

The Level of Service Quality, Location Factor and Customer Retention in the Cinema Industry

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Abstract

Customer retention is the long-term maintenance of commercial ties with existing customers. Customer retention is the inverse of customer turnover or defection. Low defection is equivalent to high retention. Customer retention is the maintenance of a continuous sales connection with repeat clients. The pandemic has affected the cinema business. Having been forced to temporarily close due to COVID-19 for more than a year now. Customer loyalty is a manifestation of consumer immunity. High customer retention is equivalent to immunity. This research was conducted to examine the factors that influence customer retention cinema during COVID19 pandemic which is to identify the level of the factors and customer retention. This study adopts a descriptive quantitative methods. In the meantime, the inferences used to analyze the factors that influence customer retention cinema.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on many businesses, including the cinema industry, which was forced to shut down for extended periods. Many small businesses are financially fragile, and both essential and non-essential sectors faced severe economic challenges (Bartik *et al.*, 2020; Refsa, 2021). Before the pandemic, the Malaysian cinema industry showed strong growth, with gross ticket sales from local films reaching RM170.4 million and RM144.71 million in 2018 and 2019 respectively (Lim, 2021). However, prolonged closures caused significant financial losses and job insecurity, putting over 20,000 industry workers at risk (Cheng, 2020; Frater, 2020). During this period, customer retention became even more critical, as maintaining loyal customers helps ensure continued support despite economic uncertainty (Nitzan *et al.*, 2011). Businesses could achieve this by providing high-quality service and strategic locations that attract and retain customers, even under challenging conditions (Mardika, 2022). In Malaysia, the cinema market is dominated by major players such as Golden Screen Cinemas (GSC), TGV, and MBO, alongside smaller operators including Lotus Five Star and mmCineplexes (Yoong *et al.*, 2019; Begum, 2021). Despite government support and health protocols, many cinemas struggled to recover due to reduced attendance, mandatory SOPs, and operational restrictions (Begum, 2020; Anuar, 2021). Some businesses survived by diversifying into food, beverages, and merchandise sales, while others faced closure. To regain stability, cinema operators must focus on improving service quality, accessibility, and overall customer experience. Factors such as convenient location, adequate facilities, and efficient customer service are critical in influencing customer satisfaction and retention (Nazy, 2012; Wehrstedt, 2021). This study, therefore, aims to

examine the level of service quality and location factors that influence customer retention in Malaysia's cinema industry, providing insights that may help the sector adapt and thrive in the post-pandemic era.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cinema Industry

The film industry, also known as the motion picture industry, encompasses film production firms, studios, cinemas, animation, scripting, pre- and post-production, film festivals, distribution, and actors. Traditionally, high production costs limited filmmaking to established companies, but advances in affordable equipment and access to external investment have allowed independent production to grow (Incekara & Sener, 2013). Globally, the film industry has experienced significant growth, with the box office valued at RM185.34 billion in 2019 and total global revenue, including home entertainment, reaching RM600 billion in 2018 (Rubin, 2019). Hollywood, based in the United States, is the world's oldest cinema industry, but China was projected to surpass North America as the largest box office market in 2020, a shift accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indian cinema leads in film production with 2,446 feature films annually, while Chinese cinemas recorded 1,650 million ticket sales in 2019, the highest globally (Agarwal, 2020). In Malaysia, the growth of the service industry has intensified competition, making service quality and strategic location critical for customer retention and business profitability (Mardika, 2022). The Malaysian film industry is undergoing substantial transformation, influenced by national efforts to shift from an industrial-based to a knowledge-based economy, with investments in education and advanced infrastructure (Aziz *et al.*, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has slowed the cinema sector, with Movement Control Orders restricting operations. Customer retention in Malaysian cinemas is strongly affected by service quality and location, as poor services or inaccessible locations discourage repeat visits. Maintaining and growing customer loyalty is essential for the industry's survival, and understanding the impact of these factors is critical for business strategy (Hadi & Indradewa, 2019; Mardika, 2022). Therefore, research into how service quality and location influence customer retention is important to help cinema operators meet customer expectations and sustain their operations.

2.2 Customer Retention

Customer retention refers to a company's ability to maintain its customers over a period of time and prevent them from defecting to competitors (Olson, 2020). It begins with the first interaction between a customer and the organization and continues throughout the relationship lifecycle, encompassing all strategies aimed at sustaining engagement and satisfaction. A firm's ability to attract and retain customers depends not only on the quality of its products or services but also on how it treats existing customers, the value they perceive, and the reputation it builds in the market (Aspinall *et al.*, 2001). High customer retention, reflected in a low churn rate, indicates greater loyalty and long-term profitability, as more customers continue to use the company's offerings over time. Effective retention strategies focus on creating lasting relationships, fostering loyalty, and encouraging customers to become advocates for the brand. For instance, cinema-goers often remain loyal to GSC Cinemas because of its consistent service quality, demonstrating how excellent customer experiences can help retain customers and build brand ambassadors (Olson, 2020).

2.3 Service Quality

Service quality refers to the delivery of services that meet or exceed customer expectations, as customers often assess quality based on perceived attributes of the service experience (Zygiaris *et al.*, 2022; Fida *et al.*, 2020). According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1988), service quality can be evaluated through five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibles include physical facilities, equipment, and other observable elements of service. Reliability reflects the ability to provide accurate, consistent, and satisfactory service, while responsiveness refers to employees' willingness and ability to meet customer needs promptly. Assurance encompasses staff competence, courtesy, and trustworthiness, and empathy involves personal attention, effective communication, and understanding of specific customer needs (Berry & Zeithami, 1988; Datta & Vardhan, 2017; Shafiq *et al.*, 2017). High service quality allows firms to satisfy customer expectations, achieve competitive advantage, and enhance customer retention (Fida *et al.*, 2020; Venetis & Ghauri, 2004). In addition, strategic location selection is crucial for business success, as it affects customer accessibility, employee recruitment, and overall profitability (Luthor, 2019). Together, service quality and location influence customer satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately encouraging repeat purchases and long-term commitment.

2.4 Location

Location refers to the physical place where a company carries out its operations, and for service businesses, it is often represented by service outlets (Mardika, 2022). The choice of location is a critical factor that influences a

company’s growth, survival, and overall marketing strategy. Strategic location affects customer satisfaction by impacting purchasing decisions, as convenient access, high traffic, and adequate facilities can enhance the customer experience (Sholihuddin *et al.*, 2020). For service-oriented industries such as cinemas, retail, restaurants, and banking, factors like ample parking, attractive surroundings, and proximity to high customer traffic areas are especially important (Indarti, 2004). Location theories suggest that companies select sites through an optimization process aimed at maximizing profit or minimizing costs, considering available alternatives and external factors (Soliha *et al.*, 2021). In the cinema industry, selecting a strategic location is essential for future growth and competitiveness. Poor location choices can lead to business failure, while well-chosen locations support customer satisfaction, repeat visits, and market expansion. As competition intensifies, cinemas must balance marketing efforts with geographical considerations to ensure long-term success.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine customer retention in the cinema industry. Data were collected using a questionnaire survey, which was designed to gather information from individuals who have visited a cinema, whether or not they are loyal customers. The study focused on respondents from Batu Pahat and Kluang districts in Johor, with a total population of 819,100 (323,762 in Kluang and 495,338 in Batu Pahat). Convenience sampling was used to select participants randomly from this population. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Part A gathered demographic information, Part B focused on customer retention, Part C measured service quality, and Part D assessed location. Part B included 15 items on customer retention based on Dehghan and Shahin (2011), Part C contained four questions for each service quality dimension tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy adapted from Temba (2013), and Part D included five items on location factors such as accessibility, visibility, environment, and competition, based on Mardika (2022). A five-point Likert scale was used for Parts B, C, and D, where 1 indicated “Strongly Disagree” and 5 indicated “Strongly Agree.” The unit of analysis was the individual customer, with the study aiming to identify the key factors influencing customer retention in the cinema industry.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Statistics

The response rate was 83.07%, which was 319 out of 384 and all the questionnaires collected were usable. The result is high due to the respondent being easy to approach and the time given to collect data was long. The respondents in this study were predominantly female (77.4%) and mostly aged between 18 and 29 years (41.4%). The majority were Malay (55.2%) and employed in the government sector (60.8%). About half of the respondents had a monthly income of RM0–RM2,500, and most held a diploma or degree qualification. Nearly all respondents (96.6%) were cinema-goers, with Golden Screen Cinema (GSC) being the most frequently visited (41.7%). Most respondents visited the cinema up to four times per month (71.8%) and considered ticket prices reasonable (94.4%).

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis of service quality yielded an overall mean score of 3.47 (SD = 1.44), indicating a moderate level of perceived service quality among cinema customers. Across the five dimensions tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy respondents consistently expressed moderate agreement. This finding aligns with the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991), which identifies these dimensions as key determinants of service performance and customer perceptions. Consistent with the findings of Setiono and Hidayat (2022) and Shrestha (2023), the present results confirm that when service attributes such as staff responsiveness, reliability, and empathy are rated moderately, overall satisfaction and loyalty tend to reflect a similar trend. Therefore, although the cinema’s service performance is viewed as satisfactory, the moderate mean scores suggest the need for enhancement in staff responsiveness, modern facilities, and individualized customer attention to further strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for service quality

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Tangible								
T1. Cinema customer service centers have up to date equipment such	36 11.3%	59 18.5%	49 15.4%	62 19.4%	113 35.4%	3.49	1.42	Moderate

as their self-service kiosk.								
T2. Physical facilities like, their seat or the cinema are visually appealing	35 11.0%	56 17.6%	54 16.9%	63 19.7%	111 34.8%	3.50	1.40	Moderate
T3. Employees are well dressed and appear neat.	29 9.1%	59 18.5%	61 19.1%	70 21.9%	100 31.3%	3.48	1.34	Moderate
T4. When they promise to air the movie by a certain time, they do.	26 8.2%	77 24.1%	43 13.5%	56 17.6%	117 36.7%	3.51	1.40	Moderate
<u>Reliability</u>								
RL1. When a customer has a problem, the staff show a sincere interest in solving it.	25 7.8%	61 19.1%	63 19.7%	46 14.4%	124 38.9%	3.57	1.37	Moderate
RL2. The cinema operator performs the service right the first time.	36 11.3%	63 19.7%	55 17.2%	52 16.3%	113 35.4%	3.45	1.43	Moderate
RL3. Cinema provides the service at the time they promised to do so.	38 11.9%	58 18.2%	57 17.9%	69 21.6%	97 30.4%	3.40	1.40	Moderate
RL4. Employees keep the customer records accurately.	34 10.7%	62 19.4%	56 17.6%	55 17.2%	112 35.1%	3.47	1.41	Moderate
<u>Responsiveness</u>								
RP1. Employees make information easily obtainable by customers.	32 10.0%	52 16.3%	63 19.7%	70 21.9%	102 32.0%	3.50	1.35	Moderate
RP2. Employees give prompt service to customers.	37 11.6%	52 16.3%	66 20.7%	77 24.1%	87 27.3%	3.39	1.35	Moderate
RP3. Employees are always willing to help customers.	38 11.9%	58 18.2%	55 17.2%	69 21.6%	99 31.0%	3.42	1.40	Moderate
RP4. Employees are never too busy to respond to customers requests.	25 7.8%	58 18.2%	56 17.6%	51 16.0%	129 40.4%	3.63	1.37	Moderate
<u>Assurance</u>								
A1. The behavior of employees instill confidence in customers.	31 9.7%	53 16.6%	63 19.7%	65 20.4%	107 33.5%	3.51	1.36	Moderate
A2. Customers feel safe in their transactions with employees in the Customer service counters.	31 9.7%	55 17.2%	60 18.8%	77 24.1%	96 30.1%	3.48	1.34	Moderate
A3. Employees are polite with customers.	42 13.2%	60 18.8%	62 19.4%	55 17.2%	100 31.3%	3.35	1.42	Moderate
A4. Employees of the cinema have the knowledge to answer customers' questions.	44 13.8%	43 13.5%	67 21.0%	64 20.1%	101 31.7%	3.42	1.41	Moderate
<u>Empathy</u>								

E1. Employees give customers individual attention.	25 7.8%	60 18.8%	55 17.2%	65 20.4%	114 35.7%	3.57	1.35	Moderate
E2. Their operating hours are convenient to all their customers.	26 8.2%	59 18.5%	61 19.1%	80 25.1%	93 29.2%	3.49	1.30	Moderate
E3. Employees give customers personal service.	49 15.4%	52 16.3%	47 14.7%	70 21.9%	101 31.7%	3.38	1.46	Moderate
E4. The employees understand the specific need of their customer.	21 6.6%	60 18.8%	70 21.9%	80 25.1%	88 27.6%	3.48	1.26	Moderate
Total Average Score						3.47	1.44	Moderate

The results in Table 2 revealed an overall mean score of 3.49 (SD = 1.31), representing a moderate level of agreement among respondents regarding the cinema’s location attributes. The item on the supportive surrounding area (M = 3.68) recorded a high level, indicating that customers perceive the cinema’s surrounding environment as beneficial to their experience. Previous studies have emphasized that accessibility, visibility, and environmental support are crucial determinants of customer satisfaction and revisit intentions in retail and service sectors (Jaravaza & Chitando, 2024; Moeller *et al.*, 2022). These findings suggest that the cinema’s location offers several strategic advantages, particularly in terms of accessibility and environmental appeal. However, moderate ratings on aspects such as parking and proximity to competitors imply that improvements in convenience and differentiation could further enhance the cinema’s locational competitiveness and customer experience.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for location

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
L1. The location of the cinema is easy accessible by the public transport.	22 6.9%	43 13.5%	79 24.8%	90 28.2%	85 26.6%	3.54	1.21	Moderate
L2. The location of the cinema can be seen clearly from the normal view of the road or from the far.	22 6.9%	55 17.2%	65 20.4%	79 24.8%	98 30.7%	3.55	1.27	Moderate
L3. The location of the cinema have comfortable and safe parking space for two-wheeled and four wheels.	33 10.3%	56 17.6%	74 23.2%	63 19.7%	93 29.2%	3.40	1.34	Moderate
L4. The surrounding area of the cinema support the services offered.	15 4.7%	58 18.2%	64 20.1%	59 18.5%	123 38.6%	3.68	1.28	High
L5. There are other cinema that are on the same location.	51 16.0%	53 16.6%	58 18.2%	66 20.7%	91 28.5%	3.29	1.44	Moderate
Total Average Score						3.49	1.31	Moderate

The analysis of customer retention indicated an overall mean score of 3.44 (SD = 1.35), reflecting a moderate level of customer loyalty and commitment toward the cinema. Respondents moderately agreed with statements related to continuous patronage, emotional attachment, and positive word-of-mouth communication, with the highest-rated item being customers’ willingness to recommend the cinema to others (M = 3.65). This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating that service quality and customer satisfaction are strong antecedents of loyalty and retention (Rane, Achari, & Choudhary, 2023; Shrestha, 2023). Similarly, Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) suggested that enhanced reliability and assurance directly strengthen customer commitment and repeat purchase intentions. Therefore, although the findings indicate a generally positive perception, the moderate mean implies that the cinema’s customer relationships are not yet characterized by strong loyalty. Continuous improvement in service delivery, relationship management, and value creation remains essential to foster higher retention and long-term commitment.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for customer retention

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
CR1. I use products/services from the cinema because it is the best choice for me.	16 5.0%	43 13.5%	88 27.6%	96 30.1%	76 23.8%	3.54	1.14	Moderate
CR2. If I had it to do all over again, I'd buy products/services from this cinema.	39 12.2%	66 20.7%	52 16.3%	54 16.9%	108 33.9%	3.40	1.44	Moderate
CR3. I intend to keep buying the products/services from the cinema.	38 11.9%	67 21.0%	57 17.9%	47 14.7%	110 34.5%	3.39	1.44	Moderate
CR4. I would continue to do business with the cinema if its prices increased somewhat.	33 10.3%	49 15.4%	65 20.4%	64 20.1%	108 33.9%	3.52	1.36	Moderate
CR5. When I see a new product/service, somewhat different from those of the cinema, I will not try it.	37 11.6%	55 17.2%	71 22.3%	76 23.8%	80 25.1%	3.34	1.33	Moderate
CR6. I would not switch to a competitor, even if I had a problem with the products/services of the cinema.	44 13.8%	53 16.6%	53 16.6%	76 23.8%	93 29.2%	3.38	1.41	Moderate
CR7. If the cinema is not available, it makes a great difference to me and I will not try an alternative.	50 15.7%	59 18.5%	61 19.1%	67 21.0%	82 25.7%	3.23	1.42	Moderate
CR8. In comparison to other brands I know, the cinema is growing in popularity.	33 10.3%	54 16.9%	65 20.4%	72 22.6%	95 29.8%	3.45	1.34	Moderate
CR9. The cinema is different from competing brands.	36 11.3%	68 21.3%	48 15.0%	53 16.6%	114 35.7%	3.44	1.44	Moderate
CR10. I say positive things about the cinema to other people.	34 10.7%	66 20.7%	63 19.7%	71 22.3%	85 26.6%	3.34	1.35	Moderate
CR11. I recommend the cinema to someone who seeks my advice.	12 3.8%	51 16.0%	71 22.3%	89 27.9%	96 30.1%	3.65	1.17	Moderate
CR12. I have a positive emotional relation to the cinema I have chosen, and I feel attached to it.	26 8.2%	60 18.8%	62 19.4%	73 22.9%	98 30.7%	3.49	1.32	Moderate
CR13. I am committed to the cinema.	37 11.6%	45 14.1%	60 18.8%	69 21.6%	108 33.9%	3.52	1.38	Moderate
CR14. I deal with the cinema because I want to, not because I have to.	33 10.3%	53 16.6%	57 17.9%	68 21.3%	108 33.9%	3.52	1.37	Moderate
CR15. I consider myself to be a loyal patron of the cinema.	34 10.7%	66 20.7%	53 16.6%	74 23.2%	92 28.8%	3.39	1.37	Moderate

Total Average Score	3.44	1.35	Moderate
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5. Conclusion

Overall, the study reveals that customers hold a generally positive yet moderate perception of the cinema's service quality, location, and customer retention. While the cinema meets basic expectations in terms of facilities, accessibility, and customer experience, there remains room for improvement in staff responsiveness, empathy, and loyalty-building efforts. These findings imply that cinema management should focus on enhancing both tangible and relational aspects of service delivery to strengthen customer satisfaction and long-term commitment. Strategically, investing in employee development, improving convenience features, and fostering more personalized engagement can help elevate overall customer perceptions. For future research, further exploration into the factors that mediate the relationship between service quality and customer retention such as satisfaction, trust, or digital service experience would provide valuable insights for sustaining competitiveness in the entertainment industry.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Siti Nabila Shaikh Talahah; Nurazwa Ahmad; **data collection:** Siti Nabila Shaikh Talahah; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Nurazwa Ahmad; Raja Zuraidah Raja Mohd Rasi; **draft manuscript preparation:** Siti Nabila Shaikh Talahah; Nurazwa Ahmad. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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