

Identifying and Ranking Factors Affecting Customer loyalty in Public Libraries: Synthesis of studies conducted in this field

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Abstract

This research has been conducted to identify and rank factors affecting customer loyalty in public libraries in Iran. This research is applied in terms of purpose and mixed (qualitative-quantitative) for the data type. In the first step, 45 articles on library customers' loyalty were selected and analyzed purposefully using the meta-synthesis method. Then, based on the experts' opinions and the analysis of the research findings, two factors, ten concepts, and 50 codes were identified, and their validity was confirmed using the Kappa-Kaufman test. In the second step, the weight and the ranking of the identified factors were determined by presenting a questionnaire to the experts and using Shannon's entropy method. The statistical population of the research in the quantitative part consisted of 52 specialists in the field of public libraries, who were selected by the purposeful sampling method. Intra-library factors (human resources, service quality, physical space and environment, complaint handling, technical resources and facilities, electronic access, and communication) and external factors (mental image or impression, perceived usefulness, and satisfaction) were identified as factors affecting the loyalty of public library customers. In addition, the results obtained through Shannon's entropy show that human resources, with a weight of 0.13, and mental impression, with a weight of 0.11, are ranked first and second. Moreover, perceived usefulness, technical resources and facilities, physical environment, and satisfaction were ranked third to sixth with a slight difference, with an approximate weight of 0.10. Electronic access, with a weight of 0.9, service quality, with a weight of 0.9. Complaint handling, with a weight of 0.7, and communication, with a weight of 0.6, were ranked seventh to tenth, respectively. The cultivation of customer loyalty in public libraries needs to improve the parameters and factors affecting it, and by prioritizing the most influential factors, customer loyalty will be promoted. The main goal of customer loyalty at public libraries can be achieved by recognizing and reinforcing factors that are essential in the enhancement of customer loyalty, such as growing the specialized, technical, and personal skills of the library staff, improving the social

image of the library, providing valuable services for customers, presenting diverse and up-to-date information resources for all groups of society, observing standards in the library design and architecture, providing different electronic resources and types of information, having access to authentic scientific databases, and resolving customer complaints.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Customers, Loyalty, Influencing Factors, Iran, Meta-Synthesis.

Introduction

Loyalty is one of the most critical concepts in the marketing field, which has been defined variously by numerous scholars. Oliver (1997) considers customer loyalty as a customer's commitment to repeat the purchase of a product/service. As such, customer loyalty is one of the intermediary variables in explaining customer retention strategies. A review of the existing definitions shows that customer loyalty comprises behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. Customer behavioral loyalty is related to a customer's frequent and repeated buying behavior, and attitudinal loyalty is associated with customer preferences toward a product or service. Therefore, customer loyalty is a long-term relationship that a customer establishes with an organization, based on which the customer is likely to recommend the products or services of the organization to other customers in the future as he/she is buying/using the organization's products/services. One of the significant challenges in organizations is customer loyalty because currently, unlike in the past, there are many options available to customers to choose any products or services. For the progress of any organization, it is vital to understand and know the customers and realize how their needs might change and evolve (Martensen & Grønholdt, 2003). Considering the importance of the customer in today's competitive world, studying the methods of attracting and retaining customers in different businesses is a high priority. Attracting loyal customers to the organization increases the organization's competitive ability compared to similar organizations. When customers turn to their original organization to satisfy their needs despite the marketing efforts of other competitors, it can be said that this organization has succeeded in attracting loyal customers (Malakouti Asl, Kafashan Kakhki & Parirokh, 2019).

Public libraries are considered a social institution and a vital mechanism in the cultural and social development of the society. In the UNESCO manifesto, public libraries are mentioned as a highway for the cultural development of individuals and communities. Due to societal changes, public libraries are viewed as social centers; therefore, they must coordinate and align themselves with users' changing and increasing needs to survive and adapt to society (Khademizadeh, Shekari, Navah, Hashemi & Koochi Rostami, 2021). Public libraries are a peaceful site for learning and discovery, an integral part of society, and a disinterested center for education and recreation, through which social interaction is also provided and encouraged. Customers of public libraries are people who want to meet their needs or collect information through the library; therefore, any visitor who goes to a library to search for information and meet his/her needs is a customer of that library (Hernon & Altman, 2010).

However, libraries face an unprecedented challenge due to the global digital revolution, whereby users can access the library environment from anywhere through the Internet without physically visiting the library. Accordingly, libraries are increasingly losing customers because library resources (e.g., online catalogs and unrestricted databases) are also easily accessible online (Twum, Adams, Budu & Budu, 2020). According to Kerr (2010), any customer-focused library tries to keep its users steady and stable and achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty by

providing ideal services. According to Kiran and Diljit (2011), loyalty in libraries can be defined as an increase in the number of frequent users, and this issue is essential for justifying the budget and being accountable to a parent organization.

The concepts of service and customer are the core of public libraries. Therefore, loyal customers are critical to public libraries. These libraries need to turn an average and satisfied customer into a loyal customer by increasing the marketing skills of librarians and strengthening customer relationships by identifying customer needs and preferences. Therefore, public libraries must identify factors affecting loyalty and manage loyalty in today's competitive environment.

Identifying loyal customers and the factors influencing customer loyalty has been essential to library marketing and customer service research. Accordingly, numerous studies have already been conducted in the field of customer loyalty in libraries. For example, Rowley & Dawes (1999) listed cognitive and behavioral components for loyalty and assumed that successful management depends on controlling these components. Chuang and Cheng (2010) and Mahatma, Bakti, and Sumaedi (2013) considered factors such as service quality and customer satisfaction to improve library loyalty effectively. Kulkarni (2014) discussed customer service expectations and requirements and suggested that customers expect professional facilities and services from the library. They believe these services are a reason for their repeated visits and loyalty to the library. Nurhidayah and Widarti (2019) studied the effect of advertising on loyalty. Kachwala, Panchal, and Bali (2021) examined the effect of brand image on user loyalty. According to Keshvari and Geraee (2015), customer satisfaction and perceived value affect customer loyalty in public libraries. Haddadian, Kafashan, Asmandreh, Rezaizadeh and Ehsani (2012) identified customer satisfaction and perceived quality as factors influencing customer loyalty. According to Ramezani (2016), customer loyalty is determined by knowledge's perceived quality and value. Moreover, Mohammadian (2015) argued that customer loyalty in academic libraries is defined by diversity and accessibility of information, proximity to the library, and customer service satisfaction.

Although some works have examined and described the loyalty of public library customers in the form of customer loyalty models, they lack a comprehensive approach, and a research gap is felt. In other words, the studies conducted on public libraries are scant and do not have the required coherence and comprehensiveness. Therefore, considering the existing knowledge gap, it is essential to identify the determining factors in public library customer loyalty from a theoretical perspective. By identifying factors influential in customer retention and frequent use of public libraries, library managers can provide a criterion for determining factors that guarantee the success of public libraries and provide the necessary planning for customer retention and customer attraction in public libraries. In this research, using a meta-synthesis approach, it has been sought to identify and explain the factors affecting the loyalty of public library customers. Accordingly, our research questions are as follows:

- 1) What factors affect public library customers' loyalty in Iran?
- 2) What is the importance and weight of each of these factors?

Materials and Methods

This research has been done using a combined or mixed research method, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods. According to the strategy considered in this research, an exploratory research plan has been used, and the data collection method can be examined in

two qualitative and quantitative parts. Therefore, this research has two stages, quantitative and qualitative, which will be explained in the following.

In the first stage (qualitative stage), in terms of purpose, this research includes a meta-synthesis to identify factors affecting customer loyalty in public libraries in Iran. By providing a systematic approach for researchers through combining different research studies, the meta-synthesis approach discovers new fundamental issues and propositions, thus improving current knowledge and creating a comprehensive and broad view of the problems (Zimmer, 2006). The seven-step meta-synthesis process introduced by Sandelowski, Barroso and Voils (2007) was used in this research. Finally, the expert opinions were used to refine and improve the determined factors.

Shannon's entropy method was used in the quantitative stage to prioritize the determined factors. Entropy in information theory is an index to measure uncertainty that is expressed by a probability distribution. Numerous methods have already been proposed to determine the weight of indicators, and Shannon's entropy is one of the best methods in this regard. In the quantitative stage of this research, Shannon's entropy was used to determine the weight and importance of indicators affecting the loyalty of public library customers.

The research population in qualitative and quantitative sections was as follows:

- The research population in this part includes printed documents and research on the loyalty of public library customers, which were selected by searching electronic databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, Irandoc¹, Magiran², Noormags³, and Civlica⁴.

- Several specialists and experts in the field of public libraries, including university professors, public library managers, and public library librarians, were chosen to fulfill the designed questionnaire on the indicators and factors affecting the loyalty of public library customers.

- For ranking and determining the reliability of research tools, the research population in the quantitative part of the study consists of faculty members, managers, experts, librarians of public libraries, and researchers in the field of public libraries. The sampling was done using the purposeful sampling method. The inclusion criteria were: 1) having a doctorate and 2) having executive and research records in Iran's public libraries.

Validity and reliability are essential criteria for determining the accuracy and correctness of measurements. In this research, the content validity indicator was used to measure the content validity of the identified factors. We used Cohen's kappa coefficient to evaluate the reliability of the qualitative part of the research. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha test, which is known as an indicator of the internal consistency of the variables, was used in the quantitative part. An alpha value of 0.987 was obtained for the questionnaire and research indicators, which is higher than the 0.7 value and shows the research questionnaire's high validity.

Data analysis

Step 1: Determining the research objective: By conducting a systematic review, this research sought to answer the following question: What are the influencing factors in the loyalty of public library customers?

Step 2: Systematic review of documents” In searching for articles, keywords related to the factors affecting the loyalty of public library customers, such as ‘loyalty,’ ‘factors affecting loyalty,’ ‘customer satisfaction,’ ‘customer service,’ ‘public libraries,’ and ‘customer loyalty

models,' were used. Table 1 shows the search terms and search strategies in the databases.

Table 1

Keywords for search strategies

Boolean operators	OR
AND	Public library, Customer loyalty, User loyalty, Service quality, User satisfaction, Client loyalty, Loyalty, Library Marketing

The data collection tool was mostly internet search; books and existing models were also reviewed in some cases. Table 2 describes the most critical databases and tools used in this research.

Table 2

Scientific research sources used in this study

Internal databases	External databases
SID	www.springer.com
Magiran	www.emerald.com
Iran Scientific Information Database (Ganj)	www.scopus.com
Civilica	www.scholar.google.com
Noormags	www.sciencedirect.com
Islamic World Science and Technology Monitoring and Citation Institute (ISC)	www.elsevier.com
www.ensani.ir	www.Webofscience

Various criteria have been used to evaluate the sources and articles, some of which are in Table 3.

Table 3

Source selection criteria

Research language	Time interval	Research population
English	2000-2021	Library users and customers
Persian	2001-2021	Library users and customers

Step 3: Searching and choosing suitable articles: After the search process, the selected sources were examined, and the required information was extracted based on the first and foremost purpose of the research, which was to identify factors affecting the loyalty of public library customers. Different parameters, such as article abstract and content, were evaluated to select suitable articles based on the observed algorithm. Articles related to factors influencing customer loyalty in public libraries were considered concerning the research title. In the content section, content analysis was done based on the articles' attention to the influential factors, and irrelevant sources were removed. In each review, some articles were excluded from the meta-synthesis process. Figure 1 shows the steps for removing found articles. A total of 30 English articles and 15 Persian articles were analyzed in the meta-synthesis process.

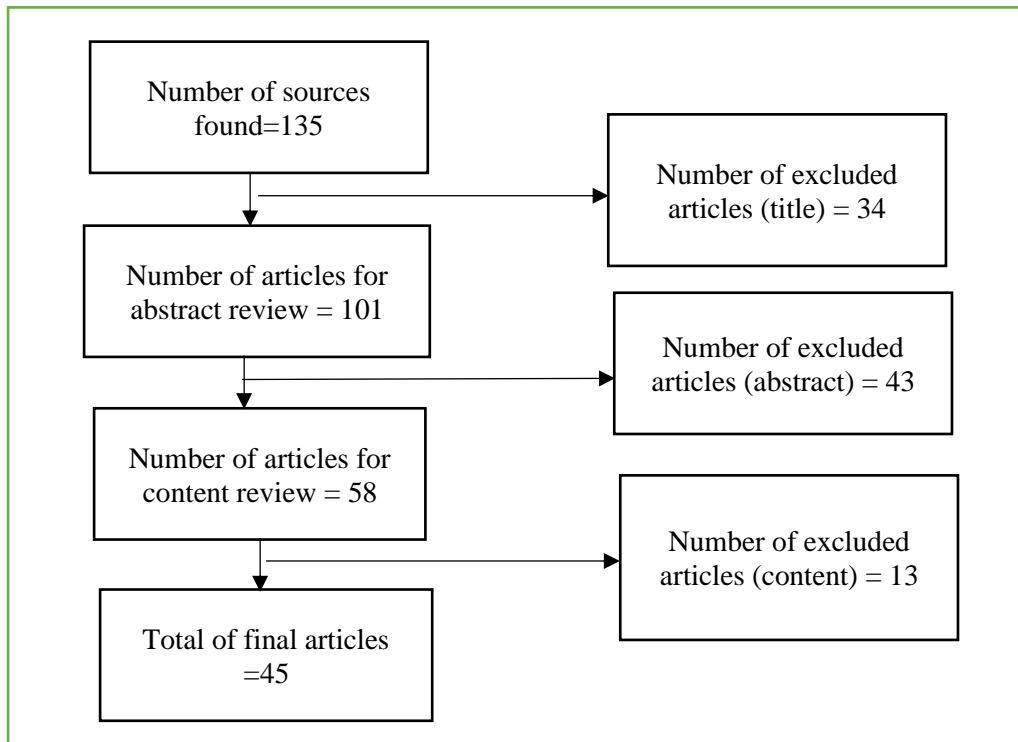


Figure 1: Results of article search and selection

Step 4: Extracting the results: At this stage, based on the search sources, articles' information (e.g., author(s) and the year of publication) was classified, and the desired factors extracted from the review of the articles were considered as codes. In total, 90 indicators or codes were identified.

Step 5: Analysis and synthesis of qualitative findings: In this research, first, all factors extracted from previous studies were used as codes (Table 4). Then, by considering the concept of each code, the codes were subsumed under the category of a relevant concept so that the research concepts were categorized and identified. Based on the analyses performed in this study, by the content analysis of 45 articles finally selected, 90 codes, 11 concepts, and two factors were identified and labeled as factors affecting customer loyalty in public libraries.

Table 4

Codes and information resources

Row	Source	Code
1	Proper skills to communicate with customers	Ramezani (2016); Tajedini, Khasseh, Afzali and Sadatmoosavi, 2020); and England (2013)
2	Sufficient knowledge and expertise	Amini and Pashootanizade (2016); and Helgesen and Nettet (2007)
3	Familiarity with library	Jafarinaia, Azimi Khabbazan and Abazari (2018)
4	Good manners (polite and respectful behaviour)	Ramezani (2016); Tan, Chen and Yang (2017); England (2013); and Mahatma et al. (2013)
5	Librarians' preparedness and willingness to help customers	Keshvari and Abdollahi (2013); Helgesen and Nettet (2011); England (2013); and Harun, Kiran and Tahira (2017)
6	Patience	Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017); Helgesen and Nettet (2011); and England (2013)

Row	Source	Code
7	Having technical skills	Keshvari and Abdollahi (2013); and England (2013)
8	Providing professional guidance and services	Keshvari and Abdollahi (2013); and Mazloom, Soltani and Soltani-Nejad (2017)
9	Suitably-clad (well-dressed/well-suited) staffs	Mohammadian (2015); Mazloom, Soltani and Soltani-Nejad (2017); and Mahatma et al. (2013)
10	Having sufficient knowledge	Jafarinia et al. (2018); Mohammadian (2015); Tajedini et al. (2020); and Mahatma et al. (2013)
11	Understanding and paying special attention by librarians to the information needs of users	Keshvari and Abdollahi (2013); Jafarinia et al. (2018); and Helgesen and Nettet (2011)
12	Continuous and effective presence of the library on social media	Keshvari and Abdollahi (2013); and Nurhidayaha and Widarti (2019)
13	Providing useful catalogues and advertisements	Miri and Salami (2015); and Kerr (2010)
14	Clarity and usefulness of guidelines and other navigational information in the library	Jafarinia et al. (2018); and Tan et al. (2017)
15	Appropriate information regarding the schedule of providing services to customers	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); and Tan et al. (2017)
16	Providing printed and online guidelines	Jafarinia et al. (2018); Tan et al. (2017)
17	Using communication tools such as short messages, phone and e-mails	Miri and Salami (2015); Kerr (2010); and Haddadian et al. (2012)
18	Library service advertisements by customers	Mazloom, Soltani and Soltani-Nejad (2017); Wantara (2015); and Selega-Cristobal (2018)
19	The reputation of the library	Haddadian et al. (2012); Hariri and Rowshan (2015); and Helgesen and Nettet (2007)
20	Customer information confidentiality	Hariri and Rowshan (2015)
21	Library's credibility and reliability	Xu and Du (2018); and Kachwala et al. (2021)
22	proper services compared to competitors	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Fatemian, Farhadpoor (2019); and Tan et al. (2017)
23	Preferring the library to its competitors	Haddadian et al. (2012); Xu and Du (2018); Wantara and Tambrin (2019); and Selega-Cristobal (2018)
24	Pleasant environment	Helgesen and Nettet (2011); and Kim (2008)
25	Quality of information and services	Amini and Pashootanzade (2016); Bakti and Sumaedi (2013); and Kim and Nam (2007)
26	Providing comprehensive information and services	Haddadian et al. (2012); Xu and Du (2018); Kachwala et al. (2021); and Helgesen and Nettet (2007)
27	Holding cultural and educational events	Ramezani (2016), Oh (2019)
28	Detailed information and resources	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Kiran and Diljit (2011)
29	Timely provision of services	Haddadian et al. (2012); Xu and Du (2018); Kachwala et al. (2021)
30	Up-to-date resources and books	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017)
31	Service provision speed	Amini and Pashootanzade (2016); Haddadian et al. (2012); and Soares-Silva, de Moraes, Cappelozza and Morini (2020)
32	Providing customized services	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Amini and Pashootanzade (2016); and Xu and Du (2018)
33	Providing professional services (up-to-date information, multimedia, etc.)	Mazloom, Soltani and Soltani-Nejad (2017); and Bakti and Sumaedi (2013)

Row	Source	Code
34	Holding educational programs	Mazloom, Soltani and Soltani-Nejad (2017); Jafarinia et al. (2018); Jafarinia et al. (2018); and Martensen and Grønholdt (2003)
35	The quality of educational programs	Jafarinia et al. (2018); and Martensen and Grønholdt (2003)
36	Up-to-date information and services	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Xu and Du (2018); Chuang and Cheng (2010)
37	Receiving valuable services for the time spent	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Keshvari and Gara (2013)
38	Accessing the required information through the library	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); and Kachwala et al. (2021)
39	Enhancing learning through the library	Ramezani (2016); Keshvari and Gara (2013); and Soltani-Nejad, Vakilmofrad, Fazli, Saberi, Doulani & Mazloun, (2021)
40	Modern equipment	Kachwala et al. (2021); and Helgesen and Nettet (2011)
41	The possibility of accessing information and electronic resources without visiting in person	Amini and Pashootanzade (2016); Helgesen and Nettet (2011); and Kim and Nam (2007)
42	Increasing public information through library resources	Keshvari and Gara (2013)
43	Positive feelings towards the usefulness of the library	Ramezani (2016); Xu and Du (2018); Wantara (2015); and Chuang and Cheng (2010)
44	Facilitating the progress of customers	Amini and Pashootanzade (2016); and Soltani-Nejad et al. (2021)
45	Library closeness to customers' ideals	Miri and Salami (2015); and Wantara (2015)
46	Printed and electronic resources	Helgesen and Nettet (2011); and Kim and Nam (2007)
47	Library environment and space	Keshvari and Gara (2013); Suki (2010); and Sumaedi, Bakti and Yarmen (2012)
48	Librarians' knowledge and behavior	Amini and Pashootanzade (2016); Srirahayu Hartini, Handriana, Layyindah and Firdaus, (2020); and Kulkarni (2014)
49	Facilities	Ramezani (2016); and Srirahayu et al. (2020)
50	Sources (books and other publications)	Keshvari and Gara (2013); and Helgesen and Nettet (2011)
51	Service quality	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Wantara (2015); and Kiran and Diljit (2011)
52	Library software	Hariri and Rowshan (2015)
53	Executed programs	Biranvand, Ghaffari and Haghirosadat (2019); Helgesen and Nettet (2007)
54	Service delivery speed	Biranvand et al. (2019); and Xu and Du (2018)
55	Overall satisfaction with the library	Keshvari and Gara (2013); Tan et al. (2017); Wantara (2015); Srirahayu et al. (2020); and Biranvand et al. (2019)
56	A comfortable place for study and personal activities	Mohammadian (2015), Helgesen and Nettet (2011), and Mahatma et al. (2013)
57	A comfortable place for thinking and creativity	Kulkarni (2014); and Kachwala et al. (2021)
58	Ease of access to the library from all parts of the city	Keshvari and Gara (2013); Lee (2013); and Tajedini et al. (2020)
59	Library architecture and building	Mohammadian (2015); Biranvand et al. (2019); Ayuni and Utthavi (2018); and Chen and Chen (2006)

Row	Source	Code
60	Suitable heating and cooling systems	Soltani-Nejad et al. (2021); and Ayuni and Utthavi (2018)
61	A suitable place for brainstorming, discussing and exchanging scientific information	Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017); and Haruna, Kiran & Tahira (2017)
62	Proper reading halls and book repositories in the library	Mohammadian (2015); and Soares-Silva et al. (2020)
63	Convenient working hours	Kachwala et al. (2021); and Soares-Silva et al. (2020)
64	A proper safeguard	Kachwala et al. (2021)
65	A place with suitable facilities for quiet study	Helgesen and Nettet (2011); Kim and Nam (2007)
66	Appropriate scientific articles and databases	Selega-Cristobal (2018); and lee (2013)
67	A comprehensive series of information sources	Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017); Lee (2013); and Twum et al. (2020)
68	Up-to-date books and magazines in print	Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017); Helgesen and Nettet (2011); and Jafarinia et al. (2018)
69	Information sources of diverse subject areas	Jafarinia et al. (2018); Oh (2019) ; Lee (2013) ; Haruna et al. (2017)
70	Technical facilities (hardware, software, etc.)	Soltani-Nejad et al. (2021); Fatemian and Farhadpoor (2019); and lee (2013)
71	Electronic resources (scientific databases, books, etc.)	Mazloom, Soltani and Soltani-Nejad (2017); KIM(2008); and Kim and Nam (2007)
72	Easy access to library resources and facilities	Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017); Soares-Silva et al. (2020); and Srirahayu et al. (2020)
73	Available tools	Oh (2019); and Twum et al. (2020)
74	Modern equipment	lee (2013); Twum et al. (2020)
75	Technical equipment	Soltani-Nejad et al. (2021); Selega-Cristobal (2018); Srirahayu et al. (2020); and Sumaedi et al. (2012)
76	Valuable service for the time spent	Fatemian and Farhadpoor (2019); Wantara (2015); and Srirahayu et al. (2020)
77	Standard and desirable quality of service	Keshvari and Abdollahi (2013); Wantara (2015); and Biranvand et al. (2019)
77	The important and valuable role of the library in life	Soltani-Nejad et al. (2021); Keshvari and Gara (2013); and Selega-Cristobal (2018)
78	Improving work and quality of life by using the library	Xu and Du (2018); and Twum et al. (2020)
79	Complaint handling unit	Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017); and Ayuni and Utthavi (2018)
80	Reply to complaints	Ayuni and Utthavi (2018); and Haruna et al. (2017)
81	Careful handling of complaints	Ayuni and Utthavi (2018); and Chuang and Cheng (2010)
82	Continued list	Lee (2013)
83	Relevant and valid information	Hariri and Rowshan (2015)
84	Ease of access to the website	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Xu and Du (2018); and Soares-Silva et al. (2020)
85	Appropriate library software	Miri and Salami (2015); Chuang and Cheng (2010); and Xu and Du (2018)
86	Providing electronic services such as virtual reference desk	Miri and Salami (2015); and Selega-Cristobal (2018)
87	Possibility of membership/subscription and reservation	Miri and Salami (2015); and Mazloom, Soltani

Row	Source	Code
	of information resources	and Soltani-Nejad (2017)
88	Ability to access and use software	Hariri and Rowshan (2015); Selega-Cristobal (2018); and Kiran and Diljit (2011)
89	Accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information	Hariri and Rowshan (2015), Xu and Du (2018); and Twum et al. (2020)

Step 6: Checking the extracted codes: To determine the validity of the identified factors, the list of factors was provided to 20 experts, and they were asked to express their opinion on each concept and code as numbers 1 to 4. In this questionnaire, number 1 means that the item is unrelated; number 2 means that the item is related but needs a general review; number 3 means that the item is related but needs a partial review; and number 4 means that the item is wholly related. After gathering the questionnaires, the content validity indicator (CVI) was used to determine the content validity. This index can be calculated at two levels of item and structure (Halek, Holle & Bartholomeyczik, 2017). I-CVI is the content validity index of the item, which is equal to the ratio of experts who rated the item 1 and 2 to the total number of experts who reviewed the item.

According to the experts' opinions, 50 codes, ten concepts, and two factors were determined as final factors and codes. The results of this step are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Factors affecting the loyalty of customers of public libraries in Iran (intra-library factors)

Code	Concept	Factor
Librarians' communication skills to interact with customers	Human resources	intra-library factors
Librarian's adequate knowledge and expertise to answer customers' questions		
Polite and respectful behavior of librarians toward customers		
Suitably-clad librarians		
Understanding and paying special attention by librarians to the information needs of users		
Librarians' preparedness and willingness to help customers	Service quality	
Providing comprehensive information and services		
Quality of educational programs and organized events		
Proper organization of scientific, cultural, social, and religious events		
Timely provision of library services		
Providing customized services in proportion to the customers' needs	physical space and environment	
Providing up-to-date information sources		
Sense of comfort and relaxation in the library environment for reading, reflection and thinking		
Creating a suitable environment for the growth of innovation and creativity		
Ease of access to the library from all parts of the city		
Library architecture and building (lighting, reading hall, tables and chairs, etc.)		
Suitable heating and cooling systems		

Code	Concept	Factor
A suitable place for brainstorming, discussing and exchanging scientific information		
Convenient working hours		
Reply to customer complaints	Handling complaints	
Careful handling of customer complaints		
Existence of complaint handling unit		
Availability of information resources in various subject areas	Technical resources and facilities	
Appropriate technical equipment (hardware, software, etc.)		
Ease of using resources and technical facilities		
Ease of use of library resource search software	Electronic access	
Providing electronic services such as 'virtual reference desk' and 'ask the librarian'		
Possibility of membership/subscription and reservation of information resources by library software		
Easy access to library website and software		
Access to electronic resources, such as scientific databases, books, and electronic articles		
Continuous and effective library presence on social media, e.g., Instagram, Telegram, etc.	Communication	
Providing useful and effective advertisements in various ways, such as continuous and in-print guidelines		
Clarity and usefulness of guidelines and other navigational information in the library		
Appropriate information on customer service schedule		
Popularity of symbol (brand name, logotype, logo over the library door, etc.) in virtual space such as Instagram		
Using communication tools such as short messages, phone, and emails		

Table 6

Factors affecting the loyalty of customers of public libraries in Iran (external factors)

Code	Concept	Factor
The reputation and authenticity of library	Mental impression	factors external to the library
Customer information confidentiality		
Providing standard and desirable services		
A pleasant and desirable environment		
Receiving valuable services for the time spent	Perceived usefulness	
The value of using library resources from the customer's point of view		
Customer's positive feeling towards the use of resources to increase his/her ability to learn and progress		
Positive feelings towards the usefulness of using library services	Satisfaction	
Satisfaction with printed and electronic library resources		

Code	Concept	Factor
Satisfaction with the physical space and environment of the library		
Satisfaction with the facilities and amenities used in the library		
Satisfaction with library services		
Satisfaction with the programs implemented in the library		
Satisfaction with the behavior and knowledge of library staff		

Researchers' opinions were compared with experts' opinions for the final control of extracted concepts. When two raters rate the respondents, Cohen's kappa index is used to evaluate the consistency between these two raters. The Kappa index is used only for variables whose level of measurement is the same and the number of their classes is equal. The Kappa index value fluctuates between zero and one. The closer the value of this measure is to one, the greater the consistency between the raters. When the value of Kappa is closer to zero, there is less consistency between the two raters (Manian & Ronaghi, 2015). Using SPSS software, the significance value of 0.001 and the index value of 0.787 were calculated, as seen in Table 11. Considering that the significance value is smaller than 0.05, the hypothesis of the independence of extracted codes is rejected. Therefore, it can be stated that the codes extracted have good reliability. The results of the Kappa test are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Consistency values

	value	Significance level	Standard deviation
Kappa consistency value	0.787	0.001	0.13

Step 7: Presentation of outputs and final model: After identifying the factors, by combining and integrating them, the conceptual model of the research was extracted, as shown in Fig. 2.

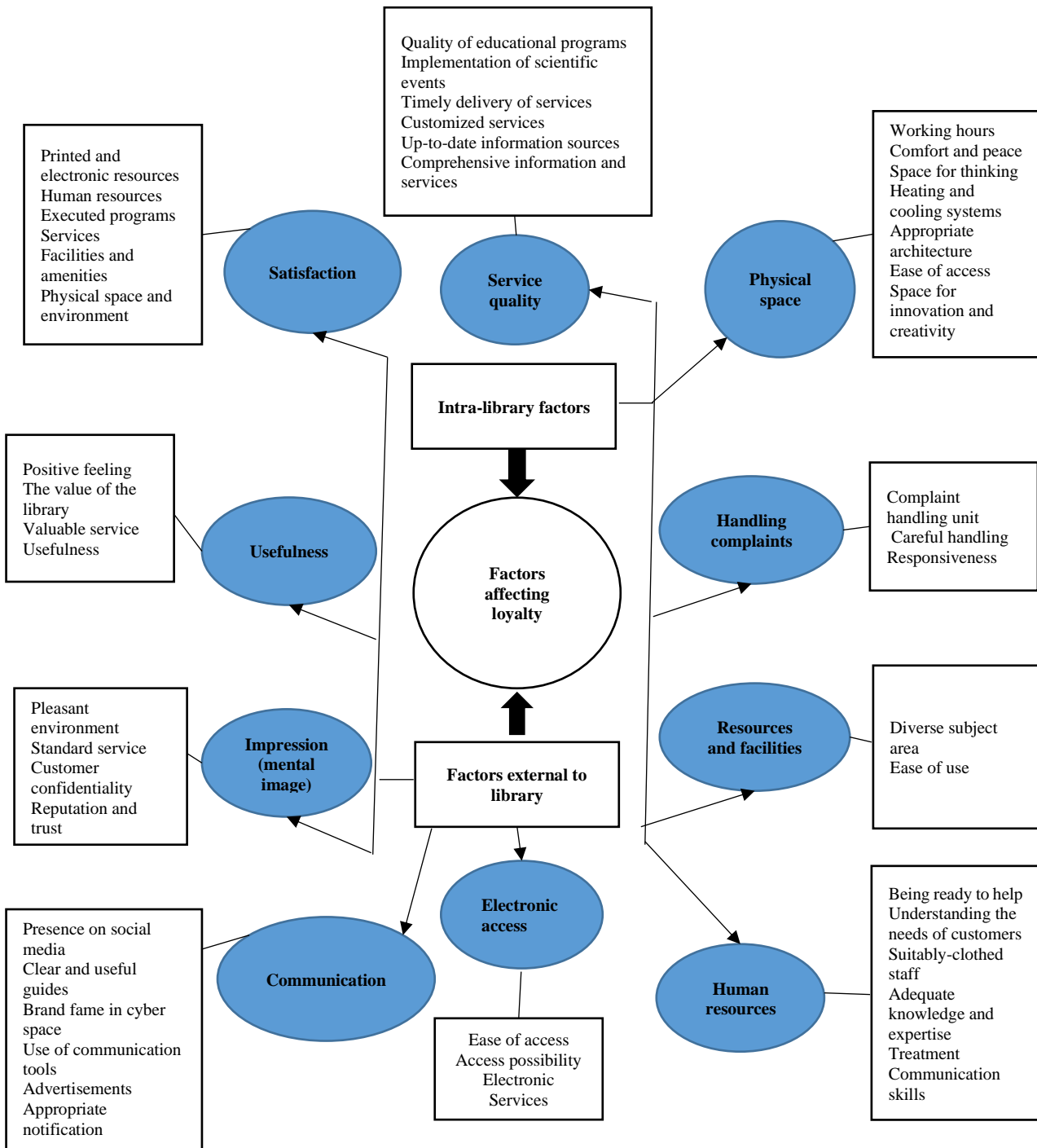


Figure 2: Final model of factors affecting the loyalty of customers of public libraries in Iran

Shannon’s entropy method ranked factors affecting public libraries' customer loyalty. In this research, the components were investigated and subsumed under five options (very low, low, medium, high, and very high) and ten indicators (human resources, communication, mental impression, service quality, usefulness, satisfaction, environment, and space, resources, and facilities, handling complaints, and electronic access). Table 8 shows the entropy and weight of each indicator. This table is drawn based on the weight criteria of each indicator. Accordingly, the indicator/criterion with more weight has more importance and priority.

Table 8

Calculated indicators

Electronic access	Handling complaints	Resources and facilities	Environment and space	satisfaction	usefulness	Service quality	Mental impression	Communication	Human resources	Indicators
0.62	0.69	0.59	0.60	0.61	0.58	0.64	0.57	0.73	0.46	Entropy of each indicator
0.37	0.30	0.40	0.39	0.38	0.41	0.35	0.42	0.26	0.53	Deviation of each indicator
0.09	0.07	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.06	0.13	Weight of each indicator
7	9	4	5	6	3	8	2	10	1	Rank of each indicator

Shannon's entropy ranking results show that the factors affecting customer loyalty in Iran's public libraries are: 1) human resources, 2) mental image or impression, 3) usefulness, 4) facilities and resources, 5) environment and space, 6) satisfaction, 7) electronic access, 8) service quality, 9) complaint handling, and 10) communication.

Discussion

This study has sought to identify and evaluate factors affecting the loyalty of public library customers in Iran. Factors affecting customer loyalty in public libraries were subsumed under two general categories: 1) intra-library factors and 2) factors external to the library. In the category of intra-library factors, seven concepts were identified: human resources, service quality, physical space and environment, complaint handling, technical resources and facilities, electronic access, and communication.

According to the results, public libraries' human resources, especially librarians, are service providers and play an effective role in customer loyalty. According to Martensen and Grønholdt (2003), the most important factor affecting customer loyalty is human-related aspects. The result of the study showed that librarian services are the most important factor in enhancing customer satisfaction and the repeated use of the library by customers. The research findings of Keshvari and Garae (2013) align with the present study's findings. Public library staff play an important role in providing various services to customers in the library, as they interact with customers to provide service, and the quality of this interaction leads to gaining competitive advantage and building trust. Service quality is another factor that affects the loyalty of public library customers. Quality can be defined as all specifications designed to meet customer needs. Chuang and Cheng (2010), Wantara and Tambrin (2019), and Twum et al. (2020) confirmed the direct effect of perceived quality on customer loyalty. Mohammadian (2016) showed that service quality positively and significantly affects customer loyalty. Service quality is defined based on the customer's expectations and perception of the service. Expected service is the proper and ideal service or level of service that customers hope to receive. Customer perceptions are the customers' interpretation of the service quality they have received.

The physical space of a public library consists of a set of departments with applied and organized objectives that have clear boundaries and function under a planned communication

system, which should be designed per modern standards and the customers' needs. Amini and Pashootanzadeh (2016) considered the lighting and tranquility of different library parts as factors that affect customer loyalty. Tajedini and Amirtaimory (2017) also posited that the library building design and compliance with interior design standards are among the factors that can increase customer loyalty. Paying attention to the environmental properties and using interesting and appropriate decorations, such as suitable architecture (e.g., being located in a suitable and standard site, allocating special sections for different types of customers like children, disabled, and researchers, and good quality of lighting, ventilation and furniture) and tranquility and cleanness (a calm environment away from emissions, disorder, and interference) are among the important ways to build customer loyalty and encourage customers to use the library services again.

Technical facilities and resources of the library consist of a series of information resources (number of resources, variety of resources, up-to-date, qualitative content in proportion to the needs of customers, and printed, electronic, and audiovisual formats according to customers' tastes) and hardware and software facilities in the library which are designed to meet the customers' needs. Helgesen and Nast (2011) investigated the effect of library facilities on customer loyalty and concluded that this factor indirectly affects customer loyalty by creating satisfaction. In this way, suitable facilities in the library affect customer satisfaction, which, in turn, affects customer loyalty. Moreover, Tajadini and Amirteymori (2017) emphasized the importance of digital, visual, and audio information and diverse information sources on customer loyalty.

The purpose of communication is to transfer, exchange, or share information. What the library seeks to transfer and disseminate is the information whose senders and receivers are varied and numerous in the library. Haddadian et al. (2012) stated that communication positively affects library customers' loyalty. Awareness of the services that can be provided is the starting point for the relationship between the library and the community. Since libraries and information centers are not profitable organizations and their value, reputation, and sustainability are not determined by their profitability, they will not be financially supported unless customers use their services. Public libraries must provide tools and facilities to inform customers of their services. One of the effective ways in this field is the use of advertisement marketing in the library, which can be done through advertisements, regardless of their commercial aspects, to convey capabilities, goals, and services to customers.

Complaint is the expression of customer's dissatisfaction that needs to be addressed and solved. Suki (2010) examined the relationship between complaint behavior and customer loyalty and showed that loyal customers usually express their dissatisfaction with services to their friends and acquaintances instead of officials, which causes negative word-of-mouth advertising. Tajaldini and Amirteymoori (2017) considered the existence of a complaints-handling unit as one of the factors affecting customer loyalty. When customers complain, they must maintain their relationship with the organization and feel that their needs should be satisfied. When a customer has a complaint, the library can improve the services provided and maintain and strengthen its relationship with the customer through timely and appropriate resolution of the problem. Therefore, the existence of a complaint handling unit and responding correctly, timely, and quickly to customer complaints until customer satisfaction will make the customer return to the library.

Concerning the factors affecting customer loyalty, three concepts were identified under the

factors external to the library: mental image (impression), perceived usefulness, and satisfaction. Mental image (impression) is defined as a structure that reflects the sum of beliefs (opinions), ideas, and feelings of a person towards a destination (product or entity). Helgesen and Nast (2011) concluded that university image directly affects student loyalty. Kakra et al. (2020) concluded that library brand image mediates the relationship between service quality indicators (service effectiveness, information access, and personal control) and user loyalty. An impression is measured by respect, trust, reputation, aptitude, credibility, and organization status. The primary function of the mental image is that it helps to recognize the library, its capabilities, and service standards. Accordingly, public library services need certain conditions such as credibility and reliability, especially in today's competitive environment where, due to the vital role of information channels and mass media, any carelessness, disorder, and interruption can endanger the library's reputation.

Customer satisfaction is a feeling created from service evaluation based on the customer's expectations and understanding of the services provided. Mahatma et al. (2013) also showed satisfaction's positive and direct effect on customer loyalty. Ramezani (2016) investigated the relationship between satisfaction, service quality, and perceived value and offered a direct and meaningful relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer satisfaction will be attained if the customer's perceived value of the public library's services exceeds his/her expectations.

Perceived usefulness is the degree to which a person believes that using the services or facilities of an organization will improve his/her performance. Mir and Salami (2015) investigated the effect of structural and content quality of public library websites on customer satisfaction and loyalty recommended electronic advertisements and concluded that structural and content quality can affect users' loyalty through perceived usefulness. Therefore, the perceived usefulness is the customer's evaluation of the value of the service, which is obtained by comparing the benefits that the service provides to the customer against the cost that the customer spends. If the customers' perception of the library services is higher than their expectations, it indicates the value of the service received, affecting the customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Any library that enhances the capabilities and performance of clients through the benefits it brings to the client is more useful and referred to. Therefore, from the perspective of perceived usefulness, it is necessary for public libraries to design the fastest methods for providing reliable services, resources, and information for customers based on existing facilities and infrastructure and prepare the ground for customers' return and re-use of library services.

Conclusion

One of the important factors in the success of libraries is their ability to retain current customers and make them loyal to the library. The success of libraries in maintaining and making customers loyal is influenced by various factors discussed in this research. The findings of this research show that human resources are the most important factor affecting the loyalty of public library customers. These results show the importance of having trained personnel with technical knowledge and skills to deal with customers. Customer loyalty can be obtained by encouraging/motivating library staff to provide services corresponding to customers' needs. As regards the importance of the customers' mental image of the library, the library must fulfill its obligations and gain the trust of the customers to present a proper image of the library in the minds of the customers and maintain the library's reputation, as customers might communicate

with an organization (e.g., library) based on their perception of that organization.

Moreover, perceived usefulness affects customer loyalty, demonstrating the value of services and the benefits customers enjoy. Appropriate services (e.g., good quality, sufficient facilities and equipment, various printed and electronic resources, etc.) make customers realize the value of services compared to the cost they have paid. Hence, they might consider the library to be an advantageous service-providing organization. Based on the results of this research, the availability of various information sources and appropriate hardware and software equipment in libraries effectively obtains customer satisfaction and loyalty. The library's physical environment also plays an essential role in customer loyalty. The loyalty of library customers can be influenced by various indicators and factors, such as providing a comfortable and peaceful place, a place for reading, reflecting, and thinking, standard architecture and building structure, a suitable place for brainstorming, discussing, and exchanging scientific information, and having convenient working hours. In addition, other factors influence customer loyalty. These factors include satisfaction with the environment, human resources and service quality, synchronization of the library with new technologies, ease of access to electronic scientific resources and databases, provision of quality services such as comprehensive, updated, and customized services and information and educational programs for customers, the existence of a unit to resolve customer complaints, and building long-term relationships with customers. It can generally be concluded that by considering and improving factors, such as growing the specialized, technical, and personal skills of human resources, improving the social image of the library by increasing the reputation and reliability of the library among customers, providing valuable services for customers against the cost they spend, availability of diverse and up-to-date information resources for all parts of the society, compliance with designing standards in library architecture, availability of various electronic resources and information and reliable scientific databases, and timely response to customers' complaints, the main objective of the present study, which is the loyalty of public library customers, can be achieved.

Endnotes

1. <https://en.irandoc.ac.ir/>
2. <https://www.magiran.com/>
3. <https://www.noormags.ir/view/en/default>
4. <https://en.civilica.com/>

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