

Understanding Consumer Loyalty and Switching Barriers in the Vehicle Washing Service Business: A Case Study of Risqiva Carwash

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to analyze the drivers of consumer loyalty and identify switching barriers at Risqiva Carwash, a micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) in the vehicle washing service sector, examining how technical service quality, strategic location integration, and emotional experience shape customers' decisions to consistently revisit and stay. **Method:** This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a single case study design. Informants were selected purposively based on visit frequency and depth of engagement with the business, with recruitment continuing until thematic saturation was reached at the 35th informant, when no substantially new themes emerged. A total of 50 informants participated, comprising 48 loyal customers and 2 management representatives, through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and visual documentation; data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model and validated through source and method triangulation. **Results:** Consistent technical service quality, maintained through double quality-control procedures, forms the fundamental basis of consumer loyalty. The strategic geographical layout adjacent to Assalam Hypermart creates situational switching barriers, manifested as high non-monetary switching costs, since customers are reluctant to lose the time efficiency that allows them to multitask while waiting. The integration of the washing service with surrounding commercial facilities also generates a positive emotional experience that contributes to revisit intensity. **Novelty:** This study offers a preliminary conceptualization of "location integration-based switching barriers" as a construct that, to the researchers' knowledge, has received limited explicit attention in prior service-marketing literature on micro-scale service MSMEs; it is proposed as a starting point for further theoretical elaboration and empirical validation rather than as a fully established construct.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the service sector in Indonesia over the past decade has experienced significant acceleration, in line with the increasing number of motorized vehicles and public demand for support services. Badan Pusat Statistik, (2023) noted that the number of motorized vehicles in Indonesia reached more than 150 million units, with an average growth of about 5–7% per year over the last decade. This increase directly expands the market share of vehicle maintenance services, including car wash services. This dynamic encourages the emergence of new business actors in this segment, which in turn creates an increasingly competitive business climate, especially at the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) scale (Marmin & Sampurna, 2025; Saputra & Wala, 2024).

In competitive market conditions, the ability to retain customers (customer retention) becomes a critical determinant of service business sustainability. Previous research consistently shows that the cost of acquiring new customers is much higher than the cost of retaining existing ones, making loyalty strategies and the development of switching barriers the main pillars in service marketing management (Subrahmanyam, 2017). Cross-industry research also confirms that customer satisfaction strongly correlates with long-term loyalty (Devy et al., 2024; Sinambela et al., 2022), when

supported by consistently built customer emotional engagement (Ningrum & Pratiwi, 2026).

Switching barriers are defined as all factors that make consumers reluctant to switch to alternative service providers, encompassing dimensions of economic costs, emotional attachment, psychological costs, and the loss of situational benefits (Bendriouch et al., 2023; Fatimah et al., 2025). Risqiva Carwash, a vehicle washing service MSME located in Surakarta, has a location advantage that directly correlates with consumer loyalty and switching barriers (Syahputra et al., 2025; Widiyastuti & Widianari, 2024). This business operates adjacent to Assalam Hypermart, a medium-scale shopping center, thus providing situational added value for its customers. This location integration allows customers to utilize the vehicle washing waiting time for shopping or recreation, thereby forming high non-monetary switching costs if customers consider switching to alternative service providers (Nursasi et al., 2024; Wijanarko & Dwiyanto, 2024).

Recent empirical research proves that location and integration with surrounding commercial facilities increase customer loyalty in the modern retail context (Alhamidi & Deswita, 2026; Anugrahwati et al., 2025). This condition makes Risqiva Carwash a relevant subject of study to identify the relationship between location factors, consumer loyalty, and switching barriers in the context of service MSMEs.

A review of the existing literature reveals a significant research gap. Most studies on consumer loyalty and switching barriers focus on large-scale industries such as banking, telecommunications, and modern retail (Jusuf et al., 2024). Research that specifically examines this phenomenon in the context of automotive service MSMEs, especially vehicle washing, is still very limited. More specifically, no research has explicitly mapped the role of location facility integration (proximity to shopping centers) as a component forming situational switching barriers at the micro-business scale (Albakir et al., 2022; Keaveney & Parthasarathy, 2001).

Beyond this contextual gap, a theoretical gap can also be identified. Classic switching-barrier frameworks primarily conceptualize switching costs along procedural, financial, and relational dimensions, and emphasize that even satisfied customers may defect once a superior alternative becomes available. These frameworks, however, offer limited theoretical elaboration of place-based or locational integration as a distinct antecedent of switching barriers, particularly within micro-scale service settings. This research therefore also seeks to address this theoretical gap by examining how locational integration functions as a situational switching barrier, in addition to the contextual gap identified above.

Based on the identification of these gaps, this research is formulated to answer three research questions: 1.) How do driving factors such as service quality, price, and strategic location create consumer loyalty at Risqiva Carwash?; 2.) What are the switching barriers perceived by customers that make them continue to choose Risqiva Carwash's services?; 3.) How do emotional experiences and the convenience of situational facilities influence customers' decisions to make consistent repeat visits?

Consumer loyalty in the service context is a customer's commitment to consistently reuse services from the same provider, regardless of competitive efforts that potentially encourage switching behavior (Baxendale et al., 2015; Foxall, 2023). Service quality and customer satisfaction are empirically proven as the main antecedents in the formation of

loyalty (Aminsyah, 2019; Saputra & Wala, 2024). Current theoretical models indicate that customer loyalty is formed through a sequential path:

service quality → satisfaction → trust → loyalty commitment (Amiruddin et al., 2023; Hae et al., 2026). Customer trust built through consistent service quality significantly increases long-term loyalty commitment (Shankar et al., 2003). Furthermore, research shows that service quality extends beyond core transactions and encompasses every customer touchpoint, including the waiting experience (Azharly & Muslim, 2024; Suteja & Yudiaatmaja, 2026). This indicates that strategic location facilities are an integral part of the overall value proposition offered by service providers. In the vehicle washing service industry, technical quality in the form of clean washing results and maintained operational standards become the foundation of basic satisfaction that cannot be compromised (Anindia, 2024; Mapiasse et al., 2025).

Switching barriers refer to a series of obstacles faced by consumers when considering a move to alternative service providers (Fatimah et al., 2025). In service marketing literature, switching barriers are categorized into three main dimensions: switching costs (both monetary and non-monetary), interpersonal attachment with service staff, and situational barriers stemming from the unavailability of equivalent alternatives (Lupiyoadi, 2018). Relational and situational switching barriers have a more persistent influence on loyalty compared to purely economic switching barriers (Mulya & Sari, 2025; Nurdiana et al., 2025). Customers' perception of switching risk is an important component of switching barriers, where the higher the perceived uncertainty of alternative quality, the stronger the switching barriers formed (Harrati et al., 2016). Research shows that switching costs not only prevent switching but also protect customer loyalty even during service failures, indicating the importance of switching barriers as a solid foundation for loyalty (Galih et al., 2025; Han et al., 2011).

Albakir et al., (2022) in their research on D'King Car Wash Gorontalo empirically proved that physical facilities and location advantages have a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty in vehicle washing services. These findings indicate that in the car wash service industry, the situational value created by location attributes is not merely a supporting factor, but a strategic variable that can become a source of competitive advantage difficult for competitors to imitate. This is relevant to the concept of experiential value in modern service marketing, where the consumer's experience while waiting for the service to be completed becomes an integral part of the overall value proposition (Ali, 2019).

Positioning these situational findings within the classic switching-cost literature clarifies the intended theoretical contribution of this study. Classify switching costs into procedural, financial, and relational types, while demonstrate that even satisfied customers may defect once a more attractive alternative value proposition emerges. Neither typology, however, explicitly accounts for costs that arise from a service's spatial or locational integration with surrounding commercial facilities. This study synthesizes these classic frameworks with the situational and experiential-value perspectives above to argue that locational integration constitutes a distinct, situational form of non-monetary switching cost one that is neither purely procedural, financial, nor relational, but instead arises from the customer's embeddedness within a broader activity ecosystem built around the service location.

Based on the literature synthesis above, this research proposes a theoretical framework that consumer loyalty in vehicle washing service MSMEs is formed through two complementary paths. The first is the technical path, namely satisfaction with consistent wash quality results. The second is the situational path, namely the added value created from the integration of location facilities with the surrounding commercial ecosystem. Both paths synergistically form switching barriers that retain customers from switching, either through functional satisfaction mechanisms or through non-monetary switching costs in the form of lost time efficiency and positive emotional experiences. This theoretical framework is visually presented in Figure 1.

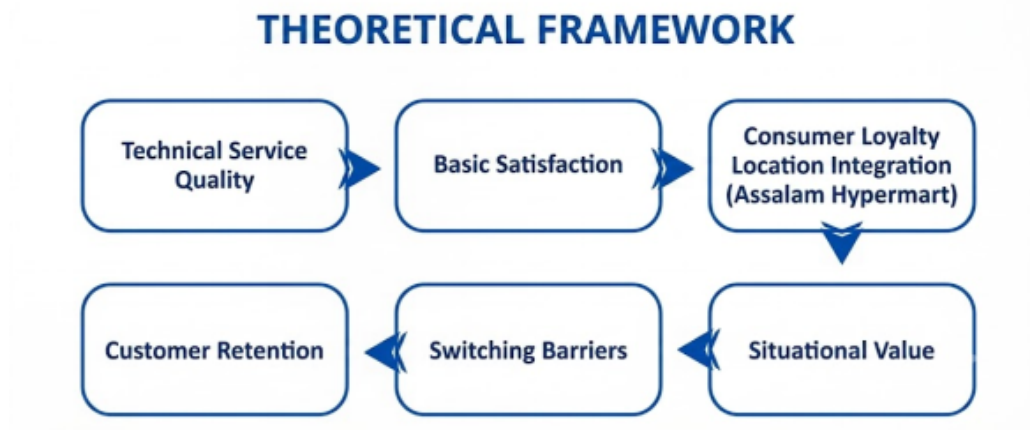


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a single case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach was chosen because it is able to capture the depth and contextuality of the phenomenon of consumer loyalty, which is subjective and situational. The researcher acts as the key instrument going directly into the field to obtain rich and holistic data.

Location and Subject of Research

The research was conducted at Risqiva Carwash, Surakarta, which is located adjacent to Assalam Hypermart. Research subjects were determined through a purposive sampling technique with the main criteria: service users who have had their vehicles washed at least three times in the last two months. As a methodological note, several informants with a visit frequency of twice in that period were still included based on the consideration that they are customers with a regularly scheduled visit pattern (every three to four weeks), so their routine and visit commitment have been verified even though administratively only recorded twice during the observation period. The total number of informants was 50 people, consisting of 48 loyal customers and 2 management representatives.

Sample Size Justification and Data Saturation

The final sample of 50 informants was not fixed in advance but determined by the principle of information power and thematic saturation appropriate to qualitative case

study research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Recruitment and interviewing continued until no substantially new themes or categories emerged from successive informants, a point that was consistently reached from the 35th informant onward. The remaining interviews were retained because they served to confirm, deepen, and triangulate the themes that had already emerged particularly across different visit-frequency sub-groups rather than to generate new categories, which strengthens rather than merely pads the credibility of the reported findings.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through three techniques forming a method triangulation: 1.) Semi-structured interviews, guided by a flexible interview guide focusing on perceptions of service quality, price satisfaction, and customers' subjective reasons for staying. Given the characteristics of customers who tend to be in a hurry (utilizing waiting time to shop), interviews were conducted in two stages: short intercept interviews on location, followed by in-depth interviews during the informants' free time; 2.) Non-participant observation, directed at operational aspects of washing, conditions of the waiting room facilities (dry-zone), and ease of access between Risqiva Carwash and Assalam Hypermart; 3.) Visual documentation as a complementary instrument to validate narrative data from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis refers to the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes three stages: data reduction (sorting and coding relevant data), data display (compiling narratives and matrices of relationships between variables), and drawing conclusions. Coding was conducted iteratively in three stages. First, open coding was applied line-by-line to interview transcripts and field notes to identify initial concepts. Second, axial coding grouped related codes into broader categories reflecting the study's three theoretical dimensions: technical service quality, situational location integration, and emotional experience. Third, selective coding integrated these categories around the core phenomenon of switching barriers, guided by constant comparison against the theoretical framework. Two members of the research team independently coded a subset of transcripts and reconciled discrepancies through discussion to strengthen coding reliability. Data saturation began to be consistently detected from the 35th informant onwards, indicated by no substantial new themes or categories found from subsequent interviews. The validity and credibility of the research results are guaranteed through source triangulation (comparing customer data with management data) and method triangulation (comparing interview data with observation and documentation findings) (Rachman et al., 2024).

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to standard ethical principles for qualitative social research. All informants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntary nature prior to participation, and verbal informed consent was obtained before each interview and observation session. Informant identities were anonymized using codes (P-1 to P-48 for customers, M-1 to M-2 for management) rather than personal names, and all recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. Informants

retained the right to decline participation or withdraw at any point without consequence to their relationship with the business.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Informant Profiles and Thematic Summary

To avoid an overly descriptive presentation of raw data, the 48 customer informants' reasons for staying were grouped thematically into five categories through the coding procedure described above. Table 1 summarizes these themes by frequency of occurrence; the full profile of all 50 informants, including individual reasons for staying and perceptions of alternative services, is provided in Appendix A (Table A1).

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Reasons for Staying (n = 48 customer informants)

Theme	Description	n	%	Representative Informants
Technical/Functional Service Quality	Cleanliness, wash results, tool safety, water quality	15	31.3%	P-1, P-7, P-25, P-28
Locational Integration & Time Efficiency	Proximity to Assalam Hypermart, multitasking, time savings	13	27.1%	P-2, P-6, P-19, P-26
Facility Comfort & Emotional Experience	Dry-zone comfort, ambiance, family-friendliness	7	14.6%	P-5, P-10, P-12, P-34
Relational/Interpersonal Attachment	Employee familiarity, trust, key security	5	10.4%	P-9, P-16, P-33
Price Value & Habitual Commitment	Price fairness, status quo, long-term commitment	8	16.7%	P-13, P-23, P-41, P-48
Total		48	100%	

Service Quality as the Foundation of Loyalty

The first finding identifies that technical service quality is a fundamental prerequisite for the formation of consumer loyalty at Risqiva Carwash, consistent with Theme A in Table 1. The majority of informants consistently expressed satisfaction with the detailed cleanliness of the washing results as the main reason for their loyalty. This is reflected in the acknowledgment of informant P-07, who stated that the experience of washing vehicles elsewhere produced unsatisfactory quality, characterized by the presence of dried soap residue on the vehicle body after washing. This statement illustrates how negative experiences at alternative places empirically strengthen customers' commitment to stay. This phenomenon is in line with the findings of Fardhasila & Ningsih, (2025) who

proved that service quality significantly affects purchasing decisions in vehicle washing services, where the final standard of cleanliness becomes the main indicator of customer assessment (Putri & Arifiansyah, 2020).

Management statement M-02 confirmed that the implementation of double quality-control procedures before handing over the vehicle to the customer is an operational standard consistently enforced. The management (M-02) emphasized that the double verification procedure for washing results is an obligation that cannot be ignored; if discrepancies are found at the final check stage, the washing process must be repeated before the vehicle is handed over to the customer (Habel et al., 2016). This finding aligns with the research of Widyantara & Cipta, (2025), which affirms service quality as a determinant of customer satisfaction in vehicle washing services, and is consistent with the theoretical proposition of Saputra & Wala, (2024) regarding service quality as the main predictor of loyalty, echoing the findings of Monika & Telagawathi, (2024) that service quality and satisfaction positively and significantly influence customer loyalty in automotive services. Beyond restating these parallels, the present finding suggests that technical quality functions less as a differentiator and more as a loyalty threshold: it appears to be a necessary but not sufficient condition, since Themes B and C below indicate that situational and emotional factors are what ultimately convert baseline satisfaction into durable switching barriers.

Situational Location Integration as Switching Barriers

The second and most distinctive finding of this research is the formation of switching barriers that originate not from core service quality, but from the situational value created by the location integration of Risqiva Carwash with the Assalam Hypermart commercial ecosystem, corresponding to Theme B in Table 1. Informant P-02 pointed out that the vehicle washing process generally requires a considerable waiting time, and this condition usually causes boredom. However, the presence of the adjacent Assalam Hypermart allows customers to utilize this waiting time productively by shopping. This statement explicates the mechanism by which waiting time, which is usually perceived as a burden (waiting cost), transforms into an opportunity for productivity.

This situational switching barrier mechanism is reinforced by the admission of informant P-26, who explicitly calculated non-monetary switching costs. The informant revealed that although they had received promotional price brochures from alternative service providers, their reluctance to try these services was driven by the inability to leave the vehicle elsewhere during the washing process something they could comfortably do at Risqiva Carwash. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of non-monetary switching costs in the framework of Fatimah et al., (2025), where the loss of situational benefits is accounted for by consumers as a real cost of switching. The relevance of these findings is reinforced by Fatimah et al., (2025), who, in the context of retail MSMEs, proved that switching barriers encompassing situational dimensions significantly affect consumer loyalty, with satisfaction as an intervening variable. This finding extends the findings of Albakir et al., (2022) regarding the role of facilities and location in car wash customer loyalty by adding a specific dimension in the form of commercial ecosystem integration as a mechanism for switching barriers. This locational mechanism does not map cleanly onto procedural, financial, or relational switching costs; it instead behaves as a fourth, situational category grounded in the customer's spatial embeddedness a

distinction that sharpens, rather than merely restates, the theoretical contribution of this study.

Emotional Experience and Facility Comfort

The third finding identifies an affective dimension that complements the previous two findings, corresponding to Themes C and D in Table 1. The waiting room facility (dry-zone), separated from the wet area, equipped with air conditioning, and physically close to Assalam Hypermart access, collectively creates a positive emotional experience that goes beyond mere functional satisfaction. Informant P-10 revealed that the presence of small children during the waiting process is generally a distinct source of stress because children tend to be impatient. However, the proximity of Risqiva Carwash to Assalam Hypermart allows customers to take their children to activities in the shopping area while the vehicle is being washed, making the visit experience more comfortable and enjoyable for the whole family. This statement demonstrates how situational facilities eliminate major sources of stress, which directly contributes to the overall quality of the visit experience. This finding is in line with Fardhasila & Ningsih, (2025), who assert that customer experience significantly affects satisfaction and, in turn, forms long-term loyalty, which is also in line with (Aisyah & Harto, 2024), who found that a positive customer journey is the main driver of loyalty in experience-based services.

Furthermore, informant P-33 revealed a relational dimension where Risqiva Carwash employees have recognized customers' identities and preferences personally, making the communication more familiar and efficient.

Proposition Verification

The following table summarizes the verification results for the three main research propositions:

Table 2. Proposition Verification

No	Proposition	Data Verification	Conclusion
1	Technical service quality is the main driving factor for basic customer loyalty.	Majority of informants (P-01, P-07, P-25, P-28) confirmed satisfaction with detailed cleanliness. Informant M-02 confirmed the implementation of double Quality Control SOPs. Observation notes show employee consistency in following SOPs.	VERIFIED
2	Proximity of location to Assalam Hypermart creates situational switching barriers.	Most customers (P-02, P-06, P-15, P-19) highlighted time efficiency from multitasking. Informant P-26 specifically mentioned the loss of integrated access as a high switching cost.	VERIFIED
3	Situational facility comfort triggers positive emotional experiences	Many customers (P-05, P-10, P-12, P-21, P-34) felt very helped by the well-ventilated and child-friendly dry-zone. This facility is	VERIFIED

No	Proposition	Data Verification	Conclusion
	that encourage repeat visits.	considered to eliminate boredom and stuffiness.	

Discussion

Situational Location Integration as Switching Barriers

This phenomenon aligns with Fatimah et al. (2025), where the loss of situational benefits acts as a non-monetary switching cost driving consumer loyalty. Furthermore, it extends Albakir et al., (2022) findings on car wash locations by introducing commercial ecosystem integration as a specific switching barrier. Rather than falling under procedural, financial, or relational costs, this locational mechanism forms a distinct fourth "situational" category based on the customer's spatial embeddedness, thereby sharpening this study's theoretical contribution.

Emotional Experience and Facility Comfort

Consistent with previous studies (Aisyah & Harto, 2024; Fardhasila & Ningsih, 2025), positive customer experiences and journeys drive long-term loyalty. Additionally, personal attachments to staff create emotional and relational switching barriers that competitors struggle to replicate (Jusuf et al., 2024; Saputra & Wala, 2024; Wahyuddin et al., 2019). Ultimately, these emotional and relational bonds do not drive loyalty independently; rather, they serve as a secondary layer that reinforces the primary technical and locational barriers.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This research yields three main findings. First, consistent technical service quality anchored in detailed cleanliness standards and double quality-control procedures forms the primary foundation of basic customer satisfaction and loyalty at Risqiva Carwash. Second, the business's geographical integration with Assalam Hypermart generates situational switching barriers manifested as high non-monetary switching costs, particularly customers' reluctance to lose the time efficiency they have come to rely on for productive or recreational activities. Third, this same locational integration also produces a positive emotional experience that meaningfully contributes to repeat-visit intensity. Theoretically, this research offers a preliminary conceptualization of "location integration-based switching barriers" as a distinctive construct that complements classic switching-cost typologies, positioning locational embeddedness as an understudied source of non-monetary switching costs in micro-scale service MSMEs. **Implication:** Practically, the findings suggest that technical quality and the strategic use of locational assets jointly rather than independently sustain customer loyalty in small-scale service enterprises. Three strategic and operational recommendations are proposed for the management of Risqiva Carwash and similar service MSME actors. First, management is advised to formalize and measure technical quality standards by codifying the existing double quality-control practice into a written SOP with a measurable indicator, for example a target of zero customer-reported defects per 100 vehicles washed, verified through a final visual checklist co-signed by the washing staff and the quality controller, and to track this indicator monthly as a KPI for washing staff. Second, rather than treating proximity to Assalam Hypermart as a passive asset, management can systematize the locational advantage into a commercial

partnership by formalizing a cross-promotion agreement with Hypermart tenants, such as a shared discount voucher redeemable within 30 minutes of a car-wash receipt, and by tracking monthly voucher redemption rates to evaluate and adjust the partnership's commercial value. Third, management should invest deliberately and incrementally in the waiting experience; concrete, low-cost additions such as a small Wi-Fi-enabled workspace corner, a children's play corner, and a WhatsApp-based completion-notification system should be piloted over a 3–6-month period, with repeat-visit frequency and customer-reported satisfaction tracked before and after implementation to evaluate their effectiveness before scaling up further. **Limitation:** This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a single case study, its findings are contextual and cannot be statistically generalized to a wider population of vehicle washing MSMEs. Second, data on customers' perceptions of alternative service providers were derived entirely from informants' subjective reports, without independent observational verification of competitors' actual service quality, which may introduce social desirability or recall bias. Third, this research did not quantitatively measure the relative contribution of each identified factor (technical quality, location, facilities) to overall loyalty, limiting the ability to assess their comparative weight. Fourth, from a methodological standpoint, interviews were conducted and coded primarily by the research team without external audit, and the translation of interview data from Bahasa Indonesia into English may have introduced minor interpretive nuances. **Future Research:** Future research is encouraged to pursue several directions. Comparative, mixed-method studies across multiple vehicle washing service providers, including those without comparable locational advantages, and across different cities, would help test the generalizability of the location integration-based switching barrier construct to broader urban and semi-urban contexts. Quantitative instruments should be developed and validated to operationalize this construct, enabling structural modeling of its relationship with loyalty alongside classic switching-cost dimensions. Finally, experimental or longitudinal research could examine the effectiveness of specific managerial interventions, such as cross-promotion schemes or waiting-experience enhancements, in strengthening switching barriers and loyalty over time.

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