

The Effect of Public Service Quality on Citizen Satisfaction with Public Trust as A Moderating Variable at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City

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ABSTRACT

Citizen satisfaction is an important indicator for assessing the success of public service delivery. At a Public Service Mall (MPP), satisfaction is related not only to technical service quality but also to citizens' confidence in the service-providing institution. This study aims to examine the effects of public service quality and public trust on citizen satisfaction and to test the role of public trust as a moderating variable in the relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City. The study employed a quantitative approach with a causal survey design. Data were collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire from 175 service users selected using accidental sampling. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4. The results show that service quality has a positive and significant effect on citizen satisfaction ($\beta = 0.379$; $t = 5.658$; $p < 0.001$). Public trust also has a positive and significant effect on citizen satisfaction ($\beta = 0.407$; $t = 6.069$; $p < 0.001$). However, the interaction between public trust and service quality has a negative and significant effect on citizen satisfaction ($\beta = -0.160$; $t = 2.716$; $p = 0.007$). These findings indicate that public trust is a stronger direct predictor than service quality, whereas its interaction effect is negative and small ($f^2 = 0.046$). This study contributes to an understanding that the relationship among service quality, public trust, and citizen satisfaction is not always linear or mutually reinforcing. The findings imply that MPP management should integrate service quality improvement with procedural consistency, information transparency, and efforts to strengthen public trust.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public service is one of the fundamental functions of government because it is directly related to meeting the needs of society. In modern governance, service quality is not merely an administrative matter; it is also part of citizens' assessment of the capacity and credibility of public institutions. Services that are fast, accurate, responsive, transparent, and consistent can create positive user experiences, whereas uncertainty regarding procedures and service completion times may lead to dissatisfaction.

In this study, service quality is examined within the SERVQUAL framework, which comprises tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In the context of public services, these five dimensions represent citizens' experiences regarding facilities, process reliability, staff responsiveness, service assurance, and attention to users' needs. This framework is used as the basis for measuring public service quality at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City.

Citizen satisfaction is an important consequence of the service experience. This study conceptualizes satisfaction as the result of comparing citizens' expectations with the performance of the service received. Accordingly, service quality is theoretically associated directly with satisfaction: the more closely the service meets users' expectations, the more positive their evaluation of the service will be.

However, service quality is not the only factor shaping citizens' evaluations. Public trust in the service-providing institution also plays an important role. In this study, trust refers to citizens' confidence in the integrity, competence, consistency, and transparency of the service provider. This aspect is increasingly important in integrated services because a single service experience may involve more than one unit or institution, each with different procedural characteristics.

The Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City provides a relevant context for examining these relationships. An MPP integrates various services delivered by local government agencies, vertical institutions, state-owned enterprises, and other organizations within a single integrated service system. The MPP is managed by the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Office (DPMPTSP) as the principal institution responsible for coordinating service delivery. The study notes that such integration facilitates access, but service delivery still faces challenges, including variations in quality across institutions, limited human resources, and public perceptions regarding transparency and service certainty.

This context gives rise to a more specific research problem. Previous studies reviewed in this study have largely positioned public trust as an independent or mediating variable. Meanwhile, studies specifically examining public trust as a moderating variable in the relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction at city-level MPPs remain limited. In addition to the relationship gap, there is a contextual gap because integrated services have cross-institutional characteristics that require coordination, procedural consistency, transparency, and uniform service quality.

Therefore, this study examines three main relationships: the effect of service quality on citizen satisfaction; the effect of public trust on citizen satisfaction; and the effect of the interaction between service quality and public trust on citizen satisfaction.

The main contribution of this study lies in the finding that public trust has a direct effect on satisfaction, but its interaction effect with service quality is negative and significant. Thus, the study not only confirms the importance of service quality and trust but also demonstrates that their relationship with citizen satisfaction at an MPP does not entirely follow a linear reinforcement pattern.

Public Service Quality

Service quality refers to citizens' perceptions of the extent to which the service received meets their expectations. In this study, service quality is operationalized using the five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Tangibles refer to physical facilities, supporting infrastructure, and staff appearance. Reliability indicates the provider's ability to deliver services accurately and in accordance with procedures.

Responsiveness concerns the speed and readiness of staff to assist citizens. Assurance relates to competence, security, courtesy, and professionalism. Empathy concerns attention to users' needs and circumstances.

At an MPP, service quality has distinctive characteristics because citizens' experiences are shaped not by a single type of service but by an integrated system involving multiple units. Therefore, service quality must be understood not only in terms of facilities but also in terms of procedural clarity, service-time certainty, staff interactions, and service consistency.

Public Trust

Public trust is understood in this study as citizens' confidence in the integrity, competence, consistency, and transparency of the service-providing institution. Trust is built through citizens' experiences in receiving services and their perceptions of the provider's conduct and capacity.

In public service, trust is important because citizens are not always able to assess every administrative process technically. Their evaluations are also influenced by the belief that public officials act in accordance with regulations, provide information openly, and are capable of completing services professionally.

Citizen Satisfaction

Citizen satisfaction is the user's evaluation after comparing service expectations with the performance received. The study uses indicators of overall satisfaction, fulfillment of expectations, service conformity, interaction with staff, and service responsiveness.

Satisfaction is therefore an evaluative outcome of citizens' experiences. In the context of an MPP, satisfaction reflects whether service integration actually produces an experience that meets users' needs and expectations.

Development of the Relationships among Variables

Service quality is conceptually expected to increase citizen satisfaction because fast, accurate, responsive, safe, and empathetic services provide experiences that are more consistent with users' expectations. Previous studies reviewed in this study generally also indicate a positive relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction.

Public trust is likewise expected to affect satisfaction. Citizens who have confidence in the provider's integrity, competence, consistency, and transparency tend to evaluate their service experiences more positively.

This study further positions public trust as a moderator. Conceptually, trust may change the strength of the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. However, this study found a negative interaction. This finding is particularly important because it shows that trust does not always strengthen the relationship between service quality and satisfaction.

Based on this framework, the study tests the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Service quality has a positive effect on citizen satisfaction.
- **H2:** Public trust has a positive effect on citizen satisfaction.
- **H3:** Public trust moderates the effect of service quality on citizen satisfaction.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method and a causal design. The research was conducted at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City. Data collection began in March 2026 using a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms.

The population consisted of citizens who received or had previously used services at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City. The sample comprised 175 respondents selected through non-probability sampling using accidental sampling. All 175 distributed questionnaires were usable,

resulting in a 100% completion rate. The respondents consisted of 79 men (45.14%) and 96 women (54.86%).

The research instrument used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Service quality was measured using 15 indicators representing tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Public trust was measured using 12 indicators representing integrity, competence, consistency, and transparency. Citizen satisfaction was measured using 10 indicators.

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4. The evaluation covered the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model was used to test construct validity and reliability, whereas the structural model was used to test direct relationships and the moderating interaction.

The moderating effect was formed through the interaction construct of public trust $\times$ service quality. The significance of the relationships was tested using bootstrapping. The model was also evaluated using VIF, R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2_{predict} .

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent Characteristics and Variable Conditions

A total of 175 respondents provided complete responses. Service quality was in the fairly good category. The TCR values for all indicators ranged from 78.97% to 79.77%. The highest values were recorded for service completion timeliness and staff response speed, each at 79.77%. The lowest values were recorded for procedural clarity and staff members' ability to understand users' circumstances or difficulties, each at 78.97%.

Public trust was also in the fairly good category, with TCR values ranging from 77.60% to 78.97%. The highest-rated indicator was the belief that staff acted in accordance with regulations, while the lowest-rated indicators concerned staff competence and procedural consistency.

Citizen satisfaction was in the fairly good category, with TCR values ranging from 77.94% to 78.74%. The highest-rated indicator was the conformity of services with citizens' expectations, while the lowest-rated indicator was staff members' ability to assist users until the service process was completed.

The descriptive findings show that all three constructs were evaluated positively, although they had not reached the "good" category according to the TCR criteria used in this study.

3.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The results show that the constructs had average variance extracted (AVE) values of 0.898 for service quality, 0.864 for public trust, and 0.828 for citizen satisfaction. These values indicate that the convergent validity criteria were met.

The HTMT values were also well below the threshold of 0.90. The highest value, 0.375, was found between public trust and citizen satisfaction. Therefore, the constructs were empirically distinguishable.

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values also exceeded the minimum criteria. However, the values were very high, exceeding 0.95. This indicates very high internal consistency but should also be examined carefully because it may indicate redundancy among the indicators.

3.3 Structural Model Evaluation

The VIF values ranged from 1.004 to 1.011, indicating no collinearity problems among the predictor constructs in the model.

The R^2 value for citizen satisfaction was 0.304, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.292. Thus, service quality, public trust, and their interaction jointly explained 30.4% of the variation in citizen satisfaction.

The Q^2_{predict} value for citizen satisfaction was 0.271. This positive value indicates that the model had predictive relevance.

The effect-size results show that the contribution of public trust to citizen satisfaction was 0.236 and that of service quality was 0.204; both were in the moderate category according to the criteria used in this study. Meanwhile, the interaction effect size was 0.046, which was in the small category.

3.4 Hypothesis Testing

Service quality had a positive and significant effect on citizen satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 0.379, t-statistic of 5.658, and $p < 0.001$. This result supports H1.

Public trust had a positive and significant effect on citizen satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 0.407, t-statistic of 6.069, and $p < 0.001$. This result supports H2.

The interaction between public trust and service quality had a negative and significant effect on citizen satisfaction, with a coefficient of -0.160 , t-statistic of 2.716, and $p = 0.007$. Therefore, H3 was supported in the sense that public trust statistically moderated the relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction, with a negative moderation direction.

Discussion

Service Quality and Citizen Satisfaction

The positive effect of service quality on satisfaction indicates that improvements in the quality of the service experience are associated with more favorable citizen evaluations. The coefficient of 0.379 shows that service quality had a substantive direct effect in the model, with an effect size of 0.204.

This finding is consistent with previous studies reviewed in this study, including studies of various MPPs that found a positive relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction. This consistency indicates that service attributes such as speed, accuracy, responsiveness, facilities, and the quality of staff interactions remain important foundations of user satisfaction.

However, the descriptive findings provide an important nuance. Although service quality had a significant effect, its perceived level remained in the fairly good category. The lowest-rated indicators concerned procedural clarity and staff members' understanding of users' circumstances. This indicates that increasing satisfaction cannot be achieved solely by accelerating service delivery. The user experience is also influenced by how easily procedures can be understood and how effectively staff respond to individual circumstances.

Thus, the findings support the view that service quality is a direct determinant of satisfaction while also indicating room for improvement in the procedural and human aspects of service delivery.

Public Trust and Citizen Satisfaction

Public trust had a coefficient of 0.407, which was higher than the service-quality coefficient of 0.379. The effect size of public trust, 0.236, was also higher than that of service quality, 0.204.

This finding indicates that, in the context of the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City, institutional trust was a relatively stronger direct predictor of citizen satisfaction than service quality. This finding is important for public administration because citizens' evaluations of services are not determined solely by what they receive technically. Their confidence in staff integrity, regulatory compliance, competence, transparency, and service consistency also shapes their interpretation of the service experience.

The descriptive results show that the highest-rated trust indicator was the belief that staff acted in accordance with regulations. Conversely, staff competence and procedural consistency received the lowest ratings. This pattern indicates that the foundation of trust has been established but is not yet fully robust.

Therefore, increasing citizen satisfaction in the context of an MPP should be understood as a combination of improved service performance and strengthened institutional credibility.

The Negative Moderating Effect of Public Trust

The most important finding of this study is the interaction coefficient of -0.160 , with $p = 0.007$. This means that public trust statistically changed the relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction in a negative direction.

This finding differs from the initial assumption that higher levels of trust would always strengthen the effect of service quality on satisfaction. In other words, in this study trust did not function solely as a factor that strengthened the relationship between service quality and satisfaction.

The result must nevertheless be interpreted proportionately. The interaction effect size was only 0.046 and was classified as small. Statistical significance therefore does not mean that the moderating effect is a dominant factor in shaping satisfaction.

The findings demonstrate a distinction between the **direct effect** and the **interaction effect**. Public trust was a relatively stronger direct predictor, but when included as an interaction construct with service quality, its effect was relatively small and negative.

In the context of an MPP involving multiple institutions, this finding may indicate that service quality and trust do not always produce a simple cumulative effect. Citizens may assess service quality based on technical experiences while simultaneously evaluating the institution based on integrity, consistency, and transparency. When these two evaluation mechanisms operate simultaneously, the relationship between service quality and satisfaction may become more complex.

This interpretation is consistent with the discussion in this study, which views the relationship among service quality, trust, and satisfaction as dynamic and context-dependent.

Implications for Public Administration

The findings convey two main messages. First, service quality improvement remains important because it has a positive effect on satisfaction. Second, building public trust should not be treated as an automatic consequence of technical service improvements.

In the context of an MPP, trust should be strengthened through consistency of procedures across units, information transparency, service certainty, staff competence, and professionalism in interactions with citizens.

The negative moderating finding also suggests that service-quality improvements need to be communicated clearly to the public. Technical changes in service delivery do not always produce proportional changes in perceptions if citizens do not receive adequate information about those changes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that public service quality and public trust are two important predictors of citizen satisfaction at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City. Service quality has a positive and significant effect on citizen satisfaction, while public trust also has a positive and significant effect.

Public trust has a larger direct-effect coefficient than service quality. Therefore, in this research model, trust is a relatively stronger direct predictor of satisfaction.

The principal finding concerns the moderating effect. The interaction between public trust and service quality has a negative and significant effect on citizen satisfaction. With an effect size of 0.046 , this interaction effect is relatively small compared with the direct effects of the two constructs.

These results show that the relationship among service quality, public trust, and citizen satisfaction in integrated public services does not entirely follow a simple linear pattern. Service-quality improvement remains necessary, but strengthening public trust must be integrated into service governance.

Theoretically, this study expands understanding of the role of trust in public services by showing that trust can function both as a direct predictor and as a variable that changes the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of procedural consistency, transparency, competence, and professionalism among public officials.

The study shows that the relationship between service quality and citizen satisfaction should be understood together with public trust. Trust is relevant not only as a predictor of satisfaction but also as a potential moderating variable. The negative moderating effect indicates that the relationships among the three constructs are not always mutually reinforcing. This creates opportunities to develop more contingent and context-sensitive models of public service delivery.

MPP managers should maintain service quality, particularly with regard to timeliness, staff responsiveness, facility comfort, professionalism, and procedural clarity.

Improvements should also focus on indicators with relatively low scores, especially procedural clarity, staff members' ability to understand users' circumstances, staff competence, and procedural consistency.

Local governments should treat public trust as part of service-quality improvement policies rather than as an outcome that emerges automatically.

Integrated service policies should strengthen inter-institutional procedural standardization, information transparency, service-time certainty, public communication mechanisms, and civil-servant competence.

This study is limited in geographic scope because it was conducted only at the Public Service Mall of Padang Panjang City. Consequently, the findings should be generalized to MPPs in other regions with caution.

The use of accidental sampling also limits the representativeness of the service-user population. Future studies could expand the research sites, increase the sample size, and use sampling techniques that provide broader representation of service users.

The research model includes only service quality, public trust, and citizen satisfaction. Future research could develop the model by incorporating variables such as institutional image, perceived fairness, digital access, information-system quality, complaint handling, loyalty, and public service value.

Further studies could also examine trust as a mediator or as an endogenous construct influenced by service quality.

To develop the moderation finding, future research should conduct conditional-effect or simple-slope analyses and visualize the interaction so that the mechanism underlying the negative moderating effect can be understood more thoroughly.

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