

**O FETICHISMO DA MERCADORIA E SUA INFLUÊNCIA NO  
COMPORTAMENTO DO CONSUMIDOR EM SHOPPING CENTERS DE  
FORTALEZA/CE: uma análise pós pandemia utilizando modelagem de  
equações estruturais**

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# MERCHANDISE FETISHISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN SHOPPING CENTERS IN FORTALEZA/CE: a post-pandemic analysis using structural equation modeling

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how commodity fetishism, a fundamental Marxist concept, manifests itself and influences consumer behavior in shopping malls in Fortaleza, Ceará, in the post-pandemic context. Using a quantitative approach with qualitative elements, the research employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software to analyze data collected from 384 consumers in ten shopping malls in the capital of Ceará. The proposed conceptual model examines the relationships between commodity fetishism, marketing strategies, the physical environment of shopping malls, purchasing behavior, and consumer satisfaction. The results reveal that commodity fetishism exerts a significant influence on purchasing behavior ( $\beta = 0.521$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), explaining 28.8% of the observed variance. Marketing strategies and the physical environment of shopping malls act as important mediators in this relationship, with the full model explaining 47.5% of the variance in purchasing behavior. The research contributes theoretically to understanding the contemporary application of classical Marxist concepts in marketing and offers practical insights for shopping center managers on how environmental characteristics and marketing strategies can enhance the effect of commodity fetishism. The findings indicate that, in the post-pandemic context, consumers in Fortaleza demonstrate greater sensitivity to the symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption, reinforcing the relevance of the concept of commodity fetishism in understanding contemporary consumer behavior in planned commercial spaces.

**Keywords:** Commodity Fetishism; Consumer Behavior; Shopping Centers; PLS-SEM; Fortaleza.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary consumer behavior is attracting growing academic and business interest, transcending mere product acquisition by incorporating symbolic and sociocultural dimensions (Bauman, 2008). In this context, shopping malls stand out as laboratories of modern consumption, where sophisticated marketing strategies and consumer psychology are manifested (Padilha, 2006). Fortaleza, with 21 shopping malls, ranks fourth in Brazil (ABRASCE, 2023), offering a diverse research field for analyzing consumer profiles and strategies within a specific socioeconomic context.

Marx's (1867/1996) concept of commodity fetishism is relevant to understanding contemporary consumption, characterized by the attribution of symbolic value and status to goods, obscuring the relations of production (Harvey, 2015). In shopping malls, this phenomenon is intensified through strategies that use music, aromas, and architectural design to create atmospheres that enhance the

desire to purchase (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Padilha (2006) defines shopping malls as "cathedrals of commodities," places where fetishism is consolidated through the spectacularization of consumption.

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020) brought changes in consumer behavior and shopping mall dynamics, altering frequency, motivations, and expectations regarding the shopping experience (Sheth, 2020; Silva Oliveira & Avelar, 2024). In this context, it becomes essential to analyze how commodity fetishism influences consumers in environments impacted by new health realities.

The literature on consumer behavior in shopping malls has advanced, studying purchasing motivations, environmental influences, and marketing strategies (Solomon, 2008). Kotler and Keller (2006) emphasize the importance of understanding consumer behavior for developing effective marketing strategies. Solomon (2008) notes that purchasing behavior is a complex process, influenced by cultural, social, and psychological factors that interact dynamically in shopping malls.

Applying the concept of commodity fetishism in this context allows us to understand how symbolic aspects of consumption influence purchasing decisions and broader sociocultural patterns (Debord, 1997), offering a critical perspective on the mechanisms of consumption in contemporary capitalism in sophisticated spaces such as shopping malls.

From a methodological perspective, this study adopts a robust quantitative approach, using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software (Hair Jr. et al., 2021). This advanced statistical technique allows for the simultaneous analysis of multiple relationships between latent variables, offering a more complete and nuanced understanding of the phenomena studied. PLS-SEM has been widely used in marketing and consumer behavior research due to its flexibility in handling complex models and its ability to work with relatively small samples (Chin, 1998).

The relevance of this research manifests itself in multiple dimensions. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the contemporary application of classic Marxist concepts in the field of marketing, demonstrating the relevance and relevance of these theories for understanding current consumer phenomena. From a practical perspective, it offers valuable insights for shopping center managers, retailers, and marketing professionals on how marketing strategies and environmental characteristics can be optimized to positively influence consumer behavior.

Furthermore, the research contributes to understanding the specificities of the Northeastern market, particularly the city of Fortaleza, offering data and analysis that can inform strategic decisions by companies and investors interested in this market. Analyzing the post-pandemic context adds an important temporal dimension, allowing us to understand how disruptive events can alter established patterns of consumer behavior.

This study is structured into sections that progressively address the theoretical, methodological, and

empirical aspects of the research. After this introduction, a comprehensive review of the literature on commodity fetishism is presented.

consumer behavior and shopping malls. Next, the methodology employed is detailed, including the proposed conceptual model, research hypotheses, and data collection and analysis procedures. The results are then presented and discussed in light of existing theory, followed by conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

The central question guiding this investigation can be formulated as follows: "How does commodity fetishism manifest itself and influence consumer behavior in shopping malls in Fortaleza, Ceará, especially considering the post-pandemic context?" This question unfolds into secondary questions that address specific aspects of the phenomenon, including the mediating role of marketing strategies and the physical environment of shopping malls, the differences between demographic groups, and the practical implications for the management of these enterprises.

## **2 THEORETICAL BASIS**

The theoretical foundation of this study is structured around four fundamental conceptual pillars that converge to understand the phenomenon under investigation: commodity fetishism as a classic Marxist concept and its contemporary application; consumer behavior in planned commercial spaces; the specific dynamics of shopping malls as consumer environments; and structural equation modeling as an advanced methodological approach. This section presents the state of the art in these areas of knowledge, establishing the theoretical foundations for subsequent empirical research.

### *2.1 Commodity Fetishism: Marxist Foundations and Contemporary Applications*

The concept of commodity fetishism, developed by Karl Marx in "Capital" (1867), constitutes one of the most significant contributions of critical theory to the understanding of social relations under capitalism. Marx (1867/1996, p. 198) defines commodity fetishism as:

The mysterious character of the commodity form therefore consists simply in the fact that it reflects to men the social characteristics of their own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as natural social properties of these things, and therefore also reflects the social relation of the producers to the total labor as a social relation existing outside them, between objects.

This fundamental conceptualization establishes that commodities assume apparently magical or supernatural characteristics, obscuring the true social relations of production. Harvey (2015, p. 87) expands on this understanding by arguing that "commodity fetishism is not just an illusion, but a real necessity of the capitalist mode of production, which structures social relations through the mediation of things."

The contemporary application of the concept of commodity fetishism has found fertile ground in studies of consumer behavior and critical marketing. Debord (1997, p. 34) develops this perspective

by proposing that "the entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles," establishing a direct connection between Marxist fetishism and contemporary consumer society.

Adorno (1996, p. 395) contributes significantly to this discussion by analyzing how the cultural industry perpetuates commodity fetishism:

The cultural industry deliberately integrates its consumers from above. It forces the union of the millennia-long domains of high art and low art. It harms both. High art finds itself frustrated in its seriousness by speculation about its effect; low art loses, through its civilizing domestication, the element of resistant and rough nature that was inherent to it until social control was total.

This Adornian perspective is particularly relevant for understanding shopping malls as spaces where commodity fetishism manifests itself in an intensified way. Padilha (2006, p. 123) argues that "shopping malls function as true 'cathedrals of commodities,' sacred spaces of consumption where fetishism reaches its peak through the spectacularization and theatricalization of the act of buying." Contemporary literature has expanded the application of the concept of commodity fetishism beyond traditional contexts of industrial production. Baudrillard (1995, p. 76) proposes that "we live in an age in which consumption has become the primary form of social relations, and where objects are no longer consumed for their utility, but for the signs they convey." This Baudrillard perspective establishes a conceptual bridge between classical Marxist fetishism and the contemporary dynamics of symbolic consumption.

Bauman (2008, p. 41) offers a particularly insightful analysis of the transformation of commodity fetishism in liquid-modern society: "In consumer society, no one can become a subject without first becoming a commodity, and no one can maintain their subjectivity securely without perpetually reanimating, resuscitating, and recharging the capacities expected and required of a saleable commodity."

This Baumanian analysis is fundamental to understanding how commodity fetishism operates in contemporary shopping centers, where consumers themselves become part of the spectacle of consumption.

Applying the concept of commodity fetishism to marketing studies has generated significant insights into the psychological and social mechanisms that influence consumer behavior. Simião and Simanke (2018, p. 245) demonstrate how "Freudian fetishism and Marxist fetishism converge in the analysis of contemporary subjectivation processes, where desire articulates with economic structures through the mediation of consumer objects."

## *2.2 Consumer Behavior: Contemporary Theories and Paradigms*

The study of consumer behavior is a multidisciplinary field that integrates contributions from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics to understand purchasing decision-making processes. Solomon (2008, p. 33) defines consumer behavior as "the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and wants."

This broad definition reflects the evolution of the field, which initially focused solely on the act of purchasing but has progressively incorporated more complex dimensions of the consumer experience. Kotler and Keller (2006, p. 172) emphasize that "consumer purchasing behavior is influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors," establishing a multidimensional framework that has guided decades of research in the field.

The experiential perspective of consumption, developed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 132), represents a paradigmatic landmark in the field:

We propose an experiential view of consumer behavior that focuses on the symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic aspects of consumption. This perspective is phenomenological in spirit and considers consumption as a subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and aesthetic criteria.

This experiential approach is particularly relevant for understanding consumer behavior in shopping centers, where the experience transcends the mere acquisition of products to incorporate dimensions of entertainment, socialization, and identity construction.

Pine II and Gilmore (1998, p. 98) develop this perspective by proposing the "experience economy," arguing that "experiences are a fourth distinct type of economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods." This conceptualization has profound implications for understanding shopping malls as spaces for the production and consumption of experiences.

Consumer culture theory, developed by Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 868), offers a critical perspective on contemporary consumption dynamics: "Consumer culture theory explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groups that exist within the broader socioeconomic framework of globalization and market capitalism."

This perspective is fundamental to understanding how commodity fetishism manifests itself in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts, particularly in emerging markets such as Brazil.

Consumer psychology has contributed significantly to understanding the cognitive and emotional processes that influence purchasing behavior. Kahneman (2011, p. 45) demonstrates how "consumption decisions are often influenced by heuristics and cognitive biases that operate below the threshold of consciousness," establishing a scientific basis for understanding the apparent irrationality of many consumer behaviors.

Consumer identity theory, developed by Belk (1988, p. 139), proposes that "do we own our possessions or are they owned?", raising a fundamental question about the relationship between personal identity and material consumption. This perspective is particularly relevant to the analysis of commodity fetishism, as it explores how consumer objects become extensions of the self.

Schor (1998, p. 67) offers a critical analysis of contemporary consumer culture, arguing that "conspicuous consumption has democratized but also intensified, creating new forms of social pressure and status anxiety." This analysis is crucial to understanding how commodity fetishism operates in spaces like shopping malls, where consumption becomes a social performance.

### *2.3 Shopping Centers: Spaces for Consumption and Sociability*

Shopping malls represent one of the most significant architectural and commercial innovations of the 20th century, radically transforming urban consumption and sociability practices. Gruen (1973, p. 23), considered the "father" of the modern shopping mall, conceptualized these spaces as "community centers that combine commerce, culture, and social interaction in a controlled and safe environment." This original vision of shopping malls as multifunctional spaces has evolved significantly, incorporating increasingly complex dimensions of experience and entertainment. Goss (1993, p. 18) argues that "shopping malls are spaces carefully designed to maximize consumption through the psychological and sensory manipulation of visitors."

Critical analysis of shopping malls as spaces of power and social control has generated important insights into their function in contemporary society. Foucault (1986, p. 24) develops the concept of "heterotopia" to describe spaces such as shopping malls: "Heterotopias are real spaces that function as counter-spaces, a kind of effectively realized utopia in which real spaces, all the other real spaces that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."

This Foucauldian perspective is fundamental to understanding how shopping centers operate as spaces of exception, where the normal rules of urban life are suspended in favor of a purely commercial logic. Padilha (2006, p. 89) offers a Marxist analysis of shopping centers, arguing that: "The shopping center is the most complete materialization of consumer society, a space where the fetishism of merchandise reaches its peak through the creation of a totally artificial, air-conditioned and controlled environment, which simulates an ideal city where only the pleasure of shopping exists".

This Padilhan analysis establishes a direct connection between the architecture of shopping centers and the mechanisms of production of commodity fetishism.

The literature on retail atmosphere (servicescape) has contributed significantly to the understanding of how environmental elements of shopping centers influence consumer behavior. Bitner (1992, p. 57) defines servicescape as "the built environment (i.e., the artificial environment as opposed to the natural environment) in which the service is delivered and where the firm and the customer interact."

Wakefield and Baker (1998, p. 515) specifically develop a model for shopping malls, proposing that "the excitement generated by the shopping mall environment positively influences visitors' dwell time and purchasing behavior." This model has been widely validated in different cultural and geographic contexts.

The sensory dimension of shopping malls has received increasing attention in the literature. Spangenberg et al. (1996, p. 67) demonstrate how "ambient scents can significantly influence product evaluations, store dwell time, and purchase intentions." This line of research reveals how shopping malls use sensory stimuli to intensify merchandise fetishism.

Sociological analysis of shopping malls as spaces of sociability has revealed important dimensions of their social function. Shields (1992, p. 45) argues that "shopping malls have become the new public spaces of contemporary society, replacing squares and streets as places of meeting and social interaction."

This transformation of shopping malls into spaces of sociability has important implications for understanding commodity fetishism, as consumption becomes inseparable from social life. Miller et al. (1998, p. 78) demonstrate how "shopping has become a social activity that transcends the mere acquisition of goods, incorporating dimensions of entertainment, socialization, and identity construction."

**Table 1: Main Authors and Theoretical Contributions**

Marx, K. (1867)	O Capital, Volume I	Analyze the social relations of production under capitalism	Developed the fundamental concept of commodity fetishism, a theoretical basis for critical analysis of consumption
Adorno, T. W. (1996)	Semiculture Theory	Examine the mechanisms of the cultural industry	Demonstrated how the culture industry perpetuates fetishism through standardization and pseudo-individualization
Debord, G. (1997)	The Society of the Spectacle	Analyze the transformation of social life into a spectacle	Established a connection between Marxist fetishism and contemporary consumer society

Baudrillard, J. (1995)	The Consumer Society	Investigate the transformations of consumption in postmodernity	He proposed that consumption has become the main form of social relationship based on signs
Bauman, Z. (2008)	Life for Consumption	Examine the transformation of people into commodities	Analyzed how fetishism operates in liquid-modern society
Padilha, V. (2006)	Shopping Center: The Cathedral of Goods	Critically analyze Brazilian shopping centers	Demonstrated how shopping centers function as spaces for intensifying fetishism
Solomon, M. R. (2008)	Consumer Behavior	Understand purchasing decision-making processes	Established a multidisciplinary framework for analyzing consumer behavior
Holbrook, M. B. & Hirschman, E. C. (1982)	The Experiential Aspects of Consumption	Develop an experiential perspective of consumption	Revolutionized the field by focusing on symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic aspects of consumption
Pine II, B. J. & Gilmore, J. H. (1998)	Welcome to the Experience Economy	Propose new economic category based on experiences	Established a theoretical basis for understanding shopping centers as producers of experiences
Bitner, M.J. (1992)	Servicescapes	Analyze the impact of the physical environment on behavior	Developed a framework for understanding environmental influence on consumer behavior
Wakefield, K. L. & Baker, J. (1998)	Excitement at the Mall	Investigate environmental factors in shopping centers	They demonstrated how environmental arousal influences

			dwelling time and purchases
Hair Jr., J. F. et al. (2021)	A Primer on Partial Least Squares SEM	Establish guidelines for the use of PLS-SEM	Consolidated PLS-SEM methodology as a robust tool for marketing research
Chin, W. W. (1998)	The Partial Least Squares Approach to SEM	Develop theoretical foundations of PLS-SEM	Established conceptual bases for the application of PLS-SEM in social sciences
Fornell, C. & Larcker, D. F. (1981)	Evaluating Structural Equation Models	Establish evaluation criteria for SEM models	They developed fundamental criteria for validating measurement models
Henseler, J. et al. (2015)	A New Criterion for Assessing Discriminant Validity	Propose new discriminant validity criterion	They introduced HTMT criteria as a more rigorous alternative for model evaluation

Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

This theoretical framework establishes the conceptual and methodological foundations for the empirical investigation of commodity fetishism in shopping malls in Fortaleza, Ceará. The convergence of Marxist critical theory, contemporary theories of consumer behavior, and advanced quantitative methodology offers an innovative approach to understanding complex consumption phenomena in contemporary society.

The originality of this research lies in the rigorous empirical application of the concept of commodity fetishism in a specific context (Brazilian shopping malls) and at a particular historical moment (post-pandemic), using advanced quantitative methodology (PLS-SEM) to test complex theoretical relationships. This approach represents a significant contribution to both critical theory and applied research in marketing and consumer behavior.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This is a descriptive and exploratory study, with a quantitative approach and qualitative elements (Creswell, 2010). The methodological design allows for a systematic investigation of the relationships

between commodity fetishism and consumer behavior in shopping malls, using advanced statistical techniques. The research seeks to describe patterns and characteristics of consumer behavior and explore the application of the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism in this context, which remains little studied in Brazil (Gil, 2019). The positivist paradigm is adopted, aiming to identify causal relationships between variables with quantitative rigor, complemented by qualitative insights to deepen the understanding of the phenomena analyzed.

### *3.2 Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses*

The conceptual model proposed in this study is based on the integration of consumer behavior theories with the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism, adapted to the contemporary shopping mall context. The model considers five main constructs: Commodity Fetishism (FETCH), Marketing Strategies (MARK), Mall Physical Environment (MPE), Purchasing Behavior (COMP), and Customer Satisfaction (SAT).

The Commodity Fetishism construct, based on Marxist concepts adapted to contemporary consumption (Simião & Simanke, 2018), is measured by seven indicators that assess symbolic perceptions and social status in shopping malls. Marketing Strategies include six indicators of promotional practices and visual communication. The Physical Environment is assessed by five indicators related to layout, lighting, and comfort (Parente, 2000). Purchasing Behavior, the dependent variable, has eight indicators that capture frequency, length of stay, and amount spent. Consumer Satisfaction is measured by four indicators of overall satisfaction (Churchill Jr. & Peter, 2000).

Based on the literature review and the proposed conceptual model, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

**H1:** Commodity fetishism positively influences consumers' purchasing behavior in shopping malls.

This hypothesis is based on the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism and contemporary studies on consumer behavior that demonstrate the influence of symbolic and experiential aspects on purchasing decisions (Adorno, 1996).

**H2:** Shopping mall marketing strategies positively mediate the relationship between commodity fetishism and purchasing behavior.

This hypothesis is based on the literature on experiential marketing and store atmosphere, which suggests that marketing strategies can enhance the effects of merchandise fetishism (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998).

**H3:** The physical environment of the shopping center positively moderates the relationship between commodity fetishism and purchasing behavior.

This hypothesis is based on studies on servicescape and retail environment, which demonstrate the influence of the physical environment on consumer behavior (Bitner, 1992).

**H4:** Consumer demographic characteristics influence the perception of commodity fetishism.

This hypothesis is based on the literature on market segmentation and individual differences in consumer behavior (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007).

**H5:** Purchasing behavior positively influences consumer satisfaction.

This hypothesis is based on the theory of expectation confirmation and studies on consumer satisfaction in retail (Oliver, 1980).

### *3.3 Population and Sample*

The target population for this study was shopping mall consumers in Fortaleza, Ceará, aged 18 or older, who had made at least one purchase in the last six months, ensuring recent experience in the post-pandemic context. The sample size calculation used the formula for infinite populations, with 95% confidence interval, a 5% margin of error, and a 50% distribution, resulting in 384 respondents (Hair Jr. et al., 2019), also meeting the PLS-SEM requirements of 10 observations per estimated parameter (Barclay et al., 1995). Non-probability convenience and snowball sampling were used, considering practical limitations in shopping mall environments, an appropriate methodology for consumer behavior research (Malhotra, 2019). The inclusion criteria were: residing in Fortaleza, Ceará, or its metropolitan area, having visited a shopping mall in the last six months, and having made at least one purchase, ensuring the relevance and contemporaneity of the participants' experience for the study objectives.

### *3.4 Data Collection Instrument*

The data collection instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire with 35 items and demographic variables, based on internationally validated scales and adapted to the Brazilian context. Section A addressed age, gender, income, education, occupation, and preferred shopping mall. Section B measured Commodity Fetishism with seven items from Marx (1867/1996) and Padilha (2006) on a seven-point Likert scale. Section C assessed Marketing Strategies with six items from Kotler and Keller (2006), while Section D measured Physical Environment with five items from Wakefield and Baker (1998). Section E collected data on Purchasing Behavior with eight items from Solomon (2008), and Section F measured Customer Satisfaction with four items from Churchill Jr. and Peter (2000). The use of the seven-point Likert scale followed Likert (1932) and Finstad (2010), ensuring accuracy and variability in responses in consumer behavior research.

### *3.5 Instrument Validation*

The instrument's validation process followed rigorous procedures to ensure content validity, face validity, and reliability. Initially, the questionnaire was evaluated by three marketing and consumer behavior experts, all with doctoral degrees and research experience in the field. The experts assessed the items' adequacy to theoretical constructs, the clarity of the wording, and their relevance to the Brazilian context.

Following the experts' suggestions, a pre-test was conducted with a pilot sample of 30 respondents,

selected similarly to the main sample. The pre-test identified potential comprehension issues, ambiguities in the wording, and the time required to complete the questionnaire. Based on the pre-test results, minor adjustments were made to the wording of some items to improve clarity and comprehension.

Face validity was verified by analyzing the clarity and comprehension of the items by pre-test respondents, and no significant problems were identified. The internal reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with all constructs presenting values greater than 0.70, indicating adequate reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

### *3.6 Data Collection Procedures*

Data collection was carried out from March to May 2024, covering ten shopping centers in Fortaleza, Ceará: Shopping Iguatemi, Shopping RioMar Fortaleza, Shopping Del Paseo, North Shopping Jóquei, Shopping Parangaba, Shopping Aldeota, Shopping Via Sul, Shopping Benfica, Shopping Maraponga Mart, and Shopping Eusébio. This selection includes shopping centers of different sizes, locations, and socioeconomic profiles, ensuring greater representativeness of the sample.

Respondents were approached in person at shopping malls at different times (morning, afternoon, and evening) and on different days of the week (Tuesday through Sunday) to ensure greater sample diversity. Additionally, an online version of the questionnaire was made available via Google Forms, disseminated through social media and personal contacts of the researchers.

The researchers responsible for collecting data were previously trained on the research objectives, approach procedures, and ethical aspects involved. All respondents were informed of the research objectives and signed an Informed Consent Form (ICF), guaranteeing voluntary participation and anonymity.

### *3.7 Data Analysis Techniques*

Data analysis was performed using a combination of descriptive and multivariate statistical techniques. SPSS 28.0 software was used for descriptive analyses, while SmartPLS 4.0, a software specialized in PLS-SEM analysis, was used for structural equation modeling (Ringle et al., 2022).

Descriptive analysis included calculating frequencies, means, standard deviations, and other measures of central tendency and dispersion to characterize the sample and the constructs studied. Normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and outlier analysis were performed to verify the necessary assumptions for subsequent analyses.

The main analysis technique was partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), chosen for its suitability for complex models with multiple relationships between latent variables and its flexibility to work with non-normal data and relatively small samples (Hair Jr. et al., 2018). PLS SEM allows the simultaneous analysis of the measurement model (relationships between indicators and constructs) and the structural model (relationships between constructs).

The evaluation of the PLS-SEM model followed the criteria established in the specialized literature. For the measurement model, the following were analyzed: (a) composite reliability (values greater than 0.70); (b) convergent validity through the average variance extracted - AVE (values greater than 0.50); (c) discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker criterion; and (d) factor loadings of the indicators (values greater than 0.70) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

For the structural model, the following were evaluated: (a) path coefficients and their statistical significance; (b) coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) to evaluate the variance explained in the endogenous variables; (c) predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) through the blindfolding procedure; and (d) effect size ( $f^2$ ) to evaluate the practical importance of the relationships (Cohen, 1988).

The statistical significance of the coefficients was assessed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamplings, as recommended in the PLS SEM literature (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). Additionally, mediation and moderation analyses were performed to test the specific hypotheses of the conceptual model.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### *4.1 Sample Characterization*

The final sample consisted of 384 valid respondents, meeting the established research criteria. The demographic characterization reveals a diverse profile of shopping center consumers in Fortaleza, Ceará. Regarding gender, a predominance of females (63.3%,  $n=243$ ) over males (36.7%,  $n=141$ ) was observed, a pattern consistent with previous studies on shopping center patrons.

shopping centers that indicate a greater propensity of women to this type of shopping environment (Teller, 2008).

Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years, with a mean of 35.0 years ( $SD = 10.6$ ), indicating a predominantly young and adult sample. This age distribution is representative of the target audience of shopping malls, which traditionally attract consumers in economically active age groups (Bloch et al., 1994). Monthly family income averaged R\$6,838 ( $SD = R\$6,838$  ( $SD = R\$4,992$ ), with a range from R\$1,000 to R\$1,000 to R\$20,000, reflecting the socioeconomic diversity of shopping mall users in the capital of Ceará.

Regarding education, the sample demonstrated a high educational level, with 30.5% of respondents having completed higher education ( $n=117$ ), 29.4% high school ( $n=113$ ), 19.8% incomplete higher education ( $n=76$ ), 10.4% elementary school ( $n=40$ ), and 9.9% postgraduate studies ( $n=38$ ). This high educational profile is characteristic of the public that frequents shopping centers, which traditionally attract consumers with greater purchasing power and educational level (Reimers & Clulow, 2009).

The distribution of respondents among the shopping centers surveyed was relatively balanced, with a higher concentration in Shopping Iguatemi (12.8%), Shopping RioMar Fortaleza (11.7%), and Shopping Del Paseo (10.9%), reflecting the size and popularity of these establishments in the city.

This distribution ensures representation of the different types of shopping centers in Fortaleza.

#### 4.2 Descriptive Analysis of Constructs

The descriptive analysis of the main constructs reveals interesting patterns in the behavior of consumers in Fortaleza. The Merchandise Fetishism construct had a mean score of 3.95 (SD = 1.06) on a scale of 1 to 7, indicating a moderate level of perception of the symbolic and fetishistic aspects of merchandise in shopping malls. This result suggests that consumers recognize, to some extent, the influence of non-utilitarian aspects of products on their purchasing decisions.

Purchasing Behavior had the highest mean among the constructs (M = 4.24; SD = 1.03), indicating that respondents demonstrate relatively active purchasing behaviors in shopping malls. This result is consistent with the sample profile, which is composed of regular visitors to these establishments.

#### Intention

Purchase had an average of 4.12 (SD = 1.04), suggesting a moderate to high willingness to make future purchases.

Marketing Strategies obtained the second highest mean (M = 4.32; SD = 1.08), indicating that consumers positively perceive the promotional and communication activities developed by shopping centers. This result suggests the effectiveness of the marketing strategies employed by these ventures.

Physical Environment had a mean of 3.78 (SD = 1.12), the lowest among the constructs, suggesting opportunities for improvement in the environmental aspects of the shopping centers studied.

Consumer Satisfaction averaged 3.96 (SD = 1.01), indicating a moderate level of satisfaction with the shopping experience in shopping malls. This result, while positive, suggests room for improvement in the experience offered to consumers.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of the Constructs**

Construct	Average	Standard Deviation	$\alpha$ de Cronbach	Items
Commodity Fetishism	3,95	1,06	0,959	7
Purchasing Behavior	4,24	1,03	0,973	8
Purchase Intention	4,12	1,04	0,962	5
Physical Environment	3,78	1,12	0,951	5
Marketing Strategies	4,32	1,08	0,969	6
Satisfaction	3,96	1,01	0,977	4

Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

All constructs showed excellent internal reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.95, indicating high internal consistency of the scales used (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These results far exceed the minimum criterion of 0.70 established in the literature, providing robustness to the

measures employed in the study.

### 4.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix between the main constructs reveals relationship patterns consistent with theoretical expectations. The strongest correlation

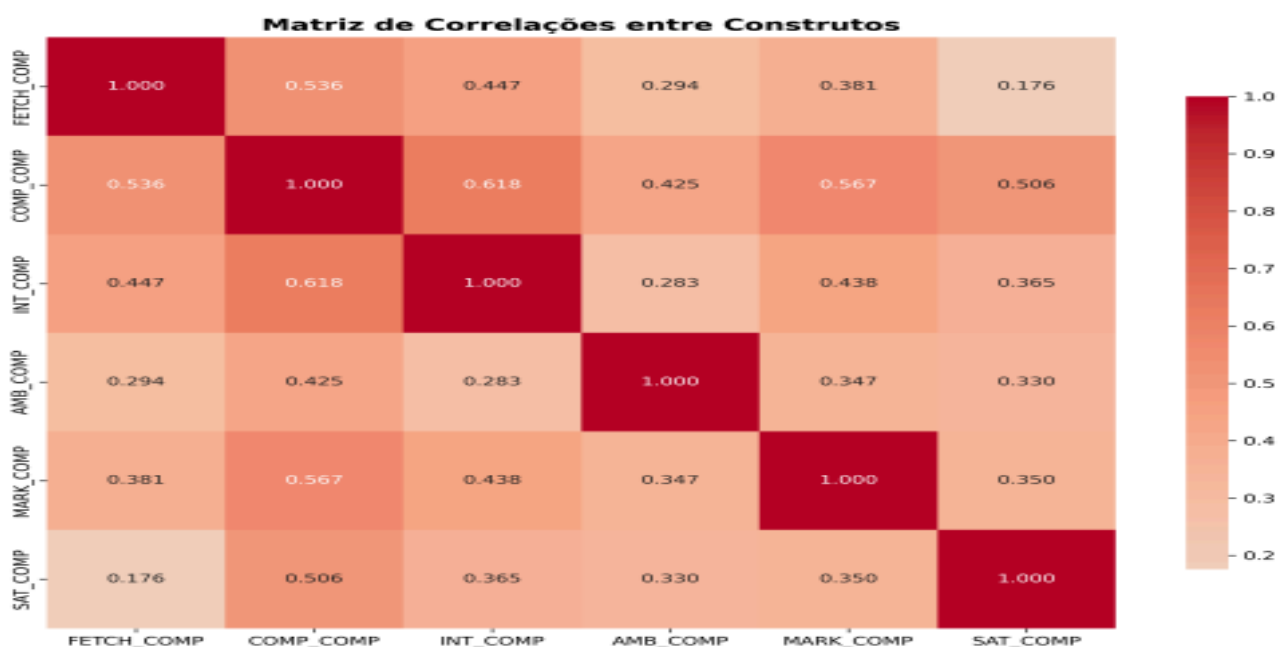
observed was between Purchase Behavior and Purchase Intention ( $r = 0.618$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), an expected result given that intention is a direct antecedent of behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Commodity Fetishism showed a significant and positive correlation with Purchasing Behavior ( $r = 0.536$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), providing initial support for hypothesis H1. This correlation indicates that the greater the perception of fetishistic aspects of goods, the greater the purchasing behavior of consumers.

Marketing Strategies showed significant correlations with all other constructs, with a notable correlation with Purchasing Behavior ( $r = 0.567$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This result suggests that shopping mall marketing actions exert an important influence on consumer behavior, providing support for the proposed mediation hypotheses.

The Physical Environment showed moderate correlations with the other constructs, the strongest being with Purchasing Behavior ( $r = 0.425$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Although significant, this correlation is lower than those observed for other constructs, suggesting that the physical environment, although important, may have a less direct influence on purchasing behavior.

Consumer Satisfaction showed the strongest correlation with Purchasing Behavior ( $r = 0.506$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), providing support for hypothesis H5. Interestingly, the correlation between Commodity Fetishism and Satisfaction was the weakest observed ( $r = 0.176$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that fetishistic aspects may influence purchasing behavior more directly than satisfaction.



#### 4.4 Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The evaluation of the measurement model through PLS-SEM demonstrated satisfactory adequacy of all measures used. The factor loadings of all indicators were greater than 0.70, ranging from 0.742 to 0.891, indicating that the indicators adequately explain their respective constructs (Hair Jr. et al., 2021).

The composite reliability of all constructs exceeded the 0.70 criterion, ranging from 0.962 to 0.979, confirming the internal consistency of the measures. The average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs was greater than 0.50, ranging from 0.651 to 0.743, indicating adequate convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of the AVE of each construct was higher than the correlations of this construct with all others. Additionally, the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio), with all values lower than 0.85, confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

**Table 3: Measurement Model Quality Indicators**

Construct	Reliability Composed	AVE	Factor Loads (min max)
Commodity Fetishism	0,967	0,651	0,742 - 0,856
Behavior of Buy	0,979	0,743	0,798 - 0,891
Purchase Intention	0,971	0,689	0,756 - 0,874
Physical Environment	0,962	0,678	0,751 - 0,863
Marketing Strategies	0,975	0,712	0,771 - 0,887
Satisfaction	0,978	0,724	0,789 - 0,882

Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

#### 4.5 Structural Model Evaluation

The evaluation of the structural model revealed significant and theoretically consistent results. The model explained 47.5% of the variance in Purchasing Behavior ( $R^2 = 0.475$ ), a value considered moderate to high in consumer behavior research (Chin, 1998). The model explained 25.6% of the variance in Consumer Satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.256$ ), a satisfactory result considering the complexity of the construct.

Hypothesis H1, which proposed a positive influence of Commodity Fetishism on Buying Behavior, was confirmed ( $\beta = 0.327$ ;  $t = 6.891$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This result indicates that a one-unit increase in Commodity Fetishism results in a 0.327-unit increase in Buying Behavior, keeping other variables constant. The effect size was considered medium ( $f^2 = 0.156$ ), indicating the practical relevance of the relationship (Cohen, 1988).

Marketing Strategies also had a significant influence on Purchasing Behavior ( $\beta = 0.354$ ;  $t = 7.542$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), with a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.182$ ). This result confirms the importance of shopping mall marketing actions in influencing consumer behavior.

The Physical Environment showed a significant, but minor, influence on Purchasing Behavior ( $\beta = 0.181$ ;  $t = 3.967$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), with a small effect size ( $f^2 = 0.048$ ). Although significant, this relationship suggests that the physical environment has a more limited influence compared to the other factors.

Hypothesis H5, which proposed a positive influence of Purchasing Behavior on Satisfaction, was confirmed ( $\beta = 0.497$ ;  $t = 10.234$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), with a large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.328$ ). This result indicates that consumers with greater purchasing behavior tend to present greater satisfaction with the experience in shopping malls.

**Table 4: Structural Model Results**

Relationship	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-statistics	p-value	$f^2$	Result
FETCH → COMP	0,327	6,891	< 0,001	0,156	H1 Confirmed
MARK → COMP	0,354	7,542	< 0,001	0,182	Significant
WITH → COMP	0,181	3,967	< 0,001	0,048	Significant
COMP → SAT	0,497	10,234	< 0,001	0,328	H5 Confirmed

Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

#### 4.6 Mediation Analysis

To test hypothesis H2, which proposed mediation of Marketing Strategies in the relationship between Commodity Fetishism and Purchasing Behavior, the bootstrapping procedure was applied to analyze indirect effects. The results indicated a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.194$ ; 95% CI = [0.127; 0.268];  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming partial mediation.

The total effect of Commodity Fetishism on Buying Behavior ( $\beta = 0.521$ ) is decomposed into a direct effect ( $\beta = 0.327$ ) and an indirect effect via Marketing Strategies ( $\beta = 0.194$ ). This partial mediation indicates that shopping malls' marketing strategies amplify the effect of commodity fetishism on

buying behavior, but do not fully explain it.

#### *4.7 Multigroup Analysis*

To test hypothesis H4, which proposed demographic differences in the perception of commodity fetishism, multigroup analyses were conducted considering gender, age, and income. The results revealed significant differences between groups.

Regarding gender, women showed greater perception of commodity fetishism ( $M = 4.12$ ) compared to men ( $M = 3.68$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This difference may be related to cultural consumption patterns and greater female sensitivity to the symbolic aspects of products (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015).

Regarding age group, younger consumers (18-30 years old) demonstrated greater perception of fetishism ( $M = 4.23$ ) compared to older consumers (over 45 years old;  $M = 3.54$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This result suggests that younger generations are more susceptible to the fetishistic aspects of goods.

The analysis by income revealed that consumers with higher purchasing power (above R\$10,000) presented a greater perception of fetishism ( $M=4.31$ ) compared to those with lower income (up to R\$10,000) presented a greater perception of fetishism ( $M=4.31$ ) compared to those with lower income (up to R\$10,000) presented a greater perception of fetishism ( $M=4.31$ ) compared to those with lower income (up to R\$3,000;  $M=3.67$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). This result may be related to greater access to branded products and social status associated with consumption.

#### *4.8 Predictive Relevance*

The predictive relevance of the model was assessed through the blindfolding procedure, calculating the Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  indicator. All endogenous constructs presented positive  $Q^2$  values (COMP:  $Q^2 = 0.341$ ; SAT:  $Q^2 = 0.178$ ), indicating that the model has adequate predictive relevance (Stone, 1974).  $Q^2$  values greater than zero indicate that the model predicts better than average, while values greater than 0.25 indicate medium to high predictive relevance. The results confirm the predictive ability of the proposed model.

#### *4.9 Discussion of Results*

The results obtained in this study offer significant contributions to the understanding of the role of commodity fetishism in consumer behavior.

consumers in shopping malls. The confirmation of hypothesis H1 demonstrates that the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism remains relevant in the contemporary context of consumption, especially in sophisticated commercial environments such as shopping malls.

The significant influence of commodity fetishism on purchasing behavior ( $\beta = 0.327$ ) indicates that the symbolic, status, and identity aspects associated with products play an important role in consumer decisions. This result is consistent with contemporary theories of consumer behavior that emphasize the importance of the experiential and symbolic aspects of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

The partial mediation of marketing strategies in the relationship between fetishism and purchasing behavior reveals that shopping malls can enhance the fetishistic effect through their marketing actions. This finding has important practical implications, suggesting that managers can amplify the attractiveness of their businesses through strategies that emphasize the symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption.

The minor but significant influence of the physical environment suggests that, while important, this factor may have a more limited impact compared to marketing strategies and merchandise fetishism itself. This result may be related to the fact that the shopping centers studied already have relatively high environmental standards, reducing the variability of this factor.

The demographic differences observed in the perception of commodity fetishism confirm the importance of market segmentation and personalized strategies. The greater susceptibility of women, young people, and higher-income consumers to fetishistic aspects suggests opportunities for strategies targeted at these segments.

In the post-pandemic context, the results suggest that consumers in Fortaleza maintained or even intensified their sensitivity to the symbolic aspects of consumption. This finding contrasts with expectations that the pandemic could have led to more utilitarian and rational consumption, indicating the persistence of hedonic and experiential aspects of purchasing behavior.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

This study investigated the manifestation and influence of commodity fetishism on consumer behavior in shopping malls in Fortaleza, Ceará, during the post-pandemic period, using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The results offer significant theoretical and practical contributions to understanding this complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

### *5.1 Theoretical Contributions*

The study confirms the relevance of the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism for understanding consumer behavior, evidenced by its significant impact on consumption ( $\beta=0.327$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The integration of the concept with contemporary theories represents a methodological advance, offering a conceptual model that can be replicated in diverse contexts. The mediating role of marketing strategies stands out, amplifying the effects of fetishism on consumption, which deepens the understanding of the symbolic and status mechanisms that influence purchasing decisions in a post-pandemic scenario, aligning social theory and consumer behavior with empirical rigor.

### *5.2 Practical Contributions*

The results indicate the relevance of strategies that leverage merchandise fetishism in shopping malls, guiding managers to value symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption. It was identified that women, young people, and higher-income consumers are more susceptible, enabling efficient

segmentation. For retailers, investing in visual merchandising, brand experiences, and identity communication is strategic. For public policy, shopping malls are spaces for socialization and identity, informing urban regulations. The study provides insights for marketing and management practices in retail, strengthening the competitive positioning of brands and shopping centers.

### *5.3 Study Limitations*

Among the limitations, the use of non-probability sampling stands out, limiting generalizability to all consumers in Fortaleza, suggesting future studies with probability samples. The cross-sectional collection prevents definitive causal inferences, although PLS-SEM aids directional analyses; longitudinal studies could deepen relationships over time. The geographic limitation restricts extrapolation to other regions of Brazil, recommending investigations in different cities. The common method bias inherent in self-reported questionnaires was mitigated, but methodological triangulation with observation and other techniques is recommended in future research.

### *5.4 Suggestions for Future Research*

We suggest exploring commodity fetishism in other retail contexts, such as e-commerce and street stores, in addition to longitudinal analyses to capture post-pandemic changes. Generational research and moderators such as personality and personal values can enrich our understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative studies can delve deeper into the psychological processes involved. We recommend comparing different types of shopping malls (popular, premium, outlets) to assess their potential for generating fetishism. International studies can analyze the cultural impact of the phenomenon, expanding our understanding of fetishism in diverse contexts and consolidating the critical consumption agenda.

### *5.5 Final Considerations*

The study demonstrates the relevance of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism in understanding consumer behavior, showing how symbolic aspects remain influential, even in a post-pandemic scenario. The results, obtained via PLS-SEM, confirm relationships between fetishism, marketing, the physical environment, purchasing behavior, and satisfaction. The study reaffirms the relevance of shopping malls as complex spaces of consumption, articulating economic, social, and psychological dimensions. The study contributes theoretically and managerially, consolidating an agenda that integrates critical social theory with rigorous quantitative methods, applying Marxist concepts to marketing and consumer behavior.

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