

Understanding Online Store Service Quality Antecedents and Their Impact on Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions in Iran

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Abstract

The proliferation of online stores in Iran surged in recent years, yet a notable proportion of these ventures faltered shortly after inception. Among the myriad challenges confronting Iranian online retailers, the discontinuity in customer purchases stood out prominently. To address this issue, this study delved into the influence of online store service quality antecedents, specifically perceived risk, service convenience, and website design, on both customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The statistical population of this study included customers of selected online stores who had made at least one purchase in the last three months. The sampling method used was stratified sampling. Data collection entailed administering a questionnaire, and the research model underwent scrutiny via structural equation modeling (SEM). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, while the average extracted variance (AVE) was employed to measure the validity. The results indicated a significant positive association between website design and the quality of online store services. Moreover, service convenience and the quality of online store services emerged as robust determinants of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction, in turn, exhibited a substantial positive impact on customer behavioral intentions. Conversely, perceived risk exerted a negative and significant influence on the quality of online store services. Notably, the effects of service convenience on service quality and the impact of service quality on customer behavioral intentions were statistically insignificant at the 95% confidence level. However, the mediating variable of satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between online store service quality and customer behavioral intentions.

Keywords: Online Store, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, behavioral intention

Introduction

In recent years, due to the development of infrastructure needed by online stores in Iran, such as the development of electronic banking (Emami & Namamian, 2018), increasing the penetration rate of the Internet and increasing the speed of the Internet (Imankhan, 2018), the necessary conditions to expand online store activity have been provided throughout the country, even in rural areas (Safari Ali Akbari et al., 2018). For this reason, many online stores have been

set up in Iran during this period, but most have failed (Khademi & Farazandeh, 2019). One of the reasons for the high failure rate of online stores in Iran is their failure to retain customers, so most customers buy only once or twice from them (Gharibi et al., 2020). Since attracting new customers is very expensive (Agrawal & Agrawal, 2019), online stores can only make good profits if they satisfy customers and have a long-term relationship with them (Park & Thangam, 2019). The primary challenges for e-

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commerce operators are establishing trust with customers to encourage initial purchases and securing a favorable position in consumers' minds to promote repeat business (Darvish et al., 2023).

To satisfy customers, online stores must provide high-quality services (Rita et al., 2019) so that satisfied customers buy again and introduce and recommend the store to others. In other words, online stores today must provide high-quality services to their customers to survive, keep their current customers satisfied, and attract new customers (Hult et al., 2019). Electronic services differ significantly from traditional services. Electronic services mean providing services on electronic networks such as the Internet, including services provided by service companies and manufacturing companies (Paiola et al., 2021). Online store services also differ significantly from physical stores, and various factors affect the quality of online store services (Blut, 2016). For example, how to provide information, how to send goods to customers, how to get money from customers, guarantees, and after-sales service all affect the quality of online store services (Al-dweeri et al., 2017). Website design is a critical component that can enhance the user experience and facilitate easy navigation, ultimately leading to higher customer satisfaction (Zadegan et al., 2023). Service convenience, which includes factors like the ease of finding products, simple checkout processes, and efficient customer support, also plays a vital role in shaping customer perceptions (Rane et al., 2023). On the other hand, perceived risk, which encompasses concerns about security, privacy, and the reliability of online transactions, can negatively impact customer trust and satisfaction (Jin & Lim, 2021).

Understanding these factors is essential for the success and sustainability of online stores in Iran, a rapidly growing segment of the retail market. This study investigates the effect of online store service quality antecedents—perceived risk, service convenience, and website design—on customer satisfaction and behavioral

intentions. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following question: How do perceived risk, service convenience, and website design influence the quality of online store services, and in turn, how do these factors affect customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, with satisfaction serving as a mediator? By addressing this question, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that can help online retailers improve customer retention rates, increase profitability, and foster long-term growth. This study not only contributes to the academic literature on e-commerce and service quality but also offers practical implications for online store managers and policymakers striving to enhance the online shopping experience and ensure the sustainability of online retail businesses in Iran.

Literature Review

Some experts define service quality as the consumer's comprehensive judgment of service performance compared to similar services (Park et al., 2023). In another definition, the quality of a service is determined by the degree to which the service performance matches the customer's expectations. The quality of e-services is the customer's understanding, judgment, and overall assessment of the virtual marketplace service quality. Many researchers have proposed various features and dimensions to measure the quality of electronic services. The main features of e-service quality are delivery speed, ease of use, reliability, enjoyment, and control (Nandankar et al., 2023). The quality of a website's e-services reflects the ease, efficiency, and effectiveness of product search, product purchases, and product delivery processes (Gupta et al., 2024).

Because all e-services interactions are through websites, some authors have emphasized the importance of web service quality as a prerequisite for customer satisfaction (Abesh Loui Aghdam et al., 2023; Vasić et al., 2019). The quality of website services is essential because the

initial perception of customers is formed from the website's value. However, it also makes it possible to continue their current and future searches on the website. Research shows that the quality of e-services has a significant impact on the perceived value of

customers, which in turn has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, repurchasing, word of mouth, and ultimately their online loyalty (Uzir et al., 2021).

Table (1) presents the results of some studies related to the present research area.

Table 1.
Research Background

Source	Research title	Results
(Qalati et al., 2021)	Effects of perceived service quality, website quality, and reputation on purchase intention: The mediating and moderating roles of trust and perceived risk in online shopping	The study findings indicate that perceived risk moderates the relationship between trust in online shopping and purchase intention. When perceived risk is high, the relationship between trust and purchase intention becomes stronger. Trust also mediates the relationship between perceived service quality, website quality, reputation, and online purchase intention. Increasing trust can reduce the impact of perceived risk on purchase intention and foster stronger customer-company relationships.
(Zhou et al., 2019)	Measuring e-service quality and its importance to customer satisfaction and loyalty: An empirical study in a telecom setting	The study confirmed the positive relationship between e-service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. In addition, the quality of electronic services is recognized as the main predictor of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer satisfaction emerged as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty.
(Vásquez & Vera-Martínez, 2020)	From e-quality and brand perceptions to repurchase: a model to explain purchase behavior in a web-store	In contrast to previous research, the findings of this study suggest product brand perception and store brand perception as a predictor of customer trust and behavioral intentions in an online store.
(Habeb & Sudhakar, 2019)	Analyzing Causality Among the Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intention Variables Concerning E-Shopping: An Empirical Take	Research shows that the quality of e-services has a positive effect on e-satisfaction, which in turn affects consumer behavioral intentions, such as word of mouth, web browsing, and repurchasing.
(Jeon & Jeong, 2017)	Customers' perceived website service quality and its effects on e-loyalty	The findings of this study confirm that loyalty changes from cognitive (perceived service quality of the website) to emotional (customer satisfaction) to results (intention to return) and finally to the stage of action (customer loyalty). The perceived service quality of the website is a prerequisite for customer satisfaction, which leads to repurchasing intention.
(Biswas et al., 2019)	The Influence of Website Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction Towards Online Shopping: The Mediating Role of Confirmation of Expectation	The results of the study showed that the quality of website services has a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction and, in turn, their satisfaction with online shopping.
(Wali & Opara, 2012)	E-Service quality experience and customer loyalty: emphasis of the Nigeria airline operators	There is a positive correlation between website design and customer repurchase. Also, the credibility of the company's online services affects the repetition of consumer purchases.

The present study examines the prerequisites and consequences of website services quality of online stores in Iran, which is, therefore, different from other research in which the quality of service is

only used as an independent or dependent variable.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model of the present study is shown in Figure 1.

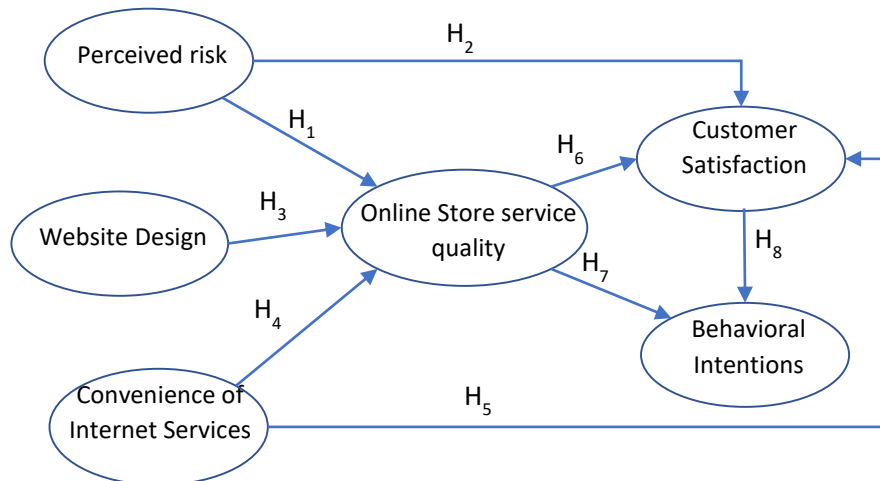


Figure 1. *Conceptual model of research*

Antecedents of online store service quality

Perceived risk: The customer's concern about the possible loss caused by online shopping is called perceived risk. Potential risks of online shopping include privacy, security, and credit card theft (Torki Biucky et al., 2017). Security and reputation of online store positively affect cognitive trust, whereas it negatively affects perceived risk (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Online shopping risks include abusing customer information, sending the wrong shipment, sending poor-quality products, and not providing after-sales service (Das & Kunja, 2024). To evaluate the credibility of the online store and the quality of the product, the customer only has access to the information and content provided on the store's website, and unlike physical stores, it is not possible to evaluate the seller's credit and product quality closely; as a result, the perceived risk of the customer is greater than the physical store (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018). Risk perceived by e-customers has been identified as one of the significant barriers to online shopping. As a result, online stores are trying to reassure customers about the security of the process and reduce their perceived risk (Udo et al., 2010). The results of several studies show that perceived risk has a significant impact on customer perception of the quality of e-services as well as satisfaction (Akbari et al., 2023; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018).

Hypothesis 1: Perceived risk significantly impacts online store service quality.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived risk has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

Website Design: Website design can be defined as the presentation and layout of website information and the work process (Al-Qeisi et al., 2014). This structure includes dimensions such as the quality of information, the appropriateness of the information, types of media, presentation mode, size and type of images or videos, and how the website purchase process is performed (Hasan, 2016). Also, a combination of photos, graphics, and audio and video files can be used to enhance the website design quality. Findings from some studies suggest that website design can effectively influence customer behavior, leading to behavioral intentions and continued use of the website's services (Nazari Ghazvini et al., 2023; Rita et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 3: Website design significantly impacts online store service quality.

The convenience of Internet Services: One of the most important benefits of online shopping for customers is the convenience of online shopping in terms of access at any time, the availability of information, no need to spend much time, no geographical barriers, and anonymity (Mombeuil & Uhde, 2021).

Some studies show that customers often cite the convenience of online shopping as a primary reason to shop online (Duarte et al., 2018). Customer satisfaction is effectively affected by the convenience of the online marketplace. Some researchers have also found that the convenience of Internet services significantly impacts the perceived quality of services (Jebarajakirthy & Shankar, 2021).

Hypothesis 4: The convenience of Internet services significantly impacts the service quality of online stores.

Hypothesis 5: Convenience of Internet services significantly impacts customer satisfaction.

Consequences of online store service quality

Customer Satisfaction: Customer satisfaction is a sign of confidence that service will likely lead to a positive feeling (Udo et al., 2010). Customer satisfaction of online store is influenced by product delivery, perceived security, information quality, and product variety (Mofokeng, 2021). So, Customer satisfaction results from customer experience during the buying process and plays a key role in influencing future customer behaviors, such as repurchasing and loyalty. One of the essential criteria for the success of online stores is customer satisfaction. A satisfied customer will likely buy again and recommend the store to others (Meilatinova, 2021), while a dissatisfied customer leaves the online store with or without a complaint. The findings of the study show that the quality of online store services, directly and indirectly, has a positive effect on satisfaction as well as behavioral intentions, i.e., intention to repurchase, word of mouth (WOM), and revisit the store site (Gholipour Soleimani & Einolahzadeh, 2018).

Hypothesis 6: The online store service quality significantly impacts customer satisfaction.

Behavioral Intentions: Behavioral intentions can be expressed through intent to repurchase, word of mouth (WOM), loyalty,

complaint behavior, and price sensitivity (Lin et al., 2022). High quality of service (understood by the customer) often leads to desirable behavioral intentions, while low quality of service leads to undesirable behavioral intentions (Hossain et al., 2023). Customer experiences are related to behavioral intentions, so the more positive the customer experience, the more likely he or she is to want to use the service again (Barari et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 7: The online store service quality significantly affects behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis 8: Customer satisfaction has a significant effect on behavioral Intentions.

Methodology

The present study is a descriptive survey study regarding the data collection method. A questionnaire was used to collect research data. Cronbach's alpha coefficient evaluates the reliability of the questionnaire, and the average extracted variance (AVE) was used to measure the validity of the questionnaire. The research model has been tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). In this study, SEM was conducted using LISREL (Linear Structural Relations). LISREL allows for the simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships, providing a robust framework to assess both the direct and indirect effects of various antecedents on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

The statistical population of this study includes customers who have purchased from the online stores under study at least once in the last three months. This timeframe ensures that respondents have recent and relevant shopping experiences, allowing them to accurately recall and evaluate the content of the website and the quality of online store services. Given the widespread and continuous nature of online shopping, the number of potential customers is extremely large. Therefore, the statistical population can be considered infinite. This assumption helps in applying statistical methods that are designed for large populations, ensuring the

reliability and generalizability of the findings. Selecting people with online shopping experiences in the past three months is crucial. It ensures that participants can remember and provide detailed information necessary to answer questions related to website content, service quality, and their overall shopping experience. This approach enhances the validity of the data collected, as recent shoppers are more likely to provide accurate and relevant responses. In

the present study, a stratified sampling method was used. In this way, first, the list of buyers of each online store in the last quarter was received, and then, in proportion to the number of buyers of each site, electronic questionnaires were sent to users randomly. Finally, 251 questionnaires were collected, of which 245 were used for analysis. Table (2) shows some of the demographic characteristics of the research sample.

Table 2.

Demographic characteristics of the statistical sample

Variable	Dimensions	Number	Percent
Sexuality	Female	57	27.23
	Male	188	73.76
	Total	245	100
Age	20 years and less	13	31.5
	Between 21 and 30 years	160	31.65
	Between 31 and 40 years	55	45.22
	Between 41 and 50 years	12	9.4
	51 years and older	5	04.2
	Total	245	100
The number of online purchases in the last three months	1 time	123	2.50
	2 times	49	20
	3 times	23	39.9
	4 times and more	50	41.20
	Total	245	100

Questionnaire and its Validity and Reliability

The primary tool used in this study to collect data was the Standard Questionnaire, which included 27 questions. Based on previous research, a seven-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed for measuring the construct components. The questionnaire was sent by email to the respondents. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to

evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire has acceptable reliability since Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated for all questionnaire dimensions is more than 0.7. The average variance extract was used to evaluate the validity of the questionnaire. The average extracted variance above 0.5 indicates the appropriate validity of the questionnaire. Table (3) presents the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 3.

Resources, validity, and reliability of the questionnaire

Constructs	Source	Number of questions	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
online store Services Quality	(Al-dweeri et al., 2017)	4	0.807	0.538
Satisfaction	(Alkhouli, 2017)	3	0.895	0.728
Behavioral Intentions	(Yeo et al., 2017)	4	0.902	0.723
Perceived risk	(Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2018) (Bonnin, 2020)	6	0.904	0.580
Website Design	(Rita et al., 2019) (Dianat et al., 2019)	7	0.871	0.506
The convenience of Internet service	(Khan & Khan, 2018)	3	0.764	0.523

Model fit test

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine the model's fitness, shown in table (4). A value less than 3 is acceptable for the

Ratio of Chi-Square to degree of freedom, and values greater than 0.9 are desirable for GFI, CFI, NFI, and NNFI, while a value less than 0.1 for RMSEA is acceptable. The indices presented in Table 4 show that the research model is quite acceptable.

Table 4.

Model Fit indices

Index name	Value indicator	Limit	Results
Chi-Square to Degree of Freedom Ratio	1.53	Less than 3	Acceptable
GFI	0.98	Above 0.9	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.047	Less than 0.9	Acceptable
CFI	0.97	Above 0.9	Acceptable
NFI	0.94	Above 0.9	Acceptable
NNFI	0.91	Above 0.9	Acceptable

Research findings

The correlation coefficients between the research variables are shown in Table (5), all of which were confirmed at 95% confidence

level. Due to the significance of the relationship between the research variables, the research hypotheses were tested.

Table 5.

The correlation coefficient among research variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1) Perceived risk	1					
2) Website Design	-0.333	1				
3) Convenience of Internet service	-0.048	0.321	1			
4) online store Services Quality	-0.406	0.792	0.301	1		
5) Satisfaction	-0.442	0.638	0.366	0.743	1	
6) Behavioral Intentions	-0.446	0.549	0.418	0.665	0.820	1

The test results of 8 research hypotheses based on the modeling of structural equations are shown in Figure (2).

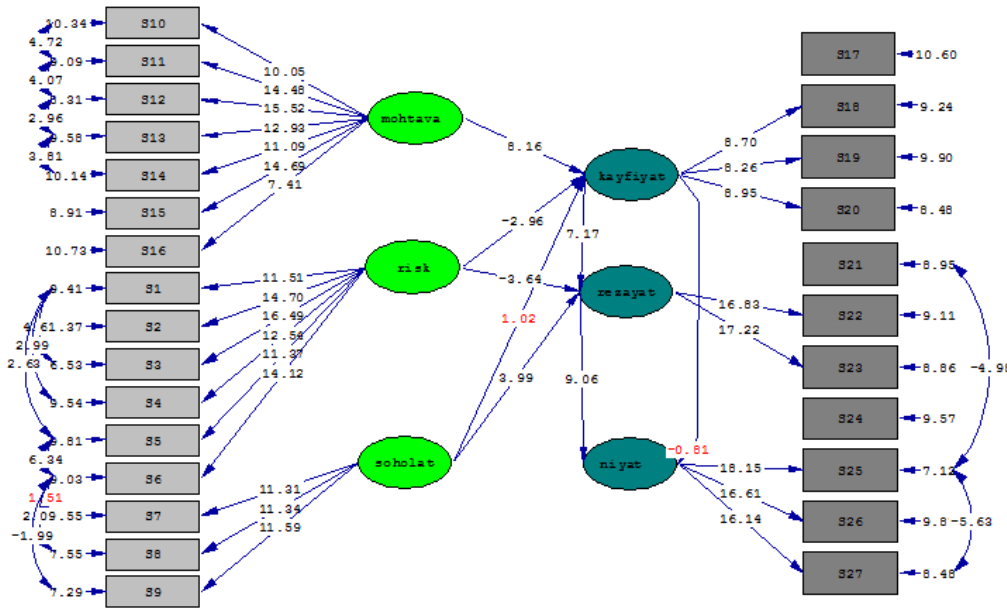
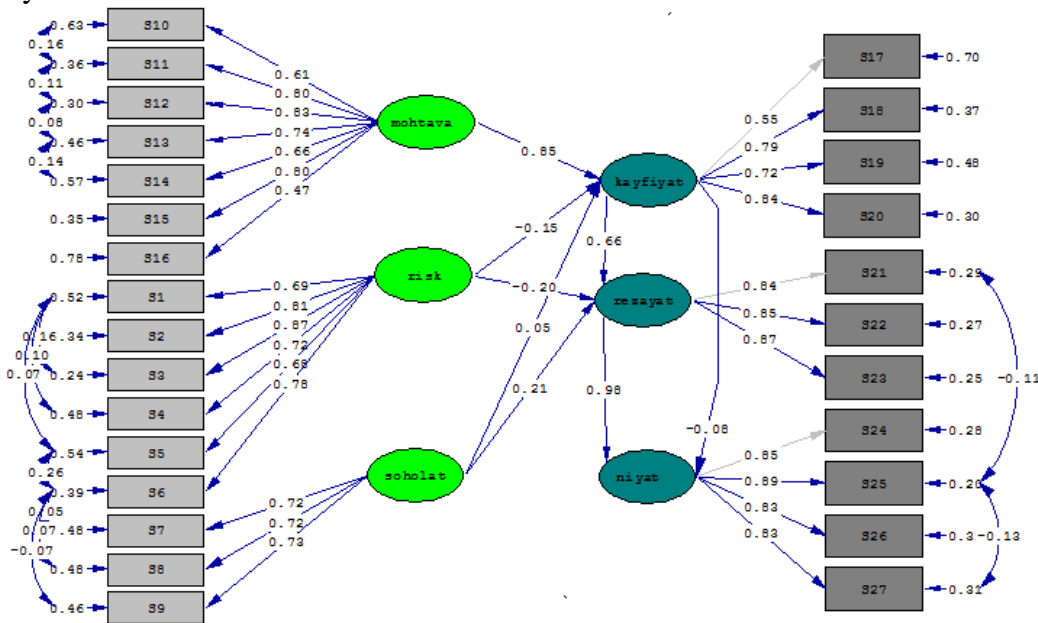


Figure 2. Research model in a significant mode (T-value)

As shown in Figure (2), the first, second, third, fifth, sixth, and eighth hypotheses have been confirmed according to the value of t-statistics. Therefore, perceived risk and website design significantly impact the quality of online store services. Perceived risk, Convenience of internet service, and quality of online store service also

significantly impact satisfaction. Satisfaction also has a significant effect on behavioral intent. However, the effect of the Convenience of internet service on the quality of online store services and the impact of the quality of online store services on behavioral intentions is not significant at the 95% confidence level.



Chi-Square=458.59, df=300, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.047

Figure 3. The research model in the Estimating path coefficients

Considering the number of path coefficients shown in the relationships

between the research variables in Figure (3), it can be concluded that the effect of web

design on the quality of online store services, the effect of internet service convenience, and the online store services quality on satisfaction; also, the effect of satisfaction on

behavioral intentions is positive. However, the impact of perceived risk on the quality of online store services and satisfaction is negative.

Table 6.

Results summary

Hypothesis	Independent V.	Dependent V.	Path coefficient	T-value	Conclusion
H1	Perceived risk	online store service quality	-0.15	-2.96	supported
H2	Perceived risk	customer satisfaction	-0.20	-3.64	supported
H3	Website design	online store service quality	0.85	8.16	supported
H4	Convenience of Internet services	online store service quality	0.05	1.02	Not supported
H5	Convenience of Internet services	customer satisfaction	0.21	3.99	supported
H6	online store service quality	customer satisfaction	0.66	7.17	supported
H7	online store service quality	behavioral Intentions	-0.08	-0.81	Not supported
H8	customer satisfaction	behavioral Intentions	0.98	9.06	supported

Conclusions and Discussion

With the advancement of technology and the growth of competition, the distribution of products has also undergone a fundamental change. Today, online stores play an important role in selling products in all regions and countries. The most critical issue in this competitive market is the quality of services. Due to the increasing number of online stores, only those online stores can achieve appropriate profitability, which provides high-quality services to satisfy customers and turn them into loyal customers (Suhartanto et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study has examined the antecedents and consequences of online store service quality. In this regard, a questionnaire was distributed among 245 customers of online stores, and data were collected.

Based on the results of the data analysis, six hypotheses were confirmed, and two hypotheses were rejected. Website design has a positive and significant impact on the quality of online store services. Also, the Convenience of internet service and the quality of online store services have a positive and significant effect on customer

satisfaction. Satisfaction also has a positive and significant effect on customer behavioral intentions. The impact of perceived risk on the quality of online store services and satisfaction was negative and significant. Nevertheless, the impact of internet service Convenience on the quality of online store services and the impact of the quality of online store services on behavioral intentions was not significant at 95% confidence.

Website design and perceived risk had a significant impact on the quality of online store services, so the impact of perceived risk on the quality of online store services was negative, and the impact of website design on the quality of online store services was positive. Therefore, to increase the quality of online store services, we should reduce the perceived risk and improve website design. Also, because of the negative impact of perceived risk and positive impact of internet service convenience on satisfaction, perceptual risk should be reduced, and convenience of internet service should be increased to enhance customer satisfaction. Finally, since satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to buy, to increase the

buying intention, customer satisfaction should be increased. However, the increase in satisfaction also depends on the factors affecting it.

The results of previous studies are contradictory regarding the impact of perceived risk on the quality of e-services. In a group of studies, the impact of perceived risk on the quality of e-services has been confirmed (Ahmad et al., 2016; Rita et al., 2019). In some studies, the hypothesis of the impact of perceived risk on e-services quality has not been confirmed (Blut et al., 2015). This discrepancy in the impact of perceived risk on the quality of e-services is probably due to differences in the community under study. Customers have sufficient confidence in online stores in developed countries where specific security standards govern online store operations. However, there have been occasional reports of customer information theft or other criminal activity in countries like Iran, where there are no strict regulatory mechanisms for online store activity. So, one of the Iranian customer's concerns is online shopping risk; therefore, online stores should take special measures to reduce customers' perceived risk. The findings of the present study regarding the positive effect of website design on the quality of e-services, the positive effect of the quality of e-services on customer satisfaction, and the positive effect of satisfaction on customer behavioral intentions are consistent with previous studies (Rita et al., 2019; Vásquez & Vera-Martínez, 2020).

While the hypothesis of the impact of Internet services convenience on the quality of e-services has been confirmed in several previous studies (Shi et al., 2018; Udo et al., 2010), in the present study, the relationship was not significant at the of %95 confidence level. This hypothesis may have been rejected because convenience is more related to the user's expertise and skills than the e-services' quality. Of course, website design is involved in the perceived convenience of internet service, but not so much as to make the impact of perceived convenience on the quality of e-services meaningful. Another

hypothesis that was not confirmed in the present study was the effect of e-service quality on behavioral intentions. Although this hypothesis has been proven in many studies (Purnamasari & Suryandari, 2023; Retno et al., 2019), in this research has been rejected. The reason may be related to other factors affecting the customer's buying intention. This means that other factors, such as product price, are more important for customers with high price sensitivity; therefore, the customer pays more attention to these factors than the e-service quality when purchasing. Also, due to the demographic characteristics of the statistical sample, more than fifty percent of the respondents have bought from online stores only once in the last three months, so it could be said that a significant number of online customers in Iran only buy online to get online shopping experience and do not seriously intend to make regular purchases from online stores.

Given the above, online stores should strengthen the website design and convenience of access but weaken the perceived risk. To facilitate convenience of access, online store managers should design their websites so that the customer can go to the desired location (for example, to find a specific type of product) without any hassle. Of course, while maintaining the beautiful appearance of the website, the website should be designed in such a way that visitors can browse it easily despite the slow internet speed in Iran. For example, the website may offer similar products when a customer searches for a product. To reduce customer's perceived risk, the website should be designed to increase customer confidence in the store. For example, an online store can reduce the customer's perceived risk by posting that their money will be refunded if there are any problems with the purchase process. Alternatively, the trust of new customers can be gained by posting positive experiences from previous customers. It should be noted that although such content is necessary for e-businesses, exposing it to

customers can dramatically affect their confidence.

Regarding the results of the present study, paying attention to the following items can be helpful in future research. First, the conceptual model of this research has been tested among customers of all kinds of online stores. Therefore, it is recommended that in future research, this model be considered in a specific group of online stores, for example, online bookstores or clothing stores. Second, in this study, a questionnaire was used to measure all variables, including variables related to the consequence of the quality of online store services, but the consequences can also be observed. The results of the observational study can be more valuable and valid.

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