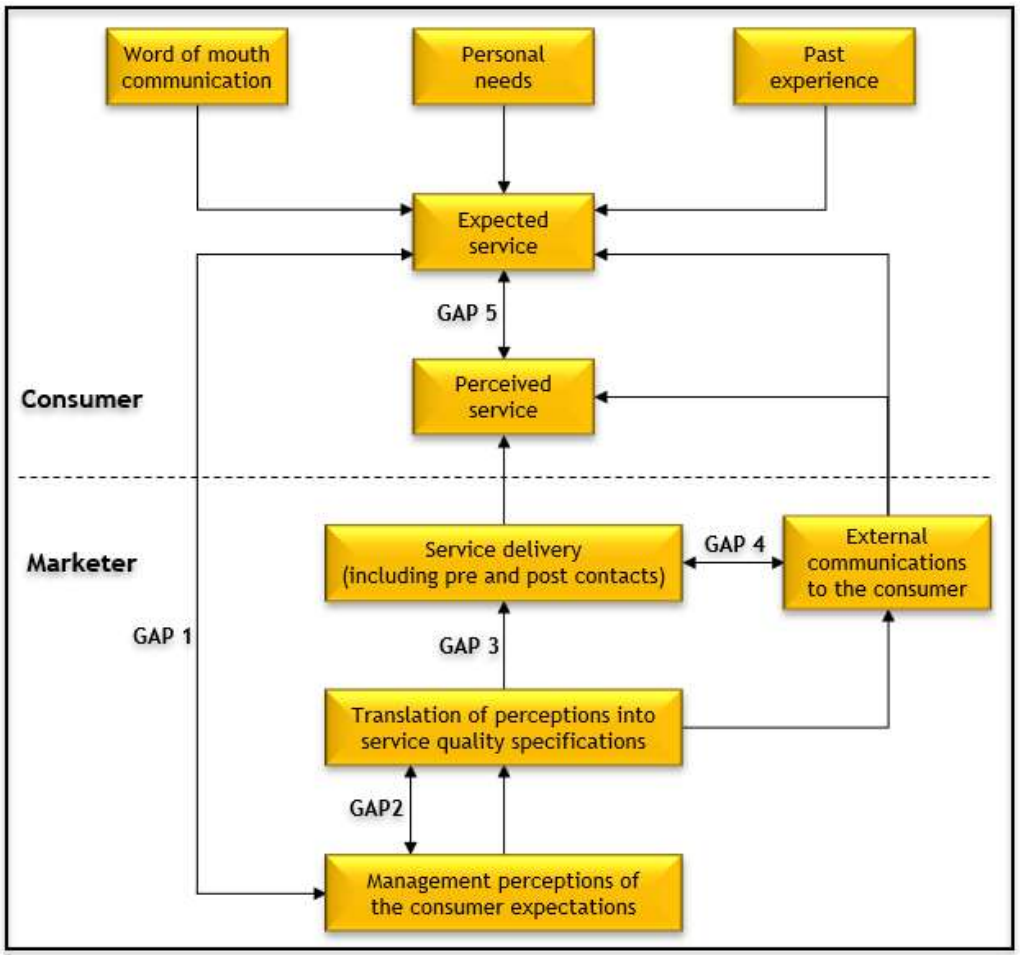

Source: Adapted from Parasuraman et al. (1985)

Figure 1. SERVQUAL model

2.2 Online Shopping on a Global Perspective

Online shopping has experienced substantial global growth in recent years. According to the estimates provided by Anon (2021), in the year 2023, over two billion people would have purchased goods or services online, with global e-retail sales exceeding $4.2 trillion dollars. By 2023, internet shopping would have accounted for 22% of all retail sales worldwide. Global online sales are estimated to surpass $6 trillion by 2024 (Anon, 2021). According to statistics provided by Sabanoglu (2020), there were 256 million internet shoppers in the United States in 2020. In Europe, there has also been an increase in online shopping. According to the Vietnam E-commerce Report, in 2015, 28% of the Vietnamese population engaged in online buying, with revenues reaching $4.07 billion USD, up 37% from 2014 (Pham et al., 2018). E-service quality dimensions are discussed the sections that follow.

2.3 E-service Quality Dimensions

2.3.1 Efficiency

Efficiency focuses on the speed and accuracy with which an online store delivers services to its customers (Frick & Matthies, 2020). Therefore, in addition to effective websites and other online shopping portals used by businesses to connect with customers, the provision of an efficient transportation system is crucial for ensuring customer satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The efficiency of a website is measured at three levels: pre-transaction, transaction, and post-transaction. This means that

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service delivery within the online store context begins when a customer visits a website that is always accessible to customers (Mtotywa & Kekana, 2023).

2.3.2 Fulfilment

According to Blut (2016), fulfilment activities involve ensuring that clients receive the exact products they request, as presented and described on the website. This includes delivering the correct product in good condition, at the agreed-upon price, and within a specified timeframe. Fulfilment is closely linked to one's ability to succeed in specific situations (Chuchu & Chuchu, 2016). This involves executing customer orders as promised, fulfilling the obligations of the online store, and meeting customer expectations regarding product and service delivery (Mtotywa & Kekana, 2023).

2.3.3 System Availability

Zehir and Narcıkara (2016) defined system availability as the accurate/proper technical functioning of a website. Similarly, Blut (2016) stated that system availability can be described as the functionality of a website from a technical perspective. According to Al-Nidawi et al. (2018), in this context, system availability refers to a website's legitimate and correct technical functioning, with all links working properly. According to the definitions provided, system availability refers to a website's capacity to perform properly from a technological perspective. Previous empirical studies have looked at system availability as a dimension of e-service quality to evaluate e-government service quality (Al-Nidawi et al., 2018) and the effects of e-service and e-recovery quality on value perception and loyalty intentions (Zehir & Narckara, 2016).

2.3.4 Privacy

Privacy is an individual’s desire to control or influence personal data about oneself (Bélanger & Crossler, 2011). Nasser et al. (2015) define privacy as the level to which customers are assured of the protection of their personal information and of the website's safety against intruders. Blut (2016) elucidated that privacy refers to the privacy of shared data and the security of financial payments, not just during but also after the sale.

2.3.5 Responsiveness

Responsiveness stands for a company’s reaction to customer requests (Chang, 2022). Responsiveness refers to an organization's willingness to provide prompt service to its customers and to go above and beyond to guarantee that their requests are handled efficiently and effectively (Hanks et al., 2017). Famiyeh et al. (2018) defined responsiveness as the ability of a business to perform a service within the appropriate time. The willingness of the business to solve customer problems as quickly as possible (Behdioglu et al., 2019).

2.3.6 Compensation

Zehir and Nareikara (2016) claim that compensation refers to the extent to which an organization is willing to go in order to compensate clients for problems they may encounter. Compensation is one of the solutions that can be employed to mitigate any bad reactions caused by the company's service faults (Yu et al., 2019). Ridwandono et al. (2020) state that compensation is used to measure the level at which a business can recover from service failure.

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2.3.7 Contact

Zehir and Narcikara (2016) defined contact as the availability of live assistance, which is instant from the business through the phone or online. Ridwandono et al. (2020) stated that contact is used to measure the level at which a business can recover from service failure. Carlson et al. (2018) concluded that contact is how a firm effectively and efficiently communicates with customers physically at the store or online.

2.3.8 Customer Satisfaction

According to Leninkumar (2017), customer satisfaction is influenced by customer experience after acquiring a product or using a service. Fernandes and Pedroso (2017) defined customer satisfaction as the extent to which a customer can derive positive or negative feelings from consumption. Awang et al. (2019) mentioned that customer satisfaction is how consumers feel after consuming a product or a service. An individual's satisfaction is a key driving force behind all behaviors (Venter de Villiers et al., 2020). Previous research has shown a link between client loyalty and customer satisfaction (Leninkumar, 2017).

2.3.9 Customer Loyalty

Leninkumar (2017) elucidated that customer loyalty is an unspoken pledge that consumers make to vendors to buy items and services over a set period of time, regardless of new offerings from competitors. Customer loyalty, according to the aforementioned definitions, is a consumer's commitment to acquire a specific good or service from a company on a regular basis. Previous research has investigated the relationship between customer trust and loyalty (Leninkumar, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020). Customer loyalty thus occurs when customers are satisfied with a service that has met their expectations (Naini et al., 2022).

2.3.10 Repurchase Intention

Mao and Lyu (2017) stated that repurchase intention is the likelihood of a client purchasing a good or service again in the future. According to the company, repurchase intention is the inclination of customers to buy goods or services from the same vendor on a regular basis (Ali, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2021). Repurchase intention is a customer's judgment on paying for a particular service from the same company. Based on this information, repurchase intention refers to consumers who would repeatedly purchase goods and services from the same retailer.

2.3.11 Word of Mouth Communication

According to Hung (2017), word-of-mouth refers to the transmission of knowledge from one person to another. Therefore, it plays a significant role in brand awareness (Itasari & Hastuti, 2023), influencing consumers' decisions to buy products. As a result, the antecedent of consumer evaluation is informal communication among customers regarding the attributes and usage of certain items and services. Word-of-mouth communication can also be conducted online and is known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Plidtookpai and Yoopetch (2021) claimed that electronic word of mouth is informal communication shared through Internet-based technology among consumers, and the information is mostly used by potential consumers. Deducing from the aforementioned information, word of mouth refers to information shared between consumers about the experience of a particular product or service.

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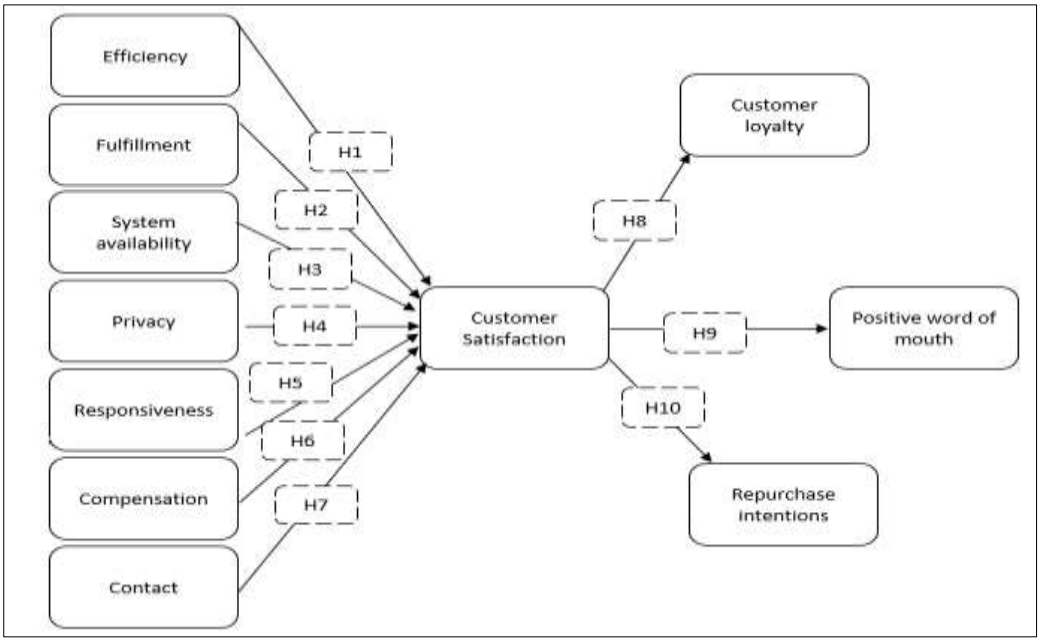
3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the interaction among e-service, customer satisfaction, and customer behavioral intention constructs. Thus, e-service is conceptualized as having an effect on customer satisfaction. In addition, this study hypothesized that customer satisfaction affects customer behavioral intention constructs, such as customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repurchase intentions. Figure 2 displays the conceptual model for the study.



Source: The authors (2023)

Figure 2. Conceptual model for the study

Based on the aforementioned empirical objectives and the undertones of the electronic service quality model and the theory of planned behavior, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1 : Efficiency has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H2 : Fulfilment has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H3 : System availability has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H4 : Privacy has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H5 : Responsiveness has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H6 : Compensation has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H7 : Contact has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction
H8 : Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty
H9 : Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on positive word of mouth
H10 : Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on repurchase intentions

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4. Methods

4.1 Participant

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the behavior of online consumers in the Mangaung Metropolitan District, which is situated within the Free State Province of South Africa. Non-probability sampling, a form of convenience sampling, was used in this study as the chosen sampling technique. This was due to the absence of a sampling frame for all possible participants. Data were collected over a period of five months, when 307 respondents provided feedback for the research. This timeframe allowed for a comprehensive examination of online consumer behavior, considering potential fluctuations or trends that might occur during this period.

4.2 Measurement

Data were obtained using a questionnaire based on descriptive statements and variables from the study's model. The variables under investigation were operationalized from previous studies, where a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used to obtain data from the respondents. The predictor variables, efficiency, fulfilment, compensation, system availability, and responsiveness, were adapted from Makanyeza and Chikazhe (2017), privacy taken from Blut (2016), and contact from Jeon and Joen (2017). The mediator variable, customer satisfaction, was taken from Rita et al. (2019), while all three outcome variables–customer loyalty, repurchase intentions, and word-of-mouth communication–were also taken from Rita et al. (2019). The measurement instruments are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement instrument of research

Codes	Items
Efficiency	
EF1	The online stores employees provide personal service and understand the needs of their customers.
EF2	Information from the website was helpful to make my purchase decisions unchallenging.
EF3	The operating system of the websites is easy to use.
EF4	The operating system of the websites is easy to use.
Fulfilment	
FUL1	The online store satisfies my needs adequately.
FUL2	The website is neatly designed and does not contain anything superfluous.
FUL3	Overall, the quality of the online retailer's order fulfilment is excellent.
FUL4	I am generally very satisfied with the order reliability.
System availability	
SA1	The website provided the exact service quality I expected or desired.
SA2	The website's service offerings matched its rating online.
SA3	When I use the website, there is very little waiting time between my actions and the website's response.
SA4	The website loads quickly.
Privacy	
PRI1	The website described complete information about the privacy policies of the website.

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Codes	Items
PRI2	My personal information is safe with this online company.
PRI3	I trust the website administrators will not misuse my personal information.
PRI4	It protects information about my web-shopping behavior.
PRI5	I feel safe in my transactions with the website.
Responsiveness	
RE1	Receive quick online assistance from the employees when needed.
RE2	Always online staffs are willing to solve customer problems.
RE3	Always the online employees keeps me informed as to when service will be performed.
RE4	Organization answers quickly when I call or write e-mail.
Compensation	
COM1	The online store meets my expectations.
COM2	The online store employees are consistently courteous with customers.
COM3	Organization picks up items I want to return with minimum hassle.
COM4	Organization compensates me for problems it creates.
Contact	
CON1	Overall, the services from the online helpdesk of this website were excellent in quality.
CON2	The employees of the online stores are available when needed.
CON3	My overall evaluation about staff's personal interaction is very positive
CON4	The online store's employees are trustworthy and honest.
Customer satisfaction	
CS1	I am pleased with the exchanges I make through online shopping platforms
CS2	I am happy to use online shopping platforms in South Africa
CS3	Buying goods online by means of the internet is generally very simple?
CS4	The online experience of most websites in South Africa are easy to use
Customer Loyalty	
CL1	Online shopping is my favourite method of shopping.
CL2	I am willing to maintain my relationship with South African online stores.
CL3	There is a high likelihood that I will shop online again.
CL4	There is a high likelihood that I will shop online again.
Repurchase intentions	
RI1	I am willing to buy from a South African online store again.
RI2	I intend to repurchase from South African online stores more often.
RI3	I intend to buy from South African online stores again.
RI4	I will increase purchases through online shopping.

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Codes	Items
Word-of-mouth communication	
WOM1	I give positive reviews about online shopping to others.
WOM2	I recommend online shopping to others.
WOM3	I would say to friends and relatives to choose online shopping over physical store shopping.
WOM4	I recommend this online shop to anyone who seeks my advice.

4.3 Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS version 27. The collected dataset underwent thorough data preparation, including addressing the missing data and managing outliers. The normality of the data distribution was assessed to meet the statistical test assumptions. The measurement scale ranged from -2 to 2 for Skewness and Kurtosis, as required for normality (Hair et al., 2010). Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, were then applied to understand the characteristics of the dataset. Regression analysis in SPSS was used to explore the relationships between the variables and investigate the predictors of online consumer behavior in the Mangaung Metropolitan District.

5. Findings

5.1 Respondent Characteristics

The sample profile is presented below, followed by reliability checks of the study's data. The sample comprised 307 respondents. Sex was evenly distributed, with males (173) and females (134) being split at almost 50%. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 39 years, as indicated by the two largest age groups, 18–29 and 30–39 years, accounting for over 80% of the sample. The age distribution was as follows: 18–29 (127), 30–39 (120), 40–49 (39), and 50 and older (21). The distribution of respondents' occupations was as follows: students (103), employed (109), unemployed (52), and entrepreneurs (43).

Table 2. Profile of the respondents

Category	%
Gender	
Male	56.4
Female	43.6
Age	
18-29	41.3
30-39	39.1
40-49	12.7
50 and older	6.9
Occupation	
Student	33.6
Employed	35.5
Unemployed	16.9
Entrepreneur	14.0

Based on this profile, it possible means that e-service quality is a topic of interest for these age groups and stands to benefit the most from such research. About one-third of the participants indicated that they were employed, with smaller percentages indicating that they were either entrepreneurs or unemployed at 14% and close to

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17%, respectively. Since the study's participants were predominantly employed and students, this could suggest that the findings are generally influenced by these two groups. Data reliability results are presented in Table 2.

5.2 Reliability Analysis

As shown in the Table 3, all constructs managed to reach the recommended threshold for the Cronbach's alpha test of 0.6, making the data suitable for further analysis. Further analysis was conducted in the form of regression to generate insights from the proposed relationships.

Table 3. Reliability analysis using cronbach alpha

Construct	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Efficiency	0.824
Fulfilment	0.709
System availability	0.745
Privacy	0.748
Responsiveness	0.709
Compensation	0.605
Contact	0.775
Customer satisfaction	0.755
Customer loyalty	0.767
Repurchase intention	0.640
Word of mouth communication	0.786

5.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the connection between independent and dependent variables. Table 4 shows that the adjusted R^2 value is 0.551. This suggests that customer satisfaction varies by approximately 56% depending on e-service quality aspects (efficiency, fulfilment, system availability, privacy, responsiveness, contact, and compensation). The remaining 44% were for other factors that were neither known nor investigated in this study.

Table 4. Regression analysis: e-service quality dimensions and life satisfaction

Independent variables	Dependent variable: customer satisfaction			Collinearity statistics	
	Beta	T	Significance	Tolerance	VIF
Efficiency	0.014	0.306	0.760	0.706	1.415
Fulfilment	0.019	0.375	0.708	0.547	1.829
System availability	-0.036	-0.652	0.515	0.484	2.064
Privacy	0.060	1.327	0.186	0.725	1.379
Responsiveness	-0.059	-1.430	0.154	0.864	1.157
Compensation	0.001	0.27	0.979	0.810	1.234
Contact	0.752	18.121	0.000	0.852	1.174

Note: R = 0.562; Adjusted R^2 = 0.551; F = 54.723; VIF: variance inflation factor.

Multiple regression was used to assess the predicted association between the e-service quality dimensions (efficiency, fulfilment, system availability, privacy, contact, and compensation) and customer satisfaction. According to various authors, for a relationship to be considered significant, the p-value should be equal to or less than 0.05 and the t-value should be above 1.96. The relationship between contact (β =0.752, t= 18.121, Sig< 0.001) and customer satisfaction was positive and significant.

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In contrast, the relationship between efficiency (β= 0.014, t= 0.306, Sig= 0.760), fulfilment (β= 0.019, t= 0.375, Sig= 0.708), privacy (β= 0.060, t= 1.327, Sig= 0.186), and compensation (β= 0.001, t= 0.027, Sig= 0.979) and customer satisfaction indicated a positive but insignificant relationship, as it did not meet the recommended threshold for significance. Lastly, the association between system availability (β= -0.036, t= -0.652, Sig= 0.515), responsiveness (β= -0.059, t= -1.430, Sig= 0.154), and customer satisfaction is negative and insignificant, as it does not meet the recommended benchmark for significance. Therefore, this study finds that contact has a statistically significant relationship with customer satisfaction. This implies that customers become satisfied with a service organization that provides platforms for communication. However, this study found that efficiency, fulfilment, privacy, and compensation do not have a statistically significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction. This means that efficiency, fulfilment, privacy, and compensation do not have a relationship with customer satisfaction. This study also found that system availability and responsiveness were not related to customer satisfaction.

5.4 Customer Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction

Table 5 shows that the adjusted R^2 (explanatory variable) was 0.341, indicating that customer loyalty explained approximately 34% of the variance in customer satisfaction. The remaining 66% were accounted for by other factors that were not examined in this study.

Table 5. Regression analysis: customer loyalty and customer satisfaction

Independent variable	Dependent variable: customer satisfaction			Collinearity statistics	
	Beta	T	Significance	Tolerance	VIF
Customer loyalty	0.586	12.616	0.001	1.000	1.000

Note: R = 0.343; Adjusted R^2 = 0.341; F = 159.160; VIF: variance inflation factor.

For a link to be considered significant, the p-value must be less than 0.5 and the t value must be greater than 1.96 (El-kerdany et al., 2017). Consequently, the predicted association between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (B= 0.586; t= 12.616; p= 0.001) appears to be positive and significant. This means that customer satisfaction is related to customer loyalty.

5.5 Word of Mouth Communication and Customer Satisfaction

Table 6 shows that the adjusted R^2 was 0.001, which denotes that employee satisfaction explained approximately 0.01% of the variance in life satisfaction. The remaining 99.99% is accounted for by other factors that were not examined in this study.

Table 6. Regression analysis: word of mouth communication and customer satisfaction

Independent variable	Dependent variable: customer satisfaction			Collinearity statistics	
	Beta	T	Significance	Tolerance	VIF
Word of mouth communication	0.062	1.076	0.283	1.000	1.000

Note: R = 0.004; Adjusted R^2 = 0.001; F = 1.159; VIF: variance inflation factor.

As a result, the proposed association between word-of-mouth communication and customer satisfaction (B=0.062; t=1.076; p=0.283) reveals a positive but insignificant

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relationship because it exceeded the recommended threshold (B=0.062; t=1.076; p=0.283). This implies that word-of-mouth communication did not have a relationship with customer satisfaction in the current study.

5.6 Repurchase Intention and Customer Satisfaction

Table 7 shows that the adjusted R^2 was 0.001, which denotes that employee satisfaction explained approximately 0.01% of the variance in life satisfaction. The remaining 99.99% is accounted for by other factors that were not examined in this study. The proposed association between repurchase intention and customer satisfaction (B=0.063; t=1.099; p=0.273) shows an insignificant positive relationship between these two variables. This means that customer satisfaction did not have a relationship with repurchase intention in this study. The following section presents a discussion of the results.

Table 7. Regression analysis: repurchase intention and customer satisfaction

Independent variable	Dependent variable: customer satisfaction			Collinearity statistics	
	Beta	T	Significance	Tolerance	VIF
Repurchase intention	0.063	1.099	0.273	1.000	1.000

Note: R = 0.004; Adjusted R^2 = 0.001; F = 1.208; VIF: variance inflation factor.

6. Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between various e-service quality parameters and customer satisfaction as well as their implications for online retail managers. First, this study identified a positive and significant relationship between customer contact and customer satisfaction. The association between contact and customer satisfaction is positive and significant, which means that the customer is highly satisfied with this dimension, and as better contact is established between the online retailer and customers, customer satisfaction increases significantly. These results mirror those of Firdous and Farooqi (2017), who found that contact had a significant positive association with customer satisfaction. This suggests that online retail managers should prioritize and enhance customer interaction to improve overall satisfaction. The results obtained in this study are consistent with those of Redda et al. (2017), Kusdibyo and Februadi (2019), and Rita et al. (2019), who also found a favorable connection between e-service quality parameters and customer happiness.

This result confirms the assumptions of the SERVQAL model and is supported by Uvet (2020), who established an association between contact and customer satisfaction. Customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are also found to be both supported and significant, and are supported by Dam and Dam (2021), who also found the same result. Mainardes and Freitas (2023) also find a positive and significant association between loyalty and satisfaction. Previous studies have confirmed that customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are directly related (Ahmed, 2022; Hayati et al., 2020; Boonlertvanich, 2019; Hamouda, 2019). Hence, the level of customer contentment or satisfaction with a product or service plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of an organization. This includes fostering positive customer encounters and emotions and fostering a sense of commitment and reliance on the service provider, thereby increasing the likelihood of customers recommending the organization to others. This underscores the connection between behavioral characteristics and the recurrence of service utilization.

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This study found that word-of-mouth communication and customer satisfaction are associated, as supported by Gunawan and Susanti (2021), based on the SERVQAL. This finding is consistent with several previous studies conducted in the context of higher learning institutions (Abdullahi & wan Yusoff, 2019; Lemy et al., 2019). This observation implies that higher learning institutions with customers who are highly satisfied with their service facilities will always be communicated positively by their actual customers, herein defined as students to other potential customers. Kazungu and Kubenea (2023) also discovered that the relationship between customer satisfaction and word of mouth is positive and significant. However, the contradiction between Gunawan and Susanti (2021) is that this relationship is not significant. Repurchase intention is a direct outcome of customer satisfaction, and this is endorsed by Fared et al. (2021), who found that repurchase intention and customer satisfaction are linked in e-service quality. In addition, these results are in accordance with the existing literature on marketing and consumer behavior, which has documented well-established empirical evidence on the link between customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Ashfaq et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019; Law, Zhang & Gow, 2022; Jain et al., 2021; Nasir et al., 2021). The results show that customers who were highly satisfied with the service were more likely to intend to repurchase the product or service. This means that higher levels of customer satisfaction are expected to increase the likelihood of repurchasing a product or service.

This study's findings present an interesting perspective on the factors influencing customer satisfaction in e-service quality. While efficiency, fulfilment, privacy, and compensation have a positive impact, they do not reach the level of statistical significance. This means that while these aspects are beneficial, they should not be the sole focus of online retail managers. Instead, they should prioritize enhancing customer interactions to increase customer satisfaction. In practice, this suggests a more comprehensive approach, in which these positive but less significant factors are integrated into a strategy that emphasizes meaningful and engaging customer experiences, ultimately leading to higher satisfaction in the online retail landscape.

Furthermore, the association between system availability and responsiveness to customer satisfaction is found to be negative and insignificant. This implies that customers do not perceive these factors as critical determinants of satisfaction. Online retail managers may need to investigate and improve their system availability and responsiveness but should prioritize other areas to enhance customer satisfaction. Interestingly, this study also revealed a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This finding supports that of Pour and Langroudi (2020), who indicated a strong link between customer loyalty and customer pleasure. Online retail managers should recognize that satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, making customer satisfaction a key driver of long-term success.

In summary, the study's findings underscore the paramount importance of customer interactions in bolstering customer satisfaction in the online retail sector. While factors such as efficiency, fulfilment, privacy, and compensation certainly hold relevance, their significance falls in comparison to the impact of meaningful customer interactions. Although system availability and responsiveness should not be overlooked, they did not exert a strong influence on overall satisfaction. Furthermore, this study highlights the critical ripple effect of customer satisfaction, as it positively correlates with customer loyalty, word-of-mouth communication, and repurchase intentions, underscoring its pivotal role in the success of online retail businesses. These insights provide invaluable guidance for digital marketing and online retail managers seeking to enhance e-service quality and customer satisfaction strategies in

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order to boost a company's financial performance. More specifically, this research could shed light on how e-service quality results in customer loyalty, repurchase intention and positive word of mouth within the context of online shopping which was the intended purpose of this study.

However, it is important to note that the study had certain limitations, such as the use of a non-probability sampling method, which may have introduced bias in participant selection and limited the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relied on self-reported data through structured questionnaires, which might have been subject to response bias or social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the results. Additionally, the research utilized a specific conceptual model, the SERVQAL model, which may not encompass all relevant variables, potentially excluding important factors influencing e-service quality in online shopping. Finally, the study's focus on the South African online shopping context might restrict the broader applicability of its findings to other regions or markets, given the potential differences in consumer behaviors and preferences across diverse cultural and economic contexts.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes by attempting to address the research problem of a better comprehension of consumers' perceptions of the quality of electronic services offered by online retailers. To this end, the research objectives were formulated to investigate the factors that would aid in explaining customer satisfaction in online shopping. The primary objective of establishing the e-service framework is to measure customer satisfaction from online shopping. The study found that online customer satisfaction depends on the level of electronic service quality.

This study focuses on consumers in the free-state region of the Mangaung Metropolitan District in South Africa. This study aims to understand how e-service quality characteristics impact customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The findings of this study can be used as marketing strategy guidelines for South African marketers and international advertisers targeting this demographic. Specifically, this study can help online firms understand how e-service quality characteristics influence customer satisfaction and drive consumer behavioral intentions. It is crucial for online merchants to ensure that their platforms provide a high level of electronic service quality to satisfy customers, foster loyalty, encourage positive word-of-mouth communication, and increase repurchase intentions.

8. Recommendation

The study's first restriction is that it only examined the electronic service aspects of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in the Bloemfontein district of South Africa; therefore, the sample size was limited. This limited the study's ability to generalize its findings to include only internet shoppers in Bloemfontein.

It may not be possible to generalize the findings of this study, even though it had a large sample due to the use of a single specific region. Perhaps if the data collection is broadened to include the electronic service dimensions of customer happiness and consumer behavioral intention in other parts of South Africa, far more interesting study findings will emerge. This study will help online retailers understand the importance of customer satisfaction and how to achieve it. One example is to ensure that the website or application is user friendly. However, both e-service quality and customer satisfaction are in tandem. This study will assist in better understanding

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how customer satisfaction leads to loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repurchase intention. Furthermore, the findings of this study were restricted to the Bloemfontein area. As such, future research should accommodate other regions to ensure that valuable information is obtained to develop appropriate marketing strategies and segment the markets. From a theoretical perspective, further research could investigate the potential hypotheses that were not tested in this study.

Therefore, this study indicates the ways in which general practitioners can achieve this by ensuring e-service quality and customer satisfaction. As such, future research should accommodate other regions to ensure that valuable information is obtained to develop appropriate marketing strategies and segment the markets. Contact as an e-service quality component had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction according to the findings of the study. Therefore, it is recommended that online retailers ensure that consumers receive assistance at the quickest convenience, as this is rated as very important by consumers. Retailers should ensure that their employees are well trained to provide live assistance to customers. Investment in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems will make it easy for consumers to always be able to receive the required assistance.

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