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Article

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Exploring the customer e-loyalty of millennials when purchasing footwear online in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Millennial purchases of footwear products online have grown in South Africa. Consequently, retailers in the country should develop increased knowledge of these consumers' online expectations to strengthen their satisfaction and future loyalty intentions. The study aimed to explore the factors influencing millennial consumers' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty when buying footwear online in South Africa. An enhanced understanding is required of the factors impacting millennial consumers' e-service experiences and e-trust behaviour, and their influence on e-satisfaction when purchasing footwear online. Data were collected from 248 respondents who bought footwear online over the past year. An online questionnaire and structural equation modelling were used to measure the hypotheses. In terms of the findings, website design secured the most significant impact on customer e-service experience, when buying footwear through an online platform. In addition, it was established that e-satisfaction significantly impacted millennial consumers' e-loyalty when buying footwear online. As such, it is imperative for online retailers targeting millennials to ensure a superior online shopping experience that will exceed their expectations. This will enhance the overall e-satisfaction experience of millennials and ultimately positively influence their attitudinal loyalty (AL) towards the retailer.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Designer footwear has become the ultimate status symbol for millennials and this consumer cohort is spending more money on clothing and footwear than any other consumer cohort in South Africa (Morency, 2018). Footwear is starting to feature as a prominent segment in the online purchases of apparel among millennials (BMI, 2022, GlobalData, 2022; Statista, 2023).

Millennials (born between 1985 and 2000) in South Africa are spending more money on clothing and footwear than any other consumer group (Biron, 2017; Shezi & Redda, 2022). This consumer cohort is fashion-conscious and has shown a strong preference for fashion brands (Eytan, 2019). According to Duggan (2021), millennials spend on average about one sixth of their monthly budget on clothing and footwear and are specifically purchasing online (Swiegers, 2018). To reach this target market, online retailers need to identify the online needs of this cohort through an understanding of e-service quality and e-trust to secure the e-satisfaction of the millennial market. Ting et al. (2016) concur stating that a positive e-service experience will increase customer satisfaction and result in repeat purchases. Superior e-service quality results in e-satisfaction, while e-trust enhances e-satisfaction (Purnamasari, 2018). As such when consumers (such as Millennials) are satisfied with an online retailer, this satisfaction creates the perception that the retailer is trustworthy (Chou et al., 2015; Krishnadas & Renganathan, 2022). Considering this, an understanding of the factors that influence millennials' e-service experience and e-trust behaviour and their impact on e-satisfaction is of importance to South African retailers. Specifically considering that it will enable online retailers to retain loyal customers and increase overall retailer profitability in the long term. The results of the statistical analysis revealed that e-service quality dimensions are an important element of online shopping that has a significant positive influence on the e-service experience of millennial consumers online purchase of footwear. In addition, e-satisfaction was also found to be an important element of online shopping that has a significant positive influence on the attitudinal loyalty (AL) of millennial

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consumers purchasing footwear online. The main recommendations for online retailers is i) to invest in website personalisation functionalities that create a unique digital experience for an online visitor, ii) to incorporate price comparison features over promotional seasons to entice consumers to purchase from their online store over their competitors and iii) implement voice search functionalities to create real-time voice user interfaces and use live video chat services to update consumers on their purchase and the status of their orders.

1. Introduction

E-loyalty has been extensively validated in marketing literature as an outcome of e-satisfaction (Juwaini et al., 2022; López-Miguens & Vázquez, 2017). Numerous scholars (e.g. Kaya et al., 2019; M. A. Khan et al., 2019) have confirmed that customers' future e-loyalty is guided by their e-satisfaction experiences when purchasing online. Consequently, a deeper understanding of e-satisfaction and its impact on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty in a competitive environment, such as online retail, is required. Rodríguez et al. (2020) referred to e-loyalty as customers' online willingness to secure continuous purchases of a product in the future. The outcome is the unremitting purchase of and support for specific product types or brands, although competitor brands are making similar products available. Consequently, knowledge on e-satisfaction, its precursors and outcomes is critical to strengthen the future e-loyalty of online customers, such as millennials. This is imperative considering that the millennial cohort (born between 1985 and 2000) in South Africa is spending more money on clothing and footwear than any other consumer group (Biron, 2017). According to Duggan (2021), millennials spend on average one sixth of their monthly budget on clothing and footwear and are specifically purchasing online (Swiegers, 2018). This consumer cohort is fashion-conscious and has shown a strong preference for fashion brands (Eytan, 2019). According to Duggan (2021), millennials spend on average about one sixth of their monthly budget on clothing and footwear and are specifically purchasing online (Swiegers, 2018). To reach this target market, online retailers need to identify the online needs of this cohort through an understanding of e-service quality and e-trust to secure the e-satisfaction of the millennial market. Ting et al. (2016) concur stating that a positive e-service experience will increase customer satisfaction and result in repeat purchases. Superior e-service quality results in e-satisfaction, while e-trust enhances e-satisfaction (Purnamasari, 2018). As such when consumers (such as Millennials) are satisfied with an online retailer, this satisfaction creates the perception that the retailer is trustworthy (Chou et al., 2015; Krishnadas & Renganathan, 2022). Therefore, to reach the millennial market, online retailers need to identify their online needs through an understanding of e-service quality, e-service experience and e-trust to secure their e-satisfaction and ultimately their e-loyalty.

Ting et al. (2016) and Juwaini et al. (2022) stated that a positive e-service experience will also increase customer satisfaction which could result in repeat purchases. Superior e-service quality results in e-satisfaction, while e-trust enhances e-satisfaction (Purnamasari, 2018). When consumers are satisfied with an online retailer, this satisfaction creates the perception that the retailer is trustworthy (Wani et al., 2023). Customer satisfaction is also validated as a cognitive construct where consumers compare the service quality received based on their expectations. Various studies have addressed the positive relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty (Azhar & Bashir, 2018; Al Amin et al., 2023). Therefore, consumers who are highly satisfied with the product or service of an online retailer tend to display high levels of loyalty and will repeatedly purchase products or services from the same retailer (Purnamasari, 2018). Marketing scholars, such as Malhotra et al. (2021) concur and state that a deeper understanding of the factors impacting e-satisfaction is required, as it can provide guidance on online customers' future e-loyalty intentions (Gupta et al., 2019). Emamdin et al. (2020) and Wani and Mushtaq (2019) agree, arguing that the future e-loyalty intentions of online customers (e.g. millennials) are guided by their level of e-satisfaction when purchasing from an online platform. The results that accrue from these studies are critical, since they validate the importance of e-satisfaction as a stimulant of future e-loyalty intentions. Furthermore, e-satisfaction is considered important for strengthening the e-satisfaction and e-loyalty relationship (Juwaini et al., 2022). The delicate nature of the e-satisfaction and e-loyalty relationship is

the result of increased customer expectations towards e-trust and e-service experience when using an online platform (Wani et al., 2023).

Asih and Pratomo (2018) purported that the level of satisfaction of online customers (specifically millennials) is increasingly guided by their level of trust towards the online platform as well as their overall experience when using the platform (Emamdin et al., 2020). This argument aligns with the findings of Bailusy et al. (2022), stating that millennials increasingly need honesty and transparency when purchasing through an online platform. Therefore, these customers are more likely to attain increased levels of e-satisfaction when they believe that the online store has incorporated security measures to safeguard internet shoppers purchasing online and when the online store has a secure online paying system (Hatane et al., 2019). This implies that online customers (e.g. millennials) have a greater intent to be loyal to an online retailer if their need for online safety and a fluent online experience are satisfied (Al-Khayyal et al., 2020). However, a new school of thought has emerged, arguing that the strengthening of future customers' e-loyalty will be guided by their desire for greater online privacy and engagement when purchasing online (Annisa Islam & Ezni Balqiah, 2021; Parihar et al., 2019). In addition, Al-Khayyal et al. (2020) and Juwaini et al. (2022) confirmed that the strengthening of the e-satisfaction and e-loyalty relationship will depend on online retailers' ability to provide a trustworthy online experience. Such an experience needs to be characterised by the online retailer's ability to safeguard transactional information from inadvertently being changed or destroyed during transmission on the internet, that the online retailer offers a secure online paying system, that the online store is capable of managing online hijackings, and that the online store protects online transactions through a state-of-the-art security system (Giao et al., 2020; M. A. Khan et al., 2019).

Relationship marketing research has extensively explored the direct relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty in banking or tourism settings (S. A. Khan et al., 2021; Mahadin et al., 2020a; UI Haq & Awan, 2020). Moreover, e-trust and e-service experience have been explored as antecedents to e-loyalty, word of mouth, loyalty and repurchase intention in multiple settings (Ghosh, 2022; Zia et al., 2022). Yet, limited studies have explored e-service quality as a multidimensional antecedent to e-service experience, and e-service experience and e-trust as unidimensional precursors to e-satisfaction in an emerging African market context. Furthermore, the interrelationships between the constructs in this study's proposed model have not been explored in their entirety in the context of the online purchase of footwear in South Africa. Investigating such relationships is imperative, since online millennial customers' e-loyalty reflects a continuous intention to repurchase a product in the future (Li et al., 2022). Additionally, investigating the hypothesised relationships is necessary in a highly competitive online retail environment in an emerging African market, such as South Africa, where the loyalty of online retail customers like millennials cannot be guaranteed. Subsequently, e-satisfaction directly impacts online retail millennial customers' future loyalty intentions, thereby directly influencing the future existence of online retailers (Emamdin et al., 2020).

The general significance of e-satisfaction and its relationship with e-loyalty have been widely studied over the past decade (Kesharwani, 2023; Rodríguez et al., 2020). Nevertheless, limited research has been conducted assessing the relationships between e-satisfaction, its precursors and postcursor (i.e. e-loyalty) in an online retailer context and exploring these relationships from an online footwear purchasing perspective in South Africa remains unexplored. To explore this research gap, this study's primary focus is to establish the factors influencing millennial consumers' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty when purchasing footwear online. South Africa's online retailer industry is the focus of this study, where elevated levels of competition are relevant (Larkin, 2022; Mordor Intelligence, 2022; Research & Markets, 2021). In addition, there are low switching barriers in the industry, highlighting the need to develop knowledge of the factors that influence millennial customers' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. By securing such knowledge, online retailers in South Africa will be empowered to enhance millennial customers' overall e-service experience and e-satisfaction levels, which could lead to positive future loyalty intentions. Emamdin et al. (2020) and Racbhini et al. (2021) argued that e-satisfaction is a differentiator that could enhance millennial customers' future willingness to remain dedicated to an online retailer. Such dedication could enhance future loyalty intention, thereby increasing the sustainability of an online retailer in a competitive South African retail industry. Therefore, scholars, such as Li et al. (2022) and De Silva and Wijesundara (2023) argue in favour of continued research on the factors that influence the e-satisfaction of millennial customers

purchasing online and its ultimate impact on their e-loyalty in an emerging market context. They argue that such research is important to secure the future survival of the online retail industry in emerging markets.

The study contributes to theory since it confirms the importance of two theories (i.e. social contract theory and expectation confirmation theory) in an evolutionary online setting in South Africa. In addition, the research confirms the importance of nurturing e-service quality, e-service experience and e-trust in enhancing the relationships between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. Furthermore, the study recommends a model that confirms the relationships between e-satisfaction, its antecedents, and postcedents in an online retailing context in an emerging market, such as South Africa. Regarding its practical contribution, the study guides online retailers in developing enhanced knowledge of the factors that impact e-satisfaction and how e-satisfaction can enhance online customers' future e-loyalty intentions. Online retailers can also obtain increased knowledge of the role of e-satisfaction and its impact on the different dimensions of e-loyalty in an online retail context.

This article initiates an overview of the problem being explored and the need for the research problem under investigation. This is followed by the different theories applied to the study and the validation of the different hypotheses proposed. Furthermore, the methodology applied, the study's results, the theoretical contributions, and the managerial implications flowing from the study are discussed.

2. Theoretical framework

South Africa's footwear industry is well developed, centring on manufacturing and distributing of domestic and international brands (Research & Markets, 2022). In 2022, the industry recorded total sales of US\$2.2 billion (approximately R37.4 billion), and is expected to grow by 3.17% between 2023 and 2027 (Statista, 2023). From an online perspective, the online footwear sector in South Africa forms a small percentage of the footwear sector (2%) and it is predicated that 8% of overall revenue in the footwear sector will be created from online sales by 2024 (Statista, 2022). In South Africa, the footwear and apparel industry is a division of the clothing, textile, footwear and leather goods sector. Furthermore, there are approximately 11,000 people in the employ of the South African footwear retail sector, a labour-focused sector in the country (Who Owns Whom, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, in South Africa, the footwear retail market includes income from sales made from children's, women's and men's footwear (Allied Market Research, 2019). There are around 184 footwear makers and around 100 cut, make and trim industrial units and component producers that feed into the industry supply chain (Who Owns Whom, 2019).

3. Theoretical framework and hypotheses testing

3.1. Social contract theory

A social contract is a legitimate pact between exchange partners that protects each partner from being negatively influenced by practices, such as exploitation (Weber, 2014). Compared formal contracts, social contracts are informal and guide exchange partners to manage conflict in a fair and orderly manner (Loewe et al., 2021). The aim of social contract theory is to inform individuals how to behave when they are requested to share their personal information (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, social contract theory stipulates that in an online environment, the collection and provision of personal information needs to be managed in a professional manner that is characterised by the desire to care and protect (Vermanen et al., 2022; Martin, 2016). In the context of online purchasing, scholars (e.g. Salminen et al., 2018) argue that social contract theory reflects an arrangement between suppliers and customers. In such an arrangement, the customer is requested to disclose private information and, in return, the business (e.g. the retailer) is required to safeguard customers from sharing customers' personal data with third parties without customers' approval.

3.2. Expectation confirmation theory

Expectation confirmation theory is built on the principle of evaluation and comparison, since individuals base their judgement of performance on assessment or comparison (Biswas et al., 2019). The theory

further posits that should a service provider's performance be in excess of previous performance outcomes secured, positive disconfirmation is achieved, which enhances satisfaction levels (Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2017; Qazi et al., 2017). Consequently, expectation confirmation theory is crucial when exploring customer expectations towards e-satisfaction and e-loyalty (Al-Maghrabi et al., 2011). Wu et al. (2020) concurred, stating that a business's ability to go beyond customers' e-satisfaction expectations is contained in the business's capacity to develop knowledge of how customer expectations are created and affected. In the context of online retailing, H. Tang et al. (2017) purported that expectation and disconfirmation work together, having a contrasting effect on e-satisfaction. This implies that positive disconfirmation is the outcome when performance is higher than expectation, while negative disconfirmation is the outcome of performance being below individual expectation (Forero & Gómez, 2017; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010). In summary, should the expected performance of a product, such as footwear, purchase online be in excess of pre-purchase expectation levels (confirmation), higher levels of e-satisfaction and eventually e-loyalty can be secured (Chen & Chang, 2018; H. H. Huang, 2015; H. Tang et al., 2017).

3.3. An overview of the key constructs in the study

E-service experience refers to the degree to which a web page enables seamless and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery of products and services (Z. Huang et al., 2019). E-service quality comprises four dimensions that make up overall e-service quality, namely efficiency, fulfilment, reliability and website/application (app) design. Efficiency refers to a customer's ability to easily steer, explore and look through a web page to obtain knowledge regarding a product or service (Indeche, 2017). Through the provision of a quality experience founded on efficiency, online consumers are guaranteed a well-organised, well-structured, manoeuvrable website or app with brief and clear content and conditions to secure a positive e-service experience (Sheu & Chang, 2022).

Fulfilment relates to the degree to which a website or app declaration relating to order delivery and item availability are achieved (Hizam & Ahmed, 2019). Ighomereho et al. (2023) validated fulfilment as a key element that secures high levels of positive e-service experience to online consumers, such as millennials. Furthermore, marketing scholars, such as Kesharwani (2020), maintain that reliability infers the ability of a website or app to correctly deliver on the pledged services and secure an accurate online transaction security. Raza et al. (2020) concur stating that reliability signifies the need to secure truthful information regarding products and orders, the ability of the website or app to finalise a purchase dependably and accurately, and the capability of the online retailer to reply to queries fast and professionally. Website or app design encompasses characteristics including graphics, frames, pop-up windows, search engine configuration, text, site layout dimensions and media dimensions that guide consumers' decisions to buy a product online (Akram et al., 2018). Concerning the study, millennials perceive a website or app design as physical evidence of a retailer's ability to provide a painless service experience (Schauer, 2022). Hence, such assessments indicate the total online service experience delivered by the website or app (Zhuang et al., 2021). Gosh described e-service experience as 'electronic offerings' secured through the internet that complete tasks, solve problems or conduct online transactions. As such, scholars, such as Companjon (2021) and Li et al. (2022) argued that millennials crave an eloquent and rewarding online shopping experience when buying online and not just an impersonal online transaction experience. Consequently, e-service experience is an online element that can be used to generate e-satisfaction and loyalty.

As per Kumar and Ayodeji (2021), trust is a positive feeling towards a supplier that stimulates customer intent to buy products online. In this study, e-trust is founded on online security (e-security) and online privacy. E-security is associated with the guarding of financial information, such as credit card numbers and account details, during online purchases (Ha & Pan, 2018). Online privacy, on the other hand, is a consumers' readiness to disclose information over the internet to finalise a purchase made online (Trivedi & Yadav, 2020). Melinda et al. (2023) described e-satisfaction as customers' assessment of whether a product or service has reached their expectations. An understanding of e-satisfaction is important in building long-term relationships with customers as it provides perspective on how customer expectations are developed and influenced (Wu et al., 2020). Finally, according

to Shafiee and Bazargan (2018), e-loyalty involves securing a positive attitude towards a product, brand or a retailer. Sharma et al. (2019) added that e-loyalty embraces an approach of repeat purchasing through an online platform. In the context of this study, e-loyalty consists of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty (AL) relates to a sense of belongingness that a consumer develops towards a product or brand (Sadeghi Boroujerdi et al., 2023). Behavioural loyalty, on the other hand, embraces a deeper understanding of consumer intent to purchase online, the rate of online purchases made as well as the rate of recurrence of online footwear purchases amongst millennial consumers.

4. Theoretical model development

4.1. The interrelationship between efficiency and e-service experience

In marketing literature, efficiency is the ease and speed of accessing and operating a website (Firdous & Farooqi, 2019). Efficiency has relevance in the online buying process since it stimulates online users to utilise the provided electronic platform effortlessly and efficiently more regularly (Ligaraba et al., 2023). Shared (2019) concurred, stating that an efficient website enables consumers to find their desired product and information associated with it and to be able to check out and complete the purchase with nominal effort. Purwianti and Jeslyn (2021) added that if the functionality of an online platform does not meet millennials' expectancies, they are quick to explore alternate channels to secure an online purchase. Millennials therefore seldom blame themselves for an inefficient unresponsive website, compared to older users who mostly blame themselves for problems experienced with an online platform. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Efficiency has a significant and positive impact on the e-service experiences of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.2. The interrelationship between fulfilment and e-service experience

The element of fulfilment integrates the accuracy of service promised, the availability of products or stock in hand, and being able to sell the products to consumers in the promised time (Sukendi et al., 2021). According to Veloso et al. (2020), e-service experience is influenced by the fulfilment process, where dimensions, such as stock availability, punctuality and reliability are inserted. Although price is one of the reasons why millennials utilise online shopping, they still consider fast and reliable delivery and stock availability to be important (PwC, 2021). Therefore, to achieve maximum levels of fulfilment, millennials require online platforms to be effective from the processing of information and transportation of the purchased product to its delivery address, which influences e-service experiences (Veloso et al., 2020). Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Fulfilment has a significant and positive impact on the e-service experiences of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.3. The interrelationship between reliability and e-service experience

Reliability is the capability of delivering the requested task or service dependably, consistently, and accurately (Kusdibyo & Febuadi, 2019; Al-Rubaye et al., 2023). It is related to fulfilling promises made to customers regarding services and products so that customers' expectations are exceeded. Esmailpour et al. (2017) postulated that reliability also includes showing an interest in solving customer problems first time and providing regular updates on the status of their purchase, which influences their e-service experience. According to Putra et al. (2021), millennials are the most emotional and least loyal consumer group and are heavily reliant on a satisfactory experience when engaging with an online store for the first time. This consumer group is deemed to have high service expectations regarding order fulfilment, timely service and prompt responses when purchasing online (Halim & Malelak, 2021). As such, reliability

is deemed an important element of e-service quality that influences e-service experience (Vatolkina et al., 2020). Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H3: Reliability has a significant and positive impact on the e-service experiences of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.4. The interrelationship between website design and e-service experience

Website design is an essential element in determining the success or failure of online shopping. It can refer to the aesthetics or general layout of a website, the user interface, and the use of visuals on the website, which impact customers' online shopping experiences (Rita et al., 2019). Furthermore, visual aspects, such as colour combinations, layouts and appealing font size, attract millennials to visit the website and create an experience for them. Millennials tend to focus on the overall appearance of the website first, rather than the actual product when visiting an online store (Sukendi et al., 2021). Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2020) stated that web design is a determining factor in user adoption for millennials and significantly impacts their purchase decisions. Furthermore, Fadli et al. (2023) asserted that website design should not only be about layout and aesthetics, but should also include elements, such as navigation and functionality, which create a pleasant online experience for millennials. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H4: Website design has a significant and positive impact on the e-service experiences of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.5. The interrelationship between online security and e-trust

E-security is about safety and being secure from possible online threats. Lim et al. (2023) and Vasić et al. referred to e-security as the website's ability to protect consumers' personal information from unauthorised disclosure. It concerns the protection of personal data from online fraud and unwanted intruders. In addition, e-security issues are also perceived as barriers for consumers, such as millennials to trust an online retailer (Hussein, 2019). Ecommerce Pro (2019) suggests that millennials are technologically savvy, have sound knowledge of digital platforms and prefer to make purchases online, although this consumer group still has concerns over the safety and security of online transactions. Mitek (2021) concurred, stating that millennials want their personal information to be confidential and fear being exposed to fraudulent online behaviour. Consequently, in an online purchase context, e-security is perceived as a foundation for e-trust building in the online retail space. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H5: Online security has a significant and positive impact on the e-trust of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.6. The interrelationship between online privacy and e-trust

Online privacy is an individuals' ability to control the terms and conditions under which their personal information is collected, distributed and used (Y. Wang & Herrando, 2019). Zhu et al. (2022) stated that a general lack of control over online consumers' private information and/or from doubts about how retailers will distribute their data to third parties is the root of consumer online privacy concerns. According to Internet Innovation Alliance (2019), there is growing concern amongst millennials on how online tech companies access online data and location information for commercial purposes. Therefore, when millennials have high privacy awareness, it affects their attitude towards online purchases (Hendriana et al., 2021). Furthermore, the lack of privacy in online retail shopping negatively affects the e-trust of consumers, such as millennials (Kim & Kim, 2020). Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

H6: Online privacy has a significant and positive impact on the e-trust of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.7. The interrelationship between online service experience and e-satisfaction

E-service experience dimensions determine the overall evaluation of the quality of that service in the virtual marketplace. According to Jaiswal and Singh (2020) and Rita et al. (2019), e-satisfaction is the result of a good customer online service experience pre-transaction, transaction and post-transaction and plays an important role in influencing customers' future purchase behaviour. For millennials, e-service experience is an 'electronic offering' made available *via* the internet enabling them to complete tasks or conduct online transactions efficiently and securely (Simamora & Islami, 2023). This generational cohort values an efficient online platform that offers a quick and easy navigational system to ensure their overall service satisfaction with the online experience (Yañez et al., 2022). Prior literature has confirmed a significant relationship between customer e-service experience and customer e-satisfaction (Jaiswal & Singh, 2020; Masturoh & Djumahir, 2020; V. Naidoo & Botsi, 2021). Isa et al. (2020) argued that e-service experience positively impacts e-satisfaction and has a strong influence on the intention to make a future online purchase. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H7: Online service experience has a significant and positive impact on the e-satisfaction of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.8. The interrelationship between e-trust and e-satisfaction

E-trust refers to buyers' confidence that sellers will not take advantage of a transaction; sellers are expected to be ethical, dependable and fulfil their commitments (Prahawan et al., 2021; Wilis & Nurwulandari, 2020). In addition, e-trust is the expectation or confidence that buyers can rely on sellers to act ethically regarding the purchases made online (Emamdin et al., 2020). For the millennial generational cohort, e-trust is the mechanism that relieves the uncertainty of purchasing online and influences online transactions (Dewanta et al., 2023). Moreover, this consumer group's e-satisfaction is achieved when it feels comfortable with making a purchase over the internet and feels confidence and security towards the online purchase. Hence, e-trust is a strong predictor of e-satisfaction in online retailing (Bhat & Darzi, 2020; Tran & Vu, 2019) and strengthens long-term commitment (Roberts-Lombard et al., 2017). Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H8: E-trust has a significant and positive impact on the e-satisfaction of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.9. The interrelationship between online satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty

AL is the continuous relationship between a customer and a brand or business (Yao, 2019). This type of loyalty entails different factors, such as commitment, trust and emotional attachment towards the brand or retailer (Bisschoff, 2020). Ayuni (2019) argued that the millennial consumer cohort has a unique AL towards brands. Millennials are most satisfied with brands or retailers that offer what is important to them and what they value in life (Dolan, 2021). These consumers always develop brand loyalty if they trust the brand, but that loyalty may only last for a limited period due to exposure to multiple price promotions and alternatives (Carvalhas, 2021). Therefore, Lavuri et al. (2023) posited that AL for millennials is the most vital loyalty behaviour because it ensures long-lasting relationships between retailers and millennial consumers. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H9: Online satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on the attitudinal loyalty of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

4.10. The interrelationship between online satisfaction and behavioural loyalty

Behavioural loyalty refers to the degree to which consumers are committed to a brand or retailer, considering the emotional component that would influence consumers to switch to an alternative brand or

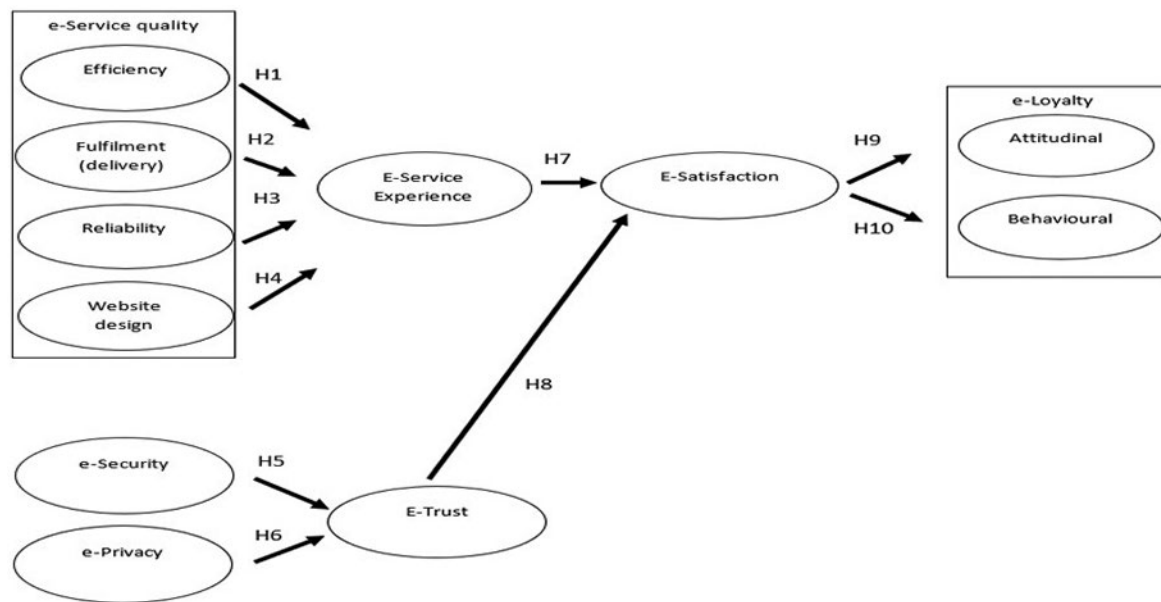


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model. *Source:* Researchers' own construct.

retailer (Mardaleta et al., 2022). Consequently, behavioural loyalty is mostly demonstrated in repeat purchase and usage behaviour, which indicate customer satisfaction (Rita et al., 2019). Drenik (2019) postulated that millennials are only satisfied with brands and online retailers that they perceive to be relevant and authentic. Moreover, Mgiba and Nyamande (2020) argued that millennials rely heavily on word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals before purchasing a product. This suggests that consumers influence other potential consumers by expressing their views on a retailer and its products. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that:

H10: Online satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on the behavioural loyalty of millennial customers purchasing footwear online.

The proposed hypothesised relationships in the study are illustrated by Figure 1.

5. Methodology

The study's target population was South African millennials aged 18–34 at the time of the study who purchased footwear online in the past 12 months. A sample size of 260 were targeted, but only 248 usable questionnaires could be used for data analysis purposes. This sample size is within the minimum sample range of 200–450 recommended by Hair et al. (2010) and Malhotra (2010). Screening questions were applied to ensure the sample met the set requirements to partake in the study and the study intended to generate quantitative data to deliver findings that could be generalised.

A self-administered questionnaire was used in the study and was distributed to online footwear consumers via an electronic channel, such as email or social media (Google Forms, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram), and at high-traffic malls in Gauteng. The study included respondents from Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Pretoria in Gauteng (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The study used a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire included a foreword that orientated the respondents towards the nature of the study and their rights, followed by sections measuring respondents' demographics and online purchasing behaviour towards footwear. Also, full consent to participate in the study was secured from respondents as they had to provide permission on the pre-amble of the questionnaire, prior to completion of the questionnaire.

The items applied to measure the different constructs in the study were adapted from existing measures used by Chauke (2014) (as referred to in Table 1). A seven-point Likert-type scale was used to measure the level of agreement for the items tested in the study, where one signified 'strongly disagree'

Table 1. Constructs and items.

Key constructs	Item count	Source
Efficiency	5	Türk et al. (2012)
Fulfilment	5	Türk et al. (2012)
Reliability	4	Ting et al. (2016)
Website design	5	Noorshella et al. (2015)
E-service experience	5	Chou et al. (2015)
E-security	5	Chou et al. (2015)
E-privacy	5	Chou et al. (2015)
E-trust	5	Chou et al. (2015)
E-satisfaction	5	Chou et al. (2015)
Attitudinal loyalty	5	Hong and Cho (2011)
Behavioural loyalty	5	Tankovic and Benazic (2018)

Source: Researchers' own construct.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha scores per construct.

Key construct	Cronbach's alpha value
Efficiency	0.869
Fulfilment	0.856
Reliability	0.929
Website design	0.900
E-service experience	0.925
E-security	0.927
E-privacy	0.910
E-trust	0.890
E-satisfaction	0.948
E-loyalty	0.900

Source: Researchers' own construct.

and seven signified 'strongly agree' with respect to items measuring efficiency, fulfilment, reliability, website design, e-service experience, e-security, e-privacy, e-trust, e-satisfaction, AL and behavioural loyalty. To further validate the survey, a pilot test was secured. The pilot test encompassed self-administered questionnaires *via* an electronic channel survey using a small sample of 20 individuals included in the results. This was done to provide assurance that the survey was appropriate for use on a larger scale.

After cleaning and editing the data, it was entered into SPSS version 28.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Through the application of AMOS version 26.0 (University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa) (The employer of the authors on this article have a copyright licence to enable the authors to use the software programme SPSS version 38.0 and AMOS version 26.0), the calculation of frequencies and descriptive statistics were done to obtain knowledge on the demographic profiling of respondents and the 54 items measuring the 11 constructs used in the study. The assessment of the measurement model was secured through the examination of its psychometric properties by executing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The measurement model and structural model were assessed using AMOS version 26.0. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the general rule of thumb is that Cronbach's alpha scores of 0.7 and above are good, 0.8 and above are better, and 0.9 and above are excellent. As noted in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha values are all within these required boundaries. The Cronbach's alpha values for the 11 constructs in the study are illustrated in Table 2. Conclusively, ethical clearance for the study was secured through the School of Consumer Intelligence at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. The ethical clearance number for the study is 2021SCiIS030.

6. Empirical findings

6.1. Behavioural profile of respondents

The majority of respondents (41.5%, $n = 103$) purchased footwear online three to four times in the past 12 months. Moreover, the largest number of respondents (50.4%, $n = 124$) bought footwear online once every three months. The results also showed that most of the respondents purchase higher-valued shoe brands, such as Nike (34.3%, $n = 85$), followed by a combination of 'other' online brands (34%, $n = 84$), namely Asics, Maxed, Miss Black and Polo. The third and fourth most purchased value shoe brands were Adidas (13.3%, $n = 33$) and Vans (5.8%, $n = 14$) respectively. From an online retailer perspective, the

results showed that majority of respondents purchased footwear using a combination of 'other' retailers (41.6%, $n = 106$), such as Adidas, Drip South Africa, Mr Price, Takealot, Wish and Zara; followed by Superbalist (20.2%, $n = 50$); The Foschini Group (i.e. Markham, Archive, G-Star Raw, Totalsports, Sportscene) (15.3%, $n = 38$); and Nike (9.7%, $n = 24$).

6.2. Normality assessment

Normality was tested through the application of the measures of skewness and kurtosis. Scholars, such as Singh et al. (2019) and Watkins (2018), argue that the distribution of data can be considered normal if the values of skewness are between -1 and $+1$ and the values of kurtosis are between -7 and $+7$. The values of all items in the study fell within these stipulated parameters recommended. Therefore, the distribution of the data can be considered normally distributed. However, it is important to state that due to the large sample size, Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilks tests were not conducted, as suggested by Yap and Sim (2011). The reason being that these tests are very sensitive with large samples (these tests are more robust for a sample of less than 100).

6.3. Reliability assessment

Cronbach's alpha values were used to determine internal consistency. Hair et al. (2014) argued that Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 are acceptable. Therefore, the values obtained for this study illustrate reliability, as illustrated by Table 2. As a result, considering that Cronbach's alpha values for the different constructs in the study are above 0.7, internal consistency reliability was secured.

6.4. Measurement model assessment

A CFA was secured through the application of AMOS version 26.0. The CFA was done on the 54-item 11-construct model to assess the psychometric properties of the measurement model. However, the CFA revealed that behavioural loyalty items had high cross-loadings onto other factors. All items dealt with issues concerning online loyalty with the online store from a behavioural perspective. Consequently, these items were removed using the CFA and the behavioural loyalty construct was not considered for further analysis. Table 3 reflects the outcome of the measurement model testing, illustrating that all goodness-of-fit measures are within the recommended limits, as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). The CMIN - Normed chi-square (χ^2 / df) was statistically significant, with a value of 2664 ($(\chi^2 / df) \leq 3$); and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) was also statistically significant, with a fit of 0.872 (which should reflect a value of ≥ 0.8) (traditional fit). Moreover, the comparative fit index (CFI) (0.891) fell within the required parameter, with a value of 0.891 (namely $CFI > 0.95$) (great fit) (Hair et al., 2014). The Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) was 0.878, which is below the required threshold of 0.90 (traditional fit) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was acceptable as it fell with the 0.05–0.10 parameter, with a value of 0.082 (Hair et al., 2019). These results indicate model fit, as supported by Hair et al. (2014, 2019).

Table 4 outlines the outcome of the factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and the mean and standard deviation scores of the 54 items applied to measure the different constructs of the study (i.e. efficiency, fulfilment, reliability, website design, e-security, e-privacy, e-trust, e-service experience, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty). The factor loadings and AVEs for all items exceeded 0.5 (as reflected by Table 4). The results in Table 4 also present a composite reliability (CR) value of 0.934, which means the scale has good reliability. In general, CR is greater than 0.6 as recommended by Hair et al. (2014) and the AVE is greater than 0.5, therefore indicating the reliability of this model is good.

Table 3. Measures for goodness of fit (measurement model).

CMIN	AGFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
2664	0.872	0.891	0.878	0.082

Source: Researchers' own construct.

In terms of descriptive statistics for the items, it is evident that the means varied between 2.77 and 6.02, with standard deviations between 1.249 and 2.073. This is suggestive of regularity between the items that measure the constructs of the study.

6.5. Convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model

Convergent validity is a method used to test construct validity, it identifies the relationship between measures and the extent to which two measures capture the same information (Carlson & Herdman, 2010). In this study, convergent validity was measured by ensuring that the AVE for each construct was above 0.5 and the CR per construct was above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4 reflects that each construct has an AVE above 0.5 and a CR higher than 0.7. Contrastingly, discriminant validity measures the extent to which the results from a scale do not correlate with a scale item from other constructs. Discriminant validity is measured in the study by assessing the square root ($\sqrt{}$) of the AVE and the presence of significant cross-loadings. The square root of an AVE should be larger than the correlations between the constructs and the model should not contain a high number of cross-loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 5 presents the discriminant validity, with each of the values in bold being higher than the correlation values.

Table 5 presents the square roots of AVE for the constructs and it is evident that all the values are higher than the correlation estimates. It is also important to note that all the constructs included in the

Table 4. Factor loadings, average variance extracted, mean, standard deviation and composite reliability.

Construct and items		Factor loadings	AVE	M	SD	CR
Efficiency	E1	0.887	0.741	5.81	1.474	0.934
	E2	0.910		5.74	1.450	
	E3	0.734		5.74	1.577	
	E4	0.855		5.59	1.582	
	E5	0.906		5.80	1.469	
Fulfilment	F3	0.916	0.826	5.52	1.478	0.935
	F2	0.916		5.73	1.443	
	F1	0.895		5.61	1.521	
Reliability	R3	0.752	0.659	5.30	1.509	0.852
	R2	0.890		5.30	1.479	
	R1	0.787		4.94	1.624	
Website design	WD5	0.871	0.800	5.47	1.561	0.942
	WD4	0.855		5.77	1.365	
	WD3	0.896		5.75	1.401	
	WD2	0.918		5.77	1.416	
	WD1	0.833		5.79	1.419	
E-service experience	ESE1	0.887	0.719	5.82	1.321	0.927
	ESE2	0.775		5.73	1.485	
	ESE3	0.841		5.70	1.524	
	ESE4	0.863		5.96	1.274	
	ESE5	0.868		5.95	1.249	
E-security	ES5	0.818	0.765	4.99	1.520	0.928
	ES3	0.874		5.25	1.504	
	ES2	0.919		5.29	1.518	
	ES1	0.884		5.31	1.436	
E-privacy	EP5	0.790	0.669	4.77	1.649	0.910
	EP4	0.861		4.59	1.686	
	EP3	0.889		5.00	1.514	
	EP2	0.793		5.08	1.576	
	EP1	0.748		4.88	1.696	
E-trust	ET3	0.763	0.741	5.15	1.507	0.895
	ET4	0.904		5.43	1.485	
	ET5	0.907		5.47	1.478	
E-satisfaction	ES1	0.847	0.790	5.81	1.532	0.950
	ES2	0.920		5.99	1.298	
	ES3	0.939		5.92	1.436	
	ES4	0.870		5.85	1.492	
	ES5	0.866		6.02	1.441	
E-loyalty	AL1	0.711	0.709	5.49	1.664	0.906
	AL4	0.919		5.63	1.594	
	AL5	0.946		5.69	1.594	
	AL3	0.769		2.77	2.073	

M: mean; SD: standard deviation; CR: composite reliability

Source: Researchers' own construct.

Table 5. Component correlation matrix (discriminant validity).

EFF	0.861									
FUL	0.716	0.909								
REL	0.708	0.711	0.812							
WD	0.819	0.671	0.683	0.894						
ESE	0.790	0.738	0.704	0.881	0.848					
ES	0.580	0.745	0.692	0.620	0.704	0.875				
EP	0.535	0.588	0.625	0.617	0.648	0.768	0.818			
ET	0.650	0.650	0.654	0.716	0.720	0.728	0.753	0.861		
ES	0.750	0.750	0.631	0.800	0.797	0.593	0.556	0.713	0.889	
EL	0.644	0.644	0.556	0.723	0.672	0.523	0.490	0.659	0.790	0.842

EFF: efficiency; FUL: fulfilment; REL: reliability; WD: website design; ESE: e-service experience; ES: e-security; EP: e-privacy; ET: e-trust; ES: e-satisfaction; EL: e-loyalty

The diagonal elements are the square root ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) of AVE and the off-diagonal variables are the inter-construct correlations.

Source: Researchers' own construct.

Table 6. Measures for goodness of fit (structural model).

CMIN	AGFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
2550	0.872	0.996	0.978	0.082

Source: Researchers own' construct.

study had a good correlation among each other, except for e-loyalty and e-privacy, which had the lowest correlation value of (0.490). Considering this, discriminant validity was achieved. After the basic assumptions of the model were confirmed using the measurement model, it became important to measure the structural properties of the model. Upon inspecting the structural model's fit statistics as per Table 6, it was found that the CMIN - Normed chi-square (χ^2 / df) was statistically significant with a value of 2550 ($(\chi^2 / df) \leq 3$) and the AGFI was also statistically significant with a fit of 0.872 (which should reflect a value of ≥ 0.8). In addition, the CFI fell within the required parameter with a value of 0.996 (namely CFI > 0.90) (Hair et al., 2014). The TLI was 0.978, which is above the 0.90 threshold and the RMSEA was acceptable as it fell within the 0.05–0.10 parameter, with a value of 0.082 (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, the results indicated a model fit, as supported by Hair et al. (2014, 2019). These findings revealed that the model fits the data sufficiently because the goodness-of-fit measures all fell within the limits, as recommended by Hair et al. (2014) The normed fit index, TLI and CFI were above the 0.9 cut-off and the RMSEA was below 0.08.

Considering the discussion above, Table 7 illustrates the outcome of the tested hypotheses. In total, seven of the nine formulated hypotheses were supported.

Considering the results discussion above and the outcome of the hypotheses as per Table 7, the final model in Figure 2 is proposed.

Figure 2 considers each hypothesis tested in the study. The hypotheses reflected in black indicate a significant path, whereas the ones in red indicate a non-significant path in the final proposed model.

7. Discussion

Most respondents agreed that the design of the website as a dimension of e-service quality is a fundamental element of online footwear shopping. For a technologically advanced generation, such as millennials, it can be assumed that this finding is consistent with this generational cohort, as they no longer view the design of a website as a bonus, but an expectation. Furthermore, it was established that most respondents agreed that from their most recent online footwear purchase, the design of the online store was not creative. Based on this finding, it can be assumed that the visual appeal of a website is a fundamental element for the millennial cohort, which impacts their online service experiences. Moreover, website design was found to exert a high predictive and significant influence on e-service experience, which determines e-satisfaction. Therefore, e-service quality (through its selected elements) is viewed by millennials who purchase footwear online as an important driver of e-service experience. Prior research by Paek et al. (2021), Pratika and Sutikno (2017), Rahi and Ghani (2019) and Sukendi et al. (2021) also established the positive impact of e-service quality on the e-service experience of customers purchasing online.

Table 7. Hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Variable	Variable	β	Sig	Finding
H1	Efficiency	E	0.095	0.154	Not supported
H2	Fulfilment	F	0.156	0.005	Supported
H3	Reliability	R	0.038	0.541	Not supported
H4	Website design	WD	0.735	<0.001	Supported
H5	E-security	ES	0.349	<0.001	Supported
H6	E-privacy	EP	0.541	<0.001	Supported
H7	E-trust	ET	0.215	<0.001	Supported
H8	E-service experience	ESE	0.736	<0.001	Supported
H9	E-satisfaction	ES	0.836	<0.001	Supported

Source: Researchers' own construct.

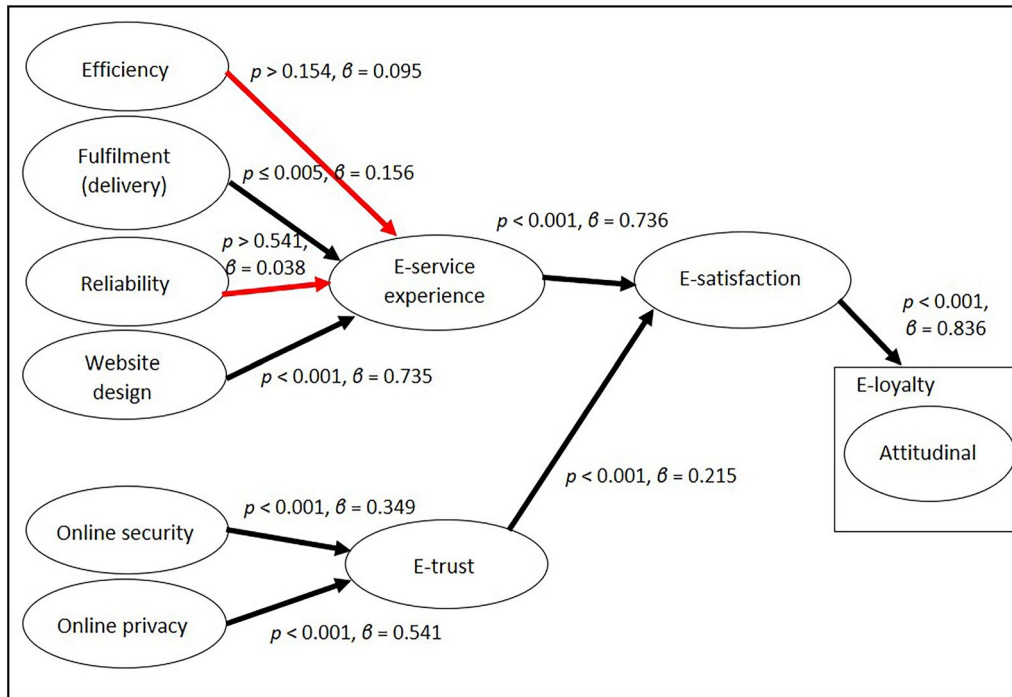


Figure 2. The path coefficients and beta value of the refined model, showing the relationship between factors influencing millennials' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty towards online footwear purchases. Note: \rightarrow indicates a significant path; \rightarrow indicates a non-significant path. Source: Researchers' own construct.

The study found most respondents agreed that e-service experience has a significant positive influence on their e-satisfaction levels when purchasing footwear online. Consequently, it can be implied that the above finding is consistent with tech-savvy millennials who use e-service experiences to evaluate or formulate judgements regarding the product or level service provided to them. Interestingly, most respondents agreed that they receive all necessary purchase confirmations and communication when acquiring footwear online. However, respondents revealed that they were not in control of the shopping process. Yet, the results determined that online e-service experience has a significant and positive relationship with the e-satisfaction of millennial customers purchasing footwear online ($p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.736$) which is in line with a study by Dewi and Riani (2017). Therefore, online e-service experience is an important element of online shopping, which has a significant and positive relationship with the e-satisfaction of millennial customers when purchasing footwear online. Al-Khayyal et al. (2020), Dewi and Riani (2017), Rita et al. (2019) and Swapana and Padmavathy (2017) concurred with the findings of this study, establishing that online e-service experiences positively impact e-satisfaction.

Respondents felt that their perceptions of e-trust influence their overall e-satisfaction when purchasing footwear online. This holds true in the context of the millennial cohort in the online footwear shopping environment. Although millennials regard purchasing online as less risky, they believe that the

information provided online by retailers is not always accurate. In addition, e-trust was found to have a significant and positive relationship ($p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.215$) with the e-satisfaction of millennial customers purchasing footwear online. E-trust is the foundation of the social contract theory and how it influences consumer online behaviour when engaging in online footwear shopping (Kruikemeier et al., 2020, p. 270). Previous research in the social sciences field also established that e-trust significantly impacts e-satisfaction (Bauman & Bachmann, 2017; Giao et al., 2020; Purnamasari, 2018). In addition, research by Emamdin et al. (2020), Rao et al. (2021) and Shahin and Priyanka (2021) indicates that high levels of e-trust can result in high levels of e-satisfaction.

From the results of the study, it can be established that millennials were satisfied with their experiences of purchasing shoes from the online store. Therefore, this finding is consistent with the millennial cohort, who crave a meaningful and more fulfilling online shopping experience when purchasing online (Companjon, 2021; Drenik, 2019). Interestingly, majority of respondents agreed that they were pleased with the experience of purchasing footwear from the online store. Furthermore, it was established that online satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on the AL of millennial customers purchasing footwear online ($p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.836$). Prior research by Ayuni (2019), Biswas et al. (2019), Carvalhas (2021) and Mahadin et al. (2020b) concurs with the results of the study, stating that e-satisfaction has a positive impact on millennials' e-loyalty.

8. Theoretical and managerial implications

8.1. Theoretical implications

The findings concur that e-service quality (through its selected elements, namely fulfilment and website design) have a significant and positive impact on e-satisfaction. Furthermore, e-service experience has a positive and significant effect on e-satisfaction. Scholars (e.g. Puranda et al., 2022; Quan et al., 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2020) confirm that the easier an online platform is to use, the higher customers' perceptions of the overall level of online experience received will be. Moreover, e-security and e-privacy significantly and positively impact e-trust, and the latter has a significant and positive effect on e-satisfaction. Al-Khayyal et al. (2020) and Wilis and Nurwulandari (2020) stated that if online customers believe that their sharing of personal information through an online platform is protected and will not result in any form of misrepresentation, their overall level of satisfaction is strengthened. Finally, e-satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on the e-loyalty (attitudinal dimension) of millennials when purchasing footwear online. Interestingly, studies by scholars like Alnaim et al. (2022), Juwaini et al. (2022) and M. A. Khan et al. (2019) have established that in emerging markets, such as Saudi Arabia, India and Pakistan, the influence of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty is not e-loyalty dimension-specific. This implies that online customers' e-loyalty is influenced by e-satisfaction, irrespective of the nature of e-loyalty in the regional context.

The results of the study also confirm that the scales applied to test efficiency, fulfilment, reliability, website design, e-service experience, e-security, e-privacy, e-trust, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty regarding the online purchase of footwear in South Africa are reliable and valid. The proposed hypothesised model has been confirmed, approving the hypothesised relationships in the proposed model in an online buying context.

8.1.1. Deeper understanding of the antecedents of e-service experience and the role of e-trust in strengthening e-satisfaction

The study's results validate the interrelationship between selected antecedents of e-service experience (fulfilment and website design), e-trust, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. Knowledge of these direct relationships is essential, as it has inferences for the discipline of marketing. Customers' e-loyalty is guided by an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence their e-trust and e-satisfaction.

It is fair to believe that if an online store delivers orders in the promised time, delivers the same products as described on the online store, and informs online customers about the order status, their overall e-service experience level is enhanced (Rita et al., 2019). Furthermore, when the online experience of the customer is reasonably enhanced should the display pages within the online store be easy to read, the

start page of the online platform easily leads the consumer to the information required, the online page is easy to navigate and the online store page uses a good colour combination, the overall e-service experience and e-satisfaction level of the customer are enhanced (Suryani et al., 2020). Moreover, when online customers believe that the online store always provides correct information, that there is no misrepresentation by the online store, and that the risk to purchase from the online store is low, their level of e-trust and overall e-satisfaction are enhanced (Sadeghi et al., 2021; Trivedi & Yadav, 2020). Multiple studies have supported the importance of e-trust and e-service experience as precursors to e-satisfaction in a business-to-consumer (B2C) context (Behjati et al., 2012; Çelik, 2021). Yet, the current findings stimulate research on the relational linkage between e-service quality, e-customer experience, e-trust and e-satisfaction through a deeper understanding of the precursors of e-satisfaction in an online purchase context.

8.1.2. Greater knowledge of the stimuli of e-trust in strengthening e-satisfaction

The results of the study confirm that e-trust is an important precursor to e-satisfaction in an online purchase context. Furthermore, the results validate that e-security and e-privacy are core antecedents to e-trust and need to be considered by online retailers when strengthening the overall online consumers' e-trust. As a result, knowledge of e-trust's antecedents guides online retailers towards the impact that e-trust can have on consumers' future e-satisfaction. Consequently, it seems as if customers purchasing online require online stores to always provide the correct information when making purchases, so that there is no misrepresentation. Additionally, online customers want to believe that the online store from which they make a purchase provides recommendations to them based on equal benefits with no fraudulent acts (Wilis & Nurwulandari, 2020). By securing an online environment that is based on these principles, online consumers will feel more secure when purchasing online from a selected platform through lower levels of perceived risk. For example, online customers need to believe that the online retailer employs security measures that will safeguard them when buying through the online platform. Moreover, customers have to believe that the online platform provides protection from transactional information potentially being changed or wiped out during transmission on the internet and that the online store has the ability to handle online hijackings. Through the provision of such online security, online customers' e-trust is strengthened, which may impact positively on their overall e-satisfaction when purchasing online (Prahawan et al., 2021).

8.1.3. A perspective on e-satisfaction in strengthening customer e-loyalty

The research findings validate the precursor role of e-satisfaction in strengthening customers' e-loyalty (attitudinal) (Kaya et al., 2019; Ting et al., 2016). Scholars, such as Purwanto (2022) and L. Wang and Prompanyo (2020), have extensively validated e-satisfaction as a precursor to e-loyalty. Therefore, it would seem that the strengthening of e-satisfaction is built on aspects that include having a positive experience when buying online, creating an emotional feeling of contentment when making a purchase through an online retailer, delivering customers' online expectations and creating feelings of pleasure when buying online (Juwaini et al., 2022; Vijay et al., 2019). E-satisfaction is imperative to strengthen the attitudinal dimension of e-loyalty, especially since an overall high level of e-satisfaction enhances customers' intentions to make online purchases more regularly, increase the emotional attachment of the customer to the online retailer brand, and stimulate online referrals based on positive e-satisfaction online experiences. Moreover, numerous scholars confirm that the higher the level of customer e-satisfaction, the stronger customers' future loyalty intentions will be (Mahadin et al., 2020a; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Suariedewi & Suprpti, 2020). Through such a positive attitude affirmation, customers' willingness to remain with the online retailer is strengthened (Ashiq & Hussain, 2023). Thus, the impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty might be different from what marketing literature promulgates, necessitating further investigation.

8.2. Managerial implications

Online retailers should develop strategies to enhance the online purchase intentions of the millennial cohort in South Africa. This is especially important when considering that millennials in the country are spending more money on clothing and footwear than any other consumer group (P. Naidoo, 2018; Pentz et al., 2020). For example, to enhance the overall e-service experience and e-satisfaction of millennials,

online retailers can consider live video chat as a tool, since it has a significant untapped potential for online retailers that wish to adapt to the transformed e-commerce landscape. As South Africa steps into the next technology revolution, connecting with an assistant live who is committed to resolving online queries makes a consumer feel connected with the retailer. In addition, retailers can embed a video chat link on the website and mobile apps where it can be easily seen or accessed by the consumer. Having a single-click option for consumers to ask questions during their online purchases is a way of showing them support and ensuring a seamless experience when engaging with the online retailer. Online retailers can also develop a deeper understanding on how millennials feel while using the product. Storytelling is a great way of conveying brand values through emotional content that facilitates effective communication and builds strong relationships with this customer segment. When delivering a story on a website, retailers should focus on how people feel or what their experiences are when using their products/brands. They should highlight the benefits and advantages of using the product/brand and how it adds value to the life of millennial consumers. In addition, retailers should always use easy-to-interpret content, such as images or videos. As a result, retailers should sell not just sell a product as such, but rather an idea of what it means for customers to purchase and use the product and how it improves their overall brand image and life quality.

To enhance e-satisfaction and loyalty of millennial consumers, online retailers need to better understand that millennial consumers are smart and internet-savvy consumers. With all the information that is widely available and accessible at a touch of a button, millennial consumers still engage in product comparisons before they make their purchase decisions. Therefore, online retailers need to consider an online integrated price comparison feature that shows pricing on three different levels: i) average selling price (the price of the product in a specific category across different markets and channels); ii) the benchmark product price (the standard price of the product across different retailers); and iii) the retailer promotional price (the retailer's reduced price of a product to entice potential consumers to make a purchase). Assuming that the retailer will be selling at a promotional price, having all three price differences on display will further convince consumers to purchase from the retailer, resulting in a better purchase decision for consumers.

Finally, it should be noted that millennial consumers are drawn to and support companies that share their same value systems. Consequently, online retailers need to offer products that tie to a cause they support or feel strongly about. The product should be themed after the cause. A great example of how this has been perfectly executed in the past is the collaboration of Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi with local lifestyle brand Freedom of Movement to launch a limited-edition shoe. The proceeds made from selling the shoes were used to fund various community upliftment projects in the impoverished township of Zwile in Port Elizabeth, which is Kolisi's birth town. These upliftment projects include renovating sports infrastructure in and around Zwile, providing sports kits and equipment to the less fortunate, and supporting local feeding schemes in the community. This is one of many ways retailers can align themselves with a good cause or support movements that this consumer group feels strongly about.

9. Conclusions, limitations and areas for further research

The purpose of the study was to determine the factors that influence millennial consumers' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty when purchasing footwear online in South Africa. The results of the study indicate that fulfilment and website design impact e-service experience, e-service experience and e-trust influences e-satisfaction and e-satisfaction affects the future loyalty (attitudinal) of millennial customers purchasing footwear online. The study's results should be considered against the background of the study's identified limitations. First, a convenience sampling approach was applied to the study and, second, only millennial respondents from the Gauteng province in South Africa were included. Consequently, the findings of the study cannot be generalised across South Africa, as an emerging African market. Future research could include more provinces in South Africa (e.g. Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal). Furthermore, a mixed-method approach that encompasses quantitative and qualitative research techniques could be applied to secure more depth into consumer perceptions of online buying experiences of various product purchases in different settings.

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The authors, Siphamandla Bingwa, Professor Christine De Meyer-Heydenrych and Professor Mornay Roberts-Lombard, made equal contributions to the article. They were involved in conceiving and designing the study, analysing and interpreting the data, drafting the article, critically revising it for intellectual content and granting final approval for publication. All authors accept accountability for all facets of the work.

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The authors have no interest to declare in terms of this article.

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Data availability statement

The data set is available from the corresponding author on request.

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