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Examining Key Determinants of Customer Satisfaction in the Post-Pandemic Cinema Experience

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction has become an important performance indicator for entertainment service providers such as cinemas, particularly in a competitive industry driven by experience and content quality. This study aims to analyze the factors influencing customer satisfaction toward Golden Screen Cinema (GSC) in Malaysia by examining five key determinants: ambience, service quality, accessibility, pricing, and movie genre. Using multiple regression analysis on data from 104 respondents, the findings reveal that ambience ($\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.01$) and movie genre ($\beta = 0.313$, $p < 0.001$) have significant positive effects on customer satisfaction. In contrast, service quality ($\beta = 0.172$), accessibility ($\beta = 0.045$), and pricing ($\beta = 0.138$) do not significantly influence satisfaction. The model explains 68.1% of the variance in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.681$), indicating strong explanatory power. The results suggest that the cinema experience and film selection are the main drivers of customer satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of enhancing environmental quality and curating appealing movie offerings to maintain customer satisfaction in the entertainment industry.

Keywords: Accessibility; Ambience; Customer Satisfaction; Movie Genre; Service; Ticket Pricing

INTRODUCTION

Golden Screen Cinemas (GSC) is Malaysia's largest and most established cinema and entertainment company, with a long-standing presence in the nation's film industry. Founded in 1987 as Golden Communications Circuit through a joint venture between Hong Kong's Golden Harvest and Malaysia's PPB Group, GSC rapidly expanded its operations. Following its merger with the Malaysian branch of Cathay Organization in 1988, the company was rebranded as GSC (Golden Screen Cinemas [GSC], 2021). Today, GSC operates in major cities across Malaysia, primarily within popular shopping malls such as Mid Valley Megamall. Its cinemas feature a wide range of films, including both Hollywood blockbusters and local Malaysian productions, supported by advanced technologies such as Dolby Digital and THX sound systems (GSC, 2021). As of 2021, GSC holds approximately 40% of Malaysia's cinema market share, positioning it as the leading player in the country's entertainment sector.

In the increasingly competitive entertainment and media industry, technological advancement plays a critical role in enhancing the customer experience. The transition from traditional film projection to digital technology has significantly improved viewing quality, providing audiences with sharper visuals and superior sound (Alforova et al., 2021). However, these technological innovations also pose challenges for cinema operators, who must continually invest in advanced equipment and maintain high service standards to meet evolving customer expectations for comfort and convenience (Iyer et al., 2024).

To maintain its market dominance, GSC focuses on attracting new customers while retaining existing ones by delivering consistent value and ensuring high levels of satisfaction. The company continuously strives to enhance its offerings to ensure that customers enjoy memorable and satisfying cinema experiences, encouraging repeat visits (Situmorang & Harmawan, 2022). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, some customers' expectations remain unmet, highlighting areas that require strategic improvement (Bouman & Simonse, 2023).

The relevance of this study is further reinforced by the profound lifestyle and behavioral transformations that emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic fundamentally reshaped entertainment consumption patterns, with extended lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and social distancing accelerating the global shift toward digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon Prime. As a result, audiences developed new habits of consuming on-demand entertainment from the comfort of their homes (Badran et al., 2024). When cinemas gradually reopened, moviegoers became more selective and cautious about their leisure activities, prioritizing factors such as safety, hygiene, comfort, and value for money over mere accessibility (Changsong et al., 2024). Consequently, cinema operators must adapt to these evolving expectations by reimagining their service delivery and customer engagement strategies to maintain competitiveness and loyalty in a rapidly changing entertainment landscape.

Moreover, lifestyle changes after the pandemic have heightened the demand for health-conscious, convenient, and immersive entertainment experiences, reflecting the increasing consumer preference for flexibility and comfort in media consumption (Herdanto, 2023). Contemporary audiences now expect more than just a film screening; they seek an emotionally engaging, multisensory experience that combines technological sophistication, such as high-definition projection, surround sound, and comfortable seating, with a sense of social belonging and escapism (Orzel, 2023). In this post-pandemic era, customer satisfaction has become a critical metric for survival and differentiation within the cinema industry. For GSC to remain relevant and competitive, it must fully understand the key determinants of satisfaction, including service quality, ambience, pricing, accessibility, and movie genre, as these factors collectively shape audience perceptions, influence loyalty, and determine the long-term sustainability of cinema operations in Malaysia's entertainment sector.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the influence of ambience, service quality, accessibility, pricing, and movie genre on customer satisfaction toward GSC in Malaysia. The objective is to identify which factors most strongly determine customers' satisfaction and to provide empirical evidence on the post-pandemic shifts in audience expectations. Data are collected through structured surveys and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including multiple regression analysis, to evaluate the relative impact of each factor. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the underlying drivers of satisfaction within Malaysia's largest cinema operator, reflecting the evolving priorities of moviegoers in the digital and post-pandemic era.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it extends the application of the service quality and customer satisfaction framework within the entertainment industry, an area that remains underexplored compared to hospitality and retail sectors. The study's novelty rests on its integration of experiential and contextual factors, such as ambience and movie genre, into customer satisfaction modeling for low-contact entertainment services. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for cinema managers to enhance service delivery, optimize customer experiences, and sustain competitiveness in a rapidly transforming media landscape (Weinberg et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most extensively discussed concepts in business and marketing literature, referring to the degree to which products or services meet or exceed customer expectations. It reflects the overall evaluation of a company's performance based on the perceived value and experience of its offerings. According to Singh et al. (2023), customer satisfaction measures how effectively a company fulfills customer expectations through its products and services. Similarly, Ramasamy et al. (2024) describe satisfaction as the result of confirmation or disconfirmation between expected and perceived performance, where positive disconfirmation leads to satisfaction and negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction. In other words, when a product or service performs better than expected, customers are likely to feel satisfied, while unmet expectations lead to dissatisfaction.

Hsieh and Yuan (2021) define customer satisfaction as the emotional outcome experienced by customers after evaluating a company's performance in fulfilling their expectations. Nissai et al. (2024) further emphasize that satisfaction represents a consumer's fulfillment response, a judgment regarding whether a product or service provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including instances of under- or over-fulfillment. Kotler and Keller (2012) conceptualize satisfaction as a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance with expectations. Likewise, Effendi et al. (2025) view customer satisfaction as the perceived value that arises from a transaction or relationship. Miao et al. (2022), however, extend this understanding by noting that satisfaction influences repurchase intentions and future organizational profitability.

Customer satisfaction is especially critical in the service industry, where direct interaction between service providers and consumers determines perceptions of quality and value (Teoh et al., 2022). In the cinema context, satisfaction plays a central role in shaping audience loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion. Satisfied customers are more likely to revisit and recommend the service, contributing to sustained profitability and competitive advantage. Marcos and Coelho (2022) identify customer satisfaction as not only a key performance goal but also a determinant of customer loyalty, while Demydyuk and Carlbäck (2024) highlight its role as a predictor of long-term business success. Roy et al. (2022) add that customer experience, a major component of satisfaction, arises from sensory, emotional, and cognitive interactions between customers and service providers, emphasizing that satisfaction is deeply rooted in experiential engagement.

In the film and cinema industry, customer experience constitutes an essential dimension of satisfaction, as it directly reflects how well cinemas meet audience expectations for entertainment, comfort, and emotional fulfillment. The cinema-going experience is considered an immersive and hedonistic activity that satisfies the need for leisure and escape from everyday routines (Pett, 2021). Sakhaei et al. (2022) highlight that visual aesthetics, sound quality, and overall entertainment value are critical determinants of audience satisfaction in the cinema setting. Iyer et al. (2024) further argue that continuous innovation in cinema technology, content variety, and service quality is vital for sustaining audience satisfaction and driving the growth of the film industry.

Overall, customer satisfaction serves as a strategic foundation for organizational success. It not only enhances customer loyalty and repurchase intentions but also helps attract new customers through positive experiences and recommendations. For cinema operators such as GSC, understanding and improving customer satisfaction is essential to maintaining competitiveness, ensuring profitability, and fostering sustainable growth in the dynamic entertainment industry.

Hypotheses Development

Ambience

Ambience is one of the most critical environmental factors influencing customer satisfaction in the cinema industry. It encompasses various physical and sensory elements, including lighting, sound, seating comfort, and visual quality, which collectively shape the overall moviegoing experience. According to Sharmin and Haque (2024), customer satisfaction in cinemas is significantly influenced by the presence of high-quality screens, immersive sound systems, comfortable seating arrangements, and well-maintained facilities. Ray and Bastakoti (2023) also emphasize that key cinema features such as digital sound quality, screen size, seating comfort, location accessibility, film selection, food and beverage options, parking convenience, and safety standards are major determinants of audience satisfaction.

A study found that seat quality and seating arrangement received the highest mean values among various cinema attributes influencing customer satisfaction. This indicates that comfortable seating and well-designed spatial layouts play a crucial role in shaping the overall cinema experience. A superior cinema ambience not only enhances viewing comfort and immersion but also contributes to customers' emotional satisfaction and perceived value of the service. As a result, audiences are more likely to engage in repeat visits, express higher levels of loyalty, and recommend the cinema to others through positive word-of-mouth communication. The aesthetic and environmental quality of the cinema, encompassing aspects such as lighting, cleanliness, temperature, and interior design, therefore serves as a vital competitive advantage that directly affects customers' evaluations and behavioral intentions (De De Zune, 2019).

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H1: Ambience is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Service

Service quality is widely recognized as a central determinant of customer satisfaction in the service industry. It refers to the perceived outcome of a company's service delivery system and is closely linked to customer perceptions, opinions, and overall satisfaction levels (Akram et al., 2022). According to Bolton & Drew (1991) and Cronin & Taylor (1992), service quality represents a behavioral construct related to satisfaction but distinct from it, as it reflects the balance between customer expectations and actual performance outcomes.

Advancements in science and technology have significantly enhanced service delivery, narrowing the gap between customer expectations and perceived performance. High-quality service positively influences customer satisfaction by improving customer perceptions of reliability, responsiveness, and empathy. Dam and Dam (2021) emphasized that customer satisfaction tends to increase as the quality of service improves, indicating a direct and positive relationship between the two constructs. Picolo et al. (2022) further introduce the "Bonbonniere" dimension, which evaluates not only the quality of services but also the diversity and presentation of products offered to customers. These findings highlight that service quality plays a pivotal role in attracting customers, increasing profitability, and enhancing brand reputation. Therefore, service excellence can be regarded as a primary factor influencing customer satisfaction.

H2: Service is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Ticket Pricing

Ticket pricing is another vital determinant of customer satisfaction, as it reflects the perceived fairness and value-for-money associated with a service. Arteaga et al. (2019) describe fair pricing as one of the most influential elements determining customers' overall assessment of moviegoing experiences. Similarly, Drayer et al. (2018) found that lower or reasonably priced tickets have a significant positive influence on audience satisfaction and perceived value.

Ali et al. (2024) highlight that institutional pricing policies, including discount strategies and promotional bundles, can either attract or deter customers depending on their perceived affordability and fairness. Iyer et al. (2024) underscore the importance of continuous innovation in pricing strategies, such as loyalty programs, student discounts, and dynamic pricing models, to deliver greater customer value. Yum and Kim (2024) add that economic factors, particularly the balance between cost and experience quality, are key drivers of customer retention in the entertainment industry. Taken together, these studies emphasize that a fair and well-structured pricing system enhances customer satisfaction and strengthens long-term loyalty toward the cinema.

H3: Ticket pricing is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an essential factor that contributes to a positive customer experience, especially in service industries like cinemas, where convenience and inclusivity are critical. Accessibility in cinemas involves not only physical access but also the availability of facilities that ensure inclusivity for all audience members, including individuals with disabilities. According to Hong et al. (2011), accessibility encompasses features that enable individuals with visual or hearing impairments to fully experience films, such as audio descriptions, captioning, and adaptive technologies. Lopez et al. (2021) further note that the inclusion of closed captions, descriptive audio, and accessible seating significantly enhances inclusivity and enriches the overall cinematic experience.

Ray and Bastakoti (2023) recommend that cinemas provide level access, automatic doors, and accessible toilets to ensure convenience for all customers. In addition, Uzzo and Madonia (2024) emphasize that prioritizing accessibility not only fulfills ethical and legal obligations but also promotes cultural inclusiveness, allowing people of all backgrounds to share cinematic experiences. Enhanced accessibility can increase customer satisfaction by fostering a sense of belonging, comfort, and appreciation among diverse audiences.

H4: Accessibility is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Movie Genre

Movie genre represents the thematic and stylistic classification of films and plays a central role in shaping audience preferences and satisfaction. According to Tchernev (2015), genres categorize films based on narrative structures, settings, characters, tone, and mood, helping audiences identify films that align with their interests. Moon et al. (2010) observe that viewers tend to exhibit genre loyalty, meaning that individuals often choose to watch movies belonging to their favorite genres, such as action, thriller, or romance, because these genres provide the most satisfying experiences.

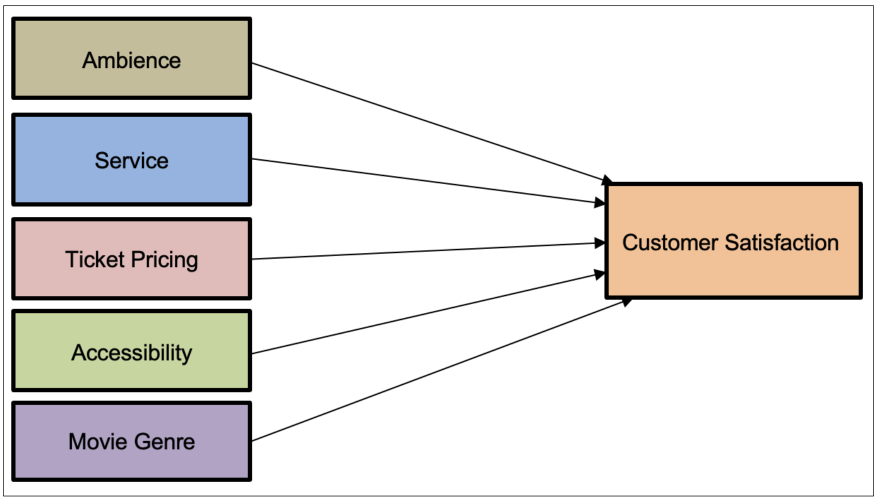
Khalish and Hanami (2025) explain that understanding movie genres enriches the viewing experience by offering audiences a framework to interpret stories and connect emotionally with film narratives. Each genre reflects distinct human emotions, social values, and cultural contexts, contributing to varied audience engagement. As a result, the diversity and relevance of movie genres offered by a cinema can significantly influence customer satisfaction. When audiences find films that align with their preferences and expectations, they are more likely to report higher satisfaction and repeat attendance.

H5: Movie genre is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Framework



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RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Procedure

This study adopted a quantitative research design employing a structured survey as the primary data collection instrument. The target population comprised individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds who had prior experience visiting cinemas in Malaysia. A total of 104 valid responses were obtained from moviegoers through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. This approach facilitated efficient data collection, convenience for participants, and broad geographic coverage across multiple states and age groups, thereby enhancing sample representativeness.

Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened to remove incomplete or duplicate responses, ensuring data quality and reliability. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the research objectives before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained in accordance with ethical research guidelines, and all collected data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

Measures

All constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), with specific measurement items detailed in the Appendix. Demographic variables were captured through single-item questions covering age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, and annual income. The dependent variable, customer satisfaction, was measured using a four-item scale designed to capture overall satisfaction with the cinema experience.

The independent variables included ambience, service quality, ticket pricing, accessibility, and movie genre, operationalized through a total of 23 items adapted from validated scales in previous studies. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics, while multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the effects of the independent variables on customer satisfaction. This analytical approach provided empirical insights into the key determinants shaping customer satisfaction within Malaysia’s cinema industry.

RESULTS

Table 1. Respondents Demographic Summary (N=104)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	57	54.8
Female	47	45.2
Age		
18-24	55	52.9
25-34	16	15.4
35-44	11	10.6
44-54	9	8.7
55-64	10	9.6
Above 64	3	2.9
Ethnicity		
Malay	55	52.9
Chinese	16	15.4

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Indian	20	19.2
Indigenous (Orang Asli, Sabah, Sarawak)	13	12.5
Occupation		
Student	54	51.9
Private Sector	6	5.8
Government Sector	8	7.7
Unemployed	10	9.6
Employed (Full-time)	2	1.9
Employed (Part-Time)	8	7.7
Retired	12	11.5
Homemaker	4	3.8
Monthly Income		
Below RM 1,000	55	52.9
RM 1,001-RM 2,999	9	8.7
RM 3,000-RM 4,999	9	8.7
RM 5,000-RM 6,999	13	12.5
RM 7,000-RM 9,999	11	10.6
RM 10,000 and above	7	6.7

Based on Table 1, the demographic analysis shows that the majority of respondents were male (n = 57; 54.8%), while female respondents accounted for 47 individuals (45.2%). This distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation of gender among the moviegoers surveyed.

In terms of age, the largest group of respondents fell within the 18–24 years old category, comprising 55 individuals (52.9%). This was followed by 16 respondents (15.4%) aged 25–34 years, 11 respondents (10.6%) aged 35–44 years, 9 respondents (8.7%) aged 45–54 years, and 10 respondents (9.6%) aged 55–64 years. A small proportion of 3 respondents (2.9%) were aged above 64 years, indicating that the survey captured a wide age range of GSC patrons, though dominated by younger audiences.

Regarding ethnicity, the majority of respondents were Malay (n = 55; 52.9%), followed by Chinese (n = 16; 15.4%), Indian (n = 20; 19.2%), and Indigenous (n = 13; 12.5%). This reflects Malaysia's multicultural composition, with Malays forming the largest segment of cinema-goers in this study.

In terms of occupation, more than half of the respondents were students (n = 54; 51.9%), followed by those working in the private sector (n = 6; 5.8%) and government sector (n = 8; 7.7%). Meanwhile, 10 respondents (9.6%) were unemployed, 2 respondents (1.9%) were full-time workers, and 8 respondents (7.7%) were part-time workers. Additionally, 12 respondents (11.5%) identified as retirees, and 4 respondents (3.8%) as homemakers. This indicates that a substantial portion of the sample consisted of younger individuals still pursuing their studies.

For monthly income, more than half of the respondents (n = 55; 52.9%) reported earning below RM 1,000 per month. Meanwhile, 9 respondents (8.7%) each reported earning between RM 1,001–2,999 and RM 3,000–4,999. Another 13 respondents (12.5%) earned between RM 5,000–6,999, 11 respondents (11%) earned between RM 7,000–9,999, and 7 respondents (6.7%) had a monthly income of RM 10,000 or above. This income distribution suggests that the majority of respondents were low-income individuals, consistent with the high number of students in the sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Example (N =158)

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Ambience	0.762					
2	Service	0.685**	0.742				
3	Accessibility	0.642**	0.635**	0.713			
4	Pricing	0.571**	0.603**	0.556**	0.556		
5	Movie Genre	0.716**	0.676**	0.568**	0.497**	0.713	
6	Customer Satisfaction	0.746**	0.699**	0.599**	0.592**	0.736**	0.742
M		3.6154	3.5048	3.4923	3.3534	3.5745	3.5288
SD		0.94569	0.76551	0.83836	0.78719	0.89421	0.94272

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability measures, and zero-order correlations among the study variables. The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.56 to 0.74, indicating acceptable internal consistency for exploratory research. The five key variables influencing moviegoers' experiences at GSC in Malaysia (ambience, service quality, accessibility, pricing, and movie genre) were all positively correlated with customer satisfaction. Among these, ambience and movie genre demonstrated the strongest associations with customer satisfaction, followed by service quality and accessibility. The results indicate that environmental and experiential factors play crucial roles in shaping customer satisfaction at GSC. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values reflect moderate to high levels of agreement among respondents, suggesting a generally favorable perception toward the overall cinema experience at GSC.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis

	Customer Satisfaction Towards GSC Variables Entered	Beta
1	Ambience	0.296**
2	Service	0.172
3	Accessibility	0.045
4	Pricing	0.138
5	Movie Genre	0.313***
R^2		0.681

Note: N = 104, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p <0.001

The hypotheses of this study were tested using multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of the independent variables (ambience, service quality, accessibility, pricing, and movie genre) on the dependent variable, customer satisfaction. As shown in Table 3, the results indicate that only ambience and movie genre demonstrated a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction among GSC moviegoers in Malaysia.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that ambience would have a positive effect on customer satisfaction, while Hypothesis 2 proposed that service quality would positively affect customer satisfaction. Hypothesis 3 suggested that accessibility would positively influence customer satisfaction, whereas Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 posited that pricing and movie genre, respectively, would be positively related to customer satisfaction.

The regression results revealed that ambience ($\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.01$) and movie genre ($\beta = 0.313$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects on customer satisfaction. In contrast, service quality ($\beta = 0.172$), accessibility ($\beta = 0.045$), and pricing ($\beta = 0.138$) did not show

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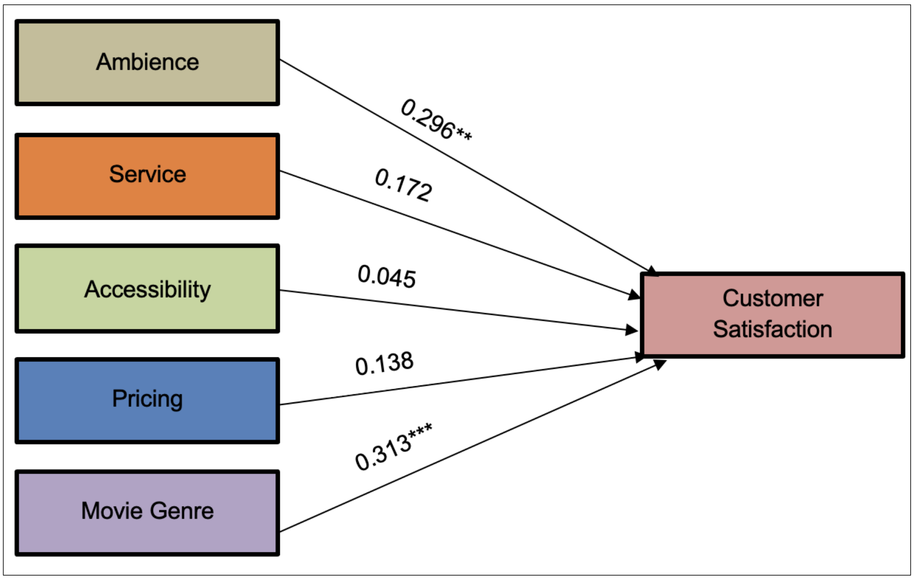
statistically significant relationships with customer satisfaction. Hence, Hypotheses 1 and 5 were supported, while Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were not supported.

The model explained 68.1% of the variance in customer satisfaction (R^2 = 0.681), indicating that ambience and movie genre jointly account for a substantial proportion of the variation in customers' satisfaction levels toward GSC. Among the significant predictors, movie genre emerged as the most influential factor affecting customer satisfaction, followed by ambience. These findings suggest that moviegoers' satisfaction is shaped primarily by the cinematic environment and the types of films offered, highlighting the importance of experiential and entertainment-related elements in enhancing the overall cinema experience.

The summary of the results is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Overview Result



DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that ambience and movie genre significantly influence customer satisfaction at GSC, while service quality, ticket pricing, and accessibility do not show significant effects. These results highlight how experiential and emotional factors outweigh functional attributes in shaping moviegoers' satisfaction and loyalty within Malaysia's cinema industry (Picolo et al., 2023; Tang & Yu, 2021).

The positive relationship between ambience and customer satisfaction underscores the importance of environmental and sensory experiences in influencing audience perceptions. A well-designed and comfortable environment, characterized by superior sound systems, sharp visual projection, and modern facilities, plays a crucial role in shaping customer experiences (Sakhaei et al., 2022). According to Alforova et al. (2021), advancements in digital and cinematic technologies enhance film presentation quality and strengthen the emotional connection between audiences and the visual environment. This aligns with the perspective of Pett (2021), who asserts that cinema today functions as an immersive cultural and emotional space that satisfies both aesthetic and sensory needs. Furthermore, studies by Dam and Dam (2021) and Marcos and Coelho (2022) demonstrate that service environments with strong experiential components significantly elevate customer satisfaction and brand attachment.

Therefore, ambience in a cinema is not merely a supporting factor; it is a decisive determinant that transforms a simple viewing activity into a meaningful and memorable experience.

Similarly, movie genre emerged as another dominant factor influencing customer satisfaction. Moviegoers tend to choose films based on genre preferences, such as action, adventure, romance, or comedy, which reflect both individual emotion and social trends. Bondebjerg (2015) emphasizes that film genres function as structured narrative systems that influence production decisions and audience interpretation. However, as Girsang et al. (2024) and Moon et al. (2010) point out, audience preferences evolve dynamically over time, meaning cinema managers must continuously monitor genre trends to align film offerings with changing market expectations. Changsong et al. (2024) further illustrate that Malaysian audiences, particularly in the post-pandemic era, prioritize entertainment experiences that align with their psychological comfort, thematic interest, and cultural values. By offering a diverse range of movie genres, GSC can enhance emotional engagement, attract repeat visitors, and maintain competitive relevance in the evolving entertainment landscape.

Conversely, service quality, pricing, and accessibility were found to have no significant impact on customer satisfaction in this study. These findings are consistent with prior studies by Akram et al. (2022) and Singh et al. (2023), which suggest that customers often view such factors as basic expectations rather than satisfaction drivers, unless service delivery or pricing fails to meet their minimal expectations. Arteaga et al. (2019) argue that in the modern cinema industry, ticket pricing has become standardized, diminishing its influence as a differentiating factor. Similarly, accessibility, while crucial for inclusivity, may not strongly affect satisfaction once customers have already reached the venue (Ray & Bastakoti, 2023; Uzzo & Madonia, 2024). This implies that customers now prioritize emotional fulfillment and sensory experiences over purely functional attributes such as ticket price or location convenience.

From a managerial perspective, these results provide valuable insights for cinema operators. GSC should continue to invest in enhancing ambience through improved visual and sound quality, comfortable seating, and aesthetically pleasing design, to create an emotionally engaging atmosphere that differentiates it from competitors. Managers should also analyze audience behavior and genre preferences regularly to plan film lineups that align with current cultural and emotional trends (Khalish & Hanami, 2025). By focusing on the experiential and emotional dimensions of the cinema experience, GSC can strengthen customer loyalty, promote positive word of mouth, and maintain a competitive edge against other major cinema chains such as TGV or MBO.

Theoretically, these findings enrich existing literature by reaffirming the significance of hedonic and experiential dimensions in the service quality framework (Dam & Dam, 2021; Hsieh & Yuan, 2021). Traditional service models emphasize reliability, responsiveness, and assurance (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Cronin & Taylor, 1992), yet the current study demonstrates that sensory, emotional, and environmental factors are more influential in determining satisfaction for entertainment-based services. Future research should incorporate mediating variables such as customer loyalty, perceived value, and emotional engagement (Miao et al., 2022; Yum & Kim, 2024) to better explain how experiential factors translate into behavioral outcomes.

Overall, this study confirms that customer satisfaction in the cinema industry depends not only on functional performance but also on the creation of meaningful, immersive, and emotionally resonant experiences. By integrating environmental aesthetics and film diversity, cinema operators can cultivate deeper audience connections, encourage repeat patronage, and achieve sustainable competitive success in Malaysia's entertainment sector and beyond (Girsang et al., 2024; Iyer et al., 2024; Picolo et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of ambience, service quality, accessibility, pricing, and movie genre on customer satisfaction among Malaysian cinema audiences. In conclusion, the findings provide empirical evidence that ambience and movie genre are significant determinants of customer satisfaction among GSC moviegoers in Malaysia. The results indicate that audiences place high value on environmental quality, such as sound systems, seating comfort, and visual presentation, and film selection as key components of their cinema experience. Conversely, factors such as service quality, pricing, and accessibility were found to have no significant influence, suggesting that these elements function more as supporting conditions rather than primary drivers of satisfaction. This implies that while such factors remain essential for maintaining operational standards, they no longer serve as differentiating features in today's highly competitive entertainment market.

Overall, the findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that enhance customer satisfaction in the cinema industry. By emphasizing the experiential dimensions of ambience and movie genre diversity, cinema operators can improve audience engagement, encourage repeat patronage, and strengthen emotional connections with their brand. In the post-pandemic context, where customers seek comfort, safety, and immersive experiences, focusing on these aspects becomes even more critical for sustaining customer loyalty and attracting new visitors.

From a managerial standpoint, GSC and other cinema operators should continuously evaluate and innovate their environmental design and film programming strategies to align with evolving audience preferences. Investments in technology, aesthetics, and personalized marketing can further enrich the customer experience and reinforce brand loyalty. Furthermore, understanding the psychological and emotional responses of audiences toward ambience and genre can help businesses craft more effective experience-based strategies to retain and expand their market share.

Future research is encouraged to expand this model by including additional factors such as customer loyalty, perceived value, technological innovations, or marketing communication strategies to develop a more integrated framework for understanding customer satisfaction in the entertainment and service sectors. Extending the study across different cultural or geographic contexts may also provide valuable comparative insights into how cinema audiences worldwide perceive satisfaction, thereby contributing to a broader theoretical and practical understanding of customer experience management in the film industry.

LIMITATION

The present study is not without limitations. First, the research was constrained by a relatively small sample size, as technical issues during the data collection process limited the number of valid responses. The study initially aimed to obtain 200 respondents who had visited GSC; however, only 104 responses were successfully collected, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research focused exclusively on GSC in Malaysia, limiting its scope to a single cinema brand. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of moviegoers who frequent other cinema operators or entertainment providers.

Third, this study employed a quantitative research approach using an online survey distributed via Google Forms. While this method allowed efficient data collection, it did not capture the depth of customer insights that could be obtained through qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus group discussions. Future studies could adopt a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction dynamics and generate richer managerial implications.

Lastly, the research was conducted only within the Malaysian context, which may limit its applicability in different cultural or regional settings. Cross-cultural comparative studies are recommended to explore whether the identified factors influencing customer satisfaction are consistent across different countries and demographic groups. Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable foundation for future research to further investigate the key drivers of customer satisfaction in the cinema industry and to develop more robust, generalizable insights.

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The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the study, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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