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# Factors that influence the success of customer service in pharmacies in Guayaquil

Factores que influyen en el éxito del servicio al cliente en las farmacias de Guayaquil

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the key factors that influence the success of customer service in pharmacies in Guayaquil, taking into account the current competitive environment and the importance of service quality in fostering customer loyalty. The main objective is to identify and evaluate the factors that influence customer satisfaction, with the aim of proposing strategies to improve the customer shopping experience and strengthen the position of pharmacies in the sector. To this end, a combined methodology was used that integrates quantitative and qualitative techniques. Surveys were conducted with 385 regular customers of pharmacies in Guayaquil, and interviews were held with leaders in the pharmaceutical sector, providing a more comprehensive and detailed perspective on service perception. The findings indicated that logistical efficiency, staff training, and the incorporation of technology for inventory management and customer service are key factors that determine service perception. Furthermore, it was recognized that digitization and engagement on social media play a fundamental role in improving communication and customer engagement. The study concludes that optimizing service in pharmacies requires a comprehensive approach that combines operational, technological, and human talent management strategies. Further research is recommended on service personalization and the sustainability of pharmaceutical management to enhance the sector's competitiveness.

**Keywords:** customer service, service quality, pharmacies, customer satisfaction, technology.

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## Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained prominence in language learning in higher education by facilitating personalized practice, immediate feedback, and self-directed support. This study analyzed the acceptance of AI tools in learning English as a foreign language among university students at the A2 and B1 levels, using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). A quantitative approach with a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and correlational design was adopted. Using non-probabilistic convenience sampling, the study involved 296 students from the University of Guayaquil. The instrument was a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire, validated through expert judgment and pilot-tested with 30 students. Analysis in SPSS revealed adequate levels of reliability ( $\alpha = .879-.912$ ) and positive, significant correlations between perceived usefulness and intention to use ( $r = .767, p < .001$ ), ease of use and intention to use ( $r = .709, p < .001$ ), and usefulness and ease of use ( $r = .694, p < .001$ ). The findings indicate a favorable perception of AI; however, its sustained integration requires pedagogical guidance and the strengthening of digital literacy.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence, language teaching, higher education, student attitude, information technology.

## Introduction

The public health landscape is heavily influenced by the pharmaceutical industry, which is undergoing constant change driven by increased competition and growing consumer demands. An important factor for the sustainability and profitability of companies is the quality of customer service. This concept is characterized by the gap between what customers expect and their perceptions after receiving the service, which is closely linked to customer satisfaction and trust—key factors for maintaining competitiveness within the pharmaceutical sector (Juan Silva et al. 2021). Furthermore, recent research shows that perceptions of service quality influence not only satisfaction but also customer collaboration and recommendations—areas where we can improve (Suárez-Flores et al., 2022).

Guayaquil, recognized as one of Ecuador's most dynamic cities, presents a landscape where reliability, empathy, and speed of service play an important role in customer perception and satisfaction (Juan Silva et al. 2021). Despite this, research still reveals gaps regarding the specific factors that influence the customer experience within this context. Recent studies highlight that both personalized attention and prompt service are key to ensuring customer satisfaction in pharmacies (Eduardo Siavichay et al., 2023). However, customer service goes beyond the simple delivery of products; it also involves building trust and fostering empathy, which are key elements in building strong relationships with consumers (Causado, 2021). Finally, factors such as the perception of value received and comprehensive care play a significant role in strengthening customer loyalty (Malpartida Gutiérrez, 2021).

From an organizational standpoint, employee motivation and satisfaction are key factors. A proactive and stimulating work environment has led to superior customer service, fostering dedication and efficiency. Furthermore, the implementation of quality management systems, such as ISO standards, will strengthen the organization's culture, promote continuous improvement, and ensure high standards of quality (Genesis Peñafiel et al. 2023). In this context, effective leadership plays a key role, motivating

teams to achieve superior performance and contribute to the success of quality initiatives (Genesis Peñafiel et al. 2023).

The key factor for every company is service quality, as it sets it apart from its competitors. Furthermore, it forms the foundation for stability and progress for both public and private organizations, as customers demand efficient service (Rodríguez Armijos, 2023). Customer service is more than just an operational function; it is a fundamental strategy that can determine the future of pharmacies in a constantly evolving market (Carlos Escobar, Garrido, 2021).

Product and service quality are essential for a company to operate successfully, as they help meet customers' needs and expectations. According to (Carlos Escobar et al., 2021), service quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction and is currently a key component of a successful marketing strategy. Satisfied customers not only strengthen their preference for the company but also generate additional benefits. This leads to a reduction in the effort required to attract new customers. This is due to the differentiation achieved compared to other businesses, which positions the company as a top choice in the market (Karen Ordoñez, 2020).

In Guayaquil's pharmacies, customer service performance is based on various factors. This includes optimizing logistics, facilitating product distribution, and ensuring that operational processes are followed correctly. According to (Chalen Chang et al. 2023), the effective implementation of information systems improves order management and billing accuracy, reducing errors and delays. At the same time, ongoing employee training is essential to ensuring top-quality service, strengthening customer relationships, and providing a more rewarding experience.

Likewise, the integration of technology and innovation has become a necessary component for improving efficiency and meeting the demands of an ever-changing, evolving market. These tools enable pharmacies to optimize their service processes and adapt to shifting customer expectations (Nereysi Zavala, 2020). Models such as SERVQUAL, which evaluate dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, have been widely used to measure service quality and provide pharmacies with the tools to identify and bridge the gap between customer expectations and perceptions (Osejos Vásquez, 2020).

#### Key Theories and Concepts: Fuller's Triangle Method

Fuller's Triangle Method is one of the approaches used to evaluate perceived service quality in the pharmaceutical sector. Service triangles generally refer to a model that illustrates the interaction among the three key components of service delivery: companies, employees, and customers (Isaac Maliza Cruz, 2023). Service quality in pharmacies depends on the synergy between these three elements, since a pharmacy may offer high-quality products, but if the staff lacks training or courtesy, the customer experience will be negatively affected (Yeimily Cano, 2023). It is essential to manage customer expectations by ensuring the availability of medications, clarity of information, and personalized service (Karl Albrecht, 2022). Furthermore, using the Service Triangle

helps identify opportunities for improvement in the interaction among these stakeholders, which promotes customer satisfaction and business success (Yeimily Cano, 2023). To achieve this, a well-defined service strategy requires a robust and efficient support system and trained staff dedicated to delivering excellent performance in pharmaceutical supply.

Service marketing refers to the tactics and strategies used to sell services rather than tangible goods. Unlike products, services are intangible, inseparable, variable, and perishable, which requires a different approach to their promotion and distribution. (Nataly Guiñez, 2020). Today, marketing has become an essential tool for any service-providing company to survive in such a competitive environment. The uniformity of services has driven companies to implement marketing tactics, which help them find viable ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In this context, focusing on quality in service delivery becomes one of marketing's primary tasks, alongside promoting these services as tools for achieving a strong market position. The service itself is a process involving a series of actions, a performance, and a collective effort. It can be sold, rented, exchanged for another service, or even given away. Although a service is a performance and, therefore, intangible, it can include elements that appeal to our senses: visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory. According to Saldaña and Cervantes (2020), these services are a form of product consisting of activities, benefits, or satisfactions offered for sale that are intangible and do not result in ownership of anything.

On the other hand, (Jaime Fernández, 2020) argues that a service involves task-oriented activities that go beyond proactive sales, including interactions with customers in person, via telecommunications, or by mail. It is essential that this function be planned, carried out, and communicated with two key objectives in mind: achieving customer satisfaction and optimizing operational efficiency.

According to the authors (Barrios, 2020), the service-learning (ApS) methodology is an educational approach that integrates academic learning with community service, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to projects that address real needs while developing practical skills and a commitment to social responsibility.

In the pharmaceutical sector, service-learning (ApS) has found a place in various initiatives. An illustrative example is the initiative led by the School of Pharmacy at the Complutense University of Madrid, in which students offered workshops to older adults. These sessions addressed critical issues such as the age- e effect of aging on pharmacokinetics, practical recommendations for improving treatment adherence, and instruction on detecting adverse drug reactions and drug interactions (Jaime Fernández, 2021).

In contrast, according to (Carmona Mata et al. 2021), within the context of pharmacies in Guayaquil, the implementation of Pharmacy in Service (ApS) could take place through innovative projects, such as consulting initiatives where marketing students examine and improve the customer experience. In addition, market research could be conducted to determine users' needs and expectations, along with activities that promote essential

skills such as collaborative work, communication, and empathy among employees. This approach not only enhances students' practical learning but also benefits pharmacies by improving service quality and strengthening their commitment to society.

The SERVQUAL model, created by Parasuraman (2023), was conceived by its creators as a primary tool for evaluating quality in various areas, in response to the lack of appropriate measurement methods at the time. This approach focuses on perception and expectation factors within a holistic framework. According to the authors (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 2019), it is important to assess and improve the quality of customer service in Guayaquil's pharmacies, as it allows for the identification of differences between users' expectations and their perceptions of the service they have received.

This model is based on five dimensions: tangibility, which refers to the aesthetics of the facilities and the technology used; reliability, which refers to the ability to provide accurate information and ensure product availability; responsiveness, which evaluates the speed and effectiveness of customer service; assurance, which reflects the knowledge and confidence that staff instill; and empathy, which measures the care and In the pharmaceutical sector, the implementation of the SERVQUAL model has proven to be effective. For example, a study conducted in the southwestern part of the city assessed service quality and customer satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of these factors in increasing business competitiveness (Vásquez Villafuerte, 2020)

Additionally, studies conducted in various regions have examined service quality in independent pharmacies and pharmacy chains, using the SERVQUAL model to identify areas for improvement and increase customer satisfaction (Balderas Huerta, 2021). Applying this model in pharmacies enables the development of effective strategies to exceed customer expectations, highlighting the importance of ongoing staff training and the adoption of cutting-edge technologies, which ensure high-quality service that promotes the well-being of the community (Bustamante et al., 2019).

## Materials and Methods

This research was conducted using a combined approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing customer service in pharmacies in Guayaquil. Analytical and deductive methods were employed, facilitating the structured analysis of information and the drawing of conclusions based on specific data.

On the quantitative side, surveys were administered to a representative group of customers who visit pharmacies. To calculate the sample size, the Economically Active Population (EAP) was used as a reference, applying the appropriate sampling formula for unlimited populations, given that the need for pharmacy services is universal and not restricted to a specific group.

On the qualitative side, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three specialists working at pharmaceutical companies. These interviews included eight

questions designed to examine different aspects of customer service and its influence on the corporate strategy of pharmacies.

A total of 385 respondents participated in the survey, helping to identify the factors that influence the success of customer service in Guayaquil's pharmacies.

## Results

The following is a statistical summary of the characteristics of the 385 respondents and their perceptions of the factors that influence customer service in pharmacies in Guayaquil. This analysis seeks to identify the key elements that contribute to the success of customer service from the consumers' perspective, providing a representative view of the current situation in the city's pharmacies.

**Figure 1.**

How often do you visit pharmacies?

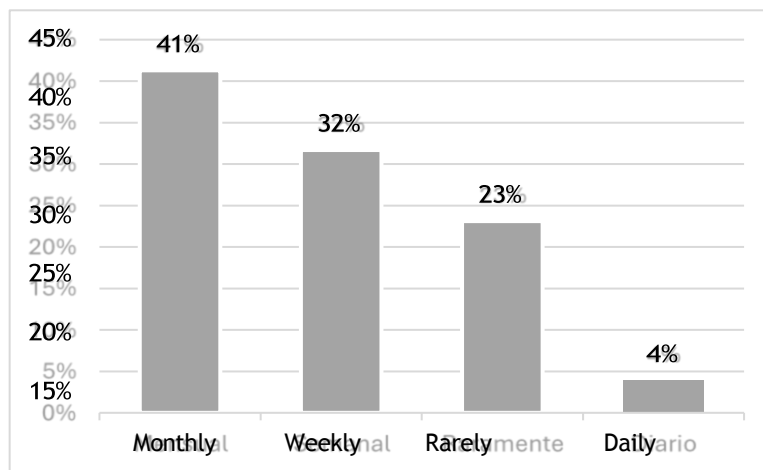


Figure 1 shows that most respondents visit pharmacies monthly (41%) or weekly (32%), indicating consistent and planned demand. Only 4% visit daily, likely due to emergencies, while 23% visit rarely, reflecting a lower level of interaction. These findings are important for adjusting service and inventory strategies to align with customer preferences.

**Figure 2**

What is the main reason for your visit to a pharmacy?

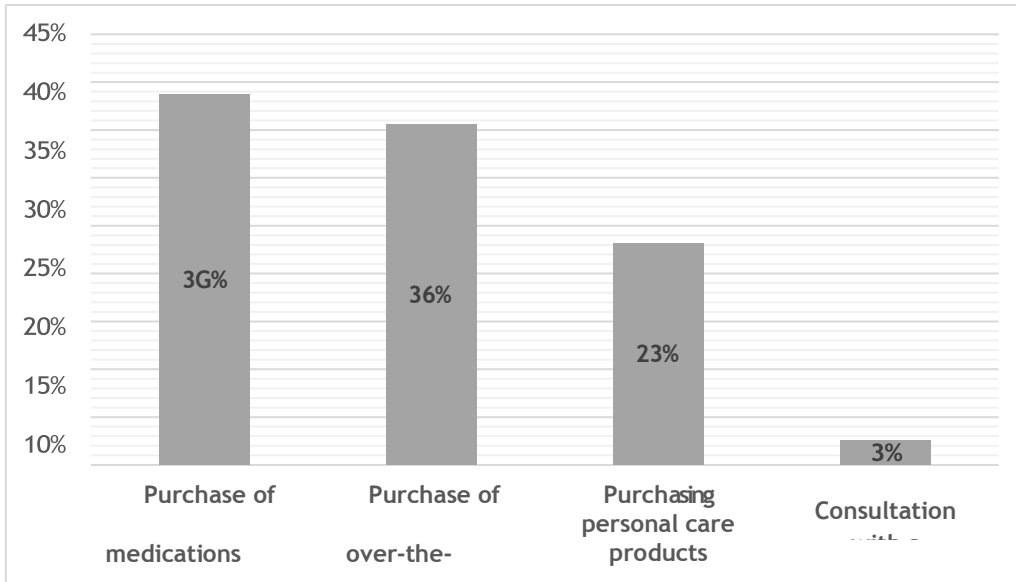


Figure 2 shows that 75% of respondents visit the pharmacy to buy medications, with over-the-counter purchases (39%) being more common than prescription purchases (36%). Twenty-three percent purchase personal care products, while only 3% consult with the pharmacist, indicating low demand for advice. These data highlight the need for efficient service and a differentiated strategy to improve the customer experience.

**Figure 3.**

Which pharmacy do you visit most frequently?

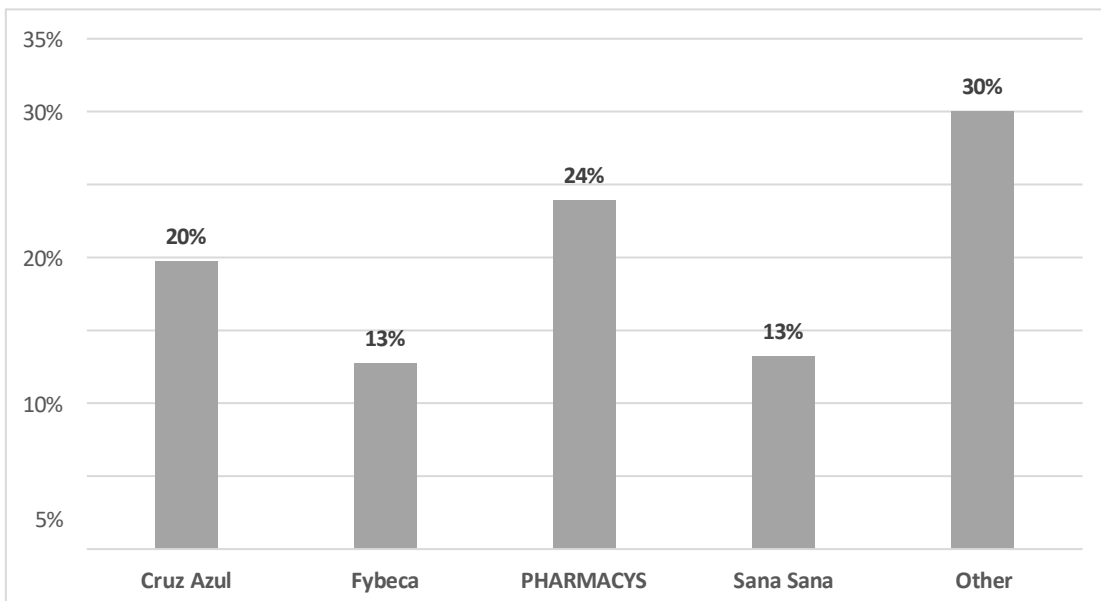


Figure 3 shows that the results indicate PHARMACYS (24%) and Cruz Azul (20%) are the most frequently visited pharmacies, while Fybeka and Sana Sana are less preferred (13% each). However, 30% of respondents choose other pharmacies, indicating a diversification in choice, possibly influenced by factors such as location, prices, or customer service.

The perception of service at pharmacies is largely positive, with 56% of respondents rating it as good and 37% as excellent. Only 8% consider it average, indicating that most customers have a satisfactory experience. This suggests that pharmacies maintain an acceptable level of service, although there is still room for improvement to achieve higher quality standards.

The efficiency of pharmacy staff in handling inquiries is viewed positively, as 47% of respondents indicate they receive good service almost always and 40% say they always do. Only 13% mention that this happens sometimes, and a mere 1% say it never happens. These results suggest that, although most customers perceive good service, there are still opportunities for improvement to ensure consistent, high-quality care. The data shows that the majority of respondents (60%) have a neutral perception of the speed of pharmaceutical care, while 34% are satisfied. However, 6% express dissatisfaction, and 1% report being very dissatisfied. These results indicate that, although there is no widespread perception of dissatisfaction, there is room for improvement to optimize service times and increase customer satisfaction.

It is evident that customers highly value staff friendliness (66%), competitive pricing (44%), and the safety of the premises (45%), considering these factors "very important." Likewise, aspects such as business hours (53%) and product availability (58%) are also highly valued. On the other hand, wait times and the staff's level of technical knowledge are perceived as less relevant. These findings indicate that factors such as customer service, costs, and safety play a decisive role in the perception of service quality at pharmacies.

The survey reveals that proximity is the most important factor when selecting a pharmacy, at 66%, underscoring the importance of geographic convenience for customers. This is followed by product variety and affordable prices at 43%, indicating that both product selection and price influence purchasing decisions. Special offers and sales, at 40%, also have a significant impact. In contrast, the quality of customer service (36%), extended hours (17%), and recommendations from others (4%) play a less decisive role. This implies that pharmacies should focus on locating in strategic areas and offering competitive prices to attract and retain customers; 70% of customers fall into the highest probability category for recommendations (9–10), indicating a high degree of satisfaction and loyalty toward the pharmacy. On the other hand, 24% fall into the moderate category (7–8), suggesting a lower propensity to recommend the pharmacy, while only 7% have a low probability of recommendation (0–6). Overall, the trend is encouraging, as the majority of customers are willing to recommend the pharmacy.

The interviews were conducted at three pharmaceutical companies located in Guayaquil. To gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the success of customer service, a set of open-ended questions was developed. These questions gave the interviewees the opportunity to express their views and experiences comprehensively and without restrictions. The main objective of this study is to identify and examine the factors that contribute to successful customer service in the pharmacy sector in Guayaquil. Through these interviews, the researchers sought to collect relevant data and diverse perspectives to enhance the study.

**Table 1**

*Criteria Suggested by the Experts.*

Question 1	Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3
<p>How would you define customer service in a pharmacy, and how important is it to your business strategy?</p>	<p>Emphasize the importance of the organizational culture and creating the “wow effect” to ensure warm and professional service.</p>	<p>He defines it as the cornerstone of the operation, emphasizing personalized service and ongoing training to improve the customer experience</p>	<p>He highlights the absolute commitment to providing effective and professional service, which helps the pharmacy stand out in a competitive market and ensures long-term customer loyalty and satisfaction through constant process improvement.</p>

**Analysis:** The interviewees agree that customer service is essential to the pharmacy’s success. They emphasize individualized service, professionalism, and ongoing training. It is key to provide a positive and reliable experience for customers, which helps increase their loyalty and satisfaction. The strategy focuses on providing friendly, effective, and specialized service to stand out in a competitive market and exceed customer expectations.

**Table 2**

*Key Factors Influencing the Success of Customer Service in Pharmacy Establishments.*

Question 2	Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3
<p>What are the main factors that you consider to influence the success of the service customer in your pharmacy?</p>	<p>Emphasize the importance of well-trained staff, clear protocols, empathy, a clean and well-lit environment, and an adequate and diverse inventory.</p>	<p>It mentions the accessibility of services, the helpfulness and friendly attitude of the staff, clear information about medications, and good inventory management</p>	<p><i>It highlights ongoing staff training, product availability and accessibility, prompt service, and personalized care with post-sale follow-up</i></p>

*Analysis: The success of customer service in pharmacies is based on various elements. These include staff training, empathy, a welcoming environment, product variety, proper inventory management, accessibility, prompt service, and a well-defined protocol. All these components together contribute to creating a positive experience for the customer.*

The results of this study provide a detailed understanding of the factors that affect the quality of customer service in pharmacies in Guayaquil. The combination of survey data and interviews allows for a more comprehensive analysis, reflecting both customer perceptions and the perspectives of industry professionals.

Previous studies have shown that service quality in pharmacies is influenced by several factors. A study conducted by (Félix et al., 2020) in pharmacies in Lima highlights the importance of providing efficient service and product availability to ensure customer

satisfaction. These findings are consistent with those of this study, in which participants emphasized operational efficiency and personalized care as key factors.

The information gathered from the surveys shows that staff friendliness and prompt service are the elements most appreciated by customers. These findings are consistent with the research by (Karen Vargas and Victoria Yauris, 2021), who determined that the quality of interaction with staff directly influences customer satisfaction in retail pharmacies. However, several survey participants expressed dissatisfaction with wait times, indicating a clear opportunity to improve service efficiency. In this context, respondents agreed that ongoing employee training and improved operational procedures are essential strategies for speeding up service.

Additionally, product availability was highlighted as a key factor in customer trust, as numerous survey participants emphasized the importance of always having the medications they need in stock. This aligns with the study by (Rivero Albarrán et al. 2022), which found that improving inventory management through cutting-edge technologies reduces negative perceptions of service and enhances the user experience. Furthermore, discussions with pharmacology specialists support this perspective, highlighting that the implementation of inventory management systems, such as SAP and Neptuno, has facilitated improved product availability and reduced restocking times.

In contrast, the pharmacy's location proved to be the most significant factor in its selection, followed by product variety and affordable prices. These findings support the notion that convenience is a fundamental factor in the choice of pharmacies, as indicated by recent research on consumer behavior in this sector (Becerra-Godínez† et al. 2022). The interviewees emphasized that, in addition to location, service excellence and personalized attention are distinctive elements that can foster customer loyalty.

The pharmacy's ambiance plays a vital role in how the service provided is perceived. Studies, such as the one conducted by (Abuzour et al., 2021), highlight that elements such as lighting, hygiene, and proper product display enhance consumer trust and comfort. The participants in this study agree that these elements are essential, highlighting the importance of creating an organized and welcoming environment to enhance the shopping experience.

## Conclusions

This study has identified the main factors that influence the perception of customer service quality in pharmacies in Guayaquil. Among these factors are logistical efficiency, ongoing staff training, and the use of technology for inventory management and customer service.

Regarding the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, the results show that prompt, empathetic, and personalized service directly contributes to

consumers' perception of better service, which in turn strengthens their loyalty to the pharmacies.

As for recommendations to improve customer service, the importance of implementing strategies that optimize the consumer experience is emphasized. Digitalization and the use of social media help improve communication with customers, streamline the purchasing process, and build trust in pharmaceutical services. Additionally, investing in ongoing staff training improves the quality of care, fostering greater commitment among employees.

Although this analysis provides relevant data, further research is recommended to explore the impact of service personalization, the adoption of innovative technologies, and sustainable practices in medication management. These aspects could contribute to the development of more effective strategies, aimed not only at strengthening the sector's competitiveness but also at ensuring that healthcare services are more accessible and efficient for the community.

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