Research Paper

Perceived service quality effect on consumer attitude, consumer behaviour and retail sector performance

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Abstract: The current study sought to understand the effect of perceived service quality on consumer attitude and behaviour as well as on the performance of the retail sector. The study explores the mediating role of consumer behaviour on the relationship between perceived service quality and retail sector performance. A cross-sectional survey of 340 randomly selected managerial employees was carried out to gather data from the food retailer business in Harare, Zimbabwe. A structured questionnaire with Likert type questions was physically administered during the data collection process between May and June 2024. Results indicate that perceived service quality positively influences consumer attitude, consumer behaviour and retail sector performance. In addition, consumer attitude was found to have a positive effect on consumer behaviour with consumer behaviour positively impacting on retail sector performance. The results of the study indicate that consumer behaviour partially mediates the effect of perceived service quality on retail sector performance. The findings expand the existing literature in strategic and operational management by introducing behaviour as a mediator on the relationship between service quality and retail sector performance.

Keywords: consumer attitude, consumer behaviour, perceived service quality, retail sector performance, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Globally, retailers are bracing for conditions to worsen in the near term, with profitability taking a knock as a result of challenges partly related to service quality (Chikazhe et al., 2023), keeping up with ever-changing consumer expectations and the maintenance of consumer loyalty (Maumbe & Chikoko, 2022). In order for the retail industry to thrive, the sector must quickly adapt to evolving consumer shopping behaviours (Elgarhy, 2022). Most retailers in Zimbabwe are finding it difficult to move stocks as the market is flooded with roughly similar consumer goods from neighbouring Zambia, Botswana and South Africa. The quality of service has become the only differentiator in the retail business since products were almost similar in design and price (Chikazhe et al., 2024).

To date, retail organisations which are capable of delivering superior service quality, e.g. Chicken Inn, Engen and Total among others, are the only ones guaranteed to stay in business (Chikazhe et al., 2023). Those retailers that fail to improve their service delivery levels continue to suffer and they are on the verge of collapse (Elgarhy, 2022). Thus, service quality is proving to be a cornerstone for every retail business (Mehralian & Khazaee, 2022). As part of its survival strategy, the global retail industry needs to aspire towards the provision of superior service quality. Retail businesses that prioritise superior service quality continue to enjoy a competitive advantage (Mharidzo et al., 2022). Also, organisations that continue to embrace contemporary service quality strategies and pay attention to service quality effects like consumer attitude and behaviour continue to outperform competitors (Gaura et al., 2021).

Paying close attention to service quality results in positive consumer attitude and behaviour and this also contributes to business growth (Chikazhe et al., 2021). Since the global retail industry has become very competitive, successful businesses now increasingly depend on the solid understanding of consumers' behaviour and attitude (Murambi & Chivivi,

2022). Retail consumers' behaviour and attitude are directly influenced by superior service quality.

The retail sector in Zimbabwe has not been spared by the service quality call as it is not performing well (Maumbe & Chikoko, 2022; Murambi & Chivivi, 2022; Chada et al., 2022). The Zimbabwean retail market is characterised by fierce competition. Zimbabwe is still primarily a cash economy, with the retail sector deriving the majority of its income from cash transactions (Mutaurwa et al., 2024). Because most products are imported, many grocery shops have meagre profits and a high-volume business model. These comprise a variety of retail sales and shop kinds, such as department stores, independent retailers, discount stores, grocery, convenience, and speciality stores (Maumbe & Chikoko, 2022). Major players on the market include operators like OK Mart, PICKnPAY, Farm and City, Edgars Stores, Chicken Inn, Engen and Total among others. The influx of retail products on the market, like groceries from neighbouring countries, has posed a challenge to the Zimbabwean retail industry as products with almost similar prices are dominating the market (Mutaurwa et al., 2024). This has triggered a behaviour and attitude change for consumers, which resulted in switching suppliers. Life has become difficult for retail businesses that ignore service quality calls. Retail consumers' continuous switching between suppliers is resulting in certain businesses booming whereas others have since been elbowed out of the market.

Several studies have been conducted elsewhere to address service quality, consumer behaviour and organisational performance challenges (Amin et al., 2017; Chikazhe et al., 2021). However, none of the earlier studies focused on monitoring consumer attitude and behaviour in the context of service quality and business performance, especially with respect to the retail sector of an emerging market like Zimbabwe. Thus, the current study sought to close this knowledge gap in the literature by establishing the influence of perceived service quality on consumer attitude and behaviour. Moreover, the current study sought to understand the mediating role of consumer behaviour on the relationship between perceived service quality and retail sector performance. The current study aimed to achieve this by responding to these questions: 1) What is the effect of perceived service quality on retail sector performance, consumer attitude and behaviour?; 2) How does consumer attitude result in consumer behaviour?; 3) What is the influence of consumer behaviour to the retail sector performance?; and lastly 4) What role is played by consumer behaviour in mediating the relationship between perceived service quality and the performance of the retail sector?

2. Literature review

The research was founded on Gronroos' (1982) Technical and Functional Quality paradigm. A business must comprehend how consumers see quality and how service quality is impacted in order to compete successfully (Seth et al., 2005). So that consumers can be satisfied, managing perceived service quality requires the aligning of perceived and expected levels of service (Seth et al., 2005).

2.1 Retail sector performance

Business performance is organisational effectiveness generating and providing value to the firm's internal and external consumers (Mehralian & Khazaee, 2022). Performance in management refers to the accomplishment of organizational goals and the encouragement of organizational effectiveness through others, or the power of a team (Chigunhah et al., 2020; Elgarhy, 2022). Business performance is demonstrated by the amount of revenue, profit, or wealth it produces for the shareholders or owners over a specific time period (Mwandifura et al., 2023). One of the most important elements that determine whether an organisation succeeds or fails is performance (Mharidzo et al., 2022).

Corporate behavioural activities – such as luring in new clients with specific services, achieving anticipated growth and market share, and making sure that such behaviours could support organisational performance – all have an impact on performance (Maumbe & Chikoko, 2022; Chada et al., 2022). A company with more advanced technological equipment, goods, and services will generally exhibit more noteworthy organisational performance (Mehralian & Khazaee, 2022). Excellent service quality, according to Mwandifura et al. (2023), is the primary driver of an enterprise's improved organisational performance in

a globalised market. In other words, offering high-quality services gives an organisation a competitive advantage (Murambi & Chivivi, 2022). In addition to increasing an organisation's revenue, outstanding service quality also results in excellent organisational performance (Chigunhah et al., 2020).

2.2 Perceived service quality

The degree to which a service satisfies its consumer's demands or expectations is referred to as service quality (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022). Service quality, as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988), is an attitude that may be linked to satisfaction and is the outcome of a comparison between expectations and performance judgements. Essentially, service quality refers to how consumers perceive entire service excellence, with a focus on the client experience throughout service delivery (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Consumer impression of service quality surpasses cognitive evaluation since it arises during the creation, distribution, and consumption of services rather than merely at the consumption stage (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022). From the standpoint of the consumer, service quality includes both what the consumer expects and how the consumer is treated (Gaura et al., 2021). Consumer behavioural intentions, such as switching behaviour, are related to service quality judgments (Moghavvemi et al., 2018).

2.3 Consumer Attitude

An attitude is defined as inner feelings that reveal whether a consumer likes or dislikes something, for example, a brand or service (Chikazhe et al., 2024). Furthermore, attitude is anything that stimulates the tendency to respond in a positive or negative way toward something (Nthullih et al., 2020). Consumer attitude is described by Ekasari and Jaya (2021) as a taught reaction that relates to the assessment of one's concept. Additionally, attitude refers to how much someone thinks favourably or negatively about the behaviour in question (Mathur et al., 2021). On the other hand, Makanyeza and Du Toit (2017) contend that a person's attitude affects how they behave.

Attitude is a key predictor of the intention to adopt a behaviour (King & So, 2015). Individual attitudes affect how people decide on what actions to take, whom to approach or avoid, and even what things to purchase, all of which are frequently quick and simple choices (Derek et al., 2022). Marketers need to be aware of consumers' attitudes in a variety of contexts in order to develop methods for influencing those sentiments in favour of the goods or services that are being sold (Mathur et al., 2021). Additionally, attitudes influence decision-making by consumers (Bansal et al., 2022; Chambon et al., 2022).

2.4 Consumer Behaviour

Purchaser behaviour is the search for, acquisition of, utilisation of, comparison with, and rejection of goods and services (Mehta et al., 2020). Consumer behaviour refers to actions taken by people or organizations in search of, purchase, use, compare, and reject services and goods to satisfy their needs (Di Crosta et al., 2021; Nyagadza et al., 2021). Also, consumer behaviour is the study of the methods people and companies use to choose, buy, utilise, or discard products, services, ideas, or reports in order to meet their requirements and objectives.

Consumer behaviour is described as the conduct of consumers demonstrated in looking for, buying, utilising, assessing, and dismissing services and items that they feel will fulfil their wish (Nthullih et al., 2020). Consumer behaviour determines how people, organizations, and businesses select, acquire, use, and discard goods, services, viewpoints, or opinions to satiate their needs and desires (Derek et al., 2022). Consumer behaviour generates a strong imperative around which services, products, and strategy are developed in the majority of firms (Mehta et al., 2020). While staying bound by consumer behaviour and behavioural options, retailers ought to identify strategic assets that enable them to generate efficiency and differentiation (Di Crosta et al., 2021; Ayalew & Andualem, 2023).

2.5 Development of research hypotheses and research model

The literature confirms that service quality directly influences organizations' success (Boulifa et al., 2022; El-Borsaly & Hassan, 2020). Yingfei et al. (2022) studied the service quality effect on firm performance: it has been demonstrated that service excellence and business performance are strongly correlated. Additionally, Sultan and Wong (2019) looked at how behavior, image, and performance are affected by perceived service quality: the investigation came to the conclusion that all three variables are directly related. Similar to this, Akbari et al. (2020) looked into how service quality affected the success of businesses: the findings showed that a firm's service quality has an impact on organizational performance. Consequently, it is proposed that:

H1: Perceived service quality positively affects retail sector performance

According to the literature, service quality and consumer attitude are positively correlated (Makanyeza & Du Toit, 2017; Chambon et al., 2022). Zarei et al. (2019) examined the effect of service quality on consumer attitude. The findings indicate that consumer attitude is significantly impacted by service quality. In their study, Mbete and Tanamal (2020) proposed variables that influence consumer behaviour: the study's findings show that service quality is among those variables that influence consumer attitude. Similar research was conducted by Chetioui et al. (2021) to determine what influences consumers' attitudes toward internet buying. Findings confirm that the quality of service is among the factors that explain consumer attitude. Considering the preceding debate, it can be hypothesised that:

H2: Perceived service quality has a positive effect on consumer attitude

Higueras-Castillo et al. (2019) evaluated consumer perceptions about electric vehicles. The results of the study demonstrate how important consumer attitudes result in change of behaviour, which affects business performance. Additionally, Wu et al. (2020) conducted a study to comprehend consumer attitude on the sales of connected, autonomous, and electric automobiles. It was concluded that consumer attitude influences manifestation into action (behaviour). Furthermore, Gaber et al. (2019) tested the effect of consumers' attitudes towards performance of organisational brands. One of the conclusions of this study was that consumer attitude plays a role in influencing behaviour and the adoption of organisational brands. As a result, it is proposed that:

H3: Consumer attitudes positively affect consumer behaviour

Consumer's behavioural intents, such as switching propensity, are related to service quality judgments (Moghavvemi et al., 2018). Thus, total service quality is an important element in determining repeat business. Consumers routinely compare the calibre of services and will not think twice about switching service providers. Consumer happiness and, as a result, consumer purchasing behaviour are directly impacted by service quality. Additionally, prior studies (Dwaikat et al., 2019; Rajput and Gahfoor, 2020) have shown a connection between consumer satisfaction and behavioural intentions indicating that pleased consumers have favourable behavioural intentions. According to a similar study by Slack et al. (2021), satisfied consumers are more likely to stick with the current service provider, take part in good word-of-mouth marketing, and are less inclined to change service providers. According to Sulaiman and Haron (2013), readiness to suggest is immediately and favourably impacted by consumer satisfaction. Using these prior studies as a foundation, it is hypothesised:

H4: Perceived service quality positively affects consumer behaviour

Gordon et al. (2021) studied the determinants of firm performance. Consumer behaviour was among the factors that were found to influence firm performance. Similar research was conducted in Thailand by Charoensukmongkol (2022), who looked at how consumer behaviour affected the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. The findings of the study support a positive relationship between consumer behaviour and firm performance. In India, Jain (2022) studied consumer behaviour and strategy. The study concluded that business performance has much to do with consumer behaviour. In light of this, it is conceivable to suggest that:

H5: Consumer behaviour positively affects retail sector performance

Previous studies confirm direct relationships among perceived service quality, firm performance and consumer behaviour (Boulifa et al., 2022; El-Borsaly & Hassan, 2020; Yingfei et al., 2022, Makanyeza & Du Toit, 2017; Zarei et al., 2019). Also, direct relationships among perceived service quality, firm performance and consumer attitude have been identified (Charoensukmongkol, 2022; Dwaikat et al., 2019; Gordon et al., 2021; Higueras-Castillo et al., 2019; Jain, 2022, Moghavvemi et al., 2018, Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Wu et al., 2020). However, none of the studies considered behaviour as mediators of the effect perceived service quality has on firm performance. This makes the current study unique and forms the research gap paving the way for fresh insights within retail business operations, marketing, and the body of management knowledge. Given the above, it can be proposed that:

H6: Consumer behaviour mediates the effect of perceived service quality on firm performance

Based on the preceding concepts, the following conceptual framework is provided in Figure 1:
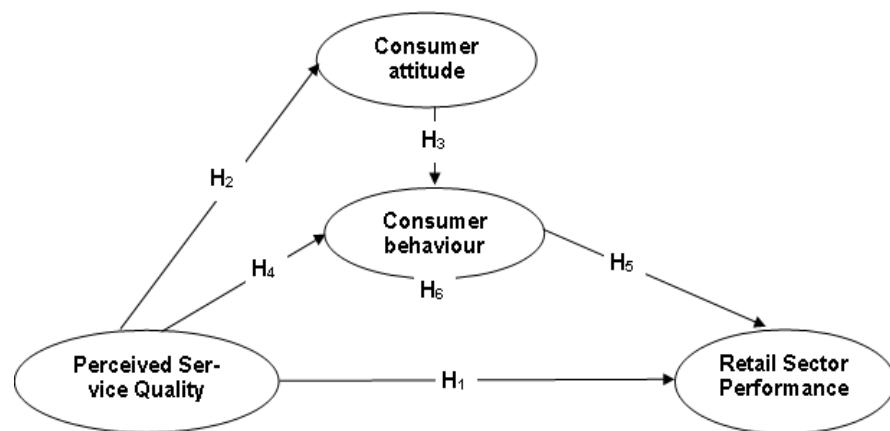

Figure 1: Conceptual framework. Source: Authors' own

There is no empirical support in the current research on consumer behaviour as a mediator of the link between perceived service quality and retail sector performance. As a result, the research model presented in Figure 1 is recommended. Figure 1 illustrates how perceived service quality affects the success of the retail sector. According to the suggested model, consumer attitudes, consumer behaviour and the performance of the retail sector are influenced by perceived service quality.

3. Methodology

The study technique is concerned with questionnaire design and measurement, as well as sampling and data collection procedures. The study's target audience were managerial employees within the food retail in Mash West Province, Zimbabwe. Chinhoyi was chosen since it is home to many retailers that represent the whole country (Zimbabwe). Managerial employees of food retailers were chosen as the study's target audience based on their experiences with food retailers' service quality. A cross-sectional survey was used to obtain data from 340 participants during the period between May and June 2024. Respondents were randomly selected from among big retailers like Pick n Pay, OK Stores, NRichards, Metro Peech and Farm and City within the central business district of Chinhoyi.

3.1 Design and measurement of questionnaires

A two-phase measurement development approach was used by the researchers to choose the measurements of the designated variables for the study model. First, a survey of the literature was done to find current measurements of factors that have been studied or

recommended by previous research (Hooper et al., 2008). Secondly, a group of specialists from academia with more than five years of retail management expertise was contacted by the researchers. Some of the items were borrowed and modified to meet the needs of this investigation.

The survey instrument had five sections: perceived service quality (PSQ), consumer attitudes (CoA), consumer behaviour (CoB), retail sector performance (RSP), and demographics. All items within each construct were scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 1 shows the items and sources for the questionnaire.

Table 1. Questionnaire items and sources. *Source: Authors' own*

Code	Perceived Service Quality	Sources
PSQ1	The organisation delivers superior service quality	Chikazhe & Makanyeza 2022; Gaura et al., 2021
PSQ2	The company promptly responds to consumer needs	
PSQ3	The behaviour of employees builds consumer confidence	
PSQ4	The employees are easily approachable	
PSQ5	The company's visual appearance is excellent	
	Consumer Behaviour	Sources
CoB1	Consumers search for goods or services from where they get expected service	
CoB2	Consumers purchase from reputable retailers	
CoB3	Consumers compare products or services before purchasing	Derek et al., 2022; Mehta et al., 2020
CoB4	Consumers reject products if they are not satisfied with the retailer's quality of service	
CoB5	Consumers have a positive behavioural intention towards retailers that provide superior service quality	
	Consumer Attitudes	Sources
CoA1	Consumers enjoy doing business with visually appealing companies	
CoA2	Value expression coupled with attitude function drives consumers to purchase high-status products and service	
CoA3	Individual knowledge and opinions on a selected few goods or services have an impact on consumers' intentions to make purchase	Mathur et al., 2021 Mehralian & Khazaee, 2022
CoA4	Consumers talk more about a firm's products and the supplier when they are satisfied	
CoA5	Consumers buy products associated with superior service quality	
	Retail Sector Performance	Sources
RSP1	Employee productivity is significantly higher than the average for the industry	
RSP2	For the past year, the firm has been making profit	Chada et al., 2022; Maumbe & Chikoko, 2022
RSP3	In comparison with the retail industry, the average sales are higher	
RSP4	The organisation achieves set targets	
RSP5	The number of consumer complaints continue to decrease	

A pilot test was conducted using a structured questionnaire before it was physically administered for the data collection process. The instrument was refined after the pilot test to improve its reliability and validity.

3.2 Scale validation

Data were validated through exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, convergent validity, and discriminant validity prior to testing research hypotheses. The analysis was

carried out using AMOS® version 21 and SPSS® version 21. Robust evaluations need high-quality data, which is facilitated by the use of well-designed and validated scales.

3.3 Sampling adequacy

As a first step before conducting tests such as exploratory factor analysis, Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity (BTS) are performed, which mathematical checks used to determine the sufficiency of the study sample and the suitability of the data (Chan & Idris, 2017). Additionally, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy shows how much of the variance in your variables might be due to underlying causes. High numbers (around 1.0) typically suggest that the data used can benefit from a factor analysis. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was performed using SPSS® version 21.

3.4 Data Analysis

Before employing the related variables for further research, exploratory factor analysis was used to refine and limit their number to a more manageable and constrained amount. Researchers are advised by Chan and Idris (2017) to conduct an exploratory factor analysis as part of scale validation at the start of data analysis. The benefit of using exploratory factor analysis is that this helps those researchers who are unaware of how many factors affect the ways a set of things interact. Also, the primary goal of factor analysis is to comprehend the structure of a latent variable and create a questionnaire to measure it. Exploratory factor analysis can be used to understand item structures of variables and to determine which items actually measured the underlying constructs within the questionnaire.

4. Results

The net sample amounted to 340 participants. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the sample used in the current study.

Table 2. Demographic breakdown of the sample. *Source: Authors' own*

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	200	58.8
Female	140	41.2
Other	-	-
Age		
Less than 30	68	20.0
30 to 39	130	38.2
40 to 49	108	31.8
60 and above	34	10.0
Respondents work experience		
Less than one year	82	24
1 to 5 years	187	55
6 to 10 years	51	15
More than 10 years	20	6
Level of education		
Below diploma level	75	22.1
First degree	125	36.8
Master's degree level	87	25.6
Post graduate level	53	15.6

Statistics in Table 2 indicate that there are slightly more (58%) male managerial employees in Zimbabwe's retail sector. Women's contribution is close to that of males maybe because of the nature of the work within the sector, which accommodates more women. The majority (70%) of managerial employees within Zimbabwe's retail sector are aged between 30-49 years. Concerning work experience, the majority (76%) of managerial employees that

participated in study had enough experience i.e. they had worked for more than one year. Thus, data were gathered from those respondents who had knowledge of what was taking place within the sector. Hence, this work relies on their contributions. Also, the majority of respondents (78%) had a qualification level of a first degree or above and this shows that managerial employees for the retail sector in Zimbabwe were educated enough to understand the requirements of the study instrument.

The Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was performed using SPSS® version 21. The outcomes are shown in Table 3:

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test. Source: Authors' own

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.951
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	335.418
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

The results in Table 3 indicate that the sample was sufficient (0.951) and significant at p<0.00, which enables the use of exploratory factor analysis (Hooper et al., 2008). Measurement model fit indices, reliability, standardised factor loadings, critical ratios, and average variance extracted (AVE) were taken into account while convergent validity was assessed. In other words, standardised factor loading measures how closely this value relates to a certain factor (Chan & Idris, 2017). The idea behind the factor analysis approach is often to decrease the need for the collection of variables in a dataset through using the knowledge of the interdependencies between observed variables. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which ranges from 0-1. Favourable results from the Cronbach's alpha scale are those closer to 1. The dependability of a composite scale, which consists of many items or sub-scales intended to assess a single underlying concept, is measured by its composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha and the composite dependability value ought to be higher than 0.7 (Kołodziej-Zaleska et al., 2023). Critical ratio is an index used to determine how much a task is on schedule. To determine how significant the difference between a sample mean and a hypothetical population mean is, one might utilise the critical ratio. Its purpose is to ascertain if a sample is representative of a population with a certain mean (Hooper et al., 2008). Average variance extracted (AVE) is a statistical term used in classical test theory: it quantifies the amount of variation collected by a construct relative to the amount of variation caused by measurement error (Kołodziej-Zaleska et al., 2023). Through the maintenance of unique and well-defined constructions, AVE adds to the overall robustness of the structural equation modelling process as well as improving dependability.

The findings in Table 4 demonstrate that measurement model fit indices result in a minimal convergent validity requirement.

Table 4: Measurement model fit indices. Source: Authors' own

Fit indices	Measurement model	Recommended values	Sources
χ^2/DF	1.85	≤3.000	Chan & Idris, 2017;
GFI	0.898	>0.900	
AGFI	0.899	>0.900	Hooper et al., 2008
NFI	0.905	>0.900	
TLI	0.922	>0.900	
CFI	0.908	>0.900	
RMSEA	0.039	<0.080	

The measurement model shows a good fit as the value for χ^2/DF fell between 0 and 5, with lower values implying better fit (Hooper et al., 2008). Furthermore, the Goodness of fit index (GFI), Adjusted GFI (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative fit index (CFI) and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were considered in determining the measurement model fit indices. Values were all greater than 0.8, with good fit falling closer to 1 (Hooper et al., 2008). Additionally, RMSEA results were between the recommended range of 0.05 and 0.10 (Chan & Idris, 2017). Table 5 presents results for Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliabilities (CRel), standardized factor loadings

(λ), critical ratios (CRs) and individual item reliabilities (IIRs) obtained when measuring convergent validity.

Table 5. Constructs, standardised factor loadings, individual item reliabilities, critical ratios, Cronbach's alpha reliability and composite reliability. *Source: Authors' own*

Construct	Standardised factor loading	Individual item reliability	Critical ratios	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Perceived service quality					
PSQ1	.637	.734	-	.769	.785
PSQ2	.853	.801	12.3652***		
PSQ3	.550	.733	7.124***		
PSQ4	.789	.741	9.785***		
PSQ5	.806	.756	11.014***		
Consumer behaviour					
CoB1	.652	.741	-	.776	.791
CoB2	.829	.763	13.325***		
CoB3	.652	.754	9.754***		
CoB4	.747	.804	9.369***		
CoB5	.701	.709	12.451***		
Consumer attitude					
CoA1	.748	.715	-	.874	.786
CoA2	.784	.766	19.324***		
CoA3	.685	.724	12.451***		
CoA4	.845	.884	8.697***		
CoA5	.624	.802	9.456***		
Retail Sector performance					
RSP1	.690	.701	-	.705	.834
RSP2	.675	.725	20.124***		
RSP3	.788	.811	14.158***		
RSP4	.840	.700	9.645***		
RSP5	.744	.731	11.258***		

Note: CR is fixed; ***significant at p < 0.001

Kuo and Ye (2009) recommend that every construct should show composite reliabilities and a Cronbach's alpha (α) with a cut-off point above 0.7. Furthermore, standardised factor loadings (λ) for every item were higher than the recommended 0.7 cut-off mark. At p<0.001, critical ratios are appropriately big and significant. Additionally, each individual item's reliabilities should be at least 0.5. The AVEs of every construct have to be greater than 0.6 (Chan & Idris, 2017). Considering all the preceding recommendations, results in Table 5 were satisfactory since minimum conditions were met.

The findings in Table 6 demonstrate that the requirement for discriminant validity was satisfied. All AVEs (diagonal elements) were higher than the squared correlations between constructs (Kołodziej-Zaleska et al., 2023).

Table 6. Average variance extracted and squared inter-construct correlations. *Source: Authors' own*

Construct	PSQ	CoB	CoA	RSP
Perceived service quality (PSQ)	**.694**			
Consumer behaviour (CoB)	.236	**.702**		
Consumer attitude (CoA)	.331	.297	**.713**	
Retail Sector performance (RSP)	.341	.326	.293	**.749**

Note: diagonal elements represent average variance extracted

Hypotheses1-5 were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS. Model fit indices (χ2/DF = 3.01; GFI = .893; AGFI = .912; NFI = .863; TLI = .882; CFI = .879; RMSEA = 0.38) were acceptable (Newsom, 2020). Results for H1-5 are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Structural Model Results (H1 – H5). *Source: Authors' own*

Hypothesis	Hypothesised Relationship			SRW	CR	Remark
H$_1$	PSQ	→	RSP	0.325	9.674***	Supported
H$_2$	PSQ	→	CoA	0.296	12.250***	Supported
H$_3$	CoA	→	CoB	0.238	15.398***	Supported
H$_4$	PSQ	→	CoB	0.302	21.475***	Supported
H$_5$	CoB	→	RSP	0.339	31.251***	Supported

Notes: SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, *** significant at p < 0.001

With the help of AMOS 21's structural equation modelling, the relationships between the independent and dependent variables were looked at. The hypothesised correlations (H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5) were investigated using the structural equation modelling approach. Because structural equation modelling can show linkages and can also reveal whether the study model and observed data are generally consistent, it was chosen as the method of analysis. All of the hypothesized correlations are supported, as shown in Table 7, because both the critical ratios and the standardized regression weight had respectable margins. Results indicate that perceived service quality positively influences consumer attitude, consumer behaviour and retail sector performance. Thus, H1, H2 and H4 were all supported. Also, consumer attitude has a positive effect on consumer behaviour whilst consumer behaviour positively impacts retail sector performance. Hence, H3 and H5 were both supported.

H6 was tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS. Model fit indices (χ2/DF = 4.11; GFI = .930; AGFI = .891; NFI = .903; TLI = .874; CFI = .919; RMSEA = 0.40) were acceptable (Newsom, 2020). Results for H6 are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of hypotheses test (H6). *Source: Authors' own*

Hypothesis	Path	Description	Path Coefficient	Comment
H$_6$	PSQ → CoB → RSP	CoB partially mediates the effect of PSQ on RSP	0.315***	Partial mediation

The results in Table 8 show that CoB partially mediates the effect of PSQ on RSP. The relationship was partially mediated since PSQ had a direct relationship with RSP although CoB (mediator) shows direct relationships with both variables as indicated by a strong path coefficient (0.315 at p<001). Therefore, H6 was supported.

5. Discussion

The study's goal was to determine how perceived service quality influences consumer attitude and behaviour, which impacts the performance of the retail industry. To determine whether there were any direct correlations between the study's variables, hypotheses tests were first carried out. Firstly, it was investigated whether perceived service quality and business performance were related. The study findings indicate that perceived service quality influences firm performance. This implies that management should ensure that their firms deliver superior service quality. Also, management should consider organisational culture as they work towards improving service quality. Cultural considerations have a significant impact on business. Culture affects the best way to manage people according to their objectives and values. The functional domains of distribution, sales, and marketing are also impacted. The results support the literature, which writes about similar relationships between the influence of service quality and consumer attitude and behaviour (Boulifa et al., 2022; Chambon et al., 2022; Gaber et al., 2019; Moghavvemi et al., 2018). Moreover, the study findings support related studies by Utama et al. (2024) and Feng et al. (2021), which show that service quality positively influences strategic alliance formation, which then enhances business performance and sustainability.

Also, investigations were completed to find out how perceived service quality affects consumer attitudes. The results confirm that consumer attitude is influenced by perceived service quality. This suggests that the retail sector should deliver expected service quality so that consumers develop a positive attitude towards their products or the services on offer. This result corroborates with the results of Zia (2022) and Tran (2020), who concluded that these is a linear relationship of service quality, satisfaction and attitude. Also, companies can utilise consumer attitudes to pinpoint their target market and set themselves out from the competition (Makanyeza & Du Toit, 2017; Chambon et al., 2022). Additionally, this may assist a company in maintaining client satisfaction and tailoring its marketing efforts.

Additionally, the relationship between consumer behaviour and perceived service quality was investigated. It was found out that perceived service quality positively affects consumer behaviour. Thus, businesses within the retail sector should seriously consider offering superior service quality since this results in a positive behaviour by consumers towards the firm's offerings. Furthermore, the study sought to understand the effect of consumer attitude on consumer behaviour. The finding indicates that consumer behaviour is a product of consumer attitude. Hence, perceptions and emotions regarding goods and services shape preferences, decisions about what to buy, and brand loyalty, all of which are influenced by consumer attitudes (Gaber et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020). The results agree with Tuncer et al. (2021), who have found that consumer attitude results in change of behaviour.

Furthermore, the study investigated the effect of consumer behaviour on firm performance. It was concluded that consumer behaviour influences firm performance. Results are in line with Barari et al. (2021), who settled for direct and positive relationships among attitudinal engagement – loyalty and behavioural engagement – and firm performance. This also suggests that firms in the retail sector ought to ensure a positive attitude and behaviour by their consumers since this plays a key role in business growth. Moreover, comprehending customer purchasing behaviour is essential for marketers, since it illuminates the reasons behind consumers' purchases (Charoensukmongkol, 2022, Gordon et al., 2021; Jain, 2022). As a result, marketers will be better able to identify which of their initiatives are most successful and allocate their marketing budget more precisely for going forward and boosting return on investment.

The study examined how consumer behaviour affected the relationship between perceived service quality and firm performance. The study found that consumer behaviour partially mediates the effect of perceived service quality on the performance of the retail sector. Thus, firms are encouraged to improve the link between perceived service quality and retail sector success. Retail managers ought to consider all the three variables (perceived service quality, consumer attitude and consumer behaviour) concurrently when working towards improving organisational performance rather than treating these variables as individual influencers.

Overall, the study's findings confirmed the results of prior scholars, supported the literature and added a new dimension through establishing the mediating role played by consumer behaviour.

6. Implications

The study was underpinned by Gronroos' (1982) Technical and Functional Quality model, which states that a successful company should understand how consumers perceive quality and how service quality is affected by this. Moreover, the above model indicates that firms should align the perceived and expected levels of service. The current study concluded that service quality level should be raised so as to achieve positive consumer attitude and behaviour. This implies that if a retail firm aligns service delivery, positive consumer attitude and behaviour are achieved, and this results in the growth of business. Thus, the study results validate Gronroos' (1982) Technical and Functional Quality model.

This study discovered a connection between perceived service quality and retail business performance. This finding corroborates the works of earlier researcher (Gordon et al., 2021; Elgarhy, 2022; Le, 2022; Maumbe & Chikoko, 2022). This research contributes to our knowledge of how perceived service quality and company success are related. The current study confirmed positive relationships between perceived service quality and consumer attitude, between perceived service quality and consumer behaviour, between

consumer attitude and firm performance, and between consumer behaviour and firm performance. Thus, the study findings support prior studies (Gaber et al., 2019; Gordon et al., 2021; Jain, 2022; Mbete & Tanamal, 2020; Moghavvemi et al., 2018; Slack et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020; Zarei et al., 2019), which settled for almost similar results. This study shows that perceived service quality, consumer attitude and consumer behaviour are all critical factors that influence retail sector performance in the retail sector environment.

In the business management literature, despite the recognition that the improvement of service quality increases firm performance (Akbari et al., 2020; Boulifa et al., 2022; El-Borsaly & Hassan, 2020; Sultan & Wong, 2019; Yingfei et al., 2022), other factors should be included to reinforce this relationship even more. Additionally, there is a dearth of information in the currently available literature on studies that have examined how consumer behaviour and attitude may mediate the link between service quality and retail performance. The investigation detailed in this paper was carried out to fill this informational gap.

For practitioners, retailers are encouraged to re-strategize and address issues to do with service quality to increase the performance of firms in the retail sector industry so that positive consumer attitudes and behaviours can be created. Therefore, management is advised to take into account a combination of these elements as predictors of retail company success rather than considering service quality, consumer attitude, and consumer behaviour separately. Retailers are recommended to handle all of the following issues at the same time in order to ensure the performance of the retail sector. First, shops should make sure that their employees are well-groomed, that consumers receive timely service, that service is personalised, and that what the consumer requires is understood. This will create positive attitudes within consumers and will result in positive behaviour change towards firms' products and services. Hence, this enhances retail sector performance. Second, it is recommended that retailers make consumers enjoy doing business with their firms. This could be achieved by, for example, providing high service quality, being responsive to consumers and being ethical when doing business. Third, retailers are advised to work on understanding consumer behaviour towards their products and services. This can be done, for example, through consumer behaviour research and educating consumers.

6. Conclusions

The results show that consumer behaviour and attitude have a significant mediating role in the relationship between service quality and retail sector performance. In light of this, the attitude and actions of the consumer also play a role in the link between perceived service quality and firm performance. This leads to the conclusion that for the study of business success in the retail industry, both consumer attitude and behaviour should be taken into consideration. With the help of introducing consumer attitude and behaviour as mediators of the relationship between service quality and retail organisation performance, the present findings expand the existing literature with strategic and operational applications. This is so because of the scarcity of studies that investigated whether consumer behaviour mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and firm performance.

The study includes limitations that give good cause to perform more research. For instance, the study was restricted to a single nation and industry. This makes the generalisation of results challenging. In order to increase the generalizability of the results, it is advised that similar research be carried out in other industries and markets. Moreover, the current study used employees' perceptions, which leaves room for future studies to also use consumer perceptions. The current study was restricted to only four variables (perceived service quality, consumer attitude, consumer behaviour, and retail sector performance), and future studies could incorporate more mediators and moderators for improving the study.

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