



## Exploring the Pharmaceutical Consumer Journey: Evidence from Community Pharmacies in Londrina, Brazil

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<https://doi.org/10.36557/2009-3578.2025v11n1p283-294>

Artigo recebido em 29 de Maio e publicado em 24 de Junho de 2025

### ARTIGO ORIGINAL

#### RESUMO

O setor de farmácias no varejo brasileiro tem se expandido rapidamente, impulsionado pelo aumento da demanda dos consumidores, por mudanças regulatórias e por expectativas crescentes em relação aos serviços de saúde. As farmácias deixaram de ser meros pontos de venda; atualmente, oferecem testes diagnósticos, consultas farmacêuticas e monitoramento da saúde. Essa transição para hubs integrados de saúde criou novas oportunidades e desafios para o marketing farmacêutico e o desenho de serviços. Compreender a jornada do consumidor nesse ambiente transformado é essencial. O conceito de “jornada do consumidor” refere-se à sequência completa de interações que um cliente tem com um negócio, desde a conscientização até a avaliação pós-compra. No contexto das farmácias, isso inclui não apenas a decisão de adquirir um medicamento, mas também o uso de serviços prestados no local, a percepção sobre o farmacêutico e a experiência geral de compra. Embora a literatura internacional tenha explorado as jornadas do consumidor nos contextos de varejo e saúde, pouco se sabe sobre como os consumidores brasileiros se relacionam com farmácias que oferecem serviços clínicos. Este estudo busca preencher essa lacuna, examinando o comportamento dos consumidores em Londrina, uma cidade de médio porte no sul do Brasil. Especificamente, investiga como o layout, a variedade de serviços, a interação com a equipe e a disponibilidade de serviços clínicos influenciam a experiência do consumidor.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornada do Consumidor em Farmácia; Marketing em Saúde; Serviços farmacêuticos; tomada de decisão.



# Exploring the Pharmaceutical Consumer Journey: Evidence from Community Pharmacies in Londrina, Brazil

## ABSTRACT

Pharmaceutical retail in Brazil has undergone a structural transformation, integrating clinical services alongside the sale of medicines and beauty products. This study investigates the pharmaceutical consumer journey in community pharmacies in Londrina (Paraná), focusing on the impact of clinical services (such as consultations and laboratory tests) on consumer decision-making and store loyalty. A quantitative survey was administered to 118 residents of the city, collecting data on purchasing behavior, service awareness, and perceptions of pharmacists' roles. Results show that women are the primary decision-makers in pharmaceutical purchases, often combining health and cosmetic product needs. Consumers value convenience, product organization, and customer service, but awareness of clinical services remains limited. The study contributes to the marketing literature by detailing a consumer journey that blends traditional retail dynamics with emerging health service expectations. The findings offer insights into the optimization of store layout, communication strategies, and service design for pharmaceutical retailers aiming to enhance customer experience and loyalty.

**Keywords:** pharmacy consumer Journey; healthcare marketing; pharmacy services; decision-making.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The retail pharmacy sector in Brazil has expanded rapidly, driven by increased consumer demand, regulatory changes, and evolving expectations for health services (IQVIA, 2024). Pharmacies are no longer mere points of sale; they now offer diagnostic tests, pharmaceutical consultations, and health monitoring (HEPLER & STRAND, 1990). This shift toward integrated health hubs has created new opportunities and challenges for pharmaceutical marketing and service design (SOUZA & OLIVEIRA, 2020). Understanding the consumer journey in this transformed environment is crucial. The concept of the "consumer journey" refers to the full sequence of interactions a customer has with a business, from awareness to post-purchase evaluation (LEMON & VERHOEF, 2016). In the context of pharmacies, it includes not only the decision to purchase a medication but also the use of in-store services, the perception of the pharmacist, and the overall shopping experience (SOUZA & OLIVEIRA, 2020).

While global literature has explored consumer journeys in retail and health contexts, little is known about how Brazilian consumers engage with pharmacies offering clinical services. This study addresses that gap by examining consumer behavior in Londrina, a mid-sized city in southern Brazil. Specifically, it explores how layout, service variety, staff interaction, and clinical service availability influence the consumer experience.

**2. Literature Review** The traditional model of pharmacy retail focuses on accessibility, product availability, and pricing (HERMES et al., 2016). However, the rise of experiential marketing has shifted attention toward service design and in-store experience (KOTLER, 2017). The buyer's journey framework—comprising awareness, consideration, and decision stages—has proven useful in understanding health-related consumer behavior (MIAKE & CARVALHO, 2018). Research in healthcare marketing suggests that patient loyalty is driven by perceived value, trust in professionals, and ease of access to services (OLIVEIRA, 2022). In pharmacies, the pharmacist's visibility and customer service quality are crucial for trust-building (HEPLER & STRAND, 1990). Furthermore, merchandising strategies such as shelf organization and aesthetic design can influence consumer choices subconsciously (CRAVEIRO, 2010).

The Brazilian legislation, such as the RDC 786/2023 and Law 13.021/2014, has formally recognized pharmacies as healthcare establishments. This regulatory shift



enables pharmacists to provide clinical services, positioning them as key players in primary healthcare (BRAZIL, 2013).

## METODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative survey methodology to explore consumer experiences in pharmacies offering clinical services. A structured questionnaire with 21 items (19 closed and 2 open-ended) was distributed via Google Forms to residents of Londrina's eastern zone. Data collection occurred between August 14 and 24, 2024.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling, with inclusion criteria being: (a) over 18 years old, (b) resident of Londrina, and (c) consent to participate. The survey covered six themes: respondent profile, purchase motivations, buying behavior, decision-making factors, service awareness, and experience evaluation.

Of 120 responses received, 118 were valid. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to identify trends in purchasing behavior, service awareness, and consumer preferences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**4.1 Demographics** The majority of respondents were female (71.1%) and aged between 45 and 59 (40.8%). Most held at least a college degree, and nearly one-third were employed under formal labor contracts (CLT). This profile reflects a demographic with purchasing power and a heightened concern for family health.

**4.2 Purchase Behavior** Most consumers (73.7%) visited pharmacies primarily to purchase medicines. A significant minority (17.1%) reported buying cosmetics and personal care products. Convenience was paramount, with 59.2% preferring to shop near home.

Pharmacy chains were favored by 76.3% of respondents, suggesting that brand recognition, pricing, and product variety influence store choice. Additionally, 54% stated that the storefront appearance influenced their decision to enter the pharmacy.

**4.3 Decision Drivers** Price was the dominant factor (51.3%) influencing purchase decisions, followed by product variety, promotions, and store organization. Customer service was universally valued, reinforcing its strategic importance.

**4.4 Experience and Layout** A total of 65.8% agreed that shelf organization influenced



their purchase choices. Satisfaction was high, with 89.5% rating their shopping experience as positive. Social media presence was relevant for 71.1% of respondents, although only 35.5% felt that posts influenced in-store purchases.

**4.5 Awareness of Clinical Services** While 63.2% were aware of services like health check-ups, 56.6% were unaware that pharmacies could perform laboratory tests. Nevertheless, 90.8% recognized pharmacists as qualified healthcare professionals, though only 48.7% considered pharmacies as full-fledged healthcare establishments.

**5. Discussion** The findings reveal a partially informed but highly engaged consumer base. Women, often managing household health, are key decision-makers. Their expectations span from pricing to professional advice, highlighting the hybrid retail-health nature of modern pharmacies.

The disconnect between available services and consumer awareness represents a lost opportunity. Pharmacies should invest in marketing communication, staff training, and in-store signage to promote clinical services.

From a marketing strategy perspective, layout design, digital presence, and staff visibility are not peripheral concerns; they are central to consumer satisfaction. The transformation of pharmacies into health hubs must be accompanied by experiential improvements that align with consumer expectations.

## CONCLUSION

This study underscores the evolving nature of pharmacy retail in Brazil. In Londrina, the consumer journey is shaped by convenience, trust, and emerging expectations of health-related services. While product pricing remains essential, service quality and awareness of clinical offerings are increasingly influential.

Pharmaceutical retailers should adopt a holistic view of the consumer journey, integrating merchandising strategies with service delivery. Investing in pharmacist visibility and service communication may enhance consumer trust and loyalty.

Future research could employ longitudinal or comparative methods across cities to explore regional differences and trends over time. Additionally, qualitative methods could further unpack consumer perceptions and decision-making nuances.



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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form**

I, André Schmidt Suaiden, a student in the MBA in Physical and Online Retail program (MBA USP ESALQ), under the supervision of Professor Dr. Dayse Maciel de Araujo, invite you to participate in a study on the factors that impact the purchasing journey and healthcare services in a pharmacy setting. Your participation in this research will involve answering a questionnaire sent via email or WhatsApp.

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal, though you may experience occasional discomfort or embarrassment in response to certain questions. To minimize this possibility, you are encouraged to answer only the questions you feel comfortable with. You may choose not to answer any specific question or withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences.

The benefits of this research include contributing to the field of marketing management by gathering data on consumer behavior and market habits, thereby supporting professionals and academics in this area.

You are free to withdraw your participation in the study at any time and for any reason, without any negative consequences. We assure you that your identity will remain confidential, and the results obtained will be used solely for the scientific purposes outlined above, including publication in specialized literature.

If you have any questions or need further clarification, you may contact the researchers at any time. Contact: andresuaiden@gusp.br; mobile: +55 (11) 9-4990-5700.

By selecting the “I agree to participate” option below, you confirm your consent to participate in this study and acknowledge that you understand its objectives, the methodology, and the potential benefits, as described above.

**I have read and agree** \*mandatory response

- ☐ YES (I agree to participate in the study)  
☐ NO (I do not agree to participate in the study)



## **Appendix 2 – Semi-Structured Questionnaire**

### **Respondent Profile**

☐ Gender

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

### **Age Group**

☐ 18 to 29 years

☐ 30 to 44 years

☐ 45 to 59 years

☐ Over 60 years

### **Educational Level**

☐ Elementary School

☐ High School

☐ Undergraduate Degree

☐ Graduate/Postgraduate Degree

### **Main Occupation**

☐ Formal employment (labor contract)

☐ Independent contractor (PJ)

☐ Entrepreneur

☐ Student

☐ Currently neither working nor studying

### **Place of Purchase**

Do you usually purchase products only at pharmacies close to your home or workplace?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What type of pharmacy do you prefer to buy your medications from?

☐ Chain Pharmacy

☐ Neighborhood/Independent Pharmacy

Does the exterior design/facade attract your attention and motivate you to enter the pharmacy?

☐ Strongly agree



- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

**Purchasing Behavior at Pharmacies in Londrina (PR)**

What do you purchase most frequently at pharmacies?

- ☐ Medication
- ☐ Personal care and cosmetics
- ☐ Other item. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

What influences your decision to buy at a pharmacy?

- ☐ Customer service
- ☐ Price
- ☐ Promotions
- ☐ Wide variety of products and brands
- ☐ Well-organized store that makes products easy to find
- ☐ Other factor. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

The way products are organized on the shelves influences my purchasing decision:

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

How would you rate your most recent experience at a pharmacy?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

Do you find it relevant for pharmacies to use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do social media posts influence your in-store purchase decisions?



- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

### **Awareness of Health Services Offered by Pharmacies**

Are you aware that pharmacies offer services such as heart check-ups, diabetes and cholesterol management, among others?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you know that pharmacies provide clinical blood tests for health monitoring?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you familiar with the role of the pharmacist within the pharmacy?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you trust a pharmacist to provide information about diseases?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Did you know that pharmacies offer clinical consultation services?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you believe that a pharmacy is also a place for healthcare treatment?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree