

The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Salesperson Behavior and Perceived Service Quality

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on salesperson behavior and perceived service quality from the customers' perspective in the clothing industry. This study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of methodology. The statistical population of the study consists of clothing salespeople, the total number of whom is unspecified. To determine the sample size, 384 individuals were considered, and the sampling method used was convenience sampling. Data collection tools included standardized questionnaires for emotional intelligence, salesperson behavior, and perceived service quality. The validity of these instruments was confirmed by experts, and their reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software and structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings indicate that salespeople's emotional intelligence has a positive and significant effect on their behavior in the sales environment. Furthermore, this behavior indirectly enhances the perceived service quality from the customers' perspective. Accordingly, it is recommended that clothing store managers focus on training and developing emotional intelligence skills among their employees to create an appropriate foundation for improving sales performance and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, salesperson behavior, perceived service quality

1. Introduction

In an increasingly customer-centric market landscape, the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping effective sales behavior and enhancing service quality has attracted significant attention in the fields of marketing and management. Within the context of the retail clothing industry, which is characterized by high interpersonal interaction and intense competition, the ability of sales personnel to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions has emerged as a key determinant of both individual and organizational performance. Emotional intelligence, as a multidimensional construct encompassing self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills, enables salespeople to navigate complex customer interactions, build trust, and deliver personalized services that contribute to perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Khan et al., 2025; Wulandari & Darmawan, 2024).

Several studies have demonstrated that emotionally intelligent salespeople are more likely to engage in customer-oriented behaviors, leading to improved sales outcomes and higher levels of customer loyalty (Santos et al., 2020; Supramaniam et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence supports a salesperson's capacity to adapt communication strategies, manage customer expectations, and resolve conflicts effectively—competencies that are essential in relationship-oriented selling environments. In particular, the regulation of emotions plays a pivotal role in minimizing the negative impact of customer rejection and stress, thereby fostering sustained performance across diverse market conditions (Khan et al., 2025; Kidwell et al., 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that the emotional calibration of salespeople—defined as the alignment of emotional displays with situational demands—positively correlates with sales performance and customer satisfaction metrics (Kidwell et al., 2021).

The theoretical underpinnings of this phenomenon can be traced to the emotional labor theory, which posits that employees' emotional displays are integral to service delivery, especially in face-to-face transactions. Salespeople often perform surface acting or deep acting to manage their emotions in ways that align with organizational expectations and customer perceptions. However, individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to engage in deep acting, thereby achieving authentic customer interactions and minimizing emotional exhaustion (Delpechitre & Beeler, 2018; McQuiston, 2018). This authentic engagement not only enhances the customer experience but also

contributes to the long-term psychological well-being of the sales staff, fostering resilience and commitment to sales goals (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2019; Rafi et al., 2014).

Moreover, research has increasingly explored the mediating mechanisms through which emotional intelligence influences sales performance. One such mechanism is the development of customer-fit reconfiguring capabilities, wherein emotionally intelligent salespeople adjust their selling strategies in response to dynamic customer needs (Rahmawan et al., 2023). Another pathway is through improved interpersonal trust and rapport building, which are essential in cultivating strong buyer-seller relationships (Varghese et al., 2017). These relational competencies are particularly critical in industries where service differentiation is minimal, and the salesperson becomes the primary source of competitive advantage (Mullins et al., 2014). Emotional intelligence also enhances salespeople's ability to interpret customer cues accurately and respond with appropriate emotional expressions, leading to more satisfying customer experiences and positive word-of-mouth (Briggs et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2017).

From a skill-based perspective, the integration of emotional intelligence into the broader competency framework of sales professionals has been shown to enhance both individual and team performance. Skills such as empathy, emotional regulation, and social awareness augment traditional sales competencies like product knowledge and negotiation, enabling a more holistic approach to customer engagement (DeCarlo & Lam, 2015; Shafiq, 2017). The dispositional-situational framework proposed by DeCarlo and Lam (2015) highlights the interaction between inherent personality traits and contextual variables in shaping effective sales strategies, suggesting that emotionally intelligent salespeople can better adapt to fluctuating market dynamics and customer expectations. This adaptive capability becomes increasingly critical as businesses shift toward solution-based selling and consultative approaches (Hall et al., 2017; Kadić-Magljajić et al., 2016).

In emerging markets, where formal training in emotional intelligence is often limited, the strategic development of EI competencies can serve as a low-cost yet high-impact intervention to boost frontline sales productivity. For instance, Musau (2023) found that self-efficacy and emotional intelligence jointly contribute to superior sales manager performance in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, indicating the cross-sectoral relevance of emotional intelligence as a predictor of success (Musau,

2023). Likewise, Udayana (2022) identified niche-based relational capabilities, underpinned by emotional intelligence, as instrumental in enhancing sales performance in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), thereby affirming the scalability of EI training across organizational contexts (Udayana, 2022). These findings reinforce the need for organizations to embed emotional intelligence development into their human resource practices, particularly in recruitment, training, and performance appraisal systems.

Beyond individual outcomes, emotional intelligence also influences team dynamics and organizational climate. Sales teams that exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to engage in more constructive conflict resolution, greater knowledge sharing, and more collaborative problem-solving efforts—all of which contribute to superior team performance and customer service excellence (Nusantara et al., 2022; Singh & Venugopal, 2015). These positive spillover effects further highlight the organizational value of investing in emotional intelligence development. Additionally, emotional intelligence facilitates ethical decision-making and value-based selling, promoting long-term customer trust and brand loyalty (Linh, 2020; McQuiston, 2018).

Despite these established benefits, the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived service quality remains underexplored in certain retail sectors, particularly in the clothing industry where sensory experiences, aesthetic preferences, and emotional connections with products significantly shape customer evaluations. In such contexts, emotionally intelligent salespeople play a vital role in interpreting non-verbal cues, managing emotional atmospheres, and creating personalized shopping experiences that elevate the perceived value of service interactions (Khan et al., 2025; Supramaniam et al., 2024). Furthermore, the emotional dynamics of the retail environment demand rapid emotional adjustments from salespeople, underscoring the importance of real-time emotional regulation skills for performance sustainability.

Given the rapidly evolving consumer behavior patterns and heightened expectations in the post-pandemic retail landscape, it is imperative to revisit traditional models of salesperson performance and integrate emotional intelligence as a core construct. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of emotional intelligence on salesperson behavior and the perceived quality of service from the customers' perspective in the apparel sector.

2. Methods and Materials

The research method is applied in terms of purpose and categorized as descriptive-survey in terms of data collection. The statistical population of the present study includes clothing product salespeople, the total number of whom is unspecified. To determine the sample size, 384 salespeople were considered, and the sampling method employed was convenience sampling.

Emotional Intelligence: The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire was developed by Wang and Law (2002) based on the emotional intelligence framework proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1993). This questionnaire contains 16 items and assesses four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. It is measured using a Likert scale with items such as "I am well aware of the reasons that often shape my emotions and feelings." In the study conducted by Heydari (2016), content, face, and criterion validity of this questionnaire were evaluated as appropriate. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient reported in Heydari's study (2016) was estimated to be above 0.929.

Salesperson Behavior: This questionnaire was developed by Kazemi and Emami (2022) and consists of 23 items aimed at evaluating the dimensions of professional salesperson behavior, including trust, expertise, salesperson image, pleasant interaction, perceived risk, and loyalty to the salesperson. The scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale. In the study by Kazemi and Emami (2022), the face and content validity of the scale were confirmed by university faculty members. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which was reported to be 0.82.

Perceived Service Quality: The Perceived Service Quality Questionnaire was developed by Chiu et al. (2011) to measure perceived service quality. This questionnaire includes 3 items and is rated on a Likert scale with statements such as "The design and customization of the product before purchase and before receiving the service were of good quality." In the study by Seyed Danesh (2018), the content, face, and criterion validity of this questionnaire were evaluated as appropriate. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient reported in Seyed Danesh's study (2016) was estimated to be above 0.95.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, education level, age, and work experience. To examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, salesperson behavior, and perceived service quality,

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using SPSS software. The model assessed both the strength and significance of direct and indirect paths among variables. Model fit was evaluated using indices such as the chi-square statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The significance of each hypothesized relationship was determined based on standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values, with t-values greater than 1.96 indicating statistical significance at the 95% confidence level.

3. Findings and Results

Out of the total 384 individuals in the statistical population of the present study, 154 individuals, equivalent

to 40.10%, were male, and 230 individuals, equivalent to 59.89%, were female. Out of the 384 individuals in the statistical population, 208 individuals (54.16%) held a bachelor's degree, and 176 individuals (45.83%) held a master's degree or higher. Ninety-two individuals (24.21%) were 40 years old. Of the 384 individuals in the statistical population, 64 individuals (16.16%) had less than 5 years of work experience, 118 individuals (30.72%) had between 5 and 10 years of experience, 107 individuals (27.86%) had between 10 and 15 years, and finally, 95 individuals (24.73%) had more than 15 years of service.

The research model for examining the relationships between the variables was obtained as follows: the intensity of the relationships between the research variables in the final model is presented below.

Table 1

The Results of Hypothesis Testing

Research Hypothesis	Effect Size	T-value	Significance Level	Result
Sub-hypothesis 1: Emotional intelligence affects salesperson behavior.	0.927	10.310	0.001	Confirmed
Sub-hypothesis 2: Emotional intelligence affects perceived service quality.	0.626	13.632	0.001	Confirmed

The effect size indicates the strength of the relationship between variables and ranges between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger the relationship between the variables.

T-values, calculated by dividing the effect size by the standard error, indicate the statistical significance of the relationships between latent variables. T-values between -

1.96 and +1.96 indicate no significant effect between the respective latent variables. T-values between 1.96 and 2.576 indicate a significant effect with 95% confidence, and T-values equal to or greater than 2.576 indicate a significant effect with more than 99% confidence between the latent variables.

Figure 1

Model with Beta Values

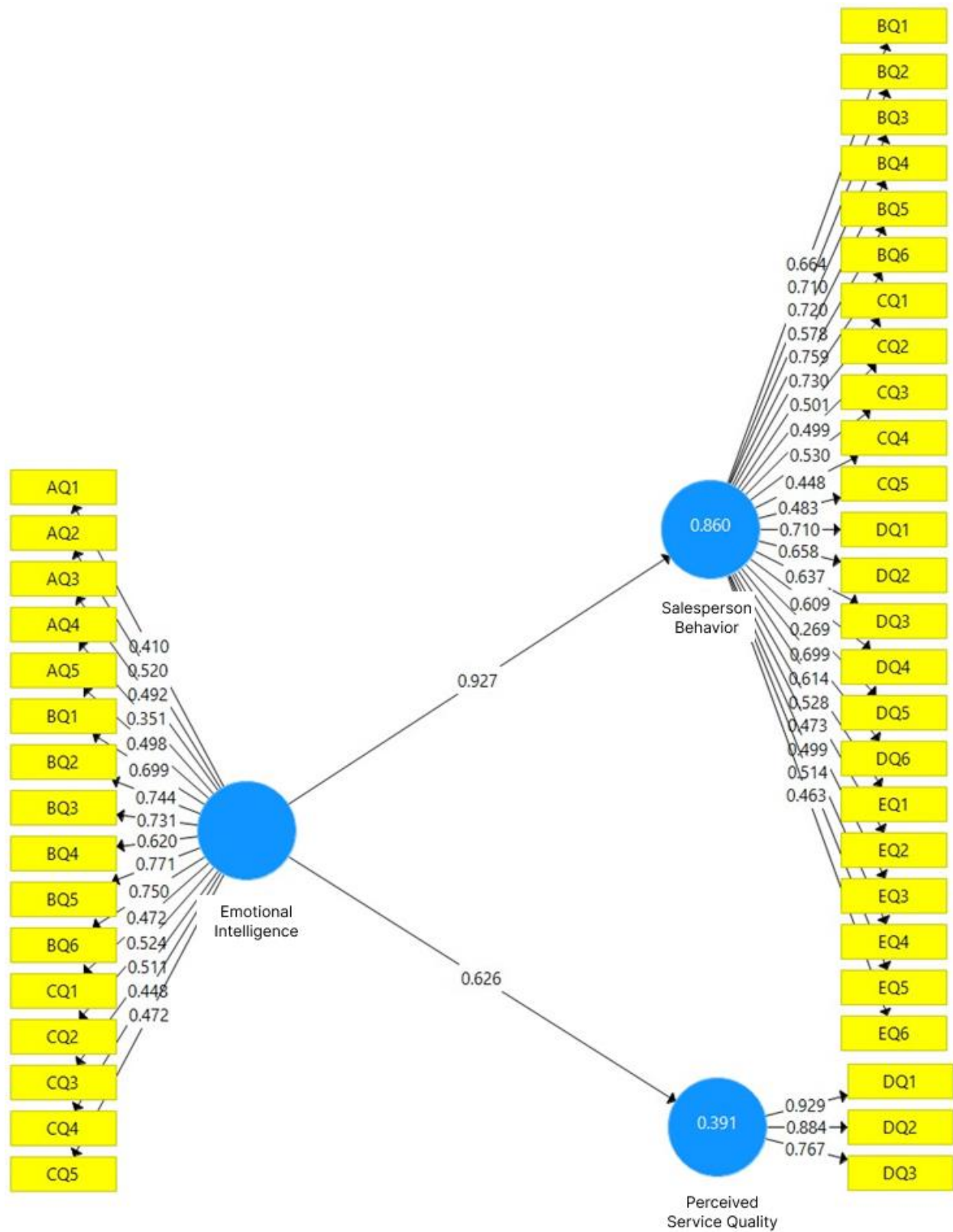
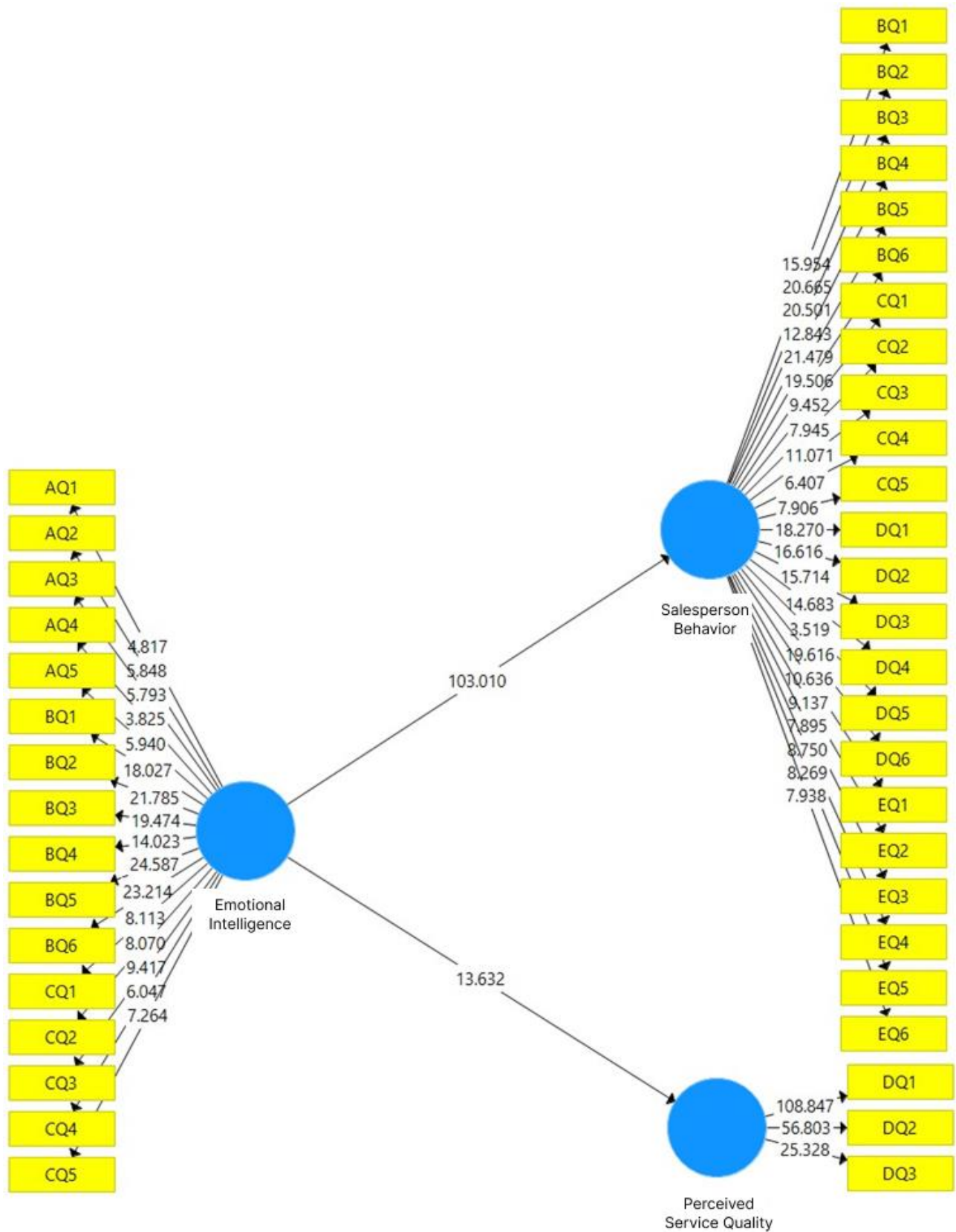


Figure 2

Model with T-Values



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on salesperson behavior and perceived service quality in the retail clothing sector. The structural equation modeling results confirmed both proposed sub-hypotheses. Specifically, emotional intelligence significantly and positively predicted salesperson behavior ($\beta = 0.927$, $p < 0.001$), and also had a significant positive impact on perceived service quality ($\beta = 0.626$, $p < 0.001$). These findings underscore the central role of emotional competencies in driving customer-facing behavior and shaping how customers evaluate service interactions.

The finding that emotional intelligence significantly influences salesperson behavior aligns with the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of EI in shaping interpersonal competencies and workplace conduct. Emotional intelligence enables salespeople to perceive, understand, and manage their emotions as well as those of customers, which enhances their ability to adapt behaviors to various selling contexts (Khan et al., 2025). High levels of emotional regulation contribute to improved emotional stability in high-pressure environments, such as retail settings, where customer demands can be unpredictable. This ability to manage emotions directly correlates with increased trustworthiness, professionalism, and customer-centric behaviors, which are hallmarks of effective sales practices (Musau, 2023; Wulandari & Darmawan, 2024).

The strong effect size observed in this study ($\beta = 0.927$) echoes the findings of Kadić-Maglajić et al. (2016), who established a clear link between EI and enhanced salesperson performance, particularly in customer-focused roles where emotional management is key to forming enduring client relationships (Kadić-Maglajić et al., 2016). Similarly, Delpechitre and Beeler (2018) found that emotionally intelligent salespeople tend to engage in deeper emotional labor strategies that result in more authentic interactions and customer satisfaction (Delpechitre & Beeler, 2018). The high t-value (10.310) in this study further validates the consistency and robustness of this relationship across different studies and sectors.

In addition to its effect on salesperson behavior, emotional intelligence was also found to positively and significantly impact perceived service quality. The findings suggest that emotionally intelligent salespeople are better able to create emotionally resonant service encounters that customers interpret as higher in quality. This result supports

Santos et al. (2020), who argued that customer orientation combined with emotional intelligence results in more favorable customer perceptions and improved service evaluation (Santos et al., 2020). When salespeople effectively recognize emotional cues and respond empathetically, it creates a personalized service experience, which in turn elevates customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

This mechanism is further supported by Supramaniam et al. (2024), who demonstrated that salesperson empathy and emotional engagement significantly affect the emotional state and satisfaction of female customers in retail interactions (Supramaniam et al., 2024). In line with this, the work of Singh and Venugopal (2015) indicates that EI facilitates the execution of customer-oriented strategies, allowing salespeople to fine-tune their responses in alignment with customer expectations, ultimately improving the perceived quality of service (Singh & Venugopal, 2015). The findings of this study provide further empirical support to this framework, suggesting that EI enhances not only the emotional calibration of sales behavior but also directly influences how service delivery is experienced by customers.

The significant relationship between EI and perceived service quality can also be interpreted through the lens of relational selling. Mullins et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of salesperson perceptions of relationship quality in shaping account profitability and customer loyalty (Mullins et al., 2014). In emotionally charged service settings like retail, where customer interactions are frequent and often brief, the capacity of salespeople to foster an immediate sense of rapport becomes a strategic asset. Emotional intelligence supports this by enabling salespeople to synchronize their emotional expressions with customer needs, creating positive micro-moments that enhance perceived value.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate previous research which found that the effects of EI on performance are particularly pronounced in high-contact, dynamic service environments. For example, Kidwell et al. (2021) introduced the concept of "emotional calibration" as the process by which salespeople align their emotional expressions with both organizational goals and customer expectations, leading to improved customer reactions and higher sales performance (Kidwell et al., 2021). This notion complements the current study's findings, suggesting that the ability to emotionally engage with customers can

enhance their perception of service quality, even in brief, transactional exchanges.

From a practical perspective, these results highlight the necessity of integrating emotional intelligence training into salesforce development programs. The emphasis on cognitive skills alone is insufficient in today's emotionally demanding retail environments. As shown in the findings, emotional capabilities are crucial to translating product knowledge and selling techniques into behaviors that customers find trustworthy, responsive, and satisfying. Previous studies by Ahmad and Ahmed (2019) and Rafi et al. (2014) also reinforce this argument, showing that salespeople with high EI are more successful in building customer commitment and long-term relationships (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2019; Rafi et al., 2014).

It is also important to consider the broader implications for organizational culture. McQuiston (2018) proposed a framework that blends customer orientation with servant leadership, emphasizing empathy, service, and ethical interaction in the sales process (McQuiston, 2018). Organizations that foster these values are more likely to support emotionally intelligent behaviors and benefit from higher levels of customer satisfaction and employee engagement. Similarly, Linh (2020) emphasized that EI enhances internal alignment between team members and improves overall service outcomes (Linh, 2020). The current findings reinforce the view that EI should not be treated merely as a personal trait but as a strategic competency that can be nurtured and institutionalized within organizational systems.

The study also contributes to emerging literature on sales behavior in developing markets. For instance, Rahmawan et al. (2023) found that EI significantly improves customer-fit reconfiguring capability—a critical skill in adapting to rapidly evolving consumer preferences in competitive sectors (Rahmawan et al., 2023). Similarly, Nusantara et al. (2022) highlighted that collaborative models like ride-sharing partnerships can improve sales outcomes when supported by emotionally intelligent relational capabilities (Nusantara et al., 2022). These studies, along with the current findings, collectively suggest that the development of EI in sales teams can serve as a lever for performance enhancement in various cultural and economic contexts.

In conclusion, this study extends the current understanding of the emotional foundations of sales effectiveness by empirically validating the dual impact of emotional intelligence on salesperson behavior and perceived service quality. It bridges the theoretical gap

between emotional competencies and measurable sales outcomes and affirms the importance of EI in creating value for both the customer and the organization.

While the findings of this study offer valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was confined to the retail clothing sector in an unspecified geographic region, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other industries or cultural contexts. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires for assessing emotional intelligence and behavior introduces the risk of social desirability bias, where participants may overstate their emotional competencies or underreport undesirable behaviors. Third, although structural equation modeling establishes the strength and significance of relationships, it does not confirm causality, leaving room for potential reverse causation or the influence of unmeasured moderating variables. Lastly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to observe changes over time in emotional intelligence and its behavioral manifestations.

Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to assess how emotional intelligence and sales performance evolve over time and in response to targeted interventions such as training or coaching. It would also be beneficial to conduct multi-sectoral comparative studies to evaluate whether the impact of emotional intelligence varies across industries with different customer interaction intensities. In addition, future research could include observational and qualitative methods such as customer feedback, manager evaluations, or ethnographic studies to validate self-reported data and capture the nuances of salesperson behavior in real-world interactions. Lastly, exploring potential moderating variables such as gender, organizational culture, or customer typology would add depth to the understanding of EI's role in sales dynamics.

Retail organizations and HR managers should prioritize the inclusion of emotional intelligence assessments in their hiring processes and incorporate EI-focused modules in onboarding and professional development programs. Leadership should foster a workplace environment that values empathy, emotional expression, and psychological safety, enabling salespeople to engage authentically with customers. Structured mentoring and feedback systems can help identify and nurture emotionally intelligent behaviors among sales staff. Additionally, integrating emotional intelligence into performance appraisal systems can reinforce its strategic importance and encourage continuous personal development. Such practices are likely to yield

long-term benefits in terms of employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, and sustained business performance.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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