

Promoting perceived service quality and organisational performance through customer retention strategies: the moderating role of ICT

Customer
retention
strategies

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Abstract

Purpose – The major objective of the study is to investigate the effect of selected customer retention strategies (fair pricing, online marketing and frequent communication) on perceived service quality and organisational performance within the retail sector in Zimbabwe. Also, the study sought to understand the moderating role of ICT on the effect of customer retention strategies on perceived service quality and organisational performance.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional survey of 280 employees within Zimbabwe's retail sector was adopted and respondents were selected using simple random sampling method. A structured questionnaire with Likert type questions was used to gather data.

Findings – The study findings indicate that the performance of organisations within the retail sector is influenced by superior service quality, selected customer retention strategies and also moderated by the use of ICT.

Originality/value – The study contributes to the business management body of knowledge by assessing the effect of selected customer retention strategies (fair pricing, online marketing and frequent communication) on perceived service quality and organisational performance within the retail industry of an emerging economy. The study is also unique in that it used ICT to moderate the effect of selected customer retention strategies on perceived service quality and organisational performance.

Keywords Organizational performance, Customer retention strategies, Information and communication technology, Retail sector, Perceived service quality, Zimbabwe

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Customer retention is becoming an increasingly important managerial strategy, particularly in the context of saturated markets (Chikazhe *et al.*, 2022a, b). It is not just a practical and beneficial procedure in the present business world, but it is a need for business supportability (Chikwere *et al.*, 2022; Souiden *et al.*, 2019). Customer retention has acquired expanding consideration from researchers in services marketing, business administration and business management (Otto *et al.*, 2020). There are several approaches to developing customer retention strategies in general; any process that fosters customer loyalty can be classified as a customer retention activity (Paul and Rosenbaum, 2020).

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Customer retention being a business strategy, it aims to keep as many customers as possible while also improving customer relationships (Liao *et al.*, 2019). Mwandifura *et al.* (2022a, b) proposed that there ought to be equilibrium of endeavours between winning new clients and holding old ones. Customer churn and customer acquisition both have a direct impact on the customer retention rate, or how many loyal customers one can keep over a given time period. Organisations have recently showered a greater number of assets on pulling in new clients than on fulfilling old clients, yet in the present low development and profoundly serious commercial centres, organisations are investing more energy into continuing existing clients by utilising compelling relationship methodology arrangements, including maintenance and reliability procedures (Fernandes and Caldeira, 2019). Customer acquisition is unquestionably important for any business, but if businesses spend the majority of their time and energy wooing new customers at the expense of keeping existing ones, they will soon see an increase in churn and a downward trend in customer satisfaction (Zietsman *et al.*, 2019). Also, keeping current customers is often less expensive than finding new ones (Alshamsi *et al.*, 2020).

If properly managed, customer retention benefits businesses through improved service quality and sales growth (Mwandifura *et al.*, 2022a, b). The quality of service could be improved if the organisations keep a base of old customers, thus organisations design expected product for their clients (Mharidzo *et al.*, 2022). Also, the organisation can grow its business through frequent communication with customer, online marketing and fair pricing of products amongst other strategies (Mashapure *et al.*, 2022a, b). Frequent communicating with customers is another way to improve service quality and retain consumers in business (Akpomi *et al.*, 2022). Continuous customer engagement results in relationship management which can influence business performance. Also, management could include staff members and promote their participation in order for the communication plan to be successful (Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa, 2022).

The greatest way to provide ongoing improvements and maintain high levels of engagement is through their feedback (Caiati *et al.*, 2020). Companies may raise brand recognition by using online marketing techniques (Djakasaputra *et al.*, 2021) like pay-per-click and social media marketing. Additionally, these marketing techniques give businesses dynamic tools to expand their visibility and draw in new customers, which boosts revenue. Moreover, businesses interact effectively with customers in order to improve the quality service to enhance business growth (Jing *et al.*, 2020). Businesses adopt online marketing as a way to improve service quality and increase sales. By promoting and offering goods and services through the use of a digital and virtual environment, online marketing is not only doing business at a low-cost but also effectively in drawing clients 24/7 (Denner *et al.*, 2022). By its nature, online marketing benefits every business immensely as it is a great way to reach people everywhere as long as they are online (Chikazhe and Makanyeza, 2022).

An effective pricing strategy accurately connects the value of service with the willingness of your target customer to pay (Faith, 2018; Jing *et al.*, 2020). A reasonable pricing also encourages customers to make purchases and could strengthen their loyalty, supporting the company's development (Fan *et al.*, 2020). A business may support sustainable development by setting fair prices, giving customers good value and upholding social responsibility.

Over the past years, firms within the retail industry have experienced fluctuating customer base (Chikazhe *et al.*, 2022a, b) and Zimbabwe's retail sector is not an exception. Several challenges experienced within the retail sector are alleged to be emanating from customer base shrinkage and these include; lack of expected service quality, failure by management to satisfy customer needs, absence of modern technologies amongst others. This has had a significant impact on most retail enterprises' success, particularly in emerging markets like Zimbabwe. Thus, the problem underlying this study is insignificant business performance within Zimbabwe's retail sector and it's assumed that customer retention and

service quality could be the main contributing factors to this problem. In trying to address similar problems, several studies were carried out in various sectors of the economy (Alshamsi *et al.*, 2020; Chikazhe *et al.*, 2022a, b; Maladi *et al.*, 2019; Otto *et al.*, 2020; Souiden *et al.*, 2019). However, none of these studies used frequent communication, online marketing and fair pricing as customer retention strategies to influence service quality and business performance within the retail sector. Moreover, none of the studies included the moderating role of ICT on the effect of customer retention on service quality and organisational performance within the retail sector. Thus, the current study intends to close this knowledge gap in management literature by examining how ICT (digital communication, online payments, collecting, storing and analysing) can be incorporated to moderate the relationship between customer retention and both service quality and business performance. Thus, the major objective of the study was to: (1) establish the effect of selected customer retention strategies (digital communication, online payments, collecting, storing and analysing) on perceived service quality and organisational performance within the retail sector in Zimbabwe (2) ascertain whether perceived service quality influences organisational performance and (3) understand the moderating role of ICT on the effect of customer retention strategies on service quality and organisational performance.

2. Literature review

2.1 Customer retention strategies

Maladi *et al.* (2019) defines customer retention as an all-encompassing marketing strategy and actions aimed at retaining both new and existing customers by developing, maintaining and maximising long-term gains that deepen and broaden the joint relationship of two parties. Subrahmanyam and Arif (2022) claim that this further emphasises that customer retention is not only about giving customers what they expect in order to retain them but also about exceeding their desires. Customer retention, according to Artha *et al.* (2022), is the tendency of customers to stick with their service suppliers. The current study defines customer retention as purchasing the same product or service many times, leading to economic benefit and gaining a competitive advantage in the market. Moreover, the current study understands that customer retention is influenced by managerial strategies that involve fair pricing of products and services, online marketing of commodities and frequent communication between the business and the customer.

The competitive environment forces businesses to adopt innovative customer retention strategies in order to maintain their business position in comparison to competitors (Hashem, 2022). Commerce-mates emphasised the scope in which customer retention is promoted through customer centricity, economic consistency, building a strong image, and, ultimately, higher profits. This shows that customer retention has a competitive advantage in attaining a long-term competitive advantage and allowing the organisation to enjoy long-term profits, which is every company's objective. Customer satisfaction contributes to customer retention (Adzhigalieva *et al.*, 2021). This suggests that poor customer satisfaction can be caused by poor service quality and a low degree of complaint management, which lowers customer retention.

Furthermore, Zietsman *et al.* (2019) emphasise that the primary goal of a firm is to satisfy the client while building a long-lasting and valuable relationship. As a result, by looking at dull purchases, holding clients were generally submitted and given to a firm. Refresh-buy is bestowed as an outstanding commitment to ceaselessly buy and repurchase a service later on (Alshamsi *et al.*, 2020). Recurring purchases also demonstrate that customers are satisfied with the affiliations' responsibilities. Refresh clients were, in a general sense, expected to purchase something similar or different from their previous purchases during their subsequent visits without contemplating different retailers (Chikazhe *et al.*, 2022a, b). This client was thus endorsing their social occasions for allies to purchase and continue

purchasing from a specific firm and expanding the association's introduction levels (Ferraris *et al.*, 2019). All things considered, it is understandable that clients who have a negative attitude towards a company would begin to spread positive information about the company to their social contacts (Zietsman *et al.*, 2019).

2.2 Fair pricing

A fair price is a selling price that considers factors including performance, supply, timing and payment choices (Caiati *et al.*, 2020). It is calculated at a level that is fair for both sides. The seller gains some margin, which is not excessively high (Victor *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, both sides of the transaction should be happy with that price. A fair price also increases purchasing intentions and may increase customer loyalty, thereby sustaining the business in the future (Fan *et al.*, 2020). A commercial firm can contribute to sustainable development by offering fair prices to its customers while also being socially responsible. Pricing is the process of determining how much money a manufacturer will receive in exchange for services and goods. The pricing method is used to adjust the cost of the producer's offerings to make them more appealing to both the manufacturer and the customer (Mwandifura *et al.*, 2022a, b). An effective pricing strategy accurately connects the value of your service with the willingness of your target customer to pay. It might be challenging to determine a fair price in some situations. Particularly problematic is when trading is conducted through an intermediary (Chikwere *et al.*, 2022). The price of the product in third-world countries can be extremely low, as there are very low labour costs (Jing *et al.*, 2020).

2.3 Online marketing

It is an assortment of technologies and techniques that are used in online marketing to advertise goods and services online (Shokeen *et al.*, 2022). Akpomi *et al.* (2022) proclaim that, due to the additional channels and marketing tools made available by the Internet, online marketing encompasses a larger range of marketing components than traditional corporate marketing. Additionally, Christina *et al.* (2019) defined marketing as the organisational function that can stay in continual contact with the company's customers, anticipating their requirements, designing products that address those needs and creating a communication system to explain those purposes. Online marketing, which is also referred to as digital or Internet marketing, means doing the usual selling of the products, but unlike in ordinary marketing, this is done over a computer-mediated network (Krizanova *et al.*, 2019). Online marketing is the deliberate application of digital networks and technological platforms to the promotion of commercial endeavours. Online marketing, in this sense, employs a range of digital, online and electronic channels to communicate with both present and potential clients of the company.

Usually, online marketing messages are designed as images, text, or video and distributed through such media as social media, emails, newsletters and websites (Bala and Verma, 2018). By promoting and offering goods and services through the use of a digital and virtual environment, online marketing has not only made doing business low-cost but also been effective in drawing clients 24/7 (Denner *et al.*, 2022). By its nature, online marketing presupposes that businesses are already online, but when adopted, it benefits every business immensely as it is a great way to reach people everywhere as long as they are online (Chikazhe and Makanyeza, 2022). As a result, marketers must understand the marketing environment, particularly who the potential clients are, what items they are interested in (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2016) and how to establish an online relationship with them.

2.4 Frequent communication

Marketing communications are the messages and platforms that businesses employ to reach out to their target audiences (Mashapure *et al.*, 2022a, b). Marketing communications include,

but are not limited to, traditional advertising, direct marketing, social media marketing, presentations and sponsorships. Marketing relies on communication to keep everyone on the same page (Chikazhe *et al.*, 2022a, b). Thus, the current study understands frequent communication as the facilitation of the transfer of information on products, services and ideas from the business to the customer, as well as the development and maintenance of relationships with customers, prospects and other key stakeholders within the organisation.

Communication is of paramount importance between retail businesses and their customers (Ferraris *et al.*, 2019). Employees and management must interact effectively with customers (Noorbehbahani *et al.*, 2019) in order to achieve organisational goals and be more aligned with core company values (Jing *et al.*, 2020). Its primary goal is to improve organisational performance through the elimination of silos, keeping customers informed and reducing customer complaints (Chikwere *et al.*, 2022).

2.5 Perceived service quality

Chikazhe *et al.* (2022a, b) described service quality as meeting customers' expectations. By examining how effectively a company satisfies client expectations, one can ascertain the quality of its services (Jing *et al.*, 2020; Victor *et al.*, 2018). Thus, any business can grow if it can find a way to improve the calibre of its offerings (Paul and Rosenbaum, 2020). Customers purchase services to meet specific needs (Fan *et al.*, 2020). Canh *et al.* (2019) claim that the process of ensuring that the customer obtains services that live up to his expectations is known as service quality management. In essence, it assesses a service's effectiveness in order to improve its quality going forward (Huotari and Hamari, 2011), identify problems and fix them to increase client satisfaction (Jing *et al.*, 2020).

2.6 Organisational performance

The ability of an organisation to achieve its goals and optimise results is referred to as organisational performance (Khin and Ho, 2018). Organisational performance in today's workforce can be defined as a company's ability to achieve goals in an environment of constant change (Otto *et al.*, 2020). Organisational performance analysis is the capacity to implement the strategies, tactics and resources utilised to assess programme and organisational performance and provide crucial performance data that is used to guide choices, actions, communications and accountability systems (Krekel *et al.*, 2019).

Businesses require effective performance management (Cardão-Pito *et al.*, 2021). Through both official and informal methods, it helps them match their systems, resources and personnel with their strategic objectives (Canh *et al.*, 2019). How well a company achieves its stated goals is one of the most common ways to assess organisational effectiveness and performance (Ferraris *et al.*, 2019; Mwandifura *et al.*, 2022a, b). This method would assess factors such as how well an organisation meets its objectives. Likewise, Khin and Ho (2018) claim that organisational effectiveness relates to how an organisation has attained complete self-awareness as a result of, amongst other things, executives articulating clear objectives for workers and outlining strategies for effectively achieving those objectives.

2.7 Information and communication technology (ICT)

Information and communication technologies refer to a broad range of technological resources and techniques that are used to create, transfer, store, share and exchange information (Denner *et al.*, 2022). According to Akpomi *et al.* (2022), information and communication technology (ICT) is a broad, extensible and communication equipment that obtains, manipulates, transmits and stores information electronically in a digital form, such as radio, television, cell phones, computers, network hardware, software, systems and

services. ICTs provide customers access to information through telecommunication systems (Aparicio *et al.*, 2021); they also provide manipulation and communication services (Souiden *et al.*, 2019). Through newly emerging channels, customers and businesses are connecting to exchange information all across the world (Bhattacharyya and Abdel-Raheem, 2022). ICTs and information technologies (IT) are interchangeably used, but the most ideal term to use in the 21st century and beyond is “ICTs,” which is more encompassing. The current study understands ICT as the use of digital technology by firms as they collect, store and analyse customer data as well as digitally communication with customers.

ICT is the most critical contemporary business resource that is so dynamic that it changes the business landscape for the better (Costa *et al.*, 2017; Salamova *et al.*, 2021). This presents opportunities presented to businesses by ICTs (Ferraris *et al.*, 2019). It is every business' wish to spread its tentacles globally, developing new markets for new and existing products and services and opening new remote business offices, leading to huge profits. The new and ever-evolving ICT-driven business initiatives require more robust communication lines, infrastructure and service assurance to ensure customer satisfaction, retention and eventual business success (Denner *et al.*, 2022). The burning question in research is: in what way do ICTs enable customer retention in businesses of the 21st century and beyond? Chief amongst the strategic ICT implementations, it enables satisfaction, loyalty and retention through a good customer digital experience and meeting the individual's needs (Shokeen *et al.*, 2022). Akpomi *et al.* (2022) allude to the fact that ICT is the biggest business game changer in customer retention through easing transactions and the red tape characteristic of manual and semi-automated processes in placing, paying, collecting and delivering business orders. ICTs enable brand presence on any mobile gadget through voice, audio, short message service and video capabilities in mobile media devices.

2.7.1 ICT literature gap. This ICT performs several business-related tasks such as the checkout process (i.e. scanning, payments, etc.), account management, managing in-store inventory and more. Through ICT, processes can become much more efficient. However, the retail sector in Zimbabwe lags behind in that the use of ICT is very limited and this has disadvantaged the sector. Businesses are enjoying the use of ICT in communicating with customers but the use of modern communication platforms like social media, online advertising, online payment and digital storage of customer data amongst others is still at the infancy stage. Currently, some retailers are not computerised hence relying on manual transactions which compromises their operation. Thus, the current study sought to establish whether the introduction of ICT in communication, data storage, Internet selling and online payments could influence.

3. Empirical evidence and development of research model

3.1 The effect of customer retention strategies on organisational performance

Literature confirms that prices empower firms to create the expense and extra pay for the worth dedicated to the merchandise and enterprises to easily meet the expense of creation and assurance some degree of supportability of the business (Faith, 2018; Feng *et al.*, 2022; Haripersad and Sookdeo, 2018; Li *et al.*, 2019; Subrahmanyam and Arif, 2022). Haripersad and Sookdeo (2018) investigated the competitiveness of the banking sector as determined by factors including cost containment and fair pricing. The study concluded that management out to consider fair pricing of commodities in order to retain customers. The impact of pricing tactics on the purchasing of consumer goods was also studied by Faith (2018). The results imply that consumers' perceptions of value are mirrored in the costs of goods sold by businesses. Also, Li *et al.* (2019) studied aggressive pricing plans in a pure duopoly where two platforms have products with high dependency. According to the study findings, a platform's pricing strategy is important not only for branding but also for capturing customers'

willingness-to-pay. [Feng et al. \(2022\)](#) investigated how customers will react to short-term price changes during a disruption.

It was determined that using a fixed pricing strategy to completely eliminate customer order variability is not recommended, and that adjusting the price to match supply with demand is required to improve profit. It is on this note that the examination conjectures that:

H1a. Fair pricing has a positive impact on organisational performances.

Digital marketing helps firms perform better by integrating technology with their customers and business operations to achieve profitable growth ([Bala and Verma, 2018](#); [Kovalenko and Kuzmenko, 2020](#); [Oktavianna et al., 2019](#)). [Kovalenko and Kuzmenko \(2020\)](#) investigated the phenomenon of Internet website visibility from the standpoint of marketing information flows in small business activities. The findings indicate that there is a link between the number of Internet marketing methods used and the visibility of small business websites in search engines. In a related study, [Bala and Verma \(2018\)](#) investigated current and future marketing trends. The study determined that, in comparison to old or conventional techniques, consumers are exploring and searching more on the Internet to discover the greatest bargain from merchants. In an almost similar study, [Oktavianna et al. \(2019\)](#) discovered that fish farmer organisations used online platforms like Facebook, Instagram and other social media to market directly to consumers, which increased sales for the company. Thus, it can be hypothesised that:

H1b. Online marketing has a positive effect on organisational performance.

[Singh et al. \(2019\)](#) looked into how information and communication technology applications could help SMEs in the Indian food sector grow sustainably. According to the findings, communication is essential for business expansion. Another study by [Krizanova et al. \(2019\)](#) concentrated on a methodology for putting into practice an indicator suitable for assessing the efficacy of online communication activities in the Slovak hotel industry. According to the study's findings, hotels in Slovakia consider online marketing communications to be important regardless of their size, number of years in business, spending capacity or class. Hence it can be proposed that:

H1c. Frequent communication with customers positively influences organisational performance.

3.2 The effect of customer retention strategies on retail service quality

As mediators between price fairness and perceived value in service encounters between micro-enterprises and their banks, perceived price and service quality were tested in a study by [Zietsman et al. \(2019\)](#). The results showed that the relationship between business banking customers' perceptions of price fairness and the value of service provided is influenced by perceived price and service quality. Equally, in the context of halal-certified restaurants, [Abdullah et al. \(2018\)](#) investigated the impact of food quality and price fairness on restaurant re-patronage intention service quality. The findings indicated that customer satisfaction and service quality are influenced by food quality and price fairness. The goal of the study by [Vallery et al. \(2020\)](#) was to examine and analyse how price and advertising affected the calibre of the service and customer satisfaction for online transportation services. The results of the study show that price and promotion have a favourable and considerable influence on customers' satisfaction levels and the calibre of online transportation services. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that:

H2a. Fair pricing is positively related to service quality.

Literature confirms a positive relationship between online marketing and service quality (Akhmadi and Pratolo, 2021; Djakasaputra *et al.*, 2021; Veluchamy *et al.*, 2020). Djakasaputra *et al.* (2021) analysed the relationship between digital marketing and quality service amongst small and medium. The study results indicate that digital marketing has a significant effect on quality service. Likewise, Veluchamy *et al.* (2020) examined the effectiveness of online marketing and its determinants. The study settled the level of service quality is influenced by online marketing. Akhmadi and Pratolo (2021) explored the extent of online food product marketing practices in a marketplace. The study's findings indicate that service quality was included as a value proposition with the consumer to consumer e-commerce model as well as other important business model components. Thus, it can be proposed that:

H2b. Online marketing has a positive impact on service quality

Frequent communication with customers improves service quality within a modern business setup (Ratheeswari, 2018; Garcia-Sanchez *et al.*, 2020; Seric *et al.*, 2020). In a study by Garcia-Sanchez *et al.* (2020) to examine the effect of business communication strategies in business performance, it was concluded that proper communicating with customers impacts positively on service quality and business performance. Likewise, Seric *et al.* (2020) looked at the results of customer-brand relationships and perceived consistency in marketing communications. Results show that brand trust, service quality and brand loyalty are strongly impacted by consistent communication. Hence it can be hypothesised that:

H2c. Frequent communication with customers has a positive impact on service quality.

The quality of service offered by the business has an influence on its growth (Kayapinar and Lorcú, 2020; Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa, 2022; Feng *et al.*, 2021). Kayapinar and Lorcú (2020) looked at how employee empowerment and training affected how customers perceived the quality of the services. The study's findings support the idea that employee empowerment and training have a positive impact on how well services are perceived, which has a positive knock-on effect on business expansion. Also, Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa (2022) looked at how employee empowerment and training affected how customers perceived the quality of the services. The study's findings support the idea that employee empowerment and training have a positive impact on how well services are perceived, which has a positive knock-on effect on business expansion. In a related study focussing on the connection between service innovation and firm performance, Feng *et al.* (2021) found out that service innovation significantly improves firm performance. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

H3. Service quality has a positive influence on organisational performance.

Evidence from literature show that there are direct relationships amongst customer retention, service quality and firm performance (Kayapinar and Lorcú, 2020; Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa, 2022; Feng *et al.*, 2021). A study by Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa (2022) indicated that service quality has a positive influence on firm performance. Calvo-Porrá and Nieto-Mengotti (2019) examined whether consumer use of ICT has a moderating effect on customer behaviour in mobile services. Results demonstrate that customer interaction with ICT affects how they behave when using mobile services. The purpose of a study by Chaudhary *et al.* (2020) was to establish the effect of ICT orientation on university's brand performance. It was found out that ICT has a significant effect on the quality of university's brand performance. Studies by (Feng *et al.*, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2019; Kovalenko and Kuzmenko, 2020; Seric *et al.*, 2020; Veluchamy *et al.*, 2020; Zietsman *et al.*, 2019) confirm direct relationships amongst customer retention, service quality and firm performance. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that:

H4. ICT moderates the effect of customer retention on organisational performance.

H5. ICT moderates the effect of customer retention on service quality.

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows how the selected customer retention strategies (fair pricing, online marketing and frequent communication) influence service quality and business performance within the retail sector. Also, the conceptual framework indicates the moderating role of ICT on the effect of customer retention on service quality and organisational performance.

4. Methods

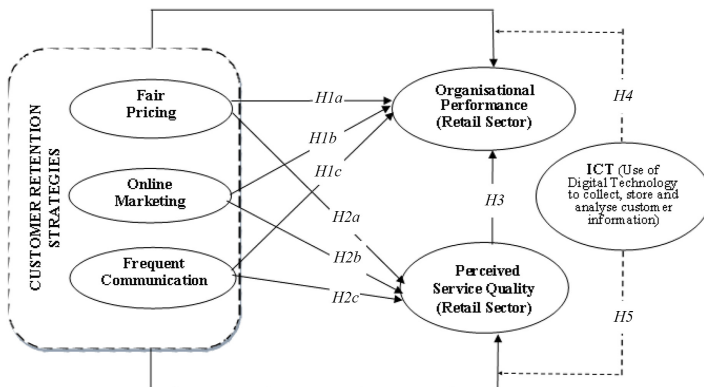
This section looked at the questionnaire design and its measures, sampling technique and method used as well as the data collection process.

4.1 Questionnaire design and measures

A structured questionnaire with seven sections to cater for all variables under study was designed and used to collect data from 280 retail sector employees in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe. Chinhoyi town was chosen because of many retail firms found in nearly all cities in Zimbabwe. The seven sections which formed the questionnaire were; fair pricing (FAP), online marketing (ONM), frequent communication (FRM), organisational performance (ORP), ICT and perceived service quality (PSQ) and demographics. The items used in the questionnaire design were borrowed from related studies as indicated in Table 1 and they were refined to suit the requirements of the current study. All items under each construct were measured using a Likert scale which ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). A pilot test was conducted before the actual data collection exercise. This allowed the researchers to refine the instrument before it was subjected to the actual data collection exercise. Table 1 below shows items and sources used for the current study.

4.2 Sampling and data collection

The study used a quantitative research methodology primarily to examine the relationships between customer retention, perceived service quality, firm performance and ICT. A quantitative research approach is the most suitable in common social research situations, such as those that call for the identification of variables that influence an outcome. The quantitative research method also makes it possible to comprehend the study frameworks and hypotheses better. The design of the survey was cross-sectional.



Source(s): Figure by author (2023)

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Fair pricing (FAP)

The prices on most products attract me to do business with the firm
 The company's pricing system is reasonable
 The company's prices contribute to my loyalty
 Prices are relatively low at business of choice compared to competitors

Caiati *et al.* (2020)
 Victor *et al.* (2018)
 Fan *et al.* (2020)
 Jing *et al.* (2020)

Online Marketing (ONM)

Online advertising creates brand awareness
 It is easy to search for wanted products online than any other means
 Use of online adverts provide feedback which enhances product awareness
 Online advertising is more efficient compared to other media channels
 The nature of the information on online adverts influences consumer decisions making

Bala and Verma (2018)
 Krizanova *et al.* (2019)
 Christina *et al.* (2019)

Frequent communication (FRM)

The organisation always inform customers about new products on the market
 The company's employees always inform customers about reduced products
 The company continuously advertise its product to customers
 The company is always in touch with customers, e.g. sending birthday messages
 The company keeps new information in its data base for all customers for easier communication

Ferraris *et al.* (2019)
 Jing *et al.* (2020)

Organisational performance (ORP)

The company is opening more branches
 The company's financial statements indicate huge profit making
 There is evidence of improved market share
 The firm is continuously employing more people, a sign of business growth

Khin and Ho (2018)
 Krekel *et al.* (2019)
 Otto *et al.* (2020)

Perceived Service Quality (PSQ)

Employees are well presented in front of customers
 The retail business' infrastructure is modern and appealing
 Employees give prompt service to customers
 Employees are reliable and they keep customer promises
 The retail business' operating hours are convenient to customers
 The firm deals with customer complaints in a professional manner

Chikazhe *et al.* (2022)
 Jing *et al.* (2020)
 Morgan *et al.* (2020)

ICT

The firm digitally communicates with customers
 Computers are used to communicate with customers
 Online advertising done through the Internet
 The firm digitally stores and analyse data
 The firm makes use of online payments

Akpomi *et al.* (2022)
 Denner *et al.* (2022) Salamova
et al. (2021)

Table 1.
 Items and sources

Source(s): Table by authors (2023)

Respondents who participated in the study were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The population of the study comprised 280 employees randomly selected from the retail sector organisations. A RAOSOFT sample calculator was used to calculate the sample size. The researcher ensured that there would be no bias through randomly selecting respondents from various organisations that include Pick and Pay, OK Store, N'Richards, Metro Peach, Farm and City, Edgars' Stores, Jet Stores amongst others. The high number of retail employees was considered to accommodate employees from various retail shops in

Chinhoyi and also to ensure that the sample was a representation of the total population. The study made use of retail employee perception in assessing customer retention strategies, service quality and organisational performance. Questionnaires were physically distributed to employees in selected retail firms with the aid of trained research assistants. A maximum of five working days was allowed to respondents to complete the questionnaires before they were collected and coded. Out of the 280 questionnaires which were distributed, 225 (80%) useable questionnaires were returned within the stipulated time. Table 2 below shows the results for respondents' profile.

The results in Table 2 show that the majority (70.2%) of retail employees who participated in this study were aged between 30 and 49 years. Male respondents constituted the majority (67.6%) of retail employees. Employees who were engaged on permanent basis formed the bulk (73.3%) of participants. Thus, data were gathered from employees who had a better understanding of the retail sector. Moreover, the majority (85.3%) of employees were employed for a period of more than 5 years. The data which was used in the current study came from employees engaged in various departments, a sign that ideas came from various experts within the retail sector. The bigger part (58.7%) of retail employees who participated in this study were holders of diplomas in specialised areas.

5. Scale validation

5.1 Exploratory factor analysis

Data were validated through convergent validity, discriminant validity and exploratory factor analysis before hypotheses were tested. SPSS V26 and AMOS V6 were used for exploratory factor analysis and the data analysis exercise. Sampling adequacy was carried

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent (%)	
Age	≤30	48	21.3
	30–39	95	42.2
	40–49	63	28.0
	50–59	17	7.6
	≥60	2	0.9
Gender	Male	152	67.6
	Female	73	32.4
Employment type	Contract	46	20.4
	Casual	14	6.3
	Permanent	165	73.3
Length of employment (Experience)	≤5 years	33	14.7
	5–10 years	88	39.1
	11–15 years	71	31.6
	16–20 years	21	9.3
	≥21 years	12	5.3
Department within the organisation	Sales	63	28.0
	Purchasing	30	13.3
	Finance	48	21.4
	Marketing	51	22.7
	ICT	23	10.2
	Other	10	4.4
Highest level of educational qualification	≤ Diploma	132	58.7
	Bachelor's Degree	58	25.8
	Master's Degree	25	11.1
	Doctoral Degree	8	3.6
	Other	2	0.8

Source(s): Table by authors (2023)

Table 2.
Respondents' profile

out through Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results obtained (KMO = 0.521, Approx. Chi-square = 4,924.321, Degrees of freedom [DF] = 397; $p < 0.001$) indicate that minimum conditions for sampling adequacy were achieved and this gave way for exploratory factor analysis to be conducted.

5.2 Convergent validity

Convergent validity was evaluated through measurement model fit indices, reliability, standardised factor loadings, critical ratios (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Results for convergent validity were satisfactory. The measurement model showed a good fit (CMIN/DF = 1.967; GFI = 0.869; AGFI = 0.897; NFI = 0.930; TLI = 0.912; CFI = 0.893; RMSEA = 0.046). Reisinger and Mavondo (2007) recommended that a satisfactory model ought to show a χ^2/DF that ranges between the scale of 0–5 with lesser values indicating a better fit. Moreover, values of GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI and CFI show a good fit when close to 1, and RMSEA should fall between 0.05 and 0.10 for it to be satisfactory (Field et al., 2012).

All constructs had Cronbach's alpha (a) reliabilities and composite reliabilities (CRel) greater than 0.6 as commended by Hair et al. (2013). Moreover, all items had standardised factor loadings greater than 0.6, a cut-off point recommended by (Field, 2009). All critical ratios were satisfactorily large and significant at $p < 0.001$. Reliabilities of each individual item exceeded the predicted minimum coefficient of 0.4 (Field, 2009). These findings demonstrate that the conditions for convergent validity were met.

5.3 Discriminant validity test results

To evaluate the discriminant validity, average extracted variance was compared to squared inter-construct correlations. Table 3 presents results for discriminant test results.

Since average extracted variances were higher than 0.5 and higher than corresponding squared inter-construct correlations, the results in Table 3 suggest that discriminant validity was obtained (Byrne, 2013). Thus, preliminary test results satisfied minimum conditions and allowed hypotheses testing to be performed.

6. Results

6.1 Hypotheses test results for H1, H2 and H3

Through structural equation modelling, H1, H2 and H3 were tested. Customer retention was treated as a second order construct. The model indices results indicated satisfactory fit (CMIN/DF = 2.147; GFI = 0.908; AGFI = 0.895; NFI = 0.901; TLI = 0.940; CFI = 0.857; RMSEA = 0.048). Table 4 shows hypotheses test results for H1, H2 and H3. Results in Table 4 show that customer retention influences both perceived service quality and organisational performance. Therefore, both H1 and H2 were supported. Results also indicate that perceived service quality positively influence organisational performance. Hence H3 was supported.

Construct	M	SD	FAP	ONM	FRM	ORP	PSQ	ICT
Fair pricing (FAP)	4.012	1.011	<i>0.631</i>					
Online marketing (ONM)	4.241	0.876	0.236	<i>0.598</i>				
Frequent communication (FRM)	4.008	0.914	0.369	0.198	<i>0.639</i>			
Organisational performance (ORP)	3.921	0.836	0.452	0.224	0.401	<i>0.702</i>		
Perceived service quality (PSQ)	3.841	1.110	0.501	0.312	0.236	0.245	<i>0.695</i>	
ICT	4.022	1.032	0.285	0.336	0.196	0.305	0.314	<i>0.742</i>

Note(s): Diagonal elements in italic represent AVEs

Source(s): Table by authors (2023)

Table 3. Discriminant validity test results

6.2 Hypotheses test results for H1a-c and H2a-c

Likewise, structural equation modelling was performed to test H1a-c and H2a-c. The model indicates a satisfactory fit (CMIN/DF = 2.234; GFI = 0.876; AGFI = 0.932; NFI = 0.893; TLI = 0.875; CFI = 0.937; RMSEA = 0.041). Table 5 results show that all dimensions for customer retention (frequent communication, online marketing and fair pricing) positively influence both organisational performance and service quality. Thus, H1a-c and H2a-c were all supported.

6.3 Moderated regression results

H4 and H5 were tested using moderated regression analysis. Table 6 summarises results which indicate that coefficients for the interaction terms (Frequent Communication x ICT, Online Marketing x ICT and Fair Pricing x ICT) were significant ($p > 0.000$). This suggests that ICT moderate the effect of customer retention on organisational performance and perceived service quality. Therefore, H3 and H4 were supported.

Hypothesis	Hypothesised relationship	SRW	CR	Remark
H1	Customer retention → firm performance	0.297	13.012***	Supported
H2	Customer retention → perceived service quality	0.308	11.364***	Supported
H3	Perceived service quality → organisational performance	0.423	19.824***	Supported

Note(s): SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, *** significant at $p < 0.001$
Source(s): Table by authors (2023)

Table 4.
Results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Hypothesised relationship	SRW	CR	Remark
H1a	Fair pricing → organisational performance	0.297	13.012***	Supported
H1b	Online marketing → organisational performance	0.308	11.364***	Supported
H1c	Frequent communication → organisational performance	0.299	9.468***	Supported
H2a	Fair pricing → perceived service quality	0.417	15.323***	Supported
H2b	Online marketing → perceived service quality	0.363	19.334***	Supported
H2c	Frequent communication → perceived service quality	0.512	22.104***	Supported

Note(s): SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, *** significant at $p < 0.001$
Source(s): Table by authors (2023)

Table 5.
Results of hypotheses testing

Variable	Beta	t-statistic	Sig
Customer retention	0.759	22.031	0.000
Frequent communication	0.754	21.641	0.000
Online marketing	0.812	23.641	0.000
Fair pricing	0.738	19.341	0.000
ICT	0.823	24.142	0.000
Customer retention × ICT	0.835	26.312	0.000
Frequent communication × ICT	0.757	22.324	0.000
Online marketing × ICT	0.789	24.001	0.000
Fair pricing × ICT	0.836	26.312	0.000

Note(s): R Square = 0.735, F = 15.6, significant at $p < 0.001$
Source(s): Table by authors (2023)

Table 6.
Coefficients of moderated regression model

7. Discussion

According to business management literature (Faith, 2018; Feng *et al.*, 2022; Haripersad and Sookdeo, 2018; Li *et al.*, 2019), despite the need to improve customer retention in order to advance organisational performance, other elements must be included to reinforce the relationship. Service quality and ICT are critical in business management especially within the retail industry (Chikazhe *et al.*, 2022a, b; Denner *et al.*, 2022; Morgan *et al.*, 2020; Salamova *et al.*, 2021; Souiden *et al.*, 2019). About the moderating effects of ICT on the effect of customer retention on perceived service quality and organisational performance, there is little empirical literature. In order to fill the knowledge gap currently present in the literature on business management, the current research was conducted.

The current study demonstrates that customer retention, perceived service quality and ICT are vital aspects which influence organisational performance within the retail sector. As expected, the study established that customer retention strategies (online marketing; frequent communication and fair pricing) influence service quality. The results corroborate findings by Vallery *et al.* (2020), Seric *et al.* (2020) and Garcia-Sanchez *et al.* (2020). This suggests that companies should consider frequent communication, fair pricing and Internet marketing when developing strategies to increase service quality.

Similarly, the study settled that customer retention strategies (online marketing; frequent communication and fair pricing) influence organisational performance. These results concur with recent findings from earlier researchers (Faith, 2018; Feng *et al.*, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2019). This imply that management within the retail sector should include online marketing; frequent communication; and fair pricing to ensure business growth.

As anticipated, the study found out that perceived service quality impacts positively on organisational performance. The results concur with earlier studies by Kayapinar and Lorcú (2020), Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa (2022) and Feng *et al.* (2021). This imply that organisational performance is driven by the quality of service offered by the same firm.

Moreover, the study was unique in that it established the role of ICT in moderating the effect of customer retention on service quality and organisational performance. This suggests that businesses may enhance customer retention, perceived service quality and performance through incorporating ICT. The relationship between customer retention, perceived service quality, organisational performance and ICT is better understood as a result of these discoveries.

8. Implications

For retail organisations to improve their performance level, management is advised to look into aspects like service quality, customer retention strategies (fair pricing, online marketing, frequent communication) and ICT. As a result, the retail sector management is recommended to consider all of these factors collectively rather than individually as predictors of organisational performance.

Foremost, management should improve customer retention by fairly pricing their products. Retail firms ought to consider online marketing as one of the modern strategies which promotes products to wider markets at a low cost. Frequent communicating with customers helps to keep customers updated of new products and to keep all consumers on the same page. It also facilitates the transfer of information on products, services and ideas from the business to the customer, as well as the development and maintenance of relationships with customers, prospects and other key stakeholders within the organisation.

Subsequently, the retail sector management should consider offering superior service quality as this is a gadget that encourages the induction of upper hand amongst rival firms. Superior service quality ought to be seriously considered since it ensures competitive advantage to businesses within the retail sector. As a result, providing products to the market that meet customer needs, function as intended and that are continuously enhanced on all

quality dimensions in order to surprise and delight the consumer enables a firm to increase a competitive advantage. By satisfying customers and promoting repeat business, superior service quality aids businesses in increasing sales.

Because the business retains consumers, high service quality lowers marketing expenses. Keeping existing customers is more cost-effective than finding new ones.

Finally, retail firms need to take cognisance of the moderating role ICT on the effect of customer retention on perceived service quality and organisational performance. Thus, the retail sector must ensure that ICT is incorporated into their businesses since it is the only way customers and businesses are connecting to exchange information across the world. This allows a business to spread its tentacles globally, developing new markets for new and existing products and services, new remote business offices leading to huge profits. Moreover, new and ever-evolving ICT driven business initiatives requires more robust communication lines, infrastructure and service assurance to ensure customer satisfaction, retention and eventual business success. Chief amongst the strategic ICT implementations it enables satisfaction, loyalty and retention through a good customer digital experience and meeting the individual needs. ICT is also the biggest business game changer in customer retention through easing transactions and red tape characteristic of manual and semi-automated processes in placing, paying and collecting/delivering business orders. ICT enable the brand presence in any mobile gadget through voice/audio, short messaging service and video capabilities in mobile media devices.

9. Conclusions

The current study yields distinctive results in relation to influence of customer retention strategies on perceived service quality and organisational performance, and the moderating role of ICT on the effect of customer retention strategies on perceived service quality and organisational performance. The results of the present study provide a lesson that the impact of customer retention on organisational success depends not only on the aspect of customer retention but also on the level of service that the organisation provides. Furthermore, ICT should be considered when making customer retention and service quality to improve organisational performance decisions. However, the study has limitations that make it necessary to conduct additional research. To increase the generalisability of the findings, more research is therefore recommended in other industries and marketplaces. Future research can take into account additional moderating factors that affect the customer retention-organisational performance relationship. Moreover, future studies can make use of different retention strategies other than fair pricing, online marketing and frequent communication. It would be good for future studies to incorporate customers from the retail sector to have their opinions on issues to do with service quality for the retail sector.

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