



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Evaluating the influence of service quality dimensions on customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice

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Abstract

Community pharmacies play a vital role in delivering primary healthcare services, particularly in developing countries where accessibility and affordability are critical. In recent years, the concept of service quality has gained increasing attention as a determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This study evaluates the dimensions of service quality in community pharmacy practice and examines their influence on customer loyalty. The research adopts a conceptual and analytical approach by integrating established service quality frameworks with pharmaceutical care practices. Key dimensions such as accessibility, pharmacist competence, interpersonal behavior, drug availability, counseling effectiveness, and pricing transparency are analyzed. The study finds that relational aspects of service delivery, especially pharmacist-patient interaction and counseling, have a stronger impact on customer loyalty compared to structural factors. The findings highlight the need for community pharmacies to adopt patient-centered service models to enhance long-term customer relationships and healthcare outcomes. Community pharmacies play a vital role in delivering primary healthcare services. This study evaluates service quality dimensions and their influence on customer loyalty. Findings indicate that pharmacist behavior and counseling significantly impact loyalty.

Keywords: Service quality; Customer loyalty; Community pharmacy; Pharmaceutical care; Patient-centered services; Healthcare quality

1. Introduction

Community pharmacies represent one of the most accessible components of healthcare systems, especially in countries like India where primary healthcare infrastructure is still evolving. These pharmacies serve as a bridge between healthcare providers and patients, offering immediate access to medications, health advice, and basic medical services. Over time, the role of pharmacists has transitioned from product-oriented dispensing to patient-centered care. This transformation has increased the importance of service quality in determining patient satisfaction and loyalty. Customer loyalty in community pharmacy settings refers to repeated visits; trust in professional advice, and willingness to recommend services to others. However, inconsistencies in service delivery, lack of professional training, and variations in infrastructure often affect customer perception. Therefore, understanding how service quality influences customer loyalty is essential for improving healthcare outcomes and ensuring sustainable pharmacy practices.

2. Literature Review

Service quality in healthcare has been extensively studied using models such as SERVQUAL, which evaluates service performance across dimensions like reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

In community pharmacy practice, service quality can be categorized into:

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- Technical Quality: Accuracy of dispensing, professional competence
- Functional Quality: Communication, empathy, responsiveness
- Previous studies highlight that:
 - Effective pharmacist communication enhances patient trust
 - Counseling improves medication adherence
 - Availability of medicines influences satisfaction
 - Waiting time and accessibility affect service perception

Despite these findings, most research has focused on satisfaction rather than loyalty. The long-term relationship between service quality and customer retention remains underexplored.

2.1. Factors influencing customers satisfaction in community Pharmacy

Figure 2.1 illustrates the relative contribution of various factors influencing customer satisfaction in community pharmacy services. The distribution clearly indicates that pharmacist behavior constitutes the largest share at 30%, highlighting the critical role of interpersonal interaction, communication skills, and professional conduct in shaping customer perceptions. This suggests that customers place significant importance on how they are treated and guided during their interaction with pharmacy staff. The second most influential factor is drug availability (20%), emphasizing the necessity for pharmacies to maintain an adequate and consistent stock of medicines. The availability of prescribed drugs directly affects customer convenience and plays a vital role in retaining customers.

Counseling quality accounts for 18%, indicating that effective communication regarding medication usage, dosage, and precautions significantly contributes to customer satisfaction. This reinforces the importance of patient-centered pharmaceutical care in community pharmacy practice. Waiting time contributes 12%, reflecting the moderate impact of service efficiency on customer experience. Although customers value prompt service, they may tolerate minor delays if the overall service quality is satisfactory. Both pricing (10%) and infrastructure (10%) represent relatively lower contributions. This suggests that while affordability and physical environment are important, they are secondary compared to professional behavior and service-related factors. Overall, the pie chart demonstrates that human-centric factors (behavior and counseling) dominate over structural and economic factors, reinforcing the conclusion that improving interpersonal service quality is essential for enhancing customer satisfaction and, consequently, customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice.

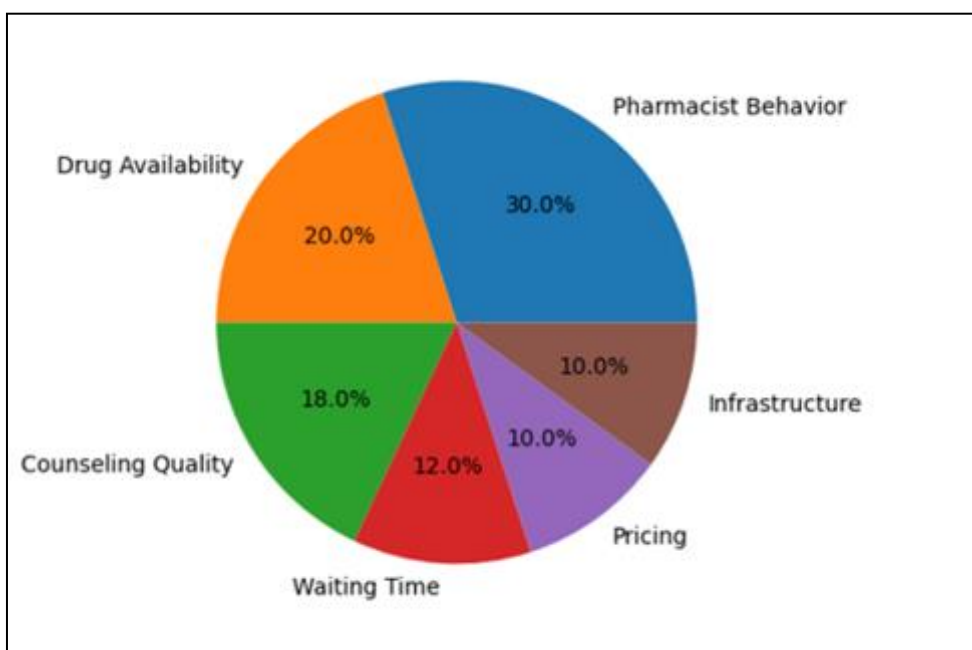


Figure 1 Factors influencing customers satisfaction in community Pharmacy

2.2. Impact of Service Quality Factors on Customer Loyalty

Figure 2.2 presents the impact of various service quality factors on customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice, measured on a scale of 1 to 10. The analysis clearly demonstrates that different dimensions of service quality contribute unequally to customer loyalty. Among all factors, pharmacist behavior exhibits the highest impact score of 9, indicating that interpersonal interaction, communication skills, and professional attitude are the most influential determinants of customer loyalty. This highlights the importance of human-centric service delivery in fostering long-term relationships with customers. Counseling services follow closely with an impact score of 8.5, suggesting that providing clear and effective guidance regarding medication usage significantly enhances customer trust and retention. Similarly, drug availability shows a strong impact level of 8, emphasizing the importance of maintaining an adequate stock of medicines to meet customer needs. In contrast, waiting time demonstrates a moderate impact score of 6, indicating that while service efficiency is important, customers may tolerate minor delays if other aspects of service quality are satisfactory. The factors pricing (5.5) and infrastructure (5) exhibit comparatively lower impact levels. This suggests that although cost and physical environment contribute to overall service perception, they are less influential in determining long-term customer loyalty when compared to interpersonal and professional factors.

Overall, the graph indicates that relational and service-oriented dimensions—particularly pharmacist behavior and counseling—play a dominant role in influencing customer loyalty, whereas structural factors have a secondary influence. These findings reinforce the importance of adopting a patient-centered approach in community pharmacy practice to enhance customer retention.

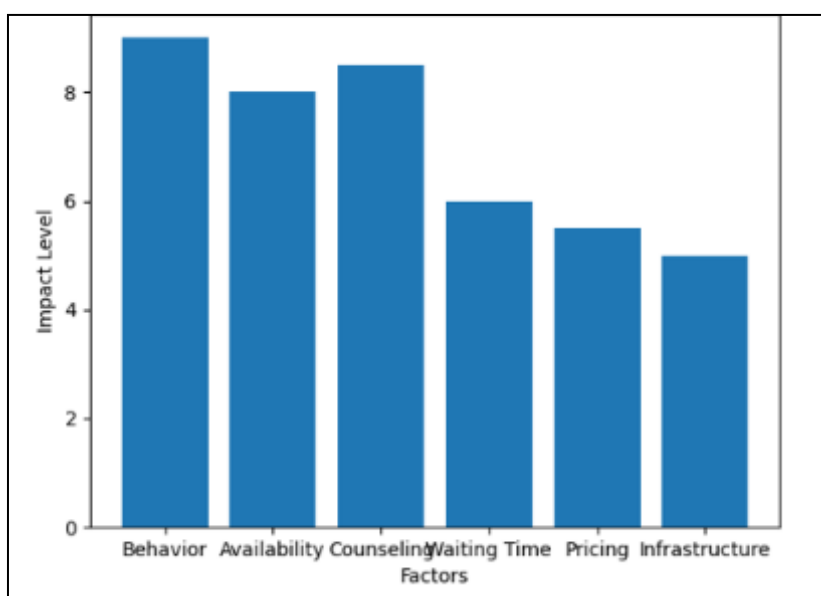


Figure 2 Impact of Service Quality Factors on Customer Loyalty

2.3. Relationship between service quality and customer loyalty

The figure presents the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice. It can be clearly observed that there is a direct and positive relationship between the two variables. At the lower level of service quality (value 2), customer loyalty is also low (around 3), which indicates that customers are less satisfied and more likely to switch to other pharmacies. As the level of service quality increases to 4, customer loyalty rises to 5, showing an improvement in customer preference.

A further increase in service quality to 6 results in a noticeable rise in customer loyalty to 7. This indicates that customers begin to trust the pharmacy services and are more likely to return. When service quality reaches 8, customer loyalty increases to approximately 8.5, reflecting a strong level of satisfaction and trust. At the highest level of service quality (value 10), customer loyalty reaches its peak (around 9.5). This suggests that customers are highly satisfied, prefer the same pharmacy, and are likely to recommend it to others.

Overall, the graph shows a **steady upward trend**, confirming that improvement in service quality leads to an increase in customer loyalty. The relationship is almost linear, which indicates that even small improvements in service quality

can positively influence customer behavior. This finding supports the main objective of the study that **better service quality results in stronger customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice.**

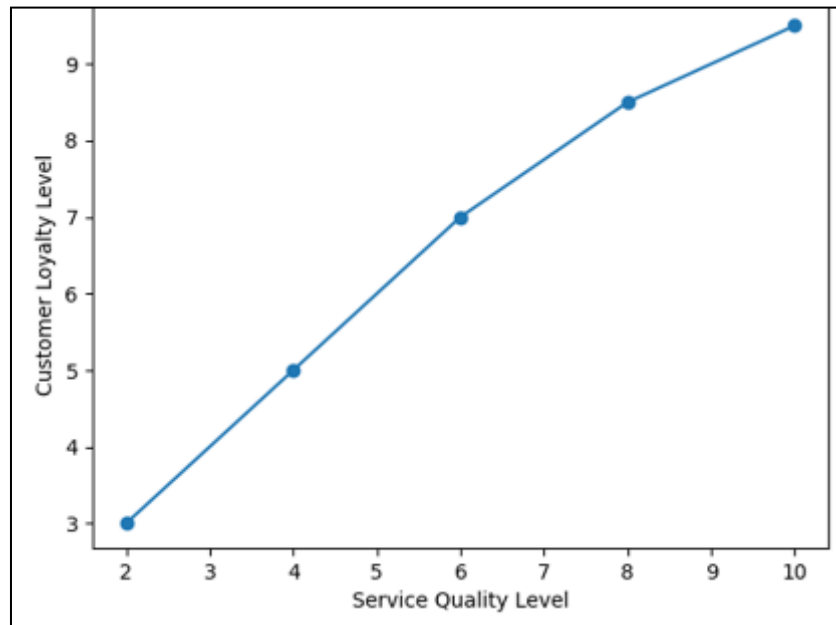


Figure 3 Relationship between service quality and customer loyalty

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a conceptual and analytical research design to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice. This approach has been selected to provide a structured and systematic understanding of how different aspects of service delivery influence customer behavior and long-term engagement. The conceptual aspect of the study focuses on developing a theoretical framework by identifying and defining key dimensions of service quality such as pharmacist competence, interpersonal behavior, drug availability, counseling services, accessibility, infrastructure, and pricing transparency. These dimensions are considered essential components that shape the overall service experience in community pharmacy settings. By reviewing and organizing existing concepts and models related to service quality, the study establishes a logical foundation to explain how these variables are linked to customer loyalty. The analytical aspect of the research involves a detailed examination of the identified variables and their potential influence on customer loyalty. Instead of collecting primary data, the study relies on a careful synthesis of existing literature, previous research findings, and established theoretical models. This allows for a comparative understanding of how different service quality factors contribute to customer satisfaction, trust, and repeat patronage. The chosen research design is particularly appropriate for this study because it enables a comprehensive evaluation of the subject without the limitations associated with field-based data collection. It also helps in identifying patterns, relationships, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge. Through this approach, the study aims to present a clear and well-structured explanation of the role of service quality in shaping customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice. Overall, the conceptual and analytical design provides a strong base for interpreting the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty and supports the development of meaningful conclusions and recommendations for improving pharmacy services.

3.1. Data Sources

The present study is based on secondary data, which has been gathered from a variety of credible and academic sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The use of secondary data allows for the examination of existing knowledge and helps in identifying key trends and relationships related to service quality and customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice. The data for this study has been collected from peer-reviewed journal articles published over the period from 2005 to 2025, with a particular focus on healthcare service quality, pharmacy practice, and customer satisfaction studies. In addition, widely accepted service quality models, including SERVQUAL and similar theoretical frameworks, have been referred to for understanding the dimensions of service performance. Relevant published literature on pharmaceutical care and community pharmacy services has also been reviewed to gain insights into the evolving role of pharmacists and their impact on patient experience. Furthermore, reports and publications

issued by recognized healthcare organizations have been considered to support the study with authentic and standardized information. All sources included in the study were selected with careful consideration to ensure that the information used is reliable, relevant, and up-to-date. This approach helps in maintaining the academic quality of the research and provides a strong foundation for analysis and interpretation.

3.2. Variables of the Study

In order to examine the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice, the study identifies and classifies the relevant variables into independent and dependent categories. This classification provides a structured framework for understanding how different dimensions of service quality influence customer behavior.

3.2.1. Independent Variables (Service Quality Dimensions)

The independent variables in this study represent the core components of service quality within the context of community pharmacy services. These dimensions are considered critical in shaping customer perception and overall service experience. Pharmacist Competence: This variable refers to the level of professional knowledge, technical expertise, and accuracy demonstrated by pharmacists in dispensing medications and providing appropriate guidance.

Interpersonal Behavior: This includes the manner in which pharmacy staff interacts with customers, encompassing communication skills, responsiveness, empathy, and the ability to build a positive rapport with patients. Drug Availability: This dimension reflects the extent to which prescribed medicines and suitable alternatives are readily accessible to customers without delay or inconvenience. Counseling Services: This variable captures the quality of information and guidance provided to customers regarding medication usage, dosage, possible side effects, and necessary precautions. Accessibility: Accessibility relates to the ease with which customers can obtain pharmacy services, including factors such as location, operating hours, and waiting time. Infrastructure: This refers to the physical conditions of the pharmacy, including cleanliness, layout, organization, and the overall environments in which services are delivered. Pricing Transparency: This dimension represents the clarity, fairness, and consistency of pricing and billing practices, which influence customer trust and satisfaction.

3.2.2. Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

The dependent variable in this study is customer loyalty, which is defined as the tendency of customers to repeatedly visit the same pharmacy, continue using the evaluation of service quality in community pharmacy practice is essential for examining its impact on customer loyalty. Service quality is considered a multidimensional concept that encompasses both technical components, such as dispensing accuracy and professional competence, and functional components, including the manner in which services are delivered and the nature of interactions with customers. Within the scope of this study, service quality is examined through a set of defined dimensions that collectively influence customer perception and their continued association with a particular pharmacy. These dimensions provide a structured basis for understanding how different aspects of service delivery contribute to building trust, satisfaction, and long-term customer loyalty's services, and recommend it to others based on their overall experience.

3.3. Pharmacist Competence

Pharmacist competence forms a key technical component of service quality in community pharmacy practice and plays an important role in ensuring the safe and accurate dispensing of medications. It reflects the pharmacist's level of professional knowledge, practical skills, and ability to provide appropriate guidance related to drug usage. Customers depend on pharmacists for reliable information regarding medication, including dosage, administration, and possible precautions. A higher level of professional competence contributes to increased confidence among customers and minimizes the chances of dispensing errors. This, in turn, strengthens the level of trust customers place in pharmacy services. On the other hand, any lack of competence or incorrect handling of prescriptions can negatively affect customer perception, leading to dissatisfaction and a decline in trust. Therefore, pharmacist competence is considered a significant factor influencing repeat visits and the development of long-term customer relationships.

3.4. Interpersonal Behavior

Interpersonal behavior is a significant dimension of service quality in community pharmacy practice and has a strong influence on customer experience. It refers to the manner in which pharmacy staff communicates and interact with customers, including aspects such as clarity of communication, responsiveness, courtesy, and empathy. Effective interaction between pharmacists and customers helps in creating a comfortable and supportive environment. When customers feel that their concerns are being heard and addressed properly, it enhances their overall experience and

satisfaction. Such interactions contribute to building trust and encourage customers to continue using the same pharmacy services. In contrast, poor communication or an indifferent attitude can negatively affect customer perception and reduce their willingness to return. Therefore, maintaining a professional, respectful, and patient-oriented approach in all interactions is essential. Pharmacies that focus on improving interpersonal communication are more likely to establish strong and lasting relationships with their customers.

3.5. Drug Availability

Drug availability is a critical component of service quality in community pharmacy practice, as customers expect timely access to prescribed medications. The consistent presence of required medicines plays an important role in meeting customer needs and ensuring continuity of treatment. Pharmacies that are able to provide medicines without delay are more likely to create a positive impression among customers. In contrast, frequent unavailability or stock shortages can result in inconvenience, leading customers to seek alternatives from other pharmacies. Such situations may negatively.

3.6. Counselling Services

Counseling services are an essential part of service quality in community pharmacy practice, as they directly support the safe and effective use of medications. This aspect of service involves providing clear and accurate information to customers regarding dosage, method of administration, possible side effects, and necessary precautions. When pharmacists offer appropriate guidance, customers are better able to understand their treatment, which increases their confidence in using the prescribed medicines. This not only improves adherence to therapy but also strengthens the level of trust customers place in pharmacy services. As a result, customers are more likely to continue visiting the same pharmacy for future needs. On the other hand, the absence of proper counseling can lead to confusion, incorrect usage of medicines, and dissatisfaction.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of service quality dimensions in community pharmacy practice reveals a significant relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Based on the conceptual and analytical evaluation of the identified variables, it is evident that both technical and functional aspects of service quality influence customer perception and retention behavior. Among the various dimensions, interpersonal behavior of pharmacists emerged as the most influential factor affecting customer loyalty. Customers tend to prefer pharmacies where they receive respectful communication, empathy, and personalized attention. Effective interaction between pharmacist and patient not only enhances satisfaction but also builds long-term trust, which is a key driver of loyalty. Counseling services were found to have a strong impact on customer loyalty. Proper guidance regarding medication usage, dosage, and precautions significantly improves patient confidence. Customers who receive clear and comprehensive counseling are more likely to revisit the same pharmacy and rely on professional advice in the future. Pharmacist competence also plays a crucial role in determining service quality. Accurate dispensing and professional expertise contribute to patient safety and trust. Customers are more inclined to remain loyal to pharmacies where they perceive a high level of professional competence. Drug availability was identified as another important factor influencing customer retention. Pharmacies that maintain a consistent stock of medicines are more likely to satisfy customer needs and reduce switching behavior. Lack of availability often leads to dissatisfaction and loss of customers. On the other hand, accessibility and waiting time were found to have a moderate influence on customer loyalty. While convenience is important, customers are willing to tolerate minor delays if the quality of service and professional interaction are satisfactory. Infrastructure and pricing transparency showed a relatively lower but still significant impact on customer perception. A clean and well-organized environment enhances the overall service experience, while transparent pricing builds customer confidence. However, these factors alone are not sufficient to ensure long-term loyalty without strong interpersonal and professional service quality. Overall, the results indicate that relational and human-centric factors dominate over structural factors in influencing customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice. The findings support the conceptual framework that service quality leads to satisfaction, which in turn fosters trust and long-term loyalty.

5. Conclusion

The present study concludes that service quality is a fundamental determinant of customer loyalty in community pharmacy practice. The analysis highlights that customer loyalty is not solely dependent on the availability of products or pricing strategies but is significantly influenced by the quality of interaction and professional services provided by pharmacists. Among the various dimensions of service quality, interpersonal behavior, counseling services, and pharmacist competence were identified as the most critical factors influencing customer loyalty. These elements contribute to building trust, enhancing patient confidence, and encouraging repeat visits. Structural factors such as

infrastructure, accessibility, and pricing transparency, although important, play a supportive role in shaping overall service perception. However, they are less influential compared to human interaction and professional expertise. The study emphasizes the importance of adopting a patient-centered approach in community pharmacy practice. By focusing on improving communication skills, providing effective counseling, and ensuring professional competence, pharmacies can enhance customer satisfaction and foster long-term loyalty. Furthermore, the findings suggest that strengthening service quality in community pharmacies can lead to improved medication adherence, better healthcare outcomes, and increased trust in healthcare systems. In conclusion, the success of community pharmacy practice depends not only on operational efficiency but also on the ability to deliver high-quality, personalized, and reliable services that meet the expectations of customers.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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