






DECODING LOYALTY IN CONTINUOUS SERVICE IN SHARED USE: TRIPLE SERIAL
MEDIATION OF BRAND PERSONALITY, AWARENESS, QUALITY, AND LOVE

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To advance the understanding of brand loyalty in continuous service in shared use (CSSU) contexts by proposing an innovative measurement model based on a triple serial mediation framework. **Method:** A structural equation modeling approach was applied to data from 706 fitness and wellness consumers to test the relationships among brand personality, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand love, and brand loyalty. **Main Results:** The model demonstrated strong explanatory power, with R^2 values of 72.5% for brand loyalty and 80.69% for brand love. Results revealed that brand love plays a key mediating role in fostering loyalty, while brand personality, although not directly influencing loyalty, significantly impacts brand love. Consumer identification with the brand also amplifies emotional and cognitive bonds, especially in niche or localized markets. **Relevance/Originality:** This study introduces a non-linear, emotionally grounded loyalty model, challenging traditional linear frameworks and emphasizing the role of affective constructs. **Theoretical/Methodological Contributions:** It advances the literature by validating a dynamic, triple mediation structure incorporating emotional and cognitive pathways in brand-consumer relationships. **Social/Management Contributions:** The findings provide practical guidance for managers seeking to enhance loyalty in CSSU environments, encouraging a focus on emotional engagement, perceived quality, and the strategic cultivation of brand identification.

Keywords: Service Marketing, Continuous Service in Shared Use, Branding; Brand Loyalty, Brand Love.

DECODIFICANDO A LEALDADE EM SERVIÇOS CONTÍNUOS DE USO
COMPARTILHADO: TRIPLA MEDIAÇÃO SERIAL DA PERSONALIDADE DA MARCA,
CONSCIÊNCIA, QUALIDADE E AMOR À MARCA

RESUMO

Objetivo: Avançar na compreensão da lealdade à marca em contextos de serviços contínuos de uso compartilhado (CSSU) por meio da proposição de um modelo de mensuração inovador baseado em mediação tripla seriada. **Método:** Utilizou-se modelagem de equações estruturais com dados de 706 consumidores dos setores de *fitness* e bem-estar para testar as relações entre personalidade da marca, consciência da marca, qualidade percebida, amor à marca e lealdade. **Principais Resultados:** O modelo apresentou elevado poder explicativo, com valores de R^2 de 72,5% para lealdade à marca e 80,69% para amor à marca. Os resultados revelaram que o amor à marca é um mediador central na formação da lealdade, enquanto a personalidade da marca, apesar de não influenciar diretamente a lealdade, impacta significativamente no amor à marca. A identificação do consumidor com a marca também demonstrou potencial para intensificar vínculos emocionais e cognitivos, sobretudo em mercados especializados e locais. **Relevância/Originalidade:** O estudo apresenta um modelo não linear e baseado em vínculos afetivos, desafiando abordagens tradicionais e destacando o papel central de construtos emocionais. **Contribuições Teóricas/Metodológicas:** A pesquisa valida uma estrutura dinâmica de mediação tripla que integra caminhos emocionais e cognitivos na relação marca-consumidor. **Contribuições Sociais/Gerenciais:** Os achados oferecem subsídios práticos para gestores que desejam fortalecer a lealdade em contextos CSSU, recomendando o foco no engajamento emocional, na qualidade percebida e no estímulo estratégico à identificação com a marca.

Palavras-chave: Marketing de Serviços, Serviços Contínuos de Uso Compartilhado, Branding, Lealdade à Marca, Amor à Marca.

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of hyper-competition and rapidly evolving consumer preferences, understanding the attributes that foster brand loyalty has become a critical focus in marketing research. Brand loyalty, a cornerstone of brand equity (Aaker, 1998; Fagundes et al., 2022; Milan et al., 2021; Song et al., 2019), represents a consumer's consistent commitment to repurchasing and engaging with a particular brand despite competitive influences (Han et al., 2019; Keiningham et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2009). This sustained allegiance is not merely transactional but deeply rooted in emotional and cognitive dimensions, necessitating a comprehensive exploration of the constructs that influence such behavior.

Among these constructs, brand love has emerged as a pivotal antecedent to brand loyalty. Defined as a consumer's profound affection and emotional connection to a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Cruz-Ros et al., 2024; Kaufmann et al., 2016), brand love encapsulates a blend of passion, positive evaluations, and intimate experiences (Song et al., 2019). The literature underscores its transformative power, revealing its role in driving long-term consumer relationships and fostering repeated engagement with the brand (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

Furthermore, other brand attributes, such as brand personality, perceived quality, and brand awareness, play integral roles in shaping brand love and loyalty. Brand personality enables consumers to humanize brands, attributing traits that fulfill symbolic or self-expressive needs (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015; Japutra & Molinillo, 2019). Perceived quality, reflecting consumers' evaluations of a brand's overall excellence, has been linked to heightened satisfaction and loyalty (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; García-Fernández et al., 2018). Lastly, brand awareness, denoting the strength of a brand's presence in consumers' minds, acts as a fundamental prerequisite for loyalty by facilitating recognition and differentiation (Foroudi, 2019; Milan et al., 2021).

These dynamics are particularly salient in the context of continuous service in shared use (CSSU), a service delivery model characterized by recurring interactions and shared consumption experiences. CSSU is prevalent in industries such as education, fitness, and leisure, where consumers engage with the service provider and with one another over time (Munaier,

2022; Munaier & Costa, 2021; Munaier & Mazzon, 2021; Munaier & Serralvo, 2022). This shared environment amplifies the role of communal interactions in shaping consumer experiences and adds layers of complexity to the evaluation of brand loyalty. For example, the interplay between consumers' satisfaction and their shared experiences with others can significantly influence loyalty outcomes (Lin & Wong, 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019).

The literature on CSSU and loyalty has begun to address the complexity and multiplicity of factors influencing consumer retention intentions in continuous and shared use contexts. For instance, García-Fernández et al. (2018), who examine low-cost fitness centers demonstrate that perceived quality and service convenience directly influence perceived value, subsequently impacting satisfaction. Satisfaction serves as a crucial mediator between perceived value and loyalty. Similarly, Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016), focused on education services, found that perceived quality directly affects satisfaction and influences student loyalty and motivation, either directly or indirectly through satisfaction. Motivation, in turn, is shaped by perceived quality and satisfaction.

However, to the best of our knowledge, theoretical models in this domain have predominantly measured impacts linearly without adequately accounting for the interwoven and dynamic relationships between constructs and their collective influence on loyalty. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the relationships between brand love, brand personality, perceived quality, and brand awareness, as well as their collective impact on brand loyalty within CSSU contexts. We propose a conceptual model and test hypotheses that elucidate the pathways linking these constructs. The findings aim to contribute to the theoretical discourse on consumer-brand relationships while offering actionable insights for brand managers in fostering loyalty through emotional and cognitive brand attributes.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

1.1. Continuous service in shared use

The concept of CSSU refers to recurring service delivery experienced collectively by multiple consumers within a shared environment. This service model

is prevalent in industries such as education, fitness, and leisure, where consumers engage in repeated interactions with service providers and with other users over a defined contract term (Munaier, 2022; Munaier & Costa, 2021; Munaier & Mazzon, 2021; Munaier & Serralvo, 2022). Unlike one-off service experiences, CSSU combines individual and collective dimensions, offering opportunities for co-created consumer value through shared interactions and social dynamics.

Examples of CSSU can be observed across sectors. In education, students in a university continuously interact with professors and peers, collectively shaping the learning experience (Lin & Wong, 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019). Similarly, fitness services such as water aerobics combine instructor-led sessions with customer interactions in shared spaces, enriching the communal experience (Munaier & Costa, 2021; Munaier & Mazzon, 2021; Munaier & Serralvo, 2022). Hospitality services like resorts offering all-inclusive packages also exhibit CSSU characteristics, where unrelated guests share facilities, interact with staff, and co-participate in recreational activities, influencing one another's service perceptions (Lin & Wong, 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019).

In CSSU contexts, three critical elements shape the consumer experience: the service provider, other consumers, and the cultural environment where these interactions occur. Together, these elements highlight the unique dynamics of CSSU and their influence on perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty.

1.2. Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is a widely studied construct in consumer behavior and a fundamental dimension of brand equity (Fagundes et al., 2022; Song et al., 2019). It reflects a consumer's commitment to consistently engage with a brand, characterized by repeated purchasing behavior and resistance to competitive influences (Han et al., 2019; Keiningham et al., 2015). Loyalty involves psychological attachment and behavioral response, distinguishing loyal consumers from those who merely demonstrate transactional behavior (Aaker, 1998; Milan et al., 2021).

Achieving loyalty confers distinct advantages, such as reduced sensitivity to price and promotional efforts (Botelho & Urdan, 2005). Studies have shown that emotional attachment, such as brand love, serves as

a significant driver of loyalty by fostering trust and positive attitudes (Fagundes et al., 2022; Song et al., 2019). These findings underscore the importance of exploring emotional and cognitive dimensions in fostering loyalty, especially in shared service environments like CSSU.

1.3. Brand love

Brand love is a critical antecedent to brand loyalty, defined as a consumer's deep emotional connection and affection for a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Cruz-Ros et al., 2024). This construct encompasses a range of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors, including passion, self-identity alignment, and positive evaluations of the brand (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Song et al. (2019) argue that brand love is an ongoing process essential to building meaningful consumer-brand relationships, resulting in both long-term loyalty and short-term consumption increases.

In the context of CSSU, brand love may be influenced by the communal and cultural dynamics of shared experiences. For instance, consumers in fitness classes or educational settings might develop emotional bonds with the brand through collective interactions with staff and peers. This dynamic leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand love positively influences brand loyalty.

1.4. Brand personality, awareness, and perceived quality

Brand personality refers to attributing human traits to a brand, allowing consumers to connect with it on a symbolic or self-expressive level (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015; Japutra & Molinillo, 2019). In CSSU, brand personality can influence perceptions of service quality and emotional attachment by fostering a sense of alignment with consumer identity (Sammour et al., 2020). This alignment can amplify loyalty and emotional bonds, particularly in shared environments with frequent and multifaceted brand interactions. Thus, it is possible to formulate the final hypotheses:

H2: Brand personality positively influences brand awareness.

H3: Brand personality positively influences perceived quality.

H4: Brand personality positively influences brand love.

H5: Brand personality positively influences brand loyalty.

Brand awareness reflects the extent to which a brand occupies a prominent place in consumers' minds (Foroudi, 2019; Milan et al., 2021). It enables brand recognition and differentiation, facilitating consumer decision-making in competitive markets. In CSSU, strong brand awareness may enhance the perceived quality of the service and deepen emotional connections through repeated exposure and familiarity (Munaier & Mazzon, 2021; Munaier & Serralvo, 2022). Furthermore, brand awareness acts as a prerequisite for loyalty by ensuring consumers are aware of the brand's existence and value. Thus, we propose:

H6: Brand awareness positively influences perceived quality.
 H7: Brand awareness positively influences brand love.
 H8: Brand awareness positively influences brand loyalty.

Perceived quality refers to consumers' evaluations of a product or service's overall excellence based on expectations and experiences (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; García-Fernández et al., 2018). In CSSU, perceived quality is often shaped by both individual interactions with the service provider and shared experiences with other consumers. Research indicates that perceived quality impacts satisfaction, value perceptions, and future purchase intentions (Munaier, 2022; Munaier & Serralvo, 2022; Vacas de Carvalho et al., 2020). Additionally, perceived quality fosters emotional connections like brand love, strengthening loyalty (Han et al., 2020). Thus, we propose:

H9: Perceived quality positively influences brand love.
 H10: Perceived quality positively influences brand loyalty.

By integrating these dimensions—perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand personality—into the context of CSSU, this framework (Figure 1) provides a holistic understanding of the drivers of brand loyalty. These relationships emphasize the interconnected roles of cognitive, emotional, and communal factors in shaping consumer loyalty within shared service environments.

2. METHOD

To achieve the research objective, the fitness and wellness market was chosen due to its alignment with the characteristics of CSSU (Munaier, 2022; Munaier & Mazzon, 2021). Brazil, the second-largest fitness market globally regarding the number of gyms and the fourth-largest in the number of users, provided a highly relevant and dynamic context for this investigation (Munaier & Costa, 2021; Munaier & Tavares, 2022). A cross-sectional research design was adopted (Malhotra et al., 2014) utilizing data collected from 706 consumers affiliated with four gym brands across three Brazilian states and the Federal District. The sample included a variety of business models to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. These models encompassed a 4-unit chain operating in a capital city in the Northeast region,

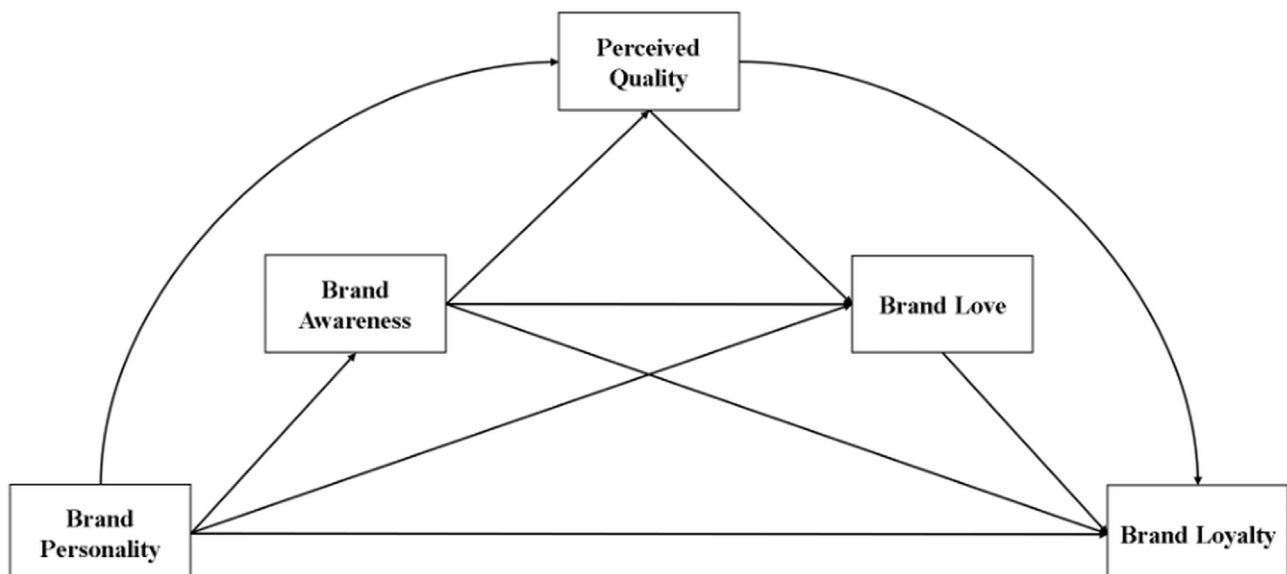


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

an independent gym located in a Southeastern capital city, another independent gym in the interior of a Southeastern state, and a swimming school in Brasília, Federal District. This diversity allowed for a broader analysis of consumer behavior within CSSU contexts.

2.1 Data collection

Data were collected online over a 4-month period using an electronic questionnaire developed through Google Forms. The questionnaire links were emailed to gym customers, targeting only individuals who met specific eligibility criteria. To align with the research

objectives, participants were required to be 18 years or older, current or former users of gym services, and not employees of the gyms. A filter question ensured these criteria were met. The sampling method was non-probabilistic and convenience-based (Hair Jr. et al., 2014), including diverse respondents from the selected fitness facilities.

2.2. Measurements

The survey instrument was developed using validated scales to measure the constructs of interest (Table 1).

Table 1. Scales.

Constructs	Scale items in Portuguese	Scale items in English
Perceived Quality Yoo and Donthu (2001)	QPER_1. Eu confio na qualidade dos serviços desta academia	I trust the quality of this gym's services
	QPER_2. Os programas de treino desta academia devem ser de muito boa qualidade	The training programs at this gym must be of excellent quality
	QPER_3. Os programas de treino desta academia apresentam excelentes características	The training programs at this gym have excellent characteristics
Brand Awareness Yoo and Donthu (2001)	CONS_1. Algumas características da marca desta academia me vêm rapidamente à mente	Some characteristics of this gym's brand quickly come to my mind
	CONS_2. Eu posso reconhecer essa marca rapidamente entre outras marcas concorrentes	I can quickly recognize this brand among other competing brands
	CONS_3. Eu tenho familiaridade com esta marca	I am familiar with this brand
	CONS_4. Eu reconheço o logotipo desta academia dentre as marcas concorrentes	I recognize this gym's logo among competing brands
Brand Personality Aaker (1997); Phau and Lau (2000)	PER_1. Honesta, sincera	Honest, sincere
	PER_2. Excitante, legal, jovem	Exciting, cool, young
	PER_3. Confiável, segura	Reliable, secure
	PER_4. Charmosa, fora de série	Charming, outstanding
	PER_5. Forte, robusta, consistente	Strong, robust, consistent
Brand Love Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)	AMOR_1 Esta é uma marca maravilhosa	This is a wonderful brand
	AMOR_2 Esta marca faz eu me sentir bem	This brand makes me feel good
	AMOR_3 Esta marca é completamente incrível	This brand is completely amazing
	AMOR_4i Esta marca me é indiferente	I feel indifferent about this brand
	AMOR_5 Esta marca faz com que eu me sinta muito feliz	This brand makes me feel very happy
	AMOR_6 Eu amo esta marca	I love this brand
	AMOR_7i Eu não tenho sentimento em particular em relação a esta marca	I have no particular feelings about this brand
	AMOR_8 Esta marca é um puro prazer	This brand is a pure pleasure
	AMOR_9 Eu sou apaixonado(a) por esta marca	I am passionate about this brand
	AMOR_10 Eu sou muito ligado a esta marca	I am very attached to this brand
Brand Loyalty Yoo and Donthu (2001)	LEAL_1 Eu me considero leal a esta academia	I consider myself loyal to this gym
	LEAL_2 Esta academia é a minha primeira opção	This gym is my first choice
	LEAL_3 Eu não faço atividade física em outro lugar se não for nesta academia	I do not exercise anywhere else except at this gym

Perceived quality was assessed with three items, brand awareness with four items, and brand loyalty with three items, all based on the Yoo and Donthu (2001) scale. Brand personality was measured using five items adapted from Aaker (1997) and Phau and Lau (2000). Finally, brand love was measured with ten items from the scale developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). All scales had been previously tested in the Brazilian Portuguese context (Fortes et al., 2019). Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis followed established methodological guidelines to ensure robustness and alignment with the study’s objectives (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). First, descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of the sample. Subsequently, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted to assess the convergent validity of the measurement scales. Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$) was used as the minimum threshold for scale reliability (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). EFA employed the principal components method with Oblimin oblique rotation, supported by Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin ($KMO \geq 0.6$) measure of sampling adequacy.

To test the research hypotheses, serial mediation analyses were conducted using Process Macro Model 6 (Hayes, 2017). This approach enabled the examination of the relationships among the constructs, including direct and indirect effects, providing a comprehensive understanding of the drivers of consumer loyalty within CSSU contexts.

3. RESULTS

The final study sample consisted of 706 respondents, 61.2% women, and 79.9% had at least completed higher education. No respondents were excluded, as those who did not meet the criteria could not submit responses. The characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 2.

The EFA presented acceptable indices after removing three items from the brand love scale (AM4, AM7, AM8). In this sense, Bartlett’s sphericity test was sig-

Table 2. Sample description.

Variables		n	%
Gender	Man	274	38.8
	Woman	432	61.2
Formal education	Incomplete elementary	6	0.8
	Complete elementary	4	0.6
	Incomplete high school	23	3.3
	High school	25	3.5
	Incomplete ungraduated	84	11.9
	Ungraduated	232	32.9
	Incomplete graduated	41	5.8
	Graduated	291	41.2
Income	≤ 1 Brazilian Minimum Wage (BMW)	60	8.5
	$> 1 \leq 3$ BMW	147	20.8
	$> 3 \leq 5$ BMW	161	22.8
	$> 5 \leq 10$ BMW	174	24.6
	> 10 BMW	164	23.2
Age	18–24 years old	94	13.3
	25–39 years old	370	52.4
	40–59 years old	219	31
	60 years or older	23	3.3

nificant ($p < 0.001$), and the KMO test was adequate (0.967) for the analysis (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). After carrying out the necessary methodological procedures, the factor loadings were adjusted to five factors, with 80.6% of the total variance explained by the sample. Table 3 presents the EFA results.

The regression analyses revealed a direct and significant positive effect between brand love and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.7633$; *standard error* [SE] = 0.0444; 95% confidence interval [CI] [0.6760–0.8505]; $p < 0.000$), thereby **confirming hypothesis H1**. Similarly, brand personality demonstrated a direct and positive influence on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.7450$; *SE* = 0.0249; 95%CI [0.6960–0.7939]; $p < 0.000$), providing **support for H2**. Additionally, brand personality was found to have a direct and positive effect on perceived quality ($\beta = 0.6719$; *SE* = 0.0346; 95%CI [0.6040–0.7398]; $p < 0.000$), **confirming H3**. The relationship between brand personality and brand love was also significant and positive ($\beta = 0.6764$; *SE* = 0.0461; 95%CI [0.6050–0.7861]; $p < 0.000$), **supporting H4**. However, no di-

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis⁸.

Items	Love	Quality	Awareness	Personality	Loyalty	Uniqueness	α
BL6	0.922					0.0491	0.98
BL9	0.917					0.0745	
BL10	0.784					0.1349	
BL5	0.734					0.0949	
BL3	0.706					0.0821	
BL1	0.543					0.1110	
BL2	0.531					0.1370	
PQ2		0.929				0.1404	0.92
PQ3		0.812				0.1714	
PQ1		0.634				0.2638	
AW2			0.900			0.1543	0.87
AW3			0.752			0.3755	
AW4			0.681			0.4425	
AW1			0.427			0.3309	
BP1				0.655		0.1635	0.94
BP2				0.614		0.2420	
BP3				0.610		0.2375	
BP4				0.494		0.2332	
BP5				0.436		0.2084	
LY1					0.862	0.1321	0.91
LY2					0.747	0.1319	
LY3					0.630	0.3634	
Variance	26%	14.1%	13.3%	14.4%	12.8%	V. Total	80.6%
SME= 0.967		Bartlett's= ($\chi^2= 21,001$; $df= 231$; $p< 0.001$)					

*Bold font is used to emphasize the Cronbach's alpha values and the extracted variance.

rect effect was observed between brand personality and consumer brand loyalty ($\beta = -0.0464$; $SE = 0.0614$; 95%CI [-0.1669–0.0742]; $p > 0.10$), leading to the **rejection of H5**.

Moreover, brand awareness exhibited a direct and positive impact on perceived quality ($\beta = 0.0910$; $SE = 0.0348$; 95%CI [0.0227–0.1593]; $p < 0.000$), thereby **confirming H6**. A significant positive effect was also observed between brand awareness and brand love ($\beta = 0.2740$; $SE = 0.0371$; 95%CI [0.2011–0.3469]; $p < 0.000$), **supporting H7**. Furthermore, brand awareness demonstrated a significant, direct, and positive effect on consumer brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.1658$; $SE = 0.0452$; 95%CI [0.0769–0.2546]; $p < 0.000$), **aligning with the prediction made in H8**.

Perceived quality was also found to have a significant and positive direct effect on brand love ($\beta = 0.1984$; $SE = 0.0402$; 95%CI [0.1195–0.2773]; $p < 0.000$), **confirming H9**. Finally, perceived quality demonstrated a direct and positive effect on consumer loyalty to the brand ($\beta = 0.1086$; $SE = 0.0480$; 95%CI [0.0144–0.2028]; $p < 0.03$), **providing support for H10**. The results of the regressions can be observed in Figure 2.

3.1. Further analyses

An average of the tests was performed to understand the business models separately. Thus, a Student's t-test was performed to analyze the models of

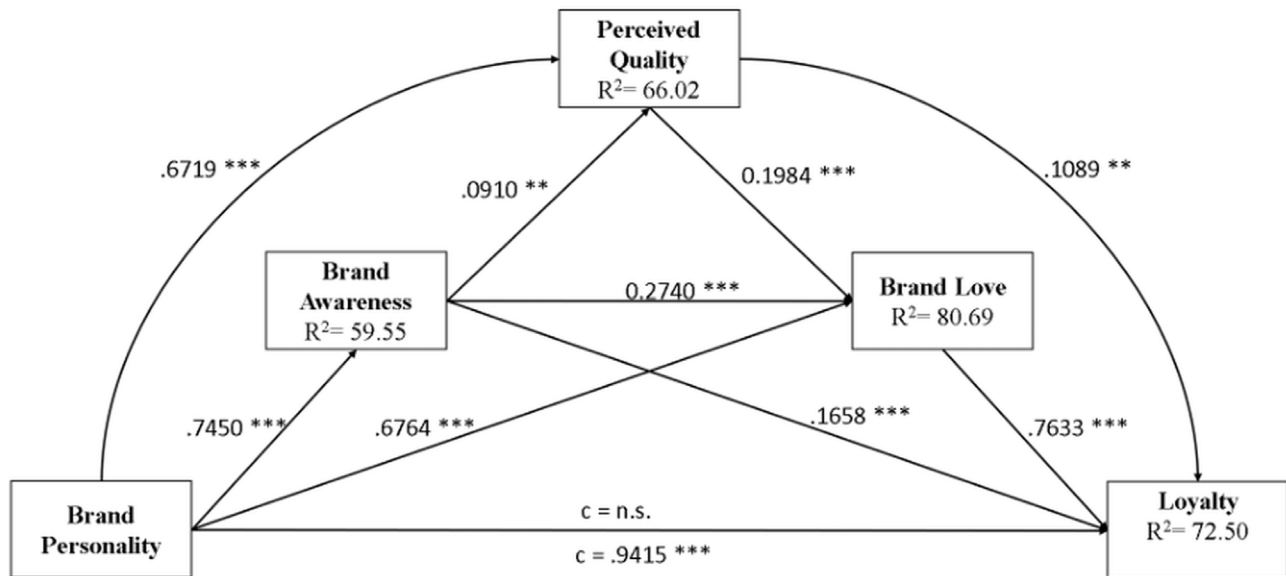


Figure 2. Results of regressions.

mall-of-services versus swimming, gym chain versus independent gym, and, finally, independent gym in the capital versus the independent gym in the Brazilian interior.

Thus, it was identified that swimming consumers evaluated the brand personality more positively ($M_{\text{MALL}} = 5.39$; $M_{\text{SWIMMING}} = 5.90$; $t_{(704)} = -2.542$, $p < 0.02$), awareness ($M_{\text{MALL}} = 5.46$; $M_{\text{SWIMMING}} = 5.95$; $t_{(704)} = -2.520$, $p < 0.02$), perceived quality ($M_{\text{MALL}} = 5.47$; $M_{\text{SWIMMING}} = 6.61$; $t_{(704)} = -5.884$, $p < 0.001$), brand love ($M_{\text{MALL}} = 4.59$; $M_{\text{SWIMMING}} = 5.41$; $t_{(704)} = -3.238$, $p < 0.002$), and attitudinal brand loyalty ($M_{\text{MALL}} = 54.38$; $M_{\text{SWIMMING}} = 5.77$; $t_{(704)} = -5.130$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, behavioral brand loyalty, measured by the time the individual spends at the gym, had better scores for the swimming brand as well ($M_{\text{MALL}} = 2.53$; $M_{\text{SWIMMING}} = 3.50$; $t_{(704)} = -5.147$, $p < 0.001$).

The results indicated that, when comparing chain versus independent models, consumers of independent gyms may have a more positive evaluation of the brand personality ($M_{\text{CHAIN}} = 5.09$; $M_{\text{INDEPENDENT}} = 5.74$; $t_{(704)} = -5.678$, $p < 0.001$), awareness ($M_{\text{CHAIN}} = 5.23$; $M_{\text{INDEPENDENT}} = 5.71$; $t_{(704)} = -4.211$, $p < 0.001$), perceived quality ($M_{\text{CHAIN}} = 5.13$; $M_{\text{INDEPENDENT}} = 5.87$; $t_{(704)} = -6.567$, $p < 0.001$), brand love ($M_{\text{CHAIN}} = 4.21$; $M_{\text{INDEPENDENT}} = 5.03$; $t_{(704)} = -5.657$, $p < 0.001$), attitudinal loyalty ($M_{\text{CHAIN}} = 4.06$; $M_{\text{INDEPENDENT}} = 4.76$; $t_{(704)} = -4.395$, $p < 0.001$), and scores for behavioral loyalty ($M_{\text{CHAIN}} = 4.59$; $M_{\text{INDEPENDENT}} = 5.41$; $t_{(704)} = -3.238$, $p < 0.002$), also better for independent business models, on average.

For the independent business models, when comparing the independent mall-of-services businesses operating in the capital versus the interior, the results indicated that consumers of gyms located in the interior evaluated the brand personality more positively ($M_{\text{CAPITAL}} = 5.47$; $M_{\text{INTERIOR}} = 6.24$; $t_{(704)} = -5.144$, $p < 0.001$), awareness ($M_{\text{CAPITAL}} = 5.48$; $M_{\text{INTERIOR}} = 6.15$; $t_{(704)} = -4.336$, $p < 0.001$), perceived quality ($M_{\text{CAPITAL}} = 5.61$; $M_{\text{INTERIOR}} = 6.34$; $t_{(704)} = -4.860$, $p < 0.001$), brand love ($M_{\text{CAPITAL}} = 4.60$; $M_{\text{INTERIOR}} = 5.83$; $t_{(704)} = -6.194$, $p < 0.001$), and attitudinal loyalty ($M_{\text{CAPITAL}} = 4.25$; $M_{\text{INTERIOR}} = 5.69$; $t_{(704)} = -6.717$, $p < 0.001$). However, there was no significant difference in the scores for behavioral loyalty ($M_{\text{CAPITAL}} = 2.92$; $M_{\text{INTERIOR}} = 3.02$; $t_{(704)} = -0.639$, $p > 0.10$).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides significant theoretical advancements in understanding brand loyalty within CSSU contexts, focusing on fitness and wellness markets. This research develops and validates a comprehensive model that captures the dynamic and interwoven relationships influencing brand loyalty by integrating constructs such as brand love, personality, perceived quality, and brand awareness. This represents the article's first theoretical and methodological contribution: a triply serial mediation model dynamically integrating these constructs. Previous models (e.g., García-Fernández et al., 2018) analyzed these con-

structs in a linear and non-integrative manner. Notably, the quality of the model allowed for the measurement of brand loyalty with an $R^2 = 72.5\%$ and brand love with an $R^2 = 80.69\%$.

Thus, this study supports and extends prior research on the critical role of brand love as a driver of brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Song et al., 2019). Consistent with previous findings, we observed a significant positive relationship between brand love and loyalty (H1). This reinforces the notion that emotional connections foster sustained consumer engagement, especially in environments where shared experiences amplify communal bonds. Such results align with studies in other service contexts, such as hospitality and education (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015; Cruz-Ros et al., 2024).

Importantly for this article, brand personality emerges as a pivotal antecedent influencing brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand love (H2, H3, H4). This study demonstrates that humanizing brands fosters emotional connections and enhances consumer perceptions of service quality, consistent with Japutra and Molinillo (2019) and Sammour et al. (2020). However, contrary to our hypothesis, brand personality did not directly influence brand loyalty (H5), suggesting that its effect is mediated through other constructs, such as brand love and perceived quality. This finding challenges prior linear models (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016) and highlights the importance of capturing indirect pathways to loyalty in CSSU contexts.

Possible explanations for this finding lie in the idea that brand personality is timely and necessary for identification (Sammour et al., 2020). It does not guarantee loyalty by itself. For instance, agreeing with a brand's activism or causes does not necessarily result in loyalty. Additional attributes, such as perceived quality, are essential.

However, the regression beta between all constructs and brand love is worth noting, with brand personality exerting the most significant impact. This underscores its importance in building the emotional bond between consumers and the brand. While brand personality may not ignite the «fire» of loyalty, it acts as the «spark» that initiates deeper consumer-brand relationships.

Furthermore, this research confirms the significance of perceived quality as a direct and indirect

driver of brand love and loyalty (H9, H10). These results align with existing literature (García-Fernández et al., 2018; Han et al., 2020), with an important nuance: in CSSU settings, perceived quality is shaped by individual evaluations and shared consumer interactions. This result highlights the communal nature of CSSU environments, where collective experiences amplify the perceived excellence of service delivery. This nuance is also reflected in Munaier and Mazzon (2021) and Munaier (2022).

Additionally, brand awareness positively influenced perceived quality, brand love, and loyalty (H6, H7, H8), emphasizing its foundational role in consumer decision-making (Foroudi, 2019; Milan et al., 2021).

4.1. Management implications

The findings of this study provide significant managerial implications for fitness and wellness businesses operating in CSSU contexts. By examining distinct business models—mall-of-services, swimming facilities, gym chains, and independent gyms—this research highlights critical insights that can inform strategic decisions to enhance brand loyalty and consumer engagement. These insights are particularly valuable, integrating theoretical constructs such as brand love, personality, perceived quality, and awareness with observed differences across business models.

First, the results indicate that swimming facilities consistently outperformed mall-of-services across all measured constructs, including brand personality, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand love, and attitudinal loyalty. Notably, behavioral loyalty, measured by the time spent at the gym, was also significantly higher for swimming facilities. These findings underscore the unique value proposition of specialized fitness models, such as swimming schools, where a focused service offering fosters higher perceived quality and stronger emotional connections. In CSSU environments, these communal and interactive experiences align with existing literature, which suggests that perceived quality and emotional bonds—such as brand love—are amplified through shared service settings (Munaier, 2022; Munaier & Mazzon, 2021). Therefore, mall-of-services managers should consider enhancing the communal experience and improving service specialization to compete effectively with niche-focused facilities.

Second, independent gyms exhibited significantly higher evaluations across all constructs compared to gym chains, including brand personality, perceived quality, brand love, and both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. These results suggest that independent gyms benefit from stronger consumer perceptions due to their localized and personalized service offerings. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of brand personality and perceived quality in fostering emotional bonds and driving consumer loyalty (García-Fernández et al., 2018; Japutra & Molinillo, 2019). Independent gyms should capitalize on their operational flexibility to deliver tailored experiences, strengthen community relationships, and reinforce their distinctive brand personality to sustain a competitive edge over larger chains.

The comparison between independent gyms in capital cities versus those in interior regions revealed further nuances. Gyms in the interior areas demonstrated significantly higher scores for brand personality, awareness, perceived quality, brand love, and attitudinal loyalty. However, no significant difference was observed in behavioral loyalty, indicating that consumers in interior regions perceive stronger emotional and cognitive connections to these brands. However, their behavioral engagement—such as frequency of visits—remains comparable to that in capital regions. These results can be explained by the strong social ties often experienced in smaller cities, characterized by a heightened sense of belonging and territoriality (Munaier, 2021; Munaier et al., 2022; Munai-er & Serralvo, 2022). This highlights the importance of regional contexts in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors, supporting prior literature emphasizing localized strategies to enhance brand equity and loyalty (Foroudi, 2019; Milan et al., 2021).

For managers of fitness businesses in capital regions, these findings suggest an urgent need to address perceived quality and emotional connection gaps. Strategies aimed at humanizing the brand, improving service personalization, and creating engaging, community-driven experiences can help bridge these gaps and strengthen consumer loyalty. Conversely, managers of gyms in interior regions should leverage their emotional and cognitive advantages to reinforce their market position and further enhance loyalty outcomes.

This study reinforces the interconnected roles of brand personality, perceived quality, awareness, and

love in shaping loyalty within CSSU contexts. While brand personality may not directly influence loyalty, its significant impact on brand love highlights its foundational role in fostering deeper emotional relationships with consumers. This finding aligns with existing literature, underscoring the importance of emotional connections in driving long-term loyalty, particularly in communal and shared service environments (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Song et al., 2019). Managers must recognize that while functional elements, such as perceived quality, are essential, emotional and symbolic attributes of the brand play an equally critical role in enhancing consumer engagement and retention.

4.2. Limitations and suggestions

While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of brand loyalty within the context of CSSU, it is not without its limitations. First, the research employs a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to infer causality or observe changes over time. Future studies could benefit from a longitudinal approach to explore the evolution of consumer relationships with brands in CSSU environments.

Second, the study relies on self-reported data collected through an online survey, subject to potential biases, including social desirability and recall biases. Incorporating behavioral data or experimental methods in future research could strengthen the robustness of the findings.

Third, the sample is non-probabilistic and convenience-based, focusing on Brazilian consumers within the fitness and wellness industry. While this provides a rich and contextually relevant dataset, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or industry contexts. Future research should consider diverse geographical and cultural settings to broaden the applicability of the results.

Finally, the study examines specific constructs such as brand love, personality, perceived quality, and awareness. Although these are critical to understanding brand loyalty, additional factors such as trust, perceived value, or emotional attachment could provide a more comprehensive picture of loyalty dynamics in CSSU contexts. Future research should aim to integrate these dimensions to enhance the explanatory power of the proposed model.

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